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## **Diegetic Theatre as a ‘Place’ for the Theatricalised Spectator**

By Jane Turner

### **Abstract**

This article explores two theatre events that are considered here as examples of diegetic theatre. The two events, *Iris Brunette* (2009) by Melanie Wilson and *Whisper* (2008) by Proto-type Theater have been selected as they both use narration as a strategy to create an ‘immersive’ theatre experience, specifically second person narrative. They are positioned here as examples of diegetic as opposed to mimetic theatre. The ‘immersive’ experience is achieved by offering the spectator a position of participant observer, a position whereby the spectator is positioned physically inside the fictional matrix as an active participant as well as critically outside the theatrical event as an active observer. This immersive ‘place’ might have the potential to create a sense of interplay and connectedness between spectators and performers that resonates experientially for the spectator, but also has the effect of opening up a critical space where the spectator can evaluate the fictional world and ‘characters’ encountered. The article will initially draw on ideas derived from Kristeva, as well as Lehmann and Pavis, to contextualise the theatre events whilst also engaging with ideas drawn from narratology.

This article seeks to critically consider a form of contemporary theatre that engages with narration as a theatrical strategy and has the effect of producing a diegetic as opposed to mimetic theatrical event. The two theatre events being discussed here are Melanie Wilson’s *Iris Brunette* (2009) and Proto-type Theater’s *Whisper* (2008). Both theatre events focus specifically on the ways in which narrated text has the potential to generate a collaborative theatrical experience where the spectator appears to be integrally involved as both a participant and observer. This spectatorial position or ‘place’ is created in both examples being discussed here because the spectator occupies the fictional space as a result of the narrative voice speaking in the second person ‘you.’ This directly implicates and connects the spectator to the event. The argument being made here is that diegesis, in

conjunction with an ‘immersive’ experience, paradoxically offers the spectator a theatricalised ‘place’ that is both dynamic and critically reflective.



**Fig. 1:** Melanie Wilson in *Iris Brunette*, Battersea Arts Centre (2009). Courtesy of Ed Collier.

The notion of ‘immersive theatre’ being explored here differs from the recent spate of theatre events produced in England by companies such as Punchdrunk and Shunt. Similarly, the spectator is implied to be ‘in role’ but a key difference is that shows such as those produced by Punchdrunk require the spectators to actively follow the action being played out by actors across a range of theatricalised spaces. In such productions, as Sophie Nield and her posse of ‘Spectators’ note, the spectators’ experiences are often ‘pre-occupied with staying safe/invisible/out of the way/on top of the story’ (Nield 533). In both theatre events being examined here the spectator remains immobile, in a ‘place’ that encourages an interplay of imagination and sensory experience evoked by narration.

Kristeva states that modern theatre fails to exist as it has no ‘place’ and fails ‘to constitute a communal discourse of play (interplay)’ (277). It is this sense of ‘place’ that I am arguing is created in these examples of diegetic theatre. The liminal space created between reality and fiction is a theatricalised space, or more specifically, in the instances of *Iris Brunette* and *Whisper*, a re-enchanted space that has the potential to ‘constitute a communal discourse of play’ (Kristeva 277) and as such, in Kristeva’s terms, theatre is reinstated as an affective ‘place’ for both performers and spectators.

The performance *Iris Brunette* by Melanie Wilson (2009)<sup>1</sup> is set in a small rectangular space with a row of seats pushed against the four walls enclosing the space; there is an empty space at each corner and two small, low, circular tables positioned at the edges of the space with a pile of salt at the centre of each table. Audience and performer occupy the same small enclosed space that contains no evident theatrical set, costume or props; however, the space is theatrically transformed and an immersive experience created through the use of narration, sound, lighting and smoke effect. The limited audience of twenty enter the space and take a seat. An eerie sound fills, or consumes, the space and a theatrical ‘fog’ envelopes both space and spectators. Out of this ‘fog’ appears the figure of Iris Brunette, played by Melanie Wilson (see Fig. 1); on the walls indeterminate shapes emerge in gold and scarlet. She begins her narration, plunging us into a fictional world inspired by the experimental 1960s film directed by Chris Marker *La Jetée*. She echoes the film saying that this is a ‘dateless world.’ The space becomes a café ‘thick with people... with just the space in between that begins to

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<sup>1</sup> The performance of *Iris Brunette* being discussed here was performed at the Axis Arts Centre on 9 October 2009.

fill up.’<sup>2</sup> As a spotlight above each of our seats lights up, Iris Brunette points to us and introduces each of us as a designated character in her narrative: The Ship’s Captain, The Cartographer, An Iconoclast and others. Iris is as indeterminate as the images on the walls as she weaves a narrative from fragments of identities that she conjures with us in the space. As a spectator, the narrative experience was like being woven into a web. Iris the narrator became my eye/I as we searched seas of faces for a particular face: a lost loved one perhaps? I was woven into the world as, having been given a ‘character’ in the café, I was asked to engage in a dialogue with Iris Brunette. I faintly recall our exchange but vividly recall her holding my hand and reading my palm. While the spontaneous and ephemeral dialogue I shared with Wilson has faded, the touch of her hand, the haptic experience of the performance, remains vivid.

*Whisper* by Prototype Theatre (2008)<sup>3</sup> is performed in a seemingly more conventional theatrical frame, although the frame is recognisably cinematic. The three performers on the stage are masked by a gauze screen stretched across the stage frame. The auditorium is darkened and the performers’ speech is mediated through microphones and received by the spectators through individual sets of headphones, thus creating a disjunctive space for the spectators between what they see and hear. Both performances play with explicit reference to narratives derived from detective fiction and both construct a noir-like quality using narration, light and sound. Further film connections are evident in the way in which *Whisper* deconstructs spectatorial experiences more familiar to cinema audiences. The concept of diegesis being explored here is more evident in cinema

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<sup>2</sup> A short extract from the performance can be seen on Melanie Wilson’s website: [www.melaniewilson.org.uk](http://www.melaniewilson.org.uk)

<sup>3</sup> The performance of *Whisper* being discussed here was performed at the Alsager Arts Centre.

than it is in theatre and the relationship between the diegetic reality and the spectatorial experience is different. As Morkham and Staiff argue, cinematic diegesis is a diegetic reality that the viewer actively chooses to enter during the cinematic experience, whereas in the theatre events discussed in this article the spectator is immersed and more actively implicated in the narrative. Morkham and Staiff's appraisal of the spectator's perceptual experience as alternating between two separate but related sets of information, 'that derived from reality of the world at large, and the commensurable but surrogate reality of the diegetic worlds on the screen' (301), does, however, usefully support the argument being made here. Diegetic theatre, I argue, offers the spectator a different experiential 'place' that subverts the normative viewing experience by placing the spectator inside a narratorial world that is not coherent and thus requires the spectator to make choices and reflect on perceptual notions of time, space and reality.

In *Whisper* all the movements and gestures are discerned as shadows projected from behind the screen-like gauze (see Fig. 2). Shadowy figures continually come in and out of focus as I attempt to connect the voice from the headset to the shadows on the stage. Three silhouettes are captured in boxes of light behind the gauze and I hear three voices narrating in the second person as they take me on a claustrophobic journey from an interior domestic space into the darkened streets of a city. In a similar way to *Iris Brunette*, *Whisper* pulls me into a fiction while simultaneously reminding me of the theatrical illusion. Proto-type Theater describe their event as playing with Foley sound<sup>4</sup> and thus the audience sees the sources of the sound effects that reinforce the illusion of

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<sup>4</sup> See the Proto-type Theater web site: [www.proto-type.org](http://www.proto-type.org). See also, Peter S. Petralia's 2010 'Headspace: Architectural Space in the Brain,' an article that provides an insight into the making of *Whisper* and the binaural research that formed the basis of the theatre experiment.

the fictional world we inhabit. The narration refers to ‘dripping water’ and I see shadowy figures behind the gauze pouring water slowly into a saucepan close to a microphone. The sound connects to the voice I hear through the headphones and is transformed into the ‘dripping water’ in the apartment described in the narration. Similarly, I see the performers creating the sound of hissing gas by blowing up balloons and slowly releasing the air into a microphone. The narratorial voice positions me in a psychonarration: ‘a narratized discourse representing a character’s thoughts’ (Prince 80). In this instance the discourse is narrated in the second person so the voice I hear tells me where ‘I’ look, what ‘I’ think and where ‘I’ turn. The narration takes me through the building where ‘I’ live and recalls my memories of a woman in another apartment who tried to gas herself. The narration disorientates me as it continually shifts between different voices always speaking in the second person; these voices sometimes place me in the fictional now and sometimes in a fictional past. The shifts into sequences that are remembered are accompanied by a sound motif and a shift in the lighting to warm tones; the ‘real’ time is lit by colder, blue tones. However, there is also a blurring between these different fictional places as the figures in separate boxes of light diffuse and I lose track of what is memory and what is occurring ‘now.’ The narratives bleed into each other and it becomes more and more difficult to create conjunctive links between the narrative voices and the activities behind the gauze. The disorientation is reinforced by the theatrical trickery of light and gauze. As figures retreat upstage towards the light source they become larger, disfigured and monstrous. It is as though I am always on the edge of a nightmare.

While the immersive strategies used by both theatre events differ, both defamiliarize a spectator's normative viewing position, whilst imposing another, and consequently create a participatory 'place' for theatricalised play. The 'place' being argued for here is a communal place that, like carnival, allows us to be other than ourselves but also reinforces a sense of shared identity through collective experience.<sup>5</sup> In order that the two theatre events can be perceived to offer a theatricalised 'place' to the spectator, this article argues that the notion of diegesis, specifically in the form of a diegetic theatre, opens up such opportunities to play.

In both instances cited here the immersive theatrical experience could be described as pleasurable, one might even say seductive, as both performances create a fictional matrix that combines intrigue and allure. Yet both events also create a sense of anxiety. The spectator is always first and foremost an actual spectator, a witness to a theatrical event; however, in these instances the experiences are non-conventional. In *Whisper* the sensory engagement is heightened by the use of headphones and disoriented by the obscured figures behind the gauze. *Iris Brunette* uses spatial intimacy to both engage and disorient the spectator. Both theatre events play on an edge that immersively engages the spectator in both experiences of anxiety and pleasure. Pavis notes that enjoying theatre 'distances us from signs and meaning, and pitches us into sensations of presence and of balance, which attempt to neutralise any intellectual aspect of theatre experience. What emerges is an "energetic" criticism of semiology' (313). He describes

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<sup>5</sup> While Marie-Madeleine Mervant-Roux uses the term 'community' in relation to twenty-first century theatre that operates to, in her words, 'erase or blur the distinction between stage and audience' (229), I use the term collective. Collective is preferred here to describe the opportunity offered to me and fellow spectators by both theatre events to engage in a shared experience in a context that places me in a fictive space where, although I am static, I am collectively participating in the generation of a fiction.



this criticism as a circuit, a flux of impulses, an intersubjective space where actor and spectator are seen as both subject and object. He says, '[t]he attention we bring to bear on stage materiality is reinforced by a denial that reminds us incessantly that we are at the theatre and that we perceive only forms and matter' (313). Both theatrical events immerse the spectator in a dream world where proximity, either auditory or spatial, has the effect of dissolving the distance between our sense of ourselves as spectators, and participants; however, the close proximity of the other spectators and the foregrounding of theatrical devices also have the effect of reminding us that we are in a theatricalised space. As so often is the case in dream worlds, we are unable to change or determine the course of the event. Although inside the event, we remain powerless to act in a meaningful way in terms of controlling the narrative direction of the performances. In both events the spectator is given a 'character' and there is no choice of narrative journey for that 'character.' However, both performances create fictional worlds that are elusive and the narrative journeys are fragmentary. So, paradoxically, while there are prescriptive aspects of the immersive experience, becoming an 'other' in these texts allows for gaps, escape routes, and spaces to reflect on what is of value and important to us as individuals outside of the fiction while simultaneously being in the fiction.

The function of theatrical mimesis has been radically called into question in relation to many contemporary theatre performances and the traditional concept of drama is not so much challenged, as disregarded in favour of other structuring strategies. As Lehmann states, 'new theatre begins precisely with the fading away of this trinity of drama, imitation, action. It is a trinity in which theatre is regularly sacrificed to drama' (37). Both theatre events are postdramatic as they embrace different creative strategies

and do not seek to set themselves in a position that is oppositional to a normative dramatic theatre, especially in relation to the generation, use and status of theatrical text, but do employ a range of writings that derive from non-dramatic contexts. Similarly, the events conform to what Lehmann describes as ‘state,’ a term he uses to denote theatre that is opposed to or offers an alternative to action. He says, ‘[t]he state is an aesthetic figuration of the theatre, showing a formation rather than a story (68).



**Fig. 2:** Alice Booth, Gillian Lees and Andrew Westerside in Proto-type Theater’s *Whisper* (2008).  
Courtesy of Peter S. Petralia.

Prince, in *A Dictionary of Narratology*, defines distinguishing features of the different positions that both literary narrator and reader can occupy within a diegesis and his terms are here being applied to the positions of spectator and performer in a theatre

event or 'state.' The spectator takes on the role of narratee: a player in the interplay of fact and fiction; an authorial audience, that is, one who is aware that the event is fictional; and, finally, a 'narrative audience,' for whom the reality of the fiction is accepted. Prince points towards the difficulty in distinguishing between a 'narrative audience' and narratee in literature (61). The theatrical events cited here demonstrate that these positions are not either/or but both/and as the audience simultaneously occupies different roles during the theatre event. As well as being the actual audience, the audience takes on the role of narratee and, in some instances during *Iris Brunette*, this role can include participatory unscripted/unrehearsed exchanges of dialogue with the character of Iris Brunette. We are ensnared in her journey, her search for a man she spied across a café, a man she has lost track of in a war, in a strange city. At points in the performance she turns to the 'characters' and engages us in what appears to be impromptu conversation. I was designated the role of The Cartographer in Iris Brunette's narrative. At one point in the performance she sat by me and asked for my hand: that is, the hand of The Cartographer. She held my hand and read my palm, asking me questions concerning what I thought she should do. My responses did not change the course of the narrative but the act of participation shifted my sense of immersion in the world and created an intensely affective experience. As the storyteller, Wilson creates a discourse between herself as the narrator and the spectator as narratee. The discourse shifts on the one hand between interchangeable positions taken by the real author (Melanie Wilson), the implied author (Iris Brunette,) and the narrator (Iris Brunette), and on the other between the real audience, the implied audience (the characters in the café and other places in the fictional landscape) and the narratee (members of the audience). Both Wilson and her audience

shift between being subject and/or object within the fictional world of *Iris Brunette* and first person/second person within the narration.

*Iris Brunette* demonstrates the complexities of a diegetic theatre event further by creating an intradiegetic and autodiegetic narrator. Melanie Wilson is author of *Iris Brunette* and performs the role of an intradiegetic narrator who conjures up the place and characters who populate *Iris Brunette*'s world; this narrator occupies the fiction as she appears to be a character reporting on rather than being in the diegesis. Melanie Wilson also occupies the space as an autodiegetic narrator when she speaks as *Iris Brunette*, who is a primary character in the diegesis; at these points she speaks in the first person (Prince 9).

Peter S. Petralia, the writer and director of *Whisper*, states that he was interested in exploring the possibility of creating alternate ideas of time and space through the use of headphone performance, '[c]reating an 'inner-gaze' though the use of second-person voice (you) and/or introspective text, which softens the focus of the audience/participant and places them at the centre of the work' (97). While Brecht was interested in exploring a narratorial position in theatre, he was wary of allowing the spectator to be theatricalised: that is, cast as a character in the fiction.<sup>6</sup> What the theatre events here illustrate is that such narrative strategies can open up new discourses about writing, speaking, text and audience. Ironically, while I enjoy the experience of being inscribed in a theatrical world, the more I am implicated as a participant in the textual world, the more anxious and/or sceptical I become. As a narratee I am bestowed with knowledge, beliefs,

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<sup>6</sup> Brecht's *Lehrstück* plays offer a similar position but it is evident that these plays were not conceived as being performed to an audience as a theatre event but were deemed to be didactic exercises.

values and feelings by the narrator and, as the spectator within the fiction, I am characterised with these attributes; however, I may reject or question these attributes and this can lead to a greater sense of interplay, not just within the fiction but, more specifically, in the relationship between the fiction and the real. Theatre that tends towards a concern with diegesis, that is with telling stories, and bestows the spectator with the role of narratee (one who temporarily embodies a character) supports characteristics of Brecht's conception of theatre in terms of foregrounding the position of narrator, although the diegetic strategies cited here demonstrate how the current theatre practices have moved beyond Brecht and found ways to theatricalize the spectator. Spectators are immersed in the fiction in order to become reflexive and critical of the experience.

Derrida puts forward a position that might be referred to as the 'revenge of writing' (*Writing and Difference*). He comments that speech is contaminated by traces of writing; however, it is the written-ness of the utterance, the overt textuality of the speech that is of specific interest in these examples of theatre. My argument does not follow Derrida nor, conversely, argue for a theatre where writing is contaminated by the utterance, by speech, but rather it supports a theatre where textuality allows the written-ness to surface. The textual fragments evoke a particular literary landscape that the spectator and performer can imaginatively engage with: a landscape that while familiar is not fixed or closed. Textual landscapes that feature spoken text, written text and mediatised 'live' and pre-recorded visual texts are a common feature in many contemporary theatre performances, as is the theatrical space that draws on literary forms of writing and is also foregrounding textualisation. What is of particular interest here is

the effect that the spoken text potentially has on the spectator/audience. The whispered voices heard through the headphones in *Whisper* connected me to the shadowy figures behind the gauze. Petralia says that the use of headphones in *Whisper* has the effect of blurring the boundary between the performance space and the receptive space of the audience. The performance is brought closer to an audience member in a personal, tangible way as it focuses on the sensory gap between sight and sound (97). The interplay of audio and visual scores conjure up late night journeys through urban spaces where I get glimpses of the interior domestic spaces that are other people's lives. There is a pre-recorded spoken text in *Iris Brunette* that drifts in and out of the theatre space. This disorients the spectator, as at times it becomes difficult to determine Iris as someone present and speaking in the space and this other Iris who speaks from another space. These texts have the potential to directly affect the spectator. I am connected to the theatricalised space and am tangibly transported to another fictional space. The performances are aesthetically coherent in themselves and suppress a tendency towards a dramatic schema, although they playfully tease the spectator with fleeting encounters with 'characters' and 'story.' Elinor Fuchs supplies a useful descriptor that can be applied to the theatre works being examined here: 'The weaving of fragments never coalesces into an illusionistic reality with plot and character, yet coheres because the texts behind the text are a part of our cultural narratives' (169).

*Iris Brunette* plays with our recognition of a fictional world and allows us, the spectators, to join her and play in the world conjured up. While there are numerous potential plots and characters that could be followed, ultimately we do not follow any one plot or become any one character. Similarly, *Whisper* infers narrative pathways and the

shadowy outlines of possibility and recognisable characters, but these momentary manifestations disappear. We are merely passing tourists whose gaze and interest flirts tantalisingly with the possibility that what is happening to the people behind these doors, walls, windows may be important, significant, and dangerous. Susan Sontag (*Regarding the Pain of Others*) argued that the proliferation of information in the modern age has not left us desensitised to the ills of humanity, but has overwhelmed and disempowered us. With so many fragments of narrative to organise and align with the obscured figures on the stage, the spectator is left to find a tangible form and a stable perspective that allows the textual knot to be unravelled and ordered. While there is pleasure in being on the outside, pleasure in the position of voyeur, there is also a parallel frustration in only having a partial view: a frustration in being denied access beyond the surface, to follow the story and find out what happens next. As a spectator here I think I am experiencing an individual journey as I am shut away from my neighbour, isolated in my seat with headphones on, in the darkened auditorium, voices whispering to me, never demanding anything of me but to turn this way or that, to hear or see, or to remember. But there is also an anxiety: am I hearing the same voices as my neighbour? Am I tuned into the same frequency? While the experience is mediated through technology and recreates a now typical transient experience of travelling through peoples' lives, I am confronted by my complacency, my tendency not to act, not to become involved. I think I can escape the persistent whispering voices in my head by removing the headphones, only to realise that the whispering is pervasive. The disembodied voice of the narrator is not in my head but is an extension of the voices we have all created that habitually textualise our thoughts and experiences. The performance here works with a diegetic structure and the challenge

to the audience to do more than listen and watch is a consequence of the separation of sensory experiences. There is pleasure in the experience offered to the audience here, but also displeasure in that the potential interplay between art and life results in the exposure of our current inertia. The sensory gap and the insistent whispered voices in the head of the spectator create a very particular place for the spectator: a place that offers pleasure because of the sensual vocal qualities used by the performers. However, the experience also invokes a sense of resistance. If we as spectators do not resist and critically reflect on the character we play in the world, we condone the voyeuristic behaviour and the apathy of the narrated character 'you.' The spatial and sensorial disjunctive strategies employed in the performance all contribute to a decomposition of the theatre experience, or what Lehmann describes as 'the unconscious of spoken theatre' (149).

*Iris Brunette*, as a vehicle for non-conventional storytelling, employs a heightened formal literary-ness. The performer uses narration to conjure a world of enigma, mystery and nostalgia that she generously offers to the audience as an experiential journey. There is, as a result, a slippage between the formal literary text and an illusion of spontaneous dialogue that again lends itself to a diegetic structure. Derrida challenges theatre to escape its dependence on writing. He problematises the relationship between spoken text and written text, placing them in an oppositional rather than dialogic relationship; again, we should be seeking a both/and position that celebrates and embraces this slippage between that which is written and that which is spoken. The text here does not operate on a mimetic level but employs a diegetic framework as there is a narrator who conjures a fictional world where fleeting figures, shadows and ghosts of characters are partially embodied by the spectators. As spectators we are not transformed, but we are transported



by the power of the narrative and the theatricalisation of the space to this very other world. Initially the worlds of both performances are redolent of scenarios drawn from film noir and espionage novels and offer a sense of escapism; however, in both instances the ‘other’ world, while initially seductive, creates a sense of anxiety as the spectator becomes aware through the narration that the worlds inhabited are plagued with loss, despair, betrayal and paranoia.

We are participants/observers in these worlds and as such we are integral to the making of the theatre event in that moment and thus responsible for our inertia and passivity. The conclusion to *Whisper* narrates that we look in the mirror and are ‘smiling’ and are ‘the happiest we have ever been’ despite the narration that has led ‘you’ to place a rope around ‘your’ neck and jump from a window. Perhaps it was all a dream and we are lucky to have escaped unscathed. But the intensity of the narration here, and in *Iris Brunette*, has ‘penetrated into the body’ (Petralia 108) and I am left with a sense of disease. If I am integral in the making of the event then I am left with a sense that I can ‘act’ differently. We are reminded by both theatre events that while theatre is about a live encounter between a performer and spectator the traditional normative relationship between performer and spectator has here been dispersed and replaced by an affective state of reflection. As spectators we do not remain on the outside of the event but become subjects of the fiction and as such also become objects of the spectatorial gaze. The idea of the theatre event as a reflective mirror has turned inwards and trapped us in its gaze; it appears to ask us what we will do. There is a strange paradox at work here: the immersive engagement of the spectator as subject does not initially reinforce the immediacy of the event as a living present but gives us licence to experience some other time and a sense of

being temporarily elsewhere. However, my experience was to fight against this immersion, as I was not ‘the happiest I had ever been.’ The performance space in *Iris Brunette* incorporated the space where the spectators sit and while we are not required to move, the performance absorbed us and mis-recognized us as ‘other’ people in an ‘other’ place. As a spectator I was beguiled by the prospect of my presence being integral to the fictional world. At the same time, I realised that while my involvement was necessary, I was impotent to change the course of events.

Wilson’s performance also contains an ‘epilogue:’ an audio performance titled *Mari Me Archie* where we are invited, with the help of Iris, to transform our own environments into fictional landscapes. On this audio walk, actual places, figures, dialogue and events within our own environments have the potential to be acts of espionage, betrayal and thwarted love: the substance of literary fiction. *Mari Me Archie* takes the headphone strategy, discussed here in relation to Proto-type Theater’s *Whisper*, and extends the diegetic world of *Iris Brunette* more specifically into our actual world. It encourages the participants to blur the distinction between their real lives and textualise the world around them. While the textualisation of actual places and people may be seen to encourage the notion of the hyper-real, the consciousness of the act again creates a critical distance that allows us to consider the ways in which peoples’ lives are appropriated as narrative. *Mari Me Archie* is an important partner experience to *Iris Brunette* as it not only extends Iris’s world but also extends the process of critical reflection.

The examples of contemporary theatre cited here evoke a different sense of critical engagement due to their event-ness, what Pavis has called an ‘energetic’ criticism

(313) that focuses on the experience, not the intellectual fixing of meaning, or what Lehmann calls a ‘rage of understanding’ (Lehmann 88). The radical forms of textualisation explored in these works invite us to question the concept of mimesis and its synonymous relationship with theatricality. Either we need to re-think what we understand mimesis to represent or we need to more fully acknowledge the theatre event as an art form that is separate from the art of the dramatist and notions of the dramatic. As Lehmann remarks, ‘the absence of mimesis of action’ does not mean the end of theatre, as ‘theatrical need is not fixated on action alone’ (78).

In the position of narratee, the spectator/audience of these events is offered a different sense of connectedness. Although we are, as one of the voices in *Whisper* says of us, ‘out of sync with reality,’ we are also connected to the others present in terms of the intimacy of the shared experience. Both performances provoke us to consider our intersubjectivity, our place within shared stories, and shared lives. David Edgar stated in 1988 that the future of theatre was in carnival: a space where the spectator merely had to step off the pavement to be transported into the carnival world (287). In this place we are both participant and observer and are encouraged, through an immersion in language, to sensorially experience our intersubjectivity and to both think and act. So, while Kristeva argued that modern theatre was waiting for a ‘place’ and that this would occur with the re-making of language (281), what the work here demonstrates is that there is a vital interplay that implicates the spectator more integrally in the theatrical discourse. Thus it is not just the theatre but the spectator who needs to be re-accommodated with a place.

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