The Tempest
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~~ Introduction ~~

At the time I learned that the performance studies major included a senior capstone piece, I'd already been hoping for some time to direct a play as part of an academic project. My style of directing has, from quite near the beginning, been academic, in a way, or influenced by scholarship.[1] This production of *The Tempest*, in the sense of the thinking I've been doing about the play, how it would be staged, and why, has been in the works for a while; after proposing it to a few different venues, I eventually secured a slot in the PW Upspace, December 13-15, 2012. Although of course rehearsals will not have ended when this is handed in, it is a write-up of what I've done so far, including some of the main influences in my staging of this play.

The Tempest is not my favorite play (Stoppard's *Arcadia*) or even my favorite Shakespeare play (*Love's Labour's Lost* or *King Lear*). However, an important part of my development as a director at Brown has been realizing that my job isn't just to take the play off the page and put it on the stage. This means that it's not only about whether I like a play – it's about whether I have anything to say about it. As much as I like it, I'm not sure, right now, that I have anything to say about *King Lear*. On the other hand, I saw a number of productions and adaptations of *The Tempest* in my

[1] For example, the way I worked with Nick Lourie, who played Duke Vincentio/Friar Lodowick in my production of *Measure for Measure* last fall, was somewhat in reaction to analyses of the play which talked about the character as an enigmatic puppet-master figure. I was interested in the character's change over the course of the play when he found, on several occasions, that things had happened which he did not expect.

years at Brown (both on- and off-campus) and they made me want to put my own thoughts about the play, which seemed to be different from the thoughts of the people who had made the other productions, on stage where other people could see them.[2]

The productions I saw, including Cambridge American Stage Tour's modernist photography-inspired version, the extravagant Baroque opera pastiche *The Enchanted Island* at the Metropolitan Opera, and Shakespeare on the Green's site-specific traditional production, generally relied on various special effects – projections, dry ice, many lighting changes – for the play's magic. I was more interested in drawing on ritual for the magic, in a way that was grounded in the actors – their bodies, use of space, effort, and relationships with each other – rather than in offstage technical elements.

I learned in TA123 a few years ago about the origin of theatre in ritual, which is an interesting connection, but I was also very inspired by the way non-theatrical rituals of all kinds formalize relationships between participants, place bodies in space, and demarcate the boundaries of the sacred (taken broadly) and the mundane. (One of several specific rituals that I might say inspired me was the Japanese tea ceremony, or chadō. It will not actually appear in the production, but it provided me with a way of thinking about the precise sequence of objects displayed, gestures made, and words spoken that has had some influence on the staging of magic in the play.)

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[2] I think this tendency is another way I might describe my directing as academic, in a way; there are plays about whose themes I could write a monograph, but I'd much rather just stage, say, a production of Puccini's *Turandot* that focused on its sexual violence issues.

Although this isn't a metatheatrical production, like many other productions of *The Tempest* (eg. Giorgio Strehler's, Yukio Ninagawa's, and others[3]) have been, there is a degree, I think, to which the magic in it is still "theatre magic." This is in the sense that the elements with which any given play that isn't about the supernatural creates "magic" in the theatre by getting the audience to suspend their disbelief – the actors' physicality and movement, gaze, and responses to one another – are the same elements that my cast and I can use to create the magic of Ariel and Prospero in this particular play.

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~~ Process ~~

Auditions for *The Tempest* were held on the Monday and Wednesday of Hurricane Sandy, which certainly generated a lot of jokes. I asked each auditioner to read one scene with another auditioner and to read a monologue on their own, and gave a note for each so that I was able to see how well they took direction. I do not cast (as I have figured out in the past year or so) for character interpretation; I've realized that I come into plays with thoughts about themes and staging, but very open to any of the many different interpretations of the same character that an actor might present me with. (My thoughts on the characters in this play do exist, but can probably be summed up as meta-thoughts along the lines of "Characters have depth

[3] Dymkowski, Christine. "Introduction – Metatheatrical approaches.." In *Shakespeare in Production: The Tempest*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000.

and agency.") When casting, I looked for things like ability to use space well, ease of delivery of the text, creation of a relationship with the other character in the scene, and use of the body as a vehicle for communication (of intent and of status) as well as words. (I love being surprised and pleased by actors. I really wasn't sure what I was going to do about Caliban, but didn't expect it would be very traditional; the guy I ended up casting, Sinan Eczacibaşi, plays him very traditionally, as a "monster", and it's fantastic because I never know what the character is going to do next.)

In rehearsal, after warmups and movement work, I have started with free-blocking each scene; then, after the actors run through it, I am able to clarify the shape of the scene while avoiding stifling the actors' impulses. Generally my notes and blocking have been about the characters' movement and use of space – for instance, asking Antonio and Stephano to treat their dialogue about killing Alonso and Gonzalo as a chase where Antonio has to catch Stephano by persuading him; or having Ferdinand continue to carry logs during his scene with Miranda instead of stopping at the beginning so they can talk, and seeing how that movement changes the intent of the lines. This last alludes to a general practice of mine in directing, in that I do very little table work; I often find that the meaning of the text is greatly fleshed out by putting it on its feet.

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~~ Performing in the Round ~~

The Production Workshop Upstairs Space, where this production will be performed in December, is a small black box theatre. From the very beginning of my thinking about doing this play, I've wanted to do it in a black box or other flexible space; I think a lot about the architecture of the performance space and how it affects the content or meaning of the performance,[4] and I knew I wanted a space where I could perform in the round. An important element of a number of the rituals that I've thought about in this production is the audience's participation in them, and I feel that bringing the audience and actors together into a space with no pre-constructed boundaries between them, where it's not the actors on one side of a line and the audience on the other, will weaken that barrier and bring the audience in to what is being performed.

One of the rituals that's been important in my thinking about *The Tempest* is the masque. This Jacobean performance form was popular at the time Shakespeare wrote *The Tempest* in 1611, and Prospero "directs" or "stage-manages" (to use the language of some analyses) one performed by spirits representing classical goddesses and pastoral nymphs and shepherds in Act IV to celebrate the engagement of his daughter Miranda to Prince Ferdinand. However, the direct inclusion of a masque in the play isn't what interests me about this performative genre (in fact, we

[4] The first full-length show I directed at Brown was Puccini's opera *Gianni Schicchi*. It's such a funny opera, but people, especially of my generation, so often think opera is stuffy and boring; I wanted to stage it in a way that broke past the physical boundary of the proscenium theatre to help get past the conceptual boundary of opera. It was performed in Alumnae Hall with a thrust stage set up in front of the proscenium and a large flight of stairs leading down from the thrust into the center aisle; a good amount of the action took place on the stairs, on the floor, and in the aisle, and almost no action was actually behind the proscenium.

are not staging that part as written at all). I'm more interested in, as I said, the masque as a social ritual.

Masques were scripted theatrical performances, in some respects similar to the plays of the era. However, they also lacked an actor-audience boundary in several different ways: they were both watched by and performed by aristocrats, and in addition, those who functioned as the audience would also participate in some of the dances that made up the masque.[5] Nor did they serve merely as entertainment; masques affirmed the relationship between the monarch, the land, and the community, with Jonson's *Masque of Blackness* in 1605, for example, explicitly identifying the territory of Britain with its mythological ruler and, symbolically, with its present ruler, James I:

> This land, that lifts into the temperate air
> His snowy cliff, is Albion the fair;
> So call'd of Neptune's son, who ruleth here.[6]

The participation (both through witnessing and through performing) of the audience in this ritual is necessary to its fulfilling its social purpose. ("Methexis", which originates in Platonic philosophy and now frequently used in discussions of radical black performance, is a term I have found useful. "[The shift from mimesis to methexis] is a shift from drama – the spectacle observed – to ritual, the event which dissolves traditional definitions between actor and spectator, between self and other."[7])

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[5] Ravelhofer, Barbara. *The Early Stuart Masque: Dance, Costume, and Music*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006.
[6] Jonson, Ben. *The Masque of Blackness*, 1605. Luminarium.
[7] Benston, Kimberly W. "The Aesthetic of Modern Black Drama: From Mimesis to Methexis." In *The Theatre of Black Americans*, ed. Errol Hill. Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall, 1980. P. 62-63.

Other ritual traditions where witnessing constitutes or constituted necessary participation include the Eleusinian Mysteries and some spiritual possession traditions in Haitian vodou. Thinking about these and about the masque has helped me conceptualize the audience's role in the production as active rather than passive, which is important to me since, in this production but also in theatre in general, the final product emerges not only from the actors (and directors, designers, …) but also necessarily from the audience's willingness to extend their imaginations and take part themselves in the work of creating. I came across a great quote from Jerzy Grotowski about this:

> Theatre – through the actor's technique, his art in which the living organism strives for higher motives – provides an opportunity for what could be called integration, the discarding of masks, the revealing of the real substance: a totality of physical and mental reactions....It is true that the actor accomplishes this act, but he can only do so through an encounter with the spectator – intimately, visibly, not hiding behind a cameraman, wardrobe mistress, stage designer or make-up girl - in direct confrontation with him, and somehow "instead of" him. The actor's act – discarding half measures, revealing, opening up, emerging from himself as opposed to closing up – is an invitation to the spectator.[8]

Thinking about the relationship with the spectator as crucial to this production, and about participation as necessary and self-evident, has not only led me to imagine this theatrical space in the round, in which there aren't quite as many conceptual walls between the actors and the spectators as there usually are (and to think about the possibility of incorporating the audience into what will replace the scripted masque), but also to look with fresh eyes on the epilogue, where Prospero

[8] Grotowski, Jerzy. "Statement of Principles." In *Towards a Poor Theatre*. New York: Routledge, 1968. P. 255-256.

asks for the audience's applause ("release me from my bands/With the help of your good hands"). After watching the play for two hours (however actively I conceptualize this witnessing), they will literally have the power in their hands to "set [him] free," and participate in the magic in that way. I think it will be really powerful.[9]

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[9] I've instructed the actress playing Prospero not to leave the stage after delivering the epilogue until she gets applause. Not because I'm worried that she won't, but because I want that bit of magic to be "real" to within the world that we make.

~~ Viewpoints ~~

Viewpoints is a technique I've been working with extensively in rehearsals for this production. We've used Viewpoints exercises so far as warm-ups and as character work, but we will also be using them to devise some of the more complicated movement-based sequences in the play: the banquet which is placed before the traitor nobles and which then vanishes, and the masque which Prospero stages for the engagement of Miranda and Ferdinand.

Viewpoints is a way of improvising and composing movement for the stage, originating in dance, that provides a vocabulary with which to talk about what happens onstage. It focuses on the production of and response to actions, rather than "solipsistic" emotion alone; doing rather than feeling, or rather, feeling arising naturally from doing rather than from an attempt to feel.[10] We've been doing Viewpoints work in Kym Moore's Stage Movement for Actors and Directors class this semester, which has been very influential while I've been working on this production, and this technique in particular is one that, I've found, is very compatible with my view of *The Tempest* as grounded in the body, in the significance of gesture and space, and the actors' physical and spatial relationships and responses to one another. I followed Kym Moore's lead in using Mary Overlie's Six Viewpoints – Space, Story, Time, Emotion, Movement, Shape – rather than

[10] Bogart, Anne, and Tina Landau. *The Viewpoints Book: A Practical Guide to Viewpoints and Composition*. New York: Theatre Communications Group, 2005. p. 8; 16.

Anne Bogart and Tina Landau's Nine Viewpoints, although the latter's book has been very useful.

One Viewpoints-based exercise that we've used in a number of rehearsals has been grid work. In this exercise,

> Based on listening and responding with a Viewpoints vocabulary…the participants are free to move in any direction that conforms to a grid pattern (no diagonal lines, no curves).[11]

When I began using grid work in rehearsal, we had already introduced the individual Viewpoints to the actors and done a little Viewpoints work. We had also been using an exercise that I typically do at the beginning of every rehearsal process, where I have the actors walk around freely in the space at different speeds and in different imagined circumstances simply to become aware of how it is that *they* walk. In this exercise, the actors focus as they walk around on a number of elements such as posture, tension, and placement of the feet, so that awareness of their own body can later help them make deliberate changes to create the character's body. (As we progressed, I had the actors do the same exercise while creating the character bodies.) Thus, our grid work also focused, to start with, on actors rather than characters, and likewise on cultivating awareness of the self, space, and group that would later be important in scene work.

Departing a little from the book's description of the exercise and from the way it had been set out in class, I chose to ask each actor to come up with their own goal for movement in the space and interaction with others, while still maintaining the freedom through constraint that grid work provides. Afterwards, we talked about

[11] Bogart and Landau, p. 70.

what each person's goal was. Actors' goals ranged from "green" (following other actors who happened to be wearing green) to "meeting everyone" (she stood face to face with everyone at least once) to "being a tourist" (checking out as much of the room as possible).

Some of the cast weren't quite sure how this would relate to the play, but seemed to get my explanation that abstract-sounding, spatial goals could also be a part of the characterization they would develop; that how a character uses space is meaningful. For instance, the actor who will be playing Caliban had, as his goal in the first exercise, having someone between him and a wall at all times; this is something that could easily manifest itself in the character as well, if we chose to concretize it as him not wanting to be trapped. We would later continue the grid work with goals in a way that was "informed by" (the terminology I used) characterization, relationships between characters as established in the play, and the character bodies we'd worked to create. As before, we discussed after each exercise what the goals were, how and whether they changed when people were removed from and added to the grid, and how each actor's own objectives were affected by others' actions.

Some of what emerged from the grid exercise has definitely made it into subsequent scene work. While the grid lines are, of course, dissolved, I'm still seeing as we block these scenes that (for example) our Prospero often stays on the edge of the space in order to keep everyone else in her sight line, and Trinculo and Caliban, at times, are both trying to get close to Stephano while keeping the other one further away.

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~~ Magic ~~

While we haven't yet created all of the moments of magic in the play, there are a few specific strands that have been emerging, consistent with my research and with the themes on which I place importance in this production – particularly, the use of space and of the body to create magic.

One scene we blocked recently was the one in which Ariel tells Caliban that he is lying about Prospero's taking the island from him and his ability to carry out the murder plot, whereupon Stephano beats Trinculo, having thought that he said it. I already knew that I wanted Trinculo to speak those lines – to have Ariel's magic work on his body, rather than being simple voice-throwing – but we also experimented with how it is that Ariel makes him say them. What Sarah Black, our Ariel, and I came up with was a small but very clearly significant gesture of the hand; something that I might describe as inspired by *mudras*, hand gestures of spiritual power in Hindu practice (and theatre) which focus energy or concentration.[12] I and Ana Olson, our Prospero, came up with similar gestures (not in their specific forms, but in the basic generality of a small physical hand gesture that has a larger external effect on another person) earlier when blocking the scene where Miranda and Ferdinand meet; these magical gestures cause Miranda to see

[12] "Mudrā", in *Encyclopedia of Hinduism*, eds. Denise Cush, Catherine Robinson, Michael York. Abingdon: Routledge, 2008.

Ferdinand and then him to see her, his sword to drop, and his muscles to become weak and unable to support him.

Another element of magic that's become very important in the last scene is Prospero's magic circle. This is scripted – the stage directions state, "They all enter the circle which Prospero had made, and there stand charmed" – but dealing with the reality of it onstage became very interesting, particularly because it doesn't go away until Prospero picks it up and everyone has to be aware that that's a space demarcated as different. Prospero creates it during the "Ye elves of hills" monologue; due to doubling-related switching around of sections, its first use is for Prospero to stand in while addressing Stephano, Trinculo, and Caliban, then becomes the circle where the nobles stand unable to move. As Prospero describes the charm's weakening in the monologue where he addresses the frozen traitors, I have the actress pick up some of the stones which form the circle, thinning it; after they are set free, it is used again for Prospero's "resurrection" of Ferdinand and Miranda, and then conclusively broken, with the last remaining stones being picked up during the epilogue.

As I said, there are ways in which the magic in this production is just like regular "theatre magic," if perhaps exaggerated; the awareness of the different space created by the circle on the ground is the same sort of spatial awareness (and corresponding creation of spaces through physical response, since of course the inside and outside of the circle aren't *really* any different) one might cultivate in any show. Trinculo tests its edge while Prospero is inside it and can't get through; it's still a boundary that none of the courtiers cross once freed from it; no one can "see"

Ferdinand and Miranda until they are revealed in it. Yet, in addition to being theatrical in this way, it also maintains the ritual element of a division between one space and another, one sacred (again, broadly; not always religious) and one mundane.

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~~ Conclusion ~~

The conclusion of this write-up is, of course, not the conclusion of the project. That's not to come for a few weeks, and there's a lot of rehearsal and exploration between now and then. Even now, though, working on this production of *The Tempest* has broadened my horizons a great deal – I've never worked before on a show that was so movement-focused – and I'm very excited to continue. (It will only be complete when it has an audience. I may hold open rehearsals once we get close, because I don't want to throw that element in for the first time on opening night.)

APPENDIX

The Tempest, William Shakespeare, Dec. 13-15 2012, PW Upspace

Prospero: Ana Olson '14

Ariel: Sarah Black ‘16

Caliban: Sinan Eczacibaşi ‘14

Stephano/Sebastian: Uday Shriram ‘15

Antonio/Trinculo: Kent Smith ’16

Gonzalo: Nick Lourie ’14

Miranda: Emily Garrison ’16

Ferdinand: Kim Sarnoff ’16

Alonso: Alisa Yuasa ’14

Director: Rebecca Maxfield ’13

Stage Manager: Sarah Tropp ’15

Set Designer: Rosa Congdon ‘15