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THE WESTERN STATES
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THE WESTERN STATES THEATRE REVIEW

Editor

George Caldwell
Theatre, School of Arts and Communication
Oregon State University
Corvallis, OR 97331
(541) 737-4627
E-mail: george.caldwell@oregonstate.edu

Publication Designer: Cheryl McLean
ImPrint Services, Corvallis, Oregon
E-mail: cheryl@imprint-services.com

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Living Lense

LOIS KAGAN MINGUS

Alright. I'll be the first one to admit it. I am not fond of puns. But I simply couldn't resist titling this piece "Living Lense" because, well, working with The Living Theatre since 1988 has given me not only theatrical insight, but eyes to see myself reflected in my work as an actor, director and playwright, both on and off stage.

Flashback. I'm a theatre major in college. I've attended years of drama school as a kid and done five seasons of summer stock. I know what I want to be! A musical theatre entertainer. All the while, though, there had been this little tug at my heart and head, an *avant-garde* angel on my shoulder whispering in my ear, "Use theatre as a force for social change!" Not a new idea, of course. *Show Boat* did that. *Hair* and *Short Eyes*, to name a few. But then it happened. I cracked open my textbook, and there they were. Judith Malina, Julian Beck and The Living Theatre. And what they did. Oh, what they did!

I was somewhat familiar with the company's work: being provocative, performing nude, encouraging audience participation. I knew the ingredients but hadn't delved into the ultimate product. That product did and still does, indeed, use theatre as a force for social change. There it was, on page 95 in my textbook.

I began to rethink my heart and head's desire.

The company was based in Europe and New York City and was an enormous influence on the Off-Broadway movement. I saved up my money, went to New York City and ate up any and all experimental political theatre I could. I read everything that was available to me about The Living Theatre. I realized *that's* what I want to do, be, taste, smell, see, hear, feel and most importantly...give.

Lois Kagan Mingus is a long time company member of The Living Theatre and Co-Founder of The Living Theatre Workshops and Action Racket Theatre. The Living Theatre Workshops website is www.thelivingtheatreworkshops.com.

This is not the place to speak of The Living Theatre's long history except to say it has been on-going since 1947. Its life can be found in hundreds of books dedicated to it and referenced in many more, as well as dozens and dozens of college papers, theatre encyclopedias, Internet listings, articles and the like. It is the mother of Six Degrees of Kevin Bacon! Somebody knows somebody who knew somebody who performed with, slept with, took a workshop with or hung out with The Living Theatre.

It's the late 1980's. I found myself at a Living Theatre rehearsal, hoping to run props, stage manage, anything that might get me through the front door. Scripts are passed around. I get one. Judith instructs everyone to read a line. I think, "cool!" An opportunity. Then later, she and her husband, the late Hanon Reznikov, ask if I'd like to perform in the play.

Yes...I would.

Floating down Broadway from 116th Street to 86th Street (I wouldn't be contained on a bus!), I knew I was about to live out a cliché, that is... my life was about to change forever.

It did.

Since the late 1980's we've had two homes on the Lower East Side in NYC, one on Third Street and Avenue C and our newest home on Clinton Street, as well as a five year residency in Italy. In the last three decades, we've performed over thirty works in the U.S., Europe and Latin America, both original and revivals.

In a recent conversation with Judith, I asked if the last six decades affects how the company creates its work now. In one short response she said it all. "Yes," she said, "because The Living Theatre moves inside the stream of history." And I might add, everything old is new again. And newer and newer.

"History fluctuates and changes. We have to understand that the fundamental principle of abuses have changed very little. There is still racism. Economic class division. Suffering. The art of the theatre is to see which way it's changed and in which way it still rests on the eternal principles. We continue to live in an authoritarian structure with borders." I think about what Judith says. She is continually finding ways to push what *is* into the realm of what *can be*. That's our job as theatre artists. As she often says, "Find a way. Make it work."

And as a company, we make it work in form, in rituals, in ideas, in the vocabulary and in the dramaturgy.

Four generations of Living Theatre actors moving forward.

Politics and Performance: Repression and Resistance in Lee Blessing's *Billy the Kid* and Rudolfo Anaya's *Billy the Kid*

CECILIA J. ARAGÓN

I liked the Kid very much, and long before we even reached Santa Fe, nothing would have pleased me more than to have witnessed his escape. He had his share of good qualities and was very pleasant. He had a reputation for being considerate of the old, the young and the poor. He was loyal to his friends and above all, loved his mother devotedly... In looking back to my first meeting with Billy the Kid, my impressions were most favorable and I can honestly say that he was "a man more sinned against than sinning.

—Miguel Antonio Otero, former Governor of New Mexico
and author of *The Real Billy the Kid* (178-179)

Historically, Billy the Kid (a.k.a. William H. Bonney) has become one of the largest legends of the lawless Wild West frontier.¹ However, he was more than a mere outlaw character in the western landscape; he was a cultural icon that captured the American imagination. Billy the Kid was a cultural manifestation through which critics, audiences, and readers debated important issues of the late 19th Century New Mexico territory,² including not only the volatile issues of law and justice but also the social construction of Billy the Kid and his ever-increasingly involvement with *Hispanos*³ of New Mexico. To New Mexicans he was known as “*el Bilito*,” “*el chivo*” (the kid), “*el chivato*” (their little Billy).⁴

Billy the Kid gained popularity in the literary public sphere through late 19th Century and early 20th Century publications of dime novels and collected memoirs of Billy the Kid. Concurrently, yet another form

Cecilia J. Aragón, Ph.D., is Associate Professor of the Department of Theatre and Dance and the Department of Chicano Studies, University of Wyoming in Laramie.

of narrative was re-created of Billy the Kid as he entered the realms of theatre and pageantry. In August 13th 1906, the Star Theatre in New York City opened a melodrama titled *Billy the Kid* written by Walter Woods and Joseph Stanley, starring Joseph Stanley as Billy⁵. Additionally, in August of 1940 in Lincoln, New Mexico, community members came together to celebrate one of the oldest folk pageants on Billy the Kid titled, *The Last Escape of Billy the Kid*, and produced by Quatro Centennial.⁶ Two years later, in April 21st 1942, the National Theatre in New York opened a ballet production of *Billy the Kid* that was produced by the Dance Players, Inc., Eugene Loring with music composed by Aaron Copeland⁷. Furthermore, in 1965, *The Beard*, by Michael McClure opened off-off-Broadway.⁸ Eight years later, in 1973, filmmaker and playwright, Michael Ondaatje's play, *The Collected Works of Billy the Kid*, was written as a performance piece of a collection of poems, history, fiction, and biography for the sole purpose of keeping in mind the postmodern era audiences⁹. While these performance texts function as cultural narratives, these narratives also construct a problematic view to the varied apologue of Billy the Kid, often times dismissing the geopolitical, social, and cultural perceptions of Billy the Kid with the *Hispanos* of New Mexico. Most recently in my research¹⁰, I have come across two dramatic texts that juxtapose the varying social and cultural relations and representations of Billy the Kid, *The Authentic Life of Billy the Kid*, a play in two-acts by Lee Blessing (1980),¹¹ and *Billy the Kid* by Rudolfo Anaya (1994).¹² These texts characterize concepts of subjectivity and historiography in the various recollections of re-writing Billy the Kid or *El Bilito*.

This article examines the impact of social patterns and cultural perceptions of Billy the Kid through a close reading of *The Authentic Life of Billy the Kid* and *Billy the Kid*. By examining these historical contemporary plays, I highlight the politics of interpretation by which playwrights transcend social structures and use culture to render meaningful representations of Billy the Kid. Blessing and Anaya exemplify cultural practices, as their cultural scripts construct folk narratives on the cultural and political perceptions of Billy the Kid. Building on the foundational work of cultural studies critics John-Michael Rivera's (2006) and Eric Hobsbawm's (1969)¹³ cultural theory of "social bandit," and ethnographic scholar Norman K. Denzin's cultural performance theory of performance ethnography (2003)¹⁴, I argue that Anaya's play, *Billy the Kid*, sets out to interpret and recover a cultural reality that existed in the late 19th Century and early 20th Century New Mexico one that addresses the social and political relations between "*el Bilito*" and the *Hispanos* that constitute what I call as the "mythos of *el Bilito*." The historical narrative discussed in *The Authentic Life of Billy the Kid* by Lee Blessing is seen as an interpretation

and reflection of the economic and political manifestations of the late 19th Century New Mexico territorial political era and foregrounds the ideological underpinnings of colonialism. While Blessing's play recaptures an old west gunslinger, cold-blooded killer mythos, Anaya re-writes the *Hispanos* voice into the theatrical history of *El Bilito*. As the native people's voice, I argue that Anaya's text is an effort to disrupt convention through re-visiting of the past, offering a counter discursive critique of *El Bilito*'s political and social configuration as a "social bandit" and folk hero. Both Blessing's and Anaya's plays inform the productive and reproductive logic of "story-telling."

I contextualize my reading of the play in terms of its radical critique of historical events as well as some of the more dominant concerns of Billy the Kid as an outlaw. It is important to place both dramatic texts in the historical and political context in order to explore more fully the folk narratives of Blessing's economic and political representation of Billy the Kid and Anaya's cultural and social disruption of the dominant narratives as perceived by the two culturally diverse playwrights.

Billy the Kid/*El Bilito*: Social Bandit Theory

The genesis and application of the "bandit" concept has been recently debated in the field of social science and social history. Some scholars have traced the theoretical concepts of "bandit" back to the early writings in the *Hebrew Bible*, making references to stealing, robbery, and rustlers.¹⁵ Most recently, scholars have coagulated beliefs on bandits into the study of "social bandit," in which researchers examine not only the study of violent acts, crime, social defiance, political rebels, but also the popular adulation of bandits who fight against oppression and social injustice.¹⁶

The conception of bandits and social bandits can be found in many cultures in the world, often times, in children's folk tales.¹⁷ In Mexican/Mexican-American cultures, several bandits (*banditos*) arose out of the 19th and 20th Century political upheaval in the form of folk tales and ballads (*corridos*). Américo Paredes, in his book, *With his Pistol in His Hand: Border Ballad and Its Hero*, examines the role of "folk hero" in the legendary story of Gregorio Cortez.¹⁸ In the early nineteenth hundreds, Gregorio Cortez became a hero to many Mexican-Americans living in south Texas and alongside the U.S.–Mexico border for wrongly being charged of horse theft and murder of the sheriff and deputy of Karnes County, Texas. The Gregorio Cortez incident of 1901, inspired the Mexican folks to compose the *Ballad of Gregorio Cortez*.¹⁹ Likewise, western historian Joseph H. Jackson documents the life and times of Joaquin Murrieta, a Mexican legendary figure in California during the California Gold Rush. Murietta, much

like Billy the Kid, was known for resisting the Anglo-American economic, political, and cultural domination over California. He stands as a social revolutionary symbol fighting against racism and discrimination.²⁰

In 1959 Eric J. Hobsbawm introduced the concept of “social bandit” as an archetype who gained fame among the folk masses for defending their rights, protecting them from oppression, and battling with authoritative figures or institutions represented by the elites.²¹ His theory explains that social bandits possess these qualities within the context of a state and its people:

They are peasant outlaws whom the lord and state regard as criminals, but who remain within peasant society, and are considered by their people as heroes, as champions, avengers, fighters for justice, perhaps even leaders of liberation, and in any case as men to be admired, helped, and supported. In the cases where a traditional society resists the encroachments and historical advance of central governments and states, native or foreign, they may be helped and supported even by the local lords (2000 [1959]: 20).

Hobsbawm goes on to describe how social banditry is universal. Social bandits are activists who defy the law in order to defend the people or peasants from capitalism or colonialism whose very systems regard as criminals; they serve as protectors of the people and their territory; they personify the marginalization of the people during social movements and stand as a symbols of resistance to perceived oppression.²² Some combination of these elements can be seen operating in the life of Billy the Kid in Anaya’s *Billy the Kid* (1994).

Resistance Narratives: Performance Ethnography Theory

The history and the cultural texts of outlaw heroes coalesce into a performance cultural script in which the heroes are connected to personal narratives labeled by cultural studies scholar Norman K. Denzin as “performance ethnography,” where the writer-as-performer or writer as representative of community.²³ As Denzin states:

[the writer] is self-consciously present, morally and politically self-aware. The writer uses his or her own experiences in culture reflexively to bend back on self and look more deeply at self-other interactions...recreating and re-writing the biographic past, a way of making the past a part of the biographic present (14-15).

Denzin argues for a cultural performance or cultural scripts that are intrinsically connected to power, cultural politics, identity, and a commitment to being the voice of the community (231). Furthermore, a strong element in which Denzin applies to performance ethnography as he suggests is “an emancipatory discourse that speaks to issues of racial

inequality under neoliberal forms of democracy and capitalism” (24). It is a cultural script that is related to social conflict to illuminate the structural relationships between opposing narratives that connect it to a genealogy composition of the past to the present.

Denzin’s model of performance ethnography draws on the literary and aesthetic guidelines:

[These texts] emphasize community, collective action, solidarity, and group empowerment. . . . these texts presume ethnographers, performers, and social researchers [writers] who are part of and spokespersons for local moral communities, communities with their own symbolism, mythology, and storytelling traditions. These texts draw upon the vernacular, on folk and popular culture forms of representation, including proverbs, music (work songs, spirituals, blues songs, jazz, rap, *corridos*), sermons, prayers, poems, choreopoems, folktales, paintings, plays, movies, photographs, performance art pieces, and murals. These texts are produced by artists-researchers-writers who aim to speak to and represent the needs of particular communities (122-123).

Thus, Denzin purports that performance ethnography produces texts and performances that are grounded in personal experiences of the local folk and vernacular culture. They, writer and texts, “record the histories of injustices experienced by the members of the oppressed groups” to negotiate politics, identities, meanings, and forge to challenge the dominate narratives (123).

This “cultural script” and “sense of local folk and vernacular culture” contributes to and is echoed in Anaya’s *Billy the Kid* play as it attempts to speak to the past and present histories of *Nuevo Mexicanos*. It is useful to think of Anaya’s *Billy the Kid* as an example of performance ethnography, that specific sub-genre of performance writing which “privileges” the voice of *Nuevo Mexicanos* and their social, political, and cultural community. Anaya utilizes the voice of the people as necessary ground for re-writing the folk narratives of Billy the Kid. Although “emancipatory discourse” and “spokespersons for local moral communities” are certainly terms applicable to Anaya’s *Billy the Kid*, Denzin’s comments of life writing as a ritual act are Anaya exerting a “self-consciously present, morally and politically self-aware” in the play to expose the social and historical relations between *Nuevo Mexicanos* and Billy the Kid.

The New Mexico Political Context: Tussling for Land, Power, and Identity

The political years surrounding Billy the Kid’s life discloses much about the social and political dramatic changes in New Mexican based on the territorial politics, race relations, and the inclusion of the larger U.S. democratic system as New Mexicans as “citizens.” The Treaty of

Guadalupe-Hidalgo, which ended the Mexican-American War (1846-1848) the Mexican loss of California and New Mexico, and the Gadsden Purchase (1853) brought turmoil to the citizens as change meant the expansion of the transcontinental railroad. It also meant that Anglo settlers began to purchase and steal lands throughout the region from Indo-Hispanic ranchers, farmers, and elite Mexican Americans (Gómez-Quíñones 1994).²⁴

According to historian, John-Michael Rivera, in his book, *The Emergence of Mexican-American: Recovering Stories of Mexican Peoplehood in U.S. Culture* (2006), there were several political events that he contextualizes as the evolving split persona of Billy the Kid for Anglos and *Hispanos*. First, the Otero Era. As the first Mexican-American territorial governor of New Mexico, Miguel Antonio Otero during his governorship (1897-1906) was instrumental in the transformation of New Mexico and Billy the Kid's interpretation, concurrent with those of *Hispano* attitudes and opinions (Rivera, 112). During Otero's governorships, Senator Albert Beveridge, chairman of the Senate Committee on Territories felt as though the "race element" in New Mexico was problematic of New Mexico joining the U.S. democracy and statehood (Rivera, 118). Otero in defense of the *Nuevo Mexicano* people and the territory, spent most of his governorship arguing that "the people of New Mexico are capable of self-government and worthy of full citizenship" (*An Autobiographical Trilogy*, 212-215).²⁵

Secondly, the U.S. political control of New Mexico attracted eastern businessman as they viewed New Mexico to have abundant resources, pastoral beauty, and trade routes that would make them millions of dollars (Rivera, 116). Third, Anglos found it difficult to take political and economic control, because New Mexico was dominated by the elite *Nuevo Mexicanos*, and it was mostly Mexican and Native American in population. This created a volatile and hostile environment for a changing "old" *Hispano Nuevo Mexicano* to the "new" New Mexico (Rivera, 116). Fourth, and most importantly, the political power at this time was characterized by one organization of Anglo businessman, ranchers, landowners, and attorneys—the Santa Fe Ring. They were the political constituency affiliated with the Republican party in Washington, D.C. They were financially supported by the Murphy-Dolan, and Riley Families, the owners of the Murphy-Dolan Store, which had economic and political control of Lincoln County (Rivera, 119). As Otero notes in his autobiography, *The Real Billy the Kid*, that the "all powerful Santa Fé Ring political power-house of New Mexico and the most lawless machine in the territory's history, became actively interested in the Lincoln County slaughter, lining up solidly behind the Murphy-Dolan-Riley faction. Headed by Attorney Thomas B.

Catron, ruthless overlord of all the Southwest racket interests...the Santa Fe Ring gave the Murhpy clan a semblance of legality and lawfulness that only the cold facts belied” (Otero 136, 54). In essence, as Rivera and Otero suggests, the Santa Fe Ring was “a cartel that promulgated and, in time maintained the white male imperialist power structures that had been created after the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo” (Rivera 2006, 120).

As the Santa Fe Ring gained momentum, activism from other locals formed its own legal force, the Tunstall-McSween faction. Out of this rivalry for economic and political power in New Mexico, the Lincoln County war began in the latter part of 1878, dividing the war between the old *Nuevo Mexicano* elites and the Murphy-Dolan “white male imperialists” gang (Rivera 2006, 120). It was a fight for political control of New Mexico, which created a volatile environment for both Anglos wanting to take the power and *Nuevo Mexicano* elites holding on to the power.

Billy the Kid: Lee Blessing’s Outlaw Dream

Lee Blessing’s play, *The Authentic Life of Billy the Kid*, exemplifies the characteristics of the Santa Fe Ring political beliefs through the central character Ash Upson, the ghostwriter for Pat Garrett’s Novel, *The Authentic Life of Billy the Kid: the Noted Desperado of the Southwest* (1882). The opening scene of the play takes place some 15 years after the fact of Billy the Kid’s death. Ash Upson comes back to visit Sheriff Pat Garratt at his ranch house in Las Cruces, New Mexico somewhere near the Organ Mountains. Ash Upson demonstrates his personal and political motives on writing fictional stories about Billy the Kid by stating:

They were not lies! They were truer than truth! You never understood that, did you, Pat? Every word I wrote came out the Kid’s mouth. Besides, it all made you look better. Pat, Billy was a phenomenal man. You and I were lucky to know him. Without him, you’d have been just another sheriff, and I wouldn’t have been allowed to chronicle the deeds of one of the great killers of the American Southwest. As I look back on it, I begin to regret you shooting him. He was the single greatest money-making enterprise in New Mexico. (*The Authentic Life of Billy the Kid*, 13)

Ash Upson echoes the ideological beliefs of the businessman coming in from the East coast, the Anglo views of the Santa Fe Ring, and the criminality of Billy the Kid. Ash, who is a metonym for the media, confesses in creating a socially deviant figure all in the name of making money. The message that Blessing creates is an image of Billy that is perpetrated by the media and courts of the time; Billy the Kid as an outlaw.

Furthermore, Ash introduces to Pat his rider, Barlow, who is disguised as Billy the Kid. Ash reveals to Garrett that Barlow is really the real Billy

the Kid and that Pat never really shot Billy that night in Fort Sumner at Pete Maxwell's house. Convincingly, Billy shares intimate incidents with Garrett. Ash continues to tell Pat Garrett about his project of resurrecting two great American rivals of Billy the Kid and Sheriff Pat Garrett.

Ash: What do you think? Pat, this is one hell of a project. The best I've ever found. This man—this man and you are the two halves of the world for me. And now I've put you together. (Toasting.) We are going to make money!

Pat: How, another book?

Ash: That's only part of it. We're going to arrange a tour for you two, as The Greatest Outlaw the West Has Ever Known, Suddenly Found to be Alive, and The Greatest Sheriff of Them All. Think of it! A dramatic reenactment of the monumental moment when you two, each the paragon of his chosen field, met in the deadly zoon between law and lawlessness—Pete Maxwell's darkened bedroom...We'll have the Go Grant episode, highlights of the Lincoln County War...

Billy: Fightin' Indians.

Ash: Billy Fighting Indians—we'll have lots of Indians, in Europe they love Indians... (21).

With this idea of a revivification performance between Billy and Pat, Ash epitomizes the disreputable attitudes of the cultural past as a privileged site where configurations of *Nuevo Mexicanos* and American identity merged. Ash serves to endorse an imperialist cultural legacy that embraced colonialism and commodification as unifying facets of the American attitudes toward *Nuevo Mexicanos*. Ash posits that audiences will pay money to see them perform. Ash's plan is to "market" Billy and Pat, as they are transformed into a labor-product that commodifies them within a performative context. Billy the Kid and *Nuevo Mexicanos* indubitably served as an economic gain to Anglo audiences. With the incorporation of selling the west, more specifically, selling New Mexico, Anglos financially benefited.

Thus, Ash exemplifies the ideological beliefs of how Anglos viewed the natives of New Mexico; they served as economic resources within the political context of the Lincoln County War between—The Santa Fe Ring and the Tunstall-McSween party. As John-Michael Rivera notes "New Mexico, then, one of the last territories of the southwest, was a particularly enticing prospect for eastern businessman, as its abundant resources, pastoral beauty, and trade routes would garner millions of dollars" (116). Furthermore, as Otero points out "...the motive behind Pat Garrett's relentless pursuit of The Kid was that his death meant money and the office of sheriff of Lincoln County" (1936, 144). According to Otero, Garrett's economic and political gain was a selfish act not a cultural

collective act of resistance against outsiders. In Blessing's play, the Billy the Kid figure, therefore, stands both as a signpost of economic gain for Ash and political rewards for Garrett, which reflects the Anglo attitudes of the late 19th Century colonialist perspectives of Manifest Destiny experience in New Mexico.

Though Blessing's and Anaya's cultural positions differ in their respective narratives, both of their Billy the Kid's are culturally competent and well assimilated into the local culture of *Nuevo Mexicanos*. For Billy, in Blessing's play, acculturation into the New Mexican culture is more than a means of socialization; it was an act of survival and flight. These acts of survival and escape are described by Billy:

You know how I broke out? You never counted on my loyalty among the native New Mexicans. I spoke Spanish like one of 'em, y'know. I lived with 'em, made all their girls happier'n they'd ever be again—they called me *El Chivato!* That means, "The Kid."...Well, them natives slipped me news of a plan, an' I worked it just right. I asked Bell to take me out back to the shithouse, so I could take care of my funtions...an' I went inside the shitter an' reached way down in the hole there for the gun my friends'd left at my disposal. It was wrapped in some pretty smelly newspaper, you better believe it! (32-33)

The loyalty that Billy the Kid speaks of is essential to his survival. He not only satisfied his sexual needs from the *Nuevo Mexicana* women, but also his cultural connections kept him alive. Although Blessing's play does not particularly emphasize the New Mexican culture as central to the action of the play, he clearly acknowledges the social ties and understanding of the *Nuevo Mexicano* people in aiding Billy's break away from the law and death under the hands of Pat Garrett, at least temporarily. By the end of the play, Pat Garrett shoots Billy proclaiming "I am the man who killed Billy the Kid, twice"—living the dream of the dutiful sheriff taking the life of the vicious outlaw (50).

El Bilito: Rudolfo Anaya's Social Bandit and Folk Hero

As the Santa Fe Ring was a collection of Anglo businessman, attorneys, and storeowners, the Tunstall-McSween faction was primarily composed of *Nuevo Mexicano* farmers and small ranchers who had lost their land to the Santa Fe Ring (Rivera, 121). Otero recalls that members of the Tunstall-McSween party were "McSween, Francisco Zamora, Ignacio Gonzales, Vicente Romero, Hijinio Salazar, José Chávez and Billy the Kid or *El Bilito* as the other native New Mexican farmers and ranchers named him" (Rivera, 121). The Mexican relationship with *El Bilito* is alluded to in Rivera's summary of the role and respect that Mexican's had for *El Bilito*.²⁶

To contrast the cultural views of Blessing's narrative, one of the most recent and remarkable plays representing the *Nuevo Mexicano* cultural views of Billy the Kid is Rudolfo Anaya's *Billy the Kid* (1994). Anaya is considered to be the foremost authoritative voice for many *Nuevo Mexicanos* and Chicanos throughout the United States. The representation of *El Bilito* by Rudolfo Anaya in *Billy the Kid* clearly conforms to this perspective. The play is set in the historical time of 1881 the night of the death of Billy the Kid in Pete Maxwell's home. The voice representing *Nuevo Mexicanos* in the play is "Paco Anaya," the narrator, who was a friend of *El Bilito*. He also serves as a commentator on the action as he witnessed it, and providing the perspective of the *Nuevo Mexicanos*. He is a constant reminder that the presence of Billy the Kid lives in the consciousness and physical reality of *Nuevo Mexicanos*. In the opening scene, *El Bilito* is in the home of Pete Maxwell. As he holds Rosa Anaya, his lover, in his arms, he speaks to her with a mixture of Spanish and English—code-switching. He articulates his plans for the future with Rosa:

Billy: Time to settle down...give up being a *vagabundo*.

Rosa: *Siempre lo premetes...*

Billy: *Esta vez lo voy hacer*. Mira. A hundred acres, enough land to run a small herd. You should see it, Rosa. There's good grazing, plenty of water, and the beauty of the mountains. It's what I always wanted...

Rosa: *Es un sueño*, Billy.

Billy: *Tue eres mi sueño*, amor...*Te vas conmigo?*

Rosa: *mi padre no lo permite*.

Billy: *yo hablo con el*. *Vas a ver*. *Voy a cambiar...*

Rosa: *Porque te gusta tanto ese maldado condado de Lincoln? Quedate aqui*.

Billy: *Me gustan las montañas*, y *la gente*.

Rosa: *Pero los tejanos no te quieren*.

Billy: *Que importa*. *Anda*, *casate conmigo*. *Quiero hijos...*

Rosa: *Seria possible?*

Billy: *Si, es possible*. *Ven*. *Imagina*. *El Bilito*, *con hijos*. Let the papers write about that. *Y despues*, I'll be a grandfather. (Anaya 2)

With this opening scene, Anaya places *El Bilito* within a specific ideological locus, as a family acquaintance within a *Nuevo Mexicano* cultural context and fluency with the Spanish language. As historian Michael Wallis states in his book, *Billy the Kid: the Endless Ride* (2007),²⁷ "it helped that he [Billy the Kid] spoke Spanish as fluently as a native, a proficiency that served him well with the Hispanics for the rest of his life" (129). With

Billy the Kid's acquisition of bilingual language skills and the cultural acceptance of *Nuevo Mexicanos*, this marked him as a social member of the *Hispano* community. Billy the Kid not only formed a political agency with defending the rights of democratic citizenship for *Nuevo Mexicanos* but also created a social bond with cultural practices of *Nuevo Mexicanos* ways of life. The primary gesture in this passage for Anaya is to reflect the intimate relationship of *El Bilito* with the *Nuevo Mexicanos*. Rosa is metaphorically a representative spokeswoman of the *Nuevo Mexicano* culture, which can be read as a radical critique of social power that women held in *El Bilito*'s gateway into the community.

Another cultural element in which Anaya uses in his text of *Billy the Kid*, to recollect the sentiments of *Nuevo Mexicanos*, is the use of *corridos* (ballads).²⁸ In his play, *Billy the Kid*, Anaya documents two *corridos* (ballad) and a *melodía* (melody), which serve as important elements of storytelling to the legend of *El Bilito* in New Mexico and his affable relations with the natives. The first *corrido* written by Anaya is told by the voice of *Nuevo Mexicanos* as they mourn Billy the Kid's death. The *corrido*, *Billy the Kid-El Bilito*, begins with a description of the fateful night of 1881 when Billy was shot by Sheriff, Pat Garrett, in Pedro Maxwell's house in Fort Sumner. The *corrido* tells of his lover Rosita witnessing his death and crying as Billy fell wounded into her arms. This type of *corrido* falls into the category of *corridos* about *bandidos*. The second *corrido* that Anaya incorporates in his play was, *El Corrido del Bilito*, which serves as a cautionary *corrido* to all mothers and fathers in protecting their children. As Anaya writes in the *corrido* ". . . *El era valiente y muy arriesgado, amante del juego y de las mujeres. Con ellas bailaba, con ellas cantaba, pero con pistola, muy lista y muy brava,*" as a warning to steer clear of how *El Bilito* lost his life to gambling and violence. The third song that Anaya writes is a *melodía* (melody) *Billy y Rosita*, describing the love between the lovers. Through the use of song, Anaya recovers the voice of *Nuevo Mexicanos*, placing their subjectivity as central to the play and to the life of Billy the Kid, as they comment on the relationship between *Bilito y Rosita* and *Bilito* and the people.

Undoubtedly, Anaya's *Billy the Kid* is known for becoming one of the largest legends for *Nuevo Mexicanos*. Anaya's play and songs remain as evidence for the long-standing folklore of *El Bilito*. With the use of the *corridos*, Anaya represented the *Nuevo Mexicanos* sentiments toward Billy the Kid, expressed the political and cultural struggles against the Anglo regime that had taken their lands, and the social climate that the territory of New Mexico was undergoing during the 19th Century. *El Bilito* made an enormous impression on *Nuevo Mexicanos*, as they were involved in creating legendary stories, folk songs, and plays that still exist within the

communities that he engaged with. As a folk expression, *Nuevo Mexicanos* hold *El Bilito* as folklore and legend to the history and the makings of New Mexico statehood.

In the final scene, Anaya's play begins as it ends, on the night that Billy the Kid was shot by Pat Garrett at Pete Maxwell's house in Fort Sumner. As Billy and Rosa appear on stage in one of the bedrooms:

Billy: *Espera aquí.*

Rosa: *No, voy contigo.*

Billy: We have plenty of time to be together, querida. Tomorrow we leave for Mexico.

Rosa: A new life...

Billy: Don Pedro wants to see me.

Rosa: Why so late?

Billy: He owes me money. Josefina said he's ready to pay.

Rosa: Josefina? No, Billy, don't go!

Billy: Why are you trembling?

Rosa: There's no light in his room...

Billy: The old cheapskate doesn't like to burn his oil. Wait.

Rosa: Billy.

Billy: *Que?*

Rosa: I love you.

Billy: *Y yo tea mo a ti.* (they embrace warmly. Deputy Poe appears.)

Rosa: *Quien es?* (Billy pulls out his knife. Poe backs away.)

Billy: Just one of Don Pedro's *vaqueros*. *Espera aquí.* (He leaves Rosa and softly enters Maxwell's bedroom.)

Billy: Don Pedro. Who is the man outside (Garrett stands. Billy Faces him.)
Quien es? Quien es?

Maxwell: That's him!

Billy: Garrett?

Garrett: *Soy Yo.* (Garrett fires once, Billy grabs at his gut in pain, steps forward reaching for Garrett. The figure of death, *la muerte*, appears...)

Rosa: Billy! Billy! Oh, *Bilito*...

Billy: I love you, Rosa... (Billy dies in the arms of Rosa. She holds and rocks Billy in her arms.) (Anaya, 37-38)

The ending passage introduces the history and perspective on *Nuevo Mexicanos* who recall this fateful incident of a beloved hero. Anaya's play challenges the popular Anglo image of Billy the Kid. However, it is a view that reflects the sentiments of many *Nuevo Mexicanos*. Anaya and Rivera are of the same opinion that:

Billy the Kid became a hero to the Mexican people throughout the territory. He became a symbol of resistance and freedom for the Mexican population. To the Mexicans, *El Bilito* was on their side, fighting the Anglo regime that had taken their lands and impoverished their lives since the end of the U.S.-Mexico war. Because of *El Bilito's* courage, he became a weapon that could help fight against the Santa Fe Ring...For the Oteros, the death of Billy the Kid symbolized the passing of their economic power, and their ability to define the political public spheres. (Rivera, 121, 123)

Anaya symbolically represents these sentiments as Billy dies in the arms of Rosita. In his play, Anaya posits the perceptions of *Nuevo Mexicanos* as counter storytelling to the folk legend of *El Bilito* juxtaposed with that of the Anglo historical narratives of Billy the Kid as a criminal and an outlaw. Anaya captures the social and political essence that describes *El Bilito* as agreed upon by John-Michael Rivera's (2006) and Eric Hobsbawm's theory of a "social bandit" for the *Nuevo Mexicanos*. According to Hobsbawm's social bandit theory, Rivera agrees that Billy the Kid possesses the following qualities:

1) protects the people from the onslaught of modernity or colonialism 2) is a person who avenges the institutional wrongs the people have felt in the wake of political strife caused by colonialism 3) is one who impedes the civilizing and modernizing mission of a given territory for democracy 4) personifies the marginalization of the people's political and cultural struggles against the encroaching state (Rivera, 111).

When *El Bilito* died in the arms of Rosita so did the dreams to defend the "political public spheres" of the passing on of the economic power for *Nuevo Mexicanos*.²⁹ Fighting alongside *Nuevo Mexicanos*, *El Bilito* became a hero to the New Mexican people throughout the territory. He became a symbol of resistance and freedom for the New Mexican population. To the *Nuevo Mexicanos*, *El Bilito* was on their side, fighting the Anglo regime that had taken their lands and impoverished their lives since the end of the U.S.-Mexico War. Because of *El Bilito's* courage, he became a weapon that could help fight against the Santa Fe Ring. With the help of *El Bilito*, the Oteros hoped to win the war and regain the political and economic control that they had lost to the [Santa Fe] ring (Rivera, 121). The death of *El Bilito* represents one of the many miscarriages of justice in New Mexican history, which profoundly affected the *Nuevo Mexicano* communities and their cultural perceptions of *El Bilito*.

Since the rise of the Chicano Movimiento, Anaya uses a technique of writing for the people as folk narrative, especially in his play *Billy the Kid*. Anaya's technique of writing is best described by Norman Denzin who calls the process of writing the "pedagogical performance narratives" (*Performance Ethnography* 2003, 38). Pedagogical performance narratives are based on reflexive writing that edits an experience or draws upon multiple personal and group experiences in which often the writer criticizes social formations and writes from a social and political culture (*Performance Ethnography* 2003, 38). In an email to the author, Michael Wallis, Frederick Nolan, perhaps the most prolific historian on Billy the Kid, states that "the Hispanic viewpoint deserves further examination... The idea of emphasizing his [Billy the Kid's] folk-hero status in Hispanic culture is attractive. I have always said we will never understand this story until someone tells it from that side of the cultural divide" (Wallis, 184). Anaya's play, *Billy the Kid* remains as an important source and serves as a cultural viewpoint that revisits and helps to define the image of *El Bilito* more clearly. Anaya engages in a Denzin's theory of pedagogical performance narrative—recreating the urban mythos of *El Bilito*. Anaya fosters a sense of collective engagement and works toward a goal that fits in with the mission of its historical society: creating a folk narrative that preserves and shares the stories in the representation of "speaking for" the history and the people of New Mexico.

Conclusion: Riding Into the Western Sunset

While differences of opinion and points of view are inherent as each playwright brings his own experiences and expertise to the stage, a more dynamic Billy the Kid who fights for social justice is represented in Anaya's play, *Billy the Kid*. Blessing's play on Billy the Kid fits the dominant narrative of popular culture and exemplifies the beliefs and attitudes of Anglos during the historical period. Like the image of Billy the Kid as a western outlaw, violent gunman, and a pawn for economic and political gains, Blessing's script poses a problematic view to the exploration of community, people, and place of the historical past. Whereas Anaya uses two narrators, Paco Anaya, representing the view of *Nuevo Mexicanos*, and Ash Upson, the novelist and ghostwriter of Pat Garrett, to explore the multivocality and nuances that *Nuevo Mexicanos* spoke about within social, economic, and political structures embedded in the culture and their relationship to *El Bilito*.

However different these plays are from one another, their common denominator of space and place reveals the extent to which Billy the Kid or *El Bilito*'s cultural representation are contingent on negotiations

between a geopolitical space, people, and social structures. Both Anaya's and Blessing's text reveals a "tragic hero," Anaya's text, however, of *El Bilito* attempts to reveal Hobsbawm's "social bandit" and forges an oppositional consciousness, which challenges the Anglo folk narratives of Billy the Kid. By propelling change in folk narratives, Anaya radically shifts the politics of cultural production in the ethnographic representation of *El Bilito*. The cultural symbolism, according to theories of Rivera, Hobsbawm, and Denzin, in my examination of Anaya's *Billy the Kid* and Blessing's *The Authentic Life of Billy the Kid*, therefore, is intimately tied to the economic, political, cultural, and social context of New Mexicans. As Michael Antonio Otero insists "Billy the Kid was a perfect gentleman and a man with a noble heart. In all his career, he never killed a native of New Mexico, which was one of the reasons we were all so fond of him" (173). Anaya and Otero influence the process of folk narrative and performance ethnography as a political act emphasizing community, collective action, solidarity, and group empowerment; as Denzin says "spokespersons for local moral communities, communities with their own symbolism, mythology, and storytelling traditions" (123). It is through their efforts that we have documentary evidence to understanding why Billy the Kid/*El Bilito* was their "beloved" hero.

Acknowledgments

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Endnotes

- 1 See Walter Noble Burns, *The Saga of Billy the Kid* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, Page and Company, 1926); Pat F. Garrett, *Pat F. Garrett's Authentic Life of Billy the Kid* (New York, NY: The McMillan Company 1927); Robert Marshall Utley *Billy the Kid: A Short and Violent Life* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1989); Micheal Wallis, Michael *Billy the Kid: The Endless Ride* (NewYork, NY: W.W. Norton and Company, 2007).
- 2 New Mexico became a territory in 1850 and obtained statehood status in 1912.
- 3 *Hispano* is a term used by Rudolfo Anaya to identify the people of New Mexico that have historical traces to Spanish ancestry.
- 4 See Marta Weigle and Peter White, *The Lore of New Mexico* in "Billy the Kid" (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1988. 352-362); Michael Wallis, *Billy the Kid*, in chapter "El Chivato" (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2007. 233-249); Rudolfo Anaya, *Billy the Kid* (Albuquerque: Rudolfo Anaya. 1994). The play was reprinted in the *Anaya Reader* by Rudolfo Anaya (Grand Central Publishing. 1995. 495-554); Robert F. Kadlec, ed., *They "Knew" Billy the Kid: Interviews with Old-Time New Mexicans* (Santa Fe, NM: Ancient City Press, 1987); John-Michael

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- 5 Information on this production is made available through Internet Broadway Database: The Broadway League, at <http://www.ibdb.com/show.php?id=397800>
 - 6 Drew Gomber, “The Last Escape of Billy the Kid—America’s Longest Running Folk Pageant,” July 17, 2003, available at <http://www.southernnewmexico.com/Articles/Southeast/Lincoln/Lincoln/TheLastEscapeofBillytheKi.html>
 - 7 Ibid., <http://www.ibdb.com/production.php?id=1189>
 - 8 The play first debut was at the Actor’s Workshop Theatre in San Francisco on December 18, 1965.
 - 9 Holly Maples play review of *The Collected Works of Billy the Kid* in The Columbia Encyclopedia of Modern Drama, Vol. 1, 278-79.
 - 10 I have been interested in New Mexico’s Billy the Kid, or as New Mexican natives call him, *El Bilito*, since my childhood. As I child, I recall visiting *El Bilito*’s gravesite in Fort Sumner, touching his gravestone gently to pay my respects. From these childhood memories, *El Bilito* became part of not only my family history but also my history lesson of New Mexico. Years later in my adult life, I developed yet another layer of interest for *El Bilito*. In 1996, Rudolfo Anaya, my father’s first cousin, my second cousin, gave to me a script of *Billy the Kid*. As I found the script to be exciting, recollecting of my family tales, and folk songs I had recalled my father singing, I decided to direct and produce Anaya’s *Billy the Kid* (1994). As Artistic Director and Founder of La Cas Teatro, *Billy the Kid* received its world premiere production at the South Broadway Cultural Center in the summer of 1997. I was pleasantly surprised to find in our audiences Billy the Kid aficionados and New Mexico-*El Bilito* enthusiasts, and New Mexico natives telling me stories and commenting to me about the play...“Anaya has told the story of how “we” remember *el bilito*” (theatre patron of La Casa Teatro, 1997). Years later in my scholarly studies, I have found yet another intersection with *El Bilito*. Collecting theatrical memorabilia such as play scripts, playbills, musical scores, recorded performances of ballets, and theatrical productions.
 - 11 Lee Blessing, *The Authentic Life of Billy the Kid* (New York: Samuel French, Inc., 1979, 1980).
 - 12 Rudolfo Anaya, *Billy the Kid* (Albuquerque: Rudolfo Anaya. 1994). The play was reprinted in the *Anaya Reader* by Rudolfo Anaya (Grand Central Publishing. 1995. 495-554.)
 - 13 For an intense study of “social bandits” see John-Michael Rivera, *The Emergence of Mexican America: Recovering Stories of Mexican Peoplehood in U.S. Culture* (New York:

- New York University Press, 2006, 111) and Eric Hobsbawm's *Bandits* (New York, NY: Pantheon, 1969).
- 14 See Norman K. Denzin, *Interpretive Ethnography: Ethnographic Practices for the 21st Century* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 1997, 199) and *Performance Ethnography: Critical Pedagogy and the Politics of Culture* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2003, 14-15).
- 15 For a more extended search on bandits and social bandits see Eric J. Hobsbawm *Bandits* (New York: The New Press, 2000)—this book first appeared in 1969 from Liedenfeld and Nicholson in London and in *Primitive Rebels: Studies in Archaic Forms of Social Movement in the 19th and 20th Centuries* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1959); Chris Frazer *Bandit Nation: A History of Outlaws and Cultural Struggle in Mexico, 1810-1920* (Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press, 2006); Richard W. Slatta, ed., *Bandidos: The Varieties of Latin American Banditry* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1987); Richard W. Slatta Eric J. Hobsbawm's *Social Bandit: A Critique and Revision* at http://www.ncsu.edu/acontracorriente/spring_04/Slatta.pdf; John-Michael Rivera, "Claiming *Los Bilitos*: Miguel Antonio Otero and The Fight for New Mexico Manhood" in *The Emergence of Mexican America: Recovering Stories of Mexican Peoplehood in U.S. Culture* (New York: New York University Press, 2006, 110-134).
- 16 Ibid.
- 17 Some of these folktales include: Chinese, *Filial Children—Series Three* and *The Big Tortoise Who Seized the Bandit* at (<http://chinesefolktales.blogspot.com/2010/01/stories-of-filial-children-series-three.html>); Italian, *The Marriage of a Queen and a Bandit in Italian Folktales* by Italo Galvino (New York: Mariner Books, 1992, 606-609); H. E. Marshall *Stories of Robin Hood Told to the Children* (NC: Yesterday's Classics, 2005).
- 18 Américo Paredes, *With his Pistol in His Hand: Border Ballad and Its Hero* (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 1958); Cynthia E. Orozco, *Gregorio Lia Cortez*, in the Texas Handbook Online at <http://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/CC/fco94.html>; and Arturo F. Rosales, *Pobre Raza! Violence, Justice, and Mobilization among Mexico Lindo Immigrants, 1900-1936* (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 1999); "The Ballad of Gregorio Cortez" in Maria Herrera-Sobek, *Chicano Folklore: A Handbook* (London: Greenwood Press, 2006, 107-112).
- 19 Ibid.
- 20 See Eric J. Hobsbawm *Bandits* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1969, 128); Joseph H. Jackson *Bad Company* (Bison Books, 1949, 346); John Rollin Ridge *The Life and Adventures of Joaquin Murieta: The Celebrated California Bandit* (Oklahoma: University of Oklahoma Press, 1955, 159); William B. Secrest *Lawmen and Desperadoes: 1850-1900* (Arthur H. Clark Company: 1994, 343).
- 21 Ibid.
- 22 See Eric J. Hobsbawm *Bandits* (New York: New York Press, 2000, 7-34).
- 23 See Norman K. Denzin, *Performance Ethnography: Critical Pedagogy and the Politics of Culture* (London: Sage Publications, 2003).
- 24 See Juan Gómez-Quinones in his seminal book *Roots of Chicano Politics, 1600-1940*. (Albuquerque, NM: University Of New Mexico Press, 1994, 241-279).

- 25 Miguel Antonio II Otero, *Otero: An Autobiographical Trilogy*, Vols. 1-3 (New York: Arno, 1974).
- 26 See John-Michael Rivera book chapter "Claiming *Los Bilitos*: Miquel Antonio Otero and the Fight for New Mexican Manhood," 110-134.
- 27 See Michael Wallis, *Billy the Kid: The Endless Ride* (New York: W.W. Norton and Company Ltd., 2007).0
- 28 See Maria Herrera-Sobek *Northward Bound: The Mexican Immigrant Experience in Ballad and Song* (Indiana University Press, IN: 1993); Ramón Saldívar, *Chicano Narrative: The Dialectics of Difference* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1990).
- 29 See John-Michael Rivera book chapter "Claiming *Los Bilitos*: Miquel Antonio Otero and the Fight for New Mexican Manhood," 110-134.

Editor's note: Owing to the collaborative work with three other colleagues on a previous unpublished article, the authorship of Cecilia J. Aragón's "Social Protest as Social Performance: Examining Oppositional Performances with Latina/o Youth" in the *Northwest Theatre Review*, Vol. 15, 2009, should accurately be cited as Dr. Cecilia J. Aragón, Dr. Leticia Alvarez, Dr. Francisco Rios and Dr. Margaret Zamudio.

Good Dramaturgy

ROBERT CAISLEY

The theatre is full of mystery. Civilians (people not involved in the profession) are curious about what we do, and how we do it, and this wonderment is sometimes expressed in the unexciting questions most frequently asked at audience “talk-backs.” Playwrights, for example, are asked, “How long did it take you to write the play?” Actors are asked, “How did you memorize all those lines?” As a literary dramaturg, the question I am most frequently asked is, “What is a dramaturg?” However, it’s not just civilians who ask this. Many of my own colleagues and collaborators have expressed a similar bewilderment, confusion, bias and occasional distaste for the nature and purpose of dramaturgy.

So “What is a dramaturg *really?*” I could probably provide as many answers as the number of times I’ve been asked the question. Every professional dramaturg I’ve met has offered a different definition, and that definition seems to be rather “liquid,” shifting from project to project. For the last decade, my dramaturgical work has been almost exclusively focused on new works, and so I thought I might offer what I think a good literary dramaturg is and does. These musings are by no means intended to be an exhaustive list of those qualities which make up the “essential dramaturg.” They are simply personal opinions about those practices I have found to be most useful when, as a playwright, I have myself collaborated with a dramaturg, and when, as a dramaturg collaborating with a playwright, have experienced a truly beneficial and harmonious creative exchange.

A good dramaturg ...

- Asks lots of questions
- Gets everyone else in the room talking about the play more than they talk about the play

Robert Caisley is Associate Professor and Head of Dramatic Writing at the University of Idaho, Moscow.

- Needs to be the “dumbest” person in the room
- Suggests possible narrative solutions without plot making
- Sets the play and the playwright up on a blind date
- Gives sensitive, but radically honest feedback
- Listens carefully to the writer to understand the play he/she is trying to write
- Offers suggestions that are consistent with the play the playwright is writing, not the play the dramaturg would write
- Is in service of the playwright and director (but is *neither* the playwright, *nor* the director)
- Never gives notes to a director about their direction (notes should be given only insofar as they are directly related to the text)
- Never gives notes to the actors (ever!)
- Does most of their work *outside* the rehearsal studio
- Respects the ever-shifting authority of knowledge: i.e. allows for the possibility the playwright either knows *everything* there is to know about their play, or knows *nothing at all* (but it’s probably somewhere in between)
- Offers suggestions that are consistent with the *internal logic* of the play
- Is able to help the writer see, understand and better make use of the *inherent* or *emerging* or *hidden* structure of their play
- Nurtures the writer not just the play
- Helps the writer develop “best practices” (routine and discipline)
- Keeps the script development plan on track toward the intended goals, but allows for creative detours along the way
- Does not direct the play, but tries to anticipate the kinds of logistic and aesthetic considerations a director would have in rehearsal
- Understands that research, in all its forms, is only good insofar as it can be rendered as a dramatic moment within the context of the play (failure to do this, makes you perhaps helpful as an historian, but useless as a dramaturg)
- Has an *evolutionary* knowledge of the script; they need to be able to remember each successive draft of the play without imprinting an earlier draft on a current one

“The Evolution of Chaos” a ten-minute play

BRYAN WILLIS

Cast

Allison

Becca

Colleen

Diane

Age is unimportant, though please note Becca is pregnant.

Set

The bare floor of a yoga class.

ALLISON and BECCA enter a yoga class. Both look at themselves in a large mirror—ostensibly located where the Audience is seated—before unrolling their mats and assuming the lotus position. Soothing music. Low light. There is no conventional dialogue during the play. It is understood that all the words the Audience hears represent the interior thoughts of the characters. COLLEEN enters, removes her shoes, and feigns surprise as she notices BECCA is “showing.” They exchange smiles as COLLEEN unrolls her mat and assumes the same position as the other two students.

BECCA: Think about—

ALLISON & BECCA: Nothing.

Bryan Willis is playwright-in-residence, Northwest Playwrights Alliance @ Seattle Repertory Theatre.

BECCA: Relax. Control the moment.

COLLEEN: Relax.

BECCA: Control the moment. Distractions.

BECCA, COLLEEN & ALLISON: Breathe.

ALLISON: Give yourself time.

BECCA: Relax.

BECCA, COLLEEN & ALLISON: Let go of—

COLLEEN: The Day. & BECCA: Distractions. & ALLISON: Chaos.

BECCA: Think about—

ALLISON & BECCA: Nothing.

COLLEEN: Control.

They begin to move—always in unison. This is a practiced routine.

COLLEEN: Aaand that hurts already. I'm fine. That's fine.

BECCA: Think about—

ALLISON & BECCA: Nothing.

COLLEEN: That's good.

ALLISON: I'll get my shoes on, towel off and pay—did I, jeeze, did I bring checks? I'll use the card, except if the machine's down or slow it was what, ten minutes last time puts me in total crap traffic unless I *don't pay* except if she reminds us again and then what? I pay. Otherwise. Okay. Priorities. Gotta pee. (*Sung to the tune of "Gotta Dance!"*) Gotta Pee! That's another two minutes, five if she goes.

She looks to BECCA in what would be the large D.S. mirror.

BECCA returns the smile.

ALLISON: She always goes. She sprints. So that's another five, plus pay if she announces, that's—shit, did I leave the lights on? God-Dammit. That's it, no more nothing until I buy a friggin' car with a friggin' bell for every—Goddammit. That gives me five, maybe seven minutes before it's totally, yeah. Okay. I can, yeah, that's fine. I'll just—I can't. What if I—no. Okay. I'm relaxing. Yeah. That's fine, the battery's dead but I'll be, yeah, relaxed. Do a little stretching with the jumper cables. That's another ten minutes if, goddammit, where is she? Great, so then I have to call (*Sees DIANE enter.*) oh god, thank you. I hope you drove.

DIANE motions to ALLISON that her car lights are on. ALLISON smiles—signals an "OK" and a "will you jump my car" pantomime to DIANE.

DIANE: Idiot.

ALLISON: Saved. Okay. Well.

DIANE: (*Motions that she'll help.*) Like I want to end class jumping that cruddy little car.

ALLISON: (*Lips move—no actual words.*) Thank you.

DIANE: (*Looks to COLLEEN.*) You—are in my spot.

COLLEEN: Streeetch it out.

DIANE: That's my spot.

COLLEEN: (*Peeks at DIANE'S footwear.*) Nice shoes.

DIANE: Move.

COLLEEN: She going to take those off?

DIANE: (*Removing shoes.*) That was my spot before you started this class. That's mine. That's been mine, you know it's mine, that's my spot.

COLLEEN: Streeetch it out.

DIANE: Move.

COLLEEN: So that's fixed rate, 30 years at 7 & 3/4 with two years paid. Or refinance at a variable rate maybe saves—nothing by the time the finance charges, yeah. Unless we go with, no. And the whole concept of getting a loan from—Ick. Not worth it.

COLLEEN & BECCA: Relax.

BECCA: Control the moment.

COLLEEN: They'd lord it over us. So that's—yeah.

COLLEEN'S monologue is continuous as DIANE finally unrolls a mat and joins the routine.

COLLEEN: Or one of those credit card, I mean is that possible? Just to float the whole thing at 2.9. I could still write that off, I could—why not? So. That's 3% of 220,000, 3, 6, basically seven grand compounded assuming you get another offer and transfer otherwise you're stuck with 19%. Hmm. You'll get more offers. Unless there's some bio-mail scare and they stop sending junk mail and. Worst case scenario, 19% of \$220,000; 19, 38, another four that's \$42,000 interest. Compounded. Divided by 12.

DIANE: That's the last time you're getting my spot.

COLLEEN: Ohmygod.

DIANE & COLLEEN: She's looking at me in the mirror.

They both give a little wave to what would be the reflections.

DIANE: Don't be smiling at me. Don't smile at me.

COLLEEN & BECCA: Relax.

ALLISON: Control the moment.

We hear a beeper or cell phone.

COLLEEN, BECCA, ALLISON, DIANE: (*Pandemonium. All saying something different:*) Ohmygod, that's not mine, please, oh crap, ignore it, ignore it, ignore it, etc. (*The noise stops.*)

DIANE & ALLISON: It was her.

BECCA: So if I do it I should tell him. It's going to be, well it's going to be right there. He *should* know about it, that's the point. You take the diaper bag, you've got it. Right there. But then does that make me a total alarmist? Or just, oh god. But then what's worse if it does happen and I don't have it for him because I'm worried about what Rob says. Or then what do I say if it actually happened and I knew exactly what to do and didn't. But that's not going to—it could. 9/11. What are the odds of (*Deep breath, exhale*). So. If Hanford goes, the wind would probably...that's probably safe. But then Trident. Ft. Lewis. Boeing's still, yeah. Or Microsoft. Seattle. Right. So that just becomes like a lunchbox thing. I mean at some point, when he's at school: Here's your snack. Juice. Potassium Iodide. Cookie. Oh, by the way, that one's designed to protect your thyroid in case of a radiation emergency. Little guy. My little guy. Think about—

ALLISON & BECCA: Nothing.

BECCA: Relax. Control the moment.

COLLEEN: Relax.

The routine begins to wind down.

BECCA: Control the moment. Distractions.

BECCA, COLLEEN & ALLISON: Breathe.

DIANE: If you try and hug me after class I'm gonna whop you.

ALLISON: Give yourself time.

BECCA: Relax.

COLLEEN: Control the moment.

BECCA, COLLEEN & ALLISON: Let go of—

COLLEEN: The Day. & BECCA: Distractions. & ALLISON: Chaos. & DIANE: That's my spot.

BECCA: Think about—

ALLISON & BECCA: Nothing.

COLLEEN: Control.

All four students have returned to the original position.

Fade to black.

The End

All inquiries regarding production and other rights to this play should be addressed to: Bryan Willis, P.O. Box 1088, McCleary, WA 98557, (360) 754-2818, willis@olynet.com

Signs of Life: The Interdisciplinary Performance of the Un-Animated

ANN C. WRIGHT

I cannot even remember the first time it occurred to me, as an actor, that the set was not simply an elaborate backdrop for my personal performance. I do know, however, that throughout my career I have had numerous opportunities to work intimately with this entity in her many guises—an entity I choose to identify as the “last player.” This collaboration begins with a phenomenon that occurs approximately one week prior to the opening of a show, and continues throughout the run. Let’s see if any of the following sounds familiar to you.

Enter the Diva! From some mysterious laboratory, far removed from the rehearsal process, the set designer introduces a spatial version of the director’s vision. She appears on the stage—demanding, temperamental, needy—disrupting the entire rehearsal process with her insistence on “make up touch-ups,” “costume modifications,” and “lighting adjustments”—very special treatment that no one ever offered me.

She remains silent, for the most part. And yet, as an actor I can recognize from this point through the run of the show that this majestic presence unashamedly initiates and perpetuates a rather robust monologue—a private performance conducted for, and with, audience witnesses. She invites these witnesses into the world she defines, and in some mysterious way, these viewers become participants in the development of that environment.

Bottom line, I’ve got a little competition here—unless, of course, I choose to enter into dialogue with her—live within the environment she offers, rather than simply “act” in front of her. It seems to me, that during “tech week,” a new actor joins the

Ann C. Wright, Ph.D., is Assistant Professor in the School of Theatre and Dance, University of Montana in Missoula.

cast—the ensemble is fleshed out without more flesh—and she’s powerful. My job is clear. Work with her, or anticipate being swallowed alive.

Her performance is the first experienced by the audience. She is present as witnesses enter the theatre, even before lowered houselights. Good grief! She’s occasionally received an ovation before I can even make an entrance. Of most interest to me, however, is the manner in which she initiates and perpetuates her message, and the parameters she establishes for any subsequent performance destined to take place within her embrace.

Apparently tireless, she doesn’t even leave the stage after the curtain call, but remains to remind any audience member that may glance back as they leave the theatre of the events that have occurred here, the emotions that have been aroused, and the physical sensations triggered. In the return to reality, and houselights, this assiduous actor reinforces memories embedded in the audience member’s psyche. Concurrently, and perhaps of most significance, she re-presents performances caught in the shapes and forms of the design elements left behind. She never quits!

What’s really going on here?

The Ancient Maya Ceremonial Arena and Its Relevance to Contemporary Theatre and Performance Studies

Most studies of art and architecture regard material objects as static, historic, and inanimate. Studies of performance, on the other hand, emphasize movement, linear progression, and animacy. Closer examination, however, reveals blurred relationships between the social (performative) and aesthetic (spatial), suggesting that visual and/or structural elements within an environment are perhaps more aptly termed *relics of experience*, capable of re-presenting their message in perpetuity.

Comparing the parallels between the phenomena of “performance” by a contemporary set and its counterpart in a more controlled environment, I turn to the ancient Maya ceremonial arena long devoid of human participants. I explore this constructed environment as a continuation of expression and re-presentation of accomplishment long believed completed. Greg Dening, historian and author of *The Death of William Gooch: A History’s Anthropology*, offers a window into the basis of this theory when he notes:

The Past survives only in its inscriptions . . . the expressions of what has happened. Inscriptions are written down, committed to memory, or caught in the shapes and forms of environments, in buildings, in landscapes, in artifacts. The Past, when it survives, is phrased in some message . . . encoded in symbolic forms. These relics of experience are often all that there is of the Past.¹

Current scholarship indicates that the ancient Maya awarded their monumental structures animacy, thereby openly practicing the creation of material objects intended to provide perpetual performance to witnesses and ritual participants. Formerly considered backdrops for human performance, the myth-history decoded by leading Mesoamerican scholars indicates that the fabricated urban environment played an active, participatory, role in ancient Maya life. These monumental actors emerge as an un-animated chorus of *performative visual forms* perpetually re-presenting experience through a *temporal, narrative process*.

Contemporary scholarship tells us, furthermore, that the sophisticated, multi-dimensional methodology employed in Classic Maya historiography—synthesizing architectural design, hieroglyphic writing, and detailed iconography—was generated not so much to *express a purpose* within a multilingual community as to *fulfill it*—a classic definition of performance. The creation of visual art as practiced by the Classic Maya re-presents a multitude of philosophical, ideological, and theological perspectives expressed in time and space. These aspects of Maya experience, captured in the media/message of the culture's urban design, manifest in the present through a *synthetic now* that directly addresses witness' memory, spatial intelligence, and kinesthetic imagination.

As with other forms of performance, embellished architecture of ancient Maya endeavors to bring about that which it depicts. Temple/pyramids, for example, re-presented specific mountains (homes of specific deities) and were birthed, dedicated, cared for, and often ritually terminated when their usefulness ended. V-shaped ball courts, on the other hand, served as actual doorways into the specific dimension of Maya reality called the underworld—the site of the important creation myth associated with the Hero Twins and the the re-birth of their father as the Maize God. Many of these monumental structures, including the Temple of Inscriptions at Palenque, serve as ritual participants and practitioners of perpetual performance, or *art acts*, identifying, transforming, and re-presenting notions of authenticity and experience for their audiences. Through such intimate dialogue, observers become participants in monumental occasions.

Mediating the codes evident in current Mesoamerican studies with translations of theoretical positions favored by performance studies sheds new light on old evidence. Integrating these reflections with perspectives offered by an interdisciplinary matrix of complimentary disciplines, augments a philosophical stance formerly believed unambiguous in both fields. Such conjunctions illuminate the peripheral area between the temporal and the spatial, bringing issues of representation and re-

presentation closer to the center of debate. Further investigation promises not only the capacity for a more inclusive interpretation of antiquity, but also a redirecting of the conventional emphasis on speech acts toward a broader set of definitions applicable to contemporary conditions, spatial expressions, and visual experience.

Combining our Resources

Traditionally Mayanists investigate architecture, or the built environment, for the following reasons:

- To define the Maya cultural area and bolster theories of cultural origins, development, and evolution
- As a repository of inscriptional and iconographic information
- To understand Maya cognition, especially as it relates to spaces and places
- As a source of stratified artifact deposits and features with implications for Maya cultural history
- To link the Pre-Spanish Maya to ethno-historic accounts
- As an inferential tool to address issues such as Maya population size and subsistence agriculture
- To promote interest in the past as a matter of national pride and to attract tourists
- To generate and test hypotheses about the nature of Maya society and culture, most particularly the manner in which political power was organized, legitimated, and exercised.

Adding Performance theory into the mix, and incorporating theoretical posturing from any number of related disciplinary sources, there may be another possibility: to witness, and participate in, the perpetual performance of ancient Maya ritual occurrences, intentionally designed, and ultimately re-presented by the *relics of experience* that make up the ancient Maya urban environment.

Artist/architects, scribe/priests, scientist/mathematicians, and/or historian/mythologists, employing definitive design codes—embellished with hieroglyphic writing and detailed iconography—created these “living” structures from stone, mortar, and stucco. Often literal re-presentations of distant locations, these monumental structures made liberal use of *speech made visible* (hieroglyphic writing), and *re-presentations of being* (iconography).

Spatial art, viewed as history perpetually re-presented, and re-inventing itself, in the present, constitutes a departure from the strict emphasis on the linear progression of the verbal/linguistic and suggests the establishment of a shifting, even cyclical, perception of what is real, based on interpretations made by the spatial and bodily/kinesthetic intelligences. Scrutinized as an historical landscape, as John Lewis Gaddis has defined it, the Past becomes an act of re-presentation that lifts us above the familiar.² This perspective allows us to experience vicariously what we cannot experience directly, providing a wider viewpoint for subsequent analysis. If, however, the argument advances one-step further, and this artistic, historical landscape reveals itself as a *performative visual form*, this extensive view becomes a wide vista for interpreting a largely silent past.

Were the historian—often considered a manipulator of interpretation—offered the opportunity to re-insert immediacy into the presentation of historical information, the result would be quite extraordinary. Issues of time and space—dimensional components essential to any discussion of performance, historiography, or visual art—would assume new meanings in this altered configuration. Such an opportunity rests in a re-evaluation of the historian’s task and his/her ability to embrace new tools, and even new labels, in the construction of their work.

Continuing his assessment of the historian’s task, Gaddis points out that if transcending the dimensions of traditionally understood time and space, historians must “accomplish their manipulation in such a way as to at least approach the standards for verification that exist within the social, physical, and biological sciences.”³ The responsibility of applying empirical standards of verification, however, is not the only reason the historian has for assuming an interest in scientific disciplines.

These intertwined elements—monumental architecture, hieroglyphic writing, and detailed iconography—served not only as the media for conveying messages to witnesses, but also as the messenger. Defined by Mesoamericanist Stephen D. Houston as incorporating a “shifting now,” this approach intentionally results in work that re-presents experience in perpetuity.⁴ Rather than a simple chronicle of details, however graphic, that locks you into a particular time and place, this methodology suggests how this ancient culture viewed such complex issues as time and space—issues that remain central to contemporary physics, history, and performance studies.

Various definitions of time and space surface within a wide variety of interdisciplinary sources, including disciplines that initially appear as far afield from Fine Arts as physics and mathematics, opening new doors for a discussion of *performative visual forms*. C. P. Snow’s celebrated division

of the thinking world into two cultures—that of the literary intellectual and that of the scientist—has been augmented recently by philosophers such as John Brockman, editor of *The New Humanists: Science at the Edge*.⁵ In what he calls the “third culture,” Brockman introduces the work of leading scientists and scholars of the humanities who focus on a broader worldview, projecting ideas regarding the development and performative practices of humanity based on revolutionary developments in scientific and technological achievement. In doing so, he heralds our contemporary return to a more fifteenth century concept of “humanism” tied to the intellectual whole and offers a more appropriate vantage point from which to initiate interpretation of a holistic culture such as the Classic Maya.

Physicists, including Stephen Hawking, *The Illustrated Brief History of Time*, Gary Zukav, *The Dancing Wu Li Masters: An Overview of the New Physics*, and Julian Barbour, *The End of Time: The Next Revolution in Physics*, offer clear challenges to the various conceptual ways we currently define time and space.⁶ Their views question categorizations that have formed the foundation of Western physics for the past fifteen centuries and encourage us to consider, for example that time may not be linear, or that it is only a social convention and does not exist at all, or that, if it does exist as a dimension, can, and does, move both forward and backward.

Add such revelations to cognitive science, and we recognize that imagination can create perceived performances in and around an apparently static image, resulting in the impression of movement through space—an impression of performance as real and justified as what we traditionally call action. Viewed through the most contemporary lens, these theories turn traditional understanding of reality inside-out and provide provocative avenues for approaching *performative visual forms* as employed by the ancient Maya, or contemporary designers, in their cultural expression of experience.

A theatrical set, an example of monumental architecture, a statue or particularly vivid painting participate in some ambiguous way with human perceptions of time and space, contributing significantly with the performance of the environment in which they exist. Expressions of experience, captured in art and urban design, re-create a synthetic Now—a *presence* for informed observers—resulting in *art acts* that directly address witness’ memory, spatial intelligence, and kinesthetic imagination. Within these *instants of Now*, observers become participants in re-curing monumental occasions or ritual activity.

Viewing the art and architecture of the ancient Maya through the temporal lens of performance, the cityscape becomes a visible portrait and perpetual performance of the collective Maya experience. These

structural messengers, when viewed as *relics of experience*, identify themselves as survivors—contemporary re-presentations of ancient Maya cultural traditions and practices. Emerging from centuries of silence, choked by tropical undergrowth and years of decay, these shapes and forms of the Past un-self-consciously re-assume their original role, performing identity for contemporary witnesses just as they did for seventh century ritual participants.

Indeed, the shapes and forms of their cities—the scrupulous use of design devices and meticulous positioning of enormous structures on the landscape—served the ancient Maya as media for a form of record keeping and visual communication more inclusive than the worded texts confined to codices. The application of additional languages, such as hieroglyphic writing and detailed iconography, to the already symbol-laden design devices incorporated into the structures, advocates an integrated system for re-presenting history, myth, and vision.

On a broader scale, memory, myth, history, and ideology were (and continue to be) embedded in, embodied by, and ultimately transmitted by walls, spaces, and pathways that made up the Maya urban environment. The design features and iconographic embellishments of the Temple of Inscriptions, viewed collectively as an active participant in the ceremonial landscape of Palenque, also re-present ancient Maya notions of portraiture and re-presentation. These complex notions bear on the ancient display of political authority and cultural ideology. Rather than serving merely to adorn places constructed for human performance, such devices, including the use of hieroglyphic writing incised in certain surfaces, compliment the narrative related by the structure itself. They offer specific illustrated and worded reflections and re-productions of actual physical activity, often perceived directly through the witness' spatial intelligence.

As Marvin Carlson notes, in *Places of Performance: The Semiotics of Theatre Architecture*, spaces of performance become performative places. Just as written histories or ritual performance construct identities that can be interpreted and acted upon by witnesses, he argues, “places of performance generate social and cultural meanings of their own which in turn help structure the meaning of the entire performance experience.”⁷ The performative presence of the Temple of Inscriptions, like so many other structures evident in Maya urban design, indeed helped construct the meaning of the ritual performance conducted in its shadow. The same is true of the setting constructed for the performance of a play. Triggered by embedded memories or kinesthetic imagination of the audience recipient, settings achieve fuller meanings and performance potential than simple dimensional backgrounds. As actors and audience

interact with the constructed environment prepared for them as a part of the director's vision for the intended performance experience, the encounter with the event takes on newer and fuller meaning beyond the action provided by human actors and their spoken words.

The Classic Maya approach to presenting historical data, mythology, and ideology as contemporary experience existed within a web of interconnected symbol systems. Each system represented a discrete language that addressed a specific faculty of human awareness. These faculties, as they are understood today, include verbal-linguistic, spatial, logical-mathematical, and bodily-kinesthetic intelligences as outlined in psychologist/theorist Howard Gardner's *Frames of Mind: The Theory of Multiple Intelligences*.⁸ Gardner's scientifically demonstrated views on how humans understand, make meaning, interpret visual stimuli, and learn allow us to interrogate structural design, hieroglyphic writing, and iconography as performative elements that impact the whole witness through intellectual capacities beyond the verbal-linguistic.

Stephen Houston and Karl Taube's recent work in "An Archeology of the Senses: Perception and Cultural Expression in Ancient Mesoamerica," moves the concept of spatial meaning one step further, and serves as evidence of performativity in Classic Maya iconography at a level that might be considered more basic than the verbal-linguistic.⁹ Houston and Taube's exciting perspective tackles the ancient Maya methods for communicating beyond words, exposing iconographic symbol systems that directly address the senses of sound, smell, and touch. Such strategies for expanding evidence of experience allow us to re-consider those who view the structures today as having the capacity to re-witness, re-sense, and re-comprehend historical experience, once considered approachable only as written documentation.

The designers who conceived of and realized the construction and embellishment of the buildings and environments of the Maya ceremonial arena were recognized within their culture as interdisciplinary scholars—approaching their tasks from a decidedly holistic perspective. They were simultaneously record keepers, artists, scribes, and scientists, mathematicians, astronomers, and poets, rather than specialists divorced from other's practical and/or philosophical pursuits. They were also a variety of theologians and politicians. Their tasks were considered sacred. Enjoying elevated status within the community—often coming directly from the elite or ruling family—these interdisciplinary artist/historians occupied a liminal position within their culture similar to that of contemporary historians or creative scientists. As such, their contributions to the preservation of the Past reflect the same holistic stance, somewhere

betwixt-and-between myth and history, when re-presenting their culture's ideology and worldview through artistic expression.

The desire to present a unified expression of cultural experience is apparent in the culture's diverse forms of inscription. These various languages, including architectural design, hieroglyphic writing, and detailed iconography, appear to contemporary witnesses as a plethora of intricately encoded symbol systems. These various languages, although capable of performing separately, were, when combined, the basis for a sophisticated, multi-dimensional methodology for communicating Maya experience. Rather than providing their audiences with simple editorial commentary or political propaganda, the works created by these artist/intellectuals intricately intertwine on multiple levels, expected to re-present a contemporary reality of Maya experience recognizable as a consensus for cultural expression (specifically among the elite.)

David Stuart, in "Kings of Stone: A Consideration of Stelae in Ancient Maya Ritual and Representation," highlights this type of experiential phenomenon by suggesting that these monumental sculptures are an "extended representation of self."¹⁰ Stuart advocates, "rather than being simply a medium for the commemoration of royal deeds and other events, [this type of art] played very direct and active roles in ancient Maya ritual life."¹¹

Performance historian and theorist Joseph Roach contributes to this interpretation of visual/spatial performance when he braids together themes of embodiment, surrogation, and collective memory in *Cities of the Dead: Circum-Atlantic Performance*.¹² His theories define genealogies of performance as "the historical transmission and dissemination of cultural practices through collective representation."¹³ Citing evidence for ancient philosophies and practices now theorized by Roach as kinesthetic imagination, vortices of behavior, and displaced transmission, in light of Gardner's theories of multiple intelligences and the contribution of contemporary thinking in physics, offers suggestions as to how and why Maya historiographic practices were developed and exercised. Such evidence also helps explain how such practices could have created performative documentation. These theories of performance and human reception act together to construct an encompassing re-presentation of experience, suggesting ways in which such information translates into deeper understanding of human interaction with spaces and places.

While comprehensive studies, such as Roach's, that focus on the historic role of visual, spatial art as a performative entity are few and far between, theoretical approaches and discussions of the performative potential of objects have been touched upon by several other important

performance theorists. Specific examples of contemporary theory, in addition to that proffered by Roach and Carlson, help define notions of un-animated performance in the Classic Maya culture, the contemporary urban landscape, as well as specific applications such as the theatre set. Erving Goffman, for example, in *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (1959), defines performance as “all the activity of a given participant”—object, human actor, spectator—“on a given occasion, which serves to influence in any way the other participants.”¹⁴ In *Unmarked: The Politics of Performance* (1993), Peggy Phelan acknowledges Goffman’s definition of the performative, and elaborates by pointing out “performance is centered on the interaction between the art object and the spectator [which] is, essentially, performative.”¹⁵ Phelan’s views on the performative nature of iconographic and structural forms, as exemplified in her investigation of the Rose Theatre archeology, from *Mourning Sex*, contributes to the discussion of the effects generated by the presence of specific structures within the urban setting, and the embellishments that add flourish to their performance.¹⁶

Through her work involving the performative nature of photographs, paintings, films, theatre, architecture, political protests, and performance art, Phelan allows us to view the material object in an entirely new light. “The performance of a photograph,” she posits, “can occur only by means of reproduction.”¹⁷ Arguing that photography is the quintessential art of reproduction, and that it survives only in encounter and re-encounter of the spectator, Phelan suggests that performance of the material object, then, is recoverable in time. Fluid in its perceived reception, however, Phelan points out that the *instant of Now*, as defined by the image, is obviously never the same performance, even for the same individual. No longer are in-animate objects relegated to static description or role of background for human activity: they assume a *life*, and variable communicative ability, of their own.

Additional recent performance theory scholarship presented by Eve Sedgwick (*Performativity and Performance*), Catherine M. Soussloff (“Like a Performance: Performativity and the Historicized Body”), Judith Butler (“Burning Acts—Injurious Speech”), and Catharine MacKinnon (*Only Words*), also helps define experience similar to that perceived from within the ancient Maya worldview.¹⁸ These scholars examine effects generated by material objects due to strategic positioning and timing experienced by the witness. In addition, Della Pollack’s views on performative writing contribute to an examination of the hieroglyphic inscriptions as ancient examples of this phenomenon.¹⁹ Her observations compliment those of linguist, J.L. Austin (*How to Do Things with Words*, 1975), whose theories

on the performative nature of writing translate and apply to forms of textual inscription other than speech made visible.²⁰ These theorists' explorations invite entry into a more complex, interdisciplinary discussion of the visual/spatial image as a performer in the cultural arena.

Architectural and urban theory also directly addresses issues of the performative capabilities of structures and cityscapes, and both have contributed to my definitions of elements of urban design as re-presentative reflections of cultural ideology and experience. Roland Barthes, Kenneth Lynch, Sylvia Ostrowsky, and Richard Fauque, as well as Spiro Kostof, each address un-animated performance.²¹ Architectural art and design, as clues to perception, are also discussed at length in architectural theorist Edward T. Hall's *The Hidden Dimension* and Italo Calvino's *Invisible Cities*.²² Perhaps most influential, however, in the search for justification of the thesis that architectural structures offer performances within the experiential landscape comes from interdisciplinary studies of the performance of sacred architecture within the urban plan, such as Lindsay Jones' *Hermeneutics of Sacred Architecture*.²³ Jones' work provides a foundation for comparative analysis of architectural constructions that serve the religious or ideological needs of a culture. Close examination of his "Morphology of Sacred Architecture," explores specific examples of not only Maya, but also other cultural examples of architectural designs that function as *performative visual forms*. More importantly, Jones' analysis provides a foundation for investigating the ultimate results of these performances.²⁴ These theorists address common elements, such as those that make up the urban environment, and help us identify methods for categorizing urban semiotics. Their assistance in defining the elements and effects of the urban environment compliment art history's and performance theory's conjectures regarding the object as performative.

Such a synthesis of languages reflects ancient Mesoamerican concepts of the cosmos as a unity, in which the gods, the natural world, and humans occupied not separate spheres, but a profoundly connected one. As such, the resulting cultural realities—embedded in, and expressed by, the Classic Maya urban design and architecture—re-present, for the informed witness, a microcosm of the balanced, holistic universe to which the Maya aspired. Knitting the sciences and the humanities into a cohesive package allows illumination of the hazy area between art and performance as experiences encountered either in the ancient Maya ceremonial arena. Examples of the mythologies, ideologies, sciences, and cultural practices of the Classic Maya, augment the work of both scientific and humanities scholars with research conducted by leading Mesoamericanists and architectural theorists, show how this culture established its identity and

subsequently chose to communicate it. Using evidence available in the archeology and current scholarship in the field of Mesoamerican studies, illustrates ways in which the ancient Maya employed various tactics and devices in the development of their historiography, thereby translating Classic experience into the perpetual venues of art and architecture.

If this seemingly obvious observation is true, what does that do to our vaulted understanding of Performance as a discipline? What are we to make of the effect of visual art on contemporary perception? What draws us into the space inhabited by a work of visual art, and introduces us to the much larger space behind the image, and then seems to allow us to participate in activity conducted there? What phenomena often leave us with the feeling that we have shared in some way with a performative message frozen in time, thawed by our presence and participation—a message which takes on a sense of progression as we, the viewer, apply memory and social conditioning to our initial impressions? Encouraging both Visual Art and Performance Theorists to take a broader look at definitions—to incorporate performances offered by not only animate, but also inanimate, and un-animated, objects into study of the social versus the aesthetic—how do we mediate the codes?

Searching for a viable example of this phenomenon, in all its manifestations, I return to the architecture of the ancient Maya culture as primary evidence for theories regarding *performative visual forms*. As new sites are discovered, and the structures re-emerge, the ancient Maya architecture once again assumes its performative presence on the landscape through the performance of the archeology. Re-presenting a nearly obsessive interest in time, elite genealogy, and ritual activity, the embellished monumental structures re-surface as relics of ancient Maya experience, struggling to identify themselves and their historic role in this culture's fabricated expression of itself.

So What?

This article serves as a critical analysis of performances such as that offered by the Temple of Inscriptions within the urban environment of Classic Palenque. The creation of visual art as practiced by the Classic Maya re-presents a multitude of philosophical, ideological, and theological perspectives expressed in time and space. As with other forms of performance, ancient Maya embellished architecture endeavors to bring about that which it depicts. These aspects of Maya experience, captured in the media/message of the culture's urban design, manifest in the present through a *synthetic now* that directly addresses even the most contemporary witness' memory, spatial intelligence, and kinesthetic imagination. These

structures can, therefore, serve as ritual participants and practitioners of perpetual performance, or *art acts*, identifying, transforming, and re-presenting notions of authenticity and experience for even their most modern audiences. Through such intimate dialogue observers become participants in monumental occasions.

Embracing the full impact of this phenomenon, in which the witness becomes a participant in the performance of the past, offers a viable alternative to compartmentalized thinking that has long dominated the intellectual efforts of the Western world. It offers immediate access to cultural experience. At the same time, it places history in a more relevant light when seeking to assess the present or anticipate the future.

Viewing the art and architecture of the ancient Maya through the temporal lens of performance, the cityscape becomes a visible portrait and perpetual performance of the collective Maya experience. These structural messengers, when viewed as *relics of experience*, identify themselves as survivors—contemporary re-presentations of ancient Maya cultural traditions and practices. Emerging from centuries of silence, choked by tropical undergrowth and years of decay, these shapes and forms of the Past un-self-consciously re-assume their original role, performing identity for contemporary witnesses just as they did for seventh century ritual participants.

Indeed, the shapes and forms of their cities—the scrupulous use of design devices and meticulous positioning of enormous structures on the landscape—served the ancient Maya as media for a form of record keeping and visual communication more inclusive than the worded texts confined to codices. In this document, however, I show that the application of additional languages, such as hieroglyphic writing and detailed iconography, to the already symbol-laden design devices incorporated into the structures, advocates an integrated system for re-presenting history, myth, and vision.

The evolution of this Classic Maya cityscape thus illustrates the initiation of dialogue between structures of specific building groups. Hence, Maya architecture proves a part of the complex matrix of social concerns and actions, or *monumental occasions*, which contribute to the relic of experience's particular meaning and functional capability. Such unification of perspectives establishes the cultural context in which urban environments such as Palenque arose and prospered. Investigating the central architectonic group, consisting of the Palace Complex, the Cross Group of temple/pyramids, and the Temple of Inscriptions, provides an arena for investigation of the significance of the performative nature of this assembly as a whole (a position essential within Maya worldview).

The ideology set forth by the performances of the structures in this architectonic group establish, for future generations, the multiplicity of performative requirements necessary for all subsequent king-making in Palenque.

The Temple of Inscriptions undertakes a specific role in the evolution of a rejuvenated Palenque, becoming much more than an inanimate, randomly placed, monument to a specific king, a tomb for an extraordinary leader. Examples of visual art and inscription, performing within a multi-dimensional matrix of communicative devices, continually represents and re-affirms the ideologies evident in the narrative offered by the embellished structural design of the temple/pyramid. Mytho-historic information, translated into contemporary experience for witnesses and participants in ritual performance, promises perpetual performance opportunities observable by twenty-first century witnesses. Evidence offered for the contemporary attention to matters of un-animated performance in architecture, graphic art, installation art, and even scientific art, serve to solidify my argument and demonstrate the significance of studies of this kind, not only for historians, but also for today's students of performance theory, visual art, and architecture.

Bringing this argument full circle to include theatrical sets encourages designers to see their creations as fully functioning expressions of narrative—re-presentations of environments recognizable to audience members, offering clues as to the back story of the script itself, and continuing to tickle the kinesthetic imagination of the spectators and witnesses as they participate in the development and telling of the story. Memory, embedded during the production and ultimately reflected in the design itself, remains vibrant for spectators, and, if accomplished affectively, can suggest some of the same story elements to viewers who have not even seen the performance with live actors.

Visual art, in consequence, exists *not so much to express a purpose* within a community *as to fulfill it*. The signs of life, or re-presentations of being, evident in relics of cultural experience speak to us daily whether in the buildings, cityscapes, and architectural embellishments evident in the Classic Maya archeology, or those of a contemporary performance environment. As inscriptions of experience, the structures re-animate cultural memory, articulate the memory-scape of the culture they perform, and establish the un-animated's social responsibility for identifying itself within established ideological guidelines.

The use of interdisciplinary methodology encourages a more inclusive—even participatory—interpretation of the past, while exposing broader avenues for analyzing contemporary cultural conditions, spatial expres-

sions, and visual experience in the present. In view of this alternative way of thinking about the object, further investigation promises a redirecting of the conventional emphasis on speech acts toward a broader set of definitions applicable to contemporary conditions, spatial expressions, and visual experience. Ultimately, this argument encourages a simple changing of our minds about performance potential while embracing the interdisciplinary nature of our constructed environment.

Endnotes

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A Journey for Rachel: Taking My Name is Rachel Corrie from Corvallis, Oregon, to Antioch, Turkey

CHARLOTTE J. HEADRICK

Editor's note: My Name Is Rachel Corrie is a one-woman play about a young American volunteer from Evergreen State College in Olympia, Washington who had taken a year off to assist with humanitarian aid in the Gaza Strip. She was crushed to death by an Israeli bulldozer during a protest against an effort to demolish the Palestinian homes in the area. The play is based largely on her diaries, emails and letters.

In the spring of 2008 David McMurray, Chair of the Department of Anthropology at Oregon State University, asked for my help in mounting a production of *My Name is Rachel Corrie* by Alan Rickman and Katherine Viner. He had received a grant to bring the play to campus. After several failed attempts at importing a production, David asked me if I would take on the project as a director. I agreed. Little did I know then that this project would become one of the most incredible experiences of my directing career.

McMurray has a long interest in the Middle East, having lived in Lebanon and Morocco and also having a long-time interest in Palestinian rights. As it turned out, there was a personal connection to the play. McMurray's mother is a Corrie and Craig Corrie, Rachel's father, and he are related, but neither had ever met the other prior to this production. McMurray organized a series of pre-show talks in the Green Room of the

Charlotte J. Headrick, Ph.D., is Professor of Theatre Arts at Oregon State University, Corvallis.



Elizabeth Hellman as Rachel Corrie in the OSU production. Photo © James Folts.

theatre prior to the production opening in the OSU Lab Theatre. Both of Rachel Corrie's parents joined us on Thursday of the five day run of the production and attended the last four performances of the play. Cindy Corrie thought that the Oregon State production was around the fourteenth they had seen. Asked by an audience member if she found it upsetting to see the play, she responded that she found great comfort in

the production and said that Craig and she had learned so much about theatre production through the various interpretations of the script. On the Oregon State production, she said she was particularly glad that we had captured Rachel's sense of humor.¹

Having taught a course in Activist Drama, I was well aware of Rachel's story and the play. I was also aware of the controversy that had attached itself to various productions across the United States. So, in October of 2009, the University Theatre produced *My Name is Rachel Corrie* for five performances in the Lab Theatre seating one hundred and twenty. Elizabeth Helman, adjunct theatre faculty, performed the role of Rachel. Although she was thirty-one years old at the time, a comment from the Department of History chair, Jonathan Katz, made me realize that Liz could "play young." In discussions with Katz about the Holocaust Memorial Week production, which Helman was scheduled to direct, Katz quipped something to the effect of "How old is she? Twenty-one?"

All of this would have made the production special: the Corries, the family connection, the pre-show presenters who often took part in the post-show discussions, and the special nature of the play in relationship those of us in the Northwest, and the poignancy of Rachel's story; all were a part of those extraordinary five days. But what made the run of the performance more telling was the presence of Setenay Yener. At midnight on opening night, I received a telephone call; Setenay was on her way, having flown in from Turkey to see the production. Setenay was both McMurray's and my student. Graduating with a theatre degree, she went on to receive a Master of Fine Arts from West Virginia University in theatre. Since her graduation from West Virginia, she had been working in television and film in Turkey.

Inspired by Rachel's story, Setenay was determined to translate the play into Turkish, portray Rachel, and produce the Turkish premiere of the play. And that is exactly what she did in March of 2010. The larger surprise was that in January of 2010, Setenay contacted McMurray and me, informing us that she had made arrangements to fly us to Turkey for the opening of the play. Fortunately, the timing was perfect. The premiere of *Benim Rachel Corrie* was to be premiered during our spring break. So, David and I flew to Istanbul and on to Antyaka/Antioch to be with Setenay.

By the time Setenay arrived in the United States in October, she had already lined up an entire production team and had almost completed the translation of the play. As we know, life often intervenes; in the early winter, she "lost" her director. She had seen four of the five evenings of performance at Oregon State, taken copious notes, so I gave her total



Setenay Yener in the Turkish premier of *My Name is Rachel Corrie*. Photo by Charlotte Headrick

permission to use my staging. She kept telling me that now I was her director. What I was not prepared for upon my arrival in Antioch was to see a huge red banner over the Meclis Theatre proclaiming *Benim Rachel Corrie* with Setenay's name as Rachel and listing me as "Yöneten," Turkish for director. The posters were all over town.

I was not a "yöneten" in name only. When I got to Antioch, Setenay put me to work and, since it was my staging complete with the Oregon State University visuals, I was clearly able to follow the story and give her feedback although I spoke no Turkish. She had put together a remarkable piece of theatre, yet some sections of the play simply did not translate from the English. The "slam poetry" section did not convert. The Turkish "test" audiences objected to a woman saying some of the rough language

that Rachel uses, so those parts had to be tamed, but they certainly did not affect the heart of the play, and Setenay's sincerity and commitment to Rachel's story shown in every moment.

Alan Rickman was invited to the production but could not make it. At one point his assistant in an e-mail to me complimented Setenay on her organization and how she was producing the play. I wrote the assistant saying that she did not understand what a powerhouse Setenay was; she had not only translated the play, found the funding, secured a venue, but she was also portraying Rachel.

In the Oregon State production, there was no curtain call. After Rachel left the stage to "go eat some peas," and after the requisite tape played the description of Rachel's death as well as the tape of the young Rachel making a plea for peace, a simple pool of light came up on the makeshift chair and table and Rachel's computer. In Turkey, Setenay walked out on stage with a huge framed photograph of Rachel.

Setenay purposely chose Antioch as a site for the play, because it has traditionally had the reputation of being a city of peace and co-existence. Along with the predominant Muslim population, there is a very visible Roman Catholic presence and a small Jewish community. We literally walked in the steps of St. Paul and Luke the Evangelist. Syria was ten miles down the road. A short distance from Antioch in the mountains is an Armenian village with a church built prior to WW I.²

So, in effect, the Turkish production was a different yet similar version to the one in Oregon. I carried in my luggage several bags of the Evergreen State t-shirt, my violet pasmina, and several bags of Doritos for the production. It was a remarkable evening in the theatre. Setenay had mobilized the business community to back and support the production as well as mobilizing the local student arts population to work as her crew. While we were in Antioch, a local businessman "gave" us his driver for the time we were there. Living up to their welcoming reputation, David and I were overwhelmed by the generosity shown to us by Setenay's family and the larger community of Antioch.

After opening night, Setenay conducted an American style "talk back" with the audience, pulling Dr. McMurray on to the stage with her. (We discovered that "talk-backs," while common in theatre in the United States, are not familiar to Turkish audiences.) I was presented by the rector (president) of the University one of the largest bouquets of flowers I have ever received.³ The post-show discussion was much more politically far-ranging than the ones we had at Oregon State. I certainly was not prepared to discuss the U.S. nuclear policy.

At the time of this writing, Setenay is currently working with a new production company and director in Istanbul, planning a multiple city tour of Turkey with *Benim Rachel Corrie*. Her commitment to telling Rachel's story remains undaunted. And the Oregon State production will be with her as she tours Turkey, in the production, wearing the Evergreen State t-shirt and the violet pasmina.

Endnotes

- 1 The production team of George Caldwell, Cassie Kornman, Charles Lubbers, Aaron Kopperman, and Jordan Brinck were essential to the success of the Oregon State production.
- 2 I lit a candle in the church in memory of my friend Lee Borazian Rianda's grandmother, who was saved by a Turkish family during the slaughter of the Armenians in Turkey.
- 3 Setenay and her family are well-connected in Antioch. Her father, a pilot for Turkish Air, and the Rector had been boyhood friends, and the Yener family estate is located just outside of the city.