UNIVERSITY OF CALGARY

Optative Theatre:

A Critical Theory for Challenging Oppression and Spectacle

by

Donovan King

A THESIS SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES

IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE

DEGREE OF MASTER OF FINE ARTS (THEATRE STUDIES)

DEPARTMENT OF DRAMA

CALGARY, ALBERTA

NOVEMBER, 2004

APPROVAL

UNIVERSITY OF CALGARY

FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES

The undersigned certify that they have read, and recommend to the Faculty of Graduate Studies for acceptance, a thesis entitled "Optative Theatre: A Critical Theory for Challenging Oppression and Spectacle" submitted by Donovan King in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Fine Arts (Theatre Studies).

_____
Supervisor, Barry Yzereef, Dept. of Drama

_____
Gavin Semple, Dept. of Drama

_____
External Examiner, Mary Polito, Dept. of English

Date Approved: _Dec. 17/04_____

Abstract

The goal of this thesis is to develop a powerful new socio-theatrical paradigm for the 21st Century: the optative theatre. Exploring the state of oppression in the new millennium, the shortcomings of standard theatrical paradigms, and explosions in critical discourse and new technology, this thesis proposes that a new activist and user-based theatre is both necessary and desirable in order to overcome the dragooning of theatre, society, and humankind. Drawing primarily from the fields of Cultural and Theatre Studies, especially as they relate to Cultural Resistance and Global Justice, the Situationist notion of Spectacle is examined as an oppressive force that quagmires and devastates the whole of humanity. Critical thinking is provoked regarding human behaviour and dramatic performance on the world stage, and concepts of revolutionary theatre and theatrical revolution are examined in depth as they relate to Spectacle and the liberation of humanity.

Based on the concept of *counter-hegemonic playing*, the highly activist optative theatre is portable, user-friendly, and free. Designed to inspire critical reflection and humanist transformation, optative theatre proposes that by adopting an anti-oppressive foundation to human identity, it is possible to employ theatre activism to challenge oppression in all its forms - by meta-theatrically playing the provocateur, and hence by living in action. With the ability to create instant virtual realities, optative theatre provides both a tool for critical reflection and a theatrical strategy for challenging oppression on personal, cultural, and structural levels of society. Furthermore, as a viral form of theatre, it has the potential to spread rapidly.

<u>Acknowledgements</u>

Table of Contents

List of Figures

<u>Introduction</u>

We believe this text will help avoid any future confusion.
If our activities seem feverish, it is because we feel the urgent need for solidarity with others.
And in that regard, our success has been explosive.
Yesterday we were alone and irresolute.
Today a group exists, with deep and courageous ramifications, some of them already spreading beyond our borders.
We must share the glorious responsibility of conserving the precious treasure we are heir to. It too is part of a long historical tradition.
Our relationship to its artefacts must be constantly renewed, challenged, called into question. This is an impalpable, demanding relationship which requires the vital forces of action.
The treasure I speak of is the poetic stock, the emotional fountain of youth from which future centuries will drink. It can only be transmitted if it is TRANSFORMED. Otherwise, it is distorted.
Let those moved by the spirit of this adventure join us.
Within a foreseeable future, men will cast off their useless chains. They will realize their full, individual potential according to the unpredictable, necessary order of spontaneity - in splendid anarchy.
Until then, we will not rest or falter. Hand in hand with others thirsting for a better life, no matter how long it takes, regardless of support or persecution, we will joyfully respond to a savage need for liberation.

- Paul-Émile Borduas, Refus Global, Québec, 1948

In the 21st Century, the theatre has exploded into a maelstrom of forms, styles, contents, and processes, and taking note is Mark Fortier, who recently summarized the most prominent theatrical theories in his book <u>Theory/Theatre</u>. Noting the difficulties of blending theatre and theory in a business and art-field that is somewhat resistant to change, he challenges the reader to take the time to reflect on what theatrical theorists have been doing for a long time: attempting to challenge both the theatrical and societal *status quo*. He concludes at the end of his book:

> But we still don't know what happens next. Have we come to a temporary end of theory or exhaustion of theory, analogous to the 'end of history' that has come with the global triumph of capitalism? Is it time for theory to settle down for a while? Have we seen the last of any big new movements? Perhaps, but it is just as likely that something new and unexpected is already on its way. If so, I leave you to make your own introductions. (148)

Not surprisingly, Fortier concedes that capitalism has triumphed, which has prompted me to urgently write my own introductions. I contend that the time is ripe to create new theatrical theories that beg to differ. Surrendering to capitalism is the equivalent of dooming humanity to endless oppression and inequality, and the dawn of the new millennium has signified an extension of consumer-capitalism into almost every aspect of our lives, resulting in increased alienation, depoliticisation, and oppression. This problem was identified in the 1960s by revolutionary Guy Debord, who defined society as a "Spectacle", so-called because it is designed to immobilize people by centering their attention on something outside of themselves, much like spectators observing actors in the theatre. For Debord, the Spectacle was a way of describing how modern life reduced individuals to a state of passivity in which they lost all sense of full human potential. It was a metaphor for the way in which the forces of state, capital, and media denied the individual control or participation in daily life, effectively casting them as spectators to their own lives. Given that present social conditions – the rise of the consumer society, the development of a homogenised global culture – actively work against creative expression and the possibility of individual freedom, the central question Debord asked was how could a liberating transformation of humanity be brought about? By defining present day society as a Spectacle of "unrealism," and by advocating the construction of "Situations" as a form of cultural resistance, Debord initiated a *détournement* (an overturning of, or subversion) of the consumer-capitalist structure as a whole, hence challenging the ontology of social reality (Hussey, 2002). Debord's theories have been gaining currency of late, especially in activist circles, but there has been little examination from within theatrical circles, which seems unusual given that theatricality is a central component of any spectacle.

The Classical and Renaissance concept of *theatrum mundi*, or that of "all the world's a stage," appears to be re-emerging as a powerful influence in global politics and cultural resistance, and it is my contention that a critical (socio-theatrical) theory is needed to examine dynamics of how theatre and society relate to one another, and how this relationship can be re-engineered with a view of challenging Spectacle and oppression. Theatre can be used as a tool to liberate perceptions, and I propose that we must create a theatre that is both activist and user-based, and contend that through personal theatre activism and the construction of controversial "socio-theatrical situations," the Spectacle can potentially be *détourned* on a global scale. However, the theatre is in need of a rigorous re-engineering if it ever hopes to accomplish these goals, because at the moment its potential influence has not been fully realized, let alone unleashed. Despite the fact that theatre offers entirely new ways of seeing, being, and playing, it is rarely afforded any influence or credit when compared to "the real world," or "reality". This view is misguided, because if the society is a Spectacle, then we, comprising that society, must also comprise the theatrical players and the spectators. By studying this societal concept in a dramaturgical manner, central questions arise as to who is writing the script, who is doing the casting, and in whose interest is the Spectacle being "produced"? I argue throughout this thesis that human beings, far from being liberated, are unwittingly and unknowingly being cast (by default) into the Spectacle to serve the interests of late capitalist society, and propose that theatre can be employed to undo this unfortunate situation.

In this late capitalist society, the line has been drawn in the sand, and the world is currently witnessing a power-struggle of unprecedented proportions. Not surprisingly, Marshall McLuhan predicted that World War III was going to be a media war: a guerrilla information war fought not in the sky or on the streets, but in newspapers and magazines, on the radio, on TV and in cyberspace. It is a dirty, no-holds-barred propaganda war of competing worldviews and alternative visions of the future (Lasn, 1999).

On one side are the dominant factions that wield enormous power and resources, such as corporations and governments, who are pressing for dominant worldview consistent with neoliberal and corporate principles. By fostering globalization based on oppressive capitalist principles, their thinking is consistent with claims made by American political theorist Francis Fukuyama. His controversial book, <u>The End of History and the Last Man </u>(1992), posited that history had ended with Western liberal democracy's triumph over communism (and, by implication, Marxism), hence ushering a new era where ideological conflict vanishes because "the ideal of liberal democracy could not be improved upon" (xii,xi). Employing mass culture as a hegemonic tool, this worldview strives to maintain a cultural hegemony that indoctrinates people as depoliticized consumer-capitalists. This faction reinforces (and is reinforced by) the Spectacle.

On the other side is the Global Justice movement, which sees human liberation and the end of oppression as its ultimate goal. With rapid advances in technology, an unprecedented growth in interconnectedness, critical thinking, alternative discourses, and activist practice has occurred. The Global Justice movement recognizes the importance of challenging individual political perceptions, and in fostering a movement of human liberation and solidarity, encourages people to activize themselves. Seeking a sustainable future whereby all humans are equal and free from oppression, the movement is comprised of a chaotic mish-mash of people and groups with no obvious hierarchy, strategy, or leader. United in dissatisfaction, they are activists, including people from all walks of life, who are developing and implementing strategies to bring about this seemingly impossible goal. In direct opposition to the Spectacle's message and *modus operandi*, those acting for Global Justice can be said to cast themselves, and write their own scripts. Promoting desire and hope for a better future, Global Justice loudly declares: "Another World is Possible."

Society, it appears, is on the cusp of massive transformation as a result of advanced technology and increased globalization, although it remains to be seen whether new resultant conditions will have an effect of liberating or further oppressing humankind. Social conditions are changing quickly, potentially

leading to the increased possibility of resistance to the Spectacle and the mass culture it employs to dragoon humanity. For the first time in human history, for example, people have the potential to control their own mass media. Using the Internet, organisations such as adbusters are initiating a re-appropriation of the way information is imparted. With the advance of technology people will soon be able to control what information they are exposed to, and the media as we know it, will be dissolved into a near-infinite choice of what one might want to see or be influenced by. To counter the free-information revolution, corporations are becoming bolder to maintain their stranglehold on consumers minds, attitudes, and behaviours, using ontologically disturbing theatrical techniques such as reality advertising, identity branding, and stealth marketing. It is an exciting and frightening time for everyone, because unless the powers-that-be find a way to maintain media control, the social fabric as we know it will be irrevocably altered. People will soon be able to choose better alternatives to the neoliberal worldview, hence shattering its cultural hegemony. Technological advances have been instrumental in the growth of the Global Justice movement, and according to McLuhan Program Director Derrick de Kerckhove, computer principles (including interactivity, hypertextuality, and connectedness) are leading towards connected intelligence, increased human sensibility, and ultimately a new psychology (de Kerckhove, 1997). The idea of a new emergent psychology is also consistent with advances in critical thinking; disciplines such as Marxism, feminism, post-colonialism, deconstruction, queer theory and postmodernism have challenged the oppressive social reality associated with modernism, which is itself an extension of the "Enlightenment" project. All of these movements also challenge modernism's tendency to marginalize, silence, and oppress voices of the "other", voices which are perceived as threatening oppressive dominant worldviews and agendas. In these challenges, the critical discourses reject oppression and aim towards human choice over destiny. Furthermore, it appears that all of these movements, disciplines, and discourses are in the process of converging under one common umbrella: Global Justice.

While the theatre is still not seen as a major force in this unprecedented "guerrilla information war", those within the Global Justice movement would be wise to consider theatre as an essential tool in the struggle. At its most basic level theatre involves the playing of a character (or role), and it is easy to see that the Spectacle is, in fact, based on this very principle. Despite the insidiousness of its project, the Spectacle employs theatre regularly, and does so with devastating impact. I deconstruct these hidden dynamics, re-examine the role of theatre in society, and recommend that people reclaim their tools for dramatic expression as a first step in fighting for human freedom.

Furthermore, it is my belief that conditions now exist that are fertile for Revolutionary Theatre, and perhaps even Theatrical Revolution. Paradoxically, these concepts seem to defy logic; how can a fictional form like "theatre" be revolutionary, and how can a drastic event like "revolution" be driven by theatricality? The two concepts are sometimes difficult to describe (let alone pinpoint), but within them a potential exists to shake the foundations of global politics and social reality through theatrical anti-oppressive discourse and practice. The Revolutionary Theatre, having existed as long as human beings have communicated, can be seen as a myriad of anti-oppressive theatrical practices deployed against authoritarian targets and situations – the goal being to encourage reflection on the oppressive system, often through amusement and irreverence. Closely associated with folly, festival, masquerade, carnival and social justice, trends have fluctuated over the centuries in terms of strategies employed by the players and the effectiveness of their actions. We have only to hark back to the Feast of Fools, in which the roles between lord and peasant were reversed for a period of twelve days, or the days when entire cities erupted into Saturnalian festival, and wonder what happened to them. Unfortunately, ever since the so-called "Enlightenment" began attempting to plot discourse and social reality along the lines of "Reason", the theatre's role in society has been compartmentalized, and hence neutralized of its encompassing transformative powers. The theatre activist has been marginalized, and one might say banned from the stage in favour of the Spectacle.

However, being optimistic about the new social conditions, I forecast that a lively re-entrance is almost certainly on the horizon. Drawing upon traditional folly, but appearing in today's disenchanted post-modern society, the concept of the Fool is being resurrected - and played! I envision that a colourful cast of theatricians, fools, tricksters, culture jammers, street activists, performance artists, entartistes, satirists, mavericks, cultural resistance scholars, ballot-eaters, street reclaimers, raging grannies, radical cheerleaders, media activists, Global Justice demonstrators, and the disillusioned, will one-day gather and concoct a revolutionary theatre scheme like no other before. No longer satisfied with the occasional cameo appearance in the mass culture, these magnificent characters are becoming keenly aware that, with the dramatic passing of the millennium, conditions are coming into existence that may well allow them to hijack the Spectacle *en masse*, and *détourne* it once and for all. *Theatrical Revolution*.

This thesis is divided into twelve chapters of varying lengths, which can be read chronologically or as separate units. Each chapter is self-contained and explores one specific dramatic theme, but also inter-relates with the others and builds upon previous arguments and observations.

Chapter 1 deals with the idea of a critical theory of society and theatre, or a **critical (socio-theatrical) theory**. Grounded solidly in the tradition of critical thinking, I propose re-engineering the relationship between theatre and society. Chapter 2 explores the Situationist concept of **The Spectacle** and how it insidiously affects our lives, while Chapter 3 places **"Theatre" in the Spectacle**, and examines how the Spectacle neuters, co-opts, and compartmentalizes theatre. Standard paradigms such as traditional, progressive and applied theatre are explored (for their strengths as well as their weaknesses), and placed into a 21st century context; a genealogy will be traced from Artistotle to the present, contextualizing each type of theatre in regards to human liberation.

Chapter 4 looks more closely at Boal's progressive theatrical theories, specifically the idea of **Invisible Theatre**, and questions emerge that are intent on forwarding Boal's notion of a theatrical "rehearsal for revolution." Chapter 5 focuses on the topic of **Spectacle & Oppression**, highlighting the ways in which

these two forces operate in collusion. By analyzing oppression in detail, it is isolated and deconstructed. In view of developing an anti-oppressive practice, oppression is presented as a dangerous hegemonic construct, a disease within humankind that replicates virally and causes devastation. Concepts that reinforce oppression, such as cultural imperialism, monoculture, and cultural hegemony are examined, and components of cultural communication such as memes and mediums are explored. Oppression is examined as something that is hegemonically devastating the mental environment. In Chapter 6 the idea of **Clandestine Theatre** emerges as an exposé on how the Spectacle uses theatre more effectively than theatre artists. Highlighting unscrupulous corporate techniques such as stealth marketing and identity branding, questions emerge in regards to how "casting" actually works in the Spectacle. In Chapter 7 counter-hegemonic strategies of resistance are highlighted, suggesting that the Global Justice movement is mounting a **Counter-Spectacle** or sorts. By looking at liberating discourses (eg: Queer Theory, post-modernism, post-colonialism) and activist techniques (eg: meme-warfare), I argue that this optimistic movement, as it continues to develop anti-oppressive discourses and practices, is growing rapidly. In Chapter 8 the stormy state of the theatre is explored, and the Artaudian idea of **Theatrical Revolution** is examined as a misunderstood paradigm that has the great potential of permanently sweeping away oppression.

Chapter 9 explores the concept of **Revolutionary Theatre**. I assert that the goal of any revolutionary theatre project is to theatrically challenge hegemonic thought patterns and oppressive systems, with their *détournement* being the main objective. I also argue that *counter-hegemonic playing* is necessary to truly disrupt Spectacle, and trace revolutionary theatre developments throughout history, including ancient traditions such as that of the Fool; twentieth century contributions including Dada, Surrealism, Futurism, Lettrism, and Situationist theory; and most recently, Culture-jamming and Reflectionism.

Chapter 10, the **Revolutionary Theatre Cookbook** is an examination of theatrical resistance techniques, including the most recent developments: role-

appropriation, masquerade, invisible theatre, Viral Theatre (eg: traditional and spontaneous), Sousveillance Theatre, Electronic Disturbance Theater, Ontological Shock, Reclaim the Streets, and Carnival Against Capitalism, to name a few. Chapter 11 deals exclusively with a new paradigm for 21st Century performance activism – **Optative Theatre**. Examining issues raised in previous chapters, I theorize that an "optative theory of theatre" is necessary, effectively placing theatre into a new and more powerful user-based context. The Optative Theatrical Laboratories, the meta-physical theatrical paradigm Peter Pelletier and I created at the beginning of the new millennium, is presented as new model in theatre activism. The chapter describes our mandate, *modus operandi*, and provides practical and theoretical frameworks for creating interconnected revolutionary theatre projects. By carefully examining and studying the chapter, anyone can learn how to open up their own Optative Theatrical Laboratories, and join others in theatrically challenging hegemonic thinking and oppressive systems. Chapter 12 highlights and examines **Field Work** carried out at the Optative Theatrical Laboratories. A chronological list of projects appears, followed by detailed analysis on the following five OTL projects: 1) **CAR STORIES** (Montréal, Québec); 2) **Buy Nothing Day meta-play #6** (Montréal); 3) **The Lysistrata Project** (International); 4) **Circle-Jerked: a corporate critic critique** (Montréal)*;* and *5)* the **infringement festival** (Montréal and Toronto). Cross-referencing the projects with the planning and framework guidelines set up in Chapters 10 and 11, they are deconstructed and analysed for effectiveness.

To conclude, in addition to being an exploration of the philosophies and techniques of revolutionary theatre, this thesis is also a call to action for nothing less than theatrical revolution. Activists and theatre artists alike can benefit from such a text, expanding their understanding on the theatrical arts and how these are being critically employed in the 21st Century. It is my hope, that if inspired, the reader might try theatricalizing their activism or activizing their theatre. This text can be used as a recipe book for theatrical actions, as a reference for better understanding the connections between theatre and activism, and can even be employed as a dramatic text (or a "play", if you will.) As both a thesis and treatise

on revolutionary theatre and theatrical revolution, I have taken the liberty to write in a somewhat dramatic and theatrical manner. I invite you, the reader, to take the liberty to dramatize your reading, and treat the text theatrically. You may have noticed that attached on a cord to the *spine* of this thesis is a pair of coloured glasses (if they are missing, it is advisable to get a pair before proceeding). While there will be more on the use and metaphorical importance of these "optative glasses" in Chapter 11, the basic concept is that when wearing them you are allowed to perceive the world theatrically and play any role you want. A mask of sorts, not unlike a clown nose or sock puppet, liberties are granted in both playing a role and hence seeing reality. With the optative glasses firmly on, the reader is free to explore the text dramatically, read it aloud, treat quotes as characters, react theatrically, write dramatic responses, break it into units, use it as a prop, stage it. You are encouraged to *play*.

Chapter 1

Critical (socio-theatrical) theory

I propose that we need a critical (socio-theatrical) theory. Just what exactly this is, and why we need it, are the topics of exploration in this chapter. However, before elaborating on these questions it is important to note that *theory* itself offers no guarantee of being effective; indeed it appears that *theory* is generally viewed with a certain degree of disdain, resistance, skepticism, or confusion. Unfortunately, theory is often viewed as abstract, esoteric, discombobulating, and academic. *Practice* is generally regarded as common-sensical, applicable to the "real world", and hence many people go about their daily routines ignorant of the vast possibilities theory can provide us to challenge the way we see ourselves, and transform the world we inhabit. Theory is usually hidden, invisibly driving our behaviour, and yet we use theories in everyday life, unaware that we are doing so. Critical (social) theorist Bob Mullaly, provides the following example: "If we see dark clouds and tell ourselves it is going to rain, we have expressed a theory about the relationship between dark clouds and rain. Without such a theory we would often get wet when we saw clouds and did not prepare for rain because we would have no conclusion that it would rain" (2002: 1). Theory, then, is employed within our personal lives and our practices every time a decision is made. It is my contention that when we do look at the theories driving our thinking and behaviour, we can find new ways of being, seeing, and playing.

I am indebted to the University of Calgary's Department of Drama, whose Contemporary Drama class provoked me to take a deep interest in reading and writing theory. Studying issues of deconstruction, feminism, post-colonialism, semiotics, queer theory, postmodernism, and so forth, led me to reconsider my own hegemonic assumptions and worldview. These theories gave me new ways of looking at culture, politics, theatre, society, and indeed reality itself; they deeply inspire the theory I now write. What most of the theories had in common

for me was a calculated rejection of oppressive paradigms, a gearing towards dismantling them, followed up by the creation and implementation of new systems. What united all of these theories for me was a rejection of oppression, in whatever form it happened to appear. Here were critical thinkers who eagerly wanted to find ways to overcome patriarchy, colonization, capitalism, homophobia, and other oppressive norms and worldviews. They wanted to challenge dominant discourses, histories, Canons, thinking-patterns, and ways of seeing reality. Further investigation revealed that many of the theories we had studied in-class fall into a larger body known as "critical theory", of which Karl Marx is arguably the founder. Critical theory is not a singular or unified body of thought; it is a theory cluster. According to Douglas Kellner the job of the critical theorist is to provide criticisms and alternatives to traditional or mainstream theory. Critical theory is motivated by an interest in those who are oppressed, is informed by a critique of domination, and is driven by a goal of liberation (Kellner, 1989). It concerns itself with moving from a society characterized by exploitation, inequality, and oppression to one that is emancipatory and free from domination. Stephen Leonard defines critical theory in the following way:

> A critical theory of society is defined as a theory having practical intent. As its name suggests, it is critical of existing social and political institutions and practices, but the criticisms it levels are not intended to show how present society is unjust, only to leave everything as it is. A critical theory of society is understood by its advocates as playing a crucial role in changing society. In this, the link between social theory and political practice is perhaps the defining characteristic of critical theory, for a critical theory without a practical dimension would be bankrupt on its own terms. (1990: 3)

Agger (1998: 15) possibly sums it up best when he says that critical theory "conceives human liberation as the highest purpose of intellectual activity".

That being said, there is also an area within critical theory known as the "conflict perspective". Rejecting the order perspective notion that society is harmonious and consensual, the conflict perspective attributes social problems to social structures. These structures are viewed as facilitating an illusion created by the dominant group in society to lead the less powerful into accepting an

unequal social order. Instead of believing that social problems normally originate within the individual, the family, or the subculture, the conflict perspective suggests that these difficulties arise from the exploitative and alienating practices of dominant groups in society. Given societal inequalities structured along lines of class, gender, race, age, and ability/disability, the conflict theorist feels that social problems are more realistically described, analyzed, and explained at the structural level (Reasons and Perdue, 1981). Conflict theorists will always look to public issues (i.e., social institutions and hegemonic ideology) as the source of private troubles. Given that social problems are rooted in social order, they cannot be resolved by technical or administrative reforms, but can only be resolved by a massive reorganization or transformation of the social system, followed by the society as a whole (Mullaly, 2002).

Given that this thesis is well within the conflict perspective of critical theory, it would seem appropriate to now call for a critical (socio-theatrical) theory, if such a thing doesn't exist already. In critical theory a bracket often appears between the two words, signifying the area(s) to be explored and challenged (eg: social, cultural, legal, etc.) One good example that comes to mind is Rosemary Coombe's recent call for a critical (cultural-legal) theory; exploring the medium of struggles around commodified cultural forms, she believes that "…controversies over intellectual properties speak to larger debates in the humanities and social sciences about subject-formations, identity and community, hegemony and alterity, democracy and difference, imagery and embodiment, narrativity and nationality" (8). Using this basis for investigating both cultural and legal discourses, Coombe then "engage(s) and rework(s) debates in cultural anthropology, cultural studies, and political theory" (8). The potential that exists in her venture is both astounding and radical: "law" itself is challenged as merely a cultural entity (and an oppressive one at that!), whereas "culture" is freed from the restraints of the law, challenging legal concepts such as copyright and "intellectual property". Both fields are simultaneously challenged, opening up a space for critical thinking and potential transformation.

A critical (socio-theatrical) theory must then concern itself with the inter-relationship between theatre and society, and the role these two play in either oppressing or liberating humanity. Given massive global inequalities and pervading oppression, it is clear that our late capitalist society is far from the goal of achieving human liberation. The theatre, oft-depicted as reflecting the society, does not necessarily offer any solutions. Indeed, a theatre that merely mimics or mirrors the society without challenging it is a mere reinforcement tool to the hegemony that maintains the oppressive system.

Given the inter-relationship between theatre and society, and the incredible power they both have to influence and challenge the other, a great potential exists for the employment of critical theory to ultimately transform both – away from oppression and towards liberation. From this perspective, a massive transformation of both the social and theatrical systems is necessary in order to reach the goal of human liberation. I am therefore interested in engaging and re-working debates in social, cultural, psychological, and theatrical fields, and like Coombe, highlight struggles to explore the issues – in this case socio-theatrical controversies. When the theatre escapes the holding pen of the traditional stage, controversies often erupt, resulting in radical challenges to various social structures and systems (and hence social reality). For example, if an *entartiste* plops a cream pie into the face of a disliked politician, a crucial question appears: was it an act of theatre or an assault? Typically the *entartiste*, representing the theatrical viewpoint, will claim that the old cream-pie-in-the-face routine was a performative act designed to highlight unscrupulousness, corruption, and lousy politics – it casts the unsuspecting politician into the performance. However, the politician, representing the social viewpoint, will insist that being pied constitutes illegal actions such as assault, vandalism, etc. When cream meets face and socio-theatrical controversy comes into being, an ontological tear appears in the fabric; the reality of the social structure (in this case government) is challenged. Because social reality and theatrical reality are inherently different, what is at claim is reality itself!

Before moving on to the specific dynamics of how a critical (socio-theatrical) theory might operate, it might be best to explore our current society from Debord's (and my own) point of view: the Society of the Spectacle. This notion opens up an academic goldmine in regards to this critical project precisely because Spectacle is indeed an extremely controversial socio-theatrical issue (and social structure), but most people are supposedly too busy watching it to notice.

Chapter 2

The Spectacle

The term "Spectacle" implies some sort of circus or show put on by a few and watched by the masses, who stare dumbfoundedly in amusement and amazement. Generally considered a public performance on a large and lavish scale, it is intended to shock and awe spectators with astonishing and remarkable acts. Magnificent illusion and entertainment unfolds on the stage, which is carefully stage-managed from behind the scenes: this is the performance. Meanwhile the spectators, in the darkness, are physically separated from the performance in their own special observation area: this is the audience. Given that their attention is focussed exclusively to the theatricals on the stage, spectators, while sitting as a collective group, are effectively isolated from one another. In the revolutionary book by CrimethInc. Workers Collective Days of War, Nights of Love it is observed that:

> The curious thing about a spectacle is how it *immobilizes* the spectators: just like the image, it centers their attention…around something outside of themselves. It keeps them occupied without making them active, it keeps them feeling involved without giving them control. (145)

To Guy Debord, the "show" is contemporary society, and we are unwittingly cast as the immobilized spectators. His text The Society of the Spectacle is a great theoretical work on how social reality is negatively influenced by modern-day capital, cultural imperialism, and the role of mediation in social relationships. To Debord: "The entire life of societies in which modern conditions of production prevail announces itself as an immense accumulation of spectacles" (1970: 1). Furthermore, according to the revolutionary theorist:

> The spectacle grasped in its totality is both the result and the project of the existing mode of production. It is not a supplement to the real world, an additional decoration. It is the heart of the

unrealism of the real society. In all its specific forms, as information or propaganda, as advertisement or direct entertainment consumption, the spectacle is the present model of socially dominant life. It is the omnipresent affirmation of the choice *already made* in production and its corollary consumption. The spectacle's form and content are identically the total justification of the existing system's conditions and goals. The spectacle is also the *permanent presence* of this justification, since it occupies the main part of the time lived outside of modern production. (1970: 6)

It is easy to see how inescapable the Spectacle is. Whether we like it or not, we are surrounded by a sea of news, advertising, infotainment, billboards, pop-ups, jingles, telemarketers and images; these elements of the Spectacle, these theatrical representations, attempt to influence our ways of thinking and behaving (our social reality). Lasn, in his study of the Situationist International, describes the concept:

The Situationists spoke often of the "spectacle" of modern life. The term encompassed everything from billboards to art exhibitions to soccer matches to radio to TV. Broadly speaking, it meant modern society's "spectacular" level of commodity consumption and hype. Everything human beings once experienced directly had been turned into a show put on by someone else. Real living had been replaced by prepackaged experience and media-created events. Immediacy was gone. Now there was only "mediacy" – life as mediated through other instruments, life as a media creation. The Situationists used the term "kidnapped": The spectacle had "kidnapped" our real lives, co-opting whatever authenticity we once had. (1999: 101)

This "kidnapping" constrains us and then feeds us constant streams of suggestive theatrical representation, encouraging us to play the spectator to society and to consume. During the hours of production, we are expected to contribute to the overall nature of the Spectacle without ever questioning our role. For example, a telemarketer is indoctrinated with the idea that what they are doing is a "job" rather than, say playing a *character* in the Spectacle.

Collectively, the Spectacle reifies the capitalist view-point that we should be both producing goods and services (eg: working at a job), and then

consuming these things outside of working hours. It doesn't really matter what we produce or consume; as long as we are mesmerized by the various elements of the Spectacle, by default we must accept the capitalist prescription for social reality. Hence the minute a child is born s/he enters an oppressive system designed to automatically depoliticise, by constantly luring humans (even during initial cognitive periods) into its heart of commercialist unrealism.

The origin of the Spectacle is found in an emerging commodity society. As outlined by Debord in <u>The Society of the Spectacle</u>, the industrial revolution must be seen in two stages. The first stage marks the transition from pre-capitalist society, where the commodity has only a marginal economic function, to capitalist society, where it assumes autonomy and begins to dominate social and cultural life. As the transition is made from early into late capitalist society, the commodity eventually assumes "total control". Through the creation of an advanced information/communication network that operates uni-directionally, a new type of human being is created: the consumer.

The Spectacle reflects a refinement of how images and representations relate to the capitalist domination of life. In an idealized "early capitalist" society, there is only wage work that does not directly impinge the "culture" of workers, which may be comprised of family and community. The quantitative increase in the level of marketing results in a qualitative change in the relationship between people and their representations. In most "advanced" conditions, capitalism directly markets to all parts of the wage labourers' culture, effectively eroding and eventually negating community itself. Previously, people created a community-based culture that in the balance belonged to them, even if there were many parts of it created by particular specialists (eg: church, state, ruler). Even those representations that were externally manufactured had to make reference to this community-based culture. Tracing this transformation of social reality through ritual, image, and myth, Coult and Kershaw suggest:

> In tribal societies, it is arguable that 'official' rituals gave an organic coherence to living that was essential to survival. In modern technocratic states, at war within themselves socially and morally,

communal images and myths are highly likely to be empty relics of past organic culture, or state propaganda designed to subdue popular expression and action. (12)

Today, the Spectacle is more and more an area autonomous from the masses, where the most visible representations not only fail to reflect objective reality, but in many cases outright manipulate and lie to the spectator. In this reversal of cultural perception, even self-originated ideas usually have to make reference to this new consumer-culture, or monoculture. For the Situationist, the Spectacle is the sum of all looking, and all representation. In the pre-Spectacular world, lies were balanced by enough of common understanding that they could be unambiguously called lies. In the Spectacle, all apparent authenticity on the level of surface, in this sense, is a false statement about the conditions of today. Hence the world we see today is not the "Real World", but a reified illusion that we are conditioned to observe and accept as "real".

The Spectacle, then, is a capitalism-inspired representation system and social structure that colonizes social relations, and hence transforms social reality. As a whole, thoughts and social behaviour go from being immediate results of authentic relationships to being controlled by the logic of the flow of images. The Spectacle is not the domination of the world by images or any other form of mind-control, but the domination of a social interaction mediated by images; it is a unifying principle of society where it reunites the separate, but reunites them as separate.

At the level of monetary relations, images, or "image-objects" are simultaneously commodities and capital, meaning that potential financial value is attached. Representations found in advertising and marketing have the ability to capture the "mindshare" of the consumer. Martin "Eudoxus" Hlavacek, an Internet scholar for totse.com, describes the concept:

[Mindshare] is the investment of capital (money) placed into educating or informing the consumer (you) of particular products or consumables (stuff you buy). Furthermore 'Mindshare' is the so-called 'stake' the corporations lay claim to, on an individuals thoughts as a result of the investment. In laymen's terms, branding

> a chunk of your brain…These "Mindshared" thoughts manifest themselves externally by influencing the targeted individuals behavioural characteristics..."Mindshare" is not a tangible thing but a culmination of a various number of thoughts, things and concepts. "Mindshare" is the key to a corporation entrenching itself and whatever it might be in the business of selling into the individual and public psyche. It is the advertisement (lock), method of teaching/ informing the public (stock), and finally the establishment of empathy with targeted audience/consumer group (and barrel) that form the core of "Mindshare"**…**The insidiousness of "Mindshare" works on a multitude of levels.

Mindshare, then, is the percentage of people's thinking that is captured by specific products and services. The general idea can also be extended to include the percentage of thought devoted to ideas, situations, and strategies. In the idealized Spectacle 100% of all mindshare is devoted to consumption, and hence people's ideas, situations, and strategies should all revolve around what to buy next, how to earn more, how to improve one's image, etc. As the Spectacle moves forward in time, advertising and marketing invade almost all aspects of human living, effectively subsuming humanity in a monocultural and consumerist social reality: it is a never ending grab at our mindshare, an endless torment of advertising, promotion, media events, marketing, seduction and production of "image-objects" (or representations) as commodities. Furthermore, as commodity moves towards "total control", replacing a previous community-based culture and social reality with a new consumer-based one, it effectively alienates, dehumanizes, and oppresses in the name of financial profit and capitalist worldview.

Kalle Lasn summarizes the issue in his book <u>Culture Jam</u>:

> Brands, products, fashions, celebrities, entertainments – the spectacles that surround the production of culture – *are* our culture now. Our role is mostly to listen and watch – and then, based on what we have heard and seen, to buy...We are being manipulated in a most insidious way. Our emotions, personalities and core values are under seige from media and cultural forces too complex to decode. A continuous product message has woven itself into the fabric of our existence...*We ourselves have been branded.* The

human spirit of prideful contrariness and fierce independence has
been oddly tamed. (xiii)

It is a frightening notion that people's minds have been colonised by a corporate agenda, and that core values are under siege from forces "too complex to decode". The end result, according to Debord, is a reified human psychology consisting of both alienation and the passive acceptance of domination. Lasn further identifies the problem, referring to the phenomenon as the pollution of the mental environment:

…consumer capitalism – the society of spectacle - …cannibalises
your spirit over time, it puts you to work as an obedient "slave
component" of the system without your ever even knowing it. (140)

As community transforms into commodity, alienation becomes unconscious. Once a consciously experienced and unwanted misery, it is made "comfortable" and "normal", and is vastly multiplied in consumption. Domination, once essentially coercive and economic in nature, is now primarily ideological and cultural: ideological, as the tangible world and machinery of the Spectacle sets up above itself an inverted unreality of reified thought and images, which are taken as real; and cultural, as the power of this ideological control is disseminated through the cultural apparati of society, especially the media.

The society of the Spectacle thus casts us as spectators. The Situationist notion that the society of the spectacle cannot admit negative forces that are beyond its control (or ability to contain) suggests that failing to accept this casting will result in further alienation and oppression. We *must* accept our role as spectator, or we will ruin the show for everyone else. The Spectacle subsumes all the means and methods power employs, outside of direct force, to relegate potentially political, critical, and creative human beings to the margins of thought and behaviour. It then is depoliticisation *par excellence*, indoctrinating society with a general attitude of non-intervention. Mesmerised by the wide array of "diversions" offered by the spectacular society, from goods and services to entertainment and conveniences, human beings stray far from the most critical task of transforming the world and liberating everyday life.

"Theatre" in the **Spectacle**

Where exactly the "theatre" fits into the Spectacle is the topic that this chapter explores. Over the centuries academics have pondered the nature of theatre, and have theorized as to its role in society; in the "official" Western theatre tradition a genealogy of sorts can be traced. The major discourse I explore encompasses the historical continuum between Aristotle (signifying the traditional theatre), Brecht (progressive theatre), and Boal (applied theatre). I say "official" because these forms of theatre generally capture the most mindshare within the Spectacle matrix, and also because they are the paradigms most often sanctioned by dominant social structures, such as theatres, universities, and governments. What is most notable about the differences between and among the three paradigms is that each one proposes different relationships (on psychological and ontological levels) between theatre and politics, theatre and society, theatre and representation, and theatre and performance. While there certainly is a progression towards the liberation of humanity, the sanctioned process appears to stop dead in its tracks at Boal's "rehearsal for revolution"; stepping beyond it usually signifies a socio-theatrical controversy.

To begin the tracing of this genealogy, the "traditional theatre" is generally considered to be the dominant paradigm in both Western performance and theatre education: the staging of written drama. Derived from Renaissance interpretations of theatrical "recipes" outlined in Aristotle's Poetics, one common description is the "Playwright Model" whereby an author strives to create a "well-made play" which is then produced by "professionals" for a viewing public. It seems when most people in the Western tradition think of "theatre", it is this model that usually comes to mind. Those having attended this theatre as spectator probably had an experience not unlike like the one theatrical theorist Charles Deemer describes very nicely:

> Traditionally, we enter a building called a theater and take a seat that faces a stage. The house lights go down, which is a signal that the play is about to begin. When the stage lights come on, actors on stage begin talking and moving, and in this way present the action of a story. We sit in the dark in seats bolted to the floor-and watch. We soon begin to understand what the play, the story, is about… By the end of the play, we should be able to identify a central story and one or two subplots, which in a traditional, well-crafted play have a relationship to the main story… The action we see on stage is what the play is about. What happens off stage does not concern us as much, if at all. In fact, when too much action of interest occurs out of our focus - off stage - we are disappointed…What the playwright presents to us in traditional theatre is highly personal, an artistic skewing of a story that depends on personal choices: what to emphasize here or understate there. This personal shaping of the material is communicated to us by the linear action we watch on stage as we sit in the dark, passively taking it in. (39-40)

Deemer's description of the spectators' experience and expectations reveals several issues that deserve to be highlighted. Firstly, it is important to note that the material is communicated in a uni-linear manner, not unlike television or radio. Secondly, the story is crafted by a playwright; not only then is there a definite source of the spectacle, but it is all rooted in the imagination of a solitary artist – it is their personal "artistic skewing of a story." Finally, the ideal spectator watches the stage in the dark, passively taking it all in; all attention is focussed on absorbing the author's tale. Indeed, Susan Bennett, who analyses the role of the audience in theatre from a number of recent theoretical perspectives (semiotics, post-structuralism and reader response), concludes that the spectator in the traditional theatre enters into a 'social contract,' agreeing to be passive in their behaviour but open, eager and active in their acceptance of decoding the theatrical signs presented to them (91). This 'social contract' is invisibly enforced through the social structure that is the traditional theatre. Focused directly on the action of the play, the spectator is not concerned with what is happening behind the scenes, even becoming "disappointed" when the theatrical illusion is disrupted by events off-stage. Furthermore, according to theatrical theorist Dan

Zellner, the spectator "enters into the reality of the play and accepts the given circumstances of the performance or shuts it off and is bored" (21).

Zellner describes the representation seen by the spectator during the performance as the "theatrical field." In the traditional theatre this field appears much like a three-dimensional television screen, or imaginary "fourth wall", which the spectators observe, voyeuristically. What is most clear is the separation between stage and audience; the stage, usually occupying a different level of height, effectively fortifies itself as a reified "no-go" area for the spectator. The proscenium arch, like a gigantic picture-frame, is the clear boundary; and it can usually be sealed with curtains and firewalls. Needless to say, crossing into the theatrical field and onto the stage is not allowed; the spectator may watch the spectacle, but not play in it. Their "theatrical contract" is simple: the spectator may not play any roles, but must sit patiently and watch, dragooned in their position.

Taking a peek on the other side of the traditional theatre proscenium divide reveals a very different reality. Behind the scenes, off-stage and far beyond are a number of artists who are involved in creating the performance that the audience will come to perceive. In essence, these artists are what Zellner calls "designers" - they literally "design" the theatrical field:

> The Playwright designs the space, sound, movement (to varying degrees), smell, and sight. The playwright lays down the blueprint for the space or the field. The Director interprets the playwright's plans and applies them to the space. The director creates the space, chooses the actors to create the action and to interact in the space. The director guides the action of the space and, depending on the company's budget, may even design and take part in building the physical space and choosing and/ or defining the actors' costumes. The Technical Designers, in collaboration with or in line with the director's interpretation, create the physical space. They create the visual and aural space and even perhaps the smell of the space! …The Actors are the operators in this field. They execute the actions in this place. The actors interpret the character design of the playwright and, in collaboration with the director and designers, create the action of the character. (21)

The "designers" also follow rigid social contracts regarding their responsibilities. Those role-playing (actors) might be considered to have "socio-theatrical contracts" that govern their place in the rehearsal process and within the theatrical field. It is noteworthy that only the actors may play characters, and usually some sort of director decides who plays what, and then proceeds to mould actors into the desired theatrical shape during the rehearsal process.

This spectacle is based on the ancient musings of Aristotle, which are examined in some detail to provide a standard recipe for the creation of traditional theatre. Aristotle's Poetics is largely devoted to drama, in particular to tragedy, providing both a history of the development of poetry and drama, and a critical framework for evaluating tragic drama. The Poetics is the first systematic essay in literary theory in the West, full of insight, it shows a high degree of flexibility in the application of its general rules. Like many of Aristotle's other attempts to systematize knowledge about an area, this framework has had a strong influence up to the present day, and was particularly influential during the Renaissance and the early modern European periods, where it was reified as being prescriptive for any theatre of worth. The most notable thing about Aristotle's view of the poetical process is that he sees it as an 'imitation' (*mimesis*) of real situations, rather than invention. However, since it is a mental abstraction derived from many single instances, it is "truer" than any individual situation, because it is more "universal", more general. Aristotle felt that imitation and the desire to order (or pattern) things are part of human nature and are both enjoyable and necessary for learning. Furthermore, pleasure can be derived from learning something, from the recognition of something familiar depicted, or from the novelty of the imitation of something one has not had the opportunity to see. According to Aristotle drama is also the "highest", or most important, of all the art forms. Aristotle also stressed the need for a work to be "unified": the plot should be unified, effectively portraying one extended action that is set up, develops, and comes to a climactic conclusion (followed by a denouement). It should not develop in a tediously predictable fashion, but should have twists, turns and surprises that will keep the viewers' interest and arouse the desired emotional

effect on the spectators: *catharsis*. According to Aristotle the purpose of drama is to arouse in the audience feelings of pity and fear, and to then purge these emotions (*catharsis*), thereby making people stronger emotionally. While he does not develop this theory at any great length (it occurs in only a few lines of the Poetics), it has had formidable influence on Western dramatic representation over the centuries. Aristotle's dramatic "recipe" continues to be the dominant model used to produce most theatre and other artistic forms involving storytelling (eg: film, television, the novel).

Aristotle also suggests that there are six constitutive components of a play, which he ranked in order of importance. The first is "plot", which Aristotle defines as "the arrangement of the incidents", followed by "character", which includes all qualities we associate with individuals represented in the play. The third component, "thought", is more elusive, but it seems to indicate the processes of reasoning that lead characters to behave as they do. Next come "diction" and "song". Diction refers to the metrical composition of the spoken lines, and song refers to the vocal compositions incorporated into the performance. The final element of "spectacle" includes the costuming of the actors, the scenery, and all other aspects that contribute to the visual experience of the play (51). These six elements can be organized, as Aristotle shows, under the major categories of object, medium, and mode:

Object	Medium	Mode
Plot	Diction	Spectacle
Character	Song	
Thought		

Using the "recipe" of Artistotle it is possible to put together endless dramatic stories, and if done well, to capture the undivided attention of spectators. What is most important about this overall theatrical structure is that it takes for granted that the spectators will be immobilized to take it all in, hopefully being fully immersed in the illusory story and swept away with emotional

catharsis. This formula, we are told, has served as the reified foundation for most Western theatre for over two millennia now.

The traditional theatre system described as such begs several questions about the entire theatrical process; especially regarding the hierarchy. Who writes the story? In whose interest is it produced? How are the "designers" selected? What is their process? Who oversees them? Why is this "theatrical field" coming into existence?

Generally speaking, the "designers" of the traditional theatre are all specialists in their craft, who each have a responsibility within the theatrical process. This status-based system labels them by job description, defining what they have to do if they are to be accepted as spectacle-creators. Whether they be "producers", "actors", "directors", "stage hands", "playwrights", "critics", or anyone else with a job in the traditional theatre, they must be willing to follow the social contract set out. In following an autocratic structure that is both highly competitive and quagmired in hierarchy, they must serve the theatrical spectacle as but one component. Theatrical contracts are reserved for actors, and the roles they play (and their arrangement within the theatrical field) are dictated from above. Nobody, it seems, is employing the theatre with any sort of liberty.

I also contend that the traditional theatre is based on the principles of capitalism – the strongest, most powerful, most enduring, most clever, and most manipulative will "succeed." One amusing example appears in How to be a Working Actor, where Mari Lyn Henry and Lynne Rogers prescribe a good dose of "common sense" to potential "actors" in their Introduction:

> You are approaching that singular community of theatre-TV-films which…is known as The Business. It is a world of bright lights and frenzy…The Business happens to be a very accepting community. There is always room, at least on the outskirts, for a newcomer – someone who responds to the brightness and the energy and the lure of personal satisfaction. It is the devoted ones who establish permanent residence in this community and who, eventually, make their way toward the centers of recognition, money, and power…Jobs, careers, and recognition are what we hope you are after. Then you can try fame and fortune. Are you ready? (16-17)

This guidebook to "fame and fortune" then goes on to describe the amount of rules, regulations, and helpful hints that must be followed in order to accomplish what the Spectacle is itself prescribing: pursuing diversions such as money, fame, power, and the so-called "American dream". In this pursuit, the critical goal of liberating humanity is lost; in creating a mini-spectacle, the "designers" reinforce the society of the Spectacle by providing yet another diversion.

The creation of the traditional theatre is also usually dependent on large sums of money, which often comes in the form of "sponsorship" from other agents of the Spectacle such as corporations and governments. The deadly combination of a reified theatrical process mixed with dubious financiers (who will often not tolerate critical behaviour) makes for a theatre that is itself dragooned. There is not a single "designer" in this type of theatrical process who does not follow a social contract; one that severely limits and compartmentalizes their role in the creation of the theatrical field, and commits them to the telling of a story that is not necessarily theirs. In many ways these "designers" are also meant to obsess with the creation of their designated element of the theatrical production; like a cog in the spectacle-creation machine. With both spectators and "designers" having committed to reified social contracts, both groups are mezmerised by their immediate mini-spectacle at hand. Furthermore, binded by strict theatrical contacts, "actors" can be said to *doppelganger* the effect of the Spectacle; they step outside of themselves to embrace and embody theatrical illusion. With all these contracts, both the "designer" (who can clearly see through the theatrical illusion) and the spectator (who are meant to consume the illusion) are discouraged from seeing through the overall illusion generated by the society of the Spectacle, all of them essentially remaining *de facto* spectators to it.

In many ways the traditional theatre appears to be the perfect microcosm for Debord's theory – it is the literal creation of a spectacle; a mini-spectacle within the society of the Spectacle, if you will. In both cases the spectator is immobilized by a form of political indoctrination whereby, as described by Fortier "an ideological acceptance of the status quo and fear of change is instilled in a passive and oppressed audience…the manipulative ideology of the status quo

means the audience is not allowed to think for itself, and the audience's passive position as spectators it is not allowed to act for itself" (140). Thankfully, there are some differences between traditional theatre and the Spectacle. Firstly, going to the traditional theatre is optional. Secondly, the spectator in the traditional theatre often enjoys an intermission or two where s/he can step out of the theatre, and indeed is encouraged to leave altogether when the show is over. The spectator may exit the dramatic world at any time, which will come to an end usually after one or two hours. Finally, the dramatic convention that creates the illusion is broken at the end with the curtain call, or actors' bow. What is most chilling about the society of the Spectacle is that there is no intermission, and no end – it is a never-ending barrage of diversions, advertisements, and media; a deceitful discourse based in illusion and geared towards consumerist social colonization. It is not optional and its dramatic convention may not be broken or exposed without serious consequences.

Now, all being said about the traditional theatre and how ineffective it is towards the critical goal of human liberation, thankfully there are other theatrical paradigms out there that do not mimic, but rather challenge the Spectacle. Here I am speaking of the progressive and applied theatre, each of them overlapping clusters of paradigms based in particular theoretical foundations. It was only early in the 20th Century that the entire Western theatrical formula was brought into question, with the birth of what I call the "progressive" theatre.

The progressive theatre generally concerns itself with a moving away from the traditional theatre to explore new theatrical relationships not only in form, space, content, and process, but also in the spectator's relationship to the theatre. Sometimes called contemporary, experimental or avant-garde, progressive theatre is similar to the traditional theatre in that it focuses on the presentation of a play. However, the "designers" are much more free to explore the limits of creation and representation, production and reception. The director might replace the playwright as the most important "designer" for example, or perhaps a collective creation might be manufactured by all of the "designers". Social and theatrical contracts are more negotiable. Furthermore, one of its main

goals, according to Bertolt Brecht (arguably the founder of progressive theatre as it is now understood) is to allow the audience to think for itself, effectively breaking free from the illusionist nature of the traditional theatre.

Brecht, poet, playwright, theatrical reformer, and one of the most prominent figures in the 20th-century theatre, has had a widespread and profound effect on both theatre practice and critical theatrical analysis. Disillusioned with the traditional Aristotelian theatre and inspired by Marxist ideology, he declared:

> We need a type of theatre which not only releases the feelings, insights and impulses possible within the particular historical field of human relations in which the action takes place, but employs and encourages those thoughts and feelings which help transform the field itself. (190)

Believing that theatre should appeal not to the spectator's feelings but to his/her reason, Brecht's "epic theatre" aimed, above all else, to change the conventional modes of production and reception. While still providing entertainment, it should be strongly didactic and capable of provoking social change. In the traditional theatre of illusion, he argued, the spectator tended to identify with the characters on stage and become emotionally involved with them, rather than being stirred to think about his/her own life. Susan Bennett, a scholar of spectatorship, believes:

> Brecht's work…consolidated a developing theatre practice self-consciously concerned with production and reception. Performance, hitherto almost hermetically sealed, demanding of the audience only the role of receiver, became essentially a co-operative venture. Thus a role of activity was established for audiences and their centrality to dramatic process acknowledged. This not only encouraged what Althusser calls 'the production of a new spectator, and actor who starts where the performance ends' (1969: 151), but questioned the dominant (or "natural") model of stage-audience communication. (30)

Invoking a new theatre designed to provoke social change by attempting to re-activate stage-audience exchange, Brecht believed:

> The theatre has to become geared into reality if it is to be in a position to turn out effective representations of reality, and to be allowed to do so. But this makes it simpler for theatre to edge as close as possible to the apparatus of education and mass communication. For although we cannot bother it with the raw material of knowledge in all its variety, which would stop it from being enjoyable, it is still free to find enjoyment in teaching and enquiring. It constructs its workable representations of society, which are then in a position to influence society, wholly and entirely as a game. (186)

Brecht's strategy involved a radical departure from the traditional theatre, indeed a critical re-engineering of the theatrical event was initiated, and the "epic theatre" was born. Here Brecht highlights 'certain changes of emphasis as between the dramatic and the epic theatre' (37):

DRAMATIC THEATRE	EPIC THEATRE
Plot	Narrative
implicates the spectator in a stage situation	turns the spectator into an observer
wears down his capacity for action	arouses his capacity for action
provides him with sensations	forces him to take decisions
Experience	picture of the world
the spectator is involved in something	he is made to face something
Suggestion	Argument
instinctive feelings are preserved	brought to the point of recognition
the spectator is in the thick of it, shares the experience	the spectator stands outside, studies
the human being is taken for granted	the human being is the object of the enquiry
he is unalterable	he is alterable and able to alter

eyes on the finish	eyes on the course
One scene makes another	each scene for itself
Growth	Montage
linear development	in curves
evolutionary determinism	Jumps
man as a fixed point	man as a process
thought determines being	social being determines thought
Feeling	Reason

Brecht envisaged the epic theatre as a place for discussion. The audience is presented with a topic of social or political relevance and an opinion or message on the said topic. The epic stage provides its audience with questions, possible solutions and actively encourages them to think, determine and take action. Walter Benjamin describes the process:

> A double object is provided for the audience's interest. First, the events shown on stage, these must be of such a kind that they may, at certain decisive points, be checked by the audience against its own experience. Second, the production; this must be transparent as to its artistic armature. (1973: 15-16)

To facilitate the audience's perception of the "double object", Brecht developed the *Verfremdungseffekt* ("alienation/distancing/defamiliarizing effect"); the use of anti-illusive techniques to remind the spectators that they are in a theatre watching an enactment of reality, instead being absorbed in the presented theatrical reality. The term refers to the use of various devices to make things appear in a new light, so we consider them with intellectual objectivity, robbed of their conventional outward appearance. When something is presented in an unusual or surprising manner and we see it afresh, a *Verfremdungseffekt* has been achieved; it is the effect that makes things seem strange, different, or de-

familiar. According to Brecht, it is effective because "a representation that alienates is one which allows us to recognize its subject, but at the same time makes it seem unfamiliar" (192). The purpose of the Brechtian effect, according to Jameson, is:

> …a political one in the most thoroughgoing sense of the word; it is, as Brecht insisted over and over, to make you aware that the objects and institutions you thought to be natural were really only historical: the result of change, they themselves henceforth become in their turn changeable. (1972: 58)

Such techniques included flooding the stage with harsh white light, leaving the stage lamps in full view of the audience, making use of minimal props and "indicative" scenery, intentionally interrupting the action at key junctures with songs in order to drive home an important point or message, and projecting explanatory captions onto a screen or employing placards. Brecht felt that:

> Not everything depends on the actor, even though nothing may be done without taking him into account. The "story" is set out, brought forward and shown by the theatre as a whole, by actors, stage designers, mask-makers, costumiers, composers and choreographers. They unite their various arts for the joint operation, without of course sacrificing their independence in the process. [...] Just as the composer wins back his freedom by no longer having to create atmosphere so that the audience may be helped to lose itself unreservedly in the events on stage, so also the stage designer gets considerable freedom as he no longer has to give the illusion of a room or locality when he is building his sets. It is enough for him to give hints, though these must make statements of greater historical or social interest than does the real setting. (202-3)

In Brecht's didactic (deliberately opposed to the process of catharsis that has marked traditional theatre since Aristotle), the radical montage of elements works against the Aristotelian goal of "fusion," whether this be understood in terms of the generation of a dominant mood (or atmosphere), or regarding the empathic identification with characters on the stage.

Brecht takes his model of acting from social life, from the 'Street Scene' in which someone demonstrates an event – an accident, for instance, or an assault

– not by becoming the person or action represented, but by demonstrating it objectively from without. From his actors Brecht demanded not realism and identification with the role, but an objective style of playing whereby the actor has a double role on stage as both character and actor/demonstrator:

> In order to produce A-effects the actor has to discard whatever means he has learnt of getting the audience to identify itself with the characters which he plays. Aiming not to put his audience into a trance, he must not go into a trance himself. [...] At no moment must he go so far as to be wholly transformed into the character played. […] He has just to show the character, or rather he has to do more than just get into it. (193)

Brecht also demanded that his actors employ what he called *gestus*: everything an actor does (in terms of gesture, stance, body-language, and intonation) distilled in order to show the significance of a scene. According to John Willett:

> It is at once gesture and gist, attitude and point: one aspect of the relation between two people, studied singly, cut to essentials and physically or verbally expressed. It excludes the psychological, the subconscious, the metaphysical unless they can be conveyed in concrete terms. (173)

Elin Diamond defines the Brechtian *gestus* as "a gesture, a word, an action, a tableau by which, separately or in a series, the social attitudes encoded in the play-text become visible to the spectator" (89). In an ideal situation the individual *gestus* of the actors will infect the spectators, effectively creating a "social gestus", which according to Brecht "allows conclusions to be drawn about social circumstances" (105). Mark Fortier suggests:

> The social *gestus* does not arise from identity, a phenomenological closeness to being and doing; it is a role, one we agree to or are forced to adopt... (24-25)

In many ways the *gestus* can be seen as an eddy formed in reflecting the currents of history at a particular point in space and time, an emergent knot of tension at which the situations of the story collide to reveal specific social forces at work, or unmask the crisis of authority.

Brecht's theatre aimed to break down the socially unquestioning way people watch spectacle. By foregrounding the theatrical process and establishment, stage-audience communication operates in a context that questions not specific artistic or political concerns, but instead those social relations that are generally accepted as universal or natural. Brecht calls the audience's attention to theatre as a cultural institution, an apparatus of the society in which it exists. Social contracts must therefore be re-negotiated; rejecting the role of passive voyeur, the spectator is challenged to become active in the creation of political meaning. Brecht's epic theatre was able to allow the audience to think and judge for itself, with its continual admonitions to the audience to find its own solutions and effects to distance them from incapacitating emotional pitfalls. Above all, Brecht's work makes manifest the productive role of theatre audiences and positions that role ideologically.

The influence of Brecht has been enormous on theatrical discourse and practice. Critical theatre artists have moved beyond the conventional apparatuses of iconic performance, dramatic mimesis, linear narrative, and traditional stage conventions such as the proscenium stage, maintaining the fourth wall and darkening the audience-occupied area, to re-present theatre as social *gestus*. While it is beyond the scope of this work to explore in any great detail the vastly diverse progressive theatres that have been born out of Brecht's ideas, it is sufficient to say that many performance approaches to fields of critical thinking such as feminism, post-colonialism, queer theory, and cultural studies are indebted to Brecht's theories. His work has illuminated the fact that despite the potentially coercive and obfuscatory powers of theatre, dramatic performance also contains possibilities for foregrounding the process of representation, unveiling the ideological workings behind theatrical illusion and demystifying representation. Indeed, Jill Dolan notes that Brecht's influence has allowed us to shift our theatrical concern "from looking into the mirror for an "accurate" representation to questioning the nature of the mirror itself and its ability to reflect what is increasingly seen as an unstable, non-unified self" (3).

If the progressive theatre's goal is allow the audience to think for itself, then the goal of applied theatre is to encourage the spectators to get out of the traditional theatrical relationship, and to employ theatre as an interactive tool for education and social justice. They are to act, quite literally, for themselves in an empowering theatrical setting. Sometimes called sociodrama or non-scripted theatre, applied theatre encompasses Drama Therapy, Psychodrama, Grass Roots Theatre, Theatre of the Oppressed, Workplace Role Training, Playback Theatre, Drama in Education, and Theatre in Development. According to the *Applied and Interactive Theatre Guide*, an Internet resource: "Theatre professionals throughout the world are working to bring their skills as change agents, as awareness builders, and as empathy masters to the personal and social needs of a world hungry for connection."

Internet scholar Joel Plotkin makes a convincing argument that Applied Theatre is usually related to one or more of the following spheres: Therapy, Politics, Education, and Spirituality. In *Applied Theatre: a Journey by Joel Plotkin* the author confesses that he was drawn to various applied theatre projects for several reasons:

> …first, a Brechtian attitude that theater is a tool to make a better world by helping people look at their communities; second, dissatisfaction with commercial, academic, and even most avant-garde production; third, a personal need for spiritual, moral, and ethical purpose in focusing my limited vision and energy.

Plotkin, who sampled and analyzed many different applied theatre projects for his study, surmises:

> These efforts represent a minor, but vital, trend. Not a new trend, certainly - applied theater forms in which some clear purpose overshadowed the entertainment function appear throughout Western theater history. This study seems especially timely not only because of the burgeoning of this work, but also because of widespread attention to the new media of information transfer. Theater as a non-technological form definitely has increasing importance as a metaphor and contrast to information technologies. Predictions of full involvement "participatory" forms in virtual reality hold some interest to theater folk.

Plotkin appears to be on the right track – with applied theatre poised to throw off the theatrical shackles of Aristotle, and move beyond the stage/spectator relationship that Brecht's work did not consider, a vigorous re-examination of theatre is currently in process. Plotkin is also wise in noting that there is a strong connection between theatre and computer technology, an important topic that will be taken up later.

While it is beyond the scope of this thesis to examine in great detail all of the forms of applied theatre, one person I have chosen to focus on is Brazilian theatre practitioner and cultural worker Augusto Boal, who developed the Theatre of the Oppressed (TO) during the 1950s and 1960s. Fortier, ruminating on the limitations set out by progressive theatre, suggests that:

> Boal's project takes the next step and seeks to find ways of allowing the audience not only to think but also to act for itself, thereby turning theatre from an ideological state into a '*rehearsal for revolution*'. (140-141)

In an effort to transform theatre from the "monologue" of traditional performance into a "dialogue" between audience and stage, Boal experiments with many kinds of interactive theatre. His explorations are based on the assumption that dialogue is the common, healthy dynamic between all humans, that all human beings desire and are capable of dialogue, and that when a dialogue becomes a monologue, oppression ensues. Theatre then becomes an extraordinary tool for transforming monologue into dialogue. Boal has consistently created and evolved various forms of theatre workshops and interactive performances that aim to meet the theatrical needs of all people – for interaction, dialogue, critical thinking, action and transformation. While the performance paradigms of Boal's Forum Theatre, Image Theatre, Cop-In-The-Head and the vast array of Rainbow of Desire techniques are designed to bring the audience into active relationship with the performed event, the workshops are virtually a training ground for action in life. According to Boal:

> The Theatre of the Oppressed is a system of physical exercises, is a system of physical exercises, aesthetic games, image techniques, and special improvisations whose goal is to safeguard, develop and reshape this human vocation, by turning the practice of theatre into an effective tool for the comprehension of social and personal problems and the search for their solutions….all of the techniques have something to do with the rainbow of desire: all try to assist the analysis of its colours, with a view to combining them in other desired proportions, configurations, and frameworks. (1995: 13-14)

Resulting from Boal's revolutionary re-engineering of the theatre is the extremely important concept of the Spect-Actor: the theatrical fusion of both actor and spectator. According to Boal, "all human beings are Actors (they act!) and Spectators (they observe!). They are Spect-Actors." He continues that:

> The theatrical language is the most essential human language. Everything actors do, we do throughout our lives, always and everywhere. Actors talk, move, dress to suit the setting, express ideas, reveal passions – just as we all do in our daily lives. The only difference is that actors are conscious that they are using the language of theatre, and are thus better able to turn it to their advantage, whereas the woman and man on the street do not know that they are speaking theatre…(1992: xxx)

Prior to his experimentation, and following tradition, audiences were invited to discuss a play at the end of the performance. In so doing, according to Boal, they remained viewers and "reactors" to the action before them. In the 1960's Boal developed a process whereby audience members could stop a performance and propose different actions for the actors, who would then carry out the audience suggestions. In one now-legendary development, a woman in the audience was once so outraged the actor could not understand her suggestion that she came onto the stage and showed what she meant. For Boal this was the birth of the Spect-Actor, and his theatre was transformed. He began inviting audience members with suggestions for change onto the stage to demonstrate their ideas. In so doing, he discovered that through theatrical participation the audience members became empowered not only to imagine change, but to actually practice that change, reflect collectively on the suggestion, and thereby become

empowered to generate social action. Theatre became a practical vehicle for grass-roots activism. The Spect-Actor today is the active spectator, the audience member who takes part in the action. Within the Theatre of the Oppressed, there are not supposed to be any inactive/passive spectators. Boal emphasises the potential involvement of even those who do not physically participate, observing that at least they have the choice.

The typical Theatre of the Oppressed workshop comprises three kinds of activity. The first is background information on TO and its various exercises provided by the workshop facilitator (or "difficultator," as Boal prefers to say). Such information begins the workshop, but is also interspersed throughout the games and exercises. Moreover, the group is brought together periodically to discuss responses to games and to ask questions of the various processes.

The second kind of activity is the games. These are invariably highly physical interactions designed to challenge us to truly listen to what we are hearing, feel what we are touching, and see what we are looking at. The "arsenal" of the Theatre of the Oppressed is extensive with more than 200 games and exercises listed in Boal's Games for Actors and Non-Actors alone. Ultimately, these games serve to heighten our senses and demechanize the body, to get us out of habitual behaviour, as a prelude to moving beyond habitual thinking and interacting. Participants become actively engaged with each other, developing trusting relationships, and generally having a very good time. A small theatrical community is created for the duration of the exercises.

The third area of activity involves structured exercises, which are formulated so as to infuse a given structure with genuine content. These activities are designed to highlight a particular area of TO practice such as Image Theatre, Forum Theatre, Rainbow of Desire, Legislative Theatre, etc. Participants are invited not only to imagine new possibilities and solutions, but to actively participate in them, Forum style. It is never didactic to its audience, it involves a process of learning together rather than one-way teaching; it assumes that there is as much likelihood of the audience knowing the answers as the performers. According to Boal translator Adrian Jackson:

Forum Theatre is a theatrical game in which a problem is shown in an unsolved form, to which the audience, again spect-actors, is invited to suggest and enact solutions. The problem is always the symptom of an oppression, and generally involves visible oppressors and a protagonist who is oppressed. In its purest form, both actors and spect-actors will be people who are victims of the oppression under consideration; that is why they are able to offer alternative solutions, because they themselves are personally acquainted with the oppression. After one showing of the scene, which is known as 'the model' (it can be a full-length play), it is shown again slightly speeded up, and follows exactly the same course until a member of the audience shouts 'Stop!', takes the place of the protagonist and tries to defeat the oppressors. The game is a form of contest between spect-actors trying to bring the play to a different end (in which the cycle of oppression is broken) and actors ostensibly making every possible effort to bring it to its original end (in which the oppressed is beaten and the oppressors are triumphant). The proceedings are presided over by a figure called the 'joker' whose function is to ensure the smooth running of the game and teach the audience the rules; however, like all the participants in Forum Theatre, the joker can be replaced if the spect-actors do not think he or she is doing a fair job, and virtually any of the 'rules' of the game can be changed if the audience wants. Many different solutions are enacted in the course of a single forum - the result is a pooling of knowledge, tactics and experience, and at the same time what Boal calls a 'rehearsal for reality' . (1992: xx-xxi)

Throughout this game group problem solving, interactive imagining, physical involvement, and trust combine to create fun and vigorous interpersonal dynamics. As a result, spect-actors learn that they are, if not the source of their difficulties, at least the reason for their maintenance. More importantly, they are clearly the source of their mutual liberations. Boal explains the transformative results:

As for the oppressed, they will be able to practise, to train for action, they will be able to act within the imaginary life of the theatre forum, so that afterwards, catalysed, they can immediately apply this new energy to their real lives, since these oppressed are part of both worlds….The oppressed act as subject in both these worlds. In their fight against the oppression of the imaginary world, they are practising and fortifying themselves in preparation for the future

fight they will undertake against the real oppressions, and not simply against the real images of these oppressions. (1995: 245-247)

Another interesting observation is that Boal strives to diverge from both Artistotle's theatre of emotional involvement and Brecht's intellectual approach by embracing both in the approach of TO process:

The rationalisation of emotion does not take place solely after the emotion has disappeared…it also takes place in the emotion. There is a simultaneity of feeling and thinking. (1992: 47)

In addition to striving for a balance between engaged rationality and emotional involvement, Boal also suggests that the Theatre of the Oppressed is located precisely on the frontier between fiction and reality. If the show starts in fiction, its objective is to cross the border and become integrated into reality, into life. Overall then, Boal operates on ontological boundaries.

Driving both his theory and practice are his encounters with the oppressive world, and desire to liberate that world by using the theatre as a tool for action. The theatre thus becomes, as Boal states, a "rehearsal for revolution". The Spect-Actors, having theatrically explored oppressive situations and possible tactics and strategies to overcome them, are then encouraged to take action in the "real" world. Whether that action is concrete and within the realms of societal norms and cultural hegemony (eg: it is acceptable *behaviour*), whether it is theatrical, or whether it is both, is an urgent matter for exploration for the revolutionary project that is this thesis. While there is certainly not very much discussion on this topic as of yet, it is unfortunate that most TO sessions generally conclude with Forum Theatre. There is actually a fourth and final area of activity according to Boal; the Invisible Theatre (see Chapter 4). Something of an anomaly within the TO matrix, Invisible Theatre moves beyond the rehearsal for revolution, and becomes a revolutionary theatre practice in itself. Here the Spect-Actors, having rehearsed, move out of the Forum-setting and into the "real world", where they perform invisibly (meaning that nobody observing is aware that theatre is taking place). Indeed in Boal's own writings the Invisible Theatre

is not covered in any great depth, nor is it clearly placed within the TO matrix. It took a personal meeting with the Brazilian theatrician to clarify the matter – the Invisible Theatre is the component that follows all others, the last theatrical step in the TO process. Unfortunately there seems to be some confusion or apprehension among Boal enthusiasts, and Invisible Theatre is not applied very often, meaning many TO workshops conclude in the Forum (rehearsal) stage.

Boal's theatre, and indeed all applied theatre radically challenge the dragooned structure of the traditional theatre, and move beyond the limitations set up by the Progressive Theatre (namely the immobilization of the spectator). Overall, the impact of Boal's theatre is impressive compared to the other two:

> …the theatrical rituals are abolished, only the theatre exists, without its old, worn-out patterns. The theatrical energy is completely liberated, and the impact produced by this free theatre is much more powerful and longer lasting. (1985: 141)

The same can be argued for quite a lot of applied theatre. Because theatrical conventions (and socio-theatrical contracts) are negotiable, especially in regards to the actor-spectator relationship, there is an enormous amount of freedom to explore and experiment dramatically within different group settings and paradigms. While applied theatre groups all have their own techniques, rules, strategies, and boundaries, the common denominator for them all is the employment of theatre for social, educational, and therapeutic needs within specific (often oppressed) communities.

As I mentioned earlier, each of the three abovementioned "official" paradigms attempt to provoke the human psychology in regards to re-positioning the theatre's relationship: with politics, society, representation, performance, and reality. All these spheres are directly related to everyday life, and hence crucial in the formation of human interpretations, and imperative to the formulation of social and theatrical realities. I will briefly cover these terms, as they relate to the theatre participant's experience. "Representation" refers to that which is represented, such as a play on the stage being the representation of a story. In all forms of theatre representation is employed. "Society" involves thinking

critically about the world we live in. "Politics" is meant to suggest the arousal of the human decision-making process; does the theatre encourage its participants to think critically about society? Does it further the idea that the personal is political, encouraging concrete activism? "Performance" refers to the active creation and performance of a character, typically reserved for "professional actors" and such. "Social Reality" consists of the general reality outside the theatre building or setting, not the theatrical reality that is created (eg: the illusion on the stage). There is a trajectory across the paradigms whereby the theatre evolves, gaining more influence over the as-defined spheres. As the theatre evolves it branches out in a web-like manner, expanding into areas of potential influence:

Area	Aristotle	Brecht	Boal	(invisible theatre)
Representation	●	●	●	●
Society		●	●	●
Politics		●	●	●
Performance			●	●
Social Reality				●

Figure 1.3 – Linear progression of "official" theatre and its influences.

Traditional theatre is generally the most limited in its scope in terms of influencing the spheres I mentioned, whereas with progressive and applied theatre we can see a gradual encompassing of many, a widening of ontological boundaries. As the spectrum is crossed from Aristotle to Boal, the theatrical settings and time frames open up towards more liberal uses. Furthermore, when the line is crossed between Boal's "rehearsal for revolution" and his revolutionary theatrical practice of Invisible theatre, social reality is also affected.

These charts should provide a brief summary of the different paradigms, including areas of "Setting" (where the theatre is allowed to take place) and "Time Frame" (the duration of the theatre), as a useful tool for comparing them:

Area	Aristotle (Traditional Theatre)
Politics	Apolitical
Society	A diversion within Society
Representation	Play is a fictional representation
Performance	Reserved for actors
Social Reality	Does not affect outside reality
Setting	A theatre
Time Frame	Duration of play

Area	Brecht (Progressive Theatre)
Politics	Political – used to analyse society
Society	Designed to challenge hegemonic thinking
Representation	Representation is exposed
Performance	Reserved for actor/demonstrators
Social Reality	Does not directly affect outside reality
Setting	An "exposed" theatre or unconventional space
Time Frame	Duration of Play

Area	Boal (Applied Theatre)
Politics	Political – re-enforces idea that personal is political
Society	Rehearsal for Revolution – reflection on oppression
Representation	Used as a tool (eg: Image Theatre)
Performance	Those present can participate (as Spect-Actor)
Social Reality	Can affect outside reality (eg: Invisible Theatre)
Setting	Any gathering area
Time frame	Duration of event

Given that each of these paradigms evolved out of different historical times, as a reaction to the previous (limiting) social and theatrical structures, the key question that needs to be asked now is whether or not these theatrical paradigms are having any impact in the society today; how are they faring within the Spectacle? Within today's historical circumstances, the "time of the

Spectacle" as we might well call it, I argue that all three "official" theatrical paradigms thus explored are not furthering the revolutionary project to any large degree. They are all dragooned by the Spectacle, unable to challenge it in its entirety.

Recalling the notion that the Spectacle cannot admit negative forces that are beyond its control or ability to contain, the theatre accepted by the Spectacle must not challenge it in its totality, but rather reinforce its power on one level or another. Ironically, the theatre must be contained by the Spectacle to prevent it from wreaking any theatrical havoc on the ongoing show that is our society. The theatre that is most promoted within the Spectacle today usually fits into the traditional category, commodified as but one more diversion for the spectator to "consume". In the Spectacular mindscape places like "Broadway" and "The West End" are generally considered as the apex of the theatre industry, where the "best" theatre occurs. The wealthy, elite, or those looking for an alternative leisure activity partake with great pleasure. Through the cultural apparati of the Spectacle, such as the media, the theatre is effectively cast as a marginal diversion. Given that theatre cannot be broadcasted in its pure form, and because it plays for what is overall a very small amount of elite spectators who watch the even fewer specialists performing it, the traditional theatre not only makes a minimal impact, but has become extremely marginalized within the Spectacle. Because it is extremely time-consuming and prohibitively expensive to create, because it does not generate massive profits or capture significant amounts of mindshare, the role of the theatre within the society of the Spectacle is generally considered insignificant by the dominant powers. Also, the education system generally teaches that "theatre" equates to the traditional model, focussing on training future spectators to indulge, and in certain cases (eg: theatre programs) to train specialized theatrical "designers" to create it.

In this way, the traditional theatre only accounts for only a tiny, tiny percentage of mediums being employed. Within the Spectacle we are exposed to numerous mediums on a regular basis - television, radio, billboards, newspapers, magazines, the telephone, the internet – but living and breathing traditional

theatre is something people rarely experience. Even the most devoted of theatre-goers must spend far more time immersed in other mediums, and between dramatic viewings are subjected to the Spectacle's barrage. "Theatre" cast-as-such within the Spectacle is marginal and insignificant:
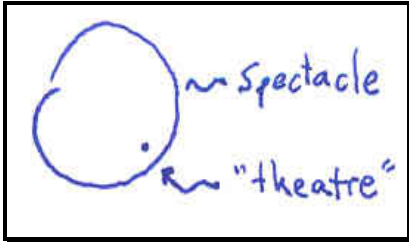
Figure 3.1 – "Theatre" in the Spectacle

Furthermore, in the Spectacle the so-called "theatre" is given very little media coverage; traditional theatre is advertised in the form of marketing and "theatre criticism", progressive theatre is rarely mentioned at all, and applied theatre is almost never discussed. In fact, one usually has to hunt high and low to find any progressive or applied theatre, and when one does find it, it is usually restricted to a specific group (eg: a theatre company, a dramatherapy session, a role-playing workshop, etc.), and therefore closed to the average individual. The sum of all these effects generally reifies the concept of "theatre" as synonymous with traditional theatre paradigm. Were we to magnify the "theatre" in Figure 3.1, I surmise that we might see the following:
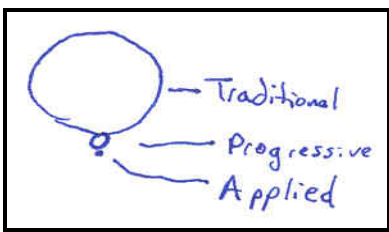
Figure 3.2 – "Theatre" magnified

The insignificance of theatre as a whole within the Spectacle, coupled with traditional theatre's dominant position results in a dragooning combination whereby that the vast majority of people remain disaffected by theatre. In considering theatre as merely a consumable leisure activity, people vastly remain

unaware of its potential uses, benefits, and transformative powers. This is unfortunate, because the traditional theatre is by its nature toothless and immobilizing, a mere reinforcement tool for the Spectacle. However even when the other two paradigms are employed, the overall effect, the overall mindshare captured if you will, is minimal. Perhaps the most important common denominator that dragoons the three "official" paradigms within the Spectacle, besides the limited durations and settings, is this: none of them directly challenges the social reality outside of the theatre setting (with the exception of the rarely-deployed invisible theatre). It is a crucial point, because the unaffected social reality outside of these theatrical settings is in fact the Spectacle. The intersection between the "rehearsal for revolution" and the moment when theatre is deployed into the Spectacle (eg: invisible theatre) is where the socio-theatrical controversy begins; it is at this boundary where the revolutionary theatre project appears.

Chapter 4

Invisible Theatre

There is something absolutely mysterious, magical and paradoxical about the idea of invisible theatre. Invisibility, the quality of not being perceivable by the eye, suggests that despite something being present, it cannot be seen or detected. The theatre, on the other hand, is usually associated with sensual eye-catching visuals, bold gestures, dramatic sounds, and what amounts to an intense atmosphere. Fortier suggests:

> Much happens and many elements are at work on a theatrical stage: bodies, breathing, light, sound, movement, language and the material accidents and minutiae of existence. The range of such elements and their combinations are in many ways specific to theatre as an art form and cultural phenomenon. (17)

Theatre described as such, a vivid theatrical smorgasbord of dramatic events and philosophical revelations on a stage, would appear to be the last thing that could be rendered "invisible". Indeed, if the theatre were to become invisible, would it not defeat its very purpose? Tracing Western "theatre" back its roots of Robert Cohen notes that:

> The word comes from the Greek *theatron*, or "seeing place." It is "a place where something is seen." And the companion term *drama* comes from the Greek *dran*, "to do." It is "something done." Theatre: Something is seen, something is done. (9)

For something that relies on "seeing" for its very existence, the concept of invisibility seems not only incompatible but also negating; how can a "seeing place" not be visible? The paradox of the invisible theatre is that while it is not seen, it causes us to see. The invisible theatre, as the only theatre within the three standard paradigms that can deploy into the Spectacle, offers much hope for this project.

Before elaborating on the specifics of the paradoxical nature of Invisible Theatre, it noteworthy to mention that theatre itself is extremely paradoxical. According to Cohen, unlike the more static arts, theatre presents a number of classic paradoxes:

1. It is unique to the moment, yet it is repeatable.
2. It is spontaneous, yet it is rehearsed.
3. It is participatory, yet it is presented.
4. It is real, yet it is simulated.
5. It is understandable, yet it is obscure.
6. The actors are themselves, yet they are characters.
7. The audience believes, yet it does not believe.
8. The audience is involved, yet it remains apart. (5)

Furthermore, Cohen feels that these paradoxes do not stem from any flaw or weakness in the logic of theatrical construction, but rather from the theatre's essential strength, which "resides in its kinship and concern with the ambiguity and irony of human life – our life" (5). The theatre's power to influence lies in its paradoxical nature.

To Cohen, the theatre is not necessarily something that falls within the standard paradigms mentioned earlier. He suggests that:

> Theatre is the most natural of the arts. There is no culture that has not had a theatre in some form, for theatre, quite simply, is the art of people acting out-and giving witness to their most pressing, most illuminating, and most inspiring concerns. Theatre is at once a showcase and a forum, a medium through which a society's ideas, fashions, moralities, and entertainments can be displayed and its conflicts, dilemmas, and struggles can be debated…And it goes on incessanty in the minds of its authors, its actors, its producers, its designers, and its audiences. For theatre is, above all, a living art form - a *process*, an *event* that is fluid in time, feeling, and experience. It is not simply a matter of "plays," but also of "playing"; and a play is composed not simply of "acts," but also of "acting." As "play" and "act" are both noun and verb, so theatre is both a "thing" and a "happening." It is continually forming, continually present in time. In fact, that very quality of "presentness" (or, in the actor's term, "stage presence") defines great theatrical performance…The theatre is not merely a collection of crafts, a branch of literature, a

collaboration of technique, or even an all-encompassing art form. It is a life. It is people. It is people making art out of themselves. Its full reality transcends by light years anything that could be said or written about it. (viii)

Cohen, while certainly profound, is very broad in his definition of theatre: "a life". Many theatrical theorists have a difficult time describing what exactly the theatre is, and hence many of them offer definitions that encompass everything from theatre buildings to companies of players to political establishments to "theatres" of war. Such a plurality of definitions may lend themselves well to the concept of *theatrum mundi* ("All the World's a Stage"), however they are not necessarily helpful to the task of critical (socio-theatrical) theory. If everything is theatrical, does this not negate the theatre, rendering itself invisible? If everything is theatre, how can it be used as a tool for human liberation and the end of oppression?

In the last chapter I asked what happens following Augusto Boal's "rehearsal for revolution". Following the Theatre of the Oppressed workshop session(s), what are participants meant to do? If a rehearsal for revolution has indeed occurred, when does the revolution takes place; and what form does it take? When the rehearsal is over, is a "performance" of some sort meant to start, and what is the Spect-Actor's role? Presumably there should be revolutionary activity of some sort, although again, the details are vague and there is little guidance. It is ultimately up to the Spect-Actor to take initiatives, such as challenging one's own perceptions, creating dialogue, planning more TO, taking on an oppressive system or situation, or taking to the streets and internet in a revolutionary manner. Whether the actions are meant to be theatrical or "real" is an intriguing question, and one which we will come back to again and again.

Before further explorations, it might be wise to examine Boal's own definition of theatre, which is notably different from Cohen's:

Theatre is born when the human being discovers that it can observe itself; when it discovers that, in this act of seeing, it can see *itself* – see itself *in situ*: see itself seeing.

Observing itself, the human being perceives what it is, discovers what it is not and imagines what it could become. It perceives

where it is, where it is not, and imagines where it could go. A triad comes into being. The observing-I, the I-*in-situ*, and the not-I, that is, the other…Therein resides the essence of theatre: in the human being observing itself. *The human being not only 'makes' theatre: it 'is' theatre.* And some human beings, besides being theatre, also make theatre. We all of us are, some of us also do.

Theatre has nothing to do with buildings or other physical constructions. Theatre – or theatricality – is this capacity, this human property which allows man to observe himself in action, in activity. The self-knowledge thus acquired allows him to be the subject (the one who observes) of another subject (the one who acts.) It can allow him to imagine variations of his action, to study alternatives. Man can see himself in the act of seeing, in the act of acting, the act of feeling. Feel himself feeling, think himself thinking…

An actor, acting, taking action, he has learnt to be his own spectator. The spectator (spect-actor) is not only an object, he is a subject because he can also act on the actor – the spect-actor is the actor, he can guide him, change him. A spect-actor acting on the actor who acts…

Only the human being is tri-dimensional (the I who observes, the I-*in-situ*, and the not-I) because it alone is capable of dichotomy (seeing itself seeing). And as it places itself inside and outside its situation. It needs to symbolise that distance from 'I am' to 'I can be', and from present to future; it needs to symbolise this potential, to create symbols which occupy the space of *what is, but does not exist* concretely, of what is possible and could one day exist…

The being becomes human when it invents theatre.

In the beginning, actor and spectator coexisted in the same person; the point at which they were separated, when some specialized as actors and others as spectators, marks the birth of the theatrical forms we know today. Also born at this time were 'theatres', architectural constructions intended to make sacred this division, this specialization. The profession of 'actor' takes its first bow.

The theatrical profession, which belongs to a few, should not hide the existence and permanence of the theatrical vocation, which belongs to all. Theatre is a vocation for all human beings: it is the true nature of humanity. (1995: 13-14)

To Boal, the theatre is both a way of seeing and a way of imagining – it promotes active self-reflection, followed by anti-oppressive action. Whereas perhaps the typical person might be dragooned in the hegemonic "us vs. them" / "I vs. Not-I" mentality, when Boal's theatre of the I-*in-situ* is tapped into it becomes possible to observe oneself objectively, removed from the heat of the action. It is almost as if a third eye is available to look through; one is free to observe oneself objectively, leaving space to reflect. We must imagine an invisible video camera constantly following and recording us, a device that we can employ to view ourselves at any time. In many ways the theatre in this sense offers us the keys to the reality control room of our own lives. Instead of operating blindly, it becomes possible to operate on a more objective, critical and reflective level, leading us to personal insight and ultimately transformation. We can see the larger picture this way; we can see outside of the "social reality" box.

The theatre as such is "in" us, it is human nature, and therefore is available to those who know about it. Unfortunately not many people have heard of it, and the definition is so broad that it could make itself invisible; if we all *are* the theatre, how can we employ it critically? How can we go beyond the TO matrix? What should we do, and under what guidelines? Boal's definition, while certainly progressive in its scope, is somewhat loose and short on specifics; it raises as many questions as it answers. According to Bernice Fischer "Boal's techniques themselves do not tell us when or how or with whom they best fulfill our political intentions" (191). TO does not necessarily offer a critical (socio-theatrical) theory a solid theatrical foundation to work from, although some extremely promising ideas include: seeing "reality" in a theatrical light, creating spaces through theatre for self-reflection, developing an anti-oppressive practice, and of course the concept of the spect-actor.

The task of assembling a unified theory of theatre appears to be a difficult one. Fortier asks:

> How is theatrical reality best understood? As life, embodiment, sensation, event, representation, meaning, a kind of writing? How does the nature of this reality limit the possibilities of theatre? What are the inescapable laws and fate of theatre? (17-18)

He concludes that "different theoretical perspectives suggest different responses to these questions", and indeed goes on to list a mind-boggling collection of theatrical theories (many of them in the progressive theatre paradigm), several of them critical, but none of them providing a solid and unified base for a critical (socio-theatrical) theory and praxis.

The invisible theatre extolled by Boal, in any case, is not an all-embracing philosophy, but rather a specific theatrical technique. Unfortunately, there is very little written about it (perhaps understandable given its invisible nature). As mentioned previously, Boal's invisible theatre is meant to be employed following the other stages in the rehearsal for revolution; as the last step in the TO matrix, it occupies the space between the rehearsal for revolution and the revolutionary theatre itself. Starting with Boal's own description:

> Invisible theater…consists of the presentation of a scene in an environment other than the theater, before people who are not spectators. The place can be a restaurant, a sidewalk, a market, a train, a line of people, etc. The people who witness the scene are those who are there by chance. During the spectacle, these people must not have the slightest idea that it is a 'spectacle,' for this would make them 'spectators.' The invisible theater calls for the detailed preparation of a skit with a complete text or a simple script; but it is necessary to rehearse the scene sufficiently so that the actors are able to incorporate into their acting and their actions the intervention of the spectators. During the rehearsal it is also necessary to include every imaginable intervention from the spectators; these possibilities will form a kind of optional text. The invisible theatre erupts in a location chosen as a place where the public congregates. All the people who are near become involved in the eruption and the effects of it last long after the skit has ended. …It is always very important that the actors do not reveal themselves to be actors! On this rests the invisible nature of this form of theater. And it is precisely this invisible quality that will make the spectator act freely and fully, as if he were living a real situation - and, after all, it is a real situation! (1998:121-124)

The invisible theatre thus creates an ontologically-challenged space, one whereby people are unknowingly transformed into spect-actors within a given performative situation. The next immediate question concerns the material to be

performed and the venue: what type of scene should be created, where should it be played, and for whom? These questions are not covered at any great length in most of the writings on Invisible theatre, although Boal does suggest that: "The chosen subject must be an issue of burning importance, something known to be a matter of profound and genuine concern for the future spect-actors" (1992: 6). Given the ontological nature of the performance, Boal notes:

> Invisible Theatre almost always comes up against an important problem; safety. Invisible theatre offers scenes of fiction. But without the mitigating effects of conventional theatre, this fiction becomes reality. *Invisible theatre is not realism; it is reality.* (1992: 15)

Having read the little there is regarding invisible theatre, I decided that I needed to know more. With unanswered questions about the whats, wheres, and whys, along with the specific mechanics and processes to create it, I was eager to learn more. Augusto Boal suggests that "invisible theatre fascinates people" (1994: 21), and given my curiosities, I jumped when the opportunity presented itself to meet the man himself.

Boal, arguably the world's most influential living theatrical theorist today, has a busy schedule teaching his arsenal of Theatre of the Oppressed techniques to social and cultural activists across the world. In May 2003, Boal delivered a much-anticipated workshop on Invisible Theatre in New York City, home to the world's worst examples of corporate excess (eg: the recently Disneyfied Times Square). Hosted by the Theatre of the Oppressed Laboratory (TOPLAB) and the Brecht Forum, this workshop is rarely given, the previous one having being cancelled after the 9/11 terror incident. Lasting three days and involving an extremely diverse group comprised of educators, theatre artists, health care workers, and anti-oppression activists, 39 participants came from all over the world to learn the secrets of Boal's technique, and to apply the invisible theatre in a series of direct actions in the heart of NYC on May 26th. Representing the Optative Theatrical Laboratories (see Chapter 11), I was in attendance along with colleague Molly McGiverin. We hoped (in addition to

clarifying some theoretical concepts) to be inspired by Boal, and the charismatic and good-humoured Brazilian theatrician did not disappoint. Augusto took the time to address our concerns about the corporate Stealth Marketing phenomenon (see Chapter 6), explained the goals and mechanics of invisible theatre in intricate detail, and contextualized the technique into the overall Theatre of the Oppressed matrix.

The actual mechanics of the invisible theatre begin with a group who decide on a pressing theme involving an oppression of some sort. The group then brainstorms, and after much workshopping, settles on an open theatrical situation that best highlights the issue. Usually involving the oppression of a silent victim, a pivotal situation emerges, a question of oppression hangs in the air, and the public, encouraged by players, must decide on how to respond. By inspiring people to rally around a question of oppression that demands resolution, a socio-theatrical situation unfolds. Like a reversed invisible information booth, the question is foisted into the air for the public to solve. If it is powerful enough, people will be enticed to join the scene as "spect-actors" – they will not only observe (as spectator) but will also take action (as actor) in terms of trying to deal with the question, oppression, and situation.

The scene is carefully crafted, and everyone involved creates a character to play in the situation. Some roles typically include: The Oppressor, the Silent Victim, bystanders who might side either way, and others who lure people into the *mis-en-scene*. Despite the fact that scenarios are rehearsed as much as possible, the level of improvisation rises sharply as more spect-actors join in the theatrical fray. Security concerns must be addressed beforehand, ensuring the safety of the players. Given that anything can happen in this type of scenario (including arrest!), invisible theatre might well be described as activist "Extreme Theatresports." If the situation does heat up too much in public, players are trained in techniques to cool things down. The "Yes, But" strategy is used to calm over-excited spect-actors by agreeing with them before arguing a point. "Bystanders" can also cool things down by siding in favour of the anti-oppressive side, and even scolding the Oppressor if necessary. The Oppressor can also

"give up" and admit they were wrong. Regardless of the strategies employed, there should always be a careful communication strategy among players, various exit–routes, and an emergency plan in case things get out of control (sometimes it is unavoidably necessary to break role).

In the TOPLAB workshop five groups were formed, each dealing with different issues of oppression (eg: sexism, classism, and racism). Our group, which included several Arab-Americans, rallied around the theme of "Manufacturing Fear." This timely topic was chosen in response to the escalating erosion of civil rights currently being witnessed across the USA. Members of our group who maintained their Arab cultural identity reported sharp increases of incidents involving discrimination, fear, oppression and violence following the so-called American "War on Terror." We concluded that propaganda designed by the US government - Homeland Security, "Code Orange", plastic sheeting and duct tape, instructions in subways to "report all suspicious activity" to the police, etc. - is being used to instill fear and submission into accepting its imperialistic (and racist) agenda. The scene we created was a response to this problem:

INVISIBLE THEATRE #5: "Manufacturing Fear"

Location: Madison Square Park, NYC

Players: 12 (2 TOURISTS, 2 MUSLIM WOMEN, 8 PARK-GOERS)

Action #1
Two REDNECK TOURISTS videotape their visit to Madison Square Park. In a loud and gaudy manner, they draw attention to themselves, filming statues, the Empire State Building, making speeches for friends back home, etc. TOURIST #1, with the video camera, is from some Midwestern state, and expresses concern and fear about potential terrorist danger in NYC: with the "Code Orange" alert, the government has advised people to be vigilant and report "suspicious activity" to the authorities. TOURIST #2, slightly more reasonable and currently living in NYC, attempts to assuage TOURIST #1's fears.

Action #2

Two MUSLIM WOMEN enter, wearing the hijab, and take photos of the Empire State Building. TOURIST #1, alarmed by this sight, begins filming the women with his video camera. TOURIST #1 speculates that the women might be connected to the "War on Terror" and that they might be photographing installations for terrorist groups. He remarks that on the subway there are posters asking citizens to be alert and to report suspicious activity to the police. TOURIST #2 tries to assure #1 that Muslims are common in NYC, and suggests that he might be over-reacting.

Action #3

The MUSLIM WOMEN ask spect-actors (eg: people sitting on a bench) if they are being filmed, and exhibit fear over the situation. Several PARK-GOERS begin generating interest in the situation by either confronting or supporting TOURIST #1, or by speaking with spect-actors about the situation and inviting them to take action.

Action #4

The MUSLIM WOMEN exit the scene. A crowd of PARK-GOERS and spect-actors gathers around the TOURISTS, engaging in a heated debate about the situation. TOURIST #1 insists that he is following government orders for everyone's safety. A PARK-GOER counters the argument, pointing out that it is overt racism. Topics of racism, terror, harassment, surveillance, Homeland Security, and "Code Orange" emerge.

Action #5

The TOURISTS, feeling harassed, exit. Several PARK-GOERS stay on to debate the whole situation. Even after all the players have left, the theatre continues – in the minds (and eventually actions) of those who participated.

Given the "Code Orange" atmosphere of fear permeating New York City (eg: armed soldiers on the street), our group was careful in selecting the location. Ground Zero and the Staten Island Ferry were deemed too dangerous for the Muslim members of our group, so we decided on Madison Square Park. Our

invisible theatre performance heated up very quickly and soon a large angry crowd had gathered around the TOURISTS, many of them demanding that the video cassette be erased or handed over for destruction. The question of oppression raised was whether or not it was acceptable for vigilante U.S. citizens to follow government suggestions to racially profile Muslim people. I am pleased to report that the answer from the public in this case was a resounding NO.

Boal applauded the scene, and suggested that if enough groups of people engaged in invisible theatre on a given day on a given topic, it might be possible to transform the mental environment of an entire city, provoking its citizens into rejecting oppressive submission by becoming politically active. The beauty of the invisible theatre is that with standard theatrical rituals abolished, an amazing socio-theatrical energy is liberated, and "the impact produced by this free theatre is much more powerful and longer lasting" (1985: 141). Those who experienced the invisible theatre that day, both as players and spect-actors, probably still have the theatre burning in their minds from that incident. I know I do. It was one of the best experiences I have ever encountered in education, activism, and theatre.

Invisible theatre is a powerful (and often overlooked) form of activist theatre. Because it entices people into its activist *mis-en-scene*, monocultural settings and their social realities are radically challenged. They are transformed from a place of banality, submissive behaviour, and hegemonic thinking into anti-oppressive zones - heated playgrounds where critical thinking, passionate debate, and direct action come into existence. The goal of the Invisible Theatre is to provoke people to reconsider their assumptions, and it sells people on the idea of challenging oppression by surreptitiously casting them into the roles of themselves. By not following typical theatrical conventions, which tend to limit our experience of the theatre, there is no baggage of expectations in this experience; it is pure. The paradox of the invisible theatre: while it is not seen, it causes us to see – to *really* see. Theatre: something is seen, something is done.

Still, in some cases, there is hesitancy to employ the invisible theatre technique. To some, it is sneaky, deceptive, and therefore unethical, dishonest,

or immoral; challenging the ontology of everyday life in a theatrical manner is deemed unfair. In an interview with Cohen-Cruz, Boal attempts to justify the technique:

> …I want to talk about the problem of morals that comes up every time I use invisible theatre. For instance yesterday, when we did invisible theatre on the Staten Island Ferry, a reporter from The Wall Street journal came along and asked the actors how they felt about duping the spectators. They said it was not a deception; they were doing a play about littering. In the play, two actors were throwing paper on the ground while they were talking. Two other actors protested and said, "You have to pick this up because this is not your living room. New York belongs to me also and to everyone." And the man who was littering said, "I don't care. I'm creating new jobs because some people come to clean." Then other people, non-actors, intervened, and they all went from talking about littering to discussing many of the problems of New York. The reporter asked, "Is it moral to do that?" I believe invisible theatre is moral because first, we never lie - that is, we use incidents that are not only possible but that happen frequently, like littering. In New York we see how dirty the streets are, it is a reality. Second, when we do invisible theatre we are running a risk. It's theatre when we rehearsed it but when we go to the real Staten Island Ferry it is reality. The man who threw the garbage on the floor - he was really throwing garbage on the floor. He takes responsibility for the action. It's a planned action, but it's a real action; it's not fiction any more. (1994: 228-232)

Personally I agree with Boal – there is nothing wrong with doing invisible theatre; the theatricalization of a space normally interpreted as "reality" is a good for challenging perceptions - especially against oppression. Furthermore, that the players accept responsibility for their actions signifies that there is nothing irresponsible about invisible theatre. In fact, it appears to be the responsible thing to do, especially given the Spectacular barrage we must face every day.

Fortunately from a critical (socio-theatrical) theory perspective, the invisible theatre does offer some very powerful insights. It offers us a tool that can disrupt the Spectacle, and rally others into the breach. Returning to our chart, the invisible theatre in its current state deploys anti-oppressive memes directly into the Spectacle, albeit on a limited basis:
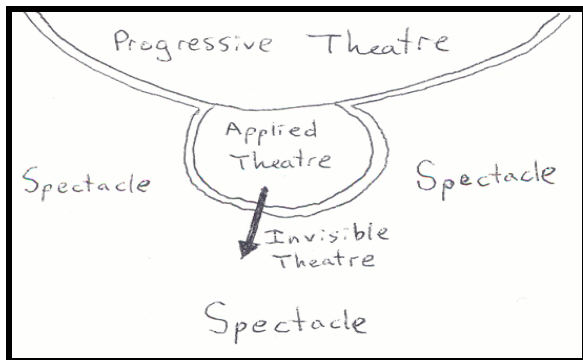
Figure 4.1: Invisible Theatre deploying into Spectacle

Invisible theatre offers us a chance to breach the membrane that contains the theatre within the Spectacle. It gives us a temporary and fleeting "out".

However, questions still linger. The invisible theatre, it seems, comes with certain limitations. Given that the invisible theatre is the last step in the TO matrix, is that to mean that it is the final stage in the revolutionary process? If the theatre ephemerally continues after the event, how does it inspire others to use Invisible Theatre as a tool, given that spect-actors are not even aware of it? Also, given that there aren't really that many TO practitioners in the world, and given that most TO sessions do not reach the invisible theatre stage, how much impact on the Spectacle does this type of theatre have? Following a TO session, where are the tools to set up an entire TO company? And even if TO companies are set up *en masse* and players are convinced to use invisible theatre frequently, what will be the effect? According to Coult & Bradshaw, Welfare State, a company that employs activist theatre techniques:

> ….cannot, of itself, change society, nor could a hundred Welfare States, but it can help to inform the inevitable large changes in society with kinds of feeling often neglected by conventional political art. (1983:12)

Would a hundred TO companies be able to have any more impact? Boal seems to think that if enough invisible theatre takes place on a given day in a given city, it would be possible to radically challenge the mental environment on one given

topic of oppression. It is an experiment I hope to see happen soon, because I am not entirely convinced that this is the best approach.

In summary, the problems I perceive with invisible theatre are as follows:

1) It is highly structured. More than one person is needed, and it is not easy getting people together for this type of theatre. There is a lot of scene construction and rehearsing involved.

2) It is not sustained. It usually only happens once or twice. While having an immediate impact on the Spectacle, its theatrical effect eventually dissipates.

3) It only targets one specific instance of oppression per performance.

4) It does not re-produce itself. There is no official mechanism in the TO matrix to encourage people to continue doing invisible theatre on a regular basis.

5) It is "invisible", meaning that the non-players, or spect-actors, are not aware of the tool that influenced them to reflect and take action. The players are also put at risk (eg: the man playing the litterbug could be given a fine for littering, even though it is only a performance!)

6) It does not attempt to *détourne* the Spectacle in its entirety.

Still, even with these limitations, the invisible theatre does offer a glimpse of what-could-be. It must therefore be our task to find a way to overcome these limitations, and to develop a truly unified theory of theatre that can operate within the Spectacle on a sustained basis and in an uncontained fashion.

Because TO and invisible theatre target oppression, it might be best to study what exactly oppression is and explore how it operates within the Spectacle, before moving on to any more construction of this critical (socio-theatrical) theory.

Spectacle & Oppression

Oppression is a topic of enormous importance in any sort of theatre that employs critical theory and praxis – as was noted with most forms of progressive and applied theatre. Boal's "Theatre of the Oppressed" is perhaps the theatre that has been recognized most in regards to fine-tuning what the goal of theatre in the 21st Century should be – to challenge oppression and liberate humanity from it. But what exactly is oppression and how does it work? What is the relationship between oppression and the Spectacle? Is Boal's theatre effective at combating it? Does more need to be done?

Recalling the first step in the goal of the critical theorist, it is to locate the "source of domination". Mullaly locates this in one word: oppression. Sources of domination are commonly defined in terms of system (capitalism, religion, etc.), nation (eg: USA, Iraq, etc.), or individual (Bush, Bin Laden, etc.) In this way competing dominant groups feel justified in attacking the other, because to them the other (the "not-I"), is seen as the source of domination or oppression. While oppression is generally understood as the domination of subordinate groups in society by a powerful (politically, economically, socially, culturally) group, Mullaly notes difficulties with this definition. Firstly, it suggests a forceful subordination or evil intent on the part of the oppressor, and secondly, it assumes a "fixed identity" on the part of both the oppressors and the oppressed. Mullaly sees oppression not as a static concept, but rather as a dynamic and relational one whereby people are capable of being simultaneously oppressors and oppressed, and in varying degrees of constancy and intensity. Oppression, in his view, is systematic, being produced and reproduced in everyday social practices and processes in ways that serve the dominant group. In other words, this domination is not necessarily a conscious or intentional choice on the part of the dominant group, as few people in society would consider themselves to be oppressors.

Freire (1994) argues that it is more a matter that the dominant group is not aware of any viable alternative social, economic, or political structures that may be antithetical to dominant-subordinate social relations. Members of the dominant group perceive their monopoly on 'having more' not as a privilege that may dehumanize others but as their inalienable right for having taken advantage of the opportunities that exist for everyone (in their view) in society. Within such a view, there is little explanation as to why society operates in ways that privilege males over females, affluent people over poor people, white persons over persons of colour, heterosexual people over homosexual or bisexual people, young adults over children and older adults, Christians over non-Christians, able persons over persons with disabilities, anglophones over non-anglophones, employed people over unemployed people, two-parent families over other forms of families, North (industrialized countries) over South (industrializing countries), Western societies over Eastern societies, liberal democracies over social or socialist democracies, and capitalism over other economic systems. What currently exists is a totalizing culture with inclusions and exclusions. While most people would fall within some of the above categories of the dominant culture, they would also fall outside many of the categories. It is therefore possible to be both oppressor and oppressed (Mullaly, 2002).

While many might argue that oppression is the byproduct of domination, Mullaly argues that oppression also breeds domination, creating a vicious cycle that maintains and reinforces both of these forces. By claiming oppression itself as the ultimate source of domination, subscribers to narrower views are challenged to delve deeper, to look at what role oppression plays in their lives and worldviews, and what role they play in strengthening or challenging oppression. Whether it was the chicken or the egg that came first is a moot point; what is needed from a critical (socio-theatrical) approach is the best possible understanding of oppression and domination in order to deconstruct and analyze their power dynamics.

In Challenging Oppression: A Critical Social Work Approach, Mullaly provides an in-depth look into the topic. Noting that there is no unified theory of

oppression or definitive approach to anti-oppression, he proposes (after much research, probing, and critical analysis) that the best approach to challenge oppression is to foster a "psychology of liberation" among all peoples. Aimed at helping people resist oppressive hegemonic pressures, Mullaly encourages critical thinking to reject current social norms as natural and unchangeable, and to search for anti-oppressive alternatives. By examining the causes and effects of oppression on the personal, cultural, and structural levels, Mullaly proposes measures aimed at destabilizing and eventually toppling the present social order in favour of a new era where no group dominates another within the realized set of social relations. To him, awareness of the oppressive nature and functions of our current social structures is an essential element of anti-oppressive theory and practice, which can be regarded as the first step towards human liberation.

For Mullaly and I, oppression is something that needs to be separated as a concept, and then be studied under the microscope. If it is indeed the source of the world's woes, we need to know what it is, where it came from, how it operates, and how to put a stop to it. Metaphorically speaking, oppression can be seen as a disease, and it is my intention to treat it as such. For our purposes, let us diagnose the disease as "Viral Oppression"; let us think of it as being contagious. Why viral? According to Princeton University's WordNet Dictionary, a virus is defined as an "ultramicroscopic infectious agent that replicates itself only within cells of living hosts; many are pathogenic." This seems like a good definition, given that we cannot actually "see" oppression; rather it is something that works on our behaviour. Another definition, on a more metaphorical level describes a virus as "something that poisons one's soul or mind: the pernicious virus of racism" (The American Heritage Dictionary). By analyzing oppression as a virus capable of replicating in the body of human culture, it then becomes possible to search for a cure.

Far from being a natural part of "human nature", oppression only became firmly established in human societies within the past 10,000 years (Gil, 1998). Given that humankind's history extends back 300,000 years, oppression has only been with us a relatively short time. If we personify humankind into an

"Everyperson" and do some mathematical calculations, it is as though this unfortunate victim contracted the oppression virus at the age of 29. Metaphors will prove useful throughout this thesis - now that we have established a medical condition and patient, we can begin the arduous process of examining the illness in search of a cure.

The beginnings of oppression have been traced: using anthropological, historical, and archaeological sources. Gil (1998) demonstrates that relations of domination, subordination, and exploitation within and among human societies were never (nor are they now) normal, natural, and inevitable. Rather they were (and are) the results of human choices and actions. He attributes the introduction of oppression to the development and spread of agriculture, animal husbandry, and crafts, which gradually generated a stable economic surplus. Zerzan (1999) goes further by suggesting that the inventions of time, number, and specialized language also bear great responsibility in ushering in the era. These new conditions facilitated the emergence of complex divisions of work, social castes, and the spatial and social differentiation of societies into urban and rural areas - all of which set the conditions for oppression and injustice. Gil furthermore creates two categories of oppression for those early societies: the exploitation of strangers (other societies and their people) and the exploitation fellow citizens within society. Using this observation as a base, he concludes that these ancient sources are responsible for contemporary manifestations of oppression such as racism, classism, sexism, ableism, ageism, and heterosexism. With the creation of a society of "haves" and "have-nots", dominant groups have benefited ever since at the expense of oppressed subordinate peoples.

How can we detect it? Oppression is determined when a person is blocked from opportunities to self-development, is excluded from full participation in society, is denied certain rights that the dominant group takes for granted, or is assigned second-class citizenship not because of individual talent, merit, or failure, but because of his or her membership to a particular category or group of people. All forms of oppression are designed to stigmatize subordinates. The

following list suggests that oppression is at work whenever there are instances of:

Exploitation

Marginalization

Powerlessness

Cultural Imperialism

Violence

While many of these are self-evident, the issue of Cultural Imperialism will be examined more closely later in this chapter. Violence, according to Mullaly, includes not just physical attack, but also harassment, ridicule, and intimidation. The oppression of violence lies not only in direct victimization, but also in constant fear that violence may occur solely on the basis of one group's identity.

Oppression occurs in many places, operating constantly on personal, cultural, and structural levels. Each level is integral to the reinforcement of oppression on other levels.

Personal: thoughts, attitudes, and behaviours that depict a negative pre-judgement of a particular subordinate group.

Cultural: values, norms, and shared patterns of seeing, thinking, and acting, along with an assumed consensus about what is right and normal.

Structural: social institutions, laws, policies, social processes and practices, the economic and political systems.

Oppression also manifests itself simultaneously in two ways - overtly (conscious acts of aggression and/or hatred) and covertly (unconscious acts of aversion and avoidance.) It is noteworthy that in some cases an oppressed person can also effectively oppress themselves with attacks on their own identity and person, such as in cases of (overt) bodily mutilation and suicide or (covert) self-deprecation (Mullaly, 2002). Boal calls this *le flic dans la tête* – the metaphorical police officer installed inside our mind, who causes us to second-guess and censor ourselves, effectively preventing us from taking political action.

The overall results of oppression are devastating: in reviewing a series of studies, Moane (1999) found that oppression negatively affects psychological functioning because it leads to a loss of personal identity, a sense of inferiority or low self-esteem, fear, powerlessness, suppression of anger, alienation and isolation, and guilt or ambivalence. The victim's mental environment becomes unsuitable for healthy human functioning, destabilizing identity and positive thoughts of self-worth.

How does oppression sustain itself? How does it spread virally? Oppression appears to be sustained and reproduced through a system of cultural imperialism and cultural hegemony. Before moving onto these concepts, it would be useful to look at the notion of culture itself. Traditionally, culture is often defined as a common set of values and norms, including shared patterns of seeing, thinking, and acting, that a group holds. However, there is no accepted universal definition or unitary notion of culture today. Critical cultural theorists often view culture in a broad and anthropological sense, defining it as any expressive activity that contributes to social learning. They contend that culture refers to language we use, along with the meanings, symbols, and interpretations of social reality. It includes ideologies, religious faiths, and the texts and representations of social communication that we, as a society, produce. Within this view, society is saturated with culture, and, because culture involves social learning, it is inherently political since social learning both communicates and reproduces the social order. By broadening the definition, it becomes possible to begin the process of dismantling oppressive and dragooning notions of culture.

Cultural Imperialism is a form of oppression that comes about when the dominant group universalizes its experience and culture, and then employs these as the norm, or as the "official definition of reality" (Adam, 1978). Through a process of ethnocentrism the dominant group, often without realising it, projects its experience and culture as representative of all humanity. Young (1990: 59) notes, "the dominant cultural products of the society, that is, those most widely disseminated, express the experience, values, goals, and achievements of these [dominant] groups." Social institutions are based on the culture and experiences

of the dominant group, such as the education system, news media, advertising, and the entertainment industry (eg: The Spectacle). These "cultural" agents serve as "conduits of cultural reconstitution, by continually reproducing the language and symbolic universe of a society" (Adam, 1978: 30). This imposed "social reality" enables the maintenance of hierarchical divisions of class, gender, race, age, sexual orientation, and the like by promoting, imposing, and universalizing its own culture while repressing or suppressing other cultures. In other words, the status quo consistently receives favourable treatment and, consequentially, subordinate groups and their efforts to obtain social justice consistently receive negative treatment (Gitlin, 1980).

Members inhabiting a society enveloped by cultural imperialism are then encouraged to accept this official definition of reality, which is continuously reinforced by cultural hegemony. Based on the work of Antonio Gramsci, theatre historian Walter Cohen suggests:

> ... broadly speaking, [cultural hegemony] is domination by consent - [it] nicely captures the structured complex of ruling-class power and popular opposition, specifying both the limits and the possibilities of insurgency from below. (28 - 29)

Cultural hegemony, then, is imposed not through domination by force, but rather by creating and maintaining a "norm" that dictates how people are to behave. Gramsci describes how a "norm" can be created and imposed in his Prison Notebooks, suggesting that hegemonic culture works its way into the "spontaneous philosophy" of a society, with thinking contained by:

> 1. Language itself, which is a totality of determined notions and concepts and not just words grammatically devoid of content;
>
> 2. "Common sense" and "good sense";
>
> 3. Popular religion and, therefore, also the entire system of beliefs, superstitions, opinions, ways of seeing things and of acting, which are collectively bundled together under the name of "folklore". (57 - 58)

When ruling powers manage to dominate meaning within these three elements, a cultural hegemony is created, providing a seemingly "natural" social reality.

While each individual is supposedly free to choose a worldview, with social conditioning resulting from the abovementioned categories, it is easy to see how a social reality can be imposed. For example, a female born into an Islamic fundamentalist community will be expected to conform to the patriarchal *sharia* law, effectively denying her important human rights. While it might be "common sense" in that society for her to wear a hijab and obey her husband, it does necessarily not make for "good sense" when human liberation from oppression is concerned. The end result is an oppressive norm whereby people are manipulated into accepting an oppressive definition of social reality. Playwright Peter Handke describes this condition quite accurately in "Brecht, Play, Theatre, Agitation":

> People whose will is dragooned by social conditions into leaving those social conditions as they have always been, and who are therefore actually unable to will any change - these people 'naturally' don't want it any other way. It's natural that they don't want it any other way! No, it's artificial that they don't want it any other way. The conditions in which these people live are manufactured as a precaution precisely so that they remain unaware of them, and not only are they unable to will any change, they are unable to will anything at all. (89)

Furthermore, far from encouraging critical thinking, dominant group ideology manages to split the sum population of the society under a cultural imperialism into what McConachie calls "historical blocs":

> Behind these attributes of hegemonic culture are dynamic forces that set various "historical blocs" in conflict with one another. These blocs, especially those enmeshed with the ideology of ruling elites, influence subordinate groups and subcultures to accept a worldview that can facilitate the unintended participation of the oppressed in their own victimization. (39 - 40)

When enough blocs cooperate, a new norm is created to serve the interests of the collective blocs known as the ruling power in society. For example, in a U.S.

election campaign two dominant political blocs battle it out for leadership. However, given inequalities in the electoral system, close ties between government and corporations, corporate ownership of the media, and so forth, oppressed people may receive no representation whatsoever, while a neo-conservative agenda is pushed on them negatively affecting their civil rights. They must accept and serve this "social reality," or in rejecting it potentially face alienation and further oppression.

Overall, then, cultural hegemony works primarily through legitimation, the half-conscious acceptance of the norms of behaviour and the categories of knowledge generated by social institutions, public activities, and popular rituals viewed as "natural" by the people whose actions they shape. McConachie examines the present state of cultural hegemony in "Cultural Hegemony and Theatre History":

> In modern times, ruling elites broadcast their conception of the world through the press, the schools, the entertainment media, and other institutions in the private sphere. These institutions cooperate with dominant groups not only because of self-interest, but because many people in these institutions share the same or similar beliefs. Hence cultural hegemony involves no conspiracy of the "classes against the masses" and little overt social control. (40)

In other words an artificial "norm" is in place. In today's society that "norm" influences people not to be free-thinkers, but rather conform to an "acceptable" set of standards. Consumerism is shoved down the throats of people: on billboards, on the airwaves, in the washrooms, on TV, in the newspapers – advertising and maintenance of corporate hegemony is everywhere. People are told what to buy, how to look, how to behave, what to do, where to go, etc.

Althusser (1971: 136-138) sees such cultural activity as one of many Ideological State Apparatuses (ISAs), systems whereby people are made to submit to capitalist activity not through force or coercion, but through 'interpellation'. Individual ideologies have their own histories, but Ideology in general doesn't change; it is a structure upon which ideas are built. This structure is formed by what Althusser calls 'interpellation' or 'hailing', in the sense of hailing

a taxi-cab. Ideology shouts out to us, we recognize it as authoritative or attractive, acknowledge it, and in so doing become subjects of it (and subject to it). Ideology is only possible when there are subjects who acknowledge it, because it has the defining characteristic of constructing subjects or reproducing them. Thus the sense of being a subject is the primary effect of all ideologies. Althusser uses the example of a policeman calling out to someone 'Hey you!', upon which they turn round and become subjects of the policeman's discourse. Althusser notes that because we are always already subjects, even before we know about it, most ideological discourses merely re-produce already existing subject positions. In other words, the investment of identity takes place according to a pre-established series of acts of identification in the values imposed by the laws of ISAs. Interpellation both names and positions a subject; it casts them into a role. A subject may identify with their place within a particular discourse and recognise the sorts of characteristics which that discourse involves, and adapt themselves to fit. Interpellation therefore, helps to explain why people watch what they watch, how they construct their lives and form ideas and opinions. Interpellation robs individuals of the ability to construct their own identity, making them into predictable automatons; mere expressions of slotted social functions. In this way people are brought to identify with the roles capitalism needs them to play.

Who specifically, one wonders, is in charge of maintaining this deranged system? Who exactly is the ruling class? According to Lasn, the current ruling powers of the world appear to be corporations:

> In the post-World War II era, corporations continued to gain power. They merged, consolidated, restructured and metamorphosed into even larger and more complex units of resource extraction, production, distribution and marketing, to the point where many of them became economically more powerful than many countries. In 1997, fifty-one of the world's hundred largest corporations controlled 42 percent of the world's wealth. Today, corporations freely buy each other's stocks and shares. They lobby legislators and bankroll elections. They manage our broadcast airwaves, set our industrial, economic and cultural agendas, and grow as big and powerful as they damn well please. (69)

Due to the corporate control and management of the mass media, people are quagmired in the endless cycle of influenced thought, instructed to blindly follow prescribed consumerist life processes. Escape from this hegemony is difficult; because corporations control so much of the discourse – consumer-capitalism has become the *de facto* "social reality". It is noted in CrimethInc. Collective's anonymous book Days of War, Nights of Love:

> Modern Western values are so deeply ingrained in our minds that it is practically impossible to avoid being influenced in our actions by the very assumptions and attitudes we are struggling against. After a lifetime of being taught to place a financial value on the hours of our lives, it is hard to stop feeling like one must be rewarded materially for an activity for it to be worthwhile. After a lifetime of being taught to respect hierarchies of authority, it is very difficult to suddenly interact with human beings as equals… After a lifetime of being taught to associate happiness with passive spectatorship, it is hard to enjoy building furniture more than watching television. And of course there are ten thousand more subtle ways in which these values and assumptions manifest themselves in our thoughts and our actions. (129)

Breaking hegemonic thought-patterns, it seems, is extremely difficult. On the personal and cultural levels much of humanity is paralyzed by the influence of cultural hegemony and imperialism, upon which flawed and oppressive ideologies and methods of communicating have been built. Fed by dominant discourses in the interests of the ruling class, serious inequalities are built into the structural levels of society. With oppression operating on all three levels simultaneously, the discourse is mostly Spectacle.

According to the French philosopher Michel Foucault, discourse can be a source of power. A group, or individual, who controls discourse, also wields power, because they control how things are discussed. In the "Discourse on Language" Foucault (1972: 216) writes, "discussion…was one of those privileged areas in which [people] exercise some of their most awesome powers." Discourse can control or limit thoughts or it can transmit new ways of thinking. A dominant discourse is potentially much more powerful as a social control

mechanism than is an army, police force, or legislation. If subordinate group members concur with the world view and social and political practices of the dominant group, there is no need for acts of resistance or strategies for social change. However, history has shown that discourses, which contain claims to reason, order, and universality, often mask the interests of those making them. Smith (1993) underscores this point:

> Imperialist nations, ruling classes, males, whites, heterosexuals, doctors, psychiatrists and criminologists have all claimed that their perspective defines a universal and rational outlook. By doing so they have effectively silenced other nations, other classes, other genders, other races, those of other sexual orientation, patients, the mad and prisoners. (31)

The current dominant discourse appears to consist of a set of assumptions about the social world that largely reflects the interests of capitalism, patriarchy, and people of European descent. The dominant economic discourse today is that the 'laws of the market' must prevail and that the demands of global capitalism require less government involvement in social, economic, human, and environmental affairs. If the dominant group can convince the public that there is no viable alternative to its view, then its position of power and privilege is consolidated. Furthermore, because the alliance between big business and governments, who control the influential means of transmitting culture (e.g., the mass media, educational institutions), they are able to present their economic messages and views (e.g., their discourse) in a favourable light. Any alternative economic discourse can then be marginalized, ridiculed and dismissed as unreasonable or unrealistic. In other words, those with power can control the discourse, thus influencing how the world is to be seen and how it should work.

The overall effect is enormous. As Agger (1989) points out, even student textbooks are largely written within this dominant discourse. The knowledge that appears in the social science literature assists in the reproduction of the existing social order through: (1) the incorporation of ideas that support the current socio-political order; and (2) the suppression and/or marginalization of scholarship that seeks to transform it (Agger, 1989, 1992; Wachholz and Mullaly, 2000.) This

ensures that the structures and cultures of oppression remain relatively untouched. Mulally concludes that:

> Dominant discourses, then, cover up and/or contradict the interests of all sub-ordinate groups: a discourse of patriarchy contributes to the oppression of women; a discourse of white supremacy contributes to the oppression of people of colour; a discourse of capitalism contributes to the oppression of working-class persons; a discourse of heterosexuality contributes to the oppression of gay, lesbian, and bisexual persons. Dominant discourses not only reflect dominant-subordinate relationships based on social divisions such as class, race, and gender, but also occupation. For example, professions, including social work, often contribute to oppression by controlling the discourses of their practices in which pathological, diagnostic, and professional vocabularies exclude and disempower the service user. (2000: 91-92)

In the last few pages we have looked at the large-scale dynamics as to how Viral Oppression is sustained within the biology of the patient – it operates on personal, structural, and cultural levels, encompassing all aspects of everyday life. We have seen that people can simultaneously be oppressors and oppressed, and that oppression breeds itself virally through cultural channels, leading to strong influence on personal and structural levels. As with the Spectacle, oppression is not only something we live in, but is something that lives in us too. The end result is hegemonic thinking and oppressive systems that negatively drive our behaviour, homogenizing ways of interpreting social reality.

Having seen the big picture, we now take a microscopic look at the smallest unit of information, the building block of all cultural expression. In our case, comparable to what the scientist of microbiology would call a gene, we are looking at the "meme". In Culture Jam Kalle Lasn describes them:

> A meme is a unit of information (a catchphrase, a concept, a tune, a notion of fashion, philosophy, or politics) that leaps from brain to brain. Memes compete with one another for replication, and are passed down through a population much the same way genes pass through a species. Potent memes can change minds, alter behaviour, catalyze collective mindshifts and transform cultures. (123)

By breaking down cultural imperialism and hegemony into a sum of meme units it is possible to see the bigger picture more clearly.

Firstly, in our metaphorical diagnosis, it is important to develop a concept as to what the vessel is that contains all the memes. Williams (1981: 13) sees culture as "the signifying system through which necessarily (though among other means) a social order is communicated, reproduced, experienced and explored". Culture, when seen as a system of signifiers, provides possibilities for framing the entirety of the dynamic that sustains cultural hegemony and hence oppression. Douglas Rushkoff is particularly useful here in providing us with an important concept, that of the datasphere:

> As individuals we are exposed to the datasphere whenever we come into contact with communications technology. [It] is the new territory for human interaction, economic expansion, and especially social and political machination... Just as ecologists now understand the life on this planet to be part of a single biological organism, media activists see the datasphere as the circulatory system for today's information, ideas, and images... (8-9)

The datasphere, then is defined as the invisible sphere of meme-exchange resulting from communications technology. It is important now to inquire as to how meme-distribution occurred before this technological phenomenon. The idea of a "culturesphere" is central to the analysis, it essentially being the physical body of our metaphorical patient. Much like the hydrosphere includes all water or the biosphere all life on the planet, the culturesphere includes all human expressive activity that contributes towards social learning: language we use, along with the meanings, symbols, and interpretations of social reality.

Given this idea, it is important to see where, how, and why memes are created, how memes travel through the culturesphere, and how they influence social realities. Returning to the datasphere, Rushkoff examines the notion of a powerful meme-construction known as the media virus:

> Media viruses spread through the data sphere in the same way biological ones spread through the body or a community. But instead of travelling along an organic circulatory system, a media

virus travels through the networks of the mediascape. The "protein shell" of a media virus might be an event, invention, technology, system of thought, musical riff, visual image, scientific theory, sex scandal, clothing style, or even a pop hero - as long as it can catch our attention. Any one of these media virus shells will search out the receptive nooks and crannies in popular culture and stick on anywhere it is noticed. Once attached, the virus injects its more hidden agendas into the datastream in the form of ideological code - not genes, but a conceptual equivalent we now call "memes." Like real genetic material, these memes infiltrate the way we do business, educate ourselves, interact with one another - even the way we perceive "reality." (9-10)

Before the advent of the datasphere, memes travelled much more slowly through the culturesphere, and were much easier for the dominant powers to influence through control of the media. Marshall McLuhan provides an excellent analysis in Understanding Media as to how media is comprised of mediums, each medium having "the power of imposing its own assumption on the unwary" (157). Examining the history of evolving mediums, from simple speech, to literacy, and into the electronic era, McLuhan explains that "legitimated" mediums can contribute towards the maintenance of oppressive systems. For example, before the printing press was invented, books were generally created within religious organizations. Despite the fact that religious scholars provided the content, because the medium was a book it acquired a legitimacy of being respectable, important, and real. The medium of "books", then, was employed as a tool for social control. The ruling powers before the printing press were generally leaders of religions, whereas afterwards the world witnessed a shift towards and equally oppressive dominant power, namely capitalism. In the same manner mediums (such as newspapers, television, and radio) are controlled as important tools to shape perceptions of social reality.

Mediums, then, are structures upon which complex collections of memes can be imposed, then communicated. People employ mediums to communicate. If the medium is perceived as legitimate, the memes are also generally legitimated. Often as new mediums appear, it is the ruling power that controls them at first. Let us look at an example: in the middle ages the oppressive

worldview advocated by the Church (patriarchal religion) was imposed through the mediums of books, architecture, sculpture, ceremony, sermon, etc., and hence strongly influenced every-day discourse. By controlling the mediums, the Church was able to maintain a clear social reality wherein people were expected to abide by the Church's ideology. This ideological code (the hidden message behind all the mediums) had the desired effect of steering discourses and thinking-patterns, and hence was able to create and maintain a cultural imperialism and hegemony. In the example above, it is apparent that because the Church controlled the memes and the mediums, imposing an oppressive ideological code was easy. With the discourse under firm control, mindshare was captured effortlessly. The same concept can again be applied to the culturesphere. Mindshare, in this context, concerns itself with the percentage of hegemonic thought-patterns that have been installed on the person's mind by the oppressive systems of the dominant group. The higher the percentage of mindshare captured, the more likely the person will accept the so-called "official definition of reality" being imposed.

Another way of looking at the same dynamic is from a "mental environmental" perspective. Detailed in Kalle Lasn's book Culture Jam, he makes analogies between this concept and the more familiar "physical environment". He points out that in the 1980s evidence highlighted that our planet's ecosystem was in danger (eg: global warming) and could significantly affect humankind physically if we didn't do something about it. According to the analogy, the "Mental Environment" is the concept that our surroundings affect us not physically, but mentally: they shape how and what we think. For example, the information in the world around us - what our parents teach us, the way people around us behave, our physical surroundings (including a plethora of advertisements) - instructs people on how to live their lives by indoctrinating them with capitalist ideological code. The Spectacle feeds us this code endlessly, and through cultural hegemony and imperialism people unconsciously accept it. The claim Lasn makes is that through destructive human processes, like our physical environment, our mental environment has also been polluted. While Lasn frames

the mental environmental pollution problem in a contemporary setting, I feel that this pollution came into being with the onset of oppression 10,000 years ago.

While there are many ways of looking at and analyzing it, we can see that oppression is everywhere. Everyone is at risk of oppressing and being oppressed; oppression affects us all. Given the scope of this problem, it is difficult to see how it can be tackled. If the culturesphere is infected with viral oppression (aka Spectacle), how can we immunize ourselves against it? How can we fight it? Advocates of Boal might argue that the Theatre of the Oppressed matrix and arsenal are an effective tool at fighting oppression, and I concur that in many cases TO does challenge instances of oppression. While I do see a lot of potential in what Boal is saying, I fail to see how TO is making an major influence on oppression as a whole: the Spectacle continues unabated. Interestingly, Fortier argues that:

> Many of us are highly privileged and it would depoliticize Boals's project to reduce the theatre of the oppressed by universalising and abstracting it: if everyone is oppressed, the category loses its meaning, or at least its political import. Nonetheless, the post-colonial pedagogical and theatrical project holds down exciting possibilities for situations beyond its borders narrowly drawn. (143)

While Fortier usually seems to be on the ball, I cannot disagree more with him concerning this statement. Everyone *is* oppressed, as Mulally has shown. While there may be no king or obvious ruler anymore, the discourse is out of control, and nobody is safe as the oppressive hegemonic norm cements itself among all peoples. Far from losing its meaning or political import, by univeralizing oppression we can not only see how negative forces influence us, but can also take responsibility on the personal level to eradicate and build firewalls against it, like detecting, destroying and blocking computer viruses. With these personal protections in place, it is then possible to launch attacks against oppression on the cultural and structural levels.

Chapter 6

Clandestine Theatre

Upon closer inspection there is strong evidence that the Spectacle is employing theatre in a way that is far more effective than the "theatre" itself. As we have seen, the "theatre" is extremely marginalized in the Spectacle and thus captures minimal mindshare and has little impact within the culture-sphere. However, we also saw that there are many definitions of theatre that fall outside the "Official Genealogy" of Western theatre. The theatre appears to be genuinely confused, which is understandable given all the dragooning discourse and cultural hegemony that ensures it remains insignificant within the Spectacle. But what is the theatre at its most basic level?

I am of the view that the theatre comes into existence when a *character* is played; I cannot think of any examples of theatre that do not involve the playing of characters. Furthermore, on a fundamental level, theatre is live – it is in the present. Many theorists argue that theatre must involve a minimum of two people, the performer and the spectator; I am of the view that it only needs one - the spect-actor. Thus if somebody plays a character alone, perhaps while looking in the mirror, the pure theatre has come into existence. If the reader decides to put on the optative glasses, see the situation in a theatrical light, and play a role (eg: performing this section of text), then the pure theatre has appeared.

On this elementary theatrical level it is easy to see how much pure theatre there actually is – every time a character is played live, the theatre exists. Unlike representations, which are designed to immobilize a spectator into observing them, pure theatre is associated with live performance. Herbert Molderings notes that "performances do not contain a reproduction element. . . . Whatever survives of a performance in the form of a photograph or video tape is no more than a fragmentary, petrified vestige of a lively process that took place at a different time

in a different place" (172-3). Given that the Spectacle wants to immobilize people, it focuses on the creation or representations designed for constant re-production and consumption. Jacques Attali describes the Spectacle as being dominated by a "network of repetition" in which only mass-produceable cultural commodities have value (87-132). In this account, live performance is little more than a vestigial remnant of the previous historical order, which can claim little in the way of cultural presence or power. Self-initiated performance is actively discouraged, while representation is highlighted as valuable. In this way the discourse is carefully controlled – instead of people creating their own performances, they are encouraged to absorb the latest ones being played in the Spectacle.

This is an ironic situation, given that the Spectacle relies on carefully scripted performances to create its representations. It is not surprising because in order to maintain its hegemony, it must control and strictly limit the nature of performance in order to both manufacture its representations, and keep people in the dark as spectators, or non-performers. There are two ways in which the Spectacle employs pure theatre to manufacture characters to play in its "show" (discourse): overtly and covertly.

Starting with the overt, this occurs when the Spectacle literally deploys actors to play parts within social reality. Stealth Marketing, whereby corporations cast live actors to covertly market their products in a "real world" setting, is a disturbing new phenomenon. Whether it's a flirtatious girl buying the boys a round of the latest brand of vodka at the bar, a pair of tourists asking passers-by to take their photo with a Sony digital recorder, or any number of invasive "reality-advertising" scenarios, Stealth Marketing is an ontologically upsetting next step in late capitalism's deranged logic. Upon closer examination, it becomes apparent that this new form of so-called marketing is nothing short of a corporate attempt to co-opt an activist theatre technique: Augusto Boal's Invisible Theatre. Chittenden and Harlow examine the phenomenon in one Sunday Times report:

> She is beautiful, hip, and very friendly, and she wants to buy you a
> beer. A dream come true? No, you are being "stealthed". The beer

she wants to buy you is not your favourite brew but a new brand. And she is not just a pretty woman but one of a team of actors hired by an advertising agency to spread the new product by the softest sell…Critics call it guerrilla marketing or stealth advertising. Its practitioners prefer "entertainment marketing", and call the pretty woman at the bar an "ambassador". Product placement – the use of particular brands in films and television programmes – is leaving the screen and entering reality. Life, it seems, is becoming one long advertisement.

Asking "HOW far can this go?", the journalists conclude that: "It seems only the limit is a company's imagination and ingenuity." More examples from the same article include:

Jonathan Ressler, whose Big Fat advertising agency in New York has helped to pioneer new methods of product placement for clients such as Pepsi, says that this is just the beginning. "You're definitely going to see real people being sponsored by companies. It's not going to be a superstar like Michael Jordan, it's going to be Mr. Joe Average. And it'll be cheaper, more effective and carry far more credibility," he said. We've had reality television, he argues, so what's wrong with reality advertising?

To make matters worse, the article concludes with perhaps the most inhumane "marketing" example of all:

As with all new marketing trends, though, originality will be at a premium. With this in mind Jason Black, a writer, and Frances Schroeder, a former teacher, are a step ahead of the pack. The New York couple are auctioning the name of their baby son to any company willing to pay, so as to fund his school fees and provide a comfortable home. It would, the couple claimed, offer the winning company an unusual and enduring marketing opportunity…"There would be recurring interest in this young man," Black told the press. "There would be life-cycle events, birthdays, graduation." ...Richard Laermer, a self-confessed "hype-merchant" representing the couple, said: "I firmly believe middle-class people are the sandwich board advertisers of the future. Privacy is dead, so people appealing to advertisers will be invited to rent out their identity to them."

Other synonyms for these insidious theatrical techniques include "Reality Advertising" and "Identity Branding". It is easy to see that the Spectacle is moving

in disturbing directions on the corporate front. With plenty of resources for "marketing", corporations are theatricalizing everyday life by populating it with characters designed for product placement and advertising. Corporations are beginning to buy or lease people's identities, re-casting them to play the roles necessary to carry on the oppressive Spectacle.

Augusto Boal has a good definition for these types of theatricals in the Spectacle: clandestine theatre. It is evident that it is not only corporations employing these theatrical tactics, but also oppressive government regimes. Returning to his interview with Cohen-Cruz on the use of Invisible theatre in Lula's Worker's Party campaign in Brazil, Boal elaborates:

> BOAL: In Lula's campaign there was something else. In elections we are used to propaganda - politicians take the microphone and say they are better than the other ones. But Collor, who was running against Lula, did horrible things; his party made a sort of clandestine theatre. I would not call it invisible theatre. For instance, they would go to people's houses, or sometimes they would telephone and say, "I'm calling from the Workers' Party, and I'd like to know how many rooms you have in your house." And the person would say, "But what do you care about that? That's my problem." And they would say, "We are taking an inventory of all the rooms that exist here, especially Copacabana, Ipanema" - those places with middle-class and wealthy people. "We are from the Workers' Party and after Lula wins we are planning a city-wide reform of the houses. You will have to lend one of your rooms to the people from the *favela* [slum]." Some of the people thought it was true; many of them knew it was not true. And we went on television to say it was not true at all. But the fact is, it was created as a possibility - virtually it's true, actually it's not. So the lie becomes a hypothesis, something you can think about, and Collor's party manipulated hypotheses that were by no means in Lula's program. But as hypotheses they were frightening. People would say Lula is not going to do that - Collor will not either. But if one of them did, it would be Lula. So in people's heads it became almost a truth. (1994: 228-229)

Clandestine theatre then, is in many ways the opposite of invisible theatre. Even though the techniques appear identical, it is the intention and play-text that differentiates the forms: invisible theatre produces a question of oppression that rallies people to resolve, whereas clandestine theatre is more concerned with

deceiving the public with a constructed scene in order to distribute propaganda or sell products.

On a covert level, the Spectacle employs another form of clandestine theatre that is far more insidious: instead of the actor being aware that they have been cast into a specific role, the average human being is cast through the process of interpellation, being brought to identify with the roles capitalism needs them to play. The idea of there being "characters" within the Spectacle is an important one; if the society is a Spectacle, it must be populated with characters. Given that the Spectacle also resides *in* us, it makes sense that it would attempt to cast us in its oppressive "show". People are thus made into actors and assigned covert "characters" or roles, without them even being aware of it.

The labelling of people as characters, the casting of the roles that need to be played, manifests itself all the time in various social structures. In "education" we have the "student" and the "teacher". In industry there are "workers" and "bosses". In our families we have "titles". In the theatre we have "actors", "directors", "playwrights", and so forth. The overall picture presents us with a manifestation of identity that appears to be more of a matter of assigned characterization versus, say, an authentic self-construction. We are all coerced into roles, or cast as "characters", whether we like it or not. James P. Carse provides further analysis on the topic in Finite and Infinite Games: A Vision of Life as Play and Possibility. For Carse there are two types of games that people play:

> One could be called finite, the other infinite. A finite game is played for the purpose of winning, an infinite game for the purpose of continuing the play. (3)

A finite game in the Spectacle is one where we accept a role in the "show", whether willingly (eg: playing in a game of sports) or through interpellation (covertly being assigned a role to play). In the case of interpellation there is a certain amount of confusion regarding the assigned role. If the person believes that they "are" the role, they must surrender freedom and restrict their activities and perceptions to the conditions laid out in a finite game. Carse elaborates:

… it is often the case that finite players will be unaware of this absolute freedom and will come to think that whatever they do they must do… While no one is forced to remain a lawyer or a rodeo performer or a kundalini yogi after being selected for these roles, each role is nonetheless surrounded both by ruled restraints and expectations on the part of others. One senses a compulsion to maintain a certain level of performance, because permission to play in these games can be cancelled. We cannot do whatever we please and remain lawyers or yogis…Unlike infinite play, finite play is limited from without…To account for the large gap between the actual freedom of finite players to step off the field of play at any time and the experienced necessity to stay at the struggle, we can say that as finite players we somehow veil this freedom from ourselves. Some self-veiling is present in all finite games. Players must intentionally forget the inherently voluntary nature of their play, else all competitive effort will desert them. From the outset of finite play each part or position must be taken up with a certain seriousness; players must see themselves as teacher, as light-heavyweight, as mother. In the proper exercise of such roles we positively believe we are the persons those roles portray. Even more: we make those roles believable to others. (13 -15)

Roles, therefore, are all a form of self-veiling, or masking. The Spectacle assigns us masks and then expects us to perform the necessary roles in the "show". Drawing a parallel between the interpellated roles in the Spectacle and the "acting" that takes place in the traditional theatre (which is in itself a finite game), Carse points out:

It is in the nature of acting, Shaw said, that we are not to see this woman as Ophelia, but Ophelia as this woman. If the actress is so skillful that we do see Ophelia as this woman, it follows that we do not see performed emotions and hear recited words, but a person's true feelings and speech. To some extent the actress does not see herself performing but feels her performed emotion and actually says her memorized lines - and yet the very fact that they are performed means that the words and feelings belong to the role and not to the actress. In fact, it is one of the requirements of her craft that she keep her own person distinct from the role. What she feels as the person she is has nothing to do with Ophelia and must not enter into her playing of the part. Of course, not for a second will this woman in her acting be unaware that she is acting. She never forgets that she has veiled herself sufficiently to play this role, that she has chosen to forget for the moment that she is this

woman and not Ophelia. But then, neither do we as audience forget we are audience. Even though we see this woman as Ophelia, we are never in doubt that she is not. We are in complicity with her veil. We allow her performed emotions to affect us, perhaps powerfully. But we never forget that we allow them to do so. So it is with all roles. Only freely can one step into the role of mother. Persons who assume this role, however, must suspend their freedom with a proper seriousness in order to act as the role requires. A mother's words, actions, and feelings belong to the role and not to the person - although some persons may veil themselves so assiduously that they make their performance believable even to themselves, overlooking any distinction between a mother's feelings and their own. (15-16)

At issue here is whether or not the person cast into the role is able to step out of it and see it for what it is. At issue is whether or not the person can tap into Boal's I-in-situ; by seeing themselves seeing, they are able to detect the roles they play very clearly, and take corrective actions, if necessary, to alter them. According, again, to Carse:

The issue here is not whether self-veiling can be avoided, or even should be avoided. Indeed, no finite play is possible without it. The issue is whether we are ever willing to drop the veil and openly acknowledge, if only to ourselves, that we have freely chosen to face the world through a mask. Consider the actress whose skill at making Ophelia appear as this woman demonstrates the clarity with which she can distinguish the role from herself. Is it not possible that when she leaves the stage she does not give up acting, but simply leaves off one role for another, say the role of "actress," an abstracted personage whose public behavior is carefully scripted and produced? (16 – 17)

In other words, the Spectacle wants the "actress" to continue to be played after Ophelia has left the stage. It does not want the player to understand that the "actress" is just as much of a role as Ophelia. Indeed, the "actress" is an interpellated role provided by the Spectacle. The main issue arising, according to Carse, is this:

At which point do we confront the fact that we live one life and perform another, or others, attempting to make our momentary forgetting true and lasting forgetting? What makes this an issue is

not the morality of masking ourselves. It is rather that self-veiling is a contradictory act - a free suspension of our freedom. I cannot forget that I have forgotten. I may have used the veil so successfully that I have made my performance believable to myself. I may have convinced myself I am Ophelia. But credibility will never suffice to undo the contradictoriness of self-veiling. "To believe is to know you believe, and to know you believe is not to believe" (Sartre). If no amount of veiling can conceal the veiling itself, the issue is how far we will go in our seriousness at self-veiling, and how far we will go to have others act in complicity with us. (15-17)

The Spectacle, in order to continue its "show", offers complicity in playing the role as "real", thus encouraging as much self-veiling as possible,

The theatrical parallel continues. If the interpellated roles, or characters we play constitute the players in the "show", we must look at the script. Recalling the idea that discourse = power, it is obvious that a play-text or a performance is a very special form of discourse in that it has a spell-bound, immobilized, and depoliticized audience. The script is indeed the source of all the memes in a show. It may seem unbelievable that the Spectacle actually has a script, but one has to look metaphysically, or indeed meta-theatrically, to find it. We must come to understand that everything that takes place in the Spectacle (which is also a finite game) is inherently performative, as per the nature of any "show". Carse suggests:

Inasmuch as a finite game is intended for conclusion, inasmuch as its roles are scripted and performed for an audience, we shall refer to finite play as *theatrical*. Although script and plot do not seem to be written in advance, we are always able to look back at the path followed to victory and say of the winners that they certainly knew how to act and what to say. Inasmuch as infinite players avoid any outcome whatsoever, keeping the future open, making all scripts useless, we shall refer to infinite play as *dramatic*. Dramatically, one chooses to be a mother; theatrically, one takes on the role of mother…One obeys the rules in a finite game in order to play, but playing does not consist only in obeying rules. The rules of a finite game do not constitute a script. A script is composed according to the rules but is not identical to the rules. The script is the record of the actual exchanges between players - whether acts or words - and therefore cannot be written down beforehand. In all true finite play the scripts are composed in the course of play. This means

that during the game all finite play is dramatic, since the outcome is yet unknown. That the outcome is not known is what makes it a true game. The theatricality of finite play has to do with the fact that there is an outcome. Finite play is dramatic, but only provisionally dramatic. As soon as it is concluded we are able to look backward and see how the sequence of moves, though made freely by the competitors, could have resulted only in this outcome. We can see how every move fit into a sequence that made it inevitable that this player would win. (20 – 21)

The script, in other words, is written as we play the game and the roles. It is really a matter of "catching" (recording) it if one wishes to analyze the Spectacle dramaturgically. To detect it, one might start by looking for excessive seriousness, which is always a source of role-playing:

Seriousness is always related to roles, or abstractions. We are likely to be more serious with police officers when we find them uniformed and performing their mandated roles than when we find them in the process of changing into their uniforms. Seriousness always has to do with an established script, an ordering of affairs completed somewhere outside the range of our influence. (18)

To further elaborate on the concept, psychologist Erich Fromm believes that there are two types of "character": the Marketing Character and the Productive Character. The first is the by-product of the person subverted by the Spectacle, who, as a result of interpellation, did not fully develop the human capacity of employing the I-in-situ. Examining attitudes towards the core human value of *giving*, Fromm puts this creature, the Marketing Character, under the microscope, asking:

What is giving? Simple as the answer to this question seems to be, it is actually full of ambiguities and complexities. The most widespread misunderstanding is that which assumes that giving is "giving up" something, being deprived of, sacrificing. The person whose character has not developed beyond the stage of the receptive, exploitative, or hoarding orientation, experiences the act of giving in this way. (21)

The Marketing Character is unable to empathize with the fellow human being, or see beyond the Spectacle. The Marketing Character is the "actress" who comes into being when Ophelia leaves the stage. Fromm suggests:

> The marketing character is willing to give, but only in exchange for receiving; giving without receiving for him is being cheated. People whose main orientation is a non-productive one feel giving as an impoverishment. Most individuals of this type therefore refuse to give. (21)

The Marketing Character is not a giver, but rather a taker. Hypnotized by the Spectacle, hegemonic-thought patterns controlling the memes, our metaphorical victim is paralyzed into playing the script, into putting on the mask. Living in an oppressive system, the oppression is replicated on the personal level: in attitude and deportment. This sustained performance is not even recognized as such by the player. Having been assaulted by endless marketing, unable to resist, humans are cast within the Spectacle as Marketing Characters, covertly and by default. This never-ending oppressive and illusory show is called the "real world", and we are all expected to play a part.

To make matters worse, in addition to the standard social structures that indoctrinate people into the playing of finite games as "reality" (such as education, government, and religion), corporations are beginning to expand the concept more and more to ensure people strongly associate with and play their "consumer" roles. Indeed, many corporations now encourage living in a fully "branded experience," according to Naomi Klein, who notes in No Logo that:

> …the stores are only the beginning – the first phase in an evolution from experiential shopping to living the fully branded experience. In a superstore, the lights, the music, the furniture, the cast of clerks create a feeling not unlike a play in which you, the shopper, are given a leading role. But in the scheme of things that play is rather short: an hour or two at most. (152)

She goes on to observe that certain brands now have television programs to subconsciously advertise products by masquerading as a "real" show, and that some brands now have their own cities where everything from the architecture to

the landscaping to the by-laws all fit into the brand concept! It is amazing how far marketing strategies will go to further manipulate people into playing the roles of "consumers" and spectators, who must observe, absorb, and buy; having the most is to win the finite game of consumerism.

The story of Fromm's Productive Character could not be more different:

> For the productive character, giving has an entirely different meaning. Giving is the highest expression of potency. In the very act of giving, I experience my strength, my wealth, my power. This experience of heightened vitality and potency fills me with joy. I experience myself as overflowing, spending, alive, hence as joyous. (21-22)

The Productive Character, who plays infinite games, is a rare thing in the Spectacle, and certainly isn't controlling much of the discourse (or script!). To play a Productive Character would appear to be quite the incredible challenge. If we have been cast as Marketing Characters by default, how is it possible to become aware of the need to change our role?

Overall then, clandestine theatre operates both overtly (by casting live actors to play roles for marketing purposes), and covertly (by casting people as consumers, spectators, and Marketing Characters). Pure theatre, the live playing of characters, exists then on a massive scale in the Spectacle:
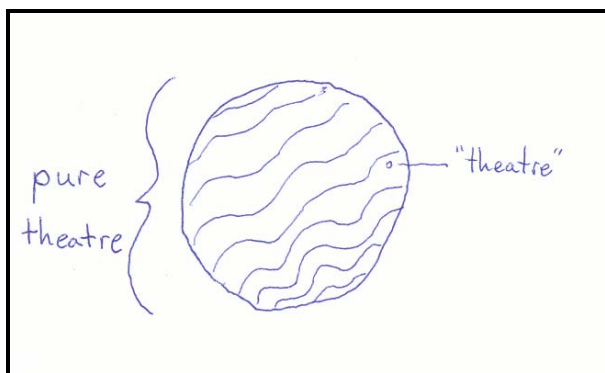
Figure 7.1: Pure Theatre in the Spectacle

Unfortunately, due to the suppression of performance and pure theatre as acceptable and accessible mediums, the scripts and characters within this massive clandestine theatre are provided almost exclusively by the Spectacle. Fortier perhaps describes the dynamics best:

> As Baudrillard points out, theatre has gone from a dominant art form in early modern Europe to a relatively minor one in a postmodern world where everything is theatricalized, but where the theatrical is more commonly presented through television, computers, film and other technological and easily transmitted media. (121)

Overt casting is reserved for "actors" and "celebrities", who engage in the production of representations (eg: advertisements, TV shows, Billboards, traditional theatre, etc.) designed for the masses to consume. In a similar vein, this overt casting now also includes stealth marketing, reality advertising, and identity branding. By masking the "theatre" as merely live, elitist entertainment, it becomes marginalized. People are made unaware that we inhabit a pure theatre where we are covertly cast as immobilized and depoliticized characters, including: spectators, consumers, and Marketing Characters. The clandestine theatre, exposed, raises many, many questions as to why the "theatre" is so extremely marginalized, while at the same time insidiously playing across the boards of the Spectacle.

Chapter 7

The Counter-Spectacle

My generation, or what scholars call second-wave feminism, made women into actors in history. We turned ourselves from passive observers of the world into active agents of change. In the process, we changed a lot of laws that were holding us back, and we changed workplaces, organizations and movements where women and feminist men are now in the lead.

– Judy Rebick ("We've Come Part Way, Baby")

Some people have had enough of the Spectacle. Indeed, there is a massive movement currently building that we might as well call the "Counter-Spectacle". There is the idea of revolution in the air, and many people are no longer satisfied with the way consumer society is running. The Global Justice movement (frequently mislabelled as "anti-globalization") is slowly pulling together to challenge the all-pervading oppressiveness associated with the Spectacle. Most Global Justice groups are seeking a redistribution of power and wealth, an end to discrimination and oppression, and a form of global socialism where the power is in the hands of the people; not the corporations or the governments they influence. Activists including people from all walks of life are developing and implementing strategies to bring about this seemingly impossible goal. Noreen Hertz, writing for The Observer noted *en route* to the G8 protest in Genoa that protesters included:

> Among them a 50-plus-year old Manchester secretary who had never been to a protest but had 'just had enough'…Also, there is Brian, the pacifist priest, and Doris, an 82 year-old pensioner. Age range diverse, accents diverse – this is not a middle-class rebellion, not anarchist chic – this is people who are united by ideals, not by class.

As more and more people get involved, people from all countries and all social backgrounds, the world is seeing the seeds of its first global revolution. Instead of race, status, or nationality defining protest objectives and goals, global humanitarianism (versus Spectacle) is becoming the main issue, and the stategies implemented are as myriad as the diversity of protesters. Naomi Klein describes the rise of resistance against the corporate monocultural global paradigm (the Spectacle) in <u>No Logo</u>:

> When this resistance began taking shape in the mid-nineties, it seemed to be a collection of protectionists getting together out of necessity to fight everything and anything global. But as connections have formed across national lines, a different agenda has taken hold, one that embraces globalization, but seeks to wrest it from the grasp of multinationals. Ethical shareholders, culture jammers, street reclaimers, McUnion organizers, human-rights hacktivists, school-logo fighters and Internet corporate watchdogs are at the early stages of demanding a citizen-centred alternative to the international rule of the brands. That demand, still sometimes in some areas of the world whispered for fear of a jinx, is to build resistance – both high-tech and grassroots, both focused and fragmented – that is as global, and as capable of coordinated action, as the multinational corporations it seeks to subvert. (445-446)

What is desired is a healthy, equal world, and the protest phenomena is growing larger every year; it is a movement of truly global proportions. The sustained and ongoing protest is a chaotic mish-mash of people and groups operating in unity across the globe, united in dissatisfaction, but with no dominant hierarchy, strategy, or leader. Both optimistic and defiant, their view is perhaps best summed up in one of their main slogans: "Another World Is Possible".

One of the main tactics being used by this movement appears to be the direct challenging of dominant discourses. According to Mullaly:

> By understanding a dominant discourse we can deconstruct it and expose any discriminatory or oppressive assumptions, ideas, and beliefs that may underpin it. And we can develop counter-discourses based on the ideals of equality, fairness, and social justice. (2000: 22-23)

Foucault (1978: 101) contends that "discourse can be both an instrument and an effect of power, but also a hindrance, a stumbling block, a point of resistance and a starting point for an opposing strategy. Discourse transmits and produces power; it reinforces it, but it also undermines and exposes it, renders it fragile and makes it possible to thwart it" (1978: 101). Certain ideas are circulated through discourse, and these ideas can lead to a new sense of self or collective identity. One can create and disseminate one's own construction of who one wants to be, enabling the formation of a new identity. Therefore, discourse is fluid, allowing any historical bloc to gain power for themselves and undermine the power of the hegemonic group. Indeed, according to McConachie:

> … it is primarily through intellectual and moral leadership rather than through political or class alliances that one way of "feeling and seeing reality" gains dominance, first over those within the bloc and eventually over an entire nation. (42)

McConachie explains that "the first step toward a revolution of the people is to change their 'common sense' to 'good sense'" (41), or to reject the oppressive but "natural" norm in favour of a more equitable one. Gramsci believes that reform and radical change are possible because hegemonic cultures are historically dynamic and incomplete, meaning that hegemony is in "continuous creation which, given its massive scale, is bound to be uneven in the degree of legitimacy it commands thus leaving some room for antagonistic cultural expressions to develop" (Adamson, 174). Any sociohistorical moment, according to Gramsci is "never homogenous…on the contrary, it is rich in contradictions" (1985: 11), giving way to the possibility of change. Hegemony is like a massive and impassible wall, but with small inconsistencies, little holes and cracks. By injecting counter-hegemonic discourses into these fissures, it becomes possible to erode the structure bit by bit. With enough counter-hegemonic erosion, the hegemonic wall collapses. In other words, through counter-hegemonic strategies genuine change can take place.

For these reasons, the Spectacle can be seen as a force that, far from being natural or permanent, can be challenged and eventually dismantled. In

many ways the exact same strategies that first put the hegemony in place can be used against it; the tools that built the master's house can also be used to dismantle it. Revolutions can take place on the Personal, Cultural, and Structural levels, because oppression is at work on all three. As individuals wake up and become enlightened to the nature of the injustices occurring, the oppression is exposed, and the metaphorical crack grows a little bigger; perhaps another brick falls out. This wall metaphor is highlighted in Québec *poete maudit* Paul-Émile Borduas' 1948 manifesto: the *Refus Global*. Signifying a human revolution against imperialism and oppression, its core messages of struggle against hegemony, critical rejection of oppression, and human transformation resonate to this day. In this passage the abandoned and oppressed French-speaking colonial descendants awaken:

> But revolutions and distant wars broke the binding spell, opened intellectual blockades. A few uncontrollable pearly drops oozed through the walls…Slowly the breach grew wider, came together, widened once more.

Once the hegemonic breach is wide enough, the morally and intellectually liberated individual can then begin the long process of working for social change, and liberating others. According to the Resource Manual for a Living Revolution : A Handbook of Skills & Tools for Social Change Activists:

> People working for social change need to understand the context of their labors. Such an understanding can be sharpened by (1) evaluating the success or failure of other efforts, historical or contemporary, (2) developing a theory for change, (3) examining present political, economic and environmental realities, (4) projecting a vision of the kinds of changes wanted, and (5) developing a strategy to accomplish specific goals. (7)

When a person decides to work for social change, as opposed to subscribing to the Spectacular diet of spectatorship and marketing, their eyes become opened to a much larger definition of reality. Suddenly it seems possible to make a difference. The illusion that was formerly subscribed to is transformed into a deranged and ever-present nightmarish enemy, constantly trying to lure its prey

back. However with new analytical skills the person, now potentially a counter-hegemonic agent, is able to look at a bigger picture and see the problems in both historic and contemporary lights. People participating, as Judy Rebick notes, transform themselves from spectators into *"*actors in history…from passive observers of the world into active agents of change." By identifying and naming the oppressive mechanisms, the agent is able to project a preferable vision of the future, and begin strategizing on how to achieve it. A Counter-Spectacle of sorts appears, populated by Rebick's "actors" who set to work challenging the dominant discourses.

The identifying characteristics of this Counter-Spectacle appear in many ways the opposite of the Spectacle. Instead of spectating, people become actors. Instead of being immobilized, people are imbued with agency. Instead of being depoliticized, the personal becomes political. Instead of simply absorbing monologues, dialogue and expression become important. Instead of subscribing to oppressive views, anti-oppressive attitudes are developed. Instead of sitting on the sidelines, these people start *doing* something. The Marketing Character is transformed into a Productive Character, and instead of "buying and selling" being the prominent discourse, the idea of *giving* takes prominence. The idea of a global citizenship takes root, and the word "responsibility" takes on additional importance. These empowered people are ready to reclaim their culture.

Luckily there are several prominent contemporary factors that make recruitment fertile for the Global Justice movement; 1) critical thinking, 2) postmodernism, and 3) technology. All of these have vast potential to expose false representations masquerading as "real", and can generate progressive ways of seeing and interpreting reality. Critical theory, as we have seen in previous chapters, is growing in scope and rigor. Its adherents are busy employing theories such as feminism, post-colonialism, and queer theory to challenge oppressive notions (eg: patriarchy, imperialism, homophobia) in order to gain rights for the marginalized while providing them with both validation and a voice. Human rights are being fought for and won. The recent explosion in critical thinking, propagated by technology and postmodernism, I argue below, can only

help the cause of liberating people from the Spectacle, transforming them from depoliticized spectators and Marketing Characters into agents of social change, or "actors" in the Counter-Spectacle.

Before returning to critical theory, I will first deal with the other two areas in some detail. Postmodernism, many would argue, is a field in the cluster that comprises critical thinking. Others, however, feel it is a condition of malaise that is exploited by the forces of capitalism. Postmodernism is a maddening art-form and condition that has caused considerable debate in recent times as to its positive and negative influences on the society. Activist playwright David Fennario asks: "Postmodernism, friend or foe?"

Modernism has been defined as "a particular view of the possibilities and direction of human social life [that] is rooted in the Enlightenment and grounded in faith in rational thought" (Johnson, 2000: 232). A modernist perspective holds that truth and knowledge exist as objective reality (as do morality and beauty) that can be discovered, examined, understood, and explained through rational and scientific means and then controlled, used, and exploited for the betterment of the human condition (Howe, 1994; Johnson, 2000). Postmodernism, a rival perspective to modernist thought, proposes that truth, beauty, morality, and social life have no objective reality beyond how we think, talk, and write about them. No social units are fixed entities, and although some representations of social life are more privileged and/or given more legitimacy than others, ultimately no one version of reality is better or truer than another. The debate between these two perspectives strikes at the heart of two basic sets of competing assumptions that underpin the attempts of each to understand the world and our experience of it (Johnson, 2000). Silvio Gaggi suggests in Modern/Postmodern:

> Postmodernism can be defined as differing from modernism because it carries modernist principles beyond anticipated boundaries or because it rejects modernist principles altogether. (19)

Whitmore contends that postmodernism has extended select modernist principles beyond their original boundaries, manipulating them to include widespread experimentation of:

> …collage, atonality, nonlinearity, decentredness, imbalance, scepticism, abstractness, ambiguity, serialization, stream-of-consciousness, and the like. Postmodern principles that reject modernism include the highlighting of self-referentiality, deconstruction, and popular culture (rejecting the notion that high art is the only art worth investigating). (3)

Generally-speaking, postmodernism has the ability to appropriate anything from the modernist tradition (or before) and re-arrange it, subverting old meanings and creating entirely new ones. According to Ihab Hassan, writing in "The Question of Postmodernism":

> Postmodernism veers towards open, playful, optative, disjunctive, displaced, or indeterminate forms, a disclosure of fragments, an ideology of fracture, a will to unmaking, an invocation of silence – veers toward all these and yet implies their very opposites, their antithetical realities. (125)

In this light postmodernism is about re-framing, playing with, and challenging old representations, structures, and ideologies, which are then re-displayed in a new light. The result of this activity, according to Mullaly, is that:

> ...postmodernism has helped to show us that there is no universal reality but there are many realities, and that language does not have the properties of absolute truth but is historically, culturally, and socially contextualized and largely reflects the interests and world views of dominant groups. (2002: 18)

On this level, postmodernism would appear to be highly beneficial for being able to liberate oneself from the Spectacle and the oppression associated with it. Because it opens our eyes, we can see beyond the prescribed social reality.

For Jameson and others, however, postmodernism is a dangerous cultural predicament brought on by late capitalism's extension of commodification into virtually all aspects of social and cultural life. Cultural production under late

capitalism's volatile and transient market configurations often takes the form of 'pastiche', a borrowing from anywhere without a commitment to anything, satire without any bite. The proliferation of technologies, commodities and information renders the world 'sublime', that is, complicated beyond a human scale of understanding. With so many choices of representation available, how is one to know what is important? In "Postmodernism and Consumer Society" Jameson suggests that one of the effects is:

> …the erosion of the older distinction between high and so-called mass or popular culture. This is perhaps the most distressing development of all from an academic standpoint, which has traditionally had a vested interest in preserving a realm of high or elite culture against the surrounding environment of philistinism, of schlock and kitsch, of TV series and Reader's Digest culture, and in transmitting difficult and complex skills of reading, listening and seeing to its initiates. (1130)

Postmodernism, in this sense, is a condition where everything is rendered into commodified representations. From this vantage point, postmodernism would seem synonymous with the Spectacle as defined thusfar. With the commodification of everything, according to John Zerzan:

> Artists no longer want to tell us anything – they have nothing left to say. With postmodernism the idea of style itself enters a stage of bankruptcy; its incoherent banality turns postmodernism into the fast-food chain of expression and reflects the exposed condition of the representational in general. In its enervated, late capitalist decline, art is no more than a specialized colony of the media. (261)

Media is largely what controls the cultural hegemony of a society, and with the capitalist banality of the "postmodern condition", the future is looking increasingly bleak as the manipulative idea of monoculture based on consumersim emerges. An endless Spectacle where everything will be co-opted into its oppressive "show". The general reaction to this predicament, is one of alienation and confusion, and this is apparently reflected in the artistic and theoretical works produced. According to Fortier postmodern artistry:

> …tends to combine a certain emotional distance – often an ironic or 'cool' relation to contemporary culture – with a generalized pessimism about the possibility of social change and revolution: the cultural, political and economic system that dominates the world is a truly formidable and overwhelming opponent. (120)

This observation suggests more of a feeling of defeat, versus say an angry cry of outrage and defiance. It suggests that contemporary artists are subdued by the Spectacle. Furthermore, Fortier suggests:

> the postmodern strategies…are often so subtle and uncertain it's not clear how much an audience is capable of appreciating them…As an effective strategy for political resistance, it may be smaller than [one] thinks. (123)

It becomes increasingly unclear with views like these what, if any, benefits postmodernism has for society. Continuing on this pessimistic track of analysis is John Zerzan, who traces the current condition back several decades to what he considers a well-intentioned avant-garde:

> The Surrealists, among other avant-gardes, set themselves the goal of aestheticizing life. Today this goal is being realised at a time when avant-gardism is nearing extinction; the ubiquity of art as manipulation is achieving this aesthetization, and is no more than advertising and styles of consumerism. The fact that the world's best photography is expressed as TV commercials is a perfect illustration of the technologized, commodified culture striving to reach everyone.This would-be conquest by media easily puts all the goods of culture in its service, as it must when there are so many signs that the whole spectacle of simulated life is running out of gas. (262)

On the more positive idea that the Spectacle may indeed be "running out of gas", it is good to know that postmodernism does have its upside for some theorists. The real predicament is how to ensure that it does indeed run out of gas. Despite the fact that many theorists argue that postmodernism is more of a curse than a blessing, many are still searching for an escape from what appears to be an endless predicament of commodified life. Not surprisingly, the theatre is one of the places they are looking.

In <u>Theatre, Theory, Postmodernism</u> Birringer laments the marginalization of theatre in postmodern culture, and suggests that while theatre's resistance to being on 'the cutting edge' is charming, it is also incapacitating. Birringer does not see postmodernist late capitalism as an attractive situation – it is a time of dematerialising and dehumanising effects on the 'dispossessed body' and of 'pervasive social and economic displacements'; there is no point, however, in refusing to engage with this situation. Birringer calls for theatre to have a 'critical connection to the postmodern culture'. Postmodernism in his view is a process still underway, not an unsurmountable *fait accompli*. For Birringer, theatre's resistance to postmodern impoverishment lies not in its anachronistic 'liveness', but in its obsessive exploration of representation and its limits, in its ability to contradict and rupture the indifference of contemporary culture: "the theatre cannot be absorbed by the Spectacle…as long as it can still experience and reperform the contradictions produced by this culture" (228). This train of thought potentially reinvigorates our commodified theatre, while at the same time hints at ways of attacking the Spectacle. As long as artists and theorists continue to be aware of, and criticize the nature of the Spectacle, all is not lost. Observations like Birringer's are important to realise that there may be techniques for resisting and overcoming such a massive obstacle.

Whether postmodernism is friend or foe, is a difficult question indeed. Having both its benefits (of allowing people to see multiple realities and call into question absolutes) and its repercussions (due to commodification, these newfound realities may all be just another part of the Spectacle), I argue that the benefit outweighs the repercussion because not all realities are part of the Spectacle. Indeed, by seeing the world in new lights it becomes very possible to discover how deranged the system is before deciding whether or not to take action against it. One thing is certain from our perspective; it is time to move beyond postmodernism, which should be seen not as a permanent condition, but rather as an important stepping stone between an oppressive past and a liberated future.

Technology also plays a key role in liberating perceptions, and with rapid advancements and newfound abilities (such as broadcasting, media production, global networking, and access to information), humanity is undergoing a massive and profound transformation. According to Steve Mann, inventor of the wearable computer and co-author of <u>Cyborg</u>:

> These are strange days for humanity. Extending the mind and body with computer prostheses is not something one does without a sense of risk and confusion. Inventions and innovations are announced at an almost daily rate. Technology changes individual lives and whole societies, and then changes us again, before we've even begun to grasp the implications of such systemic alterations to our daily fabric. Fuelled by the rapacious needs of consumer society, technology is evolving faster than our ability to harness the energies of technological metamorphosis. As a result, the dawn of the twenty-first century is also a crossroads in the history of humanity. We are entering the post-human age. In this age, biology is no longer limited by the genetic codes of evolution. Today, we can rebuild ourselves, transcend the supposed limitations of the human form – both physical and mental. This, of course, gives rise to all manner of ethical and ontological considerations. As the present eclipses the speculations of even the most brilliant of our past theorists, we must remind ourselves that though the idea of extending the human being through technology is not a new one, actually putting that concept into action remains relatively untried and untested. How will we post-humans grapple with the awesome powers to reinvent humanity and society that technology has bestowed on us? (2)

The idea of using technology to extend the human being into new realms is certainly not a new one (eg: the invention of clothing allowed humans to live in colder climates). However, with the electronic age, possibilities are coming into existence to explore (or, in some cases, mediate) reality in completely different ways – on the internet, in virtual reality, with a wearable computer, etc.

So what does all this mean? The question that McLuhan Program Director Derrick de Kerckhove asks is what happens when the amplified and accelerated intelligence of humans equipped with high-powered computers in the tens of millions connects on the Net? What might we expect from all of this networked intelligence? With the ability to construct and inhabit entirely new virtual

environments, a "new ecology of networks" comes into existence according to de Kerckhove. In <u>Connected Intelligence</u> he identifies three principles at work in this new virtual ecology:

> I. Interactivity, the physical linking of people, or communication-based industries (the industries of the body)
>
> 2. Hypertextuality, the linking of contents or knowledge-based industries (the industries of memory)
>
> 3. Connectedness, or webness, the mental linking of people, or the industries of networks (the industries of intelligence) (xxv)

The sum of these three principles results in humanity becoming "interconnected", which leads to a connected sensibility, and hence new social and personal cognitive habits. De Kerckhove describes it as "a new psychology", suggesting:

> Satellites figure importantly in the equation in that they give humanity the agency and the image of the new planetary scale of its reach; the new proportions of its collective body image. As individuals and as a species, we can begin to see the growing connections between our selves, our bodies, and our minds on the one hand and the planet on the other. Together, interactivity, hypertextuality, and connectedness constitute the basis for the planetization of ordinary people as well as organizations, nations, and continents, by a permanent, self-updating synergy of local computers, global networks, and satellites. (xxv)

Planetization is the realization that we are all part of the same ecology; it is, as de Kerkhove says, "the conscious integration of the Earth's dimensional reality...", or "the view from above" (177). The satellite, an eye in the heavens, gives us the full picture, both literally and metaphorically, according to de Kerkhove:

> A satellite gives people omniscience for a penny. The view from above, even if mediated by much interpretative technology, is comprehensive, to say the least. No matter what amount of technology intervenes, the end result is a reliable representation of what there is, and the biases of the computer data-rendering are known, adjusted, tested, and corrected to get as precisely factual a rendering of reality as possible. All the technological instruments

and transformations required to make satellite images visible on a
Web site, for example, amount to the equivalent of a pair of
glasses. Nobody ever complained that spectacles distort reality;
rather, they enhance access to it for those whose natural faculties
are impaired. Let us then assume that a satellite image is as faithful
a representation as what we might see with our own eyes... The
satellite vantage point is also becoming a personal one. Not too
long ago, satellite images were accessible only to experts who
could muster the considerable technological support necessary to
interpret the data. Today, anybody on-line can access a weather
site and obtain an image that was computed a few minutes earlier,
straight from the satellite. The basic image will be continuously
refreshed with new data, showing, for example, the minute-by-
minute progress of a hurricane. Though it's getting to be a
common-place of on-line experience, I still marvel at the fact that I
have personal access to this godlike view of my basic life-support
system. Mine and everybody else's. (191-192)

The satellite is in many ways the I-in-situ of the planet itself; we can see

ourselves seeing - from way up above. We can literally see the big picture – in

realtime. This has profound effects when adopted on a planetary scale. It

becomes possible to link the physical and mental environment with a view of the

health of the planet as a whole; a unifying ecology of which humans are part.

Examining the present state of affairs will in many ways reveal our metaphorical

patient mentioned in previous chapters. The diagnostic is not good – the at-risk

victim is being ravaged by a viral form of oppression. With global warming,

pollution, and the ongoing destruction of the physical environment, the planet

itself is at risk. With the Spectacle, interpellation, and oppression, the mental

environment isn't looking much better. Still, there is hope. According to de

Kerkhove:

If we were to internalize the consequences of our technological
innovations, especially those which extend our sensory reach well
beyond our natural body's abilities, we would soon conclude that
the standard psychology we have learned at home and in school,
our everyday self-image, simply does not fit the scale that is now
becoming the norm. If, for two thousand years, man was "the
measure of all things," today the planet is the measure of all things.
The change of scale brought to the content of our technology needs
to be accompanied by a comparable change of scale in our

psychological makeup. We might say that satellites globalize the Earth for the common person [sic]. They make the planet whole again. Psychologically speaking, this situation is not entirely unprecedented, insofar as most ancient cosmogonies and most aboriginal religions did and do cultivate a sense of the world's unity. (192)

If there is a concerted effort to interconnect with all peoples, which is made fathomable by technology, it is possible to start seeing ourselves as a whole. The Global Justice movement is doing just that. The key idea is that if we are oppressing others or destroying the environment, we are essentially oppressing and destroying ourselves. As a race of people, we need to make strides towards human liberation and reclaim our environments. Technology can be extremely beneficial to us in these respects. de Kerkhove summarizes his argument with a call to action:

> With the common nervous system and senses of the world population now in the care of satellites, and with machines approximating the condition of mind and the minds of humans connecting across time and space, the future can and should be more a matter of choice than of destiny. (xxxi)

The optimistic message is clear: with computer technology we can put the idea of human *choice* above the Spectacle's message that we have reached a permanent neo-liberal destiny.

On a more concrete level, technology is also providing people with unprecedented abilities that almost seem clairvoyant and magical. For example, we can, for the first time in history, use the internet to broadcast information, something previously reserved for governments and corporations. We can connect to any number of people in any manner of circumstances and interests. We can also expose ourselves to any number of sources for information, bypassing corporate interpretations of reality and their advertisements. With free media software and cheap video equipment we can also create our own media and websites; tools previously held by the dominant powers are now in our hands. Overall, we are gaining the ability to take control of memes in an interactive way and free ourselves from the dragooning prescription of the

Spectacle. In many ways, according to de Kerkhove, with this newfound interactivity we become a "user" to reality:

> Understanding the potential of all of this digital technology, with its latent potential for interactivity, demands a fundamental shift in point of view. To look at interactivity from the traditional broadcaster's perspective is about as helpful as looking through the wrong end of a telescope: the user's point of view should be the critical one. The First Law of Interactivity is that the user shapes or provides the content, either by taking advantage of nonlinear access to make program selections, or by actually taking full responsibility for the content as a bona fide content provider. This is by no means a trivial distinction: Marshall McLuhan once quipped, "If the medium is the message, then the user, really, is the content." In other words, the message of any medium may be thought of as the way it shapes the user merely by engaging him or her in connecting with the medium. (9)

With this new way of seeing (the "user" point of view versus the spectator point of view), it is possible to refocus away from the illusions of the Spectacle, and to examine the proverbial backstage and its oppressive mechanisms. The user can then attempt to limit the influence of dominant memes, and at the same time create and deploy memes in ways both grassroots and technologically advanced.

One helpful invention that further enhances the "user" concept of seeing and interpreting reality is inventor Steve Mann's WearComp, which he describes:

> The WearComp (wearable computer) is a data processing system attached to the body, with one or more input and output devices. The primary input/output device consists of a technology called EyeTap. This allows the user to view the world as images imprinted onto the retina by rays of laser light controlled through several linked computers. The WearComp user "sees" through miniature cameras, with the image filtered into the computer system before finally being projected into the eye. The EyeTap allows the eye to function as both a camera and a display with text and graphic capabilities. In this way, eye and camera, mind and computer, are joined. The user is at once in constant contact with the surrounding world, and in constant contact with a data processor tailored to personal specifications. This allows for all the standard functions of a desktop computer - e-mail, Web browsing, word processing, data processing, etc.- plus constant mediation of visual input, and, of course, total mobility. In this kind of wearable computer the laser

output projection is always perceptible regardless of the particular task or body position. One does not turn the computer on or off. Rather, one functions at all times through the computer. The computer runs continuously and is always ready to interact with the user. Unlike a laptop computer, the wearable computer does not need to be opened up or turned on prior to use. One's vision is, in fact, constantly mediated through the computer…Unlike in traditional computing, the wearable computer sits in the background; it is ever-present, but rarely the primary task. Instead, the wearable computer provides constant mediation of one's surroundings. (2001: 9-10)

This astounding new technology, which could soon be as ubiquitous as the pager or cellphone, literally allows the user to mediate and record "reality" as they see it. It becomes possible to radically alter the way we see things: we can now zoom in on objects, change colours, block advertisements and billboards, use infra-red vision, etc. It is as though with the WearComp we are seeing the world through a video camera, and one that is connected to the Internet. According to Mann:

In my everyday existence, I live in a videographic world: I see the entire world, even my hands and feet, through a camera lens. A simple way to describe it would be to say that it's as if I am watching my entire life as a television show. However, unlike the passive television watcher, my goal is not to tune out reality. In fact, the device I wear…has quite the opposite effect: equipped with WearComp, it is up to me how and what I see, how and what I choose to focus on or exclude; this freedom heightens my sensitivity to the flow of information that exists in a perpetual swirl all around us. It also allows me to, in effect, liberate my imaginative space from much of the visual detritus that confronts and distracts us in the form of billboards and flashing neon signs. Functioning daily in tandem with WearComp does more than simply provide me with "special powers." The wearable computer allows me to explore my humanity, alter my consciousness, shift my perceptions so that I can choose - at any given time - to see the world in very different, often quite liberating, ways. (2001:3)

Not only is the user able to mediate their personal reality, but can also interconnect in any manner of ways with any number of people over the internet. For example, it becomes possible for someone on another computer to literally "see" through the "eyes" of the Wearcomp user. Mann can be out grocery

shopping and his wife can instruct him from a home computer, via a mouse cursor, which tomatoes to select. The implications for this type of technology are enormous. Reality itself is brought into question, because it is so easily fragmented, augmented, and mediated with Wearcomp.

With technologies like Mann's WearComp coming into play, there appears to be a move toward a human-friendly technology that, first and foremost, connects and joins communities and individuals, as opposed to disconnecting and alienating them. Due to the radical effects of this interconnectedness, Mann forecasts:

> In the coming decades, we will live in an age of shared realities and new levels of cultural discourse. No longer confined to our role as passive participants in a ratings shell game, culture will be freed from the constraints of commerce and entirely new paradigms exploring the relationship of art and entertainment and employment and daily life will manifest themselves, challenging many of the ways of being we currently take for granted. (2001:38-39)

Overall then, computer technology not only leads us to being exposed to exponentially more information, but also makes powerful tools previously reserved for dominant powers available, such as media-creation and broadcasting. With the interconnection complimenting these new tools, it becomes possible to control the memes, and hence erode the cultural hegemony and imperialism. Meme-warfare against oppression on a global scale, once only a pipe-dream, is now a profound reality.

Returning to the downside of postmodernism – that the new fragmented conditions we face are easily exploited for commercial gain by the Spectacle – it is worth noting that despite all the attention currently focussed on postmodernism, there are other critical theories and paradigms that might be more useful for our project. I am speaking firstly here of post-colonialism. Fortier notes:

> Unlike much postmodern theory, post-colonial theory often combines individual emotional commitment and outrage with a

defiant optimism. It is much more strident and activist than an acquiescent postmodernism. (130)

Helen Gilbert and Joanne Tompkins discuss post-colonialism's agenda in <u>Post-Colonial Drama: Theory, Practice, Politics</u>, stating that its overall purpose is to:

> …dismantle the hegemonic boundaries and the determinants that create unequal relations of power based on binary oppositions such as 'us' and 'them', 'first world' and 'third world', 'white and black', 'coloniser' and 'colonized'…post-colonial texts embrace a…specifically political aim: that of the continued destabilization of the cultural and political authority of imperialism." (3)

In <u>The Empire Writes Back</u>, Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin apply the term postcolonial to all cultures affected by the imperial process, from the moment of colonization to the present. They observe, for example, that literatures of all these cultures "emerged in their present form out of the experience of colonization and asserted themselves by foregrounding the tension with the imperial power, and by emphasizing their differences from the assumptions of the imperial centre. It is this which makes them distinctively post-colonial" (2). The authors also discuss four models of postcolonial texts: national or regional models; race-based models; comparative models of varying complexity; and "more comprehensive comparative models which argue for features such as hybridity and syncreticity as constitutive elements of all post-colonial literatures (syncretism is the process by which previously distinct linguistic categories, and, by extension, cultural formations, merge into a single new form)" (15). The authors note that there is an ongoing vigorous debate about what "decolonisation" implies - to some it means wiping away all traces of the colonial period, "recuperating pre-colonial languages and cultures," while "others have argued that not only is this impossible but that cultural syncreticity is a valuable as well as an inescapable and characteristic feature of all post-colonial societies and indeed is the source of their peculiar strength" (30). In <u>The Wretched of the Earth</u>, Franz Fanon writes, "In decolonisation, there is therefore the need of a complete calling in question of the colonial situation" (37).

While generally dealing with issues of colonization between races and nations, some theorists are delving deeper and mapping the complexity of the post-colonial condition. The work of Edward Said, for instance, offers acknowledgement and acceptance of hybridity. Interpreting this as the entanglement of cultural identities in a migratory and diasporic world, Said calls for a subjectivity which transcends the restraints of imperial, national or provincial limits. In his discussion of hybridity, Said observes that patterns of migration have rewritten postcolonial geography as well as identity: today the post-colonial is as much a part London, Montreal, Sydney, New York and Tokyo as it is of Hong Kong, Jerusalem, Delhi and Cape Town (Said: 1978, 1993).

The wider we can draw the boundaries in this case the better; post-colonial theory is activist, anti-oppressive, and calls into question imperialist representations, while creating new hybrid representations which subvert the originals. In many ways, since the Spectacle is a capitalism-inspired representation system and social structure that *colonizes* social relations, it can be argued that there is a new colonizer, of which we are all colonized by. By broadening the definition to take into account this new threat, the same strategies developed by the post-colonial theorists can be used in an attempt to understand, and ultimately to destabilize the cultural and political authority of the Spectacle. In other words, post-colonialism need not languish in the same condition of malaise that dragoons postmodernism. Post-colonialism is indeed a key field from the perspective of a critical (socio-theatrical) theory. Recalling the methods in how "script" can be observed within and collected from the Spectacle, post-colonialism can offer us insights into how to reformulate the discourse/script.

One facet of post-colonial work is to challenge the canon of western art, a challenge which takes myriad forms, from outright rejection to reappropriation and reformulation. For example, in "Strategies for Subverting the Canon," Cima examines how plays associated with the traditional theatre can be deconstructed and subverted:

> What is the social function and effect of our directorial work? Which specific strategies – design intervention, cross-casting, textual

changes, for example – might enable the particular audience of an individual production to see themselves anew? (94)

Clements and Donkin, in <u>Upstaging Big Daddy: Directing Theater as if Gender and Race Matter</u>, encourage the actors to "develop subtexts the playwrights never dreamed of" (2). The same approach can be applied to any type of representation in any medium.

When looking at the Spectacle's "script", versus the typical approach of analyzing and deconstructing its representations (eg: literature, theatre), it becomes very possible to develop what is essentially a radical dramaturgy. Used to collect "script", analyze the sources of domination (the "playwrights"), and provide tools to redeploy counter-actors with reformatted scripts into the Spectacle, this radical dramaturgy can challenge the new colonizer directly. Counter-actors with counter-scripts can be deployed to challenge the "show".

Another important field of critical theory, again one that can be expanded, is Queer theory. Queer theory is a set of ideas based around the idea that identities are not fixed and do not determine who we are. It suggests that it is meaningless to talk in general about 'women' or any other group, as identities consist of so many elements that to assume that people can be seen collectively on the basis of one shared characteristic is wrong. Indeed, it proposes that we deliberately challenge all notions of fixed identity, in varied and non-predictable ways. Queer theory is based, in part, on the work of Judith Butler (in particular her book <u>Gender Trouble</u>, 1990). Butler argues that sex (male, female) is seen to cause gender (masculine, feminine) which is seen to cause desire (towards the other gender). This is seen as a kind of continuum. Butler's approach – inspired in part by Foucault – is basically to smash the supposed links between these, so that gender and desire are flexible, free-floating and not 'caused' by other stable factors. Butler believes: 'There is no gender identity behind the expressions of gender; ... identity is performatively constituted by the very "expressions" that are said to be its results' (25). In other words, gender is a performance; it's what you do at particular times, rather than a universal identity. Butler suggests that certain cultural configurations of gender have seized a hegemonic hold (eg: they have

come to seem natural in our culture as it presently is) – but, she suggests, it doesn't have to be that way. Rather than proposing some utopian vision, with no idea of how we might get to such a state, Butler calls for subversive action in the present: 'gender trouble' – the mobilization, subversive confusion, and proliferation of genders – and therefore identity.

Queer theory need not be limited to gender; indeed it can be expanded to include any situation where a binary hegemony exists (eg: able/disabled, young/old, black/white, etc). David Gauntlett's website theory.org suggests:

> This idea of identity as free-floating, as not connected to an 'essence', but instead a performance, is one of the key ideas in queer theory. Seen in this way, our identities, gendered and otherwise, do not express some authentic inner "core" self but are the dramatic effect (rather than the cause) of our performances. David Halperin has said, 'Queer is by definition whatever is at odds with the normal, the legitimate, the dominant. There is nothing in particular to which it necessarily refers. It is an identity without an essence.' It's not (necessarily) just a view on sexuality, or gender. It also suggests that the confines of any identity can potentially be reinvented by its owner... (theory.org)

In this view, identity is malleable; casting is an open and ongoing process, which can be seized by the "user". Instead of accepting interpellated roles as being normal, "real" and serious, people can reclaim their self-hood and go on to play chosen roles. For example, the "actress" can be re-interpreted; instead of occupying a state of being, it can be seen as a role that is played. Queer theory sees identity as fluid, not fixed, and a product of cultural circumstances, effectively freeing up our identities for our own self-casting.

The sum of these theories, conditions, and technologies is this: meme-warfare has erupted. An unprecedented information war, in which anyone can participate if they liberate themselves from the Spectacle, now exists. By controlling the information that influences us, and by broadcasting our own memes, it is possible now to go to "war" against the Spectacle. Stephen DeVoy of website breakyourchains.org believes that:

We have become mentally and physically lazy, isolated, indebted and unimaginative. We have become sheep. Until the dawn of the Internet, we were on a one way trip to complete enslavement. However, now that a means of meme broadcasting exists which is sufficiently accessible to the masses, the masses are now able to engage in meme warfare themselves. Adding to the improved balance has been the rise of new authoring technology, such as the word processor and inexpensive printer. We can now produce our own documents, bumper stickers, posters, banners and distribute them at little expense. Given that the tools now exist to aggressively employ meme warfare against the ruling class, we would be foolish not to employ these tools in the forwarding of our cause.

Devoy traces memes back to the roots of where they came from, how they operate, and who generally deploys them:

Up until memes were understood, most memes emerged unintentionally. The Twentieth Century, however, saw the rise of mass marketing, television, radio and other means of providing for the hyper-reproduction of memes conducive to the interest of those with sufficient capital to own radio stations, television stations, newspapers and magazines. The capitalist ruling class quickly learned to use these meme broadcasters to induce individuals into behavior that benefited the capitalist class. Specifically, the goal was to increase consumption (and therefore fuel markets), decrease critical thought (and therefore put off revolution) and sap away the will to take a proactive role in shaping one's own individual life.

With meme-warfare, according to Devoy, it becomes possible to challenge the way cultural information is imparted and interpreted. Instead of being blinded by the prescribed "reality", it becomes necessary to realize why this "reality" exists, and in whose interest it is maintained. Devoy elaborates:

Meme warfare has existed as long as humankind has been able to communicate and to imitate. Like many existing phenomena, it went unrecognized for eons, despite the profound role it played… Memes are best thought of as the basic unit of intellectually motivated behavior. Memes are mental recipes for behavior, manifested both in terms of outward behavior and patterns of thought…Memes reproduce by copying from one mind to another. They are copied through communication and/or imitation…The

mental universe of humanity could then be thought of as a constant struggle between memes for resources. The resources, of course, are human brains… Just as complex biological organisms are constructed from the instructions of many genes, complex behavioral frameworks are constructed from the instructions of many memes. These complexes of memes stand in symbiotic relations to each other, each helping its peers to survive and compete against other complexes of memes. Such complexes of memes are referred to as memeplexes. Ideologies and religions are examples of memeplexes. As complex memetic entities, they are composed of memes and sub-complexes of memes that serve to improve the survival and ability to reproduce of the memeplex. Highly successful memeplexes include memes that compel humans to engage in behavior specifically for the purpose of reproducing the memeplex and defending the memeplex. Thus, in many religions and ideologies we see individuals engaging in preaching to the unconverted and persecution of those whose behavior impedes the reproduction of the memeplex.

Memes and memeplexes, then, can affect the society in both negative and positive ways. As they circulate through the culturesphere, memes deployed by the Spectacle often result in oppressive behaviour and the maintenance of destructive memeplexes. However, memes deployed by the Global Justice movement can challenge (and inoculate against) oppression, effectively suffocating and eliminating dangerous memes while constructing liberating anti-oppressive memeplexes.

Kalle Lasn is perhaps one of the leading experts on the frontlines of meme-warfare, and suggests on his website adbusters.org:

Strong memes are the cutting edge of cultural evolution – they change minds, alter behavior, shift paradigms and transform societies. In our information age, whoever has the memes has the power. Right now, corporations have the power. They beam their memes into our brains at the rate of a few thousand ads, brand logos and marketing thrusts per day. In a sense, it is a single message: "You must consume." Yet it has altered everything from the food we eat, to the way we get around town, to the ways we lust and love. Corporations also control much of the means of meme propagation: the TV and radio stations, movie theaters, magazines, newspapers. But counter-memes are appearing more frequently in the mindscape: spraycan editors "liberate" fashion billboards; bumper stickers ask, "Is Economic Progress Killing the Planet?";

poster campaigns urge people worldwide to join "Buy Nothing" and
"TV Turnoff" events.

Lasn goes on to look at the bigger picture. While he does believe that individuals
can launch their own attacks, it can also be possible, with interconnection, to do
much more:

> Every outburst of cognitive dissonance is useful, but to mount a
> serious challenge against corporate rule, we jammers must build
> our own meme factory. Because we have severely limited budgets,
> our strategies must be perfectly crafted to tear gaps in the glitter of
> the consumer spectacle. We must zero in on and deploy the
> macromemes and the metamemes – the core ideas without which a
> sustainable future is unthinkable. Meme warfare is growing ever
> more intense. The next revolution will be, as media guru Marshall
> McLuhan predicted, "a guerrilla information war." It will be fought in
> the streets with signs, slogans, banners and graffiti, but it will be
> won in newspapers, on the radio, on TV and in cyberspace. It will
> be a dirty, no-holds-barred propaganda war of competing
> worldviews and alternative visions of the future. The corporations
> have their ad agencies and PR firms, their design hacks and
> lawyers, and of course, they have their multi-million-dollar budgets.
> But that may not be enough. We have the Internet – the biggest
> and best meme medium ever invented. And we have a globally
> linked network of artists, designers, hackers and multi-media whiz-
> kids who are motivated by something much bigger than pleasing
> shareholders. We can win this battle – for ourselves and for the
> future. Let the meme combat begin!

Stephen DeVoy perhaps summarizes the case best; that meme-warfare "is the
primary and most effective means of ideological struggle for our century.
Learning the power of meme-warfare is essential to the success of any
movement struggling to destroy the dominant paradigm." He concludes with:

> The only limit to meme warfare is your imagination. Learn more
> about memes. Subversion of the dominate paradigm requires your
> active involvement in meme deployment. Be an active player and
> have fun.

Overall then, a Counter-Spectacle of sorts has appeared, populated by
agents of social change, or metaphorical "actors", who have liberated themselves

and are now in the process of both liberating others and challenging the Spectacle's discourse/script. With the tools of technology, critical theory (such as queer theory, feminism, and post-colonialism), and postmodernism, they are able to enlighten themselves to the nature of multiple realities, and take action against the dominant and oppressive worldviews that reign supreme. As part of the interconnected Global Justice movement, they are challenging oppression on the personal, cultural, and structural levels by reclaiming control of the memes that influence them, and by deploying counter-hegemonic memes into the Spectacle. This meme-warfare effectively jams the Spectacle's authority and propaganda, and contributes towards its ultimate demise.

Chapter 8

Theatrical Revolution

Theatrical revolution is in the air; never before have there been more exciting and frightening times for the theatre. The millennium has passed, technology is advancing at an extremely rapid pace, and the subject of globalization has captured the imaginations of people from all walks of life across the world. Practitioners, theorists, and activists are in the process of re-exploring and re-defining the theatre as we know it, producing new paradigms, techniques, and methodologies. It would appear that theatre is in the process of being re-tooled for engagements well beyond the boundaries of the traditional stage, and indeed far past the standard Western theatrical discourses. Hot topics currently include the relationships and interfaces between: theatre and computers, theatre and oppression, and theatre and postmodern society. Within these broad categories puzzling and ontological questions are being asked about virtual reality, wearable performance, identity politics, anti-oppression, educational practices, and global justice strategies.

There are also theatre practitioners, dramaturges, and academics with various critical goals in mind who are raising serious doubts as to the nature of the theatre as it is understood today. Performance theorist Richard Schechner, framed the problem with provocative aplomb for the gathered ranks of the American Association for Theatre in Higher Education in 1992:

> …theatre as we have known and practiced it - the staging of written dramas - will be the string quartet of the twenty-first century: a beloved but extremely limited genre, a subdivision of performance. (8)

Baz Kershaw, in <u>The Radical in Performance</u>, sees evidence that "political theatre" (a genre in the progressive and applied spheres) is in the process of

transforming into a new paradigm of "radical performance", a less structured and more powerful approach to social change through drama (1999).

In addition to "theatre" itself being challenged, so is the way it is imparted; being criticized is the "education system" component of the Spectacle (eg: universities, colleges, studios), which tend to teach the traditional paradigm and encourage depoliticized "success" in the Spectacle. In "Not so Special Vehicles" notable social-change theatre practitioner Anna Deavere Smith outlines in her advice to acting teachers to counter the difficulties she perceives with the way many actors are trained today:

> The first thing I suggest is, get your students ready for the "real real world", not the real world of how to get a job…Let's try to create a new actor. An actor who is less self-conscious, less concerned about the pose of acting…I am also concerned about the kinds of people we send into theatre and into the "industry". Are they humanitarians? Are they self-absorbed? Do they have humility?… Are they vulnerable? Vulnerable to whom and what? What in the way we train them creates humility and vulnerability? Who are these human beings?…What kinds of people are we recruiting? What kind of values do they have? I know from visits to some of your universities, that some of you are very concerned about that. These last four years have shown me a student who is more anxious, more frightened, more close-minded, more intolerant than I've ever seen… Actors used to be, in the days of commedia, humanitarians, gymnasts, actors, singers, psychiatrists rolled into one. **Provocateurs** [my emphasis]. The clowns and fools were willing to say what others would be shot for saying. Who do our actors speak for? Who can they speak for? (1077)

As people become more and more aware of the oppressive nature of the Spectacle, the critical debate is starting to heat up concerning the role of theatre in the postmodern society, and the ways in which theatrical education should be imparted. One thing is certain: dominant theatrical institutions in existence today, from Broadway to the lecture hall, are being radically challenged.

In addition to those who are calling the "theatre" as we know it into question, some bold explorers are skipping the debate and encouraging theatre to spread throughout entire on-campus activities. While the current trend witnesses many "theatre" departments at universities being closed down or

merged into programs like English and Communications, some practitioners are finding new ways to keep the theatre relevant. Arndt notes, in "Theatre at the Centre of the Core":

> Some of the more aggressive of the theatre programs at small institutions are finding ways to establish themselves as central and essential to the educational objectives of their respective institutions. Productions are being used as thematic or focus studies by colleges. Theatre instructors are making important contributions to the active-learning movement being adopted by faculties across the country. Theatre classes are being taught in interdisciplinary clusters and grouped with widely disparate disciplines. An important weapon that has been added rather recently to the arsenal of the theatre practitioner in this interdisciplinary campaign is the use of technology as a pedagogical tool, both in the classroom and in the rehearsal hall. (66)

By embracing technology, Arndt is suggesting that theatre can re-invent itself and be applicable to any discipline. Indeed, drawing some important parallels between theatre and computers, he notes that:

> …the same skills and talents used by a theatre practitioner who is an actor, director or choreographer are those most valued in the world of computers: the ability to make non-linear connections, the ability to interpret and manipulate symbols and images, the ability to project an end-user's reaction, the ability to effectively communicate through multiple mediums, and the ability to visualize and then execute a final product. These abilities, when applied to the computer, present a unique opportunity for theatre educators to use technology to cross-disciplinary lines and become the innovators and leaders of education's paradigm shift from an instruction-centered culture to a more learning-centered one. (66-67)

Overall there is a sense that the theatre as we know it is either going to wither away – or explode in some sort of revolutionary manner. What is certain is that the traditional-model paradigm is under attack from many angles, and hopefully will soon no longer be able maintain its hegemony and oppressive ways.

Despite pondering the arguments for and against "theatre", from our perspective we must also ask what the theatre is theoretically capable of. Given

the revolutionary challenges to the theatre as we know it, one must ask what the theatre is potentially capable of in terms of dealing with the oppression brought on by the Spectacle. Can there be a theatrical revolution that will sweep the Spectacle away once and for all?

Antonin Artaud, the great theatrical visionary, is being closely re-examined in the light of new technological and theoretical developments. His famous book, The Theatre and it's Double, has long puzzled practitioners and theorists. Artistically Artaud longed for fluidity, seamlessness, a blurring not only between different mediums, but also between artist and audience. Using the metaphor of plague, Artaud's goal was to bring into existence a radical viral theatre to induce a revolutionary upheaval, a vast theatre that would spread across the land eating away at and destroying false illusions and perceptions:

> The theatre like the plague is a crisis which is resolved by death or cure. And the plague is a superior disease because it is a total crisis after which nothing remains except death or an extreme purification. Similarly the theatre is a disease because it is the supreme equilibrium which cannot be achieved without destruction. It invites the mind to share a delirium which exalts its energies; and we can see, to conclude, that from the human point of view, the action of theatre, like that of plague, is beneficial, for, impelling man to see themselves as they are, it causes the mask to fall off, reveals the lie, the slackness, baseness, and hypocrisy of our world; it shakes off the asphyxiating inertia of matter which invades even the clearest testimony of the senses; and in revealling to collectivities of men their dark power, their hidden force, it invites them to take, in the face of destiny, a superior and heroic attitude they would never have assumed without it. (31-32)

Artaud sought to usher in a new counter-spectacular era, and his chief metaphor of the plague illustrates the effect he wished theatre to have upon the psyches of each audience member. The plague syndrome is complete without gangrene of the lungs and brain, the victim dying, or "the putrefaction of any member at all," affecting instead "the consciousness and the will" (21). It is a terrifying theatrical scourge that is "cruel," but has a "cleansing" effect. Artaud's plague does not destroy the human body, but transforms the mind. Artaud scholar George Popovich elaborates:

> According to Artaud, the more important aspects of existence are those submerged in the unconscious, those things that cause divisions within people and that lead to hatred, violence and disaster. He believed that, if given the proper theatrical experiences, people can be freed from their demonic behavior and can express the joy that civilization has forced them to repress. (223-4)

This theatrical "plague" would presumably reflect all that is good or rotten about a person, reveal the masks they wear (eg: interpellated roles), and cause these masks to shrivel up and fall off. The result of the experience is either "death or cure," meaning that either the afflicted emerges as a "superior and heroic" being, or is somehow metaphorically devastated. Were the theatre to be plague-like, it would extend well beyond the perimeters of an enclosed theatrical stage. Indeed, Artaud claims that:

> The theatre must make itself equal of Life…[as] the sort of liberated life which sweeps away human individuality and in which man is only a reflection. Myths, to express life in its immense, universal aspect, and from that life to extract images in which we find pleasure in discovering ourselves…And by doing so to arrive at a kind of general resemblance, so powerful that it produces its effect immediately. (116)

Making theatre the equal of Life is no small task. The current system of "theatre" comes nowhere close – contained securely in a traditional space, there is nothing plague-like about it. Ironically, the Spectacle is like a theatrical plague of corporate indoctrination, messages, advertisements, and immobilization; and the "theatre" is only one facet of its all-encompassing grasp. For theatre to be genuinely equal to life it would need to be sustained over a lifetime.

Because the Spectacle has hypnotised most people to accept it as reality, the theatre of "Cruelty" is precisely cruel because it radically challenges the notion of artificial being, forcing people to take a look at themselves and the ideologies to which they subscribe. It gives them an option in very clear terms: to reject the Spectacle in its entirety, or to inhabit it knowingly. Artaud says that this

theatre is a "dangerous scourge…one that attacks not bodies but customs" (26). He believes that:

> We must insist upon the idea of culture-in-action, of culture growing within us like a new organ, a sort of second breath… *a presence of mind…*This said, we can begin to form an idea of culture, an idea which is first of all a protest. A protest against the idea of culture as distict from life – as if there were culture on one side and life on the other, as if true culture were not a refined means of understanding and *exercising* life. (8-9)

The protest Artaud speaks of has to do with what he terms the "Double", an ontologically challenging space:

> Every real effigy has a shadow which is its double; and art must falter and fall from the moment the sculptor believes he has liberated the kind of shadow whose existence will destroy his repose. Like all magic cultures expressed by appropriate hieroglyphs, the true theatre has its shadows too, and, of all languages and all the arts, the theatre is the only one left whose shadows have shattered their limitations. From the beginning, one might say its shadows did not tolerate limitations. Our petrified idea of the theatre is connected with our petrified idea of a culture without shadows, where no matter which way it turns, our *esprit* encounters only emptiness... (12)

To Artaud the "Double" is the slippery transformative area related to the petrified theatre and culture (eg: the Spectacle) which are thought of as a mere effigy to true existence. Being a shadow, its qualities are ever-shifting and its power is to shift someone's perception into the realms of otherness, potentially inciting cultural eruption and theatrical revolution. Artaud suggests:

> For the theatre as for culture, it remains a question of naming and directing shadows: and theatre, not confined to a fixed language and form, not only destroys false shadows but prepares the way for a new generation of shadows, around which assembles the true spectacle of life…This leads to the rejection of the usual limitations of man and man's power, and infinitely extends the frontiers of what is called reality…We must believe in a sense of life renewed by the theatre, a sense of life in which man fearlessly makes himself master of what does not yet exist, and brings into being. (12-13)

If both the Spectacle and the "theatre" are only effigies of true existence, their shadows are the place where the key can be found to erupt the world. The Double of the theatre and the Double of the Spectacle must be rediscovered and engaged with if any change is to take place. To get there, according to Artaud: "It is simply a matter of changing the point of departure of artistic creation and of overturning the customary laws of the theatre" (110). Artaud claims:

> And if there is still one hellish, truly accursed thing in our time, it is
> our artistic dallying with forms, instead of being like victims burnt at
> the stake, signalling through the flames. (13)

Due to the dragooned nature of the Spectacle and the "theatre," radical steps are necessary to challenge them both. But how is it possible to be like victims burnt at the stake signalling through the flames? It is quite difficult to imagine what Artaud's theatre might look like.

Harrop and Epstein, in an attempt to succinctly analyze Artaud's theories on theatre, suggest that it should:

1) Break through the veneer of contemporary culture by a rigorous assault on the senses of the audience.

2) Reject the literary text as a primary method of theatrical expression.

3) Return to a theatre of myth and ritual.

4) Emphasize dreams, fantasy, and archetype.

5) Create an all-embracing sensual impact and spectacle.

6) Achieve a therapeutic purgation resulting in a permanent psychic change in the spectator. (300)

What might this theatrical revolution look like? Given its theatrical nature, might it be a performance of sorts that sweeps everyone up into it? Because it is plague-like, presumably those touched by its presence would be afflicted by its transformative properties, emerging from the purgation either superior or devastated. Also, because it is equal to life, it would indeed have to be all-

embracing. It is a difficult revolution to imagine, because it is one whereby theatre would take its place along side what is commonly defined as "reality". One can imagine something both carnivalesque and highly dramatic existing on a permanent basis in everyone's lives.

Most theorists concur that realising Artaud's theatrical dream is, and always will be, an impossibility. Given the poetic language that flavours Artaud's highly subjective and misunderstood theories, many theorists have failed to see that any practical theatrical application is indeed possible. Peter Brook suggests in The Empty Space that "Artaud applied is Artaud betrayed" (54), and according to deconstructionist Jacques Derrida, it is impossible because "the theatre of cruelty is not a *representation*. It is life itself, in the extent to which life is unrepresentable" (234). Derrida demonstrates this by asking, "Under what conditions can a theatre today legitimately invoke Artaud's name?" By a lengthy process of elimination, Derrida concludes that no theatre can be what Artaud has proposed: "There is no theatre in the world today which fulfils Artaud's desire. And there would be no exception to be made for the attempts made by Artaud himself" (235).

However, despite the prevailing view that Artaud's theatre is impossible, some theorists engaging with the wonders of the electronic age have recently started to argue otherwise. Stephen Schrum suggests that by experimenting dramatically with computers and digital technology it is possible to create a "kind of *Theatre and its Double* for computers and theatre" (1). Concerning computer technology, it is noteworthy that many people believe that the term "virtual reality" was coined by Jaron Lanier, signifying a state of computerized mediation considered synonymous with the interface glove and head mounted display. A little known fact is that it was Artaud himself who first coined the term "Virtual Reality" in 1938, in an essay entitled the "The Alchemical Theater":

> All true alchemists know that the alchemical symbol is a mirage as the theater is a mirage. And this perpetual allusion to the materials and the principle of the theater found in almost all alchemical books should be understood as the expression of an identity (of which alchemists are extremely aware) existing between the world in

which the characters, objects, images, and in a general way all that constitutes the *virtual reality* of the theater develops, and the purely fictitious and illusory world in which the symbols of alchemy are evolved. (49)

Artuad's idea of Virtual Reality involved no computers whatsoever; he envisioned alchemically charged theatrical multimedia environments that would physically envelop and spiritually transform audiences. With the invention of computer VR, it makes it easier to try and understand what Artaud was imagining, which makes it possible to contemplate his theatre not as an impossibility, but as something that could exist. Laurel of the Japanese Atari Research Division, for example, argues that Virtual Reality creates access to areas of:

Meanings that are rarely afforded by the real world. Dramatically constructed worlds are controlled experiments, where the bare bones of human choice and situation are revealed…If we can make such worlds interactive, where a user's choice and action flow through a dramatic lens, then we will enable an exercise of the imagination, intellect, and spirit of an entirely new order. (14)

The description sounds eerily like what Artaud himself proposed, decades before the invention of the computer. It is a sign of encouragement that perhaps Artaud's theories are indeed possible, potentially inevitable.

With minor theatrical revolutions occurring in the theatrical structures that exist – the dismissal of the traditional paradigm as dominant, the question of what role theatre can and should play in education, the realisation that theatre can be said to exist everywhere – perhaps the time has come to re-evaluate Artaud's theatre in the postmodern computerized society. From the perspective of a critical (socio-theatrical) theory, the theatrical revolution prescribed by Artaud would be ideal. Able to spread like a virus, it would destroy the oppressive interpellated roles while at the same time liberating people from oppression on all levels. The big question that needs to be asked is this: how could such a theatrical revolution come into being?

Chapter 9

Revolutionary Theatre

Just as time runs out for civilised man, time is running out for the theatre. Neither will survive without radical adjustment. It is no longer possible to politely impel a static audience to higher consciousness. What is required is a vibrant responsive theatre form that will spur a community's active development of its own new order. A form that demands reaction. If necessary out of self-preservation to protect themselves from a howling mass of theatricians about to knock inspiration down their throats.

– Chris Brookes, <u>A Public Nuisance</u> (241)

Looking back on Artaud's dream of a theatrical revolution that destroys interpellated roles and stamps out oppression, it is easy to conclude that such a thing is impossible; but that certainly doesn't stop people from trying! While the terms "revolutionary" and "radical" theatre are tossed around loosely, encompassing many types of political theatre that depart from the traditional (eg: Brecht, Boal, Dario Fo), its overall aim is well-summarized in Toni Sant's online *Applied and Interactive Theatre Guide*:

> Radical theatre aims to make extreme changes in existing views, habits, conditions, or institutions. Throughout the 20th-Century, avant-garde theatre has been concerned with politics or activism in one way or another. From the actions of the Futurist Movement through to the groundswell in political theatre after the 1960s, radical thought has always been applied to theatrical forms. Over the past four decades, activist groups have used ritual concepts, often including participation of the spectator, taken to the streets, and organized festivals and spectacles presenting ideas marked by a considerable departure from the usual or traditional.

I might add, at least for the purposes of this study, that revolutionary theatre challenges specific instances of oppression. On the personal level, the player is often encouraged to overcome any oppressive tendencies and worldviews. On

the cultural level, the oppressiveness associated with traditional theatrical forms is radically challenged, freeing up the theatre as an arts democracy, and rejecting the dominant media's self-appointed right to frame social reality and maintain cultural hegemony. On the structural level, various oppressive institutions become the target of the revolutionary theatre, challenging their practices, mandates, and (in many cases) *raison d'être*.

The revolutionary theatre, like the invisible theatre, deploys its theatricals into the social reality, or "real world". In this, the time of the Spectacle, it appears to be branching out and growing at a rapid pace. Often seen as a sort of grey area between theatre and reality, revolutionary theatre, I theorize, always aims to theatrically challenge hegemonic thought-patterns and oppressive systems. Furthermore, I believe that revolutionary theatre, in order to be effective, must occupy the realm of what I shall call *counter-hegemonic playing*. To help clarify this concept, I have devised the following Reality Interpretation Chart:

Figure 9.1 – Reality Interpretation Chart
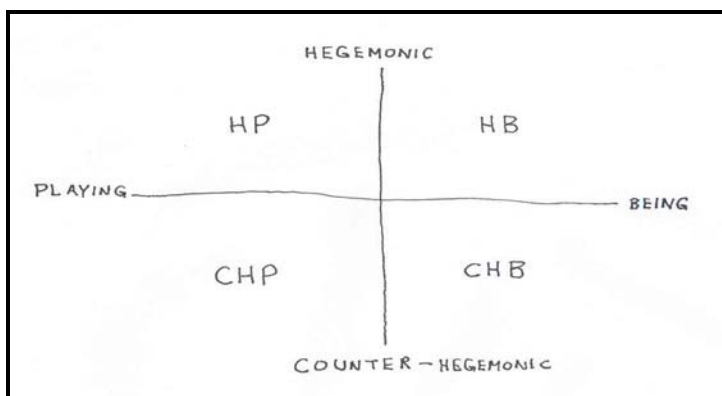
Like any good X-Y graph, the subject is placed somewhere within the mathematical matrix. In this case, the subject would be a person within a situation, and the chart would determine how they interpret the reality of that situation.

Generally speaking, the *hegemonic* versus *counter-hegemonic* axis is probably more prominent than the *being* versus *playing* axis. People either

support the hegemony that exists (the Spectacle) or they challenge it (the Counter-Spectacle). In both cases, they mostly reside in the realm of *being* – either hegemonic being (HB) or counter-hegemonic being (CHB). A CEO exists in the former, a human rights activist in the latter. These clash often, but the Spectacle wins out most times because it controls the media, it maintains a consumerist environment, it has the resources, and it can co-opt (and hence castrate or neuter) many counter-spectacular forms. CHB is always under threat of being co-opted, marginalized, and destroyed by HB. In many ways, CHB cannot physically escape the Spectacle, are hence is reliant upon it. Even the rowdiest street protest will eventually disintegrate; the CHB activity will dissolve, and the street will return to a state of HB – wonderful for shoppers. Activists, despite their best efforts, must live in a world saturated with HB and Spectacle.

The realm of hegemonic playing (HP) is also in a position that is reliant upon HB. Often seen as "leisure", HP can be said to encompass all forms of playing that are sanctioned by the Spectacle (HB) – sports, board games, entertainment, tourism, traditional theatre, etc. As forms of sanctioned play, these are often viewed as "luxuries" that are not to be taken too "seriously" in the grand scheme of things; they are commodities to be experienced and consumed. Play, in this sense, is bound by already defined "rules". Both the CEO and the human rights activist might enjoy playing a good game of squash, or perhaps a round of Scrabble. In each case, there are strict formulae, rules, and constraints (such as time). Each "play" activity is contained – it will come to an end in due course, like any finite game. HP, then, is a participatory diversion, what one might do in their "spare time". In no way does it challenge HB; rather it compliments it.

The realm of counter-hegemonic playing (CHP) is perhaps the least understood and engaged with in these times of the Spectacle; unfortunate because it offers us ways of radically reinterpreting and hence transforming reality as we know it. CHP, as positioned diametrically opposite HB, has properties that can short-circuit the hegemonic thought-patterns and oppressive systems that keep HB (The Spectacle) very much dominant and alive. Play on a fundamental level has more to do with what children do when they part ways with

reality, than say the "playing" of a sanctioned game or sport. Play, in this pure sense, is very difficult to define. Csikszentmihalyi (1981) described play as "a subset of life..., an arrangement in which one can practice behavior without dreading its consequences" (14). Garvey (1977) defined play as an activity which is: 1) positively valued by the player; 2) self-motivated; 3) freely chosen; 4) engaging; and 5) which "has certain systematic relations to what is not play" (5). The relationship between play and "reality" (non-play) is a contentious one. According to Walther (2003):

> Play is an open-ended territory in which make-believe and world-building are crucial factors… When it comes to play, the installation of the form of the play-world-non-play-world distinction must, performatively, feed back on itself during play: continually rearticulating that formal distinction within the play-world, so as to sustain the internal ordering of the play-world… In play-mode one does not want to fall back into reality (although there is always the risk of doing so)… Hence, in playing there is the inherent but fascinating danger of being "caught" in reality. Nothing is more disturbing for play than the aggressive intermission of reality which at all times jeopardizes play *as* play or simply threatens to *terminate* the privileges of play. Then it's back to normal life.

"Reality", however, is a slippery subject, especially in these times of the Spectacle, and in the case of a revolutionary theatre project getting back to "normal life" would almost certainly spell failure. Looking at the issue from a different (and more useful) angle, Walther suggests:

> Systems theory…alarms us that one should not conceive of reality in a naïve naturalistic sense. Rather, reality is the horizon that is transgressed in order to play, and it therefore becomes "the other" of play. However, importantly, this otherness also has to abide within play, as it is the latter's indication of what separates it from non-play. Therefore, the other is simultaneously, as difference, and viewed from the inside of play, the *unity* of play. Both non-play and play are "realities," because they are products of a distinction, a difference that makes a difference…The basic structure of play lies in its ability to create contingent resorts based on distinctions which are open to meaning.

Pure play, in this sense, can be seen as an alternative "reality" to HB, CHB, and HP, all of which are contained by the Spectacle. Play, in this pure sense, is perhaps non-hegemonic, sitting neutrally on the line between hegemonic and counter-hegemonic. "Play commands presence," according to Walther; paradoxically "we have to be there - not only *be* there, but also be *there*." In other words, we not only have to be present, but we also have to immerse ourselves into the new "reality" of the playing at hand.

One of my favourite descriptions of the word comes from a poem/script titled "PLAY", posted on the internet by performance artist Vincent Kamberk:

To play is to listen to the inner force
that wants to take form and rejoice
spontaneously, mindlessly, enthusiastically.
It needs no reason, no planning, no effort
it is the joyful, spontaneous expression of ones self.
Play is innocent, like our first experience of it
before the games and the rules
when we were toddlers
before the conditions and the trophies arrived
when we just went 'Hooooooopppppppppppaaaaaaaa!!!!!!!'
not knowing where we were going
without manipulation, without premeditation, without expectations
through the path of least resistance
when we could full heartedly trust the universe

no fears, no reluctance
There is such freedom there

Kamberk's poem, in my view, sums up the essence of the word best. Having seen Kamberk perform the piece, I like to frequently ponder it; indeed Kamberk tells me he lives by this word. Often I wonder as to the existence of this magical realm where there are no rules, no trophies, no fears, no reluctance. It is the sort of realm that one can find easily in the playgrounds of youth; unfortunately as one gets older it seems to fleet away, eventually becoming nothing but the vaguest of notions. Given current circumstances, it often seems hard to disagree with the pessimistic view held by the by the Crimethinc. Workers Collective:

> Daily life, with its intensifying alienations and psychopathology becomes more spectacular and bizarre. *All is not well in Utopia.* We grow more dependent on glitter and diversion to fill the void where all that is human is gutted. Life is reduced to a game. *But there is nowhere to play.* (back cover)

It often feels that play in the Kamberkian sense is simply not allowed. The Spectacle insists that we must "grow up" and stop playing; it insists that play is a mere developmental stage found in children, which helps them to develop into full fledged adults, who are expected to reside mostly in the realm of HB.

However, there is hope in the form of CHP. For play to become counter-hegemonic it must retain the qualities of pure play while at the same time directly challenge the realm of HB. From the theatrical perspective, this must involve the playing of a character in a meta-theatrical situation that is not sanctioned by HB. By "meta-theatrical" I am referring to a situation that inhabits the realms of both theatre and HB-sanctioned "reality", as in the case I brought up earlier with the *entartiste* who pies a politician. For the *entartiste*, looking at the situation dramatically, the theatrical performance is what matters most, and the politician is cast as an unwitting *character* in the play. The politician typically will not surrender any ontological boundaries; insisting that it was an act of "assault". The politician refuses to acknowledge the performance as such. Meta-theatre, in the traditional theatre sense is often defined as "a play with a play", as is evident in many Shakespearian works. For the purposes of this study, the meta-theatre is meant to be understood as "counter-hegemonic playing within the Spectacle". Characters, such as the *entartiste*, are created and played by the sorts of people who might best be described as counter-hegemonic theatricians. Instead of absorbing the Spectacle as passive spectators in the realms of HB and HP, or fighting it on its own ontological terms as in CHB, the operator in the realm of CHP is not only denying the self-appointed "reality" to the Spectacle, but is actively challenging its script/discourse in a dramatic manner, effectively propelling interpellated characters in the Spectacle to play in an entirely different show. This new show, it can be argued, is designed to expose oppressive systems, challenge hegemonic thinking, to encourage CHP, and ultimately to rip

the interpellated masks off those in HB. Meta-theatre, as such, is an act of cultural resistance.

There is a long, long history behind this sort of dramatic and revolutionary activity. While it is beyond the scope of this thesis to go into great detail on the history of all the different forms of CHP, I highlight certain ancient and contemporary philosophies that lend themselves well to the concept, and extract elements from each that are useful to this theory. Following the intellectualizing in this chapter, I provide a practical list of techniques in the next; a list of recipes for performative cultural resistance, a "revolutionary theatre cookbook".

It should come as no surprise that this type of behaviour/performance, which is prevalent throughout all human societies, is attributed to the concept of The Fool, which is closely associated with folly, festivity, fantasy, and carnival. These, in turn, are customs which temporarily invert the normal social order, often challenging authority through satire, play and masquerade. According to one mysterious quote from an unknown source:

> It is the eternal message of The Fool, who takes the stage whenever greed, arrogance, authority, pride and sycophancy lay claim to the public headspace. These are the acts of real fools, without which The Fool would be useless and mute. The Fool is a looking-glass. She is male and female, he is human and animal, they are one moment immersed in the workaday routine and the next overturning the norms of daily life. When we play The Fool, we are The Other, strangers who are in this world but not entirely of it. The ancient term Narrenfreiheit means "freedom of the fool." That freedom reminds us that in a moment of ecstasy we can sweep away the illusion of so much of what we endure. The Fool breaks the trail; the revolutionaries follow.

The first thing that must be noted is that the Fool conducts her own performance, or "show". "Narrenfreiheit", or fool's liberty, is the license to speak unpopular truths as long as they are cloaked into the forms of jokes or satire; and this license is the foundation of any Fool's performance. The overall effect is one whereby HB is radically challenged through CHP. According to Zijderveld:

> For the duration of their mirthful performances traditional fools rejected the established patterns of thought and emotion, the norms, values and meanings of daily routine, the roles and habits of everyday life – in short, the structures of the taken-for-granted lifeworld…Traditional fools played erratic games with the primary foundations of human existence, with the basic structures of the lifeworld, with the essential criteria by which human beings manage to experience meaning at all. Turning reality upside down, they rendered it, for the duration of their performance, to chaos, to the forces of unstructured primeval energy…They possessed a magico-religious surplus value. (2)

The role of the Fool, then, was to theatrically challenge dominant and oppressive social realities, and to transform HB into a meta-theatre where CHP takes prominence. Empson writes: "It is a major activity of the Fool to make a fool of other people, so that this word gives a particularly strong case for…the return of the meaning of the word upon the speaker" (107-108). If the performance is strong, according to Willeford, those witnessing the Fool are potentially liberated and transformed in their perceptions:

> The fool begins, socially, as the outcast, the parasite, the tramp, though he may in the course of his show prove himself more powerful than the king and in fuller relation than the king is to the intelligence and vitality of the world that embraces the microcosmic kingdom in a larger whole. (147)

The Fool, then, has the power to reframe a situation in a way that causes enlightenment through reflection. Zijderveld suggests that by juxtaposing hegemonic reality with subversive performance it is entirely possible to accomplish this effect:

> The traditional fool contributed to the grounding of tradition, - the values, norms and meanings of society - in the consciousness of individuals, yet by his contrary behaviour in which standard social roles and hierarchies of power and authorities were reversed, he demonstrated to the members of his audience that things as they are could just as well be quite different, that reality as it is experienced in the routine of daily life can be transcended to a level from which 'normal' reality suddenly looks 'abnormal'. That is, if one follows the fool into the reality of his looking-glass, if one adapts to his 'language', his 'logic', his kind of 'reason', the routine and

'normal' reality of everyday life, with its rules, structures and hierarchies, begins to look genuinely foolish. Stepping out of the looking-glass again, back into 'normal' reality, one will appreciate the security, the certainty, the cognitive and emotional clarity of this reality again, but one will also do so 'tongue in cheek' because one has received a very deep insight in the contingency of this very reality. (27)

The concept feels familiar, and indeed similar to Brecht's V-effects, Boal's *I-in-situ*, McLuhan's "reality control room", queer theory's performative identity, and Artaud's Virtual Reality – oppressive reality (HB) is dramatically confronted in order to liberate perceptions and lead to positive transformation. There are other similar folly-linked theories and movements in this vein, such as Dada, Futurism, Surrealism, Lettrism, the Situationists, culture-jamming, and most recently Reflectionism. We will arrive at these soon.

According to Zijderveld "traditional folly seems to represent a universal phenomenon whose basic characteristics transcend [the] circumstantial particulartities. By reflecting everyday-life reality in a looking glass, and so reversing everything that exists, folly presented a curious reality, a chimeric reality…" (10). The chimeric reality produced by, say, the *entartiste*, acts in direct opposition to the "reality" of the Spectacle. This sort of folly is the foundation of all revolutionary theatre, and for the sake of this theory, it is a place we must visit. Unfortunately in these times of the Spectacle, folly isn't what it used to be

To begin our journey into the realms of folly, we must first look at it historically. Zijderveld notes that:

Traditional folly always thrived in times and situations of transition. In many different traditional societies people have ceremonially reversed the existing order of things during periods of time in which fundamental changes took place. The ancient Roman Saturnalia, the medieval Festival of Fools, and the contemporary European carnival are examples of such foolish transition ceremonies. During the transition from the old to the new year, during Shrove Tide or Lent - a period in which nature regenerates and in which the Easter drama of death and resurrection is commemorated - during marriage and funeral ceremonies, during initiation rites, people throughout the ages and in culturally quite different contexts have staged foolish performances, changed sex roles, reversed social

> hierarchies, overthrown value patterns, violated tabooed norms, and acted generally as in a mirror fashion. In maritime history crossing the equator for the first time has always been an event which called for a ritual initiation ruled by folly. (42-43)

But folly, like an endangered species, appears to be threatened. There is a consensus among the theorists I have quoted that folly does not exist anymore in the manner it used to. Back in the days of yore it seems folly was everywhere – in the Dionysian theatre of ancient Greece, *commedia dell arte* shows, mummering, janneying, and various other manifestations. Characters including clown, bouffon, Harlequin, jester, and trickster abounded. These were ecstatic theatrical happenings that literally turned reality upside down through masquerade. One of the best examples, according to Cox, is the medieval European holiday known as the Feast of Fools:

> On that colorful occasion, usually celebrated about January first, even ordinarily pious priests and serious townsfolk donned bawdy masks, sang outrageous ditties, and generally kept the whole world awake with revelry and satire. Minor clerics painted their faces, strutted about in the robes of their superiors, and mocked the stately rituals of church and court. Sometimes a Lord of Misrule, a Mock King, or a Boy Bishop was elected to preside over the events. In some places the Boy Bishop even celebrated a parody mass. During the Feast of Fools, no custom or convention was immune to ridicule and even the highest personages of the realm could expect to be lampooned. (3)

Like a miniature theatrical revolution, for twelve days per year social roles would be dramatically reversed, unleashing periodic transformative theatricals, causing reflection on seeing, being, and playing.

Unfortunately in the current era no such concept exists concretely, suggesting that folly has indeed been in a state of demise. Cox traces its disintegration:

> The Feast of Fools was never popular with the higher-ups. It was constantly condemned and criticized. But despite the efforts of fidgety ecclesiastics and an outright condemnation by the Council of Basel in 1431, the Feast of Fools survived until the sixteenth century. Then in the age of Reformation and Counter-Reformation it

gradually died out. Its faint shade still persists in the pranks and revelry of Halloween and New Year's Eve. Chroniclers of Western history seldom lament the passing of the Feast of Fools. There are reasons why they do not. Often it did degenerate into debauchery and lewd buffoonery. Still, its death was a loss. The Feast of Fools had demonstrated that a culture could periodically make sport of its most sacred royal and religious practices. It could imagine, at least once in a while, a wholly different kind of world-one where the last was first, accepted values were inverted, fools became kings, and choirboys were prelates. The demise of the Feast of Fools signaled a significant change in the Western cultural mood: an enfeeblement of our civilization's capacity for festivity and fantasy. Its demise showed that people were beginning to see their social roles and sacred conventions through eyes that could not permit such strident satire, that they no longer had the time or the heart for such trenchant social parody…festivity and fantasy do play a less central role among us now than they did in the days of holy fools; mystical visionaries, and a calendar full of festivals. And we are the poorer for it. (3 – 4)

Why did the Feast of Fools disappear? Why did the virtues of rationality, sobriety, thrift, industry, and ambition gain such prominence at the expense of other values? Why were mirth, play, madness, and festivity effectively dismissed and marginalized?

Michel Foucault has gone to great lengths to answer these questions. In Madness and Civilization he traces folly's demise starting with a re-examination of the historical relationship between Reason and Madness:

In the Middle Ages and until the Renaissance, man's dispute with madness was a dramatic debate in which he confronted the secret powers of the world; the experience of madness was clouded by images of the Fall and the Will of God, of the Beast and the Metamorphosis, and of all the marvellous secrets of knowledge. In our era, the experience of madness remains silent in the composure of a knowledge which, knowing too much about madness, forgets it. (xii)

Our current time of the Spectacle is, of course, an extension of the so-called "Age of Reason", an era in which, according to Foucault, a schism occurred whereby "scientific" fields like psychiatry began a ruthless repression of folly. In the Introduction to Fouccault's book, José Barchillon sums up his argument:

> …the author feels that Freud's death instinct also stems from the tragic elements which led men of all epochs to worship, laugh at, and dread folly simultaneously. Fascinating as Renaissance men found it – they painted it, praised it, sang about it – it also heralded for them death of the body by picturing death on the mind. (vi)

Foucault is therefore determining an era (the Renaissance) whereby Folly was suddenly considered negative – associated with death. Ironically, the "Age of Reason" was unreasonable in that something previously deemed an integral part of everyday living – folly – was labelled as undesirable and dangerous, a stigma that goes on to this day. Returning briefly to Gramsci's theories of cultural hegemony, it is easy to see that the hegemonic norm changed in favour of "Reason" during the Renaissance. Previously the relationship between the two was balanced and interactive, but now the scales are weighed down in favour of Reason. Foucault explains:

> In the serene world of mental illness, modern man no longer communicates with the madman: on one hand, the man of reason delegates the physician to madness, thereby authorizing a relation only through the abstract universality of disease; on the other, the man of madness communicates with society only by the intermediary of an equally abstract reason which is order, physical and moral constraint, the anonymous pressure of the group, the requirements of conformity. (x)

Noting Foucault's observations, it is clear that nobody wants to be labelled a "madman"; the hegemonic forces are still far too strong. Returning to Gramsci's first criteria for hegemony to take place, language, Foucault notes there is an unequal relationship between the two:

> As for a common language, there is no such thing; or rather, there is no such thing any longer; the constitution of madness as a mental illness, at the end of the eighteenth century, affords evidence of a broken dialogue, posits the separation as already effected, and thrusts into oblivion all those stammered, imperfect words without fixed syntax in which the exchange between madness and reason was made. The language of psychiatry, which is a monologue of reason about madness, has been established only on the basis of such a silence. (x – xi)

Tying into Gramsci's third criteria: "Popular religion and, therefore, also the entire system of beliefs, superstitions, opinions, ways of seeing things and of acting" (57 – 58), it is apparent that the current hegemonic belief system is one all too often based on ignorance, greed, and HB, whereby very little changes in a positive humanist way, and the status quo of consumerism ruling is kept aloft (potentially increasing rapidly with the rise of globalization). Ironically, this HB with its oppressive "common sense" is all based on "Reason".

Can Madness therefore be a necessary ingredient to search for "good sense"? Is it possible that the only way to challenge the gross oppression suffered by all from the Spectacle is to try and accept Folly as an integral part of human nature? Must we use Madness to its full potential instead of suppressing it? Returning to Barchillon, he believes that:

> Madness is really a manifestation of the "soul", a variable concept which from antiquity to the twentieth century covered approximately what came to be known, after Freud, as the unconscious part of the human mind. (viii)

While children constantly invent new fantastic worlds in the playgrounds of their unconscious imagination, adults are limited as to what they should think and do by the hegemonic "norms" in place. Folly is actively discouraged.

Still, there is reason to be optimistic; folly appears to be making a comeback. Because the world is in a stage of rapid transition, because the modernity associated with the "Age Of Reason" is under constant attack, because enhanced expression is now available, and because the oppression is becoming unbearable, the fields are perhaps fertile for folly to grow and ripen again into the enchanted garden of yesteryear. Indeed, attempts to resurrect folly have already been made, and continue to this day under various guises.

Following the "Age of Reason", especially in the twentieth century, there have been movements that have attempted to thrust folly back into the spotlight. Here I am speaking of Futurism, Dadaism, Surrealism, Lettrism, the Situationists, and most recently culture-jamming and Reflectionism. I will cover the first four

somewhat briefly, spend considerable time on the work of the Situationists in the late 1960s, then examine the contemporary manifestations of culture-jamming and Reflectionism in some detail.

Futurism was the first attempt in the 20th century to reinvent life as it was being transfixed by new technologies and conceive of a new race in the form of machine-extended man. Futurism was first announced on Feb. 20, 1909, when the Paris newspaper *Le Figaro* published a manifesto by the Italian poet and editor Filippo Tommaso Marinetti. The name Futurism, coined by Marinetti, reflected his emphasis on discarding what he conceived to be the static and irrelevant art of the past and celebrating change, originality, and innovation in culture and society. The Futurists loved speed, noise, machines, pollution, and cities; they embraced the exciting new world that was then upon them rather than hypocritically enjoying the modern world's comforts while loudly denouncing the forces that made them possible. Marinetti's manifesto glorified the new technology of the automobile and the beauty of its speed, power, and movement. It was purposely intended to inspire public anger and generate rhetoric; passionately bombastic, its tone was aggressive and inflammatory, designed to arouse controversy and to attract widespread attention. He exalted violence and conflict and called for the sweeping repudiation of traditional cultural, social, and political values and the destruction of such cultural institutions as museums and libraries (Pierre, 1969). While Futurism did not challenge oppression itself, it did have the effect of challenging hegemonic ideas, especially as they related to representation and the arts.

Dada was a nihilistic movement in the arts that flourished chiefly in France, Switzerland, and Germany from about 1916 to about 1920. Dada was based on the principles of deliberate irrationality, anarchy, and cynicism and the rejection of laws of beauty and social organization. Hugo Ball, Emmy Hennings, Tristan Tzara, and others founded the Cabaret Voltaire, dedicated to presenting, in Ball's words, "the ideals of culture and of art as a program for a variety show." The most widely accepted account of the movement's naming concerns a meeting held in 1916 at Hugo Ball's Cabaret Voltaire in Zürich, during which a

paper knife inserted into a French-German dictionary pointed to the word *dada*; this word was seized upon by the group as appropriate for their anti-aesthetic creations and protest activities, which were engendered by disgust for modernist and bourgeois values and despair over World War I. Its proponents came from all parts of Europe and the United States at a time when their native countries were battling one another in the deadliest war ever known. They did not restrict themselves to being painters, writers, dancers, or musicians; most of them were involved in several art forms and in breaking down the boundaries which kept the arts distinct from one another. Indeed, the Dadaists were not content to make art. They wanted to affect all aspects of Western civilization, to take part in the revolutionary changes which were the inevitable result of the chaos of the First World War. (Gordon, 1987, Pierre, 1969) According to Snipe, one of the curators of the online International Dada Archive:

> They were not interested in writing books and painting pictures which a public would admire in an uninvolved manner; rather, they aimed to provoke the public into reacting to their activities: to the Dadaists, a violently negative reaction was better that a passive acceptance.

The performances at the Cabaret Voltaire were revolutionary in nature, and highly disruptive of traditional artistic norms. Anarchic in nature, they often incited people to carry out acts of revolution. The atmosphere at the Cabaret Voltaire was unlike anything seen in Europe at the time. Indeed, according to Gordon:

> The Cabaret Voltaire performances were never perceived as "theatre," and only occasionally counted as entertainment. The reading of manifestos overlapped with chansons, masked dances, lectures, and modem music. Ball, Huelsenbeck, and Tzara experimented with three kinds of poetic techniques: *Lautgedichte* (sound-poetry and noise-music); simultaneous poetry; and chance poetry. Although the Futurists and turn-of-the-century German poets had already pioneered the use of nonsense words and onomatopoetic sounds as literary devices, the Dadas incorporated them into moments of hysterical incantation with real drumbeats - when other performers were not imitating those sounds with their mouth. For Ball, the *Lautgedichte* were akin to wild episodes of glossolalia, the speaking in unknown or divine tongues; he called it

religious verse without words. The recitation of words in various languages spoken at the same time, or simultaneous poetry, produced a strange comic effect that seemed appropriate for the multi-lingual Dadas. Literature was transforming itself into a game. Finally, chance poetry, Tzara's invention, was often created by randomly picking words out of a hat. Although interesting products resulted from Tzara's technique, the very idea of chance poetry spelled out an apocalyptic and revolutionizing message: anyone can make art. (14)

This message was the foundation for a radical shake-up of the arts in Western culture, an influence that we continue to witness to this day.

Surrealism, often viewed as the more successful cousin of Dada, was a movement for the liberation of the mind that emphasized the critical and imaginative powers of the unconscious. Deeply influenced by the psychoanalytic work of Freud and Jung, surrealism is often seen as a style in which fantastic visual imagery from the subconscious mind is used with no intention of making the artwork logically comprehensible. In its negative attitude toward literary and artistic tradition, and opposition to the heritage of Western culture, surrealism superficially resembled Dada. However, surrealism is significantly broader in scope, and expounded a more positive view that the world could be transformed into a fertile crescent of freedom, love, and poetry. The movement represented a reaction against what its members saw as the destruction wrought by the "rationalism" that had guided European culture and politics in the past and that had culminated in the horrors of World War I (Waldberg, 1971).

André Breton's Surrealist Manifesto of 1924 and the publication of the magazine *La Révolution Surréaliste* ("The Surrealist Revolution") marked the beginning of the movement as a public agitation. In the manifesto of 1924 Breton defines surrealism as "pure psychic automatism" with automatism being spontaneous creative production without conscious moral or aesthetic self-censorship. Breton saw the unconscious as the wellspring of the imagination, and he defined genius in terms of accessibility to this normally untapped realm. Surrealism was a means of reuniting conscious and unconscious realms of experience so completely that the world of dream and fantasy would be joined to

the everyday rational world in "an absolute reality, a surreality." Seeking to embrace all forms of creative expression in their liberative effort to attain what Breton called "the true functioning of thought," the surrealists set about attacking, on the broadest possible front, conventions, prescribed rules, and consecrated values - cultural as well as aesthetic (Waldberg, 1971). In his "What is Surrealism" lecture given in Brussels on 1st June 1934, Breton suggested:

> …today, more than ever before, *the liberation of the mind*, demands as primary condition, in the opinion of the surrealists, the express aim of surrealism, *the liberation of man*, which implies that we must struggle with our fetters with all the energy of despair; that today more than ever before the surrealists entirely rely for the bringing about of the liberation of man upon the proletarian Revolution.

Surrealism was truly international in its scope, and exponents of its revolutionary principles shared an unshakable faith in the power of the imagination to revitalize poetry and art, and to compensate for the sociopolitical and religious forces that they found so oppressive and stultifying. Like Dada, surrealism is widely credited with catalyzing transformations in visual art, writing, film, and political thought; not to mention everyday life.

Lettrism was a response to André Breton's perceived control of surrealism and an attempt to popularise poetry. After 1945, Surrealism, weakened by splits, defections and the disruptions of the second World War, found its avant-garde hegemony challenged by new "rivals". In Paris, the young Rumanian exile, Isadore Isou, led a group called the Lettrists, who were experimenting with sound-poetry, paintings with letters as their subject, and subversive films. The Lettrists worked in a variety of forms, but were perhaps best known for their performative cultural interventions. In 1950, a group of Lettrists, dressed as Dominican monks, disrupted Easter Mass at Notre Dame and read out an anti-religious poem. Almost just as controversially, old Dadaists and Surrealists found their poetry readings disrupted by Lettrists shouting "Surrealism is dead!" Guy-Ernest Debord joined the group in 1950, following the Lettrists' attempted disruption of the Cannes Film Festival. The following year Isou's film *The Drivel*

and Eternity Treatise was awarded the "Avant-Garde Award" at the Cannes Film Festival; signaling the end of the "chiseling phase" in cinema, with the film scratched, torn, and in parts completely blank. Overall, the Lettrists produced a broad range of proposals: the abolition of museums and placing art in bars, keeping the Metro open all night, and opening the roofs of Paris like pavements with escalators to help gain access, to name a few (Hussey, 2002).

In 1952 Debord and few others broke-away from Isou's movement and founded the Lettriste International (LI). Divergence had emerged a while back, and the occasion for the break-away was a demonstration Debord and the others held against Charlie Chaplin's Parisian press conference, an action condemned by Isou. The LI was a Dada-like group intent upon a form of cultural subversion and provocation with the everyday environment as its theatre. During the five years of its existence the LI was a very small and relatively unknown group. Its magazine, 'Potlatch' was distributed freely. While avoiding "work", they decided to dedicate themselves to the serious study of leisure, mainly through practical experimentation. The LI put into 'experimental practice' the architectural and behavioural theories already outlined by the Lettrist Movement, which lead to the elaboration of the concept of Unitary Urbanism and its field-study, Psychogeography. Their starting point was the idea that architecture influences the life of the people who live in it in a much greater way than commonly thought. A critique of architecture thus becomes a way of criticising life as a whole (Hussey, 2002).

On the heels of the LI came the Situationist International (SI), originating in a small band of avante-garde artists and intellectuals influenced by Dada, Surrealism and Lettrism. The post-war LI, which sought to fuse poetry and music and transform the urban landscape, was a direct forerunner of the group who founded the magazine Situationiste Internationale in 1957 Paris. At first, they were principally concerned with the "suppression of art", that is to say, they wished like the Dadaists and the Surrealists before them to supersede the categorization of art and culture as separate activities and to transform them into part of everyday life. Like the Lettrists, they were against work and for complete

divertissement. Under capitalism, the creativity of most people had become diverted and stifled, and society had been divided into actors and spectators, producers and consumers – the Society of the Spectacle now existed. The Situationists therefore wanted a different kind of revolution: they wanted the imagination, not a group of men, to seize power, and poetry and art to be made by all. Debord, in "Theses on Cultural Revolution", outlined the goals of the Situationists:

> The traditional goal of aesthetics is to make one feel, in privation and absence, certain past elements of life that through the mediation of art would escape the confusion of appearances, since appearance is what suffers from the reign of time. The degree of aesthetic success is measured by a beauty inseparable from duration, and tending even to lay claim to eternity. The Situationist goal is immediate participation in a passionate abundance of life, through the variation of fleeting moments resolutely arranged. The success of these moments can only be their passing effect. Situationists consider cultural activity, from the standpoint of totality, as an experimental method for constructing daily life, which can be permanently developed with the extension of leisure and the disappearance of the division of labor (beginning with the division of artistic labor).

The methodology of the SI verges on the theatrical, calling for the construction of dramatic and subversive "situations" in every-day life. By living in this manner, hopes existed of eventually arriving at a state of eternal festival. Lasn, in his book Culture Jam, elaborates on the philosophies behind, and theatrical revolutionary activities of the SI:

> The Situationists declared a commitment to "a life of permanent novelty." They were interested only in freedom, and just about any means to it were justified. The creativity of everyday people, which consumer capitalism and communism had weakened but not killed, desperately needed to find expression. Down with the bureaucracies and hierarchies and ideologies that stifled spontaneity and free will. To the Situationists, you are – everyone is – a creator of situations, a performance artist, and the performance, of course, is your life, lived in your own way…The Situationists believed that many times a day each of us comes to a little fork in the path. We can then do one of two things: act the

way we normally, reflexively act, or do something a little risky and wild, but genuine. We can chose to live our life as a "moral, poetic, erotic, and almost spiritual refusal" to cooperate with the demands of consumer culture. (101)

Central to the methodology of the SI is the idea of the *détournement*, a French word meaning deflection, diversion, rerouting, distortion, misuse, misappropriation, hijacking, or otherwise turning aside from the normal course or purpose. Debord thought that governments and corporations had made art irrelevant, had made both work and leisure an utterly boring sequence of repetitive and canned routines, and had all but eradicated imagination itself. To make a complete break with a dead present, one had to rip out pieces of old art, both high art and everyday imagery from the media, and place them next to new or different work with an "attitude." He appropriated bits and pieces and treated them like letters rather than like sacred wholes, remixing them with other elements: his operation altered the way these bits made meaning. Artful juxtaposition energizes fresh insight, as the remixed elements take on new meanings in relation to each other, rather than in their original contexts. Debord suggested in a 1956 essay ("Methods of Détournement"):

> Any elements, no matter where they are taken from, can serve in making new combinations. The discoveries of modern poetry regarding the analogical structure of images demonstrates that when two objects are brought together, no matter how far apart their original contexts may be, a relationship is always formed. The mutual interference of two worlds of feeling, or the bringing together of two independent expressions, supersedes the original elements and produces a synthetic organization of greater efficacy. Anything can be used.

His point was to go beyond the humor of mere parody, instead creating a combination that makes one think radically differently about the detourned representation. In a 1959 essay called "Détournement as Negation and Prelude", the Situationist Internationale stated:

> Détournement, the reuse of preexisting artistic elements in a new ensemble, has been a constantly present tendency of the

contemporary avant-garde, both before and since the formation of the SI. The two fundamental laws of détournement are the loss of importance of each detourned autonomous element — which may go so far as to completely lose its original sense — and at the same time the organization of another meaningful ensemble that confers on each element its new scope and effect…Détournement has a peculiar power which obviously stems from the double meaning, from the enrichment of most of the terms by the coexistence within them of their old and new senses. Détournement is practical because it is so easy to use and because of its inexhaustible potential for reuse.

Détournement, then, negates the original meaning of a representation by re-framing it, offering access to a completely different, often opposite meaning. A successful détournement diverts the usual train of associations; it embezzles the style and ideas of the original and spends them against old habits and for new experiments in living; it abducts tradition, and forces it to update itself.

Applying the principles of détournement to every day life, it was then possible to create "situations" that would offer escape from the Spectacle, and potentially detourne oppressive social realities. Vaneigem, a member of the SI, suggested in his book The Revolution of Everyday Life: "One can escape from the commonplace only by manhandling it, mastering it, steeping it in dreams, giving it over to the sovereign pleasure of subjectivity." The way out for the Situationists was not to wait for a distant revolution but to reinvent everyday life here and now; by liberating oneself from Spectacle, power relations and therefore society were transformed. The Situationists therefore tried to construct situations which disrupted the ordinary and normal in order to jolt people out of their customary ways of thinking and acting.

With the ideas of the SI spreading rapidly, through their publications, cultural interventions, and subversive strategies, their influence became explosive. In 1966 at the University of Strasbourg, students of the university and members of the SI were able to print 10,000 copies of a subversive pamphlet with university funds. Entitled "On the Poverty of Student Life: considered in its economic, political, psychological, sexual, and particularly intellectual aspects, and a modest proposal for its remedy", copies were distributed at the official

ceremony marking the beginning of the academic year. The student union was promptly closed by court order (Hussey, 2000). The SI pamphlet, highly critical of the university, society, and education in general, called for total revolution:

> The student, if he rebels at all, must first rebel against his studies, though the necessity of this initial move is felt less spontaneously by him than by the worker, who intuitively identifies his work with his total condition. At the same time, since the student is a product of modern society just like Godard or Coca-Cola, his extreme alienation can only be fought through the struggle against this whole society. It is clear that the university can in no circumstances become the battlefield; the student, insofar as he defines himself as such, manufactures a pseudo-value which must become an obstacle to any clear consciousness of the reality of his dispossession. The best criticism of student life is the behavior of the rest of youth, who have already started to revolt. Their rebellion has become one of the *signs* of a fresh struggle against modern society. After years of slumber and permanent counterrevolution, there are signs of a new period of struggle, with youth as the new carriers of revolutionary infection. But the society of the spectacle paints its own picture of itself and its enemies, imposes its own ideological categories on the world and its history. Fear is the very last response. For everything that happens is reassuringly part of the natural order of things. Real historical changes, which show that this society can be *superseded*, are reduced to the status of novelties, processed for mere consumption. The revolt of youth against an imposed and "given" way of life is the first sign of a total subversion. It is the prelude to a period of revolt – the revolt of those who can no longer *live* in our society. (library.nothingness.org)

This sort of subversive provocation was the hallmark of most "constructed situations" carried out by the SI. With members across Europe and other parts of the globe, their influence continued to grow as more subversives took note of their methodology.

In 1967 Debord published <u>Society of the Spectacle</u>, his major work, which had an enormous influence on the student rebellion in May 1968. The occupations started at the university of Nanterre and spread to the Sorbonne in Paris. When police tried to take back the Sorbonne, a riot ensued, and before long the entire city had erupted in "a chain reaction of refusal" against consumer

capitalism (Lasn, 1999). First students, then workers, then professors, nurses, doctors, bus drivers, and a piecemeal league of artists, anarchists, and Enragés took to the streets, erected barricades, fought with police, occupied offices, factories, dockyards, railway depots, theatres and university campuses, sang songs, issued manifestos, sprayed slogans like "Live Without Dead Time" and "Down with the Spectacular-Commodity Culture" all over Paris, and challenged the established order of their time in the most visceral way. The breadth of the dissent was remarkable. Art students demanded the realisation of art; music students called for 'wild and ephermal music'; footballers kicked out managers with the slogan 'football to the football players'; gravediggers occupied cemeteries; doctors, nurses, and interns at a psychiatric hospital organised in solidarity with the inmates. For a few weeks, millions of people who had worked their whole lives in offices and factories broke from their daily routines and *lived*. It was the largest general strike ever to stop the economy of an advanced industrial country, and the first wildcat general strike in history, and it spread rapidly, first around Paris and France and then around the world. At the height of the uprising in Paris's Latin Quarter, fifty thousand people marched in Bonn, and three thousand took to the streets in Rome. Three days later, students revolted at the University of Milan. The next day, students staged a sit-in at the University of Miami. Then skirmishes erupted in Madrid, Berkeley, New York City, Frankfurt and Santiago. The wave reached London, Vancouver, Dakar, Munich, Vienna, and Buenos Aries, then Tokyo, Osaka, Zurich, Rio, Bangkok, Dusseldorf, Mexico City, Saigon, La Paz, Chicago, Venice, Montreal, and Auckland (Plant, 1992, Hussey, 2000).

For a few heady weeks tantalizing questions hung in the air: What if the whole world turned into the Latin Quarter? Could this be the beginning of the first global revolution? As it turned out, this brief, hot happening the Situationists had helped catalyze stopped short of becoming a full-fledged global mind-shift. The protests petered out, governments restored control and the *status quo* crept back in. The SI lasted until 1972 when it disbanded with only two members remaining; Guy Debord was the only member to stay with the group throughout its

existence. Disappointed by the generation that followed him, bloated and decayed with alcohol poisoning, he ended his life in 1994 with a bullet through the heart.

The Situationists' message and methodology can be credited with influencing activists such as Abbie Hoffman and political theatre groups like the Yippies into taking theatrical action, and with technological advances such as the Internet, SI theory still reverberates and has stayed very much alive. Today many activists are familiar with the Situationists and their antics, and indeed there are two noteworthy contemporary offspring of Situationist theory: Culture-Jamming and Reflectionism.

Culture-Jamming is an international movement that was unleashed in the 1990s as a subversive response to the Spectacle and its uni-directional information flow. According to Wikipedia, a free online encyclopedia, Culture jamming:

> **…**is the act of using existing mass media to comment on those very media themselves, using the original medium's communication method. It is based on the idea that advertising is little more than propaganda for established interests, and that there is little escape from this propaganda in industrialized nations. Culture jamming differs from artistic appropriation (which is done for art's sake), and from vandalism where destruction or defacement is the primary goal. The word, "culture jamming" comes from the idea of radio jamming: that public frequencies can be pirated and subverted for independent communication, or to disrupt dominant frequencies. The Situationist International first made the comparison to radio jamming in 1968, when it proposed the use of guerrilla communication within mass media to disseminate confusion within hegemonic cultural discourse. Culture jamming is a form of activism and a resistance movement to the hegemony of popular culture, based on the ideas of "guerrilla communication" and the "detournement" of popular icons and ideas…Forms of culture jamming include adbusting, performance art, graffiti art and hacktivism (notably cyber squatting).

Culture jammers borrow liberally from the avant-garde movements of the past – from Dada and Surrealism to the Situationists, but the emphasis of today's culture jammers is mostly to hack into corporate advertising and other avenues of

corporate speech. The ultimate goal of a culture-jam is to radically challenge standard interpretations of corporate representation, and hence norms of behaviour; done by metaphorically throwing a wrench into the officially sanctioned "culture" of the Spectacle. Naomi Klein suggests:

> The most sophisticated culture jams are not stand-alone ad parodies but interceptions – counter-messages that hack into a corporation's own method of communication to send a message starkly at odds with the one that was intended. The process forces the company to foot the bill for its own subversion, either literally, because the company is the one that paid for the billboard, or figuratively, because anytime people mess with a logo, they are tapping into vast resources spent to make that logo meaningful. (281)

A good jam, according to Klein "is an X-ray of the subconscious of a campaign, uncovering not an opposite meaning but the deeper truth hiding behind the layers of advertising euphemisms" (281-282). Culture jamming can be seen as a sort of "semiotic jujitsu" - media power is used against itself; a radical deconstruction of corporate memes is carried out, exposing the system as illusory and oppressive. Semiotics, as used by culture jammers, it is an essential tool in the all-important undertaking of making sense of the world, its networks of power, the encoded messages that flicker ceaselessly along its communication channels.

The movement is loose, informal, and growing quickly. According to Kalle Lasn, and one of the planet's most recognized jammers, membership in the movement is diverse:

> We're a loose global network of media activists who see ourselves as the advance shock troops of the most significant social movement of the next twenty years. Our aim is to topple existing power structures and forge major adjustments to the way we will live in the twenty-first century. We believe culture jamming will become to our era what civil rights was to the '60s, what feminism was to the '70s, what environmental activism was to the '80s. It will alter the way we live and think. It will change the way information flows, the way institutions wield power, the way TV stations are run, the way the food, fashion, automobile, sports, music and culture industries set their agendas. Above all, it will change the way we interact with the mass media and the way in which meaning is

produced in our society. We are a very diverse tribe. Our people range from born-again Lefties to Green entrepreneurs to fundamentalist Christians who don't like what television is doing to their kids; from punk anarchists to communications professors to advertising executives searching for a new role in life. (adbusters.org)

Culture-jamming for many is an entire way of living. Its advocates generally reject the notion of the citizen as merely consumer, and the idea of society as only marketplace. The culture-jammer approach to life questions the underlying social relations which govern the place of media (and by extension, capital) in our culture and society. According to Dery:

> Part artistic terrorists, part vernacular critics, culture jammers…introduce noise into the signal as it passes from transmitter to receiver, encouraging idiosyncratic, unintended interpretations. Intruding on the intruders, they invest ads, newscasts, and other media artifacts with subversive meanings; simultaneously, they decrypt them, rendering their seductions impotent. Jammers offer irrefutable evidence that the right has no copyright on war waged with incantations and simulations. And… they refuse the role of passive shoppers, renewing the notion of a public discourse.

Culture-jamming strategies are also all about self-empowerment. They embrace self-publishing in all its forms: self-made 'zines, techno music done by teenagers in bedrooms, personal web site production, graffiti, hacking, billboard alteration and other forms of popular media resistance to the mainstream can reside under the broad banner of culture-jamming. Jamming is also all about interconnectedness and collaboration in non-corporate settings; a growing creative movement is emerging which identifies with open systems of all kinds. The rise of the Linux computer operating system and IndyMedia publishing empire are good examples; constructed as alternatives to corporate systems, they are free and available to anyone. "Shareware" culture of this type reflects a broader sense in the community that ideas, like software, music or a good joke, are there to be shared, circulated and made available. Hirsch suggests:

> …culture jamming is about exerting your democratic and human rights by reclaiming the airwaves, taking back the ability to communicate with other people. culture jamming is a tactical and strategic approach to progressive change. it is about the synthesis of culture and politics, the combination of love and rage. it represents a new environmentalism, a new holism, that incorporates our immediate realities and environments into the struggle for equality, social justice, and democracy.

Furthermore, culture-jamming can also be used as a way to strengthen awareness about the Spectacle, and ultimately to act as a filter for the deceptive and depoliticising corporate media representations that bombard us on a daily basis. Mizrach believes:

> Culture jamming is more than just a clever game. In an era in which conspicuous consumption is slowly eating up the entire planet, it may just be the key to survival itself. We may not be able to stop the signal at its source, but at least we can jam its reception. The point is to awaken people to their media-controlled life, to stop and notice the signal and noise that is their mental environment.

In many ways, jamming can be seen as a self-initiated deprogramming effort, metaphorically not dissimilar to debugging a computer of the malicious viruses that prevent it from functioning properly. By setting up a sort of "firewall" against Spectacular messages, we can protect our mental environment from all the pollution that poisons our minds, depoliticizes and dragoons us.

On a grander level, culture-jammers are aiming at a complete *détournement* of the Spectacle. Disillusioned with all the empty glitz and glitter of the Spectacle, Lasn believes that the time has come to toss out the old and bring in the new, the "new American dream", that is:

> One of the great secrets of demarketing the American Dream is *détourning* it, in the public imagination, with a dream that's even more seductive. What's better than being rich? *Being spontaneous, authentic, alive.* The new American dream is simply to approach life full-on, without undue fear of crippling self-censorship, pursuing joy and novelty as if tomorrow you'll be in the ground, The Situationists called this impulse "the will to playful creation," and they believed it should be extended "to all know forms of human relationships." There's no one more alive than the

person who is openly, freely, improvising…There's no other way to discover what's at your core. This is what the new American dream is all about, and this is the kind of person the culture jammer aspires to be: someone who, to paraphrase Ray Bradbury, "jumps off cliffs and builds his wings on the way down." (1991:168-169)

Lasn maps the route towards this seemingly impossible goal, describing the concerted and sustained actions of jammers as a massive *détournment*-in-process, otherwise known as "Uncooling the Spectacle":

Using a methodical, systematic, social…campaign, we start at the personal level and grow in scope. We begin by demarketing our bodies, our minds, our children. Then we join like-minded jammers to demarket whole systems. We go after chief social and cultural rituals, now warped beyond recognition by commercial forces, and try to restore their original authenticity. We reverse the cycle. We demarket our news, our entertainments, our lifestyles and desires – and, eventually, maybe even our dreams. (199: 181 - 183)

The goal is huge, but if the idea of culture-jamming spreads virally, which it often does, the hopes are there that perhaps one day it might be possible to finally abolish the Spectacle, and HB as we know it.

Culture-jamming is certainly revolutionary and theatrical in nature, however not all acts of culture-jamming involve overt performance. A billboard liberator, zine artist, or hacktivist is not necessarily creating and playing a character, but rather focuses on challenging oppressive systems and détourning their representations. However, there are some culture-jammers who place theatrical performance as central to any cultural intervention; going beyond only jamming images and representations, they insist on jamming both everyday life and specific oppressive social realities. Creating their own characters, they temporarily transform oppressive spaces (eg: shopping malls, corporate headquarters, military bases, universities) into reflective meta-theatrical performances. One fine example of performative culture-jamming is the theatrical antics of New York-based theatrician Bill Talen, known in-role as the "Reverend Billy". Tracing Mayor Giuliani's campaign to "clean up New York City" with a

series of draconian measures intended to displace those deemed "undesirable", Talen believes:

> When the sidewalks were cleansed of the "characters" who supposedly unnerved the tourists, the big Broadway houses were cleansed as well. No one caught on that the theater indoors was related to the theater outdoors…The streets evolved into the hallways of a mall, overpoliced, oversurveilled, and bland with visitors from outer Paramus. This could be called Consumer Theater, whose leading actors perform on the shoulders of Diane Sawyer or Bryant Gumbel, while those in the chorus jump up and down waving to their grandmothers in Dubuque. You couldn't have in that shot, for example, a middle-aged black man monologuing to no particular audience. Arrest those characters before they get in the frame – that was the point. Now the lights of Broadway shine for shows that are nothing but long commercial breaks…Broadway is a single show now. It's called *Consumed!* The critics love it. Here's the plot: Life is dramatized as nothing but a commercial break between the unknown before you're born and the death after you've spent it all. (2003: 31-32)

Disillusioned with the "Disneyfication" of Times Square and Broadway (both considered symptoms of consumerism gone too far), Talen created his character to culture-jam the recently-gentrified area, and by extension to theatrically challenge consumer-capitalism itself. In the spitting image of a fire-and-brimstone Vegas-style preacher (complete with collar, white jacket, and passionate fervour), Reverend Billy is known to dramatically barge into any number of monocultural corporate institutions (eg: The Disney Store, Starbucks, Wal-Mart, etc.) in order to conduct theatrical anti-shopping sermons. As the charismatic leader of the "Church of Stop Shopping", he is often accompanied by a "Stop Shopping Gospel Choir" and a host of other theatricians playing various roles invisibly, such as on cellphones. The performance disrupts the carefully stage-managed consumerist mecca, thrusting counter-hegemonic topics (eg: "Disney exploits children in third world sweatshops to manufacture overpriced toys") into the otherwise bland and hegemonic consumer-oriented discourse (eg: "Oh! Little Karla absolutely *needs* that $95 Mickey Mouse doll!"). Counter-hegemonic playing meets hegemonic being.

In a Starbucks coffee shop at the newly-gentrified Astor Place in New York, the former site of a family business that was coercively evicted from their location by Starbucks' lawyers, the Reverend, with a host of characters (choir singers, deacons, invisible theatre, etc.) sermonizes to stunned coffee-drinkers:

> *"I COME BEARING GLAD TIDINGS: YOU ARE NOT REALLY BUCKHEADS! YOU'RE JUST IN HELL, THAT'S ALL - Hell defined as sitting here fibrillating on minor drugs surrounded by fake avant-garde wallpaper: Is there anyone here, children, is there anyone here who is not SICK TO DEATH OF GOOD GRAPHICS? …Where is Starbucks? IT'S NO PLACE. In fact, we are tourists in our own lives, there's a disconnect. Our words have a barely discernible echo. We have the same relation to living real lives that these art-school Starbucks graphics have to the real artists who lived on this street. WE'RE IN THE FAKE CAFE, AND WE CAN'T KNOW THE REAL COST OF THAT LATTE!"* (14)

The Reverend Billy character Talen brings to the setting has the effect of challenging the carefully sculpted "reality" associated with the Starbuck's brand image. The reaction, as usual, is swift:

> Now the manager's lip's are spraying spit in my ear as he mouths, *"Police!"* The congregation before me is dividing into several camps: There are the unrepentant sinners who frown and concentrate hard on their Frappuccinos, there are the loving-this people who clap along with the choir, the ubiquitous cellphoners who turn away to face the wall. Then there are those for whom we are New York characters to be captured on their tourist cameras, and a more sinister group who are also, recording us on film - the corporate executives who will view the surveillance tapes at Starbucks' Seattle HQ. The manager has turned up the volume of the Muzak machine. But that's naive, I'm loud. The choir is irresistible. We are ripping open this thick, gauzy mood. Who and what is this preacher? …*"Now, let's talk. Children, I live here. Can I talk to you without a corporation's mediation for just a moment? Let's make a decision. Do we want to cooperate with them?"* I decide to keep moving, following the deacons who are handing out the flyers. I channel the flyer, I sing the flyer electric: *"Starbucks has a long history of buying coffee from plantations where they employ families at slave wages, where the monoculture-and-pesticides approach to raising coffee has replaced shade-growth biodiverse farming… then they add unhealthy genetically altered milk...Howard Schultz…nearing his first billion… has used prison labor to package*

Starbucks products...surveilling labor reps at the roasting plants. . ."
(14-15)

The performance of the Reverend Billy, a fine example of the "Fool's show", raises awareness about unethical business practices, thereby causing brand damage and cutting into Starbucks' profit margin. In this way the Spectacle is deflated a little bit more. With the Spectacle radically challenged, Talen takes inventory as to the reaction:

> There is a part of my mind that is watching the coffee drinkers at their little circular tables, mostly those aforementioned Sunday couples, although there are also one or two families with children and strollers, waiting for the wild church to blow over. I don't preach over them. I try to look into everyone's eyes and sometimes it becomes all one eye. A vortex of witnessing and weighing the meaning that they are building in themselves - my argument that we are sitting in a financial bubble that has hurt people who are not here. Once again, the people who are not here. The choir is filing out past the mermaid [logo], back out to the street, singing and hip-rocking like a conga line, the Parisian camera people dancing with them. Vera is staring down the manager, and Tony is standing there like a football coach on the sidelines. And then suddenly several cops are walking towards me. (15-16)

It is an ending Bill Talen has played time and time again, with the good Reverend locked up in the "Tombs" – overcrowded apartheid-esque police cells infested with cockroaches – for the night (Talen, 2003). Indeed, Talen's performance is so powerful that the agents of the Spectacle time and time again try to shut him up, and failing that lock him up. When HB meets CHP, this violent reaction is all too common. The performative quality of his jam raises the stakes considerably – instead of merely détourning a corporate representation, he is détorning an ongoing corporate performance. Re-appropriating this "ongoing-ness", the Reverend Billy is a sustained character that continues to be played to this day.

The final area I wish to cover in this chapter is Reflectionism, a philosophical frame created by Steve Mann, which is especially useful for integrating computer technology with culture-jamming, done in order to create

even more powerful *détournments*. Explored in detail both online and in the groundbreaking book <u>Cyborg</u>, Mann proposes on his website:

> "Reflectionism" as a new philosophical framework for questioning social values. The Reflectionist philosophy borrows from the Situationist movement in art and, in particular, an aspect of the Situationist movement called détournement, in which artists often appropriate tools of the "oppressor" and then resituate these tools in a disturbing and disorienting fashion. Reflectionism attempts to take this tradition one step further, not only by appropriating the tools of the oppressor, but by turning those same tools against the oppressor as well. I coined the term "Reflectionism" because of the "mirrorlike" symmetry that is its end goal and because the goal is also to induce deep thought ("reflection") through the construction of this mirror. Reflectionism allows society to confront itself or to see its own absurdity.

Initially created as a response to increasing technological assaults by the Spectacle in our society - ubiquitous surveillance, incessant monitoring, and constant intrusion – the Reflectionist framework can also include the re-appropriation of *any* tools and strategies employed by the oppressor.

One fine example of Reflectionism is Steve Mann's "Please Wait" performance, whereby the following technological apparition enters a store:
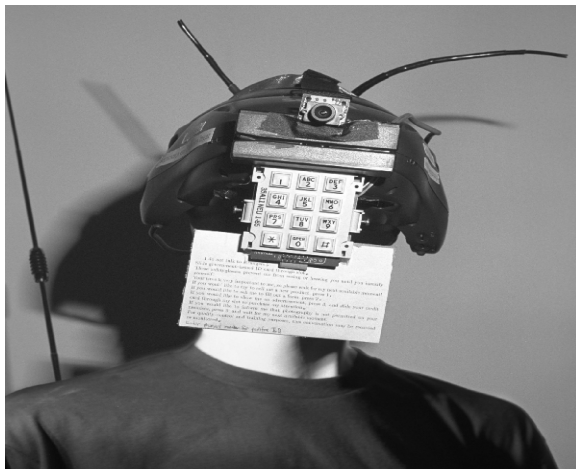
Figure 10.2 – Steve Mann in "Please Wait"

According to Mann:

> The manager of a large department store is summoned by a clerk in the men's suit department. He hurries over and is confronted by a man in a jacket and tie standing motionless in front of a display. Instead of a face, the man is showing a video camera, opaque safety glasses, sound-blocking ear protection, and a magnetic stripe card reader (similar to the machine that reads your bank card). On the lower part of what should be the spectre's face is a list of instructions on how to "use" him. (105)

Upon closer examination of this strange robot-like creature, the list of instructions reveals the following:

> I do not talk to strangers.
>
> Therefore you must slide a government-issued ID card through the slot on my head if you want to talk to me.
>
> These SAFETYGLASSES prevent me from seeing or hearing you until you identify yourself!
>
> Until you provide positive ID, the camera and microphones on my head will not be connected to my head mounted display set.
>
> Your time is very important to me, so please wait for my next available moment!
>
> If you would like to try to sell me a new product, press 1.
>
> If you would like to ask me to fill out a form, press 2.
>
> If you would like to show me an advertisement, press 3, and slide your credit card through my slot to **purchase my attention**.
>
> For quality-control and training purposes, this conversation may be recorded or monitored.
>
> If you would like to inform me that photography is not permitted on your premises, press 9, and wait for my next available moment.
>
> Your time is very important to me, so PLEASE WAIT, while I steal your time, your life, and your soul!

This situation created by Mann is highly theatrical and does have the desired Reflectionist effect – by appropriating the tools of the oppressor, deep thought ("reflection") occurs through the construction of this dramatic mirror, allowing society to confront itself or to see its own absurdity. Mann explains:

> Almost inadvertently, the manager tries to see the face through the display screen, tries to make some kind of contact with this creature so rudely imposed between him and the wares for sale. The manager looks for eyes, but the apparatus completely covers his gaze. The manager puts a hand on the creatures shoulder; but gets no response. Nothing the manager does gets a reaction. Bewildered, the manager wants to walk away. But how can he walk away? This is, after all, his store, his responsibility. The manager feels drawn toward this mute creature - so out of place in the mall and yet, somehow, not all that unfamiliar, there's something about the figure, the language of corporatese, the ominous lack of human connection, and, finally, the vague welling of frustration that boils up inside the manager at his failure to get an explanation, a human response, a recognition that his time has been occupied, his energies disrupted. Reluctantly, the manager steps away, heads back to his desk to call security. The manager looks behind him as he leaves, to see if the joke is over; if the man will now take off his mask. He does not. The manager returns to his office, shaken, pelplexed, no longer in the mood to make the company money. (106)

In many ways Mann is giving the manager, the department store, and indeed the entire Spectacle a taste of its own medicine. The goal, like any good culture-jam, is to ontologically shock those hypnotized by the Spectacle into re-evaluating their perceptions for the better. The technological mummy created by Mann is not meant to be seen as a practical device to be used on a regular basis by activists, but rather as an "interventionist piece meant to eliminate the need for its own existence" (106). Reflectionism takes the Situationist project one step further in that its goal is not "momentary disruptions of everyday life (situations) but rather ongoing projects that constantly confront hidden biases" (104). Reflectionism is meant to be a sustained and ongoing project (that can be greatly aided by Mann's WearComp), and the "Please Wait" performance can be seen as one inspiring performance that can inspire many more. Indeed, one important

theatrical development that has come out of the Reflectionist philosophy is Sousveillance Theatre, a topic that will be examined in the next chapter.

Overall then, it is my thesis that all acts of revolutionary theatre involve counter-hegemonic playing within the dominant social reality, or the Spectacle. In doing so, the theatricians engage in what Talen calls "political acting on the sloppy stage of someone else" (3). Those inhabiting the ossified and controlled realm of hegemonic being are potentially ontologically disturbed by such theatricals; by virtue they are unwittingly cast in the performance. Talen suggests: "They will somehow collaborate in [the] action with us. Their understanding of the script may be to act as witness to the police, but they will be on our stage" (5). Such an act has the dramatic effect of inducing reflection on the society, challenging oppression, and hence initiating positive social change - *and* contributing towards the overall *détournement* of the Spectacle.

The roots of revolutionary theatre as defined go way back to the days of yore where folly was an integral part of life and where the Fool had a prominent role to play in society. Despite the dragooning effects of the "Age of Reason", contemporary fooling, culture-jamming through performance and reflectionism, are now taking a lead role. One of the main differences is that revolutionary theatre today, with new technological tools at its disposal, is growing exponentially, becoming more and more sophisticated, interconnected, and sustained. Also, there appears to be a shift towards the counter-hegemonic playing of characters within hegemonic realities. Debord and the Situationists, for example, did not create characters to play, but rather created situations. In the 21st Century the "constructed situations" are becoming more theatrical; the Fool appears to be growing as a viable role that we can all play, when necessary, to challenge oppression.

Chapter 10

Revolutionary Theatre Cookbook !!

I came to think of the matrix of hearts and minds and media as a vast theater of viral warfare.

– Andrew Boyd

Cooking up theatre activism is not unlike cooking up food; it requires careful thought regarding occasion, recipe, ingredients, kitchen process, table settings, and the comfort of the guests themselves (not to mention cleaning up afterwards). The big difference with theatrical activism lies in the fact that *theatre* (instead of food) is cooked up, oftentimes to unsuspecting "guests" who were not expecting the hearty and dramatic "meme-based" servings.

Because meme-theater is so new to the scene, there are not many sources where one can learn more about it. Luckily, by using the internet to connect with theatre activists across the globe, I was able to track down (and meet) pioneer Andrew Boyd at Ryerson University, where he presented a workshop called "Culture-Jamming 101". Based in New York City, Andrew Boyd uses performance within a variety of community-based organizations to culture-jam various oppressive targets. His workshop was all about the dynamics of culture-jamming through performance, and I am greatly indebted to him for providing a practical foundation for the Revolutionary Theatre Cookbook. Deeply inspired by this new way of looking at and organizing activist theatre, George Mougias and I further expanded Boyd's list of "ingredients" to include some goodies that had evidently been overlooked (such as Steve Mann's Sousveillance Theatre).

Boyd is responsible, in my mind, for one of the most impressive revolutionary theatres in existence today: the Billionaires for Bush, a grassroots

meme-based viral theatre. Before moving on to the dramatic ingredients and recipes for theatrical activism, I would like to highlight this one revolutionary theatre performance matrix as an example of cutting-edge 21st Century *counter-hegemonic playing*. It is an example we will come back to again and again, and as such is examined in some detail.

Set up originally as the Billionaires for Bush (or Gore) during the 2001 U.S. election campaign, the organizers' original goal was to theatrically "educate the public about the twin evils of campaign finance corruption and economic inequality" (Boyd, 370). According to BillionairesForBush.com downloadable online guidebook (*Be A Billionaire! The Official Billioniares for Bush Do-It-Yourself Manual*), the organization

> …is a strategic media and street theater campaign whose combustible mix of humor, savvy messaging, grassroots participation, and cutting edge internet organizing tools will flush out the truth about the Bush administration's disastrous economic policies and help turn the scoundrels out of power in November. Economic justice arguments tend to get dismissed as "class warfare," but the Billionaires-by impersonating the super-wealthy in a boosterish, over-the-top manner, and cheering on George Bush and his economic policies-are able to paint the President as a friend of the wealthy with surprising effectiveness. It's a back door that allows class issues to be aired in surprisingly sharp terms. (4)

An ongoing and sustained theatrical campaign, the Billionaires for Bush not only employs a diversity of theatrical tactics (eg: street theatre, internet), but it is also extremely *viral*: it inspires thousands of people, in various chapters across the United States, to invent (and then *play*) fictional billionaire characters – who culture-jam political gatherings of all sorts. The theatrical effect is both satirical and ontologically challenging. New York Times reporter Jack Hitt's article "The Birth of the Meta-Protest Rally" has a wonderful description:

> The protests in mid-March that greeted President Bush on Long Island for a $2,000-a-plate fund-raiser after the groundbreaking for a nearby 9/11 memorial seemed pretty typical at first. The crowd of 200 or so activists carried the usual placards denouncing war, oil and environmental policies…Across a vast artery of screaming

traffic stood the Bush supporters, maybe 50 people. A small blond girl waved a big flag. Then a new group of Bush supporters tumbled out of a van on the wrong side of the street. The men handsome in tuxedos and top hats and the women stunning in ball gowns with elbow-length gloves, they marched boldly past the protesters. They shouted, "We want Bush!" One placard they held up read, "Because He's Just Like Us." Hisses traveled through the body of the mob, as a policeman stopped traffic so they could cross. Applause erupted from the ranks of the flag-wavers at the arrival of such beautiful people. Pro-Bush people happily backed up, ceding the most prime piece of their "free speech zone." Then it happened. Halfway across the street -- in that moment of eerie suspension as the bare flick of a police officer's hand caused the dragon of traffic to pause -- you could see the epiphany. The newcomers unfurled their giant banner: "Billionaires for Bush." The revelation -- is this somebody's idea of joke? -- moved across the faces of the crowd like a wave undulating through a sports arena. Amid the hand-drawn placards, the Billionaires unsheathed their professionally printed, brightly colored laminated posters. "Leave No Billionaire Behind." "Corporations Are People Too." The Billionaires popped corks and drank bubbly from flutes. Huge cigars and cigarette holders appeared. When the Billionaires started a chant -- "Tax Work Not Wealth" -- the pro-Bush folks shouted back, "Tax Cuts!" But irony has a toxic effect on earnestness. The counterchant quickly faded, and right away the anger began to smolder.

Paradoxically by appearing to *be* for Bush, the players involved are actually *playing* against him - and the oppressive systems and hegemonic thought-patterns he signifies. In a brilliant re-appropriation of the "Billionaire" character, capitalism's hidden agendas are exposed through over-the-top masquerade performance. Because of its theatrical component (the playing of characters on the streets, in the media, and online), socio-theatrical controversy is generated time and time again. The Spectacle is attacked in a Reflectionist manner, its own tools (eg: interpellated "Billionaire" characters) being employed against itself.

Boyd describes this type of theatre as a form of "meme-warfare"; and takes meticulous care to explain that each campaign must start with a Rushkoffian "viral design":

It took ingenious "viral design" to get our message through the corporate media's editorial filters and out into the datasphere at large. We built our virus by embedding a threatening idea inside a

non-threatening form. The "protein shell" of our virus: "Billionaires for Bush (or Gore)." Our meme, or hidden ideological code: Big Money owns both candidates' parties; both candidates/parties are roughly the same. Elegantly encapsulating the core ideas of the campaign into a funny five-word concept made for a sleek and potent virus. This concision also served as an "inoculation" against distortion. Even the most fragmented and de-contextualized mention in the media tended to carry our name, and thus our message. If they also got our tag line, "Because Inequality is not Growing Fast Enough," then the message deepened. If they picked up modular parts of our shtick, then it deepened further. (372)

By using the Brechtian concept of the actor/demonstator, a double situation comes into being: those exposed to the performances (eg: media, protestors, police, etc.) have two options: they can interpret the Billionaire *characters* as being "real", or the *theatricians playing the Billionaire character*s as being "real". Either way, the subversive message gets out. Boyd explains:

When they invited us on the air for lengthy radio interviews, we could eventually drop character and proceed with a straight up critique. The campaign had layers of code – concentric rings of more and more elaborate messaging. Each component was modular, compact, and self-contained. It could survive in a hostile, unpredictable media environment and like a fractal, still represent the campaign as a whole. The Billionaires used irony's double edge - its capacity to simultaneously pose both a straight literal meaning and a subversive implied meaning - to neatly flip between the virus' outer shell and its inner code. In this way we could reach our two disparate audiences - corporate media and grassroots activists - at the same time. Activists immediately picked up on the various layers of irony. While the mainstream media could be seduced to "play along" with the literal, tongue-in-cheek meaning, letting the public decode the implied and subversive meanings for themselves. (372)

There is something very liberating in providing people with a dual method of interpreting social reality; the actor/demonstrator technique provides those infected by the meme with a very unusual ontological situation, a situation where two realities, one theatrical and one "real", co-exist. Furthermore it is possible to navigate between these "realities", and in doing so a whole new range of options comes into existence. The police, for example, become characters in the

performance to those interpreting the situation theatrically, and they can be dealt with in-role as "Billionaires" (CHP). Alternately the police could be approached simply by "theatre activists" (CHB). Because there are these two options, a truly socio-theatrical situation comes into existence whereby ontological stimulation can catalyze those present into questioning their own interpretation of reality.

There are many crucial differences between this newer "meme-based theater" versus typical political street theatre (which often consists of staged presentations on the street). By emphasizing the meme (versus the street performance), meme-theatre is primarily concerned with the ongoing deployment of counter-hegemonic memes into the Spectacle. Meme-theatre, as a distinct entity within the meme-warfare matrix, offers theatre as a tool to *play*. With ongoing construction of socio-theatrical situations (eg: "Billionaires" appearing at all Republican events), a volatile prescription of CHP is constantly discharged into hegemonic social reality (HB). Unfortunately not a lot has been written yet on the topic of meme-based theater, and I hope it one day becomes a great empowering field where activism and theatre merge seamlessly. I have created a list of elements within meme-theater that I feel are both distinguishing and potent:

1) The meme itself is the most important element, and is comprised of an outer shell (eg: "Billioniares for Bush") and an inner code (eg: Big Money owns Bush). It has a specific goal and a call to action.

2) It is played in an inter-disciplinary manner – the characters may play on the streets, but also frequently appear on the internet, phone, etc. Meme-theater will employ *any* medium in order to get the memes out, but often in a theatrical manner.

3) "Theatre" is not usually employed in a traditional manner, but rather has a more Brechtian application; by using it in an actor/demonstrator fashion (it can be turned on and off), the point can be further illustrated. An option is provided to play in a counter-hegemonic manner, simultaneously activizing and theatricalizing the participant/spect-actor.

4) The theatre is viral, it spreads by enticing more people to join, building theatrical communities. Anyone can participate, invent a character, and play.

5) It involves guerilla theatre actions, creates meta-theatrical situations and areas, and raises ontological questions.

6) It has an educational component.

It is my hope that by starting this list others will be inspired to add ideas to it, ultimately delving deeper into meme-theater's *raison d'être* and potential applications.

The next question, then, is how to create such a marvelous revolutionary theatre yourself. The first thing to consider are the recipes:

RECIPES

Recipes for theatre activism can either come pre-packaged (as in the Billionaires for Bush), or it can be created from scratch in a Do-It-Yourself fashion. Uniquely, theatre activism occupies a very transformative area between theatre (which is often viewed as being very conservative) and activism (where CHB usually overrides CHP). The first takes "art" extremely seriously, whereas the second sees it as a potential tool in the struggle. Nowhere but theatrical activism do the two meet mid-way. It is useful to note that the components of most art-forms include *form* (or style), *content*, and (to a lesser extent) *process*. It is no different within the theatre, where considerations typically include the following:

Form How will the performance-text look to the eye, and where will it be presented? What styles, genres, and forms will be used, and how?

Content What are the written words of the dramatic text and the interpretation of it? What are the themes?

Process How will the theatrical action be facilitated? What strategies will be used? Which people are necessary (eg: playwright, actors, director) to the process, and what guidelines (eg: an Actor's Equity schedule) will they follow?

Unfortunately these three components are typically the only ones considered by theatre artists when mounting a production.

Unlike the traditional theatre, within theatre activism there are additional points to be considered. Because activism aims to achieve real goals in the real world, activists typically ask the purpose of the exercise, the goals, and targets.

Purpose   Why is the activism being carried out? What oppression is being challenged, and how will the project inspire or enlighten people?

Goals   What are the goals of the campaign? What are the activists aiming to achieve?

Targets   Who or what is being targeted?

The theatre activist must consider both sets of considerations with equal weight.

Importantly, within the *process* category, the theatre activist must also ask what strategies will be necessary in both the preparation (eg: rehearsing) and the action itself (eg: guerrilla theatre). Also, unlike the traditional theatre (which focuses on the creation and presentation of a product), theatre activism is typically included as part of a larger activist campaign. The theatrical actions are often tied into a larger protest movement as one component in a larger struggle.

Once an oppressive system is targeted and the issues are identified, it is important to design a theatrically delicious recipe, using as many ingredients as necessary to achieve the desired effect. Rushkoff's concept of the "media virus" is a good starting point for designing a "recipe", consisting of both a viral shell and its inner ideological code. Boyd suggests that:

> Viruses happen. Viruses are also made to happen. Some radical viruses (cultural formations such as Reclaim the Streets and Critical Mass) evolve more or less organically out of communities of resistance, while others (media campaigns such as the Billionaires) are more consciously designed and injected into the mediastrearn. In both cases there's an ideological code as well as a viral shell. In pop culture, we've seen how a viral shell can be made of almost anything - from an advertising jingle to a new technology. For activist viruses, the viral shell is often a model of participatory action. For RTS the ideological code was a utopian demand to

> resist capital and liberate public space; the action model was a militant street carnival. It was the RTS action model that drove its viral explosion. People across the world grabbed onto the carnival, replicated it, and mutated it in their own way. As with Critical Mass, the RTS ideological code was elegantly embedded in the action itself. By doing the action, participants live the code themselves as well as deploy the code for others to reckon with…However it is launched, a truly successful virus must eventually take on a life of its own, demonstrating self-sustaining and self-evolving properties. Either it must infect the code of mainstream discourse and permanently change the habits of mainstream institutions…or it must create alternative ongoing institutions that carry and reproduce the living meme. (374-375)

By creating an attractive activist "viral shell" with important ideological code embedded inside, it is possible to create any manner of theatrical media viruses that can really get the memes out into the culturesphere. The actual design of a media virus might look like this:
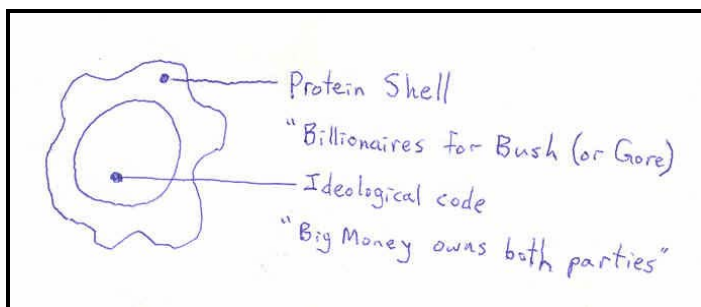
Figure 11.1 – Basic Media Virus Design

The basic design is fairly simple to create, but much thought will be needed as to whether or not the virus will be successful, depending on the target, environment, and nature of the shell and code. Designing an extremely powerful theatrical virus is not necessarily easy, and trial and error certainly come into play a lot. Boyd is careful to warn that:

> All viruses are not created equal. Some spread faster, some last longer, some mutate into more and less resistant strains, some lie dormant for years and then explode, some get injected into the media body in massive $40 million Madison Avenue dosages, some travel its hidden pathways. Some happily co-exist, some

compete, while some are carriers on others. The dense complexity of networks within the infosphere cause it to operate much like an ecosystem: a huge self-organizing interpenetrating organism, a system so large and complex that it is, in a sense, wild and "out of control," or at least can't be programmed or controlled from any one point or by any one entity. Viewing the overall media body as an ecology can help activists switch focus from the hard boundaries of commercial vs. non-commercial, mainstream vs. sidestream, and top-down vs. bottom-up to a more fluid and nuanced model. (1994:375)

Because the goal of revolutionary theatre is to challenge oppressive systems and hegemonic thinking, the wider the virus can spread its memes the more effective the results of its counter-Spectacular activities will be. Ideally a good recipe will ensure that the revolutionary theatre project becomes a meme-fountain, constantly spewing counter-hegemonic memes in all directions.

Another important consideration is the question of *who* is going to play in the project. Finding dedicated players is not always easy; the theatre activist is often viewed as too "artistic" for hardcore activists, and at the same time too radical for "professional" theatre artists. Given that the activist typically inhabits CHB and the theatre artist HB, it should come as no surprise that theatre activism (signifying CHP) doesn't exactly fit into either paradigm. Luckily there are some people from both fields who are open-minded to theatrical action, who are interested in politicizing their theatre artistry or using theatre as a tool in activism. Luckier still are all those people not necessarily associated with either field, who seek creative activity, critical dialogue, and solidarity against oppression. These are all very human needs which revolutionary theatre promotes. It is also important to make as many allies as possible, and fortunately organizations are coming into being to interconnect theatre artists and activists across the globe. Theaters Against War (THAW), currently with over 200 member theatres across the planet (and growing), is one such place. According to their website:

THAW is an international network of theater artists responding to the United States' ongoing "War on Terror", its aggressive and

unilateral foreign policies, and its escalating attacks on civil liberties in the US and throughout the world.

By interconnecting and sharing resources and strategies, theatre artists are encouraged to activize against war in solidarity with thousands of others across the globe. The idea also spreads virally through the web-site, informing potential recruits that:

> Signing on with THAW means that your theater agrees to make a public statement that it shares THAW's concerns. Period. Your theater can make this statement in ANY WAY it chooses - in gestures from subtle to grand - the vital thing is for the theater community to make a pro-peace statement together.

Networks like THAW are important places for theatre activists to get connected, and there are others out there. As more people sign up, the networks continue to grow in complexity and influence. The theatre activist is well-advised to make as many connections as possible, both in the specific project and larger movement.

INGREDIENTS

The ingredients of any revolutionary theatre recipe are obviously crucial if the campaign is to be successful. These ingredients can be seen as tools of theatrical resistance, dramatic tools that can be employed in a variety of manners to theatrically spread the memes. Once the viral shell and ideological codes are in place, it is important to select whichever ingredients are necessary for the core of the campaign, and to consider adding others at a later time to improve flavouring. Here is a list of theatrical ingredients in various categories, which are followed by useful descriptions and examples:

1)   Theatrical Actions
        a. Role appropriation
        b. Street theatre
        c. Invisible theatre
        d. Guerrilla theatre

2) <u>Anti-advertisements</u>
    a. Ad-Jam
    b. Billboard Liberation
    c. Banner Hang
    d. Guerrilla Leafleting

3) <u>Media Actions</u>
    a. Media Hoax
    b. Media Stunt
    c. Media Prank
    d. Newspaper Wrap

4) <u>Electronic Actions</u>
    a. Guerrilla Projection
    b. Electronic Disturbance Theatre
    c. Sousveillance Theatre

5) <u>Activities & Events</u>
    a. Installation Art
    b. Happening
    c. Temporary Autonomous Zone (T.A.Z.)

6) <u>Advanced Tactics</u>
    a. Ontological Shock
    b. Sustained meme-warfare
    c. Viral Theatre
    d. Virtual Reality
    e. Global Invisible Theatre

<u>Theatrical Actions</u>

Theatrical actions typically rest at the core of revolutionary theatre activity, and with careful character-design and "scripting" marvelous dramatics can come into existence.

<u>Role-appropriation</u>

In the case of revolutionary theatre it is usually necessary for players to create characters, and often the most prominent actions involve the appropriation of interpellated and often ghettoized roles. Grandmothers and cheerleaders, both positioned by patriarchy as subservient creatures, are liberalized when

transformed into troupes of "Raging Grannies" or "Radical Cheerleaders", *détourning* original character interpretations. Likewise, the "Billionaires for Bush" manage to get their central message out by appropriating and masquerading as the ultra-wealthy. There are many options for roles to appropriate, but as a general rule of thumb the appropriation should cause a culture-jam X-ray on the original character, exposing its contradiction, subtext, and hidden meaning.

Street theatre

Street theatre refers to typical actions such as marches, rallies, speeches, performances, and interventions that occur in a public space, and are of a theatrical nature. Examples might include: a procession of dramatic coffins, a Pink Bloc tickling riot police with long pink feathers, or a political satire played by masked activists on the street. Another fine example was witnessed by theatre activism pioneer Jason Grote, at the 2004 Republican National Convention, who wrote in his blog (08.31.04) that:

> …acts of creative street theater stole the show, with creative expressions suggesting that America's activist movement may have come of age. Running helter-skelter down side streets perpendicular to the protest thoroughfare, the Clandestine Insurgent Rebel Clown Army played a virtual game of freeze tag with journalists and photographers before suddenly retreating in chaotic fashion. They wore dirty green army fatigues, fake passes identifying them as Republican delegates to the convention, and ridiculous clown paint on their faces. "Our hero, Dubya, is in town for the Republican National Clown Convention, so we've got our credentials," said Larry, a leader of the Clown Army. "We're the Big Top delegation, from right between Kansas and Missouri. We're ready. We're just as big clowns as they are." Suddenly Larry moved out of character. "We're trying to find different ways to express dissent in the public space, with satire and with irony. We're trying to move in ways that are different and create a subculture, because I think it's important to create a culture instead of just consuming it."

Street theatre is typically bold, colourful, and political; it's unfolding drama commands a strong presence, and provides great visuals that are both entertaining and critical. When many street theatre performances converge, as they did at the 2004 RNC, the city can transform into the carnivalesque.

Invisible theatre

Invisible theatre, a useful ingredient in any campaign, is discussed at great length in Chapter 4.

Guerrilla theatre

Guerilla theatre is perhaps best described as the covert cousin of street theatre. Instead of dramatic overtness, Guerilla Theatre relies on stealth to be successful. Good examples include actions such as those carried out by the Reverend Billy and his team – with a combination of stealthy invisible theatre and sometimes flash mobs, a setting (such as Starbucks) can be transformed suddenly into a critical performance space. Guerilla theatre is covert, stealthy, and often plays in areas outside of the public sphere. It is often controversial, and sometimes treated as criminal.

<u>Anti-advertisements</u>

Anti-advertisements are visual culture-jams that hack into the Spectacle's messages. Used as part of a theatrical campaign, they can enhance the meaning of the actual performance by being used as dramatic plot elements (eg: the unfurling of a banner), often adding bold counter-hegemonic visuals to the play-space. They are also good for creating general counter-hegemonic ambiance, and can even be used as stealth weapons.

Ad-Jam

An ad-jam is the "editing" of (often corporate) images, whereby they are subverted and bestowed with new, often contradictory meanings. These jammed images can be used in a variety of propaganda, such as on leaflets or the internet. One of my favourite examples is the jam we created by co-opting the Montreal Fringe Festival's corporate logo, and editing it to suit our own needs. We removed the corporate sponsor (St. Ambroise beer) and with a paint program on the computer added a few extra letters. In a double attack we not only

subverted the original corporate logo, but also created a new logo for our own activist event (to be described in Chapter 12).

Figure 11.1 – image BEFORE culture-jam

Figure 11.2 – image AFTER culture-jam

Images can be jammed using a variety of techniques, and it is relatively cheap to do so with discount copy centers and free computer software. How these images are used is up to the revolutionary theatre troupe.

Billboard Liberation

With the proper tools and people, corporate billboards can be "edited" and hence *détourned* in the same manner as images. This can be done overtly as part of a performance, or covertly as part of a larger campaign. We could have, for example, "edited" Fringe banners hanging over the streets in the dead of the night, or alternately in broad daylight as part of an overt performance.

Banner Hang

With a Banner Hang activists literally unfurl their messages, often where they will make the most impact. When captured by the media their message

spreads rapidly as counter-hegemonic memes are injected into the hegemonic discourse.

Guerrilla Leafleting

In many cases leaflets can be used in a guerilla manner. One example that comes to mind would be the theatricals of various anti-sweatshop activists who have been known to cause disruptions at offending retailers by leaving sarcastic "thank you" letters in the pockets of merchandise - from children enslaved in the sweatshops where the clothing is manufactured. Leaflets can also be slid under plastic casings of advertisements to cover the originals, and can be distributed or posted in any number of subversive ways.

Media Actions

Media actions are important if one wants to hack into the core of the Spectacle's distribution mechanisms – the corporate media. With clever ploys carefully-plotted stunts, and elaborate hoaxes the corporate media can be deceived into spreading counter-hegemonic activist memes, sometimes even against itself.

Media Hoax

The Media Hoax is perhaps one of the most satisfying ways of getting a message out, largely because it generates a media frenzy that tricks media into treating the "hoax" as though it were real. One good example of a media hoax occurred in 2000: the People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA) warned that it planned to sabotage the bass fishing tournament in East Texas's Lake Palestine by releasing tranquilizers into the lake before the fishing contest started. Their announcement stated that "this year, the fish will be napping, not nibbling." According to the online Museum of Hoaxes, state officials took the threat seriously and stationed rangers around the lake in order to stop any tranquilizer-toting PETA activists from drugging the fish, and numerous newspapers reported the threat. The hoax got out the memes opposing animal-

abuse, and PETA's message benefited from massive media exposure. It took several days for the tournament organizers to conclude that it was case of hoax – a scientific evaluation revealed that because the lake contained 40 billion gallons of water, it would have taken truckloads of sleeping pills to potentially have any effect on the fish. The media was effectively duped in providing free advertising for PETA that otherwise could have cost a lot of money.

Media Stunt

A media stunt is an activity designed for the media to consume. Often done to provide good visuals for media cameras (to enhance counter-hegemonic messages), sometimes stunts go as far as attacking the media itself. One good example that comes to mind is the "Fox News Shut-Up-A-Thon" at the 2004 Republican National Convention in New York City. According to newyorkmetro.com journalist Kathryn McGrath:

> Outside the Fox News building on 6th Avenue, a man in a Bill O'Reilly mask led protesters in chants of "Give truth a chance," and "The more you watch, the less you know." Although police quickly corralled protesters into a steel pen, the first-ever "Fox News Shut-up-a-thon" drew several hundred people, carrying signs that read, "No Spin Zone" and exuberantly yelling O'Reilly's favorite denunciation, "Shut Up!" to the handful of bemused men in suits who gathered just outside the doors of Fox News headquarters. Organized by groups from all over the country, the protesters included members of Code Pink clad in their signature color and the Fox News Republican Cheerleaders, three men wearing cheerleading outfits and Fox News anchor masks. As the outdoor Fox News scroll boasted, "Up to the minute coverage of the war and the race for the White House," protesters chanted, "Shut the Fox up" from behind their steel barricades.

The beauty of the stunt is that it drew media, apart from Fox News, to broadcast memes against the right-wing station.

Media Prank

A media prank is one whereby the media is tricked, not with a stunt or a hoax, but rather with a prank. One good example, whereby we tricked a

committee of theatre journalists adjudicating a series of "awards" by sending in our own journalist characters, will be discussed in the Field Work chapter (12).

Newspaper Wrap

A favourite among culture jammers, the newspaper wrap is done by replacing the front cover of a newspaper (such as in a newspaper box) with an "edited" version, creating an entirely new image for the corporate media and potentially *détourning* the entire paper for dedicated consumers.

Electronic Actions

Technology has provided a boom to activists in terms of being able to express themselves. Indeed several new types of activist theatre have recently come into existence based on newly-available technologies such as video cameras, cell phones, and the internet. As more and more of society's economic, political, and everyday communication moves online, electronic methods of protest are becoming increasingly important.

Guerrilla Projection

A Guerilla Projection involves activists screening images or videos on surfaces not normally projected upon (such as buildings), usually without permission. The effect can typically *détourne* entire places by broadcasting counter-hegemonic messages for all too see. Anti-war activists might, for example, use a guerilla projector to screen critical films and/or images of war, death, and destruction on an American Consulate building, identifying it as a place responsible for extreme oppression.

Electronic Disturbance Theater

Ricardo Dominguez is credited with the creation of Electronic Disturbance Theater (EDT), a budding theatrical form of hactivism that takes place in cyberspace and "disturbs" the electronic communications of targeted institutions. According to Duncombe:

> What makes Dominguez's understanding of electronic activism so noteworthy is his insistence that EDT's activism be understood as theater. It sounds crazy but it makes sense. The web is merely the technological extension of a larger historical process: the growth of the mediated world, one of signs and symbols, meanings and understandings. This semiotic system, performed everyday, has real economic and political power - think of the stock market for instance. EDT actions function within this larger drama as a cultural counter-performance, an informational intervention: harnessing networks, clogging up websites, and generating hype. (379)

Strategies such as phone, fax, and web-jams, VR-sit-ins, and "swarming", in combination with powerful tools such as FloodNet has a powerful effect by virtually putting activists into the heat of the protest, even though they might be in an armchair on the other side of the world. Such techniques interrupt the everyday flow of websites or other communications tools in much the same manner that a number of individuals sitting in the president's office at a university could interrupt the flow of the people moving around the office. EDT, in this sense, can be very empowering. Dominguez elaborates:

> Sometimes we have gotten e-mail from people who are blind, from people who are stuck at home for various reasons, people who have to work and they have to support their kids or they are too far away, they are in South Korea. They couldn't be in Seattle but in their hearts they wanted to be there. Here was the gesture that they could add to those databodies. Say that you only get 500 people at an action. Electronically, perhaps you could add another 12,000 from around the world. So all of a sudden what is considered a small local action becomes a larger global action. And that means to me, that you can leverage small actions into global actions. (392)

EDT, by giving agency to people through technology, can, according to Dominguez "create a gesture that is both magical, unique, poetic, but that can change and transform the very nature of power" (396).

Even though EDT is still in its early stages of development, in my mind it can be said to encompass all electronic actions that cause "disturbance". Inventing characters and playing them online, for example, can be useful in terms of gathering information, as part of a prank or hoax, or to create conditions of ontological confusion.

Sousveillance Theatre

Sousveillance, meaning "filming from below" (versus above, as in *surveillance*) is an important concept Steve Mann has been experimenting with for some time. Basically instead of having the authorities snoop on you, you turn the camera on them - and let them know their surveillance is itself being surveyed and noted. The idea is that if the cameras can't be eliminated, all of us "below" should at least be keeping our eyes on those "above" who are keeping their eyes on us. Activists armed with cameras (including fake ones) can create Sousveillance Theatre by playing in surveillance situations in an attempt to challenge them. December 24th has been declared "World Sousveillance Day"; at doingfreedom.com Mann wryly advises Sousveillance Theatre players:

> As high noon sweeps past various time zones, the shot heard around the world will be that of clicking cameras. Rather than protesting by carrying signs, or by marching, citizens will protest by going on shooting sprees. Armed with their own photographic or videographic cameras and recording devices, ordinary citizens will dish out some accountability…All you need to do is bring a camera --- any camera (even a fake or broken camera, or one with an empty film magazine) --- to a place where video surveillance is used…Taking pictures of the surveillance cameras will cause models to appear very quickly for you to photograph. When you point your camera at their cameras, the officials watching their television monitors will very quickly dispatch the models for you to shoot. This is a universal phenomenon that happens in nearly any large organization where video surveillance is used. Models often carry two--way radios and wear navy blue uniforms with special badges. Most will be eager to pose close to your camera, especially the hand models. They will reach out to you. They want to get close to you. They will crave the glamour of your camera. They will reach out and touch you, or place their hands over your camera lens so you can get a closeup picture of their photogenic fingerprints.

More elaborate scenarios can be created too. Steve Mann told me of one he planned to play very soon whereby he and his "lawyer" would go to an expensive restaurant, and while dining open up a briefcase. Mann would then read some documents, and suddenly "realize" that a surveillance camera was filming him. The documents were to be stuffed back into the case, at which point Steve

planned to take out a camera and start taking pictures of the surveillance camera, ordering his "lawyer" to call the police. When security officers arrived, Mann planned to declare: "There's been a theft – this camera has stolen my intellectual property!" By reversing the authority of a surveillance situation, magnificent counter-hegemonic theatre can indeed be created! Normally Mann also advises using hidden cameras to capture the performance, which can then be broadcasted on the internet, further subverting the concept and practice of surveillance.

Activities & Events

Installation Art

Installation Art can sometimes be used with great effect to create a stationary meme-fountain. Good examples abound. Activists sometimes create "participatory" sculptures, where people are invited to bring symbolic items (eg: shoes representing victims of a war) to add to the work. A few drops of food colouring can transform and ordinary fountain into a bubbling pool of blood with an anti-war theme. Likewise, a real turf lawn laid out over a parking spot has the effect of highlighting the lack of greenspace, all the while providing a small "park" for people to enjoy, perhaps equipped with lawn chairs. A good installation will *détourne* a monocultural space.

Happening

A Happening is often described as improvised, often spontaneous performance, especially one involving audience participation. It can be of any size, from a small group of people doing something theatrical, to a massive international action. A "Vomit-in" is a good example of a Happening; people show up at a certain place and time and spew fake vomit in order to express their disgust. Other small-scale examples include flash mobs, "die-ins", and speaker's corners. On a much larger scale, organizations such as adbusters.org have created Happenings such as Buy Nothing Day where entire segments of the

population make no purchases whatsoever, and often engage in culture-jams against corporate culture.

Temporary Autonomous Zone (T.A.Z.)

The *Temporary Autonomous Zone* is Hakim Bey's most famous concept, the political tactic of creating temporary space that eludes formal structures of control. Some examples that come to mind include not only rave-parties in the desert, but also activist performances such as Critical Mass bike rides, Carnival Against Capitalism, and Reclaim the Streets (RTS). Activists can literally reclaim spaces for limited durations; not only protesting what they are against, but also creating an experiential model of the culture they are for.

RTS is a good example. The phenomenon appeared as a form of direct theatrical action in the United Kingdom not too long ago, in an attempt to prevent the destruction of neighbourhoods which were threatened by motor-way expansions. People took to the streets of the Claremont Road, prevented the demolition crews from entering the homes, and partied like there was no tomorrow. The mutation of the street into a phenomenally imaginative theatre of creative resistance was also a transformation of personal and social space. With RTS, according to Jordan: "The road becomes a stage for a participatory ritual theatre: ritual because it is efficacious, it produces real effects by means of symbolic causes; participatory because the street party has no division between performer and audience, it is created by and for everyone, it avoids all mediation, it is experienced in the immediate moment by all, in a spirit of face-to-face subversive comradeship" (354). Commenting on the Claremont Road action, after the police had finally managed to clear the partying street reclaimers, Jordan declared: "This was theatre like you'd never see it; theatre on a scale that would not fit in any opera house. It was a spectacle that cost the government over 2 million [pounds] to enact; a spectacle in which we were in control, for which we had set the stage, provided the actors and invited the state to be in our play; to play our game" (352).

Advanced Tactics

Ontological Shock

Oftentimes tactics that ontologically shock people can be used with great effectiveness in the revolutionary theatre. An ontological shock is one whereby a person is forced to immediately review their assumption of reality, usually caused by an action of some sort. One such example occurs in the BUY NOTHING DAY meta-play (to be discussed in Chapter 12): spect-actors playing hungry "tourists" begin the scene, and are soon followed by others playing "protesters". A conflict ensues between the two factions, with the "tourists" wanting to buy Happy Meals and the "protesters" trying to convince them otherwise. To the average person witnessing the scene, including the manager and security guards, the situation is interpreted as real. As things heated up and the police were called, the ontological shock was delivered: Ronald McDonald himself burst onto the scene and, like a corporate super-hero, beat the "protesters" up and kicked them out to the cheers of the "tourists". Ontological shock has the power to instantaneously cause deep reflection, and hence drastic re-evaluation of social reality.

Sustained meme-warfare

Here the question comes into play whether the revolutionary theatre activity will be a "one-off" or a sustained performance. While the BUY NOTHING DAY performance was intended as a single performance for the glorious activist day, other projects might be more effective if sustained. The Billionaires for Bush and the Reverend Billy and Church of Stop Shopping are excellent examples of sustained revolutionary theatre. Instead of playing the characters just once, an entire virtual world is created whereby the spect-actors can play their characters on a sustained basis.

Virtual Reality

By "Virtual Reality" I am not referring specifically to the computer paradigm, but rather am using it in an Artaudian sense. While the computer version creates the VR through technology, the theatre version does so through

dramatics. Theatre activists can create dramatic virtual realities whereby social reality is "doubled" with a sustained revolutionary performance. Activists playing "weapons inspectors", for example, might attempt to visit a Weapons of Mass Destruction production facility in the United States, baffling security agents by demanding access to inspect the facility. If the performance is sustained and made to look like reality (eg: a website reporting the inspections, in-character interviews for the media, realistic costumes, etc.) a whole virtual reality can come into existence.

Viral Theatre

Viral theatre appears to operate on two levels. On the one hand there are progressive theatre plays that are designed to spread virally, such as The Vagina Monologues or The Laramie Project. By bringing reality-based theatre to the stage (all dialogue is collected from real people dealing with real issues) counter-hegemonic memes can spread from the boards and in the media, all the while raising money for the given cause. Viral theatre, in this sense, spreads to theatres and campuses throughout the world and helps to activize performers and their audiences.

The second type of viral theatre involves recruitment into sustained revolutionary theatre campaigns, such as the Billionaires for Bush. Through their website thousands of players and hundreds of chapters are recruited into the performance. They are given information on how to create a character, loose guidelines on how to play, and details on how to interconnect and collaborate.

Global Invisible Theatre

Global Invisible Theatre (GIT) will be discussed in the next chapter (12).

CLEAN-UP

The final consideration for the theatre activist is the eventual act of cleaning up after a hearty dramatic meal. Here I am speaking about the issue of

cultural production: how the theatricals were recorded, and how those recordings will go on to be used again. The beauty of revolutionary theatre is that is has the capability of playing twice; the first time live and in the thick of it, the second time as films, websites, articles, books, zines, poems, speeches - hopefully being employed to inspire others to join the struggle. The more media that is generated, the more the memes will spread. It is important to collect as much of this dramaturgical material as possible, and to re-mix it into entirely new subversive products. In this way the *détournement* can continue even after the project is over. The hoped-for effect of all these revolutionary theatre activities, deep reflection leading to positive transformation, is perhaps best summed-up by Steve Mann:

> Reflectionism holds up the mirror and asks the question: Do you like what you see? …When Reflectionism is successful, we smash painfully into the mirror it has held up to us (society). At first it appears as an idiot or a drunk, driving on the wrong side of the road, until we realize it is a mirror image of ourselves. Collision with the mirror, it is hoped, will reveal truths otherwise hidden from us. (2001: 118)

Chapter 11

Optative Theatre

The thing is to act, to act joyously, not to accept that we are helpless to effect change. For if we seek to resist the roles and lives set forward for us, if we find a spirited fight against the forces that would keep us in despair, if we dare to act on our own and to act passionately and freely, that itself is revolution. (131)

- *CrimethInc. Workers Collective*

Feeling uneasy about the dragooned nature of the theatre and the society just before the dramatic turn of the millennium, I came to the conclusion that a new paradigm was needed for both, and set about conjuring the optative theatre to critically re-examine and re-define the inter-relationship between the Spectacle and the "theatre". The Spectacle, as I present throughout this thesis, is a major problem concerning the liberation of humanity. Its problem is two-fold in relation to both the society and the theatre. To the society it distorts reality in the interests of the ruling class, and encourages spectatorship (and hence depoliticisation) among people. In this way it does its own casting in the form of interpellated roles, which are used to maintain its oppressive "show". To the theatre, the Spectacle distorts and keeps hidden its true and liberating nature, while at the same time marginalizes and co-opts it. The Spectacle attempts to replace real human desire with illusion, manipulation, and despair, and despite offering endless consumer "choices", ultimately offers no real choice but to subscribe to it. Oppression, with all its damaging results, is allowed to flourish under such conditions.

The word "optative", in the sense it applies here, means "indicative of desire or choice". The optative theatre seeks to reverse the Spectacle's trend by promoting a passionate desire for a better world, and by empowering people into making dramatic choices on how to achieve positive social change. Central to the optative theatre are questions of how theatre can be used as a tool for human

liberation, of whether revolutionary theatre can be made more effective, and on the possibility and desirability of a theatrical revolution. I have posited that when people become activist and reclaim their means for dramatic expression, it is entirely possible to disrupt the Spectacle by deploying counter-hegemonic playing (CHP) into its oppressive realm of hegemonic being (HB). By creating our own characters, we alter the course of the "script"/discourse, and call into question the nature of power and oppression. I have come to the conclusion that in order to take the revolutionary theatre project to the next step we need to focus on the idea of a *user-based* theatre. Recalling earlier criticisms of traditional, progressive, and applied paradigms of theatre, especially in regards to both accessibility and effectiveness, it is distressing that "theatre", as we know it, is generally out-of-reach for the average person, and certainly a far cry from Artaud's wish of it being "equal to life".

It is noteworthy that in the past 100 years the theme of drama and theatre as 'necessary' to healthy societies and to healthy individuals has re-emerged. In The Theatre and Life Evreinov says that theatre is "infinitely wider than the stage", and is not just for entertainment and instruction; it is "something as essentially necessary to man as air, food, and sexual intercourse" (6). Phil Jones in Drama as Therapy, Theatre as Living states that:

> …participating in drama and theatre allows connections to unconscious and emotional processes to be made. Participation is seen to satisfy human needs to play and create. The festive act of people coming together through drama and theatre is seen to have social and psychological importance. Theatre is both an activity set apart from everyday reality, which at the same time has a vital function in reflecting upon and reacting to that reality. [It] ...can bring people together and can comment upon and deeply affect their feelings, their politics and their ways of living. (3)

Theatre is rooted in the playing of a character, and role-playing can be seen as a healthy human behaviour designed to improve human understanding through enhanced reflection. According to Morgan and Saxton, in Teaching Drama:

> In role-play the participants see the world through someone else's eyes, and in so doing not only show the outer aspects of that person, but also try to understand how that person thinks and feels. (38)

When involved in role-playing, an identity is shifted, meaning the individual does not consider themselves to have attributes and qualities normally ascribed to them. To a small or large degree, they have shifted their identity. A small degree of shift might involve acting as themselves by emphasizing or taking on different characteristics or circumstances. A large degree of shift might involve playing something totally foreign. In role-play there are also generally considered two approaches: Rationality and Ecstasy. Rationality refers to the analytic, logical, thought-orienting aspects of role taking and playing. In this way of seeing role taking, emphasis is placed upon the degree to which the role taker stays aware, reflective and analytical of the role playing during and after enactment. Ecstasy refers to a sense of being 'taken over' by a role or dramatic experience – of being 'lost' within it. In <u>Performance Theory</u> Schechner refers to both Balinese trance and Stanislavski's approach as being linked by this ecstatic approach of enactment: "performing by becoming or being possessed by another" (177). Coult, of the UK's alternative performance company Welfare State, describes this way of working as "the inducing of trance-like states in which reflection, reason, and awareness are suppressed or abandoned" (1983: 27). Whatever the reason and whatever the approach, role-play can be seen as a good thing for human beings; the very act of playing opens up reflective and transformative spaces. Furthermore, according to Phil Jones:

> …entry into an enacted self, a dramatic role, is, within certain disciplines, seen as connected to creating a space which is separate from usual reality to redress problems or difficulties. The temporary change of identity gives permissions and alters the experience of self and others in a way which is seen to help bring about difference and change. (203)

Theatre can be seen as an extremely useful tool for reflecting on everyday activity, for revising notions of identity, and for instigating positive social change.

Unfortunately, despite the obvious benefits of taking the theatre into one's own hands, the very notion has strong objections from the powers-that-be, who consider it provocative. The benefits of drama, under current Spectacular conditions, are all too often dismissed and replaced with the very opposite results: fear, alienation, depoliticisation, and oppression. Because the Spectacle cannot admit forces beyond its control or ability to contain, the "script" (discourses of "common sense", Reason, psychology, et. al) dictates that the capability to assume different (unauthorized) persona is both questionable and undesirable. Phil Jones notes that:

> The enacted self is linked to breach and disturbance by a number of authors. Within this approach to examining role, the shifting in identity in taking on a role is seen as a way of responding to crisis…[E]ntry into role can often be experienced as socially and individually disturbing. It marks an experience outside the usual framework by which an individual is known to others and by which individuals know themselves. (202-203)

Role-playing can be seen as a "restricted" activity in the Spectacle, and there is a certain feeling that we are not allowed to play. Identity is meant to be stable and synonymous with interpellated roles, and unauthorized role-play is actively discouraged. Traditionally, identity has been defined as being reliant upon an interconnected system of roles (Argyle, 1969), and the coherence of the individual social role and its connection to other roles is supposedly crucial to the functioning of societies and to the individual's well-being (Brissett and Edgely, 1975). From this perspective the health of any society and the effective functioning of an individual (in terms of their sense of identity) are interdependent. Argyle, a major proponent of this view, asserts that social organisations consist of a number of individuals interacting in a regular manner. The description of a regular pattern is made possible "by means of the concept of role which [is]…defined…as the model behaviour of occupants in a position…" (277). "Identity", in this traditional sense, is the passive acceptance of interpellated roles, and by extension oppression associated with these roles. In other words, authorized "identity" has a suffocating effect against the possibility

of theatrical resistance. By reserving overt role-playing for "professional actors," the rest of the population is cast as spectators.

One must wonder how things would be different if everyone could easily access a user-based theatre? What if they could turn it "on" and "off" whenever they liked? What if they could use it to short-circuit Spectacle, fight oppression, and advance the Global Justice cause? What if suddenly theatre could "be equal to life"?

Attached to this thesis should be a pair of coloured (or "optative") glasses; they represent both a metaphor and a practical tool for the user-based theatre I am proposing. If they are missing, they may have been taken by a previous reader to use against oppression, or perhaps they were destroyed, stolen, or denied "permission" to be here. If they are not present, I strongly advise getting a pair as soon as possible. The user, when wearing them, is encouraged firstly to see things theatrically; the world seen through the user's eyes is literally dramatized by the coloured lenses. Secondly, the user can play any role they wish when the glasses are worn. The user-based theatre comes into existence when a character is played. Not unlike a clown nose, dramatic mask, or sock puppet, the optative glasses are a theatrical empowerer; they allow us to reframe social reality, and give us permission to play. The glasses then signify the importance of the ability to; a) see the world theatrically, and b) *play* (both counter-hegemonic games, and characters who disrupt the Spectacle). By reclaiming dramatic tools of vision and expression, the user can see and expose the Spectacle as merely oppressive "script", and transform the discourse by playing the roles that *détourne* it. The optative theatre as a critical (socio-theatrical) theory is designed to criticize existing theatrical and social structures (with a view of liberating them from oppression) by re-engineering the relationship between the two. As I have tried to present, the *theatrum mundi* concept applies today more than ever – theatre in its pure form is everywhere within the Spectacle, only it works against humanity because it operates in covert ways that cast people into oppressive roles and oppressive systems. Recognizing this abuse of theatre, the optative approach is useful in identifying

the oppressive uses of theatre employed by the Spectacle that foster oppression (eg: stealth marketing, clandestine theatre), and advancing human empowerment against them by putting a critical theatre into the hands (or over the eyes) of the user. Using radical dramaturgy, Spectacle can be analyzed as "script", and an initial analysis of the casting (and roles) reveals the difference between the two approaches:

ROLES	SPECTACLE	OPTATIVE
Primary	spectator (passive)	activist human (active)
Secondary	interpellated ("I *am* an actor")	optative player, provocateur
Additional	characters reserved for trained professionals ("I *play* Ophelia")	can play any character

Not surprisingly, the roles distributed by the Spectacle are mostly hidden, meaning that those cast are not aware that they are playing both spectators and interpellated roles. Unlike the dragooning casting structure of the Spectacle, the optative approach is liberating. Because the world is seen theatrically, users are free to cast themselves, and consequently can reclaim culture, theatre, and means of expression to play against the Spectacle. Recalling our earlier charts of theatre progressing through the ages, I propose the optative theatre might look like this:

Area	King (Optative Theatre)
Politics	Political, user-based
Society	Equal to Society, directly challenges oppression in society
Representation	Used as a Reflectionist tool (eg: Culture-Jamming)
Performance	Anyone can play (as Spect-Actor)
Social Reality	Creates virtual realities, subverts oppressive realities
Setting	Anywhere
Time frame	Ongoing, can be turned on and off by user

The user-based theatre can be employed by one person, acting alone. Recalling earlier analysis that fundamentally theatre is born when a character is played, it is easy to see that theatre can be created by a single person; one

spect-actor is all it takes. A typical person looking in a mirror will likely be inhabiting the realm of HB (eg: while applying make-up or fretting over a pimple), or perhaps CHB (eg: while pondering the sorry state of humanity). Should that person put on the optative glasses knowingly, he or she would become a theatre "user" with "access" to a whole new world of dramatic possibilities, reflections, and transformations. The user can suddenly choose between "being" a person looking in the mirror for whatever reason, and "playing" the spect-actor – who by seeing the situation through a dramatic lens, and by performing a character, gains access to the *I-in-Situ*. Now able to challenge oppression dramatically, the user can summon a state of advanced self-reflection. The mirror-situation effectively becomes a meta-theatre: comprised of both social reality and theatre, in the Derridian sense it is equally neither. It is a dramatic and transformative space for the spect-actor; a magical realm where any situation can be explored through a theatrical lens, where any character can be simultaneously played out and observed, and where revolutionary theatre can be brought into existence.

Of course, the glasses are as much of a metaphor as a practical tool, (which can be used in both performance and process). The important thing isn't to get everyone wearing the glasses *per se*, but rather to get them acting on the newfound theatrical powers that are associated with the metaphor – the ability to challenge Spectacle by seeing theatrically and playing roles, and by creating anti-oppressive dramatic worlds. Beginning on the personal level, the user can employ theatre to inoculate themselves against Spectacle, and to eradicate themselves of lingering personal oppression. By seeing the Spectacle through a dramatic lens one is able to see its back-stage, its inner workings. One can see in whose interest it is produced and maintained and examine how it affects social reality. With the Spectacle identified, situations where oppression occurs can now be theatrically examined. Characters can be played through any medium whatsoever, and by playing them in a revolutionary manner (CHP) against the given instance of oppression (HB), the Spectacle is challenged in a visceral way. Ontological boundaries blur and factions struggle for the control of the script and discourse, HB typically through coercion and bullying, CHP through reflection

and *détournement.* By experimenting theatrically with form, content, and process, and by inserting itself into every day reality, optative theatre can manifest itself at any time, anywhere, with anyone.

The main differences between revolutionary theatre as defined (Chapters 9, 10) and optative theatre are primarily regarding the accessibility to and understanding of the "theatre" itself. In the revolutionary model the player sees the character as a tool within the overall subversive goal, and likely plays one role in a performance for a limited duration. The project, with all its glorious memes, usually comes first:
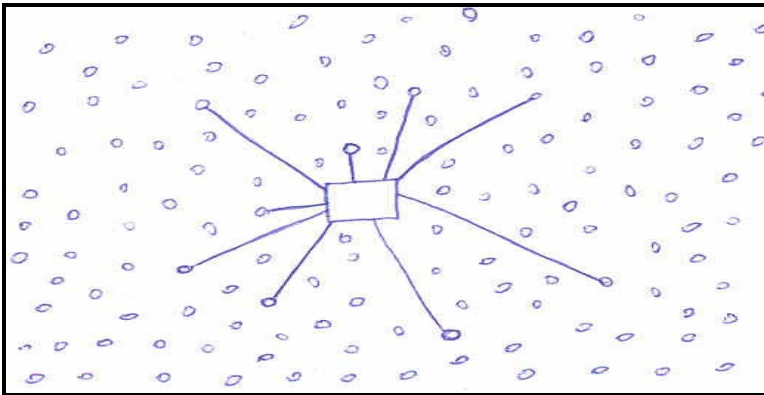
Figure 11.1 – Revolutionary Theatre structure

In the figure above the "theatre" is signified by the square, with the circles indicating people, several of whom (the ones with lines connecting) are involved in the project. The theatre occurs in the square area, when the players assemble. Those involved with the Billionaires for Bush, for example, play their characters when together at a performance, then go home and await the next opportunity. To illustrate the point, I played "Rollin Gincash" with hundreds of "Billioniares for Bush" during the Republican National Convention in New York City, but can no longer access the performance because I am now in Canada. Revolutionary theatre, it appears, is not accessible enough. In the optative theatre the same principles at work in revolutionary theatre can also apply to any given situation in daily life. In other words, while the Billionaires for Bush might be one well-structured theatrical project, the optative theatre user is positioned to not only

play with them, but also to play in a myriad of other performances, some very small, and others spanning the globe. Likewise instead of being restricted to one character within a set of guidelines, the user can create and play as many characters as they wish through any number of mediums. Because any situation, theatrical or "real" can be interpreted and reacted to in a dual manner (either dramatically or "in reality"), the theatre is indeed then capable of becoming "equal to life" for the user. A subversive dramatic tool comes into existence for simultaneously filtering out and challenging both Spectacle and oppression. Unlike the centralized revolutionary theatre model where it is not always easy to access a performance, in the optative model every player can access revolutionary theatre whenever they like through the user-based paradigm, and then inter-connect with other players and projects. The optative model is much more lively and flexible, and results in exponentially more revolutionary theatre activity.

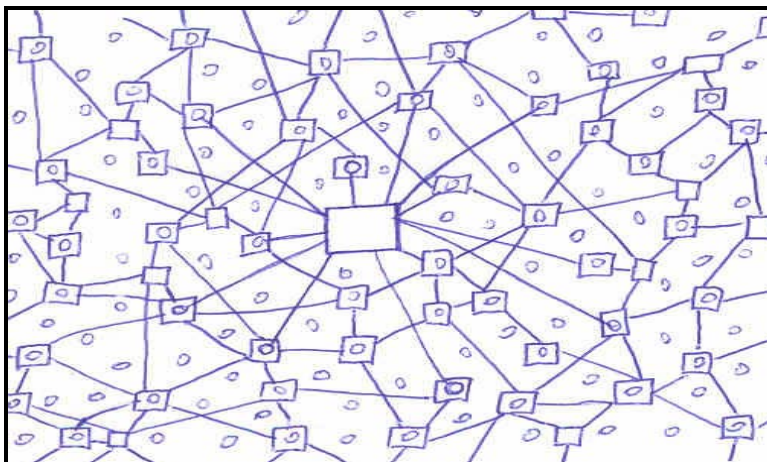
Figure 11.2 – Optative Theatre structure

The Spectacle becomes seriously disrupted as individuals running their own critical and theatrical laboratories inter-connect and collaborate on new projects. Because of the optative theatre's web-like structure, those inhabiting the realm of Spectacle will likely encounter cultural resistance and revolutionary performance on a more frequent basis.

With a basic understanding of how the optative theatrical technique works on the personal level, the user can then interconnect with other users in order to create more elaborate schemes, grandiose revolutionary theatre "performances" that challenge oppression on both the cultural and structural levels. Because cultural and structural levels tend to be complex, users must find ways to organize and collaborate in order to launch successful challenges. Needing a structure to carry out such a praxis, the Optative Theatrical Laboratories (OTL) was created at the University of Calgary in late 1999. Set up as a laboratory for critical thinking and theatre activism, OTL is primarily a metaphysical paradigm versus, say, a theatre company or troupe. Anyone can create an OTL: far from being a physical entity, it more resembles a paradigm that can be accessed at any time by the user. OTL is like a computer program: it is "downloaded", not onto a hard drive, but rather into the mind. Once this socio-theatrical tool is in place, it can be accessed in the same way a computer user "opens" programs and tools.

I have employed OTL to facilitate and play in revolutionary theatre projects in various locations across the world (see Chapter 12), and OTL continues its subversive dramatic activities to this very day. Those visiting our website can learn more by reading the Mission Statement:

> OTL is a non-hierarchical dramatic collective whose mandate is to "theatrically challenge hegemonic thought-patterns and oppressive systems." Its community-based project is both activist and theatrical, occupying the unique transformative space between the two fields. Facing issues of oppression in the age of globalization, the OTL was conceived at the turn of the millennium (at the University of Calgary) as a new form of 21st Century performance-activism. The word *optative*, defined as "indicative of desire or choice", drives the collective in its theatrical explorations, experiments, and cultural interventions. Through experimental practice, critical theory, and sustained performance, OTL's goal is to revitalise theatre as an agent for social change. Inspired by Situationist philosophy and Reflectionist theory, the OTL designs sustained and interconnected theatrical campaigns that target instances of oppression. Using many mediums in an inter-disciplinary manner (live performance, direct action, theatre, video, text, music, internet, installation, etc.), the OTL employs a diversity

of cutting-edge activist performance techniques: culture-jamming, Viral Theatre, Sousveillance Theatre, meme-warfare, Electronic Disturbance Theater, and Global Invisible Theatre, to name a few.

By introducing play into politics, individuals and communities are empowered to radically challenge official culture's claims to authority, stability, sobriety, immutability and immorality. By putting performance and process above representation and product, the OTL applies the *theatrum mundi* concept - "All the World's a Stage" - and encourages those involved to adopt an activist user-based theatre. Keeping in mind the critical 21st Century goal of human liberation over oppression, OTL's art is not about representation but presence; its politics is not about deferring social change to the future, but about change now. Through an ongoing process of performance, education and community-building, the OTL focuses on the creation of an interconnected global network capable of responding dramatically to issues of oppression, such as war, consumer-capitalism, human rights violations, and discrimination. By theatricalizing the activists and activizing the theatricians, the OTL looks to collaborate on direct theatrical actions, share its dramatic ideas, reclaim the culture, *détourne* the Spectacle, and highlight the activist message: Another World is Possible.

Concerning the creation of revolutionary theatre projects, I have found that typically two structural roles need to be filled: the Artistic Facilitator and Chaos Organizer. While these two can be combined or broken down into many roles, their responsibilities essentially remain the same. An Artistic Facilitator is responsible for setting up the playground (designing the project) and recruiting other users (essentially, populating it with players). The Facilitator establishes the purpose and goals of the project, sets the parameters, and promotes the idea. Typically involved in the creation of the artistic and theatrical aspects, the Facilitator may be seen as a sort of non-hierarchal theatre "director" (or perhaps a drama coach) who oversees and facilitates the project artistically. The role of Chaos Organizer is more akin to a traditional stage or production manager, whose responsibility is to stay on top of things organizationally, and handle a variety of standard "non-performance" tasks such as scheduling, updating files, finance, publicity, etc. It is important that these roles be filled in whatever manner works best, because without them it would be difficult to conduct larger projects

that target cultural and structural oppression. The OTL, more than anything else, is a loose structure designed to support players involved in any given project.

Creating projects depends on selecting oppression to be targeted, whether on structural or cultural levels. Once an oppression is targeted, the players are well-advised to look for the most volatile and symbolic spaces to create their meta-theatrical playgrounds and deploy their projects. Socio-theatrical controversy, the desired effect, can be the result of carefully planned actions. However, it is just as likely that controversy will come unannounced, such as when forces of the Spectacle are provoked into taking action against the project and/or players. In other cases the oppressive situation can be "flagged" and labelled as an "optative seed" (or what Steve Mann prefers to call a "King seed"): as an opportunity for future critical action. For example, when the TD Bank literally bankrupted OTL in "service charges", we flagged it as a place for future theatricals ultimately designed to challenge them to create a fee-less account for artists and the disadvantaged.

Those responsible for the creation and maintenance of an optative playground, in order for it to be effective at theatrically challenging hegemonic thinking and oppressive systems, must strive towards a way of operating that is the very anti-thesis of the Spectacle and its *modus operandi*. A fertile environment where user-based theatre can thrive and oppression can be weeded out is necessary, and I posit the following characteristics are important for effective optative theatre:

- Anti-oppressive
- Interactive
- Accessible
- Dual
- Reflective
- Viral

An anti-oppressive environment is one whereby oppression is identified as a constant danger, kept in check by constant critical analysis, and challenged when it presents itself. Such places are anti-imperialist, opposed to colonialism, patriarchy, racism and homophobia; they denounce all forms of exploitation,

discrimination, oppression and domination. Those present are both critical and political. Asserted is a worldview based on the respect of differences and the autonomy of groups, individuals and peoples. The Peoples' Global Action Network provides a good anti-oppressive paradigm for a basis of unity, in the form "The Hallmarks":

> 1. A very clear rejection of capitalism, imperialism and feudalism; all trade agreements, institutions and governments that promote destructive globalisation;

> 2. We reject all forms and systems of domination and discrimination including, but not limited to, patriarchy, racism and religious fundamentalism of all creeds. We embrace the full dignity of all human beings;

> 3. A confrontational attitude, since we do not think that lobbying can have a major impact in such biased and undemocratic organisations, in which transnational capital is the only real policy-maker;

> 4. A call to direct action and civil disobedience, support for social movements' struggles, advocating forms of resistance which maximize respect for life and oppressed peoples' rights, as well as the construction of local alternatives to global capitalism;

> 5. An organisational philosophy based on decentralisation and autonomy.

It is wise to follow guidelines like these, because if the environment itself becomes oppressive, it is very difficult to challenge oppression to any great extent. For those practicing optative theatre, an anti-oppressive approach is extremely important – *everyone* should feel welcome to participate, regardless of training, status, or reputation. Ideally the players, when not in performance, operate in the realm of CHB. There should be no hierarchy or authority, and democratic principles should be employed when necessary to make group decisions. How to sustain an anti-oppressive environment is a topic of much consideration, and certainly there have been many attempts to find the best

paradigms, including our own. Typically, during the projects we have carried out, we have tried to encourage users to follow three personal rules when "being":

1. Nobody is allowed to tell anyone what to do.

2. Nobody is allowed to start a conflict, unless they are civil about it and are willing to compromise and find resolution.

3. Nobody is allowed to say things behind the backs of others that they are not willing to say to their face.

Because all these discouraged behaviours typically lead to oppression, by curtailing them it is possible to operate on a level CHB (which can then be complimented with operations in the realm of CHP). With a healthy guidelines in place, anything occurring outside of these standard OTL "rules" is immediately suspect: any activities that foster oppression can be interpreted as an intrusion of Spectacle (HB). Anybody carrying out any oppressive activities (see Chapter 6 for more on oppression) can be theoretically targeted by other theatre-users, who can work both on the levels of CHB and CHP to eradicate the oppression (and Spectacle) that is dragooning the misguided player - and the project. Indeed, a very interesting dynamic is at play when dealing with oppression in this manner. Those affected by HB might be either involved in the project (eg: as a player or spect-actor) or provoking it from the outside (eg: as an oppressive component of a structural or cultural force). Regardless of who is affected, the optative theatre is designed to challenge the hegemonic thinking and oppressive systems that drive people's behaviour.

Optative theatre should also be highly interactive, much in the same way as computer Virtual Reality: the user navigates. Users can take as many initiatives as they like – they play the lead role, after all. By inter-connecting with other players, by playing between realms of reality interpretation, and by theatrically challenging HB in solidarity with others, the optative theatre is extremely interactive in nature. It should also be as accessible as possible; it must be easy to tap into as an individual, and the various groups running

different projects should be welcoming of other users. At the same time users can play on their own terms, and participate as often as they wish. A grandmother, for example, might only play once a week from the comfort of an armchair and a computer (eg: contributing towards an Electronic Disturbance Theater performance); or perhaps it is just as likely she would assemble a troupe of Raging Grannies and take to the streets, in combination with dozens of other projects.

In order to make theatrical impacts, optative theatre is also inherently dual; players operate between the realms of being and playing. The theatre can be turned "on" and "off" by the user at any time, in a way similar to the Billionaires for Bush (see Chapter 10), who could answer questions as either themselves or the characters they were playing. In many ways this duality is a combination of Brecht's actor/demonstrator and Boal's invisible theatre, in that the characters can be played invisibly or overtly, and in that the actor can step out of role to comment on it. The combination of the two theories/techniques coupled with experimentation in form, content, and process offers limitless radical possibilities to play in both the theatre and in society. This duality erupts binaries (such as artist/spectator, playing/being, professional/non-professional, public/private, etc.) and can bring about the desired goal: deep reflection regarding oppression, and hence transformation against it. Optative theatre can often be very direct and very political, and those engaged with duality can be said to play the *provocateur*, or the Fool.

Finally, optative theatre needs to be viral if it is going to have the desired effect of dramatically revolutionizing humanity against oppression. It needs to be able to spread across the world, linking people who want to fight oppression into its user-based theatrical matrix. If it becomes well-organized and supported, it might eventually become ubiquitous and indeed equal to life: a theatrical revolution that liberates humanity and demolishes the Spectacle.

Overall, with optative theatre, the goal is to playfully provoke ourselves, the participants, and society at large into using drama for critical thinking and challenging oppression. Because the theatre is provocative in that it attempts to

convince all people to play using the optative technique, it is also highly activist against cultural hegemony and dragooned social reality. Since the ultimate goal is human betterment through theatrical intervention, optative theatre can be largely seen as a culture-jamming strategy or subversive game in the Global Justice movement, and as a new form of 21st Century theatre-activism. While culture-jamming is often associated with agit-prop alterations of billboards and advertisements - in the optative theatre the "jam" applies to everyday behaviour, to any oppressive situation. What is being "jammed" is the complacency associated with the way society is run, and the passive acceptance of the "norm:" global capitalism and corporate brainwashing affecting the majority of citizens to accept the Spectacle's *status quo*. The monoculture of the Spectacle is designed to turn us against ourselves through spectatorship and depoliticisation; the optative approach activizes and liberates us by turning the monoculture against itself. As a pure process, there are no social or theatrical standards to be evaluated. The optative approach "succeeds" best when it causes as much reflection as possible of the socio-theatrical controversies it creates; when it becomes a dramatic counter-hegemonic meme-fountain. Ultimately, through its spread, it is hoped the optative approach will contribute towards a new psychology of human liberation, with focusing on interconnected, global, and critical play.

One of the biggest challenges of the optative theatre is to find ways to liberate people from Spectacle and get them playing counter-hegemonically. Within the Spectacle, as we have seen, rejecting interpellated roles (HB) in favour of our own (CHP), is frowned upon and actively discouraged by cultural hegemony, and by extension "social reality" itself. In The Desperate Politics of Postmodernism Henry S. Kariel describes what he sees as a performative feature of postmodernists, but what might be equally applied to the optative player's approach:

> Heroically unheroic, they put their very identities at risk. Their careers follow no definitive obituary. Presupposing no golden age in the past or future, they treat everything, including themselves, as

> present – or, rather, as capable of being *made* present by changes in style, genre, form, context, perspective, and interpretation, by whatever it takes, not to change the institutions of modernity, but to out-perform them. (122)

The optative approach has one central difference: the players are not only trying to outperform the oppressive systems, but are also trying to *détourne* them. Unlike the questionable (and often apolitical) approach taken on by typical postmodernists, the optative player sees a better, attainable future. Kariel assumes the role of the first person to describe the reactions one might typically have to the antics of postmodernist players:

> Deeply implicated in the prevailing culture, too fatigued or embarrassed or resentful to embellish it, we speak of postmodernists…in the third person plural. We say *they* are responding to the institutionalized terrors of our times by complacently affirming the worst and the best, the vulgar and the sublime, the fictitious and the real. It is *they* who fail to discriminate. It is *their* paranoia, *their* duplicity, *their* faithlessness, *their* recklessness. However mixed our feelings, *we* go on being trustworthy, loyal, truthful. Too preoccupied to explore our own misgivings, we fail to come to terms with our deepest political impulse – the impulse which postmodernists express by living in contradiction, by relinquishing the comfort and ardor of ideology, by rejecting the worldview that divides society into an *us* and *them*. We take sides and consecrate the purity of our perfectionism and technology for enforcing it. Thus we insure ourselves so fully against Otherness that we deplete what resources remain for play and politics. (180)

One of the central challenges of optative theatre, then, is to convince people that role-play, far from being some sort of "unauthorized" activity, can actually be employed in a useful way to achieve positive personal and social change.

Having looked at various critical approaches to "identity", such as Queer Theory, postmodernism, and post-colonial theory, it is easy to see that "identity" is both fluid and malleable. Instead of accepting the role of the helpless spectator to "life" and allowing the powers-that-be to cast us in the Spectacle, the CrimethInc. Workers Collective argues:

> We need to strive simultaneously for freedom from external constraints and for the strength to love and forgive and cooperate, and for this project we absolutely must be ready to shake off need for Identity in the traditional sense. What we need most now are ways to speak that can *give* others voices of their own…ways to act that can activate – these will be the weapons no power can defeat. What is needed above all, then, is the self-confidence to talk with and listen to others, to find magic tricks by which old conflicts can be superseded and…rival factions discover ways to coexist and support each other. For revolution is not making everyone the same in their ideologies or relations with each other, but simply establishing mutually beneficial relations between different individuals and groups. (135)

By reconfiguring "identity" to operate in the realms of CHB and CHP, oppression can be eliminated and anything in the realm of HB can be re-interpreted as Spectacle: theatrical roles, mere illusions vacant of moral or intellectual authority. The Collective also suggests:

> We might have more success in our pursuit of happiness if we start trying to really participate. Instead of accepting the role of passive spectators to sports, society, and life, it is up to each of us to figure out how to play an active and significant part in creating the worlds around us and within us. Perhaps one day we can build a new society in which we can all be involved together in the decisions that affect the lives we lead; then we will be able to truly choose our own identities. (146)

Catalyzing a re-interpretation of "identity" can often be accomplished with a combination of critical discussion in the realm of CHB, and critical performances in the realm of CHP. Furthermore, by analyzing the Spectacle dramaturgically, it is possible to initiate a re-appropriation of interpellated roles to use as necessary both in process and in performance. In *performance* one might re-appropriate the role of Billionaire, in order to satirize and challenge it. Likewise the roles of "actor", "director" or "stage-manager" might be useful in the *process* of constructing a component of a revolutionary project. Instead of *being* interpellated roles such as these, the optative player can *play* them, short-circuiting hegemonic thinking and oppressive theatre systems. Because everyone in the optative theatre has the lead role of *playing* a provocateur, no

other assumed role is as important. A provocateur is someone who provokes reaction in others through unconventional behaviour/performance and fantastic expression. Willing to say what others would be shot for saying, they are Picaros, confidence men, satirists, *entartistes*, double agents, imposters, charlatans, jokers, Doppelgangers, ringmasters, jesters, fools, actors, tricksters, and Nanabushes. Playing the provocateur as our secondary role (the *human* role being the primary one), we can then appropriate and play any other roles as necessary in both process and performance. The optative player, then, strives to balance between CHB and CHP. Any venture into the realm of HB can be done in-role in order to theatrically challenge it, even if invisibly. Escaping HB, as I have pointed out, is a very difficult task. The optative approach offers us ways of inhabiting HB when necessary (such as when doing one's "job") that aim to both analyze oppressive situations critically and potentially contribute towards their dramatic subversion and *détournement*.

Another dramaturgical tool is to look at the plot of any given situation. By examining the sequence of events in the same manner a dramaturge examines a script, it is possible to see which roles operate in an oppressive manner, and to look at the hidden agendas driving their hegemonic behaviour. A "meta-play" can be created by "scripting": collecting real materials (such as footage, media reports, communications, etc.) related to a situation, and by reframing them into a (potentially playable) collection that critically analyzes them. In this way it can become apparent which characters belong to the Spectacle. With the entire situation now re-evaluated in regards to the oppression itself, it is possible to subject those unknowingly playing the interpellated roles to a potential ontological challenge that is designed to eventually lure them into the optative fold. Oftentimes those involved in an inter-performance (eg: someone unwittingly cast in an optative action) will be challenged to reject the realm of HB in favour of CHB and CHP, potentially leading to their transformation of perception. As the Spectacle and its hypnotizing memes are disrupted, the possibilities increase that people will be led to questioning and ultimately rejecting the entire deranged system.

Hal Niedzviecki, in <u>We Want Some Too: Underground Desire and the Reinvention of Mass Culture</u>, eloquently summarizes the current dilemma facing humanity within the Spectacle's mass culture:

> And so the search for a space – physical and mental – where we can say what we have to say and be the way we have to be, in order to reach new understanding of the way we live, continues with increasing urgency. It continues because mass culture's relentless synergy of entertainment and information has rewritten our conception of our own lives. Because to be able to supply ourselves with our own perspectives, we need to re-imagine a world where we are all artists, critics, thinkers, dreamers. Because when we actually try to step into the looking glass of this dreamy, seedy panorama, we are branded as wacky, weird, and probably dangerous; we are prevented from realizing that basking in the ultraviolet rays of the false dawn entertainment economy is only a small part of what could be the western world's real sunrise: a cultural renaissance of unprecedented proportions. (326-327)

For cultural renaissance there first needs to be cultural resistance; both in liberating every day life, and against the dominant (mono)culture that now exists.

The theatre, as the only medium that encompasses all other mediums, offers up enticing possibilities for re-imagining the world and realizing the liberated future being sought. Today, many within the Global Justice Movement are beginning to see the value of playing as a form of political activism, and not only against corporations, but against Spectacle in general. Carnival is increasingly becoming the response to the Kafkaesque. Naomi Klein, examining the "Reclaim the Streets" movement (whereby people emerge to jam the *status quo* by taking over a street to throw a huge playful party), notes:

> After Trafalger Square…it was too easy for the street party to be seen as fun, just a party with a hint of political action…If people think that turning up to a street party once a year, getting out of your head and dancing your heart out on a recaptured piece of public land is enough, then we are failing to reach our potential…The next task…is to imagine a takeover bigger than just one street…The street party is only the beginning, a taster of future possibilities. To date there have been 30 street parties all over the [UK]. Imagine that growing to 100, imagine each one of those happening on the same day, imagine each one lasting for

> days on end and growing…Imagine the street party growing roots…*la fête permanente…* (318-319)

The spirit of *la fête permanente* ideally permeates each optative project, allowing for all the players to celebrate the meta-theatrical playground that at once frees us from Spectacle while offering a peek at a liberated future. At the same time, with enough concerted effort from the players, the utopian ideal of *la fête permanente* could very well become a reality one day.

At this point I would like to elaborate on the idea of a Global Invisible Theatre. As I mentioned earlier, the optative player is well-positioned to employ concepts drawn from both Brecht's actor/demonstrator and Boal's invisible theatre techniques; characters can be played invisibly or overtly, and the actor can step out of role to comment on it. Questions of oppression can be thrust into the public spotlight, and people can be rallied to resolve them. I propose that an overall collection of optative players and their various projects constitutes a Global Invisible Theatre, and suggest the benefits of such a dramatic planetary interconnection are obvious. If one day there are millions of optative players not only will there be millions of small and medium-sized grassroots actions, but there will also be the possibility for massive global theatrical strategies and campaigns. Agents across the planet playing in solidarity with one another will be able to share ideas and resources, and with such a system in place it is surely only a matter of time before a massive Spectacle-deflating action occurs. With theatre activists frequently barred from the decidedly vanilla Spectacle, the Global Invisible Theatre can provide the players with a structure for strategizing how to storm the stage and *détourne* the "show". Deflating the Spectacle is no simple task, and the CrimethInc. Workers Collective suggests:

> We could work around the clock for the rest of eternity, meticulously constructing and deploying strategy after strategy, without coming any closer to real revolution…or, just as possibly, one thoughtlessly defiant creative act at the right moment might be all it takes to start the chain reaction we've dreamed of for so long. (171)

The Global Invisible Theatre can be seen as such a defiant creative act, and if it grows in size, structure, and stature, it could very possibly trigger a theatrical revolution against the Spectacle designed to demolish it once and for all. Instead of languishing in Boal's "rehearsal for revolution" stage, a proper theatrical revolution could be unleashed. As such, this thesis is a call to dramatic action.

In summary, optative theatre seeks to foster a new human psychology against oppression by encouraging a new breed of playful, challenging, thoughtful, and political players. By playing against oppression meta-theatrically and by creating transformative dramatic playgrounds, we can disrupt Spectacle, challenge others to enter this incredible realm of freedom, and bring about the possibility of changing the world. Mastery can one-day be transformed into fellowship, and the optative theatre offers an approach, which while still in its infancy, may very well succeed in accomplishing this seemingly-impossible venture one day.

Chapter 12

Field Work

Since the formation of the OTL at the turn of the millennium, there has been substantial revolutionary theatre activity. Because there are so many sustained projects and because the theatre is user-based, an ongoing Counter-Spectacular meta-performance exists, populated by various players drifting in and out of the various *mis-en-scenes*. "Projects" are usually certified as such by a team consisting of the Artistic Facilitator and the Chaos Organizer, and can also be part of a larger campaign. In all cases, as per Artaud, the theatre begins with a protest; whether this begins at a personal, cultural, or structural level is ultimately up to the Artistic Facilitator who creates the project. The OTL revolutionary theatre projects I have been involved with to date include:

- Miss Julie: a theatrical experiment into the psychosis of August Strindberg (Calgary, Alberta: 2000)
- CAR STORIES (Montréal, Ottawa, Toronto, cyberspace : 2001-present)
- Stones Scandal (Galway, Ireland: 2001-present)
- FJOLS! (Elsinore, Denmark: 2001)
- Zombie protest against the FTAA (Montréal, Québec: 2001)
- King's Appeal - The Lonesome West (Calgary, Alberta, cyberspace: 2001-present)
- Buy Nothing Day meta-theatre: McDonalds (Montréal, Québec: 2002)
- Revolutionary Theatre workshop (Montréal, Toronto, Ottawa, New Orleans, New York City, Calgary: 2002-present)
- The Lysistrata Project (International: 2003)
- *Quartier des Contre-Spectacles* (Montréal, Québec: 2003)
- Invisible Theatre in "Code Orange" NYC (New York City: 2003)
- Circle-Jerked: a corporate critic critique (Montréal, Québec : 2003)
- Buy Nothing Day meta-theatre: WalMart (Montréal, Québec: 2003)

- Infringement Festival (Montréal, Toronto, cyberspace : 2004-present)

- Republican National Convention Protest (New York City: 2004)

- Death by Latté, a tragedy (Toronto, Montreal: 2004)

Of these sixteen projects, five are still active, continuing as sustained performances. For the purposes of this study, because of limited space, I have selected five projects to focus on:

1. Car Stories
2. Buy Nothing Day meta-theatre: McDonalds
3. The Lysistrata Project
4. Circle-Jerked: a corporate critic critique
5. Infringement festival

I feel these projects offer good examples of revolutionary theatre because they vary in size and duration, target a wide-range of oppression, and employ a good variety of theatrical strategies and techniques. Each project, for the purposes of analysis, will be broken down into the following elements:

Facilitator:	Who created/facilitated the playground?
Duration:	When did it start, what was/is its duration?
Purpose:	Why was it created? What was targeted?
Strategies:	What theatrical strategies were employed?
Description:	What were the circumstances? How were strategies employed? What happened?
Reflection:	What was learned?
Status:	Is the project finished, in dormancy, or active?
Cultural Production:	What artistic products resulted?

Car Stories

"The visceral, Freudian image that springs to mind most adamantly as I read the papers related to the project or speak to its creator is this: "Come into my parlour" - a seduction followed by an act of theatrical cannibalism…Plotting is utterly fluid and can change from performance to performance and day to day. "It's always a process," says King. "It's not about the product. It's about challenging the rules. Ultimately, it's about social betterment." It is also, importantly, about how the spectator reacts; this determines the final emotional impact, and, says King, whether "it's a nightmare or dream…whatever you want to call it." Yikes! "

- Gaetan Charlebois, former theatre critic, HOUR (June 14th, 2001)

Facilitators: Donovan King and George Mougias

Duration: Ongoing (June 2001 – present)

Purpose: The purpose of the Car Stories experiment has always been primarily to create an arts democracy wherein people are challenged to assume the role of spect-actor. By subverting traditional theatre structures, Car Stories is also designed to theatrically challenge "fringe" theatre, and by extension a gamut of problems in the arts, such as corporatization, corporate media influence, monoculture, and the co-opting of culture. The meta-theatre created by Car Stories, often called the "urban wonderland", offers a transformative space wherein the rules of social reality are suspended in favour of the antics of a crew of theatre activists playing whatever roles they want – within a theatrical matrix of alleyways, parking lots, streets, and cars. Only three spectators can see the show each time, being ushered into the back seats of the cars by zany urban guides. Despite the tiny audience size, the entire neighbourhood becomes spectator to a meta-theatrical transformation whereby it can be difficult to tell the difference between what is theatre and what is real. In this urban wonderland players are free to cast off preconceptions of the theatre, and play on the purest level possible. The purpose of such an experiment, besides the obvious dramatic

liberation from both the traditional theatre system and the doldrums of everyday life, is to encourage people to see the world in a theatrical light, and to then take action in a collaborative setting. In this dramatic space players can see and act in an entirely different manner, and through the medium of theatre, can explore and challenge issues of oppression - in solidarity with others.

Strategies: Virtual Reality, TAZ, street theatre, guerilla theatre, electronic disturbance theater, invisible theatre.

Description: CAR STORIES is perhaps best described as interactive "performance art" or "experimental theatre". Our website describes it like this:

> *Car Stories* is Montréal's longest-running experimental theatre project, and hits the four year mark this June. As the only show ever to be kicked out of a "Fringe Festival", it has been described as "infamous" (Amy Barratt, *MIRROR*), as "a lot of fun, interactive and exciting" (J. Kelly Nestruck, *National Post*), and as "Montreal's longest running experiment in drama as a culture-jamming street disturbance" (Matt Radz, *Gazette*). Everyone, it seems, has an opinion…

The format is as follows: three spectators at a time are led by theatrical guides through a series of parked cars in an urban environment. Each car is transformed from a gas-guzzling environment-killer into an exciting miniature theatre, where short scenes (eg: 12 – 15 minutes) are played out. The back seat is the auditorium, the front seat the stage. Unlike the traditional theatre where audience members far outnumber the actors, in Car Stories this situation is reversed. The three spectators on the dramatic journey often encounter upwards of dozens of characters, both on the streets and in the cars. Encouraged to play along, in the same way that Alice in Wonderland might interact with the characters she meets, people are welcomed to transform themselves from spectators into "spect-actors". The website continues:

You can play for an hour, play for a day, or play for the whole run – it's up to you. You can play a role *in* the performance, or play a spectator (or *spect-actor*), who *experiences* the theatrical creation. The overall goal is to *play*. In doing so we reclaim our tools for dramatic expression, we reclaim the theatre, and […] we reclaim our culture.

The effect is one of unprecedented theatrical intimacy, whereby the overall experience is shaped by both the show's participants and the spect-actors themselves. No two shows are ever the same, generating a unique dramatic experience each time. The characters inhabiting the show are created in a grassroots manner consistent with any arts democracy; guide characters are the creations of those playing them, and the theatre in each car is done as collective creation. Car Stories is a community-based project whereby people from the city (and beyond) are invited to join in, share their stories, and help shape the overall theatrical experience. *Anyone* can play in this non-hierarchal dramatic environment. In Car Stories there is no hierarchy or leader, meaning that there are no status-based figures (such as playwrights, directors, or bosses) or oppression associated with these dominant figures. The players take responsibility for themselves and the overall ensemble supports itself morally, artistically, and politically. In this way a fun, energetic, and exciting dramatic environment is created, with a focus on dramatic creation, critical thinking, and cultural interaction. Such is the purpose of the Car Stories project - it invites us to invent and play any role at all in a surreal urban wonderland. It draws us together to create a magical transformative experience that people will never forget.

Overall, the urban area or neighbourhood occupied by the Car Stories project is transformed into meta-theatrical zone. Those in the show see the urban wonderland as a vast theatrical field. Seeing it in a theatrical light, the neighbourhood is transformed into one big theatrical set, complete with décor (buildings), sound effects (traffic), lighting (lampposts), and characters (people). Those in the area will possibly witness some theatre right before their noses; indeed inter-performances can and do take place between those in the show and those populating the neighbourhood. Because this piece of "theatre" is set in

"real" neighbourhood, a temporary space comes into existence that is both "theatre" and "reality", yet in the Derridian sense of *différance*, is equally neither. Dancing between "theatre" and "reality", CAR STORIES short circuits these distinctions to create an entirely new transformative space, or what Hakim Bey might call a TAZ (Temporary Autonomous Zone). Within this theatrical matrix (the "Urban Wonderland") spect-actors are led on a dramatic tour from car to car. Anywhere along the route players are free to create theatrical situations and scenarios with both the spect-actors and the public. The matrix used in Montreal 2004, for example, looked liked this:
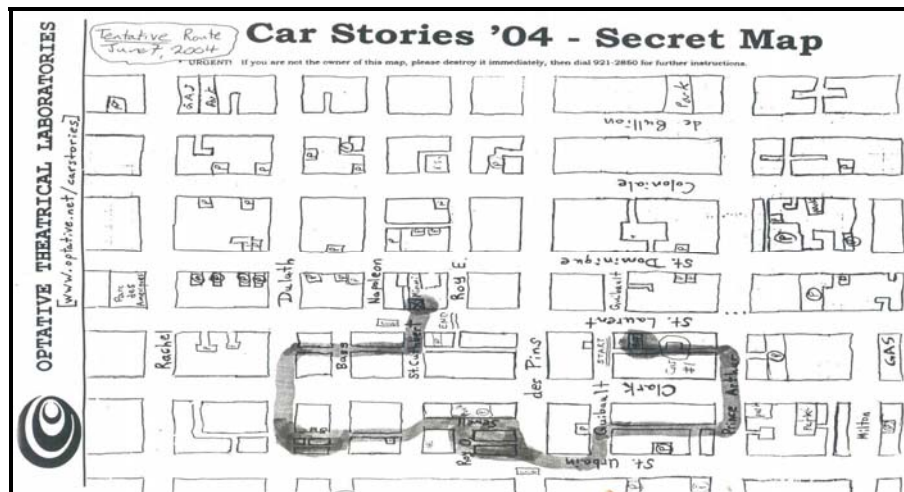
Figure 12. 1 – Theatrical Matrix, CAR STORIES 04

The snake-like area that is highlighted signifies the route where urban guides lead spect-actors from car to car. While the hardware of the matrix is the bricks-and-mortar alleyways, parking lots, and cars on the tour route, the software (the characters, stories, spect-actors, and situations) is constantly in flux. There is a certain amount of fluidity to the performances, and a great flexibility exists to play with themes, through-lines of action, or anything else the troupe deems worthy of exploration. Once the basic goal of providing people with optative theatre tools is accomplished, through collaboration the show can be steered in any number of directions. In this manner we have explored critical themes and targeted specific instances of oppression, especially on the structural and cultural levels. Typically

because the show is constantly disrupting social reality and hence the Spectacle, socio-theatrical controversies tend to present themselves on a regular basis. The Spectacle's "authorities" (as represented by the following interpellated roles: corporate media employees, festival producers, police, sponsors) have presented themselves time and time again, often to try and put a stop to the show in an attempt to remove the CHP from the Spectacle.

Car Stories, despite being a very tiny theatrical show, has caused massive waves within the culturesphere, spouting counter-hegemonic memes on a sustained basis. Amazingly the performance is still around, especially after having provoked many socio-theatrical controversies, large and small. Did I mention that Car Stories is the only show in the history of "Fringe" theatre (see infringement festival later in this chapter) to be ejected from a festival?

Figure 12.2 – Culture-Jam of <u>The Gazette</u>, June 22, 2001

The circumstances surrounding the shows' ejection from the "Fringe" festival are not surprising, especially given its activist mandate. Car Stories was kicked out on orders of a corporate sponsor, a sponsor that doubled (in a conflict-of-interest) as the corporate media covering the festival. The socio-theatrical controversy that erupted in Montreal on June 19th, 2001, continues to resonate to this very day. In a nutshell: then-theatre critic Pat Donnelly of Can-West Global's <u>The Gazette</u>, the only Anglophone daily in Montreal, came to see Car Stories (which

started at a table in the St. Ambroise Fringe beer tent). Ms. Donnelly, inhabiting the realm of HB, sought a free ticket due to her status as theatre critic. However, when she arrived instead of being greeted by a typical box office, present were zany characters *playing* the "box office" – trying to sell tickets in the same manner as a scalper or drug dealer might. When the grungy urban characters insisted that "everyone pays, even the producer" (which was true), the critic flew into a rage, even going so far as crumpling up a paper note and hurling it at one of the characters (played by Robin Tivy) and hitting her in the face. At this point I arrived, having just returned from the parking lot where the cars were situated. While in-role as my character (a disillusioned and corrupt accountant/producer) I tried to placate Ms. Donnelly by offering to pay her fare if she agreed to loan us her car and play IN the show the following day. As CHP (our characters) met HB (the theatre critic), a socio-theatrical explosion occurred. When "her" ticket was sold, Ms. Donnelly angrily stormed out of the beer tent.

The next day I prepared a satirical "open letter" to Donnelly's editor, in-role once again as the "corrupt accountant". With permission from the Fringe organizers, we posted it in the beer tent for all to see:

To: Gazette, Entertainment section

Dear Editors,

Please be aware that there appears to have been a mistake. Lisa Levack, our Choas Organiser, has sent an apology to Pat Donnely on our behalf without consulting us at all! As such I am FWDing this message to all participants, who can apologise if they see fit. Personally I see no need to apologise at all - in fact I believe Ms. Donnely should be apologizing to the innocent box office volunteer girl, the victim of your "critic." Ms. Donnely flew into a rage when she realised that the ticket was not for free for her, and hurled a paper note at the girl before retreating to the beer tent! This resulted in a severe paper cut to the face, scarring a once-pretty girl. She could have lost an eye, and now everyone is teasing her by calling her "scarface"! Ms. Donnely then returned and demanded to be let in for Free. I informed her that all spectators had to pay, myself included. It was the best $7.00 I'd ever spent on seeing a show! When Pat still refused, I offered to pay myself out of my own pocket if Pat agreed to play IN the show the following day.

Unfortunately as negotiations were going on, the ticket was sold to a very excited girl, who'd been waiting days to see CAR STORIES. CAR STORIES has sold out every single show to date. It's been widely covered by all papers & other media (except The Gazette), and has the most and the best BUZZ of the beer tent. With over 30 artists on the payroll and merely 3 spectators per performance, it makes good sense to charge everyone. Our lazy artists got very little in the form of sponsorship, and I stand to lose lots of $$$$$$ if we don't charge admission to everyone. As such, please open your petty cash box and give Pat the $9 to see it, or I, a starving debt-ridden artist will payout of my own pocket, but only if she will play in the show. She can make up the role, or even play herself: why doesn't Pat play a role in the show, and write a critique from that perspective? It would be more original than the other "critics" - that's for sure!! And please give her a little extra to buy her victim a beer and make amends. We just want to play (except Lisa).

The letter, while satirical, is also another form of CHP that is designed to cause further socio-theatrical controversy (and reflection) within the larger meta-theatre of the project. Suddenly it is not just a case of people playing in cars, but also people playing in the culturesphere – in writing, on the internet, phones, etc. – to challenge cultural and structural problems, such as the role of the theatre critic and corporate media in what should have been a non-hierarchal dramatic setting. Because the project is sustained, a Virtual Reality of sorts can come into existence whereby the players in the street performances can also play in the meta-theatre through other mediums, such as video (eg: Sousveillance Theatre), internet (Electronic Disturbance Theatre), radical dramaturgy (eg: collecting meta-play for scripting), or other guerilla theatre tactics (eg: invisible theatre, culture-jamming). This theatrical action was designed specifically to expose and challenge the critic's deportment, and by extension to target oppressive corporate theatre journalism in general. It was also a test of the Fringe's commitment towards artists over corporate sponsors – The Gazette that year was funding the Fringe to the tune of $15,000.

True to the optative theory, all hell broke loose the following day. The critic, upon arriving at the beer tent was quick to notice our "letter" posted all over the place. In a fit of anger for having been criticized, Donnelly stormed out of the beer tent once more. As collective punishment, she stopped reviewing all Fringe

shows the very same day. We were told later that evening by "Fringe Producer" Jeremy Hechtman that we were getting the boot because The Gazette was also threatening to withdraw its sponsorship. He claimed that due to my satirical letter, there would be no more coverage or sponsorship of the festival, and that The Gazette was planning to launch a "slander suit" against us.

Our show collapsed, with several players (mostly those involved in the "professional theatre", including our own Chaos Organizer) siding with the critic and returning strictly and at-once to the realm of HB. A rebel faction of interpellated roles formed. In an effort to please the higher-ups in the status-based world of the Spectacle, the former Chaos Organizer quickly subverted the OTL's press apparatus, and the following letter was faxed to arts editor Lucinda Chodan:

> I am writing to you on behalf of the cast and crew of 'Car Stories,' the Fringe Festival play which has caused so much controversy. We wish to extend our sincere apologies to you and your staff as well as to the staff and participants of the 2001 Montreal Fringe Festival. Donovan King has purported to act on our behalf during recent events, but in fact we have not been consulted, and his behaviour has come as quite a shock to us. Most of us have now resigned from Optative Theatrical laboratories, the company formed by Mr. King to produce the show. Our intention when joining the 'Car Stories' project was to create something truly original and to have fun, not to alienate and offend the Gazette, The City of Montreal, or The Fringe Festival and its guest companies. We would like to state very clearly that we do not support Donovan King's recent actions, which were undertaken solely by him. The Fringe Festival is not responsible for the recent regrettable occurances. Unfortunately Mr. King's behaviour is now affecting all the Fringe participants and we, the former members of 'Car Stories' regret that more could not have been done to stop this beforehand. I have personally been involved with the Fringe Festival for the last 5 years in different capacities. It is the event each year that I look forward to the most. I am ashamed that a member of this community would single-handedly attempt to destroy the Festival, let alone a member of a company that I was involved in. On behalf of the resigned OTL troupe, I ask you to reconsider your decision to stop reviewing the Fringe festival this year. It is a marvellous event which is of enormous benefit to the local theatrical community, and emerging artists. Once again our sincerest apologies,

Lisa M. Levack
Past OTL Member…

Cc: Pat Donnelly, Jeremy Hechtman

For the players there were two choices: to continue playing in the meta-theatre (without the cars or theatrical matrix), or surrender to the Spectacle and return to HB as disgraced "theatre artists" who had over-stepped the boundaries. The risk factor was high, and several hegemonic forces engaged in some extremely nasty tactics to try and finish off the show, including (but not limited) to defamation, slander, fraud, marginalization, and censorship, all typical forms of oppression. Even what Boal termed "clandestine theatre" was used against us on several occasions.

I am pleased to say that many of us did choose to continue playing, and are extremely satisfied with the results. Not only did we manage to cause a serious shake-up within corporate theatre journalism in Montreal (both Donnelly and her Editor were replaced soon-after a notable Electronic Disturbance Theater action), but Car Stories has continued to play for four consecutive years at the time of this writing. Every summer during the Fringe Festival, our cars are parked just beyond its perimeter, and this is a fact the corporate media now relishes. To date there have been over 20 media articles about the show, and indeed two movies are in the making. Car Stories has also played for Québec's *Journées de la Culture* (in September), and recently took a road trip to Ottawa and Toronto with significant funding from the Canada Council for the Arts. In 2002 it was short-listed for the "prestigious" Bank of Montreal-sponsored $100,000 Siminovitch Prize in Playwrighting. At the same time it has played everywhere from the Internet to the streets, from the rumour-mill to the media, from the Montreal Courthouse to the boardrooms of academia. There have been culture-jams at the Fringe, guerilla performances, subversions of Fringe propaganda, Electronic Disturbance Theater, and all sorts of other subversive theatrical strategies and techniques. Overall what we have conducted is a

sustained meme-warfare pertaining to the reclaiming of our culture – and Fringe. Car Stories, I am pleased to say, has achieved the status as an urban legend.

Reflection: Car Stories has succeeded time and time again in carrying out the goal of "theatrically challenging hegemonic thought-patterns and oppressive systems". It has challenged traditional theatre by inverting every aspect of it. The idea of the "Fringe" has been re-evaluated in light of its co-opting by corporate forces. People have been challenged on the streets, in cyberspace, and elsewhere to *play*. What is perhaps most amazing and disturbing is how very controversial the show is – it has caused a polarization of people in Montreal, who either side with OTL or the corporatized Fringe. Through this discourse, many people have re-evaluated their own perceptions regarding the corporate media, the status of our (mono)culture, and the rights to freedom of expression. In other words, Car Stories has acted as a catalyst for people to take a peek behind the curtain of the Spectacle. On the level of carrying out the optative mandate, the project was (and is) successful.

One of the most important lessons I learned during the process of Car Stories is the importance of finding players who are not dragooned by oppressive theatre systems (eg: "actors"); important are people who are open to questioning the theatre, culture, and society. The biggest mistake in the initial verison was having aspiring traditional theatre artists, especially including our Chaos Organizer in the project at all. People who aspire exclusively to the traditional theatre are ill-equipped for this type of project, largely because the traditional theatre's hegemony, as taught through education and standard process, finds the project questionable (both from theatrical and social points of view). Because the project subverts authority, the traditional theatre artist may feel uncomfortable after having relied on hierarchy for so long, especially if actions are designed to challenge the oppressive systems related to these. If an "actor" has a vested interest in pleasing the corporate critic, it would seem counter-productive to participate in a critique of that critic. In other words, the best players are those who already inhabit the realm of CHB, not HB as in the typical "theatre artist"

nowadays. A solid core of political players can prevent the sort of corporate subversion we faced, especially when it handles both Artistic Facilitation and Chaos Organizing.

Another observation I have to make is regarding levels of oppression we faced – never in my life have I seen the extents people in the realm of HB will go towards in order to snuff out CHP. It is important to be prepared to take on the forces of HB point by point, issue by issue, in both the realms of CHB and CHP. By allowing our press apparatus (our connection to the datasphere) to be subverted, we were ill-prepared to deal swiftly with the socio-theatrical controversy that was generated. It is vital to know media skills and have contingency plans for times when the Spectacle decides to eradicate revolutionary theatre projects. The Spectacle must be fought meme for meme.

Finally, I would like to comment on the process itself. To the traditional theatre artist it might seem like folly to do a show with no playwright, director, or other authoritarian. I have found that by providing participants the basic tools of drama – permission to play a character – there is no need whatsoever for dominant artistic roles. At the same time, it is important to be available to provide feedback and insight for the players, should they so wish. At the end of the day it will be the spect-actor who experiences the theatrical creation, and regardless of the characters or stories involved, the real value in this project is that it jolts people out of the Spectacle, and encourages them to think critically and play their own roles. Car Stories can be created by anyone in a DIY manner, and the real beauty of it, in my mind, is that it can short circuit hegemonic social reality by the very fact its participants are playing theatrically within the "real world".

Status: ACTIVE

Cultural Production: Currently, at the time of this writing, there are two documentary movies in the making about the Car Stories project.

BND meta-theatre: McDonalds

Optative Theatrical Laboratories (OTL), a Montreal group that explores culture-jamming through performance, has targeted the monoculture of McDonald's. OTL will stage a satirical confrontation at an undisclosed McLocation between gaudy tourists, bearded radical BND protesters, and jolly old St. Ronald himself…

- Sara Falconer, journalist, HOUR

Facilitator: Donovan King

Duration: 10 minutes on Buy Nothing Day, 2002

Purpose: The purpose of this exercise was to tap into the global dissent that is known as Buy Nothing Day, and use theatre as a weapon to specifically target McDonalds "restaurants", and by extension the fast food industry, consumerism, and monoculture.

Strategies: invisible theatre, sousveillance theatre, ontological shock, role-appropriation, masquerade.

Description: Sometimes opportunities for revolutionary theatre present themselves out of the blue, and other times they are carefully designed and constructed by activists. Buy Nothing Day (BND) is one example of the latter; started in 1993 by the founders of adbusters magazine, it is now an international event celebrated in over 55 countries. According to the adbusters website:

> The concept couldn't be simpler. As a symbolic protest, on the busiest shopping day of the year, you refuse to participate in the consumer frenzy that has become everyday life. 24 hours, no purchases.

In addition to making a personal pact to buy nothing whatsoever, some people also organize protests, distribute information, or stage culture-jams. The organizers in the United Kingdom call BND:

…the self proclaimed festival of frugal living and culture jammers jamboree. It's a day where you challenge yourself, your family and friends to switch off from shopping and tune into life. Celebrated as a holiday by some, a street party by others - anyone can take part provided they spend a day without spending!**...**The challenge is to try simple living for a day, spend time with family and friends, rather than spend money on them. People make a pact with themselves to take a break from shopping as a personal experiment or public statement and the best thing is - IT'S FREE!!!

Sensing a global solidarity against consumer-capitalism, the OTL decided to embrace the annual holiday as an opportunity not only to challenge Spectacle on the personal level (by not buying), but also on the structural level (by bringing revolutionary theatre into monocultural places where sales occur). In 2002, our first year participating, we decided to play at McDonalds. While it is not my intention of getting into all the evils of that "restaurant", it should be noted that the particular establishment we targeted was also involved in a recent union-busting action whereby the whole McDonalds shut down, fired all its employees, then re-opened a few blocks away. The exact sort of oppressive behaviour, we felt, that deserved a bit of cultural resistance. The following script, or "meta-play" was prepared:

BUY NOTHING DAY: Meta-Play #6

A meta-play is a guideline for performance, and should be seen as a very loose script for anyone wishing to culture-jam through performance. You have permission to flesh it out, alter it, or write your own. It is NOT a polished play, but rather a guideline to playing. Its overall purpose is to serve as a blueprint for creating a Temporary Autonomous Zone wherein the daily monotonous routine is disrupted in favour of heated theatrical debate, action, and reflection. Being a Reflectionist form of theatre inspired by Steve Mann, its goal is to allow "society to confront itself or to see its own absurdity."

Dramatis personae

TOURISTS   loud and gaudy, stereotypical

PROTESTERS   radical "Buy Nothing Day" activists

RONALD MCDONALD   the corporate clown

OTHERS   staff & customers

Setting: A McDonalds restaurant near you, November 29th. The interior is brightly fluorescent, plastic, and squeaky clean - a monocultural environment. Behind the counter pimply servants wearing absurd uniforms follow a standard script to attempt to sell as much "fast food" as they can. Customers of various types indulge in "Happy Meals" and such, often "supersizing" to ensure maximum intake. Piling the fast food into their mouths, they are oblivious to any threat on their monocultural plastic utopia.

Enter two TOURISTS; wearing gaudy brand-name clothing and "fanny packs," they are armed with digital cameras. They fuss about the place and settle in, feeling right at home. They are heard speaking in loud, twangy, and annoying voices as they film their trip. Eg:

TOURIST #2: McDonalds at last! I'm starving!

TOURIST #1: Thank God we're here! My feet are so sore after all that shopping. Thank God there's so many McDonalds here!

TOURIST #2: Just like home!

TOURIST #1: You'd better believe it! I'm so hungry - I could eat 3 Big Macs! You gonna supersize?

TOURIST #2: You'd better believe it! (etc.)

Suddenly a commotion is heard outside, and the TOURISTS react accordingly, shocked that their "home away from home" has been disturbed. They point the video cameras towards the distraction, as several rowdy PROTESTERS, Buy Nothing Day activists enter the scene. Carrying placards, stickers, leaflets, and copies of "Fast Food Nation," the PROTESTERS take centre stage at the "restaurant" and begin lecturing the staff and customers on the importance of Buy Nothing Day. Perhaps occasionally bursting into carol or quoting from "Fast Food Nation," these activists do their utmost to ensure that nothing else is bought from McDonalds.

By now a commotion has probably already begun, perhaps with the manager entering the scene. The TOURISTS, who want service, complain and argue bitterly, trying to get staff and other customers to do something. As the commotion continues and the tension

builds, the PROTESTERS and the TOURISTS will attempt to get others into their respective camps. For example a PROTESTER might try and subvert a staff member into quitting, while a TOURIST might try and get the crowd to boo, or might try and borrow a cell phone to "call the police."

As the conflict reaches its heights, suddenly into the scene bursts RONALD MCDONALD! Like a super-hero, he dashes towards the villainous PROTESTERS and disperses of them with theatrical flare, berating the lot, and perhaps tossing them out on the street with a swift kick in the arse to boot.

TOURISTS: Hooray!!!! Now we can eat!!!! (etc.)

RONALD MCDONALD accepts the gratitude of the consumers and staff, and after denouncing the PROTESTERS and Buy Nothing Day, gives a speech on the value of a healthy fast food diet, the importance of global monoculture, and why dissent is evil. The scene concludes with a flourish, as RONALD MCDONALD dashes off - to fight injustices at other fast food outlets throughout the world.

- CURTAIN –

In order to encourage copy-cat actions (Viral theatre) and recruit players for the Montreal *mis-en-scene*, the meta-play was subsequently posted on the internet at places like Indymedia.org and the adbusters networking component of their site. One group from Italy contacted us requesting permission to play the piece - there was no need to even ask.

On the day of the performance itself we gathered beforehand to discuss the long list of reasons as to why McDonalds is oppressive. We also rehearsed our characters, and ran through various scenarios that could happen. Once in costume, we descended on St. Catherine Street, and sent our performers in, unit by unit. The "Tourists" raised no suspicions whatsoever, and they were even able to record their "pro-McDonalds" gesticulations on their video camera without interference. As they drooled in anticipation of ordering super-sized Happy Meals and whatnot, a ragged band of "BND Protesters" burst into the fast food joint, chanting:

> Nothing bought is something gained!
> No more Buying, we abstain!
> Corporate bull-sh*t is insane!
> Stop McF*kcing with our brain!!

Equipped with their own "Indymedia Cameraperson", the "protesters" began preaching about the evils of consumption while passing out BND propaganda. As if on cue, within seconds the McDonalds security forces appeared to model their hands before the "Protester" camera, and threatened to call the police. An argument ensued with the "Tourists" and security forces trying to eject the "Protesters", who refused to budge. As the situation heated up and police were called, suddenly "Ronald McDonald" burst onto the scene, causing a severe ontological shock. Like a corporate superhero, he cleaned the place out of any "undesirable" elements, physically attacking and forcibly removing the "Protesters" to the cheers of the "tourists".

Reflection: Like BND itself, the primary goal of our performance was to encourage the re-evaluation of our consumption habits. Our performance had much more impact in the meta-theatre surrounding the project than it did in the performance itself: while the act was witnessed by a few dozen people in the McDonalds, the real message got out via the internet. Given that there were two active video cameras operating (the "tourists" and "protesters" each had one), it was easy to capture the drama from different angles. A short movie was prepared by parasite.tv, an experimental internet television station, and broadcast as a documentary. Amazingly to this day people still ask me about the performance, citing having seen it on the internet.

Another element I found extremely interesting was our use of invisible theatre. Despite the fact that we had people playing tourists and protesters, these characters were interpreted as "real" by the people in the McDonalds. All too often traditional protest lacks theatricalization, and unfortunately most BND

events involve activities in the realm of CHB (eg: handing out flyers, marching). The reaction we saw, the calling of the police and attempted removal of the "protesters", was consistent with HB cracking down on CHB. However, when "Ronald" arrived an ontological shock spread throughout the McDonalds, stunning even the manager. The entire oppressive social reality of McDonalds was shattered, causing immediate re-evaluation of the situation regarding what was "real" and what was "theatre". This is usually the best time to get the critical message out, as people who have been ontologically shocked will tend to remember the event vividly. When a message is attached, deep reflection on that message occurs.

Overall, the BND performance, while a one-off, has caused reflection on a host of issues, such as consumerism, monoculture, fast food, and the nature of both protest and theatre. Through the actual performance and the broadcasting of the act, we hope to have inspired others to reclaim culture in the very locations where it has become the most dragooned and vapid. It is now a tradition for the OTL to stage a counter-hegemonic performance at some local monocultural institution, such as Wal-Mart or Starbucks, on Buy Nothing Day.

Status: INACTIVE

Cultural Production: Video: short documentary by parasite.tv

The Lysistrata Project

With a wind-whipped chill plunging below 40 degrees Celsius, Montreal registered the coolest of the 1004 Lysistrata Project readings that took place around the world yesterday. The massive anti-war protest was staged by theatre artists in 59 countries…One company took its theatre to the streets, drawing a small crowd of media observers to a mock news conference outside the U.S. consulate on St. Alexandre St. Masquerading as a U.S. diplomat in a white stetson adorned with stars and stripes, Optative Theatrical Laboratories artistic director Donovan King railed against the danger of "cultural terrorism" posed by the Lysistrata Project, before he was pied in the face, wrapped in plastic and whisked away by members of his company.

- Matt Radz, Gazette theatre critic

Facilitator: George Mougias

Duration: One day: March 3rd, 2003

Purpose: The Lysistrata Project's purpose was to theatrically challenge U.S.A. president George Bush's war against Iraq, through global readings of anti-war play <u>Lysistrata</u>. Our own take at OTL was use CHP to challenge the war, corporate media, and the depoliticisation of theatre artists.

Strategies: global happening, viral theatre, media stunt, masquerade, role-appropriation

Description: The Lysistrata Project, designed by Kathryn Blume and Sharron Bower, is primarily a viral theatre. The basic idea was to encourage people across the globe to stage readings of Aristophanes' ancient Greek anti-war comedy <u>Lysistrata</u> in solidarity with theatre artists across the globe. The impending war could be protested through drama, while at the same time money could be raised for organizations promoting peace. Initially a plan by Kathryn Blume herself to stage *one* reading of the play, it soon ballooned (primarily through the use of the internet) into a project that spanned fifty-nine countries

and every single state in the U.S.A. Billed as "The First-Ever Worldwide Theatrical Act Of Dissent", on Monday, 03/03/03, 1,029 readings of <u>Lysistrata</u> erupted across the planet to protest the Bush Administration's unilateral war on Iraq. According to the website:

> Readings were held in theatres large and small, schools, churches, libraries, in music halls, homes, cafes, community centers, clubs, subway cars, parks, and on street corners. More than 300,000 people attended readings organized by…1,029 Lysistrata Project "spearheads." Readings raised an estimated $125,000 for non-profit organizations working for peace and humanitarian aid. Some readings didn't raise money, but the fact that they occurred at all resonated as a powerful symbol of world citizens united for peace. For example, a secret reading in northern Iraq was organized by members of the international press corps, who had to keep quiet about it or risk losing their jobs. A reading in Patras, Greece was held by Greeks and Kurdish refugees in an abandoned factory. There were secret readings in China and Israel. A group of activists in Mindanao braved volitility to present their reading. The list goes on...

The event captured the imagination of people across the planet, and garnered an enormous amount of media attention. Again according to the site:

> The Project was featured on multiple CNN news programs, PBS' Lehrer News Hour, and many network and local news programs. Dozens of radio programs featured stories about the project, including NPR's All Things Considered and Dutch, French, German, Canadian, Japanese and Greek stations. Features appeared in The New York Times, Newsweek, The Chicago Tribune, L.A. Weekly, The Village Voice, Ms. Magazine, American Theater, El Mundo, and thousands of other publications across the globe as the Associated Press offered the story, and as international Lysistrata Project participants dropped their own press releases.

While the one reading Blume had planned could have been easily ignored and dismissed by the corporate media, the fact that thousands of theatre artists across the globe were playing on the same page resulted in coverage multiplied exponentially.

The effect was no different in Montreal where eight companies, both French and English, both established (National Theatre School, Théâtre du Nouveau Monde) and impromptu, staged their own readings. Prominent figures in the local theatre community such as Gordon McCall (Artistic Director of Centaur Theatre) and famous playwright Michel Tremblay participated, and traditional theatre-goers were presented with a variety of staged readings. Sensing inadequacy with the dragooned form (staged readings in the traditional theatre), we decided to do things differently - by going right for the symbolic jugular:

Street artist Donovan King, portraying a U.S. diplomat, is hustled away by pretend Secret Service agents after being pied by the actor at right during an Optative Theatrical Laboratories play performed outside the U.S. consulate in Montreal yesterday, part of the world-wide Anti-War Lysistrata Project.

MARCOS TOWNSEND THE GAZETTE
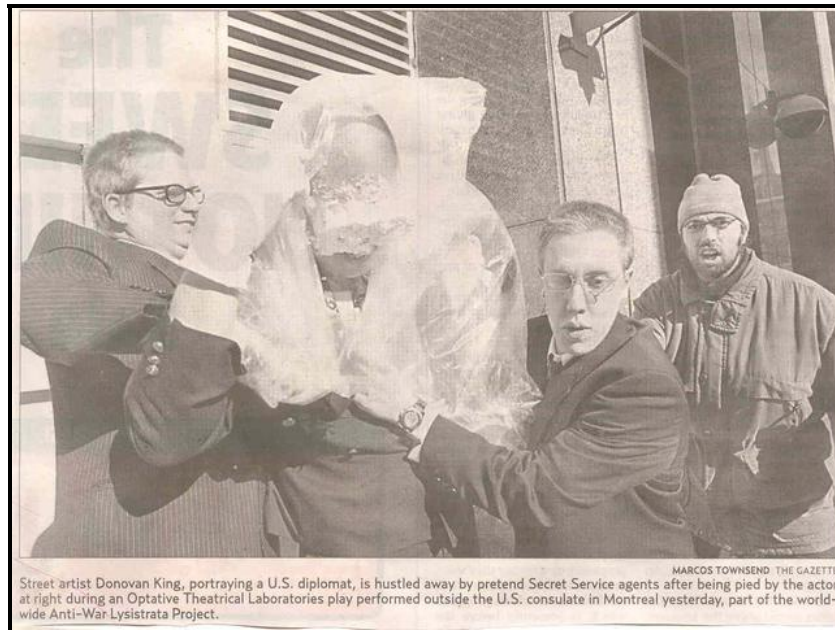
Figure 12.3 – Corporate media photo; *our* image

Sensing that the American "War on Terror" was making the planet more unsafe, we concluded that discourse beaming through the corporate media (eg: Homeland Security, "Code Orange", plastic sheeting and duct tape) was being used as government propaganda to instill fear, and hence submission into accepting its imperialistic agenda. Not being able to slam a pie into the face of President Bush, we did the next best thing - through a media stunt at the American Consulate. With me masquerading as the top diplomat, complete with

Bush-like vocal-patterns and a big cowboy hat, we managed to get our preferred image into the corporate media. Here's the script:

> *As the crowd gathers at 2pm, several FBI AGENTS are seen wearing suits and mirrored glasses. They maintain order and security in the area by making sure the spectators are well-behaved, and ensuring there are no Weapons of Mass Destruction being employed. Two FBI AGENTS prepare the crowd for a Press Conference. They get the crowd's focus, and introduce an AMERICAN OFFICIAL, who comes to speak. The AMERICAN OFFICIAL is like any other in the current Bush Administration - straight-and-narrow, dressed in a suit, and dramatic (perhaps even wearing a cowboy hat!) Yet another Press Conference begins about the dangers of Weapons of Mass Destruction:*

AMERICAN OFFICIAL:
Good afternoon ladies and gentlemen, and welcome to this press conference. We have just received word that there is a potential security breach, here at the US Consulate in Montreal. I am here to inform you of the nature of this breach, and to tell you what we are doing to contain the situation at the moment. Now I'm sure you all know that there are terrorists out there who want to destroy America. Lined up on an Axis of Evil, we have proof that they are developing Weapons of Mass Destruction, which they intend to use on the Free World. Nuclear weapons. Chemical Weapons. Biological Weapons. Our Intelligence Officers with the FBI, CIA, Homeland Security Department, Naval, Air, and Armed Forces, have been tracking down the terrorists. We will not let them sleep, until they are dead. We recently received information about a cell, in New York City, which was using the Internet for their agenda of destruction. Calling themselves "The Lysistrata Project", they are distinctly un-American. And a threat to our security. It started off as one "reading" in early January, set up by Sharron Bower and Kathryn Blume. What started off as an idea to stage some theatre, has managed to somehow spread like a virus. Today, across the world, thousands un-American people are trying to stage readings of the play lysistrata. They are attempting to raise money for groups opposing the war. Now you'll recall George W. said "You are either with us, or with the terrorists." What that means is that those people, participating in this "Project", are with the terrorists. They are not with us. They are not with the war. They are not with Freedom. They are not with Liberty. They have aligned themselves with the Axis of Evil. Now when I say a virus, let me give you some statistics. The Project has grown and grown, and now involves 1004 readings in 59 countries. This dang thing is spreading like a

disease; its not stopping at borders, and attacking the very values that we as Americans hold close to our hearts. Our Intelligence Officials have traced this thing back to FRANCE. I was not surprised to hear this, and yes, I do encourage you to make sure you don't buy any French products or eat any French Fries. Antonin Artaud is from FRANCE, and he wrote in his terrorist manual The Theatre and its Double that the theatre must "start with a protest", and that this theatre must also be a "dangerous scourge.. .one that attacks not bodies but customs." Antonin Atraud compared theatre...to the plague. This is one of our Intelligence Officers who can fill you in on what he said:

FBI INTELLIGENCE OFFICER:
Thank you sir. These are the terrorist's words:
"The theatre like the plague is a crisis which is resolved by death or cure. And the plague is a superior disease because it is a total crisis after which nothing remains except death or an extreme purification. […]

AMERICAN OFFICIAL:
This French man is comparing the theatre to the Plague, ladies and gentlemen. Now, we all know that the Plague is a deadly virus, and we all know that viruses are Biological. The Lysistrata Project, ladies and gentlemen, is a Biological Weapon of Mass Destruction. I mean, these people are crazy. They are calling for Laura Bush to abstain from her matrimonial duties to our great President, George W. Bush. . Now, ladies and gentlemen, our security forces have received word that a group called the Optative Theatrical Laboratories intended to perform the play at 2 o'clock today here at the Consulate. Americans will not tolerate any form of biological terrorism, and I am here to tell you that the show has been cancelled. I repeat - there will be no theatre here today. Our security forces intercepted these biological weapons just earlier today.

(he signals to an FBI AGENT who brings forward a box with a bio-hazard symbol on it. It is opened, and the AMERICAN OFFICIAL removes the contents with a pair of tongs. He holds them up to the crowd: a sock puppet, clown nose, a pair of Optative Glasses, a Whoopee-Cushion, etc..)

Apparently this terrorist group thought they could just come here and attack, but once again they have underestimated the United States of America.

(a BOUFFON startles the AMERICAN OFFICIAL and the whoopee cushion goes off, alarming the AMERICAN Delegation.)

Code Yellow. Please do not be alarmed Ladies and Gentlemen. Please remain calm. I repeat, Code Yellow.

(They speak into cell phones, confirming the upgrade of threat status, and keep the AMERICAN OFFICIAL advised that Air Force One will be arriving to get the Delegation into the air in the event of an attack. A BOUFFON appears and snatches the AMERICAN OFFICIAL's hat, alarming the AMERICAN Delegation, who are starting to panic.)

Oh my gosh! Code Orange! We are going to Code Orange! Ladies and Gentlemen, we have to go right now, but I do advise you to take precautionary measures for your own safety. Protect yourself from Evil. We will not let this terrorist menace stop our resolve. Long live America!

(an ENTARTISTE, who has been sneaking around, manages to slam a cream pie into the face of the AMERICAN OFFICIAL. The ENTARTISTE escapes.)

Code RED! Code RED! Code RED! Evacuate! CODE RED!

(the FBI AGENTS quickly reach into their black duffle bag and begin removing rolls of duct tape, and plastic sheeting. They begin wrapping the AMERICAN OFFICIAL in the plastic sheeting, securing it with duct tape. They exit quickly. At this point the focus of action is turned over to the Bouffon reading of Lysistrata.

This should involve elements of Invisible theatre. People playing activists, media, etc., can add flavour and conflict to the spectacle...)

* Please note that this text is a guideline only. Please feel free to add additional characters and situations, but remember to co-ordinate with all players in the scene.

When I arrived on the scene in masquerade an immediate socio-theatrical controversy occurred – the consulate on St. Alexandre was promptly locked up by security agents, who observed the show from the inside (and on their surveillance cameras!) In this way we were able to appropriate their Consulate for our set. It was well below 40 degrees Celsius on that day, but nonetheless we

managed to attract quite a crowd of media observers, both corporate and alternative, both "real" and played. For a short duration our meta-theatrical playground existed as our take, if you will, on the American government. With the real diplomat hiding behind locked doors and security apparatus, I was free to play him in masquerade! The crowd enjoyed it, and many played along as journalists (heckling and asking questions) before my dramatic (and creamy) exit.

Following the abovementioned script, two "Bouffons" (played by George Mougias and Danny Bonin) enacted a satirical (and seriously cut-down version) of Lysistrata - complete with long phalluses and humping motions. Later that evening, we staged a more traditional (yet still satirical) performance at Concordia University's Reggies Pub, introducing the reading once again with the diplomat character (who again got pied). We raised over a hundred dollars and donated it to a local agit-prop street theatre troupe known as Block the Empire.

Reflection: What is perhaps the most interesting thing about this project in my mind is this: the original concept was to challenge the war (HB) with a voice for peace (CHB) through traditional readings (HP). Nowhere but in Montreal was CHP employed, and only by us. I cannot help but wonder how the effect might have been different if, instead of giving the tools of HP (traditional theatre) to the dissenters, they were given the tools of CHP. How might things have been different if, instead of reading or spectating, people *played* against the war as characters on a sustained level? What would have happened if every US Consulate across the planet witnessed players masquerading as their diplomats? What if all those players were free to use any revolutionary theatre strategy they wished?

Perhaps the idea is ahead of its time, and probably wouldn't have had as much viral spread. The Lysistrata Project succeeded because the time was right and the issue was there; by choosing a very popular anti-war play, it gave theatre artists a fun and easy opportunity to express dissent. To its credit, the Lysistrata Project did manage to raise over US $125,000 for peace charities, garner extensive media coverage, and build a much stronger and more interconnected

global theatre community. Participants were also energized by this act of solidarity, and reflection was generated through this dramatic inter-connection. The website states:

> Many of us are more politically active today due to our participation in Lysistrata Project. We felt inspired by the palpable unity with others around the world on that day of action. We value the thought-provoking conversations initiated by the readings, and the new friendships fostered there. Above all, Lysistrata Project participants discovered individual empowerment to speak out for what we believe.

In other words, it has inspired people to move from HB into the realms of CHB, through the tool of HP. While the project did inspire the global theatre community on a very profound level, I cannot help but wish that it had given them the tools of CHP. Still, as the "First-ever World-Wide Act of Theatrical Dissent", it is extremely impressive nonetheless. I see it as a stepping-stone towards better interconnection, greater critical thinking, and hopefully many more revolutionary theatre projects of truly global proportions.

Status: INACTIVE.

Cultural Production: On the global level, a movie will be out soon, hopefully inspiring others to carry out similar acts of resistance. Kathryn Blume also went on to create The Accidental Activist, a one-woman play about her experience. On the local level, our own performance resulted in a very amusing video that we often play at workshops on Revolutionary Theatre.

<u>Circle-Jerked: a corporate critic critique</u>

Early last week, the Montreal English Critics Circle sat down to debate which English theatre artists were most deserving of MECCA prize parchment. Although there were a few warmish debates, the most interesting portion of the night revolved around a couple of masked gate-crashers who in some creepy fashion had discovered where we were meeting and demanded to be admitted to our rather rectangular circle. They were far too late and anonymous to be taken seriously and stayed well past the point of humour…As a close friend wisely observed upon hearing about the evening, "Don't those losers have anything better to do?" I'm pretty sure she was talking about the guys in masks.

- Jason Whiting, form HOUR theatre critic

Facilitator: Donovan King

Duration: One evening (September 8, 2003)

Purpose: Dissatisfied with the treatment theatre activists received from Montreal's corporate media, this guerilla action was designed to theatrically challenge local theatre journalism and cause critical reflection on the (interpellated) role of the "critic".

Strategies: media prank, Guerilla theatre (invisible & Sousveillance), role-appropriation, masquerade, Electronic Disturbance Theater.

Description: On Monday September 8th, 2003 the "Circle", a collection of Montreal anglophone corporate media employees, gathered at Le Commsensal restaurant (on St. Denis) to decide which anglophone theatre in Montreal was worthy of their praise (and cashless "MECCA awards"). Not surprisingly, these so-called "critics" missed most theatre throughout the season that was either activist or critical. The most glaring absence from their evaluation was the

Lysistrata Project, which apparently was not good enough for the "Circle" to consider.

As but one of many activist theatre companies in town, the Optative Theatrical Laboratories was engaged in a series of critical projects throughout the year in question. Eight major theatrical events were designed to expose and theatrically challenge several issues of oppression: consumer-capitalism, monoculture, war, corporate media, gentrification, Québec politics, limits on freedom of expression, abusive Montreal by-laws, mental environment pollution, corporate interference with artistry, and the dragooned nature of the theatre itself. Some of the venues we played include McDonalds, the US Consulate, Place des Arts, Reggie's Pub, the Montreal Municipal Court House, the back alleyways of the Plateau, and even the Internet. We also brought theatre to Toronto, Ottawa, and New York City, and collaborated with luminaries such as Augusto Boal, David Fennario, Judy Rebick, and Kathryn Blume, plus international groups such as THAW (Theatres Against War). One of our anti-war stages (the *Quartier des Contre-Spectacles*) was actually busted by riot police at the Place des Arts, but alas, this too was deemed unimportant by the "Circle", who completely ignored the story.

Despite publicizing the events we staged, not a single corporate media "critic" ever witnessed any of them (expect for one brief visit from The Gazette's Matt Radz). Furthermore, Jason Whiting (HOUR) failed to report on any of our projects, Amy Barratt (MIRROR) briefly mentioned two of them, while Matt Radz managed to describe our involvement in three. While the so-called "critics" happily covered all of the fluffy traditional theatre at places like the Centaur Theatre and Saidye Bronfman Centre, they missed the bulk of our activities, and when they did mention anything it was usually in the form a tiny paragraph buried deep in another article. OTL, like many activist troupes in Montreal, is constantly misrepresented, underreported, or ignored by the corporate media "Circle". To us, this was yet another sad demonstration of misguided, backwards, and narrow-minded arts journalism. The Montreal English Critics Circle enthusiastically promotes and awards glossy corporate theatre in their largely

banal articles, which appear surrounded by a sea of advertisements and infotainment in their respective publications. Furthermore, their "Circle" is comprised only of corporate media employees; student journalists, alternative publishers, artists, and academics are not invited or welcome. In many ways they have a stranglehold on the very definition of theatre.

In any case, the pure theatre (of the CHP variety) was employed that night mentioned by Whiting, although he along with the others in the "Circle" failed to detect it. It is noteworthy, however, that Whiting's "brief" was the only ink that mentioned the fact that anything had happened at all; Radz and Barratt neglected to mention that part of the evening in their reports. The theatre that night was actually very amusing. As the "Circle" voted on their "awards", both Critics A and B appeared (wearing groucho-marx noses, eyebrows, moustaches, and glasses,) sat down at the table, and attempted to help adjudicate. These critics frequently go to the theatre, and publish monthly reviews in the <u>Indie Theatre Times and Review</u> (Canada's only independent theatre publication). However, unlike the corporate "critics", they are characters that anyone can play. Given that theatre is an extremely subjective medium where perceptions are constantly challenged, A & B embody the reality that anyone can play the critic. Theatre is not, as the "Circle" would have us believe, the artistic presentation of plays by aspiring or established professionals. Theatre is a plurality of concepts, clusters of paradigms, and a great transforming shadow. It offers an inter-face between playing and being, fantasy and reality, and can also be employed as a tool for global justice, and as a weapon against oppression and, in this case, Spectacle. Critics A & B personify the sum of all views on theatre, and thus offer very plural and compelling representations of theatrical reality. They are Everypersons. The so-called "real" critics, however, represent a corporate attitude that is more concerned with marketing, advertising, and deceiving the public. The masks worn by the likes of Barratt, Whiting, Radz, and the rest of the "Circle" are provided by CanWest-Global, Québecor, and other corporations. Like sleazy telemarketers, they try and sell us on an idea of theatre that dragoons us, casting us as spectators to their corporate pitches, banal monologues, and

boring theatrical prescriptions. The corporate media propagates the neoliberal worldview and suggests that the theatre is a mere diversion for the elite or intellectual. The extremely limiting corporate puffery spouted by the "Circle" signifies to us that we shouldn't trust them any more than we should the advertisements surrounding their columns, images on the Billboard trucks, or commercials flickering on the television: as agents of the Spectacle they mislead us. The paradox here is that Critics A and B, while masked and anonymous, are actually more real than the critics: they are the embodiment of unlimited theatrical exploration – for anyone at all. The "critics," while physically maskless, as agents of the Spectacle (and interpellated roles) wear invisible corporate masks. The characters here are more real than the people.

In any case, when A & B did enter the performance space and seated themselves within the "Circle", the reaction of the "critics" can only be described as disturbing and outrageous. When CHP (Critics A & B) intruded on HB (the corporate "critics" and their adjudication process), the resulting socio-theatrical controversy was volaitile to say the least. Luckily the actors were wired and the situation was recorded, transposed into meta-play, and published in Montreal's Indie Theatre Times and Review. In an interesting *détournement* of the event, the "critics" inadvertently masterminded their own critique! Here's how the performance opened:

> *In early September, CRITIC A and CRITIC B joined the committee of the Montreal English Critics Circle Awards (MECCA). Astonished and dismayed at the reaction they received, they spent the rest of the evening drinking and cannot remember much of what happened. Fortunately, though, they were able to give us this report with the help of a hidden tape recorder in CRITIC B's pocket and a digital camera a table away. Portions of the tape are inaudible and will be presented as (…..). CRITC C is Jason Whiting of HOUR Magazine, CRITIC D is Amy Barratt of the Montreal MIRROR and CRITIC E is Matt Radz of The Montreal GAZETTE. Although the other seven remain unknown, we're pretty sure CRITIC I works for Radio Centre-Ville….*

Setting: *Le Commsensal restaurant, St. Denis, Montréal. 8:45 pm, September 8*[th]*, 2003.*

CRITIC A: Okay, we've got our coffees, now downstairs to join the MECCA Awards circle. I hope we aren't too late.

CRITIC B: I'm sure it will be fine.

(THEY ENTER THE MEETING AND SIT DOWN)

Sorry we're late. Really, really, really sorry we're late!

CRITIC A: I'm so sorry!

CRITIC B: We're CRITICS A and B of THE INDIE THEATRE TIMES AND REVIEW and I sincerely apologize for our tardiness. I mean, this guy, he lost control in the car and…

CRITIC F: Why are you sitting at our table?

CRITIC B: We're CRITICS A and B, THE INDIE THEATRE TIMES AND REVIEW, here!

(CRITIC B HANDS THE OTHER CRITICS COPIES OF OUR PAPER)

CRITIC G: Try next year, there's no latecomers at this meeting.

CRITIC B: There's no latecomers?

CRITIC A: You mean we're going to have to start all over?

CRITIC B: What category are we on, now? We could stick with the category we're on, we could vote on that, and all is good, all is good! I don't…

CRITIC H: This is really amusing, but you're disturbing us.

CRITIC B: Disturbing you?

CRITIC H: Yeah, you are.

CRITIC B: But we're CRITICS A and…

CRITIC I: Then vote for yourselves and then go.

CRITIC B: Vote for ourselves? Are we going to be able to vote? What are we voting on now?

CRITIC H: You really are disturbing us, you're infringing on our meeting and we have a lot of work to do…

Instead of playing along in the theatrical sketch, the "critics" reacted violently. Critics insisted that they had an "embargo" on adjudicating theatre in Montreal, and one critic screamed, "We don't want to play!" Meanwhile, several minutes into the scene, one of the "critics" actually had the effrontery to lunge forward and literally unmask the actors playing A & B, violently yanking their glasses & noses right off their faces. Both an intimidation ploy and attempt to identify the players (who were presumably placed on respective blacklists), it was a shocking realization that the "Circle" not only failed to identify the theatre surrounding them, but actually tried to cannibalize it:

CRITIC B: I just want to drink my coffee. Look, we want to vote, too. I don't care if you've already done some votes, we just want to add our…

CRITIC H: But you're not part of this group. We don't know you, we don't know your paper. We don't trust you. We have an embargo on this. We're not going to…

CRITIC B: But we're CRITICS A and B.

CRITIC H: We have an embargo on this information and we're not going to give it out to anyone else that we don't know.

CRITIC B: Well, read our paper, you'll see we're real, we're not making this up.

CRITIC C: You don't understand the word embargo.

CRITIC B: You don't understand the word embargo?

CRITIC C: No, you don't understand the word embargo.

CRITIC B: I don't understand the word embargo. Okay, I could look it up in a dictionary if you really want me to.

(CRITIC J UNMASKS CRITIC B, THEN CRITIC A)

We're here to work, we're not here for fun, I don't understand this we're…

CRITIC I: Its not fun for us.

CRITIC B: I'm drinking a coffee, I want to be drinking a beer, for crying out loud.

(CRITIC D GETS UP AND GOES OVER TO CHASTISE CRITIC B, BABY IN HAND)

CRITIC D: Let me just say that we don't want to play.

CRITIC B: You don't want to play?

CRITIC D: We really don't.

CRITIC B: We're not here to play.   Are we here to play?

CRITIC D: I thought that was your schtick, "we want to play."

CRITIC B: We're not trying to play, we're just here because it's the MECCA Awards, obviously.

CRITIC D: Yeah, could you leave, though?

CRITIC B: Could we leave?

CRITIC D: Could you leave, please and let us get this done?

CRITIC B: We want to help you, we want to help you get this done.

CRITIC D: Okay, they're not leaving, so we're going to have to leave.

CRITIC B: No, no, we want to get this done.

CRITIC E: You guys are not doing yourselves much of a favor by assaulting this group, by provoking us.

CRITIC B: We're not trying to assault you, sir. We just…

CRITIC E: But we said okay, the game's over, goodbye. […]

The scene ends shortly thereafter with the dejected Critics A & B exiting after being further harangued by members of the "Circle". A digital camera operated by actors in a nearby Sousveillance Theatre scenario captured the performance. Without realizing it, members of the "Circle" cast themselves as extremely narrow-minded and anti-theatrical characters. As Spectacle-creators, they proved Debord's theory: the society of the spectacle cannot admit forces that are beyond its control or ability to contain.

The question we raised was this: why should anyone take seriously a group of corporate media employees who claim to be expert "critics" on the theatre, especially given their bombastic performance? By refusing to investigate or report on the theatrical projects that challenge the oppressive *status quo* or the issues that are important to the community-at-large, these "critics," we summarized, failed to reflect theatrical reality. Our conclusion was that the "Circle" is nothing more than a collection of Spectacle-makers who try and feed us poison; masquerading about as experts and power-brokers of theatre, they abuse their positions time and time again. When Whiting's colleague asked: "Don't those losers have anything better to do?" he responded: "I'm pretty sure she was talking about the guys in masks." Ironically, in their act of unmasking the actors playing Critics A & B, the "critics" effectively exposed their own corporate masks, leading me to concur with Whiting's friend.

Reflection: This experimental inter-performance was extremely successful in dramatically challenging Spectacle, and the biggest lesson I learned is that sometimes you have to go right to the source of the oppression in order to maximize the challenge to it. Like it or not, the corporate theatre "critics" wield enormous influence over the community (as we saw in the case of the Car Stories scandal), and by turning the microscope on them we were able to induce deep reflection. Despite claims to authority and expertise within the "Circle", this performance demonstrated not only their lack of theatrical understanding, but also their inability to play in the theatre. It took a theatrical act of dissent for the so-called "critics" to potentially reflect on their own role in the Spectacle - and

consequently the theatre. Because the "Circle" was theatrically jerked, the illusion of their power was broken, and the "critics" were given the opportunity to begin the long process of cleaning up their acts.

While the traditional theatre artist might be shocked at such a risky and brazen tactic (for fear of the blacklist above all else), I am pleased to report that the results were very successful. Not only did OTL get substantially more coverage in the following year from the "critics", but we also noticed an increase in critical thinking and discussion about non - "professional" theatrical activities. Everyone is human, and sometimes it takes a well-orchestrated act of revolutionary theatre to get those inhabiting the realm of HB firstly to realize it and identify their interpellated role, and secondly to re-evaluate how they are going to play it for the better.

Status: INACTIVE

Cultural Production: Play-text

<u>infringement festival</u>

[Former] Fringe producer Nancy Webster… was instrumental in the formation and direction of the Canadian Association of Fringe Festivals (CAFF), which has registered the Fringe trademark…the corporate approach has…raised some eyebrows. "The Edinburgh producer was here a few years back to do a little session about how she does the Edinburgh Fringe," Webster recalls. "She thought the idea of a Fringe trademark was appalling -- so against what the Fringe was all about." Webster says she could relate on a purely emotional level to the woman's reaction, but insists that the move to a formal trademark was made solely to protect the artists and the integrity of the festivals. Webster's background in corporate fundraising also made it easier for her to pursue corporate connections. "I guess I'm a little more comfortable with the people artists normally refer to as 'suits' than some of the other Fringe producers."

- Kevin Connolly, journalist, EYE Magazine

Facilitators:　　　　Donovan King and Jason McLean

Duration:　　　　　　Ongoing (began June 2004)

Purpose: As an act of cultural resistance, the infringement festival is both a culture-jam and a transformative space that celebrates "infringing" against the Spectacle. It was created to challenge the co-opted Fringe™ (signifying monoculture, corporatization of the arts, and artistic depoliticisation), and to reclaim its original spirit by providing an alternative festival without all the corporate attachments. Like RTS, the infringement festival reclaims space for creative purposes and encourages reflection. Aiming to provide a positive environment that encourages and nurtures critical art, the infringement emphasizes both critical practice in the arts, and artistic practice in activism. It also conducts a campaign to "Reclaim the Fringe".

Strategies:　 Re-appropriation, Viral theatre, Electronic Disturbance Theater, Guerilla theatre (various).

Description: The infringement Festival is an interdisciplinary festival open to all critical artists. Celebrating Freedom of Expression and designed as a real arts democracy, this festival is a critical response to the oppressive neoliberal worldview and all its Billboard Trucks, Televisions, flyers, advertisements, jingles, made-for-TV Wars; and the depoliticisation of people through this diversionary Spectacle. The infringement welcomes a variety of performances and cultural resistance: theatre groups, performers, street activism, political theatre, musicians, radical performance, visual artists, films, marginalized arts, spoken-word, puppet shows, disadvantaged groups, and anyone wishing to artistically infringe on the monoculture that creeps into every corner of our lives. The infringement festival began in Montreal (in 2004) as a response to the corporatization of the "St-Ambroise Montreal Fringe Festival" and the trademarking of the word "Fringe" by the Canadian Association of Fringe Festivals (CAFF).

The term "Fringe" theatre originated in Edinburgh, Scotland in 1947. The Fringe Festival was born when local artists and activists protested the strict entry criteria into the Edinburgh International Festival, a corporate theatre showcase. Boasting the best in experimental and DIY theatre, it was open to anyone who wanted to participate, and was the beginning of one of the world's most interesting theatre festivals. Indeed, a whole new style and approach to the craft was developed: risky, experimental, low budget, and wacky; often employing unique venues. The fringe phenomenon spread virally, not only outgrowing the original festival, but multiplying across the globe. There are currently over 30 of them. Unfortunately, this international festival of anything-goes DIY theatre has recently come under threat from corporate interests: the CAFF trademarked the word "Fringe" in 1998 and has begun restricting its use for artists. It is now common to see the festivals heavily endorsing (and even being named after) corporate interests and charging the artists they supposedly support hefty "registration fees". Once a popular people's festival of creative resistance and expression, it is now a co-opted commodity with a corporate agenda. A Fringe™. Unfortunately, even the arts, the supposed bastion of free expression and critical

thought, is suffering from corporate encroachment. In Joost Smiers' book <u>Arts Under Pressure</u> ("the NO LOGO of cultural research") he grimly notes that as a result of corporate globalization, basic cultural rights are becoming seriously endangered. Offering strong arguments for cultural diversity and human freedom of expression and broadcasting, Smiers displays a deep and genuine concern for the lives of artists across the globe. He notes, for example, that "…corporatization of the market of ideas, images, texts, and sentiments has also caused a shift to the political right. Corporate owners push their favoured interests, and in the decision-making process are less tolerant of anything that places a question mark against existing society and its rulings" (29).

Smiers' observations were proved correct in Montreal, summer of 2001, when the first show ever in the history of the fringe theatre movement was kicked out. <u>The Gazette</u>, a Can-West Global publication (and corporate sponsor of the Fringe™), literally booted OTL's Car Stories out of the festival. A playful attempt to charge the theatre critic, followed by a satirical critique when she refused to pay, sparked off a chain of disturbing reactions. Not only did <u>The Gazette</u> threaten to withdraw $15,000 in sponsorship, but also halted all fringe reviews. Car Stories was asked to vacate the premises by the end of the day. The Montreal Fringe Festival™ predictably sided with the corporate sponsors. The CAFF, disregarding its own mandate, sided with the Montreal Fringe Festival™. The real question that emerged was this: is the trademarked "Ste. Ambroise Montreal Fringe Festival" actually fringe, or had it transformed into a marketing opportunity for corporations whose brands want to be associated with "cool", who want to market products to the artsy/hipster consumer demographic?

Examining the financial history of the CAFF and its "Fringe" franchises, I was not surprised to learn that recently there have been several major financial scandals, including the Enron-like implosion of the Seattle "Fringe" which, according to <u>National Post</u> reporter J. Kelly Nestruck "went bankrupt, leaving $63,000 in debt to artists" (2004: B9). Another disturbing financial scandal is connected to Edmonton, home of CAFF President Miki Stricker. In 2003 Nicole Ticknovich, a former festival cash office worker and ex-wife of former fest director

David Cheoros, was sentenced to three years in jail after sending a phony fax from The Fringe Theatre Adventures Society transferring $110,000 out of the festival's account. It was withdrawn by an unnamed seventeen-year-old girl and paid to a man named Theodore Pemberton, who disappeared and is "presumed to be dead" (Kristiansen, 2004). Add to this the Car Stories debacle at the 2001 Montreal "Fringe", and the picture becomes clear that corporatization is indeed a problem across the board within the CAFF model. Indeed, according to <u>National Post</u> reporter J. Kelly Nestruck the "Fringes" are in the big leagues financially; the Edmonton Fringe alone has an impact "estimated at $8.2-million a year" (2004: B9). Matt Radz of <u>The Gazette</u> describes the Montreal "Fringe" as a "$300,000 production… [with a] legion of volunteer helpers" (2004: D1). Stan Kristiansen, who investigated the situation at the Montreal Fringe in 2004, concluded that many artists at the "Fringe" were dissatisfied over a host of corporatization issues, including "pay-to-play"; the charging of fees in the range of $300 - $700 to be associated with the "Fringe" trademark. Other complaints include: "Service charges" of $1 - $3 added on to every ticket sold, unethical and conflict-of-interest sponsors (eg: Starbucks, Diesel Jeans, General Mills Foods, MAC Cosmetics, various corporate media outlets), the banning of artists from the festival, a lack of democracy, and a host of other incidents that put power into the hands of the Spectacle at the expense of the people (Kristiansen, 2004). The festival appears to have been privatized without the consent of the artists.

In Montreal, the Car Stories incident (and subsequent critical analysis of the Fringe™) has sparked off an artistic outrage and concerted efforts are now being made to stop the corporate branding and ownership of local culture, and to put the fringe back into the hands of the artists and community. In 2002 OTL launched a "Reclaim the Fringe" campaign, demanding from CAFF the following:

- The word "Fringe" must be un-trademarked or placed in a public trust.
- An accountability mechanism must be created to uphold the mandate.
- There must be fiscal transparency.
- Conflict-of-interest sponsorships must stop.

- Democratic principles in organizing the festivals must be implemented.

- Artists who were defrauded by Fringe™ Festivals must be reimbursed.

When CAFF did not respond to our demands, we decided in 2004 to create the infringement festival.

We designed the infringement festival to meet the needs of exploited artists by dramatically challenging the corporate "Fringe" while simultaneously providing a better, corporate-free alternative. Adhering to a mandate that signifies the spirit of the real Fringe, there are firewalls and safeguards in place to prevent their artists from being exploited and the festival from being commodified. To prevent itself from being co-opted, the infringement festival follows a mandate that looks like this:

> 1) The festival is free for all artists to participate in. Artists must provide their own venues, staff, etc. Artists can charge what they like, and keep 100% of profits.
>
> 2) The festival will be supported by a central office, whose goal is to help co-ordinate and advertise the events (eg: with a website, press releases, and a central gathering place).
>
> 3) The festival will be run on a not-for-profit basis.
>
> 4) There must be no unethical or conflict-of-interest sponsorships.
>
> 5) The festival will be run democratically.
>
> 6) The festival will never discriminate. It is open to all people and languages.
>
> 7) The festival aims to emphasize both critical practice in the arts, and artistic practice in activism. It also aims to provide a positive environment that encourages and nurtures critical art. "

It was our hope that by re-engineering the "rules" we could reclaim the influence from the corporations and put it back into the hands of the artists.

After hammering together a website, we put out invitations. With memes spreading word-of-mouth, through the internet, and eventually the corporate media, we were impressed with the amount of interest generated. Over 30 acts

signed up for the infringement in a space of only three months, including not only various local acts (eg: Travesty Theatre's "Dead Dolls Cabaret", David Fennario's "Mysteries of Montreal") but also notable critical artists from the USA (such as New York City's Alexis Sottile and Kayhan Irani, and Bostonian transgendered artist S. Bear Bergman). The variety of acts was impressive: political puppet-shows, burlesque cabaret, poetry slams, performance art, culture-jamming, and even a "Naked Critical Mass" bike ride! Car Stories filled the role of the festival's inaugural corner-stone, running for its entire duration (June 10 – 20, not coincidentally the exact same dates as the Fringe™). The infringement festival was heralded by the corporate media, who mentioned it alongside the "Fringe" in several articles. Our viral design was successful in spreading the memes where we needed them most, for the examination of artists and spectators interested in the "Fringe". With an outer shell celebrating "infringement" (something typically painted as negative, even illegal) it was easy to capture people's curiosity and attention. The inner ideological code ("reclaim the fringe") succeeded in inspiring people to question the Spectacle (as signified by the Fringe™) and to take action by reclaiming the culture. The discourse of the infringement festival created a schism within the theatrical community between long-time "Fringe" subscribers and artists looking for a critical alternative. The topic was prominent for artists in both camps, and critical discussion about the arts emerged on a frequent basis. According to Mimi Luse of the McGill Daily:

> Montreal theatre rarely reaches these levels of gossipy excitement. This summer, the Montreal Fringe Festival, the bearer of the irreverent theatre torch since its initiation, was out-fringed by a motley crew of theatre activists.

Heated dialogue about corporatization in the arts replaced the previous uni-directional *status quo* - complacency with and submission to the Fringe™, its corporate sponsors, and by extension the Spectacle.

Furthermore, to really get the meme-fountain optimized, in addition to the variety of critical artistry presented at the infringement festival, players also conducted various guerilla theatre operations to put the memes right into the

heart of the action. One notable example occurred on the final evening of the festivals, at the "Frankies" where the Fringe™ offers artists a variety of corporate-sponsored "awards" on its outdoor stage. In this particular guerilla operation we had several units:

1. Security unit
2. Video/Theatres Against War unit
3. "Fringe™ investors" unit
4. "infringement artists" unit

For the culture-jam, we deployed Unit #1 first to scope out the security situation (many OTL artists are banned from the Fringe™) and to report back to the other units. Next came our Video unit, where I played a THAW journalist who was reporting "Live" to New York City via our videographer Shahin K. Taher. Armed with THAW propaganda, we were able to penetrate the security cordon under the guise of artist-journalists trying to get an opinion from Fringe™ artists on war. Because challenging the illegal war on Iraq is deemed an important cause, security guards were reluctant to refuse us entry on camera, and we were allowed in. Next came the "Fringe™ investors" unit; inspired by the Billionaires for Bush, the "investors" were a collection of society's most privileged millionaires. Dressed to the nines, they presented themselves as "allies of the Fringe" who arrived from Toronto to investigate purported copyright infringements affecting their stock portfolios. Claiming that the infringement was hurting their Fringe™/CAFF investments (and rate of return), they were admitted without question by the security guards. Finally the "infringement artists" unit (comprised of an assortment of clowns, bouffons, and other odd-balls) arrived, protesting against the Fringe™. They were stopped at the Fringe™ border, and protested on the sidewalk at the entrance of the beer tent. When the "investors" caught wind of the protest, they immediately went outside and started a counter-protest, withdrawing placards with slogans like "Corporations are people too", "Our culture *IS* for sale", and "Jeremy is innocent" (Jeremy Hechtman being the "producer" responsible for kicking Car Stories out). Suddenly the drama at the

entrance of the beer tent was deemed far more interesting than that inside, and many spectators were drawn into the scene. As with Invisible Theatre, a question of oppression was raised, and people rallied around it. Meanwhile, on the inside I was able to interview a lot of people about their reaction to the "protest/counter-protest" going on at the gates. In one case, the subject complained bitterly about the infringement artists, claiming that they were out to "ruin the fringe". As I was interviewing him one of the "Fringe™ investors" arrived, wholeheartedly agreeing and declaring something like: "These infringement artists are a nuisance and should be arrested. Their actions are a violation of the Fringe trademark I have invested in, and the brand damage is hurting my profits. We need to exploit artists and spectators, otherwise our portfolios will decrease in value." In a classic case of subversion, the subject, who was originally pro-Fringe, began vehemently debating against the "Fringe™ investor"!

The infringement festival, designed as closely as possible to the original "Fringe" concept, has the same viral component, meaning that it can spread across the globe. I am happy to say that at the time of this writing two infringement festivals have already occurred (Montreal, Toronto), and in the summer of 2005 there will be at least two new additions (Ottawa, Buffalo, NY). It is our hope the festival will spread quickly as an alternative to the Fringe™, inspiring people across the planet to celebrate cultural resistance, and to dramatically challenge monoculture and corporatization wherever they may appear.

Reflection: The infringement festival is OTL's most successful project to date in my mind. Because of its ability to spread virally, the infringement offers great potential to inspire people to employ CHP against HB. The infringement provides a space free from corporate interference and puts the arts right back into the hands of creators and community. The Fringe™, despite its claims to being edgy and avant-garde, generally operates in the realms of HB (supporting the Spectacle) and HP (playing written drama on stages). The infringement, on the other hand, typically occupies the realms of CHB (critical thinking) and CHP

(playing against Spectacle). When the two meet, a beautiful socio-theatrical controversy erupts, causing deep reflection and heated dialogue within the community. Because the infringement has no hierarchy, authority, or strict guidelines, it offers a perfect environment for critical artists to dialogue and collaborate on actions designed to *détourne*. Drawing from any form of cultural resistance, the infringement is infinitely more flexible than the Fringe™; it is not dragooned by entry-criteria, bureaucratic guidelines, and financial obligations.

Also, because the infringement festival is a perennial event, it has the potential to take on a life of its own. I cannot help but feel that OTL has created a beneficial "monster", and wonder if we could stop it even if we wanted to. I imagine the concept spreading across the globe to all sorts of places as a theatrical empowerer. Despite its initial opposition to the Fringe™, the infringement does not rely on its nemesis in order to exist. The infringement festival in Buffalo (NY), for example, does not have a Fringe™ to operate against. Because the infringement offers what the original Fringe had – a free opportunity for people to express themselves critically and dramatically – it can happily bloom in any location, regardless of language or culture.

Finally, the infringement can theoretically catalyze a cultural renaissance of unprecedented proportions. If the infringement multiplies and spreads, if it extends its yearly duration to embrace more and more days, and if it interconnects with other infringement festivals, it may very well be the first steps towards Klein's concept of *la fête permanente*. Furthermore, as it grows in size, it will also grow in complexity and influence, raising the spectre that it may become a breeding ground for larger, more interconnected, and more powerful acts of revolutionary theatre. Theoretically, if it eventually inspires a critical mass, the infringement could one day trigger a global theatrical revolution, dramatically *détourning* the insidious and oppressive Spectacle once and for all.

Status: ACTIVE

Cultural Production: Movie in the making

<u>Bibliography</u>

Adam, Barry D. <u>The Survival of Domination: Inferiorization and Everyday Life</u>. New York: Elsevier, 1978.

Adamson, Walter. <u>Hegemony and Revolution: A Study of Antonio Gramsci's Political and Cultural Theory.</u> Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1980.

Adbusters Buy Nothing Day webpage. "Buy Nothing Day". Oct. 2003. <http://www.adbusters.org/metas/eco/bnd/>.

Agger, Ben. <u>Critical Social Theories: An Introduction</u>. Boulder: Westview Press, 1998.

---, <u>Cultural Studies as Critical Theory</u>. London: Falmer Press, 1992.

---, <u>Socio(ontology): A Disciplinary Reading</u>. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1989.

Althusser, Louis. "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses." <u>In Lenin and Philosophy, and Other Essays</u>. Trans. Ben Brewster. London: New Left Books, 1971. 136-170.

American Heritage® Dictionary of the English Language, 4th ed. "Virus". Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2000. <www.bartleby.com/61/>.

Applied and Interactive Theatre Guide. Oct. 2003. <http://www.tonisant.com/aitg/index.shtml>

Argyle, M., <u>Social Interaction</u> (London: Methuen, 1969)

Arndt, Michael J. "Theatre at the Center of the Core (Technology as a Lever in Theatre Pedagogy)." <u>Theatre in Cyberspace: Issues of Teaching, Acting, and Directing.</u> Ed. Stephen A. Schrum. New York: Peter Lang Publishing, 1999. 65 - 83.

Aristotle. <u>Poetics</u>. Trans. S.H. Butcher. New York: Hill and Wang, 1961.

Artaud, Antonin. <u>The Theatre and Its Double.</u> New York: Grove Press, 1958.

---,"The Alchemical Theater". Ibid. 48 – 52.

Ashcroft, Bill, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin. <u>The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-Colonial Literatures</u>. London: Routledge, 1989.

Attali, Jacques. <u>Noise: The Political Economy of Music</u>. Trans. Brian Massumi. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1985.

Barchillion, José. "Introduction". <u>Madness and Civilization: A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason</u>. New York: Random House, 1988.

Benjamin, Walter. <u>Understanding Brecht</u>. London: New Left Books, 1973.

Bennet, Susan. <u>Theatre Audiences: A Theory of Production and Reception.</u> London: Routledge, 1990.

Bey, Hakim. <u>The Temporary Autonomous Zone, Ontological Anarchy, Poetic Terrorism</u>. New York: Autonomedia. Anti-copyright, 1991.

BillioniaresForBush.com. "Be A Billionaire! The Official Billioniares for Bush Do-It-Yourself Manual." Version 1.000.000.000. Feb 2004. <http://billionairesforbush.com/diy_v2_contents.php>.

Birringer, Johannes. <u>Theatre, Theory, Postmodernism</u>. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991.

Boal, Augusto. <u>Games for Actors and Non-Actors.</u> London: Routledge, 1992.

---, <u>Hamlet and the Baker's Son: My Life in Theatre and Politics.</u> London: Routledge, 2001.

---, "Invisible Theatre." <u>Radical Street Performance</u>. Ed. Jan Cohen-Cruz. London: Routledge, 1998. 121-124.

---, <u>The Rainbow of Desire.</u> London: Routledge, 1995.

---, <u>Theatre of the Oppressed.</u> New York: Theatre Communications Group, 1985.

Borduas, Paul-Émile. "Refus Global". tr. Ray Ellenwood. Toronto: Exile Editions 1985, uncatalogued. <http://www.poetics.yorku.ca/article.php?sid=57>.

Boyd, Andrew. "Truth is a Virus: meme warfare and the Billionaires for Bush (or Gore)." <u>Cultural Resistance Reader</u>. Ed. Stephen Duncombe. London: Verso, 1994. 369 – 378.

Brecht, Bertolt. <u>Brecht on Theatre</u>. Trans. John Willett. London: Methuen, 1964.

Breton, André, "*Le Cadavre Exquis*" and "First Surrealist Manifesto," In <u>Surrealism</u>. Ed. Patrick Waldberg. New York: McGraw-Hill. 1971, 93-94.

Breton, André. "What is Surrealism?". Pamplet handed out after lecture. Paris: 1934. Jan 2004. <http://pers-www.wlv.ac.uk/~fa1871/whatsurr.html>.

Brissett, Dennis, and Charles Edgely, eds. Life as Theatre: A Dramaturgical Sourcebook. Chicago: Aldine, 1975.

Brook, Peter. The Empty Space. London: Penguin Books, 1990.

Brookes, Chris. A Public Nuisance: A History of the Newfoundland Mummers Troupe. St. John's: Institute of Social and Economic Research, Memorial University,1988.

Butler, Judith. Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity. London: Routledge, 1990.

Buy Nothing Day UK website. "Buy Nothing Day 2003". Sept. 2003. <http://www.buynothingday.co.uk/index.html>.

Carse, James P. Finite and Infinite Games: A Vision of Life as Play and Possibility. New York: Ballantine Books, 1986

Charlebois, Gaetan. "Driven to extremities". HOUR [Montreal] 14 June 2001. 8.

Chittenden, Maurice & Harlow, John, "Beware of the Beauties in the Bar," The Sunday Times [London] 9 September 2001, 12.

Cima, G.G. "Strategies for Subverting the Canon". Upstaging Big Daddy: Directing Theater as if Gender and Race Matter. Ed. Susan Clements and Ellen Donkin. Ann Arbour: University of Michigan Press, 1993. 91 – 105.

Circle-Jerked (play-text). Indie Theatre Times and Review. Dec 2003/Jan 2004 edition. Ed. Jason C. McLean. <http://www.travestytheatre.com/circlejerked.html>.

Clements, Susan, and Ellen Donkin, eds. "Introduction." Upstaging Big Daddy: Directing Theater as if Gender and Race Matter. Ann Arbour: University of Michigan Press, 1993.

Connolly, Kevin. "State of the art: Tenth annual Fringe theatre festival is not just a showcase, but a creative breeding ground." EYE Weekly [Toronto] 07.02.98.

Cohen, Robert. Theatre. 3rd ed. London: Mayfield Publishing Company, 1981.

Cohen, Walter. Drama of a Nation: Public Theatre in Renaissance Theatre and Spain. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985.

Cohen-Cruz, Jan. "Theatricalizing Politics: An Interview with Augusto Boal." In
Playing Boal: Theatre, Therapy, Activism. Mandy and Jan Cohen-Cruz.
London: Routledge, 1994.

Coombe, Rosemary J. The ©ultural Life of Intellectual Properties: Authorship,
Appropriation, and The Law. London: Duke University Press, 1998.

Coover, V., Deacon, E., Esser, C. Moore, C. Resource Manual for a Living
Revolution : A Handbook of Skills & Tools for Social Change Activists.
Philadelphia: New Publishers Society, 1977.

Coult, Tony, and Baz Kershaw. Engineers of the Imagination: The Welfare State
Handbook. London: Methuen, 1983.

Cox, Harvey. The Feast of Fools: A Theological Essay on Festivity and Fantasy.
Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1969.

CrimethInc. Workers Collective. Days of War, Nights of Love. Canada:
CrimethInc. Free Press, 2000.

Csikszentmihalyi, Mihaly. "Some paradoxes in the definition of play." Play as
context:1979 proceedings of the Association for the Anthropological Study
of Play. Ed. Alyce Taylor Cheska. West Point, NY: Leisure Press, 1981.
14-26.

Debord, Guy. "Methods of Détournement." *Les Lèvres Nues* #8 (Translated by
Ken Knabb). Paris: May, 1956.
<http://library.nothingness.org/articles/all/en/display/3>.

---, Society of the Spectacle. Detroit: Black & Red, 1970.

---, "Theses on Cultural Revolution." Translated by John Shepley. Internationale
Situationniste #1. Paris : June, 1958.
<http://www.cddc.vt.edu/sionline/si/theses.html>.

Debord, Guy, Wolman, Gil J. "A User's Guide to Détournement". *Les Lèvres
Nues* #8 (Translated by Ken Knabb). Belgium: May, 1956.
<http://www.bopsecrets.org/SI/detourn.htm#N_1_>.

Deemer, Charles. "The New Hyperdrama: How Hypertext Scripts Are Changing
the Parameters of Dramatic Storytelling." Theatre in Cyberspace: Issues
of Teaching, Acting, and Directing. Ed. Stephen A. Schrum. New York:
Peter Lang Publishing, 1999. 39 - 49

de Kerckhove, Derrick. Connected Intelligence: the Arrival of the Web Society.
Toronto: Somerville House Publishing, 1997.

Derrida, Jacques. "The Theatre of Cruelty and the Closure of Representation." Writing and Difference. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978, 232-250.

Dery, Mark. "Culture Jamming: Hacking, Slashing and Sniping in the Empire of Signs". Pamphlet #25 in the Open Magazine Pamphlet Series. 1993. <http://www.levity.com/markdery/culturjam.html>.

DeVoy, Stephen. "What is meme-warfare?" Breakyourchains.org. Jan 2003. <http://www.breakyourchains.org/meme_warfare.htm>.

Diamond, Elin. "Brechtian Theory/Feminist Theory: Toward a Gestic Feminist Criticism." The Drama Review 8 (Spring 1988): 82-94.

Dolan, Jill. "Gender Impersonation Onstage: Destroying or Maintaining the Mirror of Gender Roles?" Gender in Performance: The Presentation of Difference in the Performing Arts. Ed. Laurence Senelick. Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 1992.

Dominguez, Ricardo. "Electronic Disturbance: An Interview." Cultural Resistance Reader. Ed. Stephen Duncombe. New York: Verso, 2002. 379 – 396.

Empson, William. The Structure of Complex Worlds. New York: New Directions, 1951.

Evreinov, N, The Theatre and Life. New York: Harrap, 1927.

Falconer, Sara. "Buy Nothing Day." HOUR [Montreal] 28 Nov. 2002: 3.

Fanon, Franz. The Wretched of the Earth. London: MacGibbon & Kee, 1965.

Fisher, Berenice. "Feminist Acts: Women, pedagogy, and Theatre of the Oppressed." Mandy Schutzman and Cohen-Cruz, Jan. Playing Boal: Theatre, Therapy, Activism. London: Routledge, 1994. 185 – 197.

Foucault, Michel, "The Discourse on Language," appendix to The Archaeology of Knowledge, trans. A.M. Sheridan Smith. New York: Pantheon, 1972. 215-237

---, Madness and Civilization: A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason. New York: Random House, 1988.

---, History of Sexuality: An Introduction, Volume I, trans. Robert Hurley. New York: Vintage Books, 1978.

Freire, Paulo. <u>Pedagogy of the Oppressed</u>. New York: Continuum Publishing Group Inc., 1993.

Fromm, Erich. <u>The Art of Loving</u>. New York: Harper, 1956.

Fortier, Mark. <u>Theory/Theatre: An Introduction</u>. London: Routeledge, 1997.

Fukuyama, Francis. <u>The End of History and the Last Man</u>. London: Hamish Hamilton, 1992.

Gaggi, Silvio. <u>Modern/Postmodern</u>. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1989.

Garvey, C. <u>Play</u>. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1977.

Gauntlett, David. "Judith Butler". Theory.org.uk. July 2003. <http://www.theory.org.uk/ctr-butl.htm>.

Gil, David G. <u>Confronting Injustice and Oppression: Concepts and Strategies for Social Workers</u>. New York: Columbia University Press, 1998.

Gilbert, Helen and Joanne Tompkins. <u>Post-Colonial Drama: Theory, Practice, Politics.</u> London: Routledge, 1996.

Gitlin, Todd. <u>The Whole World is Watching</u>. Berkeley: University of California Press.1980.

Gramsci, Antonio. <u>Selections from Cultural Writings</u>. Ed. David Forgacs and Geoffrey Nowell-Smith. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1985.

---, <u>Selections from the Prison Notebooks of Antonio Gramsci</u>, ed. Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell-Smith. New York: International Publishers, 1971.

Grote, Jason. "T2k commentary blogitude". Entry: 08.31.04. New York City <http://www.theater2k.com/JGrote_T4C_Blog_2.html>.

Gordon, Mel, ed. <u>Dada Performance</u>. New York: PAJ Publications, 1987

Hughes, Robert. <u>The Shock of the New</u>. New York: Knopf, 1981.

Handke, Peter. "Brecht, Play, Theatre, Agitation." <u>Theatre Quarterly</u> (Oct – Dec 1971): 81 - 90.

Harrop, John, and Sabin R. Epstein. <u>Acting With Style</u>. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1983.

Hassan, Ihab. The Postmodern Turn: Essays in Postmodern Theory and Culture. Ohio: Ohio State University Press, 1987.

Hertz, Noreen. "Summit diary." The Observer [London] 22 July 2001: 4.

Hirsch, Jesse. "The Politics and Practice of Culture Jamming Democracy". Vanguard Online. July 2004. <http://www.vanguardonline.f9.co.uk/00806.htm>.

Hitt, Jack. "The Birth of the Meta-Protest Rally". New York Times. March 28, 2004. <http://www.nytimes.com/2004/03/28/magazine/28ENCOUNTER.html?ex=1395810000&en=2a84e4f3a12ac7a0&ei=5007&partner=USERLAND>.

Hlavacek, Martin. "Mindshare". totse.com. Aug 2003. <http://www.totse.com/en/conspiracy/mind_control/166449.html>

Home, Stewart. The Assault on Culture: Utopian Currents from Lettrisme to Class War. London: Aporia Press and Unpopular Books, 1988.

---, ed. What is Situationism? A Reader. Edinburgh: AK Press, 1993.

Howe, David. "Modernity, Postmodernity, and Social Work". British Journal of Social Work 24 (1994): 513-32.

Hussey, Andrew. The Game of War: The Life and Death of Guy Debord. London: Pimlico, 2002.

Infringement Festival. "So what is the infringement festival anyway?" June 2004. <http://infringementfestival.com/info/>.

---, "Mandate and Code of Ethics". June 2004. <http://www.infringementfestival.com/newfestivals/mandate.html>.

---, "History". June 2004. <http://www.infringementfestival.com/info/history.html>.

---, "Horraire/Schedule". June 2004. <http://www.infringementfestival.com/sked.html>.

Jameson, Fredric. "Postmodernism and Consumer Society" Modern Drama, 3rd ed. New York: Harcourt Brace Publishers, 1995.1130 - 1138.

---, The Prison House of Language. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1972.

Johnson, Allan G. The Blackwell Dictionary of Sociology: A User's Guide to Sociological Language. 2nd ed. Malden, Mass: Blackwell, 2000.

Jones, Phil. Drama as Therapy, Theatre as Living. London: Routledge, 1996.

Jordan, John. "The Art of Necessity: The Subversive Imagination of Anti-Road Protest and Reclaim the Streets." Cultural Resistance Reader. Ed. Stephen Duncombe. New York: Verso, 2002: 369 – 378.

Kamberk, Vincent. "PLAY." Jan 2002. <http://sites.netscape.net/vincentkamberk/creativefreedom.htm>.

Kariel, Henry S. The Desperate Politics of Postmodernism. Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1989.

Kellner, Douglas. Critical Theory, Marxism, and Modernity. Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1989.

Kershaw, Baz. The Radical in Performance: Between Brecht and Baudrillard. London: Routledge, 1999.

King, Donovan. "Buy Nothing Day meta-play #6. Optative Theatrical Laboratories. Aug 2004. <http://www.indymedia.org.nz/newswire/display/2009>.

---, "Mission Statement. Optative Theatrical Laboratories. Aug 2004. <http://travestytheatre.com/otlmission.html>.

Klein, Naomi. No Logo. London: Random House. 2000.

Kristiansen, Stan. "Infringement Festival: The LINUX of Theatre". The Indie Theatre Times and Review [Montreal] June/July 2004: 1 -3.

Laurel, B. "Reaching Out To Touch Our Fantasies". The Guardian [London]. 26 Aug. 1991: A14.

Lasn, Kalle. Culture Jam. New York: HarperCollins, 1999.

Lasn, Kalle . "What are memes?" adbusters. Dec 2003. <http://www.adbusters.org/magazine/32/meme.html>.

Leonard, Stephen T. Critical Theory in Political Practice. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1990.

Luse, Mimi. "Fringe Rejects Start their Own Club." McGill Daily [Montreal]. Issue 1. 7 Sept 2004. <http://www.mcgilldaily.com/view.php?aid=2741>.

Lysistrata Project webpage. "What is Lysistrata Project?". Oct 2004. <http://www.pecosdesign.com/lys/about.html>.

Mann, Steve. "Please Wait". Oct 2004. <http://wearcam.org/pleasewait.html>.

---, "Reflectionism". Oct. 2004. <http://wearcam.org/leonardo/index.html>.

---. "World Sousveillance Day: The shot seen around the world by *wearcam.org.".*
    Oct. 2004. <http://www.doingfreedom.com/gen/1202/wsd.html>.

Mann, Steve, and Hal Niedzviecki. Cyborg: digital destiny and human possibility
    in the age of the wearable computer. Toronto: Doubleday Canada, 2001.

Marinetti, F.T. "The Founding and Manifesto of Futurism." Paris: *Le Figaro.*
    February 20, 1909. <http://www.unknown.nu/futurism/manifesto.html>.

McConachie, Bruce A. "Using the Concept of Cultural Hegemony to Write
    Theatre History." Interpreting the Theatrical Past: essays in the
    historiography of performance. Ed. Thomas Postlewait and Bruce A.
    McConachie. Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1989:37 – 58.

McGrath, Kathryn. newyorkmetro.com. Fox News "Shut-up-a-thon" August 31,
    2004. <http://thekicker.nymetro.com/archives/000419.html>.

McLuhan, Marshall. "Understanding Media." Essential McLuhan. Ed. Eric
    McLuhan and Frank Zingrone. Toronto: House of Anansi Press, 1995.

Mizrach, Steve (aka Seeker1). "culture jamming: the information war of the 90s".
    May   2003.
    <http://www.geocities.com/SoHo/Opening/7482/mizrach.html>.

Moane, Geraldine. Gender and Colonialism: A Psychological Analysis of
    Oppression and Liberation. New York: St Martin's Press, 1999.

Molderings, Herbert. "Life is No Performance: Performance by Jochen Gerz".
    The Art of Performance: A Critical Anthology. Ed. Gregory Battcock and
    Robert Nickas. New York: E. P. Dutton, 1984. 166-80.

Morgan, Norah, and Juliana Saxton. Teaching Drama. London: Hutchinson
    Education, 1987.

Mullaly, Bob. Challenging Oppression: A Critical Social Work Approach. Don
    Mills, Ont: Oxford University Press, 2002.

---, Structural Social Work: Ideology, Theory, and Practice. 2nd ed. Toronto:
    Oxford University Press, 1997.

Museum of Hoaxes, "#79: PETA's Tournament of Sleeping Fish". May 2004.
    <http://www.museumofhoaxes.com/hoax/aprilfool/P70/>.

Nestruck, J. Kelly. "When the Fringe becomes the main event." <u>National Post</u> [Toronto] 15 June 2004: B9.

Niedzviecki, Hal. <u>We Want Some Too: Underground Desire and the Reinvention of Mass Culture</u>. Toronto: Penguin Books, 2000.

PGNA. "Hallmarks of the Peoples' Global Action Network: as agreed to by social movements at the PGA Conference in Cochabamba, Bolivia, August 2001". <http://www.nadir.org/nadir/initiativ/agp/en/>.

Pierre, José. <u>Futurism and Dadaism</u>. London: Heron Books, 1969.

Plant, Sadie. <u>The Most Radical Gesture: The Situationist International in a Postmodern Age</u>. New York: Routledge, 1992.

Plotkin, Joel. "Applied Theatre: a Journey by Joel Plotkin". Applied and Interactive Theatre Guide. 1997 <http://csep.sunyit.edu/~joel/article.html>.

Popovich, George, "Artaud Unleashed: Cyberspace Meets the Theatre of Cruelty". <u>Theatre in Cyberspace: Issues of Teaching, Acting, and Directing</u>. Ed. Schrum, Stephen A. New York: Peter Lang Publishing, 1999. 223-4

Radz, Matt. "All the world's a stage for peace: Quebec actors out in force to demonstrate support for peaceful resolution in Iraq." <u>The Gazette</u> [Montreal] 4 Mar. 2003: A16.

---, "Party-animal policy at Fringe Festival". <u>The Gazette</u> [Montreal] 10 June 2004: D1.

Reasons, Charles E., and William D. Perdue. <u>Ideology of Social Problems</u>. Scarborough, Ontario: Nelson Canada, 1981.

Rebick, Judy. "We've Come Part Way, Baby: A new opportunity has opened for the women's movement." Rabble news. Rabble.ca. 2004. <http://rabble.ca/news_full_story.shtml?sh_itm=9eef7880ce4b73bc6868da0dd56fa115&r=1>.

Rushkoff, Douglas. <u>Media Virus! Hidden Agendas in Popular Culture</u>. New York: Ballantine Books, 1994.

Said, Edward. <u>Orientalism</u>. New York: Pantheon, 1978.

---, <u>Culture and Imperalism</u>. New York, Knopf, 1993.

Sant, Toni. Applied and Interactive Theatre Guide. "Radical Theatre"

<http://www.tonisant.com/aitg/Radical_Theatre/>.

Schechner, Ricard. "A new paradigm for theatre in the academy." <u>The Drama Review</u> 36, 4 (1992).

---, <u>Performance Theory</u>. New York: Routledge, 1988.

Schrum, Stephen A. <u>Theatre in Cyberspace: Issues of Teaching, Acting, and Directing</u>. New York: Peter Lang Publishing, 1999.

Shipe, Timothy. "The International Dada Archive". University of Iowa. Oct. 2003. <http://www.lib.uiowa.edu/dada/archive.html>**.**

Situationist International. "Détournement as Negation and Prelude". Paris: 1959. <http://library.nothingness.org/articles/SI/en/display/315>.

Smiers, Joost. <u>Arts Under Pressure: Promoting Cultural Diversity in the Age of Globalization</u>. London: Zed Books, 2003.

Smith, Anna Deavere. "Not So Special Vehicles." <u>Modern Drama</u>. 3rd ed. W.B. Worthen ed. New York: Harcourt Brace Publishers, 1995. 1074 – 1082.

Smith, T. "Postmodernism: Theory and Politics." <u>The Activist</u> 3, 7 (1993): 31-34.

Talen, Bill. <u>What should I do if Reverend Billy is in my store?</u> New York: The New Press, 2003.

Taussig, Michael, and Richard Schechner. "Boal in Brazil, France, and the USA: An Interview with Augusto Boal." Ed. Richard Schechner. <u>Playing Boal: Theatre, Therapy, Activism</u>. Ed. Mady Schuztman and Jan Cohen Cruz. New York: Routledge, 1994. 17-32.

Theaters Against War. "THAW". New York. May 2004. <http://thawaction.org/index.html>.

U.N.E.F. Strasbourg. "On the Poverty of Student Life: considered in its economic, political, psychological, sexual, and particularly intellectual aspects, and a modest proposal for its remedy". May 2003. <http://library.nothingness.org/articles/SI/en/display/4>.

Vaneigem, Raoul. <u>The Revolution of Everyday Life</u>. Paris: 1967. tr. John Fullerton and Paul Sieveking. May 2003. <http://library.nothingness.org/articles/SI/en/display/34>.

Wachholz, Sandra and Robert Mullaly. "Policing the deinstitutionalized mentally ill: Towards an understanding of its function." <u>Crime, Law and Social Change</u> 19 (1993): 281-300.

Waldberg, Patrick, ed. <u>Surrealism</u>. New York: McGraw-Hill, 1971.

Walther, Bo Kampmann. "Playing and Gaming: Reflections and Classifications". <u>The International Journal of Computer Game Research</u>. Volume 3, Issue 1, May 2003. <http://www.gamestudies.org/0301/walther/>.

Whiting, Jason. "Return to MECCA". <u>HOUR</u> [Montreal] 18 Sept 2003: 29.

Whitmore, Jon. <u>Directing Postmodern Theatre</u>. Ann Arbour: University of Michigan Press, 1997.

Wikipedia free online encyclopedia. "Culture Jamming". Oct 2003. <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Culture_jamming>.

Willeford, William. <u>The Fool and His Sceptre: A Study in Clowns and Jesters and Their Audience</u>. London: Edward Arnold Publishers Ltd., 1969.

Willett, John, ed. <u>Brecht on Theatre</u>. New York: Hill and Wang, 1964.

Williams, Raymond. <u>Culture</u>. Cambridge: Fontana, 1981.

WordNet Dictionary. "Virus" NJ: Princeton University. Oct. 2003. <http://www.cogsci.princeton.edu/~wn/>

Worthen, W.B., ed. <u>Modern Drama</u>. 3rd ed. New York: Harcourt Brace Publishers, 1995.

Young, Iris Marion. <u>Justice and the Politics of Difference</u>. NJ: Princeton University Press. 1990.

Zellner, Dan. "Definitions and Directions of the Theatre." <u>Theatre in Cyberspace: Issues of Teaching, Acting, and Directing</u>. Ed. Stephen A. Schrum. New York: Peter Lang Publishing, 1999. 19 – 29.

Zerzan, John. <u>Elements of Refusal : Essays by John Zerzan</u>. Seattle: Left Bank Books, Anti-copyright, 1988.

Zijderveld, Anton C. <u>Reality in a Looking-Glass: rationality through an analysis of traditional folly</u>. London: Routledge, 1982.