

# Web of Performance

An Ensemble Workbook

Edited by **Monica Prendergast & Will Weigler**



# Web of Performance

An Ensemble Workbook

Edited by

**Monica Prendergast & Will Weigler**



University  
of Victoria

Copyright © 2018 by Monica Prendergast, Will Weigler, Robert Birch,  
Trudy Pauluth-Penner, Sandra Chamberlain-Snider, Kathy Bishop,  
Colleen Clement

Published in Canada by University of Victoria  
Victoria, BC V8P 5C2  
press@uvic.ca

Cover image: “Spider Web” by sethink on pixabay.com, CC0.

Book design by Rayola Creative  
Printed and bound by University of Victoria on 100% post-consumer  
content recycled paper

For questions about this book, please contact the Copyright and Scholarly  
Communications Office, University of Victoria Libraries at press@uvic.ca

### **Library and Archives Canada Cataloguing in Publication**

Web of performance : an ensemble workbook / edited by Monica  
Prendergast & Will Weigler.

Issued in print and electronic formats. ISBN 978-1-55058-622-0  
(softcover). – ISBN 978-1-55058-623-7 (PDF)

1. Performing arts – Study and teaching (Secondary).  
2. Interdisciplinary approach in education. 3. Curriculum planning.  
I. Prendergast, Monica, editor II. Weigler, Will, editor III. University of  
Victoria (B.C.), issuing body

PN3171.W43 2018

371.39'9

C2018-901405-9  
C2018-901406-7

This book is released under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0  
International (CC BY-NC-SA 4.0) license, except as excluded in the  
List of Images. This means that you are free to copy, display,  
perform, and modify this book, as long as you distribute any  
modified work on the same terms. If anyone wants to distribute  
modified works under other terms you must contact press@uvic.ca  
for permission first. Under this license, anyone who distributes or  
modifies this book, in whole or in part, should properly attribute  
the book as follows:

Prendergast, M., & Weigler, W. (Eds). *Web of performance: An  
ensemble workbook*. Victoria, BC: University of Victoria. This book is  
published by the University of Victoria under a CC BY-NC-SA 4. 0  
International license.

Download this book for free at:  
<http://dspace.library.uvic.ca/handle/1828/3857>

The publisher does not have any control over and does not assume  
any responsibility for third-party websites or their content.

ePUBLISHING  
SERVICES  
University of Victoria Libraries

# Table of Contents

iv	Acknowledgments
v	Introduction
1	Performance as play/Play as performance WILL WEIGLER
23	Performance as ritual/Ritual as performance ROBERT BIRCH
49	Performance as healing/Healing as performance TRUDY PAULUTH-PENNER
69	Performance as education/Education as performance MONICA PRENDERGAST
93	Performance as power/Power as performance SANDRA CHAMBERLAIN-SNIDER
113	Performance as identity/Identity as performance KATHY BISHOP
137	Performance as everyday life/Everyday life as performance COLLEEN CLEMENT

# LIST OF IMAGES

Images were used in this book with permission from the copyright-holder or under individually-applicable Creative Commons licenses. Reuse and attribution should consider the following:

## Cover Image:

*Spider Web* by sethink on [www.pixabay.com](http://www.pixabay.com), from <https://pixabay.com/en/spider-web-web-water-drops-dew-399854/>. Used under Creative Commons “No Rights Reserved” license (<https://creativecommons.org/share-your-work/public-domain/cc0/>).

## Icons:

Icon images are available under a Creative Commons license at <https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/Emoji>.

## Chapter 1

*Polish Survivor of Auschwitz* by Wilhelm Brasse, c.1943, from <https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Czeslawa-Kwoka.jpg>. Public domain.

## Chapter 3

*Brain 19* by affen ajlfe, 2017, from <https://flic.kr/p/RXUciP>. Public domain.

*Hustle and Bustle* by Primawera from <https://pixabay.com/en/hustle-and-bustle-human-face-arrows-1738068/>. Used under Creative Commons “No Rights Reserved” license (<https://creativecommons.org/share-your-work/public-domain/cc0/>).

Logo by Art Saves Lives International, from <https://artsaveslivesinternational.com/>.

*Photo of Garden* by Trudy Pauluth-Penner. Used with permission.

## Chapter 4

*Still Moon Arts Society Moon Festival* by Benjamin Rosen-Purcell, 2010. Used with permission.

## Chapter 5

*Malala Yousafzai at Girl Summit* by UK Department for International Development, 2014, from <https://flic.kr/p/oqfS67>. Used under Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 2.0 Generic (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/2.0/>).

*Sir Henry Irving* by Samuel A. Walker, 1883, from [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Henry\\_Irving#/media/File:Henry\\_Irving,\\_tragedian\\_-\\_Weir\\_Collection.jpg](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Henry_Irving#/media/File:Henry_Irving,_tragedian_-_Weir_Collection.jpg). Public domain.

*Image from the Farm Show production at 11 Trinity Square*, photographer unknown, c.1972. L-R: Ann Anglin, Miles Potter, Paul Thompson, Fina MacDonell. Courtesy of the Farmshow Collective and Theatre Passe Muraille.

*Image from first Farm Show production at Ray Bird's barn*, photographer unknown, 1972. Audience shown with Paul Thompson in the foreground. Courtesy of the Farmshow Collective and Theatre Passe Muraille.

## Chapter 7

*Henri Lefebvre*, photographer unknown, 1971, from [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Henri\\_Lefebvre#](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Henri_Lefebvre#). Used under Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike 3.0 Unported (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/3.0/>). Original source: Dutch National Archives.

21 *Balançoires, Promenade des Artistes* (21 Swings) by art\_inthecity from <https://flic.kr/p/9Gc4Fh> . Used under Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 2.0 Generic (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/2.0/>).

*Haircuts by Children* by John Lauener (jlphoto.ca) (2006). Used with permission.

*Image from Quilters* by Dennis Gorsline. Courtesy of Marshall Civic Players Archive, Marshall, Michigan, U.S.A.

*Clouds* by Bergadder from <https://pixabay.com/en/cloud-sunset-colors-light-284688/>. Used under Creative Commons “No Rights Reserved” license (<https://creativecommons.org/share-your-work/public-domain/cc0>).

*Word clouds* created by Rayola Creative.

# ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This curriculum development project was generously funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC) and the Office of Research Services, University of Victoria. We are grateful to have had the opportunity to create this new curriculum with their support.

Chapters of the workbook were reviewed by experienced drama teachers in and around Victoria, BC in 2016-2017. We are very grateful for their time, energy and participation in consulting on this project. These teachers are:

Laura Angrove, St. Andrew's Regional High School, Saanich, BC  
Jason Donaldson, Gulf Islands Secondary School, School District #64, Salt Spring Island, BC  
John Gray, Reynolds Secondary School, School District #61, Saanich, BC  
Jane Leavitt, St. Margaret's School, Victoria, BC  
Libby Mason, Pearson International College of the Pacific, Metchosin, BC  
Alan Penty, Victoria High School, School District #61, Victoria, BC  
Colin Plant, Claremont Secondary School, School District #63, Saanich, BC

We would like to thank the authors of the chapters for their dedication and patience as we saw this project through to completion.

Monica wishes to thank Will Weigler for taking on the co-editing with her. Will, I couldn't have done this without your tireless commitment and patient attention to details.

We would like to thank our editors, Inba Kehoe and Stephanie Boulogne, and the University of Victoria ePublishing program. We share their commitment to Open Access publishing. Their care and consideration in guiding us through this project was invaluable.

Thanks to Clint Hutzulak at Rayola Creative for his graphic design and layout work on the workbook.

Dr. Monica Prendergast  
University of Victoria

Dr. Will Weigler  
Community-based Theatre Artist  
Postdoctoral Researcher  
Victoria, BC



# Introduction

## Dear Student,

If you love being involved in theatre and you're also searching for opportunities to make a positive difference in your community, this workbook was written for you. You may think that theatre and all the other things you are passionate about represent different directions in your life, but they don't have to be separate. They can converge in performance studies, a category of theatre based on the idea that nearly everything we do is related to performing. Once you begin to understand how performance is connected to all aspects of our lives you can use that knowledge to invent, create, and build performance-based activities that you can integrate into all the other interests that define who you are and what you want to do in *your* life.

Are you able to name what it is you care about – what you enjoy doing and would like to do more? Each one of the seven people who wrote a chapter for this workbook has expertise on how to fuse what they care about into performance activities, and they have broken down how to do it so you can use that knowledge yourself. They all begin their chapters by telling a little about themselves and why they care about their subject. Then, rather than move right into the how-to section, they each give you some background information on famous theorists and writers from history whose ideas have helped shape the concepts they'll be explaining in the rest of their chapter. Think of it like an instruction manual with a part called “what you need to know before you get started.” It is important to read these opening sections because they will help you make sense of what

comes in the second part of each chapter: examples of actual performances that demonstrate what these concepts look like in real-life situations. We think you are going to find their ideas and the examples useful and even exciting to read. Each chapter then has a final section with a bunch of try-it-out-yourself activities. The whole point of the workbook is to give you the expertise you need to put these ideas into practice so you can integrate performance into whatever projects and activities you want to create.

If you are the kind of person who likes to organize creative activities with groups of people, you will like Will's chapter “Performance as play/Play as performance.” Will introduces you to several thinkers who have spent time figuring out the different ingredients that make something fun for people to do. He then gives several examples of performance-based projects that put these theories into practice. In the final section, he suggests activities that you can try to test your own ideas for constructing activities that will be fun for participants.

Robert's chapter, “Performance as ritual/Ritual as performance,” is for anyone who is interested in understanding what rituals are – how rituals can offer people ways to feel connected and supported as they pass through challenging times or how rituals can provide active ways to celebrate important mile-

Performance Studies is like a spider's web that connects at multiple points to everything around it. That's why we've called this workbook *The Web of Performance*.

stones in life. Robert explains what goes into a ritual, and how you can create one that is meaningful and safe for those who want to participate in the experience.

If you are the kind of person who is drawn to helping people through their healing from illnesses or injuries, or you want to encourage wellness in general, Trudy's chapter, "Performance as healing/Healing as performance," will introduce you to loads of ideas for how to integrate performance into this important work. You may be surprised to learn the wide variety of ways that healing and wellness can be supported through performance.

Do you enjoy tutoring and mentoring younger students? Do you see yourself becoming a teacher some day? Monica's chapter, "Performance as education/Education as performance," shows how there is much more to teaching than standing in front of a classroom of students or even sitting with them to teach one-on-one. You will learn all sorts of ways to bring the effectiveness of performance into the teaching process.

Are you keen to be a community leader or do you already think of yourself as one? Sandra's chapter, "Performance as power/Power as performance," sheds light on how power in society works and how having and using power is closely connected to performance. You will learn how to establish your own power and the power of your group to bring about the change in the world you want to see.

In Kathy's chapter, "Performance as identity/Identity as performance," she takes a close and careful look at the kind of pres-

ures that come at us from all sides telling us to conform to other people's expectations of who we should be. Kathy shows how to use the skills of performance to take charge of the story you want to tell about yourself. She also shows how to create performances about the identity of a place and about other people's identities as a way of bringing forward important stories that need to be heard.

Colleen throws the door wide open in this last chapter, "Performance as everyday life/Everyday life as performance." She shows how pretty much everything around us has the potential for being turned into a performance-based project or activity. Whatever you love doing, whatever captures your interest, Colleen makes it clear that you can turn that thing into a performance that will get other people to care about it, too. Just like the other authors, she starts with some theorists, then offers some examples of what different people have created, and then sets you on your path with suggestions for activities to try.

*Web of Performance* is designed for you and your classmates/friends to use as your own workbook and instruction manual. Our idea is that, as you work through the ideas and activities in each chapter, your teachers will offer you guidance and support. We hope that you will turn the ideas and knowledge you find here into dynamic and powerful performances that will make the world a better place.

## Dear Educator,

This workbook has been designed and written for senior secondary and junior postsecondary students, ages 16-20, who may be interested in how performance works. The chapters cover broad topics drawn from the field of performance studies, an academic field developed out of theatre studies, anthropology, sociology and cultural studies in the 1980s and 1990s. At present there are a number of universities offering undergraduate and graduate degrees in performance studies. What has been missing in the field is a text designed for younger students, and one that invites students to work together as a performance ensemble in order to best explore the ideas we present. That is what we offer to you and your students here.

*Web of Performance* covers key topics in performance studies: Performance as it relates to Play; Ritual; Healing; Education; Power; Identity and Everyday Life. Each of these topics works like a web, inviting your students to explore in multiple directions, across many threads. The threads we include, beyond the written text, are invitations to visit websites, watch videos, to learn more about an important concept, performance theorist, or performance artist. A 21st century textbook needs to have the capacity for students to explore in these intuitive and curiosity-driven ways. We hope that each topic and its explorations will result in lively discussion and debate and in even more lively performance creation processes.

The book may be read and studied in the order it is presented. Your whole course may be designed to work on the chapters sequentially. Alternatively, you may wish to engage students in determining what topics draw their interest the most and work through the text in that way. Or, you might wish to separate your class into specialist groups that each tackle

one of the seven topics we cover. These groups can then take on the role of presenting ideas to their peers and leading the class ensemble in facilitating a performance piece based on understandings and interpretations of their chosen topic. Like a web, you may travel multiple pathways through this text. No performance is ever the same twice; we hope this text offers a similar bounty of directions and variations.

Our intent is to invite classes to respond to each topic through their own ensemble performance making. The chapter on Play, for example, could result in a group applying what they have learned about play theory and practice into a performance piece they have designed for other students or even members of their community that is a rewarding experience for all. The same process can apply to each chapter, and the culmination of the class might be to weave together these seven short performance creations into a final ensemble performance.

If you have experience facilitating performance creation, then you are more than ready to work with this guide. If that is not your background, we certainly recommend that you take advantage of some of the many resources available on devising, playbuilding and collective creation. Both of us have written about approaches to play and performance creation that you may find useful, and there are other books on this topic we recommend. Please see the references section for a list of these resources.

Performance studies broadens the way we think and practice in the performing arts. Because performance can happen in so many places, in so many ways, the kind of performances that your students might wish to explore will likely move beyond standard dramatic, musical or movement modes. We en-

## viii

courage you and your students to think about the artists and concepts presented across this guide as sources of inspiration. Spoken word, audio plays, immersive performance, web-based performance, performance art – there are any number of ways that performance can be embodied.

This is not to say that the approaches we may know best are no longer valid; the challenge is to weave newer performance forms into the more discipline-based methods we learned in our own education. You may well find that students are way ahead of us and will fully embrace the invitation to bring multiple performance forms into their classroom or studio.

We are very interested to hear from you and your students about the value of this guide. Please send us your comments, student work (via video or other formats) and their thoughts on how the material has shifted their understanding of performance as a human activity.

Enjoy your journeying inside the *Web of Performance*.

Dr. Monica Prendergast  
Associate Professor, Drama/Theatre Education  
Faculty of Education  
University of Victoria

Dr. Will Weigler  
Community-based Theatre Artist  
Postdoctoral Researcher  
Victoria, BC

Email Monica at [mprender@uvic.ca](mailto:mprender@uvic.ca)

## REFERENCES

- Bicat, T., & Baldwin, C. (2002). *Devised and collaborative theatre: A practical guide*. Marlborough, UK: Crowood.
- Bray, E. (1991). *Playbuilding: A guide for group creation for plays with young people*. Paddington, NSW: Currency Press.
- Govan, E., Nicholson, H., & Normington, K. (2007). *Making a performance: Devising histories and contemporary practices*. Oxford: Routledge.
- Graham, S., & Hoggett, S. (2014). *The Frantic Assembly book of devising theatre*. (2nd ed.). New York, NY: Routledge.
- Hatton, C., & Lovesy, S. (2009). *Young at art: Classroom playbuilding in practice*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Neelands, J., & Dobson, W. (2008). *Advanced drama and theatre studies*. (2nd ed.). London: Hodder & Stoughton.
- Oddey, A. (1996). *Devising theatre: A practical and theoretical handbook*. London: Routledge.
- Prendergast, M. & Saxton, J. (2013). *Applied drama: A facilitator's handbook for working in community*. Bristol, UK: Intellect.
- Rohd, M. (1998). *Theatre for community, conflict and dialogue: The Hope is Vital training manual*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.
- Tarlington, C. & Michaels, W. (1995). *Building plays: Simple playbuilding techniques at work*. Markham, ON: Pembroke Publishers.
- Weigler, W. (2001). *Strategies for playbuilding: Helping groups translate issues into theatre*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.



# Performance as play/ Play as performance

## Will Weigler



I have loved theatre for as long as I can remember. I started acting when I was about seven years old, and produced and directed my first professional show when I was 15. It was an opera about a cockroach and an alley cat. Since then, I've worked in many cities and towns as an actor and a techie, a playwright, a designer, a producer, and director. No matter what the particular job is, there's one thing that always draws me to theatre work. It's the chance to play in a world that is not the same as our day-to-day world. I believe that theatre has its own language, and I don't mean the language that the characters speak — the words that are written in the

pages of their scripts. I'm talking about the staging and the props, the lighting and sounds, the actors' transitions and gestures, their surprises and stillness. All of these different aspects of the language of theatre come together with their words to create meaning on stage. When it works well, a performance can open up the possibility for people in the audience to understand what someone else's life is like. Reading a book or a poem can do this, too, but in a different way from theatre. Theatre has a sense of playfulness that invites the audience to play along in real time. It's as if the actors are saying to them, "come on, just for a little while, let's all pretend together." I have devoted most of my career in theatre to finding ways to rely on the rich language of theatre to create a world on stage that is vivid and thrilling.

---

## 2 CHAPTER ONE



Read about Homo Ludens in J. Huizinga's *Homo Ludens: A Study of the Play Element in Culture* (1950)  
<https://tinyurl.com/yd6mgsao>

This book shows how nearly everything that everyone does can be seen as a performance of one kind or another. This chapter is about the relationship between performance and play, which is a huge part of who we are as human beings. Many years ago a Dutch historian called Johan Huizinga [pronounced Yo-hahn Housing-ha] wrote that although the name we give our species is *Homo Sapiens* (the man who is wise), a better choice might be *Homo Ludens* (the man who plays). We play every day of our lives, whether we realize it or not.

Whenever you play with other people there are always some ground rules that the players agree to. You can skate into the middle of a hockey game, but no matter how good you are on ice, you are not going to be able to play or have much fun playing if you don't know anything about the game. Once you know how the game works, you can start to develop techniques and strategies, skills, and even wisdom based on experience that will make you a better player. This enables you to have more fun. Your knowledge of the game lets you get more deeply into it and gives you a way to stretch the limits of what you are capable of doing. To use another analogy, you can try to drive a car across an empty parking lot without knowing what the gearshift does or knowing the difference between the clutch, the brake and the accelerator, but it's going to be a bumpy ride. Performance studies is like learning what all those things are and how to operate them. When you see how it all functions, it makes sense to you and you're able to drive. What's more, if you learn how a car is put together, you could build your own car. It's the same with performance studies.

When you are able get a clearer sense of how performance works you will be able to build performances that do what you want them to do.

Here are some of the things you will find in this chapter:

- ▶ What are the different kinds of play and what is it, exactly, that makes each one fun?
- ▶ What can a performance do, and what do you need to think about to make a performance that's effective?



- There are many different kinds of playgrounds for people of all ages. Some are real and some are virtual. What makes a good playground, and how can you design one so that it's a place where people want to come and play?

Playing is fun. When you get right down to it, that's the whole reason people play – because it's fun. If someone forces you to do it, if it's a duty or if it's boring, it's not play. People who study play like to point out that playing is not just for people. Non-human animals like to play, too. Scientist and philosopher Gregory Bateson and Johan Huizinga have both written about the way that dogs will pretend-fight with other dogs. Instead of chomping its teeth into another dog's neck, a dog will run up, give another dog a little nip, and then go running off so that the other dog will chase it. It's as if the dog is saying, "we're not really enemies, let's just pretend we are for the fun of it." The nip is a signal the first dog uses to let the other dog know it's just a game.

Part of performance studies involves identifying what kinds of signals humans give to each other to let other people know that we are playing. The term for this is meta-communication. It's an extra layer of communication on top of simply saying something outright. A subtle way to do this is with a wink or a smile that implies to the other person, this isn't for real; this is just for fun. There are much bigger signals and clues that we give people to let them know that it's just a game, just for fun. Let's say you and your friends want to try out the murder scene from a play you're rehearsing. If you perform it on a sidewalk downtown, and if you're pretty good actors, you might find that someone interrupts the scene and tackles you to save the victim, or that someone calls the police. When you perform the scene on a stage in a theatre, the place itself is a signal that lets people know this is a performance, not real life. Having a particular place where the playing happens is a very common way to signal to everyone, "what happens in here is play." Huizinga described it as a "Magic Circle." It might be a sports arena, or a virtual game world, or a kids' sandbox. The idea is that within this playing space or "site" everyone understands how certain rules apply that do not necessarily apply in the outside world.

French sociologist Roger Caillois [pronounced Roger Ki-wah] respected Johan Huizinga and the ideas he contributed to our understanding how play

## 4 CHAPTER ONE



In *The Princess Bride* (1987) the two swordfighters have fun because they are equally matched. Watch a clip at <https://tinyurl.com/y99xume3>



The *Pie to the Face Game* (2015) is all about alea. What makes it fun is not knowing who will “win” and who will “lose.” <https://tinyurl.com/nvkdh8u>

works, but he disagreed with Huizinga on a couple of points. For example, he felt that instead of thinking about play happening in a special place, it was more useful to think about different types of play. Caillois identified four categories that he believed covered every type of play and gave names to each one. He called them **âgon**, **alea**, **mimicry** and **ilinx**. You can think of them like a kind of secret code that lets you look at something fun and figure out what it is that’s making it fun. And then you can build fun from scratch.

### Âgon

Âgon is a Latin word that comes from the Ancient Greek word for contest. Âgon is the type of play you see at sports events. The true sense of âgon is not really about the aspect of winning or losing; it’s about the fun of playing opposite athletes who are a match for your skills. Where is the fun in playing against a team you can beat without even trying? On the flip side, where is the fun in playing against a team that will crush you without even trying? Admit it, the most fun happens when you are up against a team with players who are a perfect match for you and your teammates. In a game like that you get to test just how good you can be and push yourself to your limits. Sure, you’re trying to win, but honestly, the fun part is playing with/against someone who is just as good as you are. That is âgon.

### Alea

Roger Caillois called his second category of play alea, which is the Latin name for the game of dice. Sometimes the fun of play is about the thrill of not knowing how things are going to turn out. Unless you’ve got some trick up your sleeve, gambling games are all about the excitement of alea. Maybe you’re going to win, or maybe not.

### When you have fun, is it Autotelic or Exotelic fun?

Hungarian psychologist Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi [pronounced Me-high Cheek-sent-me-high] writes about being 'in the zone' and its relation to play. He calls it flow. When you are in the state of flow you lose track of time: you are in the moment, loving what you are doing and completely focused on it. You are totally absorbed in it and absorbed by it. Sound familiar? The enjoyment of being in flow is known as **autotelic**, which means your fun comes from the experience of doing the activity. When your fun comes from getting a reward later on like winning the game, finishing the puzzle or getting a prize it's called **exotelic**.

### Mimicry

The third category he called mimicry, which is related to the word mimesis from an Ancient Greek term that means "to imitate." This is the kind of play that happens in theatre. Acting on stage is fun when you get to play characters – be people – who are different from you and from your life. We know that little kids have fun playing 'let's pretend' games, but the fact is that people of all ages enjoy it. Gamers have fun by taking on roles as avatars and simulating invented worlds to play in. And why not? The world famous game designer Jane McGonigal asks where else in life are the heart pounding thrills and challenges, victories and agonizing defeats that gamers get by just plugging in. It's not real life; it's just for fun. And the way into the fun is through mimicry.

Daydreaming falls in the category of mimicry, too. When you are daydreaming you are playing out simulations in your imagination, taking on roles and letting your mind spin out possibilities and pictures of what could be. The fun that comes from watching a play or a movie, or listening to music is also related to mimicry since in all these cases you are imaginatively entering into the world of the performance. Philosopher Kendall Walton points out that when you are watching a horror movie, you don't really think that zombies are going to come out of the TV set and get you. What's happening is that the performers, who are performing in the mode of mimicry, have offered you an invitation to play along with them in the world of their story and you've accepted the offer, because it's fun.



Watch Csikszentmihalyi's TED talk (2004)  
<https://tinyurl.com/zjn2azr>



To learn more about flow, check out this short video  
 (2017) <https://tinyurl.com/y8q88wkt>



Read Jane McGonigal's *Reality Is Broken: Why Games Make Us Better and How They Can Change the World*  
 (2011) <https://tinyurl.com/y9v3recn>



To learn more about this, check out Kendall Walton's  
*Mimesis As Make-Believe: On the Foundations of Representational Arts* (1990)  
<https://tinyurl.com/yb2vaxhg>

### Ilinx and Destructive Ilinx

The name for Caillois' fourth category for play is Ilinx, the Greek word for whirlpool. This is the kind of play that is fun because of the rush that comes when you are out of control. It is the other side of the spectrum from *âgon*, where the fun has to do with skill and precision. When you are going full tilt downhill on a really high, really fast roller coaster, or when you are strapped to a bungee cord jumping off a bridge and letting out a scream, that's the fun of play called ilinx. The dizzying thrill of vertigo isn't for everyone, as I am sure some readers will admit. There are plenty of people, however, who seek out play that yanks them out of their everyday sense of stability. Ilinx makes them give in to the sensation of being off balance. When these people arrive at the end of the scariest ride at the carnival, their first question is usually, "Can we go again?"

Caillois also wrote about what he called destructive ilinx. This is like ilinx's evil twin. It can describe the rush of putting yourself in serious physical danger and also includes the rush of feeling off balance ethically or morally. Most people have a fairly clear sense of the difference between right and wrong. Destructive ilinx is the impulse to cross over the line for the fun of it. It can span the range from harmless pranks to straight out bullying and wrecking things. Although it is a recognized human tendency to flirt with this kind of play, there is an important question to ask. If you are playing in the mode of destructive ilinx, are the people you are playing with in on the game, or is your fun going to hurt them? When you are in this kind of play it is easy to fall into cruelty and meanness without giving any thought to the effect your playing has on other people.

Performance studies gives you a way to step back, look at what's happening, and understand it better. So, take a moment to think about times you have had fun playing. What made it fun? Was it *âgon*, *alea*, *mimicry* or *ilinx*, or maybe a combination of two or three of them? Break it down!

In the field of performance studies there is more to play than having fun. Play lets us *do* things – lots of things – that aren't necessarily available to us in day-to-day life. Performance theorist Richard Schechner [pronounced Sheck-

ner] writes that the study of performance is the study of transformation. He explains that through performance, human beings have an ability to re-invent ourselves as something or someone else, even if only for a short while. Through performance we can create something that wasn't here before, we can change what was, we can celebrate what is, and can we commemorate the ending of what has been. Schechner lists the things that he believes performance does:

- ▶ Performance entertains
- ▶ Performance makes something beautiful
- ▶ Performance marks or changes community
- ▶ Performance heals
- ▶ Performance teaches, persuades or convinces
- ▶ Performance deals with the sacred and the unholy



*Which one of these resonates with you? Are you drawn to one more than the others? When you use a performance as a place to try out ideas, there is no reason why you can't incorporate more than one of these, or even all of them.*

As a performance theorist, there are other questions you can ask to understand what's happening in a performance. Let's consider three of them. First, you can ask, how does the performance itself come across as a work of the imagination? For example, does it entertain, or is it beautiful? Beautiful doesn't necessarily mean pretty flowers and rainbows. It can be anything that captures your imagination with its artistry. Beautiful can be terrifying or awesome, breathtaking, lovely and delicate, or captivating in some other way. Second, you can ask, how does this performance relate to other performances that are similar to it or different from it? That is, how can we make sense of it according to the kind of performance it is? For example, if you are looking at a teenager's amazingly great cell phone video of herself lip-synching all the parts of "One



To learn more about Richard Schechner's ideas on this, check out his *Performance Studies: An Introduction* (2013) <https://tinyurl.com/ya5qjzsd>



Watch a teenager's cell phone video *One Day More* (in the car) (2016) <https://tinyurl.com/y8kkq8kh>

Day More" from *Les Misérables*, you don't compare it to a whole cast of professional actors singing that song in the movie version or stage production of the musical. As a performance theorist, you ask, how does it compare to other video performances by other teenagers lip-synching to songs? You compare similar things to figure out what's happening in this particular performance that makes it stand out. Third, you can ask, how does this performance make the world a better place? How is it contributing something that is needed or has been missing? Performance theorist Dwight Conquergood called these the three As of performance studies: artistry, analysis, and activism. Sometimes he called them the three Cs of performance studies: creativity, critique, and the community. Or sometimes the three Is of performance studies: imagination, inquiry, and intervention. He liked threes. It all adds up to the same thing. By looking at a performance from three different angles, performance theorists can get a grip on what it is that's happening.

Here is an example.



Watch *The Washington Post's* "Stop and Hear the Music" (2007) <https://tinyurl.com/y7krz5se>

In 2007 in Washington, DC, a newspaper reporter wanted to try a performance experiment. Joshua Bell is one of the world's most famous classical violinists and people were paying a lot of money for tickets to hear him play at night in a concert hall. The reporter asked Mr. Bell to pretend to be an ordinary busker playing his violin for people in the subway on their way to work. They set up a hidden camera to see what people would do. Most people walked right by him without stopping to listen. The reporter wrote a story in the paper about how people don't recognize or appreciate "good" music.

The story was posted online and a lot of readers left online comments saying that people are idiots. But there was one comment from a woman in New York who was an actual subway busker. She wrote that Mr. Bell was undoubtedly an excellent musician who plays beautiful music in his concert performances. Here she was considering his artistry, creativity, and imagination. But then she brought up the second question performance theorists ask about how a particular performance is similar to or different from other things that are like it. She wrote that buskers are not only thinking about presenting beautiful music to listeners. In her opinion, buskers get people to stop, listen, and give money by drawing them into the playing. Buskers often succeed by making people feel

that they are an active part of the experience with a back-and-forth exchange between the listeners and the musician. That, she wrote, is the big difference between a concert violinist and most street musicians, and that is the reason why nobody stopped to listen to him. If you were to continue her performance analysis, you might ask about the ways that Mr. Bell's concert hall performance contributes to his audiences' lives compared to the ways a busker's performance contributes to the lives of the "community" of people on the sidewalk or in the subway. Performance analysis can be tricky. Some musicians perform in concert very much like a busker on a street, while some buskers perform more like traditional concert musicians. By asking questions like these, we can put it into focus and come to a fuller understanding of the dynamics of what's happening in any performance.

All three questions are related to the relationship between the performer(s) and the audience. Theatre historian and performance theorist Marvin Carlson explains that what defines a performance is that it is done for an audience. Even when you make a YouTube video, you are not actually performing every time someone clicks to view it, but you had an audience in mind when you made it. So ask yourself, when you create a performance live or recorded, what choices do you make about the creativity in your presentation, where does it fit in with other performances that are like it or not, and how does it open up our human connections with each other?

Asking how a performance supports activism, engages with a community, or makes an intervention in the way things are, is a significant part of a performance analysis. It is easy to think about a performance only as something that entertains an audience, but it can do so much more. James Thompson is the founder and co-director of a group called *In Place of War*. They create theatre with people in communities around the world who are surrounded by war and poverty and distress. Thompson describes how quickly people's lives in these situations can go from a sense of security to feeling completely bewildered when the lives they knew are turned upside down. When the *In Place of War* team creates theatre in communities, their intention is to use play and performance as a way to re-weave a sense of coherence in the midst of things falling apart.



Watch *In Place of War: The Story of the Artists* (2012)

<https://tinyurl.com/ycotasc4>



To learn more about the *In Place of War* project (2004 – ) go to <https://tinyurl.com/y75byjvd>

In the next section, we'll look at some examples of different kinds of performances in Canada and around the world to see how they connect with their audiences through play.

### **Making a fun “Playground”**

If you want to produce a performance that invites people to want to participate – to play along – one of the first things to consider is how you can set up an interesting and inviting playing space. Live theatres and movie theatres do this all the time. The audience comes into a room that has been set up to focus attention on a place where something is going to happen (the stage or the screen). It's almost as if you sign a contract when you walk in the door that says you agree what happens here is going to be different from the regular world. As Huizinga reminds us: in a playing space, special rules apply. The lights go down, the show starts, and the playing starts.

Halloween haunted houses have the same kind of unwritten contract. You walk in the front door and the way the house is set up creates an invitation for you to play along. Haunted houses are a combination platter of alea, mimicry and ilinx. Alea, because you really don't know what's going to be waiting around the next corner, and that's part of the fun. Mimicry, because you don't seriously believe that those are re-animated corpses – you are playing along for the fun of it. If it's a good haunted house, there's ilinx too: it's the fun of being caught off guard by a “gotcha” that makes you scream and then laugh.

There is actually a performance version of haunted houses. It's called immersion or immersive theatre. Like a swimmer totally immersed in the water of the ocean, audiences in these productions enter into a space where they are completely immersed in a performance that's taking place all around them. Sometimes immersive theatre happens indoors and sometimes outdoors in a public park or on city streets. Here are a few variations of immersive theatre.



Watch a review of *Sleep No More* (2011) by an audience member <https://tinyurl.com/qzpvdol>

### ***Sleep No More***

Punch Drunk is a theatre company that started in London, England and then expanded to New York, Toronto, San Francisco, and other cities. One of their most famous shows is a mashup of the 1940s movie *Rebecca* and Shakespeare's



*Macbeth* called *Sleep No More* (The show's title comes from Macbeth's line after he murders Duncan the King: "Methought I heard a voice cry, 'Sleep no more! Macbeth does murder sleep"). The audience is invited to come in to what appears to be an old hotel from the 1940s. In the different hotel rooms and ballrooms and even in closets there are different scenes adapted from *Macbeth* and *Rebecca*, but without words: it's all done as movement and action and dance.

The audience gets to wander around wherever they want to go. They can follow certain characters or just go off exploring on their own.

### ***You Me Bum Bum Train***

Lots of theatre groups are making immersive theatre in every kind of site you can imagine. Also in London, there is a show called *You Me Bum Bum Train* that has been produced on and off for many years. Its creators Kate Bond and Morgan Lloyd actually prefer to call it a ride instead of a show, but it is definitely performance-based. The actors – a couple hundred people who volunteer to be in it – do brief “scenes” up to 70 times a night, each time for an audience of one. At the beginning of the “ride” you’re put into a wheelchair (the bum bum train) and wheeled down the hall to start your own personal adventure. You get thrust into one scenario after another. For instance, you might find yourself in an American football locker room where you have to give the inspirational halftime speech to the players; then you’re put inside a (fake) MRI machine in a hospital and when you come out the other side you’re given an apron and you’re the waiter in a Japanese restaurant. You go into the kitchen with your customers’ orders and suddenly you find that you’re assisting a burglar sneaking through someone’s bedroom at night. Then you go through a door and the spotlight hits you: you’re a politician being grilled by reporters at a press conference. The scenes in the show are different from year to year. You might be in a prison during visiting hours, or a rock star onstage during a concert where screaming fans want you to jump into the mosh pit and crowd surf. You might go through a door and find that you are now a conductor at the podium and everyone in the symphony orchestra is waiting for you to wave your baton and



Read the *New York Times* review of the play, *You Me Bum Bum Train* (2010) <https://tinyurl.com/2d2pjba>

conduct something by Mozart. The sheet music is right there in front of you. You might slide down a garbage chute and be a bag of trash that the sanitation crew doesn't want to touch because you're too stinky for them. You might find yourself signing stacks of copies of your book surrounded by a crowd of fans who tell you that your book has absolutely changed their lives. The whole point of *You Me Bum Bum Train* is to give audiences loads of different experiences that aren't virtual in the gaming sense. You are actually there, surrounded by real people, immersed in a life that is radically different from your own. People who have done it say there is nothing else like it in the world.

### Holocaust Museum Project

It might seem strange to think of “play” as a useful way to look at painful experiences, but immersive theatre can do just that and do it well. A few years ago over a hundred students at a North Saanich Middle School on Vancouver Island, British Columbia, spent all year preparing a two night performance. The CBC heard about it and ran a news story. Suddenly, everyone wanted to come see it and so the students kept the show going for two weeks. It got such a great response that the school did it again the next year and the year after that. It was called *The Holocaust Museum* and was an immersive theatre/art/tech performance created and performed by the students themselves.

The audience arrived at the school in the evenings. They were assigned tickets for certain times, so they might come at 6 pm, 6:15 pm or 6:30 pm and so on. When it was time to begin, they were met by a guide who led them on a walk through a school that had been transformed with fabric and theatre flats into passageways turning left and right, around corners into rooms and out into other rooms. The journey lasted about an hour. All along the way, the audience found students acting in scenes, or performing their own poems, or storytelling about old artifacts. There were also some visual art installations and computer-based interactive learning stations. Everything in the show was related to what the students had learned about the lives and sometimes deaths of children, teens, and adults during the Holocaust in Europe during World War II.

In their Humanities, Language Arts and Social Studies classes, the students had spent the year gathering what they needed to know to create the perfor-





Read more about the play *From the Heart* (2015)  
<https://tinyurl.com/y85tesx3>



To see some examples of site-specific theatre, check out *dreamthinkspeak* <https://tinyurl.com/lvqrg27>

at North Saanich Middle school, this group also turned the most impactful stories and experiences they found into short performances: scenes, songs, stories and art installations. Then it started to get really interesting. Working with a couple of architects, we built an indoor labyrinth about the size of a hockey rink made from a huge truckload of old doors and windows we borrowed from a building salvage company, plus hundreds of metres of fabric and big tree branches. We placed our 17 performance pieces and art installations all along the route of the labyrinth and the whole thing was lit by strings of Chinese paper lanterns. Unlike the *Holocaust Museum* performance, there was no guide in this show. Every 20 minutes, an audience of 8 people walked through on their own, stopped when there was a performance to see, and then continued on their journey. It took about an hour and a half to go all the way through and when people finally got to the end of the path they were met by someone who said, “Welcome to the heart of the labyrinth. Would you like a cup of tea?” The final room was set up as a place where people could hang out for as long as they wanted, drinking tea, drawing, writing and talking with others. It was an important part of the experience to let everyone have a chance to chill out and let it all sink in.

Like the *Holocaust Museum* performance, the actors in *From the Heart* never tried to preach at the audience or trick them into feeling a certain way. Instead it was as if each of them were saying, “This story helped me get it and now I’ve made this performance about it to help you see what I’m seeing.” We did everything we could to make the labyrinth itself and all the individual scenes so beautiful that the audience would be captivated by our stories.

### Promenade Theatre

Immersive theatre can happen outdoors, too. This kind of theatre is sometimes called promenade theatre from the old fashioned word for people going out on a walk together (it’s where our word “Prom” comes from). People who produce immersive theatre productions can choose to take advantage of the unique

qualities of a space to build their scenes in relationship to the place. A cramped room might lead to the idea of creating a scene about claustrophobia. The ruins of a building with lots of windows could be perfect for different actions happening in each window. A park with a path that leads to a clearing in the woods or to a stone bridge over a brook could be incorporated into a story. This is sometimes called “site-specific” or “site-sympathetic” theatre because the place itself – the site – is the inspiration for the design of the scenes. In the book *Immersive Theatres*, Samantha Holdsworth of England’s Nimble Fish theatre describes this process as “finding the language of the space.” Alternatively, you might decide to make an immersive theatre project in which you create a completely invented space as was done with the labyrinths in The Saanich Middle School’s *Holocaust Museum* and in *From the Heart*.

### Inventing recipes for fun: combining âgon, alea, mimicry, and ilinx

#### Contact Improv

One way that âgon, alea, and ilinx come together in a performance is in a dance form called *Contact Improv*. All over the world Contact Improv groups meet to perform in something that is a little bit aikido, a little bit surfing, a little bit wrestling, and a little bit dance all wrapped up in one. The name Contact Improv comes from the fact that your physical contact with your dance partner is not choreographed: it’s completely improvised. On any dance floor where you improvise dance moves with your partner there is a certain degree of being in tune with the moves your partner is making. Contact Improv takes that quality of being in tune with each other and cranks it up to the top of the dial. It’s all about finding points of connection with each other from one second to the next. You rely on each other’s bodies to support weight, roll over, lean on, and be rolled over and leaned on. The last thing you want to do in Contact Improv is trot out your tried and true moves. Instead, both of you are inventing moves on the spot – matching each other’s creativity and intuitively responding to what your partner is doing. You are there for them and they are there for you. It’s all about the unexpected. Neither of you knows what’s coming next. There is Ilinx here, too: you can be upside down and backwards as much as you’re



To learn more read Josephine Machon’s *Immersive Theatres: Intimacy and Immediacy in Contemporary Performance* (2013) <https://tinyurl.com/y88gfrz>



Learn more about Contact Improvisation  
<https://tinyurl.com/yatctlr>



Watch *Contact Improvisation - Moments of Practice with Irene Sposetti & Johan Nilsson* (2011)  
<https://tinyurl.com/y76arge7>

right side up and on your feet. And it works best when there is âgon: if you have a partner who matches your ability you can make a surprising, astonishingly beautiful performance in tandem with each other that is like nothing anyone has ever done before.

### ***Blind Date***

Alea and mimicry overlap in a performance called *Blind Date*. Imagine going to a show. Onstage there is a young woman sitting at a café table waiting for someone. Her name is Mimi. She speaks with a French accent. Oh, and did I mention she is wearing a small red clown nose? She's waiting for her blind date, but after a while she realizes she's been stood up. So what does she do? She asks a random person in the audience if he would like to be her blind date tonight. She finds someone who is willing and he comes up onstage to join her. The rest of the show is their blind date. It's not a set-up with another actor planted in the audience. Each time, she just gets someone to take a chance on having a date with her in front of everybody. *Blind Date* is the brainchild of Toronto-based actor Rebecca Northan. She has performed it all over the world and each time it's different because she can never be sure what her date is going to do or say. That's the exciting and fun part. That's *alea* meeting *mimicry* in performance. Now the great thing about Rebecca is that she is always very conscious of not making her date feel like an idiot onstage. She asks him questions, a little like people ask each other questions on actual dates, and she really listens to the answers and responds, as Mimi, wearing her little red clown nose. Why the nose? Remember the nip that the dog gives to signal that "this is play, not a real bite?" It's the same with the nose. It's a reminder to her date and to the audience that this is not reality TV with cameras watching an actual date. The nose signals that it's all for fun: it is alternate reality and everyone can enjoy the *idea* of a date. The blind date goes away feeling that he or she hasn't been the butt of a joke – it's been fun for both the date and the audience.



Watch Citadel Theatre's explanation of *Blind Date* at the Citadel Theatre (2013)  
<https://tinyurl.com/y7jk393q>

When it comes to incorporating mimicry into a performance, you are not limited to creating a play on stage. The possibilities are as wide open as your imagination will carry you. Stories are the foundation of how we make sense of the world and as a

performance theorist you can use your skills to weave performance into nearly any situation.

### Using the *idea* of play to face difficult experiences

If you have ever been in the middle of a natural disaster or a disaster brought about by war you know how terrible it can be. When a huge earthquake struck Christchurch, New Zealand in 2011, the community was devastated. Homes, streets and buildings were destroyed and family members died. As little kids started to return to school after the quake, there was a big question about what teachers could possibly do to help those kids make sense of what had happened and what was still happening all around them in the aftermath of the destruction. New Zealand teachers Peter O'Connor and Molly Mullen were invited to classrooms to offer some creative responses to the students' traumatic experiences. Peter and Molly are not therapists – they are theatre artist-educators who use storytelling, drama and performance as a way to help young people learn and work through various challenges they face.

This time, they started with the beginning of a story and then created a drama and art making space for the five and six year old students to complete it. Peter told the first line: "A girl gets up and gets ready to visit her grandmother. And when she does, she trips. And when she trips, she tears her cloth of dreams ...." This wasn't a story about an earthquake, but it held the same kind of meaning for the children. Something very important had been damaged. Within the story, and relying on their imaginations, the children could work through what it was going to take for them to heal. All the children were eager to help the little girl in the story and in that classroom they created a drama about repairing her torn cloth of dreams. The drama involved mending the torn cloth with a magic thread and together they invented a recipe for making the thread. They decided that the ingredients for this special thread included:



Watch the video about the project called *Earthquake: A Teaspoon of Light* (2011)  
<https://tinyurl.com/ycr3gbt>

Schechner's list of what a performance does:

- Performance entertains
- Performance makes something beautiful
- Performance marks or changes community
- Performance heals
- Performance teaches, persuades or convinces
- Performance deals with the sacred and the unholy

*1 teaspoon of light in the darkest tunnel*  
*10 cups of love*  
*2 teaspoons of belief*  
*1/2 cup of adventure*  
*3/4 cup of hope.*

Through imaginative play the young students made the thread, they repaired the cloth, and they envisioned the possibility that hopes and dreams and lives can be repaired even if they are never fully restored to the way they once were.

The next section offers suggestions for how you can draw on your knowledge of performance theory to create spaces that make people want to play in them and performances that connect audiences to important ideas through play.

## PERFORM



Earlier in the chapter I explained that performance and play lets us *do* things. So what is it that *you* want to do? More to the point, as a performance theorist, how are you going to use performance to do what you want to do?

Think about what fires you up. What is it in particular that inspires you or makes you mad? Is it a story about something you care about that's already happened or looks like it is going to happen? Is there a poem or a piece of writing, an artwork or photo, or even a single quote that is especially beautiful to you: something you really love? Maybe you've recently discovered it or maybe it has been a favourite of yours for a long time. Take another look through Richard Schechner's list of what performance does and see how this thing of yours relates to what he describes.

### Choose a topic

Is there something in this list that is in line with what you feel called to do? Maybe you are drawn to it because it is just plain entertaining or beautiful. Does



it fire your imagination because it makes you want to take action against an injustice or do something to heal a wound? Do you feel you want to lead other people to understand something you feel they don't understand? Do you want to call attention to, or 'mark' something you feel is important to celebrate? Are you looking for some way to use performance to show why something is important to you, or show why it deserves to be laughed at?

Use the juice of what revs you up and fires your imagination. Let it be the catalyst – the spark – to launch you on a performance project. Maybe you use the original thing itself, or maybe you respond to it and write your own material inspired by it or in response to it. Or both! The Canadian poet, P.K. Page, was known for finding poems that she loved and then writing her own poems that integrated individual lines from the other poet's work into her poetry. Found poems are poems that are built from single words and phrases in someone else's writing – you pull out the bits that have resonance for you and make your own.

Another way to respond to something is to have a conversation about it and decide what it is about this writing or this experience that really inspires you and use that as a springboard to write your own material. In 2014, journalists at *The Guardian* newspaper in London, England partnered with playwrights to have conversations about things like music, sports, fashion, politics, and education. Then together, they made a series of very short “micro-plays” and hired actors and directors to stage them for videos. It was an experiment to see how performance could help make a news issue more vital and relevant and *human*.

Another great use of performance and play was when the European Space Agency wanted to get people around the world excited about the Rosetta space mission to land a craft on a comet. They commissioned a team of filmmakers to co-create a short sci-fi movie and called it *Ambition*. It went viral and people wanted to know more. That's the power of performance.

### Make it happen

Choose an event or a topic that you want to get people excited about or interested in. With your team, talk through how you could create a truly fun experience for an audience that will get them excited or interested in it. Start by writing down different aspects of the idea that appeal to you. Now brainstorm



Watch *Groove is in the Heart: A Microplay* by the *Guardian* and the Royal Court (2014)

<https://tinyurl.com/y98hmggu>



Watch *Ambition – The Film* (2014)

<https://tinyurl.com/y884huvl>

how you could build an experience using âgon, alea, mimicry, or llinx, or combinations of some of them.

### Inventing a playing space

Earlier I mentioned theatre director Samantha Holdsworth who talks about “finding the language of the space.” What does that mean? To find the language of the space, look at a room or a collection of rooms in a building, an outdoor area, or anywhere at all you want to have your performance. Scan it and let your imagination run wild. What can you picture happening here? Is there a place where performers can hide and then emerge on cue? Is there a hallway that lends itself to creating a moment in a performance about a passage through some challenging transition? Is there a small room at the top of a stairway that would lend itself to a sense of something remarkable and rare happening there? This imagination exercise is something one person or many people can do – generating ideas in response to the site so that a performance can take full advantage of all the peculiarities of the natural or built environment.

As your ideas start to come together for a performance, keep in mind how you might create a *relationship* between the performers and the audience.

We usually just think of the audience as just an audience – people who are there to see the show. But when you are inventing a playing space, you can be much more specific about what role you are asking the audience to play. You can think of them as people who have a reason to be there that involves more than having a ticket. You can leave a gap in the way you create the performance – a gap that they can fill. For instance, you might imagine that they are eavesdroppers listening in on a private conversation. Maybe they are tourists on a tour led by the performers. Maybe they are invisible ghosts. The performers don’t see them, but feel a sense that someone is watching them. Building in a relationship like this draws the audience into the performance even if nobody explains to them what the relationship is. When the performers have decided who the audience is to them, they will treat them as being more than mere observers.

For the sake of practice, imagine a playing space that is all about *âgon*. How might you create a performance that invites an audience to experience the fun of meeting their match? Keep in mind that for *âgon* to work, the audience can't be treated like puppets in your game. They will need to feel that they are fully engaged in the back and forth of the performance. The word for this is *agency*. When people have agency, it means they are in charge of their own choices. For them to achieve agency in a performance it might mean that you start by introducing them to the "rules of the game" so they meet the performers as equals. Contact Improv is one example of performance-based *âgon*. What other scenarios can you invent that work in similar ways? As you are inventing this playing space, decide if your performance is all about entertaining the audience, or if it's about creating beauty, or celebrating a person, place, event or idea. Is the performing place and the performance that happens in it intended to heal or is your hope to change people's minds about something? Is it about the sacred or the unholy? The more you refine your understanding as a performance theorist, the easier it is to shape the performance just the way you want it to be.

Now imagine a playing space that's all about *alea*. For the audience (and maybe for the performers too) the key to this kind of performance rests on the fact that nobody knows how it's going to turn out. Can you invent a playing space that is fun because it embodies a true sense of chance? After you start the process of brainstorming ideas, ask yourself the same questions as before.

The possibilities for a playing space based in mimicry are wide open. What signals or cues can you build into the design of the place and the performance that will draw people into wanting to play along and deciding to go for it? It might be as simple as Mimi's little red nose, or as complex as the different rooms in *You Me Bum Bum Train*.

Don't forget to ask the same questions to refine your own sense of clarity. Is it all about entertaining the audience, or creating beauty, or celebrating a person, place, event or idea? Is the performing place and the performance that happens in it intended to promote healing or is your hope to change people's minds about something? Is it about the sacred or the unholy?

When the audience members in *You Me Bum Bum Train* are put into the wheelchairs then rolled quickly down the hallway and launched into their dizzying ride, they experience the fun of ilinx. In that show, everyone is told that if at any time they want to bail out, there is a signal they can use. They can lift their hands straight up in the air and say out! And then the ride stops and they are escorted to the exit with no questions asked. Giving the audience this kind of veto power is especially important when ilinx is involved in a performance. When you are getting on a roller coaster it's pretty clear what you are in for over the next few minutes and you make a choice to strap into that car. In a performance where the audience could be plunged into physically alarming situations, the right thing to do is to let them decide if they want to stop and get off if that's what they choose to do. And, of course, safety is always the number one concern. As an artist, you never want to put people in actual physical danger. Can a playing space based in ilinx be about entertaining the audience? Of course it can. Like all of the others it can also be about creating beauty, celebrating a person, place, event or idea, promoting healing, changing people's minds about something or dealing with the sacred or the unholy

These imagination exercises are designed to get you to become clear about the differences between âgon, alea, mimicry or ilinx. As you saw in the examples, the fun of a playing space and a performance is rarely about just one category; it is the combinations that make a performance interesting and rich. So now, look for those things that fire you up and start to imagine how you can create playing spaces and performances that rely on combinations to make them fun and playful, even if they deal with serious topics. Bring those ideas alive for an audience.

# Performance as ritual/ Ritual as performance

**Robert Birch**



performance-relationship tapestry weaves together the colourful threads of our own personal, political, and

I think about you reading this now. I wonder who you are. What influences the way you feel and see the world? What do you and your generation need in these extraordinary times? I imagine you might like my friends. Over the past decade every six weeks we gather to enact spontaneous mostly outdoor rituals. Our

cultural values while affirming our ability to adapt to what life throws our way. For us, change is not an isolated or isolating experience. Rather, our performance rituals reveal to us how transformation, like seasonal change, is necessary for mutual health and wellbeing. We know stagnation numbs the joy out of life. Ritual helps us express our passionate care and concern for each other, for the earth, and for a vision of fairness toward all beings. Our ritual work can demonstrate our appreciation for the generations of social change makers that came before us — our ancestors — and helps us imagine ways we can support those who will show up after us — our descendants.

---

Ritual is multidimensional. It's a tool. It's a practice. It's a process. Ritual helps us give shape to the seeming randomness of our world. Ritual permeates all aspects of life: birth, death and regeneration — and everything in between. Ritual is immense and ever evolving in its scope, application and possibility. When we open ourselves to ritual it meets us where we feel the most alive. Ritual for all its conceivable grandeur is also an under the nose, tip of the tongue mystery. Once you begin to understand the significance of ritual you begin to unlock one of its many secrets: ritual is everywhere.

### My own initiation into performance/ritual

I have come to believe that we are born with an intrinsic sense of ritual. From breathing to seasons, life expresses itself in rhythm. Rhythm is intimately connected to ritual, and therefore ritual can intimately deepen our connection to life. The American poet Mary Oliver writes:

*... rhythm is one of the most powerful of pleasures, and when we feel a pleasurable rhythm we hope it will continue. When it does, it grows sweeter. When it becomes reliable, we are in a kind of body-heaven.*

*A Poetry Handbook: A Prose Guide to Understanding and Writing Poetry* (2001)

<https://tinyurl.com/ybehog32>

The constant rhythm and repetition of rocking soothes a child. I was an expert rocker. I would agitate my cradle back and forth until, by the end of the night, I had moved that cradle across the entire room right up against the door, jamming it shut. By the age of four I moved on to twirling like a whirling dervish. Again and again I would spin and rotate around the living room until I would accidentally crash into the corner of the television set, and once again get sent to the hospital for stitches. I was a wild child and now that I look back, I see that it was theatre that saved me. Theatre provided a harness for my pent up energy. To a kid who felt lonely and different from everyone else, theatre also offered a place to belong. It helped me find my crew of adventurous playmates. We liked getting lost and finding our way home again. We performed our way into trouble in order to find an inventive way out of it.

We were learning to investigate our inner/outer realness through our very own make-then-believe world of performance. I used to think I was a fraud. I now realize I am simply pretending-my-way-into-real. Performance ritual is now my life's practice.

My life has always involved performance in one way or another. At age 15 I was the founding artistic director of the Peterborough Children's Theatre Workshop. I hired five young talented friends and together we figured out how to produce, perform and pay the bills. For five summers we toured southeastern Ontario and ran summer drama camps. After a year at theatre school I quit and travelled the world. Daily, I discovered how to trust others by trusting myself. I returned, finished my acting degree and got my first big break performing in a play called *Flesh and Blood*, the first national youth production about HIV/AIDS at Theatre Direct in Toronto. I had just come out of the closet as a gay person (perhaps my biggest life ritual rite of passage ever) and was cast as the boyfriend of the lead male character who had contracted AIDS. I can still hear the audience of high school students either clap or boo when I kissed the other male actor on stage! I was proud to be gay and on the cutting edge of social change.

I then moved west, and by age 25 I was directing plays and running theatre festivals. One day just as we were about to launch a performance about HIV, my doctor called to say that my own every-three-months routine HIV test had come back positive. I was thrown into what I now understand as my next big rite of passage, a very intense kind of ritual that you will read about later in this chapter. My life and my art were mirroring each other. With lots of support from friends and community I learned how life and art can also nourish one another.

I soon left commercial theatre to focus on theatre as a healing art. For many years I travelled, performed and taught Playback Theatre, a form of ritualized theatre where we spontaneously performed audience members' real life stories. By performing hundreds of life-defining moments each year, I learned a lot about the human spirit. Finally, I moved to a small island to become a hippy-farmer where ritual found me hungry to merge my community values and art back together again with the healing power of nature. So as you see, ritual has



Read more about *Playback Theatre*  
<https://tinyurl.com/ybgzno7k>

always been an important part of my life. To me, it is a form of sacred theatre where nature, mythology and politics meet and where personal and community education, play, art and healing intersect to help us re-connect to what matters.

Deep in my bones I know that ritual helps us collaborate toward creating a safer and saner world.

### Performance as Ritual

There is no quick and easy way to define “ritual.” Our English word for it comes from a 14th century Latin word – *ritus* – which meant a religious ceremony or occasion, and also meant a custom that was handed down. These days, it’s common to think of rituals as connected to religious ceremonies but there is much more to a ritual than that definition. Of course religions of all kinds incorporate rituals and so do activities that are non-religious, or secular. Our wise sage of performance studies, Richard Schechner, tells us that

*Teaching ritual is incredibly difficult because the subject is so vast with no general agreement on the basics, including what ritual is, how it works, what it feels like to perform a ritual or participate in one, and what its functions are.*

The best part of this ambiguity is that every generation gets to make up our own rituals.

Rituals involve people doing very real things in real places, while at the same time they invite people to enter the realm of their imaginations. Ritual is often filled with paradox, of seemingly competing ideas *and/or* actions. A ritual can be deeply reassuring for some participants, while at the same time it can be deeply unsettling for others. Aspects of ritual that might seem like opposites contradicting each other can dramatically play off of each other in very dynamic ways. In fact, using a forward slash is a good way to show how full of paradox the world of ritual can be. It’s all about the power of ambiguity.



Read more about Richard Schechner and his works  
<https://tinyurl.com/yazchb8b>



Ritual is *secular/sacred, reassuring/unsettling*, it takes place in *real/imaginative* spaces, it is *here/not* here.

My intention for this chapter is for you to learn that performance liberates: what's *inside*, performance *outs*. This is what makes performance exciting and scary – it has the magic to make change. While I feel honoured to introduce you to some of the artists who have influenced me, the real story here is you and this whirling period of history within which you live. You are a generation of new ritual makers. Ritual can temporarily carve out a definable creative space within the seemingly chaotic pace of global change. Throughout this chapter, I invite you to mull over some of the ways you see ritual in your culture today.

### A world of ritual

If you look up the word 'ritual' in any thesaurus you may find any of the following:

Rites Formalities Festivals Fairs  
 Military Parades Sacraments  
 Masses Cavalcades Circuses  
 Pilgrimages Ceremonies Routines  
 Religious Celebrations Carnivals Practices  
 Initiations Pageants Processionals Habits  
 Observances Recitals

?

*Are there other words you might think of adding?*

## 28 CHAPTER TWO



Read more in *Teaching Ritual* edited by Catherine Bell (2007) <https://tinyurl.com/yaoma6wf>



Watch the movie trailer for *Pina* (2011)  
<https://tinyurl.com/y9epmbhy>



Also, take a look at this short video from the film showing a march of the seasons performed by her ensemble of dancers (2011)  
<https://tinyurl.com/y7959n3v>

We can start by taking a look at the different layers of rituals. I'll lead you through some of the concepts worth knowing, including trance and ceremony, as well as rites of passage and initiation. Then I'll give you some examples of three performers I know who ground their work in ritual. Finally, I'll offer you some suggestions for how to start (or continue) your own work as a ritual maker.

The film *Pina* reveals the sublime work of the innovative German choreographer and dancer, Pina Bausch, whose choreography has many ritual elements.

Love  
Freedom  
Struggle  
Longing  
Joy  
Despair  
Reunion  
Beauty  
Strength  
Dance, dance... otherwise we are lost

Pina Bausch

When you are performing on stage you are both yourself and the character at the same time. This is a vitally important concept to wrap your head around. Acting in a play can be fun to do, especially when you get to imagine yourself “as if” you were a character whose life is very different from yours. But can you imagine playing a character and then getting so completely swallowed up in that character that you lose all sense of reality and start to think you actually are that person? Part of a theatre director’s job is to guide actors so that they can reach a high level of intensity while performing a scene, but always coming back to their real lives once the performance is over. It is very much the same with ritual. Participants in a ritual rely on the ability to step temporarily “over

the borderline” into the realm of belief. We use the symbolic power of imagining “as if” in order to make the ritual come alive while it’s happening and then when it’s completed we step out of it, back over the borderline into habitual reality. This is one of the reasons people feel a calling to create and participate in rituals. It is because rituals offer us a chance to step into creative realms for a while and be temporarily lifted out of life as we know it – surrender to greater heights of wonder and euphoria – before being safely returned back to the earth of our bodies. Rituals refresh, renew and revitalize us. Taking part in rituals occasionally has the power to leave us permanently changed.

*There is a deep longing among people in the West to connect with something bigger – with community and spirit.*

Sobonfu Somé

## Ritual as Performance

### Trance ritual in Indonesia

During religious ceremonies in many tribal cultures, the separation between people and the world of the spirit disappears and something extraordinary emerges. In these ancient traditions, rooted in generations of training, this is sometimes known as trance possession. On the islands of Indonesia, trance ritual is rooted in tribal cultures, passed along through the generations from their ancestors.

Trance is a cathartic and cleansing ritual. Fred Eiseman, Jr., an expert on rituals from the Indonesian island of Bali tells us that the word for trance in Balinese is *rauh* meaning “come.” The notion is that a spirit has come and ‘entered the body’ of the performer in trance. Trance participants become vessels for elemental, ancestral or divine spirits. Trance may also be brought on for the purposes of hearing prophecy, or to direct the community to fulfill some neglected ceremony or function. The trance leader is called the *dalang* (or sometimes called the *pawang* or *penimbul*). The dalang oversees the physical and spiritual well-being of the ritual and its participants.

Sobonfu Somé, whose name means “Keeper of Ritual,” is one of the most notable voices in African spirituality.



Learn more about Sobonfu (1999 – )  
<https://tinyurl.com/yaxrclyg>



Watch an 8-minute preview of the documentary  
*Jathilan: Trance and Possession in Java* (2011)  
<https://tinyurl.com/ycavqdo3>



Read about Robin Wall Kimmerer's *Braiding Sweetgrass: Indigenous Wisdom, Scientific Knowledge and the Teachings of Plants* (2013)  
<https://tinyurl.com/ybptsaqm>

This sacred performance renews the community's commitment to a divine source of their spiritual practice and to their ancient past. It weaves together their heritage of honouring their ancestors with their present daily concerns about births and marriages, sustainable crops, and health in the village. While people in Western cultures may easily dismiss this approach to life and death, there are Indonesians who rely on trance performance as one way to remain spiritually and culturally grounded as they face the complexities of an uncertain future in the 21st century.

### Ceremony in the lives of Indigenous peoples

*Ceremony focuses attention so that attention becomes intention. If you stand together and profess a thing before your community, it holds you accountable .... These are ceremonies that magnify life.*

Robin Wall Kimmerer

As part of this chapter I respectfully requested Coast Salish elder and friend Bill White to share his thoughts on ritual and ceremony. When Bill White lost his father at the age of five, his mother Kay George made sure that young Bill would spend a lot of time with relatives and learn about his people's traditional ways in order to give him strength in his life. That early period framed his love and acceptance of the protective qualities of elders and traditions. Since the 1970s Bill has worked with Elders/Sulsalewh through the local School District and the University of Victoria. I am honoured he chose to share his wisdom with us.

### Letter from Bill White

Dear Robert,  
 Many of us grew up travelling with parents and grandparents to spiritual and cultural events in our own Coast Salish communities of southwestern British Columbia and northwest Washington State. Often a thousand people attended. Can you imagine a thousand First Nations families

gathered in one longhouse? The basis for participating in ritual and ceremony in our culture is to learn from childhood to listen intently and to watch. At least four formal times in a persons' life (naming, puberty, marriage, initiation) the old people provided songs, ceremonies meant to protect, to surround and to visibly show our world consists of movement, ways of understanding our connections to the natural and supernatural worlds. Ritual and ceremony provides a vehicle for training for life. We need to learn that holding onto various 'griefs and sorrows' are dangerous and if unchecked could result in illness and or alienation. These formal events are meant to remind individuals 'you belong', 'you are worthy' and that throughout life we must learn 'to move together', 'to love one another' and 'to always help one another.' I have worked with elders since the mid-seventies onward and learned that with each new day the past becomes the present, the present prepares us for the future.

When we consistently let go of 'darknesses' (hurt and sorrow) we obtain 'balance within' and the future is stronger! Our old people always open each private and community event with prayers and or prayer songs to help remind us of our connections to the Creator and through him to each other.

Our shared world is fast paced and now more than ever it is essential for young people to learn they belong, to learn to listen to their own hearts and souls, and to know there is great joy when connected to others. Listening to old people, observing preparation for ritual and ceremony, and in particular opening prayers, as well as to the advice to the audience it became clearer to me that 'talk' too was sacred. The old people believed all things are sacred. Hy Staapka Siem Na Sulxwane (thank you dear elders)!

– Bill White

### Rites of Passage

In some cases, rituals are intended to help people make a transition at a significant point in their lives, as they move from who they have been into who they are about to become. These rituals are called *rites of initiation* or *rites of passage*. After going through a rite of passage we are transformed and can never go back to being the person we once were. A healthy society provides its young people with rituals to guide them through these stages of growing up. As I described earlier, tribal, Indigenous or other tradition-rooted cultures actively and carefully train their youth through rituals and ceremonies that prepare them to navigate and recover from the struggles and dangers they will face in their lives, and also to challenge them to awaken their ability to search for answers from within. These initiatory practices bring on heightened states of consciousness that transcend personal day-to-day levels of awareness. The process of initiation is intended to bring young people to their full power so that as they grow, they can take command of their own value as contributing members of their communities. Sadly, most Western cultures don't have structured rites of passage to help youth today to step into their power.

Life is packed with challenging transitions. Looking back, the first time you lost a tooth may not seem like a big deal now, but it was probably a big deal for you when it was happening. That's a marked life transition. What about the first time you were taken to a hospital because you broke a bone or had a serious illness? Have you gotten your driver's license yet? That's a significant life change, too. More seriously, perhaps you or people you know were living a normal life when war came and threw everything into chaos. Surviving violence or the death of a loved one are profoundly life altering transitions.

You start out one morning with a sense of who you are and what your life is like. That's your identity. Then suddenly a crisis! The origin of the word 'crisis' comes from the notion of a "decisive point." You either choose or are forced to confront your sense of what's happening in your life. If it is shocking, it can throw you seriously out of whack for some time. A change has occurred, and with it new decisions must be made. As you move through these times of tran-

sition you realize that the experience has changed you. Often, after you've made it through this period you are considered more mature than you used to be. The important question is this: was there someone at your side who offered support while you were going through it and basically confirmed for you that, yes, this is a big deal? It makes a valuable difference to not have to go through our challenges alone. It's a little like learning an instrument or a sport all on your own versus having an excellent teacher or coach who's been there, who can give you the guidance you need to prepare for the challenges ahead, and who is there at the end to say: congratulations, you made it.

It is during these times of transition in our lives that we really need people at our side – people whose opinions matter, like close friends, teachers we trust who believe in us, or family members who love us. Without them, we'll probably still make it through the crisis. But, if we go through a tough transition alone it is very easy for us to become numb and shut down, just to protect our minds, bodies and hearts.

This is where rites of passage and rites of initiation come in. As I mentioned earlier, many cultures around the world have long held traditions of rituals where young people are initiated with a process that guides, challenges, and acknowledges their major transitions through life. These rituals are not so common in modern Canada. Our loss. That said, my friends and I consider the current climate crisis to represent a global rite of passage, initiating the world into a more ecologically responsible and socially caring society. It is my hope that you can be part of helping to create and restore constructive rituals for your generation and the generations that come after you.

In his book *The Forest of Symbols*, Anthropologist Victor Turner presents a useful idea he got from the French folklorist Arnold van Gennep. Van Gennep wrote that to understand how rites of passage work, you need to realize that they have three parts or stages: **separation**, **transition**, and **reincorporation**. Let's break them down.

- **Separation.** The first stage is the crisis that happens to you, changing the life you've always known. Someone you care about moves away or



Read Victor Turner's *The Forest of Symbols: Aspects of Ndembu Ritual* (1967) <https://tinyurl.com/yaxbuxlf>

dies. You get fired from your job or you get seriously ill, or hurt. Maybe you make a realization about your sexuality or gender and finally accept that there's no going back. You are separated from the way your world used to be. Dealing with this change, whatever it is, that's your initiation into a new version of you. The bigger the crisis the more intense the experience is going to be.

- **Transition.** As you go through a big change, a rite of passage gives you a kind of time-out space between the old you and the new you. It is during this second stage that you are forced to ramp up your game and figure out some new skills to be able to manage what's coming at you – skills that may have seemed impossible for the old you. Victor Turner called this time-out period the **liminal** space. He said it was “betwixt and between” life as it used to be and life as it's going to be from here on out. It is an intense time, no doubt. You have to reinvent yourself as you look for meaning, purpose, and belonging in your life, and that's hard work. The point of a liminal space is that human beings are not machines. You can't be expected just to switch gears and be good to go. It takes some time to gear up until you are ready to launch yourself back into the world as the newer, older, wiser, and more confident you.
- **Reincorporation.** In this final stage of a rite of passage the 'aha' moment occurs when you realize that although you've lost something, you've also gained something – a new sense of who you are and more of what you have to offer the world. A true rite of passage involves other people welcoming you back into the family of things. It is vitally important to have other people who acknowledge that you have grown and are able, as a result of your initiation, to take on new responsibilities. At the end of a successful rite of passage these people say: *While we have not directly experienced your journey, we went through a similar journey. We know that it has been difficult, and we're here to say: thank you for your stamina and courage. You made it. We appreciate you and welcome you as part of*



*your chosen community. Please share what you have learned on your journey so we may all continue to grow together.*

Turner had a word for this spirit of a community where each person feels connected and committed to each other. Each person has something to contribute and much to receive. He called this vibrant spirit of community: *communitas*. When the new initiate is welcomed back from the initiation, there is a party to celebrate. Celebrations are built into rituals and for those who truly know how to celebrate, the party can be a work of art!

### Myths, stories, and rituals

No one knows for sure whether myths grew out of rituals or rituals grew out of myths. What is important to us here is that while a story is not always part of a ritual performance, myths and fairy tales, legend and lore, as well as our own personal stories can often play a significant role in rituals. The ageless stories that have been passed down to us with their symbol-rich characters, extraordinary settings, epic disasters and heroic adventuresome deeds can make for inspired performance material.

*The true purpose of the theater is to create Myths, to express life in its immense, universal aspects, and from that life to extract images in which we find pleasure in discovering ourselves.*

Antonin Artaud

### Music and Ritual: R. Murray Schafer's *Patria Cycle*

I will never forget that night deep in the woods by the shore of a lake in central Ontario when I witnessed an extraordinary performance called *Patria 9: The Enchanted Forest* directed by R. Murray Schafer. At the end there was a woman playing Mother Earth who was wearing a gown as big as a parachute. As we turned the corner we came upon her floating on the lake. She was a mezzo-soprano and at the exact moment she began to sing, "Your soul is now awake ..." the Northern Lights suddenly appeared in the starry skies over our heads. It wasn't some kind of trick done with special effect lighting instruments; it was the actual aurora



Learn more about *Communitas*  
<https://tinyurl.com/y6wdtebe>



For more on Antonin Artaud, read *The Theater and Its Double* (1958) <https://tinyurl.com/ycn54s4b>



To learn more about the *Patria* performance ceremony or to get a copy

<https://tinyurl.com/ybuaq334>



Learn more about Theseus, the mythic king and founder-hero of Athens <https://tinyurl.com/ckjo3cx>



Learn more about Ariadne  
<https://tinyurl.com/yawmey4c>



Hear co-designer Gerard Smith talk about his work on the *Patria* cycle, the part called *Asterion: A Journey Through the Labyrinth* (2014)  
<https://tinyurl.com/y7qkclcl>

borealis – the Northern Lights! Her singing only lasted for a few minutes. As the final notes of her song turned into a whisper, those glorious colourful dancing lights high up in the sky just faded away. A newspaper reviewer who was there that night wrote that God must have been the stage manager.

I was so blown away by the experience that I signed up to be part of the crew of 60 musicians and other performing artists who perform a nine-day ceremony that takes place every year in the wilds of Algonquin Park, Ontario. Wouldn't you have done the same thing? It is part of an ongoing series, or cycle, of music dramas called *Patria* that Canadian composer R. Murray Schafer has been creating for decades. The performance ceremony is called *Patria Epilogue: And Wolf Shall Inherit the Moon*, which is the eleventh and final installment of the *Patria* cycle. As you can imagine, being part of this crew involved more than going to a theatre to set up. We all helped each other to transport food, clothing, families and equipment (including a double bass!) by canoe. Separated into eight different animal clans we were spread out over three wilderness lakes.

During the time we were together we performed rituals from the moment we were awakened by a solo musician serenading us on a misty morning lake to the closing songs and moonlit wolf calls around the campfires late at night.

Schafer is a composer who creates a space of transformation for the participants in his performance rituals through music. The *Patria* Cycle is an example of ritual being both/and or both/neither. It's not an opera, it's not musical theatre, it's not a play, and yet it's all of them and it's more. To give this performance ritual a shape, he draws upon the image of a labyrinth to act as a guiding symbol. Wolf (parallel to Theseus in the original Greek myth) must journey through the dark and mysterious labyrinth while the Princess of the Stars, Ariadne with her knowledge and her beautiful lyrical singing, inspires him to find his way. *Patria Epilogue: And Wolf Shall Inherit the Moon* is performed every year for eight days and nights in August at the Haliburton Forest and Wildlife Reserve in Ontario. Perhaps someday you may choose to take part in this magical ritual.

For Schafer, the primary purpose of art is transformation – he believes that art succeeds only if it truly changes both the people who make it and the people

who come to experience it as witnesses and participants. And why is this important? He passionately believes that art will save the world by restoring what has been lost: the harmony between people and the natural environment.

The idea is that by mythically recreating a world of wonder and joy and connection to the sacred through ritual, the people will become awakened to what has been lost and they will renew their personal passion to rediscover it and fight for it. I can tell you, this has certainly been true for me.

### Burning Man

In the desert pop-up city of the annual Burning Man festival, over sixty-six thousand DIY/DIT (do it yourself/do it together) co-creators immerse themselves in a week of performative art.

#### The 10 Principles of Burning Man

Burning Man co-founder Larry Harvey wrote the Ten Principles in 2004 as guidelines for the newly-formed Regional Network. They were crafted not as a dictate of how people should be and act, but as a reflection of the community's ethos and culture as it had organically developed since the event's inception.

##### Radical Inclusion

Anyone may be a part of Burning Man. We welcome and respect the stranger. No prerequisites exist for participation in our community.

##### Gifting

Burning Man is devoted to acts of gift giving. The value of a gift is unconditional. Gifting does not contemplate a return or an exchange for something of equal value.

##### Decommodification

In order to preserve the spirit of gifting, our community seeks to create social environments that are unmediated by commercial sponsorships, transactions, or advertising. We stand ready to protect our culture from such exploitation. We resist the substitution of consumption for participatory experience.



For more information on R. Murray Schafer

<https://tinyurl.com/ybjcc8op>



To see a video of the Burning Man Festival (2014)

<https://tinyurl.com/y76335he>

**Radical Self-reliance**

Burning Man encourages the individual to discover, exercise and rely on his or her inner resources.

**Radical Self-expression**

Radical self-expression arises from the unique gifts of the individual. No one other than the individual or a collaborating group can determine its content. It is offered as a gift to others. In this spirit, the giver should respect the rights and liberties of the recipient.

**Communal Effort**

Our community values creative cooperation and collaboration. We strive to produce, promote and protect social networks, public spaces, works of art, and methods of communication that support such interaction.

**Civic Responsibility**

We value civil society. Community members who organize events should assume responsibility for public welfare and endeavour to communicate civic responsibilities to participants. They must also assume responsibility for conducting events in accordance with local, state and federal laws.

**Leaving No Trace**

Our community respects the environment. We are committed to leaving no physical trace of our activities wherever we gather. We clean up after ourselves and endeavour, whenever possible, to leave such places in a better state than when we found them.

**Participation**

Our community is committed to a radically participatory ethic. We believe that transformative change, whether in the individual or in society, can occur only through the medium of deeply personal participation. We achieve being through doing. Everyone is invited to work. Everyone is invited to play. We make the world real through actions that open the heart.

**Immediacy**

Immediate experience is, in many ways, the most important touchstone of value in our culture. We seek to overcome barriers that stand between us and a recognition of our inner selves, the reality of those around us, participation in society, and contact with a natural world exceeding human powers. No idea can substitute for this experience.

Larry Harvey's Burning Man Project (1989 – )  
<http://burningman.org/culture/philosophical-center/10-principles>

### The Red Tent, an ancient ritual re-imagined for our times

One of the great tragedies of our times is that the vast majority of us have received no traditional rites of passage to mark the changes in our lives. One exception is in the Jewish tradition where boys and girls at the age of 13 experience their Bar Mitzvah or Bat Mitzvah.

A profound rite of passage happens when a girl physically and psychically transforms into a young woman through the arrival of her first monthly menstruation cycle. I have asked my best friend and co-ritualist Seraphina Capranos – a classical homeopath, herbalist and sexual health educator – to share her knowledge of the Red Tent, a ritual-based experience that supports women. Red Tent opens spaces for women of any age to support one another during what many call a woman's *moon time*, reflecting the parallel between the 28 day cycle of a woman's body and the moon.

### Letter from Seraphina Capranos

My best friend Robert has asked me to share with you my experience of a Red Tent. This relatively new women's movement, based on an ancient ritual, was re-inspired by Anita Diamant's book of the same name. In it she envisions the book of Genesis from a woman's perspective. Imagine if you will, entering a dome shaped tent, a space that is warm, cozy, a space made beautiful by women for women who are menstruating. Here is a ritual of refuge, a break from linear time (schedules, clocks, the mundane world). Our society has forced women to keep going when our bodies need a break, a creative space to draw, journal, and dream into deeper experiences. You walk through the threshold passing out of the outer world of busy into a world of red, a fluid, dream-like space rich with comfort. Everywhere plush pillows, old woolen carpets, a table laden with chocolates and delicious fruits. Spread before you are coloured pencils, paints, journals, tarot cards, essential oil perfumes, massage



Read more about a Bar Mitzvah (2018)

<https://tinyurl.com/y82guqen>



Read more about Seraphina's projects (2015)

<https://tinyurl.com/y8bzbebe>



Learn more about the Red Tent Movement (2012)

<https://tinyurl.com/y72lfpgy>

oils, herbs for cramps, tampons, and pads, books about women's bodies and ecstatic poetry. Groups of women may quietly massage one another's feet and hands. Others are off in a private corner. Here I found a sanctuary I did not even know I craved.

There is a profound depth when women are in their moon cycle together.

When our senses are more fully awake all the things in this ritual space are reflective of the depth and rhythm of your body, heart and soul, dark chocolate, plush velvets, rich aromas. This mysterious rite of passage opens within you one of nature's greatest secrets: each woman is connected to all women.

There is no need to talk; laughter and tears are always welcome. Co-creating this ritual container marks this space as sacred. You have temporarily entered into a world of co-creation, one suggestive of mystical experience.

– Seraphina Capranos

### Visual Art and Ritual: Anna Gustafson's *Snow Fence*

As we've seen, one of the definitions for ritual involves actions and activities that are repeatable. Even though we may be following in the steps of a tradition – repeating actions in a certain way – it feels new each time. Through this repetition we can become more mindful, to the point of actually experiencing something bigger than ourselves. There are, however, plenty of things we do in our lives exactly the same way, day in and day out, purely out of habit. When I asked my artist friend Anna Gustafson how ritual figures in her work, she told me that she designs visual art installations to bust up the kind of mind-numbing ruts we settle into as we move through our days. Anna believes that simply becoming more thoughtful and conscious will lead to greater and more alive connections among people. So how does she accomplish this through visual art? Her latest project is called *Snow Fence* and, like Schafer, she also turned to the Greek myth of Theseus and Ariadne. In that story, the king's clever daughter

Ariadne gives a ball of red thread to Theseus. By gradually unwinding it as he goes deep in to the labyrinth he doesn't have to worry about getting lost because he knows that he can find his way out by following the thread back to the entrance. That means he can give all of his attention to his task – defeating the Minotaur. He does slay the Minotaur and after saving all the Athenian youths from death, he leads them back to safety.

Anna's *Snow Fence* seems simple enough. It is a fence, fifty feet in diameter, made from dozens of red wooden slats set up in two interconnecting spirals. It can be assembled, disassembled and reassembled anywhere in the world where there is enough room to put it. There are entrances on either side and people who start travelling into the labyrinth from opposite ends will meet in the middle. *Snow Fence* is designed to be a container for a ritual. That is, it's full of potential for people to be as focused as Theseus, able to put all their attention to a task, a question or personal intention – whatever that means to them. They can create whatever ritual they can imagine in that space.

*Snow Fence* offers an invitation for meditative walking or for exploration and interaction through dance, music, performance or really any ritual that can fit into this unique space whether that ritual involves two people or two hundred.

Anna's ritual-space artistically supports people to explore their inner and outer realities simultaneously.

You can design a ritual that is just intended to be fun and still follows the principles of more serious rituals.

### Cheese Rolling

For nearly twenty years at a place called Cooper's Hill in Gloucestershire, which is in South West England, they have held an annual ritual event called Cheese-Rolling. Cheese, as you may know, is made in round "wheels," which make them very handy for rolling down hills. Every year in this ritual, the cheese-roller at the top of a very big, very steep hill starts by launching a wheel of cheese down the hill. Then DOZENS of people start running down the hill chasing it and trying to be the one who is able to catch it. A wheel of cheese rolling down Cooper's hill can reach speeds up to 70 mph.



Read more about Anna Gustafson's *Snow Fence* project (2016) <https://tinyurl.com/yddqejfj>



Check out the video to get a flavour of this cheese-related ritual (2015) <https://tinyurl.com/p9ccx7t>



This is their official website if you want to learn more <https://www.cheese-rolling.co.uk>

## PERFORM



Before moving on to steps for designing your own rituals, here are some recipe ingredients to help you make your ritual stew.

### First: a danger warning

Ritual is an extremely powerful tool. When used irresponsibly, rituals can deflate courage, stifle creativity, and cause serious harm. There is, sad to say, a nasty history of rituals used to bully, demean and hurt people. Think of ritual hazing or rituals intended to force entire groups of people to submit to falling in line. As artists, it is our responsibility to use our talents and artistic vision to contribute to making a more conscious world – to support people and communities not to damage or manipulate one another. Build your rituals with utmost care for the participants. Here's an important question to guide the ritual's values and principles: would you want to be a participant in the ritual that you're creating for others?

### Intention

Before setting out to create a ritual, choose where you want to go. Decide what your intention is. What is it that you hope the participants will have by the end of the ritual that they didn't have when they started?

As a group, decide:

- ▶ Is the intention of your ritual to show solidarity and support for someone going through a transition?
- ▶ Is the intention of your ritual to celebrate or mark an important event in someone's life?
- ▶ Is the intention of your ritual to celebrate or mark an important event in the life of the whole community?
- ▶ Is the intention of your ritual to celebrate or mark something else: the seasons, or a death, an historic event, or something else?



**Find a story or myth to build into your ritual**

Once you set the intention for your ritual, you can start to look for a traditional story or myth that mirrors that intention. Invite everyone in the group to suggest folk tales and myths they know and like. Make a list of the *elements* in each story or myth: what do the characters actually *do* from beginning to end (or maybe you just want to use one part of a long story).

- ▶ What challenges do they face? Do they go on a journey?
- ▶ Do they rely on their cleverness or strength or do they rely on help from someone else?
- ▶ What discoveries do they make along the way, and how are they changed by their experiences?

See if one (or more) of the stories has elements that will be perfect to use because the elements in the story are a great match for the intention of the ritual you want to create. If you need to, go to the library or check the Internet to read more about the story or myth you have chosen. There may be details in the story that you have forgotten or never knew, or maybe one of the members of the group offered this story and nobody else was familiar with it until now. Add the elements you learn into your outline of the story or myth.

**Make a map of what will happen first, then next, then next**

Think about the intention you've set for your ritual, think about the myth or story you've chosen, and all the elements in it. Now let your imaginations start to run with it. Imagination is your greatest tool and a lifelong ally. Nothing human has ever been created without it! Don't let "reality" stop you: pretend your way into making your ideas happen. One of the great truths of ritual is that belief goes a long way in making the world you create become momentarily real.

**Be present with each other**

At the heart of a ritual are the relationships we have with each other, just like relationships are at the heart of our everyday lives. In a ritual there is a you, there is me, and somewhere between these two amazing beings there is an 'us' playing out a dramatic process of mutual discovery. When designing your ritual, notice emerging patterns evolving between all the people on your team. Ask each other questions and be sincerely curious about your ensemble partners' ideas and how they are being expressed. When you can openly allow the group's innate intelligence to guide you, it will deepen the overall 'magic' of the ritual.



Read more on myth in traditional stories

<https://tinyurl.com/d6yusft>

### Play with the ideas of fixed and fluid

As you create a structure with fixed steps that you and the participants in your ritual will move through, you will start to discover opportunities for surprising spontaneity and flurries of abandon from within the structure. You're going to have to trust me on this one.

Having a set structure can take you further than if you're just winging it on your own. It's a paradox because we think of structures as putting limits on us, but it actually works the other way around. Try it out and I guarantee you'll be integrating this concept into all sorts of performance work you do.

My grade 11 English teacher gave me some advice I have used all my life: "As an artist learn to move freely in the harness."

### Introducing rhythm

One of the ways you can lead the ritual participants to be fluid and to move freely in the harness is by introducing rhythm through repetitious sounds and actions that will encourage everyone to surrender to the experience.

Connecting to a rhythm during a ritual can help keep everyone focused and present with what's happening right now.

Once it's finished, there will be time for the group to go back to reflect on what happened and understand where you went together, but in the midst of the ritual/performance, you'll want to stay fully engaged in the moment.

### Big energy that listens

You can raise ritual energy even further through drumming, movement, music, and chanting.

Play with the rise and fall of that intensity in your rehearsals. During high-energy moments it is especially important for the guide(s) to have eyes, ears

and senses fully open to what's happening in the group as a whole, and with all the individuals within the group. I call it *big energy that listens*, meaning when you are being big and bold leading the group, it's not a one-way street with all your energy moving outward. It is a valuable skill to be highly aware of yourself while actively taking in a sense of where people are at in the group physically and emotionally. Like an empathic form of a martial art, you tune in to everyone's needs, including your own and adjust as needed. This is a practical skill that requires reflection and refinement – and is a path to gaining mastery in this work.

### **Make the container a sanctuary, a safer place to take creative risks together**

Rituals are places to be seen and heard. Create opportunities in which participants may (if only temporarily) experience a sense of belonging, have a personal and collective sense of purpose by making discoveries together. This gets to the heart of a ritual – it's about doing something with other people who see and acknowledge each other as they move into and through the experience together.

**A sanctuary is a place where people trust that they will be safe – a place they feel free to take the risk of being fully themselves without fear.**

As you consider what will go into your ritual, give some thought to what you can do to create an environment that will seem like a sanctuary to everyone who is there. The participants need to feel that as their ritual guide, you will do your best to ensure they will all be able to trust each other. To begin, that means that you need to make sure *everyone* feels included and welcome. Ideally, each participant will be tuned in enough to notice if there is unconstructive stress or conflict among people in the room.

As performance leaders, what can you do in practical terms that will help participants develop the skills they need to do this and to ease stress if someone feels left behind or unfairly pressured? Learning how to resolve conflicts between people creatively with a calm and win-win attitude is a sign of a maturing ritual artist. That's part of your job description when you take on the responsibility of creating and guiding a ritual. If you don't feel quite ready for it,



Here is a website with some useful ideas for creating safer, anti-oppressive spaces  
<https://tinyurl.com/yaa45vk7>

### **Telling Stories**

People in Canada and around the world right now are having important discussions about the question, *who has the right to tell stories from different world cultures?* The topic brings up a lot of strong feelings and as a society, we are all still trying to work out good answers. As you look for myths and stories to use as a foundation for a ritual you want to create, I want to encourage you to move carefully and respectfully. For example, you may not want to use the first version of a story you find. You may have a version that was written by outside observers who didn't quite get it right, or who adapted and changed it for their own reasons. Do your research, ask librarians, or find people who know a lot about the culture of that story's origin. Ask them if there is a particular book or other source that tells the story the way the people of that culture feel it should be told. If it's appropriate, you may want to ask permission to incorporate a story from another culture into your ritual.

find someone else on your team who has that ability so you can learn while developing your own ritual facilitation style.

When people feel more included, they are more willing to step outside of their comfort zones.

Participants in a ritual take risks not because they're reckless, but because they feel everyone in the room is looking out for each other. Nothing ever changes without vulnerability, and when people trust that they can take a risk, they start to surf the performative energy together. That's when peak experiences can happen. The writer Brené Brown once said,

*Staying vulnerable is a risk we have to take if we want to experience connection.*

Brené Brown, *The Power of Vulnerability* (2010). TED Talk  
[https://www.ted.com/talks/brene\\_brown\\_on\\_vulnerability](https://www.ted.com/talks/brene_brown_on_vulnerability)

Once you and your team have put your attention to figuring out how you're going to make a performative space that will feel like a sanctuary of mutual trust, creative vitality and intelligent risk, you are on the right road to where you need to be. Your imaginations will then guide you through the next steps.

There are so many variables in the world that it's impossible to have a 100% safe space. So instead we often talk about creating "safer" spaces, which means as safe as we can make them with as much thought and care as we have to give.

### Wrapping up

After the performance/ritual let everyone involved get grounded again. Have a brief, perhaps silent rest, eat some food and drink some water before discussing the ritual. Then share what happened from each of your different points of view.

?

*Could you feel moments of resistance and surrender? What were the most effective transitions? What made them work?*

My favourite ritual debrief is in a talking circle where we describe what happened as if it was an amazing, life changing story. To do this can be as simple as the first person starting the description of their experience with the words “Once upon a time ...” Then even your performance analysis becomes its own ritual simply because you used story-like language to describe your actions. Try this one out. You may surprise yourself with how much you are learning together.

**A final word of encouragement: Keep it simple.**

■ *Simple does not always mean easy.*

Let the ritual be your teacher, guiding your efforts one step at a time. Simplicity helps you stay focused on your group intention and will support you to have a more intimate and enlivening performance experience.

### **Listen To Your Intuition**

Resistance and willingness are both necessary to amplify the dramatic edge of your work. We want to encourage each other to experience creative risk and reward through action, reflection, and artistic processes. However, if the participants find they are resistant to an idea or experience, you can encourage them to *listen to their intuition* and ask for more valuable information before leaping in. When they feel confident they will step in to contribute to the group energy and get charged by it. The same advice goes for you and your team when you are creating and leading the ritual. Listen to that inner voice. It is an awesome guide.



# Performance as healing/ Healing as performance

## Trudy Pauluth-Penner



When I was young, the grownups in my life kept saying to me: 'Oh, you are so dramatic' as if there were something wrong with that. I drew elaborately coloured pictures on the pages of my history textbook. In my home economics class I used the bread dough to sculpt little characters. They were good enough that the teacher showed them to my parents and said I should be sent to art school. My parents didn't see it that way. They thought I was just being disobedient. I was always the loudest one in the hallway, but I was only using my theatre voice. I didn't fit into or want to be part of any one clique at my school. Somehow I knew in my heart that being different was okay, yet looking back, I

don't know how I got by with all my insecurities, constantly questioning who I was, and wondering how and where I belonged. At age 15, the future seemed insignificant to me and completely out of reach. I could not imagine being 25.

In my first year of university, I found out that a theatre course was a required part of an education degree. I couldn't understand what theatre had to do with education. As it turned out, that theatre-in-education class changed my whole life. My teacher was inspiring and what we did in class that year encouraged me to want to learn more about drama and performance. After seeing how valuable theatre, performance, and art can be for teaching, I began to see how theatre, performance, and art are just as valuable for healing. Now, as an adult, I know exactly who I am and who I have always been — an artist.

---

## 50 CHAPTER THREE

### Who am I?

I am tall  
Dark in summer's heat  
Pale in winter's hail

Ready to leap  
awaiting awakenings

Never quite complete  
nor exact  
rather  
I am constantly exploring  
reshaping my sense of self  
Always in the continual process of  
becoming  
Sometimes rapidly  
sometimes slower than a mature snail's slime

But  
Always gaining ground  
both aware and unaware  
Free and stifled  
at times too timid to  
Show my self to you  
yet  
Brave enough to be

Who am I?  
I am tall, dark in summer's heat  
and pale in winter's hail.

*Trudy Pauluth-Penner*

### Performance and Healing

Here is a question for you:



*How do you define health and well-being?*

And here's another:



*How do you think that performance can be healing: physically, emotionally and psychologically?*

In this chapter I will share with you some of what I have learned about these ideas and I will invite you to consider what these questions mean to you – whether you feel they are as relevant to your life as they have been for mine. I want to introduce you to the idea that the creative process can be seen as a healing agent that will improve the quality of life. I will give you and your friends some practical techniques for using theatre and performance to express what you are thinking or feeling about the issues that are impacting your life, to practice new ways of being or acting, to see the world from different perspectives and, ultimately, to tell the stories that will help heal you. It is my hope to create an open space for you to express yourself without judgment.

The chapter is divided into three parts. Part 1 will give you some background on the history of performance arts and healing with a little extra on drama therapy and how it has influenced this work. In Part 2, I will give you some examples of people who bring together healing and performance. Part 3 is a list of activities and exercises you and your friends can try as a way to start creating your own performance pieces on health and well-being as it relates to what happens in your lives.

### Performance as Healing

Since the days and nights that the first humans sang their songs, beat their drums, and danced as part of their rituals of well-being, healing and perfor-



mance have been closely connected. As the millennia passed, every culture on earth developed its own interpretations of healing and its own expressions of performance. Music and dance, storytelling and visual arts have generally merged over time into what we now call theatre and/or performance art, but the link to healing remains.

Research shows that being involved in creative artistic work holds the potential to heal people.

The research suggests that doing creative work changes the physiology of a person's body, turning stress into ease and turning fear into inspiration. Being involved in creative work is shown to affect brainwave patterns, too, which directly affect autonomic nervous systems, hormonal balance and neurotransmitters (the brain's chemistry). Change on that level can lead to changing unhealthy behavior. This is what healing can look like.

Before we go any further, let's define what people mean when they talk about physical and mental health and well-being.

### Defining Health

We usually think of health as physical health: a healthy body. In the back of many people's minds, having good health often means just not being sick. Of course a person who is terribly out of shape, eats candy bars and pizzas all day and guzzles litres of pop may not technically be sick, but that person is not exactly what you would call healthy either. A more complex way of understanding health looks at the bigger picture. It looks at the social dimensions of health, called SDH for short. SDH takes into account all the different factors that affect our health. It considers the physical health of people's bodies, but also the environment they live in, and what kind of harsh realities they may have to deal with because of their economic and social status. It's called the social dimensions of health because the social conditions of our lives have a huge influence on our health and our well-being. And here we're not only talking about physical health, but mental health too. Our ability to be healthy and stay healthy physically and mentally is deeply connected to where we are born and grow



*Brain 19* by affen ajlife (2017). Public domain  
<https://www.flickr.com/photos/142299342@NO6/3279407273>



Learn more about the *7 Dimensions of Wellness*

<https://tinyurl.com/hp3zedt>



*Hustle and Bustle* by Primawera. CCO.

<https://pixabay.com/en/hustle-and-bustle-human-face-arrows-1738068/>



Read David Sze's article on *Maslow: The 12 Characteristics of a Self-Actualized Person* (2017)

<https://tinyurl.com/njd9rv7>

up; the kinds of jobs we have and whatever else we might need to do to survive; the places we live as adults and how we live; whether or not we can access help when we need it; and what kind of support we get as we grow older. When you are looking at the social dimensions of health you start to see that good health is not just being free of disease. There is an intricate and complicated web that holds good health together. You might say that the formula for well-being comes down to something that looks a little like a math equation. For any particular person, what's the ratio of positive health influences to negative health influences? The more you can build up the positive side of the equation, the more you are likely to be healthy and feel a sense of peace, happiness, and meaning in your life.

### Seven Dimensions of Wellness

- Social Wellness
- Emotional Wellness
- Spiritual Wellness
- Environmental Wellness
- Occupational Wellness
- Intellectual Wellness
- Physical Wellness

### Mental Health

These days when you hear talk about mental health, it's often about lack of mental health, or 'mental health problems.' Struggling with mental health is a major issue for a lot of people, but it is important to keep in mind that the topic of mental health includes wellness too. In the late 1960s the psychologist Abraham Maslow wrote about how people could actively build stronger mental health through what he called self-actualization, envisioning what you could be and moving toward that positive potential. Another psychologist, Steven Hayes, suggested that mental health is all about developing a strong enough sense of your core values and goals that when having to face unexpected changes in your life, you are mentally flexible – you can adapt and roll with the

punches. Hayes developed a process for strengthening that kind of mental flexibility. He called it Acceptance and Commitment Therapy, or ACT. Soldiers who spent time on the battlefield may suffer from mental distress. Doctors and others on the home front who have tried to help returning soldiers have slowly come to understand how mental health can be damaged by war and what can be done to heal these veterans. During the First World War when soldiers came back emotionally broken, the doctors called it 'shellshock,' referring to the shock of having bombs going off all around you. At that time, psychological distress was considered an illness and the doctors felt that the cure was to keep those who were affected by shellshock isolated and shut away. A lot has changed since then. What used to be called shellshock is now known as post-traumatic stress disorder, or PTSD and it covers a wide range of experiences not limited to war or age.

Young people who have lived through traumatic experiences in their lives are sometimes seen as having PTSD. Even so, many people in society don't understand or accept the seriousness of mental health issues or realize how common they are.

Efforts are being made around the world to talk about mental health, bring it into the public conversation, and reduce the stigma so that those who suffer from it don't feel they have to hide it away.

### Drama Therapy

It is easy to think of healing and therapy going hand in hand, but in this chapter we're not focusing on therapy as such. Instead, we'll focus on the healing aspects of performance. For insight on how performance might heal, we will start by looking to the practice of drama therapy.

Drama therapy is a form of therapy designed to use drama to bring about real personal change in people. In this case, people use drama to investigate situations from their own lives and then spend time afterward talking through what happened. It helps them clarify for themselves what in their lives they



Check out D. Serani's article on Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (2011)  
<https://tinyurl.com/jpmo47u>



Learn more about PTSD  
<https://tinyurl.com/y96oflcx>



*Contact! Unload* is a theatre project with military veterans who tell their stories interwoven with text from Shakespeare's *Henry V*. The performance starts at 5 minutes into this video (2016)  
<https://tinyurl.com/y8zfe5sv>



Learn more about the practice of Drama Therapy  
<https://tinyurl.com/jlat3ay>



Healing and performance can also include music and dance therapy. Learn about the work of Judith-Kate Friedman who brings the power of song writing and music making to support people facing serious illness (2010) <https://tinyurl.com/ybp46s6j>

may be struggling with. Once they start to understand what's happening in their lives, the easier it is to change.

Drama therapists believe that because drama can tap into people's playful side, it has the power to get them to connect directly with their emotions and their unconscious thoughts. When people can temporarily set aside their everyday reality and play, the drama they create can bring out what may be hidden deep inside them so that it can be seen and talked about. Using this approach, performance heals by connecting feeling with thinking.

Some techniques used in drama therapy are:

- ▶ Writing and performing a script about your life experiences.
- ▶ Dramatizing existing stories and myths to act out themes based your personal issues.
- ▶ Creating and performing dramatic rituals connected to areas of your life experience.

In the next section we'll cover some examples of theatre performances that relate to healing. Then we'll move beyond using plays with scripts to look at the broader questions of how people rely on performance as part of healing.

### ***Der Pflaumenbaum (The Plum Tree)***

*In our backyard there's a tree  
 A scrawny plum tree wannabe.  
 Around it is a fenced enclosure  
 So that no one knocks it over.*

*That puny tree just wants to grow  
 Never going to happen though.  
 Everyone says: what are the chances?  
 It gets no sunshine on its branches.*

They all say it can't be true  
That it's a plum tree – there's no fruit.  
But it is a plum tree, I believe  
You know by looking at its leaf.

by Bertolt Brecht (translation by Will Weigler)

?

*How do you see the plum tree? As a failure? It doesn't get enough sun and nobody cares about it or even thinks it's a plum tree since it's not showing any fruit. Or do you choose to see it as a success? It has a plum tree leaf, meaning that it has within it the potential to spring into full life and flourish. What will it take to make it a healthy tree? The plum tree in Brecht's poem is a metaphor for human beings. The challenge lies in figuring out what is needed to nurture a living being and not only bring it back to life but maintain its health for as long as it lives. As humans, what do we need to reach our potential to be as well and healthy as we can? What do we need to do, not only individually but also collectively, to build and sustain healthy communities?*

### Healing as Performance

You will find people who tell you flat out that art saves lives. There's an international organization called Art Saves Lives with a website and a Facebook page.

Not everyone is so confident, though. Personally, I believe it is generally true, but I am cautious about saying so absolutely when my own life experiences and the life experiences of people I know have not always backed up the claim. In fact, there are times when I have seen that art does not automatically heal. My feeling is that the arts creates an environment where healing can happen. True healing seeps in because of the people who are making the art. It is what you bring to the work of making art that heals, not the art all by itself. I believe that art-making provides an opportunity for a combination of mind,



Learn more about Expressive Therapy  
<https://tinyurl.com/y9av9kfp>



Learn more about Art Saves Lives  
<https://tinyurl.com/ybysayw4>  
&  
<https://tinyurl.com/yc6vku7>

body and soul to mix with whatever art you are doing and that's what creates a place for healing.

As performers we need to keep an open mind to new ideas while also developing critical thinking skills. It is possible to figure out how performance heals by asking tough questions and working out what the answers might be.



*These are the questions I want you to keep asking yourself:*

*How can performance arts heal?*

*What happens in the creative process that promotes healing?*

*When healing isn't happening through art, what is getting in the way?*

### A Personal Perspective

If I am going to ask you to think about these questions as they relate to your own life, then it's only fair I tell you about how they relate to my life. To begin with, I am not entirely comfortable with the word "healing." If I talk about my own healing, it gives the impression that something is wrong with me – something that needs fixing. Or could it be that there is something wrong with my friends, my family, my community, my culture, and so on. Right from the start, the idea that I need to heal makes me feel less able, less well. And then I ask, "What am I healing from?" Maybe from the injuries I've had to my body in my lifetime, or illnesses I've had, or whatever psychological and emotional stress I've gone through? Then I have to ask, "What is wellness?" or "What is health?" and do I have the right to say what these things are for other people?

I'll take a moment here to share a little bit about my own healing journey. As I mentioned earlier, I am an advocate for integrating arts in health and healing. So when I was diagnosed with a serious medical condition and started to go through a program of treatment for it, I was surprised to find myself rejecting the arts.



Trudy's photo of her garden

I did not particularly feel like documenting my journey of healing by making it into a play or a video, or addressing it through photography or the visual arts. Instead, I took solace in transforming my backyard weed field into a garden of beauty.

Being actively engaged in a creative process distracted me from my illness; it created a calm stillness in my mind, opening me up to possibilities. Using my hands to feel the textures of the soils; having exposure on my skin to sunlight and warmth; absorbing fragrances and watching grey weeds transform into masses of full-bloom colour, all of these heightened my senses.

To become well, I first needed to rest and focus my energy in the physical realm. I did that through my gardening. Once treatment was complete, though, I went through an identity crisis. I didn't know how to adjust to a return to regular life and health. I had lived with the illness and its symptoms for two long years and I found that no matter how hard I tried to get back to normal, my illness still controlled my life. I wondered who I was and if I would ever be the same as I used to be. I finally realized that the illness was like a 'container' that surrounded me.

I was performing my life as a person with an illness, but it was no longer needed. To let that illness container go, I needed to create a new container and start performing my life as a person who was healthy.

That was the second phase of my healing – the emotional and psychological phase. Then my health and wellness began to emerge.

My energy and creativity began to return at their own pace, in their own time. I learned to trust in the rhythm and process of becoming well. The experience gave me a great deal of respect for chronic illness and the healing processes that each person must find. The steps I went through, the decisions I made, how I coped or didn't cope, and how I managed my feelings were all part of my performance of healing. In the end, my experience reaffirmed my passion for the arts and creativity, while at the same time it strengthened my belief that we must approach the idea of arts in healthcare practice with caution. Yes, we can believe in the power of performance to heal, and we also need to be

thoughtful and careful in proclaiming it. There is no magic formula to follow, but as part of the healing process there is a creative space in which we can explore what is most meaningful to us.

Performance arts create opportunities to come together across ages, genders, cultures and social classes to explore everyone's diverse views, opinions and concerns, all in an environment where we can express ourselves and be heard. We can create a place to share stories, to imagine worlds where we get to try on roles different from the roles we usually play, and see life from other angles. Through performance we can playfully and safely explore options, test values, 'practice' life and then, moving beyond the theatrical world, we can transfer our experiences from the imaginative world of play to our real lives.

Performance can develop skills that will help build resilience and health. In this next section on ways that performance may heal, I focus mainly on topics as they relate to mental health and well-being.

Some of these topics may be sensitive and even feel taboo for some, but it is my hope that the context of performance will open a space to look at these with care and sensitivity.

### Performing through loss

All human beings at some point face death and loss. To cope with grief most cultures have a version of ritual ceremonies to honour the deceased and mourn their losses. In North America we tend to refer to these as funerals, memorials, or celebrations of life. These can be viewed as performances in and of themselves that aid our healing and lessen the pain of loss. These performances serve an important function; they give us opportunities to reflect on the meaning of life, our spiritual views, and how these affect how we live our lives. We say our goodbyes, remembering our experiences of this person. These celebrations provide a way to come together to pay tribute to our loved ones. The grieving practices encourage us to come to terms with unresolved issues and lay them to rest.



Watch *A Night for All Souls* (2005) at Mountain View Cemetery, Vancouver, BC  
<https://tinyurl.com/ycch77ck>



### Performance-based healing

People often think of Posttraumatic Stress Disorder, or PTSD, as something that affects adults – especially military personnel returning from war and also families who have been in the midst of war. But PTSD has many causes and it can affect people of all ages anywhere. In our day-to-day lives, we are always subtly adjusting our understanding of the world around us. As we experience new things, we process the information we take in. That's how we learn. Dr. Bessel van der Kolk an expert on PTSD explains that a sudden traumatic experience can happen to anyone and when it happens, it can be overwhelming. The intensity of a big trauma can so severely disrupt the ability to process information that the brain can't make sense of it all and we just shut down. Trauma specialist Peter Levine points out that the impact of trauma is not a disease; it is connected to our human instinct for survival. For self-protection, the automatic systems in our brains respond to the overload by shifting into disengagement mode.

In recent years, groups around the world have been turning to theatre to support the healing of trauma experienced by military service members, veterans, and their families. On Veterans Day in 2002, five theatre students were among the audience at Quinnipiac University in Hamden, Connecticut when a group of veterans shared stories about how serving in war had affected their lives. These soldiers were part of a group called the PTSD Arts Council and they didn't just talk to the audience; they presented their experiences through art, poetry, photography, and improvised theatre pieces.

One veteran recalled the years he lived as a ghost in his own house after his return from Vietnam, passing his wife and children on the stairs and never seeing them .... A Marine medic described the experience of holding his best friend in his arms as the soldier bled to death; another veteran told students he made a point of never knowing the first names of those he served with because the personal contact made the pain greater when they were killed.

Crystal Brian from "Devising community"



Watch Dr. Bessel van der Kolk about Restoring Joy and Treating PTSD <https://tinyurl.com/p3wfn7t>



Watch Peter Levine use a Slinky to explain how trauma affects people (2009) <https://tinyurl.com/nry28wt>



Watch a preview of *A War in the Mind: Veterans Transition Program* — a documentary with interviews of young Canadian veterans returning from war, talking about their experiences (2012) <https://tinyurl.com/y787fuvi>

The theatre students were so moved by what they heard, they knew they had to do something to carry it forward. They wanted to make a deeper connection with the veterans, learn more from them and bring what they learned to the community. Working with their theatre professor, Crystal Brian, they got to work and created an original performance they called *The Antigone Project*, using the ancient Greek tragedy *Antigone* by Sophocles as the framework for their play.

They had to step very carefully as they waded into this material, since they would be dealing with real people who were struggling with serious emotional issues.

Mary Lou Lauricella, a drama therapist who was also the director of the veterans' Homefront Theater helped them. She guided the students, teaching them techniques for interviewing that included learning how to establish boundaries to protect the participants' emotional well-being. For example, the students came up with a question they felt would lead to a great scene or a monologue: "Describe the most horrifying incident you experienced during combat," but Mary Lou Lauricella explained that asking an emotionally 'hot' question like this was out of line. The students' intentions may have been good, but the project was about enriching understanding, not exploiting the veterans' experience for the sake of drama. Students learned that establishing boundaries with the people you are interviewing means making it absolutely clear to them that they can always choose to not answer an interviewer's question. The students gathered their material from interviews, created their show, and performed it for the general public and for veterans.

Another theatre company that developed performances delving into the issues raised by PTSD include *Theater of War*, based in New York. Like the students at Quinnipiac University, the director and actors at *Theater of War* believed that even though Sophocles' plays were first performed over 2,400 years ago, the way these plays show the impact of war is still incredibly relevant for us today. *Theater of War* has put on over 300 performances of two other plays by Sophocles: *Ajax* and *Philoctetes*. They have performed readings of the plays at army posts and army hospitals, homeless shelters, high schools, theatres, and churches. They have performed for many groups of service members



*Thirteen Tips for Interviewing Veterans* from the DART Center for Journalism & Trauma (2011)  
<https://tinyurl.com/ydbr3gsl>



Watch *Theater of War: Ancient Words, Modern Wounds* (2011) participants discuss the performance on campus <https://tinyurl.com/ycqgal4u>

and veterans. After each show, they open a conversation with the audience to talk about the feelings and insights that have come up from watching the performance.

Griffin Theatre Company in Des Moines, Iowa used actual letters written by and to American soldiers serving in Iraq and Afghanistan to create their play, *Letters Home*.

Meanwhile, in Montreal, the Living Histories Ensemble *Life Stories Project* starts with the facilitators interviewing people from different generations of people living in the Montreal area, who have been displaced by war, genocide, and human rights violations.

These interviews, or oral histories, are adapted into performances intended to enable those who have experienced trauma and violence to share how it has affected their lives so that audiences can witness and hear them.

All of these examples demonstrate the power that theatre has to aid in the recovery from trauma, by helping people to better manage and speak out about their distressing feelings and experiences.

### Performance shining a light on what's happening

As you may have noticed, there is a common thread running through these theatre performances. They all bring troubling issues out into the open. Why is it so hard to deal with issues like this, do you think? Is it the social stigma that gets in the way of being able to talk openly about things you feel are embarrassing, like finding you can't function in life anymore the way society says you are 'supposed' to function? Certain topics, even life threatening problems, can be thought of as so taboo that some people don't feel they can reach out to resources and support systems that are available to them. Often, seeking help from a professional is considered a taboo in itself. Or maybe it's hard for a person to deal openly with issues like depression since depression cuts you off from your friends and family, making it almost impossible to talk about with anyone. In some cases, there will be conflicts between people who have strong emotions associated with their personal feelings on drug and alcohol misuse,



Watch an excerpt of Actor Christian Kain Blackburn performing a letter written by Marine Lance Corporal Matthew Webster in the Griffin Theatre Company national touring production of *Letters Home* (2011)  
<https://tinyurl.com/y99qd9j2>



Read more about Living Histories Ensemble's *Life Stories Project* (2007 – 2012)  
<https://tinyurl.com/y7a9zlmw>



Find Patricia Sternberg's books: *Theatre for Conflict Resolution* (1998) <https://tinyurl.com/y9fbld3>  
&  
*Sociodrama: Who's in Your Shoes?* (2000)  
<https://tinyurl.com/ybcj3lps>

or various forms of abuse, or sexual orientation and gender identity, AIDS, and suicide. People get riled up, conversations get heated, and the conflict just gets worse. So instead of facing it, they avoid the topic altogether.

Theatre and performance offer an especially effective way to move past stigma, taboo, and conflict.

Theatre is *about* conflict. Theatre is based on characters on stage who have a problem and go at it with each other. That's drama. And in the course of a play, the audience gets to see what the problem is all about. Plays examine the conflicts — they shine a light on what's happening.

Patricia Sternberg was a drama therapist and a theatre professor who devoted herself to finding ways performance could be used to break up stigmas, defuse emotions, deal with tough problems, promote cooperation, and encourage people in groups to feel a sense of solidarity with each other. Her books, *Theatre for Conflict Resolution*, and *Sociodrama: Who's in Your Shoes?* are full of theatre activities and games designed to help people create performances and dramas in a classroom as a way to work through conflicts and to get past stigma and taboo. Once it's out in the open, we see it for what it is and we can start to change attitudes. That's an important part of what healing is all about.

### Suicide – Let's Talk About This

I would like to look at the topic of suicide, partly because it is considered the number one cause of death for today's youth, and also because suicide has touched me personally. As difficult and painful as this was for me to go through, I learned a great deal. I learned how to recognize the signs of distress. Later, having that knowledge gave me what I needed to intervene in a youth's suicide attempts. Deep in my heart I have come to believe that regardless of how desperate a person may feel or how impossible a situation may seem, there is always hope, and support and resiliency can always be found.

Why do some people decide to end their lives? Some researchers explain that there is a strong link between suicide and being mentally unwell, and they emphasize that there is a big difference between self-harm behaviours and sui-

cidal intentions. It is important to understand that feelings of sadness and being clinically depressed are not the same thing. Also, clinical depression can be very challenging to manage, but it does not necessarily lead to feeling suicidal.

For years, Marion Crook was a nurse practitioner in remote areas of Canada. She is also an author, and is particularly keen to address the concerns of young people. In her book, *Out of the Darkness: Teens Talk About Suicide*, she interviewed teenagers who had experienced the effects of suicidal struggles in their lives. She shares their stories: the risks they identified and their coping strategies, some of which they turned into poems. She chose the title for her book, “Out of the Darkness” for a reason. Based on what she learned, she believes that with the right support systems, it is possible to overcome and even transform the darkness into light. The performing arts can point the way to new possibilities. And even more than that, performance can actually help in “making possibilities probable.”



Read excerpts from Marion Crook's book *Out of Darkness: Teens Talk about Suicide* (2003)  
<https://tinyurl.com/ya76vhyf>

I believe that, in one way or another, performance arts can offer a lifeline for people who are in pain.



*What do you think? Can the practice of theatre offer hope?*

*How might performance build resilience?*

*How can performance arts heal?*

*What happens in the creative process that promotes healing?*

*When healing isn't happening through art, what is getting in the way?*

The answers you have to these questions provide glimpses into how you perform healing. In the next section we move from ideas into performance practice activities for you to try. To close this section of my chapter, I present you with a challenge. Take on the taboos, the stigmas, the trouble many of us have with coping, and find your own way to address these sensitive topics directly. Find a way *through performance* to get people talking to each other about their personal understanding of these debilitating issues. Doing this kind of



Learn more about different kinds of arts-based expressive therapies <https://tinyurl.com/ydhyh8dz>

work has been known to bring up emotional responses among the people who are facilitating, so it is important to identify topics that may cause you distress and to develop protective strategies ahead of time so that you will have support in place to take care of yourself and your peers as you move forward. Remember through it all that the ultimate purpose is to build more understanding and appreciation for whatever challenges people are going through. Use the arts to encourage hope by focusing on our resilience and our strengths as human beings.

It is my hope that this chapter has sparked your interest in the connection between performance and healing, and will encourage you to use your voice creatively and imaginatively to positively affect change, to raise our collective awareness on health and well-being. The World Health Organization defines “health” as more than the absence of disease — health has to do with a person’s ability to adapt to change. Always remember that you have it within you to adapt to changes that happen to you and to shape your own future.

## PERFORM



### Put your skills to work



Harpist Lisa Lynne brings her gifts as a musician to the bedsides of people in hospitals. Lisa doesn’t see her job as “entertaining” her audience. She pays attention to how the person she is with is feeling in that moment and she uses her music to respond to them in a supportive way.

After listening to Lisa talk about how she approaches her work, take a minute to think about the different skills you have as a performer/artist. Do you play an instrument? Do you sing? Do you tell stories? Do you make artwork? Brainstorm with your group and make a list of how each of you might rely on your particular performance/artistic skills to connect with and support someone who is going through a difficult experience. Think about a time when you were



Watch harpist Lisa Lynne tell her story (2010)  
<https://tinyurl.com/ycwtlf5h>

struggling with something. Is there something on the list that would have helped you? Find a partner and try it out as an improvisation. Afterwards, meet again as a group and talk about what worked best. If you feel this mode of performance as healing resonates with you, look around your community to find if there are opportunities to bring your skills to others outside of your group.

### Creating Theatre in Health Education Performance



What health concerns affect the communities where you live and work and go to school? How can you and the others in your group support healing through the arts? Some possible topics include: stress and anxiety, lack of exercise, unhealthy food choices, screen addiction (video games/social media), lack of spiritual values in contemporary society, environmental issues threatening the wellbeing of the community and the planet.

Working together in a whole ensemble or in smaller groups, identify a health issue of interest to you and your community. Do some research on your topic by searching in the library or online for news articles, scientific studies and other resources on your topic. See if there are any videos posted on sites like YouTube or Vimeo that feature individual people's stories of dealing with the health topic, or their activism in working to address the issue.

Contact people in your community (at your local university or college, or through local health organizations) who are knowledgeable about how to support those who need healing and ask if you can set up a time to come meet and interview them. Learn what you can from them about effective ways to support healing based on their experience.

After gathering your research, you will have a wealth of material to share and discuss. The next phase of performance creation is about sifting and sorting through this material, deciding together what resonates most. This is a collective negotiation to be handled with care! Remember that someone who brought an item of interest to the group may find it challenging if the group decides to let it go. Deal with each other with care.

By the end of this stage, you should have 5 to 10 good stories to begin working with, to begin translating them through dramatization. Don't limit yourself



To find inspiration, check out *Empower: Youth, Arts, and Activism* (2009) — an online manual designed for youth by youth that features a diverse range of projects put forward by passionate, inspiring and fired-up individuals committed to social change. Each individual, group and project is committed to challenging social and structural issues around HIV and AIDS. From HIV positive youth fighting stigma to peer education projects and safer sex parties, this manual honours the work of communities creating spaces to talk about the issues that matter most. And, each project is accomplished with the use of art! <https://tinyurl.com/y88aewd2>

Permission to reproduce the manual  
<http://www.catie.ca/en/permission-reproduce>

to scenes or monologues! Performance creation opens up possibilities to create performance with songs, choreography and movement/physical theatre, spoken word, puppetry, mask, video, and other genres.

Break into smaller groups to build these shorter pieces and keep challenging yourselves to try out your ideas in new ways. Experiment with a new performance style each time until you land on one that feels 'right.' Share these pieces with the rest of the ensemble and listen to the constructive feedback offered.

Finally, decide on the sequence of these pieces and a framework that provides an effective way to link them together. Sections of the performance can be linked with text, music and/or movement. This is when you will need to work together as a whole class.

Share your work with a chosen audience that you feel will most benefit from your project. Be sure to prepare and carry out a post-performance conversation with the audience to gather their thoughts about the work you have done.

### Creating a Public Service Announcement



A Public Service Announcement (PSA) is a commercial that promotes an important idea about something that will help people instead of promoting a product for sale. The best PSAs rely on the presentation of a performance to make an impact on the audience. To find inspiration and examples, search for “Best PSAs”

on YouTube.

For this activity, draw from your own experiences and research to create a 3-minute public service announcement about some aspect of health and wellness that will raise awareness about your topic and promote action among other youth and adults. It can be either videotaped or performed live. In your group decide which one of the *Seven Dimensions of Wellness* described earlier in this chapter that you want to focus on.

When you are ready, find opportunities to show your PSA to other classes or somewhere in the community. Think of the PSA as a conversation starter and be prepared to lead a conversation with your audience.

### Seven Dimensions of Wellness

- Social Wellness
- Emotional Wellness
- Spiritual Wellness
- Environmental Wellness
- Occupational Wellness
- Intellectual Wellness
- Physical Wellness



**Humour can be the best medicine**

All this talk of mental health is enough to make anyone ill, but no one needs to stay stuck there. We all face challenges in our lives, what matters is how we handle the challenges. When things seem overwhelming, there is nothing as comforting as a good friend who takes time to listen and offer a shoulder to lean on, or a trip to the wilderness. When all else seems to fail, there is always good humour. A good sense of humour is ultimately healing for the soul. Being able to laugh at your situation actually changes your neurology and physical stress level.

This activity is about looking for the fun, the funny, even the absurd, and finding a way to laugh about whatever it is that has got us down. Create a comedy performance that finds what it is that's funny in a situation that seems stressful and hard. Create a scene of the event. In the scene the character wants something: perhaps relief from pain, or hope, or comfort. But she or he is not getting it. In your scene make your character try and try to get what they want, but something is getting in the way. Figure out what it is in real life that gets in their way and exaggerate it into the comedy version of real life.

As you try out different comedy versions of the barrier that your character faces, you will find that one of your ideas is a perfect metaphor for the real life situation. It will be funny for you and for your audience because it absolutely captures the truth of what gets in the way of a person's ability to heal. Refine and rehearse several different comedy routines about different kinds of stress and challenges. Pick the best ones and perform them for an audience.

Afterwards, have an open conversation between the audience and the performers about what they saw and if they recognized themselves in the comedy routines. You may then invite everyone to suggest what would help the characters overcome the barriers they face. That is one path to healing, a path through comedy.



For more in-depth activities on using comedy to explore challenging issues. Check out the free online resource, *Laughing Allowed!: A How-to Guide for Making a Physical Comedy Show to Build Neighbourhood Resilience* (2016)

<https://tinyurl.com/ycwckhvr>

### Creating a healing ritual



In chapter 2, *Performance as ritual/Ritual as performance*, Robert Birch invites you to create a ritual. For this activity, consider creating ritual designed to acknowledge and heal from the loss of a loved one. It doesn't have to be a person you know, although it may be. The ritual could be for a beloved pet that has died, or someone you admired but did not know personally.

# Performance as education/ Education as performance

## Monica Prendergast



I have been a teacher for over 25 years and an actor for longer than that. I began my career in professional theatre as an *actor/teacher* working for theatre companies in Regina and Toronto. My colleagues and I toured to schools, performing plays we had created ourselves. We also taught drama workshops

in classrooms and we prepared students who were going to see a play at our theatre by getting them to become curious and engaged about what they would be seeing.

My career took a turn and for many years I worked as a high school Drama and English teacher. When I became a full time teacher it was difficult for me to hold onto my actor identity because the role of a drama teacher is more like that of a director and producer.

Drama teachers rarely perform *with* their students, although I always wonder, *why not?* Of course it may be challenging to perform alongside someone as an equal, then have to give that person a grade.

It was in my new hometown of Victoria, British Columbia that I was able to bring my two selves — the actor and the teacher — back into harmony. Victoria is the home of a professional theatre company called the Belfry Theatre and it was there that I created an audience education program called Belfry 101. It brings students from many high schools to the theatre five or six times a year to do pre-show preparatory and post-show drama workshops related to play productions. This program is extra-curricular so the students are not graded. Without having to worry about the pressures of getting good marks (or giving them) we were all free to get on with the work of making theatre together.

In more recent years, I have become a university professor teaching drama and theatre education (and I write and broadcast reviews of local theatre as a way to

educate the public). Much of my work at the university is training future teachers how to use drama in their classrooms.

Telling you about my background is my way of showing you what a vital connection I feel there is between performance and education.

Theatre can teach us a lot about what it means to be human, whether we're making and performing theatre ourselves or watching, reading about, and responding to other people perform.

We also learn about our own humanity by looking at performances by people from different cultures, both now and in the past. This chapter on performance and education — and performance *as* education — begins with the connection between performance and teaching over time.

---

How do we first learn to walk and to talk? We learn by watching those around us, and copying what they do. We learn to read and write in similar ways.

Can you remember what it was like for you when you first began to make sense of letters joining together to become words, and words joining into sentences? Do you remember learning to ride a bike, or trying to play a musical instrument for the first time?

Learning is hard work, and that's what makes it performative, the *doing* part of learning.

There are many ways to understand education through performance. In this section I want to offer you four approaches to thinking about education as a kind of doing and make connections between each of them to examples from the worlds of theatre and performance. These four approaches are:

- ▶ 1. Education as Asking Questions and Storytelling
- ▶ 2. Education as Re-telling and Re-hearing
- ▶ 3. Education as Learning by Doing
- ▶ 4. Education as Liberation and Revolution

In the second section I will give you different examples of how some people have built these approaches to education into their performances. Once you see how other people have done it, you will have a better sense of how to create performances that will teach an audience new ideas.

### 1. Education as Asking Questions and Storytelling

As I mentioned above, humans often learn by copying, sometimes called *mimicry*, but we also learn by being asked interesting questions and having to figure out answers on our own.

The ancient Greek philosopher Socrates was born almost twenty-five hundred years ago, in the year 470 BCE Socrates taught his students by asking them questions. When they worked out an answer, he would ask other questions. It would go on like this, back and forth, and after a while his students got to be better and stronger thinkers, clarifying their ideas through the process of working out answers to all the questions. This is known as the *Socratic method* and is still practiced in many classrooms. One of Socrates' best students, Plato, went on to be an important philosopher himself. Plato wrote down these dialogues.

In many ways Socrates' method looks like a scripted dialogue between a teacher and a student and can be read out loud as a kind of drama (although admittedly without much action).



You can read Aristophanes' play *The Clouds* (2013 Translation by William James Hickie)  
<https://tinyurl.com/y8gkcozl>



Read excerpts from Morgan and Saxton's book, *Asking Better Questions* (2006)  
<https://tinyurl.com/y7vph2mf>

- What questions will grab their attention?
- What questions will get them to want to share their ideas with me?
- What questions will invite them to take action?
- What questions will give them a chance to think about what all of this means to them?
- What questions will create a space that lets them ask their own questions about what they're learning and then take it to the next step?
- What questions will encourage them to test out their new ideas in their own creative ways?

Adapted from "Taxonomy of Engagement" in *Asking Better Questions* by Norah Morgan and Juliana Saxton (2006)

In fact, the playwright Aristophanes (446 – 386 BCE) put Socrates into his comic play *The Clouds* as a way to poke fun at the philosopher and his teaching methods, which were very popular in Athens at the time.

Questioning is at the heart of good teaching. Listening carefully to build on students' responses to questions is what separates a good teacher from one who is not so good. There are different types and kinds of questions.

As you begin imagining how to create a performance that will involve teaching, an excellent first step is to start thinking about how *questions* might support your performance creation.

Well thought out questions might be part of the dialogue in the performance or, using a more interactive mode, they may be asked directly to the audience as part of a follow-up to the performance.

Two drama teachers, Norah Morgan and Juliana Saxton, wrote a book called *Asking Better Questions* that shows how not all questions are equal. They say that some questions are really mini tests that are just checking to see if a person knows the "correct" answer. But other questions can actually encourage people to be interested and make them want to learn more. The trick is to figure out how to phrase your questions just right. Morgan and Saxton wrote a list of the types of questions that they felt were useful to ask. As you read through their list, think about which ones you might be able to integrate into your creative work before, during or after a performance.

Integrating questioning directly into your performance work, or as a question-based discussion after a show, can be a powerful way to encourage your audience to learn about the topic you want to share with them.

An example of a question/dialogue-based performance project is *This Progress* created in 2010 by Tino Sehgal. Most of Sehgal's works involve performers engaging visitors with some kind of topic of conversation. In this project, visitors to the Guggenheim Museum in New York were greeted by a child who asked them, "What is progress?" The child led visitors up the spiraling

walkway where they were passed on to a second performer, this time a teenager, who continues the conversation. The teenager transfers visitors to an adult and they are relayed once more to a senior citizen at the very top of the ramp. In another of his works, *This objective of that object* (2004), the visitor entered a gallery and saw five people facing away from them. The five people began to chant together, “The objective of this work is to become the object of a discussion.” If the visitor does not reply, they begin to sink down to the ground. If the visitor said something they began a discussion.

Another example of a performance project focused on questions and dialogue put the audience in the role of invisible listeners to conversations between high school students. *The Roof is on Fire* was performed in Oakland, California in 1994. It was created by performance artists Suzanne Lacy and Chris Johnson with over 200 local high school students. The students from inner city Oakland schools, a majority of whom were students of colour, sat inside dozens of cars on a rooftop. Each group of young people had lists of conversation topics they had chosen, but no set script. The improvised performance took place with an audience of adult observers who walked around the rooftop, listening in on the conversations on race, sexuality, class, and social change. The project offered these participants a chance to be seen and heard in a positive light, to be recognized for their individuality, and not be reduced to a statistic.

## 2. Education as Re-telling and Re-hearing

Another way that education is performed is through apprenticeship. In cultures throughout history, older more experienced *Masters* have transferred their skills to their *Apprentices*. For example, a young child might learn how to be a hunter, builder or a baker by apprenticing with either a family member or being accepted into a business to learn the trade. As a performance theorist, you can see the connections here between performance and learning. All of these forms of labour were learned in performative ways, by watching, listening, learning, and doing: watch what I do then do as I do, or *mimic me*. These days we might call it a trades program or pre-professional training or an internship, but the



Read *At the Guggenheim, the Art Walked Beside You, Asking Questions* (2010) to learn more about the project <https://tinyurl.com/y9fwycqo>



Watch a one hour documentary on *The Roof is on Fire* (1994) project <https://tinyurl.com/ybluvvn4>



Watch this short animated video with Lego figures describing Russian psychologist Lev Vygotsky's theory about how we learn through watching others. He called it the *Zone of Proximal Development* (2017) <https://tinyurl.com/yc5xfsha>

principles are similar to the ones that have supported human societies over thousands of years.

Watch, listen, learn and do. Perform as your elders show you how to, practice over a long time and aim to one day gain the mastery that will allow you to teach an apprentice yourself.

The more personal and local apprenticeship model broke down in Europe and North America in the 18th and 19th centuries when public schooling began. For the first time, large numbers of young people were placed into classrooms. These schools were created alongside the rise of the Industrial Revolution, so it was no surprise that schools were designed as factories. Although these factories produced learning, they were still factories based on the principles of replication (imitation and copying) and repetition (worksheets, tests and drills).

*This is called the Factory Model of School and is based on “top-down management, separation from the community, emphasis on management, centralized planning, standardization, outcomes designed to meet societal needs, and efficiency in producing results.”*

Wikipedia

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Factory\\_model\\_school](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Factory_model_school)

Many movies have criticized the Factory Model of School by showing a heroic teacher who battles ‘the system’. These movies are intended to inspire and are sometimes even based on true stories (for example, *Freedom Writers*, *Stand and Deliver*, *Lean On Me*). But when you look closer, you can see that these movies often replicate and repeat the assumption that the purpose of schools is to ‘produce’ adults with employable work skills. It’s rare that these teacher characters challenge the whole system of education. A more complex portrait of how these ideas of social control endanger us all can be seen in the book and movie *The Wave*.



To explain to his students the atmosphere in the 1930's Nazi-Germany, history teacher, Burt Ross, initiates a daring experiment. He declares himself leader of a new movement, called 'The Wave'. Inspired, he proclaims ideas about Power, Discipline and Superiority. His students are strikingly willing to follow him. Soon the entire school is under the spell of 'The Wave'. Anyone who refuses to be a part of the Movement, faces threats or worse. Ross himself gets carried away by his own experiment. Or has it turned into something more than an experiment?



Watch a trailer for the movie *The Wave* (2008)  
<https://tinyurl.com/ya8vhbvn>



*What are your thoughts on the notion of schools as factories, set up to reproduce society as it is?*

*What are the risks that education can be misused and abused as a tool of social control?*

*How are the actions of repeating and copying contrasted with actions of creativity and self-expression in an educational setting?*

Repetition and mimicry can be used in more positive ways as tools for powerful creation. For example, British artist, Jeremy Deller's 2001 performance project *The Battle of Orgreave* literally brought history to life for the people in the town of Orgreave and the surrounding area. Here is what Deller himself has to say about this project:

For years I had had this idea to re-enact this confrontation that I had witnessed as a young person on TV, of striking miners being chased up a hill and pursued through a village. It has since become an iconic image of the 1984 strike – having the quality of a war scene rather than a labour dispute.... After two years' research, the re-enactment finally happened, with about eight-hundred historical re-enactors and two-hundred former miners who had been part of the original conflict. Basically, I was asking the re-enactors to participate in the staging of

*a battle that occurred within living memory, alongside veterans of the campaign. I've always described it as digging up a corpse and giving it a proper post-mortem, or as a thousand-person crime re-enactment.*

*Jeremy Deller, The Battle of Orgreave (2001)*

<https://tinyurl.com/j3q4z7u>



Watch a full length documentary film on *The Battle of Orgreave* (2001) <https://tinyurl.com/y7xn9wlr>



Here is a monologue from MacLeod's *The Shape of a Girl* <https://tinyurl.com/yb7e63ag>



Toronto's Young People's Theatre produced *The Shape of a Girl* in 2011. Here is their study guide for the play, with many ideas and activities on the topic of bullying <https://tinyurl.com/ycer36fm>

For me, the educational aspect of Deller's amazing work, involving over 1000 people and two years' of preparation, is its reframing of a notorious miners' strike (under Prime Minister Thatcher's anti-union government) into a battle in a war. In this case the war was a class war between impoverished striking miners and the government that sent in police forces that attacked and violently suppressed the miners' right to protest. It was a terrible day in British labour history. Deller's recreation of it as a live performance, involving many people who were there 17 years earlier in 1984, is a consciously political and educational act of repetition and replication.

Retelling a story to educate people about what happened in our past doesn't necessarily mean you need to tell the actual story. The history of an event and what was learned from it can be an inspiration for creating a performance that draws on what happened to present a new story.

In 1997 in Victoria, British Columbia (where I live), a 14-year-old girl named Reena Virk was bullied, tortured, beaten up and left to drown by a group of teenagers. It was a shocking event that began a much-needed and continuing conversation around the problem of peer bullying. When Vancouver's Green Thumb Theatre commissioned playwright Joan MacLeod to write a play, MacLeod knew that Reena's murder was an extreme case of bullying, but she decided to write a play that was not directly about those events. Instead, she wrote a one-woman play called *The Shape of a Girl* that presents a young girl, Braidie, who talks to her brother (who is not there) while sitting on a beach on a Gulf Island in BC. We find out that she has seen a news report about a terrible killing rooted in bullying. This story prompts Braidie to think more deeply about her involvement with a group of girls at school who have been cruelly bullying

another girl. By the end of the play Braidie takes responsibility for her actions and the actions of her so-called friends and decides to go and tell a trusted adult about what has been happening. The play toured across Canada in the early 2000s and has been performed both in high schools as well as theatres for more general audiences. Since *The Shape of a Girl*, a number of other plays on this topic have been produced by Theatre for Young Audiences companies, including *rhiannaboi95* by Jordan Tannahill, a webcast performance that Sandra Chamberlain-Snider discusses in the next chapter on power.

### 3. Education as Learning by Doing

In the year 1762 in France, just before the French Revolution, philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau published a book called *Émile, or On Education*. Almost immediately the book was banned by the authorities and was even publicly burned due to Rousseau's criticisms of religion. But over time the book became hugely influential. The book was mostly on how to teach children using an interactive and apprenticed form of education. Today we would call it highly performance-based.

Rousseau believed that when students are actively doing something, they will learn much more than if the teachers explain it to them.

In *Émile*, Rousseau wrote that if students make mistakes, it's not on purpose. They simply haven't yet learned the right way to do it. For that reason, they should never be punished or forced to apologize when they get something wrong.

These days the authorities don't burn Rousseau's book in public, but 250 years after it was written, his beliefs about how to teach students still seem radical to many people. His theories and his progressive vision for education led to the development of new thinking about education. Unfortunately, the Factory Model tended to prevail over time. There are examples of thinkers and educators who were interested in a more student-led way to teach and learn.



Read *Émile* by Jean-Jacques Rousseau (2011  
Translation by Barbara Foxley)  
<https://tinyurl.com/oyu6g5f>



*What about your own educational experiences?*

*How much time have you spent sitting at a desk, watching and listening, rather than getting up, moving around and doing?*

*What are some ways your learning would be different if it was more experiential, as Rousseau recommends? (see textbox below)*

#### **Excerpt from *Émile, or On Education* by Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1762)**

Children will always do anything that keeps them moving freely. There are countless ways of rousing their interest in measuring, perceiving, and estimating distance. There is a very tall cherry tree; how shall we gather the cherries? Will the ladder in the barn be big enough? There is a wide stream; how shall we get to the other side? Would one of the wooden planks in the yard reach from bank to bank? From our windows we want to fish in the moat; how many yards of line are required? I want to make a swing between two trees; will two fathoms of cord be enough? They tell me our room in the new house will be twenty-five feet square; do you think it will be big enough for us? Will it be larger than this? We are very hungry; here are two villages, which can we get to first for our dinner?

<http://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/5427>

John Dewey was an American philosopher who believed that young people could develop into free individuals in a progressive society through the power of education. Dewey started The University of Chicago Laboratory School as a place to experiment with his ideas and it is still going strong today. Students at the school learn by doing, studying subjects that interest them. Dewey wrote many books exploring his philosophy and his theories have had a huge influence on helping educators teach young people by nurturing their abilities, and especially their imaginations.



Learn more about John Dewey  
<https://tinyurl.com/oblddcw>

Rousseau and Dewey teach us that if you want someone to learn something — to understand something — one of the best ways to accomplish this is to make the

learning process an experience. Make it something that happens rather than something that is just talked about. How might this approach be translated into performances if you want someone to learn about a particular topic? How can you design your performance in ways that are experiential and interactive?

Here is one example of how Canadian artist and activist, Carmen Rosen, did it. Still Moon Arts Society is based in the Renfrew–Collingwood area of Vancouver BC, which is on the unceded, occupied, and traditional lands of the Squamish, Musqueam, Tsleil-Waututh, and Stó:lō nations. Still Moon inspires people of all ages to become actively involved in fun and rewarding artistic projects that focus on the natural world that surrounds them and the diverse cultural heritage of everyone who lives there. In the process of creating these performances and visual arts, participants discover that they want to learn more and they start to care more about the neighbourhood.

It all started back in 1999 when artist Carmen Rosen saw how the river that ran through the Renfrew Ravine in her neighbourhood was full of garbage and the salmon that used to live there were long gone.

In fact, to a lot of people, the ravine was just a handy garbage dump. She began by teaming up with neighbours to haul the trash out of the creek. That was just a first step. She realized that to keep it sustainable, neighbours would have to learn to care about the ravine. As an artist, she wondered how the arts could get people to think about the ravine in a new way – as a sanctuary for animals and for people. An idea began to form. Before long, she was working on a whole series of arts-based projects including mosaic-making along the ravine's walkways and later, a festival with paper lanterns and music, and performances of all kinds that celebrated the best of what their neighbourhood had to offer. These projects involved organizers and also lots of local participants to make the art together. The art making drew them in, and in the process of building and preparing and performing, everyone learned from each other and taught each other. Every year, neighbours continued to work on



*Still Moon Arts Society Moon Festival* by Benjamin Rosen-Purcell (2010).



Watch *Shedding Light on the Ravine* (2004) a film created by Carmen Rosen, produced by Documenting Engagement  
<https://tinyurl.com/yahvsqw7>



Take a look at Taylor Mac's website for more on his project (2011 – ) <https://tinyurl.com/y8bfawte>



Watch a 5 minute video on the project <https://tinyurl.com/yaggmky2>  
&  
a slideshow <https://tinyurl.com/ycczf8e8>

clearing the trash out of the river and the ravine, and making it a habitat that was healthy and safe enough to support the salmon.

Then, in 2011, a remarkable thing happened. The salmon began to return to the river in the Renfrew Ravine. The neighbours had made a difference. Art making had made a difference. Anything is possible.

Here is another example of a performance project that is imaginative and experiential, and also very educational. In the fall of 2016 the radical gay performance artist, Taylor Mac, performed a 24 hour marathon called *A 24-Decade History of American Popular Music (1776 – 2016)*. Each hour featured songs chosen from one decade. The daylong performance began with a musical band of 24 players that dwindled down, one per hour, to the final hour in which Mac performed solo songs without accompaniment. The show was filled with inventive drag costumes worn by Mac, who changed every hour, as well as sets, lights, props and lots of audience participation (including meals) and sing-alongs. It was a creative spectacle that was both exhilarating and exhausting. The learning part of this project?

*Yes, [it] requires an artist who understands the power of drag to subvert convention. And in song after song (after song), Mr. Mac, who's white, gay and 43 years old, explored the racism, chauvinism, homophobia, misogyny and white supremacy coursing through the history of American song.*

Wesley Morris (Oct. 10, 2016) Review: Taylor Mac's 24-Hour Concert was One of the Great Experiences of My Life, *New York Times*  
<https://nyti.ms/2okpOsu>

#### 4. Education as Liberation and Revolution

To help explain how education can be strongly connected to liberation and to social revolution, I want to introduce you to two radical educators: Paulo Freire and bell hooks. Their work and writing lets us see education as a way

to recreate and reconstruct society to be more peaceful, fair, and ecologically healthful.

Paulo Freire was a Brazilian activist who grew up living in poverty. Later in life he became a teacher and dedicated himself to improving education for millions of people. He developed a teaching method based on dialogue in which both teachers and students learn from each other side by side. He spent time with his students, learning about who they were and the challenges they faced. He made lists of the words that came up when they talked about their lives and their struggles to survive. When he started teaching them, he didn't use vocabulary lessons out of some textbook; he taught them how to read and write the words he'd collected on his list. As you can imagine, his students cared deeply about learning because these words were important to them. But there was much more to it than learning literacy.



More on Paulo Freire <https://tinyurl.com/qcpzos4>

Freire believed that people could not only learn to read the *word*, they could also learn to read the *world*.

By *reading the world*, he meant that as people understood more about the meaning behind these words, they could begin to learn how to “read” the events in their daily lives. They started to see how they were being kept down by those in power and oppressed in ways they hadn't even realized. As they became more conscious of it, they could take action to do something about it. He called this process of critical learning *conscientization* [pronounced CON-chee-entie-zay-shun]. Paulo Freire's most well-known book is *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (pedagogy means teaching). A Brazilian theatre director and activist called Augusto Boal created a whole approach to theatre that was largely inspired by Freire's work. He called it *Theatre of the Oppressed* and you will read about it in Chapter 5.



Can you imagine integrating conscientization into a project of yours?

What would it look like for you to spend some time learning about the lives and struggles of some people in a group, and then working with them



Read excerpts from bell hooks' book *Teaching to Transgress: Education as the Practice of Freedom* (1994) <https://tinyurl.com/y7ohybo3>

*to find ways to express themselves not through written words, but through art: through a collaboratively created visual presentation or a performance?*

bell hooks is an African-American feminist and social activist who has written dozens of books on issues such as race, class, gender equity, and anti-oppressive education. She intentionally spells her first and last name with lowercase letters. It is her pen name, based on her grandmother's name. In one of her most well-known books, *Teaching to Transgress*, she writes about teaching as “engaged pedagogy” meaning that learning should never be boring, that students and teachers must work alongside each other with a sense of give and take: a call and response that is joyful, hopeful and resistant to oppression. She was inspired by Freire and also by Vietnamese Buddhist monk and teacher, Thich Nhat Hanh. It was Hanh's philosophy of self-actualization that led hooks to think of teaching as the practice of freedom. She saw that a classroom had the potential to be “the most radical space of possibility” where students and teachers acted together, consciously, to free themselves from male-dominated, white-dominated, programmed, and corporatized ways of thinking and being.

What might bell hooks' teachings have to offer you as a performance theorist and artist? First, she would advise you to make sure that when you are collaboratively exploring ideas about how society works, you must always remain aware that you and all the various members of the group will see things differently according to your race, gender and class. Be fully prepared and even eager to accept that your version of how life is will only be one version of reality. Challenge yourself to be open to hearing and seeing other people's versions of reality based on their personal experiences. Second, she would want you to think about education as a healing process (see Chapter 2 on performance and healing). Third, she would invite you to think about your performance creation practice as an act of resistance to apathy, complacency or injustice and even transgression (misbehaviour, disobedience, wrongdoing). Ask yourself, how might your performance space become, as hooks wishes classrooms to be, a radical space of possibility that draws on everyone's strengths and insights to create a better world?



I now want to offer you a couple of examples of liberatory and revolutionary performance practices that focus on educating the audience in order to bring about awareness and social change. The first example is from the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the second is a newer performance form that has been effectively used in many places around the world – *documentary theatre*.

An important historical European playwright you should know about for the radical nature of his work is Henrik Ibsen (1828-1906). This Norwegian playwright's plays are considered some of the finest ever written. Ibsen's influence on culture and society in Europe and North America in the 19th and early 20th century was astonishing. People were either Ibsenites or anti-Ibsenites. It is hard to imagine a playwright having that kind of deep effect today. What made Ibsen so powerful a force? His plays bravely and unflinchingly tackled many taboo topics of the time, including issues surrounding women and their liberation.

*A Doll's House*, premiered in 1879, is a good example. In it a young woman named Nora becomes suffocated by her life as a dutiful wife and mother and leaves her family at the end of the play. The moment of her exit has come to be known as "the door slam heard around the world" for its scandalizing effect on audiences.

No playwright before Ibsen had questioned the liberation of women in this way. Ibsen's stance influenced many playwrights who followed him, such as George Bernard Shaw, Oscar Wilde, Arthur Miller, Tony Kushner, and Caryl Churchill. Ibsen's best plays – *A Doll's House*, *Ghosts*, *The Wild Duck*, *Enemy of the People*, *Hedda Gabler* – are still produced regularly around the world, second only to Shakespeare in number of productions.

*A woman cannot be herself in the society of the present day, which is an exclusively masculine society, with laws framed by men and with a judicial system that judges feminine conduct from a masculine point of view.*

Henrik Ibsen, *Notes for the Modern Tragedy* (1912).



Learn more about Henrik Ibsen  
<https://tinyurl.com/hh9dmal>



Alecky Blythe talks about bringing real life to the stage (2012) <https://tinyurl.com/y76wprd9>



Learn more about *Verbatim Theatre* (2014)  
<https://tinyurl.com/ycrxkxnd>

Another way to raise an audience's consciousness through performance is called documentary theatre. This theatre form has also been called verbatim or transcript theatre. Documentary theatre is nonfictional and usually is based on interviews, news reports or trials. Sometimes a documentary play combines all three of these types of source materials. Documentary performances inform audiences about an event or issue that the artists involved consider important.

### Examples of Documentary Theatre

- *The Laramie Project* is a play based on interviews held in Laramie, Wyoming following the murder of young gay man Matthew Shephard in 1998 <https://tinyurl.com/7nr5q5t>
- *The Exonerated* draws on testimony from wrongfully convicted prisoners and is intended to promote justice for innocent inmates <https://tinyurl.com/ydc5bdgt>
- *Black Watch* used both interviews and historical events to tell the story of the Scottish Black Watch Battalion <https://tinyurl.com/y9p44ptn>
- *Fires in the Mirror* (search youtube) and *Twilight: Los Angeles* <https://tinyurl.com/yc8o33y4>
- *The Middle Place* was created from interviews with homeless youth living in a shelter in Toronto <https://tinyurl.com/ybrvkgsz>

A documentary theatre project that was turned into both a musical (very unusual for this performance form) and a movie is called *London Road*. This musical play is based on interviews with residents of a street where a serial killer lived. This criminal, Steve Wright, preyed on young women drug addicts who often were sex workers as well. The interviews with his neighbours were carried out by playwright Alecky Blythe and she gathered over 100 hours of tape recordings. She then wrote a play with songs about how the residents of this street reclaimed their neighbourhood. Blythe's approach to verbatim-style documentary theatre is to have the tapes of interviews play through head-

phones into each actor's ear. Her method ensures that actors will be as accurate as possible with recreating the speech of the original interviewees, including things like pauses and hesitations. This documentary theatre project teaches us how a community can cope with and recover from a traumatic event.

It takes imagination to dream of being free. The social imagination of performance can allow us to glimpse better worlds, future possibilities and to experience a sense of collective hope.

## PERFORM



This first set of activities invites you to think about how teachers “perform” their teaching. That means they *do things* in the classroom (and sometimes outside of the classroom) that either help students to learn well, or make it more difficult for students to learn well. I’m sure that in your own experience as a student you’ve had some teachers who *did things* that made learning fun and easy, and others who *did things* that made learning harder and more frustrating. For this first activity, I invite you to take a trip down memory lane. Make a long piece of paper by taping together a few pages. Draw a continuous line at the bottom from left to right. The far left side is when you were very young, and the far right side is the age you are now. Make marks on the line to represent yourself at different ages. Think about the best learning experiences you’ve had all the way back to when you first started school, and also the worst learning experiences. As you remember them, make some notes about each experience at the timeline mark that shows how old you were then. The most important part of this exercise is to identify what it was that the teacher *did* that day that made the learning easy for you or hard for you. By the time you have filled in the whole timeline, you will have a record based on your personal knowledge of how a teacher can either perform teaching well, or perform teaching badly.

**Write and tell a story about a teacher who helped you succeed.**

Looking over your timeline, find one particular story that stands out for you as an example of the best learning you ever had: a time when you really learned something important in your life. Was it in school or outside of school? Was a teacher involved? If so, what did that teacher do that made the teaching/learning so effective? Write the story of what happened that day and as you fill in the details, be sure to include how you were feeling at the time, what else was happening at the time, and what that teacher did that made it such a good learning experience for you. How did that teacher “perform” her or his teaching? When you are ready, tell your story to the others in your group and listen to their stories. Compare notes on how different teachers can perform their teaching in ways that help students to learn well.

**Write and tell a story about a time you felt a teacher failed to help you succeed.**

This is a variation of the above. Looking over your timeline, find a different story, one that stands out for you as an example of a time you were just not able to learn something, especially something that you really wanted to learn. Was it in school or outside of school? Was a teacher involved? If so, was there something that teacher *did* that made the teaching/learning feel like a failure? Write the story of what happened that day and as you fill in the details, be sure to include how you were feeling at the time, what else was happening at the time, and what that teacher did that made it such an unhelpful learning experience for you. How did that teacher “perform” her or his teaching? When you are ready, tell your story to the others in your group and listen to their stories. Compare notes on how different teachers can perform their teaching in ways that do not help students to learn well.

**Write and tell a story about a time you felt pressure to succeed.**

Looking over your timeline, find another story connected to school or an extracurricular activity that stands out for you as an example of a time you felt under a lot of pressure to succeed. Was a teacher involved? If so, was there something that teacher *did* that made you feel the pressure to succeed was a positive experience? For example, did you feel good about being encouraged to do better than you thought you were able to do? Or was there something that teacher *did* that made you feel the pressure to succeed was a negative experience? Did you feel ground up by the pressure to succeed? Write the story of what happened that day and as you fill in the details, be sure to include how you were feeling at the time, what else was happening at the time, and what that teacher did that made it such an unhelpful learning experience for you.



*How did that teacher “perform” her or his teaching?*

When you are ready, tell your story to the others in your group and listen to their stories. Compare notes on how different teachers can perform their teaching in ways that either help or do not help students to feel they can do better than they think they can.

**Interview a teacher**

Find a teacher who is willing to be interviewed about her or his experience with teaching. Set up a time to meet and explain that during the interview you will be asking for examples of times they felt they did something in the classroom that helped students to learn. Let them know that you will also be asking an example or two of times they felt they *did* something in the classroom they wish they had done differently because it did not go well for their students. Be aware that it is hard for anyone to talk about times they felt they made mistakes. It may be useful to ask about a time their teaching went badly and also what they do differently because of what happened.

Based on what you learn in your interview, write notes on how a teacher can “perform” their teaching in ways that either help students to learn or make it difficult for students to learn.

When you are ready, tell your story to the others in your group and listen to their stories. Compare notes.

After everyone in your group has completed all of these activities, gather your notes and have a group conversation about what you’ve learned about how teachers perform their teaching. Do any of the stories you’ve collected match up with each other? Work together to list the various things teachers *do* when they are teaching that help or do not help students to learn well. This list and the stories connected to them could become the material you can use to create a performance, if you wish, about how education performs and how performance educates.

### Re-telling and Re-hearing the news



The purpose of this activity is to explore how we can be educated and mis-educated by news stories. Facts may be facts, but someone has taken those facts and put them into a format to create and deliver them as news.



*How much does “performance” of the news — the way it is being told — affect how we hear and learn about the facts?*

*Are the facts based only on some stories, not others?*

*Who is choosing which stories are told and are there other stories that are silenced or ignored by those who “perform” the news?*

To prepare for this exercise, find some news stories that you consider important and interesting. Share these stories with the others in your group and discuss what each story is communicating to readers or viewers. What is each story ‘teaching’ about the facts? The next step in the exercise is to perform one

or more of the news stories as theatre. It's likely that all the stories will be worth exploring, but you will see that some of them will translate into theatrical forms better than others. Look for a story that involves a subject (persons, places, or things) and presents an attitude about the subject. Depending on the size of your group, pick one, two, or three stories that you all agree can be easily translated into a performance.

For each story, decide what attitude you believe the original writer of the article wanted to communicate. Now stage the story in verbatim style, with the actors speaking the words exactly as they are written in the story and try to reproduce the original writer's attitude. Challenge yourselves to use full body movements, gestures and simple theatrical techniques to make the story as visually interesting as possible. One option is to use found objects to represent people or issues within your chosen story. Tell the story in tabletop theatre style, with found objects standing in for the people in the story.

Share this first version of your story with the whole group and ask them to tell you what they learned from it based on your presentation of the facts. Now open the conversation. What voices or points of view are missing? What are some other ways of performing the same facts that will communicate different meaning and attitudes?

Next, go back into your small group and decide how you will build on the version you staged, considering the suggestions from the others – the alternative perspectives and positions that were not included in the original news report. Then begin rehearsing your story with these changes and additions added in.



*How will these voices and perspectives be woven into the performance?*

*Are there theatrical techniques you can use to support your critical thinking about how news reports 'work' on viewers and readers as a form of education and maybe even manipulation?*



Learn more about Tabletop Theatre style  
<https://tinyurl.com/y7j62tm2>

Consider the use of shadow theatre, puppetry, internal/external doubling (when we hear a character speak in a public voice and then hear her inner thoughts spoken by an actor standing next to or behind the first actor), choral speaking, music or movement to reflect your thoughts without words.

Finally, present your restaged story to the rest of the class, or perhaps even to a social studies or media studies class in the school. Conduct a debriefing dialogue with the audience that allows for a fuller exploration of the story and its impact as a tool of information and/or misinformation.

### Conversations with Your Audience

Be sure to include planning for how to engage your intended audience in a well-planned post-show conversation. What questions would you like to ask them after they witness your performance? What are some effective ways to invite your audience to respond that does not put too much performance pressure on them in turn? You might ask each person to write thoughts, questions and comments on a post-it note, for example, then share them with a person sitting in the next seat. The audience can be divided into small groups with one or two performers from your ensemble facilitating a feedback session with prepared questions or storytelling prompts. What stories do your audience members have to share in response to your stories?

### Education as Liberation and Revolution



Here is a performance creation variation on the processes offered above, this time with a more overt political focus. Design a performative intervention on educational issues to be seen somewhere in your school for a political consciousness-raising purpose. Take care here to confer with your teachers and to protect yourselves from any overly negative reactions or disciplinary actions. At the same time be brave and let your thoughts and voices be heard! Here are some prompts to begin with:



- ▶ What does it mean to have your consciousness raised?
- ▶ Tell a story about a time when that happened for you. What was it that opened your eyes? Was it in response to an injustice or inspired by an action taken by a person or a group?

As a group, after hearing each story, figure out what it was that sparked a change in someone's awareness and understanding.

■ Create a performance about these moments of eye-opening, of waking-up.

Do not feel you need to recreate your own story, you may swap stories with others and perform theirs. Also, do not feel you need to tell the whole story. Focus in on the moment when something shifted and you gained new knowledge as a result. The performance is about the mechanisms that cause someone's consciousness of social justice to be raised.

### Some Possible Topics to Explore

- Reading the World [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Critical\\_pedagogy](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Critical_pedagogy)
- Education as the Practice of Freedom <http://www.bellhooksinstitute.com>
- Teaching and Learning as Acts of Resistance
- Education in the Lives of Girls in the Developing World
- Staging the UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights (or chosen sections) or the UN Declaration of Child Rights <http://www.un.org/en/universal-declaration-human-rights/> or [https://www.unicef.org/rightsite/484\\_540.htm](https://www.unicef.org/rightsite/484_540.htm)
- Injustice and Education (How education can and does 'fail' some students in the larger sense of that word)
- The Factory Model of Schooling versus A New Vision of Schools and Schooling



# Performance as power/ Power as performance

## Sandra Chamberlain-Snider



As a child I was always trying to tell the adults in my life who I was. I told them through performance. I would dress my little brother and sister and my cousins and my dogs and myself in costumes and I'd set up a stage area in the living room to act out my stories. In these performances, I was at the centre of the action and I was in control of how the story played out. Then we all got a little older and my ability to direct without question lost its power. My younger siblings and cousins and even my dogs became less willing to do what I told them to do. I learned to compromise, which is an important skill in life but I never forgot the feeling of what it was like to be able to tell the stories that I wanted to tell.

When I got a little older, my father fell ill. My mother divided her time between going to work and caring for him, so I took charge of the housecleaning and cooking, and taking care of my siblings and the dogs. As an adult, I had jobs where I was quickly promoted from worker to supervisor, managing people and projects. I began to realize that in both my personal life and at my jobs I did have power — power to do things the way I felt they should be done. Still, I felt I was missing something. It wasn't until I saw my own children performing their stories that I realized I really wanted to be able to tell my story again, this time as an adult. I went back to school — to university — to learn more about how people use performance as a way to say, “*This* is who I am.” That is a powerful thing to be able to do because saying who you are is closely connected to saying what you believe is important and what you want in life.



Watch Libby VanderPloeg's giphy depicting women power <https://tinyurl.com/yadp9jkn>

You will read more about Goffman's work in Chapters 6 and 7

In this chapter you will learn how performance can help expand your ability to assert who you are and what you want.

Then, once you start to recognize how performance empowers, you will be able to share your knowledge with friends and collaborate with them so that individually and as a community you can *all* use performance to tell the stories that let others see who you are and start to bring about what you want to have happen in the world.

### Power as Performance

We usually think of power as a thing that one person (or a group of people) has over another person or group. We think of power as something that powerful people have and use to control other people's lives. But in reality, it's more complicated than that.

Power is what you might call fluid. It can slosh around.

Parents have the power to decide what's for dinner and put it on the plate, but a kid can cross her arms and refuse to eat it. She will probably have to face the consequences of resisting, but she has the power to say no. Politicians can create laws that affect millions of people, but those same people can vote the politicians out of office at the next election. In some cases, people have performed acts of civil disobedience and risked jail time or bodily harm to take a stand against laws they felt were unjust. When they've been successful, it's because after seeing their "performance" of disobeying the law, many more people started to agree that those laws were unjust. Ultimately, the politicians felt pressure from the public and were forced to change those laws. Power can slosh around.

A common way of understanding power is this: power means being able to make things go the way you want them to go. And here is the heart of where power is connected to performance. The Canadian-born sociologist Erving Goffman studied how people present themselves in their interactions with other people. He wrote about how we perform power in our everyday lives be-

cause performance is *what we do* to get things to go the way we want them to. At the extreme end of the scale of how power is used, there are those who rely on physical violence or intimidation – the threat of violence – to get others to do what they want. When bullies threaten their victims, they are performing.

The way they talk and the way they move and even the clothes they wear (also maybe the weapons they carry) can all be seen as a kind of performance that is designed to intimidate.

■ Bullies know that if their performance is convincing, their victims will probably back down.

Beyond the threat of violence, though, there are many other ways that people perform to get what they want. It might be the way they dress or the words they use, or any of a million other things. Whatever it is, they are *doing something* that is designed to convince everyone else that they should get what they want. You've probably heard the term "status symbol." People who collect status symbols are trying to convince others that they have a higher status, meaning that they are more powerful. Clothes, cars, jewelry and so on is one way to show status. Your online identity is another way of showing status and can shift power back and forth between you and your friends or followers.

One of the most powerful symbols in your life is the image you present of yourself (See Chapter 6 on Performance as Identity). You and your friends probably use social media apps like Instagram, Snapchat, Twitter, or Facebook. When you spend time creating a profile picture or choosing which images of yourself and your friends to upload, you are using your power to create an online identity that affects how the rest of the world sees you. This is similar to the way people use *status symbols*, but the power of what is considered a status symbol is not the same as it used to be. Your power comes from your control over your online image to persuade others of your status.

■ When people see my status, it makes me seem like a pretty awesome person.



Malala Yousafzai at Girl Summit by UK Department for International Development (2014). CC-BY-NC-SA 2.0.  
[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Malala\\_Yousafzai\\_at\\_Girl\\_Summit\\_2014.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Malala_Yousafzai_at_Girl_Summit_2014.jpg)



Watch how *Teens Reach to Malala Yousafzai* (2014)  
<https://tinyurl.com/ogqvex7>



Read more about the *Idle No More* march (2013)  
<https://tinyurl.com/y9lb6gpv>  
 &  
 Read more about *Idle No More's* vision  
<https://tinyurl.com/ydh8a3gk>

For example, let's say I post a picture of a gorgeous looking meal I cooked. Even though people who see it online can't taste it, just by looking at the photo they are impressed by what a great cook I am. Or maybe I go on vacation and post pictures of me laughing and playing with my friends next to a pool in some distant place. If I get a big response to the post, everybody's interest in my pictures and my story increases the power of my status even more. Then if a friend of mine posts a funny or interesting comment, and other people react or respond positively to what they wrote, some of the power I have shifts to my friend. These examples show that while we can increase our power by creating our own status symbols, we still need other people to help us be powerful.

*To understand how other people's opinions help give a person power, consider Malala Yousafzai, who speaks out on the importance of educating girls. She speaks from her heart about a subject that is important to her, and millions of people around the world think of her as a hero. Our admiration for her gives her power.*

### The status quo

You may also have heard the Latin term *status quo*, which means the way things are right now.

Some people use their power to try to keep the status quo just as it is, while other people use their power to challenge the status quo and change the way things are.

In Canada, First Nations communities have been working for a long time to bring changes that will challenge the status quo that negatively impacts their lives. When the *Idle No More* movement took to the streets of Ottawa with large numbers of people marching to the Parliament buildings to protest proposed legislation regarding First Nations' rights and land use, that was a show of power – a performance of power – that drew national attention. The *Idle No More* movement continues to gain social and political power within Canada. Its power grows as Indigenous people come together with non-Indigenous allies to fight for social justice and change.

### Different ways of understanding power

So how else do people use and relate to power? To answer that, it's helpful to look at some of the theories of a French philosopher called Michel Foucault [pronounced Mee-shell Foo-coe]. Foucault wrote that power in and of itself is not a bad thing or a good thing; power is simply how people (and the groups they are a part of) relate to each other. Foucault believed that if we know how power operates, we are able to understand ourselves better.

Can you remember a time when you felt powerful — a time you had power right in your hands?

It might have been when you got a good mark in school or accomplished a difficult task. I bet you can also remember its opposite—when you felt other people had power over you at a time when you didn't have any. Foucault would say that your personal experience of the times when you didn't have power is exactly what makes you have empathy toward other people during those times when you do have power. He called it the “ethics of freedom,” meaning that we behave as ethical people not because of some outside law telling us what to do, but because we know what it's like to be under someone's power and so when we get power ourselves, we make a choice to use it to be better people. Our first-hand knowledge of these feelings can lead us to contribute to making a world that is more socially just for everyone. Foucault believed that power does not have to be abusive or negative. Although he knew how easily it can be used to destroy lives, abuse and coerce people, he felt that power can equally be a force that engages, constructs, and creates.

Another French philosopher worth looking at is Michel de Certeau [pronounced Mee-Shell de Sir-toe]. In one of his books, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, he described his theory about the differences between strategies and tactics. De Certeau writes that if you are in a position where you already have power over others, you rely on *strategies*. That is, you keep your power and get more by figuring out how to set up the situation so that it always works in your favour. If you don't have much (or any) power to start with, de Certeau explains that you rely on *tactics*. This means you get what you want by “knowing how to



Listen to *Philosophy - Michel Foucault* produced by The School of Life (2015)  
<https://tinyurl.com/y963hnm7>



Read excerpts from Michel de Certeau's book, *The Practice of Everyday Life* (1984)  
<https://tinyurl.com/y8sxfvfm>



Read the story *The Raven Steals the Light* (1984)

<https://tinyurl.com/yb9trsa5>



The story has also been retold through a live action and animated film by STORYHIVE (2016)

<https://tinyurl.com/ya4e5xyl>

*Mary Parker Follett: power over versus power with:*

“When you and I decide on a course of action together and do that thing, you have no power over me nor I over you, but we have power over ourselves together.” – from *Creative Experience* (1930)

get away with things.” So even though people without much status may not appear to have power, they can get what they want by being clever and tricky. In some First Nations cultural mythologies, the characters Coyote and Raven are known as trickster figures. They don’t have a lot of power over others, but they manage to get what they want by using their wits to dupe the ones who do. Coyote and Raven use tactics and that gives them power.

*An ancient story about Raven and his trickster ways has been retold by poet Robert Bringhurst and illustrated by Haida artist Bill Reid in the book *The Raven Steals the Light*, created by a collective of Canadian artists. In the story, an old man is keeping all the light in the universe for himself. He holds all the power. But Raven uses his knowledge of human relationships and desires, as well as his magical abilities, to trick the old man. Raven relies on clever tactics to free the light so that everyone can see.*

The American social worker Mary Parker Follett, who lived from 1868 to 1933, also contributed to our understanding of power. In fact, her work and writings have profoundly influenced the way many people think about power these days, including contemporary feminist perspectives on power. Follett is best known for her creative ideas as a management consultant. She felt that when conflicts arose between managers and workers, there were four ways to resolve the problem.

- ▶ One side or the other could just give up and give in.
- ▶ One side could force the other side to give up and give in.
- ▶ Both sides could compromise by giving up a little.
- ▶ They could all collaborate to come up with a new solution together.

She didn’t care for the first two options since they both rely on an imbalance of power that leads to one side losing. She didn’t like the third option either, since she felt compromise only smooths out a problem without really dealing



with it. She encouraged people to go for option 4: sharing power as a way to come up with an answer that relies on insights from all sides to solve the conflict. She described this approach as the difference between forcing your choices on other people by having *power over* them – and sharing power with other people by having *power with* them so that everybody wins.

Lisa VeneKlasen and Valerie Miller expand on these ideas in their book, *A New Weave of Power, People, and Politics: The Action Guide for Advocacy and Citizen Participation*:

You can choose to use **power over**: where you coerce someone to behave in the way you want, or you can choose **power with**: where you find common ground across people of different interests, or **power to**: where you look within yourself for the knowledge and abilities you already have, and **power within**: which may be the hardest to do but so important to living in an ethical society – the ability to recognize your own self-worth while respecting someone else's different point of view or values.

## Empowerment

Since we're talking about power, let's look at the idea of empowerment and what it means to "empower someone." It is a bit of a buzzword. Many people say it, but it's not so clear how it is supposed to work.

### How do you give someone else power?

Perhaps the most useful way to think about empowerment is the concept of *power with*. What do you think you could do to work alongside people who may not feel powerful – what strategies could you set up – so that they could start to feel that they do have some power after all? You can start by thinking of these things:



Learn more about Bertolt Brecht  
<https://tinyurl.com/h427uvs>



Watch *Brecht in Theory* — Helene Weigel on *Epic Theatre* (1989) <https://tinyurl.com/ya4u26t6>



*What resources — either knowledge or actual stuff — would help them have more control over their own lives, and how can they get access to those resources?*

*How could you set up opportunities for them to take steps toward getting what they want?*

*What are the particular ways that you could offer them support in the work they need to do to claim their own power?*

*And, considering the purpose of this book and this chapter, how could you use performance to do any or all of these?*

## Performance as Power

### Bertolt Brecht

Bertolt Brecht was a German playwright, theatre director, and poet who did most of his work from the 1920s to the 1950s. In Brecht's view, people with the most power set up systems (or they rely on systems already set up) that will benefit them at the expense of everyone else. He felt that working people simply gave away their power when they assumed the status quo was “just the way life is.” Brecht was a communist who believed that the best way he could empower people was to create plays that got everyone to realize what was actually going on around them. If they could only see it as it really is, they wouldn't accept the status quo any more: they would claim their power. During Brecht's long career he wrote and produced many plays, often in collaboration with the women in his life. He was inspired by theatre directors like Erwin Piscator from Germany and Vsevolod Meyerhold from Russia, and was always experimenting with new ways of doing plays. He called his approach *Epic Theatre* and the techniques he invented and refined have profoundly affected the way people think about theatre (and also movies) to this day.

Brecht wanted an audience at a play to have the same kind of attitude toward what they were watching that people have at a sports event.

If you are watching a hockey game, you don't think, "Oh, it's so sad that the goalie let the puck through. I guess it is just the tragic fate of this team to lose." More like: "Hey, what's the matter with you? Didn't you see it coming? You should have blocked it! You could have blocked it if you tried a little harder! And you – the rest of the team – how the \*%# did you manage to let the puck get that far? That's just wrong!" Can you imagine doing this at a play? Brecht wanted these same kinds of thoughts going through audiences' minds when they see one of his shows. They see how things really are and get outraged. Then when they go back to their regular lives they begin to see how things really are in the world and start to take action to change it.

*Change the world, she needs it.*

Bertolt Brecht

### Who gets to be in charge?

Once upon a time there were actor-managers in theatre who held all the power. One of the most famous of the actor-managers was the 19th century British impresario Sir Henry Irving, who oversaw the design and building of the sets and lighting, chose the actors in his theatre company, directed the shows, and played the lead roles himself.

Sir Henry lived in a time when it was common for one person to make all the decisions in artistic creation, but times have changed. Although there are still plenty of theatre directors who hold the reins of power, there are many theatre companies in Canada and around the world that use an approach called collective creation or devised theatre.

With this approach, the actors and directors and writers, sometimes also the designers and administrators together decide what kind of plays they want to do and they share responsibility for creating them. There is no one system or formula for how to write and produce a performance with equal input from everyone in a group. Instead of an emphasis of one person as the genius artist, the power to create is spread among all the contributors.



Sir Henry Irving by Samuel A. Walker (1883). Public domain. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Henry\\_Irving#/media/File:Henry\\_Irving,\\_tragedian\\_-\\_Weir\\_Collection.jpg](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Henry_Irving#/media/File:Henry_Irving,_tragedian_-_Weir_Collection.jpg)



Learn more about *Collective Creation*  
<https://tinyurl.com/y9bzbrbx>



Image from *The Farm Show* production at 11 Trinity Square, photographer unknown (c. 1972).

When you consider how many people it takes to create a performance event like theatre, it makes sense to empower all the people in the group.

In the early 1970s, Toronto's Theatre Passe Muraille (Theatre Without Walls) tried something radical. The company of actors and the director left the city one summer to live in the farming community of Clinton, in southwest Ontario. They volunteered working on the farms and they asked the people of Clinton to tell them about their lives – what was important to them and how they saw themselves. From all those conversations and from the actors' experience of helping out with the chores in the haylofts and fields, they created a play they called *The Farm Show* under the guidance of director Paul Thompson. They performed it first in a livestock auction barn in Clinton, and then toured it to other auction barns around the country and in theatres in Canada and Great Britain. It was an enormous success and became a model for collective creation in Canadian theatre from then on even though, at the time, the actors were more or less making up their collective creation process as they were doing it. The script was mostly written by improvisation based on the actual words and stories the actors heard from the people in Clinton.

You can see how the old model of a director having *power over* the other people in the theatre company changed to everyone in the company having *power with* each other. This includes shared *power with* the local families who contributed their stories and songs and trusted that the actors would treat what was shared with respect. *The Farm Show* also presents an example of how theatre can support *power within*. In this case, it supported power within the audience. The whole project honoured the wisdom and insights and life experiences of the people it was being performed for.

The play worked like a mirror that reflected back to the audience a sense that they – the audience – had lives that were interesting, vital, valuable, and worth celebrating.

It's important to mention that before *The Farm Show*, almost all the plays produced in Canada were scripts from the US, England, and France. Here at last

was a play about Canadian people talking with Canadian accents. Theatre Passe Muraille company member Ted Johns was responsible for writing the script. He later commented, “No one anticipated the delight people would take in hearing their own language and observing their own culture.”

The challenge is more or less the same for any group project: How do you make sure that people's ideas are heard and valued and that you draw out the best in everyone?

Ideally, the group itself starts in a position of power as a group. This means that instead of individuals coming up with their own tactics for how to get what they want, the group works together to come up with a strategy designed to make sure, as much as possible, that everyone gets what they want.

We've looked at collective creation in general as one way that performance can play a part in sharing *power with* people. *The Farm Show* offered an example of how performance supported *power within* for the people in the audience. Let's now look at an example of how performance can offer support for people to have *power to* achieve something. *Search for Common Ground* is an organization based in the Democratic Republic of Congo. They use participatory theatre performance as a productive and creative way to offer a voice to Congolese villagers.

These performances generate the possibility for some positive interactions for people who are used to experiencing unjust and violent confrontations.

The theatre work done by Search for Common Ground in the Democratic Republic of Congo is similar to what is known as Forum Theatre, developed by Brazilian theatre practitioner Augusto Boal. He was a political activist as well as a theatre practitioner, and Forum Theatre is just one of a whole range of different exercises and forms of theatre he called *Theatre of the Oppressed*. In the late 1960s and early 1970s, Boal started experimenting with all sorts of ideas for how to use theatre and performance in ways that would reveal the realities of oppression in people's lives – how power in society affects them.



Image from first *Farm Show* production at Ray Bird's barn, photographer unknown (1972).



To see a video about Search for Common Ground (2008) <https://tinyurl.com/ybxalxev>



There are lots of books full of different working methods and approaches to collection creation and theatre devising. Here are some of them:

- *Devising Theatre: A Practical and Theoretical Handbook* by Alison Oddey (1994)
- *Strategies for Playbuilding: Helping Groups Translate Issues into Theatre* by Will Weigler (2001)
- *The Alchemy of Astonishment: Engaging the Power of Theatre* by Will Weigler (2017)
- *Making a Performance: Devising Histories and Contemporary Practices* by Emma Govan, Helen Nicholson, and Katie Normington (2007)
- *Devising Performance: A Critical History* by Jane Milling and Deirdre Heddon (2005)
- *Collective Creation in Contemporary Performance* by S. Proudfit (Ed.) (2013)
- *Collective Creation, Collaboration and Devising* by Bruce Barton and Ric Knowles (2008)
- *The Frantic Assembly Book of Devising Theatre* by Scott Graham and Steven Hoggett (2009)
- *Theatre for Community Conflict and Dialogue: The Hope is Vital Training Manual* by Michael Rohd (1998)
- *Staging Social Justice: Collaborating to Create Activist Theatre* by Norma Bowles and Daniel-Raymond Nadon (Eds.) (2013)

In the opening pages of his autobiography he describes a woman, a housemaid by profession, who had performed in a festival of the Theatre of the Oppressed. Boal writes that when she realized that with her performance, she had gone from an invisible housemaid with no voice, to someone with a voice who was heard – a person, with thoughts and feelings that an audience had spent time with and seen – she began to cry. It is a moving example of how performance can share power simply by creating a space that acknowledges a person's existence.

### Theatre of the Oppressed Terms and Definitions: Joker

In the *Batman* Universe, The Joker is a psychotic criminal mastermind. This is a very different kind of Joker! Think of a deck of playing cards. The Joker is not one of the hearts, clubs, spades or diamonds: it's the one card in its own unique category. Jokers in Theatre of the Oppressed performances are a little like that, they are neither an actor in the play nor a spectator in the audience. They're in their own category somewhere between the two. In Forum Theatre the Joker talks to the people in the audience, explains how the idea works, invites them to be part of the performance onstage, and later stands at their side gently challenging them to think through the experience they had out loud. The important thing about Jokers in Theatre of the Oppressed is that they are not like theatre directors who coach people on how to be better actors. Jokers always put their own opinions aside and support people to find their own *power* to find solutions themselves, and to find *power within* their own personal knowledge and experience to come up with useful, innovative ideas.

### Forum Theatre

This is one of the most well-known forms of Theatre of the Oppressed. Actors create and perform a play that demonstrates real-life situations in which one or more people get hurt by others and by the social circumstances they are in. The situation gets worse and worse until it reaches a crisis and that's where the play stops. Then the Joker, who has explained ahead of time how the show works, tells the audience that the actors will start the play again from the be-

ginning and this time, if anyone in the audience sees a way that one of the characters could do something different that would make the situation safer and less harmful, that person can shout “Stop!” and the action will freeze. Then the person from audience gets to come up on stage, tag out the actor who has been playing that part, and switch places with them. The scene continues, the new person tries out the idea, and at the end of the scene, everyone takes a pause and the Joker invites the volunteer to talk about what happened – how it worked out and why it did or didn’t succeed. The actors then pick up the play where they left off and continue with the play until someone else shouts “Stop!” (or they can go back to the same scene if someone from the audience wants to try a different tactic).

One of the rules in Forum Theatre is that the person from the audience can’t take the role of the character in power who is harming someone else and just magically turn them into a nice person!

The challenge is to figure out what tactics someone can use when they don’t have power.

David Diamond is a Vancouver BC-based theatre director who has produced Forum Theatre plays for many years. Instead of *Theatre of the Oppressed*, he calls the work he does *Theatre for Living*. He believes that people are usually hurtful toward others because of something that has happened to them in their own lives. Instead of thinking of them only as oppressor bad guys who need to be stopped, we need to look at the big picture and stop the systems and situations that hurt everyone.

### Other ways to perform power

In her 2005 book, *Utopia in Performance*, Jill Dolan writes about another way of empowering audiences. She describes plays and solo performers that rely on performance to show life the way we sometimes wish it could be: full of hope and possibility. It’s as if these plays gave the audience a sneak peek at what the world would be like if everyone actually lived the ideal of creating “power with” each other. These actors or characters behave toward each other with care and



Learn more about David Diamond’s *Theatre for Living* approach for performance  
<https://tinyurl.com/y9qgk8pr>



love sometimes against all odds. The word Dolan uses to describe this is *communitas*, which is a term she got from an anthropologist called Victor Turner. It is a word you will often see come up in performance theory. *Communitas* is the thrill of excitement people have when they feel that they are truly a part of a group.

What she calls a utopian performative is one more way to empower an audience through performance — by showing on stage what could be, and offering a space to imagine the possibility that any of us could live like that if only we were willing to try.



Read excerpts from Jill Dolan's book *Utopia in Performance* (2005) <https://tinyurl.com/yao2jhvg>

One of the examples that Dolan describes in her book is a play she once went to see with her family in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. The show was called *The Chief*, which was the nickname for Art Rooney, the man who started and owned the Pittsburgh Steelers, an American football team. Dolan grew up in Pittsburgh and a lot of her family lived there, and they were all big Steelers fans. In fact, her great uncle used to be an announcer for the team. She writes that she was the only person in her family who had never been to a Steelers game, but she loves theatre and went with her family to see the play. It was a one-man show — only one actor on stage the entire time. His name was Tom Atkins and he played Art Rooney. He spent the whole hour and a half-long show impersonating Rooney, talking to the audience about the history of the Steelers and about life in Pittsburgh. He talked about what it means to a town to have a team to root for, and also what it means for a team to have a whole town that believes in them. So here's the utopian performative part: as Jill Dolan sat there in the theatre, she felt surrounded by people on all sides who felt they were all part of a family of Steelers fans, and that this was important and something to feel good about. During the ninety minute performance, the whole audience seemed to feel connected with each other as if they were all one big family, and they were proud to be part of it. And it happened because one guy stood on the stage and told stories in a performance. It was a powerful feeling, shared by everyone.



Queer Canadian artist Jordan Tannahill keeps inventing new ways to create edgy and amazing performances that matter to people. One of his plays was performed not on a stage, but streamed live for free on the internet for five days. It's called *rihannaboi95* and it was inspired by Tannahill's own experience as an adolescent and teenage boy. The play is designed to look like the actual video posts of a 16-year-old called Sunny who is hiding out in his friend's bedroom. He talks openly about his life as a queer teenager, what he faces from the bullies at school and from his family, and about how his life changed when his dancing and lip-synching to Rihanna songs on his blog went viral.

*rihannaboi95* might look like any other YouTube videoblog but Tannahill says it is different. He calls it "web theatre" because it was originally streamed as a performance in real time online. He got word out about the online show to Toronto high school teachers, LGBTQ youth groups, local outreach programs at Toronto theatres and media outlets. The idea was that anybody with access to a computer could see the show for free from wherever they were in the world in the privacy of their own space.

One of the ways that Tannahill empowers audiences through his play is called *giving voice*. When a play enables the audience to witness a character or characters inspired by real people who are usually ignored or silenced, that performance lets their voice(s) be heard. That means something. It says to the world, these voices are important – they have something important to say. And if you are one of those people who has been ignored or silenced, seeing people who are like you on stage/in a performance being validated by audiences is empowering. So as a performance creator, you can put your own voice out there and can collaborate with others to put their voices out there in public.

■ You can perform power by giving voice.



Watch *rihannaboi95* (2013)  
<https://tinyurl.com/y7d8kryn>



Cardboard Citizens is a British theatre company that  
 gives voice to homeless people  
<https://tinyurl.com/y82y527u>



Learn more about Keith Johnstone and The Loose Moose Theatre Company in Calgary  
<https://tinyurl.com/y74547cg>



Watch this video *How to Stop a Bully* (2014) that uses status to undermine the bully  
<https://tinyurl.com/y7aag6nf>

Now try your own improvisation based on what you learned.

## PERFORM



Keith Johnstone, is the founder of The Loose Moose Theatre Company in Calgary, Alberta. He believes improvisational theatre is especially interesting and fun to watch when the characters try to get power over each other. In his books *Impro*, and *Impro for Storytellers*, Johnstone has lots of exercises that are great for developing communication skills, releasing creativity and, most importantly, learning how characters shift their power in performance. He calls them “status” exercises because the power, or status, of the characters in the improvised scenes keeps changing as both people try out different tactics to raise their status or lower the other person’s status. These improv exercises are very fun to do and even though they are usually very funny and exaggerated, they are an excellent way to develop your sense of how people in real life make use of tactics to raise their status (or lower other people’s status). They also teach us that no behaviour is without some form of intentional power. When you perform these improves for an audience, they can work in the same way that Brecht’s plays work: the audience starts to see how tactics are used to get power and later they’ll be able to recognize it happening in their own lives.

Remember, power is created in the interactions between people. It is shared, sloshy, shifty, and never neutral. Both characters have the power to influence each other. Your job is to reveal it as you improvise in performance.

### Columbian Hypnosis



This game created by Augusto Boal actively demonstrates what it feels like for someone to have **power over** you.

To play this game, everyone finds a partner. One person is A and the other is B. A “hypnotizes” B by placing her hand a few inches from B’s face. B must follow A’s hand while keeping the distance equal at all times. With using any words, just the hand in front of B’s face, A commands B into all sorts of shapes and positions: up, down, back and

forth. Then A and B switch so that B has the power with a hand in front of A's face. Another variation on this game (and a good example of one person to have power over many) is to have A hold out both hands and "hypnotize" two people at once.

After everyone has had a turn at being both the "hypnotizer" and the "hypnotized," gather in a circle to reflect on how power was shared and/or not shared in these activities. How do your muscles feel? Are you tired or sore? What felt harder: sharing power or having power over someone?

### **Push NOT to Win**

This is another Boal game. Work in pairs. Stand facing with an imaginary line between the pairs. Hands are placed on each other's shoulders and they begin to push against each other. The object is to maintain their position without crossing the line. Each person must gauge the strength of the other's body sometimes supporting their weight and sometimes pushing against it. Another variation would be to start at a sitting position, back to back, and slowly move into a standing position keeping your backs touching. Or place your shoulders together side by side and try to keep a seesawing motion going. Like the status improv and the game Colombian Hypnosis, this exercise gives you a tangible sense of what it means to share power. You can feel the shift between yourself and your partner as your body moves from strong positioning to supportive positioning. The goal here is to have a physical memory of what shared power feels like.



In social and environmental justice movements, when people gather to rally or march together in solidarity in protest or in support of a cause, they often rely on the power of social media and broadcast media to gain more support from all the people who are watching from the sidelines. The sheer number of people who show up can convince observers that the cause is important, as well as hearing what the speakers say. Another significant tool for getting allies is the signs people carry.



Here's the powerful story behind the Pussyhats at the Women's March (2017). Read this story to see how women performed their solidarity in a huge protest against the Trump presidency  
<https://tinyurl.com/yc7tobpb>

Check out the Online Toolkit of resources put together by ArtBridges <https://tinyurl.com/yc6rc7j4>

Scroll through and see if you and your team can find one you can apply to a project you want to try.

Also look at the Arts Practice & How-To  
<https://tinyurl.com/ychedkk23>



*When you think about the marches or rallies you've seen (or joined) were there signs people carried that won you over or made you even more committed?*

*Were there signs that turned you off or turned you away?*

*What makes a sign (or a chant) effective? Is it humour?*

*Is it a powerful picture or a compelling analogy to the problem? Is it a well-crafted statement?*

As an exercise, decide as a group what movement you feel strongly about. If you have seen or taken part in rallies or marches for this cause, list the signs you've seen there (in person or on the internet or TV), that made a big impact on you. Now create your own signs (using words and images) that you feel would be effective to win allies to your cause. Share them with others in the group and be prepared to explain to people outside your group what tactics you were using to win people over.



ArtBridges is a not-for-profit organization based in Toronto that connects people who are interested or active in community-engaged arts across Canada. They have loads of online resources for how to use art and performance to build connections between people in communities. A lot of the resources are designed as ways for people to share power through the arts. Pick an arts-based activity that will achieve one or more of these goals:



*What resources — either knowledge or actual stuff — would help them have more control over their own lives and how can they get access to those resources?*

*How could you set up opportunities for them to take steps toward getting what they want?*

*What are the particular ways that you could offer them support in the work they need to do to claim their own power?*

Considering the purpose of this book and this chapter, how could you use *performance* to do any or all of these?

Find a copy of Augusto Boal's book *Games for Actors and Non-Actors*. It's full of activities that are all based on supporting power with and power within. Choose some of the activities that are particularly interesting to you. Learn how they work and then hold a workshop where the people in your group take turns leading the workshop participants in these different games. Afterward, discuss with the other facilitators and with the participants how it felt and what you learned.

### How can you shift power?



As a group, think of some examples of an individual or organization or group that tries to exert their power over us. For ideas, do a Google image search for "Adbusters" [see sidebar]. Once you have collected some good examples, identify what they are relying on to try to make us accept that they are powerful. Now start coming up with some ideas for how you could subvert their power. Take the best ideas you come up with and invent a way to create a performance with your ideas, either on stage or in real life (for example at a mall).

**What can be done to subvert the messages of power pushed upon us through advertising and propaganda?**

Take care not to damage property in this activity. Instead, think of temporary ways to subvert power messages, such as using sidewalk chalk on the pavement. Or performance-based actions that are there and then gone.



Check out excerpts from Augusto Boal's book *Games for Actors and Non-Actors*, Routledge (1992)

<https://tinyurl.com/ya9zqzjj>



*Adbusters* is an activist magazine that encourages readers to engage in "culture jamming." The 2011 Occupy Movement was inspired by culture jamming.

Take a look at the kind of subversive images *Adbusters* creates, often based on existing advertisements, corporate logos and slogans

<https://tinyurl.com/jbea8pm>



Read this article about how a German town shifted the power status against a neo-Nazi protest group (2014) <https://tinyurl.com/zudywfq>



# Performance as identity/ Identity as performance

## Kathy Bishop



When I was a teenager, I spent a lot of time in the woods by a river questing and dreaming. I wondered, “Who am I?” And I dreamed about who I would become. I dreamed glorious dreams full of possibilities and promise. After high school I was at a crossroads: Should I become a social worker or go into theatre? The truth is that

I didn’t feel brave enough to go into theatre. I became a counselor with at-risk youth. In treatment centers in both England and Canada, I worked with a range of youth: those who were abused, those who were violent with others, those who slashed their own wrists, those who were gang members, those who were teen prostitutes, those who were survivors living on their own since they were just kids, and those who were teen moms. All of them were looking to make better lives for themselves. I used performance and artistic activities as a way to help them explore and express who they were,

and who they were not — when they were on their own and when they were around others. Over the years, I stayed open to where life was taking me and where I was taking my life. As I dedicated myself to becoming the person I wanted to be, I identified who I am in many different ways: a social worker, a counselor, an executive director for a non-profit agency serving youth, a business consultant, an executive director of a chamber of commerce, an adult educator in the community, a university professor, a woman, a daughter, a sister, a wife, a mother of two amazing young men, a Canadian of Scottish/European descent, a yogini, and an Ironwoman triathlete. Also, some twenty years after my high school days, I found that bravery I didn’t think I had and returned to the stage as a performance artist and theatre-maker. I completed a PhD combining Applied Theatre, Educational Psychology, and Leadership Studies. Through it all I discovered that people ultimately all want the same things. Whether in the backstreets or in boardrooms or classrooms, we all want to be happy, we want to feel we belong somewhere and we want to be fulfilled. How we make this happen is up

to each of us. Richard Bach, who is one of my favourite authors, once wrote:

The simplest questions are the most profound. Where were you born? Where is your home? Where are you going? What are you doing? Think about these once in a while, and watch your answers change.

– Richard Bach,

*Illusions: The Adventures of a Reluctant Messiah*

As I have thought about these questions over the years, my own answers have changed.

*We are the stories we tell ourselves.*

Filmmaker Shekhar Kapur



Watch Shekhar Kapur's TED talk (2009) about identity <https://tinyurl.com/j6vxok7>

---

This chapter is about identity, and the relationship between identity and performance. As you ask yourself questions about who you are, I want you to know that you are not alone. Performance gives you – gives all of us – a space where we can see how connected we really are to each other. The stories that we tell ourselves about who we are – and the stories that other people tell about us – shape us, both individually and collectively. Performance offers us a way to look deep into these stories, to explore possibilities of who we are becoming and to write and rewrite the stories that we tell ourselves. It is a place to try out and perform different roles and aspects of our identity. It is a place for personal dreaming and social dreaming and making a difference. Performance offers us a space to quest together.



## Identity as Performance

### How does Performance Identify?

As we consider how we perform identity, it's helpful to break it down to three parts. One part of our identity is *what we do*. Another part of our identity is *what we are*. And another part of our identity is *how we make sense of the world* that we are born into. For the sake of simplicity, we can call these three aspects of our identity *doing*, *being* and *making meaning*. Let's start with doing. It can sometimes be obvious who you are just by looking at the social role you play in your family, or in class, or in a club or organization, or at your job. What you do in those places, and what you do in relation with those people, is an expression of the kind of person you are. Do you get involved in political activism to change the world? Do you spend most of your time reading on your own or playing video games with friends? You can also think of what you do according to mythic archetypes. Are you a trickster type of person, or a visionary artist or poet, or are you an adventurer? No matter what it is, what you *do* is part of who you are.

Your identity is also linked to being. Part of who you are is what you are, such as your gender, your culture, and your body. It is also what you think and feel. What you think and feel shapes the image you put forward to the world through your personal style, and how you interact with your physical environment and your larger connection to the planet.

Finally – and this can be a challenging aspect of identity to understand – part of who you are involves the very individual way that you try to figure out what life is all about. When you are looking for answers about your purpose in life and dreaming about what will make you happy, do you listen to your heart and spirit, or do you think it through with your mind, or do you take clues from your body? Maybe you rely on a combination of these. Also, important to consider is what might be some of the ways that the people in your life impact the way you make sense of the world. For example, do you pride yourself being part of a certain club and so dress in a certain way or hang out with a certain group of people because of it? We all have different ways of going about the process of making meaning in our lives. The particular way that you choose to

know the world is part of your identity. All of this adds up to how other people see you.

People “read” our identity through their interpretations of what they see us doing, their interpretations of what we look like to them, and how we appear to be making meaning in the world.

In this way, “performance” identifies us.

### How might Identity Perform?

Identity isn't something that defines us; we define our identity and we do it by making choices about how we want the world to see us. Canadian sociologist Erving Goffman wrote a book called *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*. His theory was that we perform ourselves pretty much the same way that actors perform characters. When we're around other people, he wrote, we show everybody the version of us that we want them to see. Of course, in a theatre there is a backstage where the “mask” comes off.

Goffman pointed out that when we are by ourselves or around certain people we trust, we sometimes drop the public part of our identities — the mask — and allow a different part of ourselves to be seen.

However, British cultural anthropologist Victor Turner moved the focus from how a person acts in real life to analyze real life in terms of social drama. Performance theorist Richard Schechner was a good friend of Victor Turner's. These theorists help us to start thinking about how we are performing identity by thinking about how we present ourselves at any given time.

### Performativity

While it is interesting and valuable to think of all the different ways we perform in our everyday lives and in our interactions with others, there are also times when people literally make performances about themselves. Canadian scholar Sherrill Grace writes about what she calls performative auto/biographics. If an



Watch a BBC Radio 4 series on Erving Goffman and the Performed Self (2015)

<https://tinyurl.com/ztd8jp3>



Watch Richard Schechner talk about social drama (2012) <https://tinyurl.com/ybe5gxbu>



Learn more about performativity

<https://tinyurl.com/y8gcqq4r>

autobiography is what someone writes about her own life, and a biography is what someone writes about another person's life, then Grace's performative auto/biographics is what someone writes and then performs about her own and/or someone else's life, possibly weaving both together in a single performance.

The writer/performer puts a version of her life in front of other people as a way of saying, "This is who I am."

She deliberately constructs a version of her identity according to the way she wants people to see her and she performs it herself on stage. There is a word for how identity is constructed and performed. The word is performativity.

Sherrill Grace explains that while many Canadian plays can be called performative auto/biographics, they take different forms. One person may deliver a monologue spoken by a single character, or may take on the persona of two or three or many more characters in a single performance. A play may be exclusively about the story of the person who is performing himself or herself, or it may include multiple personas, possibly different aspects of the same person as different characters. In her book *Autobiography and Performance*, theatre scholar Deirdre Heddon writes that autobiographical performance is a "performance of possibility," meaning that in the process of making and presenting a play about who you are, you are also performing who you are becoming. In another book, *Performing Autobiography*, author Jenn Stephenson agrees with Heddon. She believes that autobiographical performance is not about documenting what happened to you in the past.

Theatre is such a powerful medium that you can use performance to re-invent the story of you: your past, present, and future.

Performative auto/biographics provides a space to explore possibilities of who we are and who we are becoming – to write and rewrite the stories we tell to ourselves and to others.



Get a copy of Sherrill Grace's book *Theatre and AutoBiography* (2006) <https://tinyurl.com/ycpakwd7>



Read excerpts from Deirdre Heddon's book *Autobiography and Performance* (2008)

<https://tinyurl.com/y88nylm4>

&

Jenn Stephenson's book on *Performing Autobiography* (2013) <https://tinyurl.com/y7bfmmbv>



Check out TJ Dawe's *Totem Figures* interview with Steve Dawson and some of his podcast interviews <https://tinyurl.com/yahzffzq>



Learn more about *Performance Art* <https://tinyurl.com/y84yc44m>



Learn more about the Dada literary and artistic movement <https://tinyurl.com/6lk9epj>



Learn more about Allan Kaprow and *Performance Art 101: The Happening* (2012) <https://tinyurl.com/ya263m57>  
& <https://tinyurl.com/ybsnzdkg>



Listen to Kaprow explain *How to Make A Happening* (1966) <https://tinyurl.com/yqcppnmu>

TJ Dawe, one of Canada's most renowned autobiographic performers, is an excellent example of performative auto/biographics. He looks at patterns within himself and connects them within a larger social context. He wrote a show, *Totem Figures*, "about the idea that we're all the main character in our own life story spinning out our own epic adventures, creating our own mythology with everything we do and every choice we make ... connecting people, places, fiction, music, influences ... stories we keep coming back to for a good chunk of our lives again and again ... being on a hero's journey." He then started interviewing people about their Totem Figures.

### Performance art

Another term you will come across is performance art. Often described as NOT theatre, performance art moves away from the concept of creating a play with characters and a plot to communicate meaning to audiences. Instead, performance artists tap into a different realm of communicating through engaging in everyday happenings. Their experimental performances might express identity by focusing attention on time and place, emphasizing ordinary or extraordinary things happening right now, right here with *these bodies*. The origin of performance art can be traced back to July 14, 1916 in Zürich, Switzerland when an art movement called Dada was born. The Dadaists were fed up with traditional ways of thinking about art. With a wicked sense of humour and a serious plan to change society, they wanted to turn the old art world of reason and logic upside down.

Fast-forward to the late 1950s and early 1960s when American Allan Kaprow invented what he called "happenings." These were partly planned and partly improvised unpredictable live art events that often involved interaction between the artist/performers and the audiences. Art was essentially seen as anything done consciously. Peeling an orange or banana intentionally could be art. Kaprow said that, "The everyday world is the most astonishing inspiration conceivable. A walk down 14th street is more amazing than any masterpiece of art."

Around the same time, George Maciunus (Mach-oh-nas) founded Fluxus (meaning "to flow"). It was an international movement of artists with a dream/plan of creating art for everyone, not just for art critics and so-called

experts. Performance artist Yoko Ono was part of the Fluxus movement. She married John Lennon and on their honeymoon they “performed” a Bed-In by staying in bed all week as a protest for peace. They did it first in Amsterdam and then for another week in Montreal. They invited newspaper, television and radio reporters from around the world to come talk to them in their hotel room. It was while they were in bed at the Queen Elizabeth Hotel in Montreal, that they wrote and recorded the song *Give Peace a Chance*.

Yoko Ono was not the only woman in the Fluxus movement. She and artists like Carolee Schneeman and Shigeko Kubota experimented with performance art that focused on the female body to make bold critiques of how women were treated unequally in a male-dominated society, and even within the Fluxus art collective itself.

Performative auto/biographics and performance art are some of the ways that you could choose to perform identity either on your own or with others.

### Why Perform Identity?

When you perform yourself you are putting forward a story that says: this is who I am. Often you tell the story of yourself that you want people to see. This doesn't mean you are making things up. We all have so many different parts to ourselves that any performance about self-identity is simply highlighting certain parts of yourself.

*I am embodying the different selves that I have been, but I filter them, I transform them into some kind of fiction.*

Performance artist Marie Brassard

When you think about it, if everyone is always giving out signals about who they are whether consciously or unconsciously, there is nothing fictional about choosing what parts of yourself to feature. Ronald J. Pelias who writes about performativity, put it this way:



View John Lennon and Yoko Ono's *Bed-In* (1969)  
<https://tinyurl.com/y8zzjmv3>



Learn more about performance artist Marie Brassard  
<https://tinyurl.com/y8cutt92>

*The search for form requires more than anything else, the maneuvering of self, sometimes putting the self forward, sometimes holding the self back, sometimes testifying, sometimes sticking to the facts, sometimes using fiction to tell the truth.*

Ronald J. Pelias, *A Methodology of the Heart: Evoking Academic & Daily Life* (2004)

<https://tinyurl.com/y8btc6mb>

In this section, we'll take a look at the crossovers between the idea of “everyday you” performing your identity, and the idea of “performance you” presenting the story that you deliberately create to express what it is about yourself that you want to be seen and heard.

### **Who is in charge of your story?**

After Richie Wilcox became a celebrity as a finalist on *Canadian Idol*, he discovered that his version of who he was got away from him. Being on a TV show meant that the producers were in control of presenting his story to the viewers. They skipped right over the fact that he'd had quite a lot of experience as a theatre performer and instead they described him in the promo videos as an assistant deli manager. That was true, but it was just his job, not necessarily the way he would describe the defining aspect about his life. The TV producers, who believed it would be more exciting for the viewers to tell the story of this ordinary guy turned into a big star overnight, created the character of “Richie Wilcox” by emphasizing the part of his story they wanted to tell.



*Can you imagine someone else being in charge of telling your story — explaining who you are?*

*What piece of your life might a TV producer latch onto and make into the story that they think defines who you are?*

*Would you have a problem with that?*

**Who is your audience and what do you want from them/for them?**

Up to now, we've been focusing on the stories that performers want to present about their identities. What about the audience? They are a significant part of the equation and so I invite you to ask what the *gift* is in your performance. What will they get out of your performance? Do you want to challenge the way the audience thinks about something? Do you want them to have a particular kind of experience? Do you want to inspire them to take action and if so, what action?

What risks are you willing to take, and by risks I mean what if you put your identity out there and people don't like it?

Adrian Howells was a Scottish performance artist who specialized in one-to-one performances. In these pieces, Howells was interested in the connection he could make with one audience member at a time. Examples of these performances include: *Salon Adrienne* (in a hair salon, during which Howells would wash your hair and ask questions about memories and thoughts on aging); *Held* (during which Howells would ask permission to hold you while discussing various topics); *Foot Washing for the Sole* (Howells washed your feet and engaged you in a discussion). In this risky work (for both artist and audiences), Howells remained interested in creating spaces where people could have a few moments of genuine connection.

*My motivation for making confessional work was the sense that within mass-media culture, what people sought was a genuine connection. Rather than contributing to the deafening 'white noise', an alternative performance strategy might be to carve out other spaces, modes of connection other than the spoken exchange, other forms of the dialogic. In a noisy culture like mine, silence rings out loudly, offering another place to 'be' or to become: to reflect, to imagine, to project, to re-connect – with self and others and other selves – through the unique relationship of a quiet, considered, one-to-one encounter.*

D. Heddson & D. Johanson (Eds.), *It's All Allowed: The Performances of Adrian Howells* (2016)

<https://tinyurl.com/yapbav75>



Watch a two-part interview with performance artist

Adrian Howells (2010)

Part 1 <https://vimeo.com/18162606>

Part 2 <https://vimeo.com/18162810>



Listen to Thomas King speak about *The Truth About Stories* (2003) <https://tinyurl.com/lsvtp8x>

You are the person in charge of the story you want to tell about yourself. And yes, it can be risky. I love what Thomas King has to say: “stories are wondrous things. And they are dangerous.” King writes about First Nations’ world views. He says it is worth being careful about the stories we tell. For me, this is not about hiding our stories or sugar coating or downplaying the seriousness of the problems and issues we are addressing. It is about recognizing that any story you put out into the world for all to view can be seen as the story that defines you. In one sense, then, our stories become etched in stone. So my invitation is for you to think through the stories you want to tell about yourself.

Take time to craft your story carefully so you don’t wind up accidentally falling into stereotyping yourself or others.

Make sure you are confident that your performance says what you want it to say so that if others react badly and judge you, you remain rock solid in your belief that you stand by the performance you give.

### What aspects of Identity do you want to perform?

*One is not born a woman; one becomes a woman.*

French feminist and writer, Simone de Beauvoir

American feminist, Judith Butler, has a theory about performativity that might seem surprising at first, but it makes perfect sense once you think about it. Butler believes that being a man or a woman isn’t just a matter of biology. She says that we perform our gender like we perform other parts of our identities. People have an idea of what a woman does that makes her feminine: the way she walks or talks or moves her hands, or the thousand little ways she relates to people. Those “rules” for how a woman behaves will change as she gets older. Do you have an idea in the back of your head about how a little girl should behave, compared to a seventeen year old, or a woman in her thirties or in her sixties? People do typically have expectations about each age. The same is true for expectations of what a man does that makes him masculine. Butler points



out that none of this is built in to our operating systems at birth. We simply pick up on all sorts of cultural and social clues throughout our lives about how we are expected to perform our gender.

We learn what people of our gender are supposed to do and we do that — we make it part of our daily lives, and we learn to expect other people to perform their genders too.

All the little details in what we do add up to how our identities are constructed and performed, which brings us back to the word *performativity*. Judith Butler says that “we act as if being a man or being a woman is actually an internal reality, or something that is simply true about us — a fact about us. Actually, it’s a phenomenon that’s being produced all the time and reproduced all the time. So to say that gender is performative is to say that nobody really is a gender from the start.” What happens, though, when some people don’t meet other people’s expectations of how they are “supposed” to perform their gender? Some people are more comfortable performing aspects of gender associated with the opposite sex, such as how they relate to people, or how they move, or their tone of voice. Depending on the situation, performing one’s gender against expectation can lead to bullying, harassment and even threats of violence. As a university professor and social activist, Butler fights for the rights of those who do not fit into mainstream society’s ideas about what “normal” is supposed to look like. It gets very interesting when you realize that as a performer you have it in your power to consciously disrupt people’s unacknowledged assumptions about gender performativity.

### Intersectionality

Another concept you’ll want to know when it comes to performance and self-identity is Intersectionality. Basically, intersectionality is about the fact that who we are and how we relate to the world is the direct result of the unique mix of all the different individual aspects of us intersecting. We’re each like a unique cake, made up of a certain combination of ingredients. A couple of small changes in the recipe would probably only make a small difference in the cake



Watch Judith Butler speak about *Your Behavior Creates Your Gender* <https://tinyurl.com/l72fqta>

– but they would make a difference. If there are major changes we would turn into a whole different cake, or something else altogether.

Intersectionality deals with aspects in our lives like our gender, culture, age, language, birth order, body features (hair, eye colour, weight), sexual orientation, economic and social status, where we were born, where we've lived (geographically and the kind of housing we've lived in) and on and on.

Each of these aspects of identity play off each other and they are dynamic, meaning as one changes, the others shift around too and our sense of who we are changes. For example, one aspect of who I am – how I identify myself – is Kathy the performance artist. My sense of what it means to be a performance artist is absolutely influenced by the fact that I am also a mother, a married heterosexual woman, white, well educated, and physically fit. When I was a 14 year-old high school student who weighed 200 pounds, the formula that combined to make me who I was then was very different than it is today. As you think about performing identity, it's useful to recognize and even make an inventory of all the aspects of yourself that intersect to contribute to your own understanding of who you are. This is your palette.

### Performance as Identity

Next, I will introduce you to some performers who not only play with performing gender, but also play with performing intersectionality, body, culture, community, and ecology.

### Margaret Dragu: Intersectionality meets performance

One of Canada's first performance artists, Margaret Dragu is based in Vancouver, British Columbia. Her art rises out of her identity and everyday life experiences as a working-class mother, feminist, and political activist.

Dragu is known for taking on different personas. She is Verb Woman, Lady Justice, and Nuestra Senora del Pan. As Verb Woman, Dragu explores verbs – various everyday actions to understand what it means to be human – such as sleeping, driving, shopping, and cleaning. In her 2014 public art project called



Learn more about Intersectionality

<https://tinyurl.com/ofzejo2>

“Mending,” Verb Woman walked the streets of various cities, including Vancouver, where she mended (hemmed, patched and/or sewed buttons onto) the clothes of those in need. Dragu explained: “I believe that mending is a form of healing. Repairing a hem can be the first step to mending a broken heart.” For every button she sewed on someone’s clothes, she also sewed a button on her own clothes. She fashioned her coat after the button-covered suits of London Pearlies. London Pearlies are members of an organized charity who wear pearl button suits to collect money and draw attention to fundraising efforts to help the poor. She called the buttons on her coat “button stories” and shared the stories of those she helped. As Lady Justice, Dragu bears witness. For several years after the 1989 Montreal Massacre at L’Ecole Polytechnique, Lady Justice would annually perform salt and wine rituals to remember the 14 young women who were randomly killed by a gunman who declared a fight against feminism. Also as Lady Justice, Dragu re-enacted her own version of John Lennon and Yoko Ono’s Bed-In. In that performance, she invited people into bed with her to talk about sex and intimacy. Her persona Nuestra Senora del Pan (Our Lady of the Bread) celebrates the domestic and the peasant. In her performance “Rising,” Nuestra Senora del Pan, makes bread for eight hours. Dragu says, “For me, the ritual of making bread is a celebration of peasant life. Bread takes time. Bread never comes out the same way twice. Bread requires you to be at home. Bread fails if you rush it. Bread sometimes fails for no reason at all – it is mysterious.” In this way, Dragu brings together her way of doing, being and making-meaning.

### Marina Abramović: Performing body

Another important performance artist who consistently creates art with her own body is Marina Abramović, a Serbian performance artist based in New York. In the 1970s, when she met West German performance artist Uwe Laysiepen (known as Ulay), they formed what they called a “collective being” to explore ego and artist identity. They performed as a “two-headed body” known as “the other” and collaborated on many projects. One of their best-known projects was called *The Lovers: The Great Wall Walk* (1988). Starting at the opposite ends of China’s Great Wall, the two walked towards each other and met in the middle



Learn more about *The Many Faces of Performance Art Legend Margaret Dragu* (2013)  
<https://tinyurl.com/y6w7pnsu>



Read Emma Brookes’ interview with Marina Abramović for *The Guardian* (2014)  
<https://tinyurl.com/yagbruh8>



Read more about the *Great Wall of China* project (1988/2008) <https://tinyurl.com/ycfa3qun>



Watch Marina Abramović talk about trust, vulnerability and connection (2015) <https://tinyurl.com/zkawzwj>

as a way to end their relationship. Although the audience was not present, the performance was a powerful expression of love and endings.

In 2010, at the Museum of Modern Art in New York (MoMA), Abramović performed *The Artist Is Present*. This was a 736-hour performance piece that took place over a period of three months. In the middle of one of the museum's galleries, she sat in a chair at a small table facing an empty chair. People would take turns sitting in the chair across from her looking without speaking. She did this from the time the museum opened until the time it closed (7 hours a day, 6 days a week). She did not stop to eat or go to the bathroom. Pop singer Lady Gaga went to see *The Artist Is Present* and was so moved by it, she told her fans that they had to go. Abramović said, "The public who normally don't go to the museum, who don't give a crap about performance art or don't even know what it is, started coming because of Lady Gaga." By the end, more than 1,400 people had sat in silence across from her, and experienced a profound way of communicating.

Performing for over forty years, and with her own Institute now, Marina Abramović continues to "explore the relationship between performer and audience, the limits of the body, and the possibilities of the mind."

A project in the United Kingdom called Take a Second Look created a video to experiment with the idea of how people might talk to each other without the instant attitude that starts up when we first check out each other's appearance. They introduced strangers to each other for some conversation, but before they met each other, both people were blindfolded. The blindfolds only came off after they'd talked for a while.

You can watch the experiment *Do You Judge a Book by Its Cover?*

<https://tinyurl.com/y7x9fvts>



*Can you imagine creating a performance that destabilizes people's quick and automatic habit of making judgments about other people based on physical appearance?*

*How might you perform identity in a way that says to the audience: My body and appearance is part of me, but there is more to me than that?*

### Monique Mojica: Inspiration from cultural forms

Based in Toronto, theatre artist Monique Mojica is from the Kuna and Rappahannock First Nations. She grew up around theatre: her mother Gloria Miguel and her aunts Muriel Miguel and Lisa Mayo were founding members of New York's Spiderwoman Theater, the oldest and longest running Indigenous feminist theatre group in the world. Monique Mojica works as an actor in film, television and on stage. She is also a playwright, and co-creates plays with other people. For several years she worked with a team of Indigenous and non-Indigenous collaborators to research and develop a theatre performance that would apply Indigenous understanding and ways of knowing to the process of writing a play. The group called themselves the Chocolate Woman Collective because the play they came together to write was going to be called *Chocolate Woman Dreams the Milky Way*. Mojica, her mother and her aunts invited all the other members of the Chocolate Woman Collective to join them in finding inspiration in the traditional art made by their peoples. In the country now called Panama in Central America, the women of Kuna Yala make molas: colourful panels on cloth skilfully designed with embroidery, appliqué and reverse appliqué.

The molas tell stories about Kuna identity. Woven into the designs are stories about the way that the Kuna people see the world and the way they understand how the universe works.

Mojica explains that when Kuna women turn their molas into blouses and wear them, it is said that these women are “walking stories.” To create a play that would express what it means to be Kuna, the Chocolate Woman Collective followed the lead of the approach to playwriting that Spiderwoman Theatre had been doing for decades. They challenged themselves to invent ways of making a play based on how molas express stories, rather than based on the ways that Western/European writers look to plot or characters. Molas were their palette.



Watch an interview with Monique Mojica — Actor, Writer, Chocolate Woman Collective (2014)  
<https://tinyurl.com/y7g8meum>



Learn more about the Chocolate Woman Collective (2007 – ) <https://tinyurl.com/yccmvp97>



To learn more about Anna Deavere Smith's process, I encourage you to watch this six minute video — *How are Language and Identity Connected* (2012) — of her talking about how she approaches her work as a performer <https://tinyurl.com/y8lycmad>



The play that made Anna Deavere Smith famous was called *Fires in the Mirror*. It is her one-woman show about a riot that took place in the Crown Heights neighbourhood of Brooklyn New York. Search for the recording on YouTube.

### Anna Deavere Smith: Performing a community

Anna Deavere Smith is an American actor, playwright and a professor of performance studies. She has a gift for being able to play men and women of all different cultures – and really transform herself into each person on stage. Years ago she started creating a series of plays called *On the Road: A Search for American Character*.

Her quest: to make plays that would capture the identity of particular places and times in the United States.

She goes to places where some serious defining event happened, and interviews people who lived through it. She videotapes the interviews and then watches and listens to them over and over until, as a performer, she can reproduce exactly what each person said and how they said it. Different people have different opinions and sometimes they directly contradict each other. When she puts them all together, performing each person one after the other in her one-woman shows, the audience starts to get the big picture of what happened. In one interview she says there is much more to performing identity than repeating the words people say. She listens for the sounds of their voices – the pauses, the emphasis on certain words, and the musicality of their voices. She says that when people talk about something that is important to them, it's almost as if they are singing. Not really singing, of course, but their voices take on a rhythm and that rhythm in their speech is what she reproduces in her performances along with the words they used.

Smith goes on to describe the difference between what she does as a performer to capture a person's identity compared to someone who impersonates people. She says that a mimic – someone who does impressions – copies gestures or phrases that the person they are mimicking does repeatedly. If you imitate those things, the audience will recognize the person being imitated. Smith looks for the repeated gestures and phrases that a person does, but she keeps her eyes and ears open to notice when the person she is interviewing does something that is definitely NOT what they always do. That's what she pays attention to and studies because that is what lets her start to understand

what's important to this person. She wants to make her plays about what is important to the people she interviews.

### Performing Ecology and the Canadian Community Play movement

*Canadian community plays and their associated projects ... embrace a huge diversity of arts disciplines: from theatre arts to music, from opera to video productions, from shadow plays to clown, from sewing to ceramics, from murals to performance art, from quilts to processions, from feasts to celebrations. They are multi-faceted, multi-disciplinary, interdisciplinary and very exciting.*

Savannah Walling, Founder and Artistic Director of Vancouver Moving Theatre

When you hear the word “ecology” it’s easy to think about the environmental movement. But “ecology” can also simply mean how organisms relate to each other and to what’s around them. That’s the sense of the word that is meant when we talk about performing ecology. Over the past 25 years, there have been theatre artists and theatre companies all over Canada who have collaborated with people in their communities to create plays about the identity of the places where they live and what those places mean to them. Now known as the Canadian Community Play movement, it began in the late 1980s when Dale Hamilton, a playwright and poet from Ontario, spent some time in Great Britain learning first-hand about these kinds of projects. She returned to her family’s home in Eramosa Township near Guelph and started a theatre project there, bringing together people from around her community to be part of a play called *The Spirit of Shivaree*.

Adding a Canadian twist, the show was performed outdoors and the audience followed the actors around. The idea caught on and two years later theatre artists Rachael Van Fossen and Darrel Wildcat started a project in the Qu’Appelle Valley of Saskatchewan that let hundreds of people – both Indigenous and settler – meet, learn from each other, then create and perform a play about the history of the Calling Lakes area – the town of Fort Qu’Appelle and the 16 reserves. Their show, which was also performed outdoors, was called *Pa’Ko’Pi’-*



Learn more about *The Spirit of Shivaree* (1992)

<https://tinyurl.com/yb3ncolp>



Watch a short documentary called *Documenting Engagement: A Community Artists Institute* (2004)  
<https://tinyurl.com/ydhpb47a>



Learn more about Savannah Walling and Terry Hunter's initiative <https://tinyurl.com/yat394r5>

*Ci'Wak* or *The Gathering*. The idea gathered momentum and before long theatre artists in British Columbia were making plays in partnership with their communities about the places where they lived. In the town of Enderby in the interior of BC, Cathy Stubington, a theatre artist, collaborated with First Nations Splitsin historian Rosalind Williams to lead hundreds of people from the town and the Splitsin reserve in making a play about their history called *Not the Way I Heard It*. That show inspired Savannah Walling and Terry Hunter, two Vancouver-based theatre artists, to collaborate with people living in Vancouver's poorest neighbourhood to create a play about the lives of the people there. It was called *In the Heart of a City: The Downtown Eastside Community Play*.

These are just a few of the arts projects that have happened and are happening all over the country — in fact all over the world — where the intention of the work is to capture the identity of a place and its people.

The artwork or the performance gives people a way to show what it is that makes their home unique and valuable — what connects the people to that place and to each other, and what that place means to them. The task for theatre artists who are interested in performing ecology is to find a way to collaborate with others to turn their connection to the place where they live into an exciting work of art that brings that connection alive for an audience.



**(“Otesha” is a Swahili word meaning “reason to dream.”)**

From 2002 until 2015, Otesha began as a grassroots initiative combining sustainability, biking adventures and theatre to become a national youth-led charitable organization. Youth from all across Canada came together to travel by bicycle while learning more and performing plays about ecological sustainability and social justice. The bike tours ranged from one to two months and each tour covered between 1,000 to 1,500 kilometres. Cyclists would visit approximately 22 communities on each tour, performing for over 4,000 people. For 17 good years, Otesha operated a total of 39 cycling and performing tours throughout Canada, with over 500 tour participants in all, reaching more than 160,000 audience members along the way. They even expanded into the UK, Australia and the Philippines. Theatre for social change was at the heart of many Otesha performance tours, opening dialogue with their audiences on issues that matter, such as:

- How can both Indigenous and settler people share this land justly?
- Where do our cellphones come from?
- Who grew the ingredients in my lunch?

*The Otesha Project* (2015) <http://www.otesha.ca>

**Performing personal narrative: Spoken Word**

The chances are that you know something about Spoken Word and the power a spoken poem can have to bring to life the story of who you are and how you experience the world. This is performing identity at its most basic. And it is a form that anyone can tap into. Poetry readings and poetry slam/competitions where poets read or recite their original work can be found around the world or can be organized anywhere. The Canadian Festival of Spoken Word has become the flagship event for poetry slam in Canada.

Metis poet and artist-activist Moe Clark asked her audience these questions when she gave a talk about Spoken Word, performance narrative and traditions of circle singing at TEDx Montreal:

- *What drives your heart racing?*
- *Who inspires your soul to sing?*
- *What helps you get up in the morning?*



Watch The Otesha Project's YouTube channel

<https://tinyurl.com/y7f76gkg>



Read more about the Spoken Word Canada initiative

<https://tinyurl.com/yc5gv6d4>



Learn more about Moe Clark

<https://tinyurl.com/y8vfawh6>



Check out Moe Clark's inspiring 18-minute talk *What Keeps You Alive?* (2012)

<https://tinyurl.com/ycsdybmx>



CBC's Fifth Estate did a documentary on Ashley's mistreatment, mental health issues and suicide while she was incarcerated (2010)

<https://tinyurl.com/nbcnm56>



Read about the Waterloo theatre project (2014)

<https://tinyurl.com/y8ep8moz>



Ashley Smith's prison death is the subject of a new one-woman play by Judith Thompson. Read more about it (2015) <https://tinyurl.com/ybw8ncna>

### Performing someone else's story because you believe it must be told

*Imagine being 15 years old and throwing crabapples at the mailman. You are arrested and sentenced to a youth detention center. At the center, you resist and act out so they put you in solitary confinement. You are incarcerated for three whole years, and for two years and three months of that time you're kept in solitary confinement. When you turn 18, they move you to the adult prison system. They keep moving you around from one cell to another and one prison to another. You are moved 17 times in less than one year. You finally end it by killing yourself while guards watch.*

This is Ashley Smith's story and it happened in Canada.

In October 2007, Ashley Smith strangled herself with a strip of cloth inside her solitary confinement cell at the Grand Valley Institution for Women in Waterloo, Ontario. Her family sued the Correctional Service of Canada for negligence and in 2013 a jury decided that because the guards saw her do it and didn't do anything to stop her, Ashley's death should be considered a homicide.

Andy Houston, a theatre professor at the University of Waterloo, watched the documentary when it was shown on television. It affected him deeply. He saw how Ashley struggled with mental health issues and in his job as a university teacher, he'd witnessed students he cared about also dealing with mental health related problems. He imagined how any of them – his students or his sons – could have been in Ashley's shoes. Houston invited performance artist Melanie Bennett to work on a theatre project with him and his 28 drama students around Ashley Smith's story that they later called *From Solitary to Solidarity*.

Melanie Bennett, a graduate from the University of Waterloo, went on to specialize in auto-ethnography – similar to what Sherrill Grace would call performative auto/biographics. Houston and Bennett invited more artists into the project, including multi-media artists. The project participants intertwined the biography of Ashley Smith with the students' encounters with issues of mental health – their own stories or their personal responses to the stories of people they were close to. Professor Houston felt that allowing students the opportu-

nity to contribute their autobiographical voices to the play, “seemed an effective way of examining how our multiple layers of experiencing mental health, through the context of Ashley’s story, might connect us all.” Working together, they created a multi-media theatre performance, interactive exhibit, and public symposium that led them to be able to open a conversation about the issues of mental health with their audiences. The project gave participants a complex and dynamic way to tell an important story that had happened to someone else and yet was also extremely important to them. Performing identity gave them and their audiences a way to make a difference.

*Ahem.*

*Yes.*

*What about you?*

*Me?*

*Yes. How are you performing identity?*

## PERFORM



Let me start with a wide-open invitation to you. Working on your own or as part of a group brainstorming session, draw on your creativity to invent an interactive art installation or performance of some kind that invites people to express something about their identity. Perhaps it incorporates ordinary objects, or images from magazines, or selfies of participants, or single words or phrases written on paper or rocks or anything at all. Give viewers/audience members/participants something they can do that lets them respond to the questions:



*What shows who I am?*

*What shows what I am?*

*What shows what I do to make sense of the world and other people?*

And also, remember how this chapter started.

*Performance gives you – gives all of us – a space where we can see just how connected we really are to each other.*

So create your interactive art installation or performance in a way that gives people a way to connect their answers about themselves with other people's answers about themselves. Are there overlaps, similarities or big differences? How can you make those overlaps, similarities or big differences visibly tangible through your interactive art installation or performance?



Remember the quote from Allan Kaprow:

*A walk down 14th Street is more amazing than any masterpiece of art.*

Find a place where you can build a performance about that place. Perhaps, it's a hallway in your school, or out in a community park or, I have even seen performances done on the fire escape of a six-storey building. Any place you pick will already have a sense of identity based on how that place expresses the identities of the people who spend time there. In a brainstorming session with others in your group, design a series of events that you can make happen as your audience takes a walk in that place. What will you set up that will give them a deeper appreciation of the identity of that place and what makes it unique according to:

- What people who spend time there do
- Who they are
- How they make meaning of the world.

Use your interactive art installation or performance to show what it is that makes this place unique and valuable – what connects the people to that place and to each other, and what that place means to them. The task for theatre

artists who are interested in performing ecology is to find a way to collaborate with others to turn their connection to the place where they live into an exciting work of art that brings those connections alive for an audience. How can you create a performance that does this? How can you involve people in the audience so that they become part of the experience? Make it so that the performance relies on the people in the audience who walk through it. As you work on this activity, remember some of the invitations I gave you earlier:



*What about the audience? They are a significant part of the equation and so I invite you to ask what the gift is in your performance.*

*What will they get out of your performance?*

*Do you want to challenge the way the audience thinks about something?*

*Do you want them to have a particular kind of experience?*

*Do you want to inspire them to take action and if so, what action?*

*What risks are you willing to take, and by risks I mean what if you put your identity out there and people don't like it?*



Remember the project in the United Kingdom called *Take a Second Look* where they introduced strangers to each other for some conversation, but before they met each other, both people were blindfolded? The blindfolds only came off after they'd talked for a while. The idea was to experiment with how people might talk to each other if they didn't have the instant attitude that comes when we first check out each other's appearance.

As a follow up activity, what other performance or interactive art installation can you invent that will destabilize people's quick and automatic habit of making judgments about other people based on physical appearance? How might you perform identity in a way that says to the audience: *My body and my appearance is part of me, but there is more to me than that?*

## 136 CHAPTER SIX

Why not try this same experiment yourself? Set up a time and a place where you can invite people to have a conversation with a stranger while blindfolded.



Watch *Do You Judge a Book by Its Cover* (2015) to refresh your memory of how it works

<https://tinyurl.com/y7x9fvts>



Ask yourself the questions that Moe Clark asked her audience in Montreal:

- What drives your heart racing?
- Who inspires your soul to sing?
- What helps you get up in the morning?

Use your answers to create an autobiographical performance like Deidre Heddon describes: a “performance of possibility,” meaning that in the process of making and presenting a play about who you are, you are also performing who you are becoming. Don’t forget how Jenn Stephenson encourages you to use performance to re-invent the story of you: your past, your present, and your future.

Remember my advice from before:

Think through the stories you want to tell about yourself. Take time to craft your story carefully so you don’t wind up accidentally falling into stereotyping yourself or others. Make sure you are confident that your performance says what you want it to say so that if others react badly and judge you, you remain rock solid in your belief that you stand by the performance you give.

# Performance as everyday life/ Everyday life as performance

**Colleen Clement**



Growing up in Michigan, I learned how hard life can be witnessing just some of Mother Nature's magnificent performances: blizzards, tornados, ice storms, thunderstorms and lightning, subzero temperatures, suffocating humidity, droughts, and flash flooding, not to mention mosquitos and

biting black flies. Throw in an economy utterly connected to a fickle auto industry, and, well, it could be tough for a family just to get to the end of a day. Finding the positive side of things was definitely a survival mechanism. Since I loved the challenge of a good game, I learned to create games out of mundane, everyday tasks in order to make things interesting to me.

I'd involve a range of performance elements, especially anything athletic and artistic: feel the rhythm, test abilities, develop skills, find new possibilities and

perspectives, and, above all, make it as enjoyable as possible whatever the limitations of the situation. Dad needs help in the early morning shoveling an overnight 3-foot dump of snow? Let's see how many driveways we can clear before the neighbours get out of bed. Incorporating the performance of chores, efficiency, flow and rhythm, fresh air, responsibility, kindness, speed, and strength all in one game helped take quite a bit of the sting out of what would have otherwise pretty much been seen as a bitterly cold, pre-snow blower scenario.

Just as all games have their own set of rules and limitations, the variety of situations we come across in our everyday lives can have their completely different terms of play, too, each with its own unique performance demands. Just think about the number of roles and duties you perform each day at home, school, and work. While I wasn't conscious of the concept of performance studies when I was young, I began to figure out that a society operated through this incredible mix

of everyday performance roles and regulations, formal and informal, written and unwritten.

This game performance angle applied to school, too. Why write another essay on paper when I could get a couple of friends to help develop and perform a suspense thriller radio show? I mean, I simply learned more and remembered more when I engaged all of me, not just my head, in some sort of performance process.

To survive each day, I learned not only how and when to perform my various roles and duties, but to perform them well, and most of the time without question which I discovered later in life can lead to both positive and negative outcomes. It depends on whether you like the status quo or decide to question it. But I'm jumping ahead a bit.

---

### Performance as Everyday Life

In life we often measure our performance by the big – a graduation, the championship match, the history-making world event, or even buying a house. However, in this chapter, we're going to focus on the small – the ordinary, day-to-day, journey-through-life particulars.

I'd like to create a space for noticing without judgment, shame, or comparison to others – a means to simply take notice of our everyday performance activities and decisions.

What happens when we start to look at every aspect of our lives, no matter how seemingly boring or mundane, as a performance choice? Could an exploration into the simple everyday roles and tasks challenge our notions of self and our impact on our communities? Could the *small* actually be *huge* in the



grand scheme of life? While many people have played with questions like these, let's take a look at just a few of the individuals whose study of the everyday helped pave the way for Performance as Everyday Life as a formal academic field of study.

### Henri Lefebvre

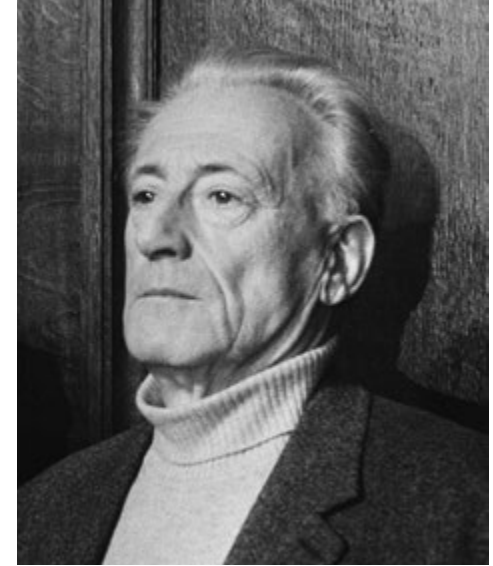
In 1947 theoretician and philosopher Henri Lefebvre [pronounced On-ree Le Fehv-rah] wrote *Critique of Everyday Life* as part of a series of writings to more closely examine some of the original ideas behind Marxism, such as injustice in social class and economic labour.

Lefebvre saw that workers who do not own what they produce, do not have a say in how a business is run, and do not share in the profits are bound to feel disconnected — or alienated — from their daily work.

The end result of this kind of alienation, for Lefebvre, is that commodities or products are valued more than the people who produced them. With alienation of the common worker as a primary focus, it's not surprising that Lefebvre chose to take an up-close and personal look into the common, the everyday life. To him, you couldn't truly understand the impact and consequences of a society's economic and political decision-making *without* trying to understand the *entirety* of human existence.

This meant going beyond generalizations about ordinary individuals or groups. Lefebvre needed detailed portraits of the ordinary, everyday actions and activities of everyday people. He needed to look beyond the wealthy, powerful rule makers.

Lefebvre brought to light the idea that everyday life is as much of a performance as a piece of theatre is. His work helped establish the importance of understanding the seemingly trivial everydayness of experiences and the performances of everyday life. Soon after his work was published, studies about everyday life began to prove more and more valuable to a wide variety of occupations, including historians, sociologists, ethnographers, journalists, and artists, just to name a few.



Henri Lefebvre, photographer unknown (1971). CC-BY-SA 3.0. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Henri\\_Lefebvre](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Henri_Lefebvre)



Learn more about Erving Goffman's theories in *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (1956)  
<https://tinyurl.com/kp3uyj6>

This reminds me of a trip I took to the Mayan ruins in Mexico. I signed up for a guided night tour of an ancient city to learn about its history. As I was seated at the top of an outdoor arena, a spotlight hit an area of the city and voices came over the loud speaker. But instead of hearing the typical list of famous names, dates, and landmark accomplishments, I heard conversations about everyday things like a woman buying food in the market or a father worried about a boy who's been paying too much attention to his daughter. Every time the light hit a different part of the city, they played a different conversation. Covering everything from getting in trouble at school to worrying about a traditional ceremony, it got me out of the historical trivia mode so I could see a 3000-year-old history as real, living people with everyday concerns just like me. It was totally unexpected and fabulous. It was also a bit unsettling because it highlighted how easy it is to judge and separate ourselves from the cultures we read about in history books. I mean, how much have motivations for performing everyday life really changed for us today?

### Erving Goffman

In 1959 Erving Goffman examined what motivates us to communicate with, connect to, and control perceptions of others in our daily lives. In his book *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* he highlights how many times the lines between theatrical performances and our daily life performances get pretty blurry, if not erased altogether.

In exploring how we represent ourselves on stage, Goffman started to question whether or not we might, in fact, *always* be performing. In order to maximize our advantage and control the impressions we make in any given situation, could we always be choosing between different ways to perform ourselves? Goffman went even further to ask what it means to present our authentic self to anyone, including ourselves. By questioning the small everyday actions and portrayals of self, he helped open up a huge field of study.

**Ágnes Heller**

In her 1984 book, *Everyday Life*, Hungarian-born philosopher Ágnes Heller outlined a theory of everyday life. Similar to Lefebvre, her motivation sprang from examining the political and economic ideas in Marxism, which was experiencing a renewed popularity in the 1960s. Heller's work impacted a variety of fields by reminding us that, far from being simple, the everyday is actually really complex. On the one hand, certain types of activities need to become repetitive and ordinary for us to be successful in our everyday lives. For example, can you imagine what it would be like if you had to come up with a new way to get out of bed or to get ready for school each morning? On the other hand, we must also be able to come up with new ways to navigate the ever-changing social customs that go along with each new situation we find ourselves in, like adapting to a new school or job environment or relocating from the country to the city.

To Heller, everyday survival depends on our ability to generalize and repeat daily patterns, as well as our ability to challenge those generalizations and the status quo in order to move up or evolve to the next higher stage of living. She describes our daily existence in modern society as “a battle with the world's sharp edges.”

**Michel de Certeau**

In 1984, philosopher and scholar, Michel de Certeau [pronounced Mee-Shell de Sir-toe] explored the power structures in a society through the lens of the everyday in his book *The Practice of Everyday Life*. De Certeau looked at the routine ways in which everyday consumers bend the rules and creatively get around what he saw as strategies to control imposed by the rule makers – the producers or institutions of power. You can read more about de Certeau in Chapter 6 on Performance and Power.

**Richard Schechner**

In other chapters you have read about one of the founders of the field of performance studies, Richard Schechner. In his 1985 book *Between Theater and*



Read excerpts of Richard Schechner's book *Between Theatre and Anthropology* (1985)  
<https://tinyurl.com/ybecvhw3>



Read excerpts from Richard Schechner's book  
*Performance Studies: An Introduction* (2002)  
<https://tinyurl.com/ya5qjzsd>

*Anthropology* he provided an extensive look at the performance of rituals throughout the work. In this work, he distinguishes between two main areas of performance theory: all human behaviour as a type of performance and the artistic performance as a type of personal or social interaction.

Schechner questions the traditional definition of performance knowledge and the boundaries between specialized performances and everyday performances.

For example, who is to say that an actor's performance begins and ends when the curtain goes up and comes down? While that's certainly one way of looking at it, this traditional definition of performance might not be nearly big enough to encompass all that goes into performing.

*Schechner says, think about what happens after a performance is over in theatres everywhere in the world. The actors, dancers, or singers probably go out and celebrate with food and drinks and partying. They share the stories of what they've just gone through together and what's coming up next for them. The show may have taken a lot out of them and the partying is their way to restore their energies or maybe they are so jazzed from having done a successful show, they have to let that energy out. Either way, they are still performing at the after-party.*

In 2002, Schechner wrote *Performance Studies: An Introduction*, a university-level curriculum guide. In a section on performing in everyday life, he asks the readers about the difference between performing in “real life” and acting on a stage. He examines a variety of everyday situations by highlighting their theatrical and dramatic elements. Think about what you see and hear in a courtroom. There are some pretty specific roles and codes of behavior and dress/costume required in the courtroom to convey authority that aren't required outside of the courtroom, right? There's a very specific seating or set requirement, too. There are essential props like the gavel signifying a call to order or the end of a scene.

It can be a really powerful shift in perspective when you allow yourself to look at all human interaction as a form of performance.

Most of daily living is taken up by performing job, professional, family, and social roles. Each of these, in every culture, comes equipped with ways of behaving and interacting. Everyone masters to some degree or another the social codes of daily life. Rebels intentionally break the rules; revolutionaries want to change them permanently.

Richard Schechner, *Performance Studies: An Introduction*

### Everyday Life as Performance

Now we are going to take a look at some contemporary explorers of performance as everyday life whose creative offerings may or may not come from a formal education position.

I can't possibly cover everyone whose practices involve performance as everyday life. So, I'd like this section to serve as an invitation for you to explore further on your own.

I've tried to provide a cross-section of the very different ways you can approach this concept, highlighting any performances that might specifically interest young adults. Again, these examples are just the tip of the iceberg, so to speak.

### Performative Writing

Scholar and author Ronald J. Pelias uses a variety of writing techniques, including performative writing and poetry, to understand and reflect upon his daily experiences and interactions with the world. For example, through an almost absurdly detailed analysis of the simple task of ordering lunch at a Panera restaurant, Pelias cleverly reveals the extent to which everything in our everyday life could be considered performance, going way beyond the standard assumptions and generalizations.



Read excerpts from Pelias' book *Performance: An Alphabet of Performance Writing* (2014)  
<https://tinyurl.com/yboo8agq>

*Before entering Panera I stop to blow my nose (Performance of Personal Maintenance). I believe some might object to such a display of bodily functions in an area for dining (Performance of Respect). My wife, Mimi, waits until I'm finished (Performance of Patience). Once inside, Mimi and I fall in line to wait our turn to order (Performance of Civility). We read the menu posted on the wall above the cash registers (Performance of Capability), sometimes moving a bit out of line to make the words on the wall come into clearer focus. We signal we know our place (Performance of Politeness). As we approach the register, we greet one of the Panera servers who has taken our order many times before: "Hi, Cole. How are you doing?" (Performance of Friendliness).*

Ronald J. Pelias, *Performance: An Alphabet of Performative Writing*



*21 Balançoires, Promenade des Artistes (21 Swings)* by art\_inthecity (2011). CC-BY-NC-SA 2.0  
[https://www.flickr.com/photos/art\\_inthecity/5705672586](https://www.flickr.com/photos/art_inthecity/5705672586)



Learn more about *21 Balançoires (21 Swings)*, a special project by Daily Tous Les Jours (2011-2014)  
<https://tinyurl.com/olsovrdr>

## Community Arts

Community artist, disability culture activist, and scholar Petra Kuppers spreads messages of disability awareness and justice by creating public performance projects that highlight people's experiences of exclusion from so-called "normal" performance spaces. For example, she calls attention to the challenge of navigating stairs and public transportation when a person has some physical limitations. These performances allow communities to witness, experience, and meditate upon issues of access to public spaces in order to challenge our everyday habits of thinking. Showing this in performance is highly effective because it isn't just hearing someone talk about an issue – it's the total embodiment of it.

Performance has the ability to help the gut understand things that the mind alone often overlooks.

In 2011, design group *Daily Tous Les Jours* gave the city of Montreal a community art installation that, while definitely on the light-hearted side of things, is having a significant impact on those who visit the

downtown in the spring each year. The installation 21 Balançoires (21 Swings) contains 21 multicoloured full-sized swings, each connected to its own system of sounds that change depending on how high you swing. Without words or speeches, this piece of art inspires complete strangers to sit and swing together creating music. It is a reminder of the importance of the performance of harmony in our daily lives.

### Connecting People

Playwright and performance artist Darren O'Donnell along with his theatre company Mammalian Diving Reflex use a variety of performance genres to promote social awareness and activism throughout the Toronto area. They have a particular interest in engaging youth and involving them in the community at large. For example, O'Donnell trained a group of 5th and 6th grade students from the Parkdale Public School to cut hair, a basic activity. Then O'Donnell and the students went out into the community to meet people and perform/offer free haircuts to anyone who needed them. *Haircuts by Children* is just one example of the many creative projects by O'Donnell and his company that have been presented at various festivals throughout the world. These projects consciously connect communities through unexpected performance opportunities that allow us to reconsider our perceived everyday roles and responsibilities.

Another example of engaging people through performance of the everyday is the *Jane Jacobs Walk*.

The Center for the Living City, a nonprofit organization with offices in New York and Utah, helps urban communities throughout the world come together and thrive by organizing community walks in honour of Jane Jacobs.

Having lived most of her life in New York City and Toronto, Jacobs was a community activist who believed that everyone in a community matters. However, she felt that communities were falling apart because people didn't seem to know their neighbours anymore. They seemed to hang out either in their



*Haircuts by Children* by John Lauener (2006)



Learn more about Mammalian Diving Reflex and the *Haircuts by Children* project at

<http://mammalian.ca/projects/#haircuts-by-children>



Learn more about Jane Jacobs and her initiative

<https://tinyurl.com/y8zs3btm>



Learn more about Richard Renaldi's *Touching Strangers*, Aperture Foundation (2007-)

<https://tinyurl.com/y9f75lyt>



Watch the ways in which Liz Lerman has answered the question *Who Gets to Dance?* (2012)

<https://tinyurl.com/ycumdq5b>



Learn about Liz Lerman's "Art and Community: Feeding the Artist, Feeding the Art" in Chapter 3 of *Community, Culture and Globalization* ed. Don Adams and Arlene Goldbard (2002)

<https://tinyurl.com/yazbyqto>

homes or in their cars, making it really easy for outside interests to come in and take over neighbourhoods. So, even though urban communities are very complex environments, Jacobs started to bring people together by organizing one of the most basic types of daily performances – walking through your neighbourhood. This simple performance act helped people notice the details of their surroundings, a way of reintroducing them to their unique environment and community members. Today the *Jane Jacobs Walk* program can be found in more than 70 cities throughout the world.

Photographer Richard Renaldi takes a totally different approach to exploring how we connect with people on a daily basis with his *Touching Strangers* project. Since 2007, Renaldi has been hitting the streets in towns and cities all over the United States, asking complete strangers of all ages to pose together for traditional family portraits, which is a lot more difficult than it may first sound. This activity requires a complex negotiation of comfort zones physically and emotionally (think performance boundaries) in order to create a pose that is normally reserved for more intimate relationships. While initially pretty reluctant and uncomfortable, participants say that the entire photo session, from the introductions to the resulting portrait, makes for a completely life changing experience. It takes away the distance we normally create between the strangers we encounter daily, allowing us to see ourselves and our interactions through a new lens. Through the Aperture Foundation, Renaldi continues to engage everyday people in this unexpected performance of human connection.

## Dance

In 1975, dancer Liz Lerman began teaching dance to everyday adults at the Roosevelt for Senior Citizens city-run facility in inner-city Washington, DC. By the following year, she founded the Dance Exchange, an intergenerational company of artists, in effort to create awareness through engagement with dance and connect generations.

Dance Exchange's mission is "to create dances that arise from asking: *Who gets to dance? Where is the dance happening? What is it about? Why does it matter?*"



The Dance Exchange is actively engaged throughout the world, serving as an incubator for research and collaboration. It crosses boundaries, using performance in unexpected ways to explore a huge range of everyday issues that can impact communities, such as the environment, genetic research, human rights, particle physics, and the idea of rest in a fast-paced society.

### Music and musical theatre

As a singer/actress myself, I am drawn to this type performance medium because the scripts often deal with issues of everyday life and the music helps me handle the emotions where I can't find the words. Whether it's happy or sad, inspirational or contemplative, funny or dramatic, music has a way of getting past our defenses, giving us time and space to feel and consider in ways we often don't in our daily lives.

For example, the musical *Quilters* by Molly Newman and Barbara Damashek really had an impact on me, first as an audience member and then as a cast member in a community theatre production. It revolves around the importance of the quilting bee to the survival of pioneer women who lived on the prairies in the American West. The script is based upon the research done by Patricia Cooper and Norma Bradley Allen in their book *The Quilters: Women and Domestic Arts, an Oral History* and features seven female cast members who play multiple roles. With a minimalist set and just a few props, each scene presents a different story of everyday life and represents a patch in the quilt of prairie life.

Each scene has its own quilt and piece of music. In one scene, I was a 5-year-old singing a delightful melody with my sister as we played on our family's windmill. In another, I was a father falling over frozen to death just outside my cabin as I attempted to cover the cows during a blinding blizzard. And in another, I sang a haunting lament about a butterfly trying to fly, while center stage a young woman suffocates to death, lost alone in a sandstorm. The show ends with the raising of a giant quilt comprised of all of the scene patches.

*Quilters* provided me with such powerful performances of everyday life that it made me question the relevance of only reading about big events and dates in



Image from *Quilters* by Dennis Gorsline. Marshall Civic Players production, with Colleen Clement on the far right.



Watch *Quilters* at Lamb's Players Theatre to see how this musical "celebrates the extraordinary, everyday women who settled the West" (2014)

<https://tinyurl.com/ybdbu62e>



Director Heidi Malazdrewich talks about the 2015 Manitoba Theatre for Young People production of *New Canadian Kid* <https://tinyurl.com/ya4fyh7y>



Learn more about Griffin Theatre's production of *Letters Home* <https://tinyurl.com/y9kh7u7t>

school history books. Without the everyday details, can't history easily be taken out of context?

### Theatre

Playwright Dennis Foon decided to tackle the everyday difficulties faced by immigrant students in Canadian schools in his play *New Canadian Kid*. Through the use of physical and verbal comedy, he created an extremely engaging and effective script by adding an unexpected performance twist. Foon had the Canadian characters speak gibberish, which is what any new language sounds like when you're just thrown into it. And he had the immigrant characters speak English, so that the audience could better experience and understand the frustrations immigrants encounter daily. This light-hearted performance approach to a difficult immigrant performance situation made the play so relatable and accessible that it has been produced in theatres around the world, as well as in different languages.

Griffin Theatre Company seeks “to create extraordinary and meaningful theatrical experiences for both children and adults by building bridges of understanding between generations that instill in its audience an appreciation of the performing arts.” With that as its mission, Griffin Theatre took on the very serious subject of war in Iraq and Afghanistan in its touring production of *Letters Home*.

The play uses actual letters from soldiers and their families to create a series of dramatic monologues to reveal the private thoughts of the people serving in a military capacity. Rather than focusing on the politics, the performance provides a candid voice to the day-to-day living concerns, prayers, struggles, and uncomfortable debates over the reasons for war.

The sparsely dressed stage along with the use of spotlights and video backdrops creates a powerful atmosphere to encourage individuals in the audience to consider, question, and reflect on their own. The company always conducts

a post-play discussion for those who choose to stay and participate, adding another layer of performance and/as everyday life to the overall performance.

### Online

Playwright, filmmaker, and theatre director Jordan Tannahill and his Toronto-based company, Suburban Beast, stretch the boundaries of performance by mixing new media, theatre, and documentary to explore issues around queer identity, youth subculture, and suburbia. For example, Tannahill staged his award-winning one-person play *rihannaboi*<sup>95</sup> online. As you read in Chapter 6, the play is about a teenager's daily struggles with the unexpected and uncomfortable consequences of a lip-synching video that went viral. Tannahill performed the play using live streaming on the Internet, allowing people who might not have the ability to get to a theatre to have access to his performance.

In addition to live online viewing, there is a huge market for pre-recorded performances online through sites like YouTube, Vimeo and Vine, covering just about any topic you can think of.

These videos aren't necessarily created/produced by professional artists — many by what you'd call regular, everyday people who are often capturing some silly moment in a day. Some are edited; some aren't. Some are scripted; some aren't.

This brings up a rather interesting take on everyday performance. Not only are people posting short, everyday moments from their lives online (Vine is limited to only six seconds!), but people are viewing them. Many people are spending hours a day surfing through thousands of video choices to view other people's performances of ordinary moments.



*Why are these sites so popular?*

*To spark creativity? To make us laugh? To expose us to worlds beyond our own?*



Learn more about Suburban Beast's performances  
<https://tinyurl.com/ybtkkbyr>



Check out OK Go's video "This Too Shall Pass — Rube Goldberg Machine" (2010) which features everyday objects used in unexpected ways. While it took over 80 attempts to get it in one take, this video takes performance and/as everyday life to a new level, even impacting the meaning of the song  
<https://tinyurl.com/y8hdbody>



Clouds by Bergadder. CCO.

<https://pixabay.com/en/cloud-sunset-colors-light-284688>



Watch Pretor-Pinney's TED talk *Cloudy with a Chance of Joy* (2013) <https://tinyurl.com/yby3rpyj>

*What is the balance point between the performance of watching others and the performance of doing something ourselves? Does there even need to be a balance?*

*Do you have to be a big production company to create your own performance and share it with the world?*

### Nature

One of the best examples I've seen of performance as everyday is a Gavin Pretor-Pinney's TED Talk *Cloudy with a Chance of Joy*. It's about interaction with an everyday performance of nature – clouds. He talks about the number of everyday negative associations we have with clouds, like referencing bad news as a cloud on the horizon and how clouds seem to be our “default doom and gloom metaphor.” He thinks that because they are so common, so mundane, that we rarely really notice them unless they get in the way of the sun.

So Pretor-Pinney founded the Cloud Appreciation Society to remind us of the beauty and wonder that clouds perform in our everyday. He explains the behind the scenes performances of nature that make these clouds, creating a connection between the sky and nature and ourselves.

Clouds aren't something to moan about, far from it; they are by far the most diverse, evocative, and poetic aspect of nature.

He reminds us of the importance of that childhood performance of brilliance and creativity where we allow our imaginations to flow and see images and ideas by simply taking time to look, really look, at the clouds in the sky. Performing this activity forces you to slow down, to calm yourself, and to find moments of joy – a performance of letting go and unplugging from the fast-paced everyday demands of our modern society and just be.

### Everyday settings/Everyday objects

Forklift Danceworks is a dance company, based in Austin, Texas, that has a mandate to create dance projects rooted in everyday life. The company, under the leadership of Allison Orr has carried out projects with many groups of people:

*With past projects in over 20 communities, previous dances have included City of Austin sanitation workers, City of Austin firefighters, Venetian gondoliers, two steppers on the steps of the Texas Capitol, guide dogs and their owners, Austin Symphony Conductor Peter Bay, linemen and electrical technicians from Austin Energy, marching bands from Houston-area high schools and the University of Houston, the Huston-Tillotson University Baseball Team, The Japanese Women's Baseball League (the world's only professional women's baseball league), and most recently, the Urban Forestry Division of Austin's Park and Recreation Department. With a focus on relationship building, our community-engagement process aims to keep the community at the center of our art-making while creating innovative and award-winning art projects.*

ForkLift Danceworks, *Company History*  
<https://tinyurl.com/ybph5rxe>

Puppeteers are masters at observing everyday human movements and behavior and getting their puppets to perform them so they're believable.

Even when only using simple sock puppets, good puppeteers are hyper-conscious of their environments. They examine our physical reactions to situations in such detail, learning the emotional differences of the tiniest of ordinary movements and know exactly when to use them – a smile or a smirk, a lean in or out, a tilt of the head or a bow of the chin, nothing is considered mundane.

**Think about it. To make an inanimate object convincingly come to life, you really have to know what a life looks and acts like.**

There are so many other ways to look at performance and/as everyday life, for example, careers/jobs, physical exercise, and interactions with nature, to name a few, not to mention the ways that crossover into the areas mentioned in the other chapters in this book. While we can't cover everything in this small



For some inspiration on the possibilities of puppetry, check out this clip from a class by master puppeteers Toby Olié and Finn Caldwell of England's Gyre & Gimble (2015) <https://tinyurl.com/ycm7tmyq>

chapter, I think we've looked at enough to let you start investigating on your own.

## PERFORM



Find your own space in the room and have your teacher take you through a 24 hour day, beginning at midnight. Every 20 seconds, the hour moves forward to the next hour. Enact what you may be doing each hour in mime or with sound. Pair up at the end of the activity and discuss the experience.

What is a typical day like for you?

Variations of this activity could be going through your best and worst days. Be sure to keep this lighthearted, focusing on the humour of a very bad day, not going through a traumatic experience again.



Decide on a public place where many people gather (park, beach, fairground, shopping mall, etc.). One person enters the space and begins an activity, in silence. One at a time, join in the improvisation, either connecting with others or doing your own thing. Let the group improv continue for as long as it feels productive. When your teacher calls a freeze, talk together about what you noticed and how authentically you were able to reproduce the sense of an everyday location shared by a community. What potential dramas were occurring? How truthful were they? How might these dramatic and performative moments be developed into an environmental performance piece, perhaps in an actual space like a park or a shopping mall?



The group Improv Everywhere creates performances in public places to bring a sense of fun into everyday settings. Take a look at the company's YouTube site <https://tinyurl.com/28f5wm>



Purchase a copy of *Moss Park* and *Tough!* by George Walker (2015) <https://tinyurl.com/yatxrtrr>

Two very good plays that would work well for this purpose are *Tough!* and *Moss Park* by Canadian playwright George F. Walker. Each play takes place in a public

park, in real time, between a teen couple who are dealing with a pregnancy in the first play and with parenthood in the second.

A variation of this activity is to find a space in your community where it would be possible to mount a performance project. You might need to get permission if using a private space like a shopping mall, but public spaces like parks should be fine. Then, visit this place as an ensemble and consider some monologues or scenes from plays that would work well staged in this space. Create an anthology performance of these scenes and monologues. Capture it on video if you wish.



With a partner, go on a neighbourhood walk in the area around your school. Take notes on what you see and who you encounter on your walk. Pay close attention to possible performance spaces. Engage in conversation with some people you encounter along the way: shopkeepers, seniors, parents with young children in the park (talk to the parents first!).



*What can you find out about them, without being too intrusive?*

*How long have they lived or worked in this neighbourhood?*

*What brought them here?*

*How do they feel about the neighbourhood?*

*What are some issues or some changes they would like to see?*

Then, write a short monologue or scene based on this experience. Perform it in a chosen space in your neighbourhood for the rest of the ensemble.



Think back to Ronald Pelias's description of a visit to a coffee shop as a series of everyday performances. Working in a small group, take a look at this list of possible performances of the everyday:

Aging Plants Music Waste Learning  
 Daydreaming Imagination Sound  
 Grooming Making Vocation  
 Medicine Respect Movement Stillness  
 Nature Crowds Sleep Roles  
 Animals Purchasing Eating Schools Nothing  
 Secrets Behaviour Biology Career Geography  
 Education Creativity Transportation  
 Large Technology Control Wild Vulnerability  
 Growing Silence Comparison  
 Fashion Relationships Play Survival  
 Weather Society Boundaries Chores Small  
 Exercise



England performance company Forced Entertainment often uses the everyday as a way of working <https://tinyurl.com/y7j62tm2>

Choose a topic that is of shared interest to your group. Do some research on it then think about a story based on this topic that has some dramatic potential; that is, that features some kind of tension, or quest, or secret, or mystery, or discovery.

Take a look at Forced Entertainment's *Table Top Shakespeare* project. Then, bring in a set of everyday objects from home (salt and pepper shakers, mugs,



glasses, jars, household cleaners, etc.) Objects that sit upright work better than those that lie flat. Use a table as your stage and rehearse your story with the objects 'playing' the characters. Share your performance with the rest of the ensemble. You might even wish to video and post these projects!

If you love being involved in theatre and you're also searching for opportunities to make a positive difference in your community, this workbook was written for you. You may think that theatre and all the other things you are passionate about represent different directions in your life, but they don't have to be separate. They can converge in performance studies, a category of theatre based on the idea that nearly everything we do is related to performing. Once you begin to understand how performance is connected to all aspects of our lives, you can use that knowledge to invent, create, and build performance based activities that you can integrate into all the other interests that define who you are and what you want to do in your life.

This workbook has been designed and written for students in high school and university who may be interested in how performance works. The chapters cover broad topics drawn from the field of performance studies, an academic field developed out of theatre studies, anthropology, sociology and cultural studies in the 1980s and 1990s. *Web of Performance* covers key topics in performance studies: Performance as a form of Play, Ritual, Healing, Education, Power, Identity and Everyday Life. Each of these topics works like a web, inviting students to explore in multiple directions, across many threads.



University  
of Victoria

