

## **Abstract**

This thesis explores the common and dialectical features of pedagogy, Bertolt Brecht's *Gestus*, and identity construction. It speaks from the perspectives of pedagogue, actor and subject. It argues that in each of these modes the subject is necessarily engaged in both an ontological dilemma and opportunity, which is performative. It exposes embodiment as an oscillatory process of absence and presence. This is predicated on the impossibility of arriving at a fixed notion of being in the world.

The thesis is set within an autobiographical frame. First because each mode marks an encounter in the life of Rob Vesty, and second because the practice-based-research uses autobiographical performance.

It advances by constructing a piece of performative writing, an autobiographical timeline, to affect an experience of the practice, which informs this thesis. This piece introduces a montage of three juxtaposing studies. The first draws on Rob Vesty's work in TIE with Splendid Productions and uses the company's 2007/2008 performance and workshop tour of Brecht's *The Good Woman of Szechuan*. It argues that a dialectic, rather than didactic, process must occur in the pedagogic setting and that this is dependent on the presence of a creative gap produced by a strong aesthetic. The second study then argues that the *Gestic* actor embodies and 'writes' this creative gap in a parodic way and that a virtue is made of showing its construction. The final study turns to Rob Vesty's (2008) solo theatre show – *One Man Good Woman* – to chart the way identity impacts upon autobiography. It argues that the 'written' nature of autobiography and identity renders the subject both absent and present and retains dialectical features in its construction.

***What to do with Gestus Today? Version II***

*The Unfinishing Business of Brecht: how Gestus exhibits our  
contradictory being-in-the-world.*

*or*

*Gestus: showing things as they (really) are?*

*or*

*Disappearing Acts: getting a glimpse at Gestus.*

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Appendix I - DVD, *One Man Good Woman*  
Recorded 26 & 27 September 2008  
Aphra Theatre  
UKC  
Canterbury, England

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Even when a character behaves by contradictions that's only because nobody can be identically the same at two unidentical moments. Changes in his exterior continually lead to an inner reshuffling. The continuity of the ego is a myth. A man is an atom that perpetually breaks up and forms anew. We have to show things as they are.

(Brecht, 1964: 15)

### Robert Andrew Vesty: a chronology

- Jul. 1973 Born 19<sup>th</sup> July, Luton, Bedfordshire, UK. Male. Named: Robert Andrew Vesty. Spends early childhood in towns of Burnley and Colne in Lancashire, Northern England. Mother: Lynda Vesty (nee Stratton). Father: Ken Vesty. Younger siblings: Barrie and Daniel. The family are council-housed and later secure a transfer to a village in Essex, Southern England.
- Mar. 1985 Vesty attends Hedingham Comprehensive School. After being bullied by a fifth-former, he fakes headaches to get out of school. He dissembles for over a month. This involves several visits to the doctor, three 50-mile round trips to Colchester hospital in a borrowed car, 1 CAT scan and 1 other type of scan, (he can't remember the name of), that involves having pads put on his head. This later reminds him of *One Flew over the Cuckoo's Nest*. He is sure the doctors know he's faking it.
- Aug. 1989 He takes and passes 10 GCSEs.
- Sep. 1989 He remains at Hedingham Comprehensive School and joins the sixth-form, taking A-levels in English Literature, Theatre Studies, and History.
- Sep. 1992 He secures a place at Birmingham University to study on a three-year BA Drama & Theatre Arts programme.
- Jul. 1995 He writes his BA dissertation on Arnold Wesker's work with Centre 42, its relationship to the Trades Unions Congress and its roots in agit-prop. He graduates with First class honours and a practical distinction. When he calls home with the news, his mother shouts to his father: "Ken, he got a one-one".
- Sep. 1996 He attends (Royal) Welsh College of Music & Drama for a one year Postgraduate Diploma in acting. The actor Anthony Hopkins gives him a £2,000 grant due to 'lack of financial support'. He wins that year's acting prize.
- Nov. 1997 He takes his first professional acting job with the Unicorn Theatre playing Callum in *Cinderella* at The Arts Theatre. He gets an agent called Barbara Pemberton. She thinks Vesty is a 'northern' actor. Vesty spends the next 6 years putting-on a Lancashire accent whenever he speaks to her. During this time Vesty works at several repertory companies, continues work with the Unicorn, and also works with companies such as Sound & Fury and Boilerhouse.
- Aug. 1999 Vesty meets Joanna Bryant. She is from the West Country. She becomes his girlfriend for two months.
- Jan. 2000 He kisses a man.
- Jul. 2000 He has sex with a man.
- Dec. 2000 His father 'outs' him on Christmas Eve. They are with his two younger brothers, their girlfriends, and his mother. His father says, "Rob, are you homosexual?" Vesty replies "No", but can't hide the betraying smile on his face. The two drink whisky and smoke cigarettes in the backyard. His father says: "It don't matter...I've had thoughts." The two return inside to tell

Vesty's mother that he's a homosexual. His mother retches. She says that she was merely "choking on (her) biscuit". That same night, with its spirit of confession, Vesty is 'outed' again by his brother Barrie, for 'faking headaches as a child'. His mother is hurt by this. Vesty's father retires to bed but vomits all over the sheets. He has drunk too much whisky. Vesty wonders about when it was his father became less homophobic.

- Aug. 2001 Vesty meets Sean Vickers in London. Vickers is from Sheffield. They are boyfriends for two months.
- Nov. 2001 Vesty meets Paul Bowyer in London. Bowyer is also from Sheffield. They are boyfriends for two months.
- Jul. 2002 Vesty meets Bryce Lease in Ireland. Lease is from Lake Tahoe, California, in the US. They are boyfriends for three years.
- Sep. 2002 After a 2-month long-distance relationship, Lease leaves Ireland and moves into Vesty's flat in London. Vesty's parents think Lease is "nice".
- Dec. 2002 Vesty and Lease spend part of the Christmas and New Year holiday in Lake Tahoe, California.
- Jan. 2003 Vesty leaves his agent, Pemberton, and his role as Pip in the Unicorn's *Great Expectations*. Lease does not have a Visa to remain in the UK so the two move to Budapest, Hungary. In Budapest, Vesty and Lease teach in language schools.
- Jul. 2003 Vesty and Lease move to Dublin, Ireland.
- Sep. 2003 Vesty and Lease move to Bologna, Italy
- Dec. 2003 Vesty and Lease spend Christmas in Lake Tahoe.
- Feb. 2004 Vesty and Lease move back to Dublin
- Aug. 2004 Vesty is invited to take up a post in the UK. He and Lease move to Canterbury. Vesty begins working as a teacher of Drama and EAL at a boarding school. It is The King's School - the oldest school in England where the fees to attend are around £22,000 per year for a boarder. It is a Christian school within the foundation of Canterbury Cathedral. Vesty and Lease are given accommodation on Palace Street, which backs on to the Archbishop of Canterbury's 'palace'. Vesty and Lease go, 'publicly together', to the Headmaster's 'welcome' drinks on the lawn. Vesty's accent becomes closer to Received Pronunciation.
- Nov. 2004 Lease applies for leave to remain in the UK as an unmarried partner. He and Vesty apply through a specialist immigration lawyer in London who has experience with the cases of same-sex couples. They put together a dossier of evidence, which proves they have been co-habiting as a couple for at least 2 years. It is around 100 pages long, and documents their relationship. It consists of photos, bills, joint bank account statements, and letters of 'verification' from friends and family. The dossier is introduced with personal testimonials written by Vesty and Lease, detailing their commitment to each other. In time Vesty comments on how the dossier 'performs' their relationship for the authorities.

- Jan. 2005      Unbeknownst to Vesty, Lease embarks on an affair with Anthony Lyons. Lyons is the Head of English at King's.
- Feb. 2005      Lease is granted a visa. Vesty embarks on formal teacher training which eventually leads to Qualified Teacher Status (QTS). So that he can concentrate on teaching Drama he suggests to the Director of Studies at King's that Lease take over his EAL teaching. Lease begins working at King's.
- Aug. 2005      Vesty and Lease are re-accommodated on St. Radigund's Street. Lyons lives in the house opposite.
- Sep. 2005      At 4:30am one morning Vesty wakes to notice Lease is not in bed. At 5am he gets dressed, crosses the road and looks through Lyons' letterbox. He sees Lease's trousers and shoes on the floor. He goes home, takes a bath, drinks wine, smokes cigarettes, puts on his suit, and because it is his assembly morning, he also puts on his academic gown. He goes to work. Vesty shares a joke with the Headmaster before assembly. During that morning's break, Vesty and Lease walk through Green Court toward the church hall in which Vesty teaches. Vesty asks Lease if he is sleeping with Lyons. Vesty's class of fifth-formers are waiting outside the church hall. Lease says "yes". Vesty gets 'cover' for periods 5 and 6 and returns to work after lunch. That evening Vesty and Lease take a coach-load of sixth-form Theatre Studies students to the National Theatre in London to see David Hare's *Stuff Happens*.
- Nov. 2005      Lease moves out of St. Radigund's Street. He begins a doctorate programme in the drama department at the University of Kent (UKC). Vesty's relationship with Lease is ending. Vesty continues to work with Lease and Lyons, which he finds difficult. He spends hours monitoring Lyons' front door from his bedroom window at the front of the house. King's provide Vesty with access to the school counsellor. They, (King's), are 'concerned' for his welfare. The counsellor is trained in psychotherapy. He tells Vesty to move to the back bedroom.
- Mar. 2006      Vesty is offered a job in London. He turns it down. Leaving Canterbury feels like 'running away'.
- Jun. 2006      One of Vesty's tutees asks him if it's true that Lyons was involved in the breakdown of his relationship. Vesty laughs, leaves the girl's study and breaks down. Allegedly the pupil has heard the rumour from another girl who has heard it, in turn, from one of the Classics teachers.
- Feb. 2007      Vesty tends his resignation from King's. He has no work to go to but wants to leave that Summer. It feels more like 'moving on' this time.
- Mar. 2007      Splendid Productions visit King's with their production of *Antigone*. Kerry Frampton invites Vesty to work with them from August on their tour of Bertolt Brecht's 1953 play *The Good Woman of Szechuan* as an actor and workshop leader. Despite reservations, he accepts.
- Apr. 2007      Vesty's friend Patricia Logue, who is employed in the drama department at UKC, suggests he use the Splendid tour as the research-base for a Masters there. He is unsure on the grounds that it would bind him to Canterbury. After three glasses of wine one evening he emails Paul Allain in the Drama

department about the Masters Practice as Research (MAPaR) programme. A week later he is in his office discussing his application for a studentship.

- Jul. 2007 After 3 years at King's, Vesty leaves and moves to Brighton. Around this time he meets many new people: among them, artists, drag queens and lots of 'out' homosexuals.
- Aug. 2007 He begins rehearsing with Splendid in London and becomes a *Gestic* actor. Brecht's play has been adapted for Splendid by Ben Hales. A decision to call it *The Good Woman of Szechaun* as opposed to *The Good Person of Szechuan* in line with some translations is a considered choice. Frampton says it's significant that the play's protagonist, Shen Te, is a woman.
- Nov. 2007 Vesty submits his proposal and application for the MAPaR. In it he says: "I hope to link Brecht's interest in the connection between dramaturgy and pedagogy with regard to *Gestus* with the conjoining of these functions in my own practice, particularly in relation to the crossover between dance and theatre. I will consider whether stock or archetypal gesture constitutes a 'universal' physical language or whether it is delimited by cultural factors, such as gender, age or race. I will consider how more contemporary concerns for ambiguity might facilitate a universal model of expression. I will also examine the relationship between the physical shape of a gest (bearing, carriage, and mien) and its environmental and/or spatial contexts in the communication of character and meaning. My discoveries will be disseminated in the form of a performance entitled *One Man Good Woman*. This performance piece will use Splendid Productions' *The Good Woman of Szechuan* as a stimulus, with a focus on storytelling using a *Gestic* style of acting."
- Jan. 2008 Vesty is enrolled on the MAPaR programme at UKC. In effect he becomes a reflexive practitioner.
- Mar. 2008 The tour of *The Good Woman of Szechuan* ends.
- May. 2008 Vesty goes to Moscow with UKC and attends classes at Moscow Art Theatre. The classes in Michael Chekhov technique reinvigorate his passion for acting.
- Jun. 2008 He leaves Brighton and moves to London. He is still unsettled.
- Jul. 2008 He works extensively in Canterbury on the making of his MAPaR show *One Man Good Woman (OMGW)*. He concentrates on the character of Mrs Yang. He is seeing a lot of drag and one of his new friends is a drag-artist, George Ikediashi, aka *Le Gateau Chocolat*. Vesty also re-acquaints himself with an old friend and contemporary (from University) the drag-artist Jonny Woo. He decides he wants to use drag-play in his show.
- Aug. 2008 *OMGW* evolves. It is autobiographical. It charts Vesty's acting career, uses his experience in *The Good Woman of Szechuan* to talk about *Gestus*, and tells the story of one of its characters: Mrs Yang. It also casts Vesty as a character: 'Rob Vesty'.
- Vesty decides to open the show with a short film: a morphing sequence of stills of him as a younger actor through to the guises of masculinity and

femininity. It's designed to also synopsise the narrative of the 'play'. It lasts around 4 minutes.

He begins the play with an interpellation: "Hello, my name is Rob Vesty. I'm an actor". He then tells a story he often tells. He calls it, *Oh Look Here Comes Jesus!* In it, he recounts an experience of how, as a new boy at a small primary school, having just moved from the north to the south of England, he is written into the school nativity. His one and only line is "Oh, look, here comes Jesus!" Vesty's northern accent makes this familiar nativity moment very strange for people in the audience, and they erupt with laughter.

From here he tells his story as an actor, and uses slides of photo images of him in various roles projected on to the cyclorama. In their exhibition, he plans to present this story as 'fact'.

In the play, the autobiographical exposition leads, chronologically, to the point where he is involved in the performing of *The Good Woman of Szechuan* in 2007 – the point of departure for his 'research'. He plucks out the narrative element involving the characters of Mrs Yang and her son Yang Sun. In Brecht's play Yang Sun dupes the *good woman* and protagonist of the play, Shen Te, into marrying him so that he can use her money to fulfil his dream of becoming a pilot. Vesty decides that Mrs Yang should have suffered her own duping, by an American flyer, and that she is somehow cloning that experience through her son out of a desire to not lose sight of the love that she lost.

The *playing* of these *Gestic* characters becomes a focal point for a lecture-demo style exposition of the aesthetic quality of *Gestus*, as Vesty sees it, in its crude form: exaggerated gesture, facial expression and vocal quality to *show* the social drivers for a character's behaviour and how this underpins characters' transactions. There is a clear attempt, through this middle section of the play, to exhibit the practice-as-research by referencing questions concerned with what Vesty has to 'do' to be a *Gestic* actor, or whether gesture in *Gestic* theatre must be exaggerated. He 'exhibits' the quality of caricature.

He then makes an attempt to progress the research beyond the *crude* to a *subtler* aesthetic. He articulates, by using direct-address, what he thinks he already knows about *Gestus*. He does not articulate what he is finding out because he cannot find the words.

The *subtler* aesthetic of *Gestus* manifests itself in the part of the play where he takes the idea of *playing* the character of Mrs Yang as a game of undressing, dressing-up and cross-dressing to the point where the performance becomes drag-performance. He tells the audience he is doing this because he is fascinated with this character (Mrs Yang) and he expects them to believe this is *fact*. He layers this with the narrative invention that the character of Mrs Yang wants to be an actress and plays with the idea of memory and loss. Mrs Yang's/Vesty's *struggle to perform* which has been a running theme throughout the play is dramatised through stage fright and the forgetting of lines. This dramatisation is set to a series of Paul Dessau's songs from Brecht's original 1953 production of *The Good Woman of Szechuan* where he attempts to play with the idea of *Gestus* functioning as a tool to unlock the politics of identity, memory and loss and their latent contradictory natures.

Narratively, the play ends with Rob Vesty's relinquishment; a letting go of the character of Mrs Yang by undressing and leaving the stage. And, presumably, a 'letting go' of the identification with Mrs Yang's narrative.

Sep. 2008 Vesty performs *OMGW* over two nights in The Aphra Theatre at UKC. On the first night, Lease and his mother (who is visiting from California) are sat on the front row. Vesty is glad that they are present. Somewhere, in the middle of the audience, Lyons is seated next to his girlfriend. Later, in conversation with Vesty after the show, Lyons would describe the experience of watching the show as "vertiginous". Elsewhere there are students and staff from UKC, and students and staff from King's.

At the end of the show Vesty walks off-stage in his underpants and high-heels and doesn't come back to bow. A song plays the show out. Vesty has already ditched an earlier idea to use Estelle's *American Boy*. Instead, he settles for Martha Wainwright's *You Bloody Mother Fuckin' Arsehole*.

Jun. 2009 Vesty submits his MAPaR thesis. It is supposed to be a reflection or critical enquiry into the practice-as-research - a written submission to complement the performance element. He calls it *What to do with Gestus Today?*

Nov. 2009 He is asked to re-submit his thesis with major revisions. The examiners describe the performance element as "unremarkable" (Bottoms) and "disappointing" (Pavis). They suggest that not enough research into *Gestus* took place and that the written submission was "hampered" (Bottoms) by this. The examiners seem to recognize an unresolved tension between the need to stick to the proposal to research *Gestus* and that which Vesty appeared to want to do: research questions of 'personal identity' and 'desire'.

Vesty agrees with the examiners on many points.

Mar. 2010 Vesty works on a new thesis. He has a different supervisor: Dr Nicola Shaughnessy. His practice-as-research becomes a practice in re-searching after developing a feeling that the 'practice' has been marked as absent or lost; that it only exists as an accessible object through its documentation. Memory is merely one form of documentation. Today, this writing marks another documentation; and another performance of it. The act of re-writing is performative. Vesty is inspired by Phelan who says, "performative writing is solicitous of affect even while it is nervous and tentative about the consequences of that solicitation. Alternately bold and coy, manipulative and unconscious, this writing points both to itself and to the 'scenes' that motivate it".<sup>1</sup>

Performativity seems key. The act of making the show has a performative value in that it reverts to writing. Here, the idea of writing through speech and gesture is influenced by Butler and Derrida. *Gestus* is a parodic style of writing with its own performative value.

Focusing on performativity, Vesty decides to use the autobiographical element to his work as a frame within which to position three studies.

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<sup>1</sup> Phelan, P. (2007) *Mourning Sex*. London: Routledge p12

**Study 1** – he calls this **PEDAGOGY: a performative act?** This study draws on the subject's desire to achieve self-knowledge and have political agency. This has a transformative value. The study focuses on pedagogy, Splendid's position within Theatre-in-Education (TIE), and Brecht's place in that genealogy. It uses Brecht's *Lehrstücke* to reveal a re-functionalisation of the audience/actor dynamic which proves crucial to an understanding of the collaborative and dialogic quality to teaching and learning. It draws on Anthony Jackson's assertion that the efficacy of educational theatre relies on a strong aesthetic to produce 'creative gaps'. This liminal space is where meaning is potentially made.

**Study 2** – this is called **GESTIC ACTING: exhibiting things as they (really) are?** Here Vesty draws on his attempt at becoming a *Gestic* actor in *The Good Woman of Szechuan*. He grapples with *Gestus* as an acting style by re-appraising how an actor embodies role. He suggests that the dialectical nature of embodiment becomes a feature of all actors' work through an oscillatory practice of presence and absence. The *Gestic* actor merely makes a virtue of exhibiting that process. He continues in this study to make the suggestion that the UK conservatoire system of actor training is, nevertheless, dominated by a less disruptive, more illusory, notion of embodiment. He draws attention to *Gestus* as a form of writing.

**Study 3** – **ONE MAN GOOD WOMAN: (re)presenting the gaps?** Here he turns to *OMGW* and assesses the implications of writing autobiography. He says that it, like *Gestus*, is contradictory, unstable, and indeterminate. In autobiography we make assumptions about the nature of the presence of an authorial subject. Discussing identity is therefore key. He uses Butler's theories relating to gender identity and Heddon's work on the fictive presence of the autobiographical subject. He draws on Butler's discussion of parody and suggests drag and *Gestic* practice share similar properties. He also comments on his movement from *Gestic* actor to reflexive practitioner and how the latter seems to resemble the way in which *Gestus* functions.

Vesty then works on a **Conclusion**. He says that critical consciousness (conscientização – Paulo Friere's term) bears striking similarities with Brecht's *Gestus* and the way in which human beings attempt to make sense, through praxis (action and reflection), of their, contradictory, being-in-the-world. Pedagogy, *Gestus*, and the way in which we construct identities all share similar dialogic features and are determined by gaps through which an oscillatory practice of absence and presence occurs.

Vesty's style of writing is at times performative, not least to support his argument that *Gestus* parodies the pedagogical processes subjects engage in to construct meaning.

Vesty decides to give the new thesis one of three sub-titles:

Option A: *The Unfinishing Business of Brecht: how Gestus exhibits our contradictory being-in-the-world.*

Option B: *Gestus: showing things as they (really) are?*

Option C: *Disappearing Acts: getting a glimpse at Gestus.*

But he can't settle on one, so asks the participant to choose/construct one after reading.

## Study 1

### **PEDAGOGY: a performative act?**

Human beings emerge from the world, objectify it, and in so doing can understand it and transform it with their labor. (Freire, 1993: 106)

#### **Overview**

This *study* asks whether pedagogy is a performative act under perpetual construction. It uses, predominantly, my work as a performer and facilitator with Splendid Productions and our 2007/2008 tour of Brecht's *The Good Woman of Szechuan* as a focal point for researching questions concerned with what constitutes pedagogical processes. It will lead us to consider how being subjected to these processes might help us define notions of identity. I draw on the work of Paulo Freire (1993), Charles Garoian (1999), Jon McKenzie (2001), Anthony Jackson (2007) and Helen Nicholson (2009) to frame an autobiographical concern: my consumption (as learner) and production (as teacher) of pedagogies. I use their work to show that it is the performative quality inherent in this learning/teaching dynamic which undermines its apparent didacticism and allows space for, what Jackson terms, the 'transaction' to occur. (2007: 268) This 'transaction', marking an occupation of that space, is crucial to its efficacy - it is the gap in which a negotiation (a dialectical motion) takes place, fuelled by a hungry desire for knowledge and understanding, and where, ultimately, meaning is made. We will see how this act of making meaning can in itself be deemed performative. Firstly, because the making of meaning is a necessary and unavoidable condition to which we are all subjected to through discourse. Secondly, because the conditions under which this meaning is made relies on a dialectical motion. And thirdly, because meaning making is an *unfinished* business – a participatory project, which happens in space and time, time and again.

#### **Performativity & Pedagogy**

Let's first look at why a theory of performativity is useful. The term refers to a number of practices, not least the speech act as identified by J. L. Austin<sup>2</sup>. Here, the act of utterance 'does' the thing it utters – through the speaking of it. "I name this ship"<sup>3</sup> performs the act of the naming (assuming the context is apt). The act lives within a discursive practice. Similarly, Judith Butler argues that identity and certain social practices such as sex and gender are 'called' into being through utterance – "It's a girl!" is an interpellation where the

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<sup>2</sup> See J. L. Austin, (1962) *How to Do Things with Words*

<sup>3</sup> This example is taken from several sources inc. Salih, Fischer-Lichter. It is an oft-cited example, taken from Austin, and used to exhibit the speech-act theory.

thing becomes the thing it is named through its naming. Butler's theories of sex and gender construction are in part built around Austin's speech-act theory. It has implications for how we 'learn' about identity and how we construct meaning around them. But because, as we will see, the word itself is unstable, itself subject to change and transformation, it involves us in a perpetual state of flux. As meaning is made present, its absence also occurs. In this sense, identity becomes a pedagogical site and pedagogy, due to its discursive quality, we can deem as performative. The term *performative* also refers us to the practice of being seen to *do*, or as Schechner puts it "showing doing." (2002: 22) Once we turn to *Gestus* we will see how it too performs that function. For now, within the autobiographical, and temporal frame of this thesis, the term *performativity* serves as a common denominator. My subjection to a multiplicity of identities is contingent on its interplay with a multitude of contexts: a working-class boy wanting to transcend the class represented by home; a student of theatre and acting in the UK education system; an actor working in professional theatre; a teacher working in a private boarding school; or reflexive practitioner in another educational setting. I play these roles at certain times in certain places and spaces and a change occurs. Later I will say how the place or space in which our identities are performed is significant; here, it is important to note how their performativity can be located in a desire to either produce, promote, or place oneself in subjection to, change or *transformation*.

### ***Transformation***

Paulo Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1993) is a treatise on the transformative power of education. Though based in literacy acquisition initially, Freire's arguments develop to reject a 'banking' system of education - one where a teacher 'deposits' learning *in* the learner - on the grounds that this pedagogical approach becomes "an instrument of oppression" (1993: 79). Instead he advocates a dialogic (and dialectical) process of learning and teaching which he terms *conscientização*, sometimes translated as critical consciousness or consciousness raising<sup>4</sup>. Freire's pedagogy is a negotiation, which empowers *all* subjects to know themselves and the world in a 'better' way. What's more, Freire makes clear that this is a political, emancipatory act. (1993: 81)

These kinds of *transformations* can happen anywhere and regardless of whether they take place in a theatre, they can be performative. But pedagogy is not only a performative act; it can also be a subversive one. Pedagogy is predicated on its quality of transformation in an

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<sup>4</sup> See *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1993) in which Freire uses this term to mark the subject's critical engagement with the world so that it perceives its social and political matrices and inherent contradictions. This, he argues, is necessary as a way to overcome oppressive forces, gather political agency, and achieve democratic modes.

effort toward revolution and renewal. Our aspiration toward transformation relies on upsetting the status quo. It must resist convention. It must be rebellious. The familiar must become strange for us once again - Brecht's *Verfremdungseffekt* - so that we look, perhaps look again, and adopt a critical stance. This impacts upon our notions of identity. How we learn to construct identities, or how they are constructed 'upon' us will become more of a concern later; in this study I want to note that pedagogical acts are how we come to a knowing in the world and therefore a knowing of 'self', for "human beings are not built in silence, but in word, in work, in action-reflection" (Freire, 1993: 69). At this stage, how this process functions through Splendid's work as a TIE<sup>5</sup> company will become my point of focus by examining how, if at all, the transformation takes place.

### ***The Development of an Aesthetic***

Anthony Jackson's work on educational theatre and TIE has at its centre the argument for the place of "art" or the "aesthetic" as a vital feature of it. A strong aesthetic must exist to allow for an *as* vital measure of participation in an efficient pedagogical process.

If the TIE programme reveals its didactic purpose too explicitly, if it hammers home a message that the drama is merely designed to illustrate (rather than explore) and provides its audience with little or no creative work to do in 'realising' the text, then arguably, again, it stands accused of betraying its aesthetic status and at the same time its ability to educate. (2007: 182)

The non-didactic approach protects pedagogic value through its dialogic approach.

If the messages on offer are worth hearing, they will be picked up by the audience in their own way and at their own choosing. Forcing the message down their throats is, as we all know only too well, not only counterproductive; it denies the liberating power of drama to move us in surprising ways. (2007: 230)

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<sup>5</sup> Splendid have been established as a TIE company since 2003 and follow a well-established TIE format for coupling performance and a participatory workshop to create a more rounded pedagogic functionality. Nicholson and Jackson both offer comprehensive studies of the TIE movement and the longer tradition of educational theatre, which Brecht was a part of. Nicholson even suggests, "TIE marked a significant development of Brecht's unfinished cultural project" (2009: 32) because of its participatory nature. Both Nicholson and Jackson respectively tag the development of educational theatre, or the TIE movement, to atmospheres of politicisation, either because of this early educational theatre's "socialist agenda" (Jackson, 2007: 77), or through an acknowledgement that TIE breaks "the authoritarian structures of a traditional education by taking radical forms of theatre into schools." (Nicholson, 2009: 21).

Jackson argues for ‘space’ or ‘indeterminacies’, and that these can only exist in work with a high aesthetic value. Jackson argues that this engenders active participation from the audience because it is facilitated by, what he terms, ‘creative gaps’ in the theatre’s construct.

At the heart of all effective educational theatre practice, and more critical even than the active participation of the audience, is the existence, in whatever form, of that ‘aesthetic space’, those ‘creative gaps’, within which audiences and participants can forge, negotiate, and own, meaning. (2007: 271)

This brings us back to Brecht insofar as scholarly arguments abound as to the balance between the didactic and aesthetic in his work. That John Willett’s translation of *Brecht on Theatre* (1964) is subtitled *The Development of an Aesthetic* seems to pitch the aesthetic nature of Brecht’s work as a cultural endeavour for Brecht. While on one level, Brecht was happy to accept that the “proof of the pudding is in the eating” (Brecht, 1964: 88), presumably suggesting that if it ‘works it works’, Brecht was nevertheless hugely concerned with developing a body of theory that could be applied to this work. Likewise while the TIE movement, and educational theatre, remains a fairly abundant practice in the UK, it should be useful to try and articulate how the ‘work works’ in an effort to encourage practice, which maintains the kind of efficacy Jackson refers to.

### ***Mind the Gap***

I want to suggest that when Jackson’s ‘creative gaps’ are not present, theatre loses its *intended* subversive potential. In order then to test whether the Splendid model can truly stake its claim to be a “little subversive” (Frampton, 2010: email) I want first to offer up a model (fictional) of what might constitute ‘bad’ TIE where Jackson’s ‘gap’ disappears. In an episode from the first series of the comedy *The League of Gentleman* aired on BBC 2 in 1999 a fictional TIE group *Legz Akimbo* visit a primary school. The comedy sketch (which can be accessed on Youtube<sup>6</sup>) serves as a useful touchstone for how TIE can often be perceived at its worst as being dull, over-worthy, amateur, and a stepping-stone for actors wanting to get into ‘better’ acting work such as TV. The sketch reveals and uses the most negative stereotyping of TIE work for comic effect but like all comedy works on us recognising the truth in its perception. In it, an aggressive female vicar announces to the class of primary school children that instead of doing “proper lessons” they will in fact be “watching a play about homosexuality aimed at 9 to 12 year olds.” The vicar goes on to say “some people call this theatre in education, I call it AIDS in a van!!!” What the audience then sees is a short and

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<sup>6</sup> Go to: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=J4yYhnkxdfI>

ridiculous ‘forum’ theatre workshop followed by the most didactic of theatre pieces<sup>7</sup>, entitled *Everybody Out*, which goes on to expose how the worst kind of educational theatre ends up enforcing negative stereotypes rather than challenging them. As sets wobble, costumes split and cues are missed, we see shots of an uninterested, and patronised, audience of children watching as three actors, who frequently and unintentionally ‘come-out-of-character’, try and ‘show’ that gay men “are just normal healthy guys” before raising the spectre of AIDS in the shape of an actor dressed in a skeleton costume.

The *Legz Akimbo* sketch illustrates how poor aesthetics, or a too fiercely didactic approach, might inhibit learning. First, because the audience are quite simply bored, uninterested and disengaged; and second, because the actors are too present. The dilemma of the actor’s presence as both phenomenal and character bodies raises the question of embodiment, which will resurface, in depth, in *Study 2*. For now, we can see how the poor aesthetic values present in the *Legz Akimbo* sketch obfuscate, confuse and alienate the issues, because the will to instruct supercedes either the will to engage in dialogue or the imperative to entertain.

### ***Suspicious Minds***

Is it likely that within the cultural imagination there exists a view of drama in education or TIE, which the *Legz Akimbo* sketch resembles? Historically, drama has had to deal with a wider suspicion of its value. I want to suggest that school management teams, governments and local authorities, as well as parents and pupils themselves, have authored this suspicion<sup>8</sup> - either because much of this work is considered didactic, and didacticism is considered doctrinaire; or that its purpose is not understood as having a value in the economic structure of the workplace; or because its aesthetic value is being inefficiently negotiated during the act of participation as we have just seen in the *Legz Akimbo* example. Teachers might well question drama and TIE’s efficacy, but before I use Splendid’s work in order to testify against and challenge these suspicions I want to say how education might be more generally viewed as suspicious by using an autobiographical example.

In May 2009 my Dad got drunk at a family party and performed an aggressive outburst. Although there was potentially an audience of many, the majority of this performance, because of the party hubbub, was one-to-one: him-to-me. His anger was directed at me

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<sup>7</sup> The ‘forum first/play second’ format is against accepted notions of TIE’s efficacy.

<sup>8</sup> See Dorothy Heathcote’s work. Paul Sutton’s PhD thesis, (cited below) again expands on her strategies for overcoming obstacles for teaching drama by promoting collaborative approaches. The establishment of SCYPT also points toward a need for an organised lobbying of drama’s educational value. I’m also well aware that my claims remain largely unsupported by anything other than anecdotal or perceptual evidence.

because he felt I had not seen how he had supposedly defended me in the face of secondary school teachers who, at a parent's evening during my A-levels, were encouraging me, by proxy, to work harder and read more widely. Dad spat inadvertently in my face when he told me that he was trying to "protect" me by encouraging me "to have a life". When I asked Dad what he felt he was 'protecting' me from, and what the 'life' was that he wanted me to be having, he didn't or couldn't answer – words, at that point, seemed to fail him. Perhaps he stopped short of acting on an instinct to say that 'life' lay in working class pursuits or me engaging in more *manly* endeavours – I remember him actively encouraging me to learn how to change a carburettor on my clapped-out Ford Escort car after we visited a scrap-yard, and how he repeatedly voiced his concern that I did not have time to learn DIY because I was so busy with my studies.

It occurs to me now that given my Dad's upbringing (which I have sometimes described as 'feral') and the fact that he was subjected to that system of education in the 1950s and 1960s, which rendered him part of the lower tier in the Secondary Modern/Grammar paradigm,<sup>9</sup> that his view of education is emotionally complex. Without even entertaining the potential implication of any emotional issues Dad was experiencing through drunkenness,<sup>10</sup> it might well be that his view of the education system induces an inferiority complex, or a feeling of failure, or, at the very least, of an unrealised potential. It may be that he has a feeling of being labelled or cast unfairly – there have certainly been frequent comments in the family at various times about how, as a Mathematician, he could have studied successfully at tertiary level. But crucially, on the surface at least, there seems to have existed a suspicion in Dad about the usefulness of education – Shakespeare was "crap" and History was "pointless", he once or twice memorably said. It was against this backdrop that I was schooled, and as the first in even the wider family network to study at A-level I was the unprecedented link between this working-class home and an unknown educational quantity. I was also, as the eldest of three boys, setting an example for his younger sons to follow. For Dad whose stated dream was to run a business with his sons,<sup>11</sup> my, by no means inevitable, move away into the professional, or even middle, classes through the education system must have represented a challenge to his expectations. Dad's suspicion might well have revolved around a fear of the unknown effect of his son's transformation. My subjection to education therefore represented

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<sup>9</sup> See Jackson's study on the post-war expansion of education in the UK (2007: pp39 – 46)

<sup>10</sup> The family party coincided with the fairly recent arrival of Dad's first grandchild, my niece, who I was holding at the time of the outburst. Perhaps the telescopic relief into which the generations are thrown on such occasions provoked Dad's wrath?

<sup>11</sup> In the 1980s Dad sold DIY wares under the trading name of *Danbar Products*. The name was supposed to have derived from his three sons' names: Robert, Barrie and Daniel. I often noted, without concern or regret, that I seem to have been, perhaps presciently, under-represented. Barrie and Daniel are both now traders in LED lighting.

a resistant force, a challenge to convention – and therefore, I would suggest, the act of pedagogy becomes subversive because it has a transformative value predicated on its ability to disrupt and alter the status quo. Would it be too dramatic to allude to Freire’s universal oppressive forces through this particular autobiographical example?

The question remains how to overcome latent suspicion for educational theatre through a good aesthetic that allows for the ‘creative gap’?

***Slick, adj. First-class, excellent; neat, in good order; smart, efficient, that operates smoothly; superficially attractive, glibly clever. (Of things, actions, etc.) (OED)***

Let’s look at how aesthetic concerns help to create Jackson’s ‘gaps’ in Splendid’s work. In rehearsal and through the 7-month run of *The Good Woman of Szechuan*, Frampton, Mackay and I paid a lot of attention to the aesthetic frame of the drama. Playing space was clearly delineated with a rope, creating a clear separation from the audience. The end-on staging helped to create clear frames. Our choreography had a symmetrical quality. Playing multiple roles promoted a sense of *actorly* skill through the juxtaposition of heightened physical and vocal elements. A screen placed upstage projected well-edited visuals to add to the montage of effects, for example, through static images aiming to contradict the attitude being presented by the actors on stage. The production according to Jane Barrie, (Director of Drama at Kirkham Grammar School in Preston), was “vibrant, engaging, slick and accessible.” (Splendid’s website<sup>12</sup>)

I am unsure at what stage in the run Barrie saw our show, and it may be that she saw a ‘slicker’ version because it was nearer to the end than the beginning of it, but this description is significant. It is this quality of vibrancy and slickness, which adds to any work’s accessibility too. The sensations of beauty, joy and fun (Brecht’s *Spass*) produced by a well-made aesthetic help ensure that the inefficient blocks do not appear. The ‘bad’ and inefficient *Legz Akimbo* TIE company produces suspicion and cynicism, which closes or shuts-down the pedagogical appetite. What the *Legz Akimbo* audience sees are ridiculous actors rather than character creations, inefficiency and bad craft rather than an invisible competency. The *Legz Akimbo* audience is not able to transcend the experience of inefficiency at any point. It is not able to engage in a dialectical structure because the distance becomes too great and the gap is never narrowed. The audience and actors need to cover some ground in that gap, if not thoroughly close it, in order for a new synthesis – the making of meaning – to appear.

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<sup>12</sup> ([http://www.splendidproductions.co.uk/feedback\\_new.php](http://www.splendidproductions.co.uk/feedback_new.php))

### *The Appetite for Subversiveness*

Assuming a strong aesthetic is present in Splendid's work, and that there is enough 'space' for the 'creative gap' to appear, what happens there? Pedagogy, as I have so far discussed here does not protect the status quo, it subverts it, necessarily; and, is in a constant state of flux. "At any one moment of perception and response, the meanings we construct will be unfixed, provisional and negotiable in form." (Jackson, 2007: 270) Using Splendid's work as an example, I want to discuss how a strong appetite for subversiveness might exist in the TIE audience. This will allow us to see how, historically, teachers' feedback supports the argument that companies like Splendid have to negotiate a tension between their aims toward subversion while trying to avoid being seen as doctrinaire. Crucially, in the example of Splendid, this has been negotiated by participatory dialogue with students.

In their 2005/2006 show *4 Legs Good 2 Legs Bad*, an adaptation of George Orwell's *Animal Farm*, footage of The World Trade Centre collapsing after the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001 was shown at the point where in Orwell's narrative the windmills collapse. Frampton notes how this "caused some controversy" (2010: email) and how

in one school a young man stormed the stage after the show to complain about our use of the film. We spoke to him for a little while about why he was offended and how it worked with the story and he seemed to calm down a little. (2010: email)

As if to bolster Splendid's reputation for subversive theatre, Frampton also notes how

one school in Bath gave us one of the toughest post-show discussions ever after our production of *Antigone*. They accused the company and our piece of being left wing propaganda. Which it wasn't, we just offered some facts and figures about the war in Iraq, Guantánamo Bay and the knee-jerk reaction laws that had been put in place after 9/11. The teacher has stopped bringing us in now our work is not so politically like a punch in the face. He loved the fact that his right wing (some further right than you might like) students were challenged directly by a piece of theatre. (2010: email)

In another instance a Year 10 pupil asked Frampton if Guantánamo was real. After learning that it was, the girl spent the night looking up facts about it on the internet before collecting signatures from other school pupils for a petition which she eventually sent with a letter of complaint to Tony Blair, a moment Frampton describes as "genius" (2010: email). The reaction is suggestive of a latent politicisation amongst secondary school pupils that can be 'activated' by this type of work. In order for this *transformation* to take place, it is necessary

that more questions be asked than answers given in order to set up the space for a suitable dialogue to appear as dialectic. At no point in *4 Legs Good 2 Legs Bad*, which I saw as a teacher/client at the King's School, did the company pronounce that Guantánamo was 'bad' or at least not in any overt way, although we can make guesses as to how Splendid might view it. That the space existed for the audience to formulate questions about it in relation to Orwell's fictional point in the play did however lead to an 'active' response, certainly in the case of the Year 10 girl who, it might be said with tongue-in-cheek, was turned into a 'political activist' overnight.

Clearly within Splendid's wider canon there are subversive elements at work, but how are these qualities expounded in *The Good Woman of Szechuan*?

A song with the following lyrics 'opens' the show:

Everybody hates poor people  
Everybody hates poor people  
Everybody hates poor people  
I do, don't you?

Poor people everywhere  
With their dirty faces and horrible hair  
Prams overflowing with fat kids  
Who never stop eating chips

Why don't they feed them organic fruit?  
Why don't they feed them organic fruit?  
Everybody hates fat people  
I do, don't you?

We sing the lyrics as if we are "patronising plutocrats" (Hales, 2007) using parodic gestures of 'refinement', during which real-life images gathered from the media are projected on a screen behind us. The images aim to illustrate the reality of poverty, such as the price of organic fruit compared to a loaf of white bread and offer a counter-attitude to that being clearly presented by the actors through their song. We allude to topical beliefs expounded in the media about the choices some socio-economic groups make in relation to areas like diet. We provoke questions about whether those choices are motivated by *taste*<sup>13</sup> or economics. Of

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<sup>13</sup> As if to extend Brecht's distaste for the 'culinary' (see footnote on p.23) Hales' adaptation illustrates a more contemporary concern related to over-consumption. The phenomenon of eating-habits, obesity

course, it also frames the ensuing narrative and its suggestion at the corruptive power of money. Even with this short example from the first 3-minutes of the show, we begin to see how the politics might readily be viewed as ‘subversive’, although I will also question whether this is the case later.

If we continue, for a moment, to accept these elements as subversive we can view it that teachers remain largely supportive of them. As we might expect from any business with commercial aims, feedback abounds on Splendid’s website to testify to that. In fact, Frampton cites the following example as her ‘only’ complaint:

Perhaps political points of view and comments in workshop were biased and not balanced in discussion...The play may well be biased as a work of art but I felt you needed to present the views as your own rather than as the accepted majority viewpoint. (quoted by Frampton, 2010: email)

Amanda Mitchell, Head of Drama at Sir Roger Manwood’s School in Sandwich, Kent, provided this feedback after Splendid visited the school with their production of *Antigone* in 2006/2007. These comments were born out of a discussion, which ensued in the subsequent workshop. Frampton goes on to recount how they:

...got into a debate about the futility of war and the perceived stupidity of George Bush. The students were actually the instigators, but Sandwich is quite a conservative place and the room was filled with poppies and war memorials and felt a little more like the British Legion. (2010: email)

Clearly, this example invites us to consider the dialogic quality of TIE and the particularity of the place and space in which it is performed along with all its cultural delimiters. It is Frampton’s view that:

there seemed to be a more extreme reaction to the politics of our pieces within the public school sector. It seemed that the private school students got more offended on other peoples behalf’s, (*sic*) there was more of an inclination for outrage. (2010: email)

Frampton also notes how there are:

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and the economics of taste is exhibited through a presentation of facts and statistics to offer up a point of contrast to the lyrics of the song. One such fact, presented here, is that people on low incomes have similar diets to the rest of the population.

a high number of religious schools on our client list too, these drama departments tend to suffer from quite a lot of intervention when choosing the work they would like to (*sic*) students to perform. Some subjects are completely over-ruled and language is taken out of work if it might potentially cause offence. These schools LOVE (*sic*) getting us in, because they know that we will challenge their students mentally and their opinions on what theatre should be. They know that we will provide some material that they themselves could never put on in school. (2010: email)

It would appear from our quick analysis of the Splendid model that from within Drama departments there is an appetite for the company's 'brand' of subversiveness, but crucially, this sits within a wider suspicion or distaste for it, even from within the school environment itself.

However, given what we know about TIE and educational theatre operating within a marketplace and how Brecht (certainly for Splendid) has become an industry in itself with its own imperative to protect the revenue it generates without third party funding, could it be that an illusion or semblance of subversiveness is simply being regurgitated? How can we be sure this 'subversiveness' is not a mere copy or replica designed to support the commodity of Brecht? How do we know that the act of staying up all night to write a letter to Tony Blair is not simply the performance of an empty gesture?

Any attempt at answering these questions demands a re-calibration of what it is to be a 'political activist'. This then helps us move from a purely Marxist position concerned only with the politics of the class struggle, toward the more, paradoxically, pluralistic realm of the politics-of-the-personal and the individual's desire for transformation. This is dependent on the 'creative gap' in the aesthetic, which allows a pedagogical process to happen. This is in itself subversive because it ushers in that move toward transformation that the individual does through the act of making, or trying to make, meaning.

We see how the TIE movement<sup>14</sup>, and by proxy, work in educational theatre, has latent political connotations and therefore an inherently subversive potential, not least because of its genealogy and its connection to a politically dominated ancestral line. If Brecht marks some kind of 'beginning' in this respect, let's look at his early *Lehrstücke* (*learning plays*) written

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<sup>14</sup> For a fuller enquiry into TIE see Paul Sutton's published (1997) PhD thesis: *The Dramatic Property: a New Paradigm of Applied Theatre Practice for a Globalised Media Culture*. In it he expands on the TIE movement in the UK. From the initiative at Belgrade Theatre, Coventry in 1965, widely seen as TIE's 'inception' through to the continued promotion of TIE's values through The Standing Conference for Young People's Theatre (SCYPT).

between 1926 and 1933 before considering how my work with *Splendid* sits within the evolutionary model of educational theatre.

### ***Lehrstücke – lost in translation***

Brecht's *Lehrstücke* (learning plays) were revolutionary in the way that they marked a wholesale re-structuring of the actor/audience relationship. Despite their formal structure, these texts were designed as highly adaptable and 'functional' pieces to be performed by amateurs. In reaction to theatre which Brecht terms 'culinary'<sup>15</sup> his aim was "to bring about a more democratic mode of communication" (Mueller, 1994: 103) which promoted a more critically productive engagement with the art through the audience's participation in the plays as actors. This was an attempt to move away from passive modes of consumption, toward the less gluttonous mode of active participation. The emphasis elevated the participatory process above any notion of product by aiming toward "a total abolition of the division between performance and audience" (1994: 105). Clearly, the *Lehrstücke* were an attempt at innovation.<sup>16</sup> However, like much of Brecht's innovative theory and practice, there has remained a problem in the way that the *Lehrstücke* have been 'handed' to us as 'didactic', or as 'thesis pieces'. (Wirth, 1999: 113) At the least, this reading misrepresents their innovation. Analysis of the *Lehrstücke* does point toward their dialectical nature: "Learning how to think dialectically is central and applies to the content (the specific *Lehre*) just as much as it does to the formal arrangement". (Mueller, 1994: 108) However, the fact that Brecht's *Lehrstücke* have been passed on through seminal translation as pieces of didacticism is what Mueller calls "a more-or-less total misunderstanding of this group of plays". (1994: 79) As if to support this view, writing in 1936, Brecht seems even to apologise for the *Lehrstücke*'s didactic nature, "with the learning-play...the stage begins to be didactic. A word of which I, as a man of many years of experience in the theatre, am not afraid." (Brecht, 1977c: 6) Of course, we are subject to another translation of Brecht's words here<sup>17</sup>, but it nevertheless appears that his tone is defensive. Is he also all too aware of the didactic play's limitations? Or is there a case for the play to be both didactic and dialectic?

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<sup>15</sup> Brecht uses the term "dishes up" in a comparison of Dramatic and Epic Opera in the essay *The Modern Theatre is the Epic Theatre* where he suggests that music in the Epic Opera should communicate a position or attitude. He suggests the effect of the new theatre's innovations may be a "threat to opera" which he characterises as "culinary" because of its propensity toward "sensual satisfaction" or pure "pleasure" as opposed to "philosophical, dynamic" critical engagement. (Brecht on Theatre, 1964: 39) Brecht, of course, was reacting to that 'bourgeois' theatre which aimed at illusion or a mollifying affect on the audience that consumed it.

<sup>16</sup> Paradigmatically, later developments such as Boal's Forum theatre innovations may be seen as a descendant of the *Lehrstücke*.

<sup>17</sup> John Willet's (1964) translation of Brecht's writings is collected under the title *Brecht on Theatre: the development of an aesthetic*. It is a seminal text along with the translations of Martin Esslin, which, for non-German speakers studying Brecht's work, serves as key source.

The problem of being lost in translation is one reason why the *Lehrstücke* are considered to be didactic but we would be wise to look elsewhere too. Mueller claims that the *Lehrstücke* were designed to function in the ‘new state’ where the ‘old’ apparatus of the theatre machine, with its emphasis on separation between actor and audience and its reliance on commodification, was to have been long overthrown. Potentially, the biggest coup de theatre of all time would have been committed by a group of artists whose shared goals “involved as a major concern the elimination of the gap between the production and consumption of art”. (Mueller: 1994: 82) Viewed in this light, the *Lehrstücke* are revolutionary pieces in ways that Brecht’s later work, (including *The Good Woman of Szechuan*) might be seen as ‘admissions’ of the continued existence of the ‘old’ state’s apparatus because of the latter’s continued physical separation of actor and audience. The *Lehrstücke* are therefore anachronistic. Clearly they were built for a different world order, and appeared too readily as instructive or didactic. It is only once they are re-appropriated in a more openly dialectic fashion that their efficacy is re-discovered.

Wirth, having documented his extensive work on *Lehrstücke*, sees how:

Today it is possible to free the *Lehrstücke* from the compromises of the past and to bring them up to the standard of, as I call it, the autarkic metatheatre. When you arrange the *Lehrstücke* as performance libretti and not as tools of indoctrination, their performative potential, like the revolt of the young comrade, breaks through all barriers of doctrine. (1993: 118-119)

I have engaged in this discussion of the *Lehrstücke* because it exemplifies the tension between didactic and dialectic pedagogies. But it also highlights Brecht’s prescience of the actor/spectator dynamic and the breakdown of its bourgeois apparatus, especially in the various performative contexts as we might perceive them at this point in the twenty-first century.

### ***Performativity in the classroom***

Having discussed the performative nature of pedagogy from the perspective of the actor/spectator model in the context of theatrical performance, I want to go one step further than the *Lehrstücke* in the dissolution of space and suggest that teaching itself, in a classroom setting, can also be performative. Of course this represents a logical extension of the Butler argument for the performative construction of identities, with, in my case, the Teacher just adding to the canon I might perform, or have performed on me. But in *Performing Pedagogy*, Charles Garoian discusses how performance artists, especially, have “used memory and

cultural history to critique dominant cultural assumptions, to construct identity, and to attain political agency.” (1999: 2) Garoian suggests that performance art teachers especially engage in performative acts necessarily. Schechner too, in his definition of performativity<sup>18</sup> alludes to its various modes and how they often take place outside theatre spaces. Performativity, here, is “like a performance”, but not in the “orthodox” sense. (2002: 110) As a teacher in a secondary school I have engaged in this kind of performativity in various ways through certain provocations or interventions – *Verfremdungseffekts* applied in life outside a theatricalised frame, such as holding hands with a male partner at the King’s welcome drinks, or wearing multi-coloured nail polish as a teacher in a class of 11 – 13 year olds. These acts have a performative quality in that they are bound in a desire to subvert a hegemonic set of cultural assumptions.

### ***Perform or Else***

This is not to say that all performative acts have subversive aims. Jon McKenzie in *Perform or Else* (2001) builds his thesis around the idea that the language of performance permeates the discourse around theories of globalization. He suggests that a matrix has been opened up which demands that as subjects we engage not just with the language of performance but also its objectives that are geared toward growth, higher-performance and increased efficiency. It’s a language that permeates management structures and corporate culture while, McKenzie argues, driving a demand for technological advancement; what he calls “the challenge of efficiency.” (2001: 56) This ‘challenge’ paradoxically has implications for how Splendid ‘package-up’ Brecht. During my time with the company, Frampton repeatedly referred to it as a business with clients to protect and revenue to manage. This imperative for increased efficiency would manifest itself in protocols and systems of behaviour, to which I, as an employee, was expected to adhere – from the ordered ‘get-in’ to the delegation of ‘tour tasks’ like recording mileage. The management of us as employees was, for Frampton, an integral feature of her drive for efficiency and ‘increased performance’. Brecht, within this model, is a commodity, and its consumers are the learners we were performing to as employees of *Splendid Productions*. Brecht thereby became tightly wedded to the maintenance of the business’ branding. ‘Doing’ Brecht became a ‘culinary’ practice. As the language of business permeates, the language of performance becomes a unifying, motivational and galvanizing discourse that functions to promote us as better, more functional subjects.

At the most concrete level, discursive performatives and embodied performances are forms of knowledge that challenge forth the world according to different relations of force, making it

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<sup>18</sup> See Schechner, R. (2002) *Performance Studies: An introduction*. London: Routledge p110

perform in the name of technological effectiveness, organizational efficiency, social efficacy, and many other performative valorimeters. At the turn of the twenty-first century, the paradigms are coming into contact more and more, and as their citational networks become hyperlinked, their respective performatives and performances break apart and recombine in a highly charged, highly pressurized milieu. (McKenzie, 2001: 194)

The suggestion that within this twenty-first century terrain a labour-force is complicit in this performative culture has implications for the way TIE might continue to develop, as it no longer exists as the only site for the kind of participatory learning that characterises it. The dialogic forces and pendulum-flow conspire to empower subjects to inhabit new ‘creative gaps’ in the aesthetic properties of a globalised culture driven by technological advancement.

Has a new educational imperative therefore opened up? One that must meet the demands of this transformation, which McKenzie seems to think is running at hyper-speed, and equip learners with the skills to cope with it? The culture of fixed lessons, learning outcomes, target-meeting, and grade-attainment might be seen to be an out-dated educational paradigm and in the twenty-first century, in the UK at least, we might easily take the view that the model for teaching Brecht has been paradoxically ignored, or that it has failed to discover and re-discover its own dialectical nature. Sure, Brecht, a self-declared utopian, wanted to transform the world, (he was a Marxist after all), but he did not transform the world on the grand scale that such a statement suggests. He did however revolutionize theatrical language and bring attention to a bourgeois ‘apparatus’ in the theatre. So now that revolution has been and gone, the question now might be: what next? How to avoid consigning Brechtian theory to history as part of a Brechtian legacy?

I would suggest: by aligning ourselves with Mumford’s observation that “Brecht was an ever-changing lover of flux who came to believe that we are contradictory beings, constantly modified by our interactions with the social and material world, and by the eye of each new beholder.” (2009: 1) That Brecht’s theory and practice would stop performing in some way would have been anathema to his ideal. So when we use the term post-Brechtian, as Hans-Thies Lehmann says, we are not talking of “a theatre that has nothing to do with Brecht but a theatre which knows that it is affected by the demands and questions for theatre that are sedimented in Brecht’s work but can no longer accept Brecht’s answers” (2006: 27).

This is where the subversive action and function of pedagogy gets to relocate and reassert itself in the argument because it also addresses, directly, a (very Brechtian) concern with transformation. Things remain in flux and, in an organic and molecular way, are consistently

changing. In Marxist terms too, as subjects, we are alterable and if we are alterable, we can be empowered to alter or affect change. Brecht aligns his theory with Marxist philosophy. This is why, when we think of change in relation to Brecht we also endow the subject with the capacity, and if not, then at least the potential, to help shape and re-order structures within what McKenzie calls the “performative matrix” (2001: 131). The meta-theatrical language Brecht developed was, as we would expect, also subject to this changeability. Lehmann’s post-dramatic study provides a useful touchstone when he alludes to the new shape of power relations which is “increasingly organized as a micro-physics, as a web, in which even the leading political elite – not to mention single individuals – hardly have any real power over economic-political processes any more.” (2006: 175) This theorizing of the new politics leads me to suggest that serving up ‘culinary’ Brecht inherently falsifies his theory and deems him irrelevant. In this context, Brecht’s pedagogy ceases to perform. And in the example of Splendid’s work, we can see, that despite Frampton’s integration of the company into the market economy, it avoids, to some extent, becoming ‘culinary’ Brecht on two counts. First through its open dialogue with participants and second through its upholding of strong aesthetic values in its productions. Key to this is a commitment to maintaining ‘relevancy’ for the target audience. If Brecht’s theory has been falsely married to a Marxist doctrine in a post-Marxist society where the binary quality of a mis-reading of Hegelian dialectics leaves no room for the creative gap or what might be seen as a flatter, less hierarchical transmission of knowledge and power, it is bound to lose its relevancy. In losing its relevancy it loses also its legitimacy as a call to participate. Without participation there is no pedagogy and without pedagogy there is no subversive action. This is why in management terms, in the now entrenched globalised hegemonic system of capitalism, the imperative is for subjects to be creative participants in the global protocol rather than passive consumers of it. To uphold its subversive potential and therefore its performative value, we have to go further than crediting the TIE movement as being the epitome of the development of Brecht’s ‘unfinished project’ and take it up where McKenzie locates it – in our active participation as performers in the learning-play (*Lehrstücke*) of everyday life.

## Study 2

### *GESTIC ACTING: exhibiting things as they (really) are?*

There is no escaping the fact that *Gestus* is the key concept in Brechtian actor training and the defining quality of a truly Brechtian performance. (Thomson, 2000: 109)

#### **Overview**

Here I will focus on *Gestus* as a technique of acting from the actor's perspective as a route to understanding its pedagogical function. I will draw on my own experience of encountering Brecht's work as an actor in *The Good Woman of Szechuan*, and Meg Mumford's (1997) theorizing of *Gestus* along with her accounts of performances of Brechtian role in both British and German contexts. We will see that *Gestus* appears to resemble, through its dialectical characteristics, Jackson's creative gaps and represents an ideal tool with which to 'write' meaning. The way in which the actor embodies the *Gestic* style will lead us to reconsider how the British system of actor training is dominated by a view of embodiment that sits within a different dichotomy. This paradigm is readily perceived as contradictory and pitches Brechtian understandings of embodiment in opposition to Stanislavski. I will undertake a re-appraisal of this paradigm by drawing on Philip Zarrilli's (2004), and Erika Fischer-Lichte's (2008) work on embodiment. It will allow us to arrive at an idea of embodiment, which will question the conditions under which I worked as a *Gestic* actor. We will see how it is possible for inefficiency and lack of understanding to become embodied within performance. But, crucially, we will see how the very concept of embodiment, as it has been 'handed down' to us, is insufficient as a preparation for what a *Gestic* actor might 'be' and 'do'.

#### ***Brecht is for the Brain***

In *Study 1*, our pedagogical setting was chiefly the secondary school, and we have seen how a tendency toward reduction often features, sometimes necessarily, here. The act of making Brecht 'palatable' is a reductive process, which involves packaging-up titbits and sound bites – clearly at odds, paradoxically, with Brecht's rejection of the culinary. To give an example, I often used the following phrase, no doubt inherited from Frampton, in workshops:

Brecht is for the brain, Stan for the heart<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Certain short-cuts and catch-phrases evolved through the act of work-shopping. This particular one goes on to describe Artaud as being 'for the guts'. While it is hard to cite authorship, much of Splendid's parlance used Frampton as its conduit, if not its source.

While the summing-up served to grade the information for a variety of learners and ‘position’ Brecht’s approach within some ‘known’ parameters, as one would expect, the reductive tendency is problematic. It supports the production of binaries.

Many secondary school pupils appear to sum up their understandings of Brechtian acting as ‘opposite’ to Stanislavskian acting, and clearly, in this context, we, in *Splendid*, were complicit in this binary’s entrenchment. In this *study* my focus is to review the Stanislavski/Brecht paradigm from the perspective of the Brechtian actor not because I am interested in re-positioning Brechtian Studies<sup>20</sup> - that remains outside the scope of this study - but in an attempt to discover how, as an actor, I was led to engage with the problem of identification with role through Frampton’s insistence that I must ‘act with the head’ – as if I shouldn’t ‘act with the heart’. And, given that either through teaching or learning I have been complicit in the hardening of certain derivations of that head/heart binary: (with)in/(with)out, feeling/distance, absorption/alienation, realistic/unrealistic, natural/stylized, embodied/disembodied, body/mind; I must attempt to unravel them.

If only to answer Brecht’s call implicit here:

Ignorant heads interpret the contradiction between playing (demonstration) and experiencing (identification) as if only the one or the other appeared in the actor’s work...In reality it is, of course, a matter of two competing processes that unite in the work of the actor...Out of the struggle and the tension between the two antipodes...the actor draws his real impact. (Brecht 1967: 703)

My resolve suddenly appears as a ‘humanising’ one – an attempt to avert a purely utilitarian understanding of what it is to be a *Gestic* actor and explode a ‘two-world’<sup>21</sup> view which may have impeded my development as a *Gestic* actor. What’s more, my desire to engage in an emotional embodiment of Brechtian character, would, as we will see in *Study 3*, have effects beyond Brecht’s play, and impact upon my MAPaR show because of the more autobiographical context of personal trauma.

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<sup>20</sup> On the problem of comparing Brecht’s theory to Stanislavski see: John Rouse *Brecht and the Contradictory Actor* (*Theatre Journal*, Vol. 36, No. 1, *The Interpretive Actor* (Mar., 1984), pp. 25-42) Rouse begins this article by stating: “Much scholarly material has been written on the subject of Brecht and the actor. The vast majority of this material, however, has focused on Brecht’s various theoretical statements about acting, absolutising them into an inviolate theory of so-called Epic performance and getting caught up in vaguely generalized comparisons between Brecht’s “system” of acting and Stanislavski’s.

<sup>21</sup> Erika Fischer-Lichte coins the term ‘two-world’ to describe the view that embodiment has been theorised since the 18<sup>th</sup> Century as a separation - inspired by the Cartesian split between body and mind.

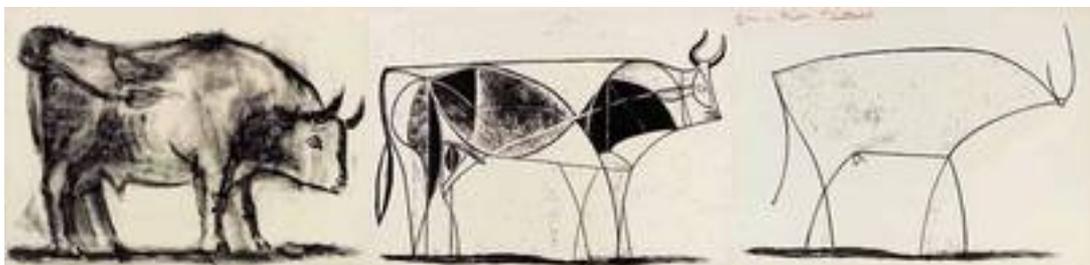
## *Gestus?*

But first, what is *Gestus*? While *Gestus* is problematic in its etymology, difficult to grasp as a concept and widely mis-understood, it clearly underpins Brechtian ideology.

Brecht believed that it is the actor's business not to express feeling but to 'show attitude' or *Gesten* (Willet, 1959: 172)

The question of its extent is as complex as that of its specificity. *Gestus* may be a simple bodily movement of the actor (facial expression), or a particular way of behaving (gestuality), or a physical relationship between the two characters, or a stage arrangement (a figure formed by a group of characters), or the common behaviour of a group, the collective attitude of characters in a play, or the gesture of global delivery from the stage to the public via the *mise-en-scene*. This range of different kinds of *Gestus* reveals the constant enlargement of the notion of social *Gestus*. What would appear, in its slightest manifestation, as the index of an attitude, becomes an intentional signal emitted by the actor. The actor constantly controls his gestuality, in order to indicate the character's social attitude and way of behaving. (Pavis, 1982: 41)

Clearly, apart from anything else, *Gestus* has aesthetic values, if only because it involves the *showing* of the contradictions at the heart of human behaviour. At this point Jackson's 'creative gap' reappears as *Gestus* offers up a space, through its contradictory nature, where potentially meaning can be made. While *Gestus* is an ideology, a staging device that impacts upon arrangement and stage proxemics, a way of constructing fable, and a musical genre - all of which contribute to the aesthetic - it is, crucially, for the actor on the stage, a system of acting, which to follow Jackson's argument, must have an aesthetic dimension if it is to succeed in its pedagogical effort toward transformation.



[Figure 1] *Der Stier (The Bull)* – Picasso ([http://www.graphikmuseum-picasso-muenster.de/sammlungen/pablo\\_picasso\\_brdas\\_lithografische\\_werk.html?L=](http://www.graphikmuseum-picasso-muenster.de/sammlungen/pablo_picasso_brdas_lithografische_werk.html?L=)) accessed 8/6/09)

Early on in the preparation and rehearsal of *The Good Woman of Szechuan* it appears I may have tried to access the Brechtian aesthetic through a quality of caricature – the 'other' to the

Stanislavskian hegemony; an over-exaggerated physical style, comedic, pantomimic, ludic(rous), enforced by its reliance on the construction of tableaux vivants and tending toward a cartoonish use of vocality and physicality. I used the term ‘cartoonish’ readily. My hunch at this stage in rehearsals for ‘equating’ *Gestus* with *cartoon* was however a lever for my process of considering and reconsidering it. The caricature imposes a reductive process and yet the style becomes ridiculous, through the enlargement of its most striking features. Caricaturing is a *Verfremdungseffekt* - the familiar ‘real’ is made strange. Apparently, the representation is re-presented in a less ‘life-like’ way. Yet in its strangeness and ‘less life-like’ way, the ‘thing’ remains ‘real’ in its perception. Brecht’s ‘hall of mirrors’ merely parodies the ‘real’ thing so that its constructed state becomes more visible. In effect its ‘real’ quality is not compromised as we discover a phenomenological truth that the real/unreal binary is itself constructed. (This observation is crucial to the way parody works in the context of identity construction, as we will see in *Study 3*). In Picasso’s triptych [fig. 1] the thing we call a *bull* remains firmly intact as ‘a bull’ in each of its representations. If *Gestus* operates as a tool to fulfil Brecht’s theatrical endeavour ‘to show things as they are’, we might be looking in the wrong place as we turn to the signified and search for the ‘thing’ (in this case, the bull) as the locus of the ‘real’ because the representations are evidently unstable. The representation takes on multiple guises. What we begin to see is that the transformative power of its construction is the only thing we can rely on. The writing of the bull is transformative in that it exhibits the process of its construction.

Another paradox emerges. The movement characterised by the juxtaposition of Picasso’s three drawings relies on a quality of stasis. In *The Good Woman of Szechuan*, Frampton, McKay and myself used the technique of freeze-framing heavily. In order to explode a moment in the narrative – the transacting of money for example – a *Gestic* still was created to make clear the attitude of the character toward that transaction. At other times, episodes were ‘book-ended’ or made quotable through a definite gesture designed to make comment from a character’s perspective. The tableau vivant or a moment of punctuation through stillness is an interruptive gesture, which produces a still moment and yet, as Mumford notes, it is the “striking feature of the practice of *Gestus* that it entails the presentation of dialectical flux through the stasis-oriented picture.” (1997: 85) Thomson too is ‘fascinated’ by the “tension between the static and the dynamic.” (1998: 233) This quality of stillness seems to mark the absence of movement, but is therefore contingent on movement’s presence. Movement and flow, which in non-*Gestic* theatre remains less interrupted, is ruptured in order to engage the spectator in a paradox; that of witnessing change. A gap is created with quite specific aims: to effect a process of making meaning. The *Gestic* actor embodies this gap. If then, it is the actor and/or director who chooses, like a fine editor, what to ‘cut out’, omit, write into view

or render present or absent, is it perhaps the responsibility of the actor, as a master of this meaning making, to be in absolute control over the signs they emit?

### ***The Semiotic Body***

As an example, Picasso's *Bull* serves another function: to illustrate the geometrical quality of *Gestus*. Pavis in his workshop on *Gestus*: (21/2/03 – Aphra, UKC) uses the journey from human being to animal to machine to provide a tangible example for his student participants on the “readable” and “essential” or “signature” quality to the gesture. (Pavis: 2003) Pavis refers to the ‘abstraction toward essence’ where there is a reduction to lines and shapes. Mumford also comments on “the artistic nature of *Gestus*, its ‘cut to essentials’ implying a selection and shaping process” and articulates its clear link to ‘attitude’, which she claims is “both a socially conditioned mental stance *and* body orientation in space and time.” (2009: 55) What’s more, Mumford makes a further distinction between *attitude* as a solely intellectual or cerebral position and considers the physical comportment of certain behaviours in order that they “open up for scrutiny behaviour that had been learned, that was liable to change”. (We might note at this stage how Mumford already moves us on to the terrain of embodiment.) At the heart of the function of Brecht’s theatre, Mumford claims, is the question: “why and to what end do people comport themselves as they do? Can and should their social bearing or stance be changed?” (2009: 55)

The *Gestic* actor has to embark on an effort toward reduction in order to know what to ‘write’, what to produce, what to change. The overtly authorial quality to this process thrusts the *Gestic* actor into the role of Semantician, but it might also suggest that the actor’s investment in this process is somehow disembodied because it exposes the actor as both a subject and object. The process of objectification is set in motion as the actor uses the body as a tool in an overt way. The *Gestic* actor makes no attempt to covertly disguise this process of objectification in the way that the Stanislavskian actor-of-illusion might in their efforts toward portraying pure subjectification. Here, the gaps between the subject’s multiple distinctions as actor, designer, body and spectator are clearly on show. What’s more a virtue of that ‘showing’ is made, as itself becomes a productive tool for creating gaps, which allow the spectator to see the construction. In its self-referentiality the *Gestus* is the *Gestus* of showing, or, the *Gestus* of performativity. The self-reflexive mode, which is revealed through the very language of *Gestus*, also reveals the way in which subjects are constructed and therefore profiles the dialectical subject/object motion.

The *Gestus* of performativity is crucial to an understanding of how the *Gestic* actor embodies role. The *Gestic* character exhibits how subjects are ‘written’ by showing the process in a

parodic form. This, along with Mumford's argument that the *Gestic* style of acting maintains a continued relevance because of its capacity to "produce a celebration of difference and transformability" (1997: 285) will resurface in *Study 3*.

### ***The Material Body***

First, we must also entertain the facticity of the actor's presence. Brecht's technological advancement of *Gestus*, in its elevation of the plasticity of the body and its utilitarian function cannot be truly divorced from the corporeal presence of the actor in performance. This leads us to consider how, in actor training, the idea of embodiment has evolved. Studies in acting have long been concerned with a science of embodiment<sup>22</sup> and these have largely dealt with the question of the character body, and its imitative structure. Here the actor's objective is to "make the image of a person other than themselves materialize in time and space" (Roach, 1993: 133). The will is toward a kind of disappearing act. We might suppose that the 'disappearance' of the corporeality of the actor is achieved through a 'total' embodiment of the dramatic character. Of course, the fact of the actor's body as a presence in space and *as* space for the construction of the dramatic character is an unavoidable one.

Fischer-Lichter's focus on embodiment and the presence of the 'phenomenal body' is aimed at a re-appraisal of its aesthetic properties, and an acknowledgment that the theatrical 'event' is constituted in the temporal concerns of performance, which implicate the body of the actor. Here "the emphasis lies in the tension between the phenomenal body of the actor, or their bodily being-in-the-world, and their representation of the dramatic character" (2008: 76). The paradox surfaces once we consider that in the moment of performance, we see both. They are both in a state of 'becoming'. My separation (above) of the semiotic and material body becomes merely titular once we accept Fischer-Lichter's claim of the "obsolescence" (2008: 82) of this theory of embodiment where the "art of acting has its roots in the mind-body dualism, or the two-world theory." (2008: 78)

### ***Zarrilli's Modes of Embodiment***

In acknowledging that through the very process of acting "the actor exemplifies that body and mind cannot be separated from each other" (Fischer-Lichter, 2008: 99) we might be reminded of Brecht's 'two competing processes' between demonstration and identification, and allow that as an access point toward considering a deeper, more 'bodily' appraisal of what

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<sup>22</sup> See Denis Diderot's essay *Le Paradoxe sur le Comedien* (1773) - a treatise on how great actors should create illusion and affect emotion. Diderot describes as a paradox that the best actors create the best effect toward emotion by *not* feeling emotion themselves, but rather by engaging in mimesis. See also, Joseph R. Roach's (1993) *The Player's Passion – Studies in the Science of Acting*.

‘embodiment’ might mean for the *Gestic* actor. In Zarrilli’s article: *Toward a Phenomenological Model of the Actor’s Embodied Modes of Experience* (2004) he frames an analysis around a post-Merleau-Ponty phenomenology. Here Merleau-Ponty offers us a lever with which to undermine the dualism of the mind/body split many actors appear to be preoccupied by.

The synthesis of in itself and for itself, which brings Hegelian freedom into being, has, however, its truth. In a sense, it is the very definition of existence, since it is effected at every moment before our eyes in the phenomenon of presence, only to be quickly re-enacted, since it does not conjure away our finitude. By taking up a present, I draw together and transform my past, altering its significance, freeing and detaching myself from it. (1962: 528)

At first, through a phenomenological reading, it appears as if the body has engaged in a consumptive act, which has subordinated absence. But then we get to see how Merleau-Ponty’s ‘re-enactment’ involves a repositioning of the body’s presence as *the* point of consciousness – a ‘body-mind’, or ‘bodymind’ as Zarrilli terms it. (2004: 659). Its productive value occurs by operating, to borrow Zarrilli’s term, as a ‘processual’<sup>23</sup> negotiation between felt experiences.

Merleau-Ponty (re)claimed the centrality of the lived body (*Leib*) and embodied experience as the very means and medium through which the world comes into being and is experienced. (Zarrilli, 2004: 655)

But Zarrilli moves on to dissect the nature of this embodiment by first invoking Drew Leder’s concept of the *absent body*, which he frames as a “fundamental paradox” (2004: 656). In short, that as our bodies engage in the everyday business of performing tasks or activities, it ‘forgets’ itself – its ‘presence’ becomes ‘absent’. The awareness of the body’s ‘doing’ recedes from the point of ‘doing’, much like an archer’s presence recedes as the target of the bow comes into view. The absence of the body, Zarrilli maintains, is a feature of certain “modes of embodiment” (2004: 665), which pertain to the everyday, two of which are characterised by Leder as the *surface body* and the *recessive body*.

The *surface body* revolves around a sensorimotor experience – what it touches and feels through nerve-endings and its ‘flesh’. The *surface body* “is ‘ecstatic’ in that the senses open

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<sup>23</sup> Zarrilli uses the term ‘processual’ in *Acting (Re)considered* (1995) to describe the indeterminate and unfinished nature of performance. He explains his rationale for using parentheses with the help of Margaret Drewal: “I use (re)consider to mark clearly the implicitly processual nature of “considering.” This view invites us not only to see performance as processual but also to see that “both society and human beings are performative, always already processually under construction” (Drewal, 1991: 4).”

out to the world” (2004: 658) and its experience is accessed through its surface - an exteroception. As it undergoes this process of ‘opening out to the world’ it senses the ‘Other’ and its own presence disappears from full view. This disappearing act is important, Zarrilli maintains, once we consider the adjustments the ‘bodymind’ makes as it learns a new skill, and, through the practice of it, arrives at an “intuitive” understanding of what the skill involves so that it becomes second nature. (2004: 659)

The *recessive body* refers to “the deep, inner, visceral body of corporeal depths, which in physical terms includes the mass of internal organs and processes enveloped by the body surface, such as digestion and sensations such as hunger” (2004: 660). It is ‘recessive’ because it is “going or falling into the background” (2004: 660) – the experience of this is an interoception and marked by ‘blood’ rather than ‘flesh’. As it falls away to its ‘visceral depths’ it too “disappears from full view” (2004:660).

From here Zarrilli suggests that “the normative disappearance of both surface and recessive bodies is reversed when we experience pain or dysfunction” (2004: 660) by asserting that it is this ‘affective call’ that compels the body to ‘regain’ or recalibrate its presence.

Our everyday experience of the lived body is a constant intermingling and exchange of “flesh and blood,” i.e., “we form one organic/perceptual circuit” inhabiting the surface/recessive body[ies] as a gestalt which moves between ecstatic and recessive states – projecting out into the world and falling back. The body’s disappearance and absence thereby mark our “ceaseless relation to the world” (2004: 660)

Already, within the wider context in which this study sits, we are reminded of the participatory nature of making meaning, the way in which *Gestus* exhibits contradiction, or the oscillatory mode in which the reflexive practitioner operates. But further insight is gathered once we draw on Zarrilli’s extension of Leder’s modes of embodiment because they pertain more directly to our concern for how the actor embodies experience in rehearsal and performance. For these purposes, Zarrilli adds third and fourth modes, which pertain to ‘extra-daily’ activities. He calls them the *aesthetic inner-bodymind* and the *aesthetic outer-body*.

The *aesthetic inner-body* refers us to practices and trainings that the actor’s body might more readily undergo - Zarrilli uses the example of Indian yoga. He suggests that by paying attention to the breath in these body-practices, an awareness is ‘cultivated’, designed to arrive at more “subtle levels of experience and awareness” (2004: 661). “At first, this subtle inner

bodymind is hidden, unknown, and therefore fundamentally absent from experience” (2004: 661) but through these psychophysical practices, its dormancy is awakened and remains as a dialectical motion of presence and absence. “For the individual practicing some type of psychophysical discipline or through long-term embodied practice, the experience of surface and recessive bodies can be enhanced and modulated by the gradual awakening and attunement of [this] third, *aesthetic inner bodymind*. (2004: 664)

The *aesthetic ‘outer’ body* deals with the particularity of the actors performance ‘score’ and, crucially, Zarrilli refers to the presence of the spectator in this mode. Typically through the creation of character, the actor embodies a split.

The actor’s body is a site through which representation as well as experience are generated for both self and other. The actor undergoes an experience that is one’s own, and is therefore constitutive of one’s being-in-the-world, and simultaneously constitutes a world for the other. (2004: 664)

In the heightened mode of performance, the actor must constantly adjust in the moment while enacting and inhabiting the score that embodies the character *and* the actor so that “the actor’s lived experience within the world of performance engages a constant dialectic between and among these four bodies.” (2004: 665)

Zarrilli concludes:

Within the phenomenological model explored here, the actor’s complex subjectivity is never settled or fixed within a present or a body, but rather is engaged continually in a process of its own play with ‘tos and froms’ which are characteristic of each mode of embodiment. (2004: 665)

Clearly:

For the contemporary actor who is exposed to and/or expected to perform in a wide variety of types of theatre/performance, the actor’s perception and practice of acting is a complex, ongoing set of intellectual and psychophysiological negotiations. (Zarrilli, 1995: 4)

Too complex, or too ongoing, for me to fix into words?

Maybe so, and later I will touch on another implication of this problem in relation to the practice-as-research phenomenon and the problem of theorising practice, but here the attempt

at a writing will at least mark a re-performing of my experience as a *Gestic* actor - at once an ontological and phenomenological act, and at once a way of performing this thesis as it begins to '(re)consider' *Gestus* in the light of Zarrilli's 'modes of embodiment' and Fischer-Lichte's assertion that "since the performative turn (1960s) artists do not take the body for granted as an entirely malleable and controllable material but consistently acknowledge the doubling of "being a body" and "having a body," the co-existence of the phenomenal and semiotic body." (2008: 82)

### ***Being and Having a Gestic Body***

In *The Good Woman of Szechuan* we are three actors who, in total, play somewhere between ten and fifteen characters - the playing of dramatic characters is therefore integral to the aesthetic. The presence of the character body is, necessarily, strong. The problem of to what extent we as 'phenomenal bodies' disappear in this process of acting with the head rather than the heart is solved, in part, by Zarrilli's modes of embodiment. Design imperatives and typical Brechtian values such as playing multiple roles differentiated through physicality rather than costume allow for the 'presence' of the actor's phenomenal body *and* the character body. Through their absence and presence, they play in constant flux, and this, we discover is crucial to the efficacy of the *Gestic* theatre.

In *The Good Woman of Szechuan* the presence of the phenomenal body exhibits the dialectical theatre at work *and* becomes a potent comic force through cross gender casting. 'I am playing a mother (Mrs Yang). We (her and I) purr like a cat against her upright son (Yang Sun) here played by, the female actor, Frampton. Our role-reversal is out-of-time, an anachronism, a contradiction which depends on the co-presence of the phenomenal and character bodies. The cross-gender casting becomes a potent *Gestic* tool here in a cast made up of two women and one (gay) man, and allows at times, for eruptions of gender discourses facilitated by the 'putting-on' of gender. Gender is inscribed through comportment. At another point the male character Yang Sun played by the female actor Frampton 'slaps' the female Shen Te's male alter-ego, Shui Ta, played by the female actor McKay, in a display of 'sex-play' thinking it is the female Shen Te. The 'who does what where to who?' gap is opened up and becomes a potential new site for making meaning. Again the *Gestic* actor embodies the pedagogical gap.

The bodily being-in-the-world of the actor provides the dramatic character with its existential ground and the condition for its coming into being. The character exists in the actor's physical performance alone and is brought forth both by his performative acts and his particular corporeality. (Fischer-Lichte, 2008: 84)

This re-appraisal of embodiment for the *Gestic* actor allows for us to move beyond the ‘two-world’ view and see its nature as an oscillation between and around points that remain in flux. And yet, during the work and subsequently, in preparation for my MAPaR show, was I not hampered by a ‘two-world’ view? The practice did not seem to reveal enough about how I was now functioning as a *Gestic* actor? Could it be that my actor training had inefficiently set up a false dichotomy in my understanding of embodiment? Are actors in the German tradition much better prepared in this respect?

Mumford presents a comprehensive study in her unpublished PhD thesis (1997) of how actors within the Berliner Ensemble used *Gestus*. She compares Helene Weigel’s role-playing of Mother Courage with two British characterisations of the role in productions for the RSC (1984) and Citizen’s Theatre, Glasgow (1990) by the actors Judi Dench and Glenda Jackson respectively. I use the terms ‘role-playing’ and ‘characterisation’ observably because they are suggestive of the way in which corporeal embodiment differs in each approach. Mumford concludes that “in contemporary British mainstream theatre the prioritisation of the politically most conservative premises of the (Stanislavski) System contributes greatly to the suppression of *Gestic* acting.” (1997: 199) Ultimately these actors were “unable to transform the character-oriented super-objective into the socialist superstructure” (1997: 199). Dench’s, and Jackson’s, presumed lack of training in the *Gestic* tradition was embodied in their performances. (Mumford, 1997: 199)

There are, as Brecht found in his study and use of Stanislavskian techniques in the 1950s, parallels between the ideas of *Gestus* and Objectives, *Grundgestus* and Super-Objectives but as a product of the System-centric British actor-training model, my training meant that any application of a system for my work on *The Good Woman of Szechuan* was Stanislavskian in nature.<sup>24</sup> It focused on a will to construct an illusion of uninterrupted presence of the

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<sup>24</sup> For the actor working in Britain there are perhaps three or four main routes to becoming a professional actor: either through the University or Conservatoire system, a combination of both (as in my case), or through taking no formal training at all. Francombe outlines the broad differences in the two types of institution: the University is characterized by a proliferation of courses in Drama since the early 1960s which in tandem grew alongside changes in the way in which Drama was perceived as a multi-disciplinary subject, even to the extent that its re-naming/framing as Performance Studies has been felt necessary in some quarters. Stephen Bottoms, in his article *The Efficacy/Effeminacy Braid: Unpacking the Performance Studies/Theatre Studies Dichotomy* (2003), tracks the splitting of the Performance Studies and Theatre Studies disciplines within academia and criticises the atmosphere in which this split took place, suggesting that, in part, it was motivated by certain prejudices including

character body, where the processual nature of embodiment is almost denied as an observable function. Moving toward a fuller Brechtian understanding of embodiment where the dialectical flow of identification and demonstration opens up space, within which the contradictory process gathers presence, is key to our understanding of the participatory element to Brecht's theatre. It refers us back to Freire's *conscientização*. The critical consciousness, which evolves through the presence of a contradiction in the actor's various modes of embodiment on the stage.

### ***The Reduction***

Insofar as *Gestus* functions to create gaps that allow for critical engagement, and the actor, through a composite of gestural, facial, vocal, and postural actions, embodies that function it can be said that the *Gestic* actor embodies the pedagogical gap. The process of embodiment, as we have seen, is a complex negotiation between presence and absence; a 'processual' oscillation, which is performative. Crucially it never arrives at a fixed point. Given that the function of *Gestus*, and in turn the *Gestic* actor, is to exhibit that dialectic, it could be said to have an autopoietic structure – it is self-organising and contains within it, its own structure for renewal. The *Gestic* actor, not only shows, but embodies 'things as they (really) are'.

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homophobia before going on to suggest that the two disciplines would benefit from taking a more collaborative approach. More recently, in line with Bottoms' view, Francombe notes that "the Universities have responded to the deregulation of an industry by opening out and embracing wider notions of performance, stressing the essential interdisciplinarity and intercultural nature of form and content. (2001: 183) Meanwhile, in the conservatoire tradition, courses are generally more focused on the actor's place within a, predominantly, UK-bound industry and is therefore wedded to economic imperatives. A third-way exists, as Clive Barker notes in his (1995) essay *What Training for What Theatre?* A way to bypass these routes into the profession: "Probably the best way for anyone interested in theatre training is to join with one of those companies committed to working in a particular style, with its own clear aesthetic." (1995: 105) Clearly the actors of the Berliner Ensemble and similarly those like Barker who worked within Joan Littlewood's Theatre Workshop were subject to fewer formal or dedicated training options. But, as Mumford documents in her discussion of the Berliner Ensemble's approach, and Barker too in his account of working with Littlewood (in Hodge, 2009), this latter route allows for the actor to engage in a strong ensemble and defined aesthetic rooted in experimentation. Given the experimental nature of Brecht's work, the Berliner Ensemble could be said to fit the laboratory definition of actor-training – a synthesis of practice and theory through reflective processes - a pedagogical approach taken up perhaps by the practice-as-research model being assimilated into University postgraduate programmes in the UK.

### Study 3

#### ONE MAN GOOD WOMAN: (re)presenting the gaps.

A man is an atom that perpetually breaks up and forms anew. (Brecht, 1964: 15)

#### *Opener*

Brecht's adage reverberates through this *study*, which will focus on my MAPaR show – *One Man Good Woman (OMGW)*. The show produced a set of problems that, in time, came to illuminate as productive the tensions created between what was absent and what was present there. Of course, as I will also discuss, a phenomenological reading of that very statement immediately undermines, in line with Brecht's view, the notions that either my intentions or their results can be characterised in any fixed way. The affect/effect dynamic is indeterminate. Just as I have presented the argument Jackson makes: that pedagogy functions by creating a 'gap' for meaning to be made and is a process that must be viewed as motional; and just as I posited too that *Gestus* must, even through its quality of stasis, produce a dynamic movement based on the relation between two or more objects for it to exhibit its ability to show things as they (really) are, I want also to argue here that identity and the subject's desire is contingent on 'gaps' that exist between points which are unfixed. We are in a perpetual state of 'becoming'.

*OMGW* as it was presented, and as I am re-presenting it here was also a representation of those gaps, which to follow the logic, disappear from view as soon as we try and spot them. To use Derrida's erasure concept<sup>25</sup>: the gaps are at once ~~gaps~~.

It is this very quality of enduring indeterminacy that I seek to explore in relation to identity. Clearly this became an overriding feature of *OMGW*. Sometimes, but evidently not always, this was at odds with my stated aim to 'explore *Gestus*'. Yet despite that, it may in fact be that *Gestus* was the ideal pedagogical tool with which to explore the subject of identity.

To help me I will, predominantly, draw on the theories of Judith Butler (1990), and the work of Deirdre Heddon (2008). In doing so, I will discuss the place of autobiography within *OMGW* and its implications, not least in its function toward recovery or recuperation from

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<sup>25</sup> Derrida in his essay *Signature Event Context (1972)* deconstructs the presence and value of signature: "Effects of signature are the most common thing in the world. But the condition of possibility of those effects is simultaneously, once again, the condition of their impossibility, of the impossibility of their rigorous purity." (p. 20). The concept of erasure appears elsewhere and evolves from Martin Heidegger. The ~~striketrough~~ of the word is designed to bring attention to the sign's instability or impossibility. The familiar word is made strange, not to suggest it shouldn't exist, but to exhibit its contradictory structure. The sign both does/doesn't do the thing it purports to do.

trauma. I will reiterate notions of performativity in relation to gender identities and also queer identities as I draw on *OMGW*'s drag-play elements. I will also discuss the notion of nostalgia in relation to desire and its fictive presence in places and spaces – here I will touch on Baz Kershaw's work (2002) - before attempting to draw some conclusions on how *OMGW* might not simply be seen as a representation of pre-constituted identities, but rather as a creative, performative and therefore pedagogical act of recovery (recovery from trauma) or invention of identities as much authored or constructed by the event of performance (and its long reflexive aftermath as I reconsider my place within it) than through any textual choreography composed in advance through its writing.

### ***Becoming a Reflexive Practitioner – catching glimpses.***

Human activity is theory and practice; it is reflection and action (Freire, 1993: 106)

That *OMGW* was a 'taking part' or performance within a formal pedagogical frame is significant. The imperative to make the show was born from a shift in my identity as a *Gestic Actor* to Reflexive Practitioner. That this shift happened within a specific pedagogical paradigm such as the MAPaR programme is also worthy of our attention here. Even a cursory glance at the discussions, which centre around the practice/research (or PaR) phenomenon through the Practice as Research in Performance: 2001 - 2006 (PARIP) project conducted by Baz Kershaw at Bristol University suggest a fast-moving and unstable relationship between the two poles. Martin Welton, in his paper *Practice as Research and the Mind-body Problem* (2003) focuses on this very uneasiness through a discussion of the performer and their encounter with the 'lived' experience of performance through the body. By invoking Merleau-Ponty's phenomenological elevation of the body as *the* point of consciousness Welton points toward the dangers of turning to a potentially 'reductive' process of 'thinking' a corporeal experience within an academic frame.

To add to the complexity, here I have to both contend and contend *with* the reality that I am writing this in 2010 after a period, which has allowed for a distancing, or an absence, of the 'practice' in my memory. Perhaps also I have to contend with the fact that my critical powers were not sufficiently honed to be able to 'see' in 2008/2009 so near to the *OMGW* event in order to re-perform it through another writing of it. A tension existed in the show due to a lack of clarity in its objective. Put simply, its blindness was made visible. Or to put it another way: its absence was made present. The 'lack' of understanding, 'lack' of depth, 'lack' of focused research, as it was identified by the examiners, was brought into view. The gap in knowledge was performed and embodied within performance. Again, another gap has

opened up – that of the distance between the practice that became more a point of departure for the research and more *seeing* through this writing of it. And so it goes on: a perpetual closing and opening of pedagogical gaps through various performative modes. Perhaps one effect of this was to limit *OMGW*'s efficacy for the audience because of a split in its function. Evidently its function was unclear. But once we accept that, the possibilities become clearer, and not unlike the way *Gestus* functions as an exhibition of the way in which we embody a process, which involves critical engagement, a productive site appears.

First, we have to acknowledge the research was inhibited by my decision to make a solo piece: if *Gestus* is largely about the *relations* between represented characters through their pictorial arrangement on stage, I would naturally be unable to explore this as a solo performer. Only now, through this re-performance am I able to *show* my hunch that *Gestus*, as a style of acting, on the basis that it exposes contradictions in behaviour, could operate as a tool to deconstruct, to some extent at least, the politics of identity, and more to the point, serve as a pedagogical tool for the reflexive practitioner.

To what extent has this challenged the pedagogical model PaR suggests?

By acknowledging the paradox of losing sight through a distant memory of the performance of *OMGW* and yet being able to see more clearly the meaning that was made both there and thereafter through further (non-practice based?) research, throws another perspective on the embodied (and performative) nature of academic writing and its relation to the 'show' as the practice. How does the act of reading and, in particular, writing (re)perform the practice? As each incarnation of the *OMGW* experience lives, I am reminded of Mackenzie's imperative to 'perform, or else'. As the deadlines loomed and continue to loom and I emerge with the reflexive practitioner identity-tag which is charged with the imperative to create commodities that satisfy the demands of the PaR pedagogical structure - demands such as 'summing-up' the show to meet publicity deadlines well in advance of the event, or in 'offering' up the event itself, or in meeting writing deadlines – the elements engage the practitioner in processes which at first seem at odds or in conflict with their role as a performer. That is until that term 'reflexive' is added to the taxonomy of roles that exists within performance and performance studies and creates the possibility of the subject being both within and without, embodied and disembodied - the feeling *and* the thinking body.

When we consider the implications this has for the performer within the PaR context, how might some of the problems we encounter when we reflect on Brecht's *Gestic* style of performance, which plays with and relies on the interplay between being within and without,

both the embodied character and the critical observer of it, help us here? Indeed, does not *Gestus* itself exhibit these very performative tendencies? This appears to be an especially pertinent question within the multi-contextual landscape in which this project sits – that of autobiography, pedagogy, Brecht’s *Gestic* acting style, embodiment and its relation to identity and identification, as well as the PaR pedagogical model - especially when these are refracted through a phenomenological prism. And, at each of these points in the process, as Mackenzie would surely concur, we are bound in the imperative to perform and re-perform *for* the thing we are performing. Not *simply* a solo show with purely commercial or artistic ends and means; not just a show that (I felt), needed to *show* its practice-as-research methodology, by engaging in a particular (lecture-demo) style at points; and not just a show that played with notions of identity by *casting* its subject (me) as a character, Rob Vesty, under development toward *becoming* a reflexive practitioner. *OMGW* performed *for* all these purposes, and more. I am re-performing it now through this writing in order to grasp at its desire to exercise a personal recovery from trauma. So the writing of *OMGW* here through the reflexive practitioner guise is another performative mode which will have further implications once we consider later how the writing of autobiographies perform too. We can then take into account “there is no theatre without self-dramatization, exaggeration, overdressing, without demanding attention for this one, personal body – its voice, its movement, its presence and what it has to say.” (Lehmann, 2006: 179) Just as we can only rely on the construction of the bull’s representations, we can only, in the theatre, ‘show things as they (really) are’ by admitting the fictive nature of the narratives and how narrative is an imposition on truth. How does the process of empathy work if not to impose my narrative on yours, as if to graft my experience on yours as I step into ‘your’ shoes? Autobiography functions similarly. It occupies liminal space on two counts. First because it sits on the threshold of ~~truth~~, and second, because it is constructed in the space between the actor and spectator and the synthesis of their respective narratives.

We are beginning to see how, within the demands of the pedagogical frame, a certain call to role-play was performed through various narrative constructions. But when we then consider just how and how often *OMGW* makes that call, we are offered the chance to consider the nature of identification, identity and the paradox of the actor’s presence in performance, especially when we begin to interrogate who the subject *was, is, wants to be, and is becoming* in as far as it is *shown* and *seen* within the context of a performed event, which clearly occupies an autobiographical space.

### *Autobiography and Performance – making it up.*

Deirdre Heddon's 2008 study *Autobiography and Performance* situates various performance artists, from the feminist movements of the 1970s to contemporary solo performers, within a historiography of autobiographical performance, noting along the way the 'appeal' of the autobiographical mode for marginalised subjects (2008: 2). In doing so, Heddon's work provokes questions around what it means for these subjects to have a voice and achieve visibility. She also negotiates how that *seeing* functions for the performer and spectator as a political act. Kershaw's observation that "since the personal became political, in the 1960s, the political has found its way into almost every nook and cranny of culture" (2002: 16), is echoed by Heddon when she asserts that for the second-wave feminist movement in the 1970s, the "entry of the explicitly personal into the aesthetic should itself be considered a political gesture." (2008: 21) This is where we can begin to see how *OMGW*, insofar as it attempts to write or re-write identities for its subject, (Rob Vesty), might fit within this post-Marxist politics-of-the-personal frame, but more to the point, we also begin to see, despite the presentation of separation of *fact* and *fiction* in *OMGW*, how *all* these writings are fictive.

This added complexity presents itself once we begin to reconsider the distinctions between the fictive modes *OMGW* operates in. In one place, there is the *fictional* role-play as it is differentiated by Brecht's *dramatis personae*: Mrs Yang and Yang Sun. In another place, the subject is cast as a character too. Indeed the character of Rob Vesty even shares top-billing on the publicity posters and in the opening credits. This character is placed very much at the centre. But at the centre of what? Despite some effort to construct a narrative through-line, there are, inevitably, a number of narratives at work here. These are being constructed in a number of ways, in the liminal space between performer and audience in the moment of performance. Is there one where the subject is *more* present?

There is another way in which 'I' am at the centre of things. Given that *OMGW* is a solo-show, it is my phenomenal body, which is centre-stage. Quite literally, through much of the first third of the show I choose to place myself centre-stage. The *mise en scene* is constructed to serve that. A chair is placed centre; and other set pieces are positioned so that they are directed diagonally toward the centre too. I am therefore placed at the centre of a web of perspectives. The question of presence beyond corporeality is especially pertinent when we consider the autobiographical elements to *OMGW*. I am presenting information as fact; the fact of my life and events within it; (where I grew up, where I went to school, and what I did to affect identity), and I think I want the audience to perceive the character of Rob Vesty to be *more real* or *closer to truth* than Brecht's characters. But do I? Are they? Again, how can

we show things as they really are? Already, more complex ground opens up, and once drag-play enters the frame through the *OMGW*'s aesthetic other dimensions to this discussion of identities and their presence is offered – that of *Gender*, and *Queer*. But before interrogating this further, given the abundant 'fictive' terrain we seem to be occupying, we may well look at what I was attempting to 'cook-up'.



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[Figure 2] I commissioned the artist Chris Randall to produce this image for use in the creation of publicity flyers and posters for *One Man Good Woman*. The Hollywood actor Veronica Lake, who obtained her pilot's licence in 1946, inspires the image of Mrs Yang.

The tag-line for *OMGW* ran: *What happens when one man plays a good woman...* This is of course, along with the title, a play on words. This is a one-man show – a version of Brecht’s *The Good Woman of Szechuan*. I am a man, choosing for much of the show, to play a woman, Mrs Yang, even progressing this into an area of camp performance by engaging with drag-play. Then, within the fictional narrative, there is the suggestion that Brecht’s ‘good woman’, Shen Te, is being ‘played’ by a man in the sense of *being taken advantage of by a womaniser*. Beyond this I am constructing the idea that Mrs Yang has bequeathed her own experience of being womanised and has created a clone in her son. The nub of the narrative is therefore born out of this notion of ‘copying’, or ‘mirroring’, or ‘repetition’. Yang Sun, in Brecht’s play, tells Shen Te he is in love with her because he wants her money so that he can get a job as a pilot. In *OMGW*, the narrative is projected back and concentrated into one night in the distant past. Mrs Yang’s nostalgia (pain induced through the loss of her ‘home’ and ‘love’) causes her to try and clone the man she loved – an American pilot - hence the publicity image (fig. 2) of a glamorous woman (Mrs Yang) holding up the man/baby image of her son, Yang Sun.

But, of course, there is another, less explicit, story being told – that of the actor/subject. It is Rob Vesty’s story, or one of them. A piece of autobiography that remains hidden from full view but remains potently present through his identification with Brecht’s *good women* and their narratives. What happens when one man plays a good woman, when that good woman is Rob Vesty is a need to recover a sense of self, especially when that self has been subjugated through his real-life relationship with his own *man/player/American Flyer*. The ‘I’ is therefore there, and as a corporeal presence that ‘I’ is transparent – the act of undressing helps that transparency, but as a narrative presence there remains an air of opacity. Somehow this narrative presence is not quite written clearly enough, probably because it has been in part obfuscated by tensions in the aesthetic and its inner logic, but also for another reason too: there is a problem of not knowing the truth of the self that writes it.

According to Heddon “we need to remember that the presentation of self (in performance particularly) is a re-presentation, and often a strategic one” but that the “activity of representing the ‘self’ adds a further problematic layer to notions of ‘truth’ because, in the act of representing the self, there is always more than one self to contend with; the self is unavoidably split.” (2008: 27) Later in this *study*, Butler’s critique will illuminate this problem of the ‘split’ further, but for now, let us stay poised on the edge of the apparent binary between art and life that autobiography contends with. This binary revolves around the contention that art is written and life is not. And yet, “the ‘self’ is as much a discursive construct as anything else, constructed in particular times and places”. (2008: 27) By

acknowledging the fictive processes subjects engage with in reality we can begin to challenge the hegemony of authorship. Suddenly, whereas the corporeal 'I' appears to be very present within *OMGW*, the narrative 'I' becomes elusive through the impossibility of writing itself in its multiplicity of identities.

### ***Recovering***

For me, out of this problem of being able to write life, another tension arises. It is born from a personal desire, embodied in the drive to make *OMGW*, to rehabilitate lost identities, either because they had been subjugated by a traumatic relationship or because they pertained to an area of work (being an actor) that I wanted to recover. Desiring this kind of fixity of identity is linked to the experience of trauma and Heddon well-documents the way in which performance artists turn to performance and performance-making as a way of 'making sense' of trauma (see pp 53 – 60). "During traumatic events, subjectivity becomes annihilated; the subject disappears or becomes transformed into an object – powerless, lacking agency and, in the most brutal of examples, less than human...it is the recovery of this self that enables recovery from trauma." (2008: 55) But trauma is impossible to write, so how do we deal with it apart from recourse to analogy? Perhaps, through the very hallmarks of performance: repetition, presentation, and re-presentation.

Seen in this way, *OMGW* refers to repetition not just thematically, but theatrically too. It is in itself performative of its exercise toward recovery. In one way it performs this telescopically by re-covering a more distant past in order to recover and accept it. Autobiography therefore serves to bridge the gap or bring distance closer into view in order to make sense of it; it has a tendency toward chronology and a desire to create beginnings, middles and ends. Indeed Heddon's study reveals this tendency, "with its linear progression and its narrative drive to resolution" (2008: 36), as the dominant narrative model in autobiographical storytelling. To see how this functions in *OMGW* we might just look at the 'beginning' of the autobiographical narrative, which is also the beginning of the 'play'.

### ***"Oh look here comes Jesus!" – solace in re-location?***

In the opening monologue of *OMGW* I recount elements of my childhood in a Lancashire mill-town. The narrative is built around a desire to be an actor. The pieces of narrative are constructed in such a way as to attempt to build a picture of a boy whose desire is already at odds with his working-class background. The surprise move from the 'grim-up-North for the Essex countryside where instead of "sooty stone mill blocks" there "stood loaves and loaves of whitewashed cottages topped with crusty fat thatch all snowed-on and white and perfect" (*OMGW* – script) conjures a quality of escape which we could easily take as emblematic of

the boy's desire to transcend his class. The audience might already surmise, not least because they know they are being 'presented' with autobiography, that the subject is marking his 'difference'. In one sense this is made very clear by the suggestion of mis-placement through the storytelling of geographical re-location. But earlier in the narrative, the word 'queer'<sup>26</sup> has been placed. It is used by the 'Nans' to describe the estranging quality of there being an actor in the family. I assume that the word will reverberate within the audience through their understanding of the etymology of the term – the vocalisation of the word itself has a *Verfremdungseffekt* because of its invocation of the 'other'. I assume the use of the word will also be performative by serving as a 'coming out' (inasmuch as I need to) in front of a largely familiar and known-to-me (and me-to-them) audience who know me as gay and might already be trying to determine whether this performance could be categorized as 'queer'. Not that all gay performers engage in queer performance, or that queer performance is delimited by sexuality, but clearly, here, for me, my 'coming out' as gay is important. In part, this is because, although I am already 'out', I am exacting a need to come 'out' *again*. This is significant, because the desire to 'come-out' is never quite satiated, and it must be performed and re-performed; located, and re-located within each new context as it is lived, because each new context renders the presence that the act of 'coming out' performs, either *less* present or absent. But crucially, my *being* gay is important in the signifying of my identification with Mrs Yang's narrative. The author in autobiographical performance has to manage a relation between subject and character. The balance between how far one or other is 'present' in the narrative is negotiated in the writing and is predicated on whether either is present 'enough'. This being present or absent 'enough' is an essential, and ethical, feature of how we construct narratives and consequently how we 'write' them.

The feeling of 'enoughness' is significant because it raises ethical concerns about how we write and therefore *edit* our identities. The Derridean conception of erasure is helpful to me here because, of course, just as we write experience or identity it mimics the pattern of desire through its disappearance. Borrowing from Paul de Man (1979), Heddon asserts that "writing the self, inevitably writes over, writes out, erases the writing 'self' since language is always metaphorical and cannot hope to represent the 'real'". (2008: 27) Through our acceptance of the disappearing, or loss, we might naturally turn to a belief in the imaginary real as the only way in which we can concretise any notion of 'self', and in autobiography that imaginary real is constructed in narratives which, if we are to follow the logic outlined by Heddon, are always fictive because of their writing.

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<sup>26</sup> The word 'queer' maintains a quality of estrangement within its effect; it is dialogic in its make up because of a doubling of what it is and is not. This has been triggered in part by the appropriation of the term by the 'non-homophobic' or 'non-heteronormative'. These terms are discussed/coined by Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick in her book *The Epistemology of the Closet* (1990).

Writing memory in *OMGW* as a process of recovery is accordingly a fictive one. The success of recovery from this phenomenon (the erasing of ‘self’) depends on reaching an acceptance of loss and the inevitability of its disappearance, but also on the idea that “a believable image is the product of a negotiation with an unverifiable real” (Phelan, 1993: 1). The Hegelian concept *Aufheben* might help us reconcile what we do with that believable image as we lose sight of it again due to its impossibility of being. *Aufheben*, like *Gestus*, does not translate directly. This is useful. It is readily translated as ‘sublation’, a term which relies on its contradictory nature. The act of sublation cancels out and yet preserves the thing it has cancelled. But it also elevates that ‘thing’ so that its value is greater than the sum of its parts. It is crucial to an understanding of a Butlerian theory of desire. Desire is an “interrogative mode of being, a corporeal questioning of identity and place.” (Butler, 1999: 9) It drives the dialectical process forward. In this way our perpetual forming anew is fuelled. Desiring that which we have lost is a process of understanding its new value in the dialectical process as it absorbs and elevates it.

The idea of loss, and letting-go of that which has been lost, is explored thematically in *OMGW – the story of a good woman turned sour by the memory of one man (a player) who crushed her heart so hard, she couldn’t let him go* (from *OMGW* publicity 2007) but as I have said, it is also a hallmark of the performative because of loss’s tendency to induce repetition. We have a desire to re-experience the thing we have lost. It is this notion of not letting go and the pain produced by loss that I want to pay some attention to next within the context of class and sexual identity. The two subjects might readily be ascribed to Marxist and post-Marxist domains respectively, and it is this movement that could be said to characterise my autobiography while implicating Brechtian politics. I will do this by exploring the idea of nostalgia.

### ***Nostalgia – the pain of the uprooted***

Leaving any obvious psychoanalytical concerns with nostalgia and loss aside, what we might first note is that nostalgia is the synthesis produced by the dialectic of the personal sense of the past being refracted through the presence of the present. (Could *Gestus* be said to function similarly? The demonstrated and historicised ‘past’ located in narrative re-embodied somatically through the critical eye of the present?)

Since our awareness of the past, our summoning of it, our very knowledge that it is past, can be nothing other than present experiences, what occasions us to feel nostalgia must also reside

in the present, regardless of how much the ensuing nostalgic experience may draw its sustenance from our memory of the past. (Davis, 1977: 414)

Davis' observation offers some clues as to why nostalgia might be so well suited to the quality of immediate presence in live performance. So too does Kershaw's book *The Radical in Performance* (2002) which uses case studies in the heritage industry and in the field of Reminiscence Theatre to discuss how nostalgia functions there as either an attempt to write a lost place into being, or more radically, as a springboard for transcendence through the repetition of memory in order to find new ways of knowing history. (Kershaw, 2002: 177) In the context of *OMGW* as autobiography this act of performing memory through a repetition is a kind of re-placing of the mis-placed. Desire is predicated on its will toward relocation; a re-finding and a re-positioning. It would appear to be an embodiment of presence and absence – an oscillatory practice involved in *doing* both.

In *OMGW* this desire is dramatised through the characterisation of Mrs Yang. She is constructed in such a way as to be driven centrally by a desire to *not* let go of that which she has lost, or to repeat experience (the cloning of experience through her son for example). Mrs Yang's character becomes a useful vessel, one that belies an assertion I was in any way fascinated by her as if she were solely Brecht's invention. Indeed, it would be truer to say that through Mrs Yang, I am able to embody my desire to relocate myself.

Gender identity would be established through a refusal of loss that encrypts itself in the body...incorporation *literalizes* the loss *on* or *in* the body and so appears as the facticity of the body, the means by which the body comes to bear "sex" as its literal truth (Butler, 1990: 68)

The autobiographical construct of Rob Vesty and the implication that this represents a thing *closer to truth* is again thrown into question by Butler's assertion. It might be 'closer to the truth' to say, paradoxically, that I get to relocate myself, (even if it is a glimpse), through the playing of the female Mrs Yang, and *not* through the playing of the male Rob Vesty.

That said, in the playing of Rob Vesty, I do make attempts to re-view history and my place within it. I relocate myself in front of the audience. I am a corporeal presence. I am a presence in a particular space in which a multitude of other spaces is created, not least through an invocation of my working-class home. Richard Hoggart in his *Uses of Literacy* (1957) titles a discussion *The Uprooted and the Anxious* in which he portrays the contradictions at play in the ex working-class boy:

He cannot go back; with one part of himself he does not want to go back to a homeliness which was often narrow: with another part he longs for the membership he has lost...The nostalgia is the stronger and the more ambiguous because he is really 'in quest of his own absconded self yet scared to find it'. He both wants to go back and yet thinks he has gone beyond his class, feels himself weighted with knowledge of his own and their situation, which hereafter forbids him the simpler pleasures of his father and mother. And this is only one of his temptations to self-dramatisation" (1957: 294)

Then Heddon:

For the gay son or lesbian daughter, home may be a discomfiting closet where one is always dissembling rather than a place of relaxation and relief from the daily 'public' stresses" (2008: 117)

If in the struggle to re-locate identity, we concern ourselves with the temporal and spatial features of nostalgia, what else can we say about the re-presentation of space in *OMGW*?

In one sense, *OMGW*, is a period piece. It is rooted in the past. Its aesthetic has certain components: wood mirrors, a 40s wardrobe, dressing table, a 40s dress, a nearly 40s play as its stimulus – its affects are supposed to be evocative of this period. In effect, while this is visible, another presence is the presence of the 'here and now' and the particularity of the time of the event - those evenings in September 2008. The act of autobiography which thrusts its lens into the past, or the act of representing a past epoch, or the act of telling tales about real-life events in the recent past, are all performative in that they produce their own nostalgia.

The specificity of *OMGW*'s performance in a particular space (The Aphra Theatre, UKC, Canterbury, England) – a town in which I had lived and worked for over three years - is also significant insofar as it allows us to make certain assumptions on the part of the audience. This was largely made up of people who have an understanding of the demands of PaR. But it was also made up, by several at least, ex-colleagues at The King's School who we might assume had a more 'personal' knowledge of me, and my 'real' life. From a Marxist position, it might be tempting to question perceptions of the 'real' within the context of a boarding school: the oldest in England. One where the 'ruling classes' promote a world we might perceive as divorced from the 'reality' of an ex working-class subject. It has implications, but as we are discovering within the context of this discussion, and to quote Dad, it (probably) "don't matter" – to me at least (anymore). It does matter that the audience was also made up of specific members (Lease and Lyons) who were implicated in the 'real-life-story' of loss

and betrayal that I was attempting to dramatise or reference through the piece because of its attempt at recovery. In this context this attempt needed to be witnessed by a *particular* audience, not just *any* – the exactness of its performativity is dependent on the presence of that *particular* audience. Likewise, the particularity of place and space is also crucial as the site of the attempt. Place and space, even in this context, is therefore a potent presence, and as part of the writing, is one where the audience is part of the authorship. In this sense the place and space is also performed – whether it be the home of the working-class boy, or the site of his attempted recovery, or the closet which he thinks he no longer occupies – and these places, performed through the repetition of memory become a “safe harbour” (Heddon, 2008: 94). Heddon suggests in this respect that we might even think of autobiography as a kind of “cartography of self” (2008: 88), a mapping into being, in the way that I perceive the songlines of the Indigenous Australians might work to call the landscape into being in order to make it navigable or known.

Another dimension to the potency of space is revealed when we consider that “many cultural geographers have noted that most space is heterosexualised through the repeated performance of heterosexuality that takes place within it” (Heddon, 2008: 111 – 112). Brecht, and the Marxist political domain in which he operated is implicated when we consider Hoggart’s uprooted and anxious subject not being able to go back to narrow homeliness: a space which almost certainly could be characterised as heterosexualised; but once we turn to Heddon’s gay son or lesbian daughter we see that, as a space, the closet implicates a post-Marxist domain concerned with a politics-of-self that might be seen to be at odds with an anti-individualist Marxist position. We might well ask at this point whether, after-Brecht, the class-based identity politics I have sought to expose through autobiography is relevant any longer and therefore what place gender and queer identity politics has in the post-Marxist domain?

### ***One XY good XX – exploding the binary***

In order to interrogate what the post-Marxist subject becomes after he/she has left the class-struggle *and* the closet, I will turn to Judith Butler’s post-structural theories of gender and sex. If Heddon is right and there is no ‘self’ outside the writing of it, then Butler’s work should deepen our understanding of how our identities are constructed discursively.

That these discursive practices are rooted in repetition, which lends them their performative quality, we might also be able to see how *OMGW*, and especially its drag-play as an expression of ‘queer’, may sit within it. That assumes we have to enter the realm of parody to encounter issues of gender identity in their imitative form as if there were a ‘real’ or ‘authentic’ subject from which to base the copy. According to Butler “there is a subversive

laughter in the pastiche-effect of parodic practices in which the original, the authentic, and the real are themselves constituted as effects” (1990: 200). We might then begin to characterise the drag-play elements of *OMGW*, (the drag-playing of Mrs Yang) as an exaggeration, an inflation and reduction; a cartoonish drawing of *a* gender with a more subversive aim: to show how gender is constructed as an effect of social relations, which are discursively practised through their writing, speaking, and drawing of. Again, Picasso’s triptych comes back into view – the *Gestic* quality of that which is parodied through a reductive ‘cut to essentials’ in order to show the constructed nature of things as they (really) are. Surely then we have to proceed not just by discussing parody, but *what* it is that is being parodied.

It would be wrong to think that the discussion of “identity” ought to proceed prior to a discussion of gender identity for the simple reason that “persons” only become intelligible through becoming gendered in conformity with recognizable standards of gender intelligibility. (Butler, 1990: 22)

Clearly any discussion of identity has to contend with its gendered construction because we are bound to view it in relation to the hegemony of a sex and gender binary. To what extent, in *OMGW*, was I complicit in a re-enforcement of that hegemony? In 2007 my attempt to align myself with a sensibility which I locate as feminine either through camp or drag, or through the narrative construct of identification with a female character, appeared to me, at least up until that time, as an ‘admission’ of feeling that my response to trauma and my tendency toward nostalgia as a route toward recovery might be best ‘placed’ within the female body. That objectification of the ‘feminine’ sensibility is suggestive of a social and cultural construction that sees the female body as a ‘vessel’ for a quality of emotion which ‘masculinity’ might want to ‘reject’, and one that historically I may have adhered to.

At first, a Butlerian reading offers an easy solution to the seemingly ethical problem of where to gender emotion by altering perspective in order to allow for the male body to re-claim camp or even parody. But then the pendulum swings yet again and we get to see through Butler’s dialectic that all gender is ‘parody’ in part due to its will as a social construct to protect its own naturalisation. I see this as a kind of hetero-normative survival version of McKenzie’s ‘perform or else’ designed to stave off the ‘danger’ of a queer-based universality. It is only when we begin to accept that *sex* and *gender* are performative – in that these concepts sit outside the subject as discursive practices, and are therefore *effects*, that we can start to reconsider how Brecht’s adage about ‘atoms breaking and forming anew’ impacts upon our notions of *what*, rather than *who* we really are. And, given the proclaimed function

of Brecht's theatre to show things as they are we may do well to investigate this further as a political imperative.

***How to act? Speech-acting.***

In *OMGW* I was making an attempt at recovery, as we have seen, and I want to suggest that the act of recovery involves the very *political* question of how to act. If the sense of loss or subjugation is strong the question of what to do, a) to recover a stronger sense of self or b) to make decisions that feel 'right' can be framed in this way: how to act? How to act is an ethical question that concerns many of us, and many of us too might think this is a political question. How to act in the school nativity, or in the south of England, or the ritual of tea-making, or sitting quietly in the posh woman's thatched cottage, or as an actor, or as a boy, a good boy, a good person, a young-man, a young-gay-man, a woman, a good woman, in the closet, out of the closet, half-in-half-out (for we continue to be constrained by it), or as a teacher here or as a teacher there. For me, in these contexts and that of *OMGW* and the writing (and now re-writing) of it, the question of how to act, might also be readily asked with the words: *what to say?*

When Butler uses J. L. Austin's speech-act theory to underpin her theory of performativity she is construing that the discursive practice is the *cause* of the *effect*, which is what we see and hear. But that seeing and hearing also sits within the added mechanism of re-writing it through the act of seeing and hearing. What we see then, is that these *effects* are produced in relation to their context and the connections we make there, but that we do so through a discursive practice, which is wedded to the act of speaking. As soon as we take this into account, we arrive yet again at the problem of the word's indeterminacy or instability and the Derridian notion that the sign and the referent are involved in a perpetual game of hide and seek. The intertextual nature of this dynamic game-play would seem to render the theatre as the perfect place to play it out; with its liveness, its audience, its actors, and its qualities of repetition and representation and re-presentation.

This intertextual game-play is explored in *OMGW* through a literal game-playing with the audience where they are asked to relay 'forgotten script' back to the character of Mrs Yang. The piece of script, already a literal repetition from an earlier point in the show, is projected as a slide-show serving the function of prompt-cards, and the audience is called upon to "help (Mrs Yang) out a little" because "she has dried", i.e. forgotten her lines. This game depends on a contrivance: that we have to suspend our disbelief that the actor/character has truly forgotten the script. As it does, the narrative of Mrs Yang's 'night' with the American flyer is re-told with the help of the audience speaking out bits of the script. At the point where the

narrative reaches its climax, in the news that the American flyer has left Mrs Yang and “gone”, there is an obvious duality in my, (Rob Vesty’s)/Mrs Yang’s, response: “I know” - I know he has gone, and I know the line, and we know I know the line because I wrote the play and have clearly constructed this game-play. But there is another dimension at work too in that the audience, in that moment, must surely have to acknowledge they have been complicit, not just in a meta-theatrical game of suspension, but, that from within it, they have been implicated, and implicated themselves in the narrative, by ‘delivering’ the news of Mrs Yang’s loss.

I am edging toward the notion that the audience, in its own efforts to construct narratives, is also constructing meaning, which is made in the event of live performance, and long afterward, through a writing, re-writing, speaking or re-speaking of it, but more to the point, is serving to ‘help’ me, as the performer, attempt an acceptance at ‘loss’. Does this mark one of the abusive powers of autobiographical performance? While the liminal space that is created through the dialectic of sign and referent and its doubling back is another element to the problem of authorship, (the ‘what is being written and by who?’), I am nevertheless perceived as the authorial voice. I can also rightly claim it, for, on one level, this is my play and I wrote it. But if this suggests oppressive and/or didactic forces are at play, this can surely be refuted by the knowledge that the author is nevertheless implicated in the instability of how to perform or describe identity. It is because identity is a discursive effect and that the language of sign and referent is unstable, that we are left bereft with an excess of variability. Surely then, when I say, “I know” (especially in the context of a performance and its audience), I am performing an effort toward acceptance of loss in both the performative space of the play, and, because of its autobiographical status, in everyday life. Heddon’s trauma comes back into view, and the phrase “I know” is an interpellation insofar as the act of saying it, is also an attempt at admission of loss and therefore an attempt toward acceptance of it regardless of how I might be making attempts to implicate the audience. The game of ‘forgetting and remembering’ is a metaphor, notwithstanding its efficacy here as a theatrical device, which is designed to embody the process of learning how to act, or what to say. The interpellation calls into existence the thing we fear to act or say but *must* in order to affect recovery. The “I know” performs acceptance, through the notion of interpellation.

### ***Drag – a cartography of gender construction***

The many ways in which ‘I’ exist in this moment of interpellation is interesting – my character knows the narrative and the line, and so do ‘I’. Who ‘I’ am at this moment is however problematised by my appearance. I am occupying some kind of liminal space through my ‘guise’. I am not quite a full representation of a ‘woman’, and not ‘myself’ as a

‘man’. What we quickly learn, through Butler’s essay *Bodily Inscriptions, Performative Subversions* (1990), and her comments on drag, and of course elsewhere in her theoretical writings, is that this is not another metaphor for ‘being lost’, or ‘not at home’ but is rather an exaggerated gesture of the real – a parody – for there is no real or true identity that can exist outside discursive practice. If, as we have already noted, ‘all genders are parodic’, we can see that drag becomes simply *more* parodic – a “corporeal stylization of gender, the fantasied and fantastic figuration of the body” (Butler & Salih, 2004: 110). We can see that this ‘stylized’, ‘figuration’ bears a quality of being ‘put on’, both in the sense that it is *worn* and affected.

Drag is not the putting on of a gender that belongs properly to some other group, i.e. an act of expropriation or *appropriation* that assumes that gender is the rightful property of sex, that “masculine” belongs to “male” and “feminine” belongs to “female”. The entire framework of copy and origin proves radically unstable as each position inverts into the other and confounds the possibility of any stable way to locate the temporal or logical priority of either term. (1990: 128)

This is helpful as I continue to reflect on *OMGW* and my positioning of its emotionality, not least because I never intuitively aligned my practice with other *Queer* artists or placed it in that genre of *Queer* theatre although I might have drawn on it. Even my status as a gay man, within the making of *OMGW*, felt almost irrelevant. I am merely a man who fell in love with another man. I would aver that what I was seeking to explore was a challenge to the binary poles of male/female. Or that being masculine or feminine has any bearing on emotionality – that we may embody a particular sentiment by naming it masculine or feminine. Once, of course, we consider that drag has functioned, like the *Gestic* function toward parody, to hold a magnifying glass up to a closer truth or reality; namely that the binary<sup>27</sup> structure itself is ‘put on’ or worn, we can begin to see how Brecht’s *Gestus* similarly functions.

### ***Back to Gestus***

In *Study 2* I drew attention to the similarities between the *Gestus* of showing and Butler’s theory of performativity. Could it be that by claiming identification with a female character (Mrs Yang), and by choosing parody as a medium that my performance inadvertently stumbled upon the more archetypal features of *Gestus*? My *showing* of Mrs Yang takes on the aesthetic of drag performance through fairly conventional means - bra, dress, wig, lipstick, heels – but in doing so, a clownish, more caricatured, quality is lent to this mode of performance through the phenomenal presence of (my) male body.

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<sup>27</sup> For an analysis of this binary construction look to Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick’s *Epistemology of the Closet*.

Because we know that *Gestus* cannot exist in purely aesthetic terms alone (the showing); that it is dependent on *signified meaning* (the shown) to reveal the attitude and contradiction, I might well attempt to split discussion of my playing of Mrs Yang as drag-play into the two strands that Pavis argues exist when he says that “instead of fusing logos and gestuality in an illusion of reality, the *Gestus* radically cleaves the performance into two blocks: the shown (the said) and the showing (the saying).” (1982: 45) And yet, in the showing of Mrs Yang, Pavis’ description of these elements as ‘blocks’ seems too monolithic and intractable. Is there not, if we refract this process of acting through Butler’s theory, a more subtle and fluid convergence of the shown and the said? In acting Mrs Yang the *Gestus* of *showing* reveals itself in my undressing and the *shown* becomes unavoidable. I take off my clothes, stand in my underwear and socks and *show* my body to the audience. It reveals its male-gendered hallmarks, and the ghost of that maleness hangs around long after the dress has been worn a while. I haven’t shaved, and my beard is noticeable. I am not making any attempt now at female impersonation. So who is the audience looking at? Rob Vesty? Who is Rob Vesty being? Mrs Yang? An ‘other’? Why another? Is it a disguise? Is it too simple to call this role-playing? Man dressed up as woman? The audience still sees the beard, and don’t they still see the ghost of the half-naked male body they have just seen? How, if at all, is that different to what they are being ‘asked’ to see? Am I not also, through the ‘putting on’ of drag, interpellating an identity, which might as readily be named Rob Vesty as Mrs Yang? In ‘doing’ that am I not choosing also to *show* that Mrs Yang’s emotion might just belong to me?

Because I am choosing to frame myself as a female clown and make myself appear strange – the *Verfremdungseffekt* is a product of the *Gestic* happening – I show the ‘figurative’ structure of identity. I am ‘drawing’ it on. It is a grafting. By dressing up, I turn myself into a visual image, a walking piece of art. I, as Rob Vesty, dressed in my everyday clothes, despite the framing of set and stage (which already accentuates the artifice), am not able to lift myself out of a comparatively banal mode of stage presence. Using the presence of the character body of Rob Vesty, I have a limited lever (in the theatre at least) from which to pursue my aim to accentuate the figurative. But in drag, I can. It has a visually, or at least, pictorially pleasing aesthetic quality which produces a ‘creative gap’. So this *written, drawn, put-on* image in *OMGW* adds to the aesthetic of *Gestus*. Its efficacy, as a tool for unlocking the contradictions, characterised by Butler’s theory of identity, propels it beyond the theatre, in such a way as, according to Butler, we are complicit in everyday:

If gender is drag, and if it is an imitation that regularly produces the ideal it attempts to approximate, then gender is a performance that produces the illusion of an inner sex or essence or psychic gender core; it produces on the skin, through the gesture, the move, the gait (that array of corporeal theatrics understood as gender presentation), the illusion of an inner depth. (1990: 134)

Brecht's atomic view of 'man breaking up and forming anew' and Butler's theories of how subject's perform that process, both suggest that there is no fixed view, only an illusion of fixity through a representation of the gaps that appear in the flux. *OMGW* might now be seen as an attempt to (re)present those gaps, or ~~gaps~~, as they perform their (dis)appearing act.

## Conclusion

You could not step twice into the same river; for other waters are ever flowing on to you. (Heraclitus)

Given the thrust of this thesis, we might expect a Conclusion to be the *last thing* to write. But, at the risk of resorting to cliché, in every end is the beginning. In its autopoiesis, it performs. This thesis has performed in at least two fundamental ways. First, by re-performing the practice as research, which it marks a critical reflection of. (In this way it is praxis.) And second, through its transformative power, which it continues to exercise.

More or less.

Within the word we find two dimensions, reflection and action, in such radical interaction that if one is sacrificed – even in part – the other immediately suffers.

There is no true word that is not at the same time a praxis. Thus, to speak a true word is to transform the world. (Freire, 1993: 68)

True words?

Praxis represents an embodiment of both action and reflection. It also represents this dialogue as an ‘existential necessity’; in order to see the world as it really is, full of contradiction. Freire’s term *conscientização* refers us to the dialectical forces at play in their conflict. Through their transformation, an act is performed in order to overcome oppressive forces. This is our desire: to speak of the world. According to Freire: “Dialogue is the encounter between men, mediated by the world, in order to name the world”. (1993: 69)

But what happens when the interpellation fails?

I began, through the object of a chronology, by writing into view certain features of my autobiography. The *fabel* as I have constructed it alludes to oppressive forces characterised by struggle and trouble. Through the particularity of certain details I am attempting to edge toward a universality of their concerns. I chose those features because I wanted to contextualise the three subsequent *Studies*. Each of these is a study in particular transformative practices: pedagogy, *Gestus* and identity. If this thesis has one function, it is to *montage* these practices in order to show that they are bound in a perpetual game of

mimicry, for they each resemble the other through their performative value and contradictory nature.

But as I read back, I notice how at various points, the words fail me. They too contradict.

*Gestus* is the awareness of contradiction. As an acting style and theatrical device it exhibits contradiction. *Gestus* is praxis. *Gestus* is praxis in a *more* parodic form. *Usually*. In terms of the actor's playing style, the crude tendency toward caricature, (exaggerated gesture etc.), presents the signifier and the signified as *more* parodic. A move toward a subtler aesthetic does not necessarily compromise *Gestic* theatre's right to be named *Gestic*. The signified can remain parodic. But in an effort to make something available for scrutiny, the '*more parodic*' appears strategic. We have seen how *drag* plays that card in relation to sex and gender construction. We have seen how the contradictions in social relations still exist in the subtler aesthetic because it is an existential necessity, but the cruder turn toward parody in *Gestus* helps fulfil its function. *Gestus* performs 'better' this way.

We have also seen that what the actor *does* in the event of live performance epitomises another contradiction: the oscillation between presence *and* absence of the semiotic and material bodies of the actor. We cannot escape this. The body's instability as a fixed entity is exhibited right there, right now, on stage, for us all to see. If every actor embodies this process, the *Gestic* actor makes a virtue of it. Through a '*more parodic*' style, it calls attention to that very process.

Yet in its will to show things as they (really) are, *Gestus* refers us back to the subject of the everyday. Whilst that may be true of all theatre, the *Gestic* theatre is explicit in its referral to us as contradictory beings. Through our desire to know and transform ourselves, we are each cast as an unfinished project. In casting us in this way, the *Gestic* theatre compels us to accept our capacity as affects and effects of change. That we might also fear the freedom this entails sometimes produces a contradictory desire to fix an illusion of ourselves.

Ontologically, whether this is a dilemma or an opportunity might depend on how well the subject negotiates the dynamic. At least by turning to Butlerian theories of performativity we get to see that *how* we negotiate it through what we say, and therefore do, with our words has a transformative value.

This may well be traumatic.

Earlier I referred to utopia and Brecht's desire for radical change in the world, and I am assuming none of us want to live a 'worse' life in a 'worse' world. Jill Dolan refers to live performance as a "place where people come together, embodied and passionate, to share experience of meaning making and imagination that can describe or capture fleeting intimations of a better world." (2005: 2) That this thesis and the performance practice it refers to, in all its autobiographical eulogising and criticising, has helped *me* arrive at a better place in a world, which continues to perplex me, remains both a dilemma *and* an opportunity. Perhaps, in response to the imperative to 'perform, or else!' this goes some way toward rehabilitating or sublating failure.

That is one story.

This thesis also tells another. One that is both particular and universal. It is the story of dislocation, of the *uprooted* and *anxious*. Searching, re-searching, researching, for ways in which to recover by re-covering old ground, incorporating lack and loss, running away and moving on. Transcending class, embodying sexual difference, seeking out learning opportunities, moving to this place or the next place; these are all attempts at re-locating a sense of self.

If only to catch a glimpse of it before it disappears again.

Oh, what to do with *Gestus* today?

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