

LondonTheatrePaper17Feb2005 - LeGrace Benson

### **An Introduction**

Writing plays is a conjuring of Something out of Nothing, that Nothing insubstantial but consequential. It is here. It is there. It is anywhere, like Puck flying around the world in minutes. A villa in Verona. A school in Northumberland. A bog in Ireland. Berlin. Arabia. Concoctions of love, antic laughing, contentions, fears, agonies amusements, death It is only words, just marks on a screen or paper that try to be recreations of places, events, and the ineffable connections binding one life to the others. Real or imagined it is all the same with the marks, never quite equal to the task of truth telling or of lying. Then the words are staged..Something else begins, literally, to *take* place.

Writing this paper in Ithaca, New York near the beginning of the year 2005, I am aware of trying to gather into a reasonable piece of reading some ideas that are as old as the first gestures exchanged between human being awaking into consciousness and as far-fetched as the arrangement of planets. This little paper is meant to join together an assortment of learnings from a few days of looking at actors and stages and audiences sitting in theatres or groping their way through unknown tunnels, led by women dressed as birds. Theatre. Amazing theatre. What happens in a theatre that is capable of generating waves of other happenings in its wake? How does that mystery work?

Here I will pay closest attention to one aspect of the several theatrical events: the aspect that is visible, audible, palpable: the staging and its concomitant, the role of the audience. Each of the fourteen plays gave location, hence believable existence, to the subtle intangibles of our collective lives here on this curious planet. What Shakespeare knew becomes what Corin Redgraves knows becomes what I know. Simon Russell Beale thrusts a double wisdom about lust for power, his own and the great Will's into my face and into my consciousness. How so?

To stage something is to devise a comprehensible simulacrum of the cosmos and to act out our lives in that universe. Neurological researchers recently begin to understand and tell us something about how acting may work, but we have known how to do it for 35,000 years at least. Clear evidence of our acting and our establishment of a communicative empathy among ourselves and between us and the gods is on the walls in Chauvet. Now they tell us we have a "mirror" function in the brain that lets us know how any other part of our collective humanness may think and feel. We knew that, already. We just couldn't see the neurons at work. Oh, acting. That is another paper. Back to the layout of surfaces in the theatre and the conditions for seeing and hearing and feeling that a certain type of staging both imposes and elicits from the *hoi poloi* and grandees gathered to be a-mused.

We do not know yet how ancient is the idea of reserving a special space for special forms of communication but it may be as old as those oldest communications still visible from the past –the cave paintings in Chauvet. Perhaps we created something like the *griot* spaces of West Africa at least that early. Campfires at a childrens' camp may be

our most enduring form of “theatre”. Dance circles may share that antiquity. At some time we humans devised the notion of agonistic games and their arenas, probably at roughly the same moment as courts of decision or displays of authority. That carving out of a progressing performance space we call procession or parade may surely have arisen as the actors in the authority or justice dramas ceremoniously approached and retreated from the main scene. Even earlier, probably, we set aside altars and the dedicated space and surfaces next to them. The tent of the Arc of the Covenant comes to mind, with its combinations of worship and justice, parade and display or hiding of display. When we were Greeks we made the amphitheatres, and afterwards we set up a whole range of architectures to accommodate not only authority and justice and agon, but also spectacle, entertainment, political satire and romantic love gone right or wrong. Apparently we need these spaces, reserved, charged, activated, always with the necessary reciprocal of an audience for drama, contest, play, game, or spectacle.

We saw fourteen plays, with fourteen different stagings hence fourteen different reciprocal relationships between stage and ticket holders. Each of them is the latest use of one or another of the ancient reserved spaces. Herewith a description and analysis of selected instances in order of appearance.

## The Plays

### I.

#### **Romeo and Juliet**, William Shakespeare.

*Director, William Gill; Set Design, William Daw. Costume Designer, Deirdre Clancy; Lighting, Hartley T. A. Kemp; Sound, Jeremy Dunn; Music, Terry Davies; Fight Director, Terry King . Cast: Anita Booth, Sian Brooke, Peter Bygott, Caolan Byrne, Edward Clarke, Samuel Clemens, Matt Cross, James Curran, Jonathan Forbes, Trystan Gravelle, David Hargreaves, Tam Mutu, Sion Tudor Owen, Emily Raymond, Matthew Rhys, Jessica Tomchak, Gideon Turner, June Watson, Leo Wringer, Anatol Yusef. Royal Shakespeare Company, Albery Theatre, 5 January 2005 [I was unable to find a specific role cast list for this performance]*

This familiar play continues to yield up new insights into the tissue of loves and hates we wrap around our lives. The Albery stage with its apron into the audience area bears some, but only some resemblance to the Elizabethan theatre Shakespeare would have known. William Daw intensifies the resemblance with his two-tiered, balconied construction similar to that of the Globe Theatre in Southwark. His, construction can, however, roll forward and back in center stage space, which, together with clever light effects by Hartley T.A. Kemp, marks a shift of both scene and mood. Using the architecture for these purposes suppresses the cosmological symbolism it carried in the Globe. Only once does the structure function as a marker of placement in the universum at the opening. Escalio, Duke of Verona, takes the Chorus lines to announce the portentous theme of the two households that will sully fair Verona with their bloody conflict. Escalio intones the Prologue from the balcony, Prince of the Realm and Judge, speaking from on high. Then at the end, Escalio, like all Verona, stands on the lowest level, stage front to proclaim both the justice that shall be meted out for the profound woe that has brought down the beloved children of two families.

The backdrop behind all perhaps calls too much attention to itself with its monumental-scale scenes of Verona spread out like giant potshards across the surface. An easy reading of this might suggest “broken Verona” –a theme of the play, but there are puzzling elements such as a *mamma col bambino* (or is it *Madonna e Gesù*), and a seated classical figure that some decoded as Blind Justice. The mother and child have a possible effect of underscoring a theme of parental and filial love that usually receives little attention. Taken together, the experience of this backdrop, coupled with the Duke’s two bracketing *pronuncimienti* does accentuate the embracing themes of this tragedy: familial devotion and the deep requirements for civic peace. The set thus could be seen as embodying a wisdom like that of Confucius: “When there is peace in the family there will be peace in the district. When there is peace in the district there will be peace in the city...” The love of Romeo and Juliet is the playing out of the great themes in this literal and metaphoric setting.

Shakespeare’s plays are so often studied as language that a performance serves to remind us that he intended each of them to be experienced by an audience of people high and low, educated and uneducated. Action in the controlled space of the “little cosmos” surely was intended to reach the individuals in those audiences in bone and gut as well as in ear and mind. Juliet’s body language and traverses across the stage are eloquent and, for me at least, made a mirror of her anguish bright and clear across the transparent frontier between stage and audience. Of all the moments in the staging of this version, that of the battle encounter between the Montagues and Capulets was, for me, the most chilling and forceful. The battle choreography (designed by Terry King) raged convincingly enough to draw me into a complete “...willing suspension of disbelief...” I came close to real fear, totally forgetting that the outcome was predetermined and that I would not have to fight my way to the exit. This was both stage and staging. The fighters came daringly close to that immaterial yet clearly perceptible border between players and onlookers. Thus can we see immediately exemplified how that border must be breached perceptually and conceptually, emotionally and intellectually yet in itself stand with unbreached integrity. This paradoxical rule characterizes any theatrical use of space, even in panto.

## II.

**Aladdin.** Billy Brown (after Sir Richard Burton); *Director, Sean Mathias; Designer, John Napier; Choreographer, Wayne McGregor; Musical Supervisor, Gareth Valentine; Orchestration, Christopher Walker; Costumes, Mark Bouman; Lighting, Mark Henderson; Sound, Fergus O’Hare; Musical Director, Kevin Amos. Cast Widow Twankey, Sir Ian McKellan; Dim Sum; Maureen Lipman; Abbanazar, Roger Allam; The Emperor of China, Sam Kelly; Genie of the Lamp, Ramon Tikaram; Aladdin, Joe McFadden; Princess Badruldadoor, Cat Simmons; Hanky, Owen Sharpe; Panky, Joanna Page. A Panto” performance. Old Vic Theatre 6 January 2005*

Panto famously –or infamously, engages the folks in the seats across the border from the stage. A ragged street-boy Aladdin observes us as we enter, “casing the joint” as thieves would say. With his gaze he already transgresses the border of time, that of the beginning and the end of the play. Yet even panto respects, sort of, the real and imagined distinction between everyday reality of the audience and the imaginary world of the actors. The loud audience participation is as scripted as the play itself. We are free to shout, “It’s behind you!” We are not so free to stand up and give a political diatribe or

tell one of our own jokes. Imagine that happening in the panto space: others in the audience would soon shout the offender down. This production of *Aladdin* playfully pokes holes in the border, which nevertheless remains intact. Old Vic is a proscenium arch theatre with a horseshoe of orchestra seats and three tiers of gilded Rococo boxes and balconies, a traditional, even heritage, arrangement which makes the puncturing of the border in both directions more titillating than might be with an arena or thrust stage. The heart and muscle of the spectacle is onstage.

And this is spectacle. As such it intensifies the distinction between one side of the border and the other even when and as making a temporary breach. Spectacle requires spectators, requires to be looked at, or its magic disappears. The communication is that of wonder and excitement. John Napier's staging is increasingly audacious beginning with the simplest of backdrops. Quickly begins the magician's act of pulling one set after another out of little boxes, culminating in the bejeweled explosion of the cave. Such a marvel. From something the size of a large traveler's valise stalagmites and dark corridors, glittering strings of jewels and rocky barriers fill the entire stage. The audience gasps and sighs in satisfaction. Stunning. A palpable reality over there in the world of the imagination. Its wonder ceases if you see the parachute folds, the transparent fishing line, and hear the stagehands grunt. It's just the day's job if you are the one who puts that contraption together before each performance. Sweat restores the reality of the illusion.

Panto transgressions are the Rules of the Game. The impudent actors addressing the spectators, the call and response, the shouts or warning from the excited children, the bucket of paper water cast into the first rows of seats, the trans-sexuality and cross dressing in major roles (and in the case of Ian McKellam both a cross-dressing and a crossing of expected role), the risqué language that probably *is* understood by many of the youngsters, the political jibes and satires are all *de rigueur*. The entire theatre becomes the space of the playing-out. The catharsis is like that of carnival where obscene and seditious misbehaviors are gleefully tolerated in a reserved time and place. We do not know how old this practice may be, but we can see how necessary it is by observing those societies where there is no Panto or Carnival. How they fail their humanity when ruly rigor mortis chokes the breath of laughter!

### III.

**The History Boys**, Alan Bennett. *Director, Nicholas Hytner Designer, Bob Crowley; Lighting Designer, Mark Henderson; Music, Richard Sisson; Sound Design, Colin Pin. Cast: Crowther : Samuel Anderson; Boy, Tom Attwood; Posner: Samuel B[redacted] (to 18 December Geoffrey Streatfeild ( from 20 Dec); Dakin : Dominic Cooper; Timms, James Corden; Akthar, Sacha Dhawan; Boy, Rudi Dharmalingam; Hector, Richard Griffiths; Lockwood , Andrew Knott; The Headmaster: Clive Merrison; Scripps , Jamie Parker, Rudge , Russell Tovey; Mrs Lintott.: Frances de la Tour. Royal National Theatre, Littleton Theatre, 6 January 2005.*

Among the Royal National Theatre notices posted on the Web there is one for an evening poetry reading. Some of Hector's "Boys" were to read literary selections, open to the public, 11 February 2005. The play itself could be presented that way, as it carries its central meaning in the lines and in the resonance of the quotations embedded in those

lines. Sound alone can convey Bennett's urgent message. This presents a challenge to director and set designer. Scenes as written are as fluid in time dimensions as the film quotes and acting-out laced throughout. There are "cuts" and "fades", and even something akin to iris shots from beginning to end. In some respects it would be easier to make a radio version of this play than to mount it as a stage production.

Hytner and Crowley rise to the challenge magisterially. They so well succeed that I am not sure my judgment about the ease of making a radio show is correct. Re-reading the play some days later, in my mind the video they used overhead was running, and the wall arrangements slid noiselessly into place just as they had in the theatre. I am about to send my precious signed copy of the play to My Son the History Professor and wonder if just the bare words will touch him as deeply as they have me who witnessed the staging. No, not "staging". Environment. The overarching video encompasses the set in its several transformations, which holds the play, which holds the movie re-enactments and the quotes from poets and philosophers. At the core of this Matruschka is the question: "Why have I spent my life in this God forsaken place?" The answer. "Pass it on." The environment in which the action and the talk *take place* is an adumbration of Bennett's words.<sup>1</sup> More than simply covering the shifts of walls along tracks to effect scene changes, it tells out the quotidian side story. A different side story video accompanies the scenes when Irwin, the smart young opportunist with his exaggeration of credentials and his meretricious view of how history can be narrated, is making one of those popular TV programs for the mass viewers presents a tourists' eye view of an ancient abbey. The number of possible texts that can be read or placed beside such images is indeterminably large, the scope for successful lying immeasurable. Dean McCannell once called this sort of staged presentation an "inauthentic demystification."<sup>2</sup> Irwin's motif in the play is thus neatly brought to our eyes, and may even elicit a question or two about how we watch such programs and how easily we accept their gloss.

Some other, less prominent, details of the staging are nonetheless important to the presentation. One is the shifting of the school walls, which simultaneously mark change of space and time relentlessly forward, even as speeches refer to near and distant pasts. A second is the placement of the piano at edge of the apron, some feet away from the center of action. The music thus verging on the orchestra space, becomes nearly an accompaniment to rather than a part of the play. The piano and the singing are more than just metaphorically out on the edge of permissible classroom activities. A third aspect of staging recalled for me Thornton Wilder's graveyard scene in *Our Town*.<sup>3</sup> For Hector's memorial service there are two lines of chairs, one for the boys, a space, a shorter one for the headmaster, Irwin and Mrs. Lintott. The time is ambiguous, neither present nor past and, Hector might add, neither indicative nor subjunctive. It is like Wilder's cemetery, no

---

<sup>1</sup> Bennett in an interview in the Cayuga Community College Threatre Program class session, [National Theatre, 11 January, London] explained that it was the Director who had had the most to do with arranging the staging and the video-over. Of the video scenes themselves, Bennett said, "I was much taken with them. The boys said it was the 'best part'. That [video] covered the scene changes so well. I liked it a lot."

<sup>2</sup> Dean McCannell, personal conversation during the period when he was writing *The Tourist, May, 1971, Ithaca, New York*.

<sup>3</sup> Another possible echo from Wilder's play can be heard in some of the lines of Scripps, where he serves the same function as Wilder's Stage Manager.

time, any time. *Our Town's* Emily sits in her straight chair, like any of the history boys, and may choose to revisit any moment of her own past. Mrs. Lintott, history teacher, picks a bit of history and present from each life, or is it a prediction? Hector opens a door behind them and projects his unequivocal sentence into the ears of the theatre audience. Imperative mood, present tense: "Pass it on!"

#### IV.

**Blithe Spirit**, Noël Coward. Director, Thea Sharrock. Cast: *Charles Condomine*, Aden Gillett; *Edith, the maid*, Michelle Terry; *Ruth*, Joanna Riding; *Dr. Bradman*, Derek Hutchinson; *Violet Bradman*, Barbara Kirby; *Medium Madame Arcati*, Penelope Keith; *Elvira Condomine's Ghost*, Armanda Drew. The Peter Hall Company, Savoy Theatre, 7 January 2005.

The current production of Noël Coward's 1941 play is in the same Savoy Theatre in which it opened sixty-three years ago. Blitzkrieg bombs were a daily unpredictable nightmare. Winston Churchill said later it was the *Book of Common Prayer* that enabled the British to survive. One thinks of other factors: the English, who took their cartons of tea and the silver service up the slopes of the Matterhorn a generation earlier, observed teatime right through the war. Coward's coolly sophisticated comedy of death and dying lifted a few eyebrows concerning its appropriateness, but may well have been as crucial as the Book of Common Prayer and tea for maintaining gritty endurance in the face of an apocalypse. There is a tale from Native Americans of a brave over and over chased by the Devil. The shaman tells him what to do next time: "Turn around and look the Devil in the eye. Stand your ground and laugh in his face." The brave followed instructions and the Devil shriveled and ran away. Noël Coward flung his joke in the Devil's terrible face. The play seems quaint now, but the need for laughter remains. The ability of this recreation to elicit the saving grace of giggles, guffaws and belly laughs is a legacy of delight. The legacy can these days be seen as foreshadowing the demise of the world of grand Georgian drawing rooms and velvet smoking jackets after the destructions of World War II.

The staging, the lighting and the costuming, even the body language and the gestures of the actors take the audience into an era of elegant plasterwork and overstuffed furniture, tasteful floral arrangements, well-cut smoking jackets for the quiet evening with friends at home, soignée coiffure and bias cut gowns. The "fourth wall" of Savoy's proscenium stage retains its unruptured surface even in the mayhem of Act III as Georgian columns and crystal chandeliers tumble and explode. The utter destruction all takes place behind that impermeable screen. We are safe to enjoy it. How must such pandemonium (for that is precisely what it is) have affected the raw nerves of wartime Londoners? Did that safe border at the proscenium allow a kind of inoculation against angst? For the viewers of today, that respected limit is not so neutral as a television screen, yet still emotionally distant. It's safety stands as a diametric opposite to the staging of Shunt's *Tropicana*(see below).

#### V.

**Fix Up**, Kwame Kwei-Amah. *Director, Angus Jackson; Designer, Bunny Christie; Lighting Designer, Neil Austin. Cast: Brother Kiyi, Jeffery Kissoon; Kwesi, Steve Toussaint; Norma, Claire Benedict; Alice, Nina Sosanya; Carl, Mo Sesay. Royal National Theatre, Cottesloe. 8 January 2005.*

Cottesloe is a “Black Box” theatre, transformable into a number of different stage-audience arrangements. *Fix Up* stage was raised about a meter at one end of the space with seating located in orchestra and balconies. Unremarkable layout, remarkably transformed by Bunny Christie’s three stories of books. Shelves of books rose up beyond the door to the second-floor apartment, and from time to time the stuttering Carl went down below stage to what one imagined were even more stacks of tomes. As with the video in *The History Boys*, the set is a physical metaphor for a central theme of the play – knowledge and its transmission or failure of transmission. Some viewers found the set overwhelming, and so it is with the knowledge of history, whether personal or collective. At the end, Brother Kiyi, both bookseller and *griot*, his heart triply pierced by the loss of his bookstore and the finding and loss of his estranged daughter, wreaks havoc with all this intellectual treasure. He wrestles the contents of his littered desk to the floor, throws down stacks of books, and cuts off his great, flowing beard. One might think of the simultaneous downfall of mighty Solomon and the temple. In contrast to the noisy destruction of the set at the finale of *Blithe Spirit* which had the audience bouncing in their seats with delight – even laughing, here viewers drew a shocked breath and pushed back into their seats. The downfall of this giant man, dedicated in equal measure to redeeming and hiding his murderous past, and the downfall of the books hit the gut of this educated audience.

## VI.

**Ken Campbell’s History of Comedy Part I, Ventriloquism.** *Ken Campbell. Drill Hall Theatre, 9 January 2005.*

Staging was minimalist for this one-man show. A painted backdrop reminiscent of the panoramic Pop art of James Rosenquist was hung as informally as wash on a line. Two large wooden tables held the paraphernalia and books that Campbell would use during his performance. A plain wooden chair completed the setting in this arena.

Campbell used all his props, especially the ventriloquist dolls to good effect, but otherwise the *mise-en-scene* was nearly incidental to the performance. It was about Campbell and his relationship with language and identity. His motions in the space and his establishment of rapport across the border with his audience was limited. He engaged only those in the immediate front of the semicircle around the arena floor. In this work about throwing the voice, hence about message and identity, he left out his audience in seats to left and right of center. This did not appear to have any intentional motivation, and made for a fair number of disgruntled ticket-holders.

As a literary piece it had some merit, and some marvelously funny lines. After a while it was possible to tease out a structure of meaning, advancing to a conclusion. Campbell’s engagement with the other side of the transparent screen was effected almost entirely by means of the verbal aspect of communication. He’s no Edgar Bergen.

## VII.

**By the Bog of Cats**, Marina Carr. *Director, Dominic Cooke; Set Designer, Hildegard Bechtler; Lighting Designer, Jean Kalman; Sound, Gareth Fry; Costume Designer, Nicky Gillibrand; Composer, Gary Yershon; Choreographer, Liz Ranken. Cast: Hester Swane, Holly Hunter; Ghost Fancier, Darran Greer, Mrs. Kilbride, Barbara Brennan; Hester's Child Josie, various, including Elli Flynn-Flynn-Watterson, Kate Costello; Catwoman, Brid Brennan; Carthage Kilbride, Gordon McDonald; Caroline Cassidy, Denise Gough; Joseph Swane, Adam Best; Father Willow, Patrick Waldron; Monica Murray, Sorcha Cusack; Xavier Cassidy, Trevor Cooper; Warren Rusher; Aoife Madden. Wyndham Theatre, 10 January 2005.*

There are interesting contrasts between the settings of two plays that have to do with ghosts and spirits of the dead – *Blithe Spirit* and this, *By the Bog Of Cats*. The former presents the familiar daily world of surfaces and objects and invites the spirits to enter. The latter presents localities, even in the wedding scene, in which the parallel universes of spirit and the quotidian co-mingle or at the very least intersect. Mists and mysteries permeate the earthy tattiness of Hester's broken-down caravan and even her clothing. It is a sort of doppel-ganger world where everyone and everything may at any moment show its second. Best that it stay well on the other side of the proscenium.

Lighting and sound are as crucial as the layout of spaces, objects and props. The ensemble works to draw the sensibilities of viewers across the stage edge into the situation. Unlike *Blithe Spirit*, which requires only to be looked at, *By the Bog of Cats*, requires a more active affective participation by the viewers into the stage space to be fully comprehended. I must confess that I did so at the expense of taking more detailed notes, which now I miss.

Carr's play is supposed to be a re-working of the Greek tragedy, *Medea*. Only in looking back at it does that drama show parallels. The mise-en-scene in this instance is that of the moors and bogs of the British Isles, imbued since before Caedmon and Cuculain with actual miasmatic vapors and mysterious time warps, real sink holes and imagined portals into another world. Races of elves, fairies, giants, dead princesses or warriors, sprites and spirits populate this twinned world. reported upon in detail now these many centuries. No Mediterranean seas and rocky islands throwing sun rays back at Phaeton here. Irish and Scots living in a new homeland with bayous and marshlands, enveloping fogs, and the mysterious sounds of creatures who might be animals, and then again might not told the tales They let it out that about strange sound emanating –if from animals, perhaps some disturbing combination of human and catamount or, as in the Bog of Cats, human and bird. The character we never see on stage is such a halfling<sup>4</sup>, and so is her daughter, Hester. **By the Bog of Cats** is assuredly a play in the Irish tradition of plays and story-telling however well it maps out upon the narrative of Medea and Jason.

---

<sup>4</sup> The word "halfling" was one I heard in the stories told growing up in North Carolina. It referred to creatures who were the result of what one might have called back then "miscegenation" between animals and people. There were tales a plenty of women who were cats by night, or men who became cougars. Of all these chimera, the werewolf was the most dangerous and most apt to have been actually seen by my cousins. I believed it all. I have not heard in the Northeast. I consulted the OED and Partridge as well as Webster's but did not find that usage. I did hear it, believe me.

A version of *Medea* could be played out in the Georgian décor of *Blithe Spirit*. Even with the same lines it would become perform a different play with different ramifications of meaning. This staging, including lighting and sound takes an audience beyond Medea's anguished hatred and sorcery into and through one of the aperçus into that second world some believe accompanies this one. Hester's keening to her mother in the last act tugs the listener onto the stage and across the dangerous place where the waters of both worlds evanesce their fogs and all animal genes are miscible.

### VIII.

**Festen** Stage adaptation by David Eldridge, from the Dogme film and play by Thomas Vinterberg, Mogens Rukov and Bohr Hansen. *Director, Rufus Norris. Designer: Ian MacNeil. Lighting, Jean Kalman; Sound, Paul Arditti; Music, Orlando Gough; Costume, Joan Wadge, Fight director, Terry King; Assistant director, Tim Stark; Lighting associate, Fiona Simpson. Cast: Christian, Paul Nicholls; Mette, Susannah Wise; Michael, William Beck; Lars, Andrew Maud; Helene, Lisa Palfrey; Else, Carol Royle; Helge, Stephen Moore; Pia, Morven Christie; Helmut, Michael Thomas; Grandfather, Sam Beazley; Poul, Sam Cox; Kim, Jason Baughan; Gbatokai, Patrick Robinson; Child, Sinead Goodall/Clemmie Hooton/Alice Knight. Lyric Theatre 11 January 2005.*

Stage to screen is a more usual route than screen to stage, and the adaptation of the film to stage was, David Eldridge<sup>5</sup> tells us, not an easy one. The Dogme Group already had done an adaptation, but Eldridge found it unsatisfactory for theatre. Mogens Rukov, apparently the lead director for the screen production, noted that in the original neither directors nor actors knew exactly what they would do from moment to moment. (The Dogme Group were famous for a severe commitment to realism, thus the insistence on what could be created spontaneously. This bears some kinship with Surrealist techniques to free the imagination from any planning ahead.) His initial reaction to Eldridge's stage adaptation was strongly negative, but eventually Rukov was "very happy with the result."

There was a remarkable coincidence among the several plays viewed in that three of them, *By the Bog of Cats*, *Festen*, and *King Lear*, make use of a starkly planar and frontal banquet table either at the beginning (*Festen* and *Lear*) or at a climatic point (*Bog*). This would be called "classic" composition amongst art historians, but the staging around or before and after the table scenes is anything but classic in any of the three examples. However, the classic separation of the space of the stage and the space of the theatre-goers is maintained in all three. *Festen* uses a deep stage with a far-rear opening to a brick wall –presumably that of the theatre itself, and some of the most violent action takes place into that space from mid-stage, not unlike the deployment of the troops in a Baroque war painting. Jean Kalman's lighting is here, as in *The Bog of Cats*, sensitively related to plot and character.

Most striking are the scenes in and around an enormous bed at center stage, a brilliant solution to presenting simultaneous bedroom actions of several fighting or fucking couples. Reading about this device in reviews conveys none of the dense excitement focused there that propels this plot along its merciless way. Eldridge said of it,

<sup>5</sup> David Eldridge, guest at 13 January 2005 class discussion, National Theatre.

“ It is an excellent metaphor but difficult for the actors.”<sup>6</sup> In another metaphoric staging, at key moments servants come up from or go down into below stairs. One in particular has the old, deep friendship that often arises between a patriarch’s children and his servants. The servant –more a man than his master, come up from below stage to strengthen Christian in his resolve to bring his incestuous father to account.

While the action often uses the stage spaces along “baroque” diagonals, the staging itself is spare. The furnishings are elegant Scandinavian modern in “good Norwegian wood,” paralleling the original language of the screenplay. “Norwegian is a more spare language [than English]. I had to find some word-way past the literal translation.”<sup>7</sup> *Festen’s* great success at the box office has to do with this precisely conceived knitting of language, dramatic action and staging.

### IX.

**Grand Hotel.** Book by Luther Davis based on the novel by Vicki Baum. *Director: Michael Grandage Music by: Robert Wright and George Forrest; Lyrics by: Robert Wright and George Forrest; Book by:; Designer: Christopher Oram; Lighting Designer: Hugh Vanstone; Cast: Sarah Annis, Hattie Bayton, Gillian Bevan, David Birrell, John Conroy, Martin Ellis, Daniel Evans, Paul Hazel, David Lucas, Graham Macduff, Mary-Elizabeth Mastrantonio, Joseph Noble, Julian Ovenden, Sevan Stephan.*[Unable to locate list with roles played.]

The staging in this version of novel, then film and now a musical, is an elaborate choreography. A few simple props suggest various interiors of hotel, and at one point the players themselves represent the revolving door entrance. There is the Grand Hotel marquee seen as though from inside and a catwalk above that figures in an attempted robbery that become a love scene. The main story is literally “woven” with the motions of actors in a sort of macramé that is tied off in the finale.

Choreography rescues the potential melodrama and pathos latent in the story lines from those too-easy emotions. Sharply rigorous, the long vaudeville-like song and dance routine begins at the moment the play opens and ends when it closes. It is as precisely organized as a Busby Berkeley chorus line production or the military parades in a Leni Riefenstahl movie. That is appropriate, given the period piece atmosphere and especially given the old clichés about Germanic discipline. Some viewers might feel a frisson to realize that this degree of exactitude on stage echoes the ruthless law and order of the fascist state that followed the downfall shadowed forth in this play. That in retrospect. During the performance itself one is happily engaged in the snappy, energetic performance.

In contrast to Broadway musicals or even Hollywood musical films, the presentation in this theatre space is almost intimate. The best seats in the (ware)house were first row center balcony. From there the tracks and trails of the characters in their inexorable dancing and singing stitchwork were evident in a way that must have been obscured if viewed from stage level. Stage and audience were inches apart, and the cleverly arranged rhythms and melodies kept the two sides bound together.

---

6

<sup>7</sup> Eldridge, 13.01.2005.

## X.

**The Mandate.** Nikolai Erdman, translation/new version by Declan Donnellan. *Director:* Declan Donnellan; *Producer:* National; *Designer:* Nick Ormerod; *Lighting Designer:* Judith Greenwood; *Sound:* Rich Walsh. *Cast:* Nadejda Petrovna, Deborah Findlay; Ivan Ivanovich Shironkin, Adrian Scarborough; Nastia, Sinead Matthew; Agaphangel, Harry Towb; Olymp Valerianovich Smetanich, Bruce Alexander; Autonom, David Collings; Varvara Sergeevna, Naomi Frederick; Anatoly, Daniel Hart; Pavel, Martin Hutson; Vishnevezkaia Tamara Leopoldovna, Carol Macready; Valerian, Laurence Penry-Jones; An Organ Grinder Roger Sloman; also Sarah-Jane Drummey, Sean Jackson, Michael Rouse and Anne White. Royal National Theatre. Cottesloe, 12 January 2005.

The flexible space of the Cottesloe in this instance places the stage inches above and adjacent to the first row seats. A wall at the rear encloses a bourgeois Russian parlor of the 1920's and its three doors, someone assured me, meant we were surely about to view a farce. Indeed so, and the three portals were fully exploited for such purpose. Actors changed the pictures on the wall as needed to signal the requisite political allegiance for a given visitor or inspector. The furniture and décor were of the period, and an enormous trunk was key to the plot.

Deployment (for that is what it was) of the actors within this stage space took lessons from both vaudeville turns and silent movies –again a period style. There were scenes and transitions when the actors used their bodies in a way reminiscent of the jerky motions of Charlie Chaplin with the turn, foot stuck forward, thrust a bit, stop, turn. This amusing exaggeration was a skillfully accomplished comic bit. In a class session, Adrian Scarborough (“Ivan Ivanovich Shirokin”) spoke of how the ensemble included “...some actors who are experienced farceurs and other, younger ones who do not yet have this sense of timing.”<sup>8</sup> From a viewer's perspective, in this instance the experienced ones carried the novices along in well-paced, timing.

The play unfolds both on the visible stage and the invisible but well-perceived spaces beyond those three doors. Seen and unseen, obvious and hidden are as much a function of the setting and the concealing trunk as the theme of the play. Comedy has freer license to punch a hole through the “fourth wall” than do drama or tragedy, and in this instance, Scarboro as the complaining neighbor Shirokin, does so with a clever bit with a notebook of a young woman in the first row. As with *Grand Hotel*, the theatre space itself made an intimate performance possible.

Curiously, while the staging and choreography of *Grand Hotel* evinced at least an undercurrent of the disastrous regime that would follow, *The Mandate* scarcely did so. This, despite lines that evoked chuckles in their probable applicability to current British politics. It may have been the sinister appearance and cynical commentary of the Doctor in *Grand Hotel* that triggered such a response. All the *Mandate* actors played antic caricatures, thus putting a safety lock on that trigger

## XI.

---

<sup>8</sup> Adrian Scarboro, 17 January 2005 at class session in National Theatre.

**Tropicana** The Shunt Group Director, David Rosenberg, in collaboration with *Silvia Murcurali, Nigel Barret, Paul Mari, Chris Tekkam, David Farley, Leila Jones, Max Ringham, Ben Ringham, SusanneDietz, Helena Hunter, Sarah Cant, Julie Boules. Sound and music in collaboration with Conspiracy.* [Shunt Group Collaborative also includes Layla Aldridge, Serena Bobowski, Gemma Brakis, Lizzie Clachan, Louise Mari, Hannah Ringham, Andrew Pulland, Mischa Twitchen, Heather Uprichard.] Shunt Vaults, 13 January 2005.

The easiest way to get to the vaults that are the site for this show is to take the London Underground to London Bridge Bridge Station and walk a few meters through the station to the Shunts entrance. In retrospect, the performance space expands out from the staged action all the way from one's entrance to the Northern Line right through to getting off at the same station about three hours later. "Invade" is more correct than "expands." *Tropicana's* incursion into everyday space and life simultaneously sets up an audience foray into the reserved space of theatre –an underground subversion if ever there was one. Such a use of space, including architecture of a space, remains controversial, despite some four decades of experiments like the Happenings of Jim Dine or Allen Kaprow of the last century. The separation of game or play space, sacred or ritual space or theatre space retains the sacrosanct fields, chancels, frames and borderlines that are usually vital to achieving the desired outcome. The extravagant transgression across proper lines that characterizes *Tropicana* only works because it sets up clear signals that this is a treason of established order of things. By attending we agree to participate in subversion.

The ticket taker, soon to be seen as one of the actors, accepts the entrance card, and directs the playgoer into the "lobby." The audience is already on the staging area, observed by video cameras and by actors selling drinks. There is some initial ambiguity concerning whether this is really a lobby –the drinks are there to be sold, or already the start of the show. The role of Observers switches from ticket holders to actors. An ominous voice over intones a brief description of what is about to take place, and a claustrophobic may wish to be excused at this point. Unlike in the usual theatre lobby, actors have already asserted control over the ticket holders. Continuing to stay with the event is a decision to accept their control, not knowing whither or when or why.

The next "set" is a lift operated by a pleasant enough fellow who will appear much later in quite other guise. That is it *looks* like an elevator and *feels* like an elevator, but responses to gravity leave the audience unsure of whether it goes up or down. Neither, it just rattles and shakes enough to raise the level of anxiety, then opens to the vast brick caves that were most recently a wine storage depot. Women in bird-like cabaret costumes confront the docile crowd and give a few instructions concerning the routes one is to take. Everyone goes into a room stacked with animal crates to observe a man and woman give a bit of performance and read the many signs urging friendship between humans and other animals. Animal and animal/human motifs appear throughout *Tropicana* but two members of the collaborative disavowed any continuous "message" intended.<sup>9</sup> That may well be, as artists cannot know all the "content" or "intent" of their works; much enters through routes more darkly mysterious than this set. An committed animal rights believer would, however, not miss such motifs, and there is something

---

<sup>9</sup> Heather Uprichard and Lizzie Cochlin, visiting theatre class, 15 January 2005.

about the repetition of them that recalls the late Stan Brakhage's film *Dog Star Man*. From this third scene the audience are herded like cattle out into what Victorians would have called "Stygian" darkness. It felt like that, or like being pulled into a movie you know is going to be a horror flick from the look of the dim lighting of the leader footage. The architectural layout could evoke recollections of Piranesi's *Carceri*.

Shuffling through unknown territory in the dark with minimal and sometime confusing leadership from strange people, some –perhaps many in the audience lost their bearings. Throbbing musical tracks, screeches. Lights suddenly flaring and subsiding into blackness. People in masks, the cabaret girls in a few feathers. Then all of those "not with it" seated on low benches in an array of interconnecting alcoves. An overhead track, once used to move casks of wine through the corridors now accommodates an antique automobile and then a hearse, the corpse the friendly elevator man. And much more. And much more to this disruptive display. Sirens and sounds like bombs falling assault the ears. Older members of the audience could remember hearing about the underground bomb shelters of the blitzkrieg years. Some visitors to the performance may even have so used this very space, for that was its function in that era.<sup>10</sup> I was not one of those, but the experience was the first time I had ever viscerally comprehended what that war was like for Londoners. It was shocking..

Later the audience was walked past stands of chairs, with seated cobwebbed skeletons, and the names of the dead, then on into an acrobatic wake where the bird women did a marvelously obscene dance around and over the hearse. In other parts of the world there are traditions of commingling sex and death in theatrical rituals that are at once funny and frightening. The *Gedé* of western Africa and Haiti are examples. Something like it appears in some German films of the twenties and thirties, and there are folktales in goodly measure that put a raunchy edge on the terrors of oblivion. But this presentation was almost certainly a novelty for most London theatre goers. As with any proper wake, we were invited to partake of refreshments during what turned out to be a sort of intermission. Many did so, and there was the usual milling about and conversation that occurs at any entree. Yet here there was the same ambivalence that obtained in the lobby: intermission was also part of the play. "The world is but a stage..."

The final "act" of this elaborate event had the audience sitting on seats amphiatre fashion, while a startlingly disgusting mock autopsy took place in what would have been stage space under other circumstances. Bright lights alternated unpredictably with a return to Stygia, and a rush of wings signaled that a bird woman was flying into the only traditional audience space of the evening. And then another, better lit, and then the returns to the "stage space." Here there was a lot of political harangue spoken or marked out on the walls in sanguine graffiti. After a while it came to an end. Not a conclusion but an end.

---

<sup>10</sup> Lizzie Cochlin, Designer, in response to my question noted that indeed the space had been used as a bomb shelter, and that there is still a German bomb embedded in the overhead structure, and a blue marker historical plaque. However, she and colleague Heather Uprichard, visiting our class noted that although the troupes knew of this, it is not such an intentional incorporation. There is a high degree of chance and randomness in the performance and even in the uses of the space.

Some in the audience were left with much about which to grumble and complain. Outside the conversations seemed divided by generations, with younger people saying, “Like that was so-o cool!” or “God, I loved it.” By chance the audience mostly consisted of twenty-somethings and senior citizens with few middlers. The seniors appeared not to have liked the performance at all. It bears some pondering about why this was so. Some seniors had been to happenings, but rejected this form generated out of similar sensibilities. The apparent lack of dramatic structure, the inclusion of a great many events, costumes, lines, lights and sounds with no conjunctive meaning and, for several, the advertisements that seemed to promise a bit of titillation, all surfaced in conversations that were almost entirely disappointed and disparaging. There seem to have been in fact two different audiences experiencing the offering from two different world views.<sup>11</sup>

## XII.

**King Lear**, William Shakespeare. *Director*, Bill Alexander; *Set Design*, Tom Piper; *Costume Design*, Kandis Cook; *Lighting*, Tim Mitchell; *Music*, Johnathan Goldstein; *Sound*, David Tinson; *Fights*, Malcolm Tanson. *Cast*: King Lear, Corin Redgrave; Gonerill, Emily Raymond; Duke of Albany, Caolan Byrne; Regan, Ruth Gemmell; Duke of Cornwall, Anatol Yusef; Cordelia, Sian Brooke; King of France/Gentleman, Samuel Clemens; Duke of Burgundy, Jack Witam; Earl of Kent, Louis Hilyer; Earl of Gloucester, David Hargreaves; Edgar, Pal Aron; Edmund, Matthew Rhys; Lear's Fool, Leo Wringer, Moriani, Michael G. Jones; Oswald, Sean Hannaway; Curan/Doctor, Peter Bygott; Captain, Johnathan Forbes; Lady, Louise Bangay; Knight/Servants Matt Cross; Tam Mutu; Jack Whitam. *Royal Shakespeare Company, Albery Theatre, London, 14 January 2005*

*King Lear* demands so much from an audience that aesthetic distance is absolutely necessary. The separation of stage and theatre provides a kind of filter protecting those in the seats from the *terribilitá* before them, driving relentlessly through human frailty to the final tragedy. RSC actors are skillful and disciplined enough to lift the astounding poetry above the scenery, sound and light effects to send the poet's message directly into the audience.

Although this article centers on staging and the relationships created thereby, a word needs to be said here about the interpretation. Redgrave's Lear limps onstage in the expected manner of an old man, but already one notices that the cliché flowing white beard is absent. Suddenly Redgrave unwinds from this doddering posture like a spring released. This is a man just past the cusp of his late middle years, still powerful, still, until only a few moments later, in full control of his kingdom and his minions. This action, coupled with costuming, more clean-shaven CEO than mediaeval ruler, broadens the emphasis from downfall of an elderly king to give voice and vision to the full scope of Shakespeare's words. Such a portrayal of Lear captures the sensibility of anyone who has reached a point of realization that he has already been whatever he was going to be when he grew up. Anything else is too late in coming. For many, this moment of truth burns in as a searing disappointment. To place Lear there instead of a place father along

---

<sup>11</sup> A personal note: I very nearly left at the very beginning, reacting to the closure and control as though in a nightmare about genocide. We were later told that sometimes people have to be assisted to leave, being in such state of distress. Yet I was glad I stayed, glad to have endured the thrill of it. I wish I could have gone again.

his life's trajectory makes the final, inevitable annihilation all the more devastatingly, personally meaningful.

Staging here, as in several other of the plays viewed, serves metaphorically. The great wall at the rear cracks open, the lightning flashes of the storm scene echoes in the zigzagging rift. The scenery is at first doubles then becomes increasingly dispersed and deliberately disunified. Only in the final scene is the "unity of time and place" restored. Just ahead of that, as Edgar leads Gloucester to the supposed brink of the chalk cliffs, the stage is nearly bare: fate being wiped clean. The supposed precipice lies between the actors and the first row of seats. Edgar's gaze is on his father. Gloucester faces the audience but in his blindness cannot see them eye to eye. A mercy and a blessing for the onlookers, else it be too much to bear.

Costuming for this performance was perhaps too obtrusively "meaningful. To have Lear in near-modern attire is disconcerting, given the sort-of Renaissance costumes and swords of many of the players. Regan is a strange Punk-Gothic and Gonnerill reminiscent of Miami vulgar nouveau riche. Cordelia is gowned out of Pre-Raphaelite paintings of sentimental, sad heroines. Each of these modes is in some way related to the character who dons them, but may be too much. The words have such a heavy freight of meaning that the women's costumes could, perhaps *should* be neutral.

Set and props are relatively simple, although the cloth that descends from on high to become the ironic throne whereon Cornwall gouges out Gloucester's eyes, and later ascends is a bit of spectacle. The long banquet table is broken up into its components after the first, divisive scene. Lighting and sound on the other hand, are complex. Interrelated, in turn they relate to the words and action sometimes to provide the requisite ambience and sometimes to echo, magnify, and intensify the emotional burden of the lines. Above sound, light, dramatic gesture and action are the words, the words. This is what came across in the most literal sense.

This was the first time I truly heard the poetry and received its message from the most powerful play I have ever seen.

### XIII.

**Macbeth**, William Shakespeare. *Director: John Caird; Designer, Christopher Oram; Lighting Designer, Neil Austin; Costume Designer, Christopher Oram; Sound, John Leonard. Cast: Macbeth, Simon Russell Beale; Lady Macbeth, Emma Fielding; Malcolm, Tom Burk; Macduff, Paul Higgins; with Paul Ritter, John Rogan, Hilary Sesta, Jane Thorne, Janet Whiteside. Almeida Theatre, London 15 January 2005*

Is it the times we live in? All three of Shakespeare's tragedies seen this January hold the fated jewel of individual tragedy in the clasp of a riven and then restored state. Broken Verona's scattered shards "Where civil blood makes civil hands unclean..."rejoin as Capulet says, "O brother Montague, give me thy hand..." Gloucester announces "...division of the kingdom..." in the second line of *Lear*, and shortly Lear brings forth his map to initiate the process. It is a reprehensibly irresponsible process, as Lear seeks to be what Freud would call an "infantile omnipotent," gone to play war

games with his soldiers while leaving the royal duties to others. At the play's end Albany utters his sad command: "Bear them from hence. Friends of my soul, you twain rule in this realm, and the god's state sustain." *Macbeth* begins in revolt and ends with Malcolm, hailed King of Scotland "...calling home our exil'd friends abroad." In between, there is the exchange between Malcolm and Macduff:

**Macduff:**                   Bleed, bleed poor country!  
For goodness dare not check thee, wear thou thy  
wrongs....

**Malcolm:** ...I think our country sinks beneath the yoke;  
it weeps, it bleeds, and each new day a gash  
Is added to her wounds.

**Macduff**... Oh. Scotland, Scotland...

then

**Ross:** Alas, poor country.  
Almost afraid to know itself. It cannot  
Be called our mother, but our grave...

These excerpts from Act IV, scene III, remind that Macbeth's personal tragedy is mapped out upon the country as a national tragedy; just as the love affair of Romeo and Juliet maps out into the streets and families of Verona; just as Lear's failing of character and dissolution into grieving madness maps out upon the wreckage of his realm. May it be the case that the preternatural wisdom of the playwright used personal and familial instantiations to exhort his warring countrymen to an examination of conscience?

Christopher Oram's setting is more bleak than the most barren of Scottish crags, eil Austin's lighting is yet more stark. The stage is usually round, backed with stony gray walls, and is somewhat thrust into the audience space. Entrances and exits on stage are generally into and out of dark, constricted portals. Unlike with *Lear* there are entrances and exits through the aisles of the audience space, and the rustle of these has an effect of pulling the audience into the action. Yet the crucial moments of the play remain distanced. Toward the end the three witches are pressed against the outer edges of the stage space, nearly motionless, their physical presence an intrusion of the prophecy into the moment of its fulfillment.

The playwright called them "witches," but as directed by Caird, they seem more like seers. It may be useful to remember that in the Elizabethan era, the notion of witch was somewhat different from what we have come to make of it in modern times. The possibility of evil-doing was less central than that of special, secret or occult knowledge. These three weird sisters—oracles, are alternately situated center stage or on the periphery. Their placement becomes a part of the physical as well as moral environment of the play.

Whether by direction or by his intuition as an actor, Simon Russell Beale's position on stage at all times seems as deliberate as gesture and speech. His static position at the center in the end was apparently his choice.

I'm going to sit centre stage for the whole of the fifth act, waiting for the world to come to me. I was very keen that there should be minimal fighting, because the last bit of the play is linguistically and spiritually very interesting. For example, when Macduff arrives, I want to be able to explore what it's like for Macbeth finally to meet the father of the children he has had murdered ('Of all men else I have avoided thee'). So I had this idea of being absolutely stationary, and an image of Stalin trapped in his paranoid little room.<sup>12</sup>

This use of space indeed results in the desired effect. Beale's exceptional control of voice lifts Shakespeare's word out into the audience. Antique as the language is, we cannot fail to grasp the nerve and blood of the ineluctable message.

#### XIV.

**Head/Case**, Ron Hutchinson. *Director, Caroline Hunt; Designer, Tom Piper; Lighting, Ben Ormerod; Music, John O'Hara. Cast: Tracey, Claire Cogan; Julia, Sarah Cattle; Jimmy, Jonjo O'Neil. Soho Theatre and Writers' Centre, under auspices of Royal Shakespeare Company. London, 16 January 2005.*

A half-way house for those recovering from brain injuries looks like all those inert rooms in which modern "health services" warehouses those victims, the patients. Nothing in the décor would encourage optimism. A bed, A couch and doors that roll about to signal a shift of time and slight shift of space leave the stage to be filled with the old-timey Irish songs of Jimmy and the unremitting babble of Tracey's talk. Not conversation: talk. Tracey has stopped a brick in the troubles of Northern Ireland, Julia was in an automobile accident. Like *Blithe Spirit*, this is a play seen from the other side of the stage, and nothing makes incursion in either direction.

The team uses stage space imaginatively, and eventually the rolling about to place doors in one site or another helps disclose that Jimmy is the other side of Tracey's own character. He comes in and out of the door, approaches and retreats as though making an agile migration from one hemisphere or lobe of the brain to another. The opposite of his supple transpositions is Julia's calcified rigidity. Sarah Cattle must need a professional massage after every performance. Place changes of the props always move the play forward toward its eventual revelations, the denouement coming with Jimmy's remarkable decent and disappearance into the couch cushions. Julia unbends a little, Tracey gentles and this allegory of Irish and English strife and reconciliation is accomplished.

A slight staging, a slight play, but well-acted, especially by Claire Cogan.

#### Conclusion

---

<sup>12</sup> Paul Taylor, <http://enjoyment.independent.co.uk/theatre/features/story.jsp?story=600012>. 15 January 2005

To judge from these fourteen plays, the scope, the energy, the traditions and the creativity of British theatre are alive and well and living in London. The stagings ranged from the most elaborate grand machines and architectural extravagances to the simplest of low-budget productions, and in every case displayed professional expertise and imagination. Aside from the Ken Campbell's one man show with poster backdrop and a couple of tables, *Head/Case* must have had the lowest budget, yet the simple, quite standard pieces were used with insight and flair. *Blithe Spirit* was a tour de force of elegance exploding. It was fascinating to see how a long banquet table could present one complex of meanings in *The Bog of Cats*, another in *Festen*, and yet another in *King Lear*.

In discussing each of the plays, I have had in mind most of all the relationship between the reserved space in which the staging takes place and the space from which the unpredictable, happenstance gathering of people observes the unfolding story. *Tropicana* necessarily broke open that simple outline, and in a sense illuminates how the reserved spaces function. As I consider the social effects that these different uses of space may have, and in being so particularly conscious of three-dimensional spaces and surfaces, I arrive at a more elaborated awareness of the differences of theatre, video and film. The social *effects* of the literary aspects of all three may be similar, but the *affect*, hence the possible social *effects* are, I am coming to understand, different in crucial and profound ways.