

The University of San Francisco
**USF Scholarship: a digital repository @ Gleeson Library |
Geschke Center**

Doctoral Dissertations

Theses, Dissertations, Capstones and Projects

2008

Beginning in the midst of the world : ethics, poetics and social change on an international stage

Michael Fontaine

Follow this and additional works at: <https://repository.usfca.edu/diss>

 Part of the [Education Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Fontaine, Michael, "Beginning in the midst of the world : ethics, poetics and social change on an international stage" (2008). *Doctoral Dissertations*. 190.

<https://repository.usfca.edu/diss/190>

This Dissertation is brought to you for free and open access by the Theses, Dissertations, Capstones and Projects at USF Scholarship: a digital repository @ Gleeson Library | Geschke Center. It has been accepted for inclusion in Doctoral Dissertations by an authorized administrator of USF Scholarship: a digital repository @ Gleeson Library | Geschke Center. For more information, please contact repository@usfca.edu.

The University of San Francisco

**Beginning in the Midst of the World:
Ethics, Poetics and Social Change on
an International Stage**

A Dissertation Presented
to

The Faculty of the School of Education

Department of Leadership Studies
Organization and Leadership Program

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Education

by
Michael Fontaine
San Francisco, California
May 2008

TABLE OF CONTENTS

UNIVERSITY OF SAN FRANCISCO	i
TABLE OF CONTENTS	ii
ILLUSTRATIONS AND ABBREVIATIONS	iv
DEDICATION	v
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	vi
PROLOGUE	viii
CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION	
Introduction	1
Background of Research Topic	3
Significance of the Research Issue	7
Summary	11
CHAPTER TWO: REVIEW OF LITERATURE	
Introduction	13
Folk Tales, Myths, Stories and Symbols	13
Contemporary Performance Text Theory	19
Critical Hermeneutics	21
CHAPTER THREE: RESEARCH PROTOCOL	
Introduction	29
Conceptual Framework	29
Entrée and Conversation Partners	39
Questions	41
Timeline	42
Data Collection	42
Data Presentation and Analysis	43
Pilot Study	44
Background of Researcher	48
Summary	50
CHAPTER FOUR: DATA PRESENTATION AND PRELIMINARY ANALYSIS	
Introduction	51
Southeast Asia	51
Giving Voice and Agency	52
Truth Must be Conveyed	54
Within a Short Space of Time	58
Always a Creation of Imagination	61

Helping People Find a Way	65
Central Europe	70
Open Enough to be Ready to Understand	70
Facing the Power	75
A Realm of Possibilities	78
Deciding for Oneself	82
United States	86
Let Us Live Peacefully	86
Jumping Off a Cliff	90
A Year in the Arts	94
Pushing Boundaries	97
Summary	101
CHAPTER FIVE: SECONDARY ANALYSIS	
Introduction	102
Martin Heidegger	102
Paul Ricoeur	105
Hans-Georg Gadamer	109
Jürgen Habermas	111
Richard Kearney	114
Summary	117
CHAPTER SIX: FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS	
Introduction	119
Findings	120
Recommendations	125
Challenges	126
Future Research	128
Summary	129
Personal Thoughts	130
Concluding Comments	131
EPILOGUE	133
BIBLIOGRAPHY	134
APPENDICES	137
APPENDIX A: Letters	137
APPENDIX B: Arts Events	142
APPENDIX C: Letter written by Somtow Sucharitkul	143
APPENDIX D: A Year in the Arts Template	144
APPENDIX E: IRBPHS Approval Acknowledgment	145
APPENDIX F: Pilot Study Transcript, Data Analysis and Implications	146

ILLUSTRATIONS

Figure 1	The Sleep of Reason Produces Monsters	vii
Table 1	Formal & Informal Conversation Partners	40

ABBREVIATIONS

CRC	California Redwood Chorale
DPA	Digital Performance Archive
EU	European Union
MIT	Merlin International Theatre
NYTW	New York Theater Workshop
TFMS	Theatre, Film & Media Studies Department
UKM	Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia
USF	University of San Francisco

DEDICATION

*To my sister Vickie for imagining
new possibilities for herself and family.*

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would first like to acknowledge Dr. Ellen A. Herda, my advisor, dissertation chair and friend. I have gained so much from her classes, from private conversations, and from travels together in Southeast Asia in 2005, 2006 and 2007. Thank you.

I thank Dr. Deborah Bloch and Dr. Shabnam Koirala-Azad for their expertise, insights, and positive encouragement regarding this research.

Thanks, too, to George Freund, Chair of the Philosophy Department at Santa Rosa Junior College for reading my proposal and providing me with useful observations.

Dorothy Rose and Dr. Grant Patrick have not only been good friends, but they have very kindly taken care of my pets during three consecutive summers of travel. Thank you both.

I would also like to thank my dear friend Rosemary Parks for her continued enthusiasm and support of my doctoral program activities, including this research.

And finally, I would like to acknowledge my longtime friends Dwayne Stincelli and Jackie Garbarino for providing me with countless opportunities to learn about myself during what I hope will continue to be a lifetime of friendship.



Figure 1: *The Sleep of Reason Produces Monsters*
By Francisco Goya (Hagen 2007: 34)

PROLOGUE

Never had men believed themselves to be so wise, so sure of possessing truth. Never before had they such confidence in the infallibility of their judgments, their theories, their moral principles...But all were victims of their own anguish and unable to comprehend each other. Each individual, however, believed himself to be the sole possessor of truth and became depressed at the sight of his fellows...They could no longer agree among themselves as to what sanctions to adopt towards good and evil, and knew not who to condemn and who to absolve. They ended up killing each other in a sort of absurd fury (Dostoyevsky 1866: 539).

CHAPTER ONE: BEGINNING IN THE MIDST OF THE WORLD

Introduction

In the preceding excerpt from Dostoyevsky's 1866 novel *Crime and Punishment*, the character Raskolnikov's nightmare vision is provoked by his guilt at having committed a crime for which he has yet to be brought to justice. It reflects a society functioning without ethical constraint: something Richard Kearney examines in *The Wake of Imagination*. Applying Sartre's existentialist theories to the situation described in the Dostoyevsky text, Kearney (1998: 242-243) writes "if everything is permitted, then what makes one man's moral choice of self-creation any better than another's? The collapse of morality into an absolute relativism of conflicting values" will in turn create a challenging dilemma: "the choice between the primacy of imagination and reason." This research explores the ability of art text to address this "dilemma" by linking poetic imagination to ethical responsibility for the other.

Prior to beginning my studies at the University of San Francisco, I would have been unable to offer any sort of methodology for addressing the problem posed by Kearney. I had only vaguely heard of hermeneutics in a career devoted almost exclusively to theatre: acting, directing, teaching and administration. Escaping to graduate school as a middle-aged man, I was determined to leave the arts behind, but – ironically – while trying to leave I found a passion that had been lacking in my creative endeavors. It was through a new understanding of the potential relationship of art text to ethics: a union requiring the blending of equal parts "imagination and reason" that could potentially lead to an answer to the question asked by Kearney. This discovery eventually led to my research travels and conversations in Southeast Asia, Central Europe and in

the United States, as well as my attendance at a diverse array of arts-related events in these locations. It has been a remarkably satisfying journey comprised of many memorable moments, including this one that I would like to share. Near the end of my research in Central Europe, I traveled to Prague in the Czech Republic determined to attend as many performances as possible during my five-day visit. While walking across the historic Charles Bridge towards the center of the city, and after passing a lively Dixieland-style jazz octet performing to an appreciative audience, I recognized the poorly amplified sounds of a familiar operatic melody playing in the distance. Moving through the nearly shoulder-to-shoulder crowds towards the music, I arrived at the place from which the sound was coming, just moments before a petite woman began to sing: a tape player at her side providing the only accompaniment. Awkwardly clasping an oversized Braille book, she ran her fingers along the raised musical notes and began singing the *Habenera* from Bizet's opera *Carmen*. Though her voice sounded tired, and her pitch wavered a bit, there was something unusually moving about her performance: a blind Czech singer, reading Braille to interpret a Spanish temptress brought to life by a French composer, and performed in front of Americans (and many other nationalities) who had stopped to watch and to place a coin or two in her "donations please" basket. Months later, the image of the Czech Carmen on the Charles Bridge remains with me, serving as a visual metaphor for the Arts potential to serve as mediator between dissimilar cultures and traditions.

In this Chapter, I provide an introduction to my research, some background on the issue at hand, comments on the study significance, and a concluding summary. In addition, I introduce the other five chapters that helped shape this investigation which is

grounded in critical hermeneutic theory. Finally, I would like to explain the reasons for including the phrase *Beginning in the Midst of the World* as part of my dissertation title. Paul Ricoeur (1992: 105) refers to this phrase in his book *Oneself as Another*, stating that these words – from Kant – refer to human activity: in contrast to the world’s origin. Ricoeur asserts that such a beginning is practical in nature and is related to individual freedom of choice. I believe this phrase and explanation suggest a potential poetics/ethics relationship that might assist with the prevention of Raskolnikov’s nightmare from becoming a reality.

Background of Research Topic

In 1948, as a response to the atrocities committed by doctors in Nazi Germany, the General Assembly of the World Medical Association met in Geneva, Switzerland and adopted the use of the Physician’s Oath. Allegiance to this pledge must be sworn by each doctor at the time of being admitted as a member of the medical profession. The text includes a number of written promises, among them: “I solemnly pledge myself to consecrate my life to the service of humanity” (Declaration of Geneva 1948). It is interesting to consider the possibilities for ethical action if similar pledges were required of persons in other professions. One of the most enticing aspects of a career as an artist is the potential for challenging societal conventions. Would artists be able to honor a pledge to serve humanity: to do no harm? This is difficult to imagine, for the mere mention of potential constraints can trigger outrage from artists and non-artists alike who decry any infringements on creative liberty. It is a volatile issue that has made headlines of late.

This week’s suspension of a controversial production of Mozart’s opera “Idomeneo” by a Berlin opera company rides a global tide of unsettling questions about free expression, censorship, religion, ethnic sensibilities, multicultural ideas

and public safety. Artists who express contrary or unpopular viewpoints on such issues as Islamic customs, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict or Christian doctrine risk everything from boycotts to bannings to death. Humor, music and drama have become lethal weapons to some observers (Winn 2006: E1).

The production of *Idomeneo*, referred to in this San Francisco Chronicle article (September 30, 2006), was initially cancelled by Berlin Opera management in response to threats received for having included the image of the prophet Mohammed in the production design: an act forbidden in Islamic tradition. In fact, images depicting three religious leaders – Jesus, Buddha, and Mohammed – were featured, as was a final scene integral to the director’s production concept (certainly not a part of Mozart’s original text!) in which the severed heads of the three figures were presented at court by the opera’s title character. I mentioned the Berlin controversy to several of my research conversation partners and asked for their opinions on the issue. Their responses varied. Impresario Lazslo Magnacs, of the Merlin International Theatre in Budapest, said “I think that is a stupid idea. We have to be tolerant and before we do something we have to understand each other.” In California, Digital Theatre Artist Nadja Linnine Masura responded by saying “I don’t know personally that I would care if they used [an image of] Mohammed and incited riots because...I think that’s a valid response.” Short story author and Professor Noraini Yusof, a Muslim woman with whom I spoke in Kuala Lumpur, said that the *Idomeneo* concept – similar to the controversial Danish cartoons caricaturing Mohammed – “are in poor taste and may be not as sensitive to the culture and religion as possible.” She believed that if a similar event were to occur in Kuala Lumpur, there would be “a small minority [of Muslims] that will go overboard and do all the resistance...[but] that [small] portion [of the community] will get all the press.” The

varied responses from these three individuals living in different parts of the world are illustrative of the complexities of the ethics versus poetics issue: a non-Muslim, liberal male artist in Hungary condemning the Berlin director's choice; a non-Muslim, liberal female artist in the United States believing the choice may have been appropriate; and a Muslim, conservative female professor and author in Malaysia politely criticizing the choice and suggesting that a minority of Muslims in her country might object. Which of these three opinions is correct? Are they all valid?

The potential for divisiveness occurring through an arts-related event makes for good reading in international media. What is seldom reported is how the arts can actually support efforts to bring disparate peoples together: lessening cultural differences to encourage increased understanding. I experienced a number of these kinds of events during my research travels, and spoke with remarkable individuals, all of whom were involved in the arts in some capacity. I additionally attended or participated in performances presented in languages that I did not comprehend – Vietnamese, Thai, Hungarian, Czech – yet I believe authentic communication occurred, regardless. One such episode was an evening of song and dance in a village located in northern Vietnam. Other events were expensive affairs in grand concert halls or state-of-the-art theatres, while still others were spontaneous, free-happenings presented in unadorned settings. All of them offered an opportunity for increased understanding: similar to the one I describe in my July 23, 2007 research journal entry, written during my travels in central Hungary.

Dinner at 6pm followed by bus ride to the village of Lake Balatonszarszo Hungary, where the CRC [California Redwood Chorale] was set to perform as part of the opening of summer festivities. When we arrived at the small town square, a local band – whose members ranged from teenaged to elderly – were playing John Phillip Souza marches to an appreciative crowd of locals dressed in

shorts. Once the band finished, we sang about eight songs, alternating between spirituals, Gershwin classics, and a few songs we'd learned phonetically in Hungarian. We were well-received. But after we were done, a quartet of Beatles look-alikes took the stage to perform a tribute to the Fab Four. They were great, performing song after song without stopping! At first, Hungarian audience members danced with each other while members of our group danced separately. Then something remarkable occurred: the locals joined hands with us and we all danced in circling formations in the town square. Though they didn't speak English and we didn't speak Hungarian, it was a wonderfully upbeat evening with Beatles music facilitating easy communication. A CRC member said "I never realized how much the Beatles are a universal language."

Only a few weeks prior to this event in the Lake Balatonszarszo town square, I sat in the Esplanade Theatre in Bangkok, Thailand to see the Muang Thai Rachadalai Company's debut production of *Fah Jarod Sai*, a new musical based on a popular romantic novel. I felt strangely conspicuous in the all-Thai audience, especially when we were asked to stand for the Thai national anthem just prior to the start of the performance. However, once the theatre darkened and the music began, it could have been a theatre anywhere in the world, for it was easy to become engaged with the narrative. At intermission the man seated on my left spoke to me in Thai. He was surprised to learn that I did not speak the language, and wondered how I would be able to enjoy the production, as it was not performed in English. I said that the experience was somewhat comparable to attending an opera performance given in Italian or French. While I might not be able to speak these languages either, the story told could be followed because the plot elements – character types, conflicts, resolution, and so forth – were universal. After the performance, when we were exiting the theatre, I asked the man for his opinion. He offered general praise of the production before saying that the leading man was fine, but – having first read the novel – the actor did not match the image he had in mind for this character. I smiled, said goodbye, and as I returned to my hotel I reflected on how this

casual comment made in Bangkok was another reminder of how the arts could be a catalyst for expressing common sentiments irrespective of the culture represented in the work.

Significance of the Research Issue

Gadamer (1998: 98-99) writes that “this one world in which we all live is marked by a diversity of languages, religions, cultures, and traditions that...represents a problem of tolerance that is hardly less severe than those of earlier times with the ruling orthodoxies of various churches and religious denominations.” He says that “we can see that new confrontations leading to intolerance are always arising from the way distances are being closed up by modern transportation, telecommunications technology, and all the other possible modern forms of mobility.” Continuing, he observes that “we might think of the separatist tendencies in countries where language, religion, or economic factors endanger the unity of a state that has evolved in the course of history.” It is his belief that “this makes all the clearer the moral duty of tolerance that is a duty for each and every human being. With the dwindling of collective ties and their self-evidence, it seems to have become a new absolute duty.”

As Gadamer intimates, the world is becoming smaller, and its citizens face a number of issues: continuing terrorism and warfare in the Middle East and elsewhere; devastating poverty and hunger; and the destructive effects of global warming. These challenges require collaborative efforts if lasting solutions are to be found, and perhaps it could be achieved more quickly through the lessening or elimination of beliefs that continue to emphasize separateness between nations and religious traditions. Richard Kearney (2002: 121) suggests that philosophy might assist with this endeavor by helping

us to make more sensitive and just judgments through the questioning “of dogmatic polarizations between US and THEM – that is, by challenging the binary opposition separating ourselves as ‘saints’ from others as ‘strangers’”. He says that “while ‘saints’ and ‘strangers’ are not always the same, they are not always diametrically opposed either. There is probably a ‘saint’ in most ‘strangers’ and a ‘stranger’ in most ‘saints’”. An example of the Arts contribution to the “polarization” of global communities is demonstrated in the Berlin production, to which I refer above. With so many conflicts in the world arising due to struggles between Christians, Jews, Muslims, Kurds, Sunnis – and on and on – was it really necessary for the Berlin stage director to demonstrate his cleverness by making artistic choices that were overtly contemptuous of a large segment of the world community?

There have been other arts events – though perhaps not quite as volatile – that either antagonized different nations and religious groups, or were appropriated by a government in order to further a particular political agenda. An example of the former is the New York Theatre Workshop (NYTW) presentation of *My Name is Rachel Corrie*, a play based on the words of the American peace activist crushed to death in 2003 by an Israeli bulldozer in Gaza. Though the play enjoyed a sold-out run and numerous accolades at London’s Royal Court Theatre, the New York premiere was cancelled on opening night due to the American producers’ concerns that – among other reasons – Ariel Sharon’s illness and the election of Hamas to the Palestinian Authority combined to create unfavorable circumstances for the play’s debut, and would antagonize pro-Israel or pro-Palestinian New Yorkers who happened to be NYTW donors (Democracy Now 2006). An example of the latter – an event’s possible appropriation by a government in

order to emphasize their control of society – may have occurred with the Bangkok Opera premiere of *Ayudhya* – an original opera based on a story from the *Ramayana*. Written as a tribute to Thailand’s King Bhumipol in honor of his 60th year as monarch, the *Ayudhya* controversy originated from a single bit of stage action involving the death of the character of the demon-king Thotsakan (renamed Ravan in the opera), which – in Thai tradition – always happens offstage to avoid bad luck. In the Bangkok Opera premiere, the stage director – Somtow Sucharitkul – chose to have this character die in view of the audience. Because control of the Thai government had recently changed as a result of a military coup in which the Prime Minister was ousted, the Thai Ministry of Culture stated that they were concerned the bad luck induced by this onstage death could negatively affect the country’s delicate political situation (Condie 2006). Mr. Sucharitkul, who also serves as Artistic Director for the Opera company, wrote a passionate letter defending his actions, which appeared in the Thai media (Appendix C). Nevertheless, he had to alter the staging before the government would allow the opera to be performed.

While in Bangkok a few months after this incident, I asked one of my (informal) research conversation partners, Porntip Singha, for her opinion on the controversy. Ms. Singha provided interesting commentary on the topic. She believed the Bangkok Opera troubles were nothing new, and said that the Thai government has a history of allowing artists to create works without constraints. However, when the works were ready to be presented to an audience, the government has suddenly requested changes or threatened cancellation. It was her opinion that these arts events were conscripted in order to promote the government’s agenda. A relevant theoretical explanation of her comments

regarding this possible appropriation has been offered by Ricoeur, which Kearney (1998: 166) explains.

By ritualizing and codifying its experiences in terms of idealized self-images, recollected from the past, a society provides itself with an ideological stability: a unity of collective imagination which may well be missing from the everyday realities of that society. Thus, while Ricoeur readily acknowledges that every culture constitutes itself by telling stories of its own past, he warns against the ideological abuses attendant upon such a process of imaginative restoration. ‘The danger is that this reaffirmation can be perverted, usually by monopolistic elites, into a mystificatory discourse which serves to uncritically vindicate or glorify the established political powers. In such instances, the symbols of a community become fixed and fetishized; they serve as lies’.

In the Bangkok incident, the “idealized self-images” may be those associated with the *Ramayana*-inspired Thai traditions surrounding good and bad luck, while “perverted reaffirmation” may describe the Thai Ministry’s actions imposed on Bangkok Opera by an unstable government as a result of the recent coup. The problematic relationship between ethics and action can be discerned in the Bangkok episode: and in the Berlin controversy as well.

Paul Ricoeur defines ethical intention as aiming for the good life with and for others in just institutions (1992: 172). How might the Arts incorporate this definition of ethical intention in support of fostering respectful relationships between nations of various faith and cultural traditions? Anthropologist David Bidney writes that “a human or a group of humans freely creates something cultural, which may then precipitate some consequence, also cultural. But then humans can in turn react to that cultural consequence, and can change it” (1996: xxv). Performance-specific anthropologist Victor Turner (1974: 14) states that “human social groups tend to find their openness to the future in the variety of their metaphors for what may be the good life and in the contest of

their paradigms.” He says that “If there is order, it is seldom preordained ... it is achieved – the result of conflicting or concurring wills and intelligences, each relying on some convincing paradigm.” It is my belief that the arts can contribute to more harmonious relationships between differing peoples through a “convincing” arts creation and presentation paradigm that acknowledges concern for the other: supporting the transcendence of traditional boundaries of exclusiveness through a mindful blending of ethics with poetics. The difficulty is how to proceed if, “as most post-modernists claim, there is no concept of universal right or regulation to guide our interpretations” (Kearney 1998: 219).

Summary

The arts have the potential to serve as an effective medium for communication between different cultures. They can promote increased understanding, or they can be used to promote otherness and be manipulated to support a political agenda. This research explores the ability of art text – in selected sites in Southeast Asia, the United States and Europe – to assist in the addressing of global issues through the transcendence of traditional boundaries of exclusiveness within and between countries by linking poetic imagination to ethical responsibility for the other. In the Chapter Two Review of Literature I examine some of the characteristics the Arts have in common – including possible historical origins – as well as performance text theory and relevant critical hermeneutic concepts. Chapter Three discusses the research protocol used for this study, as well as introducing the conceptual framework used for data analysis, and also information on the Pilot Study undertaken in advance of this investigation. In Chapter Four, the formal conversation partners who contributed to this research are presented

with accompanying theoretical comments relevant to their unique contributions. A more detailed theoretical analysis of these conversations is presented in Chapter Five. Finally, in Chapter Six I summarize the research findings, and provide comments on how this information might influence future arts creation and research related to ethically informed poetics. As Kearney (1998: 229) writes, “if it is true that we cannot possess knowledge of what is good in any absolute sense, it is equally true that we have an ethical duty to decide between what is better and what is worse.”

CHAPTER TWO: REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Introduction

The first category of this literature review will discuss folk tales, myths, stories and symbols. The second category examines contemporary performance text theory. Finally, in the third section, critical hermeneutic concepts are reviewed under the headings of narrative identity, imagination, and ethics.

Folk Tales, Myths, Stories and Symbols

From the word go, stories were invented to fill the gaping hole within us, to assuage our fear and dread, to try to give answers to the great unanswerable questions of existence: Who are we? Where do we come from? Are we animal, human or divine? Strangers, gods, or monsters? Are we born of one (mother-earth) or born of two (human parents)? Are we creatures of nature or culture? In seeking to provide responses to such unfathomable conundrums – both physical and metaphysical – the great tales and legends gave not only relief from everyday darkness but also pleasure and enchantment: the power to bring a hush to a room, a catch to the breath, a leap to the curious heart, with the simple words ‘Once upon a time’ (Kearney 2002: 7).

During the late 19th and early 20th century, several noted anthropologists researched the origins and significance of folk tales, myths and stories. One of them, Franz Boas, examined the use of these forms of narrative by indigenous peoples and found that they are “taken seriously in the sense that they deal with subjects of the utmost importance to native life and constitute primitive man’s beliefs as to the nature and origin of his world and the cosmic significance of his rites and customs” (Bidney 1996: 291). The question which came first – myth or folk tales – was answered by Boas who believed that myths were “said to be rationalizations or after-thoughts attached to rituals and folk tales” (1996: 292). Boas additionally believed that the “environment has an important effect upon the customs and beliefs of man, but only in so far as it helps to determine the

special forms of customs and beliefs. These are, however, based primarily on cultural conditions, which themselves are due to historical causes” (Boas 1924: 162-163).

While Boas asserted that myths were somehow related to or derived from folk tales, anthropologist Bronislaw Malinowski believed that the two were entirely distinct. Malinowski integrated ideas of cultural theory with psychological science, refuting Freud’s theory of the Oedipus Complex, and argued that culture functioned to meet the needs of individuals rather than society as a whole, and that by meeting individual needs society’s needs would be met. Malinowski’s examination of the stories told by primitive cultures resulted in his distinguishing three particular types: tales, legends, and myths, with myths being the most significant. In *Magic, Science and Religion* he writes:

Myth, as a statement of primeval reality which still lives in present-day life and as a justification by precedent, supplies a retrospective pattern of moral values, sociological order, and magical belief. It is, therefore, neither a mere narrative, nor a form of science, nor a branch of art or history, nor an explanatory tale. It fulfills a function... closely connected with the nature of tradition, and the continuity of culture, with the relation between age and youth, and with the human attitude towards the past... Myth is not merely a story told but a reality lived (in Firth 1957: 100, 146).

Malinowski’s (in Firth 1957: 108) observations of indigenous societies allowed him to conclude that “stories form an integral part of culture...their existence and influence not merely transcend the act of telling the narrative ...they govern and control many cultural features and form the dogmatic backbone of primitive civilization.” The significance of stories or narratives for individuals and community – as explored by Boas and Malinowski – has been further developed by contemporary philosophers, including Paul Ricoeur, who writes (1984: 47) that:

Without myths that have been passed on there would be nothing to transform poetically. Who can fully put into words the inexhaustible source of violence

received from the myths which the poet transforms into a tragic effect? And where is this tragic potential more dense than in the received stories about a few celebrated houses: that of the Atrides, that of Oedipus? It is not by chance therefore that Aristotle, so concerned elsewhere about the autonomy of the poetic act, advises poets to continue to draw upon the most frightful and pitiable matter in this treasury.

Ricoeur believes that myths can be understood as symbolic stories. He states (1967: 18) that they are a “species of symbols developed in the form of narration and articulated in a time and a space that cannot be co-ordinated with the time and space of history and geography.”

Ricoeur asserts that one’s personal identity is understood in a manner similar to understanding the characters in a story, a book or a film where we can observe and understand the characters, their relationships and their distinct backgrounds as demonstrated through the plot. In performance text, events are configured or arranged by the author/presenters in a particular sequence to tell a story that may reveal individual character strengths and weaknesses, while simultaneously conveying an overarching message or point of view. For example, the director of the Berlin *Idomeneo*, referred to earlier, has said that his choice to display the severed heads of the three religious figures helped to convey his production concept that the three major world religions have failed to create or achieve lasting peace (Dempsey 2006): a choice that coincidentally contributed to the identity of the title character – Idomeneo - as being superior, or more powerful, than Jesus, Buddha, or Mohammed.

A narrative’s ability to reveal the identity of individuals is assisted, shaped and expressed through cultural (control) symbols or images that inform communal behavior. The concept of cultural control mechanisms was elaborated upon several generations

after Malinowski by Clifford Geertz. In *The Interpretation of Cultures* Geertz discusses the concept of *consensus gentium* (a consensus of all mankind) – present during the Enlightenment and continuing into the 20th century – meaning that “there are some things that all men will be found to agree upon as right, real, just or attractive and that these things are, therefore, in fact right, real, just or attractive” (1973: 38). However, he refers to a dualism between universal and variable aspects of culture, and says the consensus approach fails to address this issue. His investigations allowed him to conclude that what is universal is that various cultures have social, psychological and biological levels and means of artistic or cultural expression although the characteristics of each are unique. Geertz states that anthropologists have been fearful of examining cultural particularities for “fear of historicism, of becoming lost in a whirl of cultural relativism so convulsive as to deprive them of any fixed bearings at all” (1973: 44). He asserts that the stratified concept of cultural levels needs to be replaced “with a synthetic one: that is, one in which biological, psychological, sociological, and cultural factors can be treated as variables within unitary systems of analysis” (1973: 44). In order to address the concept of integration, he proposes two ideas. First, that culture should be viewed “as a set of control mechanisms...for the governing of behavior”, and second, that man is in need of external mechanisms/cultural programs, “for ordering his behavior” (1973: 44). While Boas and Malinowski emphasize the significance of folk tales, myths and stories reflecting the values and traditions of primitive peoples, and Ricoeur offers a critical hermeneutics of anthropology that essentially supports the importance of myths and stories or narrative in determining identity, Geertz emphasizes the controlling mechanism of symbols which man finds in his community when born, and which – though perhaps with modifications

– exist after he dies. Without the use of culturally-determined controls “man’s behavior would be virtually ungovernable...” (Geertz 1973: 46). Again citing the Berlin *Idomeneo*, the presence of visual representations/symbols in the form of Jesus, Buddha and Mohammed not only contributed to the overarching production concept for that particular realization of Mozart’s opera, but coincidentally reflected the controlling affect world religions have on their followers.

Ricoeur, too, writes of the significance of symbols, believing that there are three principal symbolic categories – cosmic, oneiric and poetic – all of which “find expression in a *linguistic* imagination” (Kearney 1998: 153). Ricoeur states (1984: 57) that “if in fact, human action can be narrated, it is because it is always already articulated by signs, rules, and norms. It is always already symbolically mediated.” He says (1984: 58):

A symbolic system thus furnishes a descriptive context for particular actions. In other words, it is “as a function of” such a symbolic convention that we can interpret this gesture as meaning this or that. The same gesture of raising one’s arm, depending on the context, may be understood as a way of greeting someone, of hailing a taxi, or of voting. Before being transmitted to interpretation, symbols are interpretants internally related to some action.

How people give meaning to and express their reality through cultural symbols is the primary emphasis of the research of anthropologist Mary Douglas, perhaps best known for her writings on human culture and symbolism. In *Natural Symbols*, her book on both religion and secular symbolism, she discusses the relationship between symbols and ritual and asserts that the strongest forms of ritualism are experienced in closed social groups where “...non-verbal symbols are capable of creating a structure of meanings in which individuals can relate to one another and realize their own ultimate purposes” (Douglas 1970: 50). She determines that all societies can be compared by their two

cultural dimensions: *group* (the degree of division between insiders and outsiders of a society), and *grid* (rules that relate individuals to one another). In strong group and strong grid societies, individuals are regulated for the sake of the group through clearly defined social sectors: classes, castes, age-grades, etc. In a society with low group and low grid controls, people are viewed more as individuals than as part of the group, and are regulated by political laws. From daily cleanliness rituals to world views, she asserts “that culture is rooted in daily social relations and grants that the structuring of experience often comes about through a system of paired opposites: male/female, black/white, good/evil ... distinctions that let us know when we have encountered a symbolic boundary” (in Wuthnow 1984: 82). Douglas observes that moral order is intrinsic to our structuring of reality, consequently activities related to putting things in their place – sorting, tidying, cleaning – “act to reinforce not only the structure of social reality but of moral sentiments too... When things get out of place the normative and legal order is challenged and society re-establishes that order by taking ritual action” (1984: 87-88) to persecute people in an attempt to redraw threatened boundaries.

In this way the community can actually ‘manufacture’ deviance, which is exactly what a witch-hunt is all about. An aroused community persecutes people who have done nothing. The community need not wait for individuals to stray across the moral boundaries; the boundaries can be shifted to redefine individuals as being on the other side. Authorities can always declare some activity illegal or immoral and prosecute, no matter whether the same thing in a different place or at a different time was ‘legal’. The community’s rules shift when there is a crisis in its corporate identity or collective existence, creating an organic need to manufacture enemies to bring the community closer together (1984: 90).

This concept is perhaps exemplified in the outcry by members of the world Muslim community in response to the Mozart production; in the actions of the Thai Ministry of Culture (in an attempt to prevent bad luck from adversely affecting Thai society) by

vilifying the stage director of the Bangkok Opera production of *Ayudhya*; and perhaps even in the response provoked in artists and art lovers world-wide – in general – regarding censorship of the above performance texts: itself a binary or ‘US versus THEM’ polarization. Douglas’ ideas regarding group action also influence her opinions on a community’s relationship to music and art as a means of communication and a conveyor of collective information. She writes that “art ‘speaks’ as colors and shapes are combined to make statements, which like speech and music, can be deciphered in terms of elaborated or restricted codes” (in Wuthnow 1984: 109).

The significance of the arts in shaping societal behaviors has been the research emphasis of several authors contributing to the field of contemporary performance text theory, which will be discussed in the following section.

Contemporary Performance Text Theory

Anthropologist Victor Turner, referred to earlier in Part One of this proposal, elaborates upon theories introduced by Boas, Malinowski, Geertz and Douglas. For Turner, there is “a continuous, dynamic process linking performative behavior – art, sports, ritual, play – with social and ethical structure: the way people think about and organize their lives and specify individual and group values” (Turner 1987: 8). He explores concepts relating to ritual process and distinguishes three specific types of human ritualization: social, religious, and aesthetic, each of which can be further divided into types and genres which differ in different cultures, “and in terms of the scale and complexity of the sociocultural fields in which they are generated and sustained” (1987: 11, 82). In support of his belief that performance is “a legitimate object of study for postmodern anthropology,” Turner (1987: 81) writes:

If man is a sapient animal, a tool-making animal, a self-making animal, a symbol-using animal, he is, no less, a performing animal, *Homo performans*, not in the sense, perhaps, that a circus animal may be a performing animal, but in the sense that man is a self-performing animal – his performances are, in a way, *reflexive*, in performing he reveals himself to himself. This can be in two ways: the actor may come to know himself better through acting or enactment; or one set of human beings may come to know themselves better through observing and/or participating in performances generated and presented by another set of human beings.

In addition to his premise that humans learn through participation with or observation of other groups, Turner states that lived experience “is made up of not only our observations and reactions, but also the cumulative wisdom ... of humankind, expressed not only in custom and tradition but also in great works of art” (1987: 84).

The peculiarities of human performance has been a research emphasis for a colleague of Turner’s, theater director and impresario Richard Schechner, whose views on the sociological and psychological characteristics of actors in ritual, ritualized theatre, and more secular types of performance are expressed in his work *Between Theater and Anthropology*. Schechner has investigated the *how* of performance including the relationships between actors, audience and a text. His particular focus is non-western theater and its religious origins and ethical world views – quite different from a Euro-American outlook – though he also explores the familiar cultural performances of western film, television and stage. His insights include details related to how “ritual and theatrical traditions become enflashed in performance and in their dynamic incarnation act as a reflexive metacommentary on the life of their times” (1985: xii). Turner (1985: xii) states that anthropologists may benefit from Schechner’s work because he “is a practiced diver, and he brings up for us many treasures as well as dead men’s bones. He

might just be the catalyst anthropologists need to get them thinking about what Dilthey called “lived-through experience.”

Though Turner and Schechner explore performance in general, Paul Atkinson, a social anthropologist at the Cardiff School of Social Sciences in Wales, examines the world of opera specifically through fieldwork at the internationally regarded Welsh National Opera (WNO) company. In his operative ethnography, *Everyday Arias*, Atkinson provides a behind the scenes glimpse into rehearsals and performances at the WNO, and discusses the relevance for a sustained investigation into opera as a cultural phenomenon and its potential contribution to understanding collective working relationships and social organization.

The effect that performance text may have on a reader or viewer – the research field of *aesthetics* – has been explored by Wolfgang Iser in *The Act of Reading* and *Towards an Aesthetic of Reception* by Robert Jauss. Both writers examine the individual and collective reactions to the set of instructions offered by a text and how these instructions may result in a passive or creative response by a reading public (Ricoeur 1984: 77).

The examination of individual and collective relationships is further explored in the following section, which discusses three distinct critical hermeneutic subjects: narrative identity, imagination and ethics.

Critical Hermeneutics

Narrative Identity

Ricoeur (1992: 147-148) writes that “the narrative constructs the identity of the character, what can be called his or her narrative identity, in constructing that of the story

told. It is the identity of the story that makes the identity of the character.” His concept of narrative identity asserts individuals are defined by specific and temporal parameters influenced by events and relationships, and posits that personal or narrative identity is constituted by an *idem*-identity (sameness) and an *ipse*-identity (selfhood). The *idem* is that part of one’s identity that remains permanent through time: an individual is born into a particular set of circumstances and family relationships that, regardless of life experiences, remain unchanged. The second aspect of one’s identity – the *ipse* – is that part of oneself that continues to evolve due to life experiences: career choices, marriage, increased personal or spiritual understanding, and other experiences. Who we are at any given moment – our *character* – is the result of the tension between the two (sameness and self-hood), and this exchange is fueled or driven by “imaginative variations” (Ricoeur 1992: 148). Our personal identity, which continues to take shape during our lifetime, is directly determined by our narrative: the story of our lives. This relationship, therefore, allows us to equate personal identity with narrative identity. Ricoeur’s analysis of personal narrative identity yields four conclusions that are basic to his anthropology.

They are:

1. Because my personal identity is a narrative identity, I can make sense of myself only in and through my involvement with others.
2. In my dealings with others, I do not simply enact a role or function that has been assigned to me. I can change myself through my own efforts and can reasonably encourage others to change as well.
3. Nonetheless, because I am bodily and hence have inherited both biological and psychological constraints, I cannot change everything about myself. And because others are similarly constrained, I cannot sensibly call for comprehensive changes in them.

4. Though I can be evaluated in a number of ways, e.g., physical dexterity, verbal fluency, technical skill, the ethical evaluation in the light of my responsiveness to others is, on the whole, the more important evaluation.

Ricoeur (1991: 437) writes that “we do not cease to re-interpret the narrative identity that constitutes us in the light of stories handed down to us by our culture. In this sense our self-understanding presents the same traits of traditionality as the understanding of a literary work does.” He asserts that “in this way we learn to become the *narrator of our own story* without completely becoming the author of our life.”

It could be said that we appropriate in the application to ourselves the concert of narrative voices that make up the symphony of the great works, of the epics, the tragedies, dramas, and novels. The difference is that, in these works, the author has disguised himself as narrator and bears the masks of his many *personae* in whose midst he is the dominant narrative voice telling the story we read. We can become our own narrator, following these narrative voices, without becoming authors. That is the great difference between life and fiction. In this sense it is certainly true that life is lived and the story told (Ricoeur 1991: 437).

Life and stories are reconciled to each other because, while stories are told, they are “also lived in the imaginary mode” (Ricoeur 1991: 432). The importance of imagination in shaping the identity of a character/self has been referred to above. It is additionally explained in the following section.

Imagination

Richard Kearney (1988: 16) identifies four definitions of the term *imagination*. The first is “the ability to evoke absent objects which exist elsewhere, without confusing these absent objects with things present here and now.” The second: “the construction and/or use of material forms and figures such as paintings, statues, photographs, etc. to represent real things in some ‘unreal’ way.” Third: “the fictional projection of non-existent things as in dreams or literary narratives.” And finally, fourth: “the capacity of

human consciousness to become fascinated by illusions, confusing what is real with what is unreal.” Immanuel Kant and Martin Heidegger assert that imagination was an inherent part of being, and that it allows for the intuition or creation of mental (visual) images, rather than simply the derivation of images from empirical perception. Paul Ricoeur’s theory is based on the belief that the productive power of imagination is primarily verbal, and is revealed through discourse in its many forms. Commenting on Ricoeur’s belief, Kearney (1998: 142) writes that imagination is “an indispensable agent in the creation of meaning in and through language:” what Ricoeur calls “semantic innovation.” This requires a “more poetical role of imagining...the ability to say one thing in terms of another” through the use of metaphors, symbols or narratives, or “to say several things at the same time, thereby creating something new:” allowing the freedom to “conceive of the world in other ways and to undertake forms of action which might lead to its transformation. Semantic innovation can thus point towards social transformation” (1998: 145, 149). The use of imagination to introduce *innovation*, however, is dependent on *tradition*, and performance texts have to balance these two extremes: servile application (tradition) and calculated deviation (innovation). It is not an easy task. Kearney observes that “while myth, folk-tale and traditional narratives in general gravitate towards the first pole, the more modern and post-modern exercises in narrative tend toward deviation” (1998: 164). As an example, the controversies associated with the aforementioned productions in New York, Berlin and Bangkok may be the result of the author/presenters’ tendency towards unbalanced deviation. Ricoeur assigns the reader or audience member the imaginative responsibility of completing the narrative during the viewing or reading experience, but his or her ability to do so may be prevented by a text that is deviant to the

extreme and not reflective of the reader's social imaginary: defined as the "whole set of collective stories and histories...which exercise a formative influence on our modes of action and behavior in society" (1998: 165). Similar to the dialectic between tradition and deviance, the social imaginary is comprised of two contrasting images that reflect either *ideology* or *utopia*. The first uses imagination to mirror the order: in the second imagination is used to disrupt the order (Ricoeur 1986: 64). Two Bangkok Opera productions in 2006 exemplify this use of imagination. The first, *Ayudhya*, has already been discussed. The second was a production of Verdi's *Aida*: an acknowledged success. Traditionally set in Egypt, the director and his design team changed the opera's setting to 17th century Siam (Thailand), which – given the relationship between Siam and Burma during that period, and combined with the events and characters in the original libretto – refigured Verdi's work by creating a performance text that increased the Thai audience's ability to participate in the unfolding narrative. Both *Ayudhya* and *Aida* demonstrate the use of imagination to combine tradition with innovation. *Aida* was embraced from the outset, while the Thai Ministry of Culture insisted that *Ayudhya* could only be fully appreciated by Thai audiences after a change was made to the text, allowing for an imaginative interpretation conforming more closely to the existing Thai social imaginary.

Kearney (1998: 230) states "that without [the] imaginative ability to invoke exemplary figures and narratives, to put oneself in others' shoes, to identify oneself with their actions, thoughts or feelings, it is difficult to see how moral sentiment or reason could operate at all." The relationship of action to morals and ethics will be discussed in the following section.

Ethics

In *The Wake of Imagination*, Kearney states (1988: 362, 395) that “ethics has primacy over epistemology and ontology” and that ethical imagination “bids man to tell and retell the story of himself. And it does so...out of fidelity to the other. It is above all the *other* who demands that I remain responsible. For if there is no longer a self to abide by its promises, there is no ethical relation possible.” He believes that ethics “presupposes the existence of a certain *narrative identity*: a self which remembers its commitments to the other (both in its personal and collective history) and recalls that these commitments have not yet been fulfilled.” He says “this narrative self is not some permanently subsisting substance (*idem*)... rather... a perpetually self-rectifying identity (*ipse*) which knows that its story, like that of the imagination which narrates it, is never complete.” For Kearney, critical practical judgments are essential to ethics, for there must be some way to distinguish good from evil. He proposes (2003: 100) a three-fold hermeneutics of action to address this need: “(a) practical understanding (*phronesis-praxis*); (b) working-through (*catharsis-Durcharbeitung*); and (c) pardon.” Of these three, the most demanding, he believes, is pardon.

In his investigation into the relation between narrative theory and ethical theory, Ricoeur has asked how self-understanding resulting from narrative is related to an awareness of the ethical implications associated with one’s actions. He refers to a “conceptual network” when discussing action to distinguish “the domain of action from that of physical movement” (1984: 55).

I say “conceptual network” rather than “concept of action” in order to emphasize the fact that the very term “action,” taken in the narrow sense of what someone does, gets its distinct meaning from its capacity for being used in conjunction with other terms of the whole network.

He states that actions imply goals, refer to motives and have agents “who do and can do things which are taken as *their* work, or *their* deed. As a result, these agents can be held responsible for certain consequences of their actions” (1984: 55). Mastering this conceptual network is dependent upon practical understanding.

Ricoeur defines ethics as being the aim of an accomplished life, and morality as the articulation of this aim through norms: a concept originating in the reflections of Aristotle who believed that an accomplished life was achieved through praxis (theoretically informed practices) involving many possible choices of action. These potential choices reflect standards of excellence that are determined socially, which Ricoeur relates to the ethical aim of living well. The determination of socially acceptable choices is greatly influenced by who is wielding power in a community or country. Ricoeur distinguishes three types of power: power-over, power-to-do, and power-in-common. A wide variety of issues contributed to the controversy surrounding the New York Theatre Workshop (NYTW) production of *My Name is Rachel Corrie*, and perhaps all of them were power-related. Successfully presented in London, the cancellation of the United States premiere at the NYTW is thought by some to have been politically motivated. The Workshop’s published position was that presenting the play could be viewed as “taking a stand in a political conflict (the Israeli/Palestine struggle over the Gaza strip) that we didn’t want to take” (Democracy Now 2006). Others believed the play offered a moving example of one person’s commitment, courage and idealism in confronting injustice, and, as a work of art, the play should be presented without apology or explanation. The NYTW producers publicly stated that because various communities

might be affected by the play's content – including major donors – they needed more time to assess how best to proceed, believing ultimately their purpose as a presenting organization in “producing art is to foster community dialogue” (Democracy Now 2006). The debate as to whether or not the NYTW would stage the work continued on both sides of the Atlantic for some time, eventually resulting in the presentation of the play by another New York theatre organization six months later. Events associated with this controversy can be examined with regards to the three forms of power described by Ricoeur, with the “power-over” possibly exemplified by anti-Hamas protestors and major donors.

Though the New York Theatre Workshop presenters were unable to present *My Name is Rachel Corrie*, their desire to “foster community dialogue” – part of their justification for the production's cancellation – is an important concept in the creation and presentation of performance text that is ethically informed and acknowledges concern for the other. It is reflective of Ricoeur's concept of power-in-common and additionally addresses his ethics of argumentation, which asserts that it is only through “public debate, friendly discussion, and shared convictions that moral judgment in situation is formed” (Ricoeur 1992: 290-291).

CHAPTER THREE: RESEARCH PROCESS

Introduction

Chapter Three describes the hermeneutic participatory research process used for this study, drawn from Herda (1999), which has abided by the Human Subjects regulations of the University of San Francisco (see Appendix E). The first section reviews the conceptual framework used for data analysis, followed by a description of the entrée and selection of participants, research sites, and methods of data collection and analysis. The third section discusses the pilot study – including theory used for textual analysis and implications – that served as the preliminary exploration for this research project. The final section presents a description of the background of the researcher. The complete text of the pilot conversation, analysis and implications is found in Appendix F.

Conceptual Framework

The adoption of hermeneutics – as the ‘art of deciphering indirect meanings’ – acknowledges the *symbolizing* power of imagination. This power, to transform given meanings into new ones, enables one to construe the future as the ‘possible theatre of my liberty’, as a horizon of hope (Kearney 1998: 147).

Martin Heidegger

Hermeneutics is primarily an interpretive approach to understanding involving more than the recognition of symbols and patterns. It is concerned with “being” rather than “knowledge”. Heidegger is a key contributor to the theoretical concepts relevant to this research, in particular his theory regarding being-in-the-world (Dasein) revealed through language, and the relationship of language and understanding to the ontology of being. Dasein does not refer simply to characteristics that are associated with isolated persons, but rather to the being that takes shape within individuals as a result of living in

relationship – in community – with others. Heidegger associates Dasein with a concept of time that is divided into three temporal categories reflective of his philosophy of care. The first, *thrownness*, is being-in-the-world today, though informed by the past. The second, *projection*, is being-in-the-world thought of as future possibilities. The third – *fallenness* – is a being-in-the-world that is pre-occupied with current circumstances. All three temporalities are fundamental to Dasein, and do not necessarily reflect linear time (Heidegger 1962: 219-224). Though one's separate identity – or being-in-the-world – is unique, it can be subsumed by the larger group. Of Heidegger, Collins (1998: 63) writes that “*Dasein* is subject to take-over bids by the Others. It exists as an ‘I am’ but also as an ‘I-am-with-the-Others’.” Heidegger (1962: 164) explains:

In utilizing public means of transport and in making use of information services such as the newspaper, every Other is like the next. This Being-with-one-another dissolves one's own Dasein completely into the kind of Being of ‘the Others’, in such a way, indeed, that the Others, as distinguishable and explicit, vanish more and more. In this inconspicuousness and unascertainability, the real dictatorship of the “they” is unfolded.

Heidegger's views regarding ontological imagination are relevant to this research and are additionally expressive of Dasein. Kearney suggests that imagination is a pseudonym for Dasein and states (1998: 53-54) that it is the invisible source of our vision: “that which makes a world possible. Imagination is *Dasein* understood as being-in-the-world, hermeneutically prefiguring one's world horizon as that towards which one projects one's possibilities...*Dasein* is the very origin of the creativity of being.”

Finally, Heidegger's writings on the creation of works of art, and the truth that is to be found in them, also informs this research. The importance of the relationship

between language and the arts is central to his thesis, which is explained in the following excerpt.

Whenever art happens – that is, whenever there is a beginning – a thrust enters history, history either begins or starts over again. History means here not a sequence in time of events of whatever sort, however important. History is the transporting of a people into its appointed task as entrance into that people's endowment. Art is the setting-into-work of truth (1971: 77).

A possible example of this “setting-into-work” is suggested by an event described by one of my conversation partners – a stage director in Kuala Lumpur – who told me of a particularly violent incident in Malaysia's recent history that was depicted in a new production at his theatre company. Revisiting this horrible incident was a key element of the dramatic plot for this premiere: a truth, he said, Malaysians would rather not face. Yet remembering that this violence had occurred was essential, he believed, for the country to avoid similar trauma in the future.

Heidegger's theories regarding the temporal divisions of Dasein and the significance of imagination in relation to being are concepts that were further developed in the critical hermeneutics of Paul Ricoeur.

Paul Ricoeur

Ricoeur's writings play a significant role in the conceptual framework for this research, in particular his theories on narrative identity, imagination and ethics (which have been discussed earlier in Chapter Two of this document), as well as three-fold mimesis. In *Oneself as Another*, Ricoeur states that “the person, understood as a character in a story, is not an entity distinct from his or her ‘experiences.’ Quite the opposite: the person shares the condition of dynamic identity peculiar to the story recounted” (1992: 147). This comparison of living individuals to fictional characters as a means of

explaining narrative identity can be further elaborated upon. In a narrative we come to understand the characters by way of the plot, with each person's individual identity intersecting that of other persons. In addition, every character comes from a particular place and has a particular heritage. Finally, narratives show that from the standpoint of ethics, there is an "ethical primacy of the other than the self over the self" (1992: 168).

In his examination of the relationship between narrative theory and the theory of action and ethics, Ricoeur distinguishes the difference between the capacity for individuals to act versus an obligation to act, and asserts that individual actions lose their significance without having an awareness of the larger whole. This means that the responsive self should be primarily concerned not with its own condition but rather with responding thoughtfully to others in hope that this responsiveness will bring about a better life for all persons involved (1992: 165-68). Ricoeur's concept of solicitude – "whereby each person is irreplaceable in our affection and our esteem" (1992: 193) – serves as the underlying motivation for "responding thoughtfully" which, together with similitude – the bond between oneself and the other – "authorizes us to say that I cannot myself have self-esteem unless I esteem others *as myself*" (1992: 193).

Ricoeur defines the term institution as meaning "the structure of *living together* as this belongs to a historical community... the bond of common mores" (1992: 194). A just distribution of power within institutions is demonstrative of equality: the name "given to the ethical core common to distributive justice" (1992: 194). He posits that there are multiple spheres of justice involved with the distribution of shared goods, governing membership in society, security and welfare, money and merchandise and equal opportunity, and asserts that the obligation to serve the institutions of a constitutional

state is of lesser importance than moral obligation. He writes that “when the spirit of a people is perverted to the point of feeding a deadly *Sittlichkeit* (morality), it is finally in the moral consciousness of a small number of individuals, inaccessible to fear and to corruption, that the spirit takes refuge, once it has fled the now-criminal institutions” (1992: 256). A recent example of this point made by Ricoeur is suggested by something I learned from Balzacs Lazar, an actor in Budapest with whom I spoke. Balzacs described Hungary’s difficult transition from communism to democracy during the last several decades, and said that in the fall of 2006, news media revealed that the Hungarian government – members of which had served in the former communist regimes – had manipulated data to mask the fact that huge amounts of money had been borrowed from foreign investors: money that the government could not repay. The country was faced with a financial crisis that led to public protests in the streets of Budapest – something unheard of in the country’s totalitarian past.

Finally, Ricoeur’s concept of the three-fold mimesis has practical application to this research, particularly with regards to understanding the process involved in the refiguring of existing performance texts and the relationship of the persons involved in this process. During my research, I attended a surprisingly moving performance – surprising because the actors never spoke – given by the Black Light Theatre of Prague. It was titled *Aspects of Alice* and was based on Lewis Carol’s *Alice in Wonderland* stories. Using the definitions for the three-fold mimesis provided in Herda (1999: 78), the production of *Aspects of Alice* can be viewed in light of the mimesis process. For example the first step, mimesis₁ – a world already figured – may have included the history of prior productions of *Alice in Wonderland*-based stories/stage productions and

the experiences each member of the assembled production team – director, costumer, set and light designer, and so forth – had acquired prior to assembling as a team for the project at hand. The second step, *mimesis*₂ – a narrative configured – reflects the relationship of the Black Light Theatre production team as they explore the possibilities of what a re-telling of the *Alice in Wonderland* story may reveal, and to make decisions regarding their future actions together. The third step, *mimesis*₃ – a refigured action or the proposed world of the text – is the production concept for *Aspects of Alice* that has been collaboratively envisioned during *mimesis*₂, and serves as the production team’s guide for the steps they’ve agreed are necessary in the creative process, from that point forward, until the newly-imagined *Aspects of Alice* text/performance could be received by an audience. Recalling the earlier reference to the Berlin Opera production of Mozart’s *Idomeneo*, it was the refigured action (*mimesis*₃) expressive of the stage director’s concept (developed during the *mimesis*₂ phase) that resulted in representations of the severed heads of Buddha, Jesus, and Mohammed being used in the performance and creating uproar in the Muslim community.

The role a viewer plays in the reception and interpretation of art text is explored by Gadamer, who relates art to a notion of truth: an encounter that “leads us toward the renunciation that is involved in genuine theory” (Gadamer 1998: xxvii).

Hans-Georg Gadamer

The philosophical hermeneutics of Gadamer – in particular his theories on interpreting art text, the relation of the text to a reader or viewer, the matter of the text, and his views on tolerance – significantly contribute to the conceptual framework and textual analysis for this research. Gadamer asserts that the nature of understanding, which

rests in language, is historical, and that an interpreter's history and prejudices are essential for understanding to occur (Herda 1999: 59-62). This historical pre-understanding is brought to an art text by the interpreter (reader/viewer) which may allow for an experience of truth: a sudden moment of discovery/comprehension which Gadamer refers to as a fusion of horizons experienced by the interpreter in which the text "speaks to the self-understanding of *every* person, and it does this as ever present and by means of its own contemporaneousness" (Gadamer 1976: 102). During my research conversation with Argentinean-born Conductor Daniel Canosa, in which we discussed what he believed to be his primary responsibility to an audience, he repeatedly used another phrase specific to a music-making context, but one I believe nevertheless reflects Gadamer's concept. Daniel hoped that audience engagement with the musical text would allow them to "experience the magic" or truth he believed was inherent in the work.

Key to the creation of performance text in which truth may be experienced is Gadamer's definition of "the matter of the text," which Herda (1999: 65) defines as "the dialogue, which we are, and our prior understanding" which "stands apart from the speaker and text as such." She continues:

This matter of the text stands ready to be used by community members of a school to develop curriculum or a community of managers in a corporate setting to design corporate policy. These communities...are intentional communities whereby the members have common vision and purposes enacted in practices that bring forth new narratives that give direction to our relationships and our lives.

The performance-specific corollary to the example offered by Herda has already been referred to above in the description of the threefold mimesis explanation of *Aspects of Alice and Idomeneo*. In these examples I've used the phrase "production concept," or "stage director's concept." In a theatrical context, the "concept" is "the matter of the text"

which informs the decisions made by all personnel involved with the creation of the stage production. Determining an effective concept is of the utmost importance, for truth conveyed in a work of art can be particularly powerful. As Gadamer (1976: 104) writes “the distinctive mark of the language of art is that the individual art work gathers into itself and expresses the symbolic character, that hermeneutically regarded, belongs to all beings.” The significance of language – particularly language in use or as a form of action – is a central tenet of Jürgen Habermas.

Jürgen Habermas

The critical theory of Habermas has been applied to this research specifically with regards to his writings on communicative action, the force of the better argument, the public sphere and universals. His emphasis for the first of these subjects is on the relationship between a speaker and a hearer: or language in use. The ability of these two persons to effectively communicate is dependent upon four validity claims that must be true for both if the discourse is to be successful: comprehensibility, shared knowledge, trust and shared values. Both parties must be oriented towards reaching an understanding, which may require that one of them relinquish their position on the topic at hand. The agreement or understanding achieved between them is not coerced or manipulated but is the result of the force of the better argument in which one of the partners realizes that the position taken by the other is preferable to his or her own, or they have contributed equally to the creation of a new point of view arising out of their conversation (Herda 1999: 65-72). This concept is applicable to this research project specifically with regards to the exchange between two entities rather than two persons. For example, an opera, theatre or media presentation and the audience that is experiencing that text. In this

circumstance, the communicative action requirements and experience have been transferred to the public sphere, of which Habermas (1996: 360) has written:

The public sphere is a social phenomenon just as elementary as action, actor, association, or collectivity, but it eludes the conventional sociological concepts of “social order.” [It] cannot be conceived as an institution and certainly not as an organization. It is not even a framework of norms with differentiated competencies and roles, membership regulations, and so on...The public sphere can best be described as a network for communicating information and points of view.

Of Habermas’ theories, perhaps most important to this research has been his views on moral argumentation and universalism which is dependent upon communally accepted norms resulting from public discourse. Habermas (1990: 62) writes “enduring acceptance of a norm...depends on whether, in a given context of tradition, reasons for obedience can be mobilized, reasons that suffice to make the corresponding validity claim at least appear justified in the eyes of those concerned.” Continuing, he says “applied to modern societies, this means that there is no mass loyalty without legitimacy.” My conversation with Lazslo Magacs in Budapest, and his views regarding his theatre’s responsibility to assist residents of that city become better informed and more responsible citizens of Hungary – irrespective of their political affiliation – is particularly demonstrative of Habermas’ universalism theory. Similar concepts regarding difficulties that may arise between individuals and groups living in community have also been explored by Richard Kearney.

Richard Kearney

Kearney further develops Ricoeur’s theories on narrative, imagination and ethics, and his interpretation of these subjects – as well as the stranger as other – additionally contributes to the conceptual framework used for this research.

Reminiscent of the theories of Mary Douglas concerning the symbolic creation of enemies or deviance in order to reassert threatened boundaries, Kearney's work *Strangers, Gods and Monsters* further elaborates upon the idea of otherness. He writes that "ever since early Western thought equated the Good with notions of self-identity and sameness, the experience of evil has often been linked with notions of exteriority" (2003: 65), and states that the prejudice against exteriority continues today in various forms. The idea of an other as adversary allows society – in the public sphere – "to demonize alterity as a menace to our collective identity" (2003: 65). This form of persecution, he suggests, is a form of injustice that "demands a redressing of the balance so as to arrive at a more ethical appreciation of otherness" (2003: 66). Appreciation of "the human stranger before us" is essential because "openness to the Other beyond the Same is called justice" (2003: 67). My research conversations reveal numerous examples of how alterity has affected the artists with whom I spoke, including: the visual artist living with HIV disease in Hanoi; the Malaysian theatre producer whose work continues to be informed by the divisions between Indian, Chinese and other ethnic populations in Kuala Lumpur; and the pagan ritual theatre artist in California whose performance methods may be feared by religious conservatives. Art text can reveal a respect for otherness, but it requires a balanced point of view informed by equal contribution to the text from persons with varying opinions on the subject-at-hand. The idea of blending together different viewpoints or stories on a particular topic is also reflected in Kearney's writings on the importance of memory. He states (1999: 30) that "narrative imagination can assist a certain *universalisation* of remembrance, where our own memories – personal and communal – can be shared and exchanged with others' of very different times and places,

where the familiar and the foreign can change hands.” This is applicable to the creation of art text that blends the histories of different cultures in a mutually respectful manner, allowing for increased understanding amongst the peoples represented in the work.

Entreé and Conversation Partners

Field-based research requires the design of a personal research protocol with boundaries created by the people who have agreed to participate in the data collection and analysis process. How the data are understood and interpreted by each reader depends upon what each reader brings to this text. Its ontological orientation is reflected in the writings of Ricoeur (1981: 56) who writes that:

...understanding is not concerned with grasping a fact but with apprehending a possibility of being. We must not lose sight of the point when we draw the methodological consequences of this analysis: to understand a text, we shall say, is not to find a lifeless sense which is contained therein, but to unfold the possibility of being indicated by the text.

The concept of understanding expressed in the above passage informed the process that has been used in this research. Primary research sites were located in Southeast Asia, Central Europe and the United States. Fourteen formal and three informal research participants contributed to this study, representing a diverse array of arts-related professions: including acting, choreography, directing, painting and short story writing. These participants will be presented in detail in Chapter Four, however, a list of their names appears here as Table 1. Information gathered from my attendance at a number of arts events is also reflected in this document. (The complete list may be found in Appendix B.) Research participants were selected through a combination of referrals from friends and colleagues, U.S. Embassy staff, and internet queries sent to arts

Name	Title	City/State/Country
FORMAL CONVERSATION PARTNERS		
Dr. Noraini Yusof	Writer & Professor, University of Kebangsaan	Selangor, Malaysia
Joe Hasham	Artistic Director, The Kuala Lumpur Performing Arts Centre	Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
Faridah Merican	Executive Producer, The Kuala Lumpur Performing Arts Centre	Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
Nguyen Trong Kien	Visual Artist	Hanoi, Vietnam
Dangkamon Na-pombejra	Stage Director, Professor Chulalongkorn University	Bangkok, Thailand
Chotiros (Pew) Viboonlarp	Vocal Artist & Multi- Percussionist	Bangkok, Thailand
Lazslo Magacs	Director, Merlin International Theatre	Budapest, Hungary
Balzac Lazar	Stage & Film Actor	Budapest, Hungary
Daniel Canosa	Music Director & Conductor	Buenos Aires, Argentina
Martina Payr	Library Manager & Lecturer Department of Theatre, Film & Media Studies, University of Vienna	Vienna, Austria
Charya Burt	Dancer & Choreographer Charya Burt Cambodian Dance Company	Windsor, California
Chris Smith	Artistic Director, The Magic Theater	San Francisco, California
Dyan Foster	Founder & Director, The Arts & Ethics Academy	Santa Rosa, California
Nadja Linnine Masura, Ph.D.	Digital Theatre Artist	Santa Rosa, California
INFORMAL CONVERSATION PARTNERS		
Kim Anh	Musician	Hanoi, Vietnam
Porntip Singha	Front Desk Manager, Queen's Park Hotel	Bangkok, Thailand
Julie Middleton	Ritual Theatre Artist	Sebastopol, California

Table 1: Formal and Informal Conversation Partners

organizations located in the research locations mentioned above. Those formal participants confirmed in advance of my travels were initially contacted by email. Once they agreed to participate they were emailed a formal invitation/confirmation letter (Appendix A). Some of the participants with whom I had arranged to speak were unavailable when I arrived in their city, or – as was the case in Vietnam – I had been unable to make arrangements to speak with anyone prior to my arrival. Fortunately, these problems were remedied with the assistance of my advisor who helped me to locate other research partners. All research conversations were conducted in English with the exception of one formal and one informal conversation in Hanoi, both of which required assistance from a professional Vietnamese translator.

Questions

Though several of the actual questions used in this research varied somewhat depending on the actual arts background of the participant, the following list was used as a basis for each research conversation.

1. How do you view your role as an artist?
2. Were there outside influences that contributed to your current involvement with the performing arts?
3. When you create a performance in collaboration with others, what do you think contributes to the most successful production? What is your process and who participates?
4. Does this creative process change depending on the type of product being created, or depending on the community/country in which the product will be viewed or read? Is it necessary to observe certain protocols or make creative choices with specific ethical considerations in mind?
5. How much of an effect does the need to generate revenues from an artistic product influence the creative choices you might make?

6. What is your opinion regarding creating/interpreting a performance text in a manner that challenges viewpoints/traditions held by members of the community in which the text is read/performed?
7. What kinds of responsibilities, if any, do artists – authors, painters, directors, actors, designers, film makers, singers, etc. – have in relation to an audience? Should an audience influence your final presentation?
8. Should the presentation of provocative performance texts be preceded or accompanied by an educational component intended to assist the reader/audience prior to experiencing the text?

Timeline

A timeline outlining the stages of the research process appears below.

Research Action	Projected Start	Completion
Initial Pilot Project Research Conversation	October 2006	October 2006
Developed Entrée and Selected Participants	April 2007	August 2007
Confirmation Letters Sent to Participants	May 2007	August 2007
Research Conversations/Data Collection	May 2007	September 2007
Transcription of Conversations Prepared	June 2007	September 2007
Transcriptions Sent to Participants	September 2007	October 2007
Primary Data Analysis	September 2007	December 2007
Secondary Data Analysis	September 2007	January 2008

Data Collection

Data collection for this study included performance literature, recorded conversations, and art text/performance observation. The entire research process was recorded in a personal journal which then became another source of data available for analysis. The participants were fully advised of the nature of this methodology prior to

the conversation. (See Appendix A for sample letters and conversation guidelines.) Each participant understood that his or her name and transcription data would be used in this doctoral dissertation and potential post-doctoral publications. The taped conversations were personally transcribed by the researcher so that all nuances of gesture and tone of voice could be brought to bear on the meaning of the conversation partners. The transcription process was undertaken as soon as possible after the conversation had been taped.

Copies of the transcriptions and preliminary analysis notes were sent to each formal conversation partner, providing each participant with the opportunity to read and reflect upon his/her own transcript as well as the preliminary analysis. Upon reflection, each partner had the opportunity to delete, add, or change the transcript of what he/she said in the recorded conversation. The substantial geographic distance between the researcher and many of the participants required that communication subsequent to the research conversation itself be conducted through email.

Data Presentation and Analysis

In a participatory hermeneutical approach, data analysis is “a creative and imaginative act” in which the researcher “appropriates a proposed world from the text” (Herda 1999: 98). This appropriation may change the manner in which the researcher views the subject at hand from what he understood prior to the research. Data analysis took place in two stages – preliminary and secondary – and followed the guidelines presented in Herda (1999: 98-99). Preliminary analysis of the transcripts involved reliving the conversations while recording notes that applied to six research categories. Significant themes relating to these research categories were highlighted and

substantiated with excerpts from the conversations and from observations recorded in the researcher's journal. In Chapter Four, one or more theoretical concepts have been used in the preliminary analysis and are presented with a mostly descriptive narrative representing each formal research conversation. Secondary analysis, which involved examining transcript themes in light of the particular theories associated specifically with Heidegger, Ricoeur, Habermas, Gadamer and Kearney, is presented in Chapter Five. This analysis integrates theory with themes, sub-themes and groupings of quotes from the transcripts. The research problem, the relationship of poetics to ethics, was explored in terms of the theoretical background with the expectation that implications for a possible new paradigm of arts creation/presentation might emerge. Implications discovered in this analysis provided further insight into the relationship between poetics and ethics – or imagination and reason – as well as implications for future actions. Combining the limitless possibilities of poetic imagination with an ethical intention is essential, for “ethics without poetics leads to the censoring of imagination. Poetics without ethics leads to dangerous play” (Kearney 1998: 236).

Pilot Study

To test the feasibility of a research subject emphasizing the relationship of ethics to poetics in the performing arts, a pilot study was conducted during the fall of 2006 using an abbreviated version of the methods discussed above. It provided insights into how a larger investigation might proceed and assisted in the development of the research questions. My conversation partner for this study was Richard Harrell, Director of the Opera program at the San Francisco Conservatory of Music. An internationally recognized leader in the field of opera training and production, Mr. Harrell previously

held artistic and administrative positions with the Juilliard Opera Center, the San Francisco Opera Center, and the Opera Training Program of the New National Theatre in Tokyo. Currently, he serves as visiting faculty for the International Opera Center Netherlands, and as artistic advisor and principal stage director for the Bangkok Opera. (The entire transcript, data analysis and implications resulting from the Pilot Study can be found in Appendix F.) The information that follows is excerpted from the complete study to provide a sampling of the information gathered during this preliminary process.

Pilot Study Theory and Analysis

The performing arts have this special quality: that the works they deal with are explicitly left open to ... re-creation and thus visibly hold the identity and continuity of the work of art open towards its future (Gadamer 1975: 119).

The conversation I had with Richard Harrell particularly emphasized the “re-creation” possibilities of operatic productions. My analysis of the text from our discussion distinguished several recurring themes reflective of theoretical concepts developed by Gadamer, Habermas and Ricoeur, including ideas related to the text as a work of art; the matter of/world of the text; mimesis; the force of the better argument or argumentation and debate; and the relationship of ethics to action.

Gadamer writes that “the world of the work of art, in which play expresses itself fully in the unity of its course, is in fact a wholly transformed world. In and through it everyone recognizes that that is how things are” (1975: 113). The idea of a “wholly transformed world” was echoed by Richard in his enthusiastic description of opera’s unique characteristics.

Richard: The power of opera is its wholeness. The fact that it is drama and music and singing unamplified in the darkened theatre. I mean, it goes back to the caves, you know, when you danced for the hunt and the harvest with the skins around

the fire ...chanting... up unto the Greeks. All the stuff, Aristophanes and all that, was basically sung because you had to be heard, etc. and there's a ritual, spiritual, visceral power that opera can have that – when you get it in the groove – is fabulous. It is different than film, it's different than literature, it's different than straight theatre. It's dance, it's all inclusive...

The determination of the concept for a stage production on which Richard is working is achieved through a collaborative process (similar to that of the researcher in the participatory inquiry process) with his team of production designers (scenery, costumes, lights, etc.). The concept – realized through the interpreters' (team members) explications of the operatic libretto and musical score – becomes the *matter of the text* used to guide all aspects of configuration or re-figuration. When the production is ready to be viewed by an audience, the artistic creation process advances to another level. “Thus it is not really the absence of a fourth wall that turns the play into a show. Rather, openness toward the spectator is part of the closedness of the play. The audience only completes what the play as such is” (Gadamer 1975: 109). The significance of the viewer's contribution to a performance experience is further elaborated upon by Gadamer, who writes (1975: 109):

... however much a religious or profane play represents a world wholly closed within itself, it is as if open toward the spectator, in whom it achieves its whole significance. The players play their roles as in any game, and thus the play is represented, but the play itself is the whole, comprising players and spectators. In fact, it is experienced properly by, and presents itself (as it is “meant”) to, one who is not acting in the play but watching it. In him the game is raised, as it were, to its ideality.

An audience's ability to provide the missing piece of the performance puzzle is aided by directors and designers who successfully engage in the mimesis process to refigure a text for increased viewer emersion in the narrative. Several successfully revisioned operatic texts were referred to during my conversation with Richard, including

a production of Bizet's *Carmen* that was moved from the 19th to the 20th century and set in Spain during the civil war. The motivation of the leading characters' actions became clearer for the audience in the updated 20th century setting.

Unfortunately, not all refigured performance texts are as successful in providing the audience with an opportunity to contribute to or complete the work of art. This is not necessarily due to a failure of the mimesis process, but rather to the director or presenting organization's inability to successfully put forth a better argument via the revised text. Similar problems arise when arbitrary and perhaps capricious manipulation of the text by the director (or presenting organization) is undertaken in order to increase box office revenues by specifically creating controversy. Although arbitrary artistic decisions of this nature appear to be in conflict with ethical behavior, they are unfortunately all too common: especially in directors hoping to increase their prestige. Richard and I discussed this problem as it related to several productions, including those presented by a controversial Spanish stage director.

R: ... There's a great history, this guy, this Spanish director who, oh he did all kinds of ... things that were controversial – in Berlin that were very controversial – a real sado-masochistic *Abduction from the Seraglio*, and so on. There's a lot of directors that specifically do... want to be bad boys... they do stuff on stage, they de-construct a piece with lots of nudity or violence as often as not has nothing to do with the libretto, just to create controversy and get buzz and get people angry, hopefully... There's a lot of directors who frankly, think that opera is silly and so they go in and make a statement rather than telling a story or having some sort of new insight.

Illegitimate renderings of a performance text may prevent the ultimate realization of the work, which – as Gadamer has written – depends on the audience for completion. My conversation with Richard elaborated upon many of the potential problems that can be associated with operatic production, and demonstrated that it is often difficult to gauge

the correct mix of artistic innovation and tradition that will generate approval from a paying audience.

Hence the stage is a political institution par excellence because only the performance brings out everything that is in the play, its allusions and its echoes. No one knows beforehand what will “hit home” and what will have no impact. Every performance is an event, but not one in any way separate from the work – the work itself is what “takes place”...in the event...of performance (Gadamer 1975: 147).

After testing the research process through my pilot study, I realized that the relationship of the performing arts to ethics was a subject worthy of further investigation. I also realized that expanding the research from opera and the performing arts to allow for contributions from artists working in other related fields – painting and short story writing, for example – would increase the possibilities for obtaining diverse viewpoints on the relationship between imagination and reason.

Background of Researcher

So that the reader may better understand how I came to pursue this research, some background information may be useful. Born and raised in northern California, my introduction to the performing arts began in middle school and continued through my undergraduate experience at San Francisco State University where I received a B.A. degree in Theatre, with an acting emphasis. Shortly thereafter, I became a member of two of the professional acting unions – Screen Actors Guild and Actors Equity Association – auditioning for numerous roles, and performing in stage productions in the San Francisco Bay Area.

After a number of years as a working actor for small theatre organizations in California, my repertoire expanded to include stage direction, which eventually led to my

receiving an M.F.A. degree in Directing from the University of California, Davis. Shortly thereafter, I was engaged to direct productions – theatre classics, musicals, and opera – for a variety of organizations: primarily in the San Francisco Bay Area.

Having had the opportunity to teach while a graduate student – and enjoying it very much – I decided to pursue my secondary credential in English at Sonoma State University, which entitled me to teach English and Theatre courses at the middle and high school level. I coincidentally received a Lifetime Community College Credential, and began teaching theatre-related courses at Santa Rosa Junior College, Sonoma State University, and at a local high school. Concurrently, I founded and served as Artistic Director for a theatre company while working as General Manager for a nonprofit arts presenting organization. It was an extremely busy period in my professional life.

After continuing to juggle my various work assignments with several different organizations simultaneously, yet finding time to volunteer for a local AIDS food bank for a couple of years, I decided to change the direction my life had taken by shifting my career priorities to engage in work that was directly benefiting persons in need in my community. I became Administrative Director for an AIDS services organization. Though this was satisfying work, I was eventually lured back to the arts, becoming Director of Education for a regional symphony orchestra. This position was able to utilize my arts administration experience, while satisfying my desire to serve the community through public school music education outreach activities to elementary school children. One year after beginning work with the Symphony, I enrolled in the University of San Francisco (USF) School of Education's Organization and Leadership program: a decision that has greatly contributed to an expanded ontological awareness that I began pursuing

years ago. During my studies at USF, I had the good fortune to travel to various countries in Southeast Asia in 2005, 2006 and 2007 with a group of educators and professionals – led by my graduate advisor, Dr. Ellen Herda – which additionally provided me with renewed insights into compassionately living in relationship with others, and offered opportunities for praxis informed by critical hermeneutics. I look forward to continuing my career in the arts and plan on doing so with an ontologically motivated intention.

Summary

The findings from my pilot study with Richard Harrell in San Francisco resulted in my expanding the research focus from persons involved exclusively in opera/the performing arts to include artists working in a variety of disciplines. With the exception of two discussions held in Hanoi, Vietnam – where a professional translator was used – the research conversations held in Southeast Asia, Central Europe and the United States were conducted in English. Minor adjustments were only occasionally made to the guiding questions to reflect the particular arts discipline practiced by the research partner with whom I was speaking. Kearney (2002: 133) writes that “life is always on the way to narrative, but it does not arrive there until someone hears and tells this life as a story.” Chapter Four introduces the artists who very kindly told me their stories.

CHAPTER FOUR: DATA PRESENTATION AND PRELIMINARY ANALYSIS

Introduction

In this Chapter I introduce the fourteen formal conversation partners who contributed to my research. Located in three different regions of the world, these artists provided a unique perspective on issues including the art text creation process, responsibility for the viewer for whom the work has been fashioned, and insights regarding the larger public sphere in which the text is offered for interpretation.

The hermeneutic self is still resolved to travel with Hamlet to those countries ‘from whose bourne no traveler returns’ and tell the story; to relate the impossible tale; to put a face on the vizored ghost (Kearney 2003: 230).

Southeast Asia

In the spring of 2007, I made arrangements to join a group of San Francisco Bay Area educators and professionals traveling to S.E. Asia for a combination of service and culture-related activities. I had participated in similar tours in 2005 and 2006, but the 2007 trip was different in that a large number of travelers – myself included – had been invited to present papers at a conference in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia before continuing on to visit Vietnam and Thailand. It was an ideal opportunity coincidentally to gather research data, and so in advance of departure from San Francisco, I attempted to schedule appointments – via email – for formal conversations with artists in the various locations to which we were traveling. My first research conversation, however, was a spontaneous occurrence at the *Language and Nationhood: Discourses Across Cultures and Disciplines* conference hosted by Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM) where I spoke with a UKM faculty member.

Giving Voice and Agency

Dr. Noraini Yusof – a UKM professor in the School of Language Studies and Linguistics since 1996 – is a published short story author: her most recent work appearing in a collection titled *25 Malaysian Short Stories: Best of Silverfish New Writing 2001-2005*. Having received both her undergraduate and graduate degrees from California State University Fresno, she returned to Malaysia for her doctorate in Creative Writing. A Muslim, Noraini believes her role as an artist is to “bring parts of my life as a Malay... and tell that story: the experiences of a normal, average Malay girl growing up...facing the world and having to negotiate the changes that come along in my life: but do it in English.” She said “Malaysian literature in English is a body of literature that is still very...young – it’s barely fifty years old.” The lack of writers in this genre is probably the result of “the switch over from colonial [rule] to independence, and...the change in language policy from English...to Malay...as the medium of instruction in public schools.” Noraini believed that “if you are a creative writer in the Malay language, in the national language, you get a lot of support from the government. But if you are writing in English or in any other languages then you are marginalized.” The concept of marginalization was a motivating factor for a work of fiction she wrote based on Malaysian history. She said “I am from Malacca, and during the 16th century the Portuguese came and they conquered Malacca, and it was that part of history that I used and transformed into fiction.” To do so, she found that it was necessary to

give voice and agency to characters from both the local and also the Portuguese world. For example, in the history textbook Afonso de Albuquerque [is] the Admiral who came and conquered Malacca, so all the attention, all the writings would be on [him], but never on Sultan Malacca. You never hear his voice. So I would look at that, and I would give both voice. So I would take, say,

a warrior from Malacca. You would have the Portuguese soldiers – and there are a few of them who have been given voice in the history textbooks – but you don't hear anything from the Malacca warrior perspective. So [I] reposition[ed] characters: characters that had been marginalized have been repositioned to the center of the narration.

Noraini's choice to refigure Malaysian history in her work of fiction exemplifies a point made by Kearney, who writes (2002: 136):

History telling is never literal...It is always at least in part *figurative* to the extent that it involves telling according to a certain selection, sequencing, emplotment and perspective. But it does try to be truthful. Were this not the case, there would be no way of countering the historical distortions of Holocaust deniers or propagandists. We would be unable to respect our debts of memory, in particular to the forgotten victims of history. History-telling seeks to address the silences of history by giving a voice to the voiceless.

Writing two decades earlier, Ricoeur provides the basis for Kearney's position by stating (1984: 75) that "we tell stories because in the last analysis human lives need and merit being narrated. This remark takes on its full force when we refer to the necessity to save the history of the defeated and the lost." Continuing, he says "the whole history of suffering cries out for vengeance and calls for narrative."

As a creative writer in Malaysia, Noraini acknowledged that certain cultural and religious traditions in Malay society will influence the particular plot elements she selects for her works of fiction.

Noraini: For example, you see in my story there is this Malay woman who had this sexual relationship with a Portuguese man, and as a result of that union you have the descendants. So, supposedly she is the matriarch of this group of people. But when I was writing this story, of course in my sub-conscious mind I have to be careful: do I make her have this relationship willingly – and that may not please the sensibilities of modern Muslims living here in Malaysia – or do I make her raped? That would please them because that is what they would expect.

Michael: Because it wasn't her choice?

N: Something like that...You have to be very careful.

M: Is that a pretty consistent qualifier when you write: that you have to toe-the-line in a certain way?

N: Only in that aspect.

M: On issues of sexuality?

N: Yes.

Societal influences on her life as a Muslim author in Malaysia continued to be a theme throughout my conversation with Noraini. Freedom of artistic expression was possible, but always with certain qualifiers. She said “I believe that here in Malaysia we do have the freedom to write and to publish to a certain extent...unless...for example, I published a book that was so controversial it...attracts a lot of attention and controversy from society. Then maybe they would ban the book.” Noraini offered an example of subject matter that would not be tolerated by the government. She said, “Let’s say...you have the staging of a theatre piece and it creates controversy. It will still go on. But if the controversy is big enough that it affects, basically, the relationship between the races then they [the government] will [ban or prevent the production].” She concluded this example by saying “Because you see, for Malaysia, the concern is that all the races must co-exist.”

The relatively recent historical event underlying this particular example offered by Noraini was explained in greater detail by, and had significantly influenced the theatrical production choices of, my next conversation partner in Malaysia: Joe Hasham.

Truth Must Be Conveyed

In anticipation of traveling to Kuala Lumpur, I did a web search of arts-related organizations and individuals and had the good fortune of receiving a response to my query from the Artistic Director of the Kuala Lumpur Performing Arts Centre (KLPAAC),

Joe Hasham, an ebullient Australian whose vibrant personality and kindness was apparent from our earliest email exchange. I met with Joe in his office at the newly constructed KLPAC, a beautiful, glass-walled, multi-storied structure containing several theatre spaces, rehearsal halls, administration offices, a café, and even a lending library: an impressive theatre facility that professional arts organizations in the United States would envy. Having enjoyed an extremely successful career on the stage in Australia, Joe eventually turned to commercial film directing, and it was while shooting a documentary on the Australian armed forces located in Panang, Malaysia that Joe first visited the country. Several years after this, he relocated to Kuala Lumpur where he met his wife Faridah Merican – commonly referred to as “the First Lady of Malaysian theatre” – and in 1989 they founded The Actors Studio. Joe quickly learned that working in Malaysia was “almost a 180 degree turnaround” from what he had experienced in Australia.

Joe: For example, the teaching aspects of it: the education side of the performing arts. Because we are a mixed country of mixed races, mixed ethnic backgrounds, cultural backgrounds, religious backgrounds, one is forever cognizant of that fact. And when I first came here, for the first couple of years, I felt as if I was almost treading on egg shells, not knowing whether it was politically correct – PC is not the right word for that: someone will invent a word for it about this country. It has a whole lot to do with face. You know the Asian thing about saving face... which to me means not to embarrass them in front of other people.

Joe believed that continual mindfulness of the language he was using while teaching – so as to avoid embarrassing his less experienced actors – eventually created a barrier between him and his students, and he felt as though he couldn’t “go the full nine yards with them.” Thinking that this was inhibiting the learning process, he made the “conscious decision to forget the cultural, religious, ethnic boundaries, and just do it the way that I felt it. And from that I have discovered a whole new way of teaching here...the

language I used, the words that I chose to use totally changed.” Being an outsider to Malay culture, this decision was perhaps easier for Joe than it would be for a native. Nevertheless, the discovery of a more effective method for working with his actors informed the philosophy Joe now uses when creating theatrical productions for Malaysian audiences.

Joe: When we are creating a new work, for instance, rather than allowing the racial and social and religious differences to get in our way, we use it to the advantage of the piece that we are creating. So that it doesn’t become – as it used to many years ago – it doesn’t become “Oh, we must be careful about that.” It becomes totally the opposite: “great, let’s use it; let’s exploit that, let’s take it to the fullest and see where it gets us.” And if it means at the end that we have confrontation because this is a Malay edict and this is a Chinese edict, then let’s have the confrontation... We are dealing with topics that you won’t find in Malaysian history books.

Listening to Joe, I was reminded of Noraini’s comments the day before regarding a hypothetical theatrical production’s contribution to the peaceful coexistence of the country’s mixed races. My puzzlement as to why each of these artists discussed the arts influence on race relationships in Malaysia was soon addressed when Joe asked if I was aware of the May 13, 1969 riots. I confessed I was not. He then provided me with the grim details.

Joe: It’s almost totally eradicated from the Malaysian history books because it was such a horrendous time. It happened because there was a bi-election, meaning that a politician had died and they had to hold an election for that particular constituency and it was in the inner city. And the opposition party won. I mean, no one expected them to win, but they won. And because they were so gung-ho about the fact that they had won, they went marching through – now the opposition party was mainly made up of Chinese – they went marching through (almost like a northern Ireland situation, you know: Ireland and the IRA) they went marching through one of the Malay kampungs [villages]...and were beating drums, and of course this is not the thing to do, you know...So it started what will forever go down in the history of Malaysian politics as one of the blackest periods...because many, many people were tortured, murdered, raped, killed – on both sides.

Joe's vivid description of this terrible period in Malaysian history was immediately followed by an enthusiastic remark: "So we are dealing with this issue in this play: in this musical:" a newly-commissioned work titled *Tunku*, featuring episodes from Malaysia's fifty year past that have shaped the country's national identity – including the events of May, 1969. At first hearing, I found Joe's comment to be a bit disconcerting. For me, images of singing, dancing and murderous race riots are not particularly compatible. But then I realized that his matter-of-fact statement simply reflected his philosophy that theatre could be used to address issues of public concern. His purpose for presenting *Tunku* – and apparently other musicals commissioned by the KLPAC on topics of national interest – was to give viewers an opportunity to reflect on the country's troubled past: the chance to say "guys, let's bring it up: let's air it, let's sort of get it off of our chest." Joe's vision regarding the power of the performing arts to address society's ills has not been without its frustrations.

Joe: You know when I first came here – you might find this an interesting analogy – because I was shooting a lot of commercials, a lot of films – and even in theatre it's the same – but particularly in commercial film-making here in this country, I likened it to being a painter whereby...okay you are a great painter, I give you a canvas, I give you a brush, I give you the paint and I say to you "paint anything you like, but it must be in yellow." That is the kind of constraint that kind of exists in this country.

Michael: And you are trying a different color?

Joe: Yes. I am always trying a different color. I mean ...we have a responsibility as creators to continue trying different colors, you know.

The concept of responsibility – not only to oneself as an artist, but especially to the viewer of the performance text – was a recurrent theme during our conversation. Perhaps most important for Joe was his belief that "truth must be conveyed" through the theatrical

event. Heidegger states (1971: 7) that “art is the setting into work of truth.” Kearney, too, comments on truth’s revelation through narrative.

The best way of respecting historical memory against revisionism is...to combine the most effective forms of narrative witness with the most objective forms of archival, forensic and empirical evidence. For truth is not the sole prerogative of the so-called exact sciences. There is also a truth, with its corresponding understanding, that we may properly call ‘narrative’. We need both (Kearney 2002: 148).

The KLPAC’s ability to present theatre as a service to the community through works serving as “narrative witness” is greatly assisted by the actions of Joe’s wife, KLPAC Executive Producer and co-Founder, Faridah Merican.

Within a Short Space of Time

Meeting in her office near the administrative center of the KLPAC building, I began my conversation with Faridah by asking about the unofficial title bestowed upon her by others: First Lady of Malaysian Theatre. She laughed before responding, saying “that’s only because I’ve been on this earth for a long time: born a long time ago...I started in the arts in the late fifties and I’m still doing it.” Early in her stage career, Faridah appeared primarily in Malay language productions “and in those I was mixing with Malaysians who were having this nationalistic spirit after 1957” (the year independence from Britain was gained) who believed they should “put on plays about ourselves in the language of the country; so Malay language theatre was quite rampant.” In the past several decades, however, her performance and producing experience has emphasized a new theatre art that has blended the country’s different languages and cultural traditions with mixed success.

Faridah: Malaysian theatre is what we are trying to present ourselves as, [but] it doesn’t matter what language we use, it is still nevertheless Malaysian theatre and

it still hasn't gotten through to the nation at large – to the community. It's still [the typical Malay theatre presentations] very much Malay language theatre or Chinese or Tamil. Maybe the English language theatre keepers are more in keeping with the Malaysian idea [by unifying diverse cultures through a single common language].

Faridah's experiments to create theatre works reflective of Malaysia's multi-faceted cultural identity has included a production of Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, for which she served as stage director in three different realizations of the text. The first was a Malay language production featuring university students; the second – also a Malay language production – combined students and community players. The third production, she said, was performed in English and she “purposely took actors who were non-Malays: Hamlet was played by a Chinese boy... It was lovely. It was a great experience.”

Creating theatre works reflective of the lives of average Malaysians has been the focus of a series of original plays produced by Faridah, all of which were based on the true life experiences of people in the community. Videotaped conversations were transcribed, edited, and turned into scripts with the intention of “telling stories about who we are, what we are all about...Some stories are very angry about the country. Some are very sad about how we feel for each other and how they feel for their fathers and their mothers, and so on. It certainly makes you think.” The significance of the diverse perspectives and responsibilities depicted in these original works is explained by Kearney, who writes (1988: 395-396):

To reply to the question ‘who?’ is to tell one's story to the other. And the story is always one which narrates a relation to the other, a tale of creation and obligation that never comes to an end...The notion of personal identity is thus opened up by the narrative imagination to include that of a *communal* identity.”

Continuing, Kearney says “the self and the collective mutually constitute each other’s identity by receiving each other’s stories into their respective histories.” A desire to create activities related to the development of a unifying “communal identity” has prompted Faridah to implement a variety of KLPAC educational programs designed to coincidentally address a lack of government funding for the arts during the last two decades. Though classes are currently offered in the arts at the university level, she said

there are no arts education activities in the primary and secondary schools because the country went into the science and technology idea of developing Malaysians who are going to be scientists and accountants and lawyers and doctors... and then took away from the curriculum the performing arts, literature, poetry, debating, elocution contests... Sports, I think, kind of survived, because money is being pumped into sports but the arts definitely not. And so for twenty years or so there was no performing arts education in the schools.

Faridah expanded the KLPAC’s community education programs to address the arts-education void believing that “we have to do what we can... within the short space of time.” Her comment regarding a “short space of time” to complete education projects with which she is engaged exemplifies an aspect of Heidegger’s complex hierarchical description of temporality: specifically, the concept of “being-towards-death”, of which Ricoeur (1984: 61) observes:

Heidegger reserves the term temporality... for the most originary form and the most authentic experience of time, that is, the dialectic of coming to be, having been, and making present. In this dialectic, time is entirely desubstantialized. The words “future,” “past,” and “present” disappear, and time itself figures as the exploded unity of the three temporal ekstases. This dialectic is the temporal constitution of Care... Being-towards-death imposes... the primacy of the future over the present and the closure of this future by a limit internal to all anticipation and every project.

Regarding the KLPAC’s education activities, Faridah said “we are still nurturing; we are still giving training; we are still having what are known as outreach programs...and also

since the nineties we've been working with disabled people." After reluctantly finishing our conversation, I left Faridah's KLPAC office and took a taxi to the Kuala Lumpur airport, where I joined others in my travel group for our flight to Vietnam. Unbeknownst to me at the time, I would soon be speaking with a visual artist in Hanoi whose life's work had been greatly influenced by his disability: HIV/AIDS.

Always a Creation of Imagination

I had been unable to confirm an appointment with a conversation partner in Vietnam prior to my travels, and whereas the American Embassies and arts-specific organizations I had contacted in Central Europe responded to my emails, none of the queries I sent to their counterparts in Hanoi were acknowledged. It was frustrating, given my success in Kuala Lumpur. Now I found myself in Hanoi with limited time and zero prospects. Not quite in a panic, but moving closer towards this frame of mind, on the bus ride from the airport to our hotel I approached Thuy – the petite and charming travel guide who had been engaged to lead our group tour of Vietnam. I believe my first words to her were "Hello, my name is Michael. It's very nice to meet you. Please help me." It was probably not a good first impression: a crazed, near-desperate, middle-aged American violating any sense of courtesy while blurting out a request for assistance. Thuy must have gone right to work on my behalf, however, because a few short minutes after arriving at our hotel she knocked on the door to my room and said a friend of hers had recommended I speak with a visual artist living relatively close to the hotel. Thuy and I met in the lobby a couple of hours later, and then walked to a neighborhood of narrow streets and cramped two and three-story dwellings surrounding the Hanoi University of Art. When we arrived at a particular intersection, she made a phone call.

Shortly thereafter, we were met by a man on a bicycle who asked us to follow him a half-block or so to the home of artist Nguyen Trong Kien. The wide, unscreened entrance to Kien's home – one he shared with his parents – was open to allow the air to flow through the two-story structure on what was a very hot and humid early evening. The main room was small, with plastic chairs and a tattered loveseat arranged around a low table: the entire configuration of furniture only about ten feet from the outside pavement. The popping sounds and oil smells of deep fried cooking were coming from the adjacent kitchen where someone was preparing a meal. Thuy introduced us both to Kien – a thin man 28 years of age with long straight hair and rumpled western-style jeans and t-shirt. She told him that she would be serving as a translator for us. After receiving his permission to record, transcribe and use the conversation in my research, our discussion began.

In his first sentence to me Kien mentioned two things: first, that he was an artist; and second, that he contracted HIV disease when he was 16 years old. This bit of unexpected information caused me to silently question whether or not the conversation I had planned would need to be modified. However, after a polite acknowledgment of what he had said, I simply posed the same question I had asked Noraini, Joe and Faridah: could he tell me the story of how he became an artist. He said that he came from a family of painters: “my mother is a lacquer painting artist, my father is a silk painting artist, and my sister is an oil painter.” Oil paints were also his medium, and he said that his canvases often featured a woman and a child – or children – as subjects. I asked him how he selected who would appear in the works: were the people his friends or family, or was his inspiration from another source? My composure was slightly bumped again when he

mentioned that, because he was a man living with HIV/AIDS, he painted a life he thought he could never have: “I started to paint all the women and children because I have a problem – HIV – and with HIV I can’t have children, and I really desired a family: that is what is always in my mind, which I translate to the painting.” Kien said his illness – like that of all persons who contract HIV/AIDS in Vietnam – was eventually announced in public news media by the government to warn people of the dangers of associating with him. Shortly after this announcement, his friends – including his girlfriend at the time – left him “because they were scared that [other] people would recognize” that they were friends with “an HIV-person.” A college graduate, he had been continuing his studies as a first year student at the arts university, but when his teachers learned that “I got HIV, I had to leave the school:” – the consequences of a perception of otherness, which Kearney (2003: 5) says is “the attempt to simplify our existence by scapegoating others as ‘aliens’”. Persons with HIV/AIDS have a medical condition requiring special consideration, certainly, but the overtly hostile and fearful behavior of government authorities and Kien’s friends and teachers seemed unreasonable. Kearney (2003: 61-62) writes:

If it is the sleep of reason that produces monsters, as Goya says, it is, I would suggest, the perversion of reason in a certain sacrificial mood...When violent fears go, so do monsters...Embracing [them] doesn’t mean you have to invite them to dinner – or set up house. Some monsters need to be welcomed, others struggled with. The important thing...is to try to tell the difference.

Since the disclosure of his health status, rather than retreating to a life of isolation, Kien has become a public advocate on behalf of persons with HIV/AIDS in Hanoi, and has organized four art exhibitions featuring his work: with most of the proceeds from the sales given to AIDS service organizations. He said that “All of the paintings that I sell,

the profit...that I get – I give for people with HIV and I keep a part for myself...because a long time ago, when I had no money, I had a...big debt, but now I am alright. So I just keep a little bit for myself...and the rest I give away.”

Kien mentioned that when he and his parents talk together during meals, “we are usually talking about our art. But here, the life of the artist is very quiet and if any of us want to draw something we go to our own corner and we do it...and nobody touches each other...it’s like quiet time.” He said that he becomes very excited when painting, and that while “some people are waiting for the emotion to come” in order to begin a new canvas, “I am different.” He will “spend about six to eight hours a day just working” and “when I am working, I will have the emotion. If I wait for emotion it never comes, and I prefer painting to relaxing or going out.” Having already learned how the subjects in his paintings were determined, I could see that Kien’s HIV status was reflected in all of the art works hanging on the walls. His use of vibrant colors and interesting character relationships conveyed a magical realism style. His composition, he said, was determined purely through his “imagination: even the color. Always it is a creation of imagination.” Kien’s paintings were a tangible demonstration of Heidegger’s ontological imagination concepts which Kearney (1998: 53) explains is “the invisible source of our vision: that which makes a world possible. Imagination is *Dasein* understood as being-in-the-world, hermeneutically prefiguring one’s world horizon as that towards which one projects one’s possibilities.”

Near the end of our conversation, we stood and moved about the room to take a closer look at some of Kien’s works. Pointing to one of his paintings, which showed the image of a man lying down on a coffin-like bed, and a woman with flowers standing

nearby, he said “this is leaving. When I think about my life in the future...when I lie down to die, I am dreaming there is a woman who is missing me, who loves me.” The dream represented on canvas appeared to have manifested in his waking life, for just prior to our leaving his home, Kien proudly mentioned that he had recently married a woman who was also an artist. She was HIV-negative.

Our conversation finished, I thanked Kien for speaking with me – especially on such short notice – and then Thuy and I returned to the hotel to join the others in our group. For the next two weeks, as we traveled north in Vietnam visiting a number of small towns, tourist sites and remote villages, I attended various arts events and continued to reflect on my conversation with Kien: in particular, the difficulties he experienced living with HIV disease in Vietnam, and from trying to earn a living by selling his art to persons in a community who had been encouraged by the government to shun him. In Malaysia, current creative processes for the three artists with whom I spoke had been significantly informed by historical events and continuing government reaction to them. In Vietnam, the potential for Kien’s life as an artist in Hanoi had been restricted by an official government act. It had also been an issue for one of the artists with whom I had been planning to meet in Bangkok.

Helping People Find a Way

Several months prior to visiting Thailand, my Pilot Project conversation partner, Richard Harrell, suggested I contact a colleague of his – Somtow Sucharitkul, the Artistic Director of Bangkok Opera. During several email exchanges, Somtow agreed to meet with me in Bangkok to discuss his work, in particular *Ayudhya*: the controversial production (referred to earlier) that had been threatened with cancellation by the Thai

Ministry of Culture. While traveling in Vietnam, I had been trying to confirm my meeting with Somtow (and with others in Bangkok to whom I had sent emails): to no avail. Somtow had mentioned that he sometimes travels out of the country on short notice, so I thought perhaps this is what had occurred. Unfortunately, I then found myself in a position similar to what I experienced upon arrival in Hanoi: limited time and zero prospects. Good fortune was on my side however, for just prior to leaving Vietnam for Thailand, I explained my predicament to the leader of our tour group (who also happened to be my advisor) Dr. Ellen Herda, who has traveled extensively in S.E. Asia. She sent an email to a good friend in Thailand, followed it up with a phone call at the Hanoi airport, another call when we arrived in Thailand, and shortly after I arrived at the Queen's Park Hotel in Bangkok I was able to confirm an appointment for two days later. That evening, with at least one appointment confirmed, I attended a performance of *Siam Niramit*, a Thai history spectacle featuring one hundred fifty performers on one of the world's largest indoor stages. Apparently intended for tourists, it was nevertheless an impressive theatrical event that told the story of Thailand's cultural heritage. The next night I attended the premiere of a new musical based on a Thai bestselling novel titled *Fah Jarod Sai*: another pleasant experience in a beautiful theatre facility. On the morning of my scheduled appointment with Chotiros (Pew) Viboonlarp – thought to be Thailand's only female percussionist – I was delighted to discover that Pew had brought along a friend to join her: Dangkamon Na-Pombejra, stage director for the *Siam Niramit* event. It was a wonderful coincidence as Pew was unaware that I had just seen this production two nights previous.

Early in our conversation, I learned that Pew and Dangkamon had been drama students together at Chulalongkorn University in Bangkok. Sometime after graduation, Pew moved to Southern California where she lived and worked as a percussionist and vocalist for thirteen years – attending Cal Arts in Valencia – before returning to her family in Bangkok. During this same period, Dangkamon had remained in Thailand, working as a commercial stage director and as a lecturer and director at the University. Pew referred to herself as a professional musician, sometimes doing voiceover work and singing for Thai commercials. She said “I’m kind of lucky because I’m the only woman here – somebody told me that – you are the only woman in the market who plays percussion. I thought ‘Really, [there’s] nobody [else] in Thailand?’” Dangkamon then quipped “It doesn’t look nice for a Thai girl,” which provoked laughter from them both.

Pew said “when I work I start from me. When I think about what I want to perform, or what kind of music I want my audience to see – to hear – it will start from a lot of things. I gather strange compositions, or drumming with cardboard: something like that.” She likened her work to that of Dangkamon’s as a stage director with regards to controlling the artistic process, saying “if I don’t call the shots I won’t do it. I want people to see me the way I am: as an artist, like him (referring to Dangkamon).” Her creative methods sounded similar to what Kien had said regarding working alone and discovering emotion or creativity in the act of doing the art. Pew said “when I go to my practice room – the studio, whatever – I create something from the practicing... or sometimes it will come from a book, you know. I don’t know why it is related: the book and the drumming.”

Heidegger (1962: 26) writes that “looking at something, understanding and conceiving it, choosing, access to it – all these ways of behaving...are modes of Being,” and – like Pew’s comments on her practice regimen and her question regarding a book’s influence on her creativity – are expressions of *Dasein*. While Pew’s creativity can be expressed in isolation, Dangkamon’s work as a stage director requires collaboration with performers, designers and others. Regardless of the theatrical genre, his directorial process begins with the same initial preparation.

Dangkamon: First I have to find what is in the play, or what is in the production, that touched my heart. And then just convey [this] to the [production design] team and listen to what they take from the play. We discuss it and we talk about what we can see, what we can share, how we might believe in the same thing, what risks... So we have to find sort of a unifying message first.

The process Dangkamon described is similar to that referred to earlier regarding the *Aspects of Alice* and *Idomeneo* productions: action influenced by the matter of the text, or – as Dangkamon referred to it – “a unifying message” that informs decisions made during the stages of mimesis. He acknowledged that conveying the performance message to a Thai audience can often be difficult because “they want to be safe...they don’t want to be...challenged...[but] we have to challenge the audience.”

His belief that an audience needs to be introduced to new ideas, or to provocative methods for presenting old ideas, has no doubt contributed to the clear distinction Dangkamon makes between the commercial and the legitimate (non-commercial, educational or nonprofit) theatre worlds. For him, commercial endeavors cater to perceived audience taste for purely monetary reasons, while legitimate theatre productions take risks to educate audiences on topics they might prefer to avoid, regardless of whether they generate revenues, and often incorporating provocative

elements. He said “well, if you want to be safe, don’t contradict what people want to see. But maybe, then, it’s not theatre or it’s not art at all.” As clear examples of the point he was making, during our conversation he spoke disparagingly of the *Siam Niramit* and *Fah Jarod Sai* productions I had seen, primarily due to the commercial intention of these works, and even though he had been stage director for one of them. His views are perhaps corroborated by Habermas (1989: 165-166), who writes: “In the past, the ‘people’ were brought up to the level of culture; culture was not lowered to that of the masses.”

Continuing, Habermas states “Mass culture has earned its rather dubious name precisely by achieving increased sales by adapting to the need for relaxation and entertainment on the part of consumer strata...rather than through the guidance of an enlarged public toward the appreciation of a culture undamaged in its substance.” Kearney (1988: 375) observes that “Our society has now reached a point where aesthetic production has become integrated into commodity production generally.” He says that “one of the most serious consequences of such a merger is the new facility of the established commercial culture to recuperate or neutralize the ‘oppositional’ power of art.”

Dangkamon acknowledged that while he may wish to use the power of theatre to challenge audience perception, as a “legitimate” stage director he nevertheless has a responsibility towards them.

Dangkamon: We do theatre because we care for the audience. I mean, as I said before, agree or disagree or feel anything about the play or the show, but at least the play communicates something to them: to their minds, their perception. So, if they do not like the show they can talk about it, they can talk back to me, they can discuss it. But I don’t think I want to shock the audience to make them unhappy about themselves...because theatre, for me, needs to help people to find a way for their lives.

Our conversation continued regarding a perceived conflict between creating personally satisfying art while still caring about viewer perception. Pew then observed that finding a balance in performance between personal satisfaction and audience expectation could generate extremely pleasant results.

Pew: A lot of people come to me when I... perform, and say what are you playing? It's beautiful: it's strange. For me it's not strange because I learned... from my teachers from around the world. And then I came back here and I realized that this is very new to them: to Thai people, to Thai women, Thai guys, Thai percussionists, too. It makes me happy. Not as the first person who plays this and that, but as a person who lets them know that this exists. This is happening in the world.

Of course I didn't know it then, but introducing a particular community to vital ideas and issues reflective of what was "happening in the world" was to be the dominant theme of the next formal research conversation I was to have in Budapest. Thanking Pew and Dangamon for speaking with me, the three of us left the hotel lobby at the same time: the two of them returning to their careers in Bangkok, and me to join my travel group as we continued our journey in Thailand for a few days more. Two weeks later, as a singer with the California Redwood Chorale (CRC), I was performing in a concert tour of the Lake Balaton region of Hungary.

Central Europe

Open Enough to be Ready to Understand

Music as a universal language turned out to be the central theme for all of the concerts the California Redwood Chorale presented around Lake Balaton. In each location, we shared the program with one or more local choirs: their repertoire primarily in Hungarian and ours primarily in English. However, in anticipation of our music collaboration, the Americans learned a few songs in Hungarian, the Hungarians learned a

few in English, and we all learned Mozart's *Ave Verum* in Latin. When the choirs from both countries together sang this shared repertoire, any sense of separation or boundaries disappeared. We were simply singers performing beautiful music together.

Our performance schedule had sufficient time between concerts to allow for train travel into Budapest: about an hour and a half journey from Lake Balaton. In advance of my trip to Hungary, I had made arrangements to meet with two theatre professionals in this city. My first conversation was with Laszlo Magacs, Director of the Merlin International Theatre (MIT) of Budapest, who met with me in the Theatre's café. The large, two-story brick MIT building was originally a fire station when constructed in 1920, and after a number of varying uses over the decades, it stood vacant following the end of communism in the late 1980s. At that time, several theatre artists in the city approached the Mayor and asked to use the building to create an international theatre presenting English language and Hungarian language repertoire. Laszlo became Director of the English language division in 1991.

Laszlo: In those days the...idea was to do English language theatre during the summer for tourists... and to do Hungarian theatre during the normal theatre season, which is end of September to end of May. The original idea was wrong...So I changed the philosophy and started to do [English-language] theatre during the ['normal'] season for two reasons. One was because, in those days – 1991 – we had a hundred thousand expatriate community here...and there were many international companies coming to Hungary. They brought their employees, they brought management staff and they needed some culture. So that was one of the reasons. The other one was obviously to do English language performances for Hungarians. And this slightly changed [when] I took over the whole venue in 2003, and I made it more international.

During our conversation, Laszlo elaborated on the many ways the MIT has developed an international identity. In the last year alone, he presented theatre companies performing works in Polish, Russian, German, English, Latvian and French, and plans

were underway for a Dutch/Flemish festival in February. Under his direction, the MIT is also an official European Union (EU) information center, presenting public discussions on EU topics in the afternoons, hours before regular theatre programming at night. He contrasted the work of his alternative company with that of state-funded theatre organizations, saying “there are two different fields of theatre in the Hungarian theatre profession. One is the government subsidized theatres: huge theatres...keeping huge ensembles and wasting a lot of money. And...alternative theatre which has no guaranteed subsidy.” Of the subsidized theatres he said, “they do a naturalistic style of theatre...work as a factory [and]... do a [traditional] repertoire system.” In contrast, he believed alternative theatres like the MIT have more connections to the world.

Laszlo: The problem in Hungary is that all of the subsidized theatres are run by the same artistic direction [personnel] that existed before the changes [from communism]. They are too old. I think they should retire...Professional theatres are just focusing on their own little repertoire [and] are not interested in what is happening in the world. They are, from my point of view, quite narrow minded and repeat: sometimes they do Shakespeare, sometimes they do Moliere, sometimes they do others, but they are not going further.

Laszlo stated that “going further” to create an organization with an international focus requires a different kind of commitment to theatre presentation. He said that it “is always a challenge ... to understand each other coming from a different background, from different countries... [and] different cultures. But I think talking about the EU is b***s*** unless there is a real, human artistic relationship and connection between us.” His desire to both serve his perceived audience and to personally learn about cultures and lifestyles different than his own has informed MIT programmatic choices, which have included Jewish, Islamic and Gay and Lesbian Theatre Festivals. Aware of the fact that some of these choices might have angered members of the community, he said that “if I

chose something that is harsh or strong, I'm not choosing it because I want to provoke the audience. I chose it because I think this is a good answer for a moment in Budapest."

Continuing, Laszlo said "I try to think European and I try to think liberal because that's me... We welcome everybody who brings quality. I'm not trying to solve the problems of the world. I'm just trying to live...trying to behave normally." Laszlo's personal beliefs, which strongly influence his programmatic choices for the Theatre, are reflective of the concept of universalism developed by Habermas, who believes (1988: 436) this requires:

that one relativizes one's own form of existence in relation to the legitimate claims of other forms of life, that one attribute the same rights to the strangers and the others, along with all their idiosyncrasies and incomprehensibilities, that one not insist on the generalization of one's own identity, that the realm of tolerance must become endlessly larger than it is today: all this is what moral universalism means today.

While Laszlo is open to a diverse array of performance genre, he intentionally excludes certain types of presentations.

Laszlo: This Islamic community was here in the Merlin and they were talking about that [Sufism]. And they came here because they knew that I am open for things like that. [But] I'm not open for aggressive parts of these ideologies. So, for example, there is one policy which I never break. There is no party business here in the Merlin. So I don't care if my colleagues are liberal, socialist, or radical. We are the same citizens of this country...I don't let political programs happen in the Merlin. That is the only thing. Partly because of this divided nation...how do you say this...?

Michael: Because of it's divisiveness?

L: Yes. If that would be normal, I wouldn't mind. But...this is a venue, this is theatre, this is culture: we don't care about politics. Well, obviously we do because from an artist point of view, when you direct a play, you want to tell your story and your vision about something: that is political, in that sense. But not directly political: so this is important, the tolerance.

Providing his audiences with educational opportunities to help prepare them for life in the twenty-first century is clearly a priority for Laszlo. He referred to one of his

most recent programmatic endeavors “where I bring young people into the theatre before the chosen performance, and I ask experts to talk about the culture of the 20th century. But I am not asking theatre people to talk about it.” He said “I am asking, for example, the Director of the Museum of Fine Art to be part of the teacher group...but not to talk about the performance. They are talking about cultural ideas or topics which they think are related to the performance.” His list of lecturers in this program includes literature teachers, musicians, poets and writers who help to create a cultural context in which the performance may be better understood, and its relevance to the lives of the viewers articulated. With these kinds of activities, Laszlo is able to fulfill what is very clearly the mission of The Merlin Theatre: “to teach the audience one thing only: to be open enough to be ready to understand; to be someone who is willing to cope with something new.”

Kearney (2003: 102) writes:

No experience is so utterly alien or alienating that it removes all possibility of human response. This response may be in terms of protest, praxis, imagination, judgment or even ‘understanding’...but to rule out such possibilities, however tentative or partial, is, it seems to me, to condemn oneself to the paralysis of total incomprehension and, worse, inaction.

Our conversation finished, Laszlo snuffed-out what may have been his sixth cigarette during our discussion, and then gave me a tour of the facility before hurrying off to a production meeting with theatre artists visiting from another country. My next research conversation in Budapest was with a professional actor whose career had been dependent on a variety of performance opportunities: stage, film and voice-over work. While Laszlo spoke disparagingly of them, actor Balzacs Lazar continued to earn the major portion of his livelihood as a performer in state-subsidized theatre.

Facing the Power

Through a series of friendly emails, I had learned a little bit about Balzacs prior to meeting him, including the fact that – after completing his studies at the Hungarian [theatre] Academy in Budapest – he had received a Fulbright scholarship and spent a year studying at the Del Arte theatre training program in Blue Lake, California. We had arranged to meet in front of the McDonald’s restaurant in the Octagon neighborhood of Budapest, and to walk from there to a sidewalk café in Lizst Square. Neither of us knew what the other looked like: we simply assumed we would find each other, and we did. He was a man about thirty years of age, recently married and with a newborn son. I had imagined that our conversation would primarily focus on his work as a freelance actor in Hungary. While fortunately it did include this subject, it also – for me – turned out to be a primer on the country’s recent political history and current state of affairs. Balzacs spoke passionately about both.

Balzacs: Actually, now, it [the country] is in social and economic turmoil. Hungary was a kind-of good boy, you know, which meant that Hungary was able to have money from western countries... which caused a rise in debt – of state debt – but then they were able to keep the standard of living relatively high in this artificial way. It was not because of the economy or because of the work. It was because of the western money. And that’s why socialism collapsed in Hungary, because suddenly there was a huge state debt. And for years it was manageable and it was possible to pay it back, but after the new government started to keep the old system – to receive money and to create a sort of artificial standard of living – it [blew] up like a balloon after awhile – and we have to face the serious problems now.

The “serious problems” to which Balzacs referred – including the closing of hospitals and schools, and the introduction of “rich insurance and poor insurance” due to the privatization of health care in the country – prompted riots in the streets of Budapest in the fall of 2006. He mentioned that reductions in government funding for the arts had also

occurred, and were anticipated to continue until possibly all state subsidies would eventually be withdrawn.

Balzacs: So theatre has to be faced with these new challenges, and to try and find private sponsors, which is not easy. It is easier to find for films but it is not easy to find for theatre. And the companies have to face – the permanent companies – that they will be split up soon because then theatres won't have to be paid regular money... Only a few of them will remain.

Though he works in subsidized theatres, Balzacs – too – is critical of the persons who manage them, and believes that this issue affects other state institutions as well.

Balzacs: It's actually the main problem of the country: because, thanks to God, it was a bloodless revolution. But it means that the old guys remained in power, or they were able to save their power and money during privatization and have good fortune. And I think it is the main problem in the theatre as well, that these guys are still the remnants of the old times in the Ministry... that's why the socialism in Hungary is different from western countries... all the communist guys came to the socialist party.

Throughout our conversation, Balzacs interspersed details about the country's political situation with his life as a professional actor in Hungary. He felt fortunate to have been given a Fulbright immediately after completing his university studies; to have received public recognition awards while a member of a state-funded theatre in Paige, Hungary; and – a few years after leaving the Academy – to have starred in an extremely popular Hungarian film. This provided him with a bit of recognition and fame that allowed access to other acting opportunities in the years that followed. Referring to actors in the country, he said “fortunately we have lots of opportunities to make a living... I have six contracts with the big [Vigszínház] theatre because I am in six plays. I play with other companies as well, and I have – not regular, but sometimes – dubbing work. And I go for castings to Hungarian and foreign films.” When I met with him, he was currently starring in an outdoor summer theatre production of Goldoni's *A Servant of Two Masters*, and

was anticipating beginning rehearsals for the first of his many upcoming roles at the Vigszinhaz Theatre.

Having grown up under socialism, the freedom to ask questions and to point out problems in society or with the government continues to be a relatively new experience for Balzacs. Of the country today, he said “it’s a real democracy in Hungary and I am happy about it. But the problem is... turning a system – socialism – into capitalism: it’s not an easy thing and nobody tried it before. And even after almost twenty years since the change we are faced with the real core problems of society.” He acknowledged that in spite of the new freedoms available to him “I just feel in my veins, still, that I have this suppressed feeling sometimes. But then I have to face the power:” the opportunity to publicly criticize those persons ruling the country and the ability to pursue the life of his dreams, rather than one the government may allow. Balzac’s maturation from birth to the present can be viewed in relation to the three temporalities expressive of Heidegger’s Dasein: its past, its possible futures, and its present. These temporalities are represented by the terms *thrownness* – being in a world outside of one’s control; *projection* – a looking forward to possibilities of being; and *fallenness* – everyday absorption in the world (Heidegger 1962: 219-224). Born during Hungary’s communist past (thrownness), he envisions a good life for himself and his family in an evolving democratic culture (projection), yet acknowledges some trepidation about his ability to overcome past fears and to use the freedoms available to him today (fallenness).

While clearly Balzacs was enjoying a successful career as an actor in Hungary, the evolution of his identity as a citizen of the country was perhaps the most significant element of our conversation: an identity shaped by continuing changes within a single

culture. The identity of my next research partner, however, had been shaped by encounters with a variety of cultures in locations around the world.

A Realm of Possibilities

Currently Music Director for several choirs and orchestras in Northern California, my conversation with California Redwood Chorale Conductor (CRC), Daniel Canosa, took place in Zamardi, Hungary: a village on the shores of Lake Balaton. I had been singing under Daniel's direction for more than a year, and had spoken with him regarding various music-related topics, but our discussion in Hungary was the first opportunity for each of us to learn more about our lives outside of rehearsals.

Daniel's musical training began as a child in his native Argentina, which "was a very musical place: in a folk kind of way... I believe my parents sent me to study guitar when I was six years old because my father wanted me to sing tangos for him." A significant memory of his early music education was "this very special experience going to hear a choir in Argentina: it was an excellent choir, and they did a whole program of music by Kodaly in Hungarian." His reaction to the music at this concert was something he likened to an "out-of-body experience", and was – he believed – perhaps prophetically linked to his current conducting of the CRC in Hungary.

Daniel: I never in my life heard something like that before. I remember almost the whole concert: the moments, where I was seated, the people who were singing in front of me. And this person – the conductor – was a very important influence for me because he produced... this magic that I hadn't heard before. So it touched me in a very special way. I realized that music was out-of-this world... You know I am not a religious person of a particular religion, but I realized that music is... like between heaven and earth. It's like a bridge or something.

Daniel's words bring to mind a concept related to Heidegger's views on the creations of works of art, and how they may disclose being-ness through the dynamic tension between

things of the world (the realm of human activity and relations) and those of the earth (the realm of soil, animals, and so forth). Heidegger has explained his theory using the example of a painting by Van Gogh titled *Old Shoes*. The shoes depicted in the work are of the earth because of their practical connection to soil and farming; whereas they are also of the world because of the story they imply about their owner: i.e. her health, family and aspirations. Heidegger (1971: 75) asserts that this painting – similar to the ability of other works of art – is an interface site: a poetic projection of truth that “is the opening up or disclosure of that into which human being as historical is already cast.”

As Daniel pursued his education in the United States and in Europe – mentored by several internationally-known conductors – his expectations as a musician and conductor continued to be strongly influenced by the transformative experience at the Argentinean concert. Of his own conducting work, he said what he is trying to produce is “a moment of beauty [where] the music speaks directly to your heart.” Continuing, he said “as a conductor I am trying to be as invisible as possible in a way, so that this [beauty] happens to the audience and to the performers.” Daniel applied this concept of invisibility in performance to his singers and instrumentalists as well, believing they must be transparent conduits.

Daniel: They have to have a high level of technical control, but they don't have to worry about it. They don't have to be thinking about it. Like when you sing you cannot think about how you are going to pronounce, how you are going to put the sound here...Because all of that is a barrier between you and the experience. And the magical thing happens in the moment. It's not something that you plan for...you have to be very open, in the moment: be able to be flexible and ready to create.

Daniel's experiences as a composer have included writing full-length musical scores and shorter compositions for classical Greek and Shakespearean stage productions.

When doing so, he said that “you don’t want to make a reconstruction of something, you want to use elements of the music of the period in a new era...I studied how music was in the Greek period. So I used little pieces that [are] extant from the period and then I rework[ed] around that.” Daniel believed that musical text is imbued with the culture of the composer and of the conductor who interprets the text in performance. He said “each country is like a color, or has a different scent, so that essence is in everything that culture produces.” He offered as examples a comparison to painted works of art: “you could see a painting and know that it is Italian, because you see the colors and you see the form. And then you see another painting and you know that it’s Dutch because of the light, the color: it is obviously an element of the culture.” I asked Daniel for his opinion on the particular “scent” or characteristic that he believed was conveyed by the Hungarian music the CRC and our host choirs were performing. Referring specifically to music by Kodaly, he said “what I recognize in the Hungarian music is that it has something similar with Argentinean... There is this wonderful party and festivity and energy and there is a hole in the heart: not a hole, but maybe a wound. And there is this hope out of desperation.”

Daniel viewed his role as a composer as being significantly different from his role as conductor: the first, he said, creates the medium – and “for that, you should be alone” and “don’t think of the listener at all” – while the second performs the medium in the hopes of creating a “magical” experience for an audience. He said “that is what the audience comes there for. They don’t come there to hear what you have done [composed]. They come here to experience that [the magic]. The composition itself has to be complete [but] it exists in a realm of possibilities,” meaning that a conductor might

vary the tempo, volume and other aesthetic aspects of a particular work from one performance to the next, or interpret it differently than previous conductors. Gadamer offers an opinion that would seem to corroborate Daniel's.

The director who stages the play displays his skill in being able to make use of the occasion. But he acts according to the directions of the writer, whose whole work is a stage direction. This is quite clearly the case with a musical work – the score is really only a set of directions. Aesthetic differentiation may judge the performance against the inner structure of sound read in the score, but no one believes that reading music is the same as listening to it. Essential to dramatic or musical works, then, is that their performance at different times and on different occasions is, and must be, different (Gadamer 1975: 147-148).

When I asked Daniel for his opinion on the need to adhere to a composer's original intent, he said one should be aware of it, "but just in the background...to study one piece you have to study a hundred pieces so you can understand the language of a composer: the composer's temperament. We know that Beethoven is powerful, so as much as you'd like you cannot make his music quiet." To contrast with Beethoven, he said "Mozart is much more feminine and round and soft...So as an interpreter, my job as I see it is to deepen the music, and try and bring that up: but not from me, for itself. So if the music is different from what I am, I try to do the music as it is as much as I can." This philosophy has led to some conflicts for Daniel, when others – including friends – have conducted his original compositions: interpreting them differently than he may have intended. He has found these performances to be "shocking. Most of the time I am the director of the pieces that I compose, but I did a choral piece for a group that I used to work with, but I am not the director: a friend of mine is, so I gave her the piece." His friend surprised him by scheduling the work as part of a holiday concert that Daniel attended. He said "it was so different... strange. I am more active and she is very passive, so she made the music

like that [like her]. I couldn't believe it...it was more in the character than in the notes...or the intensity." Continuing he said, "from one point of view...my friend wasn't right by doing the music so much like her instead of so much like me. As an interpreter...she should have known that the music came from me." Daniel's words regarding what he perceived to be a friend's misinterpretation of his composition seemed to be somewhat in conflict with his earlier statement that the composer's original intent should remain in the background. My next conversation partner in Vienna had an opinion compatible with that of Gadamer. She believed art text interpretation was the responsibility of the viewer.

Deciding for Oneself

Martina Payr is the Head Librarian of the Theatre, Film and Media Studies (TFMS) Department of the University of Vienna, and our conversation was one of the few I had been able to arrange in advance. Traveling from Budapest two days prior to our appointment, I had time enough in Vienna to attend an evening of classical music and ballet in the Imperial Hall; to observe amazing street performers – including hip hop gymnasts – near the Stephenskirche (Mozart's parish church); and to finally confirm the exact location of the very small TFMS library in the former Hofburg Palace: a sprawling complex covering several city blocks. The morning of our meeting, I returned to the Hofburg to speak with Ms. Payr, but the courtyard adjacent to her building – which had been empty yesterday – was now filled with a military regiment, musicians and various Austrian officials performing a state welcoming ceremony for a foreign dignitary. I waited for the limousines and motorcycle police escort to depart before proceeding to an unmarked stone staircase that lead to the cramped third floor TFMS Library and Ms.

Payr's office. She was much younger than I had envisioned: perhaps only thirty years of age. Her office, in a side room adjacent to the reference librarian desk, had storage cabinets and shelves that extended from the floor to the twenty-foot-high ceilings. Stacks of books – old and new – covered every available table top, and after cordial introductions, our conversation began.

Martina told me that there were no artists in her family, but as a child she attended theatrical performances with her parents. As a young adult, she was more interested in visual art, rather than theatre, and when she enrolled as a student in the Theatre Studies Department of the University of Vienna – where she now works – she was a double major: theatre and art. One year after graduating from the program in 1999, the Department changed its name to Theatre, Film and Media Studies. She said “it was, I think, a sort of strategy because in Germany they have theatre studies and film studies: the institutes are more varied. In Austria we only have one institute for theatre studies and it is this one.” An unusual aspect of the Department – in comparison to the typical theatre program with which I was familiar in the United States – is that it does not have an actor training component. Instead, the curriculum emphasizes writing: on theatre history, directing, criticism, and other related topics.

Martina likened the theatre community in Vienna to that of the Broadway theatre scene in New York: a mixture of commercial, alternative and government funded companies. She said that economic difficulties due to competition from the film industry had inspired several of the theatres to include film screens and projected mixed-media as part of the live stage experience. Works by a few contemporary Austrian playwrights and directors had been noteworthy for their provocative interpretations or compositions –

including plays by Nobel Prize winning-playwright Elfriede Jelinek – yet Martina said audiences “in Austria are not easily getting excited.” She said that “people who go to the theatre are very intellectual in Austria” but this is only “a small part of the community.” This theatre-going segment of the population is further “divided into smaller groups, and these groups go always, I think, to the same theatres...where they play classics...[but] they won’t go to other theatres.”

Viennese audiences may prefer one particular theatrical genre over another, but Martina said her work as Librarian and purchasing agent of all textbooks and reference materials for the TFMS Department required that she not play favorites. She stated that “it’s very important to collect everything...In literature you say there is some sort of canon, but we don’t do this. So I try to collect a wide view of literature or theories or books.” How these works will be interpreted and valued by instructors and students is a matter of personal preference: something Martina acknowledged the average reader or viewer finds difficult. She said “some people don’t want to think for themselves” when looking at a painting, film or play, “but I think it’s very important to decide for oneself what it means to me.” Martina observed that at a theatrical performance a good portion of the audience “just want to sit there and have a nice evening and that’s it.” Her comments reminded me of criticisms I’d heard from other of my conversation partners regarding audience reluctance to attend performances that may be disturbing or make them feel uncomfortable: in particular, the words of Dangkamon in Bangkok regarding the audience desire to remain “safe.” This preference for a more passive experience allows them to remain complacently anonymous within a larger group of viewers. Heidegger refers to this larger group through use of the words *das Man*: the nearest English

equivalent for which “is perhaps ‘one’ as in ‘One would say that, wouldn’t one?’ It is also translated as the ‘Them’ or the ‘They’ with senses of ‘People’ or the ‘Public’, taken as an impersonal faceless collective” (Collins 2006: 64). Heidegger (1962: 211, 213) states that “these terms prescribe one’s state-of-mind and determines what and how one ‘sees’... We take pleasure and enjoy ourselves as *they* take pleasure; we read, see and judge about literature and art as *they* see and judge; we find shocking what *they* find shocking.” He believes “Dasein is absorbed in the ‘they’ and is mastered by it.”

Absorption into the “they” may result in an “inauthentic” Dasein or beingness. On the other hand, retaining one’s individual identity – while being with others – expresses its opposite: an “authentic” Dasein. Martina has found that a number of the older TFMS faculty have pursued authenticity to the extreme by declining offers to participate in new technological advances available in the Department and through a general resistance for collaborating with others. She has found that younger faculty and visiting lecturers from other countries, are far more open to new ideas and methods for working together.

Martina: We had an American professor during the last term and he walked into the library and he was using the computer and asking me questions. And it was good for me. But our teachers won’t come, because I think it’s a kind of a barrier to ask me. It’s like “if I have to ask her then I might give the impression I don’t know.” I think this is a problem in German-speaking countries, maybe. I think English or American teachers are more open. They talk more freely. Sometimes I think it’s not a problem to say “I don’t know this, please tell me.”

When our conversation was completed, Martina showed me the small TFMS Library, which was as crowded with floor-to-ceiling books as her office had been. A lone student sat reading below a crystal chandelier, a remnant of the room’s Habsburg past. Later that same day I traveled to Prague, and spent nearly a week seeing various theatre and music performances, including the Czech Carmen and *Aspects of Alice* production,

referred to earlier. Returning home, I began rehearsals for a production of Mozart's *Abduction from the Seraglio* for which I was serving as Stage Director, and transcribing my most recent research conversations. Having spent three weeks in Southeast Asia earlier in the summer, I found it interesting that my first California conversation would be with a classical Cambodian dance choreographer and performer living in the United States.

United States

Let Us Live Peacefully

I had heard months prior to my conversation with Charya Burt that there was a Cambodian dance troupe in the county where I lived, but I had never read anything about them in the local media. During my data gathering process, however, I was pleasantly surprised to read an advertisement for the Charya Burt Cambodian Dance Company who were presenting an evening of classical and folk dances at a local arts center. I attended this performance and was intrigued by the beauty of the dancers' movements, their elaborate costumes, and the stories they told. Gadamer (1998: 3-4) states that "because we are a conversation, we are the one story of mankind. In constantly discovering... the oldest traces of human life and in investigating ethnic islands hitherto unreached by the stream of world-historical tradition, we come to know more and more of this story." The day after attending Charya's performance, I contacted her and arranged to meet and discuss her "historical tradition".

Charya had enjoyed the beginnings of a successful career as a Cambodian classical dancer in her native country. Two years after she met her American-born husband in Cambodia in 1991, she moved to the United States to be with him: settling in

the northern California community of Windsor. Shortly thereafter, she began attending classes at a local college: educating herself to prepare for a new life in America while coincidentally performing in ethnic dance festivals in the greater San Francisco Bay area. Early in our discussion, Charya indicated that the transition to life in America was made a bit easier due to her continued dancing. She said “because of dancing I felt so connected to who I am: because it’s part of who I am, it’s part of my culture.” During our conversation, I learned that students of Cambodian classical dance are required to master 4500 precise hand and foot positions – requiring hours of practice daily – which may then be combined into particular symbolic patterns during the choreographic process.

Charya: The hand gestures and body sculpture require a lot of training. And most students who came to our school had to start at a very young age: maybe seven or nine years old, and that’s when the body is very flexible. And you start training, bending your hands backward, and sculpting your body: that’s when everything needs to be focused. And for me, I started a little late, you know – twelve years old – but I really worked hard.

Contemporary classical Cambodian dance movements continue to be based on the stone-carved images of “celestial dancers” depicted on the walls of the Angkor temple complex near Siem Reap, Cambodia. Charya said “most of the hand gestures and the body sculpture were inspired by that [the carved images] and [they are] the inspiration for the dance creators... today.” The classical Cambodian dance tradition – together with other art forms and educational endeavors – was violently interrupted in 1975 when the brutal Khmer Rouge regime came to power in Cambodia. After they were defeated four years later, those master teachers still living were desperately needed to help revive the dance form as their memories were the only existing records of the choreography. The

movements had not been formally documented because the dance tradition had been passed from generation to generation as part of an oral tradition. Charya said:

when the school opened in 1980...they got all the teachers from different provinces who they knew were still alive... they made an announcement...and they said “please come and help open the school, and start to teach again. There are students who hunger for knowledge.” And so after the war there’s a sense of wanting to do something that we can maintain and preserve. It was like a rebirth-type of idea that all the teachers who wanted to teach [returned] and I started then. And this is all...you know, from their heads...what they taught is what they remembered.

After attending Charya’s performance, I was curious if there were any particular problems or issues she faced when presenting her work to an almost exclusively non-Cambodian audience. She said “I think there are a lot of challenges...but opportunities and advantages, too...When you perform for a different audience, they have so little understanding of the language and of your art form.” Sometimes, prior to the performance, she will explain the meaning of the intricate hand and foot gestures: but this is not always possible when her company shares an evening of dance with other troupes: there simply isn’t enough time. A lack of Cambodian musicians with whom she might improvise or experiment using different musical compositions, has also been problematic: consequently, she must rely on existing sound recordings. Yet another challenge she faces in the United States is a lack of colleagues who have been trained in the same dance tradition.

Charya: If I were in Cambodia I would have my teacher who’s always with me... [There are] more choices and people who know your art form. You communicate with them more closely. Over here you are basically on your own, so you have to find ways that will work for you...[W]hen you choreograph your pieces it is difficult to not have people who can observe and critique.

I asked Charya if she is at liberty to improvise when choreographing a new classical dance, to which she responded “maybe a couple of steps, but most of the movements are already there. I just take it and [sequence it] so that it matches the movements I am looking for.” She said that it was important for her “to be able to do something different but to preserve the flavor” of traditional Cambodian dance “rather than just doing something that isn’t really authentic within my own art form.” Using classical movements to create contemporary interpretations has resulted in a number of successes for which she has received public recognition. An intriguing example was a solo piece she created using Cambodian dance steps to interpret a character from Tennessee Williams’ play *The Glass Menagerie*. It was titled *Blue Rose*, after the nickname given to the character Laura by “the gentleman caller” in Williams’ play. Charya said “people really loved it, and a reviewer from the [San Francisco] Chronicle came. It is very nice to have people look at your piece” and to appreciate it. Her desire is that audiences will experience more than simply the external beauty of the classical dance form.

Charya: What I am looking for is for the audience to see not just the dance is pretty – the outside – or the costume is so beautiful, so gorgeous: her hand is so flexible. I think what I would love is to go beyond that: to move more into the complexity of the art form itself: to see the inside...[which is] something so beautiful, something celestial...which is not in heaven but is right here on earth, and you have an opportunity to see it... Seeing some things that are not human may help you forget about your problems... and you can walk out from the performance feeling very good: very light, and thinking that was wonderful.

Charya’s hope that the viewer might experience something emotionally or spiritually satisfying by observing her dances is supported by Gadamer, who writes (1975: 102, 108) that “the work of art has its true being in the fact that it becomes an experience that changes the person who experiences it.” Continuing, he says:

The presentation of a god in a religious rite, the presentation of myth in a play, are play not only in the sense that the participating players are wholly absorbed in the presentational play and find in it their heightened self-representation, but also in that the players represent a meaningful whole for an audience. Thus it is not really the absence of a fourth wall that turns the play into a show. Rather, openness toward the spectator is part of the closedness of the play. The audience only completes what the play as such is” (Gadamer 1975: 109).

In her recent performance, a folk dance featuring five women wearing peacock headdresses was presented in which the dancers appealed to their ancestors for protection. I asked Charya if there was an occasion today that would prompt non-performers in a Cambodian village to present this type of dance as part of their daily living experience. She said “yes, this kind of dance is often performed... [It] is a way of asking the ancestors [who] protect the forest for their permission – when we are arriving, or when we are here: ‘may you protect us’; ‘may you let us live peacefully’.”

Working with playwrights to create theatre texts proposing alternative methods for living together continues to be the life’s work of the next conversation partner with whom I spoke.

Jumping Off a Cliff

Nationally known for presenting new works and for launching the careers of several highly regarded playwrights – including Pulitzer Prize winners Sam Shepherd and Nilo Cruz – the Magic Theater has recently celebrated its fortieth anniversary. When I was first attempting to schedule appointments with arts professionals in the San Francisco Bay area, I had sent an email to Chris Smith, the Theater’s Artistic Director. Chris responded promptly, stating that he would be pleased to meet with me. I had hoped this would take place prior to my conversations in Southeast Asia and central Europe, but schedule conflicts prevented our meeting until the 2007-2008 season was well underway.

In retrospect, I realize that it was helpful to have already spoken with Chris' counterparts in Kuala Lumpur and Budapest prior to our conversation, as Joe and Laszlo had given me an increased understanding of artistic director responsibilities relating to the presentation of new theatrical works. I met with Chris in his Magic Theater office located in the Fort Mason complex in view of the Golden Gate Bridge. He immediately captured my attention by saying "I'm a risk junkie, in a certain sense, because every new play you jump off a cliff. You don't know if you are going to land hard or land soft or take flight. There is always the fantasy that you are going to take flight and soar out and accomplish tremendous things." His reference to fantasy brought to mind an observation by Kearney, who states (1998: 149) that poetic imagination "liberates the reader into a free space of possibility, suspending the reference to the immediate world of perception (both the author's and the reader's) and thereby disclosing new ways of being in the world...which transcend the limits of our actual world."

Prior to joining the Magic Theater, Chris spent eighteen years in New York City in a career dedicated to the development of new plays, and had been involved with a number of different theatre companies and artists. Most of this time was spent with The Ensemble Studio Theatre (EST), which emerged out of the growing off-Broadway theatre movement in the early to mid-seventies. He eventually became director of an EST-affiliated collection of emerging writers called Youngblood that met weekly with the intention of facilitating the development of new work in general, as well as the "voice and body of work" for that particular group of artists. Becoming Artistic Director of the Magic Theater in 2003, Chris said of his current duties:

Leading a nonprofit organization, by its very nature, creates a responsibility, an obligation and a relationship with a specific community. One of the interesting things about the Magic is that ...our community is both local and national. From a local perspective we are in dialogue with the broader Bay Area in the most sort-of elemental way that all arts are: particularly all performative arts which exist only in their correlation to having an audience present. So as a leader in an arts organization – programmatically speaking – I’m engaging in a dialogue with this particular community.

At the same time, however, Chris was mindful of the influence the Magic Theater has on the national theatre scene. He said “we are a player in the national dialogue about theatre artists: predominantly playwrights. There are also directors, dramaturgs, designers, and actors that emerge from our particular hub and go out into the world.” I asked Chris about the process he and his colleagues use when selecting and developing new works, including those that may address provocative or controversial topics. He said that the Magic receives “seven, eight hundred scripts a year, and from that you start to note trends and topics.”

Chris: There’s a whole bunch of perspectives about what’s flowing through the minds of American artists in our art form: international artists as well, but predominantly American. So we can tap into that...[This] is a filter point from which we say to the community “these artists, these issues are important. We want to wrestle with them with you. We want to be in a dialogue about them with you, or we want to excite you about them in some way.”

He spoke of a particular play in the current season that addressed “the dominating quality of anxiety in the American psyche right now” which shows that the “American dream has a dark underbelly to it, and that the future is not going to be better than the past.”

Working with a playwright to shape provocative text on a difficult socio-political issue is a challenging task. Ricoeur (1984: 69) observes that “in the same way as the grammar of a language governs the production of well-formed sentences, whose number and content are unforeseeable, a work of art – a poem, play, novel – is an original production, a new

existence in the linguistic kingdom.” Chris said that working with playwrights to create a new linguistic entity requires that “one always strike a balance between the receiver – the audience – and the generator – the artist – and that’s the excitement as well as the challenge of what an artistic director gets to do.” We discussed the controversies associated with the productions in Berlin, Bangkok and New York to which I referred earlier. It was his belief that “there’s an ecology around controversy that is remarkably healthy, and one of the great things ... is it actually emboldens artists. Times of great turmoil tend to be times of great art.” Referring to controversy as “a lens through which we look backwards, as much as looking forward,” he spoke passionately about the difference between organizations that consciously court controversy as, perhaps, part of a marketing ploy as opposed to organizations that may unexpectedly find themselves addressing it after the fact.

Chris: Inevitably, in my experience, the most controversial public art events were not anticipated to be as controversial as they were, and that controversy is one where you prick the body public’s weak spot in a way that’s unanticipated. And I think ... that very act of challenging communal perceptions is thrillingly important for the arts. In fact, if the arts in general are not doing that then we are squandering one of the most significant aspects of what the arts are expected to be, which is deeply thinking, caring, feeling individuals reflecting back to their world things that are important to them. And it’s one of the great revolutionary opportunities.

Preparing audiences to receive new works – controversial or otherwise – is a significant part of the educational and marketing endeavors of the Magic, which employs a variety of web-related activities “because new audiences look to the internet as their portal” for entry into the organization’s mission. These web-based activities include interviews with playwrights, Hollywood-style video-trailers, and links to dramaturgically relevant information – all intended to create context in which the audience can better appreciate

the work. Chris likened the Theater's efforts to that of art museums "in the sense that they tend to either say 'here's a room with a singular artists work' or 'a room based on a moment in time' and you see a multiplicity of perspectives: or based on a particular theme in which you see the currents resonating across many things." This activity is especially important for theatres like the Magic "because we don't have the kind of filter of perceived reaction by which to enter the...new work." He offered an example to affirm the point he was making: "we go into Shakespeare, somehow in our bones thinking that this is important and valuable because it's been taught to us: there's a reverence with which the name is spoken that suggests – on many levels – that it's valuable."

A passionate belief that the arts are "important and valuable" teaching tools prompted my next conversation partner to create a learning environment that encourages high school students to use their "utopian capacity to imagine things being other than they are" (Kearney 1998: 28).

A Year in the Arts

In the fall of 2007, Dyan Foster founded the Arts & Ethics Academy, a charter school for secondary students in Santa Rosa, California for which she serves as Director. Participating in theatre productions as a young adult, Dyan majored in film and philosophy in college, focusing her studies on ethical media. Shortly after graduation, she began working for the local Public Broadcasting Station for Sonoma County, and it was while working there that she helped to create a documentary on a San Francisco-based organization that used theatre to help educate young people regarding the dangers of drugs and alcohol. The Director of the Sonoma County Health and Human Services

Department saw the film, which eventually lead to a grant being awarded to Dyan to create a similar program for Santa Rosa and surrounding cities.

Dyan: Eventually it [the grant] just kind of landed in my lap and it was really good timing because I'd just gotten married and I was pregnant with my first child... So I left Channel 22 and... started meeting with kids in my neighborhood ... I had a good friend, who is a mentor of mine as well, and she said "why don't you incorporate as a nonprofit? You can really take this on the road." And I thought well, okay. So I started Routes for Youth and the theatre company just sort of took off from there.

A core program of Routes for Youth is titled Teen Court: based on a model that started in Odessa, Texas. A peer-based program, Dyan said it arose from a community's response to "juvenile justice and juvenile crime that includes young people" in a process of addressing the problem.

Dyan: So, say one of the kids gets arrested for assault and battery. Maybe they don't have an extensive criminal history. Probation will refer the case to us and they will go through a court that is staffed by young people... The County gives us a courtroom that is right downtown near the County jail, and the case is heard by a jury of their peers. The jurors are past defendants. So if a kid goes through court [this] Thursday, next Thursday he or she will be serving on a jury, so we keep it really peer-based.

Dyan said that the mock courtroom proceeding is "primarily a sentencing hearing because there has to be an admission of guilt on some level... of culpability." She said "we have a pool of local attorneys who preside as judge – they love it – but they [the teens] are trying cases in a community of their peers and giving them appropriate consequences." The ultimate benefit to the teens involved, "and the positive hook for the kids, is that if they complete the diversion program" by participating in the theatrical court process "the charges against them are dismissed."

Dyan's success with the Teen Court eventually lead to her envisioning an educational program for teens as a replacement for the traditional secondary high school

experience: one that could have as its foundation a curriculum based on theatre and other arts. She said “actually some of our students [at the Arts & Ethics Academy] are student clients from the Court,” and believed that the creation of the Academy was a natural progression. When “you look at the arts and you look at the Teen Court program... there’s ethics and justice. What I found working with young people is they have a very strong longing for justice, you know. That’s the age where the battle cry is ‘it’s not fair!’”

Because her experience has shown that engagement with theatre and the arts is empowering for teens, the curriculum for the Arts & Ethics Academy (based on a model developed by the Marculi Center at the Santa Clara Center for Applied Ethics) incorporates five different types of arts programming – performances, intensives, residencies, workshops, and long-term programs – as part of a school calendar year divided into five six-week semesters. Each of the five semesters has an ethics-based guiding principle or overlay that informs the educational process. Dyan provided me with a variety of materials explaining the Arts & Ethics Academy 2007-2008 *A Year in the Arts* programmatic structure, including a template (Appendix D) used to guide curriculum development. She acknowledged – since the Academy had just opened – using the arts as a basis for teaching core subject areas (math, language arts, and history for example) was still evolving as the teachers and students were working together to create an effective curriculum. Dyan had already observed, nonetheless, that after only three weeks of instruction they had shaped a community where all participants had the opportunity to contribute to a unique learning environment: something reflective of the communicative action and universalism theories of Habermas, who writes (1990: 67-68) that “nothing better prevents others from perspectively distorting one’s own interests than actual

participation...[T]he descriptive terms in which each individual perceives his interests must be open to criticism by others.” Continuing, he states “needs and wants are interpreted in the light of cultural values. Since cultural values are always components of intersubjectively shared traditions, the revision of the values used to interpret needs and wants cannot be a matter for individuals to handle monologically.” Dyan spoke to me of a technique she has used with teens to engage them in the process of creating mutually agreed-upon principles for living together.

Dyan: We did this exercise where I tried to get them to envision that they are gods and goddesses on Mount Olympus, and if they could create a... brand new world, what would the ten universal laws be: that would just be, just like gravity...it’s like you have a magic wand. And they just got stuck...Somebody says “no violence” and [the students respond by saying] “that’s not ever going to work because people are always going to get mad at each other, and sometimes you need violence to thin out the population”: these kinds of things...[But] they always, always, always come up with these basic shared values... justice, equality, harmony, love, safety, and... inherent in those laws they come up with – like no violence – there’s a value of peace.

I asked Dyan how she envisioned her students using knowledge they acquired at the Academy after they’ve graduated. She said it was her wish that they would be “engaged community members living lives that contribute...having a sense of purpose, and feeling fired up to go for their passion, you know. And to see and live a life of possibilities.”

My next conversation partner was an artist in a relatively new arts discipline which – through a combination of live theatre with digital technology – offers tremendous “possibilities”.

Pushing Boundaries

Nadja Linnine Masura recently received her doctorate degree in a subject area of which I had never heard: Digital Theatre. Like many undergraduate students in theatre

programs around the United States, Nadjja's degree emphasized general theatre instruction as part of a liberal arts curriculum at the University of Puget Sound. She performed in several stage productions and worked as the props master for the Theatre Department. While pursuing her Masters degree at the University of Michigan at Ann Arbor – in literature, criticism and dramaturgy – she wrote a thesis examining the symbolic use of the human body in theatrical works, paying particular attention to the concept of “transcendence in terms of religious...overtones: the way that the body was used in that climactic moment” of the plot. While a doctoral student at the University of Maryland a couple of years later, she continued to pursue this area of research but with an added component– digital technology: the result of further study and two community college diplomas she received (after her Masters degree) in Multi-Media. While in Maryland, on a fellowship divided between the Department of Theatre and Performance Studies and the Maryland Institute for Technology in the Humanities, she began to investigate what she perceived to be an extreme separation of theatre from technology. She said that “dance seems more consistently to be using the body and technology” and there is a “tradition of dance for the camera... which naturally leads into...projections or allows for animation or for body technology interaction through sort of interactive... motion triggering.” Her two-year exploration of the Digital Performance Archive (DPA) resulted in numerous examples of stage productions that blurred the boundaries between theatre and digital performance art. She said “the DPA had everything... *Puppet Hotel* from Laurie Anderson... works from George [Coates] like *Tempest 2000*; they had weird happenings... and it was all in there because it's digital performance.” It was her belief that these productions diluted “the idea of what theatre is. By expanding it they washed it

out. Like if you do watercolors, and you have your pigment and then you just add too much water: it thins and loses its meaning.” She said, “coming from a theatre background... I wanted there to be some core recognition” of what constituted Digital Theatre, so she developed a set of qualifications to distinguish it from performance art.

Nadja: I was trying to draw lines in the sand, some impermeable bracketing around what might be most interesting if you were looking for the combination of theatre and digital technology. I determined four criteria: 1) which is liveness; 2) the inclusion of digital technology...integrated into the performance piece; 3) some verbal elements: some sort of spoken language or narrative; and then 4) delineated participation...so...you ask me a question, I send it back, it bounces back and forth.

She said Digital Theatre is “having co-presence...a live actor and a live audience in the same space together, but it also has a digital element. And it can be new works... or it can be staging Shakespeare’s plays... but you have to have that tension, you have to have that hybridity” between the live performer and technology. I asked Nadja about the digital theatre pieces she had developed while a doctoral student at the University of Maryland. She said these were all original, multi-site works utilizing Art on the Grid.

Nadja: Art on the Grid... is an artistic community on the Access Grid:... the high end video conferencing program used by research institutions...I staged two productions locally, and then I was a participant in four annual interplay productions where we had six different institutions, each one sending different video streams of animation or video or performance or music... It is a collaborative art form, and that’s my thing. Technology has actually...opened the doors for a lot of people to participate and use whatever skills they’re good with: whatever they can contribute.

Kearney affirms technology’s potential for expanding the awareness of responsibility for the well-being of others. He writes (1988: 364, 365):

The ethical imagination... does not endorse a puritanical disdain for the new technological media. On the contrary, an ethical imagination alert to both the liberating and incarcerating potentials of postmodern culture, would be one determined to use all available technologies to pursue its concern for the

other... The particular task of the ethical imagination in such a civilization of postmodern communications is to ensure that a democracy of images avoids superficiality and remains dialogical, i.e. attentive to the demands of the other.

Early in our conversation, Nadja said that she liked “the idea of theatre as an area of contention: theatre as a rebellious thing,” so that when a viewer sees familiar media used in a different manner and then sees “the human body reacting to it [the media], or succumbing to it, or whatever the interaction is... as an audience member ... you have a choice to make... a Brechtian moment, perhaps, where you just reevaluate either what’s happening on the stage or... in your life.” When I asked for her opinion regarding a Digital Theatre artist’s ethical responsibilities, she responded by saying that “It doesn’t matter what the medium is: you always have the same criteria... The media just adds a different dimension to it... The only thing that I would be concerned about ethically, in terms of Digital Theatre – honestly – would be [physical] pain.” Nadja then referred to Australian-based solo performance artist Stelarc.

Nadja: He’s a performing artist who comes out of an art tradition. He used to do hangings: an artwork where you suspended yourself from hooks.

Michael: Oh, I’ve heard of that.

N: Well, he moved into technology so he wires his body up to the internet and lets people control his muscle tissue.

Recalling her earlier remarks regarding evaluating what was happening on the stage in relation to one’s life, I found it difficult to believe that viewing the Stelarc muscle tissue performance could result in any emotion other than fascinated revulsion: similar to driving past the scene of a terrible vehicle accident. But this example merely served to support Nadja’s contention that certain live events utilizing technology may not be construed as legitimate theatre. Digital Theatre, she said, “is pushing our boundaries of

what you expect theatre to be: what's the costume, what's the scenery, what's the actor's body? Is the scenery really the actor? All these things...switch around." She said "There's an interplay that happens right between the actor and the place or the stage itself... and new things can happen." As the last of my formal research conversations, it seemed especially fitting that it would emphasize a new genre of art text that has only just begun to be explored: one with intriguing potential.

Summary

The preceding data presentation and preliminary analysis has provided an introduction to each of the formal participants while offering one or more related theoretical concepts from Heidegger, Ricoeur, Gadamer, Habermas or Kearney. Ricoeur (1991: 432) writes that "a life is no more than a biological phenomenon as long as it is not interpreted. And in the interpretation fiction plays a considerable, mediating, role." He says that "to pave the way towards this new phase in the analysis we must attend to the mixture of doing and undergoing, of action and suffering which makes up the very texture of life." The Chapter Five secondary analysis of the preceding conversations offers an expanded interpretation of the "doing" and "undergoing" experienced by my research partners in their lives as arts professionals.

CHAPTER FIVE: SECONDARY ANALYSIS

Introduction

Similar to views expressed by Gadamer, Ricoeur believes that what is to be interpreted in a poetic work – i.e. a play, opera, novel, painting – is dependent on what one brings to the viewing or reading experience. He says (Ricoeur 1991: 430-431) “the... significance of a story wells up from the intersection of the world of the text and the world of the reader. Thus the act of reading becomes the crucial moment of the entire analysis. On this act rests the ability of the story to transfigure the experience of the reader.” In this Chapter, I present a secondary “reading” of the research conversation texts with regards to themes pertinent to the ethics/poetics relationship using the following theories: Heidegger’s concept of Dasein and the truth to be found in art; Ricoeur’s narrative identity, ethical action and mimesis theories; Gadamer’s views on art interpretation; Habermas’ views on communicative principles, universalization and discourse ethics; and Kearney’s theories of narrative imagination and otherness. Kearney (2003: 102) writes “that no matter how avant-gardist the text or work may be... none of them is completely *closed* to hermeneutic response,” and suggests that the “sublime ‘shock’ provoked by certain anti-art experiments only achieves its impact because these experiments are reacting against, and therefore still presupposing, the inherited paradigms of ‘art’.” In other words, he says “we can run rings around the hermeneutic circle but we can never escape it entirely.”

Martin Heidegger

In Chapter Four, I referred to Heidegger’s concept of Dasein – or “being-in-the world” – which asserts that one’s identity is realized or demonstrated through

engagement in practical, everyday activities. I mentioned this theory in regards to words spoken by my conversation partner Chotiros (Pew) Viboonlarp of Bangkok, and her creative process. I also spoke of authentic versus inauthentic being in the data presented of my conversation with Martina Payr in Vienna. A potential risk to one's unique Dasein arises when working with others, because the group's opinion or beliefs may replace a dissimilar view held by the individual. In this manner, authentic being loses its integrity, thereby becoming inauthentic (or average) and resulting in a lessening of being's possibilities. When I was speaking with Pew, she referred to comments made by music producers in Thailand who had asked her to modify her unique vocal style and/or percussion playing to more closely match that of well-known, highly paid musicians. She said "a lot of producers and song directors think the same way. I have to become kind of Sheila E...They say 'Pew you have to do this because it sells.' I'm not Sheila E. I do frame drums!" She was adamant regarding the need to retain her authentic means of artistic expression. Dangakmon had been similarly frustrated with the commercial endeavors with which he had been engaged, in contrast to the artistically satisfying productions he has staged at Chulalongkorn University. While serving as Director for *Siam Niramit* – the Thai history spectacle I viewed in Bangkok – Dangakmon said the show's producer had regularly vetoed his staging choices. "She listened to me," he said, but regularly objected, saying the artistic interpretation of particular scenes could not be done as he envisioned because the audience "were tourists [and] we don't want anything that difficult or elaborate." He believed his unique expressions of creativity as the Stage Director were unjustly restricted. Heidegger's concept of authentic being – and how it may be retained while working with others – can perhaps be understood through the

following example from the world of classical music. The typical orchestra has multiple instrumental sections: strings, winds, brass and percussion. Each of these sections is further divided by instrument type. For example, in the strings section there are violins, violas, cellos and bass instruments. Under the direction of a conductor, when played at the same time the individual instruments retain their unique tone while working together to realize a single musical text. Violins continue to sound like violins; percussion instruments do not suddenly sound like flutes. The individual tonal contribution by each musical instrument remains distinct: authentic, yet blended with others for a harmonious result.

Continuing to use music in reference to a concept of Heidegger's, during my Chapter Four presentation of the conversation I had with Conductor Daniel Canosa, I referred to his comment that music seemed to serve as a "bridge" between heaven and earth. This, to me, was suggestive of Heidegger's view that art could reveal a particular truth related to things of the earth and things of the world, serving as a kind of interface site. In describing this concept, Heidegger offers the example of a painting by Van Gogh titled *Old Shoes*. The shoes depicted on canvas were of the earth because of their practical nature and connection to soil: but of the world, too, because of the story that could be imagined about their owner. An earth/world relationship can be discerned in the various art forms represented by my conversation partners. Noraini's short stories, for example, tell of distinct persons from a specific era in Malaysia's past. However, a reader interpreting the trials and tribulations of her characters may detect themes that have application to the individuals and social contexts of any country. Daniel had mentioned that, as a young man, the music of Hungarian composer Zoltan Kodaly had a tremendous

effect on him: the distinct structure and musical notes had been sequenced to create satisfying melodies for the listener: things of the earth. What was particularly memorable for Daniel, however, was how the construction of the text conveyed a sense of the struggles of a people who had been wounded yet remained hopeful: qualities evocative of the life experiences of Hungarians who had endured harsh conditions under the rule of an oppressive political system. The images and feelings revealed through Kodaly's music – and inspired by actual circumstances in Hungary – had meaning for Daniel's life as an Argentinean and possibly could – as well – for others in the world who were familiar with similar forms of oppression. The ability of art text to reveal characteristics associated with a particular people can also be examined through the narrative identity theories of Ricoeur.

Paul Ricoeur

Ricoeur (1984: 3) writes that “time becomes human to the extent that it is organized after the manner of a narrative; narrative, in turn, is meaningful to the extent that it portrays the features of temporal existence.” In Chapter Two I refer to the *ipse* and *idem* aspects of personal identity. The *idem* is that part of the individual that remains constant over time, while the *ipse* is that part of an individual's identity that continues to change as one ages and encounters new experiences. These new experiences are the temporal events we include when telling others the story of our lives: when we share our individual narratives. Shakespeare offers an excellent example of this concept in a speech spoken by the character Jaques in *As You Like It*. In this soliloquy, which starts with the oft-quoted line “all the world's a stage and all the men and women merely players,” Jaques describes the seven “ages” or periods of a man's life (in an intentionally comedic

fashion). The first age is the “mewling and puking” infant. The second: the “whining schoolboy.” The ages and their unique characteristics continue to be delineated: “lover”, “soldier”, “justice”, retired “pantaloon”, and onward to the final stage just before death – “second childishness,” the “last scene of all that ends” one’s “strange eventful history” (Shakespeare 1600: 42). Though the form varies, each of the artists with whom I spoke are involved in the creation or presentation of completed narratives – a particular short story, a finished painting, a new play – while their own life’s narrative continues to take shape. Joe and Faridah at the KLPAC create and tell “stories about who we are as Malaysians,” believing that as artists they cannot skip the painful events of their country’s past. The texts they create emphasize specific periods or “ages” from their recent history, while their identities as citizens of Malaysia continue to be informed by past and current political events and religious traditions. Faridah made reference to their evolving narrative identity when she said “to have succeeded to live as peacefully as we have been living since the days of the British and the Japanese, and the communists, and so on, I think it has been short of a small miracle.” Laszlo Magacs in Budapest, on the other hand, said that Hungarian Theatre does not have a unique identity because the standard fare at state-subsidized companies is a repetition of a classical repertoire written by non-Hungarians. His fellow country man, Balzacs Lazar, however, referred to plays by Ferenc Molnar and Hungarian operetta as expressive of Hungarian Theatre’s national identity, however these works reflect a late 19th/early 20th century identity that may no longer be relevant to a 21st century Hungary where her citizens attempt to embrace a free-speech *ipse* that characterizes their current identity while moving away from a communist *idem*. Past traditions were essential to the narrative identity of Cambodian dancer Charya

Burt, who told me that classical dance allowed her to remain “connected to who I am... it’s part of my culture.” Her identity as a performer in this tradition is part of the larger narrative of Cambodian history, and of yet another arts-specific sub-narrative within this: the narrative of Cambodian classical dance from its historical origin through its near disappearance and resuscitation in the late 1970s. Though integral to her personal identity, this dance history narrative can be distinguished from the narrative of Charya’s personal life, which is the story of a childhood in Cambodia and the events leading to emigration and citizenship in the United States.

Ricoeur (1984: 58-59) states that “as a function of the norms immanent in culture, actions can be...judged according to a scale of moral preferences. They thereby receive a relative value, which says that this action is more valuable than that one. These degrees of value first attributed to actions,” he says “can be extended to the agents themselves, who are held to be good or bad, better or worse.” It is his belief that action “can never be ethically neutral.” Referring specifically to artists, he says “one reason for thinking that this neutrality is neither possible nor desirable is that the actual order of action does not just offer the artist conventions and convictions to dissolve, but also ambiguities and perplexities to resolve in a hypothetical mode.” The “modes” used by artists with whom I spoke to challenge conventions or to offer innovative solutions for addressing recurring problems has varied. Noraini chooses to write stories that fictionally unite races in a country where they remain divided, featuring characters overlooked in more traditional texts: but must do so while remaining mindful of her role as a Muslim woman in Malay society. Joe and Faridah tell similar stories on the stage, focusing on subjects that “have been eradicated from the history books:” a delicate undertaking in a country where racial

issues influence artistic liberties. Faridah stated that “on the stage there are certain expressions or freedoms that we exercise, but we must be responsible. We are not asking people to feel the angst [of the 1969 riots] all over again.” And Dyan spoke of the shared power between students, teachers and administrators at the Arts and Ethics Academy, who are collaborating in the further development of an arts and ethics based curriculum intended to prepare future leaders through a new teaching/learning paradigm. In contrast to the ethically informed actions of these artists, the behavior of the Berlin Opera *Idomeneo* director appears overtly contemptuous. While it is true that art text has the significant responsibility of introducing viewers or readers to different concepts or points of view of which they might otherwise remain ignorant, there are some topics or issues that may require special consideration. Knowing that the display of the image of Mohammed – in any form whatsoever – is an affront to Muslims, and yet still making a personal choice to do so in a stage production or in any other art text, is an overtly hostile and, I believe, less-than-ethical act.

Ricoeur believes that “to imitate or represent action is first to preunderstand what human acting is, in its semantics, its symbolic system, its temporality. Upon this pre-understanding, common to both poets and their readers, emplotment is constructed and, with it, textual and literary mimetics” (1984: 64). This activity is explained in his theory of the threefold mimesis, which I have discussed in Chapter Three related to the Prague *Aspects of Alice* production. Refigured action is represented in the final stage, mimesis₃, which is “the intersection of the world of the text and the world of the hearer or reader...the world wherein real action occurs and unfolds its specific temporality” (1984: 71). This aspect of Ricoeur’s mimetic process is reflected in the creative activity of a

majority of my conversation partners. Kien studied the works of Salvadore Dali, creating approximately “1000 paintings.” He said “Dali is one who is always showing happiness and sorrow in the same picture. And after I was influenced by him, I found my own way...the Asian way.” Daniel used music extant from the classical Greek period, but combined it with his unique musical voice to create a new vision of what he believed the ancient Greek theatre experience might have been like. The original performances created by Digital Theatre Artist Nadja Massura have exclusively combined traditional staging practices with advanced technology to create works that are part of a new theatrical genre. While the work of these three artists reflects actions specific to the threefold mimesis, the experiences of Laszlo and Balzacs in Budapest differ in their ability to engage in the mimesis₂ “opening of the kingdom of the *as if*” (Ricoeur 1984: 65). This is because traditional state-funded theatre companies in Hungary continue to utilize production methods that are remnants of the country’s communist past, while the Merlin International Theatre – under Laszlo’s direction – is presenting a theatre of possibilities. This has involved actions similar to those of Chris Smith at the Magic Theater in San Francisco, who stated that “there is something significant about a... mission that looks to the future in a very different way than a lot of canon-based work, which is looking-to-the past to re-examine the present.” The relationship of the past to our ability to achieve understanding in the present is essential to the philosophical hermeneutics of Gadamer.

Hans-Georg Gadamer

Gadamer asserts that our traditions and values have been determined by the culture in which we were raised, and have resulted in our possession of specific points of view or prejudices that influence our interpretive abilities when we are engaged in

conversation. Cognizant of our history and biases we can sincerely participate in a dialogue, which may then lead to the speakers developing a deeper understanding of one another and the topic at hand: possibly leading to an “ah ha moment”: or fusion of horizons. He believes that though we are unable to objectively criticize our cultural traditions because of innate prejudice, “we can achieve a sufficient level of open-mindedness to be able to re-evaluate a few prejudices at a time” (Dawson in Gadamer 1998: xxx). Dangkamon, in particular, expressed frustration during our conversation regarding audience reluctance to use the performance experience as an opportunity to acknowledge possible prejudices and to learn something new. Of a recent controversial production he directed at Chulalongkorn University – *The Miraculous Adventure of the Conch Prince* – he said, “I just intended to open their [the audience’s] eyes to see something that is in the shade or put in the shade. They can’t accept it or they don’t want to see it.” Joe and Faridah acknowledged this problem in Kuala Lumpur, as did Balzacs in Budapest who said Hungarians “are shy to talk and ask questions.” Artists whose work requires collaborating with others understand that engaging in passionate conversation with an intent of learning something new is part of the creative process. This is especially true for the stage directors with whom I spoke: Joe, Dangkamon, Laszlo and Chris. Of this process, Laszlo said “you as a director have to have an idea, but be open enough. You are not working with robots; you are working with human beings. The more people working to put something together, the better the art that will come out of it.”

Does audience reluctance to talk about what they see or feel in relation to viewing art text reduce the possibilities of meaning they may derive from it? Gadamer relates the hermeneutic idea of truth to art, believing that it is only when viewed by a particular

audience on a particular occasion that a work of art will be found to have meaning for those participating in the encounter. He writes (1975: 578-579) that “to be fixed in a picture, addressed in a poem, to be the object of an allusion from the stage, are not incidental and remote from what the thing essentially is; they are presentations of the essence itself.” He states that a work of art “experiences a continued determination of its meaning from the ‘occasion’ of its coming-to-presentation. This is seen most clearly in the performing arts...which wait for the occasion in order to exist and define themselves only through that occasion.” He believes this is true for “this statue of Phidias, this tragedy of Aeschylus, this motet of Bach. The hermeneutic constitution of the unity of the work of art is invariant among all the social alterations of the art industry” (Gadamer 1975: 578-579). Commenting on audience willingness to fully engage with art text, Chris Smith told me that, in his opinion “new works, and art in general, intimidates people...I can’t tell you the number of people who say ‘I don’t think I’m going to get it,’ and I say ‘of course you will. Because what you get is what it is supposed to be.’ And that is the beauty of art.” Practical measures that could assist viewers and artists to engage in conversation regarding art text – thereby addressing the frustrations expressed by Dangkamon, for example – are offered in the communicative action theories of Jürgen Habermas.

Jürgen Habermas

Habermas (2006: 15-18) asserts that “daily social relations rest on a solid basis of common background convictions, taken-for-granted cultural truths and mutual expectations.” He has said that “at this level, the coordination of action takes place via familiar language games...in the public space of more or less good reasons.” It is his

belief that disruptions in communication arise from “misunderstanding and incomprehension, insincerity and deception.”

Attempts at understanding can only succeed under symmetrical conditions of *mutual* perspective taking. Good intentions and the absence of naked force are, of course, helpful, but they are not sufficient. Without the structures of a communicative situation free from distortion and latent power relations, the results are always open to the suspicion of being imposed” (Habermas 2006: 18).

Somtow Sucharitkul’s difficult situation at the Bangkok Opera with the Ministry of Culture in Thailand is certainly reflected in Habermas’ observation regarding “latent power relations” and the imposition of results. The violence that erupted in the 1969 race riots in Kuala Lumpur can also be examined with regards to Habermas’ theory. Here the absence of mutual perspective taking and an imbalance of power between political parties had tragic results, which continue to influence Malay society in general, and the work of Noraini, Joe and Faridah in particular. On a much simpler level, Nadja Massura spoke to me of the difficulties she experienced as a doctoral student with a fellowship requiring that she divide her time evenly between the Department of Theatre Studies and the Maryland Institute for Technology in the Humanities. These two entities, Nadja believed, distrusted one another, and she was caught in the middle of this unhappy dynamic.

Habermas introduced the concept of universalization: a strategy for addressing conflicts similar to those experienced by these artists, and for societies in general. It is a rule of argumentation “that makes agreement in practical discourses possible whenever matters of concern to all are open to regulation in the equal interest of everyone” (Habermas 1990: 66). He states (2006: 35) that “the self-understanding of modernity... has been shaped by an egalitarian universalism that requires a decentering of one’s own perspective. It demands that one relativize one’s own views to the interpretive

perspectives of equally situated and equally entitled others.” Habermas believes that “the ‘reason’ of modern rational natural law is not instantiated by universal ‘values’ that one can own like goods, and distribute and export throughout the world.” Universal values, he says “including those that can count on winning global recognition – do not float in mid-air, but acquire binding force only within the normative orders and practices of particular cultural forms of life.” At the Magic Theater, Chris commented on the practical assistance new theatre text may offer in a discourse related to the determining of cultural values.

Chris: Now the zeal to confront issues, and the passion from which to be willing to wrestle with issues that are controversial, is absolutely an essential element to any society: just like a person, as an individual, you don’t want to avoid the things that are creating conflict within you. The great thing that one wants to do is to really sort of address one’s issues as a human being, and that will lead us to a greater state.

The principles of universalization may be implemented through discourse ethics:

Habermas’ model for encouraging “respectful dialogue between citizens with differing interests and backgrounds who want to find better ways of living together” (Habermas 43, 44). The four most important features of the discourse ethics model are: 1) nobody who wishes to make a relevant contribution may be excluded; 2) all participants have an equal opportunity to contribute; 3) participants must be sincere, meaning what they say; and 4) all communication must be free of external or internal coercion. Of Habermas’ theory, Goode (2005: 73) writes that “although discourse ethics aspires to orient participants to the ‘moral point of view’...it is in itself not a universal morality.” Continuing, he says what Habermas is “talking about is not simply a set of abstract ideals, but the institutionalization of discourse in real, historically specific public

spheres.” A lack of familiarity with principles related to discourse ethics perhaps contributes to artist frustrations regarding diminished audience participation in discussions pertinent to their art text creations. Audiences may not know how to respond.

Pew: They want to see, they want to know, but they don't want to ask questions. I don't know why.

Dangkamon: The audience? They don't want to look silly: to look stupid.

Habermas' principals of universalization, implemented through discourse ethics, may lead to the creation of “a new validity claim that is a substitute for [an] old one. Agreement of this kind expresses a *common will*” (Habermas 1990: 67). Continuing, Habermas states that “only an intersubjective process of reaching understanding can produce an agreement that is reflexive in nature; only it can give the participants the knowledge that they have collectively become convinced of something.”

Kearney believes that another form of universalization is available through the use of narrative imagination, “where our own memories – personal and communal – can be shared and exchanged with others of very different times and places, where the familiar and the foreign can change hands” (1998: 101).

Richard Kearney

Kearney (2002: 82) suggests that “the solution to many national conflicts may well reside in the willingness of both disputants – for example Arab and Israeli, Nationalist and Unionist, Serb and Croat, Tutsi and Hutu – to *exchange narrative memories*.” He believes that the “mutual translation of competing stories might eventually enable the adversaries to see each other through alternative eyes.” For example, “if warring nations were able to acknowledge their own and the other's

narrative identities, they might then be able to reimagine themselves in new ways.” In this way, “blocked and fixated memories, trapped in compulsive repetition and resentment, could then find the freedom to remember the past differently, historical enemies recognizing themselves as mirror-images.” Successful reimagining, however, is dependent upon all parties’ willingness to engage in dialogue: to share power.

The use of narrative imagination to address societal issues through theatre has been the predominant production focus of the KLPAC, where Joe and Faridah present what they believe to be “Malaysian Theatre” in which Chinese, Tamil, Malay and other ethnic groups are depicted as contributors to a single national identity. Kim Anh, a dan bau (stringed instrument) player in Hanoi – who was one of my informal conversation partners – creates musical performances that blend world music (Vietnamese, Chinese and American, for example) as an acknowledgment of the distinct narrative identities of multi-national listeners who are attending one of her concerts. In an upcoming collaborative work titled *Spirit Intertwined*, Charya Burt will be working with two other dance troupes to present the unique dance traditions used by Cambodian, Japanese and Native American cultures to honor their ancestors. And in Hungary, the use of narrative imagination on the part of leaders in the theatre community may allow for respectful working relationships to be developed between the state-funded and alternative theatre organizations when government subsidies are eliminated in the not too distant future.

In Chapter Two, I referred to Anthropologist Mary Douglas’ views on a community’s ability to manufacture deviance resulting in the redrawing of cultural boundaries specifically to exclude persons perceived to be a threat. Critical hermeneutic theorists have offered numerous corroborative points of view, including Kearney, whose

work *Strangers, Gods and Monsters* scrutinizes the various ways societies react to “otherness”. He writes (Kearney 2003: 4):

Most strangers, gods and monsters...are, deep down, tokens of fracture within the human psyche. They speak to us of how we are split between conscious and unconscious, familiar and unfamiliar, same and other. And they remind us that we have a choice: (a) to try to understand and accommodate our experience of strangeness, or (b) to repudiate it by projecting it exclusively onto outsiders. All too often, humans have chosen the latter option.

Kearney believes that there are four ways to respond to feelings of estrangement.

Religion and psychoanalysis are two of them. A third is the hermeneutic model of philosophy which “construes otherness less in opposition to selfhood than as a partner engaged in the constitution of its intrinsic meaning...[for] it is the other within who is calling us to act on behalf of the other without” (Kearney 2003: 80). The fourth form of response to otherness is through art. Depending on who is doing the criticizing, the Other could be Muslim, Jewish, Christian, Pagan, Tamil, a Digital Theatre artist singled out by traditional theatre artists, anyone suggesting ethical constraints to freedom of poetic expression, or an artist living with HIV/AIDS in Hanoi. Kearney’s assertion regarding otherness and art is exemplified in the various art traditions practiced by my conversation partners. For example, Kien’s feelings regarding being an Other in Vietnam are depicted on canvas, where his fantasies of a normal, disease-free existence can be lived.

Kearney (1998: 234) observes that otherness lessened through a form of narrative or ethical imagination allows one to expand “the range of compassion from the private to the public...[where] ethical imagination...takes on a political role, that of envisaging the needs of others not immediately present to us, and of envisaging the most effective social means of meeting them.” He states that “it is surely the case that the deepest motivational

springs of political involvement are located in the capacity to *feel* needs for others beyond our immediate circle of family and friendship” (Kearney 1998: 234). With few exceptions, the concept of using narrative or ethical imagination to better the lives of persons outside their immediate circle – with whom they live in community – has been a significant motivator for several of my conversation partners. The actions of Laszlo Magacs in Budapest are particularly noteworthy in this regard. But, so too are those of Dyan Foster who, in developing an arts and ethics curriculum, is linking her students’ on-campus learning to practical experience obtained through internships with community organizations whose activities support the Academy’s vision. Ritual theatre artist Julie Middleton – one of my informal conversation partners – creates theatre events in which members of the community participate in circle dance formations and call-and-response vocal chanting on holidays tied to the Pagan calendar. Chris Smith made an observation that may help to explain why finding a balance between imagination and reason through the arts is so difficult in the United States and perhaps elsewhere.

Chris: Great civilizations are defined by how they revere their elderly, their teachers and their artists, because those are three tremendous repositories of self-reflection. And part of what I feel at odds with in our particular moment in this country is that I feel that our culture does not place enough value in any of those: that the arts predominantly have been seen as decorative as opposed to [a] fundamental... activity with which we wrestle with our very nature... and communal existence.

Summary

In this Chapter, I offered a more in-depth examination of my research conversations through an interpretive lens informed by the theories of Heidegger, Ricoeur, Gadamer, Habermas and Kearney. Representing a variety of disciplines, these individuals – located in three different geographic regions of the world – share a passion

for creating and/or presenting art that has the ability to transform the viewer or reader – within the parameters of an ethical concern for others – through exposure to new ideas and techniques. In the next and final chapter, I discuss my findings and recommendations for creating and interpreting art text that remains cognizant the relationship between imagination and reason.

It is the task of hermeneutics...to reconstruct the set of operations by which a work lifts itself above the opaque depths of living, acting, and suffering, to be given by an author to readers who receive it and thereby change their acting (Ricoeur 1984: 53).

CHAPTER SIX: FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Introduction

Gadamer (1976: 95) writes that “of all the things that confront us in nature and history, it is the work of art that speaks to us most directly. It possesses a mysterious intimacy that grips our entire being, as if there were no distance at all and every encounter with it were an encounter with ourselves.” Ricoeur (1991: 431) observes that this “encounter” with text – a painting, a play, an opera or a dance, for example – may “open up a horizon of possible experience, a world in which it would be possible to dwell.” He states (1991: 431):

A text is not an entity closed in upon itself; it is the projection of a new universe, different from the one in which we live. Appropriating a work through reading it is to unfold the implicit horizon of the world which embraces the action, the personages, the events of the story told. The result is that the reader belongs to both the experiential horizon of the work imaginatively, and the horizon of his action concretely. The awaited horizon and the horizon meet and fuse without ceasing.

The individual artists with whom I spoke for this research have used the experience of creating, presenting or viewing art text to appropriate a new way of being in pursuit of an “awaited horizon” where, perhaps, imagination and reason are more successfully integrated. Noraini, Faridah and Joe in Kuala Lumpur create fictional worlds where mixed races live in harmony. Kien – in Hanoi – sells his autobiographical paintings to raise funds for HIV/AIDS service organizations. Laszlo, Chris and other of my conversation partners seek opportunities to introduce citizens to new ideas they believe will contribute to a more felicitous living together, while Dangkamon and Martina envision engaged audiences eager to dialogue with artists regarding theatrical texts. The stories of these artists – together with those of Pew, Balzacs, Daniel, Dyan, Charya and

Nadja – suggest beginning-in-the-midst-of-the-world actions intended for the betterment of a larger community. Below are findings and recommendations that may assist artists and those working in arts-related professions with the linking of imagination to ethical responsibility for others.

Findings

Because the majority of my conversation partners were involved in the performing arts, the findings presented here emphasize this medium. However, all of the findings presented have relevance to the various arts media, with the last finding perhaps being the most significant.

1. Finding: Artists believe a discrepancy exists between commercial (including state-funded) arts organization production choices and intentions to those of alternative/educational theatre organizations.

Ricoeur (1984: 50 & 79) writes that what is to be experienced by a viewer “must first be constructed in the work. What a reader receives is not just the sense of the work, but, through its sense, its reference, that is, the experience it brings to language and in the last analysis, the world and the temporality it unfolds in the face of this experience.” The productions created by Dangkamon in Bangkok, Joe in Kuala Lumpur, and Laszlo in Budapest contain issues to which these men believe audiences need to be exposed. It is their intention that audiences should learn something through attendance at theatre performances. Commercial arts presenting organizations, on the other hand, may seek to increase revenues by providing an enjoyable entertainment experience often with little, if any, enlightening content. Is there a middle ground?

2. Finding: Individual artists or presenting organizations may produce works without concern for the cultural traditions and/or persons represented in the text: additionally, perhaps, courting controversy as part of a marketing strategy.

Habermas (1990: 67) states that “rather than ascribing as valid to all others any maxim that I can will to be a universal law, I must submit my maxim to all others for purposes of discursively testing its claim to universality.” He says this emphasis then “shifts from what each can will without contradiction to be a general law, to what all can will in agreement to be a universal norm.” Are options available within the existing production process for directors, playwrights and other related arts personnel to offer their production concept for scrutiny before it is developed into an interpretive opportunity for the viewer? Objective analysis of the concept for its ethical sensitivity – by the team that created it – is impossible. Richard Harrell, my Pilot Project conversation partner, spoke of a specific Spanish stage director who was notorious for his controversial renditions of familiar operatic works. His reputation for what appeared to be arbitrary, provocative interpretations followed him from opera stage to opera stage in Europe. Working in isolation from an outside critical viewpoint is common for artists. Daniel Canosa mentioned that his creative process requires that he forget completely about the future listeners of his compositions. Chris Smith of the Magic Theater said that playwrights need to lose sight of the audience for a bit to create more exciting and effective art. How long? Too short and the result may not be art: by Dangamon’s standards. Too long and the result may be disrespectful of the viewer. The KLPAC and the MIT are interested in presenting works that are conscious of the various religious groups and cultural traditions within Malaysia, Hungary and beyond. Is a more expansive awareness of one’s ethical responsibilities in the world – as an individual artist – necessary when creating art in private but presenting it to the public?

3. Finding: Arts organizations are inconsistent in their educational outreach activities intended to assist the viewer with the contextualization of new and/or provocative works.

Kearney (1998: 228) observes that “the status quo reigns supreme for as long as we refuse our utopian capacity to imagine things being other than they are.” My research data shows that some organizations are doing a tremendous job at offering viewers opportunities to make connections between art text and everyday living experience. Laszlo at the Merlin International Theatre is particularly successful in this regard. The Magic Theater in San Francisco also has much to recommend – including its online educational offerings – though these are somewhat limited. Question and answer discussions held after performances are relatively common for many theatre organizations: though Balzacs said they were almost unheard of in Hungary. However, educational opportunities prior to attending a performance are not that prevalent, due to staffing, financial or other constraints. Faridah said this was certainly true for the KLPAC. Perhaps new methods for creating an art viewing context need to be imagined.

4. Finding: Artists have observed that viewers are often reluctant to voice their opinions in response to art text, or to attend functions intended for this purpose.

Collaborators in the creation of a performance text will converse, compromise, and defer to the force of the better argument in order to determine the production vision or concept to be used when developing the work over a weeks and perhaps months-long process. If the text challenges, offends, or otherwise disturbs the viewer, a means for expressing their opinion to the text creators or presenters may not be available. Or, if it is, the viewer may choose instead to simply put the unpleasant experience behind them: silently sending a message of approval. The viewer’s ability to influence the future creative processes of particular artists or presenting organizations has thereby been lost.

Habermas (1989) believes that members of the public have not always been so passive, and he describes a sequence of historical events in which critical viewers were transformed into passive consumers.

Up until the late 18th century, classical music performances were tied almost exclusively to particular religious or court events, and they were evaluated according to their success at meeting the sacramental, or pomp and splendor requirements of these particular occasions. The average person had few opportunities to hear music except in church or through access to noble society. Near the turn of the 19th century, however, public concert societies were started, allowing admission by payment of a small fee, which turned the music performance into a commodity. For the first time, an audience gathered specifically to listen to music without its being part of another social function. Habermas (1989: 39) notes that, as a result of this innovation, “art became an object of free choice and changing preference. The ‘taste’ to which art was oriented from then on became manifest in the assessments of lay people who claimed no prerogative, since within a public everyone was entitled to judge.” Whether it was a theatre performance, a painting in a museum or a literary work, “discussion became the medium through which people appropriated art” (Habermas 1989: 40). During this same period of time, professional art critics emerged who viewed themselves as “spokesmen for the public – and in their battle with the artists this was the central slogan – because they knew of no authority beside that of the better argument” and “because they felt themselves at one with all who were willing to let themselves be convinced by arguments” (Habermas 1989: 41). While money was required to purchase books, attend theatre and concerts, or to visit a museum, conversation and debate on what had been read, heard or viewed was a

free, public activity. Habermas asserts that the introduction of the naturalistic novel – which readers could enjoy in the privacy of their homes – greatly diminished the opportunities for public discussion on current art forms and events because this newest form of arts consumption became a private matter, which in turn contributed to the public’s losing “its critical power over the producers. From this point on modern art lived under a shroud of propaganda” and “the sounding board of an educated stratum tutored in the public use of reason [was] shattered” (Habermas 1989: 174). Habermas writes that the lessening of public involvement in the critique of culture, which began in the early 19th century, has resulted in a public “split apart into minorities of specialists who put their reason to use nonpublicly and the great mass of consumers whose receptiveness is public but uncritical. Consequently, it completely lacks the form of communication specific to a public” (Habermas 1989: 175). He believes that conversations specific to issues of community concern – unfortunately – are often professionally administered panel and round table discussions on television, at conferences or town hall meetings, where the concern is more on questions of etiquette, and fears of hurting someone’s feelings rather than on substantive issues.

Conflicts, once fought out in public polemics, are demoted to the level of personal incompatibilities. Critical debate in this manner certainly fulfills important social-psychological functions, especially that of a tranquilizing substitute for action; however, it increasingly loses its publicist function (Habermas 1989: 164).

My research partners’ observations that viewers are unable or unwilling to respond publicly to art text did not diminish their belief that dialogue with their communities is essential. It was, perhaps the most significant finding of this research.

Recommendations for addressing this problem in a practical, community-oriented manner are suggested in the following section.

Recommendations

Hermeneutics has – since its origins – been directly linked to the arts. Kearney (1988: 391) explains that it is associated with “the legend of Hermes – the child god who first explored the possibility of creative art by transforming an empty shell into a musical instrument.”

As the legend goes, the boy Hermes emerged from his cave one day to find a discarded tortoise shell which he interpreted as a means of producing music and song, once equipped with strings and accompanied by rhymed verse... Hermes’ role [was] as messenger of the gods and inventor of human signs and symbols (lending his name indeed to the term ‘hermeneutics’ – the science of interpreting signs)... [He] was the one chosen by Zeus to supplement Prometheus’ gifts to man with the art of justice and respect for the other.

Below are a few ideas that might be brought into consideration in any future discussions about the creation and presentation of ethically informed art text. They may help contribute to a message of increased “justice and respect” through the arts.

- In advance of viewing provocative text, arts organizations might offer viewers relevant educational activities to assist them with the interpretation of new concepts. This may include the use of internet and other technology, as well as pre- and post- performance discussions.
- Individual artists and presenting organizations might consider creating new – or affiliate with existing – Arts in the Schools programs to educate children to talk about art, encouraging them to develop critical thinking skills that will assist them in later life.

- Arts organizations might consider including a form of discourse ethics as part of their educational outreach programming, and encourage persons who moderate pre- or post- show discussions to use Habermas' model rather than a talk show or similarly limiting format.
- Arts organizations, unions, and private arts funding foundations might examine their policies with regards to supporting an arts creation process that is mindful of ethical responsibility for others, and to articulate this expectation as a condition of membership or to receive financial support.
- If not already a part of their formal charter, government arts agencies distributing public funds could be encouraged to articulate a clear expectation that at least one of their funding priorities is for ethically-informed art, and to monitor adherence to this expectation through the regular reporting process of recipient organizations.

Though this short list offers practical suggestions, significant challenges must also be acknowledged.

Challenges

Habermas (1990: 62, 63) states that “a positivistic enactment of norms is not sufficient to secure their *lasting* social acceptance,” for “enduring acceptance of a norm *also* depends on whether, in a given context of tradition, reasons for obedience can be mobilized.”

The moral principle is so conceived as to exclude as invalid any norm that could not meet with the qualified assent of all who are or might be affected by it. This bridging principle, which makes consensus possible, ensures that only those norms are accepted as valid that express a *general* will (Habermas 1990: 63).

In Chapter Two I refer to the 18th century concept of *consensus gentium* (a consensus of all mankind) present from the Enlightenment into the 20th century. This phrase referred to any idea or principle to which all men could agree. Geertz (1973: 44) believed that a single principle applicable to all peoples in all cultures was not possible or desirable. However, perhaps this concept should be revisited: not as it relates to the creation of a single ethical response to art text creation, but to the idea that an ethical component of some fashion should be inherent in the art creation process, with the particulars being determined for each culture through adherence to concepts specific to universalization and discourse ethics, and use of narrative imagination. Distances between countries have diminished due to technological advances. The eccentricities specific to each have become more visible as formally unfamiliar cultures now seem to be in our own backyards. As new methods for living harmoniously together as a single world community are pursued, tolerance must prevail. However, developing increased tolerance of persons unlike ourselves – including those with different religious traditions – is a difficult challenge. Kearney (2003: 232) suggests “faith in an Absolute might best avoid the trap of absolutism – source of so many wars and injustices – by embracing a hermeneutics of religious pluralism.” Gadamer (1998: 4) offers words of encouragement however, when he states that “the more we become acquainted with the past and present cultures and traditions of peoples who stand outside our Christian tradition, the more we realize that this is a conversation that, however various its languages, always takes place in human, learnable ones.”

Future Research

Due to the artist-specific emphasis of this research, persons examining the relationship of ethics and poetics in future studies might consider expanding the scope of the research to include the following recommendations.

- Examine the relationship from an *aesthetic* (audience or interpreter's) point of view. With the exception of my informal conversation with Porntip Singha in Bangkok, all data gathered during this research was from the arts professional's point-of-view.
- Investigate commercial arts producers' opinions regarding their responsibilities towards viewers.
- Examine marginalized groups who work towards social change through arts-specific/agit-prop theatrical activities.
- Examine the educational outreach activities offered by arts organization related to preparing audiences to receive the information, and explore existing online discussion forums and technologically assisted methods for public engagement in discourse ethics, to supplement face to face conversation opportunities.

Kearney (1998: 224) writes that if we do not “develop a critical hermeneutics capable of discerning differences and making judgements we will find ourselves helpless before the malign post-modern view that culture is but... a bric-a-brac of imitations where nothing means anything because everything is the same as everything else.”

If we reject the question of value and settle for a description (thematic, sociological, formalist) of a work...if we equate all cultures and all cultural activities (Bach and rock, comic strips and Proust); if the criticism of art (or meditation on value) can no longer find room for expression, then the historical evolution of art will lose its meaning, will crumble, will turn into a vast and

absurd storehouse of works. One riposte to such a regime of sameness is to advance a model of judgement motivated by a poetics of the possible.

Summary

As stated in Chapter One of this document, it was my intention – in the pages that followed – to delineate characteristics arts media may share, and to link this commonality to yet another mutually shared trait that I believed should be present in the works and creative processes: a blending of imagination with reason. I proposed that this might contribute to increased understanding between members of differing cultures and traditions. Does this mean, however, that artistic freedoms need to be compromised? Are ethically informed arts on an international scale possible? Opera ethnographer Paul Atkinson states that “the application of universalistic aesthetic criteria, like the invocation of inherent meaning, is repugnant to the empirical anthropological study of art and cultural performance” (2006: 54). However, he also acknowledges that “equally...one must allow for the possibility – indeed the pervasive phenomenon – that performers and others have criteria for judging their own and others’ performances” (2006: 54). Is it such a stretch of the imagination to believe that the phenomenon of “criteria for judging” art is not possible on a larger scale? Anthropologist David Bidney comments on “normative freedom... which is among other things our liberty to judge the cultures that we make” (1996: xviii), and observes that “man is not alienated from his own products and creations but continues to be existentially involved in the continuation and innovation of cultural activities” (1996: lviii-lix). He argues for “the social responsibility of the scientist” (1996: 447). Do not artists and arts presenters have social responsibilities as well? Past creative processes may no longer be sufficient to address the needs of an

increasingly global community. As Bidney writes (1996: 123-124), “the issue, then, is not whether man’s will is free...but whether man...is or is not...the active agent and efficient cause of the cultural process and whether culture...is subject to human control in the interests of human well-being.”

Personal Thoughts

After Thuy and I left Kien’s home in the University of Hanoi art district, we returned to our hotel. Several members of our travel group – myself included – had made reservations to see the traditional water puppet show that evening. We crowded into a few cabs and headed towards the theatre, but because of that weekend’s Ho Chi Minh birthday celebration, our driver had to take some creative detours through Hanoi’s perilous streets: outdoor stages had been placed at major intersections, blocking the most direct route. Arriving at the theatre, we had to push our way up the staircase and through the crowds exiting from the earlier show, only minutes before our performance was to begin. It was a madhouse. Finally in our seats, the music started, and during the course of the next hour or so, we watched eight puppeteers manipulate wooden figures of people, animals and fantasy creatures in the shallow pool that served as a sort of rice paddy stage. The largely Vietnamese audience loudly voiced their approval of the puppets’ antics throughout the performance.

The next morning, we took a one hour flight north to Dien Bien Phu, where – among other things – we visited historic sites, got soaked to the skin in a torrential downpour, and attended a remarkable evening of song and dance in a Thai Dam village. Arriving for the performance, our bus parked next to the two story wooden structure, and we took the stairs to the second floor where we were invited to sit on straw mats and

enjoy cups of tea. The chief of the village – wearing a Vietnamese military uniform – spoke a few introductory words in Vietnamese, and then welcomed us by singing a solo in a booming voice. He finished, we clapped, and then seven women dressed in traditional costume danced for us: presenting carefully choreographed movements in the relatively small room – so small, in fact, that the posts holding up the roof sometimes blocked the dancers performing in front of us. A sing-a-long followed, and we were invited to stand and join in a circle formation where one of the villagers, clutching a microphone, led us in song. Because it was in Vietnamese, members of our group had to sing using “la, la, la” and tried to at least repeat the melody that the villagers were singing. Near the end of the third verse, having done a pretty good job at singing the tune in unison – without any words, of course – we were smiling and truly enjoying the experience as the song leader lead us in the grand finale: “la, la, la, la, la, Ho Chi Minh.” As we returned to our places on the straw matted floor, I remember the look on some of my fellow traveler’s faces as we finally realized what the purpose of the song had been. I found it difficult not to laugh, for it’s not every day that 21st century tourists from California are invited to sing happy birthday to a communist leader from world history’s tumultuous past.

Concluding Comments

That group sing-a-long in Thai Dam village was followed by more dancing (we danced, too!), singing, and drinking rice liquor through three-foot-long reed straws placed in a communal ceramic urn. It is only one wonderful memory among dozens that I acquired during a research process that allowed me the opportunity to more fully understand and relate critical hermeneutic concepts to my work as an artist. This

experience has provided me with numerous examples in seven countries of how the arts can serve as a form of communication between peoples of different cultures and traditions. My advisor has mentioned on several occasions that a dissertation is not the completion of a learning process, it is only the beginning. I'm ready to start.

EPILOGUE

Raskolnikov lay on his plank bed and thought...his enemies looked at him differently; he had even entered into talk with them and they answered him in a friendly way. He remembered that now, and thought it was bound to be so. Wasn't everything now bound to be changed? What were all, all the agonies of the past! Everything, even his crime, his sentence and imprisonment, seemed to him now in the first rush of feeling an external, strange fact with which he had no concern...Life had stepped into the place of theory and something quite different would work itself out...But that is the beginning of a new story (Dostoyevsky 1866: 541-542).

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Journals and Books

- Atkinson, P.
2006 *Everyday arias: An operatic ethnography*. Lanham: Altamira Press.
- Bidney, D.
1996 *Theoretical anthropology*. New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers.
- Boas, F.
1924 *The mind of primitive man*. New York: The MacMillan Company.
- Collins, J. & S. Howard
1998 *Introducing Heidegger*. Cambridge: Totem Books.
- Dostoevsky, F.
1866 *Crime and Punishment*. New York: Random House.
- Douglas, M.
1970 *Natural symbols: explorations in cosmology*. London: Barrie & Rockliff.
- Firth, R. ed.
1957 *Man and culture: An evaluation of the work of Bronislaw Malinowski*.
New York: The Humanities Press, Inc.
- Gadamer, H.-G.
1960 *Truth and method*. New York: Continuum.

1976 *Philosophical hermeneutics*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

1998 *In Praise of theory*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Geertz, C.
1973 *The interpretation of cultures*. New York: Basic Books.
- Goode, L.
2005 *Jürgen Habermas: democracy and the public sphere*. London: Pluto Press.
- Habermas, J.
1988 Interview with J.M. Ferry. *Philosophy and Social Criticism* 14, nos. 3-4.

1989 *The structural transformation of the public sphere*. Cambridge: The MIT Press.

1990 *Moral consciousness and communicative action*. Cambridge: The MIT Press.

- 1996 *Between facts and norms: Contributions to a discourse theory of law and democracy.* W. Rehg, trans. Cambridge: The MIT Press.
- 2006 *The divided west.* Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Hagen, R.M. & R. Hagen
2007 *Goya.* Los Angeles: Taschen.
- Heidegger, M.
1962 *Being and time.* New York: Harper Collins.
- 1971 *Poetry, language, thought.* New York: Harper Colophon Books.
- Herda, E.
1999 *Research conversations and narrative: A critical hermeneutic orientation in participatory inquiry.* Westport: Praeger.
- Kearney, R.
1988 *The wake of imagination.* London: Century Hutchinson Ltd.
- 1998 *Poetics of imagining.* New York: Fordham University Press.
- 1999 *Questioning ethics: Contemporary debates in philosophy.* London: Routledge.
- 2002 *On stories.* London: Routledge.
- 2003 *Strangers, gods and monsters.* London: Routledge.
- Malinowski, B.
1925 *Magic, science and religion, and other essays.* New York: Doubleday Anchor Books.
- Ricoeur, P.
1967 *The symbolism of evil.* Boston: Beacon Press.
- 1981 *Hermeneutics & the human sciences.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- 1984 *Time and narrative, vol. I.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- 1986 *From text to action.* Illinois: Northwestern University Press.
- 1991 *A Ricoeur reader.* Toronto: University of Toronto Press.
- 1992 *Oneself as another.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

- Schechner, R.
1985 *Between theater & anthropology*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.
- Shakespeare, W.
1600 *As You Like It*. Published 1919. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Turner, V.
1974 *Dramas, fields, and metaphors: Symbolic action in human society*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.
- 1987 *The anthropology of performance*. New York: PAJ Publications.
- White, S.
1995 *The Cambridge companion to Habermas*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Winn, S.
2006 Essay in San Francisco Chronicle. September 30.
- Wuthnow, R., J. D. Hunter, A. Bergesen, & E. Kurzweil.
1984 *Cultural analysis: The work of Peter L. Berger, Mary Douglas, Michel Foucault and Jürgen Habermas*. Boston: Routledge & Kegan Paul.

Internet Sources

- Condie, B.
2006 Thailand's culture police turn an opera into a censorship drama. *The Observer*. Electronic document dated November 26, 2006. Accessed March 12, 2007. <http://observer.guardian.co.uk/world/story/0,,1957222,00.html>.
- Declaration of Geneva.
1948 Physician's Oath. Electronic document dated September, 1948. Accessed October 10, 2007. <http://www.cirp.org/library/ethics/geneva/>.
- Democracy Now
2006 My name is Rachel Corrie. Electronic document dated March 22, 2006. Accessed March 12, 2007. <http://www.democracynow.org/article.pl?sid=06/03/22/1435259>.
- Dempsey, J. & M. Landler
2006 Berlin opera canceled after religious threats. *International Herald Tribune*. Electronic document dated September 26, 2006. Accessed March 12, 2007. <http://www.ihf.com/articles/2006/09.26/news/germany.php>.

Appendix A: Letters**Invitation/Confirmation Letter**

Date

Participant's Name and Title
 Company or Organization
 Address
 City, Country

Dear _____,

Thank you for agreeing to participate in an exploration of my dissertation topic. My research looks at the issue of the relationship of ethics to poetics in international art text with the intention of discerning common arts characteristics and whether or not freedom of artistic expression can be linked to the ethical responsibility for the other. I am writing to confirm that we will meet at TIME on DAY/DATE at LOCATION.

Our conversation will act as data for my analysis of the research topic described. Once transcribed, I will provide you with a copy of our conversation so that you may review it. You may add to or delete any section of the conversation during the research process. When I have received your approval, I will use our conversation to support my analysis. Data that you contribute, your name, and position will not be held confidential.

When we meet, our conversation may include questions on the role of the artist and collaboration. I am also hoping to hear stories from your experience and observations as they relate to creating, presenting, and/or viewing art texts. Though the conversations and transcripts in this type of research are collaborative, the writing that comes from them would be my research product and may include some editing, and – as mentioned above – would not remain anonymous. Should you feel it necessary, however, you may withdraw at any time without any adverse consequences.

Thanks, again for your willingness to meet with me. I look forward to seeing you soon.

Sincerely yours,

Michael Fontaine
 Researcher, Doctoral Student
 University of San Francisco
 School of Education

mgfontaine@sbcglobal.net
 Tel/Fax: (707) 887-9726
 Cell: (707) 529-3643

Alternate Confirmation Letter

Date

Participant's Name and Title

Company or Organization

Address

City, Country

Dear _____,

Thank you for very much for allowing me the opportunity to have a conversation with you about your experiences and perspectives on the issue of the ethical linking of freedom of artistic expression in the arts to responsibility for the other. I am confirming our meeting on _____. Please let me know if something requires you to change our arranged date, time, or place.

With your permission, I will tape record our conversation, transcribe the tapes into a written text, and submit it to you for review. I would like to discuss our conversation again and include any follow-up thoughts and comments you might have. Please know that data for this research are not confidential.

The exchange of ideas in conversation is the format of participatory research. This process encourages you to comment upon, add to, or delete portions of the transcripts. In addition, this process allows you the opportunity to reflect upon our conversation, and possibly gain new insights into the subjects, only after you have approved the transcript, will I process to analyze the text of our conversation.

Again, I thank you for your generosity in volunteering your time and energy. I look forward to meeting with you, and to our conversation.

Sincerely,

Michael Fontaine
Researcher, Doctoral Student
University of San Francisco
School of Education

mgfontaine@sbcglobal.net

Tel/Fax: (707) 887-9726

Cell: (707) 529-3643

Thank You and Follow-Up Letter

Date

Participant's Name and Title

Company or Organization

Address

City, Country

Dear _____,

Thank you for taking the time to meet with me on _____. I appreciate your willingness to participate in my research project, and believe our discussion will be a valuable part of my dissertation.

I have attached a copy of our transcribed conversation for your consideration. Please take a moment to review it, adding any changes or clarifying comments you believe are necessary, and return it to me at your earliest convenience.

In the meantime, I thank you, again, for your generous participation.

Sincerely,

Michael Fontaine
Researcher, Doctoral Student
University of San Francisco
School of Education

mgfontaine@sbcglobal.net
Tel/Fax: (707)887-9726
Cell: (707) 529-3643

Consent to Be a Research Participant

Purpose and Background

Michael Fontaine, in the University of San Francisco, School of Education, asked me to be a participant in his research. This research explores the issues of narrative identity, imagination and ethics found in international performance text, with the intention of discerning whether or not it is possible to ethically link freedom of artistic expression to responsibility for the other, and what implication this may have for organizational meaning.

Procedures

I agree to be a participant in this study. I am aware voluntary conversations between myself and this researcher will occur and that all conversations will take place in English. I understand that each conversation may be approximately one hour in length and will be recorded and transcribed. A copy of the transcription will be sent to me for review, editing, correction and approval prior to use in the data analysis. I understand that I may withdraw from the study at any time before publication, that I may discontinue the conversation at any point, and may request changes or deletions in the transcript. My participation in this research project is voluntary, and I understand that any data I contribute to this study will not be confidential.

Risk and Discomforts

I understand that I am free to decline to answer any question, ask that the recorder be turned off, or terminate the conversation at any time. I may terminate my participation in the study at any time if I should become uncomfortable. I understand that my name and the content of the transcription will be included in the study and in potential subsequent publication. I understand that any potential risk due to lack of confidentiality will be mitigated by my editorial control over the transcript of my conversation.

Benefits

There is no direct benefit to me from participating in this study and I will receive no monetary consideration. An indirect benefit is that I may gain knowledge of the topic at hand and new understanding or insight through the conversation.

Alternatives

I have freely chosen to participate in this study. There will be no cost to me for participating in this study.

Questions

If I have any questions or comments about the study, I may contact Michael Fontaine at mgfontaine@sbcglobal.net or by mail at P.O. Box 1069, Forestville, CA 95436 USA. I may also contact his advisor, Dr. Ellen A. Herda at the University of San Francisco, (415) 422-2075. Should I not want to address comments to either of them, I may contact the office of Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects between 8am and 5pm, Monday through Friday, by calling (415) 422-6091 or by writing to the

IRBPHS, Psychology Department, University of San Francisco, 2130 Fulton Street, San Francisco, CA 94117-1080, United States.

Consent to Participate in Research

I have been given a copy of this consent letter to keep. I understand that my participation in the dissertation research conducted by Michael Fontaine is voluntary. I fully understand and agree with the above procedures and conditions.

While the conversations and transcripts in this research are collaborative, the writing that comes from them is the researcher's product and may include some editing by the respondent. I therefore consent to forgo anonymity under these conditions. I acknowledge that I have been given complete and clear information about this research, and it is my option to make the decision at the outset about whether to participate or not, and can withdraw at any time without any adverse consequences.

Participant's Signature

Date

Michael Fontaine

Date

Appendix B: Arts Events

Event	Location	My Role
Thai Dam Evening of Folk Song & Dance	Dien Bien Phu, Vietnam	Participant/Audience Member
Water Puppet Performance	Hanoi, Vietnam	Audience Member
Vietnamese Music Trio	Hanoi, Vietnam	Audience Member
<i>Siam Niramit</i> Theatre Performance	Bangkok, Thailand	Audience Member
<i>Fah Jarod Sai</i> Theatre Performance	Bangkok, Thailand	Audience Member
Choral Concerts	Lake Balatonscarzso, Siofolk, Zamardi & Foldvar in Hungary	Soloist & Member California Redwood Chorale
Evening of Strauss & Mozart – (opera & ballet)	Vienna, Austria	Audience Member
Marionette rendition of Mozart’s <i>Don Giovanni</i>	Prague, Czech Republic	Audience Member
Evening of Bach (instrumental & vocal)	Prague, Czech Republic	Audience Member
Black Light Theatre production of <i>Aspects of Alice</i>	Prague, Czech Republic	Audience Member
A variety of street artist/musical performances	Vietnam, Austria & Czech Republic	Audience Member

Appendix C: Letter written by Somtow Sucharitkul to Thai Media

Appendix D: A Year in the Arts

SAMPLE

(First Semester)

Overlay: Responsibility Requires Action

THEME: Ownership

Visual: Junk Art

Performing: Singing & Ensemble Instrumentation: Music of Protest

Radio: Radio Journalism

Special Performance: TBA

(Second Semester)

Overlay: Change Requires Effort

THEME: Time

Visual: 3-D Art

Performing: Beatboxing & Emceeing

Radio: Radio Journalism

Workshop: Animation

(Third Semester)

Overlay: Justice Requires Restraint

THEME: Monsters

Visual: Graphic Design/Graffiti Art

Performing: Sketch Comedy/Playwriting

Radio: Radio Journalism

Workshop: Mask-Making

(Fourth Semester)

Overlay: Courage Requires Moderation

THEME: Immigration

Visual: Mural Painting

Performing: Capoeira; Ethnic Dance/Musical Traditions

Radio: Creating Radio Theater

Special Performance: Mexican Folkloric Dance & Music

(Fifth Semester)

Overlay: Integrity Requires Wholeness

THEME: Water

Visual: Filmmaking

Performing: Spoken Word/Poetry

Radio: Recording & Producing Performance Poetry

Special Performance: Hip Hop Theater Festival, May 2008

Appendix E: IRBPHS Approval Letter

Appendix F: Pilot Study Transcript, Data Analysis and Implications

Transcript

M: Alright. So, what I was thinking is that I would ask some questions and pick your brain on topics like or related to traditional productions versus restagings of operatic standards. You know, restaging using existing concepts and sets versus revisioning, and are there differences related to refiguring for Western audiences as opposed to Eastern audiences. I saw that you were a stage director for Bangkok Opera. I've been in Thailand last June, and last year as well but I didn't have a chance to see a production, so I'm curious about that. So, ah.....

(He shows me a copy of Opera Now that has a copy of a traditionally dressed Thai dancer on the cover.)

Is that the edition out right now?

R: It features photos from my production of *Aida* which was set in Siam.

(looking at color photos inside the magazine)

M: Oh my gosh...

R: Which was...

M: Oh how beautiful. When did it go up?

R: *Aida* was about a year and a half ago: a year ago April. I would be happy to make you a Xerox of this.

M: I would love to have a copy of that. When we were there it was the 60th anniversary of the king, all the celebrations ...

R: Oh, in June?

M: Yes.

R: I was directing *Così fan Tutte* then.

M: Oh were you?

R: Yes, all the boats and all that.

M: Oh yes, all the pageantry on the water...

R: Yes, I saw all of that...

M: And who would think it would be followed shortly thereafter by a coup.

R: Yeah, but it didn't have anything to do with the King though.

M: Yes, but it's not too often that you hear of a King endorsing a coup.

R: True.

M: Isn't that strange. So, I have some experience in stage directing and some of the questions I am going to be asking are from the stage directors' point of view.

R: Um hum.

M: So, when you create the production concept from inception to opening night, who is shaping, who is contributing to the concept? Is it your idea and you go forward and you find people who support your vision, or do you have an idea that is shaped by the people around you, that may end up being different than the germ that you started with.

R: Oh, sure. Ideally, you have a very strong concept of what you want to do and how you want to realize it and you gather a production team around you who will facilitate that as, um, completely as possible. Uh, I tend to be a very collaborative artist so – I was a singer for many years before I became a director – so I think in terms of ensemble you know. And I'm very, very happy to have my concept altered and shift and change if a designer – costume designer, set designer, light designer has a good idea, or what not, and I am happy to have it shift. Likewise even in – I don't want to jump to performance – but yes, again, in truth, in opera – in particular in opera in America – a lot of the stuff is financial.

M: Oh yes...

R: You can have an idea and then you see what you can afford. I mean right now, I'm doing, putting together a production of *Midsummer Night's Dream* for the spring, well, I...I have some ideas, but I have to go with what I actually can afford to do. How many costumes I can rent, how many I can afford to build, etc. etc. so it is a very fluid process when you don't have unlimited funds...

M: Um hum....So collaborative...

R: Absolutely collaborative. I think that's the best work....

M: ...yeah...

R: ... rather than dictatorial, this is how it must be, and you really can't do it that way – in opera – unless you've got unlimited funds.

M: Does that change, does the development of the concept change depending on whether or not you are working in a Western environment as opposed to, say, a Thai environment, in terms of what is the norm for a collaborative process?

R: Um, oh gosh... In Thailand... frankly, it kind of breaks down into more, even more practicalities: how much time do you have, what can you afford to build. The *Aida* thing was interesting. That was truly, um, we turned out to set it in Siam rather than in Egypt because in truth that was because we could get really spectacularly beautiful Siamese costumes for much less money than Egyptian things, number one. Number two, as we scratched around and looked at it, historically...um...17th century Siam – what was going on with the wars in Burma, the powers of the priests, burying people alive – historically it matched the *Aida* story better than Egyptian. Indeed. Egyptian history is very cut and pasted, you know, in terms of what Verdi put together...

M: ...right...

R: for *Aida*... like Ethiopia was this lush, green place, and it wasn't at all. It was a desert, so there is all this stuff that if you actually know anything about the history of Egypt and then you read the libretto, it's kind of silly.

M: ...yes...

R: It actually fit in terms of... a Thai person knowing anything about the history of their country sitting and watching when the Burmese come in there triumphantly with their prisoners and everything, it all makes perfect sense. And when the Brahmins have that much power... it actually worked beautifully...

M: Oh, isn't that great...

R: And we kind of backed in to that...

M: I see...

R: You know, it was the ...uh...mother of invention, of necessity...

M: It was serendipitous...

R: But it worked out beautifully. It was a lovely production with these spectacularly beautiful Siamese costumes for very little money.

M: The photos are fantastic. So, would you say though, if that ability to borrow, use existing costumes...would there have been any other...is there anything else about the collaborative process, about developing a concept for an Eastern audience in Thailand, that there's protocol, ethical concerns, anything else...

R: Oh, gosh yes...

M: That you don't have to think about here?

R: Oh my, there was an opening night last night in Bangkok of this piece (Iutea?) (referring to the photo on the cover of the Opera Now magazine), and it..which was an opera based on the story of the Ramiyana...

M. Oh yes?

R: And it was a huge kafofel. There was a scene in which the raven dies. Well traditionally, the raven never dies on stage, and they had the raven die on stage, and it hit the fan. The cultural ministry came and did this whole thing. They threatened to shut the production down, the attendant had to sign a paper saying that if the cultural ministry felt that what was going on onstage was inappropriate...it was a huge kafofel. And fortunately, the princess who was there at the opening night made light of it and just thought that the whole thing was very silly, but there was this enormous controversy about that. You wouldn't see that here. You saw that in Berlin a few weeks ago.

M. Yes. I have the paper in my bag and was going to ask you about that.

R: Yes, that was an interesting situation.

M: Mohammed, Buddha and Jesus represented onstage ...

R: ... and having Mohammed's image is anathema to Muslims so, you know, it wasn't quite as stark as that but it was a huge controversy and they jolly well could have been shut down.

M: Well, what about that, when you are creating a production and you think this is an exciting idea to do something different about a traditional text...

R: I am going to print out for you what Sontaow wrote (the artistic director of the controversial Bangkok production) and give it to you before you leave.

M: Oh thank you. Is this the stage director?

R: No, he was the composer and he is the attendant, and he wrote this thing about this production and it ended up in the newspaper, so I will print this up for you and I think you will find it interesting: his take on it all.

M: You know, I'm actually primarily a non-musical director so attendant, I actually don't know that term so what is that?

R: He's the artistic director and head of the company. That can be divided into different ways.

M: So do you think....

R: Don't let me forget to print this out for you. (He is at his computer keyboard)

M: Can I talk to you while you are doing that?

R: Yeah.

M: Knowing that aspect of the Ramiyana, that that change could provoke passionate responses in the community, um what do you think about being a stage director and knowing that your interpretation could challenge the community in a way and create a lot of tension, and is it worthwhile in an era when we are trying to have people "just get along", you know?

R: In truth, I think they blew it. I think they pushed it too hard. I think they got – both Hans – who's a friend of mine who is Dutch and the stage director – and Sandhow, who is Thai but basically grew up in Europe. He is very European and American and uh you know it would be interesting to see your response to what he wrote. They could have handled it better.

M: I see.

R: I think they were...me personally, I think they were getting off on the controversy and it made them...

M: Sell more tickets...

R: Precisely.

M: And is that ever a motivation, realistically?

R: Oh sure. There's a great history, this guy, this Spanish director who, oh he did all kinds of Barcelona – things that were controversial – in Berlin that were very controversial – a real sado-masochistic *Abduction from the Seraglio*, and so on. There's a lot of directors that specifically do...want to be bad boys...they do stuff on stage, they de-construct a piece with lots of nudity or violence as often as not has nothing to do with the libretto, just to create controversy and get buzz and get people angry, hopefully. I'm sorry I can't remember the director's name. It starts with an X... I can find that out for you. There is a great history of that in the theater and it has been happening in opera a lot. One of my great mentors, Frank Corsone (sp) who's right there (points to picture) that's him on the right and Maury Sendak on the left, Frank in the 70's was an incredible bad boy. He'd come from the Actors Studio with James Dean and those people and as a

director started doing opera and he liked to shake things up. But Frank had taste most of the time and whatnot. And every time he got booed, his fee went up to a certain extent. But Frank had exquisite taste and Frank loved opera. There's a lot of directors who frankly, think that opera is silly and so they go in and make a statement rather than telling a story or having some sort of new insight.

M: Well what do you think, though, about you as a director and the fact that here is an exciting idea and the idea – something I'm exploring has to do with responsibility. I'm going to be presenting a paper at a conference in Malaysia that has to do with Language and cross cultural understanding, and refiguring operatic texts in pursuit of cross cultural understanding is an aspect...

R: Sure...

M: So what do you think about your responsibility as a stage director...

R: Right...

M: You want to be provocative, you want to challenge but there a responsibility to the community, I think ...

R: Of course...

M: Is that for you as well?

R: Certainly. I believe it's in Kuala Lumpur that I know people who have an opera company there...

M: This is where the conference is.

R: ...and... when is this?

M: May 15, 16 & 17.

R: This coming May?

M: Yes.

R: Well you may meet Santaow. (Bangkok Artistic Director) My understanding is that on stage at the opera company men and women can't kiss. I'll give you Santaow's email address...

M: That would be great.

R: So you can speak with him. He is exceedingly articulate. He's a writer, he's a novelist. Um more than a composer. He's an interest fellow and now that this project is over he probably has some time to correspond with you. But, um, so how do you do that? There are places in the libretto, in stories particularly where you are supposed to kiss. Some of them are pretty important and you just don't do it. In that sort of situation you just sort of tai chi around it.

M: Yes...

R: You know I think, I'm pretty conservative. Not as a person but in terms of my view of the role of opera, the role of a conductor and the director. In my world, if the director is doing something that is so removed from the story and the text, what people are saying and what is going on on the stage – if there's all kind of extraneous stuff going on, trying to take you off – if the audience is busy in their head trying to figure out what the director is doing...

M: Yes...

R: I think you've emasculated the art work. The power of opera is its wholeness. The fact that it is drama and music and singing unamplified in the darken theatre. I mean, it goes back to the caves, you know, when you danced for the hunt and the harvest with the skins around the fire preparing for the...and all that...chanting the thing up unto the Greeks. All the stuff, Aristophanes and all that, was basically sung because you had to to be heard, etc. and there's a ritual, spiritual, visceral power that opera can have that when you get it in the groove is fabulous. It is different than film, it's different than literature, it's different than straight theatre. It's dance, it's all inclusive, and if the director is going (ying, ying, ying, ying, ying) and taking you off on some kind of intellectual exercise, I think it takes the wind out of the sails.

M: Do you think that...your experience from what I've read in your resume shows a tremendous amount of work in the US and the Netherlands and then back in Thailand – the appropriateness of revisioning or refiguring texts. Does it vary? I mean you're in Netherlands and it's anything goes, whereas in Bangkok it's more conservative and here it's box-office driven...

R: Typically the libretto is not changed. Typically the words, text, are not changed...

M: Correct...

R: Um, you know you have super titles and what not, and sometimes people will monkey with those. Peter Sellars will monkey with those.

M: Yeah...

R: I've seen his Mozart productions and watched the super titles or the subtitles on television...

M: He's rewriting the libretto?

R: Um, he's tweaking what the Italian actually says. He's putting a spin on it and it's inaccurate sometimes, he'll do it here and there...

M: So the language sung by the singers is the same, but what he is allowing the audience to read is different?

R: Um hum.

M: Oh, isn't that interesting.

R: He also at one point did one of the Wagner operas, I don't remember if it was Lohengrin, I think it was in Chicago, you'd have to look this up, but he did two or three different sets of super titles. He did what was the translation, then he did another set that was the subtext, what was underlying...

M: Oh. Motivation?

R: Yeah. Again, that's interesting...

M: That seems kind of odd to provide to the general public, doesn't it.

R: It does, but if I'm going to an opera and if I have to really read the production – I'm not talking the synopsis but the conceptual thing in order to understand what's going on – I think it's short-circuited. I really do. I mean that's me...

M: Yeah...

R: and I've been singing opera, and directing opera and going to opera for, you know, thirty years...

M: Yes, and you don't want to have to ...

R: And look, I've seen spectacular avante garde treatments that totally worked. I've seen just updating things – like Frank – Frank did a, this is totally low key by today's standards but back in the 80's Frank did a Carmen that was set in the Spanish civil war and they were – the gypsies were politicians – and the stuff they were smuggling were arms. And Carmen was with Jose because she needed the military thing and then the toreador was a superstar and had power and had this sort of star power and it was all political.

M: Oh, interesting...

R: And a lot of the amorphous impulses of her and the gypsy guys was suddenly clear: they had an agenda. They were revolutionaries. And everything they did and everything they said in the libretto...

M: ...was supported by the concept...

R: Yes, it illuminated it – what was going on – beautifully.

M: That's exciting.

R: A lot of people will try and do that but then it will sort of fizzle out in the final scene. They can make it work for a while...but that's great.

M: There was an opening this last weekend at Sonoma State the...

R: Oh, the Jack London...

M: Yes, the Jack London show with Rodney Gilfrey...It was such a wonderful team working on the production: Libby Larsen writing the music; Phillip Littel the librettist...it's interesting...something that you said about having this great idea but its realization may not be pulled off: that was my perception. It's always so interesting. You know, when you said about reading, have to read everything to understand and I was thinking "okay, I'm not getting this." I think that the people who had the concept in mind had a really clear and exciting idea that propelled them forward, but it did not translate to the audience in a certain way.

R: And that's our job. And when it doesn't click, and it could be the music, it could be the libretto, it could be the performers, it could be the lights – you can't see – there are so many elements. It's so hard to do opera, you know.

M: Do cast members have much to say when they work with you regarding the realization of their characters?

R: Absolutely. Probably more with me than with many other directors. As a singer I really liked a director encouraging me to find my own way into it, and I knew it would make me more comfortable and would make me sing better. I love to give singers as much latitude as I can to come up with their own ideas and use their suggestions, but sometimes they don't work or singers aren't very good at that.

M: They want to be told.

R: Some singers you just wheel them around and tell them – and that’s fine too – but singers are really happy when a director gives them a sketch and a general scope of what they are supposed to be doing, and say okay now that we have this together, let it go.

M: Yes.

R: You can change things, you can alter things, and say well try that, or if they say can I try this? Yeah, let’s see if it works. No that didn’t work. Or yes, that was fantastic, or that was great until here, but then you need to follow through with this. And that’s great fun.

M: How much are singers informed of the concept in your productions so that they can filter down so that their own interpretation is mindful of that concept? Is that even there?

R: Yes, at the beginning you talk through that. You show them the model, and you show them the costumes. They don’t generally – in America, anyway – they don’t generally know this stuff ahead of time. They come with the text and the music memorized, as opposed to theater, which is...there’s just not enough time. It would be nice if you could do that in opera, but there’s not enough money to do that. You have to compress the time so much. But, yeah, you say okay, this is this this and that. And a singer might say “I was feeling this way in this moment, but you’re saying that. Why is that?” And then I say, yeah, if you went in this direction...well for example, in Tokyo. Now this didn’t just happen to me in Tokyo, but I was the artistic director of this particular program at the National Theater there and they had a young German director mounting this production of *The Marriage of Figaro*. Very bad casting. Anyway, she had the Count being very violent, particularly in the second act when he’s coming in and “who’s hiding in the closet?” and he’s got this crowbar kind of thing and is looking very probably like he would pop his wife one with the crowbar. And I said to the stage director, two things: number one this is a comedy. It says so right here (Italian phrase.... Drama in joicoso). We are not doing some sort of Verdi drama. Number 2, let’s look at the last scene. He asks for forgiveness in the most radiantly beautiful – you remember the moment in the movie *Amadeus*, when Salieri said Oh My God, and then the Emperor yawned – well that moment in the play and the film is a perfect moment of transcendent redemption. Well if the Count is such a jerk that he’s ready to hit his wife in the head with a crowbar in Act Two, that moment doesn’t happen. Number one: we can’t be sympathetic to him. And number two: she’s an idiot. How can she forgive him if he’s that violent and out of control? Ick is our response, rather than (sighs). I said you cannot, that will destroy the end of the opera. Stop it.

M: Was she receptive to that? You were the artistic director...

R: I had to keep fighting the fight.

M: Well what about that? You have a stage director who is pursuing a concept in this way, but the management has the sense that this really not something that we wish to

present. We're responsible. How does that conversation take place? Is it just you will change it, and that's that?

R: If it has to, if it has to go there, then yeah. Ideally, all that stuff is worked out in the beginning, and then if the stage director starts doing something you can say "you know what, this isn't what we talked about."

M: I see.

R: Now...

M: You have the framework that you can fall back on: that was discussed.

R: Exactly. This is not what we talked about.

M: You know, I can't remember if you said something that distinguished your experience...well actually back to your US, Netherlands, Bangkok... I'm curious, my theme – whatever it turns out to be – involves the interpretation of texts, East and West. And, so a question to you is, does the particular audience for whom a production is being staged have an impact on the way a production is realized? Does a Netherland's audience determine a *Marriage of Figaro* differently than...

R: Yes.

M: Okay. Good. How?

R: Well, in moving from west to east as it were, if you want to move from the US to Europe to Asia, um, Europeans have – most Europeans – have been seeing opera since the beginning: seeing it, seeing it, seeing it. An average opera goer, you know – a cab driver in Europe is – in Germany in particular – is probably an opera goer. They go to opera the way we go to baseball.

M: It's subsidized.

R: Well, yes it is subsidized. So yes, it's less expensive to go and what not. But it's just what you do. It's part of the culture. It's like going to a Broadway show. Oh "let's go see the next *Traviata*." Well, you know, someone who has seen *Traviata* ten times, it's gotten to many places – particularly in Germany and Holland to a degree – some other places – the expectation is we're going to see some new twist on this old story. So there is an expectation of that. And just going in.... They just wheeled a very traditional *La Traviata* into the Netherlands Opera, or certainly into Stuttgart, or some of the more edgy, where Pamela Rosenberg came from, people would just be puzzled by that. That is just not the expectation.

M: But would you say that *Idomeneo* production, they're so familiar with the original they want a variation, is that...but it was too much? Was it too much that led to the outcry from a cab driver, or was it a religious faction ...?

R: Well that was a purely religious thing in Berlin there.

M: But what about the cab driver? Is the idea of having innovation in a production for this person?

R: Well, no, it's more for the elite: my sense of this. The people who are in the opera business and what not, the intelligentsia, have this expectation. In point of fact, people are, a lot of people particularly those who are not living in the major cities – people who are off in, I mean I worked on for a couple of years trying to get a tour in Holland of the smaller cities because all the stuff that they got – they couldn't get tickets to the Netherlands Opera in Rotterdam because they were all sold out – they would get either these really awful productions from Bella Russia or Bulgaria or wherever and they were just bad: bad singers, bad ugly ninety year old sets and stuff, or they would get these sort of edgy twisted takes on *Traviata* where it takes place on the moon of whatever. And they didn't like either of them. What they were thirsty for was a really excellent production – someone coming and telling the story with good costumes and good sets and a good orchestra – so there is still, and I was speaking to a buddy of mine who was singing in Cologne and Kathy Cathcart was in Cologne for many years. After she left, after we got into the late 80s and 90s the intendants didn't care if people liked it or not. They just did what they did. Ticket sales went down, down, down. Some people really liked it and had an expectation and others went Oiy! this is boring. Again, I'm not getting this ...

M: visceral experience.

R: ...visceral experience, I'm getting this intellectual treatise here and, so, so there's a balance. As you get to America, people are willing to see unusual things – more so in New York City Opera than they would at the Met. There is a very edgy theatre in Long Beach. Long Beach Opera has been doing edgy stuff for years and years and years. You wouldn't get a co-production between Long Beach and Des Moines, you know. People in Des Moines would just say “what is this.” Pamela Rosenberg, a very bright woman, came in and said well this is how it needs to be, and she tipped a balance. And some people said now wait a minute. I'm perfectly willing to see some of this stuff but...

M: Not all of it...

R: Not all of it. You got to give us, there's got to be a formula that you have to survive in America. You have to meet ticket sales, you have to raise this much money, and you can't have edgy stuff or unfamiliar repertoire rammed down your throat. You have to establish a balance. And it's fine to challenge your, it's your responsibility to challenge your community into thinking and questioning, that's much of the role of the artist. But in

Germany, art is much more viewed as edification. We go to be taught something. And it has a seriousness and an intellectual quality. In Italy, in America, in Asia, it's still showbiz.

M: Is it more elitist in Asia?

R: No, but it's more conservative.

M: Would you see tuk tuk drivers at the opera?

R: No. Not in Bangkok, but in Japan – and my only experiences in Asia are in Japan and Thailand – well really, Tokyo and Bangkok, that's all I know – man, they went to everything in Tokyo. Ever recital, every classical music event that I went to was packed. And people loved it. Now, there's a lot of people there, but that wasn't an elitist thing. They really liked it. But they didn't like the edgy stuff so much, they really didn't. Their inclination was towards the label. Is this the Berlin Opera, is this La Scala...

M: I've heard this...

R: Is this Italian. I understand that this is an opera but it's in German so. Italian is opera, there's La Scala... I was encouraged to bring teachers from Italy, and other teachers from Europe and the United States because we knew that they were really opera people: stupid stuff like that.

M: I've heard that. Our Youth Orchestra, one of our youth orchestras has the possibility to perform in China – it may not happen – but the man who wishes to present us, and this is the main thing, our youth orchestra has no name recognition, so he has to create a package that meets the needs of the locals in Shanghai, for example, because its all labels, it's all prestige factor, it's all prestige.

R: Yes.

M: And it seems to be particularly an Asian thing.

R: It is, it is. And quality is secondary. They assume that if the label is good then that equals quality. Maybe it does in Asia but it doesn't necessarily here, as you know. And they are perfectly happy to have bad teachers with a credential that was connected to a place that was well known.

(Phone rings. Richard answers and tape recorder is turned off. Conversation resumes a little later.)

M: I have just a couple more questions to ask. The first has to do with – you've answered so many of these things in different ways, I appreciate that – um, you mentioned

something about – you didn't mention it in this way, but the need to generate ticket revenues having an impact on production values or that it might influence...

R: You know I didn't actually say that...

M: Okay, what did you say?

R: I said in terms of what you could afford in terms of sets and costumes, etc.

M: But what about this idea?

R: Certainly. Certainly. I was directing several years ago in Sacramento – I've done several productions there now – but I was saying to Tim, the director of the company "how are ticket sales?" And he said they were up 30% this year. And I said, what? Did you do a major new campaign? He said uh, uh. San Francisco Opera people stopped going (to SF) because of the stuff was being presented. People who were traveling to San Francisco didn't like the stuff that they were seeing so they stayed home.

M: Oh. During the Rosenberg tenure.

R: Precisely.

M: I see.

R: There's an eloquent example of what can happen in a situation. So, yeah, you have to sell tickets. You have to be mindful of and respectful of your community, which is not to say that you don't do challenging things. They did the Harvey Milk opera: they commissioned that here. That's wonderfully appropriate thing for a company like this. They commissioned *Death of Klinghoffer*. It's fine to do things, and it is important to do things that are challenging, that make you think, that might even upset you in the way that Bertolt Brecht liked to, but you have to do it respectfully. If you are going to do something edgy like that you are best, I think you are being more responsible when you add, when you really juice up your education component of that: you're doing magazine articles and you're doing your interviews on the radio and tv: "this is what we're doing, and this is (dit, dit, dit, dit)" to lubricate your audience. To prepare them for what they are about to see, and you're very judicious about what you do put in the program. And, you don't make that your whole season.

M: So, you would say that if you are creating a production that has a somewhat difficult interpretation or provocative, the education of the audience will help make it more palatable?

R: Absolutely. For example, Minnesota Opera a number of years ago did a premiere – a brand new work, which can always be dicey with the audience – of *A Handmaid's Tale*, and they didn't even call it an opera. They just said we are doing *A Handmaid's Tale* –

they may have called it a musical theater thing – and they had the author of the book was there, and they had all these things, I don't remember if they showed the film. But....

M: I'm not familiar with it.

R: Oh, *A Handmaid's Tale* is....I'm trying to think...there was a movie with...it's this futuristic thing where the conservative religious types take over the country and men and women are separated and there's some sort of biological things where conception has been limited in some ways (di, di, di, di). Robert Duvall was in this movie, and...anyway...But it was a big success because they went on this major quest to prepare their audience.

M: Did it help ensure the production's success?

R: It did very well.

(He turns to computer to look up some pertinent online information regarding the production.)

M: When was this?

(phone rings)

R: It was in the last four years. Cause Kevin did this – ah, Margaret Atwood – yeah they did a big presentation about it at the Opera America conference, and it was this whole, and they said “we chose not to sell it as an opera, per se”, and everyone knew the book, the book was popular and a lot of people saw the movie...

M: So it was popular?

R: Yes.

(He answered the phone. When his conversation was finished, I neglected to turn the recorder back on for the last minute or so of our conversation.)

Data Analysis

The conversation I had with Richard Harrell, Director of the Opera program at the San Francisco Conservatory of Music, particularly emphasized the ‘re-creation’ possibilities of operatic productions. My analysis of the text from our discussion distinguished several recurring themes reflective of theoretical concepts developed by Gadamer, Habermas and Ricoeur including ideas related to the text as a work of art; the matter of/world of the

text; mimesis; the force of the better argument or argumentation and debate; and the relationship of ethics to action.

Gadamer has written that “the world of the work of art, in which play expresses itself fully in the unity of its course, is in fact a wholly transformed world. In and through it everyone recognizes that that is how things are” (1975: 113). This idea of a ‘wholly transformed world’ was echoed by Richard in his enthusiastic description of opera’s unique characteristics.

Richard: The power of opera is its wholeness. The fact that it is drama and music and singing unamplified in the darkened theatre. I mean, it goes back to the caves, you know, when you danced for the hunt and the harvest with the skins around the fire preparing for the...and all that...chanting the thing up unto the Greeks. All the stuff, Aristophanes and all that, was basically sung because you had to be heard, etc. and there’s a ritual, spiritual, visceral power that opera can have that when you get it in the groove is fabulous. It is different than film, it’s different than literature, it’s different than straight theatre. It’s dance, it’s all inclusive...

The determination of the production concept for a stage work on which Richard is working is achieved through a collaborative process (similar to that of the researcher in the participatory inquiry process) with his team of production designers (scenery, costumes, lights, etc.). The ‘concept’ – realized through the interpreters’ (team members) explications of the operatic libretto and musical score – becomes the *matter of the text* used to guide all aspects of configuration or refiguration: influencing costume, lighting and staging choices, among others. The production text is then ready to be viewed by an audience who advance the artistic creation process to another level. “Thus it is not really the absence of a fourth wall that turns the play into a show. Rather, openness toward the spectator is part of the closedness of the play. The audience only completes what the play

as such is” (Gadamer 1975: 109). The significance of the viewer’s contribution to a performance experience is further elaborated upon by Gadamer, who has written

... however much a religious or profane play represents a world wholly closed within itself, it is as if open toward the spectator, in whom it achieves its whole significance. The players play their roles as in any game, and thus the play is represented, but the play itself is the whole, comprising players and spectators. In fact, it is experienced properly by, and presents itself (as it is “meant”) to, one who is not acting in the play but watching it. In him the game is raised, as it were, to its ideality (Gadamer 1975: 109).

An audience’s ability to provide the missing piece of the performance puzzle is aided by directors and designers who successfully engage in the mimesis process to refigure a text for increased viewer emersion in the narrative. Sometimes they are successful, and other times they are not. The mimesis₃ realization of Richard’s recent production of Verdi’s *Aida*, which he staged for Bangkok Opera, was a tremendous success. Traditionally set in Egypt, Richard and his design team changed the setting to 17th century Siam, which he believes improved upon Verdi’s original concept and increased audience identification with the text.

R: In Thailand... the *Aida* thing was interesting... We turned out to set it in Siam rather than in Egypt because in truth that was because we could get really spectacularly beautiful Siamese costumes for much less money than Egyptian things, number one. Number two, as we scratched around and looked at it, historically...um...17th century Siam – what was going on with the wars in Burma, the powers of the priest burying people alive – historically it matched the *Aida* story better than Egyptian. It actually fit in terms of... a Thai person knowing anything about the history of their country sitting and watching when the Burmese come in there triumphantly with their prisoners and everything, it all makes perfect sense. And when the Brahmins have that much power... it actually worked beautifully.

Additional successfully revised operatic texts were referred to during our conversation, including a production of Bizet’s *Carmen* that was moved from the 19th to

the 20th century and set in Spain during the civil war. The motivation of the leading characters' actions became clearer for the audience in the updated setting.

Unfortunately, not all refigured performance texts are as successful in providing the audience with an opportunity to contribute to or complete the work of art. This is not necessarily due to a failure of the mimesis process, but rather to the director or presenting organization's inability to successfully put forth a better argument via the revised text. The night before my conversation with Richard, Bangkok Opera premiered *Ayudhya*, a new work based on a story from the *Ramiyana*. The director/composer's concept for a particular bit of stage action directly confronted the Thai expectation regarding how this subject matter was to be presented. Tradition dictates that an inappropriate rendering of this particular text generates bad luck. Richard commented on the controversy during our discussion.

Michael: ...is there anything else about the collaborative process, about developing a concept for an ...audience in Thailand...protocol, ethical concerns, anything else... that you don't have to think about here?

Richard: Oh my, there was an opening night last night in Bangkok of this piece (referring to the photo on the cover of the Opera Now magazine), ... which was an opera based on the story of the *Ramiyana*...

M. Oh yes?

R: And it was a huge kafofel. There was a scene in which the raven dies. Well traditionally, the raven never dies on stage, and they had the raven die on stage, and it hit the fan. The cultural ministry came and did this whole thing. They threatened to shut the production down, the Intendant had to sign a paper saying that if the cultural ministry felt that what was going on onstage was inappropriate...it was a huge kafofel. And fortunately, the princess who was there at the opening night made light of it and just thought that the whole thing was very silly, but there was this enormous controversy about that. You wouldn't see that here.

The threat of cancellation by the Thai Ministry of Culture prompted Somtow Sucharitkul, composer of *Ayuhdya* and Intendant for the Bangkok Opera company, to modify the offensive bit of staging. He unrepentantly explained his reasoning for the controversial interpretation in a letter to the Thai media (Appendix C). This particular incident exemplifies a lack of ‘benevolent spontaneity’ and ‘solicitude’ as defined by Ricoeur since Sucharitkul was compelled to respond due to pressure from the authorities. It additionally reflects the three types of power distinguished by Ricoeur: power-to-do (Sucharitkul); power-in-common (the Thai audience/community); and power-over (the Thai Ministry of Culture).

While the failure to present the better argument through a revised performance text – even when the presenters believe their interpretation has artistic merit – may provoke a hostile reception by a paying audience and/or members of the larger community, similar problems arise when arbitrary and perhaps capricious manipulation of the text by the director (or presenting organization) is undertaken in order to increase box office revenues by specifically creating controversy. Although arbitrary artistic decisions of this nature appear to be in conflict with ethical behavior, they are unfortunately all too common: especially in directors hoping to increase their prestige. Richard and I discussed this problem as it related to the production of *Ayodhya* and to other situations in his professional experience.

M: Knowing that aspect of the *Ramiyana*, that that change could provoke passionate responses in the community... what do you think about being a stage director and knowing that your interpretation could challenge the community in a way and create a lot of tension, and is it worthwhile in an era when we are trying to have people ‘just get along...’?

R: In truth, I think they blew it... I think they were getting off on the controversy and it made them...

M: Sell more tickets...

R: Precisely.

M: And is that ever a motivation, realistically?

R: Oh sure. There's a great history, this guy, this Spanish director who, oh he did all kinds of ... things that were controversial – in Berlin that were very controversial – a real sado-masochistic *Abduction from the Seraglio*, and so on. There's a lot of directors that specifically do... want to be bad boys... they do stuff on stage, they de-construct a piece with lots of nudity or violence as often as not has nothing to do with the libretto, just to create controversy and get buzz and get people angry, hopefully... There's a lot of directors who frankly, think that opera is silly and so they go in and make a statement rather than telling a story or having some sort of new insight.

Illegitimate renderings of a performance text may prevent the ultimate realization of the work, which – as Gadamer has written – depends on the audience for completion. Their participation in the text requires that they identify or can see and feel themselves as part of the unfolding narrative. “What we experience in a work of art and what invites our attention is how true it is – i.e. to what extent one knows and recognizes something and oneself” (Gadamer 1975: 114).

My conversation with Richard elaborated upon many of the potential problems that can be associated with operatic production, and demonstrated that it is often difficult to gauge the correct mix of artistic innovation and tradition that will generate approval from a paying audience.

Implications

In *Oneself as Another*, Ricoeur states that there are two different types of beginning: the beginning of the world and “a beginning in the midst of the world” (1992:

105). The idea of ‘beginnings in the midst’ directly correlates to an arts presenter’s decision to prepare a performance text for an audience and his or her responsibility for the events that unfold in pursuit of that objective. This responsibility ultimately expands to a larger group of individuals involved in the creation of the performance text – director, designer, choreographer, performers – and is further complicated by the way their actions eventually are intertwined with those of an audience and a larger community in which the performance occurs. I would argue that the persons responsible for the development of a production have an ethical responsibility to ensure that their creation is always respectful of the viewer for whom the performance has been prepared. The question then becomes, how can innovation and freedom of expression co-exist with responsibility for the other in public performances? Will artistic integrity have to be compromised? Is an international ethic in the realization of opera, theater and dance performances possible? Opera ethnographer Paul Atkinson has written that “the application of universalistic aesthetic criteria, like the invocation of inherent meaning, is repugnant to the empirical anthropological study of art and cultural performance” (2006: 54). However, he then acknowledges that “equally...one must allow for the possibility – indeed the pervasive phenomenon – that performers and others have criteria for judging their own and others’ performances” (2006: 54). Is it such a stretch of the imagination to believe that the phenomenon of ‘criteria for judging’ performances is not possible on a larger scale? Anthropologist David Bidney has written about “normative freedom... which is among other things our liberty to judge the cultures that we make” (1996: xviii), and has said that “man is not alienated from his own products and creations but continues to be existentially involved in the continuation and innovation of cultural activities”

(1996: lviii-lix). He has also argued for “the social responsibility of the scientist” (1996: 447). Do not arts creators and presenters have social responsibilities?

The issue, then, is not whether man’s ‘will’ is free, in the sense of being undetermined or causeless, but whether man as a whole is or is not to a limited extent the active agent and efficient cause of the cultural process and whether culture, if its historical conditions are understood, is subject to human control in the interests of human well-being (1996: 123-124).

Gadamer’s extensive writings on interpreting art acknowledge a special relationship between a viewer and the work itself: a relationship that is informed by what the viewer brings to the experience. “In a certain sense interpretation probably is re-creation, but this is a re-creation not of the creative act but of the created work, which has to be brought to representation in accord with the meaning the interpreter finds in it” (Gadamer 1975: 119). The ‘meaning’ found in the work is dependent upon the viewer’s innate recognition of the ideas or emotions being conveyed. This resonance is not possible in public performances when interpretations – similar to those presented by the Berlin and Bangkok opera companies – conflict with the inmost beliefs and traditions held by the audience. Perhaps directors and presenting organizations can expand their concept of the ingredients essential for creating effective interpretations of performance works by acknowledging responsibility for their communities on an ontological level, and allow this awareness to influence their production decisions. Past production methods may no longer be suitable to address the needs of an increasingly global community. Regarding myths, though clearly applicable to international performance texts, Ricoeur (in Kearney 2002: 121) has stated that they

are not unchanging and unchanged antiques which are simply delivered out of the past in some naked, original state. Their specific identity depends on the way in which each generation receives or interprets them according to their needs,

conventions and ideological motivations. Hence the necessity of critical discrimination between liberating and destructive modes of reinterpretation.