

**RAISING ENVIRONMENTAL AWARENESS THROUGH  
PERFORMANCE ART**

by

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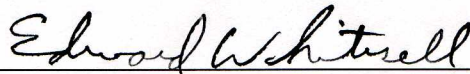
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## **ABSTRACT**

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Theater for social change focuses on the dynamic relationship between theatre and society and sees itself as an agent for social criticism and/or change. Throughout the twentieth century, many developments in theater for social change (including educative theater, theater of the oppressed, theater for development, theater in education and activist theater) have brought attention to myriad social issues. Most recently, performances have begun addressing environmental issues as well. This thesis investigates the significance of environmental topics as subject material for performance art and found that the environment can be seen as a social issue that has recently begun to benefit from, and contribute to, theater for social change. Theater for social change can raise awareness about environmental problems we face and the potential solutions available. Four performances from the West Coast of the United States are reviewed to examine their place within theater for social change. All of the performances are found to be message-driven and community based and to incorporate a variety of theatrical methods drawn from other areas of theater for social change. In addition, methods for measuring the impact of a performance on knowledge retention and attitude change are presented.

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## I. INTRODUCTION

Peter Donaldson walked onto the stage and welcomed the audience to his show. He told us that we would soon be meeting another man named Cyrus Jackson who works at a dam in Washington State. After donning a ski cap, Donaldson transformed into the character of Cyrus, who proceeded to explain that his job is to drive salmon up and down the river in the back of his work truck, around the dam, to ensure that they can get to and from their historical spawning streams. Cyrus, though a fictional character, spoke directly to the audience from the stage, about the life history of the salmon and their importance to the people in his life for the next hour and a half.

This is just one of many examples that I have witnessed over the past few years that foster environmental education through the use of theater, parades, and other forms of performance art to reach large audiences and increase environmental awareness. I began to study this relatively new form of performance art, to learn more about its nature and its impacts. This thesis bridged two of my passions – environmental education and performance art.

Performance art can be a formal theater play, song, dance, puppetry, simple storytelling or anything else that is performed in front of an audience. Often I will use the terms *performance art* and *theater* interchangeably, for the sole reason that much of the literature that refers to theater for social change includes all of these approaches under the umbrella term of *theater*. I will, for the most part, follow this convention, but where convenient and appropriate I will also distinguish various types of performances under these



terms. Also, environmental education in this paper covers a wide spectrum of topics and participants. Education is not limited to young people or formal learning environments. The performances represented in this paper pertain to people of all ages from all over the world, from children to grandmothers, from activists in Canada protesting their government politics, to villagers in Africa organizing for community development. The breadth of material supports the notion that we are all continual learners as well as teachers and potential artists.

Existing literature documents the significance of art in other areas of social change but little has been written about art that focuses on environmental degradation or the interactions of humans and their environment. This is surprising because theater has historically been used to raise awareness about numerous other social ills and environmental issues are not that new – although they are gaining ever-increasing attention in the media and even motion pictures (for example, look at Al Gore's documentary *An Inconvenient Truth*). In addition, the performances I have witnessed share a great deal in common with the intentions and methods from the practice of theater for social change throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century, but are seldom mentioned. The central question of this thesis is can these environmentally themed performance pieces be considered part of the canon of theater for social change?

I pose a secondary question in this thesis as well: how can we measure the success of theater for social change, most specifically within the

area of environmental issues? For example, in a zoo show, a keeper will showcase wild animals while sharing tales of their native habitats and behaviors. While it is clear that the performance intends to impact the thinking and behavior of the audience concerning the appreciation and conservation of the animal and its habitat, it may not be clear to the performer how much influence the performance had. In order to shed some light on this important question, I included measurement strategies in my research and was sure to bring up the issue of measurement in interviews with local performers.

The intended audience for this paper includes environmental educators, advocates, performance artists, and any other individual interested in effecting change with their art. Environmental educators can glean some new ideas for educating their students and the general public through the adaptation of theatrical philosophies to specific environmental topics. Producers of performance art pieces may be inspired to look at environmental topics as an area that needs to be addressed in the same way as other social issues that have been and currently are the subject of theatrical productions. With more people making plays and entertainment in general about the many environmental crises and potential solutions that we encounter today, the performers and their audiences will be exposed to new information through art and, hopefully, be inspired to make change.

This thesis recognizes that contemporary environmental performance art is simply a relatively recent extension of theater for social change and as

such has been largely overlooked in the research on theater for social change. The existing literature focuses predominately on other societal issues – a very few examples of topics include gender issues, civil rights and gay pride. Hopefully, my research will open the door further to explore the role of performance art as a catalyst for environmental awareness as well.

Chapter 2 addresses the importance of using performance art as an educative tool. Chapter 3 introduces the development of performance art for social change throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century. I begin with the educative theater of Bertolt Brecht in Germany and his then highly innovative methods, such as recognizing the audience, using written signs on stage, or speaking stage directions out loud; some of his methods are considered standard theater practices today. In addition, Brecht was one of the first to include non-professional actors in his works to bring his theater closer to the working classes. The pedagogy of Paulo Freire, and Augusto Boal's theater of the oppressed expanded on Brecht's philosophy of theater for all by literally bringing theater to the people – in the streets, factories and any community meeting place. Theater for Development, as its name suggests, takes place around the world in developing nations, though often as a tool for both governmental and non-governmental agencies to share education materials with community groups. Theater in Education, which has its roots in England, promotes student learning through the theater or "acting out" of problem solving across a myriad of school subjects. Finally, I introduce what I call Theater as Activism, in which theater, produced for the express purpose

of influencing policy, is taken to the streets. Chapter 3 concludes with a summary of the fundamental characteristics of theater for social change across these many approaches.

Theater for social change and the environmental performances that I viewed aim to make an impact on the audience. However, it can be difficult to determine precisely what is to be measured and how. Chapter 4 explores established possibilities of measuring the impact of a performance piece. Chapter 5 documents the performances of four artists from the West Coast of the U.S. that approach a variety of environmental issues through different methods including plays, assemblies, and parades. I conducted interviews with the artists to explore the goals of their projects and the methods they use for connecting to an audience, in order to compare it to theater for social change. I also inquired about their methods for measuring the success of their projects, in order to document any additional possible methods of measuring success.

Chapter 6 explores the similarities of the case studies from my interviews to established practices of theater for social change. In answer to my first thesis question, I conclude that indeed these strong similarities indicate that they should be considered a part of the theater for social change movement. Regarding my second question, while the performances I studied can be considered successful regarding their popularity – because of large numbers of participants and/or audiences – none of the performers were able to provide what would be considered quantifiable data to confirm that they

had made an "impact." They did demonstrate that they were concerned about making an impact by sharing stories that indicated to them their success. Nonetheless, methods are available that could be used to measure these performances (those outlined in Chapter 4). Also included in Chapter 6 are my recommendations for future research in the area of social change and environmental education.

## **II. WHY USE PERFORMANCE ART?**

First and foremost, performance art attracts a great deal of attention to an issue. Theater is alive, colorful, often humorous and, if done well, engaging. People will want to watch and listen. After gaining the attention of an audience the performance then is not meant to just entertain, but to stimulate thinking and effect change. Theater is an ancient art form, something that has caused a visceral reaction in spectators for thousands of years. Storytelling and drama satisfy the dual purposes of passing on the beliefs, values and knowledge of a culture and of sharing new information with groups of people.

Incorporating theater into modern schooling or adult education curricula adds variety to conventional forms of learning. It also promotes group cooperation and critical thinking when developing story lines and proposing problems and solutions. Knowledge retention is increased when relating complex issues to everyday concepts through stories and analogies. Because of the complexity of many environmental issues, especially the technicality of the science and policy behind them, theater is also an innovative way to stimulate people to learn about the subject matter.

Performance art can also bring a community together, whether it is a classroom full of students or a group of strangers in a town that share a common concern. Many hands are needed and everyone has skills to offer – writing the script, painting scenery at a theater or designing posters or flyers,

running the administration, acting, singing, dancing, etc. On an even grander scale, the need for multiple resources will promote coalition building.

In the late 1990s, the US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), assisted by a local non-profit organization called the Watchperson Project, conducted a survey of local anglers in a predominantly Latino neighborhood in New York to determine the amount of fish consumed from the East River. Extremely high numbers of fish in the diets of local residents translated into a particularly high cancer risk for this population. The EPA decided that the usual methods of regulatory responses and educational campaigns would not be effective. The Watchperson Project, composed of local community members sensitive to the cultural needs of the people, proposed a waterfront festival.

At the festival, theater, dance and street-art supplemented educational materials about the hazards of eating locally caught fish. All materials were presented in Spanish and English. The festival was only realized however, once the EPA and Watchperson Project were able to form a coalition with other organizations including the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation, the local chapter of the Sierra Club and three local organizations, Neighbors Against Garbage, The Greenpoint Waterfront Association for Parks and Planning, and The Friends of the India Street Pier (Coburn 2006).

Another benefit to community art about the environment is the valuable knowledge provided by citizens about their surroundings. Local

knowledge often differs from that of "experts" and politicians. Theater for Development projects in Africa specifically aim to find out about a community's needs this way. Identifying community needs and proposing creative solutions can be very empowering. The process, which is just as important as the product, gives people the opportunity to express themselves and exchange ideas with those around them. After the play is over, there is a base group capable of furthering their political and social action.

Finally, participating in or watching a performance art piece is enjoyable. While it may be intimidating for many people to get involved at the onset, once engaged, they can develop individually in their skills and confidence to achieve goals, while promoting a cause they believe in.



### **III. FOUNDATIONS OF PERFORMANCE ART FOR CHANGE**

Performance art is a powerful tool to bring attention to social, political and environmental issues around the world. In fact, at any given moment a performance for change is occurring somewhere. The events for change presented in this chapter occur on a local community level, whether through organized events aimed at educating local community members or as the result of local citizens themselves banding together with the aim of influencing social and political change. This chapter charts the historical development of various approaches to theater for social change to provide a framework for later comparison of contemporary performance pieces that have an environmental focus.

This chapter begins with an introduction to performance art for social change, a movement that developed throughout the twentieth century beginning with Bertolt Brecht's creative use of educative theater for the working class in Germany. Next is an exploration of Augusto Boal's theater of the oppressed (Boal 1979), based on Paulo Freire's pedagogy of the oppressed (Freire 1970). Brecht and Boal's theatrical approaches were adapted to many projects around the world in what has come to be known as Theater for Development. Finally, Theater in Education, a British-based system (Jackson 1993) and another theatrical approach, what I distinguish from the rest as Activist Theater, are discussed. While these approaches overlap, they all have distinct histories and as such have developed unique attributes. One or more may be most suitable for any given situation

depending on what the educational or activist goal is and depending on the target audience. This chapter concludes with a summary of the fundamental characteristics of theater for social change across these many approaches.

### ***Educative Theater: Bertolt Brecht***

Bertolt Brecht, a playwright and director, worked in theater for many decades, but it was early on in his career when he became the first to influence what theater for social change is today. Many books have been written on his life and theatrical methods but this section will only address Brecht's initial impact on the role of theater in Germany in the 1920s--his development of educative theater. The *raison d'etre* of theater at that time was to entertain the audience and distract them from reality. The canon relied heavily on emotional themes, and it was expected that the audience be able to empathize with the characters. This theater was "naturalist" in that the audience was separated from the play by an invisible wall: the characters went through the story without acknowledging the audience. Brecht altered this form of naturalist theater by breaking down that invisible wall in an attempt to urge the audience to critically analyze their own reality and the social ills of the day, and to motivate them to leave the theater and effect change:

This view influenced ideas on theatre as a medium, as a didactic instrument. Educative theatre distinguished itself from other types of theatre because of the fact that it aimed primarily at the process of awareness raising among their audience, to which the medium was subordinate. First of all, educative theatre was meant to change the view, which the target groups had of reality: to have

them consider things in a different way than they used to. Secondly, educative theatre was designed to provide as many means as possible for the target group to realize the desired interventions of their reality (Epskamp 1989, 47-48).

Plays were intentionally written and acted so the audiences were well aware that the play was a representation of reality and not reality itself. For example, Brecht utilized techniques that included "direct address by actors to the audience, transposition of text to third person or past tense, speaking the stage direction out loud, exaggerated, unnatural stage lighting, the use of song, and explanatory placards" (Willet 1992, 138).

Many of Brecht's plays are viewed as propagandistic, supporting the unionization of workers or calling attention to Marxist theory. Brecht therefore moved away from the canon of creating plays focused on the lives of the bourgeois, although such plays were popular among all the classes. In addition, he cast both amateur and professional actors to move away from bourgeois identity and appeal to the working classes to see the plays. Another practice Brecht utilized were didactic pieces written for laborers and schoolchildren. They then considered their roles and struggles within the acting process, not necessarily from established scripts. His support of the working classes and his opposition to the Nazi's rise in Germany forced him to leave Germany in 1933, though he eventually returned in the 1950s.

Many of Brecht's innovations are now viewed as standard theatrical methods. One group that used these methods was *El Teatro Campesino* (*El Teatro Campesino*, 1970). *El Teatro Campesino* evolved out of the organized strike led by Cesar Chavez against grape growers in California.

The small group of theater performers was born in 1965 on a picket line when they repeated everything the grape growers were yelling at them. Eventually the grape growers were so annoyed and frustrated with the non-compliance of their farm workers that they left. This small success was the catalyst for the group's evolution into something more than a protest against working conditions – it became a declaration of human rights and a uniting of Mexican-Americans. The members of the group included farmworkers or former farmworkers.

In their theater work, they used methods, knowingly or not, originally developed by Brecht. These methods included directly addressing the audience, incorporating songs with catchy choruses that the audience could sing along to, and most significantly wearing signs around their necks so that it was clear who the actors were portraying. Some of their sketches were recorded and aired on National Education Television in 1970. In one of their scenes, one actor played a White field manager, the *patron*, and another played a Mexican farmworker. At certain points, the characters switched roles by exchanging their signs. This switch was significant because the audience was identifying and sympathizing with one actor, but when the sign was exchanged, they were shaken out of the "make-believe" world of the skit and focused on what was being represented. In their new awareness, the audience realized the sketch was about the situation occurring outside the theater, not about the actors themselves. Also, solutions to the problems were proposed, such as forcing the patron to sign a contract promising fair

wages. While all of their performances were moving, they also incorporated satirical comedy to appeal to their audiences (*El Teatro Campesino* 1970).

***Pedagogy and Theater of the Oppressed: Paulo Freire and Augusto Boal***

Beginning in the 1960s two Brazilians, Paulo Freire and Augusto Boal, alerted the world to the crucial need for liberation of the people through adult literacy campaigns (Freire) and participation in theater (Boal). Since that time their philosophies on education and theater have spread especially well in developing nations, where they are used to specifically address the social concerns of marginalized people.

Freire devised informal and popular education practices to raise general awareness of disparate social positions held in society and understanding of the causes and solutions to the situation. Informal education in Freire's approach was the knowledge learned in daily life. In contrast to formal education, in which teachers "teach" and students absorb information, informal education promotes interaction and sharing of knowledge with others. Informal education is thus personal, unpredictable and at times an emotional process. Informal education in this way also builds communities by bringing together many members of society to participate in dialogues of people working together to explore solutions. "Popular education" refers to education by and for the working class majority.

Freire focused on "functional literacy" as a means of liberating individuals and groups to explore and change their physical and social

environments. His functional literacy approach was a response to the late 1960s movement to incorporate literacy into development campaigns where the globalization of capitalism was taking place. For example, Maguerez in North Africa "referred to the importance of literacy as an integrated part of vocational training, fulfilling the needs and problems that the adult laborers experienced within their working situation. He made it a condition for motivating adults to learn to read and write" (Epskamp 1989, 18). Freire, on the other hand, took the promotion of literacy past the point of purely benefiting the socio-economic development of the country and brought it down to the personal level of the individual, while also emphasizing the political dimension of the world in which illiterate people were living. Freire "considered reading and writing as vital in the process of 'concientization', which represented the development or the awakening of critical awareness" (Epskamp 1989, 19).

Augusto Boal drew on Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1970) and the concept of "concientization" as well as the dramaturgy of Bertolt Brecht, forming the theater of the oppressed. In fact, Boal, in publishing his book called *Theater of the Oppressed* (1974) was paying homage to Freire's work. But Boal had been creating theater for the people since the 1950s, when he recognized the need to address the oppression of large segments of the Brazilian population. At the time he was the artistic manager of the Arena Theater in Sao Paulo, where he produced classical and modern plays. On the side however, he presented theater pieces to others who he felt needed to

become more socially and politically aware of their situation. He was drawing on Brecht's idea that the role of theater was not only to reflect reality, but also to interpret and try to change it. In his efforts to perform pieces *to* the oppressed, however, he ran into a problem: the oppressed groups often did not see themselves as discriminated against or oppressed. Somehow, there was still a disconnect between the theater and the people.

The classic example of Boal's realization of the need to change his approach comes from his experience producing a play on the second military coup occurring in Brazil in 1968. While the theatrical rendition of the coup happened inside, the real thing was going on in the streets. He then decided to abandon the ticket-only theater and took theater outside to the community in churches, factories and local meeting places. Also, he decided to forget the idea of performing for the oppressed and instead opted to begin facilitating the plays that would be created and produced by the oppressed themselves (Epskamp 1989, 52).

Two of Boal's theatrical methods, forum theater and invisible theater, have greatly influenced the whole concept of theater for social change. Both methods utilize Brecht's model of giving peasants and working-class people the opportunity to participate in a performance in order to explore solutions to the problems they were facing. Forum theater was revolutionary in that:

Through storytelling techniques, Boal worked with groups to create a scene in which a protagonist is failing to achieve what s/he needs or desires. Audience members stop the dramatic action at any moment they feel the protagonist has an option s/he is not exercising. They then physically replace the protagonist in the scene and improvise

their alternative action, thus rehearsing for social change (Schutzman and Cohen-Cruz 1994, 2).

In this way, spectators become "spect-actors," that is to say, engaged participants practicing strategies for personal and social change.

Boal also conceived of invisible theater, also known as *guerilla theater* today. Invisible theater takes place in public spaces, where actors perform previously rehearsed scenes that uncover social injustices. These public scenes draw the attention of groups of people, unaware that they are actually witnessing staged theater. Often the actors actively seek to stimulate discussion (Schutzman and Cohen-Cruz 1994, 2).

Invisible theater and variations on the idea of invisible theater exist especially in places with incessant censorship of the press and suppression of freedom of speech. In the Philippines, for example, invisible theater was the only kind available after the introduction of martial law in 1972. Before martial law was declared some theatrical troupes traveled around the country putting on their shows in public spaces. Although still permissible, they frequently stuck to churches and other safe havens criticizing the government and exchanging ideas with local people. After the imposition of martial law, theater troupes utilized a variation on invisible theater:

To avoid actors being arrested, detained and beaten, performances were given in the church or the market place, with few props or costumes. The starting time was made known by word of mouth and people would accumulate in the market place. Look-outs were posted who, at the merest indication of danger, would signal to actors and audience to mingle inconspicuously with the crowd (Epskamp 1989, 139).



While this is not exactly "invisible" theater like Boal's—in this case, people were aware of when and where performances were to take place—it still incorporated the aspect of surprise and engaged the audience in discussion.

Both of Boal's innovative approaches can and should be adapted to issues of environmental importance today as well. Forum theater, with its spect-actors, can engage communities in discussions about environmental problems they are facing. And invisible theater draws the attention and awareness of the general public. In fact, at least one performer in the Northwest has utilized a variation of invisible theater, performing in the Seattle Center, attracting the attention of holiday shoppers who had no idea they were about to stumble across an outdoor performance. This and other examples are presented in Chapter 5.

### ***Theater for Development***

Theater itself is based on the traditional form of sharing stories, particularly for passing on information from community to community to facilitate the sharing of important current events, or from generation to generation to maintain an oral history and to foster tradition. The modern information age in the developed world now negates the need for theater as a form of everyday information sharing, so theater for this purpose has all but disappeared. Conversely, in the developing world, high illiteracy rates and the lack of access to information, even among literate populations, have precipitated an ever-widening information gap. Theater for Development

(TfD) is based on this concept of disparity between the haves and have-nots, stemming from post-colonial poverty. Therefore, TfD is a creative means for continued information sharing in parts of the world that identify with and continue to have strong relationships with traditional forms of storytelling.

Theater for Development can be divided into two broad categories. The first category of TfD, *TfD for education*, comes from "outsiders" who want to share information with local communities with high illiteracy rates and limited access to education and information. Much of this theater focuses on health education including, but not limited to, the awareness and prevention of illnesses such as AIDS, tuberculosis, and malaria, or the importance of treatments. Other areas frequently addressed include sustainability, family planning, nutrition, and gender equality (McIntyre 1998, Epskamp 1989, Abab 1997). These topics are often surrounded by cultural taboos, and theater is a creative means of bringing sensitive subjects out into the open for discussion.

The second category, *TfD for needs assessment*, uses TfD as a means of exploring community needs and resources for development. Community performance pieces can vocalize communal concerns and work towards an understanding or consensus about which concerns are of the most importance and creatively discover solutions to those problems. Often, in this approach the TfD is produced by supra-governmental, governmental and non-governmental development organizations. One important thing to note is that in TfD, even when the performers are from the local community, is still

frequently facilitated by "outsiders." However, it is important to recognize that TfD in this second approach does draw on traditional ecological knowledge that sustained people before the era of colonization. Theater for Development can also, in some cases, be a mixture of these two categories.

#### TfD for education

Within the category of TfD that brings "outside" education to a developing community, one of the most frequently used, and I think most interesting, methods is puppetry. There are many forms of puppet theater that embody strong local or regional cultural identities. Puppetry therefore makes for an excellent local approach that can use an already familiar and respected art form to introduce new information. Examples of local puppetry forms include small two-dimensional shadow puppets popular in India; puppets popular in Vietnam that are submerged in water in front of a bamboo wall and operated with underwater rods and wires; or "Muppet" style puppets, those with large eyes and moveable mouths, made famous by Jim Henson's television shows *The Muppets* and *Sesame Street* in the United States. Sometimes, using traditional puppet forms makes it easier to connect with a local audience, but it may be risky to interfere with traditional puppet characters. Using traditional puppets to further an outsider's cause can be offensive, especially if those puppets have religious connotations (Epskamp 1989). In this case, adapting traditional character puppets to make it obvious that they are there for a different sort of educational purpose, or even using

alternative forms of puppetry may prevent the co-opting of the traditional art form.

Nonetheless, puppetry has many advantages. The greatest advantage, as already mentioned, is that many cultures in developing areas around the world are already familiar with and highly respect puppetry as a method of entertainment and information sharing. This has evolved out of the fact that, for centuries, puppeteers have been presenters of both traditional stories and current events to illiterate villagers. Often the puppeteer may be illiterate himself (Epskamp 1989).

Puppets can be adapted to the style and approach of someone who is respected locally. The familiarity of puppets providing information, especially from a known local person, makes it easier to incorporate new messages. In addition, information coming from a puppet may seem less critical than information coming directly from a person. Puppets are viewed as neutral parties, creating a world that mirrors that of people so that we can identify with them without feeling the embarrassment of watching people perform on stage. This aspect of puppetry can be especially useful for educators tackling sensitive, locally controversial topics such as AIDS prevention or the rights of girls to attend school. Parents may also be willing to listen to their children or see the world through their eyes when the children can explain their views through the intermediary of a puppet (McIntyre 1998).

Examples of puppetry for development come from all over the world. Burkina Faso, a landlocked nation in western Africa, has one of the lowest literacy rates in the world – a good reason to incorporate storytelling. Puppets were used there as part of a mobilization campaign for sustainable development and children's rights (McIntyre 1998, 9). Puppets were used in Nepal to encourage people to build latrines, in Indonesia to motivate people to participate in reforestation projects, and in India to promote family planning (Epskamp 1989). In the United States, *El Teatro Campesino* also used puppets in some of their acts. The director of *El Teatro Campesino*, Luis Valdez, stated "[You] can knock puppets around more, even kill a puppet . . . Still hang signs on all characters, because then they are easily identified" (*El Teatro Campesino* 1970).

Puppets are just one example of art that is working to raise awareness surrounding social and environmental issues in the developing world. Other forms include picture-based poster projects and radio and television shows. Often the television shows geared towards young children incorporate the use of puppets. Incorporating these art forms within development projects will emphasize the broader scope of communication and provision of services. Whatever the message, it is still important that the educational purpose of theater complement, not displace, the pursuit of entertainment value.

### TfD for needs assessment

The second broad category of TfD focuses on theater created by the communities themselves for the purpose of identifying communities' needs and resources to solve pressing local concerns. Often this process takes place in the developing world where communities still struggle to gain the attention of government officials who are often distant and hard to reach. Some communities may not even be able to clearly identify and subsequently communicate pressing issues affecting their people.

While community members are the performers, outside facilitators once again are often used in this type of TfD. Most of these facilitators are from local universities or governmental agencies. TfD has become a fairly common practice in Africa in the past few decades. Once again, TfD in this capacity is drawing on already established community forms of oral history and knowledge sharing. The following is an example of how TfD can be a tool for community organizing. Surely elements of this approach are applicable to communities confronting environmental concerns around the world no matter what their economic status.

Nigeria has one of the longest histories of using TfD, dating back to 1975. But it was not very well documented until Nigerian Oga Steve Abab wrote one of the first books on TfD, about a workshop he conducted in three small villages. In 1989, Abab was a leader of the Nigerian Popular Theatre Alliance (NPTA), a non-profit, non-partisan, and non-governmental organization – although he himself was affiliated with a local university. The

workshop arose out of a food shortage crisis in the country, where 80% of the people are farmers. Prices were skyrocketing 75-100% above their normal prices. Abab outlined four purposes to having the workshops:

1. To analyze the agricultural and the food situation in workshop villages;
2. To discuss the identified agricultural problems and related issues and to explore how these reflect the development problems and therefore how they contribute to informing the picture of life in these communities;
3. To test and/or affirm the potential of popular theatre in identifying and analyzing the community problems and to suggest, through the play-making process, what means the communities may adopt, within their limits, to solve their problems; and
4. To make use of theatre to mobilize the target communities towards agricultural and social development (Abab 1997, 2).

Abab described two reasons for the choice of the theater option for discussing community development. The first addresses the fact that, of course, theater is fun and entertaining, and so is a great way to get community members involved. The second, and more significant in this study, is the importance of the process of creating theater with the input of an entire village. The rural villages were already accustomed to participatory and communal approaches to problem solving, and the workshop aimed to explore how theater performance would discover potential solutions to the agricultural crisis and enhance agricultural performance (Abab 1997, 4-5).

The performances in the villages were interactive. For example, in one village there were two fictional candidates for public office who made promises, and the other villagers took on roles, sometimes spontaneously, asking questions of the candidates. In another there was a role-play about a community bank in which women wanted to participate. The money would

allow women to purchase seeds and tools to work on their own agricultural plots. It would also provide a means for women to invest in their neighbors' prosperity, by loaning money through the bank and earning interest payments in return. What happened in the theater forum was interesting. The line between fiction and reality was blurred. Sometimes characters began talking with real people (Abab 1997). This demonstrated that community banking was already identified as a major interest among the women. They had already been frequently debating community banking, and many women were used to openly communicating their concerns about it. The framework, however, of theater may also have given them some more freedom to voice their opinions as "characters," without personal consequences.

Follow-up was crucial to see if the use of theater had led to any concrete changes. Abab and his colleagues returned to the villages a few months after the workshops were completed to see what had changed. In some cases the theater workshops were successful. In the village where the elders were talking about banning the community bank, they came to an agreement that the women could meet on a monthly basis to invest and take out loans. There are some successes and lessons to be learned from this case study. Abab stressed the importance of a base group for contact throughout the process. A base group can help bring the facilitators, record suggestions for improvements in the village, and continue implementation and lead community members afterwards. It is also essential to make sure the theater participants know that the facilitators are there to create dialogue--not to



solve problems for the village. In the end, the success of the theater workshop is in how much it strengthens base groups to continue work after the facilitators leave.

While TfD has thus far been limited to the developing world of African and Asian countries, many of the methods behind it could be applied to issues occurring in communities in the developed world. It would be interesting to see how successful the approach of community theater forums would be in Western countries where community approaches to problem solving are not as strong due to larger population bases and the detachment many average citizens feel from their communities. Even in a democracy, only a few politically active citizens frequent town hall meetings to voice concerns. As individuals, we may not know exactly what issues are most pressing to our communities until we communicate with others in the community. Taking TfD as an example shows how using theater can facilitate clear identification of areas of concern to a town or city. Taking needs and resources assessment out of the political arena of the town hall or editorial section of the newspaper and making it personal and community-based could shed light onto community concerns, needs and resources. Local knowledge, local resources and local interest of people can increase the health of the communities, and this is true not only in "traditional" societies, but everywhere.

### *Theater in Education*

Theater in Education (TIE) began as a movement in British public schools in the 1960s. This educative tool uses theater for instruction in a variety of subjects including the environment, race relations, local history, languages, science and health. The aim "is to provide an experience for children that will be intensely absorbing, challenging, even provocative, and an unrivalled stimulus for further work on the chosen subject in and out of school" (Jackson 1993). Because TIE began with the focus of children in mind, it is often misinterpreted or categorized along with "children's theater," which it is not. "Children's theater" refers either to performances where children act out pre-scripted moralistic stories or to professional theater companies that target children as their audiences: TIE, alternatively, engages students to consciously participate in problem solving simulations.

Theater in Education provides a venue for students to improvise a drama, developing characters and storylines that model real-life decision-making. This type of theater helps the student to simulate real-world experiences they might have when they leave the school setting. Similar to Boal's forum theater (see p. 18), students outside of the play can challenge and advise the students that are in it. The opportunity for post-play discussion about the events presented also allows students to reflect and analyze the situations after the fact. While TIE was specifically designed for school age students, it is applicable to all ages. Theater in this sense is a

means of exploring situations with the idea of cooperating for creative solutions.

### *Activist Theater*

Brecht and Boal were deliberate political players in theater, aiming to raise the individual and collective consciousness of people. The actors and their audiences came from the same oppressed groups. In most respects their theater was a process of building identity and pride. Theater for Development in many ways is empowering because it brings a community together to identify problems and begin working on solutions. Activist theater takes these self-realization processes one step further by actively seeking to effect social and political change through their performances. They are less exploratory by nature and more demanding of outcome. Activist theater is an eclectic term though. Activist theater can address issues of racism, sexism, war or any number of social concerns either inside a traditional playhouse or using invisible theater. Often this takes on the form of theater in the streets or in front of government buildings as demonstrations.

The Raging Grannies is a group of social and environmental activists that creates short, humorous sketches and songs, which are performed at protests, outside of political leaders' offices and homes, in local tourist spots, at festivals, and anywhere else they see a need to be. The first Raging Grannies made their appearance in 1986, in Victoria, British Columbia, where they presented an un-valentine (a broken heart) to a parliament

representative to protest the presence of US nuclear-powered and potentially nuclear-armed vessels in Victoria's Harbor (Roy 2000). Today the Victoria Grannies continue address a variety of issues, from war and nuclear weapons to forestry practices and toxics. Since then, the Raging Grannies have become a phenomenon in over 50 cities around the world (Acker 1992). They exaggerate their role as grandmothers by dressing in stereotypical clothing of little old ladies, some wearing fancy hats and white gloves, others in housedresses with aprons (Brightwell 1988, Goldberg 1993). They arrive armed with theatrical props, singing songs and acting out sketches. The Raging Grannies' best weapon in fact, is their humor, which attracts a great deal of media attention to the issue at hand.

In 1990, the Raging Grannies in Victoria protested the continued presence of US nuclear vessels in their harbor by launching their own navy in Canada's capital of Ottawa. Their naval fleet consisted of dinghies, canoes and kayaks, which they "paddled" on the concrete around the Centennial Flame fountain on Parliament Hill, while singing songs of protest. The Raging Granny Navy was there to focus national attention on the US nuclear ships and they succeeded in generating nationwide news coverage of their rebellious antics. By keeping a sense of humor throughout their performance they gained a lot of positive feedback in the press for their actions and their cause. Of course the Grannies do at times receive negative responses to their methods. Letters to the editor have been written in the same humorous design the Grannies use to present an opposing viewpoint (Roy 2000). This

type of response reveals the power of the satirical theatrical style of the Grannies.

The creativity and dedication of this group of women has brought attention not only to the issues they choose to raise but also to the women themselves. They have the unique and slightly marginalized position of older women in the social and political structure of Canadian culture where, as in the U.S., what they think can be overlooked and even ridiculed. Using a few subtle (or not so subtle) techniques, the Grannies have garnered a lot of respect from their local and national governments. First, by exaggerating the stereotypes surrounding them, they are actually breaking down those stereotypes, increasing the awareness of the individual and collective power of their group. But also, their real-life roles as grandmothers focuses attention on the urgency of environmental issues that will eventually and significantly affect their grandchildren, which strengthens their political message. Secondly, the satire and good-natured approach mitigates the often negatively viewed "hysterical housewife" reaction to female environmental activists. Finally, The Grannies' rigorous research and presentation of facts grants them the respect they deserve, allowing them to be taken seriously by their representatives – even though they use the vehicle of humor to garner attention in the first place. In fact, the Grannies were so well recognized by 1990 that they were invited by the federal government to attend the Aging Into the Twenty-first Century Conference held in Ottawa.

Often activist theater is not as lighthearted as what the Grannies present. Many groups around the world face great risk for even attempting to speak out through theater. For example in India, a young student group set up the Rural Community Development Association (RCDA) to promote the rights of Harijans, formerly known as untouchables, the lowest in the Hindu caste system. In the late 1970s the Harijans organized and presented street theater portraying class conflicts, especially the low wages they were paid to work on higher caste landowners' property. The skits themselves incorporated humor and the landlords even came out to watch the shows. When the landlords recognized caricatures of themselves on stage they would react by turning off power or even resorting to violent tactics, including hiring people to beat up Harijan leaders (Ravi 1979). This example shows the power of theater in uniting a community, giving voice to a group of oppressed and raising awareness among outsiders as to the conditions in which the Harijans were living.

When political protest turns violent, it is often due to a response to the drama of popular action. Representations of leaders or events can strike a deep emotional chord with whoever is watching – and with those responsible for maintaining order. The power of that emotional connection is theater's greatest advantage, so knowing how to best use theater to further the educative purpose of a group is fundamental. The next section lays out some of the overarching premises of theater for social change. Pulling from the

key historical movements in theater outlined above, many of the methods used have become standard theatrical practice.

### ***Fundamental Characteristics of Theater for Social Change***

Theater for social change, in all the examples provided above, occurs on a community level. Performances are locally oriented, from the performers to the audiences to the topics addressed. Although actors are usually members of the community, sometimes they are professional performers. One case might be the use of local puppeteers presenting new "outside" information to the public. Also, professional actors might be utilized when groups are attempting to make a quick connection to the audience when in towns for very short periods of time. Performances also take into consideration the diversity of people and their needs in the community. They are then given for all people regardless of age, ethnicity, or income – in fact, one of the biggest aims is to pull communities together by crossing these boundaries and empowering the whole group.

Theater for social change is also goal-oriented, portraying an educational message through entertainment. Often the message aims to change behavior to increase public health or promote economic sustainability and equality. It is very important to note that using theater to mirror the reality of a situation and bring attention to the cause is only one step in the process.

Many innovative methods and styles of theater – which may be considered common practices today – are also the product of theater for social change. Brechts use on placards, unusual lighting, stating stage directions out loud, or Boals use of theater in public spaces are just a couple of examples.

Finally after awareness is raised, steps are often taken to work on the issues at hand. A group may brainstorm solutions during a performance, like that in Nigeria, but then people need to be selected to act on making change. As another example, after a puppet performance promoting vaccinations, information may be provided as to the location of local clinics, or vaccinations may be offered on the spot. The performances that I will review in Chapter 5 share many of these same themes fundamental to the practice of theater for social change. A discussion of whether or not those performances should then be considered part of the collective theater for social change is presented in 6. Before that, I introduce my secondary research question in Chapter 4, regarding the importance of, and the methods available for measuring the impact of a performance.



#### **IV. MEASURING THE IMPACT OF A PERFORMANCE**

One would imagine that a performance impacts both those who produce or take part in it, as well as, those who are in the audience. While a performance can serve to educate members of both of these groups, it might impact them differently. The writers must research the topics to be presented, understand them and create a script that is clear and entertaining for the target audience. Performers have to understand the material if they are to effectively communicate it to the audience. Prop and costume designers also have to understand how to best visually complement the message of the performance piece. The audience is then affected by the overall production. This brings up my secondary research question: while the performer will often know whether or not he or she has made a connection to the audience, how does s/he know if the intended message was received?

Performers presenting a piece over and over again will be constantly adjusting the dialogue, movements, storyline, etc. depending on the response of the audience. This is often an undocumented process, one that the performer knows about, but the audience does not. The audience may believe that the performance they are seeing has always been performed exactly the same way and always will be, but, in fact, the performer is constantly self-evaluating and adapting the piece to better communicate his/her message. If the performer is to know what kind of impact s/he made, then they must develop a plan for feedback from the audience members.

A number of quantitative and qualitative measures have been designed to assess the impact of performance art. Three major areas that are significant regarding educational theater pieces include knowledge retention, attitude shifts, and behavior changes. Examples below are drawn from three performance projects that address these areas. For the purposes of this chapter, the evaluation methods used are of greater importance than whether the outcomes of these actual events were deemed successful or not. As long as the evaluations were reliable and reproducible (i.e. authentic results), then it is a matter of improving the performance – the significance of evaluation in the first place!

***Knowledge Retention: Rainier High School Drama Class***

Ti Locke was making her living writing and producing K-12 science/math-based school assembly programs when she questioned what concepts the audience and the performers would really remember immediately after the performance and one month later. Locke chose to set up an experiment on knowledge retention while student teaching with 20 high school students at Rainier High School, in Rainier, Washington in the spring of 1992. The students researched, wrote and performed their own science-based assembly for an audience of 150 elementary school students. The student performers were divided into groups that each wrote and performed a mini-script on one of six topics including Brownian Movement, Bernoulli's Principle, territory/aggression of dogs, territory/aggression of humans, mitosis, and recycling (Locke 1993).

Since she was most interested in knowledge retention she devised a multiple-choice questionnaire with one question about each of the topics presented, that the performers (high school students) and the audience members (elementary school students) took immediately after the performance and then again one month later. The second questionnaire asked the same questions in the same order but the answer was in a different place (Locke 1993).

Locke found that the lowest information retention of any group was at 73%. Not bad; however this was among the performers themselves – the high school students! One reason for this may be that they were preoccupied with their own skits and so did not retain some of the information presented by the other student groups. And while retention did go down in some topic areas for the second questionnaire, one month later, it actually increased in other areas for both the performers and the students. This is due to the fact that some teachers discussed the concepts before or after the initial survey. Locke also points out for other educators interested in using theater that repetition of the key take-home message, humor and relating topics to everyday experiences are all important for retention (Locke 1993).

### ***Attitude Change: Metro Washington Park Zoo***

The Education Division of Metro Washington Park Zoo in Portland, Oregon began presenting free shows with flying birds of prey in the summer of 1986. By 1990, the zoo decided:

Providing factual information about the animals and making the public aware of the environmental crisis were not enough. [A] new script was written with the *objectives of persuading* people there is a direct connection between their personal actions and threats to wildlife and *persuading* them that the personal choices they make in their daily lives can make a difference in the survival of wildlife [Note: my italics] (Yerke and Burns 1991).

In 1991, Yerke and Burns created a more rigorous study design where:

The objectives of the study were to assess favorable-unfavorable reactions of viewers to the show (entertainment/attention value), assess recall of specific information imparted in the show (educational/attention value), and a comparison of pre and post show attitudes towards environmental and conservation concerns (educational/persuasive value) (Yerke and Burns 1991).

Using pre- and post-show questionnaires (see Appendix 1 for a reproduction of those questionnaires), which enjoyed a high return rate due to a reward of free tickets to a train ride, Yerke and Burns did indeed demonstrate that the new show increased knowledge about birds of prey and positively changed attitudes in the audience.

### ***Behavior Change: DramAidE (Drama for AIDS Education)***

DramAidE is an organization affiliated with the Universities of Zululand and KwaZulu-Natal that began using drama and theater for social change in 1992. Their first major project covered 800 schools in a region-wide effort. The major aim of this project was to organize students to create performance pieces for their peers that addressed topics surrounding HIV/AIDS prevention, such as the dangers of drug use and unsafe sex. Like many other educational pieces, DramAidE used audience participation,

including interaction between audiences and the performers (Dalrymple 2006).

Before proceeding to describe the methods of measuring impact, in this case it is especially important to note that when performance pieces are funded from outside sources, especially if they are grant-funded as is the case for DramAidE, they will probably be required to submit reports on the outcome and success of a project. This is a very common scenario with many educational performance pieces, so observing how others have measured impact, especially to satisfy reporting requirements, can be helpful.

The original funding for DramAidE was provided through South Africa's Department of Health. Subsequent funding has come through other sources, including the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and international non-profit organizations. In order to measure the success of the student productions DramAidE, under the direction of Lynn Dalrymple, developed a model they called KAPB – knowledge, attitude and practice/behavior. This model builds upon the previously described knowledge and attitude measurement methods. A questionnaire that contained an attitude scale was distributed to students before the performance and a sample of the participants completed follow-up questions. In addition, focus group interviews with key groups, such as parents and teachers were held. The findings of the research "indicated a gain in knowledge about prevention of infection with HIV and a significant change in attitude" (Dalrymple 2006).

Another major DramAide project was Act Alive, which formed youth clubs in schools to put on plays, again for their peers, promoting healthy schools in response to the escalating AIDS epidemic. This time around, DramAidE was keen on evaluating the impact of the project and used a number of evaluation tools:

Qualitative techniques included an assessment of background documentation, focus groups with youth and community organizations, and semi-structured interviews with teachers. A quantitative evaluation of the project's impact on schools with active Health Clubs, in comparison to non-intervention schools in the area, was also conducted (Dalrymple 2006).

Dalrymple is careful to distinguish between individual behavior change and what she refers to as a major societal shift, which can only be measured at provincial or national levels through surveys. Also, behavior changes usually occur through a fairly comprehensive intervention system – something that is bigger than one performance piece, so while it is a component of change, a broader strategy is needed to make a social impact (Dalrymple 2006).

### ***Limitations***

Some limitations do exist concerning the measurement of impacts. The most difficult obstacle to overcome when measuring an impact of a performance art piece is other outside influences. For example, in Ti Locke's science programs, she was measuring the retention of information. Some teachers may have reviewed the material with students, or helped students with answers, while other teachers did not. In addition, there was the follow-up survey one month later, where at least one teacher was doing a unit on

recycling, so the mantra of reduce, reuse, recycle was familiar to students at that time and in fact raised the retention score in that subject area (Locke 1993).

In the case of DramAidE, there were ever-increasing levels of awareness about the methods for preventing the spread of HIV/AIDS. However, prevalence rates of HIV among antenatal clinic attendees in South Africa continued to rise between 1990 and 2004. This does not necessarily mean that DramAidE's programs were not successful in changing the attitudes and behaviors of students - they most likely were - but other factors, such as cultural taboos against women being assertive and asking about condom use or being forced into an arranged marriage could have perpetuated the rise in HIV infection rates (Dalrymple 2006). Also, even though there may be attitudinal changes, behavioral changes may be dependent on other factors, such as life skills development or access to the resources necessary to make change.

### ***Summary of impact measurement methods***

The examples provided in this chapter present a number of quantitative and qualitative methods that could be adapted to measure the impact of performance art. Quantitative methods include pre- and post-knowledge and attitude-based surveys given to performers and audience members; or looking to surrogate data on, for example, the change in membership levels of a zoo friends club after seeing a show promoting

conservation. Also, comparative measurements of knowledge or attitudes can be given to samples of people who have and people who have not been exposed to a performance piece. Qualitative methods include individual interviews or focus group interviews with participants and audience members and analysis of scripts or other background documentation. Often a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods will garner the most feedback for an educator/performer to assess how much of the message was understood by the audience, or to measure how much the performers themselves know.

The next chapter focuses on performance projects located along the West Coast of the United States. Each one incorporates some of the theater practices detailed in Chapter 3 concerning the historical and theoretical foundations of performance art for social change. They also have some unique anecdotes about how they themselves measure success—different, but no less worthy of analysis than those presented here. These case studies will exemplify the use of theater to spread an environmental message, connecting on a local level to address environmental concerns in their communities.



## **V. CONTEMPORARY PERFORMANCE PIECES FOR ENVIRONMENTAL AWARENESS**

This chapter focuses on four case studies of current performances that utilize environmental themes. They range from 1) an annual procession (parade) honoring Earth Day; 2) an annual outdoor theatrical extravaganza acknowledging the scientific and cultural associations of the Winter Solstice; 3) a touring theater piece addressing the life story of the Pacific Northwest's salmon species and the concept of sustainability; and 4) a vaudevillian school assembly and festival program that tours schools and fairs raising environmental awareness. This chapter is not intended to argue that these performances might be the best or the most representative of performances addressing environmental issues, but they certainly cover a wide range of topics and use a variety of performance methods. My main reasons for selecting these performance pieces include their longevity and familiarity to large numbers of audiences and/or participants, and to some extent their location. The first three take place primarily in the Puget Sound Region of Washington State and the fourth in Northern California. Focusing on this region provides for regional cohesion and a good background for locally specific issues. Of course, the themes and methods addressed in this region could indeed be applied more broadly.

My intent is to document the historical development of each performance to provide examples to others who might be interested in

creating performance pieces, and to describe the intentions and methods used by various artists who create environmentally themed theatrical productions. Also, performance measurement methods, whether actual or suggested by the performers, are documented. The performances will be examined in Chapter 6 to see if and how closely they relate to the foundations of theater for social change. Overall, each performance does incorporate methods of theater for social change or combine these methods in a unique way, thus illustrating that theater for social change can indeed be applied to environmental topics. That said, there are some striking differences as well.

Four artists agreed to participate in this project, allowing me to interview them during the winter and spring of 2007. The interviews, which lasted between 45 minutes and 1 hour and 15 minutes, were all audio recorded. I asked the same open-ended questions of all of the participants. A copy of the interview questions is available as Appendix 2. Before conducting the interviews I attended three of the four productions (all but the Winter Solstice Celebration) in 2006. And in the interest of full disclosure, I want to make it known that I fully enjoyed the time I spent volunteering for and participating in the Procession of the Species in April of 2006, as part of one my electives for my graduate program. In fact, that course and my experience with the Procession is what lead me to my ultimate interest in this research topic. In addition to witnessing and/or participating in the productions, I have supplemented other information from written documents

including newspaper articles, outreach materials and websites to provide a fuller picture of the performances.

### ***Procession of the Species, Olympia, Washington***

The Procession of the Species is an annual event commemorating Earth Day in Olympia, Washington. The Procession experience lasts much longer, however, most significantly for the seven weeks leading up to Procession Day, when a sense of community is fostered through art. A Procession art and dance studio is open during this time, and any member of the community is welcome to participate in workshops and create art, music and dance routines leading up to the culminating Procession through downtown Olympia. Participants are asked to make a small donation (usually \$5) to reimburse for art supplies, but no one is ever turned away for lack of funds. Businesses and individuals from Olympia also sponsor the Procession. In some years, the Olympia Parks and Recreation Department has also provided funding.

The very first Procession, in 1995, was the idea of Eli Sterling and a small group of dedicated individuals who wanted to celebrate the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Endangered Species Act. The Procession is now in its 13<sup>th</sup> year. The Procession mission states:

Created by the community for the community the Procession of the Species Celebration is a joyous, artistic pageant, embracing the languages of art, music and dance to inspire learning, appreciation and protection of the natural world. The intent of the Procession is to elevate the dignity of the human spirit by enhancing the cultural exchange that we have with each other and with the natural world . . .

and to do that through imagination, creation, and sharing (Procession of the Species website 2007).

For the most part, people select an animal or plant they wish to represent and create a costume from used and recycled materials and art



**Picture 1:** Group work on a float for the Procession of the Species.

supplies. If they want to, they can join groups that have formed around a musical style or theme. For example, one of the many groups that del Caribe. Cuban salsa music played by musicians dressed as seaweed and jellyfish accompany dancers dressed as water and octopuses. The

weeks leading up to the Procession I spent learning how to sew my water costume together

and attempting to remember the steps to our salsa dance routine. In addition, I met a group of wonderful women who opened my eyes to other parts of Olympia, challenged my perspective of the town, and introduced me to skills I would otherwise not have so enthusiastically tackled.

The Procession is decidedly non-political in nature, which is illustrated by the first of three rules posted conspicuously in the studio and on the website: no words, no pets, and no motorized vehicles. Sterling explains:

Earlier on there was a whole women's group from the lesbian community that wanted to participate, they wanted to wear their pink triangles and we said "no, there's no written words, there's no symbols" and they were just really angry, and they weren't going to participate . . . it became this large discussion in front of this whole group and I said, okay, I looked at everyone and said "how many people have signed a petition for something that you wanted to

change?" So everyone raised their hand. And I said, "let's be modest, how many of you have signed 20 petitions", so everyone raises their hands. "Let's just say this, you guys have all signed these petitions, it could be from Exxon to abortion rights, doesn't matter what it is, say all the petitions came true, you guys know what the world would look like?" And people just stopped. And I said "who here can tell me what the world would look like? I can tell you if you want me to. It would look like Procession Day, not because it's a celebration, but because no one needs to have any identifying characteristic because they're all honoring something that is larger than themselves". They were chastising me, because I don't let anyone sign petitions, we're all lined up and the petition people want to come and I kick them out, I say no, right now someone is in a goat head mask and the next person next to him is some bat with zebra strips and they're talking about whatever they're doing and then somebody comes up with a petition and one person signs it and the other one doesn't, suddenly they're not about the creature they have created they're about their political identity (Sterling 2007).

It could be argued that taking out all the sub-groups of political activity is itself a political statement. Once one group, or a few groups become identifiable, then it would become apparent who is in fact missing. Instead, an open invitation of "leave your labels at the door" fosters a community that in fact includes the whole community! This is a statement of dignity for all humans and dignity for all life on the earth.

Another significant factor of the Procession is its longevity. The very first year, Sterling and his small group of collaborators decided it would last twenty years, with the express purpose of affecting one generation. They are more than halfway to that goal. The most beneficial part though, is the community that has been formed around this event. People participate or go to watch the Procession year after year. Visitors fly in from all over the country. The peak year was in 2004, during its tenth anniversary, when over 2,500 people participated and there were over 37,000 spectators (Sterling

2004). And, in fact, the idea of the Procession has spread to many other cities around the United States, and to other countries including Romania and Nicaragua. It was to the surprise and delight of Sterling and his associates that every year new cities request information on how to create a procession in their own town. The Olympia group has even created an entire section on their website ([www.procession.org](http://www.procession.org)) dedicated to educating others on how to create a procession in their town.

### *Winter Solstice Celebration, Seattle, Washington*

Manuel Cawaling produced the first Winter Solstice Celebration in 2001. The event took place on the Saturday closest to the actual solstice. At the time, he was teaching at Youth Theater Northwest and wanted to have his students create a piece that they could take outside of the theater and show the general public. Cawaling suggested they use the International Fountain at the Seattle Center, the geographical and symbolic "heart of Seattle." Though he had wanted to perform at the International Fountain for years, for the very reason that it is a well-known and well-liked public gathering place, the Seattle Center Commission had turned him down, stating that it would be too dangerous. However, a few months earlier, in the days following 9/11/01, the Seattle Center finally became receptive to the idea of using the Fountain as a space where people could build memorials and place flowers, which was, once again, Cawaling's suggestion. The 9/11 memorial experience opened the door for Cawaling to request to use the Fountain one more time –

this time for a Winter Solstice Celebration to be written and performed by his students from the youth theater.

The first Winter Solstice project was a new experience for the already seasoned young actors, a collaborative project that would not be in a theater. They picked the Winter Solstice as the performance date and created a show about the turning of the seasons. The intent was to commemorate the winter solstice and confront the fact that people are headed further out of step with nature than ever before. Cawaling and his students discussed cutting forests, removing hills, ocean dumping, global warming, and everything else they viewed as a profound lack of respect for nature. In the end, Cawaling chose not to focus on specific environmental topics, but rather to celebrate what the solstice means culturally and scientifically. To be good stewards of the environment means more than just active conservation, but also building awareness—and this group aimed to do just that through theater.

Cawaling is now the managing director of the Langston Hughes Performing Arts Center, a part of the Seattle Parks and Recreation Department. His dedication to the Winter Solstice Celebration continues for him as a personal project. He and a small group of other volunteers coordinate the Winter Solstice Celebration, which is now co-sponsored by the Seattle Center itself and is greatly anticipated by the Seattle community. It has turned into an annual event – five thus far, drawing over a thousand people, and now incorporating professional performers as well.

The celebration has evolved into a daylong event, beginning with arts and craft workshops for kids inside the Seattle Center House. The main craft activity is making luminaries, which represent the sun. Kids write their hopes for the new year inside the luminaries, which are to be set in the fountain later. Everyone learns about the solstice in its most simple form,



**Picture 2:** A luminary-bearer at the edge of the International Fountain in the Seattle Center.

how it is the shortest and darkest day of the year, the tilt of the planet on its axis and the earth's place in the solar system. In the afternoon, there are short performances by storytellers, singers and actors who create both dramatic and funny skits, revealing the significance of the winter solstice to different cultures.

At the end of these short performances, four characters, Winter, Spring, Summer and Fall are introduced. Kids pick up their luminaries and the whole Center House empties as people follow the characters outside to Fisher Lawn for a procession. Outside, eleven other characters, each representing either a planet, the Sun or the Moon, are spaced out across the lawn, orbiting around the fountain. The audience is not told who these characters are, but after a while they begin to figure it out. Each "planet" performs in some way that is representative of its physical characteristics. For example, Uranus, which spins on its axis differently from all the other



planets, is represented by a breakdancer. An opera singer laments her lonely position as Pluto, and acknowledges that she is no longer an "official" planet. Mercury, the smallest planet and the one closest to the sun, is played by a little girl on roller-skates who whizzes around the fountain, orbiting the sun faster than the other planets.

The remainder of the procession, the placing of the luminaries in the fountain and the death of Winter and reawakening of Spring, is guided by a couple of principles. First, the audience is not solicited. Many of the audience members were at the Seattle Center shopping or on their way to or from watching the seasonal performance of the Nutcracker or a hockey game. It is to their surprise and wonder that they have stumbled upon it. It is like invisible theater for the reason that it is pre-rehearsed and takes place in a public space, however, it is a little different because it is obviously a performance. That said, however, it is up to the audience to figure out what is going on and what it means. Another principle is the transformation of space and architecture. Audiences find themselves among the performers, surrounded by the planets, in order to witness the culmination of the celebration. Much is left up to the interpretation of the audience members. There is no literal story line, but rather a lot of imagery.

Cawaling weaves ritual and symbolism into the piece, but is very conscious to make it art and performance. To make it pagan would make it inaccessible. In fact, one year some people were furious about what they viewed as pagan worship, threatening to call the mayor's office about it

despite Cawaling's insistence that the Winter Solstice Celebration is a recognition and respect of nature, as well as a cultural event recognizing different myths and legends about the winter solstice from around the world. Also, a lot of the audience doesn't see the whole process; they see only parts, and so a program has been created that people can take home afterwards.

The Winter Solstice Celebration can be viewed as a success for many reasons. First of all, professional and amateur performers vie every year for one of the volunteer performer spots in the Celebration. Secondly, people have been returning year after year to the celebration since first stumbling upon it. A review by Seattle's local cable channel 21 reads, "With growing annual attendance, Seattle Winter Solstice has become a beloved holiday tradition" (Seattle Channel 21 2006). In addition, over two hundred children every year make luminaries and are taught about the science behind the solstice. Finally, the popularity of the Winter Solstice has led to the incorporation of the Celebration as part of the Seattle Center's five-week-long Winterfest activities, and the program is now co-sponsored by the Center and the Seattle Parks and Recreation Department.

***Salmonpeople, Anywhere Pacific Salmon Swim, West Coast United States and Canada***

Peter Donaldson is the writer, producer, and actor of his one-man play, *Salmonpeople*. He is also the facilitator of a sustainability movement

called "Salmon Nation" in the Pacific Northwest. Explaining the premise of the show is best done in his own words:

Cyrus Jackson [the character played by Donaldson] is a modern day everyman who finds himself employed up at the local dam driving a salmon taxi to transport spawners up past where there is no fish ladder. Cyrus has been scratching his head lately about this whole endangered species thing. By nature a curious man, Cyrus' self-taught, wide-ranging lessons in economics are a triumph of the vernacular, an arresting synthesis of complex patterns and changing values in the name of common sense for the common good. He tries to tell the truth as he is coming to know it. He's listening for the things that make sense, common sense. He is trying to figure out how to participate (Donaldson 2006).

The show is a proclamation of a shifting consciousness. Cyrus represents the curiosity and ingenuity of every person. Cyrus, like any one of us, does not have all the answers; rather he explores unanswered questions. As we grow to like and identify with this character, perhaps we can begin to emulate his hope in humanity and strengthen our ability to create a better legacy for future generations.

Donaldson's intention with *Salmonpeople* is not to provide all the answers either, but rather to make us understand that we are all members of what he calls "Salmon Nation." Salmon Nation encompasses all the home territory of the Pacific Northwest salmon species. Salmon, in addition to being one of the region's ecological keystone species, are culturally and economically valuable for all the citizens of the region. By erasing the political boundaries between the United States and Canada--and those between the states of Washington, Oregon, Idaho and California--Donaldson demonstrates how the rivers and watersheds of the salmon bind people

together through a singular identity. Salmon Nation is the backbone of his sustainability project, which reaches out to communities throughout this region.

Every fall, *Salmonpeople* tours to different cities and towns in Salmon Nation. Each municipality, in order to bring the play, must organize a coalition of local entities in that community. This eclectic group will involve various civic organizations, schools, government bodies, social



**Picture 3:** Peter Donaldson as Cyrus Jackson in *Salmonpeople*.

service organizations and environmental groups willing to participate in workshops after the performance to discuss sustainability. The community coalition "can explore ways to develop indicators, measure local progress, and link local progress to academic excellence in schools"

(Donaldson 2007a). Donaldson's ultimate vision is movement from an industrial economy to a sustainable economy. The performance is a catalyst for change occurring in many of these communities. *Salmonpeople*, as art, not only impacts the audience, but also motivates them to action leading up to and following the performance.

Donaldson emphasizes the vitality of telling a good story, explaining that good teaching is itself storytelling, whether in a classroom or through filmmaking; even scientists organize their data around a story. Audiences

relate to stories, because they are real circumstances with which anyone can identify. The character Cyrus is ultimately just a good storyteller. Donaldson views a good character as one that can take over and speak for himself. And Donaldson also stresses to not forget to let theater be theater, allowing for elements like spaces and surprises – events that occur in all our lives.

A running theme in the play is Cyrus' repetition of the phrase "everyone knows how the real world works." Every person indeed has his or her own interpretation of how the world works but, by Cyrus saying it, we begin to see that ultimately no one person knows how the real world works or how it should. It is collectively that we can begin to address issues of a sustainable economy.

Donaldson keeps track of the numbers of audience members and youth, teachers and community leaders reached through *Salmonpeople*. A quick summary of the numbers illustrates the far-reaching impact throughout Salmon Nation. Over the past two years 2,980 people have seen one of 22 performances; 7,320 students have participated in workshops, assemblies and conferences; 198 teachers have gained new curriculum material; and 527 community leaders have been reached through workshops and presentations on sustainability indicators (Donaldson 2007a). More interesting than these figures is what Donaldson identifies as his greatest indicator of success—the fact that no one has ever left a *Companion Reader* behind after a performance. The *Companion Reader* at first glance simply looks like a long

theater program, but it is really an innovative tool for extending environmental education to the audience. The *Companion Reader* provides additional local success stories from local groups and media about positive steps toward sustainability that are already occurring in the community. In addition, at the end of each *Companion Reader* is a "Sustainable Habits Survey," which provides readers with a means of self-evaluating their own behavior regarding things such as food purchasing, transportation, and energy choices. The *Companion Reader* and all of Salmon Nation's principles are based on Donaldson's belief that the most effective means of reaching an audience are presenting the good news and providing practical steps you can take.

### ***EarthCapades Environmental Vaudeville, Northern California***

Lissin Lev Chaya has been a co-director and performer of EarthCapades Environmental Vaudeville, based out of Northern California, for ten years. Before that she was an environmental educator in Tennessee, as well as an actor and singer. In 1997 she teamed up with her now-husband David Heartlife, another environmental educator and circus artist, to create EarthCapades. Today EarthCapades performs about 80% of the time for school assemblies and 20% of the time at festivals.

What makes their show unique is the incorporation of circus props. Lev Chaya explains that the juggling, unicycling and stiltwalking attracts a lot of attention at the festivals, getting people to stop and listen to their

environmental message. These same skills she views as secondary agents in school shows, where they are more visual aids to back up their stories. For example, first they will write the script about the water cycle and then figure out how to use the diabolo (a prop that looks like an oversized yo-yo) as a visual aid to illustrate or mimic what the story is saying. Lev Chaya also stresses that the songs and stories themselves are not preachy. One of their exemplary stories is a true story that her husband and partner, Heartlife, tells.

One day, when he was in Hawaii, a turtle swam out to him in the open ocean, then dove down to the bottom. Heartlife believed the turtle wanted



him to follow, so he did, and found a soda can on the ocean floor, which he,

**Picture 4:** Lissin Lev Chaya and David Heartlife of EarthCapades with a volunteer during a school assembly.

of course picked up. This story does not explicitly tell kids that they themselves should go out and pick up trash. The sharing of a moving, personal story instead develops trust with the kids, who can then figure out the message of respect for the environment and the fact that each one of them can make a difference, for themselves.

Festival shows and school assembly shows differ on another level as well. At school shows, they integrate concrete information, such as what specific recyclables are accepted by local recycling programs, where the water comes from in the local watershed, and how students can best practice water conservation. Festivals, on the other hand, are not as specific; they are

more broadly based, concerning resource conservation issues. Festivals perform to entire families and have to be more skill-based to grab adults' attention as well. In both the festival shows and the school shows they use volunteers from the audience, which also gets a great reaction from the kids.

Lev Chaya emphasized the benefits she gains as a performer because, as she travels and performs in different areas, she needs to do research on local issues. She is constantly learning in order to integrate new, local information. For example, when traveling to new water districts she learns about where the water comes from in that area and about local water issues.

In fact, most of the funding for EarthCapades environmental programs comes from private and governmental water suppliers, and county and city recycling programs, through their outreach and education budgets. EarthCapades only performs for those whose message and environmental practices they support. This benefits the schools, which then get free educational assemblies.

After an assembly, teachers fill out evaluations, which really serves the purpose of letting Lev Chaya and Heartlife know if the performance went well and met expectations. They consistently get rave reviews, but the best feedback is from the kids themselves who send them e-mails about their accomplishments, such as recycling at home or participating in litter pick-ups. Also, when schools or festivals invite them back year after year, it is a good sign that they have at least been entertaining and are appreciated. Lev Chaya thinks it would be a good idea to evaluate the impact they are making



on the kids especially after time has passed, perhaps a month or two later. She and Heartlife have been looking into it recently, but are still uncertain about how to quantify the impact.

Despite all their accomplishments, Lev Chaya is disappointed about one thing. EarthCapades used to provide curriculum to accompany the assemblies, but the teachers did not have the time to use it. This increases the need for assemblies such as this, but less than an hour of entertainment, no matter how engaging, might lose some of its impact without the intended follow-up to their performance. However, the material is still on the website ([www.EarthCapades.com](http://www.EarthCapades.com)), along with links to other resources, if teachers decide they want to use it.

Lev Chaya's advice to other environmental educators is, first of all, don't lecture. Just tell a story, and if you can use props or other visual aids to keep it interesting then all the better. You want it to be entertaining and attention grabbing. If environmental stewardship can be made fun, then kids will want to become better stewards. Second, the science behind environmental topics can be very complicated and intimidating to understand. With elementary school kids you don't want to talk about doom and gloom, but for middle school kids, you do want to emphasize the science, demystify it and bring it close to home. In the end, the message that Lev Chaya wants to send home with adults and kids alike is that everything in nature is interconnected and our actions have an effect on the world around us.

### *Preliminary Analysis*

All the performers confirmed that they were intentionally seeking to raise the environmental ethic or consciousness of their audiences and to bring about change. This intention and motivation is exactly what theater for social change is all about. The methods of course were varied: two very different processions, one with community-based performers and the other a mix of amateur and professional performers; one play; and one variety show using storytelling and props. Two of the performances are one-day events (though it is fair to say that the events are, in actuality, the culmination of weeks of preparation), and two are ongoing productions. The Procession of the Species and The Winter Solstice Celebration promote hands-on creation of visual art by community members. *Salmonpeople*, and EarthCapades' school assemblies expand their performances past the show to incorporate continued learning through further education campaigns.

Despite the different approaches, the underlying message is the same: respect for humanity and the environment. All of the events begin and end with a positive message and a celebration of the successes already in progress. Each performer also highlights the importance of storytelling (excluding the Procession of the Species), and information sharing through imagery, language and/or action. The story-sharing process is accessible to an audience because it does not preach; it simply invites them to join the journey with the characters. Each individual in the audience is free to interpret the message presented in the way that is most significant to them.

The artists stressed both the amount of forethought that goes into the production and the reflection and subsequent adaptation that consistently happens afterwards. In addition, each performance was consciously non-political in nature. A discussion of the politicization of environmental issues and the role of performance art in de-politicizing environmental concerns is addressed in Chapter 6. Overall, it appears that these environmentally themed performances pieces share the intention behind, and at times incorporate methods established in the canon of the theater for social change.

Another question addressed measuring the success of a performance. This was probably the most difficult question for the participants to tackle. They *know* that their projects are entertaining and that they sustain an audience. Donaldson's play receives standing ovations; more people attend the Procession events each year; and schools and community festivals invite EarthCapades back to perform again and again. But how do they know that their message was received? Most of the responses are anecdotal. Many of the performers had indications of successfully transmitting their message, such as the e-mails that Lev Chaya and Heartlife receive directly from students who have adapted new eco-friendly behaviors or Donaldson's Salmon Nation communities that are now working on sustainability plans. Each performance has been spotlighted favorably in local media as well. In Chapter 6, I conclude with an evaluation of the status of the performance art for environmental change. A summary of suggestions for environmental educators and advocates looking to incorporate performance art into their

practices for raising environmental awareness among the general public is available in Appendix 3.

## **VI. ANALYSIS: ENVIRONMENTAL PERFORMANCE ART WITHIN THE FRAMEWORK OF THEATER FOR SOCIAL CHANGE**

In the course of my research, I found that there is great reason to believe that some of the environmentally based performance pieces I had witnessed along the West Coast might very well fit into the framework of theater for social change. I was surprised to find, however, that this sort of environmental performance art was conspicuously absent from the literature on theater for social change. And so, I decided to make my own inquiries—the fruit of which is this paper—and what I have found suggests that theater for social change and environmentally-focused productions such as those I studied are, at the very least, close kin. All of the performers agreed that they were attempting to impact the awareness of their audiences and at times affect their behavior. Their theater is not for entertainment only, but is driven by a message.

My secondary research question - how to measure the success of theater for social change, and specifically within the area of environmental issues - yielded examples for knowledge retention and attitude and behavior change. In summary, pre- and post- knowledge and attitude-based surveys for both participants and audience members (see Appendix 1 for an example), or comparative knowledge and attitude surveys for those that have and those that have not seen a performance are both methods to gather quantitative data. Qualitative methods include interviews, individual interviews, focus groups, and analysis of scripts or other background

documentation. The performers that I interviewed did not utilize any of these methods, however they did share some anecdotes about how they measure success. Methods that the performers shared as to the success of their performances include: being asked to return to a site to perform again; increase in attendance over time; people vying for participant spots; e-mails for audience members; and the example of how no *SalmonPeople Companion Reader* (theater program) has ever been left behind in a seat. These examples demonstrate strongly the popularity of the performances, however not that knowledge, attitude or behavior change.

### ***Recommendations for Future Research***

Of course, my research on environmentally themed pieces is limited by the fact that I only reviewed four performance pieces, all in one region of the U.S. In order to establish whether all, or most, environmentally themed performance pieces are part of theater for social change, it would be advisable to explore other performance pieces around the country and around the world to see how they compare with my preliminary analysis of performances on the west coast of the U.S.

In addition, a question I raised but which was outside the scope of this project is the evaluation of impact. To evaluate the impact, one would need to look at the audience. While each artist views their piece as achieving its intended purpose of affecting people, most acknowledge the difficulty in ascertaining what can be viewed as "measurable" results. Nonetheless, this

area harbors great potential for future research. There has been work done with the psychology of theater, which I didn't go into in this paper, and that could be a good starting place for future research into evaluation. I hope that my presentation of some measurement strategies described by the artists interviewed and in other case studies from Chapter 4 will be a springboard to further work on this question. Finally, theater reflecting environmental justice would be the place where social justice and environmental issues intersect. It would be profitable to explore theater promoting environmental justice within the framework of theater for social change, as well.

### ***Conclusion***

Traditionally, theater for social change addresses just that: *social* issues of race, class, gender, discrimination, equality, and the like. The performances I have reviewed address environmental issues, rather than social issues, so it would seem at first blush that these performances do not belong in the same basket as those that are more commonly known as theater for social change. However, the environment *is* a social issue, because the health of the environment is, in most, if not all, cases a precondition to the health and wellbeing of people. After all, environmental issues, such as deforestation, depletion of water resources, and excessive fossil fuel consumption are inextricably intertwined with issues such as poverty, race and class. Environmental degradation disproportionately affects some groups. In this light, then, theater designed to raise environmental awareness

does seem in good company with theater for social change performances such as those of *El Teatro Campesino*, for example, which addressed the exploitation of workers. The subject matter, then, of pieces that seek to increase environmental awareness can be said to be very much of the same type of subject matter as other examples of theater for social change—we might very well look at the former as a subcategory of the overall genre of theater for social change, much as workers' rights or women's equality are subcategories.

The examples of theater for social change examined are geared towards one group or another, the intended audience for the environmental pieces is broader, indeed universal. The environment as a whole is, after all, a universal concern. While this would seem to set environmental pieces apart from other subjects of theater for social change, we might actually consider it a peculiarity that the producers of environmental performances would not more closely focus their attentions on certain segments of the population. After all, as previously mentioned, environmental degradation tends to disproportionately impact certain other already disadvantaged groups—not to mention other species which do not, of course, have their own voice in the media or the political process. Whether, given the uneven distribution of environmental ills, this is the best strategy is a question that deserves further investigation. This much is clear, however: the "non-exclusionary" nature of these performances is the result of a conscious choice.



While hot-button environmental issues can be politically divisive, for example, all four of the pieces I explored were explicitly non-political by nature, while remaining environmentally conscious. In fact, I was surprised by the decidedly non-political, non-activist role taken among the four performers that I interviewed. They were not aligned with a political party; they were not aiming to change policy per-se; and they were not protesting. Some artists were meticulous in their response to my questioning about the political nature of their performances. Some chose to avoid the term "political" at all costs. Perhaps it is because they want to be community focused, non-alienating, and all-inclusive. Instead they used the term "celebration" or explained the motivating force as providing information, allowing audiences to decide for themselves the best actions they can take toward protecting the environment.

On the surface, then, it is hard to see how these "celebrations" fit under the umbrella of theater for social change. After all, isn't the intention to bring about change the most basic characteristic of theater for social change? A closer look, however, reveals that this intent is indeed present in the environmentally-themed performances. The Procession of the Species, for example, can well be characterized simply as a celebration. It is, however, a celebration commemorating the anniversary of the enactment of a specific (sometimes politically divisive) environmental policy: The Endangered Species Act.

In this way, it can be said to be akin to 4<sup>th</sup> of July celebrations in the United States. While there may be no explicit political message, the fireworks commemorate a specific event and the Independence Day celebrations glorify the "American Way." The implicit message is clear: this is a country deserving of love, respect, and protection. The pageantry of the Procession of the Species functions in much the same way, glorifying nature and reminding people that the environment is worthy of love, respect, and protection. In essence, to celebrate something is to deem it important and worthwhile, and while the Procession and other environmental celebrations deliberately eschew political activism, it is no large leap to say that they are activist: they seek to change minds and influence people to encourage an appreciation of, for example, the diversity of species (the Procession) or humankind's dependence on, and cultural connections with, natural phenomena (Winter Solstice Celebration).

All of the performances I studied also have an educative intent. EarthCapades, *Salmonpeople*, and the Winter Solstice Celebration teach about facts and encourage people to take a closer look, to notice, their surroundings. The Procession of the Species and *Salmonpeople* take on the role of facilitator in the communities, bringing people together to collaborate and share ideas. The Procession of the Species, for example, provides the space and the time for the celebration, and members of the community come out to organize themselves into small groups, or as individuals, to join the large group on Procession Day to recognize and acknowledge nature and the

diversity of species. *Salmonpeople* takes a more direct approach to education as a catalyst for bringing communities together to participate in sustainability planning for the town. While it can be argued that simply educating people is not the same as advocating for change, these programs are clearly driven by the motive to educate people to make "better" choices that will result, in one way or another, in a healthier environment. Thus they are indeed pursuing social change, even though they seek this change largely through influencing individuals' choices and empowering people to make choices, rather than through direct political action.

The performers and performances not only bring awareness and possible solutions to an audience: they provide a space for communities to come together and recognize and address the issues together. These performances, like many others described from theater for social change, are not reserved for people with formal performance art degrees or for those especially talented in performing in front of large groups of people. These performances are for everyday people, and in many cases incorporate community members. Anyone can and is encouraged to participate. The process often is just as important as the product: its purpose, of course, is to influence people to think about a social or environmental issue. Along the way, participation in performance art for change also fosters a sense of community, frequently touching on issues of local sustainability. It is about the learning process, individual growth, and community building that it can stimulate. Both traditional theater for social change and two of the events I

reviewed, the Winter Solstice Celebration, and the Procession of the Species, incorporate community participation. Performance art then is an immensely powerful tool that can be utilized by environmental educators and advocates to reach the masses.

Performances are not limited to theaters either. The Winter Solstice deliberately sets out to attract a crowd of passers-by in the public space of the Seattle Center. The Procession of the Species progresses through most of downtown Olympia. And EarthCapades travels to many festivals and schools. The fact that they bring theater to the community reflects the idea of the Theater for Development, in that these performances are reaching out to the public. They want to bring theater to those that might not otherwise see it, whether they be small communities that will see *Salmonpeople* (Donaldson attempts to perform all around Salmon Nation) or the random pedestrian in the Seattle Center who happens upon the Solstice Celebration, or students who witness EarthCapades when it comes to their school.

Finally, many of the artists emphasized the need for really good storytelling and accentuating the positive. Storytelling, through various performance methods, is the vehicle for presenting these choices. Each performance shared a unique story. People relate to stories. They are easier to remember than a list of facts. Audiences are able to identify with a character and can more easily understand the issues behind the story. For example, water conservation is possible – look at how this character does it! Also, visual representations, even when there is no dialogue, allow for

interpretation on the part of the audience. Thus, the viewer can relate what they are witnessing to their own experiences.

A few of the artists also accentuated the power of storytelling for the main reason that a good story will not preach. In many cultures, particularly those that have historically placed great value on independence and the importance of individual freedom and initiative, people don't want to be told what to do. Through a story though, people can figure it out for themselves. When people are not told exactly what something means or what something is, then they can interpret it for themselves, in the way that is most meaningful for them. A positive message instills hope, models what is right, and motivates an individual to participate in the process.

We can conclude that these environmentally focused performances are socially conscious. Many of the performers, knowingly or not, also draw on distinct methodologies from theater for social change. The artists' intention of effecting change and of raising environmental consciousness signifies that they are indeed following this path of theater for social change. As such, these performances, and others that seek to raise environmental awareness deserve their own place as a distinct and valid sub-section of theater for social change.

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## Appendix 1 Example before and after attitude survey

Reproduced from Yerke and Burns, Ph.D. 1991. Measuring the Impact of Animal Shows on Visitor Attitudes. American Association of Zoological Parks and Aquariums Annual Conference Proceedings: 532-539.

For Zoo Use Only  
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 P M \_\_\_\_\_ 7 9  
 W A NA B H O

### Birds of Prey Show Audience Questionnaire

Hello, we are conducting a survey of zoo visitors, and we'd appreciate it if you could take a few minutes to answer the questions on both sides of this survey. Please just circle or check off the categories or answers that best reflect your opinions or ideas.

- I. Visitor Information: Circle All Those That Apply to YOU**
- Are you a member of "FRIENDS OF THE ZOO"? YES NO
  - Have you ever seen the BIRDS OF PREY SHOW?  
 Yes, this summer only  
 Yes, before this summer  
 No, Never
  - Where are you from?  
 Portland Metro/Tri-counties  
 Elsewhere in Oregon  
 Vancouver/Clark County, WA  
 Out of State  
 Out of Country
  - How would you rate your knowledge on conservation issues? (mark on line below).  
 very well-informed |-----|-----|-----|-----| not at all informed
  - Please circle which answer you think best completes the sentences below.
    - Explicit and hawks rely mostly on their sense of \_\_\_\_\_ to catch food.  
 a. smell b. vision c. hearing d. touch
    - Which statement is *not* true about owls?  
 a. they have very sharp vision c. they hunt in pairs  
 b. they have very good hearing d. they can fly silently
    - Most birds of prey do their hunting \_\_\_\_\_  
 a. alone b. in pairs c. in groups d. on the ground
    - Which is the most effective way to save eagles from extinction?  
 a. pass laws to protect them c. stop poachers from killing them  
 b. preserve their habitat d. breed them in zoos

**III. Please read each statement and then underneath, mark where on the line your opinion falls between "strongly agree" or "strongly disagree".**

- I came to see this show only to see the birds fly.  
 strongly agree |-----|-----|-----|-----| strongly disagree
- I do not want this show to teach me more about protecting wildlife.  
 strongly agree |-----|-----|-----|-----| strongly disagree
- I don't think this zoo should have more shows that feature their animals.  
 strongly agree |-----|-----|-----|-----| strongly disagree
- I think our society is doing enough with laws to protect wildlife.  
 strongly agree |-----|-----|-----|-----| strongly disagree
- I don't think my lifestyle directly affects whether birds become extinct.  
 strongly agree |-----|-----|-----|-----| strongly disagree
- I think the best way for people to protect birds of prey from extinction is to encourage the government to pass laws to protect them from hunters.  
 strongly agree |-----|-----|-----|-----| strongly disagree
- I don't think that reducing personal energy use is an important way to help wildlife.  
 strongly agree |-----|-----|-----|-----| strongly disagree
- I think that the best way to protect animals is to put them in zoos.  
 strongly agree |-----|-----|-----|-----| strongly disagree

THANKS FOR YOUR PARTICIPATION!!!



## **Appendix 2 Interview Questions**

(Start with background of course, who are you, what is your title and role, and a little about the organization/the performance piece)

When did you first think of integrating performance arts and environmental ed/awareness/ethics?

How long has this project(s) been shown in the community? Is it annual, ongoing, or changing?

For you, what are the criteria for an environmental arts piece? (material included, methods, a storyline?) Why use art to facilitate learning – or send a message, what is it about art that makes an impact? And specifically concerning environmental issues?

What types of environmental issues does your art performance address?

Do you intend to make an impact on your audience? What does this mean to you?

Who is your target audience? Does the actual audience ever differ? Do you think there are perhaps groups that may be left out? Who might they be and how would you reach them? Why do you think they attend – is it just for fun and then they end up learning something, or is it because of the environmental theme – are they there to support an issue?

How do you attempt to relate the material to an audience? Do you have any specific examples of how you can express your message so that people can make a connection to their daily lives?

What have been the most effective means of reaching the "community" and please also define who is the "community"?

What have been positive and negative responses/feedback to programs?

So are productions with environmental themes less controversial as those of other social/political themes?

Do you have methods of assessing the success of a performance piece (if so, what are they, if not, what would they be)?

What are the top two or three things that you want the audience to walk away with? What is the major take home message?

### **Appendix 3 Components of An Environmental Performance Art Piece**

This final section aims to leave the environmental educator or activist with some practical advice, or tools to create their own performance piece. Performance in all of its forms – drama, storytelling, puppetry, dance, music or anything else – first and foremost makes information about environmental issues entertaining and therefore desirable for the general public. A great performance will have the ability to spread knowledge, encourage critical thinking and influence personal decisions. And while the end product is educational and goal oriented, the creative process for a performance piece builds communities, empowers individuals and motivates people for action. Remember, the process may end up being more significant than the product itself. Always begin with a vision and prepare your own best method for measuring success and reflection at the end. If you are prepared for ultimately reflecting on the process and the performance, then you can record your successes and challenges along the way, and better plan for future performances as well.

#### Setting The Stage – Performance as Social Change and Performance as Protest

Two major themes arise when looking at performance art with environmental themes. But first, I want to clearly preface that it is never wise to draw a dichotomous line between these themes, because often a performance can fall somewhere along the spectrum of creative endeavors.

Nonetheless, the first overarching theme is a focus on influencing the minds and behaviors of an audience from the top down – such as teaching students through an assembly about alternative forms of green energy or educating a community about local water conservation efforts through performances at a city festival. The second comes from the community, or bottom-up, which commonly is directly and overtly political, such as in protests against an unwanted new development displacing a neighborhood park.

The first category tends to resemble the discipline of environmental education. The focus is on the performance and challenging the audience to take a look at their own impact on the environment. The potential outcome of this type of performance may be behavioral changes that people can make. All of the performances that were presented in Chapter 5, the ones in which I conducted interviews with the artists, fall under this category.

The second category falls under what can be viewed as environmental political activism. The audience is usually a governmental body or corporate entity of which the performers hope to change some policy or management practice. Sometimes both methods can be utilized separately surrounding the same issue to diversify the means of gaining attention. For example, a purely theatrical performance can be a catalyst for a breakout community forum afterwards, which may lead to other forms of grass-roots political action.

### Performers

The performers may be professional entertainers or whole communities who organize an event to play out concerns that might be

affecting their town. Sometimes professional artists choose to write scripts and/or produce a show that has an environmental message and then share their creation with the general public. On the other hand, much of the environmental performance art work that is created is done by groups of everyday citizens on issues of importance to their own communities. Keep in mind that often while we may think about performers or artists as separate members of the community than say environmentalists or laborers or social workers, we are all artists in some way, in some capacity. This is why many times the process of creating a sketch or song is as important as the product of a performance. One great outcome of creating a performance piece using community members is indeed the very diversity of people who will come together to tell a story. Bringing together diverse individuals "can draw [more] attention to an issue . . . pull communities together to create art, and communicate across cultural and language barriers" (McDonald et al. 2005). Individuals also gain a sense of self-worth and belonging to the group, fostering continued involvement in community mobilization.

### Audience

Knowing who the audience will be is one of the most critical questions to answer at the initial stages. An elementary school teacher may have her fifth grade class create a play about alternative forms of transportation, but will the audience be other fifth grade classmates, a first grade class, or their families? Say there is a toxic dump located in your neighborhood and you want to organize a production. In this case does the audience consist of

elected officials, the board of a privately owned landfill, residents of the community, or perhaps all of these groups? And, thinking down the road, will the performance piece be applicable to any audience or do you have the time and freedom to adapt it, whether slightly or significantly, to multiple audiences? If you feel your performance may, because of its subject matter, have the potential of being alienating, there are ways to pull off a play in a hesitant community.

Brenda Schleunes, founder and artistic director of the Touring Theater Ensemble of North Carolina (TTENC), says many audience members simply have a natural disinclination to buy tickets to plays they view as more issue-oriented than entertaining. "Staging them has to be done in a different kind of context – a low charge, or making it available to other educational institutions, such as performing it in libraries or touring it through schools," she says. Theaters also can partner with museums, religious organizations and universities as a way of staging plays with social consciousness (Mitzell, 2005).

Sometimes controversial issues allow for more publicity and more people will see the show, encouraging more discussion, more awareness and learning. But also, an issue-oriented play cannot be expected to appeal to a large audience. That might be okay though. Sheila Kerrigan, co-founder of TOUCH Mime Theater said:

[I]t depends on what your mission is, what you want to say, who you want to reach, how you want to change them. It's more important to reach the audience you want to reach than that you reach a wide audience. Once you know what your mission is, what your statement is, who your audience is and how you want to change them, you also will have the information about who your supporters might be (Mitzell, 2005).

### Location

Let's return to the example of a leaking toxic landfill. Will the production take place as a dramatic play in a downtown theater; will it be a demonstration at the landfill site; or will it take place outside of the city hall building? Cawaling created a performance to acknowledge and celebrate the winter solstice. He elected to leave the physical theater and to take it outside where the solstice was taking place, providing the opportunity for learning for members of the general public, who were milling about doing their holiday shopping. The Winter Solstice Celebration was timed to end with the sunset, celebrating the end of the shortest days of the year.

### The Script: Topic, Research and Credibility

The more professional the product (which includes credibility in the research of the topic) the more potential exists for impact with the performance. While art may be viewed as something abstract, even opinion based, when it comes to educating students or the public, it is imperative that the information presented be accurate. The performance may foster components of interpretation, analogy, parody, or whatever, but all great performances have one common thread – sharing a compelling story. In order to be effective, this story in the context of raising environmental awareness necessitates telling the "objective" truth. Of course you also want it to be entertaining, because you want people to pay attention in order to learn through the performance as well.



Environmental issues can make for especially difficult subject matter. Darlene Clover (2000) writes, "environmental problems, which because of their complexity are often linked to science, development, trade and economics, can be overwhelming and confusing." Theater as a tool of communication helps make the science more available and accessible to audiences. Science can be intimidating and, because of its objectivity, it is by nature somewhat impersonal and therefore intangible. Tackling environmental problems in many communities can be a learning experience. "The creative process, too, draws out people's own, often extensive, local 'ecological' knowledge before moving onto [sic] outside facts and information which may be necessary to learning and future action strategies" (Clover, 2000). More often researchers are looking towards local ecological knowledge to help solve problems, whether it's the history of flooding in a neighborhood or the health concerns of people living near a polluted water supply. Theater is one creative way to get the community together to address local issues.

Over all, current performance art pieces around the world demonstrate one way that concerned citizens are taking positive steps to address environmental issues. Indeed this is an encouraging message for environmental advocates. Despite the doom and gloom surrounding the environmental crises we are facing, theater provides an opportunity for action and fosters hope. Performances empower individuals, build communities, and get the message out. Most productions are celebrations of what we have, a

hoorah for all the steps we are and can be taking for the future and an outlet for sharing these steps and positive suggestions with an audience. Raising awareness through theater is a wonderful means of promoting change. I conclude here with an insight from Victor Turner, who addresses the anthropology of performance by stating that performances "are not simple reflectors or expression of culture or even of changing culture but may themselves be active agencies of change, representing the eye by which culture sees itself and the drawing board on which creative actors sketch out what they believe to be more apt or interesting designs for living" (Turner 1987). As such, stories, through performance, are agents for change and a powerful tool available to environmental educators and advocates.