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1	<p><b>NB.</b> There was a mixture of ise and ize spellings in this article e.g. globalisation, organisation, but globalizing, localize, etc. For consistency 'ise spellings have been adopted (apart from when these are included in quotations from other sources), especially as most of the articles followed this style.</p> <p>Presumably the stars are an indication that the page numbers need to be checked. Please insert correct page numbers. If the stars do not indicate this, please clarify.</p>	

# Playwriting and Globalisation: Towards a Site-Unspecific Theatre

Dan Rebellato

Globalisation is in some ways a very new phenomenon and seems to require new cultural forms to express and resist it. In this context, playwriting may seem a rather old-fashioned way of handling these shining new realities. As I will show, some have suggested that playwriting itself is fundamentally complicit in the globalising project, and should be rejected in favour of more locally grounded and resistant performance practices. What I aim to do here is explore the complicated relationship between playwriting and globalisation in a way that will throw light both on globalisation itself and the resistant potentialities of theatre and playwriting.

In his fascinating and important book, *A Short History of Western Performance Space* (2004), my colleague David Wiles seeks to tell a new history of the theatre, not through plays or new acting or scenic styles, but through space, demonstrating the determining impact of spatial arrangements on performance. The introduction, in strongly polemical style, identifies the critical tradition that he is opposing. He argues that conventional theatre histories, in focusing their energies on actors, writers and directors, ‘present theatre spaces as immobile lifeless containers’,<sup>1</sup> an historiographical practice no doubt dictated by the dominance of the standard commercial theatre practice, in which a play is written on a computer and the production is designed on a model box, prepared in a rehearsal room, and moved from venue to venue, from studio to main stage to West End or international festival. Arguing that we should ‘refuse altogether the dichotomy of “play” and “space”,’ Wiles dismisses this tradition as ‘commodity theatre’ and plainly wishes his book to be a small contribution to its demise.<sup>2</sup>

There is evidence to support this assertion of playwriting as complicit with the commodity form. It is the case, after all, that one of the measures of British playwriting’s resurgence in the mid-1990s is the

1. David Wiles, *A Short History of Western Performance Space* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), p. 7.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 1.

number of its foreign productions. Any European theatregoer of the last ten years who has managed not to see *Shopping and Fucking*, *Attempts on Her Life*, *The Beauty Queen of Leenane*, *Knives in Hens*, *Gagarin's Way*, or anything by Sarah Kane will have spent a good deal of time and effort not going to the theatre. Wiles's claim might give us reason to pause before celebrating this efflorescence of British theatre writing.

And he is not alone in his valuing of the particular over the general. It chimes well with a common strand in the anti-globalisation movement: the assertion of the local as a site of resistance to the global. The term 'commodity theatre' seems to link the conventional theatre historian's indifference to spatial particularity and a key characteristic of globalisation: its undermining of regional particularity. Transnational Corporations (TNCs) produce commodities in the poorest areas of the world and sell them globally, often subsidised by nominally neoliberal governments, undercutting local produce and undermining local economies, then cultures, customs and traditions. Local environments are transformed, languages other than English fall into disuse, high streets the world over globally converge. In this context, the irreducible value of the local has seemed to some to be a source of resistance. The case has been powerfully made in books like Colin Hines's *Localization* and Walden Bello's *Deglobalisation*, and in celebrated acts of carnival-esque resistance like that of French farmer José Bové, who, in August 1999, led a group that dismantled a half-built McDonalds in Millau, southern France, drove the bits through town and dumped them outside City Hall.<sup>3</sup>

Wiles's argument is fed more explicitly by a theoretical principle decisively articulated by Michel de Certeau in *The Practice of Everyday Life* (1974) then amplified and transformed into a fundamental axiom by postmodernists: opposition to universals. Certeau's book calls for a profound readjustment of a view of society that privileges the view of the consumer over the producer, as witnessed in his preference for the ground-level view of the pedestrian over what he sees as the pseudo-divine perspective of the map.<sup>4</sup> In a sense, *The Practice of Everyday Life* wants to localise all understanding of culture: not taking the strategic view of the cultural producer who sees everything at a lofty height of reified conceptual generality, but taking the tactical view of consumers. As they find their own path through the city, making and remaking their lives, they enact a local-level resistance to power that might have seemed daunting when viewed monolithically from above. Such an argument's application to anti-globalisation is obvious and its influence can distantly be felt in a wide range of protest forms from the 'reclaim the streets' campaigns to 'tactical frivolity'.<sup>5</sup> This is carried forward in an even more radical form in Lyotard's work, with his implacable deconstruction of any claims to universality or conceptual generality.<sup>6</sup>

Certeau's work has provided an important theatrical impetus to the development of site-specific performance, an area of work that demonstrates, in Wiles's words, an 'intense bonding with place'.<sup>7</sup> One can see the acknowledged influence of Certeau's writing in Exeter-based Wrights & Sites's series of *Mis-Guides*, a set of printed directions

3. Colin Hines, *Localization: A Global Manifesto* (London: Earthscan, 2000); Walden Bello, *Deglobalisation: Ideas for a New World Economy*, 2nd edn (London: Zed Books, 2004); for the Bové protest see Norm Diamond, 'The Roquefort Revolution', in Notes from Nowhere (eds), *We Are Everywhere: The Irresistible Rise of Global Anticapitalism* (London: Verso, 2003), pp. 278–285.

4. Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, trans. Steven Rendall (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), ch. 7.

5. Cf. Amory Starr, *Global Revolt: A Guide to the Movements against Globalisation* (London: Zed Books, 2005), pp. 174–252.

6. One might see similar succour for the anti-globalisation movement, and an implicit endorsement of localisation, in his rallying cry 'let us wage a war on totality' Jean-François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984), p. 82.
7. Wiles, *Short History*, p. 1.
8. Cathy Turner, 'Palimpsest or Potential Space? Finding a Vocabulary for Site-Specific Performance', *New Theatre Quarterly*, 20:4 (November 2004), 373–390 (p. 385).
9. Dennis Oppenheim, Interview, in Nick Kaye (ed.), *Art into Theatre: Performance Interviews and Documents* (Amsterdam: Harwood Academic, 1996), pp. 57–72 (p. 66).
10. Certeau, *Practice*, p. 135.
11. *Ibid.*, p. 134–135.
12. See the official websites for details: <<http://www.lesmis.com/inspiration/facts/chronology.cfm>> and <<http://www.mamma-mia.com/>> (visited 4 September 2005).

'conceived as the stimulus for a series of actions, or performances, to be created and carried out by readers, who become walkers in the city's spaces'.<sup>8</sup> Site-specific performance joins a tradition of site-specific art with roots at least as far back as the 1960s; for American conceptual artist Dennis Oppenheim, what was radical about forms like 'Earth Art' was that 'it countered major canons of traditional art, such as sellability, accessibility, mobility. I mean, you can't see the art, you can't buy the art, you can't have the art.'<sup>9</sup> Again, the localised form is expressed as resistant to the smoothly global. Against the site-specific, in Certeau as in Wiles, is writing. The blank page is like the map, 'detached from actual social practices', effacing historical process and creating in its place a new logic: in writing we draw on what is external as our raw material, strip it of its particularity, process it through the mechanism of style and create a new product from it.<sup>10</sup> Writing is 'factory-processed, one might say... it is capitalist and conquering'.<sup>11</sup>

It is clear then that Wiles's identification of the form of theatre based on the production of a play with the deterritorialising tendency of global capitalism has some formidable theoretical support, a basis in the current anti-capitalist struggles and real resonance with some important theatrical movements of the last quarter-century. In fact, I want to grant much of what Wiles says: the play, of the kind we are discussing, is *not* embedded in theatre space; it is written to be performed *elsewhere*. Promiscuously, the play spends an evening with you, it's all laughs and smiles, but it's gone before the morning, and that was always the plan.

Nonetheless, I shall argue that the political conclusions that are drawn from this are mistaken, and the association of the local with resistance to globalisation and of playwriting with capitalism and the commodity form betray a serious misunderstanding of the nature both of globalisation and of playwriting.

## *Mc*THEATRE

I want to start by detaching playwriting from any easy identification with the global commodity by offering a brief description of a form of contemporary theatre that really does take the commodity form and run with it. Megamusicals are visually spectacular, quasi-operatic musical theatre productions, many of them globally successful. The names are instantly familiar: *Cats*, *Starlight Express*, *Les Misérables*, *The Phantom of the Opera*, *Miss Saigon*, *The Lion King*. Since its British premiere in 1985, *Les Misérables* has opened in sixty productions, playing over 600 cities across the world. Newcomer, *Mamma Mia* has currently sixteen productions running on three continents.<sup>12</sup> The shows are lavishly expensive – in 1982 *Cats*'s Broadway production costs were US\$5 million, 1994's *Beauty and the Beast*'s were US\$12 million,<sup>13</sup> while *The Lion King* (1997) is reputed to have had start-up costs of over US\$20 million<sup>14</sup> – but the rewards can be great as well. The global box office for *Phantom* is over £1.6 billion.<sup>15</sup> To put that in perspective, this is about the same as the *combined* global box office of the two top-grossing films of all time (*Titanic* and *Lord of the Rings: The Return of the King*).<sup>16</sup>

13. Sheridan Morley and Ruth Leon, *Hey, Mr Producer! The Musical World of Cameron Mackintosh* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1998), p. 71.
14. Jonathan Burston, 'Spectacle, Synergy and Megamusicals: The Global-Industrialisation of the Live-Entertainment Economy', in James Curran (ed.), *Media Organisations in Society* (London: Arnold, 2000), pp. 69–83 (p. 70).
15. <[http://www.thephantomoftheopera.com/the\\_show\\_phantom\\_facts.asp](http://www.thephantomoftheopera.com/the_show_phantom_facts.asp)> (visited 4 September 2005).
16. <<http://www.imdb.com/boxoffice/alltimegross?region=world-wide>>, updated: 21 September 2005 (visited 22 September 2005).
17. Tony Royle, *Working for McDonald's in Europe: The Unequal Struggle*, *Routledge Studies in Employment Relations* (London: Routledge, 2000), pp. 20–23; George Ritzer, *The McDonalitzation of Society: An Investigation into the Changing Character of Contemporary Social Life*, rev. edn (Thousand Oaks: Pine Forge, 1996), p. 30.
18. Michael Coveny, *Cats on a Chandelier: The Andrew Lloyd Webber Story* (London: Hutchinson, 1999), p. 98.
19. Edward Behr and Mark Steyn, *The Story of Miss Saigon* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1991), p. 130.

Staging the megamusical is a global business, now exclusively undertaken by Transnational Entertainment Corporations (TECs), including Disney, Clear Channel Entertainment, Cameron Mackintosh Inc.

Using the experience they had gained since the 1930s running diners and short-order restaurants, in 1951 Mac and Dick McDonald opened a new restaurant in San Bernardino, California. The emphasis was on high volume and low cost, results produced by innovative assembly-line production, in which every stage of the food preparation process was highly automated, standardised and fast.<sup>17</sup> And automation was only half of the McDonald's recipe. The second crucial innovation was the system pioneered by entrepreneur Ray Kroc who visited the brothers' restaurant in 1955 and persuaded them to let him become their franchise director, encouraging partners to set up branches using exactly the same standardised systems in other cities. The franchises were relatively cheap but an unusually high proportion of the profits flowed back to head office. In 1961, Ray Kroc had made enough to buy the McDonald brothers out and, in a sign of business practice to come, because they had negotiated hard and insisted on keeping the original restaurant, he quickly and deliberately ruined them, by opening a new McDonald's on the same street and insisted on their taking down the golden arches that he now owned.

The franchise system is precisely how the Megamusical functions. A new production of *Cats*, for example, does not just involve acquiring the rights to the show; it comes with the entire original production: the set, costumes, direction, poster, and all associated merchandising. Dewynters – Andrew Lloyd Webber's preferred marketing and advertising agency – employ an in-house glass-blower to produce signage to exact specification.<sup>18</sup>

The director of each 'new' production has no freedom to reinterpret the production; their role is to remount the original. In fact, because these shows are grounded in spectacle even the original director will often be severely constrained; for *Miss Saigon*, the famous climactic helicopter effect had been conceived, designed and built before Nick Hytner, the director, was even hired.<sup>19</sup> The designs are key to the brand; the barricades of *Les Misérables*, the junk yard of *Cats*, the candle-lit boat journey across an underground lake in *Phantom*, these are fundamental components in the experience of a megamusical.

These conditions are also deeply restrictive on the freedom of the actor. First, the actor is subordinate to the design. Physically, the scale of the stage designs diminishes the human figure within the visual field. Often, as in *Cats*, *Starlight Express*, *Beauty and the Beast*, and *The Lion King*, the human figure is distorted, reduced to a bearer of an elaborately non-human design shape. The famous logos that are used to brand the shows worldwide never feature cast members: always helicopters, a cat's eyes, a cartoon orphan. Stars are good for the box office in the short term, but bad in the long, because they can't be duplicated and after a while tend to want to do other things. But in the megamusical the sets are the stars, and the actors are endlessly replaceable. As Cameron Mackintosh once said, in an unguarded moment, '*Les Misérables*... is

20. Ibid., p. 178.
21. Burston, 'Spectacle', p. 78.
22. Susan Russell, 'Corporate Theater: The Revolution of the Species', MA thesis, Florida State University, 2003, p. 57. <<http://etd.lib.fsu.edu/theses/available/etd-11172003-215153/>> (visited 22 September 2005).
23. Jonathan Burston, 'Theatre Space as Virtual Place: Audio Technology, the Reconfigured Singing Body, and the Megamusical', *Popular Music*, 17:2 (May 1998), 205–218 (p. 208).
24. Burston, 'Spectacle', p. 78.
25. Burston 'Theatre Space', pp. 210–211.
26. Tom Pinhorn, 'Keeping the Show on the Road...' *Stage Door*, 1 (October 1999), p. 7.
27. I have taken the phrase from Nick Higgins's talk, 'The Politics and Culture of

relatively actor-proof'.<sup>20</sup> Second, the automated sets and lighting designs mean that the actors have to move in exactly the same places that the cast moved in the original production. Try to make the part your own and you risk injury or singing in darkness.<sup>21</sup>

The effect of course is to automate the actor. As Susan Russell, an ex-megamusical company member, puts it:

I was one of thirty-seven workers who built the standardised product of *The Phantom of the Opera* every night. My function was to replace a missing worker, accomplish their required tasks, and assemble the product without missing a beat, interrupting the flow, or disturbing the rest of the machine. I was highly paid for my ability to keep eight intricate assignments compartmentalised and available at a moment's notice for my employers.<sup>22</sup>

It is because of this level of standardisation, organised through franchising and automation, that the megamusical has earned the unkind but apposite nickname of McTheatre.

It is also what makes this kind of theatre perfectly suited to David Wiles's critique. Whatever spaces they are performed in, these shows are always identical. Indeed, these shows display a profound mistrust of space. One of their characteristic acoustic features is the level of amplification, in that they are miked much more loudly than earlier musicals. In fact, the megamusical invariably amplifies voices and instrumentation to just the volume where miked sound overwhelms the natural acoustics of the space.<sup>23</sup> Most megamusicals are available in recorded form before their stage debuts, and the amplification is not designed to enhance the live experience but to more exactly replicate the recording. The result is also spatially to displace the performer; first, the bombardment of sound through speakers placed all the way around the auditorium disconnects the singer from the song, nicely described by Jonathan Burston as 'a chronic despatialisation—a kind of jettisoning into sonic limbo'.<sup>24</sup> Then the smoothness and consistency of the performer's amplification effaces their movement on stage and even any sense of the human body from which these sounds are issuing.<sup>25</sup>

David Wiles's accusation of commodity theatre is here entirely appropriate. These shows are commodities and the attitudes behind them are nakedly about capital accumulation. In *Stage Door*, Cameron Mackintosh's magazine for group bookers, Tom Pinhorn, the UK touring manager for *Les Misérables*, boasts of a new strategy that the company adopted when, rather than playing the usual 1,000–1,500-seat venues, they masked off a corner of the Sheffield Arena and performed the show to 3,000.<sup>26</sup> In no other form of theatre would this be a serious boast; it is hard to imagine the audience member who heard the news and thought, 'at last! A chance to see *Les Misérables* in a vast impersonal sports arena.'

What is in fact on display here is the global capitalist mindset, the 'mental map of neoliberalism'.<sup>27</sup> Any pretence at cultural value or artistic worth is crowded out by sheer reverence at the statistical scale involved. A comparison is instructive: George Cohon is the man who brought

Transaction', delivered at Suspect Culture's symposium, *Theatre and the World of Money*, Tramway, Glasgow, 12 November 2004.

28. George Cohon and David Macfarlane, *To Russia with Fries* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1997), pp. 201–202.

29. Morley and Leon, *Hey, Mr Producer!*, p. 72.

30. 'The Miss That Became a World Hit', *Stage Door*, 1 (October 1999), p. 11.

31. Quoted in Stephen Citron, *Sondheim and Lloyd-Webber: The New Musical* (London: Chatto & Windus, 2001), pp. 276–277.

32. Ritzer, *The McDonaldization of Society*, pp. 9–11.

33. Morley and Leon, *Hey, Mr Producer!*, p. 53.

34. *Ibid.*, p. 73.

McDonald's to the Soviet Union, opening the first franchise on Pushkin Square in January 1990. In his autobiography, called, incredibly, *From Russia with Fries*, he describes the McDonald's corporation to a children's charity:

I gave my spiel: We had sold enough burgers that, if they were laid end to end, they would go to the moon and back, twice - that kind of thing. [...] One hundred and ninety five thousand tons of onions have dressed our products. Eleven million gallons of mustard have been squirted between enough buns to stretch the length of the Great Wall of China, 186 times.<sup>28</sup>

Now compare this awed description of *Cats* from a biography of Cameron Mackintosh:

*Cats* and its crew have used 31,875 headache pills; 35,625 posters; 450 radio microphones ... 449,283 throat pastilles; 3,900 pairs of shoes; 3,450 costumes for 270 dancers; 10,800 make-up sponges and 1,470 batches of lipstick, blusher and mascara.<sup>29</sup>

or this statistical rhapsodising over *Miss Saigon*:

Since the opening at Drury Lane, the cast has gone through 3,582 pairs of shoes and 2,198 costumes, and the audience have consumed 90,000 gallons of ice cream, 750,000 glasses of wine and 200,000 glasses of champagne.<sup>30</sup>

None of these statistics is related to the experience of any particular theatregoer, just as one hopes no McDonald's customer will have experienced the gallons of mustard. It is the world seen from the point of view of the accountant. It's a kind of actuarial pornography, slavering at the sheer scale of the turnover. As Sondheim said of the premiere of *Cats* with its famous \$5 million budget: '[I am all for] spectacle and spectacular things, but when there's no substance, it gets boring... I remember going to *Cats* and wondering why they just didn't stack five million dollars on the stage'.<sup>31</sup>

A founding principle of McDonald's was that every Big Mac, wherever you were in the world, would taste the same.<sup>32</sup> Cameron Mackintosh similarly – and commendably – insisted that his shows should not become any less professional and polished the further in time or space they were from the first press night.<sup>33</sup> However, as the production process becomes more and more automated, what begins as a guarantee of quality ends as a guarantee of predictability. As his biographers write, intending, I think, to be flattering, '*Cats* was effectively and expensively reproduced around the world as exactly as any can of Coca-Cola and wherever you saw it, the sensation was the same'.<sup>34</sup> In fact, just as there are minor adjustments to the Coca-Cola syrup in its various regional markets, there are occasional nods to the local audience. But the seriousness with which these TECs are prepared to reinvent their shows to appeal to local taste may be judged from the newspaper advertisement that announced the opening of *Les Misérables* in Edinburgh; the image

35. Ibid., p. 101.
36. Susan Bennett has interestingly argued that the Toronto premiere of *The Lion King* showed a more pervasive pattern of local references though the examples she cites seem occasional and not to overturn her (acknowledged) sense that the show was a skilful reproduction of the original production. Susan Bennett, 'Disney North: *The Lion King*', *Canadian Theatre Review*, 105 (Winter 2001), pp. 67–68, and there was a similar attempt to 'localise' *Mamma Mia!* in Madrid. It is also the case that for audience members their experience of the show will be inserted into their particular personal and social circumstances, but, as I'll touch on in my discussion of Certeau, I do not feel that we should allow our recognition of our immense creativity and ingenuity as cultural readers let global capital's strategy of impoverishment and commodification off the hook.
37. Richard Serra, *Writings Interviews* (London and Chicago: University of Chicago, 1994), p. 194.
38. Ibid., p. 196.
39. See Peter Willetts, 'Transnational Actors and International Organizations in Global Politics', in John Baylis and Steve Smith (eds), *The Globalisation of World Politics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), pp. 356–383.

was, as usual, the orphan girl, Cosette, but now sporting a Glengarry hat and the slogan 'Hoots Mon Ami' above her head.<sup>35</sup> McTheatre certainly fits Wiles's critique: it is a type of theatre that has wholeheartedly adopted the commodity form, and in doing so shows a profound disregard, even contempt, for space and particularity.<sup>36</sup>

## AGAINST UNIVERSALS

McTheatre establishes what theatre and performance look like in their most fully globalised commodity form, and immediately raises a question about playwriting as a global commodity. While it shares the feature of widespread portability, there are certain obvious aspects of playwriting that do not resemble McTheatre and I shall argue that these differences are crucial. Before I move on to that portion of the argument, I want to consider what we might place at the other end of this spectrum: against McTheatre's near-total disregard for geographical or cultural specificity, site-specific work – defiantly untransportable, its meanings tightly determined by local particularity – might seem evidently oppositional.

As we have seen, political claims are made for such work, usually in its resistance to commodification. Soon after Richard Serra's *Tilted Arc* (1981) was installed the 120 × 20 foot curved steel blade that sliced across Federal Plaza in Manhattan faced calls for its removal. When the General Services Administration that had commissioned it proposed moving the sculpture, Serra famously insisted that '*Tilted Arc* was commissioned and designed for one particular site: Federal Plaza. It is a site-specific work and as such not to be relocated. To remove the work is to destroy the work.'<sup>37</sup> For Serra, to have moved *Tilted Arc* would have been to destroy it as surely as the contractors did on 15 March 1989 when, by night, they dismantled *Tilted Arc* and took the steel pieces away for scrap. And he too asserts the resistant political value of this work: 'Relocation would, in fact, transform *Tilted Arc* into an exchange commodity in that it would annihilate the site-specific aspect of the work. *Tilted Arc* would become exactly what it was intended not to be: a mobile, marketable product.'<sup>38</sup>

I want to argue that such political claims made for site-specific work are false. In doing so, I am not trying to dismiss or criticise site-specific work as such. To ask questions of one asserted value does not deny that it may be rich in other kinds. Nonetheless, there are several weaknesses with the claim. That a work is not moveable does not disqualify it as a commodity; if it did then real estate would not be a commodity (which it assuredly is). More profoundly, though, there is an unexplained assertion that geographical particularity is contrary to capitalism. In fact, this isn't so, and it is one of the contradictions in the current system, and one of the drivers for the accelerated global extension of capital, that globalisation compromises regional particularity while thriving on it. Regulatory differences between states are commonly exploited by TNCs;<sup>39</sup> in a perfect market, profits would be much slower to come by. Without regional differences, and the ability to buy low in the periphery and sell



40. Immanuel Wallerstein, *The Capitalist World Economy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), pp. 70–71.

41. John Cavanagh *et al.*, *Alternatives to Economic Globalisation: A Better World Is Possible* (Berrett-Koehler: San Francisco, CA, 2002), p. 60. This is a report collectively written by ‘International Forum on Globalisation’. Colin Hines, Walden Bello, Jerry Mander, and Helena Norberg-Hodge, all strong proponents of localisation, are among the report’s authors.

42. *Ibid.*

43. Hines, *Localization*, p. 32.

44. Bruce Robbins, ‘Actually Existing Cosmopolitanism’, in Pheng Cheah and Bruce Robbins (eds), *Cosmopolitics: Thinking and Feeling Beyond the Nation* (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 1998), pp. 1–19 (p. 3).

high in the core, as Wallerstein famously describes it,<sup>40</sup> there would barely be world capitalism as we know it. (Though let me make it clear I am not recommending it; a perfect market would be, in most respects, very much worse for us all than our imperfect market is now.)

An alternative model of capitalism is offered by the proponents of ‘localisation’. Bulwarks must be raised in the form of protectionist barriers against the damaging flows of global capital. In *Localization: A Global Manifesto*, Colin Hines sets out a series of policies to protect local communities including requiring TNCs to produce only for local communities, a system of taxation to take the heat out of international speculation and encourage long-term investment, and comprehensive trade barriers to inhibit the exploitation of regional inequalities.

The problem with such policies is that, to be effective, they would have to be applied globally, and thus enforced by some kind of global authority far more comprehensively powerful even than the World Trade Organisation. Localisation of this kind requires hair-raisingly unlocal forms of global governance. The same problem is raised by the localiser’s key concept of subsidiarity: that ‘whatever decisions and activities can be undertaken locally should be’.<sup>41</sup> There is an assumption that this will lead to powers flowing downward, though this is only an assumption and a rigorous application of the subsidiarity principle might discover that, in order to ensure the kinds of global justice that Hines and others want, some powers may only effectively be exercised at a higher and more global level than they are now. The argument for subsidiarity also reveals a key confusion in the localisers’ case. As the authors of *Alternatives to Economic Globalisation* explain: ‘subsidiarity respects the notion that sovereignty resides in people. In other words, legitimate authority flows upward from the populace through the expression of their democratic will’.<sup>42</sup> This may be so, but it explains nothing about why the ‘local’ should be the appropriate way of organising this democratic will. There are many patterns and institutions between the personal and the global; corralling the world’s populations into geographical cells negates other forms of human organisation and self-realisation. Hines is very keen on the virtues of ‘community’ but never explains why this is to be understood in territorial terms. There are alternative models to this: the lesbian and gay community, for example, has forged alliances across great spaces, through myriad forms of global cultural exchange, in a way that often serves specifically to counteract the isolation and oppression that can take place in the ‘local’ community. In his villagist images of people gathering to discuss policy in the local library,<sup>43</sup> Hines’s model does sometimes seem open to Bruce Robbins’s criticism of ‘the romantic localism of a certain portion of the left’.<sup>44</sup> Curiously, Hines describes his ‘localist’ alternative as ‘rights-based’.<sup>45</sup> Rights are, however, universal or they are nothing (or, worse, likely to foster exclusionary nationalisms). But despite conceptually accepting the requirement for a global perspective, he still wants us to organise ourselves contingently in territorially separate communities.

It is perhaps the scale of the ‘global’ that is difficult to think. It is here that the views of the localisers overlap with those of Certeau and the postmodernists. To appreciate the full extent of the local’s inadequacy as

45. Hines, *Localization*, p. 28.

a ground of resistance to globalisation, it's worth investigating these connections further. What we will see as we move from Certeau, to Rorty, and then to Lyotard, is a gradually more radical and implacable hostility to conceptual universals.

46. Certeau, *Practice*, p. 93.

The reason for Certeau's hostility to maps is not consistently explained in *The Practice of Everyday Life*; but he seems to believe that while 'the ordinary practitioners of the city' experience the world at ground level, the map is the perspective from power.<sup>46</sup> The view of the city once afforded by the World Trade Centre (to use his example) is simply a reification of that perspective: it is 'the analogue of the facsimile produced, through a projection that is a way of keeping aloof, by space planner urbanist, city planner or cartographer'.<sup>47</sup> Aloofness, for Certeau, suggests a murderous disconnection from people; he never quite says this explicitly, though it emerges through his claim that the 'voyeur-god created by this fiction[al perspective...] knows only cadavers, must disentangle himself from the murky intertwining daily behaviors and make himself alien to them'.<sup>48</sup>

47. *Ibid.*, pp. 92–93.

48. *Ibid.*, p. 93. See also his association of place (which is 'space' seen from this celestial perspective) with death, p. 118.

There is a complicated thread of associations around 'sight' in this book. When Certeau applauds the 'blindness' of the tactical city user, he means that this person is 'lacking a view of the whole'.<sup>49</sup> Yet by this he seems to mean a falsely conceptual 'vision', as glimpsed when he claims that 'the panorama-city is a "theoretical" (that is, visual) simulacrum'.<sup>50</sup> In other words, his narrative seems to rely on a division between seeing and conceptualising, the former to be preferred in various ways to the latter. The objection to the map seems to hang on a belief that it shows us things that we can't ordinarily see, and that therefore it alienates us from our proper perspective on the world. And here we can see how an objection to the global and a preference for the local might come about: we can't see the whole world, but we can (sort of) see the local.

49. *Ibid.*, p. 38.

50. *Ibid.*, p. 93.

What unites Hines and Certeau, despite their very different approaches, is a preference for ground-level particularity and a fierce hostility to the 'celestial eye' of universalism.<sup>51</sup> They both seem to find the sheer scale of the global (Hines), or 'the aerial view' (Certeau) so daunting as to paralyse political action rather than inspire it. In each case, their response is to see the grander perspective as in some way false and to identify a more localised realm for meaningful political and moral action. This seems to offer reasons to oppose globalisation and to adopt a contrary perspective. Yet there are weaknesses in the argument, which can best be understood by showing the argument stretched to its furthest extent in the work of Jean-François Lyotard.

51. Certeau, *Practice*, p. 92.

A terror at the discrepancy between the self and the unthinkable vast is a theme in aesthetics – one taken up by postmodernism as demonstrating a central flaw within the whole Enlightenment project – and is usually referred to as 'the sublime'. Eighteenth-century aesthetics was fascinated by the feeling of profound disturbance often experienced when looking at a vast overhanging mountain face, a wide stormy sea, a deep canyon, despite the viewer being in no immediate danger. In Kant's influential formulation, the feeling of the sublime is in part prompted by a failure of two parts of the mind – the imagination and the understanding – to

52. Immanuel Kant, *Critique of the Power of Judgment* ed. Paul Guyer, trans. Paul Guyer and Eric Matthews (Cambridge University Press, 2000), Ak. 5: 244–260. (The page numbers refer to the Prussian Academy Edition of Kant’s works (1900-), which all scholarly editions adopt.)
53. *Ibid.*, Ak. 5: 260–266.
54. Lyotard sets out this argument in several different places, including ‘On What is “Art”’ in *Toward the Postmodern*, eds Robert Harvey and Mark S. Roberts (New Jersey and London: Humanities, 1993) pp. 164–175; ‘Judiciousness in Dispute, or Kant after Marx?’ (trans. Cecile Lindsay) in *The Lyotard Reader*, ed. Andrew Benjamin (Oxford: Blackwell, 1989), pp. 324–259; ‘The Sublime and the Avant-Garde’ (trans Lisa Liebman) in Jean-François Lyotard, *The Inhuman: Reflections on Time* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1991), pp. 89–107; and, extensively, in *Lessons on the Analytic of the Sublime*, trans. Elizabeth Rottenberg (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1994).
55. Jean-François Lyotard, *The Differend: Phrases*

match up to one other. The imagination, struggling to cope with the appearance of, say, a vastly towering mountain, finds it so enormously disproportionate to the scale it usually experiences that it can experience the mountain only as absolutely large, or infinitely large. The understanding, however, recognises that all objects must be contained within a totality of space, and that the mountain cannot be infinite. The tension between these two mental processes is what causes the discomfort.<sup>52</sup> This Kant calls the ‘mathematical sublime’ and there is a second, though similar, form of the sublime, the ‘dynamical sublime’, in which one experiences terror at the discrepancy between one’s minuscule physical powers compared with the all-powerfulness of some (usually natural) object.<sup>53</sup>

These few pages from the *Critique of Judgment* are taken up by Lyotard as the moment where the Enlightenment project reveals its own impossibility. Kant’s first critique, the *Critique of Pure Reason*, deals with what we can know about the way the world *is*. His second, the *Critique of Practical Reason*, concerns the basis for how we *ought* to behave. Between the *is* and the *ought* there is a gap and the third critique is often seen as his attempt to build a bridge between the two. For Lyotard, Kant’s analysis of the sublime is where he inadvertently reveals that the gap cannot be bridged, and thus brings the whole architectonics of his critical philosophy down around his ears. In the sublime moment is revealed the inability of conceptuality and our sensory experience of the world to correspond to one another.<sup>54</sup> This is of a piece with Lyotard’s wider project of opposing conceptual generalities, whether in the form of grand narratives (in *The Postmodern Condition*) or universal principles of justice (*The Differend*). For Lyotard what the sublime undoes is any confidence we can have in our ability to bring particulars under universals, and in this clash it is the universals which need to be abandoned so that we may more decisively confront the particular, in its pre-conceptual state.

This seems to be at work in his famous series of remarks that one must not prejudge ‘the *Is it happening?*’<sup>55</sup> He is asking us to bear witness *that* something is happening, and preserve the sense of that prior to the most basic conceptualisation of *what* is happening: ‘*Is* does not therefore signify *is there*, and even less so does it signify *is real*. *Is* doesn’t signify anything, it would designate the occurrence “before” the signification (the content) of the occurrence.’<sup>56</sup> This is particularity without any generality at all, an experience of which may be found in the sublime. Applying this to the political debates with which I am concerned, one might say, rather crudely, that in the experience of the sublime, we recover a view of the world prior to globalisation in which the singularity of the local is given its full value once more.

What is curious about Lyotard’s reading is that he virtually ignores the second part of Kant’s definition of the sublime, and thus misses the ethical significance of the argument. Kant notes that the sublime is characteristically a mixture of pleasure and discomfort. Lyotard has only concentrated on the discomfort, but for Kant it is the pleasure that is the sublime’s ultimate value. While it is true that in the mathematical sublime, the feeling is initiated by a failure of the imagination and

*in Dispute*  
(Manchester:  
Manchester University  
Press, 1988), p. 181.

56. *Ibid.*, p. 79.

57. Kant, *Judgment*, Ak.  
5: 254.

58. *Ibid.*, Ak. 5: 262.

59. For Kant, as for many ‘incompatibilists’, morality is incompatible with a wholly deterministic universe, and *a priori* we are required to assume that our will is free and undetermined. A strict Kantian position (and one which Kant does not always stick to) will say nothing more than that this must be the case, and leave the discussion of where the will resides, what its nature might be and so on, to others.

60. Kant, *Judgment*, Ak.  
5: 262.

61. Karl Marx and  
Frederick Engels, *The  
Communist Manifesto*  
ed. Gareth Stedman  
Jones  
(Harmondsworth:  
Penguin, 2002),  
p. 223.

62. Lyotard, *Inhuman*,  
p. 105.

63. Certeau, *Practice*,  
p. 18.

understanding to coincide, what this prompts is recognition of the infinite capacities of the understanding. We see something that appears incalculably, perhaps infinitely massive, something our sensuous representation baulks at taking in at all, and yet the reason can still demand that it too is a totality, a whole. The powers of the understanding outstrip even the most awesome sights that the world can offer us: ‘even being able to think of it as a whole indicates a faculty of the mind which surpasses every standard of sense’.<sup>57</sup> In other words, the result of this disjunction of sense and reason is a greater respect for reason, not its abandonment.

In the ‘dynamical sublime’, the resolution is slightly different. Here we experience a sense of pitiful powerlessness in the face of the crushing might of a mountain, or the immense implacability of a sea, but what is then evoked in us is a sense of ‘the humanity in our person’,<sup>58</sup> that moral part of us which we know *a priori* cannot be entirely determined by the natural world.<sup>59</sup> Put simply, it is not inevitable that we will betray our moral principles even under the most overwhelming physical pressure, and we can all think of remarkable examples of human resilience against the odds. Kant does not pretend that such resistance is simple or easy, yet, as he says, ‘there is truth here, however much the person, if he [*sic*] takes his reflection this far, may be conscious of his present actual powerlessness’.<sup>60</sup>

There is a different sort of lesson for the anti-globalisation movement here. Rather than recoil at the incalculable scale of the global market in favour of the local view, Kant offers us the challenge of acknowledging a mental faculty in ourselves that is even more awesome in its reach. Capitalism could certainly prompt an experience of the sublime; its vast scale and power may sometimes make resistance feel entirely futile. And yet what the sublime reminds us is that, even as ‘the need of a constantly expanding market for its products chases the bourgeoisie over the whole surface of the globe’,<sup>61</sup> our own minds can outpace capital. The force of the *a priori* is such that capitalism is always-already subject to ethical evaluation. We might even say that the sublime keeps open the dialectic. We are not trapped merely by what we see, but we retain a power of judgment that can see how it might be different. We bring the *is* into conflict with the *ought*.

Now it is possible to see the profound political limitations of the hostility to conceptual generality. Certeau’s insistence on the priority of ground-level perception is simply a recommendation of perception without reason, as is Lyotard’s preference for the pre-conceptual. Confronted by capitalism, all we are permitted is to bear witness that *it is happening*. A judgment on capitalism would be a kind of primal injustice, what Lyotard calls a *differend*, a failure to attend to its ethical particularity. Lyotard’s perspective is all *is* and no *ought*. It’s hard not to see it as awe-struck political paralysis when Lyotard writes that ‘there is something of the sublime in capitalist economy’.<sup>62</sup>

Certeau believes that the ground-level practices of ordinary people initiate a kind of play that loosens up the dreary reifications of the panorama-city. But to what end? Early in the book he describes the content of this play as ‘utopian’,<sup>63</sup> but his hostility to universals requires

64. Ibid., e.g. pp. xxiii, 92–94, 111, 135, 144, 191, 196, 218.

that this utopia can have no normative value or ethical content, and indeed most subsequent references to utopia are negative.<sup>64</sup> It is hard, therefore, to imagine on what basis such playful practices are to be commended, since Certeau has cast off the very principles he requires to give his own argument political force. His critique of the aerial perspective shows how undialectical his thinking is; rather than see the development of cartography as an achievement, he sees it as a step away from sight's origins. This genetic fallacy treats all development as betrayal and would bring the dialectic to a halt. But perhaps the daunting view from above is accurate: without it, it is hard to say whether the tactical practice of place is of any political value whatever.

The problem is that ethics unavoidably requires a level of universalisation. To say, 'you ought not steal' is recognisably an ethical statement, whether or not we agree with it. To say 'you ought not steal from Dan Rebellato' is not really an ethical statement unless it rests on the hidden syllogism 'because he is a person and you ought not steal from other people'. In other words, universalisability is a necessary (though not sufficient) condition of a statement's ethical value. An ethical principle must, of course, be enriched and renewed by particularity or it is nothing, but this does not negate its broader underpinning; as Kwame Anthony Appiah remarks, a sense of rootedness in place may indeed be by a cosmopolitan right that we should universally protect.<sup>65</sup> Indeed, we should remember that a statement like 'we should only judge people by their own local ethical standards' is contradictory since it is universal in form; it does not appear to speak from any particular local context. An ethical system must have particular application, to be sure, but one cannot expel universalism from ethics without also expelling the ethics.

Lyotard's sublime, so he says, is 'a sudden blazing, and without future'.<sup>66</sup> It certainly points in no revolutionary direction, because it leaves us only with what there is. Theodor Adorno, writing after the Second World War, lamented what he saw as the halting of the dialectic everywhere, through the pre-eminence of 'identity-thinking': the undialectical assertion of only what there is. 'That's-how-it-is,' writes Adorno, 'is the exact means by which the world dispatches each of its victims',<sup>67</sup> and it is not much of a step from *that's-how-it-is* to *it is happening*. For Adorno, the separation between the sensible and the supersensible in Kant's work is its true radicalism, and he upbraids Kant for shying away from its full power.<sup>68</sup> The totalising power of identity-thinking is not mere philosophical abstraction, though, it is Adorno's way of thinking through capitalism's further extension into social, cultural and personal life in the 1950s and 1960s. It has even more pertinence in an era of global turbocapitalism.

This allows us to understand more fully the complicity of McTheatre with global capital. The problem is not that it is everywhere but that it's everywhere the *same*. More interestingly, this might also be said of some site-specific art. Oppenheim argued that the untransportability of 'Earth Art' makes it uncommodifiable, and Daniel Buren similarly finds a radical quality in the fact that his site-specific installations (often comprising fabric or paper printed with regular stripes definitively pasted onto surfaces) were literally destroyed when taken down.<sup>69</sup> It is said that the virtue of site-specific theatre pieces lies in the fact that 'they are

65. Kwame Anthony Appiah, 'Cosmopolitan Patriots', in Pheng Cheah and Bruce Robbins (eds), *Cosmopolitanism: Thinking and Feeling Beyond the Nation* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998), pp. 91–114 (p. 91).

66. Lyotard, *Lessons*, p. 55.

67. Theodor W. Adorno, *Minima Moralia: Reflections from Damaged Life*, trans. E. F. N. Jephcott (London: Verso, 1974), p. 212.

68. Theodor W. Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, trans. E. B. Ashton (London: Routledge, 1973), pp. 386–390.

69. Nick Kaye, *Site-Specific Art: Performance, Place and Documentation* (London: Routledge, 2000), p. 188.

70. Cliff McLucas and Mike Pearson [of Brith Gof], Interview, in Kaye (ed.), *Art into Theatre*, pp. 209–234 (p. 211).

71. *Ibid.*, pp. 1–4.

72. Wrights & Sites, ‘Mis-Guiding the City Walker’. 2004 <<http://www.mis-guide.com/ws/documents/citywalker.html>> (visited 19 April 2005).

73. Quoted in Kaye, *Site-Specific Art*, p. 56.

inseparable from their sites, the only context in which they are “readable”<sup>70</sup>. But these claims look more like an undialectical assertion of identity-thinking. If the work ceases to exist when moved, can only be read in one place, or must necessarily be destroyed after being displayed, these may be simply attempts to insist that the work is just the work, without remainder, bound within the space for which it was made and closed to further meanings that might multiply its possibilities.

Here I must acknowledge Nick Kaye’s observation that Serra’s claim is a specific and extreme one within site-specific theatre;<sup>71</sup> indeed some site-specific artists have moved away from this position. Wrights & Sites are an interesting example of a group who began, in their words, ‘quite hard-line in defence of the specific over the general’, but who have moved to a different conception of their work, in particular in their *Mis-Guides* that seem to strive to make the city non-identical with itself: ‘the *Mis-Guide* explores ways of seeking cities within cities; a forged passport to an “other” city and a hyper-sensitised way of travelling the familiar one’.<sup>72</sup> Brith Gof strike a similarly Adornoan tone when they discuss their site-specifically mis-matched works: ‘they are more discursive, and have gaps in them – you can see other things through’.<sup>73</sup>

Nonetheless, Serra’s claim remains an important statement of a position and something like it seems to underpin David Wiles’s criticism of play-based theatre. We are now in a position to return to that original critique and explore anew the relationship between playwriting and globalisation.

## THE SOUND OF SPRING RAIN

These issues are powerfully explored in David Greig’s *The Architect* (1996). Leo Black, the architect of the title, designed a housing estate in the late sixties which is now in a state of terrible disrepair. One of the residents, Sheena Mackie, is gathering a petition to have the flats knocked down and asks Leo for his signature. Leo displays many features of the city-planner mentality that Certeau so furiously decries; he pays little attention to problems with the flats, insisting that ‘architecturally, they’re well designed’.<sup>74</sup> Sheena’s remembers ‘the brochures we got. A drawing of the sun shining and kids playing in the park. When they came round looking for tenants I signed like that. I saw the models. But it was all “vision”, wasn’t it? Vision’s the word you would use. Not houses, but a vision of housing.’<sup>75</sup> Her criticisms, down to the inverted commas around ‘vision’, are very close to Certeau’s. A centrepiece argument between Sheena and Leo takes place standing over the original model of the flats, as Leo attempts to demonstrate how good the prize-winning flats look from this divine perspective. As Sheena waspishly enquires, ‘were the judges in a helicopter when they gave you the award?’<sup>76</sup> Throughout the play there are images of characters, mainly in the Black family, longing to rise up above the city, often, it seems, expressing a desire to escape human contact.<sup>77</sup> Leo’s eventual death, standing in one of the flats as the buildings are detonated, seems literally and metaphorically to bring him down to earth.

Yet the play does not wholeheartedly endorse this Certeauian perspective, this collapse of all perspectives to the ground-level of

74. David Greig, *Plays One* (London: Methuen, 2002), p. 159\*\*\*.

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75. *Ibid.*, p. 161.\*\*\*

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76. *Ibid.*, p. 159.\*\*\*

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77. e.g. Paulina, p. 151\*\*\* and Martin, p. 154–155.

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identity-thinking. Alongside Leo and Paulina and their two children, Martin and Dorothy, are Sheena, a truck driver called Joe, and a young man called Billy. They are all encountered separately by different members of the Black family, and no direct connections are made. However there are tiny hints that Sheena, Joe and Billy are actually family themselves; further hints suggest that Billy may be a ghost, even an angel come to earth to save Martin.<sup>78</sup> These connections are not finalised by the text, which crucially makes it difficult to demarcate the boundary between *it is happening* and *what is happening*. Satisfyingly unresolved, the play, in this respect, is not identical with itself.

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Greig's later play, *The Cosmonaut's Last Message To The Woman He Once Loved In The Former Soviet Union* (1999), depicts a series of encounters spiralling out from a married man's affair with a young Russian woman. While the connections between the characters, though loose, are fairly clear, there are several strange echoes – mainly verbal images – that resonate across the piece and appear non-realistically in separate characters' mouths and memories. The proprietor of a French café asks if 'spy satellites can take pictures in which you can see the face of the playing card a man's holding? The tiniest blemish on a woman's skin?'<sup>79</sup> Not in a spy satellite but an orbiting capsule, we have earlier seen two Russian cosmonauts describing their masturbatory fantasies about every woman represented on a pack of pornographic playing cards; Oleg describes his 'relationship' with Vanessa: 'I took time to imagine clearly every single part of her body. The smells of her body. The tastes of her body. The tiniest blemish on the skin of her thigh.'<sup>80</sup> Oleg and the proprietor never meet in the play yet the thought of a blemish on the skin seems to pass between them. This inexplicable transmission recurs throughout, unsettling any clear assertion of the play's *it is happening*. Images drift across the realistic boundaries of the action, like the smell of garden herbs between apartments on an Edinburgh estate.<sup>81</sup>

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This effect is heightened by the deliberate use of doubling that is written into the play; most particularly, Keith, the errant husband, is encountered at the end of the play by a woman. This woman is either his wife, Vivienne, or Sylvia, who has been charged to retrieve a tape that Keith has in his possession: both characters are played by the same actress. In the short snatch of dialogue between her and Keith that ends the play her identity is not resolved, the play thus offering two simultaneous and distinct endings.<sup>82</sup> These moments of undecidable oscillation keep the play open and refuse to make its meanings ever resolvable in one production. The first Paines Plough production (1999) seemed to have Vivienne walk through the door; in the recent Donmar production (2005) it was Sylvia. At the Tron (2000), it could have been either.

It points to a structural principle of the play in performance that Wiles identified as crucial, and which we can now revalue. Plays are not exhausted by a single performance or single production; they are always capable of being done somewhere else. They are not tied to space, they always have one foot out of the door. And any competent theatregoer knows this; it's perfectly common to hear, even of a new play, someone suggest that the production didn't do the play justice, or conversely that

78. See my introduction to Greig, *Plays*, pp. \*\*\*

79. *Ibid.*, p. 44.\*\*\*

80. *Ibid.*, p. 21.\*\*\*

81. *Ibid.*, p. 14.\*\*\*

82. This ambiguity is arguably cleared up by *Pyrenees* (2005), Greig's 'sequel' to *Cosmonaut* in which Vivienne eventually tracks down Keith to the French-Spanish border. Of course, we are not obliged to make the connection between the plays (there is no indisputable link made) nor are we obliged to allow Greig to resolve the meaning of his earlier play, given that the intervention is in an ambiguously theatrical form.

the director made the play seem better than it was. We recognise that, productively, there cannot be a perfect fit between play and production.

Barry Le Va's definition of the site-specific in his own work is worth considering: 'a symbiotic relationship between the space and the work. That that work could not exist unless the space was like this or that'.<sup>83</sup>

The first half is very appropriate to the play in performance: in a good production of a play everything will come together, actors, design, direction, space, audience, and so on. The performance in December 2003 of David Hare's docudrama about the privatisation of the railways, *The Permanent Way*, in Ste. Ethelreda's Church, in Hatfield, near the site of the October 2000 rail crash, meets the first half of Le Va's definition, but not the second. The play can always exist in different spaces.

The performance may be here, but the play is not (at least, not wholly). We might say that the play in performance is spatially non-identical.<sup>84</sup>

In Britain, one contemporary feature of new writing theatre practice is the programme/text, where the programme for the production contains the full text of the performance. This was spearheaded by the Royal Court where the first programme/text was for Stephen Lowe's *Touched* (1981).<sup>85</sup> Physically and materially, as we take the play out of the building, it reinforces our recognition that the play can and does exist independently from its particular realisation.

Of course, we have long known, at least as long as printing, that the play is distinct from its production. But what is peculiarly interesting is the way this effect has been reinforced, multiplied, pressed to the very foreground of some important plays written in the last fifteen years, specifically in the turbocapitalist era, when the collapse of the Soviet communist bloc removed one of the major geographical restraints on creating a global market. At the end of the first four scenes of Sarah Kane's *Blasted*, after the blackouts, we have a series of directions to the sound designer. The first requests, 'The sound of spring rain', the second 'the sound of summer rain', the third 'the sound of autumn rain', and the fourth 'the sound of heavy winter rain'.<sup>86</sup> One can read these in a number of ways: they are poetic, they suggest the passing of time, a cyclical evocation of the seasons, and so on. They anticipate the cleansing rain that leaks into the hotel room at the end of the play. But less often remarked is that these directions are virtually impossible to realise. An audience might be able to tell the difference between light rain and heavy rain, but who in an audience will really hear specifically autumn and summer rain, especially given its lack of correspondence to the apparent timespan of the stage action?

A similar problem occurs at the end of the play. Ian, blinded and wretched from his ordeal, finds a baby and eats it. He tears up the floorboards, lowers himself into the hole and then the direction tells us, 'He dies with relief'. Rain pours into the room and – 'eventually' – we hear Ian say, 'shit'.<sup>87</sup> This poses a serious problem for the production team. It is fairly easy in stage terms to suggest someone dying; they close their eyes, they go limp, they stop moving. But it's also fairly crucial to the convention that they stop talking. The stage directions and the dialogue are in flat contradiction to one another.

83. Barry Le Va, Interview, in Kaye (ed.), *Art into Theatre*, pp. 41–55 (p. 50).

84. The spatial disruption is also internal. One of the skills of a theatregoer is to separate out what is of the play, what is of the production, and what is of the performance. The play is much less visually determinate than the production, and the production less visually determinate than the performance, as revealed when an actor forgets his lines, or when we find an actress's other roles distracting from this one. The performance is rooted in place, where the play is spatially and physically unlocated, within and without.

85. Nick Hern, Personal Email, 12 May 2004.

86. Sarah Kane, *Complete Plays* (London: Methuen, 2001), pp. 24, 39, 50, 57.

87. *Ibid.*, p. 60.



Kane has several of these challenges to production: *Cleansed*'s 'Out of the ground grow daffodils. / They burst upwards, their yellow covering the entire stage';<sup>88</sup> *Phaedra's Love*'s final direction, 'a vulture descends and begins to eat his body';<sup>89</sup> the near-total lack of stage directions in *Crave* and the refusal to identify who is speaking, if anyone, in *4.48 Psychosis*. Interestingly, Kane insisted that these plays are to be performed on no other medium than the stage; a movie could make light work of a suddenly-blossoming field of daffodils or a descending vulture. The stage finds these much more difficult which, alongside the sureness of theatrical touch evinced so clearly elsewhere in her work, suggests a deliberate attempt to make the plays, in part at least, unperformable. By this I mean that the plays forbid the (false) impression that there is a right way to do them. We know that there is no right way to do any play, but the seduction of some naturalist texts is to allow one to enter the texts novelistically. Kane's work cannot be fantasised in this way; it poses difficulties for the reader that insists on the distinctness of page and stage.

In not assigning lines of dialogue to named characters, Kane is no doubt following the example of Martin Crimp's *Attempts on Her Life* (1997), a play in which the situations of its seventeen scenes and ascription of all lines are not given. Into one scene entitled 'Untitled (100 Words)' – itself perhaps inspired by the critical response to Sarah Kane's *Blasted* – are interpolated lists of words, without indication of whether they are stage directions to be read only by the production team, words to be incorporated into the visual design, or lines of dialogue. A splendid example of the unrealisable stage direction is Crimp's prefatory direction: 'this is a piece for a company of actors whose composition should reflect the composition of the world beyond the theatre',<sup>90</sup> a commandingly meaningless stipulation that, in its terseness, seems to require being acted upon, but is so undetermined as to be infinitely interpretable. The challenge to performance of Crimp's text is immediately evident on the page, and anyone who bought the programme/text at the Royal Court will have noticed its unusual character while waiting for the performance to begin.

Kane may also have been influenced by Howard Barker, a writer whose texts offer unexplained typographical innovations (emboldened lines, long speeches arranged in tall towers of short poetic lines) and stage directions that cannot be literally followed (e.g. *The Castle*'s 'an effect of rain and time'<sup>91</sup>). Barker has also created texts that defy any kind of production at all. *The Ecstatic Bible* is an epic play covering a Biblical period of time, which contains moments of such indeterminacy that it could last anything up to an entire twenty-four-hour day. It is unlikely that anyone could perform it all, and even if they could it would try the endurance and waking capacities of an audience. In principle no play is wholly realisable in performance; this play is not even contingently realisable.

These plays are site-unspecific. Even when you are sitting in a particular theatre on a particular night watching a particular performance of the play, it is a fundamental part of understanding the experience you are going through that you can recognise that this play can be done elsewhere and otherwise. Adorno wrote that 'an "it shall be different" is hidden in even the most sublimated work of art',<sup>92</sup> and this is, of course, literally true of the play seen in performance.

88. Ibid., 133.

89. Ibid., 103.

90. Martin Crimp, *Plays Two* (London: Faber and Faber, 2005), p. 202.

91. Howard Barker, *Collected Plays Volume One* (London: Calder, 1990), p. 246.

92. Theodor W. Adorno, 'Commitment', in Rolf Tiedmann (ed.), *Notes to Literature: Volume Two* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1992), pp. 76–94 (p. 93).

93. Tony Blair, in his speech to the Labour Party Conference

2005, eulogised: 'A baby is born. The father takes a photo on his mobile. In seconds relatives around the world can see, and celebrate. A different world to the one we were born into' and then, without explanation, passed on to talking about globalisation, which he presented, equally ideologically, as inevitable, 'I hear people say we have to stop and debate globalisation. You might as well debate whether autumn should follow summer' <[http://www.labour.org.uk/index.php?id=news2005&ux\\_news\[id\]=ac05tb&cHash=d8353c3d74](http://www.labour.org.uk/index.php?id=news2005&ux_news[id]=ac05tb&cHash=d8353c3d74)> (visited 3 October 2005).

94. I must express my gratitude to Fiona Wilkie who invited me to give an earlier version of this paper at Roehampton's Drama Research Seminar and gave me many helpful pointers for reading about site-specific theatre. I hope you're not too appalled at what I've done. Thanks also to those who attended and gave such sympathetically critical responses to the ideas. I am grateful to Graham Eatough who asked me to talk about 'McTheatre' at Suspect Culture's Theatre and the World of Money symposium in Glasgow. My 'reading group' colleagues Chris Megson, Helen Nicholson, Emma Govan and Jonathan Holmes got me reading and thinking about Certeau. Dominic Symonds's work on the megamusical has been an important influence on my thinking. Thanks to Jen Harvie for patience and encouragement.

One of the characteristic ideological manoeuvres of market fundamentalists is to conflate globalisation (a narrow and relatively recent wave of global neoliberalism) with cosmopolitanism (an historically unfolding consciousness of our universal connectedness). The latter unfolds through our constantly evolving ethical consciousness of the obligations and rights that bind us all together, and through the evolving technological, intellectual and cultural means by which we experience the complexities of that world. But while the market fundamentalists like to subsume cosmopolitanism into globalisation to give neoliberalism credit for the invention of mobile phones and the internet,<sup>93</sup> post-modernism collapses the two to discredit cosmopolitanism. The particular ethical value of the play-in-performance, which distinguishes it from McTheatre and the Serra-type site-specific work, is its non-identical quality, its ability to be both general and particular, its ability to express and articulate a kind of theatrical cosmopolitanism that gives it a revolutionary ethical quality that is prior and profoundly resistant to global capital.<sup>94</sup>