Title
Inhabiting Theatre: The Implications of Space on Performance

Permalink
https://escholarship.org/uc/item/7w42z3ds

Author
Wade, Amelia Rose

Publication Date
2014

Peer reviewed|Thesis/dissertation
INHABITING THEATRE:

THE IMPLICATIONS OF SPACE ON PERFORMANCE

A thesis submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

In

THEATER ARTS

By

Amelia Wade

June 2014

The thesis of Amelia Wade is approved:

________________________________
Professor Paul Whitworth

________________________________
Professor James Bierman

________________________________
Professor David Cuthbert

Tyrus Miller
Vice Provost and Dean of Graduate Studies
## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Title Page.................................................................................................................................i

Table of Contents..................................................................................................................iii

List of Illustrations..................................................................................................................iv

Abstract......................................................................................................................................v

Inhabiting Theatre......................................................................................................................1
  The Language of Space.............................................................................................................1
  A Brief History of Performance Space...................................................................................4
  Space First...............................................................................................................................11

BarnStorm..............................................................................................................................12
  The Barn Theatre as a presentational space.................................................................13
  The Barn Theatre as a social space......................................................................................17
  BarnStorm 2013-2014...........................................................................................................19

The Last Croissant...................................................................................................................24
  Text.........................................................................................................................................25
  Audience.................................................................................................................................26
  Performance.............................................................................................................................30

Conclusion..................................................................................................................................34

Supplemental Materials............................................................................................................36
  Proposal for The Michael Becker Experience.....................................................................36
  Submission Form-BarnStorm Fall 2013..............................................................................38

Bibliography.............................................................................................................................40
LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

Fig 1. Outline of McCauley’s taxonomy of theatre space (McCauley, 25)

Fig 2. Ground plan of an ancient Greek amphitheatre (Wilson, 49)

Fig 3. Barn Theatre ground plan

Fig 4. Production still from 2010 production of Room, in the Barn Theatre (©Lauren Macadeag)

Fig 5. Picture of the Barn Theatre painted white (©David Murakami)

Fig 6. Production still from 2013 production of Dead Man’s Cellphone, in the Barn Theatre (©David Murakami)

Fig 7. Production still from 2013 production of The Importance of Being Earnest, in the Barn Theatre (©David Murakami)

Fig 8. Performance space for The Last Croissant in UCSC Upper Campus (©Amelia Wade)
ABSTRACT—INHABITING THEATRE:
THE IMPLICATIONS OF SPACE ON PERFORMANCE

By Amelia Wade

This research explores how plays and performances are affected by their physical location. I will use my experience as the Artistic Director of the BarnStorm student theatre company as well my site-specific experiments with *The Last Croissant* by Veronica Tjioe to investigate how bringing spatial consideration to the forefront affects a performance. I will also attempt to determine a reason for the recent mainstream popularization of this kind of non-standard performance space.
INHABITING THEATRE

THE LANGUAGE OF SPACE

When attempting to discuss the impact of theatrical space, the vocabulary invites an immense amount of confusion and disagreement. Gay McCauley, in her book *Space and Performance*, presents one of the main issues with defining space:

The temptation is to allow categories to proliferate with numerous subcategories and sub-sub categories in an attempt to account for every nuance and every application. The countertendency…is to simplify rigorously; the danger here is that important distinctions are submerged and one is left wanting to problematize every category. (McCauley, 24)

Though these difficulties exist in an attempt to categorize anything, the realm of theatrical spatial theory seems particularly plagued with these difficulties. So many different practitioners over the years have devised their own vocabulary to discuss space that we are left with a whole list of confusing and contradictory terms: space, place, theatrical space, performance space, dramatic space, on-stage, off-stage, mimetic space, diegetic space, etc. These terms are a result of the over-categorization that McCauley refers to.

McCauley’s own attempt to organize her own taxonomy presents a fairly clear structure of the aspects of theatre space that should be included in spatial analysis. I have included her complete outline (fig. 1) as an analytical basis. However, I will focus specifically on her definitions of social space, presentational space, and fictional space. Though her outline is effective for analysis of work performed in standard theatre buildings, the distinctions outlined in III-V are less applicable to the
site-specific and adapted spaces I will examine. Social, presentational, and fictional space and their interactions allow for broad applicability without over categorization.

In reference to the **social space** of the theatre, McCauley states, “the building, as it exists within or outside the urban space, in relation to other buildings…the connotations of its past history, its architectural design, and the kind of access it invites or denies, are all part of the experience of theatre for both practitioners and spectators” (McCauley, 24).

This social space can include elements that exist entirely outside the actual performance that is created in rehearsal. The lobby, the bar, the rehearsal room, the journey to the performance, even the toilets, are outside the realm of the performance, but still contribute to the audience experience and practitioner process in important ways. In this day and age, this social space even extends to the digital world, with theatre websites specifically built to shape the public perception of a company. The social framework placed around the

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>I. The Social Reality</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Theatre Space</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Audience Space</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Performance Space</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Practitioner Space</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rehearsal Space</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>II. The Physical/Fictional Relationship</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Stage Space</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Presentational Space</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fictional Place</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>III. Location and Fiction</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Onstage Fictional Place</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Offstage Fictional Place</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unlocalized in relation to Performance Space</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Localized in relation to Performance Space</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contiguous/Remote Spectrum</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Audience Off</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| IV. Textual Space                     |
|                                       |

| V. Thematic Space                     |
|                                       |
performance has its own intentions and implications, and as the first contact point for audiences and practitioners, obviously influences the perception of the performance.

McCauley defines **presentational space** as the area occupied by the actors and design elements of a production. This includes both the physical occupation of each individual element, as well as their interactions. This category of space is easiest to point to in a theatrical experience. While watching a play, an audience can see the tables and chairs placed on the stage, can witness the interactions between actors, can see their entrances and exits. From my experience, this is the space most explored in a rehearsal room and most discussed by an audience.

**Fictional space** is an area slightly more difficult to define. McCauley presents a number of subcategories in an attempt to clarify all the distinctions of fictional space. Her base level definition, though, simply says that the fictional space is the imagined space in which the action takes place, both onstage and off. In *Hamlet*, the fictional space is Elsinore Castle in Denmark. In *The Seagull*, it is the Russian country house. The fictional space is the world of the play that the directors, designers, and actors attempt to create within the presentational space.

Fictional space can also include locations referenced by characters that do not appear onstage. Oftentimes, action that advances the story of the play occurs in these offstage imagined spaces. To again use *Hamlet* as an example, at the beginning of Act V, Hamlet describes his interrupted journey to England and his time on the pirate ship. Through this discussion, the offstage imagined world become part of the overall world of the play.
All theatre contends, either consciously or unconsciously, with the intersection between these types of space. A very early and continuous discussion during in the creation of performance is how to bring an audience into a world that isn’t actually in front of them. Sets are built to look like the fictional space of the play. Actors develop ways to interact with the space as though they were really living within it. An actor playing a king will sit down in a chair and perform as if it were a throne. The director will decide where the imagined space extends, deciding that when an actor exits stage right, she is entering a ballroom, when in actuality she is walking to an empty wing space. If this world creation is effective, the audience then employs suspension of disbelief and agrees that the chair is a throne and stage right is the ballroom, though they rationally know neither is true.

Site-specific performance and theatre performed in non-standard theatre spaces destabilize these categories. This kind of performance explores the areas where the categories overlap and how that determines meaning in performance.

A BRIEF HISTORY OF PERFORMANCE SPACE

Since the 1960s and 70s, there has been an increasing trend towards the use of “non-traditional” theatre spaces in much of Western theatre. Allan Kaprow and the artists of the Happenings movement wanted to eliminate the concept of the frame with the intent to turn all events into theatre. Richard Schechner’s studies on Environmental Theatre worked towards a kind of total theatre, where the entire world of the production encompasses the audience and performers. Most recently, the advent of site-specific theatre has developed from these practices to create theatre
where the actual presentational location manipulates the meaning of the performance. Each of these terms is fraught with the same kind of debates as the terminology used to generally define space, which I referenced earlier.

While there are many disagreements over the exact characteristics of site-specific theatre, Mike Pearson and Michael Shanks offer an umbrella definition that, for the most part, describes the nature of this type of theatre: “Site-specific performances are conceived for, mounted within and conditioned by the particulars of found spaces, existing social situations or locations, both used and disused” (Pearson, 23). “Found space” is the most problematic term used in this definition, and causes much of the conflict when discussing site-specific work. For some practitioners, found space means discovering the location first and developing the performance entirely based on this place. For others, the inspiration for the production comes first, and then they look for the space that will enhance this production. For some, the found space contains everything needed for the performance with no design-based interventions, for others it means adapting the physical space alongside the performance. No matter the specific interpretation, the concept that this kind of work is “conditioned by” and works in such tandem with the space sets it apart from the mainstream theatre of today.

It is tempting to say simply that these practitioners are breaking with “traditional” performance space. In a 2006 publication, William McEvoy claims that the increasing popularity of site-specific performance was responsible for the recent shift away from “traditional plays” (McEvoy, 591). However, even that term is
problematic, as theatre history shows many examples of theatre that would fit under a site-specific or environmental banner definition. The following (brief) history of Western performance space, taken from Wilson and Goldfarb’s Living Theatre: A History text, to prove that the increased popularity in space conscious theatre is a rebellion against neutral playing space, rather than an attempt to be non-traditional.

As with most theatre history, I begin with the ancient Greeks. Their performance spaces had a strict social function as religious sites. The layout of the Greek amphitheatre was a circular stage space, with an altar in the center (fig. 2). The audience sat around this space in a semi-circle. In addition, they also kept a strict segregation of the performance space, keeping the audience ordered by their social standing. Though theatrical events were enormous communal events, there is evidence of a physical hierarchy, with high-ranking political and religious figures seated in the front rows.

In this type of performance, the presentational and social space took precedence over fictional space. Because theatre at the time was performed during
large festivals that almost all citizens would attend, the amphitheatre served as a location for community building. This social space also became a location to perpetuate the societal order and highlight the importance of religion. By defining the citizens by their physical location, the theatre was able to define their social status. In addition, by placing the altar in the visual center of the presentational space, the religious connotations of the culture of theatrical performance in ancient Greece was impossible to ignore. Though hardly a found space that Pearson and Shanks refer to in their definition, the Greek theatrical edifice absolutely socially conditioned the plays presented therein.

The Roman theatre structures maintained a similar layout to the Greek spaces, with some distinct changes. Firstly, there was no central altar on the playing space. In addition, most of the amphitheatres were temporary structures, unlike the permanent ones carved into the Greek hillsides. Both these changes indicate a divergence from the strictly religious hierarchical distinctions that the Greek theatres established. Though performances were part of widely attended festivals, the theatre building was not the main locus for theatrical social space.

The development of the popular theatre drew the social space away from a hierarchical location, and to the streets. For example, the popularity of the Roman mime and pantomime gave rise to an early form of site-specific theatre. These performance styles, though popular, were still viewed as immoral and therefore relegated to performing in “found spaces,” courtyards not specifically designed for theatre. This is a very early example of theatre that could fit in the site-specific
definition. It also marks the beginning of a connection between popular performance and non-standard theatre spaces, which reappears throughout history.

The medieval drama of Western Europe had a similar focus on religion as the Greeks and Romans, with most of their organized theatre performing in churches. In these religious meeting places, a stage space, called the platea, would be set aside and a scenic backdrop, called a mansion, was created to establish the fictional location. This construction established the first “neutral platform stage,” meaning the audience would accept the playing space as any location that the fictional space suggested.

This neutral platform stage and its background indicate an attempt to create a fictional space for the performances. Though the productions occurred in a very socially significant space, highlighting the social/religious aims of the performance, the theatre-makers also attempted to create a more realistic fictional world of the text.

Unlike the Greek and Roman periods, both popular and religious theatre had location-based performance in the medieval drama. The popular, secular theatre, was performed by transient troupes, and would often act as entertainment in large banquet halls, between courses of a feast. These troupes, dependent on performance as a source of income, would have to make do with whatever space they could find, often exploiting the social location created by celebration.

Some research shows that Christian pageant plays displaying biblical tales would similarly take to the streets. These shows would be set up on movable wagons, and then transported around the town, in order for all the citizens of the town to have an opportunity to view the tales. Other evidence indicates that these plays were
performed on temporary stages constructed in the outdoor town squares. In either case, the religious drama took cues from the secular performance, bringing the theatre to the people, rather than the other way around. Though they still used the conventions of the platea and mansions to construct a fictional space rather than exploiting the presentational space around them, the religious dramas certainly took advantage of the social space of the town squares to reach as large an audience as possible.

In Renaissance theatres of Europe, theatre buildings specifically for non-religious theatre began to appear. In addition, the neutral playing space established by the medieval drama took hold. In Italy, the construction of the first proscenium arch, a stage set up where the playing space is literally framed by an arch, signaled an early transition to a period of naturalist theatre. With the ability to control the audiences’ viewpoint, theatres were able to create a fictional world with fewer distractions from the realities of the presentational space.

English theatres also developed their own exploration of the neutral playing space, with the thrust stages of the Elizabethan theatre. In this set up, the stage literally thrusts into the audience space, with the spectators surrounding the stage on three sides. Although this creates a stronger physical interaction between performer and audience within the presentational space, the thrust stage of the English theatre still maintained a neutral, representative playing space. This limited the interaction of the fictional space with the presentational space.
Though there have been many technological and aesthetic developments in theatre construction over the following centuries, the proscenium and thrust developments of the neutral platform stage still continue to dominate the realm of theatrical space today. Pearson and Shanks say this neutral stage space has “become increasingly fixed and theatre serves as a verbal depiction of inner worlds and psychological spaces. So modern auditoria are *sociofugal*, throwing spectators apart, limiting their eye contact, discouraging social interaction with implications for the practice, function, and meaning of theatre...The role of spectator in signification is denied” (Pearson, 108). This use of space is effective for the psychological interpretations of naturalist theatre popular over the last century and a half. The recent mainstreaming of non-fixed theatre spaces indicates a need for theatre that allows for social interaction from the audience rather than the separation which Pearson and Shanks describe.

One major example of this popularization of site-specific performance is the recent project in 2013 by London’s Globe Theatre to perform Shakespeare’s wartime history plays on the historic battlefields where they took place. The director, Nick Bagnell, edited and directed the three parts of Henry VI to be performed first as a tour around the UK and eventually taken to the Globe Theatre itself for a run. One day of this tour was dedicated to performing all three parts back to back on the sites of the War of the Roses battles described in the Henry VI plays. 

In an article about the upcoming production, the director discusses an archaeological discovery of a mass grave filled with the bodies of men executed in
the battle by Edward VI: “Edward IV gave the order to show the enemy no mercy...This is a horrible image of what that actually meant” (Hickling). This statement illustrated the power of connecting the fictional site to the presentational site. Though Bagnell had heard of Edward’s order, he was not able to fully appreciate the atrocity until he stood on the actual site, picturing the reality of what that lack of mercy would look like.

This exercise by one of the most historically sited theatres in London shows the surge in popularity of site-specific theatre. The Globe Theatre company usually performs their work within their replica of an Elizabethan thrust stage theatre. Although the space does contain social-historical implication, the work is still focused on a neutral platform stage that allows control over the fictional space. By expanding out of their performance space, the company allows audiences to interact with the history and narrative in an even more immediate way, thereby expanding their focus on history and Shakespearean performance within a style that has seen such recent popularization.

SPACE FIRST

In the analysis of my work with non-neutral playing space, I examined the way in which the intersections between social, presentational, and fictional space affect three key areas of theatre: the text, the audience, and the performance.

I considered a number of questions when exploring the relationship between space and the text. Why should the text be performed outside a neutral playing space?
Would the script or performance benefit from the inherent meaning of the place? Does the meaning of the text change when place in this space? If so, how?

I asked similar questions about the audience experience of the place. How is the audience emotionally and intellectually affected by the space? How does the location affect the total viewer experience of the performance, i.e. how are they affected by their journey to the event, how does the space frame the perception of the show? Does the space create any opportunity for audience involvement? Are there any positive or negative limitations imposed on the audience by the nature of the location?

The questions I asked about the effect on performance were most useful in guiding the practical analysis of the creative process. What kind of challenges to blocking does a non-neutral playing space elicit? What opportunities? Does a particular acting style read better in this space than another? How do the design elements incorporated effectively into the space? Should these designs adapt the location or embrace it?

By keeping these questions at the forefront of my mind during my research, I have been able to explore exactly how a total focus on location enriches performance. These questions, particularly the ones relating to the audience experience, have also given more insight into the reason why theatre in non-neutral performance space has gained in popularity. These questions will guide the analysis into my experience with the Barn Theatre and my performance of *The Last Croissant*.

**BARNSTORM**
The Barn Theatre and the BarnStorm Company housed within negotiate the concepts of presentational, social, and fictional space in ways unique to any other performance venue on the UC Santa Cruz Campus. Spatial considerations were thrown into especial focus this year with the return to the Barn Theatre after a year of pest abatement and safety construction forced the performances to relocate. As the adage “you don’t know what you’ve got til it’s gone” states, the importance of the Barn space to student performance was not fully appreciated until it was shut down.

The Barn Theatre was renovated in 1968 from a historic working barn on the Cowell Ranch into the first theatre space on the UCSC campus. In the 2004-2005 school year, the theatre became the home for BarnStorm, a company established that year as a venue for student production (The Barn). Run by two to three graduate students, BarnStorm presents one to three quarter-long seasons of work written, performed, choreographed, built, publicized (and more) by UC Santa Cruz students. Over the years, the company has produced work ranging from one night comedy shows, to fully produced plays, to student films, becoming a space dedicated to performative expression of the student voice.

The Barn Theatre as a physical space

Beyond its implications as a locus for student expression (which I will detail later), the physical theatre space itself has a distinct layout and atmosphere that has a great impact on the work performed within. Though there were renovations and features added to create the theatre, there are many visible features that define it as a historically agricultural Barn. Immediately upon entering the lobby, you see that the
floors and walls are constructed from untreated wood which, if not actually left over from its ranch days, is very close to the kind of material a barn builder would use. If you look up, the boarded up doors to the hayloft remain above the entrance doors. No attempts have been made to cover up or disguise this rough-hewn aesthetic natural to the space.

Past the lobby doors, in the main performance space, the aesthetic remains similarly undisguised. Exposed rafters hang over the audience and stage. Original support posts, necessary to keep the roof standing, jut up in odd and oftentimes inconvenient locations. Though the stage itself is a standard smooth wood, usually painted tough-prime black, the permanent backdrop is that same rustic barn wood as the lobby walls.

Backstage, which is also downstairs, contains the greenroom, dressing rooms, bathrooms, makeshift scene shop, and storage. This is the only location in the theatre with significant departure from the barn style conventions. Down here, the floors are made of concrete, there is painted wallboard, and cabinets are made of new wood that does not fit with the weathered exterior walls. The walls are covered with signatures,

Fig 3. The ground plan of the Barn Theatre, with seating shaded in and support posts marked by solid black squares
scribblings, pictures, inside jokes, and more, drawn in Sharpie by past student performers. Although it is the same building as the upstairs performance and audience spaces, the downstairs area is very distinctly constructed as a workspace.

In addition to the rustic construction of the space, the stage layout also sets it apart from other performance locations. Within the theatre arts complex, there are three theatres demonstrating some of the neutral playing space conventions that I detailed earlier. The Second Stage is a traditional proscenium layout. The Mainstage contains a thrust stage. The Experimental Theatre is a flexible black box (although most often is set up in a makeshift proscenium or thrust layout). As you can see in fig. 3, the Barn stage is not so easily categorized.

As any student director faced with the Barn layout will tell you, uneven seating on two sides of your stage and large posts in the middle of the playing area make for some truly challenging site-lines. This construction, combined with the overwhelmingly rustic atmosphere, means that one of the first things a production must contend with is what I like to call “the problem of the Barn.” As the least neutral dedicated theatre space on the UCSC campus, the physical presence of the Barn performance space is impossible to ignore.

Some solutions to the “problem” attempt to neutralize the space. In the Fall 2011 season, a production of David Mamet’s Oleanna pulled curtains around most of the stage and limited seating to just the small jury box section (in the upper left corner of fig. 1), thereby solving the site line issue. In the process, however, most of the
dynamic entrances, like the trap door and hidden stairwell, were cut off, limiting the
dynamic staging opportunities presented by the space.

Another attempt to force a neutral attitude on the space is to build large scenic
elements to mask the natural aesthetic. The scenic design for *Room*, a new play by
Jeremy Helgeson, part of the Fall 2010 season, contained false walls with painted
exposed brick and a constructed elevated platform in order to create the fictional
space of a dilapidated apartment. This approach tried to take the audience out of the
Barn space and into the fictional world of the play. However, as you can see in fig. 3,
the wooden walls still peek out from behind the scenery, reminding the audience
exactly where they still are and illustrating how difficult it is to create a neutral or
empty space inside this theatre.
This analysis of the space in these performances is not to say that the entirety

of the production was undermined by the attempt at neutralization. Instead I argue
that an attempt at neutralization is a fruitless endeavor in an adapted theatre building
like the Barn. Its physical connotations are too strong to ignore. A production that
embraces these connotations begins the creative process one step ahead.

**The Barn Theatre as a social space**

In addition to its physical connotations, the Barn Theatre also has many social
implications, due mostly to the residency of the BarnStorm Company. As the main
location for student theatre, the theatre and the company have embedded themselves
in the culture of the UCSC students. This emotional investment is evident in the way
the students speak about the space: “The Barn...has a sense of tangible possibility that
is not present in any other venue on campus” (Glen-Lambert). This quote, taken from a proposal for the comedy team The Michael Becker Experience for the Winter 2014 season, written by Rosie Glen-Lambert, seems at odds with the idea that the Barn is non-neutral location. How can a location with such rigid visual connotations have “tangible possibility,” when the space seems to limit the type of theatre it can contain. The answer lies with the students who posses the building.

In Kent Bloomer and Charles Moore’s book *Body, Memory, and Architecture*, they raised a theory especially pertinent to the Barn community:

> We will care increasingly for our buildings if... we can actually inhabit them, their spaces, taking them as our own in satisfying ways; if we can establish in them with what we know and believe and think; if we can share our occupancy with others, our family, our group, or our city; and, importantly, if there is some sense of human drama, of transport, of tension, or of collision of forces, so that the involvement endures. (Bloomer, 105)

The year before I took the position of BarnStorm Artistic Director, during the Fall 2012 season, the Barn was shut down due to a pest infestation. For the rest of the 2012-2013 school year, BarnStorm became somewhat of a nomadic entity, occupying spaces in the main Theatre Arts complex ordinarily reserved for classroom or faculty use. During this time, murmurs of fear spread throughout the student theatre community that the Barn wouldn’t get back on its feet anytime soon.

Luckily, this year we were able to open the doors again. Our first shows were packed to capacity, nothing unheard of, but unusual enough to note. The tension surrounding its closing and the subsequent enthusiasm over its reopening solidified the intrinsic connection that the BarnStorm students have to the space itself, and explains Glen-Lambert’s comment about tangible possibility. The ability to inhabit
and take ownership of the space, as Bloomer emphasizes, is a key element in the creation of the student performance community and in the creation of artistic work. One only has to look at the graffitied walls of the downstairs/backstage area, a literal palimpsest from past student performers, to feel that ownership and habitation of the Barn. The “sense of human drama, of transport, of tension, or of collision of forces” resulting from the ownership that Bloomer describes is precisely the attitude needed to create the living, breathing theatre of BarnStorm.

The re-habitation of the Barn this year has also thrown into focus the need to care for our building, as Bloomer says. Since this is a student space, much of the responsibility is laid on the students to keep the theatre in working order. Over the years, students allowed their space to degrade through misuse. After losing habitation, though, the need to focus more on the facility became present both in my mind as the Artistic Director, and in the students minds who were thrilled to have their space back. We enforced a number of rules and policies, the main being a ban on food inside the building, cleaned and removed aging supplies, and emphasized the need to care for the space. The aim of these policies was to keep this social space operation for student in the future.

**BarnStorm 2013-2014**

One of my main roles as the Artistic Director of BarnStorm was to pick three, 10-week seasons of student work. When reading the proposals for our Fall season, I tried to focus on pieces that kept considerations of the space in mind. In particular, I wanted to select a season that maintained the spirit of the “rough theatre” that I found
so effective in past productions. Indeed, if we look at Peter Brook’s description of the Rough Theatre, it is impossible not to see the Barn and BarnStorm as an ideal example:

Through the ages [the popular theatre] has taken many forms, and there is only one factor that they all have in common: roughness. Salt, sweat, noise, smell: the theatre that’s not in a theatre...audiences standing, drinking, sitting round tables, audiences joining in, answering back: theatre in back rooms, upstairs rooms, barns; the one night stands, the torn sheet pinned up across the hall (Brook, 65).

In Brook’s definition he even describes a barn specifically as a place for rough theatre. Even without that direct and obvious parallel, though, the atmosphere Brook illustrates sounds exactly like a Friday night in the Barn (drinking, sweating and all). When reading student proposals, I kept this rough theatre definition in mind, looking to select seasons which embraced both this aspect of the Barn Theatre and which exploited the physical considerations of the presentational space.

In our Fall 2013 programming, there were three productions that spanned full weekends, with multiple performances. These productions were Dead Man’s Cellphone, directed by Luke Medina, The Importance of Being Earnest, directed by Jen Schuler, and a dance show Dance Collisions, directed by Angela Chambers. The rest of our weekends were filled out with one night performances from two improvisational teams, Someone Always Dies, Humor Force V, from two sketch comedy teams, Shebam and The Michael Becker Experience, and a night of sketch comedy.

On our application form for BarnStorm submissions, we included the question “Why is the BarnStorm Company the best place for your project? What kind of
opportunities would it offer for students in the company?” (Wade) I was looking for two things from the applicants: 1) How the performance would respond to BarnStorm’s social goal as a place for student expression; and 2) Whether or not they had considered how the unique performance space was best suited for their production.

There were a number of applications specifically geared toward filling our full weekend performance slots. *Dead Man’s Cellphone* and *The Importance of Being Earnest* were selected, both from their dynamic proposals for the two plays and based on their thoughtful answers to why the show should be performed in the Barn instead of anywhere else.

One of the most interesting responses to the space that both the full weekend productions had was not in either of their proposals. Because of the year-long shutdown, we did not have access to the space until the second week of Fall Quarter 2013. Upon entering the theatre, we were instantly met by the feeling of an abandoned space. Like the city of Pompeii, the remnants of life before the disaster still remained throughout the space. The most prominent of these remnants was the completely white paint treatment covering every inch of the stage.

As soon as we discovered this, we resolved to paint the stage back to black, and assured the directors that it would be returned to its original state. Instead, they asked if we could manipulate the existing white to create a floor treatment that would work for both shows. *Dead Man’s Cellphone* decided on checkerboard pattern to illustrate the fictional café space of the beginning of the play, incorporating some
irregularities to mirror the irregularity of the character’s experience of speaking to the dead.

The treatment for *The Importance of Being Earnest* intended to add even more black to the stage and write actual lines from the script on the floor in white. Because of artistic limitations, this idea was scrapped. However, the white emerged three dimensionally from the space in the form of shutters on the back wall and painted furniture.

By using the leftover color from the year prior, both of the productions worked with the space to create a design which both added meaning to the individual performances while also creating an artistic through line for the season as a whole.

For our next season, I wanted to focus on selecting productions that emphasized the social space of the theatre. During the Winter 2014 season, I began to think of the BarnStorm mission to create a space for performative student expression. I realized that to truly accomplish that goal, I needed to give as many students from as many departments on campus the opportunity to use the Barn space. Luckily, we were able to accept almost every single application sent in, including one for a co-production with a Music Department class and for a film. Both these productions allowed for cross department interaction, opening the social space of the Barn to a larger percentage of the student body.

In order to accomplish the volume of work that we accepted, most of the performances were scheduled as one night only engagements. Though it would have given greater opportunity for wider viewership to have more than one night of
performance, the rapid fire, constantly changing productions kept the spaces alive and

Fig 5 (top). The Barn stage as we found it, painted white
Fig 6 (bottom left). Checkerboard floor pattern, Dead Man's Cellphone
Fig 7 (bottom right). White curtain and shutters, The Importance of Being Earnest
the audiences excited. By producing this many shows, we were able to embrace the rough theatre definition into which the Barn so easily fits, while also holding true to the social objective of student expression.

The Barn exists on an unusual border between found space and designated theatrical space. The location does contain some of the elements of the neutral performance spaces, such as a blank stage, with the technical ability to transform into any fictional space. However, the space contains far too much history and meaning to ever be neutral. Though I would not go so far as to say that the Barn is a place of site specific performance, I would argue that an application of the Pearson/Shanks definition aids in successful Barn productions: “Site-specific performances are conceived for, mounted within and conditioned by the particulars of found spaces, existing social situations or locations, both used and disused” (Pearson, 23). By allowing the Barn theatre space to condition the BarnStorm Company and its performances, the theatre created can gain deeper and more exciting meaning for audiences and performers alike.

THE LAST CROISSANT

In addition to exploring the implications of a space designed specifically for theatrical productions, I also wanted to investigate what performative elements of site-specific theatre contribute to its popularity.

When I saw the first staged reading of Veronica Tjioe’s play The Last Croissant, I felt immediately that this was a very Santa Cruz play. Written while she was a graduate student at UCSC, the irreverent, outdoorsy footprint of the play comes
from a distinctly Santa Cruz voice. One of the most attractive and distinctive features of the city of Santa Cruz is its proximity to the immense tracts of redwoods forests. These contain ample opportunity for the nature activities like hiking, meditation, swimming, and bird watching in which the characters of the play participate.

The Text

The initial inspiration for this production came from the complete textual immersion in the fictional space of the play. The setting is described as “A picturesque, but somewhat cramped campground. The surroundings are so beautifully preserved that this site has become popular with nature enthusiasts causing a bit of crowding” (Tjioe, 5). As a resident of Santa Cruz and a member of the UCSC community, this atmosphere is very familiar. The campus is located in the center of a second growth redwood forest, and the city’s natural surroundings draw a multitude of environmental tourists year-round. With this proximity to a real version of the fictional space, I believed that this text would benefit from an outdoor, site specific performance.

My first thought was to stage the play in the outdoor amphitheatre at UCSC’s Porter College. Set up like a very small Roman amphitheatre, with a semicircular stage framed by a small cluster of redwoods, it is situated outside the busy Dining Hall. This location seemed ideal, as it gave the visual representation of the “picturesque” fictional space, while still offering the accessibility of a more organized presentational space.
As I began to question deeper into the purpose of staging the text outside of a designated theatre space, though, it became apparent that the Porter location was inadequate. Though the outdoor location began to blur the line between the presentational and fictional space, its setup as a designed space distanced the performance from the location, limiting the complete immersion into the text that I was hoping to achieve. I realized that to get the maximum meaning from the text, I needed to find a location closer to the fictional space of the script.

At this point, I formulated the idea that the production would take place at a campground, and be performed as a camping weekend. I planned to invite an audience to travel to one of the nearby campgrounds and spend the weekend. We would then perform the play during one of the days. In this way, the presentational space would become the entire campground, and the audience would actually perform the fictional space that the characters exist in. This meant that the show became a full event, rather than a singular, separate performance.

Unfortunately, the real world intervened, and due to an actor withdrawal from the project and difficulty procuring a space, I could not do the full performance as planned. However, I was able to present a preview performance to experiment with some of the ways the site created the event, which I will detail here.

The Audience

A major influence on many site-specific performances is the emphasis on community. The site-specific company Welfare State International, located in the UK and active from 1968 to 2006, focused on this kind of community based performance,
saying in their mission statement: “We design and construct performances that are specific to place, people, and occasion…Our long term aim is to establish creative communities on our doorstep” (Welfare). Through their use of performance and ritual, they strove to create theatre which turned the audience into the collaborator, and established a stronger community bond.

In my own performance, I wanted to achieve that same sense of bonded community. One large difference between the Welfare State performances and my own is the influence of the text. Most of the Welfare events began as a ritual, with a series of activities rather than a preconceived, narrative text. My challenge was finding a way to develop a similar series of audience-involved activities, without disrupting or undermining the story of the play.

I first focused on the audience interaction with the location. In the preview performance, the show took place in a clearing off a hiking trail in the UCSC upper campus. In order to access the site, the audience had to hike fifteen minutes from the parking lot, along the well travelled path, to arrive at the location where the “scenic” pieces (two tents, a cooler, a plastic toter, and a folding camp table) were set up and waiting for them. In order to ensure that no one would get lost, the audience met in the parking lot. Once everyone had arrived, two of the actors (out of costume) and I led the group along the trail.

Although the narrative of the play didn’t begin until the audience had arrived at the tents, the performance began during the walk. The audience conversed and developed their community as they journeyed together. More importantly, they had
the fifteen minutes to transition into the fictional space. Pearson and Shanks discuss
the importance of walking, how the way in which our body responds to the physical
environment determines our reading of the performance (Pearson, 135). As the
audience for *The Last Croissant* walked further and further from the “civilization” of
the campus buildings, they came closer and closer to the natural setting Tjoe
describes in her
play. Though they
were not necessarily
aware of this, they
were performing the
site through their
reactions, thereby
developing a social
space prior to the
scheduled show. By the time they arrived at the tents, they had the opportunity to
slowly adjust to their surroundings and fellow audience members, which eliminated
possible jarring effects of seeing a play performed outside a designated, neutral stage
space.

I also developed some ideas for activities and rituals that the audience could
perform which were informed by the text. The activity I tested in the preview was that
of an intermission feast. Within the text of the play, there are almost as many
references to the food that the characters eat, as there are allusions to the natural
setting. In the middle of the play, the characters Imogen, Frederick, Mumbo, and Jumbo sit down for a lunch buffet. Although there is not an intermission written into the script, a natural break seems to structurally come between the two scenes that contain this feast. When thinking about ways to involve the audience in the fictional space, it seemed natural to involve them in this eating ritual.

The company Théâtre du Soleil, a French based immersive theatre group, incorporates this same feasting ritual into their performances. The founder, Ariane Mnouchkine, strives to make performance that involves and immerses every audience member. An article in the New York Times describing the company’s show “Les Ephémres” describes how feeding the audience is “akin to inviting an honored guest into your home” (Cohen). Mnouchkine herself describes why she feels the need to give this invitation: “At most theatrical performances, ‘as soon as it’s finished, the public is thrown out as if we didn’t want them,’ she said. ‘But we don’t want only the money of the public, but also their presence’” (Cohen). By inviting them to eat, Mnouchkine and the company are telling the audience that they value their presence and their input. The feasting gives the audience justification and agency within the space. With the feast in The Last Croissant, I hoped to provide that same atmosphere for our audience.

At the end of the first eating scene of The Last Croissant, I stood up and invited the audience members to cross the barrier between the audience space and the presentational space and join the actors in eating the buffet they had set up. The actors dropped out of character, and the entire group set aside time to eat together. After
around twenty minutes, I instructed the audience to return to the seating area, and began the performance again. By having the audience cross the physical barrier onto the stage space, I continued to expand the presentational space. Just as the audience performed the presentational and social space during the hike, they continued to cement their position in this performance space through the feasting ritual.

The Performance

One of the most challenging aspects I had when working on this site-specific piece was deciphering how the location affects the performance. After the preview scenes, I find that this is the area I need to focus most upon. When directing in a neutral playing space, much of the performance aspects are dictated by the text. Acting styles and choices depend on the narrative and writing style, with some adjustments made for the physical size of the theatre. However, in site-dictated work like this, the location requires some performance styles that can be at odds with the text.

I knew from the beginning that I wanted to incorporate some elements of direct address, having the actors speak directly to the audience. With the physical closeness of the audience and the communal activities I established, I didn’t want the acting style to remain too distant during the actual narrative of the piece. However, there are no actual direct addresses written into the script.

To reconcile these two seemingly opposing intentions of the site and the script, I latched onto the internal monologue habits of the characters. At many points in the text, characters seem to step slightly away from their fellow scene partners and
introspect on their own emotional situation. In these moments, I saw the opportunity for the actors to involve the audience and invite them into the characters’ internal monologues. I gave the actors the note to find the places to speak to the audience, thereby involving them emotionally as well as physically and socially with the piece.

One of the most interesting ways I found the discussions of space entering into the rehearsal room was in the character development process. I tried to have as many of our rehearsals (both character development and blocking rehearsals) outside, in a similar natural environment to the site. When discussing the characters with the actors, I discovered myself asking them how their character interacted with the natural world as a way to discover how their interactions in general were shaped.

For example, two of the characters in the script are highly comedic, clown type characters named Mumbo and Jumbo. They have a number of scenes together where they bounce a back and forth, high-energy comedy back and forth. The two actors playing these roles naturally mastered that back and forth banter, but had trouble when performing in scenes without the other person. They both expressed concern that they didn’t know who their character was without their partner. To try and distinguish these two roles, I asked them each to look at how their characters responded to the natural world. We realized that Mumbo, though in love with the environment, often responded defensively when threatened by the outside forces of nature, like bringing a gun to the campsite. On the other hand, Jumbo’s character embraced the natural world, frequently meditating naked on a rock, a complete
exposure in opposition to Mumbo’s enclosure. From there, the actors were able to built very complete and distinct, yet compatible characters.

I faced my largest challenge when attempting to incorporate technical elements, like sounds cues and scene changes into the performance. Without the assistance of wings or lighting instruments, it becomes very difficult to hide anything from the audience. To try and reconcile the fact that all of the theatrical tricks would have to be done in full view of the spectators, I tried to incorporate what Richard Schechner labels “multi-focus.”

In his description of multi-focus, Schechner says, “more than one event—several of the same kind or mixed-media—happens at the same time, distributed throughout the space...The spectator must move or completely refocus his attention to catch everything that is going on around him” (Schechner, 58). In multi-focus there is always more than one thing occurring in the presentational space, and different audience members experience different events depending on where they are physically located. This performance contained both intentional and unintentional multi-focus.

I intentionally used multi-focus to distract the audience from the otherwise incidental scene changes. At every opportunity, I tried to have the action for the next scene begin before the previous scene had ended by using the undisguised entrance points. As a scene between the fighting, middle-aged couple Frederick and Imogen ended, Mumbo came tromping loudly down the hill, carrying her groceries. While Frederick is in the tent, taking the time to change out of his wet shirt, Imogen cleans
up the lunch supplies while Mumbo and Jumbo empty the wash bucket. By having events which seemed natural to the fictional location happen, I hoped to cover scene transitions that would otherwise been hidden by lights or curtains.

The multi-focus I did not count on came from interruptions within the space. Because the presentational space was located directly off a popular trail, there were a multitude of runners, bikers, hikers, and horseback riders traversing behind the audience while the scenes were taking place. Although one audience member said that these sportsmen made it feel as though any person could be a performer, these interruptions were often a distraction from the narrative. Since this was a multi-focus I had not anticipated, I had no way to work it into the performance. For the later showing, we will either have to find a way to incorporate these interruptions into the performance, or find a more secluded space.

The other unintentional multi-focus that occurred during the performance came from the atmosphere of the environment. Though most of the play is full of high energy and loud dialogue, there are some moments of stillness and quietness scattered throughout. However, in the woods, these silences were full of sound. The character Imogen thinks she hears voices or someone speaking softly to her. In this performance, when she stopped and took a moment to listen to these voices, the audience was able to hear them too, in the chirping of the birds and rustling of the leaves. Those voices, if the show were performed inside on a neutral playing space, would either have to be imagined by the audience or artificially created by the sound
design. Outside, though, the audience was able to watch Imogen listen, and believe
that she was genuinely hearing.

What I learned most from this process is the necessity to let the site occupy
every aspect of the performance. This style of theatre runs the risk of feeling
gimmicky or unnecessary when not fully thought out. The least successful portions of
the play occurred when I did not fully take into consideration the presentational space
we were occupying, such as in the case of the interruptions from the path. Deeper
meaning drawn from the space is most effective when the fictional space, the
presentational space, and the social space are all used in the telling of the story.

CONCLUSION

The professional theatre world is constantly looking for ways to stay relevant
and popular in the postmodern world. Some companies focus on programming new
works with textual relevancy to the here and now. Other theatres work new
technologies, such as media design, into their productions. The explorations into
space that I discussed have the possibility to keep the theatrical world relevant by
focusing on what distinguishes theatre from other art forms.

Theatre is exciting because it is a live performance. The immediacy of the
interactions between performers and spectators create a sense of joint ownership
between these two parties. Because the audience knows that their response, or lack of
response, or interjection into the performance can affect the performers, they
subsequently realize that they can change the show they are watching. At the same
time, performers can know on the spot how their piece of theatre impacts their
viewers. This audience/practitioner interplay does not exist at this level in any other art form.

History has shown that popular performance has often been presented on the street or in found spaces. By redefining the presentational space in this way, performers allow audience members to make their own choices and decisions about the performance. The development of the neutral playing space allowed for a more distant, intellectual analysis of what the art form was capable of. However, the continued development and attachment to this neutrality has allowed for the development of a neutral audience.

There is a reason why found space is regularly connected to popular performance. A non-neutral space is less controlled than a neutral one. The artists cannot dictate exactly what world they are in when they perform the play. By workings in spaces with preexisting meaning, theatre allows audiences to do some of the work and become part of the performance. When the theatrical notion of ownership and immediacy, we invite the creative input of the final collaborator, and are able to seriously use the elements that set theatre apart.

My own explorations in production reinforced the importance of space. The job of a director is truly to maintain the artistic integrity of the world of the play. The theatre is a collaborative form, where many different artists join together to create a cohesive performance. By focusing on how space is transformed in both BarnStorm and The Last Croissant, I was able develop a strong and interconnected world, while also emphasizing the final collaborator: the audience.
The Michael Becker Experience and the Barn
The Michael Becker Experience is UCSC’s only co-ed sketch comedy team. Formed in 2012, we are proud to be in the planning stages for our seventh live show, and hope very much that it will take place in the Barn theatre. While we have performed in many different spaces over the last three years, nothing quite compares to the quality of show that we produce when we are performing in the Barn. The Barn, due to its being student-run and operated, has a sense of tangible possibility that is not present in any other venue on campus. While we have enjoyed performing in other venues, they tend to have a setup that is more like renting a space than creating a collaboration. Completing a sketch comedy show in the barn has always felt like a collaboration between the company and our team to create new work and, specifically, new comedy. It is this sense of collaboration that we long for, and which attracts our team to the Barn. Our performances also tend to draw considerable-sized audiences, which we believe would be beneficial to the Barnstorm company.

Team Information/Rehearsal Information
Our team consists of eight performers/writers, most of which are theatre majors or minors: Rosie Glen-Lambert, Jack Davis, Ben Woehler, Evan Nyarady, Grant Palmer, Mindy Paul, Andy Nyuyen, and Luke Medina. We write our own sketches (including a couple of videos) and perform them in a once-quarterly performance. We have weekly meetings on Sundays from 1-3pm which are typically held at a teammates home but, as we become closer to the performance date, are held in a rehearsal space on campus.

Technical Support
Our shows require the following elements:
- *A stage manager* (usually provided by us, although we’d be open and happy to have this position be a Barnstorm company member’s support call)
- *A light board-op* who is in charge of basic lighting changes, mainly lights up/down between sketches
- *A sound board-op* who will play entrance/exit music, music between transitions, and occasional sound cues within sketches (all sounds and a laptop to play them off of will be provided by the team for the board-op to utilize)
- *A media board-op* to play the 2-3 video sketches during the show (This person can be the same as the sound board-op, and like with the sound board-op all videos and a laptop to play them off of will be provided by the team)
- *Access to a projector/something to project on* for video sketches

No budget is necessary for our performance. We are happy and prepared to provide our own costumes/props, but access to the Barn’s prop/costume stock, if possible, would be happily accepted.

We ask that our tech time be either the morning of our show for 3-4 hours or directly before for the same amount of time. It would also be helpful, but not necessary, to be able to use the Barn to rehearse at least once before the show when the main productions are not using the space.

Performance
We would like for our show to not conflict with the tech/performance dates of Spring Awakening (Feb 15 and 16th-tech, performances Feb 21-23 and Feb 27-March 2nd) or Machinal (Tech Feb 22-23, performances Feb 28-March 2nd, March 6-9th) as we are mostly theatre majors and may potentially be involved with these productions. We are happy to perform, however, the Friday before Machinal tech. We would also be willing, if necessary, to perform at 10pm after performances for these shows have finished. We would prefer our show to either be at the end of the quarter or around the 5-week mark.

Regards
Thank you very much for your consideration. The Michael Becker Experience was born out of the Barn’s faith and belief in the possibility of building a new team. Without it's support we never would have began and grown into all we are today. The barn has a special place in the heart of The Michael Becker Experience, and we hope the Michael Becker Experience has a place in the heart of the barn.
Project Proposal Form

Name: __________________________________________

Phone: __________ Email: ______________

Address: __________ Major(s): __________

___________ Year: __________

What is your role in the project (i.e. director, writer, etc)?

Please list any involved collaborators:

Title/Working title of piece:

Author: ______________ Script Copyright date (If Applicable): __________

If piece is student written /devised is it completed or a work in progress? (Circle one)

Genre of the Piece (i.e. drama, comedy, musical, etc) __________________________

Approx. run time: __________ Approx. # of Weeks of Rehearsal Desired: __________

Total Number of Performers ______ Females ______ Males ______

How flexible are the Number of Performers? Please explain __________________________

________________________________________________________________________

Please list any specific technical needs (i.e. media, live band, etc.) __________________________

________________________________________________________________________

If your project is not theater originated, please expand on the nature of your piece (i.e. film, music,
performance art, art exhibition, etc) __________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

*Please see reverse side for more information
In addition to the application, please attach the following:

1.) A typed Project Proposal
What do we need to learn from your proposal?
• What excites you about this project? Why do you want to do this particular production?
• Why here/why now? Why is the BarnStorm Company the best place for your project? What kind of opportunities would it offer for the students in the company?
• What would you need from BarnStorm in order to produce your work?
  - How many performers?
  - What kind of technical/design elements would be involved (i.e. lights, sounds, media, costumes, scenery, props)?
  - What other ways could the company assist in development of the piece?
• If you have any questions or concerns regarding your proposal, please contact our Artistic Director (Amelia Wade at ad.barnstorm@ucsc.edu)

2.) A hard copy of a script (if Applicable)
All submissions become the property of Barnstorm and will not be returned. Please do not submit library books. Please do not use the Theater Arts copier. Suggested places to make copies are Alphagraphics on Laurel St. or Kinkos Downtown next to trader Joes.

3.) A Current Resume
Please include any relevant experience and course work.

All applications are DUE Friday May 24th at 5pm in STENO

*Please note that enrolling in BarnStorm for all Quarters will be a mandatory requirement of this position.

There will be a BarnStorm Company Interest Meeting
Wednesday May 15th from 3-4pm in J-102

Have any questions or concerns? Please contact us!
Amelia Wade ad.barnstorm@gmail.com
Jessica Greenstreet md.barnstorm@gmail.com
BIBLIOGRAPHY


Wade, Amelia, and Jessica Greenstreet. BarnStorm Project Proposal Form—Fall 2013.
