PERFORMANCE AND THE LIMITS OF WRITING

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> Language is a physical act. It's something which involves your entire body—not just your head. Words are spells which an actor consumes and digests—and through digesting creates a performance on stage. Suzan-Lori Parks, *The America Play and Other Works.* (11)

I began using reader's theatre in English classes from the simple motive that I wanted students to engage more fully and actively in what they read. I expected that performing parts of texts would lead to greater understanding and that this greater understanding would be registered in more sophisticated writing. Students have taught me, however, that this formulation is entirely too simple. Performance activities certainly enhance writing and reading pedagogy, but at the same time performance also suggests the limits of what print can do. If all writing is in some sense disembodied, having the potential to erase the mode of its production by disconnecting itself from the hands that made it, performance restores the body to visibility. Whether composing scripts for performance or writing to make sense of what they have learned through performance, students tend to register this greater awareness of the human body in space and time, especially of the simultaneity of collective bodies in motion. Performance

extends an understanding of literacy beyond the narrowly linguistic, emphasizing the extent to which the body itself serves as a signifying modality, a modality that can signify in ways that exceed the limits of print. Using performance in the writing and reading classroom has challenged me to rethink how and why I teach as I do. Performance does not displace writing and reading in my classes, but it has come to function as another and important way of knowing, another way of making sense, another mode through which students develop critical literacy.

Performance as Disruptive Pedagogy

For all the talk, even playful talk, of performativity in current theory, pedagogical practice at the university level maintains a remarkable stillness of bodies. The pedagogical scene is traditionally scripted in such a way that professors who slip from behind podiums or emerge from the unbroken circuit of the circle risk making spectacles of themselves, while students are expected to stay remarkably still—watchers who do not expect to be watched in turn (except by one another), who trust in the presence of a fourth wall that gives them the semblance of privacy. In part, because English teachers are professionally text-bound, it may be difficult to notice the mobility and improvisation of classroom performance. Bringing theatre explicitly into the classroom, however, has the potential not only to make available for critical analysis the roles scripted through conventional pedagogical practice, but more broadly to make visible the multiple, overlapping, sometimes conflicting roles socially available to us in the everyday. Explicit theatricality has the potential to disrupt the apparently placid surface of the same, making more available for creative use the *play* of difference.

Theatre in the classroom is thus very much play within play allowing for a critical reflexivity about socially scripted roles, a critical reflexivity that has tended to be the preserve of teachers.

Students are more likely to be *told* about their social, cultural, or historically situated identities than to be invited to negotiate various understandings as social bodies operating in space and time. This pedagogical bias was brought home to me when I happened to tell a colleague about an undergraduate class I was teaching, a British literature course required of English majors. For over ten years, I have been using various kinds of performance in my college classes as part of an inquiry approach to learning, an approach that presumes the centrality of writing to learning, whether or not the course is specifically designated as "composition" or "writing intensive."[1] On this particular occasion, one group of students had performed the trial and beheading of Charles I. Based on their research that had, among other things, uncovered transcripts of the trial, they had composed a script and choreographed the classroom space to engage other class members in the complicated politics that had led to the beheading of England's monarch. At the culmination of the performance, Charles was dragged out of the classroom, and brought outside to a courtyard. As class members watched from the classroom windows, Charles was "beheaded," and a reddened Styrofoam head rolled. Class members were rather embarrassed to find themselves cheering—an embarrassment that led to an animated conversation not only about the role of regicide in England but also about the degree of our complicity in violence in our own world. As I carried the "bloodied" Styrofoam head back to my office, a colleague stopped to ask what I was up to. When, in my enthusiasm, I explained how effective the performance had been—how insightful students were through performance—my colleague dismissed the students' work as "mere spectacle."

What does this dismissive comment signal? On the one hand, the historical event, the regicide, was awe-full spectacle. But my colleague was suggesting something else, that there was something inappropriate, perhaps even wasteful about students engaged in

such "play-acting." But what makes student performance "mere spectacle" and a professor lecturing to groups of (apparently passive) bodies not so? What makes one performance "serious" and intellectually sustainable and the other excessive? If students had only read about the trial and then written research papers about the regicide, would that have been more appropriately serious? Would they have learned more about this pivotal event in English history? Students did library research, they did recompose what they found through this research in the form of a script and then again as a performance, and they wrote a "debriefing" paper. Indeed, as group members reported, they felt that they had to know the history more thoroughly in order to compose a convincing performance.

Yet, to come to understanding through the collective work of an ensemble of bodies appears somehow transgressive. In Suzan-Lori Parks's terms, language is always a physical act, involving the whole body, "not just your head" (11). Performance, in particular, brings that physicality to the fore, not simply as a matter of seeing, but as a matter of the *estrangement* of ordinary bodies operating outside expectation.[2] Indeed, it is the proximity of the ordinary and the strange that disrupts the tendency to turn "ordinary" bodies into static types. But because university teaching historically has bracketed the body, put it *officially* out of play, bringing physicality into the classroom as an explicit part of teaching is at once a violation of long-standing decorums and a potentially powerful opportunity for learning for teacher and student.[3]

Michael Heuvel has suggested that performance is "grounded in a temporality written within an aesthetic and semiotic framework that includes theatricality and spectacle." And yet, he adds, "these are just the attributes teachers are most often asked to suppress when they teach drama as literature" (160–1). I would extend Heuvel's critique beyond the domain of teaching drama, to say

that the dominant modes of pedagogical practice in the academy—whatever the subject matter—reserve the stage for the teacher, so that theatricality and spectacle are almost exclusively the professor's preserve. To give over something of the professor's prerogative—to step away from center stage—risks creating an unseemly, *unauthorized* spectacle. We sometimes characterize unauthorized spectacle, interestingly, in terms of the student who "acts out." A college student is supposed to be well-schooled enough to avoid "acting out," but rather to sit respectfully having ceded over meaning-making authority to the teacher (at least for the span of the class). Student-composed performance in the classroom invites students to act and reflect upon that acting, and as such has the potential to make the performativity of all teaching and learning more visible. That we act according to socially (and historically) available scripts suggests that we can act differently, and such a realization might lead to altered scripts for the classroom and beyond.

Writing Performance/Performing Reading

Performance can encompass a broad spectrum of activities ranging from the relative formality and explicit theatricality of the stage to the everyday performance of versions of self. Performance pedagogy can productively draw from the full spectrum of performativity. I regularly include in my courses student-composed work (such as the group-composed performance of the regicide)—as well as text-based readers' theatre, and each kind of performance tends to spill over in such a way that the everydayness of performativity becomes more visible and thus open to analysis, critique, and even celebration. With all kinds of performance, students in my classes produce a fair amount of writing. They write to prepare themselves for performance, to research and compose or recompose scripts, to share background information with other class members, and in response to their

own and others' performances. This is writing to learn at its most dynamic. As Charles Schuster has noted, students discover through performance that written texts—whether student-generated or by "recognized" authors—are not static entities, but can be remade through the students' physical and "writerly" performances (137). No single way to tell the tale emerges, but a variety of possibilities are tried out, constructed out of what students find in their research, from what they already know from living in the world, and from the generic conventions available in the culture for performance of various kinds. This is a powerful realization and leads in most cases to students' best writing. But there is also a kind of knowledge production possible in performance that does not simply augment linguistic forms. Indeed, at times the physical and temporal nature of performance makes visible the limitations of text-bound language. In Alan Read's terms, writing can "offend the corporeality"—the body-ness—as well as the non-linearity of performance "by its limited range of representational forms" (13). Conversely, performance—the whole body engaged in time and space—exceeds the stasis of print.

Michael Heuvel suggests that "conventional forms of reading have become so naturalized in literature classes that we have lost sight of the possibility that alternative modes of sense making may exist" (159). While reader-response theories put pressure on conventional notions of reading, emphasizing the reader's active role in making any text mean, the dominant modes still emphasize the "inertia of consumption" (Read 139). Pedagogically this means that students are being told what sense to make of a text as if (despite plenty of theoretical ink to the contrary) the text were static, as if it had a controllable meaning to yield to the properly trained reader. In Heuvel's terms, drama—a creature of temporality—might allow students and teachers to trouble conventional reading practices. It is not simply drama as text that has this potential, however, but more fundamentally performance

as itself, knowledge-making in motion. Any performance is both a physicalizing of understanding(s) and an ensemble of parts, of motions, and of space, that exceeds any single embodiment. No one person controls the ensemble, and perhaps for that reason it is threatening to more traditional univocal forms of teaching.

Perhaps it is not surprising to find some of the most fully articulated performance pedagogy coming out of progressive education with its Deweyan emphasis on active, purposeful knowing, and out of critical pedagogies aimed at increasing the critical agency of learners. More recent performativity theory has paid little explicit attention to pedagogy, but it can nonetheless extend the work of critical pedagogy, especially through its attention to issues of identity. Tracing such a genealogy—from progressivism to critical pedagogy to performativity—allows me to reflect on students' creative capacity to develop critical literacy through multiple ways of knowing and, by so doing, to make a case for performance in the classroom.[4]

Performance and Progressivism: Viola Spolin

In the American context, theatre and pedagogy came together across the ideological terrain best described in terms of Deweyan progressivism, and against the backdrop of depression-era social programs. One influential figure who helped to articulate a community-based, progressive performance pedagogy is Viola Spolin, who is frequently referred to as the originator of theatre gaming, a form of creative group play. In the 1920s, Spolin was a student in a school of creative drama run by Neva Boyd, founder of the Recreational Training School at Chicago's Hull House. Later, in the late '30s and early '40s, Spolin served as drama supervisor for the Chicago Works Progress Administration Recreational Project.[5] Recreational projects, comprising only a tiny portion of the overall WPA budget, included physical education, social recreation (e.g., dancing, checkers, picnics), and cultural

recreation. Drama—plays, marionettes, puppetry, vaudeville, and radio broadcasting—all fell within this latter category (*United States* 3–4). Spolin worked with adults who had little or no experience with the theatre and yet who were themselves to become teachers and/or directors involved with neighborhood work (Spolin *vii*). In addition, she was also working with neighborhood groups—children and adults—with whom she developed many of the theatre games collected in her *Improvisation for the Theater* (1963), a book that would later come to serve as "a bible for transformational training in the sixties and seventies" and that was influential in the development of feminist theatre (Keyssar 187 n.3). Spolin was an important force in shaping Chicago's Compass and Second City players (training ground later for Saturday Night Live performers). Working with her son, Paul Sills, in the 1950s, she developed a particular approach to participatory, improvisatory theatre. She has continued to develop theatre projects, and has been recognized for her work by the National Council of Teachers of English, the Secondary School Theater Association, and the Children's Theater Association (Spolin *Theater Games* n. pag.).

Spolin offers a corrective to those who think improvisation means pedagogical irresponsibility. She developed a disciplined process through which "actors created and altered the world in front of the audience, relying on their own resources of body, voice and imagination" (Keyssar 55). Spolin understood that if participants could concentrate their "energies on playing [a] game," they would lose their "self-consciousness and perform naturally and spontaneously." The challenge was to develop a game in such a way that it would solve what Spolin called "a theater problem"—what to do with one's hands, how to show grief, how to use the body rather than words to speak—and to do so "organically and uncoercively" (Sweet *xvii*). Spolin's is "an especially impermanent brand of theatre—one which lives in the fleeting moment" (Sweet

12) because it is comprised of "whoever shows up" (Sills qtd. in Sweet 14). To the extent that classroom dynamic is also always dependent on "whoever shows up," whoever signs up for a course, and to the extent that class members "play off" the other players in the room, this impermanent brand of improvisational theatre bears affinity to classroom practice.

Spolin's approach to what might be called populist or lay theatre is grounded on the assumption that participants have multiple kinds of knowledge, but that they often lack resources and opportunity to use their knowledge or to recognize it as useful in their terms. Spolin's concern then is to assist participants in developing a stronger sense of their own agency in the world, and to do so she articulates a particular role for the teacher. The teacher is literally to the side: "side coaching" is "an assist given by [the] teacher-director to the student-actor during the solving of a problem to help him keep focus; a means of giving a student-actor self-identity within the theater environment" (392). Paradoxically, in this version of lay theatre, "no one teaches anyone anything," in the sense of direct or didactic instruction. This does not mean that the teacher is absent or withholding of her knowledge. Rather the teacher-director's approach is remarkably relational. She is not divested of her expertise or her authority, but she is participating in the process without holding center stage and without controlling interpretive possibilities. This is a particularly challenging role for the university teacher to imagine, if that teacher conceives of himself or herself as responsible first to a text and secondarily to students. In Spolin's terms, the teacher-director may have ways in, processes for making meaning, but she does not control what meanings will be made. Her primary responsibility is to the participants as they produce a collective assemblage, rather than to an already existing product (a stabilized text) that exists independent of and prior to the participants.

Just as the teacher's role is relational, so, too, is the role of the student-actor, whose "self-identity" is necessarily social and physical. Thus, "any game worth playing is highly social and has a problem that needs solving within it" (Spolin *Improvisation* 5). The problem is solved not by the individual in isolation, but by "an artistic group relationship" through "physicalization": "material is presented on a physical, non-verbal level as opposed to an intellectual or psychological approach" (Spolin *Improvisation* 15). It is physical and sensory, and as such taps into ways of knowing not usually privileged in traditional schooling, especially at the university level (cf. Gardner). Spolin's concept of interactional physicalization is particularly useful in thinking about how students come to know through performance. I am less inclined than Spolin to read kinesthetic or bodily understanding as "opposed to" the intellectual, but it does appear as other than the linearity of litero-centric knowledge. As Krondorfer and Bates have noted, when students create meaning through performance, they are drawing on each individual's experiences, but they are also constructing a public and communal ensemble that is greater than the sum of its parts (237).

It might help to illustrate this process through an example. In a course I taught on contemporary literature—an elective that can satisfy a secondary certification requirement—students performed Suzan-Lori Parks's *Imperceptible Mutabilities of the Third Kingdom*, a play that attempts to make a special kind of history. As Parks explains,

> because so much of African-American history has been unrecorded, dismembered, washed out, one of my tasks as playwright is to—through literature and the special strange relationship between theatre and real-life—locate the ancestral burial ground, dig for bones, find bones, hear the bones sing, write it down. (4)

In performing "Part 2: Third Kingdom" and "Third Kingdom (Reprise)," a group of five students was faced with a text that offered minimal stage directions and few of the literary road signs they had come to expect as readers. Even granting that all texts need to be activated, actualized through reading (reading is itself, in this sense, always a performance), this text especially requires animation. Dialogue, flat on the page, appeared foreign, almost gibberish to class members, and phrases seemed to follow a logic, at best, of non sequitur.[6] If a text—any text—functions as a kind of warp for a performance web—as Cecily O'Neill usefully suggests—Parks's text offers a particularly knotty and loose surface on which to work (19). The characters in this part of the play include Kin-Seer, Us-Seer, Shark-Seer, Soul-Seer, and Over-Seer. Nothing is written in the text about how these characters (if they *are* characters) are to be arranged in space, how they sound or stand, what they wear or carry, what they look like. Left literally to their own devices by the text, the students struggled to get the calcified words off the page, to recompose them as much through their bodies as through the words as written. After much discussion and trying out of possibilities, the group decided to play their scene by arranging themselves in the shape of a boat. They understood the scene to be recalling in almost mythic terms the slave trade (hence, the Overseer).

The students arranged the classroom with the desks pushed back to form a ragged horseshoe: in the thrust-space thus opened up, each Seer sat on the floor, except one, the Over-Seer, who sat above on a chair facing the others. Over-Seer thus materialized the point of the helm and at the same time literalized her character's name. As if someone were beating out time—or calling out the commands for the pull of the oars, the players read their lines—heads down, with flat, measured voices. Their voices were ceremonial, chant-like. The simultaneity of sound and motion in space produced what writing by itself cannot. In the brief in-class

writing that preceded the playing of the scene, the majority of class members said they were baffled by the play. But as soon as the boat materialized before them, there were sounds of recognition from the rest of the class and from me. We were startled to find that the simple arrangement of bodies and the rhythm and simultaneity of voices signified more than the words on the page, indeed, exceeded the words on the page. Once the chant began (there is nothing in the text that calls for chant, or calls the words a *chant*), what had appeared as recalcitrant words on the page began to coalesce into something more like dance, the language of music and motion combined.

When the scene was complete, the players reflected on how they had prepared for their performance, noting that it was not until they had gotten themselves into the shape of a boat—improvisationally—that they felt they had "got it." To use Spolin's terms, they had to physicalize as a collective body, and then they could understand through the body how an imagined/divided/new-forming "soulf" (self/soul) could be made. In repeating for an audience what they had improvised as a small group, the performers said they had a sense of a wider scene, with the audience as players who had to participate in making the kind of history Parks calls for. The players wanted to perform as if they were the bones singing so the audience could feel it in *their* bones, so that they could feel their own connection to this history.

This was not the only sense that could have been made of the scene. Indeed, other groups borrowed from this section of the play as preamble or as part of their own scenes and thus made the play (and made the play make sense) differently. There is nothing new in saying that a play can yield different performances. But students report that they have rarely had the experience of making the differences themselves. Further, students report that they were startled to find how the different material assemblages shifted what was there to be seen. Students notice both the importance of

physical presence, the solidity of who is playing and the physical circumstances, but also the ephemerality of the performance. The group performing the slave boat did not simply reproduce what they had improvised, but found that their performance shifted *in performance* before an audience.

The scripted passivity that can characterize the role of student as audience in the lecture hall is fractured through such a performance. The audience is part of the performance—not only because all class members are responsible for part of the play and because some groups script the audience into the scene—but because the student actors play off the audience, and the audience plays off the actors. Alan Read suggests that without this active engagement between audience and performer, performance would remain in a "private, therapeutic domain." It would remain "meditative rather than expressive" (93). Even the apparently silent audience is full of motion and noise, as Read points out. These "cacophonies of witness," which are, of course, possible also in reading (Read 140), are more apparent and visible in the intimacy of classroom performance; and they allow for a dramatic sense of relationship that is not simply "there" in the written text.

It is important to emphasize that the student writing that follows multiple performances is more likely to register an understanding of the multiplicity of interpretations generated out of various kinds of difference, even as it necessarily seeks to hold steady what is fleeting. Students have been more likely to play with form, with the iconic possibilities of print, in order to visually re-present in their writing the simultaneity of overlap possible in the performance of dialogue. And, they have been more likely to position themselves spatially and relationally in their written texts, in the sense that they locate a stance or point of view as itself necessarily contingent, sometimes as communally generated, sometimes as in relation to what others have said or done. They are remarkably generous in attributing generative

ideas to other group members. Documentation of one's sources, in other words, takes on a more strongly personal and ethical dimension. All of this is indeed valuable. But the students also articulate their awareness that what they learn through writing is necessarily not the same as what they have learned through the physicalization of performance—not lesser, but also not the same—and this recognition is not the same as an acknowledgement of the failings of the individual writer, the inadequacy of his or her "skill," but a powerful realization of one condition of writing.

Physicalization has the potential to make more visible the extent to which meaning making happens always *in relation.* While much has been written about the extent to which writing is always in some sense social, students' experience of writing for the most part is that it is profoundly private and personal (cf. Brodkey). Physicalization, in getting interpretation out of the closet, has the potential to nudge writing a bit closer to the sunlight. Although, as conceptualized by Spolin, physicalization is rooted in notions of progressive individualism, from the outset the concept emphasized "group relationship" and as such involved something more than a simple pluralism, more than what Elizabeth Grosz calls a "multiplicity of singularities" or isolates (199). As students shift in role, speak multiply, or in the case of Kin-Seer, *et al.,* speak in some sense as a proliferation of processes that coalesce uneasily as the hailed "ME SOULF" of Park's play, physicalization can enable students to experience meaning or understanding as produced collectively and as interconnected in time and space (of. Braidotti).

Progressive Performance Pedagogy in Transit: Dorothy Heathcote

Theatrical expression has been used, as Gavin Bolton argues, "as a way for the individual to 'find himself.'" But, "of all the arts,

drama is a collective experiencing, celebrating, or commenting . . . not self-expression . . . [rather] a form of group symbolism" (154). Those dissatisfied with the narrowly expressivist tendencies in some forms of progressive education have found in the British educator Dorothy Heathcote's "drama of learning" a pedagogy that is more explicitly relational and communal. Now an Emerita Professor, Heathcote taught drama for thirty-six years in the Institute of Education at the University of Newcastle-upon-Tyne. Her training came not from the academy, but from the theatre. She left school at the age of fourteen, first working in a mill and later, during World War II, training as an actress. This early experience led Heathcote to be critical of decontextualized learning and the reliance on transmission models of learning too common in schooling. Instead, she has—together with her frequent collaborator, Gavin Bolton—developed an approach to learning that encourages students "to encounter challenges and [make] decisions from position[s] of increasing authority and knowledge" (O'Neill Forward *ix*).

Heathcote asserts that learners "can never be mere receivers 'told' about knowledge." They must have some purpose for their learning. Thus, "knowledge becomes information, evidence, source material, specification, records, guidelines, regulations, theories, formulas, and artifacts, all of which are to be interrogated." In Heathcote's terms, "this is an active, urgent, purposeful view of learning, in which knowledge is to be operated on, not merely to be taken in" (Heathcote and Bolton 32). Such a *rhetorical* view of knowledge requires that students "recognize what they are learning" (Heathcote and Bolton 16), or as Betty Jane Wagner puts it, performance literally brings out what the participants already know "but don't yet know they know" (13). But such re-cognizing is not simply in the service of individuality. As Bolton explains, for Heathcote, "neither art nor education are about subjectivity. She does not automatically offer children

freedom to express themselves, believing that the right to express oneself must be earned . . . children must work for autonomy" (154).

Heathcote's pedagogy might seem alien to those who think children (and adults) learn best when they are free of constraints. But Heathcote seems to recognize that there are always constraints defined by the very material conditions with which one works and that to live responsibly in the world one has to learn to work creatively with constraints. In the classroom, this requires redefining the traditional relationship between teacher and student. For Heathcote, the teacher is not to the side as she was in Spolin's approach, but in the midst. For the sake of the performance and in order to make room for the claiming of autonomy, however, Heathcote performatively divests herself of some element of her authority as expert. This process, the "mantle of the expert" approach, "involves a reversal of the conventional teacher-student role relationship in which the students draw on the knowledge and expertise of the teacher." The student is placed "in the position of being 'the one who knows' or the expert in a particular branch of knowledge" (Heathcote and Herbert 173). While Heathcote literally means that the teacher assumes a fictional role within the performance—and that is central to her approach—I am more interested in the extent to which any time a teacher steps aside—"gets out of the way," as Janet Emig puts it (132)—there is a certain fiction created about a shift in power. Getting out of the way does not have to be, as Emig makes clear, a matter of self-abnegation, but it is a matter of making room for students to play other parts than those they have been traditionally assigned (132). As more recent theories of performativity suggest, by performing the role of the one who knows, the student becomes the one who knows. Not a matter of "faking it," it is a matter of recognizing the ways in which we learn to embody

socially available roles, and as will be discussed later, to push against the limitations of those available roles.

Heathcote asserts that theatre is necessarily socially-based, and she thus concentrates on groups, rather than on the individual child. The desired end of such theatre in the classroom is conceptualized through the language of the autonomous subject, but autonomy is itself conceptualized as learning to perform socially-available roles. It is not then a big step from the progressive pedagogy of trying on roles to a critical pedagogy involving reflexive understanding of the performance of the everyday.

Although Heathcote's work is clearly grounded in progressivism, Sharon Grady sees in Heathcote's method the potential to push the reflective process beyond its "harmonizing purpose" of teaching children to get along towards a closer examination of subjective experience in order to challenge the privileging of such subjectivity as the basis of truth (18). This potential is more evident, as Grady demonstrates, when Heathcote is read alongside Augusto Boal, the Brazilian theatre activist.

Performance and Critical Pedagogy: Augusto Boal

Akin to Spolin's community-based theatre, Boal's approach to theatre that grew out of local circumstance and was intended to actively engage participants. As director of the Arena Theatre in Sao Paolo from 1956 to 1971, Boal and his collaborators broke from European theatrical tradition in a number of ways. Perhaps most striking was their response to the repressiveness of the military regimes that ruled Brazil in the '60s. Rather than following more familiar agitprop techniques to rouse audiences to political action, Boal developed a new format, forum theatre, in order to provide spectators with the opportunity to "discover their own solutions to their collective problems" (Schutzman 2).

Audience members are invited to stop the action of the performance when they feel they have solutions to propose. Audience members then "physically replace the protagonist in the scene and improvise their alternative action, thus rehearsing for social change" (Schutzman 2).

Boal's *Theatre of the Oppressed*, first published in English in 1979, is indebted to Paulo Freire's work in critical literacy and locates him within the broad frame of community-based critical pedagogy. Through the annual Theatre of the Oppressed Conference in Iowa and such workshops as that sponsored by the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF) at Goucher College in the summer of 1998, Boal has shared his work with theatre activists in North America and Europe. As the WILPF brochure suggests, Boal's workshops are "designed to bring the audience into active relationship with the performed event [and to serve as] training ground for action not only in these performance forms, but for action in life" (n. pag.).

If progressivism placed individual needs above the collective—even as it recognized the extent to which the individual is always learning in relation to others and even as it saw social change as coming from the fully actualized individual working with others—critical pedagogy has shifted the emphasis toward the social, focusing on developing the critical tools necessary for transforming society. Patrick Shannon sees critical literacy, in particular, as involving the ability to learn about ourselves, our "lives, history, culture, and contradictions; to make connections between and among [our] lives . . . within a social structure; and to act upon this new knowledge in order to bring about social justice and equality" (149). "More than just an attitude," Shannon explains, "critical literacy provides a language—a system of concepts and logic—with which to examine the past, present, and future" (149). Boal, however, extends critical literacy beyond the

linguistic to emphasize the human body as itself a crucial signifying modality and as a means for transforming the social space (cf. Schutzman).

Boal conceptualizes part of this process in terms of the notion of *metaxis* or "the state of being critically aware of yourself on two levels—as actor or doer and as analyzer or critical observer" (Grady 18). A contemporary, disequilibrating work such as Suzan-Lori Parks's *Imperceptible Mutabilities* may seem more likely to produce *metaxis.* But it is not the work *per se*, but the experience of performance—of using the body, as Boal makes clear—that has the potential to produce (at least) double consciousness, when students can inhabit at least two perspectives at once. In my experience, a canonical text such as William Congreve's *Way of the World* (c. 1700) can provide the occasion for such critical reflexivity, such double consciousness. *Way of the World* is a particularly difficult play for students to read flat on the page. Little action and a seeming excess of verbal display threaten to defeat even the most eager of undergraduate readers. Through performance, students invest the vizards, the masks, of Congreve's play with significance not necessarily mandated by the "text itself." In part because students bring in oddments from their everyday lives to serve as props and elements of costuming, signaling something of their own—albeit recontextualized, reappropriated, but sometimes bringing in the whisper of lives they live elsewhere—the permeability between the play and the everyday is accentuated. And such permeability can literalize a witty doubleness of self: the "this is me outside class" and "this is me in character" inviting a reflexivity not generated by the written text by itself.

In addition to the reflexivity generated by the visible artifacts of the everyday, there is also a reflexivity compounded by the doubling of roles. For *Way of the World*, as with most other performance projects, the size and gender distribution within any

class or small group is such that it is necessary for students not only to play more than one part, but for men to play women, and women to play men. As O'Neill observes, the necessity of doubling up on roles has the potential to heighten the awareness of theatricality, calling attention to the theatrical process (*Drama Worlds* 75). To add gender-crossing to doubling intensifies the "highly charged metatheoretical moment . . . in which actors and audience share their explicit understanding of the double pretense of theatre" (75). The permeability between theatre and world is exposed, making room for a more explicit exploration of "alternative identities, capacities, and possibilities" (75).

In a debriefing following one group's performance of *Way of the World*, several women remarked that women in our culture have greater latitude in dress than men. While women could dress "like men" without much comment ("we all can wear blue jeans"), men dressing like women always seemed to be an occasion for joking and sometimes cruelty. The humor (and the cruelty) was seen as deriving from a stereotyping of gender. These women had worried that the men playing female parts in the play would settle for stereotype to protect themselves from the ridicule of playing female roles. One character, Lady Wishfort, seemed a particularly easy target. Lady Wishfort, as her name implies, wishes for "it," but she is no longer a "beauty" with her painted face cracking and peeling like wallpaper. Her indecorous longings lead her to be duped into contracting with a man who turns out to be an already married servant. She is thus the stuff of misogynist mockery. But the male student who played Lady Wishfort, his Lady Godiva wig notwithstanding, played the part so that for the first time in my experience with the play students saw Lady Wishfort with sympathy, saw that she could be read as a character culturally written into an impossible position. This was not a humorless performance; students did not convert Congreve's comedy into mawkish melodrama or political treatise. But there was a catch in

the humor that the class noticed, an awareness in the performance that the "mask" Lady Wishfort wears (like the unlikely wig worn by the student performer) could conceal more than a pitiful old woman. The discussion moved from the character to the actor, to what allowed a man "to see into" a woman like Lady Wishfort, and how playing the part allowed for a freedom not allowed men (or not felt to be allowed) who played male roles, whether in the play or in the larger culture.

Lesley Ferris has argued that cross-dressing in performance "forces the reader/spectator to see multiple meanings in the very act of reading itself": "Unlike the stationary, handheld, literary text, a performance text operates in dimensions of real time and real space. Its primary mode of communication is not the spoken or written word; communication occurs through the use of the human body: its movement, gestural language, physicality, costume" (8). If gender is among the earliest aspects of body language we learn to read—and we are taught to read that language in nearly unwavering binary terms—then theatre that unsettles that language suggests that bodies might speak a broader range of possibility, and the participants in such theatre are invited into a reflexivity that involves conceding to "multiple meanings, to ambiguities of thought, feeling, categorization" and a refusing of closure (Ferris 8). On one level this is "simply" a matter of empathy. Consistent with the goals of progressivist education, one would want students to feel sympathy for Lady Wishfort as a fellow human being. But pushing empathy towards critical reflexivity requires more than seeing the universal in the singular (more than finding the common humanity in Lady Wishfort at the risk of canceling out disruptive difference). Theatrical cross-dressing, as Ferris puts it, provides "one way of playing with liminality and its multiple possibilities and extending that sense of the possible." While such play often "reinforc[es] the social mores and status quo," it, nonetheless, "carries with it the possibility for

exposing that liminal moment, that threshold of questioning, the slippery sense of a mutable self" (9).

In doubling parts and in gender crossing as part of theatre, students enact a mutability that they live everyday but a mutability that might not otherwise be available for critical scrutiny. Clearly, the emphasis on vizards in *Way of the World* is not the same as a postmodern mutable self of the sort embodied in the performance of Kin-Seer *et al.* in Parks's play. But, the inevitability of materializing, physicalizing such mutability through performance not only connects the performance to the everyday, but provides a bridge across an historical romanticism that often prevents undergraduates from seeing any way into or out of an "old" play such as Congreve's. Notions of the unalterability of the authentic self (like notions of a stable text with a single correct reading) are so deeply installed in our cultural vocabulary (morphing notwithstanding), that it is difficult to see past it, and texts (and selves) are rather too readily dismissed if they fail to measure up to the impossibility of immutability. Performance can operate pedagogically as a way in and out of text, but that text by itself does not govern the material ensemble; it is only part of it. It is not that text does not matter; but it matters, or is made to matter, in the context of a larger conversation. Any given performance is a possible interpretation that is more difficult to perform in writing to the extent that writing gives the illusion of uni-dimensional permanence and stability.

Boal sees theatre as the "first human invention": "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." Through this seeing *in situ* comes possibility because "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 and where it is not, and imagines where it could go" (13). Such reflexivity makes one both

"participant and percipient" (Bolton 155). In the kinds of performance pedagogy I've been looking at on a continuum from progressive to critical, students move from composer of the scene to player of the scene, to analyzer, to audience, and they thus have the opportunity to be inside and outside what more traditionally might be taken as the theatrical frame. But from Boal's perspective, they—we—are always *in* theatre because "the human being 'is' theatre" (13). And it is this move that connects critical pedagogy rather provocatively with performativity theory, theory that considers the extent to which we are always "performing" versions of self.

Performativity Theory and Critical Literacy

When children performing in a school play break the frame to wave at a parent, they are enacting an awareness of the (at least) double role they play as both Sally Smith, third grader, and Abraham Lincoln in glued-on cotton beard. For older players, especially in classes where students have developed some sense of each other (or of their classroom personae) in the course of the semester, the roles they compose as part of an inquiry project or for readers' theatre oscillate with their classroom roles in such a way that reflexivity is perhaps more apparent than it might be with "disciplined" actors who are taught to more fully inhabit a role, to block out the audience (and resist waving to friends and family unless instructed to do so).

The concept of doubling has already been discussed in regard to costuming or props that come from the students' everyday lives and in regard to gender crossing. Dissonance between classroom personae and performance role also has the potential to foster a sense of double consciousness. A particularly powerful instance of such double consciousness occurred in the performance of another scene from Parks' *Imperceptible Mutabilities*. In performing "Part 3: Open House," a group of students decided to try out the ironic

possibilities of having one of the more outspoken left-of-center students in class play the role of Mr. Charles, whom the students perceived as a racist. The student, a white man, chosen by the group to play the part came into the classroom dressed in a Ku Klux Klan sheet and hood. This costuming was not scripted by the text, but the group wanted to accentuate what they thought to be only implied in the text. Mr. Charles is the father of Blanca and Anglor, whose names suggest that they are white, Anglo-Saxons; and Charles is the master of Aretha, who is something of caretaker, housekeeper, and nanny, and whose name called up for the students the African-American singer, Aretha Franklin. Whatever the students had planned to happen for their performance, that plan was disrupted when the student playing Mr. Charles felt compelled to remove the KKK hood and announce that he really was not such a person, that he did not share the views of the character, and that he felt acutely uncomfortable wearing the KKK garb. He stepped out of character at several points, as if to remind the audience of the "not me" of the role.

In discussion following the performance, the student actor said that he had not expected to feel himself implicated in the role and that it would be clear to anybody that such a role would be anathema to him. But once he strode into the classroom, leapt up onto the teacher's desk in full KKK regalia, and worked to talk Aretha out of existence ("The book says you [Aretha] expire. No option to renew" [45]), he had to face a classroom—of whites and blacks—as if he were this character. In some sense, because he was not a professional actor, but a member of a class, he felt he had to break role and say "this is not me." By doing so, as students in the audience said, he heightened the racism of the role and forced the audience to think of this as more than "simply" play-acting. Several students said that to simply read silently the words on the page, "by oneself," allowed either a degree of distancing and

denial, or the possibility of keeping private any complicity one might feel with the racism of the character. But to perform the role, in the flesh and in public, led this student at least to ask "to what extent me?" and "to what extent do I have a choice?" This kind of performance that leaves open such breaking of frame and that allows a public persona to remove the mask makes possible a reflexivity involving simultaneously "complicity and critique" (Hutcheons qtd. in Grady 18).

As noted earlier, recent work on performativity has thus far paid relatively little explicit attention to pedagogy, but it can, nonetheless, be used to extend this notion of reflexivity still further. At its broadest, performativity signals "the ways that identities are constructed iteratively through complex citational processes" (Parker and Sedgwick 2). We borrow or cite from the socially available ways of being that are all around us and thus construct versions of self. Everyday identity is embodied through the enacting of norms from, for example, the "initiatory performative, 'It's a girl!' . . . [to] the sanction, 'I pronounce you man and wife'" (Butler 232). Judith Butler's qualification of the concept of performativity is particularly useful. In *Bodies that Matter*, Butler revisits the notion of gender performativity in order both to resist the tendency to use the idea as a way to restore a humanist, freely volitional subject (as say it might be conceptualized in progressivist notions of education) and, at the same time, to try to imagine "gender practices as sites of critical agency" (akin to practices imagined or enacted through critical pedagogy) (*x*).

To say that gender (or any other identity label) is performative is not to say that one chooses gender (or race or class or ethnicity) as one might choose a set of clothes, nor is it to say that identity performance is somehow artificial, if by that one means that it is a false front that covers some Truth. Butler notes that "our customary notions of 'construction' seem to get in the way of

understanding" the claim that sexuality is materially constructed through "the ritualized repetition of norms":

> For surely bodies live and die; eat and sleep; feel pain, pleasure; endure illness and violence; and these 'facts,' one might skeptically proclaim, cannot be dismissed as mere construction. Surely there must be some kind of necessity that accompanies these primary and irrefutable experiences. And surely there is. But their irrefutability in no way implies what it might mean to affirm them and through what discursive means. (Butler *x–xi*)

Butler proposes an understanding of construction as "constitutive constraint" (a notion that might be read in relation to Heathcote's emphasis on responsibility) to help us think of "constructions without which we would not be able to think, to live, to make sense at all, those which have acquired for us a kind of necessity." If such constraints produce both "the domain of intelligible bodies" as well as "a domain of unthinkable, abject, unlivable bodies," might one "alter the very terms that constitute the 'necessary domain of bodies'" (*xi*)? Might these domains of bodies serve, in other words, as sites for critical agency? For such agency to be anything other than delusional, however, Butler has to think the paradox of the materiality of bodies:

> The practice by which gendering occurs, the embodying of norms, is a compulsory practice, a forcible production, but not for that reason fully determining. To the extent that gender is an assignment, it is an assignment which is never carried out according to expectation, whose addressee never quite inhabits the ideal s/he is compelled to approximate. Moreover, this embodying is a repeated process. And one might construe repetition as precisely that which

undermines the conceit of voluntarist mastery designated by the subject in language. (231)

Possibility appears precisely in that space opened up by the slippage between expectation and execution of the identity assignment. Beyond the inadvertence of the inevitable "failures" to execute identity assignments fully (as if such could be fully specified), Butler suggests there may be some room for agency. Or, put differently, the very "failures" are themselves citable. The very slippage becomes part of the available social repertoire. That none of us ever quite "performs" precisely according to whatever cultural scripts are out there means that there is greater variability, greater difference from which one might draw than is necessarily acknowledged in the culture. This is not simply a matter of choice, but Butler suggests it is also not simply a matter of inevitable, lock-step reproduction of socially mandated identities.

To bring into visibility the variability in the performance of cultural assignments is a way to think further about critical reflexivity. Butler suggests that there may be a convergence of versions of performativity—the everydayness of performing identity overlapping with a performative use of discourse (writing, reading, speaking), as "modes of citationality in which the compulsory character of certain social imperatives becomes subject of a more promising deregulation" (231). The everyday citation of slippage merges in Butler's analysis with acting out, with "hyperbolic performance," with the theatrical that she argues cannot be separated from the political. Such political theatre makes visible some aspects of identity and necessarily conceals others; in some sense what is revealed is legible by reference to what is concealed (Butler 232–234). There is something risky in such theatre, but there is also at the same time a kind of protection afforded by the explicit cover of playing a role, of being in costume. There is risk, for example, in acting in such a way that

one feels one's complicity in the racism of a Mr. Charles, and there is risk in the male student playing Lady Wishfort.

But the explicit theatricality of such performance also allows for trying on of possibilities, embracing or retreating from a role, and the relatively safe exploration of implications of *being* this character. The literalizing, the acting out of what in its everydayness might otherwise go unnoticed, indeed is supposed to go unnoticed, is volatile business. But to the extent that it is structured (conventionalized in however an unconventional manner) as theatre business, it is a reminder of the me-but-not-me of acting, the believe-it-but-don't of theatre, and perhaps the potential fluidity of everyday identity as well.

Performance in these terms, as a making visible and acting out of the slippage between assignment and execution, can be seen as definitive of all pedagogy, as that space exactly where a kind of pedagogical agency occurs. It is thus not the dutiful completion of the assignment from which change comes—not from re-saying a script, whatever its cultural source, whether literally a play, or a source discovered in research, or roles determined by classroom decorum, or roles variously assigned in the larger culture—but from the reflexive, improvisational, tactical deployment of what one finds when the execution exceeds the assignment. Critical literacy depends on precisely such an active, innovative, and contextual use of language—whether in writing, reading, or speaking. And, that is what a performance pedagogy—emerging out of progressivism, critical pedagogy, and more recent performativity theory—has the potential to make corporeally available for critical work in the classroom. Spectacle indeed.

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NOTES

[1] For a full and rich discussion of inquiry, I recommend Barry Kroll's *Teaching Hearts and Minds*. Kroll explains that his goal as a teacher is not "to get students to *acquire* a body of information"; rather, he wants students "to *inquire* into the issues raised" by the readings in his course. He wants his students' inquiries to be "'reflective': grounded not in dogma, prejudice, or impulse, but based instead on analysis—on interrogative, comparative, and evaluative thinking." At the same time, Kroll—following Dewey—makes clear that such inquiry requires a fusion of intellect and emotion (10–11).

[2] The coinage, *enstrangement,* is Benjamin Sher's translation of Viktor Shklovsky's term more familiarly translated as "defamiliarization." Sher wants to signal how what has become routinized is made more complicated, made strange so that we notice it again (*xvii–xix*).

[3] It is important to note that all students, whatever their physical capabilities, can participate in theatre. In other words, part of the power of lay theatre is that one does not have to have a culturally valorized body to perform. Because students stage their own performances, they choose ways to accommodate all players. They may all remain seated; they may position themselves behind the audience or literally out of sight; they may read in chorus rather than expecting any one student to be put "on the spot." I have found my students to be remarkably generous with one another, structuring their performances not only to give space for experiment but also in some sense to protect their fellow players.

[4] "Genealogy" may imply that one idea or approach to performance makes way for another. This, however, is a genealogy that traces not an evolution but the progressive overlapping of approaches. At the time of this writing, each of the three figures I discuss—Spolin, Heathcote, and Boal—continue to contribute to theatre pedagogy.

[5] Boyd founded the Training School in order to assist inner-city and immigrant children "to adjust to the society in which they lived" through participation in traditional games (Sweet *xvii*). Spolin seems to have left behind the social engineering or social therapeutic language and intent of her mentor when she developed her approach to community theatre and retained the strong sense that through forms of play, adults and children could make meaning. An important and relevant critique of the extent to which middle-class values were installed in poor, working class and immigrant neighborhoods through the efforts of settlement houses is beyond the scope of this article. For present purposes, I am interested not in the language of "adjustment" used by Sweet to describe Boyd's project but in what Spolin did with the approach to using theatre for social work.

[6] One could explain Parks's language by noting her use of phonetic spelling—with the predominance of the schwa—"uh"—sound or her use of poetic and colloquial constructions. But such explanations only point out formal features and do not make the text *mean*. In fact, students could and did translate passages into their own dialects or into standard written English as part of their rehearsal process. "I dream up uh fish thats swallowin me and I dream up uh me that is then becamin that fish," for example, is rather simple to turn into standard written English. But the students found such translation to be beside the point. Meaning happened when the grapheme got off the page and became sound and motion. Importantly, as they played it, the schwa signaled as much as anything the centrality of breath as a living force.

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