

**ALTERNATIVE DRAMATURGIES IN CONTEMPORARY WESTERN
EUROPEAN THEATRE FOR YOUNG AUDIENCES**

* CHAPTER SAMPLE*

CHAPTER ONE

**The Aesthetics of Agency:
Alternative Dramaturgies in Contemporary Western European
Theatre for Young Audiences**

Emancipation begins when we challenge the opposition between viewing and acting; when we understand that the self-evident facts that structure the relations between saying, seeing and doing themselves belong to the structure of domination and subjection. It begins when we understand that viewing is also an action that confirms or transforms this distribution of positions.

- Jacques Rancière
The Emancipated Spectator (13)

In 1944, Fritz Heider and Marianne Simmel devised an experiment to explore the process of perception. Created to gain insight into how human beings interpret situations and activities without any specifically human components, the experiment asked participants to watch to a film where three geometrical shapes moved in various directions and speeds, and to then interpret what they saw. In Heider's and Simmel's published findings, "An Experimental Study of Apparent Behavior" the results revealed an overwhelming response rate of narrative-based observations, including individualized personifications of the three shapes and stories of rich and detailed interactions between them. While the original experiment included a guided response that fostered personification, the narratives varied and though many overlapped, there were both minute and seismic differences in the participants' perceptions based on their

interpretation of the shapes as humans with complex personalities, desires, and drives (244-247). The spectators of the Heider-Simmel video were given an opportunity to engage in a form of meaning-making which allowed them to make decisions, choices, and insert their own cultural codes, communal memories, and ideology onto two-dimensional objects. Even with the original intent of the film potentially skewing the narrative towards the creators' perspective, the participants still brought their own ideas, creativity, and individual experiences into their description of the event.

Over seventy years later, I participated in several workshops between 2015 and 2019 at the UWC-ISAK Japan international summer school in which a variation of the Heider-Simmel experiment was conducted on adolescents from diverse cultural, socio-economic, national, and geo-political backgrounds. In this version, rather than focused upon the ways in which humans perceive action and activities, the participants were simply shown the video and then asked to describe what they saw. The answers varied widely from stories of bullying to war to potential methods of conflict resolution. Even when one student described the video in terms of a mathematical event, notably the only one in five years of observation to do so, her description of the video as two-dimensional objects moving through a single plane over a confined time lapse was still indicative of her own perception of the world. This ownership of perception by adolescent spectators, the multiple ways in which a person can interpret an event, and the potential for individualized engagement, as demonstrated by my observations of the Heider-Simmel experiment, is at the heart of this dissertation.

While the experiment was based around a short film, the role of perception and narrative is also an integral part of theatre. Throughout history, theatre has engaged with

meaning-making and the social, cultural, and political possibilities of communal narrative. In the late twentieth century, experimental theatre companies in Western¹ Europe gained a renewed interest in theatre and performance as a medium for meaning-making outside of explicit narrative, eschewing the text-centric didacticism of naturalism championed by Yates, Zola, and Antoine and the psychological realism steeped in Ibsen, Shaw, and Chekhov. Instead, experimental work began to scrutinize existing forms, drawing upon theoretical readings of Wagnerian *Gesamtkunstwerk* to deconstruct dramatic performance hierarchies, which establish a distinct distance between spectator and performer (c.f. Ackerman and Puchner; Fuchs; Kloss; Knowles; Tompkins; Worthen; Reynolds). However, the companies credited with pioneering these experimental art forms are by-and-large seen as producing theatre specifically targeted towards adults. There is very little existing scholarship focused on the advances in dramaturgical practice created by Theatre for Young Audiences (TYA). With this gap in the existent exploration of alternative dramaturgies and experimental theatre practices in mind, this dissertation will examine how current alternative dramaturgies used by many theatres for young audiences in Western Europe are the direct result of the experimentations of the late 20th century and, as such, are at the forefront of alternative dramaturgy, multi-perspective viewership, and spectator agency.

By focusing specifically on the theatrical advances of TYA in Western Europe since the late 20th century, I will examine how TYA has fostered a strong alternative dramaturgy which relies on the semiotics inherent in the performance and inspires its

¹ While acknowledging the problematic delineation of “West” and “East” and the linguistic coding such delineations provide, I will be using the term for simplicity of communication. Nevertheless, I still wish to raise the point of this terminology for future studies.

audiences to practice empathy, agency, and social consciousness. I build upon two premises: (1) TYA in Western Europe participated in, and perhaps even championed, the rise of alternative dramaturgies during the late 20th century and (2) that TYA continues to promote and improve alternative dramaturgical practices by connecting to the cultural and ideological needs of young people, pushing the boundaries of what theatre can mean, and how it can both affect and be affected by those participating. To ascertain how alternative dramaturgies operate in contemporary Western European TYA, this dissertation engages with the following questions:

1. What are alternative dramaturgies?
2. How are contemporary Western European TYA companies advancing experimentation with alternative dramaturgies?
3. How are alternative dramaturgies promoting the importance of empathetic exchange and agency for young people?

Through these questions this dissertation aims to redefine current understandings of the progression of alternative dramaturgies in order to highlight a widely overlooked movement within TYA.

Alternative Dramaturgy in Theatre for Young Audiences: Definitions of the Terms

Theatre for Young Audiences

While the exact origins of Theatre for Young Audiences remain contested, many scholars suggest that the emergence of Western European professional theatre geared towards children and young audiences is a late 19th-, early 20th-century phenomenon (c.f. van de

Water “Constructed Narratives;” Schuitema; McCaslin; Springhall). Typically defined as professional theatre by adult actors created specifically for children and/or youth, TYA is situated in the larger theatrical landscape as simultaneously belonging and Other. That is to say, while practitioners engage in theatrical exploration, dramaturgical advancements, and innovation in technology and design, the position of TYA as a subject of study, or even recognized as a valuable contribution to theatre history, remains widely overlooked. Despite this gap in scholarship, TYA has made great strides in establishing itself as a recognized field of study. The International Association of Theatre for Children and Young people (ASSITEJ²) was established in 1965 with an aim to bring recognition to the field and bridge the cultural divide between the East and the West during the Cold War, while advocating for the “right of all children and young people to enrichment through the arts and their own cultural traditions, especially theatre culture” (ASSITEJ Constitution, 2016). The International Theatre for Young Audiences Research Network (ITYARN), established in 2006, was specifically founded to rectify the oversight in theatre scholarship by organizing international conferences and publishing peer-reviewed work and has been the official research network of ASSITEJ since 2011. *Youth Theatre Journal* (2009.1) provides a peer-reviewed journal for ITYARN articles. However, scholarship and research geared toward TYA still remains limited and is often relegated to TYA-specific publications rather than included in larger studies in theatre, performance, and practice.

² ASSITEJ comes from the original French title: *Association Internationale du Théâtre de L’Enfance et la Jeunesse*.

In his foreword to *Theatre for Young Audiences: A Critical Handbook*, playwright David Wood argues for the importance of TYA as a recognized art form, proclaiming that

Theatre for young audiences is an art form. There, I have said it. Theatre for children and young people is an art form. Full stop. Since 1967, when I wrote my first play for children, I have always qualified that statement with, ‘I believe that...’ or, ‘it may sound pretentious, but in my opinion...’ But this book has at last given me the confidence to state firmly that, along with opera, ballet, and mime, children’s theater and theatre created specifically for teenagers is an art form in its own right, not just a junior version of adult or ‘real’ theatre. (vii)

Despite its existence within theatre history for over a century, there are still artists, like Wood, who feel the need to preface their work in children’s theatre to legitimize its standing when speaking to those in adult or “real” theatre. However, Wood also sees TYA as a specific art form outside of the traditional view of theatre history. He and his co-author, Janet Grant, suggest in *Theatre for Children: Guide to Writing, Adapting, Directing, and Acting* (1997) that, “Theatre for children is a separate art form with qualities that make it quite distinct from adult theatre. It is *not* simplified adult theatre; it has its own dynamics and its own rewards” (Wood and Grant 5). However, Wood’s argument that TYA is a separate art form overlooks the role of theatre training and the broad definition of theatre, an oversight which other scholars seek to rectify.

In “There Is No Audience: Meeting the Dramaturgical Challenges of the Spectator in Children’s Theatre” (2012), Tom Maguire walks the line between TYA as both part of theatre history and a distinct art form. He establishes the dichotomy between

theatrical competency of the makers and the lack of knowledge (or interest) in theatre tradition by the spectators (11). Through the idea of “differential dramaturgies,” Maguire suggests “that the spectator would understand the conventions of the performance irrespective of their theatrical competence” while “their modes of accessing the performance would be addressed” (18). Thus, rather than trying to control or dictate the mode of reception, Maguire advocates for a style of spectatorship which encourages and engages with agency as a key component of the TYA craft.

This question of spectatorship, which accesses the modes of perception specific to young people, is the foundation of Matthew Reason’s seminal work, *The Young Audience: Exploring and Enhancing Children’s Experiences of Theatre* (2010). Reason advocates for the connection of TYA and theatre, providing a study which “deals with children’s engagement with theatre as theatre” (ix). His work examines spectator experiences that go “beyond the familiar questions of *why* children should experience theatre, and of *what kind*, and instead examine *how* children watch, understand, engage with, and remember theatre” (xi). By providing credibility to the child as spectator, Reason’s work advocates for the importance of spectator agency within TYA. However, by looking at TYA as existing within the “overlapping frames of reference, evoking discourses of education as much as aesthetics, pedagogy as much as art” (3) he also sets TYA within a different discourse than “adult” theatre. The two are, therefore, under the same umbrella term (theatre) yet different in the intent of the production. His conclusive argument is that TYA is part of a larger understanding of spectatorship, one in which the experiences of young audiences exemplify “the conscious and reflective pleasures that come from empathy and wonderment; and the social pleasures that come from shared

experiences. Whether we think of staring or gazing or watching or witnessing, what we are dealing with is audiencing” (172). Thus, this dissertation intends to rely upon the premise set forth by Maguire and Reason that, while Woods is correct in identifying the distinction between traditional and youth spectatorship, TYA is a theatrical art form which aims to create aesthetically pleasing and profound performances for young people through experimentation and the exploration of other broader theatrical concepts.

Alternative

Stemming from the 15th century French *alternatif* as “changeable, variable, exhibiting variation” and the Latin *alternativus* as “movements to and fro, to ebb and flow, to be variegated” (“alternative”), the word “alternative” has a variety of definitions. The ontologically and epistemologically fitting definition of “alternative” as disjunctive, and a choice between multiple things (“alternative”), highlights the ways in which many non-text-centric performances are conceived and interpreted both by their creators and by their spectators. However, the definition of “alternative” as “various (hypothetical or imagined) realities, worlds, realms of existence, differing from our own in trivial or fundamental ways” (“alternative”) is of particular note when conceiving the idea of an alternative dramaturgy. Perhaps most interestingly, the concept of “alternative” as a hypothetical or imagined realm of existence, offers the definition of alternative dramaturgies a unique position, privileging the imagination of its spectators within the definition of the term.

Dramaturgy

Defining dramaturgy may be just as nebulous as “alternative,” in that there are a variety of different ways the term is understood. In *Dramaturgy and Performance*, Cathy Turner and Synne Behrndt begin their framework by acknowledging the tenuous nature of the term “dramaturgy,” pointing to Marianne van Kerkhoven’s argument that “dramaturgy involves everything, is to be found in everything, and is hard to pin down” (Kerkhoven qtd. in Turner and Behrndt 21). They see dramaturgy as a slippery term which can encompass both the reception and the production of a piece, one in which both the construction of signs and signifiers and, the response to those codes, and the interpretation leads to a “dynamic event” (Turner and Behrndt 21). Their argument follows the established dramaturgical historiography, starting with the Greek *dramaturgia* and Aristotle’s *Poetics*, moving through G.E. Lessing’s *Hamburgis Dramaturgi*, the explorations of Johann Wolfgang van Goethe and Friedrich von Schiller in the 18th century, and rounding out their analysis with 20th century understandings of dramaturgy from Bertolt Brecht, Hans-Thies Lehmann, and beyond.³ Their conclusion, which highlights the development of the concept of dramaturgy from a structure of analysis to an all-encompassing yet amorphous perception of how and why a performance works, ultimately posits that contemporary dramaturgy “might suggest new ways of negotiating our roles as spectators and critics” (Turner and Behrndt 97). Their concept of dramaturgy is a potentially revolutionary design where “the attempt to articulate and identify what we have witnessed, is itself a political act” (Turner and Behrndt 97). Building upon their conclusion, as well as the history of dramaturgy and

³ For more see Aristotle’s *Poetics*, Bertolt Brecht’s *Brecht on Theatre*, Marvin Carlson’s *Theories of the Theatre*, Hotthold Ephraim Lessing’s *Hamburg Dramaturgy*, and Lehmann’s *Postdramatic Theatre*

scholarship it represents, this dissertation will demonstrate a way of looking, a way of conceiving human understanding in how we see, are seen, and wish to see. Moreover, while the history of dramaturgy is empowering in its interest in constructing meaning and the experience of the spectator, it also has a fraught connection with privilege and power, sometimes more interested in directing the gaze than unpacking why the gaze occurs. The liminal space between the direction of the gaze and the decision to gaze, as well as the power that choice can represent, is a vital part of TYA spectatorship and the empowerment the act of viewing can represent. For countries, cultures, and individuals grappling with fractured identities, colonialism, communal memory, and both generational and global politics, the negotiation of spectatorship as an articulation of self and witnessing becomes an especially significant act.

In places like Europe, where political, social, and theatrical history offer competing perspectives of privilege and power, clear definitions can be problematic if not impossible. Reflecting upon her work in “European Dramaturgy in the 21st Century: A Constant Movement,” van Kerkhoven acknowledges that “Today – almost twenty years of dramaturgical experience later – I still do not know properly what dramaturgy is – let alone European dramaturgy” (7). For van Kerkhoven, dramaturgy is hard to concretely define as it is a process, a thing in which “Not only the subject but also the object is constantly moving, not standing still” (7). Paralleling the history of TYA alternative dramaturgy explored in chapter three, van Kerkhoven unpacks the contemporary cultural scene in Europe, lamenting the ways in which twenty years of social, cultural, and economic changes have led to a world in which “all these small but important forms of freedom and autonomy of the citizen that seemed to be acquired since the period of May

'68 are disappearing" (9). Yet, there is also innovation in the blend of science and art, experimentation funded by research which leaves room for creativity without constraints that result from a dependence on ticket sales, and the cultural and social need for inclusive, de-hierarchical, antiracist and anti-colonial work (van Kerkhoven 9-11). Europe's dramaturgy, therefore, is one in which dramaturgy is not only "about the emancipation of the performer but also about the emancipation of the spectator" (van Kerkhoven 11). This emancipation is found in fragmentation, in the way that individual construction creates meaning. It is a way of offering "an alternation between observation and immersion, between surrendering and attempting to understand" where the emphasis moves away from emancipation and towards a desire to explore perception (van Kerkhoven 11). Through her reflection, van Kerkhoven offers a useful idea of European dramaturgy as a concept focused upon the role of complexity, a conversation between multiple perspectives, and a bridge between shifting ideas, concepts of self, and perceptions of experiences. This idea of dramaturgy as a complex, shifting bridge between people, places, ideas, and even perhaps realities, becomes especially useful when defining alternative dramaturgies in a contemporary European context, and in the intensely complex and liminal space occupied by Theatre for Young Audiences.

Parallax Viewership

Used by astronomers to calculate large distances, there is an astronomical phenomenon, also known as a parallax, where an object can appear to be different, change positions, or even change directions based on where and how the object is being observed ("parallax"). In performance, the parallax view draws from the astronomical phenomenon, creating a

way to synthesize complex and dissonant perceptions (Woolf 45). The parallax perspective is based on an understanding that each spectator is calculating meaning through the different, changing, positions of their own identity, communal memories, cultural scripts, and subjective perspectives (c.f. Karatani; Woolf; and Boenisch). A parallax can also refer to the same event perceived by multiple perspectives, such as in James Joyce's 1922 novel *Ulysses*. Combining the concepts of the parallax view, parallax perspective, and the concept of the parallax within narrative, I posit that parallax viewership can encompass both the simultaneity of dissonant perspective in the individual spectator and the multiple, intercultural, and complex perspectives of multiple spectators engaging with the same performance within the nebulous temporary community known as the audience.

Alternative Dramaturgy

Not unlike the experience of "audiencing" put forth by Reason, the ideological underpinnings of more commonly recognized alternative dramaturgy movements of the 1960s aimed to deconstruct the cultural hegemonies of modernism and foster new experiments with form and performativity. For Richard Kostelanetz, alternative theatre, or mixed-means performances, "differ from conventional drama in de-emphasizing verbal language, if not avoiding words completely, in order to stress such presentational means as sound and light, objects and scenery, and/or the movement of people and props" (3). Elinor Fuchs builds upon this idea of de-emphasized verbal language by exploring "the presentation of time and space when we are no longer in a theater of character, when the human figure is no longer the single, perspectival 'point' of stage performance"

(*Death of Character* 12). While Mike Vanden Heuvel looks at the tension between drama and performance and contemporary experimentation, unraveling traditional definitions of performance as the “staging of the literary artifact” (22-4) in order to highlight how

Performance deconstructs authorial power and its illusion of presence, and disperses its quanta of energies among the performers and the spectator as a potential source of a deferred, hypothetical, and immanent power. Performance is therefore initially the displacement of Presence, or power, and the affirmation of Absence and powerlessness. (5)

These expressions of alternative dramaturgy allow for this compilation of complex systems through multimodal, de-hierarchized, and non-text-centric performance, empowering the spectator by engaging with continuous experimentation surrounding the bounds of what theatre can be and how the spectator can be offered agency through the potential of multilayered meaning-making. For spectators whose social position exists on the fringes of power, alternative dramaturgy’s egalitarian approach to meaning-making can be especially powerful.

For young people, particularly those who live in a society where children and young people are denied autonomy, their role as “human becomings” rather than full human beings creates a liminal existence. As Victor Turner suggests in *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure* (1966), liminal personae (such as adolescent spectators in TYA) are “neither here nor there; they are betwixt and between the positions assigned and arrayed by law, custom, convention, and ceremonial” (95). Alternative dramaturgies, which focus upon radical restaging, self-reflexivity, self-thematization, and

renegotiating the place of theatre in a world where mass media rapidly shifts the conversation of art (Lehmann 17), offer theatre practitioners and young audiences a space to explore the liminality of non-binary existence. Within this dramaturgical ideology, the “threshold people” of TYA audiences can find a community and a new form of communication in the parallax of alternative dramaturgy, outside of the system which reduces them to liminal beings. They are offered spaces where they can create their own meaning, areas where “the binary of oppositions or discriminations” (Turner 106) can be explored and questioned.

When engaging with alternative dramaturgies, TYA is also offered a chance to explore the multitude of imaginative ways through which children and young people communicate with the world around them. As Beth Juncker highlights in “What’s the Meaning? The Relations Between Professional Theatre Performances and Children’s Cultural Life,”

Children’s cultural communities *communicate through action*. It is a community which constantly *deals with transformations*. You can actually be what you eat. A community *practicing the aesthetic -- symbolic dimension -- fictions -- every day*. In this dimension *everything can take place, but never ever for real*. And there is *one golden rule* here: children never start activities they don’t like. (15)

There is an inherent understanding of agency within the cultural communities examined by Juncker, an agency that alternative dramaturgies explore through multimodal ways of thinking, creating, and communicating. Non-text-centric theatre, and especially theatre which leans on aesthetics and interpretive forms of communication, offer young audiences a spectator experience where they can engage with the performance as they

might engage with their own community. There is a playfulness, an understanding of plurality where one can practice an aesthetic, to engage your imagination while also still being you, and acts which are predicated by choice.

How Do Individuals Make Meaning?

Material Semiotics

To explore the complexity of the relationship between the performed, performer, and spectator, and the agency which can result from a de-hierarchal approach to meaning-making, this dissertation will primarily use Ric Knowles' theory of Material Semiotics, which he sees as the essential interplay between the Performance Text (what exists on the stage), the Conditions of Production (who is onstage, how they are trained, who is directed, what the process involved, the architecture of the space, the historical and cultural moments influencing creative decisions, etc.) and the Conditions of Reception (who is viewing, how their experience was shaped by front-of-house and other pre-show experiences, where they come from, how they arrived, ticket prices, historical and cultural moments shaping their own experiences (*Reading* 3-9). First defined in *Reading the Material Theatre* (2004) and then expanded upon in *Theatre and Interculturalism* (2010) and *How Theatre Means* (2014), Knowles conceives the interchange between performance text, conditions of performance, and conditions of reception as a process through which meaning is made by “multiple and multiply coded systems of production, systems of communication, and systems of reception” in which “the social and cultural work done by the performance, its performativity, and its force – is the effect of all of these systems” (*Reading* 19). This understanding of semiotics as shaped by the material conditions of reception, as well as the signifiers presented to the spectator, adds a layer of

complexity to how meaning is made in the theatre. Spectators have more agency as their own identity markers, positionality, and perceptions directly impact the meaning of what they are viewing.

For Knowles, making meaning while participating in a performative event is a complex and potentially emancipatory experience. The performance text becomes far more than the literary artifact, encompassing all the ways through which spectators can read and analyze their experiences. Movement as well as the *mise-en-scène* comes together to create a “structural system that functions as the glue that holds the various sign-systems at work in a performance together” (*How Theatre Means* 79). In this space, time becomes musical, organizing itself through tempos, time signatures, bars, phrases, and movements (*How Theatre Means* 58). Space becomes relational with theatrical action carving out meaning through proximity and distance, vertical and horizontal positions, singular and choral figures, spectators and performers, all of which/whom come together to influence the ways through which the spectator perceives the event (*How Theatre Means* 59). The audience or, more accurately, the individual spectators which comprise the nebulous community known as “the audience,” embodies an intercultural “possibility of interaction across a multiplicity of cultural positionings, avoiding binary codings” (*Theatre and Interculturalism* 4). This intersectional spectatorship within an intercultural audience allows for individual acts of viewership to be executed within the bounds of a structured performance, providing a form of communal engagement with individual yet shared acts of being. Therefore, drawing from this understanding of perception and event, the interaction between the performance text, the conditions of performance, and the conditions of reception, Knowles’ theory allows

for the argument that meaning is never stagnant. There is no specific and fixed moment of understanding, no right or wrong reading of a performance, nor any one party that's entitled to create meaning. This fluidity can have a vital impact upon marginalized communities, such as those engaged in the liminality of adolescence represented by my three case studies.

Postdramatic Aspects

Furthering this dissertation's examination of the ways through which alternative dramaturgy engages with multimodal and multilayered experiences of spectatorship in Theatre for Young Audiences, I will explore how a spectator might experience aesthetics and action as integral components of meaning-making. Engaging with aesthetics, what Juncker defines as "a sensitive, playful, symbolic shaping way of exploring and experiencing the world all of us take part in" (22), alternative dramaturgies provide a complex and potentially infinite space of creativity. This space also engages with a particular form of embodied empathy, a way in which creators and spectators can engage with themselves, each other, and the performance text.

In order to approach aesthetics and the ways in which one encounters meaning, I will be focusing primarily upon Hans-Thies Lehmann's theory of postdramatic theory, and particularly his interpretation of the aspects of text, space, time, body, and media, which can serve as simultaneous, overlapping, and complex components of the postdramatic experience. This theory is explored in his seminal work, *Postdramatisches Theater* (1999) and translated into English as *Postdramatic Theatre* (2006), which offers

a useful look at how advancements in non-text-centric performance changed the late 20th-century performance landscape. Rooted in a critical look at theatre history and the various forms of dramaturgical practice and aesthetic forms, Lehmann is interested in how the postdramatic allows theatrical modes to be (de)constructed and (re)performed in a new way. For Lehmann, the postdramatic engages with postmodernism, expanding on ideas of:

ambiguity; celebrating theatre as process; discontinuity; heterogeneity; non-textuality; pluralism; multiple codes; subversion; all sites; perversion; performer as theme and protagonist; deformation; text as basic material only; deconstruction ... nihilistic and grotesque forms, empty space, silence. (Lehmann 25)

In these deformations, deconstructions, and plural spaces of discontinuous ambiguity, Lehmann locates the five postdramatic aspects (text, space, time, body, and media) as a lens through which one can analyze outside the constraints of the literary artifact, focusing instead upon both the physical and metaphysical facets of performance.

However, this dissertation is not a specifically postdramatic reading of TYA. While the ambiguity, cultural coding, and subversion involved in the postdramatic is especially impactful for the adolescent experience, contemporary TYA engages with an added layer of complexity which comes from the presence and existence of the individual spectator. While Lehmann is interested in the act of viewing, he believes that the point of spectatorship is something which “makes totality possible precisely because the position of the viewer, the point of view, is excluded from the visible world of the picture, so that the constitutive act of representation is missing in the represented” (Lehmann 79).

Though this may be true for postdramatic theatre, it is not true in TYA, an art form that is

specifically predicated upon its inclusion of the position of the viewer into the world of the picture. Thus, in order to reconcile Lehmann's understanding of postdramatic aesthetics and the abundance of parallax viewership they foster alongside the foundational component of the spectators within the purpose of theatre *for* young audiences, my use of Ric Knowles and his theory of Material Semiotics, can offer crucial insight into the role of the spectator in performance.

Methodology and Chapter Breakdown

The theoretical framework for this dissertation combines Lehmann and Knowles in order to fill in the gaps they each leave when approaching alternative dramaturgies of theatre made specifically for young audiences. Knowles's primary focus was never specific to alternative dramaturgy and his primary interest in unpacking text-centric forms of theatre, even when including aesthetic and non-text elements, only captures part of the experience of alternative dramaturgies in Theatre for Young Audience. The aspects of postdramatic theatre offered by Lehmann allow one to engage with specifically non-text-centric performances while material semiotics keep the "for" in Theatre for Young Audiences. Together they offer a rich complexity through which this dissertation can examine alternative dramaturgies used in contemporary Western European TYA and the implications of complex, inclusive, and autonomous theatre for young people they create.

While this framework can be applied to a wide, potentially global, range of TYA styles, productions, and audience demographics, I will be focusing on three case studies

which represent similar yet divergent forms of alternative dramaturgy and spectator engagement. My case studies, chosen from productions which I have either seen, have access to through videotaped footage, and/or have access to the script as well as documented feedback, engage with similar themes and intentions yet with enough points of convergence and divergence to demonstrate three variations of how alternative dramaturgy can be used to engage adolescent audiences. All three case studies are intended for young audiences 13-and-up and engage with questions of identity, gender, violence, and power. However, they each represent a different degree of use of linguistic text. The first case study, Replay Theatre's production of John McCann's monodrama *COMET*, provides an example of how script-based theatre, even in forms that appear linguistically-text-heavy like monodramas, does not necessarily require a text-centric approach. As a monodrama, *COMET* offers a unique opportunity to explore how the solo voice generates simultaneous interpretations of meaning while its production as guerilla theatre examines the role of space, power dynamics, and both interpersonal and intrapersonal engagements with material semiotics in theatre for young audiences. The second case study, hetpaleis' devised production *Het Hamiltoncomplex*, explores how language can be deconstructed through a series of episodes that play with the abundance of signs, distortions of language, and complex and multimodal forms of performance. The final case study, the ritualistic movement-based production of MAAS Theatre and Dans (in collaboration with Flat Foot)'s *Rite of Spring: The Threat of Beauty*, is almost entirely devoid of language, relying on aesthetics, movement, and spectator parallax, to create meaning. The goal of the three case studies is to unravel the existence of language in alternative dramaturgies, building upon each other to demonstrate the variety of ways

through which text, space, time, the body, and media can interact with conditions of performance and conditions of reception, ultimately creating a powerful spectator experience.

Chapter Breakdown

The main body of the dissertation will feature five content chapters. In Chapter Two: **Making Meaning: Material Semiotics of Text, Space, Time, Body, and Media** I begin by unpacking my theoretical framework in order to demonstrate how choice, engagement, and perception join together to foster agency in young audiences. I explore a comprehensive conversation between Ric Knowles' material semiotics and Hans-Thies Lehmann's postdramatic aspects of text, space, time, body, and media in order to offer a complex and comprehensive foundation for the rest of the dissertation.

Chapter Three: **Moving Forward by Looking Back: Historical Roots of Alternative Dramaturgy in TYA** focuses on the theatre experimentation which emerged from the cultural and ideological shift in Western Europe during the latter half of the 20th century. Building upon the 1970 UNESCO report "Cultural Development: Experience and Policies" by Augustin Girard, as well as analysis provided by Manon van de Water (*Theatre, Youth, and Culture* 2012) and Hans van Maanen and Stephen Elliot Wilmer (1998), I will show that the post-World War II commitment to more diverse cultural production provided funding opportunities to companies and artists interested in Theatre for Young Audiences. Exploring how funding interacted with the emergence of the TYA Emancipatory Theatre movement, Theatre in Education, and both late 20th century and early 21st century experimental theatre, I trace the progression of alternative dramaturgy

in TYA projects through the late 20th and early 21st century. I highlight how Emancipatory Theatre allowed for a performative (re)presentation of the chaos of childhood and adolescence and the intense weight placed upon the interpretation and abstraction of daily life, linking TYA Emancipatory Theatre to the theory and ideology of postdramatic productions in the 1980s; how Theatre In Education (TIE) contributed to new ways of conceiving interaction and participation with spectators; and how the development of TYA has continued to expand through the invention and incorporation of technology in the 21st century.

In Chapter Four, “**The Normality of This Extraordinary Experience:**” **Carving Space with *COMET***, I explore how directly engaging teenage spectators through guerilla theatre can redesign spaces of power. Unpacking how conditions of performance and conditions of reception can have a direct influence on a performance, I follow the construction of *COMET* from the history of the monodrama through the author’s direct engagement with his targeted audience in the creation of the script to the impact of site-specific and guerilla theatre on both the interpretation and possible intervention on its spectators. The chapter engages with cultural conditions specific to Northern Ireland and post-Troubles male adolescence in order to unpack the role of fractured identity, representation, and community explored through the piece. As the first case study, I demonstrate how de-hierarchal performance experiences creates a plurality of perspectives, non-text-centric aesthetics, and an interplay between the fictive and the real, even in a theatrical event constructed through a solo voice performing a literary text.

Chapter Five: “**Betwixt and Between:**” ***Het Hamiltoncomplex* and the Plurality of Perspective**, explores how gender performance is instructed by an act of

viewership. Exploring the ambiguity of cultural coding as it is applied to the gendered body, *Het Hamiltoncomplex* offers a dense, episodic, and highly experimental deconstruction of the perceptions and preconceptions of gender, girlhood, and adolescence. Devised by Lies Pauwels in collaboration with the ensemble, the piece is performed by thirteen thirteen-year-old-girls and one adult male body builder, thus deconstructing traditional definitions of TYA. The conditions of performance represented by the presence of adolescent female bodies, and the specific ways in which those bodies create potentially complicated conditions of reception, provide a rich tapestry of analysis. Juxtaposing the various ways through which, onto which, and in which bodies create meaning with a barrage of words, pop culture, soundscapes, and myths, *Het Hamiltoncomplex* plays with the familiar-made-strange in order to subvert cultural conceptions of gender performance as instructed by both the internal and external gaze.

Chapter Six: **“Whatever you feel about it is true:” Engaging Aesthetics in *Rite of Spring: The Threat of Beauty*** builds upon the themes and insights from the other chapters in order to explore how non-linguistic performance texts can encourage individualized meaning-making for its spectators. As a case study into the ways in which meaning can also be created through visceral experiences, *Rite of Spring* explores gender performativity and the fractured self through a lush combination of aesthetics, semiotic coding, and gesture. The chapter is predicated upon a unique engagement with material semiotics due to my access to multiple versions of *Rite of Spring*. These include my experience viewing the production as a live spectator for the 2017 South Africa version, my access to the video of the 2017 outdoor Oerol festival production, as well as my

participation in a virtual viewing and discussion of the original 2015 *Voorjaarsoffer* version as an Active Group member in the 2020 virtual Better Than Us Festival. Using my own multilayered experience with parallax spectatorship, as well as comments from other participants in the Active Group and the director, Moniek Merkx, this final case study unpacks the ways in which conditions of reception have a direct influence upon perception and meaning-making. The performance's interest in gender as a multilayered, complex, and non-binary identity creates an apt metaphor for the process of viewership and the ways in which alternative dramaturgy can invite its spectators to engage in their own agency and multilayered sense of self.

Conclusion

This dissertation seeks to explore how young people engage with complexity and how encounters with human subjectivity, the ways in which individuals view the world around them, can create a sense of agency through interactions with other perspectives, both internal and external. Theatre for Young Audiences offers a unique medium through which young people can engage with themselves and others, critique social constructions, and explore the process of meaning-making. Alternative dramaturgies take the potential for multilayered, complex, and fractured perceptions a step further by decentralizing linguistic text and offering multiple modes of communication to act as signifiers in the production of meaning. With the potential that comes from both an abundance of signs, and the possibility of empty signs, each spectator is able to construct their own joint-text, one in which their own parallax perspective can exist alongside the perspectives of others in a parallax viewership where no reading of the performance event is either right or

wrong. They can live in the liminal space between the physical and metaphysical, encounter visceral understanding without tangible signification, and engage in empathetic exchange with both the external and internal. Ultimately, meaning is a thing of simultaneity, a thread converging and diverging with various points of contact, tracing the complexity of experience, the possibility of imagination, and the power of creativity. TYA alternative dramaturgies engage with this fluid parallax, providing power, agency, and ownership to the young people who choose to engage with any two-dimensional or three-dimensional objects moving and interacting in front of them.