CLOSE ENCOUNTERS IN ENCLOSED SPACES:
THEATRE FROM A SPECTATOR’S PERSPECTIVE

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DECLARATION

I hereby declare that the thesis is my original work and it has been written by me in its entirety. I have duly acknowledged all the sources of information which have been used in the thesis.

This thesis has also not been submitted for any degree in any university previously.

Mayura Baweja

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Summary

This thesis aims to examine the relationship between the spectator and the theatre event in the context of my experience as spectator. Historically, the figure of the spectator has occupied a position at the fringes of theatre performance. In more recent times the role of the spectator has come to be regarded as an active and central role. Theatre practice and scholarly writing have attempted to understand the processes which underlie the theatre experience for the spectator. The initial conception of theatre as an aesthetic product, an object and its relationship with the recipient has been reconfigured in recent decades. The shift from product to process, author to reader, text to performance signifies new ways of understanding the symbiotic relationship between the spectator and the performance. The dissatisfaction with semiotic approaches analysing performance has given rise to other approaches which focus on the theatre event as opposed to the theatre performance. I argue that the experience of theatre performance for the spectator arises out of the event as a whole. In my analysis, the experience of watching theatre performances is a perceptual encounter which arises in the moment of performance. The immersive nature of the theatre experience emphasises the corporeal presence of the spectator at the centre of the theatre event. By examining my own responses to two specific theatre events, I have attempted to tease out the particularities of my subjectivity in relation to other subjectivities. The embracing of these subjective threads has enabled me to trace and analyse the experiential structures of this perceptual encounter. The nature of my experience and my memory of theatre performance points to the validity of an approach in which the theatre event is not a sum of its parts. The issue, in my
view, is not how we read the images we see and the meaning we make of them but about how we construct our reality with the images around us.

The proliferation of new media technologies and the time-space compression have resulted in a rethinking of the role of the spectator as well as theatre performance in the wider visual culture. The blurring of the lines between various genres of performance and the widening of the discursive spaces where we encounter art and performance, has repositioned the spectator in the context of theatre performance. Post dramatic theatre and contemporary art practices specifically address elements of time and space, presence and absence, fiction and reality, with a focus on the postmodern spectator.

It is in the broad context of these developments and my specific relationship with place and theatre itself that I situate my spectatorial experience. I analyse my experience of watching two performances- The Blue Mug (2010) and Fear of Writing (2011) - to provide insights into the processes that underlie the negotiation, confrontation and reconstitution that takes place in close encounters in enclosed spaces.
Chapter 1

Introduction

The theatre is a place where we can escape into a world of fantasy or accost the real world, laugh or cry, be alone or with others, make friends with strangers or become strangers to ourselves. Theatre allows us distance and proximity, removal and intimacy as we revisit our memories or delve deeper into questions that perplex us in the present. In the theatre we give ourselves time to reflect upon the things that matter to us.

I find the theatre fascinating because so much happens within the theatre space. In the waiting spaces where spectators gather before the commencement of a show I am accosted with both the familiar and unfamiliar. In Singapore I look for known faces in the gathering, the table for collection of tickets and programmes, and the ushers dressed in black. Elsewhere, the anonymity of being a traveller or tourist allows me to take in the faces of strangers and explore the nearby streets, theatre’s architecture, exterior and interior spaces. As I enter the seating area, often I remember other performances watched in this same place or others. And even before a sliver of light falls on the frame of an actor, I feel myself tingling as a thousand questions run through my mind: what/who am I watching? I am interested in the elements of this question – the ‘what/who’, ‘I’ and ‘watching’. My central thesis is that the experience of watching theatre is as much dependent on who is watching, where and with whom as it is on what is being watched. In the western context, theatre experience has been thought of as directed by and
deriving from the theatre performance being watched, by which I mean the aesthetic product or the ‘thing seen’. The idea of theatre performance as a staged play or a text driven performance has been dominant in our conception of theatre in the 20th century. My education in English-medium schools and colleges in independent India during the 1980s reinforced this idea. This meant that I encountered Shakespeare, Blake and Yeats through their written works first and before any other indigenous literary figures. Thus, this conception of theatre performance in the west and its transmission into colonial cultures ensured its predominance in the imagination of post-colonial subjects like myself.

By adopting a proximal approach1 to theatre performance from the spectator’s perspective, I shift the focus to the social processes and subjective pathways that underlie the theatre encounter for the spectator. The broad aims of this thesis are to examine the nature and texture of the theatre encounter, its boundaries, and in particular the relationship between performance and spectatorship. I argue that what the spectator experiences in the context of theatre performance is a perceptual encounter. By using the phrase *perceptual encounter* I foreground the corporeal presence of the spectator and emphasise the immersive nature of the theatre experience. The immersiveness of this experience, of being in the space with other spectators and the performers, distinguishes the spectator in the theatre from the reader of a book. I must

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1 Within social sciences, “distal approaches are concerned with the world as an established set of relations that are finished forms and are analyzable as such. Proximal approaches, in contrast, see relations as in a continual process of being made, a process that never comes into completion but perpetuates itself in terms of both an ongoing stasis and a source of possible change.” Kevin Hetherington, *Presence, Absence and the Globe*, (2002) in Verstraete ed. p.181
clarify here that my use of *immersiveness* should be distinguished from the notion of “immersive theatre” which has been used to refer to a genre of contemporary performance.² The terms “immersive theatre” and “visceral theatre” are used to describe contemporary performances that involve the active participation of spectators.³ The notion of immersiveness shifts the focus, in my view, from “what the theatre performance is about” to “what it does”. Immersiveness hinges on liveness, immediacy and presence. In the post-industrial world theatre distinguishes itself from other media by emphasising the aspect of liveness and presence. New forms of theatre practice distinguish themselves from more conventional offerings by the degrees of “immersiveness” that the spectator experiences. I examine this idea of immersiveness in the context of the relationship between the theatre performance and the theatre event to understand the texture of my perceptual encounter.

As a spectator of two specific theatre performances namely *The Blue Mug* (2010) and *Fear of Writing* (2011), I propose to examine this immersiveness in relation to the *who*, where and the *with whom*. Although I watched both the performances in Singapore, they offer distinctive experiences to the spectator. *The Blue Mug* (Blue), although a devised piece may be categorised as a conventional theatre performance while *Fear of Writing* (Fear) is clearly

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² The term ‘Immersive theatre’ has become a widely adopted especially in the U.K. “to designate a trend for performances which use installations and expansive environments, which have mobile audiences, and which invite audience participation.” Gareth White. On Immersive Theatre, Theatre Research International, Vol.37, Issue 3, 2012.
in the domain of non-conventional theatre, an example of what may be termed post-dramatic theatre.

**Construing Theatre**

The term “theatre” itself does not stand for a singular thing. The Greek term *theatron*, to which we trace the origin of the English word ‘theatre’, refers to “a place for seeing”. Modern usage is broader encompassing both the physical space and the activity. In addition we talk of theatre as an institution and an art form when we discuss the development of a national theatre or the theatre scene in a city. I have titled this thesis, “Close Encounters in Enclosed Places: Theatre from the Perspective of a Spectator” but I do not want to suggest that I associate theatre only with enclosed spaces. Indeed a diversity of theatres operate in contemporary culture and occupy different spaces—enclosed, closed and otherwise. What we recognise as ‘theatre” is determined by social and cultural contexts and the experience of the perceiving subject, the spectator. The question “What is theatre?” is in my view intrinsically connected with another “What do I recognise as theatre?” The answer to this latter question is articulated in the context of my own theatregoing experience as a culturally positioned spectator and my work in theatre in various capacities. The reading of any artefact, text or performance varies from spectator to spectator and cultural differences play a determinative role in the manner in which we interpret and attribute meaning to the ‘object’ of our gaze. Gender, class, race, ethnicity and language are the filters through which we make meaning of the world around us. These cultural coordinates, writes Yong Li Lan in the context of intercultural theatre, “not only entail variable, plural viewpoints, but
call up systems of value and meaning by which one evaluates a performance’s worth, and embodies a stake in the terms of that worth.\textsuperscript{4} In addition to pointing out the role that these markers play in the construction of the theatre event as perceived by me, an Indian woman writing in the English language, there are also slippages as I attempt to articulate my experiences which are bound up with other languages known to me. I am proficient in two languages, Hindi and English, but neither is my mother tongue. How can I effectively translate my experience of listening to a song in my mother tongue into writing in English?

I have watched theatre in a variety of spaces, including purpose built theatres and auditoriums, temples, church basements, shopping malls and parks. My initial encounter with theatre and cultural performance arises from participation/witnessing/observation of religious rituals/dramas/skits/entertainment shows, cultural evenings in the villages, towns and cities in India from 1981 to 2001. From 2001 to 2005, I watched theatre performances in the many and diverse theatres of New York City, the majority of which are categorised as off Broadway and the off-off-Broadway theatres. In the past seven years, I have watched theatre in Singapore, which is a mix of the work of local Singapore theatre companies as well as successful or critically acclaimed productions brought from elsewhere for Singapore audiences. The manner in which I construe theatre plays into my expectations and indeed my interpretation of the theatre event. It is generally agreed that making sense of theatrical performance requires a familiarity with the

\textsuperscript{4} Yong Li Lan, “Shakespeare, Asian Actors and Intercultural Spectatorship, we.mit.edu/Shakespeare/asia/essays/LiLanYong.html accessed on Mar 29, 2013.
underlying codes and subcodes, a kind of theatrical competence. But even prior to theatrical competence, says Keir Elam, is the ability to recognise the performance as such. Theatrical events have their own set of cultural rules – a set of organisational and cognitive principles which distinguish them from other events. It is the “theatrical frame” that ensures the recognition of the theatre event. “The theatrical frame”, writes Elam, “is in effect the product of a set of transactional conventions governing the participants’ expectations and their understanding of the kinds of reality involved in the performance.”

Theatre has been an integral part of my life for a long time. Growing up in a world before mobile phones, television and fast food, the theatre was a regular feature of my childhood in small towns and cities in India. As children we devised plays and revelled in watching them. My earliest memory of a theatre performance is of watching my mother playing a role in Bernard Shaw’s *Arms and the Man*. Seated in the last row of a large darkened auditorium, I remember vividly the woman on stage who looked like my mother but called herself Louka. The memory of those few minutes spent in the auditorium remains etched in my mind to this day. As I write, I see myself wide eyed, looking past the silhouetted heads to the bright lights of the stage, hear the giggles of other children seated next to me, and the voice of our escort hushing us into silence. This particular encounter with theatrical performance stands alongside a number of annual showings of *Ramlila* mounted on makeshift stages in busy streets that brought traffic to a halt. Watching *Arms and the Man* in a darkened hall in quiescence was a qualitatively different experience.

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6 Elam (2002) p. 79
7 A Gunners Amateur Drama Society (*GADS*) production, Deolali, Maharashtra.
than jostling with the crowd in broad daylight amongst shouts welcoming Hanuman on stage. At seven, I remember becoming aware that different rules were in operation in each space. In my experience of watching these diverse theatrical events, the encounter with western theatrical conventions played a formative role in the way I came to know and recognise theatre. In my mind, *Arms and the Man* constituted theatre and *Ramlila* was an annual cultural happening. The distinction between these two performances was the positioning of the theatrical frame – the purchase of tickets, the indoor performance space, audience seats and curtains. But in my memory of both experiences the encounter with theatricality and eventness was dominant. For the spectator it is the dynamism of the theatre event, in its eventness that the power of theatre performance lies.8 For Peter Brook, “theatre” is an all-purpose word that “encompasses curtains, spotlights, verse, laughter, darkness.”9 These trappings of theatre performance feed into the familiarity of the theatre event for me, a spectator. But Brook proffers another definition of what he calls “an act of theatre”. He says:

I can take an empty space and call it a bare stage. A man walks across this empty space whilst someone is watching him, and this is all that is needed for an act of theatre to be engaged.10

Another conception of theatre that finds frequent reference is that provided by Eric Bentley- “A impersonates B, while C looks on”.11 Bentley emphasises

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8 I use eventness in the same sense as Sauter to indicate the distinctive qualities of anticipation, presence and self-consciousness.
10 Brook (1968) p.9
the mimetic act while Brook alludes to the engagement between the performer and the spectator within a space as being the constitutive element of theatre. Variations to Bentley’s definition and its possible implications have been offered by Dennis Kennedy (2009) and Erika Fischer- Lichte (2009). These attempts to construct theatre as an act, exchange or an event demonstrate that there are many ways of thinking about the theatre performance. These conceptions of theatre clearly distance themselves from the traditional understanding of theatre performance as a representation of the dramatic fiction arising from a text. In their western beginnings, the relationship between text and performance has been dominant in the developments over the past century bearing important influences on the way we see or indeed read theatre.

In the Natyasastra, the ancient Indian Vedic text on performance, the term Natya means a combination of drama, music and dance. Written by Bharatamuni, it contains elaborate rules for the production of theatrical performances with elements of drama, music and dance. The central discourse in this treatise is the relationship between the ideal spectator (Rasika) and the performer which has been referred to as the “rasa theory.” Through the rasa and its relationship with Bhava or emotion, the Natyasastra emphasises the spectator’s experience as a perceptual one. There is some discrepancy amongst the commentators regarding the audience in the Natyasastra. According to the earlier commentators, notes Mirella Lingorska, the competence of the public is regarded as an essential prerequisite to the
enjoyment of the play. However, later commentators make a distinction between common public and the experts amongst the spectators. It is the sound knowledge of the contents and the technical intricacies possessed by the classical audience that facilitates the appreciation of the stage performance.

These differences in construction indicate that there are many ways in which we may construe theatre and this is has a bearing on how we analyse theatre performance and indeed experience of the theatrical event.

The Theatre Event

What is common to my watching of Arms and the Man and the Ramlila performances is the aspect of “eventness” that I associate with theatrical performances. Eventness includes anticipation, presence and self-consciousness. Willmar Sauter argues that while “[W]hat is perceived as theatrical is largely defined by conventions, which again are conditioned by local, national and international patterns”, “theatre” which includes “all kinds of theatrical performances-always and everywhere takes place in the form of events.”

In my understanding, there are three words in Sauter’s observation that bear a relationship with each other – theatre, theatrical and event. The spectator’s experience of theatricality in the context of the theatre performance is intertwined with the theatre event. According to Roland Barthes, theatricality

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13 I use this in the sense offered by Willmar Sauter in Vicky Ann Cremona et. al. Introducing the Theatrical Event”, in Vicky Ann Cremona et al. al., Theatrical Events- Borders Dynamics Frames, Amsterdam, 2004, p.11
14 Ibid. p.1
is “theatre minus text” which highlights all the performative components of a production: acting, mise-en-scene, stage design and technical elements. Theatricality bears a relationship with the perceptual encounter experienced by the spectator. My attempt is to explore immersiveness and its link to the layering of distance and proximity as arising from theatricality.

As a spectator I experience the theatre performances I watch in divergent ways. But there is an excitement and anticipation that I perceive in the moments before it unfolds which is hard to describe in words. Each encounter is marked by its own moments. Sometimes these moments are conversations that happened before the actual performance. Very often I make notes about these moments or write about other aspects in my diary. As I write I remember other moments from past performances and I write about these too. I find myself writing about things that I didn’t realise were there at the time when I saw the show. I realise that I write about them in the present even though these events are now in the past. What I write does not capture my experience, but it allows me some distance to reflect upon what I have seen. (I am not sure where to go with this) Is this distance necessary and productive?

My experience of the theatre performance arises in the context of the event as a whole. Eventness is not, a way to generalise the theatregoing experience in the varied cultural contexts but a way to discern the contours of the theatre experience.

Through the simple act of buying of the ticket, the spectator initiates theatrical communication, says Elam. However, for me as a spectator, the manner in

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which the theatre performance gains visibility marks the start of the relationship. This may be through the regular advertising modes—ticket agencies, email lists maintained by theatre companies, newspaper or magazine articles, posters, affiliations with clubs or groups, friends and colleagues. *Blue* being a part of the Kalaautsavam Festival (2010), Singapore was advertised as a theatre performance performed in English and Hindi. It was targeted at a Hindi speaking Indian diasporic/expat audience. On the other hand, my role as a participant in the *Fear of Writing* project a few months before positioned me as the spectator curious about the treatment of the materials and others that were part of the show. It was also the reason I opted to watch *Fear of Writing* on its opening night. I bought tickets for both these theatre performances however my expectations in relation to them arose in the broader context of the theatre event within which the specific performance itself was embedded. In my view the experience of the theatre performance for the spectator is tied to the theatre event through the positioning of the theatrical frame.16 In respect of *The Blue Mug* and *Fear of Writing*, the theatrical frame fostered specific and contrasting expectations in respect of each event. Christopher Balme has distinguished three approaches for analysing performance—performance as rehearsal, as product or as event. While rehearsal processes have their own spectators amongst the director, stage manager, actors and others, I embody the spectator who enters the scene as a corporeal presence later. The notion of performance as product in my view has similar implications as those pointed out by W. B. Worthen, “of seeing theatre as a kind of paper stage, its work and the audience’s response already scripted by

16 I use the term ‘theatrical’ in the same sense as Sauter.
the hand of the writer”. 17 For a theatregoer, the result of this narrow construction is the same as the experience of going to a restaurant knowing every item on the menu. In other words, the theatre becomes a space for closed and pre-determined meanings. The idea of the theatre event emphasises that the experience of watching a theatre performance is more than the sum of its parts. I have approached theatre performance as event in this thesis because my experience of theatre performance as a spectator arises from its eventness. This theatre event, in my experience as spectator, operates as a network of pathways for the intermingling of individual subjectivities. It is at the intersections of these pathways that meanings are made, negotiated and remade by each spectator.

In this thesis, I focus on two unstable “subjects” – the performance and the spectator’s experience. The problem of analysing performance is compounded when the question at issue is the spectator’s experience. Here, says McAuley, “the material traces are even more tantalizingly absent than those of the performance.” 18 Writing in the 1990s, Susan Bennett laments the paucity of research with the audience as subject. 19 Two decades later, there has been a significant change in that situation. In the past five years, a significant number of new scholarly works have been published which emphasise the centrality of the spectator within the theatrical event. Among these are Erika Fischer-Lichte’s, The Transformative Power of Performance:

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17 Worthen, W. B. Shakespeare and the Authority of Performance. Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1997, p.4

I view this focus on the issues of spectatorship as converging with the proliferation of technologies which have caused the world to shrink. The speed with which we communicate and travel, termed as the “time-space compression”, have altered our relationship to the world in profound ways. 20 Accelerated systems of transport and electronic communications technology have transformed social relations significantly, although unevenly across the globe. The reduced distances and increased mobility have altered our sense of connection to place fundamentally. The spread of placelessness, argues Cresswell, results from roads, railways, airports cutting across the landscape, making possible the mass movement of people with all their fashions and habits.21 The post-modern condition22 and the atomised existence that underlies the contemporary spectator and his engagement, position the spectator in a central role in an overwhelmingly visual culture. Marc Auge describes this as the proliferation of non-places resulting from supermodernity.


21 Cresswell, Tim.“Theorizing Place” in Verstraete & Cresswell eds.(2002) p.14

22 My usage of postmodernity as a condition adheres to the sense Kennedy provides- to connote interdependent world economies, a set of interrelated communication systems or a “psychosocial state of being”. Kennedy, Dennis. The Spectator and the Spectacle: Audiences in Modernity and Post-Modernity. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2009 p.6
**Spectator and the Researcher – intertwining subjectivities**

The spectator’s position within the context of this analysis brings me to the other component of the question; the “I” in what am I watching? At the heart of this question is the relationship between my two selves- the spectator and the researcher. I make a distinction between the watching self, the spectator and the self as researcher. As the analyst/researcher, I position the perceiving subject, the spectator at some distance from the self as the researcher. The researcher observes the watching self ostensibly from a distance which arises from the separation in time and space. My watching of theatre performances is located in the past but as a researcher I draw upon my memory and my notes in the present to write about the experience. The invocation of memory for the purposes of reconstruction and the critical reflection which accompanies this recall involves a negotiation of subjectivities at another level, distinct from the subjectivity of the spectator during the performance. This layering of subjectivity presents a paradox because the watching self and the researching self now overlap in all my watching of theatre. As part of a self-reflexive approach, I acknowledge the presence of these two selves placed alongside each other.

Memory plays an important role in our experience of performance. Explicating his ideas on the relationship between seeing and memory, Henry, M. Sayre, uses the idea of Freud’s Mystic Writing Pad, a children’s toy.23 Behind the retina, he writes, is the space that is like the thick waxen board of the toy, covered by a thin sheet of clear plastic upon which the user writes or

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draws. The wax below registers a faint indentation which appears as a dark line through the plastic which disappears on lifting the plastic off the wax. But “the trace of the impression remains layered into the rhythm and texture of all previous impressions”.24 Freud, Sayre points out, uses this analogy to demonstrate the workings of the psychic system. This connects, according to Sayre, to Derrida’s idea that what we see is not so much “present” before or eyes as it is the product of previous memories, previous writings or images inscribed on the writing board of the unconscious.25 This writing, Sayre quotes Derrida, “supplements perception before perception appears to itself.”

The retrieval of the experience through invoking of memory is another aspect that presents difficulties within a linear and derivative framework. The analogy of Freud’s Mystic Writing Pad makes it clear that subjectivity plays a critical role at all stages of this retrieval. The experience of performance and the writing about it involves slippages. While describing his experience of watching a video, Sayre, points out that we cannot see the video we are speaking about here, on the printed page.26 This is true for performance: a three dimensional textured canvas of imagery, text and sound. We perceive in space, we think in time, and we write about them both- space and time-in this remove, the settled placelessness of the blank page.27 Writing about performance involves a reconstruction of an event that took place in the past. A process of recall is initiated, a drawing upon memory to recreate something which then becomes a creature of the present. I argue that what we perceive

24 Ibid.
25 Ibid. at p.42
26 Ibid. at p. 39
during the performance and our memory of it arises in large part from the way we construct the event within which the encounter takes place at the time of its happening and during our subsequent retrieval of it.

As a theatreworker and a theatre student, watching theatre is an integral part of my life. My watching self is constructed by these identities. In significant ways the plays I have watched have become markers of my own life and the times I have lived through. Material remnants of plays I have watched over the years such as programs, bills, ticket stubs, and an occasional poster are kept as remembrances of these events. Quite often they serve as prompts to retrieve aspects of the performance: moments cherished for their artistic quality, a unique interpretation, a memorable gesture or a glimpse of a favourite actor. These remnants are reminders of things I want to remember. But my memories of these events often reveal the registering of other detail – the face of a stranger, the dress of a woman seated close by, the smell of the hall and the voice of the shop attendant in the street outside. These other details surprise me as they emerge alongside the memory of the show itself. These moments embody a power that I recognise only in the moment of reconstruction and retrieval. Performances have power to remain in our memory much after we seem to have forgotten most of the detail about plots, characters, themes that pertains to the show we went to see. How does theatre performance assume such power? What is the relationship between the processes of perception and memory? What are the structures of memory in relation to the theatre experience?
Both theatre and the individual spectator are inextricably linked to the economic, political and social structures that order human life and society within the specificity of time and place. The spectator’s encounter with theatre performance is a process of negotiation of the particularities of each context. I examine these issues in greater detail in the chapters that follow. In chapter 2, I look at theatre performance as a historical and cultural construct tracing developments leading up to the establishment of performance studies as a discipline. I focus on the contours of theatre performance in relation to theatre event and examine the notion of the perceptual encounter in the context of newer practices. In Chapter 3, I examine my relationship with the theatre as a culturally positioned spectator, the relationship between spectators and audiences and the role of new media technologies and their influence on spectatorship. In Chapter 4, I attempt to document and analyse my experience of watching of two specific performances- *The Blue Mug* and *Fear of Writing*. By approaching performance as event I locate the spectator in the position of power where the processes mobilised by performance are continuously scrutinised and negotiated. In Chapter 5 I attempt to bring together specific threads that allow me to make connections between theoretical issues and actual experience of spectatorship. Through a close scrutiny of the texture of the immersive moments in the perceptual encounter I attempt to understand the nature of the theatre encounter. I reflect on the processes that shape my own spectatorship. As the continuing nature of these processes suggests, I argue that spectatorship is not a state of being; it is a state of becoming. The theatre can be a place where these processes close the doorways to this
becoming, or it may be a place where they may flow and intersect with each other.

**Limitations**

My analysis has some limitations which must be listed at this point. Any approach which foregrounds the spectator’s experience is necessarily partial and incomplete. My experience cannot speak for that of other spectators, but at the same time my analysis of issues that the experience of spectatorship raises, is, I hope, of some value in offering an insight into the nature of contemporary spectatorship. The discourses that surround the notion of theatre performance and indeed inform my research emanate from scholarship in theatre and performance studies located in the ‘West’ (a term I use in the geographical sense). These are readily accessible to me, an Indian resident in Singapore. India and Singapore are tied within the geographical context of the Asian region (which now has connotations beyond the purely geographic) and the historical context of being former British colonies. Both places continue to retain significant links to the remnants of imperial culture. I have attempted to uncover and question my assumptions and responses in the context of these overarching legacies and lineages. Performance practices in the ‘East’ have evolved over many years from their own epistemological moorings. The paradigms of knowledge and processes of transmission through practices and forms in the Indian context are familiar to me. This is partly due to my lived experience as a Hindu, my use of the Hindi language in spoken and written form, an acquaintance with Sanskrit and the reading of scholarly works in the

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28 I use the term East generally to refer to the Asian region, not as counterpoint but as referring to a multitude of alternative diverse practices that exist in South East Asia and South Asia.
English language. These are only a part of the range that forms the Indian context. I have not been able to engage in an in depth study of theoretical or literary texts that are central in any discourse on performance in the Indian context. The limitations of language and the paucity of time have resulted in a less than satisfactory engagement with this body of knowledge. Although the Cartesian dichotomy between mind and body, practice and theory are not readily applicable to all cultural contexts, I believe that they acquire relevance in the context of the encounter with modernity and post-colonial discourses that are part of my engagement here with some of the issues highlighted above.

In the light of my interests and the limitations outlined above, I have found it appropriate to adopt an approach based on critical reflection and self-reflexivity. A reflective approach involves a tracking of the changing self by placing emphasis on the temporal and spatial elements.\(^{29}\) Jill Dolan reflects on her experience of watching performances in many different places, a factor which, according to her, alters perception.\(^{30}\) I have attempted to view my experience of theatre performance in three specific contexts by foregrounding my relationship to each place. I will tease out these threads in my dual role as the researcher and as a culturally positioned spectator to gain an understanding into issues that are about the theatre, the spectator and me.

Chapter 2

Theatre/Performance/Event

The subject of my analysis in this study is the spectator’s experience of theatre performance. The term theatre, as I have shown in Chapter 1, can be construed in diverse ways. Performance, states Zarilli, is a broadly inclusive term for all the ways in which humans represent themselves in embodied ways. Human history reflects the centrality of performance from the earliest time with beginnings in oral, shamanic practices and rituals. Etymologically, the word performance derives from a Greek root meaning “to furnish forth,” “to carry forward,” “to bring into being.” The emphasis, in this understanding lies in the instances of “making” and the “processual aspect of that making.” The juxtaposition of theatre and performance in the term theatre performance both limits and extends the meanings that we ascribe to the individual terms. As an umbrella term it collapses distinctions between various genres of performances that embody theatricality and embraces newer forms of theatre practice such as post dramatic, immersive, visceral and environmental theatre.

Analysing Theatre and Performance

While theatrical practices and events have been part of human history from the earliest time, the emergence of first, theatre studies and more recently, performance studies as a discipline marks the attempts of scholars and

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33 Ibid.
theorists to constitute ‘theatre’ and ‘performance’ as subjects of study and analysis. Research into these artistic practices is distinguished from other forms of research primarily because of the dynamic and complex relationship between the “object” of study, the “subject” and issues of subjectivity of the researcher.

The relationship between the art object, the creator and the beholder is a dynamic and complex one rooted in specific historical and cultural contexts. It is important to understand the historical processes in varied cultural contexts which have altered our understanding of theatre and our role as spectators within it. Our ideas about what constitutes art, the notion of art as the embodiment of truth, the authoritative position of the creator and the relationship between the art object and the recipient have been changing over time. The history of this relationship as well as the history of the discipline of performance studies, as Shannon Jackson notes, changes depending on where one decides to begin. In its western origins, the work of art is an object, an artefact, a “thing” whose “thingness” is not diminished. Like the God that created the world in the Christian belief, it is the embodiment of truth in itself. Those who behold this work of art as recipients may be able to uncover the truth or hidden meaning by patiently performing their hermeneutic operations.

Unlike the artefact, which remains consistent with itself regardless of the recipient’s presence, theatre performance is transient – it is what occurs,

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34 Jackson (2004), p.10
36 Fischer-Lichte (2009), p.161
happens, or takes place within the specific coordinates of space and time amongst a group of people. The beginning of the idea of theatrical performance as art is attributed by Erika Fischer-Lichte to the writings of Max Herrmann, Behrens and Fuchs’ in the German context. These theorists “replaced the artefact with fleeting, unique, and unrepeatable processes and relativized,” argues Fischer-Lichte “if not abolished entirely, the fundamental division of producers and recipients.” 37 In the American context, Marvin Carlson refers to developments in American Universities around the same time marking something akin to what Fischer-Lichte calls the “performative turn”. These developments represent, according to Jon McKenzie, the “Eastern” and “Midwestern” strains of performance studies. 38 The political discontent of the 1960’s in the United States was a culmination of the challenge to old values and notions of authority in the post-World War era. The emergence of theory in the 1960s was a significant thread leading up to this challenge. Post structuralism emerged in opposition to structuralism and challenged the importance of language as a structural phenomenon across cultures.

The work of Umberto Eco, Barthes and other literary theorists challenged the idea of an author as the repository of authority vis-a-vis a written text, dramatic and otherwise. Reader-response and reception theory called for a shift in focus from the meanings assumed to be in texts to a more interactive model. 39 Performances began to be looked at on their own terms rather than as a representation of dramatic text. Drama, the study of literary texts, fell out of favour and a new breed of theatre historians emerged focused

37 Fischer-Lichte (2009) p. 162
38 Jackson (2004) p.8
on studying the history of theatre and the study of theatre as a performing art. This entailed a study of theatre spaces as places where people gathered to watch performances. Theatre studies included the study of the architecture and seating plans of theatres, their location in a particular part of the neighbourhood, changing theatre conventions and of the social life around the theatre during a specific period in theatre history.

The revolutionary and avant garde practices of theatre artists in the 1960s in New York drew the attention of scholars including Marvin Carlson and Richard Schechner. Richard Schechner’s company was one of the avant garde companies pushing the borders in the 1960s. Through their writings and their work in the theatre, a generation of students were exposed to a wide range of performance. The field of semiotics in the 1970s opened the door to looking at theatre performance as a text made up of theatrical signs which the spectator was implicitly interpreting. Semioticians pointed out the limitations of language as the vehicle for the transmission of meaning and semiotics provided the push to look at performance as a separate semiotic system with its own language. In semiotics, the idea of the performance-as-text is based on the idea that performance consists of a set of ordered signs. Although semiotics recognised the importance of the non-textual in theatre performances, the idea of performance-as-text reduced theatre performance into a sum of its parts which could be read as text by the spectator.

Performance presents challenges as a subject of study for two reasons- the first relates to its ephemeral nature and the second is the result of its multiple genealogies. Many approaches have emerged in the past few decades- the
semiotic, materialist, performative, affective, and cognitive among others that highlight both the plurality of and the dissatisfaction with existing approaches for analysing performance.

**The Perceptual Encounter**

Theatrical performance is a richly textured melange of experience for the spectator. It is the blending of image, text and sound that registers at many levels. Each image embodies multiple meanings and can be interpreted in unique ways by each spectator. The performative turn signifies the turn away from theatre as a literary text to its own aesthetic of theatricality. Theatricality, according to Roland Barthes, is all the performative components of a production: acting, mise-en-scene, stage design and technical elements. All these elements in addition to the text (if present) make up the theatre performance. The shift from dramatic text to theatre performance as the subject of study necessarily involves a reconfiguring of the theatre performance for the purposes of analysis.

The problem with semiotics, avers Bert O’ States, is that in addressing the theatre as a system of codes it necessarily dissects the perceptual impression theatre makes on the spectator. And, he adds quoting Merleau-Ponty, “It is impossible …to decompose a perception, to make it into a collection of sensations, because in it the whole is prior to the parts.” The shift from performance-as-text to performance-as-event marks a shift in our understanding of the theatre encounter as a perceptual encounter. A perceptual

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encounter is, in my view, the bundling of the many sensations, processes, interactions, feelings which arise from our immersive experience.

Machon expresses her dissatisfaction with existing modes of analysis for performance that “did justice” to the “quality of experience that she and her students had had as audience members in relation to a variety of works. The absence of a “sympathetic mode of analysis that is idiosyncratically visceral and fuses disciplines, rather than fitting into one form or genre” leads to the conclusion, in her view, that methodological gaps that exist in current performance analysis.

The evocation of rasa, according to the Natyasastra is critical to theatre performance. There is no Natya without rasa, says Bharatamuni. “Rasa”, Uttara Coorlawala writes, “literally translates as that which is tasted, relished.” Rasa is the cumulative result of stimulus, involuntary reaction and voluntary reaction. Bharatamuni offers an explanation of rasa through a comparison with the enjoyment of consuming good food. In the preparation of food, he says, the mix of various condiments and sauces, herbs and other materials results in a taste different from the individual tastes of the compounds which may be enjoyably tasted by sensitive persons eating it. Similarly, the sensitive spectator feels pleasure after enjoying the various emotions expressed by the actors through words, gestures and feelings. Distinguishing rasa from the Greek catharsis, Coorlawala observes, “[r]asa is

41 Machon (2009) p.3
44 Gerould ed.(2000) p. 87
a reflective experience of tasting, rather than of devouring or being devoured by emotions.”

This description offers a window to understanding the perceptual nature of theatre performance by emphasising the performance as an entity separate from its constituent parts and the role of the senses in the experience of the spectator. In my view, the role of the senses in the enjoyment of rasa is akin to the sense that Josephine Machon refers to in her concept of (syn)aesthetics. The perceptual encounter, in Machon’s view, is a fusing of sense (meaning making) with sense (feeling, both sensation and emotion).

The idea of immersion in my view bears a close relationship with the fusing of sense with sense as articulated by Machon. The perceptual encounter is marked in my own experience through immersive moments. To be immersed, according to White, is to be surrounded, enveloped and potentially annihilated, but it also is to be separate from that which immerses. In the context of the work, White says, the relationship is that between that work (which I take as meaning the theatre event) and a distinct, swimming subject (the spectator). In White’s analysis, Machon’s theory entails that the subject that makes sense of its experience is constituted by those bodily senses, rather than distinct from them. Fear, is then an instance of immersive performance that addresses itself to the bodies of the spectators, including myself. It achieves this by (dis)locating in the performance space, in proximity with the performers and affording the spectators opportunity to move and interact.

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45 Coorlawala in Kattwinkel ed.(2003), p.38
46 Machon (2009)
In addition, the acknowledgement of a discursive space between the spectator and the theatre performance involves rethinking the role of the spectator and the bases of theatrical communication. Theatrical communication as one-way street with meaning being transmitted from the producers (author/director) to the spectators has been seriously challenged as an idea. The idea of the perceptual encounter challenges Cartesian dichotomies as well as the separation of performing and viewing spaces. Descartes’ thinking subject is transformed into the perceiving subject. The focus shifts from the making of meaning to the experience of the encounter. In the context of this bundling, subjectivity emerges, not as a “unified rational consciousness but as something which is discursively produced, encompassing unconscious and subconscious dimensions of the self and implying contradictions, process and change.”

In chapter 3, I look at subjectivity and the spectator in greater detail.

Within semiotics there has been a shift from the performance as text to performance as event. Many scholars have attempted to use a combination of approaches to analyse theatre performance as event. Ric Knowles, Fischer-Lichte and Susan Bennett have provided models to study theatre or performance as event. These models in their spatial descriptions map out the processes that underlie the context of the performance event. The pictorial depiction of these models- the concentric model of Bennett with the inner and outer frame, Ric Knowles triadic model and Postlewait’s quadrangular model shows that the event assumes diverse shapes in our mind. These shapes help

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48 Anuradha Kapur refers to the nature of subjectivity in the context of Umrao, a play directed by Anuradha Kapur, based on a translation of nineteenth century Urdu novel by Geetanjali Shree, which was a first person narrative of a famous tawaif, a courtesan, of Lucknow, Dalmia in Bhatia(2009),p.207.
to visualise the flow of processes within the larger context of the event within which theatre performance takes place.

The theatre event which houses this perceptual encounter is a means of articulating my experience of the performance as embedded in the event of which the performance is a part. The structuring of this experience presents difficulties to me as the researcher. The usage of language entails slippages but the structuring of the response in a linear derivative context is also at odds with my actual experience. The watching of *The Blue Mug* and *Fear of Writing* were completely different experiences. I have found it difficult and unproductive to fit my analysis of this perceptual encounter within the contours of any specific model.

The theatre event itself is housed in a specific place. This site moors the event in a material specificity. The site of performance may serve to frame the event as a theatre performance. In urban areas all over the world there are indoor spaces and outdoor venues, purpose-built theatres intended for theatre performances. The site of theatre performance provides the theatrical frame as discussed in the previous chapter. According to Susan Bennett, western audiences cannot understand non-western theatre by the same processes as they would apply to a performance of a Shakespeare play, but in its Western contextualizing (presentation in a building designated as a theatre space, the spatial boundaries of audience/stage, conventions of lighting and so on) it is recognizable as theatre. The spectator’s expectations and the perceptual encounter of the spectator is linked with these physical spaces and the experience of being present in them. The site of theatre performance and the
manner of organisation of the playing space, the spaces earmarked for
performers and spectators are critical choices that affect the spectator’s
experience.

Immersiveness is a way of understanding the texture of the theatre event as
perceived by the spectator. The sound of an overzealous theatre studies
student scribbling 3 seats away, the rambunctious laugh of the person next to
me, the expression of the woman in the hall are not immersive moments in
themselves but they play a part in the way immersiveness arises for me.

When I purchase tickets for a theatre performance I find myself looking at the
seating plan of the theatre space within which the performance will take place.
The shaded boxes represent the seats that I will occupy along with others. The
seating plan, akin to the world map, performs “social space”. The world map
as a representation of the world, according to Kevin Hetherington, “always
beckons us to locate ourselves in this Cartesian depiction of space.”49 The
map, as an ordering and classifying device, performs social space as territory
through ideas of boundary and reason. The seating plan for a performance
space is an attempt to replicate this endeavour. Fear of Writing frustrates this
by not demarcating spaces for performance and spectators and pushes the
borders of its designated identity as theatre.

In my title I have used “enclosed place” to allude to the performance space as
well as the layers of spaces - real, imagined or fictional- where the encounter
between performers and spectators occurs. The experience of accessibility and
removal in relation to these spaces is part of the whole theatre experience.

The processes of memory and perception are intimately intertwined. Sayre’s analogy of the waxen board of Freud’s Mystic Writing pad with the workings of the psychic mind (that I refer to in Chapter 1) is a useful one to understand the manner in which perception supplements perception. This is evident from two processes that I have attempted here. The first involves the process of remembering performance. Performances can be recalled involuntarily when we watch others or reflect about them, or this recollection may be initiated by oneself as the one attempted here. In my experience, the recall of a singular performance has proved to be an impossible task. Inevitably the memory of a performance links with the watching of others. As is clear in my analysis in Chapter 4, Dinner With Friends(2012) emerges alongside The Blue Mug(2010), and Fear of Writing(2011) brings up The Cook(2003) and Cooling Off Day(2011). In other words my experience of performance lies in its intertextualities I cannot ascribe any pattern or logic to these linkages. Against my initial impulse I refrain from using “chain” of recall to describe these linkages. The second aspect of this recall involves the structure of this process. Each time this recall is initiated a different pathway emerges. The various pathways assume a web like form, as opposed to a linear chain-like tracing.

The “ghosting” of performance, where the experience of another performance looms in our memory and in our experience of it is a term introduced by Marvin Carlson. In The Haunted Stage: The Theatre as Memory Machine. He proposes that “The present experience is always ghosted by previous
experiences and associations while these ghosts are simultaneously shifted and modified by the process of recycling recollection”.

In my memories of plays watched, small details surface in the days and months following the performance- the people I went with, the seat in the hall, the conversations before and after. Theatre events are revived by other events, theatrical and otherwise. This intertextuality of theatre performance weaves through memory like subjectivity itself making new connections from time to time.

The collage structure and the form of chapter 4 mirrors these linkages and connections. These linkages and connections between memory and perception, and memory and subjectivity play a critical role, in my view, in the layering of proximity and distance which form part of the perceptual encounter. The perceptual encounter embraces the intertextuality of theatre performance.

**Expanding Performance – old and new practices**

The performative turn, viewed as a return to theatricality, placed the emphasis on liveness and presence. Peggy Phelan’s idea of distinguishing performance on the basis of its unrepeatability invested performance with its own ontology. As is pointed out by Philip Auslander, this emphasis on liveness arises in the context of mediatisation.\(^{50}\)

Theatre performance that served to challenge the idea of art as object has now itself come to be challenged by contemporary performance art practice.

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\(^{50}\) Philip, Auslander. Liveness: Performance in a Mediatized Culture, London: Routledge, 2008, 2\(^{nd}\) edn. p.5
According to Bonnie Marranca, contemporary art practices and experimental art have blurred the borders delineating art, culture, and commerce, art and entertainment and experimental art and popular culture.\textsuperscript{51} The separation between visual art practices and theatrical arts, Marranca argues, is no longer as pronounced. Robert Wilson, Richard Foreman, and Mabou Mines are, says Marranca, the first group of American contemporary theatre artists whose work so openly demonstrates the commingling of the visual arts, dance, and theatre worlds creating theatre performance that is not based on conventional drama and dialogue. In Singapore, The Finger Players \textit{0501}(2007) and Ong Keng Sen’s \textit{Fear of Writing} (2011) are instances of productions where the boundaries are being challenged.

Not only does this cause a redrawing of borders in the domain of performing arts, this blurring of borders brings together “performance, video, dance and sound as part of a larger view of visual culture and spectatorship.”\textsuperscript{52} The expansive domain that “performance” inhabits causes difficulties, says Marranca, because academic discourse does not differentiate between performance as an ontology and performance as gestural attitude, or performance in social space and performance on stage.\textsuperscript{53} According to Shannon Jackson, performance research needs to negotiate the “discursive complexity” of \textit{performance} and the interdisciplinary encounter through multiple genealogies as its constitutive condition.”\textsuperscript{54} (Emphasis supplied)

\textsuperscript{51} Marranca, Bonnie.\textit{Performance Histories}. New York: PAJ Publications, 2008 p.3
\textsuperscript{52} Marranca(2008) p.3
\textsuperscript{53} Marranca (2008)p.13
\textsuperscript{54} Jackson (2004) Professing Performance, p.12
The cultural turn in the 1980s also contributed to this redrawing of what is encompassed by performance. Strands of ideas from the writings of Milton Singer, in the 1960s, “first re-purposed the term ‘cultural performance’ in order to include (alongside plays, concerts and lectures) also prayers, ritual readings and recitations, rites and ceremonies, festivals, and all other things we usually classify under religion and ritual rather than with the cultural and artistic.”\(^{55}\) In this expanded understanding, it is possible to regard all human activity that embodies an element of the performative as performance. Temple rituals, street pageants, parades and street performers on one hand and virtual reality, installation and performance art are all encapsulated in the expanded notion of performance. The inclusion of cultural performance into the notion of performance meant that non-western forms of performance could become subjects of study and analysis within the broad spectrum of performance.\(^{56}\) In the post-modern context which I explore in more detail in chapter 3, Nicholas Abercrombie and Brian Longhurst introduce the idea of the *diffused audience* where performance can be thought of as “constitutive of daily life.”(emphasis supplied).

In an article by Erin B. Mee titled “But is it Theatre?” the issue is whether “culture performance” can be thought of as “theatre”.\(^{57}\) In the present context the question that arises seems to be “But what kind of theatre is it? Theatre has been termed non-traditional theatre, post-dramatic theatre, immersive theatre and visceral theatre. These newer practices have challenged theatre

\(^{55}\) Ibid,p.69

\(^{56}\) Richard Shechner introduced the idea of the broad spectrum approach to performance in the 1980s.

practice and convention in past few decades. In the western context, theatre history offers a window into the changing practices and conventions. The writings and work of Meyerhold, Artaud and Marinetti find frequent reference in writings of scholars documenting these changes.

A theatrical performance, whatever its genre, writes Gay McAuley, is a physical event occupying a certain duration. These newer practices actively address space and time and our experience of it. As a perceptual encounter, contemporary performance challenges our deeply held conventional notions of time and space.

Hans-Theis Lehmann describes post dramatic theatre as

not simply a new kind of text of staging-and even less a new type of theatre text, but rather a type of sign usage in the theatre that turns both of these levels of theatre upside down through the structurally changed quality of the performance text: it becomes more presence than representation, more shared than communicated experience, more process than product, more manifestation than signification, more energetic impulse than information.

In Machon’s use, the term “visceral” denotes “those perceptual experiences that affects a very particular type of response where the innermost, often inexpressible, emotionally sentient feelings a human is capable of are actuated.” By challenging theatrical conventions and structure through inversion and re-arrangement these newer practices open up new ways of

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58 McAuley (1999) p.126
60 Machon (2009) p.197
perception. By using the term post-dramatic theatre as an umbrella term for all these new practices I do not intend to signal anything other than their relative newness and their common challenge to theatre convention. Fear, an instance of what may be described in my view as post-dramatic theatre, disrupts the facing front model established by the proscenium style theatres.

In Fear was no specific designated space for spectators other than the two halls. The first hall functioned as a waiting space but was also the site for the first act. The second hall was the space where the latter two acts were performed. No designated seats for spectators. A circular two-step structure in the centre was used by some spectators as a seating space. A spectator could choose to sit or stand in any part of the second hall. In providing this autonomy to the spectator, the performance vests the spectator with the choice of what s/he wants to see or hear and from where. The performance, which is a play in three acts (a convincingly conventional structure), challenges our assumptions by the multiple spaces within which it occurs and the multiple spaces that each spectator inhabits during its occurrence. Space becomes fluid and unbounded in the experience of the spectator which affects perception of the event.

One of the tactics that post dramatic performance employs in its play of time is to slow things down. This slowing down, Heathfield writes, de-links the demand for instantaneous relationship between art and meaning, intention and realisation, desire and fulfilment that characterises contemporary culture.61 The “mood of terror and fear may be achieved through rhythms and pauses, so

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that it is the sense of absence, of halting, of hesitation or holding back that creates the affect of fear”. By distorting this frame Fear plunges the audience into a world where the familiarity of the theatrical frame is taken away. It also employs strategies to heighten hesitation thus altering the sense of time.

When does a performance begin and end? In Fear of Writing, the performance may be said to have begun with the actors addressing the audience in the hall outside where the audience gathered or if one assumes a conventional approach, when the ushers opened the doors into the larger hall where the enactment took place. It might be that the moment when the stamp was affixed on the back of my hand at the door. Similarly at which point did the performance end? For some spectators the point of interruption by MDA officials signalled the end of the show. But a few minutes later this act of interruption was established as a fiction and followed by actors coming together to take a bow – the curtain call. Was this the end?

A theatre performance works through the juxtaposition of absence and presence, presentation and representation, fiction and reality. The spectator’s engagement with theatre performance, as illustrated above reveals a tension between immersion and distance, and perceptual processes and theatre conventions. Artistic choices and the spectator’s interpretations may exacerbate these tensions or allow them to be resolved too easily. It is these tensions that play into the dynamism of the theatre event.
The Theatre Event

As we have seen in the previous section, theatre performance is associated with a structure, a clear beginning and end. The beginning of a theatre performance marks the unfolding of fictional time and space. This serves to create, what is called, the world of the play. Theatre conventions have evolved differently in various cultural contexts to mark this beginning. In India and Singapore, theatre performances begin with an announcement over a microphone. This announcement usually includes the name of the play, the author and the sponsor as well as a reminder that audiences should switch off all electronic devices. In off Broadway theatres in New York performances usually begin without an announcement but audiences quieten with the dimming of lights. Sometimes in the smaller intimate off-off Broadway shows the director stands before the audience and thanks them for coming while reminding them to switch off cell phones. No microphones were used in the theatre performances that I watched in New York emphasising the aspect of “liveness” in the theatre. As this exchange indicates, performance conventions arise from specific cultural contexts and also function to temper audience expectations.

The dimming of lights and the announcement, gesture to the spectator the beginning of the unfolding of the fictional time and space: the start of the theatre performance. But for the spectator much happens before the announcement and the dimming of the lights. The encounter that takes place within the enclosed space is linked to what transpires just outside of it. In the phrase theat re event, the term “theatre” which focuses on the act itself – the
elements situated at the core of the performance, is juxtaposed with “event” which shifts attention from the theatre performance to different elements that are constitutive of the theatre event. This marks the movement of the spectator from the periphery to the centre of the theatrical event as a subject of analysis. The spectator builds her/his reality with what is perceived by way of images, sound and text, not all of which are supplied by the performance.

The seating plan is the first image of the collectivity that is the audience. But the actual presence of audience as a group of spectators reinforces event-ness. Venues where theatre events are held have specific spaces where audiences gather. This is also a space where the spectator registers the presence of other spectators. Where the gathering is of diaspora, the manner of dress, the heightened anticipation and excitement registers a performance that can be said to have begun in the waiting spaces. In my watching of The Blue Mug(2010) the experience of the post-show discussion feels like an extension of the performance itself.

The way in which the theatre event is embedded in my memory is related to my experience of the event as a whole. While post-dramatic theatre clearly defies containment in its structural choices, in my experience this is also true for conventional theatre performances. The immersive moments arise in the context of the event for me rather than within the bounds of theatre performance. In the spectator’s experience of theatre performance and in its reconstruction the perceptual encounter arises in the context of the theatre event. Immersiveness implies being affected on perceptual, sensory,
psychological and emotional levels. The theatre event is not the container within which the spectator is immersed. As White says, “if the performance does not just surround us but occurs within us then we are part of it, and it ultimately becomes part of us at the moment of performance.” If we are part of this reality then the piecing together of the theatre event through memory, like event itself, defies structure and pre-configuration.

In this chapter I have looked the expansiveness of theatre performance, the relationship between the what (including newer theatre practices) and where (the relationship of theatre performance to the site including space and place). I have also examined in some detail how historical and cultural factors impact the construction of the theatre event and its analysis. In the next chapter I continue to look at these issues focussing on the who and the with whom as I scrutinise my experience of theatre performance as a culturally positioned spectator within the broader context of mediatisation. The perceptual encounter, in my view, rests on the manner in which these factors interact with each other.

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63 White (2010) p.228
Chapter 3

The Spectator and the Audience

Theatrical communication is a three-way process involving the play, the spectator and the audience.\textsuperscript{64} The term ‘spectator’ presupposes the existence of a spectacle and emphasises the viewing dimension. Similar to the Greek word \textit{theatron}, it provides weight to the “seeing”. On the other hand, the word \textit{audience} has roots in the Latin word \textit{audire} with importance given to “hearing”\textsuperscript{65} as the dominant sense in the theatre experience. Undoubtedly both the senses of looking and hearing come into play in the theatre. The idea of the perceptual encounter extends the experience of these senses to include others while challenging the Cartesian dichotomy of the separation of mind and body. For my purposes I use the term \textit{spectator} for an individual member and \textit{audience} to represent the group of spectators. Although, the spectator is a member of the audience and therefore a part of the collectivity, the three-way communication recognises the separateness of these entities in the context of theatre performance.

For Alice Rayner, the audience “may be thought of as occupying the pronominal modes of I, you, it, we, they.” The idea of audience presupposes a gathering, an assembly of individuals who together make up the “unified subject” of the theatre audience. This unified subject is then associated with the idea of a community or a “collective consciousness”. It is possible to view the spectator as submerged in this unified subject: the mass of the audience.

\textsuperscript{64} I offer a slight modification of Bernard Beckerman’s identification of “a three-way communication: between the play, the individual and collective audience,” as quoted by Bennett (1997) p.8.

\textsuperscript{65} Helen Freshwater, \textit{Theatre and Audience}, Palgrave Macmillan, 2009, p.5
The idea of community as representing a homogenous entity has come under significant attack over the late 19th century. The reference to the singular unified subject conceals the differences that make each member unique not only by classifications of race, nation, class or gender, familial, social, educational, linguistic and experiential histories but also by the particular position (literally and figuratively where one sits) in the configuration of the event. As a result it is no longer conceivable to think of the audience as a unified subject. The opening up and widening of the discursive space between the art object and the beholder as mentioned in chapter 1 is also an acknowledgement of the individual response as separate and autonomous. In the era of supermodernity and the disintegration of the unified subject, it is possible to think of the spectator and dismiss the audience, except as a symbolic reference. Pervasive media technologies predispose the spectator to the individual rather than collective experience. In addition, the notion of the splintered of fragmented spectator, marking the complexity of the spectator her/himself has also gained acceptability.

It is crucial to acknowledge the collective presence of the audience as a gathering, as an assembly of persons gathered together for the common purpose of watching a theatre performance. ‘The play projects doubly’, Beckerman reminds us, ‘to each member of the audience as an individual…and to the audience as a whole, in that distinctive configuration that it has assumed for a particular occasion’. This distinctive configuration

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66 Rayner (1993) p.3
67 Ibid.
68 As quoted in Bennett (1997) p.8
or composition of the audience varies from one theatre performance to another and from night to night.

The audiences for Blue and Fear were distinct on the face of it. I have categorised the audience for Blue as a diasporic audience because I saw them as a group of people who spoke the same language, dressed similarly and looked ‘Indian’. But within this apparently homogenous group were people from different generations, Singaporeans and foreigners, travellers and residents. On the opening night of Fear the gathering was a theatre going audience of practitioners, public intellectuals and academics- arguably a competent audience. My perception of the audience and the composition of this collective entity was linked to the manner in which moments of immersiveness arose before, during and after the performance.

When does the audience come into being? The problems of delimiting theatre performance are obvious in attempting an answer to this question. Does the congruent relationship between the performance and audience also translate into a congruent existence temporally? The gathering takes place in the moments before the show begins. Spectators gather in spaces outside the theatre – an adjacent bar, a hall, a stairway or a foyer. In performances which follow the rules, the dimming of house lights is a sign that the performance has begun. The audience responds by hushing itself into gradual silence – is the audience constituted through this clear sign? Blue was staged in the Esplanade Theatre Studio in Singapore, a black box theatre affording some flexibility for audience configuration. Before the house was declared open spectators gathered in the space outside in the long corridor, on the stairs or a ramp.
leading to the rooftop garden. When the house opened the spectators entered
the Black box theatre with old Hindi songs playing in the background. I was
instantly drawn into nightly radio programs listened to during my childhood.
Did the audience come into being then? Or is it the announcement that follows
a few minutes later requesting that all mobile devices be switched off. Fear
challenged my assumptions further. Act 1 took place in the waiting hall where
spectators had gathered before the house had officially been opened. It was
the same space where the food and wine were being enjoyed amidst
conversations amongst gathered spectators. There was no announcement of
the show having begun. One of the actors stood up to get the attention of the
crowd and make “an announcement”. This was the start of Act 1 although I
did not know it then. After Act 1 was over the house was opened and the
audience was allowed to enter another space, a large hall, where Acts 2 and 3
took place. Though Blue and Fear involved divergent choices, the clear signs
that marked the moment of beginning and ending (deliberately obscured in
Fear) did not serve to contain my sense of spectatorship or audienceship
within the contours of theatre performance.

The relationship between a theatre performance and the audience is a
symbiotic one. There have been many articulations which point to the
indispensability of spectator in context of theatre performance. Meyerhold
approached every play on the assumption that it was unfinished until it
appeared on stage, which is when the “crucial revision” was made by the
spectator, as a co-creator.69 Meyerhold’s idea of the spectator as the “fourth

69 Bennet (1997) p.7
creator"\(^{70}\) was an early acknowledgment of the role that spectators played in the theatre. More recently, Susan Bennett has written that the presence of the audience actualises the performance.\(^{71}\) As a ‘maker’ of the performance the role of the spectator is distinguished from that of the bystander, observer or witness. The production of theatre performance anticipates reception. Though it is the corporeal presence of the audience at the particular time that provides it with the power to perform its role and function in the context of theatre performance, however, audiences and spectators assume importance even when they are not physically present. Susan Bennett observes that “the interactive nature of theatre is particularly evident from the rewriting a playwright often chooses (or is called) to do while a play is in rehearsal and from the cuts or changes a director makes after previews, try-outs or indeed during a run.”\(^{72}\) Patrice Pavis derives the idea of an “implied spectator” from Wolfgang Iser’s concept of the “implied reader”.\(^{73}\) The concept of ‘implied reader”, according to Iser ‘offers a means of describing a process whereby textual structures are transmuted through ideational activities into personal experiences’.\(^{74}\) We see and hear audiences materially when they enter through the doors in the theatre. As an “implied” presence they are critical to the making of any new work.

Despite their vital role, historically spectators and audiences have not been viewed positively by theorists or theatre artists. The spectator is the beholder of the spectacle and the idea of the spectacle as base, inferior and hollow is a

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\(^{70}\) McAuley (1999)p.238
\(^{71}\) Bennett(1997).
\(^{72}\) Susan Bennett, p.19
\(^{73}\) Balme (2008), p. 39
\(^{74}\) Bennett(1997) p. 43
long standing one. As Kennedy points out, Aristotle called spectacle (opsis) ‘the least artistic element of tragedy’ and the bias continues in the English language. Written in the 1960s, Guy Debord’s *Society of the Spectacle* reinforced the presumptions that paint the spectator in a morally inferior light. Jacques Ranciere identifies two reasons why being a spectator is a bad thing—first, viewing is the opposite of knowing, and second, viewing is the opposite of acting. The audience is what an audience does—a distant view of the spectators shows the audience as a fixed block watching and listening to “acts by bodies in motion”. It is the spectacle of passivity that unleashes the whole bundle of “prejudices” and “polemic” that shapes our attitudes toward the audience.

The prejudice against audiences has its roots against the polemic against the commercial and the “bourgeois theatre of illusion and escapism”. When Meyerhold broke the traditional barrier of the proscenium, he encouraged audiences to give up their passive role. The action in his closing act of *Mystery-Bouffe* spilled into the boxes adjacent to the stage and at the end of the performance audiences were invited to mingle with the actors onstage.

Augusto Boal refers to the bourgeois theatre as the finished theatre. The bourgeoisie, says Boal, already knows what the world is like, their world and is able to present images of this complete, finished world. In doing so, the bourgeoisie, he avers, presents the spectacle. Consequently in Boal’s

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75 Kennedy (2009), p.5
77 Freshwater (2009) p.14
78 Edward Braun (1977) describing the work of Meyerhold as an attack on the commercial theatre. quoted by Bennett (1997), p.6
79 Bennett (1997), p.6
conception the spectator is a bad word. The spectator too, says Boal, must be a subject, an actor or accepted on an equal plane with actors, who must also be spectators. The idea that the spectator is not a receiver of predetermined meanings has found wider acceptance in more recent times. The interpretive function fulfilled by the spectator is an active function that actualises the performance. This role requires that the spectator piece together possible meanings to create the theatre event.

There are commonalities between the spectator and the reader of a book. They both fill in the gaps and blanks to complete the picture. They draw upon their imagination to create as much as relate to what is supplied to them. But this analogy ends where perception begins because readership and spectatorship are qualitatively different experiences. The passive role of readers and spectators was the subject matter of rethinking through the reader response and later reception theory. Historically there have been attempts to extend literary theory and specifically reader-response theory to spectators in the theatre. The idea of the model spectator is developed by Marco De Marini and Paul Dwyer from Umberto Eco’s “Model Reader”. By extending the theoretical context relating to the study of text to the study of performance, the authors seek to reaffirm the link between production and reception, and also to show how performance anticipates a certain type of reception/spectator. This is done through artistic choices that underlie the internal structure of performance and the manner in which it unfolds.

De Marini and Dwyer provide two ways of viewing audiences in relation to the idea of the “dramaturgy of the spectator” in an article bearing the same
name. In the first instance the audience is construed as a “dramaturgical object”. In this sense the audience is seen as passive, as a mark or target for the actions/operations of the director, performers and the writer. The second way is based on the active or subjective sense. This notion acknowledges the various receptive operations carried out by the audience including perception, interpretation, aesthetic appreciation, memorization, emotive and intellectual response, etc. The “active cooperation” of the spectator, which is the other side of the theatrical relationship, is based on the role of the spectator as an autonomous “maker of meanings”. This extends beyond the idea of the spectator being the “metaphorical coproducer of the performance”. It is through the fulfilment of this role by the spectator that the cognitive and emotive effects of the performance can be actualised. As the authors clarify, such a delineation of the two “dramaturgies of the spectator” is only possible in theory. In actuality they are closely linked and form “the two sides of the same coin”.

This prejudice against the spectator is not reflected in the Natyasastra. Therein the rasika is, according to Coorlawala, a discerning spectator. The responsibility of evoking the rasa lies on the performer and the rasika. As Coorlawala elucidates, the performer’s role is to represent the prescribed emotional moods or bhava with sustained clear focus. The rasika apprehends sattva or the “luminous communicative energy (presence serves as a partial synonym)” that emanates from the performer’s body along with the

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82 Ibid.
83 Ibid.
appropriate bhava.\textsuperscript{84} Rasa is evoked in this interaction between the performer and the spectator and experienced by both. The concept of rasa and its importance in relation to the theatre performance places both the performer and the spectator on an equal footing. However, the Natyasastra makes limited reference to the collectivity which is the audience thus focussing only on the two-way communication.

“An audience without a history”, argues Hebert Blau “is not an audience.”\textsuperscript{85} The processes by which we have become the spectatorial selves we are linked to specific historical and cultural processes that shape identity. In the context of myself as spectator and the particular audience for \textit{Blue}, I look at the culturally positioned spectator in the next section. The cultural positioning of the spectator and the apparently homogenous nature of the diasporic audience are important factors affect the perceptive processes I aim to analyse.

**The Culturally Positioned Spectator**

The idea of cultural performance has caused me to rediscover my experiences of events that I do not conceive as theatre but embody theatricality. Among these are Hindu religious rites, rituals and festivals that arise in the context of my religious identity in each of the geographical contexts. The reference to cultural performance raises many diverse images in my mind. Among them the painted face of Hanuman in the \textit{Ramlila}, the ten-headed Ravana engulfed in flames at Dussehra, the black flowing robe of a Spiderwoman on rollerblades at a Halloween parade, the crooning Getai performer, and the

\textsuperscript{84} Coorlawala in Kattwinkel (1993) p.38
swirling skirts of the Garbha dancer. At each of these occasions, I have assumed the various roles of participant/observer/bystander/witness/spectator. Cultural performances are ways of marking the relationship of the body to the cultural and social moorings of a specific place. They are ways of making and remaking social identity within the cultural frame. The frame of the event of cultural performance enables me to mark my presence within its contours.

As I have stated in Chapter 1, my ideas of what constitutes theatre were formed by my experience of watching and reading of plays. As I have mentioned earlier, studying in English medium schools, the reading of plays in English was the first introduction to dramatic structure and form. Hindi plays which I read and watched later conformed to the structure of plays in the English language. The watching of staged plays in Indian cities concretised my conception of theatre as script driven performance. According to Erin B. Mee, the introduction of the proscenium stage in India, attributed to the British, coincided with the conceptualisation of theatre as dramatic literature.\(^86\) Despite the adage that plays were written to be performed not read, as dramatic literature they were stand-alone products that did not depend on performance. The widespread teaching of Shakespeare in newly established colleges and the associated number of productions, translations, and adaptations of his play, Mee notes, “valorised playwright initiated, text based, plot driven productions that followed a highly constructed five or three act structure”.\(^87\) The Ramlila performances did not (at the time when I watched them and in years that followed) in my mind, qualify as theatre. These local

\(^86\) Mee (2010) p. 99  
\(^87\) Mee (2010) p.99
offerings were part of larger events—festivals, rituals and religious events, processions and carnivals. The *Ramlila* performances took place annually during the month of October or November, in the weeks preceding Diwali. Bazaars were set up for the sale of clothes, fire crackers, toys and sweets along with a makeshift stage for the staging of the *Ramlila*. These events were open to all. It was an opportunity for women to dress up, men to get home early from work and for children to gather around the performance space, occupying the choice seats on the cloth covered floor. I did not associate the *Ramlila* performances that I watched annually with theatre despite the makeshift stage, the bright costumes and the representation of a well-known story based on the Ramayan. The space of the street, the fluidity of the audience and the absence of tickets worked against theatrical conventions that these performances adopted.

All theatrical performances have a specific relationship with time and place. For the spectator, the value of cultural performance arises in its relationship with the real world of the spectator. The world of my childhood is characterised by the placelessness \(^{88}\) that associates with army cantonments in India. The stability and relative safety of this environment arose from an alignment with modernity and national identity as supreme values. For my parent’s generation, the 1947 partition had partially broken the ties to a cultural past and identity. The colonial context of the new cultural space placed value on the theatre of the colonial masters. Modern Indian theatre took root in this construction of theatre as dramatic literature. As a

\(^{88}\) I refer to placenessness in the same sense as Tim Cresswell as a dilution of authentic relations to the particularity of place. Verstraete & Cresswell eds. (2003) p.14
consequence, performance based traditions were relegated to the inferior status of native cultural practices. The value I attached to ‘theatre’ was higher than that which I attached to these cultural performances. The cultural performances were ever present, within my home and outside of it, with me at the centre or at the fringes, immersed or distant. However, despite their insistent presence, for a long time cultural performances remained neglected in my mind and in constructions of theatre history of India.

The distinctions between theatre and cultural performance in the Indian context arise in the context of the colonial encounter. Shannon Jackson’s observation that the history of the discipline of performance studies changes depending on where one chooses to begin is also true in the Indian context. There has been a flurry of writings in the past decade on theatre and performance in the Indian context. Among them are Nandi Bhatia’s edited collection *Modern Indian Theatre*, Sudipto Chatterjee’s *The Colonial Staged* and Vasudha Dalmia’s *Poetics, Plays and Performances*. Beginning from 1827 Rakesh H. Solomon has provided a detailed analysis in his essay titled, “Towards a Genealogy of Indian Theatre Historiography” in Nandi Bhatia’s book. Although I have looked at developments in the post-Independence context for the purposes of this study, an understanding of the historical and cultural context in the preceding period is critical to any analysis of the Indian theatre practice. Vasudha Dalmia’s book is also useful in setting this out chronologically.

One of, what Solomon calls, “the bewildering paradoxes” I have encountered as I unpack my assumptions about theatre in India has been regarding the role
of the Natyasastra.\textsuperscript{89} This ancient text offers to the theatre scholar “copious data about every conceivable theoretical and practical aspect of theatre: acting and dance, music and prosody, shapes and sizes of playhouses, organization and management of theatre companies, costuming and make-up, properties and stage decorations, theories of emotions and sentiments, types and rules for dramatic composition, and even requirements for critics and audiences.”\textsuperscript{90} The rasa theory that is of interest to me as a researcher resonates partially with moments of rasa that I have experienced as an actor and spectator the context of theatre performance. But in the absence of actual theatre performance practices that follow the strict rules of the Natyasastra, my experience of rasa is not linked to the structure and form of theatre performance.

\textit{The Blue Mug} is modern theatre for the modern Indian. The Company Theatre is Mumbai based group of theatre makers, not unlike me, seeking to create meaningful theatre in India for urban Indians. A hugely successful production \textit{Blue} follows theatre conventions and has been widely staged in India and elsewhere. I encounter the modern Indian theatre as the modern Indian. It is important to trace the historical developments that led to the making of the modern theatre in India to understand the context from which \textit{Blue} arises and my experience of it. In the post-independence era, the notion that modern westernized theatre was an alien imposition gave rise to the theatre of roots,\textsuperscript{91} and the return to performance based theatre was a conscious effort initiated by theatre artists. The rejection of western paradigms predictably coincided with the idea of the embracing of ‘traditional’ practices. Therefore the shift from

\textsuperscript{89} Rakesh Solomon in Nandi Bhatia ed.(2009) p.4
\textsuperscript{90} Ibid
\textsuperscript{91} Ibid.
text to performance in the Indian context took place in the rejection of what was perceived as “western” or “colonial” theatre and an embracing of the cultural performance traditions. A performance based theatre, according to Mee, emphasizes the ways in which we communicate “through images, fragments of music or sound, and the kinaesthetic interaction between bodies acknowledging that these modes of experience exist outside language and are cognitively different from language-based exchanges and experiences”. This idea broadly resonates with the performance and cultural turn in 80s America. A performance based understanding, she asserts, also allows for the inclusion of a “wide variety of dramaturgical structures, acknowledging that there are many ways to think about our experiences and that these experiences both reflect and constitute culture”. These elements can be found in thriving Indian performance practices and forms such as Tamasha, Jatra and Kutiyattam, with beginnings in the pre-British period which combine elements of dance, mime, pageantry and music. Amongst the recent theatre performances I have watched, the work of directors Arvind Gaur and Amal Allana stand out as instances of “performance oriented” theatre. Allana’s Begum Barve and Gaur’s Hindi adaptation of Brecht’s The Good Woman of Setzuan titled Ramkali, Good Woman of Delhi were staged in the 1990s on proscenium stages but my experience of watching them was perceptually different from what I had watched before. Through unconventional uses of space and the deployment of multiple acting bodies on stage, Gaur’s play succeeded in obliterating the divide in stage and audience space. Allana’s use

92 Mee, p.100
93 Ibid.p.101
94 Erin B. Mee.” But Is It Theater? The Impact of Colonial Culture on Theatrical History in India”, in Henry Bial & Scott Magelssen Eds. (2010), p.103
of song and rich visual imagery emerged as strong elements alongside text in *Begum Barve*.

In my view, the resurrection of the “performance driven theatre” and the simultaneous creation of a national theatre voice was an ambitious endeavour. Amongst its objectives, I view the post-independence theatre as visualising a reclaiming of culture, re-writing of history and changing indigenous tastes. Given the diversity of regional practices and languages this was a tall order. The choice of Hindi as the national language, argues Vasudha Dalmia, had definite implications for the creation of a national theatre voice.\(^95\) The emergence of the playwright, a waning figure in the West, played a central role in the creation of the Indian national theatre voice. Modern theatre that took root and thrived in the 1960’s and 70s is attributed the “Big Four”, a group of playwrights who attempted to link past and present, rural and urban to address contemporary issues of the time.\(^96\) These four playwrights, according to Dalmia, were Mohan Rakesh, Badal Sircar (*Bengali*), Girish Karnad (*Kannada*), and Vijay Tendulkar (*Marathi*). The plays written by these playwrights acquired canonical status because they were published and translated into Hindi and thereafter into other regional languages. The subject matter of the plays was Indian but they remained true to the form of their western counterparts. Girish Karnad acknowledges the “absence of a dramatic structure in my own tradition to which I could relate myself” and the many experiments and influences of Greek tragic playwrights, Jean Anouilh, Jean-

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\(^96\) *Ibid*. p.5
Paul Sartre and Eugene O’Neill in the evolution of a style which was suited for his mythical content.97

The challenge to the creation of a national theatre voice in post-Independence India was the existence of a “peculiar multilingual situation” as is described by Uma Shankar Joshi.98 If the “concept of Indian Literature is an aggregate of all writing in all our languages,” the creation of the Hindi Theatre as a national theatre was itself quite problematic. The modern Indian theatre in the ultimate analysis, argues Lakshmi Subramanyam, was based very much on the literary text in Hindi or any of the regional languages.99 In recent times the work of directors Amal Allana and Ratan Thiyam has received attention and visibility. In their work, Kirti Jain writes that a different language of theatre is in the making,100 and this new direction may be towards a ‘performance oriented’ theatre.

In my view, despite the aspirations for a performance oriented tradition for theatre in India, language has dominated the relationship between theatre and the spectator. I have watched theatre in two languages in India – English and Hindi. Both these languages present problems in the context of post-Independence India. The English language theatre in India did not evolve in the way theatre in English has evolved in Singapore. In my experience of theatre watched in the Indian cities of Delhi, Bengaluru and Mumbai, the English language theatre in India continues to be a text driven theatre. Theatre

99 Ibid.
100 Kirti Jain. “In Search of a Narrative: Women Theatre Directors of the Northern Belt”, in Lakshmi Subramanyam (2002), p.15
performances such as *Blue* attempt some experimentation in form but adhere to conventions for most part. In urban cities, plays in the English language, usually adaptations of classical or newer literary works such as *Dinner With Friends (2012)* bring the experience of the usual text driven theatre to spectators. In the absence of newer spaces, the old theatres continue to serve as venues for new productions with large seating spaces effectively thwarting any attempts at an experimental theatre. The dwindling spaces for cultural performances like the *Ramlila* and their institutionalisation within the cultural quarters have resulted in fewer performances in the open spaces. In the absence of a community and the draw of the televised *Ramlila*, these performances no longer hold sway.

In retrospect, the creation of a national theatre in Hindi and the regional theatres with the incorporation of local practices has largely served a middle class audience. It is not surprising therefore that the character of Indian theatre remains largely unchanged. My encounter with the modern Indian theatre in the 1980s and 1990s is not the experience of a performance oriented theatre but a new hybridised theatre which seems to have recreated itself in the mould of the colonial artifice it sought to reject.

In the 21\textsuperscript{st} Century, with new accretions of geo-political status, Indian audiences are now being schooled to appreciate ‘traditional’ conventions. My interaction with Indian classical musicians resonates with a recent conversation with a friend and a spectator attending the *Antarang (2012)* program in Pune. Indicating approval and surprise at the efforts of acclaimed santoor player, Pandit Shiv Kumar Sharma, she said, “He insisted that the
audience close their eyes and concentrate on the music. Claps are not expected in shastriya sangeet because they break the vibration which impact our enjoyment of the music.” As this exchange indicates, audiences in India are now unlearning some of the old conventions to constitute another congregation. The desire to resurrect Natyasastra’s “classical audience” has received new impetus.

**The Spectator’s Experience**

The function that spectators perform in the theatre is closely aligned to the spectator’s experience and engagement in the theatre. The paperback version of the book by Nicholas Abercrombie and Brian Longhurst, *Audiences: A Sociological Theory of Performance and Imagination* has a magnified eye on the cover.¹⁰¹ The singular eye, in my view, symbolises the spectator. The fact that it is an eye as opposed to a pair of eyes, which is likely to be construed as belonging to a specific individual, the image of the eye seems to further the notion of a view that is always partial, like the view through a peephole. This sensibility, of the partial or restricted view, of half-truth, of partial reality and the interplay of subjectivity is at the heart of the way in which we construe the spectator in the current context.

Historically the relationship between what is viewed by the eye and how this translates into meaning has been the subject of enquiry in many cultures. The Bhagwad Gita’s prescription for the attainment of Dhyana includes the shutting out of the senses and fixing the gaze with the eyes closed in the space between the eyebrows. The word Dhyana may be partially understood as

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focus or the focusing of attention. Traditional Hindu practices describe Dhyana as meditative practice involving the focusing of the mind to achieve a state of pure consciousness. Various techniques for attempting Dhyana involving the closing of eyes and the fixing of the gaze indicate the obstructive function of sight in being able to grasp real meaning. The visual world that the eye pulls in is one part of the reining in. The other element is the curtailment of imagination which is sought to be achieved by focussing the minds attention to a narrow space of the forehead to eliminate all other imaginings. This reiterates the idea that the eye is an impediment to achieving higher consciousness.

The concept of apperception is useful in understanding the relationship between viewing and perception or the sense of being in the world. To understand the relationship between the eye and perception, Claude Gandelman\textsuperscript{102} begins with analysing the dichotomy between the haptic and the optic eye based on the work of Berkeley and Riegl. The optical eye corresponds to a certain way of looking which is based on scanning of objects according to their outlines. The haptic or tactile eye, on the other hand, focuses on surfaces, is penetrative and finds pleasure in textile or grain. It emphasises the value of the superficies of objects. The concept of apperception derives from the interplay of this dual axis of these two types of vision. These concepts attributed to Berkeley were extended by Riegl to art analysis, notes Gandelman. The idea of apperception allows Riegl to demonstrate that it is only through transference of the sense of touch to the eye.

that one is able to locate and identify things and evaluate one’s position in relation to them. For Berkeley, argues Gandelman, it is this transference that gives the term ‘vision’ its performative meaning – that is the sense of seeing as a potentiality of acting over the objects that surround us. ¹⁰³ This dual sense of “vision” has been the subject of much interest in the theatre and in many stories and legends. Tiresias and Oedipus in Greek theatre and Gandhari in the Mahabharata are characters who are blind (Gandhari blindfolds herself and gives up the power to see) and therefore invested with clairvoyance and spirituality. While Gandelman’s exposition of apperception is useful, more recently apperception has been described as the manner in which the body absorbs the sensations, feelings that arise from the interaction and the sense we make of it.

The notion of apperception and the perceptual encounter has implications for the role that subjectivity plays within the space where regarding of a perceived object takes place. This object may be a painting in an art gallery or a performance in a theatre. The visitor to a museum pays an entrance fee while the spectator purchases a ticket for a show. Both enter into a contract and a discursive space, where viewing is an important part of the event. The spectator of a performance views the performance as an aesthetic product. S/he views himself as being separate from ‘it’. This distance is critical for a frame to be established within which the regarding takes place. Temporal and spatial factors play an important role in the manner in which the discursive frame is established and sustained. In both instances, the processes are similar to begin with. As I look at a painting, I become aware of myself within a

¹⁰³ Ibid.
space. Whether this space is a museum or the home of an artist plays a role, as
does the persona of the artist – living or dead, famous or little known. The
audience performs its function of regarding through the processes of
apperception that Gandelman identifies. The performing of this function
requires the placing of the self of the spectator within this discursive space. In
the previous chapter, I have demonstrated that spatial factors play a role in the
manner in which theatre performance is construed. The relationship of theatre
performance to place (or site) as well as the spectator’s sense of place and
space enter into the experience. Place and space, says Auge, are sometimes
constructed in opposition to each other. In the theatre, there is a tension
between the “stability” that the place of theatre offers against the
indeterminacy of ‘spaces’ that performance opens up.

Aside from artistic choices, perceptual processes at work also arise from
theatre conventions, as well by the spectator’s perceived role in relation to the
audience. Blau makes a reference to the audience’s history as a prerequisite
for its existence. I interpret this as the reflexive element that the audience
carries into the performance as event. Kennedy dismisses the idea that the act
of “spectation” implies the presence of reflexivity about the performance. He
doubts that it is essential for watchers to have consciousness about their
watching because that would mean that there is a universal in the sense of
what their watching means. Kennedy attributes the universal to the gathering
itself.

I disagree with Kennedy’s reading of Blau. As I understand it, Blau’s
reference is to the consciousness of the existence of a universal in terms of
what their (the audience’s) watching means is not a universal in the context of meaning. Every spectator makes meanings in the theatre based on a number of disparate attendant factors. In my experience as a spectator and from my exchanges with spectators, verbal and otherwise, I see that each spectator is conscious of making meanings in the theatre and wondering about the meaning other spectators are making of ostensibly the same performance. The physical presence of the spectators within the space results in an active suppression of distance and the experience of proximity. This plays into the relationship of the spectator vis-a-vis the audience. The perceptual processes that are set in motion by the theatre event unleash the individual subjectivities of the spectators which intermingle. The splintered spectator and the variegated audience at moments in the performance become fused into a singular entity, as a kind of seamless amoeba like organism. These moments of seamlessness and others of interruption and rupture play into the layering of distance and removal that is part of the immersive encounter. This continues to happen through the event in a play that it reminiscent of the constantly changing digital images that form on the screen while we listen to music on our computers.

The magic of theatre lies in the gaps and blanks that are part of the performance. Theatre performances evoke multiple and varied responses. Despite being members of an audience, we occupy individual spaces as spectators. We watch our own version of the performance which is constructed by our labour. We watch some things and miss others. We find

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104 I differentiate this from Grehan’s (2009) idea of all proximity being the result of the suppression of distance.
blank spaces and we fill them with images, drawn from our specific cultural
and historical pasts. It is this individual, separate engagement which enables
us to make meaning of what we see, hear and feel that causes us to linger in
our seats, in the foyer or in the restroom a little longer after the show is over.
It is the pricklings\textsuperscript{105} of our engagement through the intertwining of
subjectivities that sweep us into silent, animated or reflective conversations
afterwards long into the night at a nearby coffee shop or bar. When does the
spectator cease to be one?

Subjectivity is a recurring word in the context of the discursive spaces that the
spectator navigates in the context of the theatre event. In her book titled
\textit{Subjectivity}, Ruth Robbins, looks at the evolving notions of subjectivity as
evidenced in the English language dictionary.\textsuperscript{106} The complexity of this word
is evidenced by nearly four pages of definitions and supporting quotation of
this apparently simple word.\textsuperscript{107} Current usage, in Robbins’ analysis, where
“subjective relates to the individual self and objective to the empirically
observable world” is traceable to Rene Descartes, the seventeenth century
French philosopher.\textsuperscript{108}

There is a note that Robbins highlights that strikes me as important in the
assessment of my own subjectivity. Subjectivity itself is subjective. Though
Robbins traces the definitions beginning from 1812, the word’s usage is
identified as modern, dating from 1864.\textsuperscript{109} As she clarifies, subjectivity covers

\textsuperscript{107} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{108} Raymond Williams as quoted by Robbins(2005), p.9
\textsuperscript{109} Ibid. p.8
a multitude of possibilities, but at its heart is the idea that human beings living in normal circumstances – though, as the dictionary suggests, she says, they may also have to be quite modern human beings – possess subjectivity: the consciousness of their own being, their own personality, their own individuality (emphasis re-emphasised). The notion of the modern and the origins of subjectivity in western philosophic traditions cause me to become aware of my own sense of removal from this discourse. On the one hand, I am the modern, the post-colonial subject, and the idea of subjectivity with its multitude of meanings is within my grasp. In equal measure my sense of selfhood, identity and the conscious self are entwined with my awareness of writings of and encounters with the self as a Hindu. These layers of proximity and removal towards the sources of the ideas seem to operate intermittently as I question and articulate my own understanding of subjectivity. The Cartesian mind-body dualism which is at the base of the binaries between objective and subjective is removed from my own belief system and yet it is not so far removed from other epistemological moorings grounded in the reading of English literature at an early age and my later education in legal system based on the British common law. Subjectivity then is itself subjective and hinges on cultural and historical factors.

**The Contemporary Spectator**

Spectatorship is a dynamic and changing, responding as much to convention, as to the intersection with modernity and the encounter with diverse technologies in the current context. An understanding of spectatorship in the contemporary context is incomplete without locating the spectator. The
contemporary spectator emerges, as Heathfield describes, from the ‘contracted spaces of global culture’. These contracted spaces and non-places impact social processes. Auge points out “two distinct but complementary realities of non-places: spaces formed in relation to certain ends (transport, transit, commerce, leisure), and the relations that individuals have with these spaces.” These non-places generate a feeling of what Cresswell calls placelessness, severing the link that individuals have with place (Auge’s anthropological place) but also a familiarity in terms of their homogeneity. The appearance and proliferation of non-places is characteristic of what Auge calls ‘supermodernity’. Being in these non-places alters the individual’s moorings in place and time. Individual consciousness is subjected to entirely new experiences and “ordeals of solitude”. Theatre performance in purpose-built theatres, proscenium stages or black boxes can also be regarded as one of the “contracted spaces” of the global capitalist culture. In addition to sprawling malls, amusement parks and skyscrapers, grand cultural centres have become common in the major cities of the world. These cultural centres serve local communities as well as tourists and business travellers offering diverse artistic fare for consumption. The social processes or the absence thereof that are at work in such theatre spaces also determine the kind of theatre performances that are chosen for staging. In this setting the experience of theatre performance can be indistinguishable from another, but whether it is

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110 Robbins (2005) p.11
111 Auge, p.76
112 Auge, p.76
113 Auge, p.34
114 Auge, p.75
or not depends in my view on the markers listed earlier- who is watching, where and with whom.

Increased mobility and migration are markers of our time, writes Edward Said. Cresswell offers this extract from Said’s writing to elaborate this:

> No one today is purely one thing. Labels like Indian or woman, or Muslim, or American are no more than starting points, which if followed into actual experience for only a moment are quickly left behind […]. No one can deny the persisting continuities of long traditions, sustained habitations, national languages, and cultural geographies, but there seems no reason except fear and prejudice to keep insisting on their separation and distinctiveness […]

Identities that were founded on the notions of place and the borders that constitute them have been ‘profoundly breached’ causing a sense of destabilisation. The opening of national and cultural borders, Heathfield asserts, leads to an encounter with other ways of being and thinking. In this encounter differences may be ‘assimilated, accommodated or aggressively repelled’. Whether these changes work to open up spaces where social processes flow and intersect with each other or not depends, not only on many variables, but also the specific choices that we make as spectators (including the choice to watch or not watch).

In addition, the proliferation of media and internet technologies is a significant factor that shapes the contemporary watching experience. Given the level media infusion in daily life in an urban and developed context, it is possible to

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115 Cresswell (2002), p.16
116 Ibid.
construe performance as being ‘constitutive of everyday life’. 118 Longhurst and Abercrombie aver that contemporary societies afford possibilities for various kinds of audiences to co-exist. 119 Although they identify three types of experiences for audiences – the simple, mass and diffused, it is the diffused audience experience that they identify as being pervasive. The expanded notion of performance also feeds into the idea of “diffused audiences” where the gathering is not significant. 120 In this construction, “[b]eing a member of an audience is no longer an exceptional event, nor even an everyday event.” It is the condition where being a spectator becomes “constitutive of everyday life.” 121 While this is an extreme view in my opinion, it is easy to see why the authors emphasise its role in the context of spectatorship. Heightened connectivity in a highly mediatised environment translates into obfuscating the notion of presence. We can be ‘present’ through internet chat portals and networks to someone halfway across the world while we are seated in the privacy of our home. The absent body in this kind of presence is a significant aspect of contemporary spectatorship. The desire for liveness is heightened in this mediatised environment.

As I have shown in the Chapter 2, post-dramatic theatre addresses itself to the actual physical presence of the spectator through the interplay of absence and presence, reality and fiction. Theatre performance in this mode “deploys shocks to perception” by taking the spectator into conditions of immediacy where attention is heightened, the sensory relation is charged, and the

118 Longhurst and Abercrombie (1998) p.69
119 Ibid.
120 Ibid, p.69
121 Ibid.
workings of thought agitated.” 122 Through dismantling the familiar structures of theatre performance post-dramatic theatre denies the spectator recourse to conventional behaviour patterns thus situating her/him in a liminal space. Fear confounds my expectations as a spectator but it also liberates me by providing an experience which is unbounded and fluid and outside the usual frame of perception associated with theatrical performance. By choosing where, when and how to look, hear and be within the space, I am able to exercise my agency and ‘make’ my own meanings.

The contemporary spectator inhabits many spaces and places which influence the way perception works. The past century has altered much about the way we view and experience things in the world. The value of the theatre experience for the spectator, in my view, lies in the opportunities the three-way encounter affords us to understand ourselves anew and those around us.

122 Heathfield (2004) p.8
Chapter 4

In this chapter I examine my experience of being a spectator for two specific performances- *The Blue Mug* (2010) and *Fear of Writing* (2011), both of which I watched in Singapore. The relationship between a theatre performance and its context constitute the theatre event.

As I have stated earlier, the performance as event approach is not a singular construct. It includes a range of approaches within which audience response may be articulated based on divergent methodologies. I have not elaborated on all these approaches in this thesis. Instead I have chosen to focus on eventness, a quality I associate with theatrical events. The existing models provided by Bennett, Postlewait and Ric Knowles in my understanding, establishes the link between the performance and context. Broadly, my idea of the theatre event also draws from Lehmann’s *theatre situation*[^123] (emphasis supplied); a whole made up of evident and hidden communicative processes has informed my analysis of the event.

In this chapter I have attempted to analyse my experience of watching the two plays through the theatre event and the positioning of the theatrical frame and its distortion. I have included my analysis alongside my diary entries to provide a sense of how this experience and writing about it involves slippages. I hope to provide the reader, through this choice, a sense of my perceptual encounter dotted with moments of immersiveness and distance.

[^123]: Lehmann (2006), p.16
To understand the wider context, I look at the two performances within the frame of the larger festivals that in my understanding have implications for their reception. On first glance, these wider contexts appear to be separate and self-contained, inhabiting two worlds – the world of Singapore citizens (as a voting entity) and the Indian diaspora. *Blue* was part of the *Kalaautsavam* festival held in 2010. As is stated on the website, the *Kalaautsavam* festival is an annual festival that celebrates Indian arts during the festive period of Deepavali – the Festival of Lights.\textsuperscript{124} Launched in 2002 as a three-day event, Kalaautsavam has since grown into a 10-day festival that showcases the work of “acclaimed Indian artists in Singapore and beyond”.\textsuperscript{125} *Fear* premiered on September 1, 2011, a few days after the closing of the Singapore Theatre Festival which in 2011 became the Man Singapore Theatre Festival.\textsuperscript{126} The festival is a biennial affair taking place in August. This is the month when Singapore celebrates National Day and as is stated on the Festival website, it is in this context that theatre artists and the public are encouraged to engage in a conversation about theatre, Singapore and the world.\textsuperscript{127}

The festival showcases the new works of Singapore playwrights. *Fear* was not part of this festival (it opened on September 1, 2011). But having watched Alfian Sa’at’s *Cooling Off Day* three weeks before, I viewed it as an extension of the dialogue that began in the aftermath of the 2011 election in Singapore in the month of May. The intertextuality of Alfian Sa’at’s *Cooling Off Day* and *Fear* predisposed me to a conversation begun earlier and was an integral part

\begin{itemize}
\item\textsuperscript{124} www.kalaautsavam.com accessed on August 17, 2012
\item\textsuperscript{125} http://www.kalaautsavam.com, accessed on August 16, 2012.
\item\textsuperscript{126} www.mansingaporetheatrefestival.com, accessed on Aug 16, 2012
\item\textsuperscript{127} Ibid.
\end{itemize}
of the experience. The two shows of Blue were sold out. So was the Sept 1, 2011 premiere of Fear. The two productions were housed (staged seems inappropriate to use for Fear) in enclosed spaces in the sense that there was a physical separation between the world outside and the world of the play.

Fear addresses issues regarding the curtailment of the freedom of expression in Singapore. The title “Fear of Writing” captures the sentiment of Singaporeans who feel subsumed within a culture of self-censorship arising from stringent governmental controls on the freedom of expression. These have been in place for several decades. In the recent general election, the debate centred around governmental policies that allow rapid immigration thereby affecting the social fabric and local culture. This also leads to a crunch in housing and job opportunities for Singaporeans. Some Singaporeans view foreigners, permanent residents and new citizens as supportive of problematic government policies while others see them as a threat to the common ethos and long held beliefs. The government’s policy to raise the population of Singapore has thus been the cause of much discontent amongst Singaporeans.

In an article published in April 2012, Brenda S.A. Yeoh and Weiqiang Lin, trace the immigration patterns in Singapore over the past two decades. As the authors note, since its establishment as a British trading colony in 1819 the “history and fortunes” of Singapore have been closely intertwined with migration. In 1931 its population had grown to half a million with the influx

of large number of workers “from China, Indian and the Malay
archipelago”.

Singapore attained independence in 1965, the year when the
term "citizenship" was first used, drawing a clear boundary between
Singaporeans and foreigners. The population of Singapore can be divided
into two three categories - citizens (including naturalised citizens), permanent
residents (PRs) and non-residents. As in other countries, non-residents include
workers and students who are in Singapore temporarily. In the past few years,
the term ‘foreigner’ has gained greater currency to indicate the non-resident
category. Within the broad non-resident category, the sub categories of
‘expat’ and foreign worker are used as determinants of class. The local
population which is an ethnic mix is categorised on the basis of race - Chinese,
Indian, Malay and others. Population census since 1965 is based on this
categorisation.

According to the 2010 census, about 14.3 per cent of the 3,771,721 residents
of Singapore are PRs. Between 2005 and 2009, the PR population grew an
average of 8.4 per cent per year — much faster than the comparatively modest
0.9 per cent average growth observed for Singapore citizens. Yeoh and
Weiqiang state that “the overall migrant stock, the proportion of Singapore's
population born outside of the country increased from 18.1 per cent in 2000 to
22.8 per cent in 2010.” These figures are important because of the
consciousness of the immigration, identity and race issues in the social,
cultural and political life of Singapore and indeed in the two plays. My
watching of the plays relates to these issues because the labels of foreigner and

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130 Ibid.
131 Ibid.
non-resident, Asian and Indian, local and non-local, attach to me. These labels perform an ‘otherness’ and a ‘oneness’ at the same time in my experience of living in Singapore (I have lived in Singapore for seven years now). Singapore’s demographic make-up ensures that as a face I am among many other faces that are counted as Singaporean Indians. Being “Asian” and having an urban Indian accent allows a blending into the varying tones of accents within the region. My race and nationality are designated as one - Indian- that makes me both foreign and local at the same time. Watching a play about memories of summers in Delhi where I spent most of my summers as a child, plays into my identity as a member of the wider Indian diaspora to which Blue has played in the US and Europe. At the same time this construction of the wider Indian diaspora, I recognise, is essentially flawed. The play is performed in Hinglish (a combination of Hindi and English) which is the spoken texture of language in the urban spaces of Delhi and northern India. The Punjabi and Hindi speaking audiences are the supposed target audience of this play. These audiences are a significant but a small component of the Indian diaspora located in Singapore, US and UK. In the context of Singapore itself, the Indian diaspora comprises of the Tamil, Malayalam, Punjabi and Hindi speaking communities with distinct cultural heritages. A good part of the audiences for plays such as Blue and Dinner With Friends (a one night showing at the Drama Centre, National Library, Singapore in 2012) are representative of the class of mobile Indians tied to the capitalist forces of

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the global economy. In the absence of surtitles, Blue is positioned to attract the north Indian diasporic and expat audience in Singapore.

Six actors took on roles portraying characters and representing themselves in Blue, while three female actors juggle various roles to play the actor in Fear. The dissociation from character, the choice of an all-female cast in Fear lends itself to a sense of fluidity and meandering that causes me to question the fixedness of my sense of self.

The Blue Mug

Diary entry May 20, 2012

Earlier this month, I went to the theatre to watch a play by a Mumbai based theatre group. The play is an adaptation of a Pulitzer prize winning play Dinner with Friends by Donald Margulies. Adapted and directed by Feroz Khan, a well-known theatre director in India, it has played to urban audiences within and outside of India. The performance I watched was a one night performance, held at the Drama Centre in the National Library, Singapore.

Waiting for the play to begin, I waited with other members of the audience in the space outside the theatre. Being Labour Day, a public holiday, the restaurant cum bar was closed and the Library wore a deserted look at 7.15 pm which was quite unusual.

I stood by myself in this space brimming with men and women and when I looked at their faces and their clothes I remembered the faces of others at another performance - The Blue Mug. It could have been the same set of people at both the performances - they looked the same and wore the same
clothes. They were familiar and unknown at the same time. I couldn’t be sure if I knew them or I didn’t.

*Blue* is a play about memory and memories. The play is advertised as being based on a short story in the bestselling book by a neurologist, Oliver Sacks titled, *The Man Who Mistook His Wife for a Hat and Other Clinical Tales* (1985). The play is a devised piece based on real life incidents from the actor’s lives which are interspersed with short interludes involving the dialogue between the doctor (psychiatrist) and patient. For this performance, the configuration of the theatre is proscenium style seating, with the audience facing forward. Having watched other performances in the same space, I am aware that the space at the Esplanade Theatre Studio affords other options. The play begins and ends with the dialogue between the doctor and the patient, the two actors occupying the downstage spaces at the two edges of the presentational space. Literally and metaphorically speaking, the doctor-patient dialogue functions as the book ends within which the narrative is pieced together. These two characters are consistently played by two actors, who do not assume any other roles, marking a distinction between the fictional and the real worlds that the play builds on. The Sacks story is adapted to the Indian context with the patient speaking in a Jat accented Hindi introducing himself to the doctor and the audience as Joginder, a young man from a small town. He embodies what appears to be a stock character- the unsophisticated simpleton with and at whom laughter is appropriate. Ranvir Shorey, a popular actor, plays the character of Joginder. Over the course of the play the audience realises that Joginder’s case involves a condition which prevents new
memories from being formed and results in him to be stuck in the year 1983. The audience, comprising of spectators mostly in the same age group as the actors or an older generation, identifies with the journey that Joginder embarks upon beginning with his childhood and youth. The imagery of a simple, unspoiled life is evoked - childhood games, sibling rivalry and the passage of time in the absence of television, regular electricity supply and phone lines. Quite readily the audience is transported into this world, not too far in the imagination of the spectators for whom the world has changed rapidly and drastically in the last two decades. The four actors, some better known than others due to appearances in Bollywood films, address the audience while narrating specific events from their own lives. They mark the transitions from childhood to adulthood with personal and political events - the 1984 persecution of Sikhs in Delhi in the aftermath of the assassination of Indira Gandhi and the destruction of the Babri Masjid, a 16th century mosque in Uttar Pradesh in 1992 by a mob of Hindu fundamentalists. The evocation of cultural and political memory in the context of nationhood unifies the audience into a singular entity.

In the absence of a pre-existing script, the devised piece offers no plots or progressing narrative other than the passage of time itself. The skeletal stage, like the spoken text affords to the spectators the spaces where their memories become part of the canvas alongside those of the actors and Joginder. I find my own memories flooding to fill up the frame, conjuring images that are not from the actor’s lives but my own. *I remember where I was when the news of Indira Gandhi’s assassination broke. As the red hue behind Sheeba Chaddha...*
grows deeper and she speaks of her memory of the destruction of the Babri Masjid, I smell the smoke that rises from a neighbouring Gurudwara near our house in Delhi.

On the bare stage it is the actor’s body that the spectator registers as the witness of the passage of time. Joginder’s body registers this passage although his mind does not. Towards the end of the performance, Joginder meets his brother but refuses to recognise him because the middle aged man before him is not the image Joginder bears in his mind. As a member of the Indian diaspora, I find myself wondering if I am stuck in a time warp, where my image of the ‘homeland’ is the static image of a place that exists only in my mind.

There are many threads of memory that play into my encounter of this performance. My memory of watching this play: the memories of the actors on which this devised performance is based: and my own memories of the years growing up in Delhi and the many summers spent there. A part of this recollection happens at specific moments within the time that performance unfolds; other moments are drawn out from notes and from post show conversations with friends over coffee, teh and chicken curry with buns.

In contrast to the Drama Centre, the Theatre Studio in the Esplanade as a performance space does not allow for much eventness to attach to theatrical performances. It is a Black Box theatre with little space outside for audiences to gather and collect prior to the performance. The alleyway leading up to the bars ensures a steady flow of visitors. However, watching this performance during the Kalaautsavam Festival brings in an element of theatricality that I
associate with eventness. Audiences dressed in their best ethnic wear stream in and out of the many venues at the Esplanade, a large conglomerate of theatre and performance spaces. These spaces, indoor and outdoor, house ticketed and free events offer a range of performances, classical and contemporary, by arts groups from all over India. Its popularity over the past 9 years has seen this festival grow into a ten day affair. For these ten days, the Esplanade becomes a site of cultural identity and the performance of Indian presence in Singapore.

_In the Drama Centre there was no one other than the audience for Dinner With Friends. Being Labour Day everything was shut. Usually the National Library is teeming with people but today it seemed to be another place._

The event-ness is generated by the presence of the collective, the audience itself. As if to shut off the outside world, in _The Blue Mug_ the music of old Hindi films plays in the theatre unleashing a stream of memories, immediately invoking nostalgia for a predominantly Hindi speaking audience. The film songs bring the within the frame an experience of audienceship associated with the viewing of Bollywood films and listening of the songs on radio in the past. These images that the listening and singing of songs conjure for each individual spectator signify the relationship of the Indian theatre with Bollywood itself.

Bollywood appears in _Dinner With Friends_ again but this time through the persona of the two female actors. Unlike _Blue_, the relationship is cursory in the case of _Dinner With Friends_. A conventional text driven play, its staging follows the usual theatrical conventions. Although it is staged in English, the
audience consisted of upwardly mobile Indians in their late 30s and 40s. The one day performance is not publicly advertised and seats are reserved by the organisers themselves. In this play narrative revolves around two couples and the state of their respective marriages. An acknowledgement of changing social norms within the urban context in India, the play appeals to the spectator through the frankness and honesty that the characters bring to an issue which is often hidden behind the veneer of the happy (read Bollywood) marriage that is assumed to be the cultural norm. The actors in their portrayal of characters, embodying contradictory impulses and urges, mirror the spectators. Adopting a realistic mode for the play, the artistic choice situates it in spaces where food is shared and enjoyed by most Indians living in cities- at the dining table within the ‘cosmopolitan’ living room, in a restaurant, at a bar. The ubiquity of these spaces and the audience’s familiarity with them in a globalised mobile and yet fixed context, plays a part in the reception of issues that may otherwise be shrugged off as being “western”. The psychoanalytic approach of the playwright, the use of realistic modes of presentation of space through an elaborate set and the acting choices (fourth wall intact) ensure that the reception is guided by conventional modes of spectatorship.

But the conventions fray in the Ladies restroom. Unlike the initial moments before the start of the play, the individual spectators linger in their eye contact and make conversations with strangers.  

In the restroom, a woman looks into my eyes and tells me that the toilet is not occupied. There is a degree of familiarity in the lingering of her gaze and her
gesture as she speaks from across the restroom. Another woman exclaims loudly as she rearranges her hair in the mirror- “This is too close. I’m getting a déjà vu feeling.” The group of women in the restroom hear her and laugh, as do I, surprised at my own reaction. It is an open invitation to discuss the play or to break out of the daze which I find myself to be in after a gruelling hour of listening and focusing in the dark.

The familiarity in this exchange points to the experience of the spectators to a perceived common exposure and the gradual but sure movement towards the creation of a common experience that has resonances in the idea of community. But Dinner with Friends achieves this despite itself and largely due to the theme and intimate setting of the play. It is the communal spaces of the female toilet that offer a relief from text driven unrelenting theatre. In Blue there is a concerted effort towards the making of a community which comes almost insistently into existence from the knowledge of its absence.

**Fear of Writing**

*Sept, 2011*

*I watched Fear of Writing on its opening night. This was the second trip I had made over the course of 6 months to Mohammed Sultan Road, to a large warehouse kind of space which I am familiar with as being the space where TheatreWorks, a well-known theatre company in Singapore, frequently showcases its work. The earlier trip had involved being interviewed by a young upcoming filmmaker, and the recording of my responses on camera for a performance project titled “Fear of Writing”. I had answered questions for*
half an hour about living in Singapore in a small intimate room. I stood in my white shirt facing and answering questions into a large camera at very close range with the white wall in the background. I was not comfortable.

In retrospect the answering of the questions in that tiny room about issues that had been the subject of many conversations in the preceding months put me in a particular space in relation to Fear. I was neither a participant nor just a spectator. In my dual role the sense of the liminality that I experienced was not one I could share with anyone else.

In my attempts to recall and re-present the experience of Fear in this thesis I find the material aspects provide a thread by which I may be able to hold some ideas and concepts together. My encounter with the TheatreWorks space has a history which lies outside the immediate frame of Fear and yet this is intertwined with my relationship with the performance, not only because of my involvement as an interviewee, but also how I construct the space and the performance within it. The Screens section is located centrally as “the performance” which plays out the idea of a waiting audience entering a space designated for performance and therefore within the notion of Bennett’s inner frame. The third section entitled Free Food, lies in-between the spaces of the outer and inner frame. In post dramatic performance, I identify this as a space that marks the first instance of rupture. The three sections that follow are an attempt to approach aspects of the material theatre as a discursive tool which will allow me to undertake an analysis of the immersive experience of this performance as a whole.

The Space
The TheatreWorks space is not a foreign space for me. I have watched performances as a member of a gathered audience, been a participant for a film project that was funded by TheatreWorks, aside from the interview for this specific performance which was not known to me at the time. This engagement means intermittent access to the larger and smaller spaces, literally and metaphorically to the work that goes on in this building. An old building of considerable aesthetic appeal, its walls are off-white, a white that I associate with old colonial buildings in India.

“Space is”, as Ernst Cassirer, the German philosopher put it, and Balme reproduces, “one of the fundamental symbolic forms”.133 Like all symbols, the meanings associated with space are generated by the cultures that use them. In the context of theatrical spaces, Balme makes a distinction between spaces that are purpose-built as theatres and those that were created for another practical function but which are temporarily or permanently used as theatres. The TheatreWorks space serves multiple uses as an office, as a rehearsal space, a meeting place for individuals and ideas, an experimental space for performances which are not ticketed and open to interested members of the public, and a performance space for ticketed performances such as Fear of Writing.

It was unclear to me at the time of the interview whether the video footage would find its way into the actual performance. Since this was shortly after the general elections in Singapore, I was suffused with the activity of the previous weeks and the many intense discussions with friends and strangers,

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133 Balme, (2008) p.59
and most notably taxi drivers over election results. I had been asked earlier over an initial email whether I was a Singaporean or a PR and I had thought that having identified myself as a foreigner, I had put myself out of the equation. So it came as a surprise when I was contacted over email and asked to come for an interview. The only instruction I was given was to wear plain white on the upper half of my body. The colour white has a special significance in Singapore. It marks the colour of dress for the People’s Action Party (PAP), the sole party in Singapore to enjoy political power since Independence.

*The Screens*

During the performance, the video footage was projected on to three large white screens which have a presence outside of their function as screens for viewing of video footage. In a space as large as the one where the performance (I am hesitant to classify it as the “actual” performance given the blurring of the inner and outer frames that this performance succeeds in) took place, the individual spectator, is dwarfed. In his mobility, s/he loses the collective and safe space that the promise of conventional audienceship holds out transforming the experience of the event and invoking modes of alternative spectatorship. *In the mute, silent mode, the white screens appear to be large sheets of paper which are forbidding in their whiteness and eclipse any desire to pen anything. Instead they are reminders of the condition of muteness, of the inability to express or as the title states, of the fear of writing. The white screens, sometimes full of image and voice and then silent and stark are also the image of erasure and censure, of things spoken and written but forgotten*
The video footage when watched on these screens bears testimony to the aspirations and imaginings of people living in this country, citizens and residents, not the representation of but the actual experiences of people. The scale of the screen magnifies the size of the images providing them with an alternate reality (I imagine how different the experience of watching the video footage on TV would be) and according them a surreal quality. Ong Keng Sen chooses to challenge our senses by using the screens for multiple purposes. The screens are used to view portions of the interviews, authentic voices of real people overlapping with voices and images of others, vying for attention from the spectator, sometimes clear and at other times drowned out or muffled, challenging my capacity to distinguish the comprehensible from the other. The screens are also used to project the images of the actors, as they perform their roles.

_Fear_ marks playwright Tan Tarn How’s return to Singapore theatre as his first full length play after a hiatus of ten years. _Assuming a narrator like role, Tan Kheng Hua as the playwright, is seen on one of the screens, her voice laced with the dripping sound of water, speaking about the inability to write, in letters to his daughter. This section enters a different perceptive mode- the letters to the daughter become poignant in the knowledge that the audience shares about the personal loss of the writer’s daughter in a violent senseless accident in the recent past. I remember feeling intensely unsettled as I hear in the actor’s voice the voice of the playwright and the acute meshing of the personal with the political. I become intensely aware of myself as the recipient, along with all these other people, familiar and unfamiliar, as
receptacles for a kind of collective mourning. In the mobility that is afforded to me I feel myself becoming restless and yet there is a sense of being weighed down. I look into the faces of the other spectators around me and it seems that we share the same thoughts. It is the absence of the daughter, and in the knowledge that these letters now need a new recipient that the audience suddenly finds itself in the centre. In the realisation of our inability to fulfil that role and our inaction, time passes slowly to the point of being unbearable. We wait for the moment to pass but it resists.

Two of the three screens at certain points of time are simultaneously showing clips of interviews or other footage with varying volumes. The voice of the interviewee begins loudly and then gradually begins to fade as another clip vies for the attention of the spectator. In this scenario, the spectators choose to face the screen that holds their interest, given that in this performance the spectator’s enjoy the freedom to move within the space. However, as the spectator I realize that in the fading in and out of the sounds the performance, I become aware of my own response, complicity and possibly manipulation in automatically turning to the screen that is the most audible even as words from the others filter through into my perception. In that moment I am pulled in different directions- I can turn to the most audible sound or to the image that holds my interest or I choose to look at other spectators making choices of their own.

In invoking history, the voices of members of the community and nationhood, these blank screens mark the crossings of what we remember and what we forget. In 2005, my knowledge of Singapore in 2005 was akin to a blank
screen. Over the past seven years I have been a spectator, witness, participant (although not a voter) for two of the general elections held in Singapore. Two commonly attached words to spectator and witness are silent and mute respectively, except that in my mind I don’t think of myself as embodying those attributes.

*The Free Food*

Audience members queuing up at the door outside the venue for *Fear* had their hands stamped with red ink. I raise this because a friend mentioned it later after the performance was over. In Singapore, my experience with being marked either by a stamp upon entry into designated spaces, such as the Science Centre, the Zoo or Jurong BirdPark and the furnishing of an I/C, FIN or other identification number, is so pervasive that I no longer think about it. What was unusual was the free food before the show.

In a production of *The Cook* in a small theatre in the INTAR theatre in New York, the audience was offered Cuban food as a prelude to the performance. Actors in their costumes came up with trays in hand offering food to the seated audience. The unfamiliar taste of the food and the presence of the actors in costume provided a frame within which the performance could be contextualised. It positioned the audience clearly as the “consumer” of a product but in tasting the product the audience became complicit in its enjoyment and a validator of the structures upon which the delicacies were produced. Or on the other hand, it introduced to the spectator something new - exotic food from an exotic country. Although the show proceeded seamlessly

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after this initial moment of engagement with the audience, in my experience, it pointed towards the difficult relationship between the US and Cuba, mirrored in the personal stakes of Cubans on either side of the fence, which was the subject matter of the play.

The space where the audience had gathered before the “actual performance” of Fear was a large hall with pillars, some steps on one side and a ramp. At the end of the ramp, a food table and a small drinks counter had been set up. The food consisted of snacks, sweet and savoury and the drinks section had wine and some fruit punch on offer. Audience members were initially asked to partake of the food by TheatreWorks members and volunteers dressed in black T-shirts. I associated this with this being the opening night of the production and the generosity of an established theatre company such as TheatreWorks. The hall gradually filled with people and initial hesitation yielded to partaking of the food and wine as groups gathered of people who had known each other a long time and others who had just met.

I recognised faces of well-known theatre practitioners, writers, artists and academics. After the audience had become comfortable and fairly voluble, one of the actors, Tan Kheng Hua, attempted to call the attention of the audience members from the steps and later to a raised platform near one of the central pillars. She declared that as the director of the performance she (Tan Kheng Hua) had an announcement to make. She was joined by another actor, Janice Koh who identified herself as such, and together they embarked on a dialogue addressed to the audience. They thanked the audience for the support but they disclosed a fact not known to the audience- the absence of a permit
for the production by the licensing authority, the Media and Development Authority of Singapore (MDA).\textsuperscript{135} The actors attempted to persuade the audience to stay and watch the performance despite this, by indicating that the gathering could be justified as a private party given the food and wine.\textsuperscript{136} Audience members who felt uncomfortable about attending the performance were given the option to leave with their ticket money reimbursed. On that particular night, none of the audience members exercised this option.

The composition of the audience is a key determinant of my experience as spectator. The audience for Fear of Writing on its opening night was a distinguished audience, an audience of recognizable faces from the world of Singapore theatre, public intellectuals, writers and academics. As I waited in the outside hall with others, I identified myself as a theatre student, a contributor to the performance by looking at my name on the program, and a theatreworker. Being schooled in theatre conventions and its practices, as well as the experimental work of TheatreWorks, the spectators seemed amused by the first act rather than threatened by the possibility of arrest.

During the performance this first instance of rupture opens into a full-fledged scenario with the performance being interrupted by officials declaring themselves to be from the MDA. Members of the audience were informed that they had committed an offence and they were required to provide their identity information for further action. The initial moment of response was

\textsuperscript{135} All performances in Singapore are required to obtain a prior license from the MDA. The procedure requires that all scripts be submitted to the MDA for scrutiny. See Public Entertainments and Meetings Act, 2001.

\textsuperscript{136} The definition of Public Entertainment under the Act includes not only plays but also play-reading, recital, lecture, talk, address, debate or discussion.
static – the audience seemed to become frozen not knowing how to respond. Then gradually some members began to move and look at other audience members. They looked at each other as if asking- now what do they want us to do? Do you believe this? Isn’t this hilarious? Is it real? These contradictory responses guided the movement of the audience within the space. Two of the audience members attempted to leave. *Were they planted actors?*

Post-dramatic theatre addresses the spectator. My own response to such a moment of address is the urgent need to articulate an ‘appropriate’ one. But the notion of an ‘appropriate’ response seems to fall out of the frame of this particular performance. In the situation I find myself as the spectator, my multiple identities as foreigner, student, theatreworker flash before me, mocking my state. In part my response is also linked to how I perceive TheatreWorks. In my mind TheatreWorks inhabits a safe space which pushes boundaries to an extent. The idea that TheatreWorks which like all theatre companies is dependent on government support would stage a production which had not received a licence seemed removed from reality. *I find myself questioning the extent to which my response results from being designated an observer, an outsider, a foreigner? These questions manifest in my leaning on the bars in the hall, in my fidgeting, in my own laughter as it mingles with others, in a tolerant sigh when the act goes on longer than anticipated. The balance between spectatorship and audienceship in the theatre necessitates that I bear in mind the interest of other spectators. I feel isolated and alone. I am accosted by another moment - a moment when I realise that I don’t know*
the words of any National Day songs. In this moment Fear destabilises me situating me in a liminal space where there is no recourse to the “safe spaces” or “collective experience”.

**Divergent experiences**

The two performances operate in divergent ways in invoking audienceship. I see audienceship as quality that makes the theatre “heavy”. It is the collective body, in actual and figurative terms, approximating to notions of community and evoking feelings of communality. The diasporic audience of The Blue Mug is transformed into a community by reference to a shared past, a history and memories of actual lived experience. The scattering that characterises the diaspora experience is replaced by a bubble, a known world within which the swish of silk resonates with the specificity of place and time. Fear shatters the bubble in asking each spectator to “identify her/himself”.

In Fear of Writing audienceship arises in the experience of this ‘pull’, of a knowing that we are each making a conscious choice by moving, walking to or away, turning and facing, watching and listening. The artistic choices that underlie Fear of Writing are clearly designed to heighten the experience of the spectator while in The Blue Mug, the spectator is consciously subsumed by the group, an imagined community. In The Blue Mug the character of Manjit, the patient, refuses to accept the older man who comes to visit him as the brother he knows from his childhood. This refusal plays very strongly into the diaspora’s own refusal to acknowledge that “home” does not exist or that it has never existed except as an image in our minds. The deep sadness that is shared by the audience as a result of this knowing binds the group even as it
questions the very basis for its existence. This shared feeling spills into the post show discussion when a spectator raises a question about the choice of using the Sacks story (which I view as a question of the importance of text within the devised piece) as a frame. The sharp intake of breath is followed by a near hushing of the lone voice by the disapproving audience and brushed aside by the Director with the response “Pasand nahi aaya, koi baat nahi, agli baar nikaal denge” (loosely translated as “You didn’t like that, we’ll take it out next time”).

The experience of these two theatrical performance is divergent partly because of the nature of the performance – devised or post dramatic or the constitution of the audiences – local audience or a diasporic one. These differences are known to me even before I purchase my tickets but that knowing does not prepare me for what is to come because in each moment my engagement with the performance alters and reconstitutes me as the spectator as it does the audience.
Chapter 5

Conclusion: Changed conceptions, altered perceptions

Theatre performance, it can be argued, is a time-based art. As a work of art, it is linked to the history of the idea of art as the aesthetic object or product created by the artist or its creator. The beholder of this work of art can have access to the meanings contained within by engaging with it. This space of engagement is a discursive space. Within the idea of art as described above a theatre performance can be conceived as a stasis, a cultural and aesthetic product, an object. We can scrutinise its constituent parts: the actor/s, the space within which it occurs, the mise-en scene. This is an incomplete picture that leaves out the spectator or positions her/him on the fringes of the theatre event.

The shift from the artefact to the event, from the dramatic script to the mise en scene, has placed emphasis on the fleeting, unique and unrepeatable processes that are part of the theatre performance and inevitably to the event as a whole. These developments have altered how we construe theatre, how we view theatre performances, experience theatre events and the division between producers and recipients. In addition, post-dramatic theatre, performance art and the inclusion of cultural performance into the notion of performance results in a redrawing of the boundaries of theatre performance itself. The spectator plays an important role in construing theatre performance as such. In this thesis I have attempted to examine my experience of the theatre event as a
culturally positioned spectator. As stated earlier, the developments and theories discussed earlier rest on western philosophical concepts and ideas. Analyses of western theatre practice in the past decades has assumed the centrality of these discourses in the context of spectatorship. While these discourses have shaped my own relationship with theatre as I have shown earlier, it is important to point out the existence of non-western practices and theories that are built on a different set of assumptions. My acquaintance with rasa theory although limited and not reflected in the contemporary theatre practice in Indian theatre finds resonance in other performance traditions particularly Indian classical music and dance. In my mind the rasas are Jill Dolan’s performative utopias. Performance practices in Japan and China also point towards the plurality of approaches that exist which provide a different basis for understanding the performance event.

In my view, to say that the spectator is central to the process of meaning making is not the same as the spectator being the entry point into the processes of the event. The theatre event can be construed as being made up of various parts. However, in my analysis I have focussed on the spectator as the entry point into the event. There are some strengths and pitfalls of this approach. As the title indicates, theatre from a spectator’s perspective is a view of the event from a specific standpoint or indeed sitting point. In doing this my intention is not to provide for a generalised account, where my experience as the spectator can stand in for experience of other spectators. This took the form of a disclaimer in the introduction to this work but here is serves another purpose- the possibility of this being a strength as opposed to a shortcoming.
I also caution against another “danger” that is inherent in this approach where, in the extreme, no meaning exists but in the experience of the specific spectator. I am alive to criticism that my approach may render the theatre experience mundane in the intertwining of the particular subjectivities that are specific to the individual spectator. At the same time, I believe that this approach offers something concrete in terms of the specific experience to the otherwise “slippery concept” of the spectator.  

As researcher, I am aware that this analysis which is based on my reconstruction of performance as the ‘eye witness’ may also be called into question via the notion of the reliability of the spectator’s construction, as Postlewait cautions. My intention is not to recount and describe the event as the distant observer. On the contrary, I have attempted to describe and animate the processes of the event and my experience of immersion and distance within it. Postlewait’s concern arises in the context of the historian’s role in resurrecting performance from accounts of eyewitnesses – the spectators and the material remnants of performance, where authenticity and reliability are of primary importance. I have attempted to confront my own organising assumptions and categorical ideas in my role as researcher. The creation of distance from my experience as the spectator has been a necessary part of this process however I accept that the intertwining subjectivities often result in a collapsing of this distance, a likely outcome that results from this doubling. In my view this collapse has served a productive role in the context of my analysis.

137 Kennedy (2009) p.3
The spectator enters the theatrical space with his agency intact embracing a “productive passivity” which ensues from the theatre contract.\textsuperscript{139} The theatre performance is a product of many choices. These choices anticipate the power of the spectator and create possible spaces for its exercise. Knowles asserts that cultural production does not contain meaning, rather it produces meaning through the discursive work of an interpretive community and through the lived, everyday relationships of people with texts and performances (emphases provided).\textsuperscript{140} In my analysis, the theatre event embodies a dynamism, shifting moment to moment, containing and producing meanings, creating a vibrant and alive texture within which individual and collective subjectivities play against and to each other. The spaces that are negotiated, created or suppressed in this encounter between theatre performance, spectators and the audience may themselves become challenged in the manner in which they are negotiated by the individual spectator.

Whether theatre performance is experienced as an antique pleasure or a dynamic occurrence depends on the texture of the three-way communication and the processes that inform the interaction amongst the what, who and with whom. The spectator as the individual watching subject comprises of the viewing, hearing and feeling subject. The body of the spectator, a material presence, registers the performance. The idea of perceptual encounter recognises the body of the spectator as a material presence in relation to others. I have utilised the concept of immersion to illustrate the texture of my

\textsuperscript{139} Bayly (2011), p.16
\textsuperscript{140} Knowles (2004) p.17
perceptual encounter in relation to two theatre performances. I have attempted to capture in the last chapter the sensation of immersion, of being in a dynamic space, of being surrounded and separate, together and alone. The layering of distance and proximity that results from intertwining subjectivities in this dynamic space is punctured by immersive moments. Self-reflexivity arises from the experience of subjectivity in the context of these immersive moments. As the spectator, nothing prepares me for these moments of immersiveness. The moments of togetherness and aloneness arise for me while watching *Blue* and *Fear*. Each moment arises from the particular configuration, whether actual or imagined, of the presence of other spectators and the audience as a whole. These moments are unbounded arising within and outside of the theatre performance.

In the post-modern world, spectatorship arises from several contexts. The spectator may be a traveller, visitor, citizen, resident, short or long term. In the mobility that results from the compression of time and space, these categories are no longer fixed. These labels ostensibly are linked to varying levels of embedding within a specific social, cultural and historical reality that are associated with a particular place where the performance takes place. The relation of this place and its reality to the “fictional” world of the play is the place where audienceship plays a critical role. By challenging my identity in the context of the collectivity these moments cause me to reconsider and reconstitute myself.

The decision to put together a performance is guided by many considerations that account for the diverse composition of today’s audiences. Indeed some of
these elements are incorporated into the underlying creative processes. Works are commissioned by the National Arts Council (NAC) in Singapore which allow for artists from different countries to work together for a period of time to create performance pieces. *The Book of Living and Dying* staged at the Singapore Arts Festival involves the collaborative work of The Finger Players, a Singapore based theatre company and Italy’s Teatri Sbagliati. The context which drives the artistic choices in “intercultural” productions such as TheatreWorks’ *Lear Dreaming* anticipates not only the mixed audience of multicultural Singapore, but also the pull of a Festival event in the region, as well as numerous tourists who pass through the city state. For *Lear Dreaming* (2012), the audience I encountered on the two nights consisted of Singaporeans of mixed ethnicities, theatre students from various countries, visitors from Italy and other parts of Europe.

These mixed audiences (though arguably from a certain class) are evidence of a fluidity pertaining to identity formation which impacts the theatre experience for the spectator. The ‘splintered spectator’ as the subject plays into or against the ‘multiple’ audience in the moment to moment encounter with performance.

At the book launch of Fear of writing, one of the actors, Janice Koh referred to the specific acts of the spectators on a particular night in vivid detail. She said, “I looked into the eyes of this elderly couple and I saw their eyes filled with fear and I became fearful myself. I knew that the act was an act but the fear I felt was real.” As members of an audience, as spectators or as performers, theatre requires that we give ourselves to the moment. In doing so
we ensure that many more moments, both pleasurable and torturous, where we remake ourselves, will follow.

The spectator, once considered immobile and passive, has moved from the fringes into the centre of the theatre event. Performing a vital role in the making and unmaking of meanings this spectator fulfils her/his function as a dynamic part of the theatre event and its material remnant. New theatre practice must address this spectator.
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