The Creative Spectator: The Lobby as an Interactive Space

MA Thesis

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By

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Abstract

This MA Thesis seeks to continue a longstanding conversation in Theatre Studies about the role of the audience by looking at the concept of active and passive spectators through the lens of play theory and establishing a new category of creative spectator. This study analyzes the way of conceptualizing and engaging visitors in a "visitor-centered museum" developed by the Columbus Museum of Art in 2012 to argue that this method can be adapted and applied to theatre spectators. Finally, I suggest various strategies for transforming theatre lobbies into audience-dominated spaces, which shifts the focus of scholarly conversation away from how spectators perceive what they see on stage, a space controlled by actors, designers, and directors, to what they see and how they interact with material in a space over which they can have more control in the process of making. Using this field of theory and praxis moves the conversation of spectatorship from the stage to audience-dominated spaces, in particular, the lobby.

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Introduction

When learning the basics of acting, actors are often taught the acronym GOTE, originally taught by director Robert Cohen, and told that, in order to successfully portray a character, they must first identify their *goal*, the G of GOTE.[1] It is only after establishing goals that the obstacles, tactics, and expectations (OTE) can be articulated. As a field of academics, theatre is constantly trying to establish its overall goal as something other than entertainment. In my time in academic theatre, I have participated in many classroom discussions in which the goals of theatre as listed by my professors, fellow students, collaborators, and myself were stated as starting conversations, inspiring change, and communicating something important to the audience. While these are commendable goals for the industry, without completing GOTE and thinking through the O (potential *obstacles* to the goals), the T (deciding on *tactics*), and finalizing with the E (clearly listing *expectations* of self, audience, and outcomes,) it cannot be assumed that having such goals means that they are being successfully met.

A highly collaborative art, theatre takes the thoughts and artistic visions of many-- directors, designers, actors, etc. -- and strives to create a cohesive product on the stage. However, there is a collaborator who causes confusion and who can even be overlooked by both theorist and practitioner: the audience. Successfully achieving goals such as conversation, inspiration, and communication, rely on emphasizing the role of audience as the most important collaborator. Yet this collaborator often has the least amount of influence, having no input on concepts and designs during the months of table talks, meetings and rehearsals leading up to the performance. Because of this, the others on the creative team seek to create something that is designed and

presented in such a way that the creative team feels at least semi-comfortable making the assumption that the performance will successfully make its points on the stage alone, without offering the audience the months of preparation that the rest of the team gets. The team also strives to feel that their art will be understood and/or appreciated and that despite its limited time of observation, the audience will take something from it.

From Aristotle's catharsis to Bertolt Brecht's distancing, what theatre does to the audience, and inversely what the audience does with theatre, has been a major topic of conversation and experimentation. While this conversation has often gone into the realm of active versus passive spectators, the pros and cons of each, and whether an audience can ever actually be passive or active, I seek to redirect this conversation and think instead of creative spectators. As an art, theatre is primarily concerned with creative play, the embracing of uncertainty, performance, and experimentation. I look at what it means and why it is important to have a creative, playful audience for a creative, playful artform.

Seeing the audience as a necessary collaborator in the theatrical process, theatre theorists and practitioners such as Brecht, Augusto Boal, and Richard Schechner experimented with the role of the audience and how to ensure that it is actively involved, usually in the stage-space itself. However, in more recent years, their work has been interrogated by people such as Jacques Rancière, Peter Boenisch, and Matthew Reason, who have questioned if active and interactive are truly the terms and concepts we need for evaluating audience engagement. While they agree that the audience is an important collaborator, they argue that identifying passivity as obstacle and activity as tactic does not necessarily meet the goal of inclusive audience practices. Boenisch, even asked in his 2014 article "The Dramaturgy of the Audience's Experience in

Contemporary Theatre" if we have come to idolize interactive theatre without ever stopping to question whether it actually does what we want. If the goal is conversation and inspiration, an audience member going through the motions of active spectatorship but not critically thinking about what is being said and done is simply a pseudo-participant.[2]

Many theatre practitioners are aware that the goal of the stage must include the audience. The question is how? How does one create a "multidirectional experience" which takes "into account the needs of both the participant and the institution?"[3] What are the obstacles, tactics, and expectations?

In his article "Audience Participation," Richard Schechner carefully laid out his perceived obstacles to meaningful audience collaboration, and his tactics for reaching his goals of a participating audience.[4] It is this article in particular that I will put in conversation with play theory to build my concept of a creative audience. In "Audience Participation," Schechner sees his primary tactic not as scripted audience activity but as "open space," which he defines as both physical and temporal space in which the actors and audience can meet on equal terms. I argue that theatre must go beyond being an open space and must be a usable creative space, a concept I will define and work with through the lens of the Columbus Museum of Art's 2012 transformation into a "Visitor-Centered Museum."

Beyond the problem of wondering if interactive theatre is doing what it is designed to do, there is also the question of whether that form of theatre has managed to be successful as an artform. Despite the supposed idolization of the ideal of interactive theatre that Boenisch points out, this is arguably not the form of theatre that most theatregoers experience, especially not in venues such as Broadway. Though Broadway theatres are in no way the only form of theatre nor

even the focus of this thesis, they are what many think of when the word theatre is uttered. Though Schechner declared that proscenium theatre with settled audiences was taking its final breaths back in 1988, over thirty years later, this proves not to be true.[5]

Despite the attempts of practitioners such as Schechner at new audience interactions and formats, a quick search of theatre etiquette guides from theatre bloggers and journalists shows expectations of theatre audiences. In 2018 and 2019, Chris Peterson (editor of OnStage Blog) and film and stage critic Seth Fradkoff wrote separate articles lamenting the experience of going to a show with an audience who does not know how to properly be an audience. Both men revealed their own bad behavior in their articles. Peterson recounts an anecdote about handing money to a singing audience member to remind the woman that only paid performers should be singing in the theatre, while Fradkoff relates an incident in which he snatched a snack out of another audience member's hands and threw it, to indicate that eating in the theatre was disruptive.[6] Despite the fact that both of these actions were undeniably rude, and arguably more disruptive than the criticized actions, both men justify themselves with the argument that being a theatre audience member has a set of rules that must be followed and that there must be penalties for not knowing or following those rules. The idea of expected audience behavior is a widely held belief with 92% of polled audience members saying that they moderate their behavior while attending a performance, according to a believed set of theatre etiquette or rules.[7]

While it can be argued that some actions, such as talking during a performance, should be discouraged for the sake of other audience members having a chance to observe and participate, I argue that some of these theatre rules are directly in opposition to the goal of having a conversation with the audience and treating them as collaborators. *Playbill*, a popular theatre news site, not only tells its readers that at the theatre, "while the lights are off, we can't make any

sound," but also tells them that one should only say neutral or positive things while on or near the theatre property, arguing that hearing criticism is hurtful to fans, family, and friends of the show.[8] This rule is in direct conflict with the goal of a creatively participatory audience. A silent audience can be a listening and, therefore, participating audience, but a silenced audience cannot be an audience that creatively contributes to the understanding of the experience.

In order to meet the goals of creating theatre that has a meaningful, conversational impact on the audience, we must encourage creative spectatorship. The audience must be seen and valued, not as a guest at someone else's performance, but as the production collaborator with the broadest view of the performance, with the widest selection of experiences, as well as the ability to see the finished product as it is, without the process of getting there. The audience's commentary also must be seen as more than criticism and praise of another's work and, instead, as conversation of creative meaning making which adds to the show. With that in mind, whether or not the audience physically participates in the making and executing of the stage product, it must be recognized that the audience is still capable of making creative contributions. While arguing that spectatorship does not have to be inherently passive, and that passivity does not have to be inherently problematic, philosopher Jacques Rancière said in his essay, "The Emancipated Spectator:"

> The spectator is active, just like the student or the scientist: He observes, he selects, he compares, he interprets. He connects what he observes with many other things he has observed on other stages, in other kinds of spaces.[9]

Matthew Reason, who does research on audiences, builds on Rancière's claim, saying that the true measure of a participatory audience is not what the performance does with the audience, but

what the audience does with the performance.[10] I build on this and argue that true spectator agency, participation, and buy-in has nothing to do with how visibly active the audience is, but with how well they make their experience their own, connecting the performance to their own understanding of the world, in other words, how creative they are.

While activity is easy to recognize and may even remain the primary form of measurement for a successful audience experience, the difference between an active spectator and a creative spectator is important. Active spectatorship asks for the audience to respond with a "yes," which can be a great tool for gauging the participation of the audience. Musicals such as *Natasha, Pierre, and the Great Comet of 1812* seat their audiences in a nontraditional format, allowing the actors to move between audience members and make eye contact, which is a form of "yes" behavior. The popular interactive show *Sleep No More* allows audiences to move about the theatre freely, giving them the chance to be active in their spectatorship by saying yes to the invitation to see the show from a different angle. However, anyone who has taken an introduction to improvisational acting can tell you that a yes is not good enough in the world of creation. While audiences are active in some of the decisions of the mentioned performances, they are not, necessarily, active in creating the meaning of the show. Creative spectatorship takes the concept a step further and asks for a "yes, and…," asking the audience to do something unique and personally meaningful with the performance. It is this chance for the audience to build upon the experience and make it their own that moves a performance towards the goal of meaningful impact.

Chapter One will look at the importance of creativity and play, how it functions, and why it causes meaningful impact. In this chapter, I will focus primarily on the audience theory of Rancière, who pushed back against passive spectatorship concepts made popular by theorists

such as Brecht and Schechner. Brecht worried that an audience encouraged to sit and immerse itself in the narrative and characters' emotions would not think critically about the actions and choices made on stage. Schechner, similarly, wanted to see an audience with a more active, decision making role in theatre in hopes to see them take up a more active, decision making role in society. However, when comparing their theory and praxis to learning and play theory, as well as more recent observation of the results of their praxis, there are some discrepancies. First, as Rancière points out, spectatorship does not automatically equal passivity. A physically still person can still actively be making mental connections. This connection-making, I argue, should be looked at through the lens of play theory. Play theory sees connection-making not as a stand-alone action, but as part of a creative thinking process. It also speaks to Rancière's concerns about assuming spectatorship equals passivity by recognizing that physical participation does not automatically equal any form of meaningful connection or understanding, focusing instead on what is going on in the brain rather than the body. Similar to Rancière, I argue that while the goals of active spectatorship, such as a socially aware audience, are on the right track, the perceived problem of a passive versus active spectator is misidentified. By putting Rancière's argument against the passive/active spectatorship dichotomy in conversation with play theory, I also take Rancière's argument of a connection-building audience a step further and argue that we should strive to see the audience as creative, rather than physically passive or active.

Chapter Two looks at an institution that has already grappled with the problem of creativity: The Columbus Museum of Art. In the second chapter, I move from identifying the goals and obstacles of the audience to identifying the obstacles the Columbus Museum of Art faced in its transition to being a visitor-centered space in 2012, and its tactics to overcome them. While theorists such as Brecht and Schechner tried to change the audience through the stage, the

museum shows the framework for a different audience model. Rather than trying to completely change the art with which the audience was being presented in museums, museum theory recognizes the importance of the familiar and the power of the established and simply changes the audience's relationship and response to the art. This makes space for a creative community, with the museum as a central space to explore that creativity: it takes the power away from the type of art showcased and brings it to the thought process of those who are part of the creative process of the art, including the interpreting audience.

Chapter Three then builds on this concept of changing the audience’s interaction with the art, rather than the art itself, and looks at how a creative spectatorship model begins in the lobby of the theatre. I consider the lobby through the lens of Schechner’s concerns and desires for an open space, while building upon them to show how the theatre can go a step further than open space and implement used space. In the early 1970s, Schechner wrote about changing theatre culture to one that is more inclusive of the audience. While Schechner looked at expanding control, time and space, and social circumstances for the audience, concepts that will be looked at more deeply through the lens of the play theory established in Chapter One, what Schechner and others have tried to explore is how to include the audience in the world of the stage. This chapter looks at Schechner’s six concerns and solutions for audience participation, analyzes his core concerns, and breaks them down into three categories: spatial/temporal, personal, and social. I build upon the previous frameworks of play theory and museum theory to show how the lobby can be utilized as a tool to address Schechner’s concerns, implement his solutions, and bring his vision of the active spectator into the new realm of creative spectator.

If the goal of theatre is to get the audience thinking and talking about the production, as well as acting on it, then the goal of the theatre must be to encourage creative spectatorship. We

cannot achieve audience-based goals without including the audience, and inclusion must go beyond satisfying the production team's view of an active audience and into truly handing creative freedom over to the audience. How we can do this is found in museums; Where we can do this is found in the lobby; Why we should do this is found in our communities, who need to know that their voices matter, their additions to narrative are important, and that they are capable of creative solutions and problem solving.

Chapter 1- Creativity as Goal

In "The Emancipated Spectator," Rancière builds on the ideas of empowered learning that he established in his popular work, *The Ignorant Schoolmaster: Five Lessons in Intellectual Emancipation,* relying heavily on thinking about how people teach, learn, and share information and power. Using this framework, he argues that, "Spectatorship is not a passivity that must be turned into activity. It is our normal situation. We learn and teach, we act and know, as spectators who link what they see with what they have seen and told, done and dreamed."[11] I use this quote to begin the definition of creative spectatorship that I will be using, and the tangible process that I will explore. While creative thinking is a multistep process, at its base creativity can be thought of as turning an object over and over in one's hand, making observations of the novel and connections to the known.

The important aspects of creative spectatorship are creative play and discovery, which are broken down into the steps that will be examined in this chapter. Rather than being presented as self-explanatory or even something that needs to be taught in order to have creative spectators, a performance must be presented as an experience equivalent to picking up and playing with a foreign object. Creativity first comes into play when, rather than believing that they are being told something through a performance, the audience believes they are being asked something, and that the something is open for their discovery as they turn the piece over in their hands, heads, and hearts.

After the invitation to discover, creative and playful thinking takes place in three steps.[12] The first step is exploration, or asking, "what is it?" This is time spent by the audience watching

the performance, thinking about the performance, looking at related material put out by the theatre, using their phones to search for more information, and acclimating to the space. The second step is play, or asking, “what is my influence on it?” This is the moment the audience starts making connections between the performance and their experiences or knowledge or finding ways to be participatory. The third step is socializing, or asking, “how can I use it with others?” This is the moment the audience begins discussing the performance with other audience members or with the performers, encouraging friends or family to interact, working together with someone to complete a task, or formulating a meaningful plan on how to implement their thoughts about the performance in the outside world. It is these three steps which lead to an “aha” moment, or a spark of pleasure that is gained through discovery. It is this three-step creative process that should be seen in a creative audience, and which I will break down in this chapter.

Exploration: What is it?

The first step to recognizing creative spectatorship is recognizing that asking questions is a form of creativity. A creative audience asks questions, physically participates in tasks for the sake of finding answers and discovers connections; I identify these as the measurable actions that we should look for in a creative audience.

In his article “The Creativity Crisis,” Journalist Po Bronson highlights the importance of questions when he writes about question-asking behavior in children and how it tends to be discouraged until it stops. While not malicious, tired parents and teachers discourage the many questions of kids exploring their environment and interests. This discouragement of questions eventually leads to a discouragement of creative thinking and problem solving. As Bronson says

about the discouraged children, “They didn’t stop asking questions because they lost interest: it’s the other way around. They lost interest because they stopped asking questions.”[13] Because of this culture of limiting time and space for question asking behavior, the first step to encourage creative spectatorship is to make it clear that the space and time provided by the theatre is open to questions, including hard questions, not just neutral or positive commentary.

Exploration is often the step of creative thinking with which theatres are the most comfortable, and therefore the step to which I will give the least attention. It is not uncommon for there to be information on the playwright, cast, or designs/designers in the lobby. While this practice is good, and can lead to important conversations and connections, it is often not set up in such a way as to encourage steps two and three, play and socialization, thereby not completing the process of creative spectatorship. However, I argue that it is the last two steps that truly take creative thinking out of the realm of surface level conversation, and into the meaningful realms of recognizing one’s power to cause reactions, and the ways one’s actions, thoughts, and concepts affect others.

Play: What can I do with it?

In the field of play theory, there are many definitions of play from wide, such as Schultz’s definition as any action which one does for the sake of arousal, to narrow, such as Hay’s definition which limits play to movement accompanied by laughter.[14] For the sake of establishing a usable process and measurable results, I will focus on the similar definitions and theories of play established by Michael Lewis, Robert B. McCall, Roberta R. Collard, Michael Ellis, Howard Gardner, Corinne Hutt, Jerome Singer, Dorothy Singer, and Brian Sutton-Smith at

the 1979 Johnson & Johnson Baby Products Company Round Table conference, compiled and edited by Brian Sutton-Smith in the book *Play and Learning*.

Each theorist also establishes their framework and definition of play, each with slight differences. For Lewis, play is about having choices and an ability to manipulate ends and means. McCall defines play as the exploration of one's social influence and power to influence events. Collard sees play as the active manipulation of objects for the purpose of determining the objects' reactions to one's actions. Ellis defines play as creation and resolution of uncertainty, Gardner as dramatizing observed patterns, and Hutt as consolidating information through conceptual reorganization. Singer and Singer see play as demonstration of an attitude towards the possible and, likewise, Sutton-Smith sees it as envisioning possible realms and realities.[15]

While each of these definitions is slightly different in terminology and framework, as I read through these theorists' definitions, I identified a common thread: For all of these theorists, play, at any age or stage, can be boiled down to if/then thinking. For an infant, play is as simple as gathering the rules of the world around them: "If I open my hand, then the toy falls." As children get older and begin to understand the rules of if/then, games become formed with their own rules: "If I touch you, then you are it." Humans also grow into the ability to imagine, or create hypothetical if/then scenarios, based on the patterns they have seen around them: "If toys were sentient, then they might resent new toys being introduced into their space, much like pets resent new pets." While it has been debated whether adults play, when defined as simple if/then thinking behavior, it is clear that most adults engage in play on a daily basis, and it is this behavior theatre should strive to encourage.

If/then thinking, or play, is ultimately the process of building on the known. "I know this to be true, and if that is true, then perhaps this is true too, or perhaps then I can manipulate the

circumstances in this way." In her study of play and development, child development theorist Greta Fein found that the most successful, engaging, and educational form of interaction was when concepts are exchanged by stacking onto what someone is already doing, has already done, or already knows. In the simplest example of this, if a room is set up with ball and a stick, and an infant is banging the floor with the ball, the most engaging and educational way to interact would be by banging the stick on the floor (thereby keeping the infant's action, but changing the object), or by rolling the ball across the floor (thereby changing the infant's action, but keeping the object). If the person engaging the infant were to bang the ball, changing nothing, nothing would be built upon and learned. However, if the person were to roll the stick, changing everything, the interaction would be experienced as "demanding and intrusive" by the infant.[16]

As people grow, their ability to make the jump between different groupings of information grows, however the pairing of familiar and novel is still the way people process information. Rather than accepting an object or concept as wholly new, the brain searches for something to which it can compare the novel and give a framework of understanding and a list of options on how to interact with it. Rancière touches on this when he says:

> The master cannot ignore that the so-called ignorant pupil who sits in front of him in fact knows a lot of things, which he has learned on his own, by looking at and listening to the world around him, by figuring out the meaning of what he has seen and heard, by repeating what he has heard and learned by chance by comparing what he discovers with what he already knows, and so on. [17]

In other words, no one teaches wholly new information, as the student will always find something familiar with which to compare it, making the teacher more someone who builds on already acknowledged concepts.

This should be a somewhat familiar idea to the theatre community. As mentioned before, the first rule of theatre improvisational skills is to always respond to an idea with "yes, and…" In improvisation, the concept of "yes, and" means that you take the work that your partner has already done and, rather than negating it or ignoring it, you acknowledge it and build upon it. Seeing the spectator as creative means giving them space in which the information, expectations, and experiences brought into the theatre with them are acknowledged and built upon, rather than negated or ignored. When the spectator is told "yes, and…", they are given the space to also respond "yes, and…" and make connections that were, perhaps, not made by the other contributors to the performance.

As an example of what I mean by this, for my work as dramaturg on Lolita Chakrabarti's *Red Velvet,* I used this concept of "yes, and" in my lobby design. I built on the idea that the audience comes to the show expecting to observe. My first response to the audience was *yes*, you are an observer, *and* here is something new to observe. I then introduced them to a timeline of historical events that were useful for better contextualizing the play, thereby keeping their expected action while changing the object. After the introduction to the concept of the timeline, the next segment of the lobby was another timeline in which the audience could participate, writing down important historical moments that affected them, thereby keeping their new object, while changing their action. Changing this action to a participatory one was important as it meant creating a space for the audience to also participate in "yes, and…" Rather than being expected to simply be told what the art has to say, they participated in the narrative saying "yes, this

timeline is important, and what I have to add is equally important." Thereby making a meaningful connection with the content of the performance.

Connection-making is the simple act of finding a tie between two objects, concepts, or experiences. These connections can be physical (such as recognizing two paintings as being made by the same artist), intellectual (such as questioning how two novels approach the same subject), or emotional (such as finding personal meaning in an experience due to a previous memory or experience). It is also the process of recognizing that one has some level of control over the if/then and over the connections built. What is important about this process is recognizing it is not a skill that you either possess or lack. Rather, the act of connection making, while a natural, creative function of the brain, must be practiced and developed through the action of play. Bronson says in "The Creativity Crisis:" "those who diligently practice creative activity learn to recruit their brains' creative networks quicker and better. A lifetime of consistent habits gradually changes the neurological pattern."[18] This means that connection-making is a skill available to every audience member. The skill might be at various stages of practice, but with the help of having a space to practice creativity, making comparisons and connections is ultimately how all people learn and problem solve, and these comparisons and connections are what the theatre should aim for as it designs its lobby spaces, and observes the reactions of the audience.

Socialization: How does this affect others?

In her thesis, "Confronting the Challenges of Participatory Culture with Lobby Design," Actors Theatre literary manager Jennifer Page-White highlights the importance of the "me to we design."[19] This design concept was coined by museum scholar Nina Simon, who theorized that a

museum visitor should be able to take a piece of art from a stage of "me" understanding, such as what they observe and think, to a stage of "we" understanding, recognizing the role the artwork plays in the larger narrative of society. Page-White builds on this, arguing that the use of this design concept:

> can facilitate the development of more communal social interactions amongst theatre audiences, and maximize the potential of the lobby space to serve as a transitional/transformational framework for the performance.[20]

What Page-White does not touch on, however, is how this concept of "me to we" is an important step of creative thinking known as socialization, and the third aspect that should be present in the creative spectator process.

Socialization, the third step of creative thinking, is where the highest stakes can be found. This is the moment when one considers the implications of an object, action, or concept beyond one's self. This is a crucial step to creative thinking and problem solving. Creativity is the ability to see beyond what is handed to you. It is "an attitude toward the possible […] rather than what is literally present in the situation."[21] People who play, imagine, and create, consistently test as being more aware of both the reality and the possibility of circumstances, because they have developed the ability to understand the world around them, the effects they have on their surroundings, and the way that people interact.[22] Practicing creative thinking means practicing socially aware thinking, a goal the theatre industry prides itself in taking part.

Schechner did not exaggerate the significance of the issue when he said, "To encourage participation encourages change in the social system."[23] As the creative process indicates, if done correctly, shifting the theatre model to focus on the creativity of the audience helps create a

culture of active, creative engagement in the world beyond theatre. This active, creative, meaningful engagement is the first step in building a community that approaches its issues with active, creative, meaningful solutions, and therefore should be a primary goal of the theatre community.

It is important to have a usable space in which the audience feels free to make creative decisions. In order to be the type of space in which people practice socialization, theatres must become locally focused, community driven, used and open spaces. This is a matter of theatre accessibility. As curator and museum educator Carol B. Stapp puts it, knowing how to use a space is a crucial step in making that space accessible.[24] She goes on to give the example that "basic library literacy means competence in reading books, but full library literacy signifies competence in drawing upon the library's holdings and services purposefully and independently."[25] Being able to enter a theatre is one thing, being able to successfully navigate the ways in which the theatre can serve you and your community is another; "In a word, the [...] literate visitor is 'empowered.'"[26] Rancière points out that the spectator/learner's gap is not between ignorance and knowledge, but ignorance and the means to gain knowledge.[27] In other words, it is not the role of an institution to spread knowledge, but to create space for exploring and practicing knowledge acquisition. In order to be a truly creative and engaging artform, space must be created for the audience to join the conversation started by the performance.

When the audience is allowed to be part of the conversation and the meaning-making that exists in the theatre's creative space, more change can happen more quickly. The experience is ever-evolving. We must stop and ask what it is we want the audience to gain from their theatre experience. Do we want them to be merely entertained, or should it be a space of memory and meaning? Should it be a space of narratives that are left there when the audience leaves, or a

space that “inspires people to imagine and try to shape a future that is better than the past”?[28] The goal of the theatre must be one grounded in creativity, not just for the sake of the nature of the artform itself, but also for the recognition that the more people there are in the world who actively practice creativity, the more space there is for problem solving and thinking beyond one’s self.

Chapter 2- Overcoming Obstacles: The Columbus Museum of Art

With a father in archaeology, I grew up in museums and have always had an interest in them. In college, I took courses in museum studies out of a casual interest and childhood nostalgia, but I quickly discovered that many of the theories about the audience that I was learning in my theatre courses, such as space theory and how a building directs the eye and mind of a visitor, were being used in museums and, in many ways, were being used more successfully. The summer of 2019, I worked as an intern at The Columbus Museum of Art. My work consisted of helping with children's camps, leading children's tours, taking art activities to libraries, schools, and conventions, helping out in the art studios, caring for visitor interactive activity spaces, and interacting with the visitors. I also worked in entering the visitor data that was collected from interactive spaces. I was interested in studying the Columbus Museum of Art, because of the ways they have revolutionized the visitor experience with their new system. With its new system, the Columbus Museum of Art asks: if the brain must practice creativity regularly, where better to do so than an art museum? What I seek to add to the conversation is: what about expanding the practice of creativity in theatres? While I seek to expand this creativity into theatre, I recognize the possible obstacles to successfully doing so and look to the Columbus Museum of Art for the blueprint on how to overcome them.

At the Columbus Museum of Art, the motto for their visitor centered model is "Art Speaks; Join the Conversation."[29] As the Columbus Museum of Art began their transition to a new model back in 2012, they established that, for them, the goal of audience interaction is to get the audience creatively and meaningfully involved in the conversation that the art begins.

However, in order to have a conversation, the audience needs multiple things. First, they need to know that the conversation is happening. Second, they need facts and information on the topic. Third, they need to feel inspired, encouraged, and empowered to join. And fourth, they need a forum. It is these four needs that the Columbus Museum of Art decided to address, and which I argue can be addressed in the theatre world as well.

When museums first became public institutions, the purpose of having these spaces open to the general public was so the space could encourage the morality of the uneducated masses. During the Industrial Revolution, as museums became less about curiosity and more about genius, it was a popular theory that simply exposing the poor or immigrants to great artists would enlighten and better them as individuals. Museums saw their primary goal as "contributing to the moral uplift of society."[30] While this belief system may no longer be held exactly, it has remnants in museum practice, which still often depicts art as works of great minds and carriers of inherent value for those who see them. The Columbus Museum of Art seeks to turn this thinking around, focusing on connecting the art to the audience, rather than the audience to art. In this way, rather than seeing the visitor as someone who would benefit from knowing the artwork of geniuses, it sees the artwork as something that needs the insight of the visitor in order to speak, much like a performance is not a performance without an audience.

While the exact timeline or catalyst for museum change is hard to determine, around 2000 many museums in the United States began to explore different options to help keep themselves afloat amid financial hardship. Many museums turned to new forms of visitor engagement to try to bring in more interest. In fact, it was in 2000 that Harold Skramstad, former president of the Henry Ford museum, wrote about the role of museums in a post-industrial era, and argued for the need of a new museum model. He spoke to his fellow museum leaders about

the time's object-focused model and said that, "The point is that the sense of uniqueness that we feel about our museums is not shared by our publics. For them it is an issue of finding experiences that give value and meaning to their lives."[31]

Born out of these observations, needs, and calls for change was the visitor-centered approach, adopted by many museums around the world. *Systems Thinking in Museums: Theory and Practice,* a textbook on museum planning, explains the visitor-centered approach as this:

> This visitor-centered approach hinges on understandings and crucial insights about who is likely to visit the gallery, what stories might interest them, and what they might feel and do when they visit. This also entails striving for installations of art, interpretation, and design that are welcoming, accessible, insightful, thought-provoking, interactive, and also engaging on multiple levels, including offering opportunities for visitors to form and express their own opinions.[32]

In short, this model sees the museum space as primarily about the visitor, rather than the art.

The Columbus Museum of Art was part of this change, drastically overhauling every aspect of the museum in 2012. Maciejunes, summarized their goals as "...the museum's focus had to be on art *and* people."[33] This builds heavily on Skramstad who says that a necessary new model "focuses attention on the role of visitor as learner rather than museum as teacher."[34] As subtle as it might seem, the visitor-centered approach is primarily about switching subject and object. Rather than thinking about what the art does to the visitor, it asks what the visitor does with the art.

The Columbus Museum of Art's solution to the changing field of museums was not just to focus on the visitor, but to focus on visitor creativity. Merilee Mostov was the Columbus Museum of Art's first director of visitor engagement. She highlighted the importance of creativity in her article "Making Space for Experimentation, Collaboration, and Play: Reimagining the Drop-in Visitor Experience," saying, "Creativity, in all of its myriad expressions, manifestations, and disguises, is essential to human growth, development, and achievement."[35]

Mostov's first step in making a creative space was identifying the assumptions carried by the institution about visitors. Mostov identified four assumptions made by the museum industry, and by the Columbus Museum of Art specifically, that led to the disengagement of their audience. She identifies those four obstacles as follows:

> 1. We assumed that visitors understand the relationship of the works in one gallery.
> 2. We assumed that visitors know what questions to ask when they look at a painting, or that they felt confident to ask questions.
> 3. We assumed that visitors know that we install art in chronological order to tell a grand narrative about the history of art.
> 4. We assume that visitors know how to use a label.[36]

The solution the Columbus Museum of Art arrived at for these obstacles was not to train the audience to know how to interact with the space, but to encourage the audience to make creative discoveries within the space. They also shifted their focus from being a tourist location that one might come to a couple of times, to being a central location in the community. Nanette

Maciejunes recognized that in order to survive, the museum could not rely on tourism mentality, but had to create a space that was repeatedly accessed by the community.[37] She also recognized that doing so meant that the museum could no longer function in the same way. Rather, those in the museum would have to choose "to use our expertise in a more meaningful way for our community."[38]

As a result of this choice to be more meaningful to the community, the museum is no longer just a space to house and display art. Today, the Columbus Museum of Art has open studio hours every Saturday, allowing anyone of any age and any experience to make free use of art materials and a studio space. On Wednesdays, they host teen studios, allowing highschoolers to come in, make art, and learn how to use new art tools and equipment, including cameras, recording studios, and digital programs. School tours come into the museum regularly. For the younger children there's "Artful Adventures" in which they get to respond to art by making their own creations. The museum has become involved with local libraries, churches, and businesses. Employees are encouraged to get coffee or lunch in nearby restaurants to build a relationship with their owners. They stay open later, some days are free or for a reduced price, the garden is open for yoga classes, and there are spaces in the museum that you can enter without paying. However, while these changes indicate a shift in ideology, it is important to recognize that they are not the process by which change happened, but rather the results of thinking more thoroughly about clearly communicating the conversation the museum is trying to have, prioritizing clear, accessible information, and providing a forum that empowers the visitor. The changes are also the product of clearly identifying the space's obstacles and implementing tactics that directly engage those problems. Therefore, what can be learned from the Columbus Museum of Art is not the specific tactics with which they accomplished their overhaul, but the process by which they

identified the obstacles of the museum achieving its goals with its visitors and designed tactics to fit.

Mostov outlines what this process looked like in "Making Space for Experimentation, Collaboration, and Play."[39] She breaks down the design process to big idea, design concept, learning outcome, and connectors. In order to explain these concepts and how the process applies to theatre, I will briefly work through the steps as I demonstrate how I used them in my own lobby design for the 2019 premiere of Jen Silverman's *Bonnets: How Ladies of Good Breeding are Induced to Murder*, at The Ohio State University.

Big Idea

The big idea is important as the first step, as this makes up "the broad thesis" of the design.[40] As education consultant Barbara Soren reminds us, "During a particular museum visit only an initial conceptual or emotional connection may happen."[41] The same is true of any space or experience. As far as we know, each audience member will most likely walk away with only one clear take-away. What should we aim to have that take-away be? For my lobby display for *Bonnets,* my big idea was "*Women's anger can be righteous and productive.*" I chose this big idea after long talks with the director and cast about what they saw as the primary goal of our production. What I was struck by was the absolute joy that was taken by the all women cast in having a space in which their anger about the way they were treated in society was considered valid and helpful to the project. This juxtaposition of taking joy in anger spoke to me as the backbone of the production and the singular element I needed my audience to walk away understanding.

Incorporating this singular element of recognizing joy in anger into the lobby was important. As Page-White points out, "A great number of participatory projects could be designed that have nothing to do with the theatrical production, but they would not serve the function of the lobby..."[42] Rather than simply designing something to be interactive, I needed it to serve the function of the lobby for this particular production. This is why the big idea is so necessary. Rather than simply designing something for the sake of being interactive, the theatre must first determine what the larger message of this production is. It is not enough to have a lobby that is interactive, or even a lobby that is interactive and tangentially related to the content of the play. In order to begin the creative process, what is in the lobby must be cohesive in message with the production, otherwise it does not make space for connection-making between the performance and the activities in the lobby.

Design Concept

Next comes the design concept. While the big idea is the thesis, the design concept is how that thesis will be experienced, the theme, if you will. After deciding that the thesis of my *Bonnets* display was recognizing productive and righteous female anger, I decided my design concept would be Riot Grrrl inspired. A 1990s movement of young women to express dissatisfaction with society, Riot Grrrl seems to me to epitomize the acceptance of female anger. While women's rage as productive remained the focal point of the space, Riot Grrrl became the lens through which to view it, allowing the lobby to have a cohesive aesthetic and giving me a sieve through which I could run all of my many ideas, to ensure that only the cohesive remained.

Learning Outcomes

Next is deciding on learning outcomes. This also could be thought of as visitor outcomes, or audience outcomes. This is what we want the audience to do in response to the things they are witnessing. Maciejunes suggests focusing on the audience outcomes of imagination (the audience develops a new idea), critical thinking (the audience synthesizes and evaluates an idea), creativity (the audience does something with an idea), and innovation (the audience uses the idea to make progress, change, or impact).[43] Mostov, however, focuses on more measurable audience outcomes, such as conversation (two or more people discussing a concept, or one person writing about a concept), collaboration (two or more people working together to compete a task), experimentation (manipulation of material), curiosity (asking a question), relevance (expression of a connection between the art and some other experience or concept), and critical thinking (which she further breaks down to observe, compare, question, and interpret).[44] These are also arguably not the only outcomes from which to choose, but provide insight into how the Columbus Museum of Art approaches this step.

For the *Bonnets* display, I chose curiosity (I wanted the audience asking questions about women, music, and anger before they entered the performance space) and experimentation (I wanted the audience to play with the material in a destructive way). *Bonnets* uses the tool of music to assist the story, without being a full musical, and has only three musical numbers. This was immediately a source of dramaturgical interest for me, as I wrestled to find how the music added to the story. While I, the cast, and the director came to our own conclusions on the matter, enough to move forward with the production, I decided not to hand those answers to the audience, but rather to engage them by asking them, "What does music have to do with women's

anger?" Having the audience roll that question around in their minds became one of my audience-outcome goals.

I also wanted the audience to ask how deconstruction and destruction could lead to joy or a feeling of progress. To encourage this line of thinking, especially as it is ultimately a question of emotion rather than intellect, I decided that my second audience outcome goal would be to get the audience to destroy or deconstruct something themselves, and have the experience of participating in destruction in order to build something new.

Connectors

Last, but not least in the process, comes connectors. These are "specific strategies" that the space will employ to help the audience achieve the learning goals.[45] This is the moment when recognizing the differences in how people process and engage is important. It is important to keep the audience engaged in various ways. Maciejunes argues that it is critical to invite "visitors to engage with all their senses."[46] These connectors also encourage the audience to reframe their understanding and knowledge in a way that benefits their new experience.

In order to achieve my learning goals for *Bonnets,* I played a soundtrack of angry women singing, I gave the audience quotes and faces that they had to manually uncover by lifting flaps, and I gave them magazines to tear up and scribble on, along with a creative wall space on which they could hang their work. The soundtrack connector created an atmosphere as soon as audiences entered the space, and many audience members sang along as well-known artists such as Carrie Underwood or Beyonce sang about their anger, as well as looked up lesser known female artists on their phones. This connector, therefore, caused the audience to participate in a vocal response, as well as ask questions about what they were hearing. The flap-lifting exhibit

was less successful, as there was no clear signage telling the audience that they were allowed to touch, nor, looking back, did it fit as cleanly into my goals for learning outcomes. However, it did spark interest among the cast especially, as they spent time in the lobby, allowing themselves to question which women have been covered up by history because they were considered too angry.

The lobby display was by no means perfect and I learned the importance of clear signage and instructions through that display, as expectations of space and its use is incredibly important and will be discussed further in the next chapter. However, one way in which the lobby succeeded was in the creative wall space, where audience members could tear up magazines and use them to create their own art on the wall. Some people created for the sake of creating, making little to no connection with the play. However, others left messages in their work that were in clear conversation with the performance. One excellent example was a young woman who, according to the stage manager, did not make her addition to the wall until after the performance. As the stage manager went through her various clean-up and close-up routines and tasks, she left the lobby space open longer than usual to allow this woman to finish her work. What resulted was a collage picture that included a very important question: “Why is women’s history white women’s history?”

While the cast of *Bonnets* was not an all-white cast, the play did look at feminist issues by following three very white historical narratives: 18th century French aristocracy, American puritans, and the middle-class of Victorian England. In response, this audience member used her performance space (the lobby) to question why these three elements of history were the ones used to tell the stories of women through time. She used her creative control of the lobby space

and its materials to critique with the stage-performed narrative. This is the kind of interaction we want to see from our audience.

This story highlights a particular tactic that has been largely successful at the Columbus Museum of Art, as well as many other museums, and which I see as integral to any system which seeks to redirect its focus to encouraging creative spectatorship. For the Columbus Museum of Art, a large part of the process of making a visitor-oriented, creative space is about sharing curatorial power. In the broader world of museums, theatre and museum historian Scott Magelssen reports on the trend in museums to include spaces in which visitors can write on sticky notes and add their thoughts to the exhibit. In a space that traditionally has a curator who determines which art and which pieces of the conversation are "good enough" or "valuable enough" to be included, "the sticky note wall surrendered a degree of curatorial power over the kinds of narratives allowed in the space."[47] In the art world which regularly sequesters valid creativity into the realm of genius (particularly white, male genius), knowing that their creativity is considered valuable enough to be in that space might be all a visitor needs to know in order to think more creatively. This is a concept easily linked back to play theory, for as play theorist Michael Ellis points out, increasing freedom increases responses, and doing so is, "not a particularly sophisticated or difficult thing to do."[48] The visitor should feel that their addition to the narrative will not be censored or judged as "good enough" or "not good enough" to exist in the space. They must have an inherently valid voice. The visitor, of museum or theatre, should feel that the narrative that they bring to the table, and by extension, they as individuals, are important.

The idea of uncurated responses is one in which the Columbus Museum of Art participates heavily and on which they base much of their work. Part of my job in my time there

was to keep visitor-interactive spaces clean and accessible. My instructions were to remove any visitor responses that were meaningless scribbles, promotions for a business, or which had hateful symbols or words on them, anything that I could not clearly identify as fitting in those categories was left. However, I was not to remove visitor responses for not being in line with the spirit, theme, or message of the overall exhibition. The museum saw shutting down conversations of disagreement or of different interpretation as being actively against a model that kept visitors engaged.

There is much from the Columbus Museum of Art's creative visitor model that I see as aspects that can be implemented in theatrical spaces when thinking about the creative spectator, but I especially see their process of identifying what they aim to see from their visitors, what they are doing to actively discourage that behavior, and developing new methods by which to engage the visitor with the art as what the theatre needs to emulate. Creating a new model and culture of audience creativity involves a how, but the groundwork has already been laid by museums. When Skramstad made his call for a new museum model, he said that museums should see their mission as one of being:

> experience providers with distinctive capabilities in creating experiences that are able to connect the public to larger stories, values, ideas, and myths that are in so far as possible seen as true and authentic, and which give value to their lives.[49]

This mission is easily transferable over to theatre to create a model that is more open to the creative collaboration of the audience, and which values the audience's contributions as the primary goal of the space.

Of course, using this museum revolution as a basis of lobby design is nothing new. As the *American Theatre* article by Russell Dembin, "Where the Show Begins in the Lobby," points out:

> Several proponents of interactive lobby design said they found inspiration in the book *The Participatory Museum* and the blog Museum 2.0, both by Nina Simon, executive director of the Santa Cruz Museum of Art & History at the McPherson Center in California. Simon's work has given theatre organizations a wealth of creative tactics for engaging theatregoers before they enter the auditorium.[50]

Museums worldwide implemented Simon's theories and theatre followed suit. However, The Columbus Museum of Art took the participatory experience a step farther, a step that is important for maintaining an artistic community: the Columbus Museum of Art sees the audience not just as participatory, but also as creative contributors to the meaning of the art they observe. The Columbus Museum of Art has successfully laid the groundwork for overcoming obstacles to this goal, put in place by the more traditional view of the industry. While museums have already been inspiring theatres when it comes to audiences and participation, I believe that it is the Columbus Museum of Art's history and practice that provides the solutions for engaging a creative, and not merely active, spectator.

Chapter 3- The Lobby: Theatre's Best Tactic

If creative spectatorship is the goal, and the obstacle to such, as established by the Columbus Museum of Art is an art-over-audience focus, then it can be concluded that the lobby is theatre's best tactic, as it is the lobby that is experienced as the audience's space. The spaces in which we try to achieve our goals and overcome our obstacles are incredibly important. Social geographer, Benno Werlen points out:

> All individual actors [...] are, among other things, physical organisms, which must be related in physical space. This means [...] location inherently enters into all action. [...] The range of actions in the physical world is limited, as they are tied to the locations of the institutions involved.[51]

This means that any action one seeks from a group, must be supported by the location in which one places them. This is why I focus specifically on the lobby as a primary tactic for accomplishing the goal of creative spectatorship.

The lobby, as traditionally used, can be very narrowly viewed. David R. Kilpatrick, executive director of the Des Moines Playhouse, states that, "Research of published lobby theories reveals that in addition to serving as a social center there are three additional functions of the lobby: revenue generator, transitional passage, and performance preparation."[52] The function of the lobby and the very meaning of transitional passage and performance preparation, however, has begun to expand as the meaning of interaction and audience also expands. While Kilpatrick's examples of transition and preparation primarily involve appreciation of the

architecture and history of the theatre itself, Dembin highlights some of the newer uses of the lobby:

> Theatre companies have begun giving audience members ways to directly engage with themes and ideas relating to the piece they've come to see-- as soon as they arrive at the venue. Theatregoers have always had an opportunity to seek out supplemental content before entering the auditorium-- maybe by reading about the play's historical context or the author's career, or by checking out photos of past productions or design renderings. But now, depending on what's playing and where, theatre patrons might find themselves sharing a personal secret on a Post-it note, dropping in a marble in a jar to vote on a hot-button issue, or even labeling parts of human anatomy.[53]

This use of the lobby has been very successful for, as Kilpatrick found out through his interviews, the lobby is where the theatre experience starts for many visitors.[54] Because of the way the lobby influences the experience of the audience, shifting from an attitude of awe and expected public behavior in the space to participation in the space is incredibly important. However, while these lobbies are successful, it is important to take it the step further that the Columbus Museum of Art did, and think purposefully about how these displays and interactions can promote creative thinking and accept the spectator as a creative body.

While lobby-based discouragement of audience play and creativity is often passive, resting more in tradition and default than in an active, enforced deterrence, it still has its strength in creating a culture. Audiences often enter the lobby space with the expectation to sit, be

unobtrusive, and not touch anything. Because of this, they are set up to enter the stage space with an uncreative mindset, obediently ready to accept rather than experiment, watch rather than discover. By looking at the lobby through the lens of the play theory explored in chapter one, this is not the fault of the audience. Dr. Roberta. R. Collard, a medical doctor in human development, argued in her article "Exploration and Play" that it is human nature to play as much as "a setting permits to have happen in it… a setting signals you to do what you're supposed to do."[55] Play theorist Corinne Hutt builds on this, calling play a, "less resilient behavior […] more dependent upon contextual [space-time] variables."[56] According to this way of thinking, if the theatre is not being treated by its audience as a playful space, it is because the theatre is not presenting itself as a playful space, it is not providing the control, space or time, or social tools necessary for audience interaction and play. As Werlen puts it, "A logical action accords with the objective conditions of the situation."[57] In order for the audience to play in the lobby, play must be the logical action to take in that space. He points out that, while an actor has the means to perform an action, he must also be provided with the conditions, which are ultimately out of his control, but rather in the hands of those who design the spaces in which he is acting.[58]

Recognizing the way space leads to action suggests that by focusing on the stage as the world of audience interaction, the audience has already been lost because they have been asked to come into another's space, rather than being met in their space. The stage has been given priority as the most important space of a theatre building, with the lobby often being nothing more than a holding space for those who wish to enter the stage-space. However, the lobby, in concept if not always in execution, is arguably the most functional location for the encouragement of audience control and play because it can be designed in such a way that allows it to truly be the audience's space.

Kilpatrick points out that theatre lobby is generally thought of, "in terms of financial support of the theatre."[59] However, having a space which is nothing more than a holding pen or a marketplace for show goods and alcohol does a disservice to art and audience alike. It also does not respect the very lobby space that is equally dedicated to theatre as the stage. In order to be a creative space, the lobby must have a drastic shift. Rather than being seen only as a transitional space for audiences to quiet down, get in the theatre mindset, prepare to consume the production, and purchase beverages and goods, the lobby must be seen as a space for audience action and interaction.

Schechner speaks on the concept of creating audience space that is not focused on product in "Audience Participation." He argues that the first step to changing audience culture is by treating theatre as an experience, rather than a product.[60] In order to move into a more equal role with the audience, rather than one of service and consumer, Schechner urges theatres to remember:

> Without the audience's collaboration no performance is possible. To include the audience is to work in front of it, or with it, but not for it. The buyer-bought relationship is abolished because there is nothing for sale, either goods or services. Instead, there is an agreement to begin, maintain, and possibly complete a set of actions-- many of which, in order to develop, need the audience.[61]

In order to do this, the theatre does not, necessarily, have to abolish all forms of profit generation, but must see its space, and I argue primarily the lobby space, as a space of the audience's control and creation, rather than a money-making tool.

This is only one aspect of Schechner's "Audience Participation" that I find important to this discussion. Schechner also argued that what the theatre needs is "open spaces," in which people (audience or performer) can meet on equal terms.[62] While he attempted to do so on the stage, it is difficult to make the stage this equal space. The very nature of the stage is an isolating one, in which the one in the spotlight, on the strongest stage point, the one talking, will always be isolated from the rest of the group. With this in mind, the next step to creative spectatorship is moving the concept of Schechner's open space from the stage and bringing it out to the lobby, where it is able to grow from open space to truly *used* space, one centered in creativity rather than participation.

Theatres are spaces of narrative, which is why the theatre is a great place to continue the conversation that a performance starts. However, to use terminology established earlier in this paper, if what is sought is a form of participation that relies on action or understanding based engagement, the response being asked of the audience is "yes." It is only through creativity-based engagement that the audience can respond, "yes, and…" "Yes" may be achieved in an open space, which may be the stage, but "yes, and…" requires a used space, a space more in line with the potential uses of the lobby than the stage.

When trying to design and implement these open spaces, Schechner recognized six concerns, which I recognized as correlating with the creative thought process and have, therefore, split into three categories of two concerns each, following the same question structure which was addressed in chapter one. The first category is spatial concerns. This refers to both the physical and temporal space needed for an individual to properly explore and ask the question, "what is this?" The second category is personal concerns. These are matters of personal safety and comfort that either encourage or discourage an individual from playing and asking, "what

can I do?" The third is social concerns. These are the elements that help bind together individual experiences and encourage one to interact with a group, think beyond one's self, and ask, "how does this affect others?"

Spatial: Room to Explore

In the category of spatial falls Schechner's concerns one and five. Concern one says that through audience participation, the rhythm of performance could be destroyed, thereby breaking the temporal space. Concern five is that the audience has come to this particular space to see a play and has the right to have that expectation fulfilled, making the addition of participatory behavior unsettling to the audience's understanding of the physical space.[63]

In the physical and temporal space of a performance, Schechner's concern is that there is not enough room for both rhythm and improvisation, for both fulfillment of contractual agreements and exploration of possibilities, for drama and participation. It must be either/or. There is not enough space for both. Shechner's solutions to concerns one (destroying the rhythms of performance) and five (the audience expectation to see a dramatic performance), are as follows. For the first, Shechner recommends that the theatre learn to accept random as well as prepared rhythms as artistically valid. For the latter, Shechner suggests that performers not mix dramatic performance and participatory performance, but rather create space and time for both to exist.[64]

The lobby is the type of space that can be made into the space of random rhythms and participatory performance, allowing the stage-space to exist as a space of contracts, timeliness, and pristine dramatic structure, if that is what is desired and needed by that particular production.

Structure is a useful and important tool, especially for telling a story, making an argument, or starting a conversation. However, as play theorist Dorothy Singer points out, when it comes to creativity, individuals tend to be more interested in unstructured play, as there are multiple ways to use objects and concepts in unstructured play, leading to more complex and elaborate thoughts and actions. This does not mean that people do not enjoy structured play, such as board games or watching a film or play, or that any structure at all is detrimental to creativity, on the contrary, it can often be inspiring to creativity. What she does mean is that the freedom of unstructured play leads to longer and more creative play.[65] Since both structured and unstructured involvement have their benefits, as even Schechner recognized, it makes sense to have physical spaces devoted to each, allowing a production to explore the various forms of structure and freedom along the sliding scale, rather than having to commit to structure or freedom.

The lobby can achieve this by transforming into a used space, which can be described as functioning more like a library. At a library, while there may be a scheduled event, like a lecture, happening in one room, the rest of the building is not a holding zone for people to enter the event, but is room after room of space that can be used in various ways (accessing the internet, reading, doing homework, browsing, printing, etc), whether you are there for the lecture or not. Likewise, the theatre can continue to have various uses of its stage space, from ninety-minute proscenium realism to six-hour interactive improvisation. However, the rest of the theatre, the lobby, must be open to be a creative, used space for all, and not just an entertaining holding zone for those who have paid to see what is happening in the stage-space.

Not only should the space itself be vast, but it should create temporal space that does not require the audience's experience to be centered on the performance itself. Visitors may choose to explore the lobby all day and see the production at night, or to see the production and come

back to the lobby the next day. The audience may choose to bypass the lobby all together, or, alternatively, some may decide to stay in the lobby for the duration of the performance and never actually enter the stage-space or see the performance.

What I propose to meet the spatial needs of a used space is not a simple redressing of lobbies, but rather a shift theatre's structure similar to the Columbus Museum of Art's shift, focusing on the audience the theatre brings in more than the art it puts out. With this structural change, the stage space becomes only a fraction of what the theatre has to offer, rather than the primary space, expanding physical and temporal limits of where and when the audience can take part in the narrative.

Personal: Room to Play

In the category of personal risks, Schechner addresses concerns two and four. Two says that all participation is manipulative, because the performers know things the audience does not. Four states that once the question, "who is the boss?" is asked, only hostility ensues between performers and audience. These are concerns of personal comfort, worries of individuals that they will somehow be made to look foolish or less than.[66]

The catch to interactive space is that there must be a response to audience actions in order to hold interest and be truly *inter*active. However, the idea of receiving a response to their actions must seem relatively low risk to the audience for them to participate without fear of embarrassment. Part of the concern in participating and in eliciting responses is that those responses might be highly negative. The risk of criticism can never, and arguably should never, be completely removed. However, it is the audience who takes the risk when participating on

stage with the performers, and the audience needs their own space in which it is the performer who takes a risk by interacting.

When it comes to these personal risks and concerns, Schechner lists his solutions as follows: for issue two (all participation is manipulative), Schechner says that the solution would be:

> Finding times in the performance where the performers do not know any more than the audience. These are not 'improvised' moments, where the performers work freely from a set of objectives or rules, but truly 'open moments,' like intermissions, where all the people in the room, acting either individually or in small groups, or in concert, move the action forward. [67]

For issue four (the question of "who is the boss" creates hostility), Schechner says that the solution is that there be "No attempt at forcing a point of view from either the performers' or the spectators' side." [68] What these solutions boil down to is the concept of relinquishing some element of control to the audience. The lobby acts as an ideal space for this, because of its reputation as an audience only space, and not a space for the performers. The lobby can exist as a space in which the audience is free to critique and create, thereby eliminating the "barriers for multidirectional artistic expression."[69] It is the space in which the theatre can best follow the Columbus Museum of Art's lead and give up curatorial power and be a truly open space.

People are uncomfortable in a space in which they do not know the rules. While "not knowing the rules" might seem like a petty reason for the audience to leave and never return, or while it might be tempting to blame the audience for not learning the rules, it must be understood that this fear of being embarrassed or "getting in trouble" is a natural psychological phenomenon

in which most, if not all, humans participate. Any space which wishes to encourage visitor engagement must be one in which the audience feels that they have the space and time to learn the rules well enough that they can confidently take control, and feel at ease stepping in and out of their comfort zones.

Schechner argued about the stage: “The audience must be permitted to control the space, to actually sense that it is their space.”[70] This sense of control is the feeling that one can play, explore, discover, and imagine, and that one’s voice is valid, but it is difficult to achieve on the stage. This difficulty is best explained through play theory. Hutt explains that when merely told what to do, those interactions do not allow an individual to “express his competence. It is only an imaginative situation-- one where the [individual] is in control-- which releases a performance congruent with that competence.”[71] Therefore completing tasks on stage according to actor instructions, even if the audience has some control as to timing or direction, cannot meet the potential of audience interaction, or the desires of the audience to contribute. In order to capture the interest of the audience and cause them to buy-in to the experience, they must feel that they not only can interact, but that their interaction has real results that, in some way, changes the very meaning of the moment. A playful space can be achieved in the lobby through audience access to various materials, which, while there might be suggestions to get creativity started, ultimately have no right or wrong use. Along with access to the materials, finished products and thoughts on the topic should have the space to be displayed, allowing each visitor’s contribution to become part of the artistic narrative being presented by the theatre.

Social: Room to Socialize

In the category of social risks fall concerns three and six. Concern three says that a free-for-all is neither art nor a party, but only an amorphous mess. Concern six states that neither actor nor spectator is trained to deal with participation. These are concerns of social comfort. The risk is that actors and audience will not know how to interact as a group and properly participate in the social event, thereby creating an unhelpful disaster, rather than a meaningful social statement.[72]

Schechner's solution to risk three (a free-for-all is neither art nor a social gathering) was to create a system in which both structured and open actions and interactions could exist. His solutions to risk six (neither performers nor audience are trained to deal with participation) was simply to train performers on how to be gracious hosts, and audiences on how to take advantage of open possibilities.[73] By making the lobby an open, communal, used space, these solutions become possibilities, with the lobby acting as both open interaction space and training space. Kilpatrick claims that "a number of theorists suggest that theatre is a social experience, defined as a social event in which crowds gather to share the experience."[74] He goes on in his essay to quote an interviewee as saying, "'I want to share [the theatre experience] with somebody […]that enhances the experience.'"[75] As Werlen points out, in order to have a social experience and build what he calls "we-relationships," there must be a common space for the "we."[76] How much more capable would the theatre be of fulfilling its social role, and addressing Schechner's social concerns, if the lobby space were actually built to take the creative step of socialization?

Making the lobby a social zone goes beyond seeing friends and meeting strangers. It goes beyond making the lobby a space where the audience can contribute. A truly social lobby would be one in which performers can interact with the audience in a way that decentralizes the quality

of their performance and instead highlights their connection to the community. More traditional interactions between artist and audience often look like audience interactions with the actors in character or talk-backs which are timed and still often rest in a mentality of artists being the answerers and audiences being the questioners, often despite the best efforts to make it otherwise. Another way that audiences and performer interact is in post-show meet and greets, which can often carry an awe mentality. These are not the types of social interaction that I am advocating for in this creative model. Rather, artists must see themselves and be seen as members of the community and, more than that, "active and vocal members" of the community.[77] This does not mean writing a play about a local issue, performing it, and moving on, or using some form of influence to be a spokesperson for a topic. Once again, inspiration can be gained through museums. Carlos Tortolero, president of The National Museum of Mexican Art says that he is only "interested in artists who are actively involved with issues, those who talk to their neighbors and the local barber or grocer, not just other artists."[78] This, he says, is how it should be for an art museum and, likewise, I argue that this is how it should be for a theatre. To help encourage a creative community, it is important that, "members of the community come to know working artists."[79] Audience and artists are equal stakeholders in the narrative presented in that performance moment, as well as in how that narrative affects the broader community.

A social lobby is one in which children come after school to hang out or do homework. It is one in which artists rest and relax during the day, or work on their latest project. It is one in which employees from surrounding businesses come during their lunch break and end up having a discussion with the director of the last performance they saw. A social lobby encourages

creative thinking by normalizing messy interactions, rather than etiquette-ruled meetings, and by recognizing that amorphous messes often have a way of settling into something beautiful.

Conclusion: Expected Changes

Over the course of this paper, I have explored the meaning of creativity, its use by the Columbus Museum of Art, and the lobby as a used space, a concept grown out of Schechner's open space. But how does one put these pieces together? I advocate for implementing the Columbus Museum of Art's focus on creativity and (as I have termed it) creative spectatorship in lobby spaces through the lens of Schechner's open spaces, which I see as inherently linked to the process of creative thinking in the way it acknowledges space, personal control, and socialization as the primary needs of a connected audience. With the goal of creative spectatorship in mind, the Columbus Museum of Art can help identify the obstacle of an art over audience focus, which sheds light on the need to value the lobby as much as, if not more than, the stage. However, it is Schechner, specifically in his 1971 article, who manages to bring up tangible and theatrical tactics to focus on the audience. While the museum theory might call for Schechner's tactics to be removed from the stage, it is ultimately Schechner's tactics that invite museum theory into the theatre.

In the theatre, we play many games to keep our minds and bodies sharp. One such game is the ball game, the perfect metaphor for creativity. Creative thinking is about decreasing the processed information of a new object or concept in order to make it manageable (exploration), and then increasing the object or concept to make it usable (playing), followed by reducing its size again to make it manageable enough to share with others (socializing), who you know will play with the concept or object in their own way, expanding and reducing the information as they see fit. Put this in comparison with the ball game. Performers stand in a circle and the first performer forms an invisible ball, small enough to be held comfortably in their hands. Once this ball is to a manageable size, the performer then stretches and manipulates the invisible ball to

make a larger, more creative invisible object (an umbrella, saxophone, book, etc.) needed for their brief performance. After this, the performer squishes the object back into a palm-sized ball and throws the invisible ball to the next performer who stretches it into the necessary tool for their brief performance.

Not only does this game physically enact the idea of shrinking and growing a concept, it lays out the steps of creative problem solving. First, as one is introduced to a mass of information, one must condense this information down into something that can be held, something comparable to the known, so that there is space and ability to manage it. Next, it is identified what is needed out of the ball of information and the information is expanded to create the tool needed for the moment. After which, one shares the information, once again condensing the information into a manageable ball before handing it off to the next person.

The theatre already knows how to play this game, both in its literal and metaphorical forms. Performers, directors, and designers play this game in the rehearsal space, in tech meetings, and on stage by consistently having to expand a production concept to their work, and then bring their work back down to an explainable size for their colleagues, making the creation of every production the ball game. However, if we want the audience to participate in the game, we must give them the space to join the metaphorical circle. By creating a theatrical structure which sees the audience as part of the circle, there is more opportunity for fulfilling a creative spectatorship model and meeting the needs of the audience for personal control, plenty of space and time, and a social center. Once again, to achieve this goal, it is best to look at the process of the Columbus Museum of Art and add a theatrical twist. Designing this creative space is, to some extent, about accepting the ball of information handed to us by the Columbus Museum of Art,

stretching it to its wildest, largest form, and then condensing it back down to a manageable size for the hand-off of information to our audiences to see what they will do with it.

In order to expand this research, I see the next step as an attempt to implement this model. While the research on creativity, play, museums, and audience/visitor interaction is broad and not all of it has been touched upon in this essay, what I write about is ultimately a practical model and not a theoretical framework. The easiest way to fight against cultural assumptions (such as how the lobby is viewed) is by taking part in performances that contradict those assumptions. The lobby is a space of performance, just as much as the stage-space. Adopting a lobby model that focuses on audience creativity is possible. However, to do it successfully, it must go beyond putting up displays and activities in a traditional lobby space. To make creative cultures means adopting creative solutions. No matter how much we add to the existing spaces, they will still contain what Werlen refers to as spatial residues, or a public understanding of what that space means or is for.[80] Future research would involve finding ways to design new theatres so as to decentralize the stage-space and performance, and restructure theatrical business models so as to allow for open visitation to the lobby space, as well as access to materials that allow for audience additions to the space.

For theatres without the resources to take the full plunge, they might consider implementing what they can. Creative lobby spaces do not need be perfect. In his interview with Russell M. Dembin, Steppenwolf director of new play development, Aaron Carter, attributes a large part of Steppenwolf's experimental lobbies to the fact that they are willing "to be a little messy around the edges, so that we can experiment quickly and try new things."[81] What should be learned from this is a willingness to take new steps in the pursuit of open, creative, used spaces, even if the desired framework is not quite there yet. If theatre is a creative institution that

promotes creativity in its audience, it should be expected to make creative decisions in how it operates its lobby and business.

Museum director Claudine K. Brown argued that the goal of museums must be,"to create an environment in which people see the museum as their own communal space."[82] Theatres should see this as their ultimate goal as well. To perform art is meaningless if there is no social space to explore, discuss, and interact with art. It is through a collaboration mentality that a creative spectator lobby model encourages the audience to feel a sense of ownership in the narrative, by shifting the view of a theatre's role from a guardian, authority, or presenter of culture or art to a fosterer of conversation and creativity.

In her reflection on the process of making The Columbus Museum of Art more visitor and community focused, Mostov lays out the issue quite eloquently:

> We built a reputation on the creativity of others […] and yet, we did not value imagination and creativity in our own practice; we did not give *ourselves* permission to be innovators […] The process demands that we change our old way of doing business; that we imagine, experiment, and take risks; that we embrace creativity in our practice […] Hoping and wishing and assuming that those stories will happen on their own is not acceptable [...] In our new process, we take responsibility for the outcomes."[83]

Mostov's call to arms is one that could echo through the theatre as well. No more hoping, wishing, assuming that the audience will take a narrative and do something meaningful with it. No more hiding behind the normal way of doing things, thinking of creativity as stage only, or only being willing to innovate to a point. If the goals of the theatre truly revolve around the

audience, then we must rework our system, and we must do it in a way that values space for the creative spectator. If art truly is a step in the community's process of change, rather than simply setting the goal for theatre to change the world, we must overcome obstacles, try new tactics, and set out with the expectation that theatre as we know it will one day be a vastly different industry.

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[4] Richard Schechner, "Audience Participation," *The Drama Review* 15, no. 3 (Summer, 1971): 74-5.

[5] Richard Schechner, *Performance Theory* (New York: Routledge, 1988), 146.

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[16] Greta Fein, "Play with Actions and Objects," in *Play and Learning,* ed. Brian Sutton-Smith (New York: Gardner Press, 1979), 72.

[17] Rancière, "The Emancipated Spectator," 24.

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[35] Merilee Mostov, "Making Space for Experimentation, Collaboration, and Play: Re-imagining the Drop-in Visitor Experience," *Journal of Museum Education* 39, no. 2 (July 2014): 162.

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[54] Kilpatrick, "The Theatre Lobby Experience," 107.

[55] Collard, "Exploration and Play," 66.

[56] Corinne Hutt, "Exploration and Play," in *Play and Learning*, ed. Brian Sutton-Smith, (New York: Gardner Press, 1979), 175. (Despite its identical title and publishing information, this is a separate article from Collard's.)

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[68] Ibid., 75.

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