# THE AESTHETICS OF AWE, MEANING, AND PLEASURE

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**ABSTRACT**

This thesis, *The Aesthetics of Awe, Meaning, and Pleasure*, examines how Canadian theatre can move beyond its reliance on linear, plot-driven narratives rooted in Aristotelian and well-made play traditions. By centering awe, meaning, and pleasure as primary aesthetic values, the research proposes an alternative framework for performance creation, training, and audience engagement. It challenges the dominant dramaturgical paradigms through an interdisciplinary, praxis-based approach that blends theoretical analysis with performance practice.

Drawing on postdramatic theatre and notions of liveness, the study positions awe as a transformative affective experience that fosters humility, wonder, and deeper connection between artists and audiences. Pleasure is framed not as frivolous but as a generative, embodied response that can guide artistic impulse and subvert expectations of seriousness in theatre. Meaning emerges through the synthesis of these affective experiences in both performer and spectator.

The research includes several case studies and performance experiments that put theory into action, demonstrating how experiential, immersive, and non-linear performance strategies can reimagine theatrical forms in Canada. It also addresses pedagogical implications, advocating for training models that support artistic risk-taking and non-traditional narrative development. Ultimately, this thesis argues that adopting awe, meaning, and pleasure as foundational aesthetic principles enables a richer, more innovative, and responsive theatre ecology. It offers both a critique of current institutional norms and a proposal for new artistic possibilities rooted in experimentation, presence, and joy.

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This thesis is grounded in collective encounter, shared labour, and sustained relationships. I carry all of these contributions with gratitude.

**THIS FIRST HEADING OF THE THESIS IS MEANT TO LIBERATE YOU, THE READER, FROM THE EXPECTATION OF WHAT A THESIS IS MEANT TO BE. THIS HEADING IS PREPARING YOU FOR WHAT IS ABOUT TO COME. THIS HEADING SERVES AS NOTIFICATION THAT THROUGH THIS DOCUMENT THERE WILL BE LOTS OF HUMOUR. REFERENCES TO POP CULTURE ICONS. A VARIETY OF VOICES THAT CRITIQUE AND SEEK TO ENGAGE YOU, THE READER. THIS HEADING IS TOO LONG. THIS HEADING IS BOLDED AND UNDERLINED TO MAINTAIN CONSISTENCY WITH THE REST OF THE HEADINGS IN THE DOCUMENT. THIS HEADING IS MEANT TO HAVE YOU READ IT HOWEVER YOU WANT. IN A WAY THAT MATTHEW GOULISH OFFERS IN HIS BOOK, *39 MICROLECTURES: IN PROXIMITY OF PERFORMANCE* (GOULISH, 2001). YOU MIGHT WANT TO READ THIS HEADING OVER AND OVER. YOU DO NOT NEED TO READ THIS HEADING IF YOU DON'T WANT TO. THIS HEADING IS AN INTRODUCTION, "AN INTRODUCTION IS A BOOK FROM THE INSIDE" (IBID, 18). THIS HEADING IS A STAGE DIRECTION, LIKE IN THEATRE. THIS HEADING IS GIVING YOU WARNING THAT THERE IS A MIX OF FORMAL AND INFORMAL VOICES IN THIS THESIS. THIS HEADING IS AN ANTIPOSITIVIST APPROACH TO CREATING NEW KNOWLEDGE. THIS HEADING IS AN EXAMPLE OF A PRACTICE THAT USES AWE AND PLEASURE. THIS HEADING IS AN INVOCATION OF CELEBRATION AND EXPERIMENTATION. THIS HEADING SEEMS SELF-INDULGENT BUT SERVES THE PURPOSE OF GIVING A PREAMBLE TO THE INTRODUCTION THAT I CONTINUE TO RECEIVE FEEDBACK ON (THANKS DR. MARCHEVSKA). THIS HEADING IS AN ATTEMPT TO PEEL BACK THE CURTAIN OF EXPECTATION FOR WHAT WE ASSUME WE WILL BE READING WHEN WE THINK OF ACADEMIA.**

Simply put, this thesis is designed to challenge expectations of academic writing. The above heading sets the stage for a mix of formal and informal tones that exist in the thesis, much like the various voices of characters that exist in theatre. The heading serves as a preamble to the innovative and playful approach taken to create this document. Think of it as a prologue to a new way of engaging with academic content, blending critique with celebration. My exploration of humour and celebration started when I was an undergraduate student, enrolled in a performance analysis class, to fulfill a drama credit. What I didn't expect was that this class would ignite a shift in my academic trajectory. The course introduced me to Hans-Thies Lehmann's *Postdramatic Theatre*.

During one class the instructor presented Lehmann's ideas with such enthusiasm and depth that made it very clear that there are several ways to create theatre. For the first time, I encountered a type of theatre that didn't adhere to traditional plot structures but instead focused on spectacle, character, theme, and message. This approach was both surprising and exhilarating, challenging my preconceived notions about what theatre could and should be.

This moment made me realize the possibility of exploring unconventional ideas and encouraged me to approach my studies with a spirit of experimentation. Realizing that there are numerous ways to understand and create meaning in art inspired me to dive deeper into these new perspectives. In my artistic pursuits, I will often open a piece of theatre with something containing spectacle (or a hook) if you will. An element that aims to draw the audience in. Therefore it is intended that at various points throughout the thesis, the informal moments (that recognize the reader exists) draw you back into the reading, in a way that subverts what is traditionally thought of as the right way to *perform* academia. For the last few years my colleagues and I in the PhD program have wrestled with balancing our academic philosophical viewpoints with our artistry,

engaging them both in a deep dialogue where often, they agree and disagree simultaneously. An angel and a devil on our shoulders. Or maybe you want to imagine that they are represented by puppets. One is a philosopher; one is an artist. How do they come together? What do they teach each other? How can they come to some sort of agreement? For that reason I have decided that I will include elements of a formal (academic voice) and informal (artist voice) in this thesis.

The formal voice will provide you with the theory, context, research, and information that has been borne out of the readings and explorations conducted in this study. The informal voice acts as a metaphorical peek behind the curtain into what I am thinking and experiencing as an artist creating this thesis. The informal voice is also a very intentional recognition of you, the reader/audience existing. This thesis incorporates my personal critique of the concepts being explored and some artistic musings, visual imagery, and awe-ful/pleasurable thoughts that have come up while producing this document. The moments of personal voice will be denoted by a shift of the font from Times New Roman to Wingdings.

I'm kidding. They'll be in *Arial font and italicized*. These moments can be read as stage directions. Stage directions serve to manipulate the interplay between textual elements and performative aspects within theatre. Stage directions embody the author's omnipresent agency, guiding the reader's engagement with the text while giving the perspective that the individual has agency over their interpretation of the moment. You may also consider these moments to be asides where I break the fourth wall and speak directly to you, the reader. At the start of different sections of the thesis, I have linked to my online portfolio where practical examples of my work exist. These will be clearly laid out for you as you move through the document

*You might be asking yourself? Why put any personal voice in a fancy PhD thesis? Isn't it supposed to be very serious? It is important to understand that my work employs audience participation, direct address, humour, social commentary, and many other things that these moments of personal voice are meant to convey. This thesis is about awe and pleasure as it relates to theatre and performance after all, and these asides are meant to bring some awe and pleasure into your reading experience.*

*Buckle up.*

# INTRODUCTION

Professional Canadian theatre is just a baby. It wasn't until 1945 that our first professional theatre started (Wasserman, 1993). And as such, our identity and aesthetic is also relatively fresh; it is pablum, easy to consume. There are rarely complex flavours or textures. This study, The Aesthetics of Awe, Meaning, and Pleasure looks to interrogate why this may be, and what practical praxis-based elements can be employed to expand the aesthetic of Canadian theatre and how we might look to train future generations of artists to work in unique and original ways. The central objectives that follow shaped the question: How can the integration of awe, meaning, and pleasure in theatrical practice transform the aesthetic landscape of Canadian theatre and reshape the way we train and conceptualize future generations of theatre artists?

In the coming pages I position my work in relation to the Canadian context and beyond, proving how grounding a theatre practice in awe and pleasure can:

- develop transformative theatrical practices that support different kinds of devising processes that de-centre plot as the principal element;
- innovate the way in which audiences are conceptualized within theatrical discourses and practices.
- create new ways of working and updating theatre and performance pedagogy.

The Aesthetics of Awe, Meaning, and Pleasure highlights the importance that this research plays in understanding how we may move toward presenting different forms of performance that do not adhere to the traditional beginning, middle, end structure of drama. It is a movement towards a modality of performance that understands and utilizes its liveness.

While the questions posed and the concepts of awe, pleasure, and aesthetics may not be entirely novel in isolation, their unique value emerges from the specific way they are combined and synthesized within this research. It is the particular intersection of these elements, and the manner in which they are woven together in practice, that yields distinctive and original insights.

The originality of this research lies not just in the exploration of awe, meaning, and pleasure within Canadian theatre, but in how these principles are synthesized to create new forms of theatrical knowledge and practice. This research challenges the conventional narratives of Canadian theatre, which tend to focus on linear storytelling and a limited range of aesthetic experiences, by introducing an approach that de-centers plot and instead foregrounds experiential engagement and devising.

The original contribution of this work can be understood in three key ways:

1. A Layered Theoretical Framework for Canadian Theatre: By integrating the concepts of awe, meaning, and pleasure (as well as an understanding of plot and the postdramatic) into theatrical practice, this study provides a lens for understanding how theatre can operate beyond a linear narrative space. This departs from traditional dramaturgical approaches and allows for the exploration of performance as an experience that transcends traditional structures, pushing beyond predictable, formulaic models.

2. Innovative Praxis-Based Methodologies: The methods employed in this study are not simply theoretical; they actively generate new ways of creating performance that foreground the visceral experience of theatre. While many thoughts and ideas researched and integrated into my praxis for this thesis are not original in and of themselves, my approach to and combination of these elements are original.

3. A Transformative Pedagogical Shift: The research proposes a transformative approach to theatre training and pedagogy, challenging conventional methods that prioritize linear narrative structures and plot-driven outcomes. By embedding awe, meaning, and pleasure into training practices, this research aims to equip future generations of theatre artists with the tools to create innovative, original, and non-linear work that defies the traditional narrative-driven constraints.

In conclusion, the originality of this research lies in its integrated, interdisciplinary approach that blends theoretical innovation with practical experimentation, creating new forms of theatrical practice that are deeply rooted in sensory experience and the potential for collective awe, pleasure, and meaning. This work does not merely build on existing theatrical traditions but seeks to fundamentally reframe how we understand and create theatre within the Canadian context and beyond, ultimately questioning how we might discover new knowledge about the audience and how perception of performance changes based on if it is plot-driven or postdramatic.

Chapter 1 introduces the theoretical and contextual foundation of this research establishing the relationship between this project and the broader scope of Western Canadian theatre. This

chapter also defines and clarifies the key concepts used, such as awe, meaning, pleasure, that underpin the study, setting the context for the thesis.

Chapter 2 outlines the methodological approach employed in this research. It explains the rationale behind the chosen methods and provides an overview of the research processes used to gather and analyze data.

Chapter 2 is followed by a brief intermission… *a palate cleanser, if you will.*

Chapter 3 focuses on the primary artistic projects that serve as the practical elements of the thesis. These projects illustrate how the theoretical concepts of awe, meaning, and pleasure are brought into action within the context of Canadian theatre, offering concrete examples of the research's practical application.

Chapter 4 presents an analysis of the artistic works developed throughout the research and draws conclusions about their impact on Canadian theatre. This chapter also explores potential avenues for future research and offers insights into how the findings can be applied to continue evolving and expanding the Canadian theatrical landscape and our understanding of awe in the perception of art.

Chapter 5 is an epilogue, because there must always be an epilogue.

# CHAPTER 1: THIS IS NOT A LITERATURE REVIEW: THE LITERATURE REVIEW

*A young, gay, impressionable, undergrad student walks into a performance analysis class. Buh-dum-tss! But this is no joke. This is no simulation. This. Is. Reality… The sessional instructor who has three degrees and gets paid $10,000 Canadian dollars per year to teach science students who elected to take the class because it was going to be an 'easy drama credit' cracks open Hans-Thies Lehmann's* Postdramatic Theatre*. Suddenly, rays of light, like at the gates of heaven, shine from inside the book and the young, gay, impressionable, undergraduate student is changed forever. The sessional instructor rips off her pantsuit to reveal a burlesque outfit, complete with pasties. She whips out a Ouija board and invokes the spirits of Antonin Artaud, Heiner Müller, Andre Breton, Samuel Beckett, Guy Debord, Florentina Holzinger (not dead yet), Robert Wilson (passed away), Michael Green (deceased…but Canadian), Jordan Tannahill (gay…and Canadian) and requests that they play the Macarena on wine glasses each filled with a different amount of water like a post-modern marimba… To prove that they exist. The undergrad student watches in awe. Could there really be such a thing as theatre that does not solely rely on plot as the defining factor of drama? Could a theatre exist that emphasizes spectacle, character, theme, or message over a linear structure? Could he wear pasties too? Yes, yes, yes! The sessional instructor cries out in the style of an erotic shampoo commercial. She was reading his mind. The entire classroom bursts into a full spectacle driven musical number that wraps up with a choral Shakespearean monologue written by AI. Adieu, adieu, adieu…*

This literature review will position this thesis within the greater context of western Canadian theatre and look to examples inside and outside of Canada that locate my praxis and its lineage. A

focus will be placed on works that deviate from traditional linear plot-driven narrative structures in western Canada. It is important to note that works from Quebec will be omitted from this study as the context of French-Canadian work has generally adopted non-linear, non-plot-driven narrative aesthetics and experimentation more quickly than the rest of Canadian theatre. It is also distinctly eastern. This review aims to provide a deeper understanding of the approaches to non-linear, non-plot-driven narratives in Canada (the lack thereof), influences on my praxis, and concepts that exist in my work. It will also look at the trajectory of drama and theatre as perceived by Aristotle, through to modernism, and eventually the Canadian zeitgeist.

## ***FIRST, LET'S HEAR IT FOR GREEK DADDY: ARISTOTLE.***

Aristotle is often regarded as one of the key figures of the start of drama. His *Poetics* have existed and survived centuries and have been highly regarded as instrumental in not only how drama can be made, but also examining why humans make it. Aristotle's *Poetics* laid the foundation for dramatic theory, particularly due to his emphasis on plot being the primary element of drama. According to Aristotle, a well-structured plot needs to have a beginning, a middle, and an end, with a clear progression of events leading to a climax and eventually a resolution. He believed the plot needs to be unified, with each part contributing to the overall narrative which would lead to coherence and emotional impact of the piece. Also, in Aristotle's *Poetics*, he introduces the intricate and thought-provoking concept of mimesis, a concept that has left a mark on the study of drama and its consumption. Simply, mimesis relates to representation. Mimesis serves as a tool to have the artist reflect the experiences and world of the audience to the audience themselves. Within the pages of his manuscript, Aristotle articulates the essence of mimesis, stating, "Thus the reason why men enjoy seeing a likeness is that in contemplating it they find themselves learning or inferring, and saying perhaps, 'Ah, that is he'" (Aristotle, 1961, 55). I argue that it is not simply the concept of saying, 'that is he' but also simultaneously, 'that is me'. It is pertinent to understand that mimesis was originally intended to be a tool used to show the audience themselves and their stories in the action that is taking place. Stephen Halliwell also references two interpretations of mimesis, "[it] incorporates a response to a reality (whether particular or general) that is believed to exist outside and independently of art […] mimesis is the production of a 'heterocosm' (Baumgarten's term again), an imaginary world-in-itself, which may resemble or remind us of the real world" (Halliwell, 2002, 23).

In engaging with Aristotle's *Poetics*, this research does not seek to reject mimesis in its entirety, but rather to question its continued dominance as the primary organizing principle of theatrical experience. Specifically, while mimesis as recognition, the audience's capacity to see themselves, their world, or their conditions reflected onstage, remains culturally and affectively potent, this project resists the assumption that mimetic representation and linear plot progression are necessary preconditions for meaning, pleasure, or transformation in performance.

It is then proposed that witnessing characters go through curated situations, attempting to represent one's reality, will lead to catharsis. This is an idea of mimesis. It leads to a moment where a voyeur is able to release emotion because they are so deeply connected with the material taking place in front of them. We might consider how characters in a story mirror real-life personalities or situations. Via mimesis, storytellers can evoke recognition and empathy in their audience, leading them to relate to the characters' struggles, triumphs, and emotions. For instance, the universal themes of love, loss, and redemption portrayed in countless stories resonate with audiences because they reflect fundamental aspects of the human experience, and therefore, since they are fundamental human experiences, everyone must relate to them, and therefore when we see them represented we will experience catharsis.

*Now, Aristotle thinks these things. I do not. I am wise and not Greek in 322 BCE.* I would like to express that I do not see mimesis as an employable tool. Mimesis is a concept that we may seek to have our audience experience. However, tools can be used to elucidate the feelings brought up by mimesis. For example, we may utilize costumes and sets that are seemingly realistic as a way to make the representation of what is occurring more realistic for the audience, as an attempt to have the audiences see themselves in the action taking place.

The difficulty, however, lies not in the concept of catharsis itself, but in its reliance on narrative resolution and identification as the primary mechanisms through which emotional release is achieved. This research instead explores whether affective intensity, awe, humour, and pleasure can produce equally powerful responses without requiring narrative completion or mimetic coherence.

Historically, as design elements such as sets, costumes, and lighting became more realistic, and were paired with more clearly defined plot points taking place in a linear timeline, audiences were more willing to suspend their disbelief, becoming more engulfed in the action leading to their catharsis. We are living in different times now. Audiences are paying more to be a part of an experience. A primary example is *The Burnt City* by Punchdrunk in London. When I saw the show in November 2022, I had the option to purchase a VIP ticket that would allow me to be guaranteed a more intimate experience. Right now (October 2023), at *Sleep No More* in New York City, a ticket can be purchased called "Sleep No More As Maximilian's Guest" which is tagged as the "best experience" (Punchdrunk Theatre, 2024). These works by Punchdrunk signify a departure from strict adherence to mimetic representation towards a more immersive, multisensory approach to storytelling. Because as a society we are more enticed by having an engaging experience. We are more likely to forgive a bad, or dare I say, nonexistent plot if it means we are promised or delivered an experience. This is explored later in the thesis in all of the practical examples, but specifically most in *White Guy on Stage Talking* (page 140).

We are in a post-mimetic society. The Aesthetics of Awe, Meaning, and Pleasure does not work to disprove the concept of mimesis, however, it challenges the notion that mimetic re-presentation is still the primary purpose of drama and therefore, theatre. We must remember that we are a

society who can access information at unbelievable speeds, in unbelievable locations. Greeks before Jesus, could not do this. They needed mimesis. *Jesus did not have Netflix. Jesus did not have the hit sitcom, "Friends." But Jesus did have plays. And now we have plays about Jesus.* When I describe contemporary theatre as operating within a "post-mimetic" condition, I do not mean that representation has disappeared, but that it no longer functions as the sole or dominant mode through which audiences derive meaning. In an era shaped by immersive technologies, experiential economies, and multisensory media, audiences increasingly value presence, agency, and affective encounter over faithful re-presentation.

In essence, while the concept of mimesis endures as a fundamental aspect of human storytelling, the contemporary landscape has shifted dramatically. We no longer rely solely on mimesis to convey narratives and ideas; we have evolved to embrace a wealth of technological innovations that offer diverse approaches for creative expression and storytelling. The legacy of drama and its ties to mimesis persist, but they exist within a rapidly changing cultural and technological context that challenges us to explore new dimensions of storytelling and artistic representation.

Aristotle's placement of plot as the primary element of drama was further reinforced via the creation of the formula of the well-made play. The well-made play is the name of the structure that was created by Eugene Scribe around 1825. Scribe is regarded as the leading dramatist of the first half of the 19th century. He responded to the melodramas of his time by creating the well-made play, where middle-class problems were represented onstage in plot driven narrative structures, ending in neat and realistic situations (Bordman & Hischak, 2004). This approach to crafting drama resulted in a formula that Scribe would follow when writing plays, which is still largely adhered to in contemporary drama. This is furthered by Stephen Stanton, who proposes seven

elements that make up a well-made play: lively plot, based on a secret that the audience knows but participants [characters] do not; a pattern of action and suspense; sustained conflict between a hero and antagonist; end of conflict highlighted by two contrasting scenes; a central misunderstanding or quiproquo; a logical dénouement; and the repetition of this structure throughout every act of the play (Stanton, 1957).

Below I have created a graphic of another way we can determine if something might be a well-made play.

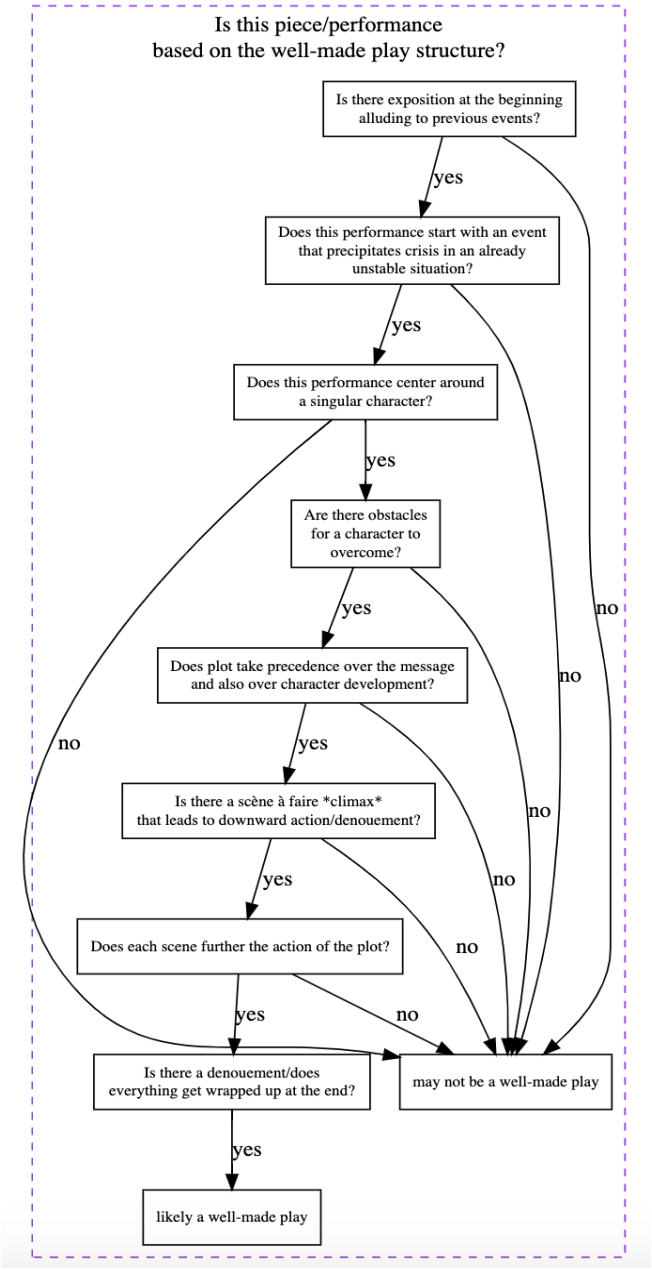


*Figure 1*

I am attempting to be non-dogmatic in my approach to labelling a well-made play. The options listed in Figure 1 are merely considerations. One of the elements Stanton highlights in relation to the well-made play is the importance placed on plot above all other elements or considerations of a performance. This sentiment is echoing what Aristotle argues in his *Poetics*, "But most important

of all is the structuring of the incidents" (Aristotle, 1961). With Aristotle's *Poetics* being one of the formative documents on what would become the foundation of knowledge surrounding drama, it is no surprise that the well-made play structure borrows a page (or several) from his book.

The ability to take an event or circumstances of a character that are relatable to the audience, and place that before them onstage helped to solidify the place of this well-made structure at the centre of many playwrights through the years: Henrik Ibsen, George Bernard Shaw, and Anton Chekhov to name a few. We see famous Canadian playwrights replicating this structure: David Fennario, Norm Foster, George F. Walker, Stewart Lemoine, Stephen Massicotte, etc. as an attempt to find excellence via playing within the sandbox of the well-made play that has been successful for so long.

Pieces that follow this structure are often crafted scene by scene, in which each scene must make a definite contribution to the development of the action. The playwright tightly ties the action of one scene into the next so that they work together, directly leading to the climax and inevitably the dénouement (ending). Douglas Cardwell also provides an analysis of Scribe's structure, "[The] most consistent characteristic of the well-made play is the thoroughness with which every action, every event, even every entrance and exit is prepared, explained, justified" (Cardwell, 1983, 882). It is this successful structure of the well-made play that assisted the movement toward a theatre of naturalism and realism. When Cardwell references justification, I am curious whether justification of the moment to moment action (via plot) is absolutely necessary. Is it pivotal that every moment logically needs to lead to the next moment? Or can we create space for surprise and experiences (this is part of the awe and pleasure piece which will be further explored in the coming pages) that

are not logically progressive, moment to moment? Tannahill writes about his experience witnessing Forced Entertainment's production of *And on the Thousandth Night* in Berlin where kings and queens compete with one another in their monologues to hold the attention of the audience. These moments are fragmented and spontaneous, where the performers intuitively cut each other off when inspired to do so. Each of the kings and queens have their own perspective on the retelling of this story, and over the course of six hours they wander through many narratives without completing any. Tannahill likens this to life, "As in life, we are perpetually in the process of experiencing the narrative, grasping but never truly able to apprehend its conclusion" (Tannahill, 2016). Tannahill's observation invites us to question our adherence strictly to the conventional narrative structures prescribed by the well-made play. Instead, his analysis of his experience at Forced Entertainment's production encourages us to explore the possibility of crafting theatrical experiences that mirror the complexity and ambiguity of real life. By moving away from the confines of linear plot-driven storytelling, we open the possibility for moments of surprise and spontaneity that resonate with the unpredictable nature of life. While Western Canadian theatre may predominantly favour plot-driven narratives, there is an opportunity to broaden the scope of theatrical exploration. By embracing diverse forms and structures, we can enrich the theatrical landscape, offering audiences experiences that challenge their expectations and invite them to engage with storytelling in new and exciting ways. This concept is exhibited in the case studies listed later on in this thesis, like *Bedeuntung Krankenwagen, White Guy on Stage Talking,* and the workshop transcriptions. In doing so, we honor the essence of live performance, not as a mere reflection of life, but as a dynamic and ever-evolving exploration of the human experience, whereby attending, hopefully we have one.

## ***THE START OF "CANADIAN" THEATRE OR: REALLY IT'S JUST A REPLICATION OF WHAT WE WERE FED BY TOURING COMPANIES BECAUSE WE CANADIANS ARE SO FAR UP THE ASSES OF BRITS AND AMERICANS)***

**As you move through the thesis, there will be opportunities to view the praxis that supports this written document. Links to the praxis will be presented in a box like this.**

**LINK TO PRODUCTION HISTORIES DOCUMENTATION*:***
**https://www.jaketkaczyk.com/appendix-a-histories-01**

***PASSWORD: TT24***

*The Aesthetics of Awe, Meaning, and Pleasure* was born out of a desire to produce theatre and performance, subverting the hierarchy that centres linear narrative structures as the most important element in performance. As a Canadian performance artist, I am intrigued by the production histories of the first five regional theatres supported by the Canada Council for the Arts: Royal Manitoba Theatre Centre (Winnipeg, Manitoba), Neptune Theatre (Halifax, Nova Scotia), The Globe (Regina, Saskatchewan), Citadel Theatre (Edmonton, Alberta), and Vancouver Playhouse (Vancouver, British Columbia) (Wasserman, 1993), and what can be perceived as their lack of programmatic experimentation when it comes to structural forms of theatre and performance. These western Canadian companies and many who did (and continue to) receive robust government support also rarely produce plays that break the fourth wall or acknowledge the fact that the audience is an integral part in live performance.

As part of my initial research, I have compiled and documented a list of the production histories of each of these companies listed above and have determined whether or not each show they produced were: written by a Canadian, a new play (produced within the first year of its premiere), and based on a linear plot-driven narrative structure. From my analysis of the production histories ranging from 1958 to 2019, 36% of them were written by Canadians. 26% of them were new plays, and 94% of them were based on the well-made play structure.

By examining Appendix A, we can see that the production histories of each of these companies deeply favoured playwrights who were not Canadian, productions and scripts that were not new (had proven *success* in other runs), and adhered to the well-made play structure. These stats are not comprehensive of the production histories of all Canadian theatres. There are several independent theatre companies or individual performance artists who have fought against the barrage of "excellence" only being attributed to plays that neatly lay out the plot for the audience.

Historically, the Canadian theatre has been built on the structures and processes of American and British theatre. Jerry Wasserman supports this in his book Modern Canadian Plays, "Playwriting in Canada in English dates back to the eighteenth century, and in the nineteenth century Canadian playhouses sprang up in substantial numbers, though mainly to accommodate American and British touring companies […] But as late as 1945 there were no Canadian professional theatre companies" (Wasserman, 1993). With no professional companies in existence, most of our theatre needs were being satisfied by watching touring shows from the United States and from Britain. Groups of people started producing amateur theatre, replicating the shows that they had been consuming via the touring productions. Eventually, a defining piece of the Canadian theatre, the

Dominion Drama Festival (DDF), was founded in 1932. Here, amateur theatre groups from around Canada would perform productions to be judged by professional theatre makers to determine who were the best artists. Let me put this into perspective. Even in the 1930's, well after Alfred Jarry's death, there was no place for anything outside of plot-focused drama at the Dominion Drama Festival. An example of this is Herman Voaden (1903-1991) a prolific playwright in Canada prior to World War II, who would blend different forms of artistic expression (modern dance, opera, and symbolist drama) and perform at the DDF, never advancing because "the adjudicators did not know what to make of them" (Wasserman, 1993, 11). Voaden called this genre of blending forms symphonic expressionism, which in a global context was not ground-breaking since France's Antonin Artaud had written *Jet of Blood* in 1925, where scorpions are supposed to emerge from the nurse's vagina. *That's right. A vagina—on stage—in 1925.* This is evidence that historically, institutions like the DDF celebrated productions fixated on plot with tidy endings. While Voaden was attempting to open doors of interdisciplinarity within theatre in Canada, as many other artists around the world were doing at the time, he was unsupported which continued the cycle of honouring productions driven by linear narratives. Interdisciplinary is used here to describe performance practices that intentionally integrate methods, aesthetics, or logics from multiple artistic disciplines within a single work, rather than subordinating all elements to dramatic text or linear narrative.

It is a bit surprising to notice that now, 90 years later, Canadian theatre still favours shows that are based on the well-made play model. Evidence of this can be found by looking at production histories of larger government funded institutional theatres from the time they were established until now. In 1958 John Hirsch and Tom Hendry merged their two theatre companies to create

what is now the Royal Manitoba Theatre Centre. This amalgamation created a company that would produce shows, tour to small communities within the province, and offer theatre workshops to locals. The Canada Council for the Arts (1957) was so inspired by this that they decided to fund four other companies across the country to create a non-centralized national theatre using regional theatres as the vehicle. For the sake of my project, I have looked at the production histories of the following English-speaking theatre companies: Winnipeg's Royal Manitoba Theatre Centre, Edmonton's Citadel Theatre, Regina's Globe Theatre, Vancouver's Playhouse, and Halifax's Neptune Theatre. These were among the first companies supported by the Canada Council and are still running today (except for Vancouver's Playhouse), therefore their production histories and continued government support highlights what is held in high regard by those doling out the money.

*Flash to me, waking up in the middle of the night sweating and screaming, "Why God!? Why, do these companies receive money to do* Clue *or* The Importance of Being Earnest*? Why can't we do something like the latest production by Florentina Holzinger or Ariane Mnouchkine for God's sake?! Who does a guy have to sleep with to have something interesting produced?*

My cries in the night led me to examine funding models and granting bodies in Canada. In an interview, "New Pie and More Pie—Funding for Canada Council for the Arts: An Interview with Guylaine Normandin and Geneviève Vallerand" we get to peek behind the curtain of how grants and funding models were restructured by the Canada Council for the Arts in 2016. The interviewer Darrah Teitel asks a question about whether juries adjudicating grant applications would be

interdisciplinary, to which the answer from the Canada Council was, “We’ve had this question a lot either in person or during the webinars and the answer is, I hope, reassuring for people that for artistic assessments the peer juries remain disciplinary” (Teitel, 2016, 13). This answer demonstrates the emphasis on separating forms of artistic expression, meaning we perpetuate traditional ways of working. If I, as an interdisciplinary artist wish to utilize theatre, visual art, music, and dance in a singular project, only to be juried by theatre-makers, the value of my art could be easily overlooked or confusing to peers who may not engage in interdisciplinary works. Furthermore, Guylaine Normandin says, “One of the messages that is clear is that this new funding model is not there to destabilize or to jeopardize the artistic ecosystem” (ibid). This is evidence that the Canada Council is more averse to risks than some might hope.

Of course, we should not blame all of this on the Canada Council. The federal government that funds the Canada Council has inherently thought of the arts and culture community in Canada as an industry. Because the government views the arts as an industry, it makes sense that our funding bodies also hold these values, and these values trickle down into the community of artists making the art, creating projects that aim for what those in charge would see as viable and successful products. Fannina Waubert de Puiseau supports this, “…even we, Canadian artists, have likewise normalized and internalized this economization that we have apparently resigned ourselves to behaving like the marginalized zombie-clowns that neoliberalism has turned us into” (Waubert de Puiseau, 2016, 9). Focusing on the economical aspect of art means that the companies receiving the funding put their dollars toward supporting and producing work that has been deemed “successful” elsewhere in the world (usually the United States or the UK) and driven by plot in hopes the success elsewhere leads to financial success of this production in Canada. The

normalization and internalization of economizing the Canadian arts community, as described above, underscores the extent to which capitalist ideologies have permeated the cultural sphere of Canadian theatre and performance making. This economization presents itself in the prioritization of projects deemed successful in the global market, particularly those originating from the United States or the United Kingdom. By focusing on work that conforms to established narrative structures and market trends, Canadian artists risk falling prey to the perpetual cycle of cultural dependency wherein originality and diversity are sacrificed in pursuit of economic viability.

As mentioned above, inspiration from American and British theatre companies would lead future plays written by Canadians to follow the well-made play structure already subscribed to by the companies who popularized theatre via touring in Canada. Looking at the production histories of the first five regional theatres in Canada shows that even now, we are aiming to produce shows that have proven "success" and "excellence". Our current arts climate does feature more independent companies who are producing work that is written by Canadian artists. The original dependence on American and British theatre prior to 1945 was partially what prompted the creation of the Massey Report in 1951. This was a report of the findings from an inquiry into the state of the arts in Canada. The report noted that Canada faced "influences from across the border as pervasive as they are friendly." It warned against "the very present danger of permanent dependence" on American culture (The Royal Commission on National Development in the Arts, Letters and Sciences, 1951). Looking at the production histories of the first five regional theatres supports the argument that in many ways, this idolatry of American or British productions still pervades. I would even argue to take this a step further and suggest that more Canadian artists are having their work produced than in the past, however, they are still feeding off the linear-narrative

structures that British and American theatre adhere to. The Canadian theatre does not seek to challenge the importance that is placed on having a neat and tidy plot.

Productions that have historically received support from federal or provincial government funding and more importantly, the productions that have been professionally archived and shared on a national scale are the ones that generally are written by non-Canadian playwrights, have proven to be successful in either the United States or the UK, and are based on a linear narrative structure. Of course, there are other theatre and performance practitioners in Canada producing work that de-centres plot, but often, these companies do not have the resources or external support to document their work and share it with a national audience (Nutting, 2012).

There are Canadian artists who have worked to subvert plot-driven linear narrative structures in their works. Notable among these are Mammalian Diving Reflex (Toronto, Ontario), Isaac Kessler (Toronto, Ontario), Theatre Gargantua (Toron…) You get the picture. Most of these artists reside in Toronto and aren't rushing to get to western Canada to produce their work, or rather, western Canada is not fighting to present it. However, it's worth noting that this movement isn't confined solely to Toronto. Artists on the western side of Canada, albeit fewer in number, have also contributed significantly to narrative experimentation. Figures such as Kristine Nutting, One Yellow Rabbit, Ken Harrower, Dr. Ryan Tacata, and Maiko Yamamoto, work outside of the well-made play structure but are not produced by regional theatres.

What would the overall Canadian theatre ecology look like if theatre companies practicing in experimental ways were supported as much as those operating under the same processes for the

past 70 years? When analyzing the production histories of the companies with the most support (support in this case being funding), we see that the artists who are given an opportunity to produce work are those who stick to the style of the well-made play and because their work is that which is produced, they are setting the precedent for what is deemed worthy. Because these productions are being deemed as an object of excellence, something successful, other theatre-makers attempt to recreate what they see being supported by grants and the community. It is this reflexivity that creates a cycle of the endless production of the well-made play. A purgatory of plot-driven productions attempting to showcase a slice of life that the audience can relate to. *Mimesis if you will.*

## THE POSTDRAMATIC

This study examines ways in which western Canadian theatre may re-imagine theatrical processes and devising practices that de-center plot driven narratives as the subject of most importance. This study adds to Canadian theatre by "advocating for a little more impulse and mystery in place of reason and structure" (Tannahill, 2015, 38). We may do this via the inclusion of principles found in Hans-Thies Lehmann's *Postdramatic Theatre*. Postdramatic theatre represents a departure from conventional dramatic forms. It blurs the boundaries between different art forms, emphasizes the presence of the performer, and challenges traditional notions of plot, character, and narrative coherence (Lehmann, 2006). Something Herman Voaden attempted in the 1930s, in Canada as previously mentioned. The postdramatic allows the audience to participate in the meaning-making process of the performance. Postdramatic theatre often employs collage-like structures, non-linear storytelling, and immersive experiences to engage audiences in new and unexpected ways. These modern approaches influenced the trajectory of contemporary theatre and performance. To draw a link between Aristotle's concept of plot and modernism in theatre, one might argue that the playwrights, in their rejection of Aristotle's linear plot structures, were challenging the common understanding of narrative and its place in crafting stories. These modernists embraced fragmentation, ambiguity, and non-linear storytelling techniques to reflect the fragmented and unknown nature of the world.

Reactions to realism and traditional theatre are being explored in my work. Lehmann expresses this as, "In the theatre of modern times, the staging largely consisted of the declamation and illustration of written drama" (Lehmann, 2006, 21). In what Lehmann is referring to as dramatic

theatre, there is a reliance on catharsis and traditional structure where the most important elements are a unified plot used to express character. *Where have we heard this before?* Postdramatic theatre utilizes what is occurring in culture as a fragmented experience without the need for catharsis or a linear progression. The ways of working that I'm primarily drawn to as a theatre-maker exist around rejecting traditional forms, for example, the structure of the well-made play and historical obsession with a linear plot. Jordan Tannahill in his book, *Theatre of the Unimpressed* speaks about the predictability of western drama and the apathetic view it breeds in people, preventing them from attending future theatrical events (Tannahill, 2015). This can be avoided, by incorporating the audience into the liveness of the event. We will see more about liveness later. In the meantime, if the audience is given a role greater than passive voyeur, we open the door to unexpected contributions to the performance that is exciting to both the artist and spectator. We create liberation and a sense of awe. A deeply unique experience, or at least a greater illusion of it.

The postdramatic creates space between the drama, linear progression of action (Lehmann, 2006), and the theatrical event. It proposes a style of theatre and performance that does not depend on a beginning, middle, end structure. It looks at creating an experience for the spectator via an understanding of phenomenology and semiotics. It recognizes that, "theatre per se is already an art form of signifying, not of mimetic copying. (A tree on stage, even if it looks very real, remains a sign for a tree, not the reproduction of a tree…)" but that it connects to the present moment through making the audience aware of their own existence, liberating them to make meaning based on their perception of an event (ibid, 167).

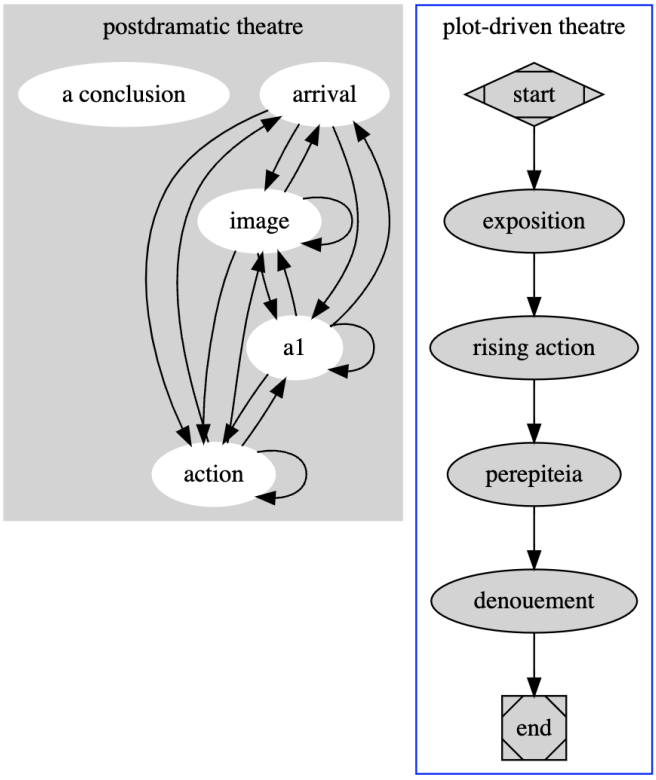


*Figure 2 shows a way that we might consider postdramatic theatre vs. plot-driven theatre.*

The postdramatic is necessary in this study because it is a response to our modern world, "...discordant chaos of occurrences" (Defraeye, 2007). Piet Defraeye is a professor at the University of Alberta who is an expert in the postdramatic. Figure 2 is included to illustrate one way we might view the postdramatic theatre as different from the plot-driven well-made play. In plot-driven theatre, things move toward the end in a progressive way. In postdramatic theatre, elements have the potential to fluctuate and move back and forth responsively between one another. We might view "a1" (in Figure 2) as any other element that is present in the performance of the work, for example, it might signify the audience, music, unexpected voyeurs (as in happenings), site-specific locations, etc. In this way, "a1" can appear several times in the diagram

as various elements. All of these elements have the potential to be in direct relationship with one another, impacting the outcome of their interactions. Additionally, in Figure 2, “a conclusion” is not necessarily attached to any of the elements. This is present in some postdramatic work. Where the work starts and ends is blurry and intentionally unclear. This diagram is also intended to showcase the parataxis (removal of hierarchy) that can be found in postdramatic works (Fuchs, 2011). Elinor Fuchs presents a thought-provoking critique of post dramatic theatre, highlighting the potential for absorption and co-opting of avant-garde art forms into mainstream culture. “If Brecht was once viewed as radically other to the dramatic, and is now absorbed within it, a shift in perspective could also lessen the distance between drama and its departed twin, theatre” (Fuchs, 2011, 69). This observation underscores the tendency for society to commodify and celebrate works that initially challenge the status quo, once they become palatable to mainstream taste and are praised as excellent. Furthermore, she also proposes that Lehmann’s postdramatic theatre is more of a fluctuation, rather than a millennial transformation of the artform (ibid). While this may be true for artists working in Germany, Canadian theatre has not experienced much of a fluctuation, so there has never been a well attempted test of her proclamation in the Canadian cultural landscape.

Hans-Thies Lehmann’s articulation of postdramatic theatre is often misread as a rejection of meaning or signification; however, his argument is more precisely understood as a shift in emphasis from semiotic interpretation toward phenomenological experience (States, 2001). Lehmann proposes that in postdramatic work, “theatre is not subordinated to the primacy of the text” (Lehmann, 2006, 21), but instead forces the spectator to “experience themselves inside of a time-space” (ibid, 152). Meaning is not eliminated but deferred, emerging through sensory,

affective, and temporal encounter rather than linear narrative logic. As Lehmann notes, postdramatic theatre privileges “presence over representation” (ibid, 109), and experience over interpretation, repositioning the audience as embodied witnesses rather than decipherers of signs. This distinction is crucial to the present research, which does not seek to abolish meaning or narrative entirely, but to explore how awe, pleasure, and interoceptive responsiveness operate within a phenomenological framework that precedes, complicates, or resists semiotic closure.

My expertise and passion lie within creating new work that subverts the dramatic structure that Lehmann talks about, crafting an experience for collaborating artists and audience members that impacts their worldviews and perspectives while being highly engaging and entertaining.

**OPEN WIDE - SAY AWE**

*Awe is ineffable… Awe is a concept that is everywhere and nowhere all at the same time. It's like a riddle that doesn't have a clear answer. It's something that every individual experiences in a different way.* Awe is a sensation or emotion related to experiencing an event or moment (typically unexpected) that leads the experiencer to recognize their existence is insignificant or part of something larger. That they are only an individual in a world where billions of people have their own lives and consciousnesses. That the world is vast beyond comprehension (Cuzzolino, 2021). This is directly tied to the concept of *sonder*, the recognition that other people are leading lives completely separate from your own (Koenig, 2012). Sonder amplifies the sense of awe. When we experience sonder, the concept reveals the immensity of human existence, where each individual is a protagonist in their own narrative, navigating through joys, sorrows, and complexities. It's a profound realization that the world is a vast stage with countless stories unfolding simultaneously, each person carrying a unique set of dreams, struggles, and triumphs. This realization also concurrently humbles the experiencer, allowing them space to recognize their own (in)significance in that present moment. In this way, Koenig's concept of sonder brings a level of awareness into the experiencer, one that is similar to holding a mirror up to them, highlighting something that they may never have seen reflected before. A reflection of the self is different from a representation of the self. Through the process of utilizing awe in the creation of new work and eliciting the sensation of awe in others we break away from the concept of mimesis and external representation. Instead, we are bringing the audience into their own experience rather than viewing the experience of someone else, hoping that they too, could be in the action. When we tap into the emotion of awe in the creation of new works and strive to evoke that sensation in

others, we transcend mere imitation. Instead of simply presenting a replication of reality in someone else's experience, we invite the audience to immerse themselves in their own unique encounter with the work. *This is super meta.* Others have also posited, "awe involves positively valanced feelings of wonder and amazement. Awe arises via appraisals of stimuli that are vast, that transcend current frames of reference, and that require new schemata to accommodate what is being perceived" (Keltner & Haidt, 2003, in Piff et al, 2015, 884). Additionally, Kant expresses that the experience of the sublime happens when the mind is not solely attracted by an object, but is alternately repelled by it as well. He adds, "The delight in the sublime does not so much involve positive pleasure as admiration or respect" (Kant, 2001, 245).

Arcangeli and collaborators further the above definition, "Awe seems to be a complex emotion or emotional construct characterized by a mix of positive (contentment, happiness), and negative affective components (fear and a sense of being smaller, humbler or insignificant)" (Arcangeli et al. 2020, 1). Some practitioners and theorists have argued that the Experience of the Sublime and awe are the same thing or are only differentiated by minor factors. While I am consistently amazed at how the English language has an obsession with creating multiple words that mean the same thing, in this case, I argue that while the Experience of the Sublime and awe have similar elements and descriptors, they are, in fact, different. The authors of "Awe and the Experience of the Sublime: A Complex Relationship" posit seven different possible relationships between awe and the experience of the sublime. It is clear that, "option A: awe and the Experience of Sublime are the same experience" is not as well supported as, awe being a factor in creating the Experience of the Sublime or vice versa (ibid, 2). Arcangeli also says, "However, it is not clear that all awe-inspiring objects are also objects of [Experience of the Sublime] or, for that matter, of any aesthetic

experience at all. For instance, our awe of Mother Teresa's compassion is arguably not aesthetic" (ibid, 3). Clewis et al make note of several positions relating to the potential differences and similarities between awe and the sublime. They highlight how, "One might think that whereas awe refers to a subjective state, the sublime is an objective property" (Clewis et al, 2022, 149) and they go on to assert how they view the sublime as a state of mind or response to elicitors (ibid). To make more clear why I have chosen the term *awe* for this study instead of *the sublime* comes later in the same paragraph of theirs, "Our approach was already adopted by Keltner and Haidt (2003), who refer to the sublime as an awe-like aesthetic emotion" (ibid). Here, they are likening the sublime to awe, giving awe the place of primary importance thus making awe preferential for my lexicon. Finally, Stellar, Gordon, Anderson, Piff, and McNeil support how feelings of awe "lead to a diminished sense of self, which in turn gives rise to the broader, more complex, sentiment of humility" (Stellar et al, 2017, 258). The authors share their defining factors of humility which center around opening up the experiencer to "a more realistic, secure, and open view of the self, and a greater acknowledgement of the value and contributions of others and outside forces" (ibid, 259). Utilizing awe in the creation and performance of an artwork, has the increased potential to spur on sensations of humility for audience and artist, cultivating elements of acceptance for one's self and others. This is significant to recognize as realizing that ones self is smaller than initially perceived *(it's not the size that counts)* can lead to humility which can be quite intense or dreadful to some. Further to the realization of being insignificant as an individual, Piff et al say, "it is claimed that awe produces specific cognitive and behavioral tendencies that enable individuals to fold into collaborative social groups, and engage in collective action" (Piff, Dietze, Feinberg, Stancanto & Keltner, 2015, 883).

Through my career there have been many forms of art that have utilized factors of awe which have elicited strong emotional responses in me - many of those moments or images in those arts have stayed with me to this day. More recently, in conducting research for this study I have been more deliberate in taking in art around Canada, the USA, and Europe (specifically London, Ghent, Antwerp, Berlin, Amsterdam, Paris). In this exploration, my focus has been on identifying instances where artists have embraced awe-inspiring or pleasure-driven impulses, particularly in projects that eschew a clear narrative structure for the audience. On November 2, 2022, Dr. Elena Marchevska and I witnessed *Tanz* by Austrian choreographer Florentina Hozinger. To say this performance is spectacle driven is an understatement. Its impact exceeded any previous encounters within the Canadian artistic milieu. When I entered the Battersea Arts Centre, I was immediately surprised by the number of people in the lobby, waiting for the theatre doors to open. The buzz was electric, almost like everyone waiting knew that something unreal was about to take place tonight. *And boy, were we ever correct.* The Melbourne Arts Centre previously presented this work and their website offers insight into the nature of *Tanz* and explicitly encourages an active and participatory response from the audience. The instructions advise spectators to make themselves comfortable, generate noise, engage with the performance, move about freely, and exit for breaks at their discretion, with the option to return when ready (Arts Centre Melbourne, 2023).

In hindsight, I realized that while I may not have paid much attention to the disclaimer before the show, it became apparent after the fact that Holzinger was sincere in her invitation to the audience. There were several unexpected images and events in the piece that were extremely awe-inducing; especially the moment where one of the dancers has her upper back pierced with hooks, is attached to pulley system, and flown into the air by her back skin… Several people gasp, leave, cheer, cry,

applaud. Holzinger is enacting work like Stellarc's in a traditional theatrical venue, something that feels sacrilegious and exciting all at the same time. Art critic, Sanjoy Roy articulates some images in *Tanz* brilliantly in his Guardian article, "A camera gives a closeup of Philippart [one of the dancers in the piece] birthing a rat, drenched in the blood that is helpfully being squirted all over the place. Another woman (suspension artist Lucifire) is hoisted into the air by meathooks pierced through the skin of her shoulders. Some of us just leave; many can only peek through fingers; yet many also whoop and cheer at the bloody-minded audacity of the spectacle, as Lucifire beams and spins in gory exultation. And that's not even the end" (Roy, 2022). The reflection regarding Holzinger's sincere invitation via her content warning prompted me to reconsider the roles of trigger warnings in performances. While they are often included as a form of sensitivity toward potentially distressing content, they can also sometimes be perceived as performative gestures, lacking genuine connection to the audience and their well-being. In the case of *Tanz*, however, it was evident that the trigger warning served as a sincere invitation for the audience to engage with the performance in a participatory and immersive manner.

Awe often arises from encountering the unexpected, and *Tanz* strategically incorporates unconventional elements that defy traditional norms. The moment where a dancer has her upper back pierced with hooks and is lifted into the air by her back skin exemplifies the choreographic experimentation that can provoke awe. This is further supported by the fact that the performers throw a broom at the suspended performer who rides it like a witch. This shock, paired with comedy, offers a departure from conventional dance movements, challenges preconceived notions, heightening the impact on the audience. *How does this European production relate to my thesis on exploring non linear narrative structures in Canadian theatre? Good question.*

*Affronting work like that of Holzinger is rarely produced in Canada. Audiences in Canada are rarely encouraged to respond to the artists. Audiences* ***are*** *given the opportunity to leave and come back if they need in most performances, however, it is usually offered to the audiences because the content being discussed by characters in the play is triggering, rather than the audience being confronted with images and participation that is intense. Our Canadian theatre is being polite. We are trying to please the audience.*

Early in my Ph.D. journey, I encountered a noteworthy instance of awe in the performance realm through Digital Theatre+. *Negative Space*, directed by Mole Wetherell of Reckless Sleepers, left a lasting impression. The production unfolds within a drywall box set, with three walls forming a square and the fourth open to the audience. Performers navigate over the top or emerge through trap doors, creating an immersive physical score. A pivotal moment occurs as the world undergoes a literal deconstruction, with performers smashing holes through the drywall. The unexpectedness of this event automatically triggers awe. The surprise of witnessing walls being breached caught me off guard, and the satisfaction of this action left me with a visceral response. Beyond the immediate reaction, I contemplated the meticulous recreation of this spectacle night after night, adding a second layer of awe.

Although I experienced this performance online, it is evident that witnessing such unexpected actions in the physical space would likely have a more impactful effect. Wetherell speaks about his onstage involvement in the work, as a performer in the show he also directed, he has the ability to make mistakes which allow everyone else in the show to make mistakes, which is arguably more interesting as it creates liveness and gives permission for the show to evolve (Digital Theatre+,

2020, 30:44). This intentional embrace of mistakes contributes to the live quality of the performance. As Wetherell notes, this potential for evolution and the spectre of failure are integral to the element of awe. Similarly, Tannahill says, “When a piece of theatre doesn’t feel quite alive to me, it’s often because it lacks this [spectre of failure] quality. A cookie-cutter touring production of a Broadway hit, for example, in which the muscle memory of a hundred rote performances is tangible. Nothing is at risk of faltering, nothing unexpected will take the performers or the audience by surprise, and thus nothing feels truly ‘live’ about the experience” (Tannahill, 2015, 16-17). The essence of live events lies in their inherent risk and the potential for failure, as underscored by Bailes (Bailes, 2011).

## LIVENESS AND FAILURE

In embracing the unpredictability of the moment, we create opportunities for unforeseen occurrences and unscripted developments, contributing to the dynamic and authentic nature of the live experience. The element of risk, far from being a hindrance, becomes a catalyst for innovation, improvisation, and a genuine connection between performers and the audience. Sara Jane Bailes' perspective emphasizes that in the realm of live events, where anything can happen, we open up a space for unique and unrepeatable moments that define the vitality and richness of the live performance. Peggy Phelan also speaks about failure and liveness in her essay, “On the Difference between Time and History”. Here she recounts closing a file on her computer, losing all of her writing during a breakthrough session. She ties this to the element of live-ness. “It demonstrated why performance and live art belong to time - the present tense is all for these arts - and not to history” (Phelan, 2014, 116). In present moments, the immediacy of live performance come to the forefront, much like losing an important file. Phelan's experience of losing her file highlights the ephemeral nature of live events, where the actions and reactions unfold in real-time, irretrievable and unreproducible. This notion of the present aligns with Tannahill's position regarding the importance of the "spectre of failure" in creating truly alive theatrical experiences.

In this context, failure is not merely an undesirable outcome but rather an essential and necessary element that infuses live performance with its uniqueness. Just as Wetherell notes the potential for mistakes to foster a sense of liveness in his work, Phelan's essay highlights how the unpredictability of the present moment distinguishes live performance from recorded forms of performance. The element of failure in live events serves as a reminder of the shared humanity

between performers and audiences. It immediately brings us together. It is in moments of imperfection that genuine connections are forged, blurring the boundaries between stage and spectator. As Phelan suggests, the inherent temporality of live performance positions it firmly within the realm of experience, where each moment is fleeting yet profoundly impactful – and potentially full of mistakes, however silly they may be.

Through acknowledging and embracing the spectre of failure, we affirm the transformative power of live performance to engage, challenge, and inspire audiences in ways that are both immediate and enduring. In doing so, we honor the essence of liveness, celebrating its capacity to do what other mediums can not. We can argue that the panic immediately felt by Phelan in the closing (and losing) of her files inspired her to write the 2014 essay. Awe (positive and negative elements of it) inspire creation. Auslander speaks to liveness adopting mediatized qualities in its attempt to replicate what is being produced by new media forms (Auslander, 1999). I argue that the incorporation of various mediatized formats creates a greater potential for failure to occur and thus increases the existence and tension of the spectre of failure. Various companies and artists in contemporary praxis have been implementing projections, video, audio amplification, AI, and other technologies in aspirations of creating exciting and engaging experiences. While these tools are influential in creating spectacle and awe, without the element of liveness (having an audience in a shared physical space in real time) they would not function the same as something that is recorded and consumed from the couch.

Awe frequently occurs in a live space, where the experiencer is a part of something, where they are affected or changed in some way. We can look to the ways in which the spectre of failure creates a space where cultivating awe is possible through liveness.

While ensuring the spectre of failure is always present is an important part of my work, my praxis also focuses on using other factors of awe, which are tools geared toward incorporating awe-ful impulses of the artist in the creation and performance of a work. Some elements I consider factors of awe are: juxtaposition, excess, visual and auditory spectacle, signs, critique of un/popular opinions, ritual, personal experiences, and audience participation. Further tools and approaches that can be used in the endeavour of crafting awe are listed in the table below.

| | |
|---|---|
| Lighting Design | Creative and dramatic use of lighting can enhance atmosphere. |
| Sound Design | Utilizing immersive soundscapes or music compositions to create emotional resonance in underscoring moments. |
| Projection Design | Incorporating projections onto surfaces to create immersive environments/visual effects. |
| Costume Design | Costumes or transformative costume changes can captivate the audience. |
| Set Design and Props | Sets that transport the audience or shift attention. Lack of set is also considered here. |

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| Special Effects | Including practical effects, such as pyrotechnics, fog machines, or mechanical devices. |
| Puppetry | Manipulating puppets of various sizes and styles to convey fantastical or mundane action. |
| Multimedia Integration | Combining live performance with pre-recorded video or interactive digital elements for a multimedia experience. |
| Physical Theatre, Dance, and Movement | Employing dance, movement sequences, or acrobatics to showcase the performers' physical prowess and engage space. |
| Immersive Environments | Designing immersive experiences where the audience can interact with the performers or the environment itself. Includes audience seating/perspective seating. |
| Site-specific Locations | Taking the action/audience to somewhere that isn't a theatre auditorium. Allowing the space to influence the essence of the project. |
| Circus Acts | Incorporating circus skills to add excitement, |

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| | risk, awe. |
| Live Music and Choirs | Integrating live musical performances or choral arrangements. |
| Audience Participation or Interaction | Engaging the audience directly in the performance, providing them with a sense of involvement, nervousness, excitement, etc. |
| Virtual Reality Integration | Offering virtual reality segments or installations for audience members to explore something beyond physical space and location. |
| Symbolism and Metaphor | Infusing the performance with symbolic imagery and metaphorical references to provoke thought and emotion. |
| Juxtaposition | Contrasting elements, could be some of the elements in this list, or pairing contrasting movement/sound, etc. |
| Interactive Technology | Incorporating interactive technologies like motion sensors or responsive lighting to engage the audience in unexpected ways. |
| Ritual | Using processes related with goals of rituals |

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| | (transcendence, absolution, etc.) to craft an experience that is transformative. Also a tool to give structure in something seemingly formless (no-plot) |
| Time Manipulation and Speed | Playing with chronology of pieces within a non-linear postdramatic piece. Also, speeding up or slowing down moments (movement, text, etc.) |
| Innovative Stagecraft | Experimenting with unconventional staging techniques, such as rotating stages or moving platforms. |
| Epic Scale or Minute Scale | Crafting productions of grand scale with large casts (choruses), expansive sets, etc. |
| Sensory Experiences | Designing performances that stimulate all five senses to immerse the audience. |
| Surprise | Incorporating unexpected elements or twists into the performance that leave the audience pleasantly surprised and delighted. |
| Humour | Humour can serve as a means of subversion, challenging expectations and inviting the |

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|---|---|
| | audience to see things from a new perspective, adding depth to the performance while being pleasurable. |
| | |

The last row is intentionally left blank because in my process of working with artists – awe can be a deeply personal experience and as such, artists can include their own tools or approaches in their work. This blank row serves as a reminder that the list is not exhaustive, and is ever-evolving.

## AESTHETICS

*Aesthetics is the first bit in the title of this thesis, so let's move on to this.* While aesthetics are hard to define, we will look at a few examples to locate this work. Gareth White speaks to the role of aesthetics in his book *Audience Participation in Theatre: Aesthetics of the Invitation.* White asks a question in his introduction: "why aesthetics?" (White, 2013, 9). He outlines that, "anything that provides a new component of the general theory of art is a work of aesthetics" (ibid). He then takes it one step further in outlining that his research is specifically looking at the actions and experiences of audience participants in events or works of art (ibid). Another assessment of aesthetics comes from D.W. Prall in the foreword to *Philosophies of Beauty* by E.F. Carritt. Prall writes, "[aesthetics] is such wavering and deceptive stuff as dreams are made of; its method is neither logical nor scientific, nor quite whole-heartedly and empirically matter of fact…" (Prall in Carritt, 1931), this is particularly fitting for this study as awe also has some of these unpinnable qualities. Prall's comment provides a sense that there are potentially endless ways that an individual may define aesthetics and that any definition can be deceptive in some way.

In speaking to Ana Sanchez-Colberg, on January 20, 2021, after she taught one of our Transart Institute sessions on phenomenology, she mentioned that the term aesthetics was not simply about relating to visual information. The obsolete definition of the word is, "of or relating to perception by the senses" (Oxford English Dictionary, 1798). We can think of aesthetics as, feeling *into* something, rather than feeling about something (Sanchez-Colberg, 2021). This feeling *into sensation* takes us into the experience of an object or situation and allows us to feel deeply what is going on. Lisa Samuels also supports this through an analysis of Baumgarten's work (the man

who first started using the term aesthetics as it relates to philosophy. "[Baumgarten] was perhaps more enlightened than we often are about the power of the senses, since he wanted to make serious place for the 'lower' sensory functions among 'higher' functions of rational meaning" (Samuels, 1997, 2). Related to this is what Schoeller and Perlovsky call aesthetic emotions. "Aesthetic emotions … are related to the knowledge instinct. In this way, they are similar to all emotions which […] correspond to a satisfaction or dissatisfaction of a given instinct" (Schoeller & Perlovsky, 2016, 2). What they are referring to typically relates to the experience of an observer of art, meaning, when an observer witnesses a piece of art, their immediate like or dislike of the piece is tied into their aesthetic emotions, which is not to be confused with Hume's perspective on taste (Hume in Stradella, 2012).

For the purpose of this study, aesthetics as it relates to sensing will be important. This sensing relates directly to awe and pleasure. This sensing goes beyond the thinking mind. In this case it is not the brain recognizing an event, sensation, or choice and then thinking about whether it makes sense, instead, it is the whole body and sensorial system being in the state of awe and pleasure that leads to the making of a decision in the act of creating performance. This approach can be used while writing new plays, performing improv, or doing crowd work (audience participation). Instantaneous communication is occurring inside the artist, that they then document while creating a new work, or are sharing immediately with an external audience.

Adam Alston writes about risk and welfare in immersive audience experiences. There are of course boundaries on what is acceptable for the performer to do, and likewise for the audience. An example of crossing a boundary occurred in Edmonton during a late-night cabaret in August 2019

at the Fringe Festival, where a performer brought an audience member on stage and made physical contact with them without their consent, leading to a larger issue involving authorities and the media. While this event took place during a cabaret and risky acts were being performed, a boundary was crossed, resulting in a problem. Alston writes about risk and safety in "Beyond Immersive Theatre: Aesthetics, Politics and Productive Participation" (2016). Specifically, Alston writes about relating to the experience of participating in Lundhal's and Seitl's *Rotating*. Alston mentions the sensations that arose associated with risk and safety. There is an absolute responsibility for the artist to keep the audience physically safe, however, at times there is an overlap that sometimes occurs where artists begin to believe they must not make their audience feel fear, because they don't want them to feel unsafe. Artists must be prepared for their audiences to feel alienated or dissociated from the present moment if the audience member is fearful, like those moving around in the dark during *Rotating,* however, if the artist is accepting of this interruption, with no real safety concerns to the audience, they should be welcome to make this decision.

Artists are not the only ones implicated in boundaries though. Audiences must also adhere to rules within immersive and experimental performances, especially as they relate to awe and pleasure. This can move beyond what can be called theatre etiquette and how to behave reasonably at shows that take place in traditional theatres (Sedgman, 2018, 2023), and towards how we might expect an audience to behave in an immersive performance. There is a potential possibility that the word pleasure or language surrounding this concept lead people to immediately think in terms that identify with sexuality. With this in mind, we might consider notifying the audiences in a pre-show/onboarding process of the do's and don'ts within the experience as is done by Megan Dart

of *Dead Centre of Town* (2021). Prohibiting latecomers or re-entry as a policy is something Fringe festivals do to manage disruptions. There may be performers in costumes as 'henchmen' or in plain clothes within the performance helping to shepherd or mediate audience behaviours. Additionally, permission can be given to artists on a project to interact directly with audiences, which in many ways can help curb unruly or disruptive behaviour. However, when we work from a place of pleasure and awe, or carefully craft moments where audiences are expected to participate, we can ensure boundaries are clearly communicated with those engaging in the performance, limiting any dangers.

In all projects throughout the study, I (and other participants) will be following impulses that are exciting or that feel pleasurable, from moment to moment as a practice of embodied aesthetics. In this way, the praxis elements of this thesis look at how the performers can utilize and chase threads of pleasure in rehearsal and performance. This is done by sensing into awe and pleasure. Feeling through interoception, sensations within the body (Connell, et al, 2018, 1), to embody and respond from and through sensations of awe and pleasure. Interoception can be thought of as another sense of the human body, like the five traditional modalities: seeing, touch, hearing, taste, and smell. While interoception can be attributed to being aware of sensations of internal organs and their functions like one's heartbeat, the act of being interoceptive is not only limited to this attention (ibid). This concept relates to visceral dramaturgies that Rosemary Klich writes about, which includes writing on visceroception. Interoception makes up a part of the overall concept of visceroception. Klich gives an account of her experience of witnessing the impact of visceral dramaturgy and the effect it has on the audience. "Both through the audio and visual content, the work deploys a visceral dramaturgy that appeals directly to the listener's interoceptive awareness"

(Klich, 2019, 188). The Aesthetics of Awe, Meaning, and Pleasure develops the interoceptive awareness of the artist, allowing them to more fully follow interoceptive sensations (impulses) that are shared with the audience in performance. Impulses have been described to me in several ways throughout my theatre training. A former instructor of mine explained that impulse can relate to the amount of intensity committed to an action (a scale of one to five, where one is doing something tiny and five is as big as you can), others have said that impulses are the first gut feeling of something you want to do, others have said its purely instinctive actions with no logic.

For the purposes of this study, impulses will be linked with interoception. What sensations feel most exciting and pleasurable in the body and how can we incorporate those sensations into the creation of new images, text, movements, etc. The act of bringing awareness to the sensations inside the body and the feelings of awe and pleasure is a driving factor of grounding a praxis in these aesthetics.

## PLEASURE UNPACKED

So we've discussed varying definitions and interpretations of awe, we've looked at failure and risk, we've explored how aesthetics can be internal and something other than beauty in art. So now we must look at pleasure and how it might connect to the concepts listed above. Much like awe, **pleasure** and **desire** are often thought of as holding elements of same-ness. We might think of desires creating a drive for an individual or group to seek out pleasurable experiences or outcomes that fulfill needs or wants. Alternatively, the anticipation or pursuit of pleasurable experiences can intensify desires and motivations. However, it is important to note that pleasure and desire also have the potential to diverge from one another. Individuals or groups may experience pleasure without necessarily desiring it or desire something and not find pleasure in achieving or receiving it. To me, the term desire in the context of this study also holds an element of expectation, creating a space where the artist is working with more focus on external gratification rather than following interoceptive sensations.

To be clear, this study does not look at sexual pleasure as mentioned by Freud (1920), Kościańka (2020), Jolly et al. (2013). This positioning also helps us to maintain boundaries as suggested previously. Stephen Rosenbaum goes all the way back to Epicurus and his theory of pleasure as being unrelated to drinking and parties, but more along the lines of the absence of pain (Rosenbaum, 1990). Salman Akhtar and Mary Kay O'Neil look at Freud's theory of the pleasure principle and challenge and progress aspects of it in their book (Akhtar and O'Neil, 2011). However, what remains clear in the writing of Rosenbaum, Akhtar, O'Neil, and Freud is their centring of the concept of pleasure being linked to primarily mental faculties. *The Aesthetics of*

*Awe, Meaning, and Pleasure* looks to take these heady concepts, applying them practically to bodily and aesthetic (physical) exploration. We can step away from the cerebral in exploration and employ it later if necessary.

Simon Shepherd speaks to the integration of audience and pleasure in theatre in the book, *Theatre, body and pleasure*. Here Shepherd says, "Consequently audience pleasure is positioned not within the embrace of orderliness but in escape from it" (Shepherd, 2006, 13). This is directly connected to the previous concept of the postdramatic. Pleasure can manifest itself within the confines of orderliness, yet its true potency often lies in the liberation from conventional structures. This notion combines the concepts of awe and pleasure discussed earlier, especially concerning interoception and aesthetic exploration. Pleasure can be found in orderliness, but inversely, escape from the mundane can also bring forth pleasure and even awe. The concepts of awe and pleasure are going to be paired with interoception discussed in the preceding writing about aesthetics. In the projects that make up the study, it is important that the participants involved are following sensations that they are perceiving as awe and or pleasure to create movement, text, ideas for the project. I am most curious about the instinctual feeling of awe and pleasure in making a performance. If the action or impulse feels correct, then it is pivotal to follow that existing thread. The process of determining what *correct* means can be an individual act, where the artist chases what pleases them, as was the case in *Bedeutung Krankenwagen* (a solo show I devised, which will be talked about in future chapters). Alternatively, as Tan et al. explain previously, we can move this toward a collective action, where a team of people sense into and reflect on what serves the work and the message, theme, spectacle, image, or dare I say plot point being conveyed. *Yes,*

*even plot-driven performances can imbue the principles of pleasure into their work. Surprise!*

If we do this, we open up a space for complete exploration.

While pleasure can create a space for awe, humour, enjoyment, the same is true for unpleasure. Laura Frost also highlights how modernism, and I would add postmodernism also "instruct its reader in the art of unpleasure" (Frost, 2013, 6). She goes on to note how this can be characterized by the sensation in space that is created when tension, obstacles, delay, and pain are held and pleasure is not immediately gratified. This unpleasure in its grotesqueness can be ironic and funny. The discomfort created by the above sensations can create a lot of sensation in the artist and the audience which can be palpable and exciting in the moment, or create massive relief when the moment ends or is satisfied. This unpleasure can lead to further pleasure. If we are obtaining pleasure, in experiencing unpleasure that can also be applied in the work, creating space for humour.

I am proposing that the concept of the pleasure related to interoception and the immediacy of knowing whether one likes something they are viewing (or doing) can be applied to that which they are feeling as it relates to devising new work or moments within a production. The immediate knowing of whether or not one is enjoying or despising a sensation, recognizing if they are bored, or being caught in awe by something surprising or amusing. For the purposes of this study, we will take the idea of aesthetic sensing, that interoceptive knowledge instinct, one step further and apply it to the performers and creators of new theatrical works. This is what I will call aesthetic

embodiment. Aesthetic embodiment are actions taken by those experiencing emotion based on their impulses. At this point it is important to note that the impulses usually talked about in theatre and performance relate only to acting. Through the process of this research project, I'm interested in uncovering ways in which awe, pleasure, and impulses can be used in the devising of material as well as the performing of material. This means that everyone involved in the process of creating a new work (including designers, stage managers, technicians) is encouraged to participate in the writing and performing of the production just as the performers are encouraged to express images and ideas to designers to help craft the world. Everyone has ideas, but in the traditional hierarchical ways of working, artists are not supposed to express them unless it is directly related to their role in the project. If space is created for all members of an artistic team to participate fully, we craft a space where moments of awe, impulses, pleasurable images are expressed into the room, creating the conditions for a truly transformational experience for the artists and the audience. Generally, when we experience pleasure, we want more of it *(unless you're masochistic—no shame there),* and so applying this fundamental principle of following impulses that feel exciting in the process of making a show will be pivotal in exploring the questions of this study. Schoeller and Perlovsky use the term knowledge instinct, which in the process of making performance will relate to the immediacy in knowing that something feels correct, somatically. This goes beyond the thinking mind. Knowledge in this case is not the brain recognizing an event or sensation and then thinking about whether it makes sense, instead, it is the whole body and sensorial system being in the state of awe and pleasure that leads to the making of a decision in the act of creating a new work. From there if we want we can tie ideas together so it makes sense for the artist but doesn't need to spoon feed the audience a clear meaning.

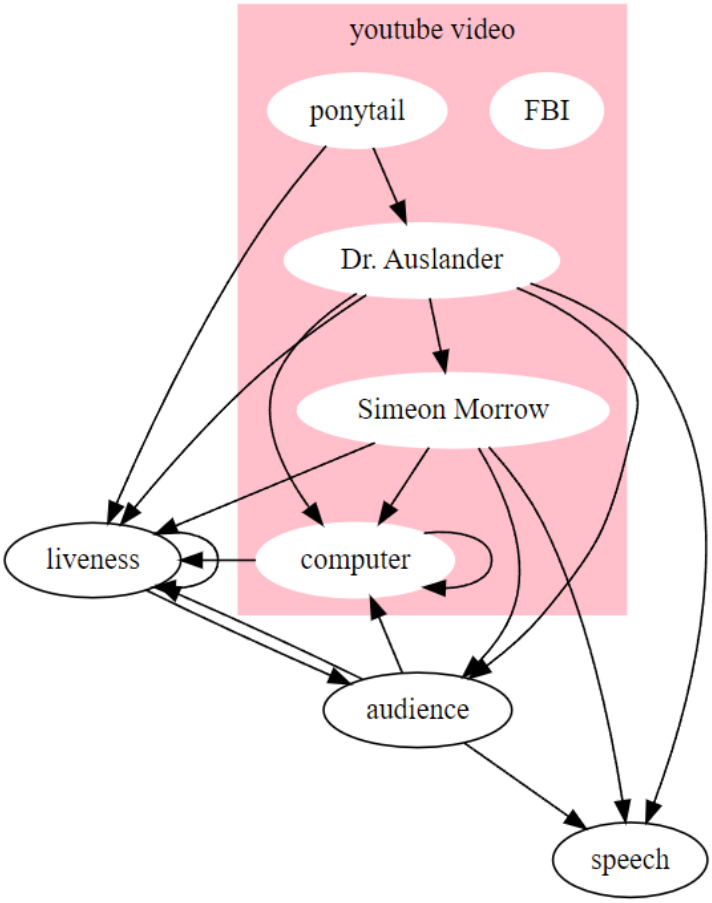


*Figure 3*

*But what does it mean!? The beauty is… you can decide. You are liberated!*

## WHY THEATRE?

The concept of recognizing the audience is sharing space in live performance is central to this project. It encompasses the recognition that having a live audience in the room fundamentally distinguishes theatre and live performance from film and television. “The only way we can sell live theatre now is by saying it’s different from video” (Auslander in Vienna Live with Simeon Morrow, 2023, 12:20). He also asserts that performance of any kind is mostly consumed by an audience through media and not as live events.

From my perspective, plot-driven narrative structures are an attempt to give our audiences all the necessary information so that we can more effectively manipulate their emotions and lead them to understand what is good, bad, funny, horrific, etc. Gareth White asks the questions of “who ‘authors’ audience participation and how, who is in control when participation is happening, and where does the ‘art’ happen - in the event itself, or in the preparation for the event?” (White, 2013, 29). Kirsty Sedgman writes about the disconnection economy and how our increased capacity to connect via technology and the internet should allow us to have positive long-term impacts on social and economic development of communities, but what we are actually seeing is an increase in distrust. Even though we have an innate desire for connection (Sedgman, 2023). She ties the above claim to social media, not our, “naturally divisive urges nor the nature of social media in and of itself, but rather how we’re using social media – or perhaps instead the way it’s now being used against us” (ibid). This is the crisis of the state of western Canadian theatre. The problem is not the audiences not coming to the shows, the problem is how our shows are not using the audiences. In essence, the challenge facing contemporary theatre practitioners is not merely to

attract audiences to their shows but to reimagine the nature of the relationship between performers and spectators. It is imperative to foster a sense of genuine engagement, agency, and mutual respect, wherein the audience members are not passive consumers but active participants in the artistic process. Only through such collaborative endeavours can theatre truly fulfill its potential as a catalyst for social change and community building.

In live performance, the audience has the genuine opportunity and, in some cases, the responsibility to influence and shape the action within the performance space. This influence might manifest through audience participation, exemplified by productions like *For Science* by Edmonton's Small Matters Productions (Christine Lesiak), where several audience members actively join the performers on stage to engage in 'science experiments' that drive the play's action forward. This is also true for Rebecca Northan's *Blind Date* (Spontaneous Theatre) where an audience member is brought up in the performance to be the main character for the evening. Both of these shows have been touring for several years and still have sold-out runs, showcasing just how hungry audiences are for an experience where they are recognized and implicated in the action. Or the potential for failure presents itself because it is clearly not rehearsed, and anything can happen. A third show that requires the audience is *This is the Story of the Child Ruled by Fear* created by Strange Victory Performance. In this production, there are seven cabaret tables with scripts on them. Audience members who wish to be one of the seven participants are asked to sit at a table and read for some of the characters in the show, progressing the action forward, yet again. To note, all of these productions are plot-centric, they experiment with form and audience participation, but they lack the postdramatic quality of severing the reliance on linear narrative structures which propel the performance forward. This form of participation not only blurs the

lines between performers and spectators but also underscores the dynamic role of the audience in shaping the performance. This show is not possible unless the audience is present and is willing to engage with the performers.

Conversely, some performances offer a more immersive experience for the audience, where they are granted the freedom to explore the performance space, interact with the environment, and curate their own experience. These types of works exist on a spectrum. For example, Catch the Keys Productions in Edmonton, Alberta, take over a location, research local horror stories that relate to the theme of the location and present a site-specific production where the audience moves through space, experiencing monologues or scenes based on the content of the research. This experience is more rigid in terms of where the audience members are allowed to go or what they are welcome to interact with since there are characters that travel with the audience (multi-tasking as eyes and interventionists to rowdy audience members). Non-Canadian works such as Punchdrunk Theatre's, *Sleep No More* in New York City and *The Burnt City* in London exemplify a more free approach. While Catch the Keys and Punchdrunk productions may not rely on the audience to progress the play's central narrative, these performances reimagine the way audiences are settled in the space, giving them more agency to navigate performance space, more than audiences in fixed theatre seating. This experimentation with audience placement enhances the opportunity for the audiences to actively shape and curate the course of their engagement through a live performance. Theatre architecture is complicit in limiting experience insofar as its conventional configurations, fixed seating, frontal stages, and clearly demarcated performer-spectator boundaries, pre-determine how audiences are permitted to engage with live work. As the participatory and immersive examples above demonstrate, when these architectural assumptions

are disrupted or abandoned, audiences are afforded greater agency to influence or curate the event, revealing how spatial design actively shapes not only modes of spectatorship but the very conditions under which performance can occur.

Consistent emphasis on producing work in traditional theatre spaces using scripts that highlight plot, limits the opportunities for artists and audiences to experience significantly affective moments (Tannahill, 2015). This is especially true when companies continue to produce work that is not as relevant for the modern audiences. This same sentiment has been echoed for years, Antonin Artaud supported this, "If the public does not frequent our literary masterpieces, it is because those masterpieces are literary, that is to say, fixed; and fixed in forms that no longer respond to the needs of the time" (Artaud, 1958, 75). In a world where we are assaulted by image after image (Debord, 1994) we must look to surprise the audience and involve them as active participants in the experience. Not to surprise them as a way to sell them the spectacle, but to cleanse their palates and to offer something that is genuinely refreshing and exciting. Something that everyone wants to be a part of. This can be done through implementing awe and pleasure into a praxis.

## CONTEXTUALIZING HUMOUR

Humour has long been recognized as a powerful tool in theatrical storytelling, capable of engaging audiences, challenging societal norms, and shocking the audience into realizing things they may not have recognized previously. From the ancient Greek comedies of Aristophanes to the modern-day satire of artists like Sarah Ruhl, Christopher Durang, Isaac Kessler, and Florentina Holzinger, humour has played a central role in shaping theatrical discourse and reflecting the human experience. A key function of humour in theatre is its ability to foster a sense of connection and empathy between performers and audience members. By leveraging elements such as irony and absurdity, performance makers invite viewers to see the world from a new perspective. This can sometimes prompt laughter due to recognizing the absurdity or incongruity of the moment taking place. Thomáš Kulka analyzes the three classical theories of laughter and humour, the superiority theory (Plato, Aristotle, Hobbes), the relief theory (Spencer, Freud), and the incongruity theory (Cicero, Kant, Schopenhauer) and the positions they take on why we laugh and what the nature of humour is (Kulka, 2007). "[The incongruity theory] maintains that the object of amusement consists in some kind of incongruity and that laughter is an expression of our enjoyment of the incongruous" (Kulka, 2007, 320). My work always incorporates humour. *The end. No more thesis to be had here.*

Moreover, humour serves as a powerful tool for social critique and political commentary within the theatrical landscape. Satirical works, in particular, use humour to challenge authority, expose hypocrisy, and provoke thought on pressing social issues. Through the use of exaggeration, parody, and comedic juxtaposition, playwrights are able to engage audiences in conversations about topics

ranging from gender and race to power and privilege. This is particularly evident in the example of Otpor in Serbia related to the protest and overthrow of Milosevic. In the video "Bringing Down a Dictator" we see a student group form (Otpor) with a desire to parody the government in power. This eventually turns into a nation-wide protest of the conditions of their everyday lives and the dictatorship that has fabricated this reality. Eventually Otpor wins. Milosevic is forced to step down. *There was an otporing of support.* "Everything we do must have a dose of humour, because I'm joking, you're becoming angry. You're always showing only one face and I'm always again with another joke, another action, another positive message to the wider audience and that's how we collected a third party" (ICNC - International Center on Nonviolent Conflict, 2019, 8:45). It was important for Otpor to use humour, it created comradery. People who participated in the protest initiated by Otpor bonded together through non-violent means. In fact, it could be argued that they took it steps further and were deliberately utilizing humour and pleasure as a way to instigate change. They created a community who wanted to laugh amidst their less than ideal conditions. Majken Sørensen says, "Humour is also frequently dialogue oriented, and some forms of humourous actions can provide a utopian enactment of the otherwise hard-to-envision futures the activists are striving towards" (Sørensen, 2017, 130). Theatre and performance that employ humour while being created around a message can do this. While humour can bring people together toward achieving a common goal, it also opens up the possibility for a legitimate conversation between parties with opposing views. Often, divisiveness is prompted by expectations. One might expect a conversation to go a certain way, so they approach a situation with a guarded and defensive mentality. However, when humour is used, we can catch the other party off guard, opening up the potential to really be heard. "When a non-humorous discourse is used, it is many activists' experience that the public meets them with preformed opinions about how to respond to

the messages they are expecting to encounter. However, when the message is ironic, people are forced to consider what the activists really mean and the conversation gets a different starting point" (ibid, 136).

It is important to recognize that humour in theatre and performance is not always lighthearted or benign. Dark comedy, for example, explores the absurdity and tragedy of the human condition, often highlighting uncomfortable or taboo subjects. This is also how bouffon functions.

Bouffon is a style of theatre that was "originally" taught by Jacques Lecoq in the 1960s at his theatre school in France. Originally is in quotation marks because the concept of bouffon comes from a long and complicated history of events in France where the lepers, swamp people, and those at the bottom of society were given the opportunity to mock and satirize the aristocracy for one day. This was referred to as la fete d'ane (the feast of the ass) or the feast of fools. The disenfranchised people who were now able to mock the higher classes had to balance their commentary with humour and charm. If they were too crass or rude, they would be punished. However, if they executed their parody effectively, they would have the members of the higher classes howling in laughter at their own image. This rumour is, sometimes members of the upper class would go home after the mockery, realize their foibles, and end their own lives. This is the intended power of the bouffon. In contemporary society, the form of bouffon is taught (in some settings) where the performer's body is augmented to simulate bumps, amputations, missing teeth, bad skin, etc. while full of charm to show a mirror to the audience about the atrocities of the world. They are full of ridicule. In this ridicule, they must also be extremely charming. However, there are some issues with lumps, bumps, etc. because it harkens to ableism.

Practitioners like Karen Hines, Isaac Kessler, Nathaniel Justiniano, Janice Jo Lee, and Ken Hall are a few examples of North American artists who experiment with what can be called neo-bouffon. Neo-bouffon is a style of performance that adopts qualities of bouffon technique and writing, but without any of the bodily modification. They look to recognize the audience and implicate them in social commentary without needing to modify their bodies in potentially problematic ways. For those who are still confused about bouffon, it is worth looking at Sacha Baron Cohen's work in "Borat" or the final scene in "Bruno". He uses an element of bouffon technique called complicité where his direct audience is complicit in the critique he is making. Complicité in bouffon highlights the role of the audience in perpetuating societal issues. A form of active mimesis. Through this technique, performers invite spectators to become active participants in the critique being presented, revealing how their reactions and responses contribute to the very problems being addressed. By fostering a sense of shared complicity, bouffon confronts audiences with the uncomfortable truth that their actions or inactions play a part in the social dynamics under scrutiny, thereby amplifying the impact of the performance. And in many circumstances, this is presented in a humorous way. This is key.

Bouffon evokes laughter. And it also prompts audiences to confront uncomfortable truths and grapple with complex moral dilemmas. Humour occupies a central and multifaceted role in performance, serving as a catalyst for connection, critique, and personal growth. By exploring the diverse manifestations of humour in theatre, practitioners can gain valuable insights into its transformative potential and its enduring relevance in contemporary artistic discourse.

Humour has always been an integral part of my creative process, serving as both a tool for artistic expression and a means of engaging with audiences on a deeper level. That is why it will continue to rear its ugly head in the thesis through the form of jokes, memes, and the content contained in the online portfolio. As you will see later in the case studies, *Bedeutung Krankenwagen* and *White Guy on Stage Talking*, these performances utilize humour and elements of the aforementioned bouffon to create an interactive space where the performance recognizes the existence of the audience – and openly reacts to the moments that they find humourous.

From the earliest stages of conceptualization to the final performance, I strive to infuse my work with elements of wit, satire, and irony, inviting viewers to explore complex themes and issues through a lens of laughter. This approach not only enlivens the theatrical experience but also encourages audiences to reflect on the absurdities of the world around them and consider alternative perspectives.

In my exploration of humour in theatre, I have found that it possesses a unique ability to transcend language and cultural barriers, uniting diverse audiences in moments of shared laughter and recognition. Whether through slapstick comedy, clever wordplay, or pointed political satire, humour has the power to foster a sense of connection and empathy among individuals from different backgrounds and experiences. This universal appeal of humour underscores its potential as a catalyst for social change and collective action, as evidenced by the role of laughter in movements for political reform and social justice around the world.

In conclusion, humour remains a cornerstone of my creative journey, serving as a multifaceted tool for expression and connection with audiences. Here, the audience's presence is not only acknowledged but actively incorporated, with the performance responding to moments of shared amusement. This ongoing exploration of humour underscores its ability to bridge gaps, provoke thought, and foster genuine connection in artistic expression.

## QUEER THEORY AND TRANSGRESSION

Often Queer Theory can be used as a methodology in work that is placed in theatre, dance, performance art, etc. However, I'm placing Queerness in this section of the thesis as I relate it to my sense of humour and acts of resistance toward the status quo. Originally, I was very resistant to include Queer Theory as any form related to this study. Mainly because of some mental block in my mind that asserts that if I use Queer Theory as a compass or if I try to incorporate it into my thesis as a Queer artist, then that must mean that all of my work has to fixate on Queer struggles or Queer content. I was enacting what Jane Ward refers to as "implicit charges of queer elitism" (Ward in Ghaziani, 2019, 265). *Was I too good to allow my work to hold elements of Queer Theory as methodology? Was I enacting the same elitism that plot-driven narrative structures have over the postdramatic in theatre? Maybe… however, now that I am very old and wise,* I recognize that Queer Theory does have a significance in the work that I make as an artist.

In Louise Turcotte's article "Queer theory: transgression and/or regression" she speaks to ways in which Queer theory can be understood. Fundamentally, Turcotte pulls from Cherry Smyth that Queer Theory goes beyond sexuality and sexual identity, that Queer Theory is "a move towards a

celebration of difference across sexualities, across genders, across sexual preference and object choice" (Smyth in Turcotte, 1994, 3). In many ways, this aligns with my theatrical research, which rejects the traditional structure of plot and narrative storytelling. Just as Queer Theory challenges the norms surrounding fixed sexual identities and gender roles, my work in theatre seeks to disrupt conventional storytelling frameworks, embracing a multiplicity of forms and expressions that move beyond linear, cause-and-effect plots.

This is furthered by McDonald's idea that "Queer theory is a broad, interdisciplinary body of thought that disrupts taken-for-granted assumptions about the world by subjecting all knowledge about social life to critical interrogation" (McDonald, 2017, 130). In this context my research follows a similar path by questioning and deconstructing traditional assumptions about narrative form in theatre, subjecting these conventions: productions, pedagogy, traditions—that are held in high regard by institutions—to critical examination.

In this way, my work looks to challenge the assumptions held by Western Canadian theatre, in playful, humorous, transgressive ways that can be witnessed in Queer culture and Queer Theory. Both Queer Theory and my research celebrate the fluidity of identity and expression, emphasizing that there is no singular, correct way to exist or tell a story which is further supported by antipositivism, which will be detailed in chapter 2.

## PEDAGOGICAL IMPLICATIONS

*Right now, I'd like you to imagine a box. Is it cardboard? Is it glass? Is it an old-timey treasure chest? Make it incredibly specific. Is it similar to a box that you saw when you were a 12-year-old child in an attic and when you opened it a large (Australian large) spider jumped out at you and you screamed and peed your pants and now you live in constant fear that your family will tell that story at your wedding, embarrassing you in front of your life partner and their family, and you'll never live that down and one day you'll get a divorce because of it?*

*…*

*How big is this box? What does it feel like? What types of things would you normally keep in this box? Now I want you to imagine that you open this box, and there's nothing inside. Nothing at all. So the only logical thing to do is to place your dreams in this box. Every single hope and aspiration you've ever had. The box is full of your essence. Everything you have ever been and everything you dream to be. Now you close this box and you begin to walk away and an anvil falls from the sky smashing the box and all of your dreams to pieces. How humiliating… You thought your dreams were safe in this box. You thought that containing them inside one thing would make it so much simpler. And now they're all gone… What would have happened if you placed your dreams in different boxes and hid them around? You could have been a modern-day Voldemort… Unstoppable… And now,*

*here you are—fooled by the false security these boxes have provided. That's intense… (long pause for dramatic and comedic effect)*

Now in case you're confused, these dreams are a metaphor for our skills, and the box is a label that exists in the performance community. In my experience, (and as can be seen through some post-secondary institutions), there is an emphasis placed on labelling ourselves as artists. Are you a cardboard box, glass box, treasure chest—are you an actor, director, playwright? For example, if we look at York University's (Toronto, Canada) program pages for theatre, they have 'streams', "Acting Conservatory, BFA Honours", or "Production and Design, BFA Honours", or "MFA, Dance", or "Stage Direction in Collaboration with Canadian Stage" (Anon, 2022). We see similarities on the homepage of the Yale website where in their drop-down menu under training, "acting, design, directing, dramaturgy and dramatic criticism, playwriting, stage management, technical design and production, and theater management" (Anon, 2022). Institutions typically silo their programs so artists can focus on becoming the best [insert job title here] they can be. It gives them an opportunity to be hyper-focused on one thing for an extended period of time. Institutions claim that this will give them the opportunity to have hands-on experience where they can make mistakes. The problem is mistakes in institutions are signs of failure. They equate to not being good enough. Mistakes and those who make them are not celebrated. Mistakes are not seen as an opportunity to discover new ways of working. I was taught that "this is the way to do acting" (Professor, 2012-2017). And if I wasn't believable enough in working that way, I wasn't a good actor. Much like in a dress rehearsal of a mainstage show, if the Stage Manager has issues with calling a section of the show, they are deemed incompetent for wasting everyone's time. Institutions are built on the back of efficiency and risk-aversion.

I am not saying that we should abolish specialized training areas or disciplines, and I'm not saying that interdisciplinary programs don't exist—heck, I'm in one! I am merely attempting to draw attention to the silo-ization that has historically been a part of the theatre discipline. Through this study I have been experiencing very real and heartfelt frustration at the labelling I find myself attempting to do when I speak about my work. Me, being trained as a theatre-maker, typically refer to myself as a performer/creator since my work lives somewhere between theatre and performance art but I often find myself being asked to define what it is I do. This is the beauty of art and this is the beauty of being a performer/creator, I have and will continue to do it all.

Therefore, it is important for me to reference how most of my professional career and previous studies have been tied directly to theatre and the tools that are frequently used in actor training, however, over the past decade I have been delving more deeply into performance and how that functions in my self-created or group devised work.

*How is an actor different from a performer? This is sort of like asking how a bartender is different than a server. While a bartender can make drinks, run items to tables, and take orders the server takes orders and delivers them to the tables. While they work in the same field, and share some of the same duties, they are not the same thing.*

*"How is an actor different from a performer?" I ask while sitting at the bar at the Banff Centre for Arts and Creativity Maclab Bistro. I have the ears of a Server and a Bartender.*

*“An actor is someone who portrays a different character, and a performer is someone who could be a dancer or singer or something else,” the bartender pipes up. The Server, “Well, an actor is a performer, but a performer doesn’t have to be an actor.”*

*Me, “but what does an actor do?” One of them says, “actors usually talk a lot and pretend to be someone else.” I follow up with asking if a performer pretends to be someone else. They both say, “they don’t have to.” Cue that beautiful moment that only exists in movies, where it’s almost like the answer to all of the universe’s questions happen all at once. Or the moment where the young detective figures out the missing piece of the mystery. This movie moment is short lived because at this point they have to go and do more important things than humour me in my questions of trying to figure out what differentiates performers and actors, if anything.*

My feelings have always reflected the idea that actors were more like puppets than performers. To me, performers have a bit more freedom in what they do. They cross disciplines and often can be seen creating their own work. Of course, artists who identify primarily as actors do create their own work and often have multi-disciplinary practices however, their primary practice is reading the words that someone else has written, under the direction of someone else who has authority over the process. Performers, on the other hand, can have an external director or outside eye, collaborators, or text creators in their process, but generally, I feel their praxis is more individualized rather than interdependent. This sentiment is supported by Carolyne Barry’s online article, “3 Differences Between Actors and Performers.” In this article, she highlights one main aspect that she calls focus. “For the most part, performers are very aware of their audience and

their reactions, whereas actors, whether it is in class, auditions, onstage or on a set, are focused and involved in their scene and their connection to the material. They are not focusing on entertaining an audience" (Barry, 2017). A primary factor of my praxis is the recognition and acknowledgment of the audience. Depending on the project, directors may have actors directly interact with or share their emotions with the audience, breaking the fourth wall. However, shows with plot-based narratives on Canadian stages rarely break the fourth wall or interact with the audience.

My experience in undergraduate actor training programs (Red Deer College and the University of Alberta) emphasized pedagogy built around Konstantin Stanislavski and the Moscow Art Theater's acting technique. I see no problem in using this technique as a baseline approach for actors wanting to pursue a career in theatre. This technique gives the actors the tools to step into the container of the character being portrayed and then perform actions based on the circumstances that the character is going through in a script. Personally, I have found this technique to be of great value when undertaking roles with vast and lofty language because it provides tools to make poetic language active. The emphasis this technique places on playing an action—traditionally a verb (I seduce you, I berate you, I dismiss you)—demands a specificity from the actor that anchors and drives the action and language of the actor in a very clear way. Yet in these programs there were minimal opportunities to be exposed to qualities that lean more into the realm of the performer that Carolyne Barry speaks about above. In my five years of formal training, the mainstage shows that I performed in were: Charles Mee's *Summertime*, Shakespeare's *Comedy of Errors* and *Twelfth Night*, Gogol's *The Government Inspector*, and Canadian playwright Colleen Murphy's *Bright*

*Burning*. These shows were chosen to train actors, and as such lacked a lot of opportunity for the actors to engage directly with the audience (in the Shakespeare plays, there were moments).

This study looks at the ways in which we might look to update theatre pedagogy in post-secondary training programs. In a world where theatre companies are producing fewer large-cast musicals, emerging graduates need the skills and experience of learning how to create and produce their own work. Part of this is not a boycott of actor training, but an expansion of and greater emphasis on training the performer-creator. Someone who can write their own work and perform in it. Coupling this endeavour of updated training methods with the concepts of awe and pleasure create a space where the performer feels liberated to make decisions or choices that are a direct reflection of what it is they wish to say or have the audience feel.

Employing a practice rooted in awe and pleasure, will develop transformative performance approaches that do not allow society's current preference for clean and tidy plot to determine what work is supported and taught throughout universities in Canada. Incorporating a pedagogy rooted in awe and pleasure represents a transformative shift in theatre training programs, challenging the prevailing reliance on linear, plot-driven plays as the standard for artistic merit. By prioritizing experiences that evoke awe and pleasure, educators can cultivate a more dynamic and inclusive curriculum that embraces a diverse range of theatrical forms and expressions.

Traditionally, theatre training programs have tended to prioritize linear plot structures, often at the expense of other forms of storytelling and performance. This narrow focus not only limits artistic exploration but also perpetuates a hierarchy of theatrical genres, emphasizing certain styles over

others. However, by centering pedagogy around the concepts of awe and pleasure, educators can expand the boundaries of what is considered valid and **valuable** in theatrical practice.

By adopting a pedagogy rooted in awe and pleasure, theatre training programs can cultivate a new generation of artists who are not bound by societal expectations or conventions. Instead, emerging artists are empowered to explore their creativity freely, to take risks, and to challenge the status quo. In doing so, educators play a vital role in reshaping the landscape of Canadian theatre, fostering a culture of innovation, diversity, and artistry. In this way we can craft an educational environment where educators are conduits for change, guiding students towards a newfound sense of creative liberation and exploration. As a result, they not only nurture individual artistic growth but also contribute to the evolution of Canadian theatre as a vibrant, inclusive, and dynamic cultural force. Through their commitment to fostering innovation, celebrating diversity, and nurturing exploratory artistry, these programs shape the future of the Canadian theatrical landscape, paving the way for bold new approaches and transformative experiences.

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# CHAPTER 2:

# METHODOLOGIES

# AND METHODS

In this chapter I highlight the methodological approaches employed in this study aiming to dissect the historical hierarchical structures that theatre is traditionally built upon, works that have typically been supported in Canada, and the pieces of contemporary performance makers to create space for an investigation on what can happen from grounding a performative practice in awe, meaning, and pleasure.

## PRACTICE MAKES …

"Practice-based research is an original investigation undertaken in order to gain new knowledge partly by means of practice and the outcomes of that practice" (Loveless, 2019, 5).

The research will draw on a range of methods to explore this approach, including performance experiments/case studies and critical analysis of existing works. The focus will be on developing and refining language around my praxis enabling me to more succinctly express the impact of my work on audiences who witness my work in the wider context of Canadian theatre. The methods will be employed and analyzed to evaluate the efficacy of this praxis framework. Additionally, the research will seek to identify any limitations or challenges inherent in the implementation of this approach, with the aim of iteratively improving and optimizing its application within the Canadian theatre landscape. Through an examination of mostly qualitative data gathered from the methods employed, this study will contribute valuable insights to the ongoing discourse surrounding innovative approaches to theatre practice and audience reception within the Canadian cultural milieu. Three primary case studies that I created will be shared: the first is an online performance about a German nihilist wellness coach, the second is an examination of the practical implementation of concepts into a Shakesperean comedy, and the third is a postdramatic

performance piece created which I presented at the Edmonton International Fringe Theatre Festival.

Along with the exploration and unearthing of the above, I ground the study through hands-on, practice-based research that includes two workshops, open to the public, on devising utilizing awe and pleasure. I also set the ground for the creation of and analysis of performances or extraneous projects that utilize these aspects of tools guiding the process. As it relates to practice-based research, Busch articulates that there exists a palpable shift towards the production of knowledge as a primary objective of making creative work, eclipsing the traditional focus on the creation of a standalone artwork (Busch, 2009).

This shift underscores and lifts the knowledge embedded within artistic endeavours, with art and making serving as expressive tools for ideas, symbols, and signification. By integrating awe and pleasure as guiding principles, these projects become more than mere spectacles; they evolve into dynamic sites of inquiry, inviting the audiences to engage with the complexities of the human experience on a visceral level. It is the analysis and crafting of words upon making or seeing a piece that solidify and make concrete the knowledge that institutions seek. Combining both practice and research gives the artist an opportunity to contribute meaningfully to academia and the broader discourse surrounding the arts. The process of making a work is similar to a lab experiment in the sciences.

By critically examining my own practice, I can uncover insights and innovations, as well as failures, thereby enriching the collective understanding of the intricate interplay between art,

knowledge, and society. In line with principles of practice-based research, Tan et al. attempt to bring Donald Schön's early research on research design into a contemporary culture. As articulated by Schön (1983), reflection in research encompasses various dimensions including reflection-in-action, reflection-on-action, and reflection-in-practice. Tan et al's exploration extends beyond individual introspection to consider how these reflective processes are shared and disseminated among team members. This emphasis on collective reflection aligns with principles of practice-based research, wherein knowledge generation is not confined to individual experiences but flourishes through collaborative engagement and shared learning. Here the examination illuminates a vital aspect of practice-based inquiry, underscoring the communal nature of knowledge construction in performative (ensemble) endeavours.

In pursuit of a more comprehensive understanding of practice-based research methodologies in the area of performing arts, Natalie Loveless' insights offer theoretical foundations. Loveless introduces the concept of "research creation" and advocates for the polydisciplinarity it entails, urging practitioners to challenge mainstream approaches while incorporating diverse methods, perspectives, and theories (Loveless, 2019). This resonates with the practice-based methodology outlined in this study, which utilizes various methods such as practical workshops, collaborative interviews, and the creation of a new show. It also directly relates to antipositivism which I will provide more detail about shortly. By embracing polydisciplinarity, practitioners can break traditional norms and explore experimental avenues for artistic expression, aligning with Loveless' emphasis on methodological multiplicity. Furthermore, Loveless highlights the importance of fostering audience engagement via structures that activate curiosity and desire. This parallels the focus of the study on implementing awe and pleasure as guiding principles in artistic projects,

aiming to enrich the experience of the artist and audience in an artwork. By following what is exciting in the creative process while respecting the aims of a project, artists can open doors to innovative possibilities as advocated by Loveless. Through her writing it becomes evident that Loveless' insights not only inform but also enrich the practical elements of research methodologies, expanding the dynamic interplay between theory and practice in performing arts. Additionally, she highlights the necessity of following what is exciting without disrespecting other forms that are held within an overarching project. Loveless directly supports and informs my research, "…practices work by luring the viewer into a relational schema that activates their desire—to explore, engage, question. It activates their curiosity" (ibid, p. 94). It is this notion of activating the audiences' desire and curiosity that comes out of working through the aesthetics of awe and pleasure. If, as artists, we break traditional norms and incorporate many ways of working, we wedge open the door to new and exciting possibilities.

"Visual art is not simply visual – there is always something written in the work, something textual, in what is seen, whether or not 'words' are present in the form of legible signs" (Dronsfield, 2009, 1). The Aesthetics of Awe, Meaning, and Pleasure looks to incorporate images into the content of the work in ways that they symbolize deeper meaning that can be created by the audience.

By consciously integrating the concept of interoception and aesthetic sensing into an artistic process, this becomes practice-based research. A practical application of a critical inquiry. This study underscores this power, and coupling these practices with the concept of awe and pleasure enable artists to create experiences that resonate deeply with viewers. In live performance, the

incorporation of interoception becomes a conduit for shared experience, which can then be synthesized into findings.

## CONTEXTUALIZING ANTIPOSITIVISM – THE NEW FRONTIER

*Now, hold my hand because people tend to get lost in the woods of which I'm about to speak…* Along with practice-based approaches to this study I am incorporating the lens of antipositivism. But first to understand how I'm using antipositivism, we should start with *positivism*. The term positivism is introduced to the world between the years of 1830 and 1842 in a series of texts by Auguste Comte. Comte, a French philosopher and sociologist, is widely regarded as the founder of positivism. Born in 1798, Comte lived during a time of significant intellectual and social upheaval, marked by the aftermath of the French Revolution and the rise of industrialization. In Comte's view, traditional forms of knowledge, particularly theology and metaphysics were inadequate for understanding the complexities of the modern world. Theological explanations, rooted in religious doctrines, and metaphysical speculations which relied on abstract reasoning, were deemed by Comte as unreliable and inconsistent. His skepticism toward theology and the metaphysical led him to develop a way of viewing knowledge and how humans can truly know anything. He argued for a more rigorous and systemic approach to comprehend the social, political, and scientific dimensions of human existence. To him, this would only be possible through the process of experimentation and observation of things that we can be certain or positive of.

Comte had a positive and negative stance towards religion, taking a perspective that continues to confuse researchers and social critics (Pickering, 2009), and in many ways this serves as a form of inspiration for my work. In discussing my thesis, I often get asked, "what is the problem with

linear narrative theatre?" Nothing, I reply. I oppose and favour theatre! In all forms. But, I am curious what would happen if we create more space for explorations of the artform that do not solely rely on plot as the defining factor of drama. *I am sure long after I am dead thousands of scholars and social critics will be pulling their hair out, trying to figure out what I was actually thinking. Because I am full of contradictions. And because I am important.*

In his writings he proposes that theology and metaphysics are imperfect and inconsistent ways of measuring epistemological data of the world. Therefore, Comte begins to devote his work to highlighting the importance of implementing a structure using scientific methods to verify *how* we can know, *what* we know, in the world. Most approaches to research begin to look at scientific methods and natural sciences as ways to produce knowledge in a world after the Age of Enlightenment. This is how we can perceive positivism. However, this study will be looking to utilize the opposite of positivism, antipositivsim, in the study along with practice-based methodologies. I am choosing to use the term antipositivism over interpretivism in this study as antipositivism takes a very active stance in the refusal of positivism. Much in the same way that the postdramatic looks to move away from dramatic forms.

Antipositivism as a methodology, challenges the Comte's positivist notion that scientific methods alone can comprehensively document and explain the complexities of human experience and the social hierarchies and expectations. Antipositivism, grounded in the belief that knowledge is subjective and context-dependent, provides a critical lens through which to interrogate traditional hierarchical structures within theatre and artistic production (Ryan, 2018). By rejecting the notion of objective truth, antipositivism encourages a more nuanced understanding of the diverse

perspectives and lived experiences that shape artistic practice. Gemma Ryan expands on this by stating that "[Antipositivism] has a 'relativist' ontological perspective. Relativists suggest that reality is only knowable through social constructed meanings and that there is no single shared reality" (Ryan, 2018, 9). This particular perspective is useful in looking at performance because while audiences and artists may experience the same event on same (or different) nights, their interpretations will likely be different. Each person who experiences the event will have a different perspective, and thus, we may see various forms of knowledge be produced. In discussions of meaning making and live performance, the perspectives of Philip Auslander and Peggy Phelan offer contrasting views that showcase the complexities of interpreting live events. Phelan argues for the inherent uniqueness of live performance, emphasizing that each performance is a singular ephemeral event, where each individual experience is original. Phelan also believes that a live encounter can not be fully captured or replicated through media (Phelan, 1993). Conversely, Auslander contends that live performances and recorded performances are not fundamentally different, but are distinct forms with their own conventions. His view suggests that recordings can convey significant meaning and that the perceived superiority of live performance is a matter of convention rather than an inherent quality (Auslander, 1999). From my perspective, both of these beliefs can be held simultaneously. We can create meaningful interpretations via witnessing a live event or a recording, but the ability for the liveness of an in-person, live event has potential to change night after night, include the audience, and fail, creating room for a multiplicity of interpretations.

Antipositivism is further defined by Dr. Huma Hassan. According to Dr. Huma Hassan, as it relates to sociology, "Antipositivism argues that humans are not mere puppets. We have intellectual

capabilities and we are the ones who have created society" (Sociology Club, 2023). Since human beings have created the process of telling stories and the ways in which we do this, i.e. theatre, it is important to note that we do not have to be held captive by the structure of the well-made play. We are able to break free from our marionette strings and explore other ways of working. Dr. Hassan also claims that an antipositivist approach uses smaller sample sizes and they are primarily qualitative methods used in collecting data (ibid). Positivists also relate the existence of certain social phenomena to natural facts for example, family exists, institutions exist, because we can see them. Antipositivists question why these things exist and who created them. Antipositivists are in relationship with rejecting the notion that things are the way they are, just because. While the analysis of works created through the process of this study will lend itself strongly to practice-based methodologies, the practice-based lens can not be the sole methodology. Barbara Bolt questions whether artistic research, often synonymous with practice-based research, risks reducing art to a mere phenomenological exploration of its reception (Bolt, 2004). Moreover, she asks whether the development of such research aligns too closely with ethnographic or auto-ethnographic methodologies. By incorporating an antipositivist framework alongside practice-based methodologies, a richer comprehension of research emerges, reaching beyond mere phenomenological (experiential) assessments. Bolt later asserts that a model based on utilizing practice-based approaches to knowledge production might create a new way of distinguishing the research from dominant knowledge models (ibid).

A fusion of practice-based research and an antipositivist stance underscores the divergence of Western Canadian theatre from conventional modes of knowledge production within the live art ecology. Drawing on antipositivism prompts a critical examination of how we cultivate and train

the artists of the future, challenging established norms therefore fostering innovation within the field. A final word from Loveless' research-creation manifesto can be instrumental here, "Research-creation works in alliance with antiracist and feminist interventions that would ask us to pay attention not only to *who* gets to participate and *whose labour* gets to count but also *which modes of address* are permitted scholarly status" (Loveless, 2019, 57). An antipositivist approach in the arts questions the ways in which we produce knowledge and creates space for new ways of making not only art, but an impact on the academy and therefore our future. In integrating practice-based research methodology with antipositivism, this study adopts a multifaceted approach aimed at moving outside conventional boundaries and embracing the complexities in both artistic expression and academic inquiry.

As mentioned in the literature review, the practice-based elements associated with this thesis will subvert and deconstruct linear narrative structures. Subversion and deconstruction will play a primary role in this study and therefore it will take the form of an antipositivist methodological approach. This methodological approach recognizes the subjective nature of human experience and emphasizes the importance of context, interpretation, and cultural influences in understanding social realities. In adopting antipositivism, this study acknowledges the interplay of multiple factors shaping human behaviour and social dynamics, fostering a more holistic and contextualized understanding of experiences of this study.

I am choosing antipositivism as it is more suitable than phenomenology for the purpose of this study. I do appreciate the lens that phenomenology provides, creating a tool to analyze an experience, especially as it can relate to the individual creating art and the individual viewing it.

However, I am utilizing antipositivism as a larger umbrella in this study, that phenomenology fits under. I look at my own experience of the projects I create with other artists and ask questions of the participants in the works (or workshops) to gain an understanding of how grounding a praxis in awe and pleasure can help create meaning for the artist and subsequently for the audience

Antipositivism serves as a disruptive force that has the potential to challenge deeply entrenched assumptions of the establishment regarding the measurement and validation of knowledge, particularly in the post-Enlightenment era. Historically, the prevailing belief and most-held view has been that knowledge is most valid when acquired through empirical observation and scientific methods, reflecting what can be called the positivist worldview. This epistemological framework prioritizes objectivity and universal truths, often disregarding subjective experiences and diverse perspectives. However, antipositivism undermines these assumptions by asserting the subjective and context-dependent nature of knowledge, and individuals' reflections on their experiences. Antipositivism rejects the notion of a singular, objective reality that can be uncovered through empirical observation alone. Instead, antipositivism acknowledges the inherent complexities and multiplicities of human experience, emphasizing the importance of interpretation, cultural context, and individual perspectives in shaping our understanding of the world.

By challenging the upper hierarchical positioning of positivist methods, antipositivism opens up space for alternative ways of knowing and producing knowledge. It recognizes that traditional hierarchical structures of knowledge production often marginalize certain voices and perspectives, perpetuating power dynamics within society. Antipositivism, therefore, advocates for a more inclusive and pluralistic approach to knowledge, one that acknowledges the validity of diverse

ways of knowing and values subjective experiences alongside empirical data. Antipositivism is deliberately acknowledging power dynamics in institutions, which is an aspect that is not as centred in phenomenology. Which is why antipositivism is the lens I'm adopting.

Overall, antipositivism serves as a critical lens through which to interrogate established norms (like the well-made play in Canadian theatre) and assumptions about knowledge production. By highlighting the subjective nature of human experience and the importance of context, interpretation, and cultural influences, antipositivism fosters a more inclusive and diverse approach to understanding art. The research will contribute to a growing body of work that seeks to expand the possibilities of theatre as an art form and provide practitioners with new tools for creating engaging, impactful, and transformative experiences.

My practice-based antipositivist approach seeks to de-centre plot in the devising and rehearsal process, giving the artist(s) the opportunity to create and perform using elements of awe, which are tools geared toward incorporating awe-ful impulses of the artist in the creation and performance of a work. Furthermore, allowing artists to explore impulses they find exciting and inspiring creates an opportunity for them to be surprised by images or ideas arising in the generation stages of a process. Through the creation process, the whole artistic team is encouraged to offer things that awe them or bring them pleasure (text inspirations, movements, images, etc.), and these often get incorporated into moments of the final performance. This approach of creating space for the whole team to participate in the making of the art subverts yet another hierarchy of playwright as absolute power.

This research is grounded in practice-as-research methodologies, in which documentation functions not as supplementary illustration but as primary research material. Rehearsal notes, audio transcriptions, photographs, and process artefacts are treated as evidentiary traces of embodied decision-making, interoceptive response, and relational dynamics within the rehearsal room. These materials are formally presented as appendices to the thesis, including documentation hosted on the accompanying website, which should be read as an extension of the written text rather than a separate or optional resource.

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# INTERMISSION

**MEAN GIRLS AND COOL MOMS**

The intermission in this chapter serves as a crucial palate cleanser, offering a moment of reflection and reorientation for the reader. In the performative context of this thesis, the intermission disrupts the theoretical intensity of the first section and prepares the reader for the forthcoming praxis. It acts as a bridge, allowing the shift from abstract theory to concrete examples and applications. This is a practical exploration and engagement with the above methodological framework. The intermission blends the praxis and the theory, in similar ways that the material in the portfolio blends art and critique. It is self-aware and critiquing (playfully) art, culture, and traditional ways of knowing. Just as a cool mom might break the tension of an adolescent drama with a laugh or an unexpected gesture, the intermission lightens the atmosphere, creating space for both a mental reset and a deeper engagement with the material that follows. This pause fosters a more dynamic reading experience, one that encourages active participation in the exploration of ideas and their real-world implications. *Afterall, every "good" play has an intermission.*

Imagine a world where the term "cool mom" is not just a passing phrase, but a subject of serious academic inquiry. Where the metaphor of what it means to be a "cool mom" shines a light on the insecurities of being a theatre-artist in a world where social media and immediate access to digital content pulls away an audience for live art. Where people are hungry for an experience beyond being a passive voyeur of plot-driven narratives, but they don't know that…yet. Where we can create thought and critical dialogues through a praxis that centers awe and pleasure rather than shame and guilt. Where artists and audiences can share space and create meaning together.

Where anyone can be a “cool mom” not to belittle other moms, but to show people that there are endless ways to raise a child (make art) in this world.

*What makes a mom a cool mom? Where do cool moms come from? Are cool moms born? Are they a product of their environment? Can a once uncool mom become a cool mom? If someone thinks they’re a cool mom are they automatically disqualified from being a cool mom? How do cool moms handle peer pressure and societal expectations? How do cool moms handle conflicts or disagreements with their children? Can cool moms still maintain authority and discipline without sacrificing their coolness? Can a cool mom also be a traditional or conservative mom? Can a mom be cool to one child but not to another? Can cool moms also be mean girls? Let’s unpack this.*

*When I think of cool mom-ness, I think of Mrs. George in the 2004 hit film, “Mean Girls”. The mother of the titular character (mean girl extraordinaire), Regina George, inspired me to analyze how I might become a cool mom myself. A cool mom who just gets it. We see a prime example of the cool mom in the scene where we first meet Mrs. George. She is completely unphased by her young daughter Kylie provocatively copying every dance move in the music video of “Milkshake” by Kelis in the living room. This exemplifies Mrs. George’s coolness via her positive demeanor and open-mindedness. Despite the sexually suggestive content of the music video and Kylie’s dancing, Mrs. George doesn't react with shock or disapproval. Instead, she maintains a calm and composed presence, signaling her acceptance and understanding of her daughter's burgeoning independence and exploration of her own identity.*

*Mrs. George also bursts into her daughter's room with a tray of drinks proclaiming that it is happy hour from four until six and when asked by her daughter's new friend if there was alcohol in the drinks she retorts with, "Oh god honey, no. What kind of mother do you think I am? Why do you want a little bit, because if you're gonna drink, I'd rather you do it in the house." Mrs. George is an extremely cool mom in this moment. She recognizes risky activities that teenagers may engage in and offers a safe space for them to explore activities of this nature. My own mom offered this as an option for me when I was in high school, but I was not a cool teenager.*

*Later, we see Mrs. George celebrating Regina's promiscuous bunny rabbit Halloween costume, while Mr. George frowns with his arms crossed. "Doesn't she look great, honey?" Mrs. George asks. To which Mr. George does not have an answer. In contrast to a lack of a response from Mr. George, Mrs. George's active engagement and affirmation of Regina's Halloween costume further solidify her cool mom status. By expressing her opinion and seeking validation from her partner, she shows that she is not concerned about societal norms or what others may think of her daughter. Overall, Mrs. George's cool mom-ness is evident in her ability to vocally appreciate and support Regina's choices, even if it results in disapproval from others. She remains true to her own beliefs and encourages her daughter to be confident in expressing herself, fostering an environment where Regina feels accepted and valued for who she is, especially as a sexy bunny.*

*During the winter talent show, Mrs. George with camcorder in hand, dances and sings along to the seductive choreography in "Jingle Bell Rock." Her willingness to actively participate and let loose in a public setting demonstrates her ability to have fun and enjoy herself without concern for what others may think. Her ability to engage in a performative experience as a cool mom sets her apart from other moms. Her confident and carefree attitude sets her apart from other parents who may feel embarrassed or self-conscious about engaging in such activities. Mrs. George performing the seductive choreography indicates her comfort with her own sexuality and her understanding that sensuality is a natural part of human expression.*

*Can she get any cooler? She can.*

*When Regina George and Shane Oman (member of the Varsity Jock Clique) are hot and heavily making out in Regina's room, enter Mrs. George to ask, "Do you guys need anything? Some snacks? A condom? Let me know. God love ya." Exeunt. How cool is this mom. She wants to make sure that her daughter is satiated and enjoying herself in a sensual moment. Her offer to provide contraception to her daughter is responsible and cool because she doesn't shame her daughter or her actions. Mrs. George is enacting a form of liberation!*

*This brings me back to the question of how one can become a cool mom. The coolness of a mom can be influenced by nature and nurture. Some moms may naturally possess qualities that make them cool moms, such as a carefree personality or an effortless*

*ability to connect with their children. However, the environment in which a mom is raised and the experiences she goes through can also shape her parenting style. A supportive and accepting upbringing, exposure to diverse perspectives, and positive role models can contribute to the development of a cool mom.*

*For me, giving birth to and parenting various daughters (performative and theatrical works) over the last decade has invariably resulted in moments where I was a regular mom and moments where I was a cool mom. I was not always a cool mom. I was raised in a traditional way. I was taught that I had to speak clearly and loudly. I was told that I should never tell a story that didn't make sense. I was trained to believe that I had to fit into a box neatly confined within the expectations of others. However, as I grew up and experienced the world around me, I became a cool mom. Like Mrs. George I now exhibit a positive demeanour and open-minded mentality, especially when holding space for my daughters to discover their own identity. As a cool mom, I recognize the risky behaviours that my daughters want to engage in or chase. It is my job to ensure I create a space where they are free to explore these risky opportunities. When my daughters want to try something new or fully express themselves, I am rarely concerned about societal norms or what others may think of them. At all of my daughter's talent shows, I am not afraid to dance in the aisles. I am not afraid to be a part of the madness. I am not afraid to let my hair down and party.*

*In conclusion, Mrs. George tells Cady Heron (Regina's new friend), "I just want you to know, if you ever need anything, don't be shy, OK? There are no rules in the house. I'm*

*not like a **regular** mom, I'm a **cool** mom". There are no rules in this thesis. This thesis is not like a regular thesis. It is a cool thesis.*

*The lights begin to flash on and off, signaling our return to the regularly scheduled programming. Hoping that what is to come is better than the first act.*

# CHAPTER 3: CASE STUDIES: THEORY IN ACTION

## 3.1: CASE STUDY: VERY SMALL AND VERY INSIGNIFICANT—THE TITLE OF MY SEX TAPE…ERR…I MEAN GERMAN NIHILIST BIOPIC. (THIS TITLE PLAYFULLY JUXTAPOSES THEMES OF EXISTENTIALISM AND HUMOUR – IT HINTS AT THE PROFOUND YET ABSURD EXPLORATION OF THE HUMAN CONDITION OFTEN ASSOCIATED WITH NIHILISTIC PHILOSOPHY)

**LINK TO *BEDEUTUNG KRANKENWAGEN IN ONLINE PORTFOLIO:***
**https://www.jaketkaczyk.com/amp-bedeutung**

***PASSWORD: TT24***

Through this project, I highlight my approach to theatre-making, thus reflecting my commitment to pushing the boundaries of conventional artistic expression, using the power of performance to provoke thought, evoke emotion, and inspire change. In *Bedeutung Krankenwagen,* the show discussed in this chapter, I dismantle narrative conventions and invite audiences to engage with characters in new and unconventional ways, redefining the possibilities of storytelling, offering a space for exploration, discovery, and transformation.

In September 2021, I developed a performance that looked to subvert the well-made play structure, which I ended up performing as part of the Play the Fool Festival in Edmonton called *Bedeutung Krankenwagen.* In German, bedeutung means, *meaning* and krankenwagen means *ambulance*. So together this is the *meaning ambulance.* This impetus for this show emerged while I was participating in a sound bath session led by Sound Bath Berlin in a Transart Institute online weekend intensive in November 2020. In the months leading up to this Transart workshop, Kristine Nutting and I had been teaching yoga online (because of the pandemic) and our approach to leading

classes focused on making the practice accessible by incorporating comedy, moving away from the spirituality of yoga and introducing concepts of nihilism. This meant that nihilism was at the front of my mind. So, naturally, while drifting away to the sounds of singing bowls, gongs, and German accents—I had a curiosity about how fun, funny, and absurd it might be to have a wellness coach host a sound bath… The twist is, what happens if he's a nihilist? This initial inspiration evolved into the concept for *Bedeutung Krankenwagen* wherein the German nihilist wellness coach provides a platform to satirize the wellness industry (which many people are a part of in some way or another). Right away, this image was something that brought me great pleasure especially in the juxtaposition between wellness and life potentially having no meaning. The juxtaposition of wellness (a realm often characterized by a pursuit of fulfillment and purpose) and nihilism, which inherently negates the assumptions often held by the wellness industry, sparked the creative tension that was the initial springboard of this work.

There are parallels that exist between practices like yoga and nihilism. Yogis believe that attachment is hindering, and nihilists believe that attachment is pointless. Finding places where the nihilistic and yogic principles align, even loosely, sharpens the point of attack that we are all just human beings on this rock hurtling into nothingness. Nihilists would believe that nothing we say or do can really change anything whereas yogis would say that our thoughts and words could change everything so we must be vigilant in our intentions of being 'good people'. In this performance I pull from what Simon Critchley writes about in, *Very little-- almost nothing : death, philosophy, literature* where he mentions the problem with nihilism in that if someone adopts it and falls into the trap of the cynicism they become a passive nihilist (Critchley, 2004, 32). In *Bedeutung Krankenwagen* I found it was the perfect vehicle to blend the qualities of nihilism

without falling into the trap of what Critchley is critiquing. The wellness aspect of the wellness coach allowed me to keep the hope inside the piece.

In its essence, the show serves as a satirical critique of the wellness industry, a cultural phenomenon in contemporary society. Drawing upon personal experiences as a 500-hour yoga teacher and spin instructor, I sought to dismantle the façade of self-improvement peddled by the industry, revealing the absurdity and contradictions lurking under its surface.

While ***Bedeutung Krankenwagen*** was created grounded in using principles of awe and pleasure to subvert linear, plot-driven, narrative structures – it is unique in this thesis because:

- it was created in a solo environment with an outside-eye coming later in the process;
- it was performed in a live online environment; and
- fixated on being developed through the element of a clearly defined character

A challenge that presented itself while working on finishing the development of the performance was the decision by the Play the Fool Festival to completely cancel any in-person events, due to board concerns of COVID. This was a particular challenge as clown performance usually relies on some form of recognition of the audience and an interaction with them through the performance. Since the cancellation of in-person programming happened well before the intended start of the

festival, they had requested that all artists create a recorded piece that could be shared on-demand with anyone who bought a ticket online. To me, this defeated the purpose of doing a clown festival. It was for this reason that I requested that I be able to perform my show live on Zoom. I was lucky enough that the festival organizers enthusiastically agreed to allow me to attempt this. Working to perform a neo-bouffon piece on Zoom was an excellent exercise in using a camera frame, point-fixe (body/physical focus), and digital audience participation.

The devising process for *Bedeutung Krankenwagen* was a journey of subversion and innovation, particularly given the constraints of transitioning to an online platform—a necessity dictated by circumstances of the pandemic, even though the original plan was to do it in-person – where people could be laying down on the floor of the performance space. However, the limitation to moving online proved to be an unexpected opportunity, challenging me to explore novel avenues of expression and engagement.

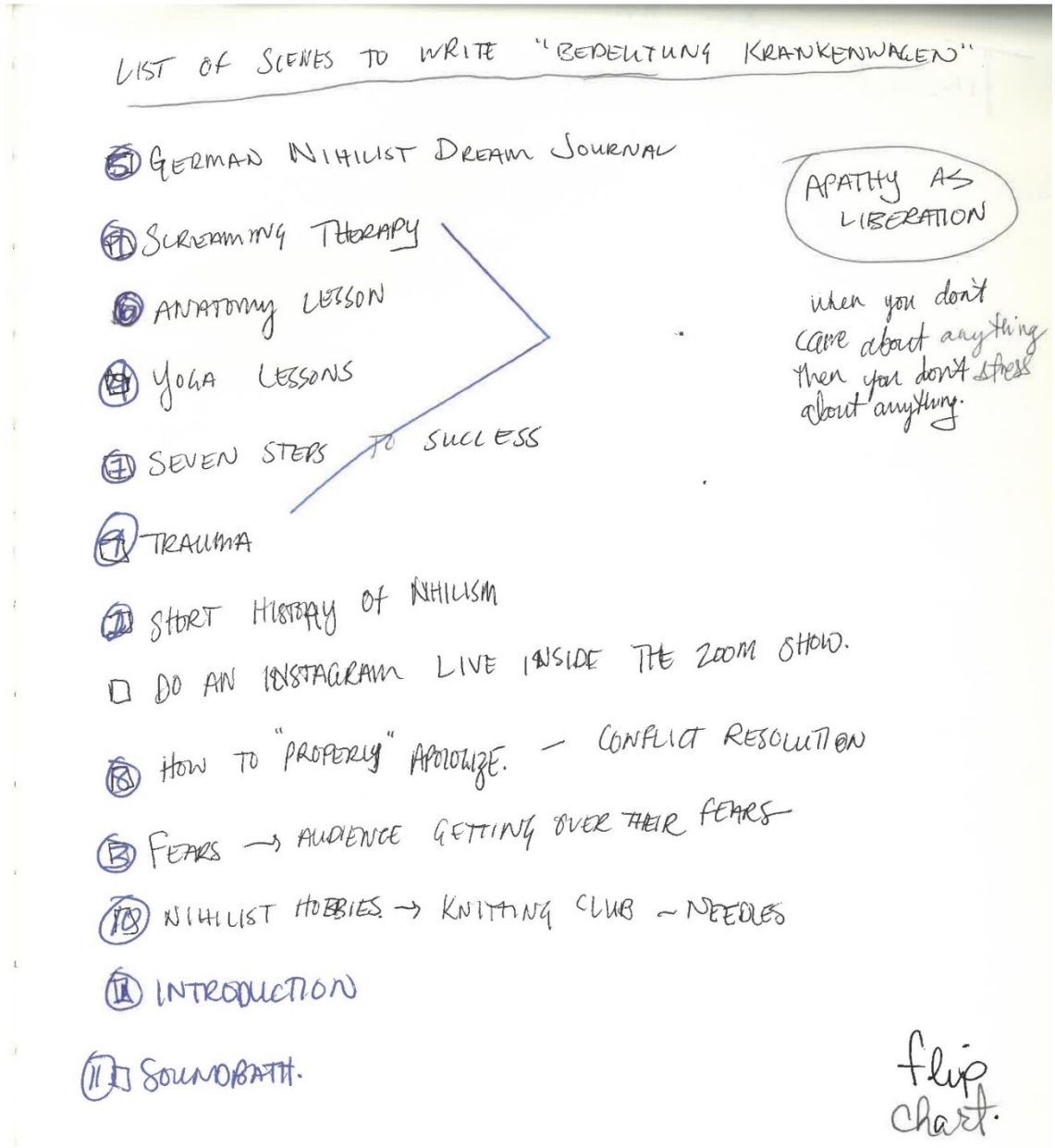
The solitary nature of crafting this piece presented challenges. Creating a show in your living room during a global pandemic necessitates developing the ability to externalize sensations experienced interoceptively. Unlike the collaborative process of other projects where the collective consciousness of the room served as a litmus test for coherence and clarity (having the ability to ask if something makes sense), this solo project required a cultivation of the ability to trust myself. There were no external sources of validation. However, within this project there was freedom to explore images, text, and movement that was not constrained by plot. Part of this process entailed tracking and maintaining an inventory of materials that were generated. In my typical approach to making new work, I act as a facilitator. Even if I am in the work. This involves leading exercises

for generating content for the piece and pulling out things that feel most exciting, crafting deeper explorations to expand on the material being explored. This method in this show did not exist. There were no external participants to include in the facilitation process. I was facilitating me, and to be clear it felt good.

In working on *Bedeutung Krankenwagen* my primary objective was to create a performance devoid of traditional narrative constraints, instead focusing on chasing the images and moments that brought up the strongest sensations of awe and pleasure —an experience grounded in the immediacy of the present moment. The process for creating this show centered around the character, not plot. By prioritizing character development over conventional plot points, I aim to showcase the richness and depth that can be achieved when storytelling transcends traditional frameworks. The creation of this show was a departure from conventional storytelling norms, with the focal point being the development and exploration of the character of Herr Frölich. Rather than crafting a linear storyline driven by predetermined plot points, the creative process resolved around understanding Herr Frölich's complex persona and things that he may say as a wellness coach and a nihilist.

Typically, in my process, I create clusters or lists that help to generate images, jumping off points for text, and other potential areas to explore in creative projects. For this show, I worked on brainstorming things that would be fun or important to share from the perspective of the character. However, due to the constraint of needing to make a 45-minute show, I found myself pleasantly surprised that the majority of the content stemmed from the very first list I created. When making lists in this process, I typically start a timer and write down ideas that come up, attempting to not

edit them. For this show, I started by writing a list of things that might be found in a wellness presentation done by a nihilist.

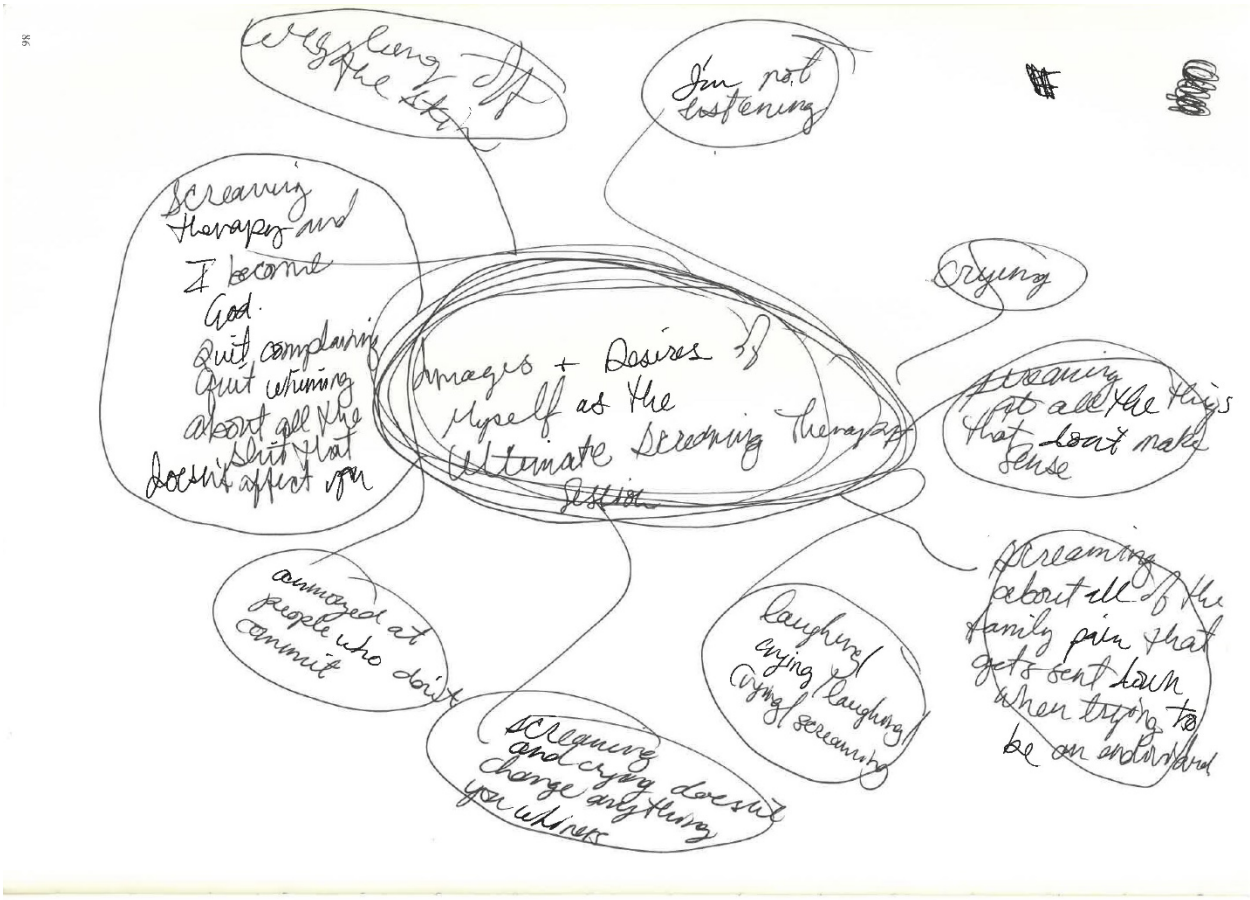



*List 1: Bedeutung Krankenwagen list of things you might find in a wellness presentation.*

Along with counterpointing and sending up the existential notions listed above, I created a list of images that could exist in wellness course or show (think Body Break). This included an anatomy section, yoga lesson, seven steps to success, conflict resolution, dealing with fear, stress management, dream journaling, scream therapy, etc. Some of these became the 'chapters' or 'subtitles' within the show, the itinerary that the German nihilist wellness coach would be sharing with participants throughout the seminar. Utilizing my list of pleasurable images that could exist within a wellness show allowed me to more effectively create content that was exciting, pointed, and had a clear message about what it means to be a human existing in the world.

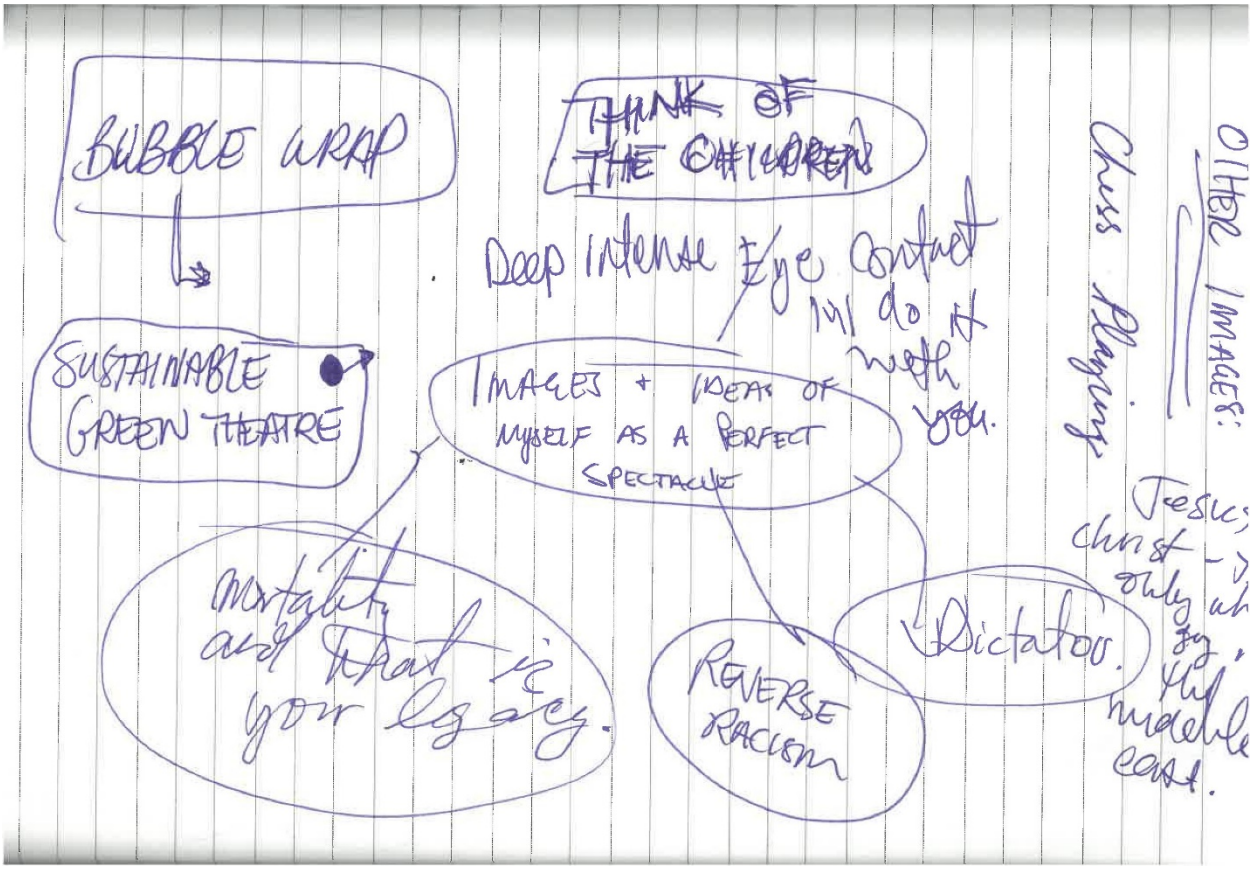
With this show, once I had the list created, I started to work on building the content of each of the items on the list independently. There was no focus on worrying about tying the bits together at this point. They were ordered once each piece had been created and a tiny transition was built between each moment to get from item to item. In creating each piece independently, the emphasis was to create content coming from a place of awe or pleasure. If I found myself stuck on parts where generating material was difficult, I would come back to clustering/mindmapping to try and uncover some potential ideas for the scene or bit. I've included two examples from Bedeutung Krankenwagen below. The approach to clustering is something I learned in my undergraduate program from Michael Kennard and Kristine Nutting where there is a phrase at the centre of a mind map, and then images and ideas stem from that. Michael Kennard uses the phrase, "Images and Desires of Myself as [insert topic of generation here]".


*Cluster 1: sample of generation for initial ideas to tie together elements in List 1, to images or pieces of text that could be used in sections of the show.*




*Cluster 2: sample of Bedeutung Krankenwagen image generation for ultimate screaming therapy.*

I've included a cluster from White Guy on Stage Talking (expanded upon later in section 3.3) below to highlight how this process can be used and how it was used for multiple projects.




*Cluster 3: sample of image generation for perfect spectacle for White Guy on Stage Talking.*

Through a series of vignettes, punctuated by the eccentric delivery of our German nihilist wellness coach, I invited audiences to confront the absurdity of their own existential dilemmas, while simultaneously reveling in the sheer ridiculousness of it all. I want to reference an example of how this process is illustrated in the final performance of the piece. When I created the list of things that Herr Frölich should get through in his show one of the elements was a **short history of nihilism.**

Part of the process of creating this show was understanding the different ways that nihilism can be viewed and understood. Based on investigation into different definitions and types of nihilism, I

turned the research into text within the script *and now I am researching the research within the script (wow, circle of life – cue Lion King music and the creepy monkey)*. The content of the research made its way into the section entitled **#2 Brief History of Nihilism,** and gave me the opportunity to set the vocabulary for the performance. This helped the audience and I to come to a common understanding of what the word nihilism meant in the context of the performance. It was at this point where the audience was invited to type in the chat, unmute their microphone, and participate in the performance – a brief icebreaker for what was to come later on. Right away, the performance goes into a Barbie puppet reenactment of the scene between Romeo and Tybalt in *Romeo and Juliet* but with a nihilist lens. This moment features heavy juxtaposition. It starts off with Shakespearean language and then transitions to a modern critique of what violence feels like to a nihilistic Romeo. Cut to a game of charades to guess the fear of Rodney the miniature classroom skeleton (who doesn't move). Turns out he's afraid of being set adrift in a meaningless universe…

The "Price is Right" music plays, and confetti flies, Herr Frölich brings out a firey sparkler, and more confetti arrives from Rodney's skull (the top of his skill can pop off – he can do so much). This ends with a popular TikTok dance from 2021. In these five minutes, we are confronted with several tools from the chart in the methods and methodologies section – hopefully inspiring some awe and pleasure in an audience who is not being spoon fed a plot-driven story. As we progress through the performance, the moments become more and more absurd. For example, in one section, Herr Frölich interprets the dreams of three audience members. The third interpretation is too personal for him to share aloud so he types it as a private message in the chat. Turns out, it is gossip about another audience member and not a dream interpretation… Unfortunately, it also

wasn't a private message, so the whole Zoom call gets to see the unfiltered commentary on an individual. This choice of playing with the chat was an attempt to maximize the potential of the site-specificity of Zoom as a performance space. This moment was a new attempt at involving the audience and breaking the fourth wall in a way that isn't as possible or as easy in an in-person experience. There are not really text chat functions in in-person encounters, so this was a unique possibility. Personally, I have been in Zoom calls where chats were sent publicly that were clearly meant to be private. This blurring of public vs. private as a device was necessary to explore.

Delving deeper into the utilization of Zoom as a performance space, the digital medium afforded unique opportunities to manipulate the framing of action. In traditional performance venues, actors can move closer to the audience to increase intensity or intimacy, a dynamic that is inherently limited by the physical space and the fixed positions of the audience. However, over Zoom, this dynamic is exploited. By moving towards or away from the camera, I could instantly alter the scale and intensity of my presence (and the point of focus) in the virtual space, directly impacting how the audience perceives and interacts with the performance. Relating this back to Auslander's comment on how liveness is trying to incorporate media into it, I attempted the inverse. It was an experiment of looking at how I could incorporate liveness into something media driven. In this way, Phelan's critique of liveness was blended back into my project, ensuring the audience still received a never repeatable event, where failure was absolutely possible, and in some ways very necessary. Utilizing Zoom as a tool to make this show happen came with obstacles of sharing my screen when I was interrupted by an 'advertisement' which was just the wellness coach character pushing his 'how to be better' material, complete with testimonials. It was not always seamless… And as you'll witness in the portfolio, the recording of this performance doesn't allow you to see

the audience reacting to the piece. These failures added to the liveness of the piece in ways that will never happen in the same way. This event was live, even in its mediatized form.

This manipulation of physical space in a digital medium allowed for an exploration of intimacy and presence in ways that are impossible in traditional theatrical settings. When I moved closer to the camera, my face and expressions filled the screens of the audience, creating an illusion of personal space being invaded, despite the physical separation imposed by the digital medium. This act of "imposing presence" was more than just a visual trick; it was a deliberate attempt to play with the audience's perceptions of closeness and distance, to evoke a visceral reaction that mirrored the intimacy of a face-to-face conversation. It underscored the paradox of digital communication: the ability to feel incredibly close while being physically apart.

This claim is further supported via my translation of the piece from Zoom to in-person in New York City. I performed this show online at the end of September 2021 and then again in-person with the Transart New York residency at the end of October 2022. This was an opportunity to see how this show specifically crafted for an online format, still had the message and theme translate to an in-person production. However, there were sections that did not work as well as they had online. For example, after the final moment of the show, the Zoom meeting ends for everyone. The audience hears, "Thank you for letting me be your Bedeutung Krankenwagen, your meaning ambulance…We are all just human beings on this rock, hurtling into nothingness. It's all senseless" and then the meeting ends and "meeting ended by host" pops up on the participants' screens. There is no bow. People are immediately back in their homes forced out of the experience of the performance. A final moment like this was not the same in-person as it was online. So the

experience and opportunity to work in this way was an excellent experiment. This show was specifically built for Zoom, and in-person the framing is not the same, the devices (like chat) didn't exist, and the overall aesthetic of the piece was different.

In traditional theatre, the audience is physically present but remains separate from the action; in the digital sphere, however, the boundaries are less clear. By filling their entire viewing area, I momentarily breached the comfortable distance usually maintained between performer and spectator, highlighting the inherent intrusion of looking into someone else's space via a screen. By manipulating the physical distance between myself and the camera, I was not only altering perceived presence but also engaging with broader questions about how we construct and perceive identity in digital environments. The choice to occupy the entire screen at times mirrored the way individuals can curate their digital personas, choosing what to magnify and what to minimize in their interactions with others. When you layer in nihilism, you beg the question, does any of this even matter.

The performance's use of camera framing and Zoom tools facilitated an exploration of intimacy and presence in the digital sphere while working on a project that didn't follow a plotline. However, the transition to a physical setting (New York) revealed limitations in some of the original writing. The lack of interactive digital features such as chat, and the different aesthetic of in-person performance necessitated a revaluation of how the piece's themes could be conveyed. Despite these challenges, the experiment underscored the potential for digital performance to offer new forms of engagement and expression.

The show's structure particularly the humourous satirical sections like #7 Steps to Success and #11 Screaming Therapy reflects a critical examination of societal norms and expectations. By employing irony and satire, I deconstructed conventional narratives around success and materialism. Herr Frolich's breakdown and subsequent screaming therapy serve as a metaphor for confronting existential absurdities, inviting the audience to question the nature of success and authenticity in a materialistic world. The final segment, with its chaotic conclusion and jarring use of "this meeting has been ended by host" reinforces the thematic exploration of meaning and human existence, related to the section on humour and bouffon in the literature review section.

For a moment, the audience is left suspended in a liminal space, confronted with the stark reality of their own mortality.

This performance exemplifies my artistic methodology, which leverages awe and pleasure to challenge traditional storytelling frameworks. By prioritizing character-driven exploration over linear narrative structures, I create an immersive experience that encourages active audience participation and intellectual engagement. The show's deliberate departure from conventional plot arcs enables viewers to engage with the character of Herr Frölich on a deeper level, fostering personal reflection and existential inquiry.

By embracing the absurdity of nihilism and breaking free from traditional value systems, the performance encourages audiences to construct their own meaning and reflect on their place in an indifferent universe. This approach aligns with the central thesis of my research, which emphasizes the transformative potential of performance to challenge norms and foster deeper understanding.

By leveraging contemporary and classical references, the performance crafts a situation that is comedic, engaging, and intellectually stimulating. The interactive elements, such as breaking the fourth wall, the audience's participation, and the unconventional use of props like Rodney the skeleton, various cardboard signs, Barbies, and rubber chickens invites viewers to reflect on the nature of existence and meaning. This approach not only entertains but also challenges the audience to consider their perceptions of values and purpose in a seemingly indifferent universe. As the performance unfolds, the layers of absurdity serve to open a space where the audience has the genuine opportunity to determine the meaning of the piece for themselves.

By distilling complex themes and character nuances into a performance based around a philosophical concept, the show embodies the essence of Herr Frölich's worldview while challenging traditional storytelling conventions. Each element, meticulously created using jumping-off points from the initial list of ideas, serves as a testament to the power of focused brainstorming in crafting a compelling and immersive creative experience that doesn't need to rely on plot. By immersing the audience in this visceral experience, the show transcends traditional storytelling conventions to offer a profound exploration of the human condition that was all created via the framing of a very specific character.. Through the lens of Herr Frölich's seminar, viewers are compelled to confront their own mortality and grapple with the eternal question of meaning in a seemingly indifferent universe.

In this way, Screaming Therapy emerges as a poignant metaphor for the human experience itself—chaotic, unpredictable, and ultimately, imbued with a profound sense of meaning precisely because

of its inherent absurdity. By distilling complex themes into a concise step-by-sktep seminar, the show invites viewers to go on their own journey of self-discovery and existential reflection, asking them to confront the stark reality of their own mortality. Through its meticulous attention to detail and uncompromising commitment to authenticity, the show not only entertains but also enlightens, offering a transformative experience that lingers long after the screen snaps to black.

From a fundamental viewpoint, nihilism offers people liberation. For example, Bayındır suggests that a response to the destructive qualities of nihilism are to channel those energies into an emancipatory practice (Bayındır, 2023). By acknowledging the apparent lack of inherent meaning in the universe, individuals are freed from the constraints of traditional value systems and societal expectations. This bleeds into the possibility that the audience can break free from the spoon-feeding inherent in plot-driven plays. Instead of succumbing to despair, nihilism encourages a transformative shift in perspective—a realization that meaning can be constructed and embraced on one's own terms. In this light, *Bedeutung Krankenwagen* not only challenges audiences to confront existential questions but also prompts them to consider how they might harness the energies of nihilism towards personal growth and emancipation. Through this lens, the performance becomes not just a vehicle for entertainment, but a catalyst for profound self-discovery and empowerment.

This work epitomizes my artistic methodology, which prioritizes the utilization of awe and pleasure to craft performances that defy conventional narrative frameworks, notably the well-made play. Rather than merely aiming to entertain, my show represents a deliberate and thought-provoking endeavor aimed at deconstructing established storytelling norms. By challenging

audiences to question and reconsider these conventions, the performance becomes an intellectual exercise, fostering an environment where spectators are not passive observers but active participants in a journey of exploration and reflection.

Central to this approach is the intentional subversion of linear narrative structures. Instead of adhering to traditional plot arcs and character developments, the performance embraces a more fluid and dynamic form, based on character first, inviting viewers to immerse themselves in the complexities of the human experience through the lens of Herr Frölich's seminar. By breaking away from the confines of predictable storytelling, the show creates space for audiences to engage with the character on a profound level.

Furthermore, by leveraging elements of awe and pleasure, the performance transcends mere entertainment, offering an enriching and transformative experience for its audience. Through moments of laughter, surprise, and wonder, spectators are not only captivated but also challenged to explore deeper layers of meaning and significance within the performance. I am not telling them what the meaning is, they are liberated to construct their own meaning. In this way, the show becomes a catalyst for intellectual inquiry and personal growth, inviting viewers to expand their understanding of themselves and the world around them.

## 3.2: CASE STUDY: *THE COMEDY OF ERRORS.* RESEARCH INTO ACTION – THE JOKE IS ON ME.

*I know, I know… In the introduction and literature review I go on and on about how I want to subvert linear, plot-driven, narrative structures… So what am I doing writing about the time I directed a Shakespearean comedy? I guess if I was trying to make excuses, I would say something like, "comedies are full of pleasure!" or "why don't you mind your own business?!" But instead, I want you to imagine me smiling at you (the reader) from over the top of my glasses, maybe with a glass of wine swirling in my hand, and a knowing glance, almost as if to say "wouldn't you like to know…"*

**LINK TO *THE COMEDY OF ERRORS* IN ONLINE PORTFOLIO:**
**www.jaketkaczyk.com/amp-comedyoferrors**

***PASSWORD: TT24***

Due to limited resources and COVID-19 public health restrictions during the 2021 production period, comprehensive video documentation of rehearsals and performances was not feasible. As a result, this case study is supported primarily through photographic documentation, rehearsal notes, and reflective writing, which more accurately reflect the conditions under which the work was created and align with the process-focused nature of the research.

If most of what Canadian universities are teaching is based on a conservatory style approach to training actors, how could the *Aesthetics of Awe, Meaning, and Pleasure* be implemented into a

system that already exists? This project gave me the opportunity to test drive this question. It also allowed me to interrogate how a well-made play could become playful, how encouraging failure could lead to more exciting choices from performers (liberating them to find opportunities for humour), and ways that plot could be de-centred in a plot-centric script. Naturally, some of these queries were easy to test while working on a Shakespearean comedy, and others were not. What follows in this chapter is an examination of how awe and pleasure can be implemented into the practice of leading a process where a linear, plot-driven, narrative script is at the centre.

Less than a year into starting the study I conducted research with the purpose of utilizing elements of the aesthetics of awe, meaning and pleasure to test how they could be implemented into the rehearsal and performance of a Shakespearean comedy. In the summer of 2021, I directed Shakespeare's *The Comedy of Errors* at the Primestock Theatre's Bard on Bower Festival. The Bard on Bower Festival happens every year outdoors in Red Deer, Alberta and usually has a company of actors doing two Shakespearean shows on alternating evenings. Paired with *The Comedy of Errors* this year was *Much Ado About Nothing.*

### 3.2.1: PREPARATION

Having worked on *The Comedy of Errors* in the past as a performer – I was excited for the opportunity to direct my own version of the production where I could look at approaching the piece using aspects of my praxis. *By that I mean not in a musty old boring way – something that Russian daddy Stanislavsky would expect.* I came up with a plan that incorporated elements of awe, pleasure, failure, humour, and experimentation related to the primary questions

of my thesis and worked with the company of nine performers on examining how grounding a praxis in awe and pleasure can work in a process where a classical script is at the centre. Some of these performers had considerable amounts of professional training and experience while others were emerging artists with minimal professional credits. This created an environment where a new vocabulary could be implemented without much resistance because everyone was coming from unique backgrounds and perspectives. This ensemble composed of people with varying levels of experience was antipositivist in nature. The process aimed at allowing the knowledge of the individuals to be an asset rather than a hindrance.

My initial vision for this show came from daydreaming about juxtaposition between style of costumes and style of acting. Most companies who produce Shakespeare in Alberta either look at modernizing the production by choosing to set it in a contemporary time period, or in a very specific thematic genre or they attempt to maintain a traditional approach, doing it in a way we believe Shakespeare would have himself. In my interpretation, the company explored the idea of the French Revolution middle class through the costume designs. The big gowns, jackets, leggings, and shoes gave a heightened feeling of spectacle, especially in a vast outdoor stage where there was an abundance of space to take up. The style of the costumes was effectively juxtaposed with the slapstick nature of the acting.

Working on a show that has a clear and tidy plot, like *The Comedy of Errors* meant that the performers were not being faced with the unknown before them. However, with a Shakespearean script the artistic team is given freedom to deconstruct the text or layer in themes or genres to aesthetically alter the time, place, relationships in the piece. This level of freedom doesn't exist in

more contemporary scripts where the artists must stick to the text that is written. In my version of *The Comedy of Errors* I looked at cutting moments and bits that were not exciting to me.

There were two reasons for this: the first intention was to make the length of the show manageable and not tedious for the audience at any point. Especially since in farces and comedies I generally want to keep the action moving. Of course, there are moments where the momentum or driving force slows down a bit (elements of the love scene between Antipholus and Luciana) to create dynamism in the energy, pace, and action of the production. As such, I eliminated anything that felt too historically relevant/archaic or moments that I felt impeded the drive of the production. This approach helped me to create a version of the show that ran 75-minutes long and seemed to keep the audience engaged. The second reason for cutting sections of the show that did not excite me was a direct method of working using the concepts of awe and pleasure. In my praxis, as referenced before, any instance of following what feels enjoyable and pleasurable in the exploration is a primary component of using pleasure, in this case altering the script.

### 3.2.2: AUDITIONS

Part of opening up the room to be okay with failure actually started in the auditions for this process. The planning for this festival happened during a time where we didn't know if we would be able to rehearse indoors or if COVID would mean that we couldn't do a show at all. As such, auditions took place online via Zoom with the other director of *Much Ado About Nothing*. In the auditions we had the performers read excerpts of the two plays in pairs or trios and then we redirected some of their work to see how well they applied direction in their work. For me this was also to get a

sense of how much they were able to make big offers from what we were asking. One effective way I preface directions I give is to say, “this may be a terrible direction, but are you willing to try it” to give them permission to mess up because it’s likely not their fault but my bad direction that is the problem.

I find that the director taking ownership of a potentially bad idea or idea that could fail gives the performers the sense that they can make a big flop/fail without feeling like it is their fault. This seemed to pay off, more frequently when I gave absurd directions that were entirely removed from the intention of the scene – just to see what would happen and how much fun the room could have. A notable moment was when an English as a second language performer was auditioning and stumbling over the words in a moment where Adriana of Ephesus is fed up with Antipholus and Dromio of Syracuse and forces them into the house. And rather than moving on I asked if the performer could do the lines in their first language. The combination of frustration of their energy, the foreign language, and Antipholus’ genuine confusion made the scene explode with hilarity. The struggle and failure that the artist was experiencing in their initial work through of the content opened up the opportunity for us to find a more exciting and humorous choice in the exploration of the work. Even though this choice did not make it into the final production of the piece, the actor who played Antipholus was able to draw on the genuine confusion experienced in this moment during the audition and apply it to this moment in the play. If the English as a second language artist did not audition and attempt to work through the scene in her original language, we may not have found the brilliance of the moment that we found because of the initial struggle and perceived failure. A common solution to a problem, especially in a cold read (where performers are asked to read text on the spot), is to move on to the next scene. But my initial gut reaction was

to try the idea with switching the language for the performer who struggled with English – because that is the barrier that was being presented. When barriers are presented, they produce an excellent opportunity for an investigation about how the barrier opens up new ways of working or problem solving that can lead to something pleasurable for the artist and audience. This is another example of following pleasure in the process. Observing what feels good and then embodying it, following it to the fullest extent possible. This is an example of how failure can be harnessed in directing and performing.

The above example also highlights the way awe and pleasure can be used in directing, illustrating the transformative power of embracing failure within the creative process. By fostering an environment where artistic risk-taking is celebrated and performers feel empowered to trust and act upon their impulses. The director's willingness to take ownership of potentially risky ideas creates a space where performers can make bold choices without fear of blame, ultimately leading to moments of unexpected brilliance and genuine hilarity. This collaborative approach not only enriches the creative process but also underscores the profound impact of failure as a catalyst for innovation and growth in both directing and performing.

Most of the organizational structure of The Bard on Bower Festival is similar to what can be found structurally at other theatre companies in central Alberta. As such, the audition process was traditional. Actors were expected to read sides for the audition. Two anomalies were that the auditions were hosted online. And that we were casting two shows in rep. Meaning the same company of actors made up the cast of both shows. People with smaller roles in one show, had a larger role in the other show. I had to negotiate with the other director for the actors I wanted in

my show and what role I wanted them to play, to ensure actors weren't overloaded with the amount of material they had to memorize. Negotiating with the other director was painless and enjoyable. Auditions are a chance for the director to curate a team.

Many processes I have worked on as a performer in traditional theatre have been processes where the director has done a lot of preparation in advance of the first day of rehearsal. This means they have a pretty good sense of how they want each moment to go. While this puts the director and leader of a process in a great position to care for their team, it can result in rehearsals that lack spontaneity. In a culture where economics are key, companies rarely have funding to support a long process where play can be at the forefront. This means directors need a very clear idea of how they want each moment to go, even before the performers are in the room. For *The Comedy of Errors* we had a slightly longer rehearsal process since we were doing two shows in rep with a large ensemble and many schedules to work around. This gave me more time to schedule some deliberate opportunities to craft moments of failure.

### 3.2.3: REHEARSALS

### EXERCISES TO ENCOURAGE FAILURE

Challenges were tackled in the rehearsal process by starting rehearsals with games and creating room for failure, emphasising that failure can be fun and extremely informative. An example of this was playing *Simon Says*. Despite its seemingly simplistic nature, Simon Says became a powerful tool for honing the actors' instincts and enhancing their ability to react in the moment. As easy as *Simon Says* is, it becomes more difficult and exciting when being eliminated is the

outcome of making a mistake which is exactly what we did. It, "raises the stakes," to quote acting teachers everywhere. This heightened sense of consequence not only intensified the gameplay but also mirrored the high-pressure situations often encountered in performance. By experiencing the tension and thrill of potential failure in a controlled setting, the actors learned to embrace the spontaneity and unpredictability of live theatre. The game *Simon Says* is especially effective when the commands come out nonchalantly. When a command is given without saying, "Simon says" observers can witness the impulse come up in the players. The players either follow through on the impulse and are eliminated, or they are able to stop before they act on it. This has been effective in showing artists about how clear and intense their impulses can be. Moreover, *Simon Says* provided valuable insights into the nature of impulse and intuition within the creative process. Observing how quickly impulses arise and how we can chose to either act on them or restrain ourselves offers a window into the depths of artistic expression. When we find an impulse inside a scene or devising process, it usually leads to something more intuitive, exciting, and satisfying. It can take several attempts and lots of failure to figure out if something works. *We might as well embrace it.*

In a project that is devised or that has a classical public domain source at the centre, we present the ability for the artists to craft the dialogue in a way that immediately suits the needs of the production. However, in contemporary work where this is not an option. We must look to other methods of incorporating awe and pleasure into the process. For me, this starts with priming the performers to be okay with **failure.** "As a trope or mode of activity, failure is inclusive, permissive even. It can lead to unanticipated effects. One of its most radical properties is that it operates through a principle of difference rather than sameness. A failed occurrence signals the

unpredictable outcome of events where a successful instance might, by comparison, be considered exclusive, prohibitive, and militated by mainstream values" (Bailes, 2011, 2). Bailes' thinking around failure works closely with Tannahill's concept of the cough to explain how liveness, risk taking, and the unexpected create a space that is electric, rather than polished and void of any divergence from what should happen. Conservatory-style training programs that pride themselves on teaching people how to eloquently perform Shakespeare are often reluctant to embrace failure. Often these programs want to approximate perfection.

In the rehearsal process we did an exercise that I learned from Michael Kennard at the University of Alberta called "Believe". It is very simple, like *Simon Says.* The objective is for the player to toss the ball into a bucket. Once you get it in, the next person throws the ball in the bucket at the same distance away. Once everyone has achieved the goal at a set distance, the bucket moves father away. The catch is you keep throwing the ball until you get it in. Involvement of every other player is put on hold until the person tossing gets the ball in. This remarkably creates a team feeling where everyone is vying for the success of each other. Sometimes when the bucket is 15 metres away, it can take a while for people to get the ball in. However, when the ball almost gets in or finally does after prolonged periods of time, the communal response is exhilarating.

This priming for accepting failure allowed the ensemble to explore massive physical choices, entrances and exits through all possible avenues, and physical proximity to the audience. These choices were discovered through rehearsal and an emphasis on creating a cohesive ensemble where even the most ridiculous choice was tried, without fear of failing.

## PROMOTING PLAYFULNESS—FOLLOWING AN IMPULSE

In my usual devising process, I place a high importance on the actor following their impulses. Creating awareness of impulse through *Simon Says* was incredibly important for this process. I prioritize fostering an environment where actors feel empowered to trust and act upon their impulses. This principle is rooted in the belief that genuine emotional responses and authentic moments of connection between performers and audience members are essential ingredients for compelling theatre.

I attempted to include elements of this in the rehearsal and performance of *The Comedy of Errors.* When the artist is having a good time, the audience typically does too, especially if it is rooted in an action or in sharing the experience or moment ***with*** the audience. It is fun to watch someone have fun. Fun doesn't have to mean only being happy in a moment. It can be the fun of really going into devastation, depression, destruction, etc. fully. It is the joy of experiencing. This is applicable to the audience as well. This concept is further exemplified in the performance piece "Negative Space" by the Reckless Sleepers, which was referenced in the literature review. My process allows for failure as does Wetherell's but more importantly, the artists are able to celebrate the failure. The failure can become pleasurable if shared, avoiding indulgence while sharing it with the audience. In Wetherell's work, the performers engage in acts of physical destruction, smashing holes in the drywall set with hammers and chairs. Despite the apparent chaos, there is an intentionality behind each action, inviting the audience to share in the transformative experience unfolding before them. The absence of traditional audience interaction, such as direct address or acknowledgment, does not diminish the impact of the performance; rather, it enhances the sense of immersion.

It is important to differentiate between genuine engagement with the audience and self-indulgent behavior. Indulgence can be seen as an excessive focus on personal gratification or a disregard for the intended message of the production, whereas genuine engagement involves a sincere desire to connect with and evoke a response from the audience. Self-indulgent qualities emerge when elements of a production lose sight of the message or thematic purpose, prioritizing individual desires over the collective experience of the event.

In absolute drama, as defined by Szondi, the audience is typically not acknowledged, yet this does not necessarily imply self-indulgence (Szondi in Hyong, 2009). Postdramatic theatre, which challenges traditional notions of performance and narrative structures, is usually critiqued because it seems to be indulgent due to its departure from conventional theatrical norms. However, the presence or absence of audience acknowledgment alone does not determine the presence of self-indulgence; rather, it is the degree to which the production remains rooted in its intended message and effectively communicates with its audience that ultimately defines its success. Postdramatic theatre is more likely to receive a critique that it is indulgent because it disregards what is perceived as the “normal” or “appropriate” way to do theatre.

I had thought working on an already produced script while finding ways to incorporate awe and pleasure with an ensemble while keeping everyone comfortable, safe, and engaged would be challenging. In many ways, at the beginning, it was. Throughout the rehearsal process, I found myself challenged to balance tradition with innovation. While Shakespeare's text provided a solid foundation, I encouraged the cast to explore choices that leaned into the absurd. I believe that the

outlandishness of this particular play gave us freedom to be audacious. If the choices were rooted in the circumstances of the moment, but were amplified in their intensity, the audience would be willing to suspend their disbelief. We delved into the nuances of each character, dissecting their motivations and relationships to uncover layers of depth that could be played in the action of the scenes. As the production took shape, it became clear that our exploration of awe and pleasure was not merely theoretical but manifested tangibly in the electrifying energy that carried each scene forward.

## PLAYING THE OPPOSITE AND EXPLORING TEMPO

Another valuable approach involved giving direction to encourage performers to play the opposite of what might be considered the obvious choices in a scene or in a moment. By exploring alternatives to what would make most sense from a first look, performers often discovered other approaches that also worked in ways that were not predictable. While not all moments of a scene were effective when played in an opposite direction, it did allow for certain elements to be uncovered. Building a culture and environment where failure was okay, allowed performers to try outlandish things that seemed backwards at the time but proved to be valuable in gaining new information about a particular scene. This commitment to embracing unconventional choices facilitated a culture of artistic risk-taking, where performers were encouraged to push beyond the boundaries of familiarity and embrace the unknown. This willingness to try the opposite of initial perceptions in rehearsal not only invigorated the rehearsal process but also fostered a sense of creative freedom and possibility. As performers navigated the complexities of playing against the

grain, they discovered new avenues for expression, connection, and character objectives, finding new things that were surprising to themselves and audiences.

Furthermore, the limits of speed and energy were deliberately pushed to the extreme. Performers were encouraged to channel maximum intensity in their movements and urgency, creating a heightened state of performance and importance for the characters that translated to inviting audiences to be swept up in the energy of the moment. This was particularly important for the solo actor who played both of the Antipholus' and the two actors who played the Dromio's in *The Comedy of Errors.* As the madness of their worlds accumulated, the increase in their urgency (speed and energetic output) helped to tell the full story to the audience. Increasing the speed and energy to the limit created increased risk of the performers fumbling their lines or encountering other issues, but this worked for the characters in the world we were creating. Had the performers not been subjected to exercises promoting failure, this may have been an issue, but our previous encounters with failure supported these actors in their pursuits.

These techniques, integrated into the rehearsal process, served to enrich the exploration of awe and pleasure, fostering an environment where performers felt empowered to push beyond perceived limitations and embrace the transformative potential of their craft. This same ethos extended beyond movement and pace to how we reimagined the structure of the play itself.

There were two specific moments in this production that embodied this approach to artistic risk. The first scene of the play opens with Aegeon arrested by the Duke of Ephesus, as Syracusians are to be put to death if caught in the city. In Shakespeare's original, this brief exchange is the last we see of Aegeon until his intended execution in the final moments. In my version, however,

I crafted two additional scenes in which Aegeon returned to panhandle directly to the audience, pleading for money to save his life. At one point, he appeared with a musical instrument and a cardboard sign reading "HELP" around his neck, attempting to busk for coins. He even referenced a GoFundMe campaign to raise a thousand marks. These interventions blurred the boundary between audience and performer, activating empathy and complicity, and aligning the spectators with Aegeon's journey.

By transforming Aegeon's plight into a shared, participatory experience, the audience became personally invested in his survival, his story no longer a peripheral subplot neatly resolved at the end, but a living thread throughout the performance.

In addition to streamlining the show's length and embracing the principles of awe and pleasure, this process cultivated an environment where artistic risk-taking was not merely accepted but celebrated. By encouraging performers to embrace failure, we opened new avenues of exploration and personalized the performances themselves, their choices became their own.

### 3.2.4: CONCLUSION

*In reflecting on this research project with Shakespeare's The Comedy of Errors, I could not help but embrace the irony of my intentions versus my actions.* Despite my initial focus on subverting linear narrative structures, here I was, delving into the realm of a classical plot driven script. However, amidst this apparent contradiction, I found profound insights into the core questions driving my Ph.D. How does one infuse a well-made play with playfulness? Can encouraging failure lead to richer performances and comedic opportunities? And perhaps most intriguingly, how can the centrality of plot be challenged within a script so inherently plot-centric?

These inquiries found ground in the vibrant chaos of directing this Shakespearean comedy, where each rehearsal became a laboratory for exploring the intersection of awe and pleasure in a theatrical praxis. From the auditions conducted via Zoom, where the unexpected language barriers birthed moments of comedic brilliance, to the playful embrace of failure in rehearsal games like Simon Says, every aspect of the process became an opportunity to challenge convention and embrace the transformative power of shared experiences. Through this project, I discovered that true innovation often emerges from the willingness to engage with failure, to playfully disrupt the expected, and to invite both artists and audiences alike on a journey.

In reflecting on my directing experience, I've found that embracing the potential for failure not only fosters a creative environment but also empowers performers to take risks without fear of blame. By encouraging experimentation, even with seemingly absurd ideas, we discovered moments of unexpected brilliance and genuine hilarity. A standout example was during auditions when a language barrier led to a scene's transformation into a comedic gem. Though this specific choice didn't make it to the final production, it underscored the value of embracing failure as a catalyst for innovation and growth. Ultimately, this experience highlights the transformative power of failure in both directing and performing, illustrating how moments of struggle can lead to remarkable artistic breakthroughs.

This case study demonstrates that even within a plot-centric, canonical structure, it is possible to decentre narrative authority by foregrounding failure, play, and interoceptive responsiveness. The practice revealed that audiences remained engaged not because of narrative clarity alone, but because of the visible risk and pleasure experienced by the performers.

## 3.3: CASE STUDY - WHITE GUY ON STAGE TALKING - BECAUSE WE NEED MORE OF THOSE

**LINK TO *WHITE GUY ON STAGE TALING* IN ONLINE PORTFOLIO:**
***https://www.jaketkaczyk.com/amp-whiteguy***

***PASSWORD: TT24***

*White Guy on Stage Talking* wasn't just a performance; it was an exploration of breaking expectations in theatrical settings. The goal of this project was to refrain from linear narrative structures at all costs throughout all elements of the production. In the creation of this piece, I worked on creating lists and mindmaps (clusters) which were used to generate the content of the show. The generation of content was not geared toward making moments that cohesively connected to one another. I was most interested in creating material that was exciting to me. This excitement was because of imagery, critique made through text, audience interaction, subversion of expectations, movement, sound design, and spectacle that was contained in the show. When I was creating scenes for the show, I was not concerned with how they would connect in the final presentation. I wanted to create moments that interoceptively felt exciting to share. In the beginning moment of the show, my bare butt cheeks pop through a black curtain in a spotlight, horizontally, complete with googly eyes. *This is not in italics or arial because it is true.* My cheeks then go on to lipsync, "Don't Rain on My Parade" by the legendary Barbara Streisand. Halfway through this opening number of the show, my hands place a cigarette in the crack of my butt and smoke appears. This moment often garnered a large response from the audience – to me – this is a perfect example of a way I've created awe in performance. Puppeting my own butt was not easy, so I knew I needed a running crew member to be my butt puppet. Meegan Sweet came

in to help with the show, and I incorporated them into the whole performance as a second character/performer. Meegan started participating quite late in the project. I had already created bits in the show that I figured would be done by someone in a running crew position – although I had not anticipated that the individual would be implicated in every scene. They ended up being a great addition to the project. Some moments that proved difficult or that I was not entirely convinced about were supported by Meegan. Since we have similar training backgrounds (they studied at Red Deer College and the BFA at the University of Alberta) we were already on the same page as it relates to vocabulary for our processes.

It was nominated for an Elizabeth Sterling Haynes Award (Edmonton professional theatre awards) for Outstanding New Work. This successful recognition highlighted how theoretical concepts, academia, and the arts can come together to make an impact on an artistic ecosystem. My hope of exploring how awe and pleasure can be used to subvert linear narrative structures was successful in that it drew a fan base of repeat viewers and garnered a nomination in a prestigious arts awards category. There was no plot to be had in this show. Instead, Meegan and I present a list of 21 things that we were going to go through in the course of the hour-long performance.

1. ASS SONG
2. THE ULTIMATE TRIGGER WARNING
3. NUMBER THREE
4. OLD PEOPLE AND CANDY WRAPPERS
5. HAPPY PRIDE
6. SOULS FOR SALE
7. CREATIVE PROCESS

8. SEXUAL ASSAULT SCENE
9. HEAVEN
10. STRIP TEASE
11. SUPPER
12. PIZZA BAUSCH
13. WHITE MAN ORIGIN STORY
14. MAKE UP TUTORIAL
15. ROMEOS MODERN MONOLOGUE - PERVERT MAN
16. CHAMPAGNE
17. THINGS I'D FIGHT TO THE DEATH FOR
18. DANCE OF DELIGHT
19. INTERROGATION
20. LOVE LETTER TO THE CHILD I'M LEAVING BEHIND IN A WORLD FIGHTING OVER THE SCARCITY OF FRESH WATER
21. LIBERATION

The 21 things listed serve as a performance score rather than a traditional plot. A plot typically involved structured sequences of events that build upon each other to create a coherent narrative arc. It is characterized by cause-and-effect relationships that guide the audience through a story. In contrast, a score in performance art provides a framework or set of instructions that guide the performance but does not aim to create a linear narrative.

In this piece, the 21 things are not designed to form a sequential or interconnected story. Instead they serve as diverse elements that contribute to the overall experience of the performance without adhering to a plot-driven structure. This approach allows for a variety of moments, each distinct and not necessarily linked to one another in a narrative sense, to unfold throughout the performance. The goal is to evoke specific reaction such as awe and pleasure, through these individual elements, rather than to advance plot.

Each moment is meant to engage and surprise the audience on its own terms, rather than contributing to a story. By using a score the performance emphasizes the immediate impact and unique experiences of each element, aligning with the goal of breaking away from traditional linear narratives and exploring new forms of theatrical expression.

In the creation process, each of these pieces was created independently. With no plot tying them together. When I had developed a piece, I wrote it down on a sticky note and eventually I ordered them in a way that intuitively felt good for the progression of the piece and my intentions with it. An example of something that was absurd, but garnered a big reaction from the audience was the "Old People and Candy Wrappers" dance that we performed. It came from an experience that I had when I was watching a dramatic moment in a play and an elderly person decided that they really needed a Werthers Original. The tension in the room was palpable. And I am certain that other audience members have experienced something similar to this in the past. We could see a familiar aspect reflected back at ourselves, but in a way that was satirical and self-aware, with added commentary. *I know, you might be thinking, well if you're reflecting ourselves back to us, isn't that mimesis? In some ways, sure. But with looking the audience right in the*

*eyes and bringing them into the shared experience of what the performers are doing, we move away from the absolute drama and the well-made play where a fourth wall separates the voyeur from the action. This links us back to Aristotle… The difference is, in this method, we see the audience, seeing us, seeing them. It's reciprocal and ongoing. Meegan and I parodying those who eat hard candies in the audience are sharing this moment with the audience. Witnessing their relation to the material. Rather than allowing them to sit there, seeing themselves or situations they've experienced only reflected back at them.* In this way, sharing a common experience directly with an audience can have impact in a way that isn't purely voyeuristic. The audience recognizes themselves in the action, but they are also a part of it.

"Incongruity theory takes its point of departure in the cognitive perception of what is funny and finds that humour involves an incongruity or ambiguity that forces us to think in more than one dimension" (Sorensen, 2017, 132). I played with this concept in the moment within *White Guy on Stage Talking* where Meegan references the Fringe program form where we are required to check the boxes that are applicable for content warnings within our piece. As performers we realized that we didn't have any moments of sexual assault within our script, and we didn't want to upset or disappoint anyone who came to the show specifically to witness sexual assault. Thus, "this is the part of the show where sexual assault happens" was born. Meegan and I then go on to play a game of "go fish" with a deck of cards while the break-and-enter/singing in the rain sound scape from "Clockwork Orange" plays underneath. The line "this is the part of the show where sexual assault happens" serves as a deliberate juxtaposition, highlighting the discrepancy between audience expectations and the actual content of the performance. When the audience hears this line, they

automatically assume that Meegan and I are going to enact violence on one another. Instead, they generate their own imagery vicariously through the soundscape that underscores an innocent card game. Rather than conforming to conventional narratives or catering to anticipated preferences, we purposefully challenge these assumptions with humour and wit. The application of this juxtaposition, humour, and overall bouffon moment (setting up how the audience may have chosen our play because it has sexual assault in the content warnings) ties in directly with the chart that outlines tools for eliciting awe and pleasure. Our further application of the incongruity theory of humour in this particular example is evident in the playful subversion of audience expectations regarding content warnings. The juxtaposition of a seemingly mundane activity with a sinister ambiance creates a dissonance that encourages the audience to reevaluate their initial perceptions and assumptions.

Overall, the use of incongruity theory of humour which is referenced in the literature review, not only generates laughter but also prompts reflection on the nature of expectation, perception, and interpretation in comedic contexts. We can create incongruity via the use of juxtaposition and other tools to illicit awe.

An example of this exists in the section titled, *Pizza Bausch,* our stage manager Louise Mallory leans out of the booth with two pizza boxes and exclaims, “this is for you”. Meegan and I receive the boxes and then as we open them at centre stage, a poem that I am reading begins. It is text from a Transart Institute intensive led by Kate Hilliard where we were to do some writing based on observations of our space. I chose to write a poem from pizza, to me. While this poem was read as a voiceover, Meegan and I recreated a deconstruction of a dance by Pina Bausch’s *Café Müller*.

At the end of our section of it, we enact the lift and drop sequence over and over. Our rule was to go until the audience stopped laughing. On one occasion, this went on for a very long time as some of the members of the audience were physical theatre performers in a show at the Fringe. After the show, they expressed how much they loved that part of the show and about how they couldn't stop laughing and that they realized that we'd keep going until they stopped. It was a fun moment to share with an audience and recognize that they can see the rules or obstacles that you're playing with as an artist. This is something that is uncommon in well-made plays or plays that are contained within a world that doesn't acknowledge an audience. Typically the obstacles are driven by the text and plot in the production. When we move away from plot as a primary element of production, we expand opportunities to play with other obstacles that can create their own meaning for audiences (whether they recognize it or not).

*White Guy On Stage Talking* moved from moments of intimacy and beauty to the absurd quickly. An example of this was going from the section called Interrogation to Love Letter to the child I'm Leaving Behind in a World Fighting Over the Scarcity of Fresh Water. The show transitions from something wild into something quite real. From me satirizing a terrible review from 2016 to a truth of our world that humans think about but don't know how to grapple with. There were many feelings about this show, audiences who crave a neat and tidy plot weren't as taken by it, but audience members who come to the Fringe to see the wild, appreciated what it was I was offering.

A review by Edmonton reviewer Liz Nicholls takes this perspective on it, "I don't want to give away the show's vision of Heaven, except to say it involves a plastic swimming pool and an electric toaster. As in surrealist imagery, you pretty much have to unhinge the lobe of your brain that craves

meaning, then hook it back up for scenes that make fun of fatuous modern practices like makeovers, or wonder about the queasiness that Juliet is 13 when she hooks up with Romeo. And modern theatre, you know, like White Guy On Stage Talking, takes some shivs too. How can you resist the spirit of performance art that water-boards "first-person theatre" in a pool. "Where's the plot?" the torturer demands to know. "How will people know the meaning? Have yourself a Fringe experience, and meaning will kind of seep into you. Don't take anyone prissy." (Nicholls, 2021). Nicholls' take on *meaning* in this show is exactly what it is I was hoping to explore in *White Guy On Stage Talking.*

Each element of the production, from the absurdity of the opening act to the nuanced exploration of societal norms, served as a catalyst for dialogue and reflection. By eschewing traditional narrative constraints, *White Guy on Stage Talking* invited viewers to actively participate in the construction of meaning, challenging them to interpret and engage with the material on their own terms.

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### 3.4.1: CASE STUDY: DIE-NASTY: THE LIVE IMPROVISED SOAP OPERA

**LINK TO SELECTED *DIE-NASTY* MATERIALS *IN* ONLINE PORTFOLIO:**
***https://www.jaketkaczyk.com/amp-dienasty***

***PASSWORD: TT24***

An ongoing project that I participate in is directing "Die-Nasty the Live, Improvised Soap Opera". This unpredictable theatrical experience continues to present a unique opportunity to explore the dynamics of improvisation within a serialized narrative framework, allowing me to test some of this research in an ongoing way.

This show runs every Monday, and like any typical soap-opera, each Monday is a continuation of the action from the week before. Every actor picks a character that they commit to playing for the season, and each season is based around a theme. In the recent seasons, Die-Nasty has explored hospitals, a 1890s circus, a 1980s ski lodge, and most recently a 1950s suburb. In my role as the director, I am tasked with ensuring the storyline of each episode is clear and moving forward, ultimately ensuring the season is enticing and full of drama. I sit in the front row of the audience with the accompanist and I have a microphone that I speak into, calling certain characters into scenes and giving them a brief scenario of what is happening in the scene. The rest is improvised by the performers. Die-Nasty has presented itself as an ongoing laboratory to test the application of key principles central to this study. Since I am not directly implicated in the action that is taking place on stage I am able to make suggestions in the middle of the scenes on the microphones to help inspire the actors to make choices that are intriguing, or that might be fruitful to follow. On occasion, I will offer up obstacles that serve to create some positive tension/opportunities for the actors to fail or succeed that the audience enjoys. This opportunity for failure opens up a level of

tension and engagement that an also be witnessed in Kulka's example of the incongruity theory of humour.

Sometimes, I will call out into the microphone that lines that are catchy or funny need to become a song. An example of this occurred on April 8, 2024, when this German immigrant husband and wife duo in the recent 1950s suburb season told their neighbour to punish her daughter by only feeding her lard and flour. I spoke in the microphone, "they sing the song lard and flour" which turned into something very outlandish, catchy, and fun. The thought of lard and flour as punishment was pleasurable to me, and asking the actors to turn it into a song ended up working very well. An audience member caught the song, which I have received their permission (and the performer's permission) to include as part of the thesis. This moment of me stepping in to add further direction in the scene is a practical example of utilizing interoception. In that moment, I felt a strong pull to hear more about lard and flour and juxtaposing this silly scenic moment with music provided the performers with a chance to make a choice they may not have originally made.

As the director, or rather external guide in Die-Nasty, utilizing interoception, I become able to recognize moments that I find exciting and progress the action and plot in ways that fulfill what is most enjoyable for me. In this way, Die-Nasty becomes an opportunity to test how following the sensations I have, that I perceive as awe-inspired or pleasure-inspired, can translate to audience enjoyment, and trigger bigger choices from the performers. There is also room for outlandishness, and therefore failure, in this format due to its improvised nature, which also creates space for absurdity and the incongruous. This incongruity can result in larger laughs from the audience and more obstacles for the characters. Due to its plot driven nature (being a soap opera) the incongruity

has a limit in some cases. In a short-form improv format, if something is falling apart (plotwise, energy wise, etc.) it is easy to wrap up the game or scene. However, in long-form improv, sometimes we have to live with the consequences. As a director, I have autonomy in stopping a scene in the middle and saying, "this is how it could have gone, but here's what really happened", to restart the scene and salvage what is happening, but that must be used sparingly. I also have the responsibility of making suggestions during the scene to help shape the direction of where the storyline can go and how drama can be crafted. Even though I may have ideas about how I want a scene or overall season to progress at times, the improvised nature of this project leaves room for me to be surprised, and for choices to be made that create massive drama for the characters in the episode. Additionally, actors sometimes make choices that I am not anticipating. This also has potential to throw off plans that I've been making as the evening is progressing or sometimes scenarios I set up are not successful, which implicates me in the game and potential failure of Die-Nasty. Which is all part of the charm. As a result, a show that is unpredictable is formed – directly satisfying what Tannahill suggests is missing in Canadian theatre.

In essence, Die-Nasty serves not only as a captivating entertainment experience for audiences and a fun Monday activity but also a platform to explore awe and pleasure in an improvised process. Methodologically improvisation requires a team effort and a dismantling of a power hierarchy. Even though I am the "director" of the episodes, it does not give me autonomy. The actors are liberated to use their own creativity and are allowed to follow their impulses. By integrating the principles and methodologies of this study into this project, I am able to push the boundaries of improvisational storytelling while simultaneously deepening my understanding of the role of awe, pleasure, and narrative coherence in engaging audiences and enriching a three-decade old show.

## 3.4.2: CASE STUDY: DEVISING WORKSHOP

**LINK TO SELECTED WORKSHOP MATERIALS IN ONLINE PORTFOLIO:**
***https://www.jaketkaczyk.com/amp-dvswks***

***PASSWORD: TT24***

Another major project I undertook to practically test some of this research was organizing and leading a two-day devising workshop open to the public. There are transcriptions of audio clips from the workshop available in the online portfolio that contain some definitions the participants offered for awe, pleasure, desire. There are practical exercises for generating new content. And there are reflections on some of the conversations and explorations in the workshop.

Overall, this project offered an opportunity where creatives from various backgrounds (emerging artists, established artists, former educators, theatre-lovers) came together to collaborate and experiment with aspects of my praxis and exercises that I utilize when devising new shows. This workshop served as a space for exploring the principles of awe and pleasure as grounding elements for artistic practice, providing a platform for participants to co-create and explore new modes of expression. Throughout the two days, participants engaged in a series of exercises, improvisations, and facilitated conversations aimed at deepening their understanding of devising new works, helping them tap into their intuition, and encouraging them to explore new modes of expression. A valuable aspect of this workshop was that it wasn't focused on creating a product. There was no pressure to create anything impressive that was to be shared with an audience on a set timeline. Instead, we were able to try out ideas, make adjustments to them, and try them again with no time

pressure. This approach was intended to be a reimagining of what traditional pedagogy could move toward. As the instructor I offered up techniques that I feel are viable for my process and opportunities to test some of those techniques were presented. However, it was not dogmatic. I was not the all-knowing, all-seeing entity that pours knowledge out that must be consumed. I was an active facilitator and as such a co-conspirator to some of the ideas being worked on by the participants. Together, we were liberated to really explore and see what we could learn from working collaboratively. Utilizing collaborative storytelling exercises, writing prompts, physical improvisations, vocal explorations, and spontaneous ensemble scenes, each activity served as an initiation for cultivating curiosity and discovery. Participants were encouraged to embrace risk-taking, to trust their instincts, and to embrace the inherent uncertainty of the creative process. Sometimes we have an idea of where we might like to end up on a project, but how we get there has major influence in what the end result is. Some material that I generated while in previous devising processes did not make it into the final version of what was at the centre of that particular process, but some of those ideas were used in shows years later.

At the heart of the workshop was curiosity. Participants shared ideas, offered feedback, and supported one another in trying out something new. There were some people who participated in both days of the workshop and others were only able to make one day. On the first day of the workshop I started with a conversation around why I was hosting these workshops and what the broad theme of my research looked to investigate. I discussed the concepts of awe and pleasure with participants and I received some unique perspectives on what these terms meant to them. We then played some games ("believe" as referenced in the case study on Shakespeare, and "rabbit rabbit") that primed us to accept failure and to follow initial impulses. This was a slightly different

experience than the ensemble building experience in *The Comedy of Errors* because in this workshop we were not specifically working toward rehearsing and building a production to be shared with an audience. This was simply a chance to explore with no time constraints of needing to be at a certain point in a certain amount of time. This freedom coupled with participants from very diverse backgrounds meant that there were lots of intriguing conversations and thoughts being brought up in the room.

We started with some simple exercises around what Mike Kennard called "clustering" in the BFA Acting program at the University of Alberta. It's essentially a stream of consciousness mind map. In the middle you start with "Images and Desires of Myself as [insert thing here]" The section being inserted could be [the scariest theatre show on Earth] and then the surrounding bubbles that make up the mind map could be images that come to mind when you think of that. Another thing that I frequently use in my own process and when I facilitate is making various stream of consciousness lists. Usually I'll set a timer and write down things in a list until the timer goes off. And whatever is on the list that excites me or other people in the process become things we explore further. These were fun exercises with the room. And in the portfolio, you will be able to hear some of the writings that emerged from the first day of the workshop.

After these explorations, I led an exercise to generate writing based on my take of the Kristine Nutting method of moving to music with the eyes closed, in ways that feel good, sensing into what images come up. Then after completing one song or a piece of a song one then writes down the list of different images that came up in the exploration. And then the process includes taking exciting images and doing some more robust writing around them. This could include taking an

image and turning it into a monologue about the image. Or it could become a physical exploration that is paired with other writing from the mind maps (clusters) or lists. For me, generating content through these three ways creates space for me to pair content together in ways that are inspiring or unexpected. An example of this was when Kristine Nutting facilitated the creation of *The Big Fat Surprise* for Sarah Ormandy and I in 2016. Somewhere on a list of images (after doing movement to music) was the image of 1,000 eggs falling from the sky and on another cluster there was something about Downton Abbey. Obviously with no budget we couldn't easily make 1,000 eggs fall from the sky, but I could smash several eggs into a clear plastic bag right in front of the audience while Sarah spoke a monologue about Downton Abbey. This is one example that I shared with the group on how these different approaches can work collaboratively to create content for a show. Some of the participants wanted to try pairing some of the lists with improvised monologues/text and images from the movement to music, to see how it can function. It had varying levels of success, but showcased an example of how we might look to use a tool like this for future projects.

This portion of the workshop was intended to give people tools and approaches that they could use to create their own work in a way that they may not have a chance to experience in post-secondary institutions. As mentioned earlier, this is one of the ways I generate images and text in my process. Often it starts with full-body integration in the creation of materials because it lessens the amount of emphasis and power I give to the editorial side of my brain. If my body is in the process then I have more openness to new ideas and less self judgement in my ideas. In the second day of the workshop, we continued with some moving techniques, and focused on trying to create improvised performance pieces while I stood on the outside and directed some of the moments. I used the

frame of the Bible for many of the explorations on the second day because it is a source that is full of well-known stories that can be deconstructed, that have a variety of topics that can be juxtaposed with movement or images and content that is highly susceptible to critique. It started with participants writing down stories or images from the bible that they found elicited awe, shock, surprise, or pleasure. And then sharing brief descriptions of what those stories were about. As the facilitator I took one of the stories that I found most exciting and pleasurable and asked one participant to do a monologue as the character in the story while three other participants did a movement score behind them. Because it was improvised it already had heightened liveness. Anything could happen. With some side coaching (having the monologue done in the style of a sermon, while the movers moved between massive fake smiles with vacant eyes, to deadpan stares on loop) we discovered something that could be used in a full version of whatever our bible play could have turned out to be. As an additional exploration on this day, we worked on what an opening image or sequence could be for the hypothetical show based on the phrase, “in the beginning”. In this moment, we had the lights in the room off, and each performer whispered, “In the beginning”, one at a time. And then each member took a moment, to express a ‘sin’ they may have committed, still in the dark. Once they all finished, the lights turned one with some music that then became the sin dance opening score. In our minds, this action could have all taken place with the audience surrounding the performers in the space, not in fixed proscenium seating.

After this exercise we did a short discussion about the processes and techniques I use and some of the discoveries that took place over our time together. In essence, the two-day devising workshop served as a microcosm of the principles and methodologies central to my research, offering a tangible and immersive experience of the transformative power of awe, pleasure, and collective

creativity. As we explored new pathways of expression and challenged traditional norms, we collectively affirmed several benefits of artistic collaboration and  of the human imagination.

My involvement in guest teaching courses at the University of Alberta Augustana campus provided me with the opportunity to engage with emerging artists, fostering dialogue and critique around contemporary theatre practices. I've been brought in on several occasions by Kristine Nutting to teach in the movement, improvisation, and performance analysis courses to share my approach to devising new work and understand the shifting landscape of modern performance practices. Through facilitating discussions, sharing some of my work, like *Bedeutung Krankenwagen*, and mentoring students, I contributed to the cultivation of new aesthetic interests of the students, some of whom were only in the class for an easy Fine Arts credit, but who grew to appreciate elements of the creative process. My own understanding of the intersection between theory and practice is always enhanced and deepened when I have the opportunity to teach and witness explorations of what I am proposing people test. Most notably, at the University of Alberta Augustana campus, I witness that while they no longer have a dedicated theatre program, they do have students who are interested in aspects of performance and participating in live art. For example, these students were not afraid to find site-specific locations around the university and perform movement scores while unsuspecting voyeurs were in the area. In some classical training programs I find that there is a level of apprehension from the emerging artists when tasked with performing in areas outside of a traditional classroom. This hesitancy may stem from an ingrained adherence to established norms and a reluctance to step outside the familiar confines of traditional theatrical environments, both of which current training programs perpetuate. However, the example from the University of Alberta Augustana campus serves as a reminder of the potential in pushing beyond boundaries,

encouraging artists to embrace new modes of expression and engage with audiences in unexpected ways.

This section of additional practical examples highlights the principles of my practice-based research by serving as a live, experimental arena where concepts could be actively tested. The hands-on nature of the projects aligns with the antipositivst stance in my methodology, emphasizing the importance of subjective experience and co-creation of knowledge. Rather than imposing a fixed set of criteria or outcomes, Die-Nasty, the devising workshop, and teaching at Augustana embraces the fluidity of the creative process and the subjectivity of the human experience.

These experiences also highlight an evolving approach to pedagogy that moves from traditional prescriptive methods. In contrast to conventional models where the instructor can be seen as the ultimate authority, these projects fostered collaborative learning environments. As director and facilitator, my role is not to dictate knowledge but to engage with participants as co-explorers in a shared journey of discovery. This approach underscores the values of experiential learning and the importance of creating spaces where participants could experiment, fail, and grow without the pressure of achieving a product or replication of perceived excellence… Something Canadian theatre has been doing since it started.

These examples demonstrate how pedagogy could be reimagined to better support artistic exploration and innovation. The diverse activities from improv and physical explorations to writing prompts and collaborative storytelling—illustrate the potential for educational practices to

embrace and nurture the unpredictability of the creative process. Ultimately, these projects not only tested and expanded my practice and methodologies, but also offered insights into how pedagogy can evolve to better support creative practice. It affirmed the transformative poser of collective exploration and highlighted the need for educational approaches that value process over product and collaboration over hierarchy. Through this immersive, practical, and antipositivist experience, participants and I alike were able to witness firsthand the boundless potential of artistic collaboration and the profound impact of engaging deeply with principles of awe and pleasure in the creative process.

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# CHAPTER 4:

# ANALYSIS,

# CONCLUSION, AND

# FUTURE WORK

*Why would anyone want to be an actor? In the traditional sense… You're a glorified fleshy puppet being paid abysmal wages to do the bidding of someone who sits behind a table and asks you to do jumping jacks, again and again, only this time with more feeling. Speaking the lines that, most often, someone dead wrote. Why would anyone want to be an actor? Before you get to do any of those jumping jacks for money, you send in staged and edited pictures of yourself and a piece of paper with arbitrary Saussurean markings on it hoping that something, anything catches the puppeteer's attention. Maybe you're lucky and you make it past the gatekeeper, (usually someone named Linda), and you find yourself with the opportunity to do a memorized speech, maybe a song, where you must convince the puppeteer that you are better at make-believing than anyone else to come before or after you. The puppeteer gives you something to try when you've finished your song. This is your chance! Quick, hear what they said but interpret what they really want. Don't mess it up! Why would anyone want to be an actor? Perhaps you land a gig, you do the jumping jacks, you open the show, now what? How exciting, you get to do the exact same thing over and over and over again, with limited variation or change. You become a second officer in your own consciousness, you hit cruise control (not on purpose) and snap out of it when you hear the applause at the end of the night, which makes you think "maybe it is worth it". Why would anyone want to be an actor?*

It is evident that the path of being an actor is lined with challenges and uncertainties. From audition processes to the repetitive nature of traditional performance, actors are faced with obstacles that can deter even the most passionate individuals (and more recently, audiences). However, despite these inherent difficulties, there remains a deep-seated commitment to the craft, a drive that compels individuals to pursue their artistic aspirations against all odds.

## 4.1: LET'S START AT THE VERY BEGINNING, A VERY GOOD PLACE TO START.

As we began with the question of how we can transform the aesthetic landscape of Canadian theatre, we can see that the key to unlocking new creative possibilities lies not in simply following traditional forms, but in embracing a performance modality that is grounded in awe, meaning, and pleasure. The exploration of these concepts throughout this research has revealed a potential shift in how theatre is conceptualized, created, and experienced. By de-centering plot as the central organizing element, this study has not only opened up new ways of making performance but has also highlighted the rich emotional and sensory experiences that can emerge when theatre prioritizes engagement over traditional narrative structures.

This thesis began with the understanding that Canadian theatre, still relatively young in its professional form, is often confined to aesthetic patterns that are overly simplistic, predictable, and formulaic. All brought on by Aristotle's *Poetics* and the conceit that mimesis will lead to catharsis, and we will therefore be changed or absolved. In seeking to understand alternatives to plot-driven narrative structured performances, I have proposed that grounding theatre practice in the principles of awe, meaning, and pleasure can serve as a catalyst for breaking free of these conventions. By emphasizing experiential engagement rather than linear storytelling, we can open new possibilities

for Canadian theatre that are both innovative and original, offering both artists and audiences an opportunity to engage in new and richer ways.

Through a layered theoretical framework, innovative praxis-based methodologies, and a transformative pedagogical shift, this study has contributed to the growing body of knowledge surrounding contemporary theatre practice. More than just an academic exercise, this research challenges the very fabric of conventional theatrical approaches. It offers practical insights into how awe, meaning, and pleasure can be integrated into the creation of performances, allowing artists to experiment with non-linear and non-traditional structures. This is not just about creating new work, but also about rethinking how we train future generations of theatre makers. By incorporating these principles into theatrical training, we are equipping artists with the tools necessary to break away from entrenched formulas and create truly transformative work.

The originality of this research does not lie merely in the individual concepts of awe, meaning, and pleasure, which have been explored in other contexts, but rather in the novel way they have been synthesized within the unique context of Canadian theatre. This work challenges the dominant narrative structures that often dictate how stories are told and consumed, offering a compelling argument for a more dynamic and embodied approach to performance that centers on lived experience rather than the predictable arc of plot. It provides both a theoretical and practical framework for reimagining Canadian theatre in a way that reflects the diversity and complexity of the world we live in today.

Furthermore, this approach to creating new work transcends mere entertainment, offering audiences a potent blend of spectacle and substance. Through the juxtaposition of moments of awe and pleasure with hard-hitting social commentary, artists are creating a platform to engage audiences in a thought-provoking dialogue that challenges conventional norms and prompts deep reflection. By confronting audiences with the incongruous one can evoke a sense of awe that transcends mere shock, leading to moments of deep thought, transformation and hopefully, conversation (or desire to engage with future artistic works).

## 4.2: PEDAGOGICAL IMPLICATIONS

Central to this study is the opinion that the training of artists in Canada must evolve to embrace approaches that subvert a primary place of importance that is often put on linear narrative structures. By coupling this endeavour with the concepts of awe and pleasure, artists can become empowered to make use of their creative impulses and interoception, presenting works that are a direct reflection of their unique perspectives and aesthetic tastes. In doing so, we not only expand the boundaries of theatrical artistry but also cultivate a new generation of performers who are equipped to navigate the complexities of our ever-changing world with grace, ingenuity, and empathy – while engaging audiences that we are continuously trying to rebuild after a pandemic. The time to be exciting is now. We must be an event that people want to participate in.

This study is examining the place of and need for training the performer-creator in addition to the traditional BFA Actor training programs that already exist. We can create room for new and experimental voices, we can look at ways to support this work and to train artists in how to make it. Emerging graduates need the skills and experience of learning how to create and produce their

own work. If our schools are producing performers who are primarily trained in traditional plot-driven theatre, we will continue to see an increase in productions that reflect this. And if theatres continue to mostly produce plot-driven productions our schools will continue to produce performers who are specifically trained to act in plot-centred productions. This is a problem of the chicken and the egg.

## 4.3: ANALYSIS OF CASE STUDIES

*Bedeutung Krankenwagen* was a project that allowed me to experiment with the integration of awe and pleasure in a digital space, testing whether these concepts could still resonate and create meaningful experiences outside of traditional, in-person performance settings. By starting with a character rather than a concept, I was able to explore the visceral, emotional potential of the performance, allowing me to pursue the most exciting impulses coming from me as the writer and performer, rather than an ensemble-based creation. This solo project provided the freedom to explore the sensory and transformative possibilities of awe and pleasure, mirroring the research's broader aim of reimagining theatrical practice beyond linear structures and plot-driven narratives.

*The Comedy of Errors* played a pivotal role in applying the concepts of awe and pleasure to an existing classical text, challenging traditional approaches to performance. By creating a vocabulary that celebrated failure, I was able to foster a process that encouraged the ensemble to take risks, embrace bold choices, and explore new creative possibilities. This was especially valuable within the constraints of a shorter repertory rehearsal timeline, as it allowed us to break free from linear, predictable structures and instead focus on the playful, transformative potential of the material, an approach that aligns with the broader goal of shifting how theatre can engage with audiences on a

deeper, more experiential level. All while gaining a deeper understanding of how failure creates space for exciting offers that may have extreme payoff.

*White Guy On Stage Talking* served as the culmination of both the theoretical and practical work explored throughout this project. Unconstrained by plot, this piece embraced an experimental structure where the flow of energy and impulses took precedence over narrative logic. The sequencing of events was driven not by a traditional storyline, but by what felt right in the moment, by physicality, intuition, and interoceptive response. In essence, this project fully realized awe and pleasure in performance by allowing these concepts to guide the creation process, rather than forcing the process to adhere to conventional narrative expectations. The fact that this approach resonated so deeply, earning a professional theatre award nomination in Edmonton, further validated the potential for non-linear, sensory-driven performance to create meaningful impact within the professional theatre landscape.

The various miscellaneous projects serve as ongoing experiments within the broader scope of this research, offering opportunities to apply and test the concepts of awe and pleasure in different environments, in varied timelines and scopes. While often smaller in scale, these projects allow me to explore the impact of these elements in a variety of contexts I may not typically engage with. Whether curating, teaching, or directing an improvised soap opera, each of these roles gives me the chance to actively guide a process that emphasizes awe and pleasure, while also providing immediate feedback, either from the artists in the room or from the audience. This real-time response is invaluable, offering insights into whether the choices I've made resonate and whether these principles can translate effectively across different modes of practice.

If a process can be promoted where artists feel free to make mistakes especially under the pressure of time, we are given the opportunity to really play within the creation process or while working on an already published piece. This freedom gives an artist the chance to generously explore images or actions that are pleasurable or based in awe. Working within awe and pleasure shapes an experience in a way where spectators can witness the impulses that really excite the artists. This is an externalization of pleasure and awe. This is met in the sense that we are facing something that is bigger than ourselves, an impulse that is a gift from ourselves (or a higher power) to ourselves, that we may share it with the world. *We are storks for creativity.*

All of the entertainment, spectacle, and original content explored throughout this work can also carry a powerful, thought-provoking message. By creating moments of joy and pleasure for the audience, we can then surprise them with a commentary on social injustices or provoke ideas that challenge conventional perspectives, ideas that don't necessarily have clear-cut answers and often highlight our collective complicity. For example, even those of us who identify as anti-capitalist may find ourselves inadvertently supporting companies like Apple, Amazon, and Google, making us all susceptible to critiques of exploitation in ways we might not easily escape.

Presenting such confrontations within a jovial or playful context offers the opportunity to disarm the audience, lulling them into a sense of comfort before turning the situation on its head. This sudden shift, or shock, can then evoke a deep sense of awe. Or humour. It is the bouffon feeling. It's in these moments of surprise that we are humbled, reminded of how much smaller we are than we thought ourselves to be. This process of humbling is closely tied to awe, as it pushes us to reflect on our assumptions and our place within the broader systems of power.

In the Canadian context, there is a need to shift the way we educate theatre artists, encouraging methods of performance that subvert linear narrative structures. By combining this pedagogical shift with the principles of awe and pleasure, we create an environment where performers are liberated to make choices that more directly reflect their interoceptive impulses, rather than simply adhering to the constraints of plot. As we foster a culture where non-linear, sensory-driven performances are normalized, we will see a shift away from the expectation that every moment in every piece must follow a rigid narrative trajectory. This approach to training will allow artists the freedom to create work that is more dynamic, responsive, and ultimately more aligned with the complex, multi-dimensional world we inhabit.

By reimagining performance, not as a series of plot points, but as a space of discovery and sensory exploration, we are creating an avenue for theatre to be both an art form and a site of personal and collective transformation.

## 4.4: FUTURE WORK

*No thanks, I'm done.*

Looking forward, the contributions of this research go beyond simply offering new ideas for theatre-making; they serve as a call to action for artists and educators alike. The findings highlight the need for a shift in how we think about both the audience's role in the theatrical experience and the way theatre is taught. The future of Canadian theatre, as I have argued, depends not only on creating new forms of artistic expression but also on fostering an environment where artists feel

empowered to push boundaries, challenge expectations, and reimagine what is possible within the theatrical space.

This work also opens the door to continued exploration of how other interdisciplinary elements, such as technology, site-specific performance, and collective authorship, can further contribute to reshaping the theatrical landscape. The integration of awe, meaning, and pleasure within performance is not a one-size-fits-all model; it is a flexible framework that can evolve alongside new methods, emerging artistic practices, and ever-changing audience expectations. It is an invitation for theatre practitioners to embrace experimentation, cross-disciplinary collaboration, and a deeper understanding of the transformative power of performance.

Through continued experimentation and refinement of praxis-based methodologies, it may be possible to develop a more comprehensive understanding of the principles and processes underlying creation of new work that centres elements other than plot and how that impacts an audience's experience of performance.

By analyzing insights from diverse artistic disciplines and engaging in interdisciplinary dialogue, future research projects could yield approaches to theatre-making that push the boundaries of traditional narrative structures and foster deeper connections between artists and audiences. Additionally, there is potential for further investigation into the broader cultural and societal implications of innovative theatre practices in Canada. By examining the ways in which non-traditional forms of theatre challenge established norms and assumptions, future research would contribute to a more nuanced understanding of the role of art in shaping individual and collective identities.

Some of this could be started by examining new pedagogical approaches to teaching theatre and performance in Canada. Some of this could be explored by examining the hierarchical structures that often characterize theatre training programs. And, instead of adhering strictly to labels and disciplinary boundaries, future pedagogical approaches could embrace a more fluid and inclusive model that encourages students to explore multiple roles and disciplines. By fostering a culture of collaboration, educators can empower students to cultivate their unique artistic voices and embrace the multidimensional nature of contemporary performance practice. Furthermore, there is potential to explore the role of awe and pleasure as guiding principles in theatre pedagogy. By centering the experience of the audience and prioritizing emotional resonance and enjoyment, educators can create a more engaging and transformative learning environment.

Future work that I would love to see undertaken, whether with me or by another researcher lies at the intersection of neuroscience and the reception of art. With the assistance of funding and collaboration with experts in the scientific community, there is potential to conduct studies examining how different forms of theatre, particularly plot-based versus postdramatic, impact brain activity and cognitive processes. Gathering participants and utilizing non-invasive neuroimaging techniques, such as fMRI, I would be intrigued to see if it would be possible to observe and analyze how people respond to these different styles of performance. Such research would likely help to expand what is already being posited by the Aesthetics of Awe, Meaning, and Pleasure. Further research could shed light on the underlying mechanisms of audience engagement and aesthetic experience, providing valuable insights into the interplay between art and the human mind–and why we like what we like.

By thinking about the intersection of artistic practice and neuroscience, I am intrigued by the potential areas of discovery and furthering of this research. The prospect of bridging these seemingly separate fields excites me, as it promises to open up a deeper understanding of the cognitive underpinnings of aesthetic experiences. By leveraging neuroimaging technology and interdisciplinary performance creation techniques, there is an opportunity to further understand the biological mechanisms underlying audience engagement with different forms of theatre. It also will help to further the research cited above surrounding utilizing interoception in generating new material and the reception of such material.

Blending concepts that can sometimes be perceived as ineffable with concrete science can take the antipositivist explorations into something that can also have scientific backing. My praxis of subverting linear plot driven structures to come up with interesting material can then be applied to making the content narrative-based if desired, as was done in the exploration of *The Comedy of Errors.* Perhaps the same can be said with the antipositivist approach. How can I look to create new knowledge that isn't based on positivism, but can later be supported by it? This is potentially one way to do it.

I am also inspired by the possibility of elucidating how the brain responds to various artistic stimuli, particularly the contrasting dynamics between plot-based and postdramatic performances. Such research holds the promise of not only enriching our comprehension of human cognition but also shedding light on the impact of art on emotional resonance and subjective interpretation.

## 4.5: THE END.

Across the case studies examined in this research, a consistent finding emerges: when performance is generated through process-led exploration grounded in interoceptive awareness, audiences encounter the work less as narrative consumption and more as a shared event of meaning-making. In conclusion, this research does not simply mark the end of an inquiry into the aesthetic possibilities of Canadian theatre but signals the beginning of a broader conversation about the future of performance. By interrogating and reimagining the role of plot and narrative within the context of Canadian theatre, we open up the potential for new forms of expression that are more attuned to the complexities of contemporary life. With the integration of awe, meaning, and pleasure, Canadian theatre can move beyond the limitations of linear storytelling and toward a richer, more expansive theatrical practice, one that speaks to the senses, emotions, and imaginations of all those involved.

The case studies examined in this research operate across differing scales, formats, and constraints, yet collectively illuminate the adaptability and coherence of a practice grounded in awe, pleasure, and interoceptive process. *Bedeutung Krankenwagen*, developed as a solo, digitally mediated work, foregrounded impulse-led creation and demonstrated how interoceptive responsiveness can generate affective engagement even in the absence of shared physical space. *The Comedy of Errors* tested these principles within the constraints of a canonical text and institutional production model, revealing how strategies of failure, play, and incongruity can disrupt inherited narrative logics while remaining legible to audiences. *White Guy On Stage Talking* represents the most fully realized articulation of the methodology, operating outside of plot altogether and allowing rhythm,

sensation, and intuitive sequencing to guide the work; its professional recognition suggests that postdramatic, non-linear performance can resonate within established theatrical economies. Finally, the miscellaneous projects function as an iterative laboratory, enabling rapid experimentation, feedback loops, and recalibration across teaching, directing, and curatorial contexts, and reinforcing the transferability of the approach across modes of practice.

Taken together, these works suggest that the significance of this research lies not only in the production of individual performances, but in the cultivation of a broader artistic mindset, one that privileges curiosity over control, sensation over certainty, and collective encounter over narrative closure. Rather than proposing a singular aesthetic outcome, this project offers a flexible methodology that responds to changing cultural, economic, and social conditions, positioning theatre as a living practice rather than a fixed tradition. We are no longer operating within the historical conditions that shaped Stanislavski and the Moscow Art Theatre; contemporary performance demands new modes of thinking, making, and training. With the foundation laid by this work, Canadian theatre stands at the threshold of a practice that welcomes experimentation, embraces complexity, and foregrounds awe, meaning, and pleasure as central drivers of transformative experience.

# CHAPTER 5:

# EPILOGUE

# BECAUSE THERE MUST ALWAYS BE AN EPILOGUE

*As we wave like the queen and stare off into the sunset, we bid adieu to this phantasmagoria of totally important research. We find ourselves floating in the surreal abyss of endless possibilities. The journey ahead resembles a parade of absurdity and reluctance. Where protest signs don't make any sense, like AI generated people who have too many fingers. Where collaboration dances with chaos, and innovation wears several hats made of cheese. Where dreams are stolen from us by Jeff Bezos, Mark Zuckerberg, and Elon Musk–and sold back to us at double the cost of our hope. We are navigating a labyrinth of avant-garde inquiry, where the boundaries of reason dissolve into a kaleidoscope of wonder. Grab your rubber chickens. Embark through the upside-down world of theatre and human experience. Who knows what awe and pleasure we'll unearth along the way…*

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