

Place-Based Performance

Introduction

This document is the beginning of a personal and lifelong development of an artistic practice. It is a set of guidelines for how to make place-based performance. These guidelines look to build on environmental discourse that, as my mentor James Proctor suggests, strives for “a deepened knowledge and practice of connections rooted in one’s immediate environs that nonetheless do not stop there.” (2015) Consequently, this article is very much a practical manifesto for making a type of performance. At the same time, it is grounded on theoretical frameworks from across several disciplines.

At the core of these guidelines for making place-based performance is the phenomenological idea that our human existence is defined by our *ontological situatedness* explained by Larsen and Johnson (2012). In their words, “No matter where you are or what you are doing, you always find yourself already and immediately in the world and, more important, any questions about the world (or any knowledge of it) instantly presuppose and invoke this situatedness...” (2012, 637) Or as Noë puts it, “we are always, already, here.” (2012, 160) This idea asks us to acknowledge our embeddedness in the world when describing how we understand our environs, instead of pretending like we can separate ourselves from the world to observe it or study it.

During theatrical performance, audience members are seeing and listening, and performers are experiencing in real-time and space. Theatre or performance cannot be understood as text or symbols that can be read, for that denies its existence as an embodied practice, both from the performers’ and spectators’ perspectives. In text, metaphors invoke recalling and imagining, but in the theatre the metaphors exist in space and time, they are seen, heard and felt. In that sense, theatre is always self-aware of its ontological situatedness by asking audience members to be there and perceive with

their whole beings. That is what inspired me to embark on this long-term endeavor. I firmly believe that theatre artists have highly nuanced methods for researching and making sense of the world. In this manifesto, I start from the premise that performance can help us understand places from a phenomenological approach that calls our attention to our ontological situatedness or our being in place.

The structure of this article is based on the idea of the *situated approach*, put forward by the Environmental Studies Program at Lewis and Clark College. The situated approach is a term used to describe an attempt to move beyond separations of nature vs. culture and local vs. global when conducting research. This one aims to help us understand environmental discourse, themes and research in a *situated context*, which could be a geographical place or locale, an object, an event, etc. and it exists in time and/or space, at a deliberately chosen scale. The situated approach provides a way of practicing scholarship that is both grounded in something specific but is also connected to larger processes, theories and actants. Thus, this approach encourages us to look at the details present in a place, and expand our understanding of how these are not isolated but inherently connected to other places.

A situated context is easily comparable to a broad conceptualization of place—understood as a messy network shaped by all sorts of actors and processes. In my writing, I will use *place* instead of situated context because this is a more commonly used term by both academics and other readers. Also, because I refer to scholars who have written about place.

This approach is thought of as an hourglass, broad at the (1)top where we find general theories and existing research about the topic and situated context that one is about to research. The (2)middle of the hourglass is narrow, and that is where we situate our research into a context that is specific, researchable and where we can see the larger issues playing out in tangible and trackable ways. Finally, the (3)bottom of the hourglass is where we make any conclusions, contributions to larger fields of scholarship and

where we might propose plans of action to tackle different problematics. I attempt to translate this approach into a place-based performance making approach.

Part 1: Top of the Hour Glass

The first steps for making new performances are always difficult. It is like diving into the dark bottom of the ocean, only driven by a sense of curiosity, in search of something we don't know yet. In the situated approach, researching has to start at the top, with a topic, a problem, an event, etc. Fortunately, we can look to theatrical traditions for guidance on how to begin to create performance. One useful method for making new work is the one put forward by famous American director Anne Bogart. She takes the widely practiced process of devising, which encapsulates any process of creating theatre collaboratively from scratch, without starting from a script. Moreover, Bogart has a specific approach to devising that includes three fundamental parts: the question, the anchor and the structure (Bogart 2005). In the following I combine Bogart's devising method to the situated approach to inform my ideas of how to make place-based performance.

The performance that I developed alongside this manifesto, in other words the practical application of this theory, was called *Being the Touristed, Part 1: The Unspoken*. For that project, I wanted to make theatre about tourism, the aspects that were rarely examined by people around me, the unspoken aspects of tourism. I wanted it to be from the point of view of the local people, those who are 'touristed'. Throughout this manifesto, I will use my own project about tourism to exemplify some of the theory I put forward.

Existing Discourse

Existing discourse refers to all sorts of conversations and narratives that deal with the topic at hand. Finding existing discourse is the initial step, it is an exploration of what has already been said about your topic. In the world of academia, you would find any

texts or primary sources that can provide information about the topic. When making place-based performance, the sources for existing discourse are more varied, and could include things such as movement, objects, songs as well as stories and newspaper articles. Different projects will require an attention to different ideas and aspects of place and of the place of the piece. As Massey describes, “what is to be the dominant image of any place will be a matter of contestation and will change over time.” (1994, 121) The world is already inscribed with all sorts of stories that, nonetheless, keep changing. Thus, the job of the theatre artist who conducts research with their whole body, from a being in place, is to learn how to notice those contested ideas that live in/as places.

In his book, *Varieties of Presence*, Noë discusses how our ability to perceive and understand the world is dependent not only on our many cognitive and sensorimotor skills, but also on our vantage point (how we are relationally situated within and as part of place). His theory builds on the phenomenological idea that before we can access the world, we are always already situated in it and that universal and simple fact grounds our entire existence, influencing anything we do (Noë 2012). A phenomenological approach to making place-based performance asks artists to trust and cultivate their own sensitivity towards the world and towards themselves, while complementing this with more traditional research that will continue to illuminate how their experiences of the local are actually linked to bigger processes.

Sensitizing ourselves to what is present to us as artists/researchers of place is a matter of exploring the boundaries of habit or style. A theater artist who takes up the exploration of place must explore their own habits and styles. Style, conveniently enough, is already used by theater artists as a concept that allows distinguishing among ways of enacting action. Style is used in the paradigm that Noë calls aesthetic criticism, in conjunction with other concepts, as a way to investigate and define action. A style is a specific way of enacting action. The investigation of style is not done by simply paying introspective attention to what is going on inside us. Instead, what is required in the

aesthetic criticism that performance artists practice is “a critical awareness of and sensitivity to what you are doing.” (Noë 2012, 131) Yet, I would add that an awareness and sensitivity to what we are doing includes a sensitivity to ourselves as the physical manifestation of an action, as a way to notice how when we carry out action, we remake ourselves in the process. Shortly stated, researching place with an embodied and phenomenological approach requires that we explore the boundaries of our habits or styles in which we perform action in specific places. That puts us at the intersection of place and self. Let’s look at three possible ways to engage in phenomenological explorations of place to find existing discourse:

1- Perform an action, and notice how your self comes into contact with a place. Go to a place, one that you are interested in researching. Then, perform a simple action, like walking. Let it involve movement. Let it evolve and take you somewhere. When you feel like you have found a rhythm, or a pattern or something exciting, reflect. Notice what you are/were doing, and how the place affects(ed) your action. This exercise is about cultivating an awareness of your own self and how it is influenced by the place you are situated within. This is one way in which performance helps us understand places in a phenomenological way, for it asks us to be aware of our ontological situatedness:

“to know the self is to explore not only the places it inhabits but also the ontological edges that mark off its possibilities for transformation and growth. Such explorations contribute to an open sense of place by heightening the awareness of context and situation, contingency and possibility, finitude and belonging.” (Larsen and Johnson 2012, 643)

To explore how our self comes into contact with place is to explore how our self (our body, history, emotional state, cognitive development, racial and gender identity, etc.) is influenced by the capsules of space/time we are a part of. Let me give you an example. One time, I went for a walk and randomly started dancing at an empty tennis court. It went for a while, but I immediately stopped once other people were around. I became very aware of the ways in which one is supposed to behave at a tennis court, and it was embarrassing to behave in a different way. There were rules that inhabited that place

and came to life for me as soon as there were other people near me. The place and my 'self' came into contact with each other, and my dancing in the place seemed to be too subversive or improper, and therefore I could only give myself permission to do it when alone. If I continued this research beyond that experiment, I could look at studies of architecture, and the ways in which we define behavior through our constructed environment. I could also look at anthropological studies of sport games and or the way gender is performed in a tennis match. Later I also thought to myself: I could have owned my artistic practice, I was dancing/making art, which people know is weird and unusual. Yet, I did not feel like it was art yet, especially because I was alone. So, I learned about my own insecurities and shame that come from me identifying as an artist and hesitating to actually call myself an artist. Personal identity and the identity of places are interconnected. Both our self and places are constructed through that interconnectedness (Massey 1999). This exercise allows you to explore the existing discourse that is part of a place.

2- Get an *insider's* ideas and perceptions of the place of interest. An insider is simply someone who has a strong or long-standing connection to that place, someone whose identity or routine seems to be significantly intertwined with that place. Find a primary source by an insider, someone who works there, someone who has changed or changes that place regularly, someone who has visited the place many times during their life, someone who tells stories about that place, etc. Trying to access others' experiences of/in place is a way to circumvent the possible effects that artists' biases would have on the research. If we are asked to find other people's experiences of that place, our own experiences might change in a way that allows us to go beyond first impressions.

A primary source could be an academic article, a verbal interaction, a song, etc. Identify how the primary source's connection to the place manifests itself as either content or in the way it is structured and delivered. For example, as part of my thesis performance, *Being the Touristed, Part 1: The Unspoken*, we started from actions such as singing Carnatic music, or making tortillas. We told each other anecdotes and examined the

ways in which we relate to those activities, how those activities are entangled with our identities, and the ways in which other people tend to perceive and relate to those activities. Our bodies are connected to the places we have been a part of, and our sense of self is therefore linked to places by the past and present enactments of our habitual actions, or what Cassey calls our schemes. (2001) Simply put, our self bears the traces of places by having carried out actions in them, by living in/as them. Thus, to get to know pre-existing narratives that inhabit a place, we can look at the *insiders* whose body/self has been influenced by a place or influenced a place. If we find what they say about or do in that place, and explore how they engage in action, we will start to learn things about the relationship between place and human selves.

3- Perform a thematic task: Perform an activity that you know is related to the place being researched. If you are in a forest, go on a hike and pay attention to what it is you do during a hike. Reflect, explore the styles of hiking. What can you do that would be considered part of the hike, and what would make the hike not a hike? How are you changed by the hike, and by the things you encounter? How do you change the forest? Explore the activity and its connections to bigger narratives such as ideas of wilderness in the US, land ownership, and laws that protect wilderness areas. By performing tasks that you have already identified as important or relevant to your framing question and the place you are researching, you get to identify the boundaries of your habitual ways of being in a place (ie. style). After you have identified these, you can start to play with how much you can learn about your relationship with that place through your styles, and you could even begin to imagine new ways of being in that place. As I said before, a phenomenological approach to researching place asks us to investigate the styles and habits as they relate to place, an attention to what we do will teach us about where we are and how we understand and relate to where we are.

Framing Question

The framing question, or just *question* as Anne Bogart describes it, points to the impetus behind the making of the performance. The framing question has to be broad, but it

must have intentionality and coherence. In other words, it contains enough specificity that one can try to start to answer it, but it is not too specific that one could answer it definitively.

The question is decided upon once some preliminary investigation of the place has happened so that the question is an informed question, not one based on superficial or first impression understandings. A question speaks to the bigger themes that have come to surface during the exploratory phase. In my theatre thesis performance, the question I explored was: how does growing up in a *touristy place* affect local people's identities in developing countries? The framing question suggests topic, and prompts further related questions, but it is too broad to be answered in any definitive sense.

An important issue to consider is the relevance of the questions both for the target audiences and for scholarly purposes. As artists, we often thrive in making art that is interesting and relevant to us. However, if we want to treat our artistic endeavors as research that will add to academic and/or social discourse, we have to consider how relevant our questions are for other groups.

As part of a theatrical production called TeatroSOLO, Argentinian artist Matías Umpierrez writes short stories that are then performed by single actors to a single audience member at a time, in different places around a city. I read and have seen performances of some of these stories in Portland, I found them to be quite touching, dramatic, poetic and entertaining. The formal concept for the piece is that the performances are 'urban interventions' (some would also call it site-specific performance). Site-specific theatre tends to happen in locations where theatre doesn't usually happen. In this case, it was not theatre as place-based research, for it did not seem to investigate any specific topic about the city. The project's value lies in the opportunity to connect with a storyteller (which I think can be very valuable, but is not enough for the purposes of scholarly research).

Theory

This refers to scholarly theoretical information about (1) the place and (2) the structure.

1- When talking about ecotheatre, Theresa May says:

Before a rich green dramaturgy can emerge, playwrights must educate themselves about ecological issues, and particularly about the ecology of their own places so that their work can grow from a personal relatedness to the land. After all, ecology is not merely a sentiment, it is a science. (2005, 94)

Artists who want to create interdisciplinary place-based performance need to go beyond the topics, themes and artistic forms that already interest them. It is necessary that artists also get in touch with individuals from various disciplines or traditions who have conducted research on the areas at hand. This can be either through reading or watching their contributions or through talking with them in person. Being in conversation with past research is how discourse is tested and advanced.

However, I want to make a distinction between place-based theatre and environmental theatre or ecotheatre. Theatre or performance about environmental issues tends to focus on the ways in which performance can deliver information (often in the form of narrative) and ask topical questions, in other words ecotheatre performances tend to be issue-plays about environmental themes. For example, [Manton and East Dartmoor Theatre](#), is a community-based theatre located in Dartmoor National Park, UK. One of their documentary dramas called *Snow* is about “the great winter of 1963.” ([MED Theatre 2016](#)) It is based on interviews of local farmers, it “examines how weather has changed on Dartmoor since the middle of the last century, providing cause for reflection on the changing climate... [and it] examines how an atypical event, a liminal phenomenon that is encapsulated by drama itself, might precipitate community.” (Schaefer 2012, 253-254) This is environmental theatre, it is about climate change and a community of a specific place, it is a reflection of a theme, but it doesn't ask audiences or performers to start by being in place. In fact, the play was performed in different

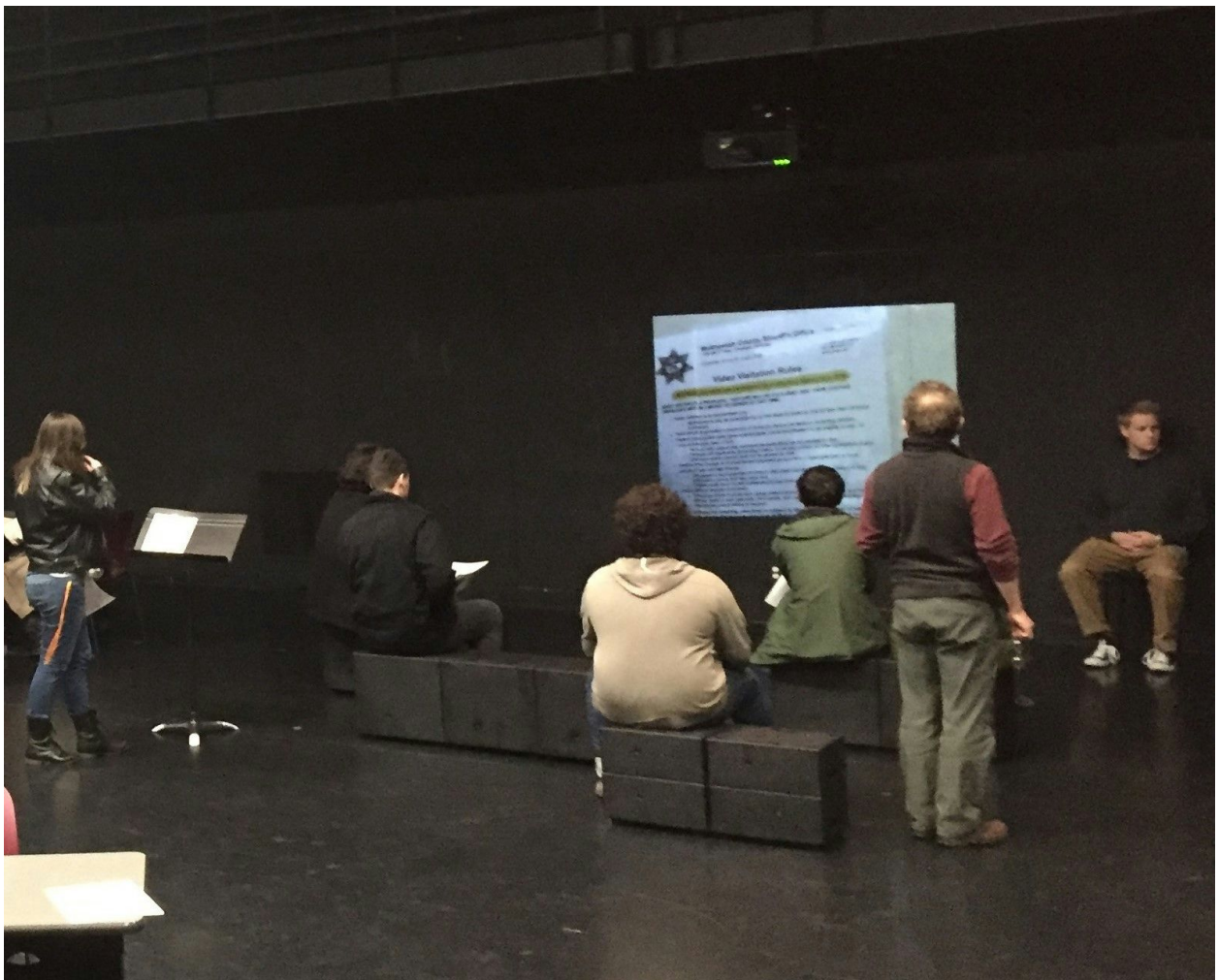
halls, highlighting the fact that the play was not dependent on a phenomenological exploration of place. The performance did not invite audiences to explore their subjective or first-hand experience of the place the performance took place in. That is why it was not place-based performance. Place-based performance is different from ecotheatre. This takes me to the second way in which we must look at theory, performance theory.

2- The structure of the piece, as Bogart calls it, is the form that the piece will take: a contemporary dance piece, a party, an improv show, or it could be as simple as beginning, middle and end. Whatever it is, the structure will ultimately provide the lens through which to view the research, it is the framework and means of dissemination. Thus, one needs to read and understand the theory as well as look at other examples of the chosen style/structure before choosing it.

What sets place-based theatre apart from things such as ecotheatre is that whatever structure one uses in place-based performance, it always aims to follow a phenomenological approach. A phenomenological approach must start by simply being in place, so that we may investigate from being here. The content of the piece evolves from there, in connection to the place where it takes place. Once more, this requires cultivating skills that sensitize the artist (our body and self) to the places we are part of, but also making sure that audiences can also experience the content of the performance in place.

As part of a piece I co-devised under the direction of Aaron Landsman, we put up a gallery space, with pictures and soundscapes of Portland sites that we had recorded during previous days. The pictures were the product of a very interesting process: we would go to places around the city of Portland that we didn't frequent regularly, or ever, and our task was to sit down and simply be present in that place, observe, listen and smell anything around us. Pay attention to the people around us, and take in as much as we could for a half hour. Then we would take a photo of something that interested us and record a soundscape of whatever the sounds of that place were. This exercise was

literally about training ourselves to be perceptive of our surroundings. Although I found these explorations very complex and inspiring, I felt as though the explorations of place stopped once we started to set a performance (in the theatre building), for an audience to encounter what we had been working on. The students had experienced them in context, as part of a larger exploration of place. The audience, however, was looking at these in a Black Box space. The content was too removed for the audience to experience first-hand the complex links between the places we had been to and the art we had made available to them.



Picture taken by Aaron Landsman. Audience members watching photos taken by students around the city of Portland, OR.

As we made the piece, we moved completely into abstraction by taking the content or results and placing them outside of place. Once again, I am not saying abstraction cannot be useful, it can be beautiful and illuminating in its own ways. However, the type of place-based performance I am proposing empowers the audience to experience content in place, hence calling attention to their ontological situatedness. If the aim of place-based performance is to encourage the research of the places we are a part of, these performances must provide a framework where the audience is able to examine the ways they are part of a place, for this they need to become aware of their own embeddedness in place.

Larsen and Johnson argue that “all things present first depend on place as the situated but universal happening, or disclosure, required for the world—natural and human—to appear. Place does more than bridge; it grounds.” (2012, 641) If I apply this to the gallery space/performance described above, I will say that the abstractions or content were developed and then superimposed on a different context (which is how theatre usually works). Thus, the experiences that we as students had around the city were very different from what the audience members were able to witness during our performance. I came to understand that whatever structure one chooses for a performance, if one wants to investigate place as a grounding concept or happening, we as performers and audiences have to experience being in that place, so that there is no disconnect between content and place. Only then can theatre get closer to framing our explorations of self and place. Only then will theatre allow us to come to understand the world by starting from our embeddedness in it.

Part 2: Middle of the Hour Glass

Zeami Motokiyo wrote in 1424, “performance without sufficient attention to detail is without interest, but too much and the performance will shrink in scale” (Worthen 2000, 198). I think that what good art and good academic research share is the need to focus enough to grapple with a subject matter, but not too much that you will lose sight

of the universal, that which you can draw generalizations from, the thing that makes an audience member meaningfully reflect on their own life after having watched a live performance.

Situated Contexts

The situated context is always place-based. It is comparable to Bogart's concept of the anchor. An anchor is the primary source of content for the performance, hence it is used as the main substance for the piece. It could be a story, a person, a concept, etc.

However, in place-based performance, the anchor needs to be directly rooted in the place of performance. In this sense, the anchor does not work to attach our ideas to the place of performance, instead, the anchor originates from place and the job of the artist/researcher is to hold on to it so that audiences are always asked to start by being aware of their embeddedness in place. Consequently, the anchor cannot be purely a product of the artist's imagination, it ought to be something researchable that already exists in the world.

For example, when wanting to do a performance about tourism, I needed an anchor related to tourism. After much deliberation, it was clear to me that to make a show about tourism in the developing world, that would be performed in a college in the US, I had to utilize the only objects of tourism I had access to in real time and space: the local people. Thus, the anchor became my *touristed body* (from Costa Rica) and the *touristed body* of my collaborator from Kerala, India. We needed an anchor that was real and researchable, one rooted in place. Thus, I turned to scholars who have theorized about bodies as place or sites of contestation.

Our bodies were our anchor/places, following the way Casey conceptualizes bodies as a set of ever growing networks connected to the places they have been a part of:

“A body is shaped by the places it has come to know and that have come to it—come to take up residence in it, by a special kind of placial incorporation that is just as crucial to the human self as is the interpersonal incorporation so central to classical psychoanalytic theory.” (Casey 2001, 688)

One could say that bodies are inscribed with personal narratives as well as an infinitude of social narratives and understandings, all of which take residence in bodies in the same ways different meanings reside within places. Moreover, as Massey describes, “what is to be the dominant image of any place will be a matter of contestation and will change over time.”(1994, 121) Thus, our selves, manifested as bodies/places, are always open to change and are influenced by personal and social forces. Our bodies were our anchor/situated context, where many narratives reside in and are contested.

In the performance *Being the Touristed, Part 1: The Unspoken*, we set out to explore how tourism can be a strong force in the creation of the identity of local people in touristy places. As part of the devising process, we looked at our bodies and skills through the lens of existing narratives. For example, my collaborator is trained in a traditional Indian school of music called Carnatic. In our performance, she sings a song in that style. This is presented by a tour guide who mentions the religious roots of the tradition, and introduces the singing as a way to ask for gods’ blessings. In the performance, we change the way in which she sings and put it in an orientalist framework to explore the exotification and romanticization of Indian cultures. This was done by exploring her usual ways of singing and exploring new ways of doing it that were based on stereotypes. We explored how her body/skills could be a site of contestation, where personal and social narratives intertwine. We arrived at the ideas for our staging by telling anecdotes about things people have said to us about our countries; my collaborator would talk also about the ways India is always portrayed in the media as a place where people go to find their “spirituality.” India is often made into a sacred place where tourists could access something that they are missing, and the local religions are hence appropriated in different ways for the foreigners’ desire to connect to something metaphysical. We staged her singing, which traditionally has religious purposes, to fulfil the tourist desire to witness something spiritual. Right after the singing, a pre-recorded video monologue is projected on a screen, in this one my collaborator talks about how she is actually atheist and how she always felt like she did

not connect to the lyrics of the songs she sang. She took up singing partially because it made her feel more 'authentically Indian'. All these big topics were situated in the anchor, which was our bodies and skills. We were able to research those big topics such as Orientalism, cultural tourism, identity construction, transnational interactions, etc. while being situated or anchored in the specifics of two bodies onstage.

The content of the performance was directly linked to that anchor and allowed the audience to be reminded of how their perceptions and experiences of our bodies were influenced by their own embeddedness in place, such as their own identity in relationship to the touristed bodies. We were able to make the audience examine their relationship to our bodies/self by being in place, by witnessing our performance of identity and stereotype. In this sense, we didn't tell the audience what the message or facts were, although there were many autobiographical facts in the piece. Instead, we performed in connection to place (our bodies) and asked them to experience place with their own curiosity. Some people came to me afterwards expressing how they were invited to evaluate their own roles as tourists. Their investigation became a personal one, one inspired by being in the room with me and my collaborator as we explored our own identities and how they have been shaped by tourism in unexpected ways.

Focus Questions and Methodology

I have called this section focused questions and methodology, because performance is inherently a way to situate research in a focused manner, at least if we rigorously ask how the framing question relates to bodies, space, colors, plot, etc. The experiencing of a theme or a question in a place, experientially, is a focused experience. In order for it to be clear and successfully ask us to explore the world from being in place, artists have to answer many questions during rehearsals, we constantly make choices about the positioning of a chair, the gestures an actor makes, the colors of a hat, and try to answer these questions with the bigger framing question in mind. This is the process of making meaning. These meanings, if constructed as vibrant elements will invoke the questions

in the spectators, who are having to interpret their own meanings from the cumulative framework the theatre artist puts together.

When talking about theatre, Noë says that a theatre that highlights our ontological situatedness should not support the illusion that the theatrical experience happens as in a TV screen, and that we ought to sit down and watch. A theater that seeks to explore and reminds us of our ontological experience encourages people changing vantage points and following their own curiosity and perceptual research to discover the world in new ways. (Noë 2012) Placed-based performance asks audiences to treat their perceptual awareness as a research method, by providing a framework through which they can explore ways of being in place. In this sense, theatre-making shares with ecology the testing of ideas to reject null hypotheses, or in our case the things that do not belong in the piece. The testing of ideas during rehearsals is about finding what belongs in our exploration or framework, and taking a leap of faith so we can believe what we could not disprove. It is the making of facts, or an understanding of a reality.

One way in which we do that is by acting. Now, I do not intend to teach anyone how to act in this paper. Nevertheless, I will outline some ways in which I think place-based theatre engages with ideas about acting. Theresa May says that our neglecting of environmental issues in the theatre is due to the fact that Western theatre has been a humanist tradition that mainly focuses on relationships, politics, families, etc. as if these were detached from the place and the world we live in. (May 2005) Actors that acknowledge place during performance listen and respond not only to fellow actors, but to other forces. For example, once I played the dog creature that Hekuba transforms into at the end of the Greek play *Hekuba*. We performed this in the woods. As I was just exploring movement in the woods, I became very aware that dogs usually smell everything around them and learn about the world that way. So, I started smelling and hence having my face close to the ground for long periods, and one time I found a huge snail that I almost touched with my face. Part of me wanted to lick it, maybe because I think that's what dogs do, or because something in me wanted to lick the snail. What is

important about this story was that my acting and the acting impulses I was having were directly linked to non-human things around me. In general, actors and theatre in the Western theatre tradition do not allow the influence of animals or other non-human forces to determine theatrical performances, that is the extent to which we attempt to separate ourselves from place.

Another more complex example can be found in my thesis performance *Being the Touristed, Part 1: The Unspoken*. During the early stages of the piece I wanted to explore the ways in which Latin men are often over-sexualized and made accessible for 'consumption' in different contexts. We explored this by staging a strip-tease in the dance style of Bachata and having a live camera follow me onstage as I strip to my underwear, the live video is also projected on a screen in the back of the stage. After talking with multiple people, during and outside of rehearsals, this seemed too simplistic. I personally loved dancing, and this had been such an integral part of me, my identity, and my exploration of my gender and sexual orientation. It seemed very untrue to my experience to only present this dance as an over-sexualization of my body. It stripped the touristed (me in that case) from any agency in the act of performance. Eventually, we developed a monologue that would be projected after the dance. In this one, I talk about how dancing has been part of my self-liberation as a gay man. Dancing is also something I really took up when I was not in Costa Rica, because I felt like I was more allowed to explore my sexuality when I was abroad. This section then became a dialectic discussion of a topic, with multiple points of view: my dance skills and body were oversexualized, but they could also be considered part of my process of self-liberation and exploration of identity. We staged the strip-tease so that audiences would have to evaluate their own understanding of it, because of the multiple and somewhat contradicting points of view that existed in my body simultaneously. In this sense, our performance opened up the process of investigation for the audiences to make their own interpretations and meanings. Place-based performance invites audiences to actively engage in the process of meaning-making as audiences, which is

more likely to provide transformational experiences than a performance that only teaches or educates in the traditional sense.

At the end of the show, I also performed my interpretation of what a woman meant when she called northern Costa Rican people primitive. In that scene, I wear a “primitive thong,” I make animal noises (for the character cannot speak) and I even eat dirt. I also performed a foreigner in the US who was told that people from northern Costa Rica were primitive; this takes the form of a prerecorded voice-over playing in the background. While watching this fictional primitive man, each audience member was faced with their own preconceptions of what a “primitive” person is, whether they have ever verbally articulated it or not. I engaged the audience in the research process by performing my exploration of a primitive self, and consequently call attention to their individual understanding of my body and its relationship to whatever ideas of “primitiveness” they might have. During the whole performance, we don’t ever define what an Indian stereotype *is* or what racism *looks like*. What we do is invite audiences to explore their subjective relationship to those concepts through being in contact with our bodies and performed selves. It allowed the audience to finish the research process by researching their own biases vis a vis our embodied explorations of self.

Part 3: Bottom of the Hour Glass

The bottom of the hourglass is where we make any conclusions, contributions to larger fields of scholarship and where we might propose plans of action to tackle different problematics.

Larger Implications

What do we aim for with placed-based performance? Every artist will aim for different things. Generally speaking though, these are some ways to judge the effectiveness of placed-based performance:

- It illuminates something about a place and its relationship with the framing question. In other words, audience members and performers are able to investigate and learn something about how place is entangled with a certain way in which we exist in the world. Whether this has to do with the exotification of 'Indian bodies' or the way we experience wilderness, placed-based theatre allows us to inquire by being in place, by experiencing while being asked to acknowledge our ontological situatedness. This means that audience members will all have a different relationships with the framing question, in fact we hope for that. The job of the artist then becomes to create a framework where the framing question is asked and where the audience members are invited to investigate from their own perspectives.
- Place-based performance is made with a phenomenological approach that prioritizes the experiential and embodied experiences over the transfer of facts. The artist constructs metaphors that ask questions instead of providing facts. This sets placed-based theatre apart from ecotheatre. It subverts the dynamics of power between the educator/scholar and the student/spectator. Place-based performance does not seek to transfer facts that scientists have "found." In place-based performance, we assume that the research process is never finished until an audience joins the process during performance and draws their own conclusions. We incorporate audiences as co-creators of meaning in the dissemination process, and not just as absorbers of meaning. For example, during my own piece, I explored and performed different identities, all somehow based on facts about my life, which is integral to the piece as the facts are linked to the anchor or place. These narratives are contrasting and reflect the contested ideas that reside in my body as place, and during performance they manifested in different selves. The variety of contrasting narratives asked the audience to evaluate their own role in interpreting my performed identities. They were invited to follow their own curiosity and figure out how they related to me. Placed-based performance honors the research and the facts or findings of the

research, but it never abstracts these findings and presents them as truth. It just asks audience members to experience these as a framework for their own research in place.

- Finally, the place of the performance is clearly linked to the content of piece. The action of the performance is not imposed on a 'set' but is grounded or rooted in the place.

My goal and working hypothesis for this life-long endeavor is that this type of theatre might take us away from the overwhelming and numbing statistically based environmental knowledge, which can be useful when making policy but not so useful in our daily lives, as embodied human beings. Understanding our lives in light of these gigantic environmental narratives can be confusing if not shocking. I quote theatre artists and scholars Heddon and Mackey: “[i]f the grand narratives of environmental change –particularly those of apocalypse and tipping points –induce denial or paralysis, what might an encounter with the small make possible?” (2012) That question is the one that I have also taken up in my practice. What I believe they mean is that experiencing the small is like experiencing a situated context. It is the way we see big themes play out in connection to the perceptible or tangible things in our lives. It is experiencing sometimes overwhelming or immense ideas phenomenologically, with our bodies, by simply being here. For example, learning about neocolonial oppression as a theme can be quite difficult and it might not even lead anywhere if people aren't able to grapple with it in their daily lives. But if they are able to research how it is present and affects the identities of a person from India and a person from Costa Rica, they might be able to analyse their personal relationship with neocolonial oppression. That is one thing phenomenology helps us do, it leads us to reclaim the validity of the subjective and asks us to acknowledge our being in place as a grounding principle and learning tool.

Theatre offers us the chance to wonder, to be curious, to reimagine the world. Yet, complexly enough, it simultaneously allows us to understand our world and ourselves better by letting us see other ways of being. Encountering the small does not mean

neglecting the big, instead it means seeing how the big is connected to the small. I think Heddon and Mackey point out that as human beings, we relate to the world by being in it, by experiencing with our senses, with our bodies.

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