PRIMUS THEATRE: ESTABLISHING AN ALTERNATIVE MODEL
FOR CREATING THEATRE IN ENGLISH CANADA

by

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Abstract

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This study of Primus Theatre is evidence of many things. First and foremost it is a long overdue print recognition of Primus Theatre’s substantial artistic accomplishments and its important contribution to the development of theatre-making in English-speaking Canada. In examining the various factors contributing to the founding of the theatre and the extremely challenging conditions in which company members functioned over the years, it remains truly remarkable that Primus Theatre existed at all.

Three central determinations emerge from the examination of Primus Theatre’s practice. The theatre truly was a pioneering venture in English Canada. Company members established an “as-if-permanent” ensemble that engaged in the creation of original performance work drawn from research that emerged from their regular training practice. The company adopted a theatre-making practice generated by the Odin Theatre in Denmark and then adapted it to vastly different cultural and fiscal contexts. It can also be determined that the origins of the company are inextricably bound to Richard Fowler’s personal artistic journey. His strong sense of the creative and communal potential for theatre not only fuelled his own creative journey but also inspired National Theatre School students to launch their own acts of courage.
The third determination arising from this study is that, while all aspects of Primus Theatre’s creative practice can be linked to that of the Odin Theatre, this relationship can most accurately be described as an imprinting, rather than an extension, of Odin Theatre practices. The conscious and unconscious permutations and advancement of the practice, driven by the technical and creative needs and interests of the young Canadian company and deeply affected by substantial financial hardships and creative setbacks, forced Primus to emerge as a unique theatre entity developing from a particular and identifiable genealogy.

This study of the establishment of Primus Theatre also provides evidence that the substantial hardships faced by company members did not dissuade them from advancing their practice of continued exploration of form and expression. The study provides evidence not only of Primus Theatre’s substantial body of creative work but also of its substantial pedagogical efforts. Subsequently, a new generation of theatre artists has been inspired and trained in this alternative theatre-making model, and they are making their own contributions to the continued redefinition of theatre in English Canada.
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Introduction

In July 1989 Primus Theatre—five graduates of the National Theatre School under the direction of Richard Fowler, an actor with the Odin Theatre in Denmark—premiered *Dog Day* at the Winnipeg Fringe Festival. The young company stunned audience members and critics alike with what CBC critic Robert Enright described as an “incredibly intense and incredibly well disciplined” performance and “one of the most radical pieces [. . .] at the Fringe Festival” (*24 Hours*, 19 July 1989). Jacqui Good of CBC Radio claimed that it was a performance to be understood emotionally, rather than intellectually, and one that continued to resonate long after it had ended (*CBC Information Radio*, 19 July 1989). Karen Crossley of the *Winnipeg Sun* described the performance as a “fascinating, beautifully acted piece to be felt rather than understood” (*Winnipeg Sun*, 20 July 1989). She also suggested that spectators would feel the full impact of the performance after they left the theatre.


This selected critical response indicates several things about Primus Theatre’s first
performance work. On a fundamental level it appears that the world created by *Dog Day* provided the spectator with an experience located “beyond the normal equations necessary for identification, [in which] the story is merely the instrument which keeps us in the flow of time” (“Dilating the Body” 209). As a result critics and reviewers were left to struggle with descriptions of their reactions to the performance. Responses to the work were often registered as visceral reactions to an incident or experience, rather than as intellectual or empathetic reactions to a play. According to Bruce Wilshire,

> theatre is a mode of discovery that explores the threads of what is implicit and buried in this world, and pulls them into a compressed and acknowledgeable pattern before us in its “world”. Theatre discovers meaning, and its peculiar detachment reveals our involvement. (*Role Playing and Identity* xiv)

The selected commentary suggests that *Dog Day* did not simply present discovered or recovered truths but addressed the act of uncovering or recovering new or misplaced meaning and enabled the audience to share in that experience. The commentary indicates a disturbance and exposure of that which lies below the surface, a glimpse of something dark and mysterious, which for some was engaging and for others disturbing. The critical response also illustrates that the performance text was structured in an “open” manner, which allowed for a wide range in the reading of arranged images and text and in the interpretation of these visual and aural patterns. The commonality that can be drawn from these variations in critical response is that *Dog Day* rattled spectators out of complacency wherever it was performed.

Primus Theatre was originally organized as a temporary arrangement directed at the completion of a work-in-progress begun at the National Theatre School. During this

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1 Per Brask’s description is directed at Primus Theatre’s second performance piece, *Alkoremmi*, but is equally true of *Dog Day* and other performance works created by the company.
2 The use of the term “performance text” for purposes of this study is based on Kier Elam’s description of the performance text as “the resulting structure [of theatrical discourse] articulated in space and time (44). The implication is that all ingredients used in the construction of a mise en scene contribute equally to the definition of the performance text. The dramatic text, a written text, is one of many ingredients.
completion process, however, company members decided to forge a long-term association, one that would eventually span nine years. Throughout its operation (1989–98) the company was based in Winnipeg, Manitoba, but maintained an extensive touring schedule. The permanent company consisted of Artistic Director Richard Fowler and five actors: Donald Kitt, Tannis Kowalchuk, Stephen Lawson, Karin Randoja, and Ker Wells. Two original company members, Sean Dixon and Richard Clarkin, left the company after the completion of *Dog Day*. The development and retention of a training practice, the development of an identifiable theatre-making process, and the establishment of a clearly defined pedagogical practice were key components of company culture.

Over the course of its nine-year existence, Primus created five major performance pieces: *Dog Day* (1989–90), *Alkoremmi* (1991–96), *The Night Room* (1991–97), *Scarabesque* (1993–95), and *Far Away Home* (1995–97). All of these were retained in repertoire and continually refined until the pieces were retired. Company members also wrote and performed a series of thirteen radio plays for CBC (1991–94), collaborated on the multi-disciplinary piece *Madrugada* (1992 and 1995), and designed and staged two “First Night New Year’s Eve” street parades (1991 and 1992). As a means of advancing pedagogical practice Primus members planned and implemented an extensive series of workshops locally (Winnipeg), in centres across Canada, and in parts of the United States. This included three extended workshops (1993, 1994, and 1997) in Winnipeg, which hosted participants from across the country, the United States, and Europe. The company was also instrumental in the organization and development of *C’era una volta in montagna* (1997, 1998, and 1999), a series of community-based productions generated in collaboration with the villagers of Nocelle in southern Italy. The first production, generated by Fowler and members of Primus
under the organizational umbrella of LA TOFA,\(^3\) became the forerunner of two similar works that were produced after the company’s demise. In 1996 Primus members self-produced an extensive national tour and also organized and facilitated an international festival/symposium, “Survivors of the Ice Age,” in Winnipeg. This was followed by the organization and facilitation of the “Show Girls Festival” in 1997.

Early in 1998 the company reached a point in which major restructuring was necessary. This was due to a major change in personnel, followed by Fowler’s decision to relinquish his position as artistic director. Remaining company members decided to allow for an organic completion of a creative cycle, and Primus Theatre ceased to operate in April 1998. Fowler was awarded the M. Joan Chalmers Award for Artistic Director on 25 May 1998. He summarized the positive aspects of Primus Theatre’s existence in the company’s final newsletter:

Your first quick glance at this, our final newsletter, will likely already have informed you that PRIMUS THEATRE is about to come to an end after nine years of creative theatre-making here in Winnipeg, across Canada and abroad. For some of the company, the unique collaboration that we have built and shared has been going on for twelve years [for those who had trained at NTS].

It has been, to put it very simply, a great run. We chose to be artists at a time and in a socio-political climate when such a choice means struggle, difficulty and hardship, and we made and lived the choice enthusiastically. We were rewarded with appreciation and adventure. We believed that theatre can still be relevant, that we could refuse to accept that it has degraded irrevocably into mediocre popular entertainment, and that the practice of theatre as an art form and as a means of making and living community can still work, even if few seem to demand it. We demanded it of ourselves and proved not only that it could be done but that it could be a wonderful human experience.

Indoors, in every imaginable kind of venue, from churches to

\(^3\) LA TOFA was a non-profit society created in 1997 by Fowler, scenographer Aniello Cinque, and four residents of Nocelle to provide an official status, administrative infrastructure, and a support system for the proposed project. LA TOFA was an umbrella organization run by a board of directors responsible for managing the official, regulatory, and financial aspects of the project.
warehouses, to train stations to tennis courts, even, yes, in theatres; outdoors, from the streets of Winnipeg at 32 degrees below zero to the sides of a Mediterranean mountain at 32 degrees above zero; performances for adults, for children; to an audience of three people, to an audience of twenty-two thousand people; intimate spectacles and mega performances involving entire communities; teaching, from the far reaches of Labrador to the hinterland of rural Denmark to Canadian city centres; professional meetings and exchanges with colleagues, old and newly met from around the world. Exploration. Celebration. Creation.

PRIMUS was always a relationship, between the individual artists that were the company, between the company and its audience and the community it found and made. That relationship will continue to grow, in new permutations and combinations. PRIMUS [in the manner of the Odin Theatre] was never an institution, never an administration, never a building; not a place but, perhaps a meeting leading to further meetings. And it was also unquestionably a living organism, a unit greater than the sum of its parts, and as such was subject to the laws of nature, which dictate that change is an inherent and integral part of every organic process. To thwart change or to ignore that it is necessary, inevitably leads to inertia, stagnation, waste. Accepting and embracing change makes growth, and new life, possible. Deciding to allow this phase of the life of PRIMUS to come to an end is our way of actively recognizing that the time has come for yet another re-invention. (Primus Theatre Newsletter, Spring 1998)

The contributions made by Primus Theatre to the theatrical landscape in Canada are manifold. On one hand Primus can be viewed as a unique theatrical entity in its own right, particularly in English Canada, at a time in which there was little support for or understanding of hybrid, post-dramatic forms of theatre. The company culture included the development of a consistent training practice, the development of an original performance vocabulary with which to construct performance material, and a collectively and autonomously managed administrative structure. All of this was a highly irregular occurrence

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4 The term is borrowed from Hans-Thies Lehman, who postulated that the adjective ‘postdramatic’ denotes a theatre that feels bound to operate beyond drama, at a time after the authority of the dramatic paradigm in theatre. What it does not mean is an abstract negation and mere looking away from the tradition of drama. “After” drama means that it lives on as a structure—however weakened and exhausted—of the “normal” theatre: as an expectation of large parts of its audience, as a foundation for many of its means of representation, as a quasi-automatically working norm of its dramaturgy. (Postdramatic Theatre 27)
for the time and place in which Primus existed.

The company can also be considered a direct link, via Richard Fowler, to an important European theatre culture established by Eugenio Barba and members of the Odin Theatre in Denmark. As such Primus was part of a tradition identified by Barba as originating in the work of Stanislavski, advanced through the work of Grotowski, and further expanded by Barba himself. Subsequently, Primus Theatre became another generation of this work by association with Fowler. While all of this is remarkable in itself, the most astounding observation that can be made about Primus Theatre is that it existed at all.

Primus Theatre’s work has been described as “physical,” “experimental,” “hybrid,” “devised” (by association with post-Primus performance work), “imagistic” (which Fowler was highly uncomfortable with), and “cutting edge avant-garde” (which he entirely disagreed with). All of these definitions position the company’s work beyond the boundaries of mainstream theatre and beyond the boundaries of literary theatre. Yet none of these descriptors explain what company members were actually doing or the breadth of the company’s accomplishment. Primus was established at a time when English-speaking students of the National Theatre School (NTS) did not know of the work being done by Barba. This lack of information was also evident in the writing of many English-speaking theorists, practitioners, scholars, and critics who were, at best, unfamiliar with the work. Subsequently, when the small group of NTS graduates chose to band together, the fledgling company had no existing support network in Canada and, for several years, no practical context in which to work.

The company was established in English Canada at a time when arts funding agencies were not inclined to support hybrid, experimental, or post-dramatic theatrical work and in a
part of the country that has been mythologized as being supportive of the arts. In reality, theatrical experimentation in Winnipeg had essentially evaporated with the phasing out of Opportunities for Youth (OFY) and Local Initiatives Project (LIP) grants in the 1970s. The most consistently supported arts organizations were well-established institutions, such as the Manitoba Theatre Centre, Manitoba Theatre for Young People, Prairie Theatre Exchange, the Royal Winnipeg Ballet, the Winnipeg Symphony Orchestra, and the Winnipeg Art Gallery. The small theatre companies that did exist were struggling to survive.

Furthermore, Primus members were attempting to apply a model for constructing theatre that had been established in Denmark with the full support of government funding. It was at a time when many theatre artists in Canada straddled the poverty line and were forced to take on massive fundraising responsibilities and/or to work outside their profession in order to make ends meet. Yet Primus Theatre managed not only to establish itself but also for a time to flourish creatively in spite of all odds. Company members managed to serve as both pioneers in their own right and purveyors of a tradition in a time, place, and artistic milieu in which the theatre’s existence should not have been possible.

In a 1990 reflection of probability and possibility in the construction of “reality,” Ker Wells wrote,

I suppose that in the infinite number of possible worlds, of possible days and possible seconds, instants,—the infinite number of possibilities that exist at the moment when any foot is exactly even with the other foot and is about to step and make one of those infinite possibilities into “reality” (from which new starting points to the whole infinite number of possibilities opens up,

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5 A Statistical Profile of Artists in Canada, funded by the Canada Council for Arts, the Department of Canadian Heritage, and the Ontario Arts Council, was released by Hill Strategies Research Inc. in September 2004. The study was based on the 2001 census and compared average earnings for artists in 1991 and in 2001. The average salary for actors in Canada in 1991 was $19,797 and for dancers $12,821. This shifted to $21,597 for actors and $15,533 for dancers in 2001(23). According to the Canada Council on Social Development, a poverty level income for a single person living in a city with a population of 500,000 or up was $18,371 in 2000 (“2000 Poverty Lines”). The population of Winnipeg in 2000 was 634,100.
spreads out like a 360 degree fan) — I suppose that because of this “infinity,” because of the whole slippery nature of probability—it is no less likely, probable, for “coincidences” to happen than for them not to. (CJ, 12 Jan. 1990)

In many ways Wells’s reflection can be applied to the existence of Primus Theatre. It also speaks to the way in which this study could have been, might have been, and finally was constructed. Years of sifting through the company archives led repeatedly to the singular question: How was it possible for Primus Theatre to have existed at all? How were Primus Theatre members able to establish themselves as a company, and how were they able to maintain their practice over the nine years that the company existed? Primus was a small alternative theatre company emerging in English Canada during the incredibly lean arts funding years of the early 1990s. Furthermore, in the establishment of their organization and in the maintenance of their practice, company members were faced with a series of serious hurdles and setbacks that were unique to their situation. Yet as Wells surmises, “it is no less likely [. . .] for ‘coincidences’ to happen than for them not to.” At a fundamental level, this study can be considered an examination of these coincidences.

In a 1999 interview Simon McBurney, artistic director of Théâtre de Complicité, explained his involvement in theatre despite what he determined to be its marginalized status as an art and the challenges of breathing life into the form:

Why do I make theatre? It’s not a dominant art form in the twentieth century and architecturally you can even chart the rise of theatre in the nineteenth century and its decline in the twentieth. One starts from a position of marginalization in theatre. At the same time theatre has ritual functions in society and is associated with signs of cultural health and economic strength, but the theatre that is living is marginalized, gasps for breath and appears to be dying. Of course, it won’t die if there are people who are passionate about it, but finding its life is still difficult. (McBurney qtd. in Giannachi and Luckhurst 72)

Ultimately, there is something beyond the prevailing circumstances themselves that becomes
the deciding factor in which possibility becomes reality. As McBurney stated, this deciding factor is a passion that moves the individual or groups of individuals to breathe life into art. It was this passion that drove Primus Theatre members forward when by all estimations they should have been stopped in their tracks. It was this need to create personally meaningful art that drove Fowler to seek alternative models for creating theatre and to inspire and encourage others to make the same geographic, linguistic, and disciplinary leaps of faith.

During his closing comments at the “Survivors of the Ice Age” festival/symposium, Fowler explained the reasons that the company had organized the event:

Why did we do it? [. . .] [C]ertainly because we are idealists: we are foolish enough to believe that the previously not-attempted, the previously unthought-of, is not impossible just because it has never before been done. [. . .] This experience has to do with a common understanding of theatre as community and theatre as a means of social definition (“Why Did We Do It?” 55).

In many ways, Fowler’s comment addresses Primus Theatre’s entire existence.

The study is constructed as a series of six chapters. Chapter One sets the context for the study by presenting a review of the small body of critical literature relating to Primus Theatre and to Richard Fowler and by examining the cultural milieu in which the company emerged. The establishment of Primus Theatre in English Canada in the late 1980s and early 1990s was an astounding event. What is equally remarkable is the sheer force of will and tenacity exhibited by Fowler during the course of events preceding the founding of the theatre. Without the creative journey undertaken by Fowler in search of a personal ideal for the creation of theatre, Primus Theatre would not have existed.

Chapter Two introduces Richard Fowler, the individual responsible for motivating the founding of the company. Fowler’s early beliefs in the possibility of theatre are presented in order to establish that his beliefs were not inspired by the mainstream theatrical culture in
which he began his career and that his search for this “ideal” was self-motivated. There has been much ado about Fowler’s eleven years at the Odin Theatre. What has received less attention is that his experience there was unique, both by default and by design. The chapter also serves to define and discuss the nature of his relationship with the Odin, as well as the creative collaborations with other individuals and groups that influenced his work and work ethic.

Chapter Three focuses on another unlikely series of events that directly affected the founding of Primus Theatre. This series of occurrences was set in motion by Nick Hutchinson, the newly appointed Director of the English Acting School at the National Theatre School of Canada (NTS). As part of his effort to restructure the school’s curriculum Hutchinson hired Fowler to work with the second-year class in the capacity of guest director. It was in this capacity that Fowler encountered the individuals who would become Primus Theatre. This chapter illustrates the training and dramaturgical practices that motivated NTS graduates to continue working with an alternative model for creating theatre, rather than launching their careers in commercial theatre. This examination also indicates the ways in which Fowler contextualized and interfaced the source practice to allow for a more ready reception into the receiving context. The chapter also introduces characteristics of this practice that would create difficulties for company members in their attempt to establish themselves within the English-Canadian theatre environment. The deliberate and highly identifiable connection between the theatre-making practice of Primus and that of the Odin Theatre is established through an examination of the way in which *Dog Day* was generated and developed.

*Dog Day* had been conceived in the setting of a conservatory training program and
the remounting developed with the support of full funding. Although this context emulated the environment in which Odin Theatre actors functioned in many ways, it was not an accurate reflection of the conditions faced by most emerging theatre companies in Canada. It was only in the aftermath of launching *Dog Day* that Primus Theatre members were faced with the very immediate difficulties, relating to funding and space, inherent in the act of attempting to establish a small alternative theatre company in English Canada.

Chapter Four focuses on the adverse and highly challenging conditions from which *Alkoremmi*, Primus Theatre’s second performance piece, emerged. This is a particularly important event in the theatre’s history because *Alkoremmi* would become the company’s signature piece and would mark the acclimatization of Primus’s source practice to a Canadian context. The making of *Alkoremmi* also marked the continued evolution of the source practice in a foreign context. Although members of Primus Theatre faced hurdles relating to funding, space, and time scheduling throughout their existence, these hurdles most significantly affected the company’s survival at this early and very critical stage of its development. The fact that company members were able to resist a substantial negative undertow is of great importance since without this effort Primus Theatre’s history and the extent of the company’s achievements would have been very different.

Primus Theatre members endured highly adverse conditions in order to commit to their theatre practice and to create *Alkoremmi*. They would continue not only to survive but also to produce a remarkably extensive body of work in a relatively short span of time. Chapter Five presents a survey of Primus Theatre’s accomplishments in three central areas of development: training, performance creation, and pedagogy. In the years following the premiere of *Alkoremmi*, theatre members built substantially upon the foundation they had
established both with that piece and with *Dog Day*. They continued not only to maintain but also to advance the common performance language they had begun to develop in earlier projects. In doing so they continued to challenge public perception of theatre as an art.

The four and a half years between the premiere of *Alkoremni* (March 1991) and that of *Far Away Home* (October 1995) were particularly prolific. During this time, Primus constructed *Scarabesque* (1992–93), *The Night Room* (1994), and *Far Away Home* (1995), as well as a series of radio dramas and collaborative projects that included interdisciplinary work with other artists and with non-professionals in specific communities. In tandem with the development of an extensive touring schedule, the company also began to nurture a pedagogical practice that would eventually become an extremely important part of its culture.

Hundreds of individuals across the country were introduced to Primus’s training and dramaturgical processes through workshop activity facilitated by company members in various locations across Canada and the US and from their home base in Winnipeg. Although there is a lack of print documentation examining post-workshop creative activity, the influence of the company’s work can be found in practical contexts.

Chapter Six focuses on a small sample of this new generation of theatre. The sample establishes the relationship between Primus and this second generation of theatre-makers and the way in which the ripple effect was set in motion. This is most obvious in the work of former company members Tannis Kowalchuk (at the North American Cultural Laboratory) and Ker Wells (at Number Eleven Theatre). The influence of Primus Theatre’s training techniques and dramaturgical processes, however, can also be found in activity emerging from the company’s pedagogical projects. This examination focuses on the experiences of original members of Boca del Lupo (Vancouver), who imported Wells and Randoja to
facilitate a workshop for the Vancouver theatre community in 1998, and of Daniel Mroz (Montreal/Ottawa) who participated in the 1993 and 1997 “Fictive Reality” workshops. The existence of this sample representation raises the question of the true extent of Primus Theatre’s impact on theatre-making in English Canada and the United States.
Chapter One: Primus Theatre in Context

Establishing Primus Theatre: An Overview

In the introduction to Collective Creation, Collaboration and Devising (2008) Bruce Barton describes Primus Theatre as “one of the most significant collectives in Canadian history” (xi). Yet beyond archival material, print documentation of the company’s work does not extend beyond a small collection of articles, minor chapter entries, and a series of performance reviews and prelude pieces. Therefore, at a fundamental level, this study is an important and long overdue acknowledgment of the range of artistic and pedagogical accomplishments of Primus Theatre members. As Per Brask states, Primus Theatre launched “an energetic quest for new metaphors [. . . and] a new vocabulary of theatrical practice” (“When the Body Speaks” 29). Furthermore, this was achieved under particularly difficult cultural and funding constraints.

In essence, the study is the examination of the establishment of a Canadian Theatre company that by all estimations should never have existed at the time, in the location or in the cultural milieu in which it emerged. The study defines the company as a complicated anomaly in the dominant English-Canadian theatre culture and examines the inherent needs of the creative practice that set it apart from the dominant theatre culture and in conflict with its organizational structure. The core of the study focuses on the way in which Primus Theatre’s practice was established. The model for theatre-making adopted by the theatre originated at the Odin Theatre in Denmark through the work of Eugenio Barba and members of his company. It is a practice that was (and still is) entirely subsidized by government
funding, which was not true in the case of Primus Theatre. Due to this significant difference, the study can be further defined as the documentation of an application of the Odin Theatre model for performance creation in a substantially different context. Implicit in this study is the examination of the hurdles and hardships endured by members of Primus in their struggle to create original theatre in a particular way. The young company was pitted against geographic, fiscal, and artistic contexts that were counteractive to the establishment of the company culture and to the structuration process with which Primus intended to work.¹

At the time in which Primus Theatre emerged, theatre that had originally been defined as alternative had become a subdivision of the financially stable mainstream theatre culture. In English Canada even experimental companies producing more traditional form and content were struggling for survival. Only in Quebec, where a tradition of theatrical experimentation had begun to take root, was the experience of truly alternative theatre-making different from anywhere else in the country.

The establishment of the company can be viewed as a relatively complex process that emerged over time and as the cumulative result of a series of personal and group journeys and experiences, rather than as the result of a linear plan of action. Although the advantage of time and distance frames this progression as a continuous stream of activity leading toward a particular culminating point, this perspective is far from the reality of the proceedings. Each segment of the journey toward the establishment of Primus Theatre can be viewed as a separate series of events. What is remarkable is that each phase of the company’s progression, and subsequent to that each phase of Fowler’s artistic progression, is punctuated

¹ Mark Fortier (1996) distinguished between the concept of structure and structuration in his discussion of Roland Barthes’ evolving theories. Structure is viewed as the “imposition of an abstract model” while “structuration [. . .] involves the specific and unique arrangements of cultural material in any particular instance” (21).
by a conscious decision that served to mark the shift into another uncharted territory.

Central to the company’s general mandate was a drive to introduce and to promote a model for theatrical creation that was essentially non-existent in Canada at the time. According to the company’s mandate, which was adjusted during the course of the company’s operation, the following goals were declared in September 1996:

1. The continued development of the company into a strong, independent unit of theatre artists capable of creating original pieces, each of which reinvent the theatre; and the presentation of these pieces locally, internationally and internationally,

2. The establishment of Primus Theatre as a centre for research and training into the art of the performer, a contact and information dissemination centre to which other Canadian and international performers and groups can refer, and with which they can collaborate,

3. The consolidation of the group as a creatively and administratively self-sufficient ensemble functioning as part of and in relation to a community of sufficiently small size as to permit a meaningful presence and interchange, and

4. The involvement of Primus Theatre in activities and projects of a “social” nature using theatre skills and techniques in non-performance situations for pedagogical, social and personal development purpose. (City of Winnipeg Operating Grant Application, 15 Sept. 1996)

The model for the creation of theatre used by Primus situated the actor as an important collaborator in this process. In addition to the actor’s role as defined by more commercially structured theatrical organizations, actors engaged in activities considered to be the work of the playwright, designer, technician, dancer, acrobat, circus performer, and musician.

Fundamental to the work created by Primus was a long-term commitment to other company members. Particular importance was placed on the development of a continuous and progressive training program that enabled company members to develop and advance a
common physical and vocal language and continually introduce new skill development. This shared theatre-making process allowed company members to create distinctive, original performance material on a long-term basis. While it is the actor, rather than the play-text, that is the source of performance development, the role of the director, as facilitator, visual artist, and composer, is also highly critical in this model for creating theatre.

Another ideal central to the company’s artistic identity is the development of what Barba defines as the “dramaturgy of the actor, [. . .] the capacity to construct the equivalent of the complexity that characterizes action in life” (“An Amulet Made of Memory” 130). This complexity of action is constructed by means of technique and specific theatrical devices that enable the actors to “transform the physical and vocal actions [which they have been experimenting with . . .] into material suitable and adaptable to a performance score” (Canada Council Short Term Project Grant Application, 30 Oct. 1991). It is the form itself—the actors presenting themselves in time and space—that provides the foundation and the content of the performance text.

This consistent attention to vocal and physical training allowed the actors ample opportunity to invent and reinvent the voice and the body as expressive tools. For members of Primus the construction of performance work was not about codifying a form but about using existing form to explore further modes of expression through the continually spiralling and expanding performance vocabulary. This vocabulary was inspired by internal rather than external landscapes, and Primus members functioned in the manner of what Barba defined as “travellers of speed,” those who occupy “a space and time that have nothing to do with the landscape and the season of the place they happen to be travelling through” (Floating Islands 11). The development of the content had nothing to do with the environment that the artists
occupied in everyday life. Primus did not produce plays with definably Canadian content or context. In general, the material related more to the universal subconscious of Carl Jung than to the crossroads of Portage and Main in Winnipeg or wheat fields. For example, while developing initial performance material for *Alkoremmi*, all company members serendipitously turned to mythical and actual characters, images, stories, and rituals from cultures other than their own.

The images that appeared in Primus performances were not presentations or representations of the ideas, situations, or characters explored by the actors but rather were the results of the actors’ encounters with the material. The performance text was constructed from the visual and aural images that were generated in the explorative phase of the performance creation process. This is to say that the actors’ ideas were filtered and examined through the physical and vocal language that was being developed in training. According to Fowler, company members “deliberately enter into intelligent chaos and begin a process of research. We discover the meaning in process” (qtd. in Buchholz 10).

Several other lines of inquiry emerged as a result of constructing a support structure for the core investigation. By default and by design, the study traces Primus Theatre’s link to the Odin Theatre through Richard Fowler’s complex relationship with the Odin and Barba. This relationship places Primus as an extension of an ongoing tradition that Fowler was careful to acknowledge: "I feel very much part of a tradition […] which stretches as far back as Stanislavski. […] My teacher [Barba] was an avid student and analyst of Stanislavski, as was his teacher [Grotowski]" (Fowler, Telephone Interview, 23 Jan. 1997). The tradition Fowler refers to places great emphasis on continuous research and exploration of the performer’s art, which is considered to be rooted in an evolving training practice. Unlike
highly codified performance forms, such as classical ballet, corporeal mime, and many traditional forms of Asian theatre, the tradition in which Primus Theatre was rooted demanded organic growth and development. Fowler noted that the tradition that he had adopted at the Odin Theatre provided a sense of security in which to create and develop, but it did not impose the definitive restraints of codified performance forms:

I don’t in any sense see tradition as being a limiting thing or an arid thing. Quite the contrary. Tradition is a means of staying alive. [...] In the tradition which I am a part of, there is an interesting paradox. [...] On the one hand you must serve the tradition and on the other hand you must betray it. [...] You have to betray it in order reinvent it, in order to make it your own. If it’s a good tradition, it will withstand the betrayal and in fact be enriched by it. (Fowler, Telephone Interview, 23 Jan. 1997)

This tradition is continued by extension into another generation of devised performance work through former Primus Theatre members’ current work and through their pedagogical and collaborative interaction with other theatre artists.

The study describes the multiple aspects of Primus’s practice, training, dramaturgy, performance aesthetic, and company culture and offers a detailed examination of the training and dramaturgical processes used by the company in the creation of their early work. This examination serves two purposes: it illustrates the ways in which the company’s theatre practice was set apart from the mainstream in the English-Canadian theatre milieu and illustrates the substantial difficulties that these differences caused the company during the establishment of their practice. The study also provides a survey of the remarkable breadth and range of the creative activity that was accomplished in spite of the hardships the

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2 Modern ballet is distinguished from its classical counterpart in that it does break with the structures established by the classical form of ballet. However, the form is an evolution of the classical form, rather than a dismissal or discarding of the source form.

3 Although many traditional forms of Asian theatre have remained codified throughout time, several forms of Chinese Opera have evolved from the original form. This occurred particularly during the time of The Great Leap Forward (1958), in which traditional art forms were considered suspect.
company encountered. This includes serving as a catalyst to a new generation of original theatre-making in Canada and the United States.

The study is also a limited developmental history of Primus Theatre. The chronological arrangement provides insight into two interrelated aspects of the company’s development: the origins of the creative processes and the organizational structures used by Primus Theatre in the creation of performance and the building of artistic community, and the development of those processes and structures during the company’s early years when it was creating *Dog Day* and *Alkoremni*.

**Review of Literature**

My research began without the benefit of major works focusing on Primus Theatre that might have served as a point of departure or as a foundation from which to expand the research field. A complete company history did not even exist. With the exclusion of this study, the status of available information about the company remains the same. As a result the task of reviewing literature became a venture focused on collection and extrapolation rather than on summarization and selection of the information most functional and relevant to this study. Beyond reviews and prelude pieces in newspapers, the extent of published information about Primus Theatre’s work is twelve articles that appeared in English-Canadian publications during the course of the company’s operation (1989–98) and one minor entry in a book chapter. The last article was published in *Canadian Theatre Review* in the fall of 1996. Primus Theatre was mentioned in a second minor book chapter entry in Kevin Longfield’s *From Fire to Flood: A History of Theatre in Manitoba*, published in 2001.
This entry is included in the review of literature.

Two articles published prior to the existence of Primus Theatre have also been included in this review. These articles discuss Fowler’s early professional affiliations and serve to link him both to Jerzy Grotowski and his Theatre of Sources experiments and to Barba and the Odin Theatre. Although Primus Theatre officially ceased operating in April 1998, four articles (not including reprints) have appeared in Canadian journals and magazines since that time. These articles, three in English-Canadian publications and one in a French-Canadian one, focus on performance work in southern Italy in which Fowler and several former company members took part. These articles are not discussed in this review but are referred to in Chapter Five.

The twelve articles that serve as the foundation of this review represent a range of reporting styles but can generally be categorized in one of three formats: overview/summary of the company’s work to date of publication; full or featured interviews with Fowler or other company members; 4 and articles written by Richard Fowler. Per Brask’s “Dilating the Body, Transporting the Mind: Considering Primus Theatre” (1994), an overview/summary, is the most complete discussion of Primus’s work in print and offers insight into and analysis of the company’s group culture and the processes that they utilized to create performance work. This article is the most important contribution to the prelude of my study.

There are several exceptions to the categorical definitions of the existing articles. Helen Peters’s article examines the effects of Primus Theatre’s pedagogical activities on subsequent creative work in Newfoundland and is the only print document illustrating the effect of the theatre’s pedagogical practice on existing theatre practice at the time. This is an

4 Articles considered featured interviews are those in which an interview (or interviews) provides a substantial portion of the content. Articles considered full interviews are those in which the only content beyond
important distinction because the company’s pedagogical practice is at the core of its legacy. Lisa Mark presented a poetic and highly subjective response to *The Night Room*, illustrating the way in which Primus performance work offered the spectator an opportunity to participate in the creation of meaning. There is no doubt that this collection of articles is highly limited and cannot be considered as representative of the range, progression, or complexity of the company’s work. The collection does, however, accurately represent the range of available documentation of Primus Theatre and its performance work.

Reviews of the company’s performance work reveal the literary biases held by the majority of critics and reviewers and will be discussed later in the study. The existing collection of articles reveals something of a different nature. There appears to be a sense of unease with the material that emerges not from a tentativeness in the observations but from a surprisingly direct appropriation of previously published material. Although some of the articles do contain new interview material, many of the writers borrow freely from published interviews with Fowler and from the most informative articles in print such as those by Per Brask. My issue with this practice is that those who borrow the information do little or nothing to advance an understanding of Primus Theatre’s work by offering new insight or by building upon the efforts of those they quote. As a result, the information in the collection of articles is repetitive. In addition to Brask, Helen Peters and Lisa Mark are the only two writers who attempt to dissect inherited assumptions about theatre and to express their observations in ways that serve to advance an understanding of the performance work that Primus Theatre was producing. In this way, these writers made a contribution to an overall understanding of the development of the cultural practice of theatre.

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interview material is interview questions.
Summaries/ Overviews

“Dilating the Body, Transporting the Mind: Considering Primus Theatre” (1994) by Per Brask, playwright, dramaturg, director, playwright, and University of Winnipeg professor, is the most complete discussion available in print. It is a revision and expansion of his earlier article “When the Body Speaks: An Encounter with Primus” (1992). In both articles Brask establishes the notion that Primus Theatre was intentionally setting out to challenge existing traditions and definitions of theatre practice. Both articles also identify two key aspects of the company practice that reappear in many of the articles reviewed. The company’s practice is clearly linked to that of the Odin Theatre in Denmark, and training is positioned as the central focus of company life. Alkoremni, premiered in 1991, is used to exemplify both discussions.

“When the Body Speaks: An Encounter with Primus” combines a condensed company history with brief descriptions of performance vocabulary, training, and dramaturgical structures. The author distinguishes Primus Theatre’s work from other companies generating original work in noting the company’s use of experimental, discovery-based process rather than of reformulation of existing theatrical vocabularies:

Implicit in the work of Primus, Odin and similar theatrical endeavours is an energetic quest for new metaphors, a new vocabulary of theatrical practice. In an important sense these companies are launching new language games, new ways of practising and talking about performance (29).

The company’s training is described as a vehicle that enabled actors to achieve “imaginative control over their bodies and for developing ‘presence’ rather than to achieve a particular

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5 Brask’s article appeared in Border Crossings in January 1992 with an estimated submission dated...
performance skill” (27). Thus, the directive of this practice encouraged actors to explore new theatrical languages by testing vocal and physical possibility.

Brask distinguishes the dramaturgical structure of *Alkoremmi* from that of story-based “dramatic theatre” by stating that in the course of performance “figures and images turn in on themselves, making it difficult and unwarranted to make immediate judgements” (29). He also notes that, although the performance material emerged from highly personal contexts, the results of this exploration were not directed at expressing emotion but evoking it (27). The dramaturgical structures used by Fowler and Primus were directed at generating an experience for spectators “through the engagement of their attention and perception in a non-daily way, very much as music does” (Fowler in Brask 29).

In “Dilating the Body, Transporting the Mind: Considering Primus Theatre” Brask advances his discussions of Primus Theatre’s performance vocabulary, training, and dramaturgical structures. He also identifies three core facets of the company’s practice: a group culture that extended beyond the act of performing, clearly defined processes at the centre of training and dramaturgy, and a connectivity between these processes. Once again *Alkoremmi* is central to the discussion.

Primus Theatre’s group culture is set apart from other ensemble companies existing at the time due to an “as-if-permanent” company status (217). This core assumption required an ongoing course of training and research activity in order to prepare new work and refine repertoire pieces. The ongoing commitment to artistic development defined the company in ways that extended well beyond performance. Brask’s acknowledgement of this core operational assumption reinforces Fowler’s assertion that Primus was an extension of a particular tradition of theatre, rather than the avant-garde presence that was often assigned by some six months earlier. The company history is therefore limited.
reviewers and critics.

Brask also advances the discussion of creative processes that he began in his 1992 article. He contends that Alkoremmi was “the result of a particular process, a distinct way of viewing the theatrical event and, ultimately, a way of life” (210). He also notes that this process had emerged from a particular tradition based on creative evolution: “[A]s the performance knowledge of this tradition moves through time, it is modified, and expanded, according to the needs of the particular artists who inherit it” (212).

He explains that the actors used their training to explore their physical and vocal potential and to shape these explorations into “an acculturated, fictive and chosen behaviour based on a maximum of energy” (212). He describes the resulting psychophysical scores as “extra-daily” and shaped by the actors’ research and training. In other words, the form generated by actors through the vehicle of training is expressive and imaginative rather than realistic. In subsequent phases of dramaturgical development the vocal and physical scores created by the actors were further developed and then arranged and orchestrated by Fowler.

Brask further explains that the scores developed by the actors were not necessarily arranged in a context similar to that from which the score emerged. As a result of the various phases of development occurring in the theatre-making process, shifts in form and perspective occurred as the actor-generated performance scores were refined and orchestrated by Fowler as director. The performance can therefore be considered the “sharing of the results of their [the actors’ and director’s] investigations by creating an experience [for the spectator]” (217), rather than as a finished piece. In Brask’s estimation the rehearsal process

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6 Barba makes a very clear distinction between everyday, “daily” behaviour, and performance "extra-daily" behaviour. He states that “daily body techniques are used to communicate. […] Extra-daily techniques, on the other hand, lead to information. They literally put the body into form, rendering it artificial/artistic but believable” (Paper Canoe 16). Brask’s use of the term “non-daily” refers to these distinctions.
is an act of generating an experience for the spectator, rather than an act of expressing
meaning for them (213). As a result the performance experience “lies beyond the normal
equations necessary for identification, the story merely the instrument which keeps us in the
flow of time” (209). It was Fowler’s hope that the spectator would “read the performance on
the basis of all the signs that make up the performance score” (“Anthropology of
Performance” 87) and then create personal meaning through an attempt to make sense of the
array of audio and visual signs.

While Brask identifies key aspects of the company’s organization and creative
processes, he also identifies the integral existence of a “confluence of procedures” (210) as a
critical facet in Primus Theatre’s operation. This is to say that the organization of vocal and
physical training informed the dramaturgy, which in turn informed the aesthetic directive of
the performance, which subsequently affected future research and developments in training.
Brask clearly states that the demarcations he has constructed for purposes of discussion
cannot be, and are not, maintained in actual practice.

Sarah B. Hood’s overview of Primus Theatre’s work in “Theatre of Images: New
Dramaturgies” (1995) is disappointing. In her article, Hood, a former staff writer and editor
at both Performing Arts in Canada and Theatrum, attempts to distinguish the performance
work of three Canadian theatre companies from text-based production work. In addition to
Primus, the article discusses the performance work of Shadowland Production Company
(Toronto) and of Caravan Stage Company (Kingston) and its sister company, Caravan Farm
Theatre (Kamloops). The section of the article devoted to Primus Theatre is largely a
summary and restatement of facts and details published by other writers at earlier dates and
lacks further insight or new perspective on the material. Hood also misrepresents the
company’s work by classifying it as “imagistic theatre.” This is a label that Fowler adamantly refuted in 1994, when he stated that labelling the work in this way displays “a lack of understanding of what Primus is all about” (qtd. in Buchholz 9). The latter part of Hood’s article presents a limited description of *Alkoremmi* that contains several problematic and misleading statements. The only information in the article that had not already appeared in print is a mention of the workshops that company members had facilitated across Canada while on tour (59).

Hood claims that *Alkoremmi* was based on a specific theme, which was illustrated through the actions of various characters (60). She draws this information from Lawson’s opening words as the Song and Dance Angel:

> There’s a place in heaven where all the souls wait in line to drop like coins into the bodies of the nearly born. [. . .] The last soul in line is already frightened, because when he is born, all the storytellers will be dead, and that's when the end of the world will come. (*Alkoremmi* 4)

In doing so she contradicts Brask’s and Fowler’s commentary stating that *Alkoremmi* “is not a piece with a singular, linear storyline representing the life of its characters” (“When the Body” 29). She also contradicts an assertion, from the same article, that the linear storyline provides only one of the multiple layers of meaning. Hood attaches a misleading sense of solidarity of action and an everyday familiarity to the entire performance when in reality this is a feature of only one of multiple narratives. Although she partly refutes this later in the article by claiming that “the story [. . .] exists in the connections each viewer will make for themselves between scenes” (60), she does not explain her shift in perspective.

Hood describes Kitt’s stilt-walking character as “one of the most striking and memorable features of *Alkoremmi*” (60) and then proceeds to describe the difficult task of the stilt-walker. While it is true that Kitt’s stilt skills are remarkable, Hood isolates the skill from
the context and places major weight on one aspect of the piece while ignoring other equally remarkable performance details. Given the brevity of Hood’s discussion of Primus’s work, this density of detail contributes to a very biased sense of what *Alkoremmi* offered spectators.

The most informative observation Hood makes is the acknowledgement of the very personal connection between company members and the work that they produced: “No other company could reproduce these highly individualized works. The skills and personalities of the performers are inseparably woven into the fabric of the piece” (60).

Kevin Longfield’s *From Fire to Flood: A History of Theatre in Manitoba* (2001) devotes a short chapter to “alternative theatre.” The twelve-page chapter, “And Now for Something Completely Different: From Theatre X to Primus,” discusses five Winnipeg theatre companies: Theatre X, Adhere and Deny, Shakespeare in the Ruins, Heritage Theatre, and Primus Theatre. As was the case with Hood’s discussion of Primus Theatre’s work, the information that Longfield presents is a highly limited and problematic restatement of facts and details.

According to Longfield Primus Theatre was based in Winnipeg because the actors followed Fowler to his place of relocation, the company was structured in a highly monistic way, and Primus operated outside of Actor’s Equity because Equity had rejected them (168). All of this information is false. Longfield contradicts his description of Primus Theatre’s monistic lifestyle when he mentions the open invitation to members of the community interested in viewing its training and rehearsals and when he discusses the company’s involvement in various community projects (169–70). The most valuable statement Longfield makes is his admission that “describing what Primus did is not an easy task” (168). He then unsuccessfully tries to describe it using Aristotle’s dramatic structure (168).
Longfield’s contribution to the discussion of Primus’s work is very similar to Hood’s in its generalized scope and misrepresentations, but it is more disappointing. Not only was Longfield writing in retrospect (the company had folded in 1998) but he was also based in Winnipeg and would have had access to information unavailable to other writers. There is also print evidence that he had followed the company’s work with genuine interest.

Articles by Richard Fowler

In the fall of 1981 an article written by Richard Fowler and entitled “Grotowski and Barba: A Canadian Perspective” appeared in Canadian Theatre Review (CTR). The article provides a chronological documentation of the travel he had begun one year earlier: a month-long participation in Grotowski’s Theatre of Sources, an assistantship to Barba at the first International School for Theatre Anthropology (ISTA), and the unexpected windfall of a training at the Odin Theatre. The article is important for several reasons. It is essentially a journalistic account of his experiences with Theatre of Sources, ISTA, and the Odin Theatre and was penned at a time when the experiences were fresh, before the colouration of memory had set in. The article identifies the young Fowler as a man on a creative mission. It is also important because he was presenting English-Canadian readers with what would not have been accessible through any other source. Although Theatre of Sources, one of Grotowski’s series of post-performance research projects, and ISTA would become notable world theatre history events, at the time both projects were highly obscure.

Fowler did not publish another article until 1995. “Surviving the Ice Age” was followed closely by another article, “Why Did We Do It?” in 1996. Both articles appeared in
The two articles offer important glimpses into company culture but are more valuable as indicators of Fowler’s viewpoints.

In “Surviving the Ice Age” Fowler expresses concern over the state of theatrical activity in Canada. He speculates that the theatre’s only chance of survival in “a technological age in which human values are increasingly scarce and increasingly fragile” (31) is through the efforts of small groups of individuals, not business-based art institutions. In his estimation the most fundamental reason that Primus was thriving creatively was that the company owned and controlled its work (30), a situation seldom afforded to Canadian theatre companies. He maintains that this ownership had been achieved through the “as-if-permanent” status of the company and cites the flexible and efficient work practices, borne out of the company culture, as essential to the company's ability to adapt and to change when necessary.

In the spring of 1996 Primus members organized the festival/symposium “Survivors of the Ice Age” in an attempt to address issues, such as those brought forth in Fowler’s article, and generate tactics for the preservation and nurturing of small independent theatre companies. This international event featured workshops, papers, panel discussions, and public performances by artists and scholars from across Canada, the United States, and Europe. That autumn (1996) CTR devoted an entire issue to “Survivors of the Ice Age.” Fowler provided a short epilogue to the event. In “Why Did We Do It?” he identifies personal and group challenge as part of Primus Theatre’s motivation for organizing the event. He also expresses the company’s need to generate an opportunity for small, struggling companies to come together and to share their work, their concerns, and their hopes for the future (54). In some ways, the project marked Fowler’s celebration of half a lifetime spent
utilizing "theatre as a means of defining and defending, a way of interacting with other human beings" (54). This was the last article that he published on his work with Primus.

The Interviews

Four of the twelve articles included in this review of literature contain either full or featured interviews with Richard Fowler and/or other company members. These interviews were all published between 1985 and 1994. Four years after Fowler’s first article appeared in Canadian Theatre Review, Paula Citron's article “Richard Fowler and the Barba Connection” (1985) appeared in the same publication. The article reported on the (Alberta) International Theatre Symposium, organized by Fowler and held in Calgary in June 1984. At the time he was working out of the Nordisk Teaterlaboratorium (Denmark) in a designation as The Canada Project. After optimistically stating that “the conference marked the emergence of a ‘Barba family’ in Canada” (119), Citron focuses on Fowler as the Canadian connection to the Odin Theatre. She summarizes his journey, from mainstream Vancouver actor to his association with the Odin Theatre in Denmark, relying heavily on Fowler’s commentary, much of which is stated in his 1981 article.

Citron presents information carelessly and attaches monolithic proportions to several very general comments. She credits the technique of Biomechanics to Grotowski, rather than to Meyerhold, and claims that “the barter system is now in place in Canada and the network

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7 Citron does not mention Anne Green, then a board member of the Alberta Foundation for the Performing Arts, who played a major role as co-organizer of the event.

8 In 1983 Barba decided to restructure the Odin Theatre. He created the Nordisk Teaterlaboratorium, an umbrella organization from which multiple projects and sub-organizations could operate. The Odin Theatre and ISTA were considered two of these sub-organizations. Farfa run by Iben Nagel Rasmussen, Basho by Tony Cots, and The Canada Project by Fowler were other such satellites projects.
[of small theatres] is in operation” (125). The latter claim is a projection of Fowler’s request that all symposium participants collaborate with at least one company or individual in the year ahead. There is no evidence that this occurred. Her generalizations are misleading, and her projections are condescending. Her implication that a support network for struggling western Canadian theatre companies had been established by a single event is both unrealistic and dismissive. While her optimism is commendable, her statements highly minimize the difficulties encountered by small theatre companies creating original work outside of the dominant paradigms of mainstream theatre.

The first feature-length article that focused on Primus Theatre appeared in *Canadian Theatre Review* in the spring of 1991. The article, “Primus Theatre Training for Independence” by Rick Skene, then artistic director of Mimeworks, poses a two-fold question: Why and how would Primus, a small theatre company made up of National Theatre School graduates practising alternative training and dramaturgical methods, “come to take root in the sometimes stubborn artistic soil of Winnipeg, Manitoba,” in the midst of a “dismal funding climate” (33).

Skene hypothesizes that the answer "may be found in the Primus approach to training" (33) and in doing so shifts focus and avoids answering his own question. He acknowledges Primus Theatre’s possession of a clearly defined artistic vision but did not define it. There is no indication as to why Primus Theatre emerged in either the time or the place that it did. One must infer, rather than be informed, that company members were sustained by the personal and artistic satisfaction of working with the performance culture and aesthetic that Fowler had introduced to them, not financial gains. The core of the article consists of interviews with company members Richard Clarkin, Donald Kitt, Stephen
Lawson, and Ker Wells. The interviews reveal the company’s use of actor training and research, not the text, as the starting point for the creation of performance (34) and an interactive and dynamic relationship between movement and text fostered by the training practices (33–34). The importance of the article lies in its status as the first print documentation of Primus Theatre’s work, rather than as an attempt to address the difficult questions Skene asks at the opening of his article. An attempt to answer these questions lie at the core of my study.

Brask’s “The Anthropology of Performance: An Interview with Richard Fowler” (1992) was published in Canadian Theatre Review the same year that Border Crossings published his first article on Primus Theatre’s work. The interview features eight questions posed by Brask and is particularly valuable as a source of information concerning the personal values and professional expectations that had influenced Fowler’s artistic choices. Fowler declares his belief in the artist as “the person in a culture who effects change, [. . .] whose responsibility it is to change our concept of reality, to break it open so we can breathe inside it” (qtd. in “Anthropology” 88). He also reveals his fascination with theatre, which provided him with a “primarily kinaesthetic experience, not a primarily intellectual one” (88).

These fundamental beliefs and interests explain his instant attraction to the work of the Odin Theatre, an attraction that, he claimed, was located in the meeting between spectators and actors through “an experience beyond the ‘everyday,’” necessitating “a different form of behaviour” (84) from actors.

Fowler also indicates that this attraction to the Odin Theatre extended beyond an interest in the performance aesthetic. He describes the Odin as “a social unit, a group of
people who work[ed] together to create a particular kind of human event” and who “created a
culture for themselves through their work” by making “a commitment to work with each
other indefinitely, as if forever” (85). The impression that Odin company culture left on
Fowler becomes apparent in the way in which he established the parameters of Primus
compny culture discussed later in this study.

In 1994 Garth Buchholz’s short article “Entering into Intelligent Chaos: Primus
Theatre” appeared in the now defunct Theatrum magazine. The article begins with a
description of the opening moments of The Night Room (1994), identifying it as Primus
Theatre’s “latest effort to manifest new cultural mythology” (9). Beyond the brief
interpretation of the performance as a “somewhat discursive blend of words and metaphors”
that must be “interpreted by the sense as much as by the intellect” (9), Buchholz offers no
other details of the performance. The article dissolves into generality as Buchholz restates the
connection between Primus and the Odin (Brask, Citron, Fowler, Skene) and claims that
Primus was “far from the flow of the mainstream” (10). Although he states that only three
other Canadian companies, all based in Montreal, were working in comparable ways at the
time (10), he does not name the companies or discuss comparable characteristics.

The rest of Buchholz’s article centres on an interview with Richard Fowler, who was
clearly attempting to address misconceptions about the company’s work. He resists the
labelling of the company's work as "imagistic" or "experimental" as a simplification of it. He
points out that the company worked carefully to weave a variety of elements, including text,
movement scores, scenographic details, and sound, into the performance work. Fowler also
refutes the notion of Primus's work as “avant-garde” or “experimental.” He states that,
although the structure of the performance was not known at the onset of the project, the
training and dramaturgy used by the company to construct a performance piece reflected “a well-delineated, comparative performance technique” (10). In this refutation of labels, Fowler invites the consideration of alternative ways in which to discuss the company’s work.

The Exceptions

Two of the articles in this review of literature are neither interview nor overview. In “Training to Survive, III: Primus Theatre: Workshops in Newfoundland” (1996), Helen Peters discusses the impact of Primus workshops on the Newfoundland theatre community. Peters, then a member of the English Department at Memorial University, explores both the direct impact of the workshops on select participants and the indirect impact on subsequent creative work in the province. Poet Lisa Gabrielle Mark’s article “Confessions of Disguise/Disguises of Confession” (1995) takes the form of an expressive, poetic “impression” of The Night Room.

While involved in program selection for the Resource Centre for the Arts (RCA) 1996–97 season, a role she began in 1992, Peters noticed significant differences in the creative submissions. Instead of the three to five original submissions it had come to expect each year, the selection committee received thirteen submissions (26). It was also clear that some of the submissions appeared to have been influenced by Primus Theatre’s performance work.⁹ Peters noted that there was “a more complex layering and interrelationship of acting and staging” and that “precisely orchestrated elements of voice and movement were evident in ways that were new to Newfoundland theatre” (26).

As a result of this discovery Peters decided to interview several of the practitioners who had participated in the three-day workshop series offered by Primus Theatre in 1995. The four participants interviewed indicated that one of the key strengths of the workshop had been the challenging of personal boundaries and fears. All interviewees saw this as an essential component in the achievement of creative empowerment and as an impetus for subsequent work. Playwright Robert Chafe concluded that the way in which Primus trained could be considered an “ongoing discovery” rather than the kind of skill-based professional training associated with “theatre schools” (qtd. in Peters 29).

Peters's article is important for several reasons. It is the only article that deals in some depth with the pedagogical aspect of Primus’s company culture. As she notes, considerable alteration occurred in both the quantity and the quality of the work produced by the local playwriting community in the aftermath of the Primus workshops. Her limited study indicates the company’s substantial effect upon theatre practise in Newfoundland and suggests the strong possibility of similar, but undocumented, situations in other artistic communities across the country.

Mark’s article is constructed as a visceral response to The Night Room and, with the exception of a brief mention in Buchholz’s “Entering into Intelligent Chaos: Primus Theatre,” is the only article that discusses the performance. Unlike many reviewers, Mark opens herself to what The Night Room offered her, rather than commenting on what she determined to be lacking from the performance:

To participate in a Primus theatre event is to give yourself over, to allow images and sounds to wash over you, to indulge your most personal

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10 The three-day workshop in St. John's (27–29 Nov. 1995) was structured as two independent series. The two-hour morning sessions were organized around video presentations, group discussions, and work demonstrations by Primus Theatre members. The four-hour afternoon sessions were designed to introduce participants to the physical and vocal exercises used by the company in their training regime.
(irrational) associations. The engagement of the actors' bodies creates an animated space which I too occupy. (28)

Mark’s article is an exquisite personal interaction with the performance, and she presents the reader with a wealth of detailed images from *The Night Room*, as well as beautifully written poetic observations. She describes the piece as “an articulation of space and body, of desire, of fear, [of] [s]peaking what cannot be spoken” (26) and identifies themes of self-reflexivity and seduction. Through her discourse, she splits her viewing experience into that of a poetic observer and that of a viscerally affected participant, which presents an interesting duality to her commentary.

While her discourse suggests the quality of experience possible for the Primus spectator, it does not provide a sense of all possibilities for all spectators. This is not to suggest that Mark should have structured her response in a different way or that her intention was to attempt objectivity. What can be inferred by highly subjective, personally referenced responses to the material is that *The Night Room* evoked such a powerful, visceral response that the only way to adequately respond is to do as Mark did—in an unabashedly subjective way. It is Mark, through her multi-levelled, poetic interaction with the material, who most clearly captures the intoxication of the Primus spectacle: “With Primus my experience of the performance emerges from a meeting place, the space between my own subjective experience and the spectacle-object presented to me” (28). Mark’s article rises to Fowler’s challenge of discovering new ways to discuss Primus Theatre’s performance work.

**Conclusions and Questions**
Collectively, the information in existing print material establishes several aspects of Primus Theatre’s work. Most of the information connects the company’s work to that generated by the Odin Theatre through Fowler’s presence. In many of the articles Primus is distinguished from other alternative and experimental theatre companies in North America by its “as-if-permanent” status and the training practice at the core of company culture (Brask, Buchholz, Peters, Skene). This commentary specifies that performance form emerged from the company’s training and was not intended to be a realistic rendering of the world (Brask, Buchholz, Mark). The performance aesthetic is differentiated from the North American status quo, Realism and Naturalism, in consciously expressed, visceral rather than intellectual responses to the performance work. The company’s pedagogical practice is noted in only two articles, and Hood’s contribution does not extend beyond a vague mention of the activity. Peters’s article, however, documents the important discovery of the effect of Primus Theatre workshops on the work of a small sample of performing artists in Newfoundland and raises the question of similar occurrences in other locations where workshop activity took place.

In effect, much of what appears in print about Primus Theatre’s work raises more questions than it provides answers. While much attention is paid to the apparent connection between Primus Theatre and the Odin Theatre, considerably less attention is paid to establishing the specific nature of this relationship. While Primus Theatre practice was certainly informed by that of the Odin, the context in which Odin members worked makes it nearly impossible to duplicate the culture outside of the original context. This aspect of the relationship between the two companies is not addressed in any of these articles. There is nothing to suggest that Odin Theatre processes and organizational structures needed to be
altered or adapted in the context of an English-Canadian theatre milieu. There is also very little discussion of the “confluence of procedures” observed by Brask in the continuum of training, dramaturgy, and performance, enabling an understanding of the way in which one aspect of the practice affected other aspects. Further to this, specific detail explaining the central purpose of training and illustrating concrete details of this practice is absent.

The work ethic and the dramaturgical processes are distanced from mainstream practice (Brask, Fowler, Skene) and, although Brask and Fowler provide insight as to why this is so, detailed discussion of these aspects of company life are also absent from the literature reviewed. The importance of the actor's research, Fowler’s guidance of these individual explorations, and his construction of the montage are aspects of company life that are mentioned in the articles but generally not explained. This lack of information indicates substantial need for a more detailed and exacting account of specific characteristics and functions of the evolving processes used by Primus Theatre.

Peters’s article alone makes an observation of the importance of Primus Theatre’s pedagogical efforts. Her discovery of the effect of workshop activity on the creative processes of a small sampling of Newfoundland theatre artists allows speculation of similar situations in other locations across the country. This speculation raises a larger question concerning the extent of Primus Theatre’s influence on the making of original theatre in English Canada.

**The Cultural Context**

In the early spring of 1993 Beverley Taft wrote an article entitled “Hard Times: How
Theatres are Surviving” for *Theatrum* magazine. In the article Pat Bradley, the executive
director of the Professional Association of Canadian Theatres (PACT) states,

[all] of our theatres have always operated close to the wire. There hasn’t been
much to cut back, except for the people and the art. The recession is having a
devastating effect on how many plays people can do, how many artists they
give work to and how much staff they have to get the shows up. (qtd. in Taft
10)

Through her description of the disastrous effects of funding cutbacks on theatre, Bradley
indicates that she is addressing a threat to relatively mainstream theatre with identifiable
programming. The survival tactics she discusses, such as co-productions and limiting length
of runs, all imply relative stability and an access to resources that small struggling companies
did not possess.

It was not until three years later that the fate of the small theatre companies was given
a public print forum. In the fall of 1996 *Canadian Theatre Review* devoted a special edition
to “Survivors of the Ice Age,” the festival/symposium organized by Primus Theatre that had
occurred that spring. The event, held at College Universitaire de Saint-Boniface (CUSB), had
been devoted to the discussion and demonstration of survival tactics by practitioners of what
Richard Knowles describes as “politically or aesthetically alternative or otherwise
challenging art forms” (“Survivors” 3) in the aftermath of an extensive funding recession.
Small arts organizations continued to struggle in the aftermath of a massive twenty per cent
reduction in federal arts funding that occurred between 1993 and 1995 (Taft 10). However, as
Knowles points out in his editorial, arts funding practices in this post-freeze environment
were “less the result of local or provincial election results, bad economic times, temporary
‘restraint’ recessions or readjustments than of major longer-term, and in many cases
deliberately orchestrated shifts in the social, cultural and political climate” (“Survivors” 3).
In acknowledging that “high-culture forms seem[ed] secure, and commercial theatre [. . .] thriving like never before (3),” Knowles highlights the fact that a funding freeze had continued only in a particular sector of Canada’s theatrical culture.

In a summary of the symposium for the *CTR* special edition, Penny Farfan identifies a series of commonalities defining the work and work ethic of most of the companies involved in the “Survivors of the Ice Age” event: a conscious decision to work as an ongoing collaborative, a clear delineation between actor and director in the process of creating a performance work (rather than the adoption of a collective decision-making process), the recognition of ensemble members as multi-faceted artists, not just as performers (or directors), the acknowledgment of training as a lifelong research venture, and an understanding of the necessity for evolution in the group dynamic (6–8). Farfan’s profile also indicates that most of the companies represented at the “Survivors” symposium claimed “the politics of space”—the lack of, limitations of, trade-offs for, responsibility of, and the way in which the responsibility for space changes practice (8–9)—as a continuing site of contention.

Savannah Walling’s keynote address, “Forces on the Artists/Artists on the Forces” (also published in the *CTR* special edition), offers the experiences of the Vancouver Moving Theatre (VMT) as a representative case study of companies choosing to work outside of the parameters of mainstream theatre in the early 1990s. Walling describes VMT’s performance work as utilizing an interdisciplinary array of performance form and as “informed by training practices, theatrical principles, and archetypal themes recurring in oral theatre traditions of many cultures” (12–13). The range of form and technique adopted by the company included music, mime, acrobatics, mask and clown work, stilt work, performer-produced musical scores, drum dancing, and elaborately detailed costumes and masks and represented the range
of form engaged in by other symposium participants. Walling indicates that she and other members of VMT were well aware that the use of a broad palette of form and technique resulted in a hybrid form:

> We know we are not creating dance. We know we are not creating theatre. We are creating what we call “moving theatre”. The sum of what we do is not reducible to its parts. When any single element is removed from our work, the whole collapses, just as water, when reduced to its hydrogen and oxygen, disappears into air. (13)

Although members of VMT were self-reflective and highly aware of the nature of their work, the hybrid nature of the form was nevertheless a consistent subject of criticism and confusion for critics and analysts and for other performance artists. According to Walling, dancers criticized VMT’s choreography and performance abilities, and theatre practitioners criticized the narrative line (13). The performances were dismissively labelled as “theatricals” and “spectacles” (13), suggesting a lesser art form. In dealing with these and other reactions to their work, VMT discovered, almost accidentally, a host of prejudices and rigidly held rules about the nature of what theatre should be. Among these discoveries were prejudices against popular theatre, non-linear narratives, cultural forms from non-European sources, collective creation, performance pieces designed for multiple interpretations, performances set in non-traditional spaces, and children’s theatre (13–14).

In practical and fiscal terms, without the benefit of solid parameters by which to define their art, VMT members found themselves in a bureaucratic slipstream when it came to funding. As a phenomenon, the work exhibited the qualities of both theatre and dance; on paper it qualified as neither. In times of bleak and diminishing arts funding, such as that occurring in the early to mid-1990s, available funding tended to be awarded to arts organizations that could define themselves in the terms established by the funding agencies.
Predictably, this initiative was disastrous for small experimental and alternative companies and many of them began a slow fade or disappeared completely.

This lack of vision by funding agencies, however, was not entirely a construct of the funding freeze of the 1990s. There is evidence that the “freezing out” of experimental form by funding agencies has a history in English Canada. Alan Filewod’s 1998 account of the rise and fall of the Mummers Troupe in Newfoundland (1973–82) reveals a similar bureaucratic blindness occurring in the 1970s. The prejudice against collectively created work noted by Walling several decades later is clearly evident in an excerpt from a Canada Council (CC) grant application assessment of the Mummers performance of *I.W.A.* (1976). In the opinion of Arts Officer Anna Stratton, the work was “sketchy” and “suffered from the lack of depth and subtlety that most collectives do.” She credited dramatic interest and depth in the piece to the work of playwright Rick Salutin (qtd. in “The Mummers Troupe” 22). Although not a hybrid company, as defined by Walling, the Mummers Troupe’s political and dramaturgical parameters were constantly called into question in funding application assessments. Filewod concludes that

> to the extent that the underlying crises of Canadian culture were exposed within the internal operations of the company by its refusal to accept the Canada Council’s terms of containment, the Mummers Troupe was the typifying expression of Canadian theatre in the 1970s. (“The Mummers Troupe” 31)

In *Producing Marginality: Theatre and Criticism in Canada* (1991), Robert Wallace also examines the critical positions and public attitudes that had resulted in the marginalization of certain types of theatre. In Wallace’s estimation the issue has been two-fold and has involved both the treatment of companies “that are relegated to the margins of Canadian theatre where, all too often, they die from neglect” (108) and the development of
playwriting in English Canada. In response to a comment by critic Ray Conlogue stating that fringe work is rarely seen by anybody (*The Globe and Mail*, 6 Mar. 1987), Wallace postulates that the reason “‘hardly anybody sees the work’ [is] because the majority of critics ignore its existence” (108).

In his essay “Understanding Difference: Theatrical Practice in Quebec and Canada,” Wallace identifies the inflated role of the playwright in the act of creating and developing a performance as a central stumbling block to the development of English-Canadian Theatre. He borrows from Filewod (1987) to support his claim that a particular post-colonial documentary quality pervades collectively created work in English Canada. Filewod states that “documentary theatre [essentially collective creation] evolved parallel to, and in some cases as part of, an emerging dramatic literature” (*Collective Encounters* 202). He also notes that the development of English-Canadian collective creation in the 1960s “coincided with the revival of nationalist (and by extension regionalist) sentiment and that it provided a generation of theatre workers with the artistic method to explore local themes in the absence of an appropriate dramatic literature” (*Collective Encounters* 202). Collectively created performance work served the needs of “the alternative theatre movement,” which was positioned as an alternative to the publicly supported regional theatre movement, which supported foreign models, standards, and content. In other words, collective creation served in the absence of indigenous text.

As Wallace indicates, however, the ascendancy of the indigenous playwright into a position of privilege and authority (“Understanding Difference” 176) quickly displaced this parallel development. This shift of position was made clear in a 1961/62 Canada Council annual report that stated that “the Canadian Theatre demands Canadian playwrights (qtd. in
“Understanding Difference” 176). In this statement the Canada Council placed the literary text in a highly privileged position. The commentary by Filewod, Wallace, and Walling indicates that this was a stand applied, unchallenged, to the development of theatre in the next three decades.

Wallace also presents a very different pattern of evolution for theatre in Quebec. French Canadians testing their sense of self and culture had broken the mode of colonialist complacency years before their English-Canadian counterparts. By 1971 Quebec had developed both an active literary drama, nurtured by Le Centre d’Essai des Auteurs Dramatique (CEAD) that was founded in 1965, and had produced a profusion of collectively created material. While collective creation in English Canada contributed to the establishment of an indigenous culture, the Association Quebecoise du Jeune Theatre (AQJT), representing artists involved in collectively created material in Quebec, was viewed as the centre of radical activity.

The positioning of collaboratively conceived performance work as equally viable to the development of dramatic literature allowed theatre artists in Quebec the freedom to develop performance that displaced the playwright as the core figure in performance creation and to develop performance in the absence of a literary source. As Wallace notes of the performance work produced by Carbone 14, “the company’s aesthetic is a direct consequence of its conception as a collaborative unconcerned with the development of literature” (188).

As a result of the privileged position held by the playwright in English Canada, the role of the theatre critic has been highly defined by literary construction. Paul Leonard’s article “Critical Questioning” (1988), published one year before Primus Theatre premiered
Dog Day, explains the way in which an insidious domino effect was limiting the advancement of English-Canadian theatre. According to Leonard, it was impossible for the critic in English Canada to discuss a performance that was not centred on a literary text. He claims the critic’s literary focus was borne out of the tendency of learning institutions at the time to classify theatre as literature. He concludes that the critic could only consider the performance as “a mediation between the audience and the script” (6–7). Without the familiar structures of a literary text to work with, the critic would be unable to provide accurate analysis of a theatrical event and would therefore turn to the documentation of perceived absences. Unable to refer to a known entity, the form of a written text, the critic then defined the differences in terms of a deficit. The performance was therefore discussed or judged for what it was not, or simply dismissed. As the commentary of Walling, Filewod, and Wallace reveals, a lack of inclusive critical discourse results in the limitation or destruction of artistic initiative. In turn, this stasis allows the perpetuation of “inherited assumptions and value-systems which erase difference, occlude understanding, and limit culture practices, including theatre” (Drennan 60).

In the face of uncharted territory, funding agencies displayed a similar suspicion that emerged from a similar lack of an accurate form of discourse with which to approach new art forms. As a result funding agencies scrutinized and chastised the creators of hybrid performance forms for “evading” assessment criterion. Walling notes that the Canada Council discontinued funding to VMT because “the work had ‘developed in such a way that it could no longer compete successfully with other funding priorities if situated exclusively in a dance context’ (or alternatively, a theatre context)” (“Forces on the Artists” 14). In effect, the Canada Council was suggesting that VMT make an attempt to fit into a category where it
could be judged more easily and was essentially discouraging difference by punishing it.

Ironically, as Anne Wilson points out in “A Jury of Her Peers,” arts council juries consist of other artists in the same field, which means that artists are judged by the paradoxical construction of a peer jury (8). In effect, a select group of artists is given the power of authority to pass judgement on the work of others in their field. Artists who sit on juries are given the responsibility for constructing “the criteria that governs acts of evaluation and thereby to determine the means and manner in which other people create their work” (“Producing Marginality” 30). As Wallace cynically points out, “critics can only pass judgement once art is produced; teachers can only interpret art once it is available; artists however can dictate art’s very existence” (129).

It was in this theatrical milieu that Primus Theatre emerged: it was an English-Canadian theatre culture in which collectively created work had been used as a handmaiden for the development of indigenous dramatic texts, in which literary text was viewed as central to a performance text, and in which hybrid work was being punished by critical and funding structures designed to serve the literary text.
Richard Fowler was born in Whitehorse, Yukon Territory, and grew up in Edmonton, Alberta. In 1965 he registered for a BA program at the University of Alberta, planning to earn a degree in Romance languages before studying medicine. In his final year of study, after completing all degree and pre-med requirements, he enrolled in an introductory theatre course. He was so inspired by what he encountered that he changed his career plans. BA in hand, he entered the University of Alberta’s acting program and graduated three years later with a BFA.

From the start of his theatre studies Fowler was fascinated by the possibility of community within the discipline. He notes this was one of the fundamental reasons he was so instantly drawn to the theatre. He was also intrigued by the discoveries he was making about the depth and breadth of human emotion and by the expression of those discoveries through interaction with others. He was excited by the idea of “collaborating with other people and of creating something over a long period of time” (Fowler, Interview, 25 Aug. 2000). From the beginning of his career he felt strongly about working within the context of a continuing ensemble—rather than building a career of stage and film contract work—and the social and collaborative aspect of making theatre emerged as a driving force in his search for an ideal theatre-making environment. In the four years that followed his graduation from the University of Alberta, he began to search for this ideal.

By the time that Fowler had completed his formal theatre training in 1971, significant
progress had been made in the development of post-dramatic, devised, physical theatre in a global context. He had, however, no access to performance work being created by Grotowski, Barba, and others who were working in similar process-oriented ways across the world. Furthermore, given the lack of communication between French- and English-theatre practice and between various regions in Canada, Fowler had no knowledge of opportunities beyond his immediate network. He was unaware of the collectively created performance being produced in southern Ontario, of the collaborative theatre experiments taking place in Quebec, and of the isolated experiments taking place in British Columbia, generated by such theatre companies as Tamahnous and Savage God,¹ which were considered “alternative in alternative ways” (Ratsoy x). Theatre companies that would have appealed to Fowler’s sense of creative process, such as Carbonne 14 (Montreal), Théâtre Repère (Quebec City), DNA Theatre (Toronto), and One Yellow Rabbit (Calgary), did not emerge until after his departure from the continent in 1980: the former two companies were founded in 1980, the latter two in 1982.

Fowler began his career in what appeared to be a flourishing theatrical environment in Alberta. The province’s two regional theatres were in full operation and producing a balanced program of commercial work in the manner of regional theatres established at an earlier date: The Citadel Theatre was founded in Edmonton in 1965, followed by Theatre Calgary in 1968. The listing of theatres in Edmonton included Theatre 3 (1970),² Northern Light Theatre (1975), Theatre Network (1975), Stage West (1975), and Catalyst Theatre

¹ Although Tamahnous (1971) and Savage God (1966) were operating when Fowler began his theatre career in Alberta, by the time that he arrived in Vancouver (1975) neither company would have been accessible to him. Tamahnous was developing a long-term ensemble project (1975) and, as of 1974, Savage God was no longer based in Vancouver (Usmiani 71–78).

² Theatre 3 collapsed in 1981 but was resurrected as Phoenix Theatre in the same year.
With the exception of Catalyst Theatre, which produced theatre for social change and was known to employ a documentary-style, collective-creation approach to achieve this, these theatres were producing scripted plays. In Calgary the theatre listing included Alberta Theatre Projects (1972), Lunchbox Theatre (1972), Cameo Productions (1973), Factory Theatre West (1973), and Pleiades Theatre (1973). Companies that might have piqued Fowler’s interest, the improvisation-based Loose Moose Theatre Company (1977) and the mime ensemble Arete (1976), did not exist until after he left for Vancouver. Calgary’s other theatres produced the same or similar fare to that of most theatres in Edmonton.

Although the emerging theatrical environment in the province offered little to a young actor who possessed such a fundamental sense of purpose and expectation from his chosen art, Fowler decided to explore all possibilities. Between 1971 and 1975 he worked on contract for a number of theatres, including Alberta Theatre Projects, Jasper Palisades Arts Theatre, Pleiades Theatre, and Theatre Calgary. It did not take him long to realize that what he deemed to be important and engaging about theatre was not possible within the context of the contract system. In Alberta at that time, however, other options were not available. Fowler was nevertheless driven by a goal to find theatre that exceeded the boundaries of those that appeared around him. He began to entertain ideas about alternative situations in which to work. His ideas and visions for and about theatre were clearly emerging from an interior landscape, rather than being inspired or influenced by external forces.

When Christopher Newton, artistic director of the Vancouver Playhouse Theatre

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3 The theatres in this list are those that were operating, or had begun to operate, at the time that Fowler launched his acting career (1971–75) in Alberta.

4 Factory Theatre West was the brainchild of Ken Gass, Ralph Zimmerman, and Gary Engler and folded after two productions: The Photographic Moment by Mary Baldridge and The Kidnappers by Richard Hornby (Stuart 231–32). Pleiades Theatre began to produce work on an occasional basis out of the Calgary
(VPT) from 1973 to 1979, announced his decision to form a seasonal ensemble company, Fowler believed this was a rare opportunity to work in the way that he had envisioned. In 1975 he moved to Vancouver as a member of the newly founded company. Unfortunately, what Newton intended for the VPT company and what Fowler was looking for in company organization were not the same. Fowler had hoped that the company structure would provide young actors with continuing training opportunities and a sense of community spirit. Neither of these expectations was met, and, as a result, he left the company after only one season.

During the two years (1976–78) that followed his departure from the VPT, he found contract work with other theatre companies in Vancouver, including City Stage, the Arts Club Theatre, and The New Play Centre. As time passed he became increasingly aware that he lacked the necessary skills and appropriate desire to function in the business of commercial theatre. He describes himself as “very negative, very polemic, very impatient, [and] very demanding, as you are when you are young and full of energy and ideas” (Fowler, Interview, 25 Aug. 2000). He realized that his ability to secure work had little to do with the quality of his technique; it had to do with how he looked and sounded: “I had managed to stumble through various jobs [...] because of my physique and because I had a good voice” (Fowler, Interview, 27 Aug. 2000). Throughout this time Fowler continued to search for situations that would nurture his thoughts and desires about the kind of theatre that he wanted to create. He had abandoned his long-term goal of a career in medicine for theatre and was not about to compromise his creative needs: “If I wasn’t going to make money, then what I was going to do would have to be really satisfying and really challenging” (Fowler, Interview, 25 Aug. 2000).

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Planetarium in 1963; however, in 1973 Ken Dyba tried unsuccessfully to start producing a regular season. The theatre company became Vertigo Theatre in 1979.
Fundamental to his belief in the theatre was the notion that it could be “a cultural
eexpression intimately linked to the people who create it” (Fowler, Interview, 26 Aug. 2000).
He maintained his initial position that an ideal situation would offer participants the
possibility of collaborating within the same group over a long period of time in order to
develop a common language and vision. He had also become interested in the idea of theatre-
making that would allow the collaborators time to explore not only fresh solutions to artistic
problems but also very personal interests. He further speculated that his ideal situation would
focus on the creation of theatre arising from issues and ideas of immediate interest to the
collaborators involved, “not watered down and misunderstood representations of words that
had been created by other people in other places” (Fowler, Interview, 26 Aug. 2000). As a
result of these considerations, he envisioned much longer rehearsal periods than those he had
in the contract system.

In 1977, after a year and a half of maintaining a busy but personally unfulfilling
performance schedule, Fowler decided to stop acting. He had concluded that, without a
drastic shift in the way he was approaching his professional life, he would continue to be
swept along by the momentum he had set in place: “My steps had taken me in a certain
direction, toward mediocrity. And that’s essentially where I stayed until I realized that I was
dying. I had to get out of it” (Fowler, Interview, 27 Aug. 2000). In order to activate the kind
of creative life that he envisioned, he realized that he had to abort his commercial acting
career and allow himself time and space to concretize his search and to open up to
possibility. He stated, “I didn’t know specifically what I wanted because I couldn’t find it. [. .
. .] I thought that I would recognize it when I did” (Fowler, Interview, 25 Aug. 2000).

During the run of his last contract job, Fowler discovered a notice on the green-room
board announcing a workshop to be facilitated by Yurek Bogajewicz in Vancouver in the spring of 1978.\(^5\) Bogajewicz’s artistic associations meant little to him, and he had no sense of what a workshop might entail; he registered for the workshop because it was an unknown quantity. Polish-born Bogajewicz was a graduate of the prestigious Academy of Theatre Arts in Warsaw and had worked with Jerzy Grotowski at the Theatre Laboratory just as the Holiday Projects (para-theatrical work) were beginning. Although *Towards a Poor Theatre* (1969) was published in English, very little was known about Grotowski’s work in North America. Fowler recalled reading the book as a student and being unable to understand anything. It was only after his experience with Bogajewicz that he was able to comprehend the material.

Workshops were not a common practice in the late 1970s, and that alone interested Fowler. In his estimation, “there was absolutely no awareness of, or [. . .] interest in, an actor as an artist or a creator. An actor was a talking and moving puppet” (Fowler, Interview, 25 Aug. 2000). The concept of lifelong training—assumed by dancers, musicians, painters, sculptors, and singers—was not at that time generally applied to acting in western Canada, or, for that matter, elsewhere in North America. In other parts of the world, the actor may have been considered as much of a skilled performer as an athlete or dancer, but that was not the case within Fowler’s circle of professional acquaintanceship. He described the current

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\(^5\) After an extended workshop for students at the Academy of Theatre Arts in 1969, Grotowski invited Bogajewicz to join the Theatre Laboratory. Bogajewicz decided to complete his formal training before taking up the offer. This meant that Grotowski had stopped creating public performances by the time that Bogajewicz joined the company. Bogajewicz remained with the Theatre Laboratory for two years and then travelled extensively in Europe and the former Soviet Union. He immigrated to Canada in 1975 (Selman 6). In the late 1970s, Bogajewicz moved to the United States and pursued a Hollywood film career as an actor, director, and producer.

Christopher Newton hired Bogajewicz to direct a version of Sophocles’ *Oedipus Rex* for the VPT’s 1977–78 season. The production opened on 7 January 1978. According to Jan Selman, tension between Bogajewicz’s focus on “process” and the VPT’s focus on “product” pervaded the rehearsal. She also reports
popular perception of the actor as fashionably superficial and somewhat self-abusive
(Fowler, Interview, 25 Aug. 2000). He entered the Bogajewicz workshop with no
preconceived notions about either the content or the direction it would take. The only thing
that he felt for certain was that something interesting would happen. The workshop would
become a pivotal moment in Fowler’s artistic development, introducing him to “a completely
different idea of what actors were and what they did” (Fowler, Interview, 25 Aug. 2000).

Yurek Bogajewicz

Bogajewicz had become a member of the Theatre Laboratory just as Grotowski had
ceased public performance and was entering into the first of his para-theatrical phases.
Because training was a central feature of the theatre company’s culture, company members
continued their training practice. Bogajewicz would therefore have been exposed to the
training exercises developed in the latter part of the company’s performance phase.
Workshop exercises that Fowler recalls can be found in some form in the chapter “Actor
Training” (1966) in Towards a Poor Theatre.

The workshop ran all day every day during April 1978. The morning sessions were
devoted to learning and practicing specific exercises; the afternoon sessions focused on the
application of those exercises in various ways.

The series of exercises that Bogajewicz taught workshop participants were drawn
from a number of different sources, then altered and used “in ways that were not relevant to
the original source” (Fowler, Interview, 26 Aug. 2000). These exercises involved “all the

that Oedipus Rex was “one of the most visually-stunning shows that Vancouver—and perhaps Canada—has
ever seen” (24).
various parts of the body and involved the cyclical repetition of various movements or actions in various parts of the body” (Fowler, Interview, 26 Aug. 2000). They included difficult gymnastic exercises, such as leaps and headstands, that were designed to “break down the body’s resistance, [. . .] to open up the body’s physical skill activity, to improve balance, and [. . .] to overcome fear [in training]” (Fowler, Interview, 26 Aug. 2000).

One of the central activities that Bogajewicz introduced to workshop participants was a series of exercises called the “Plastiques.” In Towards a Poor Theatre, Grotowski explains that the “Plastiques” are

based on Dalcroze and other classical European methods. Their fundamental principle is the study of opposite vectors. Particularly important is the study of vectors of opposite movements (e.g., the hand makes circular movements in one direction, the elbow in the opposite direction) and contrasting images (e.g., the hands accept, while the legs reject). (107–8)

Another of the central exercises that Bogajewicz taught workshop participants was one known as “the cat.” As explained in Towards a Poor Theatre, this movement sequence was

based on the observations of a cat as it awakes and stretches itself. The subject lies stretched out, face downwards, completely relaxed. The legs are apart and the arms at right angles to the body, palms towards the floor. The “cat” wakes up and draws the hands in towards the chest, keeping the elbows upwards so that the palms of the hands form the basis for support. The hips are raised, while the legs “walk” on tiptoe towards the hands. Raise and stretch the left leg sideways, at the same time lifting and stretching the head. Replace the left leg on the ground, supported by the tips of the toes. Repeat the same movements with the right leg, the head still stretching upwards. Stretch the spine, placing the centre of gravity, first in the centre of the spine and then higher up towards the nape of the neck. Then turn over and fall onto the back relaxing. (103)

On a very basic level, the workshop enabled Fowler to discover a new way of thinking about his body as a creative instrument. Although highly physically active as a child
and teenager, he had gradually lost contact with his physical powers and his ability to express himself freely in a physical way. During the workshop, his body was jolted into existence. According to Fowler, Bogajewicz taught physical work both “as an end in itself, as the development of a technique, and as a means to find out what was inside” (Fowler, Interview, 27 Aug. 2000). The physical nature of the workshop enabled Fowler to begin “accessing enormous amounts of energy” (Fowler, Interview, 26 Aug. 2000). In essence, he was learning to control and manipulate energy.

By the end of the intensive session, which included practical work and rudimentary exercises, he understood how drastically the omission of physical work from his initial theatre training had affected his ability to act. He concluded that he “wasn’t in touch with his body enough to be a really good actor” (Fowler, Interview, 27 Aug. 2000) and that he had gone through an entire university program without discovering the prerequisite for performance, “without discovering my body, without discovering the unity of body and mind” (Fowler, Interview, 27 Aug. 2000). His attitude to physical training changed, and he started to work out, to run, to swim, and to do acrobatic work in order to explore ways to dissolve the mind/body dichotomy. He spent the next decade “turning that energy and that growing mind/body connection into a technique” (Fowler, Interview, 26 Aug. 2000).

The Bogajewicz workshop also introduced Fowler to a world of performance and training that he knew absolutely nothing about (Fowler, Interview, 26 Aug. 2000) and affirmed his beliefs that alternative theatre communities existed in the world. He was determined to keep this newly found passion alive until he could find a way to access these communities. His participation in the workshop led him to like-minded individuals who were interested in continuing to explore the mind/body awareness that the workshop had
awakened. Several of the workshop participants started training together on a regular basis, and Fowler began to search for other teachers who could advance this practice.

**Keith Johnstone**

Workshops may have been a scarce commodity in the late 1970s, but they were the only means for Fowler to open himself to possibility. Thus he attended several workshops facilitated by the director and playwright Keith Johnstone in Vancouver during the months following the Bogajewicz workshop. Johnstone was not working in the tradition of physical theatre that Fowler had begun to explore with Bogajewicz, but he was exploring theatrical form that deviated from the literature-based, English-Canadian mainstream. Fowler credits Johnstone with introducing him to the work of Moshe Feldenkrais and to an original and imaginative approach to mask-work.⁶

In Britain during the 1960s Johnstone developed a sterling reputation as a teacher and as the artistic director of Theatre Machine, an improvisation company. In 1971 he began teaching improvisation in the Theatre Department at the University of Calgary and in 1977 founded the improvisation theatre the Loose Moose Theatre Company. Johnstone and his colleague Mel Tonken are best known for inventing Theatresports, a form of competitive improvisation.

Moshe Feldenkrais (1904–84) is well known for the development of a series of activities and exercises designed to enable individuals of any age to develop the body through mind/body and sense/body awareness. His methods are directed at the integration of

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⁶ Johnstone adapted the theories and practice of Stanislavski, Evgeni Vakhtangov, Michael Chekhov, and other theatrical masters, but most of his acting practice emerged from experimenting with masks.
all aspects of a human being into one fully functioning whole. Feldenkrais believed that an individual’s capacity for personal growth and development was highly limited by self-image (Awareness 15), and thus if self-image could be controlled and changed, more of the individual’s potential could be realized. Through his series of exercises, Feldenkrais sought to empower individuals to systematically alter their self-images. He identified four interconnected and synergistic components of the waking state: sensation, feeling, thought, and movement (Awareness 31). Treating movement as the locus of awareness, he constructed a system “to gradually eliminate from one’s mode of action all superfluous movements, everything that hampers, interferes with, or opposes movement” (Awareness 61). This series of exercises allowed individuals to determine their existing physical state and then to work toward improving their physical ability and stamina by developing a conscious awareness of what they were doing, while they were doing it.

This process bears a strong resemblance to Grotowski’s via negative, the “eradication of blocks” to the body’s natural impulse, which informed the physical training introduced in the Bogajewicz workshop (Poor Theatre 16–17). It can be speculated that Feldenkrais’s theories and exercises, focusing on the active and conscious alteration of the physical condition, offered a concrete extension of the physical investigations that Fowler had begun with Bogajewicz.

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7 Feldenkrais’s definitions of each of the four components of the waking state included characteristics that might not be assumed in more common definitions of the terms.

*Sensation* includes—in addition to the five familiar senses—the kinaesthetic sense, which comprises pain, orientation in space, the passage of time, and rhythm.

*Feeling* includes—apart from the familiar emotions of joy, grief, anger, and so forth—self-respect, inferiority, super sensitivity, and other conscious and unconscious emotions that colour our lives.

*Thinking* includes all functions of intellect, such as the opposition of right and left, good and bad, right and wrong, understanding, knowing that one understands, classifying things, recognizing rules, imagining, knowing what is sensed and felt, remembering all the above.
Johnstone’s approach to mask-work was respectful of the history, tradition, power, and sense of ritual associated with the mask. He introduced this work as “a balance between interest and anxiety” (Johnstone 165) and viewed “Masks as astounding performers, [...] offering a new form of theatre” (144). He believed that Masked actors “should attempt to enter the ‘Mask state’” (144), in which they would set aside intellectual choices and react instinctively (148). He believed that performers served the Mask. Both mask-work and trance were tools that allowed the performer to enable impulse and access subconscious states, thus promoting the advancement of the performer’s art. For Fowler, this work would not only have advanced the exploration begun with Bogajewicz but also prepared him for concentrated work in these areas with Andre Gregory and Grotowski.

In addition to being influenced by the Feldenkrais exercises and the mask-work, Fowler’s pedagogical and directorial approach and style were, I believe, shaped by his time with Johnstone. This opinion is based on Johnstone’s descriptions of his teaching methods, my own first-hand experience with those methods, and the reactions of Primus Theatre members to Fowler as a teacher. Johnstone was inspired by “master teacher” Anthony Stirling, who believed that “the teacher was not superior to the child and should never demonstrate, and should not impose values” (20). Inspired by Stirling, Johnstone claimed that he was “teaching spontaneity” (32) and that he wanted his students to reach a point where they could trust themselves and their colleagues enough to allow moments to happen,

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Movement includes all temporal and spatial changes in the state and configuration of the body and its parts, such as breathing, eating, speaking, blood circulation, and digestion. (Awareness 31-32)

8 Johnstone purposefully used a capital M when referring to masks:

It’s true that an actor can wear a mask casually and just pretend to be another person, but [William] Gaskill [a young director at The Royal Court Theatre during the mid- to late 1950s] and myself were absolutely clear that we were trying to induce trance states. The reason why one automatically talks and writes about Masks with a capital “M” is that one really feels that
rather than to force activity. Although seemingly relaxed and casual, these methods were carefully constructed to create an environment in which actors could experiment freely. Johnstone viewed two tenets as central to the construction of this environment: the teacher was to absorb the blame for the way in which a group interacted and each member of the group was to work for the others and to maintain an interest in their progress (29). He took care to be positive and direct in his commentary on student work (30) and to confront students’ fear of failure (31). He began to “approach each problem on a basis of common sense and [to] find the most obvious solutions possible” (28). Johnstone’s goal was simply to enable all his actors and students to react spontaneously in performance situations.

Andre Gregory

Fowler and other individuals who became the Twelfth Avenue Project were introduced to the work of New York theatre artist Andre Gregory who facilitated a workshop in Vancouver during the summer of 1978. With Gregory, the group would experiment with the application of their emerging physical power in pursuit of physically defining impulse and its ability to generate interaction. In Gregory, Fowler would find a mentor who would be instrumental in advancing his personal creative journey.

Gregory was deeply concerned by the state and direction of American theatre at the time. He asserted his fundamental belief in the importance of creative process in a 1979 interview with Polish writer Andrzej Bonarski: “[I]t is not important that one creates art, which is then presented to people, but it is important that people [. . .] are involved in the

the genuine Mask actor is inhabited by a spirit. Nonsense perhaps, but that’s what the experience is like and has always been like. (143–44)
creative process” (qtd. in Kumiega 179–80). To this end, Gregory founded The Manhattan Theatre Project in 1968 and applied a process-centred approach to mounting Beckett’s *Endgame*, Chekhov’s *The Seagull*, and Wallace Shawn’s *Our Late Night*. Gregory and his wife, Mercedes, participated in a number of Grotowski’s para-theatrical projects, including a University of Research session in Warsaw in 1975,⁹ and these experiences highly influenced the theatre art that they were making. In the late 1970s Gregory utilized many of the techniques that he had explored in Poland in a Manhattan Theatre Project adaptation of Lewis Carroll’s *Alice in Wonderland*.

Although Gregory’s workshops relied on the same physical work as those of Bogajewicz, they were very different. Gregory was interested in the exploration of process and in taking creative experimentation to an extreme. While Fowler retained from the Bogajewicz workshop vivid recollections of daily physical activity, from these sessions he was left with indelible impressions of the way in which Gregory orchestrated and developed group work. He remembers Gregory as being “very relaxed, very generous, very giving, very supportive, and a very fine teacher” (Fowler, Interview, 25 Aug. 2000). The workshop ran all day every day for three weeks during the summer of 1978. Although many of the exercises used in the workshop were similar to those used by Bogajewicz, Gregory did not attempt to teach technique. The physical work served as a vehicle for exploration, “purely to jump-start or activate a situation” (Fowler, Interview, 27 Aug. 2000). Gregory was interested in exploring the process of “physicalizing” an impulse and the resulting actions and interactions, rather than in focusing on the technical aspects of an exercise. The “Plastiques”

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⁹ Gregory first met Grotowski in Warsaw in 1975 when he attended the Theatre of Nations Festival (8–28 June). At this festival Grotowski and Barba introduced a segment of the festival called the University of Research (14 June–7 July). This was made up of live and filmed performances, public meetings, and
were reintroduced to the actors as a vehicle for creating improvisation. Through this application, Fowler began to understand how the Theatre Laboratory training might have been used to create performance material.

For Fowler, the most significant aspect of the workshop was observing Gregory’s “unqualified respect for the creative impulse” (Fowler, Interview, 27 Aug. 2000). The time spent with Bogajewicz had awakened an awareness of the mind/body power, which was reinforced in the exercises explored with Johnstone. With Gregory, Fowler had the opportunity to witness and explore ways in which this power could be harnessed for creative purposes:

He [Gregory] had an amazing [. . .] instinct for what was alive at a particular moment, and he would jettison everything else that he had thought of, that had been planned, that people wanted to do, that he was supposed to be working on. And he would focus in on, and create support for, what he perceived to be a strong impulse. (Fowler, Interview, 27 Aug. 2000)

As a central activity of the workshop, Gregory would set up improvisational situations and apply his experience and his intuition toward the identification of “flickers of energy and even unarticulated impulses” in the actors as they worked (Fowler, Interview, 25 Aug. 2000). The actors would then work on the development of the serendipitous moments that Gregory had identified, and he would seek other such moments in the improvisations for the actors to work on. Fowler describes Gregory during that time as “a flickering candle, [. . .] wildly unstructured, very intuitive, and extremely open to any creative current” (Fowler, Interview, 25 Aug. 2000). He declined to give specific details about the work situation and content because he felt it would be an invasion of the trust and privacy that the work was based on (Fowler, Interview, 25 Aug. 2000). The application of technique to a developmental workshops, as well as training demonstrations conducted by Theatre Laboratory members and invited guests (Kumiega 176–79).
process was highly inspiring and motivating to Fowler, and he was keenly interested in continuing to explore this method of theatre-making.

**Prelude to the Twelfth Avenue Theatre Project**

In the aftermath of the Gregory workshop, eight actors who met through their participation in the Bogajewicz and Gregory workshops banded together to continue training and experimenting with improvisation. Influenced by the scheduling of the Bogajewicz and Gregory workshops, the group met six days a week, from 7:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m., at the Holy Trinity Anglican Church Hall, on the corner of 12th Avenue and Hemlock Street in Vancouver. Along with physical training and experimenting with improvisation, guest instructors were brought in to teach specific skills.

It was in this capacity that Gregory returned to Vancouver in the early months of 1979. As a result of their daily work, the group had begun to develop an elementary language and “a way of working together based on shared and developed language and on shared and developed goals and ambitions” (Fowler, Interview, 27 Aug. 2000). Gregory’s responsibility in this second collaboration was to help group members with the process of further exploration and development of their shared language through improvisation.

Several months later Gregory invited the Vancouver ensemble to the United States to work with him on the exploration of vocal and physical material that he planned to configure as a performance piece would eventually be orchestrated into a performance. Four of the eight-member ensemble, including Fowler, accepted this offer. In the early fall of 1979, the group joined Gregory and four Israeli actors in the Vermont countryside. Once again the
Vancouver actors were challenged by Gregory’s highly intuitive and impulsive style of working and his ability to work with the moment-to-moment impulse that emerged from the group work (Fowler, Interview, 27 Aug. 2000). In Fowler’s estimation, “you’ve got to be really fast on your feet and really available to give up what you had decided you wanted and to go another way. I learned that from him” (Fowler, Interview, 27 Aug. 2000). When Gregory’s father became ill, he moved the ensemble to New York City, where the experimentation continued. Sadly, Gregory’s father died, and the work was never completed.

Each time Gregory worked with the Vancouver ensemble, Fowler met with him outside the studio to ask questions and to seek information that might advance his creative journey. He found Gregory to be “extremely generous, extremely wise, very perceptive, [and] very intuitive” (Fowler, Interview, 27 Aug. 2000), as he was in teaching and coaching situations. In one of these discussions, Gregory told Fowler about Eugenio Barba and the Odin Theatre in Denmark. Fowler had never heard of Barba, but began to collect articles, reviews, descriptions, and photographs of his work. He was surprised and delighted by what he learned and eventually wrote to Barba for permission to visit the Odin Theatre.

The Twelfth Avenue Theatre Project: Official Status, 1979 to 1980

In the wake of the abandoned project with Gregory, the Twelfth Avenue Theatre Project was founded by members of the original group still interested in training and experimenting with improvisation. One of these, Nick Hutchinson, was on sabbatical from his position as artistic director of the Caravan Stage Company.10 Many years later, he would

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10 The Little People’s Caravan, a puppet troupe that performed out of a horse-drawn wagon, was founded in 1970 in the Okanagan Valley, BC, by Paul Kirby and Adreanna Kelder. In 1975 the company was
alter the course of Fowler’s career through a bold professional decision made while heading the English section of the National Theatre School.

In the fall of 1979 the six-person ensemble secured a Canada Council Explorations grant and returned to Holy Trinity Anglican Church Hall to train and rehearse for their first production. The source of the project was the novel *Gormenghast*, by author and illustrator Mervyn Peake (1911–68). His trilogy, *Titus Groan* (1946), *Gormenghast* (1950) and *Titus Alone* (1959), is considered a classic Gothic fantasy comparable to the writing of Poe, Dickens, and Tolkien. Martin Dodsworth described the works as “an extravagantly detailed and somewhat ambiguous fantasy” (446). Peake was thought to have “believed profoundly in the value of human individuality and [. . .] dedicated himself to recording it in all its strange and beautiful manifestations” (Moorcock). The writer’s details provided the actors with concrete and visual aspects of character to which they could react.

Training and rehearsal was scheduled six days a week, from 7:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. Mornings were devoted to developing the company’s common language through exercises, such as the “Plastiques” and gymnastic work, borrowed from the various workshops or exercises constructed from interpretations of Grotowski’s exercises as described in *Towards a Poor Theatre*. Afternoons were spent generating and developing potential performance material. Each actor selected a character from Peake’s book and created material inspired by details such as physical attributes, props, interaction with other characters, and selections from the text. Integrated units of text and movement were developed as solo pieces and as

renamed the Caravan Stage Company, and in 1983 the company split into a resident farm and a touring company. In 1984 Kirby and Kelder and an ensemble of actors set out, with horse and wagon, on a three-year tour of the United States under the banner of the Caravan Stage Company. After the tour they moved their operation to Kingston, Ontario, where they founded the Caravan Barge Company. Nick Hutchinson, artistic director of the Caravan Stage Company from 1976 to 1984, along with another group of actors, purchased an 80-acre farm north of Armstrong, BC. He became the artistic director of the newly founded Caravan Farm
collaborative ventures. The form of expression used in the interaction of actor with the material was influenced by workshop experience, but none of the pieces was constructed with a particular dramaturgical structure in mind. All material was developed from the actors’ reactions and responses to the characters, rather than from representations of the original characters. Over several months, the company amassed a collection of scenes and moments based on individual and collective reactions to the source material.

The performance was constructed from a collection of subjective, non-realistic interactions with Peake’s “ambiguous fantasy.” The performance text was essentially improvisation developed out of “actor-based, actor-explored, actor-researched” encounters with the source text (Fowler, Interview, 25 Aug. 2000). Fowler notes that, although group members turned to him for direction and guidance throughout the project, the amassed pieces were never organized into a formal, cohesive unit. Instead, the individual pieces were adjusted in an “unelaborated, unrefined, but interesting way” (Fowler, Interview, 25 Aug. 2000). Fowler states that the production was extremely rudimentary in comparison with the sophisticated and refined work developed by companies in other parts of the world that were using similar construction methodologies (Fowler, Interview, 27 Aug. 2000).

Each night of the performance, the improvisations organically unfolded in no particular order. This presented the possibility of a very different performance each night. When one or more of the actors were presenting their “prepared” pieces, the others created support material, such as sound effects and visual images. Fowler recalls that the performance piece had “the quality of a dream or hallucination, without any apparent logic to its structure at all, very unresolved [. . .] and at the same time extremely engaging and
disorienting for the people who saw it because it was so other-worldly” (Fowler, Interview, 28 Aug. 2000). Although the performance piece ran for several days, it was not reviewed by any of the Vancouver newspapers, and written opinions or reactions to the piece do not appear to exist.

At the conclusion of the project, Fowler announced that he was not interested in serving as director or dramaturg in the future. The decision was soon rendered irrelevant. While other members debated the way in which the company should progress, he received an invitation to participate in one of Grotowski’s Theatre of Sources projects in Poland. He knew that joining the project was unlikely to advance his search for an ideal environment in which to create theatre because Grotowski was no longer involved in performance work. Nevertheless, he was interested in what the experience might offer him and accepted the invitation. He then wrote to Barba asking for permission to visit the Odin Theatre. To his surprise, Barba not only invited him to the Odin but also asked him to take part in the first International School of Theatre Anthropology (ISTA), scheduled for October 1980 in Bonn. The Twelfth Avenue Theatre Project dissolved a year after Fowler’s departure.

**Jerzy Grotowski: Theatre of Sources**

Although Grotowski’s best known theories and practices emerged from his Theatre of Performance research (1959–69), his post-performance experimentation extended for another three decades and can be divided into four distinct periods: Theatre of Participation (1969–75); Theatre of Sources (1976–82); Objective Drama (1983–92) (Fowler, “Four Theatres”
Fowler’s participation can be located in the latter part of the Theatre of Sources period. Grotowski described the Theatre of Sources research as an examination of “the source of different traditional techniques, [. . . a determination of] what the human being can do with his own solitude, how it can be transformed into force and a deep relationship with what is called the natural environment” (“From the Theatre” 120). More specifically, Theatre of Sources was constructed as a means to explore the relationship between ritual and ceremonial practices of different cultures and the commonalities in technique and effect (Fowler, “Four Theatres” 176).

In her examination of his Theatre of Performance phase, Raymonde Temkine argues that “the notion of authenticity [. . .] is at the heart of Grotowski’s conception of theatre” (114). I contend that the core principle driving all phases of his subsequent explorations is also directed at the creation or facilitation of an “authentic experience.” The acknowledgment of the macroscopic proportions of this research logic gives central meaning to each phase of his research and coherence to the overall body of his work.

A serious illness early in Grotowski’s life led him to a year-long confinement in a hospital for the terminally ill where he first observed the vitality of life through the intensity of dying. This experience resulted in a decision to direct his life toward a search for truth in art (Temkine 48) and in a devotion that would eventually manifest itself as his life’s work: the facilitation of an authentic experience. Grotowski’s interest in performance was centred on the conviction that theatre was “capable of challenging itself and its audience by violating accepted stereotypes of vision, feeling, and judgement—more jarring because it is imaged in

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11 It is difficult to discuss this final stage of experimentation with any accuracy because information about this work is still being compiled. Furthermore, upon Grotowski’s death in 1999, the work in Pontedera, Italy,
the human organism’s breath, body, and inner impulses” (*Poor Theatre* 22). Drawn to the ritual aspects of performance, Grotowski experimented with alternative uses of space, the deconstruction of classical texts, and physical and vocal expression not obscured by cultural beliefs and stereotyping.

By 1979 Grotowski had decided that he would not be able to effect the kind of actor-spectator relationship he had hoped for, the triggering of an authentic experience in the spectator, through the witnessing of the rawness of an actor’s unimpeded actions, reactions, and interactions. Considering the fundamental nature of the actor-spectator relationship an unassailable hurdle, he turned away from performance as a means of generating an “authentic experience” and began to concentrate on the construction of events in which the focus was the participant’s experience. The Theatre of Participation investigations were constructed to allow the participant to reach, as quickly as possible (Kumiega 163), the “de-conditioned” state, achieved by the actors through extensive, rigorous training:

> The various stages of a given event were fixed and controlled, the details of the activity within each stage varying according to the response, the actions of the participants. The events occurred typically in natural surroundings, [...] with long hours of various physical activities, [...] using natural elements, [...] and taking place by daylight and throughout the night. (Fowler, “Four Theatres” 176)

As participation was by invitation only and the “events” were not intended for public presentation, outside researchers were denied access to this work. Although the experimental research aspect of Grotowski’s work was continuing on, the public sharing had ceased. From this point on, his work would be conducted only within the parameters of the laboratory structures that he had established for the training and performance-creation aspect of his Theatre of Performance phase.

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continued under the direction of Thomas Richards.
After several years of devoting himself to the creation of para-theatrical experiments, a disappointed Grotowski noted that even unstructured contact among randomly arranged groups still produced “performance.” Random groupings still yielded “a kind of animation” (“From the Theatre” 120) and self-consciousness in the contact between individuals, rather than the authentic, unaffected contact that he was seeking.

In his search for a means to facilitate the “spontaneous de-conditioned contact” (Kumiega 202) of an authentic experience, Grotowski began to explore the notion of “untaming” (Kumiega 229) in his Theatre of Sources research. “Untaming” was directed at the dissolution of taken-for-granted patterns and beliefs in order to expose a primary state from which authentic experience could emerge. It was centred on the belief that the moment of birth initiated the “taming,” or training, of an individual’s behavioural patterns and belief systems.

The research focused on the determination of “the sources of different tradition techniques [and] with what precedes the differences” in these basic techniques (“From the Theatre” 120). Grotowski stated that the Theatre of Sources was devoted to “those activities which lead us back to the sources of life, to direct, primary perception” (qtd. in Kumiega 203). In many ways this work resembled that of Peter Brook, Richard Schechner, and even Barba between 1976 and 1982; however, Grotowski’s explorations were not for performance purposes.

Throughout Grotowski’s post-performance research projects, he invited “willing and interested new people” to participate in the testing of theories and techniques that he and his close collaborators were exploring (Fowler, Interview, 25 Aug. 2000). This was the reason for his invitation to Gregory in the mid-1970s and for his invitation to Fowler in the summer
of 1980 to participate in the Theatre of Sources session. Before Grotowski had exhausted all possibility for this line of questioning, the introduction of martial law made it necessary for him to leave Poland. The attention to skill and precision in action that he identified as absent from the Theatre of Sources research became the directive of his next research phase, Objective Drama.

The segment of the Theatre of Sources project in which Fowler participated lasted approximately one month and was conducted at a research centre in Brzezink, forty kilometres from Wroclaw in the Polish countryside. Fowler claimed that it was difficult to remember the exact time frame because the work occurred in such an “atemporal” environment (Fowler, Interview, 25 Aug. 2000). Research activities were scheduled at various times over a twenty-four-hour workday. Participants were not given advance information about scheduling or the nature of the work they would be involved in. Meals were scheduled on an ongoing basis, and Fowler recalled that “there was always time to rest and write in a journal and dream” (Fowler, Interview, 26 Aug. 2000). Apart from the most basic instructions before a particular activity, all research was executed in silence, contributing further to the “other-worldly feel” of the research environment (Fowler, Interview, 26 Aug. 2000). The atmosphere Fowler described resembled that created during the Theatre of Participation phase, where a sense of time and knowledge of the outside world were suspended for the duration of the event. Although his assistants supervised the workshop activity, Grotowski was often present at the sessions and each day interviewed participants about their experiences.

At the centre of the Theatre of Sources research was the examination of techniques, drawn from cultures all over the world, that were directed at the accomplishment of a
particular action and that led to “altered states of consciousness analogous to, parallel to, or similar to, the altered states of consciousness that Grotowski’s actors had arrived at through training and performance” (Fowler, Interview, 26 Aug. 2000). The segment of the project in which Fowler participated was focused on the identification of “the nature of perceptual change [. . . as determined through the execution of] certain forms of physical activity” (Fowler, Interview, 25 Aug. 2000). Grotowski was examining the “characteristics of the changed state of perception and consciousness on a technical level” (Fowler, Interview, 26 Aug. 2000).

According to Fowler, Grotowski had already determined that practitioners of particular physical techniques experienced states of changed consciousness similar to those described by his actors after specific training exercises (Fowler, Interview, 27 Aug. 2000). At the point at which Fowler became a participant, Grotowski’s investigation was focused on practical and ceremonial technique that involved specific physical configuration and detail, such as “hunting dances, [. . .] a particular means of climbing trees as practised by Aborigines in South America, [. . .] Dervish dancing, [. . .] a form of Hindu singing, classical Indian singing, and a non-competitive running technique that was used to cover long distances” (Fowler, Interview, 27 Aug. 2000). Through the investigation of these techniques, Grotowski was attempting to determine the details of the process that triggered “a change of consciousness, a change of perception” in the participant (Fowler, Interview, 27 Aug. 2000). The quest to generate an authentic experience, an altered mental/physical state, was now more narrowly focused on the production of practical and ceremonial technique.

Fowler was fascinated not only by the actual “change of consciousness and perception” but also with his growing awareness of how this change was produced. He
described this altered state of consciousness as “a trance or trance-like state,” induced by “chemicals released by the brain after an extended period of working on a certain kind of physical activity” (Fowler, Interview, 27 Aug. 2000). This state appears to be similar to the physiological effect of the rush of endorphins most commonly associated with long-distance running.\textsuperscript{12} Fowler admits that the Theatre of Sources research did not give him any real sense of Grotowski’s performance work. That did not happen until he viewed the performances on videotape and until he was able to experiment with his own performance pieces. He was, however, able to imagine the state of consciousness that Grotowski’s actors would have experienced in performance situations.

A full realization and understanding of the Theatre of Sources’s explorative work occurred several years later for Fowler while he was performing his one-man show \textit{Wait for the Dawn}. Due to the intense and physically demanding nature of the hour-long show, he would reach a peak state of consciousness by the end of each performance. Although an understanding of the notion of placing a “change of perception as a goal, not as a by-product,” informed the performance of his solo performance work, the nature and specificity of the Theatre of Sources research made it inapplicable to other contexts (Fowler, Interview, 27 Aug. 2000). He was deeply affected by the way in which engagement with the selected activities rendered “otherness, openness, and vulnerability” in participants (Fowler, Interview, 27 Aug. 2000); however, he declined an invitation to remain with the project in favour of continuing on to Denmark and the Odin Theatre, as planned.\textsuperscript{13}

\textsuperscript{12} Although medical opinions differ as to the degree to which these physiological states take hold, there is agreement that engaging in certain types of strenuous physical activity for extended periods of time does alter human physiology.

\textsuperscript{13} The Theatre of Sources project continued for several months after Fowler’s departure. In the fall of 1980 Grotowski disbanded his international company of collaborators. This was considered a temporary measure at the time, but the deaths of three key company members between 1981 and 1983 and the declaration
Fowler claims the early part of his artistic quest was an erratic venture, although he acknowledges the stream of uninterrupted progression that began with the Bogajewicz workshop (Fowler, Interview, 27 Aug. 2000). In retrospect, events do seem to reflect a strangely cohesive and linear progression. His encounters with Bogajewicz, Johnstone, Gregory, the members of the Twelfth Avenue Theatre Project, and Grotowski provided him with training and performance experience that not only influenced and informed each subsequent step in his journey but also prepared him for his encounter with the Odin Theatre. In this course of progression, Fowler developed the ability and willingness to immerse himself in an unfamiliar experience, to reflect intensely and honestly, and then to face the challenges of difficult choices. The ability to motivate and challenge actors that would become apparent in Fowler’s later career began with this intense drive to challenge and make demands on himself.

**Introduction to Eugenio Barba and the Odin Theatre**

As Fowler prepared to travel to Denmark, he discovered that the Odin Theatre was ending a collaborative residency with the Cardiff Theatre Lab in Wales. Instead of going directly to Denmark, he went first to Blaenau Ffestiniog, a small mining town where Odin Theatre members were performing *The Million*.

*The Million* had been constructed in 1978 after a three-month sabbatical in which...
company members individually studied performance forms in a variety of source cultures. After returning, each actor created “‘a travelogue,’ [consisting of] costumes, musical instruments, dances, music, or short scenes summarizing the memories of their journey” (Taviani 266). The Million was a collective journey through the various cultural experiences of company members and made extensive use of music, dance, and comedic devices. It was constructed as a thematic parallel to Marco Polo’s journeys in Italo Calvino’s novel Invisible Cities, which expresses multiple interpretations of the concept of journeys (Exe Christoffersen 66). Exe Christoffersen points out that “the cultures shown are never authentic; they are already processed, extracted from their original contexts, their content altered” (65). Viewing The Million would prove to be a life-altering event for Fowler. He was instantly smitten. Twenty years later he was able to recall his reaction to the performance with great clarity: “It was surprising, confusing, exciting, strange, presenting incredible images, wildly violent, astonishing, dream-like, other-worldly yet visceral” (Fowler, Interview, 26 Aug. 2000). Instinctively, Fowler felt that his long-term search had ended. This initial reaction was confirmed as Fowler learned about the company culture, training practice, dramaturgical structure, and aesthetic principles. After the performance, Fowler introduced himself to Barba and members of the company and travelled to Denmark with them to begin his official visit.

**Odin Theatre Developments: 1964 to 1980**

It is not difficult to understand why Fowler was so fascinated and inspired by what he

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14 At the time of the Odin’s residency in Wales, the Cardiff Theatre Lab in Aberystwyth had been in operation for six years. It had been founded in 1974 by Richard Gough and Judie Christie. In 1988 it was
encountered in the training and dramaturgical practice at the Odin Theatre. Barba and the Odin actors had established a community in which they were practicing many of the creative ideals Fowler had identified or discovered for himself: the sense of an ongoing artistic community, creative collaboration, progressive physical and vocal training, and the creation of performance art that was truly a cultural and artistic expression of the creators.

When Fowler arrived at the Odin Theatre compound in the early fall of 1980, the company had been operating for sixteen years. Training, dramaturgy, and pedagogy, as well as performance technique, had all evolved over time, emerging organically from personal and group needs for continued growth and development. Company culture, central to this model of creating theatre, had also changed over time. Fowler’s introduction to Odin practices occurred at a particular time in the company’s evolution, a time in which the theatre was launching new structural and research pursuits. In many ways the timing of Fowler’s arrival at the Odin was critical in the shaping of his experience with the company.

Influenced by Grotowski’s research model, Barba perceived the actor-as-researcher (Poor Theatre 97) and adopted the practice of modelling theatre research on the principles of inquiry found in laboratory research centres (Barba and Savarese 5). For both men, the appeal of the theatre-as-laboratory appears to be the precise and pragmatic use of the concrete as a means to initiate discovery. Ferdinando Taviani suggests that laboratory style theatre research not only enables practitioners to actively seek principles that will empower them to expand the boundaries of their art but also empowers theoreticians to find new ways to observe, recognize, and discuss these expanded boundaries (qtd. in Watson, Third Theatre 172). The laboratory situation offers a continual cycle of intense empirical research, followed by a period of reflection in which inferential and affective meaning can be deduced. This

renamed the Centre for Performance Research and became an educational charity (“About CPR”).
propels individuals beyond the range of their original knowledge. Educator and philosopher John Dewey noted that in the scientific approach to learning, new facts and new ideas thus obtained then become the ground for further experiences in which new problems are presented. The process becomes a continuous spiral, “the inescapable linkage of the present with the past” (Dewey 79).

In addition to maintaining the theatre-as-laboratory model, Barba placed great importance on the development of a group work ethic that fostered respect for all aspects of the art. Great attention was paid to the “internal dynamic, [. . .] how the group creates its productions, the members’ attitudes to the work, to each other, to the collective, and to their professional life” (qtd. in Watson, Third Theatre 30). In assembling the company, Barba chose actors for their strength of character and their commitment to all aspects of company work (Floating Islands 44). For Barba, theatre was a form of social action, defined through the quality of relationships involved in the making of the art: “Theatre is a particular relationship in an elected context. First between people who gather together in order to create something, and then later, between the creation made by this group and their public” (“The Way of Refusal” 292). It can be argued that this attention to community building has contributed to the longevity of the company and to the fact that a number of the original actors continue to work, or have returned to work, with the ensemble.

The considerable importance that Barba placed on the sociological aspects of theatre led him to name the model that he used to create theatre in order to distinguish that model from both the business of “institutionalized theatre” and the perpetual motion of avant-garde theatre in its search for novelty and change for the sake of change (Floating Islands 193). In an address to fringe theatre groups in Belgrade in 1976, Barba stated that
[the] Third Theatre lives on the fringe, often outside or on the outskirts of the centers and capitals of culture. It is a theatre created by people who define themselves as actors, directors, theatre workers, although they have seldom undergone a traditional theatre education and therefore are not recognized as professionals. But they are not amateurs. Their entire day is filled with theatrical experience, sometimes what they call training, or by the preparation of performance for which they must fight to find an audience. (*Floating Islands* 193)

During the Odin Theatre’s early years Barba adopted Grotowski’s “closed door” system of training and dramaturgy, allowing only controlled access to the training and explorative work. This, however, changed over time as Barba became interested in sharing, discussing, and writing about his work.

From the beginning Barba confined his research interests to the study of the art of the performer, “the study of the behaviour of the human being in an organized performance situation and according to principles which are different from those used in daily life” (Barba and Savarese 5). His experimental work remained focused on broadening and deepening this understanding and on exploring specific methods for constructing details of the performer’s work. Barba would eventually name this research “Theatre Anthropology” and during Fowler’s tenure at the Odin would found the International School for Theatre Anthropology as an international vehicle of practical exploration.\(^1^5\)

As with Grotowski, early life experiences defined the core of Barba’s research. The death of his father, a brief period of military training, and the difficulties of being an Italian immigrant in Norway, one unable to speak the local language, made Barba acutely aware of levels of energy and of meaning situated in the state of immobility. Because of these

\(^1^5\) The term “Theatre Anthropology” should not be confused with the “anthropology of performance” (Schechner), a study of the expressive and socio-interactive elements of cultural evolution. The “anthropology of performance” and its derivatives are associated most often with the Cambridge School of Anthropology, Victor Turner, and Richard Schechner. As Barba states, “Theatre Anthropology is not concerned with applying
experiences, Barba learned to extrapolate meaning and purpose from even subtle indications of tension or energy and to extract meaning from what he would later define as “pre-expressive” behaviour. Patrice Pavis defines the dimension that Barba would come to name the “pre-expressive” as “the common ground of any tradition in the world, which affects any audience, ‘before’ (temporally and logically) it is individualized and ‘culturalized’ in a specific cultural tradition” (Crossroads 20).

This sensitivity to human energy and Barba’s ability to deconstruct and analyze socially and culturally limited everyday behaviour, “daily technique,” served to inform his interest in construction of performance behaviour or technique, “extra daily technique.” His consistent and highly defined interest in effecting a deeper understanding of the performer’s art led him to formally pose the question: “Where can performers find out how to construct the material bases of their art?” (Barba and Savarese 8). His ongoing practical research with his actors was designed to provide specific, concrete responses to that question. Barba and the Odin actors were essentially attempting to develop a performance language that could

the paradigms of cultural anthropology to theatre and dance. It is not the study of performative phenomena in those cultures which are traditionally studied by anthropologists” (Paper Canoe 10).

16 Barba explained the “pre-expressive” state as “a basic level of organization common to all performers” (Barba and Savarese 187). The logic of this state operates from the premise that “the performers’ expression is in fact due—almost in spite of them—to their actions, to their use of their physical presence. It is the doing and how the doing is done which determine what one expresses” (Barba and Savarese 187).

Barba clearly stated that “the various levels or organization in the performance are, for the spectator, inseparable and indistinguishable. They can only be separated by means of abstraction, in a situation of analytic research or during the technical work of composition done by the performer” (Paper Canoe 9).

17 Throughout his career Barba distinguished between the way that the body is used in performance and the way that it is used in everyday life. He stated that “in the daily context, body technique is conditioned by culture, social status, profession. But in performance, there exists a different body technique” (Paper Canoe 15). Furthermore, according to Barba, daily body techniques are associated with “the principle of minimal effort, that is, obtaining a maximum result with a minimum expenditure of energy. Extra-daily techniques are based, on the contrary, on the wasting of energy” (Paper Canoe 15–16).

This definition also includes other codified or technique-based performance forms, such as ballet and corporal mime. Although Barba does not negate the idea of extra-daily technique existing within the context of contemporary realism, he does not generally refer to this context.
express all the energy and the tension that so interested him in his observations of “pre-expressivity” in everyday life.

Training at the Odin: 1964 to 1980

By the time that Fowler arrived at the Odin, training had been firmly ensconced as the foundation of the company’s theatre-making process and the core of the group culture. In 1985 Ferdinando Taviani, a long-time supporter and collaborator at the Odin Theatre, observed that

[t]he Odin’s culture is incarnated in its training. The word training indicates a continuous process, a knowledge that one knows only as long as one exercises it, but that one cannot possess and lay aside. It is a word similar to “discipline,” whose origin has nothing to do with respect for rules and orders, but which means the science of continuous learning.

Similarly, the discipline that reigns at the Odin is the observance of rule whose sole aim is to protect each individual’s work, to give him/her all the time and the conditions necessary for his/her autonomous development. The rules, therefore often change radically. The Odin members explain this with a paradox: “rules are there in order to show how one breaks them. (256–57)

Taviani also indicated that “the training changes continuously, partly because the actor’s work grows in unexpected directions, partly because he/she who has acquired self-assurance and has mastered particular exercises, then starts from the beginning in a new area” (257).

In 1976 Barba explained that training was viewed as one of “two parallel rails [rehearsal and performance make up the second] that allow the group and its activity to move forward, to grow” (Floating Islands 70). Training provided the basic structure for the Odin’s dramaturgical and rehearsal processes, the evolving form of its performance style, and the impetus for further explorative work. More specifically, training is the psycho-physical
conditioning that develops an actor’s attitude toward all aspects of the work and that develops what Barba eventually defined as an actor’s “scenic bios,” a presence or performance energy. This conditioning results in what Barba identified over time as the interdependent states of “the dilated mind” and “the dilated body.”

The dilated mind is the precondition that engenders the physical expression of the dilated body, in which “the tensions that secretly govern our normal way of being physically present come to the surface of the performer, becoming visible, unexpectedly” (Barba and Savarese 54). This action is not improvised and demands awareness and reorganization of everyday behaviour on the part of the performer. The performer’s body develops new behaviour patterns, actions, and reactions through training (58), but it is the mind that serves as the impetus for the actions. Thus the dilated mind can and must be trained as well.

Meaning is not a necessary prelude to exploration. Both mind and body are directed toward “the thinking of the thought” (58–59), the process of navigating:

To think the thought implies waste, sudden transitions, abrupt turns, unexpected connections between previously unrelated levels and contexts, routes which intersect and vanish. It is as if different voices, different thoughts, each with its own logic, were simultaneously present and began to collaborate in an unplanned way, combining precision and fortuitousness, enjoyment of the game for its own sake and tension towards a result. (59)

Together, the dilated body and mind are a means to physicalize thinking: “It is a way of moving in space [that] manifests a way of thinking: it is the motion of thought stripped naked, [. . .] starting from one point in order to arrive at another, following routes which suddenly change direction” (Barba, “The Dilated Body” 370). Thus, the interactive relationship between “dilated mind” and “dilated body” can “cause an action to develop in unexpected ways or to conclude in a way opposite to how it began” (370).

In order for this “action” to occur, the actor’s body must be in optimal physical
condition and capable of recognizing and reacting to impulse. Actors capable of reaching this complex state become empowered to construct and control their personal energy. Barba saw this as important not only for the actor as artist but for the actor as human being as well. In order to attain this state, actors need to engage in “learning to learn, [. . .] a condition that enables us to dominate technical knowledge and not be dominated by it” (Paper Canoe 9).

The central notion of “learning to learn” is that it is possible for individuals to learn to do almost anything if they clearly understand their personal process of learning: the manner in which they apply prior means of acquiring knowledge to learning something new. This process enables an actor to access infinite possibilities for expression and has become the essential underpinning of all training at the Odin Theatre. As the artistic needs of company members developed and changed, training evolved to suit these needs. In the first ten years of the company’s operation, the training evolved from a foundation of collective development toward increasingly individualistic training programs.

Grotowski’s influence lies at the core of the Odin Theatre’s practice. Barba’s earliest experience training actors borrowed directly from the Theatre Laboratory. He introduced the acrobatic exercises: rolls, headstands, shoulder-stands, and handstands. He borrowed face and eye exercises: “the cat,” the “Plastiques” (which Fowler learned in his work with Bogajewicz and Gregory), and voice resonator exercises. From that foundation, Barba began to experiment with a wide spectrum of physical and vocal techniques. He and his actors began to invent their own exercises; a mock combat exercise using sticks and a foot-to-chest contact has become highly identifiable with the Odin Theatre. Actors were encouraged to read extensively about Stanislavski and Meyerhold and to study illustrations of traditional Japanese theatre, such as Noh and Kabuki. The actors worked on études informed by
Meyerhold’s work and on accentuating body parts using Kabuki poses as source study (Watson, *Third Theatre* 46).

Due to a drastic change in scheduling during the creation of *Ornitofilene* (1965), the company’s first performance piece, innovation in the training was stalled. In 1966, however, a major shift occurred when Grotowski and Ryzard Cieslak visited the Odin. Actors were introduced to the concept of “psycho-physicalization,”¹⁸ the causal connection between inner-processes and physical action and the practice of composing an extended training score by connecting a series of smaller training exercises (47). Awareness of this process motivated the actors to push the boundaries of this connection by “experiment[ing] with a broader range of stimuli, including sounds, proxemic variations, and interpersonal interactions” (47).

This introduction of composition into training led actors to consider the concept of rhythm in their training regimen for the first time (47). Applying this knowledge to existing training work resulted in what Barba called composition exercises. A composition exercise was an arrangement of short, predefined physical exercises that were then further refined through “psycho-physical” association and “physical precision” (48). Composition exercises were constructed through the exploration of a particular concept or principle through improvisation.¹⁹ A training sequence was then built from the resulting material. When the actor had exhausted all potential for further development of the sequence, it was abandoned for the examination of another concept or principle. This shift marked a movement away

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¹⁸ This work clearly aligns Grotowski with his creative predecessor, Stanislavski. Stanislavski’s “Method of Physical Action,” the highly physical- and movement-based work that Stanislavski was engaging in at the end of his life, is directed at the concretization of the link between thought or feeling and action. Unfortunately, *Creating a Role*, which focuses on this process, is somewhat sketchy because the book was published posthumously from un-edited and unfinished notes.

¹⁹ Barba’s use of improvisation will be discussed along with his dramaturgical style later in the chapter.
from training as an accumulation of skills and toward training as a process and tool for personal research (51).

As the actors’ training became more and more individualized, Barba began to remove himself from the facilitating role. Prior to a complete exit from this role, he organized two long-term company residencies in southern Italy, in which two major advances occurred in the company’s training practice. Most of the training and rehearsal took place outdoors, which changed the actors’ perspective of a performing space and launched an initiative to create open-air performances and street theatre. During this time actors also began to investigate the use of “requisites,” or hand props, in their training (53).

By 1977 the psycho-physical focus of the company’s training had evolved into an investigation of energy. Rather than starting an improvisation with an image as a stimulus, actors now placed the achievement of a technical task at the centre of their exploration (57–60). The basis of training thus shifted from the response-based psycho-physical work to a concentration on body composition through the structuring and articulating of energy. During this phase of development every shift and change of energy and direction by one actor affected the others in some way. It was this discovery that led to the naming of the training sessions as the “fish tank” (57). Repetition of material was used to explore the variables of changes in energy.

The progression of vocal training at the Odin Theatre echoed that of the physical training but was always arranged separately from the physical training. In 1964, after a

20 The first of these residencies took place from May to October 1974 in the small village of Carpignano and the second from August to October 1975 and was split between Carpignano and two small villages in Sardinia, Gavoi and Ollolai.
month of concentrated physical work, Barba introduced the vocal exercises that he had observed at the Theatre Laboratory. The exercises focused on exploring the paralinguistic potential of the voice, rather than on traditional vocal techniques, such as enunciation and projection. The actors began with Grotowski’s resonator exercises, directed at the exploration of vocables, and progressed toward the development of what Barba termed “vocal scores.” These “scores” were created from vocables informed by research into the tone, timbre, and pitch of Beijing opera, Kabuki, Noh, jazz, and various musical hybrids (65).

The move from Norway to Denmark brought the issue of spoken language to the fore. Actors who joined the company after this time were from various parts of Scandinavia; in addition, the company began to tour Europe, where no one language could be deemed the official language of the spectator. Out of necessity Barba engaged the actors in exercises that would enable them to explore sonorous and tonal qualities of speech. Texts learned by rote were used to explore paralinguistic elements—such as rhythm, timbre, silence, tone, volume, and intonation—of the spoken words (65). Several company members began to invent languages and original linguistic logic.

These explorations revealed the distinct rhythms, qualities, and physical centres of each actor’s voice (Barba, Floating Islands 77). Actors began exploring the individual nature of their own voices—rather than developing technique. In a parallel to physical training, they also developed psycho-vocal exercises using various images to stimulate improvisational investigations. Some exercises were based on the notion that the voice is an invisible

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21 Grotowski named six resonators: upper or head, chest, nasal, laryngeal, occipital, and maxillary and acknowledged others (Poor Theatre 121–22). Vocal work focusing on the use of the resonators was intended “to amplify the carrying power of the sound emitted” (Poor Theatre 121). He stated that “resonator” is used as a convention and acknowledged that no scientific proof exists to support his claim. He also indicated that the vibration caused by the pressure applied to a resonator “modifies the voice and its carrying power” (Poor Theatre 121).
extension of the body in space (*Floating Islands* 78). While working on developing the resonating and tonal qualities of their own voices and on developing psycho-vocal images, actors used those explorations “to place the voice accurately” in space (Watson, *Third Theatre* 67).

By 1972 voice training at the Odin had taken on a more individualistic approach, and two years later Barba withdrew from his ten-year role as facilitator of vocal training. Training, although individual, focused on two major areas of research: the “study of the voice as an invisible physiological force (that is, the voice as action) and exploring the individual nature of each performer’s voice” (68). This model of voice training was practiced into the early 1990s.

**Dramaturgy at the Odin: 1964 to 1980**

For Barba the process of dramaturgy involves setting and altering the relationships between “actions” in the creation of a performance text. He defines action not only in physical and vocal terms but also in terms of light, sound, and the use of space (Barba and Savarese 68). All aspects of configuring the performance space become part of the dramaturgical process. In Barba’s estimation “the way in which the actions work is the plot” (68). He defined “plot” through two basic dimensions: “the development of actions in time by means of a concatenation of causes and effects or through an alternation of actions which represents two parallel developments [. . .] by means of simultaneity—the simultaneous

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22 This was unlike the physical training sessions, where he shifted back and forth between active and passive presence via multiple roles as facilitator, coach, and teacher until he eventually ceased regular
presence of several actions” (“The Nature of Dramaturgy” 76). Barba advances this view of
dramaturgy in “The Deep Order Called Turbulence” by explaining the three distinct facets of
dramaturgy at work in the construction of his performance pieces:

1. An organic or dynamic dramaturgy, which is the composition of the
   rhythms and dynamisms affecting the spectators on a nervous, sensorial and
   sensual level;
2. A narrative dramaturgy, which interweaves events and characters,
   informing the spectators on the meaning of what they are watching;
3. And lastly, the one that I call dramaturgy of changing states, when the
   entirety of what we show manages to evoke something totally different,
   similar to when a song develops another sound line through the harmonics.
(60)

The “dynamic dramaturgy” is created in the interface between Barba’s vision as the eye of
the spectator and the actors’ aural and physical scores. The “narrative dramaturgy” is the part
of the dramaturgical weave most resembling a linear narrative. Although a “story” is evident,
it is structured in an episodic rather than concatenate, cause-and-effect way. The “dramaturgy
of changing states” occurs as a by-product of the interaction of the first two dramaturgies
manipulated by the creators with the spectatorship. Although all three strands of this
dramaturgy present themselves simultaneously in performance, they are to be developed
separately.

It is useful to refer to the visual arts concept of “grafting” used in the creation of
collage, montage, or emballage as a means to contextualize this final phase of the
dramaturgical process and thus establish a frame for the performance aesthetic. Grafting, by
nature of its splicing action, creates “non-linear temporality and destabilized space” and so
enables the arrangement of “new relationships between objects, their forms and their
functions in this other reality” (Kobialka 329). The notion of grafting illustrates the way in

attendance in the training studio. In the voice sessions Barba maintained a consistently active presence as
teacher for the first decade of the company’s existence.
which arrangement of the collected material contributes to an overall sense of form and, subsequently, to the range of possible readings of the form.

Although refined over time and informed by the evolving research and training practices of the Odin actors, fundamental principles and techniques underpinning the dramaturgical processes have remained intact into present contexts. Barba’s first exposure to the construction of performance occurred during his tenure at the Laboratory Theatre (1960–64) when he served as assistant director on both *Akropolis* (1962–64) and *Doctor Faustus* (1963). It is therefore not surprising to find similarities between Grotowski’s dramaturgical processes and those used by Barba in the creation of the Odin Theatre’s early work, *Ornitofilene* (1965–66), *Kaspariana* (1967–68), and *Ferai* (1969–70). Barba’s distinct dramaturgical structure began to emerge during the construction of *Min Fars Hus* (1971–72), the company’s fourth production. Dramatic text was rejected as the source of exploration, and improvisation became the central dramaturgical tool. This gave actors more responsibility in the creation of performance material.

Before *Min Fars Hus*, Barba borrowed from the dramaturgical process to which he had been exposed at the Theatre Laboratory. Although little is known of the early stages of Grotowski’s dramaturgical process, it is known that only Grotowski would transpose and cut scenes to create the dramatic and thematic framework (Burzynski and Osinski 24; Temkine 112; Kumiega 132). In the second stage of development, actors would individually and collectively generate physical “studies,” or “sketches,” as they confronted the “truths” presented by the text. The confrontation was to be a personal reaction to the text within the context of current social, historical, and political realities, using the physical and vocal
vocabulary under development. For Grotowski’s actors “the author’s text is a sort of scalpel enabling us to open ourselves, to transcend ourselves, to find what is hidden within us” (Poor Theatre 57). The source text, already deconstructed, was allowed to evolve and mutate within the shifting logic of the performance piece (Temkine 112–14; Kumiega 132–35). In the final phase of the dramaturgical process, Grotowski combined and arranged the “studies” developed by the actors into a “physical score” of fixed elements (Temkine 112–14; Kumiega 132–36). The performance was, therefore, a concrete rendering of individual and collective textual exploration.

Although no documentation referring to the early work done at the Odin exists, Ian Watson reconstructs the basic details of this work using interviews with the actors in Towards a Third Theatre. The construction of the company’s first three performances used a written text as the source of their improvised explorations. Instead of drawing, however, from European dramatic classics,24 as Grotowski had done, Barba commissioned work from living Scandinavian playwrights.25 Barba discussed the themes of the texts but, unlike Grotowski, did not deconstruct them for the actors. Improvisation was initially approached collectively, but this practice was quickly discarded in favour of individual exploration. Physical, vocal,  

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23 The term as used here is Pavis’s definition of dramatic text. He states that it is “the verbal script which is read or heard in performance [. . .] texts written prior to performance, not those written or rewritten after rehearsals, improvisations, or performances” (Crossroads 24).

24 Critics of Grotowski’s work have accused him of being anti-literary due to his treatment of text, but it is true that most of his performance pieces (1960–68) named a classical Western text as the source of exploration. Apocalypsis cum Figuris used select passages from the Bible, Dostoyevsky, T.S. Eliot, and Simone Weil. One early production, Shakuntala, was based on the classical Sanskrit drama written by the Indian dramatist/poet Kalidasa.

25 Barba’s first three performance pieces were commissioned for the Odin Theatre. Ornitolene was based on a play written by Norwegian writer Jens Bjorneboe. Danish poet Ole Sarvig wrote the scenario that became the basis of Kaspariana, which was based on the real-life story of Kasper Hauser, a 16-year-old who had been sheltered from society his entire life. Peter Seeberg, Danish novelist and screenwriter, was asked to write a piece combining the Greek myth Alcestis and the saga of Danish king Frode Fredegod. This piece became Ferai. All texts were deconstructed and edited with the permission of the writers, although only Seeberg took an active part in the rewriting and adaptation process.
and musical improvisations were developed separately and then combined by Barba in later stages of development. Actors’ recollections indicate that early improvisational work at the Odin was of a realistic nature (Laukvik qtd. in Watson, Third Theatre 44; Laukvik qtd. in Christoffersen 30; Rasmussen qtd. in Christoffersen 53; Varley 170). The improvisations became progressively less realistic as discoveries in training were transformed into performance material. At the third stage of development, Barba constructed the “performance text”\(^\text{26}\) by combining, adjusting, and incorporating elements of the original text or scenario, physical and vocal improvisations developed from scenes, and “original material [. . .] that grew out of associations drawn from [the actors’] work on the dramatic text” (Watson, Third Theatre 75). Even in this skeletal recollection of Barba’s early dramaturgical practice, Grotowski’s influence is evident in the lack of attention paid to linear narrative and in the focus on an actor’s work.

When improvisation became the principle dramaturgical tool, the model for structuring performance was revised. It began with Barba identifying and discussing a basic theme or series of themes with the actors. He also granted them limited access to research material that he had amassed for his own reflection: poems, stories, newspaper clippings, photographs, illustrations, and so on. Actors then individually explored themes or detailed scenarios that Barba had identified (“The Way of Opposites” 28–30) through responsive, rather than narrative, physical improvisation in search of the “the ideal physical expression of the mental image they began with” (qtd. in Watson, Third Theatre 79). The notion of ideal

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\(^{26}\) The notion of performance text as employed by Barba at the Odin is that of an overall multiplistic structuration that does not revolve around the elevation of the dramatic text—the written text. It is positioned well outside interpretations, such as that by Fernando de Toro, which assumes a dramatic text to be the core of the performance. De Toro positions the performance text “as the process of inscription of the dramatic text’s potential [. . . as] the text that concretizes and actualizes the enunciative situation and the utterance of the [dramatic text]” (49).
expression was further refined by the construction of a set of repeatable actions, “composition improvisation,” that were based on an actor’s muscle memory of the improvisation and that were guided by notes from other actors and taped versions of the work. When actors were satisfied with the composition of the score, the process of “registering,” a period of rote learning for precision, began. The first stage of development was complete when actors could repeat their compositions with the intensity and fluidity of an improvisation (81). Vocal and musical scores were undertaken individually in the same manner.

In the second stage of dramaturgical development, Barba worked individually with each actor on their “registered” scores to provide suggestions for further exploration of the physical fragments and details, to generate ideas for characters, and to eliminate cliché elements (84). Barba worked with his actors in the manner of a production dramaturg working with a playwright on an emerging text in order to transform raw ideas and sketches into a precise and specific form.

In the final stage of developing a performance text, Barba assembled the montage. Assuming the observer’s role, he refined and shaped aural and visual imagery into a form that would most effectively transmit a sense of considered themes and ideas to the spectator. The complex audio-visual score, however, was constructed using a minimum of intended signification in order to invite the spectator to become a co-creator of meaning.

Barba combined individual movement scores to form units of two or three performers

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27 A 2005 conversation with Barba revealed that the practice of videotaping improvisational work did not, as a rule, last long. Many of the actors felt that this was cheating the process, that part of the art of composing involved the way the action was remembered—which did not necessarily mean an exact replica of the original. The video recording seemed to shift the origin of the action from internal to external source (Barba, Interview, 3 Apr. 2005).
and then adjusted the new formation to create a scenic logic out of previously separate actions. This deconstructing and reconstruction of physical and vocal patterns maintains the precision, specificity, and clarity of the actor’s individual work but in new permutations and combinations. The scenic logic was created in a variety of ways—through elimination or repetition of elements of the physical score, through a re-ordering of the pauses in action, and through the alteration of speed and duration of the action. Vocal and musical scores were combined with these units and adapted through similar means.

These orchestrations of simultaneous and concatenate actions create highly “open” performance texts intended to be interpreted in many ways. Critics have viewed this as obscure and lacking in thematic clarity. Watson notes that a common critical response to the Odin Theatre’s work is that it is all the same (Third Theatre 107). As a witness to several full-length performances and numerous excerpts of the Odin Theatre’s work on tape, three live performances, and a work in progress, I believe that the labelling of the body of work as repetitive is inaccurate.

As an author Barba has devoted his professional life to the development of a particular kind of original theatre generated from particular construction processes. Although the work contains characteristic consistencies, it is also wide ranging in scope, in arrangement of performance details, and in use of literary and technological resources. Much of the early critical response to the Odin Theatre’s work appears only in European publications, but reviews can be found in North American publications. Most of this material is very general and either attempts to identify a story or refers to specific performance details, such as the use of props and costumes. Some of the reviews, however, convey a clear sense

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28 The live performances are Inside the Skeleton of a Whale, Andersen’s Dream, and parts of Ur-Hamlet.
of performance environment or detail.

Comparing Ferai with Kaspariana, Marc Fumaroli states that “Kaspariana was an expressionist nightmare in black and white, staged with a virtuosity which hid the weakness of the young actors. Ferai, created with a more coherent and trained troupe, allows the director to play a less evident role; Barba’s evolving toward greater rigor, precision, and economy” (48). Min Fars Hus (1971–72) was described as possessing “rich ambiguity.” An interesting use of repeated scores, the multiple uses of props, and an inventive use of low-tech lighting was also noted (Carlson 382). Watson describes the complex narrative of the more recently constructed Mythos (1999) and a sceno-graphic palette “riddled with oppositions” and “rich with death” (68). He offers the description of a pebble-like path constructed from a stretch of small, lifeless white hands. In The New York Times the vocals in the performance were depicted as “wildly beautiful or terrifying” (Bruckner, 16 Oct. 1999).

In a composite review featuring a series of short, unrelated solo pieces, Seth Baumrin described the work as highly physical and “more akin to performance art or postmodern dance than drama. […] often self-referential, reflecting the performers own work as actors” (410) and said that “each [piece] centre[d] on human endeavor and led from whimsy to horror” (411).

The Odin Theatre is also well known for its street theatre practices that were constructed from a distinctly different aesthetic and used a much simpler dramaturgical process.29 The outdoor performances included parades, barters, and more formal and complex constructions, such as Anabasis and The Book of Dances. Ideas for the development

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29 Generally descriptions of street theatre have been constructed from visual information drawn from two videos, On the Two Banks of the River and Theatre Meets Ritual produced by the Nordisk Theaterlaboratorium.
of these performances were drawn from European popular theatre with its tradition of parades and street festivals. The performances featured music, colourful costumes and masks, stock characters, and large-scale circus-style entertainment, such as stilt walking, dancing, and acrobatics. In order to work with the large scale necessary for performing in public places and be able to move performers and spectators from one location to another, Barba borrowed extensively from military practice and strategy in the construction and description performance components. The company used drumming, trumpeting, and whistling to gather, disperse, and move crowds, flags to draw and shift attention, and rappelling and stylized combat as a central focus in many of the pieces (Sciarrata qtd. in Watson Third Theatre 2).

**Pedagogy at the Odin: 1964 to 1980**

When the Odin moved from Oslo to Holstebro, only three of the original four company members relocated with Barba. These individuals, Torgeir Wethal, Else Marie Laukvik, and Anne Trine Grimnes, were given the responsibility of introducing new members to the fundamentals of the training practice. The actors found that in teaching others they gained a better understanding of their own practice (Wethal qtd. in Watson, Third Theatre 46; Rasmussen qtd. in Christoffersen 174). Pedagogy was viewed as a way to understand tacit knowledge on a deeper level. Although the company’s pedagogical practice had emerged out of necessity, it evolved substantially during the mid-to-late 1970s. When Barba closed the company to new membership in 1974, Iben Nagel Rasmussen (1974) and Tage Larsen (1976) decided to “adopt” apprentices (Carreri qtd. in Christoffersen 60). The supervising member accepted sole responsibility for training, housing, and feeding the
The practice of “adoption,” however, was neither a widely accepted or consistent practice at the Odin.

Barba also found ways to contribute to pedagogy in contexts beyond the company practice. As an artist with a genuine concern about the way in which his theories and practices were transmitted, received, and interpreted, he wrote a great deal about his work. By the time that Fowler arrived at the Odin in 1980, he had published *The Floating Islands* (1979) and a series of articles in several languages. During Fowler’s tenure, this practice expanded significantly, in part because of the skills that Fowler offered as an associate.

The Odin Theatre’s pedagogical practice advanced in other ways when the company began to travel in 1974. Along with theatre performances and parades, barters were added to its repertoire. Barter is essentially the exchange of one form of culture for another. According to Ferdinand Taviani,

>a barter consists of “payment in kind;” it is the culmination of a process of relationship building between two groups—a theatre and a community which exchange their “cultures.” The theatre group presents itself through its own training, open-air activities, ways of improvising, performances, and the host community responds with its own dances, music, songs, oral literature, even religious ceremonies. (Taviani 267)

The “currency” of these exchanges was incorporated into the company’s performance work.

**Odin Theatre: 1980 to 1991**

Fowler spent his first few weeks at the Odin Theatre (Sept. 1980) speaking to company members and watching them train and rehearse. Viewing *The Million* had been
inspiring and viscerally stirring, but it was observing the training and rehearsal sessions and having the daily contact at the Odin that motivated him to stay.

**ISTA**

Fowler had also arrived at a very exciting and opportune time in the company’s research development and pedagogical practice. Barba was in the process of organizing the first International School of Theatre Anthropology (ISTA) in Bonn, Germany, as an extension of earlier Third Theatre gatherings (Belgrade 1976 and Bergamo 1977).

As the training at the Odin Theatre evolved toward more individualization, Barba began to search for other vehicles and structures in which to explore and share the art of the performer. He established the idea of ISTA in 1979 in order to address specific actor training interests. He decided to focus the research on the exploration of performance traditions in both the East and the West as a way to identify the construction of technique. Although an interest in interculturalism can be identified in the work of a number of scholars and practitioners during that time, Barba was driven by specific and personal interests, not the experimental theatre milieu of the time.

The study of “Theatre Anthropology” was organized as a systematic empirical investigation of disciplines, techniques, and aesthetics with the goal of identifying “the technique of techniques” for the actor (*Paper Canoe* 10). Through ISTA, Barba began an extensive, systematic study of the “pre-expressive” aspects of performance, the elements of

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*Cots, Sylvia Ricciardelli, Francis Pardeilhan, and Julia Varley to work on *Anabasis*. All were full members of the company by 1977.*

*These included Peter Brook, Clifford Geertz, Irving Goffman, Jerzy Grotowski, Ariane Mnouchkine, Barbara Myerhoff, Richard Schechner, Tadashi Suzuki, and Victor Turner.*
the performer’s art providing the foundation for expression. The discoveries made in ISTA sessions served to inform the training at the Odin Theatre.

The first ISTA (1980) focused on Barba’s Theatre Anthropology and was scheduled for 1 to 31 October in an abandoned school in the suburbs of Bonn. Drawing from the organizational structure he had used for Third Theatre gatherings, he created a closed community atmosphere by having the hundreds of delegates who had come from across the globe eat and sleep on site. Events and activities were organized around a three-part structure: workshop/research sessions for invited participants and guests; an open forum for theatre practitioners, scholars, and scientists who were participating in the private workshop/research sessions; and a series of performances for the general public (ISTA).

Fowler arrived at the Odin at a time when Barba was in great need of personnel to help organize and run ISTA. He not only found himself witnessing an important world historical event but also taking an active part in its implementation. He travelled to Bonn with Barba and Klaus Tams (a Danish citizen-volunteer), where the trio organized and arranged the physical space and the proceedings of the symposium in three days.

A common language had not been determined for the event in advance. As delegates

32 This first ISTA was financed by Dr. Hans Jurgen Nagel, the director of the Kulturamt der Stadt in Bonn, under the patronage of the International Theatre Institute (ITI). It was sponsored by organizations including the German Commission of UNESCO, the Kulturamt der Stadt Bonn, the Sekretariat fur Gemeinsame Kulturarbeit Wuppertal, the Ministries of Foreign Affairs of Germany, Italy, and France, and the Japan Foundation (ISTA).

33 At the first two ISTA sessions, Bonn (1980) and Volterra (1981), the private workshop/research sessions focused on the development of pedagogy—specifically on the development of training programs for western actors—by studying the training programs of eastern performance forms (Watson, Third Theatre 151). After the Volterra session, a lecture/demo format replaced the private workshop/research format and was retained in subsequent ISTA sessions.
arrived, however, it became apparent that English and French would have to be used. Barba was fluent in French and spoke English fairly well but decided that his lectures and demonstrations should be simultaneously translated. Fowler’s fluency in English, French, and Italian landed him the responsibility of translating Barba’s thoughts and ideas throughout work demonstrations, lectures, and teaching situations. He attributes his swift absorption of Barba’s theories and practice to this opportunity to translate for him (Fowler, Interview, 25 Aug. 2000). When the symposium ended, Fowler, Tony Cots, a member of the Odin, and Gisela Cremer, a German student of one of the Balinese masters, were asked to continue the supervising roles they had been assigned during ISTA. They would attend to the needs of the Japanese, Indian, and Balinese delegates during a second segment of ISTA, a month-long tour through Denmark, Sweden, and Norway organized to demonstrate and discuss ISTA research findings.

Barba also invited Fowler to reprise his roles as translator, organizer, and facilitator at a second ISTA planned for the following year (1981) in Volterra. This ISTA was to extend over three months (5 Aug.–7 Oct.) and be conducted on a much larger scale. In exchange for Fowler’s services at ISTA, Barba offered him the opportunity to train at the Odin for five months. Although his offer was a time-limited arrangement, Fowler was intent on making the Odin Theatre his creative base (Fowler, Interview, 25 Aug. 2000). Four months of travel had made him very aware of the opportunities for creative development in Europe and prompted a decision to pack up his life in Vancouver.

Artists such as Tadashi Suzuki or Anne Bogart, in absentia from their countries of

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34 Most participants were from Europe, South America, or Asia. Fowler states that there were very few North Americans participating in this ISTA (Fowler, Interview, 25 Aug. 2000). This is still true today. At ISTA 2005 (Wroclaw) four participants were from North America (two were from the United States; I was one of two from Canada).
The Official Internship

In January 1981 Fowler began his official internship and what would eventually become an eleven-year association with the Odin Theatre. It was an exciting time for the Canadian, who felt that he had found “the ideal” situation that he had been searching for since his graduation from the University of Alberta. He was not only intrigued by the artistry of the performances that he had seen but also impressed with the artists as people and with how they interacted. He felt that he had found a group of people who shared his vision and expectations of theatre. He had begun to make discoveries about the relationship between the physical body and energy and had been inspired by Grotowski’s experiments with altered perceptions. He had made fundamental progress in terms of the manipulation of this relationship through active practice with Bogajewicz, Gregory, and Johnstone. It was, however, the Odin Theatre that would provide him with a sanctuary that enabled him to...
continue his training and to create new and increasingly expressive physical performances.

In addition to Fowler, four interns had been invited to train at the Odin: Gisela Cremer (West Germany), Nette Plotsky (Israel), Didier Lebas (France), and Víctor Redonet (Argentina). When company recruitment ceased in 1974, Barba began a sporadic training practice known as the International Brigade. Interested participants would receive intensive training for a limited but concentrated period of time with the objective that participants would return to their country of origin to teach others what they had learned. The three-month training program (Jan.–July) that Barba had arranged for the quintet was supervised by Yves Lebreton, a young French director who had studied at the Odin for a number of years. Training ran six days a week, from 7:00 a.m. until 5:00 p.m. Most of this training was conducted by Ingemar Lindh, a seasoned teacher who had studied Corporal Mime with Etienne Decroux. Although Lindh taught mime, acrobatics, and exercises developed by Grotowski, he was not teaching these techniques in their original form. He taught an evolved form that he had developed beyond the sum of the source forms (Fowler, Interview, 25 Aug. 2000). The interns also learned an evolved form of acrobatics from Tony Cots. Even in the initial stages of his relationship with the Odin, Fowler was presented with concrete examples of what I define as the anomalous “tradition of change” at the foundation of Odin Theatre practice in which what is sought is the evolution rather than the retention of form that characterizes most traditional performance arts. Barba stated, “change is the lifeblood of tradition, based on the dialectic between preservation and innovation [. . .]. This capacity to redesign previously defined forms is what makes a

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35 Only two training studios existed at the Odin Theatre complex at that time. If company members needed the studios to train or to rehearse, the work schedule for apprentices would be shifted into the evening.
‘codified style’ into a true art” (“Tacit Knowledge” 23).

The only exception to the use of evolved training techniques was the voice work taught by Lebreton, which was a particular series of resonator exercises developed by Grotowski. Barba had determined these exercises to be consistently effective and had maintained and taught them for the first ten years of the Odin’s existence. The exercises were presented to Fowler and fellow interns in their original form without any degree of personal evolution (Fowler, Interview, 26 Aug. 2000).

The interns spent the afternoon session composing and developing potential performance material by applying training principles to an exploration of Don Juan by Molière. Barba watched the training and offered comments to the interns but left the practical details of the project to Lebreton. Barba’s plan had been for the group to create a performance piece, but this did not happen. At the end of the residency the interns presented a demonstration of the training and the Don Juan work-in-progress instead (“Canadian Perspective” 51).

When the internship ended, Fowler stayed at the Odin to help with the preparations and arrangements for the second ISTA.36 The theme of this event was Pre-Expressivity and Improvisation and, although structured in the manner of the first ISTA, was a much more complicated affair. As planned, Fowler reprised and expanded his translator, organizer, and facilitator duties, also taking up the responsibility of attending to the needs of all the Japanese delegates (Fowler, Interview, 27 Aug. 2000).

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36 The second ISTA was organized by Roberto Bacci of the Centro per la Sperimentazione e la Ricerca Teatrale in Pontedera and sponsored by Regione Toscana, Amministrazione Provinciale di Pisa, and Comune di Volterra (The Odin Theatre.)
The Struggle to Stay

At ISTA’s conclusion, in early October 1981, Fowler was expected to return to Canada. He had, however, decided to make Denmark and the Odin Theatre his new home. When he presented this plan to Barba, he was told that “the door would be closed” (Fowler, Interview, 27 Aug. 2000). But he did not take the rejection personally. After a brief time in Canada spent attending to unfinished business, he returned to Denmark, determined to make the Odin Theatre his new home base. He advertised himself as an English language teacher in the local newspaper and attracted a small group of middle-aged Danish women who wanted to improve their English. Coincidentally, one of these women was Inger Landsted, who was responsible for the Odin Theatre’s move from Norway to Denmark. Fowler boarded with Landsted until the time that he was invited to live at the Odin complex.

With basic needs attended to, Fowler began the task of making himself indispensable.

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37 When asked why Barba vetoed his request to return to the Odin, Fowler explained that dozens of people approached Barba to train with him and join the company. The collaborative, inter-creative nature of the creative and administrative structures at the Odin required an actor not only to commit to the organization as a whole but also to commit for a long period of time. Most of these people had little idea of the personal and artistic commitment required of the work, “so of course the first thing he always said was no” (Fowler, Interview, 27 Aug. 2000). Barba had rejected Cots and Silvia Ricciardelli when they had asked to train at the Odin in 1974. By the time, however, Fowler first arrived at the Odin (1980), both had been made company members.

Also, the Odin numbered eight or nine members at the time. This number was higher than Barba thought ideal and was expensive to maintain (Fowler, Interview, 27 Aug. 2000). There was simply no room for another person at the complex. As the Odin complex expanded, living arrangements changed. In 1981 several company members lived in the complex, and there was a guesthouse (still in operation) for people who were studying at the Odin for limited periods of time.

Else Marie Laukvik and Sylvia Ricciardelli lived on the Odin premises for some time, Laukvik in rooms that were part of the theatre and Ricciardelli in a flat on Odin grounds that she paid for herself.

38 Barba founded the Odin Theatre in Oslo, Norway, in 1964. In 1966, by invitation of the civic government of Holstebro, he moved the company to Denmark. According to Fowler, it was Inger Landsted who single-handedly managed to convince the town’s citizens to invite members of the Odin Theatre to move to Holstebro. Landsted was the head nurse in the operating room at the Holstebro Hospital and later became the director of the Holstebro Nursing School. She was very interested in theatre and belonged to an amateur theatre group in Holstebro. In 1963, while visiting her parents in Viborg, she saw an Odin performance. Thoroughly
at the Odin Theatre. He provided translating services, worked on various technical tasks, helped with the general maintenance and the expansion of the Odin complex, and loaded and unloaded sets and properties when the company set out or returned from touring. At first Fowler was not “officially” allowed to use the theatre for training; he could, however, “unofficially” use one of the studios from 5:00 to 7:00 a.m., when the company arrived (Fowler, Interview, 25 Aug. 2000). In time, he was given permission to observe company training from 7:00 to 9:00 a.m.

Fowler was neither bothered nor discouraged by these restrictions. Unlike most of the core company members, he had arrived at the Odin with a substantial professional and personal history. He had arrived as the result of a conscious search for an environment in which to create theatre, and thus his needs extended well beyond further instruction:

I was looking for colleagues and I was looking for stimulus and I was looking for a master and a lot of other things but […] I was thirty-two or thirty-three. I wasn’t a novice […] I had learned a lot from the time I had taken that first workshop with Bogajewicz [1977]. There were a lot of things that I was interested in doing. I was interested in working with masks. I was interested in acrobatics. I was interested in musical instruments. I just wanted a place to do this, where other people were doing the same kind of thing and understood why I needed to do this. It was easier for me to survive there […] than for other young people who turned up at the door without any [creative] history. (Fowler, Interview, 25 Aug. 2000).

During the course of his creative quest, Fowler had developed a plethora of training and performance interests: vocal resonator work, acrobatics, stilt-work, and mask-work. Privy to an abundance of resources at the Odin, he began to construct his own training program directed at the development of some of these interests. He gained knowledge and ideas from watching company members train and from company members who offered

intrigued by the work, she approached members of the Holstebro civic government with her plan for their relocation. Barba was not informed of the plan until the offer was formalized.
advice and suggestions. To this end, he noted the particular support and encouragement of Else Marie Laukvik and Tage Larsen.

Both physical and vocal training at the Odin Theatre had evolved to highly personal explorations, ones informed by the work sessions at ISTA that examined physical and vocal techniques for controlling and manipulating energy. Laukvik, who had developed a very specific and personal approach to creation, commented on Fowler’s work, trained with him from time to time, and helped him to develop performance material. In The Actor’s Way, Laukvik identifies the development of overall physical strength and flexibility as a key aspect of her training and reveals her understanding of her personal weaknesses that she worked hard to improve upon (94). Her creative process can be described as a gathering and arranging activity designed to trigger subconscious responses and reactions:

For me, the creative process comes about through an empty space, a kind of presence, a state in which I am and am not. I open a sluice, I let the subconscious come into its own; and yet the conscious is always present and can choose from the material which emerges from the creative process . . . I am open to the accidental possibilities which present themselves. (qtd. in Christoffersen 91)

Larsen, the Odin’s “stilt master” until he sustained an injury, taught Fowler stilt skills and how to develop performance material from those skills. Even Barba, who continued to tell Fowler that he could not stay, watched him train and offered advice and feedback.

As time passed and Fowler showed no signs of leaving, he began to be rewarded for his persistence and tenacity. He made friends with people in the company, and Barba offered him paid translation assignments. He was also given a small, rearranged closet in which to work. Bit by bit, Fowler carved out a space for himself at the Odin Theatre.
The Canada Project

In 1983 Barba took a one-year sabbatical to write *Beyond the Floating Islands*. When he returned, he restructured the company in a way that would allow for a broader encompassment of activity. The Odin Theatre became one branch of the newly established trunk organization the Nordisk Teaterlaboratorium. This organization officially recognized auxiliary activities that were already being generated out of the Odin complex, a film production and publishing sub-division, and would allow for the establishment of several new satellite projects. Under the banner of The Canada Project, Barba offered Fowler official status, a budget, and the right to use training and rehearsal space at the Odin Theatre. Two other projects were created at the same time, headed separately by actors who were “defining their own areas of work” (Fowler, Interview, 27 Aug. 2000). With her students, Iben Nagel Rasmussen developed her performance work under the name of Farfa, and Tony Cots headed Basho. Each received the privileges extended to Fowler and The Canada Project.

With that project, Fowler continued to thrive in the Odin community for most of the next decade. He expanded and developed his training techniques, developed stilt characters for street-performance parades, and created performance material that would eventually be structured as his one-man show, *Wait for the Dawn*. He helped advance pedagogical practice at the Odin through his involvement in the organization and implementation of conference projects (such as ISTA and the International Theatre Symposium [Calgary 1985]), the creation of a drama program for mentally and physically handicapped adults, and the translation of a number of Barba’s books and articles. In 1987 his goal of collectively creating a performance piece under Barba’s direction was realized in the making of *Talabot*.
Training: The Journey Continues

The creative journey that began twelve years earlier when Fowler discovered alternative actor-training models evolved into an intensely focused practice at the Odin. Training, the core of company culture, became the centre of his life, and he approached it with “fanatical enthusiasm” (Fowler, Interview, 30 Aug. 2000). He devoted himself to the development of whatever skills and techniques his Odin residency offered. His environment was highly conducive to creative development, and he was among a group of seasoned performers who were experimenting with and developing their own training regimens. He was privy not only to the most current training approaches at the Odin—those emerging from ISTA explorations—but also to earlier processes and approaches that had contributed to the evolved states of training since the company had developed a solid pedagogical practice at this time.

For years company members had experimented with and explored techniques for increasing strength, flexibility, and stamina, for improving precision and awareness, and for expanding their personal physical and vocal boundaries. Increasingly, actor training had taken on the dimensions of a personal research tool. Although improvisation remained central to training structures, it was now used in a different way. Rather than being employed in the explorative phase of developing repeatable sequences of action, it became a means to explore specific principles of underlying action.

Furthermore, influenced by ISTA research, the focus of the highly individualized training practice at the Odin shifted to the manipulation of energy through the use of
repetition and to the examination of technical principles underpinning codified performance forms, particularly those from eastern traditions. This examination of form was directed at determining the basic principles that made up specific “extra-daily technique”—such as the distribution of weight and balance and the use of the spine and the eyes—and that could be identified as physical indicators of “pre-expressive” tensions (Paper Canoe 9). Barba never intended to recreate the source form with western actors but to determine the “rules of behaviour” (Barba and Savarese 8), the underlying principles that might have relevance in the training of the western actor. What interested Barba was the exploration of the underlying performance principles that enabled the performer to physically construct a dynamic sense of presence before movement occurred. Barba drew from the ISTA research in order to advance the practical research of his actors at the Odin. Carreri recalled that Barba returned from the Volterra ISTA (1981) with a “segmentation exercise,” which required actors to move one joint at a time (Carreri qtd. in Christoffersen 150) and which served as an impetus for individual explorations of a sophisticated range of physical articulation.

Fowler’s training was altered each time he was exposed to the training methods of other individuals, other traditions, alternative performance techniques, or specific new methods of physical or vocal training. Throughout his stay at the Odin, he added details from his own discoveries and experiences to his training practice. While he was studying martial arts, he added exercises to his training practice that reflected the technical principles he was exploring. Through consistent long-term physical and vocal training his performance abilities became increasingly specific and powerful.
Solo Performance: *Wait for the Dawn*

While watching the training and development of other actors at the Odin, Fowler noticed that these individuals continually prepared potential performance material from discoveries in their training practice. He began to do the same. Although he had not intended to create a one-man show, several years of preparing material left him with a collection of raw segments that had emerged from explorations with props, costumes, text, music, and imagery. In time the material evolved from “the most rudimentary explorations [. . .] to a very elaborate and complex performance piece” (Fowler, Interview, 28 Aug. 2000).

The process of developing the piece occurred in many phases. At first he worked entirely on his own, though occasionally presenting sequences of the work to Barba, Laukvik, or another company member. As the work progressed Barba and Laukvik contributed to the developing material. Independently and consistently, each viewed the material, made suggestions, and moved the material to the next stage of exploration and development. Based on descriptions of Laukvik’s creative process and Barba’s dramaturgical process, it can be speculated that Lauvik’s input informed the way in which the process of developing material evolved, and Barba’s input focused on helping Fowler to define and develop the expressed physical and vocal material without altering its inherent qualities.

In the latter phase of development Laukvik also helped to shape and refine the piece. In the winter of 1982–83, Luca Ruzza, a young architect serving as a consultant on *Oxyrhincus Evangeliet*, became involved in the project. For the duration of her stay Ruzza viewed the evolving work daily and offered comments and suggestions.\(^{39}\) The largely self-

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\(^{39}\) There is no official documentation of the original version of *Wait for the Dawn* and therefore no evidence to indicate how Ruzza’s professional training informed her commentary.
directed early version of *Wait for the Dawn* began touring with other Odin performance pieces as early as 1983.\(^{40}\)

In 1985, during one such tour, Barba told Fowler that he would work regularly with him to build *Wait for the Dawn* into a finished performance piece if, in exchange, Fowler would assist with the English translation of *Beyond the Floating Islands*.\(^{41}\) At this point Barba took on an active role in the direction and shaping of the material. He introduced texts from *The Stranger* by Albert Camus, reorganized and edited existing performance text, and requested the development of further performance material. Nevertheless, Fowler notes that the “concerns, interests, and tastes” represented in the piece were his, rather than Barba’s (Fowler, Interview, 28 Aug. 2000). The extended version of *Wait for the Dawn* was completed in 1985 and toured on its own and with other Odin performances throughout Europe, South America, and Canada.

**Street Performances**

Fowler was also involved in staging and touring street performances. These projects provided him with the opportunity to develop performance skills specific to outdoor spaces. In preparation for these performances, Fowler mastered stilt walking and learned to work with a musical instrument as a prop. The street performances in which he participated were

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\(^{40}\) Under the umbrella of The Canada Project *Wait for the Dawn* was toured with other Odin performance pieces. It premiered during the theatre’s tour of Spain—Valencia, Barcelona, and Madrid—between February and April 1983 (Fowler, *Resume*).

\(^{41}\) Fowler is considered one of the principle translators of Barba’s work into English. The opportunity to act as a simultaneous translator for Barba at the first ISTA in Bonn (1980) gave Fowler a strong sense of how Barba expressed himself. After *Beyond the Floating Islands* he served as the sole translator of *The Dictionary of Theatre Anthropology* (1989) and *The Paper Canoe* (1994), as well as a number of Barba’s articles.
organized around a flexible central theme that could incorporate a variation of character combinations. This enabled the pieces to be reincarnated several times with different actors. He travelled to India and South America on tour with *Alice in Wonderland*, based on Lewis Carroll’s characters and directed by Tage Larsen, and with *Rooms in the Emperor’s Palace*, based on the theme of travel and adventure.

**Pedagogical Developments**

Fowler’s experience with the pedagogical aspects of Odin company life was somewhat different than his encounters with training, rehearsing, and performing. He can be considered to be an associate, rather than an apprentice, in this aspect of Odin company culture. In addition to his involvement in the first two ISTA sessions (Bonn 1980 and Volterra 1981), which have already been discussed, he served in similar capacities at the ISTA sessions in Holstebro42 (1986) and Salento (1987), providing simultaneous translations of Barba’s discussions and lectures during all the formal sessions. He also translated letters and documents, organized working and living spaces for participants, arranged cleaning and meal schedules, and attended to one of the groups of delegates. This experience served him well when he found himself organizing the three-day Alberta International Theatre Symposium in Calgary in 1985. While in Toronto as a guest teacher at an Equity Showcase sponsored training session, Barba had discovered an opportunity to introduce the Odin

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Fowler was witness to the mounting tension that occurred during the infamous ISTA 1986 in Holstebro when it became apparent that the invited guests, particularly the Americans, were more interested in debating the merits of the research being presented than learning about it. Fowler believes the points of contention arose from basic misinterpretations of the purpose of the ISTA work sessions and were further compounded by the wording of the title for the research theme: “The Female Role as Represented on the Stage in Various Cultures” (Fowler, Interview, 1 Sept. 2000).
Theatre’s training and performance techniques in Alberta. Fowler, along with his friend and associate Anne Green, then a board member of the Alberta Foundation for the Performing Arts, arranged the event in six weeks.43

The workshop/symposium included workshop sessions and discussions conducted by Barba and Fowler and performances by fifteen local theatre companies. The event took place in the large gymnasium-like space of the Reeve Theatre (University of Calgary) that Green had secured by bartering a workshop in exchange for renting the space. Echoing the arrangement at ISTA, symposium participants slept and performed on site. The schedule was arranged by lottery and, in order to accommodate the limited timeframe, was structured as an all-night marathon in which spectators were free to wander in and out as they saw fit.

Another of Fowler’s contributions to the development of Odin Theatre pedagogy was his work with mentally handicapped adults. Although this was not a project he would have envisioned himself doing, it evolved into a very satisfying and personally challenging venture. The project was initiated by Poul-Erik Papso, an innovative teacher at a local non-boarding activity centre for mentally handicapped adults who approached Barba with the idea of having one of the Odin actors work with his students as an extension to the music and drama work they were doing. Barba saw the request as an opportunity to increase the visibility of the Odin Theatre in Holstebro and to begin developing community relations, which had been minimal up to that point (Fowler, Interview, 28 Aug. 2000). Fowler was

43 Fowler notes that Barba, in his enthusiasm to promote the training and performance techniques of the Odin Theatre, encouraged company members to introduce this work in their countries of origin. Fowler was, therefore, designated as the Odin Theatre’s Canadian representative. Under the umbrella of The Canada Project, Barba expected Fowler to organize Odin events in Canada and eventually to return to Canada to carry on the work. Fowler notes that, although this indeed happened, it was not because of the expectation but rather because of the circumstance (Fowler, Interview, 1 Sept. 2000).

Green also served on the Calgary Regional Arts Foundation and ran a small retail business that was largely responsible for funding the symposium.
enlisted into the project and spent one afternoon a week at the centre during the first year of the program. In the second year, ten students and their teachers were involved in a three-week residency at the Odin Theatre that culminated in the creation of a performance piece. The performance was based on *Journey to the Red Morning Sun*, a Danish children’s story, and was composed of a collage of the actors’ improvisations (Citron 125).

It was through his work with mentally and physically challenged individuals that, Fowler claims, he learned how to be patient. He learned quickly that he could not begin working with an externally imposed framework and that he needed to allow the individual and group rhythms of the moment to emerge before progressing in a particular direction. He characterized the nature of the work as “wonderful, challenging, funny, touching, vulnerable, difficult,” (Fowler, Interview, 28 Aug. 2000) and personally very satisfying. As news of the program spread, he was invited to a number of different care facilities in Denmark to conduct similar workshops and to organize a similar intensive residency for a group of individuals from Copenhagen.

During the time that Fowler spent at the Odin Theatre, Barba wrote numerous articles and several books about his work there. Fowler translated a number of Barba’s articles into English, but his major contribution to this aspect of the company’s pedagogical development was the translations he did of several of Barba’s books. He was part of a team of translators working on *Beyond the Floating Islands* (1986) and sole translator of *The Secret Art of the Performer* (1991) and *The Paper Canoe* (1995). He also translated *The Actor’s Way* (1993), Erik Exe Christoffersen’s book focusing on the Odin Theatre’s work.
In 1987 Fowler realized a long-term creative goal. Barba decided to create a new performance piece and approached core and associate members of the company to determine those who would be interested. Fowler committed to the project immediately. The Talabot project provided him with first-hand experience of the way in which an established process could be maintained and transgressed at the same time.

In the program notes to Talabot Barba names his four points of reference for the construction of the mise en scène: a page from an essay on commedia dell’arte by Gordon Craig, in which the author advances the idea of contemporary misrepresentation of the art form; the essay “The Challenge of the Unreal,” in which Kirsten Hastrup examines the notion of “empirical” data in cross-cultural contexts; the psalm “Confession” by Danish poet B.S. Ingemann, which addresses the duality of human personality, the splitting apart of inner and outer existences; and finally, the multiple meanings of the name Talabot for Barba (Shoemaker 307–8).

During the first phase of the project the actors used Princess Ivona by Polish writer Witold Gombrowicz as a starting point from which to improvise. The 1939 novel is considered a modern Polish classic. In its original form, it has often been described as an existentialist or absurdist comedy, one that raises questions concerning morals, human flaws, and the construction of identity. As a source of improvisation, however, Odin actors applied their training and research to interaction with the text, exploring themes and ideas emerging

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44 Talabot is the name of the French engineer, Paulin-Francois Talabot, who assisted in the planning of the Suez Canal and the freighter on which Barba embarked on his first voyage as a merchant marine (Shoemaker 307–9; Watson Third Theatre 147). Talabot also means “to reach the sea shore” or “to come to
from it. The actors worked daily, from 9:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. for several consecutive weeks during the initial phase of the project. Fowler recalls that a sense of disorientation and fantasy pervaded these sessions because of the fairytale quality of the source material and the intense cloistering of the research process (Fowler, Interview, 28 Aug. 2000). In the end, the material generated in this phase of development served only as an initial impetus or transition into the theatre-making process and was discarded after the exploration period.

This was a lesson for Fowler. Barba compared the generation of performance material to the sowing of multiple seeds to generate one plant or animal, and he maintained that “there is no creative work without waste” (“The Deep Order” 63). Although Fowler had experienced this to some degree with *Wait for the Dawn*, the developmental process of *Talabot* reinforced for him the importance of allowing extended time for exploration. It also reminded him that he had to accept that creating material that would be discarded was as valuable an experience as developing material that would be arranged as part of the final montage.

The second phase of the project took place in a children’s theatre outside Rome, Italy, during the fall of 1987. Actors spent three weeks exploring the *commedia dell’arte* form in a practical, physical way under the supervision of Ferdinando Taviani from the Theatre Department at Lecce University (Fowler, Interview, 28 Aug. 2000). Barba assigned characters to the actors and Fowler was given El Doctore.45 Actors physically and vocally explored the *commedia dell’arte* form, in addition to working on specific physical and vocal attributes of their characters. Masks, costumes, and props were used in this exploration.

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agitate the body” in the Mayan language of Yucatan (Barba qtd. in Shoemaker 308; Barba qtd. in Watson *Third Theatre* 147).
Unlike the material generated in the first discovery session, segments of the *commedia dell’arte* material were retained. Selections of this material were developed in later phases of development and were woven into the performance montage (Fowler, Interview, 28 Aug. 2000).

When the company returned to Denmark, Barba revealed the source material that would constitute the “narrative dramaturgy” of the performance under construction. *Talabot* would revolve around the life of Kirsten Hastrup, a Danish anthropologist who conducted most of her fieldwork in isolated Icelandic villages. Elements of the “organic dramaturgy” would be drawn from the company’s improvisational work with *commedia* character interaction, but the core of the piece would be built around Hastrup’s experiences.

In her 1987 essay, “The Challenge of the Unreal,” the anthropologist described “the real experience of the materialization of the unreal” (qtd. in Shoemaker 308) in her story of her encounter with a huldamadur, a figure from Icelandic folklore. After reading the essay, Barba approached Hastrup with a proposal for a performance based on her writing. When she agreed, he asked her to write about “the significant events in her life as she remembered them” (Fowler, Interview, 2 Sept. 2000). This text was not constructed as a cohesive story, nor were the events linked together to form a narrative. Barba also conducted a series of taped interviews with Hastrup (Watson, *Third Theatre* 145). This series of episodes,

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45 El Doctore in *commedia dell’arte* is considered to be a caricature of learning. He claims to be a well-educated doctor of science (medicine, linguistics, math, philosophy, etc). In reality, he is a pompous, fraudulent windbag.

46 A huldamadur is “known to seduce Icelandic womenfolk and especially shepherdesses in misty mountains” (Hastrup qtd. in Shoemaker 308).

47 In 1992 Hastrup published an essay in *Cultural Anthropology*, “Out of Anthropology: The Anthropologist as an Object of Dramatic Representation,” in which she expressed her thoughts and feelings about the reverse scrutiny of having her personal and professional life positioned as a narrative stream for a performance piece.
descriptions, and interviews became the main source material for the next phase of the development.

In early January 1988 the company travelled to Chicxulub, a tiny Mexican town close to Merida on the Yucatan peninsula, where they began an intense three-month residency focused on developing performance material for the Hastrup project. The company lived and worked in two houses rented for these purposes. The day started with a two-hour training session (7:00–9:00 a.m.) in which the actors worked on individual physical and vocal research, sang, and worked with musical instruments. As Barba had determined that music would be central to the development of the performance piece, he hired Jan Ferslev, an actor and musician from Copenhagen, as both an actor and music coach on the project. During the morning training sessions Ferslev guided the company through researching musical styles, adapting those styles, building orchestral scores, and learning songs. He was also in charge of rehearsing musical material later in the day. The remainder of the working day was spent on generating and developing performance material.

At the beginning of the residency in Mexico, the actors were asked to stage three excerpts from Hastrup’s writings or interviews. Watson notes that although most of these sketches were discarded, the actors introduced props—shells, a scarf, an axe—that were retained and later used by Barba in the construction of the performance text (Watson, Third Theatre 145). It is also interesting to note that the dimensions of the Mexican living/rehearsal space would later influence the configuration of the performance space (Shoemaker 314–15).

Hastrup’s text was used as a point of departure, not as a central pivotal element. In addition to working with her text, actors continued to develop and refine the results of their explorations with the commedia dell’arte form. Barba also asked the actors to explore
additional roles as they interacted with Hastrup’s text. Julia Varley as Hastrup and Fowler as her father, Bent Hastrup,\(^{48}\) were able to directly access events in Hastrup’s life and her ideas as source material. Barba also introduced several “real-life” characters from other times and places that would provoke divergent elements of expression when he began to construct the montage: Cesar Brie was poet/visionary/madman Antonin Artaud; Jan Ferslev played polar explorer/unofficial anthropologist Knud Rasmussen; and Torgier Wethal played doctor/industrialist/revolutionary Ernesto “Che” Guevara. As Shoemaker notes, each of these individuals, including Hastrup and her father, “lived their lives split between conflicting realities [. . . and struggled] to translate/transfer experience from one reality to another” (310), a situation that inherently gave the actors further material to explore. Iben Nagel Rasmussen played a trickster character rendered visually as a combination of the archetypal fool and a butterfly (Christoffersen 200). Rasmussen was the only actor whose character did not morph from one reality to another during the course of the performance (*Talabot* video). She did, however, enter and at times create the “realities” of the other characters.

At the end of its three-month exploration in Mexico, the company returned to Denmark via Italy and Lecce University, where they presented the results of the intensive collaboration period to Taviani and an invited audience. In Denmark the company began a five-month (Apr.–Aug. 1988) rehearsal period during which the construction of *Talabot* was

\(^{48}\) Fowler was not interested in the role that Barba had originally proposed to him and counter-proposed the suggestion that he take on the role of Hastrup’s father. Barba accepted this. This counter-proposal is likely what Fowler refers to in a letter to Barba that appears in *Towards a Third Theatre*, in which he discusses Hastrup’s writing:

> Certain aspects of her [Hastrup’s] text made a particular impression on me. Among these are the importance of her father in her life; the fact of her describing herself to her father as his son, not his daughter. I felt that the conflict in her story resides within Kirsten herself, in the relationship between her evolving identity/knowledge of self/experience and society/people around her. [. . .] What is therefore dramatically necessary [. . .] is to find a concrete,
completed. In this period, Fowler recalls, a lot of discussion took place, often with Hastrup present. The project took on a very personal dimension for her. As she watched actors construct and stage her life using their personal vocabulary, the anthropologist experienced a version of the process that her subjects of study were faced with (Shoemaker 309). She later wrote about her experience in the article “Out of Anthropology: The Anthropologist as an Object of Dramatic Representation” (1992).

Using the interplay between Hastrup’s private and professional lives as the underpinning of *Talabot*, Barba wove a complex montage that included biographical excerpts from the lives of the other real-life characters he had introduced, actors playing multiple roles, songs and music, and broken, reassembled *commedia* masks (*Talabot* video).\(^49\) He used Rasmussen’s trickster character in the manner of the classical “fool” who “inverts things, changes subject and function and creations disorientation in time and space” (Christoffersen 202). Rasmussen became a constant presence, advancing and retreating from the action, “orchestrating scenes as if he/she/it had the power to bring nightmares and memories to life” (Watson, *Third Theatre* 147) and acting as “both catalyst and commentator” (Shoemaker 314). By juxtaposing incongruous images from the lives of multiple characters, Barba engendered associative links between these lives. It is this “notion of dualism and ‘the dislocation of familiar reality’” (309) that, Shoemaker claims, is a central theme of the performance piece.

\(^{49}\) Although Shoemaker and Watson describe the masks as resembling or related to broken *commedia dell’arte* masks, the masks in fact were broken *commedia dell’arte* masks. When Rasmussen’s mask was accidentally broken in transportation, inventiveness was required to make use of the irreparable and irreplaceable mask. Discussion of the themes and images being developed in *Talabot* in the latter phases of development led to the smashing and reconstruction of the masks as an overall aesthetic (Varley, Interview, 10 Apr. 2005).
The performance aesthetics of *Talabot* echoed those of past performances. Spectators were kept waiting outside the performance space until invited in by Julia Varley as Kirsten Hastrup. Varley and Torgeir Wethal pointed out vacant seats to spectators. The performance experience began with this entry. Spectators (no more than one hundred) were seated in bleachers on two sides of an oval-shaped playing space. At both ends of the space, planks had been set on an angle, resembling a teeter-totter, and behind one of these was a door. The trickster (Rasmussen) was an unrecognizable shape wrapped in a blanket in the centre of the playing space that many spectators had to pass through in order to reach their seats. The performance “officially” began with the disappearance of Varley and the physical and vocal “hatching” of Rasmussen from her blanket. The setting and lighting were very simple: suspended flashlight bulbs provided much of the lighting and there were no large set pieces, such as furniture. The performance made extensive use of props and costumes.

The actors spoke in different languages—English, Norwegian and Italian—and as mentioned, all but Rasmussen took on multiple roles. Images and sequences from the lives of Hastrup, her father, Guevara, Artaud, and Knud Rassmussen were juxtaposed with commedia-like lazzi and movement sequences, dance, and song. Sequences of action dissolved or were abruptly shifted by the trickster’s presence. Vocal images were created through moments of unexpected laughter, and a pattern of movement washed up and down the playing space (*Talabot* video).

*Talabot* premiered in Holstebro at the end of August 1988 and was generally well received by critics. According to critic Rene Zahnd, “the essential component of the production is visual. The costumes are beautiful, the objects are often handled as if they are amulets, the masks create an imaginative world, and the mise en scène surprises and
continually forces the attention from one corner of the stage to the other” (qtd. in Watson, *Third Theatre* 148). *Talabot* was performed more than 280 times in Austria, Chile, Denmark, France, Italy, Norway, Peru, Sweden, Switzerland, West Germany, and Yugoslavia before it was retired from the repertoire in 1991 (Christoffersen 213).

**The Odin Years: A Summary of Influence**

Through his encounter with Barba and the Odin Theatre, Fowler answered the needs of his artistic quest. He knew for certain that he had found a place in the world where he would have enough creative stimulation and support to last a lifetime. It is likely that he would have continued living and working in Denmark if he had not received the invitation to teach at the National Theatre School, which ultimately led to the founding of Primus Theatre. He arrived at the Odin with a clear idea of what he believed theatre was capable of. Although he had caught glimpses of the possibility in earlier stages of his creative journey, with Bogajewicz, Gregory, Johnstone, and Grotowski, it was at the Odin that his artistic needs were met, challenged, and advanced and that his creative practice evolved.

The Odin Theatre placed training at the centre of its culture, as the source from which all creative activity emerged. Fowler was made fully aware of the importance of career-long training that shifts to suit the technical and artistic needs of the actor. This practice profoundly informed his work with Primus. When he arrived at the Odin, actors were using their training as a personal research tool, and Barba was formally setting up specific research and transmissions sessions through ISTA. Given the great value that Barba placed on tradition, however, Fowler was also privy to earlier research discoveries through written and
video documentation of past projects and the company’s pedagogical practice. Although his artistic development reaped the benefits of the stimulus-rich environment of the Odin Theatre in the 1990s, he also had to actively seek and struggle for each advance in his association with the company.

In his role as performer, Fowler also learned the importance of the director in the developmental process of a performance piece. Given his particular Odin experience, he became acutely aware of the director’s role as facilitator, coach, dramaturg, and conductor. He was fully aware of the great responsibility that came with the charge of arranging highly personal performance material generated by the actors.

Fowler was not only highly aware of the importance of pedagogy to Barba and to the Odin Theatre practice but was also involved in this aspect of company culture from his first encounter with the company through his work as a translator at ISTA (1980). Throughout his residency at the Odin, Barba continued to share and present his research in practical and theoretical form, through books, articles, and ISTA, and Fowler accepted the proffered responsibility of translating this work into English. In effect, English-speaking readers were accessing Barba’s ideas, observations, and explanations through Fowler’s mind. Clearly, Barba approved of these efforts, as their partnership extended for more than a decade.

I believe that it was his unique relationship with the Odin that allowed Fowler to appreciate what others took for granted and to transmit that sense of respect and appreciation to Primus members. He clearly understood the importance of a company culture to the quality of the creative experience because he had been involved in theatre-making devoid of such a culture in his early career. He understood that an environment such as that of the Odin Theatre was rare and worth the sacrifices made for the sake of sustaining the association. He
made difficult decisions to start the journey that eventually led him to the Odin and difficult decisions to stay there.

When Fowler accepted the invitation to teach at the National Theatre School it was with the explicit directive of introducing student actors in Canada to the processes and techniques developed by Eugenio Barba and the Odin Theatre company. Neither he nor his students could have known how timely this encounter would be.
Nick Hutchinson and the National Theatre School

In 1985 Nick Hutchinson contacted Fowler at the Odin Theatre and invited him to the National Theatre School (NTS) to be a guest director. At the time Hutchinson, one of Fowler’s colleagues from his tenure at The Twelfth Avenue Project, was preparing to take on the role of Director of the English Acting Program, a position he held for four years (1986–90). In many ways Hutchinson, the son of actor Peggy Ashcroft, had been a controversial choice for the head of this national institution. His eclectic range of theatrical experiences included street theatre in France, England, and Canada during the late 1960s, the artistic directorship of The Caravan Stage Company (1976–84)—a company known for its epic outdoor productions—and, when the company divided, the directorship of the Caravan Farm (1983–93). He had also experienced the realization of Michel Saint-Denis’s ideas while studying at L'Ecole Supérieure d'Art Dramatique in Strasbourg.

Hutchinson was overtly political and viewed the actor as a thinking, political being who has power to change the world. According to Paulina Abarca, he saw the actor not “as an instrument embodying the play’s message in a traditional sense [but] as a social catalyst, somebody who could break social walls and get people to think” (qtd. in Salter 11).

Hutchinson’s ideas about training actors ran contrary to the traditions established by

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1 In a 1999 interview Hutchinson voiced his continued political view of art. As a former artistic director of the Caravan Farm Theatre, he commented on the philosophy of anarchism pervading the company’s practice: “[T]he idea of anarchism makes people very uncomfortable because it puts them in a situation where there are no safeties. But that is your place as an artist. That’s what you do as an artist. If you don’t put yourself in that place, you’re not going to produce your art” (in Kirkley 104). In the same interview, he also stated that anarchy was never an expressed or explicit intention of the company: “[W]e were just too good anarchists to do that” (104).
Saint-Denis when he had structured the English acting training program at NTS in 1960. The French director believed that “to have its meaning revealed, a classical play must be acted in the reality of its style so far as we can understand and achieve it. You cannot interpret the past in terms of the language and style of today. From your modern viewpoint you must assimilate the reality of past styles” (qtd. in Salter 5). His intention was to create a training program that would prepare actors for a “quasi-archaeological approach to the art of the theatre” (Salter 5). Students spent their first year at the school developing skills in voice training, text analysis, movement, improvisation, and period dance. In contrast, Hutchinson did not view acting as a rarefied, esoteric culture set apart from the “culture of politics and the politics of culture;” (11) but rather as one part of the whole. He wanted to create an environment in which actors could engage in the politics of living and then “to question it, and their own artistic/ideological positions within it, not only relentlessly but all of the time” (11). He decided to hire instructors who would provide students with opportunities to develop and exercise such abilities.

Hutchinson was familiar with the direction that Fowler’s career had taken and of his association with the Odin Theatre. He decided that Fowler should come to NTS to work with second-year students for an extended period of six weeks. He also hired Johanna Mercer to address the study of Canadian theatre practice and Michelle George, who had worked with Peter Brook. Fowler was well aware of the training practice associated with NTS, so he was struck by Hutchinson’s initiative (Fowler, Interview, 27 Aug. 2000). He did ask, however, for the terms of agreement to indicate that he would be introducing to the students an alternative model for the creation of theatre, not directing a play. He took a six-week sabbatical from the Odin Theatre during October and November of 1986 to accept the NTS
contract. Primus members Stephen Lawson and Ker Wells remember the air of excitement generated among the French-speaking students at the news that someone from the Odin Theatre was coming to NTS—and the lack of an equivalent reaction among English-speaking students.

Fowler had been teaching out of the Odin Theatre for ten years by the time that he arrived in Montreal and had developed both “a language and a context” (Fowler, Interview, 28 Aug. 2000) in which to work. He recalls that the reaction of NTS students was no different than that of other groups, in terms of the initial surprise and the subsequent responsiveness of the participants, except that they seemed more energized by the work process. Sean Dixon offers several possibilities for this. His class was younger, more impressionable, and less confident about their reasons for wanting to be actors than either the third- or first-year class. The group had also just completed a dispiriting commedia dell’arte project (Dixon, Interview, 31 May 1998). The actors were left exhausted, alienated from the school experience, and in great need of something that would re-engage their attention and bolster their confidence. The twelve-member class included Richard Clarkin, Stephen Lawson, Karin Randoja, and Ker Wells—all of whom, along with Dixon, eventually became members of Primus—as well as Jody Richardson and Monica Dufault, who continued on with Fowler during his return engagement the following year. Paula Danckert, a student from the school’s directing program, was also granted access to the workshop on the condition of full participation.2

Fowler’s approach to the NTS workshop was the same as it had been for other groups of students, with the exception of an anticipated public sharing of the explorative work. It

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2 The other students in the class taught by Fowler during his first engagement had no further contact with him: Neil Barclay, Bruce Dunsmore, Paul Haddad, Declan Hill, Megan Leitch, and Melissa Mullen.
was structured as an introduction to the philosophy, ethics, and practice of the Odin Theatre’s model for creating theatre (Fowler, Interview, 27 Aug. 2000). Informed by his own creative search, Fowler also hoped to expose the students to a world of theatre that they might not otherwise have known about (Fowler, Interview, 27 Aug. 2000). He was now in a position, and fully prepared, to offer students information that had taken him years to acquire. With the exception of a character mask workshop, which started midway through the session and was taught by Pierre Lefevre, Fowler had the students’ full attention for the six weeks. Dixon indicates that the mask-work reinforced the processes that Fowler was introducing because the approach was similar in that “we were expected to make theatre out of found material. [. . .] The combined experience was liberating because suddenly the theatre school experience was about being an actor at the very centre of the work and about creating original material” (Dixon, Interview, 31 May 1998).

All actors interviewed were struck by the solemnity and the intensity of their first meeting with Fowler, and they all remember some aspect of his physical presence and energy. Wells recalls, “He was very physically striking, very ‘present.’ I remember that very distinctly, [. . . and] he moved in a very definite way. I was struck by that” (Wells, Interview 6 May 1998). Clarkin found Fowler’s energy extremely engaging (Clarkin, Interview, 26 Jan. 2001), while Randoja found it somewhat intimating (Randoja, Interview, 28 June 1998). Fowler began by asking the students to sit in a circle on the floor and respond to a series of questions about art and artists in society: What constituted a theatrical event? What role did the actor play in the theatre and in the world? What was actor training was about? He also asked each person to explain her/his reasons for wanting to become an actor. Lawson recalls his surprise at being asked to scrutinize his assumptions and choices:
I had never been asked why I wanted to be an actor. [. . .] I can’t remember what I answered, and I am not sure I had any answers. [. . .] I was surprised that someone was asking us about the assumptions that we brought to our work. It was extremely respectful. [. . .] The most honest thing I could say was ‘I don't know.’ (Lawson, 17 Dec. 1999)

Randoja found herself feeling exposed and vulnerable when faced with the series of questions. Nevertheless, her curiosity was piqued in a very intense way, and she realized then that “acting was not about the role; it was about who you are as a person” (Randoja, Interview, 28 June 1998).

The actors were also struck by the investment of time that Fowler devoted to an unhurried discussion of ideas and preconceptions of acting and theatre. Through this line of questioning he was able to determine the beliefs and assumptions underlying each student’s relationship to her/his chosen art and to provide a segue to an introduction to the Odin Theatre’s training practice. Dixon recalls the sense of empowerment that emerged from a discussion of Barba's notion that “there was no such thing as an inherent ability to be an actor; there were no secrets to being an actor. Acting was an art that required hard work and a master technique. [. . .] It was just so simple and easy and grasppable and so refreshing” (Dixon, Interview, 31 May 1998).

On that first day Fowler asked students not only to share their ideas about actor training but also to actively demonstrate their actor-training practice (Wells, Interview, 6 May 1998). After watching the various illustrations of training he enlisted the group to help him to clean and arrange the workspace. Actors remember the seriousness and sincerity with which he presented this, and other, expectations of conduct and attitude:

At that time Richard never made jokes when he was teaching. He was very intense, very serious, and very focused in a way that I had never before encountered. [. . .] He explained the conditions in which we would work: We would take our shoes off when we came into the workspace. We would keep...
the space clean, [and] we would clean it every day, not because there was no one else to clean it but that keeping it clean ourselves was an important part of owning the space. We would not smoke or drink in the room. We would not eat or drink during rehearsal when other people were working. And we would not talk about other people’s work if they were not present. (Wells, Interview, 6 May 1998)

It is clear that Fowler was intent on building an environment of respect and responsibility for the work and workspace. This careful preparation and arrangement of the work area is a hallmark of both the work at the Odin Theatre and that of Grotowski in all phases of his research and can be traced back to the ethics of many Asian practices, which are rooted in ritual and in which all aspects of inhabiting a workspace are interconnected. These expectations also indicate that the work area was to be treated as a kind of sacred space separate from the quotidian world, a space in which discipline and focus could be fostered. Fowler was aware of the importance of building an environment of trust for his students in which they would be motivated to meet personal challenges. Through the preparation of the workspace and the establishment of working conditions, he reflected the influence of the masters with whom he had studied.

When the workspace had been prepared, Fowler engaged the actors in an intense physical warm-up and then introduced the “Plastiques,” the Theatre Laboratory exercise that he had first encountered with Bogajewicz and Gregory. All actors remember the moment he simply said, “do as I do,” and then began to move. He worked his way from simple to complex “Plastiques”—shoulders, arms, hands, chest, hips legs, head, and neck—and then repeated each sequence several times for the benefit of the students. Students were instructed to jump in place for five minutes (each time reaching a point of physical exhaustion) and then to continue on. They were not to think about what they were doing. They were simply to do. At the end of the first “Plastiques” session, participants were intensely aware of a sense of
heightened energy that pervaded the room. For several of the participants, the exercise was life altering:

The experience was one of the most electrifying moments of my life. He [Fowler] started to move and we started to move. He was riveting to watch but the point wasn’t to watch him; the point was to do what he was doing. We went for a long time, what seemed to be hours. [...] At the end of it, I was absolutely shocked. I knew something really important had happened to me. (Wells, Interview, 6 May 1998)

Dixon believed that, beyond introducing the “Plastiques,” Fowler wanted his students to experience the liberation that comes from hitting the wall. [...] It was the most physically exhausting, intense session I had ever experienced. [...] Even since then there has never been anything quite like that first time. I believe that [the shock] was Richard’s intent. (Dixon, Interview, 31 May 1998)

Most of the actors remember the exercise lasting for over an hour. Clarkin assuredly states that it was only about forty-five minutes long, but most of the workshop participants “hit the wall” after ten or fifteen minutes (Clarkin, Interview, 26 Jan. 2001). The physical work that Fowler was expecting of them was simply far more rigorous than anything most students had ever experienced. This instant awareness of personal power, however, drew even the self-professed non-athletic individuals into the training.

Students were introduced to other exercises and activities in the weeks that followed, including “the cat” (as discussed in Chapter Two) and acrobatic and gymnastic exercises: solo and pair handstands, headstands, somersaults, tumbling, and handsprings. Work on the “Plastiques” continued for the duration of the workshop. To instil a sense of individuation characteristic of Odin training, Fowler taught exercises on the expressed principle that each body worked in a different way and that as a result exercises would have to be executed in a different way by each person. Careful attention was paid to the progress of every individual,
attention that was noticed and appreciated by all of the students:

If the task at hand was to do somersaults, Richard’s basic expectation was that we would all line up and watch him do it. Then we would each try to do it as best as we could. There was to be no laughing. There was to be no commentary. There was to be no talking. There was to be concentration on each and every person that was attempting the task. That [kind of concentrated attention] was highly unusual. (Lawson, Interview, 17 Dec. 1999)

The very physical nature of the training provided the young actors with an immediate sense of empowerment and personal achievement through the accomplishment of previously unachievable physical and vocal tasks. Dixon identified the accessibility of the work as its central attraction: “[T]he thing that was liberating about it and the thing that we loved so much about it was that [. . .] the work began with a very concrete premise centred on the movement of a body in space” (Dixon, Interview, 31 May 1998).

What may not have been apparent to the students is the fundamental steps that Fowler was taking to establish a community. He was establishing a code of conduct by carefully constructing a work ethic for participants of the NTS workshop. Although the company culture at the Odin had been informed by Grotowski’s work ethic and then developed slowly over time in response to the needs of company members, there were clearly defined elements of that code that were transferable and that could be applied even to temporary situations. This appears to be what Fowler was doing.

Through discussion, practice, and spectatorship, the young Canadian acting students were introduced to a very different concept of “the actor” than they were familiar with. In the theatre practice that Fowler was enabling them to access, the actor was considered an interdisciplinary creator, actor training was treated as a research tool, rather than as the acquisition of specific performance skills, and an acting company was considered a collaborative community. In addition, lifelong training was considered a necessity to ensure
the continuous advancement of the actor’s instrument and the evolution of theatrical form. Fowler was providing NTS students with access to a world of theatre that many would not have discovered on their own. The training was a drastic departure from what they had known and provided individuals with previously unexplored knowledge about their physical and vocal strengths and weaknesses.

The workshop culminated in the presentation of an untitled work-in-progress that used Italo Calvino’s *Invisible Cities* as a primary stimulus. The novel takes the form of a series of drastically different descriptions of the city of Venice as presented by Marco Polo to Kublai Khan. Individually or in pairs, actors were to create “in secret” a performance score inspired by one of the descriptions. In the early stages of developing performance material at the Odin, solo exploration allowed each actor the opportunity to interact with source material without the influence of others; it is likely that Fowler’s mention of secrecy was intended to ensure this. In defining the parameters of the task more specifically than would have been necessary for actors experienced with the process, he adjusted the instruction without affecting the objective of the explorative work. This choice of action indicates that Fowler favoured the possibility of “mis-recognition,” the misinterpretation of intention (Etchells 55), of the task by each group or individual over the group effort at individuality that could have resulted from constant “checking in” between groups.

Fowler also presented the actors with a set of basic parameters for constructing the score that Dixon listed in his personal journal (PJ):

[Intexpare a scene (a sequence of actions) which are precise and can be repeated; use something stimulating from the book - a phrase; can use objects or props; if you like you may do it with another person; can use text but you needn’t—text can be from the book but it can be unrelated; don’t tell anyone what you are doing; possibilities—photocopy text and hand it out; sing a song of the text; don’t interpret the text—use it in relationship to the series of]
actions; length there is no limit (tremendous risk to do twenty seconds; [and] it shouldn’t be training exercises, but things you have learned are important [and] concepts which should be evident. (PJ, 6 Nov. 1986)

Actors continued to work with “Plastiques” and other gymnastic work in the collective morning training sessions. Fowler also introduced other principles and concepts that had emerged from Odin training: “carving space, changing direction, changing levels, changing balance, finding contrast through slow and quick motion, heavy and light, big and small, [and] masculine and feminine” (MAC Independent Theatre Projects Grant Report, 28 Aug. 1989).

Each afternoon, with Fowler’s guidance, students worked on applying these principles to their Invisible Cities pieces. In keeping with the secretive nature of the project, he met privately with each individual or group, as Barba did in the initial phase of dramaturgy at the Odin Theatre. And again following Barba’s practice, Fowler focused on enabling individuals to express their mental imagery in the most effective, concrete way possible. Students were encouraged to draw material from improvisation and then to use the discoveries as starting points from which to launch further investigation or to extract details to be further developed in their performance scores. The young actors found the work invigorating and exciting as it flowed from one point of discovery to the next. Randoja described the discovery process as “subliminal, […] like archaeology without the intellectualizing” (Randoja, Interview, 28 June 1998). Her performance score emerged from an exploration of props, a kerchief, and a pot that she decided to stand on for most of the piece. Using these props she explored principles and concepts, such as balance/off-balance, repetition, and precision. At the end of the piece, she decided, she would lift the pot and a knife and swatch of fabric would fall out. Randoja felt that she was tapping into a kind of
“child spirit of creation” (Randoja, Interview, 28 June 1998). All of the actors were learning to enjoy the unpredictable nature of the creative process.

Props and costumes were not the only source-works used in the project. Wells chose a poem by P.K. Page called “Leather Jacket” as one of his source works. The poem, about a peacock whose excessive vanity has prompted a sultan to have it sewn into a leather sack, was used as the text for Wells’s scene about a prisoner waiting in his cell. The prisoner does not realize that he has been blinded, so he continues to believe he is blindfolded even when the sack is removed. Wells used Page’s text and these ideas to develop his performance score (Wells, Interview, 6 May 1998).

Not all members of the class were connecting with the process. Lawson remembers being confused about the way in which the physical training was intended to inform the performance score:

We were doing all sorts of different kinds of exercises in training. I remember that what I created as a performance score was extremely disconnected from what I was doing in training. I was drawn to the physical nature of the work, but I don’t think that I understood what Richard was talking about in that first workshop, nor did I really understand what it was that he was offering. […] This was not the case with everyone else in the class. Karin Randoja's very first piece was extremely good. (Lawson, Interview, 17 Dec. 1999)

Eventually, the individual pieces were shown to other members of the group, and the actors took on observer duties for each other. Spectators were asked to respond as an outside eye for the performer, as was the practice at the Odin Theatre in the first phase of dramaturgical development. There was, however, an adjustment made to the function and

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3 The term source-work is borrowed from Anne Bogart. Although the way in which the source-work is processed is very different for Bogart than for Barba and Odin actors, the identification is useful. As part of Bogart’s theatrical language, the Viewpoints, the source-work refers to “the time taken (before you begin rehearsing anything that the audience is actually going to see on stage) to enter with your entire being into the world, issues and heart of your material” (Landau 17).
form of this part of the process. This was not “composition improvisation” (see Chapter Two), in which actors engaged in a collective process of constructing sections of one actor’s performance material. NTS students had already “registered” their physical scores and were presenting a composition-in-progress. Fowler appears to have adapted the original process by creating an infrastructure that served both the purposes of the source process and that respected the needs of young actors operating within a highly limited timeframe.

He instructed observing students to record lists of information that would be discussed or given to the performer at the completion of the piece. Commentary was to be aimed at providing actors with a sense of what the work suggested to spectators. Responses were to be drawn from the concrete details of the work-in-progress and recorded as answers to a series of the questions that Fowler proposed. Questions and observations varied according to the needs of each piece. Dixon’s personal journal provides a sample of the proposed questions: “1. What is the title or anti-title? 2. What should the character be wearing? 3. Where is the character? 4. Who put her/him there? 5. To whom is s/he speaking? 6. Who is around her/him? 7. What is missing? 8. Is the scene a tragedy?” (Dixon, PJ, 13–19 Nov. 1987). The performer could then choose which information to consider in the advancement of the performance score.

In the final stage of development Fowler arranged the collection of individual and pair performance scores into a larger whole. Once again he modified Odin practices to retain essential aspects of the process within the constraints of time and context. He juxtaposed solo pieces to make interesting arrangements but did not deconstruct the individual scores, as was Barba’s practice in the creation of montage. He also orchestrated group action. The beginning of the montage was inspired by the “Cities of the Dead” sections in Invisible
Cities. All the actors had stockings over their faces and were perched on window ledges in the large room of many high windows that served as the performance space. They were all to climb or jump to the floor after the opening solo (Dixon, Interview, 31 May 1998). Danckert knew how to breath fire, and Fowler wove this into the montage. No critical response to the work in print exists, but it is rumoured that the reaction of NTS teaching staff was mixed.

Stephen Lawson describes the six-week workshop as a particularly intense and meaningful time for him and fellow classmates (CC Explorations Grant Proposal, 12 Jan. 1989), and the experience left many of the participants wanting to learn more. For Randoja the attraction lay in the serendipity, the invention, and the all-encompassing nature of the work. Before working with Fowler, her experiences with acting had all centred on the notion of personality. Now, she had discovered theatrical work that “wasn’t about what I looked like or how charming I was. It was about the creative impetus” (Randoja, Interview, 28 June 1998). Wells was attracted by the opportunity to explore and challenge physical presence and vigour. He also noted that the work challenged him to confront personal issues that he might not otherwise have confronted (Wells, Interview, 6 May 1998). The experience was empowering for Dixon because it provided him with the motivation and the outlet to create: “I came out of that experience with a strong sense of what it meant to create your own work and that I wanted to do that” (Dixon, Interview, 31 May 1998). All of the actors were impressed by Fowler’s abilities as a teacher. Clarkin describes him as “inspiring, observant, demanding, and driven” (Clarkin, Interview, 26 Jan. 2001).

After the six-week engagement at NTS, Fowler returned to the Odin Theatre and a touring commitment to India and South America. Before he left, however, he and Hutchinson discussed a return engagement in the following year (1987). Fowler agreed to the condition
that he would work with the same group of students. Unaware of this arrangement, a group of his students approached Hutchinson to request that he return the next year.

**Encore at NTS: The Beginning of *Dog Day***

Fowler returned to Canada to head up a second collaboration with NTS students during November and December 1987. The third-year students were divided in two groups. One half of the class, Clarkin, Dixon, Dufault, Lawson, Randoja, Richardson, and Wells, worked with Fowler; the other half worked with Linda Moore on the staging of *Tom and Viv*, a play by Michael Hastings based on the relationship between T.S. Eliot and his first wife, Vivienne Haigh-Wood.  

Before returning to NTS, Fowler wrote to the students asking them to begin to prepare material. Each actor was to select a character, real or fictional and from any source, and to engage in research and/or original writing about that character. Clarkin chose Lorenzaccio (“L”), an Italian noble from the sixteenth century who murdered his close friend, the Duke of Florence, for unknown reasons; Dixon chose Joseph Raoul Marceau, his French-Canadian grandfather, who had his brothers and sisters shave his whole body so that he would not scare his new bride on their wedding night; Dufault chose Cassandra, the cursed prophetess from Greek mythology; Lawson chose Pan, the mischievous and unpredictable half-boy, half-goat woodland god from Greek mythology; Randoja chose the French writer Marguerite Duras, known for her darkly painted views of love; Richardson chose Dr. Wilbur Daffodil-11 Swain, the rich Neanderthal from Kurt Vonnegut’s novel

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4 Moore would become the artistic director of Neptune Theatre in Halifax (1990–2000).
Slapstick; and Wells chose the character Kai, the boy whose heart turns to ice, from the fairy tale *The Snow Queen*. The actors were also asked to describe in a single sentence a theme that they wished to explore. Once again all preparation was to be done alone and without consulting others. Fowler also decided upon a basic theme for the piece: the idea of “dog days”—“conjuring heat, disorientation, and a kind of major turning point, the beginning of the winter” (Fowler, Interview, 30 Aug. 2000).

For a second six weeks the young actors were immersed in an intensive period of training, research, and performance development. Once again they were to use their practical research to inform the development of their performance material. But, in contrast to their experience in the *Invisible Cities* project, in which an idea or image had been drawn from a common literary source, actors were starting with isolated, individually researched characters. Throughout the creation process, and particularly in the earliest phase of the process, they were asked to engage in library research that served the creative process in indirect ways. All actors recall a research venture directed at collecting methods of fortune-telling. My speculation is that the research was directed at finding a means for Dufault’s Cassandra character to explore the concept of prophecy in concrete ways.

Workshop organization was retained from the first session: training took place in the morning and preparation of performance material in the afternoon. Actors trained both as a group and individually during “pure training.” The objective of this aspect of training was to enable actors to work with technical material in a personal way. Barba defined this as “learning to learn,” an empirical approach to technique and skill development that allowed the performer to dominate technical knowledge and not be dominated by it (*Paper Canoe* 9). These sessions concentrated on reviewing the basic vocabulary that had been introduced the
year before and introducing new techniques and principles.

The initial introduction to the Odin model for creating theatre had focused on the development of physical expression. In the second workshop Fowler began to introduce various aspects of vocal training. Voice and physical training were explored separately in pure training, but this separation was not maintained at any point during the creation of performance material. This marked a departure from the way in which vocal work was treated at the Odin Theatre. Fowler, however, did maintain the tradition of vocal exploration developed by Grotowski to create vocal exercises and tasks that would enable the actors to explore the resonating qualities of their voices. These exercises and tasks included giving the voice a physical action (pushing someone into a seat or drawing them closer), creating animal images as an impetus for voice work, sending a high voice through the chest, sending a low voice through the head, placing a high voice in the head and then moving it down, starting with a normal voice and then working through the various resonators, and vocally following a picture story constructed of concrete actions (Dixon, PJ, 20 Nov. and 26 Nov. 1987).

Fowler also demanded that the actors become aware of the vocal qualities that they were using, in particular when developing performance material: the speed with which they strung words together, the length of the pauses between words and phrases, the direction of their voice in the space, and the precision of word placement (Dixon, PJ, 20 Nov. and 26 Nov. 1987). These tasks directly reflect the nature of vocal training at the Odin Theatre at that time: various stimuli were being used as explorative tools, attention was being paid to the placement of voice, and the voice was being used as an extension of the body in space and as an “invisible psychological force” (Third Theatre 60).
In the afternoon sessions, actors explored the physical and vocal dimensions of their characters by applying learned concepts and principles to specific character contexts. This application could be as simple as changing speed or centre of balance in movement through space. Throughout the training and the dramaturgical process Fowler proposed a series of tasks for the actors. Early in the developmental process they were asked to create physical scores based on a series of photographs of paintings or sculptures of their choosing. Initially the score was unrelated to a character; however, later in the process the series of actions was developed to reflect the emerging character. Fowler also requested that they develop a wide-ranging physical vocabulary to choose from in the construction of their character and that they collect or create specific pieces of text as sources of improvisation. Wells used a William Carlos Williams poem as the impetus for improvisation, which led to its use in constructing segments of his physical score. Dixon used a poem by Carl Sandburg about raindrops, and one by Joy Kogawa about shaving, as a counterpoint to a physical action in which he did a trick with rings attached by a piece of elastic.

All actors were asked to create improvisations using character-related costumes or props as an impetus. Wells’s improvisation, as Kai, the boy whose heart turns to ice in The Snow Queen, illustrates the highly personal nature of the improvisational work:

I did an improvisation as Kai, although it turned out to be about something else completely. I created a ten or fifteen minute improvisation wearing a

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5 “Proposed” or “proposal” occurs regularly in the working vocabulary used by both Fowler and Primus members. A proposal is intended as a guideline, rather than as an inflexible rule, and invites the possibility of a counter-proposal.

6 All Primus actors mention this use of pictures as a creative source and as a source of physical actions in the creation of Dog Day. It is also identified as a frequently employed methodology in later projects. The practice of using photos, images, and film as source material occurred at the Odin, but the degree to which this was used varied from project to project. It was not a consistent practice. Extensive use of images and photos occurred during the construction of Talabot (Barba Interview, 3 Apr. 2005).
nightshirt. The improvisation, which had not been decided in advance, was actually about my relationship with my father and my grandfather. [. . .] When I was about twelve or thirteen [. . .] I broke an axe and was afraid to tell my father. [. . .] The improvisation became about that relationship. It became an instinctive exploration of the way we deal with emotion and of my own fears about being emotionally frozen. [. . .] There was a lot of reflection about my father and my grandfather. That improvisation ended up being one of the main pieces of material I did in the show. (Wells, Interview, 6 May 1998)

Dixon’s improvisation was used to introduce the actors to dramaturgical technique that they had not yet explored. It is recognizable as the Odin Theatre’s “composition improvisation” but was not referred to as such:

Richard asked me to do an improvisation and then it was recreated as an “encore.” What this means is that you do an improvisation and everyone watching takes notes about what you did. When it’s over, you immediately begin to reconstruct it with the help of the observers. Then people say “‘no, no, you moved your arm this way; you moved your arm that way.’” It’s a long, long process. Richard did a few encores after that, [. . .] but he did this one with me without my knowing what he was going to do. (Dixon, Interview, 31 May 1998)

Fowler also issued general requests to the group and then narrowed an individual actor’s explorative field by selecting a particular focus. For example, all actors were requested to create a solo scene containing a dance that was based on a particular incident in the life of their character.Within that directive, Wells was asked to create “the dance that Kai did when the sliver of glass in his heart had melted, but not the one in his eye” (Wells, Interview, 6 May 1998). The score that Wells created to express that moment was drawn from a personal dream and from “Le vierge, le vivace et le bel aujourd’hui,” a poem by Stephane Mallarmé about a swan who wakes up frozen in the ice.
From chronicled information and interviews with the actors, it can be determined that Fowler also proposed other adjustments to the material once the construction of the characters had begun: additional or alternative action, ways to shape movement gestures and physical images generated by individual actors (this generally occurred in afternoon sessions), basic premises from which to generate improvisation, props and costumes with which to improvise action, and requests for scores based on particular moments in the chosen character’s life. These proposals and suggestions were not directed at all actors, and specific responses to the requests were shaped by the needs of each performer and her/his developing performance material.

Fowler’s activity is the equivalent of that characterizing the first phase of Barba’s dramaturgical process, in which intensive individual work with the actors occurred. Fowler created an infrastructure that allowed the young Canadian actors to access the Odin processes more effectively by providing specific guidelines that would not have been necessary in Barba’s situation. In providing this additional structure, Fowler invited risk—without overwhelming the students. He sought to create an environment in which the actors-as-creators could focus on finding answers to research questions, rather than initiating the questions as well.

In the afternoon sessions Fowler’s role shifted from that of observer and trainer to that of dramaturg and director. As the development of performance material progressed the tasks that he proposed to the actors increasingly reflected a directorial vision. Actors were carrying a baby, and I was afraid that I was going to drop the baby. And then I saw a frozen lake at the bottom of a crater across the tundra. I knew that I must avoid that place because the water was frozen into ice and would be dangerous. […] I end up walking on the lip of the crater, and of course I slipped. The baby flew out of my arms and broke through the ice. I ran down and pulled the baby out of the water. I opened up my coat and my shirt and put this wet, freezing child against my bare skin and I began to run. […] That dream was one of the sub-texts of that dance solo” (Wells, Interview, 6 May 1998).
well aware of the critical importance that Fowler’s role as director and facilitator in the creative process played:

Richard was watching all the time. He watched how you were training, what you needed to work on next, what you were creating, where it could go. He was not waiting for the results; the process was the result. That was what he was adjusting. (Randoja, Interview, 28 June 1998)

Fowler made specific suggestions to each individual concerning how s/he might best incorporate elements explored in training into the development of her/his piece. These suggestions referred to the use of stops, shifts in balance, and softer or more distinct execution of movement and were often serendipitous interactions with the performer’s scores. During a run of a score in which Randoja (as Marguerite Duras) was balancing on one hip while talking about love and commitment, her hair fell over her face. Fowler was struck by the oddness of the image and suggested that she find a way to recreate it in each version of the score (Randoja, Interview, 28 June 1998).

He also orchestrated group scores. He asked each actor to create a story about her/his character in the form of a tableau that would involve all other actors. These tableaux were developed with Fowler’s guidance in the afternoon sessions. This aspect of performance development was a departure from Odin Theatre practice material and was designed to allow a sense of the ensemble process within a highly defined timeline.

As had occurred at the culmination of the first workshop, Fowler combined and arranged the solo and group pieces into a performance montage. This montage would become the first draft of *Dog Day*. It is evident from viewing videotaped versions of the original *Dog Day* that Fowler had begun to work with the multiple levels of dramaturgy characteristic of

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10 As noted in Chapter Two, Odin actors used group improvisation only during the development of their first performance pieces, in which written texts were used as the source for developing material. Lack of documentation makes it difficult to determine exactly when this practice was discontinued. It is known that this
Odin performances. It is also clear that a “narrative dramaturgy” had not been constructed for the NTS montage. It would not be conceived until *Dog Day* was remounted. A written version of the original performance text, containing both spoken text and descriptions of the physical scores text, supports this observation.

The only public record of the event appeared in *The Montreal Gazette*. There, Pat Donelly declared the performance to be a “public assault” and “a throwback to the sixties.” She was referring to the accidental shattering of a mirror in the final moments of the montage and the costuming and audio scores respectively. After stating that “one does not attend Canada’s National Theatre school [sic] prepared for this sort of thing,” she concluded “disasters aside, *Dog Day* is an interesting if uneven piece of work” (*The Montreal Gazette*, 19 Dec. 1987). With this entry, the misunderstanding of Primus’s work by English-Canadian critics began.

The second project with Fowler generated a different response from the actors than the pure elation that emerged from the first workshop. Then, everything had been novel and the focus had been placed on learning basic skills. Actors participating in the second workshop, however, were advancing beyond the basic training and research practices. They had begun to focus on mastery and precision in the learning of technique. For Randoja the experience was far more difficult than in the first workshop. Not only was she struggling with increasingly complex physical tasks but, as well, her great interest in the form led her to a difficult discovery. Conversations with her teachers and other students at NTS had made her aware that the performance construction she was so drawn to was creating controversy and that critics of the form questioned its validity. She was concerned about the way in which involvement in this form would affect her professional life. Yet, in spite of all this, she

practice was phased out before the Odin Theatre began constructing *Min Fars Hus* (1972).
continued to be charmed by what she described as the serendipity of the process, “the way in which circumstances bring us to places that we would not have imagined” (Randoja, Interview, 28 June 1998). She realized that, if she decided to continue with the work, she would have to trust in self-validation rather than relying on others.

The second workshop was more difficult for Dixon as well, but his concerns were located in the nature of the process:

The second experience was harder than the first one because the first was an experience in liberation, while the second was an experience in creating an original work. Everyone wanted something [from the final draft] but the expectations weren’t realized because the performance piece wasn’t finished. The idea of a long creative process was something we had yet to understand. (Dixon, Interview, 31 May 1998)

During the *Dog Day* process Lawson began to understand the way in which the actor’s unique physical and vocal qualities informed the training, which would in turn influence the form of performance material:

I realized that the most important thing at the beginning of the creative process was to determine areas of interest, areas of work to be carried out and then to do that work to the best of my ability. What I would end up with was a whole series of different kinds of creative elements from which I could discover or create connections. (Lawson, Interview, 17 Dec. 1999)

At a much later date he would also come to the realization that what had occurred between our small group and Richard Fowler was much more than the beginnings of a performance piece. We also began to establish for ourselves a way of working. This “way of working” included both the “borrowed” techniques of the Odin[11 . . .] and the utilization of other artistic skills/interests unique to our group of individuals (for example, explorations in music, dance and writing for the theatre). It began to become clear that we were establishing for ourselves our own techniques and our own specific daily training/performance research (CC *Explorations Grant Application*, 15 May 1989).

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11 As discussed in Chapter Two, the techniques used by actors at the Odin were in a constant state of evolution and were very individually applied by this time (1986–87). The techniques that Fowler introduced to the actors at NTS were therefore those that he had been introduced to, had practised, and was practicing. At this point Fowler’s work on *Talabot* had not begun.
It is clear that several things occurred as a result of Fowler’s return engagement at NTS. A collective sense of “a way of working” was established, and this “way of working” included the beginnings of a group culture that could be defined by the members of the group. Wells indicates that the consolidation of the group of actors who would become the Primus theatre company was based on an interest in pursuing the form. He states that “it is important to understand that Primus wasn’t a company based on friendships. […] [F]or the most part we never became really close friends. I don’t think that avoiding friendship is a necessity, but I think that conditions can be very difficult if friendship is the basis of forming a company” (Wells, Interview, 6 May 1998). Fowler also realized the importance of the connection that had been made within the group. He was impressed with the young actors’ energy and enthusiasm and with their desire to create. During his last meeting with the group, he offered to return to Canada to develop the *Dog Day* project into a finished performance piece.

In many ways the introduction to Odin practice experienced by students at the National Theatre School was close to an ideal “other” context. In the flexible atmosphere of a conservatory training program, actors were free to focus solely on the training and creative processes without external distraction. This practice would work quite differently in the context of the English-Canadian theatrical environment.

**Official Company Status: Relocating to Winnipeg, Manitoba**

At the time that Fowler made his offer to the NTS actors, he had no intention of leaving the Odin Theatre. His proposal was intended solely as an offer to assist them in the
completion of the *Dog Day* performance project they had begun. Fowler was still touring his solo show, *Wait for the Dawn*, and in various street-theatre pieces. He had also committed to work on the performance piece that would become *Talabot*. Nevertheless, when the actors expressed their interest in accepting his offer, he began looking for an appropriate locale for the project and sought the advice of his long-time friend Anne Green, then an officer at the Canada Council. She suggested Winnipeg.

Historically, the city was known to be very supportive of the arts. That was true to a certain extent, but the magnitude of this support had been mythologized and generally upheld by individuals who resided beyond the provincial borders. Established arts organizations, such as the Manitoba Theatre Centre, Prairie Theatre Exchange, the Royal Winnipeg Ballet, and the Winnipeg Symphony Orchestra, were (and are) supported by both arts funding agencies and the public; however, this support did not necessarily filter down into fringe and experimental work. Green also suggested locating the project in Winnipeg because none of the theatre companies in the region was producing the kind of theatre Primus wished to create. This was also true of many other locations in English Canada.

The actors were also engaged in a similar search for a location to set their plan in motion. By the time that they graduated from NTS (1988), most of them had booked work for the following year. They were employed in theatres from Winnipeg to Charlottetown but maintained contact with each other and with Fowler at the Odin. Through letters and telephone calls, they made decisions collectively.\(^{12}\) After careful consideration, charter

\(^{12}\) The original plan was to regroup for the sole purpose of finishing the *Dog Day* project. At some point in the planning of the project, members decided that they wanted to extended the life of the company beyond the project and to become an “as-if permanent” organization. There is no consensus concerning when or how this decision was made. Most company members recall that no formal discussion took place regarding long-term planning beyond the *Dog Day* project. However, they are also unanimously agreed that by the time that the group reunited in Winnipeg (May 1989) to start the remounting project, the group possessed a united vision for a continuing existence.
members of the company, initially called Pennatus Primus Laboratory Theatre, decided to locate the company in Winnipeg. The critical factor in the decision was that three of the company members, Clarkin, Lawson, and Donald Kitt, were already working there.

A graduate of the University of Winnipeg Theatre Department (1986), Donald Kitt had not attended NTS but had a strong sense of the nature and purpose of Odin training and performance work. He had finished his university studies with a sense of vagueness about what he had learned and, although he had secured acting work, he felt that he had “no clarity as a performer” and that he was “not anchored to something that would give him creative life” (Kitt, Interview, 21 May 1998). In a journey that resembled Fowler’s early career quest, Kitt began to search for information and experiences that would bridge or seal the gaps he perceived in his understanding of theatre and acting. He decided to travel to Europe to observe theatre productions and theatre-making there. Just before that venture, he visited Dufault in Montreal and for the first time saw Dog Day. The piece affected him in the way that The Million had affected Fowler. He knew immediately that it was the kind of work that he wanted to do: “I had never gone to a performance and wanted to watch everything. [. . .] There were surprises all the time. It was uplifting. I felt that I was participating in something. I watched the performances every night that I was there” (Kitt, Interview, 21 May 1998).

Kitt spoke to Fowler about his travel plans and was encouraged to contact the Odin Theatre and ask for permission to visit. As a result, he spent three weeks in January 1988 at

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13 The words Pennatus Primus are Latin for “first wing.” With this choice the company hoped to convey two principal concepts about their work: a sense of “an ever-present beginning” and the possibility for human flight, a sense of “other worldly feats” (CC Explorations Grant Application, 15 May 1989)

14 In addition to the three mentioned, Monica Dufault, Sean Dixon, Karin Randoja, and Ker Wells are listed as charter members. Dufault withdrew from the project before the group reunited in Winnipeg in May 1989.
the Odin Theatre, watching films and live performances, training with Else Marie Laukvik, and discussing theatre with Barba, Laukvik, Fowler, and participants of the Magdelena Project. He then travelled through Europe, observing theatre and theatre-making at every opportunity that presented itself. At the Odin he had spoken to Fowler about becoming involved in Primus and the remaking of *Dog Day*, tentatively planned for the summer of 1989. He had also submitted a written proposal to the group as a whole, formally requesting permission to train with them. The proposal was accepted with the understanding that, although he would train with the company, he would not perform in the remounting of *Dog Day*. Instead, he would take on technical responsibilities.

In addition to Kitt, Clarkin and Lawson were in Winnipeg on contract work. The three took on the administrative work necessary for the incorporation of the company and attended to the practical arrangements of applying for financial support, locating rehearsal space, and overseeing other necessities. They bore the major responsibility for planning and preparing the *Dog Day* project and therefore are major contributors to the establishment of the fledgling company.

In the context of the competitive funding environment of English-Canadian theatre, company members found themselves having to explain and justify their existence right from the start. The original mandate of Pennatus Primus Laboratory Theatre was collectively generated for a Societies Act Application (24 Nov. 1988) and reshaped for funding application purposes. The first Primus Theatre mandate appeared in a 1989 Canada Council *Explorations Grant Application* and stated the following goals:

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15 The Magdelena Project was a collaborative initiative for female actors generated out of the Cardiff Theatre Lab. At the time Julia Varley and Silvia Ricciardelli from the Odin Theatre were involved in the project and the group engaged in a three-month residency at the Odin.
(a) to question the now traditional approach in English Canada to the collective creation (the traditional division of work for example and the inclusion and central focus of playwrights and literary forms of plot, etc.),

(b) to challenge the new world of Imagistic Theatre with our approach of codified movement and other researched techniques (vocal, non-literary approach to text and form, etc.) and to continue to test these concepts through daily investigation,

(c) to pursue a centre of theatrical work in Western Canada (specifically Manitoba) whose mandate is committed to the progressive research into performance technique in the Imagistic, Experimental, Collaborative and Ensemble Theatre. At the present [1989] such focus for investigation of this kind does not exist in Manitoba, [and]

(d) to perpetuate our hunger for a theatre of change, one that is in search of a new originality, an originality that transcends our traditional forms and allows itself to be formed by the fringes of both our art and our society. It will be a place where the theatre worker can refine their technique and continue their search to find the sources that make it necessary and vital for them to work. (12 Jan. 1989)

In seeking to distinguish the work from realistic and naturalistic styles of acting, the actors chose descriptors that defined the work in ways that concerned Fowler. He indicated that describing the training as “codified” and the performance as “imagistic” did not accurately represent the work. Unlike codified theatrical forms, such as corporeal mime and ballet, in which training involves the learning of an existing language, the form developed in training at the Odin Theatre was that of “personalized codes” drawn from principles underpinning a variety of codified performance forms that “the actor can change, modify and improvise with” (Fowler, Interview, 30 Aug. 2000).

While Fowler viewed the use of “codified” as an explanation of Primus’s work as incorrect, he viewed the use of “imagistic theatre” as misleading. He felt that the term conjured up a simple notion of “an assemblage of images” (Fowler, Interview, 30 Aug. 2000) and did not accurately represent the scope of the company’s creative process or the complexity of the performance aesthetic. James O’Regan implies the narrative of image
theatre is created solely by images and that the basis of this genre of theatre is a visual narrative (11–12). Bonnie Marranca provides a slightly less narrow view of the form by indicating that images provide the playwright with an alternative or additional medium with which to construct ideas (xi). For Fowler imagery was one of many elements used to construct the multiple narratives of performance in the model of theatre-making generated by the Odin Theatre and not at all limited to the singular point of view of a playwright.

The terms “codified” and “imagistic” do not appear in versions of the company mandate written after 1989. The revised mandate, included in a letter from Fowler to Michael Springate at the Canada Council in the spring of 1991, presents the company’s objectives in a much clearer and more direct fashion:

1. The building of the company into a strong, independent unit of actors capable of producing their own material and collaborating with myself as director [Fowler] in the preparation and presentation of original theatre pieces each of which re-invent theatre.

2. The establishment of the group as a centre for research and training into the art of the performer, a contact and information-dissemination centre to which other Canadian performers and groups can refer and with which they can collaborate.

3. The consolidation of PRIMUS as a creatively and administratively self-sufficient ensemble, ideally functioning as part of and in relationship to a Canadian community of sufficiently small size as to permit a meaningful presence and dialogue.

4. The involvement of PRIMUS in activities and projects of a “social” nature using theatre skills and techniques in non-performance situations for pedagogical and social and personal development purposes. An example of such activity is the work with the mentally handicapped which I have been doing in Denmark for several years. It is under our consideration that such work would not necessarily occur only in Canada, but also abroad, in association with an international relief agency. (CC *Exploration Grant Application*, 29 Mar. 1991)

The amended mandate would remain in place for the duration of the company’s existence.
The Remaking of *Dog Day*

After a year of intermittent training, preparing, and fundraising, the actors were reunited with Fowler in Winnipeg in late May 1989. Clarkin, Kitt, and Lawson had secured financial aid from the Canada Council (Explorations), the Manitoba Arts Council (Independent Theatre Productions), and from several private and corporate donors. This allowed company members the financial freedom to resume a full-time schedule of training and performance development as they revised and completed *Dog Day*. This was a luxury that they would not always have.

For seven weeks (31 May–23 June) at Prairie Theatre Exchange (PTE), the company trained, created performance material, and rehearsed with Fowler. Echoing the scheduling established at NTS, they trained in the morning and developed performance material and rehearsed in the afternoon. On weekdays, this occurred from 7:30 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. and on Saturdays from 9:00 a.m. to 12:00 p.m. At the beginning of the project, Fowler suggested that company members retain a group logbook to record the progress of company life. This company journal (CJ) was written by all members of the company on an alternating basis and became an important and often singular source of information about company activity.

Pure training sessions took place during the first hour and a half of each day. Because company members were now thinking about future projects, pure training was followed by a forty-five-minute training session directed at developing skills, characters, and material for a

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16 With the exception of the group in Winnipeg, who attempted to train on a sporadic basis, company members found it next to impossible to continue with daily training after they graduated from NTS and no longer had group support.

17 At this time Prairie Theatre Exchange was located at 160 Princess Street, in the heart of Winnipeg’s Exchange district. Rehearsal space had been donated to the company in an act of goodwill spearheaded by Kim McCaw and Colin Jackson.
proposed outdoor performance. In the pure training sessions actors were reacquainted with exercises that they had learned at NTS, such as “Plastiques,” “the cat,” pair exercises, the foot-to-chest exercise, and other gymnastic and acrobatic exercises. Fowler also introduced new concepts and principles that would challenge and advance the training. One of these exercises focused on “the eyes as expression, [as] light-bulbs of the body” and required an actor to use eye movements alone to persuade a partner to move in a particular way (Wells, CJ, 5 June 1989). Exercises involving “carving space, stops, changes of direction, surprise, [and] slow motion” (Wells, CJ, 8 June 1989) were also introduced.

Fowler also sought to advance actors’ training by explaining the objectives of training exercises and offered bits of advice to help them clarify and register their work. He reminded actors of “the necessity of performing set concrete exercises and simply performing the exercises without attempting in any way to be expressive and [of] allowing the training to be effectively simple” in order to focus on form (Wells, CJ, 5 June 1989). Actors were asked to spend time viewing photographs of sculpture to find new hand positions to add to their training (Randoja, CJ, 16 June 1989). Fowler also emphasized the importance of consciously registering discoveries, of “fixing and retaining discoveries made in training, particularly voices. [. . .] If they are not fixed they disappear or become vague” (Wells, CJ, 6 June 1989). Actors were encouraged to experiment with set exercises by working with variations in rhythm and pace and by adding props, costumes, and musical instruments. Randoja recalls her realization about training that it was “not the getting of the actual exercise that counts; it’s how you get there, what your body must go through to achieve certain skills” (Randoja, CJ, 13 June 1989). Actors were also encouraged to “compose the mistakes” (Fowler qtd. in Randoja, CJ, 16 June 1989).
Again, through “translation” and guidance and by providing clear parameters for progression, Fowler provided actors with a buffering zone in which to absorb the essential aspects of Odin training practice more quickly and accurately. His own experience accessing Odin training, in which he worked both on his own and with the help of company members, had provided him with a clear understanding of the patience and perseverance needed to access Odin techniques and processes.

Although Kitt was not performing in *Dog Day*, he participated fully in all training sessions. His training was “sponsored” by Fowler, who assumed responsibility for introducing him to the basic principles, techniques, and exercises that the others had already learned. The concept of sponsoring used by Primus was similar to the concept of adoption used by members of the Odin Theatre in the mid-to-late seventies and recalled the pedagogical duties taken on by young Odin company members after their immigration to Denmark. Unlike the supervisor in an Odin “adoption,” however, the sponsor was not solely responsible for the company member’s training, and this responsibility did not extend beyond training. Kitt worked with Wells on acrobatic exercises and with Lawson on vocal training. Primus members were thus involved with pedagogical practice at an early stage in the company’s existence, as were Odin actors before them.

Early in this training and rehearsal period Fowler took time to discuss the training process with Kitt. He wanted the young actor to understand that, because of the organic progression of the processes and the sheer time commitment necessary for mastery, it was impossible for him to breach the gap in experience between him and the NTS graduates. He asked Kitt to work on something that the rest of the company could not do, something that he would eventually teach them. Kitt immediately made the decision to work with stilts: “After
seeing films at the Odin, I decided there were two things that I wanted to learn to do, Balinese dancing and stilt-work” (Kitt, Interview, 21 May 1998). In the “just do it” spirit that pervaded training at the Odin, he built a pair of stilts and began to experiment. In late June 1989, when he had reached a basic level of proficiency, the training was brought to the attention of other company members.

During the forty-five minutes following pure training, company members worked on their outdoor performance technique. All journal documentation indicates that these training sessions were structured as group improvisations and involved extensive use of musical instruments and vocal sound production. Every member experimented with drums and bells. Dixon experimented primarily with a concertina and a bugle and Lawson with a kazoo. In late June Fowler issued a series of directives for developing the group improvisations. Actors were asked to propose ideas for costumes and props and to identify patterns and formations that were emerging from the work. He asked all actors to find a relationship to Kitt’s stilt character, to make note of the relationships that were developing between each of the characters, and to start the improvisations with physical rather than dramatic situations. In early July he asked each actor to propose a song, a character name, ideas for large-scale props, and specific group formations that could emerge from improvisation (Lawson, CJ, 2 July 1989). Due to a series of unforeseeable incidents, only select elements of this initial exploration were realized in the company’s second performance piece.

The original version of *Dog Day* presented at NTS featured seven actors; the remake involved only five of those individuals. Dufault was involved in the early organization and arrangement of the *Dog Day* completion project, but shortly after the company’s incorporation and before Fowler’s return to Canada, she withdrew from the project.
Richardson’s interest in the project had never extended beyond NTS. In order to preserve the integrity of the original production, Fowler reviewed the performance logic that had emerged from the original performance text. He was then able to determine the problems that had arisen from the absence of two characters and to begin the process of “solving the dramaturgical questions that were raised” (Fowler, Interview, 30 Aug. 2000).

Fowler claimed that directing was an “intuitive process” for him (Fowler, Interview, 30 Aug. 2000). He said that he had no patterns or models for the work that he did with the actors but that the process of constructing a performance piece was essentially the same each time. This paradox can be explained in the following way. All pieces were guided through the same major phases of development as had occurred during the creation of performance work at the Odin Theatre. Due to the unpredictable nature of the creative process, however, nothing beyond initial ideas for themes or for source-work could be predetermined. The raw material from which the performance text was constructed was located in the physical, vocal, and musical scores created by the actors. This material was the language—the equivalent of words and phrases in a written text—that the performance text would be constructed of. Thus the performance material could not be structured in a linear, plot-and-character-derived logic because it was not derived of the language necessary to do so. Fowler’s role as director was to interpret (from his perspective), deconstruct, reconstruct, and orchestrate the vocal and physical performance material that the actors had created. The arrangement of these fragments of meaning was done as carefully as the selection of words is made in a poem.

Fowler decided not to try to rebuild the organically conceived performance logic of the original Dog Day by contrived means. After determining that most of the original material could be retained, he assigned new research that would be directed at defining a
“narrative dramaturgy.” The new research emerged from a task that company members had already attended to. Before meeting them in Winnipeg, Fowler wrote to the members, asking each of them to reflect on their experience with the original *Dog Day* and to generate ideas for possible themes, stories, or moments that were already contained within the performance text. This information provided the bases for discussion and debate during which it was decided that the remounted *Dog Day* would be structured around the ceremonial ritual of a wedding. Actors were then asked to do further research on weddings: customs, arrangements, apparel, objects, and songs (Dixon, PJ, undated, post-18 May and pre-31 May 1989).

Although the theme of weddings would become the narrative dramaturgy of *Dog Day*, this constituted only one level of comprehension. Dixon explained that a wedding “wasn’t really what the play was about. That was the skeleton. The narrative was quite simple but satisfying enough that someone would be able to hold on to it” (Dixon, Interview, 31 May 1998).

Using a wedding theme as a framework, Fowler adjusted and rearranged existing material. Most of the performance material used in the NTS version of the piece had emerged from individual exploration, and the scores had not been deconstructed in the course of assembling the performance logic. This meant that most of it could be retained. All of the scores emerging from improvisations with props and costumes and the scores that contained the dances were used in the new version of *Dog Day*. According to Dixon “the dances constituted the dream quality of the play, the meat of the matter” (Dixon, Interview, 31 May 1998). The Cassandra character, created by Dufault at NTS, was retained as an invisible reference point because she had shaped the context of some of the other actors’ key pieces. One of these points occurred in a piece created by Clarkin. At NTS, he entered the playing space calling out “Monica” and then spat into Dufault’s mouth (indicating the way in which
Apollo cursed Cassandra). In the revised version, after calling “Monica,” he spat on the stage. Richardson’s Vonnegut-inspired character, Dr Wilbur Daffodil-11 Swain, had been a somewhat isolated entity and reference to the character was easily eliminated from the new performance text.

With the new framework in mind, Fowler asked actors to select new music and text and to develop new performance material. Dixon’s journal indicates that Fowler asked actors to provide research pertaining to wedding and courtship rituals in various ethnic contexts, wedding etiquette, wedding superstitions, and symbolic objects related to weddings. He asked Dixon to generate text that would accompany the newly emerging performance material. The actor was to draw from the wedding research that he and other company members had compiled and to arrange the information in a linear way that told “a concrete story, [. . .] a conventional narrative that people could hang their hats on if they wanted to” (Dixon, Interview, 31 May 1998. Although he had not done so with either of the projects at NTS, Fowler was now constructing a “narrative dramaturgy” as another layer of the multiplex logic already existing.

Fowler’s request of Dixon marks a departure from Barba’s dramaturgical process. Although Barba often used the advice and commentary of Ferdinando Taviani as part of the dramaturgical process, Taviani’s role remained that of the “ideal spectator.” There is no evidence that he ever wrote texts that were used in performance. At first glance this appears to be a major departure from Odin dramaturgical practice. However, it can be speculated that Fowler was influenced by the role that musician and actor Jan Ferslev played in the

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18 Taviani and Barba reprised this working relationship, begun in 1972, on many projects. In later years Barba began to use other individuals, such as Thomas Bredsorff, in the capacity of dramaturg (Barba, Interview, 3 Apr. 2005). Bredsorff is credited as the dramaturg on Andersen’s Dream (program notes 2005).
development of *Talabot*. Ferslev was hired both as an actor and as the musical co-ordinator on the project. In essence he oversaw and arranged the musical elements of the dramaturgy while simultaneously creating performance scores for Barba to arrange and orchestrate. In this light, Dixon’s role becomes similar to that of Ferslev because he was being asked to construct textual elements of the narrative dramaturgy while simultaneously creating performances scores. While it did differ from the Odin Theatre’s dramaturgical process, explained in this way, the dual role becomes a less drastic departure from that practice.

Fowler made specific requests of the actors for the development of performance material: he asked them to select four or five more photographs of paintings and/or sculptures as a source for expanding character scores and vocabulary, to propose alternative arrangements for performance space, and to explore and select sounds for various moments in the piece (Dixon, PJ, 2 June–8 June 1989). Each actor also had to generate two tableau pieces that would include all five cast members. These tableaux were to illustrate actions taking place at a wedding and were to be drawn from the amassed research material and Dixon’s texts. Fowler decided that all characters, except for Lawson’s Pan, would take on the multiple roles necessary to present the proposed action (*Dog Day* video). Pan would take part in the tableau as himself, serving a function similar to that of Rasmussen’s trickster character in *Talabot* (*Talabot* video).

Randoja documented a hilarious improvisation of one of the tableau scenarios in which Kai (Wells) was hiding under Duras’s (Randoja’s) wedding dress while she was being married to J. R. Marceau (Dixon). The raunchy Pan (Lawson) was the minister, and “L” (Clarkin) threw nuts at her back during the ceremony (Randoja, CJ, 14 June 1989). Some of the details of this scenario were retained in the final performance text. Dixon indicated that
the scenes and tableaux created for the remounted *Dog Day* were sophisticated versions of the tableaux that had been constructed for the original piece. The scenes developed from the tableaux varied in length, intensity, and complexity. Some were very short and simple, such as a scene emerging from one of Clarkin’s tableaux in which “L” entered the playing space with eyes downcast and began to tread over broken glass while engaging in minute and complicated hand gestures. The other characters hovered at the periphery of the space, watching his actions (Dixon, PJ, 13 June 1989).

Lawson created a tableau requiring much more choreography and involving the other characters in a much more active way. The following description of the sequence illustrates the careful construction of even the more linear threads of the performance dramaturgy. After the audience was seated\textsuperscript{19} Dixon and Wells entered the playing space carrying a full-length mirror and placed it at the top of the stairs leading to the doorway. Wells remained at the top of the stairs and delivered text about the reflective power of the mirror. Dixon moved to the lowest step but did not step to the floor until Wells said “looked its worst.” When Lawson positioned himself across from Wells and Dixon, the latter moved in a coded sequence to the opposite end of the playing space and stood at Randoja’s left. Clarkin, as the minister, spoke text written by Dixon, after which Dixon flipped the canopy to cover Clarkin. At the same time Clarkin flipped a wedding dress over the canopy to Dixon. Clarkin and Dixon tossed the wedding dress back and forth across the space until Clarkin slammed a chair into the floor. The dress tossing stopped and Randoja rolled an onion across the floor. It was stopped by Lawson (Pan) chanting, “Thrice a bridesmaid, never a bride.” Dixon and Lawson flipped “the

\textsuperscript{19} In all Primus productions the seating of the spectators became part of the theatrical experience. Audience members were escorted into the playing space and seated in a particular arrangement by members of the company. In *Dog Day* spectators were seated by tuxedo-clad cast members just before “the wedding” took place. The ushering of spectators can be viewed as an extension and development of the Odin Theatre’s
dress as bride” over to Clarkin. Lawson took Dixon’s end of the dress, while Dixon put a
bracelet/garter on his boot and moved to the centre of the playing space to do a dance (Dixon,
PJ, 9 June 1989). The scene was eventually chosen as the opening of *Dog Day*.

One of Dixon’s tableaux was developed into a scene that was emblematic of the story
created as the “narrative dramaturgy” of the remounted *Dog Day*:

> I created a scene about the wedding night. Karin and I go to bed and there is a
> river running between us. I am aware of the other characters in the room and
> have decided that they have something to do with her. I try to have a
> conversation with Karin about who these people are and where they came
> from. She does not answer. The scene ends when I get up and ask them to
> leave. Although they are hesitant, they all leave (Dixon, Interview, 31 May
> 1998).

As new research was explored and material was created, a different performance
logic began to emerge from the collected material. Fowler began to arrange the scenes,
original and new, to most effectively present this logic. The revised logic was identified in
the *Dog Day* program notes:

> A wedding takes place between two people who don't know each other at all.
> The guests in attendance and the bride and groom remember other such
> changing. But memory does not work simply. It plays tricks, interferes, [. . .]
> it doesn’t tell the story one would expect. These are the dog days of August.
> At the top of a flight of stairs the doorway to the world is blocked by a mirror
> in which every good and pretty thing fades way to almost nothing, and every
> good for nothing thing stands out and looks its worst. At the bottom of the
> flight of stairs a wedding takes place between two people who don't know
> each other at all. (*Dog Day* program notes 1989)

This was substantially different from the performance logic of the original *Dog Day*,
described in a press release written before the remounting process:

> The time is “the dog days of August,” a time rife with random acts and
> the heat of chaos. There is a sense of civilization on its last legs and
> the characters in *Dog Day* are its final evidence. They are volatile and
> vulnerable and obsessed with existence. They meet and exchange
> histories, desires, riddles, songs, dances, and silences. They are going

convention of treating the entrance to the performance space as a part of the performance experience.
up against the chaos. If this is the last dance of these people can they reveal what makes them extra-ordinary before they vanish? (Dog Day press release 1989)

Before Dog Day opened at the Winnipeg Fringe Festival several events were arranged to generate an interest in the company’s work and to introduce Primus and its work to the Winnipeg theatre community. Among these events were preview performances for three very different groups of spectators: staff from Winnipeg’s Alcoholics Anonymous for Youth, a group of twelve-to-seventeen-year-olds and their parents, and a group of creative and administrative personnel from Prairie Theatre Exchange. The purpose for arranging such a diverse spectatorship was to gauge potential public response to the work. As described in the company journal and in written commentary from the audience, the response was generally very positive, and one of most common reactions to the performance was surprise (Kitt, CJ, 10–12 July 1989).

The company also conducted the first of what would become an extensive series of local, national, and international workshops. The workshop, “In Search of the Non-Daily”, ran for two days, June 17–19, at PTE and combined films and live performance demonstrations with a practical introduction to basic training principles used by Primus and the Odin Theatre. Kitt recalls that reaction to the workshop ranged from expressions of sheer fascination to descriptions of the material as odd and weird (Kitt, Interview, 21 May 1998). One of the participants most deeply affected by the experience was Tannis Kowalchuk. A year later she would approach Fowler and company members to ask permission to train with them. Kowalchuk recalled Fowler’s “do as I do” command and aspects of the workshop that immediately piqued her interest:

It was impossible to do it like him [Fowler], but nonetheless, I was really invigorated by the physical demands, the way that most people are enlivened
when they play sports or do yoga or perform. You suddenly “wake up” on many different levels. But something grabbed me, even more than the sweat and pain and pleasure of the release, and it was something subtle. There seemed to be a huge belief and a work ethic at the base of all of this behaviour. I had sensed it in Richard Clarkin and now had encountered “it”. (Kowalchuk, Email Interview, 15 Nov. 2000)

On July 15 (1989) *Dog Day* premiered at the Winnipeg Fringe Festival with a cast of five (Clarkin, Dixon, Lawson, Randoja, and Wells). Among those in attendance were CBC critic Robert Enright and the artistic director of Prairie Theatre Exchange, Kim McCaw, who were both highly impressed by the work. By the end of the festival, Enright had declared *Dog Day* “the sleeper hit of the Fringe” (24 Hours CBC Television, 25 July 1989). Company members sensed that many audience members were entirely unprepared for what they experienced, and Clarkin stated that not everyone reacted positively (Clarkin, Interview, 26 Jan. 2001). Nevertheless, most spectators were thoroughly engaged by the work, and positive critical response and solid audience attendance continued throughout the Fringe run. Jacqui Good of CBC Radio claimed that *Dog Day* was a performance to be understood emotionally, rather than intellectually, and one that continued to resonate long after it had ended (CBC Information Radio, 19 July 1989). Karen Crossley of the Winnipeg Sun described the performance as a “fascinating, beautifully acted piece to be felt rather than understood.” She also suggested that spectators would feel the full impact of the performance after they left the theatre (Winnipeg Sun, 20 July 1989). Enright called *Dog Day* “one of the most radical pieces here at the Fringe Festival. [. . .] It’s incredibly intense and incredibly well disciplined, [. . .] a walk on the real wild side (24 Hours, CBC Television, 19 July 1989).

Interviewed several years later about his work with Primus, Fowler stated that “entertainment is only one part of a show. The rest is what’s going to resonate afterwards, how the audience is going to talk about it, think about it, dream about it” (qtd. in Buchholz
10. Initial critical and spectator response indicated that with *Dog Day* Primus had begun to create performance experiences that lingered in the spectators’ thoughts and feelings. For some, such as future Primus member Kowalchuk, the *Dog Day* experience made an indelible impression:

I had never seen work like that before. I was shocked and pissed off that nobody in Winnipeg (the people who were my teachers and directors) was attempting to do work like that. […] How was I supposed to continue on as an artist having witnessed such extraordinary theatre […] and knowing what heights could be reached? I couldn’t. I was so angry. Why didn’t any one else train? (Kowalchuk, Email Interview, 15 Nov. 2000)

**Touring *Dog Day***

At the same time that Primus members were involved in administrative and production details concerning their Fringe debut, they were also arranging to tour *Dog Day* in western Canada. Although Fowler made initial contacts with sponsoring organizations and venues, company members carried out subsequent communication with these organizations. Fowler did not travel with the company because he was on tour with *Talabot*.

After performing in a three-night run at the Best of the Fringe at the Gas Station Theatre in Winnipeg, the company packed up a van donated by Manitoba Theatre for Young People (MTYP) and headed to Calgary to perform *Dog Day* at One Yellow Rabbit’s Secret Theatre (2–5 Aug.). Company members claimed that the theatre space provided the

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20 Each year, between 1988 and 1998, a small collection of plays was selected for a limited extended run at the Gas Station Theatre. Plays were selected for a number of reasons, and the criteria for this selection changed over time. Given the fact that the Fringe Festival was only in its second year of operation, it can be speculated that media attention and critical response would have been factors in the choices. Later practice indicates box office sales as a prime factor in the selection of plays that were held over.

21 MTYP was founded as Actors’ Showcase in 1965 and reconstituted in 1982 as a professional theatre company serving the mandate of producing children’s theatre under new Artistic Director Leslee Silverman. The name was subsequently changed to Manitoba Theatre for Young People (MTYP). In 1999, still helmed by
perfect atmosphere for the performance. Unfortunately, Calgary was introduced to Primus Theatre’s work in a way that misrepresented both the nature of the performance and its construction. In a prelude piece for the *Calgary Herald*, Kate Zimmerman connected Primus with the Odin Theatre, implied that *Dog Day* had been constructed using a collective creation process, and erroneously claimed that it was “based on the true, eventful story of one [company] member’s grandparents’ wedding-day” (28 July 1989). Wells recalls that the marquee outside the theatre pronounced the piece “freaky and physical” (Wells, Interview, 6 May 1998). One can only imagine what potential spectators were thinking as they attempted to align Zimmerman’s comments with the promise of the marquee. Her review of *Dog Day* several days later provides a more accurate portrait of the piece. In it she states that the performance’s “blend of physicality, music and artifice is intriguing. [. . . ] [T]he *Dog Day* experience has an alluring, hallucinogenic quality” (*Calgary Herald*, 2 Aug. 1989).

The company returned to Winnipeg to perform the piece in a self-produced run at PTE (10–12 Aug.) to determine the extent of the audience base they could rally beyond the Fringe Festival. The effort proved to be successful and encouraging. Once again critical and audience response was positive and supportive. Randal McIlroy claimed that “calling *Dog Day* startlingly original is an understatement. [. . . ] *Dog Day* is at once unabashedly intellectual and vehemently physical, and each quality balances the other” (*Winnipeg Free Press*, 11 Aug. 1989). McIlroy acknowledged *Dog Day*’s non-linear, fractioned images but noted that the “the sheer immediacy in performance prevents the play from becoming too abstract.” The review is the first to present *Dog Day* in terms that surpass psychological and visceral reactions. McIlroy not only registers his responses but also recognizes the artistry of the work.

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Silverman, MTYP moved to a newly built facility at The Forks in Winnipeg.
In mid-August 1989 the company headed for the Caravan Farm Theatre in Armstrong and Kitsilano House in Vancouver. Nick Hutchinson was not only the director of the English acting program at NTS until 1990, but also the artistic director of the Caravan Farm Theatre until 1993. He was therefore able to help launch the careers of NTS graduates who had chosen to create, rather than consume, theatre as a result of one of his programming choices. Primus members performed *Dog Day* on an outdoor stage for Caravan Farm employees:

> It was a unique experience to present outdoors. The text and sounds of the performance provoked response from various farm animals, notably dogs and peacocks. The combination of wide open space and the intimacy of a full-house audience sitting very close to the performance created an atmosphere that was unlike anything else this writer has experienced in the theatre. (Clarkin, *CC Explorations Grant Final Report*, 24 Aug. 1989)

Company members were also involved in the Summer Children’s Theatre Workshop (17–26 Aug.), providing warm-ups and assisting instructors with the development of student scenes for presentation.

The company then went to Vancouver, where their experience with touring was about to take a different turn. *Dog Day* was booked for two weeks (29 Aug.–9 Sept.) at Kitsilano House Hall, which was simply a performance venue and not associated with a sponsoring company. Company members were therefore responsible for their own publicity. This amounted to problematic and ineffective long-distance communication with the Vancouver media. As a result attendance was very poor during the first week of the run. Through word of mouth, however, and the boost of a feature article in *The Georgia Strait*, attendance improved considerably in the second week.

It is clear from Stephen Hunt’s article and Irene D’Souza’s review that Vancouver critics were attempting to establish meaning and define genre rather than responding to an experience. After a well intended, but entirely botched, attempt to explain Primus as a Third
Theatre form, Hunt tried to distinguish the theatrical style from realism through a list of character details and actions. The descriptions are amusing, at best, but do little to support his claims. Lawson (as Pan) is described as “a tongue-wagging Mick Jagger of a gargoyle.” Hunt concludes his assessment by stating, “It’s a dark, erotic, silly, noisy theatre, [. . .] a mad kind of fusion” (The Georgia Strait, 1–8 Sept. 1989). D’Souza seemed unable to decide what to tell her readers: “I think this work’s purpose was to dramatize and emphasize the illogical and purposelessness nature of marriage, and then again I think not.” She likened the performance to Theatre of the Absurd, Dada, and even agitprop and concluded that “*Dog Day* is not theatre of identification but theatre of alienation” that would appeal to spectators “who prefer their senses and sensibilities to be assaulted rather than assuaged” (Circuit, 31 Aug. 1989).

What is striking about these and other reviews is the great conviction and lack of supporting detail used by most reviewers in their commentary. Jan Anderes and Daniel Koulack state that “*Dog Day* came off as a formal assault on the senses with some fine moments of acting, powerful imagery and intricate story lines. This was high-risk theatre which paid off in parts, but as a whole tended to alienate rather than communicate” (Theatrum 43). In another *Theatrum* review, referring to the Calgary production, the writer takes principles underlying the work out of context and misinterprets the “story.” Fowler is misinterpreted as working with the notion that actors “should always be on the edge of balance in order to create dynamic tension” and the performance is identified as being “loosely based on the Hans Christian Andersen Fable ‘The Snow Queen’”(Gottsellig 46). James Gottsellig does acknowledge, however, the “surreal, sometimes abstruse” (46) quality of the performance created through voice and movement, and he acknowledges the layering
of soundscapes and physical scores. A survey of reviews and critiques from Winnipeg to Vancouver indicates that *Dog Day* was, as its creators intended, many things to many people and that the performance encouraged personal readings of both content and form.

**Beyond *Dog Day*: The Future of Primus Theatre**

When the Vancouver run ended, the company returned briefly to Winnipeg before setting out to visit their families across the country. Members regrouped in Winnipeg on 3 October to discuss the company’s future and Fowler’s proposal of a residency at the Odin Theatre. A unanimous decision was made to continue training and creating theatre together in the manner they had begun to explore with Fowler. Although they were hopeful, the situation was far from ideal.

Fowler returned to Denmark immediately after the Winnipeg Fringe Festival to begin an extensive touring schedule with *Talabot*. He realized that it would be impossible for him to return to Canada for quite some time and suggested that the company consider plans to travel to Denmark. He had been kept abreast of the difficulties the group had experienced after his departure and wanted to provide support and respite.

In late October 1989 the company moved into an office space at the newly relocated PTE in Portage Place. In a generous gesture initiated by PTE, under the artistic directorship of Kim McCaw, the fledgling company was supplied with office and training space and

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22 Again there is a discrepancy of ‘fact’. Some company members were of the impression that the decision to be made at the October 3 meeting was whether or not the company would take up Fowler’s offer to train with him at the Odin. Others believed that the decision was twofold and in part a decision on whether the group would continue to train together or not. My speculation is that this mix of opinion is part of the issue. Some of the actors were very discouraged after the Vancouver leg of the tour. I suspect that those most discouraged by this did in fact question the merits of continuing on. Thus, the meeting and its purpose would have been coloured by each actor’s point of view, which was not necessarily shared with others at that time.
access to office equipment in exchange for odd jobs. Primus Theatre now had a home base company from which to operate. It is not difficult to speculate what might have happened to the company without this arrangement.

One of the company’s main challenges lay in establishing and maintaining a daily training schedule. Members began regular training in mid-October and spent forty-five minutes each day on pure training and another forty-five minutes on the development of street-performance material. In these two months preceding their departure for Denmark, the company’s training consisted of several key components. Individual and pair exercises, such as “Plastiques,” the foot-to-chest touch exercise, various acrobatic pair exercises, and other acrobatic actions, were retained. Musical instruments and props were used primarily as stimuli for solo exploration. At times, however, the training became highly interactive. Randoja documented an example of this that occurred midway through the two-month period:

At one point Richard [Clarkin] ran beside Don /on stilts/ clanging his clangers. Don looked like some very primitive animal, running panicked while Richard seemed to be protecting the very thing he was frightening. Ker ran up to Richard and muttered in his ear and Richard listening avidly. I was sure it was a real conversation until I began to hear strange gibberish, what sounded like Japanese, and the word “Mississippi” all mixed up. When Richard has the shaker in his mouth and he lets loose his yodel, there is no way to tell where it is coming from. Quite eerie especially when Ker is mouthing at the same time. (CJ, 23 Oct. 1989)

Along with regular bursts of interactive activity and pure training, the company was experimenting regularly with instrumental and vocal production of sound in both interactive and solo explorations of material.

The company also worked on the development of their street-performance characters. Journal entries, from the company’s residency at the Odin, indicate that the actors presented
Fowler with character scores based on the guidelines he issued during the remounting of *Dog Day*. Although these guidelines were not specifically referred to in the autumn journal entries, recorded observations indicate that the directives were being attended to. Company members were creating parade formations, finding interactive business between characters, working with specific props and costume pieces, and producing music and sound. Dixon documented explorations with props and costumes in sketches of Wells using sticks as extensions to his arm and Randoja draped from head to toe in fabric. He commented, “She looked ghostly; he looked grotesque” (CJ, 11 Oct. 1989). A series of details from one of the character training sessions further illustrates these explorations:

Sean and Stephen drumming in tandem. Sean laying a rapid steady under-beat, Stephen doing kind of a pulse over it, very strong. Richard drumming sticks on floor. [. . .] Stephen screams into kazoo; followed by a light sort of “its okay, everything’s okay” little lalala dancing through the violets song; followed by scream into kazoo. [. . .] Stephen, Karin and Don in parade. Don plays a little song on the trumpet. [. . .] Everyone is advancing into a line and then all turning right or left to form file. [. . .] Karin blew into a bugle while Sean held it. He pulled it away at the last minute. Surprise! (Wells, CJ, 16 Oct. 1989)

The actors were making an effort to maintain a training practice and to develop raw performance material. Without consistent feedback, however, at such an early stage in their training and development, it was difficult for the young actors to sustain their momentum.

The company was also working without the benefit of funding. Company members found themselves struggling to arrange group and personal training schedules around extensive fundraising activities and jobs that would pay for their living expenses. The decision to continue company activity placed members in the position of needing to maintain and raise their profile in the theatre community in order to vie for funding opportunities and to build an audience base. Primus members conducted workshops for young adults at Le
Cercle Molière and stilt-work demonstrations and training sessions at MTYP and PTE. During this time Roland Mahe of Le Cercle Molière approached Primus Theatre with an interest in producing a French version of *Dog Day*. The company accepted Mahe’s proposal, and plans were made to start working on a French translation during winter 1989 to 1990.

**Training at the Odin Theatre**

With the financial support of the Manitoba Ministry of Culture, Heritage and Recreation, the Manitoba Arts Council, the Canada Council, as well as private donations and the proceeds from a self-produced cabaret night, Primus company members were able to spend ten weeks (22 Nov. 1989–31 Jan. 1990) in residence at the Odin Theatre. The timing was extremely advantageous for Primus members because their stay corresponded with the theatre’s 25th anniversary celebration: a week of live and filmed performances and training demonstrations by Odin actors and members of invited guest companies. Primus members had direct access to the performance techniques and training methods that served as a model for their work with Fowler. They were in contact with theatrical organizations working in ways similar to those of the Odin. The theatre’s film and video library was also made available to them. For the first time since they began their training, the young company was presented with live evidence of the model for creating theatre that they had chosen to adopt. For Wells the most important aspect of the Odin residency was the sense of

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23 Cercle Molière, the oldest permanent theatre company in Canada, has been based in St. Boniface (the French quarter of Winnipeg) since 1925.

24 At the time of the Odin Theatre residency Primus members included Richard Clarkin, Sean Dixon, Donald Kitt, Stephen Lawson, Karin Randoja, and Kerr Wells.

25 This excludes Donald Kitt, who had gone to the Odin on his own before his involvement in Primus.
perspective that it afforded him:

In Denmark I realized that we were among potential peers, people with whom I wouldn't have to explain myself or what I was doing. That was the most important thing about being there—more important than any of the work we did, because it gave me a sense of a context. Even if I wasn’t living in that context, the knowledge that other people were doing the same kind of work, made me less crazy. (Wells, Interview, 6 May 1998)

During their residency Primus members were involved in an intense schedule of activity: advancing their training practice with Fowler’s guidance and through work demonstrations and exchanges with European theatre companies and solo performers, developing technique and material for their new outdoor performance, planning and implementing a three-day workshop for mentally and physically challenged adults, and preparing and rehearsing *Jour de Canicule*. They also performed a simplified version of *Dog Day* for members of the Odin Theatre community.

After Odin Week the company returned to a regular schedule of training and developing performance material. Well aware of the impact of his absence on company morale and training practice, Fowler initiated a group discussion to focus on the advantages of the situation. He shared his observation that the company had “developed a greater conviction in the value of training as a result of his absence” (Dixon, CJ, 4 Dec. 1989) and that group training had evolved as a result of discoveries made in his absence.

He remarked on the company’s “tendency to perform certain elements of training, particularly music, as a group” (Dixon, CJ, 5 Dec. 1989). Fowler embraced this departure

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26 The list of companies that Primus interacted with through exchanges and demonstrations is as follows: Bla Hest, Bjorneteatre, Cantabile 2 (Vordingborg), Kimbri Theatre (Arhus, Denmark), Odin Teatret - individual artists, Teatro Rio Rose (Iben Nagel Rasmussen’s former students), Theatre Atlantis (Szeged, Hungary), Theatre Marquez (Arhus, Denmark), Theatre Tango, Tidens Teatret (Experimental Theatre School, Arhus), and Yorick (former Odin actor Tage Larsen and his wife, Anna Lica) (CJ, 23 Nov. 1989 – 16 Jan. 1990).

27 The version of *Dog Day* that Primus presented at the Odin was sans costumes, props, sets, and
from Odin practice and began to direct the emerging form. He established a new condition for training—“there must always be a soundscape in training (including deliberate silence)” (Dixon, CJ, 9 Dec. 1989)—and asked that the company use the production of music to create a certain dynamic in the space (Dixon, CJ, 5 Dec. 1989). He also noted a collective tendency toward interaction in pure training and made two suggestions for advancing the interactions: one actor could join another, in close proximity or at a distance, to work together on the same action and/or one actor could use another as a point of stimulus by reacting to the other person in the moment, with or without their knowledge, and then move on to something else (Dixon, CJ, 9 Dec. 1989).

Fowler also made a point of carefully observing each actor’s individual training efforts to provide specific personal feedback. He introduced exercises to build the actors’ self-awareness and to encourage interactive training. These exercises included a pair rope exercise in which the rope needed to be kept taut (Dixon, CJ, 9 Dec. 1989), a pair belt resistance exercise in which one partner held the other back with a belt (Clarkin, CJ, 20 Dec. 1989), and slow-motion work which demanded “an awareness of what you are doing with your direction of energy at all times” (Clarkin, CJ, 21 Dec. 1989).

Work exchanges with other companies provided Primus Theatre members with a new and varied vocabulary of songs, dances, music, and scenography, as well as with different models for creating and developing theatre. This was particularly important to Primus members who had begun their training and performing without the benefit of interaction with other like-minded companies or individuals. In addition to providing a context for their work, members were provided with opportunities to access techniques and ideas that would inform musical instruments.

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28 Company members would use the work exchange model for the sharing of training technique many
and influence the advancement of their practice. The work exchange with Theatre Marquez
served as a model for the use of soundscapes and action-reaction sequences between the
actors (Randoja, CJ, 12 Dec. 1989). Fowler used the session as a springboard for work on
group response to sounds and actions in the surrounding space while maintaining an
independent connection to a specific task (Clarkin, CJ, 22 Dec. 1989). The Kimbri Theatre
exchange reinforced the empowerment of “steady progression through tasks, […] past

With Fowler’s guidance, company members continued to develop performance
material for a new outdoor performance piece. This started with the presentation of all
prepared character scores for commentary and discussion: Kitt presented a stilt character,
Dixon presented a character who used a bugle as an extension of his personality, Clarkin
presented “Roughstring,” a “ghost from the wild west” (Dixon, CJ, 6 Dec. 1989), and
Lawson presented a singing, kazoo-playing “Angel.” Dixon’s commentary on Wells’s work
provides an example of the reactions that were shared with each performer during discussion:
“Ker’s character [was] presented for the first time with horsehair flowing out of his sticks
and an invisible whistle inside his mouth, conjuring images of horses, samurai, Toulouse
Lautrec’s Night at the Circus, priests, witch-doctors, androgens, etc.” (CJ, 8 Dec. 1989).
Randoja’s presentation elicited not only reactions to character detail but questions about the
form as well. The performance score conjured images of professional mourners, women who
turn on the lights in the morning and turn them off at night, party-givers, party-breakers,
nurses in night-wards, etc. There was a story about how in India castrated men dressed up as
women serve as professional mourners. It was discussed that Karin would not essentially be
able to present herself as an Indian character, since she is clearly not Indian. Richard thought

years later in the organization of the “Survivors of the Ice Age” festival/symposium (1996).
that suggestions should be made about who she really is, whether the character really is a maid or a nun or a lunatic.” (Dixon, CJ, 9 Dec. 1989)

In addition to developing individual characters, company members explored the interaction between characters and projected reasons for such an assembly of characters:

a) fantasies acted out for clients at a brothel,
b) time travellers meeting in the desert,
c) appearing in limbo, re-living who we are for all eternity,
d) I [Karin] am reliving a past life and accidentally conjured up these characters (without my knowing it),
e) decadent cabaret or freakish circus,
f) Hollywood back-lot,
g) lunatics on a night-ward of a psychiatric hospital, [and]
h) circus of the apocalypse. (Randoja, CJ, 11 Dec. 1989)

During the weeks that Fowler was scheduled to tour, he provided the actors with a series of prioritized tasks for the development of each of their characters (Wells, CJ, 8 Jan. 1990). At one of these times he asked each actor to create a parade piece that would include all characters. Kitt’s arrangement exemplifies results of this assignment:

For Don’s parade we learned a song by some Scandinavian tribe, in 6/4 time (I think!) featuring drums (Ker and Stephen), bells (Richard) and vocals (Karin, Don and I/Sean/). The parade needed a very large space to rehearse in since its presentation was very “outdoorsy;” it featured two long ribbons unrolled one from each end of Don’s stick which he was holding on to in front of him such that it was parallel to the ground. We pulled the ribbons out and walked in a wide circle around Don in the centre and the rest of the group. Then we formed a “U” with Don, Stephen, Ker and Richard at one end and Karin and I/Sean/ holding the ribbons at the points and together we marched through the room singing the song. When we got to one end, Karin and I/Sean/ walked back through the line until we had our ribbons pulled taut behind them, Don turned and we began the march again. Then we/Karin and Sean/ wrapped the ribbons around them/Don, Stephen, Ker and Richard/, closing them in, until at a signal from Stephen’s kazoo, Karin and I/Sean/ let go. Don pulled up his stick and we all ran while Don twirled his sticks until the fluttering ribbons coiled around him completely and he stopped. (Dixon, CJ, 18 Jan. 1990)

Although Fowler knew that it was far too early in the process to begin orchestrating performance material, the sporadic nature of his relationship with the company spurred a
decision to construct a preliminary montage at the end of the residency. He arranged sequences from each actor’s score, the group parades, and segments of interactive group work, in linear and simultaneously occurring groupings. Most of this construction was abandoned in the next phase of development due to changes in company personnel.

Primus members worked on two other projects during their time at the Odin Theatre. In the spirit of the work that Fowler had generated with Poul-Erik Papso’s students, he arranged a three-day workshop session (6–8 Dec.), with a similar group of students to give members the opportunity to work with mentally challenged adults. Company members planned the structure of the intensive workshop and implemented the plan under Fowler’s watchful eye.

The company also spent time working on the spoken text and rehearsing for the French version of Dog Day, which had been translated by Everett Dixon and revised by Claude Emond. Jour de Canicule was scheduled to open at Le Cercle Molière in March 1990. As Dog Day/Jour de Canicule was intended to be the first piece in a repertoire series that would be toured, Fowler used the rehearsal opportunity to refine and adjust sections of the piece (Wells, CJ, 30 Dec. 1989).

At the end of the Odin residency, Dixon announced his decision to leave the company to pursue independent projects.29 In late fall, he had begun to feel the “yearning for a more private life” (Dixon, Email Interview, 6 Jan. 2001) and a distinct pull toward playwriting. He

29 Dixon went on to become the Playwright in Residence at the Blyth Theatre Festival in Ontario and has had his plays produced by various theatre companies in Canada including: Falling Back Home at the Factory Theatre (Toronto 1990), The End of the World Romance at Blyth Festival (Blyth 1991), The Painting at the Factory Theatre (Toronto 1995), The District of Centuries at the Factory Theatre (Toronto 1998), Sam’s Last Dance at the Theatre Centre (Toronto 1997), The Epic Period at the Factory (Toronto 2001), and Billy Nothing with Theatre Skam (Toronto 2003). His plays have been nominated for Dora Mavor Moore and Floyd S. Chalmers awards. He published his first novel Girls who Saw Everything in 2007.
had also begun to etch out dialogue for a second play. Doubts about continuing with the company began when he realized that he drew more satisfaction from creating *Dog Day* than from performing it: “I always expected or hoped to find some kind of psychological pathway through it [the material being worked on] and that kind of performance wasn’t about that kind of journey” (Dixon, Interview, 31 May 1998). This expectation of process was well within his grasp as a playwright. Dixon’s doubts were exacerbated by dissatisfaction with the development of his street-performance material:

I saw it as a kind of Ted Hughes’s CROW, but it inadvertently resembled more of a kind of spy-vs.-spy character, and that’s the direction that Richard encouraged me to go. I was always more of a comic than I wanted to be. In retrospect I think it would’ve been great, but I was too serious about my intentions and became disgruntled. I knew I would be stuck with material that I felt ambivalent about inside. (Dixon, Email Interview, 6 Jan. 2001)

After months of indecision and careful weighing of his options, Dixon concluded that “visceral satisfaction” in the work was not enough: “I needed to be in charge of my creative impulses” (Dixon, Email Interview, 6 Jan. 2001). He decided to leave the company after the run of *Jour de Canicule*.

**Focusing Without Fowler**

The experience of the Odin Theatre residency had been extremely important and timely for company members, but at the end of the ten weeks they were again faced with the reality of training and creating work without Fowler. In February (1990), Primus Theatre members returned to Canada to prepare for the March 14–17 premiere of *Jour de Canicule* at

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30 Dixon’s first play *Falling Back Home* premiered at the Factory Theatre (Toronto) in 1990.
Le Cercle Molière. Although reviews of *Jour de Canicule* do not exist, records in the company archive indicate that the performances were well attended. All four nights were sold out, and spectators praised the performance as a stimulating and original theatre piece. This response provided great promise for touring to Quebec.

It can be speculated that the company was training in February as they prepared for the premiere of *Jour de Canicule* and during preparation for La Quinzaine Internationale du Theatre in May. While interviews with company members confirm this fact, details and scheduling of this activity cannot be confirmed because records of it do not exist. Journal entries stop at January 22, 1990 and resume September 11, 1990. Archival material indicates that company members also continued efforts to raise their profile in the local theatre community during this time. In late March the company presented a public discussion/demonstration of the music and street-theatre work that they developed at the Odin Theatre at PTE.

As a result of recommendations from Le Cercle Molière and from Anne Green at the Canada Council, Primus was invited to perform *Dog Day*/ *Jour de Canicule* at the prestigious La Quinzaine Internationale du Theatre in Quebec City in late May. Although his touring schedule made it impossible for him to attend rehearsals, Fowler joined company members in Quebec City for the performance. The reactions of the French-Canadian reviewers were very positive, and all four performances were sold out. Jean Beaunoyer of *La Press* announced,

[v]oilà une création qui ne supporte pas l'indifférence. [. . .] Cette pièce est un rite, une danse et c'est de la musique sans note et sans instrument. Le comédiens sont exceptionnels et inventent constamment un monde nouveau, beaucoup plus fluide que le notre, beaucoup plus aérien alors que le corps annonce la parole. (23 May 1990)

[n]ow here is a performance about which it is impossible to be indifferent. [. . .] This performance is a rite, a dance, music without notes and without
instruments. The actors are exceptional and are constantly inventing a new world, a world much more fluid than ours, much more aerial, a world where the body announces the word.]

After a brief and knowledgeable commentary on Barba’s work as a segue, Jean St. Hilare of *Le Soleil* described *Jour de Canicule* as “propos éclate, hermetique même, qui exige une concentration de tous les instants du public” (23 May 1990) [A brilliant, even hermetic proposal which demands a constant concentration from the audience.] Both St. Hilare and Beaunoyer described what actually existed in the piece, without providing extensive narrative. The two reviewers are even more precise about the spectator’s role in the creation of meaning than McIlroy, who provided the most astute review of *Dog Day* in English.

Although company members were not aware of it at the time, these performances of *Dog Day/Jour de Canicule* were to be the last. Fowler had intended the production to continue on into another reincarnation, with Kitt replacing Dixon. Clarkin’s departure in early winter 1990, however, made this impossible. *Dog Day* was retired after La Quinzaine International du Theatre, two and a half years after its birth in Montreal.

After the festival the company (minus Dixon) travelled to North Hatley, Quebec, at the invitation of Greg Tuck of the Piggery Theatre and to Bishop’s University in Lennoxville, where they conducted a series of workshops. Four days at Bishop’s were also spent training, developing street-performance techniques and materials, and making plans for the future. At this time plans were made for Fowler to return to Canada from January to March 1991 to work with the company on the structuration of the outdoor performance that was in the preparatory stage.

At La Quinzaine International du Theatre, Dixon accepted an invitation from Fowler
to work as a dramaturg and writer on the new project (Dixon, Interview, 31 May 1998). At this time the company also accepted Tannis Kowalchuk into the company. The Winnipeg actor and graduate of the University of Winnipeg Theatre Program had been a participant in the workshop preceding the Fringe Festival premiere of *Dog Day*. During the year after her first encounter with Primus’s work, she found herself constantly returning to the idea of the theatre and theatre training that she had discovered through the company: “For the first time in my life I found myself in a situation where I could not find satisfaction with my life and the work I was trying to do. I realized what I had to do, and finally when I sensed the timing was perfect, I acted” (Kowalchuk, Email Interview, 15 Nov. 2000). She wrote to Primus members asking for permission to join the company and her timely proposal was accepted for the fall of 1990. With no operating budget in place to enable the actors to continue their full-time training schedule, July and August 1990 became a hiatus period.

**Conclusion**

In many ways the two-phase construction of *Dog Day*—started in the conservatory setting of NTS and continued with full financial support—created a context similar to that of the closed environment in which Odin Theatre training and performance construction took place. Company members were able to devote themselves to the full-time pursuit of training and developing performance material.

Although the way in which Fowler worked with Primus members was different from the way in which Barba worked with Odin members in the early years, it can be speculated that the former relationship was reflective of Barba’s interaction with Fowler. In both
situations, the director was in possession of information that could be shared or imparted. In the early years of the Odin Theatre, Barba had been learning and developing the concepts and processes along with his fledgling actors. In both situations, Fowler/Barba and Primus/Fowler, the recipient(s) of the information were highly aware of other theatrical options and had made definite choices to pursue a particular course of action.

In addition to transmitting knowledge to NTS students and Primus members, Fowler was also creating a kind of interface in order to allow actors to access the processes and concepts within the limited timeframes he had. In doing so he exhibited great awareness and respect for both the original process and for the young actors with whom he was working. In taking this great care in the transfer of this practice, Fowler also exhibited a clear understanding of the importance not only of transmitting this knowledge but also of the act of transmission itself. This respect and care for pedagogy would be inherited by company members and would become an important part of company culture. At a later date these individuals would treat the pedagogical practise with equal awareness and respect.

During the course of remounting *Dog Day* shifts and changes began to occur in the processes that had been adopted from the Odin Theatre. Although most of these changes were the result of necessity, a conscious change in direction was also occurring. For the most part, however, the work ethic, training practice, and dramaturgical processes that had been adopted from the Odin were essentially intact because of the conditions in which the two phases of *Dog Day* had been developed.
Chapter Four: *Alkoremni*

The Prelude to *Alkoremni*: September to December 1990

In September 1990, after a two-month hiatus, the company regrouped at PTE in Winnipeg to resume daily training and to continue to develop performance material for their new outdoor parade performance project that had been given the working title of *The Moving Wall*.\(^1\) Once again company members found themselves struggling to maintain their theatre practice in the absence of funding and without the benefit of Fowler’s guidance on a regular basis. An ideological commitment was made to regularly scheduled, daily training and to the development of performance material, but in actuality this was not always possible. Due to the absence of project funding, training had to be scheduled around paying jobs and thus could not be managed on a full-time basis. Scheduling became more complicated during times when some of the actors were committed to contract work with other companies.

Company members were also faced with the administrative responsibility of sustaining a small company. Part of this responsibility was the exhaustive effort of seeking funding that would allow company members to focus full-time on performance construction when Fowler returned to Canada in January 1991. Company members not only applied for existing arts funding grants but also solicited donations from private and corporate donors at every possible opportunity. As a result of their labours, grants were eventually secured from the Canada Council (Explorations Grant) and the Manitoba Arts Council (Independent Theatre Productions and Arts Ventures Grants), as well as from several private and corporate sources. The company journal contains a series of entries referencing the inordinate amounts

\(^1\) This was for the purpose of grant applications and other promotional activity.
of time taken up by the funding paper chase, time that took them away from their creative pursuits.

It was a difficult time for company members, and perhaps most difficult for Tannis Kowalchuk. Fowler had taken on the principal responsibility for training Kitt when he became a company member, but this was not logistically possible with Kowalchuk. Instead, she chose Lawson to be her sponsor. Wells worked with her on gymnastics exercises, and Randoja worked with her (and Kitt) on resonator exercises and other vocal techniques designed to explore and expand vocal range and presence (Kowalcuk, CJ, 11 Sept.–11 Oct. 1990). Kowalchuk received motivational feedback from Fowler through faxed letters. In one of those letters he reminded her of the reasons she had chosen to work with Primus:

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 gives 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 “acting,” being active, being one who acts, who executes actions. (Fowler, Letter, Fall 1990)

As in Kitt’s case, Kowalchuk’s training was not an attempt to bring her up to par with the physical and vocal skills of original members but to introduce her to the principles and techniques that were being used as training and dramaturgical tools. Once she was familiar with core exercises, she participated in the same training activities as the rest of the group, with the expectation that she would progress and develop at her own pace.

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I have defined “core exercises” as those introduced either at NTS or at one of the early sessions with Fowler and continually revisited throughout the company’s existence. These exercises include “Plastiques,” “the cat,” basic gymnastic exercises (such as somersaults, tumbling, handstands, and handsprings), and pair exercises that involved a belt, supported handstands and shoulder-stands, a foot-to-chest touch exercise, and a
Company journals indicate that the scheduling of activity was retained from earlier sessions. The day began at 7:00 a.m. with an hour of pure training. This was followed by an hour of street-performance work, which in the company journal was referred to as “character training.” During her first month with Primus, Kowalchuk watched her colleagues train, documented their work in the company journal, and then worked with Lawson from 9:00–10:00 a.m. each day. Her training began with the “Plastiques,” which were introduced by Lawson in an intense, extended session, as Fowler had introduced the exercise at NTS. In the wake of the physical shock she experienced, she wrote in the company journal, “I feel proud that I hadn’t cried or died” (CJ, 11 Sept. 1990). In the months that followed, Lawson introduced her to the “Plastiques” and “the cat,” pair exercises involving a belt, pair hand-stands and head-stands over a partner, and a foot-to-chest touch exercise. Lawson and Kowalchuk also began to develop original interactive training scores:

Stephen Lawson worked with me every morning. We would arrive at PTE very early, at 7:00 a.m., in fact. We had to start at that hour because the studio needed to be used by PTE at 10:00 a.m. I was not invited to train with the Primus actors right away. I would observe their physical and vocal training, and following their training time, I would work with Stephen from 9:00–10:00 a.m. He was a good teacher, even though he was, in fact, inexperienced himself. My first experience with Primus involved months of work without our leader—it was just me and the other actors (although Richard [Fowler] would fax me long letters from Denmark of work matters both practical and

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3. There is conflicting evidence concerning the exact time at which training began. Given what I know about the scheduling of rehearsals at PTE, I have chosen to use the information that supports this knowledge. All information pertaining to time, from September to December 1990, has been adjusted to serve this purpose.

4. During the making of Dog Day specific descriptors were necessary for distinguishing between performance material being created for the central project (Dog Day) and the experimentation with forms and characters that would be used in a future project (The Moving Wall). After Dog Day the company was working on only one project and therefore the need to distinguish between projects was eradicated.

5. One of the principles that Kowalchuk and Lawson explored in these interactive scores was “impulse.” Kowalchuk described these exercises through the names she assigned to them: “I’ve named two of the impulse exercises ‘the resurrection’ and ‘the sphinx.’” (CJ, September 19, 1990)
I was learning and experiencing so many new things—how my voice worked, how to fight the nausea of physical exhaustion, how the mind controls me far too much, and how to listen and work instinctively with physical intelligence and sensitivity. We Primus actors did this in an atmosphere that required faith, blind commitment, and self-generation of activity and will, as we worked alone, waiting for our leader. (Kowalchuk, Email Interview, 15 Nov. 2000)

While Kowalchuk observed and learned to execute core exercises, evolution was occurring in the training practice of other company members. Although core exercises remained a training staple, actors were experimenting with what can be called “deformation” of the source form. The “deformation” of an exercise became a way of using an exercise for purposes beyond mastery, such as using a forward roll to explore stops in action, slow motion, or concentration of energy. In this application of principle to form, the original form is superseded and a new form bearing the imprint of the original is created. This deforming enabled constant evolution of a source form, a carving of that form for use as an expressive medium. Kowalchuk’s initial observation describes the panorama of this process:

The group has just completed the first hour of their training. They are getting better; more sounds, movements and conjured images. The last time I saw them training was in Quebec at a public training session/forum. I am fascinated by each actor’s unique and completely personal style during training. This reflects an independence and confidence within the group itself. Don is on his stilts! Excellent!

Some observations:

- Karin (the times that I have seen training) starts something vocal[,]  
- Don does some interesting balancing work on the edge of his feet. He’s worked a lot on acrobatics[,]  
- Richard is methodical, so fluid, and I noticed today that he was doing that bird-head movement that I’ve seen Ker do. He used his eyes a lot as well[,]  
- Stephen starts by doing a Western-type tai chi. Today he did a song that sounded Eastern-desert nomad[,]  
- Karin used a fan seductively, playfully, and she practiced tossing and catching it. Karin’s character for the street performance seems to have emerged in the latter part of the training (is this vocabulary?)[,]
- Don kicks his legs back and steps in his stilts it is thrilling
- He turns and he is using his arms in different ways. (CJ, 11 Sept. 1990)

In addition to serving the important function of documenting the company’s training practice, Kowalchuk served as a witness to development in the training. Her words register the increased complexity in the vocal and physical images that had occurred over a relatively short period of time. Along with the evidence of increased complexity in the collective practice, individual patterns of training were also being advanced. Randoja observed that, “Don begins with the Cat, Stephen with humming and Ker with acrobatics. Each person seems to begin with something that warms them comfortably, something they do well and understand” (CJ, 21 Nov. 1990). Kowalchuk also noted distinct patterns in the training. Although each actor started their training differently, all training scores included a combination of acrobatics, impulse exercises, “Plastiques,” balance work, and stretching (CJ, 24 Sept. 1990).

Journal entries indicate that, along with deforming and patterning exercises, actors were experimenting with organically conceived training exercises, such as the interactive physical and vocal training and the production of soundscapes that Fowler had observed during the Odin residency. The following description defines the range and tone of this exploration:

Richard [Clarkin] is doing long, slow extended throws like an ancient discus thrower in slow motion. Karen is doing “funny walks” on her toes, heels, sides, fast, slow. I noticed that Stephen often goes right into his different moves, while Don does “the Cat.” I am trying to see if everyone has a sequence. I’m watching the way each actor takes the space and it seems to vary from one actor to another. Richard, Stephen and Karin broke into runs, giving the room a recharge [of energy]. Don flickers. His movement is so light it reminds me of the fairy in Peter Pan. Stephen is using a scarf stretched between his hands. Richard is using the stick and making guttural sounds like hee - yah - hah. His version of Samurai fighter-sumo wrestler. Sometimes Karin stands in front of the other actors, stops, then quickly runs off. Don is
using a head plastique now. Stephen stomps down suddenly creating a noise. Richard often claps his hands or snaps his fingers. Karin goes from daily to non-daily movement. Karin is still finding different versions for her “funny walk.” Don is moving very, very slowly. Richard has begun to hum something slow, perhaps a version of the Gregorian chant he heard this morning. This turns into a cowboy wailing. Karin joins in. Don is in the middle of the room. I think Karin uses Indian dance type facial and eye movements. Now everyone is singing this Ker-less/Careless/ sad cowboy lament they discovered on the first day of training [the day before]. (CJ, 13 Sept. 1990)

Although documentation of this particular training session indicates that group interaction is occurring, there is a subtle and often unconscious quality to these encounters. The detailing of the individual work indicates that this is the primary focus of these training sessions. One week later, however, a more conscious, active, and explosive kind of interaction occurred, which was reminiscent of early street-performance explorations with sound and music:

Don works with the stick. Successive catches are exciting to watch. Richard’s [Clarkin] samurai goes from peaceful man on a mountain to angry warrior. Ker is extending his torso in various directions and uses his arms and hands like waves, then electrical shocks, sometimes a flurry of light and at other times like a simple toss. Stephen balances on his tail-bone and tries different positions, balances, tensions. Karin does the same and her position is reminiscent of her Dog Day monologue. This slow movement to fast in different positions where balance is necessary interests me greatly. Stephen ran and did his “Jiminy Cricket” leaps for energy. Karin plays drums and does an Eastern sounding chant. Stephen sings jazz-like. Don exclams DAAA. Richard makes small stomps, body shaking. Ker keeps the tension right to the end of an action like an elastic. He makes a drumming sound with his feet on the floor. Don makes a noise the sound of a baby animal crying for its mama. Ker slaps his hand on his chest like a drum. Stephen plays the drum now. We are in the forest. More drums, clapping, everyone claps, Ker yells, Karin dances. Ker and Stephen hum. Karin uses her eyes like an Indian dancer/actor. A very good, exciting hour. (Kowalchuk, CJ, 19 Sept. 1990)

The interactive elements in this training session and the blurring of the boundaries between physical and vocal training were already a departure from Odin practice,\(^6\) where voice and

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\(^6\) This is not to say that the Odin Theatre hadn’t tried other training formats. Ulrik Skeel indicated that,
physical training remained separate until the onset of the dramaturgical process. This melding is likely to have been influenced by the group exploration of street-performance material during the remaking of *Dog Day* and barters with other companies in Denmark. As the street-performance work also involved the creation of sound and music, the introduction of soundscapes into training can also be traced to this work. Without Fowler to establish the parameters of exploration, it can be speculated that company members started from what they knew, referred to their collective understanding of that material, and from that foundation allowed invention and impulse to guide the exploration of form and expression. Available documentation indicates that this advancement of form occurred on both intuitive and consciously acknowledged levels of comprehension.

In the early fall of 1990 company members were training interactively with props, such as hand-held fans, scarves and sticks, in the strictly technical context of pure training. By late October, the company had established a regular practice of singing, which was informed by its Odin experience and which had emerged as a result of collective interest. Fridays were devoted to the development of singing (Clarkin, CJ, 19 Oct. 1990). In particular, Primus members were developing “call singing” as an effective way to create group cohesion (Wells, CJ, 2 Nov. 1990). Call singing as practised here was a vocal exercise in which one member of the company would initiate a vocal “call,” or succession of notes, and another performer would respond vocally. The original caller called again and, this time,

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although the Odin had experimented with the combining of vocal and physical training, this was not continued on a regular basis at any time in the company’s history. Group training was also not employed on a regular basis at the Odin, although it was used in specific contexts when the needs of a particular performance dictated the necessity for actors to develop particular skills (Skeel, Email Interview, 9 Nov. 2004).

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7 This process has been continued into the present (2008).
the whole company called back (CC Explorations Grant Final Report, 14 May 1991).

The actors also worked on the outdoor parade performance material that they had started in the summer of 1989 and continued at the Odin. By the time that the company regrouped in the fall of 1990, however, Dixon was no longer a member, and Kowalchuk had no role in the existing montage. As a result, she was placed in the precarious position of having both her basic training and the generation of her performance material complicated by entering into a process that had already begun. Other company members had established their individual processes for creating performance material from a training practice that had developed over the course of several projects and over several years. Furthermore, Fowler had guided them through this process. But Kowalchuk was developing performance material that would be utilized in the construction of the performance text shortly after she began her core training. Furthermore, as grant applications indicate, a thematic thread had emerged from the first two exploratory periods directed at developing material for the proposed outdoor performance. This theme was described as “the disappearance of indigenous culture and modern man’s [sic] ignorance of myth and ritual in twentieth century civilization” (MAC Art Ventures Grant Application, 24 Aug. 1990). The direction of Kowalchuk’s performance material was therefore bound by research parameters emerging from the work of her colleagues.

Although actors worked on the development of their characters during the second training hour of each day, there is no evidence to suggest that they worked on the montage created at the Odin or even on the parade pieces that had made up part of the montage during the early fall. A journal entry from mid-September indicates the highly individual focus of character training at this time:
Karin plays three songs on the accordion—very German Cabaret. Don on stilts. Stephen on Kazoo, leaping. Richard leaning against imaginary posts, sitting in imaginary chairs. [. . .] Just by watching this street performance work they’re doing gives me pictures and feelings about what the piece has in and about it. (Kowalchuk, CJ, 13 Sept. 1990)

This acutely individual focus may have been the result of an unspoken acknowledgement that adjustments to the original montage would require the outside eye of a director. It may also indicate a need for individuals to re-establish their training practice and their own relationships to the performance material before attempting to work interactively. Nevertheless, actors were generating “re-entry” activity that allowed them to further define their individual characters, rather than continuing to develop the character material based on interactions that no longer existed. This is another example of the way in which the company’s diversion from Odin Theatre practice occurred out of necessity, rather than by design. For members of Primus, particularly in the early years, the will to survive dictated the need to adapt the source practice to the day-to-day reality of the cultural context in which they were attempting to function. In order to ensure the establishment of their creative practice, Primus members needed to accept technical uncertainty as a pervading condition and to treat shortfalls as hurdles, not insurmountable obstacles.

After the first two weeks, interaction slowly began to occur between characters: “Karin plays accordion on a mime box, while Stephen moves around her in his black “anarchist” boots kazooing along with her. [. . .] Stephen walks in front of Don on stilts, imitating him” (Kowalchuk, CJ, 20 Sept. 1990). Although the interactive activity in pure training reached a fever pitch at times during this period, interactive activity during character training was generally sporadic and can be defined most accurately as ’reaction,’’ rather than interaction:

Character training was also described as “quiet” because actors were consulting notes and working through previously arranged scores. This documented observation further supports the contention that actors were reconnecting and reclaiming their material. In early October, performers began to turn to new sources, such as costume, to advance their characters. Randoja began experimenting with “a red Iranian-type orthodox dress, her face completely covered. Bells on her ankles, [ . . .] crying, old woman breathing, low voice, chest voice chanting, e-e-e-e, walking on tiptoes” (Kowalchuk, CJ, 2 Oct. 1990). Lawson began to dress in “black anarchist boots and black shirt and top. He walks with his hands behind his back (Nazi-like) and breaks into a series of big Jiminy Cricket jumps, he blows into his kazoo” (Kowalchuk, CJ, 3 Oct. 1990).

Throughout character training, musical instruments had been used to explore both character and character interaction. All actors worked with drums and bells at some point in these explorative ventures. Lawson, however, consistently explored the kazoo, Randoja the accordion, and Kowalchuk the flute. Each actor would later use details from this experimentation to develop performance material that would be woven into the final performance text of Alkoremmi.

In the latter half of October, Kowalchuk began concrete physical work on a character. She began “to improvise within a specific and set form” (Randoja, CJ, 18 Oct. 1990), using a series of pictures, and began to experiment with an umbrella as an extension of character.

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8 The dress being described was floor-length and had a hood-like head-piece, which fully covered
This experimentation arose from Kowalchuk’s research on the topics of alchemy and the hermaphrodite. These choices were somewhat limited by the identification of the thematic thread that had emerged from the performance material already developed. This delimitation marked Kowalchuk’s creative process as fundamentally different from the other actors, but it is not the only notable difference. The characters developed by the other actors emerged from images and ideas that arose from street-theatre improvisations occurring in two subsequent training sessions. Kowalchuk did not have the benefit of these interactions as an underpinning for her physical and vocal explorations. Due to the time issue, her “woman in white” character emerged as more direct, but less complex, than the other characters. She was highlighted as such and used in a very effective manner.

After the first month, Kowalchuk joined the others for training, and the documentation of company training again became an alternating group effort. Her transition into regular training patterns, however, was interrupted by two major shifts in the company schedule in October. At the end of September, Clarkin announced his intention to leave. As much as he loved the work and the people he worked with, he felt the need for more professional and financial security than working with Primus could offer him. He was several years older than the other company members and felt that, if he was going to establish himself as a working actor, did not have the luxury of time to experiment. He decided to leave the company in the fall of 1990, when the development of the new performance piece was still in a mutable form:

I was turning thirty at the time and looking ahead. It wasn't the way I wanted to continue working as an actor. I was interested in film and I was also interested in more conventional theatre. At the same time, it was an extremely difficult decision for me to leave Primus because I was so close to the work...
and to the people. It was a gut-wrenching decision and a hard leave-taking but everyone was very generous. [. . .] It was one of the most profound experiences that I’ve had as an actor. (Clarkin, Interview, 26 Jan. 2001)

Clarkin’s plan was to stop training but to stay involved with the project in an administrative and public relations capacity until the company started to tour. After a faxed dialogue with Fowler at the Odin and a three-week hiatus, he resumed training for another two months. Nevertheless, his three-week absence from the studio disrupted the energy and changed the dynamic of the company’s training practice during this time. All Primus Theatre members made difficult choices in order to commit to the work they had chosen to create. As Randoja stated months later, however, a decision to leave on the part of one individual created a ripple effect of soul-searching amongst the others (CJ, 7 Jan. 1991).

Clarkin’s announcement was not the only disruption in the company’s practice that fall. In late October, Kowalchuk and Wells began rehearsals for *Sisters* at Popular Theatre Alliance and Clarkin began rehearsals for *Liars* at the Manitoba Theatre For Young People. Infrequent journal entries, during the period of October 22–November 20 (1990), reflect the increasingly inconsistent nature of training during this time: they demonstrate no regular schedule, a focus on administrative aspects of company life, and a partiality for pair rather than individual exercises when training did occur. As Randoja stated, pair exercises offered a sense of companionship that was not so readily accessible in other exercises (CJ, 21 Nov. 1990). This change in the content and the quality of documentation serves to illustrate the degree to which company culture was disrupted.

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9 Between October 22 and December 8 (1990) only ten entries were written. Five entries occurred in the first week noted, and two of these entries indicate that no training occurred on those days. There is a gap from November 2 to 20. In most instances when gaps occur, they are explained and accompanied by summaries of creative activity when the documentation is resumed. This is not the case here. It can be speculated that this was because there was no activity to report.
Commentary in company journals also reveals a clear sense of the punishing cost of transplanting an Odin-inspired practice to an English-Canadian theatre culture. Most of the actors expressed deep concern over their exhausting and stressful attempts to lead a “split-life,” maintaining active membership in Primus while eking out a living with other work.

This dilemma occurred regardless of the nature of the work:

It is, to say the very least, frustrating to have to squeeze Primus in between the work I take, in the first place, to make Primus easier. As Richard [Fowler] warned us, the hardest part is not the time, as hard as that is, it is the change of focus, the divided attention that is required. This exists to a detrimental degree already. I find with the amount of administrative work that is required drawing us away from creative pursuits, it is even harder with the added demands of an eight-hour rehearsal day. (Wells, CJ, 2 Nov. 1990)

On a particularly difficult day Randoja wrote,

[i]t was another tiring and upsetting administrative afternoon. Long discussions on our distaste for doing too much of this kind of work. [. . .] [W]e’re all feeling so tired and frustrated about using our time to search for money. (CJ, 20 Nov. 1990)

Several weeks later she wrote,

[t]he constant strain of having to work at night and be a Primus member during the day is difficult to bear, as it has been for every one of us in one form or another. Money, duty, responsibility, commitment, private time, friendship, personal crisis, love, “art,” sweat, inspiration, fear. These are the words that have been blowing around in my mind at some time or another during these past months. (CJ, 8 Dec. 1990)

Even Kowalchuk, who was experiencing the “split-existence” for the first time, was feeling the strain and the guilt:

Being involved with this company (training, administration, research) and working on Sisters was, at times, difficult and so very, very exhausting; yet there were days when one fed the other. [. . .] However once tech week and performances began, it became almost impossible to give to each, an equitable amount of time, energy and love. One suffered inevitably, which I regret as I sit here, alone, in the office, not sure about things. I’ve got to regroup, focus. (CJ, 3 Dec. 1990)
Issues of “survival as a group, residual tensions, split personalities between public face and work face, financial survival and the on-again-off-again relationship with Richard F[owler]” (Dixon, CJ, 7 Dec. 1989) that had been discussed during the Odin residency continued to resurface in this environment of exhaustion and personal hardship. This struggle would become an ongoing dilemma for most Primus members. When the company resumed training in late November, however, Clarkin was not among them. He left Primus and Winnipeg in early December.

The Construction of *Alkoremmi*: January to April 1991

Fowler arrived in Canada at the beginning of January, and with his arrival Primus began an intense, full-time, eleven-week collaboration (7 Jan.–13 Apr. 1991) that resulted in the premiere of *Alkoremmi*. Before creative work on the project could begin, however, Fowler and members of the company needed to resolve critical practical issues. One of these was the absence of an appropriate rehearsal space. Although Primus had been working in a training space provided by PTE, Fowler knew on seeing it that it was too small for the needs of the project. The rest of his first week in Canada was spent locating, arranging, and then settling into a larger space on the stage of the Portuguese Cultural Centre in Winnipeg’s West End. This last-minute search for an appropriate rehearsal space is a prime example of the space issue that the company would face throughout its existence. Unlike traditionally staged plays arranged within the parameters of an existing theatre space, the space for each Primus performance was arranged according to the needs of the performance being constructed. As *Alkoremmi* was originally conceived as an outdoor piece and the company had been working
on filling space with their actions, the spatial needs were substantial. The search for space was an unavoidable double-edged sword. Although it forced the company to postpone creative work by a week, the alternative of constructing performance material in an inappropriate space would have compromised the dramaturgical process.

The issue of space was not the only immediate concern facing the company. With Clarkin’s departure the plan to remount *Dog Day* with Kitt replacing Dixon became impossible. The company no longer possessed an indoor performance piece that could be toured on a year-round basis. Matters were further complicated by the fact that Wells had informed Fowler that he too was considering leaving the company. The announcement had a cumulative effect on the rest of the company. As Randoja noted,

> [w]hen one person leaves a company it shakes up everything. Each person is forced to question or re-think his/her commitment to the work and the choices she/he has made thus far. “What have they seen or decided that makes them want to leave? Am I just not seeing it? Is this what I want with my life?” With two people leaving the company these questions hit home doubly hard. (CJ, 7 Jan. 1991)

As the company searched for appropriate rehearsal space and considered the shift in performance aesthetic, questions about personal and group survival and about the company’s direction and purpose continued to permeate the atmosphere. Although the actors’ introduction to the work had been channelled through relatively ideal conditions, the difficult conditions encountered during the fall of 1990 illustrated the reality of future hardships. In spite of the doubts, however, company members held firm in their belief in the work. When training and performance development began, the week of January 14–19, Wells was still a member of the company.

Journals and interviews indicate that the nature of questioning described by Randoja continued at the individual and group level throughout the company’s existence. The choice
to continue as a Primus member was therefore a consciously debated and forged decision that attests both to the self-awareness and courage of group members. The actors were also becoming aware of the sacrifice and adaptability that would be necessary to survive in their particular cultural context. They were realizing that the tenuous balance of focus, between the creation of art and the maintenance of conditions needed to create that art, required constant vigilance and fine-tuning. The questioning served this purpose.

The circumstances awaiting Fowler at the start of the three-month construction period devoted to the Alkoremmi project were significantly different from those that had existed during the remounting of Dog Day. Company members had varying degrees of experience and skill with the training and dramaturgical processes being employed, there had been a pre-construction, preparatory experience that had been bound by fragmented time frames and an altered perspective of company culture, and there was a need to re-direct the aesthetics of the piece. These different circumstances considerably affected both the training for and the dramaturgical development of Alkoremmi. The differences between the construction and development of Dog Day and Alkoremmi illustrate the difference between “transplanting” Odin Theatre practices to a relatively ideal initial context (as discussed in Chapter Three) and of doing so to the actual cultural context of English-Canadian professional theatre.

**Directives/Objectives.** The preliminary performance material constructed for the proposed outdoor piece could not have been more different in quality and quantity from that which Fowler worked with during the final phase of constructing Dog Day. The core of the original Dog Day had consisted of a series of solo dances and monologues generated from individual actor research. In the absence of two characters Fowler was able to re-orchestrate the
remaining material and the newly generated ensemble work that provided “narrative
dramaturgy” in an altered but organically sound new performance logic. The physical and
vocal scores that had been developed for *The Moving Wall* had emerged from group
interaction rather than solo work. Individual research and development of each character
allowed the initial group interactions to evolve into more clearly defined character-based
scores by the time of the Odin residency. Because the characters had been defined to a great
extent by their existing and potential relationships to other characters, however, further
detailing of these characters was explored interactively. The absence of the characters created
by Clarkin and Dixon, therefore, drastically affected the degree to which this material could
be salvaged. Fowler’s montage of parade pieces and emerging interactive scores between
characters was no longer viable without substantial reconstruction.

Furthermore, *The Moving Wall* had been conceptualized as an outdoor parade-style
performance. Company members had focused their attention on filling and moving through
space, exploring with musical instruments, using sound as a character extension, parade
formations, and interactive ensemble arrangements in space that would be effective in an
outdoor parade setting. As the performance material began to emerge Fowler began to
consider an enclosed outdoor space rather than the parade configurations he had been
involved in at the Odin Theatre. However, it was a practical decision that motivated a
conscious shift in focus. Once it was determined that revising *Dog Day* was no longer
possible, the company needed a performance piece that could be toured year-round. The plan
to create an outdoor parade piece was postponed.

*Alkoremmi* essentially arose from the ashes of the work-in-progress *The Moving Wall*. The shift in paradigm to a stationary indoor performance, after two sessions of developing
outdoor parade performance technique marked *Alkoremmi* as a hybrid performance. The Odin Theatre clearly distinguished the aesthetics of street performances from those of studio performances, and *Alkoremmi* contained elements characteristic of both. It can be argued that this hybrid aesthetic is the indirect product of Fowler’s attempt to preserve and utilize aspects of the original content and form. This is an example of what I define as Fowler’s “dramaturgy of necessity,” which arose from transitional needs at the point of contact between the Odin Theatre’s processes and techniques and the young Canadian actors who were operating in a much different cultural context.

Fowler was making small adjustments in the structure of the work processes right from the onset of his relationship with Primus actors to suit the source processes to situations defined by limited time and financial resources. This can be observed in the simultaneous act of constructing the final stages of *Dog Day* while generating performance material for a new performance piece and in the enlistment of Dixon in the dual role of actor and writer on the *Dog Day* remount. At the start of the *Alkoremmi* project Fowler took stock of what could be retained from the original exploratory work and began to facilitate the construction of new research and development in collaboration with the actors and Dixon, who had been hired in the dual role of dramaturg/writer. Although music, acrobatics, and interactive sound and movement scores continued to play an important role in the development of the performance material, Fowler asked actors to create new material in which the outdoor aesthetic was no longer considered.

This hybrid form, realized both accidentally and necessarily from the composition of material representing both indoor and outdoor aesthetics, distinguished *Alkoremmi* from *Dog Day*, which bore a direct resemblance to the Odin Theatre’s indoor performances and to
Talabot in particular. In some ways, the aesthetic quality of Alkoremmi echoed that of The Million, Fowler’s introduction to the Odin Theatre’s performance work and the only Odin production to be performed both indoors and outdoors. Alkoremmi’s complexity, however, was the result of the evolution of an outdoor aesthetic into an indoor framework, rather than of the interaction of multiple and diverse performance cultures, as was the case with The Million. Both performance pieces synthesize the colour and activity of outdoor parade performance in a much more confined space.

Skill and Technical Levels of the Actors. In addition to the necessity of reframing the performance aesthetic, Fowler was faced with a considerable discrepancy in the performers’ skill and experience levels in relation to the training and dramaturgical processes being employed. Actors working on the Dog Day project shared a common training base as graduates of a conservatory training program and participants in two intensive six-week training sessions with Fowler at NTS. As the Alkoremmi project started, the situation was much different. The experience of the two newest company members differed not only from that of the students at NTS but also from each other’s. Although Kitt had not attended NTS, he had visited the Odin Theatre on his own and had trained with the company since the spring of 1989. His training and research skills had developed well beyond the novice stage, and he was the first company member to work with stilts. Kowalchuk had begun her training in Fowler’s absence only four months earlier. Her experience with the company’s work was limited to a three-day workshop and multiple viewings of Dog Day. During the Alkoremmi project it was necessary for Fowler to adjust and buffer the source practice to suit

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10 Kitt officially began training with Primus in May 1990 but unofficially trained with Lawson and
both the temporal and spatial constraints of the English-Canadian theatre milieu and the level of familiarity with the processes and techniques possessed by each company member.

**Time Frame.** The arrangement of time was not substantially different during the final stages of project completion for *Dog Day* and *Alkoremmi*. There were, however, major differences in the “real-time” organization of each project. The actual time frame for the completion of *Alkoremmi/The Moving Wall* was nearly two and a half years (May 1989–Jan. 1991). This period of time included two phases in which company members were faced with the “split-focus” reality of attempting to juggle training and preparing performance material, without Fowler and without funding, with fundraising efforts and survival jobs. This contributed substantially to the quality of preparatory, pre-construction work because the momentum behind training and development of performance material was drastically reduced or lost entirely during these times. The resulting frustration and exhaustion served as a further distraction from the creative work.

The effect of this split-focus was compounded by another, more insidious split-focus that occurred during the construction process as a result of Fowler’s time-limited interactions with the company. The development of performance material for what would become *Alkoremmi* was never the central focus of creative work until the final phase of construction in January 1991. The first phase of development had been a daily forty-five minute exploration of street-performance technique set amidst the remaking of *Dog Day*. The second phase occurred as one of a series of activities that the company engaged in during the Odin residency and that included a substantial amount devoted to the preparation of *Jour de Dufault* when all three were cast in a PTE show. At the time Dufault intended to be in the remount of *Dog Day*. 
This splitting and splintering of focus meant that the performance material presented to Fowler at the onset of the *Alkoremmi* project varied greatly in degree of development and quality (Dixon, Interview, 31 May 1998).

**Company Vision and the Development of Company Culture.** Both the personnel and vision of the company changed in the time between the premiere of *Dog Day* and the construction of *Alkoremmi*. The decision to operate on an “as-if-permanent” basis made it necessary for members of Primus Theatre to generate a company presence beyond the boundaries of the training and rehearsal studio. Confronted with funding issues unknown to the Odin Theatre, the company was faced with the necessity of raising its profile in the community to compete more effectively for available arts funding and to build a spectatorship. The series of pedagogical and public relations activities, such as public discussions and demonstrations, workshops, and preview shows, that was launched before the opening of *Dog Day* had been supervised by Fowler. In his absence company members were faced with maintaining and expanding this profile on their own. Ongoing public funding of the Odin Theatre had allowed company members the luxury of highly private early years in which to build both their theatrical language and their company culture. This was not possible for Primus Theatre.

In addition to mustering basic survival tactics (funding, a public profile, office and training space) that would ensure the young company a future, the actors faced the daunting task of maintaining the training practice at the core of their company culture. Central to this challenge was that the practice itself placed Primus at a severe disadvantage in the bureaucratic organization of English-Canadian theatre and presented the company with a
central conundrum. To maintain a regular training schedule in an arts-funding system designed to support production projects and a contract hiring system, Primus members had two options for those time periods in which they were not constructing a new performance piece. They could take on contract projects at other theatres or seek jobs outside their artistic field. As the company discovered during the fall of 1990, contracting Primus members to other theatre companies effectively destroyed momentum in training and, subsequently, in the creation of performance material. The scheduling problems causing the gradual destruction of the regular training regimen were compounded by the fact that, even when members managed to train together, Fowler was not present to provide encouragement, instruction, and feedback. Actors became increasingly discouraged and company morale suffered.

In summary, the circumstances surrounding the final (or sole) construction phase of *Alkoremmi* and the context in which this project was set were far more complicated and difficult than those in which *Dog Day* had been remounted. The cumulative effect was that the performance material available to Fowler at the onset of *Alkoremmi* was raw and undeveloped in comparison with the highly defined individual pieces arranged in a preliminary montage that became the starting point of the *Dog Day* remount. This meant that the development of performance material for *Alkoremmi* from January to March 1991 extended well beyond the construction of a “narrative dramaturgy” and the advancement of prepared work. It would prove to be an intense and exhausting period of time, one that would test the artistic skill and personal strength of all company members. In completing *Alkoremmi* under extremely taxing conditions, however, Primus Theatre carved a presence in the Canadian theatre landscape.
An examination of the process of constructing *Alkoremmi* indicates both a continuation of Odin practices as well as deviations from this practice as observed to a lesser degree in the construction process of both phases of *Dog Day*. Primus Theatre’s relationship to the Odin Theatre becomes more complex and less immediate. It is clear from Fowler’s choices during the construction of *Alkoremmi* that he was focusing his time with the company on two things: he was reinforcing the foundations of the company’s training practice and building a performance piece from the ashes of an abandoned aesthetic.

**Training**

A highly defined schedule, which resembled the organization of past ones, was established during the second week of the project (14–19 Jan.). The day began with training—pure training from 8:30–10:00 a.m., followed by group training and call singing from 10:00–10:30 AM, and then character training from 10:30–12:00 p.m. Creating and assembling performance material occurred from 1:00–3:30 p.m. and was followed by administrative and production duties from 3:30–5:30 p.m. The very specific arrangement of the scheduling suggests that Fowler was attempting to re-formalize the training structure. The addition of specific time allotments for group training and call singing illustrates a conscious acknowledgement of the evolution of group needs, interests, and research discoveries.

Fowler was aware of the difficulties that company members had experienced when training in his absence and, in the first few weeks of training, chose to re-familiarize them

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11 Although company journal entries are not systematically organized in terms of weekly units, grant applications and reports were. As a substantial amount of information was drawn from funding applications, weekly references are used. To clarify: week one refers to Fowler’s first week with the company, while week
with core exercises and with such basic principles and concepts for exploring form as “carving the space, changing directions, changing levels, changing balance, finding contrast between slow and quick motion, heavy and light, big and small, masculine and feminine” (CC Explorations Grant Final Report, 14 May 1990). These principles and concepts were essential tools used in the construction and definition of performance material and would be honed continually throughout the company’s existence. This reinstated focus on technical mastery indicates the importance that Fowler placed on solidifying the foundation of the company’s training practice. This effort was reinforced as much as possible during the construction of Alkoremni. Midway through the process Fowler asked company members to observe the work of their colleagues and to make note of work that exemplified “particular training principles, such as stops; hard versus soft actions; and the maintenance of tension in one particular body part while simultaneously creating another action or tension elsewhere in the body” (CC Explorations Grant Final Report, 14 May 1991). In this way Fowler focused the actors’ attention not only on the act of advancing their own technical practice but also on the recognition of technical excellence in others. Randoja noted that training was slow and laboured because of this technical focus and that “energy, warmth, perspiration and inspiration” (CJ, 14–22 Jan. 1991) pervaded the training space by the end of that week.

In addition to reintroducing and reviewing the basic tools of construction, Fowler was also intent on reinforcing the philosophy of training and the work ethic that underpinned the training practice. In week two (14–19 Jan.) and week three (21–26 Jan.) he sought to re-establish and retain the parameters of the practice that he had introduced at NTS in a very practical and concrete way. Training and rehearsal space were considered separate from the two constitutes the first week of full-time rehearsal and training.
quotidian world, treated with a particular kind of respect, and subject to specific rules. The practice of cleaning, clearing, and maintaining a workspace was reinforced during the construction of Alkoremmi and maintained throughout all Primus performance projects.

As a derivative of a laboratory situation, training was considered to be active research and was to be treated as a process. In pursuing this research, it was necessary to allow time both for diversion from the intended line of inquiry and also for the pursuit of unexpected discoveries and the exploration of “mistakes”. Fowler’s reinforcement of laboratory practice can be found in the company journal entries summarizing his directives during the first two weeks of training:

Find something to explore and keep with it. Keep developing, enhancing, exploring a certain element so things don’t remain at a surface level or as random, chance exercises. To do this, one must not judge the work or progress made too much. Things need not always be brilliant or evocative or complicated. (Randoja, CJ, 14–19 Jan. 1991)

Through these directives, Fowler was promoting experimentation not only with form in general, but also specifically, that is, the continued experimentation with a source form. This repetition provided actors with a means both of gaining mastery and of establishing a common group language and collective aesthetic.

Actors were expected to respect their own work and to exhibit this respect by setting goals and conducting active research that would enable them to achieve those goals. When developing performance material actors were expected to work at developing their own ideas and images into actions before considering the influence of others and were to reserve, or shelf, judgement of their own work. This respect was extended to the work of others as well. An actor’s work was never discussed when that individual was not present, and there was no judgement projected upon the viewing of another actor’s work-in-progress. Company
members entered into an active collaboration with the creator/performer by responding to what had been embodied in the work using specific and concrete terms. This fundamental respect for the act of creation and for the place in which that creation occurred would remain unchanged throughout the company’s history.  

It took time for the actors to understand, however, not only the importance of training as a process of creating identity and independence but also to understand the ways in which it directly affected and informed the creation of performance material. Kowalchuk recalls how confused she was by the notion of action and even more confounded by Fowler’s repeated advice “to lose the form and concentrate on the action” (PJ, undated excerpt from company archives). During the course of struggle Fowler asked all company members to construct a sequence of actions from a series of sports action photos. After repeatedly and unsuccessfully attempting to gain a conscious sense of achievement with the sequence of baseball poses she had chosen, she simply gave in to the act of repetition. In time the consistent repetition of the sequence provided Kowalchuk with not only a basic physical vocabulary from which she was able to personalize her training but also the basic elements of a performance score:

After a long time, I realized that in my improvisations and daily training, I was using these athletic actions in various ways. […] I realized that I actually had a physical vocabulary that belonged to me. […] In the months that followed this work, I built a tambourine sequence that later found its last incarnation in a scene that I performed with Don [Kitt] in The Night Room. (PJ, undated excerpt from company archives)

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12 This expectation of respect for the work and workspace continues into Barba’s current practice. This is illustrated in an observation made at ISTA in April 2005. Barba was working with a group of company members and ISTA participants on an exploratory venture for Ur-Hamlet, an emerging Odin Theatre performance piece. I was among those watching this process. Several observing participants began to chat amongst themselves. Barba stopped the proceedings and then very curtly pointed out the rudeness of their actions to the offenders. He then took a moment to refocus and carried on with the coaching of the actors. Barba’s reaction to the interruption signalled a clearly defined assumption of a certain kind of behaviour from all of those involved in the creative process, both actively participating and observing. Those chastised were shocked, and embarrassed, by the reaction.
When training was interrupted, or ceased altogether, especially at such an early stage in the company’s existence, a ripple effect occurred in all aspects of performance creation. While company members may not have been fully aware of this, Fowler’s choices concerning the course of action during training for Alkoremmi indicate that he was indeed re-establishing and reinforcing a rigorous training practice. As The Moving Wall/Alkoremmi project was fully funded, the company was able to train regularly and rigorously throughout the construction process until production work in the final stages of mounting the piece made that impossible. Kowalchuk remembers the attentiveness with which Fowler watched the training during this time and how this changed the intensity of the energy in the training studio (PJ, undated excerpt from company archives). Company journals, grant applications, and interviews indicate that he placed a continued emphasis on core exercises, focused on different sets of exercises most weeks, continued to issue directives throughout the training sessions, and adjusted training as the dramaturgical process progressed.

During week four (28 Jan.–2 Feb.) the company focused on the development of specific prop-related tasks. Koshi was explored with an exercise in which two actors engaged in physical improvisation while attempting to maintain tension in a rope binding them together at the waist. A dowelling stick used as an extension of the body was used to develop a range of upper body and arm motion. Actors also chose individual props to explore in individual ways (CC Explorations Grant Final Report, 14 May 1991). At this point it was decided that character training would be replaced by the creation and rehearsal of group songs one day a week.

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13 Koshi is a karate term roughly translated as “hips” but with an implied usage of energy. This energy is first demonstrated obviously in a physical sense but, once mastered, becomes an “invisible” presence. Barba used it to explain a kind of core energy generated and controlled through a particular placement and movement
In week five (4–9 Feb.) Fowler worked with individuals identified as exemplars of specific training principles to demonstrate the advancement of that principle for the others. Randoja’s work with “stops” was noted (Kowalchuk, CJ, 4 Feb. 1991), as was Lawson’s work on alternating hard and soft action (Kowalchuk, CJ, 5 Feb. 1991). Another notable element of the training research was an organic emergence of experimental music and sound production using both voices and instruments. This vocal experimentation was coupled with the exploration of a newly assembled ladder and plank configuration that defined the playing space and created the conditions for an explosion of development in character training (discussed later in the chapter).

After a month of continuous progression in training, the momentum was disrupted for several weeks due to a series of unforeseen circumstances. In week six (11–16 Feb.) Fowler was felled by a bout of the flu and the heating system in the rehearsal space switched to air-conditioning mode. Training was stalled for the week. In a situation unbound by time and financial constraint, this would not have been an issue. Neither was the case for Primus. To make matters worse, the company was reliant upon a third party for the repair of the heating system. Given no alternative, the company worked on music and technical details in smaller, warmer rooms at the Portuguese Cultural Centre complex until the problem was rectified. Fowler and the temperature were restored by the end of the week. The only training detail of note was the introduction of Feldenkrais exercises that resulted in a collectively expressed interest for further work on the technique.

Routine was disrupted again the following week (week seven, 18–23 Feb.), when a representative of PTE informed company members that they could occupy the PTE rehearsal of the hips (Paper Canoe 17).
hall earlier than originally agreed upon. Since the hall was the intended performance site and was being offered pro bono, it was in the company’s interest to act on the offer as soon as possible. As a result, company members were packing and moving set pieces and props the same week that they were preparing and taping sections of their work-in-progress for Contact Manitoba. Contact Manitoba was an initiative of the Manitoba Arts Council (MAC) and was responsible for videotaping performances and interviews with local artists for purposes of distribution to potential booking agencies across the country.¹⁴

What is clear from this examination of the first six weeks of full-time training is that Fowler re-established a strict work ethic and a theatre-as-laboratory context for training and dramaturgical development. What is also clear is that the company’s artistic progress was riddled with distractions. Documentation of training activity for the two-week period spanning February 11–23 (1991) is almost non-existent, and information referring to dramaturgical development is minimal. The need to constantly maintain the company’s profile for grant application and audience development purposes, combined with the lack of a permanent space in which to rehearse and perform, translated into the necessity of devoting substantial amounts of time to promotional activity and the search for appropriate space. In short, an inordinate amount of time was consumed by activity other than training and performance development. Even with the benefit of full funding and Fowler’s presence, Primus Theatre was constantly faced with unexpected occurrences whose consequences diverted them from their creative work.

An uninterrupted training schedule resumed during the week of February 25–March 2 (week eight), the first of a series of weeks in which Primus members would work twelve-

¹⁴ Fowler reputedly began his interview with “The theatre is dying. It is almost dead. My name is
hour days to make up for the time lost in past weeks. The week was devoted to dramaturgical development and production work; however, several notable changes occurred in pure training. Early in the week the company applied learned technique to solo training material using taped music (Dances of the World) as a background. Fowler asked them to continue their [regular] training but add a surprise action which would affect the surroundings. This action could be something “daily” or some direct opposite movement from your sequence (an arm or hand etc). You could also surprise yourself, so you could break up and change the space. That magic phrase “carve the space” was reinforced. (Kitt, CJ, 25 Feb. 1991)

Group dynamics were further explored through directed use of vocal and instrumental rhythms. In one of these sound and movement improvisations, Kowalchuk, Lawson, Randoja, and Wells were instructed to work as a group while Kitt, on stilts, was to move in reaction and respond to the group’s physical and vocal actions (CJ, 1 Mar. 1991). By the end of the week Fowler had decided that the time scheduled for character training would be devoted to working on texts and to the development of newly created scenes (CC Explorations Grant Final Report, 14 May 1991)

Remarkably, there is evidence that new principles and skills were being introduced and explored during the frenetic final weeks of preparation for Alkoremni. In week nine (4–10 Mar.) Randoja noted knee and hip joint pain caused by kicking and lifting stilts, which indicates that Kitt had begun to teach these skills to his colleagues. As he was the only actor on stilts in Alkoremni, it can be concluded that stilt skills were being taught solely as a technique in pure training. Even at this late date Fowler continued to orchestrate new configurations in training. Randoja notes a directive made one morning when she began her training with drum-work. Fowler asked the other four actors “to make all [of their] actions

conscious, aggressive, strong and direct” and asked Randoja to match this with her instrumentation (CJ, 6 Mar. 1991). Although actors were not interacting with each other in this exercise, Fowler created a connecting bond through rhythm. The group training that day emerged organically from a period of silence and culminated in a group frenzy of pushing and bumping. Guided by Fowler the company also applied the “Plastiques” and the principle of slow motion to the development of nuanced action. The slow-motion work was directed at “exploiting the stop and completing a full, energized action before beginning another one” (CJ, 7 Mar. 1991) in order to clarify and direct an action. The “Plastiques” were directed at the exploration of energy transfer and transmission through experimentation with “different kinds and levels of energy through an action” (Randoja, CJ, 8 Mar. 1991).

Training continued to be acknowledged and noted throughout week ten (12-17 Mar.), but details progressively diminish. Only one training directive was noted. Actors were asked to “to train softly” (Kowalchuk, CJ, 12 Mar. 1991) using core exercises to explore a particular kind of energy. In week eleven (18–24 Mar.), leading up to the opening of Alkoremmi on March 26 (1991), there was no mention of training at all in company journals. A note appearing later in the journal, however, indicates that the events occurring that week (and the following week) were summarized more than two weeks later, on April 4. It is therefore difficult to determine whether training took place and was not mentioned or was abandoned entirely in order to complete the performance text and to attend to the production needs of Alkoremmi that are mentioned in the summarized notes. This delay in the documentation of company activity fundamentally changes the perspective of the information from that of an immediate reaction to that of a remembered activity. It is not surprising to find that the “remembered” and “retraced” information relates almost exclusively to specific
Throughout the structuration of *Alkoremmi* Fowler reinforced the practice of returning to core exercises, techniques, and principles and, at the same time, introduced new ones. Through this consistent effort to ground philosophic beliefs in practice, he illustrated the way in which a solid training practice could be built. According to Clarkin, “the daily dependability of training, and of the commitment we make to it, provides us with a permanent foundation from which to call ourselves actors, even when we are not performing” (*CC Explorations Grant Final Report*, 14 May 1990). Through the practice of training, Primus members were afforded a daily reminder that performance was not the defining activity of their artistic identity. The routine and structure of training provided grounding and a continuity of artistic process.

The influence of the Odin Theatre practice is clearly identifiable in the principles used by Fowler as he worked with Primus members to construct the foundation of their training practice. Yet the choices and approaches that he made can be traced as well to other sources, such as his Feldenkrais work with Johnstone. Fowler and Primus actors were also advancing the training practice in a way that was unique to the individuals belonging to the company and the context in which they were situated.

**The Dramaturgical Process**

The development of performance material for *The Moving Wall/Alkoremmi* project was initiated in a much different way than performance material generated by members of the Odin Theatre. The initial explorative focused more on group interaction than on the
construction of solo scores and dances, as had *Dog Day*. Ideas for characters emerged from improvisations with instruments and sound that had occurred during initial street-theatre explorations. These ideas were further developed through interactive exploration of a series of proposed environments during the Odin residency. The group explorations had also focused on the development of outdoor performance technique. In the aftermath of the Odin residency, the sense of uncertainty concerning the fate of assembled montage led to extensive individual work with props, such as fans, sticks, and musical instruments. It was this assemblage of material that awaited Fowler.

In week two (14–19 Jan.) Fowler viewed the performance material that had been developed in his absence: physical and vocal vocabulary, the use of music and musical instruments, dances, props, and costumes. Each afternoon one actor’s performance work became the focus of presentation and discussion. As had been the case with *Dog Day*, the development of individual material was approached in a collaborative manner. Company members viewing the emerging material shared their responses and asked questions that would inspire further exploration. Predictably, because it was in early stages of development Kowalchuk’s character generated the most discussion. Although she had been developing the work for only about two months, the reality of a time-limited schedule made it necessary for her to present her material regardless of the state of its development. The necessity of this action is another example of the practical diversion from the source practice at the Odin Theatre, where the development of performance material was never dictated by external factors. The images present in the performance material suggested potential characters—ranging “from Joan of Arc to a sick young girl with brain fever to a penitent to a young girl in a mental asylum”—for her to consider in development (Randoja, CJ, 14–18 Jan. 1991).
In addition to watching individual performance material, Fowler had the company run through the montage he arranged during the Odin residency, without any adjustments to the sequences and without props. After the run the actors were asked to respond to the work as it appeared, not as it should have been. The range of responses is recorded in the company journal: “[T]he feeling of the piece is starting to be ‘A Magical Place in Hell,’ ‘The Night Ward’, ‘A Devil’s Fairyland.’ There is a feeling of constant night, lots of magic and a catharsis or apocalypse” (Randoja, CJ, 14–19 Jan. 1991). From the start of the presentations Dixon as dramaturg began to note “possible stories, connections, scenarios, texts [. . .] which he later developed in consultation with Fowler” (CC Explorations Grant Final Report, 14 May 1991).

When he had viewed all the material, Fowler asked each company member to prepare the two cabaret pieces: one was a solo cabaret number, the other an idea for a group cabaret number (Randoja, CJ, 14–18 Jan. 1991). One of the environments that had been proposed for group improvisation at the Odin was “a decadent cabaret or freakish circus” (Randoja, CJ, 11 Dec. 1989), indicating that Fowler’s request for new material was informed by qualities in the existing work. The newly developed pieces, ranging in style and content from German cabaret songs to old Broadway show tunes to English vaudeville acts to stand-up comedy (CC Explorations Grant Final Report, 14 May 1991), were presented in week three (21–26 Jan.). The raw material was then subject to several periods of experimentation that involved deconstruction and “essentialization” of the original scores. In one phase of the transformation, actors worked on their scores “without any sound or singing and [then eventually on] only the fixed actions of the songs” (Randoja, CJ, 21–25 Jan. 1991). The distilled and pared down versions of the solos bore a ghostly resemblance to their original
versions but were substantially altered from the original cabaret form:

Each of us, one by one, gets up does our solo cabaret piece in the spotlight [which was created by a flashlight in the centre of the room]. It is quite an amazing eerie feeling. [...] It [the performance] feels like a depressing black gloomy cabaret. [...] But from the outside it seems to evoke a dream-like quality, like nightmares when all the people you meet are trying to tell you something but no sound is coming out of their mouths. (Randoja, CJ, 21–25 Jan. 1991)

This process can be explained by means of the art of “ikebana,” the Japanese art of floral sculpture that Barba used to explain his principle of equivalence (Paper Canoe 30). In this art form, flowers are used as the organic medium of an artistic expression; however, the flower’s natural form is deformed and distilled. It is this altered form that is then used as an artistic medium to express something quite different from what would have been possible in its original form. Kowalchuk notes that the “individual [cabaret] pieces were eventually dissected and their parts used and fixed in the performance as a group scene, to which texts, written by actors or the dramaturg, were added at a later date” (CC Explorations Grant Final Report, 14 May 1991). Fowler’s adjustments to the dramaturgical process can be seen paradoxically as both an extension of the Odin practice and a diversion from it.

Over the course of weeks three and four, company members began to present their ideas for the group cabaret pieces by teaching the configurations and dance steps to those who would be performing in the pieces. These arrangements included a tap-dance number created by Kowalchuk and a piece incorporating a puppet show and megaphones created by Wells (Kowalchuk, CJ, 28 Jan. 1991). Company members also developed additional character-based material using ideas and stories that Fowler had discussed privately with each actor as a point of departure for improvisation (CC Explorations Grant Final Report, 14 May 1991). Each improvisation was followed by a meticulous process of reconstruction and
memorization of the steps, gestures, and sounds of the original work—all aided by detailed notes transcribed by other company members. This process, inadvertently named an “encore” by Dixon, was first introduced to actors at NTS. Within the first few weeks of generating and developing potential performance material, Fowler decided that the emerging material would not be well suited to a traditional outdoor performance parade (Fowler, Interview, 1 Sept. 2000). In light of this, he proposed an alternative aesthetic in which performance and spectator spaces were stationary and pre-configured. Although the performance would continue to be treated as if it would take place under the stars, the fixed location would provide more versatility as a touring piece (Fowler, Interview, 1 Sept. 2000). Fowler also proposed a simple scenographic design consisting of ladders and “bridges” of wooden planks for defining the playing and spectator spaces (Fowler, Interview, 1 Sept. 2000). Once the set was arranged in week four (28 Jan.–2 Feb.), actors used the actual performance space to generate and develop performance material.

To accommodate both the unknown quantity of future performance spaces and the anticipation of touring, Fowler began to work with the concept of a self-contained performance space. The practical objective was to define a performance and spectator space that could be transported anywhere. In many ways the limitations of this need also served as a catalyst to invention. This practice was continued throughout the company’s existence. He indicates that at times an interesting spatial relationship emerged between the defined space

15 A traditional outdoor performance as structured by the Odin Theatre would have featured the performers “moving through an environment encountering the audience or moving into designated areas where the audience awaited the arrival of the performers” (Fowler, Interview, 1 Sept. 2000).

16 Although Alkoremni was designed for an outdoor setting, there is no evidence and no solid company recollection to suggest that in over three hundred performances this ever happened.
and the hosting space but that this was simply “a function [borne] of necessity not aesthetics” (Fowler, Telephone Interview, 23 Jan. 1997).

The act of defining the playing space, combined with a broad range of sound experimentation in the cabaret pieces the week before, generated a flurry of experimentation in week five (4–9 Feb.). This experimentation focused on combinations of visual and aural properties, and many of the discoveries appeared in some form in the final performance text. Elaborate costumes, masks, props, musical instruments, and four large copper megaphones constructed by Wells were introduced into the emerging performance material. Actors experimented with ways to disguise Kitt’s stilt figure within a fabric configuration in order to create a surprise transformation as he emerged to execute his first physical score (Kowalchuk, CJ, 4 Feb. 1991). They climbed and tested the ladder and platform structures and explored possibilities for incorporating these structures into existing performance scores. They discovered multiple uses for the copper megaphones in addition to speaking and singing through them. Kowalchuk affixed a candle to the top of an umbrella, and from this Fowler suggested additional lighting from the underside with a flashlight. The umbrella would become a key image in the setting of atmosphere as she used it as a guiding beacon when she led spectators to their seats and launched them on their performance experience. Kowalchuk, Lawson, and Randoja developed a complex vocal arrangement from earlier experimentation, and it was eventually co-ordinated with a stilt dance by Kitt in the performance text.

Fowler continued to “construct” improvisations with individual actors; however, texts that Dixon had written were increasingly combined with emerging and existing physical
scores. Dixon wrote a text for Wells and Kowalchuk as respectively the Last Baby\textsuperscript{17} and the Woman in White that was combined with a score created by Lawson in which he “buzzed” a conversation back and forth between his hands on the kazoo. By mid-week Fowler was attempting to rework the original montage with the inclusion of the newly developed material (Kowalchuk, CJ, 4–9 Feb. 1991). Kowalchuk described this process in the following way:

Richard Fowler takes the actors’ original material and builds various new relationships between characters. He works with the actors in creating images, concepts, sounds and songs, thus developing, enhancing and adding to the actors’ scores, and at the same time, preserving the essence of the actors’ original ideas. (CC Explorations Grant Final Report, 14 May 1991)

Fowler’s activity during this time was described in the company journal as “an incredibly time-consuming, detailed process, [this] piecing together of everyone’s material, lights going off in Richard’s head like a pinball machine, ideas, ideas, ideas” (Kowalchuk, CJ, 5 Feb. 1991).

Fowler’s illness and the “heating disaster” in week six (11–16 Feb.) had as drastic effect on dramaturgical development as they had on training practice. The work of a theatrical auteur, described by Kowalchuk, can be considered more akin to the work of a choreographer than to the work of a director building a mise en scène from a text. It involves the orchestration of bodies and voices in space as a central focus, and spatial and temporal arrangement requires a visual and audio perspective. It cannot be advanced without the individual responsible for creating and maintaining that perspective. This was the situation resulting from Fowler’s absence. Company members ran sections of the montage that had already been orchestrated and attended to technical challenges in small sections of the non-

\textsuperscript{17} The names of the characters have been drawn from the Alkoremni screenplay by Jerry Turchyn generated in 1993 for the purpose of filming the performance the same year. This was based on an existing full text version of Alkoremni.
choreographed material. One such venture was “the logistics of and practical execution of having an actor [Lawson] sliding down a piece of nylon, stretched taut by two other actors, from a wooden bridge ten feet from the floor” (CC Explorations Grant Final Report, 14 May 1991). The results of this logistical inquiry were incorporated into the performance text during Lawson’s introduction as the Song and Dance Angel.

Although the move to PTE in week seven (18–23 Feb.) completely disrupted the company’s training practice and dramaturgical progress, it was highly advantageous. As PTE was the intended performance site, the company could arrange the performance space, secure the whole structure, and attend to set details as soon as the move took place. Fabric panels were hung at each short end of the rectangular space, and tiny white Christmas tree lights were strung along the ladders and bridges to outline the playing space. The entire structure was then safely secured with aircraft cable and a turnbuckle system (Wells, CJ, 19 Feb. 1991). From that point on, an increasing amount of attention was paid to production aspects of the performance, such as the wiring of the lighting, the rigging of a curtain system, and the arrangement for special properties (Kitt, CJ, 25 Feb.–2 Mar. 1991). In order to ensure that all tasks were accomplished and that neither creative work nor production detail was sacrificed, actors began to extend the length of their workdays and of their workweeks. Primus members were ultimately sacrificing their personal time for the art they had chosen to make.

The dissolution of character training in week eight (25 Feb.–2 Mar.) provided Fowler with more time to work with actors on all aspects of performance structure. Actors worked on texts that had been written or rewritten by Dixon (Kowalchuk, CJ, 25 Feb. 1991) and created new text at Fowler’s request. One of these requests was for lists of “[negative] advice that you would give to a child to have them avoid something” (Kowalchuk, CJ, 26 Feb.
A selection of these warnings was built into a segment of the performance in which the Woman in Red (Randoja), the Woman in White (Kowalchuk) and the Song and Dance Angel (Lawson) are giving advice to the Last Baby (Wells).

Fowler also worked with individual actors on refining and developing details in their character scores. In one case he worked with Lawson on the replication of a score generated by Randoja. Lawson’s fully veiled Macabre Figure character needed to master an exact physical replication of Randoja’s fully veiled non-speaking version of the character that had appeared earlier in the performance. This detailed replication of the physical detail was necessary to ensure spectator surprise at the sudden revelation of the figure as the Song and Dance Angel. Fowler also worked with Wells on a particular point in his Last Baby character in which the score was executed so slowly that the squeaking of his shoes could be heard in the turns of his heel (Kitt, CJ, 25 Feb. 1991).

In addition to paying attention to the crafting of specific detail, Fowler also began to work on the chronological structuration of the piece. The raw material constituted a collection of the actors’ responses to assigned tasks and of character explorations manifest in physical and vocal ways. Small sections of the piece were already linked together, and a series of solo and group scores existed in various stages of development. From this Fowler orchestrated a scenic logic, using both organic and artificial arrangements of the performance material. As indicated in the examination of the construction of Dog Day, this logic did not necessarily serve a linear function. In Fowler’s words, “the final performance is then like a piece of music played by an orchestra, each of the musicians (actors) playing a score which when combined becomes the full performance” (“The Anthropology of Performance” 87). As such, it was his responsibility to arrange the various strands of the performance text and then
orchestrate the arrangement through an adjustment of the rhythms, cadences, and transitions.

Fowler’s arrangement, however, was not directed at the creation of a contemporary Gesamkunstwerk, in the manner of a Robert Wilson performance piece. He was working with a multi-levelled dramaturgy, adopted from the Odin Theatre, which was constructed in such a way that it would appeal to a range of cognitive states. An excerpt from the company journal describes the attention to detail necessary to address this:

> We have now added my [Kitt’s] parade with a slice of Richard Clarkin’s.\(^{18}\) Then it [the montage] moves into the section where the ritual texts are recited. I [Kitt] sit down on the F-seat and Tannis and Karin are on my left and right respectively. Ker picks up megaphones (which are lit by the flashlights facing the group like footlights) and turns around and around, ending up on the opposite end [of the playing space]. He will whisper his text from his journal whilst being lit by a single megaphone which he holds. (Kitt, CJ, 25 Feb. 1991)

Kitt’s description refers to a preliminary arrangement of the material, not the final form. Proceeding from a concrete base, Fowler worked with the actors to adjust material and to develop transitional material that would transport one set of actions to the next. At the end of the eighth week (25 Feb.–2 Mar.) Fowler had the company run through the “draft” of the performance text to view the effect of the arranged form and movement. Kitt’s recollection of the event states, “[I]t certainly was a stumble through. [. . .] This is Richard’s [Fowler’s] opportunity to keep things, throw things out, edit, find out what needs to be added, who needs to be where, what needs to go where, who has to move what, and who’s on first” (CJ, 28 Feb. 1991).

The “narrative dramaturgy,” which provided the audience with a reference point and a sketch of a storyline, emerged from this run-through:

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\(^{18}\) This is an example of the way in which the final product bore the memory of the process. Clarkin’s work is referred to because it was retained, in part, as a result of the salvaging of details from the original
The story for *Alkoremmi* concerns a baby who is born with the last soul on earth. After his birth, all children will be born soulless. This baby’s birth also, inevitably, signals the end of the world, or the beginning of the “apocalypse.” It is this child’s journey through the “last days” and the people and creatures he encounters that forms the story of *Alkoremmi*. (CC Explorations Grant Final Report, 14 May 1991)

An “organic (or dynamic) dramaturgy” had also been created through the particular arrangement of rhythms and tensions and was described by Per Brask as

another set of threads [...] among the first set, producing simultaneity of many events, setting them in a synchronic montage, allowing images and events to fly like sparks from one side of the stage to the other, leaping like electrons defying fixity. The resulting opacity, in the sense that all images and figures ultimately resist transparent transcription into language, heightens the audience’s experience of an experience. (“Dilating the Body” 214)

Watson states that Barba’s dramaturgy “proceeds in leaps rather than in a causally connected sequential chain” (*Third Theatre* 102) in which he creates the sensation of “thought-in-life” (“Eurasian Theatre” 129). As can be surmised from Brask’s description of *Alkoremmi*, Fowler’s dramaturgical orchestrations can also be considered to be a concrete, dramatic rendering of the process of human thought.

According to Watson, Barba’s dramaturgical process consisted of a specific and progressive series of tasks:

> [F]rom his intuitive sense of the connections between thematic sources of the work and of the material developed by the actors, Barba selects two or more of the physical improvisations to be combined into one scene. He then asks the actors to repeat these improvisations together many times, while focussing on how each is affected by the other. The actors make minor adjustments to their original improvisations as they work together, until they feel that the individualized nature of the improvisation has been replaced by a relational tension between them. At this point Barba begins to work with them (*Third Theatre* 87–88).

In Watson’s estimation, Barba began the orchestration of scenic logic after the actors had

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montage created during the Odin residency.
developed relationships within the newly arranged multiple-actor scores. Barba’s focus on editing and adding material and on conducting and rearranging rhythms therefore added another dimension to relationships already established by the actors. However, given the time constraints, Fowler’s application of Barba’s process was significantly different.

Although Fowler was engaging in a process that had been developed as a series of progressions, he was applying the principles in a synchronistic fashion. Actors developed character relationships at the same time that they were working with newly orchestrated material. Thus it was necessary for Fowler, in addition to orchestrating the existing performance material, to be cognizant of the possibilities for relating and linking vocal scores. Furthermore, he had to be fully aware of his choices in order to construct “potential” relationships for the actors to explore and develop further rather than fully defining those relationships. Subsequently, the actors developed their character relationships in a much different way than had actors at the Odin.

Although there is no evidence to suggest that Dixon’s double role was defined by the issue of time, it is reasonable to speculate that time was, at least in part, a consideration. Barba had also made use of dramaturgical support, but as an evolved form of the relationship between an artistic director and a literary advisor that was a tradition of the organization of European theatre companies. The dramaturg, often Taviani, offered an alternative viewpoint at various stages of development in the material and provided a trusted spectatorship (Barba, Interview, 3 Apr. 2005).\footnote{In recent Odin Theatre projects Thomas Bredsdorff has also served as dramaturg (Barba, Interview, 3 Apr. 2005).} Fowler’s working relationship with Dixon was substantially different. Dixon’s role in the project was as dramaturg and writer. He not only assisted in the
adjustment of existing performance text but also generated new text that advanced or altered the progression of performance material. Evidence indicates that, although his commentary was filtered through Fowler, Dixon was writing material and consulting with the director on a regular basis from the onset of the project. The text that he produced was introduced into the emerging performance text in week five (4–9 Feb.). Fowler spent the first weeks of performance development reviewing the scope of previously developed and newly generated material developed by the actors and attempting to salvage aspects of the original montage. Dixon’s texts appear to have been introduced at a point when Fowler had gained a sense of the performance potential and its needs. The material that was salvaged from the original montage was incomplete since two characters were missing from the dynamic. Furthermore, the material that the actors had created in Fowler’s absence was relatively raw as the development of this material had not included the constant feedback that had accompanied the creation of new material for *Dog Day*. Therefore, Fowler was faced with a considerable amount of performance material that needed to be refined and developed before it could be orchestrated. The concrete reality of limited time altered and accelerated the dramaturgical process that Fowler had adopted from the Odin Theatre and placed him in a position in which he could not possibly have registered all of the raw information presented by the actors. For this reason, constant input and feedback from an “outside eye” would be highly advantageous. The incorporation of Dixon’s texts, both written and visual, into the emerging performance text continued until the day before *Alkoremni* opened (CJ, 25 Mar. 1991).

Nonetheless, this arrangement was, at least in part, a matter of chance. At the point at which Fowler invited Dixon to join the project, in the spring of 1990, he would not have been fully aware of the challenges he would face in constructing the performance piece.
The dual role of dramaturg and writer positioned Dixon both as a participant in the orchestration of the performance material and also, through his contribution of spoken scores, as an active participant in each performance. Not only were the ideas of the actors and the director being expressed in a multiplicity of images and rhythms but so also were those of the dramaturg—through the spoken scores and dialogic material he had created in the second of his two roles.

The last few weeks of preparing for the opening of *Alkoremmi* can be described not only as a frenzy of activity but as an intensely creative period of time as well. The atmosphere of increasing tension is captured in the choice of content and in the manner of description employed in company journal entries. During the final weeks of construction and rehearsal, life beyond the company culture all but disappeared. Company members left the rehearsal hall when creative and production tasks were finished, not when the clock indicated that they should do so. During this time, entries referring to training practice become increasingly scarce and then virtually disappear. Although training was maintained as a core practice, this fact was simply noted in journals with little or no accompanying detail.

This was not the case with the documentation of details concerning the dramaturgical construction. What did occur, however, was a shift in sensibility concerning what and how information was transcribed. The documentation focused on the development of performance material and on the identification of problems and solutions arising from structuring the performance and related technical details. Company members were solely responsible for attention to all production needs. All buying, building, and preparing of these properties was done by company members in the extended workday that followed scheduled training and rehearsal sessions. In many ways the documentation found in the company journal in the late
stages of rehearsal for *Alkoremmi* served as a kind of collective checklist of the tasks and issues that needed to be dealt with or that had been accomplished.

Attention to technical duties was vastly increased during the course of week nine (4–10 Mar.) and as a result the workday extended into the evening. It was not unusual for company members to work ten or twelve hours a day to complete necessary technical tasks, which included rigging a curtain system, setting up the lighting panel, organizing the use of various lit props, and painting the ladder and platform structures, as well as the PTE rehearsal hall floor. The painting alone required the efforts of all company members and consumed an entire day that had been scheduled as time off.

Week nine was also an intense period of constructing and refining the performance text. Actors worked on specific detailing in multiple-actor scores already arranged by Fowler and on the construction of new multiple-actor scores drawn from the group cabaret material. Although he had arranged and orchestrated the composite scores with possibilities for relationships in mind, Fowler left the responsibility for setting these relationships to the actors. Randoja noted a particular arrangement in which she was to play a tango on the accordion at the same time that a dance duet, extracted from one of the group cabaret pieces, was being executed. As the actors worked through the combined score, they realized that both the dance and the music needed to be modified in order for the two to fit together rhythmically (CJ, 5 Mar. 1991). Randoja also noted the construction of a new scene involving her and Kitt on stilts performing selected sections of Kowalchuk’s ensemble cabaret piece. Although the original score had been choreographed with the song “Just in Time,” the tone of the reconstructed piece score was substantially altered with the decision to have it executed in silence: “[It] feels a bit eerie, these two silent masked figures doing the

In addition to the continual introduction of new material and ongoing adjustment of existing material during the week, two new characters appeared. The Shaman (Wells) and The Dark Witch (Randoja) were introduced as elemental forces catalysing the performance’s climactic scene (CC Explorations Grant Final Report, 14 May 1991), in which The Song and Dance Angel appears with a small skeleton and warns the audience of the impending end of the world. Although these characters were new additions to the performance text, both had been developed over time by the performers and had evolved through various incarnations. What is intended by introducing this information into this discussion is to point out that not all of the performance material created by the actors was used in the structuration of the performance text. The raw material provided Fowler with a range of possibility as he orchestrated the performance logic and forged the links between arrangements of physical and vocal scores. With Dixon’s assistance he drew upon this breadth of potential performance material, particularly as he constructed the transitional moments linking each score or sequence to the next. The week (4–10 Mar.) was also characterized by continual run-throughs of the performance score on a daily or almost daily basis. Fowler surveyed each advanced version of the performance text and adjusted details in a moment-by-moment fashion.

As can be deduced from descriptions of the multi-tasking that Primus members were engaging in each day, the actors were exhausted from working in this constant state of overdrive in the project’s final weeks:

I find today’s rehearsal tiring, as we go from the beginning and work on small details, practical problems and who’s where, when. I find it difficult to keep my energy up when we stop and start. [. . .] [It is] a challenge to face the tiredness positively. (Randoja, CJ, 6 Mar. 1991)
The title of the new performance was officially changed to *Alkoremmi* at the end of the week. While engaged in research exploring the significance of the number five, Dixon discovered the fictional palace of Alkoremmi in a Gothic novel, *Vathek*, written by William Thomas Beckford in the late eighteenth century. The central character of the novel, Vathek, is an Arabian prince with excessive sensual tastes. The palace of Alkoremmi, originally built by his father, was renovated as a monument to these tastes. Vathek added five wings to the building, each devoted to the indulgence of one of the five senses. Although Fowler proposed the title, he was concerned about the lack of performance information conveyed. Details that would eventually define the narrative dramaturgy had only begun to emerge, and the entire piece was still under construction. An overall perspective of the piece did not and could not exist at that time. This was a dilemma that would again be solved in the arena of necessity and practicality because a rapidly approaching performance date made it necessary for the company to begin publicity efforts. In order to allude to aspects of the atmosphere and the aesthetic of the piece Wells suggested the use of a subtitle:

A Last Circus  
(Wide and Tall)  
A Command Performance  
(Within the Wall)  
of  
*Alkoremmi*

In week ten (12–17 Mar.) Clarkin returned to Winnipeg to assume the role of publicist. The scheduling and general pace of company activity continued as it had the week before, with the addition of promotional activity handled by Clarkin and aided by Dixon. The

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20 The novel is also known as *The History of Caliph Vathek* or *Vathek, an Arabian Tale*. It was originally written in French by William Thomas Beckford in 1782. It was first published in English as a translation by Reverend Samuel Henley and did not name Beckford as the original writer. The first French
workday continued to stretch to ten to twelve hours. Journal documentation indicates an increased intensity in dramaturgical activity that included the addition of new material and, in particular, the addition of new text to certain scores, a continuation of the refining and detailing of existing material, changes and adjustments in the running order of orchestrated scores, run-throughs of the most recent versions of the performance text, and attention to the crafting of technical details necessary for a cohesive performance. As Fowler built and rearranged the chronology of the piece, he had the actors run the orchestrated sequences and attend immediately to necessary alterations. When the adjustments were made, the process was undertaken with another sequence of physical and vocal scores (Kowalchuk, CJ, 12–17 Mar. 1991).

At this late stage in the performance preparation, company journal entries relating to dramaturgical progress dissipate into vaguely referenced details. There is a series of somewhat vague statements referring to points in the performance score at which run-throughs stopped and started: “We tried to finish but got as far as the shadow play with the spooky skeleton” (Kowalchuk, CJ, 12 Mar. 1991) and “We then continued the work from Tango to Don and Karin’s scene (pulling Don’s skirt)” (Kowalchuk, CJ, 15 Mar. 1991). Although journal entries reveal less and less of the process underway, they increasingly read as dramaturgical record keeping and seem to be skeletal maps of advancing chronological progression. These journal entries also indicate continued integration of Dixon’s written texts into the evolving performance text through brief statements, such as “Ker and I [Kowalchuk] worked on our scene with the new text added. Then Stephen worked with his ‘trapeze’ text with Richard” (Kowalchuk, CJ, 15 Mar. 1991). Considering the actors’ state of embodying version was published in 1787.
the documented moments and their total immersion in the concrete details of the process, these entries would have provided substantial factual information to project participants. This is not the case, however, for a researcher seeking to gain an understanding of the process. Taken out of a concrete context, these descriptions become exceedingly vague and serve to oversimplify the arduousness of the construction process and the meticulousness of the craft. A video viewing of *Alkoremmi*, followed by a re-examination of the journal notes, provided not only a context for the commentary but also an appreciation of the labour-intensive crafting necessary to produce the resulting audio and visual images.

Although records indicate that the performance text, sans closing, was completed on March 13 (1991), numerous changes and adjustments were made in the days that followed. Fowler decided to call for an unscheduled, late-day run-through on March 17. The company spent a scheduled day off working through the adjusted performance material and, that evening, running the entire performance. As was the case in all aspects of company life, Primus members left the rehearsal studio when necessary tasks were completed, rather than working on a clocked schedule. The Canada Council *Explorations Grant Final Report* notes that this workweek also included substantial amounts of time spent on “invisible action.” This was all the unseen activity that went into the planning and cohesive execution of all the “magical” and “transformative” moments in the performance piece. Since Primus did not operate with running crews or production technicians, actors were responsible for all the production activity. Therefore, careful planning and extensive rehearsal of these invisible actions was necessary in order to make sure that spectators experienced the shifts in action and image in the manner in which they had been planned:

> The technical aspects such as lighting, the movement of props, flashlights and megaphones, as well as costume changes backstage become less and less
problematic as the company slowly works through, in detail, the organization and execution of these “invisible” actions which eventually become part of each actor’s score. (*CC Explorations Grant Final Report*, 14 May 1991)

The final full week of rehearsal occurred March 18–24 (week eleven); however, activity occurring in this week was not documented until two weeks later. Details are vague and provide little sense of the process required to achieve the documented results. The sketchiness of the commentary makes it difficult even to speculate what occurred in terms of the fine-tuning and rearrangement of the material. In effect, what can be inferred from the lack of information is that the actors were so entirely preoccupied with the multiple tasks required of them that there was no time for reflection.

Grant reports and a post-premiere summary of the activity indicates that the dramaturgical activity in the week leading up to the premiere of *Alkoremmi* (18–24 Mar.) was similar to that of previous weeks: the addition of new work (with an emphasis on the introduction of text to specific scores), changes to the order and detailing of existing material, frequent runs of the performance in order to test the dramaturgical structure, and slow, methodical run-throughs in which material was adjusted or reset.

The company journal also indicates the tense and difficult conditions in which the company was functioning. Members were dealing with far more than the general tension and apprehension associated with the premiere of an original performance. The working day continued to stretch to ten to twelve hours and into formerly designated days off. Time away from rehearsal was spent attending to immediate technical and production needs, such as shopping for props and costumes, fine-tuning set and prop details, and calculating the logistics of special effects. Lawson notes that tension crackled in the performance space as actors attended to these final preparations. He also noted Fowler’s attempt to diffuse the
worry and to place the work in perspective with the reminder that the performance would be adjusted constantly in the two or so years that it would be a part of the company’s repertoire and that therefore “the desire to be perfect or complete can never be fulfilled [. . .] and is an impossible feat” (CJ, 23 Mar. 1991). The already tense situation was further complicated by the fact that crucial final rehearsals were being scheduled around PTE performances.

As PTE had provided Primus with a cost-free rehearsal/performance space in the rehearsal hall adjacent to PTE’s main-stage theatre, the company could not rehearse when paid matinee performances were in session. As a result run-throughs were interrupted by the PTE performances for the entire week prior to the opening of Alkoremmi. A mid-week “work-through” run was stopped twice. In order to maximize rehearsal time, Fowler created a schedule that worked around the interruptions. Time was allotted for one-on-one work with each actor on her/his text, for singing that could be moved to another space, and for experimentation with possibilities for the final moment of the performance piece (CC Explorations Grant Final Report, 14 May 1991). During the early part of the week, Per Brask viewed the existing performance text and offered commentary addressing what he perceived to be several structural problems. Although details of Brask’s commentary are not documented, Dixon recalled that the comments referred to the performance logic and reinforced concerns expressed by Dixon and Fowler (Dixon, Interview, 31 Mar. 1998). Scores in the latter part of the piece were rearranged and adjusted accordingly.

It was not until the end of the week that the final moment of the piece set. Although the general structure of Alkoremmi had been determined much earlier, and possible endings

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21 It is likely that the length of time of “two years” was drawn from Odin practice in which performance pieces were retained in repertoire and toured for a minimum of two years before being retired.
explored, it had not been possible to determine the ending until the performance logic had been fine-tuned. A series of images generated by Dixon was chosen as the conclusion:

[A] beautiful image—the flickering candle behind the shadow of a man. As he moves away from the screen his shadow grows larger and larger. It is as if he disappears into our memory. The white candles flicker causing the outline to move, to jump. [. . .]. During this shadow play the “woman/lover” [Kowalchuk] character sings: “But my eyes deceive me, you were not there, just the trees that shook, [. . .] only a storm that broke through the dark air. Fare thee well, my shadow love. (Lawson, CJ, 22 Mar. 1991)

An addition was made to the end of the scenario on the day that Alkoremmi opened. The actors sang “A Candle to Light You to Bed” in four-part harmony in the semi-dark space, and when the song ended, each actor removed one item of costume, “revealing themselves, the ‘actors,’ rather than the ‘characters’” (CC Explorations Grant Final Report, 14 May 1991).

Not only were the final moments being set, adjusted, and clarified in the last few days of rehearsal but new text written by Dixon was also being introduced into other sections of the piece. Lawson was given text that echoed Puck’s final monologue in A Midsummer Night’s Dream to accompany his final physical score as the Song and Dance Angel. Actors began the week that Alkoremmi opened by doing repeated run-throughs to familiarize themselves with the realigned order, corrected details, and the subsequent shifts in the choreography of the “invisible actions.” Lawson describes the nightmare quality of a run-through two days before opening:

Sometimes I feel really crazy. I can’t remember what comes next, where to go, what to do—running through at this stage reminds me of one of those bizarre dreams so common amongst performers where nothing goes correctly, where all these fantastic events take place, “where the inexplicable takes form.” (CJ, 24 Mar. 1991)
The Performance

Although a freak snowstorm blanketed the city, *Alkoremmi* opened as planned on Tuesday, March 26 (1991) at 9:00 p.m. The close to capacity audience consisted mostly of friends and family\(^{22}\) and included Richard Holden from the Canada Council. The *Alkoremmi* experience began the moment spectators entered the PTE building that housed the performance. They were kept waiting outside the performance space until a few minutes prior to the “official” beginning. At this time, they were escorted into the candle-lit performance space in groups of four or five to seats that were chosen for them. Kowalchuk, whose attire as the Woman in White triggered images of the mythological huntress Athena (Diana), led spectators through the darkness with a large, oiled-paper parasol topped with a lit candle. The performance began when Randoja, as the Woman in Red, snuffed out the last of the lit candles. A symphony of disembodied voices filled the darkness and the world beyond *Alkoremmi* no longer existed.

All spectators, regardless of where they were seated, were no further than several metres from the space occupied by the actors. This spatial arrangement was informed by a scientific experiment conducted at ISTA (1981) in which it was proven that spectator proximity to the performers and playing space affects the intensity of the person’s experience (Fowler, Telephone Interview, 23 Jan. 1997).\(^ {23}\) Spectators were connected to the performers’

\(^{22}\) Although space was designed to accommodate an audience of seventy, the opening night audience was limited to forty people.

\(^{23}\) This research took place at ISTA and involved an experiment in which scientists and kinaesiologists used electronic devices to measure spectators’ reaction, using actor-spectator proximity as the variant. As might be expected, spectators registered heightened responses when placed close to the test performance. However, they also discovered that after a distance of four or five metres, no changes or distinctions were registered in spectator response. Fowler relayed this first-hand reporting of the experiment that occurred at ISTA 1981.
actions as the actors entered, exited, and spoke from the spaces between and behind the bleachers that continually expanded and contracted the boundaries of the playing space. As a result, the position of the spectator was constantly shifting from peripheral to central locations in the action. In response to this choreography of entrances and exits, reviewer McIlroy claimed that the warning “Watch your back, Sonny boy,” uttered by one of Lawson’s characters, was actually very practical advice (Winnipeg Free Press, 31 Mar. 1991).

While spectators were not invited to take part in the construction of the dramatic actions within the playing space, Fowler maintained that spectator participation in the construction of meaning was one of the Primus Theatre’s performance goals. Regardless of what meaning was constructed, a degree of active engagement was expected to occur between the spectator and the perceived phenomenology. The spectator experience was thus intended to be participatory at visceral, emotional, and intellectual levels. In this way, the experience of viewing Alkoremmi invited the spectator into a kind of “playground” experience in which definitive terms became irrelevant. As Fowler stated, “[w]e deliberately enter into intelligent chaos and begin a process of research. We discover the meaning in process” (qtd. in Buchholz 10). In turn, the opportunity to “deliberately enter into intelligent chaos” and to actively engage in the construction of meaning was passed on to witnesses of the performance.

It is likely that very few spectators realized the magnitude of the event that they were participating in. Primus Theatre wasn’t simply opening a performance run, it was sharing an experience and establishing a presence. The shared journey that led to the premiere of Alkoremmi had been difficult and convoluted and had involved much hardship. Company
members had come to this moment in a very conscious and mindful way and were aware of the sacrifices that would be necessary to maintain and advance their chosen practice. Company members were confronted with issues of space, which face many small theatre companies, as well as with issues of time and finance that were unique to their circumstance. They found ways to cope with Fowler’s absence from the training studio and as a group managed to survive feelings of isolation and exhaustion. They also found ways to access funding in an arts funding system that largely catered to commercial theatre. They managed to remain cohesive in the face of personnel changes that affected the performance aesthetic and structuration of *Alkoremmi*. In essence, they had established their theatre practice.

In a preface to his backdated journal entries, documenting the week prior to and the week following the opening of *Alkoremmi*, Lawson wrote a heartfelt response and tribute to the project and his colleagues:

> I look back on the past two weeks and see a blur of images, almost like the lead up to a wedding or funeral with all its excitement and confusion, and with all its dramatic after-effects. I am deeply proud of this group of people. We have done more than just merely create a performance (which admittedly is not an easy or simple thing). We have established a way of working together, a language, a community; one, which at the best of times transcends our differences, our individual desires and creates a whole—but this whole doesn’t negate individuality and differences—it celebrates it, no? However there is a respect here for the larger unit, the whole, the group—it is treated with the care that we can treat each other individually with, as if it also existed in the flesh and blood as we do. (CJ, 4 Apr. 1991)

The process of constructing *Alkoremmi* was a long and arduous one that began well before the construction period leading to the premiere. In spite of the isolation and the odds against them, company members found the strength and courage to continue to pursue their collective artistic goals. By all accounts it is remarkable that Primus Theatre was able to exist at all in the time and place in which it emerged. The examination of the period between the
company’s return from the Odin Theatre residency and the premiere of Alkoremmi exhibits both the hardships and setbacks encountered by the emerging company and the aspects of company life that compelled actors to work toward establishing such a practice in the face of overwhelming adversity. Time and again, interviews and journal entries reiterate the expression of a fundamental collective belief in “the work.” It was this belief and the personal satisfaction derived from the process of creating and performing the work that sustained company members through the nine years of Primus’s existence. In 1995, Wells stated that “one of the reasons that I have continued with this work is I get to write and I get to write the material that I’m going to perform, so I get to make choices. And I mean [. . .] I don’t always feel it’s brilliant but at least I feel like I take full responsibility for it” (qtd. in Vaughan-Jackson, 29 Oct. 1995).

What of this work? The documentation of the training and dramaturgical processes at the core of Primus’s theatre practice repeatedly indicates the unceasing demands on the actors’ time and energy and the difficulties endured for the sake of working in a way that was alien to the dominant paradigm established in English-Canadian theatre practice. This documentation also registers the respect for and joy in the work experienced by the actors. Journal entries, articles, and interview statements indicate that company members were attracted to and driven by the artistic empowerment—physical, vocal, and psychological—that their practice encouraged and enabled. They were drawn to the impetus for change and growth inherent in the principles and techniques they had learned and were developing and to the sense of play, playfulness, and exploration necessary for the advancement of their practice. While training and constructing art were the core of the actors’ culture, however, there was also a clear understanding of the theatrical experience that the company could offer
If Fowler had been interested solely in process and exploration, it is likely that he would have accepted the offer to continue working on Grotowski’s Theatre of Sources project. However, he did not. He chose to pursue his original plan to visit the Odin Theatre in order to observe the application of the techniques and principles that he had begun to explore in the structuration of a performance piece. He was interested not only in the process of creating art but also in the process of sharing the art. In 1996 he stated that his involvement in the theatre was a pursuit of “a means of defining and defending a way of interacting with other human beings in a manner which, described by social biologist Ashley Montagu in another context, ‘implies involvement, concern, responsibility, tenderness, and an awareness of the needs and vulnerabilities of others’” (“Why Did We Do It?” 54). Fowler and Primus sought to create theatre that provided the spectator with an experience that would startle and challenge the individual’s assumptions about theatre and life. To this end, performances were configured to offer spectators an experience that reflected and echoed the challenge and surprise experienced by the actors during the creative process. At a fundamental level the work echoed that of Grotowski’s performance work with the Theatre Laboratory, which was focused on generating an “authentic experience” within the spectator. As illustrated through the examination of the training and dramaturgical processes, the performance text created by Primus was a sophisticated composition of an extra-daily physical and vocal language organically developed through training, a multi-layered dramaturgical structure organized around a non-linear logic. Spoken text was one of many strands of a compositional structure that included music, song, sound, light, physical scores, props, and scenic properties. In an interview for The Evening Telegram (St. John’s), Wells indicated that Primus placed equal
emphasis and care on the development of physical, musical, and textual scores. He refuted the label of “Image Theatre” commonly applied to the company’s work. He explained that Primus’s performance work was a counteractive position to the formulaic nature of most theatre and other cultural forms, a “return to a certain ambiguity in art, where the audience can experience something on stage without interference from any pre-set conditions” (qtd. in Vaughan-Jackson, 29 Oct. 1995). Fowler explains this further in an expression of his own expectations of the theatre:

When I go to the theatre I want a primarily kinaesthetic experience, not a primarily intellectual one. I don’t go to the theatre to sit and think, activities for which I have other times and places, but to experience, to be taken out of myself, to have my expectations and presumptions about life and living surprised and changed, not confirmed and reassured. And when I go to the theatre, I want to see magicians not reciters, I want to see actors using their bodies, minds, emotions, energy, in ways which astonish and transport me to other levels of reality and perception. (“The Anthropology of Performance” 88)

In contrast to proponents of realism and naturalism, Fowler did not view theatre as a mirror but as a deconstructive tool that enables new possibilities for human interaction to emerge and to be explored. He saw the theatre in the same way that Mikhail Bakhtin saw the carnival, as a site for the exploration of basic human exchange. He placed theatre in an active position, as an opportunity for the creation of potential realities, rather than for the emulation and dissection of those in existence. He and his actors worked with the technique of montage as a basic dramaturgical structure. Montage is both the linking together of the actors’ individually developed vocal and action explorations into a score for each actor and the combination of those scores into a performance text (Third Theatre 96). It does not use a linear, progressive time model or a cause-and-effect logical model, as in psychological and social realism. Discontinuous jumps in action and breaks between action and impulse often
occur. Plot and psychology do not provide the dramatic structure of the performance piece. On one hand Primus members used recognizable coding systems from real life in the construction of *Alkoremmi*. On the other, in the spirit of experimenting with possibility, these signs were expressed and arranged in unusual ways. Viewing the material reveals songs, visual images, and character representations that were dislodged from taken-for-granted readings and offered in startling new combinations that invited unconditioned spectator response.

The popular and highly recognizable song “All of Me” was separated from the harmonious, romantic context in which it is commonly used and rearranged in minor keys. It was sung a cappella by Wells as the Last Baby born with a soul as he wandered the playing space completely isolated from the two other characters present. Kitt’s masked, stilt-walking Earth Mother, who gave birth to the baby earlier in the performance, looks on from the periphery of the playing space. Kowalchuk as the Woman in White concentrates her attention on the precisely defined square she is marking out with her feet as she moves around Wells. When the square is complete, she focuses on balancing on the invisible lines that she has created. Thus a popular song’s highly recognizable melody and lyrics have taken on a sense of strangeness and unfamiliarity within this altered context.

Candles, common symbols of enlightenment, were snuffed out before the official commencement of the performance, leaving the spectators in pitch darkness for the first few minutes as disembodied voices filled the space. In a simple act of inversion, snuffing rather than lighting candles to signal commencement, a sense of dissonance and disruption of taken-for-granted realities was established at the top of the performance piece. Folk tale clichés take on an ominous, even malevolent, quality when arranged as a relentless rapid-fire word-
sequence and delivered by distorted and disembodied voices. “Don’t stand under a tree in a thunderstorm. . . . Don’t walk between parked cars. . . . Always dress warmly . . . Stay away from a barking dog” (Alkoremmi 8). Taken out of the context of everyday conversation and positioned with similar directives, this collection of banalities takes on a very negative and fear-driving quality that has been all but removed in present usage. All three examples of inverted and/or distorted signification serve not only Fowler’s objective of an “alternative model for human interaction” but also Bakhtin’s sense of carnival logic.

This arrangement of common images in unusual ways is combined with both highly personal and archetypal visual and aural images to construct the multi-strand dramaturgy of Alkoremmi narrative. All four of Carl Gustav Jung’s essential archetypes are represented in some way during the performance.24 The Mother figure is embodied in Kitt’s stilt-walker Earth Mother, dressed in skirts, who gives “birth” to Wells’ fully grown Last Baby character wrapped in an amniotic sac of clear plastic wrap. Birth/Rebirth images occur within the simple and graceful struggle of the Last Baby to break free of this external protective “skin.” The Trickster is represented in Lawson’s cryptic, black-humoured Song and Dance Angel. He destroys stillness whenever he appears, is constantly in the state of flux, and is engaged either in lively dancing or equally lively dispensation of advice to the Last Baby. Spirit elements are presented in the disembodied voices described by Dakers as wailing, Randoja’s faceless Woman in Red, and in the primitive chanting and interactions offered by Randoja’s Dark Witch and Wells’s drumming Shaman.

Yet even these archetypes are subject to an inversion, distortion, and ambiguity that Bakhtin attributes to carnival elements. The birthing Earth Mother is a towering giant with a

24 Jung has identified the Mother, Rebirth, Spirit, and the Trickster as essential archetypes.
sterile, masked countenance, who at times is involved in a frenzied percussive dance that seems more threatening than nurturing toward her child. The Song and Dance Angel’s actions are executed in an upbeat polka rhythm, his words chanted in a manner stereotypical of sideshow barkers or the Master of Ceremonies at a Vaudeville show. But his words have a clearly ominous ring: “Have you ever heard of babies born without souls. It won’t be long now” (*Alkoremmi* 4). The dance between the Dark Witch and the Shaman shifts from angular, aggressive, and threatening motions to curvi-linear seductions.  

Furthermore, the montage structure employed in the dramaturgical framework disengages the reading of signs in a cause-and-effect manner. Images appear and sometimes reappear fluidly, transforming from one precise display to another.

The world of *Alkoremmi* offers to audiences everyday views and visions, using images and interrelationships that transgress the “real-world” status quo. The subversion explored in the piece tends toward the deconstruction and subsequent reconstruction of universal and personal ritual and myth. On a visceral level the situations and characters have been described as “haunting,” “mysterious,” “dream-like,” “stirring,” and even “creepy.” The world of *Alkoremmi* has been identified as a place “filled with beauty and magic” and “where magic is still possible.” These descriptors imply recognition, on some level of perception, of a sense of “other-world” and indicate the expectation of something other than expected. In the most fundamental of ways, spectators are therefore being positioned for surprise, “the act of coming upon unaware, or of taking suddenly and without preparation; an

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25 The word “dance” is used to describe sequences of precise, choreographed movement with and without musical accompaniment.

26 This refers to the notation by reviewers, critics, and scholars cited in this paper.
emotion excited by something happening suddenly and unexpectedly; wonder, astonishment” (Webster 845).

There is a sense of “doubleness” to the images found in the world of *Alkoremmi* that bears resemblance to the inversion that Bakhtin explores in his study of the carnival. Images capture momentary shifts and transformations rather than tangible and nameable finished properties. The lullaby-humming Madonna in Black beckons to the Last Baby with a soothing familiar melody. The only pauses in her crooning occur as she executes a half-circle turn away from the “baby.” When the Last Baby is immediately in front of her, with the flick of a wrist removing a mask, the Madonna is abruptly transformed into the Song and Dance Angel who repeats an earlier warning: “Watch your back. Sonny boy” (*Alkoremmi* 5).

This sense of ambiguity is also created in other ways throughout the narrative. The Earth Mother stilt figure is shown as a nurturing mother giving birth and standing aside watching the “baby” take his first tentative steps in the world, as an aggressive and threatening entity dancing around the Last Baby in angular staccato motions, and finally as a pathetically comic creature staggering about the playing space with a copper cone, apparently stuck, on its head. Situations also present ambiguous information. Midway through the performance, a sequence occurs in which high density spotlights careen through the pitch-black playing space, and cliché advice is delivered by disembodied and distorted voices. Although the most obvious reading of the atmosphere would be as ominous or foreboding, the Last Baby, seemingly unaware of this “reading”, is seen chasing the lights as if they were butterflies. In presenting a multiplicity of images that very concretely offer unfinished portraits of a character in the state of fluctuation or that defy common readings of the signs presented, Primus offers the spectator multiple facets of a somewhat ambiguous whole from
which individuals can draw highly personal meaning.

Humorous moments occur throughout *Alkoremni*, although they are generally unacknowledged in the critical response. This can be attributed to a failure to appreciate a broad range of humour or, perhaps more optimistically, to the lack of discursive language necessary for such an expression. Once again Bakhtin’s analysis of Rabelais’s work provides the underpinning for discussing this aspect of *Alkoremni*. Bakhtin describes the attitude toward laughter that emerged in the seventeenth century and prevailed into modern times as “narrow and specific” (67). He rejects this narrowed view for its lack of “a universal philosophical form” and its singular reference to “individual and individually typical phenomena of social life” (67). He argues that this narrowing of comic focus has led to beliefs that the “important and essential cannot be comical” (67) and subsequently to the diminished status of the comical in literature. This observation concerning the range of comedy can be applied to theatrical performance, particularly given the literary core of English-Canadian theatre.

In his discussion of carnival structures Umberto Eco notes that, in order to enjoy the parodic representations that occur during carnival, it is necessary that the “rules and rituals [being parodied, can] already be recognized and respected. One must know to what degree certain behaviours are forbidden [. . .] to appreciate their transgression” (6). While elements of parody do pervade the narrative of *Alkoremni*, it would be far too simplistic to simply categorize the work as parody. In the case of the transgressions that occur in the piece, the parodic quality is contained in brief and fleeting images rather than the re-enactment of entire rituals. These visual and aural images include the distorted kazoo version of “The Teddy Bear’s Picnic,” the cryptic streetwise comments of the Song and Dance Angel (“So let’s
dance smarty-pants. Have a last slipped in the back door, hoopla ballyhoo” [Alkoremmi 3]) and the dark melody attached to the familiar children’s game song “Oranges and Lemons” (“a candle to light you to bed […] a chopper to chop off your head” [Alkoremmi 17]), which serves as a reminder of the song’s origin. These occurrences become darkly humorous to spectators with knowledge of the common interpretations.

This is not, however, a humour defined by narrow social parameters and that presupposes that all spectators will react in the same way. The enjoyment of the moment is subject to an understanding of the original form and also an understanding of the distorted element, rather than of the subverted behaviour that Eco discusses with reference to carnival. Delighted laughter and awe are generated from the spectators as the Song and Dance Angel sends a message to the Last Baby via a sparkler-carrying, miniature high-wire artist on a bicycle, “Message for you. Heads up” (Alkoremmi 11). These antics bring to mind a multiplicity of images: the Trickster, the office joker, the clown, and popular comic book characters. It is the spectator who finalizes the image by imbuing it with a specific and personal reading.

Bakhtin identifies the concept of carnival as a borderline position between life and art: [It is] “life itself, but shaped according to a certain pattern of play” (7). He further positions the carnival as a construction of “a second world and a second life outside officialdom” (6) in which human beings resided during a designated period of time each year. The world of carnival is therefore a lived event, separate from the quotidian world. While carnival exists, there is no other reality to return to. Bakhtin claims that by means of the “other-worldly” reality of the carnival, participants experience the revival and renewal of their everyday world (7). It is this “other” world that Alkoremmi occupies as well, a world
that exists beyond the representations of everyday reality and that invites spectators into its midst for a time.

*Alkoremmi*: A Continuing Journey

*Alkoremmi* would become Primus Theatre’s longest running performance piece and was not retired until December 1996. It would also become the company’s signature piece, viewed by over 4,770 spectators in over 133 performances in two languages across Canada and in the United States. It is perhaps Primus’s best-known performance piece and, although widely viewed (as indicated by the spectator statistics), print documentation of *Alkoremmi* and other Primus work is highly limited. Although most of the articles or chapter entries written about Primus do refer to *Alkoremmi*, these documents number less than a dozen. Most of this information does little to advance general knowledge or understanding of the company’s training, dramaturgy, or performance work, and in several cases retreads information that has been covered in earlier, more comprehensive articles.\(^{27}\) Except for a small collection of spectator comments that have been preserved in the company archives, print reviews, transcripts of electronic media reviews, and short preview pieces are the only other sources of information about *Alkoremmi*. This is even truer of Primus’s post-*Alkoremmi* work, which in most cases is not discussed beyond the introduction of performance title in

\(^{27}\) Notable exceptions are articles by dramaturg/writer Per Brask and poet Lisa Mark, who indicate an understanding of intentions and purposes of the performance and/or processes necessary to reach the result. Each in their own right offers insight into the company’s work. Mark’s article refers to *The Night Room*. 
the existing articles and chapter entries discussing the company’s work.  

In general, preview pieces tend to reiterate company information issued in press packages and publications already discussed. The reviews provide quite a different kind of information. At best the information in the reviews is subjective and descriptive and is most revealing when reviewers admit their critical biases and limitations. Most of those who did so acknowledged a visceral and moving experience, even if they couldn’t quite explain it. At worst the reviewers projected their own frames of reference onto the performance without justification or explanation. In the case of the latter situation, the reviews provide limited and at times highly skewed interpretations of the material and incorrect information. Viewed as a collection, the range of reviewer responses indicates diversity not only in the expression of responses but also in what reviewers were responding to. These responses also illustrate the limited parameters with which most reviewers observed the performance.

In essence, the examination of these responses serves to support Barbara Drennan’s argument (1992) that “English-Canadian theatrical poesis is founded on the assumptions of literary poesis” (58). This argument can be used to speculate on the reasons that Primus’s legacy is evidenced most prevalently in practical rather than in theoretical contexts and is so acutely under-represented in analytic discourse. This is not to say that Primus is alone in this situation. Other small theatre companies with a variety of alternative practices have also been largely ignored by the media and by scholars as well. This is due at least in part to the English-Canadian review structure that emerged from literary theory and analysis and that has dictated the critical language and analytic structures.

What can be deduced from reviewer response to *Alkoremmi* is that many reviewers

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28 The exception is Mark’s reaction to *The Night Room* published in 1995.
working for the English-Canadian press used realism and/or plot-based progression as informing standards and made underlying and often insidious reference to Aristotelian narratives and structures. As a result those responses were predictably limited to addressing perceived absences in the performance and to drawing attention to narrative and descriptive details and to moments in the performance that could be read using established critical parameters. As Charles Marowitz notes in *Confessions of a Counterfeit Critic*,

> [i]n our culture the understanding of the performer’s work has often been blocked by the presumption of understanding. Critics, scholars, theoreticians, and even philosophers such as Hegel and Sartre have tried to interpret the performer’s creative process by starting from the assumption that they knew what they were talking about. In reality they yielded to their spectator ethnocentrism. (43)

Embedded in this literary notion of critical analysis is the expectation, or the implication, that a story exists and that from this story it is possible to extract a definite meaning. Few reviewers seem to consider the possibility of multiple readings of the performance text. Instead, the fact that a singular meaning was not forthcoming in the performance material was treated as if the meaning were somehow obscured rather than opened-ended. When a singular meaning could not be determined, the creators were blamed for failing to provide some sense of essential truth, something they had never intended to provide. Although Primus constructed performances that were intended to challenge the way in which its spectatorship perceived and responded to theatre, the reviewing faction of this population seemed intent to hold fast to preset analytic determinants. Many reviewers attempted to explain *Alkoremni* in terms that they understood, that of a plot or story, identifiable characters, and an Aristotelian dramatic progression.

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29 Most French-Canadian reviewers did not hold to this bias. There were however exceptions such as Anne-Marie Lecomte. After praising the opening of the performance she stated, “*Alkoremni* n’offre
Reporter Ross Rutherford’s televised interview with arts critic Robert Enright for CBC Late Night on March 30 1992 serves as an extreme example of this kind of bias. Although Enright was a supporter of the company’s work and has provided some of the most insightful reviewing of the company’s work available, Rutherford’s highly limited view of theatre and his undisguised lack of knowledge of Primus Theatre’s work dominated the interview. After beginning the interview with claim that Alkoremmi was basically “about the last circus on earth,” he introduced Enright and then stated, “I think of M.T.C [Manitoba Theatre Centre]. I think of Prairie Theatre Exchange. I think of the Fringe Festival. And yet this production is by a group called ‘PRIMUS.’ Now who are they?” At the time, Primus had been in Winnipeg for nearly three years. The transcript indicates that, after Enright gave a brief company biography, a short video segment of Alkoremmi was shown. The following exchange occurred at the end of the clip:

ROSS: This is unusual. I’m trying to be a little diplomatic here. This is not going to be the lead-in act for the Academy Awards tonight.
ENRIGHT: No it’s not.
ROSS: It’s pretty off the wall, isn’t it?
ENRIGHT: It’s a different kind of theatre. It’s a theatre wherein they force you to rediscover simple things. I mean, there’s a moment where a button accordionist played and when she closes the button accordion and there’s no sound, you hear the [R.E. breathes in] deep sound of the air that’s the same way that the actress breathes in certain points of the theatre. So it forces you to become aware of things you’ve forgotten about, in a kind of rediscovery play. For that it’s very intense and I admire it very much.
ROSS: It forces you to do some things. Is it a good storyline? Is it a good plot? (CBC Late Night transcript. 30 Mar. 1992)

Rutherford’s commentary is not only uninformed, particularly considering Primus’s three-

absolument aucune progression dramatique” (Voir calendrier Theatre, Jusqu’au 31 mai 1992).

30 The CBC broadcast the entire interview to a local audience on 30 March 1992. Only a portion of the transcript appears in this discussion. The show affiliation is not marked on the transcript.
year residency in the city, but also highly biased, irresponsible, and disrespectful of the work.

While the extent of this disrespect was unsurpassed by other reviewers, the Aristotelian bias continues to appear, albeit at times fleetingly, in a number of the reviews expressing shortcomings in the work. There is also a distinct awkwardness in many of the writers’ observations as they attempt to extract meaning or to explain the performance in a linear fashion. The most elegant commentary comes from writers who acknowledge their own biases or who recognize that the notion of meaning itself is being redefined by the performers. As Enright points out in the CBC interview, *Alkoremmi* is a kind of “rediscovery play” that creates meaning for the observer through the observation. In many cases advocates and critics alike appear to be struggling to find a vocabulary with which to express meaning in the performance for their readership or viewers. Addressing this “strangeness” expressed by spectators experiencing Primus performances (at the time of the interview both *Dog Day* and *Alkoremmi* had been mounted), Fowler stated,

[the spectator “reads” the performance on the basis of all the signs that make up the performance score. This can be difficult for a spectator accustomed to receiving meaning only through the spoken word, to have the meaning of what he/she is seeking told to him/her. When this kind of spectator first comes to see one of our productions he/she may not know how to “read” it, expecting the text to explain everything and contain all the performance’s meaning. Now in fact, if this spectator was given the opportunity to experience this kind of performance on a regular basis, he/she would very quickly and very easily become able to “read” it. It is just a question of changing the understanding of what the theatre experience can be. (“The Anthropology of Performance” 87)]

It is likely that the full title of *Alkoremmi* Primus Theatre’s *A Last Circus (wide and tall) A Command Performance (within the wall)* of *Alkoremmi* offered critics the permission to focus on circus imagery in discussing the performance’s content and form. The *Dog Day* program contained notes setting the context of the narrative dramaturgy, but this was not the case with the *Alkoremmi* program. The only contextual information available to the
spectators in the program was a poem by Archibald MacLeish entitled “The End of the
World.” The poem’s title, however, was not included with the text:

Quite unexpectedly, as Vasserot
The armless ambidextrian was lighting
A match between his great and second toe,
And Ralph the lion was engaged in biting
The neck of Madame Sossman while the drum
Pointed, and Teeny was about to cough
In waltz-time swinging Jocko by the thumb
Quite unexpectedly the top blew off:
And there, there overhead, there, there hung over
Those thousands of white faces, those dazed eyes,
There in the starless dark the poise, the hover,
There with vast wings across the cancelled skies
There in the sudden blackness the black pall
Of nothing, nothing, nothing—nothing at all.

In many ways the omission of the title, which in fact would have framed the
performance in another limited context, allowed the words of the poem to help sustain the
promise of the performance subtitle. Furthermore, it can be speculated that the exploration of
both outdoor performance technique and cabaret-style performance reinforced a circus
quality through the utilization of such visual imagery as a light-rimmed playing space, a little
person, a miniature bicycle on a high wire, a stilt character, and an angel with the attitude and
energy of a carnival barker or circus ringmaster. This alignment with a highly popular form
of entertainment offers both the reviewer and the spectator a familiar point of entry into the
world of Alkoremmi. As Dixon mentioned with reference to Dog Day, Primus made use of
familiar contexts as an enabling tool for the spectator in need of a set “meaning” or “story.”
As Dixon also pointed out of Dog Day, however, the “story” was not really what the
performance was all about but rather a portal into the world of the performance.

It is not surprising then to find that many of the reviews of Alkoremmi included some
allusion or reference to a circus. While it is true that the images appearing in the piece can be
discussed through the framing device of a circus, exclusive use of this set of symbols and signs had the potential of limiting the spectator’s construction of meaning. In describing the play as “a circus with a serious streak” (Good, CBC Radio, 20 June 1991) or a “three-ring circus peopled by singers, dancers, acrobats, a giant and much more” (McIlroy, Winnipeg Free Press, 31 Mar. 1991), critics subverted the possibility of a richer and more complex performance experience.

Descriptions offered by critics and reviewers extended beyond the suggestion of the obvious proffered imagery. Highly evident in these descriptions was the positioning of the world of Alkoremmi as an “other” reality, an alternative reality in a time and space removed from the historical, chronological moment of the present. CBC radio critic Jacqui Good likened her experience with Alkoremmi to “a dream you can remember after waking” (CBC Information Radio, 20 June 1991). For her, the presented images recalled the hopeful possibility of childhood, “a time when wishing could make things happen” (CBC Information Radio, 20 June 1991). Others described Alkoremmi as “the stuff of dreams” (Kaplan, Now Magazine, 3–9 Oct. 1991) or a “mysterious, dreamlike” atmosphere (Hood 60). Liam Lacey noted the performance’s “haunting memorable moments” (The Globe and Mail, 25 Sept. 1991) and Randall McIlroy registered the performance as “a stirring, complete experience” (Winnipeg Free Press, 31 Mar. 1991).

Negative reactions to the performance were also expressed as visceral responses to an “other-world.” However, also evident in these reactions was the decontextualization of images and scores in an attempt to extract linear, story-based meaning from the work. Diane Dakers of the Times Colonist allowed her initial reaction to Alkoremmi, “creepy right from the beginning” (22 Mar. 1996), to colour her entire review. She described the characters as “a
possessed dwarf, a red-cloaked faceless accordion-playing spectre, a lanky giant with an evil countenance and various and sundry wandering Halloweenies” (*Times Colonist*, 22 Mar. 1996). She distorted the carefully organized phraseology of the performance text by discussing images and taking them out of context. What is interesting is that Dakers arranged the performance details to tell a story that she created and to the reveal a logic that she imposed upon the performance, without even alluding to the fact that the structure and content of the piece allows for such individualization by the spectator. In effect, she reacted to the piece in the highly individualized manner that members of Primus had hoped for their spectators. Thus fixing the performance in a particular light, she noted, “a lot of unintelligible whispering, eerie loud moanings [. . .] and a whole lot of kazoo playing” (*Times Colonist*, 22 Mar. 1996). This commentary seems to indicate that her documented observation of spectator confusion was essentially rooted in her own experience. In an odd final twist Dakers concluded her review by claiming that Primus was “a talented bunch, despite the strange vehicle they create to showcase those talents” (*Times Colonist*, 22 Mar. 1996).

Jon Kaplan and Martin Morrow not only described specific details of the performance text out of context, as did Dakers, but also attempted to apply some degree of analysis to this material. Kaplan opened his review of *Alkoremmi* by drawing attention to both “the constant visual surprises” and the need for “a stronger sense of textual grounding” (*Now Magazine*, 3–9 Oct. 1991). Neither point is elaborated. He then proceeded to discuss the disruptive effect that traffic sounds had on the mood and the music in the performance. He mentions this in the same sentence that he comments that “the often abstruse text also has a distancing quality” (*Now Magazine*, 3–9 Oct. 1991). The reader is left to interpret the seemingly dissonant observations. In an attempt to draw meaning from the performance, Kaplan appears
to have applied standard critical jargon to a performance form that inherently resisted this type of analysis. Ultimately, although his review ended on a positive note, little information is actually imparted to the reader.

Although Morrow’s review was far less vague, he resorted to description in the form of a subjective arrangement of signs and images from the performance, presented as if it was fact, in a manner similar to Dakers’s. He identified one of the characters as “a smart-aleck dwarf in a Chico Marx hat” and another as “a stilt-walking giantess in commedia mask and sunhat [who] gives birth to a baby which emerges from a plastic amniotic sac and later regales us with a rendition of ‘All Of Me’” (*Calgary Herald*, 12 Apr. 1994). These descriptions are both highly limiting, as is the interpretation of the “smart aleck” dwarf, and incorrect, as is the identification of a commedia mask worn by Kitt’s stilt-figure. Furthermore, Morrow’s displacement of the images from the context in which they were arranged not only distorted details, as was the case in Dakers’s review, but also allowed him to conclude that Alkoremmi fails because there is no story. In backhanded compliments similar to that stated by Dakers, both Kaplan and Morrow praised Primus as a skilful acting company, although Morrow suggested that the talent should be “harnessed [. . .] to a more compelling work” (*Calgary Herald*, 12 Apr. 1994). Morrow’s earlier statements implied that this “more compelling work” would include a linear storyline.

Pat Donnelly’s review positioned Primus’s work as reminiscent of “an amateur version of the Cirque du Soleil” (*The Montreal Gazette*, 12 May 1992). Predictably, she then offered selected images that supported this assessment: “the huntress [who] pretends to walk a tightrope” or “a masked stilt-walker who pops up from the floor” (*The Montreal Gazette*, 12 May 1992). Donnelly’s Cirque du Soleil frame of reference also led her to criticize
Alkoremmi for what it was not. She mistakenly perceived the “choreographic innovations” as singular efforts on Fowler’s part and stated her desire to “see real dancers execute them [the choreographic innovations]—as opposed to acrobatic actors” (The Montreal Gazette, 12 May 1992). Donnelly’s misunderstanding of the structuration process of Alkoremmi and her need to make sense of the piece in conceptual terms that she understood diverted her attention away from a more accurate reading of the performance than she alluded to in her description of Alkoremmi: [It is] “a free-spirited ritual—bearing a whiff of many cultures—rather than a play” (The Montreal Gazette, 12 May 1992).

Of the English-Canadian reviewers, Randal McIlroy distinguished himself in an attempt to explain what was actually present in the performance to his readership. He offered information about the multidisciplinary range of the performance, about the performers, and about the atmosphere of the performance space, but he did not offer descriptors of the visual effects because, he claimed, “to describe those visuals would [be to] wrench them out of context” (Winnipeg Free Press, 31 Mar. 1991). McIlroy opened his review by suggesting the possibility of multiple ways to read Alkoremmi, rather than offering one view or one set of values as a guiding framework to do so. He contended that “the keys to this remarkable theatre are probably as many as the densely cross-referenced words and visuals that serve it” and claimed that the character who says, “I am entering a region of delicacy and violence” sets the tone for the piece (Winnipeg Free Press, 31 Mar. 1991). Without arbitrarily fragmenting the performance text, McIlroy indicated a range of possible readings, provided a few atmospheric details, and invited potential spectators to engage in a personal reading of the performance. Another reviewer, Kevin Longfield, openly acknowledged his lack of familiarity with the performance form when he stated that “sometimes the pace drags a bit
and sometimes the focus seems lost but I suspect these problems are caused as much by habits that I have required from attending more traditional theatre as by weaknesses in the production” (Theatrum, June/July/August 1991). Nonetheless, Longfield acknowledged Primus’s process-centred and non-linear performance structure and described Alkoremni as a “spell-binding evening of theatre” (Theatrum, June/July/August 1991).

Finally, there were also those who, in well-meaning but uninformed coverage of Primus’s work, diminished the hardships experienced by company members and subsequently the magnitude of their accomplishment in establishing an alternative company in highly challenging economic and cultural conditions. As indicated earlier in the chapter, most preview pieces were reiterations of press-kit information, such as company history and performance reviews, although some featured limited interviews with company members.

In March 1991, several days after the premiere of Alkoremni, The Toronto Star published a short article announcing that “Alternative theatre thrives in Winnipeg” and claimed that Primus had “carved a niche as the city’s leading alternative theatre company” (The Toronto Star, 27 Mar. 1991). No attempt was made to discuss the performance of Alkoremni and the article explained neither the headlines nor the opening remarks. As a result, these statements served as claims to both the existence of a thriving alternative community in Winnipeg and Primus’s central role in that community. The article noted a cover photograph and an article about the company’s work in a (then) current issue of Canadian Theatre Review (CTR) as evidence of the company’s success. At the time Primus was by no means on stable ground as an arts organization. The company had established a presence in the city but company members were highly aware of the effort that would be necessary to sustain the practice.
Even at the late date of *Alkoremmi*’s retirement in 1996, writer Riva Harrison would claim that Primus was a unique entity in the local theatrical community and, given the comprehensiveness of its training and performance construction, was “the only truly alternative theatre” in a city in which traditional theatre was established and popular (*Winnipeg Sun*, 18 Dec. 1996). *The Toronto Star* prelude piece, although positive and optimistic, inaccurately portrayed the young company’s experience and denied them full recognition of their pioneering efforts. Furthermore, and ironically as well, the *CTR* article referred to in *The Toronto Star* article was equally ineffective in advancing an understanding of the company’s practice. In response to this article, Lawson stated: “[While it was] good promo of sorts, […] the article never explains why *Dog Day/Jour de Canicule* was different, how it looked, its form, its sounds, its colours—all absent. Sets us up as still having to prove ourselves—an antagonistic point of view to take, I think, and for what purpose?” (*CJ*, 19 Mar. 1991).

As shown by the survey of critical response to *Alkoremmi*, not only were reviewers’ observations limited by the language of critical discourse in English Canada but also by their own “horizon of expectations,” which were unfortunately not always identified. The compound effect of these informing factors was evidenced in the often laboured and careful details of the positive reviews and the relatively and somewhat unfocused details of those registering negative responses. Viewed from another perspective, this range in critical response can be interpreted as a sign that the company’s objective, to construct an open-ended performance experience, had been achieved. *Alkoremmi* essentially offered spectators a performance logic that was very separate from everyday reality and provided an opportunity for spectators to experience disruptions of their taken-for-granted social,
psychological, and spiritual realities within the transitional or “liminal” realm of the theatre. Brask suggests that spectators entering into the world of Alkoremmi suspend their normal expectations of dramatic presentation since the images offered are “not from the world of quotidian experience” (Brask, Letter, 8 Apr. 1991).

In creating an alternative reality by means of a particular perspective of the actors’ and the director’s work and its accompanying practice, Primus offered the spectator the opportunity to be a part of a world in which anything might happen for a time. Reviewers would have been more prepared for their theatrical experience if they had arrived with an open mind, rather than with the expectation of a play structured around the principles of plot and verisimilitude. As David Prosser contends, critics and reviewers “should be attempting to participate, [. . .] to help make possible the second half of an equation without which there can be no meaningful theatre at all” (21). Prosser reminds critics and reviewers that the objective at hand is “to sharpen and focus other people’s responses, to make them better audiences” (21). It is also important for critics to note, as Natalie Crohn Schmitt does, that “the audience in theatre consists of multiple observers, not a unified mass” (233) and that this fact must be considered and examined “both in the theatre and in critical theory” (233).

Members of Primus have certainly considered the truth of this observation and the proof was in their performances.

The collective struggle to “make sense” of Alkoremmi, evident in the survey

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31 At the most fundamental level, any performance experience might be described as a potential entry into what Victor Turner describes as a “liminoid realm” (55). Such moments occur when the real time in the real world is interrupted, and emancipation from structural consistency becomes possible. However, liminoid states can also be viewed as fault lines in linearly constructed “real” time, pockets of time in which conventional logic and other cognitive structures are rendered null and void: an instant everything and nothing may be rendered possible. The second of these possible uses of the term is what is referred to in the discussion of Alkoremmi.
examination of reviews, offers considerable insight into the reasons for the limited written
discourse of Primus’s work. If these reviews are considered a representative sampling of the
critical work and writers working within this highly compact structural format had difficulty
manipulating the standard critical language to discuss the work, then it follows that those
focusing on a more intense analysis were faced with a greater challenge. A confirmation of
this hypothesis is found in the survey of articles (discussed in Chapter One) that are not
written by company members. Many of the articles fail to explain what the work looked and
sounded like and how it was different from mainstream work.

Conclusion

Upon opening a show the average professional actor working in English Canada
would then be free to engage in other contract work as long as it did not interfere with the
performance schedule. Responsibility for anything other than performing each night of the
run would be absolved once the play opened. This, however, was not the case in the
aftermath of the premiere of Alkoremni because the performance piece was not destined to
become a memory once the run was over. Throughout the training and rehearsal period
leading to its opening, company members continued to address and attend to practical aspects
of keeping the company alive, such as financing their projects and ongoing scheduling.
During this time they agreed upon a new rule requiring company members to place a singular
focus on full-time training and performance creation: when engaged in a fully funded project,
company members could not take on outside contracts and could not become engaged in
outside work that would interfere with their work with Primus at any time (Randoja, CJ, 14–
18 Jan. 1991). During March, while the company was multi-tasking in order to meet artistic and production deadlines imposed by the premiere of *Alkoremmi*, they were also making decisions about remounting and touring the performance and beginning to seek funding for these projects. Randoja noted mixed feeling about this new cycle of maintenance: “Part of me is excited and motivated by all these plans, part of me is exhausted by the amount of work and the level of commitment required and part of me wants to run away and sell flowers in Germany” (Randoja, CJ, 4 Mar. 1991).

Once *Alkoremmi* was launched, company members concerned themselves with propelling the company into the future. This meant more time dealing with training and performance space issues and filing grant applications. The piece’s inaugural run did not end until April 13; nevertheless, company members were engaged in maintenance activity almost immediately following the premiere. During this time company members began their search for a space in which to perform *Alkoremmi* during the summer of 1991, attended funding meetings with Manitoba Arts Council (MAC) and Canada Council (CC) representatives, wrote final reports for grants received, attended to odd jobs for PTE as part of their space-for-labour arrangement, and organized company meetings to discuss the scheduling of training.

Company members resumed regular training on April 8 (1991). However, as in the fall of 1990, no funding was in place at this time and training was again arranged around sustenance jobs, grant applications, and public relations efforts. Although Fowler had worked diligently at reinforcing the foundation of the practice, it was necessary for him to return to the Odin Theatre and touring commitments. At that point he made a full-time commitment to Primus members and planned to move to Winnipeg during the fall of 1991. For the actors
this meant another six months of working with difficulties and conditions similar to those examined in the early segment of this chapter.

After attending a Canada Council meeting facilitated by Michael Springate and Keven McKendrik, where changes to granting procedures were discussed, Kitt wrote,

[t]he plan does seem to be geared towards our needs, but it wasn’t made for us. Of course, the way the grants are set up now, we aren’t eligible for most of them. [. . .] What the Canada Council needs is for the communities to get together and talk about what our needs are for the future. This may be difficult because the larger established institutions already know what they want and that is to stay out of debt. (CJ, 2 Mar. 1991)

The examination of both the conditions in which Alkoremmi was constructed and the way in which these conditions affected the complex structuration process that Primus Theatre had adopted serves to illustrate two major points. The first is to define the vast difference between mounting a single project using the training and dramaturgical processes adopted from the Odin Theatre and establishing an ongoing theatre practice based on those processes and techniques. While Dog Day emerged from a highly serendipitous convergence of factors, which in many ways had emulated the conditions in which Odin Theatre actors worked, the creation of Alkoremmi was a highly conscious effort to establish a particular kind of theatre practice in English Canada.

The second major determination that can be drawn from this examination of the construction of Alkoremmi is that training and creating performance had become essential to the lives of company members. This is illustrated in the way in which the actors expressed their relationships to the work and to each other in journal entries, articles, and interviews and in the hardships they endured or overcame in order to continue their theatre practice. With Alkoremmi, Primus Theatre established its presence as a unique and important emerging company in Canadian Theatre.
Chapter Five: Performance Creation and Pedagogy

The Continuing Challenge

In the years following the premiere of *Alkoremmi*, Primus Theatre members built substantially upon the foundation they had established with their early work. During this time, they continued not only to maintain but also to advance the common performance language they had begun to develop in *Dog Day* and *Alkoremmi*. In doing so they continued to challenge public perception of theatre as an art. Members of Primus Theatre had taken up the challenge that Fowler believed was the responsibility of the theatre artist:

To me, the artist is the person in a culture who effects change. Our culture is mainly concerned with fixing things in place, making them predictable, reducing the unknown so that we can control it. I think that this is terribly dangerous—and boring. There is of course a necessary practical element to this. And it is good that some people concern themselves with it. But, god help us, if we are only a society of fixers and controllers, for our health and survival, there must also be those whose responsibility is to change our concept of reality, to break it open so that we can breathe inside it. (“The Anthropology of Performance” 88)

In his quest to be the change he hoped to affect, Fowler had ignited a passionate sense of artistic responsibility and integrity in members of Primus Theatre. The company would continue not only to survive but also to produce a remarkably extensive body of work in a relatively short span of time. The four and a half years between the premiere of *Alkoremmi* (Mar. 1991) and that of *Far Away Home* (Oct. 1995) were particularly prolific. During this time Primus constructed *Scarabesque* (1992–93), *The Night Room* (1994), and *Far Away Home* (1995), as well as a number of radio dramas and a series of collaborative projects that included interdisciplinary work with other artists and non-professionals in specific
communities. In tandem with the development of an extensive touring schedule, the company also began to nurture a pedagogical practice that would eventually become an extremely important part of company culture.

It would be heartening to think that Primus Theatre’s wide range of accomplishments was due to an increasingly supportive context in which to work. This, however, was not the case. Throughout the theatre’s existence, company members continued to face the kinds of hurdles that had been encountered during the critical and difficult period of time between the remounting *Dog Day* and the premiere of *Alkoremni*. Nevertheless, this adversity was often ignored, diminished, and even overlooked when the company was mentioned in print. In an article revisiting Winnipeg theatre in 1996, entertainment writer Kevin Prokosh revealed a generally unacknowledged occurrence in the city: there was very little support of any kind for small theatre companies. I suspect that Prokosh’s point was unintentional, but it nevertheless supports Knowles’s (1996) observations of the continued marginalization of certain types of theatre at a national level during that time period. Prokosh states,

> [w]e may look back on 1996 as the year that Winnipeg companies finally split into the haves and have-nots. Large groups such as Manitoba Theatre Centre and Prairie Theatre Exchange, which boast stable financial support and resources, are as healthy as arts organization can be in the ’90s. PTE expanded its 1996–97 playbill in a bid for a larger audience, while MTC was able to dip into a rainy day fund to pay off a $165,000 deficit and remain the only Canadian regional theatre without an operating deficit. The news was not so good for small groups, such as Popular Theatre Alliance and Theatre Projects, neither of which staged productions this fall. [. . .] Signs of financial strain are also apparent in the Winnipeg Jewish Theatre. [. . .] By most standards, Winnipeg theatre is vibrant and supported by the most devoted fans in the country. It is cold reality that the better a company is doing the more people want to support it. The converse is also true: the worse you do, the less help is available. (*Winnipeg Free Press*, 30 Dec.1996)

These “have-not” companies were not emerging companies. Popular Theatre Alliance (PTA), Theatre Projects (TP,) and Winnipeg Jewish Theatre (WJT) had been in existence for
twelve, six, and nine years respectively.¹ Several other small but established companies were completely ignored in Prokosh’s “have” and “have-not” stratification. At the time Adhere and Deny had been in operation for fifteen years,² and Shakespeare in the Ruins³ had been in operation for three years. In failing to mention these theatre companies, Prokosh unwittingly created the category of “are not.” In drawing attention to the financial struggle of some established companies without acknowledging others, Prokosh inadvertently included the press in a kind of passive-aggressive blindsiding of the realities of Winnipeg’s theatre culture. This blindsiding of experimental and smaller scale theatrical operations is representative of the position taken by most reviewers in the city, which contributed to the “have and have-not” status Prokosh discussed.

In this article Primus Theatre is addressed in a single point-form comment, in which Prokosh makes claim to the company’s well-being by noting “the continued success of the globe-trotting Primus Theatre Troupe” (Winnipeg Free Press, 30 Dec. 1996). In this seemingly complimentary statement Prokosh eliminates any notion of the theatre’s ongoing financial and cultural struggle, a condition he blatantly states with reference to other companies. He chooses to ignore the fact that the company faced near extinction in early 1993, when the City of Winnipeg overestimated attendance for a New Year’s Eve “First Night” Celebration⁴ and was unable to pay performing artists whose services had been

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¹ After years of struggling to make ends meet and several near collapses Theatre Projects and Winnipeg Jewish Theatre each reached a relatively stable position and have continued into the present (2007). Popular Theatre Alliance folded in 1998.

² Adhere and Deny emerged from a company called Shared Stage, which was founded in 1981. The company was renamed Adhere and Deny in 1987 and by 1998 had narrowed its focus to puppet and object-based theatre (Adhere and Deny; “And Now” 171).

³ Shakespeare in the Ruins was a collective initiative by a group of local actors who produced Shakespeare’s plays using a promenade performance structure.

⁴ “First Night” 1992 was a financial disaster. Based on attendance numbers from the pilot “First Night”
booked for the event. Primus was left with a $10,500 deficit, a staggering sum for a small theatre company. The seriousness of this shortfall was further compounded by the Winnipeg Arts Advisory Council’s (WAAC) decision to cut their funding to the arts by thirty per cent and by the freezing of other government funding (Lett, *Winnipeg Free Press*, 3 June 1993).

Prokosh also fails to explain (or perhaps he was unaware of the fact) that the company’s “globe-trotting” ventures were actually company retreats to the tiny southern Italian village of Nocelle, Fowler’s home away from Canada. During this time company members were training and developing new performance material and learning new skills from master instructors that they would have been unable to access in Canada. Furthermore, living in southern Italy and bartering odd jobs for rehearsal space was actually a money-saving venture. Prokosh’s comment, however, alludes to an easy existence that is not only inaccurate but also dismissive and disrespectful. Most specifically this is indicated in his seeming ignorance of the company’s relationship to its cultural context. This is particularly disconcerting considering that Prokosh was a local reviewer with first-hand access to support material for his article.

In a 1991 article for *The Globe and Mail*, Stephen Godfrey noted the utter amazement expressed by auteur Robert Lepage at what he observed as the massive restrictions placed on English-Canadian Theatre (12 Oct. 1991). Well aware of these “restrictions,” members of Primus Theatre were trying to make a difference and were working with the belief that

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5 Lepage was quoted as saying that “we are making theatre here not shoes” (qtd. in Godfrey, *The Globe and Mail*, 12 Oct. 1991).
theatre had the potential to “re-define inherited reality, be that reality political, physical, or psychological” and through that redefinition to create an “alternative model for human interaction” (“Why Did We Do It?” 54). It was this steadfast sense of artistic purpose combined with a concrete training practice and dramaturgical directive that fuelled company morale during difficult times of financial ebb and flow.

Nevertheless, this did not mean that company members were immune to the hardships. In an undated journal entry summarizing company life in early February 1994, Stephen Lawson wrote,

[w]e have no money to pay ourselves these days. This is very hard on all of us. Ker and Don are working in Mary Dixon’s warehouse, Karin is teaching, I am at Winnona’s Café, Tannis doesn’t have work (or is she doing some substitute teaching?) and Richard is trying to live off of a pitiful sum of money from a translation he did for Eugenio [Barba]. We are every day in the office though and I am proud to be working with such strong committed people. I despise poverty, and yet it is a cruel teacher, exposing the excesses in my life, and the excesses in my society, my community. Give and Thou Shalt Receive, What Goes Around Comes Around, Money is the Root of All Evil—very small comfort these days. Slowly I chip away at everything that I think is valuable, trying to expose the necessities. (CJ attachment, Feb. 1994)

Five years into a prolific and artistically sound company existence, Primus members were still scrambling for financial survival. The archival materials contain a substantial amount of material devoted to various continued efforts at fundraising. I surmise that this assumption of financial stability was drawn from the automatic alignment of artistic and/or critical success with financial stability. Furthermore, as indicated by Prokosh’s article, Winnipeg spectators generally tended to support financially successful theatres rather than those less so.

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6 The entry is attached to the company journal after an entry dated November 8–14, 1993. The next entry is dated October 4, 1994. The entry referred to is attached to a blank page between the two entries. The introduction reads “Journal entry for the period of [ . . . ] February?” The time period has been deduced mathematically.
Therefore, strategically, it would not have been in the company’s best interest to draw attention to this fact.

**Funding Issues**

In October 1991 Fowler relocated to Winnipeg to begin a full-time residency with Primus. While this resolved many of the issues resulting from the sporadic nature of his interaction with the actors’ training practice, his presence complicated the company’s already substantial funding issues. Company activity in the immediate aftermath of *Alkoremmi* reveals the extent of the planning and organizing required to arrange not only for the development of new performance projects but also for conditions in which these events could take place. The company’s culture and practice continued to create frustration for company members in their dealings with arts granting agencies. The collaborative, rather than hierarchical, business organization and the ongoing training and dramaturgical processes, rather than project-based production orientation, did not mesh with the way in which most arts funding organizations or other theatre organizations were configured. The notion of an “as-if-permanent” ensemble created for maintaining a daily training practice was not (as it is still not) a common occurrence in English Canada. The funding system was structured upon the production of short-term performance projects that implied short rehearsal periods of two or three weeks\(^7\) and box-office returns that would offset a large percentage of production costs.

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\(^7\) Maiko Bae Yamamoto, co-artistic director of Theatre Replacement (Vancouver), states that although funding continues to be a challenge for training-based companies, funding boards are beginning to understand the necessity of longer periods of development in the construction of original performance work (Email Interview, 25 May 2008).
Company members quickly realized that they would have to search more extensively for funding opportunities for which they qualified and to schedule projects in ways that would enable them to receive funding for at least parts of their work. Fowler’s constant presence increased the need for funding that would sustain company members during periods of time in which they were not involved in an intense preparatory construction process for new performance pieces. The core of their practice—training and generating preliminary material for new projects—was not recognized by most funding programs. A journal entry from late October 1991 serves as an example of the range of activity that company members would be required to take on after a day of training and performance development in order to generate funding for project work:

On the administrative side of the barn, we are getting the collaborators’ grant letters of support together, meetings with T. Pat Carrabre at the MAC, meetings with Tom Anniko at CBC, First Night [meetings], financial reports, final reports, Artists in the Schools paperwork, Fannystelle [tour to rural Manitoba] the French translation of Alkoremmi, money for the translation, money for the tour. Whew. (Kowalchuk, CJ, 22 Oct. 1991)

Beyond the ongoing negotiations with existing funding systems and agencies, company members established and maintained an assertive initiative to search for new funding possibilities and to take on self-funding projects. The company archives reveal hundreds of files relating to the business of fundraising. An initiative for a self-produced fundraising cabaret event in 1989 became an annual occurrence that continued until March 1997. There is substantial evidence indicating that company and board members alike were regularly canvassing individuals and corporations, beyond arts funding agencies, for financial support of the company’s creative activity. The company kept detailed records of potential donors, past donors, and individuals and companies that declined funding requests.

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8 A small board of directors (three members) was generated at the time of the company’s
A 1994 journal entry indicated that the company was becoming more solidly grounded financially and that company members were receiving “good (well, consistent) paycheques” (Kowalcuk, CJ, 10 Nov. 1994). As late as 1995, however, board and company members were seeking donations of goods and services, such as lumber, printing services, airfare, and rehearsal space, as well as sponsorship for specific projects (Minutes, Board of Directors, 7 June and 6 Sept. 1995).

In the summer of 1992 (Apr.–Oct. 1993), Primus hired a part-time office assistant for the first time. The position provided a visible, representative presence for the company while they were on tour to Timmins and Montreal and involved in a company residency in Italy. However, it was not until the spring of 1993, aided by a provincially funded office-training program, that Primus was able to hire a part-time office administrator (Jane Wells). This position relieved company members of some of the administrative burden and allowed them to pursue their art with less interruption.

This was a much needed reprieve for company members as they had begun to expand their national profile through increased touring activity. In practical terms this meant a concentration on the pursuit of funding and consequently more paperwork. For a short period of time in 1996, and again with the support of provincial funding, the company was able to hire a full-time administrator, a part-time office assistant, and a part-time publicist to help with tour organization (two major tours that collectively would represent a national tour) and symposium/festival organization. There was, however, never a time in the company’s history in which the actors’ sole focus was on creative work.

There were also lean times when unforeseen circumstances delayed or denied expected funding or payment. The company’s financial situation was highly compromised at incorporation, and both the size of the board and its duties expanded over time.
during the summer of 1991 due to an ill-timed delay of paperwork at the Canada Council. This resulted in a two-month delay of a ten thousand dollar grant that company members had counted on to finance their summer performance work (Kowalchuk, CJ, 21 May–22 July 1991). During that time Primus members were unexpectedly forced to scramble for sustenance jobs that would cover their basic living expenses. This would not be the only time in the company’s history that company members would be working with wildly unstable financial conditions. Nor would it be the only time that the company’s financial situation would affect or threaten the retention of their workspace and thus their company culture. The relationship between financial and space issues would prove to be symbiotic and volatile. In early 1993 Primus found themselves ten thousand dollars in debt and without funds to pursue performance projects. This occurred when the City of Winnipeg “First Night” Planning Committee reneged on payment for the Caravan of the Midnight Sun parade, which Primus had been commissioned to create with the local community. Overly ambitious planning had resulted in a major shortfall in projected box-office revenue for the various events booked for the “First Night” New Year’s Eve celebration and hundreds of artists were shortchanged. Primus’s loss was a significant one due to the expense of both personnel and materials required to launch such a large-scale project.

There were also situations in which grants were delayed or reduced or in which full funding for projects could not be raised. In these situations projects were generally redesigned, re-budgeted, or downsized (CC Report to Peter Stephens, 15 Aug. 1992). Not only did the necessary rearrangement of plans take time but this also affected all interrelated projects and project budgeting. In these situations actors’ salaries had to be downscaled as well, which created personal ramifications. There were also stretches of time, well into the
company’s operation, in which money could simply not be found to pay company salaries, and the theatre would then declare “holiday” time. This is not to say that the company was always without money but that money was always an issue. Throughout its operation it was necessary to plan for the possibility of adjusting and reconfiguring artistic vision if fluctuations should occur in proposed financial arrangements. The necessity of such anticipation became increasingly apparent each time this actually occurred.

Space Issues

The company continued to be burdened with a search for appropriate rehearsal and performance space. The situation in the aftermath of making *Alkoremmi* was no different from the situation that existed during the creative process. The procuring of space absorbed inordinate amounts of time in which company members were contacting and negotiating with individuals responsible for leasing or brokering property and leached time from creative work. Once the decision had been made to remount *Alkoremmi*, during the summer of 1991, company members were faced with finding an appropriate performance venue. As would be the case with all Primus performance pieces, the scenic elements of *Alkoremmi* were not adapted to suit the hosting space but situated within the architectural shell of the space and varied with each project. Thus the company’s spatial needs for construction/rehearsal and performance could not be met in a traditionally configured theatre spaces.

Although company members would eventually decide upon the Collège universitaire de Saint-Boniface (CUSB) gym for the second run of *Alkoremmi*, the company journal indicates a series of visits to other potential sites before this decision was finalized. These
potential sites included a steam plant, the facade of the St. Boniface Cathedral, an out-of-business movie theatre (the Metropolitan), and an old warehouse. It can be speculated that the search for performance sites became more time-efficient once company members had familiarized themselves with available local sites. Due to a number of Manitoba zoning bylaws that severely restrict the use of non-traditional spaces for purposes of public performance and to the generally lengthy re-zoning process, spaces already bearing the distinction of a public space become infinitely more appealing. As a result, in the city of Winnipeg, Primus tended to perform in designated public spaces: the PTE rehearsal hall, the foyer of the Winnipeg Art Gallery, the CUSB gym, and the rotunda at the CN train station.

The PTE arrangement, although generous, had been highly problematic during the final stages of constructing Alkoremmi. As “guests”, the company had been evicted from training space when rooms were occupied by paying tenants (CJ, Kitt, 5 Nov. 1992) and was required to work around PTE performances during critical last week rehearsals. In early December 1992 Primus Theatre relocated to an office space in Artspace, in Winnipeg’s Exchange District. The company remained in this location until 1998 when it ceased to operate. Training and rehearsal space was another matter, and the location of this space fluctuated in accordance with the company’s financial status. Although it initially leased a training space near its office, this was not an ongoing practice. Most of Scarabesque was constructed and rehearsed at St. Luke’s Parish Hall. The Night Room was begun at St. Luke’s and finished at the former Winnipeg Remand Centre, where all construction of Far Away Home took place. Although the Remand Centre was a donated space, it was also unheated.

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9 Artspace Inc. was incorporated in 1984 and opened as a non-profit, charitable arts centre on October 30, 1986. It is located in the renovated Gault Building, a heritage-building site, located at 100 Arthur Street in Winnipeg, Manitoba. Artspace continues to provide affordable office and rehearsal spaces for arts organizations and claims many of the city’s arts organizations as tenants.
which created an extremely difficult work environment during the construction of *The Night Room*:

We [. . .] moved our set in a snow storm into the Old Remand Centre [from St. Luke’s]. This attic-like space is pillarless, free and very cold. No heat, no insulation and no mercy from Mother Nature. [. . .] We cleaned the floors (four or five times) by hauling water from the main floor [which was still in use at the time], moved our set from Steve’s Garage, carpet from Ben Darvil’s house and housewares from the office. We plasticed (now a Primus term) the windows, stuffed them with fibre glass, then plasticed them again. We then hung long rolls of plastic from ceiling to floor. This was a week’s work. We bought a heater which required the purchase and installation of the proper electrical equipment. (Wells, CJ, 8–14 Nov. 1993)

**Audience Issues**

In addition to the constant requisite of justifying their practice to arts funding agencies and the relentless search for training, rehearsal, and performance space, Primus members were also faced with a need to generate and educate an audience base. As indicated by Prokosh’s article, the theatre-going public in Winnipeg was very conservative, revealing the city’s historical reputation as supportive of the arts to be a limited truth. Although mainstream theatre, ballet, and concerts were well attended, this was not the case for experimental and alternative performance work. The potential spectatorship was further limited by the city’s small size and economic status. Increasing the audience base was difficult for all small theatre companies, with little overhead to spare for publicity and public relations ventures. The nature of the company’s work compounded this issue. While Primus Theatre’s practice of touring performance work in repertoire echoes that of the Odin Theatre, it can also be speculated that the limited local spectatorship provided motivation for extending the practice. It is important to note that in time Primus did in fact build an
appreciative and loyal local following.

While the company was dismantling its office a steady stream of former spectators stopped in to say goodbye and to express gratitude for the company’s presence in the city. Although it would be impossible to determine the demographics of the spectatorship entirely from these individuals, this grouping included scholars, new Canadians, dancers, lawyers, and labourers and ranged from children and teenagers to octogenarians. Fowler and members of Primus spent years of their lives creating theatre that they hoped would be a memorable and necessary experience for their spectatorship. Comments from the individuals who stopped by in person, who sent notes, and who wrote responses to the performances indicated that this indeed had been the case.¹⁰

The Serious Issue of Mapping

Although the time period leading up to and including the construction of *Alkoremmi* was an extremely difficult time for Primus members, it was with the completion of this project that the young company gained a foothold as a solid creative entity and as a cohesive group unit. In withstanding the difficulties that had confronted them, company members established a foundation from which to build a partnership that would continue until the spring of 1998. In the summer of 1991 Randoja wrote of a CBC interview, “We’re getting respectful attention and much interest” (CJ, 18 June 1991). While it was true that hardship would continue to exist throughout the company’s existence, these hardships did not dampen the company’s original impetus for creating art. The company found ways to turn restrictions into opportunities for ingenuity:
The construction of a performance is very often full of problem solving, finding creative solutions to problems, to turn the disadvantage into an advantage. This thought process has begun to permeate my life. It is often wonderful to ask a question and receive, instead of an answer, a dozen more questions. $1 + 1 + ?$ (Wells, CJ, 1–7 July 1991)

There is no doubt that Primus Theatre’s accomplishments were substantial. One has only to read through the press packages from the latter part of the company’s operation to get a sense of this. Archive folders filled with information about the company’s activity provide proof of an accomplished range of projects. Tracing details of those accomplishments has presented a challenge. Beyond reviews and prelude pieces, which tend to repeat press release information, published information referring to performance projects after Alkoremmi is almost non-existent. A substantial portion of company archives consists of grant proposals and reports, touring schedules, publicity packages, documentation of fundraising events and canvassing efforts, and reams of financial accounting forms. This is not surprising considering the amount of effort required to maintain company status in the local and national artistic community, to seek financial support for project work, and to arrange training, rehearsal, and performance space over the course of the company’s operation. As Shelley Scott stated in her study Feminist Theory and Nightwood Theatre (1997),

[t]he paper accumulated over the years speaks volumes about how much time and effort a company must devote to raising money and the importance this holds for their survival. [. . .] Projects are abandoned because no money was forthcoming, and it is difficult to speculate how a project that was not realized might have altered the direction of history had it ever seen the light of day. (11)

Furthermore, first-hand documentation of the company’s creative work, via the company journal, eroded over time. This practice of journal writing, begun with the Dog Day remount, was an important source of training and dramaturgical information in the

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10 In each performance spectators were invited to share their responses in writing.
examination of *Alkoremmi* and the remounting of *Dog Day*. The information documented in the journal, however, became increasingly inconsistent over time. As illustrated in Chapter Four, during periods of intense time-sensitive activity maintaining the company journal became a low priority. Information covering these periods of time was often entered as backdated summaries, not eyewitness accounts of the events of the day. This fact did not go unnoticed by company members:

It’s January 24, 1992 and this book has not been written in since last year. As it has been noted more than once, perhaps even in these pages, it is at the times when the company is the most busy that it is the most important that this record be maintained and it is also at these times that we have the least time to write. What will future generations and the Canada Council auditor think we were up to? (Wells, CJ, 24 Jan. 1992)

After a gap of nearly a year in 1993–94, Kowalchuk wrote, “Well my poor little journal. We’re so sorry we have neglected you and in fact we may be very sorry in the future when we are unable to recall the details of our history (CJ, 4 Oct. 1994).

After the summer of 1991, major and minor gaps began to occur in the journal documentation. At first gaps appeared in one or two-week stretches and the manner in which entries were written began to change. Details referring to process became more irregular and erratic. Between August 1991 and January 1992 three-month gaps appeared in the writing. These gaps occurred August 1–September 12, 1991; September 12–October 7, 1991; and December

Even more serious gaps began to occur in April 1992. These omissions disrupted an understanding of the company’s day-to-day experiences and artistic progression over highly prolific periods of time. A six-and-a-half-month gap occurs between April 5 April and October 19, 1992. During this time the company toured *Alkoremmi* to Timmins and Montreal and then travelled to Italy, where they engaged in a series of intensive voice workshops, planned and wrote a series of five short pieces for CBC Radio, generated initial character

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11 These gaps occurred August 1–September 12, 1991; September 12–October 7, 1991; and December
ideas for a proposed outdoor performance piece, and generated their first artistic interactions with the community of Nocelle. The only record of this information is a summary in the final report for a MAC Collaborator’s Grant (15 Nov. 1992). Journal notation exists only in the form of a listing of this absent information. Much later, in March 1993, references were made to the vocal training and the development of new material that occurred in Italy. Discovery and progression that may have occurred in the training or dramaturgical structures during that time are lost. Without specific details of the specialized vocal training that occurred with each of the masters that the company worked with while in Italy, it is difficult to trace or identify specific influences of this work in individual or group training.

Another serious gap occurred between December 19, 1992 and February 25, 1993 during the latter part of the construction period, the performance, and the aftermath of the financially disastrous second Caravan of the Midnight Sun and the collaboration with Groundswell¹² and poet Patrick Friesen on Overture: Life Cycles¹³ for the Winnipeg New Music Festival. This was followed closely by another gap, between May 30 and August 9, 1993. Judging from comments made by company members in the journal, there was an awareness of the potential ramifications of these omissions on their own memories of their experiences and on the transmission of these experiences to others in the future. This study confirms that projected concern.

The five weeks between October 18 and November 14, 1993 were all written as summaries of past events, which changed the character and nature of the documentation, and this period is followed by a nearly one-year gap, between November 8–14, 1993 and October

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¹² GroundSwell was founded in 1991 as an amalgamation of three Winnipeg organizations, Music Inter Alia, Thira, and IzMusic, that created, produced, performed, and promoted new music.

¹³ Overture: Life Cycles was remounted as Madrugada in 1994.
4, 1994. The final company journal entry was dated July 31–August 4, 1995, almost three years before the official closing of the company. This entry notes that the company was rehearsing “the children’s piece” and had decided that the location would be “a very aesthetically cluttered and busy [. . .] European city neighbourhood” (Randoja, CJ, 31 July–4 Aug. 1995). With the exception of references to early development of performance material during their retreat in Nocelle, from January 4 to March 6, 1995, there is nothing to determine what the day-to-day progression on this final project (*Far Away Home*) may have been.

These lapses are discussed as the journals held a pivotal role in the mediation between the actual practice and the perception of the practice by outside sources in the discussion of *Dog Day* and *Alkoremmi*. As Kowalchuk stated, the journal provided a kind of diary of the company’s journeys:

> Everyone [. . .] should read it at some point. It serves as a surprisingly concise account of the training period with Richard, our rehearsals and technical days, meetings, the development of material and finally a description of our audiences, the show “that night”, who saw it. [. . .] It also mirrors each of our, for the most part (a big part) wonderful and unique thoughts on events small and large, and this journal allows us an outlet for expressing our thoughts and observations without restraint or fear. (CJ, 17 Apr. 1991)

The company journal provided candid and otherwise inaccessible information about the aspects of company life that compelled its members to stay the course. Dixon’s personal notebooks also contributed substantially to the understanding of specific details of training and dramaturgy relating to the NTS experience, both versions of *Dog Day*, and the first phases of *Alkoremmi*. Although Dixon was involved in *Alkoremmi* and *The Night Room*, he did not take part in journal keeping, with the exception of a series of observations at the beginning of *The Night Room*. The company journal had been consciously limited to the

The series of disruptions in journal documentation has therefore had a serious impact on this study. The information that had provided a parallel “inside” track to the formal, externally situated documentation and thus contributed to the duo-track reporting that occurred in the discussion of *Dog Day* and *Alkoremmi* was no longer accessible. Thus an entirely accurate summary of the development of the company’s training and dramaturgical processes in the post-*Alkoremmi* years is also not possible. This is all disconcerting as the most prolific period of time in the company’s history was the years between the premiere of *Alkoremmi* (1991) and the premiere of *Far Away Home* (1995).

It is possible, however, to make deductions and speculations from this information and to examine two things. It is possible to present a summary of the company’s creative work and thereby to establish the major artistic contributions made by Primus to theatre in English Canada. It is also possible to illustrate that Primus Theatre’s contributions still resonate in the form of a living legacy. The company’s accomplishments and the contributions made to the development of English-Canadian theatre are largely defined in three major streams of artistic initiative: training, performance construction, and pedagogy. Through Primus Theatre’s pedagogical efforts, substantial quantities of the company’s research, as developed through training and performance construction, have been transmitted to thousands of individuals across the country.

**Training**

Throughout Primus Theatre’s existence, training continued to be a defining trait of
the company’s culture, and members thoroughly understood and appreciated the role of training in their theatre practice:

The continuity of daily practice is both technically and spiritually rewarding—in the latter sense because so much of our day is spent right now, doing paperwork, administration, searching for money and working at other jobs. Hard and daunting as it can be to get up for 8:00 AM every morning for such long days, the training and singing is a real anchor and a daily reminder of why we are doing this. (Wells, CJ, 6 Nov. 1991)

Lawson described the challenge of training with the analogy of a crossword puzzle:

You assume the letters are right which leads you to layering on other words or getting stumped. Perhaps part of the word is correct. Perhaps not. One has to decipher what can still be used and start again on the never-ending search. (CJ, 5 Feb. 1992).

It was Randoja, however, who identified the nature and purpose of the company’s training most accurately:

There are still some days where I struggle with what training is and what I imagine it to be. Sometime I expect myself to fly, to be remarkable and when I’m not, am disappointed and frustrated with myself. Training quickly becomes some sort of test or barometer of worth. It’s then that I need to remind myself that training is simply research. Not good research or bad research but just an exploration of oneself and one’s energy wherever or whatever that may be. (CJ, 10 Feb. 1992)

Although there is an appreciation for this practice, it is not always noted in the journals and is often taken for granted. This becomes evident when training was resumed after a period of interruption. Randoja’s response to the return to training after the second run of Alkoremmi serves to exemplify this:

We train. It feels good to be back in the room doing the thing that all these grants represent. We continue work on our sports actions. It’s difficult but I enjoy it mainly because of the research and focused aspect of it all. (Randoja, CJ, 17 Oct. 1991)

Although the company understood the merits of training and made a consistent effort to maintain the practice, this did not take place in a routine manner. There are instances during
periods of financial hardship when the company scheduled training as early as 8:00 to 10:30 a.m. to allow company members to work around sustenance jobs. The company’s struggle, however, to maintain and advance their training practice was not caused only by a need to retain paying jobs. This struggle presented itself whenever double-duty was required: during periods of performing and touring, in the final stages of preparing a new performance, and when overwhelmed with fundraising paperwork. Numerous journal entries indicate the necessity of forgoing training in order to complete grants or to attend meetings related to grants, to attend publicity or touring opportunities, and, while the arrangement lasted, to attend to labour tasks at the request of PTE personnel. As frustrating as it was for actors, this kind of situation continued to arise from time to time. During the period in which the company was working on the first Caravan of the Midnight Sun parade, group training (but not individual training) was put on hold for six weeks in order for company members to attend to project needs (Kowalchuk, CJ, 3 Dec. 1991). Another lapse in training occurred when writing a series of CBC radio scripts had to take precedence in the company’s schedule. Wells voiced concern over these shifts in schedule in which paid project work was given priority:

I feel confused about that whole issue: the way we always end up down to the wire and having to suspend all activities to finish the project(s). I am not happy [. . .] under these circumstances and yet they seem to be a given in our work. (CJ, 12 Mar. 1993).

New Group Training

The company’s training practice continued to reflect both the advancing needs and interests of the group and those of individual company members. During the times that
company members had been training without Fowler, singing and improvisations with musical instruments became an important interactive group activity. The company worked first with songs that they had been taught by various people at the Odin Theatre but then began to bring other songs into these sessions. The need to actively pursue the development of singing and other vocal skills was identified by Fowler in an assessment of the group’s progress and their future needs:

It is my evaluation that the further artistic growth of the company now requires work in two specific areas: musicality and use of text. One of the strongest elements to emerge from our training in the past year and a half is the company’s interest in, and inherent talent for, music, and singing in particular. The first phase of the current performance project exploited that element and, through its application to a rich and demanding technique, has resulted in a groundwork which I hope to develop into one of the essential fabric elements of the new production. [. . .] The second phase of the current performance project, to be carried out here in Winnipeg in early 1993, will concentrate on the development of vocal scores for text delivery and on narrative skills. (Fowler, qtd. in WAAC Final Report, 15 Nov. 1992)

The first phase of the performance project that Fowler refers to was the four-month residency in Nocelle, June 1–September 30, 1992, at which identified vocal needs and interests had begun to be addressed. Using the southern Italian village as a home base allowed the company access to master artists who were inaccessible to them in Canada. During this time company members studied traditional Neopolitan music and popular Italian singing techniques with Lucilla Galeazi (Italy), African, Gypsy, Macedonian and “call” singing techniques with Venus Manley (England), and Iranian folk music technique with Nasrin Pourhosseini (Iran) (CC Report to Peter Stephens, 15 Aug. 1992).

The technical knowledge that the company gained during these voice intensives may have occurred earlier, but it is not made note of until the spring of 1993. At this time the company worked with tones and resonators (Lawson, CJ, 1 Mar. 1993) and with different
tempos and rhythms and improvised harmonies (Wells, CJ, 8 Mar. 1993). A second voice intensive was arranged with Manley in Winnipeg for a three-week period, from April 26–May 15, 1993, during which the company was working intensively on the development of its outdoor performance piece. Manley taught the company members another series of twenty songs that were drawn from African, Bulgarian, French, Hebrew, and Italian sources. This vocal work was used directly in the construction of vocal scores for *Scarabesque* that were described by one reviewer as “Macedonian, Maori, Italian, Bulgarian, and Arabic” (Kendall, *The Toronto Sun*, 24 July 1995). During the second voice intensive, company members became highly aware of the importance of paying consistent attention to vocal development: “It has become apparent how vitally important it is to incorporate a vocal warm-up into our work, how constant research with the voice can help us reach into new areas and correct old habits” (Lawson, CJ, 10–15 May 1993).

Fowler found ways to develop interactive skills that the company accidentally discovered while working on their own. He began to generate activities in which actors could explore and fine-tune the dynamics of whole group training. One such activity was named “fish families” by Fowler and called “fish flashes” by some of the actors:

> We consciously focus on the stimulus and response among the group—that we attempt to sensitize, during this group period, to what the other people in the room are doing and to respond directly either with an echo, a response, an opposite action, the same actions altered in some way. It’s proved to be a potentially very rich exercise, endless possibilities. And of course the emergence of patterns and recurring “themes,” ways of moving, whispering, running, that become “known” and on a spontaneous cue, everyone will suddenly begin moving quickly with panicky whispering. (Wells, CJ, 20–27 Jan. 1992)

The exercise continued to be utilized by the company over time, and variations of the exercise were also introduced:
Only one person [is] leading. So one of us focuses our actions either through the voice, making them very tiny or making them big or slow and the others react. [. . .] Synchronicity is the exception not the standard. The slight action variations make it exciting and interesting to watch, like we are sharing a secret without having to speak. (Randoja, CJ, 20 Sept. 1993)

During “fish flashing” no set vocabulary of any kind was used (Wells, Interview, 17 Feb. 2006). Although the actions and reactions of this exercise were intended to be free form, they were informed by the structured training that had occurred over many years (Kowalchuk, Interview, 17 Feb. 2006).

**New Skill Development**

Skill development was also at times a project-specific venture related to the needs of individual performers and that sometimes involved the entire company. In order to prepare for the performance of the French version of *Alkoremmi*, company members who were not fluent in French took language lessons. The entire company studied drumming with Mark Helman in preparation for the first *Caravan of the Midnight Sun* parade, and Randoja and Wells learned to stilt-walk for their roles in *Scarabesque*. Company members also engaged in specific training motivated by personal interest. Kitt and Wells advanced their percussion training by studying Taiko drumming with Hinode Taiko on their own time, and Kowalchuk took flamenco dance lessons from which she drew performance material for *The Night Room*.

New skill development and the advancement of group training exercises did not mean that basic individual and pair training exercises were discarded. Pair exercises were used throughout the company’s history, but in phases rather than consistently (Kowalchuk and Wells, Interviews, 17 Feb. 2006). The company continued to explore principles and concepts
that had been introduced in earlier training sessions. These skills, however, were often explored in new contexts, such as a long-term sports activity exercise that began in early 1991. Actors first collected images of a chosen sport and then worked to emulate those images. Later that year they were asked to create ten sequences of a score using research that had been based on the sports photo activity (Kitt, CJ, 8 Oct. 1991). Fowler watched the scores and made individual suggestions for further physical work to be incorporated into the original sequence (Kitt, CJ, 9 Oct. 1991). He also worked individually with each actor on her/his score to find “sats, transitions and to change the actions” (Kowalchuk, CJ, 21 Oct. 1991).

Although training continued to advance as an interactive group activity, it returned to a highly individual venture late in the company’s history, in the course of preparing for *Far Away Home*. This was due to the fact that the structure of the performance emerged as a collection of solo performances and was further developed as such. The pieces were very different from one another, and training was directed at the specific requirements of each actor’s piece. Kitt, Kowalchuk, and Wells continued with acrobatic training throughout this time (Kowalchuk and Wells, Interviews, 17 Feb. 2006).

The continuous focus on basic principles, as well as the introduction of new principles, concepts, and skills into the practice, enabled Primus actors to develop and maintain a strong training practice and to clearly define the process for advancing and developing that practice. This understanding of process highly influenced the developing form and content of the company’s pedagogical practice that would become the central tool in the transmission of the company’s legacy.
Performance Pieces

In the four and half years that proceeded *Alkoremmi*, the company created an extensive series of performances that focused on a particular set of challenges emerging from the company’s individual and collective interests and needs. *Scarabesque* (June 1993) was an outdoor parade performance. *Far Away Home* (Oct. 1995) was designed and constructed for an audience of children. *The Night Room* (Jan. 1994) was an indoor performance that, atmospherically, was a complete antithesis to *Alkoremmi*. The structural needs of each performance used the “language” that the company had developed in very different ways. Nevertheless, the performances were all composed of variations of the same dramaturgical process that had been used to create *Dog Day* and *Alkoremmi*.

All three performance pieces were constructed in several phases with an intensive period of development occurring in the months leading to its premiere, as had occurred with the earlier work. However, the degree to which source ideas were concretized in the initial phase of development varied from project to project. The early phase of *The Night Room* appears to have yielded the least concrete material of the three performances during initial exploration. The directive for the research, development, and arrangement of performance material also proceeded in a similar manner to that of earlier performances already discussed in this study.

In summary, the process advanced in the following way. A commencement point was identified through a series of preparatory tasks. Actors were given time to interpret the tasks and to prepare their research in various forms. The research was then shared and discussed, and Fowler issued further individual and collective tasks relating to the prepared performance
material and worked with actors on the material. In the final phase of development, the actor’s work became a cycle of defining, developing, and discarding performance material that was orchestrated by Fowler into a “first phase” of a performance text. Each performance piece was refined and developed during the course of its lifespan in repertoire. There is an absence of documentation relating to the latter part of the final stages of creating *The Night Room*. Much of the construction process, however, can be inferred from documentation referring to the early part of the process. The only significant departure from this pattern of development occurs during the creation of *Far Away Home*.

As indicated in Chapter Four, *Alkoremmi* was retained in the company’s repertoire until December 1996 and was tweaked and adjusted during the course of its extended run. Kowalchuk noted that, while preparing to tour both French and English versions of the performance piece, Fowler worked with the actors to develop new sounds and new ways to use the voice and to vocalize the text (CJ, 22 Oct. 1991). He advised actors to “keep a sense of the acoustical architecture [. . . and] through the use of voice, consciously create a bridge, an architecture to/with the audience. [. . .] Every action of text creates a different bridge” (qtd. in Kowalchuk, CJ, 24 Oct. 1991). Kowalchuk also recalled the playfulness and sense of possibility that accompanied the reworking of the *Alkoremmi* text:

> We sit around a low paper-covered table with 2-3 pages of script in our hands and with suggestions that Richard gives for actions/sound-songs/visual pictures, the text takes on a new tone, rhythm, pitch, accent; transforming the words with a new energy and meaning. Arbitrary? Yes, I think so. But it works. This fascinates me. (Kowalchuk, CJ, 21 Oct. 1991)

Nearly a year after it premiered, new material was added to *Alkoremmi*. Fowler asked actors to prepare “a scene in which something is kept from the last little soul (Wells’s character) and thus prompts him to ‘go back.’” Fowler also asked actors to make lists of six
signs of catastrophe. Lawson found a way to launch a written message into the centre of the playing space using a mechanical, unicycle-riding clown and high wire (Wells, CJ, 2–9 Mar. 1992). In her final review of *Alkoremmi*, Harrison acknowledges the complexity and density of the performance’s images and themes by way of explaining *Alkoremmi*’s consistent returning spectatorship: “Each time a layer is peeled off this production, there are three more waiting to be savoured” (*Winnipeg Sun*, 21 Dec. 1996).

**Scarabesque**

The preliminary explorations for the outdoor performance that would eventually become *Scarabesque* occurred during the company’s first residency in Nocelle (1 June–30 Sept. 1992). Grant applications indicate that the formal vocal and musical explorations that company members were engaged in were related to this piece. Beyond an identification of the various master teachers, however, details of this work do not exist. It can be speculated from the resulting performance aesthetic that this exploration recalled early street-theatre explorations during the remaking of *Dog Day*. The final construction period for *Scarabesque* did not take place until early April 1993 as the company was involved in a series of other activities and projects. At this point highly defined concrete details served to define the direction of the piece. Due to the clarity and specificity of the vision, it can be speculated that the details had been decided upon during the Nocelle residency.

Three characters were on stilts (Kitt, Randoja and Wells) and two on foot (Kowalchuk and Lawson). The company decided to work with an aesthetic that was reminiscent of “18th century France, a la revolution and Rococo with some kinkiness to it”
(Lawson, CJ, 5–10 Apr. 1993). Actors chose costumes and props to define their characters: Randoja created a decadent royal figure using an overstated dress and hairstyle and a parasol. Wells’s costume idea originated with the attire of an archbishop, and he used a bell and a whip as props. Kitt’s costume was inspired by the uniforms worn by military officers, and he chose a sword as his prop. Kowalchuk and Lawson took on servant roles, “the saucy wench and the valet,” and both were dressed in underwear and tethered on leashes. Lawson used a drum and a whistle as props (Lawson, CJ, 5–10 Apr. 1993).

This set of concrete coordinates provided the source material for the continued development of the piece. Scarabesque was constructed of group and individual scores based on character detail, parade formations, and a variety of songs and musical scores. In the early weeks of the intensive construction period, actors created “walks, dances and noises” for themselves and attended to the tasks that Fowler had requested of them—to generate a proposal for an acrobatic move and to create one large, loud sound effect, one large visual effect, one visual surprise specifically for each of their characters, and one group composition in the form of a montage (Lawson, CJ, 5–10 Apr. 1993). The company also used photo images as a source of generating visual material “which dealt with Euro-Renaissance/Baroque/Rococo/court/ royalty/coronation/underwear/servants/military/church” (Lawson, CJ, 5–10 Apr. 1993). During this time, Venus Manley arrived in Winnipeg for a three-week residency with the company.

Scarabesque premiered at the Winnipeg International Children’s Festival during the first week of June 1993 and was subsequently toured to children’s festivals and public sites across the country, including encore performances at the Winnipeg Children’s festival in 1994 and 1995. Scarabesque was described by Randoja as “a wild, classy, strange, bawdy,
funny, irreverent performance” (CJ, 9–13 Aug. 1993) and as “bursting with energy and action […] colour and sound, with stilt-dancing, acrobatics, singing, percussion, and elaborate costumes and choreography” (Scarabesque press release 1993). The highly choreographed promenade piece featured music and songs learned from Manley and other master vocal instructors that the company had studied with. Each of the early versions of Scarabesque was constructed solely as a parade. In development, however, the parade culminated with a picnic scene in which Randoja’s queen character delivered a stillborn skeleton child, meant to symbolize the moral and spiritual corruption of the society that the characters represent. After a sequence of mourning, the “child” is buried and transformed into a large butterfly that floats up into the sky. This time the symbol is of hope for rebirth and renewal.

Journal entries, reviews, print photos, and the Bravo taping of the performance indicate that Scarabesque was visually arresting, highly theatrical, physically challenging, and thought-provoking. The taping, along with the collection of print photos from periodicals across the country, illustrates the piece’s startling and arresting visual effects created by contrasts in colour, shape, height and rhythm. Although Kate Taylor seemed somewhat miffed at the lack of plotline, she admitted that “the visual spectacle draws one in” (The Globe and Mail, 20 July 1995). David Kendall described it as “melodic, multi-cultural and a barrel of laughs” (The Toronto Star, 24 July 1995). That was, until the end of the piece.

Scarabesque is perhaps best known for the controversy surrounding its Ontario Place run in 1995. Site management ordered the company to eliminate the five-minute picnic section from the end of the piece, in which the tiny stillborn skeleton child appears. By company standards, the event received massive media attention, including coverage in all
local Toronto newspapers, local and national television news coverage, and a short feature by Bravo TV. Much of the coverage presented Primus Theatre as the victim of censorship at the hands of an overly conservative park administration and focused heavily on this aspect of the performance to the exclusion of other details. As a result of this attention, most of the “reviews” in Toronto focused on the details of the controversy, rather than on artistic merit or the reviewer’s personal response to the performance. Although company members honoured the request to delete the scene, they also wanted to preserve the integrity of the performance. On the last day of the Ontario Place engagement, spectators were invited to view the censored final sequence in Coronation Park, just outside the Ontario Place gates.

Scarabesque was Primus’s only outdoor piece, and it was toured in repertoire until Kowalchuk, Randoja, and Wells left the company in 1997.

The Night Room

The primary phase of The Night Room (which then bore the working title of White Field/Black Harvest) also began during the company’s first Nocelle retreat in the summer of 1992, but there is no evidence to suggest the nature of the work. The concentrated construction period that led to the premiere of The Night Room extended over a period of four months from September 6, 1993 to January 18, 1994. While detailed documentation of the first part of this construction exists in the company journal, this documentation ceased after a backdated entry referencing the week of November 8–14, 1993. It can be speculated that the development and arrangement of the complex details discussed early in the process necessitated the extensive dramaturgical activity utilized in the making of Alkoremmi in the
latter part of the construction process.

A three-day in-house retreat launched the new project. All collaborators were asked to work on performance ideas and material prior to the retreat. Dixon had returned to Winnipeg and was reprising his role as dramaturg and writer for Primus Theatre. His research was unrelated to the tasks asked of the actors. Performers had been asked what they wanted for themselves in the project and what aspects of performance they wanted to explore through the project. Kowalchuk wanted to work on more physically challenging material, Kitt on singing and speaking after his essentially mute role in *Alkoremmi*, Lawson on extra-daily form in a realistic context, Randoja on the development of her range of vocal expression, and Wells wanted to portray a very specific single individual rather than the Everyman he had portrayed in *Alkoremmi* (Dixon, CJ, 8 Sept. 1993). Dixon noted the company members’ exceptionally cohesive expression of a sense of direction for the projected piece, although no discussion referring to this topic had taken place before the retreat:

They’re all on the same track in terms of desires [for the piece]. [. . .] It did illustrate for me very clearly, just how much I am not a member of the group. I can’t predict their desires in the way that they can probably imagine one another’s, although the ideas of intimacy, heat, modernity and a more daily way of exploring the extra-daily [. . .] correspond with my own hopes and dreams for the piece (Dixon, CJ, 9 Sept. 1993)

All company members listed enclosure, the colour white, and the use of music as principle production details. A variety of individual suggestions for specific qualities and activities also arose from this discussion: folk music (Randoja), a mark left on the set corresponding to each event and indicating sense of transformation (Kowalchuk), the use of screens (Wells) and shadows (Lawson and Wells), and the emergence of people and props from hidden places (Kitt) (Dixon, CJ, 9 Sept. 1993). In addition to agreeing with suggestions from other
company members, Fowler indicated that he wanted to use language in a less poetic and
more direct way, to give shape to the performance space using voices, and to create a vocal
score that would continue throughout the entire performance (Dixon, CJ, 9 Sept. 1993).

On the last day of the retreat Dixon presented the ideas that he had worked on in
collaboration with Fowler. He proposed a murder mystery as the narrative dramaturgy,
providing spectators with a logic with which to navigate the performance. Fowler had also
asked Dixon to propose a series of “sleight of hand” concepts that would allow surprise
revelations of the true themes of the performance. Dixon’s ideas included the creation of “a
closed environment where there are rules and a code of behaviour beneath which lie (as in a
pressure cooker) all the normal conflicts of human behaviour—power plays, envy, jealousies,
etc. and this leads to murder,” as well as audio images such as variations on the sounds of
footsteps and extensive use of singing (Dixon, CJ, 10 Sept. 1993). The completed
performance piece bore the mark of most of these initial ideas.

Unlike Alkoremmi, which dealt with lofty themes and had been designed as if it were
an open-air, under-the-stars setting, The Night Room dealt with issues of sexuality, sexual
expression, and sexual roles, and the design of performance environment was highly
enclosed. By the end of September the actors were presenting scenes “to show, [to] enact the
demon within our characters, to show what the bad seed inside us is like” (Randoja, CJ, 24
Sept. 1993). According to Randoja, the collection of scenes was “powerful, disturbing, sad,
edgy, pained” and contained “some element of extra-daily daily, meaning daily behaviour [. .
. ] that’s gone haywire. Daily behaviour that still tightens your stomach and makes you sit
up.” She also noted extensive use of costumes and props, such as “water, ‘puppets,’ pebbles,
lights, babies, daggers” (CJ, 24 Sept. 1993). In the following week the group reached consensus about a number of details, and character relationships began to emerge:

Most of us said that these people were all from different places visiting a foreign country; that they were living or meeting in a tent or on an oasis, in a resort, in a seedy hotel; that they all are strangers and that an unravelling of secrets, passions, pain and perhaps murder occurs. (Kowalchuk, CJ, 28 Sept. 1993)

During the first week of October Fowler and Dixon introduced a montage that they had fashioned using the material that the actors had generated to that point, and the next week they introduced a second montage that was “more scene-like in its construction (more layering of material, denser, thicker) [and that read as] the event, or a very significant event in the overall story” (Lawson, CJ, 6 Oct. 1993). Further performance material was generated through the reconstruction of improvisations done by Lawson and Wells, a process introduced at NTS during the creation of the original *Dog Day*. Unlike the work at NTS and the Odin Theatre, however, these improvisations were videotaped.

Journal entries indicate that performance material for *The Night Room* continued to be generated through improvisation and that material was continually being “cut, intercut, modified, expanded and set” (Randoja, CJ, 18 Oct.–5 Nov. 1993). By the first week in November Fowler had selected a series of scenes that were to be the core of the final montage. The aesthetics of the piece were also being worked on during this time, and the theme of murder mystery was explored. Actors were asked to find disguises and were given suggestions for creating mystery and suspense in the work: “screams, footsteps, people disappearing when one turns away, half-closed doors partially revealing a murder or clues, the dying man’s last words as clues” (Randoja, CJ, 18 Oct.–5 Nov. 1993). According to Dixon, “whereas in *Alkoremmini* the audience was invited into the atmosphere of a ritual, here
in The Night Room we are invited into a literal mystery which will be solved, or at least resolved, in the running of the performance” (CJ, 10 Sept. 1993).

The Night Room premiered on January 18, 1994 at the Winnipeg Art Gallery and ran until January 29. The set was designed as a huge labyrinth constructed of hundreds of metres of sheer white fabric and enclosed in a large tent. Limited numbers of spectators sat on bleachers facing each other. The narrative dramaturgy of the performance was described by the company as “the story of one man’s journey through a landscape of sexual imagery. In this world of dreams he encounters what lies in his own sub-conscious” (The Night Room press release 1994). Most of the media reaction to the performance referred to this dream state and focused on vivid visual and aural images. Good described The Night Room as “a jumble of images. [. . .] Powerful. Poignant. [. . .] Dream time is strange—it stretches like taffy—and part of me didn’t want the show to end. I wanted to stay in that shadowy place” (CBC Information Radio, 26 Jan. 1994). Chris Dafoe described the performance as stunning spectacle, all the more magical because it’s whipped up from almost nothing. [. . .] [S]ound, light and space—and yet the company creates an eyeful of vivid, powerful images: ghostly, distorted shadows, twisted faces and bodies, haunting sounds emerging from exotic tableaux. (The Globe and Mail, 14 May 1994)

The Georgia Straight review spoke in vague terms, describing the spoken text as “sometimes as profound as it is ambitious” and “the theatrical language [. . .] as pliant” (Thomas, 20–27 May 1994). The concrete images provided as support for the commentary do little to clarify Thomas’s response. Jo Ledingham called the performance “mesmerizing” and “confusing” and stated that she was “dazzled by effects and haunting images [. . .] seduced by mirage after mirage—but found no answers” (The Vancouver Courier, 18 May 1994). Roger Levesque, also impressed with the visual and aural images and the “ingenious
ways” in which the set was used, claimed that in the end the audience should not try to sort out “something that really shouldn’t be sorted out” but rather to appreciate the performance as an “abstract, fascinating re-creation of the inner depths” of humanity (*The Edmonton Journal*, 29 Apr. 1994).

*The Night Room* was remounted for a two-week run in an old Canadian Commerce Bank Building on Main Street in the city’s Exchange District from February 4 to 12, 1994. According to Tom Novak, this run benefited from the acoustic contribution of the venue: “[T]here the ethereal sound of the actors’ chanting and vocalizing echoing through the huge expanse of marble and stone created an acoustic experience that was itself worth the price of admission” (*The Uniter*, Feb. 1994). Subsequent to this *The Night Room* was retained in repertoire and toured across Canada and to select parts of the United States beginning in April 1994. This piece was also retired in 1997 with the departure of Kowalchuk, Randoja, and Wells.

*Far Away Home*

The first phase of *Far Away Home* was generated during a second residency in Nocelle (4 Jan.–6 Mar. 1995). Journal notation of the activity occurring in this phase of development exists but refers predominantly to collective preparatory activity. The only existing documentation of the final phase of preparation, which took place between July 25 and October 6, 1995, is found in the company’s final journal entry, dated July 31–August 4, 1995. The choice to retreat to Italy was borne out of a need for the company to be somewhere that was
isolated and far away from the city [Winnipeg] and all the business of running a company and all the other things that distract you and delude you when you want to enter into a major creative phase and, at the same time, a place that was highly stimulating. [. . .] Nocelle is exemplary of those two things. (Fowler, Interview, 2 Sept. 2000)

Nocelle would, however, become more than a place to work.

Company members arrived in Nocelle with little more than the idea that they would be building a children’s performance piece. Kowalchuk and Wells recalled starting with a discussion that led to a collective listing of details that company members liked and disliked about children’s shows (Kowalchuk and Wells, Interview, 17 Feb. 2008). In addition to these discussions, the first week in Nocelle was spent reinstating a regular training and rehearsal regimen. All work took place in an abandoned village school.

At the end of the first week of development (9–16 Jan.), the company spent two days in Naples researching and searching for objects. Each actor was given two hundred dollars and expected to collect “things” that might serve as inspiration or sources of explorative work. Most of the shopping and collecting was done secretively and individually; however, all company members visited the Neopolitan mask-maker Lia Arioso. Randoja bought a mask that served as the impetus for her character Togar. Wells recalled buying small clay hands, a red cloth, and a mask from Arioso that were all used in the construction of his piece (Wells, Interview, 17 Feb. 2006). After showing and sharing the collection of objects that had been amassed in the second week, Fowler asked each actor to create a montage using one or more objects from the collection (Kitt, CJ, 16–22 Jan. 1995).

Kowalchuk did not recall using anything that she bought during the Naples trip to create her piece. She did, however, recall collecting rocks in Montepertuso (near Nocelle), one of which had a hole in it, as well as seashells. She also wrote original words to the tune
of a traditional Brazilian folk song. This song, the rocks, and the seashells served as the basis for the construction of her montage (Kowalchuk, Interview, 17 Feb. 2006). Kowalchuk and Wells also recalled being asked to work with changing perception, big to small or the reverse, within a contained space, and using small scale (Kowalchuk and Wells, Interview, 17 Feb. 2006).

During this time Venus Manley arrived from London for an intensive one week vocal session in which company members spent five or six hours a day learning new Georgian, Hebrew, African, and Scottish songs (Randoja, CJ, 23–29 Jan. 1995). The content of this workshop did not directly affect the construction of Far Away Home, as had occurred when Manley worked with the company during the initial stages of Scarabesque. The sharing of the music, however, served at a later date as a bridge to the community of Nocelle and led to further community project work.

The significance of Nocelle and its people to Far Away Home came about naturally, through a kind of “infiltration, seduction” process (Fowler, Interview, 2 Sept. 2000). The central contributing factor to this occurrence was that company members were at a point in their creative process at which they were open to any and all possible shaping influences, and “actors were reaching out to the environment around them. Lawson’s character was inspired by the relationship of a real-life mother and son” (Fowler, Interview, 2 Sept. 2000). I realized how fundamentally the tiny mountain village had affected the atmospheric quality of the set and the use of space in Far Away Home when I visited Nocelle (2000).

The solo orientation of the performance text occurred organically rather than by design due to several factors. When Fowler asked for an initial sharing of the emerging performance material, the actors requested more time for construction. Hr conceded to the
actors’ wishes, although he was not entirely comfortable with this (Kowalchuk and Wells, Interview, 17 Feb. 2006). As a result of the extended period of development, the construction of this set of first-draft pieces was quite complex in comparison with those from earlier performance projects. This increased ownership on the part of the performers made it more difficult for Fowler to deconstruct or rearrange the material (Wells and Kowalchuk, Interview, 17 Feb. 2006).

As had occurred during the creation of past performances, each score was presented, and this was followed by a detailed feedback period in which company members discussed each other’s work. Fowler’s initial response to pieces prompted Lawson to note details that heavily affected further structural development:

> After all the mental energy put into the responses from our colleagues . . . Richard’s question: Do you still want to do this?—is strange. It’s much less easy to abandon something that has just stimulated five others to speak on and on. So perhaps this is the only way to do this. These scenes have about them such an importance or is it just my imagination? (Lawson, CJ, 5 Feb. 1995)

I surmise that Fowler was well aware of the impact that such a sense of ownership would have on the structural and explorative potential for the performance piece. His question indicates that he wanted the actors to understand these implications as well. By the end of the Nocelle residency two advances in the performance material had occurred. In keeping with an early decision to use small-scale actions and compact space in the structuring of the piece, Kowalchuk noted experimentation with “small props and face things for our small actions. Stephen has an umbrella, I have a hand mirror, Karin has strange lipstick and jewelry, Ker is putting his head in a box, Don is using a box with a lid” (CJ, 5 Feb. 1995). Questions directed at subsequent presentations of the solo pieces indicate an attempt to advance, rather than to shift, the form that had emerged from the initial explorative work: “[W]hat did you
see, what were the opposites, what could you help out in and who could this character be?” (Kitt, CJ, 6 Feb. 1995). In the final weeks of the Nocelle residency, Fowler met individually with each actor in order to discuss and provide direction for the development of each piece (Kowalchuk, CJ, 13–25 Feb. 1995).

The second phase of development began five months later, in July 1995, after the company’s return from Toronto and the Scarabesque controversy at Ontario Place. This occurred at the former Winnipeg Remand Centre in downtown Winnipeg, where part of the construction of The Night Room had taken place. Information referring to this period of time is highly limited. What can be determined is that training was directed specifically at the development of characters and “small voices” and that the company decided that the set would be structured as “a very aesthetically cluttered and busy and full “barrio” or European tight city neighbourhood” (Randoja, CJ, 31 July–4 Aug. 1995). Although the initial stage of developing performance material for Far Away Home had been difficult for company members due to a seeming lack of context in which to work (Randoja, CJ, 23–29 Jan. 1995), Kowalchuk and Wells agree that Far Away Home was the first Primus performance piece in which the performers were fully responsible for the material: “We certainly became creator, writer, actor, director, dramaturg with these pieces” (Kowalchuk, CJ, 6 Mar. 1995).

This affected Fowler’s role during the final stage of construction, making it very different from his involvement in previous performance pieces (Kowalchuk and Wells, Interview, 17 Feb. 2006). His role shifted from that of collaborator and director to that of director. With the exception of Lawson’s Vincenza/Arca character, there was little possibility for interactive relationships between the characters in Far Away Home, and thus there was little or no interaction between the actors in the creation and developmental process. Training
became increasingly isolated and focused on the individual needs of each performer. As a result of the choice to retain the complex solo structures that emerged during the sharing of the initial performance work in Nocelle, there was no need for Fowler to orchestrate and shape a mise en scène. In Wells’s estimation the experience was highly isolating (Wells, Interview, 17 Feb. 2006).

*Far Away Home* featured an interactive installation set that invited an audience of forty to walk and crawl through a highly defined performance world modelled as a European mountain village. Although the structure of *Far Away Home* was more linear and less complex than in earlier work, the distinctly non-daily world was as specifically detailed as previous performance work. Each character’s story was told in a different “house”, and audience members were guided to the various locations by Randoja’s silent character, Torgar. The audience was therefore required to change positions throughout the performance—which included crawling through a tunnel to get to one of the destinations.

*Far Away Home* was co-produced with the Manitoba Children’s Museum (MCM) in a production agreement brokered by Nancy Newman, the museum’s director of exhibits and programs. The MCM provided Primus Theatre with a performance space and a small monetary contribution toward expenses. Museum personnel also arranged a week of capacity crowd bookings that included both public presentations and school bookings. *Far Away Home* premiered on October 11, 1995 at the Manitoba Children’s Museum, and its run (11–18 Oct.) was extremely successful, financially and artistically, for the company. The press release was more direct and less poetic than those for the company’s adult performance pieces and indicated the hands-on features of the event. It invited spectators on an adventure that would take them through “a village at the base of a magic tree” to meet each of the
residents, “each of whom would share personal stories, [...] the stories that sent them far away from home, and the tales that brought them back” (Far Away Home press release 1995).

Reviewers were charmed by the piece. Dirks of CBC Radio and Enright of CBC-TV were awed by the intimacy, the simple magic, and the intelligence of the work. They were also both acutely aware of how engaging the children in the audience found the piece (Dirks and Enright Interview, CBC Radio, 4 Apr. 1997). Dirks observed that “children were open-mouthed and fascinated. [...] [C]hildren of the nineties who are used to Nintendo and special f/x sort of techno flash [...] were spellbound by the play and so was I” (CBC Radio, 4 Apr. 1997). Enright, a long-time supporter of Primus’s work, stated that Far Away Home was “a play that so respects children and their wholeness and intelligence, that it’s almost, at times, painful to watch because it’s so beautiful” (CBC Radio, 4 Apr. 1997). Donnelly called Far Away Home “an exceptionally child-friendly piece of young people’s theatre” and noted that children were “invited to gather around, close enough to touch the actors and puppets” (The Montreal Gazette, 31 May 1996). Prokosh defined the piece as having “a decidedly Fellini-esque flavour which seeps into its surreal setting, extravagant characters and hallucinatory images” (Winnipeg Free Press, 4 Apr. 1997). Peters was impressed by the way in which the performance themes were “complimented by contrasts manifested in the play such as large and small, freedom and enclosure, far and near and hard and soft.” (“Far Away Home” 74). In a later statement, she claimed that Far Away Home possessed a balance of “poignancy and humour, beauty and burlesque, seriousness and lightheartedness” (Primus Theatre Newsletter, Spring 1997). In his observation of both the performance and the effect upon its
young audiences, Tim Borlase, program coordinator of the Labrador East Integrated School Board, stated,

[t]he performance was captivating, exposing young people to a rich texture of themes and images that transfixed the audiences. It helped renew in students the mystery of storytelling. The Labrador Creative Arts Festival, of which Primus was a part, has been operation for 20 years. It would be fair to say that few, if any, of the visiting artists at this festival have carried with them the same impact this theatre troupe has had. (Primus Theatre Newsletter, Spring 1997)

As had occurred with previous performances, after its premiere run Far Away Home was added to the company’s repertoire and toured until the major personnel change in 1997.

New Performance Initiatives

**Madrugada.** The company also began to engage in collaborative performance projects. One of these projects, *Life Cycle: Overture*, was a joint initiative with GroundSwell and poet Patrick Friesen. The performance premiered at the Winnipeg Centennial Concert Hall as part of the New Music Festival in February 1992. The performance was remounted as *Madrugada* at the Franco-Manitoba Cultural Centre (Winnipeg) in May 1995. No documentation exists concerning the process of creating either version of the performance. Wells’s summarization of the first version of the project provides an aesthetic sense of the work:

> We recently finished in the music project and it was a really wonderful experience. Eight hundred people saw the show on the stage at the Centennial Concert Hall [Winnipeg], and we emerged from water-filled oil-drums covered in white makeup to a George Crumb piece. Then we performed a loosely set fish-family improv dance to the music of Jim Hisott with Lori Freedman on bass clarinet. We tossed wood-chips to the ground from Free Press shoulder bags. In the last piece “Old Woman of the Bones” by Mike Mathews with text by Patrick Friesen, we used our physical “prop” scores, found costumes and applied our previous work from the summer to the musical and textual structures required by the composer and playwright. (CJ,
Two years later a self-produced remounting of the piece was arranged and re-titled *Madrugada*. What can be deduced from the limited documentation about the remounting project is that it was not a remounting in the spirit of Primus’s past projects. The piece was a restaging of the original work rather than a reworking and refining of the material. The original collaboration included the work of three composers, Friesen’s text, and Primus’s visual and aural work. The remount featured only Michael Matthews’s composition, as a cohesive, extended work, integrated with text by Friesen. There was no opportunity for the actors to refine or to develop their performance material beyond the original work or adapt to the new musical score. As a result the actors were generally frustrated with the project (Kitt, CJ, 6 Mar.–31 Apr. 1996). Nevertheless, from the viewpoint of the spectator, the performance read as an odd and interesting opera/circus hybrid featuring highly orchestrated, but not necessarily fully integrated, collage of butoh-like movement performed by Primus members emerging from barrels of water, masked stilt-walkers, original live music, and spoken poetry by Friesen. Print or media reviews of *Madrugada* do not exist.

*Caravan of the Midnight Sun.* The company’s collaborations extended to non-professional performers as well. After a month of intensive work and preparation, Primus Theatre mounted its third production and first complete outdoor performance on the streets of Winnipeg in the final hour of 1991. *Caravan of the Midnight Sun* was constructed as an outdoor New Year’s Eve parade event and was developed in collaboration with people in the community. This project ran for two consecutive years, 1991 and 1992, as part of a city-wide series of New Year’s Eve events organized around the umbrella of “First Night.”
The first Caravan of the Midnight Sun parade was structured as three separate parade pieces, a group of stilt-walking bird-creatures, a group of torch-bearers, and a Chinese dragon, that converged for the final leg of the parade leading to the Provincial Legislature Building at midnight, where the event culminated with fireworks. Performers emerged from doorways and were placed in glass walkways or windows along the parade route. According to Fowler, the purpose of the parade was to create an outdoor public spectacle that used the streets as performance spaces and to involve the local community in the preparation and staging of the event (Prokosh, Winnipeg Free Press, 22 Dec. 1991).

The 1991 parade was attended by an estimated twenty thousand people and televised by two networks. Volunteers from the community made up most of the participants in each of the parade groups and were involved in the construction of costumes and props. Some volunteers actually learned to walk on stilts for their role in the parade. Although fully aware of the entirety of the project, Wells recalled being awed by the effect:

I turned in time to see a great ten-foot bird-dragon looming from the smoke above me, transcendent, from some other place I have never seen. It was the picture of the first Viking dragon ship emerging from the dawn mist on an English shore and I stood and stared. (CJ, 24 Jan. 1992)

There is little to indicate the process or themes of the second Caravan of the Midnight Sun. What is apparent from the minimal reference to the project between November 10, 1992 and February 25, 1993 is that the parade featured puppets and stilt-walkers and that it seemed ill fated from the beginning. Although Primus members intended the project to be more spectacular than in the previous year (Wells, CJ, 26 Oct.-1 Nov. 1992), this was not to be the case. Early in the planning, highly limiting safety regulations were placed on the project and,
in the last week of November, the company’s operating budget was cut in half. The company persevered and journal entries indicate full-scale preparation of puppets and stilt-walking manoeuvres (Wells, CJ, 6 Dec. 1992). Surprises were planned for the length of the parade route. The overture to the procession was performed from a glassed walkway, images were projected on the walls of buildings, large puppets were placed in parking lots, and a huge dragon would battle three winged stilt-figures at the culmination of the parade (Weber, *Winnipeg Free Press*, 26 Dec. 1992). Archival material documenting budgets and volunteer scheduling indicates plans for a complex series of installations and moving sequences for the parade.

The lack of follow-up information anywhere in the archives speaks volumes. What can be reasonably inferred by the two-month gap in journal writing is that preparation for the parade demanded the full-time attention that had been necessary in the case of the previous “First Night” project. No attempt was made, however, to summarize the experience once the company resumed its journaling practice. Although this information does not appear in the journals, involvement in the second “First Night” project created a $10,500 deficit for Primus Theatre due to non-payment by the event’s organizers. The effects of the incident can be found in notations of increased fundraising efforts and appeals to arts funding agencies. There was only one mention of this in company journals. In an after-the-fact entry many months later, Primus’s participation in the parade was referred to as “the first night fiasco” (Wells, CJ, 12-19 Apr. 1993). In a series of articles that traced the 1992-1993 “First Night” Celebration, local newspapers reported a massive mishandling of the event by its planning committee.³⁵ As a result organizers accumulated a $100 million deficit, and dozens of

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³⁵ In early January participating musicians and actors were informed that they would not be paid until
performing artists were paid only a fraction of their contracted fees. For many of the participating groups and individuals, including Primus Theatre, this was a devastating blow that threatened their survival as artists.

Nocelle Projects. The company also created environmental community projects with the inhabitants of Nocelle, where Fowler made his home away from Winnipeg. The first performance encounter with the villagers occurred in the summer of 1992, when the company accepted an invitation to perform in nearby Montepertuso at “Note de Note,” a benefit concert for homeless children in Naples. In September, at the end of their first residency in the village, Primus company members planned Viaggio Al Cielo as a gift to the people of Nocelle, to thank the village for the support, generosity and assistance given by the townspeople to the group over the four months of its residency there. The performance involved street theatre, a concert, traditional folk music and dancing. (CC Report to Peter Stephens, 15 Aug. 1992)

It was not until the summer of 1997, however, that Primus Theatre began to create performances “with and for the people of Nocelle” (Primus Theatre Newsletter, Fall 1997). The performances included the participation of guest theatre artists and of three quarters of the 125 inhabitants of the village. The village itself was used as the setting for the roving performance focused on stories told by the villagers. C’era una volta in montagna eventually

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16 Those in attendance at a “First Night” Festival Artist Fund Meeting in mid-January were told that the “First Night” Festival office was officially closed and that artists would receive a cheque amounting to 15.8% of contracted fees (Minutes of meeting, 11 Jan. 1993).
became a trilogy of performance pieces that extended over a three-year period of time. Eighty spectators per night were bussed in, as close as possible to the isolated mountain village and then led on foot, through a corridor of torches, to the entrance of the village, and the beginning of the performance. In 1997 the performance focused on stories of past work life in the village, in 1998 the event celebrated childhood in the village, and in 1999 the performance centred on stories about the construction of the village (“C’era una volta in montagna” 89).

Primus no longer existed at the time that the second and third C’era una volta in montagna projects were being developed, and L’Associazione Culturale LA TOFA assumed responsibility for these projects. LA TOFA, founded by Fowler, scenographer Aniello Cinque, and four other members of the local community were joined by former Primus members, students, apprentices, and other interested artists on a project-to-project basis. In creating opportunities for the Nocellesi to share their village and tell their stories, Fowler and Primus members (or former members) changed the villagers’ perspective of their lives:

Historically, the villagers thought of themselves as discarded, uninteresting, disregarded peasants. They knew they lived in Nocelle and life was hard, but now they have learned that their town has a special magic and beauty, that they are people of value whose lives are unique—and that they have something important to share with a larger community. (“C’era una volta in montagna” 92)

Lawson, who worked on the project for all three years, stated,

[t]his is vital work [. . .] socially responsible, political and powerful. I have continued to be reminded through this experience that the setting up of ventures based on sharing, consensus decision processes, with sound use of economic material and human resources is the only responsible way to work as an artist in an increasingly commodified, industrialized and wasteful world. (qtd. in “C’era una volta in montagna” 92)
**CBC Projects.** In 1991 Tom Anniko at CBC Radio in Winnipeg commissioned the company to write and perform five five-minute pieces that would be broadcast prior to, and in conjunction with, the first *Caravan of the Midnight Sun* parade. The five-episode series, *In the House of Asp,* was written by Wells and then presented to the other actors for feedback and help with sound effects. The story of Charlotte and the house of Asp was described as “spooky, funny and delicate” (Kowalchuk, CJ, 4 Dec. 1991). It was broadcast December 30 and 31, 1991 to highly positive responses. This resulted in Anniko offering Primus a series of similar commissions. Between mid-1992 and late 1993 the company wrote and recorded a total of twelve five- to seven-minute pieces, each associated with a different holiday or celebration. This time the pieces were distributed amongst the company members, who each took responsibility for two or three pieces. Fowler directed but was not involved in the creation of the work. Initially, the entire company workshopped each script, allowing for the reaction and input of all members on each piece. However, given the time limit, the length of the pieces themselves, and that the suggestions were highly evocative of the feelings and preferences of each speaker, company members realized that this was not an entirely helpful way to advance each script. (CJ, Lawson, 16 Mar. 1993). In 1994 Fowler wrote *Breath of Memory,* a half-hour radio drama that was broadcast nationally on CBC-FM. The performance text incorporated texts written by company members and expressed the complexities of the human experience and the changes that are registered in the body over time (Lawson, CJ insert, Feb. 1994).
Touring and Continued Repertoire

Along with the development of new performance pieces, Primus retained past productions in repertoire and performed these at festivals, in self-produced tours, and as commissions. Repertoire pieces were often rehearsed and performed during the same time period in which the company was generating new performance work. With the exception of *Dog Day*, all Primus performance pieces were all performed in repertoire. *Alkoremmi* and *The Night Room* were translated into French at the request of Le Centre Culturel Franco-Manitobain and subsequently toured in repertoire with the English versions. *Alkoremmi* premiered at Le Centre Culturel Franco-Manitobain on March 25, 1992 and *Une chambre la nuit* premiered at CUSB on September 12, 1995. On invitation Primus performed *Une chambre la nuit* at Theatre Espace La Veille in Montreal from January 4-14, 1996.

Although the concept of performance maturation was used extensively by Barba with the Odin Theatre, it was also common practice among such theatre auteurs as Peter Brook, Jerzy Grotowski, Elizabeth LeCompte, Robert Lepage, and Ariane Mnouchkine. In describing a similar process used by the Wooster Group, Johanna Mercer states that this “aging” denotes “a sense that there is no ‘final product.’ The work is constantly evolving. Earlier performances are ‘remembered’ in later performances” (19). Kowalchuk indicates,

> [t]he opportunity to perform over an extended period of time benefited Primus in a number of ways. Firstly the actors could “settle in” to the performance, individually and as an ensemble. The consistent repetition of performance deepened the actors’ understanding of his/her work and new levels and resonances began to be discovered in performance. (CC Explorations Grant Final Report, 14 May 1991)

Until 1993 Primus’s touring was limited to local and provincial sites and to short-term inter-provincial tours. Locally Primus toured to rural communities in Manitoba,
Fannystelle (Nov. 1991) and Notre Dame de Lourdes (Mar. 1992), and organized performances and extended runs at various Winnipeg locations, such as the Winnipeg Art Gallery. During this time the company also toured to Ottawa (Nov. 1991) for an International Mime Festival,\textsuperscript{17} to Timmins (Apr. 1992), and to Montreal (May 1992).\textsuperscript{18} As their repertoire increased, however, company members, along with their board of directors,\textsuperscript{19} decided to focus on increasing the company’s visibility at a national level through the organization of a more extensive touring schedule.

In the spring of 1994 (1 Apr.–11 June) the company organized a western Canadian tour of *Alkoremmi* and *The Great Divide*, created and performed by Brad Krumholz and Brett Keyser. The tour took the company to Armstrong, Calgary, Edmonton, Lloydminster, Regina, and Vancouver. The company also performed *Scarabesque* in Prince George at the Canadian Northern Children’s Festival and in Regina at the Regina International Children’s Festival. In November and December 1994 the company toured to Halifax, St. John’s, Toronto, and Goose Bay for the Labrador Creative Arts Festival.

The most ambitious tour occurred between October 1995 and April 1996. The first segment of the journey was an eastern Canadian tour of *The Night Room*, *Alkoremmi*, and *Far Away Home* that took the company to Charlottetown, Goose Bay, Halifax, Hopedale, Lennoxville, Makkovik, Montreal, Rigolet, St. John’s, and Toronto. The company also performed in Cleveland. During the second part of the tour, March 20–30, 1996, the company headed west to Victoria for an extended repertoire run sponsored and hosted by

\textsuperscript{17}The mime festival was organized by Forty Below Mime based in Winnipeg. The artistic director, Guiseppi Condello, organized both the Ottawa festival and an associated festival that occurred one month earlier (October) in Winnipeg.

\textsuperscript{18}The studio space in Montreal was donated by the National Theatre School.

\textsuperscript{19}Primus Theatre maintained a board of directors from the point of incorporation; however, this board
Kaleidoscope Theatre.

During the latter part of the company’s existence particular performance pieces were toured to specific locations. *Scarabesque* was performed at Ontario Place in Toronto in August 1995. *Far Away Home* was performed in May 1996 at Le Coups de Theatre during the Montreal International Children’s Theatre Festival, and was the only Canadian production from outside Quebec. In December 1996 *The Night Room* was performed at LaMaMa, one of New York City’s oldest and most prestigious alternative performance spaces. The performance was part of a festival of Canadian art co-produced by the Canadian embassy in New York City.

**Workshops**

Although there had always been a pedagogical component of Primus Theatre company culture, an increase in both the frequency and the breadth of the touring schedule served as a catalyst for the facilitation of what would become an extensive series of short-term and long-term workshops. In the early years implementation of workshops and lecture/demonstrations was used as a means to increase awareness of the company’s work in the local community. Once the company began to tour, this aspect of company life gained importance as both a pedagogical and a promotional venture. The company organized and facilitated workshops whenever it was feasible in their schedule. The purpose of these workshops extended far beyond creating an awareness of the company’s work in a particular community.

became increasingly proactive regarding the company’s financial security and subsequent artistic advancement.
Workshops were designed to provide participating groups and individuals with access to the company’s processes and techniques for use in their own work. Workshop participants ranged from seasoned theatre professionals to young children and the myriad of possibilities in between. After teaching high school students at the Manitoba High School Drama Festival, Kowlachuk stated, “I feel really good and confident that we should be sharing our work. Something wonderful happened in that theatre today, more life and spirit than I’ve seen in a long, long time” (CJ, 16 May 1991). During the next seven years Primus would plan and implement a series of short-term workshops in Winnipeg and across Canada. Ranging from two days to one week in length, they took the format of a lecture/demonstration of the work, an introduction to basic exercises and techniques, or combination of the two. Some of the practical workshops focused on specific skills, such as stilt-walking or drumming, and reflected the accumulated skills of company members. High school workshops often culminated in a sharing of the work through parades or work demonstrations.

Over the years Primus Theatre conducted workshops for many local organizations, including Interact Manitoba, Le Cercle Molière, Manitoba Teacher’s Network, Manitoba Theatre for Young People, Manitoba Youth Drama Festival, Prairie Theatre Exchange, R.B. Russell High School, Red River Community College, the University of Manitoba, the University of Winnipeg, and the Winnipeg Art Gallery.

While the company was on tour, workshops were conducted for such organizations and individuals as Bishop’s University (Lennoxville), Caravan Farm (Armstrong, BC), Creative Arts Festival (Goose Bay), Dalhousie University (Halifax), Ecole Secondaire Thériault (Timmins), Lakeland College (Lloydminster), Quinzaine Internationale du Théâtre (Quebec City), Research Centre for the Arts (St. John’s), University of Alberta (Edmonton),
and Victoria Composite School (Edmonton). Workshops were conducted for a series of organizations in Montreal and Toronto. In Montreal workshops were facilitated at Concordia University, the Literary Managers and Dramaturges of the Americas Conference, and l’Université du Québec. In Toronto the company implemented workshops for Equity Showcase, Nightwood Theatre, Surrey Place Centre Hospital, and the University of Toronto.

From time to time Fowler conducted for local service agencies seminar/video presentations of his work with mentally handicapped individuals in Denmark. The sessions were also conducted by request as had occurred with Surrey Place Centre in Toronto (1991).

**Training Schools**

As a result of continued requests from participants in short-term workshops for a more intensive training program, Primus Theatre initiated a series of three extended workshops from their home base in Winnipeg. During August 9–27 (1993) Primus piloted an intensive three-week program, “Fictive Reality: Constructing the Performance Experience,” with fifteen students from across Canada and the United States.20 Among the participants was Daniel Mroz, who would also attend the third school and whose subsequent independent work will be discussed in Chapter Six. This extended session was designed to provide participants with an intensive introduction to Primus Theatre’s physical and vocal training and performance creation techniques. The workshop focused on physical and vocal training but included discussion, film viewing, live demonstrations of training sequences, and live presentations of his work with mentally handicapped individuals in Denmark. The sessions were also conducted by request as had occurred with Surrey Place Centre in Toronto (1991).

performances. As Fowler stated in the final week of the workshop, “the first week of the workshop was ‘pure action,’ the second week was ‘actions in relation to each other’ and the third week would be ‘actions in context’” (qtd. in Wells, CJ, 30 Aug.–3 Sept. 1993).

Workshop participants were first introduced to specific techniques and principles and then were provided with opportunities to apply this knowledge through the construction of increasingly complex combinations and scores built from the basic techniques. The workshop began with the “Plastiques” and included core exercises, such as “the cat,” resonator work, and the foot-to-chest exercise. Basic “Plastiques” were then complicated by requests for additional detail, such as a “change of direction or speed or finding ways of using the feet” (Kowalchuk, CJ, 16–22 Aug. 1993). Participants were also introduced to exercises developed organically from the company’s interactive work, including “fish families” exercises and a three-step progression from sports exercise into character development. The participants were divided into groups, each of which was headed by a company member who taught their personal training score to the group. This score was then used as a foundation from which to explore additional concepts and principles, such as “stops” and work with props. This act of offering participants a combination of fundamental core exercises and research-generated exercises served to advance the form of the company’s pedagogical practice. This marked an official shift from earlier workshops,21 which had emerged from the transmission of Odin Theatre practice. Primus Theatre’s pedagogical practice had become unique to the membership of the company and an original practice informed by that of the Odin Theatre.

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21 Although it is probable that company members were adjusting the workshop format in some way each time that advancements were made in the training and dramaturgical research, there is no record of this. However, documentation of the programming of the first “Fictive Reality” workshop does indicate this combination of training material.
In the final week of the program, time was spent advancing the scores that each participant had constructed and exploring individual training pursuits that would carry each participant into their own work. The emerging performance scores were also shared with the rest of the group:

Each scene seems to raise different points of discussion and Richard [Fowler] takes these opportunities to illustrate, draw attention to, give examples of many problems and aspects of this work. I find that this approach gives a particularly rich exciting air of “the voyage” of research we are conducting together, all of us, rather than this being an exercise of predetermined results which we intend to control to a predictable end and goal. It makes all of us active. (Wells, CJ, 30 Aug.–3 Sept. 1993)

Written responses from participants of the 1993 workshop were highly favourable and indicated a need for a continuation of this kind of programming. The second “Fictive Reality: Constructing the Performance Experience” workshop took place September 12–30, 1994, and was again conducted with the capacity number of fifteen students from across Canada, the US, and Switzerland. With the exception of a short summary in the company journal and the documentation of participants’ reactions to the event, there is no evidence of programming details. As the workshop operated within the same time frame as the original, 1993 version, it can be deduced that the content and the progression of core material were similar. The summary of events notes one substantial diversion from the structure of the first workshop as participants developed new form. Instead of being taught training scores developed by supervising company members as the base for creating performance material, participants generated their own scores. Each company member was assigned three participants with whom to work on the generation of material pertaining to the theme of “the

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22 Participants in the 1994 workshop included Holly Bright, Guy Demers, Nadin Gilroy, Allan Grant, Camille Lipford, Lisa Mark, Catherine Myles, Alisa Palmer, Soraya Pearsby, Genvieve Pelletier, Lori Weidenhammer, Cynthia Wells, Jane Wells, Christopher Wilson, and John White.
journey/the voyage.” Each group’s work-in-progress was performed by candlelight at St. Luke’s Church on the last evening of the workshop (Kowalchuk, CJ, 4 Oct. 1994). Again reactions to the workshop were very positive.

The third and final “Fictive Reality: Constructing the Performance Experience” workshop was expanded into a three-month session and held between January 6 and March 29, 1997. Despite higher tuition fees and the condition that participants would be unable to earn income during their training, the company received twice as many applications as they had for each of the two earlier workshops. Twenty-three students, ranging in age from sixteen to forty-five, were accepted into the program from across Canada, the US, and Europe (Primus Theatre Newsletter, Spring 1997).23

Beyond application material and commentary provided by participants, the only information about Primus Theatre’s third, extended workshop is a brief three-month schedule of activities in the company archive collection. From this material it can be deduced that the workshop was a more detailed version of earlier, three-week workshops, not a totally revised program. Interviews with company members and a tape of the final performances indicate that groups of participants were each assigned to a company member, who worked with them to develop training scores and performance material. This material was orchestrated into a series of group performance pieces at the conclusion of the workshop.

Fowler had taken on a substantial teaching role in the first extended workshop; however, company members were fully responsible for the instruction in the subsequent sessions. He assumed the role of school principal in both the second and third workshops and

23 Participants in the 1997 workshop included Laura Astwood, Dorrie Brown, Carron Clarke, Jim Dalling, Alessandra di Castri, Tash Faye Evans, Adam Gaudreau, Varrick Grimes Sondra Haglund, Olivier Hugues-Terreault, Christine Irving, Christine Kennedy, Eileen LaMourie, Ruth Madoc-Jones, Margaret MacDonald, Alex McLean, Daniel Mroz, Steven Pirot, Liz Ruchker, Montie Stethem, Kersti Tacreiter, and
limited his activities to advising and administrating. He organized curriculum with company members, collaborated with them on their teaching and directing duties, and scheduled daily planning and debriefing meetings. He made a point of watching all the instructional sessions in order to provide supervising company members with general advice, to address specific issues and problems, and to make specific comments relating to coaching and directing. In this way Fowler guided company members in their individual pedagogical approaches and helped them to establish their own personal approaches for transmitting knowledge of the practice they had worked so long and hard to establish.

An article published in *The Globe and Mail* explained that, through the Primus Theatre workshop,

> [s]tudents are being trained to work in a committed group, create original performances, design sets and costumes, manage a company and teach workshops - all with the philosophy that an actor’s life should be about more than waiting for the phone to ring and biding time between auditions. (Kosterski, *The Globe and Mail*, 8 Mar. 1997)

Although highly simplified, Kosterski made the point that Primus was training a different kind of performer. The two students interviewed, both graduates of Canadian theatre programs, concurred with the assessment and expressed gratitude for the processes that they had been taught. Kersti Tacreiter claimed that the training offered “a more demanding, holistic view of performance than [had] her college program,” which she described as very fragmented in approach (qtd. in Kosterski, *The Globe and Mail*, 8 Mar. 1997). Steve Pirot noted that he applied for the workshop in order to acquire skills needed “to become a creative artist rather than an interpretive artist” (in Kosterski, *The Globe and Mail*, 8 Mar. 1997). Pirot indicated that the formal training he had received limited possibility as “it served a playwright-centred theatre, [. . .] and I think it fostered the perception that there was only one

Allison Waters.
way of working and any other approach was experimental” (qtd. in Kosterski *The Globe and Mail*, 8 Mar. 1997). For these and other students of the Primus workshop, the training was viewed as a means to develop and diversify a creative process. As Lawson stated at the end of the article, the extended Primus workshops were simply a means “to show students that there’s another way of working that’s vital to the growth of a Canadian theatre culture and a model for basic human interaction” (qtd. in Kosterski, *The Globe and Mail*, 8 Mar. 1997).

**Apprentices**

The company arranged a series of apprenticeships over the years. This was different from the sponsorships, which were designed as preparatory internships for new company members and set in place for Kitt and Kowalchuk. In some instances company members took on responsibility for a particular apprentice, but this was not the general practice. Apprenticeships were time-limited, and in some situations skill-specific, periods of training. This practice began in November 1991 with Winnipeg actor Lora Schroeder, who trained with the company for one month.

In early December 1991 Brett Keyser and Brad Krumholz arrived from Pennsylvania to start a two-month apprenticeship. In addition to training with the company the pair participated as stilt-walkers in the first *Caravan of the Midnight Sun* parade. Keyser and Krumholz then returned for another two-month residency in late November 1992 and participated in the second *Caravan of the Midnight Sun* parade. At this time they also presented Fowler with performance material that they had developed. With advice and
feedback from him, the material evolved into *The Great Divide*, which toured with *Alkoremmi* in the spring of 1994.

A number of other individuals trained with Primus Theatre for defined periods of time. Francis Ridel from Kent, England, trained with the company from January to March 1992. In February 1993 Jane Wells and Marnie Jull began apprenticeship/administration arrangements with Primus that lasted until late that year.\(^{24}\) A journal entry from early September 1993 indicated that Kitt agreed to “continue” to work with Jull (Dixon, CJ, 8 Sept. 1993). In 1995 Sondra Haglund began a similar work-for-training arrangement with the company.

Laura Astwood, a long-time fan of the company’s work, and Alessandra di Castri began apprenticeships in late July 1995 under the tutelage of Kowalchuk and Randoja. In exchange for the physical and vocal training they received, Astwood and di Castri assisted in all areas of the preparation for *Far Away Home*. At the point at which the company regrouped and reorganized in 1997, formal apprenticeships were extended to both Astwood and di Castri. Neither was given the opportunity to become full-fledged company members due to the fact that Primus Theatre closed its doors in 1998.

**Festivals and Symposiums**

In the final years of the company’s existence pedagogy emerged as a central activity in company culture. Even in the final years of operation, 1995–98, Primus Theatre consistently continued to make important contributions to the development of alternative

\(^{24}\) Although not explicitly stated, as was the case in Wells’s agreement, it can be deduced that Jull had arranged a similar barter of training for administrative work.
theatre in local, national, and international contexts. In addition to touring performance repertoire across Canada and arranging an extensive series of long- and short-term workshops, the company organized two major festival/symposiums. Each event was intended not only to focus on the promotion of identified sectors of the performing arts but to develop support networks among artists as well.

In May 1996 Primus hosted the "Survivors of the Ice Age" festival/symposium as a means of providing Third Theatre companies in Canada, the US, and Europe with an opportunity to share their work and work practices and to discuss financial and psychological strategies for survival. The festival ran from May 1 to 5 at CUSB (Winnipeg) and was structured as a combination of lectures, performances, discussions, and workshops presented by artists, academics, and writers from across Canada, the US, Europe, and South America. Speakers and performers were selected or approached for their interest and/or participation in the creation of original performance.  

Organizers hoped to distinguish the festival from other performance festivals, such as World Stage (Toronto) and Festival De Theatre Des Amériques (Montreal), in several ways. The showcased work was not only original but also created with alternative, artist-generated forms and performed by the creators. Most of the featured companies had also “established their own sense of community” and had “established a way of working together permanently that offered something other than just an employment relationship and that redefined the role

25 Invited guests included Grinning Dragon Theatre (Vancouver); Vancouver Moving Theatre; Maenad Theatre (Calgary); One Yellow Rabbit (Calgary); Theatre Gargantua (Toronto); Theatre Smith/Gilmour (Toronto); Theatre de la Veillee (Montreal); Jest in Time (Halifax); Peter Eliot Weiss (Vancouver); Gerald Thurston (University of Calgary); Susan Bennett (University of Calgary); Beau Coleman (University of Alberta); Per Brask (University of Winnipeg); Robert Enright (CBC Winnipeg/Border Crossings Magazine; Ric Knowles (Guelph University); Robert Wallace (York University); Natalie Rewa (Queen’s University); Helene Beauchamp (UQAM); Helen Peters (Memorial University); Theatre Labyrinth (Cleveland); Double Edge Theatre (Boston); Teatro des los Andes (La Paiz); Koreja (Lecce); Bonnie Maranca (Performing Arts Journal); and Jill Dolan (NYC).
of artists in contemporary society” (CC Activity Report, 1995–96). A substantial symposium component was also offered as a means of sharing information and methodology.

The event had two components: an internal segment targeting the participants of the conference, interested local practitioners, and students and an external component directed at the general local and national population. Internal programming offered work demonstrations by participating companies, panel discussions, and discussion groups focusing on issues relevant to small theatre companies producing original, creator-based work. The external component offered the general public access to performances that would otherwise have been inaccessible to local and, in some instances, national spectators.

The festival offered the national theatre community, the local theatre community, and festival participants an important opportunity to access groundbreaking theatre performance and offered both concrete and intellectual access to a variety of performance-creating techniques. The festival became the subject of a special issue of Canadian Theatre Research. Although a second event was tentatively scheduled for the fall of 1998, by that time Primus Theatre no longer existed.

In 1997 Primus Theatre organized the festival/symposium “Show Girls” to provide an opportunity for female performers to share and discuss original performance work. The idea for the festival emerged from an observation made at the “Survivors of the Ice Age” festival/symposium. It was noted that a large number of female performers were taking part in the open forum cabarets that closed each day of the festival. The scheduled programming for “Show Girls” ran from November 26 to 30 and consisted of public performances, workshops, and panel discussions. Although the majority of participants were members of
the Winnipeg performing arts community, former Winnipeggers and “Survivors of the Ice Age” participants were also in attendance.26

Performances included a broad range of music and song, video art, poetry readings, dance, and performance pieces. Workshops and lectures focused on topics such as “Developing Performance Ideas,” “Storytelling Through the Electronic Eye,” “Song Creation,” “Collaboration and Individual Creation,” “Sources and Resources,” and “Art and Audience” (“Show Girls Festival” program 1997). In a prelude piece for the *Winnipeg Free Press*, Primus administrator Rachel Lauhn-Jensen stated, “It is more difficult for women to prove themselves in art. [. . .] We’re giving people the opportunity to hear the stories of women artists and how they came to be” (qtd. in Khan, *Winnipeg Free Press*, Nov. 1997).

The underlying emphasis of the festival was empowerment, and it was hoped that, “by emphasizing the power of collaborative venture, the festival will also form the catalyst for new initiatives in original performance creation by artists from diverse backgrounds” (*Primus Theatre Newsletter*, Fall 1997).

**Conclusion**

In the company’s fall 1996 newsletter Fowler described the intense and hectic year (1995–96) experienced by the company as the busiest and most successful season to date and noted the company’s well-deserved six-month sabbatical. However, when company members

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26 Performers and speakers at the festival included Maritza Abranhantes; As the Bannock Burns; Sharon Bajer; Belmakina; Rachel Browne; Buick 6; Margo Charlton; Marine Cooke; Naomi Cooke; Therese Costes; Linda Dame; Thea Demetrakopoulos; Shawna Dempsey; Fubuki Daiko; Nancy Drake; Lianne Fournier; Holly Holsinger; Marilyn Lerner; Erika MacPherson; Lisa Gabrielle Mark; Libby Mason; Jake Moore; Debra Neufeld; Yvette Nolan; Deb Patterson; Karin Randoja; Val Shantz; Rubina Sinha; Strange Angels; Diana Thornycroft; Susan Turner; Vav Jungle; Savannah Walling Meeka Walsh, Jane Wells; and the Wyrd Sisters.
regrouped in November to “begin the process of determining its future” (Primus Theatre Newsletter, Fall 1996) and to discuss possibilities for re-inventing themselves to remain relevant and vibrant, three of the actors announced their decisions to leave. This occurred in early 1997, and later that year, an accident, in which he was blinded in one eye, made it necessary for Fowler to step down from his position as Artistic Director. He and remaining company members decided to allow the company to dissolve as organically as it had emerged, and in the spring of 1998 Primus Theatre officially closed its doors. Later that spring, in a somewhat ironic and much belated acknowledgment of his achievements, Richard Fowler received the M. Joan Chalmers National Award for Artistic Direction.

It has been ten years since Primus Theatre ceased to operate, and yet the company name continues to surface in the discourse of Canadian theatre. This occurs most often in discussions of devised theatre in English Canada and with reference to performance work generated by former company members. Most members have continued to create original performance material. Although print material discussing the company’s culture and accomplishments is highly limited and that limitation has affected the range of intellectual discourse of the company’s processes and techniques, this is not an accurate reflection of the company’s influence on the development of English-Canadian Theatre. These processes and techniques live on in adapted and interpreted forms in a range of existing theatre practices in Canada and the US and constitute a living legacy.

27 Stephen Lawson has lived in Montreal since 2002. He has been producing transmedia performance and video art with multidisciplinary artist and writer Aaaron Pollard as 2boys.tv. In 2003 Karin Randoja, along with Anna Chatterton and Evalyn Parry, founded The Independent Aunties in Toronto. She teaches regularly at Humber College and The National Theatre School. In 1998 Donald Kitt moved to Naples where he worked as a performer, teacher, and stilt instructor until 2006, when he relocated to Holstebro in Denmark. He is currently a collaborator at the Odin Theatre.
Chapter Six: Primus Theatre and the Ripple Effect

The Living Legacy

As indicated in the summary of the company’s professional activity, thousands of spectators across the country were introduced to Primus Theatre’s performance work, and hundreds of individuals were introduced to the theatre’s training and dramaturgical processes. The company had worked with individuals in many of the locations in which they had performed, and individuals from across Canada, the US, and Europe had been drawn to the extended workshop programs in Winnipeg. Peters’s observations in “Primus Theatre: Workshops in Newfoundland” clearly established the results of the company’s pedagogical efforts in that province. There is, however, a lack of similar documentation examining any post-workshop creative activity in other parts of the country. It is my contention that this lack of information exists because of the practical and concrete nature of the way in which the company’s creative processes were transmitted. As a result the work has not been given the recognition it deserves in print. In tracing the influence of the company’s work in practical ways, the evidence emerged.

My discovery of the existence of a ripple effect created by Primus Theatre occurred serendipitously. Concrete leads to the tracing of Primus Theatre’s influence on the development of theatre in English Canada often materialized from informal sources discovered during the course of a formal research venture. Without the benefit of casual conversations with colleagues from across the country at conferences or with individuals at performances and other cultural and social events, these leads would have been almost
impossible to track. What transpired as a result of pursuing these leads was indisputable evidence of Primus Theatre’s influence on the advancement of a new generation of devised theatre in Canada and the United States.

It is most obviously apparent in the artistic and pedagogical efforts of former company members who now operate, or have operated, their own companies:¹ Tannis Kowalchuk and North American Cultural Laboratory and Ker Wells and Number Eleven. The influence of Primus Theatre’s training techniques and dramaturgical processes can also be found in activity emerging from the pedagogical efforts of company members while Primus existed and after its demise. In effect, a ripple has occurred. An accurate account of the extent of this activity is difficult to determine in the absence of a concerted effort to trace creative work of participants of the various workshop sessions. This chapter focuses on a small and in part serendipitously discovered sampling of a new generation of theatre. The survey is highly limited and intended as a sample study of particular groups and individuals who can be identified as being influenced by the work of Primus Theatre. As Brask, however, noted of Primus Theatre’s adoption of the Odin Theatre practice, “as the performance knowledge of this tradition moves through time, it is modified, and expanded, according to the needs of the particular artists who inherit it” (“Dilating the Body” 9). This sampling serves to establish the relationship between Primus and this second generation of theatre-makers and the way in which the ripple effect was set in motion. The existence of this sample representation magnifies the question arising from Peters’s observation of Primus’s

¹ Former Primus Theatre member Karin Randoja co-founded The Independent Aunties in Toronto in 2003, with Anna Chatterton and Evalyn Parry. Although this work is not discussed in this study but does serve as an extension of the theatrical tradition upheld by Primus into a new generation of performance work. Information about the company and its founding artists can be found at: www.independentauntie.ca. The current work generated by Stephen Lawson and Donald Kitt is also not discussed in this study but is also a testament to the advancement and evolution of the a new generation of performance work informed by Primus Theatre.
influence on theatre-making in Newfoundland: What is the true extent of Primus Theatre’s impact on theatre-making in Canada and parts of the United States?

North American Cultural Laboratory

In 1996, after the company’s six-month hiatus, Tannis Kowalchuk decided to leave Primus to pursue her own work and left in the spring of 1997, after the third “Fictive Reality” workshop. Later that year she moved to New York City (NYC) and founded the North American Cultural Laboratory (NACL) with Brad Krumholz. Krumholz was involved in two separate periods of apprenticeship with Primus Theatre (in 1991 and 1992) and had studied at the Odin Theatre. He was also a founding member of Theatre Labyrinth (Cleveland). One year later Allison Waters, a native of Winnipeg and a participant in the three-month “Fictive Reality” workshop (1997), joined the company. Randall Kent Cohn was taken on as an apprentice at the same time. NACL was established as an “as-if-permanent” ensemble company. Although personnel has changed over the years, the company has generally operated with three or four core members and drawn further resources from ongoing professional relationships with ten or twelve other theatre artists. In addition to Kowalchuk and Krumholz, the current core members of the company are Sarah Dey Hirshan and Glenn Hall. Hirshan has been with NACL for six years and Hall for almost four years. Brett Keyser (Theatre Labyrinth/Wishounds) and Ker Wells (Primus and Number Eleven) have been ongoing NACL collaborators for years.

From 1997 to 2000 the company maintained residence at La MaMa Theatre in NYC in an arrangement similar to that which Primus had with PTE in its early years. In 2000

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2 In 2002 Theatre Labyrinth (Cleveland) became Wishounds.
NACL moved to a permanent theatre and residence space in Highland Lake (NY) in the Catskill Mountains. The stability of a permanent space has afforded Kowalchuk, Krumholz, and their collaborators the opportunity to explore adopted processes and techniques (Primus and Theatre Labyrinth) and the time to synthesis and advance this material into an original form. The company’s mandate echoes that of Primus in its scope:

1) To create and perform original theatre that is process-oriented, actor-generated, corporeal, and director-devised in Sullivan County, NYC, and in national and international venues

2) To practice and teach NACL’s ongoing performer training in rehearsals and in laboratory and educational environments, developing and documenting research in the field

3) To maintain a theatre work center and artists’ residence at NACL for exchange between local and international theatre creators, scholars, and local audience communities. The NACL Catskill Festival of New Theatre advances the development and life force of the independent theatre community from within and without through audience education and artistic exchange. (“What Is NACL?”)

NACL’s work has been performed in New York City and has toured to theatres and festivals throughout the United States, Canada, and Europe. Tour highlights include Artistic Ancestry Festival (New Orleans), the Crossing Borders Festival (Boston), Dah Teatar (Serbia), FURYFest (California), Mad River Festival (California), NET Fest (California), On the Waterfront (Halifax, Canada), Sibiu Festival (Romania), and the Varna Festival (Bulgaria).

The company describes its work as “very physical” and indicates that performances characteristically include “complex group singing, unusual audience seating, and a surprising use of sets and objects” (“NACL Performances”). The identification of these specific performance details echo details of performances that Kowalchuk created with Primus. This comparison is exemplified in a review in *The Village Voice* that describes *Arca Nova* as a kind of post-Babel, postmodern blend of dialogue and dance, music and gymnastics [. . . with an] original vocabulary [that] is utterly beguiling. [. . .] The actors speak mostly English, but they sing sweet harmonies in often incomprehensible syllables, in styles from madrigal to chant to African rhythms. [. . .] Their visual effects-like a dance of skeletal lacy parasols, veiled black and white brides swooping on stilts-mesmerize. (Russo, 25–31 Oct. 2000)

A survey of reviews indicates that performance pieces present a logic and elemental composition that is unique to each piece, thus reflecting the tradition from which NACL emerged. Christine Howey of *The Cleveland Scene* described *The Confessions of Punch and Judy* as a “blending [of] straightforward dialogue, scenes with music, mime, dance, snatches of fairy tales, old jokes, mythology, light bondage, cabbage-chopping, and random hammering to create a surreal take on the dynamics of a relationship” (29 Sept.–5 Oct. 2004).

The company has also produced the NACL Catskill Festival of New Theatre since 1999. The festival features performances by individuals and ensembles creating innovative
performance work and practical workshops. Past festivals have included the work of companies such as ArtSpot Productions, Circus Amok, Carpetbag Brigade, Curious Theatre Branch, Dah Teatar (Serbia), Great Small Works, International WOW, LAVA, Split Britches, Strike Anywhere, Theatre of a Two Headed Calf, The Walter Thompson Orchestra, and Zuppa Circus. The festival has featured work of playwrights and directors such as Raymond Bobgan, Lisa D’amour, Ruth Margraf, and Michael Rohd. The Catskill festival is part of Kowalchuk’s and Krumholz’s drive to “establish and strengthen networks of communication and exchange among artists involved in creating devised theatre and other varieties of innovative performance” (“Mutation and Performance” 24). To this end NACL has featured performances created by former and current collaborators, including Raymond Bobgan, Alessandra di Castri, Donald Kitt, Daniel Mroz, Karin Randoja, Jane Wells, and Ker Wells.

The company has established and maintained a solid history of pedagogical involvement. The annual Catskill Performer Training Retreat, usually scheduled during the festival, has played host to over 150 professional performers. During this time company members share the training practice, influenced by “the ensemble work of Denmark’s Odin Teatret, Canada’s Primus Theatre, and the research of Jerzy Grotowski” (“Training”), that they have developed over time and that company members share freely through their teaching. This training is based upon the company’s most current training practices and organized around three divisions of work: “The Animal Work (training which focuses on the behaviour of the Human Body), Vegetable Work (training which focuses on the flora and roots of the Human Voice), and Mineral Work (the mining of performance material)” (The Periodic Table, Issue 3, Spring 2000). NACL has also hosted master classes facilitated by
Mario Biagini from The Workcenter of Jerzy Grotowski and Thomas Richards in Italy, 
Roberta Carreri from the Odin Teatret in Denmark, Jubilith Moore from the Theatre of 
Yugen in San Francisco, and Michael Rohd from Northwestern University in Chicago and 
Sojourn Theatre in Portland. Kowalchuk and Krumholz teach regularly at Humber College in 
Toronto, and Kowalchuk has been a guest lecturer at Rutgers University (NYC).

In essence, NACL perpetuates the Primus tradition of pedagogical transmission 
through workshops, extended training, and the networking of like-minded artists that was so 
important to Richard Fowler. Kowalchuk and Krumholz are honouring Fowler’s creative 
generosity though their own generosity in the training and support of future generations of 
performance schooled in the tradition of theatre practiced by Primus and informed by the 
Odin Theatre.

Although Kowalchuk and Krumholz have established NACL as an important North 
American alternative theatre, Kowalchuk’s early experience with NACL was not 
substantially different from that with Primus. Early in NACL’s existence Kowalchuk wrote,

   I think that the particularly formative time with Primus gives me strength in 
   the here and now. My company, NACL, is in New York City. We are, by 
   Canadian standards poorly funded, and struggling to make the work we do 
   find a place and life in the world around us. We constantly must draw upon 
   our faith. We are always self-generating performances and activities and it is 
   this constant unified struggle against incredible odds that defines us and 
   brings us into the world. At the same time, we get strength, refuge, and safety 
   from the system of work that we ourselves have invented and continue to keep 
   alive through daily practice, commitment and attention. (Kowalchuk, Email 
   Interview, 15 Nov. 2000)

**Number Eleven Theatre**

Ker Wells also left Primus in 1997, following the third “Fictive Reality” workshop. In
an offer similar to that proposed to NTS students by Fowler many years earlier, Wells offered to facilitate the completion of the piece that had been generated by the group he had supervised. When Wells jump-started the project a year later (1998), only Sondra Haglund and Alex McLean from the original group were interested in the project. However, Varrick Grimes and Elizabeth Rucker, also participants of the 1997 workshop, expressed an interest in working with him.

Wells obtained Canada Council funding for the project and based it in Dartmouth, Nova Scotia. Number Eleven Theatre generated the first draft of *Icaria* over a six-week period of time and premiered it in Dartmouth. This was followed by a performance in Halifax that received very positive responses. The company dissolved after the Halifax performance but regrouped in Toronto in 2001 without Haglund. *Icaria* was remounted and performed in Toronto with Jane Wells remaking the role of “the mother,” which had originally been developed by Haglund. After this shift in personnel Number Eleven Theatre’s membership remained intact until the company ceased to operate in June 2006.

Number Eleven Theatre was organized as a permanent ensemble devoted to the creation of “original performances from text, action, story and song. [. . .] [o]ver an extended period of time, allowing performer training research, and a sustained ensemble dynamic, to inform the creation of densely woven performances” (Barrat, *The Montreal Mirror*, 4–10 Mar. 2004). Training was considered to be critical to the company’s creative process and consisted of “individual and collective exercises developed by the actors in collaboration with the director and drawn from previous experiences with groups working in similar ways” (Magnat 88). Unlike Primus or NACL, however, the organization of Number Eleven was more open-ended, as was the definition of “permanence.” Although the time spent on each
project was similar to that of Primus and NACL, there was no attempt to maintain company life between projects. While training was considered to be highly important and was a central focus during the course of developing new performance pieces, the company did not train together between projects. Number Eleven did not maintain an official office site, and all funding throughout the company’s eight-year existence was pursued on a project-to-project basis. Number Eleven Theatre was therefore neither in NACL’s position with full command of their rehearsal, performance, and office space, nor in Primus’s position in which acquiring these spaces became an exhausting and intrusive but highly necessary activity.

Given the project-to-project status of the company, the breadth of the creative output and the outreach and networking activity achieved by NACL was neither sought nor achieved by Number Eleven. The company did, however, produce a solid series of original performances during the course of its operation: *Icaria* (1998), *The Prague Visitor* (2002–03), *The Curious History of Peter Schlemihl* (2004), and *The Stolen Child* (2005). According to Ker Wells, the company’s performances were created with the intention that they should be multilayered and complex, with many things happening at once. [. . .] The story can be told in many different ways. Every element of performance doesn’t need to communicate the same message. [Audiences] can understand a lot more than we are given the opportunity to understand. (qtd. in Berman, *The McGill Daily*, Mar. 2004)

*The Curious History of Peter Schlemihl* and *The Stolen Child* were both produced as outdoor performances for the Cooking Fire Festival (Toronto, 2004 and 2005)\(^3\) and were retired at the end of each run. *Icaria* and *The Prague Visitor*, however, were intended for the

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\(^3\) The Cooking Fire Theatre Festival is an annual, week-long performance extravaganza celebrating theatre, food, and public space since 2004 in Toronto’s Dufferin Grove Park. Scheduled performances have included local, national, and international artist-run theatre companies. Each evening spectators are also offered an affordable organic meal made with fresh local organic ingredients. This festival is a pay-what-you-can event focusing on theatre that is accessible to all (*Cooking Fire Theatre Festival*).
Icaria and The Prague Visitor were both toured in small towns in Northern Ontario, including Elliot Lake, Deep River, and several communities on Manitoulin Island, and to large cities across Canada, including Montreal, Toronto, Halifax, St John’s, and Winnipeg, and to Highland Lake (New York).

Peter Schlemihl was an adaptation of Adelbert von Chamisso’s novel Peter Schlemmihl (1814), in which the title character sells his shadow to the devil. The piece was written by Wells and Rucker and featured singing, puppets, and stilt-work, arranged in a stationary setting. It was directed by Wells and acted by all four members of the company. The Stolen Child emerged from a concrete exploration of “the theme/mythical tradition of children stolen away” (Wells, Email Interview, 11 June 2008) and was developed in collaboration with Trinity Bellwoods Care program, where Jane Wells worked. The cast featured sixteen children, many of whom were involved in the program. The piece was written by Rucker, with contributions from Wells, who also directed it, and dialogue created by the young actors. The “simple and sweet fairytale” (Wells, Email Interview, 13 June 2008) featured singing, puppets, stilt-walking, and appearances by all company members. Ker Wells was not actively involved in the project.

Icaria and The Prague Visitor were much more complex than the two outdoor performances and were constructed in a manner similar to each other. Both pieces drew from found, adapted, and original text and emerged from extended periods of research and rehearsal. The characters in Icaria were drawn from classical mythology, while those in The Prague Visitor emerged from Ker Wells’s request that the actors create characters that

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4 Wells proposed the piece with full knowledge that the Holly Jones kidnapping and murder was a concern for the children she worked with as the crime had occurred in their neighbourhood less than a year earlier (Wells, Email Interview, 11 June 2008).
disguised themselves out of necessity or by choice (Wells, Email Interview, 8 June 2008).

Due to the efforts of scholar and dramaturg Bruce Barton, sections of Number Eleven’s dramaturgical process have been documented, and this documentation verifies the direct connection to processes used to create Primus performances. This is evident in Barton’s observations of the actors’ individual creations of “patterns of movement and voice, [and] often inspired by found or created text and songs” (“Navigating Turbulence” 107–8) in the initial developmental stages of Icaria. It is also evident in his description of Well’s prominent role in the orchestration of raw material created by the actors into the cohesive whole of a performance text:

Under Wells’s directorial eye and sensibility [. . .] the company begins the long process of establishing connections, resonance, and interpenetrations of meaning [during which the . . .] initial text fragments and physical patternings may be transposed, modified, or discarded through the progress of this work, as the emerging meaning of the piece is developed largely through the evolution of a physical dialogue between the performers, the director, and the shared space through which they move. (108)

The division of the construction process into separate phases noted by Barton during the construction of The Prague Visitor is also resonant of Primus practice: six weeks of explorative and construction work were followed by a break, in which other projects were being done, and that was followed by an intensive reworking of the piece (109–10). The results of this initial phase of development were publicly presented at the NACL Catskill Festival of New Theatre. This was a departure from Primus process in which public presentation of the work generally did not occur until the end of the final phase of construction.

Reviews of Number Eleven Theatre’s performances are also resonant of responses to Primus’s work, as were the reviews of NACL’s work. Reviewers either attempt to impose
meaning or respond in a visceral way and on rare occasions provide insight into what has actually been presented. Ben Conoley’s review of *Icaria* for *The Brunswickan* flattens the complex dramaturgical structure of the piece by focusing on a story through the parenthesis of the dream: “Daphne revisits her eccentric family in a kaleidoscopic sideshow of dream and memory, where the living and dead co-exist and light is cast unto the shadows of the past” (16 Nov. 2001). Alistair Jarvis, however, notes the precision and specificity of the moment-to-moment work arranged on the stage:

Number 11 brings together song, disparate texts and highly crafted physical movement to create a dense, multi-layered score. It is evident that each performer follows a rigorously defined path through the piece not only in terms of the text, but also in terms of vocal and physical gestures. Each is so finely wrought that at no time does one sense a moment that appears to be extraneous. The experience of watching these heterogeneous elements brought together seems akin to that of contemplating a quilt. (94)

Russ Hunt’s reaction to *Icaria* captures both the mystery and the crafting of the performance work and offers a clear sense of the overall performance aesthetic:

It’s not an easy production to follow: there are sudden jumps from moment to moment. Language is saved for story, not for transitions. But we never hesitate in our belief that even though we might not understand what’s happening right now, there is something there to be understood, and felt. Because of the discipline and control of the production, we believe that every movement, every flick of an eyelash, is deliberate, planned, part of an artifice designed to move us. Every accident is planned. We feel everything is suffused with purpose and meaning, and are prepared to wait till it makes sense—at least emotional sense, if not discursive, rational sense. (Nov. 2001)

The company culture established by Number Eleven Theatre allowed for a far more extensive set of collaborations and external projects than did that of NACL but serves the same purpose of expanding the network of individuals exposed to Primus Theatre’s training and dramaturgical processes. MacLean directed many of the Zuppa Circus (Halifax) performances, including *The Door on the Wall* (2004), *Uncle Oscar’s Experiment* (2003),

During his involvement in Number Eleven, Grimes directed a series of performances for Jumblies Theatre (Toronto), including Your Name is Written in the Sky (2005), Once a Shoreline (2004), More or The Magic Fish (2002), and co-directed Twisted Metal and Mermaid’s Tears (2000). With Rucker, Grimes also co-directed an outdoor performance, Feast of the Pariah (2006), for Sir Wilfred Grenfell College (Memorial University) in Newfoundland.

For both Jane and Ker Wells collaborations outside Number Eleven tended to be associated within the network of artists generated by NACL. Jane Wells worked with NACL on A Canon for the Blue Moon (1998) and with Theatre Labyrinth on the remounting of The Transformations of Lucius (1999) and toured the piece in 2000 and 2001. In 1999 she co-founded Clyde Umnie Co. with brother Ker, who directed her one-woman show, Brightness Falls, for a self-produced run in Toronto and for the first NACL Catskill Festival of New Theatre. It is not surprising to find that print reaction to Brightness Falls also resonates of reactions to Primus’s work. The text of the performance was described as “rippling with metaphor and simile [. . . and] mirrored by an intensely physical emphasis on movement and gesture [. . .but lacking in] dramatic conflict, internal or otherwise” (Wagner, The Toronto Star, 8 Mar. 2000). Wells has also worked as an artistic resource teacher for the Trinity

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5 Although Grimes was involved in a substantial number of other projects, as a performer and collaborator during this time, it is likely that the creative process he was using with Number Eleven would have been most evident in his directing, and therefore these are the only projects mentioned.

6 At the time the festival was called The Catskill Experimental Theatre Festival.
Bellwoods Care Program (Toronto) on a regular and ongoing basis, from where the impetus for *The Stolen Child* project emerged.

In addition to the creative involvements already mentioned, Ker Wells also facilitated and directed the Boca del Lupo Theatre (Vancouver) performance piece *Terminal* (1998). This three-month collaboration had a major impact on members of the young company and as a result altered the way in which members of Boca del Lupo (BdL) developed their productions. The affect on this young company will be discussed in further detail later in the chapter. Wells continues to act in film and television and to generate original performance material. His latest collaboration was with director Karin Randoja, another Primus alumna, and writer Michael Geither, a frequent collaborator with Wishounds in the creation of *Living Tall* (2007).

On his own Wells has made major contributions to the transmission of the training processes and dramaturgical techniques practised by Primus through his pedagogical activity. He has taught in the theatre and performing arts programs at George Brown College, Humber College, and Ryerson University and since 2001 has been a returning guest faculty member at the National Theatre School. He has facilitated workshops and master classes in actor training programs and for independent arts organizations across Canada and in the US. In 2005 he was awarded Mount Allison University’s fifth Crake Drama Graduate in Residence.

The dissolution of Number Eleven came as no surprise to company members, who began to realize this possibility when McLean left in 2005. The closure was not predicated by financial need or disharmony of any kind. From the vantage point of a senior artist, Wells found that applications for funding projects were well received at all levels of funding (municipal, provincial, and federal). While he indicated that he worked with pared-down
production values, Number Eleven Theatre received all the funding that they applied for. Over time, however, Wells’s interests had shifted, and he was increasingly interested in developing his own performance skills through collaborative work with other experienced artists, rather than launching and directing the work of fledgling performers.

The Ripple Effect

The collective and individual performance work and pedagogical activity generated by the membership of NACL and Number Eleven present the most direct contribution to the progression of Primus Theatre culture into the next generation of devised theatre work. This has occurred in a similar manner to the way in which the Odin Theatre practice emerged from that of The Theatre Laboratory, and Primus practice emerged from that of the Odin. While the companies run by Kowalchuk, and formerly by Wells serve as direct descendants of Primus Theatre, this work is not the only evidence of a new generation of work linked to Primus.

The purpose of the remaining section of this chapter is not to make broad generalizations but to focus on two representative examples of Primus’s influence on theatre-making practice in Canada. This will illustrate both the organic and practical manner in which this transmission of knowledge occurred and to offer concrete examples of the continued ripple effect. This examination focuses on the experiences of original members of Boca del Lupo (Vancouver), who imported Ker Wells and Karin Randoja to facilitate a workshop for the Vancouver theatre community in 1998, and those of Daniel Mroz (Montreal/Ottawa) who participated in the 1993 and 1997 “Fictive Reality” workshops.
Boca Del Lupo

No one involved could have predicted the impact that Primus Theatre has had on the development of devised theatre in Vancouver. A single extended workshop, facilitated by Randoja and Wells in 1997, set in motion a series of events that would affect and define the creative processes of an emerging company, Boca del Lupo (BdL), at a fundamental level for the first five years of the company’s existence. This encounter has created a substantial ripple effect since all but one of the original company members have continued to work as theatre artists in the present (2008). Two of the original members, Jay Dodge and Sherry J. Yoon, remained with BdL; James Long and Maiko Bae Yamamoto left BdL to found Theatre Replacement in 2003; and Tamara McCarthy works as a freelance actor and instructor. Kevin MacDuff left theatre to pursue a career in medicine.

In the fall of 1996 Boca del Lupo (BdL) was founded in Vancouver by Dodge, Long, MacDuff, McCarthy, and Yamamoto, who met while studying theatre at Simon Fraser University (SFU). All company members had completed their studio training at that time, although not everyone in the group was a graduate of the SFU program. Sherry J. Yoon, also an SFU student, directed the company’s first show, Drained (1997), and joined the company in 1998. BdL was generated out of a collective desire to establish a “rigorous and challenging” training base (Yamamoto, Email Interview, 30 July 2007) from which to create original, physically based theatre. The SFU program provided founding members with a variety of specific skills, a strong sense of vocation, and a sense that artists needed to

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7 Long returned to SFU to complete his degree in 1999.
question their work and the world, but the actors were searching for a technique or process that would provide them with a concrete basis for constructing performance material.

Most of BdL’s founding members had become familiar with Grotowski’s work through their work with Linda Putnam, Penelope Stella, and Marc Diamond and with cross-disciplinary work through their encounter with Lee Eisler (dance-theatre work). They had studied clown work with David MacMurray Smith and integrated dance and Qigong work with Lee Su Feh. In Yamamoto’s estimation the training at SFU provided BdL members with a solid prelude to their initial work with Randoja and Wells. Company members possessed a familiarity with basic training elements that were presented, even though they were concretized in a much different way (Yamamoto, Email Interview, 30 July 2007). In this way and at an early stage in their creative development, members of BdL became aware of issues relating to interpretation of technique and subsequently of issues relating to transmission of form.

BdL’s first performance work, Drained, opened in January 1997. Although it had been conceived using creation-based physical techniques that had been learned at SFU, the performance piece was essentially script-based (Long, Email Interview, 21 Sept. 2007). In 1997 BdL became one of a small group of Vancouver arts organizations that started an artist-run cooperative venture, The Source, which was located in a large, empty warehouse in Vancouver’s downtown eastside. Through a pooling of resources, the companies and individuals inhabiting The Source site were able to construct a sprung floor that became a shared training/rehearsal facility. The “permanent” space and the collective financial resources also meant that inhabitants of The Source were in a position to arrange training.

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8 MacDuff and Yoon took a year off from studies at SFU to study with Linda Putnam at the Foolscap Theatre School in Massachusetts.
workshops of interest to the extended group (Yamamoto, Email Interview, 30 July 2007).

One of these workshops was a three-week workshop with Randoja and Wells.

Yamamoto, a founding member of BdL and now one of the artistic directors of Theatre Replacement, saw Alkoremmi and The Night Room when Primus toured to Vancouver in 1996. She was struck by the performances and, after hearing company members speak about their creative processes and the company organization, she talked to members of BdL and other members of The Source about the possibility of arranging an extended workshop with Primus. Radix Theatre was one of the occupants of Source, and a member of the company, Tasha Faye Evans, had just spent three months participating in the 1997 “Fictive Reality” workshop. Evans contacted the company, and although touring and personal schedules rendered the request impossible at the time, Randoja and Wells were able to return to Vancouver a year later. The workshop was open to all inhabitants of The Source, as well as other interested parties in the Vancouver theatre community.

Yamamoto, along with former BdL members Long (Yamamoto’s co-director at Theatre Replacement) and McCarthy, all indicate that the timing of the workshop was critical to the development of BdL’s creative process. Members of BdL were actively searching for a concrete point of departure for their ideas and visions:

What BdL really wanted was a solid training practice to be the heart of our work together. Coming from SFU, we wanted to tell our stories utilizing a strong physical vocabulary, but we felt we needed more training in order to help build this vocabulary. We also wanted to operate as a collective, and knowing Primus worked this way, we were curious to see how they made this work. (Yamamoto, Email Interview, 30 July 2007)

Dodge, BdL’s current artistic producer and a founding member of BdL, states that Randoja and Wells offered the young company a very practical means to take an idea from abstraction to concrete expression (Dodge, Interview, 8 June 2008). The workshop facilitated
by Randoja and Wells provided members of BdL with an introduction to a wide range of “Plastiques,” corporeal and singing techniques, as well as devising exercises (Long, Email Interview, 21 Sept. 2007). Dodge, Long, McCarthy, and Yamamoto all registered initial reactions to this work that were both highly inspired and resonant of the initial reactions to the training offered to future Primus members by Fowler. Dodge was enamoured by the intense rigour of the acrobatic and impulse work (Dodge, Interview, 8 June 2008). Long recalls the intensely demanding physicality, the “wonderful sense of joy in the sweat of it all” (Long, Email Interview, 21 Sept. 2007). For McCarthy the experience reframed a personal sense of what theatre could be:

I remember feeling that I had embarked on the most magical experience of my life. I truly mean that. All my expectations were blown out of the water. I was a sponge and couldn’t soak up enough of the training, the words, the moments.[ . . . ] I wondered how I would survive. But I was young and so ready to take this stuff on. (McCarthy, Email Interview, 24 July 2007)

Yamamoto remembers the workshop being very difficult but that she was driven to seek more experience with the training and dramaturgical techniques that she was being offered (Yamamoto, Email Interview, 30 July 2007). For part of the workshop participants were split into two groups. Of the BdL membership, Dodge and Yoon worked with Randoja,9 and Long, MacDuff, McCarthy, and Yamamoto worked with Wells (Dodge, Interview, 8 June 2008). Along with fundamental core exercises, the workshop included the “building [of] material based on a source of inspiration” (Yamamoto, Email Interview, 30 July 2007). Company members chose their immediate neighbourhood, Vancouver’s East End, as their source of inspiration and drew from this environment as they created characters and stories. The workshop generated a collective interest in further exploration of the techniques and

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9 In 1999 Dodge and Yoon took up residence in Niagra-on-the-Lake in order to engage in further work with Randoja. The result of the collaboration was a short performance piece called Of the Night (1999).
processes that Primus members had introduced. As a result, Wells was invited to work with the company on the construction of a new performance piece. In 1998 he returned to Vancouver and spent three months leading BdL members through the rigorous process of building a training practice and through the evolutionary process of transforming the collections of actors’ performance material into a cohesive performance text. The culmination of this effort was *Terminal* (July 1998), culled and shaped from the material inspired by East End Vancouver that had emerged in the three-week session a year earlier. Colin Thomas described the performance as a collage of different styles of dance, songs in multiple languages, and striking visual images in particular set details that present “the staggering beauty of life and its aching frailty” (*The Georgia Straight*, 30 July 1999). He expressed his very visceral responses to several sections of the piece and claimed that *Terminal* achieved “an honesty, intensity and beauty that reminded me that the theatre can be a holy place” (*The Georgia Straight*, 30 July 1999). According to Yamamoto, *Terminal* was “BdL’s true breakout onto the Vancouver theatre scene. [. . . And] it was after this process [of creating the performance] that BdL truly adopted the training practice taught to us by Ker and Karin as our own” (Yamamoto, Email Interview, 30 July 2007). Long states that “this rigor and skill set continues to be utilized and developed” in different ways in the work created by him and Yamamoto at Theatre Replacement and by Dodge and Yoon at BdL (Long, Email Interview, 21 Sept. 2007).

In the first five years of operation, BdL operated as a collective organization, and company members committed exclusively to their work with BdL. Yoon directed all of the performance pieces, and her work was influenced by and structured using the techniques and processes introduced by Wells. The company also adopted the theories underpinning the
training and performance development in which attention was paid to the needs of the actor and to the practice of creating challenge for both individuals and the group (McCarthy, Email Interview, 24 July 2007). In support of this theory company members continued to add to their repertoire of skills by introducing boxing, rigging, stilt-walking, still trapeze, and Anne Bogart’s Viewpoints into their expanding skill base.

In 1999 the company lost the use of the Source space and was forced to look elsewhere for adequate office and rehearsal space, and in 2001 the company shifted to an artistic director and artistic producer model. As a result a major shift in personnel occurred. The shift in administrative structure was generated out of a discussion concerning future direction and expansion of the company. The possibility of touring was introduced, and although it would become irrelevant for various reasons, this brought several conflicts to the fore. Among these issues were concerns about authorship of the work, general direction of the company, and decision-making models. Several company members were not interested in touring but were not comfortable with material that they had helped to create being toured or performed without them. As the company was a collectively run venture, this was an entirely reasonable expectation. On the other hand, the issue of authorship limited possibilities for the performance of existing work with alternative casting. Long and Yamamoto were interested in bringing in guest directors to work on the shows. Dodge and Yoon were interested in shifting the nature of the commitment to the company in order to allow the membership opportunities to work with other people and in order to bring in other artists to work on the performances. MacDuff and McCarthy were considering further formal studies. Yamamoto proposed a co-directorship, but this was not accepted as a possibility. In the final analysis, Yoon took on the role of artistic director, and Dodge took on the role of artistic producer.
Within two years, Long, MacDuff, McCarthy, and Yamamoto had left the company.

Dodge and Yoon continued to work collaboratively and in a physical way with a small, consistent group of collaborators and to bring in various local, national, and international performers to work on projects. According to Dodge, the process of creating a performance was not drastically affected by the shift in administrative form. Even during the earlier collectively driven model, Yoon as director led the creative process by generating tasks for the actors and then taking on responsibility for the orchestration of the final performance montage (Dodge, Interview, 8 June 2008). The practice of assessing the production needs of each piece and then introducing new skills that contribute to “the magic of the staging” has continued into present performance construction (Dodge, Interview, 8 June 2008). Performances generally take two years to create, but this is not a full-time endeavour until about two months before the premiere of a particular show. At this point an intense period of rehearsal and construction is scheduled. Training occurs regularly during this construction period and is directed toward achieving the physical and vocal challenges presented by the project. In a practical sense this lengthy preparatory period has translated into a multi-project planning system with projects in varying stages of development being worked on over an extended period of time. BdL’s current research is focused on discovering ways that an actor can develop an interactive relationship with technology (Dodge, Interview, 8 June 2008).

The company’s current mandate identifies a mission statement that is similar to that of Primus, NACL, and Number Eleven Theatre:

Boca del Lupo is dedicated to the creation of new performance works using unique processes of collaboration and extra-ordinary interactions between performer and audience.
Boca del Lupo is devoted to discovering and actively seeking out
international, national and regional artists to collaborate with in creating new works drawn from our collective experience.

Boca del Lupo is committed to providing professional opportunities to diverse artists and individuals in our productions and tours in both emerging and leadership positions. (“Mission”)

In addition to the early performance works mentioned, BdL has produced an extensive series of indoor and outdoor performances in their twelve year existence: Circadia (Apr. 1999), Charge of the Moon (Apr. 2000), Last Office (May 2001), Inside (Sept. 2001), Hold your Head Tight (Apr. 2002), The Last Stand (July 2002), The Beginners (Apr. 2003), Lagoon of the Lost Tales (July 2003), The Suicide (Feb. 2004), Vasily the Luckless (July 2005), The Perfectionist (Jan. 2006), House of Sleeping Beauties (Feb. 2006), Suspended: Modular Life on Display (Feb. 2006), The Shoes That Were Danced to Pieces (July 2006), Hive: Holly’s Dumpster (Nov. 2006), Quasimodo or The Bell Ringer of Our Lady of Paree (July 2007), and My Dad, My Dog (Jan. 2008). The indoor performances have been toured to Calgary, Edmonton, and Toronto and to Leon in the state of Guanajuato in Mexico. Touring remains a limited venture for the company due to the costs involved with transporting large ensemble casts and with particular spatial needs.

This is an issue that is particularly prevalent with the outdoor performances. As Alexandra Gill states of The Last Stand, the site-specific staging denies portability (The Globe and Mail, 30 July 2002). After the change in administrative structure BdL began to produce outdoor performances, such as The Last Stand, on a regular basis. These performances are generally associated with site-specific environments and a roving promenade structure and often feature aerial work and rigging. The work displays the kind of expansive energy and theatricality that characterized Primus’s outdoor performance work. When Stanley Park, the site of a number of the company’s outdoor pieces, was decimated by
ice storms during the winter of 2006–07, BdL relocated their 2007 outdoor performance to
the Burrard Street Bridge. Reviews of BdL’s work note the company’s “poetic sensibility,”
“charm,” and the use of dazzling images. In discussing the combination of live action with
animation in The Perfectionist, Thomas notes the “arresting poetic sensibility that the artists
create by placing a real body in a palpably imaginary world” (The Georgia Strait, 26 Jan.–2
Feb. 2006). Peter Birnie lauded the narrative risk taking and inventiveness of The
Perfectionist and forgave what he determined to be “uneven energy.” He described the piece,
which used hoist wires and shadowboxes to create complex visual imagery, as “a mood-
inducing dreamscape unfolding in small sequences broken by blackouts and peppered by
powerful little bits of animation from Jay White (Vancouver Sun, 24 Jan. 2006). He was
equally enamoured by My Dad, My Dog, which he described as an example of the company’s
“inability to be anything other than utterly innovative” and noted the actors’ interactions with
projections, live action animation, and music as examples of this (Vancouver Sun, 30 Jan.
2008).

According to Jo Ledingham, BdL’s work “has either baffled audiences with its deep,
psychological ruminations (Bewildered) or charmed us with whimsy (Vasily the Luckless,
The Last Stand) (The Vancouver Courier, 25 Jan. 2006). Ledingham found a balance of the
two and an abundance of dazzling images in The Perfectionist: “Mary [Yoon] and Brent
[Dodge] [were] flying or tangled in wires like a human cat’s cradle or paddling a little
bed/boat across lighting designer John Webber’s glorious apricot-coloured sky” (The
Vancouver Courier, 25 Jan. 2006). Gill described The Last Stand as “a spectacular piece of
extreme theatre that sings from the tree tops and defies all conventions of the traditional
stage” (The Globe and Mail, 30 July 2002). She noted “elevated site[sic] lines [and] natural
acoustics [. . .] plenty of improvisation and a few extended dramatic pauses (while the float planes pass overhead)” as factors contributing to the overall quality of the experience. By her own admission, her only criticism, that of a very simple storyline, was overshadowed by the effect of the spectacle as a whole (*The Globe and Mail*, 30 July 2002). In Jerry Wasserman’s estimation “the company’s consistently whimsical, imaginative, original brand of physical theatre has been instrumental, along with the Electric Company, Boca spin-off Theatre Replacement, and Kendra Falconi’s The Only Animal, in re-shaping our [the Vancouver] theatrical environment” (*Vancouverplays*, Aug. 2006).

What can be determined from this selection of reviews is that reviewers tend to focus on details of specific moments in the performance or on their visceral reactions to the work. Reviewer reaction also indicates that BdL’s work is carefully crafted and highly detailed. Startling imagery, inventiveness, use of music, and interesting choreography are repeatedly noted characteristics of the work. Simplistic or confusing storylines are also mentioned. Although these comments do not indicate whether the performance form is shaped of daily or extra-daily action, the commentary does indicate commonalities with the manner in which the performances created by of Primus, NACL, and Number Eleven have been described.

The reviews also indicate that BdL’s work has evolved far from the original form and function adopted from Primus by experimenting with technological possibilities for production detail and onstage interaction well beyond the low-tech wizardry employed by Primus Theatre. The company is actively researching the development of interactive relationships between actors and various forms of technology (Dodge, Email Interview 8 June 2008), and many forms of technology have been introduced into BdL’s latter work. In *My Dad, My Dog* the technological station was highlighted rather than hidden and became an
interactive aspect of the performance text. Miniature set pieces were manipulated from this location and were enlarged and projected in behind the actors in the playing space. Similarly, set locations were sketched and projected in real time (*My Dad, My Dog*, 3 Feb. 2008). While BdL continues to produce inventive, original work using visual and aural images as central compositional tools, this work illustrates both an advancement of and departure from the source form introduced by Ker Wells a decade ago.

The company’s current structure is very different from its collective roots. The company continues to work with the artistic director and artistic producer administrative model introduced in 2001. Yoon and Dodge continue to maintain these positions. Core roles in the company include a graphic designer and a technical director. In 2005 the company began to operate with a full-time general manager. While the company does not operate as an “as-if-permanent” ensemble, Dodge and Yoon frequently work with artists for extended periods of time, two or three years, over a series of projects (Dodge, Email Interview, 3 July 2008). Company members and associates do not train on a regular basis unless they are creating a new performance piece, so locating and maintaining training space is not an ongoing issue, as it had been for Primus Theatre. Although the company engages in pedagogical activity, this is limited in comparison with that of Primus, NACL, and Number Eleven. The company has been involved in the facilitation of workshops in public schools and for the Roundhouse Community Centre (Vancouver). Given the extensive use of an alternating ensemble, tracing the company’s influence through ongoing collaborations with other theatrical organizations is not as direct a venture as it was with Number Eleven and would require extensive further research.

Boca del Lupo maintains a consistent presence in the Vancouver theatre community
and maintains public office space on Granville Island, as it has done since 2003. Funding issues that occurred in early years and that meant that the company was faced with continuously having to justify the extended rehearsal periods (Yamamoto, Email Interview, 25 May 2008) have resolved themselves with the careful planning and organization of multiple projects. Dodge notes, however, that funding continues to be an issue. Company members and their board of directors are involved in ceaseless fundraising in order to generate necessary project funding (Dodge, Email Interview, 4 July 2008).

**Theatre Replacement**

In 2003 James Long and Maiko Bae Yamamoto started their own company, Theatre Replacement (TR), in Vancouver. The two share the position of artistic director/producer in an “as-if-permanent” arrangement and work with an ongoing production staff that includes an in-house sound designer, an in-house video designer, a multidisciplinary visual artist, and a full-time office administrator. With TR, Long and Yamamoto set in motion the directives they had proposed for BdL. They began to develop “small-scale chamber works” with “artists of different disciplines and approaches” (*Theatre Replacement*), while building on the training and dramaturgical processes at the core of their creative practice. Both believe that, in their current work at TR, they have drawn directly from their work with Wells and Randoja and indirectly from this work via their experience with BdL.

For Long and Yamamoto, the rigorousness of the physical work was a critically important aspect of their work with Wells. Long stated that he had “never worked as hard (physically) on a piece of work as I did on *Terminal* or in the shows that immediately
followed. [. . . He indicates that in TR’s work] discussion has worked its way into the room as an important tool of development” (Long, Email Interview, 21 Sept. 2007). In his estimation the rigour of the physical work instilled by Wells is still manifest in his demand for physical and vocal specificity in the actors’ work and has evolved into a more cerebral form applied to the conceptualizing and writing of a performance text. Yamamoto agreed that Wells’s influence, although still an important presence, is less apparent and less direct in Theatre Replacement’s work than it was in the work done by BdL when she and Long were still members of the company. In the work done by TR,

[t]he idea of physical presence is always alert and alive in what we try and do. The idea of a heightened physicality and the idea that the physical layer is often as important as the text in telling the story is still very apparent. The idea of approaching the work with rigor and integrity is still there. The idea of building works through a highly collaborative process is at the heart of what we do at Theatre Replacement. Although we have grown in our own directions and now integrate many different elements into our process of show building, our work with Ker was a huge lesson and inspiration to us as young theatre makers, and continues to teach us and inspire us as we grow. (Yamamoto, Email Interview, 30 July 2007)

Long credits Wells with facilitating many valuable lessons early in his career:

I learned to act by doing. I learned to create by not thinking. I learned to push myself. I learned to breathe through my nose when I am out of breath. I learned to repeat and find an incredible freedom in this repetition. I learned how to approach a piece of performance from multiple angles as one must when you have repeated it 150 times. I learned that the creative process includes walls, depression, frustration, along with its jubilation. (Long, Email Interview, 21 Sept. 2007)

Yamamoto was so inspired by her work with Wells that she continued to seek training opportunities with him. This led her to NACL’s intensive summer sessions in the Catskills. She considers Wells to be one of the teachers that has most influenced the development of her career: “Not only have the training and practical skills of being a theatre artist been a huge influence, but philosophically speaking as well, his teachings on what the life of an
artist is, has been equally profound” (Yamamoto, Email Interview, 30 July 2007).

On a practical level Long and Yamamoto continue to use physical scores in the creation of their performance work and to use and to teach corporeal exercises that centre the body, build trust between performers, and create solid ensemble interaction. However, this approach to the exercises differs from that of the source form taught by Wells. Yamamoto uses the example of the difference between the way in which her SFU instructors taught Grotowski’s “the cat” exercise and the way in which Primus members taught the same exercise to explain the way in which she and Long transmit what they have learned in their teaching (Yamamoto, Email Interview, 30 July 2007). In this way Yamamoto exemplifies the modification and expansion of form according to need, as Brask identified in the tradition of theatre practiced by Primus. Although BdL maintained the “Plastiques” in training for several years after working on Terminal, this practice was phased out as the company began to work with the Viewpoints. Nevertheless, Yamamoto continued to retain the “Plastiques” and Primus-inspired vocal work in her own personal training:

[It was] that skill of communicating or speaking through a physical movement or gesture. Without this sense, the physical vocabulary would never translate. [. . .] I also found the vocal work and singing had a huge impact for me, and I still use this training both as a teacher and in our own work (Yamamoto, Email Interview, 30 July 2007).

Since leaving BdL Long and Yamamoto have continued to explore different methods of creation and have allowed their creative processes to evolve from these experiences. TR’s current mandate is more specific than BdL’s but indicates a similarity in the company’s creative objectives and directives, which is also resonant of the mandates issued by Primus, NACL, and Number Eleven Theatre. TR’s mission statement states,

Theatre Replacement builds, produces and tours unique, small-scale chamber works. We develop new work and further our artistic practice through creative
collaborations between artists of different disciplines and approaches. We exist to redefine the performance experience. Theatre Replacement fulfills this mandate by:

- combining the physical approach of the co-founders with the differing approaches of the invited collaborators;
- creating works that speak to contemporary identity and existence;
- developing and maintaining a national and international network of venues, creators and performers;
- assisting others in developing bold new works through their training programs and low-tech workshop presentations;
- seeking diverse audiences;
- actively challenging our audiences’ relationship to performance;
- evaluating and reflecting on our work on an on-going basis. (*Theatre Replacement*)


*BIOBOXES, Clark and I, Sexual Practices of the Japanese,* and *Train* are all currently (2008) touring, as will future performance work.

Although Long and Yamamoto use an identifiable research and construction process, the results of this process vary quite dramatically from project to project. In this way TR’s
performance is highly resonant of the performance work created by Primus. Long’s analysis of the company’s work as a more cerebral version of the source construction techniques is apparent in the identifiable linear narrative of many of the performance pieces. Many of the pieces are very physical, however, and all of them feature exquisitely crafted physical and vocal detail, as well as arresting visual and aural images.

Unlike reviews of the works of BdL, NACL, or Number Eleven, in which visual images and other aspects of spectacle emerge as the most cited features of the work, the narrative associations in TR’s work have led to dissention in reviewers’ commentary. Although critics mention narrative details whenever possible, this is simply not always possible, given the structural range of the company’s performance work. Through their experimentation with artists in other disciplines, TR has expanded their performance vocabulary and reinvented theatrical form to a point at which it eludes a critical vocabulary, as did Primus’s work in its time. Although hybrid and post-dramatic forms of theatre have expanded critical vocabulary well beyond that used when Primus performances were the subject of analysis and review, TR’s explorations have led to a disruption in these critical parameters. As a result, reviewers are without a framework with which to approach the performance. Palpable “indecision” is present in a number of reviews, indicated by a shift in perspective during the course of the response. This is evident by both examining multiple readings of a single performance and by examining selected reviews representing the company’s repertoire.

This search for an appropriate frame began with *The Empty Orchestra*, the company’s first major performance piece. Jessica Barrat defined the narrative as “an exploration of the kind of siege mentality which grips you in the heart of a cold spell,” listed the use of political
references, audience participation, and continuous live musical arrangements but concluded that the performance was “an imaginative and creative spin on a relatively common experience” (The Peak, 7 Feb. 2005). In a prelude piece for The Georgia Straight, Thomas referred to the same performance as an “almost surreal combination of banal suburbia and ambitious creativity” (3 Feb. 2005). Ledingham and Grace Cameron both mention the engaging chemistry between the two actors but differ in what they thought they saw and in how they express it. After attempting to describe various elements of the narrative, Ledingham comments that “not everything is clear” (The Vancouver Courier, 9 Feb. 2005). Cameron was most enamoured by “the poetry and the ambiguity; space and time an amorphous entity.” She also claims that “[t]o some extent it is the poetry, or rather an undisciplined approach to the poetry, that causes the piece to falter” (The Boards, 10 Feb. 2005). Wasserman assessed the cumulative quality of the performance piece: “James Long and Maiko Bae Yamamoto are two of the most talented young theatre artists in the city [. . .] in the forefront of Vancouver’s theatrical renaissance of the past few years. The Empty Orchestra is a sweet little show” (Vancouverplays, Feb. 2005).

Sexual Practices of the Japanese garnered responses that generally focused on the subject and narrative:

Instead of focusing inward [. . .] this play looks outward, toward Japan itself, exploring some widely held notions about the Japanese and their sexual proclivities. And instead of exploding stereotypes, the play underlines them, using comedy and clever theatricality in some brave and entirely unexpected ways. (Wasserman, Vancouverplays, Jan. 2006)

Joe Adcock described the piece as a mix of “satire and celebration, condemnation and exploitation, jeering and tittering, sorrow and cynicism” (Seattle Post-Intelligencer, 24 Feb. 2007). Birnie from the Vancouver Sun interpreted the performance as a parody of Japanese
behaviour and claimed that the “eccentric assembly of ideas feels as if it sits mid-Pacific, between two worlds, and ends up working especially well in synch with the equally strange staging” (26 Jan. 2006). For Stuart Derdeyn, the experience was “an insiders’/outsiders’” view of common sexual stereotypes of Japanese culture. [. . . It is] bound to carry somewhat different meanings depending on, quite literally, where you’re coming from” (The Province, 24 Jan. 2006). For Adele Weder, Sexual Practices was viewed as “a kind of meta-verisimilitude. [It is . . .] about stereotypes that are far more erotic than the real-life practicalities. [. . . and] reminds us that a little knowledge is a dangerous thing” (The Globe and Mail, 20 Jan. 2007). Only one of six available reviews even mentioned the highly imaginative and inventive visual and audio images used in the staging (Sexual Practices of the Japanese DVD).

A selected survey of other TR performance reviews indicates a similar a range of reception. Ledingham focused on Long’s “spellbinding” performance in his solo piece, Broiler, in which his movement “explodes with implication.” (The Vancouver Courier, 25 Apr. 2005). She described the performance as “wonderfully entertaining, endlessly inventive, seriously funny and makes compelling theatre out of grief and/or guilt” (The Vancouver Courier, 25 Apr. 2005). Birnie’s review is composed of selected narrative—“a voice over has the man occasionally intoning rules of etiquette, none of them observed as the evening descends into madness”—and speculation—“his desperate character tries to come up with a version of the truth that we, and he, can buy” (Vancouver Sun, 21–30 Apr. 2005). Beyond the implied engagement with the material, the performance is incomprehensible from the review.

The Georgia Straight described YU-FO as “the love child of Hello Kitty and R2D2: unsettling and absolutely charming” (Thomas, 5 Apr. 2007). The Vancouver Courier
described it as playful and innovative but warned that it required “a great deal of suspension of credibility and [the] abandonment of [a] search for meaning” (Ledingham, *The Vancouver Courier*, 30 Mar. 2007). After attempting to explain the wildly erratic “plot,” Wasserman reminded himself and his readers that “the presentation is endlessly inventive, witty and skilled” and that in the final analysis surrealism “doesn’t have to make sense” (*Vancouverplays*, Mar. 2007). Ironically, while reviewers struggled to make sense of the piece, a prelude article in *The Georgia Strait* featured an interview with Yamamoto in which she stated that the performance was “turning out to be a really bizarre piece” (in Varty, *The Georgia Straight*, 22 Mar. 2007)

All reviews of *BIOBOXES*, the series of six theatrical solos performed for an audience of one within the confines of a puppet-theatre-like space, agree on the ingenious and very personal nature of the work. The inventiveness of each artist’s work with small-scale detail combined with the intimacy established by the proximity of spectator to artist set *BIOBOXES* in an artistic category of its own. I agree with Wasserman who claimed, “I go to plays over a hundred times a year, yet it’s not often that I feel that I’ve seen something that has made me think really fundamentally about how theatre works or what “theatre” ultimately might be. This was one of those rare shows” (*Vancouverplays*, Jan. 2007).

Although this survey does not include reviews representing all of TR’s performances, the collection of material illustrates the range and complexity of the dramaturgical structure used by TR. The survey of reviews also indicates that the structuration of performance work shifted from project to project with the needs of the piece, rather than progressing in a particular direction. This suggests a solid creative practice at the cores of the works that allows for the dramaturgy to reveal itself in the course of the process. *The Empty Orchestra*
(2005) had a linear story line but featured music and video projections. *Broiler* (2005) was a highly physical but low-tech solo performance featuring carefully crafted interactions with props. *YU-FO* (2007) was a highly physical, visual and audio image-oriented dreamscape performance, and the tiny confined worlds of *BIOBOXES* (2007) were object-puppet-like in aesthetic. The company’s latest performance piece, *Clark and I* (2008), was an (in)body telling of a story, underpinned by a minutely detailed physical score and supported by pictorial documentation in the form of projected photographic images. An interview with Long in the *Calgary Review* puts this wide range of aesthetics and subjects into perspective: “We’re interested in documentary and verbatim theatre […] but more so with the every-day occurrence, and making it extra-ordinary through theatre and collaboration with other artists” (qtd. in King, 4–10 Jan. 2007)

Reviews alone might lead to the conclusion that TR’s work was much less physical or image-oriented than that of BdL. This would be untrue. While the scale of the physical work and its place in the orchestration of the performance text is different from that of BdL, particularly the outdoor work, TR performances consistently feature visual and aural imagery and use of inventive staging. All of these characteristics are common to the work of Primus, NACL, and Number Eleven, with the exception of the experimentation with technology that is shared by BdL. Even this exploration may be considered as an extension of the tradition of theatre practiced by Primus as the Odin Theatre has recently been experimenting with sophisticated technology. *Andersen’s Dream* features mechanical staging, special effects, digital sound framing, and very specific, detailed physical and vocal interaction (*Andersen’s Dream*, 9 Apr. 2005).

Both Long and Yamamoto are highly involved in the advancement of their creative
processes through pedagogical and networking activity, such as the Spark initiatives started in August 2004 and the now defunct Core initiative that ran for several seasons. Spark 2004 was TR’s pilot open workshop venture, during which twelve emerging and established artists spent five days creating new solo works for the stage. Participants were led through a series of training and performance-devising exercises based on approaches used by TR in creating their own work. The final pieces were publicly presented along with TR’s “work-in-process” presentation of *The Empty Orchestra*. The second Spark project occurred in August 2006. Twelve participants spent six days creating both solo and ensemble work that culminated in a public showing of the work-in-progress.

In co-operation with The Only Animal Theatre Society, TR company members co-facilitated Core, a twice-weekly training venture for local theatre and dance artists. From 2005 to 2007 local theatre and dance artists met for two hours on two mornings each week during the fall, winter, and spring to train together. The sessions were led by Long and Yamamoto, as well as by Kendra Fanconi and Eric Rhys Miller from The Only Animal. The training focused on techniques and process developed by Jerzy Grotowski, Richard Fowler, Anne Bogart, and Tadashi Suzuki. This group initiative of pedagogical activity and focus on the advancement and transmission of training and dramaturgical process are reminiscent both of Primus activity and that of NACL.

As is the case with Boca del Lupo, creative juggling of projects and schedules has made funding less of an ongoing issue than it had been for Primus, as has the dawning recognition among funding agencies of the specific and individual needs of projects involving the creation of original work:

> When we first began with Boca del Lupo this [constant fundraising activity] was, of course an issue, as we had very little funding and it was indeed
difficult to justify to funding bodies the longer development periods that this type of work called for. In a way this has influenced TR’s process. We still utilize longer development periods; however, we take breaks in between which offers respite from funding [projects] all in one go and much needed perspective on the artistic development of a work. Also, I think now funding bodies are recognizing these processes more and have developed specific grants to address this. Most of the funding bodies understand our processes by now and we don’t have to struggle so much with the rationale anymore. (Yamamoto, Email Interview, 25 May 2008)

Yamamoto indicated that, although finding good rehearsal/training spaces in the city was generally challenging, TR has always managed to find spaces that they could use consistently for extended periods of time. The performance and pedagogical activity undertaken by Long and Yamamoto indicates that TR’s practice has been solidly grounded in process and that the actor-as-creator continues to be a central focus of the company’s work. Although the form of their work is in constant evolution, the connection with the source process continues to be revisited.

**Independent Efforts: Tamara McCarthy**

In 2002 Tamara McCarthy left BdL to pursue a solo career. Although she continued to be involved in physical theatre, this is no longer her sole pursuit. Nevertheless, the three weeks she spent with Randoja and Wells and the subsequent three-month period of time spent working with Wells on *Terminal* permanently affected McCarthy’s approach to her work. McCarthy states that “the work with Ker [Wells] sparked the next five years of my life as an artist. I haven’t a clue who or where I would be today if we [BdL] hadn’t taken the direction we did” (McCarthy, Email Interview 1, 24 July 2007). She recalls with great clarity the aspects of the experience with this work that affected her most profoundly:

Although McCarthy still works in physical theatre, most of the work that she has been cast in since leaving BdL has been naturalistic. Nevertheless, she turns to her physical training background as a source for developing clarity of gesture and character work and as a means of centring herself in order to make each moment physical and engaging (McCarthy, Email Interview 1, 24 July 2007). She also makes regular use of the vocal warm-ups that she learned from Randoja and Wells.

McCarthy believes that her encounter with Primus Theatre practice has also influenced her teaching. The initial experience, coupled with the years spent advancing the learned physical and vocal vocabulary as a member of BdL, has provided her with a very solid skill base. It is a source that she draws upon in teaching physical theatre and movement, which she has done for a number of organizations in Vancouver and elsewhere in Canada.

In 2001 McCarthy also had an opportunity to work with Kowalchuk and Krumholz during a three-day intensive workshop while NACL was on tour in Vancouver. In her estimation, the NACL workshop placed more weight on story-based creation than had the work with Wells, who based the work on creating movement scores first and then building and layering story later (McCarthy, Email Interview 2, 24 July 2007). However, beyond differences related to interpretation and current practice or those related to personal energy and preference, McCarthy also noted the time factor as a possible reason for this distinction of focus (McCarthy, Email Interview 2, 24 July 2007).
The West Coast Connection

In the decade since the neophyte company Boca del Lupo was introduced to the training and dramaturgical practices of Primus, a single, shared experience has yielded three divergent ripple effects. Core members of Boca del Lupo continued to develop large-scale, original ensemble pieces that over time began to include outdoor performance work. The outdoor ensemble work maintained a focus on the relationship of the actor in space, low-tech wizardry, inventiveness, and a highly physical style of presentation. The creation of indoor pieces, however, is now generated by an ensemble of performers, animators, musicians, and graphic designers and uses sophisticated visual and digital technology interactively with live performance. Theatre Replacement has also retained aspects of the source practice in performance and performance-creation. Long and Yamamoto have consciously chosen to work with artists from other disciplines and other theatrical organizations and allow for an evolution of performance aesthetic and dramaturgical development as a result of the collaborations. Although TR focuses on solo and duet works, this is not exclusively so, and the performance structure shifts from project to project. TR also explores technology as a means to enhance live performance but has retained a specific sense of physical and vocal detail as the core of its work. It can be speculated that this grounding is the result of maintaining a specific process as the core of the work. McCarthy continues to use her experience in a very concrete way in both the preparation and execution of her roles in realistic performance work and in her pedagogical practice. A single, shared experience that occurred ten years ago has continued to resonant in three divergent practices.
Daniel Mroz’s experience with Primus Theatre was very different from that of original Boca del Lupo company members. Mroz’s encounter with Primus was the result of a personal search for a performance process. This search would lead him to like-minded individuals with whom he forged a series of collaborations. His theatre creation and training methods have been “inspired by the ethic of Suzuki, the ethic, aesthetic and procedures of Fowler and the procedures, philosophy, cosmology and ethic of traditional Chinese quigong and wushu” (Mroz 85).

By his own admission, the majority of Mroz’s theatre training at McGill University was personally and professionally unsatisfying. During the course of his studies he became increasingly aware of the fact that a childhood involvement with the Suzuki approach\(^\text{10}\) to the instruction of music had deeply affected his “entire approach to art and learning” (Mroz 3). This translated into specific needs in acting training that were not being met:

> Like the musician that I was, I kept looking for simple repeatable procedures that would communicate the play to the audience, to no avail. I was told that I had a good voice and moved well, but everything I did looked “composed” rather than “real.” (Mroz 8)

There were, however, several respites during the course of this training. Mroz was encouraged by voice and speech instructor Stephen Lecky’s rhythmic musical approach to Shakespearean text. While the experience served to enhance Mroz’s vocal technique and his appreciation for Shakespeare’s text, it did little to advance his “abilities to feel real emotions on stage or to identify with the situations of the fictional characters I was asked to portray”

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\(^{10}\) In the mid-1940s Shinichi Suzuki developed a method of musical instruction based on the manner in which young children learn their native language. This involved environmental stimulation, nurturing, and constant practice. It was first introduced in Japan and then to other Pacific Rim countries and Europe. It was exported to North America in the late 1950s and early 1960s.
At the suggestion of his undergraduate advisor Denis Salter, Mroz began to investigate Eugenio Barba’s work with the Odin Theatre. Inspired by the visual elements of the work, the performance vocabulary eluded him. In 1992, however, Mroz saw Alkoremmi, and this experience breathed life into Barba’s ideas and the Odin Theatre’s performance form:

I sat enraptured by this opposition: the vigorous execution of a performance in a simple and fragile physical environment. On one hand the bodies moved and sounded with a level of precision and ability that induced gaping amazement. On the other hand, the almost total absence of technology on stage revealed a voluntary poverty, a rejection of artifice. […] It is a rare thing in theatre, to see something from which nothing can be subtracted. (Mroz 9–10)

This experience was life altering and echoed Donald Kitt’s initial reaction to *Dog Day* and Richard Fowler’s encounter with *The Million*. Mroz wrote to the company expressing great interest in learning to perform as they did, and in August 1993 he participated in the first extended “Fictive Reality” workshop. As noted in Chapter Five Fowler took on most of the teaching responsibility in that program. Given his experience with the English-speaking theatre community in Montreal, Mroz was pleasantly surprised to find that Fowler was not interested in the representation of everyday physical reality or in the display of emotion. What Mroz understood from Fowler’s statements was that “craft can be learned and this makes the question of talent irrelevant” (Mroz 10). He credits Fowler for encouraging and enabling him to establish a solid foundation for his theatre practice:

Everything worthwhile I have learned to do as an artist and teacher arose from my meeting with Richard Fowler, a master who could do, describe and transmit every aspect of the actor’s art. He remains the most complete theatre artist I know personally. The actors he trained himself and the network of “cousins” trained by his colleagues have become my artistic family, people whose work I look forward to, whose company I seek and whose wisdom I treasure. (Mroz 11)

Mroz identified his participation in this workshop as the beginning of his
apprenticeship (Mroz 11). What he learned enabled him to draw a parallel between Fowler’s teaching and the fundamental principles of the Suzuki approach that had defined his expectations of art and learning: “In the practical, ethical and aesthetic principles I learned from Fowler I recognized the authenticity and compassions of Suzuki’s approach” (Mroz 18). At the conclusion of the workshop, Mroz asked Fowler to suggest ways in which he could continue to develop the principles he had begun to explore. Fowler suggested that he study martial arts: “[B]ased on the control of potential and kinetic energy, [it] would be a sustainable way [. . .] to practice the principles, if not the form, of the [workshop] training” (Mroz 20).

In pursuit of Fowler’s suggestion Mroz began an exploration of technique that has characterized his adult life and has highly influenced theatre-making practice. In September 1993 he began to study the art of Choy Li Fut Kuen (Cailifoquan), and over the next decade worked toward the mastery of this form and of Tong Ping Taigek Kuen (Tan Peng Taijiquan) and Zhi Neng Qiqong. He also explored a series of other martial art forms on a limited basis (Mroz, Email Interview, 25 May 2008). In his estimation all martial arts serve to train the individual both externally/physically and internally/mentally.

Along with an intensive commitment to martial arts training, Mroz continued his studies with Fowler and Primus. This occurred for a week at Espace La Veillée (now Prospero) in Montreal in 1995 and for three months in Winnipeg during the three-month final
“Fictive Reality” workshop (1997). For Mroz, Fowler’s focus on “the artist’s drive toward self-development, self-change and self-awareness” (Mroz 16) was inspiring and motivating. He was also impressed by the organicism of Fowler’s pedagogical approach: “He was the first person I met who actually embodied the aesthetic and ethical principles he proclaimed” (Mroz 16).

In 1995 Mroz formed La Compagnie du Pont-fleurs with Olivier-Hugues Terreault, a student in the dance program at l’Université du Québec in Montreal and whom he met during the Primus workshop in Montreal. Terreault was similarly inspired to create physical theatre, but his inspiration had emerged from a workshop facilitated by Ariane Mnouchkine in France in the early 1990s. The first performance by La Compagnie du Pont-fleurs was entitled *Le Jardin des poiriers* and featured an ensemble that included Mroz, Terreault, an Indonesian dancer, a Chilean actor, and a south Indian percussionist and composer. After Mroz completed an MA and Terreault completed a BA, the two performers participated in Primus’s third and final “Fictive Reality” workshop (1998). When they returned to Montreal, the pair began to create several new pieces. Tamar Tembeck, a performer with a background in dance, mime, singing, and theatre, joined La Compagnie du Pont-fleurs. The company produced an outdoor performance, *La sentier aux milles lanternes*, in 1998, and one year later (Feb. 1999) *La Croisee des magiciens* was premiered.

The company’s second indoor performance piece was more complex structurally and therefore more challenging to perform. The company spent an extended period of time developing “a unique voice and movement training” (Mroz 87), which subsequently served the development of the performance language. In order to gain a concrete understanding of the principles underlying Cailifoqun, Terreault and Tembeck spent three months training
with Mroz’s instructor, Wong. *La Croisee des magiciens* was mounted twenty times in a series of Montreal venues before being retired. Mroz indicated that Jo Leslie of *The Montreal Mirror* likened the company’s work to that of the Odin Theatre. With *La Croisee des magiciens* Mroz began the kind of intense process of developing a common performance language that had existed at the centre of Primus’s practice.

In 2000 Mroz met composer Rainer Wiens, whose compositional methods became a further inspiration to the way in which he created theatre. Mroz was particularly drawn to poly-rhythms, “the simultaneous interdependent playing of two different time signatures” (Mroz 92), and this and other processes used by Wiens in the composition of music were incorporated into the evolving creative process. In 2002 Mroz founded Holon Theatre with four former students of the Maitrise en arts dramatiques de UQAM. Holon Theatre’s first performance piece, *Peau de lune* (Skin of the Moon), was premiered at the NAACL Catskill Festival of New Theatre in 2002. Two of Wiens’s compositions were rearranged for three voices and used in *Peau de lune* (Mroz 92). Mroz described the piece as “a simple love story presented in a musical and poetic manner” (Mroz 91). Reviews of the performance do not exist. As was his work with La Compagnie du Pont-fleurs, Holon can be considered to be a testing ground for the theatre-making processes that Mroz was developing.

In 2005 Mroz founded One Reed Theatre Ensemble in Toronto with NTS graduates Frank Cox-O’Connell, Megan Flynn, Marc Tellez, and Evan Webber. The quartet had worked with Wells on the construction of an original performance in their second year of training at NTS and had been deeply inspired by the processes they encountered. According to Flynn, “[w]e fell in love with the process that was involved in telling that kind of story, building separate module pieces and putting them together under a topic or theme, crafting
the story as we were telling it” (DiRaddo, *NTS Magazine*, Fall 2005). The foursome decided to generate a piece based on their interest in “strange, forgotten history” (DiRaddo, *NTS Magazine*, Fall 2005) in order to further explore the discovered processes. The idea to juxtapose the story of Hernan Cortez’s conquest of the Aztecs and a young Canadian student’s experiences visiting a relative in modern-day Mexico emerged from discussion.

Mroz met O’Connell and Tellez through Wells at the NACL Catskills Festival of New Theatre in 2005. The pair shared their ideas about content, Mroz offered ideas about form, and it was decided that they should collaborate on the development of a performance piece (Mroz, Email Interview, 25 Mar. 2008). The group spent nearly a year in preparation: 736 hours were spent writing and constructing the work and 120 hours rehearsing it (Ruano, Ottawa (X)press, 12 Oct. 2006). One Reed Theatre Ensemble premiered *Nor the Cavaliers That Come with Us* at the Summerworks Festival in August 2006. The performance piece was subsequently toured to Montreal, Ottawa, and at the NACL Catskill Festival of Experimental Theatre (NY), as well as remounted several times in Toronto.

Mroz indicated that *Nor the Cavaliers That Come with Us* started with a wealth of text generated by the actors. This was ordered and edited over time, based on the needs of the intersection of the two stories that were being told: one focusing on the conquest of Mexico and the other on the experiences of a naive contemporary tourist. The performance text was created through the editing, developing, or omitting of details that served this dramaturgical need (Mroz, Email Interview, 25 May 2008). Mroz’s work with One Reed focused less on dance and music than had his work with Compagnie de Pont-fleurs and more on editing the writing and developing narratives (Mroz, Email Interview, 5 July 2008).

Lisa Wolford described *Nor the Cavaliers* as “a theatrically inventive and politically
astute reflection on colonization and class hierarchy that blends song and movement with liberal doses of self-deflating humour (“Revisioning”100). The notion of two distinguishable narratives is a diversion from the dramaturgical structure of Primus pieces. The progression of the construction process, however, via the continuous process of editing and developing textual and physical aspects of the work is highly resonant of the Primus developmental process. Commenting on the process of distillation and refinement that took place during the construction process, Mroz stated that “the unused or changed versions remained an important influence or scaffold on the material that remained in the show” (Mroz, Email Interview, 25 May 2008). Mroz’s concept of invisible scaffolding is reminiscent of the underpinning created by discarded street-theatre material in the construction of Alkoremmi. The trace energy of the source material remained as an informing principle, although the actual gesture or movement was absent.

The actors played multiple roles, shifted back and forth between time periods, and shifted rapidly between daily and extra-daily expression. Johnnie Walker of The Torontoist noted the “remarkable energy and physicality” of the performers in a transfixing performance:

The show is performed in the round with a few essential and often brilliantly transformed props. [. . .] The lighting, the actors and the text all come together to form a beautifully cohesive whole. Even if the story becomes hard to follow at parts, it is always compelling to watch. (The Torontoist, 30 Mar. 2007)

Jessica Ruano’s apparent surprise at the performance’s diversion from Realism reads as a statement of the obvious:

One reason the play is exceptional is it does not use the same conventions as film and television, like many contemporary Canadian productions. [. . .] All four actors are musically and physically skilled, and have had Chinese martial arts training from their director. (Ruano Ottawa (X)press, 12 Oct. 2006).
Glen Sumi and Wolford both comment on the broader contexts of the work in relation to other theatrical and cultural forms. Sumi was struck by what he determined to be an emphasis on “the communal and ritualistic aspect of theatre” (Now Magazine, 10 Aug. 2006). He also marvelled that, “not one light cue or musical note is wasted in this theatrically stunning and complex examination of several centuries of colonization and exploitation in Mexico” (Now Magazine, 10 Aug. 2006). Wolford claimed that Nor the Cavaliers blended “the stark imagery and bold actor-centred transformations characteristic of Poor Theatre with a distinctly contemporary and self-reflexively Canadian perspective on historical violence and the elision of marginalized voices (“Revisioning” 100).

Mroz credits Fowler for providing him with a means to develop a creative process, but he identifies Wells and his work on Icaria and The Prague Visitor as the most important influence on his directing. He confessed that he saw “Icaria about 15–20 times and The Prague Visitor 10–12 times, in various incarnations” (Mroz, Email Interview, 25 May 2008). In observing the way in which Wells “created links between the episodes of his performances, how he created a fundamental atmosphere, and then brought in elements to vary it,” Mroz was able to determine how to apply what he had learned about “the manipulation of space and time through martial arts” to his directing (Mroz, Email Interview, 25 May 2008). The effect of that application is evident in reviewer response to “the clarity and economy of the montage, with its striking images and stark transformations” (“Revisioning 102).

The company’s second performance piece, It’s Hard to Count to a Million, appeared as a work-in-progress at the 2008 Rhubarb Festival at Buddies in Bad Times (Toronto). According to Cox O’Connell, the project had a different point of departure than Nor the
Cavaliers. After collectively generating a title, company members engaged in individual research that the title had inspired. The collective research efforts were then discussed and the narrative chosen from this material (Cox-O’Connell, Rhubarb Festival, 20 Feb. 2008).

Although configured for the limitations of pre-determined space, *It’s Hard to Count* exhibited performance aesthetics that had dominated *Nor the Cavaliers*: a minimalist aesthetic, physical and vocal precision, and direct, clearly defined, and inventive shifts from one segue of the montage to another (*It’s Hard to Count*, 20 Feb. 2008).

*Nor the Cavaliers* was essentially sponsored by NTS’s Cultural and Artistic Leadership Program (CALP), who awarded the company ten thousand dollars and rehearsal and performance space in which to complete the first phase of development in 2005. The second phase of development was partially funded by CALP and supplemented by Mroz’s research funds at the University of Ottawa, where he is a member of the Theatre Department. The second phase of the project received funding from the Ontario Arts Council and the Canada Council, as well as travel grants for Mroz to attend events related to One Reed Ensemble Theatre. He did not draw a salary from the awarded funding. In his estimation funding is equally insufficient in both Ontario and Quebec for companies choosing to work outside of the theatrical mainstream (Mroz, Email Interview, 25 May 2008).

**Conclusion**

In the immediate aftermath of Primus Theatre’s demise, it would have been difficult to speculate on the impact that Primus Theatre had on theatre-making in Canada. Although most of the contacts that would result in the theatre-making activity noted in this study
occurred during the company’s existence or shortly after the company’s demise, evidence of this ripple effect took time. From this sampling and Peters’s study of practitioners in Newfoundland, one can speculate that the influence of Primus’s presence on Canadian theatre-making is far more pervasive than the small collection of print material would imply.

I have been reminded that I, too, am part of this ripple effect, drawn in at first by the world that Primus offered me through performance, by the visual and aural surprises exploding my sense of what theatre could be, of what I had always hoped it would be, and by the remarkably visceral reactions that resonated and echoed for weeks after I had seen Alkoremni for the first time in 1993. I trained as a dancer; however, a serious training injury altered plans for a professional career. I was encouraged to pursue acting training, but method acting and other emotion-driven approaches, as well as the typecasting practice common in the commercial theatre industry, caused me to quickly lose interest in the work.

I was interested in the study of art form, and theatre seemed so rooted in the social sciences, particularly psychology. Primus, however, was creating theatre using unusual physical and vocal form with the precision of athletes and dancers, yet the work was neither. It was, however, visually and aurally stunning. The initial experience with Primus Theatre’s work led me to research Barba’s work, to re-read Towards a Poor Theatre, and to view theatrical possibility in a new light. I was trying to find a way to make use of a background in literature, art history, and dance work within the context of the existing theatrical milieu. As I followed Primus’s work, I begin to realize (or thought I did) the remarkable commitment, tenacity, and love for the art that was necessary for members of the company to do what they were doing. I had no idea then just how remarkable that was. It was only during the course of constructing this study that I began to understand the extent of the difficulties faced by
Primus Theatre members in the establishment and maintenance of company practice. It appeared that Primus had existed in spite of, and perhaps because of, doubts and concerns about being able to sustain a company in such difficult conditions. I am in awe of what members of the company represented as artists and what they were able to accomplish in spite of the hardships.

When the opportunity arose I proposed a study of the company’s work in order to learn more about the way in which the work had been created, about the collective identity of the company, and about the individuals who had chosen to work in this way. This research has affirmed and influenced all aspects of the activity I have undertaken as scholar/practitioner: my practice as a director-facilitator, my pedagogical approach, the content I choose to disseminate, and the larger issue of the position of art-making in my life.

In many ways the study of Primus’s company culture and the work produced evolved into a process that closely resembles that of the making of *Alkoremmi*. This is to say that at a certain point in the research process I realized that, for reasons beyond my control, the project that I had intended to pursue was simply not possible. Material that I had believed to be available did not exist. The interviews that I had initially conducted with Primus members had been directed toward a particular framework that was quickly slipping from my grasp. I tried to construct a relatively traditional comparative analysis of the company’s work but found that the available material and the very present absence of material resisted this structure. The gaps in information created issues of validity in the comparisons that I was trying to make. I pursued a series of divergent but related research directives in an attempt to reclaim the project. The actuality of my research findings, however, began to alter my perspective, which was already in flux. I found that it was necessary to reassess the situation.
and to reflect upon what the research had revealed, not what I had hoped it would reveal, and
to determine what the project was really about. In short, I had to focus on the new
possibilities being offered by the altered perspective and the information that actually
existed. I focused on what the details, including the gaps in company journals, and the vast
quantities of grant and funding applications were telling me. In the end, I am very certain that
the study I have produced is indeed the study that should have been pursued in the first place.
The paradox is that I couldn’t have known this without pursuing the project in exactly the
manner that I did.

This study of Primus Theatre is evidence of many things. First and foremost, it is a
long overdue print recognition of Primus Theatre’s substantial artistic accomplishments and
its important contribution to the development of theatre-making in English-speaking Canada.
In examining the various factors contributing to the founding of the theatre and the extremely
challenging conditions in which company members functioned over the years, it remains
truly remarkable that Primus Theatre existed at all. There is something strangely
serendipitous and ephemeral about each leg of the journey. Yet these fragments can be
connected into a remarkably cohesive whole. Three central determinations emerged from the
examination Primus Theatre’s practice.

Primus Theatre was truly a pioneering venture in English Canada. Company members
established an “as-if permanent” ensemble that engaged in the creation of original
performance work drawn from research that emerged from a regular training practice. With
Fowler’s guidance Primus Theatre members adopted (Chapter Three) and then adapted
(Chapter Four) a theatre-making practice generated by the Odin Theatre in Denmark in vastly
different cultural and fiscal contexts. This adopted practice was substantially different from
mainstream or even alternative English-Canadian theatre at the time because it was not organized around a contract system, did not utilize Realism or Naturalism as the dominant style of presentation, and did not consider mounting a dramatic text at the centre of theatrical creation. Therefore, Primus was immediately positioned at odds with the rules, regulations, and scheduling of funding systems and mainstream theatre organization.

The origins of the company were inextricably bound to Richard Fowler’s personal artistic journey. His strong sense of the creative and communal potential for theatre not only fuelled his own creative journey but also inspired NTS students to launch their own acts of artistic courage. As illustrated in Chapter Two, the commencement of Fowler’s acting career was no different than for most young actors. However, his demands and expectations of both himself and his chosen profession drastically affected the choices he made and therefore the direction he took with his career. It was the cumulative result of those choices that led Nick Hutchinson to offer him a guest directorship at NTS. In meeting Hutchinson’s risky decision Fowler set in motion a series of events that would eventually lead to the founding of Primus Theatre. Beyond teaching and guiding technique and process, he was a remarkable role model for the actor-as-artist and exemplary in living an artful life and being strong in the face of adversity.

The third determination is that, while all aspects of Primus Theatre’s creative practice can be linked to that of the Odin Theatre, this relationship can most accurately be described as an imprinting rather than an extension of Odin Theatre practices. The conscious and unconscious permutations and advancement of the practice, driven by the technical and creative needs and interests of the young Canadian company and deeply affected by the substantial financial hardships and creative setbacks, forced Primus to emerge as a unique
theatre entity developing from a particular and identifiable genealogy.

This study of the establishment of Primus Theatre also provides evidence that the substantial hardships faced by company members did not dissuade them from advancing their practice of continued exploration of form and expression or from initiating a substantial quantity projects. While company members questioned their involvement in the company on a regular basis and particularly in times of greatest hardship, for core members\(^{12}\) the benefits of working as they did outweighed the difficulties and sustained them over the nine years of operation. This thoroughly conscious commitment to “the work” on the part of all company members indicates a steadfast belief in the training and dramaturgical processes being explored and advanced. The study provides evidence not only of Primus Theatre’s substantial body of creative work (Chapter Five) but also of substantial pedagogical efforts on behalf of company members (Chapter Five). Subsequently, a new generation of theatre artists have been inspired and trained in this alternative theatre-making model (Chapter Six). Through continued experimentation with theatrical form and aesthetic, this new generation of artists is contributing to the continued redefinition of theatre in English Canada.

\(^{12}\) The descriptor of core members of Primus Theatre refers to long-term members Donald Kitt, Tannis Kowalchuk, Stephen Lawson, Karin Randoja, Ker Wells, and Richard Fowler.
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