

**FOR EXAMPLE RACHEL CORRIE:
THE ROLE OF THEATRE IN,
AND AS,
AN ACTIVIST PROJECT**

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Contents

Abstract.....	1
Introduction.....	2
Chapter 1	
Rachel Corrie in Gaza.....	10
Chapter 2	
At Court.....	30
Chapter 3	
Closer to Home.....	54
Conclusions.....	94
References.....	102

Abstract

Rachel Corrie was a young American woman who died at the age of twenty-three in Gaza in 2003. She was killed when an Israeli Occupation Force bulldozer ran over her while she was defending a Palestinian house from demolition. Her martyr's death, combined with the force of her descriptions of her experiences as an activist in Palestine, not only provoked response from other activists; it became material for a number of theatrical projects, among them productions by the Royal Court Theatre in London, Bread and Puppet Theatre in the US, and in a production I recently wrote and directed here in New Zealand.

This thesis considers the example of Rachel Corrie's activism in Palestine and the theatrical performances it engendered in order to examine the role of theatre in and as an activist project. The theatre is an important component of the ongoing movement for social change. It assembles temporary communities and it portrays issues in ways that are both accessible and open to debate. But theatricality is just as often a key component of activist actions outside the theatre building: in street performances and demonstrations, and also in the way some activists can be seen to pursue their political objectives on a daily basis. Finally, the theatre is a material act of production which can challenge the dominant model of production and thus has the potential to be become an activist project as itself. As a result of my analyses of this material, I hope to provide a framework of understanding both for myself and others, of the likely role of theatre in and as an activist project, and this understanding will be of assistance in the cultural task of shifting beliefs in the movement for social change.

The key theorists used in this thesis are Walter Benjamin and Raymond Williams.

Introduction

Rachel Corrie was a young American woman who died at the age of twenty-three in Gaza in 2003. She was killed when an Israeli Occupation Force bulldozer ran over her while she was defending a Palestinian house from demolition. Her death was widely reported in the media, and at the same time, copies of her emails to friends and family were made publicly available via the internet as well as published in the Guardian and other news outlets.¹ Her martyr's death, combined with the force of her descriptions of her experiences as an activist in Palestine, not only provoked response from other activists; it became material for a number of theatrical projects, among them productions by the Royal Court Theatre in London, Bread and Puppet Theatre in the US, and in a production I recently wrote and directed here in New Zealand.²

This thesis considers the example of Rachel Corrie's activism in Palestine and the theatrical performances it engendered in order to examine the role of theatre in and as an activist project. I believe that the theatre is an important component of the ongoing movement for social change. It assembles temporary communities, it portrays issues in ways that are both accessible and open to debate, and it enables a diversity of voices to be heard. But theatricality is just as often a key component of activist actions outside the theatre building: in street performances and demonstrations, and also in the way some activists – for example, Rachel Corrie – can

¹ See the Rachel Corrie Memorial Website: <http://www.rachelcorrie.org>.

² My Name is Rachel Corrie, edited by Alan Rickman and Katharine Viner, directed by Alan Rickman. First performance at the Royal Court Jerwood Theatre Upstairs, 7 April 2005. Daughter Courage, by Bread and Puppet, first performed in 2003, with performances continuing through to 2006. Death (and love) in Gaza, based on the writings of Rachel Corrie and other Internationalists, written and directed by Paul Maunder, BATS Theatre, 25 July to 5th August, 2006; Free Theatre, September 1-3, 2006.

be seen to pursue their political objectives on a daily basis. As well, for me, the theatre is a material act of production which can challenge the dominant model of production and thus has the potential to become an activist project as itself.

How did Rachel Corrie come to be in front of the Israeli bulldozer in Gaza? What happened to the performance that Rachel Corrie gave of herself in Gaza as it has come to be represented in plays and performances around the world? And now, in New Zealand in 2006, how might the example of Rachel Corrie serve this thesis' project of understanding the relationship between theatre and activism?

Rachel Corrie grew up in a middle class family of five in Olympia, Washington. Her father was an actuary in the insurance business, and her mother was a housewife who participated in volunteer activities and played music. Rachel appears to have been inclined towards social activism from an early age. For example, a family video (used by the Royal Court in its production) shows her as a child giving a speech on poverty, and while in high school she participated in an exchange programme which took her to Russia. Rather than following her siblings to an ivy league university, she chose to enrol in Evergreen State College, a progressive liberal arts college in her hometown which emphasises social activism as central to students' learning experience. According to Evergreen's president, Thomas L. Purce: "Evergreen's students receive an extraordinary education that prepares them to engage with real-world issues in a changing world."³

At Evergreen, Rachel Corrie enrolled for a course on community politics, and inspired by a friend returning from Palestine, she signed up with the International Solidarity Movement, a pro-Palestinian group that had a recruitment base at the college. The ISM was set up by Palestinians and international supporters in 2001 as a

³ Cited on Evergreen's website: <http://www.evergreen.edu/aboutevergreen/praise.htm>.

way of furthering the Palestinian struggle against the Israeli occupation.⁴ She also formed a sister city project to link Olympia and Rafah, and both these projects formed an independent study programme for her final year at Evergreen. She spent four weeks in Gaza, training with other activists, meeting Palestinians, joining their protests and acting with other members of the international community as a human shield against the demolition of Palestinian homes. During her stay she wrote extensively and eloquently, both in her journals and in emails to family and friends, about conditions in Palestine and the Palestinian experience.

I have been in Palestine for two weeks and one hour now, and I still have very few words to describe what I see...Nothing could have prepared me for the reality of the situation here. You just can't imagine it unless you see it. And even then your experience is not at all the reality...I have money to buy water when the army destroys wells, and of course, the fact that I have the option of leaving. I am allowed to see the ocean. (Rickman and Viner, 2005:33)

It was while protecting the home of Palestinian friends that Rachel Corrie was killed.

Rachel Corrie, as a subject, interested me from the moment I received the email notice of her death, which included one of her Gaza emails to her parents: "This has to stop. I think it is a good idea for us all to drop everything and devote our lives to making this stop. I don't think it's an extremist thing to do anymore" (Rickman and Viner, 2005: 49).

As a middle-aged activist, over the past decade or so I had grown worried at the absence of twenty to forty year olds in social justice movements here. The desire for social change (other than in environmental politics) seems to be missing in recent generations. With Rachel's email, I saw it again. I wished, therefore, to present Rachel as an example to young people in Aotearoa, and thus to enter into dialogue via the theatre with a new generation of potential activists.

⁴ For information about ISM, please see their website: <http://www.palsolidarity.org>.

I have spent my adult life as a cultural worker in the field of theatre. For me, the worker changes the material world, and a play has been something material to make, even though as a material object it disappears. However, as a worker, I have often moved outside the worker's traditional relationship with capital in order to offer the means of cultural production to activist groups in the South Pacific region and elsewhere. For example, I have worked with trade unions, ethnic groups and special interest groups such as mental health consumers and a prostitutes' collective, enabling them to develop and perform plays that articulated their issues and experiences. But as well, I have worked collectively with actors, amateur and professional (sometimes a mix), on projects with content such as the Depression or the depiction of a historical figure. Sometimes I have written a street theatre script for a political occasion and persuaded actors to join me in presenting it. In each of these instances, a different set of production and social relations emerged which ultimately determined the role of theatre in and as my activist project.

In this thesis, I wish to capture and interrogate the productive processes and relationships which have governed my work to date – processes and relationships that I have always experienced without theorising beyond what was necessary to get the job done. The example of Rachel Corrie, her life and the productions that were developed after her death, are useful case studies, because they allow me to see the work both from a distance and up close in a comparative and analytical way.

In his essay "The Author as Producer" (1934), Walter Benjamin states that the progressive writer admits that he is inevitably working in the service of certain class interests and places himself on the side of the proletariat: "He directs his activity towards what will be useful to the proletariat in the class struggle. This is usually called pursuing a tendency, or "commitment" (86). But, Benjamin writes, what of the

literary quality? For Benjamin, “the correct political tendency of a work extends also to its literary quality: because a political tendency which is correct comprises a literary tendency which is correct” (86). This leads him to the question of aesthetic technique, which in turn leads him to question the role of the author as a producer in an apparatus of production.

Since Benjamin’s essay was written we have had to face the unravelling of actual lived socialism. However I wish to hold onto Benjamin’s model in terms of the artist seeking social change, for without it we are left with the opportunism of the market. So, in the early part of the 21st century, I find myself asking: What is the correct tendency? And, change the direction of the apparatus of production towards what? These questions are critical to my analysis in this thesis, because when discussing the performances that have been made from Rachel Corrie’s story, it is necessary to consider the dialectical relationship between aesthetics and the apparatus of production.

The writings of Raymond Williams are useful in developing the currency of Benjamin’s theories. As a cultural historian and literary critic, Williams remained a committed socialist while rejecting Leninism and positing instead the concept of the “long revolution.” His work traces the many and diverse social and environmental movements post World War II, seeing them as essentially based on single issues which come together, in effect, in their opposition to late capitalism. These groups could, in number, comprise a majority of people in our society, Williams says, but because their discourses are predominantly moral, the capitalist system remains dominant. Nevertheless, Williams sees the possibility of a valid participatory democracy and a locally audited economy driven by working people.⁵ From

⁵ Key texts used in this thesis are: Culture (1981); The Year 2000 (1983) and Resources of Hope (1989).

Williams, we can expect the artist to be politically committed in a way that includes the apparatus of production. My analysis of the example provided by Rachel Corrie and the productions that were built from her story will take place within this basic framework.

Chapter One of my thesis focuses on the key events of Rachel Corrie's time in Palestine, using her emails, journalists' accounts, websites and reports from other internationalists as material for my analysis. I will be looking at the theatricality of Rachel Corrie's actions and experiences, both for the way she represented herself as an actor in her accounts to family and friends and in the way the conflict between the Palestinians and the Israel occupational force can be seen as staged within a theatrical frame. That is, I am considering Rachel Corrie's actions while in Gaza "as performance" in the way Richard Schechner presents the concept, which itself is based on Erving Goffman's notion of "the presentation of self in everyday life".⁶ The act of performing this analysis must be recognised as an act of theatricalisation on my part. As someone who wasn't present, I will need to be representing her actions as interpreted through my own imagination based on my own experiences and desire to see her in a certain light – via a Stanislavskian "as if". In this chapter, I will be arguing that Rachel Corrie not only showed the correct tendency but, with the ISM, also worked within a correct apparatus of production. It is however, an apparatus that has limitations.

In Chapter Two, I trace the creation and subsequent journey of the Royal Court production based on Rachel Corrie's writings: My Name is Rachel Corrie (2005). I will argue that while the production claims a correct tendency, one can see how it works towards an ideological catharsis. That is, it appears to work to provoke

⁶ See Schechner: Performance Theory (1988), Performance Studies: an introduction (2002) and The Future of Ritual (1993); Goffman: The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life (1981).

its spectators towards a point where specific political actions are necessary; but in the end, her death is used as a means of returning us to a safe liberal position. This not so correct tendency became further distorted in the controversy surrounding the first attempt to transfer My Name is Rachel Corrie to the New York Theatre Workshop and in the subsequent production at the Minetta Lane Theatre (2006).⁷ As well, the apparatus of production retained conventional capitalist relations mediated by state and private sponsorship, which worked against the original impulse behind Rachel Corrie's emails – to make them public documents and spurs to action. Instead, my analysis will show that the Royal Court privatised Rachel Corrie's words and turned her into an "author." As a point of comparison, I will also look at the Bread and Puppet Theatre's various Rachel Corrie projects, which appear to have retained the correct tendency.⁸

In Chapter Three, I trace in detail my own production of Death (and love) in Gaza, analysing the evolution of its tendency and my attempts to change the apparatus of production. I will also trace the inevitable mediations that occurred through real conditions and the involvement of diverse people in the project. Nevertheless, I come to the conclusion that the community theatre process, as an apparatus of production, has significant symmetry to the activist project. As a result of my production experience and the writing of this thesis, I hope to provide a framework of understanding both for myself and others, of the likely role of theatre in and as an

⁷ The New York Theatre Workshop maintained that it postponed the production rather than cancelled it, but it was taken as a cancellation by the Royal Court Theatre. James Hammersteins Productions picked up the show and it played at an Off Broadway Theatre situated in Minetta Lane. It opened in October, 2006 for a six week season which was subsequently extended to the end of December.

⁸ The Bread and Puppet Theater is a nonprofit, self-supporting theatrical company. Peter Schumann founded Bread and Puppet in 1962 on New York City's Lower East Side. Bread and Puppet is now an internationally recognized company that champions a visually rich, street-theater brand of performance art. Its shows are political and spectacular, with huge puppets made of papier-maché and cardboard, a brass band for accompaniment, and anti-elitist dances. Most shows are morality plays — about how people act toward each other — whose prototype is "Everyman." Their overall theme is universal peace (www.breadandpuppet.com).

activist project, and this understanding will be of assistance in the cultural task of shifting beliefs necessary for the long revolution to occur.

Chapter One: Rachel Corrie in Gaza

This chapter looks at Rachel Corrie's life and death in Gaza, in order to explore the theatricality of her activism in light of Benjamin's notion of the correct tendency not only in intent but in the apparatus of production. I want to begin by recognising, again, the limitations of my project. Not only did I not know Rachel Corrie, I haven't been present in Gaza as an internationalist. My work in this chapter, therefore, is an actorly act of imagination based on the evidence that is available to me as understood through the lens of my own experience. This evidence is based on her own e-mails, some of which can be found in full on the Rachel Corrie Foundation and ISM websites, and in edited version in the Royal Court play, and on an article written by US journalist, Joshua Hammer, who travelled to Gaza to retrace her steps a few months after her death.⁹ In comparing the original e-mails with the playscript, there is some editing, and some tidying in terms of moving from written to oral delivery, but no serious change of description of event, or place, or person. My subsequent criticism is based on the ordering of the material rather than censoring of material. I will begin by describing and analysing her activist project – including the ISM's principles and methodologies. I will then examine key events from her Gaza experience as the meeting place between theatricality and activism: her arrival, training, coming under fire for the first time, encounters with the Palestinian people, participation in a schoolchildren's mock trial, confrontation with bulldozers, and her death. But I also want to look at Rachel's role as writer in theatrical terms. For each

⁹ The Death of Rachel Corrie, to be found at <http://www.motherjones.com>.

example, I will be considering the relationship between the tendency and the apparatus of production.

The International Solidarity Movement is the activist project that Rachel Corrie joined. Its agenda is described on its website as follows:

- (i) That international participation in the Israeli occupation of Palestine is required.
- (ii) Such participation can provide protection for Palestinians engaged in non-violent resistance.
- (iii) It can also send a message to the mainstream media, who portray the struggle incorrectly, as two equal sides fighting over a piece of land, instead of an Israeli military occupation. Internationals can reach out to their national media and correct this error.
- (iv) Internationals can bear personal witness and tell of their experience when they return to their own communities.
- (v) Finally, through their participation they can break the isolation of the Palestinians and provide hope, by saying to the Palestinians, “We see, we hear and we are with you.”

They operate according to the belief that “People acting together can change things” (<http://www.palsolidarity.org>, 2006).

The tendency of the organization is adamantly pro-Palestinian; Palestinians are resisting the occupation of their nation by a foreign power, and it is necessary for sympathetic people from other countries to support that resistance. The mode of production of that support is through non-violent direct action: to go to Palestine and participate in the struggle, that participation offering a measure of protection to Palestinians because the occupying power harms its international reputation if it

injures or kills foreigners. The internationalists should also write and speak of the struggle to their national media, for it is a struggle reported by the media in a biased fashion. Finally they should bear witness to their experiences within their local communities, through speaking at meetings.

In terms of the apparatus of production, volunteers pay their own way, and while there might be some external financial support in terms of maintaining ongoing infrastructure, I have not been able to source it. But the ISM is unlike normal aid agencies or human rights organizations, who either offer material support to Palestinians or conduct investigations into human rights abuses, and who depend on fundraising from concerned individuals, church groups etc in the developed world, in order to pay salaried staff and maintain an often comprehensive infrastructure. Instead of watching or aiding, members of the ISM join the struggle and pay their own way.

However, joining the struggle means walking a difficult path, for the Palestinian struggle is both non-violent and violent. Because of the inequality of power in the armed struggle, Palestinian violent resistance is often either token (stone throwing) or terrorist in nature (kidnapping or suicide bombing). A non-violent demonstration will contain armed men amongst the demonstrators. This blurring of boundaries is useful for propaganda purposes by the pro-Israel lobby and has climaxed in the Hamas government, elected democratically but seen by the West as a terrorist organization. While the ISM activists remain non violent, they acknowledge the right of Palestinians to conduct armed struggle and their work can be seen as protective of violence by Palestinians.

Because they receive no income, volunteers are usually in Palestine for a short time and this can lend an amateur quality to their work. They are, accordingly, treated

with a mixture of suspicion, paranoia and admiration by the conventional aid organizations. One anonymous worker described them as a “motley collection of anti-globalization and animal-rights activists, self described anarchists and seekers, mostly in their twenties...” (Hammer, 2003:3). Another stated: “Part of their gig is to break laws in acts of civil disobedience in order to draw attention to what the Israeli military is doing...what they do is incredibly frightening” (3). But as well, their apparatus of production is finally dependent on the media to publish their case, a media which remains largely under capitalist control. Accordingly, as was proven in the case of the highly newsworthy event of Rachel Corrie’s death, this dependency can have considerable drawbacks (10).

This then was the activist organization Rachel went to Palestine to join. The first scene (and I use that word deliberately) I wish to analyse is Rachel arriving at Israeli immigration on January 25th, 2003. The evidence is sparse. Rachel wrote in an e-mail to her parents: “Very little problem at the airport. My tight jeans and cropped bunny-hair sweater seem to have made all the difference – and of course the use of my Israeli friend’s address. The only question was, ‘Where did you meet her?’ The woman behind the glass appeared not to notice my shaking hands” (Rickman and Viner, 2005: 25).

Her intent, her tendency is easy to identify; in order to become an activist with the ISM she had to get into Palestine, which meant passing through Israel, the occupying country which controls Palestine’s borders. But if she made her intent clear, she would most likely be refused admission. She knew she had to act a part, and had chosen that of a conventional young tourist, there to see the country and visit a friend. She would have rehearsed this scene in her head and she dressed appropriately, in order to appear as someone without a political agenda. She would

have been careful not to have incriminating political literature in her bag. But like an actor at a first performance, she was nervous: her shaking hands. But also, like an actor, she would be intent, to use Goffman's term, to maintain control of the definition of the situation - to convince the audience that she was the part she was playing (1981:16). The audience was primarily the immigration official, but Rachel would also be aware of other security people watching her, of cameras and so on. Of course, there is as well, the official version of who one is in such circumstances, contained in the passport and immigration form one has filled out, and being American made her less likely to be suspected of deviancy than if she were from an Arab country.

Schechner states that a performance is a twice acted act, that is, that the act has been practised and is repeatable (2002:23). Rachel would have presented herself at immigration before, and in the modern world we are often presenting ourselves to officials, to prove we are who we are. So this was a performance. It is not too extravagant in fact, to characterise the performance as a rite of passage, of travelling from one state to another. She entered a liminal space characteristic of ritual, and defined by Victor Turner as a space where "Persons are stripped of their former identities and assigned places in the social world; they enter a time-place where they are not-this-not-that, neither here or there, in the midst of a journey from one social self to another" (Schechner, 2002: 57). The role she was passing from, was a complex one in the sense that it was always in transition, and this complexity and sense of transition filled the journals from which the Royal Court text was edited. The role she was passing into was to prove simpler in the sense that a military role is simpler, for it is limited in terms of possible activity. Yet it was to prove exceedingly complex in terms of its relationship to the politics of the situation. Her mode of

production was theatrical, acting a role in costume, in order to carry out the correct tendency.

But for me, there is as well, an irony, in that this rite of passage involved her lying about her true role (that of pro-Palestinian activist); so that her first significant act was to act a part she had left behind as a possibility some years ago: the conventional young person, here embarking on a non political overseas experience. She had instead become something else, was about to become something else again, and in order to do so, had to act that which she had chosen not to be.

The second scene I want to analyse is the orientation and training that volunteers underwent. Once again, the evidence is sparse. Rachel writes in her notebook: “Notes from Training: When talking – no hearsay. Call hospitals and official sources. Use quotes. Don’t appear to judge rightness or wrongness. Non Violence – Don’t touch those we’re confronting. Don’t run. Carry nothing that could be used as a weapon. No self-initiating actions” (Rickman and Viner, 2005: 26).

Hammer, in his article reveals:

She took part in role playing exercises – playing an angry settler or soldier, or an activist trying to defuse the situation – and received tips about blending into Palestinian society. The activists were to abstain from drugs, sex and alcohol; women were encouraged to wear the hijab. They studied direct-action tactics and learned a few basic rules about avoiding harm while removing military roadblocks, defying curfews and blocking house demolitions: wear fluorescent jackets. Don’t run. Don’t frighten the army. Try to connect by megaphone. Make your presence known.” (3-4)

Since I have both participated in, and led similar training and role plays, I can, from this distance, analyse the use of theatre for the purpose of preparing activists for action. The initial step is to ensure that a clear, shared analysis of the situation and the injustice exists. For non-Jewish people, the accusation of anti-Semitism is always

hovering when criticising Israel. This would be an issue to resolve intellectually, and Rachel writes of the need “to draw a firm distinction between the policies of Israel as a state, and Jewish people.” And, “I’m really new to talking about Israel-Palestine, so I don’t always know the political implication of my words” (Rickman and Viner, 2005: 25-26). As part of training, discussion and debate would have taken place in order to have a script to improvise from, no matter what the occasion, whether confrontation or media interview. These occasions would have been role played, for example, the situation set up of an activist being told by an angry right-wing Jewish settler whose relative was killed in a suicide bombing, that she was protecting terrorists. A young Palestinian might join the scene and the whole situation could become violent. The task of the activist would be to defend her position and then try and calm the situation.

Certainly, the scene of standing in front of a bulldozer, where one’s natural impulse is to run, would be rehearsed. Here, an authoritative stance is required: to act officially, to wear the fluorescent jacket that road workers, surveyors and on-site engineers wear, to speak through the megaphone, to be an overt presence rather than to appear subversive, to assume rightness- that traffic will stop if you hold up your hand, that others will do what you tell them to do.

Of course this is an extraordinary claim to make by a handful of foreigners facing an occupying army, so the belief that one is "official" must be backed by a feeling of moral outrage large enough to sustain the claim. In this training therefore, some apocryphal stories will be told, to bolster this moral outrage, to provide an emotional memory. And of course, once action begins, this emotional memory is fed by experienced events.

In this role playing, I would always call for an active spectator, a SpectActor, in Augusto Boal's terms, who will observe keenly and step in to suggest and even coach a more effective response. If there is time, the technique of dynamising a scene is useful, that is, to see the variety of roles being played by the one person, isolating these roles and choosing the most effective. Behind the assertive activist might be lurking a needy child who sabotages this assertiveness. Within the young middle class male activist there is often a clever Oedipal trickster that needs to be put aside. Of course, this can lead to psychological introspection with its ensuing passivity, so is reserved for the most difficult cases.¹⁰

Accordingly, through these role plays, the activist is prepared for the real life performance which embodies the correct tendency. The apparatus of production is clearly theatrical. The final point to be made is that, in this training, the role that Rachel Corrie was honing, was a political role, very much a masked role, of suppressing subjectivity and self doubt, of being able to speak off the cuff about this conflict with certainty, of upholding a position in debate, of confronting and maybe suffering violence, of always being, to use Goffman's terminology, frontstage in a very complex region (1981:33).

After what was an overly brief induction for such a complex task, on January 27th, Rachel and fellow recruits travelled to Rafah, a town of 150,000 people in the Gaza Strip, and mounted their first action. She describes it very briefly in her notebook: "Sleep in tent. Gunshot through tent. Start smoking" (Rickman and Viner, 2005: 27). Hammer provides us with more detail, gathered from interviews with members of the ISM:

¹⁰ Boal's methodology can be found in his two major books: Theatre of the Oppressed (1979) and Rainbow of Desire (1993).

On the first night in Rafah, Corrie and two other activists set up camp in a heap of rubble inside Block J, a densely populated neighbourhood... and frequent target of gunfire from an Israeli watchtower. By placing themselves between the Palestinian residents and the troops, and hanging up banners announcing the presence of internationalists, the activists hoped to discourage the shooting. But the plan backfired. Huddling in terror as Israeli troops fired bullets over their tent and at the ground a few feet away, the three activists decided that their presence at the site was provoking the soldiers, not deterring them, and abandoned the tent. Corrie was so shaken by the experience that she resumed the smoking habit she had quit a year earlier (5).

What is the tendency here? Young idealists, without much experience of the situation, enter a very complex region, committed to action. Where do you start? What is your “part”, your “routine” to use Goffman’s terms (1981: 27)? It is the dilemma well known to any community activist: how to announce one’s presence and one’s willingness to serve. Inevitably mistakes are made as the complex dialogue begins between the outsider and the community in question, with inevitably its own internal contradictions. Rachel and her colleagues chose to perform an extravagant action, which had not been rehearsed, so perhaps does not meet Schechner’s requirement of performance. However, we do know that some weeks before, activists had erected tents near the new security fence being built by the Israelis.

But both politically and theatrically, there was a genealogy to call on. Politically, one of the more resonant images is the tying of pacifists to a stake in no man’s land during World War 1 (see New Zealander Archibald Baxter’s autobiography). In the vocabulary of street theatre, there are numerous examples of activists making their home in, and thereby contesting the ownership of, a public space; for example, the erecting of a tent city by Aborigine people outside the parliament building in Canberra, the Greenham Common encampment to protest the

British possession of nuclear warheads, or Maori Land occupations to protest theft of tribal estates.

But in the Gaza example, the theatre form did not match the agenda. The theatre form requires that the occupiers can claim moral ownership of the land. The Aborigine could claim moral ownership of Australia, the Greenham Common women moral ownership of an England being put under threat by nuclear weapons, the New Zealand Bastion Point occupiers the theft of the land they were occupying. The internationalists couldn't claim moral ownership of Palestine. They were in fact, simply announcing their presence to both the IOF and the Palestinians in a rather extravagant way – showing off is perhaps the term to be used. And when children show off, they are both laughed at and sometimes punished by their audience, in this case the Israeli soldiers. But for the Palestinian audience, they were at least showing that they were willing to risk their lives on their behalf.

Finally, with this incident, we move for a moment, into the realm of theatrical extremity, first posited by Artaud in his proposing of a Theatre of Cruelty and then made into a methodology by Grotowski - a realm where the actor, by being cruel to himself, removes the social mask.¹¹ Grotowski describes it as follows:

We are talking about profanation. What, in fact, is this but a kind of tactlessness based on the brutal confrontation between our declarations and our daily actions, between the experience of our forefathers which lives within us and our search for a comfortable way of life or our conception of a struggle for survival, between our individual complexes and those of society as a whole? (Grotowski, 1979: 52)

¹¹ For discussion of this, see Grotowski's Toward a Poor theatre, 1979.

In this action, the activists unwittingly entered into a brutal and frightening confrontation with the Israeli Occupying Force¹² and thereby with themselves. They were making a declaration in the face of the competing experiences of forefathers which makes up the conflict. This is then, a theatrical space that has some relevance for Rachel Corrie's journey in Gaza, a place that fits Grotowski's definition of the profane. But, returning to Benjamin's framework, in this example, we have an unclear tendency and an unconscious use of an extreme theatrical form.

After the unsuccessful tent action, there was a period of work which was essential to the project. Firstly, there was the necessary act of dialogue and research into the needs of the community and a finding of an authentic role to play by the activists in the struggle. Secondly, there was Rachel's determination to "write in every spare crack of time in every day" (Rickman and Viner, 2005:28). Hammer reports:

The activists printed up white calling cards and handed them out in the street. "We are ISM volunteers that come to Palestine to be in solidarity with Palestinians," the cards read. "If there is anything that we can do in cases of human rights or injustice we will not hesitate. Call us anytime; we are available 24 hours a day." (6)

As house demolitions along the border strip began to increase, the calls poured into the ISM hotline. Volunteers stayed with families at night, a time when snipers would often shoot up a house in order to terrify the family into leaving. Such an action is only nominally performative, it having no beginning or end per se, but is often part of a community theatre project: getting to know each other and exchanging stories.¹³ It is also a complex role to play for the activists: to fit into the family routine, to know as well that it is not particularly Rachel Corrie that is important but the "privileged white

¹² The Israeli Government calls the occupying army, the Israeli Defence Force. The pro-Palestinian Movement changes the name, for obvious reasons, to the Israeli Occupying Force. I will use the latter term, as an "official" term.

¹³ See Local Acts, Cohen-Cruz, 2005.

person” with USA citizenship. But as well, by being with a family, she began to experience that family at an intimate level, made friends and experienced the generosity of a community under stress. It was a provider of sub-text, the immersing of oneself in a role, which is essential to performance.

And of course, it provided content for her writing, a content which will be explored in detail in Chapter Two. She experienced oppression at a daily grass roots level and began to feel an outrage at the irrationality and brutality of the occupation. The English novelist and art critic, John Berger, writes:

In the dark age in which we are living under the new world order, the sharing of pain is one of the essential pre-conditions for a refinding of dignity and hope. Much pain is unshareable, but the will to share pain is shareable. And from that inevitably inadequate sharing comes resistance. To forget oneself, to identify with a stranger to the point of fully recognising her or him, is to defy necessity and in this defiance, even if small and quiet, there is a power which cannot be measured by the limits of the ‘natural order’. (2001:176)

Rachel Corrie’s writing is driven by the above ethos. But is writing, that solitary act, theatrical or performative? Hammer states:

After a gruelling day Corrie would frequently huddle in front of a terminal at a downtown Internet café, typing at the keyboard from early evening until dawn. Chain smoking and downing cups of sweetened tea, she pounded out ISM reports as well as personal notes to friends and family about life inside a combat zone...”It became a joke about how much time she spent writing,” says Jenny, the Irish activist. “She summed up exactly how I felt, and she’d only been here a couple of weeks.” (6)

So, there was something of a performance happening in the eyes of the other activists. It can also be argued that as soon as writing is published (in the digital age, hitting the e-mail send button), the act becomes performative. And of course, there is the description of the performative within the writing itself: Corrie is often describing

scenes, roles and so on. Certainly the writing was to provide the content for future theatrical performances.

In summary, the tendency behind the research, the dialogue, the story telling and the subsequent writing was absolutely correct; the mode of production may or may not be seen as using theatre or performance, however was essential to subsequent actions which can without qualification be seen as theatrical. In describing this state of affairs, I am reminded of the way in which a considerable period of the theatre process is spent in rehearsal.

We know that at this time Rachel participated as witness in a mock trial of George Bush, held by a class of Palestinian schoolchildren. As part of her giving evidence she burnt a drawing of the American flag. The event is not mentioned in Rachel's writings, but assumed importance in the US when a photo of her participation in the event was published on the ISM website and picked up by the press and pro-Israel lobby groups. After the 9/11 events, and as the US moved toward the invasion of Iraq, the definition of patriotism was becoming contestable, and Rachel was cast as traitor on numerous websites. This photo also caused anti-war protestors to distance themselves after she was killed (Hammer: 2). And the photo itself is an interesting image, with Rachel appearing almost hysterical as she holds up the burning image of her country.¹⁴

The tendency here is more extreme, from pro-Palestinian to anti-US, to the extent of criminalising its president and burning the symbol of nationhood before an audience of foreign schoolchildren. In terms of the ISM agenda, it was not protective, nor did it further understanding in the activist's community (in this case the US). But perhaps it touched the essence of the slogan, "We see, we hear, and we are with you."

¹⁴ For non-Americans, Barbara Kingsolver's book of essays, Small Wonder, gives something of the feeling of the US at this time.

I can imagine, as an actor imagines, that through her contact with Palestinian families, Rachel was experiencing the helplessness of their plight, feeling the impotent anger of the oppressed, the anger that leads to the suicide bomber. She was always aware that her country was funding the oppression. She wrote, “What we are paying for here is truly evil” (Rickman and Viner, 2005: 49). She took this opportunity to express her outrage, to show her empathy past the carefulness of politics.

The apparatus of production was of course, purely theatrical; she took part in a role play with a local, live audience. But the audience, once the role play was digitalised, was anyone and everyone. The digital audience provides its own context. In Gaza, Rachel’s performance made sense. The image of her performance appearing on some Christian fundamentalist’s computer screen in the US meant something entirely different. Here the limits of the ISM apparatus of production are revealed, and indeed the limits of activism as performance for the media, for the relationship with the audience becomes serial. The performance inevitably becomes a commodity, separate from the intention and context of the performer.

But there is another image of extremity which interests me. Rachel would occasionally go out at night and stand in no man’s land, illuminating herself with a large fluorescent light, daring the snipers to shoot her (Hammer: 6). She makes no mention of this in her writing. What was the tendency? There is of course something foolhardy about all acting, standing on stage illuminated before an audience in darkness who can “shoot you down”. But there is the bravery of doing so, and the cowardice of those who stay in the safety of darkness. As well, she was testing the will of the Israeli snipers. If they chose to shoot a clearly visible, unarmed woman, they could not make excuses of it being an accident. They would have been murdering her. If they chose not to do so, they were acknowledging the power of her

ethical presence and at this point, doubt begins. For me, she was embodying the essence of non-violent resistance, which is not about publicity, but about confronting violence in all its armour with the vulnerable human body.

The apparatus of production was extremely simple: a battery powered light. There were no photos, no press presence. This was a confrontation between performers, one of whom is embedded in a military system of masks, the other who is, like Grotowski's Performer, "passive in action and active in seeing", and "conscious of his own mortality."¹⁵ As I will argue in my conclusion, this is one of the roles of theatre as an activist project.

One of the Internationalist's routine duties was to confront the Israeli armoured bulldozers as they engaged in their work of demolition of Palestinian houses that supposedly harboured terrorists, or were supposedly the endpoint of tunnels that brought in arms from the Egyptian side of the border. The Internationalists would protect the houses by standing in front of them with banners and informing the soldiers via megaphone that the inhabitants were innocent civilians. One of the threatened houses belonged to a pharmacist, Samir Nasrallah, and his family, whom Rachel had befriended.

As we have noted, "to offer protection" was at the forefront of the ISM's agenda. By getting to know the families, they could counter the Israeli justification for demolition, by telling the human story behind the rubble. The apparatus of production was simple: their bodies, a bright orange jacket, a megaphone and a banner. Wherever possible they recorded the encounters on digital cameras. It was very much an improvisation, with the huge machines often driving perilously close. There is also a genealogy of such encounters within activist history: from Czechoslovaks

¹⁵ For Grotowski's essay, "Performer", see Schechner, 1997, 376-380.

confronting Russian tanks to Tiananmen Square students confronting the Chinese military machine.

On the afternoon of March 16th, 2003, Internationalists noticed two bulldozers and a tank clearing ground near the Nasrallah house. They climbed on the roof of a nearby house and called other Internationalists to come. Rachel and some others arrived, and the group split into two, disrupting the work of the bulldozers. One of the machines went so close to one of the protestors, he was pushed into some barbed wire, and the others had to free him. The tank came over to check that he was alright. But then, the bulldozer that Rachel was targeting, suddenly continued moving toward her crouching body, lifting her onto the mound of dirt it was creating. Her body was dragged under the blade, and the machine ran over her. It then reversed over her body. She was badly crushed and taken to hospital, where she died. Theatre turned into warfare. But what does this mean?

The bulldozer was the material fact of war. Rachel Corrie stood in front of the bulldozer symbolically prepared to die, but with the belief that the bulldozer would stop because she was a foreigner. Perhaps the bulldozer driver was of the belief that if he kept going she would jump out of the way. Perhaps he didn't see her (the official explanation). But then the role she was playing required her to be visible. We know however, that she was initially kneeling on the ground – an act of cynicism, a tempting of fate? Perhaps she was simply tired. But it was not a good move if the essence of her action was to be visible. In any case, her symbolic willingness to die turned into a death scene. The time interval was so small that we have no idea if she became willing. Or disbelieved in what was happening to her. And then had to suspend that disbelief. Or perhaps the physical realities take over? But is it any different for a soldier? While symbolically prepared to die, does any soldier (other

than the suicide bomber), know he's going to die? Is it always an accident? Are the ISM volunteers in actual fact, soldiers? Is all warfare theatrical, until physical damage, either to people or to property, occurs? Is politics, in any system built on violence, another name for the theatricality of warfare? Is the response to this paradigm, whether empathetic or analytical, the difference between Stanislavski and Brecht? In any case, with Rachel Corrie's death, accepted stereotypes of vision, feeling and judgement were violated. Rachel Corrie inhabited, for a moment, the vulnerable, anonymous body of a soldier. But as a middle class US citizen, this anonymity quickly disappeared.

For the spectators, there was disbelief that this had happened. Then, once that disbelief had been suspended, a variety of models of belief formed. She took on many roles: martyr, victim, heroine, and for some, traitor. The apparatus of production available to the movement was huge as the world media became interested. As news of her death spread, together with her prophetic e-mails, it condemned Israeli arrogance and brutality in a way that the run of the mill Palestinian death could not. A transgression (similar to that at the heart of Greek tragedy) had occurred: this young, idealistic, middle class American was dead. Goffman (1981: 27) states that roles carry "appropriateness" in terms of how people react to that person. Rachel Corrie had been treated in an inappropriate way. By inference Palestinians are being treated in an inappropriate way. And as she had vehemently pointed out, "our taxes are paying for this" (Rickman and Viner, 2005: 49). The massive US support of Israel was on the line. In Turner's terms of dramas being "a-harmonic process arising in conflict situations," Rachel Corrie, by becoming an Internationalist had already "breached regular, norm governed social relations". Her death was the "crisis which widens the breach" (Turner, 1974: 37-41, qtd. in Schechner, 2002: 66).

However, the media is fickle, and given this huge opportunity to spread their message, the ISM made a serious mistake, by presenting a series of photographs of Rachel with megaphone confronting the bulldozer, which had been taken earlier, rather than at the moment leading to her death. After these had been published and then had to be retracted, much of the media lost interest (Hammer: 9). As well, with the Iraq war looming, patriotism remained a vexed question.

But as well, a variety of internet sites were busy processing this martyrdom, which was becoming a site of contestation as the pro-Israeli lobby moved into action. For what was now at stake was “the sustaining of the definition of the situation that the performance of a group foster” (Goffman: 141). Inevitably the Israeli Government and the pro-Israel lobby in the US moved onto the attack. There was a convenient arrest of Hamas “terrorists” sheltering in the ISM office in Gaza, an expulsion of Internationalists, and a web site condemnation of Evergreen College as radical, anti-God and anti-American. For some Americans, she was a traitor and at best naïve. Somewhat surprisingly, a reactionary strain amongst students was revealed. One student website came up with a new definition of stupidity: sitting in front of a bulldozer to protect terrorists.

Her death produced, and continues to produce, further performances. A commemorative service in Gaza attended by Palestinian officials was disrupted by the IOF firing tear gas into its midst. Services were held in her home-town in the US, and vigils took place elsewhere. A large contingent from Rachel’s college went to Palestine that summer as Internationalists, and in fact the role has become more accepted. There are now Christian groups who enter trouble spots as human shields – a new sort of mission. The Corrie family began speaking to peace and justice groups across the States; her parents visited Palestine to retrace their daughter’s steps (subject

of a tv documentary), set up a foundation in their daughter's name to raise funds for projects in Palestine, attempted to persuade the US government to seek an enquiry, and sued both the Israeli Government and the Caterpillar Corporation. This latter will prove interesting, for it is based on the supposition that corporations are responsible for the end use of the items they manufacture, which, if the case were successful, would prove extremely problematic for arms manufacturers. As well, they are persuading liberal shareholders in the Caterpillar Corporation, especially churches, to withdraw their funds (Emad Makay, Inter Press Service News Agency June 14, 2006).

Each anniversary, commemorations of Rachel's death are held, often made resonate by some more recent event; for example, the cancellation of the New York Theatre Workshop performances led to a reading of Rachel's Words to mark the last anniversary. She has become a quasi-religious figure, embodying liberal and humanist values.

It is clear that theatre was a key mode of production for Rachel Corrie and the ISM. It also plays a key role in the further activist projects that have evolved from her death. The tendency of these projects will vary somewhat from that of the ISM, with the work of the Foundation being of a more liberal persuasion (rebuilding Palestinian homes and helping children).¹⁶ It is also clear that, in this paradigm, the apparatus of production is dependent on the media for the creating of a wide audience, and the media, dominated by multi national organizations, will tend to produce the status quo. The project then has not changed the apparatus of production, except where it can link into indymedia sites and of course, in the use of the internet. But once again, in these outlets, the audience is likely to be those of a similar persuasion. This role of theatre

¹⁶ See www.rachelcorriefoundation.org.

as real life mode of production can become privileged above theatre in the traditional sense. Bradshaw, for example, writes:

But while theatre mostly has become a marginal commodity in the capitalist marketplace, performance has emerged essential to the production of the new world disorder, a key process in every socio-political domain of the mediatised globe.

(1999:5)

This, for me, is problematic. The problem is not the essentialism of performance, but the mediatised globe and who controls the media and the nature of the mediatised performance. But before I fully argue this point, it is necessary to examine three theatre productions that have emerged, based on Rachel Corrie's life and her writings.

Chapter Two: At Court

In terms of Benjamin's framework of analysis, most theatre productions will exhibit complex tendencies, a complex production apparatus, and a complex relationship between the two. A script will embody a tendency, but then there are producers, directors and actors involved, as well as a theatre, which will have its own history and embody a certain expectation. Often, behind this, are patrons of one sort or another. Finally, there is the judgement, perceived and actual, of the market place. A further complexity in this case, is that Rachel Corrie was both writer and subject, and deceased, so no longer in charge of her own material. Finally, the activist project becomes more diffuse, distanced from the ISM, moving more loosely within the pro-Palestinian movement. Or there is the possibility that the activist project becomes simply that of making this woman's life and opinions available to others, which was, after all, my own initial impulse.

In this chapter I will trace these complexities via the Royal Court production of My Name is Rachel Corrie. I haven't seen the production, so the source material is the script, reviews, articles and relevant e-mails. For contrast, I conclude the chapter by referring to the Bread and Puppet Theatre productions based on Rachel Corrie's last e-mails to her family.

Overall, and this will be true for Chapter Three as well, there are two competing views as to the relevancy of the traditional theatre production in the current age. For Kershaw, theatre per se has become "a marginal commodity item in the capitalist cultural market-place..."(1999: 5), without political connection or effect. Jill Dolan on the other hand argues that "...live performance provides a place where people come together, embodied and passionate, to share experiences of meaning

making and imagination that can describe or capture fleeting intimations of a better world...”(2005: 2). She continues:

The power of the performance’s effect translates into political effects, in that it opens a possibility for action that spectators might not, before, have felt or seen. The performance works emotionally to create in its presence and its present desire to feel like this outside of the theater; it creates a palpable sense that the world *could* feel like this, if every quotidian exchange were equally full of generosity, compassion, insight, and love. (111-112)

The journey of the next two chapters will test these assumptions.

The Royal Court in London has secured a notable place in British theatre history as a nurturer of new playwriting. It was founded in 1956 as a subsidized company, The English Stage Company, and its first artistic director George Devine, quickly made his mark by introducing the first wave of working class playwrights, who signalled a drastic break with English theatre’s gentry and middle class tradition. The Royal Court’s production of John Osborne’s Look Back in Anger can be seen as “the decisive starting point of modern British drama...” (Rickman and Viner, 2005). Productions of plays by Arnold Wesker, John Arden, Ann Jellicoe, N F Simpson, Pinter and Edward Bond followed.

They were a first generation of postwar, educated working class, with a strong relationship to the oppositional culture of the sixties and seventies, a culture which was diverse in its option taking, aware of process as well as content (Kershaw, 1992:17). Some of these dramatists (Arden, Jellicoe and Bond) became committed to, or at least seriously engaged with, the collective creating processes of alternative theatre and community theatre as alternative mode of production, and Wesker attempted to set up a cultural movement with trade unions. For they were inevitably aware that mainstream theatre serves a largely middle class audience, and were faced

with the contradiction that their success could lead to a betrayal of the very roots that provided the content for that success.

The Court has always been a dramatist focused theatre, remaining committed to the literary theatre tradition, and “to the development of each new generation of budding playwrights” (Rickman and Viner, 2005). As globalisation has taken hold and Britain increasingly became a multi-ethnic society, the Court “placed a renewed emphasis on the development of international work...” (Rickman and Viner, 2005). This began as “creative dialogue with theatre practitioners”, but since 1997, they have produced new international plays. They thus added to the original and ongoing nationalist project an international, inter-cultural strand. My Name is Rachel Corrie was curated by the International Department. The Court therefore embodies, as an institution, a strong tendency, that of being the vehicle for the progressive, up and coming, playwright.

This apparatus of production has a staff of seventy four, runs two theatres, and is supported principally by the Arts Council England, but also receives funding from the British Council, a wide variety of Trusts and Foundations, private companies, individuals, benefactors, and since 1997, The American Friends of the Royal Court Theatre, who have a page of their own in the supporter section. British theatre has for some time, been considerably supported by the cultural tourist, and the American nostalgia for the aristocratic provides a goodly number of these tourists, appreciative of the Royal Shakespeare Company and The Royal Court.

The Court therefore exists in a complex relation with “the market”, demonstrating “certain significant asymmetries between the social relations of the dominant productive mode and other relations within the general social and cultural order” (Williams, 1981: 50). Williams continues:

The modern patronal is common in advanced capitalist societies. Certain arts which are not profitable or even viable in market terms, are sustained by specific institutions such as foundations, by organizations of subscribers, and still by some private patronage. Intermediate between this and full governmental institutions are bodies wholly or significantly financed from the public revenue. (1981:55)

In other words, the Court's means of production is provided by a market return, subsidized by state and private patronage, which has enabled it to gain a privileged place in the mainstream UK theatre culture (which it must also continue to justify), a place which is then envied by US theatre supporters, for whom the marketplace has produced a less coherent culture. But this patronage also pushes the theatre toward the cultural emporium concept, part of the old world culture much beloved by the tourist. To quote Bradshaw:

As corporate capitalism spreads across the globe the established estate of theatre is transformed into a playground for the newly privileged, a quick stop-over site on the tourist and heritage map, an emporium in which the culturally curious can sample the latest short-lived life styles. (1999:5)

The gestation of My Name is Rachel Corrie is described by Craig Corrie, Rachel's father:

When we were first contacted by the Royal Court Theatre and told of the theater's and Alan Rickman's dream of creating a workshop or play from Rachel's emails, I was amazed that people of such talent, experience, and reputation would take that sort of interest in our daughter's writing. While I always knew Rachel was a good writer, I wasn't certain I was completely objective on the subject. So when we met at the Royal Court in the fall of 2003 it all seemed surreal. There Cindy and I explained that Rachel wrote throughout her life, and if we searched we could find a great deal of work they might be interested in. Since most of her writing was in her personal journals, we had not read what was there, but we would try to gather it together and send it to them...The dream came to fruition with that first run last spring in the Jerwood Theatre Upstairs...The Royal Court production has won over critics,

audiences, and perhaps most difficult of all, Rachel's family. Megan Dodds was spot-on that first day we met her when she said "You will love it!"

It took a great deal of trust and courage to turn over Rachel's words to those strangers from London. The strangers have now become friends, the trust has been repaid many times over, and the courage is now with the theater... They have given us a gift we can never repay. (March 11, 2006, www.RachelsWords.org)

It is possible that a certain seduction has taken place here; but then, by one of those ironies, there is something of the model of community theatre present as well, with the Corrie family and the new activist project as embodied in the Rachel Corrie Foundation, being the community with which the Court entered a partnership. The Community Theatre model's overall tendency is that of participatory democracy, allowing the expression of the diversity of cultures within a society. Within that overall tendency, the specific tendency, and hopefully the means of production, will be owned by the community.

In this case, the tendency to celebrate Rachel Corrie as writer separate from Rachel the activist, and a writer with a greater field of content than that of ISM volunteer, was shared by both the family and the Court staff. But this immediately set in place a move away from Rachel Corrie the activist within an activist project. And the means of production remained very much under the control of the Court, without the dialogue with the community, whether of family or ISM, that would normally take place in a community theatre production.

As well, this is a curiously personal example of the "circum-Atlantic", that "...new structure of cultural exchange [that] has been built up across the imperial networks which once played host to the triangular trade of sugar, slaves and capital" (Paul Gilroy, qtd. in Striff, 2003:126). In this case, Palestine becomes an African

commodity, taken to the US by Rachel Corrie, and now transported to Britain, which involved a further distancing of the Palestinian cause.

But what of the script? In the following close analysis, I wish to show that in the editing of the journals and e-mails, a distortion of tendency occurred, which derives from the editors and the theatre itself, and its place in the current circum-Atlantic cultural structure.

My Name is Rachel Corrie is a literary piece. The script celebrates the writer, her skill with words, and exhibits a tendency toward magic realism:

Trying to find a beginning, trying to impose order on the great psychotic fast-forward merry-go-round, and trying to impose order is the first step toward ending up in a park somewhere, painted blue, singing 'Row, row, row your boat' to an audience of saggy-lipped junkies and business people munching oat-bran muffins.' (Rickman and Viner, 2005: 5)

We first encounter Rachel in bohemian artist mode, waking up in a messy room trying to find a pen to write with, appalled by her creation of the room, and with just a hint of the psychotic: the bad girl and the good girl, the ceiling that might "rip me to pieces" (3-4; Laing, 1965: 193). She introduces herself as a twelve year old, "My Name is Rachel Corrie", and that child remains a motif – artists remain eternal children of course, and the child is more sympathetic than the adult.

The texture of postmodern changeability is quickly apparent: that each moment is different and we must try and capture experience as it is happening. One is reminded of Foucault's comment: "...the feeling of novelty, of vertigo in the face of the passing moment that alone enables us to grasp what is authentic in our experience of contemporary art-forms and life-styles alike" (qtd. in Gutting, 1994, 174).

Accordingly, Rachel wants to play many different roles in life and she wants people to perform openly, to have "speakers attached to their chests that pour out music so you

can tell from a distance what mood they're in..."(Rickman and Viner: 7). A hint of the Oedipal is introduced when she talks of her mother, and a sense of projection: "My mother would never admit it, but she wanted me exactly how I turned out-scattered and deviant and too loud" (7).

We find that a trip to Russia as an exchange student, changed her. She was captured by a place that was "flawed, dirty, broken and gorgeous." "I was awake for the first time," and "...some things back here in Olympia, Washington, USA, seemed a little weird and disconcerting" (7). She decided to go to a local progressive college, Evergreen, to not follow the conventional corporate path of her siblings, to become instead "an artist and a writer" (8-9). We are into classic romantic artist territory, the epiphany brought on by the disreputable, leading to the rejection of middle class conformity.

The coming trip to Gaza is introduced, and we learn that she has been organizing around peace and justice issues in her hometown, but it feels like it is isolated work. She needs to make connection to "the people who are impacted by US foreign policy" (10). She attempts to analyse this need and we find that she had signed up to a Local Knowledge class, which involved research into her community. She thought she was doing the course to flesh out her writing, but instead, she became aware of the history of the place. She had been particularly impressed by the salmon, which still swim up the creek (now piped under the town), to spawn, thus holding onto their tradition and ignoring the physical changes that have occurred.

The artist has been captured by "community", a somewhat vague notion of the masses, but nevertheless, as a place and its people, a notion of something more than bourgeois individuality. Williams also points out that community can be a grouping that "has been hammered out in very fierce conflict" (1989:114). He refers

to union members who have experienced a long strike, retaining for a lifetime the sense of shared history and identity that we expect of members of a community, even after they have dispersed. In this sense, the ISM can be considered a community.

As she packs for her trip, she enters Freudian mode, considering firstly her mother, who she challenges: “I love you but I’m growing out of what you gave me” (Rickman and Viner: 16-17). Her father has obviously been away a lot and there is not such a close relationship. She threatens him with her mother’s possible infidelity. In reply he plays the victim. Her mother is in charge of Rachel’s communication with him, but he provides the money (18-19). We are close to the reveal of Three Act theatre, the skeleton in the closet. She then “packs away” her ex-boyfriend, Colin, subject of her main, failed relationship, a boy who was too extreme for her, whereas she was much more “normal”. Another mystery, another reveal required? Or is it simply the artist’s traditional failure at relatedness? The first half of the play concludes with a meditation on aloneness and death. In this first half of the play, the editors have pieced together an identity from several volumes of diary entries. They have quickly given us a glimpse of Rachel as a vibrant gifted middle class young woman with some family hang-ups, not altogether a cliché, but close to it. There is certainly no political framework present, other than that of conventional liberalism.

Now she goes to Palestine and the writing style becomes more telegraphic, more Hemingway as she enters the war zone and begins training. The tent incident is not detailed: “Sleep in tent. Gunshot through tent. Start smoking” (27). Rachel and her colleagues begin their Internationalist work by networking, observing, and banner making. But then, as they are called upon to retrieve a dead body from near the border, they enter the war proper – “under fire” for the second time. After a week of action, she writes a long summary of her feelings. It is centred on a theme of children

and young people. Young people in Gaza are aware that life for children in other places is not like theirs'. She imagines them visiting the States. What would happen in their minds if they "spent an evening when you didn't wonder if the walls of your home might suddenly fall inward..." (33), and whether they would be able to forgive the world for their years spent suffering? She speaks of an encounter with a young Egyptian soldier, leading to the realization that this war is being fought by kids.

Finally she meditates on death (and life): the "shrug" of history: that there are no rules, no fairness, no guarantees. It is a realization strong in young people in a post-modern world: things are random (a favourite word). The neo-pragmatist philosopher, Richard Rorty suggests, "that we give up the misguided quest for reasons, principles, ideas of justice, validating grounds or whatever, and view ourselves rather as creatures whose identity consists of nothing more than a 'random assemblage' of 'contingent and idiosyncratic needs'" (qtd. in Gutting, 1994:181). But Rachel rejects that "shrug" with a concept that feels like commitment: "Now I know who cares. I know if I die at 11.15pm or at 97 years- I know. And I know it's me. That's my job" (Rickman and Viner:35).

In traditional communist terms, it might be stated that an intellectual becomes committed to the struggle of the working class, and no matter when he dies, he carries the knowledge of that commitment with him. "Caring" is however, a difficult word with which to express commitment, for it is usually used to describe the motivation for performing charitable deeds and is the trigger trying to be pulled by most advertising for World Vision and the like. As well, with Rachel Corrie, there is the middle class emphasis on "I". But while still in a liberal framework, she is on a fast learning curve, and she speaks of "a very intense tutelage in the ability of people to organize against all odds, and to resist against all odds" (34).

The writers have confined themselves to the e-mails written home by Rachel, so her political development is inevitably proscribed by the family dynamic. Her mother still clings to her abhorrence of any violence and pleads for her daughter to come home. Rachel doesn't respond directly to the violence issue, but talks instead of the community she is discovering in Gaza, of "being in this big puddle of blankets", of the ability of the people "in defending such a large degree of their humanity against the incredible horror occurring in their lives and against the constant presence of death" (39). She looks forward to "seeing more and more people willing to resist the direction the world is moving in...that our communities are not important, that we are powerless, that the future is determined, and that the highest level of humanity is expressed through what we choose to buy at the mall" (39).

This leads to a final complex sequence where, via a meditation on violence, she moves to a mature political position. She begins with a real fear regarding the reality of the Palestinian situation, before returning to her mother's phobia of violence and rejecting it. She talks of the removal of economic infrastructure that has taken place, the destruction of a middle class, even the removal of the means of subsistence, and then the use of any act of Palestinian violence to justify the destruction of the Palestinian economy. If this were happening to us, she asks, would we not want to defend ourselves? Most Palestinians attempt to continue to go about their lives, providing the very epitome of non-violent resistance. And they remain generous.

She seeks a bigger outcry, wants to believe, "that even people with a great deal of privilege don't just idly buy and watch. What we are paying for here is truly evil" (49). This is still a moralistic reaction, but then she approaches a more general mass movement analysis of the situation: "Being here should make me more aware of what it means to be a farmer in Colombia, for example..." and wants everyone to "drop

everything and devote our lives to making this stop” (48-49). This is not the world that she wanted to be born into.

She has moved away from an individual, middle class protest, toward a collective position which also accepts the need for a violent response. She has been captured by a politicised community.

And then we learn that she was killed. The death occurs off stage, too shameful to show, like a drug overdose, or Ann Frank’s arrest and deportation. The play finishes with an epilogue, a video clip of Rachel as a ten year old, giving a speech on poverty, affirming the liberal conscience (52).

While the text could be seen as the simple narrative of her development, there has been an editorial input, which, at the level of an ideological sub-text, is saying that by pushing toward a radical, collective stance, which accepts the facts of violence, Rachel Corrie necessarily died. She died because this view is not sustainable. Let us rather return to the memory of the ten year old with a social conscience. Certainly, let us reject the view that Corrie joined a movement for social change and randomly lost her life because of the violence of the Palestinian situation, a situation in which Palestinians die daily. The middle class framework with which we began the play is thus affirmed. As an audience therefore, we can listen to this voice in safety.

By choosing the one-woman show as the mode of production, the Court resurrected Rachel Corrie as an isolated individual, rather than as a member of a movement, with the Palestinian society existing only through her words. In my judgment, the tendency which Rachel Corrie represented, and the ISM continue to represent, that is, people acting together can change things, became distorted. Instead we learn that by acting together you die. It is the reverse message of the classic tragedy, in which by acting alone the hero must die.

Nevertheless, or perhaps because of the change of tendency and the individualist mode of production, the play proved very popular, especially with young people. An initial season in the studio theatre (which seats 90) quickly sold out, and the play transferred to the main theatre (800) for a further 24 performances. These sold out in two days. So, an audience of 20,000 saw the play, and the theatre was thrilled that young people were coming.

Critics are not very helpful these days, preparing as New York Times reviewer, Frank Rich states, mainly “consumer reports” (qtd. in Cohen-Cruz, 2005:120). The Observer wrote:

It could have been mawkish; it might have been sentimental. It isn't. Go, and take your teenagers with you, not because- God forbid – you want them to suffer such a terrible fate, but because just occasionally you see a show in the theatre and hear a voice that, like Rachel's, vibrates with passion and idealism, and that teaches us all how to live. (Townsend, The Observer, 24/4/05)

The more conservative caution that it is “not quite art”, (Wolf, New York Times, March 31, 2006), and young people were not interviewed with regard to their interest. All we know is that in Britain the play was a hit. I can only surmise the reason why.

Firstly, the conflict had been considerably in the news. Two English young people had been killed in Palestine before Rachel Corrie. One of them, Tom Hurndall, lay in a coma for months, before life support was withdrawn. Their deaths had been widely reported. There had been, and continues to be, Britain's involvement in the Iraq invasion and Prime Minister Tony Blair's support of President Bush's foreign policy, support which has become increasingly unpopular, whereas European neighbours had been much more cautious. There were considerable demonstrations against the Iraq invasion, and we know that many young people, including school children, took part. Reports surfaced of the use of texting as an organizing tool for the

first time. Finally, the UK has increasingly become a multi-ethnic society with a considerable Arabic community, and because of its foreign adventures, has become a target for terrorism. I can surmise therefore that the play encapsulated a “structure of feeling” for many young people, that concept of Williams which Dolan summarises as:

...a term chosen to emphasize a distinction from more formal concepts of “world-view” or “ideology.” It is not only that we must go beyond formally held and systematic beliefs... it is that we are concerned with meanings and values as they are actively lived and felt... We are talking about... specifically affective elements of consciousness and relationships: not feeling against thought, but thought as felt and feeling as thought: Practical consciousness of a present kind, in a living and interrelated continuity. (2005: 66)

Theatre is the perfect art form in many ways, for the assembling of a temporary community of interest around a “structure of feeling.” I agree with Dolan when she writes:

...live performance provides a place where people come together, embodied and passionate, to share experiences of meaning making and imagination that can describe or capture fleeting intimations of a better world... (Dolan, 2005: 2)

The parents and the Royal Court were determined to take the production to the US, to the centre of theatre activity, New York. Craig Corrie considered the Court production to be a benchmark which he wanted to be seen there, for there had been a lot of negative comment, even hateful comment in the US when their daughter was killed, for example: “She should burn in hell for an eternity”, “Good riddance to bad rubbish” (Viner, Guardian 8/4/05). But the transfer to the US was not to prove easy. The Royal Court entered a partnership relationship with the New York Theatre Workshop, a non-profit organization which depends on a subscriber list (a mix of patronage and market), whereby that theatre would host a season of the Court

production in May, 2006. But in February, the director of the NYTW, James Nicola requested “a postponement” of the season. His board " were not confident that we had the time to create an environment where the art could be heard independent of the political issues associated with it" (McKinley, Jesse. New York Times, 28/2/06). After polling local Jewish religious and community leaders as to their feelings about the work, "The uniform answer we got was that the fantasy that we could present the work of this writer simply as a work of art without appearing to take a position was just that, a fantasy," he said (McKinley, Jesse. New York Times, 28/2/06).

The Court denounced the decision as censorship and complained that the production had been settled, plane tickets booked, marketing planned and money lost. Vanessa Redgrave, one of the investors, wrote:

This is censorship of the worst kind. More awful even than that. It is black-listing a dead girl and her diaries...Megan Dodds, and a crew lose their jobs. The Royal Court Theatre lose a production that was a few weeks from opening in New York City. For the Royal Court Theatre were producing "Rachel Corrie", with the New York Theatre Workshop, and putting up a lot of money--\$100,000 dollars. (Counterpunch; March 07, 2006)

A furore immediately arose in the press, and the decision took some explaining. Why is it that the words of Rachel Corrie could not be heard in the USA- not, that is, without what the NYTW had called “contextualising”, framing the play with political discussions, maybe even mounting a companion piece that would somehow “mollify” the Jewish community?

This naked admission by a left-leaning cultural outlet that it would subordinate its own artistic judgement to pro-Israel views has served as a smoking gun for those who have tried to press the discussion in this country of Palestinian human rights... people were asking questions that had been consigned to the fringe: How can the West

condemn the Islamic world for not accepting Muhammad cartoons when a Western writer who speaks out on behalf of Palestinians is silenced? (Weiss, 2006:2)

As the Seattle reviews of the Bread and Puppet show reveal, the real issue was Corrie's connection to the International Solidarity Movement and that organization's willingness to work with a broad range of Palestinian organizations. Behind that was "the war on terror", which justifies all of Israel's actions and US imperial adventures. At this period in the US, a certain patriotic hysteria existed, once again well described by Barbara Kingsolver.

In the wake of the September 11 attacks, an amazing windfall befell our local flag-and-map store... Suddenly it was swamped by unprecedented hordes of customers who came in to buy, not maps, of course, but flags. After the stock quickly sold out, a cashier reported that customers came near to rioting as they stomped around empty-handed and the waiting list swelled to six hundred names. (2002:238)

When Weiss "followed the money" he found an affluent board behind the NYTW, about a third of whom appeared to be Jewish. "The presence of a cultural lobby is suggested that parallels the vaunted pro-Israel lobby in think tanks and Congress" (8). A month later, this lobby was further incensed by the publication of an essay by two prominent international relations scholars, Profs John Mearsheimer of the University of Chicago and Stephen Walt, academic dean of Harvard's Kennedy School of Government. They claimed that:

For the past several decades, and especially since the Six-Day War in 1967, the centrepiece of US Middle Eastern policy has been its relationship with Israel. The combination of unwavering support for Israel and the related effort to spread 'democracy' throughout the region has inflamed Arab and Islamic opinion and jeopardised not only US security but that of much of the rest of the world. This situation has no equal in American political history. Why has the US been willing to set aside its own security and that of many of its allies in order to advance the interests of another state? One might assume that the bond

between the two countries was based on shared strategic interests or compelling moral imperatives, but ...the thrust of US policy in the region derives almost entirely from domestic politics, and especially the activities of the 'Israel Lobby'. ("The Israel Lobby", London Review of Books, 10 March, 2006:1)

There is little doubt that in both controversies, we are dealing with a hegemonic situation, peculiar to the US. As Raymond Williams writes:

... hegemony supposes the existence of something which is truly total, which is not merely secondary or superstructural, but is lived at such a depth, which saturates society to such an extent... that it corresponds to the reality of social experience... (Williams, 1980, 37-38)

Nevertheless, it is remarkable that the possibility of the words of a 23 year old student being played on stage should have had such a response in a supposedly "free society".

Frederik Jameson helps us out when he states in an interview:

I happen to think that no systemic change in this country will be possible without the minimal first step of the achievement of a social democratic movement, and in my opinion even that first step will not be possible without two other preconditions (which are essentially the same thing): namely the creation of a Marxist intelligentsia, and that of a Marxist culture, a Marxist intellectual presence, which is to say, the legitimization of Marxist discourse as that of a 'realistic' social and political alternative in a country which (unlike most of the other countries in the world) has never recognized it as such. (Burnham, 1995:40)

In similar, but different vein, Edward Said considers that there is in the States:

... a new and degraded era in the production of intellectual discourse. For when the intellectuals of the most powerful country in the history of the world align themselves so flagrantly with that power, pressing that power's case instead of urging restraint, reflection, genuine communication and understanding, we are back to the bad old days of the intellectual war against communism... (2004:160)

But by June, the Court had managed to find a New York producer willing to take the piece on, to play at The Minetta Lane Theatre, a commercial theatre in Greenwich Village. The market, as an apparatus of production, proved less censorious than the patron. Or maybe, the scandal had created a firm market. It opened in October for a run of 6 weeks and continued to the end of December.

However, the tendency represented by the play had changed by this time. It inevitably involved “the right to be heard”, rather than the plight of Palestinians, and controversy had bred indifference. As well, Rachel Corrie had become “An Author”, that category of authentication in the modern age which, for Foucault, has become centered on the writer of fiction, with its link to sacrifice, even to the sacrifice of life, the deep self being expressed and so on (Rabinow, 1984:102). The activist has been effaced. This is reflected in the reviews:

Now that the Royal Court production of My Name Is Rachel Corrie has finally arrived in Manhattan...many theatergoers wonder what all the shouting was about, especially in a town where one-person shows expressing extreme points of view are common theatrical fare. (Sara Krulwich, [NY Times](#), 16/10/06)

and

Corrie certainly fails to provide a balanced view of the conflict-in her rubric, Israelis are antagonistic, Palestinians cuddly-but it is very much one woman's view of the situation. This woman, however bright and articulate, is not the most dependable narrator. Self-described as "scattered and deviant and too loud," she's the sort of Pacific Northwest creature who can say with perfect conviction, "The salmon talked me in to a lifestyle change." Killed at 23, she was still only a budding writer and thinker; her emails from the Middle East vacillate, winningly and irritatingly, between the naïve and the astute. So, consequently, does the play, resulting in a slight, though moving theatrical work. However poignant and precocious her juvenilia, it doesn't substitute for the dramatic arc of a full life. (Alexis Soloski, www.villagevoice.com, 13/10/06)

Fulfilling Kershaw's prediction, the play has become a “quick stop over site”

for the “culturally curious”, and I would argue that the ideological shift previously analysed, enabled this to happen without undue difficulty.

So the role of theatre as exemplified by The Royal Court production of My Name is Rachel Corrie is, as usual, over-determined. In terms of its role in the activist project, the production enabled the witnessing function of the ISM project to be extended and to reach a wider audience through the live encounter of theatre. It acted negatively however in terms of the recruitment/activist function of the project: to go to Gaza. Instead, we can celebrate the activist and enjoy her words in the safety of the theatre. It undoubtedly did no harm in the fund raising efforts of the Rachel Corrie Foundation (royalties going to the Foundation); it would have served some good purpose in promoting the Palestinian cause, and helped articulate a progressive thought/feeling for its young London audience. It also served a community theatre function of enabling Rachel Corrie’s story to be told and through that, some of the stories of present day Palestine. For their story to be witnessed also served a therapeutic function for the family (Cohen-Cruz, 146).

But as well, by providing an ideological catharsis in terms of real “action”, it played a conservative role, of maintaining the status quo for these privileged young people and their elders. It also, very effectively, in the production relations it established, privatised this story (part of the apparatus of production) through the rights framework, denying the ability of other theatres in other countries, to spread the story. It turned Rachel Corrie’s writings from having an organizing function, freely available to the movement, to being private, possessed, “authorial works” with a market value (Williams, 1981:50). It is a play for example, that could have had a considerable impact and assisted the opposition movement in the run up to the Israeli election.

But in one of those ironies, it played a role as an activist project in terms of revealing the pro-Israel lobby in the US, a role not played by publication of the book of the play – which was available - confirming William’s view that “... while anyone in the world, with normal physical resources, can watch dance or look at sculpture or listen to music, still some forty per cent of the world’s present inhabitants can make no contact whatever with a piece of writing...” (1981:93). Although we must not discount the part played in this controversy, by the politically naive actions of the staff and board of the theatre concerned. Surely they should have checked out their subscriber community’s likely reaction before agreeing to the production?

The doubt of whether capitalist production relations can truly be oppositional is confirmed. The Court’s London production remained, as an apparatus of production, within the mainstream, even though it was not wholly market based. And the NYTW episode revealed that where the means of production are partially or wholly dependent on patronage, then that patronage will tend to reflect the hegemony present in the society to which the patrons belong. One must return to Benjamin’s analysis where he writes that the intellectual’s place can be “identified, or, better, chosen, only on the basis of his position in the process of production...” and his demand of the intellectual “not to supply the apparatus of production without, to the utmost extent possible, changing it in accordance with socialism” (228).

Obviously, to change the apparatus in accordance with socialism is a tall order in the current world. In the academic discussion that ensued when the Court production was first “postponed”, I found the comments of John Bell of Emerson College (Theatre History Discussion List, astr-1@listserv.uiuc.edu, 3/6/2006) mirrored my own thoughts most closely. He talked of the Bread and Puppet production in December 2004, “simply performed as an expression of contemporary theatre in the

moment; a topic that needed to be addressed...” The writer, who has been involved with Bread and Puppet for many years, bemoaned the fact that “the gaze of mainstream theatre writing...limits itself to consideration of such political plays especially and sometimes only when they arrive to acceptable venues such as NYTW from the shores of England.” Bell finally asked, “Why not more American productions about Rachel Corrie, pro and con. Why not talk immediately and directly about such overwhelmingly important issues right now by means of theatre?”

It is appropriate therefore to conclude this chapter by briefly touching on the Bread and Puppet production. Once again I haven't seen it, and the evidence is sparse, a few blogsite reviews and the company's website. As a community theatre company, Bread and Puppet, despite their reputation, occupy a marginal position, so receive small attention from the media.

The group have existed since the 1960's, have a libertarian socialist perspective and perform shows using huge puppets. Their founder, Peter Schuman explains:

I decided to take my painting and sculpture into the street and make a social event out of it, and out of that grew my puppet theater... Puppet theater is the theater of all means. Puppets and masks should be played in the street. They are louder than the traffic. They don't teach problems, but they scream and dance and hit others on the head and display life in its clearest terms... (Cohen-Cruz,1998: 271-2)

They were active in the peace movement during the Vietnam war with shows such as Fire and Grey Lady Cantata, moved into social satire with Chicken Little or the story of the world and The Cry of the People for Meat. Along with other activists they moved out of the city, made “the accommodation of the seventies: ecology, return to the land, genteel and, in principal, practical communes, continued dialogue with the People in the form of gentle, reasonable, pacifist and environmentalist agitation

(Brecht, 1988:774). The group has become an activist project in its own right, with a following, and an ability to provide “shows” for current progressive movements and an established college circuit. They have a long history of showing a correct tendency, which has only had to be compromised since the move into a more conservative rural community (Cohen-Cruz, 1998: 271-281). In terms of the means of production, they depend on sponsorship from the local university, and the market. However, the means of production, when they perform in the street, are made less expensive because of there being no need to hire a venue. When they do perform indoors, the space can be either a theatre, a college campus, or simply a hall or warehouse.

The mode of production, using large puppets which are often both made and manipulated by volunteers, is also inexpensive. Finally, they are able to respond relatively quickly to a situation. The time involved in production can be an important issue for an activist project, which is often a response to an immediate situation: an impending piece of legislation, or the removal of a service, or, in this case, a death. Mainstream theatres are often programmed two to three years in advance, so that immediacy of response is impossible.

It was logical for Peter Schuman to pay homage to Rachel Corrie:

I learned about Rachel Corrie from my daughter who had gone to Palestine to try to stop bulldozers from destroying homes and orchards, but unlike Rachel had returned unharmed. So obviously Rachel Corrie's tragedy carried very special weight for me, and during the summer and fall of 2004 as part of Bread & Puppet's First World Insurrection Circus we created four productions dealing with her story:

- 1) A community workshop at the Bread & Puppet farm which resulted in a play entitled Daughter Courage and was based on one of her last letters to her parents;
- 2) A street play by the same title which we took to the Street Theater

Component of the Universal Forum of Cultures in Barcelona, Spain.

3) A three-part memorial service for Rachel at Theater for the New City in New York City which combined a musical recitation of her letter with the street play and a wordless pageant ruled by a 25-foot paper mache goddess.

4) This exhibit which presents her slowly falling body surrounded by the portraits of 100 U.S. Senators who failed to act both on behalf of her death and her cause.

(<http://www.brownpapertickets>, January, 2006)

Bread and Puppet Theatre have always operated “outside the strictures of commercial entertainment as defined by late twentieth century American capitalism” (Cohen-Cruz, 1998: 273), so could quickly begin performing these expressionist, events to their college and community audiences. But as in all agit-prop, issues are simplified: Palestinians suffer. Rachel Cory was a figure of virtue who died for their cause. Even in death she is betrayed by US senators.

There are no official reviews of the Rachel Corrie performances that I have come across, but there are some blogsite comments. For many of the audience the Jewish victims of suicide bombers somehow carried more weight than occupation and colonization, for example:

I watched entertained theatergoers last night leave the play, and head out to enjoy drinks, dinner with friends, home to TV, or a toke... Its wonderful to be a hip Seattlite.

I agree with calls for a US investigation into the death of International Solidarity Movement" (ISM) member, Rachel Corrie... But, will Congress also investigate the murder of Americans that have occurred as the result of ISM's support of terrorist organizations? The movement of the two Hamas recruits who blew up Mike's Place (a blues pub in Tel Aviv) on April 30, 2003, appears to have been masked by ISM activities. Jack Baxter, an American,

was killed in that bombing. On July 3rd, ISM launched coordinated activities in Ramallah with an umbrella group of organizations such as Fatah and Hamas. These are the same groups with which Corrie collaborated, and praised in her March 3rd reportage of a demonstration in the town of Rafah... Once Israel is destroyed, against whom do you think HAMAS intends to wage jihad? Don't worry dhimmi, it's all about entertainment. Say goodnight Gracie... (Christine, <http://www.conworks.org>, April, 2006)

and

... theatergoers should not be misled. They should know that any play based on the ISM's dogmas might possibly provide audiences with a better understanding of the organization's propaganda, but certainly will not offer viewers an accurate, complete or nuanced understanding of the difficult situation in Israel, the West Bank and Gaza Strip. ISM's partial and simplistic views are more geared toward building hatred against Israel than toward forwarding peace, human rights or justice. (Gilead, Ini. <http://blog.camera.org>, 24/5/06)

In explaining this inability to see the reason behind Palestinian revolt, the Palestinian intellectual, Edward Said writes:

The intellectual suppression of the Palestinians that has occurred because of Zionist education has produced an unreflecting, dangerously skewed sense of reality in which whatever Israel does, it does as a victim... This has nothing to do with reality, obviously enough, but rather with a kind of hallucinatory state that overrides history and facts with a supremely unthinking narcissism. (2005, 180-181)

So, while the Bread and Puppet performances had the correct tendency and the apparatus of production would be close to that of the ISM, they were not able to penetrate that hallucinatory state or the unthinking narcissism. Whereas there were reports of Jewish people being moved by My Name is Rachel Corrie, and a higher level of debate was generated by the production, despite its contradictions. For me,

the problem with the iconic, expressionist image as a mode of production, is that it is designed for the faithful, even though, in its extravagance, it can be generally entertaining. When issues remain contestable, the status quo, when faced with expressionist propaganda, is apt to remain.

This is not to deny the place of Bread and Puppet in supplying a visual dynamic to the work of the oppositional movement or its ongoing work within the community. But I am, in this thesis, wanting to focus on the role of theatre in assembling an audience to listen to utopian discourse and debate, which for me, is central to the Rachel Corrie story.

Chapter Three: Closer to Home

With the 2006 production of Death (and love) in Gaza I was both writer and director, so the evidence is much more complete in terms of tracing the evolution of tendency and the complex dialogue between tendency and apparatus of production that is involved in any theatre event. As this chapter unfolds it will be necessary to move outside the Benjamin/Williams framework to include Foucault's genealogical approach to the complexity of real events. As he stated, "Truth is a thing of this world: it is produced only by virtue of multiple forms of constraint (Rabinow, 1984: 72-73). It will also be useful to refer to Baudrillard's analyses of the dense consumer culture in which we live, for the play had to be marketed, had to confront the fact that in this "era of simulation all the great humanist criteria of value, all the values of a civilisation of moral, aesthetic, and practical judgement, vanish in our system of images and signs... This is the generalized brothel of capital: not the brothel of prostitution but the brothel of substitution and interchangeability" (qtd. in Poster, 1988: 128). As a production is an unfolding story, this chapter will have a narrative structure.

I have already stated that my original tendency was to make Rachel Corrie's spirit of activism available to young people in Aotearoa. When the text of My Name is Rachel Corrie was published, I approached James Hadley, programme manager of BATS theatre in Wellington, to see if the theatre would be interested in hosting a production. I had been encouraged to work there by Jean Betts, development officer at Playmarket. James was receptive to the proposition and penciled in an August 2006 time slot.

BATS, like the Royal Court, as an institution embodies a tendency, which in BATS case could be termed youthful, progressive and experimental. The theatre originally housed a left wing amateur group, Unity, based on the similar organization in London. The theatre in NZ, also called Unity, staged left wing British plays and European plays of avant-garde tendency until it became redundant, as many of its activists transferred their energy to the establishing of the first professional theatre in the country, Downstage. In later years Unity changed its name to BATS and formed its current kaupapa: to be an “accessible, affordable venue, developing new audiences, supporting and developing new practitioners, new NZ works and supporting established practitioners doing experimental work” (Interview James Hadley, 19/6/06). This has resulted in it mounting a great variety of plays, often involving young people, something dramaturg David O’Donnell “...loves about the place. Last week, Look Back in Anger, this week, Death (and love) in Gaza” (interview, David O’Donnell, 10/7/06).

But then I came up against the barrier of the writings of Rachel Corrie having been privatised. In August 2005 I applied to the Court for the rights and received the reply that they were not available. I realized that the play had transferred to the Court’s main theatre for a season and presumed that they would become available thereafter. In October, I contacted the theatre once more and received no reply. In November I telephoned and eventually spoke to a man in the literary department. He said the rights were problematic. The parents were wary of Rachel Corrie clones springing up all over the world. The Court wanted to take it to the US and possibly then to festivals. Theatres all over the world were after the rights, including the translation rights. The best thing would be to make a submission to the estate.

Reading between the lines, it was obvious the Court realized it had a hot property on its hands.

I accordingly wrote a careful submission, in which I empathized with the family's loss, gave the background to the possible production, outlined my own purpose of making Rachel's views available to young people here, and as well, stated what I saw as the dangers: careerism, opportunism, scandal (Submission, 4/11/05). I posted the submission to the Court for handing on, but had no confirmation of receipt and there was no response from the estate. Subsequently, I e-mailed the submission to the variety of e-mail addresses for the foundation and for the family. There was still no response. The situation did not feel promising, and of course, wasn't – as subsequent US events proved. I made further efforts to contact the family and eventually received a response from Rachel's mother. They had been in Palestine over the Christmas holiday. I sent the submission to her (17/1/06), and subsequently rang. She found the submission sensitive and saw no reason why I shouldn't do the play, but would need to discuss it with her husband. There could be a problem with the Court, who were administering the rights.

At that point, silence descended once more, despite e-mails and attempted phone calls. All along, I was aware of how puny my proposal was, in terms of the cultural politics being played. This was a community scale production destined to be seen by a few people (600), occurring in a small theatre in a small country at the bottom of the world. In this regard we in New Zealand, are very much South in the North-South paradigm. Even when, and if, the rights are freed up, Australia will be a much more potent market than New Zealand.

Nevertheless, I continued to see my impulse in wanting to pay homage to Rachel Corrie's spirit of activism as valid and politically sound. By this time I had

internalized much of the available information about Rachel Corrie, the ISM, the writings of other Internationalists and the Palestinian situation. Almost as an exercise, I wrote my own homage to these young people, and of course to Rachel Corrie in particular. I used the Brechtian device of titles for each scene, to distance the material and to enable the audience to watch a situation being played out. I started with the death, so that there was no “mystery”, no reveal required. Of course death on stage is difficult, for we know the actor is still alive. The suspension of disbelief required is extreme. In this case, as well, it was impossible to represent the means of death with any realism. And the sub text of this accidental death was not coherent, not the summary of a life such as occurs with the hero’s death in tragedy. But there was a very carefully prepared account of the incident and the events leading up to it, by an Internationalist, giving times in an almost military fashion, so that the account became evidence given in court rather than an emotional response. I began the play with this account and after that free associated my way through the material using a variety of situations: The Movement, Arrival, Dignity, Work, Rules, Love Scene and so on. Each scene gave an insight into the life of an activist in the Palestinian situation, and disrupted a simple narrative structure. I also included projected visual material of the actual Palestinian situation, to bring modern technology into the production. In this, I would be following Benjamin’s advice to make the “technical progress” which is for the “author as producer the foundation of his political progress” (1978, 231). This enabled the theatricalising of the digital world of privately received and written e-mails, a key element in the ISM operation, to make material the collectivism that is behind the private act, to add to the “melting-down process” that Benjamin sees as essential (231).

A tv documentary which followed the family on a pilgrimage back to Gaza, discovered that Rachel had begun a relationship with a German Internationalist, and this relationship, which was obviously fictionalised in the play, served as a “way in” for a NZ audience and created a tension with the didactic nature of much of the material. The theme which developed, of whether it is possible to love in a place like Gaza, created as well, a link to the Palestinian people. Can they retain a life worth living in this situation? If not, the oppression is not just material deprivation, physical danger and absence of human rights, but also, the difficulty of conducting normal human relationships. There was a further useful tension in that for most of the play, the love relationship takes place within the strictures of their activist work, where there is limited scope for the personal confession of most relationships. Indeed, the Movement frowns on the forming of personal relationships. Only in the second to last scene, did I give them scope for a love scene as such, where they could tell each other of their backgrounds. This became very much the story of how they came to be in Gaza; a story of political rather than purely personal development. A mainly silent Palestinian old woman was introduced, who sat upstage centre (the most powerful position) and turned the titles, occasionally sang and wept. Having invented two more characters, I decided that Rachel Corrie was also now an invention and called her Ruth and wrote her pieces from memory, rather than from the page.

In distancing the play, by including another Internationalist and a Palestinian chorus, in adopting this Brechtian form, by allowing greater context, Rachel Corrie, who had become Ruth, was now seen, not so much as the individual with a fire in her belly, but as a person who played a part in a movement for social change. Her death was the death of a member of the movement. It framed the material and at the end she was claimed by the old lady, who draped her in the Palestinian flag.

Ruth's commentaries in this context, could be seen as naively hopeful, so that some audience were to prefer the less voluble Gerd, who had come via the anti-capitalist movement and was "very ordinary." I was not altogether aware of this change of consciousness, which had been intuitive, until the review of the Workers Charter paper appeared, written by a socialist who had pondered the play more seriously than the normal reviewer (Workers Charter review, August, 2006).

As well, there was the movement away from the monologue to dialogue. It could be possible to see this move toward fiction, the introduction of other characters, the relationship element, and a relativising of her activist framework, as a diminishing of what had become an iconic figure, with this in turn, setting up a personal contradiction, in that my original impulse was to celebrate this icon. But I reject these doubts. To call the Rachel Corrie figure Ruth, was not problematic. If people knew of Rachel Corrie, the "based upon" was obvious and stated. If they didn't know of her, it was irrelevant. More generally, a real person when played by an actor, inevitably becomes a fictional character. Rachel Corrie became an activist, entered dialogue with other activists, a movement, and a people. To show her otherwise is a distortion. The relationship made her (and Gerd), come to terms with the task of remaining human in the Gaza situation, a task having to be undertaken by every Palestinian. The shift that Death (and love) in Gaza entailed is an example of the necessary shift in the growth of a movement. As Davis and Postlewait argue:

Just as with the person who acts out of pure rage for injustice to be acknowledged, without thought of how it is to be redressed, or how she is to gain control over her life except through this momentary expression of rage, so too the monological theatricalized effects of strategic action are going to have impact, but it will be of no use unless they can at some point be transformed into dialogical communicative action, and speak beyond the rhetorical boundaries of their own actors and acolytes. (2003,179)

Rachel Corrie's commentaries became then, listened to, and commented upon, by both Gerd the German, and Mrs Rhateb the Palestinian. They became not just dialogue with her parents, but dialogue within the movement. Within the framework of copyright and authorial possession, there were possible issues of plagiarism, even when the borrowing was acknowledged. But for me, this became a matter of story telling. Someone tells their story, another listens, then retells it in his own words, repeating however, some of the words he has heard. The play, in this context, can also be seen as fitting the community theatre model of story telling, where stories are owned by the community. For example, in Maori society, Tuhoe stories belong to Tuhoe as a people, rather than to an individual author. In this context, stories of the pro-Palestinian movement belong to the community of the movement.

In a legal frame of mind I would agree with Philip Auslander when he sees a theatre text as being more similar to a music score than to a literary work:

... my personal position... is that the concept of "compulsory license," which currently exists in the realm of music copyright only, should be generally extended. In the relevant section of the copyright statute, it states that a composer has the absolute right to license the first recording of one of his/her compositions. After that, however, anyone has the right to perform or make a recording of the song, as long as they pay the royalties.

Beyond the first production...I believe that any theatre of any kind anywhere should have the right to perform any text, again as long as they acknowledge the author and compensate the holders of the copyright for using the material. (ASTR-L@LISTSERV.UIUC.EDU, 26/2/06)

The tendency of the piece had evolved through this act of writing and the production became a focus of this thesis. Since it would be a production in which I was nominally in control and generally present, it would be an opportunity to gather first hand data as to its role, both in, and as, an activist project. That data would be

most fruitful if the production took place as a consciously defined proposition. There would be unavoidable realities, but if the path of the proposition could be traced through these realities, then some knowledge might be gained.

The proposition: this “make belief” play (Schechner, 2002: 35), telling the stories of Internationalists in Palestine and challenging people in the developed world to join the struggle for social justice in a direct way, would be mounted in partnership with the Wellington Palestine Support Group, giving them a window of opportunity to widen their membership. While it could not meet the integration of what remains for me the “perfect” community theatre group, The Kawuonda Women’s Group of Kenya, who story tell as they do their laundry by the pond, then improvise a chosen story during their rest break (Van Erven, 2001), it would still have a community theatre aspect involving story telling and partnership (Cohen-Cruz, 2005), and play a role in this activist movement to inform people and lobby Government re the Palestinian situation. While community theatre has traditionally involved partnership with particularized communities, Alan Filewood defines coalition theater as that which, “identifies ... rather, with emergent coalitions of resistance, communities activated by the political moment” (qtd. in Cohen-Cruz, 2005, 101-102). Accordingly, the tendency of the production would be moderated by the local activist community.

As well, by operating as a collective, and having as its content, direct political material, the production would be in itself, an activist project, albeit limited in scope. This point requires elucidation. In the NZ professional theatre scene, there are key people, Jean Betts and James Hadley in particular, wanting more “political theatre”, which concept for them, is broader than the rigorous demands of Benjamin. Betts and Hadley would see it more simply as plays that have as their content, political issues rather than the “routine data” (Williams, 1983:141) of degradation and/or

narcissism.¹⁷ The previous year, a production at BATS of Dean Parker's play Baghdad Baby, while still in Hadley's eyes, being in the model of "mainstream entertainment", had attracted good audiences who were appreciative that a local playwright could tackle international issues. Death (and love) in Gaza had therefore an activist role to play in helping to forge a niche for committed political theatre as content, to exhibit, in this sense, a correct tendency.

But what of the apparatus of production? BATS productions operate as co-operatives, with BATS risk-sharing by providing venue, audience goodwill, supporting staff and equipment, in return for a 15% share of the box office. This means that a co-operative does not require a large capital to undertake a production and, if the production fails, will not face a large debt. BATS receives a grant of \$215,000 a year from Creative NZ and the Wellington City Council, to pay for salaries of permanent staff and to commission new work. Ticket prices are kept low in comparison with other theatres: typically \$18 and \$13.

This means that while a play will be entering the market place as a commodity, that entry is mediated by the patronage of BATS, which in turn is made possible by BATS' patrons (both state and local body). A variety of institutional relationships are operating here, including "sponsorship" providing "early support, or early encouragement..." (Williams, 1981: 42), and "the public as patron" (43) with its controversial administering of "the supposed will of the society" (44).

¹⁷ Currently, in Williams' view, most theatre (and film), "takes human inadequacy, self-deception, role-playing, the confusion and substitution of individuals in temporary relationships, and even the lying paradox of the communication of the fact of non-communication, as self evident routine data. Buttressed in these assumption by popularized versions of cognate theories – psychological alienation; relationship as inherently self-seeking and destructive; natural competitive violence; the insignificance of history; the fictionality of all actions; the arbitrariness of language – these forms which still claim the status of minority art have become the routine diversions and confirmations of paranational commodity exchange, with which indeed they have many structural identities (1983, 140-141).

Accordingly, the co-operative as “independent producer” is only partially “offering its work for direct sale” and therefore inhabiting artisanal social relations, for BATS is operating partially as a “*distributive* intermediary” and therefore the co-operative is partially in post-artisanal relations. So BATS, in choosing its programme, will be negotiating between its responsibility or obligation to the artist, but also fulfilling its obligation and responsibility to the public, or the market, or its perception of the market (45-47).

BATS manages to carry out this negotiation, and to alleviate some of the risk factor, by having a large number of plays produced each year with short seasons (usually two weeks) and usually two shows playing at the same time. In this sense it operates as a multiplex theatre. These economic factors impinge on the characteristics of a typical production: small cast, minimal set (both because of cost and the need to take down each night), reliance on word of mouth publicity, with perhaps a run of B/W posters. Profits are not expected to provide a wage, but rather expenses will be covered, and some money will be received. Most people in a co-operative will be earning their living in other ways.

This co-operative mode of operating (which is also characteristic of CIRCA Theatre) has embedded itself in the NZ theatre scene, something which has caused mixed feelings in union circles, for it inevitably leads to actors earning less than a living wage and there is little control over conditions. But, as unionization of the sector virtually disappeared during the nineties, and as young actors entered the scene from training schools and wanted to work, the co-operative has become an accepted means to operate a semi-professional infrastructure.

The means of production of Death (and love) in Gaza, would then be co-operative, but with the above contradictions. A further contradiction would arise

through the fact that with me being both writer and director, and the original instigator of the project, there were, aesthetically, already some established power relations before the co-operative was formed.

The production company that signed the contract with BATS was Pou Mahi a Iwi - the Cultural Work Centre Trust, rather than an informal co-operative. Pou Mahi a Iwi... had been originally set up to run a cultural centre and to umbrella community theatre productions, so was not inappropriate. As well, it was necessary at an early stage to apply to the Wellington City Council for a production grant. A Charitable Trust with audited accounts is more likely to get such a grant than an ad hoc group of people with no legal structure. It was also useful in that any capital risk would be taken by the Trust. It would be much harder to get people to join the co-operative if there were a personal financial risk involved. In summary, while there would be co-operative profit sharing, the initial relations were not altogether those of a co-op, and were in fact, as complex as the relationships with BATS and the market place. Accordingly, while other activists would comment favourably on what they saw as a co-operative mode of production: "The production was based around everyone's different skill. Everyone coming together was impressive" (Interview: Serena Moran, 6/8/06), behind the scenes, it was more complex.

In this sense then, the project, as an activist project to change the mode of production of culture away from purely market place, commodity relations, would have contradictions. We would certainly fail to live up to Kershaw's expectations that, "A truly oppositional theatre needs to radicalise every element of production, distribution and exchange in order to achieve its fullest socio-political effect" (1992:146).

In order to establish the community theatre partnership, I wrote to the

Palestinian Support Group late in 2005, offering the possibility of their using the production for recruiting and informational purposes. I then attended a meeting of the group. They were keen to take up the offer and willing to advertise the production through their newsletter and to provide front of house support. I suggested that they could have a stall in the foyer. It was apparent at the meeting that there were some tensions within the group, later identified by Serena and Omar as occurring through the group being made up of a wide range of people, all of whom saw the obvious injustice being played out in Palestine, but who were often coming from very different perspectives: middle class liberalism, Arab nationalism, liberation theology, lefties, anarchists, some MP's etc. Tensions generally centred on whether to simply contribute to Palestinian welfare (education, health) or to take a political stand. There were also difficulties created between those involved from the beginning and newcomers, and a lack of willingness to work on their own group processes (Interview: Serena Moran, 6/8/06). Generally, I have found, in working in community theatre, that any group will have similar complexities. Nevertheless, they were grateful to be approached and informed. I gave them a copy of the script for their comments and from this point on, the contribution of the group, mainly from Serena and Omar, was considerable.

It was then necessary to find cast and crew, who constituted the other essential strand of the means of production. It must also be remembered that this was not a simple wage labour situation, with me employing these people, but a co-operative risk-sharing situation, where they would work without knowing what financial return they might gain. Often then, the subjective reasons for working on the play, were more important than the possible financial rewards. Foucault writes:

Subjectification concerns the way a human being turns him or herself into a subject...This self formation has a long and complicated genealogy; it takes place

through a variety of operations on [people's] own bodies, on their souls, on their own thoughts, on their own conduct. (Rabinow, 1984: 9-11)

The people who joined the project would already have a genealogy of “subjectification”. The project would be a further element of this genealogy, constitute a further “operation”. Yet the making of a play can be seen as the creating of a theatrical subject, through a variety of operations: writing, rehearsal, publicity, performance, reception etc. These parallel processes would inevitably affect the tendency.

Late in 2005 I asked the director of the National Drama School, Toi Whakaari, to circulate notice of the coming production. As a result, I received a number of expressions of interest from recent female graduates. However when I held auditions in early 2006, most had pulled out because of other commitments. I held the auditions at the premises of Te Rakau, Jim Moriarty's company, which works with alienated Maori youth via theater productions for schools and community audiences. To make the Maori-Palestinian connection seemed entirely appropriate, for both are colonised peoples.

One woman turned up from the Toi Whakaari list, but Omar brought along Elizabeth Marshall, an ex pat American actress, and Katrina Baylis, a Palestinian. Elizabeth immediately proved the obvious choice to play the Rachel Corrie figure, Ruth; while Katrina would be able to portray the old lady, Mrs Rhateb. She also seemed to have the necessary skills to produce the play and was very keen to take up the offer. Katrina was the daughter of a refugee, had lived in the UK and Australia as a child and was about to go home to Jerusalem for the first time to meet family. By one of those ironies, she earned a living as Fairy Trina, facilitator of middle class children's parties. Elizabeth was the daughter of middle class Americans, her father a neuro-surgeon. Her parents were liberals with strong values. She seemed to share

many life experiences with Rachel Corrie. For example, she had been taken to Russia by her mother, who organized a choral group so that people on either side of the Iron Curtain could share commonality through song. She had spent a year in NZ as an adolescent and then returned home to study acting. She had worked for a couple of years in the professional scene in the US, but revisited NZ and decided to stay. Acting in the US was “a meat market and dehumanizing, especially for women”. Elizabeth worked for the Wellington City Council’s recreation service (Interview: Elizabeth Marshall, 2/8/06). The partnership had unexpectedly provided these two people, both of whom had some political resonance with the project.

For the part of Gerd, I approached Charlie Bleakley, who had been in Baghdad Baby. He wanted to do plays about something. It was okay doing “nothing roles” in films, for the money, but when it came to labour intensive theatre, he only did what he described as political theatre (Interview, Charles Bleakley, 12/5/06). He was very involved in the film world where he operated in the competitive, pitching of self manner characteristic of the medium. In his film work, he wanted to graduate from actor to director.

As a “community theatre project”, or a “political theatre” project, this was already different from the ideal of a group of committed actors sharing a common philosophy of working and a common political reading of the world. But if I review my own past, this ideal has never been achieved, the closest being a sharing of a common philosophy of working during a Grotowski period. Certainly, during the growing neo-liberal climate of the 1980’s, group theatre went out of fashion.

BATS informed me of a further opportunity to gain sponsorship via the Wellington City Council. The Palestinian Support Group advised me that it would be very unlikely for the Council to support a pro Palestinian project and it would be

unwise for them to give a letter of support. A woman wanting to show an exhibition of photos she'd taken in Palestine had been refused because of its political content. Luckily they were wrong and the \$1500 we received proved invaluable as a mediation between the production and the marketplace. The grant came with few strings attached, other than a request to view publicity material before it was circulated in order to ensure that they received a credit.

But there were other tendencies which impacted through a process of creative dialogue. I received an e-mail from BATS offering the services of a dramaturg, David O'Donnell, to be paid for by the national scriptwriting agency, Playmarket. In such a dialogue, a common framework of consciousness is paramount, so with some reservations I accepted. I had reservations because of largely unrewarding experiences of the "development industry" in the film world, an industry befuddled by an ideology which I consider to be based on a bourgeois model: the three act structure, character arcs, reveals and so on. As Jameson argues, because of a shared ideological climate, the "idea of an integrated identity, a whole self, a stable and balanced individual psyche, that is the master code...does not appear as such to us ... because we accept its categories as universal categories of human nature" (qtd. in Dowling, 1984,106). When people unthinkingly accept this master code, taking into account political or class determinations is simply not on the agenda.

But when I talked to David of John McGrath and his defining in A Good Night Out (1981) of the different expectations of middle class and working class audiences, he understood where I was coming from and thereafter the relationship was without tension. David's input was very useful as he pushed for a greater element of dramatization of monologue and story telling, as he drew out the character of Mrs Rhateb, making her more articulate, and as he suggested some judicious cuts. For

David, theatre is a way to debate issues beyond the bias of the media, which is aligned to capitalism. He challenged me to encourage more debate in the play. He also talked of the funding politics of NZ theatre. Vast sums of tax payer money are directed to middle class theatre which is not seen by the majority of people. In his view, the money should be spread more evenly. If each BATS co-op received \$10,000, it would make a huge difference. Each member of a co-op would then get an artist's wage of \$500 a week (Interview: David O'Donnell, 10/7/06). This suggested of course, another activist project.

As well, there was the crucial element of design. I made contact with Kate Logan through a friend. She worked as an illustrator, video camera operator, editor and graphic designer, often doing unpaid work. The play was well aligned with her own beliefs. She was a Green activist and valued co-operation, and had entered activism through animal rights and becoming a vegan: "Changing oneself, what one eats and wears is a first step to change in the wider world." She'd never done set design before but liked learning new skills. She saw the play as an activist project, but also as an art project. In her view, "There's not enough art in activism." She was "sick of hearing about shit all the time and wants to see beautiful things." She'd visited Palestine while researching a film on sustainable environments, stayed with a teacher in the West Bank and loved the sense of community. If she went back she'd go as an activist. When I asked her if she'd be frightened, she thought that people there are so kind you'd forget the fear. She knew members of the Support Group (Interview: Kate Logan, 3/8/06). Despite her lack of experience she performed admirably, producing a set which gave the crumbling ghetto feeling of Gaza, yet which had an almost spiritual beauty. Her connections with an anarchist collective also enabled us to rent a data projector very cheaply, and it was her suggestion to have

soldiers take the audience down the side alley into the theatre, which merged the stage with the street and situated the audience before the play proper began.

Rehearsal space is a further necessary means of production, and finding a cheap space to rehearse in the city was difficult. The Wellington City Council has created an arts centre which provides subsidized rooms, but the cost would still have been considerable. I knew Bruce Stewart, the kaumatua of Tapu te Ranga, an urban marae in Island Bay, and wanting to continue the connection with Maori, I approached him, and he agreed to let us use one of the whare for a koha because he considered the play a good kaupapa.

But that other element of the apparatus of production, publicity - the need to turn the play into a commodity, to brand it - produced the most tension within the co-operative, for it inevitably involved operating within the dense commodity culture of the city. Baudrillard writes of the state of “hyperreality”, which is “the generation by models of a real without origin or reality... It no longer has to be rational, since it is no longer measured against some ideal or negative instance” (Poster, 1988:166). Whereas, what we were going to be doing, even though a play, was the very opposite of this hyperreality, for it was about origin, it was about the certain reality of Palestine. And in this lies the strength of political theatre. As a reviewer of Piscator’s work wrote:

What is basically new about this theatre is the curious way in which reality and the play merge into one another. You often don’t know whether you are in a theatre or in a public meeting, you feel you ought to intervene and help, or say something...the public feels that it has been given a look at real life... that the spectator is involved in the play, that everything that is going on on-stage concerns him. (Rote Fahne, April 12, 1921, quoted in Piscator, 1980: 54)

A group met to devise a strategy and talked through the use of e-mail groups, community newsletters, leafleting, stickers and seeking newspaper articles. But the branding? I had already asked my daughter, Te Whaea, who was willing to be publicist after having had some experience at the City Art Gallery in that role, to come up with a poster image. Using the colours of the Palestinian flag, a tank, and an iconic young woman's face weeping a tear of blood, she had sketched a political image, an image you might find on a banner or a political leaflet. She presented this image, which the others ignored. However, Katrina had brought back some posters from Palestine. One, a sentimental pre-Raphaelite image of loss, a young woman whose face merged into a fading landscape of olive trees, took Charlie's fancy. He immediately pushed for that image. It didn't make sense to me, didn't connect with the play. "It would look neat on the bedroom wall," was the reply. It was decided that Charlie should create a leaflet for Katrina to hand out at some meetings. Then Katrina presented a potential sponsors "package" which seemed totally off the mark. It used marketing jargon, called the Cultural Work Centre, an "entertainment company", talked about the "property" that sponsors would acquire. It was another encounter with the all pervasiveness of the market ideology. For Raymond Williams it has "...distorted the commonsense of a whole economy" (1983, 257).

After the meeting Te Whaea wept, because she had spent two days of her valuable leisure time on the design, "and they didn't even look at it". I interviewed her about the project (Te Whaea Ireland, 15/6/06). She was a final year BA student in English and Maori. She found Rachel Corrie courageous, but she often felt that activists were "acting out" a personal bitterness, which meant she didn't have an immediate empathy with them. They were often middle class kids. She said I'd made her feel guilty as a child, for not being an underprivileged kid, like the ones I'd

worked with in various community projects, then for not being “radical” as an adolescent, “with ripped jeans and badges”. She’d felt I’d been disappointed in her. The truth in fact, was the opposite. She’d simply picked up my unease in dealing with the contradictions of working in the community field, work which remains dominated by the middle class. (Without the play project, we might never have had this conversation.)

Once this was off her chest, she asked me why I didn’t go to Palestine. This of course was the simple yet complex demand that Rachel Corrie made: “Drop everything and come here.” If Rachel Corrie was right, putting on a play about her rather than going to Palestine was an act of hypocrisy. In the play I was celebrating a spirit of activism amongst young people, without delving into a political analysis of the ISM position, which inevitably would bleed into a political analysis of the Palestinian struggle, something which Palestinian solidarity groups avoid as well – the saga of the PLO, Hamas etc. Now it was necessary, for this conversation, to do so. I realized that the human shield is a recent phenomenon. It wasn’t present in the Vietnam anti war movement, nor in the anti apartheid movement, although activists would visit these countries and give first hand accounts. For the human shield agenda is dependent on modern communications, internet and cellphone, which enables the activist to always be visible. Organizationally, as NGO’s in the region pointed out, the ISM was seen as over the top radical, and it was often treated with suspicion by local political groups. Yet, at the same time, in its directness and in the courage of its members, it remains an attractive proposition. If three thousand human shields were in Gaza at any one time, the savage attacks on the Palestinian populace would be much more difficult. But then, a considerable infrastructure would need to be in place. And what is the personal agenda? When Gerd was asked by Ruth in a scene in Death

(and love) in Gaza, “Why Palestine”, he replied flippantly, “Adventure tourism”, before he admitted to a personal connection with a previously wounded activist, who was still in a coma from a sniper’s bullet. Rachel Corrie, being a US citizen, could feel a personal responsibility for her government’s funding of the IOF. We, in New Zealand, have no such guilt. Finally, there is the question of affordability, family responsibilities, work etc. Thayer, an Iraqi artist who added the Arabic to banner and scene titles, was dismissive of the ISM activists, “The Israelis don’t care about the millions of Palestinians, why should they care about a few foreigners.” But in his opinion, in terms of the play, the activists were a useful way into the Palestinian situation for a Western audience (Interview, Thayer Al-Rubayee, 6/8/06).

After talking through the above, Te Whaea and I considered the concept of living in good faith and bad faith, of the anguish of the consciousness of our own privilege, of doing token things (trade aid shopping, fair trade campaigns, support groups...). But it’s better to do that than do nothing. She stated that she would never be an activist of the obsessive sort, yet Rachel Corrie resonated and continued to resonate: the Royal Court play, this play... Interesting that the direct confrontation of the system via the marketing process, outside of the buffer of patronage, should have produced this discussion, which took place as well, in some form, with cast and some audience members.

But the branding trouble continued. I had the two images pasted to the wall, so lived with them daily. I realized the political image, for me, was the more honest and useful image for leaflets, stickers and ads. But a colour A3 poster was very costly. Maybe the other image could do for a black and white poster. Before we began the three weeks of rehearsal, we needed to get the publicity designed, approved by BATS and printed, ready for distribution. Te Whaea had arranged a meeting with a graphic

designer who would work for a koha, but she couldn't find Charlie to get the scan of the image from him. He was in fact in Australia. So the decision was made to go with the political image, partly for pragmatic reasons. We would be well into rehearsal before Charlie produced his design.

Leigh Cookson, a long time Christchurch activist made an interesting comment about publicity. She still believes in the old fashioned mail-out. Getting a flier in the mail, which you then stick on the fridge door, is much more effective she suggested, than an e-mail which is easily deleted. As well, people enjoy the social occasion of the mail-out: the gathering and talking and the exchanging of stories as envelopes are stuffed (Interview: Leigh Cookson, 2/9/06). She was making the point that when one is in a relatively marginal situation, to pursue community relationships can be more effective than trying to play the hyperreality game.

This aspect of the apparatus of production embodied then, tendencies which conflicted most vigorously with the tendency of the project. As the conflict threatened to fragment the project, it was necessary to write the programme note at this early stage, to articulate succinctly, the correct tendency. I drafted the following statement, and Katrina, Serena and Te Whaea had input:

This play celebrates the work and the values of young internationalists supporting communities in Palestine. Rachel Corrie was the catalyst for this project because she died "in the course of duty" (killed in 2003 by an Israeli bulldozer as she was trying to stop a house demolition), and because she described so well, the work and the values of these young people and the current situation for the Palestinian people. It is then a homage to this remarkable young American citizen. Our hope in performing this play is to awaken and/or to sustain the realisation that people in the developed world need to act in solidarity with communities on the receiving end of US, Israeli and Western foreign policy.

This could then be used for publicity statements.

It was necessary to find a technical crew willing to work on the production. Edward Goode, who worked for the Council of Trade Unions, proved a common sense lighting designer. Born in the US, he'd been brought up between Antwerp and Shanghai, his father working for a telephone company. He went to international schools and had married a Canadian. He was a global citizen. Aimee Froud, the stage manager, worked as a temp with the Departments of Correction, but described herself as a theatre producer. She has set up a company, Theatre Militia which works on gender issues. This play interested her because she didn't know much about Palestine. She saw it as an activist project. She was twenty four years old and she suspected her generation wanted to make a difference. They have a feeling that things have been left for too long. It's now or never (Interview: Aimee Froud, 3/8/06).

A third year design student, Emma Riordan, had free time during the break between semesters, and volunteered to make the dvd from which the visuals could be run. I met with her in the old National Museum, which has been taken over by Massey University. It now contains room after room of design students. It felt like a new proletariat was being created, as big a shift as the first factory workers on a production line.

Finally, Paddy, Charlie's brother, agreed to make the sound cd. When I interviewed him, he didn't know what class he was. At the moment he was living at home so was probably middle class, but if he went flatting he'd be working class. His values had changed since working on the play. He'd learnt everything about Palestine, watched videos, had a lot more fire in his belly with regard to Middle East issues. He wouldn't want to stand in front of a bulldozer himself, but had huge respect for those people. There would be better ways for him to support the cause, for example, if he got famous with his music, he'd talk about it. Rachel Corrie was a hero. There are

music heroes - Michael Moore's a hero - creative people who get stuff out there. He told me that 9/11 flicked a switch for his generation. They'd started to ask questions. He wanted to be involved in political theatre (Interview: Paddy Bleakley, 18/7/06). These young people enabled us to achieve a relatively sophisticated production technically, without a big budget.

By this stage then, this theatre project had played the role of assembling this diverse group around this utopian (Dolan, 2005) or make belief (Schechner, 2002: 35) project, had caused them to think about and in some cases, significantly research the issues. They provided a key means of production and brought with them a variety of agenda: furthering career, supporting family, having creative leisure time, skill development, Palestine, and a belief in political theatre. Already issues of commodification had been faced and could have torn the project apart. Links had been made with the community partner and with the local Maori and anarchist community for support. There was a generational interchange, with me being significantly older. Cohen-Cruz writes:

Secular idealism, too, is sustained by faith, in the sense of committed belief in a vision with no guarantee it can come to pass. In the context of community-based performance, that vision may be a longing for a better world, with or without religious undertones. The ritual dimension of fusing past, present, and future signals spirituality's marshalling of strength from those with shared values who have come before and striving toward something that has yet to be. We reach toward that future when we talk of being our best selves, of being the change we want to see in the world. (2005: 85)

We never achieved this, but were always yearning toward it.

The rehearsal process is of course, the part of the apparatus of production whereby the complex tendencies embodied in the script, the actors, the director, designer and technical crew are made material. Yet the material object constantly

disappears and has to be recreated. This is, for me, the fascination of the theatre process. As well, the necessity of embodying the other, encountering our “best selves”, of “being the change we want to see in the world”, can produce personal change in the people involved. I will therefore discuss the key themes of the rehearsal process as I noted them down.

At the first rehearsal I outlined how I saw my role as director, which was essentially that of an expert audience - sometimes provocative, sometimes supportive, sometimes nurturing. We began with a few Boal based exercises, but there was resistance. The actors were used to literary theatre and could “download” gesture and emotion from a memory of possibilities learnt from television and film: eye contact here, charm there, pregnant pause... Living in a performative age, they’d been brought up on performance, and here there was an interesting link with the real life performance outlined in Chapter One. But this is problematic for me, and I would agree with Thomas Richards when he writes:

We live in an epoch in which our inner lives are dominated by the discursive mind. This fraction of the mind divides, sections off, labels – it packages the world and wraps it up as “understood.” (1995: 5)

I worked with the actors individually to overcome this problem. Elizabeth, trained in the US, worked in a much more “method” acting system than Charlie and Katrina, so we were able to achieve an inner life which then challenged the others. For Elizabeth, the task was then to move further into a poor theatre space for some of the bigger, non- social moments. There was further pressure on Elizabeth, for she was playing an iconic figure, a celebrity, and everyone has an ideal and often different image of such a figure, which it is hard to meet and to remain subjectively honest.

A more existential dialogue also took place, for these young people were children of the postmodern era. Jameson, in his essay, Postmodernism and Consumer

Society, captures the syndrome in his analysis of the Bonaventure Hotel in Los Angeles: the reflective skin which “repels the city outside”, the unmarked entryways, the way the escalators and elevators designate themselves as “new reflexive signs and emblems of movement proper”. This becomes a symbol of the “dialectical intensification of the autoreferentiality of all modern culture, which tends to turn upon itself and designate its own cultural production as its content” (Theory of the Modern Stage, 1135). The hotel becomes an architectural metaphor for the individual who repels the political world, turning in on himself, generating his own cultural content, replacing genuine dialogue (movement) with the outside world, with emblems of dialogue (political correctness).

Of course Rachel Corrie, the ISM and Palestine itself, challenge this model. In Palestine political correctness has been buried by occupation, and there is little room for aestheticism. Rachel Corrie, in going to Palestine to join the ISM, made herself subject by moving outside these paradigms. The rehearsal process became then, a complex dialogue between these two life experiences. And of course, this dialogue resonates more widely, and was the dialogue Rachel Corrie had with herself, and with her family.

In terms of material objects with which to portray the social situation, the props were mainly those of any activist organization: a megaphone, a banner, leaflets, an office space, a computer, safety vests, a camera and cell phone, a notebook and a back pack to carry them around. These are inexpensive items. But kitting out the soldier extras involved hiring expensive uniforms and guns. This is one of the contradictions of political theatre. Portraying the system costs money, and Piscator’s theatre in Germany in the 1920’s was eventually bankrupted by this fact (1980: 300-311).

A further theme was that of seriality. I became aware of the sheer number of shows, including the film festival which would be on at the same time. I was aware of entering Baudrillard's "...brothel of substitution and interchangeability" (Poster, 1988, 128). Would we be simply another "curiosity" in Bradshaw's "cultural emporium" or could we stimulate public awareness of the issues. The latter required a dialogue with the work of the Support Group, our community partner.

They had arranged a long overdue picket for the Friday. The actors took the banner along and christened it in the real world. The event met with a generally sympathetic response from passers by, with only one man shouting abuse about terrorists. And then, in the real world, the Lebanon invasion commenced, a historical accident that authenticated the production, that broke down the theatre walls, that enabled the production to meet the definition of political theatre:

A unique moment that translates everywhere ...An utter negation of what is insupportable in our times A precipitate of crisis ... A confirmation of values held in solidarity... A gathering of a public for its own sake, and a mobilisation for other gatherings... (Cohen-Cruz, 2006: 23)

What we were showing was on tv screens every night. It was insupportable. The values that we were portraying were confirmed. I spent Sunday evening with Serena and Omar and witnessed their anger at the biased reporting. There were interviews on the tv with an Israeli General and other spokespeople. The one interview on the Lebanese side was with a weeping woman trying to flee the South. The Arabs were portrayed as hysterics, the Israelis as rational. There was immediately a wonderful irony that occurred:

BEIRUT, Lebanon (AP) -- Al-Madinah Theater was supposed to show art films this summer. Instead it has become a home to scores of refugees, and a cultural oasis where their children can act, draw and watch movies.

So far, 85 people have taken shelter from Israeli attacks, laying mattresses in the

dressing rooms and wide corridors of two underground floors. In an office building above the theater, 125 others have taken refuge.

Volunteers show up daily at the theater on Hamra Street - several miles from Israel's relentless bombardment of southern Beirut - to give art and drama workshops to help the displaced youth channel pent-up fears and anger into creative expression.

On the main stage, children scamper around their drama teacher, their giggles echoing through the cavernous theater... (aitheatre@yahoo.com, 11/8/06)

A theatre became a shelter, and continued to use theatre in a conventional way as a further piece of activism.

The Group decided to organize a march ending in a vigil. While rehearsing the play I had come to realize the symbolic place of stones for Palestinians. It is a stony land, and stones were the main weapon in the Intifada, so I suggested that stones could be painted red and placed as symbolic tombstones for each civilian death in the war so far. This idea was taken up and made a useful shot for the tv cameras. The production had become something concrete happening, so was a useful part of the protest movement, which was gathering in numbers. A week later, a couple of hundred would march down the street. Yet at the same time, I found the Lebanese crisis almost embarrassing, returning me to the ethical dilemma of making theatre as opposed to entering into direct action. I wrote an epilogue for the play:

Sometimes history overtakes plays. We must right now, acknowledge those ordinary people in the Middle East, huddled in the bunker of brutality...

David O'Donnell came to the dress rehearsal and found the epilogue unnecessary. People make the connection, he told me. It had also been difficult to work out who should say it. If it had been possible to have an audience discussion afterward, I might have begun with a statement like this, but we always had to quickly dismantle the set for the next show. So I reluctantly dropped it.

Most critics were positive about the play. Obviously the events in Lebanon gave it a context that made the normal suspicion of “political theatre” untenable. And events in the real world were too real to make it a mere commodity. John Smythe, for [NZ Theatre Review.com](http://NZTheatreReview.com) (25/8/06) found that, “the story of Ruth serves to humanize the insane self-perpetuating inhumanity of contemporary Middle East history...” He noted that the play “is clearly pro-Palestine and anti Zionist Israel. And right now, Israel’s disproportionate response to Hizbollah’s appalling actions, and the consequent civilian toll we hear of daily in Lebanon, can only add credibility to [the] editorial position.” He approved of the Brechtian structure, which for him enabled a necessary, distanced unfolding of predictable events.

The play starts with the facts leading up to and including Ruth’s death, then goes back to her arrival in Gaza and follows her story inexorably through to its predetermined conclusion. Thus, while subjective engagement is inevitable, we are also able to objectively observe the progression of events. Her idealism is simultaneously a beacon to follow and her fatal flaw.

He noticed and found acceptable, the dramaturgical breaking of rules by leaving exposition to the “third act”. “Yet it works because we care about them by now...and we welcome this simple ritual of growing human relationships amid the prevailing rule of senseless destruction.” Finally, he outlined, for him, the purpose of engaged theatre: “If, like me, you despair at each day’s news from the Middle East, Death (and love) in Gaza at least offers that strange sense of reassurance that comes from a shared recognition of what’s happening in the world. When theatre responds to world events like this, it is fulfilling a core purpose.” This review was posted on a website which is not attached to any of the major media and generally offers more engaged and longer reviews than are found in the newspapers, who no longer engage in criticism in the

old sense of placing a play in theatre perspective, but offer an informed glimpse of the show, for the consumer.

Laurie Atkinson, for The Dominion (29/8/06), devoted the first half of his review to making sure the potential consumer understood that it is political theatre. Yet, political theatre he suggested, has its place. He quoted the English playwright, David Hare, who believes that theatre “depends on engagement- between the action on stage and the audience. Lectures and plays, he asserts, are alike in relying for their true vitality on the richness of the interaction between the performance and the thoughts and feelings created by the unspoken reaction in the room.” He found Death (and love) in Gaza both “lecture and play and because of its burning topicality and the sincerity of the acting, the reaction on open night was indicated by the physical stillness of an engaged audience.” But other signals, the programme note and the handing out of a leaflet urging the audience to join the International Solidarity Movement and which included “surprisingly, details about the Wellington Palestine Group”, meant the piece could also be described “as a piece of agitprop theatre.” In Atkinson’s mind, engagement is acceptable, the pushing of a cause is not. This of course, is what the Royal Court ideological censorship was about. But he was thankful that the play “is remarkably constrained.” The potential consumer accordingly gained a useful idea of what he or she might be in for, but was also encouraged to consider that this is a valid theatre going experience. These sentiments were later mirrored by the Press critic (Alan Scott, 4/9/06), “...theatre too often ignores political and economic problems, preferring so often to deal with the soul and the psyche rather than the conditions that mould them. While the play is a political piece it is not overly strident or particularly in your face.” These reassurances could be seen as a criticism, in that the spectator was not significantly challenged, or as

affirmation, the restrained nature of the play enabling spectators to assess the argument.

The Capital Times is a more entertainment based, give-away weekly. Lynn Freeman (7/8/06), noted that the timing of the play "...could not be more perfect. Perfect though, in a terrible way." After reviewing the story, she commented, "We don't see a lot of overtly political theatre these days and Death (& Love) in Gaza is unashamedly that. It does get preachy and repetitive, the structure needs honing and some of the audio-visual material is disappointing. But it's full of heart and insight, the actors are terrific, and it will force you to think beyond the media headlines and shocking film clips."

But the conventional antagonism toward "political theatre" blossomed in the Victoria University student weekly, Salient (Issue 16, July 31, 2006). Its critic, Jules van Cruysen, began by quoting Oscar Wilde: "No artist has ethical sympathies. An ethical sympathy in an artist is an unpardonable mannerism in style." By this Wilde meant that, "art should be looked upon only as such, and that any philosophical or political message that the artist is advocating only serves to cloud the art." Accordingly, with Death (and love) in Gaza, the "political message overwhelms its artistic credibility and it simply ceases to be artistic. Death (and love) in Gaza is not a piece of theatre. It is an hour long political diatribe with actors." He accused it of being "a call to arms for any other potential activists (we are even given flyers and encouraged to donate at the end)". He found himself giggling in embarrassment at the whole piece and having to be restrained by his companion. The reactionary character of this review by a student, in comparison with the other, older reviewers, came as a blow to my original intention of making Rachel Corrie's activist spirit available to young people here, and it is necessary to respond.

Van Cruysen's position is that ethical or political content distorts the art of theatre. I am immediately reminded of a passage in Piscator:

The plain man saw the theatre as a "Temple of the Muses", to be entered in white tie and tails and in a mood of appropriate elation. It would have seemed scandalous to him to hear anything about the "ugly" daily struggle, about wages, working hours, profits and dividends amid the red plush and gold stucco of these magnificent halls. In the theatre feeling and soul should reign supreme, opening up visions of a world of Greatness, Beauty and Truth far beyond everyday life. (1980: 31)

Wishing to inhabit the Temple of the Muses, van Cruysen uses Oscar Wilde as an example of the pure artist. Wilde initially played the role of flamboyant wit - often, in the past, the Gay man's response to being considered unethical and to being given outsider status (in fact, the Hero parades continue this impulse). For Wilde, in this "unethical" role, the "art" of the theatre became the witty interchanges, in a farcical situation, of a social class without need of involvement in the productive world.

While no-one seriously considers a solid diet of The Importance of being Earnest as being appropriate in the twenty first century, the Wildean tendency does continue in theatre sports and in teams of improvisers performing for corporate functions. But then Wilde, once incarcerated by an "ethical" society, moved from "pure art" to political and ethical advocacy in a work such as The Ballad of Reading Jail, and his stories for children are genuinely socialist in ethic.

Mainstream, "art" theatre nowadays, generally inhabits quite different parameters - well defined by Raymond Williams: "the confusion and substitution of individuals in temporary relationships"; the lying paradox of the communication of the fact of non-communication"; "a natural competitive violence"; "the fictionality of all actions" (1983: 140-141). This tendency moves across to reality tv shows with the willingness of people to treat their lives as raw material for entertainment. The "art"

of playing this sort of material consists of the ability to inhabit ugliness and degradation with fervour and conviction. So already, we have a cultural relativism in “art” theatre, without delving into Shakespeare or the Greeks. If there is any universality in Western theatre as an art form, it is found in the Aristotelian cathartic relationship with the audience, a paradigm analysed at length, and rejected, by Boal in Theatre of the Oppressed (1979). Accordingly, van Cruysen, for a university based critic, was surprisingly ill-informed, a condition that giggling will not solve.

But there is another faction of the young, and Grant Brookes’ review for the Workers’ Charter paper (Issue 3, August, 2006), was one of the more thorough. He began by restating Brecht’s view that “a play should be open-ended, energizing the audience to go and make their own ending to the story in the real world after the action on stage has finished.” He found that, “Few New Zealand plays have expressed these aims as well as Death (and love) in Gaza.” He enjoyed the puncturing of “the usual boundary between action on stage and events in the real world,” as soldiers hustled the audience down the side of the theatre to enter through a checkpoint. He saw that Ruth “has rejected many of the middle class values she was brought up with... But she still has elements of a middle class American outlook in her naïve belief that the Israelis wouldn’t kill an American and... that underneath everything, people are all like her. Above all, she believes in individual action.” He found Gerd on the other hand, “working class”, describing himself as “very ordinary” and coming to Gaza after getting involved in the European anti-capitalist movement. He ended his piece by re-iterating his opening point: “...none of the conflicts in the story are resolved at the end of the play. The story of what Ruth (or the real-life Rachel Corrie) lived and died for does not yet have an ending. It’s still being added to by the movement they were part of. This play is part of that movement, too.”

I also interviewed some audience members, and the Palestinian Support Group people, asking them to situate themselves in terms of values, whether they saw the play as an activist project, and how they responded to the Rachel Corrie and the ISM challenge to drop everything and come here. In this way, I gained some data as to the role of this particular piece of theatre, in an activist project (the local Palestinian Support Group) and as an activist project – in changing the mode of production and the production relations.

Ester, who was an honours history student, described herself as pakeha and middle class. Her core values were peace, love and harmony, family, community and the local. She expected to see two sides to the story but felt it was good the play was committed. She had an embarrassing lack of knowledge of the Middle East, and the play was an opportunity to “see, feel, experience.” It also made her feel guilty because she wouldn’t do that (be an Internationalist), although, she could “consider considering it”. She felt helpless when faced with the world. “It’s too entrenched and tied up. It needs change in so many directions.” But to concentrate on one thing means being too focused, so she did nothing. But she would give to anyone who approached her. She saw Death (and love) in Gaza as an activist project. The signals were the Support Group’s information table set up in the foyer and the commitment within the play. She reacted positively to the fact that it was such a project (Interview: Ester McGill, 29/7/06).

Finn, a set builder in the film industry, described himself as a middle class pakeha. His core values were non violence and community. The poster for the play made him think he would be preached at. For him also, good plays make you see/feel/experience. He also felt helpless because the system was so entrenched. He had a great admiration for people who act non-violently in violent situations, people

who stay human. He saw the Internationalists as very brave people. He appreciated the honesty of the play. He liked activist stories because they were much more passionate than fictional ones (Interview: Finn Edmond, 29/7/06).

Nicki was 40 years old, European and unemployed. She valued her lifestyle, her friends, and being morally good. She didn't know much about Palestine, only knew about the fighting. She didn't realize the US connection. She'd be too scared to be an Internationalist: "It's a frightening world." But the Internationalists were a good role model. She saw the play as an activist project. It lit the flame and showed how it's lived out. She'd go on marches now (Interview, Nicki Harper, 27/7/06).

Jessie was 25 years old, pakeha, working class and a community worker. Her values were: truth, love, compassion and equality. She was brought up on a commune in Golden Bay. She was interested in the Palestinian situation and came to the play wanting to find out more. She knew what the play was about but didn't expect to feel a personal connection, didn't expect the raw emotion. She has a child, and that meant she felt things more. She found the play powerful. The fact that it started with the death helped. "As you watched you hoped the death wouldn't be the next scene. The tension built. You didn't want it to happen." She enjoyed Gerd, who came through as strong and compassionate. She liked the audience involvement. It meant you felt you were going through it with them. She loved the innocent relationship and it was essential that there was love in Gaza. She went to what she saw as important plays, with stories she could connect to. She didn't like going to plays which she described as "theater wank, where you ask afterwards, What was that about?" Was the play an activist project? It could be. It showed a piece of reality that people needed to know about. Then they might act. She wanted to join the Support group. Would she be an Internationalist? It would be a really hard decision to make. If she didn't have a child

she'd look at it (Interview, Jessie Francis, 3/8/06). With all of these interviewees, the play provoked deep consideration of the tendency being represented and was seen as moving outside the normal theatre model.

Darcy, a Samoan scaffolder saw the play differently. He'd never been to the theatre before. As a manual worker, he was impressed by the skill of the play: the projections, the sound, the way that Charlie could put on a German accent. He was impressed by the amount of work that had gone into it. In terms of the politics, his ethnic point of view was foremost and he was less interested in the tendency. "We've got enough on our plate helping the family survive. Can't worry about people over there..." (Interview, Darcy Tuiavi'i, 30/7/06).

I then turned to the activist audience, to gather their views as to the use of the piece to their agenda. Eileen was a ninety year old pakeha of Irish Catholic and Scottish Presbyterian descent and a long time member of the Support Group. Her values revolved around justice. "While there is injustice there will never be peace." She also believed in a social society, one in which individuals have a responsibility to society and communities. She couldn't think how the Rachel Corrie story would appear on stage, but hoped it would show the courage of the Palestinian people. She found there was a feeling of deep sincerity for the plight of the Palestinians and actions taken to help them. It was a powerful statement and she thought the simplicity of the production helped the message come across clearly (Interview: Eileen Cassidy, 31/7/06).

Twenty nine years old and a middle class Lebanese, Serena was the Palestinian Support Group co-ordinator. Her values were: justice, sharing, community, collectivism, empathy, speaking out, taking responsibility, respect, the need for there to be equal access to resources and opportunities in society, and sustainable living.

These values go right through society and human rights are linked to resourcing and power. She'd learnt these values from her parents, but they were consolidated by her work with Rape Crisis and her work with the Palestinian Support Group. She felt it was good that something unashamedly political was put into the theatre. "Theatre is a useful tool for educating people because it makes information accessible." The play showed people going and doing something, carried Rachel Corrie's message and tied in well with the rallies and the political events that were happening. It was an activist project in the way it was acted (for example the giving out of the pamphlet as part of the performance), the way it gave people a chance to learn new skills, the fact that it operated as a co-operative, and in its relationship with the support group and the way it sought information from the group (Interview: Serena Moran, 6/8/06).

Omar, also a member of the Support Group, described himself as a working class Moroccan. His values were socialism, democracy, and liberation. He finds it difficult to be in exile because he can't full participate in the social change movement, "You never learn the subtleties, the psyche of the society, the intuitive things." For Omar, Palestine symbolizes the struggle between capitalism and colonialism and the forces of liberation. It is the last political taboo in the world because Zionism is the last tolerated racist ideology. At the same time, the Palestinian cause is a difficult one to support because of the deep rooted anti-Arab and anti-Muslim sentiments in the Western world, because of the guilt in Western society about the holocaust, because of fundamentalism and terrorism in the Arab world, and because of the impotence of Arab and Palestinian leadership. He found the play great. The Support Group have different visions: some want to concentrate on human rights and fundraising, others want the politics. The play allowed both points of view to exist. Because it was an art form (play), it showed that you can embrace both things. And it was done

collectively with support from the group. It reached sections of society the Group hadn't reached out to before. There were lots of new faces, faces he hadn't seen at actions. At the same time, it didn't receive the media attention it should have and this was because of the usual fears of being anti Zionist. The media were willing to give it a window, but kept it marginalized (Interview: Omar Khamoun, 8/7/06).

For Thayer, the Iraqi artist, the checkpoint was very good in preparing the audience. Used to Arabic plays, which have a slow rhythm, Death (and love) in Gaza was in his view, contemporary and modern. He found the performances strong and enjoyed the use of stage space. He was used to war so there was no shock. He found the love story important. "When you're scared you try and make love, in order to remain human. Most New Zealanders have no idea of these things." A religious awakening is the only solution for the Middle East, to do away with the idols of the nation states created by the British. People who are essentially the same have been divided. In Islam there is no nation state (Interview, Thayer Al-Rubayee, 6/8/06). It interested me that the two Arabic people found virtue in the "play" side of theatre, and the freedom it gives. Reassuring as well, that Thayer found the love story so important.

From the above reviews, interviews, and notes from the pre-production period, it is apparent that Death (and love) in Gaza played a significant role in the activist project of the local Palestine Support Group, by espousing a correct tendency in theatre form. Then, as the Lebanese invasion began, co-inciding with the theatre season, this tendency began to resonate within the wider society. This prevented the play becoming disconnected from reality and it simply being another consumer item in Bradshaw's cultural emporium. It also affected the establishment assessment of the play in a favorable manner, its relevance being obvious. Political theatre, in the wider

sense of theatre that is engaged with the world, was thus validated. Audience members had a varying knowledge of the Middle East, but were keen to learn more. The feeling of helplessness, in the face of dense and entrenched systems, was however, pervasive.

Addressing this “structure of feeling”, Williams (1983: 243-248) identifies a deeply pessimistic elite operating on a global scale according to what he calls Plan X, a plan for the future which is nothing more than a short term jockeying for positions of advantage, unwilling and unable to tackle any of the major crises. Yet the expressed values of the interviewees were based on localism, justice, non-violence and sharing of resources. Their values had come from feminism, union, peace and justice, and environmental movements. They were open to considering the Rachel Corrie message: “We need to drop everything and stop this”, yet a mix of fear, false celebrity role models, and personal and local commitments stopped them acting as she had suggested. Instead, understanding and information were most important to them: “seeing, feeling, experiencing,” while older people retained memories of a less competitive, more equal society. There were more extreme “refugee” points of view, from people who have experienced injustice at a deep level, for whom issues of fundamentalism, racism and socialism were key.

Small movements happened: a fifteen year old schoolgirl who saw the play came to the rally, after having persuaded her mother to write a note to her school; Amnesty International decided to organize a vigil after staff saw a performance; new people joined the Support Group; a Jews for Justice group formed ... minute movements in the real world.

As an activist project, it was only partially successful in establishing a different means of production (the co-operative), for it wasn't fully co-operative,

either economically or in terms of power relations. That would require a lot more time and work to establish a group wanting to pursue this. Given the economic facts, the co-operative mode at BATS is exploitative. Unless cast and crew are absolutely minimal, there is little chance of earning anything like a wage, and this eventually meant that extensive touring of the production became impossible - Elizabeth had used up her leave, Katrina earns her living mainly at weekends.

In terms of the mode of production, there are reservations about how far the internal creative processes were collective, because the script was already created and that script was already heavily informed by Rachel Corrie's writings. On the other hand, to follow a strict community theatre creative process would have been impossible given the time restraints of a three week rehearsal period and peoples' commitment. Generally, such a process is impossible in the current funding and professional climate. But from the outside, it was seen as a collective, co-operative process, with strong links to the community.

Community Theatre projects usually reveal the next project, in an organic way. Death (and love) in Gaza revealed that within the theatre culture of New Zealand, there remains a task of activism: to re-establish "community theatre", which would include "political theatre", as a concept more generally held and to then lobby subsidy money away from the mainstream "entertainment" theatres into this movement, which would then be a necessary strand amongst the wider oppositional movement. Once again, Williams gives a useful summary of the need:

In the early days of bringing the message, the pioneers did not have to encounter minds already filled to overflowing and often to boredom with political opinionation and economic doubletalk...To give radically new kinds of information, to shift not opinions but beliefs, is from the beginning a different kind of activity. And this is what

the movement now needs, not only political and industrial wings, but on a scale not yet contemplated new kinds of educational and cultural organizations. (1989:148)

For me, this is the need being identified by those audience members who wanted to “see/feel/experience,” and Williams here issues a challenge to all cultural workers. Leigh Cookson, a long time activist in Christchurch confirmed this view. She saw activism as being about “moving people, emotionally and intellectually.” That is why we refer to “movements”. She enjoyed Death (and love) in Gaza because it was about what she does, and “we all like to be reflected”. It was twenty years since she had had that experience in the theatre; of seeing theatre which was about something real in the world, which showed people’s response to something happening. She saw theatre of this sort adding another strand to activism, adding another layer, telling stories and touching people. And in doing so “it doesn’t tell people what to think, but asks people to think.” And currently, there is so little of it. The music that does have some political content is so violent, and she can’t get past that. In the seventies, governments still funded the opposition, enabled them to express their point of view culturally and politically, but that’s stopped because the new right is very insecure. As a consequence, the community culture sphere, a sphere which could be seen as “socialist”, has disappeared: from cultural worker to event manager, from community festival to “corporate crap”. Training has changed as well. In the fields of graphic and fashion design, which are the mainstream art training opportunities, there is little opportunity for expression. It’s all about advertising (Interview: Leigh Cookson, 2/10/06).

Her final words: Palestine permeates everything.

Conclusions

The question remains of what overall conclusions can be drawn from these case studies. How have they affirmed theatre's role in the movement for social change - as a tool of activism and as a mode of production which challenges the dominant mode? To what extent have I been able to capture and interrogate the processes and relationships that I have always been intuitively aware of in past theatre projects?

It is clear from the work undertaken in Chapter One that activism extensively uses theatre concepts as a tool in any project, both for training purposes, for survival purposes, and as a means of articulation of a cause. In a media dominated age this has radically intensified, which has led to the concept of performativity and the task of reading performances. I was recently struck by Philip Auslander's perhaps casual explanation in an e-mail dialogue:

From my perspective, performance studies is a *paradigm-driven* discipline. There is no object (or set of objects) called performance(s) the study of which performance studies takes as its purpose. Rather, there is an idea, performance, that serves as the paradigmatic starting point for any inquiry that occurs within the disciplinary realm.

(Friday, 23 June 2006 12:08 p.m. ASTR-L@LISTSERV.UIUC.EDU)

In this perspective, performance becomes a universal, symbolic activity, and the duty of people working in theatre is either to "read" performances as they occur in the real world, or to perform themselves, in the real world. I find myself resistant to this stressing of performance outside of theatre process, even though I have produced street theatre, participated in demonstrations, sit ins, "performed" in the court setting after arrests and so on. The sources of the resistance are both personal and theoretical. The personal is best explained through R.D.Laing's schizophrenic framework derived

from existentialism¹⁸; of my own battle against performing a family role which was not me/false, struck through with contradiction, and of my discovering acting as a way through this. In this context, performance became a researched, practical path toward an authentic self, a means of healing of body and soul, rather than an everyday event in a post modern carnival, a carnival in which narcissism and neurosis are the preferred psychologies. I would suggest that Rachel Corrie was searching for authenticity of self as well. It is useful to re-iterate that the key to the Internationalist's project in Gaza was to stop performing and to simply be with families, with this leading to authenticated rather than schizoid actions.

In the political realm I suspect, that in terms of mode and means of production, despite a hopeful belief to the contrary, the capitalist order retains control of, and emphasises the need for, performance. Even in opposing this, people perform primarily for the media. The mode and means of production are therefore owned by the multi nationals, despite indymedia and internet democratization. We are performing for them. We are tied to them, and I remain uncomfortable in the current urban landscape of endless festival and carnival, usually tied to a capitalist impulse and celebrity worship (see Schumaker, New Internationalist 363, Dec, 2003: 34). We have been able to witness this struggle with media perversity and commodification in all three chapters of the Rachel Corrie story. And in terms of content, the performance empire constantly degenerates. Even the lowest common denominator tv series is under threat because it requires too much focus, still has a beginning and an end and a plot to follow; whereas games shows and reality tv, which are pure performance, can be dipped into more easily.¹⁹

¹⁸ See The Divided Self, 1965.

¹⁹ From an article for the NZ Writers Guild e-mail magazine, November, 2006. by Gordon White, Entertainment Account Manager for APN Digital Media. He is also part of the project group that will be launching a national entertainment site in 2007. He can be contacted at gordon.white@apn.co.nz

There remains the need to question more closely the concept of performance, rather than the category of performance, which requires a short detour, even at this late stage, into the work of Grotowski. Performance as a symbolic act, used to be symbolic in reference to the god(s), a symbolic “being” of the god(s), witnessed/shared by believers. Grotowski, basing his work on Stanislavski, explored this paradigm in modern, secular terms, exploring disciplined, theatrical actions as a path toward an openness between people. It led him to the contradiction of the theatre audience and their role in the theatre performance. For they were not trained believers in the way that everyone is trained in a voodoo ritual. This in turn led him out of the theatre to the paratheatrical encounter, to the “holyday” concept, which involved “training” the audience. This in turn proved problematic and led him into the monastic concept of theatrical training as prayer, without audience; to the daily measuring of subjectivity against traditional spiritual technique (gesture and sound) and a redefining of montage. This produced a traditional performative energy, which someone like Schechner is striving after. But it is not so easy to attain. In his essay “Performer”, Grotowski writes that, “Performer...is a man of action. He is a doer, a priest, a warrior, he is outside aesthetic genres... A man of knowledge has at his disposal the doing and not ideas or theories... Because almost everything we possess is sociological, essence seems to be a little thing, but it is ours...the body and essence can enter into osmosis...” (The Grotowski Sourcebook, 1997: 376-380).

The important discovery for me is that, for this performative energy to exist in the modern condition, Grotowski found that the audience must be highly mediated, if not excluded. Otherwise, the relations of commodification, the treating of self, even by self, as raw material (Williams, 1983: 263) takes over, leading to the constant performances of degradation we see in the media. Even in the political

sphere, the denial of audience, the long period of rehearsal, has led to the most significant “performances”: Nelson Mandela in jail, the anonymity of the Zapatista.

Within the complexities of our times, with its fragmentations, its widespread phenomenon of diaspora and cultural loss, there is a spiritual need for authenticity, for roots, to experience previous social relations but without the accompanying oppressions. This need is not only for content, but as well, to learn from previous practices.²⁰ This is one role of theatre, as a necessary therapy, a necessary occasional retreat.²¹ For Eugenio Barba, thinking along the same lines, “theatre...cannot remain isolated. But it can be an island. We could say that in the theatre the seeds of rebellion, refusal and opposition can be preserved” (Barba, 1995:148-9).

But this same paradigm, of the lengthy rehearsal of performance, of performance being something special rather than something universal, is relevant as well in the political sphere. Williams suggests that the oppositional movements could well make up a majority in society, but that capitalism maintains its hold because of the daily economic need: a job, a house, bills to pay. In his view, the oppositional movement has yet to tackle the real political and the real economic issues. The political issue is that engagement with majority systems normalizes issues, restates them in old terms. Instead, Williams believes that, while it is important to continue to engage with “the system”, it is futile to put all of one’s energies into that system. One has to continue to challenge (1983: 252). The economic issue requires a complex

²⁰ There is an excellent description of this paradigm in Arndhati Roy’s novel, The God of Small Things, when a Kathakali Theatre Troupe, forced to perform truncated versions of their work for tourists, visit a temple where they perform the true work, for themselves, in order to apologize to the gods.

²¹ And this is how I use Grotowski, even as a part of rehearsal, when the fragmentation threatens to overwhelm. But as well, there are his teachings about how to create, within poverty, to identify and search within the sphere of theatre for authentic relationships. So the reviewers still used words like “authentic”, “simple”, “compelling”, and appreciated the “commitment” of the actors when commenting on Death (and love) in Gaza; these very same words that they used in relationship to my poor theatre work.

auditing and decision making with regard to resource use and to a change of attitude away from production at all costs, to a concept of livelihood (266-7). These of course are profound changes, which will take time, the time of what he calls the Long Revolution.

I will continue then, to insist that the theatre continues to have a primary role as the mode of production of performance. With the Royal Court production, despite an arms length view, it has confirmed for me the reasons why I have never properly immersed myself in the mainstream professional theatre, even though I continue to dabble, in particular as activist writer. For one ends up “in court”, in the realm of private property and private property relations. Obviously a theatre like the Court can call on funding and patronage at a considerable level. It owns the means of production and can compete in the market place. But that comes at a price: the privatizing of Rachel Corrie’s public words, a copyrighting of the text (an essential element of the means of production), so that the spreading of that text (as means of production) remains blocked, which is unfortunate for the wider pro Palestinian movement. Yet it enabled her to speak to an audience of young people, and given the political climate of the UK, this was obviously useful in the need to change the foreign policy of the Labour Government. We must not forget the special role of theatre in assembling a temporary, living community each night, its ability to persuade people to come together and listen, in the company of others, to the traditional story telling act (Dolan, 2005: 61).

With the New York episode, theatre, almost unwittingly, became an activist project, as it revealed the pro-Israel lobby’s influence; but in doing so, and given that performances eventually did take place in the US, the emphasis shifted away from what is happening in Palestine, to the right to speak about Palestine in a committed

way, so that what was being said, was less important than the right to say it. In becoming an activist project it further distorted the tendency. Despite these perhaps inevitable asymmetries (Williams, 1981:102), the role played by the Court production was undoubtedly useful in the activist project of the ISM and for pro Palestinian English groups.

Bread and Puppet stretch across the boundary between real life performance and theatre/visual art performance, by taking to the streets for particular political occasions with easily animated expressionist images and this allows them to become an activist cultural project, in themselves. Yet we have seen that this doesn't allow the complex relations and interactions that are generated by the traditional theatre encounter.

With my own production, it has been interesting to capture the dialogue that occurs in the rehearsal process, especially when there is a voluntary aspect to it, to capture as well, the dialogue with the community partner and the energy of the interaction between disparate people that must be at the heart of democracy and which for me is a role that can be played par excellence by the theatre project. This dialogue continues into performance, but obviously not to the same degree. But it is the primary role of theatre as an activist project, for it challenges at a deep level, commodity relations. Here I would agree with Jill Dolan that theatre of this type is utopian. As usual one community project reveals the next, in this case an activist project with regard to cultural funding. Finally, the fortuitous alignment with the Lebanese crisis, revealed the need for theatre to quickly speak on current issues, yet to retain its complex process. This promoting of relevant dialogue, will for me, continue to be the emphasis of my theatre work; in William's words: "To give radically new kinds of information, to shift not opinions but beliefs..." (1989:148).

Finally, I need to speak of the necessary reproduction of culture, so that things continue. In which of the above roles of theatre can we be sure of the role reproducing itself? Raymond Williams makes some key points with regard to cultural reproduction (1981: 185-205). He talks of the distance that a cultural process maintains from the dominant social processes that organize it (in our case, capitalist, wage-labour processes). These roles of theatre operate at varying distances. In the case of theatre as a means of reading a real life experience, it is located mainly within the university, which has its own distance from the system, maintaining complex relationships with state and increasingly private funders.

In the case of a mainstream theatre, that distance is similar, through state and other subsidy, although often (as we saw in New York), that comes with strings attached. In the case of community theatre, that distance has increased, although at the cost of marginality. But in that, it more closely mirrors, the situation of the oppositional political movement. When it comes to internal reproduction, the maintaining of forms (classical, neo-classical etc), modes (dramatic, lyrical...), genres (comedy, tragedy, romance...), and types which are tied to social orders (bourgeois drama, fiction, landscapes...), is one task, which the movement can perhaps leave to the establishment. Williams states however, that cultural innovation, which concerns us more, often occurs when the social order itself is faced with contradiction. These contradictions include:

- (i) The rise of new social classes, or fractions of classes...
- (ii) Redefinition, by an existing social class or fraction, of its conditions and relations...
- (iii) Changes in the means of cultural production...

- (iv) Recognition, by specifically cultural movements, of the situations indicated in (i) and (ii), at a level preceding or not directly joined to their articulate social organization. (202)

It seems to me that the reproducing of the role of theatre in and as an activist project, hinges on point (iv), the recognition that at least new fractions of classes are arising through the opposition movement and that existing classes, or fractions, are redefining their relations and conditions, for example, in the climate change situation, or in the proletarianizing of some professional occupations. Theatre, in its activist role, must operate in, for, and with, these new fractions and with these redefinitions, even if it means accepting “artistic” marginality. This is something I have always intuitively done and will continue to do. The difficulty, in New Zealand, is the small population, which produces when working within this agenda a somewhat lonely existence, and the funding controls that operate.

Williams also speaks of the period we live in as being a period of decadence (1979, 208-219); as an old order dies, there is an inevitable grieving process, “a widespread loss of an acceptable future”, and “a dominant message of danger and conflict” from “the very active, very diverse but curiously de-centered culture of our period.” The key question in such a period is “what we want to become, rather than what we do not now want to be.”

Rachel Corrie, and the projects that she has inspired, answered the latter part of the question.

The former part has been put on the table.

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