From the interstices:

Performative instances

of productive liminality.

Utrecht University

Thesis MA Arts and Society

2017

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INTRODUCTION

Originally drawing its meaning from the universal practice of rites of passage as a category of cultural experience, liminality is and describes circumstances that are characterised by in-betweenness, ambivalence regarding both tradition and future culture, the disruption of established structures, and the upturning of constructed hierarchies.[1] Liminality, as a powerful analytical tool, is therefore well suited to overcome disciplinary boundaries and aid in the exploration of issues at the intersections of anthropology, cultural studies, and performance studies. This research project aims to explore and illustrate the productive, transformative, and destabilizing potential of liminality when evoked and utilized in artistic practices and specifically performance practices. Additionally, I am interested in how and why these liminal aesthetic phenomena foster the capacity to subvert crystallized notions and produce new cultural and societal paradigms.

Taking into account that the Euro-American tradition often takes as its central and dominant Subject the "white, male, heterosexual, urbanized, able-bodied, speaking a standard language and taking charge of the women and the children," as feminist researcher Rosi Braidotti puts it, I find it imperative to consider practices and methodologies that are able to transverse such constructed binaries of difference to uncover contemporary life and culture beyond the normative, and in complexity.[2] My

[1] Ágnes Horváth, Bjørn Thomassen, and Harald Wydra, eds. *Breaking boundaries: Varieties of liminality*. Berghahn Books, 2015.
[2] Rosi Braidotti, "Metamorphic Others and Nomadic Subjects." *Tanya Leighton* (2014).

fascination with the productive potential of in-betweenness has evolved over several years of study and research in the field of performance studies and creative production. I have found that liminality comes in many forms and under many names, but that it always dynamically introduces alternative views. By creating cracks in our fixed perception of the world, liminality can aid in the destabilization of crystallized socially constructed narratives that are based on identitarian politics of difference. The instances of performative liminality may vary from theoretical notions to more practical devices utilised in performance practices. These may include coming of age tales, carnivals, drag queen culture and performance, storytelling, community arts, parades, puppet theatre, cultural hybridity, No Theatre, the uncanny, religious concepts and rituals, street theatre, the list goes on.

Within the scope of this research project, I have focused on just two performative instances of productive in-betweenness and what makes them so. These were chosen as they represent methods through which liminality and potentially new cultural production may occur. The methods of liminality discussed in this research project are firstly, storytelling in combination with the use of the uncanny and secondly, cultural hybridity. These two examples of liminality constitute two powerful cultural practices that have peaked my interest throughout my studies. Moreover, they exemplify the broad range of practices that can be analysed through a liminal perspective, and can find wide application in performance practices and beyond.

Each chapter explores a case of productive liminality in performance paired with a case study from the contemporary performance scene. Each of the case studies that will follow seeks to point out how the instances of in-betweenness have been used in contemporary theatre, and how these have resulted in theatrical occurrences of

subversive thought and spectacle. The case studies through which the theoretical concepts find practical outlet are works by British theatrical companies, Forced Entertainment and Complicite. The geographic limitation of the range of the works presented is due to two reasons: the length of this dissertation project compelled a strong focus, which in this case translated into geographic focus, and the location of its author. This is an openly personal research project, and I set out to only include performances I have personally witnessed. Yet, what the productions may lack in ethnic range (although both represent international collaborations) they compensate for in the range of their approach, and they were ultimately chosen according to this standard.

What follows is a critical piecework of analysis of the concept of liminality, with a provisional and interrogative character, and a European perspective, meant to act as the basis for ongoing research into the productive and transformative potential of the concept. The cases of liminality presented do not intend to form rigid categories of liminal occurrences to be utilised as recipes for theatrical creation, but as flexible entities of artistic and theoretical production able to inform and challenge each other.

The first chapter establishes the context of the research project by offering an analysis of liminality in relation to performance. Through it, I set the theoretical basis of liminality, significantly examined by Victor Turner, and its inherent connection with performance. The second chapter looks into the liminal cultural practice of storytelling, which much like liminality itself, is constituted by the opposing forces of preservation of and transformation. Storytelling's liminality and destabilizing potential stems from these contradictory dynamics at play and has historically given voice to marginalised groups and alternative worldviews. Storytelling is examined here in conjuncture with the concept of uncanniness, as it is a device that is ubiquitously utilised in storytelling

and which, I theorise, gives them some of their subversive capacity. The liminality of storytelling is illustrated through the analysis of the production of Forced Entertainment, *The Notebook*, a dark coming of age tale, with a healthy dose of uncanniness in both its content and form. Following in chapter three is the analysis of the liminal concept of cultural hybridity as a productive state and how it can be incorporated into performative practice. Utilising Homi Bhabha's concept of Third Space that articulates itself as an interstitial space between cultural boundaries, I will consider the productive notion of cultural hybridity and offer a short survey of some relevant types of culturally hybrid theatrical practices. To further illustrate how the concept of cultural hybridity may inform a theatrical production I will analyse Complicite's *The Encounter*.[3] Through liminal content and form, *The Encounter* exemplifies how the use of liminal concepts can lead to re-evaluation and self-reflexivity.

The aim of this research project is to explore and analyse the productive state of liminality in relation to performative practice. Ultimately, I seek to explore if these liminal performative instances are productive and subversive and able to contribute to alternative cultural production that is more inclusive and pertinent to our current socio-political circumstances. If so, it is worth considering how artistic production can be utilised as a laboratory for the exploration of these alternative, non-normative worldviews.

[3] *The Encounter,* dir. by Simon McBurney/Complicite, Barbican, London, February-March 2016.

CHAPTER 1

The Destabilizing In-betweenness.

The *limen*, that experiential 'realm of pure possibility' apparent 'from ritual to theatre' and beyond.[4]

Through his work, British cultural anthropologist Victor Turner sought to reveal and understand deeply, how culture and society are lived by their members. He concentrated on how "symbolic units, social fields, and aesthetic genres can condense, evoke, and channel meaning and emotion." His analysis of the double-faceted character of symbols (both sensorial and ideological) allowed us to understand how rites of passage and rituals can constitute a "mechanism that periodically converts the obligatory into the desirable." [5] The concept of liminality became a fundamental theme of Turner's philosophy. His theoretical influences will form the notional and contextual basis of this research project.

Focusing on how symbolic actions were experienced and understood, Turner elaborated on an anthropology of experience that showed how rituals – and eventually ritual-like practices- were essential to the reflexive *production* and reproduction of culture and sociocultural structures. This view of ritual (and ritualistic) practices means

[4] Graham St John, ed. *Victor Turner and contemporary cultural performance*. Berghahn Books, 2008, p.1.
[5] (St John, p.3), Victor Turner, *The forest of symbols: Aspects of Ndembu ritual*. Vol. 101. Cornell University Press, 1967, pp.359-393.

that culture is not merely reflected or expressed through these practices, but also actively created, tweaked and transformed. For Turner, society could be considered as

> the product of the dialectical historical relationship between 'structure' (society's status and role differentiation, behavioral norms and cognitive rules) and 'antistructure' (those regions of experience in culture-outside*, in between*, and below structure), between the 'fixed' and 'floating worlds', corresponding to 'indicative' and 'subjunctive moods.[6]

This kind of processual understanding of the world recognizes that society and culture are in-composition, evolving, *becoming*. Most importantly, it acknowledges that the (re)production of sociocultural structures is reliant on the existence, both in the wider historical field and on the individual level, of moments of categorical disarray which foster intense reflexive and transformative potential. These transformative moments are what Turner considered and named liminal. The term, which originates from the Latin word *limen* (translation: threshold), was first used by Arnold van Gennep to describe the middle of three phases which constituted his tri-fold model of rites of passage – separation, transition, reincorporation.[7]

In the liminal stage of rituals, the participants are no longer bound by their pre-ritual identity, and have not yet begun to transform into the status they will hold after the end of the ritual. Thus, liminality is the quality of disorientation or ambiguity that ensues from this threshold stage of rituals. The participants of the liminal stage stand in-between the previous and the future way of regarding themselves, their time and community. In this stage, nothing is established or clear, creating in this way space

[6] Victor Turner, *The ritual process: Structure and anti-structure*, (Aldine, 1969, Chicago), p. 201, my emphasis.
[7] Arnold Van Gennep, *The rites of passage*. University of Chicago Press, 2011.

where the alternative can be encountered and possibly adopted into the next stage of the ritual.

Van Gennep's concept of liminality shaped a heuristic method for analysing symbolic social action which resonated with the world of literature that Turner was invested in.[8] According to his spouse and collaborator, Edith, Turner had already

> subconsciously recognized rites of passage in the shipwreck on Caliban's Island, in Rosalind's sojourn in the forest of Arden, in the quest for the whale, Moby Dick, in the passage from guilt to redemption in the *Crime and Punishment*, in Oedipus at Colonus… In the journey of the Pandava Brothers in the *Mahabharata,* in Sita's kidnapping and rescue in *Ramayana*, in Tolkien's quest for the ring, in C.S. Lewis's Narnia, in Jack Kerouac and his beats *On the Road,* in unending passage from one place to another in many of the No plays of Japan, each enacting a passage through earthly concerns to Nirvana – let alone *Mary Poppins* and countless children's stories with the theme of passage into adulthood.[9]

For Turner, the *limen* and its state of being, *liminality*, represented a temporality that was powerful on a universal level. Characterized as 'a realm of pure possibility,' the liminal space-time constitutes an intense temporary breach in structures (social, political, cultural, and aesthetic) where the normative becomes destabilized, and the familiar becomes uncertain and even foreign.[10] The liminal phase can be seen as a condition of growth and an introducer of novelty through which pre-established socio-political and cultural norms can be transcended or reformed. However, it is important

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[8] (St John, p. 5).
[9] Edith Turner, "The literary roots of Victor Turner's anthropology." In Kathleen Ashley, ed., Victor *Turner and the construction of cultural criticism: between literature and anthropology*, pp. 163-69. (Bloomington, 1990, Indiana University Press), p. 167.
[10] (St John, p. 5).

to note that liminal phases are able to introduce both positive and negative structural alterations – depending on one's point of view. Significantly, liminal conditions are "provisional of a cultural means of generating variability, as well as of ensuring the continuity of proved values and norms."[11]

In transitional rites, the liminars (the initiates taking part in the ritual) "may be androgynous, at once ghosts and babies, cultural and natural, or human and animal."[12] This in-betweenness and non-fixity to normative categories is the essence of the liminal phase where established signs are upturned, mixed, and their boundaries blurred creating new cultural significations. Liminality and its productive effects can be observed "betwixt and between" the predictable and the finished, in performative moments and spaces, margins and cracks of societal normativity, pregnant margins and thresholds of dissolution where culture and new culture are constituted Liminality can be seen as:[13]

> a framework enabling the possibility of more than one exit, a protostructural domain where the abandonment of form, the dissolution of fixed categories, and the licensed approximation of a ludic sensibility or "subjunctive mood" – the mood of *were,* in 'if *I were* you' – enables re-creation.[14]

While liminality traditionally refers to rituals of transition, seasonal and calendar rites common in agrarian societies, Turner detected "quasi-liminal" elements in the cultural practices of postmodernity. These liminal-like phenomena were dubbed by Turner as "liminoid" and differed from liminal stages in one significant way. The rituals

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[11] Victor, Turner, "The Anthropology of Performance." Edith Turner, *On the Edge of the Bush: Anthropology as Experience*. (Tuscon,1985, University of Arizona Press), pp. 177-204.

[12] (St John, p. 5).
[13] (St John, p. 4).
[14] (St John, p. 5).

within which the liminal stage occurs in agrarian societies are completely integrated and obligatory to the social life of the community. Liminoidal practices, on the other hand, are characteristic of post-industrial societies, occur within leisure settings, are voluntary, and fragmentary.

According to Turner, then, the practices observed in this research project all fall under the liminoid category as they are part of post-industrialized society, and are all entered freely. This matter of optation rather than obligation suggests that liminoid practices may wield a greater potential for social change than the liminal phase of socially prescribed rituals. However, I will not be using this distinction categorically. While I understand liminality to be a characteristic of the middle phase of ritual processes as described by van Gennep and Turner, I do not use the term (liminal) as a synonym for that middle phase, as Turner does. In this essay, the term 'liminal' is used to denote a state of in-betweenness and its characteristics and not as an alternative word for the middle phase of rituals.

While Turner's conceptualization of liminality has been used to set the frame for this research project and map out the characteristics of in-between phases, the aim of this essay is not to offer argumentation on the legitimacy of Turner's reasoning. Using Turner as the theoretical basis, I will go on to elaborate on the potential productiveness of performative practices that are characterised by liminality but not exclusively in Turner's terms and conditions. The voices and concepts of other theorists also thread throughout this research project. Erika Fischer-Lichte, whom we will encounter later in this section, has focused and theorised on the multiplicities that are expressed when participating in performances, be they aesthetic or social. Rosi Braidotti has observed a liminal quality in the "nomadic subject" that seeks discursive freedom from the

dominant socially constructed narratives that are pervasive in contemporary society. She posits that

> it is not about metaphors, but about experientially undoing the boundaries of otherness by allowing the others to express their singularity and specificity outside of any dialectical scheme of reduction and metaphysical consumption. Becomings are itineraries without fixed targets or destinations but are punctuated by constant encounters with otherness as a multi-layered and multi-directional landscape.[15]

Through her writings Braidotti explores the possibility that artistic practices may be more successful at evoking such liminal communities and that they must be used as laboratories of experimentation of alternative, inclusive and complex ways of living.

Liminality, in-betweenness, can be recognised and considered under different names and encompass a multitude of theoretical viewpoints. Namely, Peggy Phelan's "unmarked" performance[16], Rebecca Schneider's theorisations of the multivalent body in feminist performance,[17] Baz Kershaw's conceptualisation of democratic performance,[18]", and Petra Kupper's theorisation of the fruitfulness of ambivalence within the disability arts movement,[19] are all drawing from the power of liminality to compel re-orientation and transformation. My intention in this research project is to explore the productive quality of in-betweenness in performance and offer a preliminary toolbox including two such instances that I find most relevant and evocative in the current socio-political climate.

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[15] (Braidotti).
[16] Phelan, Peggy. *Unmarked: The politics of performance*. London: Routledge, 2003.
[17] Rebecca Schneider, *The Explicit Body in Performance*, (London: Routledge, 1997)
[18] Kershaw, Baz. *The radical in performance: Between Brecht and Baudrillard*. Routledge, 2013.
[19] Petra Kuppers, *Disability and Contemporary Performance: Bodies on Edge* (New York: Routledge, 2004)

Why is in-betweenness destabilizing & productive?

The qualities and characteristics of liminal phases and liminal personae are unavoidably ambiguous because the condition of in-betweenness and the persons going through such a phase elude or slip through the established network of categorizations that normally locate identity states and positions in the cultural space.[20] In the liminal stage, the individual gains the awareness to deeply examine herself as well as herself in comparison to others, and thus to realise the potentiality of the ego which could otherwise remain hidden.

The redressive nature of social rituals found cultural form in the vast spectrum of performance genres. Turner's research in social dramas, whether they take place in Zambian villages or are scandals contemporary to Turner's life in America (i.e. Watergate), with their vocabulary of "breach," "conflict," "redress," "resolution," or "schism," found relevance in cultural dramas. In turn performances, including festivals, sporting events, theatre, film, and television, provided stimulation for new social dramas. "Life and art would imitate each other according to a perpetual cultural feedback mechanism."[21] The redressive phase of social dramas evolved as a "eufunctional attribute of aesthetic genres" which much like ritualistic frames allowed collective inquiry into both the socio-historical and the everyday challenges and conflicts. Performance, from tribal rite to worldwide leisure genres, demonstrates the

[20] (Turner 1969, p.95).
[21] (St John, p. 6), Victor Turner, "Are there universals of performance in myth, ritual, and drama?" In Edith Turner, ed., *On the Edge of the Bush: Anthropology of Experience,* pp.291-301. (Tuscon, 1985, University of Arizona Press.

reliance of culture upon frameworks through which individuals and collectives can create and re-create, experience and retell their culture.[22]

Performances can then themselves be active agencies of change, representing in Turner's words "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."[23] Edith Turner lists some of the global sites for the expression of experience:

> … [Victor and I] witnessed or participated in the Yaqui Deer Dance, Suzuki's Japanese postmodern theatre, a Brooklyn gospel-singing healing service, the Manhattan Pentecostals, Japanese Noh plays, and other performances such as Kabuki, Bunraka puppet theatre, the Kagura dance of divinity, and popular festivals, Indian Kutiyattam, and Kathakali temple theatre, Korean shamanism, Eskimo dance, postmodern Off-Off Broadway theatre, Carnaval, Umbanda, the Jewish Purim and Passover, Easter and the Holy Sepulchre, Indian tribal marriage, the Ik theatr production in the USA, and *Chorus Line* – the list goes on.[24]

The ontological liminality of performance.

The performative moment is characterized by ephemerality and liveness. The fleeting moment of the performance, however ephemeral, is also experienced as an

[22] (St John, p. 6).
[23] (St John, p. 6), Victor Turner, "Images and Reflections: Ritual, Drama, Carnival, Film and Spectacle in Cultural Performance." In Richard Schechner, ed., *The Anthropology of Performance,* pp.21-32, (New York, 1987, Performing Arts Journal Publications), p. 24.
[24] Edith Turner, *On the Edge of the Bush: Anthropology as Experience*. (Tuscon,1985, University of Arizona Press), p.8.

intense present by its audience. The performance only comes into being while it is happening, in the present moment, creating itself through the interactions of the actors and audience members. Its course cannot be completely predetermined in advance or predicted and its documentation can never be entirely accurate. Performance has an autopoietic character which makes it liable to a high degree of contingency. Erika Fischer-Lichte has theorized that due to performance's co-creating nature no single person has the ability to control the performance. Thus, performances give to the participants the capacity to experience themselves as co-determining factors in the performance, which influence the experience of others as much as others co-determine their experiences. Through the performance, the participant (actor and spectator alike) emerges as "a subject who is neither fully autonomous nor fully determined by others, as a subject who takes upon him/herself the responsibility for a situation which s/he has not created but participates in." [25] This line of thought reveals any performance, whether it is an artistic or a societal one, to be a social process in which different groups encounter each other and through it negotiate their relationship. Both Turner and Fischer-Lichte, as well as many other theorists, find that during performances groupings may occur among the participants. What Turner names "communitas" is characterized by individuals interrelating unobstructed by identitarian divisions of role, class, status, age, sex, or other socioculturally prescribed divisions. The formation of spontaneous negotiatory communities during the time of a production may turn it into an intense political process, even when no political topic is being dealt with onstage.[26]

As performances are created during their course, the semiotic programme they may indicate prior to their presentation can be altered due to the unforeseen elements

[25] Erika Fischer-Lichte, "Culture as performance." Modern Austrian Literature (2009): 1-10.

[26] (Fischer-Lichte Modern Austrian Literature).

the participating audience brings to each performance. In this sense, meanings come into existence at the time of the performance and should be regarded as *emergent* and not exclusively determined by the group that presents the performance. Predetermined meanings are undermined by the existence of the phenomenal bodies of the actors and the other spectators, and the unique atmosphere of the performance. These distract from the "semiotic bodies," the pre-significations of objects or spaces, and impede the process of a solely semiotic interpretation. Hence, as spectators of performances, our perception oscillates between different orders of perception. Firstly, we perceive the actor's body and "its bodily being-in-the-world," however at the same time, we perceive her as the dramatic or symbolic figure, which she embodies during the performance.[27]

The constant shifts of perception create discontinuities and ruptures in our interpretation process which are characterized by instability and ambiguity. The spectator perceives from a space that is in-between these two orders, a liminal space. Depending on the nature of the performance these sorts of shifts in perception may happen more or less often. The more the performance facilitates or conjures perceptional discontinuities, the more the spectator may find herself wandering in the in-betweenness, gaining awareness of her role in the shifts and the fact that she may be both causing and being unintentionally affected by them. In the moment when the spectator realises that she finds herself in an in-between state without meaning to then she can experience her own perception as emergent, both outside of her control and still consciously performed. [28]

The "event-ness" of performances also facilitates a collapsing of normative oppositions. We have already looked into the socio-political character of performance as

[27] (Fischer-Lichte Modern Austrian Literature).
[28] (Fischer-Lichte Modern Austrian Literature).

it emerges through "communitas" and the peculiar in-betweenness the spectators experience in a theatrical performance; these effects and processes of performance already signal a collapsing of oppositions by which the Euro-American tradition has come to be characterized. Binarisms such as actor vs. object, social reality vs. art, liveness vs. representation, can be experienced in performance not as mutually exclusive, but as complementary or simultaneous. When the realization occurs that one moment can be dual or multiple, where one can also be the other, then we become attracted to the transition from one state to another and the ambiguous instability of liminality is experienced as an event. In the space between binary oppositions, an interstice or threshold opens up and the heightened awareness that we gain of it through performative moments allow us to inhabit and consider it consciously. Because pairs of binaristic concepts most often serve not only as descriptive and conceptualizing tools but also as regulatory notions for actions and behaviours, their destabilization causes the disruption of our worldview as concrete and singular and the subversion of normative behavioural rules. Liminal spacetimes created through performance allow different, even contradictory, notions and claims to validly co-exist as well as challenge each other.[29]

These kinds of liminal experiences can be accessed through all sorts of performances according to Turner: artistic/aesthetic, ritualistic, as well as sporting events, festivals, political rallies, or games. On this train of thought, Fischer-Lichte has theorised that within the wide spectrum of liminal experiences we can distinguish several different types of in-betweenness. While some liminal performances aim at a

[29] (Fischer-Lichte Modern Austrian Literature).

particular goal, such as a socio-culturally recognised change in status, the creation of a community or sub-community, the legitimization of a claim to power, etc., others are more concerned with the process of liminality itself. Artistic performances are more often process-oriented liminal experiences, which look to facilitate and evoke the experience of the threshold, emphasising the process of transition. Contrarily, liminal experiences that are ritualistic and are established within social and cultural traditions are more concerned with the result, the transformation of something into something else.[30]

A liminal aesthetic performance transfers the spectators into states which alienate them from their everyday life and exposes them to a space time where normative rules and guidelines are no longer exclusively valid. At the same time, these kinds of in-between experiences avoid offering clear resolutions, contrary to ritualistic liminal experiences that by nature must lead to a resolution of crisis and the re-orientation of the liminal subject. The state of in-betweenness may offer pleasure as well as uncertainty and even negative feelings, as the destabilization of a crystallized worldview can be a challenging experience. The subversive and transformational effects of liminal aesthetic experiences are most often temporary: though the performances themselves do not offer a clear resolution, this happens inevitably when the participant re-enters the everyday world. Temporary transformation may include changes in the "physiological, affective, energetic and motor states," but also "changes of status like those from the status of a spectator to that of an actor or the building up of a community between actors and spectators or only among the spectators." [31]

[30] Erika Fischer-Lichte, "Interweaving cultures in performance: different states of being in-between." New Theatre Quarterly 25.4 (2009): 391-401.

[31] (Fischer-Lichte Modern Austrian Literature).

While these changes may be evocative, perceptible and strongly felt during the performance, they reach their full potential only after the end of it. It is then up to the individual whether the subversive or productive experience of the destabilization of self and others, reality, and the loss of normative rules truly leads to a re-orientation and an ongoing transformation.

It is possible that after the spectator re-enters her everyday world bound by socially constructed norms and behaviours she dismisses her temporary destabilization as unfounded and returns to her previous perception of reality. It is, however, also possible that even after the end of the experience she remains in a state of in-betweenness and thoughtfulness and that, via continuous or periodical reflection, she either accesses re-orientation of perception or eventually returns to familiar patterns of behaviour.[32] This holds true for the spectators as much as the artists involved. Thus, the performative event may cause a transformation of the participants, which is able to endure even the temporal end of the performance.[33]

In the following chapters, I will elaborate on different liminal concepts and illustrate their effects through performative case studies. Ultimately, I seek to argue that evoking states of in-betweenness in performative aesthetic experiences has the potential to lead to a re-orientation of our perception of reality towards a more multivalent, unbiassed and more inclusive world.

[32] (Fischer-Lichte Modern Austrian Literature).
[33] (Fischer-Lichte Modern Austrian Literature).

CHAPTER 2

Tales of Unhomeliness: Contradiction and transformation.

As a cultural practice storytelling transcends time and space; stories have the ability to travel across generations, but also across borders, languages, and cultures.[34] The exchange of stories and narratives is an essential part of human communication. From the commonplace reciting of daily events around the dinner table, to the teaching of history and philosophy, gossiping, making up excuses to ditch class, telling and retelling our favourite anecdote to break the ice, telling a fairy-tale to a child before bed; these are all instances of storytelling that are ingrained into our quotidianity.[35]

But folk-tales and fairy-tales as cultural products of storytelling practices hold a dual and decisive role in society. According to Jack Zipes, a leading researcher in storytelling, folk and fairy-tales have the power, on the one hand, to communicate the norms, values, and customary practices of the communities that create them, in this way conserving them and imparting them onto the next generations. Simultaneously, storytelling inherently questions dominant value-systems, looking to alter or dethrone them entirely. And so, through its dual nature, storytelling imparts the following generation with the knowledge not only to survive but also to improve, to better themselves according to the needs of the community.[36]

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[34] Mike Alfreds, '*Then What Happens?',* (Nick Hern Books, 2013, London), p. 5.
[35] Maria-Estelle Papadimitriou, *Storytelling Practices in Contemporary Theatre*, (King's College London, 2015-2016, London).
[36] Wilson, p.xvi.

To illustrate the significance of the contradictory nature of storytelling, Zipes argues that the industrial revolution and the subsequent systemization of education and language brought about a certain 'dispossession of speech.' The standardization of language largely deprived peoples from *their* speech, accents, distinct patterns of communication, dialects, and so on. However, Zipes observes that what emerged were endeavours to "play with words" in order to resist the censorship, and training of the ruling class, and through this (often covert) resistance to forge alternative identities.[37] What Zipes portrays here is the ongoing battle between conservative standardized narratives and the ensuing efforts to destabilise them through the forging of unconventional cultural production. Storytelling's self-contradictory nature of preservation and transformation is and has always been a shaping force in our lives. [38]

This kind of simultaneous existence and productiveness of opposing forces within one concept or practice is very similar to the structure of liminality which aims to foster within it multiplicities rather than exclusive binaries. The practice of storytelling by recounting the acts and wonders of alternative worlds evokes a liminal place, somewhere between the everyday and fantasy, between the actuality of what is and the anticipation of what could be. From this interstitial space, which is physically often the stage, the storyteller has the power to subvert norms and rules by which, during the performance, she is not constrained. The experience of a symbolically alternative reality can interrupt the normative world in order "to open spaces for dreaming alternatives."[39] The allegorical relationship of fairy-tales to our perceived

[37] (Wilson, p.xvii).
[38] (Wilson, p. xvi).
[39] (Warner 1995, p.XVI).

reality is what gives them their subversive character. By employing an optative or even prophetical character, they act as 'laboratories for experiments with thought.'[40]

Marina Warner, writer, historian and mythographer, also finds storytelling to be multifaceted: incorporating both the past, the present, and the future. Ancient beliefs and lore co-exist with a sceptical and challenging attitude towards said past. Tales, then, act as a connective thread between past, present and future often revealing what might be, even if that seems impossible in the current conditions. In the narrative content of fairy-tales their transformational character is more explicitly revealed. A most prominent motif in tales is the intermediary: Shakespeare's Ariel and Puck, the various fairy-godmothers, Barry's Peter Pan, as well as a plethora of magical objects (shoes, mirrors, wardrobes…) act as connective bridges between the mortal and a multitude of wonder worlds. These individuals and objects are in effect the personification and exemplification of aesthetic liminal experiences, transporting ordinary humans into the fantasy lands within which they dwell.[41]

The greatest value of fairy-tales is that they allow us entrance to worlds that are not ruled by any religious or intellectual power. There, the storytellers can speak in alternative terms, because the dwellers of these other-worlds do not belong to a conventional value-system and are not constrained by its laws. In the in-between worlds of tales, fantasy and imagination rule, operating along mysterious principles or organized according to fundamentals that diverge from our ordinary life, often exposing the intimated.[42] The upturning of what we value as axiomatic in our daily lives is a common device utilised in folktales. In such stories, we get to experience a world that

[40]Marina Warner, 'Once Upon a Time, a Short history of Fairy-tale', (Oxford University Press, 2014, Oxford), p.4.
[41] (Papadimitriou).
[42] (Warner 2014, p.5).

seems utterly unfamiliar, or rather familiarly unfamiliar. This uneasy feeling of eeriness or confusion derives from the use of the uncanny, an often-found device at play in fairy-tales (folk and contemporary) that gives them the power to destabilize accepted norms in art and society.

Antistructural Uncanny.

As a subjective feeling, the uncanny is a non-exhaustible category and can be experienced when something familiar has been suppressed but resurfaces once more. Associated with the adjectives eerie, disturbing or bizarre, the uncanny is succinctly described as the sense of unfamiliar familiarity. The uncanny feeling that strange occurrences evoke can lead to re-evaluation compelling us through strangeness to look again at concepts and circumstances we take for granted. The situations relayed through fairy-tales frequently represent deep terrors as well as awe-inducing incidents common and uncommon. Loved ones come back from the dead, objects and animals speak and act like humans, witchcraft exists. Ruthless deeds also frequently feature at the heart of folktales: children are deserted in the forest barely escaping a cannibal witch, a father butchers his daughter's hands to avert the Devil from taking her as his bride, and step-sisters chop off their toes to usurp their sister's prosperity. While horrors like these seem unnatural, they echoed, and still echo, real-life occurrences. This 'siren function' encrypted atrocities under the pretense of storytelling, in order to be subconsciously recognised.[43]

[43] (Warner, 2014, p.80).

Freud has most famously theorised uncanniness in his 1919 essay, 'Das Unheimliche'[44] where he elaborates on the instances of the uncanny using as a case-study the tale of *The Sandman*, inspired by the homonymous folkloric character.[45] Starting with an etymological examination of the term's antonym, *Heimlich*, Freud asserts that it refers to security, comfort, and familiarity – that which belongs to the home. However, he finds that, in the tradition of the Greek word *oikeios* (translation: of the home, familiar), *Heimlich* comes to mean that which is concealed, private, withheld from the sight of others - secretive. *Heimlich* "develops in the direction of ambivalence until it finally coincides with its opposite, unheimlich."[46] Thus, the *unheimlich* – the uncanny – contains within it a semantic ambivalence, meaning both itself and its antithesis. As such, the uncanny as a concept as well as uncanny occurrences can be understood and analysed as liminal phenomena due to their ambivalent and dual nature. The feeling of anxiety and unease we feel when presented with an uncanny occurrence is one of being in-between, facing a situation that is unfamiliarly unstructured, one that leaves all signification up to us. Moreover, the experience of unease of the uncanny stems from the fear of the unfamiliar as well as from the fact that it brings up that which should have remained concealed, the aforementioned intimated, which also tends to be revealed via storytelling. Experiencing uncanniness disturbs both the awareness of one's self and one's position in the world, due to the intellectual ambivalence we encounter.

According to Freud the most prevalent uncanny experiences/feelings occur from: uncertainty about the alive-ness of an inanimate object (usually in relation to

[44] Sigmund Freud, 'The Uncanny', translated by David McLintock with an Introduction by Hugh Haughton, (London, Penguin Books, 2003), p.135.
[45] Ernst Theodor Amadeus Hoffmann, Leonard J. Kent, and Elizabeth C. Knight. *Selected writings of ETA Hoffmann*. University of Chicago Press, 1969.
[46] (Freud p.130).

dolls, autonomous limbs, automata, but also machine-like movements in humans, such as epileptic seizures or manic states, etc.), unease about damage or loss of eyes/eyesight (linked to fears of castration), coming across one's Double or Doppelgänger (signifying immortality but also experienced as a forerunner of death), compulsive or unintentional repetition of actions or repetition of numbers, images, occurrences (déjà vu, etc.) , omnipotence of thought (mind over matter or telepathy), and, for males, the female genitalia (as the entrance to an old, strangely familiar, dwelling).

Lacan offers a more historically situated theory regarding uncanniness, linking it explicitly with modernity, 'which constantly haunts it from the inside.'[47] For Lacan, the uncanny is best described by the word "*extimité,"* which he locates at the meeting point, the threshold, where "intimate interiority coincides with the exterior and becomes threatening, provoking horror and anxiety."[48] He posits that the uncanny once belonged in the category of the sacred in pre-modern societies but was displaced with the emergence of the Enlightenment when the category of the divine was overcome. The uncanny is also widely utilised in Romantic and Gothic fiction, coinciding with the industrial revolution, as it presents a counterpart to the rise of scientific rationality during that era. In post-modernism, Lacan posits that the uncanny is recognised as a fundamental dimension of modernity as we have gained an awareness of "its internal limit, its split, which was there from the outset.' [49]

The feeling of uncanniness can then be described as the feeling of being liminal. The uncertainty, anxiety and awe one feels when being in or being faced with the ambivalent and infinitely potential spaces of in-betweenness. In contemporary critical

[47] (Dolar).
[48] (Dolar).
[49] (Dolar).

theory, Nicholas Royle revisits the uncanny which he finds useful as a heuristic tool for the consideration of the political, social and cultural issues of modernity and post-modernity.[50] Royle utilizes psychoanalysis and deconstruction (which are both characterized by their pedagogical character that seeks to teach us how to alter our perspective of the world) to conclude that the uncanny can be understood as field of research that can lead to new combinations and transformations of issues pertaining to a wide array of practices including literature, technology, history, politics, and art.

Uncanniness is also productively utilized in the performance field where it can be linked to Brecht's alienation effect. Even if the A-effect is not named as uncanny, it can be effectively constructed in this manner, since it consists of turning something familiar and easily accessible into something unexpected and foreign to the audience. Overall, Brecht's theatre sought to encourage a questioning attitude towards contemporaneity by countering the acceptance and flaccidity that familiarity brings. The A-effect and the feelings of uncanniness it evokes could be productively utilized to challenge that which, has been socially imposed as the familiar and the natural. Brecht believed that the defamiliarizing process that arises from the uncertainty of uncanniness could aid in the transformation of both art and society. At the same time, Brecht found the notion of change and transformation that is inherent within the folktale – in which life is not presented as is or was but for what it might be, often incorporating social critique – to have an intense emancipatory nature.'[51]

Uncanniness when experienced though storytelling, whether that is performed in the theatre or the intimate space of the home, or gathering place, wherever it is felt, it seems to have an inimitable way of making us look twice. From realizing our innermost

[50] Nicholas Royle, 'The Uncanny', (Manchester, Manchester University Press, 2003), p.5.
[51] (Wilson, p.123).

fears to creating cracks in our perceptions of gender, sexuality or social reform, the uncanny has been employed as a destabilizing factor by a wide variety of thinkers. Its inherent fluidity and ambivalence, which aligns it with liminal phenomena, has allowed it to be applied interdisciplinarily from theatre to performance, new media practices and much more. Uncanniness is not just an eerie occurrence but a powerful tool in our search for the fundamental truths of the human condition. I have chosen to illustrate the destabilizing potential of the liminal instance of uncanniness through performative storytelling not only because the genre applies it widely to evoke its subversive effects, but also because folk and fairy tales can be equally seen as liminal occurrences, destabilizing in their own right. In the following case study, the productive effects of in-betweenness can be observed in form, genre, and narrative content.

The Notebook by Forced Entertainment.

> Antistructural liminality was said to 'generate and store a plurality of alternative models for living, from utopias to programs, which are capable of influencing the behavior of those in mainstream social and political roles… in the direction of radical change, just as much as they can serve as instruments of political control.'[52]

When fairy-tales reached mainstream printing, they experienced an intense transformation. They drifted significantly from their shock-inducing ways and became family-friendly – in tune with the rise of morality during the 40s and 50s – with the Disneyfication of classic fairytales being a prevalent example. Children became bonafide

[52] Victor Turner, *From ritual to theatre: The human seriousness of play*, (1982, Paj Publications), p.33.

innocents, and most of the vulgar language, darkness, and morbidity of folk-tales was scrubbed clean to reveal a brighter, moralised package.[53]

The Notebook, Agota Kristof's sinister coming-of-age tale, theatrically interpreted by Forced Entertainment, evokes a time when fairy-tales remained darker, violent and subversive.[54] Kristof and Forced Entertainment recount the story of twin brothers who are forced to survive in the unfamiliar setting of a small village when they are evacuated there due to the war that is raging in their country. The brothers that share an uncannily close connection, narratively utilising the motif of the double, begin to devise physical and mental exercises in order to adapt to their new harsh environment. To overcome their physical limitations, they lash and slap each other until they no longer feel pain, they fast and remain immobile for as long as they can; these act as preventative measures against the treatment they receive from their grandmother and the village. Their self-induced betterment regime extends to their sentimental limitations, and so they berate each other to forget once being called "darlings" by their mother, their names now are "sons of a bitch." [55] Their adventures are often violent and deviant; during the course of the play they will murder, steal from a corpse, blackmail, have (underage) sex with men and women, and witness bestiality. Their experiences are meticulously recorded by them in self-imposed writing exercises and "must be true." [56] Inspired by the writer's own childhood during World War II in Hungary, *The Notebook* by Forced Entertainment evokes the horrifying experiences of totalitarianism into a dystopian tale with stark narrative and political incisiveness.

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[53](Papadimitriou).
[54] Tim Etchells /Forced Entertainment, *The Notebook*, Battersea Arts Centre, London, November 2015
[55] (Kristof, p.6).
[56](Kristof, p17).

Kristof's tale is a dread-inducing account of how fascism and war can tear countries and families apart and reveal the monstrosity in people. However, it must also be viewed as part of the practice of anti-establishment retellings that draw from the folktale genre. The structures and motifs of wonder of folktales allow the opening of different ways to relay veiled experience while at the same time alluding to alternative futures when the community's woes will be over. Folktales may speak of war and hunger, poverty, cruelty, intolerance, envy, lust, greed, and their effects on the individual and historical scale. Writers, performers, and storytellers have hidden behind the themes and characters of fairy-tales to covertly communicate alternative and subversive socio-political or philosophical thinking. Satire, sexual and cultural critique, polemic, and comedy have often adopted the characteristics of the genre to veil and fortify their hidden agenda of subversion. Authors from Voltaire to Kafka, and from Jonathan Swift to Angela Carter have utilized the double register of storytelling and invited children and adults to experience the fruitful in-betweenness of alternative story-worlds.

Forced Entertainment's Robin Arthur and Richard Lowdon enact *The Notebook* in a stark but powerful production. Identically dressed, the two actors are accompanied onstage only by two notebooks and two chairs. The actors sit and stand, speak mostly in unison and sometimes in counterpoint, and recount the uncanny adventures of the twin brothers they are portraying.

Emergent Meanings – Alternative Ethics.

Robin Arthur and Richard Lowdon on stage.

In the tradition of many fairy-tales, the brothers remain anonymous, as do the other characters – Grandmother, Father, Mother – and the places – Little Town, Big Town. The ambiguity of the identity of the characters – in this instance intensified by the fusion of the identities of the twins who seem to act as one person – serves to allow the listener to step into the characters and immerse herself in their story. All the motifs in *The Notebook* are charged with uncertainty: Grandmother's house is both exile and refuge, she herself is both the *Fairy-Godmother* and the *Witch.* The unemotional and monotonous speech of the twin narrators enhances the uncertain and uneasy feeling of the audience that listens to uncanny acts being recounted with nonchalant-ness. The intense contradiction in the signification of tone and content of the stories leaves the

audience questioning the ethics of the events, the motivations of the characters and the spirit in which they conduct their actions; all of which are placed in purposeful suspension. Without moralistic judgment, the brothers relay their experiences as "blank facts" without comments or even adjectives. [57] Through this form, the audience experiences meaning as emergent, enigmas, and problems thrown into the room, as artistic director Tim Etchells describes them. The performance aesthetics of Forced Entertainment pursue the performative act as 'a troubling, and to some extent an incommensurable act' which always occurs through negotiation between performer and audience, echoing Fischer-Lichte's theorisation of performance as co-creating liminal aesthetic experience. [58]

[57] (Etchells 2014)
[58] (Etchells 2014)

The "twins"

Uncanniness is utilised in the performance to evoke and compel an uneasy feeling of re-evaluation. Most notably *The Notebook* uses the motif of the double, enacted by the twin narrators. Psychoanalytically the concept of the double finds its roots in the child's primary narcissism, i.e. self-love. By producing projections of multiple selves to ensure their immortality. Encountered later in life, however, the double incites a feeling of the uncanny, as s/he represents a return to a primitive surpassed state and a memento mori. In this instance, the doubles are actualised rather than perceived to enhance the effect of uncanniness. Through the device of the twin narration, the protagonists reject their individual identities, fusing instead in a collective subject and protective anonymity. The violence of identity-confusion within the twins is enacted through the act of speaking as one. The space of the stage serves as a non-place with the complete lack of visual stimuli enhancing the effect of liminality

through the evocation of uncertainty and the stimulation of the imagination of the audience.

In terms of narrative content, *The Notebook* relays one of the most liminal types of fairy-tales, the coming-of-age tale. Characterized by its transitory and transformational nature the experience of coming-of-age is acutely liminal, whether it is happening in real-life or in narrative fiction. The unnamed twins are abandoned in typical fairy-tale fashion, at the outskirts of town (a marginal community detached from the conventional morals of normative society) in order to survive the wider societal crisis (or schism) of war and emerge as adults. The layers of uncertainty and in-betweenness are several in the story, the deepest one being the micro-otherworld the children create for themselves. Even in the marginalized community of "The Little Town" the protagonists are outsiders. To cope, they invent their own dissident code of conduct that subverts established societal rules and through which they attempt to understand an increasingly morally absurd world. The brothers inhabit a strange dystopian world bound by its own subversive rules but emerge as struggling moralists with consistent principles against a society that is crumbling into opportunism and discrimination. When a woman that once bathed and fed them behaves cruelly, taunting a starving concentration camp prisoner, they murder her; they blackmail the village priest that used to molest their friend, but only to save her and her mother from starvation; they provide food to a war deserter, but only because he "absolutely" needs it, and in their book, he has committed no crime.

Later in the play, we listen as the protagonists recount in unison a night of S&M sex between them and the soldier that stays in their Grandmother's guest-room. When the boys express their need to urinate the man invites them to do so in their bed,

mirroring the Wolf's request in the original fairy-tale by the Grimm brothers, *Little Red Riding Hood.* While Little Red uses her need to relieve herself as a ruse to flee from the Wolf, the twins coolly indulge the soldier without skipping a beat. Unburdened by conventional propriety, the brothers have the upper hand:

> "Don't move. Go back to sleep."
>
> "We want to urinate. We must go."
>
> "Don't go. Do it here."
>
> We ask:
>
> "Where?"
>
> He says:
>
> "On me. Yes. Don't be afraid. Piss! On my face."
>
> We do it; then we go outside into the garden because the bed is all wet. The sun has risen; we start our morning tasks.[59]

What should have been a degrading or abusive scenario is turned on its head, and through it, the brothers emerge more powerful, embracing their abject body, their sexuality, turning fetish into ordinariness, and creating a crack into our established moral code.

A necessary rite of passage into adulthood, according to Freudian psychology, is the symbolic or metaphoric killing of the father. Through this confrontation the son's fear of paternal rejection and mortality is challenged and tackled, allowing the boy to

[59] (Kristof, p.84).

become his own person, free from parental influence and protection.[60] The Notebook ends with the actualization of this psychological requirement to overcome the father figure so as to become one's own person. In the alternative world of the twins, this translates into literally murdering their (until then) absent father in the most opportunistic way possible: making him travel across the country's border in order to pinpoint a path free of mines. Following the failed attempt of the father, one of the brothers steps over his father's body leaving his brother behind. In this twisted and uncannily brilliant way, the twins gain their entry into adulthood, individuated at last. Personifying the dual nature of liminal storytelling, one of the twins stays back to conserve all they have built, and one moves towards a future of boundless possibilities.

The practice of storytelling, much like performance, is incomplete without a circle of listeners; the schematic characterization most folktales adopt leaves a gap into which the hearer of the story may step.[61] The Notebook creates a two-person world that legitimizes the logic of the characters, going against the rules of a world that seems extremely unfair but also quite similar to our own reality. The brothers compel us to think about our own actions if faced with their experiences. Slavoj Žižek calls them 'ethical monsters' that choose to challenge conventional ethics, proving that ferocity may reveal itself as more benevolent than a constructed moral code. [62] Through this theatrical storytelling performance, the stage was revealed and utilised as a non-place, a multivalent space, that fostered through multiplicity, liminality and subversiveness to thrive. By evoking a liminal spacetime, the performance remained open to possibilities and unfinished without the input of the audience.

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[60] Sigmund Freud, *Interpretation of Dreams* (1899).
[61] (Warner 1995, p.23)
[62] Slavoj Žižek, *Afterword* in Kristof, p.165.

If we condemn the senselessness and subsequent bigotry of WWII does that mean that the twins are right in their actions? Or are their acts equally deplorable? *The Notebook* reveals different versions of morality, questioning its established rules, challenging them with equally immoral acts, creating other-worlds with different rules of humanity, only to reveal to us our own personal sense of justice.

CHAPTER 3

Cultural Hybridity as a productive state and its incorporation in performative practice.

> Stories, fiction are how we explain, organise and agree on the meaning of our lives.
>
> For example, two men who have never met might go to war together to fight and die for something called the United Kingdom. But the United Kingdom does not exist. It's a fictional idea that helps us organise ourselves into… what?[63]

To understand the importance of cultural hybridity as a liminal and subversive state, I would like firstly to consider the dynamics and roots of contemporary cultural relations. The notion of cultural hybridity I am using to theoretically contextualise my argument that regards it as a productive state stems from Homi Bhabha's articulation of the concept of the Third Space. The Third Space that articulates itself at the interstice of cultural boundaries evokes and produces similar effects to the liminal space. Applied to performance practices, cultural hybridity and liminality allow for destabilising and fruitful thought and spectacle. In this chapter, I will moreover briefly present some types of culturally hybrid theatres that I consider fundamental to the discourse of cultural hybrid practices. Lastly, I will utilise a case study to explore how these theoretical concepts find practical application and consider their effects.

Culture is often utilized to draw identitarian boundaries both on the personal and on the national level, essentially excluding the Other from national selfhood. Boris Buden identifies the cultural turn as a prominent phenomenon of the postmodern condition. He asserts that in our contemporary society culture has not only prevailed over the notion of society in terms of where the locus of political debate is found but

[63] Simon McBurney / Complicite, *The Encounter*, Nick Hern Books, London, 2016

more importantly that it has become the very space upon which political reality is generated and debated. This is the reason, Buden claims, that democracy, the pursuit of freedom and social justice seem to be culturally determined.[64] Accordingly, our societies and our awareness of our political reality can be considered "culturally framed."[65]

The culturally framed identitarian discourses, however, are founded on an intrinsic contradiction, the one between their essentialist claims and their self-constructed nature. National identity is generally considered, or at least presented, as pre-given, as one that persists over time, has a fixed and timeless essence, which is naturally distinct from that of other nations, has stable boundaries, etc. Nevertheless, it is easily discernible that the characteristics of national identities are carefully constructed. Buden presents an example from the German citizenship test, which on its 85th question asks the applicants to name the contemporary art exhibition that takes place in Kassel every five years. It continues by asking the applicant's opinion on a number of matters including Israel's right to exist and whether or not women should be allowed to go out in public unsupervised. The purpose of these questions is to discern and draw a line between that which is German and that which is Other to German, which is non-German.[66] This then supposes that "German" is a fixed identity, a measurable state of being.

Identitarianism informs what we perceive as our political reality as it dynamically creates its very basis by deciding who belongs and who is excluded from our society, as well as which forces and ideologies shape it. This strand of discourse aligns itself with the notion of multiculturalism, which is based on the concept of the

[64] Boris Buden, "Cultural Translation: Why it is important and where to start with it." European Institute for Progressive Cultural Policies (2006).
[65] (Buden 2006, p.2)
[66] (Buden 2006, p.1)

authenticity and uniqueness of cultural formations and finds fundamental connections between culture and racial as well as sexual or ethnic origins. While multiculturalism advocates for the rights of minority or marginalised cultures within the regulated space of the nation, it also legitimates the right of a national or ethnic community that finds itself being the majority to protect its "allegedly unique and original cultural identity."[67] According to the multiculturalist discourse, the world can be perceived as a collection of distinct identities that are either tolerantly recognizing or vehemently excluding each other, but that are never able to sublate or inform each other.

On the other end of the spectrum stands deconstruction, another major notion in postmodernity. Deconstruction questions the fundamental concept of multiculturalism, its essentialism, i.e. its belief that every identity is based on some pre-given essence. Here, culture is viewed as a system of signs that gain their meaning only from their relationship with each other and not based on some historical or physical origin. The narratives these sign-systems evoke, constitute and actively construct their own origin, "beyond any racial, sexual, ethnic or genetic essence."[68] The discourse of deconstruction regards every identity as culturally constructed. In this case, we can understand being "Greek," or "black," or "gay" as a product of specific cultural conditions, as a cultural construction without distinct origins. Cultural signs can be understood to be endlessly constructed and reconstructed fluidly in space and time according to the conditions within which they are perceived.

Out of the deconstructivist tradition emerges the concept of cultural hybridity elaborated by post-colonial thinker Homi Bhabha. Challenging the stance of multiculturalist ideology, Bhabha explores the imperative to consider culture and

[67] (Buden 2006, p.2-3)
[68] (Buden 2006, p.2-3)

cultural relations beyond the concept of essential identities and unique communities deriving from these identities. In *The Location of Culture*, Bhabha identifies the concept of cultural translation, which finds its roots in Walter Benjamin's *The Task of the Translator.*[69] In his seminal essay, Benjamin contests the binarism of traditional translation theory by asserting that both the original language and the language of the translation are non-fixed and unstable categories that are continuously transformed in space and time. A translation then becomes more than just referential to the original, and so for Bhabha, the act of cultural translation actively rejects the essentialism of an originary culture:

> Meaning is constructed across the bar of difference and separation between signifier and signified. So it follows that no culture is full unto itself, no culture is plainly plenitudinous, not only because there are other cultures which contradict its authority, but also because its own symbol-forming activity, its own interpellation in the process of representation, language, signification, and meaning-making, always underscores the claim to an originary, holistic, organic identity…What this really means is that cultures are only constituted in relation to that otherness internal to their own symbol-forming activity which makes them decentred structures - through that displacement or liminality opens up the possibility of articulating *different,* even incommensurable cultural practices and priorities.[70]

[69] Walter Benjamin, 1923/1992. The task of the translator. Trans. Harry Zohn. In *Theories of translation. An anthology of essays from Dryden to Derrida*, ed. Rainer Schulte and John Biguenet, 71-82. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
[70] Jonathan Rutherford, 1990. The Third Space. Interview with Homi Bhabha. In *Identity: Community, Culture, Difference*. London: Lawrence and Wishart, 207-221, p.210.

According to Bhabha, then, cultures can be viewed to be in a continuous process of hybridity. Just like a (cultural) translation, hybridity bears the traces of the discourses and feelings that informed it and gives them the authority or being *anterior* but not *originary.* Through the process of cultural hybridity arises something different, something new and hitherto unrecognisable: "a new area of negotiation of meaning and representation."[71] This is Bhabha's "third space", characterised as the productive space of hybridity, "located" in the interstices of cultures, which enables alternative positions to emerge. Cultural hybridity or the third space are characterised by ambivalence and liminality and can foster resistance, subversion, and transgression. For Bhabha, 'hybridity becomes the moment in which the discourse of colonial authority loses its univocal grip on meaning and finds itself open to the trace of the language of the other'.[72] In the threshold space, the binarisms that are typical of postmodernism, including the opposition between theory and politics, find themselves ineffectual, making cultural hybridity politically subversive in itself.

Bhabha's third space of cultural hybridity bears many similarities in its characteristics and effects with the productive in-between phase of liminality as described by Turner and others. As a manifestation of liminality, the third space is characterised by negotiation and translation, which Bhabha regards as the only possible way to transform the world and bring about something politically new. In his view, an emancipatory extension of politics is possible only within the field of cultural production following the logic of cultural translation. In the third space exists a 'restless,

[71] (Rutherford p. 211)
[72] Robert J. C. Young, *Colonial Desire: Hybridity in Theory, Culture and Race* (London and New York: Routledge, 1995), p. 10.

uneasy, interstitial hybridity', yet because of this ambiguity and unease, occurs cultural growth, with interstitial hybridity eventually becoming change: [73]

> This third space displaces the histories that constitute it, and sets up new structures of authority, new political initiatives, which are inadequately understood through received wisdom. [74]

Cultural hybridity is characterised by its political conditioning and it is has been often theorized how cultural hybridization can bring about change. Performance and theatre seek to access and act within this inherently political liminal space of culture, its practices falling within what Robert Young distinguishes as intentional hybridity. According to Young, organic hybridity (associated with creolization and métissage), which would align with ritualistic liminality in Turner's paradigm, often has a stabilizing function when settling cultural differences as it results in unchallenged new cultural practices and identities. Conversely, a process of intentional hybridity is characterised by self-reflexivity and negotiatory procedures that tend to highlight areas of conflict. This echoes Turner's liminoid practices which occur within leisure settings and are voluntary. Liminoidality is also associated with conditions that evoke social critique and radical experimentation. However, the two categories of hybridity can operate simultaneously, creating an antithetical movement of merging and opposition, such as we have seen with other cultural practices, like storytelling:

> The dialectical model for cultural interaction: an organic hybridity, which will tend towards fusion, in conflict with intentional hybridity, which enables a

[73] (Young, p. 25).
[74] (Rutherford, p. 211)

> contestatory activity, a politicized setting of cultural differences against each other dialogically.[75]

A vital change that can occur through liminal cultural hybridity is decentralization. In the third space of ambiguity, contestation, and interaction there can be no dominant or superior culture. Borders and thresholds are fertile spaces filled with contradictions and ambivalence. By both joining and separating different places and spaces, these pregnant margins provide immense possibilities that allow the subaltern to speak.

Culturally hybrid theatres

Artistic expression often occupies the liminal space that enacts hybridity, fostering a set of discourses that by breaching cultural boundaries reveal the intermediary positions of figurative translations; artists and works of art produce a multivalent "language" that may include visual, abstract or symbolic vocabularies from the interstices of languages, cultures, or normalized identities. An emerging exploration of cultural hybridity can also be seen in contemporary theatre, both in the aesthetic form of the performances and their narrative content. To contextually support my case study, I am focusing here on practices that are most often initiated by Western theatre practices – however, we can observe that this dualistic division between East and West often breaks down when speaking about cross-cultural theatre as the majority of individuals involved in the projects are themselves enacting hybrid identities.

[75] (Young, p. 25).

In their article *Toward a Topography of Cross-Cultural Theatre Praxis,* Jacqueline Lo and Helen Gilbert set out to map a conceptual framework for exploring a set of interrelated practices that exist under the broader category of "cross-cultural theatre."[76] In this section, I will briefly survey some of the categories that I find particularly relevant for investigating cultural hybridity as a productive instance of liminality in the contemporary theatre scene. According to the authors, cross-cultural theatre can include public performance practices that act as a merging or meeting point for different cultural resources "at the level of narrative content, performance aesthetics, production processes, and/or reception by an interpretive community." The cultural resources can vary greatly, from particular objects or properties, to myths and rituals, training methods as well as languages and visual vocabularies. Throughout the spectrum of cross-cultural theatre, we can expect to see a process of encounter and negotiation between differing cultural sensibilities. This process of negotiation may be more or less visible in the final performance event depending on the location of the project as well as the working processes that were involved in the development and execution.[77]

This description already brings to mind the notions of cultural hybridity as they were explored in the previous section. It is important to keep in mind that the mediation of cultural translation has a dual nature and can serve to both destabilize and reinforce the status quo in a set of established cultural narratives. "To cross is not only to traverse, but to mix (as in to cross-breed) and to contradict (as in to cross someone)."[78] What Jonathan Dollimore here suggests, on the one hand, is theatre's

[76] Lo, Jacqueline, and Helen Gilbert. "Toward a topography of cross-cultural theatre praxis." TDR/The Drama Review 46.3 (2002): 31-53.
[77] (Lo & Gilbert, p.31)
[78] Jonathan Dollimore, 1991 *Sexual Dissidence: Augustine to Wilde, Freud to Foucault.* Oxford: Clarendon, p. 288.

potential to intervene in hegemonic artistic practices through the productive process of hybridity, but also, the implication of misinterpretation (double-crossing). This creates a contradictory semantic field that, as we have observed previously in this research project, is characteristic of liminal states that contain both the notion, its antithesis, and the in-between notion-antithesis or antithesis-notion. Cross-cultural theatre practice then can include travesty, hybridity as well as conflict.

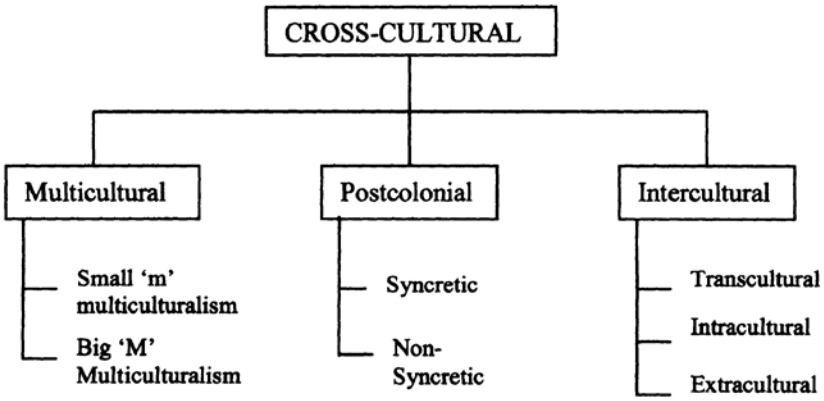

Diagram of types of Cross-cultural theatre[79]

A subcategory of cross-cultural theatre praxis is postcolonial theatre, with its main characteristic being its clear political imperative to challenge cultural hegemony that supports imperial structures of representation in the social and cultural field. Post-colonial theatre cultivates discourses of resistance that speak primarily to the colonizing subjects of Western colonial centres and/or address neo-colonial pressures in regional post-independence communities. The genres of postcolonial theatre vary widely, from forum theatre realism, and agitprop, to political satire and allegories.[80] It is important to note that the mechanisms of resistance at play in post-colonial theatre are

[79] (Lo & Gilbert, p.32)
80 (Lo & Gilbert, p.35).

often ambivalent and not easily located as texts or social practices. This is because resistance is not conceptualised as "simply there" but grounded in partial and ambiguous structures, often complicit in the systems they wish to transgress:

> The notion of resistance as unstable and potentially ambivalent strengthens the case for the inclusion of some settler theatre in the postcolonial category since, as Stephen Slemon maintains, postcolonialism is concerned with 'the project of articulating the forms-and modes and tropes and figures-of anti-colonial textual resistance, wherever they occur, and in all their guises'. [81]

This understanding of postcolonial theatre as not reliant only on overt resistance but also able to exist deep within the structures it wishes to transgress, is a strong exemplification of liminal practice. In rituals and cultural practices, such as we've seen with storytelling, the alternative inhabits within the structure and the liminal phase gives it the chance to express itself, potentially overtaking or altering the system. Hence, settler theatre can be successful at communicating subaltern voices, because it is an example of systemic rather than resistance theatre, communicating opposition from within, giving it a dual core, a liminal character.

One more subcategory of cross-cultural theatre can be found in intercultural theatre which is characterised as a "a hybrid derived from an intentional encounter between cultures and performing traditions." Intercultural is for the most part a Western-based tradition tracing its lineage in the modernist experimentations of Tairov, Meyerhold, Brecht, Artaud, and Grotowski. More recent practitioners in the subcategory include Richard Schechner, Robert Wilson, Peter Brook, Eugenio Barba, Tadashi Suzuki,

81 (Lo & Gilbert, p.35), Stephen Slemon, "Unsettling the Empire: Resistance Theory for the Second World." World Literature Written in English, 1990, 30, 2:30-41, p.35.

Ariane Mnouchkine, and Ong Keng Sen. [82] The intercultural category of theatrical praxis includes transcultural theatre that seeks a universal human condition and transcends codification that is culture-specific, and intracultural theatre introduced by Rustom Bharucha to designate cultural encounters between and across communities within the same nation-state, pointing to internal diversities within boundaries of self-signified sameness.[83]

A further subdivision of intercultural theatre that I find pertinent to discuss for the purposes of this research project is the "extracultural form of intercultural theatre". Conversely to transcultural practices that are attracted to particularities and traditions to identify sameness in the human condition, intercultural extracultural practices do not relativize or transcend cultural differences but celebrate and explore such differences as a source of cultural empowerment and aesthetic richness. As a category of analysis, extracultural theatre always concerns itself with questions of forces at work that are inextricably linked with the politico-economic space of the contributing cultures, even when such questions are side-stepped in the actual practice. [84] This type of cultural theatre is relevant to the following case study as it seeks to complexify how Western tradition views the Other. Threading thought *The Encounter* are also questions of climate-change and western representational strategies of difference.

Lo and Gilbert elaborate on an intercultural theatre practice model that is represented as a two-way flow. In their model, both partners are considered cultural sources and the target culture, the cultural "product" that their collaboration will produce, can be found in-between them but not in a fixed place. The position of the

82 (Lo & Gilbert, p.37).
[83] (Lo & Gilbert, p.38).
[84] (Lo & Gilbert, p.37).

target culture remains fluid and can shift towards either source culture depending on where and how the exchange process takes place. For example, when the performance takes place in a space that is usually the domain of one of the cultures, then the position of the target culture will shift closer to the space of that source in the continuum. This fluidity in the model seeks to represent the dialogic nature of intercultural exchange but also account for the possibility of power disparities in the process. The process of intercultural exchange "is characterized both by gain and by loss, attraction and disavowal. Our model of intercultural theatre rests on a notion of differentiated hybridity that works in multiple and sometimes opposing ways."[85] This kind of system is very useful to consider culturally hybrid theatres practices as it allows for flexibility where rigidity or essentialism would result in unproductive, wooden representations of fossilised culture. At the same time, the two-way flow model of Gilbert and Lo can be considered in itself as a liminal practice, as it allows for multiple, and even contradictory concepts and practices to co-exist and through this synchronicity produce new cultural products.

The Encounter by Simon McBurney/Complicite

In the late 60s, Loren McIntyre, a photographer for National Geographic, became hopelessly lost in the Amazon while searching for a tribe, who was believed to be extinct. His adventure inspired a novel and subsequently *The* Encounter, an immersive

[85] (Lo & Gilbert, p.45).

performance by British theatre group, Complicite.[86] A chance encounter with a hunting party left McIntyre disoriented and separated from his camp and gear. His only chance for survival became to follow the hunters of the tribe deeper and deeper into the forest and back into their secluded camp.

The language barrier did not allow McIntyre to convey his intentions of getting back to his base, he became an accidental captive of the tribe. Some were sympathetic towards him, but his presence at the camp was not welcomed by all. McIntyre became caught in a power-struggle amongst the chief (whom he names Barnacle) and a younger ambitious fighter, which resulted in the young usurper attacking him and his rescue by the tribe's chief. While language formed a gap between the photographer and the tribe, McIntyre could communicate with the chief through what he hesitantly describes as 'thought transference.'[87] This telepathic communication also included an indecipherable background "buzz" that constituted the entire tribe's cognition. McIntyre came to call these occurrences "beaming." McIntyre and Barnacle developed a bond during their encounter, and the information he got through their connection beyond words led him, after his extraction, to uncover what is considered the true source of the Amazon River that had remained undiscovered until then. Before leaving the tribe, McIntyre witnessed and took part in a ritual the Mayoruna tribe believed would be able to transfer them back in time, to an era before the invasion of their lands by Western missionaries and loggers and the destruction and death they brought.

For weeks, the tribe journeyed deep into the jungle, burning their settlements as they advanced, leading McIntyre to fear that their journey would culminate in a mass

[86] Simon McBurney /Complicite, *The Encounter*, Barbican, London, February-March 2016

[87] Petru Popescu, The Encounter: Amazon Beaming, (Pushkin Press, London, 1991), p. 121.

suicide. Instead, during the ritual, the tribes people burned all their possessions, and with them their ties to the past and the path that led them there. In their perception of the world, travelling up the river towards the source, the beginning of the Amazon, they believed would bring them back to the beginning of time, allowing them to commence a new life circle. McIntyre's encounter challenged his awareness of the world, compelling him to confront the artificial limits of Western consciousness and ideology. [88]However, the performance also questions whether McIntyre was also in some way culturally invading the Mayoruna, seeking to document and encroach on their lives, camera in hand.

Complicite's artistic director and sole performer onstage, Simon McBurney, builds the narrative of McIntyre's enthralling story on events as they were recounted to him by Petru Popescu, a Romanian writer, who wrote his novel *The Encounter: Amazon Beaming* after extensive interviews with McIntyre.[89] McBurney incorporates into his narration events and conversations from his own life and research; his quest to get his restless daughter to sleep, the creation of this performance, philosophical musings about the nature of consciousness, the awareness of time, and communication. While he is alone onstage, we also hear the voices of his invisible interlocutors recorded in the past which add to the contextual depth of McBurney's story but also serve to question the nature of performance itself, these include a professor of Mathematics at Oxford, a campaigner for tribal peoples' rights, a philosopher and psychiatrist, a professor of neurobiology, a climate-change activist, and members of the Yawanawa and Harakmbut

[88] (Papadimitriou).
[89] (Popescu).

tribes, who all speak in their own words about time, life, memory, and the nature of performance.

Destabilization and inquiry of structural concepts of Western thought

On stage at The Encounter

The Encounter transpires in an in-between spacetime; while we remain aware of our contemporaneity, we are transported in a multitude of other spacetimes, which coincide on the multivalent stage, without any of them being totalizingly defined. Our attention is divided between McBurney's musings about the universality of stories, the problematics of cultural identity and the preconceptions of time and reality. At the same time, our imagination is grasped by McIntyre's transformative journey into the Amazon, the Mayoruna tribe's quest for their new beginning and McBurney's daughter's

sleepless nights during the creation of the performance.[90] Different voices are heard, a variety of perspectives are presented simultaneously, and we go back and forth within this unique and complex environment. With playful and challenging transitions between pasts and present, between concurring narratives and realities we find ourselves in the liminal spacetime that the performance creates, a non-place that allows us to be immersed and contemplate ourselves and others in complexity.

Somewhere between seriousness and play, McBurney re-evaluates the notions of collective time, only to expose its inbuilt subjectivity and its reliance on individual perception. McBurney speaks to us facing upstage, but this is revealed to be only an impression: when he turns to face us we realise that what we were, in fact, listening to were recordings of him speaking to us from another time:

> *The recorded voice continues as the ACTOR onstage begins to speak over it.*
>
> ACTOR. That's true. We wouldn't be who we are without all the things that we've experienced. Could we even be conscious without our pasts, I mean, is consciousness possible without memory? I think not.
>
> This was recorded six months ago in my flat.
>
> Over here is my desk. And here is a window…
>
> *Opens window and the sound of the street comes rushing in.*
>
> *Closes the window.*
>
> That was the street outside my flat in London. And there's a sink here. I'll just wash my hands…

[90] (Papadimitriou).

SFX: water running.

You should hear that just behind your right ear.

The following conversation is between the ACTOR, live, and Noma MacBurney, aged five, recorded at home.

NOMA. *Dada, who are you talking to?*

ACTOR. And that's my daughter, Noma. I'm not talking to anybody, sweetie.

NOMA. *Yes, you are!*

ACTOR. No I'm not. Well, in a way…

NOMA. *But there's nobody there!*

….

ACTOR. That's a recording I made about a year ago. When she was five. She's six now. So we've got three times. We've got this time, present. Six months ago there's me remembering things, and then we've got a year ago when I recorded my daughter. But is that possible? Surely we only live in one time? This is just something we're achieved with sound recordings. Maybe…

Marcus, would you like a cup of coffee?

The following is a conversation between the ACTOR, live, and Marcus du Sautoy, recorded. All other times are still 'running' concurrently.

MARCUS. No, I've already had one, thanks.[91]

[91] (McBurney 2016), p. 11-12.

Blurring the constraints of time, as well as of the private and the public (reminding us of the etymological double provenance of the uncanny) he creates a self-reflexive narrative about communication, the timelessness of stories told across generations, and the subjectivity of time and history. The audience becomes immersed in a sort of vortex of place and time. The stage and the whole theatre becomes a non-place that hovers between present and past times, between our reality and that of the Mayoruna tribe. Through the aesthetic medium of theatre, we can accept the liminality of the hybrid world of the performance within which we are transported. Our familiar reality collides with this liminal one, creating gaps on our crystallized perceptions of quotidianity. Through these cracks alternative possibilities, models of reality, are allowed to enter out awareness as equally valid and relevant.

McBurney and the binaural microphone.

The threshold stage and the expansion of consciousness.

> A performance takes place in and through the bodily co-presence of actors and spectators. For in order to bring it about two groups of people who act as 'doers' and 'onlookers' have to assemble at a certain time and at a certain place in order to share a situation, a span of lifetime. A performance comes into being out of their encounter – out of their interaction.[92]

To begin with, McBurney chats casually to the audience in a way that suggests that the performance has yet to begin, he introduces himself and asks us to switch off our phones. He explains that to follow the performance we must put on the earphones provided, the performance can only be listened to through them. The sounds of the stage will be broadcasted directly into the headphones via a binaural microphone. Onstage, there are multipacks of bottled water, a table, a circle of speakers, and other various microphones. While the stage is stark to the point of dullness, a curious device stands centre-stage; a grey, geometric head rests on a stand that brings it to equal height with the performer. This is the above-mentioned binaural microphone that will permit the audience to hear sound in 3D placing them aurally onstage and enabling them to hear sounds in relation to distance and direction to the microphone. By using this device, McBurney is able to create soundscapes that can move from one side to the other, surround and withdraw from us. This kind or aural theatre provides McBurney with a powerful medium to tell a story that explores a challenging set of concepts regarding consciousness, time, cultural identity and memory. Telling his story through

[92] (Fischer-Lichte, Modern Austrian Literature).

sound, McBurney uses sensorial trickery and contradicting stimuli that produce a destabilizing effect, making us question the preconceived notions though which we interact with the world.[93]

Some of the soundscapes of the performance McBurney creates before our eyes by using objects, his voice and body, and effects-pedals that manipulate his voice pitch. Others are pre-recorded and expertly incorporated live into the performance by sound operators, Ella Wahlström and Helen Skiera. The different visual, physical and aural elements create a complicated arrangement that moves the audience viscerally giving us an uncanny feeling of not being able to discern what is real. What we feel sensorially clashes intensely with what we understand cognitively. For example, what we perceive as the sound of walking through a jungle is simulated by the performer by stamping on a mound of recording tape. McBurney annuls onstage the illusion of naturalism he has painstakingly created in sound.[94] These contradictory stimuli create a challenging and confusing experience that compels us to redefine the boundaries of our consciousness.

Through *The Encounter,* the performer creates a community that endures for a few hours. Honouring the co-creating spirit of performance as described previously by Fischer-Lichte, *The Encounter* places the audience at its epicentre. The form of *The Encounter* allows the members of the audience to have an experience that is both individual (through the isolation the individual headsets provide) and communal within the collective forum of theatre. McBurney also draws a parallel between his solitude onstage, perceived by an audience, and the aloneness of the individual consciousness, among the consciousnesses of many others.

[93] (Papadimitriou).
[94] (Papadimitriou).

To achieve this kind of dual awareness from the audience, McBurney questioned what may constitute the performance space, extending its effects into the individual cognition of the audience members. McBurney recounts his story by means of the audience's imagination, senses, and intellect. McBurney also made use of the stage as the ultimate theatrical liminal space, which can foster a multiplicity of cultural and social significations and symbolisms at the same time. In *The Encounter,* the potential of the stage as an in-between place/non-place is enhanced by its starkness, allowing the co-existence of contradictory stimuli, parallel narratives, as well as literal and symbolic significations of objects and bodies on equal terms. The lack of any real scenography on the stage of *The Encounter* allowed for an examination of ideological assumptions that usually characterise imaginative spaces created by the sets. Moreover, onstage the body of the performer became subject to multiple inscriptions that were both cultural (American, British, Mayoruna, Portuguese, Hungarian, to name a few) as well as social (performer, author, father, mother, spouse, etc.). The body of the single actor perceived as such a multivalent symbol, in addition to being a physical perception, creates an unstable signifier that disallows any totalizing cultural or social reading. The clash between the symbolic space of the stage and the (inter)culturally inscribed body creates "hybrid counter-energies" that can produce a radical discontinuity in the perception of the audience and "the perpetual revolution of form."[95]

[95] (Lo & Gilbert, p.19)

Hybrid models for considering the world.

In an interview regarding his concept of the third space, Homi Bhabha posits that all forms of culture can be considered as related to each other in one way or another as, according to Bhabha, culture always entails a signifying or symbolic activity:

> The articulation of culture is possible not because of the familiarity or similarity of *contents*, but because all cultures are symbol-forming and subject-constituting interpellative practices. [96]

This argument is mirrored and elaborated within *The Encounter* when Ian McGilchrist, one of McBurney's invisible interlocutors who is a psychologist and philosopher, observes:

> IAN McGILCHRIST. *Everything in the world is only known in comparison to everything else we know. There isn't a way of getting out of this. The myth that we're up against nowadays is that there is some abstract, objective reality that is beyond our myth making, beyond our language, beyond metaphor, which is absolute rather than relative. But there is no such thing.*[97]

The relativity of culture and perceived reality is something that threads throughout McBurney's effort in *The Encounter,* where he challenges the belief that "our" Western reality is the only logically grounded and culturally superior reality, contrarily to, in this instance, the world-view of the Mayoruna. By making us aware of the inherent connection of all facets of our lives – metaphor, myth making, language – with the creation of reality, McBurney legitimizes theatre, and art in general, as co-creators of reality rather than just performers of it. At the same time, *The Encounter* is

[96] Jonathan Rutherford, 1990. The Third Space. Interview with Homi Bhabha. In Identity: Community, Culture, Difference. London: Lawrence and Wishart, 207-221, p.210.
[97] (McBurney, 2016, p. 36).

built upon a strong collaboratory foundation giving voice, albeit a potentially mediated voice, to a community that has been subjected to exoticization and cultural undermining from Western culture due to its voluntary isolation. Complicite journeyed and lived with the descendants of the Mayoruna tribe in an effort to incorporate their wants, views and voices into the performance.

Cross-cultural artistic collaborations like *The Encounter* are inevitably fraught with problematics regarding cultural representation. Complicite's effort in *The Encounter* does represent a form of settler theatre, their British passports make this characterisation inevitable, however, through their self-reflexive practice, thought-provoking aesthetic, and ambiguous representational methods an ambivalent and productive core is revealed. Through the performance, the worldview of the Mayoruna is presented as valid, without however relying on the use of the trope of the noble savage, the archetype of the wise old man, or the cliché of the untamed people who represent the spirit of nature. Within their community, there is still corruption, mistakes, egos, and jealousy. This complexified representation of the Mayoruna community with their perception of the world as valid – as opposed to being mere musings of unscientific people - subverts the constructed narrative of the West's higher status from within. *The Encounter* creates a hybrid model for the consideration of the world that is informed both by Western tradition as well as by the worldview of the Mayoruna tribe, and in accordance with Gilbert and Lo's model for cross-cultural theatre, the cultural "product" of the collaboration is found in-between them, representing the negotiatory nature of hybridity, including both accordance and negation.

Through his performance, we experience if only temporarily, a way of thinking about and seeing the world that is beyond, beneath and in-between the normative worldview of the West. Experiencing the in-betweenness that results both by the narrative content (the quest, the loss of normative reality, the immersion in the jungle – an in-between space – and the subversion of all that McIntyre regarded as true) as well as the form of the performance – with its contradictory stimuli, sensorial trickery and immersion through sound and communitas – we experience a subversion of the most basic concepts that build up the occidental worldview. We are subjected to an experience that allows us to question and wonder about our reality, what is true and why we tend to regard it as true. By being exposed to an alternative ideology, as well as by being exposed to experiences that consistently subvert our own (normative) worldview, the audience begins to reconsider or at least question what they have been raised to believe is the only way to live.

Debates about cultural hybridity tend to go hand in hand with discussions of authenticity, and McBurney aims to draw attention to these issues. He makes his positionality clear, by injecting his personal life (both in affect and physical space) and by creating a multi-layered narrative that bears all the different voices that went into the making of this performance for us to perceive and consider. McBurney is not telling someone else's story as his own, and actively avoids sticking to *an* original. Gilbert and Lo posit that if intercultural theatre is to address the potential injustices involved in the cultural appropriations of the West, then its advocates must "conceive of a theatre that somehow engages with its own established "looking" relations." To address this issue, McBurney uses meta-theatrical devices such as direct audience address, self-conscious role-playing, self-reflexivity and laying all interventionary frameworks bare for the

public's consideration. [98] These devices are used to problematize the potential imperialistic dynamics of cross-cultural spectatorship. McBurney's self-reflexive theatre hybridizes cultural fragments in a way that does not present a seamless whole. Rather the cultural tensions and differences are portrayed as equals, not naturalized but allowed to co-exist, actively challenging and informing each other.

The Encounter is a story already thrice removed from the "original" story with all the layers of mediation evident. In this way, McBurney joins the ranks of storytellers that have for centuries contributed in the cross-pollination of cultures, offering alternative worldviews, ways of being and thinking and challenging all forms of cultural supremacy. A culturally hybrid theatre can act as a space where cultural boundaries and identities can be bridged and trespassed, reinterpreted and redefined into a future where difference is considered "neither One nor the Other" challenging the existence of any singular or autonomous sign of difference.[99]

The Encounter does not seek to represent tribal life as the better alternative to any other way of life, but to make us aware of the infinite complexity of thought, and compel us to question ourselves, our worldview as the only one, the dominant one, the rightful one. Our liminal experience, the challenging of our own consciousness, our fundamental ideology, of linear time, allows for the emersion and consideration of different world perceptions as equally legitimate as our own.

The Encounter attempts a reading of the empowering state of hybridity by actively challenging and undermining constructed categories that assume the existence of *a* nation, *a* language, *a* culture more legitimate or prior to others. Through this

[98] (Lo & Gilbert, p.19).
[99] (Lo & Gilbert, p.20)

process, Complicite have tried-out and invented ways of productively interweaving cultures, as well as turning the individuals in the audience into a community where different identities are not subsumed under it but participate equally – even if it will not persist outside the theatre.[100] By pushing the limits of our everyday consciousness, culturally hybrid performance can produce emancipatory spaces, which can potentially impact regulative social relations.

> LOREN: Dear Barnacle,
>
> I'm here, in Arlington, Virginia, writing to you. I sailed down with the flood, to return to my territory. But I shall return one day to your beginning. Maybe it will only be in my memory, but that will do. Because even there I will learn certain things about you, and you shall learn things about me. And there will be a consequence to our association. Maybe more people will benefit from it. Or maybe just you and I, sitting near a fire, sharing food, until our thoughts find a way to connect. [101]

McBurney extended the performative space and its liminality into the individual consciousnesses of the audience, using our mental capacity to create an immersive and challenging aesthetic experience. Through his technologically enriched storytelling, the performer altered the way we encounter the stage into a device for active viewing and considering. The community that came into being at the time of the performance required neither the abolishment of differences nor the feeling of totalizing oneness but endured as a 'third space' of in-betweenness. The liminal space into which the performance transports its audience can uncover the experience of an interstitial future

[100] (Fischer Lichte, New Theatre Quarterly).
[101] (McBurney, 2016, p.62).

where the permanence of transition constitutes a goal: "what is here perceived as aesthetic experience will be experienced as everyday life in the future."[102]This begs the question that if such a community can constitute itself within an aesthetic practice, why can't it be possible outside of the theatre? If however, for the time being, this kind of interaction is only attainable through aesthetic practices, then it is worth recognising that the theatre can become a laboratory with both aesthetic and socio-political implications. [103]

[102] (Fischer Lichte, New Theatre Quarterly).
[103] (Fischer Lichte, New Theatre Quarterly).

CONCLUSION

This research project has sought to illustrate and argue for the productive, transformative, and destabilizing power of liminality in artistic practice. It has shown that when individuals, concepts, and practices are allowed to persist in being uncertain, they create space for alternative voices to emerge and multiplicities of opinions to be heard. Conversely, it goes to show how constant systemization and stratification excludes whole groups or identities in the name of the norm.

Throughout this research project I have aimed to explore how performance practices are able to offer spaces for the reconsideration of life, consciousness, ethics, culture, and many other structural concepts. Performance itself, as medium and form, has a unique potential to produce liminality. Because of its impermanent and co-creating nature performances compel their participants to inhabit the double register of determining and determined factor. Additionally, performance requires that the audience develops a double awareness of the actor as both a physical and symbolic figure. These conditions foster negotiatory communities with political potential and reveal meanings in aesthetic and social circumstances as emergent rather than predetermined and merely expressed. Hence, through performative practices culture is also revealed to be emergent, co-determined, and possibly produced or transformed by art, and its participants.

Moreover, I have deeply explored two occurrences of productive in-betweenness and how these can be expressed and utilised in performance to nurture our awareness of the multiple and the complex. Storytelling and uncanniness paired up to explore alternative models of ethics and the significant passage from childhood into adult life. Furthermore, cultural hybridity was employed performatively in order to destabilise structural concepts of Western societies and with them the concept of occidental supremacy. While the scope of this research project only allowed for elaboration on two liminal aesthetic experiences, the liminal perspective can be effectively utilised to provoke thought and offer alternative ways of experiencing the world; from the subversion of gender binaries, to how we experience our lived environment, to uncovering alternative political paradigms, the possibilities are endless. The inherent multivalence of the stage and its use as a non-place/liminal place cultivates a sense of in-betweenness which in turn creates the conditions for subversive, alternative and thought free from rigid societal constraints.

It is inevitable that these effects might only be temporary, as the marginalization that is produced by crystallized social alignments does not just crumble in the face of multivalence. Nevertheless, as politically engaged individuals, artists, producers, audience members and thinkers, it is imperative that we keep feeling for gaps in-between normative binaries, and seek out the multifaceted interactions in performance, in art, and in everyday life that create productive encounters with difference. Uncovering what lies in-between, over and under binaries and norms, the "supplemental excess" as Peggy Phelan describes it, realizing its existence and affording it its own (liminal) space that does not require it to firmly categorize itself, can produce

individual psychic resistance and collective political change.[104] Performance is thus revealed as a place for experimentation with the production of cultural fragments and their significations, on bodies that are willing to express and evoke different meanings and audiences that are open to reading them. [105]

Going against the constructed binary that excludes critical thinking from creativity and vice versa, critique and creativity must join forces in order to design new forms of interaction and communication with otherness that are more in tune with the complexity with which society articulates itself. Braidotti echoes this call when she insists that we "need systems of thought, as well as cultural and aesthetic paradigms that can help us think about change, transformation, living transitions in an affirmative manner."[106] Being inspired by the ambivalence of liminal practices can allow us to encounter the world in all its multiplicity and complexity without resorting to essentializing the Other so we can comfortably place her in the margins of our subjective normality.

Implicit in liminal artistic practice is the political significance of the aesthetic practice of creativity that allows us to step out of constructed habitual categories and consider ourselves and others outside of categorical difference, as multivalent identities. It seems that solely theoretical and political systems are too ingrained in essentialist thinking to offer ways to step out of traditionally held positions. Nevertheless, art practices may be, at least for the time being, more effective in offering

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[104] (Phelan)
[105]Jill Dolan, "Geographies of Learning: Theatre Studies, Performance, and the 'Performative,' " Theatre Journal 45 (1993): 426, 432. Quoted in Carrie Sandhal, *Queering the Crip or criping the queer?,* GQL, 2002, 9:1-2, 25-56
[106] (Braidotti).

the possibility to reflect on the potential, the alternative and the subversive against socially coded thought and behavior.

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