Arts in London:
The Intersection of Performance Studies and Intercultural Learning

Introduction

While international experience teaches us about a new cultural environment, mostly it informs us of the ways we interact with that environment. The actual cultural experience, compared with studying about a culture from a remote classroom, helps us see and understand our privilege, our assumptions, the comforting familiarity of our "normal" life, and the everyday details of living to which we feel entitled. In its most successful form, the international sojourn provides us with an opportunity to question this entitlement, to ask ourselves if perhaps we should see past our expectations and interact with the new environment on its own terms.

Performance Studies and Intercultural Studies both place a premium on detail.[1] It is the small stuff that most profoundly constructs who we are and where we find ourselves. In the many reports on the World Trade Center attacks, we have heard over and over about items left behind--a woman's resume, a pair of glasses, a picture frame among the debris. When we are out of our element, the details become poetic reflections through which there is potential to see our frailty, our naivete, our expectations, our blindness. Likewise the critical moments of the intercultural experience revolve around details which hold instructive potential. We are out of our element (albeit in a privileged way), and it is in the process of experiencing the details of other cultures that we learn about who we are in the world.

Responding to September 11, a newspaper columnist in Austin, Texas wrote, "The most familiar things felt foreign"[2]: suddenly we experienced Brecht's alienation or *"verfremdungseffekt"* in the performance of our everyday lives. (With the *V-Effekt,*

Brecht consciously attempted to place critical and emotional between the performance and the observer.) The familiar, the mostly unacknowledged assumption that "we are safe now" seemed strange; we were removed, alienated from our American belief in "security on the homefront." We became suddenly aware that the privilege of those feelings of safety and security had probably been naïve, illusory, ephemeral. The scattered remnants of our pre-9/11 everyday lives force us to see that we are no longer entitled to be comfortably unaware of the ways in which American hegemonic discourse often eclipses the critical details and complexities of cultural contexts in other places, countries and cities to which we might travel or where we might send our students..

In the wake of 9/11 we are at a juncture of profound learning, a moment which sets the stage for the collaboration between performance studies and intercultural studies that this essay represents. We are made conscious of the ways in which mundane details are critical tools for intercultural and interpersonal understanding, an understanding that in unfamiliar circumstances we often perform badly at first and then adapt with some finesse. That adaptation is not weak or unimportant but necessary and significant. The politicians repeat the refrains, telling us that we will overcome, that no one will take American freedoms away, that no one will destroy our sovereignty and superiority. They appear like actors who have memorized their lines. Press conferences and appearances in the rose garden of the White House and in front of the capital building in Washington, D.C. seem staged. The props seem to be in the right places, the costumes appropriate, the lighting cues accurate, the scenery well-rigged. We all know that in this complex political situation, nothing is predictable. In this frightening and unsettling historical moment we must learn to see in a way that allows us to look critically at political

performance that often seems staged--immoveable, unadaptable, framed in reassurance and thus dangerous: *performance without improvisation*.

Improvisation was the pedagogical center of our collaboration (as Director of International Programs and Theatre faculty member) on Southwestern University's 2000 Arts in London Summer Program. This program, which is the focus of our paper, provided an opportunity for students to improvise performatively and to explore with relative freedom a whole gamut of cultural "stages." The ability to improvise without penalty, to "try out" new cultural selves and to make cultural mistakes is a privilege we must not take lightly. Part of a student's learning process in an intercultural context must be recognizing the consequences of their actions (however well intended) and learning that they never just "go into" a new culture, fiddle about with it, and then leave it behind. Our actions matter, and they affect others. Informed, clever, and compassionate improvisation is a skill we must consciously add to our performance in the world. As citizens of the United States we must acknowledge that we are also world citizens and that we need to improvise wisely in the midst of unsafe, unpredictable details, and adapt.

The 2000 Arts in London program was born out of seat-of-the-pants improvisation. The details of the program seem so "normal" from the outside: students go to London for a four-week summer program and participate in an interdisciplinary study of the arts. Not really something worth writing home about. In fact, the way the program played out was quite worth writing about, both to those back home and those in the fields of intercultural and performance studies.

Conspiracy and Confession

The heart of the program was its improvisatory nature. Improvisation was present from the start, informing even the way that program planning began. About a year before the program was to take place, we sat down to talk about program basics. Sue saw Juhl as a possible compatriot in her own conspiracy to set approaches to intercultural learning at Southwestern on edge, to uproot and expose the problematic nature of the consumerist model of the international sojourn that faculty and students often expect. Thus, Sue went out on a limb and started tossing out lots of ideas about getting students to go beyond the voyeuristic and consumeristic realm and to challenge themselves to examine critically their privilege and their roles as tourists and students in London. Sue didn't really know exactly how to accomplish this, but improvised a description of a program that might follow this revolutionary anti-comsumerist model. Juhl came through with flying colors as compatriot and enthusiastic fellow conspirator. She performed a dazzling on-the-spot description of the ideal intercultural learning experience that would involve a performance studies approach to the curriculum for the London experience. Sue performed the good interculturalist by throwing out all the right prompts. In that moment when they both had to invent new roles for themselves, they improvised a joint project that became inherently improvisatory. The relationship between administrative staff and faculty--often one of contention, condescension, distrust, and friction--was transformed into a dynamic working relationship that resulted in a pedagogical partnering of intercultural and performance studies.

We later confessed that we were both winging it, making it up as we went along during those initial discussions about program format and content. It was a rather sheepish confessional session that brought the "truth" of the situation to light, but this

improvisation was also a wonderful metaphor for the Arts in London program itself. Juhl developed ways to encourage students to view themselves as performance ethnographers[3] in order to call into question their own agency in constructing and acting on the London cultural stage. Sue contributed advice on avoiding the pitfalls of many study abroad programs, and while pretending that her whole job was as interesting as she made it seem in these initial conversations, she made her job almost that interesting. Thus the Arts in London program was designed as an improvisation exercise, born in a moment of spontaneous invention, of trying to save face, of colleagues responding to an unexpected situation and instantly reinventing ourselves--an ideal intercultural experience.

Peanut Butter

Peanut butter provided the first vehicle for the group's real—and rather sticky—intercultural experience in London. On their first afternoon on site, Juhl and some of the students banded together and made a trip to the post office to exchange money—rates were very high—and to buy stamps and postcards. They checked out the bank and discovered exchange rates were better. Then they went to an economical grocery store near their flats on Earls Court Road to get supplies. This shopping experience became our first "ugly Americans" adventure in London.

Some members of the 2000 Arts in London Program were just very large people compared to the Brits and to the other folks of a whole variety of nationalities who were shopping in that store. They took up a lot of room in the tiny aisles especially because they decided to move through the store in a herd. This was a neighborhood grocery store and it appeared that the folks there frequented it often and most of them knew what they wanted and where to find it. Juhl and the students didn't know where to find anything and nothing looked familiar.

Suddenly the students started to complain. Jonathan, a big 6 _ foot guy began getting a bit loud and belligerent about the narrow aisles in the store and making recommendations to anyone who would listen about redesigning the place for someone of his stature. Then Erin started worrying and then complaining rather loudly about the fact that she could not find peanut butter and that she would not be able to stay in London for six weeks without peanut butter, that she would surely starve. Juhl decided to ignore Jonathan and help Erin find peanut butter. When she realized there was no peanut butter to be found, Juhl quickly chose some fruit and vegetables and a few other items, escaped the students, and headed for the check out counter. She put her food on a low counter in front of a young woman seated behind a cash register who checked items and took her money, and then stood waiting patiently at the end of the counter for someone to bag her groceries. She was looking out the window at Earl's Court Road, taking in her first moment of "I'm really in London again," when she felt the eyes of the clerk and the customers in line staring at her. She knew instantly that her lovely London moment had been transformed into a "You stupid American" moment. Not knowing what she had done wrong, she looked over at another checkout line where a young woman was bagging her own groceries. Juhl quickly found bags, threw her stuff into one, and ran out of the store where a group of students greeted her with more complaints. She walked down Earl's Court Road listening to the students complain about peanut butter and narrow store aisles until they reached, unbelievably, a Starbucks and a McDonalds practically next door to one another. Just as she was encouraging the students to go with the British flow, they all blew up into large, happy, and boisterous versions of their American selves and took off to take advantage of America on Earls' Court Road.

Oh, the incredible importance of detail. Oh, the symbolic nature of money, exchange rates, stamps, postcards, aisle width in grocery stores, peanut butter, Starbucks, MacDonalds. What a scene the Southwestern University Arts in London Program had created that first afternoon. How engaged they were. What rich material for the first formal class the next morning where Juhl's determination to use bell hooks' notion of "engaged pedagogy" and a performance studies approach to the program could be put into action. hooks says that

> Engaged pedagogy not only compels me to be constantly creative in the classroom, it also sanctions involvement with students beyond that setting. I journey with students as they progress in their lives beyond our classroom experience. In many ways, I continue to teach them, even as they become more capable of teaching me. The important lesson that we learn together, the lesson that allows us to move together in and beyond the classroom, is one of mutual engagement (205).

Intercultural programs are inherently "beyond the classroom," rich with lived experiences that teacher and students engage in together. Juhl saw her job in the daily classroom sessions as facilitating discussions that would encourage students to see themselves as engaged cultural performers on the London scene. She was also interested in sharing discussions and not leading the group. As teacher, she wanted to circulate performance studies notions about the ways human beings perform in everyday life as a way to help them engage rather than consume London. She knew cultural gaffs and pratfalls were inevitable and she sensed that, collectively, the students would teach her many more lessons than she would teach them and that mutual learning would be on-going--engaging. The scenes on Earls Court Road that the group experienced in their first hours in London became the running themes and streams of engaged pedagogical material. They put these themes into play hundreds of times in class and in informal conversations.

Peanut butter, the dangers of not bagging your own groceries, Jonathan's propensity for Starbucks, whether or not it was okay to eat at the MacDonald's and other American fast food joints, the virtues of the American style supermarket called Sainsbury's over the small local and much cheaper markets with their narrow aisles, became words, topics, concepts, issues that wove through the narrative of the class. Juhl and the students used these details from their experiences during that first afternoon in London as "touch points" for reminding themselves that they had come to London both to see performances and observe visual art, to consume London art, and that inevitably they would and did become performers engaged in the London everyday scene. That they were Americans and that each immediate event would become an improvisation.

Performing Cultural Identity

Our project examines the process of performing cultural identity. This very broad scope is intentional--the intersection between performance studies and intercultural studies provides many avenues for exploration. The realm of intercultural studies (or, more correctly, the way that intercultural studies is put into practice by study abroad professionals) is often centered on the practical: How can we help students learn a new culture? What are the tools one needs to successfully overcome culture shock? What is the best kind of preparation for entering a new cultural situation? The focus sometimes becomes one of accomplishment and mastery, rather than improvisation and play. Improvisatory learning and playful exploration are implied on one level, but there remains the sense that the tools and concepts for successful cultural adjustment are the focus of the interculturalist's job.

One prominent focus within the broad and often unwieldy scope of performance studies is on "the presentation of self in everyday life" inspired by Erving Goffman's

famous and fascinating studies of human behavior as performative and thus playful and improvisatory.[4] What happens when improvisation is combined with learned skills for cultural adjustment? What kinds of learning and experience open up for the students in unfamiliar cultural environments when they are told to "wing it, notice what happens and learn from that"? The insertion of performance studies into the process of cultural adjustment (from pre-departure orientation through re-entry into the home culture) lends a new facet to the prism of the intercultural learning experience. The focus on the learner's agency as performer and observer dovetail beautifully with the interculturalist's goals of competence and adjustment to the new environment.

Intercultural experiences inevitably involve improvisation. There is no way that visitors to unfamiliar cultures can be taught every gesture, custom and nuance of their new environments. So, how is the competent intercultural traveler any different than a person who simply stumbles into an unfamiliar situation? In both instances, the outcome of any interaction in the new culture is largely unpredictable. The critical difference is twofold. First, preparation. In the eyes of the interculturalist, preparing to enter a new culture is a key component to successful culture learning. Preparation is also the foundation of successful intercultural improvisation. Unlike the preparation one might do to get ready for a job interview–the kind of work that is mostly about compiling facts–preparation for the intercultural plunge is about retooling the ways that we perceive the world. It is about looking at our most basic and normative assumptions, all the things we take for granted in everyday living, *and* calling them all into question, and then starting from scratch.

> The worlds people create for themselves are distinctive worlds, not the same worlds others occupy. They fashion from every incident whatever meanings fit

> their own private biases. These biases, taken together, constitute what has been called the "assumptive world of the individual." The worlds people get inside their heads are the only worlds they know. And these symbolic worlds, not the real world, are what people talk about, argue about, laugh about, fight about (Barnlund 41)

When students enter a new culture, they are facing more than just adaptation to a new set of customs. Each individual constructs meaning in a unique way, and coupled with generalizable culture differences, the potential barriers to effective intercultural interactions--to beneficial improvisation--are immense.

Much of this "preparation" for entering a new culture can actually happen upon arrival, assuming there is sufficient guidance from competent teachers and facilitators. In the case of the Arts in London Program, performance studies and intercultural studies were consciously woven into the pedagogical approach we took as we designed the curriculum for the experience and provided a stage where the sort of complex learning and observing described above could be enacted. Juhl's strategy to engage students in analyzing their everyday performance of themselves in London was critical to the on-site, on-the-spot preparation from which students were able to approach thoughtfully the vast text which constitutes the London scene.

Related to the responsibility to prepare students for the culture learning experience is the profound need to help students understand the impact they will have on a new cultural environment. It is an incredible privilege to spend time in an unfamiliar culture, and an even greater one to assume that those who live in the host culture will be at least tolerant of occasional improvisational blunders. This give and take is a vital process for both visitor and host, and should not necessarily be seen as a uni-directional consumption of the new culture by the student. Both "sides" potentially gain from the

encounter. The benefit depends largely on the student being willing to accept and learn from the unfamiliar environment. While we can never divorce ourselves from assumptions about cultures and behaviors, as Barnlund reminds us above, it is possible for us to adjust our assumptions by continually being open to the improvisational moment, to acting and being engaged in the present.

Critical, feminist, anti-racist, progressive pedagogies with all kinds of focuses emphasize action and engagement. As Aristotle defined it, drama, theatre, and performance are all about action. An important connection between performance studies and intercultural studies is centered around this idea of active/activist learning. Inherent in this activist model of learning we developed for the Arts in London was a "multi-centered politics" (24), a move away from ethnocentrism to "multicentrism. " By encouraging students to move away from pre-determined notions about the ways they would interact with the arts and culture of London, we hoped to counteract a consumerist approach to the experience.

Intercultural studies can provide students with so much more than the consumption of interesting "stuff"—both material and experiential--in an exotic "foreign" environment. The really valuable "stuff" can be and was, for the students involved in the 2000 Arts in London Program, what you learn about yourself—both the looking in and the looking out—etic and enic. This etic and enic is what Mary Catherine Bateson describes in her article "Joint Performance Across Cultures: Improvisation in a Persian Garden" where she found herself taking on multiple roles: anthropologist, ethnographer, invited guest, observer, mother (she had her two-year old daughter with her), and teacher when she was invited by her hosts, during a research trip to Iran, to

witness the ritual sacrifice of a sheep in a formal Persian garden. Bateson's perception of her multiple roles became most clear to her as she attempted to interpret this sacred, culturally fascinating yet requisitely bloody and potentially frightening event for her young daughter while maintaining a polite demeanor for her hosts.. Bateson talks about the way the "dissonance" of her multiple roles in that situation allowed her to have an extra layer of awareness—"that the effect of being under multiple simultaneous role demands is to stretch awareness and to force you out of particular stereotyped interpretations of what is going on in a particular situation" (115).

Bateson calls this phenomenon "multiple vision" and encourages us to think of multiple role-playing as a model for improving pedagogy, a way of seeing education as a process in which all the participants are teachers and learners simultaneously, sharing their "multiple visions" as they experience them. Multiple role playing demands improvisation: Bateson says of her Persian garden experience that "there was no previously-given set of rules for that improvisation. What I was doing was stringing together elements of previous knowledge in accordance with patterns that I did have in advance…We have components and we have rules for combining them, but we generate novel performances" (116). Bateson's improvisational performance in the Persian garden involved "sustaining a joint performance" with the other actors in the cultural scene. We wanted the students to learn to sustain joint performances with the people they would encounter in London, to see their everyday encounters as improvisations, as joint performances in which they were players—actors. We wanted the students to go to this new place not to consume it but to experience it in complex ways, to be in between themselves and the unfamiliar place, to play between cultural codes.

Bateson connects performance to intercultural education. She also extends this connection into the ways we perform in everyday life and the ways life “performances” are based on codes and patterns but are always improvised in the moment: "You have to begin performing a role before you learn it and the learning never ends" (118). Connected to her interest in the ways the concept of performance can enrich our understanding of human behavior, Bateson proposes introducing a "canon of human experience," something like a "canon of great books" into education curriculi on all levels. She says that we cannot teach people about other cultures, that students need to experience those cultures, to improvise, to use their codes to negotiate new codes of culture, new canons of ways of doing things, of being human. We must improvise, re-invent constantly, juggle multiple roles constantly. Intercultural education programs are, of course, ideal contexts for this kind of learning. Because negotiating everyday life in an unfamiliar culture is so full of unfamiliar circumstances, we might posit that intercultural education is, essentially, an "improvisational art form." Here, disciplinary knowledge is subsumed under the necessity for performative negotiations, for engaged learning.

Intercultural education, or “culture learning” as it is experienced by the student, is indeed inherently improvisational. The balance between knowledge/preparation and intuitive improvisation is a delicate one. Bateson tells us that she was “…stringing together elements of previous knowledge in accordance with patterns that [she] did have in advance” (116). This acknowledgement of responsibility is critical in the culture learning process. Improvisation is not simply making it up as you go along, so to speak. *Informed* improvisation is the centerpiece of successful culture learning. We did not want to simply turn the students loose in London to see what would happen through

improvisation. We wanted the students to understand that they needed to be careful, that part of their improvising might be to figure out what was appropriate and respectful behavior. Bateson reminds us that when we find ourselves in an unfamiliar cultural milieu, we must draw on previous knowledge, learn new cultural codes and then perform in a way that combines our knowledge, our selves and our desire to understand the new culture.

The Stratford "Stage"

On a trip the group took to Stratford-upon-Avon, Juhl found herself having to learn a new cultural code and create a new script for a lesson she had planned. Part of the Arts in London program is an excursion to Shakespeare's hometown to see the historical sites and to see a Royal Shakespeare Company play. Juhl had seen the Shakespeare "historical" sites during a previous trip to Stratford and had found them anything but "historical." She had been looking forward to "busting Stratford" for what she considered simplistic, anti-intellectual tourist-trap "pseudo history" from the moment she learned she was to be the instructor for the Arts in London program. She had imagined herself taking students through the Shakespeare sites and showing them how little evidence there was that anything in them was authentic. In the end, Stratford "busted" Juhl.

A lovely woman in her early 60's was the group's tour guide. She was a citizen of Stratford and had been giving tours of the Shakespeare historical sites for years. She gave the group a fabulous tour of Ann Hathaway's cottage, displaying a passion for the historical details and stories associated with the place that was charming and absolutely genuine. There didn't seem to be any question in this woman's mind that the Shakespeare historical sites were, indeed, historical. And there was no question that this

woman loved her town, that she was loyal to its "truths" and to Shakespeare, who, for her, was a lively daily presence--the spirit of the town.

Juhl realized—thankfully—that she just couldn't ask this enthusiastic amateur historian what she thought about the authenticity of the historical sites though she started to several times. It was clear to Juhl that the woman liked her and the students: a relationship had developed that everyone was enjoying. Juhl and the students were visitors in the guide's town. The students were beautifully performing the role of good tourists and Juhl joined in. The tour was more than just looking at what really are rather hokey and problematic "historical" artifacts from the life of a man whose biography is sketchy at best.[5] The tour was a performance that involved a key relationship—that between tour guide and tour group. Had Juhl or any of the students questioned the authenticity of the Shakespeare artifacts in Stratford, they would have spoiled the performance of the guide, tripped her up on her own stage, and proven themselves very bad performers, indeed. The group had become part of the landscape of Stratford. And Stratford is a place that is deeply invested in welcoming and enlightening tourists. The tour guide encouraged the group to ask questions but did not create an atmosphere for *questioning* the historical truth of her discourse. She told us which artifacts were authentic and which had been brought in as approximations to replace lost or missing pieces of Shakespeare's everyday life. The bedroom in the "birthplace" house, for example, was truly the room in which the playwright had been born but the bed was not the "actual" bed where Shakespeare's mother had given birth. The "real" bed had been lost. Through sprinkling her discourse with the "truth" about authenticity, the guide made it clear that questioning Shakespearean history and biography in a broader sense,

beyond the historical artifacts, would have been a pratfall, a practical joke, a slip out of the performance frame that would simply have been perceived as unfathomable. Stratford was Shakespeare's historical home and it had been reconstructed and preserved in a reasonably "authentic" way. Questioning the validity of Stratford as a site of historical importance would have been inappropriate. As Daniel Hess (1994) puts it, "What your host culture would like to give you may not be what you really want ." (12) Likewise, what we might want to give to the host culture (or the ways we would like to perform ourselves) may not be what the host culture really wants. We risk great disappointment if the opportunity to learn from the unexpected is lost.

Even though during Juhl's first and only other trip to Stratford, she had stayed with a very nice family in a small bed and breakfast, she had somehow discounted or forgotten that real folks live and work in Stratford. In fact, during that 1989 trip, her first outside the U.S., Juhl was incredibly naïve culturally and despite her international inexperience walked around Stratford feeling terribly sophisticated and superior. At the time she remembers feeling as though her sophistication and superiority were a performance. She remembers pointing her nose slightly upward while she looked down upon the other silly tourists who were being duped by the "artifacts."

Juhl remembers her determination not to become one of those ignorant ugly Americans being sucked in by consumerism and bad history. She was going to be not only an enlightened American but more enlightened than the British. Eleven years later, a Ph.D. in performance studies under her belt, and countless pages of feminist, poststructural, postmodern, critical race, and culture theory having passed through her mind and having planned this course based on an active performative approach to its

pedagogy, she had sense enough to realize that a citizen of Stratford had busted her with a fabulously convincing performance, with a warm and amiable demeanor, through creating a lovely afternoon for her and the students. Suddenly, being with this tour guide, having a relationship with her, satisfying her need for interested and interesting tourists was much more important than skewed history. The students didn't need to have their teacher point out the problems with tourist trap "history" to them. Allowing them to expand their cultural competency through experiencing the guide's generous interest in them and her enthusiasm for her home and its history became much more important.

Along with the students, Juhl became the tour guide's pupil through the experience of relationship--not history or discourse. The group experienced Stratford and a delightful Stratfordian character as the important cultural aesthetic of the Stratford day trip while the famous theatrical aesthetic of the place became the backdrop to a rich and pedagogically productive cultural drama. The Arts in London course included, of course, reading and seeing performances of the works of the most canonical of the canonical--William Shakespeare. The value of the group's experience with an icon of the literary canon was enriched by an encounter with the "canon of experience" embodied in the guise of the tour guide. [1]

Intercultural communication theory reminds us that what we experience as the "real world" is really an elaborate framework of constructed meaning: actions, words, and situations have meaning because we assign them as such. When actually functioning in an intercultural situation, this seemingly basic principle becomes befuddling, painfully apparent and sometimes startling. The real work of improvisation begins when we

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[1]

experience the unexpected in another culture and realize that the usual constructed set of meanings does not function as expected. For an academic with an understanding of Shakespeare through complex theatrical, literary, historical, and critical lenses, Stratford is a tourist trap of the worst kind—a display of non-critical worship for profit through storytelling based loosely on fantasy, not history. Stratford participates in the continued canonization of Shakespeare but in the process provides a valuable site for the discovery of experience worthy of canonization.

Students experiencing a new culture cannot learn the entire canon of cultural experience the new culture might present to them--every new gesture, move, speech inflection, and point of etiquette. This is why the general work of culture learning is so important in advance of–and during–the intercultural sojourn. In the spirit of bell hooks' engaged pedagogy, students must be fully engaged with a new cultural text. There is little point in trying to learn all the facts of a new culture. True, knowledge of the host culture is important, and one should never stumble in to a new cultural situation without knowing something about the context of that culture. However, the process of culture learning is much more participatory than simply compiling data, and in the end, is much more liberating than the banking system under which so much education functions.

> A greater exchange of people between nations, needed as that may be, carries with it no guarantee of increased cultural empathy; experience in other lands often does little but aggravate existing prejudices. Studying guidebooks or memorizing polite phrases similarly fails to explain differences in cultural perspectives….Useful as all these measures are for enlarging appreciation of diverse cultures, they fall short of what is needed for a global village to survive. What seems most critical is to find ways of gaining entrance into the assumptive world of another culture, to identify the norms that govern face-to-face relations, and to equip people to function within a social system that is foreign but no longer incomprehensible " (Barnlund 37).

It is not simply enough to know facts, and it is certainly not enough simply to “show up” in another culture. Improvisation is critical to an engaged understanding of the world around us, and it is a productive way to learn and to be successful in a new culture.

On the Underground

Back in London, improvisation is exactly what Juhl and the students found themselves doing all the time. Performing the role of underground passengers, for example. As American passengers on the underground, Juhl and the students were too loud, too gregarious. They just didn't fit in. They were performing American codes in British space and literally "creating a scene." As Juhl watched the other passengers on the train, it became clear that as a group they were being seen as noisy, bothersome characters. Juhl found herself critical of her American self and would try to give the students little cues like talking really or not talking at all or blatantly telling the students to be quieter. She started separating herself from the group of students. As she had done in London the last time she was there, she started bringing a book with her when she rode the underground trains with the students, using it as a disguise, a prop. One of the students, Adrienne, almost always refused to be part of the group when riding the underground railroad, and in class and private conversations with Juhl often put “American-ness “ down. Adrienne, too, often sat apart, reading, performing British passenger on the underground—taking on that role, improvising, “going native.”

Attempts at “going native” or transparently and seamlessly blending into another culture is the earnest student’s dream. Few experiences are as exhilarating as taking on a new personality and set of behavioral characteristics. After spending some length of time in a culture, it is not uncommon for students to believe that have truly adopted the host culture. On the one hand, the willingness to participate so fully is laudable. On the other

hand, the expectation that we can erase a lifetime of experience and competent performance of our own cultural codes is unrealistic. In this case, Adrienne may simply have built a British "self" that she crafted to resolve some of the dissonance created by the American group set in relief to the British background. Had she had the time to continue this performance she would most likely have been disappointed at not being accepted as British by the Brits themselves. This swing of the pendulum away from the native self in an attempt to adapt is not all bad, but the performance usually cannot be sustained for long, and usually results in a stagnated learning process. Thus, the balancing act is a tricky one, between improvisation and trying out new selves and owning our own "assumptive world."

We have stated in several ways that the intercultural learning experience is largely about the discovery of the self as it plays out in unfamiliar environments. In the course of interviewing students, Sue heard stories that echoed the transitions she felt when she was abroad for an extended period as a student.[6] What she noticed in particular about the student interviews, was the pervasive sense of accomplishment among the students when they "got the character right." Improvising on the intercultural stage and managing to produce a performance that allows you to fit in with the locals is often an intercultural sojourner's ultimate goal. The potential next step for the visitor is to take on the role of a native of the culture. Going native is tempting: it's fun and exciting to take on a new personality and try to convince those in your surroundings that you are in fact a local. The exhilarating risk of exploring your constructed identity is nicely encapsulated in a quote from Josh: "Who are you when you're not where you're from?" Why not just become someone totally new, why not become a native?

Ultimately, what may well form the foundation of this desire is finding one's self developmentally "stuck" in the middle of the cultural adjustment process. Milton Bennett (1993) has created a framework called "A Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity," which provides guidance to the way individuals move through the process of adapting to a new culture. [7] Mid-way through this six step process is a stage called "minimization." In this stage, perception of difference is minimized as the individual attempts to adapt. Sue sees a connection between the belief that one can go native and the minimization of cultural differences. This connection may seem a paradox, but having had experience with this process herself, she sees going native as an erasure of the most profound cultural differences between the home and host culture. Particularly in the case of students who are participants in a short-term program, there is not enough time to learn the nuances of the host culture. By picking out the most obvious cultural features and mimicking them, the visitor is certainly learning something about the host culture, but may also stop looking for additional differences.

The epiphany tends to come when visitors stop trying to go native and instead look for new ways to perform themselves in the host culture environment. As Josh said "You can be anyone. You get the guts to play lots of characters, so identity becomes less fixed when you're not in your own culture." Ultimately, this exploration of the self leads to unexpected discoveries about the host culture. Sue certainly remembers these identity explorations and how those characters that were the most challenging to play taught her the most about herself and the ways in which the host culture most fundamentally differed from her own.

Molly, another student, also tried to go native and separate herself from the group of American students. She told us in an interview after returning from London that she felt that to “go solo was more correct in London.” On the underground railroad and elsewhere, she said she played a character who scowled at the group of American students who were her classmates. She told us she tried to distance herself from the group as often as possible, occasionally hanging out with them if she needed to feel secure. Jonathan also wanted to blend in whether he was riding the underground or walking down the streets but found that he had to negotiate unfamiliar interactions with Londoners who, it seemed, were always bumping into him. He was very aware that he had to get over his perception that this behavior was rude and when we interviewed him, seemed proud of this accomplishment and that he was mistaken for a “Brit” several times during the summer program. Erin, on the other hand, said she knew people on the underground disapproved of the groups’ loud talk and gregarious “American” behavior but that she did not care. She wanted to talk with her classmates about her experiences and did not feel the need to suppress the fact that she was an American. On the other hand, Erin was also pleased when she was mistaken for a “Brit” on the streets.

Conclusion

Sandra Bell and her co-authors in "Teaching in Environments of Resistance" says, "In contrast to traditional liberal curricula and pedagogies, critical, feminist, and antiracist pedagogies are designed to disrupt the canon of the academy in order to bring about social change." Bell, et al. cite Chandra Mohanty’s "actively transforming knowledges," knowledges that "help move students from reflection to action" (23). The goal we were aiming for in designing the Arts in London Program was to provide students with experiences that would force them to face difference, to experience

differentiation, to become aware that the core of education, that learning is not about learning "stuff" but about becoming aware of yourself. We wanted the students to understand that most of what you learn in another culture is about yourself and that this kind of embodied learning is difficult. Josh, a student who was part of the London summer program in 2000 and spent a semester in Germany the following spring, talked to us about the difficulty of learning and of negotiating everyday life no matter where you are after he returned from both experiences. "In another culture, you have no choice; you just have to put yourself out there. Everyday, you're improvising, surviving, getting by on a different stage. Everyday is an accomplishment. Days are also hard in the states but you don't appreciate it."

During the process of interviewing students from the program, Sue was reminded of the profound learning experiences she had as a student in West Berlin. During her year there and for years afterward, epiphanies both small and grand added layers to her performance of a multitude of identities in Berlin. This is the critical piece for Sue: that the cultural identity play continues long after the specific intercultural encounter. The improvisation that made up the first intercultural interaction becomes part of the "previous knowledge" which Bateson mentions in describing her cultural navigation through an unfamiliar encounter. Cultural improvisation is not just useful as a temporary learning experience. In Sue's experience, you never get over it. That year of improvisations became a part of who Sue is today, and gave her the tools to explore further the ways that intercultural experience has a profound effect on the students she works with at Southwestern.

Bateson's notions about teaching a cultural canon as a way to expand the limitations of education based on traditional liberal arts values is useful here. Traditionally, in liberal arts, students consume knowledge rather than participate in generating knowledge. Improvisation and performance produce knowledge, new connections, and novel interpretations for participants. Traditional liberal arts has tended to emphasize reflection and passive reception of the teacher's knowledge. Activism and understanding can be born out of the multiple knowledges, the canon of experience that is required in the intercultural encounter.

International experiences hopefully move students away from ethnocentric assumptions about the world. We were determined to encourage students to begin playing their roles in a new culture as though they were rehearsing for a joint cultural performance. The question Bell, et. al. ask so clearly concerns how we get American students raised on liberal individualism, who assume its truth and moral imperative, to shift away from the perspective of their own experiences. How do we get them, instead, to rehearse joint cultural performances? How do we get them to be competent cultural improvisational performers mixing and combining codes and structures to create new improvisations, to develop new interpretations, to produce new knowledges, to juggle multiple perspectives at once and to see the juggling as playful and not frightening? How do we encourage students to think about their intercultural experiences as "knowledge production." Jill Dolan beautifully summarizes the concerns and dream we had for the 2000 Arts in London Program:

> I'm concerned with how ideas extend somewhere outside this marketplace. I'm concerned with linking knowledge to bodies and therefore to history and materiality, to specific locations and contexts in which bodies and ideas move.

> I'm concerned with the contributions we make to producing knowledges that matter ("Producing" 11).

This paper represents just the beginnings of an exploration of collaborative potential between performance studies and intercultural studies. Exploration of identity is central to both fields and the clever improvisation that we hope informed the Arts in London program is just a glimmer of what might be possible. The interactions that we had with students as we were envisioning and enacting the Arts in London program, and then talking with students in the interview process for this paper showed us indeed students produced and wrestled with "knowledges that matter."

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[1]Culture learning and cultural adjustment processes always begin with attention to detail. Theorists who discuss these concepts and processes (see for example Bennett, Hall, Hess, Kohls, among others) always emphasize the need to be aware of the small seemingly banal details that make up normal everyday life. Performance studies theory puts a high premium on detail, whether on careful analysis of poetic rhythm, structure, and language in the study of literature through performance or the analysis of pause, disfluencies, overlaps, and interruptions in the performative analysis of everyday speech or the study of myriad objects, movement, patterns, and relationships involved in cultural and social ritual (see for example Stern and Henderson, Gray and VanOosting, Hopper, among others).

[2]Louis Black in *The Austin Chronicle*, September 14, 2001.

[3]Stern and Henderson: "James Clifford describes the act of ethnographic description as 'a form of personal and collective self-fashioning.'. The ethnographer stands within culture while trying to look at it." In other words, enthnographers are participants, essentially performers, in the culture they are observing" (42).

[4]In the Preface to his book, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, Erving Goffman says, "The perspective employed in this report is that of theatrical performance; the principles derived are dramaturgical ones. I shall consider the way in which the individual in ordinary work situations presents himself and his activity to others, the ways in which he guides and controls the impression they form of him, and the kinds of things he may and may not do while sustaining his performance before them" (xi). See also Turner, Schechner, and Burke for discussions of dramatistic theories of human behavior in everyday life.

[5]According to Harry Levin in his introduction to *The Riverside Shakespeare*, "Contrary to a fairly widespread impresion, thre is no special mystery about his (Shakespeare's) life. Indeed it is unusually well documented, for a commoner's of his period. Unfortunately, for our personal curiosity, most of this documentation takes the colorless form of entries in parish registers of municipal archives, legal instruments involving property, all too fragmentary theatrical records, and a few business letters to or about him" (3).

[6]Josh, a student who participated in the Arts in London program and then later spent a semester in Germany, had the added benefit of studying in another language. This is not related to our present topic, but it is worth mentioning that additional work of the kind we are doing in this paper could certainly prove fruitful in the context of a non-English language environment.

[7]Milton Bennett, a prominent intercultural communication theorist, created the Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity as a way to add complexity and depth to existing conceptualizations of the cultural adaptation process. With his division of a six step process into ethnocentric and ethnorelative stages, Bennett connects changes in cognition with the development of attitudes toward cultural difference. The six stages are (from most ethnocentric to most ethnorelative); 1) Denial, in which cultural difference is not acknowledged, 2) Defense, in which cultural difference is acknowledged, but viewed as negative, 3) Minimization, in which cultural differences are buried. External differences are acknowledged, but the sense is that all people are really the same "deep down." 4) Acceptance, in which cultural differences are accepted and appreciated. This is the first stage of the ethnorelative set of positions in Bennett's model. In the acceptance stage, it is common for culture learners to avoid exercising power or making definite value decisions. Thus, cultural dilemmas often leave a person in this stage paralyzed and unable to take action from an ethnorelative standpoint. 5) Adaptation, which allows the person to use knowledge of the host and home culture to consciously shift to another frame of cultural reference. In this stage, knowledge of appropriate cultural behaviors is expanded, and the ability to shift cultural frame of reference is enhanced in order to effectively function in new environments. 6) Integration, which can cause conflict between internalized frames of cultural reference, none of which seems entirely like "home." As people move through this stage, they will tend to identify themselves not only by their national or ethnic origin, but more broadly as "intercultural." They may tend to gravitate towards others who are "cultural marginals." Although a person in this stage can hold a variety of cultural positions in mind at one time, unlike a person in an earlier stage of development, someone in the integration stage is capable of making contextual evaluations. There is a recognition that goodness or ethicality are not absolutes but are human constructs.