

SOMETHING BEAUTIFUL:
CRAFT AND SURVIVAL
IN NORTH AMERICAN ALTERNATIVE THEATRE COMPANIES

Carrie Kathryn Lee

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Committee:

Dr. Ron E. Shields, Advisor

Dr. Jeannie Ludlow
Graduate Faculty Representative

Dr. Jonathan Chambers

Dr. Michael Ellison

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ABSTRACT

Dr. Ron E. Shields, Advisor

The strategies that North American nonprofit theatre companies employ to ensure pragmatic survival and artistic advancement prove critical to their abilities to continue working. When the artists in these companies utilize alternative approaches to creation, the abstract quality of the resulting productions often exacerbates the need for successful survival tactics, as performances appeal to a limited number of paying audience members. Theatre practitioners who emphasize long-term performer training and the lengthy development of original montaged productions, such as companies building upon the artistic tradition of Jerzy Grotowski, represent one extreme sect of these marginalized artists. Relying on data gleaned from North American Cultural Laboratory (NaCl) in New York and Number Eleven Theatre in Toronto, two companies influenced by this artistic tradition, this study employs a grounded-theory method of analysis to examine the strategies marginalized nonprofit alternative theatre companies use to negotiate the tension between economic viability and artistic integrity.

The study reveals that these groups engage in several common survival strategies with varying degrees of success. The major differences within the companies' tactics derive from the groups' varying working structures, locations, and economic conditions. As a result of these dynamics, each company relies on one particular survival tactic most fully to ensure continued existence and artistic refinement; NaCl orchestrates community-based events, whereas Number Eleven relies on an established leader.

The results of the study suggest that through the practical action of employing strategies, transformations can truly arise. While Grotowskian practices can advance NaCl's and Number Eleven's quests for artistic refinement and fiscal survival, at times the practices also prove problematic in a contemporary North American context. The susceptibility to exclusionary politics within this artistic tradition compromises NaCl's community-based survival efforts, while the performers in Number Eleven often perpetuate the tradition's concept of a director as all-knowing *guru*, undermining the leader's desire for more equality-based dynamics. The groups partially compensate for these weaknesses through cross-company collaboration. The artistic cross-pollination and fiscal benefits of these efforts prove integral to each group's continued survival and artistic advancement, suggesting the appropriateness of this practice for North American alternative theatre companies.

This dissertation is dedicated to the loving memory of my father, Dr. Clifford M. Lee, who taught me to “fly like an eagle” and to use the pain of a fall as a lesson to help me soar again.

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CHAPTER I. INTRODUCTION:

A PATHWAY IN

Most nonprofit arts organizations face a critical tension between their desire to survive and their desire to create art or maintain artistic integrity.¹ This paradox becomes particularly challenging in companies where the artists also function as the sole administrators and/or staff members. The energy needed to search for and acquire scarce financial subsidies often takes an extreme toll on artists, while the time demands of such tasks take away from the developmental process demanded for substantial artistic accomplishment. Exacerbating these challenges is the emotional weight artists face of constantly justifying the value of art for the good of a society that frequently dismisses the work as an expendable luxury. Nonprofit arts organizations, then, are often forced to choose between focusing on practical survival or emphasizing artistic refinement. They either become commercially successful by sacrificing their artistic visions, or they maintain this creative integrity but struggle in obscurity, barely surviving or perhaps becoming extinct.

The financially driven theatre culture in North America often defaults to producing fantastical spectacles devoid of depth or intellectual intrigue. The other option is to eschew the risk of presenting new work, favoring revivals of canonical pieces that will ensure a profit. Particularly in mainstream, popular performance, the emphasis currently lies on creating work quickly that will prove financially successful. Performers and directors are forced to compromise the length and integrity of their craft in order to find work. Even serious and dedicated theatrical artists find themselves skipping essential steps in their determined creative processes to produce a finished product, often in painfully short periods of time.

The problem of negotiating economic viability with artistic refinement is compounded with more marginalized organizations within the nonprofit tradition. Within the commercial theatre culture of North America, the marginalized groups are often those who produce alternative, experimental, or non-realistic performances. The non-linear and abstract nature of these productions often frustrates many audience members. The already monumental job faced by theatre workers to develop a supportive audience base can become overwhelming when the general population labels the work *weird* or *artsy*.

One example of such marginalized organizations is the set of theatre companies deriving from the tradition of Polish director Jerzy Grotowski, whose most influential period of work occurred from 1957 to 1969 with the Polish Laboratory Theatre. This is a tradition that has been largely passed on by Grotowski's one-time assistant director Eugenio Barba and his company, Odin Teatret, in Denmark. During Barba's time with Grotowski, Grotowski focused on what he determined to be the core aspects of the theatre: the actor and the audience. In his work with the Polish Laboratory actors, Grotowski emphasized the importance of physical and vocal training outside of rehearsal in order for the actors to possess readily available tools for productions. As a result of this emphasis, Grotowski devised original, montaged productions with the well-trained performers in his company that demonstrated focus and discipline, acrobatic abilities, and use of the vocal apparatus to communicate abstract emotions onstage.²

A number of theatre companies have been substantially influenced by the "Grotowskian lineage" (Wolford, "Seminal Teachings" 39). Most notably, these groups tend to practice continuous long-term actor training, seek permanent collaboration with an ensemble of like-minded artists, devise actor-generated original performance pieces, and incorporate a substantial

amount of “non-realistic” stylized physical and vocal work as a means of interrogating complex issues through performance.

Many of the artists working within the artistic tradition began by Grotowski, however, have been “unsuccessful in starting their own theaters or feeding what they’ve done with Grotowski into their own theater work” (Schechner, *Between Theater and Anthropology* 106), suggesting the practical difficulties such companies face. Countless companies have folded amid financial struggles, failed to find other long-term members interested in working in similar ways, or have neglected the more disciplined aspects of Grotowski’s work in favor of producing fantastical pieces quickly in order to survive in the financially driven theatre culture of North America.

Several reasons can be pinpointed for this lack of success. First, the original performances these companies produce tend to be abstract in nature as the artists employ textual and physical montage as a means of creating productions, a practice and product that appeals only to a small population of North American theatre goers. Second, the process of generating original performance material extends rehearsal periods to many months; if the performers get paid at all, it is more often than not only a meager sum that many of them must supplement with income from odd jobs. Third, the focus on long-term performer training demands that the artists spend multiple hours each day (separate from and in addition to rehearsals) working on exercises seemingly unconnected to the project at hand. Fourth, artists working from a Grotowskian perspective often experience extreme marginalization within the established theatre culture in North America. Not only are these theatre practitioners working against the commercial mainstream theatre, but they are also not practicing the “cool new thing” (McClellan in Lee, *Fieldwork Notes*), placing them outside of the already marginalized alternative theatre culture.

These points do not serve to attract massive audiences or many new performers, so the development of financially stable theatre companies is exceptionally challenging for those who work in this artistic tradition.

Occasionally, even theatres operating in a marginalized status such as those in the Grotowskian tradition, seem to find a balance between economic viability and artistic advancement. Two companies that exemplify this balance are North American Cultural Laboratory (NaCl) in New York, New York, and Number Eleven Theatre in Toronto, Ontario, Canada. These alternative theatre companies work within the “North American Barba Diaspora” (Magnat 88) through the members’ first-hand experiences with Richard Fowler, who worked with Barba as an actor in Odin Teatret and subsequently served as the artistic director of the influential Canadian theatre company PRIMUS Theatre, which existed between 1989 and 1997. Both NaCl and Number Eleven can be categorized as outside of the framework of the commercial theatre of entertainment. Although both NaCl and Number Eleven remain in constant danger of closing their doors, they manage to survive financially without compromising their artistic advancement in many ways; they have developed specific strategies for both financial and artistic survival as alternative theatre companies. Because these theatre companies appear to have managed to defy the odds that have caused other theatres to compromise their artistry or close their doors, they can serve as models for understanding how nonprofit theatre organizations might negotiate these competing tensions. In this study, then, I seek to answer the research question: “What strategies do nonprofit alternative theatre companies use to negotiate the tension between economic viability and artistic integrity?”

Literature Review

NaCl and Number Eleven Theatre Companies

Beyond performance reviews, no major scholarly publications exist regarding NaCl's artistry. Three scholarly works have been published on Number Eleven Theatre, focusing on the company's performance processes.

Magnat offers a brief overview of selected elements of Number Eleven's approach to devising its play *The Prague Visitor*, focusing on the company's creative process. She primarily limits her study to an analysis of this process as evident in the small number of rehearsals that she attended ("Number Eleven Theatre's *The Prague Visitor*").

The second and third pieces are separately published but connected studies written by periodic dramaturg for Number Eleven, Bruce Barton. These pieces largely focus on Barton's role as dramaturg for the company and interrogate the concept of *authorship* in original, physically-based theatre productions. He also references selected elements of the working process of Number Eleven to support his points ("Navigating Turbulence" and "Navigating Through Turbulence").

Negotiating Economic Viability and Artistic Integrity

A number of studies have been conducted that acknowledge nonprofit theatres' challenges in maintaining economic viability and/or artistic integrity. Several salient studies surface that specifically address the tension that can arise for nonprofit theatre companies as a result of negotiating these challenges. One example of such literature (and perhaps the most influential on the members of my study) is the writing that addresses these types of negotiations as determined by PRIMUS theatre. Asserting that alternative theatres are threatened by the

current cultural and political climate, in 1995 Fowler offers a description of the conditions in which he worked with PRIMUS:

[T]here is no doubt that we are now in a state of crisis: theatre activity is like a large and unwieldy ship becalmed, trapped, in the middle of a sea where the unsettling and energizing winds of change do not blow; and this sea is full of icebergs moved by powerful currents (funding cuts, audience indifference, right-wing political agendas). We have a choice: we can choose to stay on the *Titanic*, deckhands on a ship we do not own, in the belief that somebody is piloting the ship and that it will somehow avoid the icebergs and stay afloat; or we can set off in kayaks of our own, and in small groups, each of which defines its own rules of navigation, move across the sea under our own power. (31)

As an extension of Fowler's essay, a symposium, "Survivors of the Ice Age," was organized by PRIMUS in Winnipeg, Canada, to encourage artists to find ways of overcoming the inevitable practical challenges of existing as alternative theatre companies while concurrently maintaining high artistic standards. *Canadian Theatre Review (CTR)* devoted its fall, 1996, issue to excerpts from and writings about the symposium and PRIMUS Theatre. The *CTR* issue highlights PRIMUS' extremely disciplined approaches to training, teaching, and performance. The journal also characterizes the group's original productions as employing "overt theatricality," specifically executed physical actions, attention to details, and non-linear plot structures (Wolford, "Seminal Teachings" 40). The *CTR* issue makes it clear that the PRIMUS actors succeeded in incorporating the Grotowskian-based performance approaches that they learned through their first-hand experiences with Fowler, practiced this type of theatrical work for many years, formed a stable core of like-minded theatre practitioners that sought continuous

artistic advancement, and managed to survive amid a plethora of challenges faced by alternative theatre practitioners throughout North America. Thus, the group became a working model for new experimental groups wishing to sustain their existences without compromising their artistic integrity, suggesting one reason why the symposium was so popular among artists in these types of companies.

The fall, 1996, *CTR* issue also outlines some of the most crucial things that were identified at PRIMUS' symposium as threats to the survival of alternative theatre companies in North America. As a member of the symposium, Savannah Walling explains the importance of determining these elements: "From a foundation of knowledge we will be able to launch our own struggles for creative freedom and economic survival. [. . .] By naming the forces that threaten us, we can affect, not only our reality, but our destiny—who we can be and what we can create in the years ahead" (12). Among the challenges noted at the symposium and within the subsequent *CTR* issue were the discontinuation of certain governmental grants, the freezing of many arts organizations' funding, the financial ease and convenience of film and television for the general public's entertainment outlet, the decreasing amount of performing arts courses offered in schools, and censorship due to an increasing "social fear" (Walling 11).

Also identified at the symposium were strategies that these artists might employ to remain vital contributors to the theatre community of North America. Discussions among the participants produced a variety of suggestions to aid the artists such as trusting an established director, practicing ongoing training, and building alliances with other marginalized artists. Most of the strategies discussed, however, were largely affected by one overarching commonality: remaining determined, resilient, and idealistic in the face of challenges.

Maintaining idealism within a company structure seems to be an important tactic for survival according to additional sources as well. In the Theatre Communications Group's recent documentary regarding the artistic work of the organization's past board presidents, Lloyd Richards emphatically states that the theatre practitioner must bravely find ways of negotiating the vast challenges that currently exist, because as a serious artist, one has "to have a way of life and not just a job" (Reprinted in [Theatre Communications Group Home Page](#)). For many years, Theatre Communications Group (TCG) has remained the most vocal and active service establishment for nonprofit theatres in the United States. In addition to the comments of Richards, the 2001 documentary contains interviews from such renowned theatre practitioners as Anne Bogart, Robert Falls, Kent Thompson, Gordon Davidson, and Ricardo Khan. The transcripts from the interviews were subsequently published by TCG, and throughout the interviews, these theatre practitioners continually reference the importance of a marginalized artist remaining positive, hopeful, and resolute that success is viable.

Additional literature also acknowledges the importance of idealism for theatre practitioners. For example, in his historical overview of The Washington Square Players (1915-1918), Kramer situates the historic group as practicing many techniques that are generally ascribed to contemporary alternative theatre companies. As Kramer traces the company's journey, he illuminates the benefits of the group's idealism in the face of overwhelming financial and practical obstacles (157). Moreover, in TCG's 2003 annual report regarding the economic conditions of nonprofit theatre companies across the country, Pesner sums up this vital attitude for marginalized theatre artists as he offers the words of Hopkins, the artistic director of a struggling nonprofit theatre company in Florida: "Is the glass half full or half empty? We need to look at the half-full side, which is not our nature as theatre professionals, because we feel

undervalued. We *are* undervalued. But that's not going to change until we look at the half-full side and ask 'What are we doing right?' And then replicate what's working" (47). Indeed, there are a plethora of economic and artistic challenges these companies face. To succeed, these groups must identify their struggles, refine their survival strategies, and strive to achieve their goals against the odds.

Several important studies highlight additional, practical strategies that nonprofit companies use to ensure their long-term existences and artistic advancement. Although none of the writings provide in-depth analyses of how these tactics practically manifest within a specific company structure such as I do, the writings offer a good point of departure for engaging in my current project.

One strategy that the literature suggests for maintaining economic viability and artistic advancement relies on applying for grant funding. Since Baumol and Bowen's groundbreaking study in 1967 calling for enhanced grant funding for nonprofit organizations, many scholars have argued for this type of financial support (e.g., Netzer in 1978, Fronek in 1984, and Pankratz and Morris in 1988 in the United States; Chartrand in 1984 in Canada). One of the most compelling arguments resulting from these studies claims that without significant grant funding for nonprofit organizations, ticket prices for these events would escalate. Inflated ticket prices would allow only wealthier patrons to view the work. Netzer determines that there is "something intrinsically abhorrent" about this type of restriction (195). Further, evidence suggests that since the 1960s when nonprofit grant funding began to substantially increase, there has been a significant rise in the number of adult theatre-goers in North America (Netzer 195).

One practice that aids companies' efforts in obtaining this much needed grant money is that of firmly identifying and categorizing a company's work. Bogart explains that "you create

the future by describing it” (Reprinted in [Theatre Communications Group Home Page](#)). Filewod corroborates this theory as he traces the developments and shifts of the alternative theatre movement since the 1970s. He argues that the naming of a movement, and the active location of a theatre group within that movement, serve as viable methods for meeting standards for grant-awarding organizations. He also posits that this identification has long served as a strategy that focuses leadership efforts and produces creative unity within alternative theatre groups (“Naming the Movement”). Kramer reinforces the projected success of this tactic as he claims that the act of naming and identifying a company’s artistic and economic goals has historically been a helpful strategy for theatre groups (155).

Auteri uses a theatre company’s process to review why artistic organizations may choose to classify themselves as nonprofit organizations, thereby offering substantial evidence that this type of legal categorization can be both financially and artistically beneficial for alternative theatre companies. She cites that nonprofit organizations are eligible for important and useful governmental grants and private foundation monies to which commercial theatre organizations do not have access. This money, argues Auteri, allows the members of the company to be concerned with “artistic excellence and innovation” rather than merely the financial gains of the box office (182).

Addressing the specific conditions affecting the companies in my study, Pesner notes that 2003 brought many financial challenges for nonprofit theatre organizations. However, in comparison to many previous years, he argues, there were more grant and funding opportunities for these companies (38). He offers several examples of specific theatre groups’ financial negotiations, reinforcing the importance of applying for governmental and privatized funding to

maintain economic viability. Yet, Pesner also suggests that projected funding cuts will further enhance the need for the groups to develop other tactics to negotiate long-term survival as well.

One of these tactics outlined in the existing literature focuses on sharing work with other artists and creating conditions for collaborative efforts between companies. Cherbo traces the progression of collaborative interactions that have occurred between theatre companies in North America in recent years. She also suggests that strategic alliances between companies aids in establishing financial stability and promoting creative development for the artists in the participating groups (13). Similarly, Pesner identifies the benefits of entering into collaborative efforts with other theatre companies and the advantages of co-producing productions (40). The artistic rewards of this practice are plentiful in that artists can often continue working with their established ensembles, but can also simultaneously learn new techniques from other working theatre practitioners. Co-producing is also financially advantageous, since both groups' audience bases are ideally attracted to the production, increasing the "visibility of the companies" (41). This tactic has the potential to double the size of paying audiences, while the companies reap the benefits of sharing expenses for the productions (44). Moreover, co-producing and collaborating also result in gaining emotional support for theatre artists, providing what Berson, in an overview of Seattle area nonprofit theatre companies, determines as a vital network of encouragement from "an extended family of artists" (3).

The existing literature further suggests that working with a long-term ensemble marks another strategy for financial and artistic survival for marginalized theatre practitioners. For example, Bogart shares the moment in which she first realized that she must establish a long-term, ensemble-based company, suggesting this as an appealing option for artists striving to create powerful and significant theatrical productions:

I was in Berlin in a conversation with Ariane Mnouchkine, who's really my model, though I don't know her personally really. Everyone needs a model. She's a generation older than I am, a director of a company, and somebody I admire very much. She said to me in a brief conversation, looking at me in the eye, "What are you going to do without a company? Don't get me wrong," she said in French, "a company will make you miserable. People are going to leave. There are always problems, but what are you going to do without a company?"

I had an epiphany in that moment, which was that every great production I'd seen, with no exception, theatre or dance, was always with a company. No exception. (Reprinted in [Theatre Communications Group Home Page](#))

In a connected vein, Bjerre posits that focusing on difference within a long-term theatre organization's structure can pave the way for creativity to arise among the members. Rather than encouraging a theatre company's members to change themselves to fit "the identity of the group," Bjerre argues that embracing "difference" can create tension that will foster creativity, and that might ensure that members will resist the urge to leave the group when challenges arise. Bjerre also suggests that this elevated level of collective creativity can ultimately lead to more stable economic conditions for performers working together over an extended period of time, since the company's product would ultimately be enhanced from deeper, lengthier artistic explorations. According to Bjerre, the stronger artistic work which results will then, in turn, draw larger numbers of paying audience members to the productions (235).

Pesner echoes Bjerre's findings in that he also claims that groups working together over an extended period of time can explore enhanced artistic dynamics. Pesner posits that an additional benefit to extended company interaction can be found in a group's ability to build up

monetary savings during strong fiscal years that will compensate for more challenging economic situations in the future. This practice allows companies to choose material that advances their established missions, rather than relying too heavily on fluctuating, unreliable grants or box office proceeds (39). Moreover, according to Pesner, groups that work together long-term have more success in fundraising efforts, because they work in an established location long enough for donors to realize that they are a stable part of the community's identity and are "not going away" (43).

Several other studies suggest that the development of a reliable audience base within a specific community serves as an important strategy for the nonprofit theatre organization's continued existence. In TCG's documentary, Thompson, artistic director of the Alabama Shakespeare Festival, posits that the act of engaging local community members remains central to the survival of theatre workers practicing regional or alternative work. He suggests that a key element of this strategy is to "keep engaging people and making [. . . the theatre] relevant to their lives [. . .] so that we can reconnect with the community. [. . .] We're going to have to do that to make sure that our connection is vital" (Reprinted in Theatre Communications Group Home Page).

DeMark's overview of the nonprofit theatre program, "Neighborhood Bridges," supports this position, as she points to the educational and cultural benefits that nonprofit theatre organizations can have for local communities. DeMark highlights the need for groups to become rooted in local communities, establishing themselves as vital contributors to the region's identity. This alliance will allow the theatre group to serve the needs of the community, while simultaneously appealing to a specified audience base. Within her analysis, she also suggests that one method of establishing this type of interaction with a local community relies on

presenting public festivals (166). These types of events publicize the organization's work, and can be artistically beneficial as they allow for the performers' exposure to new artistic methods.

Khan explains that "to make that one-on-one connection with people in the community" is extremely important for the survival of nonprofit companies (Reprinted in Theatre Communications Group Home Page). Cherbo also lends credence to a theatre company's practice of ingraining itself into a community as she points out that this action helps elicit integral donations from independent donors that feel invested in the group's work (7). The funding gained from independent donors serves as important supplement money that allows companies to embark on artistically rich ventures, such as touring productions. This can result in the company's enhanced artistic refinement, resulting from numerous interactions with varied audiences.

Kramer explains that one tactic a theatre company might use to become a part of a community is to set the ticket prices at an affordable rate, appropriate to the economic dynamics of the area (156). The logic behind this type of approach for theatre companies wishing to establish more secure financial positions can be found in Hopkins' explanation: "[K]eep the prices down [. . .]. Here's the formula: 'Low prices plus high quality equals high volume and high volume will cover the lack of price'" (Pesner 46). Pesner additionally points out that many nonprofit theatre companies seek to build an audience base through lowering their ticket prices, while simultaneously expanding marketing strategies (40). Given the substantial expense of most advertising options, in recent years companies have begun utilizing the internet more readily for marketing. This form of marketing allows a company not only to publicize its artistic activities, but also to encourage season subscriptions from audience members and to elicit individual donations, which seem to be "the backbone of the fundraising efforts" (42) in many

companies. Further, seeking a long-term commitment from these independent donors, such as gaining “stretch gifts” marks a viable option for theatre groups, because the companies can then select artistic work that appropriately coincides with more accurately projected budgets (43).

Many theatre troupes are also focusing on the uniqueness of the live performance experience for their viewers as an important survival strategy (Pesner 45). Davidson suggests that a type of communion between performers and audiences will bring increased stability for theatre workers. “The audience is a good barometer” for determining a group’s artistic and professional impact, he explains:

You’ve got to listen to them, not their comments necessarily, but how they’re listening. It’s always a small miracle when—whether through a joke or through a moment of truth of one kind or another—you feel the audience as one, all breathing in the same way, that sound of laughter from everybody, that silence beyond silence, that feeling when applause happens spontaneously, anything that says, “Ah, we’re at one now.” (Reprinted in [Theatre Communications Group Home Page](#))

As artists focus on these types of connections with audiences, they echo the findings of Grotowski. Grotowski posits that focusing on the power of the live “communion” between performers and audience members will produce artistically rich, abstract productions, while simultaneously bypassing an unnecessary competition with film and television (“Towards a Poor Theatre” 30).

Another survival strategy that many companies have recently been forced to employ requires re-evaluating the need for administrative staff. Pesner notes that many nonprofit groups have conducted “strategic staff reductions” (38) in recent years when faced with economic

challenges. Thus, the money which a nonprofit theatre company gains from funding sources can be used for the artistic work and the artists' wages (40). Yet, the drawbacks of this practice are found in the enhanced workloads of the artists within the group. Consequently, other theatre companies see the need to expand administrative staff rather than relying on artists to conduct fundraising efforts and jobs for which they are not trained. For example, Pesner highlights Redmoon Theater, a Chicago-based company, as a group that believes that the money used for a trained administrative staff will ultimately yield greater financial benefits (42). Still another argument enters into this debate, as Ulrik Skeel, head of the administrative staff at Odin Teatret, claims that a successful theatre company should utilize both a trained staff as well as the performers of the company to carry out administrative duties (229). This strategic approach allows the number of administrative salaries to be kept to a minimum, while practiced staff can still train the performers in effective administrative approaches. The tactic also encourages performers to spend time developing their artistic crafts, because they do not experience the overwhelming time constraints that occur when functioning as the primary business staff.

Finally, the literature suggests that companies who embrace financial constraints as opportunities rather than hindrances remain most successful within the nonprofit tradition. According to Kramer, this strategy can be practically seen in companies who focus on creating abstract presentations in performance rather than expensive realistic representations (159). For example, many artists believe that any space can serve as a functional theatre venue, as long as it allows for an appropriate dynamic of audience interaction. In fact, more theatre companies are choosing to work in environments that are not traditionally viewed as *theatres* for both financial and artistic reasons, as the alternative environment can promote substantial creativity within the performance. Bjerre aptly sums up this approach as he concludes that "creativity has more to do

with what someone does not have than with what he has, because it is in the process of achieving and becoming that creative energy lies” (233).

Method

Data

My data for this study are the artistic and financial practices of the NaCl and Number Eleven theatre companies. NaCl operates out of two locations: New York, New York and Highland Lake, New York. The company currently maintains only two permanent members and works with other independent actors on a regular basis. NaCl possesses distinctive advantages as an alternative theatre company in North America by owning a permanent theatre venue that allows the artists to engage in regular training practices, offer workshops, and house the troupe’s productions. Thus, NaCl has been able to contribute partial funding to produce performances (independent of governmental grants), and the members pay themselves small salaries generated by their artistic efforts. In contrast, Number Eleven operates out of Toronto, Ontario, Canada, and is comprised of five members. The group does not have a permanent theatre space and has thus far been forced to work sporadically. Number Eleven must rely heavily on Canadian subsidies to conduct its work, as the group members have not been able to work consistently enough to offer themselves salaries generated from artistic endeavors. I chose to analyze these companies because they share many artistic similarities resulting from working within the Grotowskian tradition; they thus provide the opportunity to study nonprofit theatre organizations committed to preservation and advancement of the artistic tradition. Yet, NaCl and Number Eleven also have substantial differences that derive from the different locations, working environments, and structures of the two companies, allowing for an examination of the different

choices made by the companies in the areas of aesthetics and economics. In Chapter Two of this study, I provide thorough overviews of both companies' work.

My data related to the companies assumed a variety of forms. They include published and unpublished pieces written by the artists in NaCl and Number Eleven about their work. Artistic journal entries to which the artists gave me access, the artists' personal reflections posted on the companies' websites, company documents outlining the professional and artistic goals of the groups, and short articles written in trade papers and/or locally distributed journals about the theatre companies constitute data. E-mail messages and faxes written by and to the artists and pre-recorded videotapes of the companies' prior productions are other forms of data to which I had access. Fieldwork notes outlining specific observations of the artists' practical performance efforts and administrative negotiations were additional forms of data for me. Inclusion of quoted material comes from written pieces and compiled fieldwork notes and appears here with the artists' permission.

Data Collection

I conducted my study using ethnographic research methods. Loosely defined as "writing culture" (Cole 167), ethnography has been substantially influenced by the work of cultural anthropologists. The origins of ethnography are often attributed to the work of Polish anthropologist Bronislaw Malinowski in 1914, and acknowledgement is largely given to Margaret Mead for advancing the initial discipline in the United States. Toward the end of the twentieth century, feminist ethnographic writers enhanced the discipline by highlighting the complexities of ethnographic research and writing. Although an emphasis on acknowledging the fieldworker's position in the ethnographic research process had previously been posited by famed anthropologists such as James Clifford and Clifford Geertz, feminist ethnographers such

as Barbara Meyerhoff, Kirin Narayan, and Ruth Behar did much to advance the discipline in this regard.³

Ethnographic research operates with the basic assumption that the ethnographer's "job is to make other cultures intelligible" (Rosaldo 1). It involves examination of "group's observable and learned patterns of behavior, customs, and ways of life" (Creswell 58). The approach requires the researcher to spend an extended amount of time in the field with a particular group to collect data. Data are commonly gleaned in fieldwork through participant-observation. Meyerhoff explains the data collecting process:

The anthropologist engages in peculiar work. He or she tries to understand a different culture to the point of finding it to be intelligible regardless of how strange it seems in comparison with one's own background. This is accomplished by attempting to experience the new culture from within, living in it for a time as a member, all the while maintaining sufficient detachment to observe and analyze it with some objectivity. This peculiar posture—being inside and outside at the same time—is called—participant-observation. (18)

My particular approach to ethnographic research was modeled on the perspective of Kirsten Hastrup. Her approach to research is most relevant to my work in her focus on theatre and in her connection to Grotowski's protégé, Barba. Barba has collaborated closely with Hastrup for many years in his work with the International School of Theatre Anthropology.⁴ As a method for studying cultures' performance practices, Barba has relied on Hastrup's anthropological work analyzing the cultures of theatre groups. Hastrup asserts that this type of practical study "reflects the double vision of anthropology: to observe the native culture and to participate in it at the same time. [. . .] There is no way of seeing from 'nowhere in particular.'

Anthropology is seeing from a point that epitomizes the contact zone” (4). According to Hastrup, a space can be made for the successful merging of theory and experience in ethnographic studies in a postmodern world by eschewing the notion of objectivity. In fact, she concludes, “This [. . .] paves the way for a new ethics of authenticity and of theory” (5).

In 2002 and 2003, I repeatedly traveled to New York City, the Catskills, and Toronto to work with the artists in the two theatre companies and to collect the data for my analysis. Grotowski himself believed that “knowledge is best passed on through direct, body-to-body transmission” (Wolford, *The Occupation of the Saint* 7). Thus, I spent my time observing rehearsals, viewing productions, attending festivals, participating in physical and vocal training workshops, building a black box theatre in an abandoned warehouse, tending bar in the lobby of a theatre, giving scholarly presentations regarding the Grotowskian artistic tradition, leading a post-production talk-back session, and doing my fair share of cooking and more than my fair share of cleaning in an effort to aid the artists with chores that might otherwise interfere with precious rehearsal time. In short, I worked with and often lived among the group members as a means of submerging myself into the culture. In return for the artists’ generosity, I tried to give something back to a company each time I visited.

I fully acknowledge that my own training and history as a theatre practitioner affect my application of the ethnographic method, my observations, and my analysis of the data. I am an actress, director, and performance scholar who believes that theatrical productions have the potential to challenge established norms and create a space for positive social growth, education, and understanding. Performance scholar Jill Dolan articulates many of my own expectations for live theatre:

Audiences are compelled to gather with others, to see people perform live, hoping, perhaps, for moments of transformation that might let them reconsider and change the world outside the theatre, from its macro to its micro arrangements. Perhaps part of the desire to attend theatre and performance is to reach for something better, for new ideas about how to be and how to be with each other. I believe that theatre and performance can articulate a common future, one that's more just and equitable, one in which we can all participate more equally, with more chances to live fully. [. . .] I want a lot from theatre and performance. (455-456)

As a professionally trained actress primarily grounded in the work of Stanislavsky and a performance scholar interested in interrogating the limitless potentials of performance, I had become dissatisfied with the current state of popular theatre in North America. I was tired of viewing what I considered under-rehearsed, sloppy, superficial mainstream productions yet understood all too well the commercial and economic factors that led to the disappointing performances. Thus, I began to engage in research focusing on more experimental theatre traditions in the hope of discovering approaches for creating socially significant productions of high artistic quality in a contemporary context. Artists practicing within the Grotowskian artistic tradition posit similar arguments to mine regarding the unsatisfactory state of popular theatre. Thus, I embarked on my research with high hopes of meeting like-minded artists, learning new approaches for creation, and bringing to my research a commitment to experimental theatre.⁵

Ethnographic research does not come without significant challenges. The comfort levels and preferences of the directors and actors determined the nature of my interactions. Consequently, I gained different types of insight in relation to each company I analyzed.

For example, as a new, visiting scholar with NaCl, I was not viewed as part of the community. Thus, the information I received was guarded because a trust-building process is inherent in ethnographic research. At the time, I attributed the uncomfortable experiences with Krumholz and Kowalchuk to my relatively new interaction with the group. Unfortunately, however, I was never fully allowed access into some of the more intricate negotiations NaCl faced as a theatre company. There frequently seemed to be disagreements between Krumholz and Kowalchuk regarding what was appropriate to share with me. Particularly in regard to specific financial considerations of the company, Krumholz resisted letting me view such material.

Overall, while I was conducting fieldwork at NaCl, the artists remained cordial and polite, but there seemed to be a certain assumption that writing about this type of work is of lesser value than participating in it. As Narayan suggests, “that’s an old problem in anthropology. [. . .] How much can bystanders, what we call participant observers, really understand? Do you have to dress up in feathers to say what’s going on in a war dance? Do you have to know grief from inside to understand mortuary rites” (37-38)? Perhaps because of the tension between observation and involvement, regardless of how many conversations I engaged in with Krumholz regarding my prior acting credits, directing experiences, and training with other theatre companies, I always felt a bit of condensation from him toward me. He established early in my research period that he preferred that I remain an observer at NaCl rather than physically engaging in the training exercises. I had the feeling, at times, that my presence was an inconvenience. As my research progressed and my trips to observe NaCl’s work became more frequent, Krumholz offered somewhat more information to me. In hindsight, however, it is

clear to me that I was viewed as a scholar passing through and not a full community member of NaCl.

In contrast, the members of Number Eleven seemed very comfortable with my presence from the beginning stages of my research. Frequently, they asked me to participate in training sessions, requested that I give suggestions for performance development, and invited me to socialize with them outside of my designated fieldwork. In part, I believe the company members' comfort levels with me may have risen as a result of meeting them informally during my observations of NaCl. These interactions aided in establishing a friendly and comfortable relationship before my formal observation period of Number Eleven's work in Toronto began. As a result, the members of Number Eleven seemed thrilled with my presence and encouraged that I was writing about their work.

Data Analysis

I used grounded theory to analyze the data I collected in my interactions with the two theatre companies. Developed by Barney Glaser and Anselm Strauss in 1967, the primary assumption of this method is that a qualitative analysis can be conducted using an inductive process of investigation to generate new theory, in contrast to a deductive process that verifies established theory. A grounded-theory approach allowed categories of analysis to emerge rather than imposing an outside theory on my data to formulate my argument. The method enabled me to engage NaCl and Number Eleven's work on the companies' own terms, without pre-conceived hypotheses.

Grounded theory is a method of analysis that involves two primary procedures. First the data are coded through a process of identifying emerging similarities within the data set that form categories and their properties. During the coding process, the researcher simultaneously

begins to identify relationships among the categories by noting emerging themes. In my case, I focused in my coding on the strategies selected by the companies to negotiate economic viability and artistic advancement. I then sorted the codes into categories and from those categories developed an argument or theory that should be viewed as an “ever-developing entity, not as a perfected product” (Glaser and Strauss 43).

Significance of the Study

In an unpredictable and tumultuous environment, new nonprofit theatre companies wishing to sustain themselves must constantly search for and engage in new strategies for survival. The quests of theatres such as NaCl and Number Eleven to develop survival tactics that honor the members’ artistic advancement have been successful in some instances and have failed in others. The practices of NaCl and Number Eleven documented and illuminated in this study can aid other companies (both within and outside of this artistic tradition) in negotiating professional survival strategies that do not require them to compromise the artists’ creative processes.

The established North American companies I analyze in this study are ones that have been influenced by the Grotowskian artistic tradition, resulting from the company members’ first-hand experiences with Barba and/or training with Fowler who employed Barba’s techniques in his work with PRIMUS. The time the artists in NaCl and Number Eleven have spent with these directors affected in major ways the companies’ approaches toward training, performance, and survival. This study thus contributes to the theatrical scholarly community by interrogating how the influence of Grotowski’s artistic tradition (once considered ground-breaking in practical productions efforts and theoretical studies) is currently being manifest in North American theatre companies. Furthermore, my work expands the typical analyses to include the practices of these

theatre practitioners beyond the artistic realm. It provides information about economic conditions and practices used in theatre companies. This study thus supports the argument that artistic practices and practical negotiations should be viewed as fluid rather than separate entities that both influence the work.

Outline of the Study

In the first chapter, I have introduced the study and explained the research question, the literature I reviewed, my method, and the significance of the study. In the second chapter, I provide a descriptive overview of the NaCl and Number Eleven theatre companies, the groups' artistic accomplishments, and the working structures of each troupe. In Chapter Three, I analyze the practices that appear to account for NaCl's survival, focusing on the company's Catskill Performer Training Retreat as an example of the group's practice of orchestrating community-based events as its most salient survival strategy. In Chapter Four, I articulate the major survival tactics used by Number Eleven, highlighting and analyzing the complexities of the company's practice of depending on a leader. In the Conclusion, I summarize my study; I synthesize the successes, challenges, and complexities of the companies in my study in relation to their determined survival strategies and artistic negotiations; and I offer suggestions for further research.

NOTES

¹ Auteri offers a good working definition of nonprofit organizations: “Legally [. . .] included [as nonprofit organizations,] are organizations engaged in ‘charitable’ activities—for example, religious, charitable, scientific, and educational organizations—as well as mutual benefit organizations such as business associations, labor unions, and country clubs. [. . .] Profit is not precluded. Its uses are restricted; a nonprofit organization may not distribute profit to officers, employees, or anyone else who exercises control over it” (185).

² See *Akropolis* for an example of Grotowski’s work with the Polish Laboratory actors.

³ See Behar and Gordon for an overview of feminist anthropologists’ significant contributions to the ethnographic process.

⁴ Richard Schechner provides a condensed overview of the work of the International School of Theatre and Anthropology (ISTA) in *Between Theater and Anthropology*: “ISTA involves training, exchange of techniques, seminars, films, and a ‘team of scientific collaborators.’ Aside from student participants and members of the Odin that take part in training sessions, workshops, and symposiums [. . .] teachers [. . . come] from India, Bali, Japan, Sweden, Denmark, and China” (27-28). See [Odin Teatret Home Page](#) for specific session breakdowns of ISTA.

⁵ Given my Stanislavskian training, that I gravitated to actors working within the Grotowskian artistic tradition is not surprising. Many have overlooked Stanislavsky’s influence on Grotowski in favor of linking Grotowski with Artaud’s theories by focusing on the more fantastic and extreme elements of the Polish Laboratory Theatre’s productions. Yet, Grotowski trained as a director in Moscow with one of Stanislavsky’s students, Zavadski, and worked directly with actors from the Moscow Art Theatre. Grotowski’s experimentations with the

method of physical actions, his long-term involvement with an ensemble, the extended duration of his rehearsal periods, and his commitment to the artistic growth and development of the actor all provide a connection to Stanislavsky. In “Grotowski’s Vision of the Actor,” Wolford suggests that a “central element of Grotowski’s approach to actor training, like Stanislavsky’s was the effort to help the actor live more truthfully onstage” (193). Furthermore, in his writings, interviews, and public speeches, Grotowski consistently cited Stanislavsky’s impact on all of his work. Specifically, “Reply to Stanislavsky” (“*Risposta a Stanislavskij*”), an important text by Grotowski that was never published in English, thoroughly maps out this theatrical influence. See Innes for an example of connecting Grotowski’s work to that of Artaud. See Thomas Richards and Wolford, “Grotowski’s Vision of the Actor” for specific discussions of Grotowski’s work with Stanislavsky’s method of physical actions.

Many of Grotowski’s early performances also demonstrate the influence of Vsevolod Meyerhold, who was initially a student of Stanislavsky’s. During the beginning phases of Stanislavsky’s realistic theatrical experimentations, Meyerhold began to find realistic stage efforts limiting and started working independently. He focused on combining what he had learned from Stanislavsky with a more physically based approach to training. He subsequently developed a basic set of exercises and working methodology that he termed *biomechanics*. Stanislavsky eventually recognized Meyerhold as his creative heir. See Leech for more about Meyerhold and a concise overview of the major exercises of biomechanics.

Traces of the directorial work of Eugene Vakhtangov, another of Stanislavsky’s students, also can be seen in the physicality and theatricality of Grotowski’s work with the Polish Laboratory Theatre. At the height of Vakhtangov’s work, each gesture, word, or sound onstage was perfected to the degree that it seemed spontaneous. Theatricality was also highly present, as

lampshades, baskets, and spoons were sometimes used as costuming items. Stanislavsky praised Vakhtangov for his ability to generate inner truth and perfectly sculpted form in moving performances. See Moore for a documentation in English of Vakhtangov's work and its connections to Stanislavsky.

CHAPTER II. CRITICAL JOURNEYS: COMPANY OVERVIEWS

After several minutes of staring in admiration at the group of actors, I am at a loss for words. Upon returning to my fieldwork notes, I simply write: “moments of bliss.” I sit on the steps of the small stage at the North American Cultural Laboratory (NaCl) in Highland Lake, New York in August of 2002. As I conduct my observations of NaCl’s Catskill Festival of New Theatre, I am struck by the extreme physical and emotional commitment of the artists. The training sessions throughout the ten-day festival have been diverse and intense, and the performers’ stamina consistently amazes me. The festival seeks to showcase alternative theatre companies and offer the participants the opportunity to explore new ways to develop their artistic crafts via work exchanges led by the attending companies. The group is comprised of the members of NaCl, the members of Number Eleven Theatre, and theatre practitioners in several other North American experimental groups.

The members of NaCl and Number Eleven Theatre have shared leadership responsibilities in this physical training session, as they approach their crafts in similar ways via working within the same artistic tradition. At this particular point in the physical training session, artistic director of NaCl Brad Krumholz leads the group in an exercise that he terms “the exploding star,” which requires the performer to spend several consecutive minutes in his or her most physically energized state. The activity prompts the participant to release stored tension and energy while noting the body’s subtle urges for different types of movement. This highly personal exercise is enacted very differently among individuals as a result of distinctive visceral impulses and varying degrees of physical ability.

As I witness this work, I am impressed with the acrobatic abilities of some of the performers. However, I do not stop frantically taking notes as a result of the grand leaping, muscular shaking, and sporadic jumping occurring in the theatre. Rather, the individual performers' extreme focus, awareness of the body, and consistent attention to detail in the exercise collectively produces a fascinating and multi-layered picture of blissful, energetic freedom in the workspace. It is clear to me in these moments that these performers love what they do. I am compelled to stop writing during this time because I am acutely aware that I am witnessing something truly beautiful.

The theatres that are the subject of this study are rooted in the theatrical tradition of Jerzy Grotowski and Eugenio Barba. Grotowski's work is generally divided into five phases: Theatre of Productions (1959-1969), Paratheatre (1969-1978), Theatre of Sources (1976-1982), Objective Drama (1983-1986), and Art as Vehicle (1986-1999).¹ During Theatre of Productions, Grotowski conducted a cycle of theatrical work with the Polish Laboratory with the goal of reviving the theatre, which he considered doomed due to its imitation of film and television. Grotowski believed that an emphasis on the live nature of the theatre remained the key to producing truthful and moving productions. As a result, he developed what he termed a "poor" theatre, which focused on the actor rather than "rich" technological elements (Grotowski, "Towards a Poor Theatre" 30). His goal during this period of time was to create a communion that would aid the actors and audience in achieving a truthful connection. In 1968, Grotowski clarified his objective:

My emphasis has been on methodology. Through practical experimentation I sought to answer the questions with which I had begun: What is the theatre? What is unique about it? What can it do that film and television cannot? Two

concrete conceptions crystallized: the poor theatre, and the performance as an act of transgression. By gradually eliminating whatever proved superfluous, we found that [. . .] theatre [. . .] cannot exist without the actor-spectator relationship of perceptual, direct, “live” communion. (“Towards a Poor Theatre” 30)

Grotowski continued this phase of work until 1969 when he broke away from traditional theatrical efforts in favor of conducting more specialized performance research. Barba, Grotowski’s one-time assistant, has maintained and continued the theatrical tradition begun by Grotowski.² Like Grotowski, Barba is known for cutting what he perceives as not *living* out of the literature he uses as a point of departure for his productions and generating performances using textual montage, a concept highly influenced by the theoretical and practical work of film artist Sergei Eisenstein. Both Grotowski and Barba are also known for highly disciplined rigorous and demanding methods of physical performer training. Both men have been largely affected by Asian performance traditions, and both have enjoyed the privileged position of the auteur stage director (or guru director), providing them with the opportunity to secure funds to conduct extremely specialized theatrical research.

Working within this artistic tradition, NaCl and Number Eleven possess many commonalities as alternative theatre companies in North America. These two groups also have substantial differences, however, which derive largely from the varying locations, different working environments, and unique structures of the two companies. In this chapter, I provide an overview of two nonprofit alternative theatre companies in North America who possess an established lineage to the work of Grotowski and Barba: North American Cultural Laboratory and Number Eleven Theatre.

North American Cultural Laboratory (NaCl)

The founding of NaCl in 1997 resulted from the personal and professional union of Krumholz and performer Tannis Kowalchuk. After marrying, the couple wanted to form a company in the United States that allowed them the freedom to work in ways that they believe are essential to producing quality original performance pieces. This was only possible for Krumholz and Kowalchuk through the establishment of “a structure within which to investigate and develop craft, in a focused and long-term group, led by a collaboration of director and actor, in a search of expressivity through action” (Krumholz, “The Problem of Movement Theater” 254). Based on these hopes and ideals, the artists founded NaCl in Brooklyn, New York. Thus far, Kowalchuk remains the lone permanent performer in the company, and NaCl has not yet been able to establish a larger group of dedicated long-term company members that share Krumholz and Kowalchuk’s work ethic and artistic vision.

NaCl focuses on creating original performance pieces through a type of lengthy collaborative work that is uncommon in the United States. “What we do is different,” explains Kowalchuk. “The process of making the play is unusual since the actor creates physical, imaginary-based actions that are personal, but related in some way to the text. Later it becomes a structure for the text to live on” (Schommer). This process requires a lengthy time commitment on the part of the collaborators in that full-time rehearsals regularly span up to six months. In addition to these extended rehearsal periods, performers also regularly participate in NaCl’s rigorous physical and vocal training. Kowalchuk trains an average of four hours per day on most weekdays. She explains: “I continue my practice every day so that I may offer myself to my work” (“Getting Ready” 6). This type of commitment to ongoing training illustrates

Krumholz and Kowalchuk's expectations for any performers with which they collaborate, suggesting a possible reason as to why NaCl has not yet been able to form a larger group.

Krumholz and Kowalchuk began an artistic collaboration with one another after meeting through the work of the influential Canadian experimental theatre company, PRIMUS. During the summer of 1997, the artists traveled to Toronto and began developing *The Secret Storey* with a group of five Canadian actors. While creating this piece, Krumholz and Kowalchuk began establishing a working process with one another that they would continue to develop for years to come. With Krumholz serving as director and Kowalchuk as primary performer, the group developed a short piece focusing on a young girl's encounter with the bizarre spirits that live in her attic. One of the performers in the piece, Jane Wells (who is now a member of Number Eleven Theatre) recalls the creation period of *The Secret Storey* as a growing experience for all of them:

It was Brad's first directing experience working in this way.³ With Brad and Tannis, there's now a sort of a passing of the baton between them as far as who does what, which sometimes didn't work that smoothly yet [in rehearsals for *The Secret Story*]. Rehearsals were incredibly intense, and it all felt very serious. But, it was *not* a fabulous show. It was a really good learning experience, though.

(Lee, Fieldwork Notes)⁴

Indeed, Krumholz and Kowalchuk view the development of *The Secret Storey* not as their most successful production but as an integral step in learning to work with one another and experiment with performance techniques through a short-term collaborative process ([North American Cultural Laboratory Home Page](#)).

The founding of NaCl occurred soon after the group presented *The Secret Storey*. With this company, Krumholz and Kowalchuk hoped to establish an idealic formal group that practiced “ongoing training and creation methods” with performers who understand “the importance of sharing ownership with ensemble members [. . .] who make the company a priority, even to the point of turning down other work” (Kowalchuk, “The Passion According to NaCl” 14).

After establishing NaCl, Krumholz and Kowalchuk did not immediately find other performers to join the group as they had originally hoped. NaCl’s first production, then, was a solo piece, Kowalchuk’s *The Passion According to G.H.* Krumholz and Kowalchuk spent many months developing the show in the Great Jones Rehearsal Building of La MaMa, E.T.C. in New York City. Based on the text by Brazilian writer Clarice Lispector, the performance displays one elegant woman’s life-changing experience with a cockroach.

Krumholz offers a lengthy but useful explanation of the couple’s approach to creating *The Passion According to G.H.* I have included his statement in its entirety below in order to provide insight into NaCl’s process of using a physical score as a basis for developing a new performance. Krumholz explains:

When I was working with Tannis on *The Passion According to G.H.*, we had the text, and it’s a big book. I looked through the book and found the stuff I was interested in. But it was by giving assignments to Tannis and her physical responses to them that I began to understand which text I was going to use. I began to understand what the spatial arrangement was going to be like. Working with her on her physical score separate from anything else, I began to observe the way she was moving in the space and the patterns that she was making in the

space. And I was trying to understand the way that I could take what she was doing and transform it into something that was meaningful and that held some kind of flow and content. A concrete example is that it became clear that she was acting inside a certain *kind* of space. There were essentially four points in her movement in the space. So, as I was seeing that, then I went back to the book to try and figure out what this could possibly be. Then I realized that there was this room that G.H. went to and that the proportions of the room were incredibly impactful on G.H. It was the room itself that allowed this entire experience to happen. And then I began to give that to Tannis' actions. So, now I know that there are these four walls. Now, what can be there? How can it be arranged according to what it says in the book? But also, what do we need as far as the action goes? So, then I started directing her to work with those four points more. And then when I started doing that, things emerged, like she's up high doing something here. So, now it's clear that there is an actual wardrobe. So, these things began to emerge, but they began to emerge from the physicality. And it takes a long time. (Lee, Fieldwork Notes August).

The premiere of the performance took place in Cleveland at The Loon Tree Festival, produced by Theatre Labyrinth in 1998; the piece then played for six weeks in New York. The show received favorable reviews from the popular press (e.g., Salomon) and situated NaCl as a new and exciting alternative theatre company in New York City. For Krumholz and Kowalchuk, however, something still seemed incomplete in NaCl. Without a larger group, the support of a community was missing; according to Kowalchuk, the process of creating *The Passion According to G.H.* was often “incredibly lonely” (Lee, Fieldwork Notes).

In 1998, NaCl recruited and accepted a new member. Allison Waters joined NaCl as a performer and worked for the company in an administrative capacity as well. Thrilled that their company had gained a new member, Krumholz and Kowalchuk immediately embarked on the development of a new project. With Waters and three other independent actors, Krumholz and Kowalchuk began working on *A Cannon for the Blue Moon*. Although Krumholz and Kowalchuk had recruited the necessary performers for the ensemble-based project, NaCl now faced the harsh realities of developing a group performance without a permanent space that met the needs of the company's rehearsal process. Jane Wells traveled from Canada to participate in this project with NaCl and recalls the development of the piece as a challenging period of time because of this lack of permanent space:

It was a very interesting experience. We were rehearsing in a room on the seventh floor of [. . .] La MaMa's rehearsal building, and that was the only room we had. At the end of the room, there were windows where we would put our stuff and we'd eat our lunch. Because we were seven floors up—we didn't really leave during lunch time because it would take so long to walk down—we really spent our whole day there from nine to three. Although there was a lot of seriousness during the work time, there was a lot of horsing around at lunch time. I felt like we were opening the valve a little bit too much. [. . .] Because we were in the same room so much, it would be hard to reclaim the intensity of the morning training in the afternoon work, when we were working on the show. I would never ever have said anything to anybody at the time because it wasn't something we could really fix. But at the end of the project, Brad and I had a meeting, and I think he had felt the same way. We were all involved in that, but it

was an interesting kind of collision and an interesting kind of collection of what it is to find seriousness and what it is to find life and how you negotiate those things in relationship to each other and in relationship to the work and in relationship to the personality of the space for the work. (Lee, Fieldwork Notes)

The group spent several months working on *A Cannon for the Blue Moon* in New York and eventually devised a show that depicts a postwar village in which one woman remains the lone inhabitant. The production opened in the summer of 1998 at La MaMa E.T.C and subsequently played in Umbria, Italy, marking NaCl's first European debut.

For NaCl's next project, *ASPHYXIA and Other Promises*, the company members decided to incorporate only one other performer in addition to Kowalchuk and Waters in an effort to maintain more of a focus on the established members of NaCl. As a sound artist and musician, John Sullivan, the additional performer, created a score for the piece and offered live interactive digital sound during the performance. Up until this point, Krumholz and Kowalchuk had only used a cappella song in their work, and the new element in *ASPHYXIA and Other Promises* served as a fresh point of experimentation for NaCl. Further for the first time, NaCl members also employed the work of a playwright, Henry Isreali, to develop this production. Isreali viewed the physical performance material generated by NaCl and embarked on a writing process that reflected these observations. Based on the parable "Parsley Girl" by Angela Carter, *ASPHYXIA and Other Promises* portrays the tale of Beatrix, the daughter of a starving young woman. Beatrix's mother trades the girl to a convent in exchange for a small portion of food. An evil nun repeatedly tortures Beatrix, who endures the horrific actions of the deranged nun by relying on her fairy godmother, Asphyxia, for guidance. Asphyxia eventually inspires Beatrix to commit murder in order to save herself from the evils of the convent. The initial development of

ASPHYXIA and Other Promises took three months, and the play premiered in April of 1999 at La MaMa E.T.C.

After a three-week run in New York, NaCl decided that the piece felt unfinished and made plans to begin reworking and remounting the show in September of 1999. The artists worked on the play for approximately four more months and premiered what NaCl refers to as “the finished piece” in December of the same year at The Piano Store in Manhattan (Kowalchuk in Lee, Fieldwork Notes).

In 1999, Krumholz’s parents donated a plot of land in Highland Lake, New York to NaCl; the land contained a bed and breakfast and an old church (see Fig. 1 and Fig. 2). After struggling to survive for two years solely in New York City, NaCl gladly accepted the gift. The church required a great deal of renovation in order to be of practical use. It had formerly served as the Catskill Actor’s Theater (CAT), a local community theatre, and CAT had added a proscenium stage to the church, which did not appeal to NaCl. The company prefers to work in spaces that allow more adaptability for the needs of specific performances. Moreover, the building did not have a heating system, which made it of little benefit during the winter months. Still, NaCl welcomed the contribution as an opportunity for growth and became determined to transform the location into a functional summer theatre venue. After working tirelessly for months to renovate the buildings, Krumholz and Kowalchuk opened the doors of NaCl Catskills. The result of the couple’s efforts proved to be a major turning point for NaCl. Only two hours outside of New York City, NaCl Catskills allows the company to maintain its base of operations in Brooklyn, while extending the group’s performance work to a new audience in the Catskills.

With the added benefit of a regular summer rehearsal space in the Catskills, the members of NaCl gained confidence that their dream of building a larger working group remained

achievable. Thus, they began to search for new members with hopes that the trio might develop into a larger and stronger alternative theatre company. In January of 2000, NaCl began working with a group of actors that the troupe met by offering a free two-week Open Work Session in New York City. During the workshop, NaCl led the participants through some of its training exercises and introduced them to the company's approach to generating performance material. Feedback during the workshop suggested that some of these participants would be interested in more formal collaborative efforts with the company. Indeed, at the culmination of the workshop, NaCl began working with a group of eight of the participants on what Kowalchuk terms "the company's epic," *Arca Nova* (Lee, Fieldwork Notes). When work on this show began, NaCl had not discussed with the new performers the possibility of becoming permanent members of the company. However, throughout the process of creating *Arca Nova*, Krumholz and Kowalchuk privately remained hopeful that the new actors would commit to long-term memberships with NaCl.

The group participated in four months of training and rehearsals in New York City to generate performance material and devise the basic narrative structure of the piece. In May of 2000, the entire cast moved to NaCl Catskills to refine the piece, working on it an additional two months. *Arca Nova*, a large-scale interpretation of the book of Genesis, premiered on August 4, 2000, in Highland Lake, New York at The First Ever Catskills Experimental Theatre Festival produced by NaCl (later called the *Catskill Festival of New Theatre*).⁵

Arca Nova was well received in the Catskills. In Highland Lake's local paper, *The River Reporter*, Jordan Kinzler reviewed the production, a review that suggests the power of the piece as perceived by a local community member:

Teeming with energy, the performance utilized aesthetically beautiful physical performance and mystical music in exploring the text of the “Book of Genesis.” “Enchanting,” “awe-inspiring” and “ecstatic” are vain attempts to describe what was truly an indescribable experience. The feeling was well beyond words. The performance incorporated acrobatics, stilt-walking, dance, chanting, and surreal costuming. But what really made *Arca Nova* special was the performers’ cultivation of awareness and an intimacy between themselves and the audience. The theater space was alive with sensitivity and alertness. [. . .] The performance was able to bring a vitality and a richness to an ancient narrative that many find difficult to relate to in our modern age. The result was a temporary deepening of my own relationship with the text. (Reprinted in North American Cultural Laboratory Home Page)

As a small community, the town embraced the new production as an accessible story to which they could relate and a welcomed cultural addition to its environment.

The First Ever Catskills Experimental Theatre Festival also proved to be a hugely successful financial and artistic venture for NaCl. Further, the festival briefly provided Krumholz and Kowalchuk the emotional benefits of belonging to a community of artists (see Fig. 3). The ten-day festival offered North American alternative solo artists and theatre groups the opportunity to produce their work for one another and for the local community of Highland Lake. After viewing the moving performance of *Arca Nova* on the first night of the festival, local residents offered overwhelming support for the entire festival by providing an audience base for the remaining productions. In an effort to further involve the citizens of Highland Lake

in the festival, NaCl arranged for local and visiting musicians to provide free entertainment after each nightly performance.

Bringing together some of NaCl's closest professional and personal acquaintances from a variety of cities in North America, The First Ever Catskills Experimental Theatre Festival offered the following performances: *Arca Nova* and *ASPHYXIA and other Promises*, presented by NaCl; *Chariot of the Sun*, presented by Jeffrey Benoit (Connecticut); *The Sibyl*, presented by Theatre Labyrinth (Ohio); *The End and Back Again, My Friend*, presented by Kathy Randels and Sean LaRocca (Louisiana); *It's a Small House and We've Lived in it Always*, presented by Split Britches Theater Company (New York); and *Me@sure3.1*, presented by Oomph! Theatre Group (Toronto). In exchange for performing at the festival, these artists received half of the box office earnings and free room and board at NaCl Catskills.

In addition to presenting nightly performances, the festival participants took part in work exchanges with one another each morning (see Fig. 4). During these sessions, the artists alternated in leading the remainder of the group in personal training techniques and presenting work demonstrations (see Fig. 5). Over the ten-day period of the festival, the theatre practitioners also attended academic seminars, led public workshops, and participated as fully contributing members of the festival community, helping with the daily functioning of NaCl Catskills. They helped cook, clean, build and strike other artists' sets, ushered for performances, and undertook a variety of other daily tasks (see Fig. 6 and Fig. 7). Thus, NaCl produced an event that incorporated each artist as an equal member of the community of NaCl Catskills. Pleased with the success of the festival, NaCl immediately committed to offering this event on an annual basis.

Thrilled at the excitement with which *Arca Nova* was received at the festival, NaCl arranged for the piece to run in New York City from October 12 to 28, 2000, at Washington Square United Methodist Church. Although less enthusiastic than the review at Highland Lake, the New York City run received favorable critiques (e.g., Russo), and NaCl immediately began planning to locate other possible venues in which the group might perform the piece. At the same time, however, Krumholz and Kowalchuk's hopes were disappointed that the performers in *Arca Nova* would become permanent members of NaCl. Although the cast obviously wanted to continue performing the show, none of the new actors was interested in establishing a more ongoing commitment with the company (Kowalchuk, "The Passion According to NaCl"). "It requires an incredible devotion to a very difficult path, for which the rewards are anything but financially or publicly gratifying," observes Krumholz ("The Problem of Movement Theater" 254). Disappointed by the cast members' decisions, Krumholz and Kowalchuk could not face producing *Arca Nova* any longer and stopped planning any more performances for the show.

Still frustrated by the failure of *Arca Nova* to produce new members for NaCl, Krumholz and Kowalchuk persevered with their creative efforts and tried to focus on new beginnings. They began considering the possibility of developing a children's performance as a means of exploring a new avenue of theatrical work for the company. The couple soon experienced another major blow, however. A few months after the New York City run of *Arca Nova*, Waters announced that she would be leaving the company to pursue a college degree. "Brad and I were quite shaken by this," explains Kowalchuk, "but decided to carry on with" the plan "to develop a children's theatre performance" ("The Passion According to NaCl" 15).

The new children's theatre performance that NaCl produced employed a different approach to creation, prompted by Krumholz and Kowalchuk's determination to experiment with

new ways of working. For the first time, Krumholz and Kowalchuk “sat down and wrote a play” (Kowalchuk in Lee, Fieldwork Notes), *The Time Cycle*, which focuses on a quirky time traveler who journeys through historical periods in an effort to find her way back to the year 2201. Along the way, she meets a cast of interesting characters including Albert Einstein, Leonardo Da Vinci, and an alchemist named Miss Terra Incognita. In planning for *The Time Cycle*, the couple decided that Kowalchuk would perform the lead role in the show and that Krumholz would perform in the piece in addition to serving as the director. Krumholz and Kowalchuk decided to hire another independent performer strictly for participation in *The Time Cycle* and contracted Megan Wyler, one of the performers in *Arca Nova*, to participate as the third cast member. Kowalchuk explains that this arrangement was “certainly a different company structure than we had imagined four years ago at our inception. We accepted this as our current situation and given reality, but it was a struggle” (“The Passion According to NaCl” 15). NaCl premiered *The Time Cycle* on July 6, 2001, at the Brooklyn Museum of Art.

While rehearsing *The Time Cycle*, Krumholz and Kowalchuk attended the Network of Ensemble Theatres conference in 2001. This event brought together over twenty theatre troupes that remained committed to long-term collaboration with their respective companies. At the conference, Krumholz and Kowalchuk met many artists that had negotiated the professional working dynamics of their companies in order to successfully function as ongoing ensembles. Thus, the couple left the conference infused with a renewed determination to continue NaCl’s artistic growth and quest for expansion of members within the company. Kowalchuk explains that “listening to so many different ensemble artists gave us inspiration and activated us. Other people were [. . .] working together—we could too” (“The Passion According to NaCl” 16).

With a renewed sense of possibility Krumholz and Kowalchuk drafted “NaCl’s Ensemble Manifesto” on October 9, 2001, in an effort to articulate their dreams for the company clearly:

For NaCl, [. . .] an ensemble is made up of permanent members who share work, responsibility, income, ownership, and credit. It is made up of people who make NaCl their work, and artistic priority, and who share the same ensemble values. The ensemble is also committed to craft, and to creating new works in an ongoing disciplined search. At the heart of this search is a training that is specifically NaCl, and which is developed over time to address the artistic needs of the company members. The ensemble and its activities, goals and ideals are defined by the individuals who take part in the life of the group. The ensemble is a fluid and flexible entity. The mission and work is solid and unifying. [. . . A]s we work together our commitment becomes stronger and more real, and the desire to make NaCl a full time job becomes a goal through our activities together, both artistic and administrative. [. . .] Membership is indefinite as long as both individual and group is being served with the highest level of commitment. [. . .] Clearly the depth of this commitment is immense. NaCl believes that only through an ensemble of this kind can we come to know real, personal, artistic, and financial growth through our work, as individuals and as a group. (1-2)

The Manifesto articulates Krumholz and Kowalchuk’s hopes and dreams for a North American theatre company in 2001. The document accurately reflects the expected level of commitment for all of NaCl’s projects and emphasizes the company’s strong dedication to the artistic process.

After writing the Manifesto, in 2001 NaCl embarked on their outdoor performance, *Invisible Neighborhood*, which problematizes dichotomous views of good and evil by

highlighting the stories and interactions of several seemingly unrelated characters. At the time, NaCl accepted another actor, Aaron Wiener, as a member of the troupe. Yet, after several months of work, Wiener left NaCl to continue working independently. Krumholz was forced to replace Wiener as a performer in the production.

Krumholz and Kowalchuk's ideal ensemble as outlined in the Manifesto has continued to prove impossible for the company to develop in a viable and ongoing way. Krumholz and Kowalchuk now have accepted that developing the type of ideal, larger, permanent group in the United States that they outlined in the Manifesto may not be possible. Although the couple has repeatedly tried to find new members, after producing *Invisible Neighborhood*, in 2002 Krumholz and Kowalchuk took NaCl in a new direction and began experimenting with the development of pieces for the company in which they did not formally collaborate with one another.

Members of NaCl

NaCl's quest for a stable group of long-term members and the company's demanding approach to developing the artist's crafts demonstrate the influences of both Grotowski and Barba. As co-founders of NaCl, Krumholz and Kowalchuk developed the basic tenets of the company from their past experiences and theatrical endeavors.

The work of Richard Fowler and his theatre company PRIMUS play an important role in NaCl's lineage, because both Krumholz and Kowalchuk studied with Fowler. Before directing PRIMUS full time, Fowler worked for many years as an actor with Barba at Odin Teatret in Denmark.⁶ Partly as a result of Grotowski's modeling, Barba uses a physical approach to create original actor-centered performances and instills in the actors with which he works a respect for rigorous training,⁷ a determination to continue evolving and experimenting as artists, and a

commitment to working as a long-term ensemble. Because acting with Odin Teatret was a formative experience for Fowler, he relied heavily on this background in directing PRIMUS and exposed the members of the company to Odin Teatret's methodologies and ethos. Although the length of Krumholz's interaction with PRIMUS was substantially shorter than Kowalchuk's, both artists credit Fowler with bringing Odin Teatret's way of working to North America and acknowledge him as a key influence on their developments as theatre practitioners.

Brad Krumholz, Director and Collaborator

Krumholz's initial interest in this type of theatrical approach began at the University of Pennsylvania where he studied with Ian Watson, whose research about Barba's work with Odin Teatret influenced the curriculum during Krumholz's time at the university.⁸ After graduation, Krumholz traveled with Watson to Denmark to study at Odin Teatret. Although Krumholz stayed at Odin Teatret for only three weeks, he recalls this period as life changing:

It was like something had touched me that made me know that I needed to continue working in that way. And it really was that: it was like a conversion experience. I was only there for three weeks, but for me, it was like three weeks of boot camp. Up until that point, I was sleeping late . . . I was staying up late. I was drinking and smoking and everything. I was *in* my body a little bit, but not *really*. And then when I started working there . . . it was just a total kick in the ass. Essentially what I realized is that if I wanted to do anything well, it would take a lot of work. It's not such a great big revelation. But it was *huge* for me because I realized that there's a way to do what I want to do. There's an actual way to do it! But I have to work my ass off in order to be able to do it. (Lee, Fieldwork Notes)

While at Odin Teatret, Krumholz physically experienced some of the basic principles associated with performer training within this artistic tradition and gained knowledge in fundamental approaches to generating physical performance material.

At Odin Teatret, Krumholz worked primarily with one of the core performers of the company, Roberta Carreri (see Fig. 8).⁹ Carreri introduced Krumholz and a group of seven other students to methods of approaching the actors' physical preparation for performance (Krumholz in Lee, Fieldwork Notes). For Carreri, physical training can evolve and shift according to what the actor needs to address in performance. For example, physical training might focus on strengthening or gaining control over the body through a series of basic acrobatic activities, or the process might involve learning to isolate small parts of the body to make use of them more effectively in performance.¹⁰ Carreri explains how she views the process of training and simultaneously lends insight into the basic principles Krumholz learned at Odin Teatret:

Training is the time and space in which the actor works both to build up presence and to break down mechanical or automatic reaction patterns. The actor's ability to be present can be the result of talent or it can be built up, it is something that can grow and be strengthened. You must be present in order to do acrobatic exercise. You can't cheat by thinking about something else, that's how accidents occur. You are forced to concentrate on what you are doing. [. . .] A very basic element, which is both elementary and dramatic, is the changing between different qualities of energy in movement, such as fast and slow, straight and round, strong and soft, open and closed. Dramatic tension is then created on the physical level. This tension has no particular meaning, but is experienced by the audience all the same. (Christoffersen 149-150)

Krumholz's participation in Carreri's classes provided him with the key training foundations on which he would later build at PRIMUS and expand in his work with NaCl.

In addition to learning training exercises, Krumholz also began experimenting with the generation of physical performance material in his work with Carreri. This involves the creation of clearly defined sequences of personal physical actions by the actor, physical sequences that can be inspired by pictures, dance movements, ritualistic activities in varying cultures, or improvised actions solidified in response to a thematic prompt given to the performer by the teacher/director. The chosen texts are then layered upon these physical actions. As Carreri notes, "Out of the physical behaviour pattern a new world [. . . can be] created" (Christoffersen 151). Indeed, after the actor has generated physical performance material, the director can then use these as units to montage an original performance. Schechner describes the meaning of montage in Grotowski's performance work, offering a useful description of a concept that remains prevalent within this artistic tradition. Schechner explains that montage refers to

the assembling of a rapid set of images that taken together lead the spectator to certain themes that are intelligible only in the whole sequence, not in any of its parts experienced separately. Grotowski developed this principle powerfully for theatre. To be effective, he needed highly trained and responsive performers.

They were the actual bodies of the montage, the makers of the images, gestures, and sounds. (Schechner, *The Grotowski Sourcebook*, 25)

The use of montage as a basis for developing the narrative of a performance is the primary method employed by Barba at Odin Teatret. Krumholz's exposure to this technique while at Odin Teatret influenced his later work at NaCl in that montage remains the most recurrent practice used by NaCl for creating a performance.

During his studies at Odin Teatret, Krumholz also met Fowler, who invited Krumholz to work informally with PRIMUS. Fowler offered Krumholz the chance to begin developing and personalizing the techniques he had learned at Odin Teatret. During Krumholz's time in Winnipeg, he absorbed all he could from Fowler and the PRIMUS actors. Krumholz learned to work with stilts in production, studied Fowler's directorial approach with the collaborative company, developed his own effective training and performance techniques as an actor, and briefly experienced the emotional and practical benefits that result from belonging to a supportive group of marginalized alternative theatre artists.

In 1994, Krumholz united with several other artists in the United States to found Theatre Labyrinth (eventually to become *Wishhounds* Theatre) in Cleveland, Ohio. Among the other founders were director Raymond Bobgan and actress Holly Holsinger. Both Bobgan and Holsinger worked with Grotowski during his Objective Drama research conducted at University of California-Irvine, an experience that significantly informed Theatre Labyrinth's approach to developing performances. Focusing on a process of creative exploration, the company developed songs and intricate physical actions that served as bases for production. Krumholz performed with Theatre Labyrinth for two years, during which the company created work through "direct collaboration [. . . which] consists of working together through the direct interaction of *doings*. Words take a back seat in this process. [. . .] In direct collaboration propositions are made through action" (Bobgan 36). Krumholz also learned a great deal from Bobgan about directing. Krumholz recognizes his time at Theatre Labyrinth as artistically productive and rewarding. His difficult decision to leave the company and establish NaCl stemmed from the desire to direct his own productions (Lee, Fieldwork Notes).

Tannis Kowalchuk, Performer and Collaborator

Kowalchuk's formal performer training began at the University of Winnipeg in Canada. During her time there, she primarily studied a very traditional approach to realistic acting based on the early writings of Stanislavsky,¹¹ which prepared her to work in the realistic mainstream theatre in Canada. Upon graduation, Kowalchuk secured several professional acting jobs but ultimately found herself dissatisfied with the experiences. Recalling this period of time, she says, "I was playing young women's roles that were frankly not very interesting. When you are a 20-year-old woman, there are not many good roles. So, I felt frustrated" (Lee, Fieldwork Notes). Thus, Kowalchuk began writing and performing in less realistic theatrical performances in the hope that she might become more fully engaged.

When Kowalchuk saw the early work of PRIMUS, she began to dream of approaching her artistic crafts in similar ways. She remembers her first encounter with PRIMUS as a turning point in her professional career:

PRIMUS was a group that was not doing traditional theatre. They were not just playwrights; they were these [. . . multi-]dimensional creatures making music, sound, movement, text, atmosphere, scenery, costumes, feelings, emotions . . . And they were making it happen all in one room. I had *never* experienced that. That really really was *it* for me. That was it! Having the ability to create on so many different levels is what really really grabbed me about it. (Lee, Fieldwork Notes)

Fascinated with the multidisciplinary nature of PRIMUS' productions, Kowalchuk began familiarizing herself with the company's approach to creation.

Kowalchuk watched the group's work and talked with the company members for approximately one year before she decided to take action. With a big smile and a twinkle in her eye, she explains this choice: "I knew how serious I felt about it and I knew how serious they were, so I couldn't just say, 'Can I join your company?' So, I plotted out my attack! And finally I wrote a very detailed letter and asked to join" (Lee, Fieldwork Notes). The members of PRIMUS accepted her as a member of the group in 1990.

Kowalchuk's experiences working with PRIMUS proved both invigorating and demanding. The degree of physicality required in the company's training surprised, challenged, and inspired her. Although she had spent a great deal of time learning about PRIMUS' working process before joining the group, she still did not fully understand the nature of the company's physical and vocal training. In articulating her initial experiences with PRIMUS' training methods, Kowalchuk suggests the overwhelming commitment required of the performers in the group:

I entered the training room at the age of twenty four, and it had been about thirteen years since I had really moved my body. I think I went into a mild form of shock in the first month. My body and psyche were completely revolutionized. It felt like I was going through puberty all over again—the sweat and pimples and emotional outbursts were far too copious and frequent in occurrence for a nice young woman like me. But I loved it. I loved my new life so much. The nausea and the blisters, the very real life-and-death importance of mastering a well-executed front roll or handstand really possessed me. I worked very hard [. . .] on the plastiques,¹² on acrobatics and on the vocal exercises [. . .] in preparation for the arrival of our director, Richard Fowler. ("Getting Ready" 1)

During Kowalchuk's initial training experiences, Fowler was still performing in Odin Teatret's productions in Denmark as well as serving as PRIMUS' director in Winnipeg. Because Fowler was not present during the first months of Kowalchuk's work, the company employed a method for teaching her that relied on an apprenticeship with Stephen Lawson, one of the actors in PRIMUS whom Kowalchuk refers to as her "personal PRIMUS trainer" ("Getting Ready" 1).¹³ This method of instruction highlights the supportive ensemble-based environment that Kowalchuk experienced when working with PRIMUS. In PRIMUS, individual performers regularly aided one another in their artistic developments and made personal sacrifices of time and energy to benefit the group as a whole.

Although Fowler was not physically present during these first few months, he kept in close correspondence with Kowalchuk and led her toward developing skills similar to those learned by Krumholz at Odin Teatret. In a fax to Kowalchuk during this period of time, Fowler highlights the personal importance of the training to her work:

You are an actor because you have a way to work, a discipline to which you apply yourself, research you are conducting, skills you are developing, and these practices belong to you, they are yours, daily, and the consistent, responsible application of yourself to these tasks give you a sense of identity and independence. You know you are an actor, a performer, a creator, daily, irrespective of whether or not you are in a show, whether or not someone is calling you up to be in a play. The actor's work is that of acting, not in the sense of "playing" or "representing" but of the "*act ing*", being active, being one who acts, who executes actions. (Kowalchuk, "Getting Ready" 1)

Kowalchuk continued to focus on PRIMUS' physical training exercises for several months and began incorporating vocal training into her daily schedule.

Vocal training proved to be where Kowalchuk most excelled in her initial work. Vocal training within this artistic tradition generally involves the actors learning to “resonate different parts of their bodies, sing and utter sounds [. . . with a certain] depth and intensity” (Schechner, *The Grotowski Sourcebook* 24). Kowalchuk found her initial vocal training in PRIMUS challenging but also an avenue of work in which she experienced some degree of success. Her singing talents substantially aided her in this element of training, and she now serves as singing coach for all of NaCl's productions.

Throughout the fall of 1990, Kowalchuk continued to concentrate on her performer-training exercises. In January of 1991, Fowler arrived to begin rehearsals for PRIMUS' upcoming performance, *Alkoremmi*. At this point, Kowalchuk continued to practice her physical and vocal work and also learned to generate performance material under the watchful eye of Fowler. Kowalchuk recalls that “Richard was an incredible presence in the [. . .] room as he watched [. . . the performers] with remarkable attentiveness. He would perch, watching on his chair, and then spring up suddenly to stride across the room to work with one of us on our exercises” (“Getting Ready” 2). Kowalchuk quickly realized that Fowler's approach to working with the performers in the company and the pieces that the group developed were much more intense than anything she had experienced in the past. Because she found PRIMUS' productions so demanding, she initially focused simply on accomplishing the physical tasks that Fowler outlined for her in performance, rather than utilizing any internal characterization techniques to bring motivation to those physical actions.

Kowalchuk continued to train and perform with PRIMUS for over six years until the company broke up in 1997. During her time with PRIMUS, Kowalchuk slowly began attempting to incorporate an internal line of motivation into her work, rather than strictly relying on the physical actions of the piece to communicate with the audience. Employing this type of internal character work in combination with a stylized external physicality remains a challenge for Kowalchuk in her current efforts with NaCl, and she cites the further development of this element as one of her personal ongoing performance goals. Kowalchuk credits her journey with PRIMUS with preparing her to explore this deeper level of performance and her time with Fowler as most significant on her early creative development (Lee, Fieldwork Notes).

Number Eleven Theatre

Number Eleven Theatre began as a result of work conducted at a three-month performer training school offered by PRIMUS in 1997 that was overseen by Fowler. The performers in the company were involved in teaching the students and assumed responsibility for most pedagogical facets of the school. During the mornings, the twenty-three students participated in general group training that consisted of singing and physical work. For the remainder of the day, the students were divided to work in smaller groups with the individual actors in the company. As a performer and co-founder of PRIMUS, Ker Wells¹⁴ led a small group of six students in the development of a new piece during this time. By introducing PRIMUS' approach to devising original performances, Wells was able to help the students develop a short piece about a coal mining family in Nova Scotia that the group performed at the culmination of the PRIMUS school (McClean in Lee, Fieldwork Notes).

By the time the group presented the performance at the end of the school, Wells had already decided to leave PRIMUS to independently explore his potential as a theatre practitioner

(Wells in Lee, Fieldwork Notes). Alex McClean, one of the students in his small group at the school, knew of Wells' upcoming plans to leave PRIMUS. Hungry to continue the work that the group had begun, McClean approached his new director and proposed that the group continue working on the project after the school concluded. Pleased with the results of the small group's work, Wells agreed to expand the project with the students the following year.

During the interim, several of the students in the group decided not to pursue the project as planned due to various other academic, professional, and personal obligations. The only students who remained committed to the project were McClean and another performer, Sondra Haglund. Two other students from the PRIMUS school who had participated in other small groups, however, heard that Wells was continuing work on his project. Elizabeth Rucker and Varrick Grimes contacted Wells and asked if they could participate in the development of the show (McClean in Lee, Fieldwork Notes March). Wells agreed, and the new group began working in the fall of 1998 in Granville Ferry, a small community in Nova Scotia. The artists spent a month there training their bodies and voices for the demands of performance and generating new material for their upcoming production (Jarvis 3). The group subsequently traveled to Halifax, Nova Scotia, to work for an additional month before the opening of what the members of Number Eleven now refer to as "the first version of *Icaria*" (McClean in Lee, Fieldwork Notes).

Icaria opened in November of 1998 in Halifax and received substantial appreciation and praise from audiences. Although the production resists a specific description of "what happens," the performance is loosely influenced by the mythological tale of Icarus.¹⁵ The show is a "dark, sometimes comic and disturbing narrative of family relationships, of expectations and boundaries violated, and of physical and psychological damage" (McCabe 12). The multi-layered action of

the piece is framed as the memories of Daphne, a woman with a troubled past. Throughout the performance, the audience witnesses incidents that have occurred in Daphne's family when she was a girl. The sporadic scenes involve Daphne, her brother, her father, and her mother. The binding element of the episodes in the fractured textual montage remains unknown throughout most of the piece until the viewers learn that all of the events connect in some way to Daphne's brother's suicide (see Fig. 9).

The content of the critical reviews from the popular press regarding the first version of *Icaria* ranged from confusion to admiration, which is common with this type of non-linear alternative performance structure. For example, Alastair Jarvis, a local theatre artist, viewed the first version of *Icaria* in Halifax and subsequently wrote a review of the production for the *Canadian Theatre Review* in 1999. In the piece, Jarvis commends Number Eleven for the depth, complexity, and effectiveness of the textual montage in *Icaria*:

The experience of watching these heterogeneous elements brought together seems akin to that of contemplating a quilt. One is amazed not only at the skill with which dozens of pieces of fabric have been stitched together to form a unified work, but also at the images and memories evoked by the individual pieces. Encountering a quilt, some may be impressed by the pattern or composition of the work as a whole, while others may be drawn to specific patches which for them contain significance. Each scrap may contain imaginatively within its edges the full piece from which it once came, or perhaps another artifact made from the same fabric. What connects the viewing of a quilt to the experience of this theatre piece is that each individual viewer will have a highly personal experience of the work. [. . .] It seems inevitable that, presented with such diversity, each

spectator must construct his or her own experience out of this work by choosing what to observe. As a result, the potential for personal resonances elicited by these choices will differ from viewer to viewer. (Reprinted in *Canadian Theatre Review* Home Page).

Indeed, numerous audience members spoke to the artists in Number Eleven and cited their strong personal connections with the production (Grimes in Lee, Fieldwork Notes).

Inspired by the “degree of recognition and success” that Number Eleven experienced from the first version of *Icaria*, the company made tentative plans to remount the production in the future for touring purposes (Rucker in Lee, Fieldwork Notes). During the period of time that it took the company to acquire enough grant money to re-work and re-mount *Icaria*, Haglund left the group. As Rucker notes, “I think she just got tired of this kind of ‘not knowing what’s going to happen next’ kind of work” (Lee, Fieldwork Notes). Wells then asked his sister, Jane Wells, if she would be interested in taking Haglund’s place in the show. Already firmly committed to working in this type of alternative performance style, she agreed. In 2001, the company re-mounted and toured *Icaria* (see Fig. 10).

The name *Number Eleven Theatre* was loosely used by the artists who created the first version of *Icaria*; the term *Number Eleven* refers to a coal mining section of Great Bay, the Nova Scotian town that was the setting for the original piece. The actual formation of the company now known as *Number Eleven Theatre* did not occur until the remounting of *Icaria* with Jane Wells in 2001 (McClean in Lee, Fieldwork Notes).

In 2002, Number Eleven initiated the process of incorporation and appointed a board of directors. As a corporation, the company gains the opportunity to apply for charitable status in Canada and creates the appropriate conditions to receive more substantial donations which will

allow for the company's future artistic and professional growth (Jane Wells in Lee, *Fieldwork Notes*). Also, in 2002, the company began developing their next production, *The Prague Visitor*, which focuses on one man's fantastical, dream-like journey through the city of Prague. With a newly incorporated status and preparations for a new performance underway, the members of Number Eleven entered 2002 with high hopes for artistic success and enhanced stability.

Members of Number Eleven Theatre

The collective of Number Eleven must be viewed as the sum of its important parts. Because the members control and execute all artistic and administrative elements of the company's work, each of the artists substantially influences the overall working dynamics of the company. Each member strives to maintain independent theatrical work in addition to his or her work within Number Eleven as a means of regularly offering the company new and unique artistic contributions. The important binding element across them remains the artists' dedication to approaching their work in ways that are reflective of the influence of Jerzy Grotowski and Eugenio Barba through Fowler. Wolford notes that many artists working within an informed Grotowskian tradition maintain a

commitment to daily training; a lifelong effort to refine one's craft; a demand for impeccability and accountability in one's work, a sense that performance can serve the practitioner as a tool for work on self (whether one chooses to define such a goal in an esoteric or a purely artistic sense); and above all, a clear conviction as to the value of maintaining a core ensemble, a group of artists willing to commit to systematic work over an extended period of time. ("Seminal Teachings" 42)

Although many other theatre companies outside of this tradition might claim similar artistic ideals, there seems to be a marked difference in how artists working in the Grotowskian tradition approach training and the creative process compared to other alternative theatre artists in North America. At least some members of Number Eleven see their work as cutting edge in ways that other alternative theatres and commercial theatrical venues are not:

There's a little bit about what we're doing on every level that is about keeping something going that may or may not be important sometime in the future—that is clearly not of this time. I don't think we live in a world and an era where how we approach work and what we do is of the *zeitgeist*. But why make theatre to do the same thing that film does? Why put yourself in that competition? Because then you look like a pale cousin. Why do that? (Grimes in Lee, Fieldwork Notes)

Ker Wells, Director and Collaborator

Wells notes that Number Eleven's commitment to "discipline, integrity, and honesty" is largely the result of an inheritance passed on by the company's mentors and artistic influences, a lineage that traces back to Grotowski (Barton, "Navigating Turbulence" 106). As the director of Number Eleven, Wells has had a substantial impact on the other members of the company. He has served as an experienced role model and teacher for the company members and reinforces the need to refine and build upon the artistic approaches that he learned from Fowler. Wells considers himself an "actor, director, and teacher" ([Number Eleven Theatre Home Page](#)). Beyond his work with Number Eleven, Wells continues to perform independently of the group and teaches, directs, and functions as a guest artist at the National Theatre School of Canada and at the Humber School of Performing Arts.

Throughout his artistic work, he explores the dynamics of performance in ways that he began learning in 1986 at the National Theatre School, where Fowler came as a guest artist and teacher. When Fowler arrived at the institution, Wells already knew that he needed to find an alternative way of approaching his craft as an actor. He found himself dissatisfied with the traditional training he had received from the National Theatre School and craved an alternative, practically based “technique” to develop his craft as an actor (Wells in Lee, Fieldwork Notes).

In his class work with Fowler, Wells found a way to approach his work that seemed tangible, physical, and exciting, as opposed to the cerebral process that he had experienced in his earlier studies. He explains: “It just made sense to me that voice and movement training involved using your voice and body and not sitting around talking about your feelings” (Lee, Fieldwork Notes). Fowler’s approach to performer training was highly physical and radically different from anything Wells had ever experienced. Fowler led his students toward acquiring a means of artistic autonomy and offered them a way to refine their tools as performers, even when they were not working on productions. Fowler’s approach, which he inherited largely from Barba, included teaching his students ways of independently training the voice and body. As Wells recalls: “What I learned from Richard was a way of working where you chose to do the work and that defined you—as opposed to waiting for someone else to give you your work. And I think that’s fundamental” (Lee, Fieldwork Notes). From Wells’ perspective, the intention of training on the most practical level is to address individual weaknesses and to “change the [performer’s] body” in some way that will benefit him or her in performance (Lee, Fieldwork Notes).

For years, Wells' approach to physical training has included a distinctive commitment to refining the ability of the body's impulses to manifest in performance. Wells remembers his first exposure to this type of work with Fowler as an embarrassing but life changing experience:

On the first day of class at the National Theatre School, Richard asked us to show him what we thought "training" was. And we did things like pushups and jumping jacks . . . you know basic calisthenics. It makes me shudder now. I don't think he was trying to embarrass us—he was trying to make a point. And then afterwards, [. . .] he just started to work and said "do as I do." And in my memory, that moment was quite blinding. He pushed us really hard. We worked and we worked and we worked and we sweated, and it was extremely exciting. [. . .] I had certainly in the theatre never experienced anything like that. I mean it was a real electrical moment! So, away he went and we just followed for six weeks. And I remember it was like this six weeks of new things and things that to me seemed like everything I hadn't been getting. Not that I had imagined these exercises, but we were making our own work. We were building things. There was this air of secrecy around what we were doing—not in a kind of "Greekish" way, but it all seemed very exciting, you know? Like when you're a kid and you build a tent underneath the dining room table . . . it was that kind of excitement.

(Lee, Fieldwork Notes)

Inspired by the training techniques and approach to devising original performances that he learned from Fowler, Wells sought a way to continue this type of work after his graduation from the National Theatre School. Thus, Wells, Fowler and a small group of Wells' classmates from the National Theatre School co-founded PRIMUS Theatre in Winnipeg in 1988.¹⁶ While at

PRIMUS, Wells created and appeared in a number of performances including, *Dog Day* (1989), *Alkoremme* (1991), *The Night Room* (1994; see Fig. 11) and a children's piece, *Far Away Home* (1996).

Jane Wells, Performer and Collaborator

After seeing Wells' performance in *Dog Day* in 1989, Jane Wells decided that creating this type of theatre might be what she had been searching for as a performer. Remembering her first experience viewing this type of work, she offers, "Somehow it spoke to and answered the elements of mystery and transformation [. . .] that were part of my early childhood" (Lee, Fieldwork Notes). Dissatisfied with the "randomness" that she found in traditional theatre training, she decided to go to Winnipeg to help PRIMUS as a volunteer for a few weeks "to try to understand why things worked when they worked" (Jane Wells in Lee, Fieldwork Notes).

Jane Wells was so intrigued with the working dynamics and artistry of PRIMUS that she stayed in Winnipeg with the company for three years. During this time, she trained periodically with the performers, learned how to operate collectively within a theatre company, executed administrative duties, learned how to write grants, and embraced a new way of creating physically based theatre that engaged the audience as co-creators of meaning and offered "an experience, not just an intellectual or emotional conquest" (Jane Wells, "Two Rooms" 20).

After leaving PRIMUS, Jane Wells continued the pursuit of creating this type of theatre by participating in the development of several new pieces, including her collaboration with NaCl on *The Secret Storey* and *A Canon for the Blue Moon*. In March of 2000, Jane Wells premiered a solo piece that she developed with Wells in Toronto. She cites the creation of *Brightness Falls* as the "test-run" for working professionally under the direction of her brother. Both artists were ultimately pleased with the professional collaboration, and when Haglund left the developmental

process of re-mounting *Icaria*, Jane Wells enthusiastically joined Number Eleven at the request of her brother (Jane Wells in Lee, Fieldwork Notes).

Alex McClean, Performer and Collaborator

By contrast, Alex McClean never had any reservations about working under the direction of Wells. McClean first encountered the work of PRIMUS in a three-day workshop he took from the company. When McClean speaks of this meeting, he remembers the initial impact that PRIMUS had on him:

I was directing at Dalhousie University in Halifax [as a student]. PRIMUS came to Halifax to teach a workshop. [. . .] And for me it was really pretty eye opening. Because I had already at that point become more interested in more alternative work. But I think my approach to it was largely intellectual, and I didn't really possess any practical tools to work with. [. . .] So this encounter with PRIMUS—it was a very brief workshop, but it was very physical, demanded a lot from me, and it excited me. I had quite a powerful experience. I had to reconnect with my body and voice . . . things that I had neglected for many years.

(Lee, Fieldwork Notes)

McClean was so enthusiastic after his initial experience with PRIMUS that he decided to pursue this type of performance work further through an internship with Double Edge Theatre in Boston, Massachusetts. Double Edge is an American theatre company working within a similar artistic tradition as PRIMUS.¹⁷ While at Double Edge, McClean applied for and was accepted into the three-month PRIMUS school, where he first began collaborating with Wells on the piece that would eventually become Number Eleven's first production.

McClean divides his time between working in Toronto as a performer with Number Eleven and living in his hometown of Halifax. While in Halifax, McClean often directs for a local alternative theatre company, Zuppa Circus. McClean posits that his different positions within the two companies allow him different types of growth as a theatre artist. He has found that “moving back and forth between directing and acting [. . .] has been enriching to both experiences” (Lee, Fieldwork Notes). He sees his work with Zuppa Circus as an important experience that feeds his artistic work with his “primary, initial, and original commitment,” Number Eleven (Lee, Fieldwork Notes). As he reflects upon his association with Zuppa Circus, he also offers insight into the changing dynamics of Number Eleven: “My involvement with Zuppa Circus sort of grew out of the way that Number Eleven was structured—which really from the beginning, it was not intended to be a year-around operation. And that has changed to some degree recently” (Lee, Fieldwork Notes).

Elizabeth Rucker, Performer and Collaborator

Within the collective of Number Eleven, Elizabeth Rucker’s artistic role is twofold; she serves as a collaborating performer in the company as well as the group’s singing coach. Her crafts as an actor and singer are garnished by her experience as a writer. In fact, before attending the PRIMUS school, Rucker had already begun to experiment with creating alternative theatre as a writer, director, and performer with Theatre Fugue, a company that she co-founded. While working with Theatre Fugue, Rucker wrote two performance pieces, *VISIT* (1996) and *Two Part Linen* (1996). With this company, she also directed *The Customs House* (1996) and *Wake* (1998).

Rucker’s decision to attend the PRIMUS school derived from her desire to gain a practical method for creating non-realistic performances. Although she felt like she learned a

great deal in her initial experimental work as a theatre artist before attending the PRIMUS school, she also sensed that she was trying to create physically based alternative theatre without any type of system in which to approach the work. Her past studies at York University had only offered her a more traditional type of theatre training based in the realistic techniques of Uta Hagen.¹⁸ Rucker enjoyed this type of theatre education and often speculates that she may want to try performing in a mainstream realistic play again. She does not believe, however, that she could work solely in a more traditional theatre community in North America (Rucker in Lee, Fieldwork Notes). Her reservations relate primarily to what she perceives as the limited amount of autonomy that performers have in the mainstream theatre in North America. She explains:

I think [that . . .] what's accepted by the traditional theatre community is not necessarily *wrong*—it's just what's become kind of a fallback for what I think can be very lazy theatre. But nonetheless, I think it can do amazing work. I think it challenges you and I think it's cultural: the fact that they say "well, how are you feeling when you do this?" And if the form is not necessarily so directed—it's very typical of our culture. You know? [. . .] That can be really beautiful, to [. . .] try to experience a vocabulary. But, in terms of a way to develop your own craft—independently of having a certain intelligent relationship with your own development as an actor—I find it very frustrating, and *very* reliant on some director who's going to work with you for a limited time. You know, when you're not in a show, you can't work. There's nothing to work on and nothing to develop necessarily. (Lee, Fieldwork Notes)

In her work at the PRIMUS school, Rucker feels that she learned an approach to combat this type of total reliance upon a director through her experiences with physical and vocal

training. Thus, she sought avenues to continue developing her training and implementing newly learned performance techniques. Consequently she collaborated with and performed in NaCl's *The Secret Storey* (1997) before asking Wells if she might work on the first version of *Icaria*. Then, while waiting for funding approval to re-mount *Icaria*, Rucker collaborated with Cleveland-based company Theatre Labyrinth and performed in *Never Speak to Strangers* (1998). Since the re-mounting of *Icaria* and the founding of Number Eleven in 2001, Rucker has viewed her commitment to Number Eleven as her utmost professional priority (Rucker in Lee, Fieldwork Notes).

Varrick Grimes, Performer and Collaborator

Varrick Grimes' professional commitment to Number Eleven derives from his genuine desire to continue making this type of theatre. When explaining why he works in this way, Grimes challenges: "This is really what I want to do, so why waste my time with anything else" (Lee, Fieldwork Notes)? Grimes' previous experiences with traditional and alternative ways of approaching theatrical production led him to enroll in the PRIMUS school. As an actor and director in Newfoundland, Grimes became frustrated with what he considered the rushed rehearsal process of mainstream theatre. At that point, he decided that he wanted to approach his crafts as a theatre artist from a different perspective and focused his efforts on studying performance as social action. Grimes studied at Augusto Boal's Center for the Theatre of the Oppressed in Paris, France, in the hope that it would satisfy his artistic desires.¹⁹ Grimes believes his time in France was a positive and productive experience, but upon his return to Canada, he became frustrated with the "lazy" approach to creating theatre employed by some of the performers that claimed to be working with the techniques of the Center for the Theatre of the Oppressed (Grimes in Lee, Fieldwork Notes).

Upon the recommendation of friends and colleagues, Grimes applied for the PRIMUS school without ever having seen any of the company's work. At PRIMUS, Grimes found the type of discipline and challenge that he craved within performance. He moved to Toronto and dedicated himself to developing a personalized performer training program, hoping that, at some point in the future, he might have the opportunity to work with a company that worked in similar ways to PRIMUS. When Grimes heard that some of the members of Wells' group from the PRIMUS school planned to continue working, Grimes seized the opportunity to participate in the creative process of developing the first version of *Icaria*.

Grimes continues to use his diverse theatrical skills to participate in work that he hopes will ultimately add to the creative development and growth of Number Eleven. He maintains two continuing professional relationships in addition to his primary work with Number Eleven. When not in rehearsals for Number Eleven productions, Grimes regularly works with Puppet Mongers Theatre, a Toronto puppetry company, and Jumbles Theatre, a company that creates plays with the members of the neighborhoods and communities with which it interacts (Grimes in Lee, Fieldwork Notes).

Grimes, like all members of Number Eleven entered into theatrical work in the tradition of Grotowski because of a desire for autonomy, a belief in the effectiveness of a disciplined and structured approach to refining the essential tools of the performer—the voice and the body—and a need to create original artistic work that ideally communicates meaning on a deep and visceral level to audience members.

Challenging Negotiations

Existing as a marginalized alternative theatre company in North America does not come without major obstacles. The artistic isolation takes a toll on the members of NaCl and Number

Eleven. There are often difficult periods of time when the artists question their choices to pursue this type of challenging work and live the marginalized lifestyles that are required. One way that the members negotiate these doubts within themselves relies largely in their determination to create art that is important on some level and that falls in line with their artistic visions. Thus, both NaCl and Number Eleven continue to try to rise above the challenges that they constantly face as young alternative theatre companies.

NOTES

¹ For in-depth descriptions of the separate phases of Grotowski's work, see Schechner and Welford.

² See Barba's text, *Land of Ashes and Diamonds* for a thorough first-person account of his work with Grotowski in the Polish Laboratory Theatre.

³ All of the artists in my study use the phrase "working in this way." The phrase references theatre artists that work within the artistic tradition of Jerzy Grotowski and Eugenio Barba. When using this descriptive phrase, the artists refer to theatre practitioners that dedicate themselves to working with a long-term ensemble, devising original performances using stylized physicality and multiple texts as bases for creation, and continuous physical and vocal performer training.

⁴ All verbal quotations in this chapter derive from compiled fieldwork notes and appear with the artists' permission.

⁵ After the first year of the festival, NaCl appropriately changed the name of the event.

⁶ Fowler also worked directly with Grotowski for a short time during Theatre of Sources.

⁷ The actors in Odin Teatret develop personalized training techniques. I refer the reader to Christoffersen for descriptions of the individual training practices of specific actors in the company.

⁸ For an example of Watson's research and scholarship focusing on Barba and Odin Teatret, see Watson's text *Towards a Third Theatre*.

⁹ Carreri remains the most active of the Odin performers in teaching new students and has had a significant influence on many of the artists in my study.

¹⁰ In Carreri's case, her eye training has been particularly in-depth and effective in performance. See Christoffersen for a through description of this element in Carreri's training.

¹¹ See Stanislavsky for an example of the theoretical approach to which Kowalchuk had access in her university education.

¹² Highly influenced by Meyerhold's bio-mechanical work, Grotowski and his actors developed the *plastiques* during the work of the Polish Laboratory Theatre. The *plastiques* are movement exercises that consist of "rotations, lifts and stretches of limbs, torso, head, face, and eyes—which [. . . take] on intensity, rhythm, and emotional coloring from whatever associations—feelings, memories, near-dreams—a person might have while executing the movements" (Schechner, *Between Theater and Anthropology* 473). See *Physical Training at Odin Teatret* for visual examples of the *plastiques*.

¹³ By this time, the use of systems of apprenticeship with experienced actors in the company had already become an integral part of Odin Teatret's working dynamics. Thus, the structure of Kowalchuk's training with Stephen Lawson derived from deep within PRIMUS' artistic heritage. See Christoffersen for more on this practice in Odin Teatret.

¹⁴ For the remainder of this chapter, I will refer to Ker Wells as *Wells* and use both first and last name to refer to his sister, Jane Wells.

¹⁵ The myth of Icarus also involves his father, Daedalus. The inventor Daedalus wanted to leave Crete. Forbidden to leave by ship, Daedalus invented two pairs of wings that he and his son could use to escape. Daedalus warned his son to avoid flying too high in the sky, as the sun's heat would melt the wax on the wings. Ignoring his father's wisdom, Icarus flew too close to the sun. The sun destroyed the wax on the wings, and Icarus fell from the sky to his death.

¹⁶ Steven Lawson, Richard Clarkin, and Karen Randoja were the other founding members of PRIMUS that graduated with Wells from the National Theatre School. After the students had decided to form the group with Fowler, Don Kitt (who had seen the students' work at the school and had worked with Odin Teatret in Denmark) joined the artists and is also considered a co-founding member of PRIMUS.

¹⁷ In 1982, Stacy Klein founded Double Edge Theatre in Boston, Massachusetts. The company creates original devised performances and conducts specialized training sessions for actors. Klein, artistic director of the company, worked with Grotowski during his paratheatrical phase. She also served as Barba's assistant director for Odin Teatret's production of *The Gospel According to Oxyrhyncus* in 1985, after which Klein wrote her dissertation about the work with Barba. For more information about the work of Double Edge Theatre, see Miller.

¹⁸ For an overview of Uta Hagen's teachings, see her text *Respect for Acting*.

¹⁹ As the founding director of the Center for the Theatre of the Oppressed-Omaha, Douglas Paterson explains: "The Theatre of the Oppressed (TO) was developed by Brazilian theatre director Augusto Boal during the 1950s and 1960s. In an effort to transform theatre from the "monologue" of traditional performance into a "dialogue" between audience and stage, Boal experimented with many kinds of interactive theatre. His explorations were based on the assumption that dialogue is the common, healthy dynamic between all humans, that all human beings desire and are capable of dialogue, and that when a dialogue becomes a monologue, oppression ensues. Theatre then becomes an extraordinary tool for transforming monologue into dialogue." For more on Boal's work, see his text *Theatre of the Oppressed*.

CHAPTER III. TRYING TO FIND A WAY:
TRAINING AND SURVIVAL THROUGH COMMUNITY
IN NORTH AMERICAN CULTURAL LABORATORY

“I feel broken, tired, and *completely wonderful*—like I really *did* something” (Participant #1 in Lee, Fieldwork Notes). As I step out of the theatre, I smile privately at the familiarity of this comment. I have heard similar statements from the participants every night that I have attended the second session of the Catskill Performer Training Retreat hosted by North American Cultural Laboratory (NaCl). The performers participate in NaCl’s demanding physical and vocal training each day and spend the evenings developing a short original performance piece. The daily schedule remains the same throughout the week-long retreat. On this fourth night, the actors still seem surprised at the intensity of the day’s work. I jot down this observation in my fieldwork notebook and make my way over to NaCl’s thirteen-bedroom summer artist’s residence that has become home for the week.

Exhausted from the weight of the day, a few of the actors murmur their goodnights and quickly disappear upstairs. Most of them, however, congregate on the old wrap-around porch of the former bed and breakfast with the director of NaCl, Brad Krumholz, and the primary performer in the company, Tannis Kowalchuk. I sit with the group, as I have done each night. A few feet away, we see the lights go out in NaCl’s old church-turned-theatre, signifying the end of a challenging day of performance work led primarily by Krumholz and Kowalchuk. The group immediately begins laughing at frustrating moments from the day, questioning performance choices in the work, and offering professional advice to one another. The authority that Krumholz and Kowalchuk maintain in the training disappears during these nightly porch sessions, and a strong feeling of camaraderie is present among the group. It is a time for the

artists to relive the trials and triumphs of the long workday they have faced together at “NaCl Catskills.”

The primary purpose of the Performer Training Retreat is to introduce the participants to NaCl’s working methods as a means of overcoming artistic challenges and developing fresh, creative performance techniques. In describing NaCl, Krumholz states, “Our theatre can be most accurately defined in regards to approach. The defining characteristics of the approach are the primacy of the physical [and] the primacy of the actor’s material” (Lee, Fieldwork Notes).¹ Since Krumholz and Kowalchuk founded the Brooklyn-based company in November of 1997, NaCl’s artistic approach has been heavily influenced by a heritage that the couple traces to the work of Polish director, Jerzy Grotowski and that of Eugenio Barba’s company in Denmark, Odin Teatret.

Like both Grotowski and Barba, NaCl consistently emphasizes the primacy of the performer in production, the need for a laboratory environment that is conducive to the ongoing investigation of the actor’s craft, the continuous long-term training of the performer, extended rehearsal periods, and an ensemble approach to creating productions. Foremost for NaCl, however, remains the company’s quest to provide relevant and moving artistic productions in a contemporary context. During the first five years of the company’s existence, NaCl produced six original productions with Krumholz serving as director and Kowalchuk as primary actress and co-collaborator: *The Passion According to G.H.* (1998), *A Canon for the Blue Moon* (1998), *ASPHYXIA and Other Promises* (1999), *Arca Nova* (2000), *The Time Cycle* (2001), and *Invisible Neighborhood* (2001). The company consistently develops multidisciplinary pieces that incorporate highly stylized physical scores, songs, and written texts, yet each of NaCl’s performances is unique. Krumholz explains that the company is simply “trying to find a way—

trying to understand what it is that theatre is and how it functions and how it needs to function in order to have certain results” (Lee, Fieldwork Notes).

My participation as an “Active Observer” at the Performer Training Retreat marked my first practical interaction with NaCl. Subsequently, I also attended the Catskill Festival of New Theatre (the company’s annual summer festival), viewed several of the group’s productions, and spoke with Krumholz and Kowalchuk on many occasions in an effort to familiarize myself with NaCl’s work. As my research progressed, I could not help but become more and more impressed with this young company’s serious commitment to ongoing artistic development and creative approaches to solving practical challenges.

To be sure, NaCl has been successful in its efforts at producing and promoting a company within the larger community of alternative theatre practitioners in North America. Still, NaCl faces the dual struggle of trying to develop a high degree of artistry in the company’s work and surviving financially outside of the mainstream commercial theatre. Like most alternative theatre groups in the United States, NaCl encounters substantial monetary challenges. For the first five years of NaCl’s work, the company’s existence depended primarily on meager grants and donations from professional acquaintances, family, and friends. In 2003, however, NaCl’s practical work began generating small, regular salaries for Krumholz and Kowalchuk. I should note that without the Krumholz family’s personal wealth, this could not have happened. The family’s substantial financial subsidies have allowed NaCl to market and advertise the company with commercial savvy, and the fantastic spectacle in some of the productions could not have been possible without this personal funding. Yet, the institution of regular salaries for Krumholz and Kowalchuk is also reflective of the company’s slowly growing stability and can be largely attributed to the artistic dedication and financial ingenuity of the two founders. In a theatrical

environment that makes it almost impossible for a new alternative theatre company to survive, it seems that NaCl is indeed “finding a way.” The troupe has learned to “transform [. . . practical] obstacles into pathways of survival” (Walling 11). In this chapter, I examine NaCl’s struggles and survival tactics as an alternative theatre company in North America and focus on the Catskill Performer Training Retreat as a community-based event that exemplifies the company’s practice of merging its quest for artistic advancement with necessary strategies for survival.

Company Struggles and Strategies for Survival

NaCl’s financial struggles as an alternative theatre company in North America obviously affect the practical dynamics of the group. “How long can grown ups work for free?” insightfully asks Kowalchuk (“The Passion According to NaCl” 15). Throughout its existence, NaCl has been unable to offer new additional members a regular salary, which has made it impossible to recruit performers for long-term membership that share NaCl’s artistic vision and work ethic. Thus, Krumholz and Kowalchuk face the inevitable challenges of an alternative theatre company in the United States alone. In fact, NaCl’s constant battle to gain new members and survive as a new alternative company has affected each major choice that Krumholz and Kowalchuk have made regarding NaCl and is at the heart of the company’s journey.

Beyond the company’s continued quest to gain new members, the largest financial and emotional challenge that NaCl faces is a lack of significant governmental or foundational funding. Throughout the company’s existence, NaCl repeatedly has attempted to gain grant monies to support its work. Through Kowalchuk’s lengthy membership in the successful Canadian theatre group, PRIMUS, she learned the importance of acquiring outside funding as a means of sustaining a company’s survival. Although financial support is not overwhelmingly plentiful in Canada, subsidies for alternative theatres still remain much easier to find and more

substantial than in the United States. As a Canadian, Kowalchuk articulates the significant emotional impact of this difference: “When there’s a government system that will still *support* even an *alternative* culture . . . you don’t feel as alternative and as isolated and so marginalized” (Lee, Fieldwork Notes). Agreeing with Kowalchuk, Ker Wells (director of Number Eleven Theatre in Toronto and former member of PRIMUS) relays his sympathy for Krumholz and Kowalchuk. In an informal conversation regarding the financial struggles of working within this artistic tradition, Wells notes with regret that his close friends and colleagues in NaCl must spend so much valuable time and energy working to obtain grants that are roughly one-fifth the size that his company would apply for and receive in Canada. Wells shakes his head and earnestly states: “Art [. . .] is something that society needs for its own sake without regard to finances” (Lee, Fieldwork Notes).

NaCl is a 501(c)3 exempt not-for-profit corporation. Thus, Krumholz and Kowalchuk have persistently continued to apply for larger governmental monies and grants from private foundations, but these efforts have resulted in varying levels of success. The company has received monetary contributions from Sullivan County Arts and Heritage, Jewish Community Fund of MetroWest, The Puffin Foundation, and The Mental Insight Foundation ([North American Cultural Laboratory Home Page](#)). Yet, NaCl has not always been successful in their efforts at obtaining outside funding which causes great strain to Krumholz and Kowalchuk.

For example, after having been turned down twice for production funding by the New York State Council on the Arts, in 2002, Krumholz and Kowalchuk invited some of the Council members to a performance of their outdoor production, *Invisible Neighborhood*, with the hope that this might aid their efforts in obtaining grant money to tour the production. NaCl managed

to convince several of the Council members to attend a production during the summer of that year.

I was also present at this particular performance when conducting my fieldwork. *Invisible Neighborhood* presents the audience with a fairytale that includes stilt walking, acrobatic tumbling, and highly intricate choreography on the part of the performers. The plot focuses on a storyteller and her struggle to determine the most important stories to tell the audience. She meets a number of different fantastical characters during her search but eventually decides to tell the story of a huge and deceptively evil-looking monster. The characters enact the monster's complex past for the audience. By doing so, they problematize the concept of an absolute truth in today's society and challenge polar views of good and evil.

Invisible Neighborhood is a very physically and vocally demanding piece, but as a result of the company's numerous training sessions and intensive collaborative rehearsals, the actors execute the challenging requirements of the show with expertise and apparent ease (see Fig. 12). NaCl places a phenomenal degree of importance on training as a means of advancing performer effectiveness in production (see Fig. 13). Upon witnessing this performance, I noted that the energy and precision of the physical and vocal training obviously transfers itself into the production.

The narrative line in the production, however, is extremely episodic, fractured, and non-linear. Proponents of alternative theatre often appreciate this type of open quality in productions, as this characteristic ideally allows for more personal connections with the performance and more individualized interpretations of action and meaning. However, Walling observes the opposite of many audience members: "Alternative dramatic forms, such as those based on cyclical, recurring structures and accumulating series of climaxes, may result in open-ended

conclusions that provoke questions rather than resolutions. Such forms can arouse intense anxiety and vitriolic responses in some viewers” (13). Indeed, many audience members hope to experience a more traditional narrative structure when attending a theatrical production.

From Kowalchuk’s perspective, such was the case with the members of the New York State Council on the Arts. Several weeks after the Council members attended *Invisible Neighborhood*, I sat on the porch of NaCl Catskills talking with Kowalchuk. When I asked about the grant application, she remained quiet for several seconds. She took a deep breath and explained to me that the company had been turned down once again by the Council for production funding. “It was awful,” she said. “They just didn’t get it. They said they didn’t understand any of it. They just don’t understand what we *do*. I think that there are just so many people here [in the United States] trying to get money. There’s just not enough support” (Lee, Fieldwork Notes).²

Without consistent access to significant grant monies, NaCl has been forced to seek alternative means of supporting itself as a company. Krumholz suggests that the “current situation of the noncommercial, non-mainstream theater in North America is incredibly cruel, bordering on impossible” (“The Problem of Movement Theater” 254). Even faced with overwhelming odds, NaCl continues to endure and thrive as a new alternative theatre company in the United States. By developing strategies for survival that simultaneously feed the company’s artistic creativity, Krumholz and Kowalchuk are successfully negotiating the vast challenges of a marginalized alternative theatre group.

NaCl’s first major survival tactic relies on the couple’s recent practice of engaging in projects independent of one another. In an effort to continue growing as theatre artists and gaining additional financial income for NaCl, the couple began exploring new possibilities in

2002 by creating pieces for NaCl in which they do not work together. This allows NaCl to produce twice as many productions, generating twice the amount of profit gained from paying audience members.

Krumholz initiated the development of his new piece, *TERROTICA*, by holding open auditions in February of 2003 in New York City. He then began working with a small group of young, independent actors to generate the physical performance material for the show. The piece examines the relationship between fear and sexuality. Krumholz lends insight into his initial approach to working on *TERROTICA* by explaining that he wrote the basic text for the show and has relied on his collaborative efforts with the ensemble to determine the nuances of the performance (Lee, Fieldwork Notes). The process of generating performance material largely occurred during the summer months of 2003 at NaCl Catskills, and in October of the same year, the group premiered the piece in New York (see Fig. 14).

When Krumholz started working on *TERROTICA*, Kowalchuk focused her efforts on two major projects. She continued to refine *Ten Brecht Poems* (2002), a co-production of NaCl and Strike Anywhere (another alternative theatre company based in New York City).³ In this short piece, Kowalchuk and Leese Walker (artistic director of Strike Anywhere) interpret selected poems by Bertolt Brecht. Kowalchuk accurately describes the piece as a “Brechtian Vaudeville” (E-mail to the Author March). Using song to garnish the text, Kowalchuk and Walker examine class issues in the United States and simultaneously protest what they view as the country’s problematic approach to resolving international conflicts. Kowalchuk and Walker initially built the piece as a method of personally coping with the tragic occurrences of September 11, 2001, and have continued to develop *Ten Brecht Poems* to address relevant political situations in North America (see Fig. 15).

Kowalchuk also began preparing for *The Confessions of Punch and Judy* during this period of time. Employing the old English stock characters, Punch and Judy, the performance looks at the “process by which couples be they historical or fictional, drive each other to extremes: politically, emotionally, violently, and sexually” (Kowalchuk, E-mail to the Author February). In this piece, Kowalchuk collaborates and performs with Wells of Number Eleven, and the production is directed/montaged by Raymond Bobgan, former director of *Wishhounds* Theatre in Cleveland, Ohio (see Fig. 16).

NaCl has created the time and financial means to pursue these individual projects by carefully negotiating the remainder of the company’s 2002-2003 production season, a practice that marks NaCl’s second major strategy for survival. After five years of working, Krumholz and Kowalchuk maintain several shows in repertory, which they continue to refine and perform. Kowalchuk still tours her solo performance, *The Passion According to G.H.*, which the couple spent the year of 1997 developing at La MaMa E.T.C. in New York City (see Fig. 17). Although the company’s outdoor performance, *Invisible Neighborhood*, failed to attract grant money for NaCl from the Council, Krumholz and Kowalchuk keep it in repertory and have toured the show in the United States and Eastern Europe (see Fig. 18). NaCl’s most financially lucrative production in repertory is *The Time Cycle*. In 2001, the couple consciously made a choice to create the show for school-aged children as a means of acquiring regular financial income and adding diversity to the company’s body of work. In that same year, the organizations Young Audiences/New Jersey and Young Audiences/New York included *The Time Cycle* in its collections of touring shows for children. *The Time Cycle* is both educational and entertaining for students ages six through twelve and has been well received. Only as a result of NaCl’s inclusion in the Young Audiences programs, however, did NaCl begin performing *The Time*

Cycle approximately four times per month at public schools across New York and New Jersey and reaping the regular financial benefits of the show (see Fig. 19).

Krumholz and Kowalchuk strive to continue challenging themselves as creators and deepening NaCl's study of the craft of performance. Krumholz and Kowalchuk's decisions to create the independent projects during 2002-2003 reflect these goals. In an interview with Richard Schechner and Theodore Hoffman in 1968, Grotowski encouraged this type of exploration for theatre artists:

[P]art of the creative ethic is taking risks. In order to create one must, each time, take all the risks of failure. That means we cannot repeat an old or familiar route. The first time we take a route there is a penetration into the unknown, a solemn process of searching, studying, and confronting which evokes a special "radiation" resulting from contradiction. This contradiction consists of mastering the unknown—which is nothing other than a lack of self-knowledge—and finding the techniques for forming, structuring, and recognizing it. The process of getting self-knowledge gives strength to one's work. (36-37)

Indeed, an emphasis on growth and investigation permeates every aspect of NaCl's work. This is reflected in the company's third strategy for survival. Krumholz and Kowalchuk gain financial income and foster the company's artistic growth by regularly offering workshops. In these workshops, NaCl develops additional training exercises and participates in work exchanges with other alternative theatre companies. These practices are integral to the company's financial security and Krumholz and Kowalchuk's artistic advancement. Since acquiring NaCl Catskills in 1999, NaCl has gained the advantage of operating out of two locations. Brooklyn still serves as the basis for the group's operations, but the company now possesses the added benefit of a

regular rehearsal space in the Catskills, allowing the couple to offer workshops, training sessions, and festivals for performers, without the added financial burden of renting a facility in New York City. In short, owning NaCl Catskills enables NaCl to host community-based events that have become important contributors to the company members' artistic, emotional, and financial survival.

Orchestrating Community-Based Events as a Means of Survival

Cultural theorist Tony Bennet notes that the term *community* “brings with it layers of historical meaning that have become sedimented in contemporary usage—the common people as opposed to people of rank or station; the quality of holding something in common; a sense of shared identity emerging from the common conditions of life” (490). All of these meanings reflect the sense of community Krumholz and Kowalchuk continually seek to cultivate in the events they produce for artists at NaCl Catskills. As Krumholz reflects on the impetus for creating NaCl Catskills, he acknowledges the appeal of the summer theatre venue as a space for collaboration with artists working in similar ways as NaCl (Lee, Fieldwork Notes).

Krumholz and Kowalchuk are particularly sensitive to the lack of community and camaraderie that they experience due to their inability to recruit new members for their company. Krumholz and Kowalchuk possess a strong need to form an expanded artistic ensemble, and this desire has repeatedly prompted the professional choices made by the couple. I only by chance became aware of an important document that reflects the depths of this desire, “NaCl’s Ensemble Manifesto.” Kowalchuk told me about this piece during a casual conversation. She explained that the couple wrote the Manifesto in 2001 to clarify their ideal company structure. The next day, I asked Krumholz about the document. He looked at me challengingly and asked very abruptly: “How did you find out about that?” (Lee, Fieldwork Notes). I referenced my previous

conversation with Kowalchuk, smiled, and tried to appear casual. What was it about this document that immediately created such tension? After looking at me for a moment, he reluctantly sat down at his computer to sift through his digital files. As he located the Manifesto, printed the document and handed me the copy, he gave a sad smile and explained to me that since writing the document, he and Kowalchuk have accepted that developing the type of larger, permanent group in the United States that they have outlined in the Manifesto may be impossible given the financial challenges of operating an alternative theatre company. Temporarily ceasing the search for new members for NaCl, Krumholz and Kowalchuk have chosen to re-evaluate the practicality of their original dreams for a company in the United States and have created a network of support through the orchestration of community-based events.

Since 2000, NaCl's annual summer theatre festival, the Catskill Festival of New Theatre, has been an integral part of the company's survival and has grown to become a widely known aspect of the group's work. In August of 2002, over fifty artists attended the Catskill Festival of New Theatre, and eight theatre companies presented original productions to local and visiting audiences. While attending the 2002 festival, Romanian playwright and scholar Saviana Stanescu observed that Krumholz and Kowalchuk have "created the perfect environment where art and life meet" (Dole 1). The popularity of the festival among theatre practitioners derives from the quality, intensity, and variety of the daily training and the provision of a quiet environment for working. In 2002, the ten-day festival continued to operate on a model established during the first two years of the event by bringing together experimental theatre companies from the United States and abroad for work exchanges, formal discussions, and nightly performances.

The financial, professional, and artistic advantages of producing the Catskill Festival of New Theatre for Krumholz and Kowalchuk are numerous. The community-based environment of the festival provides a haven from the harsh daily realities that theatre workers face as marginalized alternative artists in North America. For a brief period of time, financial concerns are suspended, new approaches to creation are embraced rather than viewed with guarded skepticism, and the artists are not in the artistic minority. As Krumholz observes, theatre has the ability to “bring a community together in an event that allows the people in it to feel life in a different way” (Gromalski 1). This is indeed the type of positive, artistically rich environment that Krumholz, Kowalchuk and the visiting participants experience at the Catskill Festival of New Theatre. As Wells observes, “Having the support of a community has everything to do with the appeal of NaCl Catskills” (Lee, Fieldwork Notes).

NaCl reaps obvious benefits by producing the festival. NaCl gains emotional support from individuals facing common professional challenges, receives fifty percent of all of the box office earnings from productions, exposes the company’s shows to a larger audience base, and learns new performance techniques from other experimental artists. Further, the festival also has allowed NaCl to make great strides toward establishing itself as a progressive and innovative force in the greater alternative theatre community of North America. Partially as a result of the festival’s financial success and emotional benefits, Krumholz and Kowalchuk have further embraced NaCl’s survival tactic of orchestrating community-based events by offering the Catskill Performer Training Retreat as a new event in 2002.

A Strategy at Work:

Creating Community Through the Catskill Performer Training Retreat

In June and July of 2002, NaCl offered the first Catskill Performer Training Retreat. The retreat is divided into two week-long sessions, and participants have the option of attending either one or both weeks. A payment of \$500 per week covers the cost of room, board, and work sessions for the performer. Four actors attended the first week, and nine actors participated in the second week; only one of these performers attended both weeks of the retreat. With the exception of one actor from Chile, all of the participants live in either the United States or Canada.

The retreat in Highland Lake offered the participants an introduction to NaCl's training techniques and the opportunity to work in a peaceful setting free of distraction. As an "Active Observer," I viewed all of the training and fully participated in the daily experience at NaCl Catskills during the second week of the retreat. Krumholz and Kowalchuk conducted formal training sessions in the mornings and the evenings. In residence for the summer at NaCl Catskills with Number Eleven Theatre,⁴ Wells also contributed his expertise to the physical training during the morning sessions.⁵ In the afternoons, the performers worked independently, relaxed in the artists' residence, swam in the nearby lake, or explored the local area of Highland Lake (see Fig. 20). NaCl views training as the foundation of the company's creative efforts and believes that it "is essential that this work occur inside of a context that can support it" (Krumholz, "The Problem of Movement Theater" 254). Thus, Krumholz and Kowalchuk have structured the retreat with this in mind. With enough free time to practice and reflect on the physical and vocal training, participants leave at the end of the week with basic autonomous

“way[s] of making one’s intentions [more] coherent [in production]” (Barba, “From ‘Learning’ to ‘Learning to Learn’” 244).

Since taking possession of the property in Highland Lake, Krumholz and Kowalchuk have learned to operate successfully communally, which the daily functioning of the retreat reflects. The practical demands of living in the artist’s residence require such an approach. Nineteen people lived and worked at NaCl Catskills during the week I attended the retreat: Krumholz, Kowalchuk, myself, the nine participants, two actors working with NaCl on *Invisible Neighborhood*, and the five members of Number Eleven Theatre. Similar to the structure of the Catskill Festival of New Theatre, all of the guests at the retreat assumed certain responsibilities such as cooking, cleaning, disposal of garbage, and theatre maintenance while staying at the artists’ residence. Krumholz and Kowalchuk performed these chores alongside the visitors, modeling the expected level of contribution to the community. In essence, the retreat is a sample of NaCl’s personal and professional worlds; while at NaCl Catskills, participants live as they live and work as they work.

Krumholz and Kowalchuk have made great efforts to orchestrate a functional and supportive environment at NaCl Catskills, and the significance of the social, community-building times at the retreat should not be underestimated. Periods in which Krumholz and Kowalchuk informally connect with the participants, such as during the nightly porch sessions, serve the important function of providing emotional support and encouragement for the group. Malcolm Gladwell articulates the importance of these types of encounters for original and successful creation:

We are inclined to think that genuine innovators are loners that they do not need the social reinforcement the rest of us crave. But that’s not how it works. [. . .]

Innovation [. . .] tends to arise out of social interaction—conversation, validation, the intimacy of proximity, and the look in your listener’s eye that tells you you’re onto something. (2-3)

Establishing positive, social relationships with like-minded theatre artists is an emotional and artistic survival skill that Krumholz and Kowalchuk have learned from years of working in an alternative, marginalized culture. Thus, the couple seeks to create an environment at the Catskill Performer Training Retreat that allows similar connections to occur for themselves and the participants. Although Krumholz and Kowalchuk attempt to shed the roles of instructors and directors in the daily living experience at the retreat, there is a stark contrast between the equality of the social interactions that occur outside of the formal training and the power dynamics within the sessions. Krumholz and Kowalchuk clearly occupy leadership positions and undisputed authority during the work periods. The atmosphere during these periods is friendly yet structured, strict, demanding, and professional.

In an interview with Marc Fumaroli in 1969, Grotowski advised that in training and rehearsals

you do not play at family life, at friendship. You work, and in the work you esteem and respect the time and effort of your colleagues. You respect the discipline of working in common, according to the rules which each one has accepted and which therefore, obligate one. Order is the necessary condition which allows me to concentrate upon creation. You have a mutual respect for each other because, in a creative community, each has a right to create, but his duty is to do so in his role, as a responsible individual. There is a meeting ground,

mutual exchange, but this meeting and this exchange burn on the hearth of the act of creation. (108)

Reflecting this ideology, NaCl approaches its own theatrical work with a seriousness that also characterizes the work sessions at the retreat. The participants do not socialize during these times. Krumholz also asks them to avoid wearing clothes that cause any unnecessary distractions (such as shirts with tears or writing). Tardiness is not accepted, and talking is frowned upon. Focused participation is always required.

Krumholz and Kowalchuk expect the participants to view the training as critical explorations into the craft of the performer, as Barba describes:

During his or her training, the performer can model, measure, explode and control their energies, let them go, and play with them, like something incandescent which is nevertheless controlled with cold precision. Using the training exercises, the performer tests his or her ability to achieve a condition of total presence, a condition which he or she will have to find again in the creative moment of improvisation and performance. (“From ‘Learning’ to ‘Learning to Learn’” 246)

Physical training within NaCl’s artistic tradition historically involves a variety of acrobatic activities, martial arts, and controlled manipulations of material objects with the body. Although developing strength and physical stamina are parts of physical training, it might more accurately be described as an approach (either individualized or pursued within the context of a specific group) to developing control and a heightened awareness of the body’s presence in space. Addressing the need for training, Wells adds, “The body is everything the actor has to express and communicate. [. . .] The major technical purpose of training is to develop and maximize physical presence and the ability to control and focus that presence” (McCabe 13).

Grotowski's influence is evident in Wells' assessment of the importance of training the actor's body for physical presence in performance. In "Towards a Poor Theatre," Grotowski notes of his work with the Polish Laboratory Theatre that

we attempt to eliminate [. . . the actor's] organism's resistance [. . .]. The result is freedom from the time-lapse between inner impulse and outer reaction in such a way that the impulse is already an outer reaction. Impulse and action are concurrent: the body vanishes, burns, and the spectator sees only a series of visible impulses. Ours then is a *via negativa*—not a collection of skills but an eradication of blocks.

Years of work and of specifically composed exercises (which, by means of physical, plastic, and vocal training attempt to guide the actor towards the right kind of concentration) sometimes permits the discovery of the beginning of this road. Then it is possible to carefully cultivate what has been awakened. (29)

Within this artistic tradition, performers also focus on vocal training, which usually involves an exploration of the potentials of the voice through the use of the body's resonators. Exercises that focus on the manipulation of the pitch, tonal quality, and volume of the voice allow actors to refine and expand their vocal abilities for future performances. Singing comprises another integral part of the performer's vocal training, as most shows within this tradition of alternative theatre rely on a cappella song as a means of connecting with the audience on a "visceral" level (Wells, in Lee, Fieldwork Notes).

NaCl believes that a fully trained performer must continually attend to the development of the body, voice, and creative mind. At the retreat, the daily division of the sessions into three parts illustrates the distinctive components of NaCl's basic original training methodology:

“Animal Work” (physical training), “Vegetable Work” (vocal training), and “Mineral Work” (searching for and developing original performance material). Each morning from 9:00 to 11:30, Krumholz and Wells lead the group in “Animal Work.” In this physical training, the participants “explore the performing possibilities of the human animal” (Krumholz in Lee, Fieldwork Notes). The sessions typically begin with Krumholz’s exercise, “The Three Layers.” He notes that he has developed this training activity to help performers notice the impact of the senses on the human body. He continues by explaining that the activity “focuses on *how* [you do something] rather than on *what* you do” (Lee, Fieldwork Notes).

The three components of the exercise prompt the performers to perceive the environment, take inventory of the body, and discover a relationship to the entire group. After noting the impact of the physical space on the body, the group slowly begins moving “when the first step becomes necessary” (Krumholz in Lee, Fieldwork Notes). Throughout the second layer, the participants concentrate on assessing the intricate dynamics of the body by exploring different ways of moving. Krumholz reminds the performers to pay particular attention to the shifting of the joints during this layer of the exercise. Gradually, the movement accelerates. The performers must then collectively determine the appropriate moments for synchronization. During these times, the participants shift to the floor, roll their bodies, and smoothly rise to begin traveling rapidly through the space. The group strives to execute these movements at precisely the same time. The exercise culminates in what Krumholz terms “The Exploding Star,” which involves the performers moving their bodies at a heightened state of energy. Eventually, Krumholz prompts the actors to begin slowly containing the produced energy inside of their bodies.

The separate parts of “The Three Layers” do not actually make the activity unique. Many theatre practitioners have emphasized the importance of these types of awareness prior to Krumholz. The fluid structure of the “The Three Layers,” however is particularly useful for performers. Krumholz intentionally uses the term *layers* rather than *phases* to label the exercise because its purpose is to create a simultaneous awareness of and connection with the structural environment, the body, and the others in the space (Lee, Fieldwork Notes). Thus, the activity builds upon itself. Krumholz repeatedly coaches the group to “add the next layer” of perception rather than changing the focus of the exercise entirely (Lee, Fieldwork Notes.) He repeats this activity daily to compel the performers to make the work interesting for themselves. In reflecting on the importance of this repetition in training, Kowalchuk provides insight to the reasoning behind this type of structure as she recalls Fowler’s outlook as the director of PRIMUS. Critiquing Kowalchuk’s early efforts at physical training, Fowler advised: “If your exercises keep changing—you never will. Set your exercises in a sequence and you will deepen and change as a performer in your application to your work” (Kowalchuk, “Getting Ready” 5). As performers learn the structure of the basic activity, it becomes harder to truly maintain focus, which creates a “resistance to overcome” (Barba, “From ‘Learning’ to ‘Learning to Learn’” 246). Consequently, the performers must banish the temptation to automatically “go through the motions” of the exercise. In short, the repetition each day forces the actor to continually challenge concentration skills and assess the body on a deeper level.

The remainder of the “Animal Work” sessions vary in content each day but always involve additional physical training exercises led by Krumholz and/or Wells. Although most of the performers attending the retreat have a degree of familiarity with experimental or ensemble based performances, most of them have limited experience training at the level of physical

intensity required (see Fig. 21). The training should not be mistaken as what might be considered “warm-ups” in more traditional theatre environments. Rather, the physical demands of the “Animal Work” more closely resemble intensive acrobatic training. In these sessions, the performers participate in extremely difficult and exhausting activities that require constant attention, precision, energy, and physical control. To aid the participants in breaking creative boundaries, Krumholz and Wells often present exercises that seem physically unfeasible to many in the group. Grotowski provided a sound justification for this type of approach to physical training:

When I say “go beyond yourself,” I am asking for an insupportable effort. One is obliged not to stop despite fatigue and to do things that we know well we cannot do. That means one is also obliged to be courageous. What does this lead to? There are certain points of fatigue which break the control of the mind, a control that blocks us. When we find the courage to do things that are impossible, we make the discovery that our body does not block us. We do the impossible and the division within us between conception and the body’s ability disappears. This attitude, this determination, is a training for how to go beyond our limits. These are not the limits of our nature, but those of our discomfort. These are the limits we impose upon ourselves that block the creative process, because creativity is never comfortable. (Schechner, “Interview with Grotowski” 40)

Indeed, after participating in one of the “Animal Work” sessions, a performer comments on her accomplishment with surprise. She notes that, upon seeing Wells demonstrate a physical exercise derived from the early training of Odin Teatret, “I thought: this man’s body is *amazing* . . . my body will never do that” (Participant #2 in Lee, Fieldwork Notes)! Wells terms the

exercise to which the participant refers as simply “foot to chest” (Lee, Fieldwork Notes). The activity involves running across the room, leaping into the air and pressing a foot gently against a partner’s chest. Repeated for a lengthy amount of time, the exercise is incredibly draining. Yet the performer must always maintain focus and bodily control in order to accomplish the task safely.⁶ Upon successfully executing the basic principles of the exercise, the participant reflected on the physical training by stating: “There’s a gentle power to it” (Participant #2 in Lee, Fieldwork Notes).

The second session, led by Kowalchuk, begins at 11:30 a.m. and continues until 12:20 p.m. During these times, the performers focus on “Vegetable Work,” which is, according to Kowalchuk, “work on the voice—creating beautiful flowers and fruit” as a group (Lee, Fieldwork Notes). Each day, the participants sing and work on harmonization. The songs originate from varying cultures and require the performers to use different vocal resonators. Kowalchuk primarily focuses on guiding the performers in using the voice as an extension of the body during this time. As Kowalchuk instructs the group, she encourages the performers to “let the vocal action take over the entire body” (Lee, Fieldwork Notes).

Kowalchuk leads the actors in exploring the resonators in the back of the head, the top of the head, the mouth area, the chest, and the abdomen when working with spoken texts. This process of exploring the different resonators proves a new experience for many in the group, and the visceral nature of the work affects the participants in varying ways. Some of the performers seem frustrated during the “Vegetable Work,” while others obviously find it useful. The varied responses can be seen during the final day of the retreat when Kowalchuk works individually with each person. Rather than fully participating, some of the actors choose to speak the texts quickly and observe the remainder of the time. Others, however, become incredibly engrossed in

the activity. In working with Kowalchuk to find the chest resonator, one of the participants begins to cry uncontrollably during the exercise. Kowalchuk prompts the actor to continue with the work, reminding the group that when “the body takes over, you are getting rid of all of the shit and to the essence” (Lee, Fieldwork Notes). After finishing the vocal activity, the participant looks relieved and astonished. Later, she shares with me that after working professionally in the theatre for almost twenty years, she has never experienced such an overwhelming feeling of catharsis from any type of vocal exercise. The participant also confides that, upon arriving at the retreat, she had doubts that NaCl could teach her anything new. She concludes: “I’ve found this experience very humbling” (Participant #3 in Lee, Fieldwork Notes).

From 8:00 p.m.-11:00 p.m., the participants experiment with implementing the newly acquired physical and vocal skills. During these times, the group participates in “Mineral Work,” which Krumholz describes as “mining and digging for raw material—chiseling away and shaping it into our own gem” (Lee, Fieldwork Notes). Assisted by Kowalchuk, Krumholz serves as the participants’ director in devising an original performance piece. These collaborative rehearsal sessions eventually lead to what Krumholz terms a *mini-performance* at the end of the retreat (Lee, Fieldwork Notes). NaCl uses no single method of building a performance. Krumholz explains that “the unifying [. . . aspect in our creation process is finding] how we are going to operate inside each [. . .] unique circumstance (Lee, Fieldwork Notes). Nevertheless, creating clearly defined sequences of personal physical actions upon which to layer the text persists as a fairly consistent aspect in NaCl’s working method. NaCl introduced this method of creation to the participants at the retreat and subsequently produced a textual and physical montage with the performers’ materials. In “The Performer’s Montage and The Director’s

Montage,” Barba offers a description of this process as employed by NaCl at the Performer Training Retreat by explaining that

[m]ontage is a word which today replaces the former term composition. To compose (to put with) also means to mount, to put together, to weave actions together: to create the play. Composition is a new synthesis of materials and fragments taken out of their original contexts. It is a synthesis which is equivalent to the phenomenon and to the real relationships which it suggests or represents.

It is also a dilation equivalent to the way in which a performer isolates and fixes certain physiological processes or certain behavior patterns, as if putting them under a magnifying glass and making his body a dilated body. [. . . I]t is possible to use [. . . the performer’s montage of actions] not as a final result but as material for a further montage. [. . . T]he director can weave the actions of several performers into a succession in which one action seems to answer another, or into a simultaneous assembling in which the meanings of both actions derive directly from the fact of their being co-present. (158-160)

The “Mineral Work” provides the participants at the retreat with a very condensed introduction to one approach used by NaCl to generate such a montage.

In approaching the “Mineral Work” for the retreat, Krumholz and Kowalchuk ask each participant to locate a piece of written text to bring with them to the Catskills. Throughout the week, this text serves as a point of departure for the actor’s creation process. To begin, each performer improvises and then solidifies a set of physical actions that are personal but somehow connected to the text. Krumholz observes the sequence and works with the performer to emphasize the most interesting and clearest parts of the physical score, a process that former

NaCl intern Rosaruby Glaberman equates to “highlighting a sentence in a paragraph.” After working with the performers in this manner, Krumholz places two participants together. Focusing on establishing clear physical actions and reactions, these pairs adjust and combine the movements to create new sequences and form relationships. Krumholz works with each pair, cutting, refining, and rearranging actions. The performers proceed by layering parts of the original text onto the movement, and Krumholz cuts or rearranges the texts as dictated by the emerging characters and dynamics of the scene. The participants then choose a costume piece or prop to incorporate into the scene. Finally, Krumholz montages the developed scenes to serve as a basis for the mini-performance, which also incorporates several songs the participants have learned throughout the week.

In my interpretation of the mini-performance at the second session of the Performer Training Retreat, the meaning loosely relates to the lives of several individuals experiencing an earthquake. The actors establish this premise during the beginning moments of the mini-performance by simultaneously executing physical actions that indicate such an event. However, the montage of scenes and songs that follow do not specifically connect to the earthquake actions. Krumholz and Kowalchuk never establish any specific meaning or over-arching theme of the performance for the participants. Thus, the mini-performance may result in a variety of interpretations. As a performance scholar and longtime contributor to Barba’s theatrical research, Ferdinando Taviani explains the problems associated with articulating the “meaning” of artistic productions:

The problem of the “meaning of a performance” is a pitfall: it conceals a more complex reality. The common expression “to have a meaning” adapts well to situations in which a thing or a sign have the same meaning for everyone. When

this does not happen, as is the case in the less superficial strata of artistic expression, one can no longer maintain that a work *has* or *does not have* a meaning. In this case one must be aware that the actions and the things do not have a meaning but that they can have a *great many* meanings. (“Views of the Performer and the Spectator” 258)

Taviani’s assessment adequately describes the nature of the “mini-performance,” as well as the density of NaCl’s formal productions. The process of layering and reorganizing the physical actions and text(s) often results in extremely abstract sequences open to many interpretations.

My description of the “Mineral Work” sessions and the resulting mini-performance should not be misunderstood as an indication of the totality of NaCl’s work with montage for the company’s productions. At the retreat, Krumholz and Kowalchuk are forced to simplify an extremely intricate and lengthy creative approach to generating performance. Krumholz explains: “We spend a lot of time building [. . . NaCl’s] performance[s]. [. . .] That time spent creates a deep connection with the work, in the actors and audience alike” (Greene). This extensive process allows the performers in NaCl’s productions to experiment with many different sequences of action. In using this type of physical approach to original ensemble creation, the artists encounter great challenges in establishing significant and clear relationships onstage. The actions must be adapted and refined according to the other performers’ sequences and in support of the determined narrative. The short time frame of the retreat does not allow for this in-depth exploration. Thus, the relationships in the mini-performance lack development that would aid in clarifying certain elements of the storyline.

Further, Krumholz and Kowalchuk do not stipulate conditions regarding the materials that the participants bring to the retreat. Thus, the texts used for the mini-performance do not

have any basic thematic linkage. This is a sharp contrast to NaCl's regular approach using written work in production. When employing literature as a point of departure for the company's shows, NaCl spends a great deal of time researching the original work(s) and selecting appropriate material.

The participants obviously understand that the "Mineral Work" at the retreat serves as a brief introduction to NaCl's working methodology. I suspect, however, that some of the actors do not fully comprehend the degree of difference between the approach to creation at NaCl Catskills and NaCl's regular developmental process. For example, one of the participants shared with me at the end of the retreat that she initially found information about the retreat by searching the internet. She traveled from Chile to the Catskills to participate because NaCl's work seemed "interesting" on the web site (Participant #4 in Lee, Fieldwork Notes). During informal conversation, this young woman demonstrated reasonable fluency in English, but she regularly misinterpreted instructions during the training sessions, and more complex phrases in the English language confused her. This participant's talent as a performer was evident, and her cultural background added a welcomed diversity to the retreat, but she possessed a limited amount of experience in the theatre and a very basic comprehension of NaCl's history and working methodologies. After the mini-performance, she expressed joy and surprise that the group created an "original production" in only a week (Participant #4 in Lee, Fieldwork Notes).

This participant's equation of the mini-performance to that of a formal production may be understandable given the combination of the language barrier and the importance placed on this final presentation. The audience consists only of the members of Number Eleven Theatre and the two actresses working with NaCl on *Invisible Neighborhood*. During the final "Mineral Work" sessions, however, there is clearly an emphasis on preparing the performance for formal

viewing. Krumholz quickly adds lighting effects and a seating procedure for the viewers, and many of the actors nervously search for appropriate costume pieces and make hectic preparations minutes before the mini-performance. Krumholz and Kowalchuk also announce that a special celebration dinner will occur after the performance. NaCl intends for the participants to discuss the work accomplished over the course of the entire week during the meal, a ritual activity that places a certain degree of significance on the final presentation (see Fig. 22).

Confusion on the part of the participants in interpreting the “Mineral Work” at the retreat as a representative of the totality of NaCl’s approach to creation could potentially cause repercussions for the company similar to those faced by Grotowski. Wolford points out that a “little knowledge, as the proverb goes, is an extremely dangerous thing, and artists who have had brief encounters with Grotowski over the years [. . .] have been surprisingly creative at bastardizing what they have learned” (“Seminal Teachings” 38-39). As the popularity of Grotowski’s early work with the Polish Laboratory Theatre grew, many artists attended his workshops and wrongly assumed the end result to be a comprehensive knowledge on their part of the director’s work. This produced a plethora of companies falsely claiming to practice a “Grotowskian Method,” which resulted in a massive distortion of Grotowski’s important teachings. Unlike many companies that claim a historical connection to Grotowski and/or Barba, NaCl possesses a legitimate lineage to these directors via Krumholz’s and Kowalchuk’s artistic backgrounds. Thus, NaCl is painfully aware of the confusion surrounding Grotowski and Barba’s efforts. In an informal discussion at the Performer Training Retreat, Krumholz shares with me at length his concern that so many theatre practitioners still misunderstand the basic elements of Grotowski and Barba’s performance approaches as a result of shallow, misguided, and unknowledgeable interpretations (Lee, Fieldwork Notes).

Due to the possibility of the participants at the Catskill Performer Training Retreat similarly mistaking the “Mineral Work” for the totality of NaCl’s process, the inclusion of the mini-performance in the structure of the experience might be questioned. Yet, by developing the presentation, the participants are applying new physical, vocal, and creative techniques and “learning to learn,” which Barba maintains “is essential for everyone. It is the condition that enables us to dominate technical knowledge and not be dominated by it” (*The Paper Canoe* 9). The mini-performance and celebration dinner also provide the participants with an important sense of accomplishment, closure, and inclusion. Although Krumholz and Kowalchuk strive to promote a sense of equality and community throughout the week, the participants occupy an uncertain and liminal status within the formal training sessions at the retreat. As Victor Turner suggests, the “attributes of liminality or of liminal *personae* (‘threshold people’) are necessarily ambiguous, since this condition and these persons elude or slip through the network of classifications that normally locate states and positions in cultural space. Liminal entities are neither here nor there; they are betwixt and between [. . .] positions” (95).

The participants at the retreat are not trained performers in relation to NaCl’s methodologies, but they are also “not-not” trained performers, either.⁷ Although the level of expertise varies, all of the actors have some prior theatrical experience. However, NaCl’s approaches to physical, vocal, and creative training greatly differ from most of the participants’ past educations. The foreign nature of NaCl’s work reverts even the most veteran actors at the retreat back to the status of beginning students. Turner provides further insight into the participants’ positions by explaining that the “neophyte in liminality must be [. . .] a blank slate, on which is inscribed the knowledge and wisdom of the group [. . .]. They have to be shown that in themselves they are clay or dust, mere matter, whose form is impressed upon them by

society” (103). During the work at the Catskill Performer Training Retreat, the security that the participants regularly feel onstage as a result of previous training, education, and experience quickly vanishes. The mini-performance and following celebration at the end of the retreat aids in alleviating the feelings of vulnerability, inadequacy, and frustration the participants have experienced during the learning process of the week and ultimately serves as a significant rite of passage into the artistic community of NaCl Catskills.

Community Benefits

NaCl intentionally orchestrates community-based events such as the Catskill Performer Training Retreat that feed the company’s artistic growth and financial stability. The inclusion of the condensed “Mineral Work” and mini-performance within the framework of the retreat creates the possibility for a misinterpretation of the totality of NaCl’s methodologies on the part of the participants. However, like the Catskill Festival of New Theatre, the financial, artistic, and emotional benefits of these summer sessions far outweigh the risks for NaCl.

As illustrated in the social interactions at the retreat, the couple manages the emotional weight of existing in a marginalized, artistic culture in America by forming a community-based support system of theatre practitioners with similar professional goals. As Kowalchuk explains, NaCl has created “an environment and social structure that provides [. . .] a matrix of interpersonal and artistic relationships that are dignified and good” (“12 Actions” 1). The sustained existence of NaCl as an alternative theatre group in the United States, however, also depends heavily on the two founders’ savvy monetary negotiations and continuous artistic development.

At times, NaCl still faces a critical tension between maintaining economic viability and achieving the company members’ artistic visions. Community-based events such as the Catskill

Performer Training Retreat help NaCl's efforts, but do not entirely alleviate this struggle. Most notably, Krumholz and Kowalchuk still do not possess an expanded ensemble that can grow and progress together, contributing to the collaborative process with greater success over a period of time because of increasing comfort levels and long-term, collective performance research.

Grotowski warns the theatre artist against continually working with new performers during the creative process: "It's like cutting the forest without planting the trees. The actors don't have the possibility to find something which is a discovery, both artistic and personal. They can't" ("From the Theatre Company to Art as Vehicle" 116-117).

Further, without other permanent members with which to collaborate, Krumholz and Kowalchuk lose a significant amount of input and important varying perspectives that would aid in clarifying the narrative lines in some of their productions. The "Mineral Work" at the retreat appeared exceptionally fractured due to time constraints. Although NaCl's productions usually possess a more established narrative line than the "Mineral Work" indicated, this element still needs development within the company's challenging creative process. The need for this type of additional attention is most evident in noting NaCl's inability to gain grant funding to tour *Invisible Neighborhood* from the New York State Council on the Arts—an organization that has seen many efforts by experimental theatre companies, and that would most likely be open to accepting the fractured nature of alternative narratives as long as a story remained somewhat intelligible. An expanded company would aid these efforts on NaCl's part. Further, studies suggest that "larger, more established [. . .] theaters are more fiscally sound than smaller theaters (Cherbo 14). An increased number of members within NaCl would allow the group to offer additional public workshops as a result of more working artists teaching the training

sessions and the ability to generate more productions, which would ultimately increase NaCl's economic stability.

Still, an idealistic outlook has been a primary contributor to NaCl's survival since its inception, and Krumholz and Kowalchuk have indeed been more successful in negotiating challenges than the overwhelming majority of new alternative theatre companies in North America that tend to fold after an extremely short period of time. Although Krumholz and Kowalchuk have temporarily ceased the search for new members, I believe that the significant advantages of an expanded ensemble will provoke their obvious tenacity, which will lead them to resume the search once they have established themselves more concretely.

During its existence, NaCl has contributed creative productions and useful training programs to the North American theatre community, but it surely will face further financial and artistic challenges in the coming years. In a commercially-driven theatre culture, practical operating dynamics remain increasingly tenuous for small nonprofit alternative theatre companies such as NaCl that are simultaneously committed to maintaining artistic integrity. One can only hope that the vital new company will continue "finding ways" and "fighting for [. . . NaCl's] vision" (Kowalchuk "The Passion According to NaCl" 16).

NOTES

¹ All verbal quotations in this chapter derive from compiled fieldwork notes and appear with the artists' permission.

² Although NaCl did not receive money from the New York State Council on the Arts to tour *Invisible Neighborhood*, the Council has awarded NaCl grant money for other projects.

³ Strike Anywhere is "a multi-disciplinary performance ensemble that has been in residence at St. Clements Theatre since 1998" ([North American Cultural Laboratory Home Page](#)).

⁴ The five members of Number Eleven Theatre stayed at NaCl Catskills from June until the middle of August in order to develop the *The Prague Visitor*, which opened in Toronto on March 19, 2003. Throughout the retreat, these actors participated in the morning training sessions with Krumholz and Wells and collaborated during the afternoons. While in the Catskills, the members of Number Eleven Theatre aided NaCl with practical tasks such as theatre maintenance and organization of summer events.

⁵ Krumholz told me that NaCl had no reservations about Wells representing the company by leading parts of the physical training. Wells, Kowalchuk, and Krumholz share a long professional and personal history with one another, and Wells and Kowalchuk worked together in PRIMUS for many years. Wells approaches training and collaborative work in very similar ways as NaCl. Krumholz indicated that he would be very surprised if Wells ever led the participants in an activity that contradicted NaCl's training methodologies (Lee, Fieldwork Notes). Further, Krumholz and Kowalchuk participated in most of Wells' training sessions. This provided them with another opportunity for artistic growth through engaging in Wells' exercises.

⁶ See *Physical Training at Odin Teatret* for a visual representation of this exercise in Odin Teatret's work. This exercise is a direct element from Grotowski's Laboratory Theatre training in Poland.

⁷ I borrow the "not-not" terminology from Richard Schechner.

CHAPTER IV. IT ONLY MAKES YOU STRONGER:
ARTISTRY AND SURVIVAL THROUGH LEADERSHIP
IN NUMBER ELEVEN THEATRE

The walk to the old Toronto warehouse should have been an easy one. Yet as I trudge through the snow and slowly negotiate my steps over the icy sidewalk, I scold myself for foregoing the convenient city bus ride. In an effort to familiarize myself with the path I would repeatedly travel in the upcoming weeks to observe Number Eleven Theatre's work, I naively left my hotel only half an hour before my scheduled arrival at the company's rehearsal for its newest show. I anxiously glance at my watch. The horrible February weather conditions have drastically extended my anticipated fifteen minute walk. My stomach turns at the thought of arriving late on my first day of fieldwork in Toronto.

After six months of periodic observations of artists working in this way, I know that arriving late to a rehearsal is not only against the rules, but it could also be viewed as a careless disruption of the performers' rehearsal process. I move faster. I negotiate my careful steps while I study the directions provided to me via e-mail by Ker Wells, director of Number Eleven. Finally, I see the narrow alleyway that I am to follow. As I approach the door of the warehouse that Number Eleven has rented to mount its production of *The Prague Visitor*, I glance at my watch. To my relief, I am only a few minutes late. I try to open the large metal door and realize that it is locked. At that moment, I hear sounds coming from inside the building. I hesitate for only a few seconds and weigh the consequences: either I stay in the bitter cold and freeze, or I knock and run the risk of disturbing a rehearsal that has already begun. Taking a deep breath, I pound on the door loudly.

A few seconds later, the door swings open, and I am greeted with an infectious smile from Jane Wells, one of the four performers in Number Eleven. Apologizing for my tardiness profusely, I step inside and quickly scan the massive cluttered space, expecting to find actors warming up for a rehearsal or an intensive physical training session. Rather, the remainder of the group stands at the end of the long room, bundled in heavy jackets and gloves, trying to protect themselves from the sub-zero temperature in the warehouse. Armed with tools, brooms, mops, and disinfectant, the company members are preparing to attack the far corner of the filthy warehouse where they will eventually construct a performance space. Jane Wells seems to be in the middle of an important discussion with performer Varrick Grimes as he turns and notices my arrival. As if on cue, he smiles, shakes his head, and says, “I swear that ninety percent of alternative theatre is moving and cleaning” (Lee, Fieldwork Notes).¹ The group laughs and comes to welcome me. After a few hugs, I put down my fieldwork notebook, grab a broom, and with that my journey with Number Eleven begins.

Number Eleven Theatre is a Toronto-based alternative theatre company that develops “densely woven” original performances that fuse physical action, song, and multiple texts ([Number Eleven Theatre Home Page](#)). The company members believe that its non-linear productions should be developed over time and allowed to mature, shift, and grow throughout the rehearsal and performance processes. The members are dedicated to working with a long-term ensemble-based company, which is reflected in their ongoing dedication to developing performer training exercises as a group. The members of Number Eleven participate in rigorous physical and vocal training that ideally continues throughout the rehearsal and performance phases of the company’s work. Although the artists have only been working together as a formal collective since 2001, Number Eleven’s heightened and stylized physicality has quickly come to

serve as a staple of the group's work. All of these points reflect the company members' commitment to working within the artistic heritage of Polish director Jerzy Grotowski and his protégé Eugenio Barba.

Number Eleven refuses to relinquish any degree of control over its professional or artistic development to outside organizations. The performers of Number Eleven elect not to join the Canadian Actor's Equity Association nor to operate regularly under the umbrella of any established professional theatres in Toronto (Wells in Lee, Fieldwork Notes).² As a result, the company as a whole maintains a certain degree of artistic autonomy that many theatre companies (alternative or otherwise) do not experience. This is a conviction that Number Eleven has most certainly inherited from PRIMUS, a Canadian experimental theatre company which Ker Wells co-founded and which offered the workshop in 1997 through which most of the members of Number Eleven first met, the PRIMUS School.

Partially as a result of Number Eleven's determination to pursue the company's artistic advancement on its own terms, the group also encounters financial and emotional struggles as marginalized alternative theatre artists in North America. These challenges manifest in myriad ways as exemplified by the company's run-down, rented facilities. The performers in Number Eleven negotiate these challenges in large part by relying on the experience and strong leadership of the company's director Ker Wells.³ In this chapter, I discuss Number Eleven's struggles and strategies for survival by analyzing the effectiveness of the group's dedication to following its established leader and the application of that leader role in the company's production of *The Prague Visitor*. I will suggest that the focus on the leader constitutes the group's major strategy to promote continued existence and to feed the members' artistic growth.

Company Struggles and Strategies for Survival

In comparison with major cities in the United States, Toronto produces a large number of alternative theatre productions each year. As far as Wells is concerned, however, in English-speaking Canada, there is “a real lack of continuity or community” among the practitioners (E-mail to the Author). This lack of community within the realm of alternative theatre in Canada that Wells senses may be related to the inability of many experimental companies to survive and sustain working for any significant period of time. A large number of alternative theatre artists do not successfully continue working in Canada for long enough to create a body or history of work.⁴ Moreover, according to Wells, “it is very much the perception, and to some extent the case, [. . . in English-speaking Canada] that alternative or experimental work is the province of young (and naïve) artists and/or those who cannot get work in the mainstream. The idea of someone continuing to work outside the text-based mainstream by choice is baffling and/or suspect” (E-mail to the Author). He continues by explaining:

There’s no experimental theatre in this country in any coherent way. When you look at the history of alternative theatre in Canada, it’s a pretty thin volume, you know? And certainly, when there was any kind of upsurge of alternative work, I think it was more alternative in terms of subject matter—of a colony establishing itself as independent and having its own identity more than any kind of coherent development of technique or an alternative tradition. (Lee, Fieldwork Notes)

As marginalized experimental theatre artists working within a specific artistic tradition and hoping to develop as an ensemble, Number Eleven struggles to find its place as an alternative theatre company in Canada.

Number Eleven faces two major types of challenges that threaten the survival of the company. The group constantly struggles with both financial and emotional challenges. To understand the realities of Number Eleven, it is best not to view these issues as two distinctive and separate areas of concern. Rather, these problems are fluid and flow into all aspects of Number Eleven's daily negotiations, threatening the company's capacity to achieve the artistic desires of its members.

Canada's governmentally based funding system for the arts is far more generous than that of the United States, and Number Eleven recognizes that it has certain advantages in Canada that the company's colleagues working in the States do not possess. Financial concerns, however, certainly do not elude Number Eleven. Although there seems to be a strong desire among the members of the group to explore a more consistent dynamic of company interaction, Number Eleven can only afford to work together on a "project by project basis" (Wells in Lee, *Fieldwork Notes*). This type of structure offers Number Eleven one advantage: the opportunity to work with other artists and bring new ideas to the company.

The drawbacks of not working together regularly, however, far outweigh the benefits in Number Eleven's view. A perception of "rushed" rehearsal processes seems to be a disturbing side effect of the group's inability to work together full time. Further, the company's lack of consistent training is a major point of concern that the group is trying to negotiate. Wells explains:

I think the whole question of training is deeply affected by continuity. And in Number Eleven's case, we have only been able to train when we are performing. I think one of the realities for companies that can't afford to work together all the time is that, realistically, training is not going to change your body if you're doing

it nine weeks now, four months off, eight weeks now, three months off. . . . So what is it? Will it define you just during the period that you're working? And I think that's a big question for companies trying to work in this model but in circumstances where they don't have a space . . . or they all have to go off and have jobs. [. . .] So, [. . .] realistically, it's not about changing our bodies. But to some extent, I think training can be about any number of things, and you have to accept that and try to make it as relevant as possible and as affecting as possible. (Lee, Fieldwork Notes)

As Wells points out in his statement, each of the artists has been forced to maintain some other type of livelihood outside of the company. Like many artists in similar situations, this type of financial negotiation understandably takes an extreme emotional toll on the members of Number Eleven. For example, Wells shares that he finds it discouraging that he has worked professionally as a theatre artist since 1988 and, at the age of thirty nine, he still has to work periodically as a carpenter in order to pay his rent (Lee, Fieldwork Notes). Though not unique to Number Eleven as an alternative theatre in North America, these monetary concerns are no less difficult for the artists and are further exacerbated by the group's existence in Toronto.

Toronto is an extremely expensive city in which to work for the group. The rental fees for the space that the company needs for ongoing training, rehearsals, and performances consume a great deal of the money that the company receives from grants (that is, if the company can find a rental space in the city at all). Number Eleven feels that Toronto is not set up for the type of ongoing training and extended rehearsal periods of artists working in this way. Theatres that are already equipped for staging theatrical productions are expensive, booked well in advance, and typically offer only proscenium staging options that the group prefers to avoid for

artistic reasons. What is more, renting a space for several months is vastly different in terms of cost and availability from renting a space for several weeks, as is often the case with mainstream productions (Wells in Lee, Fieldwork Notes).

Toronto has also become a city populated by actors wishing to work in film; television; the mainstream theatre; and, to some extent, the “hip, indi scene” (McClean in Lee, Fieldwork Notes). There is no doubt that the members of Number Eleven often feel marginalized and expendable in this urban world where their work continues to fall outside of people’s established expectations. Most practicing theatre artists that the members of Number Eleven encounter do not understand the dynamics of the company’s work. Unfortunately, this can also be the case with audiences that come to see Number Eleven’s productions. “Part of the problem,” Wells observes,

is that there should be two different words. What we call *theatre* is not what they call *theatre*, and that creates confusion. [. . .] People come to see the show and expect it to be like a play—and who can blame them? We’re advertising in the “theatre” section in the paper, and we’re reviewed by the theatre reviewers and we call ourselves *actors* and we call it *theatre*. (Lee, Fieldwork Notes)

Number Eleven is forced to approach advertising in this way in order to encourage audience members to attend the group’s performances. Number Eleven must compete with the plethora of mainstream productions running in Toronto for its audiences, which is also a large challenge faced by the company.

In an effort to explain the depth of the struggles that Number Eleven faces, Grimes shares his immense concern for the company’s existence in Toronto:

There may come a point where we can't keep a theatre company going because, to survive beyond the level that we are at, we have to change the company so radically [. . .] that we can no longer *be* the company. So, I have a fear that we can't actually exceed this and that we're only existing because we're absorbing as individuals the buffer that is the company and what is the reality here in Toronto. If we remove our personal selves from between, the company might just collapse—in terms of funding and in terms of audiences. (Lee, Fieldwork Notes)

Number Eleven must find ways to address the challenges that it faces as a company if it intends to survive as an alternative theatre in Toronto and meet the company's basic needs. In evaluating the company's essential financial necessities, Jane Wells explains: "The things that we need money for [are] to pay for our storage locker where we keep our stuff, turn over money for grant applications—there's some costs attached to them, salaries, facilities rentals . . . that kind of stuff" (Lee, Fieldwork Notes). To meet these needs, Number Eleven not only applies for governmental and private funding, but it also employs four primary ways of raising money and orchestrating the practical survival of the company.

Number Eleven's first approach to survival depends on its system of distributing the non-artistic duties within the group. The artistic director of PRIMUS, Richard Fowler, described the practical dynamics of his theatre company in 1995. In doing so, he also articulates Number Eleven's current organizational approach to running a company and one important element in the group's quest for survival as an alternative theatre troupe in North America:

The members of PRIMUS Theatre are precisely that, members, the articulating limbs of a living organism; the theatre of which they are members is not a building, not an administrative infrastructure, but the social unit which is the

manifestation of their collective relationship; they are actors, but they are also musicians and dancers, choreographers and designers and directors, stage managers and technicians, publicists and managers; [. . . t]hey do not work for a company which employs them but are themselves the company. [. . .] We own our work and have control over it. (29-30)

Within the collective of Number Eleven, the artists distribute the non performance-based duties in similar ways as PRIMUS. Specifically, performer Elizabeth Rucker is in charge of publicity and marketing, Grimes handles most negotiations that relate to facilities and technical issues, performer Alex McClean undertakes many of the writing-based tasks associated with the company's work such as compiling the script after a performance has closed and writing grants for the company, Jane Wells is in charge of handling the budgetary issues, and Wells leads most of the scenic construction for the productions. This arrangement works well for the collective of Number Eleven because it allows all members to assert a leadership role within a specified area of the company's work. The practice allows for a point of professional autonomy for the artists while simultaneously aiding the company in a financial way. Grimes lends further insight into the way that this organizational structure works for the company as he shares: "We've kind of compartmentalized a little bit. So, I feel that I have the chance to be a leader—to be in charge of decisions that are made" (Lee, Fieldwork Notes). The fact that Number Eleven does not have to pay technicians, staff, and administration significantly aids the artists in terms of their financial survival as a company.

Another important strategy for survival that Number Eleven uses is providing workshops in which they teach other theatre practitioners the company's artistic techniques. The workshops generally offer participants introductions to approaching physical and vocal training, generating

performance material, and working with a director in this type of collaborative work (see Fig. 23). All of the workshops are primarily led by Wells with the remaining Number Eleven company members assisting throughout the work periods (see Fig. 24). Rucker assumes the leadership role only briefly during the workshops in order to guide the singing portions of the sessions (see Fig. 25).

At the culmination of a day's work, the members of Number Eleven often attempt to suspend the roles of authority that they have occupied during the workshop. At this point, the collective group joins in a discussion that allows both Number Eleven members and workshop participants to ask questions and offer insights about their experiences with the activities. Although the group discussions generally begin with Number Eleven members prompting the workshop participants with questions, the students often become equally engaged in the sharing of ideas and reflections (Lee, Fieldwork Notes).⁵ This final discussion also offers the entire group the chance to brainstorm for solutions to varying challenges facing alternative theatre artists, air frustrations felt as theatre practitioners working outside of the realistic mainstream theatre in North America, and minimize the isolation experienced by the marginalized artists (even if for only a short period of time). Upon arrival at the workshops, the vast majority of participants are not what Grimes refers to as "the converted" theatre practitioners working within Number Eleven's artistic heritage (Lee, Fieldwork Notes). Most workshop participants, however, already have some experience with approaching their crafts in alternative ways and have encountered some of the same challenges as Number Eleven. Thus, the workshops are both a financial and emotional help to Number Eleven.

The workshops can be offered either in Toronto when the company is not in rehearsal for production or when the group is on tour. The workshops last anywhere from a few hours to

several days. The cost of the sessions fluctuates as appropriate to the length of time that the company members work with the participants. For example, a one-day workshop usually costs a participant \$75.⁶ The company prefers to limit the number of participants in its sessions to twelve. However, given the degree of financial benefit that can come from the workshops, Number Eleven will usually allow up to fifteen students to participate (if the available working space allows for this increased number of participants). This larger group of students is certainly not considered an ideal teaching situation, and there is the distinct feeling among the company members that they are necessarily compromising in order to aid in their financial survival.

Number Eleven also occasionally offers workshops for institutions. For instance, Number Eleven offered a one-day workshop in Toronto at the University of Toronto in April of 2003. Since this was in conjunction with a pedagogical institution, the university's Theatre and Drama Studies Program paid Number Eleven a lump sum for providing the workshop for the school's students. As a result of this venture, Number Eleven made approximately \$750 (Jane Wells in Lee, Fieldwork Notes).

The third way that Number Eleven negotiates its financial challenges is by making money from its productions. As noted above, competition in Toronto for audience members is fierce. Obviously, the amount of money that the company makes on the run of a production depends largely on how many people come to see the work. When the company premiered its recent production, *The Prague Visitor*, in March of 2003, the ticket prices for the Toronto performances ran between \$12 and \$15 each with a "pwyc" (pay what you can) show offered once per week for the matinee performances.⁷

The run of *The Prague Visitor* in 2003 lasted for three weeks. On average, the performances filled thirty to forty percent of the house, and the company made approximately

\$4,600 over the three-week period. Wells assesses that this is “pretty damn good for this type of work” (Lee, Fieldwork Notes). This degree of financial gain, however, does not begin to cover Number Eleven’s basic expenses in Toronto, not to mention the company’s monetary needs for touring. This point causes members of Number Eleven a great deal of concern. Although the company usually applies for separate grants for touring purposes, to secure money to fund the necessary rehearsal time needed to re-mount a production to tour is often difficult, particularly when the company has previously received grant money to develop and premiere the same piece.

For example, well in advance, the company made plans to tour *The Prague Visitor* several months after the closing of the premiere run in Toronto. However, just before the Toronto opening, Wells expressed reservations about these plans: “One of the things that’s difficult for me [. . . is that] I feel like before we tour it, I’d want to work on it some more and I don’t know when we’re going to do that. I certainly don’t know how we’re going to afford it” (Lee, Fieldwork Notes). Given the length of time that can pass between the opening of a show and the subsequent tour of the piece, the resumed rehearsal process is necessary in order for the company to maintain the quality and integrity of its work.

Although touring is not extremely financially lucrative, it aids the company as a tool for the artists’ emotional survival as marginalized theatre practitioners based in Toronto. Touring can be difficult for the artists in terms of fatigue. Yet Wells also finds that audiences outside of the urban areas of Canada tend to meet the experience of the performance with a more open perspective. He explains: “I think some of the most gratifying experiences I’ve had doing this kind of theatre is when we are touring and performing for a less sophisticated audience. I find them more open. They don’t know what to expect when they come to the theatre, so they don’t feel threatened if they don’t understand” (Lee, Fieldwork Notes).

Number Eleven continues to develop varying ways of ensuring the company's survival as an alternative theatre group in North America. Number Eleven's most salient approach to survival derives from the company's unwavering dedication to following Wells' leadership. As Penny Farfan suggests, "A collective agreement to choose leadership and accept direction may [. . .] be a factor in a company's survival" (7). This type of consensus within the collective of Number Eleven is necessary for sustained existence in many ways. Most notably, Number Eleven needs someone to make final decisions about both practical and artistic matters. The company grants this responsibility to Wells as a result of his experience, talent, dedication, and knowledge (Grimes in Lee, Fieldwork Notes).

The members of Number Eleven rely on Wells heavily to lead them in their artistic development as well as in overcoming threats to the company's survival. Grimes highlights the degree of importance that Wells has to the continued existence of Number Eleven by stating that

the company needs him. It couldn't really exist without him. If any one of the rest of us left, it would be problematic, but we could always be replaced. It would be very very hard, but it would be possible. But Ker's presence seems so absolutely vital to the company. We've come a long way on that path. There was a point where we could barely function without him. (Lee, Fieldwork Notes)

The group depends on Wells a great deal as a teacher, director, and leader. As the senior and most experienced member of the group, Wells offers Number Eleven years of experience in approaching this type of work as a result of his involvement in PRIMUS. There is no doubt that the members of Number Eleven trust his leadership both artistically and in regards to the practical dynamics of the company's existence (Rucker in Lee, Fieldwork Notes).

Dependence on a Leader as a Means of Survival

Wells views his role as equally that of a leader and a director. As the leader, Wells guides the performers toward acquiring autonomy within the context of the group's organizational structure and administrative approach by encouraging the actors to take charge of specific business-related elements regarding the company. This dynamic of independence can also be found in the group's training practices. Within this artistic tradition, group training is often led or overseen by the director of the company. In the same regard, if a performer undertakes individualized training and is working within a company structure, his or her activities are frequently decided upon in collaboration with the director as well.⁸

When Number Eleven gathered to begin training in preparation for *The Prague Visitor*, Wells asked each company member to assume the leadership position in training on certain days. He explains his reasoning for this departure from the norm within this artistic tradition: "I knew that I was not capable or interested in designing or leading training. I wanted the company to be less hierarchical in that sense" (Lee, Fieldwork Notes). Wells continues by describing the solution that he found to his hesitancy of solely leading the training sessions in Number Eleven:

People would teach an exercise or a game, and there was something about that that we found enormously stimulating. Like one day, Jane came in, and she treated us like we were one of her classes of kids at the daycare program [where she works]. And we each had to make our house out of blankets; we had to bring in three magic objects and [. . .] tell a story; we played grandmother's footsteps. And we played a game that Alex made based on the Enneagram with five points.⁹ We played all kinds of things. [. . .] In the course of working with Number

Eleven and from the effect and stimulus of these people, we've begun to discover what our training is as a company. (Lee, Fieldwork Notes)

In speaking with the performers in Number Eleven, each of them aired the same type of positive sentiments as Wells regarding the perceived success of the training sessions. This type of shared leadership allows Number Eleven performers to experiment to a greater extent with their craft as artists while simultaneously shifting some responsibility for the group away from Wells.

In some ways, Wells also seems to be attempting to negotiate a similar type of environment during the company's rehearsals. I do not wish to imply that Wells would prefer for actors to assume control of the rehearsal process whenever he is present. Yet, evidence suggests that Wells is trying to create a more equality-based working dynamic within the company's rehearsals. As noted above, the company members seem comfortable with Wells' efforts at creating dynamics of equality *outside* of the rehearsal process. In terms of devising and refining performances however, the actors often hold onto the concept and security of the "all-knowing" and "all-powerful" director. For instance, Wells says that often when he asks one of the actors what he or she thinks should happen at a particular point in the performance, "they look like a deer caught in headlights—like: we don't want to think about that—you're supposed to know what happens—don't ask me now, it's too scary" (Lee, Fieldwork Notes). Wells would like for the performers in Number Eleven to claim more autonomy within the creative process in that he believes that this will help advance both individual and collective artistic pursuits.

As Number Eleven develops a performance, the actors offer Wells an overwhelming amount of support. The company members are more than willing to comply with Wells' wishes and proposals during rehearsals. Grimes assuredly confirms that, during all phases of creative development, "none of us have a problem with handing over [. . .] responsibility to the director.

[. . .] But we haven't reached a point yet where we are more pro-active in asserting [. . .] things. As Ker identifies things, we sort of react to [. . . them]. That is changing. [. . .] But I feel that we are still very much reliant on Ker" (Lee, Fieldwork Notes). This process of responding to the director's requests ideally functions as a means of expediting the development of the show and ensuring the creation of a meaningful and effective performance piece that remains unified in thematic quality.

As with most theatrical approaches, during the process of Number Eleven's rehearsals, the director serves as both a necessary representative of the upcoming audience's perspective as well as a member of the creative team. In "Views of the Performer and the Spectator," Ferdinando Taviani explains that

the director has a double position. On one hand, it can be similar to the performer's position, to the position of someone, that is, who directly influences the actions in the performance; on the other hand, it can be the position of an "influential spectator" or perhaps that of a guarantee for the spectators.

Everything said, therefore, about the divergence between the performers' view and the spectators' view, about the contrast between them, about their accordance or even about the secrecy of them both, can be said with respect to the director, to his or her double interior theatre. (263)

Indeed, the director plays an integral role in the process of achieving a quality performance. When a performer is "in the work," it is more often than not impossible for him or her to assess accurately the degree to which a moment or action is effective from the audience's perspective (Jane Wells in Lee, Fieldwork Notes).

Wells agrees that a director ultimately must assume control of the production and responsibility for the quality of the piece. Particularly in this type of work, the director's role during the process of creation is of the utmost importance. He or she ultimately serves not only as the director but also the editor (and partially the playwright) of the piece (Wells in Lee, *Fieldwork Notes*). In addition to assuming the standard duties of most directors within or outside of the alternative theatre in North America, the director within this artistic tradition undertakes the challenge of fusing together the different sequences of action that the actors have created. Wells explains that the "biggest challenge is making something from nothing—and the risks entailed in that—in not starting with a script" (Lee, *Fieldwork Notes*). When working in this way, the director must orchestrate a new, meaningful, and unified piece that communicates with the audience.

Wells feels that there is room during this process of Number Eleven's work for a more collaborative dynamic of interaction. "I think that in our circumstance," says Wells, "we've reached a level of frankness with each other that sometimes I want to be able to ask [. . . for their opinions] in rehearsals" (Lee, *Fieldwork Notes*). This approach departs from the traditional, powerful role of the director that has been historically present in some companies working within this artistic tradition. Raymond Bobgan, former director of *Wishhounds* Theatre and an artist working from similar creative influences as Wells, suggests that "the actor must temporarily believe a director's proposition for new work to go on, but this need not be based on the popular neurosis of personality pull or the mask of the master" (Farfan 7). Bobgan's statement highlights the complex and heavily critiqued positions of power that directors have occupied (and that Wells is trying to resist) in some companies working within this artistic tradition.

Wells is highly critical of what he perceives as the problematic power dynamics that can exist within this type of creative work:

For me, in my relationship with my colleagues, it is so important that it be one of trust and frankly love. Because I'm asking them to reveal themselves—to make themselves vulnerable. And I think it's one of the reasons that relationships in the theatre can be so dysfunctional and damaging because it can be such an unhealthy demand. A demand that's made without reciprocation and without due concern and due care. (Lee, Fieldwork Notes)

Thus, Wells makes obvious attempts within the rehearsal process to avoid creating or supporting conditions that could immediately propel him to a status of uncontested authority. Even Wells' vocabulary during rehearsals suggests an effort at maintaining equality: "Wells' method of operation proceeds within a perpetual stream of questions—some to specific actors, but many posed generally to the company: "how about . . . ?"; "what if . . . ?"; "can you . . . ?" (Barton, "Navigating Turbulence" 113).

The company members appreciate Wells' attempts at showing them respect. Yet, they often seem uncomfortable with his desire to shed some of his authority. As a result, the performers often resist claiming a heightened degree of artistic autonomy within the creative development. Wells shares his perception of the reasoning behind the performers' hesitancy as he observes: "I think it has always had a lot to do with our relative levels of experience and that they all first encountered me [. . .] professionally [. . .] as a teacher [. . .] or a director" (Lee, Fieldwork Notes). Indeed, the majority of the company members first experienced Wells in a professional capacity at the PRIMUS school, where he was ascribed a higher, more powerful, more knowledgeable status than the students.

Although Jane Wells gets along famously with her brother, a telling statement sheds light on her personal relationship with Wells in terms of authority. She laughs as she explains that “Ker has always been the *big brother*” (Lee, Fieldwork Notes). In addition, Jane Wells’ first professional experience with her brother occurred when he directed her solo piece, *Brightness Falls*. At the time, Jane Wells had only a limited amount of experience with this type of creative approach in formal performance, while Wells had already been creating pieces for many years within this artistic tradition with PRIMUS. Thus, it stands to reason that Jane Wells would see Wells as an authority figure within their professional collaboration.

When Jane Wells speaks of the company’s current working dynamics, however, she is the most vocal of the actors in declaring the need to assert a certain degree of artistic responsibility as a performer during the creative process. She believes that, during all phases of the company’s work, each member should consciously think to him or herself: “Is this working for me? Even if Ker says it’s OK, if it’s not working for me, I have to work on this section—or I keep trying to change it” (Lee, Fieldwork Notes). She feels that such independent reflection and action are integral to achieving a high level of artistry in the company’s work. She continues by adding her personal need for claiming this type of ownership within the work: “For me, that’s part of the delight of being an actor. [. . .] And I believe that [. . . this] direction of autonomy [. . . is] critical for an artist functioning in this way and also for us as a group” (Lee, Fieldwork Notes). Beyond Jane Wells’ personal investment in asserting more artistic autonomy in the creative process, part of her logic also derives from her wish to save Wells from feeling an overwhelming amount of responsibility for the company.

As a thoughtful and dedicated leader, teacher, and director, Wells would like for the performers in Number Eleven to grow as much as possible, which is one reason why he

encourages them to assume more individual autonomy during rehearsals. However, Wells also has personal reasons as to why he would like for the company to operate in a more collaborative way during the creative process. He does not entirely relish the idea of possessing the responsibilities of a dictatorial leader. He explains: “I think some directors really thrive on that responsibility. And I don’t think that relationship is as clear with me. [. . .] I think that [. . .] my discomfort with that responsibility [. . .] is probably the thing that I battle with most” (Lee, Fieldwork Notes). As Wells honestly communicates his concerns about maintaining a position of total responsibility and authority within the group, he also highlights his desire to empower the other members of Number Eleven.

Wells did not seek out the performers whose initial collaboration after the PRIMUS school led to the formation of Number Eleven. Rather, those actors came to Wells and asked him to work with them. This is a significant point in analyzing Wells’ resistance to claiming a position of uncontested authority within the company. Before directing a small group of students at the PRIMUS school, Wells never had any directing experience and never had taken any formal directing classes. Reflecting on his entrance into the discipline of directing, Wells explains: “[Before the PRIMUS school], I really didn’t have any interest in directing. I certainly didn’t think that was what I wanted to do. [. . .] But I’d say watching Richard Fowler was a class” (Lee, Fieldwork Notes). Wells’ reference to Fowler’s influence is not surprising. In many ways, Wells seeks to emulate Fowler as a leader, teacher, and director.

Recalling the way that Fowler led the practical dynamics of PRIMUS, Wells praises Fowler by saying:

Richard didn’t boss us around and we always talked about [. . . things like] when we were going on tour. [. . .] He was very very very conscientious about

“knowledge is power” and everybody should know everything . . . that nothing is kept secret and that you have all the information at your disposal in order to make a decision. He was very good about that. There was no secrecy. (Lee, Fieldwork Notes)

This statement also summarizes the way in which Wells approaches the working dynamics of Number Eleven. The fact that Number Eleven divides the technical and business responsibilities equally among the members indicates Wells’ willingness to allow each member of the group to have a voice in major non-performance based decisions.

Wells also admires Fowler as an effective teacher within this artistic tradition. When Wells reflects on Fowler’s influence on him in this regard, he posits, “you can’t underestimate the degree to which it’s important that your teacher be a compelling person. And Richard was a compelling person. [. . .] He was [. . .] very charismatic, very certain, very sure of himself. [. . .] He was a person who seemed to have a conviction and passion about what it was that he was doing” (Lee, Fieldwork Notes). Although Wells sometimes struggles with finding confidence in his own directing talents, he is secure in his abilities as a teacher within this type of work (Wells in Lee, Fieldwork Notes).

Grimes describes Wells’ approach to teaching as “incredibly generous” (Lee, Fieldwork Notes). In his approach to instruction Wells exudes a love of his craft and possesses the ability to inspire his students to push beyond standard expectations of performance. As both a participant in Wells’ workshops and an observer of his more formal teaching situations, I could see that he motivates students to accomplish feats that often seem outside of the performers’ physical capabilities. The power of Wells’ motivational talents seems to lie in his genuine love for his crafts as a theatre artist, which he communicates unselfishly to his students. Wells also

exudes a positive—yet down to earth—and gregarious nature that puts his students at ease and infuses them with security and confidence. The members of Number Eleven also clearly view Wells as their teacher and appreciate his dedication to the group's work, his willingness to sacrifice personally for the good of the company, and his enthusiasm for each performer's individual artistic development within the collective. Rucker explains: "I just think by being my director on a long-term basis that he's taught me a lot" (Lee, Fieldwork Notes).

Just as Wells seeks to emulate certain characteristics of Fowler's approach to leading and teaching alternative theatre artists, Wells also recognizes and admires Fowler's exceptional talent as a director within this type of theatre. Upon his first interaction with Fowler at the National Theatre School in 1986, Wells was convinced of Fowler's talents as a director. Wells offers further insight into a subsequent revelation that he has had about Fowler's talent and perseverance by saying:

It kind of makes me shudder when I think back to some of those situations where I would describe what Richard did [in PRIMUS] as sort of collecting our material and putting it together in the story . . . as if it was just a matter of sort of arranging pre-made pieces that fit together in some way. And my realization once I started directing was what an enormous job that it is. (Lee, Fieldwork Notes)

Wells did not completely understand the degree of Fowler's abilities until Wells became the director of Number Eleven. Wells also says that, when he first began directing, he often made artistic decisions based on what he believed Fowler would do in the situation. Upon gaining more experience as a director, however, Wells has begun to trust his own instincts more. He believes that the directing lessons he learned from Fowler have become incorporated

knowledge, to some extent, which allows him to trust his own directing abilities to a greater degree (Wells in Lee, Fieldwork Notes).

Although Wells cites Fowler as his primary influence as a leader, teacher, and director, there are also elements of Fowler's work that Wells does not wish to imitate. Wells is consciously trying to depart from Fowler's position as an "all-knowing" or "*guru*" director in a theatre company.¹⁰ In Barba's text, *The Dictionary of Theatre Anthropology*, Rosemary Jeanes Antze lends insight into the concept of the "*guru-shishya*" (or teacher-student) relationship by explaining that "the teacher-student relationship [. . . is] a hierarchical one in the sense that a younger student owes respect to the elder master who is the source of knowledge" (33). Wells explains that, after leaving PRIMUS, he knew that he did not want to serve in this capacity to the members of Number Eleven. Rather, he says, he was "craving a situation with peers" (Lee, Fieldwork Notes). As a result, Wells' method of interacting with Number Eleven performers rarely resembles that of a "master-teacher" or "master-director." Rucker shares her understanding of Wells' desire to avoid such authority and offers a glimpse of Wells' approach to working with the rest of the company:

You know when I was at PRIMUS there was this teacher figure you know [. . . with Fowler]—definitely a higher status than the actors he was working with. PRIMUS was reflective of this Eastern model of the master and student. [. . .] And certainly Ker had [. . . been] very successful in that model, but that was another company. He certainly got a lot out of it. I just think he has some questions about that type of authority. [. . .] So, he didn't want to take on that role I don't think. [. . .] And my sense of it was, he didn't want [. . .] to work

on us like we were his army of actors. [. . .] And that's a very good relationship in a way—he wasn't trying to change us. (Lee, Fieldwork Notes)

Wells has never been comfortable inhabiting the role of the “all-powerful” director in Number Eleven. Therefore, as McClean observes, Wells has worked hard to make sure that, in regard to these types of power negotiations within the company, “the distance between us has decreased” (Lee, Fieldwork Notes).

All of the performers have repeatedly expressed an awareness that they need to claim more artistic autonomy within the creative work, but they often still seem to cling to the security of the idea of a master-director and quickly “defer to” Wells (Grimes in Lee, Fieldwork Notes). The actors are simply operating from a learned perspective in this regard. A director is commonly considered the authority during the rehearsal processes of most companies. However, the status of the director tends to occupy an even higher degree of authority in many troupes that are working in this way. I posit that the elevated status of the director within this artistic tradition happens for several reasons.

First, the artists often join the company with some degree of experience with this type of approach to creating theatre. The working dynamics that they have encountered before arriving in the group have been determined by their former directors/teachers, who have been influenced by their former directors/teachers. The lineage of this artistry traces back to the work Grotowski and/or Barba, both of whom have historically occupied perceived positions of elevated authority within companies.

A second reason why the director might occupy a higher authority within this type of work is that, during the process of devising the script, the director in this type of collaborative environment has an overwhelming amount of responsibility placed on him or her as the person

who puts together the performance script and the final performance piece. Unlike text-based theatre, the company has no script with which to begin working. Only out of the process of the director's adding, cutting, adjusting, and fusing does the performance begin to take shape.

A third reason why directors in this type of work tend to hold an elevated status is that the performers typically develop a student-teacher relationship with their directors. In part this is because approaches to working in this way are not commonly taught in other accessible places, such as university theatre programs. Thus, performers must learn through practical application, a process overseen by the director of the production or company. The student-teacher dynamic that may be found to some extent in the majority of theatre companies, then, seems to exist to a heightened degree in troupes working in this way.

Although operating from a historically appropriate standpoint as performers working within this artistic tradition, the resistance of Number Eleven's actors to offer more active contributions to the processes of creating and refining the performances places Wells in a position in which he does not feel entirely comfortable. Further, the performers' hesitancy may also negate some of the potential for artistic autonomy that this work could offer to them. Holding onto this very traditional idea of leadership within the creative process may not serve to advance the performers' pursuit of achieving artistic ideals when the director simultaneously may be trying to shed that role and develop a more community-based environment. Moreover the confusion that arises out of this type of ongoing negotiation can cost the group time and money as they must undertake an extended rehearsal process—a point that does not serve to advance the company's economic viability.

A Strategy at Work:

Negotiations of Power during the Making of *The Prague Visitor*

The process of creating Number Eleven's second show, *The Prague Visitor*, began with a discussion on Jane Wells' back porch at the end of the summer of 2001 after the company had finished touring its first show, *Icaria*. From the very beginning, Wells led the course of the making of *The Prague Visitor*. He initiated the process of collaboration by announcing to the group that he wanted the performance to incorporate the concept of hiding. Jane Wells says that Wells explained to Number Eleven during this meeting that the "theme kind of came to him in a bit of a flash" and that he wanted to explore the tension that can surface when someone does not want to be discovered (Lee, Fieldwork Notes). Wells asked the company members to gather literature in which they were interested that related to this type of dynamic in some way (Rucker in Lee, Fieldwork Notes). He continued by informing the performers that he did not want to "start from scratch." Rather, he wanted to begin with a "textual departure point" (Wells in Lee, Fieldwork Notes). The performers responded to Wells' prompt, and proposals began to circulate regarding the focus of the upcoming production. The company entertained many thoughts for incorporation into its upcoming piece. Although not intended to be the exclusive subject matter, the idea of Jewish persecution as part of the play's focus and the setting of Prague emerged as two recurring points for integration into the performance and gave the company a point of departure (Jane Wells in Lee, Fieldwork Notes).

Number Eleven began planning its approach to developing the new piece. The group members decided that they wanted to engage in two week-long workshops in preparation for the creation of the show. The first workshop would allow the company members to learn more about the art of mainstream improvisation as a developmental technique (an avenue of theatrical

work with which most of the members had little or no experience); the second workshop would supplement the upcoming production with new songs. The company also tentatively talked about the idea of undertaking the initial processes of generating material and devising a rough draft of the performance the following summer in Highland Lake, New York, at North American Cultural Laboratory's (NaCl's) artist's retreat. "I thought," explains Jane Wells "that if we were going to make a new show—that it would be amazing if we were to try to make it or to start working on it [. . . in the Catskills]. I love being there. It's like another home" (Lee, Fieldwork Notes).

All of Number Eleven's initial plans for creating the show hinged on the capacity of the company to secure funding for development and production that would allow the group to generate material for, devise, rehearse, and premiere the new piece. To complete the multiple funding applications necessary to produce the project, Number Eleven was forced to create a title for the upcoming performance before any significant phase of the piece's development. After considering the show's tentative focus, the group decided on the title *The Prague Visitor*. The company then undertook the tedious process of applying for foundation money and grants. As a result, the company received several grants for the creation and subsequent production of *The Prague Visitor* (Jane Wells in Lee, Fieldwork Notes).

The first sum of money that Number Eleven secured came from the Laidlaw Foundation, a private organization that supports the arts. The group members decided to use this money to fund the two workshops that they had initially discussed participating in as preparation for the new show. In January of 2002, the company took a week-long improvisational workshop with professional improv troupe Second City and a week-long workshop in which they learned Eastern-European Jewish songs with a musician, Allan Merovitz (Magnat 90).

The company received the governmentally based grant money to develop and produce *The Prague Visitor*. The group was awarded \$15,000 from the Canada Council for the Arts, \$7,000 from the Toronto Arts Council, and \$8,000 from the Ontario Arts Council. All of the grant funds were specified for different phases of the creative process. Thus, Number Eleven had acquired enough money to travel to Highland Lake, New York, and partially fund the members' living expenses at the artist's retreat in the Catskills for three months during the summer of 2003. The company planned to use its time in the Catskills to train together, generate performance material, and devise a rough draft of the upcoming performance. Securing the grant money also meant that Number Eleven had received enough funding to support continued rehearsals for approximately nine weeks upon the group's return from the summer work period in the Catskills. Due to pre-arranged employment obligations among individual members, the company decided to reconvene in January of 2003 for this funded rehearsal time and premiere *The Prague Visitor* in March of the same year in Toronto (Jane Wells in Lee, Fieldwork Notes).

The company came to an agreement regarding the members' pay during the rehearsal period in Toronto. Each member would receive \$325 per week during the rehearsal time, and the performers would be paid \$200 each per week during the three-week run of the show. As the director, Wells would receive the same amount as the other members of the company during the nine-week rehearsal period. However, he decided to defer the performance honorarium that each of the performers would receive. He already had plans to begin teaching at the Humber School of Performing Arts during that time, and he told the company that "he really didn't need the money" (Jane Wells in Lee, Fieldwork Notes). By foregoing the honorarium, Wells ensured that the performers received a full \$600 each, as there would be one less person among whom to divide the pay.

Wells' willingness to give up the performance honorarium in order for the actors to make more money during the run of the show exemplifies his desire for the company to function as a collective entity and to achieve economic viability. Wells felt that he would have enough money to pay his bills without going into debt during this time period. In Wells' mind, there was no reason to ask for more money, as his major concern was financial and psychological well-being of the collective. The extra money would allow the actors to pay their bills and ensure that they concentrate on executing performances of the highest quality, which, from Wells' perspective, undoubtedly justifies his sacrifice for the good of the whole.

During the months after the improvisational and Yiddish song workshops, the members of Number Eleven spent time conducting in-depth research on literature and historical figures that they believed might ultimately be included in *The Prague Visitor*. Upon arrival at the Catskills in June of 2003, the company members introduced these characters and pieces of literature to one another through the presentation of individually developed scenes. For the remainder of the summer, the company members spent mornings training together, and in the afternoons, the artists generated performance material and developed a working draft of the new show (Jane Wells in Lee, Fieldwork Notes).

To supplement the grant money that Number Eleven received to pay for the members' living expenses for the summer, the group arranged a "barter" with theatre company NaCl.¹¹ In exchange for allowing Number Eleven to use the rehearsal space at the artist's retreat, NaCl would gain Number Eleven's help producing the Catskill Performer Training Retreat (two, week-long workshop sessions offered to experimental performers by NaCl) and running the Catskill Festival of New Theatre (a festival that showcases the new work of alternative theatre artists).

At the end of the summer, Number Eleven presented a showing of *The Prague Visitor* as a work in progress during the Catskill Festival of New Theatre. As a presenter on a scholarly panel at the festival, I witnessed the company's presentation. At the time, what struck me most was the preciseness of the physicality onstage and the unfailing confidence that the actors seemed to possess in the rhythmic choreography of the piece's action. The timing seemed fine-tuned. However, were it not for the title of the show and the Eastern-European Jewish songs that were incorporated into the piece, I would not have been able to discern anything about the production's setting or theme. The narrative structure of the piece was still fragmented, although overtones of secrecy, playfulness, and confusion were beginning to emerge (Lee, Fieldwork Notes).

Throughout the processes of finding texts, generating performance material, and devising the rough draft of *The Prague Visitor*, Wells controlled the development in a number of ways. The performers responded to Wells' initiation of the project by bringing in a variety of pieces that they felt were thematically linked to the proposed subject matter. Wells' contributions to the group's textual sources consisted of four short stories by Franz Kafka; he "had been for years reading a fair amount of Kafka" (Wells in Lee, Fieldwork Notes). The company used excerpts from and/or adapted the following texts to create *The Prague Visitor*:

The Hunter Gracchus, *Metamorphosis*, and *The Blue Octavo Notebooks* by Franz Kafka. *Franz Kafka, A Biography* by Max Brod. *The Nature of the Physical World* by Sir Arthur Stanley Eddington. *A Game at Salzburg* by Randall Jarrell. *Across* by Peter Handke. *Two Birds: a Dialogue* by Mao Zedong. *Secret Song of the Heretics* by Kitahara Hakshu. *All the Names* by Jose Saramago. *Dancing Lessons for the Advanced in Age* by Bohumil Hrabal. *Scenes from the End* by

Frank E. Manuel. *Stella* by Peter Weyden. *Pirke Avot*. And the writings of Valeska Gert. (Number Eleven Theatre, *The Prague Visitor* Program)

Most of the literature by Kafka that Wells brought into the development survived the process of cutting and adapting and were included in *The Prague Visitor*. In contrast, some of the literature brought in by the performers in the company did not become incorporated into Number Eleven's show. Wells did not ignore the performers' input or textual contributions. Rather, he always makes an effort to incorporate the actors' ideas into a piece. Looking at the texts that the company used in the making of *The Prague Visitor* introduces an example of confusion that arose as Wells attempted to empower the actors with a heightened degree of artistic autonomy.

When the company began working with the textual material in the Catskills, each member offered several contributions. Rucker's initial textual input to the show consisted of *The Stories of the Golem* and a book concerning the life of Deborah Sampson, a woman who dressed in men's clothing to join the American army and fight for independence in the 1700s. *The Stories of the Golem* ended up working well with the texts contributed by the other company members, but the material regarding Sampson did not seem to fit into the overall theme of the show. Yet, Rucker continued to try to incorporate Sampson as a character into the piece and work with the texts concerning Sampson's life. Rucker explains that she "felt strongly about the material" (Rucker in Lee, Fieldwork Notes).

After working in the Catskills for three months, Rucker decided to change her character and discard the material about Sampson. Even though Wells seemed to have reservations throughout the summer about using the Sampson material, Rucker arrived at the decision to change her contribution on her own. This decision, however, did not occur until after the company had already spent the summer working to develop a rough draft of the piece. As

Rucker explains the events that led to her change of character and textual contribution, she highlights Wells' role in this process of negotiation:

When Ker mentioned trying to find a character that hid at some point in their life, I thought of Deborah Sampson and the book [. . .] I had read [. . .] about her. I knew it wasn't entirely on the Jewish subject, but I was still really interested in it. [. . .] Sometimes I regret that I brought in the Sampson stuff because I didn't feel like it was jiving with the whole piece. [. . .] And I thought that it sometimes kind of made things difficult. [. . .] It made me question as a performer how much I can just leave it up to the director to figure out. The thing is, [. . .] I didn't feel in the Catskills that my work was progressing. During that time, I felt very confused about my character. I was very excited about the play, but as far as my own work went, I felt that it never really gelled or took off. And Ker seemed a bit . . . concerned [. . .]. But having the time off [. . . after getting back from the Catskills], I thought . . . well I'm going to keep on reading the work of Franz Kafka, [. . .] because I felt that was the big continuing . . . element in the work. Just thinking about [. . .] and trying to understand more about him, I felt that it would position me in the play somehow—that I would understand that role to fill—that it would give me a sense of what I'm traveling toward. (Lee, Fieldwork Notes)

During her exploration of Kafka, Rucker decided to change her character from Sampson to Dora Diamant, Kafka's companion at the time of his death. Thus, Rucker chose to find a character that more closely related to Wells' contribution of literature by Kafka and withdrew the textual material about Sampson from consideration.

Rucker made the choice not to use her original character and texts after her time in the Catskills, as opposed to Wells' determining that for the collective. Wells resisted telling her that she needed to change her character earlier in the process as he sought to empower the performers in that phase of the artistic development. By enabling Rucker to make the choice, he encouraged her to assume a certain amount of artistic control over her own work. Unfortunately, with this decision, he also allowed the company to lose some of its precious developmental time working with a character and material that would not ultimately manifest in production. Wells lends insight into one major challenge of his position in this regard by explaining that "every time you make a piece collaboratively, you are dealing with the ideals and dreams of all of the actors in the piece—who are independently and probably distinctly conceiving of a piece that is about what they want it to be about. No matter how attune they are to the collaborative process—that's human nature" (Lee, Fieldwork Notes).

Beyond influencing the company's process of choosing the textual material for the piece, Rucker's misplaced focus also impacted her process of generating the physical performance material and the subsequent development of the production's basic narrative line. The process of generating performance material involves the development of stylized sequences of physical actions by the individual performers. The director then guides the performers in layering the actions with the textual material that has been chosen. These units ultimately serve as the building blocks from which the director begins the process of devising the emerging narrative line of the show. Wells lends insight into the director's role in this process by explaining: "I think that [. . .] if I just listen hard enough and watch carefully and have enough respect for [. . . the actor's material]—the story will emerge" (Lee, Fieldwork Notes).

The generation of performance material is commonly considered the actor's most substantial and autonomous contribution to the creative development in this type of work. Because the actors independently create the actions for performances, companies such as Number Eleven that are working within this artistic tradition are often labeled "performer-centered" or "actor-centered" (Algan 5). From McClean's perspective, however, this label needs elaboration in Number Eleven's case. He explains: "I would think of it as *performance-centered*. Ker makes the creative decisions. *We don't*. [. . .] We are very creatively involved. But, *generally speaking* that is not where our power is found" (Lee, Fieldwork Notes). Clearly, during the making of *The Prague Visitor*, confusion arose for Number Eleven as to who should take responsibility for making some of the artistic decisions.

While Wells waited for Rucker to assume responsibility for withdrawing the textual and performance material about which she felt strongly, Rucker was simultaneously waiting for Wells to make the same decision. Like McClean, Rucker believed this to fall within Wells' realm of power. She was not trying to avoid responsibility. Rather, she was simply operating from her understanding of the performer's role in this type of work—historically within this artistic tradition, a director maintains most of the control over these types of decisions. Rucker explains that "it's a challenging thing [. . .] to determine *how* to contribute [. . . to the process]" (Lee, Fieldwork Notes).

Rucker's resistance to assuming responsibility also may relate to the environment in which Number Eleven worked in the Catskills. At the artist's retreat, Wells occupied a position of power outside of Number Eleven's work, which may have reinforced Wells' elevated status in Rucker's mind. While in the Catskills, Wells served as a teacher for the physical work in the mornings at NaCl's Performer Training Retreat (see Fig. 26). Number Eleven members

participated in these sessions, just as many of them had several years before at the PRIMUS school (see Fig. 27).

Wells also served as the moderator for a scholarly panel presentation during the Catskill Festival of New Theatre at the end of that summer. This panel addressed a wide array of points concerning alternative performance in North America. Wells posed the presenters with insightful questions and knowledgeably contributed to the discussions throughout the evening (see Fig. 28). All Number Eleven performers were also present for this panel presentation. Thus, Wells' role as the panel's moderator further solidified his position of authority within an environment that involved the performers of Number Eleven (Lee, Fieldwork Notes).

Rucker worked with her texts and generated performance material during the time that Wells maintained not only a position of authority within the company but also within the total environment of NaCl's artist's retreat. The high status granted to Wells in the Catskills coincided with the phase of Number Eleven's work that ideally encourages the performers to assume ultimate creative autonomy. Wells' elevated status and positioning as an expert within this type of work undoubtedly reinforced to Rucker that Wells would know what was best for the production and cut her textual and performance material out of the developmental process if necessary. As a result of this confusion, three months were spent working with material that did not contribute explicitly to the thematic quality of the piece. Yet, from this experience, Rucker also learned that she must inhabit a more assertive and decisive role during the phases of negotiating texts and generating performance material in Number Eleven's work (Rucker in Lee, Fieldwork Notes).

For Number Eleven, the process of finding the narrative line of *The Prague Visitor* was put on hold for several months between the company's summer work in the Catskills and the

continuation of rehearsals in January of 2003. In the meantime, the group managed to secure a small rehearsal space in Toronto that would suffice for the bulk of the remainder of the company's creation process. However, Number Eleven continued to search for an appropriate non-proscenium style venue that offered enough space for audiences to sit comfortably during the run of the performance.

During this time, Number Eleven also began re-exploring its initial work on *The Prague Visitor* and slowly began re-establishing the rhythm of the piece with Rucker's new character and material. Under Wells' leadership, the company also continued to try to solidify the narrative line of the show. Although Rucker's new material lent itself better to the piece, establishing the narrative line of *The Prague Visitor* proved to be a challenging task.

This is not an uncommon struggle in this type of work that relies on textual/physical montage as a primary conduit of meaning. In "The Performer's Montage and the Director's Montage," Barba notes that, when using montage as a technique for developing theatrical work, a "performance is born out of a specific and dramatic relationship between elements and details which, considered in isolation, are neither dramatic nor appear to have anything in common" (158). The process of developing the story of the piece is perhaps the most complicated for the director in that he or she must search for and construct a narrative line from the performance material that the actors have developed. Wells lends insight into his approach to this process:

When I am creating something, it's always specific images or ideas or incidents or even phrases that make me begin to imagine what the piece might feel like. [. . .] I once read this interview with Tom Waits describing the process of songwriting. I may have extrapolated from it or changed it in retrospect to suit my own experience of the creative process, but I think Waits said that for him, the process

of creating was like crawling around the outside of a circus tent. He knew there was something extraordinary going on inside the circus, and he was searching for a hole in the tent to look through. And for me, that's what the process of creation is like. (Magnat 92)

Indeed, the actions and images that the actors create can be so disparate that they often collide with one another rather than fusing into a coherent narrative. Canadian performance scholar and periodic dramaturg for Number Eleven Bruce Barton posits that "collision" might be a strong metaphor for understanding this type of theatrical performance: "On the one hand, [. . . it is] rowdy and unstable, and on the other, [. . .] visceral and substantive" ("Navigating Turbulence" 108). In Number Eleven's work, Wells hopes that this type of collision will ultimately yield a clear enough narrative to communicate something coherent and simultaneously remain open enough to allow for an audience member's personal and individualized connection to the action.

Although Wells has never intended for every audience member to interpret *The Prague Visitor* in exactly the same way, he does believe it to be important that the audience members leave the theatre with some type of common idea as to the story of the piece. As Barton notes:

Wells' primary concern, from the very earliest stages of development, is what he calls "story." Indeed, the director has asserted that story is the only objective that can justify not only Number Eleven's creative process, but the act of making theatre itself. [. . .] Wells suggests that Number Eleven's compositional approach amounts ultimately to a search for the "best" story to be "discovered" within the particular conditions of a specific creative project. ("Navigating Turbulence" 111)

As Wells searches for the story, he makes decisions as to which actor-generated performance materials stay in the production. Whereas generating the physical actions historically constitutes the performer's most autonomous artistic contribution, the director typically assumes ultimate authority in the artistic approach to solidifying the narrative line of the piece. However, during this process is precisely where Wells seeks to allow for more contribution by the actors in Number Eleven.

Aware of Wells' desires, the performers in Number Eleven attempt to become more active in their input to the development of a narrative line, while they are simultaneously attempting to allow Wells to maintain the integrity of his position as the director of *The Prague Visitor*. Although Wells has initiated this departure from the norm within this artistic tradition, he also struggles with finding ways to redefine his position during the phase of solidifying the narrative line of the piece. Grimes explains how Wells' choices impacted this phase of Number Eleven's rehearsal period:

In the beginning, it was quite difficult because we would be working very collectively and then decisions would get made and then Ker would change them. [. . .] This was frustrating and a bit difficult because—are we a collective, or are we not? Ker was struggling with his role—not claiming his job, but then sometimes acting as if he had that job. So, that was difficult and I think we've had some problems because of that and we've worked through those issues. [. . .] I think we've gotten clearer about this in the last while. [. . .] There is a lot of text that got changed as we went along. Like Ker's idea was this, but it changed as things went along through the work. And that's not something necessarily that Ker has decided on. He has okayed [these changes], but there seem to be things

more actively communicated by the actors like “this does not make sense to me.”

(Lee, Fieldwork Notes)

Through this period of Number Eleven’s working process, the director and the performers seem to be moving from a place of confusion to negotiating a more equality-based creative environment for their group.

Although Number Eleven made great strides in defining the company’s effective working dynamics and developing a more understandable narrative line during this time, Number Eleven still faced the practical challenge of locating a suitable space to premiere *The Prague Visitor* in Toronto. After a great deal of searching, Number Eleven finally secured a section of an old warehouse at 376 Dufferin Street (see Fig. 29). After about six weeks of rehearsing *The Prague Visitor* in a small studio, the company moved into the warehouse and faced new challenges that involved the space. Cluttered with old machinery and items that appeared to have been stored for many years, the warehouse posed many problems. Yet the company remained determined to make the situation work. The artists were required simultaneously to continue to try to finalize the narrative line of the production, refine the piece, and adapt the warehouse into an acceptable space for performance in only a three-week time span (Wells, E-mail to the Author). The artists continued to persevere in the creative process to the best of their abilities. During the first week of my observations in Toronto, Number Eleven managed to work creatively during only about half of its originally scheduled rehearsal time, while the artists spent the remainder of the time working on the space. Amid all of the problems with the warehouse, the members of Number Eleven somehow managed to maintain an atmosphere of lightness during the creative work (Lee, Fieldwork Notes).

The humor and levity that characterizes Number Eleven's artistic interactions are points that distinguish this company's approach to creation from that of others working within this artistic tradition. Quite often, groups working in this way exude a seriousness in their approaches to rehearsal that borders on religiosity. For some members of Number Eleven, the levity of the company's rehearsals is one characteristic that appeals to them about this particular grouping of artists (Rucker in Lee, Fieldwork Notes). However, others are still negotiating comfort levels with this departure from the norm within this type of work. For example, Jane Wells, who first worked administratively and trained with PRIMUS, explains her position within the company in this regard:

My first experiences in being what I call [. . .] "in the room" were with PRIMUS. And it was lovely. You would come in the morning and it wasn't hushed, but it was quiet and respectful and people would be doing their work or someone was talking. But it was never boisterous—it always felt to me a little bit like church in this way. And generally the work was *very focused*. [. . .] I think in Number Eleven I'm the one who is most drawn to that type of pseudo *religious experience*. That's a more comfortable place for me and I feel like sometimes there's too much levity [in Number Eleven's rehearsals]. And I get frustrated, but you can't [. . .] make *your way be* the way because there are always beautiful sides to that levity, too. There are intense levels of affection. And [. . .] when something's built with both respect and humor or lightness or joy . . . you know [. . .] it really is underneath everything. (Lee, Fieldwork Notes)

The members of Number Eleven must constantly negotiate what they consider to be acceptable behavior in rehearsal (Grimes in Lee, Fieldwork Notes). All of the artists concede that an

environment in which jokes and laughing frequently occur may cause unnecessary distractions within the work. However, the lightness during rehearsals also seems to create an atmosphere in which Number Eleven performers feel more comfortable contributing to the creative process (Lee, Fieldwork Notes).

For instance, during the first week of the group's rehearsals in the warehouse, Number Eleven performers seemed eager to aid in the developmental process during the company's sporadic rehearsal time. The narrative line of the piece had begun to emerge, but significant progress still needed to be made in this area. Eager to help Wells and experimenting with their newly embraced power within this phase of work, performers offered opinions and suggestions with energy and excitement. In an effort to maintain an efficient working process, the performers began raising their hands when they had ideas that might aid in the development of the narrative line. Although these actions suggest the relationships of students-teacher (which are relationships that pose certain ingrained power dynamics in themselves), Wells seemed pleased with the performers' active contributions to the rehearsal periods.

As the group experimented with the placement of different scenes, McClean raised his hand and proceeded to over-emphasize the child-like nature of the action. Bouncing up and down with his hand in the air, he evoked the image of a school-boy desperate to be chosen by the teacher, as he believes that he possesses the definitive "right" answer to a problem. The company erupted in laughter at McClean's determination to be heard and his adolescent enthusiasm. McClean offered his suggestion for a scene's placement. Still smiling and joking about the incident, the performers proceeded to their respective positions to experiment with this new idea (Lee, Fieldwork Notes).

As opening night crept closer, however, the levity in the company's rehearsals began to wane. The artists still sought to establish a more solid narrative progression in the piece. With one week left before an audience would view the show, the atmosphere in the room became weighty and incredibly intense. Wells began to ask the performers to try a number of different shifts that might aid in communicating the story to the audience. A song was completely changed, lines were added, and parts of scenes were cut. The actors stopped contributing to the creative work as much and seemed desperate for Wells to assume complete responsibility for the show.

For instance, when discussing the audience's ability to recognize the identity of a character within the play's action, Wells asked for suggestions that might lend clarification to the scene. After a long silence and out of desperation, Rucker explained that she had included information about the character's background in the program, so perhaps the group need not worry about the clarification within performance. No one offered comments either in favor of Rucker's suggestion or against it. Several more uncomfortably silent minutes passed in which the actors waited for Wells to decide how to approach the problem. Finally, Wells had the performers begin the scene again and offered his own suggestions as to how the performers might illuminate the character's identity through the action (Lee, Fieldwork Notes).

As the artists' levity during rehearsals subsided and the group began to feel the pressure of opening *The Prague Visitor*, the level of input that the actors contributed to the creative process plummeted. Faced with the fear of not being prepared for opening night, each of the performers reverted back to their comfortable and familiar roles in the creative process. As Wells recalls, the moment in rehearsal when he asked for suggestions about what might clarify the nuances of a character "made them terrified. They needed to believe that I knew exactly

what was going to happen next” (Lee, Fieldwork Notes). Thus, Wells has continued to determine for himself points in the process where he must assume ultimate authority for the good of the show.

In the end, Number Eleven could not overcome one major practical challenge that it faced regarding the opening of the show. After efforts at insulating the space and the placement of small space heaters throughout the area, Wells finally recognized the impossibility of properly heating the old warehouse in time for the opening. A few days before the play’s scheduled premiere, Wells called a meeting and shared with the performers his concerns about heating the space and simultaneously finishing the process of refining the performance in time for the scheduled opening. He asked the company members for suggestions as he explained that he felt “rattled” and would prefer not to make this decision by himself. The performers remained silent for several minutes and stared at Wells. Eventually, an actor began to propose an idea and the other performers offered suggestions as well. Although the actors had good ideas, too many opinions were being shared at once to be useful in problem solving.

After a period of discussion among the company members, it became clear that they were not going to come to a unified solution. Wells stopped the discussion abruptly and made an unpopular decision: the show would be postponed. As a result, my final responsibility for this period of fieldwork was two-fold: composing a sign indicating that the opening of the show was to be postponed due to heating problems and consoling the severely disappointed company members (Lee, Fieldwork Notes).

The Prague Visitor opened on March 19, 2003, one week after its originally planned premiere. Due to pre-arranged obligations and my desire to avoid intruding on the extra week of rehearsal that the company gained by postponing the premiere, I left Toronto per my original

itinerary on the day after the play was originally scheduled to open. Eager to maintain my knowledge of the artists' progress, I remained in close contact with the company members for the next few weeks and traveled back to Toronto at the end of the run of the show to view the final performance. As in the rehearsals that I observed, I found the singing and physical actions in this presentation of the piece strong, moving, precise, and impressive (see Fig. 31). Upon seeing this performance, I also noticed that significant moments had changed during the extra week of rehearsals that I did not witness.

In the 2003 production of *The Prague Visitor*, a North American young man known as "A." travels to work in the Central Registry of Prague after receiving an unsigned letter from someone identified only as *The Registrar*. The young man begins to search for the Central Registry and explore the city. Along the way he meets a cast of vivid and mysterious characters that lead him through a ritualistic journey into their strange "other" world (see Fig. 31). Singing, dancing, and including the young man as a participant in high energy scenes, the strangers enact stories that relate to their lives and the city. The stories become progressively darker throughout the play. The viewer is left to ponder whether A. had simply encountered a strange collection of characters in Prague, or if he had died, and his experience had ushered him into an afterlife of some sort (see Fig. 32).

During rehearsals for *The Prague Visitor*, the show seemed to rely on what performance scholar Virginie Magnat calls "the spectators' freedom to view [. . . the] piece through the prism of a multifarious network of personal associations. [. . . So] there are necessarily as many interpretations of *The Prague Visitor* as there are audience members at any given performance" (88). As a viewer who observed several weeks of *The Prague Visitor's* developmental process, I found that the final performance of this run in Toronto attempted to maintain this open quality

while also offering a clearer storyline. The shifts that the company made within *The Prague Visitor* during the extra week of rehearsal revealed the complexities of the play's action in a more accessible way than I had previously witnessed.

In speaking with Wells after the final performance, I shared with him my observations regarding the piece. He seemed pleased with my assessment yet quickly added that he still did not feel that the company had finished the show. "I think this performance is far more complex than anything I have made before," he explained. "For me, personally, it revealed how long it takes to make the kind of thing that I want to make, allow it to mature, and emerge in some way. At differing times, I felt like the show revealed our greatest strengths and greatest weaknesses" (Lee, Fieldwork Notes). From Wells' perspective, the piece still felt fragmentary at times, and he believed that additional work might help the flow of the story.

When I spoke with the other members of the company, each of them individually expressed sentiments similar to those of Wells' regarding the production. The artists agreed that the piece felt unfinished and that some additional action needed to be added to further clarify the play's narrative. Explaining her opinions about the structure of *The Prague Visitor*, Rucker admitted:

I sometimes was afraid that the audience would feel a little confused because I was kind of confused. And I've done the play many many times. I didn't really know how an audience would *read* it. I think that the narrative hasn't totally solidified yet and it is still "jigsawpuzzley" a bit. And it's not a failing in my confidence in Ker. I just felt like the process had so many challenges and that we made such an observed art form—such a remarkably new form of narrative. Almost my worst fear was that it would seem that [. . . we] were presenting

something confusing and somehow it represents this avant-garde art that's merely confusing. I *feared* that. (Lee, Fieldwork Notes)

Unfortunately, Rucker's greatest fear manifested itself in the popular press' critical reviews of *The Prague Visitor*.

To the company's shock and disappointment, the reviews in Toronto ranged from negative to offensive. Although some reviewers praised the physical and vocal work of the performers (e.g., Kaplan), cruel and superficial descriptions of the production permeated the bulk of these written critiques. For example, the reviewer from *eye Weekly* claimed that "*The Prague Visitor* is indeed a Kafkaesque experience, a waking nightmare of a performance devoid of ostensible meaning or direction." He then carelessly continued by equating the episodes of the performance to those in a *Saturday Night Live* skit (Balzer). These offensive critiques, however, did partially serve as instigation for an important meeting regarding the troupe's future that the company conducted after the closing of *The Prague Visitor*.

Renewed Determination

The day after the final performance of *The Prague Visitor*, Wells asked the company members to gather to discuss the challenges and accomplishments they associated with the recent run of the show. Wells labeled this meeting a "postmortem" (Lee, Fieldwork Notes), a reference indicating an analysis of a show that has died. Yet, perhaps it was not the show that died but rather the collective frustration of the company that resulted from the struggles within the process of creation and the poor reviews of the production.

What came out of this meeting was more important for the sustained survival and artistic growth of the company than receiving positive critical reviews from the popular press. The company members collectively decided that they felt that the piece was unfinished and

committed to finding a way to continue refining the show before embarking on a tour the next year. The group honestly discussed the aesthetic of their work and communicated about their working processes with one another. They also formulated goals to prompt their continued growth as theatre practitioners working in this way.

The Prague Visitor was only the second show created by the collective of Number Eleven. The beginning stages of the company's first production, *Icaria*, took place at the PRIMUS school under Wells' role as a teacher. Thus, significant negotiations for more equality-based power dynamics within rehearsals were not possible during *Icaria*. Rather, Wells' position in PRIMUS as an established performer determined his ultimate authority for him within that process. The struggles of Number Eleven in this regard during the making of *The Prague Visitor* thus have functioned as a necessary step in the artists' collective journey to becoming a more stable and productive theatre company.

Number Eleven is negotiating its economic viability and artistic advancement in large part by relying on Wells' leadership. As exemplified in the making of *The Prague Visitor*, the members of the company must refine this process in order to ensure long-term survival as a nonprofit alternative group in North America. The time lost during the rehearsal process of *The Prague Visitor* as a result of the confusion between Wells and Rucker extended the company's rehearsal process. As a result, Number Eleven spent a great deal more money for rental space. The members of Number Eleven, however, recognize this need to continue evolving and possess a collective determination that will continue to be integral in the company's future successes. In fact, when recalling the "postmortem," Wells reflects on the resilience and bright future of the group as he smiles faintly, sighs, and says with a renewed determination: "That old maxim came out . . . what doesn't kill you only makes you stronger" (Lee, Fieldwork Notes).

NOTES

¹ All verbal quotations in this chapter derive from compiled fieldwork notes and appear with the artists' permission.

² Only Number Eleven's director Ker Wells possesses membership in the Canadian Actor's Equity Association via past professional performance work. Wells told me that in many ways he has come to view this association as a burden given the fluctuating finances of Number Eleven and frequent need for the artists to engage in exceptionally long rehearsal periods (Lee, Fieldwork Notes).

³ For the remainder of this chapter, I will refer to Ker Wells as *Wells* and use both first and last name to refer to his sister, Jane Wells.

⁴ For an interesting perspective on the development of Canadian alternative theatre see Filewod, "Naming the Movement" and Filewod, *Performing Canada*.

⁵ During my fieldwork with Number Eleven, I participated in two workshops offered by the company in Toronto. I took one day-long workshop with the group and one workshop that took place over a period of three days.

⁶ I reference all monetary amounts in this chapter in terms of the Canadian dollar.

⁷ The members of Number Eleven have recently considered changing all of their shows to "pwyc." The group often experiences greater financial gain at those performances, as individual supporters at those shows frequently donate more money than the standard ticket price.

⁸ Exceptions to this practice are often made in cases of particularly experienced performers that are capable of devising their own training or for performers working outside of the context of a group.

⁹ NaCl's director Brad Krumholz developed "The Enneagram" as a training exercise for nine participants. The exercise requires the group to stand in a pre-specified, nine-point pattern and trade places at an orchestrated, fast, rhythmic pace.

¹⁰ For many years, Grotowski has been referred to as a *guru* for his theatrical and spiritual expertise and endeavors. For more on the perception of Grotowski as *guru*, see Filipowicz.

¹¹ When describing the arrangement that Number Eleven made with NaCl, Jane Wells uses the term "barter" in the traditional sense. However, her choice of words reflects the influence of the work of Odin Teatret. Odin uses the concept of "barter" as an integral part of the company's artistic work. As Erik Exe Christoffersen notes, in Odin's work "barter is an exchange between different cultures in the form of dance, music, song and ritual, training and performances" (62).

CHAPTER V. CONCLUSION:

SALIENT NEGOTIATIONS

Nonprofit alternative theatre groups often focus on the development of new forms of artistic communication through experimentation. Historically, these types of groups have consistently experimented with tactics to negotiate the tension between artistic development and fiscal stability as well. The practical challenges that arise for these types of groups in a contemporary context continue to encourage the development of specific approaches to working that appropriately coincide with the current economic and cultural climate of North America. Troupes such as North American Cultural Laboratory (NaCl) and Number Eleven Theatre experience varying degrees of artistic and fiscal success when engaging in these efforts. The tactics that these new companies have used to balance economic stability and artistic integrity still, at times, promote one of these elements over the other, reinforcing the need for additional approaches to be developed if the companies wish to truly achieve working balances.

Nevertheless, NaCl and Number Eleven's efforts have, thus far, allowed the members to continue working as a theatre company in North America. There is something beautiful about these companies. There is something beautiful in the groups' commitment to building upon the artistic tradition of Jerzy Grotowski in a contemporary context. There is something beautiful in the precision and power of the companies' training. There is something beautiful in the troupes' dedication to the crafts of performance. And there is something beautiful in their determinations to grow and flourish as nonprofit alternative theatre companies despite overwhelming obstacles.

This study serves the important purpose of providing practical information and scholarly analysis of specific practices within company structures that contribute to determining how nonprofit alternative theatre groups use strategies to survive that simultaneously feed the pursuit

of achieving the members' artistic visions. Employing an ethnographic approach to collect my data, I have engaged in my study by researching the artistic work and practical negotiations of NaCl and Number Eleven as North American nonprofit alternative theatre companies from broad perspectives.¹ Using a grounded-theory method to analyze the data, I have determined that negotiating ways to survive within the financially driven theatre culture of North America without compromising the depth of the companies' creative processes remains the most prevalent and common goal of these artists. This desire has affected the practical choices that the members of these new companies have made and has prompted each group to engage in multiple survival strategies, developing and depending on one specific tactic most fully to ensure continued existence and artistic refinement. My data suggests that NaCl relies most heavily on the orchestration of community-based events to promote the company's survival and advance the members' artistic crafts, and Number Eleven primarily depends on an experienced leader to guide them toward stability and creativity.

The members of NaCl and Number Eleven's need to refine their artistic crafts while concurrently ensuring their continued existences remains a common goal among nonprofit theatre companies. The challenges of this quest are exacerbated during the first several years of companies' existences, suggesting the importance of developing specific tactics that will promote long-term survival and enhanced stability for newer groups such as NaCl and Number Eleven. Practical negotiations and artistic efforts remain fluid elements in these troupes' struggles to survive, bleeding into all aspects of the companies' work. In this final chapter of my study regarding NaCl's and Number Eleven's efforts at negotiating the tension between economic viability and artistic advancement, I synthesize the implications of my analysis, discuss the limitations of my project, and offer the reader suggestions for future research.

Implications of the Study

As a result of working within the Grotowskian artistic tradition, NaCl and Number Eleven approach their crafts in similar ways through a common emphasis on engaging in intensive long-term performer training and devising original physically based montaged productions. Partly from the practical influence of the Grotowskian artistic tradition, the groups also possess several similar strategies for survival. The major differences between the two companies' survival tactics derive from the groups' varying working structures, locations, and economic conditions. Since both NaCl and Number Eleven heavily rely on their artistic tradition to balance economic viability and artistic advancement, evidence suggests that certain practices in this heritage deem this association a prevalent strategy for survival in itself for both groups. The artistic tradition has been passed on to them through practical interactions with Grotowski's protégé, Eugenio Barba, and/or through the members of Barba's company, Odin Teatret. The most direct influence of this artistic tradition on the members of NaCl and Number Eleven derives from the work of one-time Odin Teatret performer, Richard Fowler, in his directorial efforts with the Canadian theatre company, PRIMUS. Whether the survival tactics were specifically declared or simply implied during these practical interactions, the actions of NaCl and Number Eleven suggest that this tradition often operates upon premises that strive to promote a company's artistic, fiscal, and professional advancement amid challenging circumstances. However, the historical practices of this artistic tradition also, at times, hinder NaCl and Number Eleven's survival efforts. The members of these companies realize that to truly maintain this historical tradition in a contemporary North American context is impossible. Rather, they seek to work under the influence of the Grotowskian tradition and build upon this

legacy in ways that prompt continued experimentation and new artistic approaches in the context in which the companies exist.

The points where NaCl and Number Eleven's artistic traditions serve to advance and/or prohibit the companies' continued contemporary quests for survival become most clear when comparing the practices of these companies with the tactics for negotiating economic viability and artistic advancement discussed in the existing literature (as reviewed on pages 5-17 of the present study). Published sources offer a number of basic suggestions for accomplishing survivability and artistic refinement in nonprofit theatre companies. These tactics include: firmly identifying and categorizing a company's work, applying for grant funding, working with a long-term ensemble, evaluating the need for administrative staff, focusing on the uniqueness of the live theatre experience for viewers, embracing financial constraints as creative opportunities, maintaining idealism within a company's structure, supporting ongoing training endeavors, developing a reliable audience base within a specified community, sharing work with other artists, and creating conditions for collaborative efforts and alliances between companies. NaCl and Number Eleven have employed these survival tactics with varying degrees of success, indicating the overwhelming challenges that North American nonprofit alternative theatre companies face.

Both groups have specifically declared the artistic tradition in which they work as a method of identification within the theatre culture of North America. NaCl and Number Eleven's references to working within a Grotowskian artistic tradition, indeed situate the companies' work for other theatre practitioners with knowledge of Grotowski's efforts. Yet, for general audience members, references to the Grotowskian artistic tradition mean little. Furthermore, Barba's work is often unknown to many theatre practitioners and most audience

members in North America. Thus, claims to Barba's influence do little for situating NaCl and Number Eleven's efforts in the United States and Canada. For example, director of Number Eleven, Ker Wells, recalls his past ignorance of Barba's work and aptly reflects the limited knowledge of many North American theatre practitioners in this regard:

In my second year at the National Theatre School, this guy came along, Richard Fowler. We heard that he was coming and that we were going to do *Grotowski* work with him. I'd heard the name *Grotowski* before, and I remember thinking it had some sort of primal scream therapy association—like we were going to be howling and rolling around on the floor—which was obviously a very naïve *generalization*. I had still *heard* of him, though. But, the interesting thing was that when we heard that Richard Fowler came from the Odin—this theatre in Denmark where Eugenio Barba was working . . . the interesting thing is that it meant *nothing* to us. We had never heard of Barba or Odin before. [. . .] We had no idea. (Lee, Fieldwork Notes)

Little has changed since Wells' initial experience at the National Theatre School in 1986 regarding Barba's recognition in North America. The relative lack of new work produced by Barba in recent years further exacerbates Odin Teatret's relatively unknown status in the United States and Canada. In fact, several of the members of NaCl and Number Eleven regularly refer to Odin Teatret as a "museum" (e.g., Wells and Jane Wells in Lee, Fieldwork Notes). The obscurity of Odin Teatret in North America makes NaCl and Number Eleven's identification with such work a less successful survival tactic.

NaCl and Number Eleven's efforts in using identification as a strategy for survival, then, have produced both benefits and problems for the nonprofit groups. The act of identification can

serve to attract other artists with similar goals to these companies' productions and events, which offers the groups financial and emotional benefits. Yet, the success of this type of identification for survivability relies on the public's respect and accurate knowledge of the tradition or movement with which the company aligns itself. Otherwise, the act of identification can produce misunderstandings of a theatre company's artistic vision.

Identification with the Grotowskian artistic tradition has also served as a primary tactic employed by NaCl and Number Eleven for obtaining grant funding, though this practice has not always proved successful. NaCl performer, Tannis Kowalchuk, recalls a meeting with a grant awarding association and articulates the complexities that NaCl has experienced in using their artistic tradition as a primary method of gaining funding:

[We] met with the director of the theatre program of the New York State Council on the Arts. We went to a diner [. . .] to discuss our company's application for funding—our third attempt, having been denied twice before. The conversation came around to our history and [. . .] tradition. [. . .] I struggled to explain our genre and heritage by mentioning Grotowski, who is very famous here, and Barba, who is rather unknown [. . . here]. We spoke about members who make the company a priority, even to the point of turning down other work. The director was surprised: "Nobody does that—not in New York. ("The Passion According to NaCl" 14)

In addition to the complexities associated with using NaCl's artistic tradition as a means of obtaining grant funding, another challenge the group faces in the United States is competition with an overwhelming number of other nonprofit theatre companies seeking the same monetary awards. This confirms that grant funding cannot serve as significant a survival strategy for

nonprofit theatre groups in the United States as it might in Canada. Kowalchuk explains the important benefits that grant money produced in her previous work with PRIMUS in tandem with the Canadian governmental structure, thereby offering an important contrast to the dynamics of similar companies in the United States:

[In PRIMUS] we performed and taught across Canada, in the USA, and even Italy, making small but intense revolutions in the spaces that we inhabited. We were becoming well known across Canada, we had many students, and we were also funded by our federal and provincial governments. This funding provided us with enough money to live on so that we, the six company members did not work other jobs. We also did not pay for health care insurance because everyone in Canada has the right to access doctors and hospitals at no cost. Our rents in Winnipeg were very low, and even though all of us had gone to good Universities and conservatories, they are generally more affordable, so this did not put us in any kind of impossible student loan debt. (“12 Actions” 1)

Indeed, governmental subsidies for companies in Canada are much more readily available than in the United States, and specific economic programs aid the members of Canadian nonprofit theatre companies in ways that American artists do not experience. Even in the face of these enhanced challenges, however, NaCl has been successful in obtaining a number of smaller grants that have substantially aided the company’s survival and continued artistic experimentations in the United States. This achievement suggests that grant money provides a necessary supplement to other tactics developed by American nonprofit alternative theatre groups. No matter how small the amount, grant money can compliment other money-making strategies and aid the troupes in expanding the scope of their artistic investigations.

Number Eleven, on the other hand, could not produce performances in Toronto without significant grant funding. Particularly as a new group, Number Eleven has come to rely on this outside money heavily to conduct its work in the expensive environment of Toronto. Number Eleven's incorporated status offers them enhanced possibilities to receive more of this funding. Yet, grant money has still not enabled Number Eleven to conduct its work on a regular basis. This deficiency in the company highlights the vital need to develop additional survival tactics for marginalized companies. Even PRIMUS' substantial governmental support did not allow the company to rely solely on this funding during its existence, as exemplified in the group's offering of the 1997 symposium, "Survivors of the Ice Age," which outlined the depths of the fiscal challenges faced by nonprofit groups. Thus, applying for governmental grant money is an absolute necessity for the success of alternative theatre companies in Canada such as Number Eleven, but theatre practitioners wishing to establish continuous artistic interaction with one another in a long-term, established structure must negotiate additional ways to balance economic viability and artistic advancement.

NaCl and Number Eleven's financial struggles as newer companies deem the debate found in the existing literature regarding an evaluation of the need for administrative staff inapplicable to their situations. Neither NaCl nor Number Eleven have funds that allow them to pay any additional administrative staff members. The groups are not stable enough at this point to entertain the idea of responsibly employing additional workers outside of the artistic process. Yet, even if the groups were more financially secure, the members' actions suggest that they would choose to remain in ultimate control of their own work, including maintaining authority over all facets of the companies' business negotiations. This approach reflects the practices of PRIMUS and the historical approach of Odin Teatret. Even though Barba currently employs

administrative staff members that work with the artists on company marketing and organization, Odin only experienced this luxury after functioning successfully for many years.

As the sole administrators of NaCl, director Brad Krumholz and actor Tannis Kowalchuk, have been more successful in publicizing and producing their own work than the members of Number Eleven. NaCl maintains offices in Brooklyn and Highland Lake, New York. These established locations encourage patrons to perceive NaCl as a stable and successful theatre company, which ultimately enhances the company's professional image.

Given Number Eleven's lack of a permanent theatre home, the members' inability to work together on a full-time basis and the group's challenging financial circumstances, the company chooses to distribute the administrative duties equally among the artists. This, indeed, seems the most practical option for the group as it currently operates. However, the time constraints placed on the members for business tasks take away from rehearsals and artistic development. This problematic point is compounded further by each member of Number Eleven spending time at an additional job in order to generate personal financial income.

All of NaCl and Number Eleven's efforts at negotiating survival reflect the members' desires' to exist as long-term ensembles. Working with a group of like-minded artists committed to continued experimentation remains a central element within the Grotowskian artistic tradition. Grotowski explains that

creativity is [. . .] to discover that which you don't know. This is the key reason why companies are needed. They provide the possibility of renewing artistic discoveries. In the work of a theatre group, a specific continuity is necessary: through each of the successive plays, over a long period of time, with the possibility for an actor to pass from one type of role to another. [. . .] There are

many elements related to craft that need long term work. And this is possible only if the company exists. (“From the Theatre Company to Art as Vehicle” 117-118)

Although Grotowski focuses on the artistic benefits of working with a long-term ensemble, NaCl and Number Eleven also seek to use this tactic to ensure the companies’ continued existences when facing practical challenges. NaCl’s desire to establish a permanent long-term ensemble for artistic and economic growth is clearly reflected in “NaCl’s Ensemble Manifesto” (2001). Yet Krumholz and Kowalchuk have not yet been able to establish this type of expanded group, which has caused them to re-evaluate this goal. Literature suggests that a larger ensemble will ultimately prove more beneficial for ensuring economic stability. However, NaCl’s inability to pay any other members regular salaries has been one major reason that Krumholz and Kowalchuk have not been able to realize their ideal vision of a larger company.

In contrast, Number Eleven inherently possesses the distinctive artistic advantages of an expanded ensemble, given the number of members in the company. The group’s practical inability to work with one another on a continuous basis, however, lessens the artistic and fiscal effectiveness of this balancing strategy. Further, the financial and emotional challenges that the artists face as alternative theatre practitioners in North America exacerbate the possibility that one or more of the artists might eventually choose to leave the group. This is a problem that NaCl does not readily face, given that the two members of the company are committed to an ongoing relationship. Krumholz and Kowalchuk’s marriage at the very least implies a lifetime commitment to one another, which creates conditions that promote a stable, long-term working environment for the two collaborators.

Although a larger, ongoing group might eventually prove fiscally and artistically fruitful for nonprofit theatre companies, the immediate, practical challenges of recruiting members and negotiating dynamics that will allow for continuous professional interaction can prove impossible for struggling new companies. Therefore, this survival strategy may be impossible to fully and successfully employ until newer groups have established themselves more concretely.

An emphasis on the uniqueness of the live theatrical experience is also prevalent in NaCl and Number Eleven's artistic approaches. This is an element that sources claim can also promote economic success for nonprofit theatre companies struggling to compete with a plethora of other entertainment options available to paying audience members. From Grotowski's beginning phases of work, he posited that the live nature of theatre can promote an artistic impact in ways that film and television cannot. Grotowski's solution to highlighting the live theatrical experience largely relied on presenting a "poor" theatre that focused on the actors' heightened physical and vocal work, as opposed to a "rich" theatre that emphasized technological spectacle that can be manipulated more successfully in other mediums. According to Grotowski, approaching theatrical work in this way can create conditions for a "communion" to arise between the performers and audience members ("Towards a Poor Theatre" 30).

Working under a Grotowskian influence, NaCl and Number Eleven consistently focus on the impact that live, abstract, episodic, movement-based narratives can have on the audiences at their productions. Relying on a physically based approach to devise original productions rather than using linear, pre-written texts for performances allows NaCl and Number Eleven to emphasize the heightened realities of the live human beings in the environment and focus on developing a connection with the audience. In short, the members of NaCl and Number Eleven choose to forego realistic representations that can be more successfully negotiated in other

mediums, in favor of producing pieces upon which audience members can layer their own unique interpretations.

NaCl and Number Eleven have experienced problems in employing this strategy as inherent in their artistic tradition. The weaknesses can be documented in both groups' experiences with unsatisfied audience members. Although these companies seek to offer a theatrical experience open to multiple understandings, they also strive to present some sort of understandable, basic narrative that audience members can use to form their interpretations. Number Eleven performer, Alex McClean, recalls a conversation with Wells that explains this goal:

I think a basic idea of the story is really important for the audience. Ker once put it in relation to *Icaria* . . . my character in *Icaria* kills himself—and . . . Ker once said, “If you come away from the show not knowing why he killed himself—then that’s okay, but if you don’t realize he killed himself—that’s a problem.” I think, in general, there’s one narrative through-line that needs to be there . . . hopefully there’s room for the audience to also have their own interpretation too . . . and to find their own *secret* in the piece. (Lee, Fieldwork Notes)

In my observations of NaCl and Number Eleven’s work, the often indecipherable narratives in the productions proved most problematic for me, which I attribute to lack of development within the characters’ motivations and relationships onstage. The resistance of the New York State Council on the Arts to fund the tour of NaCl’s outdoor production, *Invisible Neighborhood*, and the critics’ negative responses to Number Eleven’s presentation of *The Prague Visitor* corroborate my determinations. Thus, for the nonprofit theatre company to successfully use the survival tactic of focusing on a live theatrical experience by presenting abstract productions,

evidence suggests that substantial work must be done in relation to the units that establish a decipherable narrative base.

Moreover, the impetus for Grotowski's focus on a "poor" theatre was not only artistic. The Polish Laboratory Theatre did not possess finances to produce expensive productions that relied on technology. Therefore, it is also firmly present in NaCl and Number Eleven's artistic heritage to embrace financial constraints as opportunities for enhanced creativity in productions. Number Eleven performer, Jane Wells, explains the conflicting tensions that can arise for nonprofit artists who use this survival tactic:

If I had one dream for Number Eleven, it would honestly be to have more money.
[. . .] But I think a *little* desperation is good in a weird way. I think being cautious and making decisions . . . I think the whole necessity—the *aspect of necessity* when it is won by financial limitations, well, I find it is inspiring at times. I'd like to get paid more. I'd like to worry less about money, but I also like . . . I like the fact that you can't just *buy* what you want. But, I have to admit, I would like it to be a little bit less *hard work* to finance our pieces as a company.
(Lee, Fieldwork Notes)

Indeed, financial limitations can promote creative approaches to solving practical challenges, which can, in turn, encourage new, exciting work from nonprofit alternative theatre groups. However, as also exemplified in Jane Wells' commentary, there are most certainly times that the financial challenges of existing as marginalized companies weigh heavily on these artists. This burden can produce stress that can, consequently, impede the creative process, indicating the challenges of employing this survival tactic.

Yet, the members of NaCl and Number Eleven both strive to keep an idealistic outlook in the face of economic and artistic challenges. This is a characteristic that the companies have gleaned from the influence of PRIMUS. The artists at “Survivors of the Ice Age” repeatedly emphasized the necessity of a positive and determined outlook when negotiating challenges. Faced with the current conditions of operating a theatre company in North America, however, complexities continually arise in NaCl and Number Eleven’s efforts at practically employing this strategy.

NaCl’s continued attempts at acquiring additional members throughout the company’s existence imply Krumholz and Kowalchuk’s idealism. NaCl’s recent decision to forgo the search for new members after several failed attempts indicates a wane in this commitment. Yet, the orchestration of community-based events that can offer NaCl some of the benefits of an expanded ensemble reflects Krumholz and Kowalchuk’s efforts to move the company forward, despite the struggles they have experienced in expanding the group; Krumholz and Kowalchuk remain resolute that success can ultimately be achieved, in spite of the specific challenges they face as a company.

Number Eleven’s incorporation of idealism into the company’s ethos has been balanced by the members’ learned perspectives regarding their working environment. Number Eleven’s decision to postpone the opening performance of *The Prague Visitor* suggests a sense of idealism coupled with a realistic outlook that ultimately aids the company’s efforts at developing a reputation as dedicated, talented, and responsible artists. The impetus for the delayed opening derived from the practical challenges of heating the only space the group could afford—the old warehouse on Dufferin Street. The extra time that the group gained by making this difficult

decision, however, also allowed the company to make strides in establishing a slightly clearer narrative base for *The Prague Visitor* before the piece's public premiere.

Thus, idealism in itself may not ensure survival for nonprofit alternative companies in the tumultuous North American theatre culture. Yet, invoking an idealistic outlook in tandem with a certain sense of realistic perspective remains an integral component for continued existence. This overarching attitude also allows the members of NaCl and Number Eleven to negotiate the challenges of employing their most salient survival strategies.

NaCl's focus on orchestrating community-based events in New York is in direct response to the company's inability to recruit additional long-term members; the artists' need for enhanced economic stability, artistic development, and emotional support drives them to develop events that partially compensate for these missing elements within the company's structure. The development of these events indicates NaCl's efforts at incorporating several survival tactics suggested in the existing literature: supporting ongoing training endeavors, developing a reliable audience base within a specified community, and sharing work with other artists.

Moreover, Number Eleven's practice of depending on a leader in Toronto is rooted in the different experience levels between the director and the remainder of the group; faced with overwhelming creative and economic challenges, the performers strive to put their survival and artistic advancement in the hands of an experienced director. Thus, Number Eleven focuses on developing one primary survival strategy offered in the existing literature: trusting the established director as a leader.

That NaCl and Number Eleven's most salient survival strategies mimic some of the tactics for survival and artistic refinement suggested for North American alternative theatre companies at "Survivors of the Ice Age" is not surprising. Representatives from both groups

attended this symposium, and the companies have been significantly affected by the information offered at the event. Furthermore, Kowalchuk and Wells' lengthy memberships in PRIMUS taught them a number of practical ways to balance economic viability and artistic integrity, which has most certainly influenced NaCl's approach to orchestrating community-based events and Number Eleven's approach to negotiating power dynamics with a strong leader in the company.

It is important to note that in order for these survival strategies to function successfully in nonprofit alternative theatre companies, a number of conditions must be in place. NaCl's practice of orchestrating community-based events that aid Krumholz and Kowalchuk's efforts at engaging in ongoing ensemble-based training could not take place without regular access to a space. The environment must be stable and always available, such as the theatre at NaCl Catskills. Indeed, owning NaCl Catskills allows the company to offer events that span for longer periods of time that companies without access to a stable space would not be capable of supporting.

For the nonprofit theatre company to orchestrate successful community-based events, a reliable audience must also exist for any productions associated with the activities. The development of a dependable audience base within a specific community remains of the utmost importance for NaCl's success. In 2002, Krumholz and Kowalchuk began spending more time at Highland Lake in order to situate themselves into the community more fully and ensure a stable audience base for the productions that are offered through some of NaCl's community-based events. Vacating their apartment in New York City, Krumholz and Kowalchuk have established the artists' retreat as their primary residence in an effort to incorporate themselves into the local community of Highland Lake. The couple still maintains a base of operations in New York City

in order to stay professionally engaged with the theatre culture of the city. The artists' concurrent public identification as contributing members of the community of Highland Lake, however, serves the company well. The community now recognizes that NaCl is situated in the region and that the group is committed to regularly contributing to the local economy and cultural enhancement of the town. For example, the community enthusiastically and consistently attends the productions at NaCl's annual summer festival, the Catskill Festival of New Theatre. To be sure, without a dependable audience, NaCl could not successfully use this event as a means of survival.

NaCl's practice of orchestrating community-based events derives from the artists' desires to gain financial stability and support from the population of Highland Lake, while simultaneously sharing their work with other artists. Krumholz and Kowalchuk have an artistic vision that they seek to pass on to others. As a new alternative theatre company hoping to attract other theatre practitioners to the group's work, they must also publicize their artistic vision beyond local audiences.

In order to attract other theatre practitioners to nonprofit groups' community-based events, the companies must package the events in appealing ways. For example, the literature that NaCl distributes for the Catskill Performer Training Retreat emphasizes the opportunity for artistic development in the peaceful environment of Highland Lake. This approach indeed attracts artists to the retreat who seek serenity and privacy for developing their crafts. For events such as the retreat to function successfully as a balancing tool for negotiating NaCl's overall economic stability and artistic integrity, however, Krumholz and Kowalchuk must also communicate the nature of their artistic vision more clearly. I suspect that several of the participants at the retreat did not understand the physical intensity required of the work in which

they would participate. Furthermore, NaCl could avoid the confusion that some participants experienced at the retreat regarding the total nature of NaCl's work with more thorough communication before the event. This would allow the artists attending the retreat to truly understand Krumholz and Kowalchuk's expectations and goals, ensuring that the attending participants can engage in NaCl's artistic vision in profound and knowledgeable ways.

For these types of community-based events to function effectively as a strategy for nonprofit companies' survival and artistic refinement, the groups must have workshop instructors who can convey the artistic vision in exciting and interesting ways. In order to promote artistic integrity, companies must also provide a structured environment that offers the appropriate conditions for serious work to occur. Krumholz and Kowalchuk have developed a specific approach to working with one another that encourages success in both of these areas. Kowalchuk maintains lightness and playfulness when interacting with event participants which promotes an enjoyable experience for the group, while Krumholz conveys a seriousness that provides a stable, structured, disciplined working environment.

NaCl's practice of orchestrating community-based events that extend the companies' work to other theatre practitioners is also a tactic to compensate for a specific element in the Grotowskian artistic tradition that does not serve to accomplish this goal. NaCl's artistic approach is very specialized, which often deters performers from joining the group on a long-term basis. In order to function successfully in the dynamics of NaCl for an extended period of time, a performer must have knowledge of, and practice in, this approach before joining. Otherwise, the new member must be willing to learn unknown and lengthy methods of creation, which can require the actor to relinquish his or her previously established artistic vision. Further exacerbating the complexities of new performers joining a company working within the

Grotowskian artistic tradition are the practical dynamics of embarking on this new type of training. This process can take an incredible amount of time and effort on the part of the new performer, which is a sacrifice that many theatre professionals cannot make without regular monetary compensation.

Krumholz and Kowalchuk have tried desperately to find new members for NaCl, which is a quest that has indeed been hindered by the company's financial struggles. Yet, also contributing to the couple's lack of success are some of the exclusionary politics that exist within this artistic tradition. There seems to be a distinctive perception on Krumholz and Kowalchuk's part regarding who is "inside" and "outside" of their established theatre culture. Viewed as "inside" this culture are the very few individuals that work under the Grotowskian influence (Taviani, "In Memory of Ryszard Cieslak" 190). NaCl seeks to combat this element in the company's approach by offering community-based events, a practice that was also employed by PRIMUS and still exists in the efforts of Odin Teatret. Yet, the exclusion of the majority of North American alternative theatre practitioners from NaCl's efforts and vision of their established culture presents paradoxical complexities for a company attempting to expand its ensemble. Still, Krumholz and Kowalchuk's possession of NaCl Catskills and their ingrained position in the community of Highland Lake have allowed the artists to make great strides in negotiating the competing tensions in their heritage and present more inclusive events such as the Catskill Festival of New Theatre.

Nonprofit theatre companies that do not have the advantages of a stable working environment and a dependable audience base, such as Number Eleven, cannot fully employ the survival strategy of orchestrating community-based events. Number Eleven continues to negotiate its survival in the expensive and challenging environment of Toronto. Since the city

offers a great deal of theatre for its population, Number Eleven must compete with numerous other companies to develop an audience base and attract theatre workers to events. Further, the intricacies of working within the Grotowskian artistic tradition marginalize the members from the established alternative theatre community in the city. Thus, the group struggles in employing tactics to situate themselves into the local dynamics of Toronto.

Number Eleven's most successful approach to accomplishing this goal has been offering short-term workshops for theatre practitioners in Toronto. These workshops allow the members of Number Eleven to engage in important training exercises without the financial burden of renting the necessary space, as the workshop participants' payments support this work. Furthermore, offering the workshops in Toronto allows Number Eleven to publicize its work and establish connections with other alternative theatre practitioners in the area. Although Number Eleven is unable to offer longer, more in-depth events, such as NaCl's retreats and festivals, the short-term workshops in Toronto present the members of Number Eleven with opportunities to learn new artistic approaches from the participants, while simultaneously generating a small amount of income for the group.

Wells primarily maintains authority during these workshops, which reinforces Number Eleven's most salient survival strategy of depending on him as a leader. The success of this strategy for nonprofit alternative theatre companies relies on the condition that a talented leader desires the responsibility of the position and can adequately negotiate challenges that arise in the company. Wells' experimentation with shifts regarding the authority of his position as the director indicates his discomfort with some aspects of his role and reflects his concern regarding the exploitive power dynamics that can occur between the director and the performers of a theatre company. Wells also recognizes that in order to maintain an ensemble of committed

performers in the challenging environment of North America, the artists must all feel that their opinions are respected, valued, and promoted, which has further encouraged him to negotiate conditions in the group that support the actor's creative autonomy. In order for Number Eleven to truly make the strategy of depending on a leader an effective balancing tool, however, Wells must come to terms with the level of responsibility that he wishes to maintain for the company and communicate those desires directly and clearly to the group.

Successful employment of the survival tactic of depending on a leader additionally requires that the performers are willing to relinquish some of their power and unique artistic visions to another person, while simultaneously meeting the expectations of the leader. In Number Eleven's case, the performers must be willing to explore the new dynamics that Wells is trying to establish and to participate more fully in the development of performances. The actors in Number Eleven must also commit to communicating their concerns and points of confusion more readily to Wells.

In part, the actions of the performers in Number Eleven perpetuate the mindset of the director as *guru* that has been so historically prevalent within this artistic tradition. Grotowski was repeatedly labeled as a *guru* or *master* during his performance endeavors and esoteric research, and Barba still occupies a similar position of authority in Odin Teatret.² Although the members of Number Eleven seek to use the influence of their artistic heritage as a point of departure for creating moving productions in a contemporary context rather than an end unto itself, the performers' attachment to this type of authority perpetuates this less than desirable element in the group's heritage. Thus, in this instance, the historical practices of the Grotowskian tradition hinder Numbers Eleven's quest for survivability and continued

advancement, given the current context and working dynamics of the group, as well as Wells' desire to avoid this type of authority.

Engaging in more discussions, such as the “post-mortem” that occurred after the Toronto run of *The Prague Visitor*, regarding specific elements of the group's working process will continue to aid the company in negotiating their survival and artistic advancement more successfully. Thus, instances of confusion that extend the company's rehearsal processes will not occur, which cost the group more money for rental space and prohibit the artists from focusing deeply on the overall narrative bases of the productions.

In NaCl's work, the two members have negotiated the strategy of depending on a leader as appropriate to the current dynamics of the company. Krumholz and Kowalchuk often share a position of leadership when working together in their efforts with independent performers and rely on one another heavily to advance their independent creative developments. NaCl possesses a unique dynamic within the company, in that, as the primary performer, Kowalchuk has much more ongoing formal company experience in this artistic tradition than Krumholz possesses. As an exceptionally talented and skilled actress, there are instances in which it seems that Kowalchuk is teaching Krumholz about certain artistic practices. I do not wish to imply that Krumholz relies too heavily on Kowalchuk. However, this dynamic provides evidence of a willingness to embrace a new working process in this artistic tradition, which has historically supported the ultimate authority of the director in a company structure. The couple's recent decision to embark on projects in which they do not work with one another suggests a quest for new points of artistic advancement on their parts; without Kowalchuk's participation, Krumholz must experiment with new ways of developing his crafts, thereby broadening NaCl's artistic investigations.

The collaboration that occurs between NaCl and Number Eleven not only serves as an important survival tactic for the two groups, but also partially compensates for the weaknesses in each company. NaCl and Number Eleven work together a great deal. The time that the members of Number Eleven spend at NaCl Catskills provides the performers with opportunities to work under the guidance of Krumholz and Kowalchuk during some of the training sessions, which eschews a specific focus on Wells as an ultimate authority within this artistic tradition. Although complications can arise from Wells' position as a teacher during some sessions of the Catskill Performer Training Retreat and the Catskill Festival of New Theatre, Number Eleven also reaps many benefits. Most notably, when Wells participates alongside the members of Number Eleven in the training sessions that he does not lead, he reaffirms to the performers that equality and a quest for continued advancement can indeed exist among them as a collective. Furthermore, the group gains regular access to training and rehearsal space at NaCl Catskills that they do not possess in Toronto.

The presence of the members of Number Eleven at NaCl Catskills for three months during the summer of 2002 also offered Krumholz and Kowalchuk new perspectives on training and performance. Given the lengthy amount of time that the members of Number Eleven spent at NaCl Catskills, these techniques could be investigated in significant depth. Moreover, NaCl's experiences with Number Eleven serve to foster a more long-term, community-based experience for Krumholz and Kowalchuk, which provides the couple with enhanced emotional support as marginalized theatre artists that have not succeeded in forming a larger company in the United States.

NaCl and Number Eleven's collaborative efforts are essential to both groups' long-term survival. Kowalchuk and Wells' development of *The Confessions of Punch and Judy* at NaCl

Catskills during the summer of 2003 provides significant evidence of the two companies' commitments to working together (see Fig. 33 and Fig. 34). The artistic and professional cross-pollination that takes place between NaCl and Number Eleven expands the companies' abilities for innovative original creation. The personal bonds of the interactions provide necessary emotional support for the alternative theatre workers. And the groups can share the expenses of a co-production. Like the artists in my study, I see these types of connections as logical and mandatory when working outside of the mainstream theatre during a continuing "cultural ice age" in North America. Krumholz lends credence to this theory as he insightfully explains that "people [. . .] attracted by their similar needs are joining together, entering into dangerous explorations of the unknown, in a feverish effort to do something of consequence ("A Call for the End of Theatre" 1).

Limitations of This Study

Accessibility demanded that my primary research take place over a period of eighteen months during 2002 and 2003. Since that time, NaCl and Number Eleven's survival tactics and artistic work have continued to reflect the primary observations in my study. Yet, at the heart of true alternative theatre companies lies the desire to grow, produce new work, and continue experimenting with varying approaches. Consequently, NaCl and Number Eleven have continued to build upon the strategies for survival and artistic methods I analyze in this study. These companies are both relatively new groups; long-term survival is yet to be determined. Therefore, my analysis should be viewed within the specific timeframe in which it was conducted.

Moreover, the exigencies of my specific approach to utilizing the ethnographic method of conducting fieldwork have provided limitations to my study. The artists have dictated the

conditions of my interactions—parameters which I respected and observed. For example, Number Eleven requested that I participate directly in their training sessions, whereas NaCl preferred that I limit my contact to observing only selected work periods. As a result, the artists have had a degree of control over the type of information to which I am exposed. This has afforded them the opportunity to censor certain portions of their work if they so desired, which has imposed some limitations on the scope of my discussions.

Another limitation of this study derives from the varying work schedules of NaCl and Number Eleven. The amount of exposure I have had to each group's work has been dictated by their pre-arranged rehearsal and production itineraries. Although I attempted to distribute my fieldwork as equally as possible, I inevitably spent differing amounts of time and experienced varying types of interactions with each group due to the planned activities of the companies during my designated research period.

Furthermore, I have elected to study the work of two theatre companies working within a specific artistic tradition. Their methods of ensuring long-term existence can apply to other nonprofit alternative theatre groups as well. However, as a result of the members' common and specific artistic visions as gleaned through their heritage, certain points of my analysis regarding the companies' creative efforts may most readily benefit groups approaching their crafts in similar ways to NaCl and Number Eleven. Although some commonality may persist, there indeed seems to be a marked difference between how these artists engage in their physical and vocal training exercises and approach the development of original montaged productions and the practices of other nonprofit alternative theatre companies working outside of this artistic tradition. Consequently, parts of my analysis may not be artistically relevant to all nonprofit alternative theatre practitioners.

Suggestions for Future Research

Further benefits can be gained by conducting a longitudinal study of alternative groups practicing within the Grotowskian artistic tradition in North America. This research would offer a determination of how these companies' strategies and artistic work evolve over time. As newer nonprofit alternative theatre groups, NaCl and Number Eleven have focused on establishing the working dynamics of specific survival strategies within their current company structures. The groups will continue building upon their efforts and engaging in new strategies in the future if they wish to sustain their work as professional theatre companies. Thus, a longitudinal study of newer groups would illuminate the complexities of enacting additional survival strategies and offer further examples for other nonprofit theatre companies

In this study, I have focused on two newer theatre companies, given the accessibility of these groups, the members' desires as struggling artists to gain the exposure my study would provide, and the common challenges the groups face in trying to establish themselves in the greater North American alternative theatre culture. Further useful information could be collected by conducting thorough investigations of more established companies that have successfully worked in this artistic tradition in North America over an extended period of time. For instance, in addition to the NaCl and Number Eleven theatre companies, I initially contacted several other groups working within this artistic tradition, requesting permission to conduct fieldwork regarding the companies' work, with the hope of gleaning a wide variety of data. I suspect that New World Performance Laboratory (who invited me to an upcoming production, but did not allow me access to the company's working process) and Double Edge Theatre (who never responded to my many attempts to contact them about establishing a relationship with the company) may feel that they do not need publicity and that their future is more secure given the

groups' long-term existences. In contrast, less established and newer companies, such as NaCl and Number Eleven, seemed very anxious for any type of experience that might publicize the groups' work, providing significant evidence that these younger companies acknowledge exposure as a vital component of promoting their long-term existences. This contrast suggests that more established companies might employ different approaches to negotiating the tension between artistic advancement and economic viability than newer troupes. Thus, research regarding more established groups in this artistic tradition in North America would compliment my present study.

A third avenue of research upon which the reader might embark could focus on the efforts of nonprofit alternative theatre companies working outside of this tradition. I chose to explore the current dynamics of this artistic tradition in a North American context given my progressive interest in this theatrical approach and these groups' apparent abilities to defy the odds that have caused other young nonprofit alternative theatre companies to disband. Since the members of these groups have learned many of their tactics through practical interactions with other theatre workers in this artistic tradition (see Fig. 35), additional knowledge can be gained by observing the enactment of strategies in companies that approach their crafts in different ways.

Transformation through Action

Nonprofit alternative theatre companies such as NaCl and Number Eleven must determine specific strategies that negotiate a balance between artistic advancement and financial stability. It is, however, through the practical action of employing strategies and negotiating the complexities that arise within specific company structures that transformations truly arise. To be sure, if it were as simple as following a prescribed plan, nonprofit theatre companies would not

face such a critical tension when negotiating these elements. It may be simple to determine broad survival tactics for these groups, but managing the complexities that can arise when employing strategies proves more challenging. I remain hopeful, however, that with in-depth examples, nonprofit alternative theatre companies will find these negotiations slightly less overwhelming and knowledgeably employ tactics that will promote their artistic and pragmatic survival. These groups serve the important function of offering productions and events that promote independent thought, social change, and education. Indeed, there is certainly something beautiful about alternative theatre companies that should be promoted and preserved in North America.

NOTES

¹ All verbal quotations in this chapter, and in the study as a whole, derive from compiled fieldwork notes and appear with the artists' permission.

² Both Grotowski and Barba have been heavily criticized for the levels of control they have possessed over the actors in their companies. For example, complaints regarding Barba's methods of negotiation with the female performers in Odin have surfaced frequently. It is worth noting that Barba has also been repeatedly challenged for his research practices in this regard at the International School of Theatre Anthropology (ISTA). Barba received particularly scathing criticisms for his 1986 ISTA conference in Hostelboro entitled: "The Female Role as Represented on the Stage in Various Cultures." See Munk and Phelan for detailed criticisms of the gender politics at this conference and within ISTA itself. I should also note, however, that many who work closely with Barba imply that his actions are often misunderstood. See Rasmussen in Risum and Watson for a defense of Barba.

In my research with Number Eleven, Wells' approach to communicating and negotiating with the female performers in Number Eleven was never questioned or critiqued. Rather, his efforts at empowering all of the performers in the company were repeatedly praised.

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APPENDIX A. FIGURES



Fig. 1. The artists' residence at NaCl Catskills in Highland Lake, New York.



Fig. 2. NaCl's theatre at NaCl Catskills in Highland Lake, New York.



Fig. 3. Kowalchuk (front left) and Krumholz (front right) meet with independent performers outside of the artists' residence to discuss upcoming productions at the Catskill Festival of New Theatre.



Fig. 4. Artists participating in a work exchange at the Catskill Festival of New Theatre.



Fig. 5. Small group work at the Catskill Festival of New Theatre.



Fig. 6. Artists partaking in a communal meal at the Catskill Festival of New Theatre.



Fig. 7. Artists conducting technical work for another company's show at the Catskill Festival of New Theatre.



Fig. 8. Carreri (standing front right) leading a discussion for Odin Week at Odin Teatret in Denmark. Carreri remains the most active of the Odin members in teaching new students.



Fig. 9. McClean in an emotionally charged scene in *Icaria*.



Fig. 10. Jane Wells (front left), Rucker (back left), Grimes (center), and McClean (back right) in a physically abstract scene from Number Eleven's first production, *Icaria*.



Fig. 11. Ker Wells in PRIMUS' production of *The Night Room*.



Fig. 12. Krumholz (right) with independent performer Laura May (left) on stilts in NaCl's physically demanding outdoor performance, *Invisible Neighborhood*.



Fig. 13. Kowalchuk conducting physical training exercises for NaCl's work.



Fig. 14. Independent performers in Krumholz's new piece for NaCl, *TERROTICA*.



Fig. 15. Kowalchuk (left) with Leese Walker (right) in *Ten Brecht Poems*.



Fig. 16. Wells (left) and Kowalchuk (right) performing in *The Confessions of Punch and Judy*.



Fig. 17. Kowalchuk in her solo performance for NaCl, *The Passion According to G.H.*



Fig. 18. Independent performer Rosaruby Glaberman (front left) rehearses with Kowalchuk (back right) for NaCl's Eastern European tour of *Invisible Neighborhood*.



Fig. 19. Krumholz (back left) and Kowalchuk (back right) with independent performer Megan Wyler (center) in NaCl's children's show, *The Time Cycle*.



Fig. 20. Nearby scenic overlook that participants can experience during time off at the Catskill Performer Training Retreat in Highland Lake, New York.



Fig. 21. Performers participating in a physical training session at NaCl's Catskill Performer Training Retreat.



Fig. 22. The festive meal on the last evening of the Catskill Performer Training Retreat.



Fig. 23. Wells (standing) prepares independent performers and the members of Number Eleven to begin a physical training session at a workshop offered by the company in Toronto.



Fig. 24. Wells (center) supports a workshop participant in a physical training exercise, while Grimes (left) assists as a safety spotter.



Fig. 25. Rucker (center) assumes the leadership role as she guides a group in vocal training at Number Eleven's workshop in Toronto.



Fig. 26. Wells (left) leads a physical training session in which the members of Number Eleven participate at the Catskill Festival of New Theatre.



Fig. 27. Rucker (front center) participating in small group work at The Catskill Festival of New Theatre while in residence with Number Eleven for the summer at NaCl Catskills.



Fig. 28. Wells (left) serves as moderator of a scholarly panel at the Catskill Festival of New Theatre—an event at which the members of Number Eleven were in the audience.



Fig. 29. The warehouse Number Eleven was forced to rent to premiere its production of *The Prague Visitor* in Toronto.



Fig. 30. Grimes (standing back) and McLean (front) relating physical actions in the narrative of *The Prague Visitor*.



Fig. 31. Jane Wells in a scene from *The Prague Visitor*.



Fig. 32. Rucker as her new character, Dora Diamant, in *The Prague Visitor*.



Fig. 33. Kowalchuk (standing) and Wells (seated) engaging in stylized physical actions, created separately by the actors and then fused together by the director, Raymond Bobgan – an example of NaCl and Number Eleven's collaborative efforts for *The Confessions of Punch and Judy*.



Fig. 34. Kowalchuk (left) and Wells (right) using an abstracted reality to offer the audience a moment in which to layer individualized interpretations in *The Confessions of Punch and Judy*.

Fig. 35. Primary Influences of the Grotowskian Artistic Tradition on NaCl and Number Eleven

Jerzy Grotowski

Phase I: Theatre of Productions (1959 – 1969) *Poland*

- Developed productions that focused on “poor theatre” and the creation of a “communion” between the actors and audiences (Grotowski, “Towards a Poor Theatre” 30).
- Received international fame for his training practices and productions.

Phase II: Paratheatre (1969 – 1978) *Poland*

- Attempted to create a venue for genuine interaction among performers/participants focusing on physicality which included stylized and choreographed movement in combination with a cappella song, as well as intuitive actions.

Phase III: Theatre of Sources (1976 – 1982) *Poland*

- Conducted research on various techniques/rituals from different cultures that can be used as tools for the growth and change of the enactors.

Phase IV: Objective Drama (1983 – 1986) *Irvine, CA*

- Built upon Theatre of Sources, yet extended the focus to more formal performance structures, incorporating a variety of the techniques into a single showing.

Phase V: Art as Vehicle (1986 – 1999) *Pontedera, Italy*

- Used traditional, ritualistic songs and related actions to explore the physical impact that this combination had on the enactor.
- Appeared similar to theatrical, movement-based performances (Schechner, *The Grotowski Sourcebook* 1-20).

Eugenio Barba

Holstebro, Denmark

- Founder of Odin Teatret (1964-present) and The International School of Theatre Anthropology (1979-present).
- Worked with Grotowski during Phase I.
- Odin has possessed several different members over the years. Performer Roberta Carreri has been the most active in instructing new students, such as the artists in my study.



PRIMUS Theatre

Winnipeg, Canada

- Existed from 1988-1997.
- Hosted the symposium “Survivors of the Ice Age” in 1996. Representatives from both NaCl and Number Eleven attended this symposium.
- Offered three-month school for selected participants in 1997 before the company broke up. The members of Number Eleven began working together at this school.
- Primary Members:

Ker Wells <i>Performer</i> ●worked with Barba through PRIMUS	Don Kitt <i>Performer</i> ●worked briefly with Odin before joining PRIMUS ●worked with Barba through PRIMUS	Steven Lawson <i>Performer</i> ●worked with Barba through PRIMUS	Jane Wells <i>Administrative Position/ Informal Collaborator</i> ●influence gleaned through working with Fowler	Richard Fowler <i>Artistic Director</i> ●worked with Grotowski during Phase III ●worked with Barba as an actor in Odin beginning in 1980	Karin Randoja <i>Performer</i> ●worked with Barba through PRIMUS	Tannis Kowalchuk <i>Performer</i> ●influence gleaned through working with Fowler	Richard Clarkin <i>Performer</i> ●worked with Barba through PRIMUS
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Number Eleven Theatre

Toronto, Canada

- 2001-present
- Members:

Ker Wells <i>Director</i>	Alex McClean ^a <i>Performer</i> ●attended PRIMUS School in 1997 ●worked with Fowler	Varrick Grimes <i>Performer</i> ●attended PRIMUS School in 1997 ●worked with Fowler	Jane Wells <i>Performer</i>	Liz Rucker <i>Performer</i> ●attended PRIMUS School in 1997 ●worked with Fowler
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North American Cultural Laboratory

New York, NY/ Catskills, Highland Lake, NY

- 1997-present
- Members:

Tannis Kowalchuk <i>Performer</i>	Brad Krumholz ^b <i>Artistic Director</i> ●worked at Odin in 1990 ●worked informally with PRIMUS beginning in 1991
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^a McClean also served as an intern at Double Edge Theatre for a brief period of time. Stacy Klein, director of Double Edge, worked with Barba in 1985 as an assistant director.

^b Krumholz also worked with Raymond Bobgan and Holly Holsinger in Theatre Labyrinth. Bobgan and Holsinger worked with Grotowski during Phase IV.