THEORY THEATRE: REFLECTIONS ON AN EXPERIMENT IN BORDER PEDAGOGIES

WILSON BAPTIST, KAREN E.
Department of Landscape Architecture, University of Manitoba, Room 305 C J.A. Russell Building, karen.wilsonbaptist@umanitoba.ca

1 ABSTRACT

“With cities, it is as with dreams: everything imaginable can be dreamed…” (Calvino, 1972, p.44)

Bryant Alexander describes border pedagogy as a transformative practice that aspires to “engage students in the places and ideological spaces of their own experiences as they try to make sense of culture and curriculum” (p.427). Grounded in theories of performance (Thrift & Dewsbury, 2000), border pedagogies situate knowledge acquisition within an embodied, temporal, dialogical, and spatial experience for the learner. As a critical discourse, border pedagogies challenge hegemonic divisions within design schools, “refiguring the boundaries” (Giroux, 1991b, p.ix) between educator and student, thinking and making, and theory and spatiality. As an experiment in border pedagogy, theory theatre provides students with an opportunity to remap the critical dimensions of theory through a performance-based pedagogy. Working in groups of four, students construct a conversation between a theorist and a designer. The dialogue is theatrically staged within a series of imagined environments each discursively constructed through interpretations of theory. Theory theatre encourages students to act out the social, cultural and political codes embedded in theory, not only critically, but also spatially. Students reconfigure traditional terrains of textuality (Scholes, 1985) through alternative modes of representation, incorporating “play” as a “serious object of politics and analysis” (Giroux, 1991a, p.72). Reflections on the experience of theory theatre discuss the potential of theory as a performative medium which may open a space for “thinking otherwise” (Thrift & Dewsbury, 2000, p.428).

1.1 Keywords

Design education, border pedagogy, performance, critical theory
BACKGROUND TO THE RESEARCH

McHarg: “Dystopie, when I visited it, was of little resemblance to the utopias envisioned by the institutions from which it was born. The city was beautiful, a single organism, from the airplane, but the at street level the people had taken advantage of the preserved natural spaces. The resident’s extravagant lifestyle had come at the price of nature.” (Loewen, Abdulrehsman, Eidick, Yang, Mojica, 2012, p.19)

Bryant Alexander (2005) describes border pedagogy as a transformative practice that aspires to “engage students in the places and ideological spaces of their own experiences as they try to make sense of culture and curriculum” (p.427). Grounded in theories of performance (Thrift and Dewbury, 2000), border pedagogies orient knowledge acquisition within an embodied, temporal, dialogical, and spatial experience for the learner. As a critical discourse, border pedagogies challenge hegemonic divisions within design schools, “refiguring the boundaries” (Giroux, 1991b) between educator and student, thinking and making, and theory and spatiality.

This paper provides a critical reflection on the pedagogical significance of an educational experiment known as theory theatre. In this regard, I position myself as a critically reflective teacher (Brookfield, 1995) seeking to problematize traditional means of delivering and receiving knowledge. Within this guise I shall endeavor to “detterritorialize the map of dominant cultural understanding. ... [and reject the traditional learning model] as the exclusive referent for judging what constitutes historical, cultural, and political truth” (Giroux, 1991a, p.70). In this task I am equally positioned as what Henry Giroux describes as a “critically informed postmodern educator” (p.69). Here, my territory is the realm of culture, of which environmental design, landscape architecture, and the academy itself, are all generators, conveyers, producers, imitators, and consumers of cultural forms and values. Situated in the classroom, the critically positioned educator produces opportunities within the learning modules for students to experience “individual empowerment and social transformation” (Weber, 1988 in Dutton, 1991b, p.67).

The design school is a microcosm, or fractal of a larger world. Schools are not, as some students may declare, a place apart from the real world. Situated as design educators, our milieu is a veritable ratatouille of conflicted power relations, identity politics, diverse values, and the stresses and strains of any major institution where large numbers of humans congregate. However, as a “training” ground for professional practice, where students spend large amounts of time in a design studio, overseen by single or multiple tutors, students may become sequestered from the every-day world and vulnerable to the internal power hegemonies that remain endemic in design institutions (See Nicol and Pilling, 2000). Equally, the need to supplement studio education with courses of shorter duration such as history, theory, and the technological based courses such as digital methods, site planning, and grading can fragment student experience with competing workloads and deadlines, and even divergent ideological stances. In this scenario, students may rebel against the workload, or beg for an extension, but they are seldom critically sensitized to question the ways in which knowledge in the academy is delivered, replicated, evaluated. Many design educators remain equally unaware of the presence and implications of this hidden curriculum.

The hidden curriculum is produced in the alchemical merger between knowledge production and social practices in schools of design. As Thomas Dutton (1991a) notes: “...injustices and inequities of society are not simply nested in the mind but are embodied in forms of lived experience and social relations that penetrate to the innermost recesses of human subjectivity...” (p.167). For Dutton, awareness calls for action on four fronts—the problematizing of the conflicted relationship between society and power inequalities, the development of critical awareness in teachers and in students, the empowerment of individuals who are able to derive meaning from the world, and the role of theorizing design education as a form of cultural politics (p.166).

This experiment in critical pedagogy is housed in an undergraduate landscape + urbanism theory course. Theory and theorizing provide a means of illuminating the underpinnings of the discursive universe, challenging us to reconsider the broader social, cultural, economic, political, spiritual and environmental implications of our actions, and of those who have preceded us. Examined theoretically, artifacts, social practices, cultural mores, ideas, and the production of space are revealed as charged with human morals, values, and machinations; and thus design as an extension of human culture, is no longer
viewed as a neutral construct, nor as monolithic or unchanging, but as a site of multiple and heterogeneous borders” (Giroux, 1991a, p.75).

In seeking a theoretical platform upon which to engage in a series of critical reflections on the pedagogical implications of theory theatre, I was drawn to the potential of performative theory, for this mode of inquiry is implicitly directed towards examining “the social and cultural dynamic that extends and exposes the import of repetitive human activity” (Alexander, 2005, p.414) and is intended to reveal “social action as moments of broader power relations that can be illuminated, interrogated, and intervened, if not transformed” (p.414). The three primary concerns of performance theory privilege the incorporation of creative and aesthetic means of activating human expression “across borders of text, context, and embodied practice” (p.414), knowledge as “enfleshed” – situated, activated and demonstrated through the body (McLaran, 1993 in Alexander, 2005, p.425), and ethnographic approaches to reading, translating, and performing cultural practices (p.415). This final point makes reference to the liberation of the history and the theory of philosophy, ideologies and designed environments from traditional forms of knowledge reproduction in theory courses, from the report, the paper, the text gleaned from a master narrative, to a performed temporal and spatial realm of lived experience.

Performance is not foreign to theoretical discourse within schools of design. Our curriculum is peppered with references to the conceptual history of performance--the futurists, Dadaism, surrealism, (see McCall, 2000), manifestos and their idiosyncratic actors, the role of the flaneur in the activation of the city, but the key players in these performances are invariably white and male (see Wilson, 1992) and do not reflect the diversity in our contemporary classrooms. Walking as both a performative and as an epistemological activity has been ever adjacent to design discourse through the work of Stalker and Francesco Careri (2002) and Rebecca Solnit (2000; 2005) who have become essential readings for many students of landscape architecture. Certainly Anna and Lawrence Halprin’s RSVP Cycles (1969) are directly relevant to discussions here.

3 DEFINITIONS

Jencks: “Within the creation of what we understand to be the universe (The Big Bang) there was a city created within the cracks of the four forces – time, space, matter, and energy.” (Choi, Greene, Kirkland, Mejia, 2012, p.8)

Clarification of a few terms will assist the reader with this journey into the theoretical implications of performative design pedagogy. This curricular approach is situated as a “border pedagogy” (Aronowitz and Giroux, 1991, p.128). Border pedagogies are, by nature, transformative critical practices, that aim to engage students in places and ideological spaces of own making and experiences as a means of making sense of culture, curriculum, and in our instance, the production of space (Giroux, 1991a). Border pedagogies call for the renegotiation of traditional borders, boundaries, and edges that demark the divisions between thinking and making, between teacher and student, between student and text, and between schooling and “the real world”. As a postmodern pedagogical practice, border pedagogies not only acknowledge, but incorporate the critical reading of “official texts”, the legitimation of video, photography, performance, forms of popular culture, and the everyday, not only serve as alternative sources of knowledge but also as alternative modes of representation (p.72-73). “Border pedagogy must provide the conditions for students to engage in cultural remapping as a form of resistance” (p.73). As a border pedagogue, the educator must critically reflect on the implication of this approach to design education, “…student experiences have to be analyzed as part of a broader politics of voice and difference” (p.75). Equally, the educator is charged with developing a means of subverting entrenched “hierarchies of oppression” and traditional trajectories of power, and liberating discourse from entrenchment in taken-for-truth master narratives while acknowledging the role of the body as a “site of knowing and feeling, and the site from which transformation is instantiated and initiated” (Alexander, 2005, p.425). Thus the critical educator must “strategize purposeful learning with an awareness of the social, cultural, and political contexts in which learning and living take place” (p.426).

Performance has roots in non-representational theories (Thrift and Dewsbury, 2000) and was initially intended as a discourse that transgressed repressive social practices surrounding gender and sexuality (Butler 1993, in Thrift and Dewsbury, 2000, p.412). While Nigel Thrift and John-David Dewsbury have identified three distinct apprehensions of performance following Judith Butler’s work, they note the
following common attributes or aims of performance—a departure from traditional forms of representation, a focus on the epistemological potential of embodied practice, the revelation of new potentialities within human/non-human relationships, and the desire to enliven spaces [of learning] (p.411). Performance in this application is an experimental pedagogical construct, a means of “seek[ing] understanding of other cultures and lived experience [through a] body-centered method of knowing” (Alexander, 2005, p.411). Performance as a means of representing theoretical notions and the production of space become what Hayden Lorimer (2005) describes as “more-than-representational”. Text is researched, discussed, translated, performed, and reflected upon within a collective realm. Meaning cannot be transcribed by traditional means of dissemination, rather a “countermemory” (Giroux, 1991a, p.75) is produced, transgressing and reconstructing new knowledge in vanguard configurations. As a “more-than-representational” pedagogical construct, performance potentializes “an escape from the established academic habit of striving to uncover meanings and values that apparently await our discovery, interpretation, judgement and ultimate representation” (Lorimer, 2005, p.84).

4 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

J.B. Jackson: “I am reminded that every city can be described metaphorically, there is more to a city than what visually appears.”
Laurie Olin: “I agree it is almost as if every city has its own language, I try to listen and translate the language into sketches.”
J.B. Jackson: “Yes, the language, the locality, its uniqueness – the vernacular of the city.” (Shin, Brubacher, Idowu, and Ryback, 2012, p.13).

Theorized reflections on the experience of theory theatre provide an opportunity to discuss the potential of theory as a performative medium which may open a space for “thinking otherwise” (Thrift and Dewsbury, 2000, p.428) about pedagogical practices in design. Although we may know that design is never neutral, formal methods of developing form, the cold-instrumentalism of digital representation, and the insularity of schools of design may lead students to never question the implications of design in the lived-world, nor their own biases. Like all human constructs, design is shaped by human partialities, and although as landscape architects, we may explicitly insist that design emerges from a sensitivity to context, that context is as much as social realm as an environmental realm, and the interventions we propose for any location are filtered through our proclivities and subjectivities. As Dutton (1991b) observes “design…is an intentional practice that portrays the world in quite specific ways” (p.68).

As design educators, our biases and sensitivities leak into our curricular formations, thus we must find deliberate means of interrogating our practice. We must learn to read the cultural codes and cues that we embed in our pedagogy; we must question how and why these codes are produced and represented (Giroux, 1991a). How does our ideological stance effect the development of our students as independent, activated, aware producers of knowledge and of space? Giroux charges critical educators with the task of avoiding the replication of taken-for-granted ways of delivering knowledge and hidebound disciplinary boundaries. “Students must engage knowledge as border-crossers, as persons moving in and out of borders constructed around coordinates of differences and power” (p.72).

Determining the success of a pedagogical construct is seldom taken on as an exercise in critical theoretical reflection. On a day-to-day basis, our success as design educators is measured by the lack of absenteeism in our classroom, by the bell curve measuring the students’ accomplishments, by smiling emoticons in the comment section of the course evaluations. But student success cannot be represented by measures alone, these record mere frozen moments and cannot account for the fluidity of thought, the generativity of ideas, and the emancipatory potentials of a pedagogical episode that seeks to break with “established academic habits” (Lorimer, 2005, p.84).

Theory theatre is a means of deliberately disrupting pedagogical practices and expectations. This approach to learning and reflecting on theoretical principles and their application to spatial constructs is unconventional and its success immeasurable. Space is brought into becoming dialogically, discursively, and performatively. Reflections regarding the significance of the pedagogy are, in some respect, more-than-representational (Lorimer, 2005), as the social, affective, embodied and performative aspects of choreographic theorizing are complex and generative. For students, the moments of revelations may occur prior, during, or even months or years following performative act. Theory theatre constructs space
as embodied—thought and actions interface with emplaced identities (in-formation). As a performance-based pedagogy, theory theatre is intended to be “a social force, a strategic embodied methodology, and a moral discourse” and a “critical pedagogical practice designed to democratize the classroom” (Alexander, 2005, p.424). How then can we begin to understand the pedagogical significance of such an event? For Alexander it is the act of theorizing that provides the means for reflecting upon teaching practice and examining the value of performance as an insurgent method of engaging, critiquing, and commenting on culture (p.424).

5 METHODS

Virilio: “Like a long suppressed memory that cannot be erased, war shaped this city. Military tanks of old times were the feet that used to roam its former asphalt roads. Boulevards were widened to accommodate these tanks – to deliver them as fast as possible to the unruly rioters. Now motorists – with their ghostly absence – have gifted these grids with their presence”. (Cook, Flores, Li, and Moug, 2012, p.12).

As an experiment in border pedagogy, theory theatre provides students with an opportunity to remap the critical dimensions of theory through a performance-based pedagogy. Working in groups of four, students construct a conversation between a theorist and a designer. The project is assigned at the commencement of the term, and time is provided in the classroom for discussion, both within the individual groups, and with course instructors. Students theatrically stage the dialogue within a series of imagined environments, each discursively constructed through interpretations of theory. Theory theatre encourages students to act out the social, cultural, and political codes embedded in theory, not only critically, but also spatially. Students reconfigure traditional terrains of “textuality” (Scholes, 1985) through alternative modes of representation, incorporating “play” as a “serious object of politics and analysis” (Giroux, 1991a, p.72).

The origins of theory theatre in this guise are somewhat lost within a constellation of intertwined recollections regarding its genesis. I believe the stirrings of the idea began in a conversation about how to integrate a session on utopian cities into an undergraduate theory course. The dialogue between myself, and the teaching assistant for the course, Desirée Bunn, surrounded our amore for Italo Calvino’s (1972) Invisible Cities. We began to imagine the students constructing a dialogue around the production of space, in the same manner that Marco Polo and Kublai Khan dialogically reconstruct a series of cities:

Kublai: “I do not know when you have had time to visit all the countries you describe to me. If seems to me you have never moved from this garden.”

Polo: “Everything I see and do assumes meaning in a mental space where the same calm reigns as here, the same penumbra, the same silence streaked by the rustling of leaves. At the moment when I concentrate and reflect, I find myself here again, always in this garden, at this hour of the evening, in your august presence, although I continue, without a moment’s pause, moving up a river green with crocodiles or counting the barrels of salted fish being lowered into the hold.” (Calvino, 1974, p.103)

Concurrent to this conversation with Desirée, were discussions with fellow educators in our history/theory streams surrounding how to and when to introduce the students to particular philosophers, philosophies, and ideologies. As an educator and researcher, I am very interested in how theory can inform the act of design, but more over, I am intrigued by how theory allows us to dissect and to understand the world on a deeper level. This, I believe, is essential knowledge for students of design. Following Jonathan Culler (1997), my approach to theory is interdisciplinary, founded on the belief that theory is a tool for analysis, for the uncovering and dissemination of meaning and that theory is a tool of speculation. Additionally, theory forces us to move beyond common sense thinking and taken-for-granted ways of knowing—or questioning things we believe to be “natural” or given. Finally theory is reflexive, reflective, and revelatory, a means of thinking deeply about the way that we think about things in the world (p.15).

The final piece in the genesis of the project lays in the conundrum of how to activate students’ understanding of the interrelationship between philosophical constructs and spatial expressions, and to
help them discover how this has implications for the built-environment. We wanted to invite the students to envision the political, economic, environmental, and aesthetic implications of ideological constructs of lived-space. As I began to assemble the list of possible “players” for the students to explore, I became aware that the lists I made were subject to my own ethnic, gendered, and experiential biases—biases that did not necessarily reflect the diversity within the classroom. And so although I do provide the students with a series of potential candidates, many of whom have been prefaced through readings and lecture content, the students are free to suggest alternatives.

The students construct a conversation between two individuals and a series of cities. One individual is a theorist or philosopher and the other a designer. The students contrive a discursive space where the conversation takes place. Three or four cities emerge from the convergence of the setting and the discussions between the characters. Students are asked to consider how their characters’ ideas inform the envisioning of the cities and how their ideas may influence and interplay with each other. Spatial form is to be thought of as a manifestation of these ideas and thus can be abstract, symbolic or iconic in form and character. Students consider the materiality of the city, its scale, its street patterns, the qualities of public space, what sort of environmental conditions shape the city and how all of this effects the human experience of the space.

Students form groups of four or five; the project lends itself to two primary actors, allowing those uncomfortable with performing to take on other roles such as documenting the performance and producing a “playbook” of the script. What I believe to be the most dynamic actions of the project take place beyond the instructor’s purview—that is the deciphering, deconstruction, and remapping of the cultural codes embedded within the discourse on their subjects. Group dialogue is employed as a means of retelling, summarizing, expanding and reimagining histories. The performances are short, only 15 minutes in duration, and take place in a lecture space with minimal props. The settings are quite remarkable given the simplicity of the performance space—an office, a transit bus, an airplane, trains, coffee shop, a library, a taxi-cab, a bedroom. Students are invited to wear costumes and most do, as it aids in becoming the character. Students errily exchange their own ethnicities, genders, and sexual identities for an interpreted version of the subject of their inquiry. Youtube and TED videos, the Wikipedia, and scholarly sources of knowledge, are mined to discover not only the philosophical underpinnings of the character, but also their physical attributes, mannerisms, and ways of speaking as a means to animate the character. Students are not required to memorize their scripts, although they use clever means to conceal them in props that the characters use, such as a steering wheel, sketchbook, books or newspapers; alternatively sheaves of papers accompanying the ambulation across the “stage”—a minor detail soon forgotten as the audience becomes drawn into the thick descriptions that animate each invisible city.

The cities appear as dreams, as places recalled or visited, as mystical voyages, as half-forgotten recollections, or the ports of call on a drunken evening. It is clear that the pedagogical richness of each moment of the performance, is beyond its physical and discursive presence in place and in time; a “passive representation of the world replaced by notions of the direct unfolding of action in context” (Thrift and Dewsbury, 2000, p.415). The cities exist as umwelts, overlapping worlds constructed by a convergence of ideologies, spatial constructs, and fluid identities. “The terrain of learning becomes inextricably linked to the shifting parameters of place, identity, history, and power” (Giroux, 1991, p.72). The students transcend the original texts, the margins of their own identities and experiences; and in the performative act, “students cross over into borders of meaning, maps of knowledge, social relations, and values that are increasingly being negotiated and rewritten as the codes and regulations that organize them become destabilized and reshaped” (p.72). Nor is the audience complacent, for we too are drawn into the performative action as the traditional boundaries between who “performs” in places of learning, between who produces knowledge within the educational milieu and who receives it, dissolves. Performance …[is] “concerned with lessening gaps between the known and the unknown, illuminating and exploring the lived practices of others, and bridging geographical and social distances through vivid description, narration, and embodiment—helping readers/audiences to see possibilities through the visualization of experience” (Alexander, 2005, p.419).
6 IMPLICATIONS

[Driving again.]
Plato: “So let me get this straight, you want a city that is decentralized, has no history, no identity, and no discernible structure.”
Koolhaas: “Yes.”
Plato: [Drives for a bit, thinking.] “You know, there is one city, but I don’t know if you are going to like it.”
Koolhaas: “Why not?”
Plato: “Nobody who I take there ever wants to stay.”
Koolhaas: “Why not?”
Plato: “Oh, you’d be surprised … everyone is looking for a better place.”
Koolhaas: “Well, I doubt most people are interest in what I am after. Let’s see it.”

It is a truism to say that theory strongly influences design thinking. This logically infers that theory is integral to design practice. As educators we believe this to be so. Yet one of the many schisms in schools of design is the division between “thinking” and “making”. This notion influences our pedagogical methods and the tools we provide our students with so that they may become competent designers. But critical educators also envision our students as critical designers, who would challenge prevailing norms and radicalize taken-for-granted practices. The study of theory reveals the world as a deeper realm; students learn that culture is not something passively consumed, it is constructed, produced, and if not challenged, may extenuate systems that prolong, intensify, and replicate oppressive practices. This is no less true for design, than for any other discipline (Dutton, 1991b).

Theory theatre draws students out of their own experiences and invites them to construct a space of otherness where, for a short time, they dwell as other. This action creates a counter narrative that supplements and potentially contradicts pre-existing pedagogical forms and spaces. As a border pedagogy, performance, “both confirms and critically engages the knowledge and experience through which students author their own voices and construct social identities” (Giroux, 1991a, p.75).

While earlier iterations of performance neglected the realm of spatiality (Thrift and Dewsbury, 2000, p.414) more recent apprehensions of performance “takes as both its subject matter and method the experiencing body situated in time, place, and history” (Conquergood, 1988 in Alexander, 2005, p.420). Theory theatre facilitates the construction of multiple emplaced “realities”--some situated within the here and now, others may exist in the past, in dreams and visions, in recollections of a blurry night out on the town. Invisible cities require a space in which to dwell—although imaginary they are performed within an intersubjective exchange between players, audience, and milieu. Theory theatre encourages communication, cooperation, and the mutual construction of a “more-than-representational” realm (Lorimer, 2005). Performance pedagogy provides an arena for a collective negotiation of identity that helps students to move beyond an individual politicized agenda and where space becomes “an active operator”. In these transformative moments, “dead geographies … come alive as they are performed” (Thrift and Dewsbury, 2000, p.417).

Thrift and Dewsbury (2000) highlight competing strategies embedded in performance relevant to our discussion here. The “overlay of strategies” is relevant to theory theatre where all aspects leading to performance--research, discussion, rehearsal, performance, production, reflection--become as important as the act of performing itself (p.420). A “trickster”, shape-shifting pedagogy, performance transgresses disciplinary boundaries and repudiates knowledge replication, leading instead to learning episodes ripe with a “surplus of meaning” (p.420). This counter narrative supplements and potentially contradicts pre-existing discursive spaces. Theory theatre is equally an expansive pedagogy, history, philosophy, critical thinking, graphic capacities are repurposed and unhitched from taken-for-granted ways of expressing knowledge in educational settings. This “expands our knowledge of how we know what we know about the world, most especially by stressing the arts of what people do … in real time through the expressive qualities of the body …” (p.420). Additionally, the engagement of “kinaesthetic vocabularies and imaginations” (Roach, 1996, in Thrift and Dewsbury, 2000, p.420) ensures that knowledge creation through performance is sensorial, sensual, and embodied. Space is revealed as pregnant with cultural meaning and the potential oppressive nature of idealized discourses of spatial formation is revealed. And
finally time is experienced as fluid, historical ideas and “facts” are repurposed and re-imagined in the present time; these moments of “enchantment … resist the process of historicization” (Thrift and Dewsbury, 2000, p.420).

7 LIMITATIONS

Derrida: “Back to the story, we then got on the train and while on it we experienced a beautiful city that had in it a lot of ambiguity, disruption, disjunction, disturbance and oppositions.”

Gustafson: “No I remember it differently.”

Derrida: “You must have been in a different sensory territory then. Anyway, buildings had root structures spontaneously shooting out into the sky and others had irregular additive transformations to them. It was difficult to tell what the buildings were used for.”

Gustafson: “How is that beautiful?”

Derrida: “Who are you to question my standards of beauty? Why must what you consider beautiful be beautiful to all? Again I say signs are polysemic.”

(Mubanga, Goodman, Hill, and Belton, 2012, p.8-9).

The question remains, does theory theatre “provide new theoretical tools to rethink both broad and specific contexts in which authority is defined” (Aronowitz and Giroux, 1991)? In an age where students seem more and more resistant to thinking independently and schooling is becoming increasingly outcome based, the ambiguity of production, the depth of dialogue, and the choreography of potential meanings performed through theory theatre does indeed supplant the authority of the text, the canons of knowledge, and the traditional authority of the teacher within the classroom. The need for “totalizing theories” based on a desire for “certainty and absolutes” (Giroux, 1991, p.70) is abandoned, and history, theory and forms of popular culture become constituents of a rich alchemy of epistemology and experience.

But as a critical pedagogy, theory theatre is equally indebted to the project of democracy and to the development of an “architecture of resistance” where “social roles, power relationships and institutional life” are critically examined and questioned (Schuman 1991, p.15). This may occur only within the moment of performance, but should be played out in all operative fields within the academy and beyond. Monitoring this as a desired outcome of theory theatre is beyond my possible purview. I did observe, however, a marked elevation in the confidence of the students and within the intellectual discourse within the classroom. In addition to the performance, we watched films on environmental issues, on the politics of public and private space, on activism and the deleterious effects of rampant urbanization on a global scale. We held debates, questioned prevailing views, discussed manifestos, and critically examined the identity of our discipline. The students were critically engaged, politically activated, and theoretically articulate. But I cannot say if this activism moved beyond our time and place together.

Issues of privilege in the classroom are fertile topics for theorization and critical examination, but as educators we can never escape our position of power. Students performed the work because it was a requirement within the curriculum. To be sure, they were proud of their work, they learned a lot, and they had a great deal of fun performing. The performances were thoughtful and deeply considered, the playbooks provided a more reflective opportunity to discover the complexity of the ideas embedded within the performed text. It was clear that the students understood that design can liberate, constrict, empower, and destroy, that ideas about space can have an explicit effect on the qualities of social life and the environmental health of the planet. But there is always the knowledge that the work is being adjudicated and that a mark will be assigned.

For me, the assessment of performative pedagogy failed to transcend traditional means of assessment. The performances were successful, completed within the time required, thoughtful, engaging, and entertaining. Unlike the previous year, where it was difficult to discern the philosophical notions embedded in the text, theory theatre 2012 was a rousing success. The ideas came across clearly, and the moral implications of the script were evident. All the performances were of high caliber, so the variability in grading came from the craft, care and graphic character of the playbooks. But I confess this is a woefully bereft means of critically adjudicating work of this intensity. Fortunately for future iterations of this project and to the benefit of others who might wish to take on this form of border pedagogy, Alexander (2005) provides criteria for evaluation, more appropriate to performative work in the educational setting.
Although Alexander’s work is situated with performative ethnographies, these criteria are equally applicable to performative pedagogies in other milieu, and could assist in providing students with substantive critique to deepen their understanding of the transformative capacity of critical pedagogy. The evaluative categories include content, reflexivity, the expression of a substantive “reality”, aesthetic merit and impact. Briefly stated content refers to the substantiveness of the work and notions of intention—is it clear what theoretical notions that the performance/performers seek to portray? Are the moral/theoretical arguments embedded in the text discernable? Does the performance seek to incite a specific response from the audience? The notion of reflexivity surrounds the quality of information remapped within the performative text. Additionally, we query here if the characters channeled are represented in ways appropriate to their place, time and ideologies. Equally we question how deeply the “actor” has embedded themselves within the character—does their own subjectivity leak through? Is this a deliberate act that adds to the discursiveness of the event? Is the “reality” accessible? How does the audience encounter the invisible cities? Are they portrayed with thick descriptions allowing us to encounter them in all their splendor and wonder? Does the work operate aesthetically? Is the writing, the performance, the movement through the staged space, considered, choreographed, well crafted? Does the script end succinctly or does it meander off into ambiguity? Was the audience engaged by the performance? And finally what is the impact of the performance? Has theory come alive? Is the performance appropriate to its educational setting and here more specifically to our purposes, does the performance text critically examine the theoretical implications of spatial ideas for landscape and urbanism (p.428-430)? These components for adjudication could be integrated into a peer-assessment matrix provided to students at the time of the performance, but I believe they would prove even more valuable as concepts for group discussion during the formative phases of the project.

I am also left with the question of how to capture the critically reflexive insights that students harvest from this experiment in border pedagogies. Although the students maintain a theory journal, the play occurs around the end of term, and few reflections are recorded in the journals. This can be simply remedied, by integrating specific questions regarding the intellectual souvenirs of this journey into the frontiers of design pedagogy. Certainly the act of theorizing the performative capacities and pedagogical implications of work such as this has provided ample fodder for fertile interrogations.

8 SUMMATIONS

Corner: “This city is one of the most unique ones I have ever visited, it is a city that was built to eradicate what they feared....”
Kunstler: “I fear nothing but doctor-prescribed medication; what were they scared of?”
Corner: “…the street…”
[ominous silence]
(Gray, Tremblay, Jiang, and Bul-lalaya, 2012, p.7)

Thrift (2004 in Lorimer, 2005, p.84) invites us to conjure "wild new imaginaries" that can materialize from emergent performative repertoires. Similarly, James Corner (1999) has remarked, “Any recovery of landscape in contemporary culture is ultimately dependent on the development of new images and techniques of conceptualization” (p.153-154). Performative pedagogies do offer design educators an innovative means of invigorating theory, enlivening the study of landscapes--urban and otherwise, and exposes the implications of power and politics within spatial incarnations. Additionally, as design educators, the act of theorizing upon our curricular constructs, equally exposes the power relations, theoretical undercurrents, and potential transformative moments within design education and provides for reflective moments that illuminate how we can perhaps become more critically aware of the implications of our curricular constructs and their impact on the lives of our current students as future designers. I end here with some reflections from the point of view of a student:

At first when I found out that we had to do a play, I honestly was not excited about doing it at all. However, once we began to find out enough about our designers and writers and began creating characters out of this information, my perception of this project spun around. Each designer and writer’s ideals and insights were easily distinguished. Reflecting on how Invisible Cities helps me as a designer, I realized that we need to design with the landscape and to use the natural processes to function within the design. Creating cities based upon a single aspect of someone’s view shows how cities can become
fragmented. Our challenge as designers is to intertwine each aspect within a functioning design. Thinking about how this could happen, I once again come to the conclusion that whomever is in politics has the power to change building regulations, codes, and bylaws, and must do so that we can create more self-sustaining cities. (Cook, 2012, p.54)

9 ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS
Dr. Wilson Baptist would like to acknowledge the assistance of the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council.

10 REFERENCES