



## **The Shakespearian theatre, *techné* and the spectator: continuity, change and presence**

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**Abstract** This article will discuss the necessary dialectic of parts in the particular *techné* we call 'theatre' with reference to the Shakespearian stage and city. I propose this *techné* must and does embrace not only what is seen and heard and how these are presented but also the audience as 'knowing spectators' in a joint endeavour. Such endeavours rest on enduring principles of theatres, of the embodied mind, of the experiencing of the fictional within the everyday. I argue that theatre is a distinct, discrete manifestation of a wider human continuity of *techné*: skills, craft, aesthetic expression. The spectator as 'spect-actor' (after Brecht and Boal) brings embodied empathy, critical experience and knowledge to the 'without' – the shared amphitheatre where stage, sound, vision, actor-character and audience come face-to-face and ear-to-ear. This shared space is particularly resonant in the circumstances of the city that 'contained' the theatre as both central and on the edge of London-as-'cities'. The Strand and other locations are used as specific examples of the inter-textuality of street and stage. The concept of familiarity combined with certain presentational devices show how the play is 'unpacked' by a knowing audience. The article aims to show the city and theatre of the early modern period, exemplified by Shakespeare's plays and stagings, as representing a particular *techné* within the continuity of theatres and audiences.

**Keywords** *techné*, knowing spectator, encounter, dialectics, familiarity, body/embodied mind

A theatre stage is an area of maximum verbal presence and maximum corporeal presence. Any dimming of the one or the other, or of the one by the other, is anti-theatrical. (Robbins Dudeck 2013: 36)

This axiom, from a letter written by Samuel Beckett to Keith Johnstone in 1958, represents the necessary dialectic between what is heard and what is seen that is presented by the particular *techne* we call 'theatre'. I propose that such a *techne* must also embrace the spectator and their relationship to the building, stage and performance: the ways in which these are presented and received by the audience as 'knowing spectators'. Theatre is always a joint endeavour between actors and these knowing spectators. It has been usefully characterised by William West whereby 'actors and audiences share in the work of the play' (West 2006: 134), but it is evident in ideas captured much earlier by Augusto Boal (1992) with his evocative term of 'spect-actor' (cited through this paper), and implied by Aristotle.

Thus, whilst acknowledging recent scholarship on the Tudor and Jacobean audience and its relationship to the play-text and staging, I wish to suggest deeper levels to this relationship. I argue that there are enduring and diachronic principles of theatres that become manifest in particular ways from era to era, and that there are similar principles of the embodied mind that form and shape our relationship to everyday life and thus to the theatre experience. As spectators we are able to enter the auditorium and world of the play knowing that we are to see a fiction that we knowingly accept as if real, then return to the everyday taking that experience with us. I suggest Shakespeare's plays and stagings represent a particular example of the *techne* of the everyday and the *techne* of the stage: a theatre exemplifying this deeper, ongoing dialectical relationship.

## ***Techne* and The Theatre**

Given the theme of the 2016 Literary London conference (*London and the Globe*), my starting point for this article is the proposal put forward by Frances Yates for an alternative model of the Globe as an 'acoustic machine':

Yates argues that the Elizabethan public theatre, rooted in the traditions of its Greek and Roman precursors, should be understood as an acoustic machine designed for the human voice to be heard clearly for both dialogue and the intra-dialogic stage directions for action by the spectator and their imagination. (Murray and Keefe 2016: 241)

This machine, originally designed and built by James Burbage as the Theatre, is for Yates an expression of what I now consider *techne*:

By *techne*, we mean to designate two linked areas: first, the human-crafted environment which includes but also exceeds technology; and second, one term in the dialectical pair *episteme/techne*, whose historical development from the classical Greek includes the sense of knowledge/craft. (Wallis, 2005: 1)

I suggest this is a principle that finds expression across all human cultures and societies. The seemingly standard Neolithic axe is a product of its own craft technology of stone, wood and ligament but with qualities beyond its function giving also aesthetic pleasure and being imbued with 'sacred' value as a precious

possession. The materials used in the Nebra 'sky disc' (bronze with gold inlaid appliqués representing and symbolising the sun, moon and stars) seem to make this a primarily aesthetic object but again with 'sacred' qualities in its cosmological significance. Here, its key function is as a solar-lunar agricultural calendar for seasonal planting and harvests. The functional, the sacred and the aesthetic are not fragmented but intertwined.

Whilst the axe is simply an axe in its use such objects also express an idea, a concept, a function that captures the principle of *techne*. Such objects also indicate the deep roots of the notion of 'craft' as something more than the skills involved in making. In the Theatre, the Globe, the Swan and other play-houses the skills and craft of the carpenter, the painter and other technicians may remain essentially the same as those of the axe and disc maker. The changes and developments in tools, materials and design then become manifest in the changing complexities of, here, specialised buildings and staging. There have always been forms of technology utilised by the presentation and performance of art and mimetics – the use of paints and pigments, the taking and putting on of disguise and costume, and the incorporations of props and machines into staging. This suggests significant questions:

When we look at a cave or rock painting of a figure dressed in what appears to be an animal mask and skin or a figurine that seems both human and animal what do we see? The paintings that use the undulations and contours of the cave walls combined with prepared natural pigments for colour are revealed by torchlight as light and shadow together giving a 'dramatic' effect to the images and their reception. This is *techne* put to a specific cultural and social purpose. (Murray and Keefe, 2016: 234-5)

I am arguing that Burbage, as the designer (architect) and builder of the Theatre is putting into effect his craft and knowledge that draw on the *techne* of centuries of applied skills, on the sixteenth century, and on the ongoing influences of classical Roman and Renaissance theory and practice.

Burbage is an artisan joiner about whom Yates presents persuasive evidence that he not only had the craftsman's knowledge of the skills of the particular trade but also of Vitruvian theories of design and construction, and thus of geometry and proportion in relation to the public theatre. Burbage is not simply a rough carpenter but a skilled builder and technician in wood whose building makes theory into practice. Thus Yates point us to papers and studies that indicate (allowing for terminology and definitions) masons', joiners' and architects' shared knowledge of the basic principles of proportions. These, in turn, rest on the classical notion of the proportions of the human body. For example, Robert Stickells in 1595 when discussing the proportions of a building in terms of its height, stories and width of walls observes and argues that it is the human figure that is the measure of a 'true' building that has 'sense':

These things consisteth in man hime self, for that man is the proportional and reasonable creature, & therefore what so is done without these Rules of proportion, is but uncertain matter... (Stickells in Summerson 1957: 228)

As John Summerson explains, it is likely that copy-books of plans based on these principles would have been owned by any surveyor or craftsman, and commissions and patents would therefore be predicated on such craftsmen being skilled across work in stone, wood and plaster.

As Robert Stickells goes on to claim, buildings based on these proportions have 'sense' whereas modern buildings not so based have no 'sense' by ignoring such rules. In terms of the theatre, we should also remember that Burbage was an actor and thus worked with practical knowledge and 'sense' of both the stage and of building. In other words, he was aware of the requirements for the actor, for the audience, and for a practical theatre building that has to be a commercial success to repay the investment. It appears that a profound adaptation of classical principles underlies the *techné* of the English public stage as a popular venture both culturally and commercially. It is not only an actors' theatre, but also and equally a spectators' theatre. I have already invoked Boal's rich concept of the active 'spect-actor', and recent scholarship has explored this dynamic place of the spectator in early modern theatre. This scholarship suggests how we may 'conceive of the early modern audience as a vital partner in the production of meaning in early modern England' (Low and Myhill 2010: 10). As I shall argue from a long-held position, the knowing spectator is not and never has been a passive receiver of the play-text, but is always a more or less active reader of both the play- and stage-text.

What we can call 'informed practice' is, for Yates, further supported by her arguments that it was not Palladio's neo-classicism of the *Architettura* of 1570 that influenced Burbage but John Dee's *Preface* to Henry Billingsley's translation of Euclid's *Elements* where he discusses the recovered work and ideas of Vitruvius and Alberti. Published in, again, 1570 this immediately made available to a literate skilled, artisan class (represented here by Burbage and Stickells) ideas of classical architectural and geometric theory. Thus, Yates puts great weight on the date of publication of 1570 and the date of 1576 for the building of the Theatre. The easy and accessible propagation of such classical ideas, shared between a skilled artisan class that still retains remnants of its guild and apprentice structure, suggests a direct manifestation in wood, brick, stone and plaster in 1576.

However, I would argue that it is more than a matter of newly and accessibly available reading; Billingsley's book complements the traditions of craft that passes from one generation and era to the next. Dee formalises the practical knowledge of *techné* passed from master to apprentice who becomes master in turn. We see here the 'evolving continuity' of principles of *techné* where skills rooted in physical, neurological and cognitive propensities remain both the same and develop in sophistication and potential; this represents the qualifying and qualified dialectic of the diachronic and synchronic.

Such 'evolving continuity' may also characterise Mackintosh's history and analysis of theatre-stage architecture (see Mackintosh 1993). Thus his discussion of the harmonious proportion of 'ad quadratum' geometry (width equals height multiplied by the square root of two) allows for the creation of the 'sweet spot' or *vesica piscis* every actor craves – the point on an axis at which the actor's space and the spectators' space inter-connect. In the Theatre and the Globe, this is the point on the thrust stage where the actor can see and turn to 'speak' to the audience around and rising above him; in the proscenium theatre the point down stage where he or she is framed by the arch and able to see and 'speak' to the tiers of the audience. This may be defined as the optimum point of exchange between actor(s) and spectator(s) working from and with the physical stage. I

suggest Mackintosh offers further evidence for the artisanal *techne* that underpins the understanding and use of proportion (the 'sense' that Stickells refers to) marking the practical knowledge of the craftsman.

I am not going to follow Yates' path as such to her alternative design for the Globe theatre drawing on Robert Fludd and his 'memory theatre'. What I do take from Yates for my purpose is the sense of a theatre building built for the practice of theatre rather than an abstract concept into which the act of theatre is forced. Such a theatre *techne* sees the stage and auditorium as a form of prop, something to be physically incorporated into the presenting, receiving and experiencing of the play- and stage-text (see Karim-Cooper and Stern, *Shakespeare's Theatres*, 2013). In the next section I will suggest that this physical effect is also part of the spectator's empathetic and cognitive experience.

The practice was physical (the mimetic, speaking body), aural (the resonance of words with accompanying music and the listening spectator), and visual, incorporating complementary scenographic materials. Such a theatre follows the principles of Vitruvius whereby the theatre may have distinct acting space and listening, watching space but is arranged for forms of inter-action between these based on the clear projection, audibility and reception of words. The movement and words have multiple functions – not only telling a story through character and plot, but the actors moving from one point to another to change scene or location; speaking text that reveals character and motives but also telling us where we are, and what has happened/is happening/to happen as spoken *didascalia*, that is, stage directions.

This is a theatre of the stage and the actor in another aspect of the ongoing dialectic already discussed - of *actantial* and aesthetic presence where the actor and the spectators 'share the work' to make the world of the play: as Mark Anthony requests of both his Roman and Elizabethan audience: 'lend me your ears' (3.2.).

However I also feel that the audience had also to lend its eyes. Smith (2013) discusses air as a medium by which voice and sound circulate; he suggests three containers that shape the air circulating in the English Renaissance play-house. The 'within' is the tiring house – not only the point of entrance and exit, but also from which sound effects emerge (shouts, yells and other noises from off-stage for on-stage effect). For Smith, meaning-making sound begins in the tiring house – I suggest the meaning is then completed by the spectator(s).

But between these two is the 'without' – the amphitheatre where sound and vision come together as Beckett pre-figures. Here is a shared space where actor-character and audience are face-to-face and ear-to-ear with the focal point being the *vesica piscis*. Again I would extend this shared space whereby the spectators' faces and ears are attending to each other's. The *techne* of the thrust stage coming into the yard and the rising tiers of seating allows and forces the audience to view itself; spectators engaged in and watching-hearing each other across the stage, through the stage action, up to the tiers and down into the yard in the process and function of what I conceive across this paper as a 'spectatorial dramaturgy' (see Keefe 2012).

## ***Techne*, empathy and the knowing spectator**

It is not a matter of saying all theatres should follow the pattern of the Theatre or the Globe (first, second or third). Rather that form and function should be in both balance and tension, and should serve and be served by the writing that matches the theatre, the requisite staging and the attending audience. This echoes Mackintosh's argument that theatre should emulate and be guided by the principles of 'sacred geometry' in building and space design to continue the benefits of proportion. This should not be conceived as faith or rigid straitjacket, but rather 'as a system of dynamic spatial harmony' in these terms:

dynamic because theatre space is to be arranged not for repose but to encourage the movement of energy, spatial for obvious reasons and harmony because it is concerned with proportions analogous to the harmonies in music. (Mackintosh 1993: 163)

I am reminded that Shakespeare, although coloured by the vestiges of medieval theatre, wrote for a particular public stage that was already established. I would argue that he wrote for the stage conditions and theatre culture (a *techne*) he found, worked with and shaped as necessary rather than establishing a 'new' staging for his plays.

I believe this is important in that the Tudor and Jacobean audience would be seeing and hearing new plays (as in first performed) but within a theatre building and staging conditions that were familiar and thus accessible, making the plays 'not new' within the spectrum of the spectator's experience. James Shapiro, in discussing *Macbeth*, suggests that the writing in parts of this play make demands of the spectator in unpacking the dense, metaphorical style for meaning.

Shakespeare's writing had taken a new turn... But if Shakespeare's actors and audiences now had to work harder, the rewards for doing so would prove greater too. (Shapiro 2015: 37-38)

As Peter Brook uncomfortably challenges us: 'if good theatre depends on a good audience, then every audience has the theatre it deserves', however hard it is for spectators to take this (their) responsibility (Brook: *Empty*, 24)

What Shapiro overlooks is the means by which an audience that is used to listening to dense, demanding prose (in plays and sermons) and seeing the world of the play via its imagination (informed by prose and verse and music as well as complementary scenography) is helped by the familiar elements of the theatre itself. This is the 'knowing spectator' – knowing the conditions in-by which they will experience the play, knowing that they are watching and listening to a fictional world they willingly enter into via never-the-less recognisable elements. The *techne* of the building as well as of the staging complements the ability of the knowing spectator to accept the fiction being presented; this itself rests on the cognitive and neurological roots of empathy in relation to mimesis.

*Techne* can be seen as an expression of both the everyday and of a thing of particular significance using the culturally and socially currently available craft and technology. Thus the Tudor and Jacobean theatre building is an expression of the builders' and joiners' craft using techniques familiar to the audience from the everyday city they lived and worked in – different buildings, same craft. Once in the building, either in the yard or on the tiered seating, they would see staging techniques based on the lifts and cranes and other machinery familiar from the

everyday life of docks and industry and manufacturing. Whilst the technology itself would change, the principles of *techné* remain. Thus, we can reference John Dee's own description of the 'flying beetle' device he created for a performance of *Pax* by Aristophanes in Cambridge in 1547 – a crane device that would have been familiar to an Athenian audience for the same play in 421 BCE.

Such a concept of familiarity is crucial here. For example, across four volumes (1958-2002), Glynne Wickham sets out the stage effects and machinery used in the pageants, the *Corpus Christi Play*, masques and other performances from the fourteenth to mid-seventeenth centuries. These form a continuity of evolving and borrowed practice familiar to audiences in the church, street and play-house. In other words, there is a continuity from the Corpus Christi 'hell-mouth' to the 'discovery' or disclosure of Hell to Marlowe's *Faustus*.

To this adaptation of everyday machinery we must add that which is particular to the theatre whereby stage tricks use the same mechanical skills found in other crafts. I am suggesting that the complementary relationship between the skills, techniques and mechanics of everyday life and the use of these in the theatre are a continuing tradition of familiarity and adoption representing a theatrical continuity from the earliest performances of disguising and playing, through Greek and Roman theatre, the memory and vestiges of medieval church and street theatre, and into the public theatre of the English Renaissance and private masques.

Such a knowing familiarity with techniques in building and staging based on the everyday provides a ground on which to rest the demanding 'unpacking' that Shapiro suggests. Such 'unpacking' faced spectators with each new play – new in this context as the premiere – presented to them. A retrospective unpacking also becomes possible by reading the available printed textual material.

The same continuity and ability to 'unpack' are found in the knowing spectator's empathetic position in relation to the world and characters of the play. Aristotle's insights and observations concerning the enabling of 'katharsis' can now be supported by cognitive and neurological research into the 'embodied mind' of the 'knowing spectator' as the basis of a spectatorial dramaturgy of empathy, play, and imagination:

Empathy is the result of a direct experience of another person's state... thanks to a mechanism of embodied simulation that produces within the observer a corporeal state that is – to some degree – shared with the person who expresses/experiences that state. (Gallese 2010: 3; see Iacoboni *et al.* 2005: 529–32)

On playing and our pre-disposition and ability to accept the double reality of the theatre experience (already indicated by our acceptance of the *actantial* figure of actor-character) Fauconnier and Turner (2002) put forward 'conceptual blending theory'. Here, spectators faced with the double-ness of theatre oscillate – cognitively speaking – between seeing the fiction (characters, world of the play) and seeing the reality (actors, painted scenery). We suffer no cognitive dissonance or disruption due to our ability to accept the fiction as if real as I oscillate between states of being-not being in the world of the play. Similarly, Jacob and Jeannerod (2003) argue for a form of 'visual intentionalism' whereby humans have two visual systems that allow us to process dual visual stimuli. As spectators we see the

inanimate scenery as 'visual perceptions' and the actors as characters acting on the world with intention. Such a model of distributed or shared cognitions allow for individual cognition to be placed in a social-environmental system:

... individuals' inputs, through their collaborative activities, affect the nature of the joint, distributed system, which in turn affects their cognitions such that their subsequent participation is altered, resulting in subsequent altered joint performances and products. This model...stresses both individual and collaborative cognition and provides scope for changes over time (Tribble, 2005: 140)

It is the continuity of such cognitive-neurological systems and pre-dispositions that underpin human life that concerns us here. Whilst the scholarship cited in this paper reveals particulars of the early modern audience, it is these deeper, inherent and embodied pre-dispositions that are the underlying tropes of spectatorship. To take a non-theatre example to further illustrate the point: using fMRI (functional magnetic resonance imaging), research has shown that pregnancy produces changes in the cortex grey matter in the part of the brain also playing a role in social cognition. This change is part of the adaptation to mother-baby empathy, a preparation for attachment that then endures for two or more years after giving birth (see Hoekzema et al, 2016).

It is the work and research on the embodied mind within a social environment (from fMRI and other bio-sensing techniques) that allows me to suggest the concept of the 'knowing spectator'. This helps explicate how we look at the world of the play whilst always knowing it to be a fiction yet at the same time accepting it as if real as a source of entertainment and learning. The embodied mind underpins our capacity to imagine out from the world around us, other worlds not directly experienced, others' experiences as described or shared. Such a spectatorial dramaturgy sees the spectator not as passive but, as already outlined, an active component of the 'idea' of theatre; this brings together the *techne* of the building and staging, familiarity, and the knowing willingness of the spectator to 'suspend disbelief' (see Keefe 2010).

### **The city in the theatre; the immersed spectator**

Lewis Mumford talks in terms of the 'village in the city' to characterise a certain kind of urban living:

The city is a related collection of primary groups and purposive associations...an economic organization... a theatre of social action... (that) fosters art and is art; the city creates theatre and is the theatre. (Mumford 1937: 93-94)

In a later work, Mumford is more specific about the medieval city, which I suggest London in Shakespeare's time remained in large part, being 'a congeries of little cities... that enriched and supplemented the whole' (Mumford 1966: 356). This is a picture of the city as a community with a settled, dynamic; drawing on Harvey's 'body' metaphor, Peter Ackroyd offers a more venal picture with London as voracious, full of appetites, consuming and excreting in a state of greed and desire (see Ackroyd: *London*, 2000). The 2016 Literary London conference made clear that Shakespeare draws on all parts of the spectrum of sights, sounds, activities and behaviours represented by these two poles. However, as a part of the city's



cultural, political and economic activities, Mumford uses the metaphor of theatre for what I call 'social performance' – the presentation and interactions of our 'selves' in everyday life as distinct from theatrical or acting performance as persona or mimesis. It is from this city as a theatre of social action that the spectator comes from and takes with him/her into the theatre itself. But we should also note that like the River Thames itself, theatre was both central and on the edges of London's life, not as cosily integrated as seems:

Lodged on the margins of culture at a time when those margins were especially rich and polyvalent, the Elizabethan popular stage enjoyed a unique and complex ideological perspective. (Mullaney 1995; 131)

The continuing attacks on theatre and other forms of performance during the Tudor, Jacobean and Caroline periods remind us that the position of play-houses remained precarious socially and politically whatever their popular and commercial success (see Gurr 1993).

If this conveys the complexity of (non-) integration then other aspects of this term must be recognised. We may also consider theatre's relationship with early modern capitalism. Initially the public theatre was a profit-driven as well as artistic enterprise: part of a competitive market. But with the closure of the theatres in 1642, the stage loses its privileged and tolerated position, and thus its particular form of capitalist venture. In the Restoration period, theatres become newly licensed parts of a new market place (see Agnew 1986). However I would suggest that this 'new' drama simply continues to explore the social and political pressures on London and other parts of Britain that the Elizabethans would have recognised, albeit in re-styled theatres and forms of play-texts. Again we see another facet of the continuity of theatre within change.

Thus, it is all the variety and plurality and opinions of the cities that the spectators take into the theatres. During the 2016 conference, a plenary panel on 'Shakespeare in London' discussed his plays in relation to the wider city, both London and Westminster and their environs (Crawforth and others, *Shakespeare*, 2016). Thus *Timon of Athens* was related to London's King's Bench prison (to which we could add the Marshalsea in *King Henry the Eighth*), and *Romeo and Juliet* to the houses set along the Thames in Westminster (in particular, The Strand). Whilst the city may be used in the plays through distancing devices of history and re-location, I argue we may extend such relation to the spectators themselves. I suggest it is a safe assumption that the spectators would have recognised their city with a familiarity similar to that represented by Burbage's building itself. Their experience (direct and indirect) of prisons matches their experience of walking back and forth through Westminster and the City of London passing the houses, churches, other buildings and with the streets themselves as the everyday then taken into the theatre.

It is not just the allusions and metaphors that are recognised and 'unpacked' but the fleshing out of these by the spectator(s) melding their everyday experience and imagination in a complex dynamic that extends conceptual blending and visual oscillation. As the Athenian audience would see over the walls of their city from the top of the theatre seating and locate the plays in their extended neighbourhood, so the Tudor and Jacobean theatre both brings London into the

theatre, and becomes the stage for Yates' 'theatre of the world' yet remaining rooted in the familiar and everyday.

Whilst the nature of such 'city villages' will evolve and be changed through technics and culture, I feel the idea and image evokes the quality of the theatre that Yates partially captures, but which also extends into a wider sense of shared experience. This is the immersion of the spectators in the world of the play from their immersion in their own city. The same plenary panel referenced Norden's map of Westminster (1593) to illustrate the geography of streets, river and houses and the way that the layout of the latter to each other in-between The Strand and the river informs the spaces of action in *Romeo and Juliet* (see Norden 1593). Thus we see how the river is the artery of the Westminster-London area yet is outside both cities; it flows past, not through but is regarded as central to the life of both places. The maps show us other congeries facing the cities; the marshes and Lambeth House opposite Westminster, the church of St Mary Overy opposite London and in between these the 'other' London represented by Southwark and Bankside.

The maps give a sense of how citizens would be immersed in their city, and in the congeries that made up their extended city beyond the original walls. If we place map and play-text side-by-side we can see how references and topography may be matched: the hot streets occupied by the opposing gangs (giving the contrast between the old walled and packed City of London overlooked by the Tower and the more open pattern of Westminster); the merchant house of Capulet big and rich enough to hold the ball and feast; the enclosed orchards and gardens matching the houses, walls, grounds and trees along The Strand as graphically indicated by Norden (Somerset House, The Savoy, Russell House and York House). These become generic and dramatic spaces, utilised by Shakespeare, and transposed by the audience to the specific streets and habitations familiar from their daily lives and work. Verona becomes London, London becomes Verona as another form of immersion, a term that must now be used in richer and historically aware ways and not simply as a particular staging configuration.

We may also note other matters that touch on the spectator's knowledge. The word-play of the Nurse and Friar Laurence matches that in *Macbeth* for the density and 'unpacking' required, here using folk and popular references familiar to the audience. The further word-play between Peter and the three musicians named in punning terms from the fiddles and their parts again both assumes and plays with the audience's recognition in comic terms, and indicates to us the role of music in city life as well as the theatre (see Johnson 2005 on the spectator and theatre music).

Such knowledge of the prisons and streets, that is, an immersion in the city allows us to see how the spectator becomes immersed in the world of the play but always knowing they are watching a fiction whilst accepting it as if real. This is the knowing spectator:

the spectator always knows they are watching a fiction, willingly enters the fiction with a knowing suspension of disbelief, and is never 'passive' in their engagement with the fiction. (Murray and Keefe 2016: 244)

The implication is that we must review our use of the terms 'immersion/immersive' beyond the current reference to a particular form of audience participation in a

particular form of site-specific theatre. To re-state: the spectator, as individual and member of an audience, is always in a dynamic state as they immersed in the world of the play whilst knowing they are listening to and watching a fiction being presented and received as if real. The familiarity with their own city recognised in the structure of theatre and stage and the allusions within the play itself allows the knowing immersion necessary to 'unpack' the demanding density that a *Macbeth* or any other new play demanded. Such immersion and familiarity necessarily underpins the 'sharing', 'give-and-take', the 'partnership' already cited.

We are concerned with principles here, and as so often care is needed with terms: new, immersion, and also 'passive'. The spectator is always 'alive' responding with body and embodied mind, whether overtly (applause) or quietly (physical and mental concentration). Thus I return to Boal's pre-figuring of later discussion and ideas in his designation of the always-active, never passive spectator as a 'spect-actor' (see *Games*: 1992) predicated on this spectrum of involvement. I would also point to Brecht's re-thinking of epic theory and practice; in 1940 he outlined his thinking as follows:

[S]kipped through the MESSINGKAUF. The theory is relatively simple. It deals with the traffic between stage and auditorium, how the spectator must master the incidents on the stage. The theatrical experience comes about by means of an act of empathy; . . . criticism is stimulated with reference to the way empathy is generated . . . it consists in the reproduction of real-life incidents on the stage in such a way as to underline their causality and bring it to the spectator's attention. This type of art also generates emotions; such performances facilitate the mastering of reality; and this it is that moves the spectator. (Brecht 1993: 81)

It is this traffic that may induce the work of the stage being taken out of the theatre into the everyday as a reverse of the everyday being taken into the theatre to affect and colour how the stage text is received. This may then effect change in the city. Thus Brecht affirmed in 1948:

We need a type of theatre which not only releases the feelings, insights and impulses possible within the particular historical field of human relations in which the action takes place, but employs and encourages those thoughts and feelings which help transform the field itself. (Brecht 1978: 190)

The play was and is not simply a literary artefact, but part of a performance or stage text presented to the willing audience and received with degrees of active agency by the body and mind of the spectators to become various forms of social thought. Various because each spectator brings in both their own and shared experiences, knowledge and beliefs and leaves with both their individual and shared responses to the play and stage text as these play to the spectator's knowledge and imagination.

Hence, the shared experience of the city that the audience brings into the building or space, the shared experience of *techné* and culture that supports the spectatorial access to the play. Or to go into the sensual, the sharing of the breath (particularly pungent we can imagine in the Theatre, the Globe and other spaces) by which Artaud characterises the shared experiencing of the performed play.

Whilst Shakespeare may not have theorised as do Boal and Brecht, I argue he suggests the same traffic and participation in the way his words and stage are used. The audience is present before the performance begins; we are present

willingly and thus giving consent to take part in the make-believe of place, characters and action. Shakespeare makes the safe assumption that his spectators will participate, will be active in 'unpacking' the play being presented, that we are giving of our knowing suspension of disbelief. Thus the devices by which this acknowledged by Puck, by Prospero, by various Chorus and other characters (including prologues in *Romeo and Juliet* and *Henry V*, to each other, as asides (direct or indirect to the spectator), as direct address (implicit or explicit). I suggest we are played with as the spectators are invited to take the characters away, to release both actors and spectators back into the world of the everyday. At other times we find implicit instructions to the audience as to how the stage and the staged enactments are to be perceived and accepted. We may, indeed, consider a modern rendering of the same relationship, the two-way traffic between stage and spectators in Peter Brook's own playing with Shakespeare's play:

*Exeunt Oberon, Titania, and their train.*

Puck (to the audience)...

So, good night unto to you all

Give me your hands if we be friends,

And Robin shall restore amends (1)

(1) All off stage and into the auditorium, shaking hands with the audience. (Brook 1974: 85a-85b)

Such instances illustrate how we enter and are released from the world we have (knowingly) been immersed in and how we return to the everyday. This exchange rests in fundamental ways on the shared *techné* as well as ideas and experiences that are themselves a traffic between city and theatre whereby the field of each may change in ways both tangible and intangible.

## Conclusion

Yates takes her ideas into an argument against Serlio's distortion of Vitruvius that, when combined with the formalising of perspective, gives rise to a suffocating scenography that comes to dominate theatre. Whilst I have great sympathy with this view (I note the reviews of the 2016 production of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* at the Globe talked of 'an abundance of lighting and set' (Hitchings, 2016) and that 'less could be more' (Gardner, 2016), and Billington's fear of modern staging with 'attention given to ostentatious design over excavation of meaning' (*Behind the Bardolatry*, 2016)), I also believe that the theatre must be more than an 'acoustic machine'. This is the province of radio that, of course, can be regarded as the immersion of the imagination in an aural-audio environment.

So whilst I started from Yates, I finish where I began whereby theatre should follow Beckett's axiom towards a complementary dialectic of verbal presence and corporeal presence with appropriate scenographic presence. These elements may be minimal or reach for bravura – I enjoy a good spectacle – but 'good' here requires the elements always remain in constructive tension and balance, not one overwhelming the others.

But I am arguing for a deeper, enduring sense and level of integration that embraces the physical structure of the city and theatre and the embodied mind that occupies those spaces. The *techné* of the sixteenth century city and theatre

becomes an integrated means of enjoying the plays being presented, the means of presentation and accessing the meaning of the plays. Shakespeare wrote for a particular *techne* and configuration of his stages, whether we call this The Globe, The Swan, The Blackfriars and so on. He also wrote for a particular knowing audience. The spectators experienced the plays in performance in these spaces, with all their familiarity of the range of skills employed on those stages.

Whilst our contemporary theatres present their own responses, challenges and questions to my themes, Shakespeare's plays and the staging they imply are not to become totemic or put in aspic. In this context, they represent one period of the continuity of the principles of knowing spectatorship and the *techne* of theatre that make worlds we 'fall' into and 'out' of as a process always under construction:

A process of generating theatre meaning assumedly takes place in the context of each theatre experience, i.e. in the actual encounter between a theatre performance and a spectator. (Rozik 2008: 1)

## **Afterword**

This is a revised and expanded version of the paper 'The Globe, the spectator and theatre as an acoustic, technological presence' presented at *London and the Globe*, Literary London Society Conference, London July 2016. As such, it benefits from the papers and discussions running across the days and evenings of the event, for which I express my acknowledgement.

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### **Note on Contributor**

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