

Article 3

Devising Original Entertainments for Popular Audiences: ‘New Lamps for Old!’

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Abstract

Traditional forms of rustic folk theatre offer rich opportunities for enabling contemporary theatre-makers to devise performances that use the satiric aesthetic of the carnivalesque to explore the social themes that animate the conversations of ordinary citizens in their local pubs. Paulo Freire’s conceptualisation of the *conscientização* process provides a new model for guiding dramaturgical research that is conducted with the intention of creating and presenting original entertainments amongst site-specific popular audiences. This paper demonstrates how the processual phases of the *conscientização* process encourage the same ‘points of process’ that Baz Kershaw identifies as the ‘four main characteristics of the radical in performance’.

Résumé

Les formes traditionnelles de théâtre populaire rustique proposent des opportunités riches permettant aux metteurs en scène contemporains de théâtre de créer des spectacles qui utilisent l’esthétique satirique du carnivalesque pour explorer les thèmes sociaux qui animent les conversations de citoyens ordinaires dans leurs pubs locaux. La conceptualisation par Paulo Freire du processus de *conscientização* fournit un nouveau modèle pour guider la recherche dramaturgique qui est menée dans le but de créer et de présenter des divertissements inédits parmi des audiences populaires spécifiques à un site. Cet article démontre comment les phases procédurales du processus de *conscientização* encouragent les mêmes ‘points de processus’ identifiés par Baz Kershaw comme étant les ‘quatre caractéristiques principales du radical dans le spectacle’.

Resumen

Las formas tradicionales del teatro rústico folklórico ofrecen ricas oportunidades para permitir a los productores de teatro contemporáneos para producir obras que usan la sátira estética carnavalesca para explorar los temas sociales que animan las conversaciones de los ciudadanos comunes en sus tabernas locales. La conceptualización de Paulo Freire del proceso de la *conscientização* ofrece un nuevo modelo para la investigación dramaturga que es conducida con la intención de crear y presentar entretenimientos originales para las audiencias que acuden a sitios específicos populares. Este publicado demuestra como las fases procesales de la *conscientização* persiguen los mismos ‘puntos de proceso’ que Baz Kershaw identifica como ‘las cuatro características principales de lo radical en la actuación’.

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Devising Original Entertainments for Popular Audiences: ‘New Lamps for Old!’

A thin young man is performing in the midst of a rowdy pub crowd. He vamps his way around the front of a pool table as he burlesques a sleek, seductive ‘cigarette’ with a ludicrously curvaceous bosom. Using extravagantly flamboyant arm gestures, ‘she’ plays up for the crowd as she reassures a stubble-faced, flannel-shirted ‘bricklayer’ that — even though the new anti-smoking laws will shortly prevent them from ‘enjoying each other’ when he steps inside his favourite pub — she will never desert him and will always be available ‘to satisfy his cravings’ whenever he reaches for her.

A gaunt, middle-aged figure in the crowd suddenly steps forward into the performance space. He raises one hand for attention as he simultaneously places the fingers of his other hand over the gaping hole in his throat, and addresses those present. The mirthful hubbub changes to respectful silence as the vibrating tone of his voice floats out over the tightly packed bar room crowd. As he does so, he draws deep gulps of air that freeze the performers in their positions. ‘You listen to me now!’ he rumbles. ‘If you smoke, you’ll end up like me!’ [deep inhalation of breath] ‘They cut me from ear to ear to get at the cancer ...’ [rapid inhalation] ‘They told me to quit smoking, and they told me what would happen if I didn’t ...’ [deep breath] ‘But I never believed them!’ [deep breath] ‘Look at what you see!’ [pause for a deeper breath, then earnestly] ‘You don’t want to end up like me!’

Time seems to stop as the formerly rambunctious crowd listens without a murmur to the testimony of this cancer survivor in their midst. When he concludes his comedy-killing message, a pall of silence hangs in the air for a moment or two as everyone waits to see how the performers will respond to this amazing interruption. Then, with a pleasant smile and perfect timing, the 1.8 meter tall ‘cigarette’ steps forward and — with just a trace of surprised incredulity in his twinkling eyes — remarks lightly, ‘Well ... *that* was unexpected!’

There is an explosion of laughter and cheers for the anomalous moment that all have just experienced. Without skipping a beat, everyone has embraced both the impromptu admonitions of the cancer survivor and the improvised recovery line of the ‘cigarette’ as one of the other performers enhances the conviviality of the moment with a joyful rolling glissando over the keys of her accordion as the show resumes where it had left off.

‘Dialogic exchange’ and ‘participatory engagement’ with their audiences are ‘points of process’ (Kershaw, 1999: 18–20) to which performers give considerable attention throughout the preceding weeks of pre-production dramaturgical research and rehearsal. This is a story about a devising process that enables performers to engage their audiences in varying types of direct-address communication that seek to interrogate issues of current topical discussion and reflect upon those issues through a modern adaptation of the centuries-old European folk tradition of mumming.

Pre-modern folk traditions offer many opportunities for contemporary theatre-makers to connect with popular audiences in radically new ways. Since 1987, undergraduates studying for the Bachelor of Arts (Communication — Theatre/Media) at Charles Sturt University in Bathurst, New South Wales, Australia have adapted the European performance tradition of mumming (Helm, 1980) as the basis for learning how to use physical comedy to create original entertainments that are specifically crafted to address the themes and issues which animate the

conversations of ordinary Australians who patronise local Bathurst pubs. To achieve this objective, they have to learn how to conduct new forms of dramaturgical research. This undertaking challenges them to critically reassess their role as theatre-makers who, because they cannot begin with a reading of a script, must learn to initiate their production efforts with a reading of the ‘thought-language-context’ (Freire, 1998: 141) of their fellow citizens.

In this discussion, I explain how this orientation enables ‘theatre-makers’ to operationalise new processual strategies for the conduct of dramaturgical research as they engage in the pre-production and production phases of a theatre-making enterprise that uses Paulo Freire’s (1996: 127–34) conceptualisation of the *conscientização* process as a guideline for devising original entertainments that will resonate with site-specific popular audiences. I clarify this new dramaturgical orientation by offering a tightly cross-referenced rendering of Freire’s own writing in order to amplify his perspective on *conscientização* as a process of *investigation*, *thematization*, *problematisation* and *cultural intervention* (Freire, 1994: 77–78). This proposition asserts that the *conscientização* process has direct relevance for the creative enterprise of devising entertainments for performance amongst popular audiences.

Early in my work life amongst Theatre/Media undergraduates at Charles Sturt University, I began to consider the similarities between Freire’s account of his methodological innovations in adult literacy and the characteristics of what I can only describe as a type of ‘arts illiteracy’ that I often detected amongst many of the pre-professional, young adults who participated in the classes that I taught. What I mean by this is that the students’ prior learning, and their experience in theatre production, usually meant that they had studied production methods and practices that were primarily — if not solely — concerned with the analysis of scripts and the interpretation of those scripts on a proscenium arch stage within purpose-built venues.

I noticed that they did not have a working vocabulary for describing and guiding their labours if the objective of their theatre-making project was to devise original entertainments for theme-specific, or site-specific, cultural performance events. In Freire’s terms (Freire and Macedo, 1987: 35), they did not have a vocabulary for ‘reading’ and ‘naming the world’¹ because they had not yet developed a critical — and therefore transformative — stance in relation to either their own studies, or to the cultural action dimension of their theatre-making initiatives.

The primary focus of this discussion centres around my interest in applying Freire’s dialogical epistemology — specifically his ideas about the *conscientização* process — by integrating it into my own evolving approach to what a ‘co-intentional’ and ‘problem-posing education’ (Freire, 1994: 51) approach to theatre-making might mean within the context of my teaching practice. In particular, I was interested in the implications the *conscientização* process held for the dramaturgical research that forms such an important aspect of pre-production preparations for devising original mumming entertainments that are designed to address the ‘meaningful thematics’ (1994: 93) of site-specific popular audiences in provincial Australian pubs.

Reconceptualising Theatre-Making: Start by Reading Your Audience

‘The starting point for organising the program content of education,’ says Paulo Freire, ‘must be the present, existential, concrete situation, reflecting the aspirations of the people’ — one that uses ‘the thought-language with which men and women refer to reality, the levels at which they perceive that reality, and their view of the world, in which their generative themes are found’. It is important to notice that Freire’s approach to dialogue takes the learner/participants’ ‘thought-language’ about *their* ‘situationality’ as the starting point for discussion: ‘Reflection upon

situationality is reflection about the very condition of existence: critical thinking by means of which people discover each other to be “in a situation”.’ (Freire, 1994: 77–90)

The situation that shapes the learning and teaching associated with the creation of contemporary mummery for site-specific popular audiences reflects the dual character of the enterprise. This project is simultaneously an ‘educational project’ (Freire, 1994: 36) within a higher education setting, and a challenge for theatre-makers who need to know more about the ‘thought-language-context’ of their site-specific audiences.

This process begins with an investigation into the ways in which they, the theatre-makers, perceive the social reality of the types of people who they imagine they will encounter within local Bathurst pubs. At this early stage of pre-production, my role is to ‘dialogue with them about both their *objective situation* and their *awareness* of that situation [as well as] the various levels of perception of themselves and of the world in which and with which they exist’ (Freire, 1994: 76). By articulating what we already know — this is what Freire (1994: 96) calls our ‘real consciousness’ — we are then in a position to speculate about the topics of conversation that are likely to have currency amongst the ‘communities of interest’ and ‘communities of location’ that comprise the different subcultures of folk who frequent specific pubs at different times during the early evening. Having developed some hypotheses, the theatre-makers then need to test their assumptions by conducting an on-site reconnaissance of their targeted venues so that they can better understand the interests of their prospective audiences. Their purpose in doing so is to gain reliable, first-hand information of the sort that will engender a more sympathetic appreciation of the thematic concepts that are emblematic of the ‘life area’ (Freire 1994: 91) of the Bathurst ‘locals’. To accomplish this, they must engage in direct, interpersonal dialogue with the pub patrons who will comprise their audiences.

For better or worse, we have simplified Dario Fo’s reflections concerning ‘popular theatre’ by focusing on the importance of locating *representational characters* within a locally contextualised ‘*theatre of situation*’ (1985: 135–36). These representational characters emerge from the theatre-makers’ conversations with the pub patrons and are embodied in five characters that have specific roles to play. These are a ‘presenter’, a ‘figure of light’, a ‘figure of darkness’, the ‘object of desire’ and the ‘sham doctor’. The concept of placing representational characters within a locally contextualised ‘theatre of situation’ is a perspective that we have found to be very useful for the reason that we can ‘hold’ these precepts ‘in our heads’ as we work on developing scenarios for dramatic action that are tightly constructed around the interests of our prospective audiences.

We have also discovered that if we focus our devising efforts upon these two concerns, then elements of the late John McGrath’s characteristics of political theatre (1981: 54–59) tend to emerge in response to the specific thematic messages that the theatre-makers seek to communicate. What the theatre-makers need to define through their interactions with pub patrons are the specific themes, issues and localised perspectives that these characters represent, and how their motivating appetites, expressions, costumes and demonstrative actions can embody, or codify the heteroglossic voices of ordinary Australian citizens concerning these matters of current interest. Because their mummery must take into account the idiomatic expressions and contextual circumstances of their prospective audiences, the students’ dramaturgical research focuses them on the ‘generative words’ (Freire, 1998: 50–55) and the ‘meaningful thematics’ (Freire, 1994: 93) of their prospective audiences.

We have condensed the dramatic action of traditional European forms of mummery into a specific sequence of direct-address interactions with pub audiences. The performers begin by

spending 20–30 minutes ‘working the room’ through the simple activity of talking with the pub patrons. They are in costume, but at this point they are not speaking from an assumed role position. They simply talk with people in an informal way and let them know that soon they will be presenting a short bit of comic foolery. They then leave the room to regroup for a raucous musical *entrée* procession that ends in claiming a performance space in the midst of the pub patrons. The ‘presenter’ uses ‘backtracking’ conventions (Fo, 1985: 133) to introduce each character in turn, and as they come forward they use wacky rhyming verse to tell the audience who they are by detailing something about their motivating interests while at the same time, intimating what they think about the other characters who are standing behind them. This introduces information about the ‘inciting incident’ that opens up the issues of the ‘root conflict’ (Kirk and Bellas, 1985: 30–31). At this point, the ‘object of desire’ comes forward and gives some further reflections on the dilemma with which she or he must contend. Usually the ‘object of desire’ represents the interests of the pub patrons, functioning as a sort of an ‘Everyman’ figure.

The exposition of the ‘root conflict’ initiates a sequence of action in which the ‘figure of darkness’ (antagonist) and the ‘figure of light’ (protagonist) woo the ‘object of desire’ with competing flatteries and boasts. This competition for the ‘object of desire’ leads to an escalation of friction between the ‘figure of darkness’ and the ‘figure of light’ as both turn from boasts about their own prowess to the attempt to confront and confound one another with progressively more extravagant slurs and insults. All too soon, their hard words lead to a combat between the ‘figure of light’ and the ‘figure of darkness’, and this combat results in the death of one or other of the combatants; it might even lead to the accidental death of the ‘object of desire’. The zany entrance of the ‘sham doctor’ leads to a magical resurrection of the ‘deceased’ after ‘passing the hat’ (*quête*) to acquire the requisite tribute for services rendered. The entertainment concludes with some further reflections by the ‘presenter’, or with a farewell song, and then the rambunctiously joyful exit procession.

Over the years, these mumming shows have addressed a range of issues that have had currency amongst pub patrons during the time in which they were devised and performed. Examples of these topics include the imposition of a national consumption tax (GST) on all goods and services; the threat that genetically modified crops represent to the integrity of local organic and non-GM primary production; the wood chipping of native forests and consequent loss of habitat for native animals and the economic insanity of having wood and paper products made from Australian woodchips by overseas concerns, that are then shipped back to Australia as value-added imports. Other topics have focused on how a new war in the Middle East was started over non-existent weapons of mass destruction; the significant additional costs that result from a government workplace safety initiative which mandates that scaffolds must be erected on all domestic construction sites; and the over-harsh treatment of asylum seekers — including the gaoling of children and families — who seek to enter Australia as political refugees from oppressive regimes.

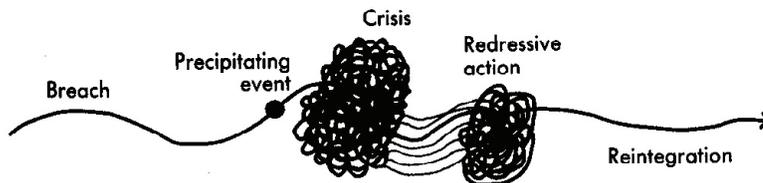
The issues that shaped the dramatic storylines of mumming shows presented in Bathurst during the past two years illustrate how varied the thematic concerns of the pub patrons can be from one year to the next. In 2007 these themes focused primarily on local concerns that related to the vandalising of the town’s war memorial; the huge expense and wasted effort of building a ‘white elephant’ hotel beside the iconic Mount Panorama Racing Circuit on the edge of town; and the danger of violent night-time attacks in local parkland by youthful alcohol-affected hoodlums. Two other mumming shows in 2007 reflected concerns that represented statewide issues in New

South Wales. The first addressed the tax revenues gathered from the presence of poker machines in pubs and clubs, and how this impacts upon the families of problem gamblers who spend alarming portions of their wages on their addiction, while the second concerned the introduction of a ban on smoking indoors within pubs and clubs.

In 2008, the hot-button issues amongst Bathurst pub patrons included concerns over town planning issues relating to new patterns of traffic congestion and commercial dislocations that people fear will result from the creation of a large new shopping centre. Other themes concerned the poorly planned design for renovations in the local hospital; binge drinking and lawless behaviour amongst youth; new taxes that increased the price of alcohol and petrol; and the rivalry between Queensland and New South Wales fans that is massively hyped by the commercial television corporation that broadcasts the annual 'State of Origin' Rugby League football competition.

Each mumming show models a different range of 'redressive actions' that generate different climactic conclusions by the end of the show. Richard Schechner (1988) uses terms drawn from Van Gennep (1960, cited in Turner, 1982: 60) and from Victor Turner (1982: 90) to create the diagrams that are reproduced in Figures 1 and 2. These diagrams offer a clear depiction of how we can understand which elements of the dramatic structure are visible to the audience.

Schechner's schema demonstrates how the audience can come to understand the ways in which the 'root conflict' is present within the 'breach', and how the 'inciting incident' equates with what he calls the 'precipitating event' (Schechner, 1988: 188).



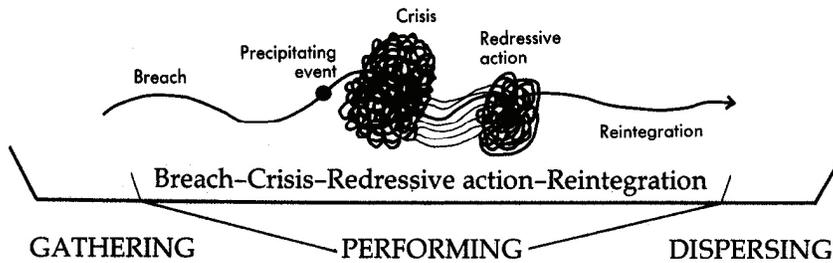
Source: Schechner (1988: 188)

Figure 1 Visible Dramatic Structure

In the mumming shows that Theatre/Media undergraduates present in local Bathurst pubs, the 'problem-posing' messages of the 'ideological transaction' (Kershaw, 1992: 63–64) are introduced through songs and through the points of view presented by each of the representational characters. The escalating tension depicted in their points of clash occur throughout the performance phase that shapes the audience's experience of the successive elements of the dramatic storyline. The actions of each representational character work to precipitate a 'crisis' that calls for 'redressive action[s]', which will result in either 'reintegration' of characters within a world in which harmony is re-established, or the 'recognition of irreparable schism' (Turner, 1982: 69).

A conflation of both Schechner's diagrams makes these propositions clearer. These diagrams are introduced to the theatre-makers in order to illuminate how the audience's understanding of the meaning of their show is experienced as a 'uni-directional movement' of dramatic action within a 'bracketed experience of space and time' that takes place between the

‘gathering’ and ‘dispersing’ phases of their performance. Presented in this fashion, these diagrams appear as shown in Figure 2.



Source: Schechner (1988: 168, 188)

Figure 2 Underlying Structure of Visible Dramatic Elements

Our discussion of the concepts embedded within Schechner’s diagrams help to forge conceptual links between the theatre-makers’ existing appreciation of mainstream theatre and their growing confidence in devising original entertainments for site-specific popular audiences. Students are then offered the following diagram (Figure 3) as a stimulus for promoting further dialogues which are aimed at developing integrated perspectives about the ways in which our particular approach to contemporary mummery draws upon performance theory which, in the top two lines, reflect key concepts drawn from the work of both Victor Turner and Richard Schechner. They are encouraged to contemplate how these ideas relate to the analysis of dramatic structure that is offered by John Kirk and Ralph Bellas (1985: 24–25) in the box at the centre of the diagram. This illustration can be read both horizontally and vertically in order to notice how Turner and Schechner’s ideas align with Kirk and Bellas’s rendering of classic Aristotelian dramatic structure, and how both aspect the approach that we take to contemporary mummery.

During the early phase of dramaturgical investigation, the theatre-makers need to be on the lookout for the types of information that would authenticate their theatrically framed dialogues, and the depictive actions that their representational characters portray, by locating their characters in a contextualised ‘theatre of situation’ (Fo, 1985: 132) so they have a clearly identifiable relationship with the themes that they have discovered through their conversations with pub patrons and bar staff.

Taking this approach means that the theatre-makers need to think and act in new ways. It is imperative that the theatre-makers’ efforts be informed by the ‘thought-language-context’ (Freire, 1994: 84) of the people who actually comprise their pub audiences and not their fantasies about what they think those people talk about. Yet at the outset of this annual project the ‘thematic universe’ of the ‘life area’ (Freire 1994: 77) of their prospective audiences is little understood by the majority of the theatre-makers. At the beginning of their pre-production research, the theatre-makers’ sketchy awareness of the thematic concerns that animate the conversations of their prospective audiences — this is what Paulo Freire calls their ‘real consciousness’ — characteristically yields little in the way of detailed knowledge about the actual issues, topics, idiomatic games and figures of speech that shape the pub patrons’ conversations. Their naïvety and ignorance of these matters are unsustainable in terms of the theatre-making outcomes that we desire to achieve. By working and dialoguing together, we attempt to supplant

their naïve thinking with a more critical approach to the challenges that this theatre-making project occasions. This, Freire (1994: 96) tells us, will happen ‘as potential consciousness supersedes real consciousness’.

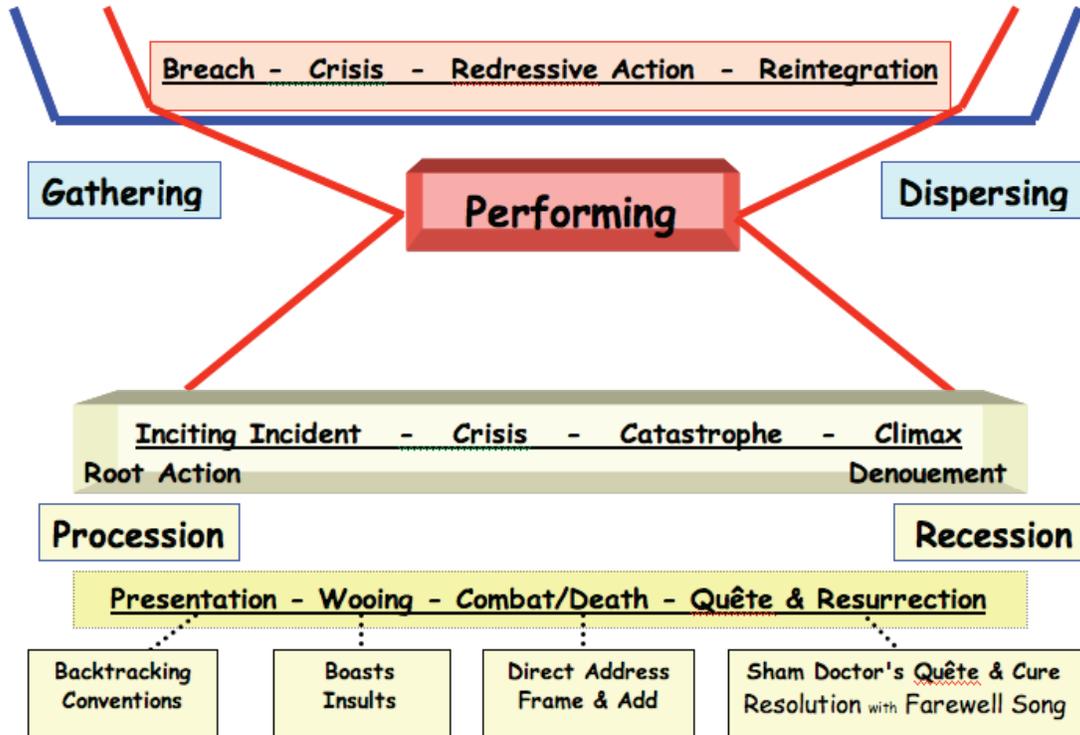


Figure 3: Stimulus for Further Dialogue

The Challenge of the Inductive Moment

The starting point for developing a new processual approach to theatre production lay in my speculations about the transferability of Freire’s ideas about the *conscientização* process to the context of my own educational practice. The conclusions that I draw emerge from a desire to theorise about what Freire’s conceptualisation of the *conscientização* might mean when applied within the particularised context of theatre-making projects that focus on the creation of mobile mumming entertainments designed to be performed amongst the popular audiences who frequent local pubs in Bathurst, New South Wales.

Progressing the project from pre-production through to the run of the performances would gain operational clarity if we employed shared vocabularies for discussing the various production issues that confront each of the multiple companies of performers throughout their devising process. As embedded theory, Paulo Freire’s propositions concerning the ‘phases’ or ‘stages’ of the *conscientização* process provide cogent conceptual categories that aptly describe the critically transformative character of this orientation towards making theatre for the people who congregate in non-standard performance settings, such as an Australian pub.

Table 1 depicts the relationship between our conscientising approach to dramaturgical research and its relationship to the well-known processual phases of theatre production. It offers a graphical representation of the relationship between the *conscientização* process and how that process contributes new meaning and insight into what can be accomplished by theatre-makers whose orientation toward production is informed by cultural action perspectives that seek ‘cultural synthesis’ (Freire, 1994: 160–64) through ludic ‘communion’ (1994: 43) with site-specific popular audiences. The audience-specific ‘complex of interacting themes’ (1994: 83) are investigated by the theatre-makers and theatrically reframed as compound codifications’ (Freire, 1994: 102) that are subsequently expressed through the personages of the mumming characters that they develop.

This approach to theatre production becomes critical when theatre-makers begin to transcend their preconceived ideas about local Bathurst pub patrons by initiating their dramaturgical research with an investigation to discover the ‘generative words’ and ‘meaningful thematics’ of the pub patrons. This enables the theatre-makers to ‘read the world’ and ‘name the world’ according to the ways in which the ‘world’ appears to their intended audiences. But to be able to do this, they must enter into authentic instances of dialogical exchange with the people who patronise the pub in which they will perform.

Having accomplished this, the theatre-makers are in a position to reduce this plethora of information into clusters of expressions and concepts that reveal the thematic universe of the ‘thought-language’ (1994: 77–78) of their prospective audiences’ ‘generative themes’ (1994: 77). This activity provides an empirical basis for developing contextually relevant dramatic action between the representational characters that the theatre-makers develop and the ways in which these characters can use conventions of direct-address as a basis for in-role dialogue with their audiences. Freire calls these clusters of vocabulary information ‘thematic fans’ (1994: 96), for they represent the complex of interacting themes that animate the concerns of the pub patrons.

The movement out of the early phase of rehearsal/construction into a middle phase of rehearsal/construction is inaugurated when theatre-makers begin to decipher the living code of their audiences’ generative themes. At this point, they are in a position to move from reading the world to naming its constituent themes as they initiate dialogues (amongst themselves) that focus on the reduction-coding-decoding of the meaningful thematics of their audiences’ event-specific interests and activities. When they begin to name these themes, they become ready to construct scenarios of dramatic action which demonstrate that they have expand[ed] their understanding of how the various parts interact as ‘moments of the life of the area’ (1994: 92) that have meaning for their prospective audiences. This activity addresses the *thematization* phase of our dramaturgical research. This approach to dramaturgical research contributes to the promotion of diverse forms of dialogic exchange with the theatre-makers’ prospective audiences. As such, this dialogical orientation is designed to enhance theatre-makers’ capacity to locate their fictional representational characters — and their audience — within a contextually specific theatre of situation. We embrace Dario Fo’s emphasis on the need for destroying the fourth wall (1985: 136), for this value/means underscores a determination to foster multiple rhetorical conventions of direct-address by empowering the audience to give utterance to their thoughts and feelings throughout the performance. In this way, they too can feel that they have crossed an invisible threshold and entered into a new quality of ludic being, as a type of ‘aesthetic reflexivity’ (Kershaw, 1999: 20), in communion with the performers.

Table 1: The *Conscientização* Process and the Phases of Theatre Production

The <i>Conscientização</i> Process	Phases of Theatre Production
<p>Investigation ‘Thought–Language–Context’ (Freire, 1998: 141) of the participant theatre-makers and site-specific popular audiences; the discovery of their ‘generative words’ (1998: 50–55) as a ‘living code to be deciphered’ (1994: 92).</p>	Pre-production as early rehearsal/construction
<p>Thematisation Identification of the ‘Generative Themes’ (1994: 77–78,) of site-specific popular audiences through ‘reduction/coding/decoding’ (1994: 86), of ‘meaningful thematics’ (1994: 93). Generative themes ‘are set into codifications’ (1998: 51). Issues emerge as a ‘thematic fan’ (1994: 96), revealing a ‘complex of interacting themes’ (1994: 83).</p>	Pre-production as early rehearsal/construction to mid-rehearsal/construction
<p>Problematism Identification of ‘Limit Situations’ and ‘Limit Acts’ (1994: 80) as ‘coded situation-problems that contain myths and contradictions relating to the ‘unique living code’ of the ‘life of the area’ (1994: 92) in which the site-specific popular audiences interact. Dialogical inter-subjectivity amongst ‘thematic investigation circles’ (1994: 98) facilitates identification of ‘hinged themes’ (101); naïve perceptions become critical as potential consciousness supersedes real consciousness.</p>	Pre-production as mid-rehearsal/construction to late rehearsal/construction
<p>Cultural Intervention ‘These contradictions constitute limit-situations, involve themes, and indicate tasks’ (1994: 94). These tasks involve ‘intervention in the world as transformers of that world’ (1994: 54) and are based upon ‘an attitude of creation and re-creation, of self-transformation producing a stance of intervention in one’s context’ (1998: 48) through the application of ‘dialogical action’ that is realised through ‘cooperation’, ‘unity for liberation’, ‘organization’ and ‘cultural synthesis’ (1994: 148–64).</p>	Production as the run of the performances

The theatre-makers' performative interventions *in situ* with pub audiences accomplish these transformative aims according to the degree to which the salience of their compound codifications succeed in problematising the generative themes that define their audiences' interests. These 'compound codifications' are embodied in the attitudes and costumes of the representational characters that interact with audiences through direct-address performative encounters. The themes engaged by these performances authenticate themselves with their audiences by aligning the theatre-makers' communication initiatives with the thought-language-context of the identifiable communities of interest and communities of location embodied by the patrons of specific pubs.

Our purpose is to promote a sense of spontaneous celebration amongst the pub patrons by facilitating a 'liminoid' experience of 'threshold' crossing (Turner, 1982: 41, 54–55) that has the objective of promoting a playful interlude that temporarily reframes the audience members' experience of the mundane social world of drinking in their local pub. By using music, and transforming themselves into wildly eccentric yet identifiable characters who represent the interests of the audience, the performers attempt to facilitate a 'threshold crossing' interlude that marks an abrupt rupture of the audience's expectations about what they imagined would happen when they enter their local pub. The immediacy of their interactions with our mobile mumming shoes works to alter the audience's sense of occasion by marking it as a bracketed period of 20 minutes, during which time they experience a ludic encounter with entertainments that function as cultural interventions which are designed to valorise the audience's own 'generative themes' through the distorting lens of the carnivalesque aesthetic.

Conclusions

John Fox's reflection on the challenge of designing entertainments for popular audiences is teasingly simple yet conceptually complex: 'Once you decide to work with people other than theatre-goers or artists, you have to find a language or a way of reaching people which is much broader.' (1999: 34) This circumstance offers a greater range of choice in terms of the directness of the 'rhetorical conventions' that theatre-makers can employ to communicate with their audiences. The broader language that theatre-makers employ must reflect the thematic universe of their event-specific audiences, for it is *their* 'meaningful thematics' (Freire, 1994: 93) that are set into the codifications which, as carefully selected rhetorical conventions, are given expression by the representational characters through song, dance, parade and slapstick comedy. Located within a strongly 'framed' and 'signed' (Heathcote, 1984: 160) context for theme-specific dramatic action, the theatre-makers use grotesque laughter and depictions of excessive, appetite-driven behaviour that enable the representational characters to play with the audience and with each other.

Our performance offerings are designed to affect a shift in our audience's perception — from their indicative expectations about how things 'are meant to be' to a more playful frame of mind that fosters the 'subjunctive mood' (Turner, 1982: 80) in which people become willing to interact with the performers through playful and excessively fanciful responses. 'The carnivalesque,' observes Baz Kershaw, 'is a cultural practice characterised by excess, immersion and elimination of distance between subject and object (1999: 52).' So the appearance of highly partisan Rugby supporters who also behave as if they are extravagantly thirsty for beer and are willing to drink yours, or characters who disport themselves as flannel-shirted sages or as stropky, pugilistic representatives of the Taxation Office, or who cavort as anthropomorphised tap-dancing beer cans, or who loudly arrive as a gigantic and malevolently vengeful Minister for

Immigration who chases and threatens a mobile hobbyhorse-like boatload of asylum seekers as they attempt to escape by weaving their way through the pub crowds — all of these character-based interactions with popular audiences have the capacity to transform the audience's expectations about what they thought it would be like to move through well-known streetscapes and into their local pub, yet find themselves in the midst of a landscape in which the familiar has been made decidedly strange.

Costumes, songs, dialogue, dance and combats all function as 'compound codifications' that are meant to facilitate the 'linking of meaningful themes' (Freire, 1994: 89) in ways that are 'simple in their complexity ... and offer various decoding possibilities' (Freire, 1994: 96) aimed at affecting a release of *ludic* 'performance consciousness' (Hilton, 1987: 132–33, quoted in Kershaw, 1992: 24–25) amongst the performers' pub audiences.

The dramaturgical research that supports the students' theatre-making efforts represents the ways in which the learning outcomes emerge as 'potential consciousness' when the theatre-makers' 'real consciousness' (at the outset of the project) changes in response to their altered 'perception of the[ir] previous perception' (Freire, 1994: 96) concerning the 'themes and dreams' of their prospective audiences. These dramaturgical perspectives lead to their conceptual reformation of the role of the performer in the theatre-making process itself. Evidence for these conceptual and attitudinal transformative effects is embodied in the decisions the theatre-makers make as they develop specific representational characters whom they situate within a thematically framed context that their audiences will readily recognise because that situation reflects the conversations they have had with the theatre-makers.

In this way, the 'synthesising, didactic vision' (Fo, 1985: 136) that audiences experience through their interaction with the performers result from the decisions the theatre-makers made in terms of how they would act to transform the perceptions of their audience concerning the 'meaningful thematics' they gleaned from their initial investigative dialogues with their prospective audiences.

These processual approaches to theatre-making are 'new' because they are theorised in a new way. This orientation reveals how Freirean theory (Table 1) has influenced the evolution of a new approach to theatre-making, one that relies on the application of the phases of Freire's *conscientização* process, and certain principles of dramatic structure (Turner, 1982: 69; 1990: 10; Schechner, 1988: 168; Kirk and Bellas, 1985: 24–25, 40–41, 231) that have been combined (Figure 3) to guide a range of dramaturgical and other production-based activities that support our annual preparations for creating resonant, in-role interactions with site-specific popular audiences.

Note

- 1 'Naming the world': In *Cultural Action for Freedom*, Paulo Freire defines this as: 'an act of knowing in which the learner assumes the role of knowing subject in dialogue with the educator. For this reason, it is a courageous endeavour to demythologise reality, a process through which men who had previously been submerged in reality begin to emerge in order to reinsert themselves into it with critical awareness. Insofar as language is impossible without thought, and language and thought are impossible without the world to which they refer, the human word is more than mere vocabulary — it is word-and-action. The cognitive dimensions of the literacy process must include the relationships of men with their world. These relationships are the source of the dialectic between the products men achieve in transforming the world and the conditioning that these products in turn exercise on men. Learning to read and write ought to be an opportunity for men to know what *speaking the word* really means: *a human act implying reflection and action* ... Speaking the word is not a true act if it is not at

the same time associated with the right of self-expression and world expression, or creating and re-creating, of deciding and choosing and ultimately participating in society's historical process. As an event calling forth the critical reflection of both the learners and educators, the literacy process must relate speaking the word to transforming reality, and to man's role in this transformation. Perceiving the significance of that relationship is indispensable ... if we are really committed to liberation. Such a perception will lead the learners to recognise a much greater right than that of being literate. They will ultimately recognise that, as men, they have the right to have a voice.' (Freire, 1972: 28–31).

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