

THINKING OUTSIDE THE BOX SET:  
INVESTIGATING THE CONCEPT, PROCESS, AND RECEPTION OF  
USING REALISM AS SOURCE DRAMATIC TEXTS FOR DIRECTORIAL  
REINTERPRETATION

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## **DEDICATIONS**

This thesis is dedicated to Dr. John Fleming and Dr. Debra Charlton for pushing me beyond my limits. And to Dr. Richard Soddors for accepting me as I am.

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## INTRODUCTION

### THINKING OUTSIDE THE BOX SET

The process of reinterpreting realist texts acknowledges the primacy of the director as a theatre artist, demonstrates the practical application of existing scholarship through the use of dramaturgy, and illuminates the value of classic and contemporary realism. The art of theatre has three basic components: concept, process, and reception. Concept is the idea, process is the means to express that idea, and reception measures how well the idea was communicated. In the following chapters each element of theatre and drama discussed is either the result of, or means of, attaining concept, process or reception relating to reinterpretation of realist drama.

Reinterpretation of realism is an abstract concept, but it is also a specific process used to bring a production from page to stage. The role of the director influences the concept of reinterpretation of realism as well as the concept of individual productions. Since dramaturgy is rooted in the understanding of theatrical process, exploration of the dramaturg's role helps illuminate the process component. Reception is best examined through production history. Through the case study of classic and canonical realist reinterpretations by Ingmar Bergman and through Stephen Daldry's recent revival of J.B. Priestley's forgotten *An Inspector Calls*, the road from concept through process in these examples reveals reception.

In any form of reinterpretation the director is the primary artist. To examine reinterpretation of realism the evolution of director from organizer to auteur needs

attention. While the playwright remains a vital artist, the director has assumed greater creative responsibility. To mediate potential conflict between director and playwright the dramaturg serves as arbiter and enabler of the theatre process.

Just as the reinterpretation of realism has been overlooked by scholars and practitioners, the director most prolific in its practice has also been ignored. Ingmar Bergman's productions of realist dramas demonstrate balance between directorial vision and playwright's intent. Investigation of the concept, process and reception of Bergman's realist productions offers the best argument for the potential of realism to be reinterpreted by a director.

Directorial reinterpretation is a wide-spread form of theatre production. Reinterpretation is only one term of many to describe the director's contribution to the stage portrayal of a text. Reinterpretation is a fresh perspective on a previously produced text. This includes drama frequently performed as well as less well-known texts. For whatever reason, the realist text is the least likely to find itself on a reinterpreted stage. Reinterpretation is a directorial art that also serves as a form of revival for the text.

In the early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century these interpretations and reinterpretations of drama began to reveal less about the text and more about the text's importance for a performance in its time (Bradby 7). In that case the reinterpretation of all texts becomes inevitable because through the eyes of the audience and the director changing times reveal changing views.

Reinterpretation is part of interpretation and can also be known as translation, revival, adaptation or revision. Amy Green's book The Revisionist Stage discusses American directors who have reinterpreted Greek, Shakespearean and neo-classical texts. She provides a specific retrospective, but focuses her attention on "a group of artists who,

depending on one's perspective, have either revitalized or disfigured canonical dramas by adapting them for the American stage" (xi). To Green, the scope of revisionism includes productions that are totally adapted to serve the culture regardless of textual meaning (2). In the productions that Green covers thematic interpretation is sometimes secondary to showmanship. After considering the ideas of translation, revival, adaptation and revision; the term "reinterpretation" is the one best suited to explain productions that varied from the original staging, but retained the integrity of the text.

There are qualities in realistic drama that keep it ever accessible and ready for reinterpretation. Though philosophical and aesthetic conventions have moved from realism to postmodernism, realistic playwriting continues to be a prolific style. There is now a rich and diverse collection of plays under the heading of realism. Reinterpretation of those plays, known and unknown, will help maintain their relevance for years to come.

Realism is a dramatic style including any play that deals with contemporary issues, uses contemporary speech and employs plausible (cause-to-effect) plot conventions. Since the structure of realism is familiar, the visual disruption of that pattern brings the source material to a new level; as such, it can carry greater relevance than a radical restaging of a non-realist text. Realist dramas known as "classic," such as those by Ibsen, Strindberg and O'Neill are more often performed and more likely to be used for reinterpretation. But other texts like Lillian Hellman's *The Little Foxes* or Beth Henley's over produced, but under appreciated, *Miss Firecracker Contest* possess the characteristics necessary for revival through reinterpretation on a non-illusionist stage.

Early realist playwrights and their work have been the subject of literary reports and analyses. Freddie Rokem's discussion of Theatrical Space in Ibsen, Chekhov and Strindberg reveals the impact of early realistic texts like *A Doll's House* and their driving

philosophies on modern theatre practice. When realism became the dominant theatrical style audiences were allowed a “voyeur’s view, into these private worlds” (1). Rokem is mainly concerned with the audience reception regarding the “voyeur’s view” that these playwrights provided. It is the slice-of-life expectation associated with the voyeuristic qualities of realist drama that make it prime material for reinterpretation. Audience perception of reality as portrayed in realist drama is literally a blank slate for visual interpretation.

In Staging the Impossible Patrick Murphy opens by saying “An amazing number of viewers suffer under the impression that drama means realism, and an uncanny number of critics prescribe for theatre, and evaluate it according to, various conceptions of realism” (1). Charles Marowitz also describes a societal premium on realism. “From the start of the century there has been a premium on realism – social, poetic, magic, etc. We have veered towards a theatre of reasonable facsimiles” (Other 2). The average viewer assumes that realism is truth when in fact a deeper truth can emerge through non-realistic staging.

Egil Törnqvist, an Ingmar Bergman scholar, is prolific in writing about performance theory of realistic and non-realistic texts. Transposing Drama discusses the journey of several texts from page to stage. Törnqvist analyzes directing choices as they relate to themes within the text. He assumes that the best productions of any dramatic style are those that reflect the text (5). In 1995, he carefully traced various productions of *A Doll’s House*, including Bergman’s Munich presentation. He shows that there are themes in realism that have barely begun to be expressed in production.

Postmodern scholars have their own opinions about directorial reinterpretation. In Directing Postmodern Theatre John Whitmore addresses the complex issues of



semiotics as related to postmodern performance theory. Julian Hilton's anthology of postmodern scholarship called New Directions in Theatre deals with subjects from "the theatre event" to "The Hermeneutic Approach to Theatre and Drama". In that essay, Hilton's contributor, Elinor Shaffer, demonstrates that the study of theatre has become the study of life. The majority of modern theatre scholarship rests in the broad, complex (and sometimes frustrating) explanations of postmodern theory. Since the scope of theatre has become unnecessarily ambiguous in correlation with these theories, the direction of **post**-postmodern theory can only proceed by acknowledging biases inherent in text, consulting available scholarship and moving on to *do* theatre.

Realism is a dramatic style. Realism is an aesthetic and directing style. The most important contribution of realism is as a catalyst for modern theatre theory. "It is from the nutrients of realism that Theatricalism, Expressionism, Surrealism, and every other 'ism' has developed" (Marowitz, Staff 125). In the most current atmosphere the key to realism is that it was a catalyst to move theatre from an art of communal, projected truths to that of individual, reflected truths. It is important for the theatre team to be familiar with the various conceptions of these truths within the modernist, classic and neo-classic movements. All of the "isms" are vital to creating concept, supporting process, and determining reception. However, postmodernism, the most recent installment to the "isms," creates some conflict regarding the meaning of words, thereby challenging play-text, accompanying scholarship and any conclusions derived from research.

Several incarnations regarding artistic reflection of truth is fleshed out in explanation of the "isms". The realists saw truth in observation; a surface truth reflected in their naturalistic staging practices involving the box set. Symbolism focused on creating a mystical, spiritual experience through the use of universal symbols.

Expressionism used distortion to combat machine-age materialism. Dadaism saw truth as organized insanity. Surrealism sought truth through the liberated unconscious mind. Absurdism's many individual incarnations reflect the futility of looking for truth or meaning at all. Postmodernism depends on a jumbled mess of previously mentioned ideas that inspire the audience to find the truth or lack of truth for themselves. Deconstruction challenges the meaning and accepted meaning of all words and symbols including dramatic text.

At this point, the only answer is to acknowledge and accept that there are many possible truths instead of one. It is the duty of any artistic practice to expand the boundaries and tell new truths as they emerge (Bartow 86). In each of these movements, from symbolism to postmodernism, and including pre-modern movements as well, the prevailing ideas and environments created can be expressed using the innovations from that time. Realist dramatic texts are rich with metaphor, thought, insight and existential voices than can be visually expressed through these previous influences.

Reinterpretation of realism is an aesthetic practice fueled by the themes in the text. In the conclusion to Marvin Carlson's Theories of Theatre he asserts that theatre practitioners "ask for whom and for what purposes each theory was developed and for what purposes has it been or might it be utilized" (540). This idea is at the very heart of the reinterpretation of realism.

By the 1890s realism on stage came to reflect the tenets of realist philosophers and playwrights. Even though illusionism may have begun as a new stage of aestheticism, realism continues to be a litmus test for theatre. Presenting a realist text in a non-illusionist world opens realism to a new audience, allows the director interpretive

freedom, and illuminates the playwright's work. Promoting the practice of reinterpreting realism makes present realist texts more accessible to future generations.

Reinterpreted productions depend on the director as the primary artist. From the moment the director steps on to the scene, s/he begins to dominate and influence live theatre practice. When Richard Wagner theorized the modern director, he proposed that the director should use his individuality to raise "a common objective for the art of all" (794). Later, Max Reinhardt's innovations expanded the influence of directing with eclectic theory. Reinhardt biographer J.L. Styan wrote: "By refusing to close any avenues the theatre of the twentieth century might take, Reinhardt assisted and inspired a generation of new directors" (4). Vsevolod Meyerhold's equally influential and more controversial notion of auteurship encouraged directors to assert a greater amount of control concerning their productions (Leiter 201).

Theoretical basis for directorial interpretation and subsequently reinterpretation on stage are rooted in the history of directing practice. Several recent scholars have compiled books outlining the theory and practice of directors. The purposes of these collections reflect the importance of past innovations to present practice. "Arthur Kahane, Reinhardt's literary advisor...observed that 'the really new is always strongly linked with the really old'" (Styan 16). Artists, especially directors, need always to be reminded of their roots so they may build on those accomplishments. James Roose-Evans argues: "Reinhardt...borrowed freely from the other traditions. Perhaps all great artists do this" (64). Leiter asserts that his collection of directors From Stanislavski to Bauralt was written so that the "theatre of the future will survive and flourish" (xvi). Robert Willis's 1976 collection of literature begins: "Ours is a theatre nourished by long years of quiet innovation followed by a burst of experimentation" (3).

Before many of the modernist movements' ideas were developed, Max Reinhardt was already beginning to think in terms of flexible aesthetics. Reinhardt said: "It was a privilege to put into practice some of the thinking of the 'aesthetic drama' movement, which wanted to combine the arts of space, and light, of music, design and the spoken word, and of acting, mime and dance" (Styan 1). Reinhardt's vision of aesthetics, notion of eclecticism and reverence for collective contribution in theatre opened the door for directorial interpretation and reinterpretation. Unlike Reinhardt, modern practitioners have more than a century of convention and philosophy from which to draw inspiration. Directors were also aided by the emergence of the set as not only background but environment. Before the realistic movement in the mid to late 19<sup>th</sup> century aesthetics were becoming naturalistic in order to increase spectacle. When the set became a functional and interactive environment a new avenue of expression for the director and designers was opened (Bradby 13).

Arthur Bartow's book The Director's Voice is a series of interviews with contemporary directors. He begins by saying: "The key to the future development of the director's craft must be, as it has been for the past one hundred years, the passing down of technique and information from senior artists to succeeding generations" (xv). All of these directing texts influence the modern director by providing supportive and inspirational resources.

Modern scholarship devoted to directing takes on four distinct forms. First the primary theory of individual directors like Wagner, Reinhardt, Artaud, and Brecht began the library of directing scholarship. Second, several modern scholars focus on the life and work of one particular director. John Fuegi's The Essential Brecht and J.L. Styan's biography of Max Reinhardt are examples of biographies and case studies that support

the full scope of those individual directors' influence. Third, other scholars, beginning with Helen Chinoy and Toby Cole in the 1960s, provided a retrospective of directing practice as an established trade in their book Directors on Directing. Robert Willis's The Director in a Changing Theatre, David Bradby and David William's Director's Theatre, and John Whitmore's Directing Postmodern Theater continued the tradition of bringing directing scholarship up to date. Finally, there are a growing number of directors who, like the early innovators, report their theories and experience in book form. From Frank McMullen's The Directorial Image to Richard Schechner's The Environmental Theatre and Peter Brook's The Empty Space to Charles Marowitz's Prospero's Staff modern directors have shown that they are the best pontificators of their own ideas. With each book, article or essay published about directing or written from the director's point of view, it becomes increasingly more apparent that directors have been and continue to guide the course of live theatre.

As previously stated, the realist movement began a chain reaction in the search for truth. One approach to directorial interpretation is to consider it a process of revealing truth. This process is dependent on many factors and differs from director to director. Some directors search for personal truth. Peter Brook biographer Albert Hunt says: "Brook's search for a 'less deadly' theatre leads him to what he perceives as 'truth', of which there is only one" (9).

Other directors look outside themselves to determine truth. McMullen believes that the director must seek to evoke the emotions of the audience (xiii). He offers a five-step procedure for the creative process of the director that involves: initial response, critical response, structural analysis, search for dominant themes, and the creation of a

directorial image from the process (6). He warns directors against “stepping over the bounds of pure interpretation into the realm of personal expression” (4).

If the “realm of personal expression” completely undermines the playwright’s intention, then it becomes a fallacy of interpretation. Robert Hapgood explains Edward Albee’s thoughts on the subject of interpretation: “Albee concedes that there is a place for ‘directorial creativity’ while maintaining that ‘it doesn’t give permission to distort’” (140). All of the discussion within this thesis will assume that directors who wish to reinterpret realism do so intending to extract and reveal the truth within the text rather than implement a radical concept without textual consideration. Any director who wishes to express something specific will choose a play already containing those messages.

Modern scholarship supports the domination of directors in contemporary live theatre. Most theorists agree that the modern director asserts a significant amount of authority over production, and the nature of that authority varies from director to director. Directing texts refer to directing “types.” They fall in three general categories: the text-true director, the interpretive director, and the auteur director.

Frank McMullen’s perception of directors falls into the category of text-true. He perceives the director as the “chief auxiliary artist” (3). Charles Marowitz hints at the existence of interpretive directors when he states that the “creative process is what confirms or transforms a writer’s meaning, and the director is, quite literally, the master of the creative process” (4). Marowitz acknowledges that the director is not a singular all-powerful artist, but the head of a team. David Bradby exposes the presence of the auteur director. He states, “Many contemporary directors dispense with the writer completely” (1). However, in those cases the director is not using a script and therefore it is irrelevant to the topic of reinterpretation of realism.

When extensive liberties are taken with an existing text some playwrights and scholars find the auteur director threatening. Each director has his/her own form of authorship. Seeking out the truth of a text through non-traditional staging is as much a testament to the playwright's influence as it is the director's.

It is the director's right and privilege to exercise some form of authorship with interpretation. Numerous books describing the arc of directing practice explain the history and the various ways in which a director influences his/her productions. Most often this influence is evident by the presence of a directorial concept. In theatre practice the directorial concept is the heart of the production. It is the physical manifestation of the most relevant theme within the text as determined by the director. Marvin Carlson makes the notion of concept clear by identifying that many directors have defined themselves by staging "MY" versions of classic theatre (Haunted 8). In other words, a theatre piece is distinguished by the directing approach as well as by content. Amy Green's exploration into classical revision also takes notice of concept. The notion of revision and reinterpretation of classic theatre has led frequent theatre-goers to expect *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *Medea*, *Tartuffe* and other classic texts to be presented by means of concept. Reception of these productions is dependent on the success or failure of the concept rather than the text.

In the pre-modern era a dramatic text was often altered or written to conform to the accepted aesthetic values of that era. These alterations and revisions of text were not a means of expression by an individual director, but a means of projecting a universal truth.

Since the rise of directing, interpretation has been individual rather than communal. During the postmodern era, that individual creativity in relation to authorship has been widely debated. Jean Luere selectively conducted and collected interviews,

articles, opinions and research in Playwright vs. Director: Authorial Intentions and Performance Interpretations. Accomplished playwrights and directors such as Edward Albee, Robert Wilson, Elia Kazan, Tennessee Williams, Joanne Akalitis, Samuel Beckett, and others are interviewed or profiled in this study. Overall, the literary and directorial points of view are equally represented, and Luere concludes that all productions teeter on the balance between playwright and director. While Edward Albee defends the right of the director to reinterpretation of dramatic text he has been to court defending the authorship of *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* (Hapgood 140). Luere also provides a copy of the legal documents regarding American copyright laws (134). Directors who wish full authorship over text are advised to stage classic texts, but those who wish to reinterpret the plays of living playwrights or those with active estates tread on thin ice. Unfortunately this includes a vast majority of realist drama. Using scholarship to defend their choices may be beneficial to all involved.

Authorship is such a pressing issue, especially due to postmodernism and deconstruction which challenged the meaning of language altogether. This leaves a confusing set of new rules for theatre practitioners to follow.

American theatre is slowly beginning to recognize the dramaturg as a hybrid element sent to bridge the gap, make sense of the rules and jump tall buildings in a single bound. A relatively new concept, American dramaturgy is best explained in two books: What is Dramaturgy? and Dramaturgy in American Theatre: A Sourcebook. They are the best-known resources for dramaturgical practice. The supporting scholarship from these books is multifaceted. The articles and essays dispel myths about the dramaturg as a thing to be feared and include production history and methodology that is helpful to the entire theatre team (Copelin 17).



Dramaturgs prove themselves to be valuable members of a theatre team because they are facilitators of the practical application of scholarship and thought to performance and aesthetics. Just as a production dramaturg uses scholarship to support practice. This thesis attempts to use practice and theatre theory to create and support scholarship. It is an experiment in “practitioner friendly” scholarship.

Dramaturgs must always be aware of the source of their information. Reliable sources are in general reference books like Oscar Brockett’s History of the Theatre and The Essential Theatre. Brockett is among the accepted authorities on the place of directing practice in relation to a full history of theatre. Another general theatre scholar, Marvin Carlson, wrote Theories of the Theatre, a concise compilation and explanation of theatre theory from Greek to postmodern theory. These resources provide a stable platform from which to understand the spectrum of theory and practice and the contribution of reinterpretation of realism to that practice.

As in McMullen’s ideas regarding communication to audience, reception and understanding of a particular audience is a directorial and dramaturgical concern. Directors must be aware of their audience because it has an effect on the reception of the interpretation and thereby the process of reinterpretation. Among the dramaturg’s many duties is to serve as the eyes and ears of the audience before opening night. Marvin Carlson also believes that audience reception has a role in theatre practice.

Marvin Carlson’s article, “The Haunted Stage: Recycling and Reception in the Theatre” touches on the theory that audiences affect their own experience in a theatre. Helen Chinoy observes that the challenge to the modern director is to merge the theatre and the audience (6). Theatre history suggests that audiences have been evolving with the theatre. For instance, as theatre exploded in the 1960s and 1970s the audience was

physically rearranged. Robert Willis asserts that during this time period “the distinction between spectator and performer frequently became obliterated” (5).

Richard Schechner’s experiments with environmental theatre are a well-documented example of the audience’s changing role in the aesthetic contribution and as receptors of theatre. The audience is an important part of interpretation and reinterpretation which must be acknowledged in concept and process in order to affect reception. Whether in regards to social implication or aesthetic value, the theatre does not exist without an audience.

Investigation into directorial reinterpretation of realism is two-fold. The idea of reinterpretation and the practical application are of equal importance. The first involves the history of directing practice and the means by which practical expression of truth occurs on stage. Second, a scholarly approach by which theoretical and philosophical background of realism and realist dramatic style needs to be explored. Covering the concept, process, and reception of reinterpretation of realism creates a window into the modern theatre process as a whole. Considering the duality of the subject matter, the manner of investigation and report is dramaturgical in nature. As such, the thesis itself becomes a practice and defense of dramaturgy.

The benefits of exploring reinterpretation are also dual. In terms of production, the reinterpretation of realism demonstrates the role of the director as primary theatre artist, and it highlights the need for a partnership of practice and scholarship via the dramaturg. More specifically, for the longevity and relevance of older texts reinterpretation of realism reveals a means for retelling classic realism and resurrecting forgotten realist texts.

Thinking Outside the Box Set explores the concept, process and reception of staging realistic drama in non-realistic modes. This method has been employed unsparingly for classic texts, but realism, though often referred to as classic or canonical in academic literature, is not traditionally given the same treatment as Shakespeare, Greek, or neo-classical plays. As the gap between modern theatre and original realism chronologically widens, novel approaches will become more common. For the reinterpretation of realism to grow as an aesthetic practice, reinterpretation should be reverent and supportive to the collective nature of theatre performance.

Reinterpretation, though an example of the collective theatre effort, is primarily a director's art. The first chapter focuses on the concept of reinterpretation as related to the modern director, and includes discussion of the ways in which the director's role has evolved. Directors currently have many influences available when approaching a realist work. Max Reinhardt was a catalytic contributor to theatre practice when he began to apply directorial eclecticism. He was the first reinterpetive director, although he did not have the benefits of what Brockett calls *A Century of Innovation*. The chapter includes identifying the origins of the theatre director and discussion of figures significant to modern directing practice. Richard Wagner, Georg II, the duke of Saxe-Meiningen, Reinhardt, Meyerhold and their contemporaries provided the fundamental tools for all directing practice. Barrault, Grotowski, Brook, and Schechner are examples of the next generation of directors who show the influences of their predecessors. Then the chapter determines the atmosphere of directorial reinterpretation for the late twentieth and early twenty-first century. Exploration continues into the evolving definition of director and a look at how that definition effects the reinterpretation of realism.

After the right and ability of the director's concept has been determined the rest of the theatre team is required to implement it. In discussion of the collective art of theatre the dramaturg is best suited to enable and explain this process. The second chapter is concerned with the dramaturg. Through a detailed explanation of the dramaturgical process scholarly and practical precedent for reinterpretation of realism will be determined. By exploring the goals, tools, responsibilities and qualities of dramaturgy, the importance of dramaturgs to reinterpretation and theatre practice is evident. A dramaturg helps resolve the conflict of the playwright vs. the director through use of thorough research. Use of dramaturgy regarding the topic of reinterpretation is imperative. The dramaturg can mean the difference between reinterpretation and deconstruction.

Included in the discussion of dramaturgy are the methods and examples of play analysis for reinterpretation in which s/he identifies the common themes associated with certain movements in theatre and how they may be applied to the staging of realist drama. Ideally, reinterpretation of realist drama expands the effectiveness of a theatrical production while maintaining the integrity of the script.

The third chapter is devoted to realistic reinterpretation of classic and canonical text as directed by Ingmar Bergman. Several directors have had success staging realist drama through aesthetic reinterpretation, but few have been as consistent in its use as Ingmar Bergman. Bergman is often overlooked as a stage director due to his luminous film career. However, in the field of theatre practice he is considered a persistent visionary especially in regard to realist drama. Bergman's career on the stage is not limited to realism, but his interpretations of *Hedda Gabler*, *The Wild Duck*, *Long Day's Journey Into Night*, *A Streetcar Named Desire*, and his innovative take on *Miss Julie* and

*A Doll's House* all contribute to a body of work that should no longer be upstaged by film. His work provides examples of how a realist text can be reinvented on the stage. Bergman's work serves as a model for the concept, process, and reception of the reinterpretation of realism.

To illustrate process and reception of reinterpretation this thesis acknowledges the reinterpretation of classic realism through Ingmar Bergman. Stephen Daldry's production of *An Inspector Calls* is an example of the revival of forgotten texts. The potential for collaboration involving the innovative director and the realistic text is virtually infinite. It expands the scope of art for the text and for theatre art as a whole.

Finally, Thinking Outside the Box Set explores realist reinterpretation as it proliferates the collective art of theatre. Often scholars demonstrate too much talk, and practitioners too much action. By acknowledging the benefits of staging technique and theory that lend themselves to the marriage of practice and scholarship; live theatre grows stronger. Regardless of an individual contribution to theatre scholarship, the goal remains a commitment to strengthening live theatre by thought and action.

Reinterpretation of realism comes down to expression of truth. Realist playwrights express their truth on paper. Directors express truth on stage. Dramaturgs must find a means to serve the truth as presented by the text and the director. Thinking Outside the Box Set means that truth can be revealed by expanding beyond realism aesthetically and mentally. Modern directors, in search of their own voice, may find it inside realist drama, but outside the box set.

## CHAPTER I

### CUES FROM THE PAST:

#### TRACING THE EVOLUTION OF DIRECTING PRACTICE AS IT INFLUENCES THE MODERN THEATRE

Modern directors are the most important contributors to production and innovation on stage. It took several years for the director to become the primary artist. The role of the modern director has changed and grown from the influence of 150 years of innovation and experimentation in theatre practice. Since ancient Greek theatre, there has been someone in control of production, but the director's art did not emerge until the nineteenth century (Leiter xi). Today s/he is the dominant creative force and is inseparable from theatrical production (Bradby 1). Functions and challenges concerning modern directing are products of this evolutionary process. The desire for realistic illusion on stage and later realistic sensibility in dramatic literature facilitated the evolution of director to his/her central position in theatre practice. The director's presence coincides with the dawn of the modern era. As the universal understanding of theatre breaks down s/he provides new answers. Careful analysis of the evolution from actor manager to the translator-interpreter-auteur will provide insight regarding the current role of the stage director.

The director is the primary artist in reinterpretation because it is about staging. It is about the visual images and pictures created by the director and inspired by the text. Directing is the most influential aspect of modern theatre practice. Therefore, it is the

director who is responsible for change in contemporary theatre. In the past century directors have fueled innovation. Their evolution from actor-manager to artistic dominance reveals the key to the road ahead for live theatre. Unlike scientific evolution which cancels itself out with each step, each theatre innovation merely contributes to the palette.

The evolution of directing can be broken into three steps: organizer, leader, and interpreter. As interpreters, directors retain the organizer and leader qualities. The emergence of the director as interpreter also sees directing practice branch off into several different types. Directors who reinterpret classic plays are part of this divergence.

The practice of theatre directing today is derived from many individual sources. It is the cumulative effect of these individual innovators that directly affect the function, role, and power position held by current directors. Each director mentioned represents a new genesis of thought, design or adaptation of a certain style. All directors can be traced to the actor-manager, but the majority of influence on directors comes from developments during the twentieth century. At the turn of that century, Max Reinhardt's eclectic theory began a chain of events leading to the era of directorial domination. Meyerhold, Brecht, Artaud, Brook, and Schechner are examples of those who took the reins and developed new theatre for their own time, and radically transformed the practice of directing.

Antecedents for the director appeared in the early nineteenth century. The director first appeared as a production organizer or stage manager. Before this period there was no need for a director. The function of theatre and staging practice adhered to a mutual understanding between players and playgoers (Bradby 2). Social, political, and economic revolutions from the preceding century motivated a desire for diversity in

theatre. The lack of communal focus demanded that a director create a focus (Chinoy 26). The primary dramatic style in the time period was devoted to melodrama and revivals of classical drama (Brockett, Century 13). Concern for historical accuracy and realistic special effects created focus for each production (13). The director as organizer was needed to facilitate these growing demands and to ensure production unity.

Notable organizers before the modern era of theatre were the playwrights or actors from within the company. In Germany, Johann Wolfgang von Goethe oversaw the rehearsals of his plays where he asserted that One should not permit himself to do anything in rehearsal that he cannot do in the play (Chinoy 19). Ludwig Tieck also assumed authority to organize the production process involving canonical works (Brockett, Century 13). Pix r court s staging of his melodramas in the early 1800s and Charles Kean s mid-century historically accurate productions of Shakespeare stand as examples of the director as organizer. Likewise, William Charles Macready was a popular actor in England who emphasized the need for a unified production (Chinoy 21). The director as organizer remained the most important function of the modern director until the late nineteenth century. It would take the innovations of an all-powerful-director to single out the director as leader.

As organizer the director was able to run the overall production from an advisory point of view. The director as leader was able to assert more creative control over the production process and performance. Richard Wagner and Georg II, the duke of Saxe Meiningen, were the first to establish the director as a singular central figure. Though they mark the move to the director as leader stage, it is important to note that the director was still subordinate to the text. Wagner and Saxe-Meiningen are responsible for many theatrical conventions taken for granted in modern theatre practice. While retaining the



role of the director as organizer, they solidify the notion of unified production and assert themselves as primary visionaries in the theatrical process.

Richard Wagner was responsible for a variety of conventions and theory that affected modern theatre. Wagner's conception of the total-art-work with himself as the all-powerful director is central to the modern conception of director as theatre artist (Chinoy 29). He wanted to manipulate production in order to create a sense of total immersion for the audience (29). Out of this desire he invented the means to do so. The darkened house, elimination of class separation in audience, and hidden technical elements on stage all facilitated Wagner's desire for immersion. Individual productions were unified under his complete control.

Elsewhere in Germany, the duke of Saxe-Meiningen developed his own means to unify production. Meiningen also set out to create realistic illusion on stage. He was a leader director because he would visualize the performance and control each moment (Chinoy 22). His attention to realistic detail extended to every element of production. Every set piece, prop, costume, and actor motivation came out of his vision (Brockett, Century 33). The Meiningen players were able to demonstrate the positive effect of organized rehearsals under the leadership of a director. To ensure further quality of production the Meiningen players also employed a dramaturg. Most of his repertory consisted of classical and romantic-era plays. Although Meiningen directed *Ghosts* in the late 1880s, there would be different leader directors to bring the realist movement to life on stage (33).

Andr  Antoine and Otto Brahm helped bring unified production into the realist era. They applied the illusionist ideal to naturalist staging. Antoine worked closely with naturalism theorist Emile Zola (Chinoy 26). Realist productions at Antoine's Theatre

Libre (1887) endeavored to engage fully the realist ideal. Antoine's use of the box set made it synonymous with the performance of realist/naturalist drama (Brockett 333). Similarly, Otto Brahm brought theatrical illusionism of realism to Germany at the Freie Bühne in 1889 (Bradby 11). Since Antoine and Brahm were predominantly realist directors, they were not only subordinate to the text, but also to the tenets of the realist movement. Helen Chinoy's introduction to Directors on Directing reports: For Brahm the director is a man who must be sensitive to the inner spirit of a work (30). Brahm's statement may foreshadow directorial interpretation, but during the realist period, the inner spirit of the realist drama directly reflected the realist ideal already intrinsic in the text.

Towards the end of the realist period, Russian theatre rose to prominence with Constantin Stanislavski at the helm. Stanislavski had been working as a director for several years before earning acclaim for his work with the Moscow Art Theatre and Chekhov's plays. Directing historian Helen Chinoy refers to Stanislavski as the greatest naturalist director (31). He would achieve the external reality through internal means by placing the actor at the center of theatre art (Bradby 10). By choosing to regard the director as a facilitator to actors he did not diminish his authority, but strengthened it. Stanislavski's influence stretched into twentieth century theatre and beyond.

Antoine, Brahm, and Stanislavski were directors who sought to support the plays of the realist movement on a realistic stage. With the same goal they all accomplished their tasks with different means. It was only a matter of time before the director would take a third and definitive step toward primary theatre artist.

The director as interpreter remains an organizer and a leader. Max Reinhardt is the most notable in the transition to interpreter. His theory of directorial eclecticism

opened the door to the director as interpreter. Theatre scholars and Reinhardt biographers agree that he crossed into a new frontier of theatrical expression. The key to Reinhardt's work is that he used outward forms only for the purpose of deepening the central mood of the play (Bahr 53). By using aesthetics to deepen the mood of the play Reinhardt becomes the first **re**-interpreter.

Like Wagner and Meiningen, he believed in the artistic unity of theatre (Chinoy 63). While Reinhardt's roots were in the naturalistic 1890s (Kahane 78), it was the influence of symbolism that most colored his work. He did not believe that theatre was formula and thereby propagated the notion of eclecticism (Chinoy 48). Fundamentally this idea puts the director in a position of greater power. Many of his productions still influence the evolution of theatre production.

Most of the drama being produced at the turn of the century was realistic. Reinhardt was no exception. However, when he staged Ibsen's *Ghosts* in 1906, he departed from the traditional box set and opted for a symbolist prison of a room (Styan 21). He used expressionist painter Edward Munch as a set designer to create the heavily psychological effect (20). Later scholars hailed this production as unparalleled; nothing of its kind had yet been seen in the theatre (Saylor 324).

Reinhardt had planted the seeds for new subjective types of interpretations. From then on, every director would be measured on the interpretive scales. As the author of the performance, the director now found him/herself in a position to express his/her individual artistic mind through production. Now the director decided which aspect of the text will be communicated to the audience. But the idea of eclecticism in itself was not enough to create an entirely new aesthetic (Bahr 40). Reinhardt laid a map for himself and future directors to find their own way to get there.

Directing style soon became a creative outlet for theatre practitioners. There was a mode other than playwriting that could demonstrate truth. There are several directors who made significant strides as interpreters and paved the way for current practice. Meyerhold, Appia, Craig, and Copeau are good examples of interpreters because they are distinguished from the past and from each other.

Vsevolod Meyerhold marks the beginning of the *auteur* directing practice. Not only did he take liberties he was the first director to deny the primacy of the text, believing instead that the play text was raw material for the director. Instead of reproducing real situations on stage he purposely pointed out the irony of situation (Chinoy 53). He felt that there was significant meaning in every element of staging (Bradby 15). Meyerhold also marks the innovation of an interactive stage environment. The actor and the set became synchronous. He influenced the *auteur* style of directing. Meyerhold's anti-realism was not the only style to flourish during the early twentieth century.

Jacques Copeau was a French director who extended the creative power of the director to create artistic unity in theatre (Chinoy 46). He believed in the living presence of the author. Unlike the early realist directors, Copeau believed that attention to the actor and a minimalist rather than wholly realistic design emphasized text (Brockett, Century 139). He generated his own aesthetics in which to tell the stories he presented.

Adolphe Appia and Gordon Craig are well known for innovations in stage design, however the philosophy involved in their aesthetic innovations had a significant effect on directing practice. Though they are often connected by theory and time, Appia and Craig were distinguished from each other as well. Both men sought simplicity in the design of theatre and insisted on artistic unity. Appia achieved unity by working as a

team player. Craig was a dictator who is famous for wanting to replace actors with marionettes.

The next generation of interpretive directors built on the ideas of these early creative men. They would see directing practice through a myriad of philosophical and artistic movements that would change theatre forever. Reinhardt and Meyerhold continued to work during this period. There were also new directors who distinguished themselves by pushing theatre to the limits of technology, artistry and decency.

Bertolt Brecht's contribution has been widely reported. He changed theatre aesthetic to mold the theatre to his social and political purpose (Leiter 100-40). In the process he set new standards and broke previous barriers between the theatre and the audience. Brecht primarily directed his own dramas. The Brechtian style is unquestionable. Conventions created to serve his theatre are useful in the practice of reinterpretation today.

The Theatre of Cruelty represents the most radical take on theatre practice. Antonin Artaud's ritualistic and visceral ideal of theatrical expression is rarely actualized on stage. The characteristic aesthetic of Artaud's work becomes a resource of conventional possibilities when staging realistic stories with gut-bending subject matter.

Reinhardt is the revisionist, Meyerhold is the auteur, Copeau is text sensitive, Brecht is thought provoking, and Artaud is viscerally effective. All succeeding directors have taken their cues from one or more of these influences.

By the end of WWII theatre had turned from expression of external truth (realism) to expression of inner truth (symbolism, expressionism, and surrealism) and then to expression of pure response and hopelessness (absurdism). In order to accommodate and radiate these visions many directors became subordinate to the cause. Among this

madness, Barrault rose to importance in France. As the director of the Comedie Franciase and after, he demonstrated the true model of modern directing. Through his work with innovators like Artaud, he began an interpretive step toward ideological and aesthetic synthesis (Brockett, Century 305). As the century continued, directors had more influences to draw from artistically and aesthetically.

During and after WWII the Group Theatre and its notable members such as Harold Clurman, Lee Strasberg, Sanford Meisner, Stella Adler, and Elia Kazan instituted interpretations of the Stanislavski system (Brockett Century 286). Elia Kazan emerged as one of the most significant directors of the 1940s and 1950s. After the landmark collaboration with Tennessee Williams on *A Streetcar Named Desire* (1947), Kazan went on to direct all of the major realist playwrights of that time period (Leiter 165). Directors like Kazan and designers like Jo Mielziner exposed the post-war audience to a new stylized realism that was outside the confines of the familiar box set yet still representational of a familiar reality.

Simultaneous to the adaptation of a new realistic aesthetic, other post-WWII movements were dominated by message and ideology rather than method and style. Existentialism, and absurdism, once the radical fringe, became an accepted part of the legitimate theatre (Willis 4). They are politically motivated and socially extreme. Directors who worked to facilitate these movements were Roger Blin, Jacques Mauclair, Georges Vitaly, and Joan Littlewood. The rules were changing and the directors were often overshadowed by the strength of the philosophers and playwrights within the movements.

Most of the extreme ideas did not take affect until the 1960s. In an aesthetic and evocative movement that reflected the philosophies of Antonin Artaud radical theatre was

defined during this era. Collective creation became more important, and some directors had to adjust for the change. The Living Theatre, though conceptualized in the late 1940s, was representative of the 1960s. Julian Beck and Judith Malina were the directors, and they pushed boundaries of content, style, and decency. In terms of convention, the Living Theatre did the most by breaking down barriers between actor and audience (Tytell xii). They broke conventional stage barriers and put the director in the mode of conceptualist rather than the strong place s/he had before. They also spawned other groups like the Open Theatre, under the leadership of Joseph Chaikin. While the Living Theatre had been a reaction to society, the Open Theatre was a reaction to the methods of the Living Theatre (Brockett, Century 393). The action-reaction cycle in theatre thought and convention will probably never be broken. By this path, director after director shows influence if not reverence for all who came before.

The latter sixties were dominated by the innovative leadership of Jerzy Grotowski and Richard Schechner who through collective creation focused on process instead of product. Just when the director seemed to be unnecessary Jerzy Grotowski and Richard Schechner showed the power of a single visionary even within the bounds of a collective working environment. The Polish Laboratory Theatre emphasized Grotowski's ideal of a poor theatre and the holy actor (Grotowski 978). He rejected aesthetics and promoted himself to the position of head shaman in the secular religious practice of the theatre (979). Though the outcome was truly unique, he attributed his work to the influence of Stanislavski, Artaud, Brecht, and several other previously mentioned directors (Brockett, Century 396). Grotowski was just as powerful and important a director in the traditional sense as any of his influences.

Richard Schechner drew from his contemporaries to redefine theatre practice (Brockett, Century 402). He noted the phenomenon of Environmental Theatre and took it upon himself to make his own experiment, which is thoroughly documented in a book by the same name. He used simple aesthetics and recognized the advantages of found space for performance (Schechner 2). Overall, Schechner and Grotowski sum up the tenor of theatre for the late 1960s and early 70s.

In 1970 Peter Brook took back the reins of director without stepping back the natural progress of theatre art. Following the tradition of Max Reinhardt, Brook staged a radical production of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* that forever altered the concept of the concept piece. Showing the influence of several years in theatre, Brook defined reinterpretation on stage. He took Shakespeare's most famous comedy (with few text alterations) and visually transformed it to make audiences see the play in a new light. Several directors had been staging interpretations of Shakespeare, but Brook shined a new light on the possibilities for a new life on stage. He clearly solidified the presence of a director as a powerful force in theatre performance. It is not just his ideas or his direction, but his total vision combined with his contemporary methods of rehearsal that put him a step above other directors of the period. Brooks in England, Ariane Mnouchkine in France, and Luca Ronconi in Italy began a journey to define visual reinterpretation of classic drama.

As the century began to draw to a close in the 1980s Robert Wilson took the power of the director to new extremes. In the tradition of Meyerhold's opinion that text is raw material, postmodernists took the auteur approach to productions whether based on classic or contemporary texts.



The postmodernist and deconstructionist director believed that the actual meaning of language, including dramatic text, differed from the accepted meaning. The director dominated postmodern performance either by radically altering existing text, or by doing away with a script completely. Unlike much of the performances in the 1960s, which were organic experiments in theatre process for social, intellectual, or spiritual purposes in the form of new works, the postmodernist director made drastic, hard-edged commentary through revival and reinterpretation. Robert Wilson directed plays by scenic writing in which he created performances from scratch. Heinar Müller would deconstruct classic texts in his performances. Other directors, like JoAnne Akalaitis and the Wooster Group took on scripts from recent playwrights and a rift that had been growing between playwrights and directors since directors became stronger was widened considerably. Legal, ethical, and artistic complications involved in this topic are further explored in the next chapter.

Today, directors are still significant, if not irreplaceable contributors to theatre art. Despite a few exceptions, directors fuel the fires of change in theatre. Robert Wilson continues to develop as a director by evolving from postmodern poster boy to conventional theatre director without sacrificing his vision or his artistic integrity in the process. Like many directors, Wilson has learned that evolution and growth keep theatre alive. Up-and-coming directors such as Stephen Daldry are also making strides that reveal the director is here to stay.

It is the director's responsibility to bridge the gap between artists and audience. Through reinterpretation, especially of older texts, this responsibility is more important. The onstage treatment must illuminate rather than detract from the original text. To express his/her ideas to a particular audience a director conceives a concept.

A director's process begins with the concept. In theatrical terms the word concept is more than just an idea. Directorial concept is the heart of reinterpretation. In Daldry's *An Inspector Calls* the concept was to create a visual representation of the inner workings of the text. Daldry believed that the Birlings' emotional breakdown could be expressed by a physical one. Bergman's work with *A Doll's House* was the simple matter of a door. There was no door on stage until Nora decided to leave. The images created were based in text and realized in reinterpretation.

Directors are visionaries, activists, and innovators who allow playwrights' voices to be heard. Classic plays have been transported through time and space by directorial interpretation. That is the power of the director. However, there are only so many plays from the Greek and Shakespearean era, and most of the movement-specific dramas need to stay closely tied to the movements they came from in order to work. Realism is more malleable than it seems. Well-written realism is as relevant today as any drama by Shakespeare, Aristophanes, or Molière. As time moves further away from *Hedda* or *Streetcar* or *Night Mother* directors have a responsibility to relate these stories on a non-realistic stage.

Directors are limited by tangible problems like legal issues, and artistic problems like the biases uncovered during the postmodern/deconstruction era. For a director to be free to create, s/he needs an intermediary to clear the red tape. Dramaturgs are slowly beginning to define themselves as influential members of the theatre community. They are the missing link in modern American theatre. Directors need to focus on production activities and playwrights (or their critical advocates) are concerned with the treatment of the script. Just because reinterpretations of text are numerous does not mean that they are endless. It is necessary for both the director and the playwright (or playwright advocate)

to consider the balance between reinterpretation and deconstruction or just plain misunderstanding. At the risk of sounding unduly optimistic, a dramaturg provides order in a world full of chaos.

In the next chapter the role of the dramaturg is investigated as a complement to directorial theatrical endeavors. The common territorial attitude in theatre practice is counterproductive. Dramaturgs pose a threat to no one. They are much more than former critics, or wishful directors with library cards. Dramaturgs complete the set in an era where recorded history and audience perception are as important as directorial interpretation and playwright's intent. Most importantly the dramaturg is a sea of calm with the resources to defend choices of the director and the views of the playwright. They facilitate the needs of production. Directors are leaders, as they have been. They can flourish into the twenty-first century by acknowledging the benefits of a dramaturg.

## CHAPTER II

### AMERICAN THEATRE S RED-HEADED STEPCHILD: INVESTIGATING THE PROCESS OF REINTERPRETATION OF REALISM THROUGH DRAMATURGY

The concept behind reinterpretation of realism is based in the growing artistic dominance of the director. In order to pursue his/her capacity as visionary the director needs assistance in providing unity to the production process. Dramaturgy is a vital component to the process of theatre as well as the best means to examine that process. It is important in this case to describe the process of the dramaturg as well as the process and problems associated with reinterpretation of realism.

The dramaturg is slowly becoming an accepted part of the collaborative effort of theatre. Theatre is live action storytelling depending traditionally on the collective talents of a playwright, director, actors, designers, and producers. The root word of each of these positions implies action. A director directs, an actor acts, a designer designs. How is a dramaturg supposed to drama or turg for that matter? This inevitably leads to the question What is a dramaturg?

Most of the scholarship attempting to answer the question contains personal accounts, while others describe a specific aspect of dramaturgy such as works in translation, classical adaptations or practical use of research. Still others concentrate on historical theory. From periodicals, personal experience, Internet sources, and essays collected within Dramaturgy in American Theater: A Sourcebook, and What is

Dramaturgy? I have concluded that the dramaturg's primary activity is explaining just what a dramaturg does. In his 1989 article "Ten Dramaturgical Myths" David Copelin describes a fundamental aspect of dramaturgy, the desire to improve productions:

MYTH # 7: *Literary managers and dramaturgs don't like most American theatre the way it is. They want our scripts and productions to be more theatrical, more resonant, less naturalistic, less trivial, more aware of the world, better. Can't they appreciate how wonderful things are?*

REALITY # 7: No. (Copelin 22)

Theatre scholarship is traditionally more playwright than practitioner friendly. However the dramaturg in theatre provides a fulcrum for playwrights, practitioners and scholars. The play is the thing and the dramaturg insures that it stays that way. Reinterpretation of realist text is an excellent example of the usefulness of a dramaturg for practice. Due to the distrust between playwrights, practitioners, and scholars that became even stronger as deconstruction and post-modernism gained steam the dramaturg is a connecting agent for all parties. Reinterpretation of realism on a non-realistic stage provides exercise and example for the impact of dramaturgy on production. Theatre and the theatre text is a living thing. That is why the dramaturg must be involved in reinterpretation.

Once a dramaturg is able to demonstrate the value of their contribution, and dispel the mythos and fear associated with their position, the work has only just begun. Each member of the theatre team serves a specific purpose. The dramaturg is no different. Susan Jonas and Geoff Proehl, in the introduction to Dramaturgy in American Theater: A Sourcebook, describe dramaturgs, in simple terms as hybrid minds that could marry theory and practice (viii). The process of dramaturgy of marrying theory and practice is necessary, but equally demanding and complicated.

Ideally, dramaturgy provides the best environment for collaboration of theatre artists, enabling them the freedom to create. But is that not the director's function? Yes, initially the director as organizer and as leader provided unity and focus, but as they have become driving interpretive artists (as seen in the last chapter) they primarily provide focus and can also benefit from the unifying element of a dramaturg. It is the dramaturg who can bring the ideas found in the script, the context of the script, the intent of the playwright, and historical impact together with the director's vision, the contemporary audience and the production itself.

Current atmosphere in the practical and intellectual circles of theatre following trends in postmodernism and deconstruction created the necessity for dramaturgs or at least dramaturgical practice within theatre production. Deconstruction taught the theatre community that symbol needs to be researched fully, and biases need to be acknowledged in the text, but not allow productions to be crippled by the supposed lack of meaning suggested by postmodern theorists. While words do not have absolute meaning, they do have meaning. It is the mode of communication enjoyed by all. The dramaturg, in a theatre process must find a balance between the notions of literary prison and literary anarchy.

Consider that a performance is a destination. The director knows the destination and the direction s/he wishes to go. The dramaturg has the map, makes sure everyone is packed, knows speed traps, has driving instructions from several sources, weather information, possible detours, gas stations marked, alternative routes, and Dramamine in case anyone gets carsick.

Through personal experience as well as essays and accounts of numerous dramaturgs the following provides an outline of the function of a production dramaturg as

part of a theatrical production team. Though there may be more flexibility and scope to the position of dramaturg, the desired goals, tools, responsibilities and qualities remain constant.

In the majority of situations the dramaturg has four goals: protecting the text, supporting the director, facilitating audience outreach, and anticipating production problems. Every action of the dramaturg supports one of these goals. A dramaturg's traditional role, and source of stereotype, has been the guardian of text and the playwright. In this position the dramaturg keeps all legal, ethical and artistic issues in check. Roger Hapgood reminds theatre practitioners that legally speaking the play is the artistic creation of the author (141).

Ideally, reinterpretation of realist text attempts to stay true to the text even though they are not text-true. Adherence to the ideological content of the script and themes found within are preferable to any implemented concept ideas. Most conflict between playwright and director emerges in reinterpretation because the director must walk the fine line between being text true or simply true to the text. Text-true productions often get lost in the style and form of the script. But since a director can be true to the nature of the text without being married to the script, there remains more freedom for the director to be creative. This approach also allows life to be breathed into the text itself.

The antipathy between living playwrights and directors is in a fevered pitch over the notion of authorship. A play-text is the sole property of the playwright. Any performance connected with the text is also the playwright's property. Directors and dramaturgs should accept that any new play is for the playwright first. The play begins with the playwright. Production occurs with the director. Even without the idea of reinterpretation, translation from page to stage is difficult, especially concerning realist

text. In one sense, drama and theatre are separate arts; however, it is the balance of these arts that creates successful productions.

There are two conditions regarding reinterpretations of realism. First, the director is the primary artist. Second, the text must already be established before reinterpretation. The original production belongs to the playwright. Authorship in theatre is a conflict that may never be solved, but it can be less harmful than in some cases. By law the playwright is protected. However it is becoming increasingly difficult to define what those protections cover. The playwright sets his/her art onto the world and cannot control how it is received. Text is distorted by all who look upon it (Luere 5).

Reinterpretation of all text becomes inevitable due to time and culture. It is the director's responsibility to bridge the gap between artists and audience. Through reinterpretation, especially of older text this responsibility is more important. The onstage treatment must illuminate rather than detract from the original text. Just because possible reinterpretations of text are numerous does not mean that they are endless. It is necessary for both the director and the playwright (or playwright advocate) to consider the balance between reinterpretation and deconstruction or just plain misunderstanding.

The director's work is also complemented by the support of a dramaturg whether s/he is staging a text-true version of a play or applying a concept to the text. A dramaturg uses his/her tools to validate as well as question the choices of the director.

Audience outreach is often confused with public relations. Outreach, however is not only about getting the word out, but creating interest, starting dialogues and raising cultural awareness of the audience through the production. By that same token, the dramaturg keeps a pulse on the community so the theatre may better serve their needs.



One of the most practical aspects of dramaturgy and goals of the dramaturg is anticipating production problems. Through research and production history the dramaturg may save the valuable time and effort of the production team by learning from the success or mistakes of previous productions and relating them in the pre-production process.

In order to accomplish these goals a production dramaturg must develop structural analysis and research skills. These are the two basic tools of the dramaturg. Quality and efficiency of the structural analysis can make or break a dramaturg's effectiveness within the theatre team. It is where the director and designers find their vision and the actors find their motivation. A production is more likely to succeed when all decision and debate concerning production have a basis in the text. It is easier to support this basis with a strong structural analysis.

After meeting with the director and choosing a script, the first task of the dramaturg is script preparation. Before the analysis can begin, a dramaturg must ask a series of questions concerning the script. Is the play a translation? How many versions are there? Which one is the best for our purposes? How long does it run? Do we need to make cuts? Do we want to merge two versions? Is it legal to do so? Notice that from the very beginning the dramaturg asks questions.

When the script has been pinned down, a structural analysis can begin. There are several approaches to play analysis. Lee Devin calls attention to the need for common terms in play analysis (209). He offers two basic types with which most practitioners should be familiar. The first being Devin's idea of the well-made play, and the second is the Aristotelian model (210, 216). The former is helpful in finding the structure of any play employing a linear plot structure. The latter reveals important concepts and calls

attention to theme. Another widely accepted form of play analysis is found in David Ball's Backwards and Forwards, which is based on an action/reaction sensibility (or reaction/action as the case may be). Ball's analysis is simpler and more widely applicable to all styles of drama than Devin's structure.

In a backwards and forwards analysis, the play begins in a state of stasis. This stasis is intruded upon and all of the actions that follow are a result of the characters attempting to get back to stasis (Ball 21). As the play goes from stasis to stasis a sequence of actions and reactions occur. Ball suggests analysis of these actions by starting from the last action and working backward for full understanding of the play's journey. These can be described as action/reaction, trigger and heap, or cause to effect. By linking these actions the shape of the play comes to light. Within them are the exposition, point of attack, rising action, complication, crisis, climax and denouement of the well-made play (Devin 210).

A solid analysis leaves no stone unturned. From personal experience the best analyses are those that answer a series of questions. The first of which is: What is the major conflict? The answer to this question effects theme, concept choice, protagonist, protagonist's goal, mood, atmosphere, intrusion (or inciting incident), point of attack, and a myriad of other inquiries that affect the production process. Major conflict is sometimes believed to be absolute, but it is a matter of interpretation. Since the most important answer in a structural analysis is up to interpretation the whole play is as well.

The dramaturg must collaborate with the director to determine the major conflict in order to begin the analysis. Once that is set the rest of the analysis falls into place. From the structural analysis emerge several important revelations. Besides the overall structure of the play, given circumstances, and character descriptions; theme, thought,

and imagery also surface. David Ball gives an excellent explanation for the necessity of structural analysis to illuminate the theme:

A theme is an abstract concept made concrete by a play's action. Theme is not meaning; it is a topic in the play. Theme is a result; it emerges from the script's workings, so examine a play for theme after you are thoroughly familiar with the play's foundation elements. (Ball 78)

Theme, however, is not the only element to emerge from the foundation elements.

Concept, imagery and playwright's intent are also revealed through analysis.

Armed with a strong analysis a dramaturg begins to fulfill her goal of protecting the text and of supporting the director. She may also employ the stability of the analysis to maintain the boundaries of production. Though the dramaturg's arguments may be in vain, she must maintain boundaries in order for the rest of the team to move freely inside them. This can be a matter of conflict within the production process; however, a good dramaturg can maintain boundaries by suggesting alternative means rather than enforcing rules.

As part of the analysis or emerging from the analysis the dramaturg employs the skill of research. Research for a production has infinite possibilities. Like the play itself, some research is concrete and some abstract. Examples of concrete research include a biography of the author, production history, historical context of the play, historical context of the time in which it was written, and any other seemingly trivial bit of interest appearing within the text of the play or relating to the director's concept. Abstract research is that which evokes the feeling of the play. Designers are familiar with initial response/reaction sketches expressing the images, which struck them upon first reading. Similarly, a dramaturg collects images. These images can be visual, iconographic, musical, colorful, historical or any other type of sense-driven stimulus. Some will be

used in production, most will not. The research has one goal, and that is to help the director communicate the world of the play for the theatre team.

Suppose a director proposed setting *Hedda Gabler* in the barrel of a gun as suggested by Bert States (85). General Gabler's guns are an important symbol to Hedda, and are present at the climax of the action. They represent the imposing force of General Gabler as well as or better than the text suggested portrait of him on the wall. If a gun barrel were to surround the stage, his influences, as well as the imminent doom of the main characters are fully realized. Proponent of the play analysis, Lee Devin discusses the opening scene for *A Doll's House* and how to determine what action takes place first through the investigation of a structural analysis.

The curtain opens. What do we show? Should the housekeeper Helene pass through on a domestic errand? Something to do with the lamp, say? If she did, she would move a couple of the several doors. Because doors and lamps are major materials of the play, it might be well to introduce them right away. (Devin 213)

By that same token, could there be only one door? No doors? The possibilities are endless. All of the possibilities have basis in the script. Realism is not only realism it is drama. In it are themes, emotions, and raw theatre as in any other dramatic text.

Realism itself also holds a key to the significance of aesthetic reinterpretation. Realist philosophical theory stresses the importance of the effect of environment on the action of a realist play. The environment whether physical, emotional, or psychological can be presented by aesthetic means. The best method to determine that environment as well as other factors that may impact the reinterpretation is the structural analysis of the text.

The key to reinterpretation of realism is to take over where the playwright left off. In the text is only what the playwright was able to communicate as truth from his/her perspective in his/her time. A director's responsibility is to continue the playwright's

search for truth visually in the theatrical medium. As the playwright was a commentator on contemporary society through words, so is the director through action on stage.

Meaning in classic realism and lesser known realism is waiting to be revealed. Some directors may see the reinterpetive process as a means to update as well as illuminate the meaning of the text. This is a commonly used tactic in reinterpretation of classic drama.

The play analysis and research are particularly helpful when merging a text with a new concept. Reinterpretation of realism as an idea can be supported in much the same manner as an individual production. The root of realism is actually found in a desire for illusionism on stage (a point at which also marks the rise of the director). Realism as an aesthetic convention soon became the aesthetic means for realist philosophers and playwrights to communicate their ideas and hold a mirror to society. Murphy's statement explains why realist texts remain confined to the realist aesthetic over a century after the original movement. His earlier statement regarding the societal conception of realism is vital to understanding the impact of reinterpretation of realism on an audience (1). Just as in Rokem's ideas about the voyeuristic qualities of viewing realism it is that comfortable feeling that the audience has for realism that can be exploited in reinterpretation.

Realistic aesthetics only presented surface reality. The presentational nature of theatre performance in itself prevents realism from being anything but surface reality. Non-realistic aesthetics are as plausible as the world created on stage allows. Aesthetics that accompanied the other modernist movements argue that non-illusionist presentation communicates a deeper truth rather than simply a surface reality.

In the case of this thesis the assumed truth of realism is exploited to express underlying truth. When realism emerged the realist philosophies argued that truth was

the highest form of morality (Brockett, Century 28). Realism opened a Pandora's Box to individual expression in theatre. There cannot be a return to structured formulas. Theatre practitioners must constantly discover new avenues to express their truth. Tampering with realism is like shaking the foundation of modern theatre. It is assumed that any tampering with this foundation is meant to cause harm. But there is no reason why reinterpretation cannot be a tool to strengthen the genre of realism rather than destroy it. Dramaturgs and dramaturgical practice within a production tries to prevent the destruction of a text through its visual reinterpretation.

Advanced theatrical convention, continued development of realist drama and the rise of directorial interpretation supports reinterpretation of realism. In the tradition of dramaturgy evolutionary basis for reinterpretation of realism can be traced through what Oscar Brockett calls *The Century of Innovation*. The reason for this is simple:

In an age of conflicting discourses it seems increasingly irrelevant (if indeed it was ever truly relevant) to ask which theory of theatre is correct, but rather to ask for whom and for what purposes each theory was developed and for what purposes has it been or might it be utilized.  
(Carlson 540)

Reinterpretation of drama by a director is largely related to aesthetics. The use of the door in *A Doll's House*, a giant gun barrel in *Hedda Gabler* or a dying apple tree in *Streetcar Named Desire* show possible aesthetic choices. The stimulation is purely aesthetic, yet the affect would reverberate through the whole performance. The impact of such visual stimuli is not only aesthetic and technological, it is directly related to the philosophies that brought it about. Aesthetic innovation grew out of thought, theme, and philosophy. Exaggerated set design and prop pieces are representative of expressionism because they were devised to promote the expressionist themes of the distortion of the human spirit due to materialist, industrialized society. Without the foundations of

expressionism those aesthetic values are changed. This approach is a practical application of dramatic scholarship to theatre practice. Realist plays from Ibsen to Miller and Williams to McDonagh can be effectively staged using the wide variety of aesthetic principles created to support the modernist movements over the past century. Through research, communication and creativity the dramaturg ensures that the text and concept are achieved successfully.

For example, in a production I directed of an adapted version of Aristophanes *Lysistrata* entitled *Aristophanes Lysistrata: A Sports Adaptation* the text was written to give a sporting context to a Greek performance. As director, I wanted the atmosphere of the sporting event to be the most important element of the play. The women of Athens and Sparta would become cheerleaders and the men would be football or basketball players. Due to the highly sexual nature of the text, the concept began to express a sense of pedophilia because neither I, nor my dramaturg, or my test audience could separate cheerleading from high school-aged children. In the spirit of compromise the Greek element was reintroduced, but the sporting context was also maintained through creative costuming and two silent cheerleaders who served as handmaidens to Lysistrata.

Dramaturgs must have a keen eye when assessing the probable acceptance and relevance of a concept. By remembering her goals, using the tools of analysis and research, and seeing to her responsibilities the dramaturg can begin to bridge the gap between text and director, director and designer and concept and audience.

When the basic tools of dramaturgy have been acquired, the production dramaturg has a series of basic responsibilities to a production process. These responsibilities can be broken into three steps of pre-production, production, and post-production.

Pre-production dramaturgy involves script preparation and research, which will be further discussed as the tools of the dramaturg. Armed with these tools the dramaturg attends all pre-production and design meetings. The earlier a dramaturg can attend meetings, the more effective s/he will be to the process. It is at this time that the dramaturg earns the confidence of the creative team, and facilitates open dialogue between them. Concept is formed and discussed in these meetings and the dramaturg keeps extensive notes regarding the progression of the concept. During pre-production the dramaturg begins to fulfill three of the four goals: protecting the text, supporting the director and anticipating production problems.

During the production process the dramaturg still attends progress meetings, but now that the play is in rehearsal her responsibilities begin to shift. A production dramaturg rarely attends fix-it or blocking rehearsals. By attending only read-throughs and run-throughs, the dramaturg stays aware of the overall vision of the production. The dramaturg makes herself readily available for the actors, and may present workshops for the actors concerning certain aspects of the play. In this process the dramaturg retains a passionate objectivity in order to serve the director's interests and to keep the audience's expectations in mind. Ideally by this time the text has been served so that the dramaturg can begin audience outreach through press releases and a well thought out public relations concept. Though many theatres and institutions may have a public relations person, the dramaturg must collaborate with this person to best serve the interests of the current production. This includes collaboration with director and designers as well. Formulating the mode in which the public will be presented with the production serves the director, the text and the audience.



Before the show goes up, the dramaturg has also developed program notes; which are usually done in concert with the director, but can often be the sole duty of the dramaturg. Program notes serve several purposes. They give the context of the play and of the concept of the production. The program relates background information on specific issues of importance to the text and the director. To complement the program notes many dramaturgs also present a lobby display of research, design sketches, set model, and other important visual information that may connect the audience to the production. Besides the scheduled talk-back, the program and lobby display are the most direct contacts the dramaturg has with the audience. (A talk-back is a scheduled session after a performance in which the dramaturg facilitates and organizes a formal dialogue between director, actors, noted scholars, the playwright (if applicable) and the audience.)

After the run of the show, a dramaturg assembles a detailed record of the performance. Theatre performances are fleeting; therefore, a dramaturg's responsibility to post-production insures that a record is preserved for posterity and future research. Contents of this record include final script, production photos, reviews, a copy of the program, examples of design, images used in lobby display, and other pertinent information. All of these responsibilities vary from production to production, but those explained here ultimately fulfill each of the four dramaturgical goals.

Armed with the tools and clarity of vision regarding dramaturgical goals and responsibilities, there remains one last aspect of dramaturgy that brings it all together. Production dramaturgs must possess several intangible qualities in order to accomplish goals use tools, and maintain responsibilities. Flexibility, artistic diplomacy, passionate objectivity, and endless idealism are among the most important qualities of a dramaturg.

Flexibility is important because each production is different and the demands on the dramaturg may be light and conciliatory for one production, while another may find the dramaturg deeply involved in each choice and action of the process.

Artistic diplomacy enables a dramaturg to open the lines of communication for the theatre team. It is well known that especially in American theatre, there is a rift between playwrights and directors that is thought to be the natural order (Copelin 21). Theatre practitioners and scholars are talented individual artists who sometimes have conflicting ideas on thought, concept and execution of theatre. This is the antithesis of the collaborative nature of theatre production. As artistic diplomat, a dramaturg is a facilitator and intermediary who provides the glue for a theatre team which includes playwrights, scholars and critics.

Passionate objectivity is another dramaturgical quality that is a source of perplexity. Though it seems like a contradiction in terms it does well to describe the contribution of a dramaturg during the production stage and rehearsal process. The dramaturg is passionate about the art of theatre, about the strength, vitality and scope of the theatre experience. However, for each production s/he needs to maintain objectivity or her/his ability to serve the production may suffer from over-involvement.

Perhaps the most difficult quality to maintain is an endless idealism regarding the possibilities of a theatrical performance. Production dramaturgs are practitioners. When used correctly they are an important part of the process. Cary M. Mazer's essay regarding dramaturgy related a story of the process between himself (as director), an assistant director, and a dramaturg. The most distressing portion of this article was that his dramaturg actually suggested that the ideas he was trying to express might better be

expressed through a scholarly article (302). Clearly Mazer's dramaturg was lacking in the idealism of the theatre process.

Dramaturgs have the ability to set the boundaries and provide the director with options when reinterpreting realistic text in the twenty-first century theatre. There is no reason to guarantee that any idea or interpretation will succeed or fail. However, analysis of the qualities of realism renders the idea of reinterpretation more palpable and possible.

Realism taps the universal. Regardless of specific situations in a given story there are most likely to be relatable qualities in character or conflict. An audience member does not need to be trapped in a 19<sup>th</sup> century marriage to relate to Nora Helmer. Realism is also appealing because unlike pure fantasy, it reminds the viewer that they are not alone. Real life is happening every day. Distortion or elevation of that reality can have an immeasurable affect on an audience. Apart from the abstract and ephemeral reasons to use realistic dramatic texts there are also arguments supported from the historical point of view.

Realistic dramatic texts are prime material for directorial reinterpretation. Traditionally realistic texts were staged in an illusionist manner, as realism has been the least likely candidate for reinterpretation. Among other reservations about restaging realism is that realistic texts can seem dull next to text related to other movements. Realism has infrequently been subjected to reinterpretation, and only a few select pieces of realism live outside their original time period because, as Robert Willis states [realism] has long been associated with the glum and joyless (10). However, through reinterpretation there is no need for realism to remain so.

The recognition of the limitations of realism stems from its beginnings. Even original realist playwrights turned to symbolism or expressionism by the end of their

careers. It was soon realized that a theatrical illusion of reality was still an illusion whether in text or on stage. From the realist movement art was turned from exposing reality to exposing truth. They used many modes and invented many conventions in order to do this.

Theatre recreates the refined and heightened truth which is what justifies its formulation as art (Marowitz, Other 113). The formulation of the isms also created a demand for technical theatre convention to express the views of each movement. Each is defined by philosophy, text, and means used to relate that philosophy to an audience.

After post-modernism and the mistrust of language, texts are vulnerable to distortion as well as interpretation. It is also important to know that playwrights are not perfect (Cox 61). Playwrights of realist text offer a vision of the world through his/her eyes (Luere 24). Discovering that vision and relating it to an audience falls in the hands of the director.

Considering the nature of realism, it is reasonable to believe that reinterpretation is as valuable and possible an endeavor as that of a Greek or Shakespearean text. It is widely known that the tenets of realism are heavily dependent on the effect of environment on its characters. The environment of the play, whether physical, social, emotional or familial can be portrayed through stage aesthetics. Directing, design, and acting choices reveal the impact of environment. Through reinterpretation of realism on a non-realistic stage the dependency on environmental condition is enhanced and better demonstrated to an audience. Audience reception and understanding of a particular audience is a directorial and dramaturgical concern.

The answer to the question What is a dramaturg? is simple: Dramaturgs are practitioners. A dramaturg is a proponent of the theatre production process. Like the

practical work of a director's direction, a designer's designs or an actor's performance, the research, writing and analysis skills of the dramaturg serve the physical production.

Can reinterpretation of realism happen without a dramaturg? Yes, but it can also happen without designers, or a director. The point is that in the search for well-rounded, truth-seeking, and prosperous live theatre all practitioners are needed for the theatre to fulfill its potential. For the future of theatre in any genre that includes the dramaturg.

## CHAPTER III

### SIMPLE REVELATIONS:

#### INGMAR BERGMAN S REVIVAL OF CANONICAL REALISTIC DRAMA THROUGH REINTERPRETATION

Ingmar Bergman s interpretations of several canonical realist dramas demonstrate balance between directorial vision and playwright s intent. He is not limited to realism, but an important portion of his work involves the use of realist dramas by Henrik Ibsen and August Strindberg. Bergman s successful synthesis of realist convention with theatrical reinterpretation gives merit to detailed investigation of his method and style. In a career that spans over fifty years, he has evolved into a creative force as a director of film and theatre. This chapter focuses on Ingmar Bergman s contribution to live theatre as an innovative director of realistic plays.

Bergman s approach to stage directing has been effected by a variety of influences. Bergman is the quintessential twentieth century director because his work combines a wide range of artistic styles and techniques. He began his career as a professional director in Sweden during World War II (Marker 291). The social and political unrest in Europe surrounding the two World Wars had created a particularly explosive artistic atmosphere. A sea of modern philosophical and creative movements had sprung up in response to this atmosphere. Ingmar Bergman was witness to these movements as a student and young director. He did not subscribe to any one movement,

but instead realized the benefits of each. Bergman prefers to approach each play as a separate entity with its own needs in production; thereby, any of the conventions created by the modernist movements could be used for any play. Throughout his career Bergman continues to combine the conventions found in the variety of modernist movements with the directorial eclecticism first theorized and practiced by Max Reinhardt. Bergman demonstrates successful cohesion of technique, style, and philosophy. He mixes a Wagnerian sense of integration and total emersion, with a Brechtian inspired preference for audience self-awareness. Furthermore, like Artaud, he remains aware of the immediate and temporary nature of the theatre art (Luere 1). This eclectic mix of influences appears throughout Bergman s career.

One of Bergman s strongest assets, and distinguishing characteristics as a director, is a strong connection to his Scandinavian roots. Whether it is the plays of Strindberg and Ibsen, or the affection of his home theatre Dramaten (Royal Dramatic Theatre in Stockholm) Bergman consistently returns to his native soil and his native tongue for inspiration on the stage (Marker 62). August Strindberg has been an especially strong presence in Ingmar Bergman s career. Strindberg s body of work has influenced all of Bergman s art, whether it is theatre or film. Bergman s earliest realist productions, however, are not from Scandinavian playwrights, but American. In 1949 he directed *A Streetcar Named Desire* with an inventive simplicity considered radical by contemporary critics (Marker 48). His stage translation of Williams classic provides a precursor for all of his realist productions to follow. In the 1950s he did more non-realistic and classical theatre than contemporary realism, but did stage two more Williams scripts, *The Rose Tattoo* (1951) and *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* (1956) (48). *Who s Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* (1963) became another American realist work to appear in Bergman s repertoire. Finally,

in 1964 he staged his first production of Ibsen's last truly realistic script, *Hedda Gabler*. Perhaps the best example of Bergman's influential staging practice is evident in his 1972 version of *The Wild Duck* in which he turned the traditional setting inside out by placing the attic down front (220). After years spent directing August Strindberg's dream plays and expressionist work he staged his own version of *Miss Julie* which ran simultaneously with his first production of *A Doll's House* in 1981. Bergman set precedents in realist stage translation with this pairing because the plays are so well known and were rarely staged outside the confines of the box set. More recently Bergman took audiences into the mind of Eugene O'Neill in a revealing revision of *Long Day's Journey Into Night* (1988). Careful analysis of Ingmar Bergman's treatment of contemporary and classic realistic texts will mark his significance regarding the role of the modern stage director.

Bergman's preference for inventive staging led him to produce unique and well-received productions of realist drama. He employs an eclectic, yet thematically unified approach to directing. Though the nature of eclecticism suggests radically diverse approaches, Bergman employs several common devices as well. First is the concept of reinterpretation itself. Since the beginning of his career, he has been reluctant to stage realism in true realistic style. Bergman asserts, "I must separate ingrained concepts and important experiences, rout out old solutions without necessarily replacing them with new ones" (255). In this rather cryptic statement appears the idea of Bergman's need to bring old theatre up-to-date without losing the essence of the original (a recurring theme in his realism and non-realism).

Bergman has staged several of these plays more than once, and most of them have run in repertory for years after the first production. *A Doll's House* and *Miss Julie* have run together and separately, and have had two to three different theatrical translations by



Bergman. His persistence in reinterpretation has caused a shift in the way the public expects to see these classic dramas produced (Marker xv). The appeal of Bergman's productions, as opposed to the traditional text-true stagings of the plays, is their dreamlike vision of reality (Leiter 32).

Ingmar Bergman's approach to text defines his role as a reinterpreter director. Bergman's philosophy regarding text and stage translation is the most important aspect of his role as reinterpreter. A text is, [Bergman] has repeatedly insisted, neither more nor less than a hidden path into the writer's consciousness. It is then the task of the director to **translate** the explicit or implicit choices into the language of the theatre (Marker, Project 32). He sees himself as a conductor of the script, much like a musical conductor (32).

Reinterpretive directors heal the wounds inflicted by, what Artaud calls, the absurd duality existing between director and author (Artaud 12). Rather than viewing a text as an abstract declaration of ideas, the Bergman lobbies to extract the intended meaning encoded by the playwright. Bergman's genius lies in his ability to find relevant themes in a variety of texts and delivering them without introducing his own topicality (Leiter 32). Any message that he wishes to portray is already inherent in the text. He also shows no desire simply to renew classic literature. He is able to direct a play to serve a contemporary audience without intentionally bringing it up to date.

By beginning with the text, Bergman's initial approach to Ibsen would be the same as the approach to Williams or Shakespeare. After thorough study of the text each play takes on its own life. Bergman feels the play should, live in the hearts of the audience (Marker 19). To achieve this goal Bergman is a strong believer in extensive

preparation, and he goes into each rehearsal with a definite vision (Leiter 32). In an interview with biographer Frederick J. Marker, Bergman stated:

When you go to the first rehearsal, you must be absolutely sure; you must have prepared precisely and you must be absolutely sure — that *this* is what Strindberg has meant. There are no longer any acts of violence, not against the text, not against the actors. (9)

Though he uses Strindberg as the example, the philosophy applies to his body of work. Bergman's flexibility of thought and art are demonstrated in a statement separating the work of Ibsen and Strindberg:

With Ibsen, you always have the feeling of limits. He always built his plays, and he knew exactly: I want this and I want that. With Strindberg you always have the feeling that there are no such limits. (Rokem 49)

From his first production of *A Streetcar Named Desire* (1949) through *Nora and Julie* (1981) and to *Long Day's Journey Into Night* (1988) it is this attention to the core of the text that shines through in every production.

To achieve his definitive vision Bergman employs several methods consistently. For Bergman the most important element of theatre is the relationship of text-actor-audience (31). The devices employed by Bergman are not attempting to tear the text apart, but to reveal the truth that is hidden there. The devices are slightly altered to serve each performance, but the convention remains constant. All of these basic characteristics aid Bergman's ultimate goal of rearranging and re-examining reality (Marker 59).

Directorially, the actor is his focus because Bergman puts great stock in the magic of the actor (Marker 19). There is no need for spectacle or radical stage design when Bergman's reinterpretation involves simply re-motivating the actors. For instance, in *Hedda Gabler*, *Nora*, *Julie* and others he singles out the main character and presents the play entirely from their perspective (Leiter 32). Bergman asks that the actor bring the

text to the audience. He stresses a close, almost erotic, nature of collaboration (32). Bergman's collaboration includes the playgoers as well as the players. Several of Bergman's productions feature the actor-spectator, which means that the actors leave the scene, but never leave the stage. Bergman uses this convention to encourage the audience to see the performance from several different perspectives. Imagine the blackmail scene from *A Doll's House* between Nora and Krogstad. It took on a new dimension when Torvald was seen witnessing the dialogue. For *Long Day's Journey Into Night* the actors left the playing area and turned away from the action. In one the audience sees Torvald where he shouldn't be and in the other the Tyrones turn their back on where they should be. Bergman shows his Brechtian influence with this convention, because the character-spectator also serves as a means for Bergman to remind the audience that they are watching a performance. Any additional conventions used facilitate Bergman's commitment to the text, the actor and the audience.

Bergman's 1949 production of *A Streetcar Named Desire* is the earliest example of his ability to root out the core themes and ideas in a realist text and present them on a non-illusionist stage. Elia Kazan's original 1947 staging, done in collaboration with Tennessee Williams, produced the definitive production of *Streetcar* (Luere 67). In America, this production represented the ultimate in textual, directorial, performance and design realism. America's *Streetcar* was designed (just outside the box) in the theatricalized realism style that became popular during the 1940s (Brockett Century 514). It was a stationary setting dominated by the Kawalski apartment. The only furniture was necessary furniture and a set of stairs leading up to the neighbor's apartment. On the backdrop were painted indications of the street. Any change of scenery was achieved through the use of lighting. Bergman's vision for *Streetcar*

deviated from the prior productions, but resulted in a veritable theatrical paraphrase and intensification of the inner spirit of Williams' drama (49).

While the dialogue remained intact, Bergman ignored most of Williams' specific stage instructions (50). He created Blanche's environment through set movement, visual symbolism and carefully orchestrated sound design. Carl-Johan Ström, his set designer, did the same with Jo Mielziner's set as Bergman did with the play itself. Ström took this idea of theatricalized realism but modified it slightly (51).

The set was released from the confines of the stage by being mounted on a revolve in order to allow the set to be moveable (51). Bergman used this convention as Blanche first entered. As she walked down the street, the street was not a two-dimensional representation, but a living, breathing entity on the stage with her. The whole stage moved as she took the walk through the city to Stella's apartment. The revolving set was only part of a greater vision created by Bergman. It was integrated with the rhythm of the whole production. In *Streetcar* it was not only about visual, vocal, textual, or even the actor's physical rhythm. Bergman regards the combined rhythm of a play as the driving force of a production (10).

Audibly, the constant buzz, rattle and hum of street sounds echoed throughout the performance (49). One of the most poignant uses of sound was created by the sustained cry of the flower vendor through the end of the play (50). Bergman employed theatrical symbolism by placing an apple tree center stage. It was the only sign of life on the street and the leaves began to fall as Blanche descended into madness. Later realist productions by Bergman rely less on stage spectacle and visual symbolism in favor of character-driven revisions with simplistic set design.

Bergman's production of *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* (1963) proved that eclectic approach means that sometimes the text can stand on its own. The European premiere of *Woolf* was under Bergman's direction at Dramaten (Marker 52). Though Bergman's *Woolf* did not stray from Albee's text, it still retained qualities distinctive to Bergman's treatment. This production showed greater simplicity in regards to setting than *Streetcar*. The actor was the primary spectacle. Bergman stated in an interview that *Woolf* did not need a director, if the actors were experienced (Marker 15). Visual symbolism was minimized, walls were suggested with black screens (52). The living room on stage was fully furnished. The furniture functioned as obstacles as well as a realistic representation of a living room. George and Martha's bar wagon was a non-obtrusive, but constant presence in Bergman's production as in Albee's script.

In 1964, Bergman's production of *Hedda Gabler* transformed perceptions of classic realism. Bergman's *Hedda Gabler* demonstrated his simplistic style combined with a conscious commitment to the core of Henrik Ibsen's drama. The Dramaten production of *Hedda* played in several venues throughout Europe in 1967 and 1968. While in Munich, he staged a German revival in 1979. *Hedda* represented the step in Bergman's career as he moved from canonical early non-realism to a series of classic realist dramas.

The textual alterations to *Hedda* were more dramatic than those given to the American plays. This was due mainly to the fact that Williams and Albee were contemporary dramatists, so the dialogue and plot devices were able to adapt to Bergman's approach more easily. Bergman regards the play as a story of Hedda's isolation. Every detail of the play was centered on the title character.

Bergman chose to do away with the lavish, naturalistic box set altogether (Marker 194). As in the Williams and Albee productions, he stripped the set to its bare essentials (194). He presented a variation of the box by using red velvet screens that created an enclosure rather than a room (195). There are no obvious doors or windows (195). At center stage sat a clear partition separating the stage into two rooms. One was the sitting room where most of the action took place; the other was Hedda's inner room. (195). [Hedda's room is usually placed far from the audience's view and so this placement seems to foreshadow Bergman's attic positioning in *The Wild Duck* (1972).] If the spectator had been to see a traditional version of the play they would also note that Bergman cut General Gabler's portrait.

For the Dramaten production of *Hedda Gabler* the curtain was up (halfway) before the play started (197). It was as if the playgoers were invited into the Tesmans home. From the auditorium they were able to have a look around. The audience's relationship with the play began before the actors appeared on stage. Again he engaged the audience by forcing them to imagine the Tesman home as more than what was on stage. This was one means Bergman used to bring the spectators closer to the action, but it also did the opposite. By seeing the set before the production; it assured the audience that they were about to witness a play, not a slice of reality.

Hedda began the play in her room with a silent, choreographed monologue communicating the hopelessness of her situation. From this moment on, Hedda never left the stage (Marker 199). This was how he communicated the isolation of the character from the beginning of the play. Her constant presence gives Hedda a false sense of control over every action. Bergman believes that Hedda begins the play with suicide in mind and what ensues is merely her path to the end. This interpretation sheds light on the

motivation of her actions throughout the play, especially the manipulation of her soul mate, Løvborg, to take his own life. Traditionally, she appears to be a heartless, desperate, poor little rich girl. In Bergman's concept Hedda became more sympathetic to the audience because she was doomed from the beginning.

The next realist play to be staged by Bergman further demonstrated his talent for the spectacle of simplicity in an inventive revival of Ibsen's *The Wild Duck* for Dramaten in 1972. Bergman's production exposed the essence of Ibsen's text as well as upholding the ideals of classic realistic thought (Rokem 27). Like his other productions, he controlled the text-actor-audience relationship with a minimal use of set decoration. The core themes present in *The Wild Duck* are presented through the actors and an innovative stage reinterpretation involving the attic space in the Ekdal home. Ibsen's plays tend to stress the influence of past deeds on present circumstances. The scenery in this production suggested those influences in both the Werle and Ekdal stage settings. Though naturalistic detail was absent, the transition and juxtaposition between the two homes were consistent with earlier stagings of *The Wild Duck*. The opulence of the wealthy Werle house was suggested by individual pieces of furniture (Marker 220). The furnishing in the Ekdal house appropriately displayed a lower-class lifestyle. The portrait studio in the home was marked by the presence of a forest backdrop (219). The older Ekdal's warnings about the forest were highlighted by the constant presence of the backdrop.

The most significant element of Bergman's reinterpretation of *The Wild Duck* revision was the repositioning of the attic from the upstage position to more predominant downstage position (220). The play is written with the attic in the upstage position and is usually staged that way providing the audience distance from the events

that occur there (Rokem 26). Bergman considers character reaction as the most important element of dramatic action (Tmqvist, Stage 34). He likes the actors to face the audience, which is not possible if the attic is upstage. Considering modern directorial technique, it would seem odd to stage the major climax away from the audience. In front, the major climax, Hedvig's suicide, was revealed by Bergman to be intentional. The audience was able to see Hedvig's reaction to the conversation between the man who she had called father and the man who deemed it necessary to expose her true parentage (227). Bergman was the first director to apply this technique so effectively. This simple repositioning was the most innovative and noteworthy aspect of the Bergman production (Marker 220).

While Bergman was directing at the Munich Residenz theatre he took on what was later to be called, The Bergman Project (1981) ( Leiter 30). It involved two theatres and three productions running simultaneously. At one theatre was *Nora and Julie*, Bergman's adaptation/revision of the two most famous dramas from the realist/naturalist canon. Though he had a long relationship with the plays of Ibsen and Strindberg this was the first time he staged either of these classic realist plays. (In the other theatre was Bergman's stage adaptation of his movie *Scenes From a Marriage*.) Staging *A Doll's House* and *Miss Julie* together was an innovation in itself. While exploring the thematic duality Bergman demonstrated a mastery and understanding of both narratives and textual styles. Bergman's intention was to challenge people to make comparisons (Marker 3). He encouraged playgoers to question both choices represented by each play. As in his production of *Hedda Gabler* he focused the entire production on the female leads. Though both Nora and Julie are metaphors about isolation and



imprisonment, each woman, and thereby each playwright, handles the situation differently (Marker 2).

The first act of the Bergman Project was *Nora*. It was the first of two stage translations of *A Doll's House* undertaken by Bergman. (The second was a Swedish language version at Dramaten in 1989 that later traveled to New York City with productions of *Miss Julie* and *Long Day's Journey Into Night*.) The two productions have distinguishing qualities, but both demonstrated his technique of visual translation. In these translations Bergman took more literary license than any of his other productions (Tmqvist, *Doll's* 93). He cut one-third of the text and presented it in fifteen (later sixteen) scenes (Tmqvist, *Doll's* 93). This fact does not negate his attention to Ibsen's text, but instead makes the themes more apparent. The plot and main action are retained with efficiency. Bergman is able to illuminate the elements he regards as important with greater intensity. He accomplished this visually by stripping the stage to its bare essentials.

An open curtain revealed an isolated, raised playing area surrounded by tall red velvet curtains. There were no exits or entrances (Marker 229). Many of the devices he used in *Hedda* can be recognized in *Nora*. For instance, he used his character-spectator convention, but rather than leave Nora as the sole spectator, none of the characters leave. While Hedda is left alone because hers is a story of isolation, Nora's is that of imprisonment. As the other characters watched her scenes she was also being judged. This type of convention was especially useful for presentation to an audience who was not familiar with the societal demands of Nora's world. The other characters in *Nora* are imprisoned as well. All of these devices contributed to Bergman's preoccupation with isolation and the imprisonment of marriage (Marker 230).

One reviewer of the New York performance commented that the character of Nora was played with greater determination and less wide-eyed innocence than previous interpretations (Gussow 129). Bergman revealed the character of Nora in an opening sequence (much like the beginning of *Hedda*). The first image of Nora was that of a rag doll, already seated, utterly immobile, leaning back against the pillows of the plush sofa (Trnqvist, *Dolls* 95). The last image of Nora is equally important. In the prison created by Bergman's set, a single door emerged so Nora could escape (94). Bergman's visual interpretations regarding Nora's prison, her character, and the relationship of the other characters to her remain constant in both the Munich and the Stockholm productions.

The primary distinguishing factors are attributed to a simple change of geography. As previously stated the reception of the Munich production of *Nora* was largely dependent on the comparison with *Julie*. Bergman's Nora and Julie were portrayed as strong and decisive. By presenting them together Bergman was able to show their similarities as well as their differences. They each find their own means of escape from their prison. The Swedish *A Doll's House* carried different meanings because the play was produced independently from *Julie* and he changed the time period to enhance the meaning. One of the basic ideas of revisionism is to make the play applicable and accessible to the audience. At Dramaten, Bergman set *A Doll's House* at the turn of the century before the union between Sweden and Norway was dissolved (Trnqvist, *Dolls* 96). Nora's emancipation from her house suddenly took on a greater meaning in that context because it connected with a social and political consciousness only understood by a contemporary Scandinavian audience (96). Nora frees herself just as Sweden had. The audience could better identify with Nora in a context that reflected

their own heritage of imprisonment. Once again Bergman's technique revealed the themes of Ibsen's realistic work in a manner that best served the audience. Whether it is geographical differences or the generation gap, Bergman's approach to realistic staging is constantly adaptable yet consistently true to the essence of Ibsen's text.

Bergman's visual translations of *Miss Julie* called attention to its significance as a dramatic text and provide examples of his ever-adaptable brand of staging. Bergman's remarkable ability to translate dramatic text into simple, yet powerful theatrical productions was demonstrated in this production. The Munich production of *Julie* with *Nora* was the first of three separate revisions of *Miss Julie* by Bergman. Each staging is noticeably different, but his overall conception of the piece remains constant (Marker 104). Julie, Jean, and Christine retained the same characteristics in each (Tmqvist, Stage 46). Julie's decision to die was one of strength rather than weakness (58). All three versions of *Miss Julie* included a passage deleted by Strindberg that calls attention to a scar on Julie's face (Marker, Project 32). The scar is visually and thematically important to the Bergman productions. It is revealed through early dialogue that she received the scar from a suitor. She was making him jump over a riding crop and instead he took it up and struck her. When she first appeared, the scar is covered with light colored make-up. As the action rose and she was exposed emotionally, the scar became more visible and started to bleed. The visible mutilation represented Julie's emotional scarring. It could also reflect Strindberg's less than respectful feelings toward women. Bergman visually portrayed Julie's state of mind as well as the playwright's sentiments toward the character.

Overall, Bergman wanted to stress Julie's entrapment (Marker 106). As the naturalists intended, it is Julie's environment that influences her capture and downfall.

The role of the celebrating servants who enter in celebration during the course of the play became part of this environment. In traditional productions the servants who enter from the party appear in gaiety and celebration. In Bergman's productions the servants were drunk and unsettling. Bergman defends this choice in an interview with Fredrick Marker about the Bergman Project: I think people are a threat. In my production there's no ballet (Marker, Project 16). Bergman intensifies Strindberg's intent in a style that Lise-Lone Marker refers to as magic realism; he exposed the naturalistic ideals that Strindberg intended in a visually stunning and accessible manner (Marker 104). The dreamlike quality captured the audiences in the truth of Strindberg's tragedy.

Beginning with the Project, Bergman's stagings of *Miss Julie* have as many distinctions from each other as they do from traditional versions. Bergman wrote his own version of the play entitled *Julie* to run with his version of *A Doll's House* in 1981. The first distinction of this production was the pairing with *Nora*. It was Bergman's intention to present the juxtaposition of these two stories and these two women. This was the most important element of this production. Visually, the stage design for *Julie* included the lower portion of the upper room (Tmqvist, Stage 47). In this production Julie's father, the Count, hovered above the entire performance. This was a visual reminder to the audience of Julie's privileged upbringing above the servant's quarters. The Count's presence served a similar purpose as the actor-spectators in *Nora*. He was there to provide perspective. This was not just a kitchen, it was a kitchen in a manor, a fact often neglected from traditional versions of the play. His presence also clearly marked Bergman's assertion that Julie is an animal in a cage (Marker, Project 16).

His second stage translation of *Miss Julie* was the first upon his return to Sweden at the Dramaten (Marker 305). Bergman returned to the original text for this production,

but did retain his addition of Julie's scar and his interpretation of the servants' dance. Bergman could more easily portray the Swedish midsummer in this production because he had an audience that could appreciate the mood (Trnqvist, Stage 47). Julie's costume was also notable. Since each production features a different actress as Julie, the costume reflected Bergman's work with the individual actress (Oliver 80). In the Dramaten production, Julie's dress was a light style and violet color that reflected the summer atmosphere and Julie's inner sense of melancholy (Trnqvist, Stage 47). By sharp contrast Julie dominated the New York stage in dark red (Gussow 123). Red is a violent, deliberate color that commands attention. This seemingly insignificant change of color for one costume piece transforms the tone of the entire production. The New York production was the most recent as part of the Festival of the Arts in 1991 (Oliver 80). In a review of the New York production, Mel Gussow says, "the director confines disparate characters in domestic disharmony" (123). Another review described the same production as "hallucinatory" and giving the feeling of being in "the bowels of a Swedish manor. Somehow you [had] been led inside a deep wound" (Rich 135). Bergman demonstrated a through-line of technique and style with each unique approach to *Miss Julie*.

In his production of *Long Day's Journey Into Night* Bergman clearly reveals that remaining true to the text does not mean a production must be text-true. Bergman's first staging of the American classic was at Dramaten in 1988 and then again in 1991 for the festival in New York. Bergman's revision of *Journey* focused on the character of Edmund as the voice of the playwright. It was his memory depicted on stage. The key word is memory because Bergman produced a "dream-like" version of the drama (Trnqvist 61). To produce these memory images, Bergman created his most non-

realistic atmosphere for a realistic text to date. The stage setting was sparse, with a screen at the back for projections and the main acting area was a raised platform (63). Bergman rejects the psychological naturalism in favor of his familiar emphasis on facial and choreographic expressiveness (Marker 272). To accomplish this Bergman emphasized the silences. Some of the O'Neill text was sacrificed in order to create Edmund's perspective (Marker 272). Most notably, however, was the method he employed to visually illuminate the complex relationship of the Tyrone family (274). Much like the silent monologues staged in *Hedda Gabler* and *A Doll's House* gave a glimpse into the inner life of the main characters; all four Tyrones began the performance by entering the stage and embracing each other in a loving bond (Marker 274). The total effect of Bergman's visual translation that is most evident in *Journey* is the changing perception of truth, particularly in the eyes of Edmund. The true message of Bergman's work with realism lies in the idea that in the most faithful representation of reality is often the hidden or total absence of truth.

Ingmar Bergman is a consistent visionary in the field of stage direction. His eclectic, simplistic and text-centered approach to realist drama reiterates his importance as a director, raises the text and reinforces the idea of theatre as a collaborative art. Though Bergman's career covers film and non-realistic theatre, his work with realism reveals a commitment to presenting truth that is at hand in all of his work. His techniques have grown steadily in each production.

In February of 2002 he staged his first production of *Ghosts* at Dramaten. Details of the production have not been translated to English. However a brief overview of the production revealed that Bergman chose to show Oswald as a sufferer of AIDS rather

than syphilis. The concept works with theme and updates the stakes for a modern audience without compromising the text.

Bergman's career defines reinterpretation because he takes risks and asserts his own vision without destroying the playwright's authorship. Bergman merits greater recognition from the general theatre community because he demonstrates how to find truth of realism outside the conceptions of reality.

## CONCLUSION

### WHAT'S OUTSIDE THE BOX?

#### PRACTICAL AND COMPELLING ARGUMENTS FOR REINTERPRETATION OF REALISM

The box set was the first method of visual expression in a time when theatre became less about what humans ought to be and more about what they are. Aesthetically, the box set provided a window into a different, but familiar world. As set design evolved to include a functional and interactive set the characters were immersed rather than surrounded by their environment and a whole new truth began to be discovered. Thinking outside the box-set is dependent on that aesthetic-centered point of view. The importance of any production includes the visual impact.

It is widely known that the tenets of realism are heavily dependent on the effect of environment on its characters. The environment of the play, whether physical, social, emotional or familial can be portrayed through stage aesthetics. Directing, design, and acting choices reveal the impact of environment. Through reinterpretation of realism on a non-realistic stage the dependency on environmental condition is enhanced and better demonstrated to an audience. Director Arvin Brown focuses on aesthetic values in his directing adventures: Very often, I've tried to work against the prevailing tone of the play in the visual environment—as long as the play isn't falsified by doing that (Bartow 27). But thinking outside the box set is not only about physical disruption, it is about the



result of that disruption on the characters. Based solely on the nature of realism, and its strong connection to the physical environment, it is reasonable to conclude that reinterpretation is not only a valuable endeavor but an inevitable one.

Reinterpretation of realist texts uses directorial concept to fuel the process of communicating to an audience an individual perception of truth. The concept of reinterpretation of realism is supported through the emergence of the director. Process of reinterpretation of realism is supported by dramaturgical practice. To fully realize a reinterpreted version of a realist text the director, dramaturg and production team are all vital to ensure the posterity of the text as well as the impact of the production. Reception of reinterpretations of classic realism was evident through Ingmar Bergman's stage career.

Reinterpretation is also a means for revival of lesser known plays. One of the best models of this practice is that of Stephen Daldry's *An Inspector Calls* (1992). Stephen Daldry's 1992 production of *An Inspector Calls* began my initial investigation into the genre of directorial reinterpretation of realism. Anthony Chase's article in TCI, Ian MacNeil (Daldry's set designer), shows full color photos documenting the stage design of J.B. Priestley's forgotten mystery drama. Chase also penned an article entitled, A Theatre Marriage for Theatre Week describing the production. In this article he describes the production as, a pivotal event in theatre history. Other reviews like Roger Copeland's 'Seeing is Believing' in American Theatre and Alexis Green's for Theatre Week observed that Daldry 'rethinks the play in a way that probably would have delighted Priestley. This statement engages the idea that radical recreations of drama by directors can still be true to the playwright and true to the text. Clive Barnes supports this claim by stating for the New York Post that the text was 'untouched'.

Daldry's reinterpretation of *An Inspector Calls* is most interesting because it is not a classic piece of dramatic literature, yet through a simple restaging the play was brought to life. Consider the original 1947 reviews of the play. These are some examples: A Fascinating Drama Which Gets Mixed-Up (Robert Garland); *An Inspector Calls* is a Confused Fantasy (William Hawkins); and Too Tedious for a Stunt, Too Trivial for a Tract (Louis Kronenberger). These illustrate how the text was the most important part of the production and the show suffered for it. It seemed by these accounts that Priestley's play would be lost in the vault. The fact that it did fair only moderately well in its own time period makes the current nine-year run of the production more extraordinary. Daldry pulled the war horse out of the vault and into theatre gold.

*An Inspector Calls* is a dining room mystery play about the wealthy Birling family who are visited by the mysterious Inspector Goole. He accuses each member of the family of having a role in the suicidal death of a young woman. As the tale is woven Goole knocks each of the Birlings off their high horse. They soon learn that the inspector was a fraud, yet their dirty secrets have already been exposed. Just as they begin to relax with the knowledge that the young woman was not dead they receive a phone call confirming the recent death of a woman in the same manner that Goole described earlier.

In Daldry's version, described as expressionistic by most reviewers, the Birling home sits on stilts in opulent majesty on center stage. It was surrounded by a bleak gray stage populated with a chorus of silent observers in rags. As the play unfolded, so did the house (literally). To represent the exposure of the Birlings' questionable behavior and hidden lives the house opened and spilled its contents to the street below. Then as they discovered the inspector was a fraud and settled back into their delusion the house reassembled itself.

Reinterpretation of realism is relevant, educational and entertaining. Most arguments are substantiated through scholarship. The first involves the concept of reinterpretation itself which is connected to the rise of the director. The modern director is able to peel away the layers of truth and present them from his/her perspective.

It has been established that the director is primary to theatre art today. If there is no directorial interpretation there is no reinterpretation of realism. Unlike playwrights, directors are present while their art is being produced. It is much more difficult to pin down the role of the director than it is to measure the contribution of a playwright. Scholarship is broader and more prolific on the subject of playwrights. Luere states in the introduction to Playwright vs. Director: We think we know what playwrights are and what they do, but what directors are and what they do is less understood (13). The theatre director must always live in his/her time. S/he must create methods for the text that s/he reinterprets to be relevant and produce a response from the audience of their time. However, reinterpretation is not only about updating material, but re-imagining the subject matter. A director must act as a translator from one cultural language to another. As a type of theatrical directing, reinterpretation is widely used in the performance of classic texts. Peter Sellars suggests, a classic is a house we are still living in (Green 173). He implies a familiarity, yet the need to modernize (173). Susan Jonas agrees by saying that any restaging depends on an accurate sense of context of current events (252). Whether reinterpreting a classic text or a realist text, the director's concept is best brought through the production process by the dramaturg.

In all scholarship regarding reinterpretation, revision or revival of dramatic text the word classic appears more frequently than any other. A classic, according to Webster is a work of enduring excellence, an authoritative source, [or] a perfect

example (Webster 1). Yet in drama a classic seems to only refer to Greek, Roman, Shakespearean or neo-classical text. Realism, though only a creation of the past century falls under the definition of classic. Ibsen, Strindberg, Wilde, Williams, Miller, and many others have written texts of enduring excellence. Reinterpretation of these plays can be as effective and entertaining as any classic work. Fortunately in some cases the reinterpretation can also be the savior of the text. Without reinterpretation *Love's Labour's Lost* is frequently *lost* to a modern audience. So even though reinterpretation of classic drama provides precedent for restaging realism, it is not only classic or canonical realism, but any realist text that is available for reinterpretation.

Reinterpretation of realism is, regardless of the scholarly and practical benefits, fun to watch, to discuss and to conceptualize. Directorial concept is the heart of reinterpretation. In Daldry's *An Inspector Calls* the concept was to create a visual representation of the inner workings of the text. Daldry believed that the Birlings' emotional breakdown could be expressed by a physical one. Bergman's work with *A Doll's House* was the simple matter of a door. There was no door on stage until Nora decided to leave. The images created were based in text and realized in reinterpretation. These conceptual stage reinterpretations, whether simple or radical, tend to reveal less about the text and more about the text's importance within the context of contemporary life (Bradby 7).

Realist dramatic style is a current and archival example of contemporary life. In realism, as in life, the more things change, the more they stay the same. Reinterpretation of realism reveals universal truths that represent timeless similarities as well as differences. Reinterpretation is what makes realism worth watching after one hundred years. The universality of realism is the most important element to its endurance in

reinterpreted and text-true productions. Everyone assumes a level of reality or truth when viewing realism. However, reinterpretation is a more fruitful endeavor because when aesthetics of realism are enhanced or skewed, a greater truth is revealed. Marowitz noted, The truth we are hungering for is not the recreated truth of life, but the refined and heightened truth which is what justifies its formulation as art (Other 113).

The practice of reinterpretation is not a matter of fantastic, conceptual madness or deconstruction of text. Reinterpretation reflects the text or it becomes something else. Realism has many unexplored themes that will only reveal themselves over time. A text that was not relevant ten years ago may serve as a voice today or a text that is lost on one community may be a connecting agent for another. Time itself also effects the reinterpretation of realism. Since classic texts are hundreds to thousands of years old, it is difficult to view a century young text as classic and treat it accordingly. It is this attitude that has confined many realist texts to their box sets. As time goes on the perspective on these texts will grow more diverse and the reinterpretation of them will become more likely.

In all of theatre history the main aspect of any movement or period is the perception of truth. As stated previously, realism marks the end of projected truth and the beginning of reflected truth. More specifically, the expression of truth can be broken down into three component parts. Pre-modern theatre was governed by a communal truth representative of the era or specific culture (Classicism, neo-classicism, romanticism). After realism appeared truth was dictated by representative movements and expressed on an individual level according to the associated movements. Postmodernism and deconstruction brought yet another aspect to the nature of truth, the individual truth. The various modernist movements as well as many individual directors working since realism

have found and created many ways to express their truths. Postmodernism separated each artist in theatre from one another and from the audience. The audience was given more responsibility for determining the meaning or worth of theatre and art.

In a vastly individual artistic society it is a wonder that theatre ever gets produced. Any reinterpretation of realism in this society must acknowledge and work through the fragmentation. Reinterpretation of realism begins with an understood truth and then digs deeper to reveal the layers of truth beneath the surface reality. Armed with the conventions and philosophies of all spokes of the modernist movement wheel, reinterpretation gains substance and merit for scholars and practitioners alike. Of course reinterpretation of realism is not limited to modernist philosophy. The events of *A Long Day's Journey Into Night* may remind a director of a Greek tragedy. Perhaps an Ayckbourne drawing room comedy could effectively be staged like a court masque. The possibilities are not endless, but they are many.

Aesthetic value, being a visual stimulus reflective of the onstage *environment* can be affected by the symbol, convention and meaning associated with modern and pre-modernisms. The box set represented a structured and observational truth regarding environment. But truth in realism is not limited to outer reality. The expression of inner reality as expressed by the modernistisms form a creative resource for reinterpretation of realism. They are inspiration as well as a means of validation for certain directorial concepts.

The pre-modernisms like classicism and neo-classicism are known for their structured, presentational, and by modern standards, false qualities. Romanticism is defined by a futile desire for a higher state. Though realism post-dates these forms, their

conventions, as well as the conventions of subsequent eras, can be used to express the truth of a realist text.

Beyond the organized movements, truth told throughout the eras of theatre is also separated by artist. Initial truth in conventional page to stage theatre is first related in dramatic terms by the playwright. There are many dramatic techniques that a playwright may use to express truth. For instance, *The Crucible* is a text in which the plot involves the Salem witch trials. However, the play was written during and about the impact of the McCarthy hearings during the red scare. There are two stories, but one truth projected through the play and several ways in which the truth can be revealed. That truth involves wrongful persecution due to fear. With that in mind, in the current American culture the play may also reflect the situation faced by Arab Americans in a time of terrorism. It is still the same truth, only in a different context. A director and his/her team must be aware of these facts in order to reinterpret the text on stage.

It is just these types of conditions that continue to elevate realism to the status of classic. Changing times, climates and the individual assertion of audience input leave any dramatic text up for interpretation regardless of presentation. The most text-true, antiquarian version of *Miss Julie* with a time-traveling Strindberg himself as director will play different today than it did then. It is the nature of the beast.

The beginning and end of drama is the same, an idea. The writing, reading, directing, designing, acting, viewing, critiquing and reflecting on a drama has an effect on interpretation. Reinterpretation of realist drama is purposeful and effective for good or ill. Charles Marowitz believes that the special virtue of a classic is that it can mean again and again above and beyond what it originally meant (Staff 6). As more time passes since the origination of the realistic style the truths in these plays can mean again

and again. The ideas that began in the mind of a playwright grow and prosper into massive feats of engineering and the smallest movements of the soul through the interpretive and re-interpretive processes.

The play begins with the playwright. Production occurs with the director. Even without the idea of reinterpretation, translation from page to stage is difficult, especially concerning a realist text. In one sense, drama and theatre are separate arts. However, it is the balance of these arts that creates successful productions. Realism is touchy to reinterpret because it is a base. Why else would the opposite be called non-realism? Realism is a community touchstone for all participants in theatre, even the audience. Reinterpretation is simply a way of affecting communication of the truths of *Miss Julie* so Strindberg would be proud and Jane Q. Public 2002 will understand.

Ideas expressed by the playwright have support and are weakened by the current theatre environment. A contemporary director, has more control over the perception of his truths as seen through the script and communicated to an audience. Should the playwright be denied ownership? No. However, the playwright must understand that the moment of releasing the text to the world is inviting interpretation. There is no such thing as definite meaning when it comes to a play-text ( Luere xii). The text is the most concrete and the most malleable aspect of theatre (Luere 5).

The greater control does not give free reign to the fancy of directors concerning realism. However, there is also no clear method for proper reinterpretation of realism. Somewhere between wouldn't it be fun if theatre and strict text-true theatre there is a place for reinterpretation of realism in directing practice. Max Reinhardt's practice in directorial interpretation revealed that he had no clear method for creation (Chinoy 48). In fact, it is Reinhardt's eclectic theory that began the snowball that became



reinterpretation. Charles Marowitz is similarly reluctant to pin the process down to a set of rules: Describing ways in which a classic can be rethought on stage would be tantamount to giving lessons in original thinking (Green 13). Perhaps it is the endless possibilities that make reinterpretation appealing.

The main idea separating reinterpretation from deconstruction is respect for the text--not devotion, just respect. Directors should think before they direct. That being said, where there is research there is a way. For instance, scholarship in the form of personal letters regarding *The Cherry Orchard* leaves the drama open for reinterpretation. Playwright Anton Checkov and director Constantin Stanislavski were constantly at odds regarding the initial interpretation of the text because Checkov saw it as a comedy and Stanislavski a tragedy (Jacobus 801). It is Stanislavski's staging that has effected the perception of the play for a century. In an attempt to discover Checkov's perspective, an advantageous reinterpretation would find the comedy in this drama. The basis for reinterpretation in this case is not theme based, but it is due to the original nature of the script.

When playwrights are alive to see their work done it is much easier to see when directors go too far without text or scholarship supported concepts. Edward Albee (whose position as a realist playwright and director give him unique perspective on authorship) says:

I like to think that one creative intelligence has an insight into another creative intelligence. And what emerges need not be a photo-image of his intention, but it should be the reflection of his intention. (Stair 50)

Albee regards the text as primary, but not sacred. He speaks of experimenting with text as long as it is respected (Luere 22). Perhaps one of the best examples of disrespect of the playwright's inherent authorship involves Albee. He filed legal action

against a performance of *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* because the couples were being portrayed as homosexual males (Hapgood 140). Though an interesting directorial choice Albee won the suit not only based on U. S. copyright law, but also from a dramaturgical standpoint. Conflict within the play is centered on George and Martha's fantasy child and Honey's hysterical pregnancy. It is a logistical impossibility for a homosexual male to become married due to a hysterical pregnancy as Honey does in the script. George and Martha's child would then have to be adopted and that is a new set of issues never covered in the script or reflecting as present themes. Concepts like this detract rather than enhance the text, regardless of creativity or good intention.

Directors are now the driving force of reinterpretation but they are not the only authority. Nurturing the relationship between playwright and director or text and director is the responsibility of the dramaturg. A dramaturg or at least use of dramaturgy is imperative when reinterpreting a realist text. One of the main reasons dramaturgy has value today is the double-edged sword that is postmodernism/ deconstruction.

The modern director is free to choose from a century of innovation. From the actor-manager to the most radical deconstructionist there are developments in theatre practice that influence the modern director. Postmodernism has been the most recent installment in a long line of influence on directing practice. Within postmodernism directors revealed the influence of twentieth century theatre innovation by combining style, concept, and media to form a new aesthetic. These postmodern directors challenged accepted meanings of language and questioned visual input as well. However, postmodernism failed to curb demand for classic or realistic plays. Instead it encourages another level of interpretation.

Postmodernism, along with deconstruction, challenges the meaning of language altogether. Amy Green believes that the combination of Freud's notions regarding interpretation and a growing general skepticism through the century lead to these movements (9). Robert Willis adds that not just words, but all symbols are rejected in expression (15). Postmodern theory challenges accepted knowledge, text, and universal symbols. Without those symbols it is difficult to create a directorial concept that will speak a universal language for the audience. Individual artists in the contemporary theatre must determine accepted symbols and meanings text by text, idea by idea, audience by audience and context by context. In this endeavor dramaturgy is not only an advantage but a necessity. Thank you postmodernism, the dramaturgs are in your debt.

Respect for the text is the conceptual separation between reinterpretation and deconstruction. The dramaturg is the practical separation between reinterpretation and deconstruction. Unlike the deconstruction that accompanied the postmodern movement, reinterpretation is a means of extracting the inner truth of the text rather than questioning it. Instead of asking "Does this mean anything?" a dramaturg asks "How many meanings does this have?" Biases must be acknowledged, but they need not impede process. However, as a result of mistrust proliferated by the practice of deconstruction any form of reinterpretation must be substantiated through scholarship.

By explanation of a process in theatre that needs dramaturgy, there emerged a defense for the application of dramaturgy. For a dramaturg's role is not just the application of scholarship for production, but also the application of production for scholarship. When all is said and done scholars and practitioners are on the same team. Their actions should support rather than impede the other's goals.

Reinterpretation of realism is a prime example of post-postmodern theatre. It keeps texts alive and introduces otherwise unknown texts. It ensures the proliferation of current realist texts in future productions. Reinterpretation makes use of dramaturgy by demanding that scholarship and practice merge together. It solidifies the director's place as a leader in theatre innovation and promotes the collective art of theatre practitioners.

Whether theory, practice or a dramaturgical exercise, the reinterpretation of realism has a vital place in the continuing tradition of live theatre, and fostering that tradition should be the goal of every theatre practitioner and scholar. It is all of these aspects of theatre working together that will ensure its survival. As time continues the possibilities for reinterpretation of realism will continue. Realist playwriting will also carry on and these texts, too, will eventually benefit from *thinking outside the box set*.

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## VITA

Angela Renee Lackey was born in New Braunfels, Texas, on August 16, 1976 to Russell and Karen Lackey. She has been performing since her first dance classes at the age of three. After an active high school life of theatre, dance and choir she earned her Bachelor of Fine Arts in Acting from Southwest Texas State University. As an undergraduate Angela stayed busy through acting and costuming. She spent one summer as an intern for the Texas Film Commission and a season as a stitcher and draper at Syracuse Stage and Syracuse University Drama Department before deciding to return to Southwest Texas to pursue a master's degree in Theatre History and Criticism. Angela's most recent passions are dramaturgy and directing. In January of 2002 she led a workshop in dramaturgy awareness at the Texas Educational Theatre Association conference. She staged (and costumed) her first independent production *Aristophanes' Lysistrata: A Sports Adaptation* in February 2002.

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