SITE-BASED THEATRE IN 21ST CENTURY BRITAIN:

CONCEPTUALIZING AUDIENCE EXPERIENCES

By

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Abstract

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Site-based Theatre in 21st Century Britain: Conceptualizing Audience Experiences
Thesis directed by Associate Professor Oliver Gerland

This dissertation sets out to provide guidelines for the conceptualization of audience experiences for site-based theatre--theatre events more commonly described as site-specific, site-responsive, or immersive. Creators of site-based theatre should design participative engagement for audiences that immerses participants in the site and interfaces with its contexts, and promotes a visceral and memorable experience of the performance.

Following a definition of site-based theatre, this dissertation investigates conceptual practices of 20 leading practitioners of site-based theatre in contemporary Great Britain; Grid Iron Theatre, Punchdrunk, Pearson/Brookes, Common Wealth Theatre Company, Hydrocracker Theatre, Red Earth, and ZU-UK, among others. Based on interviews with these practitioners, and observations of eight site-based theatre productions in the U.K. between 2011-2013, this dissertation proposes and explores a two-step sequence for the conceptualization of visceral and memorable site-based theatre audience experiences, and derives a taxonomy of the essential qualities of site-based theatre.

Chapter Three explores how site-based theatre benefits from an excited and engaged audience. Some audiences are attracted to site-based theatre's egalitarian appeal that defies the power implications of the conventional theatre transaction.

Chapter Four explains how real-world sites offer locational, societal, historical and cultural contexts to be perceived and interpreted by the spectator. Numerous

considerations for performance and participant interfaces are explored including a range of possible responses to contextual information present in the site.

Chapter Five explores the range of possible participative engagement available to creators of site-based theatre. Conceiving participative engagement requires attention to: inviting agency and active participation; engaging participants in roles in the performance; the usage and effects of immersion, proxemics, haptics and temporality, orientation and disorientation, and transitions; and methods for compelling movement through the performance and site.

This study identifies and discusses two foundational considerations for the conceptualization of site-based theatre and considers the possibility for expanded site-based theatre activity in the United States in the future.

Dedication

This work is dedicated to my father, G. Randall Harmon,

and to Mary Alice Harmon, William Arden Harmon, and B. F. Rodgers, Jr.,

in memoriam.

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Introduction

We humans, by nature, are sentient beings. We interface with our surroundings through our senses of sight, sound, taste, smell, and touch. We seek to deepen our understanding of what we experience by calibrating our engagement with the specific location we occupy against a subconscious existential awareness of our place in the universe.   In essence, our constant interrogation of location represents an innate desire to increase self-understanding.

I am drawn to the practice of site-based theatre—that is, theatre performed not in a purpose-built theatre building but in a real-world site. As an audience member, I crave the immediate visceral response produced by experiencing a theatrical event in the real world. I prefer that sort of excitement over what I can experience through a conventional theatrical transaction in a designated set-aside space where audience members are passive and performers are active.   In 2006 I founded, with eleven other actors and artisans, Specific Gravity Ensemble, a site-responsive theatre company in Louisville, Kentucky. Our company quickly garnered wide press with our festival of short plays produced in operating elevators. Building on our observations and discoveries during *Elevator Plays* (2007, 2008, 2009) we produced both new plays and a Shakespearean classic in a variety of sites: a derelict factory, the basement of a Civil War era hospital, public restrooms, an art gallery, and other locations.

My desire to learn more about site-based theatre led me to this research project which seeks to discover how creators of site-based theatre conceive audience experiences that viscerally impact the audience in the moment, and remain memorable to the participant for an extended period of time. I have discovered that to design this type of experience, these creators not only unlock the pertinent contexts of the production's real-world site but also engage audience members in an experience intended to seize their attention, engage their active participation in the moment and linger in their thoughts for weeks to come.

Throughout theatre history, a performance's site has held special significance for its audience. For example, a performance of the *Quem Quaeritis* in the newly completed gothic cathedral at Chartres one Easter morning in the early 12th century surely held its audience engaged and enthralled with the majesty of the sights and sounds of the "House of God" around them. Imagine the sense of pride and awe felt by the immense St. Petersburg crowds that watched 8000 soldiers and sailors perform *The Storming of the Winter Palace,* by Nikolai Evreinov, which reenacted in 1920 historic events at an actual site of the October Revolution three years before. Live theatre produced outside traditional, purpose-built theatre buildings, sometimes called "site-specific" theatre, surged in popularity in the latter decades of the 20th century, and remains an active form of experimental theatre today. Indeed, so widespread is the practice of this kind of theatre that "site-specific" no longer applies to all examples. A "site-specific" performance is tailored to connect to a particular location's unique features and identity, but there are also "site-responsive," "site-sympathetic," and "immersive" performances. These latter kinds of performance occur outside a purpose-built theatre but are not intrinsically connected to a particular real-

world location's unique features. Because these performance types all require similar foundational considerations in their conception, I include site-specific, site-responsive, site-sympathetic, and immersive theatre performances in this study. I shall use the term "site-based theatre" to refer to all theatre events that take place outside a building purpose-built for theatre presentation.

Although site-based theatre works have proved popular in certain urban centers of the U.S., Canada, Australia, Germany, France, Spain, Argentina and Brazil, evidence suggests that the epicenter of creative and popular site-based theatre since the late 1980's has been Great Britain. Although a few British theatre companies staged special events in unconventional places (churches, abandoned buildings, etc.), in the late 1980's critics and academics started assigning the descriptive "site-specific" to classify experimental theatre productions staged beyond the traditional theatre setting. First gaining critical notice with productions like Bill Bryce's *The Ship* investigating the repercussions of the loss of the shipbuilding industry to the Clyde River and Glasgow in 1980, and then with Brith Gof's celebration of Welsh identity with *Gododdin* in Cardiff in 1987 (and in Glasgow in 1989), over the next 30 years British site-based theatre artists and companies evolved the concept of "site" from a novel approach to authenticity of "place," to current "immersive" dialogues for the audience evocatively exploring themes of identity, location, heritage, transformation, etc.

In the 21st century two new national theatres have been founded in Great Britain without ties to any specific theatre building, the National Theatre of Scotland and the National Theatre Wales. Numerous independent professional companies across the country engage in a variety of explorations of "site" in their productions including long-

running companies like Grid Iron. 21st century stand-outs include Punchdrunk, dreamthinkspeak, Hydrocracker, and Common Wealth Theatre Company. Numerous new site-based theatre productions premiere each year at major theatre and performance festivals around Great Britain like the Brighton and Edinburgh Fringe Festivals. With more site-based theatre activity than other country, I believe Great Britain has been and remains the epicenter of site-specific theatre production and scholarship in the world.

This dissertation aims to answer this question: What are the conceptual considerations entertained by leading contemporary creators of site-based theatre?   To answer this question, I attended eight site-based theatre events in the Great Britain[1] between September 2011 and August 2013. Based on this field research, I derived a classification system (taxonomy) of essential qualities, or properties, of the site-based audience experience. To understand how those events were conceived utilizing these essential qualities, I conducted interviews with 20 leading British practitioners and scholars of site-based theatre.   Further, I collected video archives, photographs, reviews and other press, and personal accounts by audience members relating to the primary interview subjects and their most noted site-based productions. My ultimate goal is to use this research to categorize and articulate considerations for conceiving audience experiences that can be studied and practiced by future creators of site-based theatre.

Analysis of my field research and the interviews led me to identify two foundational considerations in the conceptualization of site-based theatre events. First, all sites resonate contextual information that will have bearing on the creation and perception of a theatrical performance designed to take place therein. The creator of the site-based event

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[1] Or, in the case of *Sleep No More*, in the U.S. created by a British theatre company, Punchdrunk.

should carefully consider how the performance and its participants will interface with that contextual information. Second, site-based theatre involves some degree of physical participation by the spectator beyond sitting in a seat and passively observing a performance on a stage. The creator of a site-based theatre event should consider not only how the audience interfaces with the contexts of the site but also how their participative engagement with the site and performance suspends disbelief and immerses them into a visceral and memorable experience.

While these two conceptual stages might be studied and explored separately, the two-stage sequence for conceptualization I propose herein, exemplifies a logical course that could be employed in the creation of a site-based theatre performance. Decisions made at each stage will affect or direct one toward particular considerations of the next stage. For example: highlighting certain contextual resonances of a site might suggest particular participative audience engagements, or dictate possible roles for audience participants in the dramaturgy. A certain contextual interface might also promote agency in the audience's participation in the event. While each of the considerations proposed herein may be taken separately, I propose this progression as a logical method for conceptualizing a site-based theatre audience experience.

An Example of a Visceral and Memorable Site-based Audience Experience

On a glorious afternoon, 08 October 2011, I gathered, with almost 250 other participants, on the hillside at Chantry Farm, just north of Brighton, waiting to attend Red Earth's CHALK.   Simon Pascoe, Caitlin Easterby and the Red Earth ensemble had created a promenading ritual to be enacted among the ridges, valley and in the Neolithic hilltop fort

of Wolstonbury Hill a short walk away. Singers tuned up. We milled, chattering with

excitement. As I looked around, I observed an audience ranging from teens to seniors; all

seemed to be properly kitted for a trek through the landscape on a blustery autumn

afternoon and evening. A bell was rung and all gathered to hear Simon Pascoe and Caitlin

Easterby greet us and ask us to process in "mindful silence" as a group behind two standard

bearers carrying huge green billowy flags.

We slowly started trekking up the steep side of the hill through a working sheep

pasture. Turning around and walking backwards I took in an amazing vista to the

southwest, seeing the South Downs roll on into the distance. As I turned back around I saw

a shepherd in billowy neutral-colored robes, carrying his crook, striding up the ridge to my

left, with tall grass to his waist. The shepherd, enacted by Jinen Butoh performer Atsushi

Takenoushi, strongly and confidently moved along the horizon like he was physically

connected to the land. From this point on various reed horns and medieval and primitive

bagpipes accompanied our walk. The exotic music fit the moment and atmosphere created

by the rolling grassy hills, and transported us into the landscape of this primitive shepherd.

Moments later we stood in a long arc along a Neolithic-era cross-dyke that ran

perpendicular to an ancient chalk roadway, while the Shepherd first sang to his flock, then

released them to bound into the landscape.   As I followed the sheep moving away into the

valley I began to notice the majesty of Wolstonbury Hill and the commanding place it has

over the South Downs landscape. As the shepherd turned to move down the ridge, we

turned and followed the chalk road curving down into the valley bottom. I noticed that the

shepherd's movement was no longer the confident strong stride I saw ascending the hill

earlier. Before where strong and grounded, he now stumbled, and strode erratically.

The farther we walked, the more the magnitude of the landscape revealed itself. The entire east side of Wostonbury Hill slopes steeply away about 300 feet down into a deep protected bowl. Red Earth had lined the ridgeline with a long series of tall white flags. In the distance I saw the sheep, now loosed into the landscape, traversing across the slope of the hill in parallel lines tracing the topography, following, undoubtedly, the paths left by generations of their four-legged ancestors. We stopped to take in the vista, while the Brighton Stiener School Community Choir serenaded us with a 17th century folk song, *The Shepherd of the Downs*. One could easily imagine this song being sung on this landscape in some past century by a lone shepherd tending his flocks.

After the song, we participants were summoned into the bowl by the trumpeting of echoing rams horns. I lingered, connected to the past, as I envisioned similar communities of peoples called by the horn to some ritual performance in the bowl, or into the ancient stone *henge* atop the hill. In the bowl in the distance, I could see Red Earth's greenwood sculptural installation called *Fold*, reminiscent of a medieval cattle enclosure, and I noticed smudgy fire braziers being lit in a ring surrounding it. The road down was lined with choir members and other volunteers, clanging sheep bells and softly calling and geeing. We temporarily became the herd, protected, guided, and safe.

In the bowl, we circled the enclosure as Mongolian singer Badma Samdandamba emerged from a small copse of trees, in full traditional Mongolian folk priestess costume and sang an ancient ballad. We watched Atsushi dance around and into the enclosure. Badma offered a traditional blessing of splashed yak's milk around the enclosure. As drums beat, Atsushi's dancing grew more erratic. Inside the enclosure, he seemed to wither and collapse, wildly splash himself with liquid chalk, and then disappear. We joined

with the percussionists, clanging cymbals, creating energy to raise the shepherd back up.

As Atsushi seemed to reanimate, he lit a torch and loped, in slow spirals, up the steep face

of Wolstonbury Hill. Badma led us, singing another traditional Mongolian song, up out of

the bowl, blessing us each with scattered rice.

While we ascended the face of Wolstonbury, a series of deep bells rang out around

the valley their sounds echoing round and round, accompanying our procession like a

dirge. Didgeridoos played as we ascended the Roman-built avenue straight into the

remains of the summit hill fort. Smoke from braziers lining the ancient road blurred our

vision. We emerged at the hill top into a brilliant red sunset, while the percussionists

banged large gongs and called forth the chalked shepherd, who danced his dance of

ascendance on a rock at the hill's highest point, striking a final pose, silhouetted against a

blood red sunset.

After the performance concluded, we all returned to breathing normally, having

collectively held our breath as we watched the confluence of majestic landscape, red sunset

and butoh dancer form this monumental climax. Then we slowly descended the ridge

following a line of small braziers, now lighting the dark pathway. Notably, we were no

longer a herd, but a tribe of modern human supplicants tracing the same topography of the

ridge as centuries of our ancestors had; back-lit by ceremonial fires (*CHALK*).

Defining "Site-based Theatre"

Gay McAuley describes "site-based theatre" as theatre performance intensely

engaged with its place, and "occurring in found spaces rather in designated theatre

buildings" (*About Performance* 7). In this study, the term "site-based theatre" further refers

to theatre that is not presented in a conventional stage-auditorium arrangement with spectators passively observing performers' doings.   In mainstream theatrical presentations (e.g. in New York Broadway theatres), the audience, luxuriously enveloped in plush upholstered seats, their anonymity protected by the cloaking effect of extinguished house lighting, is directed by the event's creators to focus attention toward a singular direction, the stage. Generally, the architecture is designed to enhance the creators' control of attention while enabling the performance to be viewed from all seats.   Sight lines are laboriously respected while scenery and lighting enhance and emphasize the most important characters in the play's most important moments. Typically, the stage is presented for audience members' attention by means of a centuries-old framing device, the proscenium arch, much as a Dutch master's landscape might be elaborately framed in a museum gallery to draw and focus the observer's eye.   The proscenium arch helps spectators to suspend their disbelief of the fictional events occurring on the stage by rigorously guiding and enforcing their attention on it.   The actual site of performance (the purpose-built, or designated theatre building) offers an initial image of prestige and comfort and then melts from consciousness under cover of darkness as the fictional story onstage unfolds. The fact that a touring production plays equally effectively in theatres from New York to Dallas to Vancouver indicates the relative unimportance of specific locations in conventional commercial theatre today.

In a site-based theatre production, location plays a more substantial role in the transaction between the performance and its audience. In a site-based theatre production, the audience's experience pivots on the intersection of three elements: the text (play or performance content); the concept (the creators' interpretation of the play or performance

content); and the site (the location of the performance, to which are attached manifold associations or contexts). Mike Pearson describes site-based theatre as involving "an activity, an audience, and a place" (*Site-Specific Performance* 19). The dramaturgy of the performance unifies with the available contexts and architecture of the site. Ben Harrison, founder and Artistic Director of Edinburgh's Grid Iron Theatre Company, describes a process where "You visit the site. You secure the site, and then that begins to shape the text. [. . .] There's a dramaturgy of the site, and a dramaturgy of the text, and the two have to work around each other" (Personal Interview).

This study of site-based theatre is limited to only those performances based on a story or narrative, and whose production intends to create or convey a fictional world for the audience to enter. As audiences engage with the performance, its site, and the world conveyed, participants may be invited to take individual agency to direct how they experience the event. In this study, "agency" is defined as the individual participant's autonomy in making choices as to how, and to what extent, they physically participate in the performance. However, in site-based theatre, while the participants may take agency to direct how they experience the performance, they generally cannot change the course of the action, as in, for example, applied theatre applications.

Just as the audience participant's possible agency is limited so as to not affect completion of the work, so too is the designed participation limited and engineered to fit the action and the world being portrayed. While heavy participative engagement might be invited, such as in Punchdrunk's performance environments, the design of the theatrical transaction does not allow such levels of free agency that a participant can cross the line and adversely affect the intended performance outcome. Therefore, due to site-based

theatre's adherence to the intended narrative structure or performance outcome, individual agency is generally limited to fit within the fictional world with audience participants' possible actions designed into the performance by the production's creators.

The framing of events in site-based theatre productions is less singular in focus than in traditional purpose-built theatres. A site-based production might offer a multitude of foci for audience perception. As Susan Bennett discusses in *Theatre Audiences: A Theory of Production and Reception* (1997), pleasure for the site-based theatre audience lies in their observations, perceptions, and unfolding interpretations of a multitude of signifiers communicated by the environment and the actions played within it (78).

As can be seen on the next page, scholar David Wohl observes that site-based theatre productions engage their audiences, sites and texts across spectrums of engagement. He notes that audiences can engage site-specific theatre through special invitation or as accidental bystander. He observes that a site-specific theatre event could be fixed at a single location or involve multiple locations, as one might find in a promenade-style performance. Wohl observes that a performance might totally transform a site or leave it almost wholly untouched. Likewise, the text for a site-specific performance might range from being a previously published, even classic, piece of literature to a work devised specifically for performance in that particular site (Wohl).

While I offer a taxonomy of essential qualities of site-based theatre that differs from Wohl's, I borrow with grateful acknowledgment his notion that those properties can be placed on spectrums, or continua; for example, as will be explained in a later chapter, an audience participant's physical engagement with a site can range from light to heavy.

FOUR CONTINUUM MODELS FOR SITE-SPECIFIC THEATRE, D. WOHL, 2013

Audience

Invited/Exclusive — **Accidental/Bystander**

Environment

Fixed — **Mobile/Nomadic**

Site

Unaltered — **Transformed**

Text

Previously Published — **Site-Specific**
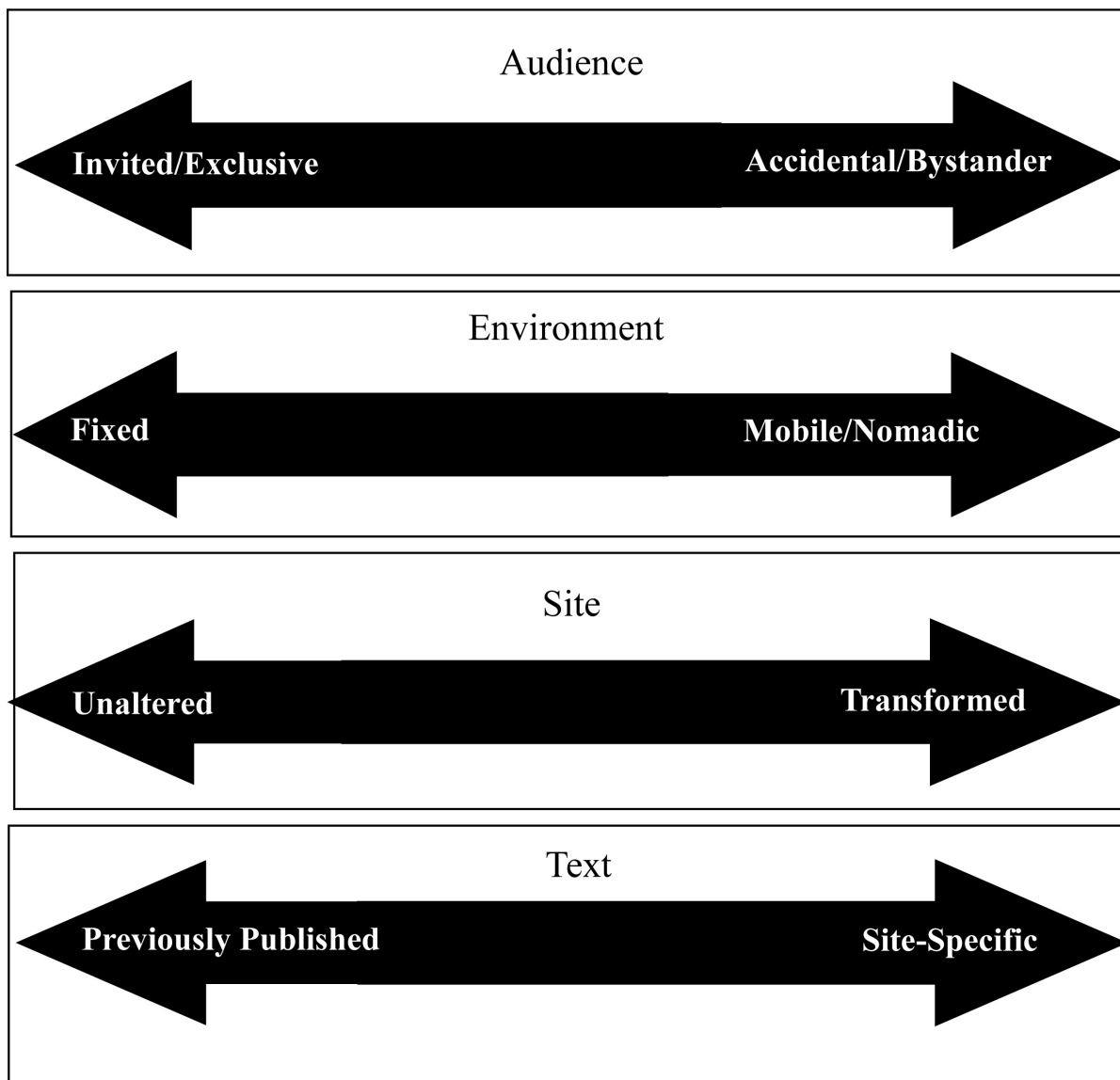
Dia. 1 -- Models for how site-based theatre can be experienced by participants as proposed by David Wohl.

Before delving further into a discussion of the site-based theatre audience experience, I must acknowledge the controversy over descriptors for this genre of experimental theatre. At the time I commenced this study, in the U.S. virtually any production outside a purpose-built theatre building was considered "site-specific." In

Great Britain I generally found that site-based theatre practitioners generally derided this term as a marketing gimmick. They preferred to use terms like "site-responsive," "immersive," "site-sympathetic," and like monikers to identify their work.

An example will help to illustrate important terminological difficulties. One of the hottest tickets in London in the fall of 2011 was for *Decade,* a co-production of Headlong Theatre and The National Theatre that explored the ten years since 9/11 through an amalgamation of short plays. Marketed as site-specific, *Decade,* immersed its audiences into a detailed constructed environment in a large, rather generic space in the Commodity Quay of St. Katherine's Docks. Upon arriving at the venue, I joined a long slow-moving entry queue where a person who appeared to be with security examined my ticket. I was asked my business, and directed through what appeared to be a metal-detector to another security table. After being asked questions that did not pertain to my purpose for entering, nor to any security issue for that matter, I was cleared to pass, as my interviewers laughed and joked. It was clear that this scam security procedure offered a sarcastic commentary on the changed notion of "security" between the pre- and post-911 world. From the checkpoint we proceeded down curving stairs into a large room full of tables, approximately 200 patrons and about a dozen uniformed waiters. I was shown to a seat on a banquette along one wall opposite a long cocktail bar. The show played on a central round stage, in a booth on an adjacent side of the room, amongst the floor tables, and along a gallery above us (where we'd passed transiting from the security area) (*Decade*). While the setting of *Decade* was a convincing rendition of the restaurant at the top of the former World Trade Center, and we audience members sat at tables and banquettes, nothing else at the site aligned

contextually with the actual site of the tragedy, nor was the performance, its content, scenography, or our participation, "specific" or unique to the site.

In her 2002 article, "Mapping the Terrain: A Survey of Site-Specific Performance in Britain," Fiona Wilkie provides a useful guide to the degrees of "specificity" of site-based theatre. Her continuum ranges from a purpose-built theatre building at one end to "site-specific" at the other, with definitions for each variation in between. At the far left of her continuum she places "in the theatre building," followed immediately by "Outside the Theatre" as in "Shakespeare in the park." Next comes "Site-sympathetic" which she defines as an "existing performance text physicalized in a selected site." Fourth on her graph, Wilkie places "Site-generic," defined as "performance generated for a series of like sites (e.g. car parks, swimming pools) ("Mapping the Terrain" 150).   Grid Iron's *Decky Does a Bronco* (2000) was written for and played in playgrounds all over Scotland, Ireland and England ("Gridiron Theatre Company"). Finally, at the right side of her graph, Fiona Wilkie places "Site-specific" and defines the form as "performance specifically generated from/for one specific site" ("Mapping the Terrain" 150).

Another embattled term is "immersive." While Punchdrunk claims "immersive" to identify their form of site-based theatre, the use of "immersion" as a factor to delineate one site-based form from another leads quickly to difficulties.   Theatre always "immerses" the audience into an environment, and this is especially true in cases of site-based theatre. Is an audience in a fictional environment such as those created by Punchdrunk more "immersed" in their experience than an audience following performers into the depths of Edinburgh's Mary King's Close as in Grid Iron's *The Bloody Chamber* (1997)? In 2011, the Traverse Theatre in Edinburgh described a production of Hattie Naylor's play *Going Dark*

as an immersive experience yet, when I attended, audience members sat in an arena-style

theatre auditorium. The only immersion was the slowly fading illumination throughout the

production that moved in parallel with the protagonist's slowly growing blindness (*Going*

Dark).

Generally, "immersive theatre" creates an audience experience where the site is a

constructed environment in a real-world building. The geographical location may or may

not have bearing on the site to be experienced, but an empirical interface with the

environment is unavoidable. An example might be Punchdrunk's *Sleep No More* (2011)

which is set in an old warehouse that contains a purpose-built environment for the

production. According to Josephine Machon,

> In theatre discourse 'immersive' is now attached to diverse events that assimilate a
> variety of art forms and seek to exploit all that is experiential in performance, placing
> the audience at the heart of the work. Here experience should be understood in its
> fullest sense. (*Immersive* 22)

The debate over definitions, sometimes heated, seems to be perpetuated by scholars

and critics rather than by the practitioners. As playwright and director David Leddy said in

our interview, "I think it's a waste of time, kind of bickering around the edges of how we

define something rather than artistically checking on all that is good." Leddy said, "I don't

consider myself to be a site-based theatre maker, I was surprised when people started

calling it that, but I also think . . . those differences don't really get in my way" (Personal

Interview). Most practitioners of site-based theatre don't think of their work within a

defined type; rather, they create the art most proper for the production they conceive and

are constantly searching for new ways to express their ideas.

Rather than focus on what makes these various types of site-based work different, I

have looked for commonalities in creators' conceptual processes. What I have found is that

there are remarkable similarities in the processes of conceiving a site-based theatre event, regardless of whether that event is properly termed "site-specific," "site-responsive," "site-sympathetic," or "immersive."

Spectator or Participant?

The nature of the transaction between audience member and production in a site-based theatre presentation is different in two important ways from that transaction in a traditional, purpose-built theatrical venue. First, audience members in many site-based theatre performances actively interact with the site, the performers, and even other audience members. Second, unlike in a conventional audience member-performance arrangement, the audience members' roles can change over time. Audience members might be actively involved as participants in one part of the show and more-or-less passive observers of the action at another. To help track the changes in the site-based theatre audience-performance transaction, I shall employ four terms for "audience member" to better represent their engagement in the production being referenced: "observer" or "spectator" (when passive observation is emphasized), and "audience participant" or "participant" (when the audience member is fully involved in the action).

This Study in Relation to Existing Scholarship

This study researches the conceptual processes used by site-based theatre creators currently practicing in the United Kingdom. My method was to prompt these artists to relate stories about how they created particular site-based works (many of which I attended). I present, compare, and categorize their conceptual considerations in order to help scholars to understand and future practitioners to create site-based theatre events.

My attention to conceptualization—a directorial process—distinguishes my work

from that of other scholars. Alexander Dean and Lawrence Carra in *Fundamentals of Play*

Directing (1989) explain that the directorial concept "will have resulted from a deeply felt

emotional experience in the artists own life—an experience not peculiar to one individual,

but universal and, in drama especially, common to the masses" (3). Generally, directing

textbooks attempt to explain and promote particular conceptual processes of theatre

directing. These textbooks attempt to introduce to the student director a difficult process

to teach, because conceptualization involves highly personal interpretations of both of the

play to be produced and of the intended audience.   What is a directing concept but a

communication of personal ideas about a particular play to be interpreted for a particular

performance before a particular audience? An individual artist's process of

conceptualization chases an ephemeral ideal; in theatre it is a personal expression that

interprets a script or narrative for a particular intended audience in reflection of the

current world, its society, issues and outlooks. A production "concept" may be hard to

articulate in concrete terms, and it may not always lend itself to realization utilizing widely-

shared methods and conventions. Peter Brook describes his conceptual process thus:

> There's a formless hunch that is my relationship with the play. It's my conviction that
> this play must be done today, and without that conviction I can't do it . . . Now,
> preparing means going toward that idea . . . Until gradually, out of this comes the form,
> a form that must be modified and put to the test. (3)

Conceptualization also involves the communion and collaboration with other members in

the creative team and the performers.

This work engages recent British site-based theatre practice as do Jen Harvie's

Staging the UK (2004), and Fiona Wilkie's "The Production of 'Site': Site-Specific Theatre

(2008). These works survey the development of the form from its early incarnation as

conventional staging of dramatic texts in non-conventional venues to the multi-faceted experiences of the past decade.

As far as addressing the theoretical constructs of site-specific theatre, Cathy Turner's "Framing the Site" (2000) and "Palimpsest or Potential Space? Finding a Vocabulary for Site-specific Performance" (2004) begin to develop the terminology with which contemporary scholars discuss the phenomenon of experiencing a theatrical event in a non-traditional venue. Mike Pearson and Michael Shanks' *Theatre/Archeology* (2001) explains the parallels between the inherent contextual interpretations of site-specific performances and archeological theory. This innovative work proposed new ways to interpret a location's contexts. Published in 2010, Mike Pearson's *Site-specific Performance* not only addresses the contextual influences that shaped site-specific productions that he created but also proposes exercises that the aspiring theatrical creator can use to interrogate potential sites to glean information and inspiration for performance in those sites. Both these works provided valuable foundations, and prompted discussions during our face-to-face interview. Like Pearson, I aim to equip practitioners with tools that will enable them to create site-based theatre events.

Josephine Machon's *(Syn)aesthetics: Redefining Visceral Performance* (2011) features interviews with creators of experiential performance. She coins the term "(syn)aesthetics" to describe a type of performance work that shifts between the somatic (or work that affects the body of the audience and performer) and the semantic (or work that involves the " mental reading of signs"). Machon's *Immersive Theatres: Intimacy and Immediacy in Contemporary Performance* (2013) offers a comprehensive study of immersive theatre, exploring its theory, history and practice, and featuring original interviews with a number

of influential contemporary practitioners, including both Felix Barrett and Maxine Doyle of

Punchdrunk. This work offers numerous observations about immersion as an experiential

element that paralleled and complemented statements made by my interview subjects.

Gareth White's *Audience Participation in Theater: Aesthetics of the Invitation* (2013)

explores and unpacks the complex problems and potentials of audience participation in the

theatre. His attention to "ascendant" site-based theatre forms, like "immersive theatre and

'one-to-one' theatre," help articulate aspects of audience participation not previously

considered in scholarship.

The Research Project

Interviews with current note-worthy site-based theatre directors in Great Britain

provided the primary source of data for my study of their conceptual considerations.

Some of these artists, such as Mike Pearson of Pearson/Brookes and Ben Harrison of Grid

Iron, have written articles and books on their work that also provide valuable information.

Observation of site-based theatre works by eight interview subjects provided data to

analyze how the directors' aims were realized in practice.   Visits to particular sites where

performances had been produced, or were in the process of being created, enabled me to

experience the processes by which creators interrogated sites and designed experiences. I

also took dozens of photographs, and collected copies of video archives, reviews and other

press publications, plus personal accounts by audience members.

Three trips to the United Kingdom occasioned the majority of data collection for this

study. I am the grateful recipient of two Ogilvy Travel Fellowships from the University of

Colorado's Center for British and Irish Studies (2011 and 2013) and of additional travel

funding from a Beverley Sears Graduate Research Travel Grant (2012). These generous grants allowed me to travel extensively throughout Great Britain from October 4 to December 22, 2011, July 30 – August 21, 2012, and July 30 – August 25, 2013.

Before the initial trip, research into the most prominent current site-based theatre companies and directors targeted 12 primary sources for interviews.   I requested interviews both directly and through intermediaries, researched and purchased tickets to see and experience particular site-based theatre performances, and planned an itinerary that provided me a month of residence in the London area, a month of residence in Glasgow and Edinburgh, and visits to Cardiff, Aberystwyth, Liverpool, Brighton, Bristol, and Bath to meet and interview directors, producers and site-based theatre artists. During this initial 13-week residency in Great Britain, my initial group of 12 interviewees grew to 27 as I was introduced to other creators and observers of British site-based theatre.

The August 2012 trip to London, Edinburgh, Glasgow and Cardiff provided opportunities to experience two productions discussed in the initial interviews: *Coriolan/Us* (Pearson/Brooks, National Theatre of Wales and the Royal Shakespeare Company), and *Hotel Medea* (Zacora Ura), and to conduct follow-up interviews with many of the directors met during the initial trip. I also met with John McGrath, the artistic director of the National Theatre of Wales.

In August 2013, I experienced two productions that were in development during the 2011 interviews. These works figure prominently in my study: *Our Glass House* (Common Wealth Theatre Company) and *Leaving Planet Earth* (Grid Iron) . The 2013 trip also provided opportunities for five follow-up interviews.

My questions in the interviews with directors focused primarily on three areas:

1) Conceptualization

- *Please discuss your conceptualization process.*
- *Where do ideas for new productions come from?*
- *Where do ideas for new interpretations of existing plays come from?*
- *What role does the site play in your conceptualization process?*
- *Generally does the production concept come from initial interrogation of the site, or does the concept exist and the site found?*
- *Please discuss your process for interrogating/discovering/interpreting/creating within the contexts of the site.*
- *How/when does an experiential interface develop in your conceptualization of the site's role in the production?*

2) Process of Designing the Audience Experience

- *For (cited particular production) on/in (date/year), please describe the audience's experience of the production within the contexts of the site.*
- *What values did the audience measure empirically?*
- *What resonated cognitively and symbolically?*
- *Can you describe audience experiences you've designed where the audience's interface with the functionality of a site holds some meaning within the greater context of the production?*
- *Can you point me to key accounts from reviews or participants' accounts that might support these experiences?*
- *Do you think there exist lingering social significances for these sites now that these performances have faded into history?*
- *What other productions from your career would you care to discuss in this manner?*
- *What productions are you conceiving or working on for the future that you are at liberty to discuss?*
- *How do you measure your audiences' reactions to particular productions?*
- *How do you measure the efficacy of a particular audience's interface with a production site(s), function, or the designed experience?*
- *If you have particular audience records pertaining to their reaction to a particular production, may I study them, and possible cite them?*
- *Would/could you introduce me to particular audience participants who I could potentially interview?*

3) Sociological dynamics of site-based theatre in Britain today

- *Do you personally think site-based, or immersive theatre is in an upswing of popularity in Great Britain today? If so, why?*
- *What societal factors do you suppose are contributing to this?*
- *What factors in British society today makes this type of experimental theatre experience so popular?*

Data compiled during the course of my three trips can be categorized as follows:

1. Interviews with the creators whose works and views proved central to this study:

> Ben Harrison and Judith Doherty, Co-Artistic Directors of Grid Iron in
>> Edinburgh
> Felix Barrett, Artistic Director of Punchdrunk in London
> Ellie Jones, director of *New World Order*, for Hydrocracker Theatre in
>> Brighton and London
> Mike Pearson, Director of Performance Studies at Aberystwyth University in
>> Wales, and an independent site-based theatre creator.
> Cora Bisset, Producing Director of Pachamama Productions and creator and
>> director of *Road Kill*
> Jorge Ramos, member of British/Brazilian site-based theatre company
>> Zacora Ura and director of *Hotel Medea*.
> Evie Manning and Rhiannon White, Co-Directors of Common Wealth Theatre
>> Company in Bristol

Interviews with additional subjects that further illuminated the conceptual considerations

discussed herein:

> Vicki Featherstone, formerly Artistic Director of the National Theatre of
>> Scotland, now Artistic Director of The Royal Court, London
> David Leddy, President and principal creator of Fire Escape Productions,
>> Glasgow.
> Simon Pascoe and Caitlin Easterby, Co-Directors of the environmental arts
>> collective Red Earth, located in Brighton
> Felix Mortimer, Artistic Director of RIFT, and former Artistic Director of RETZ
>> Productions and 19;29 Theatre Company, all of London
> Mark Fisher, Edinburgh-based theatre critic for *The Guardian*, *The Observer*,
>> www.theatreSCOTLAND.com, and other media outlets.
> Chris Hunn, avid site-based theatre audience participant and Board of Directors
>> member, Grid Iron Theatre Company, Edinburgh
> Colin Nightingale, Senior Producer, Punchdrunk, London.

> For more information regarding these interview subjects, their theatre companies, or for descriptions of specific productions referenced in this study, please refer to the Appendix.

2. Observation of rehearsals, tours of sites, and interviews with creators of works

in-process: *A Christmas Carol*, directed by Graham McLaren at the National Theatre of

Scotland, presented in Glasgow in 2011; *Leaving Planet Earth*, directed by Catrin Evans and

Lewis Hetherington at Grid Iron in Edinburgh, presented at the 2013 Edinburgh

International Festival; and *The Drowned Man,* directed by Felix Barrett and Maxine Doyle, by Punchdrunk presented in London to 2013-2014.

3. Personal experience and documentation of site-based performances: *The New World Order* (Hydrocracker), *Road Kill* (Pachamama), *Sleep No More* and *The Drowned Man* (Punchdrunk), *Coriolan/Us* (Pearson/Brooks, National Theatre of Wales and the Royal Shakespeare Company), *Hotel Medea* (Zacora Ura), *Our Glass House* (Common Wealth Theatre Company), *Leaving Planet Earth* (Grid Iron), *CHALK* (Red Earth), *A Christmas Carol* (National Theatre of Scotland).

4. Visits to sites of past notable performances including numerous sites around Edinburgh where Grid Iron has produced works and two sites in London where RETZ (now renamed RIFT) had produced works.

5. Various corroborating materials consisting of ancillary personal observations by audience members and/or artistic associates, published reviews and blogs, and video, photographic and written archival materials from the subject theatre companies.

My analysis does not include works of site-based theatre based on walks guided by a solo performer, or an individual listening or video device. I also do not address the variety of site-based performance art events, site-specific dance performance, or site-specific fine art installations. This study also excludes one-on-one site-specific theatrical experiences, historical reenactments, and themed experiential events, games or amusements. This research and analysis only concerns work by directors associated with, or guiding their own theatre companies, who present site-based theatrical events for groups of multiple spectators at a prescribed time and site, and who have attained critical notice.

Overview of Remaining Chapters

 Chapter Two – Site, Specificity, Contexts, Participation and Other Terminology will

provide the reader with an examination of the terms particular to this discourse. Covered

in this chapter are discussions on the definition of site and how this use of site is different

that that found in other conventional theatre. This chapter will include a discussion of

specificity, and definitions of context, participative engagement and various terms utilized

in the study in the illustration of these conceptual considerations.

 Chapter Three – *Why Are Audiences Interested in Site-based Theatre?* A significant

factor in the conceptualization of any theatre performance, the character and motivations

of audience participants figured prominently in my interviews with current site-based

theatre creators. This chapter collects and synthesizes observations made by interview

subjects as they responded to questions about why site-based theatre has such a popular

appeal in Great Britain.

 Chapter Four – *Contexts of the Site* explains how real-world sites offer locational,

societal, historical and cultural contexts to be perceived and interpreted by the visitor and

spectator. A production that utilizes the site and its resonances as an integrated element

leaves a strong impression on the participant. Sites with an apparent occupation or

operating function (i.e. place or worship, elevators, vehicles, working factories) provide a

very literal contextual interface for the spectator participant. This chapter will start with a

discussion of the importance of contextual interface for audience experience. Next, I survey

a range of contexts available for the audience to perceive and interpret at the performance

site. This chapter features two case studies of productions: *The New World Order*, by

Hydrocracker Theatre (London, December 2011) and *Our Glass House*, by Common Wealth Theatre Company (Edinburgh, August, 2013.)

Chapter Five – Participative Engagement examines the various ways that site-based theatre creators conceptualize audience participation and engagement in their productions.   This analysis starts with a survey of possible roles audience participants may experience or find themselves engaged in. Many site-based productions cast the spectator in a role of some kind. For example, the participant might be interrogated as a prisoner or become a celebrant at a festival. Voyeurism, an active form of observation, is explored. The chapter concludes by illuminating a number of conceptual considerations for incorporating participative engagement, including inviting individual agency, haptic and proxemic interaction, and orientation and disorientation. This chapter features two case studies of productions: *Road Kill* by Pachamama Production (London, November 2011) and *Hotel Medea*, by Zacura Ura (London, August 2012.)

Chapter Six – Conclusion will summarize the taxonomy of characteristics of site-based theatre that I have developed and provide a framework for conceiving such work. This chapter also will identify next steps for research, including application to the burgeoning phenomenon of site-based theatre in the U.S.

2

**Site, Specificity, Contexts, Participation,
and Other Terminology**

In the Introduction, I defined site-based theatre productions and offered

descriptions distinguishing variations called "site-specific," "site-responsive," "site-

generic," and "immersive." I also identified audience members as participants or observers,

and discussed conceptualization as a theatrical creative process. In this chapter, I explore

four additional terms that are integral to my research: "site," "specificity," "contexts," and

"engaged participation." I will define and discuss each of these terms and others that are

closely related, e.g. "space," "place," "architecture," etc. Throughout my discussion, I will

draw attention to the academic discourse that surrounds each term and to creators or

productions featured in this study with which each is associated.

Site

In its most basic meaning, "site" refers to the place of performance. Recent

scholarship and performance have redefined "site" by expanding its scope to, as Fiona

Wilkie describes, "a space of encounter" ("Production of Site" 101). Miwon Kwon explains

a broad definition of site

> Dispersed across much broader cultural, social and discursive fields, and organized
> intertextually [. . .] the site can now be as various as a billboard, an artistic genre, a
> disenfranchised community, and institutional framework, a magazine page, a social
> cause, or a political debate. (3)

However, for the purposes of this investigation, I employ the original concept of site as the physical location of the performance. Furthermore, as established in the Introduction, "site-based theatre" concerns work that is not located in a purpose-built theatre building or, if it is in a theatre, is not transacted in the stage house in a conventional manner. The performance in the site, then, as Miwon Kwon describes, may play upon, build, or combine any number of features: "size, scale, texture, and dimension of walls, ceilings, rooms; existing lighting conditions, topographical features, traffic patterns, season characters of climate, etc." (3). As Mike Pearson describes, sites are "found spaces: existing social situations or locations, both used and disused; places of work, play and worship" (*Site* 34-35).

Because the performance site is a physical place, it is occupied by something that might be natural or man-made. Mike Pearson points out in *Site-Specific Performance* (2010) that performance in the site "is the latest occupation of a location at which other occupations – their architectures, material traces and histories – are still apparent and cognitively active" (35). As such, a site can contain material and information that references different inhabitations, usages, or historical events or cultural meanings throughout time. Pearson makes the comparison:

> If the stage is by nature *synecdochic*, a part representing a whole, then site is often a *plenitude* . . . site-specific performance exists within a *plethora* of phenomena, all competing for attention, all potentially meaningful: a concatenation of that at the site and that brought to the site. (117, original emphasis)

When, as Pearson relates, a performance acts within and upon a site, it relies

> upon the complex coexistence, superimposition and interpenetration of a number of architectures and narratives, historical and contemporary, of two basic orders: that which is of the site, its fixtures and fittings, and that which is brought to the site, the performance and its scenography: of that which pre-exists the work and that which is

of the work: of the found – the site – and the fabricated – the performance of the past and the present. (35)

Mike Pearson and Michael Shanks in *Theatre Archeology* (2001) say that site requires a connection "with place and locale." They also "emphasize that site is as much a temporal as spatial concept – landscapes are enfolded, scenography works with the multidimensional temporality of memory, event and narrative" (55). Pearson and Shanks affirm that the "site may be directly suggestive of performance subject-matter, theme or form." The performance may use the site in a way that either directly references an historic event or connects literally or thematically to past, present, or future occupations, "drawing attention to the temporality of the place" (11).

> Performance [. . .] may reveal make manifest, celebrate, confront or criticize site or location, and its history, function, architecture, micro-climate . . . Conversely, site may facilitate the creation of a purposeful paradox, through the employment of orders of material seemingly unusual, inappropriate, or perverse at this site, site serving to recontextualize the material, relocating it and suggesting environment, equipment and working processes which might mediate and illuminate it. (111)

When discussing the performance site, I may describe its space. I use the term "space" in one of two senses, both vital to the experience of site-based theatre. Its first sense refers to individual space: the spatial volume occupied by an individual audience participant. In its second sense, "space" refers to architectural space. In this meaning, space is the available dimensional area occupied by the performance and/or scenography. If inside, the building's architecture will determine the spaces of the site: rooms, corridors, stairways, courtyards, fenced yards, etc. If outside, the nature of the landscape or its current occupation might shape space: valley, copse of trees or plowed field, ring of standing stones, etc.

Space can have an historical dimension. As Josephine Machon says, "space is the location where lots of people and things coexist and in/on which lots of situations occur at the same time." She continues to describe the temporal nature of space as our "historical memory," that

> this simultaneous activity is a constant in that space, that activity lives on, it haunts that space; and [. . .] therefore, space makes you aware of the continuing presence of 'the things done in it' and connects past, present and future via location. (Machon, *Immersive* 132)

Participants' negotiation of the space is integrated into their interaction with it. As Machon relates,

> we are not separated from it but *in* it, of it, surrounded by it, dwelling in it, travelling through it; the space is thus integrated within and as the world in which the audience-participants are immersed which ensures this sense of 'rootedness' in the world of the event is actively *felt*. (127, original emphasis)

Architectural space can dictate how audiences are required or compelled to move through the space. As Pearson and Shanks state, "movement defines and articulates space as much as walls or columns" (122). Furthermore, Pearson and Shanks assert, the human body is central to our understanding of space as the "fundamental mediation point between thought and the world" (135). As such, they explain that the perception of a space arrived at through touch and movement informs our knowledge of it (Pearson and Shanks 134). Signifiers present and observed may trigger other associations in our understanding of what we are perceiving of a space like its current or former occupations, potential danger or safety, histories, social values, etc. As will be discussed, when I experienced *Road Kill* by Pachamama Productions in London in November 2011, the council row house and its small bedrooms and corridors required performers and participants to interact at very close proximity (*Road Kill*).

"Place," in this study, refers to a location, including its associated identities.

Josephine Machon defines place in immersive theatre as encompassing "a variety of

spatialities including the geographic, the architectural, the actual versus the virtual, the

local and the global, the open and the confined, internal and external" (*Immersive* 132).

Pearson further explains,

> a place owes its character not only to the experiences it affords as sights, sounds, etc.
> but also to what is done there as looking, listening, moving. Both 'being' and
> environment are mutually emergent, continuously brought into existence together.
> And here performance might represent a place of work or special moment within
> landscape. (*Site* 16)

Joanne Tompkins, in her introduction to *Performing Site-specific Theatre; Politics, Place,*

Practice (2012), explains that "place" refers to more than a geographic reference, or a

location, for an event. Tompkins asserts that place "situates social or historical position"

(Birch and Tompkins 4). She further suggests "Studying site requires an understanding of

politics and social production, since the control of space is determined by power structures

well beyond topography" (5).

Considerations of place bear on how a site's contexts resonate with a performance

and its audience's encounter with the performance in its site. Place provides the most

immediate contextual information to the audience as they begin to interpret the site and

performance's relationship. For example, as I will show, Hydrocracker's production of *The*

New World Order in London, December 2011, capitalized on the locational contexts

associated with the place of its performance site: the building known as Shoreditch Town

Hall (*The New World Order*).

By "architecture," I mean the designed structure of a site. Architecture could refer

to space (rooms, corridors, stairways, etc.), the layout or construction of multiple spaces

(ground plan, floors, etc.), or decoration that communicates some information about the structure (trim, columns, color, elevations, etc.). As Pearson and Shanks suggest, architecture might suggest a particular "usage, or former usage." Subsequently, performance within the architecture might suggest relations of performer to audience member, or "modes" of how the performance is transacted. Pearson and Shanks suggest that "performance may allow the construction of new architecture, imposing another arrangement, floor-plan, map or orientation which confounds everyday hierarchies of place and patterns of movements" (111). The architecture of the West Chelsea warehouse in New York where Punchdrunk constructed the environments for *Sleep No More* suggested certain usages. The stairs between floors confounded audience members' movements, enacting transition between narrative locations and atmospheres (*Sleep No More*).

When I use "scenography," I refer to the constructed theatrical elements brought to the site by the performance.   Scenographic elements could include scenery, costumes, lighting, projections, or modifications to the existing architecture to accommodate the performance.   The tension between the scenography and the contextual information of the site communicates to the audience the relationship of the performance to the site. Mike Pearson recalls how Cliff McLucas, co-director of Brith Gof, characterized this tension as the relationship between "the host, that which is *at* site" to "the ghost, that which is temporarily brought *to* site" (*Site* 35-36, original emphasis). The scenography employed in Common Wealth Theatre's *Our Glass House* (2013), brought an artistic expression to all of the spaces in the generic council row house in Wester Hailes. The scenography abstracted elements of the specific domestic abuse cases being performed and promoted metaphoric over literal representations in the piece (*Our Glass House*).

When I use the term "occupation," I refer to a site's current or former identifiable inhabitations. Occupation may be the former uses of building or landscape. Occupation may refer to a particular period of human habitation within the structure or landscape. The former occupation of Shoreditch Town Hall as the municipal center of the Shoreditch district of North London lent atmosphere and locational contexts that properly set the tone for the *The New World Order's* ministry headquarters (*The New World Order*).

An occupation may also be a current or former "function" of the site. When I refer to a site's "functionality," I am referring to those functional contexts available for the participant to physically interface with (i.e. a working vehicle, elevator, or ferry). This physical interface juxtaposes with the performance text in the experience. Promenade style site-specific theatre frequently employs a site's functions, e.g. audience members might take a ferry to arrive at an historic waterfront dock or use elevators, stairways or vehicles as they travel from scene to scene.   When audience members rode from the Theatre Royale Stratford to the row house at the beginning of *Road Kill*, we participated in the performance by occupying a functioning motor coach with the performers who were performing the prologue of the play (*Road Kill*).

An "empirical value" is something that can be measured by sight, touch, or other senses. Sounds, architectural features (doors, stairs, balconies, trim, ruins), textures, temperatures, movement of air, smells, illumination, and spatiality all bear on how the spectator physically interfaces with the site, and therefore how they experience the theatrical event therein.   How all these stimuli are encountered and perceived should be considered in the design of the audience's experience of the performance in the site.   As Tim Ingold relates in *The Perception of the Environment* (2000),

A place owes its character to the experience it affords to those who spend time there – to the sights, sounds, and indeed smells that constitute its specific ambience. And these, in turn, depend on the kinds of activities in which its inhabitants engage. It is from this relational context of people's engagement with the world, in the business of dwelling, that each place draws its unique significance. (192)

Specificity

As discussed in the introduction, the descriptor "site-specific" does not suffice to describe all manner of performance that takes place outside of a purpose-built theatre building. "Specificity" refers to how clearly, precisely, and uniquely a production relates to a site. According to Miwon Kwon, true site-specific art establishes "an inextricable, indivisible relationship between the world and its site" and demands "the physical presence of the viewer for . . . completion" (12). She further relates that

To be "specific" to [the] site, in turn, is to decode and/or recode the institutional conventions so as to expose their hidden operations—to reveal the ways in which institutions mold art's meaning to modulate its cultural and economic value. (14)

Mike Pearson described his conceptualization process as "We might be absolutely thinking architecturally [. . .] about all kinds of things about the ambiance of the place. That's the first thing. I think the other thing is [. . .] specificity." He recounted the creation of *The Persians* in the Brecon Beacon highlands of Wales in 2010, explaining, "the situations we work in, in Wales, are often about cultural specificity, or locational specificity" (Pearson, Personal Interview).

Contexts

"Context" is defined as the "connection and coherence between parts of a discourse" (Oxford English Dictionary). In referring to the contexts of a performance site, I point to all

of the knowledge connected to the site that is available for interpretation by the creators,

performers, and the audience members. Sites evolve with the passage of time; their

habitations and occupations can change. What was once the apse of an Abbey containing

the bones of a reviled English king may currently appear as a paved parking lot.   Because

knowledge of contexts is individual, different people will interpret differently a site's

contextual information. Audience members may have some previous knowledge of a site

before they encounter a production there. Also, a performance may highlight or expose an

individual participant to new contexts of the site or a deeper understanding of the contexts

previously recognized.
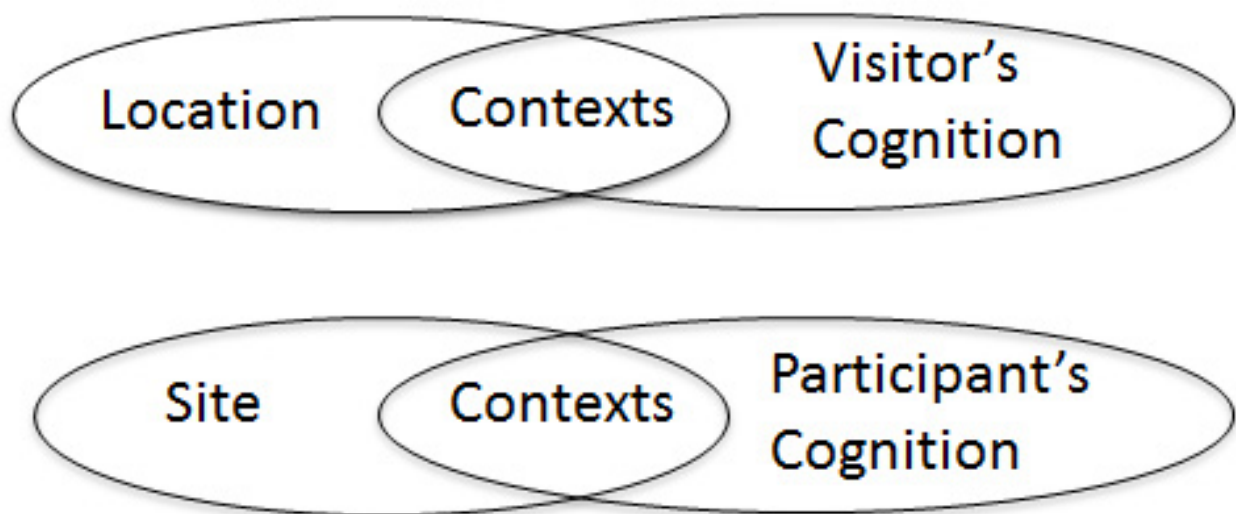
Dia. 2. -- Site-based theatre participants may interpret the contextual information
of the performance site in the same way visitors interpret a historic location.

A site's contexts may resonate differently for different individuals, depending on their

particular knowledge, interests, and emotions. By a context's "resonance," I mean its ability

to communicate information pertaining to the site. A performance in the site might

resonate some contexts over others. For example, Grid Iron's production of *Roam* (2005)

in the Edinburgh International Airport resonated numerous contexts for its audiences

associated with the airport's current occupation: global travel, fear for security while

traveling, sociological concerns surrounding travel and mixing of nationalities, ethnicities,

ideologies, etc. *Roam* did not, however, resonate any prior historic occupations of that

geographic site west of the historic city of Edinburgh (Harrison, Personal Interview).

I use the term "interface" as a verb to mean to connect with a thing so as to make

possible an interaction with it. By "interact," I mean to act reciprocally or for two things to

act upon each other (Oxford English Dictionary). People *interact* with their laptop

computers by depressing keys on a keyboard as they *interface* with the Internet.   Similarly,

a site-based theatre production provides audience participants points of interaction that

enable them to interface with certain contextual information. Using Grid Iron's *Roam* as an

example, the audience's admission tickets arrived in the form of airline boarding passes

and envelopes; they were ushered through security checkpoints; and they viewed

information on airport kiosks and displays. These interfaces referenced the occupational

contexts of a functioning international airport.

Engaged Participation

"Participation" means to share actively in a pursuit. Audiences of non-site-based

theatre are, typically, not physical participants in the performance event. Put another way,

audience members of site-based theatre "engage" the performance as they physically

participate in the event. They engage the theatrical exchange with a cognitive and sensorial

attention sharpened by physical participation. By using "engagement" to define the

audience participant's transaction with the theatrical event, I mean the act of entangling

and involving oneself in the sensation of the experience and cognition of the performance.

Gareth White explains, the audience may be asked "to involve themselves physically in tracking down or pursuing the performance" (2). Engaged participation in a site-based theatre event feels different to an audience than only visually witnessing or observing a conventional theatre performance. A site-based theatre production might involve the audience member in playing an identifiable role in the world of the play, it might invite them to interact with a performer, or it might invite them to take agency. By "invite," I mean that the creators try to attract or induce the participant to perform some act or make a choice in how to engage. By "agency," I mean the individual's ability to take action within a range of possible activities engineered to fit within the designed participation and outcome of the production. Productions by Punchdrunk and Common Wealth Theatre Company create an atmosphere that promotes individual participants to take agency. Punchdrunk creates environments where participants control the sequence in which they discover various components of the production. Common Wealth creates situations where the audience decides whether to perform a particular activity during the performance.

"Engaged participation" in a site-based theatre event means that audience participants have been invited to involve themselves in the performance in ways that promote a visceral, or physical, experience. Engaged participation is a form of what Claire Bishop calls "participatory art" which creates an "active subject, one who will be empowered by the experience of physical or symbolic participation." The desired outcome of engaging individuals' participation is self-determination of "their own social and political reality." Bishop suggests that participation in the artistic expression "derives legitimacy from" the "causal relationship" between the individual participant's experience and their agency (12).

Josephine Machon describes the desired impact of engaged participation in experiential entertainment as "visceral**.**" Machon defines "visceral" as promoting "a very particular type of response where the innermost, often inexpressible, emotionally sentient feelings a human is capable of are actuated." In her view, "visceral" is an emotional response that "affects an upheaval, or disturbance, of the physiological body itself, . . . literally a response through the human viscera" (Machon, *(Syn)aesthetics* 197). A site-based production can viscerally engage the audience by involving it in a "sensual exchange" with all the "diverse performance languages; verbal, corporeal, visual, aural, technological," as well as the cognitive experience of interfacing with the actual site of performance and its layers of contexts (9). "Put simply, we feel the performance in the moment and recall these feelings in subsequent [recall, consideration, and] interpretation" (55).

While some site-based theatre practitioners claim the adjective "immersive" to identify their particular brand of site-based theatre, immersion is a vital aspect in any entertainment that involves participative engagement. The degree of the audience's immersion relates to the extent to which the participants engage with the performance site. Deep immersion promotes a seamless suspension of disbelief in that the environment audience members experience is the setting for the story portrayed through the performance.

"Immersion" refers to the state of being deeply absorbed into a state of mind, or some action or activity (Oxford English Dictionary). Machon likens theatrical immersion to submersion in water: theatrical immersion entails being "submerged in an alternative medium where all the senses are engaged and manipulated – with a deep involvement in

the activity within that medium" (*Immersive* 22). When Machon asked Punchdrunk Artistic

Director Felix Barrett his definition of "immersive" he replied:

> It's the empowerment of the audience in the sense that they're put at the centre of the action; they're the pivot from which everything else spins. It's the creation of parallel theatrical universes within which audiences forget that they're an audience, and thus their status within the work shifts. (qtd. in *Immersive* 159)

Some degree of immersion is present in all site-based theatre experience. Mike Pearson

related immersion in site-based theatre to cultural understanding. He claimed that all the

work he had made since 1980 had been in the context of Welsh society. His productions

have immersed audiences in site-based theatre experiences that are related either to the

Welsh linguistic minority or to subject matters that hold particular meaning for Welsh

audiences (Pearson, Personal Interview).

The "proxemics" of a site-based theatre performance relate to the physical

proximity of the participant to the performer(s), to other participants, to the architecture of

the site, or to the scenography of the performance. By "proximity" I mean the relative

spatial nearness between objects. "Haptics" in site-based performance relates to how the

sense of touch is incorporated into the audience experience.

Proximity may also affect aesthetic distance. Edward Bullough and Daphna Ben

Chaim narrowly define "aesthetic distance" as proximity to a performance that affects the

psychological comfort or discomfort of the spectator (Ben Chaim 3). Bullough argues that

aesthetic distance reinforces suspension of disbelief, that is, the audience member's ability

to disregard the "actual and admitted unreality of the dramatic action" (106). In the site-

based theatre, because audience participants might find themselves at close proximity to

the performance while physically interfacing with the site, aesthetic distance can be greatly

compressed and still maintain suspension of disbelief.

In this study, when I refer to "proxemic" considerations, I mean considerations related to spatial relationships among audience participants or between audience participants and performers, the performance, the site, or the scenography. When I refer to "haptic" considerations, I mean considerations related to touch between performers and participants and other tactile sensations that are designed into the audience experience. Punchdrunk's *Sleep No More* (2011) capitalized on both proxemic and haptic exchanges throughout the production. Some participants chose to watch performers at very close proximity and to be touched or led around by them. Every room in the environment offered numerous items to be picked up or touched (*Sleep No More*).

"Temporality" refers to a relation in time, either in the present moment or in history (Oxford English Dictionary). When referring to "temporal" considerations, I mean those considerations that deal with the passage of time. Temporality is also an empirical value that can be manipulated. The passage of time, both in terms of the narrative and in terms of the performance's duration, directly bear on a participant's experience. Explicitly designed to take the audience through an overnight experience of events, Zacora Ura's *Hotel Medea* parallels Medea's own overnight destruction of her household and family (*Hotel Medea*).

Summary

This chapter explored four terms integral to this study: "site," "specificity," "contexts," and "engaged participation." As I discussed each of these terms, I defined other closely related terms, e.g. "space," "place," "architecture," etc. This vocabulary not only serves a vital purpose in this study, it also provides a foundation for discourse on site-based theatre, its conceptualization, creation, performance and effects.

3

Why Are Audiences Interested in Site-based Theatre?

I knew of the tremendous popular appeal of site-based theatre before commencing this research project. As the Artistic Director of Specific Gravity Ensemble, in Louisville, Kentucky, I had observed a similar rapid proliferation of interest in site-based work in my company's audiences. My interest in the explosion of site-based work in Great Britain during this millennium drove my curiosity as I considered and planned the field research phase.

In this chapter I will propose reasons why site-based theatre enjoys such popular appeal.   Analyzing the range of observations offered by my interview subjects, I identify how contemporary site-based theatre audiences are responding to two powerful appeals: first, an attraction I will call "proletarian" that disrupts the power implications of the conventional theatre transaction, and second, a craving for collective experiential theatrical entertainment in the face of a society saturated with technological mediation. By exploring these two attractions, I intend to portray the site-based theatre audience. As discussed in the Introduction, when conceptualizing a new theatre production, creators should consider the means by which the desired dramatic content is to be transacted with its specific intended audience.   In conceptualizing a site-based theatre event, one must try to

understand what drives the audiences' attraction to and enthusiasm for this type of experience.

 While the subjects of my research were certainly successful at designing popular site-based participative theatre works, not all of them necessarily understood, or could articulate the forces at work at the root of the phenomenon. Novelty drives attention in the form of publicity. Publicity, in turn, sparks curiosity, attendance, and "buzz." As Felix Barrett, founder and artistic director of Punchdrunk put it, "It's fashionable" (Barrett). Both Evie Manning, co-founder and co-director of Bristol's Common Wealth Theatre Company, and Josephine Machon, in her book *Immersive Theatre* (2013), comment that site-based work is attracting large segments of non-theatregoers, or audience not typically frequenting the conventional theatre performance (Manning and White, Personal Interview 01 Nov 2011; Machon 23). Machon continues to observe that "people feel involved, invited, or do not even perceive the work to be 'theatre'" (23).

 As I flew to London in early October 2011, questions on why this form had such a contemporary popular appeal, and why it had proliferated so rapidly into the mainstream of British popular culture in the new millennium, dominated my thinking. Curious as to what these theatre innovators thought on the subject, I added this line of questioning to my interviews. The resulting range of responses to this particular query not only broadened my deep appreciation of the phenomena of contemporary British site-based theatre, but also illuminated cultural contexts that undergird the audience experiences I have studied, analyzed and discussed herein.   These perspectives also gave me insight into these creators' core creative influences and inspirations.

All the subjects interviewed in this project were asked some variation on the questions: "What societal factors do you suppose are contributing to the upswing in the popularity of site-based, or immersive theatre today?" and "What factors in contemporary British culture makes this type of theatre experience so popular?" David Leddy, playwright, creator of a number of site-based theatrical events, like *SubRosa* (2009-2010) in Glasgow and Edinburgh, and *Susurrus* (2007-present) all over the world, jokingly responded with "The short answer is we really don't know!" (Personal Interview). Witty, yet I also believe he succinctly highlighted the subjective nature of this line of questioning. However interesting and relevant, the following observations, while perhaps illuminating, are not based on statistical data. Nor are the perspectives illuminated in this chapter claimed by credentialed sociology experts on contemporary Western theatre audience behavior, or likewise concerning contemporary British culture. As my interview subjects considered these questions, they tended to first consider the English, Scottish, Welsh and American cultures from their own British experiences. However, the larger societal conditions driving this upsurge in response to experiential theatre certainly can be generally observed in most Western societies.

A Response that Emphasizes the Proletarian Appeal

As discussed in the Introduction, the main difference between conventional theatre and site-based theatre lies in the physical nature of the audience's engagement with the performance. Conventional theatre relies on a varying amount of distance between the audience's seating and the performance's "stage." Conventional theatre, by the nature of its seating arrangements and their reference and intimacy to the performance, promotes a

hierarchy of classes, as opposed to the pedestrian and egalitarian nature of site-based theatre presentations.

Most of my interview subjects commented on their personal attraction to site-based theatre as a reaction against the limitations of the conventional theatre. Some of these creators freely admit to their preference for site-based theatre to free both the artist and audience from the inherent hierarchy and oppression of the conventional theatre transaction, where the roles of performer and observer are generally rigidly defined, and where the availability for intimacy and/or premium viewing is generally mediated by commerce, class distinction, and/or privilege.

While none of the experts interviewed overtly related their observations or opinions to Marxist theory, or claimed to be enacting "revolution," all referenced motivations to "break down" or "challenge" conventions, and promote the participatory and egalitarian nature of the site based-theatre experience. Only Evie Manning and Rhiannon White, of Common Wealth Theatre Company, claimed their mission as motived by a "socialist" agenda (Personal Interview 01 Nov 2011). Others referenced motivations similar to Felix Barrett when he proposed that the lure of site-based theatre might derive from a chance for the individual participant to feel empowered. He described it as "giving a bit of control back to the individual, when there is none [in the conventional theatre]" (Barrett).

As Ellie Jones related "we quite like to be slightly anarchic," alluding to the reactionary nature of experimental theatre in Britain, aiming to challenge the status quo and perhaps change popular culture (Personal Interview 16 Dec 2011). While site-based theatre is not necessarily associated with a revolutionary or a working class, it does promote a sense of a proletarian challenge to oppression; it reflects a desire to change the

status quo and to empower the individual. Most noticeably, an egalitarian philosophy defines and governs the theatrical transaction. In this study, I use the term "proletarian" to refer to the egalitarian nature of the audience's transaction with the performance and its site, the way site-based theatre disrupts the power implications of the conventional theatre's hierarchical transaction. By using "proletarian," I do not mean to reference a particular economic or social class.

Indeed, it bears noting that the majority of popular British site-based theatre productions, like conventional theatre productions, participate in and benefit from a market-driven economy. Nor are site-based theatre productions always priced for all economic classes. Considering only the productions observed in this study, admission prices ranged from free (for Common Wealth's *Our Glass House*, which was totally underwritten by national and local arts councils) to £85 (for VIP Premium entrance to Punchdrunk's *The Drowned Man*). Because site-based theatre events generally occupy a large space, and require more technical and logistical support than productions in a designated theatre building, they usually require large capitalization and significant cash out-flow during operation. Because of this, the proletarian nature of the form generally does not apply to the ticket prices. However, site-based theatre's tickets are usually priced the same for all persons admitted on a given night; this ticket-pricing choice helps to promote the notion of its egalitarian nature and appeal. While prices may vary in accordance with market demands (i.e. higher prices on more popular weekends or during holidays), and while some productions might offer a "VIP" or "Premium" admission, this variance in price does not translate into a significantly enhanced theatrical experience, at least not in my experience. While Punchdrunk's *Sleep No More* and *The Drowned Man* both

offered "VIP Premium" admission, this more expensive ticket merely afforded the ticket-holder a different entry point and a little bit more time in the performance environment. All of the audience participants for both of these shows (300 per performance for *Sleep No More*, and 600 per for *The Drowned Man*) were invited equally to engage, direct their own experience, and observe and participate in the performance.

Commerce drove the evolution of theatre architecture from the Renaissance to the modern era. At its most basic, theatre participation represents a transaction. Audiences attend and, in turn, receive a performance. When thusly considered, the audience represents the active factor. The more the audience demands, the more supply of entertainment is delivered. The more desired the audience's experience, the more they may be willing to spend on that experience. As demand for theatre as a popular entertainment grew in society, architecture had to evolve to create larger auditoriums. As the audience applied their economic pressure to this evolution, two things resulted, more comfort for the spectator, and more spectacle to assist in providing a more complete "suspension of disbelief," or detailed representation of the fiction being performed. Most conspicuous of these economically driven evolutions is the single focal point arrangement of the conventional Proscenium theatre, or "end-on" arrangement of the audience to the performance where the audience populated one end of the auditorium, and the performance's stage, occupied the other end. The desire to limit the distance of the spectator from the stage motivated the invention of the balcony. Demand for larger audiences necessitated the stacking of balconies. Free market economics dictates that, generally, those that pay the least amount for their admissions, have the highest climb to reach their seats.

Twentieth century theatre architecture's evolution responded to changing audience interests. A desire for more intimacy as modern theatre explored more psychological realism predicated a modification of the auditorium into such arrangements as the thrust stage, or the arena. A desire in directors and designers to explore the wide range of technological developments of the middle 20th century resulted in the black box theatre where the audience could be surrounded by the spectacle if so desired by the production. However, regardless of the configuration, the conventional theatre experience remained reliant on a particular comfortable distance between the audience and the performance, and economic factors usually dictated a gradient of intimacy to the performer dependent upon ticket price, or social affluence.

For much of Great Britain, London, the seat of political power, defines fashion and social status for the entire country. Generally, throughout modern British history, a theatrical presentation's success was measured by its reception in London. If a show "made it" to one of the grand theatres in London's West End, it subsequently toured to theatres in cities throughout the country. For outlying, formerly autonomous kingdoms like Scotland, Ireland and Wales, conquered by the English over history, and brought under common rule as the United Kingdom, a colonial relationship existed between those provinces and London. For example, the conventional theatres found in Scotland and Wales are traditionally English in architectural design and audience conventions. In some cities, those audience conventions might not necessarily have existed before the imposition of those theatrical traditions by English rule. Certainly, in the industrial centers like Glasgow, Aberdeen, Cardiff, Manchester, Birmingham, Coventry, York, etc., the edifice of the local grand theatre building, sometimes even called "The Royal Theatre," also represented

the imposition of economic and class divisions. The working class of Scotland probably found it economically impossible to attend a theatre event at the King's Theatre in Edinburgh. However, they probably could afford, and probably did patronize the touring "music hall" plays, musicals and "Pantos" that were performed in their local guild and community halls.

Similar economic factors, and prejudices continue into present time. It would be grossly over-generalizing and over-simplifying the economic classification and motivations of site-based audiences in stating that this popular theatre form exists as the purview of the lower or worker classes. Certainly, economic concerns continue to confront the consideration of ticket purchase for these events. Ticket prices for the most popular site-based shows will rival the ticket prices one can expect to pay for the top West End theatre seats. While ticket prices for site-based theatre events can range from free to over £80 depending on the show, economic influences on the transaction end at admission. All participants have equal access to the performance and available sight lines. Site-based theatre's intimately experiential audience engagement remains egalitarian in nature.

Foremost in this comparison, the conventional theatre experience gives the spectator little control over their transaction. A theatregoer pays for his or her ticket, attends the event, a performance is addressed to them, then at the end of the performance they choose to participate or not in the customary applause to thank the performers. In the site-based theatre experience, the participant is empowered to physically engage and participate in the performance. In some site-based productions, audience participants might be encouraged to take agency in their situation, make decisions about how they engage, and what they experience. In some productions they might even have agency to

choose in what order they might experience the event, and to what degree they physically desire to engage with it.

The proletarian nature of contemporary British site-based theatre performance took a variety of forms and effects in the observations and commentary of my research subjects. Foremost, and most common, the belief that the experiential nature of the site-based performance places the consideration of attending the event in a category similar to the decision of attending a public festival, amusement park, sporting event, or some occasion of that nature. As has been previously discussed, site-based performance breaks down and re-contextualizes the audience-to-performance conventions. Non-theatregoers, or those that don't consider themselves theatregoers, may be attracted to the fashion and novelty of the event, and respond to the experiential nature of the entertainment. Like some of the creators interviewed, who resisted the limitations imposed by the hierarchical and class-oriented culture of the conventional theatre, so some site-based theatre audience members may have been drawn to the less restrictive interactions offered by site-based theatre.

Vicky Featherstone, discussing the National Theatre of Scotland's mission to provide theatre to the entire nation of Scotland without inhabiting any one theatre building as a central "home," acknowledged an opinion of conventional theatre architecture as "incredibly limiting." However, as the National Theatre of Scotland does produce plays in conventional theatre buildings across the country, she also acknowledged a central conundrum at the heart of defining her company's core identity. She explained that she thinks theatre audiences may define themselves as "somebody who either goes into that architecture, or does not," reflecting, again, an apparent social divide associated with

patronizing conventional theatre, at least in Scotland. She continued elaborating on this

observation, stating, "And theatre buildings seem to be constantly fighting against what

their architecture is, by saying to the other group of people, 'No, you mustn't find our

Lyceum chocolate box theatre intimidating. It is open. You must come'" (Featherstone).

Beyond the edifice intimidation, Vicky Featherstone pointed to other social issues

surrounding the patronization of conventional theatre that might reinforce similar

marginalization within the ranks of theatregoers. She suggests,

> The wonderful thing about site-specific is that it doesn't have any of those issues, so I
> think that you can get audiences behaving really, really genuinely . . . without affect, or
> without an etiquette which is a secret etiquette, or an elitist etiquette. (Featherstone)

Echoing that, and illustrating the proletarian nature of site-based theatre, Judith Doherty,

co-director of Edinburgh's Grid Iron Theatre Company, told of a regular patron who

formerly feared going to a conventional theatre performance, but now after experiencing

the excitement of site-based theatre, attends all types of theatre. Doherty notes,

> They feel more comfortable, because they haven't had to walk through the glitzy foyer,
> and they don't feel that they don't know where to go, where to sit, that they need to
> dress in a specific way. They've been told all that, [to] wear comfy shoes, wrap up
> warm, and whatnot. (Doherty)

When comparing the conventional theatre's audience experience to the site-based theatre

experience, one can simply describe the effect as taking the audience out of their "comfort

zone." Ironically, the site-based experience, by its very participative, and usually intimate,

nature, denies any existence of a "comfort zone," and generally so engages the audience in

the activity surrounding them that the participant probably never thinks that they've been

removed from a "comfort zone."

Evie Manning and Rhiannon White, co-founders and co-directors of Common Wealth

Theatre Company based in Bristol, explained the motivations behind their company as

arising from a desire to bring a working-class sensibility to their theatre productions. They

freely acknowledged that they both came from modest economic situations, "from a class

that doesn't normally go to the theatre." They decried what they felt tame and boring

conventional theatre offerings as mainly targeted toward a middle class commercial

consumer. They wanted to create theatre that built off the energy of the audience

participating in the event; much like would be felt at a party, or an exhibition. Manning

classified the Common Wealth Theatre experience as socialist: creating shows

collaboratively, and disallowing hierarchy both in the creative team and in the audience-

performer interface. Manning and White described Common Wealth's work as not only

breaking down barriers, but promoting a feeling in the audience that "they've got agency,

and they've got that ability and strength to participate, and get carried away" in the action

unfolding around them, or that they were asked to perform. Both she and White agreed

that the less a conventional gulch between the audience and the performance, and the more

agency a participant is given, the more the performance can open doors, and influence

opinions. They claimed a self-described "left-wing" political mission to address the issues

of the working classes, and of the lower or marginalized classes, and of taking their

presentations into the neighborhoods and environments where their intended audiences

live, work and exist (Manning and White, Personal Interview 01 Nov 2011).

　　　Ben Harrison characterized attending a conventional "end-on," or proscenium

theatre auditorium arrangement as "very reminiscent of other forms of social oppression."

He related this oppression to the acts of watching television, or "like sitting and having

dinner as a child" and not being allowed to speak. Conversely, Harrison equated the

physical experience of participating in a site-based theatre work to "walking around an art

gallery," or "doing other things while receiving" the stimuli of whatever you are engaged in experiencing. He elaborated that he thinks the experience "creates an awareness of the place, and a greater value of the actual [experience]" when the participant is allowed "a sense of, somehow, a little bit more control" over their experience of the performance (Harrison, Personal Interview). Felix Barrett claims the return of control over their individual Punchdrunk experience to the participant as "an empowerment" (Barrett).

Cora Bissett, creator of Pachamama's *Road Kill* (2011), observed a different social connection to site-based theatre than might be engaged in the conventional, describing the collective audience involvement as a "pack" dynamic. She amplified her point by equating the emotional connection amongst the audience experience sharing a collective experience of a site-based theatre work together as similar to "going to demonstrations and marches," or "being involved with a team." Bissett acknowledged that when an audience experiences a site-based theatre performance as emotionally challenging as *Road Kill* they emerge having been affected by what they've experienced together during this isolated event on this particular night. In a sense, they experience a disconnect from their life before they experienced the work and the shared collective experience with other audience-participants conveniently provides a comforting commonality (Bissett).

Ellie Jones, freelance director and creator of Hydrocracker's *New World Order* (2007, 2011), pointed to her simple desire to provide the audience an opportunity to be included in the show. In describing her previous creation of children's theatre, she reminisced about attending holiday pantomimes as a child and being invited to the stage at the end to sing the final song. She commented, the "big thing seemed to me to be able to make your audience feel like they were part of the show."   She stated that one of the desires that

drives her to create site-based theatre is that she'd "always wanted the audience to have a role, albeit in a tiny way, or a big way" (Jones, Personal Interview 16 Dec 2011).

Chris Hunn, who as an avid theatregoer all over Britain, not just in her devoted following of Grid Iron, suspects part of the proletarian appeal of site-based theatre derives from young theatre creators wishing to free themselves from the traditions and restrictions of the conventional theatre while also drawing attention to their work in their early career. She noted, much like many of the site-based theatre creators included in this study, that along with a proscenium auditorium, "there are accepted norms and conventions of how you can do things." She suspects that "particularly for young directors, particularly where money is tight, that the chance to go and do something different [. . .] must be enormously attractive." When asked whether she thought the escalation of site-based theatre work a revolution or evolution, she thoughtfully replied that she felt, "It's all a continuum. [. . .] The generation above has done that to death," meaning the theatre artists of previous generations have exploited the possibilities of the conventional theatre spaces, and that the current generation "want to do something different. [. . .] Part of it is trying to break the rules, and break more rules" (Hunn, Personal Interview).

Cora Bissett discussed how she thinks the artistic community producing and promoting site-based theatrical work is intending, whether consciously or sub-consciously, to "bust out" of the confinement of the conventional theatre's "bourgeois, middle-class, privileged concern, that [. . .] relates to the certain few." Bissett suspects that locating the site-based theatre event outside the purpose-built architecture might "remove" the audience experience "from its historical conventions in some way," further elaborating on its freeing the experience from these "strict conventions like: there's your seat, and there's

your number, and there's your ice cream at break time." As an artist she commented on the appeal, asserting, "it's just exciting to start with a new canvas [. . .] and there's something a little bit, kind of, punk about that" (Bissett).

Amongst the immersive theatre creators, response to this line of questioning often turned at some point to referencing the 'Rave Generation.' Colin Nightingale, production manager for Punchdrunk since 2005, proposed this burgeoning of site-based theatre work seems natural as the current crop of creators came from, or knew of, the popularity of the "rave" events and movement in the 1980-90's, and respond to the concept of surrounding the participant with stimuli from all around their environment, not just uni-directional (Nightingale). Nightingale specifically referenced the "rave" phenomenon of the mid-to-late 1980's when the popularity of electronic dance music often instigated spontaneous, unofficial parties, sometimes with attendance numbering in the thousands. Municipalities offered official authorizations to some larger party organizers to try to curtail some of the more dangerous elements that infiltrated these large mob gatherings. However, police crackdowns of the unauthorized raves frequently drove the parties out of the cities into the countryside where, with the increased distance from emergency response, sometimes more frequent injuries and fatalities plagued the events. Ultimately the movement was curtailed by a parliamentary legislation, the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act of 1994, allowing police jurisdiction to stop both the performance and preparation of unauthorized raves ("Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994"). Of course, this clamping down of the unauthorized rave event brought two results, a burgeoning of the electronic dance club scene in London and other metropolitan areas around Great Britain, and, naturally, the continuation of more surreptitious unauthorized rave gatherings. Thus, the rave

revolution possessed, and continues to possess, particular proletarian political ramifications at its root. One can see the rave movement as a logical antecedent to the post-millennial proliferation of site-based theatre work, not in illegality, or danger, but in the nature of its rebellion against conventional entertainment structures, its egalitarian relationship of performance to spectator, and its environmental experiential elements.

Naturally, as these interview subjects considered the proletarian nature of the contemporary site-based theatre movement, many referred to the economics of producing this type of theatre event. Judith Doherty remarked how audiences at the Edinburgh Fringe have become conditioned to the fact that they might not necessarily consume a theatrical offering in a purpose-built theatre space. "Actually, nine times out of ten, you're not going to see something in a theatre [. . .] because even if it feels like a black-box studio, it's not. It's a church, or a pub, or something, you know?" (Doherty). Simply, Edinburgh possesses too few auditoriums and other available spaces in which a Fringe show can be presented to meet the demand each August when millions descend from around the world for the Fringe and the International Festival. Not an isolated condition particular to Edinburgh and its performance festivals, all the creators I interviewed commented on the shortage of available performance space faced by emerging theatre artists throughout the country; London, Bristol, Glasgow, etc. Shortage of performance space faces emerging theatre creators all over the U.S. as well.

Creative solutions, particularly when bringing audiences into new performing spaces, create notoriety. Ben Harrison credits the saturated press coverage of site-based work in the mainstream media for its popular appeal and proliferation. He said, "I think in the UK, the Edinburgh Festival has driven a lot of that. Because the media decamps in

August.[. . .] A tent and a show in a car for two audience members can get more coverage

than a show at the King's, a venue with 1200 [seats]" (Harrison, Personal Interview)[2]. The

question of where an emerging theatre creator will present their work concerned Cora

Bissett as well. She discussed how,

> There's a very economic and practical concern [. . .] if you can't get a foot in the door to
> the big theatres, because there's only so many training programs, for so few people,
> that can bring up assistant directors through their rounds—Where are you going to
> make your work? Where are you going to find a space to make it? (Bissett)

David Leddy also continued along this theme commenting how he discovered in Cork,

Ireland how young creators have trouble getting their work into the established theatre

buildings:

> They're very tightly controlled, and they won't give opportunities to young companies.
> So those young theatre companies say that they don't have any choice, "I'm going to do
> it in this abandoned old house." "I'm going to do it in the park." "I'm going to do it along
> the riverbank," because they can't get access—physical access—to those old theatres.
> (Personal Interview)

Leddy clarified that the Tron and the Citizens Theare in Glasgow, and the King's and the

Traverse Theatres in Edinburgh, all administer subsidized programs that bring young

artists into their buildings, because those companies have missions to support emerging

artistry, however, these programs can't address all the demand. Leddy further cautioned

that producing site-based work in Great Britain is not as easy as just finding a space and

inviting an audience, "if you're going to do it properly, it is a lot more complicated and a lot

more expensive than presenting a piece of work in a theatre" (Personal Interview).

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[2] The King's Theatre is an historic theatre in Edinburgh, at 2 Levin Street. Built in 1906, it
has undergone numerous revisions over its history.   Today, the King's has 1350 seats with
three tiers of boxes and balconies above the main orchestra level. The King's Theatre has
served an active and vital role in the Edinburgh theatre scene throughout its history.

A Response to Civilization Dominated by Technology

Suspicion of the loss of collective experience in contemporary society comprised the other most common response amongst my interview subjects. Ellie Jones, Ben Harrison and Judith Doherty, Cora Bissett, and Mark Fisher (Edinburgh-based theatre critic), all engaged me in discussions about sensing a loss in community.

In contemporary times, especially since the rise of the technological revolution, we generally find ourselves divorced from the collective, and often isolated as we proceed through our daily experiences. Most generally belong to various loosely-knit communities based on our activities, but most of those activities relate to our particular individual desires, pursuits, or familial endeavors and responsibilities, rather than participation in a greater collective. For example, in a given week an average person might find himself or herself experiencing communities that work together, transit in a group of solo-driven vehicles or in a single mass-attended form of transportation to/from employment, shop in the same place, perhaps share similar interests in politics, sports, arts, or charitable interests. But, all of these are individual experiences when compared to less frequent participation in collective experiences like, for example, living, working and transacting in an ethnically homogenous community, or frequenting a particular team's sporting events, or attending a block party, a rock concert, a disco, or a particular city's cultural festival. Ellie Jones opined that she felt that in today's society she didn't know people who had a "we're all in this together" esprit, rather she felt that today's members of society all are increasingly functioning in their own separate personalized spheres of experience and interaction (Personal Interview 16 Dec 2011).

Cora Bissett offered her opinion that a sense of geographical community has been lost, commenting on how infrequently members of contemporary society "congregate to do something together." She said, "We don't have those churches where we all meet together any more, and even clubs, or discos. It's all very solo. You don't dance with other people. You dance on your own, or in a group of people." She lamented that most people today don't know their neighbors, or even seek to know their neighbors. Whether resulting from increased lack of trust in fellow humans, or a loss of time for casual communication, or a lack of interest, in general, our sense of living in a particular community is trumped by our awareness of living in a larger national, or global community. Bissett further proposed that, sensing this loss of communal connection, we strive to build connections amongst each other in a virtual sense, that our collective experience is not actual, but dependent on instant electronic communication. Bissett put forward that this loss of physical, visceral connection with other humans further alienated our sense of social affiliation, that we as humans don't like "to just go on in a tunnel vision" and that we "now, more than ever need to re-affirm" shared experiences with other human beings, and that the theatre, being a place of storytelling about shared human experiences, especially when participative, or experiential, fills that void (Bissett).

Mark Fisher pointed out that "in an era when we are surrounded by the Internet, by television, by video, by any number of pre-recorded forms that are very, very available to us" we share many contemporary entertainment experiences. We share gaming experiences in a virtual community, or sporting events or rock concerts in near anonymity in large crowds, or even going to the local cinema. However, he observed that even these collective experiences are "atomized," or that they only provide an individualized

experience and a shared field of reference within a much larger generic societal context.
Fisher remarked that the shared live art form, like a site-based theatre event, fills that
experiential engagement that we crave, and provides a hyper-experience within a collective
of fellow humans with which you've shared a common experience (Personal Interview).

Ellie Jones's opinions on the forces driving site-based theatre's popularity fall along
the same theme. Jones asserts that audience-participants "under the age of forty grew up
video gaming," therefore, there may exist some subconscious desire to physically enact the
experience of being "the hero of the story. [. . .] We like being the hero of the story. [. . .]
We've all grown up doing that [. . .] we want to be able to continue that, but in more real
life" (Personal Interview 16 Dec 2011).

Indeed, I believe the recent rapid technological mediation of our culture now
dominates our daily personal interface with our world. This preference for device
interaction promotes frequent experiential interface with electronic sources for
communication and information. We, as individuals in contemporary Western society find
ourselves more conditioned for the experiential stimuli, as opposed to individual sensory
experiences, or interpersonal exchanges.

David Leddy elaborated on our virtual isolation by noting that in the current
"Communication Age" we are encouraged to communicate more shallowly with a larger
group of people, which runs in contrast to the interpersonal communication experience.
He said, "I no longer send a text message to a friend saying, 'I saw this funny thing that
would make you laugh' I twitter it to 500 people, or I post it on Facebook for everyone I
know to look at it at the same time." He observed that some artists are more interested in

creating "intense, complex, detailed, experiences for small numbers of people rather than a shallow experience for a very large number of people" (Leddy, Personal Interview).

Another significant factor of this loss of collective cultural experience is that our current Western society is quite devoid of ritual. Site-based theatre generally returns the audience closer to collective rituals than does the conventional theatre. Experiencing a theatrical event in a real world site, as opposed to in fictionalized conventionalized settings as found in a purpose-built theatre building, brings a sense of ritual to the experience that has been somewhat lost from contemporary society. The Brighton-based conservation and arts collective Red Earth creates new rituals in their performances. Co-directors Simon Pascoe, Caitlin Easterby, and their collaborators, create experiences that invite an audience to participate in performing ritualized experiences on a landscape thus creating a collective celebration of that landscape, its culture, and heritage. Caitlin Easterby described this aspect of the Red Earth experience as "casual ritual." Admitting to the myriad of contemporary semantic issues surrounding the use the word "ritual" she related how Red Earth's performances are not the putting on of "a show." Rather, they are one-off incursions into the landscape where, by adding elements of performance, such as Butoh dance, music, percussion, smoke or fire, flags, or static installations, the performances constitute not a religious ritual, but an artistic supposition of "how people might have moved in vast numbers across landscapes for some sort of celebration" (Easterby). Dr. Matt Pope, Senior Fellow in Paleolithic Archeology at University College London, project archeologist for Red Earth's *CHALK* (2011), remarked on BBC Radio 4 program *Making History*:

> The project itself takes its inspiration from these past landscapes and from past ritual landscapes, so make no mistake, this isn't an exercise in reconstructing the past. [. . .] This is an attempt to do something actually in the present [. . .] about how sound operates in landscapes, how people move in landscapes, and to see this work of

modern performance utilizing landscapes in ways that are evocative of, reminiscent of, engaged with the ancient ritual landscapes. ("Red Earth")

Ben Harrison, the other co-founder and co-director of Grid Iron added his opinion that popular attraction to the site-based theatre might be the result of the loss of human connection in society, and the loss of collective culture. He postulated that people crave both intimacy and spectacle. He described the effect of interactivity at the root of site-based work as an "intimate spectacle." He related,

> People do want intimacy, but they want the spectacle as well. But the spectacular can be on a very small scale. Yeah, something about the craving for community and the pleasure of being—just the pleasure of moving in a space with strangers, sharing it, not being rigidly defined by your seat [. . .] I think it just creates an awareness of the place, and a greater value of the actual. (Harrison, Personal Interview)

Mark Fisher, who has written many reviews of Grid Iron's work commented that site-specific theatre "extends what theatre can be to its utmost theatricality." Again commenting on the intimate experience shared with a particular collective audience, on a particular night, in a particular site, and referring specifically to Grid Iron's first production, he states:

> You will never experience anything, even in another theatre [performance], [like] going down into Mary King's Close [. . .] and seeing *The Bloody Chamber*. Even if you had read Angela Carter's novel *The Bloody Chamber*, you can have other site-specific experiences [of her novel] but you can't have that particular site-specific experience. (Fisher, Personal Interview)

Ben Harrison further explains that the experience of a site-based theatrical piece--participating in the theatrical experience in an actual site--compounds this effect upon a contemporary person craving the collective experience. He points to the "political dimension" of going to "sites of conflict, or going into politically charged places like an airport." He explains that productions concerning themes of immigration and identity, which Grid Iron explored in *ROAM*, at the Edinburgh International Airport in 2005, could be

performed in a conventional theatre, but "they would not have been even a tenth as

powerful" because the conventional theatre would not have immersed that experience into

the resonances and realities, the inherent power of the actual site (Harrison, Personal

Interview).

In a number of interviews, the experts consulted in this study discussed the

experiential culture that has developed in our society in this technological age. Judith

Doherty suspects contemporary audiences are conditioned to experiencing entertainment

and "culture in a variety of different ways, because of the Internet, because of [electronic]

gaming, because of mobile phone technology." Doherty postulated that audiences are

"more excited about really properly engaging with something, rather than just sitting in an

auditorium and watching." (Doherty). Punchdrunk's Felix Barrett contends that with the

"advent of the Internet, everything became so easy," meaning that technology had

expedited many aspects of everyday life that formerly required physical or mental effort.

Barrett suspects that audience participants drawn to site-based theatre might desire to be

aggressively "pushed out of their comfort zone" (Barrett).

Site-based theatre, when successful at engaging the participant, might, for a short

while, distance a person from their everyday reality while immersing them in another,

more exciting reality; a dynamic operating very similarly to the fantasy engagement

involved in playing electronic games. When one considers the popular entertainments

patronized by contemporary younger demographics like adventure sporting events like the

X Games, or RPG (role-playing game) and cos-play societies and conventions, one can easily

perceive how the younger audiences for site-based theatre might be naturally more

attracted to and conditioned for an experiential theatre experience than a conventional

one. The merging of these young consumers' actual lived everyday leisure activities with a fictional drama parallels imaginative engagement with the fantasy worlds represented in these entertainments, and celebrated with mass popular followings on social media.

Ben Harrison and Vicky Featherstone both stated belief that curiosity drives the interest and excitement for site-based theatre experiences (Harrison, Personal Interview; Featherstone). Featherstone elaborates that any site-based theatre experience "is going to be exciting." It's not "what you normally have" in the conventional theatre, or generally in everyday life. She says, "If you say to somebody, 'Turn up here. Here's a little door, go through the door,' there's always delight in it. There is always curiosity" driving the participants' excitement and subsequent engagement. Featherstone elaborated her opinion that it might be easier for an audience of a site-based theatre performance to remember an exciting experience at that event, even if the delivery of the performance is mediocre, than it might be to remember a mediocre performance of a conventional theatre work. She asserted the lure of the easy excitement to be attained for a participant's site-based theatre experience, and noted it was easier to make an effect without, necessarily, the investment in the dramaturgy that might be required of equal levels of excitement in a conventional theatre (Featherstone).

Ben Harrison frequently describes the audience's engagement with his site-specific theatre work in terms of being erotically charged. He describes the event as a "mutual [. . .] imaginative act created between strangers," the audience and the performers, that has a, "dangerous, flirtatious, and erotic charge" (Harrison "Why I do Site Specific Work"). Judith Doherty further clarifies the nature of her own personal experience at one of Harrison's performances as "even if it's not an erotic [scene], you're aware of yourself. You're more

aware of yourself and the space. You're aware of everyone else.   There's an electricity" (Doherty).

Doherty also noted that quite often site-based theatre events are staged and presented in buildings off-limits to public access (Doherty). This is particularly the case with Grid Iron, but other theatre companies generate the same excitement and curiosity inviting their audiences into an off-limits site. Many of Grid Iron's historic performances have introduced the public to sites forgotten, or kept from public knowledge. Most notably, their production of *The Bloody Chamber* (1997) introduced the public to Mary King's Close, multiple stories of former dwellings underneath the Edinburgh City Chambers, and now one of the most popular tourist destinations in Edinburgh. Grid Iron's *Gargantua* (1998) reopened long-forgotten vaulted chambers underneath the Edinburgh Central Library, which is now the hugely popular Edinburgh Fringe venue called The Underbelly.

Chris Hunn proposed her suspicions that the impermanence of the site-based theatre experience drives the curiosity and excitement making experiential entertainment so popular and prolific. Hunn, who has seen every Grid Iron production since *The Bloody Chamber* (1997), and a self-professed avid consumer of site-based theatre, observed that she feels there exists a drive in society today to embrace "living in the moment." She discussed with me how she's keenly aware of the "Pop-up" cultural phenomenon in recent years, noting that the immediate gratification that comes from consuming something that will be torn down and disappear from existence tomorrow possesses an excitement that draws masses (Hunn, Personal Interview).

Why a Proliferation of Site-based Theatre in Great Britain?

As we continued in each interview considering each subject's suspicions of the

forces behind the popular appeal and proliferation of site-based theatre in our

contemporary Western cultures, discussion ultimately narrowed to specific traits of British

culture that each individual felt particularly pertained to the question.   We easily observed

that in a culture of 67.5 million people, living on a group of islands approximately 122,000

sq. mi., and in a population density of 383 persons per sq. km., everyone, generally, feels

surrounded by British heritage (National Statistics Online). There exists in the British

populace an inherent cultural understanding of their locale that is tied to a long history and

a preponderance of very old and historic buildings, locations, and sites. Theatre and

literature represent significant and beloved elements of the British culture. The British

popular theatre tradition continues nearly unbroken from Medieval history, with

thousands of authors, playwrights, composers, actors and directors held revered, if not

perhaps held in higher esteem than military heroes, politicians and royalty.

"History accumulates," writes Michael Shanks in his and Mike Pearson's book

Theatre/Archeology (2001).

> Cities are multitemporal. The remains of the past are all around us: architecture
> survives. Here a Georgian townhouse exists next to a modern designer home. Some
> buildings are thought worthy of preservation and restoration. And some fragments of
> buildings become integrated into others as if they are half-digested, stratifications of
> past occupations, repairs and constructions, the superimposition of different time-
> scales. . . .The history of the city is revealed as a horizontal layering and a vertical
> accumulation of surfaces. (150)

Felix Barrett said referring to heritage and culture, "Is it something to do with England and

the fact that . . . there's so many stories, there's so much history, in the way that America

doesn't have." He continued, "We're used to burrowing into space and time and unearthing

stories and memories, and it goes [back] years and years and years." Elaborating on why

he thought Britain was experiencing a proliferation of site-based entertainments and the

enthusiastic response from British audiences Barrett proposed, "We're kind of isolated. We

can't look elsewhere. We can't really steal. We've got to look inwards—all we've really got

is space, and what's around us" (Barrett).

When you tour Great Britain you will probably witness the daily activity on the local

football or cricket pitch in any village or township. Or you might hear the general

enthusiasm for a favored team, when you walk past any pub during any televised football

match. On a taxi or bus ride through any British city, you can't ignore the frequency with

which you'll see betting parlors. The British sporting culture also probably plays a big role

in the popular response to site-based and immersive theatrical experiences. Hide&Seek

invents new ways for the public to play games, hosting festivals of games and "playful

experiences" and interactive gaming or game-oriented projects for a variety of public and

commercial clients (Hide & Seek Productions Ltd.). Coney builds upon this predilection

and produces interactive experiences for individuals and groups that combine theatre,

promenade, immersion, "anywhere that people gather" (Coney Ltd.).

According to many of my British friends and acquaintances, it takes little prompting

to seize an occasion to "dress up" in costume to attend a celebration. National and local

official functions follow historic orders of "Pomp and Circumstance." The long heritage of

knights, warriors, and revered characters, beloved and reviled, historic and fictional,

frequently finds representation in costumed parties, national and local celebrations, and

historic re-enactments. Ellie Jones mused that, "we [Brits] like that pretending thing. We

quite like to be slightly anarchic." She continued, "I think we've embraced it because [. . .]

there is something about an enjoyment of make-believe. [. . .] There's a big thing in this country about fancy dress and knights." Referring back to the question of site-based theatre and its popular appeal, she claimed that for people who celebrate the "imaginative [. . .] this work works really well." Jones suspects this reverence for fantasy and literature gets instilled in British children at an early age, citing the national Theatre In Education program for bringing plays into the schools to engage children in their learning. She fondly also credits the pantomime, especially prevalent in all the commercial theatres at the holidays, with most British children's first experience with theatre. She points to its participative nature: volunteers brought on stage, cheering the "goodies" and booing the "baddies" and all the kids in the audience called to the stage "at the end to do the singing." Jones feels that if the British person's first experience with theatre is participatory and imaginative, such as the examples she illustrated, then it logically follows that an innate attraction for the site-based and immersive theatre experience can be "really huge" (Personal Interview 16 Dec 2011).

Particular consideration must be given to the macro-economic forces in Great Britain over the past couple of decades. The European economic downturn of the last decade accelerated the vacating of industrial properties in Britain that actually began during the Thatcher administration. The recession of the mid-2000's, like the de-industrialization of the 1980's left many spaces open to be utilized. Whether theatre artists found factories, or warehouses, or decommissioned power plants, or government buildings, or council estates; a temporary cultural use of a vacant space found more favor to a local council than vacancy. As David Leddy described, depending on the economy of the period, sometimes you can gain access to a commercially owned site, and other times

access proved difficult to secure. According to Leddy, during and after the recent British recession, with its own real estate bubble, site-based theatre artists found a surplus of empty commercial buildings (Personal Interview).

I must note that I found the responses from the interview subjects on this theme, regarding the politics of site availability in Britain, generationally different in tone. For example, Mike Pearson, whose site-based theatre work started in the 1980's, focused the significance of changing identities, while Ellie Jones commented on the resulting artistic motivations of vacant cityscape, and the founders of Common Wealth Theatre looked to the political determination of their generation.

Mike Pearson equated the current "cultural focus" of the recent period of theatre innovation and popular attention to site-based theatre entertainments to other similar periods throughout modern British history. He quickly noted that current economic and political forces that have made possible the site-based ventures of the Punchdrunks, Grid Irons and Common Wealth Theatres of Britain, were similar to the "moment of high Thatcherism" in the late 1980's when he and Cliff McLucas created their large-scale works with Brith Gof in Cardiff.   At that particular time, immediately after the dismantling of a huge amount of British heavy industry, numerous "extraordinary industrial buildings" sat vacant.   These huge spaces, on the "scale of cathedrals," Pearson stressed, no longer exist. They have since been demolished, and were at the time "ready for demolition," or slated for demolition (Personal Interview).

However, Pearson continued, while the industrial vacancy made for available and compelling locations for Brith Gof's explorations and epic-scaled performances, the cultural timing of the event provided "terrific poignancy." As Cardiff changed its identity from

industrial center, to defunct industrial center, the future and identity as related to the rest

of the nation appeared unknown and uncertain. As Pearson reported, "Very often, when

[Brith Gof] made that moment, the audience was composed of people who had worked in

those very factories, in those buildings." He said, "So, there are things going on in

performance which are . . . quite tough," and illustrated this point telling of another incident

when Brith Gof prepared to present *Hearn* (1992) in the former British Coal Works in

Tredegar, Wales,

> There was a mobile crane that ran the full length of the building, and we could suspend
> performers, and fly them up and down the room [. . .] The only person that knew how
> to drive it was the person that had driven it before he was made redundant, you know?
> (Pearson, Personal Interview)

Evie Manning views the economic and political resonances of the current times, and

the resulting appeal for site-based theatre, from a more aggressive political stance. She, co-

director Rhiannon White, and Common Wealth Theatre view the site-based theatre

movement as pertaining to a political and cultural reaction to the times. During our

interview in 2011, Manning depicted the current innovative period for theatre

experimentation, particular for site-based theatre, as a reflection of a time where the

younger proletariat are beginning to exhibit dissatisfaction, "be really critical of

capitalism." Manning pointed to the recent Occupy movement, which, at the time of my

initial interview with her and White still surrounded and isolated St. Paul's Cathedral in

London. She proudly claimed to be part of a generation of theatre artists, "politicized" since

an early age by economic and political concerns, incited to take "a bit of authority back, and

[. . .] reclaiming [. . .] disused spaces [. . .] empty buildings." Manning cited contemporary

exposure to the lingering ill effects of Thatcherism on the culture as inspiration for the

generation of "politicized" artists that she identifies with, as well as the motivations behind

her theatre company (Personal Interview 01 Nov 2011). In 2013, when I met with her and

Rhia White in Edinburgh after experiencing their incredible production *Our Glass House*,

they informed me of their development of a new project called *Nationalisation* (Manning

and White, Personal Interview 22 Aug 2013). This project, which they started in May 2014,

commissioned by the National Theatre of Wales, is currently projected for presentation in

2016. In this production, Common Wealth is building a "community-led performance" in

the Gurnos Estate in Merthyr, South Wales, based on a fictitious circumstance where the

citizens of the town have "collectively reclaimed control" of their public services, and

imagines a "different world with a different set of rules" (Common Wealth Theatre Co.).

Common Wealth Theatre's mission to "re-claim" fits into a less aggressively toned

cultural imperative in Britain that seems apparent everywhere in the country, even to the

outside visitor's eye. Ellie Jones confirmed in our discussion in 2011 that there exists a

cultural drive, even unspoken perhaps, to re-purpose these cast off and de-industrialized

sites rather than let them rust away, or be demolished leaving barren empty spaces.

British artists feel an inherent need to make beauty out of the post-industrial, urban

wasteland (Jones, Personal Interview 16 Dec 2011).   A example of this revitalization of

disused industrial buildings would be the Tate Modern's renovated former Bankside Power

Station in the Southwark borough of London.

Mike Pearson proposed another cultural perspective that deserved

acknowledgement amongst the other answers to this line of questioning about why site-

based theatre performance currently enjoys such popular appeal and proliferation.

Pearson notes that the mainstream of English theatre--the West End, the RSC, the Royal

National Theatre, and like generators of popular theatre and popular touring theatre--

remains fairly constantly strong.[3]   However, Pearson continued, "what happens adjacent to [these mainstream theatres], kind of, comes and goes in [. . .] focus." He further proposed that those moments of cultural "focus" are tied to particular moments of cultural stress, perhaps economic or political. As already noted in this chapter, when Pearson and Cliff McLucas created large-scaled political site-based theatre events, like *Goddodin* (1987), the artistic community, especially in Wales, was responding to a "moment of high Thatcherism," as he termed it. The Welsh landscape was littered with huge industrial buildings and sites sitting empty and rusting. Brith Gof's work in these sites, exploring various aspects of Welsh cultural heritage, tied these epic site-based works to the Welsh identity, and brought a particular poignancy to the work and its moment in time (Pearson, Personal Interview).

Pearson explained that it could be argued that Britain, as did Europe and the U.S., found itself in a particular time of economic hardship and political turmoil since the turn of the millennium. Cultural focus, like happened in the late 1980's when Brith Gof garnered such critical acclaim and popular attention, has drawn into popular light the experimental and politically challenging theatre. The United Kingdom's Arts Council has provided tax subsidy funding to these large experiential events with their evidence of expanding popular appeal reaching a large segment of the theatre-going population. Pearson further postulated that those "resilient mainstream [theatre institutions], from time to time [. . .] renew themselves by embracing" the new theatre forms, drawing attention to the larger,

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[3] Pearson also distinguished that perhaps what happens as "mainstream" in Wales and Scotland might be thought of in a different way than what happens in England.

established institution, and developing new demographics for its audience (Personal

Interview).

Pearson related that Brith Gof's creation of *Goddodin*, in the discarded Rover car

factory in Cardiff, occurred at a time when the Thatcher government felt "worried about

French cultural hegemony in Europe." The administration made available a number of

million British pounds to the Arts Council to bring theatre work that existed on the margins

of the culture, and "drew it to the middle" and sent it on tour to Europe as a "marker of

British identity." This tour brought *Goddodin* not only to Italy and Germany, but also to

Glasgow, Scotland, the European City of Culture in 1988, which made a huge cultural

impact not only in Scotland, but with its critical acclaim, around all of Britain. Pearson felt

that that intersection, *Goddodin's* poignant melding of Celtic heritage and heroism with the

loss of national identity in the now post-industrial Glasgow, as it did in Cardiff where it

premiered, also occurred at a particular time when Scotland began to discuss just what a

National Theatre of Scotland might represent. Pearson believed that that particular

intersection of time, culture and performance did bear some influence on those

considerations about "what theatre might be and where it might be placed" (Personal

Interview).

One can see the influence on site-based theatre in the remit of the resultant National

Theatre of Scotland that launched in 2005 after decades of discussion and planning. The

National Theatre of Scotland engages with a diversity of Scottish artists to present new

works, developed from a variety of Scottish interests, issues, and stories, for a national

audience (National Theatre of Scotland). Both Vicky Featherstone and Ben Harrison stated

a number of observations aligning the appeal of site-based theatre to the culture and

identity of the Scottish national audience participants. Ben Harrison cited Scottish

storytelling and the "tradition in Scottish theatre of talking direct—very directly to the

audience. Harrison and Featherstone both stressed the absence of the "fourth wall" in

Scottish theatre tradition and noted how the English theatre conventions at play on the

Scottish stage came from the theatrical culture of a foreign colonizing country. Harrison

suggested that Scotland was "lucky" to not have the "curse of Shakespeare," meaning that

Scottish native performance traditions evolved liberated from the conventions and

infrastructure that distinguished the English theatre. Featherstone further noted that

Scottish villages differ in traditional layout than the English, that typically there is not a

central theatre building, and the subsequent tradition of gathering in that edifice for

"theatre," constant in the Scottish culture. Therefore, Scotland doesn't have a native

theatre convention and infrastructure in the same way as England. Both Harrison and

Featherstone believe that these are reasons that the site-based theatre might flourish so

easily with Scottish audiences and seem "really authentic" (Harrison, Personal Interview;

Featherstone).

Pearson proposed that the current popularity of Punchdrunk, and Grid Iron, and like

companies, might not be accidental.   He asserted his observation of a "similar kind of

embracing" of these companies on the margins of the mainstream, as he witnessed with

Brith Gof in the late 1980's. He noted that, in particular, Punchdrunk's collaborations with

the National Theatre, might not have had such appeal, and had such a renewing effect for

the National's audiences, a decade prior (Pearson, Personal Interview). Certainly one could

point to similar collaborations between the National Theatre of Scotland and the Edinburgh

International Festival and Grid Iron (*Roam* (2005), *Leaving Planet Earth* (2013)); the Royal

Shakespeare Festival, the National Theatre of Wales and Pearson/Brookes (*Coriolan/Us* (2012)); and the Barbican Center and RIFT, in London (*The Trial* (2013)).

Pearson remarked that the test to his theory will be the lasting effect of the recent two large pieces he and Mike Brookes have created for the National Theatre of Wales, *The Persians* (2010) and *Coriolan/Us* (2012). This new institution, founded in 2009, has, as Pearson describes, an institutional initiative to revisit as part of its remit a type of theatre that was part of the Welsh cultural heritage 25 years ago, but had disappeared when Brith Gof disbanded. Pearson proposes that the test to this site-based theatre program at the National Theatre of Wales will be whether they can sustain interest in the Welsh national audience for these types of investigations into Welsh identity that lie in the sites and places around Wales (Personal Interview).

Certainly, whether or not the interest and production of site-based theatre in Great Britain has reached critical mass and may be waning, this moment of cultural mass prompted the popular appeal and interest in creating these experiences in the country. As Felix Barrett declared, site-based work is fashionable here, in the bustling metropolis of London, with its "mountain of people and cultures that come together in this boiling pot" (Barrett). David Leddy thinks it might be contagious, "People are doing it because other people have done it" (Leddy, Personal Interview). With recent site-based theatre activity in New York, San Francisco and other American cities garnering positive press and popular appeal resulting in enthusiastic participation, these cultural forces: societal craving for collective experiential culture, proletarian pressures fighting convention, responses to heritage, and cultural focus drawing the margins and younger demographics to the center, perhaps the contagion is spreading.

4

Interfacing With the Contexts of the Site

When conceptualizing site-based audience experiences, an artist should start by

investigating the various available contexts of the performance site. As mentioned before,

real geographic locations and architectural edifices communicate inherent sociological,

historical, political and geographic contextual associations to the spectator. As Mike

Pearson explains in *Theatre/Archaeology* (2001),

> Site-specific performances are conceived for, mounted within and conditioned by the
> particulars of found spaces, existing social situations or locations, both used and
> disused: sites of work, play and worship: cattle-market, chapel, factory, cathedral,
> railway station. They rely, for their conception and interpretation, upon the complex
> coexistence, superimposition and interpenetration of a number of narratives and
> architectures, historical and contemporary. (23)

As established in Chapter 3, a curiosity for the dramatic experience of real-world sites as

entertainment drives contemporary audiences to site-based theatre performances. A

visceral connection to the cultural contexts of the site both distances the theatrical event

from a conventional experience and also provides the participants an entry into their own

personal connections to and interpretations of the theatrical production unfolding around

them. A production that integrates the various resonances of its site, or develops the site as

a character metaphor, leaves a strong impression on the spectator. Sites with a designed

function (i.e. elevators, vehicles, working airports) provide a very literal contextual

interface for the spectator/participant.

As established in the Introduction, the audience's experience of a site-based theatre production pivots on the intersection of three elements: the *text*, or the play script, narrative(s) or performance content; the *concept*, or the performance or delivery of the play; and the *context*, or the informational resonances of the site or location of the performance. A review of Mike Pearson's definition of site-based theatre provides an important foundation to this discussion:

> [Site-based] performance recontextualises [. . .] sites: is the latest occupation of a location where other occupations – their material traces and histories – are still apparent: site is not just an interesting, and disinterested, backdrop. Such performance, in its themes and means of exposition, is not of necessity congruent with its site [. . .] Interpenetrating narratives jostle to create meanings. The multiple meanings and readings of performance and site intermingle, amending and compromising one another. (Pearson and Shanks, *Theatre/Archeology* 23)

As previously established, the main foundational difference between a concept for a potential conventional production and a concept for a potential site-based production lies in the design of the physical engagement of the spectator within or on the site of the performance. In a conventional Western, or Euro-centric, theatre performance, the spectator engages the site of the performance within purpose-built architecture and in manners refined and long established by centuries of theatre tradition. These audience conventions, generally, provide the spectator a single passive physical encounter with a theatrical performance that will feature a representation of some performed content within a fictitious context. Conversely, at the most basic site-based performance, the participant will be encountering a theatrical event at a location not purpose-built for conventional theatre presentation, or, if within conventional theatre architecture, the participant will not encounter this site in a passive conventional manner. More importantly, each spectator will encounter the performance within contexts that are real and measurable, and may

have a personal significance. To provide a visceral immersive experience for the audience,

the production capitalizes on a multitude of audience perceptions both empirical (i.e.

spatial, kinetic, chromatic, thermal, temporal) and ideological (i.e. iconographic, historic,

societal). These ideological resonances comprise the contexts of the site, and are the focus

of this chapter's observations.   Cultural, political, historical, and societal contexts arising

from previous "occupations" of the site naturally may have significant ramifications for

both the creation and the resulting perceptions of the performance that inhabits the site.

The creator of the site-based performance event logically should be concerned with the

potential effects of these contexts on the performance and, subsequently, on its spectators.

Therefore, I propose careful consideration of a site's contexts as an important first step in

the conceptualization of a site-based performance and the audience experience that results

from it.

In a theatrical production within a conventional theatre space, context presents less

of a conceptual challenge than in unconventional settings. In a conventional theatre space

the purpose-built architecture provides the location where the setting, the representation

of a fictitious place exists. The stage, or the architecturally designated area for the

performance, provides the audience a target for their observation and a focus for their

attention. The architecture of the purpose-built venue generally tends to fade in

importance to the setting that is presented in the performance area. Even when the

performance extends beyond the designated boundaries, by, for example, invading the

audience seating areas, conventions tell the observer that what they are seeing is fictitious

and part of the theatrical production whereas, the architecture, furnishings, and

operational elements of the venue merely provide the foundation upon which the theatre

performance is presented. Gay McAuley argues in *Space in Performance: Making Meaning in the Theatre* (1999) that the theatrical audience's awareness is "contextualized" by the "spectator's knowledge and culturally conditioned expectations" and thus frames their perceptions of the event (271). While the observer may enjoy the surprise of discovery within the experience of the dramatic event because they readily and intuitively understand the conventional theatrical context, they generally understand the passive role that they are to play in the performer-spectator transaction.   Generally, audiences can distinguish between foundation and fiction, between the theatre venue and the dramatic presentation.

As Susan Bennett discusses in her book *Theatre Audiences; A Theory of Production and Reception* (1997), pleasure for the traditional theatre audience is interpreting the story unfolding upon the traditional theatre stage.   Pleasure for the site-based theatre audience lies in that plus the observation and interpretation of a multitude of signifiers communicated by the environment and the actions played within it (78).   Bennett describes the audience's position within the frames of a site-specific production in the following manner:

> The outer frame contains all those cultural elements which create and inform the theatrical event. The inner frame contains the dramatic production in a particular playing space. The audience's role is carried out within these two frames and perhaps most importantly, at their points of intersection.   It is the interactive relations between audience and stage, spectator and spectator, which constitute production and reception, and which cause the inner and outer frames to converge for the creation of a particular experience. (149)

In a site-based theatre production, conventional theatrical contexts are blurred and compounded by other references rising from either the current fictional or actual historic occupations of the location. Anywhere participants might gaze offers them the potential to

observe some element of landscape or real architecture. Viewed elements might trigger some historic or cultural significance for them. As Michael Shanks observes, "The continuous use and reuse of locations bestows meaning upon them affecting the way in which they are experienced . . . The place is 'read' and thereby interpreted in the same way as the performance" (Pearson and Shanks 110-111). The geographic location of the event might trigger some particular bit of knowledge for the audience, allowing them to infer, or "read" into the theatrical performance additional layers of significance or symbolism found within their previous understanding of the location's actual history, or a cultural reference indicated by specific architecture or geography. As Cathy Turner suggests, "The audience might be invited to experience and imagine beyond the confines of the performance, beyond the history of the site, slipping through the gaps in the performance to discover new narratives and experiences" ("Framing the Site").

For example, an audience standing on the steps before the main entrance of the former Shoreditch Town Hall, in northeast London, awaiting entrance into the December 2011 performance of Hydrocracker's *The New World Order* would have been aware that the Shoreditch area of London had enjoyed a long history. The area's dense saturation of formerly abandoned industrial properties had in the recent decades gentrified and been re-purposed as high-end residential lofts, fashionable boutiques, restaurants, pubs and clubs. Vacated by council government years ago, the Shoreditch Town Hall building, while starting to show the cracks and strains of disuse, and becoming a popular hang-out for a few vagrants, retained its Victorian architectural splendor and currently serves as an occasional venue for meetings, theatre performances, concerts, fundraising and social events, and other similar employments. Directly across Old Street stood the dark, hulking

edifice of the former Shoreditch courts and jail. Instantly, the audience found themselves

interfacing with geographical, historical, cultural and economic contexts, all of which, as I

will explain later in this chapter, bore upon the experience about to unfold around them as

the theatrical presentation engaged their participation. Sights and cognitive interfaces

surrounded the audience member in this production, all blurring the boundaries between

the real and the fictitious. The performance played upon contextual interfaces by

immediately immersing the participant into the environment of a fictional governmental

institution that looked and felt tangible and real.

In a conventional theatrical experience, the purpose-built performance venue, with

its traditional audience-performer relationships, frames the experience in expected and

comfortable ways. In a site-based theatre performance the various contexts of the

performance site that may be interpreted individually by the spectator-participant provide

a variety of frames for experiencing the event. The site-based theatre creators interviewed

in this study generally concur that those productions that exploit the contexts of the site,

that immerse the audience within multiple layers of significance, interpretation and

metaphor, provide the most visceral and lasting experiences for the audience.

It must be clarified that not all concepts for a site-based production commence with

an identified or secured site. As discovered in the interviews with these subjects, many

projects germinate from an idea, or a desire to explore a particular narrative, or an

intersection of complimentary narratives. However, at some point, before the creator

starts designing a site-based theatre audience experience, the intended performance

location must be considered and interrogated. The site's contexts, or all the ideological

values inherent in the site's geographical location and history, as well as any cultural

resonances found in the surrounding community, or from any communities that populated the site in the past, present, or even in the known future, all of these will have some effect on the spectator's perception of and engagement with the performance to take place.

No Longer Just a Compelling Backdrop

As established in the previous chapter, the current popularity of site-based theatre for today's audiences likely grows out of people's demand for collective physical experiences in a society that continues to grow ever more isolating and mediated by digital technology. If we indeed crave a visceral interface with our world to replace the virtual interface provided by our technology, then the theatrical event found in the "real" world trumps the artifice found in a purpose-built theatre venue. However, as contemporary consumers of theatrical entertainment demand more interaction with their entertainment, contemporary creators of site-based theatre events must seek to provide more visceral connections between spectator and performance site. Merely placing a theatre production against a real world edifice, and not taking the spectator into and through the site, can have the effect of disconnecting the audience from the experience. To create a lasting audience experience, site can no longer be just a compelling backdrop.

A physical site, no matter its age, or current state, can resonate a number of contexts in each individual audience member's perception. Contexts can come in the form of narratives, references to past occupations, or an historical event happening to, or at, the site for as long as there remains a record or remembrance. Any and all layers of contextual reference available to the visitor potentially affect how that site may be experienced and interpreted, and thus, how a performance held in the site may be experienced and interpreted. As Mike Pearson explains,

> At site, social, cultural, political, geographical, architectural and linguistic aspects of context may inform or prescribe the structure and content of performance. They may constitute a brief, recommending or requiring particular modes of engagement: to unlock the site, to reveal the multiplicity of its constituent narratives, historical, architectural and environmental. (*Site* 143)

Creators of site-based theatrical events must respect the fact that audience members living near the site, or working at some occupation in the site either currently or in the past, will possess intimate knowledge of the site, its histories and contexts. Gay McAuley observes that

> Locally based spectators experience an enhanced kind of creative agency in that their knowledge of the place and its history may well be deeper than that of the performance makers, and they will continue to frequent the place after the performers have left. It is in their lives that such a performance has its most resonant impact. (*Local Acts* 9)

Creators of site-based theatre events should respect their responsibility to honor the resonances and incorporate them into the experience, not just frame the performance against a real-world backdrop. Michael Shanks proposes that these creators "must create work which has none of the dogmatism of the theatrical performance . . . framed up, laid out for our pictorial inspection and approval." Equally important, "the very inauthenticity of the performance allows room for manoeuvre [sic], allows stances, of ownership, identity and interpretation, to be confirmed, challenged, confounded at the same time." (Pearson and Shanks 146). Shanks continues to explain how historic sites are "saturated with meaning." They are "palimpsests", physical remains of past tenancy, layers of stories waiting to be interpreted by whoever visits and experiences them, still open for future occupations, and interpretations of past events (156).

> The construction of narrative is but one aspect or possibility here. In looking at things found we make stories, relating our looking to our experiences, to connections we see and imagine. [. . .] Meaning comes from making connections and exploring contexts.

This is something constructed or brought to a place by the maker and the viewer. (157-158)

What contemporary consumers of the theatrical transaction experience at such sites, Shanks describes as "incorporations: juxtapositions and interpenetrations of the historical and contemporary, the political and the poetic, the factual and the fiction, the discursive and the sensual" (159).   This condition necessitates that creators of site-based theatricals interrogate their intended performance sites, listen to their resonances, and weave them into the audience's experience of the site and performance. However, caution is also required. They also must provide allowance for the expansion of the spectators' imaginations. The imagination and intimate interpretations of each individual participant act upon their perception of the experience unfolding in the site. The design of a site-based audience experience requires thoughtful engagement with numerous theoretical considerations and practical approaches. Michael Shanks articulates these engagements:

More complex site-specific work at such sites might use different varieties of narrative, factual and fictive, historical and contemporary, creative and analytical, in parallel and in sequence. It can overlay the documentary, the observational and the creative within a given location or architecture without laying any claim to accuracy or historical verisimilitude. (159)

Site-based theatre productions exploit the experiential interfaces with the site's contexts. The most engaging audience experience presents not just a compelling juxtaposition against an interesting location, but takes the participant somewhere, challenges them and inspires consideration and empathy. Although a physical place is the site of the theatrical event, it is the participant's specific connections to that place that need be exploited. This connection might start with recognition of the site's history, and/or the contexts or cultural resonances of the place. The manipulation of the audience's interface

with the contexts and cultural resonances found in a site provides for layers of reference within the experience.

Two Case Studies

The New World Order (London, 09 December 2011)

In November and December of 2011, the Barbican Center's BITE series presented a revival of Hydrocracker Theatre Company's *The New World Order* ("Barbican - The New World Order"), an audience favorite of the 2007 Brighton Festival. Originally commissioned by the Brighton Festival and conceived for the historic Brighton Old Town Hall and Police Station, the 2011 London production was re-mounted and adapted to fit the architectural and logistic particulars of a different historic building. This *The New World Order* promenaded the audience through the historic Shoreditch Town Hall, on Old Street, in the heart of the fashionable Shoreditch district in London's East End.

Director Ellie Jones, collaborating with Hydrocracker's ensemble, wove together and adapted five short one-act plays by Harold Pinter, (*Press Conference, One For The Road, Precisely, Mountain Language*, and *New World Order*), into an intense 75-minute immersive experience that deftly ushered the audience off the street, into official events staged in the historic building, and through a series of encounters. Participants were immediately engaged in the roles of VIPs and reporters at a press conference at the Ministry of Cultural Integrity, then later as accidental observers of an illicit exchange, and finally were misidentified and treated as political prisoners in the subterranean dungeons where they witnessed re-education programming.

The social division that lies at the heart of all five of these Harold Pinter plays perfectly undergirded our interface with this site. From the very beginning, as I walked up to the building, I sensed its menacing aura. This large Georgian, cold, massive stone edifice, Shoreditch Town Hall, built in 1850 in the middle of a working class tenement area, dominates its surrounding district, formerly saturated with small industry. Although decommissioned and now used mainly for special events, it still cast an imposing nighttime presence in a neighborhood now teeming with bars, clubs, restaurants and trendy boutiques. Across the street lurked a larger, very dark, and even more imposing and menacing building, the former courts and police station and jail—graffiti tagging the Court's former double doors, an ironically fitting social expression considering its dark past, and the experience we embarked upon a few minutes later.

The audience of approximately 50 participants, ranging in age from approximately 20-60, gathered on a small portico outside the main entrance to the Town Hall, the doorman telling us the event was not quite ready, that the ministry officials were required at a black-tie affair happening in another part of the building. We could see couples in evening attire with champagne glasses coming and going from a banqueting room through the glass front doors. While we waited, a few of bedraggled "street people" quietly dispersed amongst us, distributing flyers and quietly protesting the Ministry's recent activities. I noticed one of these gentlemen had a small boy with him.

Soon, we were ushered into the building's foyer, and after a security search and briefing by an under-minister, led into a large chamber on the second floor where we took chairs arranged in rows in front of a podium. Interspersed through the crowd were about a dozen people with video cameras, smart phones and steno pads. An official introduced the

Minister of Cultural Integrity (played by Hugh Ross) who proceeded to welcome us and discuss the successes of his Ministry's program of enforced compliance and re-education amongst the citizenry.

After the press conference, the Minister invited all of us "special guests" into his personal office for a demonstration of the effectiveness of the program's techniques. We sat in chairs encircling his desk as guards led in a prisoner, hooded with bound hands, and seated him in front of the minister. When the hood was removed we recognized this prisoner (played most effectively by Richard Hahlo) as the man with the little boy on the street distributing flyers. We watched a particularly brutal interrogation of this prisoner by the minister, during which he was branded a dissident and told his wife and son were also being held in the Ministry and were under interrogation. Then we were dismissed out a side door of the office into an inner stairwell.

Not having a staff member to guide us, or tell us whether to leave the building, the only option left to us was to explore down these stairs, finding doors blocked or locked, until we found ourselves on what felt like the basement level. After witnessing a creepy exchange between the Minister and the boy of the prisoner we'd just seen interrogated, we were lured through an unlocked door by a distressed call for help. Once through that door, we were discovered by a guard, mistaken as political prisoners, and physically herded into a wide marshaling area of the basement level of the Town Hall where we were roughly interrogated and divided. Throughout the remainder of the production, until our release, all of these subterranean areas appeared very dark, damp, decayed and echoed with terrorizing screams and sounds. For the next hour we were herded, physically handled, separated and escorted through various cells and cramped rooms in this dungeon-like

basement level of the building. We were treated like other prisoners in the area, at times yelled at and pushed by the guards, and backed up against rough, damp and peeling walls. At various times we were forced to witness brutal scenes of interrogation, torture, and the aftermath of physical abuses and rape. For the entire time the basement area of the building echoed with the sounds of people being tortured and killed. Also constant throughout were the sounds of revelry and parties both from the black-tie engagement upstairs, as well as from the real-world establishments just outside in the block surrounding the town hall.

At one point we were taken from where the dissident's wife was being raped, into an outside area behind the building, and the sounds of revelry were so loud they seemed right on the other side of the wall; the separation of the privileged from the oppressed was palpable. At one point we were "profiled" by a press secretary who casually questioned us. Regardless of our answer we were sent into the deepest of the dungeons, which looked to be former storage spaces; once we passed through a room with the rusting remains for six morgue vaults, all the doors were heavy steel. As a participant, my immersion into the surroundings and the event was so realistic and seamlessly thorough that I sympathized and identified with the prisoners in the performance. I felt constantly threatened—as if my life truly was just as fragile, my fate also in the hands of these oppressors. It felt as if all one of us had to do was somehow step out of line, or utter something counter to the constantly shifting narrow margins of Ministry policy, and we would suffer the same fate as the prisoners portrayed in the performance.

Ultimately, the dissident male was determined "rehabilitated" enough to be released back into public. The various divided subgroups of our audience were rejoined in an area

that had the look of a loading dock. We witnessed the Minister freeing the man, but only after further humiliation, and telling him that his wife was to be released in a week or so, that she had some "services" yet to perform, and that the son was killed "because he was a little prick." Exterior doors opened, and the freed dissident stumbled into a back alley full of rubbish skips and puddles of rain water, and we were summarily dismissed to follow him (*The New World Order*).

We followed the actor down the alley through a couple of turns until we found our way back to Old Street and the entrance of Shoreditch Town Hall. Returning to my own reality, I could not help but notice the constant din from the nightlife of the Shoreditch district surrounding us. We had just escaped a place of torture, and the oppression of common citizens by a government authority, underneath and in the midst of the populace enjoying their nighttime entertainments. This ironic juxtaposition certainly sparked suspicions of what unthinkable horrors were conducted by our own governments in out-of-sight dungeons, while the rest of society chooses to turn a blind eye. Society's apathy denied any acknowledgement of the fate of their fellow citizens, while their revelry literally drowned out any sounds, or evidence of the truth. Certainly, Hydrocracker succeeded in their goal of providing their audience a powerful interaction with these haunting Pinter plays.

Our Glass House (Edinburgh, 22 August 2013)

From 2012-2013 Common Wealth Theatre toured *Our Glass House* to five cities throughout Great Britain, a site-responsive performance event that explored the effects of domestic violence. This production played five different houses in five very different (low income, council housing) communities: both St. George and Lawrence Weston in Bristol,

Thorpe Edge in Bradford, Wester Hailes in Edinburgh, and Camden, in London (Common

Wealth Theatre Co.). I had followed Common Wealth since 2011 when they started

creating this piece. They premiered it in their home city of Bristol, and then were invited to

re-mount it in other sites around the country, each time finding enthusiastic response for

their profoundly moving and highly inspirational work. I caught up to the production at

the 2013 Edinburgh Fringe Festival where it won a number of prestigious awards including

a Special Commendation from Amnesty International (Common Wealth Theatre Co.).

The audience of about 25 participants, ranging in age from teens to seniors,

gathered at the Wester Hailes community center on the edge of this large council estate, a

brief walk from the train stop. In the development of the original production, in Bristol,

Manning and White discovered that gathering the audience at an easily identifiable, or

landmark location (for the St. George production it was a crossroads), alleviated confusion

over the exact address for the site. This logistical consideration also provided the

individual participants a visceral connection to the atmosphere of the council estate as they

promenaded the distance to the site along sidewalks in the neighborhood. As we walked to

the row house occupied by the production in Wester Hailes, I noted a number of individuals

and families observing us from front stoops or from within darkened front entries. A few

of these individuals asked Manning or White or the other docents about the procession, and

when informed, followed along, and even joined the audience for the performance.

Primarily in six rooms, but actually throughout the two-level, three-bedroom unit,

five of the six actors were already engaged in their performances as we entered the house.

A pregnant female occupied the kitchen area. A middle-aged Indian woman, speaking only

in Punjabi, occupied primarily the eating area adjacent to the kitchen, but also frequented

an upstairs room and the backyard. An elderly woman occupied the living room. A teen-aged daughter split her time between an upstairs bedroom and its adjacent bathroom. A young male boy roamed throughout the house observing the action, frequently retreating to a small personal space in an upstairs closet. The sixth actor, a middle-aged male, arrived at the house about fifteen minutes into the performance and occupied a third bedroom upstairs.

The performance progressed over approximately seventy-five minutes. It conveyed in sequence five themes, exploring and examining the causes, experiences, and consequences of domestic violence as developed from the study of actual case files. Each adult actor simultaneously performed a solo artistic expression of an actual victim, while interacting with his or her environment, rarely interacting with another performer. Only the boy seemed able to venture freely throughout the house seeing all of the other victims inhabiting it (*Our Glass House*). Although the audience was not made aware of these act divisions, the production followed a five-act structure, each act distinguished from the next by subtle changes to the audio score, as themes progressed through "Love," "Fear," "Control," "Expectation" and, finally, "Courage" when all the victims take agency and engineer their escape from the house (Manning and White, Personal Interview 16 Aug 2012). Each "escape" symbolized their overcoming an obstacle that represented a significant element of that respective victim's confinement. For example, the Indian woman had been forced by her aggressor to hide her Punjabi heritage, represented in the performance by a colorful bolt of fabric, her last tie to her former home. Her escape involved removing the fabric from its hiding place and spooling it out as she fled the house, down the block and around the corner. Only the final act of escape, performed by the

pregnant woman, with the boy in tow, acknowledged the presence of us audience observers.

The six rooms, plus the hallways, stairs, and an attic area, were all decorated as visual art installations by Common Wealth's creative collaborators. These artists designed each room not to only represent the setting for each performer's story, but to also be artistic expressions of the violence within each scene.   The teenage girl had been sexually abused and had normalized sexual behavior as a release. Her room was decorated with centerfolds of nude women, and a stripper pole. We later discovered this was her aggressor's room, belonging to her young boyfriend. On all surfaces of the bathroom adjacent to her room the designers had plastered journal entries about sexual abuse and isolation scrawled in blue ink and formed in curves and waves. When the girl thrashed about the bathroom, those aquatic decorative expressions elicited a feeling that she was physically expressing symbolic drowning in her writings.

The attic appeared to represent a starlit night with a wishing well. Later in the play we observed the teenaged girl going up there and throwing a coin in the wishing well. The young boy's hideout in the upstairs closet was a comfortable, safe haven. Quilts and pillows piled in the corners, the floor scattered with paper and drawing implements. Child-drawn depictions of monsters and violence plastered the closet walls.   As mentioned, the man's room appeared to be in the process of demolition. It had branches depicting a forest because the only place left where the man felt comfortable was roaming the woods. The kitchen was painted a monochromatic battleship grey, with large dimensional lettering naming all the appliances and cabinets. This installation gave the impression that the

pregnant mother was stuck in a prison of utilitarian service with no shred of individual identity left to her.

During the performance we discovered that the young mother's keys had been taken away from her and she was locked into the house. We observed her slithering her pregnant body out a narrow window opening to get into the backyard to hang out washing. The back yard was overgrown with weeds and fenced by 6-foot high wooden fences on both sides. It backed up to a two-story brick wall of a neighboring tenement. It left us feeling terrifyingly isolated when we observed activity back there, as if terrible violence could happen completely hidden from view. The only artistic expression in the yard area was a phrase applied in raised letters to the brick back wall: "You were here as a witness."

The *Our Glass House* production, as mentioned, presented these six individual performances simultaneously. These performances were carefully choreographed, not only within each themed act, but waxing and waning in intensity so to promote movement by the observers throughout the house. For example, I might have been watching the elderly lady re-enact a lengthy courtroom testimony in the living room, and then was drawn to the teenaged girl's upstairs bedroom by a loud door slam, to find her closeted in the bathroom filling the tub. Then, after the door reopened, I voyeuristically watched her dance about and upon the bathroom fixtures expressing what felt like both freedom and terror. When the male arrived at the house, the front door slammed, and we heard what sounded, and felt like stomping up the stairs, and another crash from the upstairs room where his performance resided. The first thought that came to me, and likely came to all the observers, was immediate fear that this was an aggressor intent on abuse. About a dozen of us, myself included, raced upstairs to see. We observed a very distraught man,

destroying his room while recording his confessions on a video recorder. At one point the Punjabi woman walked through the house ringing a very loud bell. All the victims gathered at the dining table for a meal. We observed a scene where all of them were waiting on their families to come home for a meal, allowing us observers to fill in gaps in the story through the exposition.

The final act, "Courage," provided us a much-needed uplift from the sad and profound desolation and despair that we had been observing. Each victim found the courage to break their ties to their aggressor and past imprisonment, symbolically and physically making an escape from the house. The young girl flopped down in despair on her bed as the young boy inquired at the door if she was okay. We turned to see the boy, and when we turned back to the girl, she had disappeared, as if she had just melted away. The man made an escape out the back window and over the fence. The young mother found the keys, grabbed the boy and escaped out the front door. As we followed the last of the victims out of the house, we paused on the stoop, observing the young mother in a small, red compact car, with the boy in the front seat, pulling up in front of the house. She gazed at us all, and then held a series of placards up to the passenger side window, expressing her private thoughts about the abuse and her situation. One, a threat from her aggressor, read "I'll put your photos on Facebook." The final placard read, "I'll probably take him back" (*Our Glass House*).

After the house and street emptied, Evie Manning invited us all back into the house for a discussion. About half the audience participated in a lively 45-minute discussion about the production, its development, and the domestic violence issues. Common Wealth Theatre distributed advocacy materials and encouraged anyone who sought assistance to

take agency, and to contact the proper authorities. *Our Glass House* provided me a visceral experience of the environment that both nurtured the violence and imprisoned both victim and aggressor. However, this production also showed me a well-crafted example of how this type of unconventional setting for theatre can support a haunting voyeuristic audience experience profoundly beautiful in its representations and remarkable in execution.

Surveying the Range of Contextual Interfaces

As previously stated, every director's conceptual process germinates from a personal connection to the themes or subject matter of the play or narrative to be staged or developed. Similarly, every creator of site-based theatre approaches the process of integrating the site's contexts into their concept for a performance from a foundation of influences and past experiences.

Each theatre director's conceptual process is unique and personal. Most directors will claim that their conceptual processes differ depending on the specific requirements of each production. These requirements amplify when considering the conceptualization and creation of site-based theatre productions. Ben Harrison says, "There isn't a blanket—there isn't a conceptual process, or a stencil, you know?" He affirms, "Each site will illuminate the prospects of the piece" (Harrison, Personal Interview). However, survey of the responses from the subjects interviewed for this study revealed some commonalities.

The directors (creators of site-based theatre) interviewed in this study approach the creation of their work from a variety of perspectives. Similarly, they all said that the conceptual process involved a myriad of techniques. However, notably, all these artists viewed their primary role as advocate for the audience. Whether each came to this responsibility from past experiences in and/or out of the conventional or nonconventional

theatre, all but a couple of my interview subjects claimed to be avid consumers of site-based performance. All directors in this study were drawn to the freedom of expression, and the freedom of experience found when site-based theatre experiences broke away from the traditional audience-to-performer theatrical transaction.

In discussing their conceptual and creative processes, the subjects of this study related how their respective works interfaced with a variety of contexts. Some productions resonated easily within locational and societal contexts, while others illuminated and were energized by the existing history and cultural significance of their sites. Later in this section, I will explore how a site associated with or currently functioning as a visible and obvious occupation might provide a particularly visceral interface for the audience's experience.

The locational and societal references arising from or relating to a site perhaps constitute the most easily identified contexts for both creator and participant. If audience members live in or near the site, they might possess intimate knowledge of its history, legends, and current occupations. If a site possesses a particularly broad historical footprint, like, for example, a historic castle or cathedral, it might be likely that most in the audience will possess a general understanding of the location prior to the designed theatrical event performed within its edifice. As individual participants prepare to travel to a geographical location for a site-based theatre presentation, they might research that area of the city, or landscape to gather information. One might discover societal values assigned to a location by the prevalent themes or sociological forces in a district of a city, the occupation of a particular landscape (historical, agricultural, industrial, residential, etc.), or the current and past economic status of a geographical area. As participants travel to the

site for the performance, they might experience certain geographic or societal resonances or signifiers promoting a familiarity with, or conversely, an alienation from, their own personal experience.

I've intentionally ordered the following discussion of contextual categories to progress from the most obvious and apparent references available to the visitor to a site, to the widest resonances. To illustrate this please refer to the diagram located on the next page.   A site's contexts can be metaphorically interpreted as concentric rings of available references and resonances. For example, imagine you parachuted into a site. You hail from a foreign land, and have no prior information about this place, or its history. Your first immediate references will be apparent in the site: locational contexts, or functional, occupational, and architectural contexts. Walking away from the site, perhaps encountering surrounding landscape or cityscape, you may begin to acquire or infer other information about the site from geographical contexts, or societal contexts. As you continue your inquiries, perhaps considering the site's relations to its nation or civilization, you may interface with the site's historical or cultural contexts.

Locational Contexts

Whether architectural or landscape, most performance sites perform an occupation. The vast majority of buildings are designed to fulfill a purpose. They are, or were manufactories, meeting places, centers for worship or study; they store items, facilitate transportation, etc. Agriculture occupies a large portion of the rural landscape, whether tilled for seasonal crops, lying fallow, or covered in forest. Passenger vehicles and devices, such as motor coaches, trains, ferries, and elevators (or lifts), when in operation, are

Locational Contexts

Cultural Contexts

Societal Contexts

Geographical Contexts

Historical Contexts
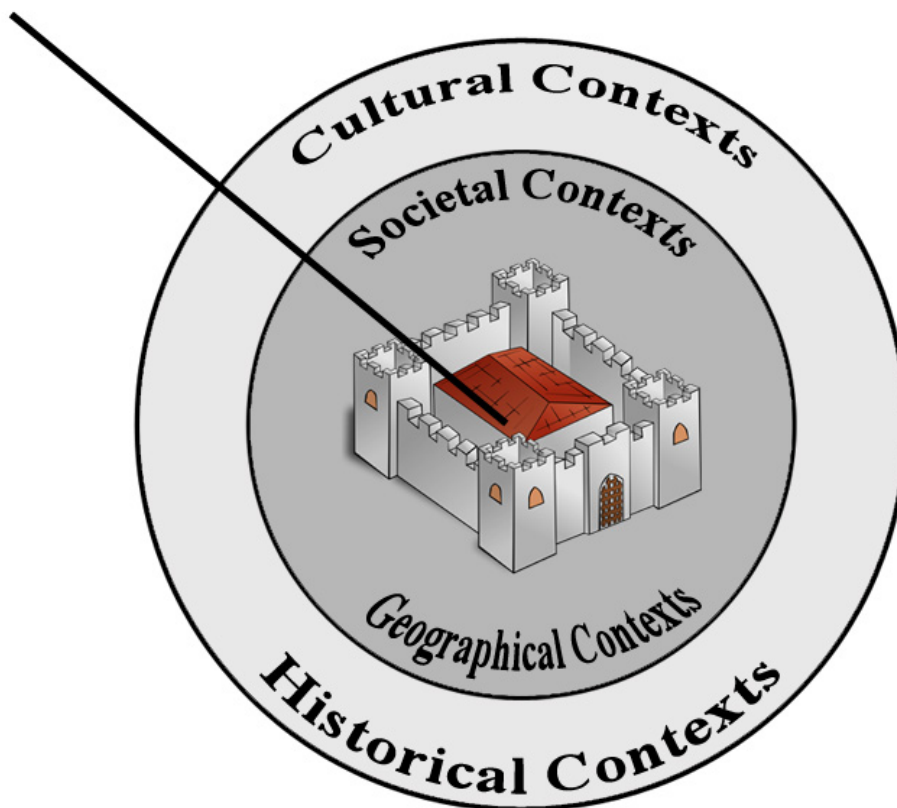
Dia. 3 – Locational contexts are most discernable at or in a location. Other contexts are not generally as intimate to the site, and require consideration from physical and relational distances.

generally occupied fulfilling that specifically designed function. Humans who enter or

engage with these constructions, landscapes or devices interface with the contexts inherent

to these functions. This section is concerned with contexts most available for

interpretation as a performer or audience participant comes in contact with a location or a

site. Locational contexts can be functional, occupational and architectural.

When site-based theatre events are located in or on such a site, Pearson observes that "performance is compatible with site in form, content and style, although the fit is not exact" (*Site* 63). Generally, such sites are not designed for the consumption of a theatrical performance; however, depending on the operational requirements of the function or occupation, performance behavior may be possible within a functioning site. For many of these types of sites, especially communal buildings and vehicles common to contemporary civilization, Pearson again discerns that "the audience is, in large part, conversant with how to conduct themselves" (63). The juxtaposition of the performance experience against functional and/or occupational contexts provides another interesting layer of interface for the audience. Generally, when engaged in a performance that is set in a functioning site in current operation, like riding a ferry or motor coach, the audience's interface with that designed function, blurs the distinction between observing a theatrical event and actually participating in that function. At such times the participant's aesthetic distance from the dramatic can be greatly reduced, even erased, depending on the individual's degree of immersion into the site's operational activity.

Nick Kaye, in commenting on the effectiveness of site-specific visual performance art, touches upon the subject of functionality: "site-specificity is linked to the incursion of 'surrounding' space, 'literal' space in the viewer's experience of the artwork," any animation of the site, relates to and within, the strata of other sensorial input emitted from the artistic presentation (25). The audience participant, having entered the performance site and committed to experiencing a site-based theatre production, fully engages the space in its designed function. For example: they ride in a ferry, smelling the ocean and the engine exhaust; they hear the clanks, bumps and bells of normal operation and feel the

sway of the waves, and the acceleration and deceleration of the boat's momentum in their knees and inner ears.

Richard Schechner describes this type of participatory theatrical experience as "transforming an aesthetic event into a social event—or shifting the focus from art-and-illusion to the potential or actual solidarity among everyone in the theater, performers and spectators alike" (45). All the participants inhabiting the operational site, performers and observers, simultaneously exist in the "art-and-illusion" while they all fully participate in its designed functionality. As Schechner puts it, participation "humanize[s] relationships between performers and spectators" (60).

Ben Harrison and Jude Doherty related how such juxtapositions had a profound impact on their audiences' experience of sites in past shows. In their design of *Roam* performed at the Edinburgh International Airport in 2005, the production occupied areas of the passenger terminal while the airport conducted normal operations. According to Ben Harrison,

> In the airport, you have very little visual control, because you have passengers disembarking every five [minutes], and you've got to allow the fiction to go out into them [. . .] So we subverted the signage on the shopping trolley, and the monitors—we did an over-ride. You do enough to just pull it toward the fiction you are trying to create. (Personal Interview)

This subversion of the normal operation of the airport site for *Roam* comprised only a single element of the audience's interface with the functional and occupational contexts of an actual operating air terminal. The participants received printed tickets and passports and underwent security checks; these experiences blurred their distinction between the real and the fiction (Harrison, Personal Interview; Doherty).

In *The Devil's Larder* (2005), Grid Iron adapted Jim Crace's novel of the same name to explore food's influence on human society, and how food can incite desires, fears, anxieties, and elicit taboo behaviors ("Gridiron Theatre Company"). Originally produced as part of a site-specific theatre festival in Cork, Ireland, called Relocation, in Cork *The Devil's Larder* promenaded through a former morgue. After Cork, the production returned to Edinburgh to play the 2005 Edinburgh Fringe, and Grid Iron re-mounted it in Debenham's department store on Prince's Street; the show performed after business hours. Surrounding and immersing the audience in all the inherent resonances of a functioning department store, Grid Iron provided a thematic tie between the gluttony of the food culture and consumerism. Highlighting this connection, a number of scenes were set at a dining table located in the middle of the "cookery department" as well as in other locations around the store (Doherty).

The most effective interface with a site's functional contexts that I experienced occurred during a performance of Cora Bissett's *Road Kill* in London (December 2011.) The production required the audience to ride on a motor coach from the Theatre Royale Stratford to the performance site at an undisclosed location. The last two persons to board the coach, and take seats near the front, were a young teenaged girl, and an older woman carrying the girl's small piece of luggage. Both women, from the color of their skin and their fashion, appeared to be from an African country. Over the course of the fifteen-minute ride to the council estate unit where we disembarked, this teen-aged girl delivered the story behind what we were about to see. As fellow riders of a functioning motor coach, we audience members were both riding and participating in conversation with her. Our

interface with the functional contexts of riding an operating motor coach blurred the

distinction between the real and the fictional theatrical presentation *(Road Kill)*.

Geographical and Societal Contexts

Walking through the Shoreditch district of North London from the Old Street tube

station on the way to the Shoreditch Town Hall, for *The New World Order*, audience

participants found themselves surrounded by the newly gentrified post-industrial area,

populated by the twenty-something, upwardly mobile denizens of the city attending to the

beginnings of their weekends' entertainments. Navigating these streets of converted

Victorian warehouses I was struck by the juxtaposition of the contemporary affluent

culture against the blue-collar industrial heritage represented in the architecture. This

juxtaposition set a proper tone for the representations of torture and oppression to follow.

The planted protesters who met us and distributed pamphlets to us as we waited on

the sidewalk in front of the Town Hall seemed so normal that most of us were fooled into

thinking them real, until one of them showed up as a prisoner interrogated in the minister's

office about fifteen minutes afterward. This feeling of distrust of what we understood to be

the contexts of our location continued as the play unfolded inside the Town Hall. When our

liberties were jarringly removed, we instantly left the world we thought we recognized and

were hurled into subterranean areas we didn't recognize and into identities we feared.

Suddenly our engagement with the site shifted from one of understanding the familiar, to

one based on suspicion or fear of past occupations of the site. Furthermore, during

moments in the play when we were being herded through the dungeons of the building, the

traffic and sirens on busy nearby Shoreditch High Street blurred our distinction between

the very real geographic context provided by our location and surroundings and the fictional drama we were inhabiting. Of course, the most emotional contextual interface came when we were observing the aftermath of the rape and torture of the young wife, and finding her next to an open window allowing in the sounds of the night life of the surrounding neighborhood, as well as the affluent charity formal ball proceeding two floors above. Just beyond the window, just out of reach of her and our escape, society continued their seemingly apathetic lives, celebrating their fortunes, symbolically unaware, and, as far as one could discern, unconcerned about the torture being executed in their midst, and by their government (*The New World Order*).

Edinburgh's Grid Iron Theatre Company built their reputation as one of Great Britain's leading site-specific and site-responsive theatre producers by taking audiences into long-forgotten spaces underneath and around Edinburgh. Edinburgh's medieval old town, built along the granite spine under what is now known as the Royal Mile, evolved as a warren of walking streets radiating off that main commercial thoroughfare. The buildings were built upward for defense, but also to enable the affluent to reside above the smells and decay of the lower classes inhabiting the lower floors down the hill from the boulevard. Now, beneath the street level, and under the Edinburgh City Council Chambers, Mary King's Close steeply slopes downward passing through the remaining five stories of old Edinburgh. Around 1753, in order to accommodate construction of the Royal Exchange building at street level, Mary King's Close was sealed, effectively removing it from habitation or visitation for the next 244 years. As happens with other locations removed from everyday civilization, rumors associated Mary King's Close with myths and legends of mysterious disappearances, hauntings and even walled-up victims of the plague.

Thus, at the Edinburgh Festival Fringe in 1997, when Grid Iron produced Keith Lodwick's adaptation of Angela Carter's *The Bloody Chamber*, audiences descended down through the historic close, engaging this infamous location of local legend. Grid Iron guided their audience participants along a torch-led promenade down through levels of the forgotten and decaying vaulted chambers beneath the governmental center of the city, paralleling the action of the play which descends into the dungeons of Bluebeard's castle ("Gridiron Theatre Company"). So visceral was the audience's interface with the legendary geographic interface of this location that, Judith Doherty related in our interview, the general fear held by the participants was that they best not step off the carpet runners guiding their path lest they be lost in the shadows of the vaulted warren of rooms (Doherty).

For the next year's Edinburgh Fringe, Gridiron produced *Gargantua*, an adapted and devised work influenced by Rabelais' 17th-century novel *The Life of Gargantua and Pantegruel*. *Gargantua* took the audience on a feast of excess beneath the celebratory culture typical to weekend Edinburgh streets, restaurants and pubs at festival time. As the feast in the performance evolves, the four main characters share and experience stories; transforming themselves and the audience as they descend five levels beneath the Edinburgh Central Library. Each vaulted room opened into a bigger vaulted room, previously forgotten beneath the city above.

When the audience entered the production they entered the Central Library building, at street level on Victoria street (Doherty).   The Edinburgh Central Library, built in 1890, sits across the street from the National Library of Scotland, and adjacent to the Edinburgh Council Chambers, one block from both the Scottish National Museum and St.

Giles Kirk, and two blocks from Bristo Square a popular gathering point of University of

Edinburgh students to the south, and two blocks from both the former Scottish Mint, and

Assembly Hall, home of the Central Assembly of the Church of Scotland, to the north. The

Edinburgh library building, centrally located amidst all these iconic locations in the heart of

Edinburgh, communicated to the audience a solid reference to Edinburgh's intellectual

heritage, and to these centers of learning, literature, philosophy and religion.   The audience

entered surrounded by and attuned to edifices representing the staid reputation of

Edinburgh intellect, society and affluence, and descended, literally, into a political theatrical

event enacting a food orgy, symbolically churning in the underbelly of the city. The

audience experienced the iconic Victoria street at the beginning of the event, with its lovely

boutique shops, restaurants, upscale pubs and the majestic library, and exited five levels

beneath in the Cowgate, amidst its squalor of drunken revelry, smoky crowded drinking

dens, and vagrant street denizens (Harrison, Personal Interview).

When Mike Pearson and Mike Brookes created their production of Aeschylus's *The*

Persians in 2010, the National Theatre of Wales secured use of the mock village called

Cilienni (or, by its MOD (Ministry of Defense) official designation: FIBUA (Fighting in Built

Up Areas)), constructed in the Sennybridge Training Area (SENTA) near the Brecan

Beacons National Park in the highlands of south Wales. In Pearson and Brooke's

production of this play about a defeated military nation, the initial audiences didn't know

exactly where they were headed on their motor coaches, but, before, when they gathered

on the military reservation pre-show, they could have instantly interfaced with the

contexts of the place. Some Welsh members of that audience might have remembered the

forced removal and relocation of families (219 individuals--54 homes) from farms in these

highlands in 1940 as part of a nationwide military preparedness effort (Pearson, "Haunted House" 71; Pearson, *Site* 136) Those not familiar with the history of the location, could reference the mysteries surrounding the government's annexation and secret occupations of military training grounds throughout the country, and imagine what kinds of war and destruction were rehearsed at such a place. Underlying these contexts, this site represented a location off-limits to civilian visitation and habitation. Audience participants experienced a landscape they might have known existed, but were never allowed to physically observe (Pearson, Personal Interview).

When exiting their coaches at the entrance to the mock village, the audience participants engaged both the geographical and cultural resonances of the production site. The crowd was led through a "war-ravaged" village. On-site they saw burned out tanks, derelict trucks and military vehicles. Spent cartridges and unexploded shells littered the ground behind barriers preventing their ingress for their safety. Stepping off and away from the motor coaches, the audience experienced a physical immersion into the site (Pearson, Personal Interview).

After a scene staged in what could have been the central town square of the village involving actors driving up in a van broadcasting political messages via loudspeakers installed on its roof, and speeches to the crowd from a temporary dais, the majority of the play unfolded in and on a mock house, the "Skill's House," constructed open on one side for the purpose of viewing battles staged inside. This large concrete-block structure, the open end facing a section of metal bleachers, only had crude openings for windows and doors. The audience remained immersed in the contexts of this fictitious village, with its obvious military purpose and its inescapable military culture (Pearson, Personal Interview;

Pearson, "Haunted House" 76).   These geographical contexts and military cultural

resonances magnified the themes of the play. This visceral interface provided the audience

a contextual basis for interpreting textual references as challenges to contemporary

Britain's participation in military actions in Bosnia, Afghanistan, and Iraq. The Sennybridge

Training Area could have been interpreted by some as amplifying societal and political

divisions regarding the country's intentions and motivations in any of these recent wars.

For a certain Welsh "constituency," the place might have fostered a resonance of the

"contentious nature of the [MOD's] occupation of the landscape." Pearson stressed his

perception that this rare opportunity to visit such a site of forced removal, an erasure of

Welsh identity from the landscape, might have held a "certain kind of place within the

Welsh psyche" (Personal Interview).

Some site-based theatre events designed by the subjects of this study provided the

audience engagement with recognizable societal contexts. For some audience

observers/participants, a location might resonate with certain values familiar to that

person's upbringing, lifestyle, or socio-economic station. For others, a production's site

might resonate with alienating, or distancing values; alluding to sociological conditions

identified with "other-ed" groups or segments of societies, dependent, of course, on

individual audience members' identities, perceptions and interpretations.

Considering, for example, the site for *Our Glass House*, Evie Manning stated,

"everyone could connect with it on a level, because everyone's living in a family house, or

heard arguments through the wall, especially as children." This familiar context, inherent

in the layout and occupation of the council estate family dwelling, provided a familiar

interface for the audience participants, even had they not been reared in a low-income

government housing estate. As Rhiannon White continued, "Even if [. . .] you're not from a

violent family, or a violent relationship, you can still [. . .] connect with it," referring to the

setting of the family house (Manning and White, "Personal Interview 16 Aug 2012").

For Mike Pearson and Mike Brooke's *Coriolan/Us*, presented in a disused hanger at

RAF St. Athan outside Cardiff in 2012, the audience found itself inhabiting and interfacing

with a familiar societal context, that of being within a large crowd. Shakespeare set the

majority of scenes in *Coriolanus* either on the streets of Rome or Antium, or within crowds

in either capital city. The crowds of Pearson/Brooke's *Coriolan/Us* provided a familiar

context, in an otherwise unfamiliar unconventional venue for a theatrical event. As

Pearson describes in *Theatre/Archeology*:

> Events create spaces. As a fight breaks out the crowd parts, steps back, withdraws to
> give the action space. Instantly they take up the best position for watching, a circle.
> It's democratic, everyone is equidistant from the centre [sic], no privileged viewpoints.
> [. . .] A proto-playing area is created, with an inside and outside, constantly redefined
> by the activity of the combatants, who remain three-dimensional. The crowd may be
> active, shouting encouragement, pushing in to jostle the combatants, engulfing the
> area. (21)

The RAF hanger at St. Athan, devoid of much architectural feature, provided ample space

for the crowd of audience milling around actors engaged in actions. We 150 audience

participants comprising the crowd created the site: a familiar social situation. Pearson

staged the majority of the production either in or around the crowd or inside gutted

caravans representing interior locations. When action moved to these interior locations,

the audience surrounded the caravan, peering in windows, or watched the action on

closed-circuit video projected on huge screens at one end of the hanger. The context of the

street crowd, even if we audience had never been involved in a political rally or observed a

street battle, provided us a familiar connection to a production site where no conventional connection existed.

As Cora Bissett set out to tell the story of the trafficked young African girl in *Road Kill,* she knew that her site-based theatre production would shock the audience, given such close proximity to its violent representation. Bissett also intentionally located productions of *Road Kill* in sites that juxtaposed the familiar context of a family dwelling, with alienating societal references   However, in this production, alienation came from the realization of the horrors being enacted on these young women, geographically close to affluent neighborhoods and bustling commercial districts of our cities. As she related, she desired the juxtaposition of familiar to alien, as felt when she first heard the personal story of a trafficked girl staying with her in her apartment for a short while:

> There was something about hearing it in that room, in that space that just removed any sort of "other" from me. She was a human being, and a young girl, in my flat, and not an issue in a paper. And that was the massive significant turning point. [. . .] I want[ed] the audience to experience my position, right now, because there is something fundamental about that. [. . .] Girls are housed in flats, possibly right next to you on [your] street, and you wouldn't know because it's done so discretely. (Bissett)

The 2010 Edinburgh Fringe production of *Road Kill* further reinforced Bissett's intended contextual juxtaposition as she located that production site in a tenement flat off the Leith Walk, mere blocks from the affluence of the Edinburgh festivals (Bissett; Gardner). Bissett located the 2011 London production of *Road Kill* in a council estate in Stratford, East London, only a few blocks from commercial areas and within sight of the lights of the Olympic Park under construction (*Road Kill*).

The council estate at Wester Hailes in Edinburgh, where Common Wealth Theatre produced *Our Glass House* for the 2013 Edinburgh Festival Fringe, certainly resonated alienating societal values for audience members such as myself, who might associate those

locations with urban crime, marginalized segments of society, and social decay. While the

family housing unit might resonate familiar societal contexts, the geographical contexts

referenced as we walked the streets of Wester Hailes, miles distant from the affluence and

celebratory atmosphere of the festivals concentrated at the center of Edinburgh, aroused

my sympathy, fear for the inhabitants, and a sense of potential danger behind every façade.

As I walked with the audience for *Our Glass House*, parading from the Wester Hailes

Community Center about a quarter mile through the council estate to Common Wealth's

site in a drab brick building of four equal two-story units, housing three other families, I

couldn't help but think about the statistic Evie Manning had quoted me: "one in four

women [in the UK] will experience domestic violence at one point in their lives." That

means that 25 houses in a council estate of 100 dwellings had some incident of violence

haunting them. I looked out across a sea of multi-family dwellings in Wester Hailes, some

with families watching our procession from doorways or front stoops, and wondered

which knew, intimately, what we were to observe and experience in that production. As

Manning said, audiences "really got an awareness [of what] is happening out on our

streets—and it could be any house" (Personal Interview 16 Aug 2012).

Perhaps more important than exploiting either familiar or alienating resonances,

Evie Manning and Rhiannon White, of Common Wealth Theatre, found freedom in the

societal contexts of their site-based theatre work. Manning and White both grew up in

modest, working-class, council estates, and created Common Wealth Theatre to provide

theatre events for their own economic and social communities. They made it their mission

to create theatre that is egalitarian, for the masses, and that erased any sense of hierarchy

implicit in the conventional theatre. Producing theatre in locations familiar to their target

audience, liberating the work from traditional theatre conventions, freed Manning and

White, as well as performers and audience, from inherent class oppression they felt defined

the theatrical transaction in purpose-built theatres. Common Wealth strives to create

theatrical experiences that allow the audience participants to feel they have a measure of

agency. Manning stressed that a familiar setting, and a playful, communal atmosphere

found inside the site, communicates to the audience that "they've got [the] ability and

strength to participate and to get carried away, and to write their secrets, or whatever it is

we ask them to do" (Personal Interview 01 Nov 2011).

Common Wealth's mission to bring theatre to their community dictates the contexts

in which they should present the work. When considering potential production sites they

look to claim "back something that was empty and disused in their neighborhood." Their

first show, *The Juniper Tree*, they produced in a "squat," an abandoned building already

being re-claimed and occupied by homeless artists (Manning and White, Personal

Interview 01 Nov 2011). Locating *Our Glass House* in vacant housing in the poorer council

estates on the edges of Bristol, Edinburgh, and London, continued this practice of creating

work within these familiar contexts for their targeted audiences.   As Manning describes,

they

> choose a site where there's a local audience [we] want to engage [. . .] and we go for
> that site and make the show based for that site, and what those people—what's most
> relevant for those people that circulate around that place, knowing about that place.
> (Personal Interview 16 Aug 2012)

Our Glass House brought audience participants from the surrounding neighborhoods

because they observed it happening nearby, and because they found it was their story. The

familiar contexts added a powerful dynamic to the audience's experience whether the

individual participant lived up the block, in the next estate over, in a more affluent part of

the city, or in another part of the world (Manning and White, Personal Interview 16 Aug 2012). In Evie Manning's words, the Edinburgh/Wester Hailes production became "basically, a new type of street theatre, which we found really exciting." When I visited with them before and after the 2013 Edinburgh performance, they excitedly related stories about how it seemed the whole community engaged with them. Local inhabitants just showed up at the door to the house during rehearsals and performances, wanting to see what was going on within. As the nightly audience processed from the community center to the performance site, local inhabitants could be seen hanging out of windows, engaging Evie and Rhia in banter as they walked by. The sign planted on the wall overlooking the backyard area of the site--"You are here as a witness"--served as a catalyst for community discussion in Wester Hailes. This simple engagement of the surrounding community and their residents extended the show's theme of community responsibility. When *Our Glass House* played the estate in Bradford, a small group of men came up to Manning and White during the procession to ask advice on how to intervene in a case of abuse of which they had intimate knowledge (Manning and White, "Personal Interview 22 Aug 2013").

Historical and Cultural Contexts

As Julian Thomas describes in his and Mike Pearson's article, "Theatre/Archeology," "The continuous use and reuse of locations bestows meaning upon them, affecting the way in which they are experienced [. . .] an attunement, an awareness of the place's historicity" contributes to how the site is "read," or how an observer/participant might interface with the contexts resonating from the site. Thomas continues, "Indeed, the reading of the place is a part of the setting of the performance, as much for the performer as for the watcher" (Pearson and Thomas 142).

Historical sites can present to the creator of site-based theatre productions a wealth of contexts to be referenced and interfaced with the audience's experience of the event. The past or current historical or cultural occupations of some sites may contain cultural codes which could affect how an audience interprets their own experience of the place. As Mike Pearson asserts, "Religious buildings come freighted with history, with established routines of observance, with atmospheres of piety." Pearson compounded this assertion noting that, comparing the fictitious representation unfolding in such a site to the actual events that happened there might make the theatrical event seem a "trivial pursuit" (*Site* 64).

Evie Manning, in discussing the role of location in conceptualizing a new production, promoted that dramatic themes to be explored in the performance "come from the people who localize that site." She, and Common Wealth Theatre, accept a creative responsibility to honor the local inhabitants' intimate knowledge and understanding of the historical and cultural contexts of the site. Manning asserted that as they are conceiving a new work, she and her collaborators "really respond to the people and their concerns, and what's relevant to them" (Personal Interview 16 Aug 2012).

At times, a response to the history of a site has resulted in the creation of a site-based production created to address a particular historical resonance. In 2007, the Brighton Festival suggested to Hydrocracker Theatre that they consider mounting a production in the former police station underneath the Brighton Town Hall. At the time, Hydrocracker's principals were contemplating producing Pinter's short political plays. Therefore, the original production of *The New World Order* became the response to that building's particular history and legends. While Pinter's plays did not address the specific

history of the police cells in the Brighton Town Hall basement, knowledge of the historical

past of that location heightened the participating audiences experience because the

fictional world inhabited the real and historical architecture (Jones, Personal Interview 16

Dec 2011).

David Leddy created the original production of his play *SubRosa* (2009) in response

to a personal tour of the under-used old historic sections of the Citizens Theatre in

Glasgow.   Originally built in 1876, the building now occupied by the Citizens Theatre

opened as His Majesty's Theatre in 1878. As the second oldest continuously-operating

theatre in Great Britain, The Citz (as it's lovingly referred to in Glasgow) retains much of its

Victorian architectural features and furnishings, as well as its original Victorian-era stage

machinery; it is the only theatre building in Scotland retaining its mechanical stageworks

as originally installed under the stage floor.   The remains of a Victorian era bowling alley

and shooting range also exist, closed up and disused underneath the currently occupied

sections of the building ("Citizens Theatre"). When Citz Artistic Director Jeremy Raison led

David Leddy on a private tour of these forgotten historic rooms, a trap door was opened

revealing yet another, deeper chamber containing piles of broken chandeliers. Raison

challenged Leddy to tell a story taking the audience on a promenade through these

forgotten rooms. This challenge haunted Leddy through a writing residency in Bombay,

India, where, surrounded by the architecture remaining from the British Raj period, he

creatively considered the social dynamics and culture of the Victorian era (Personal

Interview). The resultant production, *SubRosa*, took the audience right into the Victorian

world, backstage at a musical hall, meeting chorus girls, and tracing a murder mystery. Not

only did the historic architecture and original spaces contribute to the immersive quality of

the resultant *SubRosa* audience experience, Leddy's personal interface with its historic

contexts prompted the show's creation and the design of the participants' promenade

(Personal Interview).

The next chapter will discuss various methods for engaging a site-based theatre

audience participant within the performance experience. As will be discussed, one of the

most effective methods casts the audience in a role within the milieu of the fictional

performance world.   Depending on the complexity of the historical and cultural interfaces

referenced in the site and the performance experience, the individual audience participant

may connect to, be assigned, or reference any number of identities, both literally and

metaphorically. When Mike Pearson and Mike Brookes created *The Persians* at the

Sennybridge Training Area in Brecon Beacons highlands, the weather presented a

challenge. Even when seated in the bleachers watching the performance in the open-ended

concrete house, the audience remained exposed to the elements. The decision to provide

military-grade olive green rain ponchos to all of the audience participants, resonated

within the military contexts of the mock battle-worn village, but it also unlocked a number

of metaphoric identities. Depending on the individual's personal political perspective and

historical knowledge, audience members could see themselves as war refugees, military

personnel, military sympathizers, or, they could interpret the distribution of these ponchos

as forced compliance and homogenization by the ruling authority. The real creative

challenge, according to Mike Pearson, was to not force any one of these interpretations

onto the audience, for that would have made a specific representation out of a multitude of

contextual possibilities found in the site. He and Mike Brookes aimed to recreate as much

as possible the experience, wonder and emotion, of their own first visitation to the site (Pearson, Personal Interview).

Methods of Integrating the Contexts of the Site into the Experience

As established in the introduction, creating a concept for a theatrical production is a personal process that relies on each individual creator's influences, as well as on considerations and conditions at the time of the conception. As such, none of the subjects interviewed in this study related specific methods for their conception of a design for a site-based audience experience. Ben Harrison said, "there isn't a blanket—there isn't a conceptual process, or a stencil, for the way I approach [concept]" (Personal Interview). Almost every director similarly asserted that each site offered different resonances, therefore each conceptual process proved different depending on the circumstances, or site, or narrative being performed. Discussion across the breadth of these interviews offered insights of numerous categories, suggesting careful consideration of a range of factors that could guide the creator of a site-based theatre event toward their own conceptualization of a performance experience.

Foremost, when considering a site-based production scheme, caution is the watchword. While providing interface with the historic, cultural, societal, geographical, functional, and occupational resonances available to the audience, a theatrical transaction provides the root of the audiences' experience. Just as the creator of a conventional theatrical performance in a purpose-built theatre space should carefully conceive and construct a unified presentation, so should the creator of a site-based theatrical production carefully consider all the stimuli available for audience consumption. In the conventional theatre production, elements that don't comply with the production's unified style or

delivery, might appear highlighted, seem incongruous, or jar the audience out of their

suspension of disbelief. While a director might intend such a break in integrity for effect,

such choices are not usually arbitrary. Therefore, the underlying theatrical transaction at

the foundation of the site-based theatrical event promotes caution when conceiving how

the audience interfaces with and progresses through both site and performance. Ben

Harrison emphasized that

> The audience will accept everything within the theatrical—everything they see once they're being told they are looking at a piece of theatre, they will assume everything is under your control, or nine-times-out-of-ten, if it's not, they will always have some kind of resonance. (Personal Interview)

To illustrate this, Harrison related the story of his first realization of the power of a site-

specific theatre experience. Prior to the founding of Grid Iron, he directed an adaptation of

the "Burke and Hare" legend for the Edinburgh Fringe presented in the University of

Edinburgh's Bedlam Theatre. At the end of Act I, the cast, processing behind a fiddler, led

the audience out of the theatre, down the street, and into the Greyfriar's Kirkyard, which

lies beneath the lurking presence of the Edinburgh Castle. The rest of the production

promenaded through the kirkyard's gravestones. At one key point when a character

playing a deceased prostitute declares revenge upon her murders, the Esplanade of

Edinburgh Castle was suddenly bathed in red light (Harrison, "Why I do"; Harrison,

Personal Interview). Not planned by Harrison as an effect of his production, the lighting

was the result of a particular moment in the Edinburgh Military Tattoo performance

simultaneously underway on the Esplanade that night. As the audience gasped, sure this

grand effect part of their performance, Harrison realized the breadth of contextual

awareness the site-based audience acts upon as they consume and interpret what they

experience within the theatrical performance. During our interview, Harrison further

emphasized this point, relating how during performances of *Decky Does A Bronco*, police

vans would scream by sirens blaring and underscore the very public nature of the park

playgrounds where the show was being performed (Personal Interview).

David Leddy also further addressed this point claiming that audiences of site-based

theatre performances want to find links; they want to believe specificity applies to what

they are experiencing. Leddy expressed dismay that "what often is presumed when people

talk about site-specific work is that the site is the center of the artwork, and the point from

which everything else emanates." Leddy believes that the audience will strive to find

"patterns that don't exist, or that might exist, between a piece of work and its location." He

illustrated this by pointing out that his site-based audio tour, *Sursurrus*, originally written

to be performed in the Glasgow Botanic Gardens, was not specific to that site; rather, it was

written to be listened to while the participant followed a map through those gardens. At

the time of my interview with him, *Sursurrus* had been performed 17 times, in four

languages, around the world, with only minimal changes required by the changes in venue,

yet Leddy reported that the usual response from audience participants was how uncanny

what they were hearing through their headsets fit the locations where they were instructed

to listen to each segment (Personal Interview).

Therefore, Leddy asserts, a site-based production's specificity to its site is

negotiable. He maintained that a referenced specificity, or a reference within the

performance to a specific architectural feature or historic event in the site, could be

fictional, however, the audience may interpret the reference as truthful if they are told. He

illustrated this claim by relating how when *SubRosa* played the Edinburgh Fringe later in

2009, after closing at the Citizens Theatre in Glasgow, transferring it to a former Masonic

lodge required little adjustment to the script, and only the restaging of the promenade in response to the architecture offered by this new building. Leddy asserted that believable fiction delivered within the apparent contexts and resonances of a historical building, "particularly, when [stated within] the confines of what the audience think is a performance, then it's very effective, psychologically." At the beginning of *SubRosa*, when an actor playing the role of a tour guide conveyed the traditional safety talk (which as a convention of site-based theatre performance will be discussed in the next chapter), approximately half of the text delivered was fiction, but, as Leddy contends, "it really doesn't occur to audiences that that's the case." He continued:

> And particularly, what works well is when you insert some very outrageous true things, and then very bland fictions, which makes it then very, very believable. Because the things that you need them to believe for it to work as a site-based piece, they do believe. (Leddy, Personal Interview)

Others affirmed the crucial nature of this consideration. Vicky Featherstone questioned how much of the production needs to be specifically connected to the site, and how much should be left for accidental connection by the audience (Featherstone). Mike Pearson emphasized how the creative team for *The Persians* took great care not to tie the audience's interface with the mock village at Sennybridge to any particular interpretation. Had they made a particular choice and declared a specific context for the audience to reference, then their theatrical performance of Aeschylus' play would not have left open the layers of metaphor for individual interpretation (Pearson, Personal Interview).

Respond to the Contexts

Whether the conceptualization for the intended production starts with an idea for the narrative, an idea for the form of the experience, or grows out of inspiration from a

particular location, the site plays a considerable role in conceptual process. "Each site will

illuminate the prospects of the piece," Ben Harrison said. With the creation of *The Devil's*

Larder, both in the former morgue building and in the after-hours department store in

Edinburgh, he claimed it "took a lot to understand [the] space." He equated those

processes of fitting narrative to site to listening to the space (Harrison, Personal Interview).

Punchdrunk's Felix Barrett claims that while the geographical context has no

bearing on his site-based productions, the architectural contexts have a great deal. "It's the

canvas to build a show. [. . .] The space says what it wants inside it [. . .] once you've got a

space, it's usage, and its function, architectural function" dictates how its spaces might be

used to tell the intended stories (Barrett). On the opposite end of the spectrum, Pearson

and Brookes built *Coriolan/Us* in a venue with little contextual resonance to inform the

creation. That site provided a vast open space to allow the movement of a large crowd

creating both the context for the setting as well as individual sites for each scene of the

performance (*Coriolan/Us*).

For Common Wealth Theatre and their creation of *Our Glass House*, building off the

contexts found in that first council estate row house proved integral to the creation of the

theatrical performance. Evie Manning related how the generic architecture of the council

row house provided not just the familiar interface for the audience participants, but, more

importantly, a foundation for the creation of the work. When you look down a street of a

council estate, like Wester Hailes outside of Edinburgh, you might be looking at a series of

over a hundred identical multi-unit houses. Each house will be individually occupied,

however, architecturally identical. As the audience met at a crossroads near the unit which

comprised the performance site of the first *Our Glass House* in 2012 in the St. George estate

in Bristol, they looked over a number of streets all containing multi-family dwellings of the same architectural layout. Early in their development of the piece, Manning, White and their acting ensemble studied existing case studies, then devised each performance interpretation of these texts by challenging each actor to see how the movement related to the contexts found in each room: occupation (bathroom, bedroom, kitchen, etc.) and atmosphere (size, color, temperature, other empirical data) (Personal Interview 16 Aug 2012).

Ultimately, the house itself dictated the end of the performance. The creators came to realize this generic council estate row house symbolically represented the imprisonment of the victim of domestic violence. Each case study related how victims broke their respective cycle of violence. Manning explained, "Their bravery and courage were so inspiring and so strong." Seeking to end the production highlighting these triumphs, they viewed the context of the row house as metaphoric. Breaking the cycle of violence became escaping the confines of their imprisonment in the house (Manning and White, Personal Interview 16 Aug 2012).

Consider Capitalizing on Counterpoint Found within Context

Felix Barrett promoted in our interview that the production concept counterpoint the contextual resonances of the site. He asserted that in order to sustain theatrical tension, the designed production must capitalize on the tension between the architecture of the location and the designed environment presented within the site (Barrett). As discussed previously, Punchdrunk's brand of site-based theatrical presentation involves constructing an environment, or multiple environments within a building, and then

allowing the audience participants to roam and explore the site individually discovering

their own path through the event, and thus their own interpretation of the presentation.

Barrett illustrated his theory by discussing the two iterations of *Sleep No More*

produced in the United States. In Boston, in 2008, the production was presented in a

building formerly occupied as a secondary school. "The filmic noire landscape of

detectives, and rampant jealousy, all that bubbling undercurrent happening in a space that

wasn't suited to it" provided tension against the cultural contexts, and architectural values

of the former school building. In the New York production, *Sleep No More* was redesigned

to inhabit five stories of a vast, drafty former industrial warehouse, in east Chelsea,

Manhattan. Punchdrunk built a fictional film noir style 1930's hotel on the second floor

which served as a foundation for the performed stories to proceed into upper and lower

levels of the building, constructing surprisingly contrasting environments on each floor

(Barrett). Level three featured a representation of the high street and other environments

of Gallows Green, the site of the last mass executions of witches in Scotland. The Macbeth

and MacDuff residences and locations were found on level four and the basement level, and

a reconstruction of a Victorian style mental sanitarium and a birch forest inhabited level

five. Architecturally the building supported the hotel environment spatially, however, any

further contextual alignment ended there. Finding these other locations within the

building certainly sustained theatrical tension in the narratives, the performance, and the

atmosphere surrounding the participating audience (*Sleep No More*).

Story Animates Site – Site Animates Story

At the heart of conceptualizing the audience experience for a site-based theatre event is a narrative, or narratives, that validate the participant's relationship to the required physical interface. Vicky Featherstone observed,

> What's very interesting, I think, is when you get [. . .] directors who understand the benefit of narrative from conventional theatre, and they choose to bring that to all of the extra-ordinariness of site-responsive [. . .] and you get those two things coming together. (Featherstone)

As established in the previous chapter, today's audience craves the experiential, but it's the narrative participants find themselves immersed in which provides the lasting effect. As Ellie Jones asserted, one wants to build shows that provide the individual personal experiences, but it's the "strong, clear story within the work" that draws the distinction between casual observation and engaged interface with the site-based work (Personal Interview 16 Dec 2011). The desired immersive experience for the individual audience participant aligns closer to that of reading a novel, where the reader is able to lose him or herself in an imagined world. The story portrayed in the site-based theatre event holds the power to animate the contextual information of the site.   A tangible, experiential interface with the site allows the participant to apply the contextual knowledge they either possessed prior, or gain through their participation. Whether the site-based theatre creator describes the process as the story animating the site or as the site animating the story, the site plays a role in experience of the story.

Both Ben Harrison and Judith Doherty used the term "animation" when relating site and creation of story in Grid Iron theatre's productions (Harrison, Personal Interview; Doherty). As Harrison related, "I always describe it as a dance between the sites, and the subject or concept, and sometimes the site leads, and sometimes the concept leads"

(Personal Interview). When one considers the effect of following the characters of Angela

Carter's *The Bloody Chamber* into unknown, subterranean spaces, one can easily

understand how the dark spaces ahead, behind, and lying just out of range of the torches

held by the guides, easily cause spectators to suspend disbelief, and spark in their

imaginations a vibrant, personal, physical experience of the world of the story. As Harrison

described the phenomenon, the historic, off-limits Mary King's Close rooms "that are

rumored about [. . .] increase the theatrical temperature" (Personal Interview).

For Grid Iron's 2013 Edinburgh International Festival production of *Leaving Planet

Earth*, Catrin Evans and Lewis Hetherington wrote a play exploring the issues of human

colonization on a new planet, and the psychological conditions and effects of managing

such operations so that the new civilization has a chance to avoid the evolutionary pitfalls

and disasters that decimated the "Old Earth."   Grid Iron employed two existing Edinburgh

sites to host the production, the Edinburgh International Conference Centre and the

Edinburgh International Climbing Arena, as well as motor coaches for "transports" on the

"jump" between "Old Earth" and "New Earth." At the Edinburgh Climbing Arena the

production utilized a number of spaces throughout the five-story, modern glass and steel

building located within a former rock quarry. The audience was dropped off at the

entrance to the Climbing Arena, and experienced the entire production underneath the lip

of the quarry, until reloaded on the motor coaches headed back to Edinburgh's city center.

Experiencing the building in this manner, guided by personal communication devices

affixed to our hands (described in more detail in the next section), the performed story

animated the site, and provided the audience a physical interface to the narrative, as if we

were new colonists physically processing our indoctrination on "New Earth" (*Leaving Planet Earth*).

Certainly, as illustrated in *Leaving Planet Earth*, when you take the audience to places in the fiction being performed, you animate the story for the audience, providing a tangible setting for their suspended disbelief. In David Leddy's *SubRosa*, the audience entered the Victorian environs of the Citizens Theatre in Glasgow, and followed the story and its investigation to its ultimate climax. In Cora Bissett's *Road Kill*, we rode the bus with the young victim, and experienced her rape, abuse, and ultimate escape in the close proximity of the flat where her captors imprisoned and employed her as a sex slave. In Common Wealth's *The Ups and Downs of the Town of Brown*, their adaptation of Brecht's, *The Rise and Fall of the City of Mahogany*, the audience participants who had been complicit in the temptation and moral ruin of the protagonist, found themselves also having to serve as judge and jury at his trial. Manning and White located the final scene of the production in a room that had served as a former courtroom. The historical and cultural contexts associated with the architecture of the room provided the physical interface for the roles the audience played in the conclusion of the story (Manning and White, Personal Interview 01 Nov 2011).

David Leddy further illustrated the power of the site to animate a story, relating that *SubRosa* didn't require adaptation to fit the site. Leddy fictionalized the story to fit the empirical experience of the historic theatre's spaces. Leddy said, "You can take a wood-paneled room and get the right set dressing for it and make people believe it's an office of the kind of office that character would have." He asserted that audiences of site-based

theatre performances process a large amount of stimuli and information as they observe

and participate in the performance unfolding within a production site:

> They don't really have time to question the way that you constructed that information,
> so they tend to presume that you did the most straightforward obvious thing, which is
> that this is what the room looks like all the time, and that you based it on the history of
> that room. (Leddy, Personal Interview)

Leddy continued to theorize that when the site animates the fiction of the story in such a

way, the audience's suspension of disbelief "short circuits," and participants infer that the

creators of the site-based theatre performance responsibly represented the historic

citations within the narrative. Leddy proceeded to postulate that humans "basically believe

everything that we're told, [but] what changes is the speed with which we doubt that

information"(Personal Interview).

The site may dictate changes to the narrative, depending on the creator's desired

audience experience.   Ben Harrison admitted how when he and the ensemble of *The Devil's*

Larder transferred the production from the former morgue building in Cork, Ireland, to the

Debenham's department store in Edinburgh, the production required recalibration to fit

the experience to the site. The theme of the production fit the contexts of the after-hours

department store; however, Grid Iron cut four stories from the Cork script, and added three

more from Jim Crace's original book to provide more fitting alignment to the darkened idle

Debenham's store (Harrison, Personal Interview).

Metaphor and Layering

In many site-based performances, the animation of the site within the narrative may

be perceived metaphorically, or within multiple layers of interpretation. Just as the

dramaturgy of a conventional play may be perceived across a strata of layers of semiotic

delivery, as Mike Pearson explains,

> Performance may exist as one, two, three, or four layers in a variety of combinations and ratios. [. . .] Too much else is vying for attention at site for it to monopolize meaning-creation, to function as the principal phenomenon to which other elements adhere or for which they provide illustration. (*Site* 167)

David Leddy states the responsibility of the creator of site-based theatre fairly generally;

"The aim is to make a poly-semantic piece of work that could be understood by different

people in different ways." He poses, "I think you have to, to some degree, be ready for the

piece to work on a variety of levels at the same time" (Leddy, Personal Interview).

Grid Iron's staging of *Gargantua* as part of the 1998 Edinburgh Fringe Festival,

where they guided the audience down through five stories of vaulted subterranean

passages beneath Edinburgh's Central Library and the streets of the old city, richly

illustrates designing metaphor into the audience's interface with the site.   Ben Harrison

loosely based the play on Rabelais' 17th-century novel *The Life of Gargantua and Pantegruel,*

which "was really about many things: a) it's an attack on the church, but b) it's about a giant

who can just eat as much as it likes, and drink as much as he likes. He's like a baby . . .

there's no consequences." Harrison described the resultant production, exploring the

excesses of celebratory Edinburgh as, "going into the underbelly of Edinburgh." In

Harrison's words, on one layer the audience experienced the production as a "metaphor of

going into the body of [the] giant. It rumbled. We saw eyeballs. In the end of it we were

kind of defecated out into the Cowgate!" (Personal Interview).

Framing

In the conventional theatre experience, the architectural layout of the performance space directs the audience's primary experiential focus. The performance is traditionally staged upon or within a designated playing area. Larger purpose-built theatre buildings from the Italian Renaissance to present day often feature a proscenium arch framing the stage, symbolically highlighting and referencing what the audience perceives unfolding as belonging to the fictitious theatrical presentation. In the site-based theatre presentation, generally, as Mike Pearson describes,

> there is no formal arrangement of performers and spectators, no preordained acting areas – nothing that resembles a stage, no fixed viewpoints – nothing to focus our attention, no framing devices – no proscenium arch to tell us how to orientate ourselves. (Pearson and Shanks 20-21)

In a site-based theatre experience, without such conventional signifiers indicating where to direct one's gaze or hearing, the preponderance of contextual and empirical information might overshadow and overwhelm one's experience of the performance. Framing the audience's perceptions as they experience and sense the production poses a vital challenge to the designers of site-based theatre performances.

The fact that an individual freely chooses to attend and participate in a site-based theatre performance provides one foundational frame. I believe, for the vast majority of audience attending site-based theatre events, an unspoken contract exists between the producer and the consumer of the work that an unconventional experience is to be provided and experienced. Therefore, I believe it is safe to assume that the audience participant heightens their sensations in expectation of the unknown and the surprising. As Chris Hunn, longtime consumer of site-based theatre and a Grid Iron board member, told me in our interview, she believes the suspense of not knowing what you will

experience hastens the suspension of disbelief, and "predisposes you to pay more attention to the detail of what's being shown to you" (Personal Interview).

Another common practice of site-based productions in Great Britain, a "safety talk" delivered either by the producing staff, or by a cast member, to the audience, prior to the delivery of the performance text, offers a number of levels of framing. Generally, by the virtue of its name, the "safety talk" provides the audience vital information previewing the nature of the experience about to embark. Depending on the production, the audience might need vital information, for example, concerning the distance and nature of the terrain over which they will be walking, the level of light available as they negotiate their travel, whether or not they will experience the production as one group, numerous groups, or as isolated individuals. Some productions I've experienced encouraged the participant to participate in a certain way, or to refrain from certain activities. For example, before Red Earth's *CHALK* (2011), Caitlin Easterby explained to the massed participants that she and co-director Simon Pascoe had designed the production to be experienced by the human eye, allowing perception of the production in all its epic glory set against the entire landscape of the South Downs at that particular time of day, and not, necessarily, to be framed by the artificial frames provided by our digital cameras (*CHALK*).

The "safety talk" may be used to set a tone for the experience of the production. For example, the *SubRosa* safety talk outside the theatre building, was delivered by a Victorian costumed actor, playing the role of a period tour guide, delivering both information about the production as well as historical and fictional information pertaining to the world of the production (Leddy, Personal Interview). During Grid Iron's *Leaving Planet Earth* (2013), before we left the Edinburgh International Conference Center, and boarded the

"transports" to "New Earth," both a video describing the "jump" to "New Earth" as well as a "safety talk" delivered by Judith Doherty, provided us vital instructions regarding the electronic tracking devices strapped to our hands, and a verbal description of the physical experience: riding the "transports," following our guides through the "Indoctrination Center," our response to the delivery of electronic cues to move from one room to the next under direction by our guides, as well as other clues as to how to best experience the production ahead (*Leaving Planet Earth*).

Physical objects or devices provide an easy framing reference for audience participants. For *ROAM* (2005), Grid Iron mailed ticket purchasers a passport, tickets, and an airline ticket sleeve, and required them to bring these items for entry into the production. In order to frame the experience of interfacing with the contexts of the functioning airport and the themes of travel, identity profiling and alienation, the audience experience featured queuing through Passport Control and security and ticketing checks as they progressed through the Edinburgh International Airport with the show (Harrison, Personal Interview; Doherty). For RETZ's production of *O Brave New World* (2012), Felix Mortimer and his collaborators conceived and designed a physical frame that also served as a central mechanism for delivering the production conceit. As the audience physically passed beyond the "Borderian Travel Bureau" storefront, they passed through a doorframe painted a vibrant blue and were told they were passing through a time/space rift between London and Borderia. Once on the other side all that they experienced pertained to the world of the story (Mortimer, Personal Interview 01 Aug 2012).

Early in their existence, Punchdrunk would inform audiences that the experience of the production would take the form of a puzzle, its meaning left up to the individual

participant to personally interpret and solve. Recent Punchdrunk productions have implied this frame, the reputation of Punchdrunk preceding arrival at the site. Barrett explained that Punchdrunk strongly believes in "never spoon-feeding the audience," that such indication of an impending activity or highlighting of a significant item of information ruins the process of individual discovery. Audience ownership of the experience is vital to the aesthetic of the environment and immersive experience Punchdrunk carefully creates and facilitates (Barrett). In my experience of both *Sleep No More* (2011-present) and *The Drowned Man* (2013), the puzzle frame not only provided a purpose for the Punchdrunk audience experience, it was an overarching metaphor for parts of the environment.

The creator that employs such tangible frames should beware employing hollow frames. Just as the audience will think that anything theatrical they witness to be intentionally designed and integral to the story, the audience will also infer that any object or device distributed by the production, or in the environment, is endowed with vital significance. Should a production casually employ such an item and not fulfill the potential the audience is likely assigning it, then the effect might as easily distract as contribute to the desired interface with the site or immersion into the world of the production. As Vicky Featherstone asserted, framing the experience by offering tangible, physical interfaces "has to go to the furthest extreme if you're going to do that" and you expect a "dramatically conclusive experience" (Featherstone).

Summary

The design of an audience experience for site-based theatrical events begins with, and builds on the contextual values of the performance site. Careful interrogation of the intended site's available contexts, whether geographical, societal, historic, or cultural, helps

the creator of the experience understand some of the range of cognitive responses available to an audience participant. There is a range of options for referencing or incorporating this information. However, certain considerations of how the designed experience responds to the contextual values, how the contexts are accessed and how the interfaces are manifested, how the story animates the site and the site animates the story, how available and designed meanings are layered, and how the experience is framed, all warrant attention. The next step in designing site-based theatre audience experiences requires the creator to consider defining how the audience participant physically engages with their experience, as explored in the next chapter. However, without intimate knowledge of the contexts, and the required careful interpretation and planning, such engagement might prove confusing not only to the audience, but to the production design itself.

5

Participative Engagement

In the previous chapter I established the importance of careful interrogation of the performance site's available contextual interfaces. The creator of the site-based theatre experience must consider the range of an audience's cognitive responses to the intended performance site. Once the desired contextual interfaces have been identified and understood, the creator should next consider the manner in which the audience participants will physically engage with the performance.   Participants' engagement with a site-based theatre experience might involve physical exertion ranging from heavy to light. They might find themselves performing a role within the world of the performance, or they might become active anonymous voyeurs. Participants could be invited to take agency and direct their own exploration of the site, or to interact with the story and the performers. The possibilities for participative engagement in site-based theatre performance are as varied as the sites and stories to be performed, and the creators to conceive them. However, without knowledge of the site's contexts, and careful interpretation and planning, as previously discussed, the audience's participation might prove confusing not only to the individual participants, but to the transaction of the performance itself.

As established in the Introduction, an audience participant's possible participation is generally engineered and limited. While participants might take an active role, choose the manner and direction in which they experience an event, or join the action by

performing a task, generally, in site-based theatre, individual engaged participation will not affect the course of action, or completion, of the play. The designed participation should be engineered to fit the action and appropriately address the site's contexts and the world being portrayed. Generally, the site-based theatrical transaction does not allow such levels of free agency that a participant might adversely affect the intended performance or desired outcome.

As discussed in Chapter 3, creators of site-based theatre have responded to the rise in demand for experiential entertainment by designing and presenting increasingly complex site-based theatrical experiences. According to those creators interviewed in this study, of these numerous productions in the past decade, the most significant were those that engaged the audience's participation in the performance event employing varying levels of interface with the contexts of the site. Josephine Machon observes in *(Syn)aesthetics: Redefining Visceral Performance* (2009) that experiential culture is "at the forefront of both populist and highbrow culture." As a result, she continues, a gamut of entertainments, "from installation art to live performance to underground cinema events to music festivals to blitz parties and burlesque nights out, the focus on direct participation with a rekindling of the humans senses is paramount" (xix).

As Machon proposes, the resulting engagement invites consideration of a new paradigm for audience interaction. Except for the rare olfactory stimuli, or incident of a performer physically touching an audience member, most conventional theatrical performances rely on a performer-observer paradigm capitalizing on visual and aural semiotic deliveries. The site-based theatre performance fuses the participants' sensate, contextual, and somatic perceptions into an experiential cognition. Machon describes both

the performance and participation of this type of multi-layered experience as "visceral"

(*(Syn)aesthetics* 4).

Once creators have surveyed and planned the contextual interface(s) with an

intended performance site, they can proceed with designing the manner in which the

audience will engage with the theatrical event within the site. As site-based theatre, by

nature, requires some degree of participation, all of the site-based creators interviewed in

this study, and all of their performances that I experienced, viscerally engaged the audience

participants to varying degrees.   The productions, experiences, and observations related in

these interviews brought to light a range of complex considerations for the conceptual

process.   We discussed participative engagement as simple as physical incursion into the

architecture and geography, and motivating proxemics (the relative nearness of the

performance), and haptic interaction (engagement involving touch.) We considered the

emotional complexity of promoting individual agency, and challenging the audiences to

adopt roles within the worlds of the performances.

Employing particular interfaces to a site's contextual resonances, not only grounds

the individual's cognitive interpretation of the performance, but it also might impart clues

as to the role an audience member might play in the event. The more apparent and

integrated the role, the more readily the audience member may experience emotional

connections to the performance, or comfortably accept their own agency in a situation.

This chapter analyzes and categorizes a range of considerations for conceiving the

site-based theatre audience's participative engagement in the event, as gleaned from

interviews conducted for this study. In this chapter I will first introduce how the

audience's participation is integral to the site-based theatre event. Next, I will discuss the

range of roles that an individual audience participant might engage in as they experience a site-based theatre performance. Finally, I will propose a progression of conceptual considerations for the creator of site-based productions that address varying aspects and degrees of participation. As in the previous chapter this progression of considerations is ordered in my own sequence of priority starting with the broadest of topics and progressing to the most specific.

As established previously, the site-based theatre experience is built on a range of experiential spectrums. Sites for productions can utilize environments ranging from a single fixed location to a mobile journey through multiple locations. The setting for the production may range from a completely natural and unaltered site, to one completely transformed into the fictional location of the dramatic event. Contextual information available for interface with the designed audience experience may range from intimate and specific references to architecture, to abstract references of more global historic significance. Participative engagement of the site-based theatre production also ranges across a spectrum. While all site-based theatre will require some physical engagement, participants may find themselves passively observing while walking, or physically interacting with performers, properties and the site. As Cathy Turner explains,

> Site-specific performance is freer to renegotiate relationships with audiences than performance within traditional spaces: it becomes easier to attain a sense of equality between performers and audience, which is necessary, if audience members are to freely participate. Site-specific performance also allows a blurring of the boundaries between fact and fiction: between the expertise of the storyteller in creating a fiction and the actual experience and empirical judgment of the audience. I'm interested in a theatre where the fiction is the reality, which can be inhabited and altered by the audience. The real site is fictionalized, made metaphoric, but remains physically present and capable of other fictions, other metaphors, other occupations. ("Framing the Site")

Josephine Machon, in her book *Immersive Theatres; Intimacy and Immediacy in*

Contemporary Performance (2013), describes how site-based theatre can offer

"lawbreaking conditions to roam free, take risks, be adventurous." She elaborates that

these performances are "designed to immerse the individual in the unusual, the out-of-the-

ordinary, to allow her or him, in many ways, to become the event" (Machon, *Immersive* 28).

Richard Schechner in *Environmental Theatre* (1994) distilled what we now call

participative engagement in the theatre performance as "a way of trying to humanize the

relationships between performers and spectators" (60). In my observation, participative

engagement in the site-based theatre event capitalizes on the humanization of

relationships between the audience participants and the performers, the performance, and

the site, whether real-world or constructed.

The goal of designing these complex interfaces between the audience and the site is

to present the theatrical event as a viscerally engaging and memorable experience.

Involving the participant actively within the theatrical experience blurs traditional

boundaries between observation and performance, reality and fictional. Some

combination of kinesthetic, cognitive, and emotional participation--interfacing the audience

with the contexts of site and integrating them into the world of the performance by

assigning them a distinct role—not only constitutes a difference from traditional theatre

experiences but also connects the participant to the larger society and world.

This study prompted my participation in a range of heavily engaged audience

experiences. I engaged in a variety of identifiable roles within the worlds of these

productions, from finding myself misidentified as a political prisoner in Hydrocracker's *The*

*New World Ord*er, to portraying a plebian in the Roman mob surrounding virtually every

scene in Pearson/Brookes' *Coriolan/Us*, to being cast in the role of a colonist travelling to New Earth in Grid Iron's *Leaving Planet Earth*. Although I was engaged as an anonymous voyeur, productions like Common Wealth's *Our Glass House*, Pachamama's *Road Kill*, and Punchdrunk's *Sleep No More* and *A Drowned Man* required physical exertion and active discovery to witness significant scenes, to uncover meanings, and to progress through the performance.

A personal experiential interface with the theatre event renegotiates one's traditional notions of aesthetic distance. Site-based theatre, unlike traditional theatre, surrounds the audience with a real environment depicting the dramaturgy. The excitement of such an engagement negates and trumps the often passive experience of observing performances in traditional theatre settings. Again, Ben Harrison described this interface as an "erotic" experience, where the audience's curiosity might be met with surprise, suspense, and a flirtatious sense of danger ("Why I do"). Ellie Jones asserted that the she hopes her site-based theatre work, like *The New World Order*, or "an experience like that, as opposed to just watching in in the theatre, might galvanize you more to do something about your world, or think about it differently" (Personal Interview 16 Dec 2011). Personal agency inspiring immediate action or a lasting investment in the issues raised draws contemporary audiences to the work and motivates most of the creators interviewed in this study. As Jones says, referring to her personal experience watching *The New World Order* and the abuse of the political prisoner's wife, "I think it's much easier to dismiss when you're distanced from it. When you're up close and personal with it, I often

wanted to put my hand on Esther's shoulder[4] just to say, 'someone cares'" (Personal

Interview 16 Dec 2011).

In my experience, spectators witnessing a production in an architectural venue or

promenading through a landscape are participants performing in the space. As Marvin

Carlson explains,

> The recognition that our lives are structured according to repeated and socially
> sanctioned modes of behavior raises the possibility that all human activity could
> potentially be considered as "performance," or at least all activity carried out with a
> consciousness of itself. The difference between doing and performing, according to
> this way of thinking, would seem to lie not in the frame of theatre versus real life but in
> an attitude—we may do actions unthinkingly, but when we think about them, this
> introduces a consciousness that gives them the quality of performance. (4)

Mike Pearson compares the relationship of audience participant and performer to the

performance site to that found in a "workplace" environment. He classifies the

"engagement of the performer" at the site as essentially "ergonomic," or "body-to-

environment" and "body-to-body." He explains how the site "is inescapably of and in the

real world" and as such "may occasion or necessitate real world responses." However,

juxtaposed against a "new frame of reference—performance . . . may heighten or

exaggerate" such ergonomic engagements. Pearson points out that ergonomics "concerns

the relationship between individuals and their working or living environment, and the

application of information about human physicality and behavior to the problems of

design" (*Site* 171). Clearly, the design of the audience's participation in the performance,

within the site and interacting with the performers, requires just as much thoughtful

consideration as do other performance elements.

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[4] Esther Ruth Elliot played the character Gila in *The New World Order* (2011) being tortured
for the actions of her husband, also a political prisoner being re-educated.

Removing the audience from their comfortable anonymity "humanizes" the relationship between spectator and performer, as Richard Schechner asserts. Additionally, we find that certain audience participation in the site-based experience may also prompt a more humiliating response. As Cora Bissett observed of the audiences of *Road Kill*,

> It's a weird thing, 'cause people's faces just reveal so much. There's no holding on to your dignity, but [. . .] I think the audience in a way perform—like an audience when they go to ritualized theatre, they kind of know they are to act in a certain way [. . .] but there's something about putting people in a flat where you're all stuck in that experience together that, actually, any response is viable. It's a much more humiliating space in a way. (Bissett)

In essence, when presenting a site-based theatre experience, the producer engages in an unspoken contract with the audience: participants will be invited to do more than passively sit or stand and watch while performers perform. Advertising for site-based theatre that utilizes descriptors such as "site-responsive" or "immersive," suggests that the audience will be more physically engaged than if they were sitting in a conventional theatre. According to Vicky Featherstone,

> It's a kind of potential breaking of the contract with the audience if you place them in this context and then don't allow them to have a role in it, because you're saying you're actually just an audience standing up walking around, which is actually just the same as being in a theatre. (Featherstone)

Complicating this observation, Punchdrunk sets their audiences in the transaction as active voyeurs. Punchdrunk promotes a performance context where all of the audience participants are identically masked which, besides providing the spooky presence of anonymous watchers in every scene, increases the isolation of the individual. Audience members take an active role as voyeurs in the performance (*Sleep No More*; *The Drowned Man*).

Further, the site-based performance should be of such a scale that it promotes the investment of the individual participant's attendance and performance within the event. Just as the site-based event producer should endeavor to fulfill the unspoken contract to deliver a participative experience, the individual participant must commit to engage in an unknown experience. Jorge Ramos referred to the creation of *Hotel Medea* as a response the conventional London theatre experience, "that wants to pocket and categorize and sell everything in theatre packages [. . .] an hour-and-a-half long, and make it so easy, and so easily consumable, it might as well as not exist." Ramos continues, describing the *Hotel Medea* experience as "a massive commitment to stay overnight, to be an audience" performing roles in the retelling of a Greek myth still relevant to today's society, "a myth that happens overnight" (Ramos).

Two Case Studies

Road Kill – (Stratford, East London, 20 November 2011)

After taking our ticket and checking our coats and bags, we were given a brief safety speech by a member of the Theatre Royale Stratford staff in a small parlor off the main lobby. We were a small audience; maximum capacity for each performance set at 14. Looking around I noticed that most of my fellow audience participants were similar to myself: 30-60 years old, Caucasian, and attired for a casual evening at the theatre. Afterward, we loaded onto a small airport bus parked just outside. Right before we departed a small African girl and adult African woman got on board with their suitcases. The small girl looked in her mid-teens and talked incessantly the whole coach ride, commenting on what she saw, what she thought she'd be doing in London, asked us questions, and called out periodic reports on what she thought of it all to her "Auntie." We

quickly became enamored with her sweet innocence and vitality. Despite the cheery

nature of this animated exchange, a foreboding loomed.   Whether it was from prior

knowledge of the subject of the play, or responding the set-up being all too good, you could

just tell this girl was going to take a fall.

The trip through East London showed us a pretty squalid section of the city. We

travelled through increasingly depressed areas. Finally we pulled onto a street with vacant

two-story row houses down one side and derelict high rises on the other. The yards were

overgrown. It was a rough area. We were escorted into one row house amongst a whole

block that was boarded up. The house we entered had all its windows covered. We were

lined up along the borders of a small vestibule area adjacent to the kitchen to see the first

scene where the Auntie showed the girl their new home and introduced her to all the other

girls living there. Then we moved into a room that could have been the dining room but

didn't have any furniture in it except for a small flat-screen TV and a DVD player. The

Auntie told the girl that she was going to be called Mary, and that her own name was

Martha. Mary turned on a Beyoncé video and started dancing joyously to it in a kind of

free-form African dance.

A pimp arrived and lured Mary upstairs to watch more videos and play video games.

While we were listening to the exchange upstairs and watching Mary's videos on the TV in

the dining room, the video turned into an animated abstract display of her rape; we heard

violence over our heads, vicious stomping and banging. Mary re-emerged downstairs

crying, with blood on her dress. After she got the pimp out of the house, Martha comforted

the girl.

We were then moved into Mary's bedroom. I noted this move seemed forced and blurred our relationship to the characters in the performance. Whereas our presence was first acknowledged in the house, now we were voyeurs and seeing things secret and sinister. Mary's bedroom was in the former front parlor of the house, so there was enough room for all 14 of us to sit around the perimeter. The stools we sat on were a mixture of small black ones, and taller bar stools more recognizable as justifiably associated with the house. The room was "hidden" behind a curtain along one wall of the dining room. Martha drew the curtain back and ushered Mary in to wash her wounds, change her clothes, comfort her, and start the girl's "education" as a prostitute.

We then saw a progression of scenes where the rapes and sexual encounters were portrayed both abstractly as well as staged realistically and quite violently. The bed was raised so Mary could hide underneath it. We saw a scene in another room in which Mary was bound to the bed, prepared for a session with a client. Mary became numbed to the situation, but a final John fooled her into believing he would take her away, instilling false hope in the poor girl.

Finally we were invited to a party. First, we partied in the kitchen and the vestibule then we were taken upstairs to a room and corridor with loud music and disco lights. Mary partied with us all, dancing close with us, as if we were Johns coming to trade with her. She whispered in my ear, "Help me?," but her physicality suggested that she was propositioning me. Suddenly, there was some kind of emergency with another girl in another room, so we were hustled out. Before we could get outside the house, the pimp arrived and we watched him beat up Martha and Mary. After he left, Martha crawled into her room, and Mary led us into her room downstairs.

We sat again, and Mary addressed us this time, relating her plans to escape the house. Martha entered and pleaded with Mary to stay to help make enough money for all the girls to leave. However Mary left, and we heard her exit out the front door. Martha collapsed crying, then left as well. Alone in the room we watched a video projection showing Mary running down the street, escaping from her slavery. Then docents loaded us on the airport bus and returned us to the Theatre Royale Stratford. It was a very quiet and contemplative bus ride.

Hotel Medea -- (London, 03-04 August 2012)

This performance of *Hotel Medea* occupied the entirety of the Hayward Gallery in London's Southbank Center. The audience gathered in the lobby appeared to range in age from 20-50. As we queued to check-in at the ticket table, and checked our coats and bags, an emcee talked with us.   Very charismatic, he was dressed as a type of street ringmaster. He asked us questions like: "Why are you here? You do know this is an all night performance? Do you realize that you have no idea what you're going to be asked to do all night?" Once checked-in and assembled, we were led into the Hayward Gallery in groups of ten. The Emcee explained that as suitors to the princess Medea we needed to undergo a training session to properly prepare us to conduct ourselves at the Golden Fleece festivities. This training provided our safety talk and instructions about certain dances and songs we needed to perform during the night.

As our group finished the last training session, we were led to the top floor of the building, passing through empty corridors and galleries. We were ushered into a large room filled with a vibrant lively performance called the Zero Hour Market.   The market had a DJ playing Brazilian carnival dance music. The market was full of characters talking

in Portuguese and English regarding temptation, morals, and black magic, and each was displaying a different token item. On their backs they wore giant umbrellas with ribbons that hung to the ground and spun as they turned. Each umbrella could shelter ten audience members. We were encouraged to explore all the umbrellas. Eventually, the umbrella merchants were ushered out and we were introduced to the principal characters in the story.

The Emcee started telling the story of Medea, her home city, and the Golden Fleece. He introduced Jason and the Argonauts. When the Argonauts entered the space they were nine women, bared to the waist wearing black combat pants and boots, carrying assault rifles wearing black motorcycle helmets with visors completely concealing their heads. The Argonauts performed a rigorous dance pushing the audience and performers back to the perimeter of the room as Jason and his henchmen were introduced. Medea was then introduced with an entourage of men dressed in Latin-looking suits whom we understood to be family relations. Her brother was dressed in a native-looking outfit as if he were from an Amazonian tribe.

Jason demanded the Golden Fleece, but was denied it without first winning the hand of Medea. A large battle dance ensued with the Argonauts dancing in and fighting for Jason. Finally the Emcee forced Jason to do battle with a golden bull. Medea fought in the bull disguise. Jason won, winning her hand.

Next, the room was partitioned in half with a curtain, and we audience participants were separated by gender to wash and dress the bride and groom. We danced and sang as Medea and Jason were dressed in their wedding finery. Then the curtain was parted, and the ceremony ensued. First the bride and groom were blindfolded and told to find each

other in the crowd, which meant many of us were groped by the couple trying to find their mate. The next ceremony consisted of a dance where one performer sang a rhyming tribute, or curse, on Jason and Medea. After that scene broke down, Jason declared the party over, and informed all that he was leaving with Medea and the Golden Fleece. Medea's brother wouldn't permit Jason to take the fleece and a chase ensued. The crowd was challenged to keep the two from escaping.   Finally Medea couldn't find either Jason or her brother so she started putting her cousins under a spell and kissing them, which poisoned them; they spat up blood and died. Finally she killed her brother in the same way and took the golden fleece, but not before she had the Argonauts place his body in a trunk and carry it off. We were then ushered outside for our first break, where we were served hot tea and cookies.

After about 20 minutes, a performer (who formally had played an Argonaut), now dressed in all pale blue as a nurse or governess, separated four of us, and took us hand-in-hand into a very large room where there were approximately 30 bunk beds.   On a dais in the middle of the room was a king-sized bed surrounded on three sides by chairs. Our nurse told us that it was time for bed. She called us children, made us put on PJs, gave us hot chocolate, and read us a bedtime story from a picture book about Jason and Medea's adventures. Then she tucked us in, and worked to try to get us to really go to sleep.

Another group playing foreign ambassadors on a visit to Medea's palace entered the room and sat in the chairs around the perimeter of her and Jason's bed.   The ensuing dialogue between Medea and Jason hinted that he had been unfaithful and that Medea knew it. Another group (we found out later), located in a second room identified as Jason's re-election campaign headquarters, were watching the proceedings on closed circuit TV.

This third group of audience members portrayed a focus group hired by Jason's presidential campaign. Medea sang us "children" a lullaby and then went to bed. Jason received a mobile phone call, and he dressed and left. Medea woke shortly thereafter, realized he was gone, and angrily brooded over her suspicions of his infidelity.

The scene then repeated, and we children became the visitors. It cycled through a third time as our group became the focus group and watched the scene unfold on video from Jason's campaign headquarters. After the cycle completed, we were ushered down the stairs to meet Jason for a campaign photo op, before being given another 20-minute break.

After the break we were lined up to re-enter the nursery room, but only females were allowed in. Males were ushered into the TV room where we were informed by Jason's henchmen that the women were engaged in subversive activity. They taught us a bunch of hand signals, then dressed us in female wigs and lipstick, and led us to infiltrate Medea's meeting. We discovered there an all female cabaret where Medea and her handmaidens prepared to clandestinely poison Jason's new bride. They also ritualistically raised her deceased brother from the dead. When he emerged from a trunk, all the women swooned and came under his spell. Jason's henchmen and we disguised male audience participants then interrupted the proceedings and banished Medea and her crew. Both male and female participants were then escorted back into the TV room where the men were congratulated for doing a good job. Participants were again separated by gender, the men redressing in their wigs and the women donning balaclavas and becoming soldiers. We were then paired back up each female "soldier" with a male "woman" and were led back into the cabaret. We

"women" were forced to kneel while the "soldiers" held a finger gun to the back of our heads. The handmaidens were arrested, and Medea was cursed and banished by Creon.

All audience participants were then stripped of wigs and balaclavas and sat on the perimeter of the same large room for a beautiful ritual where Medea was ritualistically stripped then dressed in a shift and laid out on a shopping cart. The handmaidens ritualistically ripped her shift and made up her face with blood and theatrical make-up to suggest she had been raped, murdered, and cast out on the wasteland. Jason's henchmen however, had videotaped the ritual and called her bluff. Jason cursed Medea and told her he was taking the kids away from her. She put Jason under a spell and had started to make love to him when the handmaidens, now again performing the role of nurses, quietly entered and hurriedly removed us "kids" in groups of four to hide us from Medea's murdering rage.

We were taken down the stairs to the lowest level of the Hayward Gallery and left in a dark industrial room. The Nurse took one of our mobile numbers and told us to wait for her call to tell us when it would be safe to stop hiding. As we waited, we heard locked doors being violently rattled. Barely five minutes after the Nurse left, she called the mobile and screamed for us to run. We exited the basement room just as Jason appeared and told us to run to the top of the stairs and hide.

When we reached the top floor, we found it very quiet and dark. One room at the end of the corridor appeared candle-lit. We walked into that room and discovered two fellow audience members laid out in PJs on funereal biers portraying the dead princes. We were tasked with setting stuffed animals, silk flowers and candles on the biers in memorial to the princes. Medea occasionally pulled a few of us aside and whispered something in our

ears, and smeared fresh blood on our faces. Finally audience participants were told to sit on the floor and Medea read from a book a story about her murder of the princes. Jason arrived, discovered his murdered sons, and wailed in grief. His mobile phone rang. During the call, played for all of us on speakerphone, Jason's henchman told him he had won the election.

Medea then gathered the Golden Fleece and started to exit the room, leaving Jason on the floor grieving. As Medea swung open the double doors at the end of the room, we saw the sun dawning over the dome of St .Paul's Cathedral, across the River Thames. Medea then welcomed all of us around a long breakfast banquet table with fruit, bread, spreads, cheeses, and juice. The entire audience, entranced by the dawn and enthralled by Medea and her sumptuous spread of food, remained quiet for a moment, and then burst into animated conversation. Between handfuls of energy-restoring sustenance, we compared experiences and congratulated the performers on an amazing overnight performance.

Surveying the Range of Roles in Participative Engagement

The site-based theatre experience can physically engage the audience participant in the performance of the event either heavily, or lightly. While both heavy and light engagement employ varying degrees of haptic and proxemic interaction, a heavily engaged audience experience might immerse the participant in one or more roles in the world of the performance narrative or in the contexts of the site. Heavy participation by individuals might be required to advance their experience through phases of cognition beyond mere observation. Heavily engaged participation probably will invite audience participants to

play identifiable roles in the performance. Many productions incorporate participative

engagement that invites the audience participants to take agency in directing aspects of

their experience, for example, in physically interacting with the performer or performance.

Usually, heavily engaged experiences require physical exertion: walking, running, climbing,

or even consuming food and drink. The individual participant might find himself or herself

in physical contact with a performer, or handling active properties or costumes according

to the milieu of the performance world. Lightly engaged audience experiences, while

typically requiring walking from location to location will feature more passive engagement,

promoting observation and discovery.

The Audience Plays a Role

As discussed, the concept of an audience participant means that the individual

performs within the site and alongside, around, and possibly incorporated into the

performance itself. While it's not always the case that participants perform a character or

identity in the fictional narrative of the performance, according to Cathy Turner,

> Every audience member has a vast range of perceptual roles at their disposal: theatre
> spectator, tourist, game player, party-goer, voyeur, judge, connoisseur, witness,
> scientific observer, detective... the list is endless. Many performances invite people to
> play with and transgress these roles, but to evade them entirely is probably
> impossible. ("Framing the Site")

Mike Pearson observes, "site-specific performance need not invoke a collective identity for

its audience, though it might ascribe them a role" (*Site* 177). He further argues that site-

based theatre participants enacting one of these roles accept their own agency within the

situations unfolding in the performance and play along, their "active, skillful, embodied and

sensorial engagement alter[ing] and determin[ing] a process and its outcomes" (178).

These two aspects of the audience's participative engagement, the participant's role in the

performance, and the degree of individual agency allowed and promoted during the experience, comprise two key considerations in conceptualizing the site-based theatre event.

Mark Fisher, Edinburgh-based theatre critic for *The Guardian* and theatreSCOTLAND.com opined that site-based theatre experiences that create roles for audience participants within the fiction were more successful than those that merely offered passive observation. Fisher said, " If you feel that you have a reason for being there, then you know how to behave and you know why you're there." He continued, "If it just feels like you're an audience, or just observing something, then there's maybe [. . .] some disconnection" (Fisher, Personal Interview).

Vicky Featherstone echoed this observation, noting how a less tangible or cohesive engagement of the audience in roles within the performance might promote confusion. This potential confusion compounds when a participant not engaged in a role might find logical interfaces to prominent contexts of the performance site. She said, referring to past experiences in less successful site-based performances, "So often you can be titillated or seduced by 'this is who you can be' in the site," and then when the idea for an audience role gets discarded or becomes lost in the ultimate translation into performance, the experience might not deliver as much impact. She believes that challenging the audience to assume roles implicit to the dramatic action avails a more meaningful experience. Emphasizing the importance of this consideration, Featherstone noted that she thought it "really rare" that creators of site-based theatre "actually get that cohesive . . . an idea," and subsequently develop and integrate this complex level of engagement successfully into the resulting performance (Featherstone).

Grid Iron, when possible, tries to identify a specific role for the participant in the world of its productions. For *Barflies*, set in a working pub, the audience was naturally cast and engaged as bar patrons. For *Leaving Planet Earth*, audience members were identified as colonists to New Earth from their very first interaction with production staff upon entering the performance site. For *Roam*, individuals who purchased a ticket were treated as airline passengers. Tickets and instructions were delivered in an airline ticket sleeve. Motor coaches transported the "passengers" to the airline terminal at the Edinburgh International Airport. When participants arrived at the terminal they immediately underwent a security screening. Harrison explained,

> And then we divided them into "Us" and "Them," so we gave them baggage tags, but we put [the tags] on them, rather than on their baggage... So, immediately there was also play in the police who were saying, "Are you with us, or against us?" It was all post-Bush; post the Bush speech "Us and Them." (Personal Interview)

Thus, not only were audience participants cast into the role of airline traveller, but they were also forced to belong to a specific side in the then-sharply politicized identity struggle of post-911, where "others" were potentially dangerous until proven safe. Assigning identities to the participants as either privileged or persecuted underscored *Roam's* themes of travel, racial profiling, political refuge, and global ecology. Ben Harrison continued, "So it's this thing of casting the audience—shaping the audience's experience—where possible, we always try to cast the audience very precisely" (Personal Interview).

Despite Grid Iron's rigorous promotion of the audience participant as politically affiliated traveller engaged in the functional contexts of a working airport, the experience could not separate its fictional reality from the real world. For obvious operational reasons, some segregation between the Grid Iron theatrical production, and real world

airline travel had to be established and enforced. Chris Hunn, long-time Grid Iron patron

described the experience:

> I think that maybe I didn't feel like a traveller with other travellers. It almost felt as if
> we were in a kind of glass bubble. Because, all of the time we could see real travellers,
> staring at us, wondering what was going on, going to the check-in desks, and along the
> escalators, and, you know, the normal life was all happening around. So, yes, we were
> gathered around the luggage collection point, or we went on the transport bus, but, as
> soon as we entered the airport you were aware you weren't a traveller as other
> travellers [. . .] there was a feeling of separation from [. . .] You knew you weren't there
> to travel, you see? (Personal Interview)

In my opinion, this segregation didn't detract from the audience member's experience as a

traveller negotiating a globally politicized ideological divide. Deftly, Harrison and Grid Iron

manipulated the separation between identifiable role and voyeurism. This precise casting

of *Roam's* participants, in both identifiable roles and as voyeurs, allowed for sufficient

distance to allow the individual space to make a rational judgment on the issues being

explored.

Interfacing with current or past occupations of a site will promote a cohesive, logical

casting of participants in the intended role(s). Hydrocracker capitalized on the current and

past occupations of Brighton Town Hall in their original production of *The New World*

Order in 2007. When the production's creative team first visited and interrogated the site,

they were impressed by the working culture of the upper floors of the building where day-

to-day operations occurred, with people bustling from place to place. The juxtaposition of

the working floors above the vacant historic police station and jail cells in the levels below

presented not only a strong metaphor for the resulting production, but also provided

cohesive connections between the roles the audience were asked to assume and the

performance (Jones, Personal Interview 16 Dec 2011). While the transfer of *The New*

World Order to Shoreditch Town Hall in 2011 didn't benefit from such obvious occupations

of the site, the architectural contexts still promoted the easy assumption of roles by the audience. When welcomed off the street into the building's foyer and then escorted up to the upstairs office and corridors, we audience participants discovered that we were being treated as members of the press or VIPs. When we found ourselves in the dungeon-like environs of the lower floors, our treatment by the security guards underscored that we were of the same underclass of people as the political prisoners we watched being tortured as the play progressed (*The New World Order*).

Taking Agency

As Gareth White explains, the participant's taking agency in a site-based performance may "take forms that are found in all performances: the power to interpret, to take viewpoints, to shape our own experience, to follow invitations to active participation, and to initiate participation" (Oddey and White 221). However, the choice to physically engage in a performance might seem easier in a site-based theatre event than when seated in a conventional theatre. For example, when experiencing a Punchdrunk environment or a Common Wealth Theatre performance, I felt able take agency and direct my own consumption of the event. When I stopped for a moment to experience *Sleep No More* from a stationary position, at a single location in the site, I quickly found myself isolated, and feeling left behind, as the performance moved into other rooms or levels of the building. Conversely, when I chose a particular performer to follow in *Sleep No More* or a sound to investigate in *Our Glass House*, I was rewarded with a discovery that led to another choice and reward, which helped me to connect narrative threads, interpret symbols and metaphors, and unlock meanings for myself.

London's Punchdrunk built their reputation producing immersive environments where not only audiences heavily engage with the site and the performance unfolding around them, but also direct their own experience of discovery. As Gareth White observes, Punchdrunk's "work is predicated on the agency of the spectator." As White went on to say, Punchdrunk "engineers this agency" by a variety of tactics including separation and disorientation. Fragmentation of the narrative forces the individual participant to search for connections amongst numerous evocative environments for exploration (Oddey and White 219). Most Punchdrunk productions require the audience to don masks at some point early in the experience. I will discuss Punchdrunk's theories behind their use of masks and the effects of the masked audience on the productions later in this chapter. However, it is worth noting that the donning of a mask separates participants from any friends they might have at the event. This isolation not only provides them the freedom to direct their own engagement but also empowers them to suspend conventional spectator inhibitions to behave less self-consciously. As Gareth White points out, the masks "frame the work as a solitary experience," and the resulting disorientation and scattered entry points to the performance site also promotes a subconscious necessity to search for other humans in the large, darkened, "maze-like" site (224).

Common Wealth Theatre Co. endeavors to design a welcoming atmosphere for their audience participants. They want their audience to feel comfortable in the performance environment and to easily engage in the performance. They might ask their audience to bring items, like they did when they suggested the donation of an apple for *The Juniper Tree*. In other productions they've asked the audience to participate by proposing ideas or writing lyrics that affect the show's performance and progression. These actions, according

to Evie Manning, "directly, straightaway" empower the participant's engagement (Personal Interview 01 Nov 2011).

Audience as active voyeurs

        As mentioned, audience participation can fall in a range of physical engagement from light to heavy.   A popular choice in site-based theatre is casting the participant in the role of voyeur. In certain instances the voyeur's experience offers a highly effective active participative engagement. As illustrated by a number of the following examples, while participants perform the role of voyeur, they are engaged in active observation but are not necessarily limited to passive activities.

        By masking audience participants, Punchdrunk instantly casts them as voyeurs. While these masks empower participants to freely explore and interact with the environment, the two productions I attended did not enable a generous, passive voyeuristic experience. Both *Sleep No More* and *The Drowned Man* placed the participants in an environment that required them to make choices about where to explore and what to observe or interact with. As previously discussed, Punchdrunk does not offer their audiences linear progressions through narratives. Should participants desire answers to the narrative puzzle, they must search the environment and actively engage with the performance, not merely watch from an anonymous place within the crowd of blank masks.

        The commemorative program for *Sleep No More* in New York features an interview with creators Felix Barrett and Maxine Doyle. When asked about the masks, Barrett explains:

> Handing out the masks is like assigning seats in an auditorium. It establishes each
> individual as part of an audience, and creates a boundary between them and the action.

The masks create a sense of anonymity; they make the rest of the audience dissolve into generic, ghostly presences, so that each person can explore the space alone. They allow people to be more selfish and more voyeuristic than they might normally be. Hidden behind a fictional layer, they lose some of their inhibitions. It's an important part of the dreamlike world we are trying to create. (Maughan 26)

Felix Barrett claims that the masks remove "that sense of trepidation"; "whatever baggage" the participant brings into the performance experience is "neutralized by the mask." Barrett advocates the critical strength of the masked experience in that participant's status is shifted from traditional spectator to active participant. He described the empowerment afforded participants by the masks as

the ability to define and choose their evening without being judged for those decisions. They are also removed from the traditional role of the passive, hidden audience, as they become part of the scenography and sometimes actually create walls to frame the action, providing a more intimate environment. (Barrett)

Barrett continues to explain that because a mask hides participants' personal identities, it enables "them to come out of their shell and adapt their behavior accordingly." This, he posed, might allow some participants to adopt a different character in their interactions with the world of the performance (qtd. in Machon, *Immersive* 160).

Barrett pointed out that a participant, normally timid in the outside world, could be crazily engaged in the Punchdrunk world (Barrett). While the masks offer Punchdrunk participants a mechanism for voyeuristic freedom and empowerment, their distancing effect may not work for all.   As Maxine Doyle said, the masks offer participants an opportunity to "really relinquish inhibitions and [lose] themselves in the world and in the play," however, "less confident participants might be "overwhelmed" or "put off" by the experience (qtd. in Machon, *(Syn)aesthetics* 90).

Masked participants are instructed before entering the performance environment not to remove their mask until the conclusion of the event and not to talk to each other,

themselves, or the performers. Masked audience participants move quietly through the multiple rooms and corridors, up and down stairs, following performers. Masked participants are free to explore the various levels of the building and take on a ghost-like or super-natural presence in the performance site. Lone masked participants tend to go unnoticed in the larger rooms when standing still. Larger groups of masked audience members tend to form a large white mass of masks or surround a scene, ironically promoting an extreme intimacy in a crowded voyeuristic exchange (*Sleep No More*; *The Drowned Man*).

As the Punchdrunk ensemble devises a production, they discuss and vote on the identity of the audience within the world of the performance. Once the identity for the audience is determined, the ensemble sets the rules for engagement with the individual participants. For, as Felix Barrett explained, to the characters in *Sleep No More*, the audience participants were ghosts or spirits.   Thus, he said, "if it's a mortal character, a living, breathing mortal character, they can't see the audience." In *Sleep No More*, he elaborated, "only characters who are supernatural, or dead, or mad . . . because they are on a supernatural plane, [they] can see the audience." Indeed, as Macbeth and Lady Macbeth descend into their respective madnesses, the performers playing these roles key off the audience participants directly. Barrett commented, "for the performers, the paranoia is just suddenly checking yourself, and realizing you're surrounded by all these people [wearing masks]" (Barrett).   This framework for the participative engagement of the masked audience members made for some extremely interesting exchanges. There were moments when a witch might peer directly at an individual participant or drag one by the lapels into a private room and close the door for a one-on-one performance exchange. It

also happened that a lone participant came upon a lone "mad" character and was treated to a private, spontaneous, unique exchange (*Sleep No More*).

Barrett asserts that the masks are just one element in the overall atmosphere of discovery that Punchdrunk establishes at the top of every show. They inform the *Sleep No More* audience that the experience poses a puzzle and they challenge individual participants to find their own connections. Barrett strongly feels that the individual participants need to feel a sense of ownership in their experience, thus Punchdrunk fights against "spoon-feeding the audience" (Barrett).

Common Wealth Theatre cast the audience participants as active voyeurs in *Our Glass House*. The sense of voyeurism was established immediately for me when I crossed the front door threshold and entered the council row house where I experienced the production in Edinburgh's Wester Hailes council estate in August 2013. Common Wealth does not, however, mask their voyeurs like Punchdrunk does. In my opinion, Manning and White, and their designers, established an atmosphere where a small group of voyeurs could interact with this environment. As Evie Manning described, they intended participants to constantly feel that they were in someone else's house. They wanted to establish a feeling of invasion, a sense that participants felt they were some place they weren't supposed to be (Manning and White, Personal Interview 01 Nov 2011).

Manning and White felt it crucial to encourage participants to take agency in their individual explorations of the entire house, and to interact with the six simultaneous performances as they instinctually desired. Before leading audience members to the performance site, Manning and White instructed them to "explore the house. Follow anyone or anything that takes your fancy." They then guided the audience as a group to the

site, opened the door and let them engage as they would. As they created the piece, they

intended to promote a sense of play within the council house, as "latch-key" children might

play alone in their own homes. Unlike in their previous shows, Common Wealth didn't

want the audience of *Our Glass House* to interact with the performers until the very end of

the performance. Manning reported that the silent observation of these six victims of

domestic abuse, with their expressive performances, promoted a feeling of complicity in

most participants (Personal Interview 16 Aug 2012). In my experience, Manning and

White did not design a passive voyeuristic exchange. I constantly had to negotiate with the

site and the environment. Sounds, shouts, loud monologues, door slams and other

signifiers prompted frequent shifts between locations around the small row house (*Our

Glass House*).

For *Road Kill*, we audience participants also played the role of voyeurs the majority

of the time that we were in the council row house. Not only were we voyeurs, but at times

we watched the performance from extremely close proximity. However, at times during

the performance, most notably when Mary approached us, seeming to party with us and to

whisper in our ears, our role as voyeurs became blurred. We seemed to slip between

voyeur and client which brought, at least for me, a measure of moral discomfort as I'll

discuss later (*Road Kill*).

Range of physical engagement

Participative engagement in both the performance and the site differentiates site-

based theatre from conventional theatre. The participative experience of site-based

theatre requires the individual audience member to take agency beginning with their

decision to attend the event. The promotion of the participant's individual agency remains

integral to the experience. Agency may range from making the decision to continue to

follow the production through the site to making complex decisions about where to explore

the performance environment, or whether to physically interact with the performer,

performance, or scenography. Participants' physical engagement might range from heavily

engaged to lightly engaged.   Whether the experienced physical engagement is heavy or

light remains a purely individual subjective judgment. However, for the purposes of this

study, I classify heavy physical engagement as involving intimate haptic and proxemic

engagement with actors, production elements, or the site. Heavily engaged experiences

might compel the participant to heavy physical exertion, or require specific actions to

advance the participant through the experience. Heavy engagement might encourage the

participant to take agency to affect the performer or performance in a manner that

contributes to or advances the dramatic action. While both heavily and lightly engaged

participation require some level of physical interaction between the participant and the

site, for the purposes of this study, I am limiting light engagement to exertions such as

walking, standing, and riding. A lightly engaged participant might still experience intimate

proxemic or haptic interfaces, however, light engagement generally promotes observation

over exertion.

Heavy Physical Engagement

    The moment audience participants are physically handled—like being pushed

against the wall at gun point, for example—they become heavily engaged in the

performance (*The New World Order*). Similarly, when queued through the security checks,

passport control, and departure gates of Edinburgh International Airport participants were

heavily engaged in *Roam* (Doherty). These types of physical interactions between the

audience and the performers, performance, or performance site, illustrate how easily a site-based theatre production may engage the audience's participation.

Pearson/Brookes' *Coriolan/Us* was presented in a vast hanger at RAF St. Athan outside Cardiff.   When performers drove a car into the middle of the crowded audience space, we spectators found ourselves heavily engaged in the performance. Most of the scenes in this production were intentionally placed in close proximity to spectators thus heavily engaging their participation in the scene. In some cases, such as when Coriolanus confronted the crowd at his arrest, spectators were heavily engaged in the action being portrayed. In certain moments, like when I was shoved out of the way by a cameraman trying to get a better shot of Coriolanus arguing with a Tribune, audience members were jostled like a mob would be during a street demonstration or public political event (*Coriolan/Us*).

Our identification as the Roman mob in these scenes became clearer when we discovered that we could see ourselves in live video footage being projected on the large screens hanging at the end of the hanger. Our heavy physical interaction with *Coriolan/Us* provided us both the haptic and proxemic engagement to the action. Pearson described his intention in creating this kind of engagement:

> Having a lot of cameras, one way or another, which can give views of what's going on [. . .] so you can constantly see this movement. But, really to—for a crowd, kind of, however far away you are from that movement of action, you still see a great picture of it. So you might be seeing it next to you, or you might be seeing it on a screen in the distance, but you are still seeing it, kind of, you know, close up. (Personal Interview)

Engagement with my identity as a member of the mob prompted me to experience empathetic emotional responses ranging from intimidation to complicity like members of the Roman mob in the play (*Coriolan/Us*).

Cora Bissett heavily engaged the audience of *Road Kill* with the plight of the

production's protagonist. As described earlier, we were engaged at close proximity with

the young African female protagonist who, like us, rode the motor coach through the

streets of London. As Bissett explained,

> She's just arrived from the airport, and she's wide-eyed and excited and she's talking
> very lively, as young children do, and to anybody. She's just a wonderful ebullient
> character. So, you get the backstory without it getting too expositional [. . .] And those
> fifteen minutes you bond with her. I see every face—I've watched this bus trip
> hundreds of times, and I just see people melt. They just love her. She's actually a
> wonderful young girl. (Bissett)

More importantly, Bissett continued, the audience sees this young girl before they realize

that she's become a victim of sex trafficking. The fact that participants are cast into the role

of anonymous punters on a bus where this young girl has smiled at them, talked to them,

befriended them, and formed emotional ties with them sets up incredible tension once the

production arrives at the council row house and the girl's indoctrination commences. In

the house, participants found their role instantly switched from friendly acquaintance to

voyeur as they watched a terrible tragedy being enacted upon this young girl with whom

they'd recently developed a fond attachment. Curiosity to discover what is really

happening in this modest apartment quickly turns to suspicion, which is replaced by horror

when the pimp arrives. The sounds of rape and physical assault in the bedroom above our

heads brought feelings of guilt and complicity. Our previous heavy and intimate

engagement with the young girl, coupled with our close proximity to the abuse going on

just beyond a wall, led audience members to feel complicit in the violation of Mary (*Road*

Kill). Cora Bissett intended this extreme implication of the audience in the event to inspire

participants to take political action against sex trafficking in their home constituencies. As

will be described later in this chapter, this heavy engagement on rare occasions also

prompted complicity and guilt to evolve into physical intervention. The emotional

engagement overrode the suspension of disbelief in those particular participants (Bissett).

In addition to the constant sensation of a mask on one's face, Punchdrunk

productions provide audience participants the opportunity for heavy physical exertion as

they explore the numerous rooms and corridors or follow any one of the numerous

performances happening simultaneously in the performance site. Although set in an

enormous building with over 50 fully-realized rooms scattered over five floors, *Sleep No

More* exploits close proxemic engagements with the participants, as, for example, when

Macbeth assaults and strangles Lady MacDuff in a crowd-crammed parlor.   The production

also employs haptic interactions between the witches and the participants, the most

visceral and memorable example being the Hecuba incantation in a secret speakeasy

lounge where all the participants were touched, fondled, and possibly even splashed.

Furthermore, as I experienced in Punchdrunk's *Sleep No More* in New York, both in

September 2011 and December 2013, and in *The Drowned Man* in London in August 2013,

my physical engagement remained constant from beginning to end. As the pace of the

performance increased I accelerated my physical exertions to keep pace with events

unfolding throughout the immense sites (*Sleep No More*; *The Drowned Man*).

When Zacura Ura's Jorge Ramos and Persis-Jade Maravala conceived *Hotel Medea,*

they were searching for ways to engage their audience throughout an event lasting until

dawn. As Ramos describes, "All we wanted to do was an overnight event that looked after

its audience." What they discovered in their creation of the event were, as Ramos further

described, "a number of participatory contracts with [their] audience." If they immersed

audience participants into "theatrical moments" in the story, the audience became so

heavily engaged in their participation that they stayed awake and present throughout the night (Ramos).

As they began exploring the Medea story, Ramos and ensemble designed an event that physically engaged the audience. As Ramos explained, they weren't interested in just an immersion into spatial relationships between the characters in the narrative. What they desired was to engage the audience physically, through the course of one night, in the exploration of the myth of the fall of Jason and Medea's household. The audience participants were always linked to the story by experiencing events from various perspectives.

In Act One, we participants played the role of suitors to the Princess Medea. We were engaged by street vendors, dancing in the Golden Fleece celebration, embroiled in the political struggle between the conquering Jason and Medea's ruling family, and ultimately part of the wedding party bathing, dressing the bride and groom and celebrating the marriage ceremony. In Act Two we were dressed in pajamas, tucked into bed, fed hot chocolate and told a bedtime story by our nanny as we physically explored the role of the young princes, overhearing parents Jason and Medea arguing in their bedroom. We were ambassadorial dignitaries visiting Medea's palace and witnesses to their falling out. We were political operatives in Jason's election headquarters watching the idyllic and photogenic family of our candidate dissolve at the exposure of his infidelity and scandal. In Act Three, depending on our gender, we were either women participating in Medea's secret ritual or men disguised as women infiltrating Medea's cabal. Shortly afterward, we were the young princes running for our lives and hiding. Then later, when we discovered the funeral of the murdered princes, we were welcomed to their wake by Medea and

participated in mourning rituals, and ultimately were served breakfast by Medea as the sun

rose over London at the end of the night (*Hotel Medea*).

Throughout the evening, from one scene to the next, *Hotel Medea* heavily engaged its

participants, precisely prescribing our participative engagement without allowing

individual agency to affect the ultimate outcome. The event enacted a well-known myth.

The outcome was known and unchangeable. *Hotel Medea's* creators designed an

exploration of the Medea/Jason myth to provide an experience of exploring and unlocking

the emotions and atmospheres in the episodes found in the story (Ramos).

Jorge Ramos and the ensemble focused the creation of the *Hotel Medea* audience

experience on providing participative engagements in the spaces where each episode of the

story was performed. The creative team directed the staging away from an exploration of

the available architectural contexts (Ramos). We participants were engaged in close

proximity to the other performers and the various properties necessary for the action.

Large spaces in the performance site, devoid of any identifiable occupational context, were

filled with events featuring moving bodies, live music, rituals, singing, chanting, sounds and

a few props. Many times throughout the evening, we participants were handled and

touched: tucked into bed and kissed goodnight by Medea, grasping the hands of our nurses

as we were led running to hide in the building, holding each other's hands as we danced in

celebration. The creators designed these haptic engagements to prompt personal

memories in the individual participants to recall generic social contexts: childhood

bedtime, weddings, civic celebrations (Ramos).

Ramos intended *Hotel Medea* to break the expected theatrical codes. There was to

be no focus on theatrical pretense, only a contract with the participant to take part in the

reenactment of the myth. He intended the designed participation to disorient the audience

then, when they were hit with a different familiar social context, they were more ready to

accept the invitation to join in, play a role, and experience the moment. For example, in Act

Two, when urged by our nanny to close our eyes and try to sleep, we were being lured into

the familiar security of childhood memories, only then to be jarred into an emotional

response by the sounds of our "parents" fighting in the next room. This participative

engagement trumped watching a traditional theatrical transaction from an aesthetic

distance designed to promote an intellectual identification. In the end, according to Ramos,

"all the structures of participation we created [were] about how those [participants]

present [were] engaged all night" (Ramos).

Particularly in their shows prior to *Our Glass House*, Common Wealth Theatre

Company guided audience participants to take agency and choose to perform certain tasks.

In *The Juniper Tree* and *The Ups and Downs of the Town of Brown*, Evie Manning and

Rhiannon White designed moments that challenged the audience participants with tasks

that had to be performed for the performance to progress. Both Manning and White

commented on how tasking the participants in this way promoted very strong engagement.

Manning also noted that the context of a particular moment within a performance dictates

a great deal how the participants may engage. For example, in *The Ups and Downs of the*

Town of Brown, the audience found themselves in a scene the creators nicknamed the

Money Orgy. In this scene participants were given loads of money and aggressively urged

to spend it on food, drink, games and gambling. At the end of the scene the protagonist is

arrested and the participants next find themselves in the jury at his trial. When given the

opportunity to bail out the defendant, they've spent all their money (Manning and White, Personal Interview 01 Nov 2011).

Considerations for Conceptualizing Participative Engagement

As in the previous chapter on conceptualizing the contextual interface, all the site-based theatre creators I interviewed in this study reported very individual processes for engaging their audiences' participation. As I have established, participative engagement in both the site and the performance in the site is a defining feature of the site-based theatre experience. All of the interviewees illustrated this fact by citing examples from productions where audience participation ranged from heavy to light engagements. However, when prompted to discuss how they conceived the participative experience, or what aspects of participation they most employed, a broader range of considerations resulted. In this section, I will present observations on the range of conceptual considerations for engaging the audience's participation. I've ordered this progression according to my own sequence of priority, starting with the broadest considerations. I begin with the possible usages or effects of immersion, then discuss engaging emotions and inviting and engaging active participation. I then narrow my focus to considerations concerning specific conditions or effects, like proxemics, haptics and temporality, orientation and disorientation, transitions and the movement of participants through the site, and conclude with establishing rules for engagement.

As a creator of site-based theatre myself, I was understandably enthralled with the stories and discussions related by each interview subject. However, when Jorge Ramos described his conceptual process as his "writing the dramaturgical participation," I

suspected that I had heard a perfect metaphor for conceptualizing the site-based theatre

experience. Just as I described directorial conceptualization in the introduction as related

sequences of questions, Ramos described the conceptualization of *Hotel Medea* as exploring

the myth, asking what happens in the story, who experiences these actions, and how.

However, determining the sequence, or even the range or types of experiences does not

guarantee participation. Ramos explained, "We offer a number of invitations, and the

audience member decides to take them up and they decide to take how far." The key to

engagement becomes providing the conditions and tools to gain the audience's

participation. Ramos continued:

> How they participate in a certain moment will effect what expectations you fulfill in order to take them further. If you want them to say yes to this invitation here, what tools do they need to have gained before. If it's taken the actors six years to train to stay [engaged] overnight like this, how can you train the audience in a few minutes, before they come in? (Ramos)

The result is what Ramos called the "training camp." In the half-hour before they entered

the performance, the audience, divided into groups of 8-10 were trained in a number of

actions that they would be invited to enact during the performance; e.g., dancing, singing,

etc. Participants also were briefed on simple rules and told that they would be asked to

play certain roles in the story as the night progressed, starting with foreign suitors to the

Princess Medea at her city's Golden Fleece celebration (*Hotel Medea*).

　　　Ramos's metaphor of "writing dramaturgical participation" encapsulates the

process of conceiving the audience experience. It defines the participation as integral to

the performance of the content. It equates the audience's participative engagement with

their cognitive engagement of the performance content and the site's contexts. By

describing conceptualization as "writing" Ramos endows these invitations to physically

engage with the same integral importance to the performance transaction as the lines that are spoken or sung by the performers.

Immersion

All site-based theatre is immersive, whether labeled as such by each show's producers, or critics.   The degree of immersion poses a crucial consideration for designing a visceral participative experience.

Punchdrunk Artistic Director Felix Barrett finds immersion the most effective method to achieve their primary aesthetic goal, which is to allow the audience the opportunity to "feel" the performance (Barrett). He is quoted by Machon as saying, "It's all about being able to feel it. Not just seeing it or hearing it, it's about what the audience feel, because it is about the visceral" (qtd. in Machon, *(Syn)aesthetics* 95).   Providing an immersion into the environment where all elements of the production are fused--site, text, performance, lighting, furnishings, atmosphere--not only unifies the work, but as Barrett explains, denies what he calls a "hierarchy of discipline." In other words, because an immersive environment brings all the semiotic systems into play, it enables its creators to choose the most effective signifiers at any given moment to impact the participant. Barrett stresses this point, noting that whether "a lighting cue, or a performer grabbing you if it needs to be tactile, or if it's the smell of rose petals on the floor," immersing the participant into a total environment enables a particular emphatic gesture to be "about the most efficient way to cut straight to an audience member" (qtd. in Machon, *(Syn)aesthetics* 95).

Barrett explained his goal as striving to create as solitary and personal an engagement with the performance as possible. He related to me a personal experience at Artangel's *H.G.,* in 1995 (staged by Robert Wilson in underground vaulted spaces in

London,) which inspired him to pursue his particular aesthetic. When he first experienced

H.G. it was a seductive, nearly solitary experience; moreover, even when performers were

absent the environment was still charged as if they were present. When he returned a

week later, the production had greatly increased in popularity and the environment was

crowded with spectators. Barrett felt his connection undermined by the other spectators

being present. He desired the private, purely personal experience that he'd had previously

(Barrett). Barrett further explains this aim in his interview with Josephine Machon,

> It was clear that to have an immersive experience you need to remove the rest of the
> audience members *being the audience* from the picture. If they're comrades of you, on
> the same mission, or if they're part of the scenography then they're either excluded
> from, or a complementary addition to, your reading of the work. (qtd. in Machon,
> *Immersive* 164, original emphasis)

For Barrett, the prime factor in providing effective immersion for an audience is to shift

their status from a traditional audience role to an active role in the experience. He says

that the Punchdrunk style of participative engagement "can be empowering because you're

never consciously watching the action, you're part of it, you are the protagonist." In a few

Punchdrunk productions, like *The Crash of the Elysium* in 2011, Barrett explained, the

audience was not masked because they had been endowed with "a specific role to play."

Thus, when tasked with a role, their participation shifted from traditional spectator to

active participant (161).

From my experience, the Punchdrunk immersive environment also provides

opportunities for the participant to experience and interpret the many layers of the

performance. In *Sleep No More,* you may explore the numerous rooms on each level, and in

each find clues as to the stories being performed around you. You can examine in detail a

Victorian sanitarium, or you may pick through relics in the shop fronts of the rural town of

Gallow's Green. On another level, you could be navigating a dark, hazy maze of trees trying

to follow a performer interacting with their environment, or you could be a silent solitary

watcher of an interchange between characters.   In some rooms you may be one of a

hundred identical masks watching a scene unfold (*Sleep No More*). Although, your

engagement might be primarily observatory, by physically experiencing the same

environment as the performers, you are allowed a more visceral connection to the

atmosphere, to the action, and to the progression of discovery in the production.

Common Wealth Theatre has learned that immersion helps maintain their

participants' engagement, and helps to empower their audience to take individual agency

in their experience. Co-director Rhiannon White explained, "We try and fill every space, or

have something, whether it be an installation, whether it be a performance, whatever it be,

so they're engaged constantly and their minds are active." She cited examples of attending

site-based performance where less attentive productions featuring empty corridors bored

audiences, disengaged their attention, and even nurtured casual chatting. Evie Manning

added that when their audiences are immersed in an environment, "then there are times

where it's just buzzing energy," and that the participants will "take control of it in their

way." To illustrate this point, Manning and White related scenes from *The Ups and Downs*

of the Town of Brown. When in the Money Orgy the participants were given "loads of

money," they were then surrounded by a number of temptations for spending it, and

actively encouraged to do so. Later in the play, the audience was ushered into a space

formerly a courtroom, and into a jury box, where they were immediately addressed by the

judge as the jury and engaged in voicing their judgment (Manning and White, Personal

Interview 01 Nov 2011).

For Jorge Ramos and Zacura Ura, engaging the audience's participation relied less

on immersing participants into a total environment and more on giving them specific roles

to play. When I experienced *Hotel Medea* in London in 2012, I never was fooled into

thinking that the production wasn't residing in the Hayward Gallery of the Southbank

Center. No attempt was made by the creators to cover up the current occupation of the

spaces, except the removal of any exhibition materials from the halls and corridors that did

not pertain to their production. However, the events enacted in those large blank galleries

and corridors so totally immersed me in the activities of the Medea story that the absence

of any ties to architectural or occupational contexts never deterred from my engaged

participation. For example, in Part One of *Hotel Medea*, when we entered the room where

the Zero Hour Market was already underway, we were instantly engaged in participating in

a vibrant, celebratory, active scene, surrounded by driving drumming, and music, and

dancing and huckstering (*Hotel Medea*). This activity fluidly transitioned into the next, and

the next, as the story unfolded around us. These activities provided visceral connections to

the energy and emotions aroused by reenacting this mythical event.

Engaging Emotions

Audience participation in the site-based theatre event will usually also ignite an

emotional engagement.   Emotional engagement in the audience, and the conditions that

promote such engagement, surfaced as themes throughout the interviews conducted in this

study. Numerous creators identified an alluring environment, that also nurtures in the

participants' a sense of safety, as key to a participative engagement that precipitates an

emotional response. The participant should feel confident and safe to engage in the

activity, and if required, compelled to accept their role in the performance.   Ben Harrison,

and Grid Iron, strive to build trust and inclusion for their audience to readily engage with

their productions (Hunn, Personal Interview). Grid Iron's Judith Doherty illustrated this by

telling of how they attempted to alleviate any confusion or disorientation arising from the

site for *Huxley's Lab* (2010). Before entering the performance site, which was the

functioning informatics laboratory on the University of Edinburgh campus, each audience

member was given a lanyard and badge with an identifying number which told them which

group they were assigned to, which elevators to queue for, and on which side of rooms or

corridors to stand (Doherty).

As established in the previous chapter, Punchdrunk's creators are concerned with

responding to the immediacy of the surroundings and atmosphere. In our interview, Felix

Barrett asserted his theory that too much cognitive analysis impedes the immediacy of the

experience. Barrett affirms he's less concerned with textual language than with the visual

and experiential transaction (Barrett). From past experience, Barrett has observed that too

much textual delivery changes the audience response. Referring to earlier Punchdrunk

productions that did not employ dance and movement as their primary performance

vocabulary, Barrett relates:

> What happened was the audience would be there, tuned into the pulse and rhythm
> of the building and the world then as soon as the text kicked in, was delivered, they
> would go back to autopilot, back into being an audience member, and physically
> their response would change; they'd be more self-aware, they'd shuffle they'd move
> out the way, they'd be aware of other audience members. It broke the spell. (qtd. in
> Machon, *(Syn)aesthetics* 97)

In Machon's *(Syn)aesthetics*, Maxine Doyle furthers this observation, claiming that the

Punchdrunk experiences are designed to "force" the participant to engage "instinctually,

and respond emotionally, rather than intellectually" (89). When participants approach the

Punchdrunk show intellectually they generally find themselves frustrated as she explains:

> We have put lots more signifiers in place to lead the audience, to give them more clues, not to follow a narrative but in a really simple way to indicate where action is going to happen or where there's going to be some big shift. Whether that's through lighting changes or music changes [. . .] clues so that there is some information to help them crack the puzzle. It's all visceral and emotional; we don't really give them any intellectual clues. (qtd. in Machon, *(Syn)aesthetics* 91)

Having experienced two Punchdrunk shows, I would agree that the design of the environment and performance promotes an instinctual and, at times, emotional engagement over an intellectual one. While "forcing" an engagement might be an overly strong description of the participant's transaction with the site and performance, my experience certainly supports the claim that trying to decipher all of the signifiers in the environment and performed scenes would frustrate even the most knowledgeable theatre-goer.

Ben Harrison cites the site-based audience's inherent curiosity and excitement as contributing to a ready participative engagement. He thinks that the buzz of site-based events, the "sense of kip" or novelty "increase[s] the theatrical temperature." Harrison believes that site-based theatre naturally taps into the inherent "curiosity of an audience." He elaborated that even when an audience knows the story that is being performed, their curiosity to see how they will participate next drives engagement (Harrison, Personal Interview).

Grid Iron's Jude Doherty pointed out how the excitement arising from getting access to an otherwise unknown or off-limits site encourages audience engagement. She explained that "quite often [Grid Iron will] choose buildings that people don't ever get into, spaces they can't get into, or even if they can—obviously, you can get into Debenham's department store, but not after [hours]," referring to the performance site for *Devil's Larder* (Doherty). Certainly, curiosity about off-limit spaces has undergirded audience

engagement throughout Grid Iron's career as can be seen in audience response to Mary King's Close (*The Bloody Chamber*) and the vaults under the Edinburgh Central Library (*Gargantua*). Grid Iron also has provided audiences privileged access to exciting locations like the Edinburgh International Airport (*Roam*), the University of Edinburgh Informatics Form (*Huxley's Lab*), the Anatomical Museum at the Old Medical School at the University of Edinburgh (*What Remains*), and the Edinburgh International Climbing Arena (*Leaving Planet Earth*). Doherty noted that in *Roam*, participating in a live performance during regular operations of an international airport elicited from the audience high levels of excitement and engagement (Doherty).

So far, these examples have illustrated both how readily the site-based theatre audience will engage with the experience and the necessity of providing a proper alluring atmosphere. Both these considerations will promote emotional engagement alongside the audience's cognitive and sensorial engagements. However, site-based theatre can also promote a sense of complicity in the participant when conditions prompt even deeper emotional engagement with the performance or the performers.

Productions that make the participant feel complicit in the situation or the protagonist's plight evoke a visceral engagement. When Grid Iron's *Roam* challenged the audience participants to choose a side, "Us or Them," each individual became complicit in creating an ideological divide. In Pearson/Brooke's *The Persians*, when audience participants disembarked from motor coaches, donned olive green rain ponchos, entered the town square, and were addressed as "citizens," they were implicated as members of a community. This subtle treatment from the top of the production created a possible sense of political complicity.

The moment audience participants entered the hanger for Pearson and Brooke's *Coriolan/Us*, we were confronted with playing the role of the Roman crowd on the streets witnessing the political divide that Coriolanus opened between himself and the polis. We were complicit as Roman citizens represented through the words and deeds of the tribunes who were our "elected representatives." At Coriolanus's fall we knew we were the Romans who betrayed one of their own (*Coriolan/Us)*.

Cora Bissett, in our discussions about *Road Kill*, posed the question: is it possible to push an audience's emotional engagement to a point where they forget the suspension of disbelief and confuse the fictional with the real? Witnessing from such intimate proximity the young protagonist's tragic fall into sexual slavery, the audience experienced an intense emotional engagement with the circumstance, performer and performance. Because of the theatrical transaction, they were withheld from taking the protective or interventional action humane compassion prompts. They felt complicit (*Road Kill*). Bissett has witnessed her *Road Kill* audiences pushed to extreme emotional quandaries when, toward the end of the play, Mary, the young girl, dressed evocatively and smiling seductively, whispers in certain participants' ears, "Help me." Numerous audience participants have told Bissett how close they came at this moment to snatching Mary and escorting her away from the house. She related to me that on one occasion, one participant lost in the moment, actually grabbed Mary and carried her down the stairs, only to be met by the pimp entering the house who retook control of the scene. On another occasion, she observed in two participants what seemed to be the passing of subtle signals between them with their eyes and hands. When questioned afterwards, these women admitted to being off-duty child

protective service officers who were so carried away in the moment that they caught themselves communicating their tactical rescue of the victim (Bissett).

Engaging Participation

As established earlier in this section, engaging the audience's emotional participation requires an inviting environment that also instills confidence in the participant. Similarly, engaging the audience's participation requires an environment that appears safe and encourages engagement. Ellie Jones asserted that to get an audience's participation they have to feel it is safe to play along. She said, "You've got to feel, is this for real? Am I safe here? [. . .] We want to say, 'Look how easily you can follow us, and look how easily you're led through these things'" (Jones, Personal Interview 10 Dec 2011).

Jones holds that sometimes a creator needs to plant performers into the production so that the audience can be more easily guided (Personal Interview 10 Dec 2011). Other times a verbal or gestural prompt can move an individual to participate in the performance. For example, during *The New World Order*, when my group found ourselves at the bottom of a stairwell, obviously not where we were supposed be, I heard on the other side of a door, "Come help! Come help! She's been bitten by a dog." I led our group through that door into the dungeon-like portion of the basement. We then were immediately misidentified as political prisoners and subjected to harsh treatment as we witnessed the torture of the characters in the rest of the production (*The New World Order*). Ellie Jones confirmed the design of this ruse. A verbal lure played on the charged emotions of the participants, prompting them to take a risk on the unknown beyond the door. Sometimes the invitation to engage can take the form of a moral challenge. Playing the role, perhaps engaged emotionally in the moment, one thinks one needs to do something. The need to

play a real role in the performed activity, other than just observe from close proximity, seduces the individual into participation (Jones, Personal Interview 16 Dec 2011).

Effective design of audience engagement should balance the invited participation against the participant's threshold of tolerance. Judith Doherty stated that the engagement needs to be compelling and cannot make participants feel foolish, or they might defer to playing the traditional observatory audience role (Doherty). Mike Pearson believes that audience members take their participation to the level they desire. He said, "They decide on the degree of involvement, you know, the degree of commitment they are, or aren't, going to give this thing" (Pearson, Personal Interview). Ellie Jones echoed this observation, however, she added that if you invite audience members to engage in a participative activity that is too tough they might disengage. She also pointed out that if audience participants feel unsafe, they also might disengage. She remarked that it was difficult to anticipate everyone's general reaction to the harsh guards in *The New World Order*. Every individual will react differently (Jones, Personal Interview 16 Dec 2011).

Providing participants with choices as to the direction of their experience is another effective way to invite participation. As previously discussed, Punchdrunk has based their aesthetic on freeing individual participants to self-direct their experience of the performance. Felix Barrett says, "a central feature of the work is the empowerment of the audience." He describes Punchdrunk's attempt to "fight against audience apathy and the inertia that sets in when you're stagnating in an auditorium." Barrett explains that when the audience is required make "decisions and choices," then they will "make some sort of pact with the piece," and become "physically involved . . . and therefore it becomes visceral"

(qtd. in Machon, *(Syn)aesthetics* 89). Maxine Doyle describes the participant's

empowerment as a confidence that allows

> you to really play the game. You don't have to be an experienced theatregoer to play
> the game, it might be that you're a crazy clubber, or really into gigs so this dark,
> strange, gothic world is familiar to you and you approach it in a certain way. It might
> be that you're a really avid filmgoer and the filmic is the thing that stimulates you or
> you're a visual artist so you're looking at the space in a particular way. It is
> multidimensional in terms of what people can tune into. (qtd. in Machon,
> *(Syn)aesthetics* 92)

On two occasions during my interviews, discussion turned to what happens to an

audience when, at certain moments, it's not clear what level of participation is available. As

Cora Bissett illustrated with her anecdotes about extreme audience reactions to the tense

moments right before the climax of *Road Kill*, instinctual responses to moments of high

emotional engagement might prompt a participant to interact with the performance in a

way that conflicts with the designed outcome. It is important to creators to clarify

participants' roles, at all times throughout the experience. Invitations to participate and

interact should be clearly communicated. As Jorge Ramos of the Zacura Ura ensemble

related,

> Who is the audience at this point in time, is a question that drives the decisions we
> make. That's key. Who are they, here? Because if we don't know who they are, we
> can't decide what they're watching, and how they're watching it, and what potential
> participation they might have with it. (Ramos)

Proxemics and Haptics

Proxemics and haptics pose additional extremely important considerations in

designing the audience's participation with a site-based theatre event. Proxemics relates to

the ways people interact spatially in particular situations. Haptics refers to the ways

people touch, both themselves and each other, as a means of non-verbal communication

(Oxford English Dictionary). Mike Pearson, in *Theatre/Archeology* (2001), describes four

physical zones of inter-body spatial relationships: "intimate, personal, social and public"

that "permit and enable different modes of physical and verbal discourse." Pearson

illustrates, as an example, that "inappropriate invasion of a zone – shouting in someone's

face – may be experienced as unwanted intrusion leading to unease and stress." He further

claims that we humans have a "propensity to transgress proxemics and haptic boundaries

and taboos, without thought for social implications." Transgression of proxemics and

haptic social conventions, Pearson says, "may be sanctioned in extreme circumstance or by

social convention" as in transacting performance. Pearson elaborates this special

circumstance:

> During meeting[s], intercourse, physical interaction and exchange, proxemics –
> interpersonal distance – and haptics – touch of self and others during interpersonal
> contact, in what contexts and to what degree – become part of the expressive
> repertoire. (Pearson and Shanks 9)

In the charged atmosphere of the site-based theatre event, these considerations prove vital

to not only the transaction between the performer and participant, but also in establishing

emotional engagements, inviting particular participations, and establishing a mood or tone

of a scene to be experienced.

When a performer intrudes into an audience member's personal space, the physical,

and emotional effect is immediate and reflexive. While experiencing *The New World Order*,

I was shoved by a gun-wielding security guard against the concrete wall of the larger

assembly area in the dungeon portion of the Shoreditch Town Hall; at that point, my

understanding of my role in the participative experience instantly changed. In less than a

minute I went from a VIP lost in the ministry building to fearing for my freedom. That

guard calling me a "prisoner" from close proximity, and the haptic exchange of touching my

chest with his arms and shoving me against a wall, communicated a change in my status

and changed the dynamic of my participation in the experience (*The New World Order*).

Discussing the creation of that moment, Ellie Jones described the importance of this type of

interaction within a group experience:

> If you know you could be picked out with eye contact in the next thought, you're going to listen more intently, because that could be you. And if the person next [to you gets called out]—you know—and you're enjoying that someone else has gotten that. (Personal Interview 16 Dec 2011).

She continued, "individual experience within the group experience . . . keeps an audience

much more engaged than a blanket kind of line" delivered by a performer to the group

(Jones, Personal Interview 16 Dec 2011).

Jones also discussed how touch might be used to motivate movement. She

explained that, to encourage a participant to follow along, performers might touch us on

the top of the arm, or by a hand on the back (Jones, Personal Interview 16 Dec 2011).

Certainly, as I described, a shove in the chest or the back by an armed guard will motivate

one to move as well.

Ben Harrison described the close proximity between performers and audiences in

Grid Iron's site-based productions as erotically charged. He pointed to the extremely close

proximity of performers to audience participants in *The Bloody Chamber* as promoting a

strong identification with the central character so that her experience of the spooky

atmosphere of the site became the way they experienced it (Harrison, Personal Interview).

Judith Doherty related how in *Barflies* close proximity of audience to the performers in

Edinburgh's Barony Bar established familiar contexts, helping participants feel like they

were at their local pub. Amusingly, she later explained, this erotically charged atmosphere

became literal for a particular table of participants when a scene of a sexual nature was

played out on their table. Familiarity turned to surprise and shock, and the proxemic

relationships became extremely intimate (Doherty).

Proxemic and haptic engagement in the site-based productions that I experienced in

this study occurred in both intimate and extremely public circumstances. All of the street

mob scenes in *Coriolan/Us* (2012) relied on close proximity between the performers and

the participants. As we were wearing audio headsets and could hear the performers, we

weren't required to stand close to the action. I noticed some audience members were

reluctant to join the crowd and stood on the periphery watching from a distance or

watching the video projected overhead. However, active participation as a member of the

Roman mob required interaction at close proximity. At times, we were touched

conspiratorially by a performer, or, in one case, were pushed aside to open a path for

Coriolanus to exit through the crowd (*Coriolan/Us*).

The close proximity we shared with the performer playing Mary, the trafficked

young African immigrant in *Road Kill* prompted a range of personal emotions in the

participants. Her addictive ebullience in the small motor coach at the top of the experience

cemented our allegiance to her. No audience participant sat more than two rows away

from her and her personality and lively banter filled the entire bus for the duration of the

ride. This allegiance turned to empathy and sympathy for her when the horror of her

situation was revealed to us. Fourteen participants experienced the events unfolding in the

council row house, all crowded into small bedrooms and corridors along with 2 to 3

performers. When the rape occurred, we were only ten feet away, separated by a ceiling

(*Road Kill*).

As these examples suggest, creators of site-based theatre events should take care to consider the proximity of audience members to performed scenes. Hearing a scene performed beyond a door, or watching an interaction from a distance will alter the dynamics of the participant's engagement. In *Hotel Medea* when I was dressed in pajamas and tucked into bed, I could hear Jason and Medea, my "parents," fighting and threatening each other. At that moment, in what might be a familiar context, I experienced fearful curiosity, ashamed to be intruding on intimate personal business, and an erotic charge by being engaged in a taboo activity (*Hotel Medea*).

Temporality

Duration of the production presents another important consideration for the site-based theatre creator. As Josephine Machon articulates,

> Duration is not simply 'how long it lasts', the running time of the performance from start to finish, but holds a greater significance in regard to the interactive relationship established between the audience-participants and the event within the timescales set. (Machon, *Immersive* 96)

When designing an audience's participation, temporal considerations can take many forms. Foremost, as Machon states, "the length of time spent within the world impacts on the experience of the world according to the parameters of the event" (96). Creators should weigh other time-related considerations as well. Pacing of the performance, for example, can seem to compress time, to magnify the moment. From my experience, three-and-a-half hour shows like *Sleep No More*, or *The Drowned Man*, so engaged my participation and attention that time flew by. I left these performances not only physically exhausted but amazed at the rapid sequence of experiences and images that caused time to fly so fast.

Temporal considerations were central to the conceptualization of the all-night *Hotel Medea*. As Jorge Ramos explained, Zacura Ura desired to build a performance that took the audience through an entire night and the Medea story and myth proved the right narrative to provide that exploration (Ramos). Enduring such a participative engagement all night held personal fascination for me. At about 3:00am after 3.5 hours of heavy participation in numerous action scenes I was tired and sleepy. Following a 20-minute break, Act Two quickly re-engaged my attention. By the end of Act Three, having been chased into the bowels of the building and having participated in the emotional and haunting wake for the dead princes, I was still fully engaged. At the end of the production, as Medea exited, she flung open double doors to show us the sun rising over the dome of St. Paul's Cathedral across the Thames. I was so engaged in the performance that I had lost track of time's passage and was surprised it was morning (*Hotel Medea*).

Jorge Ramos' manipulation of the temporal in *Hotel Medea* was masterful in its employment and effect. Ramos modulated the speed of time's passage, repeated sequences in time, and timed the ending with an actual event in the real world.

Orientation—Disorientation

Audiences can have a difficult time suspending disbelief when they engage a site-based theatre event. As Chris Hunn said:

> When you arrive you have really, very little idea about what's going to happen to you. [. . .] You've already made a big leap into trusting the people who are going to tell you whatever it is they're going to tell you or show you [. . .] and you've gone somewhere that you've never seen before [. . .] this idea that you've gone somewhere that you wouldn't be allowed to go into, or that other people can't go into it now—you know, whatever it is during the day time. All of that predisposes you to pay more attention to the detail of what's being shown you. (Personal Interview)

These distractions might deter an individual from empathetic immersion into the world of the performance. Even in productions that surround the audience with detailed environments, anticipation and physical discomfort might pull a participant's engagement from the fictitious back to the real world. For example, I found that the masks in *Sleep No More* and *The Drowned Man* provided plenty of physical discomfort that distracted from my engagement.

Given the possible distractions posed by the environment, creators of site-based theatre events must plan orientation activities and messages. Orientating an audience participant to the world of the performance could be as simple as addressing the participants about what to expect before they enter the site. Other orientation activities could simply provide the audience time and space to explore their surroundings, interface with available contexts, observe objects in the space, and listen to their surroundings. At the top of *Our Glass House*, after the audience was admitted to the council row house, they had ten minutes to explore, breathe, notice the art installations in each room, corridor and the stairs, and orient themselves to the layout of the house. Evie Manning observed that this initial orientation period tended to be quite intense. Audience members reported that they felt they had entered into a painting and were observing all it contained from within (Manning and White, "Personal Interview 16 Aug 2012").

Other orientation can engage the participants immediately with the roles they are to portray in the performance. At *The New World Order*, audience members were held outside the Shoreditch Town Hall until a few minutes after the scheduled curtain time. While we waited, we observed ministry officials in the building scurrying about, and were approached by some street characters quietly handing out political flyers. We later

learned this simple interaction incited the conflict portrayed in the play. When we were

finally admitted into the foyer of the building, we were met by a performer who introduced

himself as a ministry press official. He welcomed us, apologized for the wait, informed us

that the press conference was nearly set up, and would begin as soon as the Minister

arrived (*The New World Order*). This brief welcoming scene oriented us to the production.

It informed us that the performance had already started, and introduced us to the roles we

were playing as we participated in the production. It was a highly effective and efficient

strategy: participation was quickly engaged, I was oriented as to the identity and working

of the site, and I was able to suspend disbelief.

As I entered the venue of *Hotel Medea* our orientation began. The Emcee (played by

Jorge Ramos) met and conversed with us as we queued for entrance in the venue. His

character was very charismatic and a jokester; he quickly won my allegiance and trust with

his personable exchanges. He also provided a bit of distancing, asking questions like, "Why

are you here? You do know this is an all night performance? Do you realize that you have

no idea what you're going to be asked to do all night?" He then guided us through our 30-

minutes of training sessions and, afterwards, led us upstairs through various empty

corridors and galleries into a large room where we engaged with the Zero Hour Market

(*Hotel Medea*).

At this point, orientation turned to disorientation. Audience members were

immersed into a vibrant marketplace. Hucksters wearing large umbrellas festooned with

ribbons and beads twirling and dancing filled the space. Drawn into these umbrella-

covered spaces two or three at a time, we were engaged by the performers, encouraged to

behold special objects relevant to our celebration of the Golden Fleece. We were fluidly

interacting with each performer in a twirling intimate space, then drawn to the next

umbrella, and the next. By the time this scene concluded I, as a participant, was disoriented

from the "training session" fifteen minutes earlier. I had abandoned my pre-conceived

notions about the performance and was ready to embrace the new conventions that our

guide and that Medea's court invited me to adopt (*Hotel Medea;* Ramos).

Disorientation can, in this sense, orient and assist in the suspension of disbelief.

However, if the audience's participation is intended to be self-directed exploration, as in

Punchdrunk shows, disorientation and confusion can raise the participant's tension and

promote more urgent instinctual engagement with the production and the site.

In *Sleep No More*, as I left the entry point, having presented my ticket and checked

my coat, I ascended a wide staircase and entered a dark, smoky maze. After I groped

through a number of twists and turns, I emerged into the foyer of an extremely active

cabaret in the McKittrick Hotel, the constructed fictitious site where *Sleep No More* is

presented. From the cabaret, where the audience has all gathered and perhaps enjoyed a

drink or cocktail, they enter the production in flights of approximately thirty. They are

given their masks and loaded into an elevator. Individuals are then discharged singularly,

or in small groups, on any of four floors of the performance site (*Sleep No More*).

According to Felix Barrett, the entry maze is a crucial element of the Punchdrunk

audience engagement. He explained that the disorientation of the maze hastens the

participants' decompression. Suddenly, engaged with groping through an unfamiliar,

uncomfortable maze, any real world concerns are discarded and the participant is primed

and eager to interface with the world of the performance (Barrett). Barrett further clarifies

the purpose of the entrance maze as providing the participant an opportunity to

"acclimatize to the world [. . .] to the rhythm of that world . . . before being set free in it" (qtd. in Machon, *(Syn)aesthetics* 91).

Punchdrunk also relies on disorientation to increase the tension of the experience. The entire environment of the production is like a maze; *Sleep No More* contains hidden doors and alternate passageways. Points of entrance or egress for a particular room may have changed when that room is revisited later in the performance. *The Drowned Man* disoriented participants with its sheer size (*Sleep No More*; *The Drowned Man*). If audience participants didn't pay close attention to how they got into a space, they could easily find themselves disoriented. In our interview, Felix Barrett told of how Punchdrunk designed *Faust* in 2006 to compound the participant's disorientation. When audience participants encountered *Faust*, they explored a five-story building with "the same icons and same signifiers on every single floor, so you just lost track of where you were." As Barrett emphasized, the Punchdrunk show "is a puzzle" (Barrett).

Transitions

Transitions between scenes or acts in a conventional play usually signify shifts in time, place or circumstance. An audience experiencing a site-based theatre event also experiences similar transitions, although in a physical manner that engages different sensate and cognitive processes than if they were sitting in a conventional theatre. In a conventional theatre, the attentive audience member can sense what is going to happen, and generally understand the conventional theatre practices that will be used to depict this change in the story. In a conventional theatre, established theatrical effects communicate transitions (curtains closing, changes in lighting, moving scenery, dance numbers, etc.) In a site-based theatre, transitions happen to the audience physically: a door, a turn in a

passage, a new encounter with a character, a light illuminating something that had

previously been dark, etc.

When participants physically shift locations in a site, they may find associated shifts

in the narrative similar to what they might find in a traditional theatre production. One

location in a site might be portrayed at one point on a timeline, and the promenade to the

next location might signify a shift in time as well as place. However, a physical transition in

a site-based production also commonly shifts circumstances in the performance, so

participants might find their roles have changed.

In *The New World Order,* when my group of participants ventured from a basement

hallway through a closed door, our role abruptly transitioned: we were identified as

political prisoners. Accompanying this shift in role, our cognitive and emotional

relationship to the site also shifted. When we were in the upstairs chambers we were

playing the roles of VIPs or members of the press. We felt we were welcome, that we were

being shown what the public should see of a government ministry. As Ellie Jones

articulated, at this time individual participants could be thinking, "I feel like I could leave at

any time [. . .] I have my freedom, I'm walking about, I do the things I do, I'm allowed to

leave, I'm allowed to talk about things, I'm allowed to sign a petition" (Personal Interview

16 Dec 2011). Then, with this abrupt transition in environment, as we passed through a

door, our engagement transitioned from being guided and observing, to being shoved,

herded, and shouted at. At this one point of transition, we were VIPs and then we became

political prisoners (*The New World Order*).

A physical transition can likely also shift the participants' emotional engagement

within the performance. As we shifted from VIP to political prisoner, not only did we feel

the shock and fear of that moment, we felt distress for our situation, and distrust of the

performers playing government officials and staff. As Ellie Jones described,

> the darkness of those rooms, the look of those rooms [. . .] and also the actual descent
> of coming downstairs, and ending up in those places [. . .] and then just for helping
> someone out lands me in a position of distress, as if I'd spoken out against the
> government. (Personal Interview 16 Dec 2011)

I believe, in this moment, my emotional distress aligned with a parallel cognitive shift: my

budding suspicion of fascist-sounding rhetoric I had heard upstairs in the ministry I now

realized was the reality of this fictitious world, and I was ensnared in its corruption. As I

later related this experience to the bigger political contexts of my own world, this

significant shift in my cognitive engagement promoted parallel suspicions about my own

country's politics (*The New World Order*).

Moving the Audience

Moving an audience through a site as they engage with or participate in a

performance poses an understandable challenge to creators of site-based theatre.

Audiences, regardless of their enthusiasm for experiencing the site-based theatre event,

become easily disoriented when out of their comfort zone. They may desire participation,

but, unless prompted to explore and take agency in directing their participation, most

audiences expect to be escorted and instructed on how to proceed. Some site-based

theatre events may engineer engagements that compel participants to move themselves

through the progression of scenes and activities. Merely herding groups of spectators from

one location to the next, like docents guiding tours of a museum, is less than ideal.

Ellie Jones employed both direct and indirect methods of moving her groups of

audience participants through *The New World Order*. As mentioned in the section on

Proxemics and Haptics, the touch of a performer urging or commanding one to move in a certain direction presents a very compelling motivation to follow. Besides touch and voice commands, Jones also moved her participants through use of shock. In moments where the participants have relaxed, a shocking sound or revelation might motivate movement toward or away from a scene (Jones, Personal Interview 16 Dec 2011).

Employing performers to lead the audience from the conclusion of one scene to the next is one of the most popular and easiest solutions to the problem of moving an audience. In *Road Kill*, Mary, Martha and the pimp moved through the various rooms of the row house. Cora Bissett's staging of scenes helped inform me where to go in the house to observe the next scene. Only twice were audience members directed by a staff member to move: when we disembarked from the motor coach and were lead into the house, and when we moved into Mary's bedroom and were instructed to sit on a grouping of stools and chairs to watch Mary's indoctrination (*Road Kill*).

As mentioned earlier, Ellie Jones utilized what she called "intelligent audience," or plants in the audience, playing "community characters." As Jones describes, these performers were "essentially docents that guide the experience but they're playing dramatic characters" like ministry staff, or other members of the press that get lost with us in the dungeon level of the performance. If the planted audience members demonstrated that an area or a movement was safe, then the remainder of that group of participants would generally follow (Jones, Personal Interview 16 Dec 2011). Twice during our time in the dungeon, we were halted and processed by a staff member who questioned us and directed us down alternating corridors (*The New World Order*).

Punchdrunk's *Sleep No More* and *The Drowned Man* compelled movement through a variety of methods including the manipulation of the sounds and lights in the environment. However, the most prominent method of moving audience participants happened automatically, when individuals chose to follow particular performers through the building. With *Sleep No More*, as the production progressed, the number of narrative threads available to follow also increased. In both productions, as the pace of the production accelerated, so did the number of performers moving through the building. Following a performer led to a scene, and to more performers to choose to follow, and so on (*Sleep No More*; *The Drowned Man*).

Punchdrunk also limited movement in *Sleep No More* and *The Drowned Man* by gating, which is a design feature frequently utilized in role-playing electronic games. Essentially, doors are kept locked until players reach a certain point in the game. Similarly, in Punchdrunk shows, and in *The New World Order,* areas were blocked by doors only opened at a particular point in the performance. In *Sleep No More* and *The Drowned Man*, docents also functioned as "gates." These docents wore black masks for easy recognition that they were neither audience, nor performer (*Sleep No More*; *The Drowned Man*; *The New World Order*).

Common Wealth utilized sound to attract participants to different areas of the house in *Our Glass House.* Mostly, sounds were generated live; a slamming door, a scream, a raised voice. However, also effective, a musical and sound score was played throughout the performance. As each act of the performance reached its climax, the score would intensify, and then change when the next act commenced. We participants weren't instructed to listen for these aural shifts so we didn't expect or necessarily immediately understand

what they meant. However, as the performance progressed, I could anticipate the changes

coming by listening to the score and the sounds generated in the house, and instinctually

moved to where the most compelling action was happening (*Our Glass House*).

In bigger venues, or in bigger rooms, large movements will compel audiences to

move.   A performer making a movement across a large space will signify the strong

possibility that something is about to happen. I witnessed this in Pearson and Brookes'

Coriolan/Us in the St. Athan RAF hanger. When a vehicle moved in the space, it generally

stopped where a scene was about to commence. Sometimes I could see performers moving

into or out of the caravans around the periphery, and generally sensed the need to migrate

toward these caravans to see the scene happening inside or just in front of them

(*Coriolan/Us*).

Rules of Engagement

The audience's participative engagement depends on an implicit contract between

the creators and/or producers of the event and the audience participants. This contract

invites "varying levels of agency and participation" depending, of course, on participants'

personal thresholds of tolerance (Machon, *Immersive* 99-100). But safety is crucial. This

contract also assumes participants' and performers' safety. Participants expect the event to

be designed for an experiential transaction that is safe for both performers and

participants. The information a participant requires to safely negotiate the site, or

effectively engage with the production may be offered as a "safety talk" prior to the

audiences' entrance into the performance. At other times, pertinent information like

background stories, rules for engagement, or other tools needed for their participation

might be incorporated more surreptitiously into the fictitious world of the performance.

Safety talks may seem an intrusion on the participants' engagement with the

fictitious world of the performance. However, these speeches offer valuable frames for the

experience. The participants gain knowledge that is needed to maximize their experience.

Ben Harrison says that Grid Iron often "polices" the audience, and "definitely want them to

stand in certain places." "Because there are rules," he says, for how the audience

participants are to relate to the performers. He illustrated his point by recounting how

performers in *The Bloody Chamber* informed audience members to stay on the carpet, that

"the playing space is defined by the carpet" (Harrison, Personal Interview).

I greatly appreciated the safety talk delivered by Caitlin Easterby and Simon Pascoe

as we prepared to start the *CHALK* performance on Wolstonebury Hill in October 2011.

Caitlin rang a large bell and gathered us all in a hillside pasture near the disembarkation

point where we'd been instructed to gather. She welcomed us and introduced herself and

Simon as co-creators of the piece. Then she instructed us we'd be led through the site,

walking over the terrain approximately 2.5 kilometers, and then would be led back to this

point after sunset; to follow the flags, roads and fire pots. She then said that the creators

prefer audience participants not experience the performance through frames of cameras or

phones. She explained that *CHALK* was designed to be experienced by the human eye, ear

and body, and that no digital recording could do that justice. Cameras were put away and

we all trekked up the hill and into the Neolithic landscape where we participated in an epic

ritual performance (*CHALK*).

Safety talks also free the audience to more readily explore the site and the performance when such freedom is invited in the production. They give producers a chance to encourage the audience to experience the site as it has been designed to be experienced. For example, when Evie Manning and Rhia White met the audience at the designated gathering point before each performance of *Our Glass House*, they told the audience they were going to walk as a group through the council estate to the performance site and that, once they entered the site the performance, they will see a performance already started. Manning explained that audience participants were free to explore all the rooms at their will and that, after the performance concluded, a discussion on the production and on issues of domestic violence would be convened in the living room of the house. Participants were encouraged either to attend the post-show discussion or return to the disembarkation point on their own (*Our Glass House*).

Cleverly disguised safety talks are often part of the audience's first interface with the world of the performance. When David Leddy produced *SubRosa* a cast member spoke to the audience on the street outside the theatre, both in Glasgow and in Edinburgh when it transferred to the Edinburgh Fringe. The entire safety talk was written in the same Victorian language as the play, so the audience became immediately conditioned to the world they were to enter. Rules or tips concerning audience safety were interspersed throughout the talk, which also included real and fictitious facts about the building and the surrounding neighborhood. In this way, the safety talk also served as a contextual frame for the experience (Leddy, Personal Interview).

Audience members for Grid Iron's *Leaving Planet Earth* were instructed to report to the check-in desks at the Edinburgh International Conference Center. When I presented

my ticket to the event, I was welcomed as a colonist to New Earth, and an ergonomically

designed monitoring device was strapped to my left hand. The device was tested, and I felt

it buzz in my palm and a light lit up. Audience participants were told to wear the device at

all times, that it would not only provide the Galactic Futures Organization (GFO) the ability

to track us spatially, but it also would provide GFO constant monitoring of our emotional

state. The color of the device relegated us to queues for particular transporters. After we

queued, Judith Doherty's welcome speech repeated these logistical instructions. Frequent

video segments on monitors in the disembarkation area, and on the "transports,"

reinforced the delivery of this vital information, as well. During the performance, as we

were led through various rooms of the Edinburgh International Climbing Arena, which had

now become the New Earth Indoctrination Center, the devices cued us to change locations.

(*Leaving Planet Earth*).

Some productions do not employ a safety talk. Their creators prefer to employ

either rules of engagement or to more tightly control the audience's movement through the

site. Josephine Machon claims, "Whatever the scenario, the rules of play may be offered

secretly before entering the world of the event, or inferred secretly by the audience as they

experience the work moment-to-moment" (*Immersive* 28). Ellie Jones prefers not to

present a safety talk before participants enter the performance; rather, she incorporates

rules in the design of the audience members' participative engagement with the site and

performance. "It's got to be part of your world," she explained, noting that "community

characters" (audience plants) can keep the production moving per its design, "but our

audience don't have to know that they're there" (Jones, Personal Interview 16 Dec 2011).

Some productions may offer a hybrid safety talk that clearly communicates rules of engagement but is couched in the world of the play and is enacted by docents playing characters. Jorge Ramos explained his preference for a progression of training episodes to provide tools for the audience participants in order to better prepare them for the experience before them (Ramos). After I'd gained entrance past the ticket tables of *Hotel Medea*, Ramos, in his Emcee character, explained that he was conducting a small training academy for suitors to the court of Princess Medea so that audience members could fully participate in the festivities. In this way, my role as a suitor, and VIP foreign traveler was established. Later, our trainers performed other characters while moving groups of participants. For example, in Act 2 and Act 3, these trainers were dressed as and performed the role of the audience participants' nurses, first dressing them and tucking them into bed, and, later, by taking them by the hand and helping them hide in the bowels of the building as Medea was in chase (*Hotel Medea*).

Summary

The conceptualization of the audience members' participative engagement deserves careful consideration. Audience participants might find themselves performing a role within the world of the performance or they may be engaged as active anonymous voyeurs. Participants might be invited to take agency and direct their own exploration of the site or be precisely led through it by docents or performers. Participants' engagement might range from heavy physical exertion to light. Heavy participative engagement might take the form of participants performing activities ranging from high levels of physical exertion to intense emotional encounters. The creator should consider the depth of emotional

engagement desired for the experience and how participants are invited and prompted to engage with the performance. The participants' interaction with the performance may be affected by proxemics, haptic and temporal considerations. The use of orientation and disorientation may heighten the experience in various manners. Moving the audience through the site and the progression of the performance in a safe and desirable manner prompts further consideration of possible employment of devices and designed activities.

6

Conclusion

As a sited-based theatre artist, I keenly pursued research into the conceptual processes of contemporary creators in Great Britain. This project sought to discover how these creators of site-based theatre conceive audience experiences that I found especially visceral and memorable. With more site-based theatre activity than other countries, and burgeoning popular appeal as evidenced by increased attendance and press coverage in the past decade, Great Britain is the epicenter of this exciting form of theatre. Three trips to the United Kingdom between October 2011 and August 2013 afforded me numerous valuable opportunities to experience and document a broad range of site-based theatre events. Analysis of this data revealed that site-based productions with the most profound impact were those that not only unlocked and animated the contexts of the production's real-world site but also engaged audiences in experiences that seized their attention, igniting participants' viscera in the moment, and lingering in their thoughts for weeks to come.

To understand how audience experiences were conceived, I conducted interviews with more than 20 leading practitioners and scholars of site-based theatre currently working in or based in Great Britain. Further, I collected videos, photographs, reviews and other press, and personal accounts by audience members relating to these creators and their most noted site-based productions. My ultimate goal was to propose a process for

conceiving audience experiences that could be studied and practiced by future creators of site-based theatre events.

My analysis led me to identify two foundational considerations in the conceptualization of site-based theatre events. The nature of the site-based performance transaction requires these two conceptual steps that are not generally required in the preparation of conventional theatre performances.

First, creators of site-based theatre events should carefully consider how the performance and its participants might interface with the site's contexts. All sites resonate contextual information; ones that are visited casually and ones that are targeted for a site-based theatre production. All perceivable contexts will have bearing on the creation and perception of a theatrical performance in a site. Audience participants might interpret information about the site from available locational, geographic, societal, cultural and historic contexts referenced by the site, or highlighted by the performance. Productions might impose various kinds, and degrees, of scenographic elements onto the site. Productions might impose fully designed and realized environments onto the site or they might inhabit the site with little or no additional scenography. A production that integrates the various resonances of its site, or incorporates the site as a character or metaphor, leaves a strong impression on the participant. Numerous considerations for possible performance and audience interfaces should be explored including a range of possible responses to the contextual interfaces.

Second, creators of site-based theatre events should consider not only how the audience interfaces with the contexts of the site, but also engineer participative engagement that immerses them and promotes a visceral and memorable experience. All

site-based theatre involves some degree of physical participation beyond how a spectator might engage with a conventional theatre performance in a purpose-built theatre building. Engagement in the site-based theatre event may be dissected into numerous spectra and categorized by possible effects. Participants may be engaged on a spectrum of heavy to light participation. Possible participation may range across a variety of spectra that measure degree of exertion, complexity of activity, and level of agency, among others. Audience participants might be invited to perform roles defining how they engage with the performance. Conceiving participative engagement also requires attention to other conceptual considerations including inviting agency and active participation, the usage and effects of immersion, proxemics, haptics, and temporality, orientation and disorientation, transitions, and methods for compelling audiences' movement through the performance and site.

While these two conceptual stages might be studied and explored separately, the two-stage process offers a logical sequence that could be employed in the creation of a site-based theatre event. Decisions made at each stage might affect other choices or direct the site-based theatre creator toward particular considerations in the next stage. Highlighting certain contextual resonances of a site might suggest particular participative audience engagements, for example, dictating possible roles for audience participants in the dramaturgy. Contextual interfaces might promote the participants' agency in the event, empowering them to direct their experience or to interact with a performer. While each stage of the conceptual process proposed herein may be taken separately, and, on its own, lead to the design of a memorable audience experience, I propose this progression as a logical and effective sequence for conceptualization.

However, this study does not present a recipe for the creation of memorable site-based theatre. The data analyzed herein reflects a finite period of creativity in Great Britain, conducted by a body of theatre creators selected by the author for the critical success they achieved in recent years. These creators chased an ephemeral ideal expression as they worked through their individual conceptual and production processes, guided by outlooks and concerns unique to each of them. As established in the Introduction, the conceptualization of a theatre production is a highly personal decision-making process leading to the presentation of a particular performance for a particular audience. The conceptual processes leading to the significant site-based theatre performances studied herein proved no less personal, and were, as related by these interview subjects, unique to each creator, performance site, and production. The conceptual processes of numerous leading directors of conventional theatre have been catalogued and archived in scholarly works for decades. With the exception of a scant few works focusing on particular artists, elements, or styles of site-based theatre, the conceptual philosophies and practices across such a wide spectrum of British site-based theatre creators has not yet, to my knowledge, been recorded or categorized in one work, as I have done here. However, while these observations and findings may prove useful to future creators of site-based theatre, one must respect that, due to the ephemeral and temporal nature of the theatre transaction, the conceptualization process cannot be refined into a universal methodology. As this study makes abundantly clear, each site-based production is unique and requires unique acts of creation. Who knows what will happen next in our world? How will the site-based theatre creators innovate to reflect our ever-changing world? Where will site-based theatre go next?

As this study has shown, site-based theatre benefits from an excited and engaged audience. Site-based theatre events of many varieties enthrall audiences from demographics across contemporary Western society. Some audiences are attracted to site-based theatre's proletarian appeal, which defies the power implications of the conventional theatre's hierarchical transactions. Contemporary audiences might crave a collective tangible experience as an escape from a technology-saturated civilization. Furthermore, these two appeals promote innovation in its creators, prompting them to conceive new work, which, in turn, further feeds the site-based theatre popular attraction.

Based on my field research, I derived a taxonomy of possible essential qualities, or properties, of the site-based theatre audience experience. Considered separately, these essential qualities illustrate numerous facets of experiential theatre for contemporary audiences. My analysis not only illuminated the affective power of each property, but also explored and highlighted conceptual considerations for incorporating such characteristics into a site-based theatre experience.

Finally, this study provided documentation of a sizeable number of critically acclaimed site-based theatre performances during a two-year period of prolific production in the United Kingdom. By aligning production documentation with the creators' thoughts and opinions, I offer valuable case studies for students and future creators of site-based theatre.

Other Considerations

Creation of site-based theatre events can be divided into three macro-stages: Conceptualization (the focus of this study), Design and Rehearsal, and Producing. These

other macro-stages of creation, as well as other dramaturgical considerations deserve additional study, analysis and discussion.

The audience, while experiencing an engaging performance in a site, might not give much thought to the empirical values (what can be measured by the senses, i.e. spatial, kinetic, chromatic, thermal, temporal) that they perceive.   Certainly, how these values are being manipulated within the production's design to cause an effect in a scene or highlight site's particular contextual resonance is probably far from their minds in the moment. Capitalizing on the empirical values of a performance site involves gauging and manipulating the politics of the space; in other words, what element has the most power and effect at any given moment. Solving problems like: Who or what is coming from this particular direction? How does this location convey a particular atmospheric characteristic, or the underscore a particular theme of the show?   How can scenographic elements enhance the site's inherent ability to surprise or empower the audience participants? Study and analysis of these creators' insights on responding to the architecture and spatiality of a site, elevations, illumination, and the effect of incursions by outside items like vehicles, or other scenographic elements all require further discussion. Further, how the audience encounters and perceives sensorial stimuli (tactile, olfactory, temperature, weather, sounds, vibrations) deserves attention.

Common Wealth Theatre produced *The Ups and Downs on the Town of Brown* in a building that had formerly been occupied by legal courts. The structure had evolved through numerous occupations to the point where the show inhabited the space, however, one room preserved its court's architectural layout and style. Manning and White utilized the other rooms and corridors surrounding the courtroom, introducing scenography, and

compelling the movement of the audience through the spaces in such a way that they were

able to conceal and preserve the courtroom for the final show down at the climax of the

play. Integral to surprising the audience was a sudden transition from the raucous "Money

Orgy" to the serious courtroom, so Manning and White needed to mask any empirical

reference to the existence of this courtroom.   The audience encountered locked doors, anti-

rooms, and moved through corridors surrounding and in close proximity to the courtroom,

yet still were shocked when they suddenly found themselves in the courtroom, occupying

the jury's dock (Manning and White, Personal Interview 01 Nov 2011). Manipulation of the

empirical values in the site can contribute to a range of effects on the audience experience

including surprise, disorientation, changes in tempo, sequencing of scenes, gating of ingress

and egress, and achieving balance in the delivery of the narrative content.   Creative teams

interrogate, respond to and build upon a site's empirical values in a variety of manners

when designing the experience. Ensembles of performers encounter and respond to the

site in surprising and valuable ways as they inhabit the site and build the performance to

be presented.

Anther area of design and rehearsal that could be addressed is the rapidly

developing use of technology in site-based works. How can creators incorporate a variety

of media into the site-based experience? Does the incursion of live video feed, or live

internet access, dilute the suspension of disbelief, or benefit from paralleling everyday

culture? How can technology change the audience's interface with the site's contexts, the

performance, or their individual participative engagement? How can the manipulation of

technological elements encourage orientation or disorientation for the audience

participants? How can creators combine live and virtual entertainment and informational transactions into one aesthetic, or a unified experience?

As discussed in this study, Mike Pearson in *Coriolan/Us* utilized personal audio delivery systems to enhance the audience's experience, and projected live video of the play's action onto overhead screens incorporated into the production's environment (*Coriolan/Us*). Recent shows by Felix Mortimer and Josh Nawras of RIFT in London are expanding their audience's notions of site. Their *O Brave New World* in spring and summer 2012 was preceded by a number of weeks of internet communication with the audience providing fictional news, internet sites, and social media posts concerning not only the narrative of the production but a larger fictional world. When the audience members arrived at the performance site for the live event, the site already resonated contexts that the creators had meticulously prepared and communicated to the audience (Mortimer Personal Interview 01 Aug 2012).

Evie Manning, Rhiannon White and the Common Wealth Theatre Company ensemble are preparing a large site-based event currently called *Nationalisation* intended for production in 2016. Groups of performers and audience participants will gather at decommissioned utilities sites around Britain on a particular date and "reclaim" them, celebrating a new "nationalized" energy for the country. The sites will be joined by satellite feed. In this way, technology will connect and combine multiple "local" engagements into one "national" engagement (Manning and White, Personal Interview 22 Aug 2013). Because technology is part of our everyday information culture, it can serve as a compelling element in a site-based theatre experience, and can be easily and smoothly integrated into the story and performance (Pearson, Personal Interview).

Other areas of research pertaining to the design and rehearsal of site-based theatre production could investigate traditional directorial dynamics (i.e. pacing, tempo, foreshadowing, tension) and how site-based staging might require modification to the processes that directors use to modulate these dynamics. How might directing pedagogy evolve to incorporate these changed conventions? Furthermore, actors in site-based theatre productions, due to the nature of the transaction, are required to interface with real-world locational contexts and must modify their performance to effectively deliver their performance in a variety of possible spaces, climates, and acoustic situations. How might acting pedagogy evolve to address these new demands on the craft?

Producing a site-based theatre event in a real world site can be complex and difficult. For almost every site-based production discussed in this study there was a backstory pertaining to the complexity of its creation, and the subsequent limitations and discoveries that changed the design and delivery of the intended production. Governmental oversight of public events in the UK is meticulous and rigorous, especially for events in public, historic, and/or potentially hazardous sites. Numerous authorities have approval over proposed production plans, from the local council government to health and safety administration.

Grid Iron's Judith Doherty told of numerous limitations placed on productions by the particularities of their sites or by Edinburgh's government authorities. The economics of producing epically scaled audience experiences in real-world sites places additional burden and considerations on the creative team that will affect the final production and its audience experience. Limitation and compromise instigate change, and many times these changes cause a discovery or solution that results in unforeseen

enhancements to the production.   In 2004, while preparing *These Eyes, That Mouth* for the

Edinburgh Fringe, Grid Iron's Judith Doherty received the news two weeks before opening

that they could not produce the production in the flat that they had planned. Despairing,

she put out calls for help, and after a nervous weekend, Grid Iron, with the help of an

enterprising realty agent, moved the production into a three-story townhouse undergoing

renovation. Ben Harrison, and the production's creative team and ensemble scrambled and

quickly converted a show formerly developed for a horizontally-oriented residential flat, to

a vertical promenade roaming over a three-story townhouse, requiring extensive

movement of audience participants up and down staircases to view the various scenes.

The increased audience movement and physical engagement resulting from this

reorientation of the production made for a more dynamic audience experience. The new

site required additional expenditure, and monumental work the prepare the building site

for public access (plumbing, safety), but the show not only opened on time, it proved a

popular hit, selling out two shows a night for three weeks and garnering Grid Iron seven

awards (Doherty).

Beyond the two main conceptual stages as discussed in this study, I believe other

critical and dramaturgical issues could be explored. While the role of narrative as it relates

to interfacing with a site's contexts was mentioned in this study, further investigation as to

how narrative shapes the process of designing and building the site-based theatre

experience would prove useful.   When the dramatic content of the performance is devised

specifically for the site, how do creators choose the proper site for the as yet unknown

performance concept? How does interrogating the site and relating context and available

empirical values to the potential story affect the development of ideas? How do these creative influences balance?

Another area deserving further investigation is the changing identity of a site once a production has inhabited and vacated it. The majority of the creators interviewed in this study expressed some interest in this idea. David Leddy expressed dislike at the idea that once a site has been used, "it's been used up and can't be used again" (Personal Interview). Mark Fisher commented that if non-traditional performance sites weren't used and re-used annually in the Edinburgh Fringe, the festival would have run out of venues and stopped expanding years ago (Personal Interview).

What physical remains are left behind after a site-based theatre event departs a site? What cultural footprint is left behind, if any? How does a site's identity, or contexts, change once a performance has inhabited it? The famous "Brook Wall" left behind in Glasgow's Tramway performance space after Peter Brook's 1988 performance of *The Mahabarata*, remains a beloved touchstone for Glaswegians, and a monument to the building's transformation from derelict former Museum of Transport to vibrant center for the performing and visual arts (Fisher, "Peter Brook's"). Felix Mortimer showed me a scenic piece left in the foyer of the former Islington Town Hall after a production by his 19;29 Ensemble. He related he'd seen at least one subsequent production in that site that utilized his former scenography as part of their performance site. How does a site's performance history figure into its perceived historical contexts, and thus how would these footprints affect future audiences' interfaces? These other areas of concern arising from my research for this project interest me greatly and will provide the focus of my ongoing analysis and exploration.

Site-based Theatre in the United States?

While this study focused on site-based theatre in Great Britain, the frameworks for conceptualization proposed herein should prove valuable for practitioners in the United States. While site-specific production activity migrated to the United States in the mid-1980's, outside of the local phenomenal success of En Garde Arts in New York, 1985-1999, and a few other notable companies in Chicago, San Francisco, New Orleans and New York, the U.S.A. has few sustained companies systematically exploring this type of work. In general, site-based theatre in the United States remains a novelty for audiences.   What has held back the development of site-based theatre in the United States?   As can be witnessed from the development of site-based theatre in Britain over the past fifteen years, once an experimental theatre movement gains traction, particularly if fueled by popular appeal, it can gain momentum exponentially. Experimental theatre practitioners in the U.S. however, need to shift paradigms with regards to potential funding sources and negotiating possible performance sites.

While the American theatre holds a different spot in the American national consciousness than British theatre does for British citizens, similar 21st century societal pressures affect both countries' audiences.   The egalitarian nature of the site-based theatre transaction, defying the conventional theatre's power implications could hold a particular appeal to 21st century American society's strong individualist determinism. Contemporary America is technology-saturated, so site-based theatre's collective physical experiences could offer a refreshing break from the day-to-day homogeneity that is mediated by smart phones and tablets, social media, and instant-access news and punditry.

The British experimental theatre benefits from a different public funding structure for the arts than is available to possible site-based theatre creators in the United States. The temporary nature of site-based theatre can require extensive capitalization and expenditure, especially in accommodating large audiences such as patronize Punchdrunk, Grid Iron or recent Pearson/Brookes shows, for example. Even modest site-based productions can be expensive, particularly if the production requires a large cast, inhabits a sizeable building, or requires extensive construction or technical support. Conventional theatre production, in purpose-built theatres, benefits from existing technical and facilities infrastructure. Generally, site-based theatre performances have to import all required infrastructure into their intended site. Therefore, besides typical production expenses (performers, technicians, scenery, costumes, props, marketing, publicity, ticket sales) a site-based theatre production needs to also provide for infrastructure needs like electricity, sanitation, water, ventilation, security, emergency preparedness, ADA compliance, and parking (or transportation to the site). While experimental theatre generally burdens its producers with fundraising demands, already difficult in the U.S.'s competitive non-profit culture, these additional production and infrastructure requirements make site-based theatre a daunting prospect.

However, a paradigm shift away from traditional non-profit theatre funding sources could assist the aspiring site-based theatre producer. While the theatre institutions in the U.S. can't benefit from the large grants provided by British arts councils, they can turn to commercial and non-traditional sources for underwriting and capitalization. If the designed production will bring commerce to an otherwise blighted section of a city, civic, state and federal development funds could be secured. That city's Chamber of Commerce,

while not typically in the arts granting arena, could serve to connect arts entrepreneurs to corporate and private funders interested in urban renewal. Other charitable organizations might see the benefit of assisting a project's underwriting if the ultimate goal increases long-term public awareness and introduces new funding sources.

Furthermore, no American law dictates that theatre companies have to be operated as a non-profit institution. A private-public partnership, with proper legal and fiscal accountability, could bring commercial and artistic agendas together in the pursuit of an epic experiential entertainment enterprise. Emursive's commercial production of Punchdrunk's *Sleep No More* continues to illuminate the benefits of this type of new funding paradigm for future American site-based theatre entrepreneurs. Funding source and capitalization scale issues may have impeded the American site-based theatre's development, however, as *Sleep No More* has shown us, with the right experiential attraction, public-private partnerships can be forged, and epic-scaled site-based theatre can be successful in the U.S.

Another condition possibly retarding the growth of American site-based theatre could be the difficulty in securing sites for production. While American cities might have the same prevalence of vacant buildings as can be found in British cities—American empty buildings tend to be sold, renovated, or dismantled when they stop producing profits for the owners. As well, American municipal codes and commercial property markets dissuade the planning of such temporary incursions into vacant buildings as can be employed in Great Britain. Landlords generally operate on a long-term lease business plan. Proposals for a temporary habitation of a property might be received less favorably than an

application for a lease. If a landlord does entertain a short-term occupation, chances are,

the rent required may prove prohibitive to the finances of the theatre company.

My theatre company's experience securing performance sites, however, does prove

the existence of broad-minded landlords who are the exception to this norm. Specific

Gravity Ensemble, in Louisville, Kentucky, approached the owners of our performance sites

as potential partners, proposing non-currency rental transactions like providing promotion

or manual labor. Landlords, especially those incurring losses from vacancies, or desiring

capital improvements, might be receptive to creative rental solutions for a temporary use

of their site. Other possibilities might arise with from this proposed paradigm shift away

from the traditional commercial realty transaction. Buildings or sites undergoing

construction or renovation might see the benefits of a temporary occupation by a theatre

production, especially if the event draws favorable attention to that site's future enterprise.

Government or privately held parks and preserves might ease restrictions if the proposed

project also serves to improve a property or provide underfunded programmatic services.

We Players, in San Francisco and the Bay Area, has addressed the problem of finding

epic-scaled sites to host their ambitious site-based productions by finding a welcome

partner in the National Park Service. Ava Roy started the company at Stanford University

in 2000 and continues producing epic site-based productions to the present day, attracting

bigger and bigger audiences. Their production of *Hamlet on Alcatraz* in the fall of 2010

brought this company to national attention[5]. In 2009, We Players became the first theatre

company in the history of the National Park Service to be granted resident status (Roy).

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[5] For a critical exploration of the audience's experience of *Hamlet on Alcatraz* please refer
to my article "*Hamlet* on Alcatraz, A Journey into the Power of Sacred Space," *Ecumenica
Journal of Theatre and Performance*, 6.2, Fall 2013 (Harmon).

Since that time, every We Players presentation has been located in a National Park Service,

or California State Parks location.

　　To date, over two hundred thousand participants have experienced Punchdrunk's

long-running New York engagement of *Sleep No More*. This production will surely prove a

catalyst for similar immersive theatre experiments across the country. American site-

based theatre practitioners can embrace the innovative work currently gaining momentum

in this country, shift their thinking about developing new funding structures, and negotiate

new partnerships with private and civic landlords. As happened in Great Britain,

innovation gets noticed, and popular attraction to novelty garners favorable press.

Demand for experiential theatrical entertainment will increase the supply of new and

innovative site-based performances. Popularity increases attendance, which attracts

critical attention and scholarship. While the number of site-based theatres in the U.S. may

be seen to lag behind Britain, signs indicate a similar burgeoning of creativity and appeal

taking hold.

　　As creators of site-based theatre continue to innovate and provide ever more unique

opportunities for collective experiential entertainment, so will the possibilities evolve for

theatre creators and artists. The thoughtful analysis of this field research concerning the

processes and experiences of noted British contemporary site-based theatre practitioners

yielded results valuable to the aspiring site-based theatre artist.   This work—its

documentation, observations and analyses—provides a framework for understanding the

styles, characteristics and elements of site-based theatre.   This taxonomy of essential

qualities of site-based theatre, and my proposed process for considering and conceiving

contextual interfaces and participative engagement in the site-based theatre event

provides foundational knowledge for the possible future creation of audience experiences

by future theatre practitioners, not just in Britain and the U.S., but wherever there are

adventurous and innovative theatre artists and audiences. While this work aims to inspire

the creation of visceral and memorable experiences for its audience participants, I can

attest that working in this exciting medium will impact the creators in meaningful and

transformative ways as well.   The experiences related within were as precious and

powerful to me as I interviewed, experienced and explored, as they were to the creators

themselves, and, as I am sure, they were to the numerous participants that experienced

these events.

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APPENDIX:
People and Productions

In this appendix, I provide a brief introduction to the people interviewed and the productions mentioned in this study. I provide a brief overview of each theatre company and its aims and history, and introduce the subjects interviewed who are associated with that company. I also provide a brief description of productions by that company or individual which are referenced in this study.

Grid Iron Theatre Company
Edinburgh, Scotland, UK

Grid Iron describes itself as a "new writing theatre" that "specializes in creating site-specific and location theatre." While its most high-profile productions have taken audiences into previously off-limit sites, it has also made innovative and exciting ensemble-created work for the conventional stage. After producing *The Bloody Chamber* in the "haunted" Mary King's Close under the Royal Mile in 1997, Grid Iron's reputation quickly grew as it produced numerous daring, and award-winning site-based theatre performances. Since its founding in 1995, Grid Iron has garnered 27 awards for its site-specific and touring productions. Grid Iron productions have taken audiences into interesting locations all over the UK and the world, including the Edinburgh International Airport, the vaults under the Edinburgh Central Library, the old city morgue in Cork, Ireland, The London Dungeon, a boat construction yard in Norway, a former jute mill in Dundee, the former General Security building in Beirut, the company's local pub The Barony Bar, and playgrounds all over Scotland and England, to name a few. Grid Iron has received two European Capital of Culture commissions (Cork 2005, and Stavanger, Norway 2008), and has twice been invited to present as part of the Edinburgh International Festival (*Grid Iron Theatre Company*).

Ben Harrison and **Judith Doherty** are Co-Artistic Directors of Grid Iron. **Judith Doherty** is the Producer, Chief Executive and Co-Artistic Director of the company. She has produced every Grid Iron production since the company's founding. Doherty has also served on the Board of Directors of the Edinburgh Festival Fringe since 2000. In 2003 Doherty was awarded the *Daily Mail* Spirit of the Fringe award for her service and contributions to the Edinburgh Fringe (*Grid Iron Theatre Company*). **Ben Harrison** joined the company in 1996 and has directed 20 of the company's 26 productions to date (*Grid Iron Theatre Company*). From 2002-2004 Harrison served as an Associate Director at the Almeida Theatre in London. From 2002-2007 Harrison was also a Director for the Dutch theatre company Muztheater. Harrison has also directed for the Traverse Theatre, National

Theatre Scotland, 360 Entertainment, Dogstar, and Tromolo Productions ("Ben Harrison/Theatre Director").

The Bloody Chamber, adapted by Keith Lodwick from the novel by Angela Carter, directed by Ben Harrison.

Premiered in Edinburgh, August 1997 (Vaults of Mary King's Close under Edinburgh's Royal Mile). Toured in 1998 to London (The London Dungeon), and to Belfast (Lagan Weir).

Grid Iron led audiences on a torch-led promenade through the depths of Bluebeard's castle as they explored Carter's sensual and witty text, examining "the questionable delights and deviance of desire and curiosity" (*Grid Iron Theatre Company*). Mark Fisher nominated *The Bloody Chamber* to *The Scotsman's* "Top 20 Theatre Events of All Time" stating that the staging "made electrifying use of the crannies and catacombs, so that the theatrical experience never let up" ("The Top 20").

Gargantua, devised by Ben Harrison and the ensemble.

Performed in Edinburgh, August 1998, in the vaults beneath the Edinburgh Central Library and George IV Bridge (now known as The Underbelly).

In *Gargantua*, four friends escape the grind of their everyday work life and share stories while indulging in an exquisite meal. These stories transform both the tellers and the vaulted spaces through which the performance advances. As the production took the party and the audience deeper into the bowels of the building, the stories grew increasingly bizarre.   Ultimately, the audience was discharged into Edinburgh's notorious Cowgate Street, five stories below the Central Library's prestigious George IV Bridge entrance (*Grid Iron Theatre Company*; Harrison, Personal Interview).

Decky Does A Bronco, by Douglas Maxwell, directed by Ben Harrison.

Premiered in Paisley in July 2000 (Barshaw Park playground). Toured extensively to playgrounds and parks throughout the UK and Ireland 2000-2002, and again for three months in 2010 around Scotland and England.

Maxwell's play about the passage from boyhood to adulthood features five young men playing their machismo-fueled, daring game of "bronco-ing" on the playground swings. *Decky Does a Bronco* was a huge hit at the 2000 Edinburgh Fringe and garnered a *Scotsman* Fringe First for Outstanding Production, and the TMS/Barclay's Stage Award for Best Touring Production, among many other awards (*Grid Iron Theatre Company;* Doherty).

The Devil's Larder, based on the book by Jim Crace, adapted and directed by Ben Harrison.

Commissioned by the Cork (Ireland) European Capital of Culture 2005 (former morgue building), transferred to Edinburgh Fringe (after hours in Debenham's Department Store on Princes Street).

Performed as a promenade through the building, Grid Iron took the audience on "a journey into a culinary underworld; an uncanny, uncomfortable examination of the envy, love, revenge, hypocrisy, loss and lust which seethe beneath the false calm of the menu, the shopping list, and the recipe" (*Grid Iron Theatre Company*). As *The Scotsman* described the Edinburgh production:

> The mood of the scenes ranges from Little Britain-style comic-grotesque to the profoundly erotic, the sinister and the quietly tragic. But Harrison's astonishing command of the whole language of the 21st-century theatre—text, movement, image and the breathing presence of the audience—never wavers. ("The Devil's Larder")

Roam, written and directed by Ben Harrison.

A co-production between Grid Iron and National Theatre Scotland, premiered in Edinburgh, in 2006 (BAA Edinburgh International Airport).

This multiple award-winning production took the audience participants into a working international airport to explore themes centered around international travel: national and ethnic identity, political and sociological ideology, the politics of the age of terrorism, human achievement, contemporary nomadic identities. The audience were cast in the roles of travellers, asked to bring a passport or ID card, and tasked with checking in, passing security and proceeding to the departure lounge (*Grid Iron Theatre Company*; Harrison, Personal Interview).

Barflies, adapted from stories by Charles Bukowski. Adapted and directed by Ben Harrison.

Premiered at Edinburgh Fringe Festival 2009 (The Barony Bar). Toured Scotland 2012 (various pubs).

First staged in Grid Iron's local pub, The Barony Bar, *Barflies* explores alcohol and sexuality in the stories and poems of Charles Bukowski. Audiences patronizing the pub encounter Bukowski's alter-ego, Henry, and a string of his female acquaintances. Grid Iron describes this play as looking "at the profound liberation of alcohol, its opening up of corners of sexuality and mental activity, as well as its most undesirable effects" (*Grid Iron Theatre Company*).

Leaving Planet Earth, written and directed by Catrin Evans and Lewis Hetherington

Premiered at Edinburgh International Festival, 10-24 August 2013 (Edinburgh International Conference Center, Edinburgh International Climbing Arena).

In this world-premiere, co-playwrights/directors Evans and Hetherington explored the social and psychological issues colonists might face migrating to a fictional New Earth. Upon arrival at the disembarkation point, the Edinburgh International Conference Center, participants watched video segments explaining the establishment of the New Earth colony by the Galactic Futures Organization. Before departure for the "jump" to New Earth, participants were equipped with innovative communication devices that directed individuals when to move from room to room throughout the performance. Participants were also told that these devices allowed the Galactic Futures Organization to monitor stress levels during acclimatization on the new planet. Upon arrival at New Earth, the central character, Vela, who designed and governs the colony, welcomed the colonists, but she soon found that her obsession with her memories and ties to Old Earth challenged her ability to lead. Inspired by the futuristic architecture and the former rock quarry location of the Edinburgh International Climbing Arena, and collaborating with the University of Edinburgh Centre for Design Informatics, Grid Iron created an interactive performance experience on a grand scale. *Leaving Planet Earth* capitalized on the otherworldly location and architecture, and utilized innovative media and technology to provoke participants to suspect that this, supposedly, improved human society, may not actually be the utopian solution the marketing materials promoted (*Leaving Planet Earth*).

Punchdrunk
London, UK

Founded in 2000, Punchdrunk builds immersive site-based theatre productions on an epic scale, where audiences are free to choose how they experience epic storytelling inside a sensory-saturated theatrical world. Punchdrunk performances fuse a physical/movement interpretation of classic texts and narratives with the voyeuristic adventure of exploring an imaginative and mysterious site. They convert deserted and disused multi-room buildings into settings for the action executed at a "cinematic level of detail" and atmosphere (*Punchdrunk*). The Punchdrunk sited theatre aesthetic blurs the traditional margins between audience, performer and performance space. Individual participants are masked to hide their identity, and free to roam throughout the site, choose what to watch or explore, and direct their own performance experience.

Felix Barrett founded the company in 2000 and leads Punchdrunk as its Artistic Director. Barrett conceives and directs every Punchdrunk production, working closely with designers and production staff to construct the elaborate settings and environments, and with the Associate Artistic Director/Choreographer Maxine Doyle, and the ensemble, to devise the performance inhabiting each site (Barrett). **Colin Nightingale**, Senior Producer, joined Punchdrunk in 2002 for *Chair*, and has coordinated production for every show produced since that time (Nightingale).

Faust, adapted from the original text by Goethe by Felix Barrett and the ensemble, directed by Felix Barrett.

Performed in London 10 October 2006 to 31 March 2007 (derelict 5-story former archive building), playing to sold-out run of over 119 performances, for approximately 30,000 audience participants (*Punchdrunk*; Barrett).

Punchdrunk converted this vast deserted building (over 150,000 sq. ft.) into an environment that evoked the landscape and a rural community of the American Deep-South (Punchdrunk).

Sleep No More, adapted from Shakespeare's *Macbeth*, and other folktales and legends, by Felix Barrett and the ensemble, directed by Felix Barrett.

Premiered in London, in 2003 (Beaufoy Building, a former Victorian school building). Revived and performed in Boston, in 2009, for a five-month sold-out run, in association with American Repertory Theatre (Old Lincoln School). Revived and performed in New York, opening in March 2011 and running to present date, in association with Emursive (McKittrick Hotel, constructed in a disused 5-story warehouse) (*Punchdrunk*; Barrett; *Sleep No More*).

In its original iteration in London, *Sleep No More* explored the *Macbeth* story reimagined as a Hitchcock thriller, underscored by derivative and re-arranged music from Hitchcock films. When the production was redesigned for the Boston performance, Barrett and the

ensemble further explored the atmosphere and style of the Film Noire cinema and literary genre against the architecture of the site's disused public school building. The New York production retained its 1930s Film Noire atmosphere and interwove references and narratives from the Gallow's Green witch trials, references to other historic supernatural legends and to Victorian/Edwardian, and earlier, treatments for insanity (Barrett). Audience participants enter the production at a disembarkation point in the cabaret showroom of the fictitious McKittrick Hotel, and after being equipped with masks, they enter the performance at random locations throughout the performance space, free to explore in any direction to their choosing. Over the five-story site, participants could encounter performers in the McKittrick Hotel, in the various residences, in a sanitarium, a small English village's high street, in forests, or other environments (*Sleep No More*).

The Drowned Man, by Felix Barrett and the ensemble, directed by Felix Barrett and Maxine Doyle.

Performed in Paddington, London, June 2013 to July 2014 (former Royal Mail sorting station.)

The Drowned Man was performed in Punchdrunk's largest setting to date. Over four floors of this vast building (over 200,000 sq. ft.), participants explored the fictitious Temple Pictures Studio and encountered characters both employed in and lingering around the margins of the movie industry. This tale of love, lust and betrayal played out in two parallel narratives amongst the actors, producers, directors and other bizarre and provocative characters in the studio community. The narrative for *The Drowned Man* draws heavily on the plot and themes of George Buchner's play *Woyzeck* (left unfinished at his death in 1837), and was also inspired by Nathaniel West's *The Day of the Locust* (1939) (Dickson). Audience participants were immersed in the workings, politics and intrigues of the Temple Pictures studio where the make-believe world of the cinema blurred the distinction between fantasy and reality. Participants could encounter performers in any number of sound stages and sets, dressing rooms, the studio cantina, a forest, corridors, workrooms, offices and other environments (*The Drowned Man*).

Pearson/Brookes

Mike Pearson (performer/director) and Mike Brookes (artist/scenographer) co-founded this performance collective in 1997. Initially Pearson and Brookes explored their collaboration though performance works Brookes describes as "propositional 'duets'" (Brookes). These first productions established an aesthetic for their collaborative explorations, moving away from architectural models for sited theatre transactions to using performance in the landscape to explore "place-making," and incorporating media and technology into the audience experience (Pearson, *Site-Specific* 5). Recently Pearson/Brookes have been commissioned to explore sited productions on a large scale. In 2010 they created *The Persians* for the inaugural season of the National Theatre of Wales in a mock-village training facility on the Stennybridge Military Training Reservation in the Brecon Beacons highlands of Wales. In 2012, commissioned by the National Theatre of Wales and the Royal Shakespeare Company, Pearson/Brookes created an innovative sited theatre production of Shakespeare's *Coriolanus* (Pearson, Personal Interview)*.

      Mike Pearson is one of the most respected and revered site-specific theatre creators in Great Britain. His career, making site-based and experimental theatre, spans six decades. Pearson is a Professor of Performance Studies in the Department of Theatre, Film and Television Studies at Aberystwyth University. He was a member of the renowned physical theatre troupe R.A.T. Theatre from 1972-73. From 1973-1980 he was the Co-Director of the Cardiff Laboratory Theatre. In 1981, he and Lis Hughes Jones founded Brith Gof, where he served as Co-Artistic Director until 1997. The early Brith Gof productions were relatively small-scale, presented in intimate studio spaces and found spaces like churches, chapels and houses (Pearson, *Site-Specific* 4). Brith Gof, throughout its history, focused its central concern on Welsh issues: "cultures, languages, histories, mythologies . . . 'scattered memories'" (Harvie 45). During Pearson's later tenure with Brith Gof, the company was noted for creating large-scale sited works including *Gododdin* (1988-1989) in Cardiff, Wales; Glasgow, Scotland; Polvirigi, Italy; Leeuwarden, The Netherlands; and Hamburg, Germany; *PAX* 1990-91 in Cardiff, Glasgow, and Aberystwyth; and *Hearn* in 1992 in Tregedar, Wales. In 1997, Pearson departed from Brith Gof, joined the faculty at the University of Wales, Aberystwyth, and started the Pearson/Brookes collective (Pearson, Personal Interview; Pearson, *Site-Specific* 4; *Brith Gof*). Pearson is the author/co-author of numerous books and articles on performance studies and sited theatre. He has written the books *In Comes I: Performance, Memory and Landscape* (2006), *Site-Specific Performance* (2010), *Mickery Theater: An Imperfect Archaeology* (2011), *Marking Time: Performance, Archeology and the City* (2014), and co-authored with Michael Shanks, *Theatre/Archeology* (2001).

       The Persians, by Aeschylus, adapted by Kaite O'Reilly, directed by Mike Pearson.

Performed in Cilienni, a mock village in the Stennybridge Training Area in the Brecan Beacons highlands of Wales, in August 2010 (Pearson Personal Interview; Pearson, "Haunted House"; *The Persians*).

For this production, Pearson/Brookes and National Theatre Wales worked closely with the British Ministry of Defense to provide audience participants safe egress into this restricted training area. After participants disembarked from the motor coaches they'd ridden from Cardiff, they promenaded through this deserted war-ravaged village and assembled in the remains of the town square where a four-man chorus introduced the circumstances that set the play. Afterward, the audience processed to the Skills House, a concrete structure depicting a large house (used for urban warfare training.) The audience sat in bleachers at an open end of the structure to observe the performance of the play. The scenes portrayed were observed live, as well as on video screens, as if mediated through news networks. As Michael Billington commented in his review, this performance focused attention "on how war destroys the very fabric of people's identity." He concluded by stating that

> This superb production [. . .] literally takes one on a journey. And, as one went back down the hill after, strange lamentations emerged from the deserted houses. Shivering slightly, one moved on, still hearing the aftermath of war in one's ears. (Billington, "*The Persians*")

       CORIOLAN/US, by William Shakespeare, Co-directed by Mike Pearson and Mike Brookes.

Performed in Hanger 858 RAF St. Athan, Vale of Glamorgan, 8-18 August 2012.

For this production, Pearson and Brookes "reimagined" Shakesepeare's tragedy "in the era of 24-hour news, of celebrity culture, and of new global politics" (*CORIOLAN/US*). Staged across the vast floor space of a generic RAF hanger, the milling and reforming crowds of audience participants became the sites for this performance. As most of Shakespeare's play is set on the streets of Rome or Antium, this production staged scenes in the open space of the hanger floor, around working and hulked vehicles in the space, and in and around derelict caravans depicting interior spaces. Audiences could also experience the performance through live video projected on large screens over the performance space, and musical scoring and dialogue reproduction delivered through headphones issued to every audience member. Audiences could participate in the scenes at close proximity, or watch the video as if the scenes were mediated by live news coverage. In his review, Michael Billington described the effect of the performance staged within the crowds of its audience: "It's the immediacy of the events that grabs you. As the senator Menenius tries to reason with the starving citizens, they start to rock the campervan on which he is precariously perched" (Billington, "Coriolan/us – review").

Common Wealth Theatre Company
Bristol, England, UK

Common Wealth Theatre Company creates ensemble-devised sited theatre focusing on contemporary political and social issues. It combines new and verbatim writing, movement, electronic sound and composition, and visual and installation art to create its immersive events. Common Wealth strives to engage their audiences in a performance experience that leaves a lasting impression by inviting participants to take agency and/or respond to their emotions in the moment. Founded in Bristol in 2008, Common Wealth has rapidly built a national reputation for hard-hitting evocative work. The company views its work "as a way of bringing people together and making change feel possible" (*Common Wealth Theatre Co.*).

Evie Manning and **Rhiannon White** co-founded and serve as co-directors of Common Wealth Theatre Co. Manning produces and directs Common Wealth's shows. Manning has also worked with Metis Arts, Hope Street Ltd, TATE Liverpool, Tara Arts, The Albany Theatre and Caravan Stage. White researches and co-creates all of Common Wealth's shows, as well as serving as the ensemble's production manager. White has also performed with the Invisible Circus, at Experimentica in Cardiff, and has worked extensively with Circus 2 Palestine, touring both the West Bank and Gaza (*Common Wealth Theatre Co.*; Manning and White, Personal Interview 01 Nov 2011).

The Juniper Tree, adapted and devised by the ensemble, directed by Evie Manning.

Performed 30 Jan – 03 Feb 2008 in Bristol (in a disused former medical facility).

The audience was encouraged to bring an apple, join the community, and wander freely through a de-constructed Grimm fairy tale. Common Wealth built this promenade fantasy as a progressive journey through individual and communal trials and ultimately celebration, featuring art installations, minstrel music, and cider to stimulate the senses (*Common Wealth Theatre Co.*; Manning and White, Personal Interview 01 Nov 2011).

The Ups and Downs of the Town of Brown, adapted and devised by the ensemble, directed by Evie Manning.

Performed in Bristol, 2009 (Bridewell Courtrooms).

A sited musical based theatre performance based on Bertolt Brecht's *The Rise and Fall of the City of Mahogany*, this production satirized the state of contemporary Britain by challenging copyright law, capitalism and consumerism. Common Wealth combined raucous revelry and choreographed provocative songs fomenting the audience's complicity in hedonistic consumption. The company incorporated a live five-piece band, Circus of Invention, two soundscape artists, and filled the various spaces in the site with cardboard set pieces (*Common Wealth Theatre Co.*; Manning and White, Personal Interview 01 Nov 2011).

Our Glass House, adapted and devised by the ensemble, directed by Evie Manning.

Premiered in 2013 in the St. George community of Bristol (disused council estate house), and toured to vacant council estate houses in Lawrence Weston in Bristol, Thorpe Edge in Bradford, Wester Hailes in Edinburgh, and Camden in London, 2012-2013 (*Common Wealth Theatre Co.*).

This production was staged in vacant council estate housing units. The performance text was devised from actual case testimonies of domestic abuse victims.   Audiences were free to roam the house to observe seven simultaneous solo performances. Reviewing the Edinburgh production, Lyn Gardner wrote,

> The audience is given the freedom to wander around the house in a way that many who experience abuse cannot. Even so, the space feels tiny with so many of us crammed in, like the prison it is for its inhabitants, who are caught in lives and relationships from which escape seems impossible. Shattering. (Gardiner, "Our Glass House")

Hydrocracker Theatre Company
Brighton, England, UK

Hydrocracker creates new theatre in non-traditional performance spaces that unlocks the power of its performance texts and provides audiences with visceral experiences. The company claims a political motive for its work, stating on its website: "We want to change people's minds. We want more for our audiences than to sit in the dark and watch" (*Hydrocracker*).

Ellie Jones is a freelance director noted for critically acclaimed theatre-based and sited theatre productions. For Hydrocracker she directed *The New World Order*, both at the Brighton Festival (2007 & 2011) and in London's Shoreditch Town Hall for the Barbican BITE Season (2011). Other sited production include *As You Like It* at the Arundel Festival and *A Christmas Carol* which was performed under the railway arches at Southwark Playhouse. Jones served as Artistic Director for Southwark Playhouse from 2007-2010 (*Ellie Jones – Director*).

The New World Order, by Harold Pinter, directed by Ellie Jones.

Premiered at the Brighton Festival in May 2007, restaged for Brighton Festival in May 2011 (Brighton Town Hall). Transferred to London for Barbican BITE Season, November-December 2011 (Shoreditch Town Hall).

This production merged five of Harold Pinter's short political plays: *One For The Road*, *The New World Order*, *Precisely*, *Mountain Language*, and *Press Conference*. For 75 minutes audiences promenaded through public and private spaces of historic government buildings (Brighton Town Hall, or Shoreditch Town Hall) and experienced a haunting inside look at a government ministry. Hydrocracker's *The New World Order* resonated contemporary political relevance and evoked suspicion about Great Britain's role in the rendition and torture of international terrorist suspects (*The New World Order*).

ZU.UK (formerly Zecora Ura)
East London, England, UK, and Rio de Janeiro, Brazil

Formerly known as Zecora Ura and Para Active, ZU-UK is a company dedicated to creating immersive and participative theatre events that are evocative, unforgettable, and innovative. Jorge Lopes Ramos and Persis Jade Maravala founded the company in 2001 based in London, however, throughout, they have maintained a satellite base for the company in Brazil. The company builds its events collaboratively, creating urban rituals that unite performers and audience participants in transformative experiences (*ZU-UK*).

Jorge Lopez Ramos and Persis Jade Maravala are the founders and joint artistic directors of ZU-UK.   Ramos serves as a Lecturer in Theatre Studies at the University of East London. His doctoral research investigates the "dramaturgy of participation," or the "unspoken contract between the audience and the actor" in contemporary immersive theatre events (*Profile Ramos*).

Hotel Medea, devised by Persis Jade Maravala and the ensemble, directed by Jorge Lopes Ramos.

Premiered at the Arcola Theatre, 2009, and performed at the Trinity Buoy Wharf as part of the LIFT Festival 2010, at the Summerhall as part of the Edinburgh Festival Fringe 2011, and London's Hayward Gallery in Summer 2012. *Hotel Medea* was also performed in Rio de Janeiro as part of the TEMPO Festival, and in Brasila at the Caixa Cultural Centre *(ZU-UK).*

Hotel Medea explores the myth of Medea through a participative theatrical experience lasting from midnight to dawn. Through the course of the evening, performers and audience participants jointly enact the ceremonies and rituals of the Medea story through three acts: Zero Hour Market, Drylands, and Feast of Dawn.

Pachamama Productions
Glasgow, Scotland, UK

Cora Bissett only recently started directing for the theatre, having enjoyed a noted and award-winning career as an actor in theatre, television and film. It was her work as an actor in site-specific work, and as an assistant director to Grid Iron's Ben Harrison, that led her to develop *Road Kill* as a sited theatre event. In 2009, Bissett founded Pachamama Productions, a Glasgow-based theatre company creating new collaborative works.

Road Kill, written and directed by Cora Bissett.

Premiered in Glasgow, 2010, and transferred to Edinburgh Festival Fringe, 2010, where it won numerous awards including the Amnesty Award for Freedom of Expression. Performed in London, as part of the Barbican Centre's BITE Season 2011, and a U.S. tour in 2013 to Chicago and New York (*Cora Bissett*)

Road Kill is a sited theatre production exposing the tragedies of sex trafficking and inspired by the true story of a young African woman trafficked to Scotland (*Road Kill*).

Red Earth
Brighton, England, UK

Red Earth is an international environmental arts collective that creates site-specific sculptural installations and performances in landscapes in order to highlight cultural and environmental heritage and nurture understanding. Founded in 1998 by Caitlin Easterby and Simon Pascoe, Red Earth has produced in Europe, Java, Japan and Mongolia. Their projects explore humankind's complex relationships with the landscape (ecological, geological, archeological, and cultural) and the issues and affects of climate change. The performances Easterby and Pascoe research, design, construct and produce immerse audiences in the landscape, and engage their participation in the performance. Red Earth's performances and installations nurture inter-cultural exchange, collaboration, increased awareness. Performances and installations are sensitive to their sites, and utilize locally-sourced materials (*Red Earth*; Easterby and Pascoe).

Caitlin Easterby and **Simon Pascoe** are co-directors of Red Earth. Easterby is a visual artist working in temporary sculpture installations. Pascoe is a musician, visual artist, director and performer (Pascoe and Easterby).

> ***CHALK***, created by Simon Pascoe, Caitlin Easterby and the ensemble.

A two-part site-specific performance in 2011, in two locations of the South Downs National Park: Harting Down (Chichester) and Wolstonbury Hill (Brighton).

CHALK created performance rituals enacted by both performers and audience participants that explored the myths and possible usages of prehistoric landscape. The performance was built around greenwood sculptural installations in the landscape, and incorporated Japanese butoh, live sounds from pre-historic instruments (horns, whistles, drums, bells), a Mongolian singer, and fire (*CHALK*).

For a detailed account of my experience of this production in Brighton on 08 October 2011 see page 5.

David Leddy is a playwright, director, educator and the founder and artistic director of Fire Exit, a theatre company based in Glasgow, Scotland. Leddy founded Fire Exit in 2002 and writes and directs all the company's shows. These award-winning works have been produced all over the world and include *Long Live The Little Knife*, an absurd thriller about forgery; *Sursurrus*, a self-guided audio tour around a botanic garden; and *City of the Blind*, a online political thriller, among others.

> **Sub Rosa**, written and directed by David Leddy.

Premiered in Glasgow, at the Citizen's Theatre , 19-31 January 2009. Performed at the Edinburgh Festival Fringe, at the Hill Street Theatre, 5-30 August 2010.

Sub Rosa was originally written for a promenade through the production and other disused spaces in the 100-year old Citizens Theatre building in Glasgow. This macabre, Victorian thriller tells the comic tale of chorus girl murdered while the show played on in the music hall overhead (*David Leddy/Fire Exit*).

Felix Mortimer has always been fascinated with installation art and theatre performance. After university, Mortimer served an artistic internship with Punchdrunk, after which he began creating his own immersive theatrical events, founding 19;29 and RETZ with various collaborators. In 2012, Mortimer and Joshua Nawras founded RIFT, a sited theatre company that "tells stories without boundaries" and creates worlds for its audience to explore without the limitations of "platform, space or time" (Mortimer, "Personal Email"). As RIFT, Mortimer and Nawras have directed, designed and produced:
O Brave New World (2012) in a storefront in East London, *The Trial* (2013) in various locations across East London, and an overnight production of Shakespeare's *Macbeth* (2014) in a vacant residential tower in East London (*RIFT*). RIFT has also been awarded residencies with the Barbican Centre, the V&A and the LIFT festival, and taught students at Guildhall School of Music and Drama (Mortimer, Personal Email).

Mark Fisher is an Edinburgh-based theatre critic, author, editor and freelance journalist. Fisher is the Scottish theatre critic for *The Guardian*, and *Variety*. He formerly served as the editor of *The List* magazine, and has contributed to numerous other news media and websites. Fisher has written about Scottish theatre since the 1980s, is the editor and manager of theatreSCOTLAND.com, and is the author of *The Edinburgh Fringe Survival Guide* (2012) (*Mark Fisher*).

Chris Hunn is a passionate theatregoer and patron residing in London. She developed her love for attending and performing theatre while a student at Cambridge University. Hunn has attended the Edinburgh Festival Fringe for the past 25 years, has attended every Grid Iron Theatre Company production, and serves on its Board of Directors. Currently, Hunn works for Beanstalk, a charity that helps children to develop a passion for books and stories (Hunn, Personal Email).