Re-Rehearsal: Tropics of a Past Self/Non-Self

Boone J. Hopkins
Converse College

As I step out into the darkness of the Laird Studio Theater, consciously trying to make

my footsteps loud enough to grab the attention of a restless audience, I balance a dictionary

under my arm, holding a cigarette between my lips and a box of matches in my hand with one

match pulled, ready to strike. The first line of the play, "How wonderful to see you all," is poised

on my lips, a line curiously and impossibly offered in a pitch-black theater where no one can see

anything. With my excitement and nervousness, amid the technical demands and notes from my

director that swirl in this "moment before," my thoughts shift to the last time I said these lines in

front of an audience. A similar scene flashes in my mind, a familiar feeling in a different context,

and I am struck for a moment by the strangeness of reproducing performance. The ontological

queasiness[1] brought on by this reproduction in performance never fully hits me until I stand face

to face, in the dark, meeting a new audience and feeling like half of myself, or twice myself, as I

put a revivified act in an old container. And somehow, in spite of all this thinking, I know what

comes next. The lines come and the first laughs come and the performance begins in

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[1] Nicholas Ridout, *Stage Fright, Animals and Other Theatrical Problems* (Cambridge UP, 2006),
10. Ridout explores strange moments that occur in the theatre as moments of affective,
productive resistance to oppression.

Spartanburg, South Carolina even as my thoughts toggle back and forth between there and Lawrence, Kansas.

This essay considers the preparation for performance and re-performance through two distinct rehearsal processes for *Thom Pain: based on nothing* by Will Eno. The first iteration of the play took place in the spring of 2010 at the University of Kansas and the second with new collaborators at Converse College in the fall of 2012.[2] Through comparative analysis, my practice-based research explores the necessary ontological instability that emerges when an actor opens up his process to allow different artistic visions to compete and proliferate in rehearsal. In the first production, five different faculty directors at the University of Kansas were each given one-fifth of the script to direct as they saw fit. In the second iteration of the project, I received a grant from the Converse College Creative Collaboration Program to work with visual artists, musicians, and psychologists in an effort to re-interpret the main character of the play by using their expertise to reconsider the role. In these two different productions of *Thom Pain: based on nothing* I served as the lead collaborator, organizing the rehearsals and arranging the conditions of participation for my collaborators. My aim in these two research projects was to track the ways influence moves, particularly through language, as it emerges between collaborators. Using an auto-ethnographic approach, I documented and video-recorded the rehearsal interactions with each collaborator to understand how they were influencing my performance. (See Figure 1)

By exploring what I experienced in rehearsal and comparing it to rehearsal footage after the fact, I examine the ways that a fragmented, non-linear script, interpreted through multiple artistic visions on two separate occasions, continues to become inevitably unified through the

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[2] See Figure 1, at the end of the essay on page 31, for a diagram of the different collaborators. The fifth director at the University of Kansas, Dr. Nicole Hodges Persley, is not a part of the analysis in this essay, so is not included on the diagram.

actor's experience. As a theoretical frame, I organize the persuasive efforts of my collaborators using Kenneth Burke's reading of the four master tropes[3] – metaphor, metonymy, synecdoche and irony – to identify what I argue are rhetorics of everyday rehearsal. These tropes are beneficial for theatre artists to consider in efforts to make more effective theatre, but thinking through these modes of expression also allows artists to engage reflexively and experimentally on their roles in rehearsal processes. As I reflect on my own process and re-rehearsal of *Thom Pain*: *based on nothing* I recognize that my ability to persuade and to be persuaded was significantly marked by my previous experience with the role. The old myths of Thom that I created with earlier collaborators haunted the borders of each choice I made in the re-rehearsal. Even if the choice was to reject a past act the process necessarily included comparison, and through this weighing out I was distanced, if briefly, from the interaction at hand. My new colleagues also deferred to me much more in the second rehearsal process, endowing me with greater persuasive power even if it was not desired. To this end, this exploration of rehearsal asks: how do artists persuade one another? And, subsequently, how do we act in response to persuasive rhetoric?

Rhetoric and Rehearsal

Since the emergence of the modern director in the middle of the 19th century[4], discourses about rehearsal in European and North American theatre have largely followed two distinct

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[3] Kenneth Burke, *A Grammar of Motives* (London: Prentice Hall, 1945), 503.

[4] Helen Krich Chinoy's introduction to *Directors on Directing* (1953) considers the director's necessary emergence as a product of Enlightenment thought. She cites the "emergence" of the director to May 1, 1874 when the Duke of Saxe-Meiningen brought his troupe to Berlin (22). Chinoy interestingly marks the performance, not the rehearsal, as the moment of the director's emergence.

strands. Directors and actors have reconstructed rehearsals from their personal experiences[5] or historians have used the detritus of performance (Brecht's modelbook, Stanislavski's paper stage, or the stage manager's prompt script, etc.) along with anecdotal evidence to reconfigure rehearsal practices.[6] Both strands of rehearsal research are highly useful; however, they tend toward privileging the ways directors create for audiences rather than considering the actual exchanges between actor and director. To get at these conversations, the discourse is often abstracted away from any specific rehearsal interactions and becomes primarily instructional, focusing on pedagogic approaches to directing and actor coaching.[7]. Between the historical and the "how-to" texts there exists a void of description and analysis of rehearsal practice between directors and actors.[8] I advocate for moving the target in rehearsal discourse away from questions surrounding the intention of playwrights or the problems of actors to consider the director's motives as an underlying act that I suggest can be best discovered through examining the rhetoric of everyday rehearsal.

Following dance scholar Susan Leigh Foster's utilization of Kenneth Burke's four master tropes in *Reading Dancing*, I argue that metaphor, metonymy, synecdoche and irony provide a dynamic conceptual frame for reading the efforts of theatre collaborators. As Burke reminds us,

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[5] See *On Directing* (1972) Clurman, *The Director's Voice: Twenty-One Interviews* (1988) by Arthur Bartow and *In Contact with the Gods: Directors Talk Theatre* (1996) by Maria Delgado and Paul Heritage.

[6] Examples of this include *Systems of Rehearsal: Stanislavski, Brecht, Grotowski, and Brook* (1992) by Shomit Mitter and *Great Directors at Work* (1986) by David Richard Jones.

[7] For examples, see *Between Actor and Director* (2002) by Mandy Rees and John Staniunas and *Director's Craft: A Handbook for the Theatre* (2009) by Katie Mitchell.

[8] Two exceptions that have attempted to fill the void are Susan Letzler Cole's *Directors in Rehearsal: A Hidden World* (1992), Norris Houghton's *Moscow Rehearsals: An Account of Methods of Production in Soviet Theatre* (1936) and more recently *Making Contemporary Theatre: International Rehearsal Practices*, edited by Jen Harvie and Andy Lavender (2010).

the borders between tropes are highly porous: "It is an evanescent moment that we shall deal with – for not only does the dividing line between the figurative and literal usage shift, but also the four tropes shade into one another."[9] Each director in the course of her work with actors is likely to strike upon countless variations of these tropes. What the tropes offer then is not a way to categorize certain collaborators, but rather a way to understand *how* all theatre artists use language to communicate their ideas effectively in everyday rehearsal.

At the intersection of thought becoming action, Will Eno's 2005 finalist for the Pulitzer Prize in Drama, *Thom Pain (based on nothing)*, offers an open field for considering performance. Eno's play is a meditation on the universal nature of fear and performance through a single character's fragmented experiences.[10] In his notes that precede the acting edition, Eno writes: "Thom Pain believes and feels almost everything he says, at the moment he says it. Though there are many parts of the play that are meant to be funny, for the most part, Thom Pain is unaware or unconcerned that what he is saying might be found humorous. He is serious, he is trying."[11] When my colleagues asked me why I chose this piece, which all did at some point, I used this quote as my answer to emphasize Thom as a traditional dramatic character. This focused our efforts in rehearsal, providing a control to guide and frame my creative collaborators' persuasive efforts by mobilizing a dominant concept in Western theatre making: "believability."

Phillip B. Zarrilli unpacks the nature of "believability" as an organizing principle in acting: "[The term] 'believe' makes an implicit truth claim which disguises its metaphoric

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[9] Burke, *Grammar*, 503.

[10] The "truth" of these experiences (Thom's? Eno's? The actor's? The audience?) is questioned even in the sub-title of the play (*based on nothing*) and serves as a reminder that what is being made for language in rehearsal.

[11] Will Eno, *Thom Pain: based on nothing* (New York: Dramatists Play Services, Inc., 2005), 4.

construction. The request for 'believability' collapses the character as a fictive construct and sign system into the actor-as-person."[12] For the direction of *Thom Pain* this meant that my collaborators were focused on creating a character whose actions could be observed as believable. This focus inevitably positions the objective "eye" of the director as dominant to the perceptive "I" of the actor. Trust in the director's vision is a central crux for these two practice-based rehearsal research projects. Zarrilli acknowledges the limits that this frame has for the development of both actor and character.[13] But such limits, much like a control in a scientific experiment, are useful in reading the work of multiple collaborators and the rhetoric they use to affect an actor's performance.

I. Metaphor

To parse the four master tropes, Kenneth Burke pairs each literary term with a literal application, or put in acting terminology, an objective for each action. For metaphor the goal is perspective as metaphor compares two unlike terms. Perspective is what a director activates for the actor to position the character or circumstances of the play through the use of figurative language. Burke defines metaphor as "a device for seeing something *in terms* of something else.

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[12] Phillip Zarrilli, *Acting (Re)considered: A Theoretical and Practical Guide* (London: Routledge, 2008), 9.

[13] Zarrilli writes, "The language of 'believability' is problematic because in its propositional mode it appears to make truth claims which mask the referential, signifying quality of any linguistic statement about acting. It also masks its ideology of identity – the collapse of the 'person' of the performer into the role […] A second problem with this particular metaphor is that 'believe' is devoid of any reference to the body" (10). Zarrilli seems to lose the corporeal process of hearing and intensifying that occurs in response to this, admittedly, vague direction. Zarrilli does powerfully assert the dominant role of metaphor in shaping Western acting creating a point of departure for considering Burke's other tropes (11).

It brings out the thisness of a that, or the thatness of a this."[14] Metaphors were present in most rehearsals for *Thom Pain*, particularly in the early conceptual phases of work with each director. "Thom is you. Thom is T.D. Jakes. Thom is not you. Thom is an abused child. Thom is Criss Angel. Thom is a jilted lover. Thom is a masochist. Thom is Harold Hill."[15] The directors offered a reading of Thom, often through metaphor initially, to give perspective on how the actor should approach him. But metaphors organize directing thought beyond the initial impressions.

Leslie Bennett, the director of the first five pages of the Kansas production, mobilized metaphors at multiple levels throughout rehearsal. Bennett is a director and movement teacher, well-versed in the techniques of Michael Chekhov. "Metaphors" Bennett acknowledges "are so powerful [in acting] because a long time ago they actually meant something."[16] The bodily metaphor became the cornerstone of her approach to this project and she began the first rehearsal by interrogating the relationship between Thom Pain and the archetypes against which he might be compared. "Is he injured or is he making himself the victim? Or is he just a sadist?" Through asking these questions Bennett offered room for the actor to compare and ultimately she proposed the archetype of the masochist that distinguished Thom as "one who actually takes pleasure in receiving pain."[17] The metaphors that Bennett discarded also help to clarify Thom by

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[14] Burke, *Grammar*, 503.

[15] A lack of clear citation and mixing of voices is intentional here. The point being that the experience of hearing multiple metaphors gives perspective but can also be disorienting for the actor. Ultimately the process of organizing these competing comparisons became less of a challenge as the character's multifaceted nature emerged within the contradictions.

[16] Leslie Bennett, Rehearsal Notes, 16 April 2010. Bennett never explicitly references *Metaphors We Live By* (1980) but her ideas mirror the authors' notion that metaphor is not just language but is in fact the way the human conceptual system is organized. See also Zarrilli's work on Western ideologies and metaphor in acting mentioned earlier.

[17] Bennett, Notes, 16 April 2010.

providing perspective on the archetypes he is not. Resisting metaphors that are too comfortable or passive is the director's work in Chekhov technique as Bennett pushes toward the ultimate goal of "inspired acting." Chekhov writes, "This longing for knowledge makes the real artist brave. He [sic] never adheres to the first image that appears to him, because he knows that this is not necessarily the richest and more correct. He sacrifices one image for another more intense and expressive, and he does this repeatedly until new and unknown visions strike him with their revealing spell."[18] The director functions to enhance the "longing" and aid in the "sacrifice" of inadequate images that the metaphors carry. However, even the discarded metaphor functions in rehearsal as a tool for more nuanced perspective. To this end, the process of "trying on" metaphors enhances the perspective for actor and director.

My current colleague Melissa Owens also specializes in the Chekhov technique and she is equally adept at creating significant metaphors. Owens was the director of the South Carolina production and adopted a highly physical method of exploring the text. The Chekhov approach to directing relies on the ability of the director to perceive abstract bodies and think through their relation to the actor's body explicitly in terms of metaphor. Chekhov scholar Lenard Petit writes:

> The work of the actor and the director is an interpretive art; suggesting [an] archetype in no way absolutely defines him [sic] for every production of this play. This is only one actor's choice, one possibility. […] The real purpose of working with the archetype is to find a synthesis of all the disparate elements before us. Something must hold it all together, one guiding principle, one feeling of the whole that makes it possible to act.[19]

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[18] Michael Chekov, *On the Technique of Acting* (New York: Harper Perennial, 1993), 6.

[19] Leonard Petit, *The Michael Chekhov Handbook: For the Actor* (New York: Routlege, 2010), 48.

Bennett and Owens offered the language of archetypes as organizing principals that became a metaphorical way of thinking that unified the physical discoveries in rehearsal. Both directors then built movement from this metaphor, relying on the actor to feel and name an inner movement. Bennett evoked the masochist archetype to begin the play, saying, "If I say to you 'despair' [*my shoulders drop*] right… so there it is. But before you move, there's an inner movement, right? Right before you move […] that's what you have onstage is the inner movement. This is the artistic frame, external expression begins with an inner movement but it doesn't have to be it exactly… it's not that the psychological gesture is the actual gesture, we don't carry it onstage with us… but we do… and we don't."[20] Here Bennett assembled a complicated metaphor that guided movement by directing me to compare my body to an imagined body that moves internally so that my actual movement as Thom can radiate this large archetype subtly. I experienced my body in terms of an internal, imagined body that was powering my gestures from within, creating in Bennett's words, "an artistic frame that is watching a movement first."[21] Working on the same moment Owens chose to use the joker archetype for this early beat in the play. She said, "We want to lift off the fun of messing with them… lots of play and poking."[22] The two metaphors did not contradict one another as one might expect, but rather enhanced my understanding of the complicated nature of Thom who is both masochist and joker as the play begins. To extend the use of metaphor, the directors both, following the discourse of Chekhovian technique, then enhanced this artistic frame by giving it

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[20] Bennett, Rehearsal Notes, 16 April 2010.

[21] Bennett, Notes, 16 April 2010.

[22] Melissa Owens, Rehearsal Notes, 30 October 2012.

context; positioning my imagined body within a figurative, imagined space evoked by the term "atmosphere."

The play begins with Thom entering in the dark and lighting a match to smoke a cigarette. He accidentally snuffs out the match twice before giving up and speaking to the audience in the dark.[23] The darkness became a profound image for Bennett's directorial imagination as she said, "Chekhov tells us that the atmosphere at the beginning of the play carries the whole play within itself."[24] Bennett then suggested that this play is "all about atmosphere" and asked me to define my impression of it. I was standing and shifted my weight before speaking to which she acknowledged a tacit knowledge of atmosphere already present in my body. The acknowledgement of my physical response was effective because the metaphor, whatever we chose to call it, was derived from my bodily reaction. She asked, "How would you describe the feeling of being in the dark?"[25] I suggested "uncertainty" and the director then refined my impulse saying, "Okay, may I offer something? Is it fear?" The strategy of "offering" metaphors was used frequently by Bennett to guide the rehearsals and enhance the dynamics of space. Bennett offered again saying that fear "feels like it is surrounding you…closing in."[26] But still not satisfied with the description of the atmosphere she then said the moment reminded her "of blindly feeling behind a couch for an electrical outlet, groping for the plug without being able

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[23] Eno, *Thom Pain*, 7.

[24] Bennett's enthusiasm for these early discoveries revealed another trope. She said, "The whole play is right here in the opening" (16 April 2010), an example of synecdoche and the blended borders to which Burke alluded.

[25] Bennett, Notes, 23 April 2010.

[26] Bennett, Notes, 23 April 2010.

to see and afraid of getting shocked."[27] This rich metaphor notably works on the body and serves to intensify Bennett's earlier offerings through a "fear" of electrocution and the claustrophobia of being wedged between furniture and wall. Her motives shifted from the abstract metaphors of feeling to a metaphor that has real implications for the body in an identifiable situation.

In my re-rehearsal of this moment the residue of fear still hung over the scene but the new director did not find it as useful. Director Owens suggested, "He is in control here. He has called us all here, right? So what if he starts off a predator. Knowing what he wants, what he's hunting and it's only later that things don't go as he planned."[28] This new metaphor, Thom as predator, opened up a very different sense of the early beats of the play for me and ran counter to my previous understanding of the character. I found that the tension between these metaphors gave me a new appreciation for Thom's complex relationship to meeting his audience for the first time. The atmosphere could be both terrifying and thrilling as he hunts in his audience for some intangible thing that he has yet to identify. The two directors, who work in the same technique using a similar vocabulary, used different metaphors to produce radically different conclusions.

Metaphors about atmosphere enhanced my physical perspective by engaging the impact on the body and this figurative language gave the circumstances of the play a more affective immediacy. For Lear on the heath, the body is tied to the uproar of the mind and that chaos is echoed in the storm. Bennett had me embody atmosphere further by asking, "What does 'fear' for Thom feel like? Let's get it on its feet and see."[29] "Blindly feeling" was made literal as

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[27] Bennett, Notes, 23 April 2010.

[28] Owens, Notes, 30 October 2012.

[29] Bennett, Notes, 16 April 2010.

Bennett covered my eyes and had me walk around the rehearsal room. Initially, I walked with confidence knowing the floor from memory but Bennett started shifting chairs and I suddenly felt vulnerable. The figurative was made physical and the embodied exercise enhanced the influence of the atmosphere. Directors like Bennett and Owens coach through metaphoric language that constitutes a real experience in rehearsal. The space between naming and feeling in these examples become useful as directors expand perception and build a real character on the basis of a real metaphoric experience.[30] In rehearsal the metaphor is the dominant rhetorical trope through which directors offer perspective and connect the character to things that the actor knows. By extending analysis beyond metaphor an actor is able to discover a more nuanced understanding of how figurative language operates in creative rehearsal spaces.

II. Metonymy

The second trope, metonymy, works in Burke's conception as a complement to metaphor. The goal that Burke assigns through metonymy is reduction. Metonymy draws on related terms as opposed to metaphor that relates unlike terms. For example a waiter at a restaurant might say, "the ham sandwich is ready for her check." Obviously the customer is not a sandwich but she is defined by her relationship to her food order. Burke writes, "The basic 'strategy' in metonymy is this: to convey some incorporeal or intangible state in terms of the corporeal or tangible."[31] While metaphors expand perception through poetic comparison, metonymy focuses the

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[30] Acknowledging the often-evoked impossibility of defining "the real" or in psychoanalytic terms "recovering the real," I employ this contested term nonetheless to understand what Bennett's process is working toward in rehearsal.

[31] Burke, *Grammar*, 506.

metaphysical by relating it in physical terms.[32] Metonymy in rehearsal is a way to make literal the things that are felt through the text, the feelings with which artists are already in contact. Where metaphor introduces new conceptual qualities by way of comparing phenomena outside the frame of the play, metonymy mines the actual words and phrases of the play deeply and reveals qualities already associated with the object being studied.

An example of metonymy at work in rehearsal rhetoric emerged in the practice of director and performance studies scholar Henry Bial. As the director for the third section of the *Thom Pain: based on nothing* Bial noted that he typically works on devised theatre projects and has developed his approach through work primarily with an ensemble of actors. He did not make claims toward any specific acting tradition but through his practice I recognized the influences of Bertolt Brecht and Richard Schechner.[33] Using Brecht's notion of *gestus* and Schechner's concept of restored behavior Bial organized his section of the play by cultivating a language of gestures. He directed me in this process through metonymy.

First, Bial had me deliver the lines of the section rhythmically, repeating a shoulder shrug on the downbeat, and he noted my response to the script. Then the key terms or concepts in the text became a source for our exploration of gestures. To explain this early "digging" in the text, he said, "I'm a believer… if it's in you it must have come from the script."[34] Using the specific language of the written text and the implication that it was already connected to me, Bial encouraged the cultivation of a succinct gestural vocabulary. He explained, "You have five pages

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[32] Burke's example: "to speak of 'the heart' rather than 'the emotions,'" parallels the Chekhov exercises described earlier but works in reverse, moving in to specific contiguities.

[33] Bial studied with Schechner and edited publications related to both of these performance theorists: *The Performance Studies Reader* (2004) is a complement to Schechner's *Performance Studies: An Introduction* (2002) and he co-edited *Brecht Sourcebook* (2000) with Carol Martin.

[34] Henry Bial, Rehearsal Notes, 19 April 2010.

and you can't play one impulse for five pages… so for me, what would be nice to look for is a number of what I guess I'd call *gest* or *gestus*." To illuminate this Brechtian term, he continued: "More clearly a movement or image that you can kind of come back to and kind of draw on and repeat."[35] In his *Short Organum for the Theatre* (1949) Brecht defines *gestus* as the blending of a physical gesture with an accompanying attitude. Translator and Brecht historian John Willett notes that *gestus* "means both gist and gesture; an attitude or single aspect of an attitude, expressible in words or actions" (42). In Brecht's equation the reciprocity between movement and attitude gives *gestus* its potency; however, in rehearsals the flow initiates as a one-way exchange, from feeling to gesture, and it was this metonymic honing that the director guided through language.

The process of creating a physical vocabulary necessitated looking at the demands of this section and choosing key concepts worth expressing. Bial was specific: "One of them we're gonna call, for lack of a better term, 'let's talk about love' right?"[36] While the choice is deliberate, Bial offered it in flux acknowledging that a "better term" may emerge, as the moment is refined. This direction encouraged the actor to consider "love" a major force at work on the character, putting it first into short phrases and then reacting to it physically. Through repetition, the responses to the conceptual phrase could be experienced and refined. Bial developed five specific gests with me that he drew from my kinesthetic responses to the text.

An example of Bial's specific direction of the *gestus* demonstrates the useful limits he imposed. He said, "There's something in here about magic," again avoiding a definitive naming, "so I'm gonna have you get on your feet, you think better that way, right? And what I'd like you

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[35] Bial, Notes, 19 April 2010.

[36] Bial, Notes, 19 April 2010.

to do again is think about magic. Not some abstract magic, like a thing you believe in or not, but prestidigitation, a slight-of-hand and what that makes your fingers want to do."[37] The direction suggests gesture should be practical or like a movement a magician might make and more specifically that the fingers should be involved. However, the feeling that completes Brecht's equation is derived from "thinking about magic." Significantly, this poetic reduction of magic to a specific gesture is in Burke's understanding not a decrease in material equivalents. "[The artist] knows, however that these bodily equivalents are but part of the idiom of expression involved in the act. They are 'figures.' They are hardly other than 'symbolizations.' […] For in 'poetic realism,' states of mind as the motives of action are not reducible to materialistic terms."[38] The material gesture in the *gestus* is not a reduction in substance but a honing of terms that rhetorically guide the necessary limits on the field of expression. These limits are significant when Thom asks the audience, "Do you like magic? I do. I think. It's fairly ambivalent this love of mine."[39] Within this confined unit of action a specific physical gesture can offer the actor a stable site in which to develop a relationship to the ambivalent idea through a meaningful gesture. The fingers move but the actor, considering the *gestus*, can position the audience in the role of interpreter along with the actor/character.

To further read Bial's direction of the "magic" *gestus*, Brecht's treatise on "A New Technique of Acting" (1949) is useful. Brecht writes, "In visibly observing his own movements, he achieves the A-effect. Whatever the actor renders by way of gesture and verse-speaking must be *ready* and bear the stamp of readiness, finishedness, the stamp of rehearsal. An impression of

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[37] Bial, Notes, 19 April 2010.

[38] Burke, *Grammar*, 507.

[39] Eno, *Thom Pain*, 24.

ease, which means an impression of difficulties overcome, must be given."[40] Brecht deftly

illuminates the metonymic as a directorial tool for focusing movement and making it ready for

the actor to hold out for an audiences' consideration. Rehearsing *gestus* is a metonymic process

that Burke might suggest "translat[es] the spiritual into an idiom of materialist equivalents."[41]

Working on the five *gests* in rehearsal required repetition to uncover how figurative

language can return to embodied practice and in effect repair meaning. Burke maps the

transition from the metaphor to the material:

> Language develops by metaphorical extension, in borrowing words from the realm of the
> corporeal, visible, tangible and applying them by analogy to the realm of the incorporeal,
> invisible, intangible; then in course of time, the original course of reference is forgotten,
> and only the incorporeal, metaphorical extension survives."[42]

Refining the gestures and working them into a new form redraws the connection between the

intangible and the tangible. Bial then read the section aloud directing me to only use the five

gestures or stillness in response to the piece. He announced a conscious attempt to avoid reading

the lines with any affect but encouraged me to respond to "without thinking too much" and to

use the text to find "new meaning in the *gestus*."[43] As he read, the connections between words

and movements were different and at times unexpected. On completion of the exercise I asked if

should begin refining or scripting the links we discovered. Bial rejected a planned order to the

gests but insisted that the movement in the piece "play like a jazz riff" revealing a new phrasing

with each occasion of performing this section. This concept of free flow is reminiscent of

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[40] Bertolt Brecht, *Brecht on Theatre: The Development of an Aesthetic*. Ed. and Trans. by John
Willett. New York: Hill and Wang, 1957, 310.

[41] Burke, *Grammar*, 507.

[42] Burke, Grammar, 506.

[43] Bial, Notes, 21 April 2010.

Schechner's notion of twice behaved behavior. For Schechner, performance is restored behavior, or twice behaved behavior with an emphasis on repetition and iterability in that it has the potential to be repeated but is never actually repeated in the exact same way.[44] The capacity to be repeated in different contexts is the potency of this limited vocabulary because through repetition the meaning is compounded and the audience is put in the position of thinking through the play. Brecht writes: "A bold and beautiful verbal architecture itself alienates the text,"[45] meaning that through Bial's organization the audience thinks their way through the performance and must be engaged in reading the gestural text.

For the Converse College production a single director lead the project; however the influence of collaborators expanded my interpretation of Thom Pain. Scenic designer Andrew Blanchard also participated in a process of metonymic reduction as he reacted to the play and shaped the visual aesthetic of our production in Spartanburg. An Associate Professor of Screen Printing and Photography, he did not say much after the first read through, only responding with, "Yeah, yeah, I got some ideas."[46] Then he came to almost all of our subsequent rehearsals and would offer his visual art as a concise reaction to what he had seen the night before. He would say, "I thought we needed some legs, some ladies legs,"[47] in response to the woman that Thom loved and lost. And he would present pink screen-printed legs in high heels and fishnet stockings that were affixed to the front of a platform. He also found a tire swing half buried in red clay that

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[44] Richard Schechner, *Between Theater and Anthropology*. Philadelphia: Pennsylvania UP, 1985, 36.

[45] Chinoy, Helen and Toby Cole, eds. *Actors on Acting: The Theories, Techniques, and Practices of the Great Actors of All Times as Told in Their Own Words.* New York: Crown Publishers, 1949, 308.

[46] Andrew Blanchard, Rehearsal Notes, 30 October 2012.

[47] Blanchard, Notes, 2 November 2012.

he dug out of the ground and hung in the middle of the theatre space. Blanchard never explained his thinking behind these objects but as the actor I could connect with the tire every time I recalled Thom's childhood. In this way Blanchard offered a metonymic map that visually reflected the character's preoccupations that were mentioned in the script. Because the legs of Thom's lover and his half-buried childhood are actually described in the script, using them in rehearsal is different than using a metaphor. Blanchard was not comparing Thom's experience to these objects but was emphasizing their impact on his experience. I found these visual signposts useful in re-creating Thom because the scenic designer was accumulating material representations of the pain that Bial had created through gestus. The two uses of metonymy encouraged me to focus my efforts uniquely as an actor.

While Burke considers the reduction to be a poetic application of the metonymic, I would argue that a better way of understanding it through artistic endeavors might be to pair it with the goal of focus. With this objective the director/designer is motivated to channel the actor's efforts and complete concentration on a limited number of gestures that are highly refined and offered for the audience to consider.

III. Synecdoche

The third trope in Burke's organizational model is synecdoche, which he pairs with the goal of representation. Synecdoche relates an understanding of a part from the whole or the whole from a part. In poetic representation, Burke notes, "The 'noblest synecdoche,' the perfect paradigm or prototype for all lesser usages, is found in metaphysical doctrines proclaiming the identity of 'microcosm' or 'macrocosm.' In such doctrines the individual is treated as a replica of

the universe […] either the whole can represent the part or the part can represent the whole."[48] Synecdoche in rehearsal can serve as a way to consider a character through the details of the body or behavior. Or, working toward an opposite representation, a director might consider Thom as a substitute for the social order of which he is part; with all his contradictions and regrets he is a microcosm of social relationships at large. Synecdoche in either order relies on knowing the character materially through figurative connections to the elements that constitute the body and culture.

The rhetorical strategies of director and theatre historian Mechele Leon exemplify a synecdochic approach. Leon directed the fourth section of the play at the University of Kansas through a series of exercises that focused on the elements of Thom that stand in for him. She began by asking the familiar question, "Who is Thom Pain?" I gave my standard answer, Thom is real, he is serious and he is trying to connect with a real audience. To which Leon replied, "That's excellent. But I'm going to blow your mind. I'm going to give you the most remarkable given circumstances you have ever had and I want you to play with them."[49] By engaging new given circumstances Leon began to conceptualize Thom through his constituent parts. First, she offered Thom as an isolated voice, speaking but unseen in a prison cell. The voice became the only part of Thom that represented him in the exercise and Leon intensified this isolation by creating a physical barrier with rehearsal furniture. "If we think of Thom as voice," Leon described, "you have to make me listen and all you have is your voice."[50] The segmenting of the actor into parts, mind, body and voice, is common practice in actor training but to implement this

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[48] Burke, Grammar, 508.

[49] Mechele Leon, Rehearsal Notes, 26 April 2010.

[50] Leon, Notes, 26 April 2010.

in rehearsal is not common. Leon used the exercise to foreground the ways Thom maintains attention not only through what he says but also in how he says it. By isolating the voice in this way the director guided the actor's attention and shaped the character as components.

Using synecdoche in rehearsal was not strictly a tool for Leon to carve up the performing body; it also served as a way to conceptualize the character. She explained the metaphysical leap:

> Thom Pain is just a name he's based on. You are like a supernatural being… imagine you are pure mind. Imagine if God came down and talked to all of us one day. And there he was in flesh he had taken on some fleshy substance and tried to communicate to you how absolutely amazing things are in our world that we can't see. Thom Pain, imagine for a minute, is like pure mind. He is everything that mind is which is to say a little crazy, changeable, totally from one moment to the next, unpredictable, conjuring up all sorts of images that like fuck with our heads and we don't ever really look at it.[51]

Thom as pure mind functions as representation that particularly engages the synecdoche trope. The allusion does not offer a comparison outside Thom or me (metaphor) because the mind is part of each person. Nor does Leon make the metaphysical nature of Thom's mind concrete (metonymy) because she does not say Thom is brain. Instead Leon uses a part of Thom, his mind, to represent his ontological position in relationship to his audience. This aspect of the character defines him in Leon's direction. Thom has a mind and at the same time he is this thing he has; he is the mind. Eno puts the mind onstage when Thom says, "I sometimes like to think. Though this wasn't always the case. I'm thinking right now. Yeah. I am. We were the perfect height. Look at me think."[52] Leon used the complicated workings of the mind to represent the complexity of Thom's engagement with the audience. She continued, "Now I'm going to give you the full idea, follow along, Thom Pain as mind. It's as if mind wants to say 'See me… I'm with you all the time. Let me say some stuff to you,' and that's your mind. And everyone just sits

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[51] Leon, Notes, 26 April 2010.

[52] Eno, *Thom Pain*, 24.

there and they don't get it but I do because I'm your mind."[53] Leon makes mind a mode of

organization for the character and in this representation of Thom the scatological thoughts and

odd or disturbing images make sense because the mind is unpredictable. Interestingly the

director's mind is also doubled in this moment of figurative thought as she explains the ways her

mind works in order to encourage me to consider how I experience my mind. Put more

concisely, the director had me think about the nature of thought through her thoughts that

constituted a synecdoche.

If Thom is pure mind then the representation of him as a 'real' character can seem

limiting. Leon did not want to take the synecdoche to a symbolic extreme like the mouth in

Samuel Beckett's *Not I* but she was intent on pursuing the mind as the character in a deep way.[54]

Leon mobilized the concept of mind by directing a "light touch and rapid delivery" to give Thom

the effervescent quality of subconscious thought. "Mind doesn't have to work hard," she said,

"mind just flows and rests in strange places."[55]

The mind in the body offers a paradoxical position in the realm of representation.

Mending the Cartesian spilt between mind and body has been the project of recent cognitive

studies in acting and can also explain a revivified interest in holistic psychophysical approaches

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[53] Leon, Notes, 26 April 2010.

[54] The stage directions for Beckett's play read: "Stage in darkness but for MOUTH, upstage audience right, about 8 feet above stage level, faintly lit from close-up and below, rest of face in shadow" (216). Beckett's disembodied mouth never reveals its body and becomes the ideal synecdoche. The character is named "Mouth."

[55] Leon, Notes, 26 April 2010.

to acting.[56] However, Leon's direction intriguingly reverses the trend toward absolute cohesion. Implementing a synecdochic conception of a character can provide a productive resistance to any totalizing craft of acting or overly simplified unification of mind/body parallelism.

Oboist Kelly Vaneman took a different approach to the same moment. As the accompanist and music director of the Converse College production, Vaneman utilized synecdochic representation through sound. She listened intently and emphasized the sound of a blowing nose. She matched the gross sound with a complementary note on the oboe and continued it far beyond the limits of my ability to exhale. The strangeness of the oboe in this moment matched other moments in the play where Thom's discoveries and feelings became compellingly premeditated. The moment also pointed humorously to the lack of control that Thom the would-be maestro has over his own body and his own performance. The representation of the character is further heightened in this section as Eno expands from the snot to the stages of man from infancy through death concluding with, "Until an old man sits in a chair, the hearing gone the eyes gone, the body almost gone but the brain still going, the mind still insisting on itself, making itself heard, causing trouble."[57]

The practicality of synecdoche lies in its ability to make the actor's craft reflexive of the parts that constitute it, be it as complex as the mind or as simple as the expulsion of mucus. In describing the conceptual limits of Thom as pure mind Leon said, "Coherency is good as long as it's good and when it's no longer good we can float around a lot of different ideas."[58] To this end

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[56] See *The Actor, Image, and Action: Acting and Cognitive Neuroscience* (2008) by Rhonda Blair and Performance and Cognition: Theatre Studies and the Cognitive Turn (2010) edited by Bruce McConachie and F. Elizabeth Hart.

[57] Eno, *Thom Pain*, 21.

[58] Leon, Notes, 26 April 2010.

the figurative inspiration of 'Thom as mind' or "Thom as snot" served as another conceptual layer, coexisting with the Chekhov and Brecht work described earlier, to enhance the representative aspects of the character. Leon in Kansas and Vaneman in South Carolina each built on my understanding of Thom Pain by directing my attention to a particular aspect of the character. The synecdoche in this case is not an all consuming organizational trope, but served as a tool that is "good as long as it's good" for the actor. As such, it helped me ground the sections of the play that I found challenging.

IV. Irony

Perhaps the most difficult trope to read in rehearsal rhetoric is irony. Irony positions terms based on incongruity and opposition. Where the other three tropes discover relationships, irony is used to explore fissures and disruptions that are generative. Burke writes: "Irony arises when one tries, by the interaction of terms upon one another, to produce a *development* which uses all the terms.[59] Irony, in Burke's definition, produces moments of discovery that, not unlike the punch line in a joke, require broader perspective to understand. To demonstrate how irony appears in rehearsal it is necessary to consider how it is authored and for whom. Additionally, irony in this context should not be confused with sarcasm though the two concepts are related and directing sarcastically is certainly an available, albeit nasty strategy. The verbal irony that is Burke's focus is contingent on an author saying something that reveals something else, a development or reversal of terminology.

The moment in both rehearsal processes where irony emerged was in the climactic bubbling forth of Thom's psyche. This is probably not surprising when considering the bold

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[59] Burke, *Grammar*, 512

perspective shifts that Eno offers in the final scene. Jack Wright, director and acting teacher at the University of Kansas, was responsible for the fifth section of *Thom Pain: based on nothing* and he employed irony in interesting ways. While the implication that a director might say one thing and mean another may seem to be poor directing, I would argue that the use of irony is in fact a highly nuanced tool for persuasion in the director's rhetorical repertoire. Wright engaged this trope by interrogating Thom's relationship to his disturbing memories. Near the end of the play, Thom experiences a purging of regret as the images from his life "bubble forth in a stream of consciousness"[60] monologue. Following my performance, Wright, responded:

> This is only a thought but the flow of the ideas here seems to be more graphic and disturbing than anything else you've talked about and there is something specific here like vomiting and guts spilling out and I'm wondering if… I'd like to try at least, a less presentational, less reporting of the incidents and more of a reliving of that personal experience so that you almost forget that, starting with 'I miss her' you lose yourself and almost forget that the audience is there at all. And you go back and you relive that… I mean it was so strange…[61]

The irony authored by the director hinges on a single character caught between remembering and forgetting. Wright's suggestion turned counter to all of the preceding character developments and ran antithetical to the rest of the work I had done in attempting to directly address and acknowledge the audience. The irony authored here was a suggestion to draw the audience by seeming to be further away. The construction of a fourth wall for this moment of the play was a development of the terms of the "real" in the scene and I felt, as the performer, that the audience did draw closer to me in the moment I looked inward.

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[60] Jack Wright, Rehearsal Notes, 20 April 2010. Wright's use of metaphor is of note also.

[61] Wright, Notes, 20 April 2010. The tropes compound as the director offers the physical act of vomiting (metonymy) and the guts stand in for Thom (synecdoche).

In my re-rehearsal of this moment, psychologist Marie LePage, who worked as dramaturge for the Converse College production, pressed my understanding of the character into a more complicated development. She asked a series of questions:

> So let's think about the whole play, what's different about this time as you start into the final stages of your story? What's different in your personality your energy the momentum you've captured to this point? Is there a change? And if so, if it is the beginnings of a change, what are they? What do you want to accomplish? Maybe it is nothing, maybe you don't want to do anything but I think it is actually very therapeutic.[62]

While the strategy by Wright in the Kansas production relied on conflicting statements to create dialectic, the act of open questioning by LePage in South Carolina encouraged me to reframe this final breaking point for the character. Through her questions LePage drew attention to the inconsistency of this moment in the play that made me reconsider my own understanding of the character. The irony offered by LePage trades on an idea that Thom has seemed to act in a unified manner over the course of the play but now acts out of character. Asking questions in rehearsal can bring the actor to discover irony in productive ways. This strategy is not new and questioning the actor while having answers in mind is frequent in contemporary directing practices. William Ball writes:

> A director thrives when he [sic] puts his ideas in the form of questions […] When the director limits himself as much as possible to asking questions the actor develops the habit of right answers. The encouraged actor rapidly develops intuitive right knowledge. His answers become more sure and true the longer you rehearse because the actor learns to leave his intellect – the left-brain, critical faculties – and his ego-testing games behind.[63]

Ball's description of successful directing represents common conceptions about how the director is expected to engage the creative ground of the actor. However, through the act of questioning

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[62] Marie LePage, Rehearsal Notes, 11 November 2012. Note the synecdochic correlation between the final moment and the play as a whole that LePage offers.

[63] William Ball, *A Sense of Direction: Some Observations on the Art of Directing* (New York: Drama Book Publishers, 1984), 51.

the director is not simply asking questions. To consider LePage's questions in light of Thom's

earlier revelations actually reminded me of Wright's insistence on not being too presentational.

In a twist, LePage's attempt to change my performance actually reinforced my original work on

the moment. The process of questioning produced a further dialectic process that connected my

two rehearsal experiences and allowed the previously discovered figurative potentials to be

rediscovered.

Dialectic is revealed in the mutually related yet divergent perspectives. Wright and

LePage guided the climactic moment by emphasizing incongruity and promoting the competing

ideas that emerge for Thom in his moment of crisis. Irony authored in this moment, by the

director Wright and the dramaturge LePage, enabled me as an actor to broaden the depth of

Thom's experience. The terms that developed that appeared to be about the audience were more

pointedly reformulated to be about the character's relationship to his own memories. In this

dialectic between appearance and actuality Wright and LePage produced useful competing

agendas that enabled me to negotiate the experience of recognizing this loss onstage. The

dialectic was enhanced further by the connections, made by the actor, over the two different

rehearsal processes. The difference in these complications added depth to the difficult work of

generating authenticity in rehearsal.

V. Four tropes of rehearsal thought

A director communicates effectively with actors through rhetoric that is both meaningful

and makes meaning. The four tropes are not exclusive to any one director and often emerge

successively within a figurative web of significance. What the tropes offer are four modes of

directing thought that work to clarify the metaphysical confusion surrounding a collaborative

creative act like rehearsal. Directing thought through figurative language might be succinctly framed as follows: 1) through metaphor directors communicate by comparison to gain the actor perspective; 2) through metonymy directors communicate by focusing on immediate circumstances to gain the actor particular concentration; 3) through synecdoche directors communicate by symbolizing or signifying to gain a heightened representational mode for the actor; and 4) through irony the director communicates the contingency or incongruity of choices to engender a dialectic complexity.

By analyzing the form and content of persuasion in rehearsal I would argue that a kind of double vision is necessary for collaborators to work more effectively in rehearsal. Barthes poetically conveys the double vision that I experienced in rehearsing and re-rehearsing *Thom Pain: based on nothing*:

> The meaning is always there to present the form; the form is always there to outdistance the meaning. And there never is any contradiction, conflict, or split between the meaning and the form: they are never at the same place. In the same way, if I am in a car and I look at the scenery through the window, I can at will focus on the scenery or on the windowpane. At one moment I grasp the presence of the glass and the distance of the landscape; at another, on the contrary, the transparency of the glass and the depth of the landscape; but the result of this alteration is constant; the glass is at once present and empty to me, and the landscape unreal and full.[64]

Working on *Thom Pain* as an extended practice based research project was a process of learning double vision, in which the meaning and meaning-making exist simultaneously. Articulating a rehearsal rhetoric -- the howness of the whatness of directing -- is beneficial for all authors of performance. Following this analysis, I recognize that new applications of rehearsal rhetoric will inevitably await us each time we step into the space of persuasion and performance, the crucible

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[64] Roland Barthes, *Mythologies*, trans. Annette Lavers (Hill and Wang, 1972), 123.

of the rehearsal studio. A greater awareness of how persuasion moves between artists will

ultimately enhance all of our efforts at collaboration and communication.

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Henry Bial
Director #2
(Metonymy)

Mechele Leon
Director #3
(Synecdoche)

Leslie Bennett
Director #1
(Metaphor)

Actor/ Thom
Pain *at the
University of
Kansas*

Jack Wright
Director #4
(Irony)

Melissa Owens
Director
(Metaphor)

Actor/
Thom Pain
*at Converse
College*

Marie LePage
Dramaturge
(Irony)

Andrew
Blanchard
Scenic Designer
(Metonymy)

Kelly Vaneman
Music Director
(Synecdoche)

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