

UC Santa Cruz

UC Santa Cruz Electronic Theses and Dissertations

Title

Therapeutic Elements of Theater

Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/4jj3h2cg>

Author

Pratt, Allie

Publication Date

2019

Peer reviewed|Thesis/dissertation

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA

SANTA CRUZ

Therapeutic Elements of Theater

A thesis submitted in partial satisfaction
of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

in

THEATER ARTS

by

Allie Pratt

June 2019

The Thesis of Allie Pratt
is approved:

Professor Daniel Scheie, Chair

Professor Michael Chemers

Professor Amy Mihyang Ginther

Lori Kletzer
Vice Provost and Dean of Graduate Studies

Contents

List of Figures.....	iv
Abstract.....	v
Acknowledgements.....	vi
1. Introduction.....	1
2. The Purpose of Theater.....	3
3. <i>The Children's Hour</i>	17
4. The Interview.....	24
5. The Results.....	31
5.1 Aristotle's List.....	31
5.2 Elements of Therapeutic Theater.....	39
5.3 Pratt's List.....	53
6. Moving Forward.....	55
Appendix.....	58
Aristotelian Rankings.....	58
Bibliography.....	59

List of Figures

Figure 1.....	36
Figure 2.....	37
Figure 3.....	48

Abstract

Therapeutic Elements of Theater

by Allie Pratt

Every theater history class I have ever taken has started with ancient Greek classicism and Aristotle's musings on Tragedy. While Aristotle makes a solid case for the purpose of Tragedy and how best to invoke catharsis in the theater, I would like to push his theories a step further; if theater can be cathartic to its audience, can it be therapeutic?

In this thesis, I will be looking at the University of California Santa Cruz's 2018 production of *The Children's Hour* through both an Aristotelian and a psychodramatic lens in order to explore if and how a piece of canonical, American theater might be therapeutic to its audience, eventually creating an elemental list of therapeutic theater.

Acknowledgements

To my parents,
two incredibly intelligent individuals
who have long-embraced and supported
my decision to spend life playing.

To Danny Scheie for his bizarre and wonderful direction.

To my graduate cohort
specifically for repeatedly
explaining how to cite sources correctly.

To Lillian Hellman for writing Martha Dobie into existence.

1. Introduction

My mother was an eighth grade science teacher at a public school in a low-income area. My best friend from kindergarten is now a journalist for BuzzFeed assigned to, and living in, Nairobi, Kenya. My cousin is a paramedic and spent years fighting fires with the United States Forest Service. Me? I am an actress. A card-carrying, Shakespeare-reciting, ready-for-my-close-up actress. I have been a professional actress since earning my Bachelor of Fine Arts in 2013. I have played Alice in *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* for children at schools all over the Pacific Northwest; I have played a handful of Shakespearean ingénues, and one time I had a scene in a movie with Bill Pullman and he said I was “the real deal” between takes. Our scene was cut. The only way I have been able to reconcile what is essentially playing pretend for money for the last six years is by carrying on with the delusion that I am helping the world in some way. This idea came to me when an older gentleman came up to me after a performance of *Peter Pan* in which I played the title role at Fairfield High School, in Fairfield, California at the age of seventeen. This man came to me with teary eyes and said, “I haven’t been to Neverland since my wife died. Tonight I was back there,” and walked away. I was floored. Flash-forward over a decade and it is still happening; after a performance of the University of California Santa Cruz’s (UCSC) *The Children’s Hour*, an older gentleman came up to me and said I had “changed his molecules.”

My whole adult life, I have had snippets of reinforcement that my make-believe in front of people matters, that it heals in some way. I may not help the world as much as my social worker aunt, but I seem to help in certain situations. I never thought to test or interrogate that theory until now. Using UCSC's production of *The Children's Hour* as my case study, I can actually explore if and how a piece of theater can help the world. Because the *Introductory Studies in Acting* class is offered at UCSC as a general education credit every academic quarter, and it is a class requirement to see the Theater Department's main production within that quarter, I have access to a pool of audience members I can ask about the show. The academic setting dispels the awkward and outlandish nature of questioning audience members about their honest experience seeing work in which I was involved. This is the opportunity to test my theory and determine if the theater I am involved in can be helpful and, more specifically, therapeutic.

Using Aristotle's elemental writings on Tragedy and a psychodramatic lens to analyze UCSC's production of *The Children's Hour*, I hope to find overlap between the ancient philosopher's theories, canonical American theater, and modern drama therapy practices. My goal is to create a new elemental schema, detailing the psychodramatic conditions in which professional, Western theater could be therapeutic to its audience.

2. The Purpose of Theater

The idea of audiences benefitting psychologically from theater is not novel. “In primitive dramatic rites the aboriginal performer was not an actor, but a priest. He [sic] was like a psychiatrist engaged in saving the tribe” (Moreno 13). This kind of live performance is confirmed and detailed in many accounts, for example in John G. Neihardt’s *Black Elk Speaks*, an elaborate Horse Dance is performed to cure a tribe of the Sioux nation. In describing his community post-show, Black Elk says, “I could see that my people were all happier. Many crowded around me and said that they or their relatives who had been feeling sick were well again” (Neihardt 134). Though this particular performance took place in the 1880s, the rituals described are a part of an ancient tradition. Before the Common Era, the Greeks also practiced dramatic religious performances. “Therapeutic drama having its roots in early healing rituals in which movement and incantation uniting body, mind, and spirit were known to have a curative effect involving the experience of total personal communication” (Grainger 120). And as far as what the Western world largely considers to be legitimate theater, we have Aristotle’s musings on Tragedy, *Poetics*.¹

¹ Most English translations of *Poetics* capitalize Tragedy to differentiate between dramatic genre and descriptive everyday language, dramatic genre being capitalized. The same is true of the dramatic elements he describes, discussed later in the chapter.

Customarily, a Western, Eurocentric theater history education begins with the ancient Greeks, Aristotle's definition of Tragedy being key to the curriculum. Currently, even the UCSC Department of Theater Arts graduate program has a class that fits this description. Aristotle defined a Tragedy as a performed piece of poetry which is, "an imitation of an action that is serious, complete, and of a certain magnitude" (5) which inspires pity and fear in order to induce *catharsis*, or, "the proper purgation of these emotions" (5), in its spectators. He details how, precisely, to get maximum catharsis out of a Tragedy. Specifically, Aristotle described six elements of Tragedy and how to properly manipulate them to elicit the pity and fear an audience needs for this psychic cleansing.

First of the tragic elements is Plot, the arrangement of incidents, which must be at once spontaneous and probable. Aristotle deems this the most important element; it is, "the first principle, and, as it were, the soul of a tragedy" (6). Second in order of importance is Character. Aristotle describes Character as, "that in virtue of which we ascribe certain qualities to the agents" (5). Character is the instrument that carries out the sequential actions of the plot. Character must be good, propriety, true to life, and consistent according to Aristotle. Next Aristotle details Thought and Diction, the philosophy and expression of the Tragedy. "Thought," writes Aristotle, "is found where something is proved to be or not to be, or a general maxim is enunciated" (6). In essence, Thought is the message or moral of the story. Diction is the, "expression of the meaning in

words" (Aristotle 6). Theater at this time was still closely allied with epic poetry and predominantly written in verse.² There is also mention of a sort of acting method, the "Delivery" (Aristotle 16). In order to express the meanings of the words, the speaker must know the connotation and purpose of those words and deliver them accordingly.

At the bottom of the tragic elements lie Song and Spectacle. Of Spectacle, Aristotle writes, "[It] has, indeed, an emotional attraction of its own, but, of all the parts it is the least artistic, and connected the least with the art of poetry" (6). He later mentions, "Fear and pity may be aroused by spectacular means; but they may also result from the inner structure of the piece, which is the better way, and indicates a superior poet" (Aristotle 11), further imposing the hierarchy of his list of tragic elements. Spectacle being last on the list, we can assume Aristotle would not have been amused with a contemporary *Cirque du Soleil* performance, at least not in this purposeful, tragic sense. Song was largely incorporated into theater in ancient Greece, a metered and harmonious speaking, similar to Diction in that it expresses Thought in an artistic way. In an interview for the *Performing Arts Journal*, American theater maker, Lee Breuer, touched on his own work bringing classicism and myth into the twentieth century stating, "The black church experience," and, "rock concerts," were perhaps, "closer to what the original Greek performances were like" (Rabkin 49). Aristotle considers song,

² Trochaic tetrameter and iambic trimeter were most common.

however, as more of an embellishment than a core tenet necessary for the intense purgation of emotions, one of what he calls “important accessories” (26), but *only* an accessory nonetheless.

This hierarchal structure has widely been accepted as the basis of “legitimate” theater in the Western, Eurocentric world for over two millennia. And the catharsis it incites has been regarded as a positive effect of theater. Humans feel feelings for a reason. I once told a therapist that I did not see any use in anger and he asked me, “Then why would you feel it?” Similarly, pioneer of psychoanalysis, Sigmund Freud, was widely attributed with the quote, “Unexpressed emotions will never die. They are buried alive and will come forth later in uglier ways.” Expressing emotions is generally a healthy thing to do, however, it does not imply a shift in behavior or attitude. Releasing the build up of, say, misery does not actually do anything to cure or change the circumstances which caused misery. *Poetics* argues that the Greeks experienced catharsis upon witnessing Tragedy. There are other accounts to support this, in fact according to legend, Aeschylus’ third play in the *Oresteia* trilogy was so stirring it induced miscarriages in pregnant women and fainting from others (Fagles 89). Clearly these Tragedies were effective in inciting intense and even visceral reactions, but what comes next? What comes after catharsis? An emotional purge does not necessitate change; rather I assert its purpose lies in maintaining the status quo. Perhaps some societal rule has been reinforced negatively through pity and fear in the performance, and the spectator will continue to adhere to social norms in order

to avoid future calamity. Without the necessitation for change, what is to stop audiences from simply returning to their normal daily lives that gave them the need to purge in the first place?

What at first looks like an asset of Tragedy now seems to be an integral part of a somewhat innocuous cycle, inviting audiences into a liminal space to feel feelings and purge, only to be ushered back to their starting point, never crossing the threshold of liminality and discovering a new sense of self, outlook on life, or purpose. There is no lasting positive change that eliminates this need for purgation. This coy invitation has been a useful tool to keep audiences morally educated and in check for centuries, perhaps constantly in a state of pity and fear. Twentieth century Brazilian theater maker Augusto Boal went as far to say that the Aristotelian power dynamics between spectator and actor were inherently oppressive. Boal asserted that Aristotle's, "coercive system of tragedy" (46) was essentially, "a powerful system of intimidation" (46) used to repress revolution.

Though we think of catharsis as a lofty mission, it is really not much different from the pure escapism the Romans provided with their Naumachia exhibitions, or the drawing room comedies of early 20th century England, which were more places to be seen, the playwrights literally repeating the exposition around twenty minutes into the story to accommodate for those arriving *fashionably late*.³ Catharsis feels good and keeps the status quo. Consequently, though Aristotle makes a great case for how to inspire catharsis in the theater, there are certain things, as a contemporary

³ For example, A. A. Milne's *Mr. Pim Passes By*

actor and theatergoer, with which I disagree. This makes sense; it has been over two thousand years. The world is different now. For instance, a woman's story can be just as effective as a man's. Aristotle believed that "woman may be said to be an inferior being" (12). According to the old philosopher it is better to tell a good man's story to evoke pity and fear to ultimately incite cathartic release in an audience. Obviously we are still battling these old worldviews, but society has evolved. An example of this collective advancement is the success of Lillian Hellman's *The Children's Hour*. Hellman, one of the only female, American playwrights of the twentieth century to have her work canonized along with her male contemporaries, centered her Tragedy around two women barely emerging into American middle class. The play ran for nearly two years in its first iteration, has been revived a number of times on prominent stages in the United States and abroad,⁴ and was adapted for film in 1961 starring Hollywood icons Audrey Hepburn and Shirley MacLaine. The play itself shows significant leaps forward on the issue of Aristotle's ideal Character, and its long lasting success reaffirms that progress.

Society has evolved since 335 BC and so has theater. There are so many new elements Aristotle could not have dreamed up in his wildest reveries. We have theaters indoors, blackbox spaces where plays are performed *in the round*, sound design, lighting design, projection and new media. Theater audiences can be participatory in the action like in William Finn's *The 25th Annual Putnam*

⁴ The most notable and recent production was directed by Ian Rickson at the Harold Pinter Theatre in London starring Elisabeth Moss and Keira Knightley in 2011.

County Spelling Bee,⁵ or in charge of the plot as in the site specific *Fefu and Her Friends* by the late María Irene Fornés, where one goes room to room as they please, unraveling the story in a distinct way depending on the sequence of rooms they enter. Men and women of color write and star in award-winning plays like Lorraine Hansberry's *A Raisin in the Sun*⁶ and Qui Ngyuen's *Vietgone*.⁷ Performances can be small and intimate in theaters with only ninety-nine seats to fill or in an elementary school's multipurpose room for children with a wide spectrum of learning differences, socioeconomic backgrounds, disabilities, racial, gender, and cultural identities.

Theater has expanded and developed accordingly with the times, continuing to deliver catharsis to increasingly diverse audiences. So how can we possibly maintain that an ancient structure created with one perspective in mind holds any value? Is it a universal structure that transcends socioeconomic? What *does* hold value in contemporary theater? Can we make theater that carries audiences across the liminal space, through catharsis, and what would be the value of this?

⁵ In this Tony award winning musical comedy, audience members are invited to participate in the action, misspelling words on stage in the spelling bee, only to be escorted back to their seats by the cast in song and dance.

⁶ Originally only nominated, the play has gone on to win several Tony Awards in its subsequent revivals.

⁷ *Vietgone* won Ngyuen the Ted Schmitt award for the world premiere of an outstanding new play in 2016.

First of all we need to define and assess the goal of successful theater. I am specifically referring to theater as a live performance that is dramatic, i.e. it has a plot enacted by at least one character. Returning to the cradle of the craft, we can establish that one of the primary goals of this type of dramatic live performance is to heal. But what does successful healing look like in our contemporary world?

What we are entering is the realm of *therapy*, which is not to be confused with catharsis. To proceed, I need to clarify my working definition of therapy. In order to determine whether certain audience members had a therapeutic experience, I need to determine what constitutes the success of therapy. According to the American Psychological Association (APA), "In psychotherapy, psychologists help people of all ages live happier, healthier and more productive lives. Psychologists apply researched-based techniques to help people develop more effective habits" ("Therapy"). This has become the basis for my definition of therapeutic success. It implies that nothing is wrong with the individual undergoing the process, whereas a more Freudian definition, or even Merriam-Webster's definition, "the treatment of mental or psychological disorders by psychological means" (Port) include dysfunction or illness in the individual. The current APA definition is inclusive--everyone can benefit from therapy, just as everyone can arguably benefit from theater. Entire theatrical genres have been created to this end. *Theatre for Development* since the 1960s has been spread across the globe "as a learning strategy in which theatre is used to

encourage communities to express their own concerns and reflect upon the causes of their problems and possible solutions” (Epskamp 3). This genre drew from other experimental theater movements, makers, and activists, like Augusto Boal and his *Theatre of the Oppressed* and Bertolt Brecht’s *Epic Drama*. In 1920s and 1930s Germany, Brecht, “wanted a form of drama and theatre that would stimulate an increased sense of political awareness” (Epskamp 13). Boal took Brecht’s intention a step further decades later, inviting audience participation. In *Theatre of the Oppressed*, Boal writes of ancient theatrical traditions, “free people singing in open air” (119). He then writes, “the ruling classes took possession of the theater and built their dividing walls” (119) referring to the fourth wall, or the imaginary wall that completes the set and stands between performer and audience. Theater, then, becomes a vehicle for propaganda, or, “coercive indoctrination” (119) as Boal emphatically puts it.

These genres of political theater aggressively incite societal and political change, which arguably can, “help people of all ages live happier, healthier, and more productive lives” (“Therapy”). I would like to focus on what theater can do on a personal level. If theater has the power to heal society, or at least encourage gradual positive change, can it do the same for an individual audience member?

The APA says we can do this through therapy by developing “more effective habits.” What does this mean specifically? A habit is an action or attitude to which we are so accustomed, it has become almost involuntary. We may not even be aware of our habits. When we talk about habits, there is an

implicit longevity. Habits are not short lived and it can take tremendous effort to make and break them. We can create or destroy habits mentally or behaviorally. Thus we can determine the success of therapy by looking at positive, long lasting changes in these two factors: mindset and behavior.

Enter Dr. Jacob Levy Moreno, another sociological and political theater maker. His *Theatre of Spontaneity* practiced the *Living Newspaper* genre. “Moreno thought of the Living Newspaper as sociodramatic; it enabled a group and audience to explore a social, shared problem, to understand the interplay of roles and events” (Casson 115). Much like Boal, Moreno sought to tear down the fourth wall. “Moreno would involve members of the whole group-audience and trained auxiliaries-who would spontaneously take on roles to explore social issues of concern to the group. Sociodrama is a creative action method used today in group therapy and education” (Casson 116). Moreno was very interested in not only societal health, but also individual mental health, laying the foundation for his concept of *psychodrama* and its subsequent, perhaps more familiar coinage, *drama therapy*. “Drama therapy, like drama itself, is an arrangement of forms - roles, conventions, contrasts, similarities, modes of understanding, ideas and feelings - which encourages us to discriminate between and choose among a range of different kinds of perception or ways of perceiving” (Grainger 11). Drama therapy is the use of dramatic practice (i.e. role playing), usually in a group setting, to enact or reenact complex social and/or emotional difficulties in order to explore new methods of coping or comprehension.

Currently drama therapy is tremendously effective with individuals affected by autism, as a lot of its aims and applications are interpersonal in nature.⁸ Drama therapy can also be helpful for those who deal with depression, schizophrenia, or any other psychological troubles with defining roles in their daily lives. In the first half of the twentieth century, Moreno, a doctor of medicine, psychology, psychiatry, and a theater maker, simply coined his psychodrama as, “the science which explores the truth by dramatic methods” (Johnson and Emunah 408). In response to Aristotle’s definition of tragedy as an “imitation of action” (5), Moreno contends that, “Psychodrama defines the drama as an extension of life and action rather than its imitation, but where there is imitation the emphasis is not on that it imitates, but upon the opportunity of recapitulation of unsolved problems...” (15).

Moreno introduced group therapy to the APA in the 1930s and brought role play to mainstream psychotherapy. According to his first volume of *Psychodrama*, he once encountered Freud after attending one of the famous psychoanalyst’s lectures and remarked, “I start where you leave off... You analyze their dreams. I give them the courage to dream again. You analyze and tear them apart. I let them act out their conflicting roles and help them put the parts back together again” (5). Freud’s method of talking through psychological troubles could only be so effective; humans need to actively engage with their

⁸ For more information about current drama therapy practices and applications, the *North American Drama Therapy Association* is an excellent resource. nadta.org

problems through play and theatrical expression in order to get to the root of their problems. Moreno conducted his psychodrama sessions in a group; he saw great importance in active roleplaying as well as audience engagement. Viewing these psychodramatic scenes served the entire group, not just those currently engrossed in self-expression.

If a psychodramatic or drama therapy session can be fruitful not only to its immediate participants, but to those observing the action, can we make professional theatrical performance that is therapeutic and carries an audience through that liminal space, leaving them positively altered in their lives? And what might be the importance of this? Why not just seek out conventional psychotherapy or its many artistically focused branches?⁹

Economically speaking, the United States of America has monetized wellness. Therapy can be expensive even with health insurance, and health insurance is costly in itself. In a well-developed society, therapy and healthcare should be universally affordable to all citizens. But sadly that's not the case in modern America. Theater can by no means replace psychiatry and psychological conditions that require medication, but if it can be somewhat medicinal in its own right, we as theater artists have a duty to channel this ancient power into positive action.¹⁰

⁹ For example, drama therapy, music therapy, art therapy, etc.

¹⁰ Theater tickets can be expensive, of course. A quick search for tickets to Broadway's current phenomenon, *Hamilton*, ranges anywhere from \$179-849, which in some cases is more expensive than therapy. Our production of *The Children's*

Socially we are inundated with constant distraction and a lack of social capital, which is, “the connections among individuals--social networks and the norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness that arise from them” (Putnam 19). A communal activity like seeing theater potentially builds this social capital, and the nature of theater being live and dependent on audience engagement promotes sustained and active attention. Furthermore, a communal event is more apt to affect audience members emotionally, and shared emotional experiences are, “rewarding,” and even heightened for the individuals in a group (Goldenberg et al. 26). Roger Grainger, a registered drama therapist who held a PhD in Sociology from Leeds University, explained these rewards; “[P]eople leave the theatre in a frame of mind which is eager to embrace the world outside, to engage ideas, situations and people with renewed vigour because of the interpersonal happening in which they have just been involved” (11). It can be said, then, that theater can be both economically and socially advantages to our society. Why not curative? Why not therapeutic? “Psychologically speaking, it allows us to measure our private ways of making sense of life with what is going on in the play and to take comfort from the recognition of the common ground that exists” (Grainger 25). How can we make the kind of live performance that is therapeutic for its audience? What are the specific elements necessary to create it?

Hour at UCSC was free to students and faculty, the most expensive ticket costing \$18.

I am obviously not the first to explore this subject. Moreno, Grainger, and a multitude of others have contributed to the expanding field of the psychology of theater and its therapeutic benefits. Lee Breuer even mentions cathartic theater moving, “one step further [to] find pity and terror turning into joy and ecstasy” (Rabkin 48). My aim in joining these artists and scholars is to assess if and how the canonical Western theater we already have and widely produce can serve as therapy to its audience, or is that therapeutic effect reserved for psychodramatic and drama therapy sessions or certain specifically psychotherapeutic plays and ancient healing rituals? Can a classic American play be therapeutic to an individual theatergoer and how?

To investigate this, I developed a series of interview questions and gathered a group of five individuals who saw UCSC’s production of *The Children’s Hour*, my goal being to determine if any of these interviewees underwent a positive change in mindset or behavior after seeing the show and why. After the questions, I had them rank Aristotle’s elements of Tragedy in the order they deemed most important, in order to ascertain how audiences have changed since 335 BC, and to create an elemental list of my own.

My findings were both surprising and affirming. In the following chapters I will discuss the specific production of *The Children’s Hour* I am using for my case study, the interview process, my expectations, the data gathered from my interviews, and what I have found to be the key to make a piece of live performance not just cathartic, but therapeutic.

3. The Children's Hour

When I got an email from Professor Danny Scheie over the summer asking me to submit an audition tape for *The Children's Hour*, I jumped at the chance. It is rare to work on scripts authored by females. In my theatrical career I have only had the opportunity to work on one published female playwright's work when I understudied a role in Lisa Loomer's *Distracted*, directed by Patricia Troxel.¹¹ Working with another female's text feels different from the standard patriarchal narrative. I remember telling Patricia that I felt "taken care of," and she agreed. Not only are most of the characters on my resume described as "girlfriend" or "wife," the majority of females in our beloved classic American theater can likewise be reduced down to one dimension. It is the work of the actress to flesh out the character and give her a full life with complex intentions and purpose. Even Shakespearean heroines can be dwindled down to *lover*, their stories often being purely bent towards heterosexual romance. When offered the opportunity to audition for a female playwright as respected and prolific as Lillian Hellman, an actress cannot help but seize the chance.

The Children's Hour takes place in 1930s rural America where two young women, Karen Wright and Martha Dobie, run an all girls' boarding school in an old, repurposed farmhouse. The two women built the school from the ground up,

¹¹ Pacific Conservatory Theatre (PCPA Theaterfest), 2009

“slaving and doing without things to make ends meet” (Hellman 1.1) only to have it stripped away by a devastating little fib from their most severe problem student, Mary Tilford. When Mary spreads a rumor of a lesbian affair between the two school teachers, they lose the students and then the school, Karen loses her male fiancé, and, after a difficult admission that perhaps the lie had a bit of truth to it, Martha takes her own life. I had always heard of it as “The Lesbian School Teacher Play that Audrey Hepburn was in.” And as much as my childhood self wanted to be Audrey Hepburn, when Danny asked me which character I would like to play I enthusiastically chose the non-Hepburn role of Martha.

I entered the process like I enter every rehearsal process. I had my script bound and highlighted, pencil ready for notes, and took on the script with my feminist, realist, psychoanalytical, Hagen-esque, Stanislavskian lens. I use Stanislavski’s empathic *Magic If*, an imaginative technique where the actor puts themselves in their character’s *given circumstances* in order to find motivation for action. I also employ Stanislavski’s *units and objectives*, using transitive verbs to guide me in the rehearsal process. An example of my implementation of the Stanislavski technique would be in Act I of *The Children’s Hour*, when the subject of Karen’s impending marriage pops up in conversation:

MARTHA. So soon? Then we won’t be taking our vacation together?

KAREN. Of course we will. The three of us.

MARTHA. I had take for granted, I guess, that we were going to the lake, like we always do, just you and I.

KAREN. Now there’ll be three of us. That’ll be fun too.

On the surface this appears to be a friendly enough exchange, but knowing that Martha's given circumstances are that she has intense yet undefined romantic feelings towards her dear friend and fears the next chapter of the school they have worked so hard to get on its feet after she is married, paints an entirely different picture. Rather than making pleasant conversation and straightening out logistics, I used transitive verbs (e.g., to guilt, to judge, etc.) to get Karen to postpone her wedding, which for that particular unit, or *beat*, would have been Martha's objective.

In terms of Hagen¹² technique, I use what she coined as *transference* to try to better engulf myself in the play's given circumstances. This simply involves associating personal experiences with experiences in the play. In reference to the above exchange between Karen and Martha, transference was simple. I have definitely been in a passive aggressive conversation where I feel the other party has let me down, which is how I knew that guilting and judging Karen would work theatrically.

Analyzing the text and parsing together the pieces of Martha's life I quickly realized that this is not "The Lesbian School Teacher Play;" at least my Martha would not fit into that production. This was a play about a woman who

¹² Multiple Tony award-winning actress, Uta Hagen, graced the world with iconic stage performances. Notable roles include Blanche DuBois in *A Streetcar Named Desire* and Martha in *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* on Broadway. For further reading on Hagen's career and technique, I suggest her book *A Challenge for the Actor*.

lacked the vocabulary and reference to live the life she needed. Martha only truly loved one person in the world and that person was Karen. It felt a little like I imagine playing Romeo would, except instead of witty banter about the moon and stolen kisses, it was full of repressed, unnamed impulses and longings that manifested in strange little outbursts about Karen's fiancé. I approach my work very realistically, analytically, and with the utmost empathy.

Danny Scheie's direction was an entirely different beast. I had heard of these big spectacles Scheie had produced at the university before. I heard rumors of nudity, dance numbers, and lots of drag. Of course, as a very traditional Stanislavskian actor, I was very hesitant towards his bent for the surreal. By the end of the rehearsal process, I came to admire this mixture of natural and strange in the production and the impetus behind it.

There were certain liberties Scheie took with the text that my very conventional and somewhat Aristotelian mind could not quite wrap around. For example, the third and final act of *The Children's Hour*, where Martha commits suicide, the script is very clear:

“Martha exits L. Karen sits alone without moving. There is no sound in the house, until, a few moments after Martha's exit, a shot is heard. The sound of the shot should not be too loud or too strong, the act has not been sensational...”

Whether it was an issue of staging or an artistic choice, every edition of Hellman's script has Martha's death offstage. Scheie's vision was to have Martha's death onstage for all to see. There was talk in the beginning of hanging,

walking up in the lighting grid, everything short of a dream ballet with red ribbon streamers. In the end our staging was quite different. Martha did not exit the stage, for instance. Instead she simply walked upstage center to a sort of ethereal dramatic space, a room apart from the previous action. Karen still sat alone and motionless. However the pause between Martha's "exit" and the shot was filled with the character of *Grocery Boy*, who entered upstage left to deliver Martha a loaded gun. Martha quickly took the gun, pulled back the hammer, held the barrel to her temple, and pulled the trigger. A loud shot was heard localized from the gun. Quite a different effect than the stage directions in multiple publications of Hellman's script.

It was differences like these that set alarms off in my head. I wanted to follow the letter of the story, Plot being, as Aristotle so excessively declared, the most important thing. This action did not necessarily disturb the plot, but it did transgress the playwright's vision.

In my very practical undergraduate education, we touched on experimental theater and the deconstruction of traditional, Western performance. I was made aware of the epic political theater efforts of theater makers like Bertolt Brecht; we studied Marxism, Dadaism, and the *Theatre of the Absurd*.¹³ My first year of actor training at the Pacific Conservatory of the Performing Arts (PCPA) we were

¹³ Martin Esslin's *Theatre of the Absurd* is an excellent resource for more information on twentieth century experimental and absurdist theater.

required to read Luigi Pirandello's 1921 play, *Six Characters in Search of an Author*. At Cornish College of the Arts in Seattle, Washington I was involved in a very wacky and experimental adaptation of *The Pied Piper of Hamelin* simply called, *The Piper*. I played a dancing rat as well as a drunken snake judge. This production is *not* included on my resume. Both PCPA and Cornish tended to throw more resources at more conventional shows. The more experimental productions were given smaller spaces and very little technical support. The big budget shows I saw around me in the professional realm were not anything like the avant-garde material we were studying in class. It ingrained in me a sense of disparity; traditional theater with conventional plot structures and realism was resource and career worthy, while experimental theater was what you did when you could not make it to the professional level. Little in my professional life contested this opinion. So I was obviously perturbed by what I perceived to be throwing out the author's intent, turning this classic piece of American theater into an incongruous experiment, which relied on Spectacle.

Scheie's production had a lot of Spectacle in it. A tap dance number just before the final act done atop horrible homophobic slurs written on the stage in chalk, an eerie operatic song Mary crooned at the top of the show, and, yes, a whole of lot drag were all woven in to UCSC's production.

My inclination being towards healing theater and psychoanalytical realism, I was wary of these devices and I expected my interviewees would feel the same. I developed a series of interview questions to assess the production

from a psychoanalytical standpoint. I wanted to know which parts of the production were impactful, what themes from the show resonated with the audience, what was unhelpful or disengaging, and how the production changed the audience, if at all. I expected to find that the realism of the show was engaging, the more unorthodox elements distracting, and overall that no one had undergone a significant change because of the show's constant and jarring juxtaposition of styles. Being trained in a very traditional way, I had never seen much merit in the kind of experimentation Scheie was teasing out of the script. My interviewees felt quite different. In the following chapters I will detail my interview process and the insights I gained from it.

4. The Interview

Attendance to *The Children's Hour* being a course requirement for UCSC's Introductory Studies in Acting course, I was presented with the opportunity to contact a pool of audience members unfamiliar to me for the first time in my career and ask them about the production.

Given the relatively short duration I was afforded to conduct this study, I limited my interview pool to five individuals of different race, gender identity, sexuality, education, and age. I wanted my interviewees to be unfamiliar to the majority of actors cast in *The Children's Hour*. Because my colleagues, Benjamin Chau-Chiu and Melissa Cunha, were employed by the university as Teaching Assistants for Introductory Studies in Acting during the production's run, I had access and to a pool of interviewees that fit this description. As it is a course requirement to attend weekly class sections, each led by a Teaching Assistant, my interviewees were familiar with Ben and Melissa, respectively. I included a question in my interview about how that might have affected their engagement with the show, and, unexpectedly, it did not cause much interference.

I picked three students of various ages, majors, and academic years upon my colleagues' recommendations, and I responded to a message from an anonymous fan, who happened to be in the course as well. I also met with a professor from a different department who had seen the show.

I conducted my interviews some months after the production had closed because therapy, as we discussed in the second chapter, implies longevity and not fleeting change. I wanted to gauge if the play had any long lasting effect.

Given more time and resources, it would be interesting to conduct the study again with a larger and more anonymous pool; however narrowing down the number of interviews allowed me to take time with the questions and delve deep into some very interesting answers. Each interview lasted at least an hour, and no two were exactly alike, though they all shared certain themes.

All interviews were done formally in person, and all participants signed an official consent form.¹⁴ All subjects were kept anonymous and given aliases because of the personal nature of the interview. Out of appreciation and respect for them, I have not included their full transcripts. I feel it is not my place to share their personal stories outside the context of my particular investigation.

My interviewees identified as follows:¹⁵

Interview 1: Adam, he/him/his, white, gay, cisgender, third year undergrad in Applied Linguistics, has seen a handful of community or university theater productions

Interview 2: Jake, he/him/his, mixed/white, straight, cisgender, first year undergraduate, has seen a number of plays at the Oregon Shakespeare Festival and participated in theater in high school

Interview 3: Felicity, she/her/hers, white, straight, cisgender, recent graduate in Legal Studies (saw *The Children's Hour* during

¹⁴ The UCSC Institutional Review Board's Informed Consent Form

¹⁵ Names have been changed to protect anonymity.

her final quarter at UCSC), saw plays growing up at a local theater company

Interview 4: Tabitha, she/they pronouns, black, bisexual, “woman-ish,” assistant professor, holds a Master’s Degree in Media Arts,¹⁶ worked admin/tech side of a Shakespeare company between undergraduate experiences, has not seen much theater otherwise

Interview 5: Sam, they/them/theirs, Asian American, queer, transmasculine and nonbinary, first year undergraduate in Game Design, acted in school plays until high school, has seen a fair amount of theater

I asked these individuals the following questions:

1. How do you identify yourself?

2. What is your theater experience?

I wondered if the more experienced theater practitioner and audience members were affected differently. I know as an experienced professional actor, I am more easily taken out of performances than someone who is not as familiar with the world. Continuity, the delivery of lines, and technical choices contribute to my overall engagement with the piece.

3. What is your therapy experience?

This question was included in order to compare theatrical and therapeutic experiences--what is similar and what is different?

¹⁶ I have intentionally left out university names and field of study to protect the anonymity of this particular subject.

4. *Did you have any expectations walking in *The Children's Hour*? What were they?*

Presumably less expectations or the more broken expectations are, the bigger the impact. Aristotle writes that though the sequence of events should be necessary and probable, the effects of pity and fear are "best produced when the events come on us by surprise" (8).

5. *What was the approximate size of the audience? How did this affect your experience?*

I wondered if anonymity had anything to do with individual engagement in the audience. If the audience is larger, anonymity increases--does that create a safer place for audiences to have a therapeutic experience?

6. *Did you know any cast members personally? How did this affect your experience?*

I wanted to get a general sense of how audience's suspension of disbelief may be affected by having personal connection to the cast members.

7. *What do you remember about the set/props? How did this affect your engagement with the play?*

This question gauges how the sparseness of the set might affect the audience's experience. Perhaps a more detailed and elaborate set, akin to those we see in film, or the intricate scenic designs of the early Moscow Art Theatre's scenographer, Viktor Simov, would be more engaging. These Russian sets were extravagantly accurate to real life. Simov "built whole houses and apartments on

the stage, arranging and furnishing even those rooms that could not be seen by the audience. So, leaving the stage an actor would still be existing in a habitual [sic] for the hero environment" (Oves).

8. What are some moments that resonated with you in *The Children's Hour* and why?

This is the pivotal question in the interview. We are stepping out of the technical realm and diving into the personal, emotional, and psychological. I asked my interviewees to go into as much detail and explanation as possible. What has a profound impact and why is different for each audience member, but I hoped to discover some universal truths in order to construct a general outline for creating impactful theater.

9. Did you identify with any particular character in *The Children's Hour*? Why?

Based on Aristotle's theory, modern psychodramatic theory, and drama therapy practice, I felt that identification and representation might be key in engaging and affecting audience members.

The remaining interview questions were crafted in order to discern whether the subject experienced therapy, which we now know to be a change in either mindset or behavior:

10. What new thoughts have you had about *The Children's Hour* post-show?

11. Does/did anything about *The Children's Hour* lead you to act differently? How?

12. What themes arose for you?

Question twelve is specifically priming the interviewee to consider the Thought or philosophy of the play to which Aristotle refers.

13. How do you think this piece of theater could have been more impactful?

This question gives room for the interviewee to air any grievances with the production and identify if any elements were distracting or disengaging. As I mentioned in the previous chapter, I originally anticipated that the mix of realism and surrealism would be problematic, that varying genres would clash and confuse or even alienate audience members, and I have always thought that a kind of Brechtian alienation effect where, “the artist never acts as if there were a fourth wall [and] expresses his awareness of being watched” (Willett 91-92) would be too heady and pretentious to really reach an audience on a deeper level. In his essay, *Alienation Effects in Chinese Acting*, Brecht actually points out that this particular method is used in many “plays of a non-Aristotelian (not dependent on empathy) type” (Willett 91). Without empathy, what is theater, but spectacle? Stanislavski’s entire acting method is based on empathy. His *Magic If* is the practice of assuming a character’s given circumstances, which results in “the prompting of true inner feelings” (Stanislavski 55). As a Stanislavskian actress, I

saw little merit in Brecht's contrarian theories, and I wanted to know if the audience felt the same way.

14. Has any live performance ever had a lasting effect on your thoughts, actions, or worldview?

The Children's Hour being one particular piece of theater, I would of course like to investigate other elements that are successful in theater that may not have been present in UCSC's production.

After the series of questions, I briefly explained that the intent of my research was to examine if a piece of theater could be not just cathartic, but therapeutic in that it affects long lasting positive changes in the mindset or behavior of its audience.

I then presented each subject with a list of Aristotle's tragic elements in no particular order. I succinctly described what each one was and how it might translate to today's theatrical conventions. I asked them to rank each element in order of importance and encouraged them to think aloud, as I was recording the interview process. I then gave my interviewees the option to add a new element to the list. I imagined I would be able to recreate an Aristotelian rubric of my own based on these interviews, using UCSC's production of Hellman's play as my baseline.

After the interviews were concluded, the question for me became did *The Children's Hour* change audience members' behavior or mindset for the better and, more importantly, if it did, how?

5. The Result

5.1 Aristotle's List

Originally I had plans to interrogate Aristotle's list. If a guideline for cathartic theater already existed, surely I could use that as a base for therapeutic theater. What is more I thought the ancient philosopher presented a strong argument, though sorely in need of a tune up--it is over two thousand years old and, frankly, bigoted. In his description of Character, he discounts women and slaves. Aristotle believed that because "woman may be said to be an inferior being, and the slave quite worthless" (12). He also claimed that, "There is a type of manly valor; but valor in a woman, or unscrupulous cleverness is inappropriate" (Aristotle 12). This has already been debunked. A woman's story has just as much worth as a man's. In a study of 350 top grossing films, "on average, female-led films led global box office revenue at every budget level for 2014-2017" ("Female-Led Films"). I must also touch on his notion of "valor" in a woman. If films like *Wonder Woman* and the recent additions to the *Star Wars* saga do not disprove this, which you can see in the aforementioned study, topped the charts, I would like to bring a tried and true thespian into the mix, Shakespeare. Shakespeare's comedies are rife with clever and even, "audacious" (2.3) ladies. *Twelfth Night's* Viola, posing as Cesario, has wit enough to charm and fool a grand duchess. Paulina stands up to a great king to save her country's dear queen and newborn princess in *The Winter's Tale*. Of course Lady Macbeth

subverts the patriarchy every step of the way in *Macbeth*, questioning her noble husband's sanity and manhood. These women, for better or for worse, are full of valor and cleverness and at least two of these plays have been successful in achieving catharsis in their audience.¹⁷ Clearly this Aristotle's thoughts on Character do not stand the test of time, and *The Children's Hour* is a prime example of this.

Though in dire need of renovation, I believed that it could indeed be renovated and not reinvented or even scrapped. I theorized, for example, that Character, being redefined, would come first on a new and improved Aristotelian rubric. We are more egocentric and narcissistic as a society than ever.¹⁸ The success of *YouTubers* like Logan Paul and Jenna Marbles, our collective fascination with celebrity and shows like *Keeping up with the Kardashians*, even our social media feeds with algorithms that encourage users to post more selfies and more often are all signs that we are fascinated in ourselves and in the way the rich and the famous live their lives.

I also considered the addition and subtraction of elements. I thought maybe Spectacle and Music could be taken off a list of elements for therapeutic

¹⁷ This is based on audience feedback I received while playing Perdita in Shakespeare By the Sea's 2018 production of *The Winter's Tale*, directed by Stephanie Coltrin in San Pedro California, and Viola in Seattle Shakespeare's 2014 production of *Twelfth Night* directed by Jon Kretzu in Seattle, Washington.

¹⁸ For further reading on this phenomenon, I suggest Twenge and Campbell's *The Narcissism Epidemic: Living in the Age of Entitlement*.

theater. When I asked my interviewees if they had anything to add, to my surprise, the majority of them rejected the idea of a ranked list of elements entirely.

Upon the task of ranking the list my first subject, whom I shall call Adam, remarked, “The thing is that I think these things are all as equally important, like if I could give these all a one, I probably would” (Adam).¹⁹ He described a “non-linear” connection between the elements. Adam, Jake, and Sam all ranked at least two elements equally, claiming one could not exist without the other. This codependency of elements mirrors Richard Schechner’s *6 Axioms of Environmental Theatre*. Schechner’s fifth axiom states, “All production elements speak in their own language” (59). He goes on to question, “Why should the performer be any more important than other production elements? Because he [sic] is human? But the other elements were made by men [sic] and operated by them” (Schechner 59). Because of my experience with film, I was initially apprehensive towards this assertion. Without the *talent*,²⁰ all the other elements fall apart. This is why talent gets paid handsomely, is provided with private trailers, and generally coddled onset. Without the actor’s performance everyone’s hard work goes to waste. Not only does this notion not translate to the stage, it does not even hold up in the film world. I reflect on all the brilliant cinematographers that I have had the pleasure of working with; they have been

¹⁹ All interview subjects have been given aliases to protect their identities. Included in the appendix is a chart I have created to display their Aristotelian rankings.

²⁰ *Talent* is the industry term for a cast member on set.

just as integral to the production process as the talent, if not more. And what of the editors and location managers? Without the 2nd AD²¹ to call talent to set and make sure everyone gets their lunch orders in, films would not get made. And what of live performance? There is no lunch, no editing, and no cinematographer to frame the shot up just right. Everything happens in the space and must go smoothly on the first take.

I would have thought that simply hearing the story of *The Children's Hour* or seeing a character's performance would have been enough to impact the audience, Plot and Character still remaining at the top of my elemental list, but an overwhelming attachment to the set (perhaps classified under Spectacle) in my interviews proved that, indeed, Schechner's egalitarian view of the theater is more resonant with contemporary audiences than Aristotelian ranking. Adam enthused about the use of chalkboards by set designer Monica Ravitch in *The Children's Hour*,²² "[I]t was just that ever presence of the school being there... It was like the characters never had an escape from the academic setting" ("Adam"). In reference to the third and final act, he added, "The floor is now this giant chalkboard, and it turns out the whole set is a chalkboard, and it's like so much bigger, the macrocosm of it all... it really fed well off of my imagination and how I laid out this world" (Adam). Jake and Tabitha commented on how the minimalist set design helped them focus on the action, that with a more elaborate,

²¹ The second assistant director is in charge of wrangling the actors, creating a call sheet, and generally managing everything going on behind the scenes.

²² See Figure 1 on page 35.

perhaps Viktor Simovian²³ design they would have been distracted by the minutiae and not as thoroughly engaged with the performance.



Figure 1. Scene from Act I. Set Design by Monica Ravitch. Photo by Monica Ravitch. Used with permission from the Department of Theatre Arts, UCSC.

The tap dance at the top of the third act was universally poignant to audiences. My fifth interviewee, Sam, noted the intense effect, “[W]hen the audience realized what they were clapping for, it was really harsh with all the sounds and the lighting and stuff. It was really jarring.” In a contemporary world where the story of the suicidal lesbian is a trope and young audiences do not face

²³ For more on Viktor Simov and his designs, refer back to the fourth chapter.

the same extremes as their foremothers, this act of Spectacle served the story. Spectacle created a situation where the audience was recontextualized and applauding the horrible, slanderous celebration on stage. (See *Figure 2*, below.) All the Spectacle in Scheie's production served this purpose. The Spectacle brought back the shock and scandal Lillian Hellman was so bold to produce eighty-four years prior to this particular remount at the notoriously liberal UC Santa Cruz.



Figure 2. Scene from Act III. Set Design by Monica Ravitch. Photo by Steve DeBartolomeo. Used with permission from the Department of Theatre Arts, UCSC.

According to these audience members, Spectacle was essential to this production. It highlighted the original context of the play. Adam actually touched on this. When I asked if he had anything to add to the list he reflected on the context. He specifically mentioned the terms “setting,” “context,” “presentation,” and “framework” (“Adam”). Without the setting or context, the show can fall into a tired historical drama. The framework and presentation, how the piece is delivered, helps to give that context. Adam ranked all these new elements at zero, saying that they create a sort of foundation for the performance to have meaning. This was in Scheie’s direction and more specifically in his Spectacle. This was pretty stunning to me, as I originally agreed with Aristotle; so much so that I thought maybe a new list of elements might not even include Spectacle. But without this element, ranked last on Aristotle’s list, our production of *The Children’s Hour* would not have had nearly the same impact on its audiences.

Aristotle’s elements can still be used to categorize specific moving parts of live performance, but the idea of a rigid and ranked system is outdated. Sam put it best:

“[T]here’s so many different things that people value in theater and I feel like it’s not about trying to find what ninety percent of people will enjoy--like the formula that will make this successful. Ideally you shouldn’t have terrible design thinking, ‘Well most people value character,’ ‘cause that’s not really gonna fly. But it should be balanced. And I feel like ranking things implies that these things are not important, and maybe that’s why I don’t really like concept of ranking these things. I feel like the question should be ‘How do you make all these things a part of *everyone’s* experience?’”

Audiences being more diverse than ever, a one-size-fits-all system does not quite work anymore. Aristotle wrote from one perspective, *for* one perspective. And his idea of catharsis, as we explored in the second chapter, merely maintains a status quo. These interviews raised important questions about how relevant this list is in current performance practices, questions I never thought to ask. After the interview process, my original intention to rework the rubric had been rendered obsolete. Instead, my work became about exploring commonalities in my interviews and trying to understand those themes as they pertain to psychotherapy.

5.2 Elements of Therapeutic Theater

Though the Aristotle's hierarchical structure was universally discredited by my interview subjects I did manage to confirm a few sneaking suspicions and find some common ground among their experiences.

In Roger Grainger's *Drama and Healing: The Roots of Drama Therapy*, I was able to further confirm my findings. In *Part I: Roots* the doctor of therapeutic drama outlines, "the effects of the dramatic experience that make it a unique healing force" (66). He cites catharsis, psychological integration, security, and validation as the four pillars of healing theater.

Three out of the five interviewees actually used the word "validation," when discussing representation on stage, and all five touched on the universal need to be seen or heard. At the beginning of this process, I more broadly theorized that representation would be the key, and it is in some respects, but there is a reason why seeing our stories and ourselves represented on stage is effective; seeing our experiences played out for an audience can be *validating*. The APA defines validation as "the process of establishing the truth or logical cogency of something" ("Validation"). I find this definition to be a bit too scientific for the arts. Dr. Karyn Hall, who holds her PhD in child and adolescent psychology from the University of Virginia, has a much more practical and accessible definition for the purpose of psychotherapy, defining validation in an article for *Psychology Today* as, "the recognition and acceptance of another person's thoughts, feelings, sensations, and behaviors as understandable"

(Hall). For the purpose of both theater and psychotherapy I am defining validation simply as affirmation that a person and their feelings are worthwhile. Validation is immensely important for the development of a positive sense of self. “The social groups and social identities that present the greatest obstacles to a positive sense of self are those that are disparaged (including ‘invisible’ identities, such as sexual orientation), those that have to be negotiated frequently because of their visibility (physical attributes, for example, such as dark skin color), those that have become politicized by social movements, and so on” (Hurtado and Silva 21). Hurtado and Silva’s use of the terms “invisible identities” and visible identities needing to be “negotiated” is key. Three out of my five interviewees identified themselves as queer, which can be considered an invisible identity. Even in 2019, all three of these individuals felt validated just in seeing a fellow invisible identity working through issues on stage. Tabitha, identifying as bisexual and “woman-ish,” expressed the importance of visibility in her own life:

“[A]s I became more of a public figure, I kind of felt like it was my responsibility to portray all of my identities. One being, like, you know there are bi folks, who are straight passing who, like, don’t know if they’re validated. Bisexualism is like erased even in queer communities so I was like, you know, I should probably... the fact maybe I don’t seem like the typical assumption or stereotype of what you think, maybe that’s even more reason to be visible for folks who are wrestling with that.”

Visibility and validation were likewise integral to my third interviewee, Felicity’s, response to question three, *What is your experience with therapy?* “I feel like, from what I’ve heard from my mom it’s--she just feels like she’s not

crazy... It's more like someone just to listen because she has MS, which isn't something that like anybody can help or cure. So it's kind of nice to just have somebody listen to her, um, and like she gets a lot of help with her anxiety which she has because of it." The concept of validation as therapy is a cornerstone to group therapy. Dr. Lewis Yablonsky writes of group therapy, "[T]here is a tendency for people to feel better about themselves when they realize that others are encountering problems that parallel their own" (149).

So my original supposition that representation was important merely scratches the surface. Specifically, the power lies in making the invisible or the negotiated visible. Sam experienced this first hand at the first concert they attended. They described the event: "[I]t was specifically the moment when the singer said something to the effect of, like, 'No matter how you identify,'--and she specifically used the word *sexually*, which meant a lot at the time because a lot of people tried to skate around it--'No matter all these things we're all still here together and there's no judgment.'" Sam, who identifies as queer, transmasculine and nonbinary, explained that the specificity mattered a great deal, that they felt *seen* by the specific terminology.

Visibility is not just important for the development of a positive sense of self, it is necessary for the development for any basic sense of self. "Some consciousness of what that particular category signifies socially is necessary for identity constructions" (Hurtado and Silva 22). If we do not have the reference or the vocabulary necessary to define our identity, then our identity cannot be

established. I came to this conclusion organically in the process of playing Martha. If, as she says in *The Children's Hour*, Martha does not "believe" (3.1) in homosexuality, if she "never felt that way about anybody but [Karen]" (Ibid.) then she has no reference. Martha cannot claim her romantic and sexual identity because her "category," to use Hurtado and Silva's term, has never been presented to her, much like Plato's cave dwellers unaware of the world outside their own. Adam identified with this particular existential conundrum, "I can just relate in the sense of not having any reference for an identity that I'm now very proud of, and now have the words and reference to think about and identify with. And it very much seemed like parallel in the sense of [Martha]." *The Children's Hour* gives that visibility to the invisible identity of Martha's queerness. Theater, and media in general, can be instrumental in our social and personal identity development, giving us examples of different categories that we might previously not have considered.

In trying to discern if my interviewees underwent any changes in attitude or mindset, Adam, who identifies as gay, had this answer, "[I]t was so nice seeing a play that was tailored towards a queer-esque storyline, or queer story line. 'Cause I don't see that often. [...] It did change my thought process because now I'm like, 'Okay, I can see plays that are about these storylines.' That's not like--like it's not like I have to go to some far off exotic place to go see something like that." According to Adam, that visibility changed his thought process. The accessibility of a queer story on stage dispelled a sense of novelty. Queerness is worthy of seeing on any stage, and it is not

a burden to anyone to produce those productions. In this way our production of *The Children's Hour* was effective and fit our definition of therapy by positively changing an audience member's mindset through visibility. It must be addressed, though, that the play falls short in the validation of a *positive* sense of self.

Sam states, "we didn't want the queer character to die, but we also expected it. It sucked but we weren't surprised exactly. And it just got me to realize, like, how little media there is for us to consume. And this is definitely an important story on its own, but yeah. I guess that knowing this story is told over and over and over again, because it is so common in real life too." Seeing these stories represented on stage, making the invisible visible is the first step in a long process. It is the least we, as theater makers, can do. Tabitha put it perfectly: "I mean representation isn't everything, but it certainly matters." She continues on representation in media, "because of the power of fictional narratives, we're creating empathy in sort of this low stakes situation, which I think is the best place to create it. Having visible representation of marginalized people that are crafted thoughtfully and lovingly, and really nuanced and positively enables people." Not only do we need to see these identities, but we need to see them thrive.

Silva and Hurtado dive deeper into the necessity for positive visibility when detailing a children's television show²⁴ that deftly normalizes and navigates

²⁴ The episode Silva and Hurtado reference specifically is titled *A Ramp for Monty* from the series *Little Bill*, which ran from 1999-2004.

living with disabilities, all while thriving in a black community. “The story communicates the value of derogated social identities and reinscribes these identities with new content and meaning” (24). Visibility as validation is one thing, but in order to help curate that positive sense of self, positive narratives with these now visible identities are necessary. Silva and Hurtado conclude their chapter stating that further research is needed in the field of children’s media, but that it does seem to have had an effect on the “awareness and reevaluation of stigmatized social identities” (29).

In talking about representation, Tabitha brought up another key component of therapeutic theater. She mentions creating empathy in a “low stakes situation,” saying it is, “the best place to create it” (“Tabitha”). One of the major differences between drama therapy and theater is participation and the existence of the fourth wall. There is an aesthetic distance that coats a theater audience. Sue Jennings writes in her *Introduction to Dramatherapy* that when we see theater, “we are in a different kind of space-set-apart. [...] We become drawn into a spectacle within which we may have significance but are not the totality. Thus theatre art enables us to find our place in a symbolic enacted world...” The fourth wall gives us the agency and the safety to explore our own lives at our own discretion. This is what Grainger refers to as *security*. He writes:

“the mixture of safety and danger, protection and exposure, that we call ‘aesthetic distance’ makes the ‘as if’ real to us. [...] The artificial nature

of drama is both defensive and aggressive, drawing us into the action of the drama through its ability to intensify the power of the natural urge to become involved with our own kind and protecting us from its disturbing force by underlining its identity as fiction" (22).

Tabitha explained her reasoning for the importance of that aesthetic distance, further substantiating Grainger's theories:

"That confrontational way just triggers a sort of automatic response that becomes a barrier. [...] Whereas if you're just passively consuming media and you're seeing stories play out, they're not about you directly, but maybe somebody who looks like you, or someone who's saying things that you've said in a sort of more simulated environment and seeing how that plays out without you having to... without anyone pointing a finger at you. I think that's more effective because viewer gets to opt in, the viewer gets to watch that play out and make their own judgments. So any change from there comes from the person, it's internal, it's not external. It's their choice."

Essentially the fourth wall creates a safe space for the audience to reflect on difficult themes. Sam felt that this aesthetic distance created, "a space to explore those things that you can't do in real life, and therapy is a similar experience. Because ideally you should be able to talk about things that you feel guilty about or, you know, anything that you don't feel like you can be open about." The theater creates a paradoxical phenomenon where an audience member can at once be open and anonymous in a communal space, shared with other theatergoers.²⁵

²⁵ The breaking of the fourth wall, in my experience, does not tear this safety net long as the world of the show is still in tact. For example, Viola's famous ring speech in *Twelfth Night* can directly address the audience without confronting them. If the character remains steeped in their given circumstances, the audience will too.

This all depends, of course, on audience engagement. Grainger refers to this as *psychological integration*, “identifying with objects, images, and, later on, ideas” (66). I was originally intent on specifying this particular term. How can a person identify with an object? I figured I would get more mileage out of questions of Character. I expected question fifteen, *Did you identify with any particular character in The Children's Hour? Why?*, would garner fruitful results. Instead it was question twelve, *What themes arose for you?*, that really stuck with my subjects. They did not all necessarily identify with Character, but each one of them identified with the general themes in the play and were left to ruminate on the subject. When I asked this question of my third interviewee, Felicity, she had this to say: “[T]he power of misinformation or the power of slander. There are a lot of really serious allegations that come out against people who have like, um, perpetuated abuse. [...] It’s interesting just to see how, like, misinformation, or fake news, or whatever could spread so rapidly.” She claimed that this general theme affected her actions, “I feel like it’s made me kinder because you don’t know, I guess, what someone’s going through, because you kind of see how gossip destroyed and deteriorated that entire life” (“Felicity”). Felicity’s inclination is confirmed by sociologist Lewis Yablonsky, who writes, “While an action goes on, each person in the group participates through identification with individuals and emotional themes. Extending these experiences in his own fantasy and often moving into action” (104). An audience member can identify with “emotional themes” as well as characters in the play.



Figure 3. Scene from Act II. Set Design by Monica Ravitch. Photo by Monica Ravitch. Used with permission from the Department of Theatre Arts, UCSC.

I would also argue that the set design aided psychological integration. My second interview subject, Jake, mentioned having our living room set from the second act, seen above in *Figure 3*, within a few dreams after seeing the production. He claimed that, “none of the other characters [were] there,” and none of the play’s events took place, but that space resonated with him. And of course Adam’s reaction to the chalkboards, discussed earlier in the chapter, played a huge role in facilitating his psychological integration. Any element can help to serve the audience’s introspective, psychological journey and imaginative participation with the performance, the important part is that they *do* participate.

Catharsis is what I come to last on Grainger's list of healing elements of theater. This appears almost redundant to me. If we are psychologically integrated and therefore invested in the performance, if we have the security, or the aesthetic distance, "which unites persons by separating them" (Grainger 20) and allows a safe place to explore certain dangerous themes, then it follows that given the right material, one would experience catharsis. I contend that a more accurate term would be *cathartic consciousness*.

As we explored in chapter two, catharsis is not enough to heal because no real change occurs. Catharsis is a cyclical purgation, which is but a temporary balm. In order to experience therapy, we must make positive long lasting change in mindset or behavior. This requires consciousness. These changes can perhaps be sparked by a cathartic experience, but a cognitive recognition is needed to actually achieve a therapeutic healing process. *Cathartic consciousness of visibility and validation* and *psychological integration*, and the *aesthetic distance* to do so at one's own pace create the necessary climate for theater therapy, in no particular order or ranking.

According to my interviews, live performance has activated these elements and affected behavioral changes in four out of the five participants, and mental changes in all five. As far as individual therapy goes, a play like *The Children's Hour* is not terribly effective. It serves to highlight an invisible identity, create awareness, and heighten a sense of empathy, and my subjects were

definitely impacted by that, but it also reaffirms a narrative of marginalization and suffering.

Rather than being in opposition to Boal et al, it turns out that realism and naturalism can also have broad impacts on prosocial politics. The more significant therapeutic impact from a play like *The Children's Hour* is societal. Tabitha put it best, "it creates maybe a low level shift... My mom, regardless of her homophobia, would never vote against gay people getting married for example. She'll be like, 'Yeah, of course people should have those rights.' But does that make her like somebody who's not homophobic? No. But it *does* create systemic change that allows for more agency and power for a marginalized community." For a person like Martha, who does not have the reference, vocabulary, or agency to live the happy, healthy life they deserve, seeing Martha commit suicide is not a therapeutic experience. For someone who hasn't experienced that kind of marginalization or oppression, seeing Martha, a witty and charismatic woman who is a non threatening trailblazer end her life because of that oppression can be life altering. They may, like Tabitha's mother change their politics, which can create a sort of societal therapy.

At the end of my final interview, Sam had this to say, "I guess kind of like the quote that's like, 'disturb the comforted and comfort the disturbed.'" I had never heard this phrase before. As it turns out it is a fairly common aphorism, widely attributed to the infamous street artist Banksy. Aptly, the quote's origin leads back to the newspaper. The quote can more accurately be attributed to

Finley Peter Dunne, a satirist and journalist who worked the decades surrounding the turn of the twentieth century in Chicago. Through his well-known comic *Mr. Dooley*, Dunne commented on the social, political, and economic issues of the day. In 1902, Mr. Dooley, in his thick Irish dialect remarked that the newspaper, “comforts th’ afflicted, afflicts th’ comfortable” (Dunne 240). And I think this exactly what *Epic Theatre*, *Theatre of the Oppressed*, *The Living Newspaper*, and many other forms of social justice theater are all about.

And I think that is the crux of the whole matter. Theater can be therapeutic on a personal level when it comforts the disturbed, when it validates those invisible or negotiated identities, or introduces the missing piece to someone’s identity puzzle. When theater makes a marginalized person feel at home, safe, and heard, it can be individually therapeutic, it can calm their mindset and change it from one of alienation to belonging. When theater disturbs the comfortable, however, the hope is that those comfortable audience members become more empathetic and use their power to affect change and justice in their communities. We can disturb the comfortable in society by mirroring them and all their faults. Plays like Wallace Shawn’s *The Fever*, Tectonic Theater’s *The Laramie Project*, and even classics like *To Kill a Mockingbird*,²⁶ which was adapted for the stage and performed at Oregon Shakespeare Festival in 2011 and

²⁶ Jake, identifying as a straight, white male, saw Oregon Shakespeare Festival’s production of *To Kill A Mockingbird* in 2011, and cites it in his interview as making him aware of his inherent privileges.

is currently running on Broadway, can be very unsettling to society's unoppressed, non marginalized, and "comfortable" populace. And these plays can incite action, activism, and awareness. "Theatre makes use of our ability to put ourselves in another person's place and 'see' through his or her eyes," (Grainger 12). In other words, theater can disturb us, while using our human sense of empathy to affect change. The UCSC Department of Theater Arts' own Michael Chemers, whom I had the pleasure of working with in *The Children's Hour*, writes, in his book *The Monster in Theatre History*, that theater in fact can serve "as an amplifier of empathy" (167). While I agree, I would also like to think that theater not only amplifies our sense of empathy, but *exercises* it. Tabitha and I talked a lot about empathy in her interview. She called out the problems with our concept of empathy, saying we equate it with a personality trait, something we are born with, when in reality empathy is, "active and must be practiced" ("Tabitha"). Yablonsky writes "[E]mpathy, in effect, involves putting yourself in the other person's shoes" (144). Empathy is active. In Boal's estimation, "Empathy takes place especially in relation to what the character *does*" (35). Seeing theater can make us more empathetic, but unless it moves us to take action, it is simply a static, cathartic experience. I return to Grainger, who likewise finds that the therapeutic effect of theater lies in action stating, "The play directs us to a reality which is both ours and not ours, affording a vision of truth which we reach out to but are not able to grasp. It is in the reaching out that healing lies" (20). Again to describe empathy or a healing process transitive

verbs are used. In essence there is a fifth part to this list of therapeutic elements,
action.

5.3 Pratt's List

After tossing the notion of a ranked list out the window and finding that no singular element or theatrical device can be trusted to achieve a universal and intentional effect on audience members, these are the elements that I feel are necessary for a piece of theater to be individually therapeutic. Each element is as important as the others and in some cases their functions connect, or even overlap. I have to take a moment to admire the simplicity and order Aristotle sought in creating his list of tragic elements, but when we take the multitude of perspectives existing in the theatergoing world today into account, it is impossible to cleanly and definitively state which theatrical conventions impact audiences in which way. Nonetheless, the following is the first iteration of *Pratt's List of Therapeutic Elements in Theater*:

Validation and visibility

Being recognized and affirmed that our feelings and our entire selves are worthwhile is instrumental in defining our positive sense of self. Seeing other people's stories played out in front of us not only intensifies our sense of empathy and awareness, but also may present reference and vocabulary that was previously missing from our personal and social identities.

Aesthetic distance

The fourth wall in theater creates a safe space to explore difficult themes. "[It] enables us both to see something more clearly, and to understand it in new ways, and also to enter it without risk and therefore come closer to it"

(Jennings 24). This enabling without risk allows the audience to opt in and take agency over their psychological journey, “to develop himself in his [sic] own terms” (Yablonsky 154).

Psychological integration

Imaginative engagement with performance allows for personal connection. Audience participates by observing and actively identifying with characters, themes, and any other artistic elements of the show and applying those elements to their own circumstances.

Cathartic consciousness

An intense emotional response must be accompanied by reflection of the events that triggered it in order to be therapeutic. Feeling feelings is healthy, but unless we critically engage with the motivation for those feelings, we have no agency over our emotional lives, and therefore will continue to be susceptible to both positive and negative, or even harmful, emotional surges.

Action

Even with these four elements in play, an audience member must practice empathy and endeavor to affect change in themselves or the world around them in order for a piece of theater to be therapeutic.

6. Moving Forward

I started this process and this program with a need for academia, which until now I have largely associated with the statistical and quantifiable. I wanted to prove the worth of my craft with scientific data. I wanted to quantify my contributions so that they might line up with my friends and family whom I so much admire for spreading goodness in the world through their work. I thought perhaps an ancient Greek philosopher might help with the credibility and legitimacy of my life's work. What I realize now is that what we, as theater makers, do is impossible to measure. It is impossible to know the impact that we will have on our audiences. I reflect on that first moment of discovery after *Peter Pan* at the very start of my journey over a decade ago. It is somewhat peculiar that an older gentleman was so moved by a children's story of insolence, imagination, and adventure; certainly that story has very little to do with widowhood. When I saw Sara Porkalob's *Dragon Lady* at the Jones Playhouse in Seattle in 2017, I could have never anticipated that I, a straight, white, middle class, third generation Californian woman, would uncontrollably sob during the final scene and subsequently decide to apply to grad school on the trek back home. Aristotle was right about something, theater is most powerful when it defies expectations, "when the events come on us by surprise" (8).

The wonderful and terrible thing about this craft is that we can never know how our art will strike the audience. Even specific performances, such as student

matinees or Shakespeare in the penitentiary, contain unknown factors; for within the confines of one school or one prison there are a thousand different inner monologues and given circumstances that we can never fully understand. I had no idea that my Martha's confidence, specifically her hands in her pockets and her posture, would have had an effect on anyone.²⁷ Every piece of energy and life we give to our live performance gets absorbed by someone in the audience. Every prop, every sound cue, every action, every breath is all part of a bigger picture and the picture looks different from every seat in the house.

It is clear to me now that I have struggled to see performance outside my role as an actor. If elements of the production do not directly serve the Character, the agent of the action, then how can it serve the audience? In analyzing *The Children's Hour* and the audiences' responses to it, I have found that the harder I work, the more I use my imaginative qualities, the *Magic If*, the more I practice empathy on stage, the more the audience engages with the performance. A sparse set is not distracting, rather it invites both actor and audience to cocreate a world. Surrealist elements that break from the reality of the given circumstances likewise beckon the audience to participate, so long as the performance maintains its suspension in the world it has created. Theater is a dynamic system between all elements. There is no hierarchy. More than anything this research has taught me to interrogate the traditional artistic process with which I am so familiar and value

²⁷ Felicity called this out in her interview, claiming the character's charisma was engaging and made her eventual suicide all the more traumatic to witness.

the bizarre and unconventional. Realism and experimentation overlap in the belief that the audience plays a critical role in live theater. Both can be impactful and both can be therapeutic.

I wanted to figure out how to make a piece of therapeutic theater and determine if my work has been healing, but in the end, it is not up to me or my work, it is up to the audience. The best thing I can do is proceed courageously and earnestly and hope that someone somewhere has been positively moved to create a better life for themselves. Sam, a budding game designer, proved to be wise beyond their years, saying, “[O]nce you release the game, it’s not yours it’s theirs. The way that players play your game will determine what your game is. And I feel like that’s also true in other media, like once you’re done with it, no matter how much you say, ‘No! I meant to actually say this!’ it won’t make a difference because people are what determine what your media is." People are what determine what a piece of theater is and if it is therapeutic. All we can do as theater makers is present our audiences with the option and continue to practice and find new truths in our ancient craft.

Appendix

The following chart illustrates how my interview subjects ranked Aristotle's elements of Tragedy:

	Plot	Character	Thought	Diction	Song	Spectacle
<i>Aristotle</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6
Adam	3	2	1	3	4	4
Jake	1	2	2	4	6	5
Felicity	3	5	2	1	6	4
Tabitha	3	1	4	2	6	5
Sam	4	1	3	1	6	5

Plot, Character, Thought, and Diction on average, are pretty equally ranked, ranging between 2.2-2.8 on a scale of 1-6, 1 being of most significance.

Bibliography

- “Adam.” Personal Interview. 7 Mar. 2019.
- Aristotle. Translated by and Butcher, S. H., *Poetics: 350 BC*. Infomotions, Inc., 2001.
- Boal, Augusto. *Theatre of the Oppressed*. Translated by Charles A. McBride and Maria-Odilia Leal McBride, Theatre Communications Group, 1985.
- Brecht, Bertolt. *Brecht on Theatre: The Development of an Aesthetic*. Translated by John Willett, Hill and Wang, 1964.
- Casson, John W. “Living Newspaper: Theatre and Therapy.” *The Drama Review*, vol. 44, no. 2, 2000, pp. 107–122.
- Chemers, Michael. *The Monster in Theatre History: This Thing of Darkness*. Routledge, 2018.
- Dunne, Finley Peter. “Newspaper Publicity.” *Observations by Mr. Dooley*, by Finley Peter Dunne, R. H. Russell, 1902, pp. 237–244.
- Epskamp, Kees. *Theatre for Development: an Introduction to Context, Applications and Training*. Zed Books, 2006.
- Fagles, Robert. “The Oresteia.” *Oresteia: Agamemnon, The Libation Bearers, The Eumenides*, translated by Robert Fagles. By Aeschylus, Penguin Books, 1984, pp. 86–97.
- “Felicity.” Personal Interview. 8 Mar. 2019.
- “Female-Led Films Outperform at All Budget Levels.” *shift7.com*, Creative Artists Agency, 11 Dec. 2018, shift7.com/media-research.
- Grainger, Roger. *Drama and Healing: The Roots of Drama Therapy*. Jessica Kingsley, 1990.
- Goldenberg, Amit, et al. “The Psychology of Collective Emotions.” OSF Preprints, 17 Aug. 2017. Web.
- Hall, Karyn. “Understanding Validation: A Way to Communicate Acceptance.” *Psychology Today*, Sussex Publishers, 26 Apr. 2012,

www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/pieces-mind/201204/understanding-validation-way-communicate-acceptance.

Hellman, Lillian. *The Children's Hour*. Dramatists Play Service, Inc., 1953.

Hurtado, Aida, and Janelle M. Silva. "Creating New Social Identities in Children Through Critical Multicultural Media: The Case of Little Bill." *The Intersections of Personal and Social Identities*, by Margarita Azmitia et al., Jossey-Bass, 2008, pp. 17–30.

"Jake." Personal Interview. 7 Mar. 2019.

Jennings, Sue. *Introduction to Dramatherapy: Theatre and Healing, Ariadne's Ball of Thread*. Jessica Kingsley, 1998.

Johnson, David Read., and Renee Emunah. *Current Approaches in Drama Therapy*. Charles C. Thomas, 2009.

Moreno, J. L. *Psychodrama*. Vol. 1, Beacon House, 1946.

Neihardt, John G. *Black Elk Speaks*. University of Nebraska Press, 2000.

Oves, Liubov. "Artists of the Moscow Art Theatre." KTAA/OISTAT Scenography Symposium. 2006, Seoul, Korea,
www.oistat.org/Item/Show.asp?m=1&d=1198.

Port, Fredrich K. "Therapy." *Merriam-Webster.com*, Merriam Webster,
www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/therapy.

Rabkin, Gerald. "Lee Breuer: On 'The Gospel of Colonus.'" *Performing Arts Journal*, vol. 8, no. 1, 1984, pp. 48–51.

"Sam." Personal Interview. 12 Apr. 2019.

Schechner, Richard. "6 Axioms for Environmental Theatre." *The Drama Review*, vol. 12, no. 3, 1968, pp. 41–64., doi:10.2307/1144353.

Shakespeare, William. *The Winter's Tale*. Edited by John Pitcher, Arden Shakespeare, 2010.

Stanislavski, Constantin. *An Actor Prepares*. Routledge, 1989.

“Tabitha.” Personal Interview. 16 Mar. 2019.

“Therapy.” *American Psychological Association*, American Psychological Association, www.apa.org/topics/therapy/index.

“Validation.” *APA Dictionary of Psychology*, American Psychological Association, dictionary.apa.org/validation.

Yablonsky, Lewis. *Psychodrama: Resolving Emotional Problems Through Role-Playing*. Gardner Press, Inc., 1981.