THE SPECTATOR, THE NEW, AND A DISRUPTING CREATIVE PARTICIPATION

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ABSTRACT: Creative and cultural institutions, cultural industries, and the creative work they embrace and foster are arguably predicated on an almost unquestioned concept of ‘the new’. Each seemingly new play or production is seeking some unique ‘not done before’ to validate itself as an event, its marketing and audience appeal. In this, the spectator is too often assumed or placed as a passive consumer. This paper will offer a provocation that contests such assumptions by placing the spectator as always a poacher or nomad, always an engaged participant reworking the piece offered and thus creating an always-disrupting relationship to the stage work as part of a spectatorial dramaturgy. Here, the ‘new’ always becomes relational to what has gone before, to what has been previously experienced and thus reframing the ‘now experienced’ within the on-going ‘weave of the performance... (the) dram-ergon, the work of the actions in performance’ (Barba and Saverese, 1991: 68). Reference will be made to conceptual blending and other neuro-cognitive theory, to the ‘embodied mind’, to the play-performance continuity, and to case studies from the ‘immersive theatres’ form. The paper will thus argue that the spectator – as qualified agent – is always knowingly performing their role as empathetic ‘spect-actor’, forcing a post-production reading of the work on-stage and thus creatively disrupting/rewriting the work offered simply by being present.

INTRODUCTION

It is some 2.6 Myr since the appearance of intentionally modified stone tools (see Cook, 2013). Recent studies indicate that as such tools evolved, so did the parietofrontal circuits in the brain enhancing sensorimotor adaptation, a co-development central to the Early Stone Age (see Stout et al, 2008). Such a process of encephalisation of the brain (the evolutionary relationship of brain mass to body mass), cognitive capabilities, and development of artefacts suggest an entangled, long history of embodied technological, cultural and social co-evolution.

“...a time in which were forged nearly all those characteristics of man’s existence which are most graphically human: his thoroughly encephelated nervous system, his incest-taboo-based social structure, and his capacity to create and use symbols. The fact that these distinctive features of humanity emerged together in complex interaction with one another rather than serially...suggests that man’s nervous system does not merely enable him to acquire culture, it positively demands that he do so if it is going to function at all.” (Geertz, 2002; 67-68)

The result is a long orchestration of innate capacities, social practices of ‘techné’ (the cultural entwining of knowledge and craft), and cognitive processes. The hands that shaped the stone blank into an intentionally modified tool are essentially the same as my hand. What then is ‘new’?

“new’: not existing before; now brought into existence for the first time” (Shorter Oxford English Dictionary)

I suggest the human has a cultural propensity to believe, to claim, to celebrate that what is being done now has not been done before, that it is ‘new’. But

“Invention, strictly speaking, is little more than a new combination of those images which have been previously gathered and deposited in the memory: nothing can come of nothing: he who has laid up no materials, can produce no combinations.” (Reynolds, 1769/1997: 27)

Our contemporary culture is marked by an ambivalent relationship with history and agency. We both revere the past, and are equally trapped by a lack of proper historical awareness – ironically the ‘new’ is reified, thereby subverting the long view implied above. We arguably fail to apply perspective to properly frame the contemporary.
“Particular histories represent to you, what things have happened to such or such a People with all their circumstances. But to understand the whole clearly, you must know what relation every history can have to others.” (Spencer, 1731)

Likewise we too often believe that what we do is from our own volition, without reference to the impact of our ‘previous’ selves or from others.

Men make their own history, but they do not make it just as they please; they do not make it under circumstances chosen by themselves, but under circumstances directly encountered, given, and transmitted from the past. (Marx, 1869: 360)

I present these quotes in juxtaposition to my opening statement to signify my position that such historical relationship and such qualified agency make all spectatorship (and by extension, readership) a creative participation, hence a potentially disrupting and distorting force acting on the created works and their denotative-connoted intentions.

As a prefix, ‘new’ can become a catchall phrase, implying a uniqueness that is not justified by the substance of the work itself. It may be newly minted in the sense of first appearance, but not new in style, genre, or subject matter. ‘New’ scriptwriting will deal with the same issues as previous works differing only in language used, levels of violent or sexual content and the graphic quality of these, and other dramaturgical devices. The ‘new’ may refer, at a subjective level, to an ‘old’ book that becomes new if being read for the first time. Works from any period are made ‘new’ for any reader or viewer when first read or seen; hence the continuing accidents of serendipity, combination and coincidence as ‘new’ work is re-framed and re-formed from what is already known.

This is not to deny that there are new things in a proper sense of the term as indicated above – merely that the appellation be applied and accepted with critical attention. What then is really ‘new’, really ‘first time’, beyond the qualified subjective or discovered? To reiterate:

“Invention, strictly speaking, is little more than a new combination of those images which have been previously gathered and deposited in the memory: nothing can come of nothing: he who has laid up no materials, can produce no combinations.” (Reynolds, 1769/1997: 27)

‘New’, without critical attention, too often becomes confused with differences (marginal or otherwise) in materials and content.
My examples follow the OED with its extensions to the base term as in ‘novel’, ‘newly known’, previously ‘strange or unfamiliar’. Thus, a supposed ‘new’ style of performance, of presentational mode may be just that. A novel use of design or staging that says nothing new in the material being presented but retains the seductive lure of the ‘shock of the new’ (Hughes, 1991). Strictly speaking, the newly minted work has been brought into being for the first time but what it is saying and how it is saying it may not be so new; seeming distinctions with no or little difference. The term is made banal without a sense of history or context.

Likewise, the appellation must be ascribed not only to what but how it is being said. If we accept there are ‘only seven (or six, or five) basic stories in the world’ (Booker, 2004: 3) it would seem we only present, by one plot and design or another, variations on archetypal themes.

If the principles of theatre persist as diachronic tropes (the actor-character-spectator nexus in designated spaces or sites for specific, shared purposes), then again can there only be variations of conventions in mode, style, and relational configurations within the prevailing cultural and social parameters – the old, re-presented? If dramaturgy is ‘the weave of the performance... that is, drama-ergon, the work of the actions in the performance’ (Barba and Savarese, 1991: 68), then any consideration of dramaturgy – old or new – must place the spectator into that weave. A spectatorial dramaturgy places the spectator-as-audience into the strange, messy hybrid named ‘theatre’; a placing necessary for theatre to be theatre with all the implications of a disruptive participation.

Retaining traces of a particular voice from the original presentation, I will explore the implications of this new/not new tension for creative participation focusing on the theatre spectator in particular. I will briefly outline some key (ethical) issues for our cultural institutions and certain key terms - recycling, poaching, interactive - before considering the role and position of the spectator when participating in a particular form of theatre; the site-specific and immersive. I will draw on my own experiences, set out in episodes, thus giving an unapologetic subjective, empirical underpinning of a theorised position that recycling and poaching as dynamic, creative participation will always mediate any sense of claims for the ‘new’, whether in created work or cultural institution.

**THE NEW AS THE ‘RECYCLED’ AND ‘MADE FAMILIAR’**

Thus, following Reynolds, Spencer and Marx, ‘new’ becomes a meaningful formulation only in relational terms: to what has gone before, to what is being
experienced, with whom we are sharing the experience and in what contexts. My very first time at the theatre, at whatever age, will be a ‘novel or newly known’ experience in itself, but not at a deeper level; my familiarity with listening to and reading stories has already granted a means of following a narrative through my imagination and cognitive processes.

One outcome of the long process of encephalisation is the embodied capacity to imagine.

“All human beings entertain the capacity to imagine worlds that they have or have not seen before, to imagine doing things that they have or have not done before... in the light of neuroscientific research... we now know that visual and motor imagery are embodied.” (Gallese and Lakoff, 2005: 463)

These are the fundamental, embodied sensory-motor systems and mirror neuronal mechanisms that allow us to place ourselves in the position of others – to have empathy from embodied simulation and shared corporeal states whilst at the same time not necessarily wishing to be that person. The work on mirror neurons located in cortical area F5, using fMRI and other techniques, reveals measurable theories and outcomes suggesting a wide range of cognitive and other mechanisms linked across a number of cortical areas (see Fabbri-Destro, 2008): what I discuss elsewhere as the ‘embodied-social mind’. In the case of empathy, allowing us to imagine and project and place ourselves in the position of others.

“Mirror neurons are pre-motor neurons that fire when the monkey performs object-directed actions ... but also when the animal observes somebody else ... performing the same class of actions. . . In contrast, the present data show that the intentions behind the actions of others can be recognized by the motor system using a mirror mechanism.” (Iacoboni et al., 2005: 529-32)

These same mechanisms necessarily act on our being in the theatre: ‘Conceptual blending theory’ (drawing on Fauconnier and Turner, 2002) suggests that as spectators faced with the double-ness of theatre, we cognitively oscillate between knowingly seeing the fiction (characters, world of the play) and knowingly seeing the reality (actors, painted scenery) but suffer no cognitive dissonance due to our ability to blend cognitive categories; the spectator accepts the fiction as if real by moving between states of being-not being in the world of the play. This, of course, has echoes of the original theories of ‘psychical distance’
(Bullough, 1912) or what I elsewhere discuss as our ‘knowing suspension of disbelief’, whereby the fictional status of the work is accepted as such. ‘Visual intentionalism’ (drawing on Jacob and Jeannerod, 2003) suggests that humans have two visual systems in place that allow the processing of dual visual stimuli - as spectators we see the inanimate scenery as ‘visual perceptions’ and the actors as characters both acting on our world. This is the ability to imagine that allows us to simultaneously accept the object seen whilst also ‘seen as’ something else—a trajectory of imagination (see Hutchins, 2008). The trajectory of imagination that sees the stone blank and simultaneously the Ice Age axe ‘seen–as’ within the blank (the ‘new’ within the ‘old’) is the same as those embodied neural-cognitive mechanisms that see the actor onstage and simultaneously, the ‘seen-as’ character accepted by my knowing suspension of disbelief. As with our hands across millennia and the trajectory of imagination, we are apparently making something new, as our own, from what is onstage, and in relation to our being in the world. I argue that such work supports the intuitions and observations represented by Aristotle and others. It is our shared nature, body and mental predispositions, and abilities that seem to underpin the ‘embodied mind’ cited above. The registering of equivalent acts done by self and by others ‘like me’ (Meltzof, 2005), to imagine myself in others, to project my body and experiences onto that of others, both real and the fictional ‘as if’ real

“Empathy is the result of a direct experience of another person’s state (action, emotion, sensation), thanks to a mechanism of embodied simulation that produces within the observer a corporeal state that is—to some degree—shared with the person who expresses/experiences that state.” (Gallese, 2010: 3)

Such embodied empathy is, of course, a rogue emotion and response, as Aristotle intimated, and often beyond our control even if, as spectators, we are aware of the emotional, mimetic and other manipulations before us. We not only react to high tragedy, but also to low comedy, the sentimental, the shallow, the moving, the poignant, the bathetic and the profound. Because of the inherent affective quality in all mimetic and similar material, anything may provoke the deepest visceral memories and human emotions, and the range of such response mirrors the range of output of our cultural institutions.

But not only is there paradox within this range of product and effects, there are also contradictions here. Theatre seeks to be a commercial success – to gain an audience – and to be a cultural product. It does the former by being appealing and welcoming, by claiming to present something new yet which remains
familiar. It may do the latter by claiming to be new and saying something significant. To appropriate Rancière, theatre aims to be a rupture of our normal positions (Rancière, 2010). But such rupturing is liable to offend the spectator, to be a challenge that is not accepted and begging the question of what is our normal position. Thus, the continuing tension evoked by the ethical status of cultural product; to protect the commercial imperative by a ‘safeness’ that is given a fig-leaf of claimed ‘new’ or by the cant of false or manufactured notoriety that is pseudo-disruptive. Against an ever-rolling backdrop of events across the world, where do cultural institutions and their products place themselves within such tensions and dilemmas? How are the admissible rights and limits of freedom of expression to be set against the responsibilities that come with such rights? The need to be irreverent against power and its abuse, to be offensive for justified social and political ends, must be set against the ethics of the means being used or other ends; there is no absolute right to offend, no absolute right not to be offended given the qualified relative nature of offence. For example, one conference paper discussed the protest performances of Pussy Riot about human rights abuses - a cause that most would support, we may agree. But the use of irreverence here is justly countered by claims of blasphemy concerning the means and material by those who are offended. By what criteria are means to be chosen and defended, sensitivities to be respected? Just as the seeming or proclaimed ‘new’ both appeals and disappoints, so we applaud yet are fearful of the transgressive.

There will always be uncomfortable truths on both sides of such equations. To make claims that ‘anything goes’ under the guise of artistic or creative expression can easily become self-indulgent banality, totemic abstraction or a slippage into misogyny, racism or other negative prejudices against ‘others’ represented by stock-types that ignores the fact of our qualified agency and being, having meaning only in relation to others. Likewise, to claim that nothing should be offensive or irreverent denies us the ability to confront power in any guise whilst respecting qualified differences. Does any cause or end justify any means? Cultural and political expression will always exist within a dilemma - the social restraints of mutual respect (albeit that these are too often ignored or disdained), the legal restraints from one jurisdiction to another, the ethical restraints that come from the ability to make choices. The definitions, social conventions and laws implicit in all the terms here are, of course, diachronic across eras and changing sensibilities. We are confronted by the dilemma of how cultural institutions, including analogue, digital and other media, and their products remain both expressive about the world whilst being responsible within these parameters.
The real challenge, to extend Brecht’s terms, is not only ‘making the strange familiar’ but also the challenge of how ‘to make the familiar strange’ such that it confronts us to re-look at the world – to be disruptive in a positive way (Murray and Keefe, 2007: 165).

But all attempts at such ‘rupture’ must also confront the human propensity and necessity to make the ‘new’ familiar and thus disarming the intentions of the creative team and created work.

“A process of generating theatre meaning assumedly takes place in the context of each theatre experience, i.e. in the actual encounter between a theatre performance and a spectator.” (Rozik, 2008: 1)

Each phenomenological encounter, of the moment and of hazy, stumbled-through memories, is the temporary culmination of all previous encounters, an on-going experience 'always processually under construction' (Zarrilli, 2002: 1). Consequently, each encounter takes its place in affecting the next encounter, through dialectical actions and predilections to ‘recycle’ and ‘poach’. Here ‘recycling’ is that process whereby spectators - as qualifying and qualified agents – question and use inheritances that are genetic, material, social and cultural in encounters both diachronic and synchronic to rework the familiar and imagined. A similar process is involved in improvisation where the work of the phenomenological moment draws on what has gone before in a dynamic loop of creative expression (see Pressing in Keefe and Murray, 2007).

Such forms of re-cycling embrace notions of ‘poaching’ and the ‘nomadic’. Following Jenkins (1992) we may characterise all spectators as poachers, taking what appeals, intrigues, appals and otherwise draws us in to the world of the fiction to make it our own as qualified agents with embodied minds. To borrow de Certeau’s notion of ‘the nomadic’ (1984), spectators make

“...concrete connections which ever-changing, fluid subjects forge between ideological fragments, discourses, and practices.” (Radway, 1988: 365)

This fluidity differentiates poaching from reader reception/decoding in that the spectator/viewer/reader makes meanings from their dynamic knowing interpretations, both within each case and in a process from one to the next. As such we are also engaged in ‘post production’ cognitions, poaching from Bourriaud (2002); later reflections and re-visitings taken into subsequent experiences pace Rozik.
These are dynamic processes drawing on the notion of the active reader and making all spectators 'spect-actors' (after Boal, 1992). There is no 'passive' spectator or reader as too often claimed; we do not need to apply

“... strategies to theatre-making, as a means of making audiences imaginatively active in, and aware of, their roles as spectators.” (Bottoms, 2011: 446)

Rather, the knowing spectator is always aware of and active in their role, is always engaged to a lesser or greater degree, always participating, whether overtly or not. Conventions may (usually) keep us in our seat but we are never still – we breathe, our heart pumps and our blood flows, our body, mind and brain are always active. Our body reacts in a variety of material and cognitive ways whether seated or promenading through a piece of immersive theatre. Indeed, whether seated or standing or walking, we are ‘in’ the world of the play as we cognitively oscillate, knowingly suspend our disbelief.

Meaning then is located somewhere in the tension and equation between the intentions of the piece and its makers, the spectator’s response and desire to make any piece familiar and thus accessible by referencing previous work, the process and procession of experiences, the disrupting of aims by a creative participation that imposes connotations outside the control and parameters of the piece and thus inherent in the occasion.

The spectator is never passive (see Bouchard, 2009; Bottoms, 2011) but always creatively participating, whether overtly or not, simply by being present – by spectating.

SOME (SUBJECTIVE) INTERACTIONS AND IMMERSIONS

Like ‘new’, the terms ‘interactive’ and ‘immersive’ seem to be ones that have many claims made for and on them; in theatre, in many modes of digital technologies.

Like ‘new’, I suggest that claims are made predicated on terms not sustainable in practice.

“The summer of 2006, the ‘PLAY’ orchestra project on London’s South Back; 56 plastic cubes were set out as if an orchestra and wired up as individual instruments, so that by sitting on a cube one ‘played’ the instrument. The project was described as interactive and participatory by
going from one cube to another, ‘re-orchestrating’ the music as a sound game... But we could not change the piece of music, simply how it was heard – re-arranging not changing the sounds. It was play... that also showed the limits of interactivity within the overt participation; I cannot change the game, only some of its ingredients.” (Keefe, 2010a: 45)

A contemporary (2014) example of similarly limited interactive but creative play can be seen in a project located in the M.K. Ciurlionis State Art Museum in Kaunas. Here, a group of art students from Vilnius have created an installation that allows the viewer to manipulate the lighting and thus ‘play’ with how Ciurlionis’ painting, *The Offering*, may be received in terms of colour, tone and illumination; the painting remains the same but is made different through a restricted, playful activity of the viewer.

Thus we may note that Smuts, in his discussion of ‘interactivity’, points out that

“... to think DVD chapter selection or TV channel changing is interactive is to mistake control over the presentation of an art work with interactivity.” (Smuts, 2009: 56)

I suggest this is equivalent to the book reader who has always been able to skip chapters or read out of the printed chapter-page order. This is a creative participation whereby the reader as poacher re-orders according to his or her inclinations, beyond the author's control. Likewise in theatre:

“The first lesson the playwright learns is that he is not going to be able to control an audience’s reactions anyway... As you can't control people's reactions to your plays, your duty is also not to reduce people's reactions, not to give them easy handles with which they can pigeon-hole you, and come to comfortable terms with what you are saying.” (Hare, 1978: 57)

What emerges from Smuts’ overview is that such modifying of the experiencing of the work does not change the content of the work itself. Rather we must re-consider the deictic or you-I exchange whereby degrees of interactivity are contingent on the parameters of exchange between artwork and always-engaged spectator. This makes interactivity relational between us and the work.

“In themselves, things are not interactive; it is only in relation to our ability to control something that it is interactive for *us*.” (Smuts, 2009: 65)
This is not an either/or relationship; rather, it is on a spectrum from minimal to maximal predicated on the always-engaged spectator as re-cycling poacher and nomad. Where the manifestation and expression of participation ranges from overt to non-overt or tacit according to the occasion and mode of work concerned.

We can re-order the reading sequence of a novel whilst not re-ordering the composition of the painting or play; we still make the artwork or stage-work our own within material and other inheritances through cognitive, imaginative processes. Whilst we cannot intervene as such in the conventional work of theatre, we remain participants in responses, applause and so on.

As a re-cycling poacher, we do not abolish the author but put the author-spectator relationship on a more uneasy ground of tension: potential disruptions of authorial intentions whilst responses rest on these (one can only work with what one is given), and the messy empirical experience that is less, or more, than the artwork’s claims.

To turn to a particular style and mode of theatre; if we think of ‘immersive’ not simply as ‘new’ but as physical as well as psychological senses then we see pre-figurings in the Theatre of Dionysus, The Globe, the cyclorama, Wagner’s concept of Gesamtkunstwerk, Gropius’ design for a ‘Totaltheater’ or Kaprow’s ‘Happenings’. Thus, ‘immersive’, ‘site-generic’, perhaps ‘marginal’ and ‘post-dramatic’ theatres are both a continuing rejection of a still hegemonic prosценium or end-on spectator-stage relationship and newly minted variations of other configurations. The new immersive rests on the very particular locating of the spectator in the dramaturgy of the site and work itself, to be a (relatively speaking) more integrated part of the dramaturgical weave of the encounters and actions yet within varying fixed parameters. (See also Murray and Keefe, 2007; 2016.)

My intention is to trace the roots and ‘transversals’ that link certain pieces and productions; my own procession of experiences by which I co-generate meaning from and between one and another. It is the notion of journey that also takes us into the particular dramaturgy and interactions of spectator and site that mark the performance installations labelled ‘immersive theatre’. Whole sites become the dramaturgical playground for performers and spectators sharing three-dimensional space, rather than engaging with three-dimensional designs and staging looked at from the auditorium. This playing offers specific encounters of spatial narratives and dramaturgies as the spectator journeys to
and through the site; encounters with performers, other spectators; spaces that may be traversed, and objects stumbled across.

I make tracks along with my fellow spectators.

*Tri Bywyd/ Three Lives.* (Brith Gof at Esgair Fraith, Wales, 1995). Once again by coach to the performance site but now deep in the forests. This shared journey becomes a semi-ritualistic travel into the site, the place of magic and transformation. And the site is magic, is magnificent. Stages growing out of the ruined walls, out of the trees – yet the trees grow out of and through the stages. We sit literally in/by the trees looking at the array of platforms and ladders. It evokes the mediaeval theatre; not the stations of the cross but the stations of a contemporary secular morality play. Five performers tell the intertwining stories of victims and rooms; clambering through poles & trees, criss-crossing the stages as we are shown the life of a house, the death of a prostitute, the dying of a fasting girl with the parallels of places, events, violences. We are confronted by the sordid realities of undignified lives and deaths. A soundscape reverberates around the trees as lights swing from one figure to another. We are surrounded by nature but here nature does not carry salvation; it is ironic, the mute setting only for the events of a broken society. The piece does not have the incessant pounding power and physical impact of *Arturius Rex*... Rather it is the totality, the vision of the space that resonates this time; the sheer presence of the stages, trees, stone walls, roots, darkness and lighting, sound, figures all intertwined and growing from each other as the space itself overarches the action. (Keefe, 1995: 24)

The emphasis is on both the use and the dramaturgical effect of the specificity of the site itself, part of which is the journey there. Not simply walking through a foyer, but a journey by coach and foot that becomes part of the experience of the site. I may not promenade as in the following examples, but I am immersed in the site and performance

*Oráculos.* (Vargas, Old Coach Station, London, 1997). This was not a free navigation in that I could only follow a pre-set route through the labyrinth of 15 chambers linked by passages, all made from curtains, gauzes and mirrors. I am alone as I encounter different textures, levels of darkness, smells, hidden lights, sounds, but occasionally an actor-character appears who invites me into some action or other before disappearing again. It is not wholly interactive in Smuts’ terms; I cannot re-order the labyrinth, but I do interact
with the created environment in terms of the sensory, tactile experience. I also, of course, interact with myself as ‘re-knowings and un-forgettings’ rise up from my lone walking and encounters. My ‘new’ immersion is both mediated and mediating - by the artwork in itself, what this may evoke, by what I take in as my biography thus both qualifying and enriching the dramaturgy I am knowingly and directly part of.

I am taken to the 31st floor and, after initially following arrows on the floor, left to free navigate over three floors of rooms and corridors. Although entering alone, I could come across other wanderers by chance. Responses and reactions were not those of an audience but a collection of individuals finding themselves temporarily in each other’s company before wandering off alone again. It was an experience of tracking through abandoned spaces and objects. The presence of anonymous angels was signified by abandoned wings and feathers and actors in evening suits or dresses with white or black wings attached. I was interactive in terms of my freedom to wander through the installation but not in terms of mutual responsiveness as setting and angels ignored me. I also interact with what is evoked; as well as stories, legends, and tales similar to Oráculos, I now take in fears of post-apocalypse survival, of histories of refugees, of collapse.


For 3 hours I am immersed in a performance installation as I wander the worlds of Faust and The Masque of the Red Death, encountering, exploring, being accosted or left alone. I have my nails painted in a 1950s salon, am offered tea in an opium den, take rest in a cornfield, mugged in a London rookery. I move from one transformed space to the next, marvelling at the detail, the completeness of the décor and scenography through which I make my way but am not permitted to re-arrange. I am quite clearly an overt part of the show, in company as I promenade and intermingle with spectators and actors alike. I am sharing their breath in a quite literal way, looking and being looked at...

I can choose whether or how to look and participate, or to turn to something or someone else. When alone in a room with no actors or audience present, I am then the spect-actor for myself alone; the location has no meaning until I read it, bring my ‘habitus’ into play. But in refusing to keep the carnival or plague masks on – which I often did as these became uncomfortable or simply as an irritated response to
being continually bullied into wearing the mask – was I breaking the rules of the game? What if I had taken my participation to the point of touching, moving, re-ordering, re-placing the objects so carefully situated as individual and collective installation? What if I had pushed the mugger away, responded in kind as I am invited by this action to become an actor myself; would this offend or embarrass the actor? (Keefe, 2010a: 46)

In these pieces I can free navigate within the fixed parameters until the final scene of each piece, when spectators are gathered as an audience for the climax and denouement. The shared experience turns from one mode to another. These immersions into Punchdrunk’s work are repeated in The Duchess of Malfi (2010, and The Drowned Man (2013), and prefigured in a spectrum of works before 1995.

The purpose of this recalling and retelling is to exemplify the difference and sameness within an arc of events by marking the tracks through the series. Each show is ‘new’, as not-performed-before, but not new in the shared modes of performance, devices used, and ongoing spectatorial experience. The very fact of my participative attendance qualifies and mediates the creative intentions of each ‘new’ piece: my presence is my disruptive, creative participation. Likewise, the tracking through these representative pieces becomes an empirical supporting of Roziks’s position already cited, with the inevitable and necessary qualifying by and of each piece seen in turn. There are also all the other similarly marked theatre experiences that are both different yet share the same principles of theatre and spectatorship.

As each piece of theatre and my experience of it draws from what has gone before, all theatre is, I would claim,

“... essentially a ghosted space filled with the possibility of arresting judgment and forcing ‘recognition or re-knowing or un-forgetting.’” (Colbert, 2011: 160)

From the perspective this evokes, I would argue that all theatre is a series of more or less related palimpsests as each piece rests on, seemingly replaces what went before, remains in our memory and re-callings.

Such (possible) forced re-knowing or un-forgetting is both the power of theatre – making the strange familiar or familiar strange – and its challenge and obstacle faced by most creative product – not simply to leave the strange as
strange and the familiar as familiar. Whilst immersive theatre may be a newly minted experience for any one spectator, this first time will never-the-less be mediated by recyclings and encounters from before, from poachings and post-productions. I take into each and every event, materials that will qualify the never-before-ness as I find ways of accessing what confronts me and what I confront – my creative participation. This is not to diminish the experience but to properly contextualise it within the material, discursive, social and cultural forces and inheritances that shape all spectatorial practices.

SIGNPOSTS TOWARD CONCLUSIONS

In 2000, Simon Persighetti proposed the notion of the ‘actor as signpost’ in relation to his work in ambulatory performance.

“... reconfiguring the play or position of the artist as one of guide or mis-guide through real time and space rather than as narrator or interpreter of place.” (Smith, 2009: 160)

But why restrict this role and status to the actor-artist, and to immersive and promenade theatres only? The actor has a privileged semiotic status but not an exclusive one in relation to the effect the spectators have on each other and the sites. As ‘spect-actors’, we have the freedom, to a greater or lesser degree, to navigate our own routes and paths through the installations. As each navigate, so are others, acting as guides and signposts for each other. The boundaries of looking and being looked at are blurred as we become part of, have presence as navigators in the dramaturgy of, the installation for our-selves and others.

But we must extend that these actions as spectators are also signposts for each other across all theatres, where each member of the audience is simultaneously influenced by the reactions of their fellow spectators and influence their reactions – I/we laugh, I/we applaud. Acknowledging this always present and ongoing role is central to the concept of a spectatorial dramaturgy; the locating of the spectator in theatre.

Dramaturgies rest on continuity and variation, and must always embrace the implications of the positioning and status of the spectator in all theatres. It is a matter of transversals between those category principles that define theatre, between the old and the innovative, newly minted variations that we experience. In all dramaturgical manifestations, the spectator remains both old and new by virtue of their predilections to roam, poach and re-cycle; their ability to use the
trajectories of imagination and processional experience to both see and ‘see as’ – to be spectators for and with each other.

As such, we mediate the intentions of the cultural makers and industries by our own creative participation based on unforeseen empathy, enlightened irreverence, unexpected responses, disruptive ruptures, un-shocking the new, mocking the celebrated, being prejudiced, and being critical – constructive or otherwise. I would argue that all cultural products are affective – it is the effects that we dispute in the disruptive dynamic of readership and spectatorship.

Poaching from Hans Christian Anderson’s always-relevant moral tale how, when and where do we point out that the ‘emperor’ is wearing no clothes; that a theory or idea or production, if not naked, then is wearing only a fig leaf of ‘new’? As spectators who are signposts for each other, who is brave enough to be the little boy who points out to any and all cultural institutions the paradoxes and contradictions that flow from our creative participation?

**CODA; SOME MUSINGS AND REFLECTIONS ARISING FROM THE PAPERS AND DISCUSSIONS AT THE CONFERENCE**

On History and Language: Theatre demands a sense of history in order that we avoid simply reiterating rather than re-working. We inherit whether or not we deny this – awareness allows us to co-shape and re-frame the inheritances rather than be trapped for ideological or dogmatic reasons. Such awareness also rests on language and how we use our theatre vocabularies and dramaturgical terms not only aesthetically, but also within historical, political and cultural contexts. Hence the need to contest the assumptions and received ideas represented by terms such as ‘passive’, binaries rather than dialectics, dichotomies rather than spectrums.

On Remains: If the bones are what remain as a memory of flesh, then the tools and artefacts that somehow survive are the incomplete memory of the culture that produced them.

On Anonymity: Why is anonymity to be desired, the face hidden behind masks or in half-light? Such a desire raises many troubling questions and fears about the spectator’s ethical position, but as theatre is a shared experience, then I want to see the faces of my fellow spectators (as well as the rest of their bodies) so that responses are mutual and reciprocal – as in all theatres.
Soon after we can see, we are aware that we can also be seen. The eye of the other combines with our own eye to make it fully credible that we are part of the visible world. (Berger, 1972: 7, 9)

By ‘taking away’ the face, we are fragmenting the body: to be resisted against Levinas and others.

“But the face is only one part of a whole body and we know both ourselves and others, in so far as we can, by our bodies as a whole. I look at the whole body, whatever particular focus or privilege I give to the face. By separating body and consciousness, we also come perilously close to a dualism.” (Keefe, 2010a)

On Dualism: The ghost or spectre hovering over our culture remains that of dualism; not only of the enduring dogma of mind v. body, but of the empirical v. the romantic, of the phenomenological v. the mystical, of modern v. postmodern and other ‘isms. Given that cultural product tends toward such dualisms, the notion of the embodied mind represents a challenge to such a deep received idea. How is the dualistic and dichotomous hegemony represented here by ‘new v. not-new’ to be contested by the more challenging dialectic and dialogic of ‘new/not-new’? ‘Life by its very nature is dialogic’ – Bakhtin; ‘We act in relation to others’ – Cecchin. (Keefe, 2013: 92)

On the Embodied Mind: Not only does this concept challenge dualism, but also received ideas of empathy. The human is seemingly inherently predisposed to putting him- or her-self in the position of others, both in the real world around us and in the mimetic ‘world-of-the-play’ knowingly treated as if real. Thus we respond empathetically both of and not-of our own volition; not only emotionally but also physically and cognitively to empirical and phenomenological events, and the simulation of these in art; hence Brecht’s advice to the actors - to visit the streets. (Brecht, 1981: 176)

On Agon: If the fundamental dynamic of all stage works is the agon, then this is to be found not only on the stage between actor-actor/character-character, but between stage and audience as spectators both accept and contest (receive and interpret) the created material being presented and its modes of presentation. Brecht’s traffic between stage and auditorium should not have easy passage but be part of the hard weave of the performance experience.
AFTERWORDS

This is a revised and expanded version of the paper given at the international conference on Cultural Institutions and Communication: Towards Creative Participation, held in Kaunas, October 2014. As indicated in the body of the essay and coda it draws on and benefits from the other papers and discussions running across the days and evenings of the event. The essay purposely retains some of the flavour of the paper; as a piece about theatre, it seems right that the performance colour of the delivered paper should be present in this printed version. The paper and essay also benefit from the parallel research and writing for the second edition of Physical Theatres: A Critical Introduction, due for publication in late 2015, and I acknowledge the happy serendipity of being able to draw this work.
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The Spectator, the New, and a Disrupting Creative Participation


John KEEFE

ŽIŪROVAS, NAŬJA IR GRIAUNANTIS KŪRBYNIS DALYVAVIMAS

SANTRAUKA

Kūrybinės ir kultūrinės institucijos, kultūrinės industrijos ir kūryba, kurią aprėpia ir puoselėja šios institucijos, yra neabejotinai grindžiama beveik nekvestionuojama sąvoka „naujumas“. Kiekvienas iš pažiūros „naujas“ veikėjas ar kūrėjas ieško unikalių, inovatyvių sprendimų, pateisinančių įvykį ir rinkodaros patrauklumą auditorijai. Žiūrovas yra pernelyg dažnai suvokiamas kaip pasyvus vartotojas. Šiame straipsnyje, atvirkščiai, į žiūrovą žvelgiama kaip į brakonierių ar klajoklį, aktyvų kūrybinio proceso dalyvį, nuolat jsitraukiantį, santykį su sceniniu kūriniu transformuojantį kaip tam tikrą žiūrovo dramaturgiją. Šiame kontekste „naūja“ visuomet priklauso nuo to, kas jau yra buvę praeityje, ir to, kas buvo anksčiau patirta, tokiu būdu įrėmiant dabartinę patirtį. Konceptualiai derinama neurokognityvinė teorija ir „įkūnytas protas“ pjesės-spektaklio tėstinumui ir „įtraukiančio teatro“ formų nagrinėjimui. Straipsnyje teigiama, kad žiūrovas, visuomet sąmoningai atlikdamas savo kaip suprantų žiūrovo-aktoriaus vaidmenį, skatina scenos kūrinio postprodukciją ir tokiu būdu dalyvauja kūrybinio pertrūkio ir (arba) atkūrimo procese.

REIKŠMINIAI ŽODŽIAI: naūja, įkūnytas protas, įtraukiantis, žiūrovas, žiūrovas-aktorius, dalyvavimas.

The Spectator, the New, and a Disrupting Creative Participation