"Theatre in the 'Engaged University': A Context for Habermas's Communicative Action"

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Throughout its history, the American university has learned to accommodate divergent functions—theological, humanistic, vocational, and scholarly, for example—that have been organized into curricula, and legitimized on the basis of changing ideas about the uses of knowledge. The growth of theatre studies has been complex and multifaceted but, in the end, its generalizable characteristics can be understood to fall into two prevailing curricular orientations. The first, an *aesthetically-oriented* curriculum, teaches the values of the liberal humanist approach. The second, a *market-oriented* curriculum, is characterized by professionalism and vocationalism. These formulations mark the triumph of "Enlightened" objectivity that has afflicted our practices with discordant beliefs about whether to teach humanistic content or the crafts of theatrical production. In the 1930s, this debate came to be identified as a dichotomy between "craft" or "culture."[1]

The field has never resolved this clash and is still mired in disagreements about whether to emphasize intellectual growth or technical skills, or whether and how to do both. Currently, liberal arts education embraces a market-oriented, utilitarian aim as students' intentions for the bachelor of arts (B.A.) degree have changed from developing a philosophy of life to that of preparing for economic security.[2] This trend is especially troubling for theatre studies because it raises questions about the ethics of professional training for a labor market with so few careers. All too often now an entrenched dichotomy frustrates efforts to teach a theoretically coherent curriculum. Both foundations of the theatre curriculum—the liberal arts and the pre-professional—have been exhausted. Programs are notoriously disjointed and dysfunctional, quagmires of turf battles, ideological discrepancies, and fiscal scarcity. So in its 200 year struggle for recognition worthy of its potential in liberal arts education, theatre's disciplinary potency and integration with larger university concerns remain illusive.

The field often suffers, in sum, from a crisis of legitimacy. But educational dispensations are neither monolithic nor neutral, not intransigent but malleable.

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Historian of higher education Herbert Kliebard shows that disciplinary histories reflect, above all, struggles for legitimacy within arenas of shifting and contested ideas about the purpose of a university education. The undergraduate curriculum is therefore shaped by competing agendas for curricular content, with attempts to reform it necessarily bound by comprehensive academic agendas.[3] So we can surmise that theatre studies will be legitimized to the degree that it appeals to the university's defining interests. The rescue of theatre programs depends, I think, on scholars' and teachers' willingness to understand temporal constructions of knowledge in higher education and to link the field actively to their formulations. For unless the discipline vigorously participates in the university's discourses, it can expect little control over its own affairs.

I want to propose here a coherent approach for undergraduate, liberal arts theatre studies that, first, repairs the aesthetic versus vocational impasse and, second, legitimizes the field on the basis of current formulations of knowledge that tilt toward reflexive praxis—that is, of *simultaneously* understanding and acting upon the world.[4] In this attempt, I put forth a theory that brings into focus a more contextualized, communicative picture of knowledge grounded in a current version of higher education, that of the "engaged university"—a model that advocates its public, communitarian mission and replaces the traditional bifurcation of applied and basic research with a commitment to praxis.

The concept of an engaged curriculum inevitably alters our traditional view of the liberal arts, with their disinterested, context-independent theory of knowledge—that is, a production of knowledge divested of personal and ideological prejudices and interests—and their separation from more useful or applied forms of inquiry.[5] An engaged theatre curriculum, on the other hand, would shift its interest from the formalist study of aesthetics and the crafts of theatre production in the manner of the traditional, bifurcated notion of *artes liberales*, to an exploration of the art of theatre as a channel for participation in public life. Gaining full membership in the academy will then correspond to the institutional and rhetorical force of its contribution to new models of liberal education. This expectation, I will show, would change current priorities in our teaching.

Toward this aim, I will begin by historicizing our predicament in the academy as it has been shaped by changing definitions of knowledge. Then, I will turn to Jürgen Habermas's critical theories of knowledge constitutive interests, communicative action, and discourse ethics to help articulate the character of, and criteria for, a more critical form of aesthetic pedagogy that promotes public, civic engagement. As we shall see, Habermas's interest in strengthening a communicative and dialectical epistemology within social institutions is especially well-suited to the collaborative and public nature of theatre arts. These concerns would also accommodate a concrete engagement with the practical world that intertwines theory and action, life and art,

in promoting theatre's capacity for democratic dialogue. Finally, I will propose a curricular praxis in the context of the engaged university.

Theatre Studies in the Modern University

The theatre curriculum entered higher education in the United States at the turn of the twentieth century with the formation of the modern research university, fashioned in Berlin by Wilhelm von Humboldt in the early nineteenth century. Humboldt developed a plan for a more utilitarian and practical university that would serve Germany's new status as a nation-state. Facing debilitating social problems associated with industrialism, and seeking strategies and mechanisms to manage an ever more complex society, American educationists traveled to Germany after 1865 to study Humboldt's plan. They returned to advance a theory of educational *usefulness* by way of the new sciences (chemistry, biology, medicine), and introduced modern tools of scientific research.[6]

Subsequently, historians have argued, the confluence of economic, political, and educational forces that consolidated the features of the modern university in the U.S.—and made possible the introduction of theatre studies—rest on an unresolved tension between two visions of knowledge and their various combinations, those of *humanism,* authored in the colonial college, and *utilitarianism*, derived from the Humboldtian ideology.[7] In the first vision, the academy advances a liberal and secular culture, while safeguarding and disseminating a national cultural heritage. Formulated to preserve the past and to prepare a leadership of minister-teacher-scholars ("gentlemen"), the humanists of classical culture advocated *general* (unspecialized) education centered on disciplined, intrinsically valuable inquiry. The second vision, that of utilitarianism, fosters development of research-based, increasingly technological knowledge, with social and economic payoffs.[8] In these conditions, scientific research became synonymous with liberal culture.[9] By 1910, the mandates of research-based knowledge became dominant, leading to the expansion and diversification of the curriculum, differentiation of the colonial college's general curriculum into discrete disciplines, and departmentalization of the academic program.[10] Such modern categories of "humanities," "sciences," and "liberal arts and sciences" came to designate the varied methodologies of undergraduate curriculum.

At the intersection of humanism and utilitarianism in the early twentieth century, drama entered the academy in language and speech departments.[11] The inclusion of drama was subsequently drafted according to the university's dual interests and substantiated in competing epistemic dispositions. Drama first appeared under the aegis of humanism, then reacting against the university's growing functionalism and its pursuit of knowledge within increasingly narrow disciplinary borders. In the first decade of the twentieth century, the humanists, who saw American culture in steep decline, promoted the classics, philosophy, language, and literature—remnants of

the classical college—as a way to raise intellect and culture to an idealized vision of humanity.[12] Drawing inspiration from Matthew Arnold's *Culture and Anarchy* (1869), Irving Babbitt (followed after the First World War by T. S. Eliot and F. R. Leavis) countered the crass materialist democratization of industrial society with aesthetics ("sweetness and light").[13] Performance techniques and playwriting were introduced to teach language and literature. These experiments supported then current romantic versions of aesthetic expression as the search for eternal truths in the mold of Arnoldian humanism. Invoking a universal dramatic "instinct" or "sensibility" as the source of untapped educational potential, teachers constructed the prototype of drama teaching in an aesthetically-oriented curriculum.[14]

In the second decade of the twentieth century, college drama programs in the humanist vein began to give public performances outside the classroom in the form of "amateur theatricals." Dramatic study soon gained legitimacy and autonomy. Departments of theatre were formed and, leaning toward the utilitarian interest, began to add specialized courses to bolster production values in self-consciously amateur performances. In this milieu, performance quality began to be measured against more professional standards and by the early 1930s, a craft-inflected curriculum, aimed to prepare students for the semi-professional theatre, gained momentum. Circular arguments for production-based curricula were pragmatic: if the university produced plays for the public, it should train students to give public performances. As one scholar said, "It is the moral duty of the university to provide accurate and intelligent basic training."[15] Thus was born the "craft or culture" dilemma—whether to emphasize instrumental technical skills or generalized intellectual qualities—which played out in an often bitter scholarly debate that still persists.[16]

The so-called "boom time" for higher education, from 1945 through the 1970s, saw theatre studies' professionalization in the academy as the number of programs offering B.A. degrees, and eventually bachelor of fine arts (B.F.A.) degrees, soared. The *Directory of American College Theatre* (DACT), 1960, reported the doubling of undergraduate theatre programs from 1945 through the 1950s, with most colleges and universities providing curricula, and a quarter of them offering a B.A. in theatre arts. After 1960, the number of theatre teachers and students tripled, the 1967 DACT reported, and theatre courses grew by 71% in an increasingly specialized curriculum.[17] The emergence then of a market-oriented curriculum was literally cemented by a prolific building program in which, beginning in the 1950s and continuing for two decades, hundreds of performing arts facilities were constructed at universities and colleges across the nation.[18] Highly trained scenic designers, directors, and technicians were hired, and students trained to perform in newly-constructed capacious theatres—designed with the latest architectural specifications—as theatre programs became "producing units."[19] In undergraduate theatre education, then, the priorities of liberal culture and general

education (humanism) were largely supplanted during the second half by those of professionalism (utilitarianism).[20]

At the same time, with others in the humanities committed to reconceptualizing liberal arts, the culturalists promoted the reinvention of theatre studies. They derived from John Dewey, Susanne Langer, and Alfred North Whitehead, for example, a basis for probing what they saw as theatre's untapped experiential and aesthetic forms of learning. The interest in Dewey's pragmatism—"education not as preparation for life, but as life"—animated much of the humanists' conversation. Claiming to counter a perceived emphasis on a detached relationship between students and subject matter, theatre educators under Dewey's influence put forth experiential pedagogies—"teaching students rather than subject-matter," teaching theatre as "an educational tool," and as "process over product"—to fulfill this vision.[21]

Still, the most important development in the undergraduate theatre curriculum of the 1960s and 1970s, and continuing in the 1980s, was an entirely different sort of pragmatism, that of professionalization. Professionalizing theatre studies included its alliance with the growing number of professional regional theatres launched during the Kennedy administration. So the experimental, humanist proclivities were presented in fundamentally incongruous curricula because instrumental, vocational instruction was widely justified as a form of liberal education.[22]

As the first step to gaining full membership in the academy, we must repair an incongruous curriculum that has rigidified in the dichotomy between the aesthetic and market-oriented orientations. Specifically, I propose that we reconstruct theatre studies as a *civically-oriented* curriculum, contextualized in students' aesthetic, cultural, and social interests. We can move, now, to put forth a theory of aesthetic practice promoting theatre's capacity for democratic dialogue. The formal study of production and performance would shift to an exploration of theatre as a channel for participation in public life in the spirit of the engaged university.

Knowledge Constitutive Interests

In this attempt, I move now to Jürgen Habermas's theory of knowledge and human interests in order to establish a perspective from which it is possible to set forth principles and values of theatre studies as a civic discourse, out of concern for the reflexive and experiential nature of theatrical knowledge. Proceeding from Aristotle's categories of knowledge production, Habermas elaborates three human interests intrinsic to thought and action—*technical, practical, and emancipatory*.[23] Because they are related to necessities for survival, Habermas claims, these interests constitute "fundamental sciences" by which societies generate and organize knowledge. In this epistemology, the technical interest engenders an empirical-analytical science of knowing; the practical, an historical-hermeneutic; and the emancipatory, a critical-cognitive. Motivated by the need to manage and control

the environment, the *technical interest* is the foundation of empirical and analytical methods expressed in positive sciences. According to Shirley Grundy, curricula guided by a technical interest purport to transfer knowledge and confer skills deemed necessary for the student to succeed in managing, or "manipulating," his or her world. The curriculum consists, first, of objectives that represent knowledge, and, second, of content and methods by which objectives are transmitted to learners. Teaching entails the application of procedures mechanized according to pre-ordained objectives. In modern Western societies, Grundy claims, Habermas's technical interest has dominated curricular theory and design. Consequently, students generally come to understand knowledge as a delivered product—the representation of phenomena, organized in an objective world.[24]

Whereas the technical interest is concerned with products, Habermas continues, the *practical interest* seeks access to facts governed by *meaning* rather than observation. Deliberation, judgment, and meaning-making are central to practical action, which concerns a fundamental interest in understanding the environment through interaction based upon a consensual interpretation of meaning. In Grundy's view, curriculum as practice, or action, rises from the collaborative deliberation and judgment of its participants—teachers and students—whose needs and well-being it addresses. By accentuating practice over products, a practical curriculum is concerned with furthering "the good" of its contributors. Hence, it is justified *morally* rather than cognitively.[25]

Because of the tendency, Habermas argues, for persons to be deceived by the interests, aims, and rhetorical muscle of the powerful, the practical interest does not defend against social coercion. Thus, the *emancipatory,* or *critical, interest* springs from the impulse of individuals and groups to take control of their lives through self reflection in responsible and autonomous ways. Habermas speaks of *critical dialectic* where action follows from critical reflection. In Grundy's view, a curriculum informed by a critical interest (as with a practical) centralizes deliberation and action rather than a product, and reason rather than rule-following. Importantly, a curriculum informed by the emancipatory interest specifies a setting free of social coercion. Invoking knowledge constitutive interests, Grundy formulates curriculum as a critical praxis that extends from "a fundamental interest in emancipation and empowerment to engage in autonomous action arising from authentic, critical insights into the social construction of human society."[26]

Evaluating theatre studies' rise in the American academy against Grundy's framework shows that in neither the aesthetic nor market-oriented missions have curricula been methodically practiced as means of producing knowledge through Habermas's iteration of the practical and critical interests. At several points theatre educators did forge more practical pedagogies that emphasized reflective participation in society. During the century's first two decades, for example, George Pierce Baker, Frederick Koch, and others promoted the design of theatre education

as a form of public service and "education for citizenship," designing courses in which students wrote and produced "folk dramas" about life in rural communities.[27] But responding in the 1930s to expanding audiences and the perception of these experiments as an unsophisticated theatrical vision, utilitarian arguments for technically-oriented instruction in production crafts carried the day.

An important factor in the incremental advance toward professionalism was the university's move after the Second World War toward becoming a national resource for training professional artists, erasing an historic dichotomy and hardening the market-oriented curriculum that still prevails. The problem with this approach in undergraduate education is that students learn to associate professional standards with true knowledge of their theatrical and dramatic culture. But in fact, they learn a particular knowledge intended to help them maneuver in the world of work while domesticating them to the tastes and values of an idealized middle-class audience. So the governing technicism in current theatre curricula tacitly emphasizes acritical objectives in training, fashioned to the standards of mainstream theatre outside the academy. This contradiction lies at the root of the field's current travails.

Like all generalizations, this assessment is itself an oversimplification. Nothing in the ever-changing landscape of undergraduate education is inevitable, and certainly intrepid theatre educators, students, and scholars will always move theatre study with exigency, toward new horizons. Since the 1980s, for instance, scholarship in performance studies as conceived by Richard Schechner and others has repositioned drama and theatre as just one category in a larger field of performance. This perspective looks at a broad spectrum of performative behavior, from artistic activity, explicitly framed as performance (e.g. theater, dance, music) to cultural performance (e.g. ritual, communications, social life). Interdisciplinary in nature, it explores the intersections of performance and other fields such as anthropology, sociology, folklore, language communication, and popular entertainment. By understanding culture as something constituted through performance—that is, as an enactment of social life—performance studies has transformed critical studies in theatre.

Still, the field appears to be as vulnerable at the start of the twenty-first century as it was when it first entered undergraduate education at the start of the twentieth. For the university that now accommodates both professional training and critical studies seems typically to accept theatre studies ungenerously since it does not contribute in an obvious way to either of its major tenets. Consequently, theatre departments all too often have little, if any, disciplinary and institutional power. The first task in revising the curriculum, then, is to provide a theory of knowledge that renounces these oppositions in current versions of theatre education. The theory cannot be established as a "middle ground" that escapes the shortcomings of opposing goals and practices. Instead, it must rescind the institutional patterns

that gave rise to the oppositions in the first place, and with them, the hierarchies of old.

Incorporating Habermas's practical and critical interests suggests a way to legitimate theatre studies' value in liberal education by promoting its unique capacity for democratic dialogue. What is needed now is a theory that would retain some of the liberal arts' traditional concerns—its commitment to ideas and reflection, questions of human life and meaning, and attention to matters of character, ethics, and the development of citizenship. But these concerns would also accommodate a concrete engagement with the practical world that is typically associated with the applied arts.

Communicative Action and the Public Sphere

To begin articulating such a pedagogy, we can turn now to Habermas's theory of *communicative action*. To begin, Habermas recalls Max Weber's analysis of modernity. Weber defines modernity as the splitting of cultural reason into three discrete spheres, those of science, morality, and art, which came to be separated when the unified paradigm of religion and metaphysics unraveled.[28] By the eighteenth-century Enlightenment, Habermas determines, the separation led to the formation of three autonomous cultural realms: the cognitive-instrumental, moral-practical, and aesthetic-expressive. During the nineteenth-century "age of progress," knowledge became fragmented and administered as the contents of specialized knowledge to be handed down by professional experts. What accrued to culture through specialized treatment and reflection, Habermas adds, became divorced from the property of everyday life.[29] But everyday life depends on the interactive relationship of each sphere in order, he says, to safeguard social praxis from social coercion. It is the cumulative effects of this rupture that have led, Habermas says, to "the crisis of modernity."[30]

Throughout his writings, Habermas is concerned with the question of whether or not democracy is possible in the context of cultural fragmentation within advanced, global capitalism. That he hypothesizes in all his works practices that will strengthen this possibility reflects a conviction that opportunities for democratic action have not yet been exhausted, and that the Enlightenment remains "an unfinished project."[31] In advanced states, he claims, private interests have overlapped into public arenas, and state and social systems have become interlinked. In this situation, private interests seeking to influence the political aims of the state constrain open discussion, and citizens are no longer able to participate equally in the political process. Two tasks must be undertaken, he concludes, to reintegrate cultural spheres and reconstruct democratic action. First, a *public sphere* that mediates between state and private citizens must be reintroduced. A public sphere consists of any space or process in which citizens reflect upon and make apparent political and administrative decisions of the state.[32] Second, *communicative practices* that comprise open civic discourse

must be redeveloped. With these recommendations, Habermas lays the groundwork for his theory of communicative action.[33]

The emergence of critique potentiated by cognitive differentiation fatefully distinguishes, for Habermas, the secular and modern from traditional religious societies. By opening a possibility for interpretation and revision of existing conditions, critique constitutes the grounds for a continued commitment to another axiomatic principle of the Enlightenment—*rationality*. Habermas defines rationality as any way that decentered subjects, in possession of an independent and objective mind, apply cognition to form judgments. He contends that to understand fully the failures of modernity and recognize, as well, its possibilities, it is necessary to inquire into the uses of several kinds of rationality, together with the relationship of each to the production of knowledge. The crucial concept for Habermas is not rationality as such, but that the differentiation of modern consciousness into three worlds elicited a diversification of *rationalities*. The attitude of the actor in *teleological*, or goal-directed, rationality (cognitive-instrumental) is objectivation, treating the object of inquiry as having an existence that is external to and apart from the self. The attitude of the actor in *normatively regulated* rationality (moral=practical) is social and norm-conformative, and in *dramaturgical* rationality (aesthetic-expressive), the expression of a free and autonomous subjectivity.[34] He suggests that a one-dimensional application of each model of rational action has correlated in modernity with the fragmentation of consciousness into its three domains.

The fragmented, disengaged, and anomic state of contemporary life resulting from the splitting apart of rationality leads Habermas to attend to the importance of building up communicative praxes in social life for critical reflection. At this point, it is important to acknowledge Habermas's fundamental proposal that in the world that confronts *us*—a world whose Enlightened legacies and traditions are transparent even in the manners by which we try to quash them, a world where all attempts at discovering ultimate foundations for knowledge have broken down—any possibility for democratic action and civic discourse depends on a dialectical critical theory. To elaborate, Habermas proposes that we conceive of modern societies simultaneously as *lifeworlds* and *systems*.[35] The hermeneutic concept of lifeworlds refers to the taken-for-granted universe of daily social living—that storehouse of knowledge, tradition, and custom unconsciously passed from one generation to next. Language is the dominant medium of the lifeworld, a "culturally transmitted and linguistically organized stock of interpretive patterns."[36]

Systems, on the other hand, are society's structural features: institutions, bureaucracies, administrations, and formal regulations—those organizations generally derivative of government and economics. Habermas describes these arenas as "speechless" because they do not feature the communicative orientations of the lifeworld but are, instead, governed by non-linguistic media—in particular, money and power. In modern capitalist societies, he observes, systems and lifeworlds have

become polarized by the pervasive application at all levels of society of teleological rationality as the mechanism of formal, means-end, instrumental reasoning. The resulting "rationalization" of society has been distorted, he believes, by a form of rational action used to dominate persons and things rather than as tools for achieving cooperative understanding.

These distortions have forged societies in which systems categories have progressively impinged upon the communicative patterns in lifeworlds, which continue to diminish against the progressive reach of technology. The "colonization of the lifeworld"[37] as such has lessened the need for consensus by communicative means because disagreements are resolved by established structures of power through regulation and law. Simultaneously, the possibilities for autonomy and mutual understanding decline with the polarization of lifeworlds from structures of decision leading to systematic dehumanization.[38]

Another effect of this movement, Habermas says, is the continuing erosion of public spheres that allow for a reflective critique of controlling actions at the systems level. He attributes a progressive erosion of public spheres to the colonization of the lifeworld by the apparatuses of systems. The idea of the colonization—or "rationalization"—of the lifeworld by systems means that

> it is not the differentiation and independent development of cultural value spheres that lead to the cultural impoverishment of everyday communicative practice, but an elitist splitting-off of expert cultures from contexts of communicative action in daily life . . . [and] the penetration of forms of economic and administrative rationality into [this realm].[39]

Habermas concludes that the Enlightenment's vision of a secular life and democratic action, guided by reason, cannot be achieved without attenuating the pattern of rationality that methodically deracinates the lifeworld and eviscerates the public spheres necessary for deliberative reflection.

To undertake this reversal, he introduces a fourth concept of rationality, that of *communicative action*. By integrating the three-world model of rationality into communicative action, Habermas gives hope for the possibility of democratic emancipation. In contrast to teleological rationality, which is oriented to reaching *success* by egocentric calculation, *communicative* rationality aims to achieve *understanding* by *uncoerced agreement* between actors.[40] As a medium of social integration expressed in language, communicative action is therefore proper to the lifeworld. In the lifeworld, where speakers and listeners are able to refer simultaneously to things in the subjective, objective, and social worlds, they can subordinate the conduct of systems to decisions made through the open discourse of practical and emancipatory communicative action. Habermas derives from

hermeneutics the central component of communicative action, that of *interpretation*. Interpretation refers, first, to the background lifeworld which informs individual perception and, second, to the process involved in negotiating situations which admit consensus. For each party in communicative action, "the interpretive task consists in incorporating the others' interpretation into one's own in such a way that in the revised version . . . the divergent situation definitions can be brought to coincide sufficiently."[41]

So in contrast to the one dimensional applications of teleological, normative, and dramaturgical rationalities, communicative rationality aims to achieve understanding among participants able to "overcome their merely subjective world and . . . assure themselves of both the unity of the objective world, and the intersubjectivity of their lifeworlds."[42] Under these circumstances, *all* have equal rights to initiate debate, question, express wishes, feelings and intentions, make assertions and recommendations, and challenge justifications.[43] Otherwise, for Habermas, such a consensus is *prima facie* neither genuine nor rational. Communicative action as such seeks a practical, intersubjective understanding as rational grounds for ethical and political claims traditionally sought in metaphysics or religion.

With communicative action, finally, Habermas points to the possibility of subordinating "media-steered" systems to decisions accomplished in open communication. Central to this possibility is the securing of a public sphere in the lifeworld where practical decisions can be made through collective discussion and agreement, in spaces as uninfluenced by differential power as possible. Habermas's project is to devise real or virtual public sites where communicative action can flourish. For if it can be cultivated in "uncorrupted" spaces in the lifeworld, he contends, then democratic action remains an underlying notion in our culture.

Theatre Curriculum as Communicative Action

For several reasons, educational sites hold opportunities for inquiry, practice, and cultivation of what Habermas calls "building up the interactive to coordinate actions" in accord with the critical interest.[47] First, he asserts that the "rationalization of worldviews" occurs in learning processes.[48] Second, classrooms and curricula in which educational missions are carried out are both interactive and public. Third, because learning processes are institutionalized here, colleges are settings where system and lifeworld directly interact. The conditions for a communicative curriculum comprise, then, a structure for practical and critical reflection by fellow subjects acting with and among subjects, rather than upon objects—intrinsic to the technical interest. The focus is on understanding and reflection, the inclusion of multiple voices and perspectives, and the development of kinships across cultural boundaries. True, forms of coercion at all levels of institutionalized education obviously constrain, even prevent, open discourse. But on hermeneutical grounds,

Habermas counters that "the lifeworld has to be able to develop insights out of itself."[49] So with the aim of constructing a *bona fide* public space to mediate between systems and lifeworlds, I shall hypothesize theatre education, an aesthetic-expressive medium, as an apt setting for the realization of communicative action.

The intrinsically public, interactive, and aesthetic character of theatre and performance recommends it as a site for emancipatory communicative action. The form that theatrical practice takes is situated in the ongoing tension between the creative insights of the self and the generality of affiliations we share with a community of others. Hence, in the field of theatre work, subjective, objective, and social actions are all, in varying degrees, in play. As a medium of human expression, performance is ritualistic, formal, and public. As such, it is rooted in rational social behavior. Like communicative action, theatre is capable of theoretical reflection on action. Finally, the process of making theatre "coordinates action" in face-to-face, social contexts where the possibility always exists for theatre artists and spectators to realize a collective agreement. The full process of making theatre can occasion an aesthetic dialectical continuum of action and response that *usefully* (not transcendentally) attends to the unpredictable nature of the world.

Habermas stresses that communicative action occurs in the context of the socially constructed lifeworld where persons publicly, and communally, form normative judgments. Likewise, theatre can occur in a specific lifeworld context where its multiple participants publicly and interactively form aesthetic and critical judgments. (These "agreements" comprise what Habermas calls rational communication.) As with communicative action, the illocutionary effects of language (verbal and nonverbal) bind participants in a performance event across the subjective, objective, and social domains of cognition.

A distinctive feature of theatre curricula as emancipatory action would be the promotion of presentational, experiential learning. Certainly, the concept of experiential pedagogy is not new, especially in theatre education, which has advertised its experiential, "hands-on" advantages since day one. But given our Western heritage of linguistic representation—of philosophy over hermeneutics and rhetoric, and of foundations over history—genuine experiential learning is a radical and elusive project. "Hands-on," for instance, is not synonymous with "experiential." Duplicating the mimetic, text-led tradition in Western theatre, the dominant model for theatre education has ultimately been representational—even in "practical" courses like acting, directing, lighting design, and so forth. Lacking a theory of praxis, curricula in this vein still reduce the arts and the symbolic universe to models for an empirical kind of social, aesthetic, or formal analysis.

From this perspective, we are in a position to ask what uses of communicative action inspire as an antidote to the epistemological dichotomy that afflicts the field, frustrating its interest in legitimation. The first dispensation typifies what I earlier called aesthetically-oriented curricula. The second typifies what I have

called market-oriented curricula. Both are outcomes of a technical interest that brought us to the dead-end of craft vs. culture. But the aesthetically and market-oriented structures could be fruitfully repaired if subsumed in a *civically-oriented*, communicative interest that would stress knowledge in action, familiarity with cultural worlds, and aesthetic conversation across multiple perspectives. A civic orientation, through communicative action, would promote understanding of cultural forces that shape performance as public phenomena while examining the intersections of aesthetic, social, and curricular interests. Lastly, the project necessitates a linking with other disciplinary methodologies by which the definition of liberal arts, as we have seen, can be altered. Such a model can be found in that of the engaged university—a model that might facilitate theatre's disciplinary legitimacy on the basis of its potential as reflexive praxis.

Theatre Studies in the Engaged University

Habermas's critique of predatory systems in the lifeworld coincides with the current notion of the engaged university. This model promotes a more active academic relationship with social and natural worlds outside established boundaries of institutional traditions and procedures. An engaged epistemology embraces its public and communal character and sees intellectual development in curricula that stress pragmatic and interdisciplinary approaches to civic involvement.[50] Most importantly, it has been positioned as a site for an epistemological praxis within the context of the emergent corporate and entrepreneurial university.

A core element of the scholarship of academic engagement is its critique of academic neutrality on questions of value. It challenges prevailing traditions that centralize a teleological acquisition of skills taught by professional experts while eschewing understanding and acting within public sites where democratic action can be practiced. Consonant with Habermas's critique of cultural fragmentation, it argues, too, that the dominant concept of intellectual growth focuses on value-neutral analytical reasoning. Carol Geary Schneider characterizes this curriculum as fundamentally procedural in that it "interferes in political society only to assure that individuals have fair access to a political and economic sphere, with each envisioned as open markets of freely competing individuals."[51] The individualistic and instrumental nature of this model fails to prepare students to participate critically and relationally in ways that will encourage civic and democratic culture, with ethical responsibility toward others. Instead, a technicist and procedural dispensation implicitly contributes not just to the severance of academic from hermeneutical life, but of academic disciplines from each other. Engaged scholarship calls for a more direct integration of analytical reasoning with civic affairs where questions of ethical value are implicit. Accordingly, curricula should incorporate initiatives that strengthen civically-oriented and interdisciplinary inquiry—i.e., projects that

bolster interconnectedness between actions in the lifeworld and political life, and within disciplinary culture.

Let us consider in general terms what engaged theatre pedagogy would become if it were conceived according to Habermas's theory. Above all, it would define knowledge as a kind of action, or practice, not as the specialized treatment of things to be transmitted, say, from one generation to the next. With this dispensation in mind, I suggest three interrelated tenets for a grounded structure from which to generate learning practices and activities. The first tenet is committed to building public communities of learning toward *a dialogical and contextual formulation of knowledge*. In this way, curricula would emphasize understanding and sociation over the preparation for careers upon graduation. It would derive from students' symbolic creativity and so would begin with their own experiences and extend outward to the world that shapes them. As such, it stipulates that the gulf between the student-as-object and the dominating teacher-as-expert be reconstituted as an emancipatory relationship of equality and collaboration. A contextualized curriculum as such would elevate the importance of non-scripted, student-devised texts and performances. "Scripted theatre" is typically concerned with the single vision of a playwright, interpreted and staged according to a well-honed production hierarchy headed by a director. Non-scripted theatre is distinguished by an emphasis on developing new texts and performances in a collaborative process.

The second tenet emphasizes *citizenship over skill development*. With this slant, a curriculum would redirect the individualistic interests typical of theatre students to the uses of theatre forms—inside and outside the classroom—that speak to public and social issues. This tenet departs from prevailing strategies that shape teaching to imperatives of the college theatre production, defining theatre not as a building, nor as an accumulation of technological acquisitions and methods managed by experts, but as theatre making with the resources needed for communicative action: public space, a community of performers, and spectators or participants. Above all, aesthetic and moral interests would not be bifurcated into two, institutionally governed camps. An important component of the curriculum as such would concern the make-up and site of "audiences" and the exploration of citizenship in relationship to space. Student-devised performances could function in classrooms, black boxes, theatres, and found spaces but would also motivate participatory and applied performance methods in theatre making with community partners outside the university's borders. Theatre can play a vital role in forging relationships between colleges and living communities, and we can encourage our students to discover ways this might happen.

The third tenet focuses on theatre study as a form of *reflective engagement* with public culture and language. With this tenet, a critical dimension would aim to buoy students' capabilities for mediating between lifeworld and systems categories. In this orientation, the curriculum would connect original student-based

work experimenting with performative conventions, texts, and media with critical study of the relationship between performer, mise-en-scène, venue, and audience or community partnership. With this approach we ought not neglect the aesthetic and ritual fields of drama, that is, the continuum of comparative theatrical forms. Understanding a variety of historical and cultural traditions would open access to the widest range of symbolic and performative material, from genre, technique, and convention, to performers, texts, authors, and designers, and to artistic and intellectual movements. To exile theatre from its histories is to deprive students of any living sense of a tradition involving plays, actors, performances, and performance forms.

This curricular framework, then, would harbor a greater appreciation of critical theory. The study of theatrical history, literature, and theory would provide for analysis of theatrical representation through critical and interpretive languages. For this project, we can now draw concepts and vocabularies from performance studies, cultural studies, semiotics, psychoanalysis, and feminist and postcolonial theory, among others. By examining the continuum of theatrical forms and critical theories, students engage in a conversation between tradition and innovation. Inventive interpretation of received work changes that work while the process of embodying the work changes the student; we reconstitute the past and it reconstitutes us.

My argument, then, does not advise that we jettison the theatrical and dramatic canon and the classical repertoire, or "high art" and the "Western cultural heritage" from curricula. Nor is it an attack on the considerable accomplishments of past and current theatre educators who have succeeded—often ingeniously and against the odds—in legitimizing theatre study in higher education, and making it a significant force in American theatre. I argue, instead, that theatre history, literature, and criticism should not be turned into justifying categories which then dominate interpretations seeking evidences. Habermas says,

> [T]he project aims at a differentiated relinking of modern culture with an everyday praxis that still depends on vital heritages, but would be impoverished through mere traditionalism. . . . This new connection can only be established under the condition that societal modernization will also be steered in a new direction.[52]

To bring about a "relinking," students would go back and forth between their own cultural milieu and received aesthetic traditions in such a way as to illuminate both. The process would accentuate theatre's reflexive nature to unveil tacit assumptions within social myths and discourses that codify relationships between lifeworlds and systems.

Practicing a Communicative and Engaged Pedagogy

Let us recall that what differentiates a communicative curriculum are its *practices*. One approach to a critical aesthetic praxis would be to introduce required courses intended to generate a communicative ethos rather than to produce technical excellence. Students in these courses would not accumulate skills according to the terms of professional expertise, but would participate in theatre making in which the "non-specialist" (amateur) has equal access to the production of theatrical culture. In these settings, the emergent aesthetic and cultural interests of the group would supersede the reproduction of pre-specified outcomes—for example, those of the theatre teacher/director as artistic expert. The teacher would serve as a facilitator, integrating theatre forms and other possibilities—ideas, personal histories, images, objects, artworks—with students' social and political concerns to instigate theatre projects and to discuss intersections between performance, social issues, and community. Existing training of students as actors, designers, technicians, and directors, along with innovative study of cross-cultural and cutting edge performance forms, would be brought to bear neither for the sole pursuit of "art for art's sake," nor as the teaching of vocational skills. Instead, performance competencies would be geared toward bolstering the theatrical and aesthetic impact in the production of community-oriented performances. Finally, as we have seen, teachers would provide critical languages for understanding cultural forces that give rise to and shape performances as public phenomena.

We can now move to the more specific problem of designing the theatre course as a critical aesthetic praxis in the production of communicative knowledge. There is, of course, no all-purpose methodology in any discipline, including theatre studies. Pedagogical approaches in what Schneider calls "relational learning" include 1) Collaborative Inquiry, 2) Experiential Learning, 3) Integrative Learning, 4) Project-based Learning, and 5) Service-Learning.[53] Teachers are using most of these methods in theatre making already. For example, scholars in the field once called oral interpretation, now performance studies, are expanding the meanings of "text" and "performance" to include an array of cultural, oral, aesthetic, and social texts. Teachers have adopted theatre-making, integrative strategies that spur interest in recreating into presentational performance tropes: community-based oral history, ethnographic study, storytelling, and performance of culture, along with personal narrative and conversational analysis.[54]

In engaged curricula, student-devised, community-based projects and service-learning, typically elective, would move to the center. A growing interest in experiential praxis is reflected in numerous case-studies published in a variety of journals. In individual courses and extra-curricular projects educators are developing student-devised theatre-making forms to discover new dimensions of theatrical culture, stage performances in non-theatrical spaces, and conduct site-specific community projects.[55]

A rich area of activity generally undiscovered at the college level lies in the field of primary and secondary education. Driven since the 1970s by artists and teachers in Great Britain, Australia, and Canada, the field once called “creative dramatics” has evolved into multiple applications including “drama/theatre” as social action.[56] Jonathan Neelands speaks of “drama/theatre” in order to break with the tradition in process drama that designates “drama” and “theatre” as opposing terms. He offers, instead, new forms of performance that encompass “the process of drama tradition within a broader field of theatre which acknowledges both the Euro-American performance tradition and other ‘rich traditions’ as well—Noh, Kathakali, and Topeng Pagegan.[57] English language journals and publications of the International Drama Education Association (IDEA) are forums for research in applied and participatory theatre making. Active research in Western and non-Western societies focuses on recent theatre work in identity-formation, social justice, and economic equality.[58]

The first IDEA world congress convened in Brisbane, Australia, in 1995 and has since become part of an educational paradigm in the making—global in scope, intercultural in texture, democratic in style—that promotes theatre studies as an agent for transforming self and society. Summarizing the research presented at the first congress, Neelands outlines the agendas for two themes. For the first, which addressed cultural action, the agenda was “a) intercultural, multicultural, and community theatre, b) intracultural communication through the medium of drama/theatre, c) women’s theatre and indigenous theatre, d) oral traditions and traditional performing arts in a contemporary context, and e) the influence of Asian culture and theatre forms on contemporary non-Asian theatre.” For the second theme, which addressed the needs of young people, the agenda was “a) the role of drama/theatre in the ongoing struggle for social justice, human rights, and cultural action, b) drama/theatre work with young people in war zones and other institutions of threat currently suffered by children, young people, and adults, and c) the drama/theatre work that presents positive images of social justice, peace, and an ecologically sustainable world to children and young people.”[59]

In sum, a civically-oriented pedagogy, embodied in a curricular praxis of communicative action, might heal the breach between aesthetically-oriented and market-oriented visions. Active participation that is motivated by the practical and critical interests would constitute a departure from the kind of participation that prevails in technicist curricula which tend to subsume the pedagogical agenda within the imperatives of the main-stage college theatre production. Curriculum as a critical praxis would change the idea of “getting a show on its feet” to reflexive theatre making as an agent in democratic action. This idea defines theatre as an aesthetic arrangement of ideas put into practice with the resources needed for a communicative curriculum: a public space and students as inventors and participants in dialectical critique.

A coherent theory revisioning the undergraduate theatre curriculum as a public site for Habermas's project would shift formalistic and technicist curricula to an emancipatory communicative praxis that stressed active and collaborative learning, embraced multi-disciplinary perspectives, and incorporated rationally-based and values-based knowledge. Centralizing open, uncoerced conversation would reinstate the traditional definition of liberal education as freedom to think and learn outside any structure or dogma. But, in cultivating an aesthetic sensibility that reintegrates the cognitive-instrumental, moral-practical, and aesthetic-expressive spheres that Habermas identified, we define free thinking as inseparable from ethical thinking. This viewpoint recommends an exploration of theatre studies that would robustly contribute to the formulation of engaged education, legitimize the field, and move it from the university's margins to its center.

Notes

1. For a detailed discussion of the historical relationship between the aesthetic and market orientations, and their correlation with two visions of modern university—the *humanist* and the *utilitarian*—see Anne Berkeley, "Changing Theories of Knowledge: The Struggle for Theatre Studies in Higher Education, 1900-1980," *Teaching Theatre Today: Pedagogical Views of Theatre in Higher Education*, eds. Anne L. Fliotsos and Gail Medford (New York: Palgrave, 2004) 7-30.

2. David Koeppel, "Choosing a College Major: For Love or for the Money?" *New York Times* 5 Dec. 2004, late ed., sec. 10: 1+.

3. Herbert M. Kliebard, *The Struggle for the American Curriculum: 1893-1958* (New York: Routledge & Kagen Paul, 1986).

4. In Aristotle's notion of praxis, language, ideas, and social relations mutually support one another, making the separation of *ideas* and *actions* conceptually flawed.

5. The origins of this separation can be found in the colonial college's aim to preserve the past and to prepare a leadership of minister-teacher-scholars. Promoting classical and theological learning, the concept of "liberal" education sought to strengthen the faculties of mind that would liberate individuals from cares thought to be incompatible with wisdom, for example, physical appearance, personal gain, and social approval. Set apart from the "servile arts," the liberal arts of classical culture were associated with an "ideal," and as such, centered on disciplined, intrinsically valuable inquiry. Derived from the seven "artes liberales" of medieval universities (grammar, rhetoric, logic, geometry, arithmetic, astronomy, and music), the curriculum consisted of those domains of knowledge associated with the "higher" things of life. See Bruce A. Kimball, *Orators and Philosophers: A History of the Idea of Liberal Education* (New York: Teachers College P, 1986) 15-23.

6. Laurence R. Veysey, *The Emergence of the American University* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1965) 113-130.

7. 113-134.

8. Louis Menand, "What are Universities For?" *Falling into Theory: Conflicting Views on Reading Literature*, ed. David H. Richter (Boston: St. Martin's P, 1994) 88-99.

9. To understand how utilitarianism became associated with liberal culture during this period, see Veysey 59-120.

10. 125-134.

11. Clifford Eugene Hamar, "College and University Theatre Instruction in the Early Twentieth Century," *History of Speech Education in America*, ed. Karl Wallace (New York: Apple-Century-Crofts, 1954) 572-594.

12. Gerald Graff, *Professing Literature: An Institutional History* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1987) 98-118.

13. Matthew Arnold, *Culture and Anarchy: An Essay in Political and Social Criticism* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1971) 69. Original edition (London: Smith and Elder, 1869).

14. Berkeley 11-12.

15. John Young Wray, “A Curriculum Plan for a Major in Play Direction,” *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 27 (1941): 412
16. To understand the origins and progression of the “craft vs. culture” controversy, see Berkeley 13-20.
17. Burnet M. Hobgood, “Theatre in U.S. Higher Education: Emerging Patterns and Problems,” *Educational Theatre Journal* 16 (1964): 139-147.
18. Jack Morrison, *Rise of the Arts on the American Campus* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1973) 42-59.
19. Hobgood 144.
20. For more detail on the professionalization of undergraduate theatre curricula after the Second World War, see Berkeley 17-20.
21. For a summary and discussion of Dewey’s pedagogy, along with those of Susanne Langer and Alfred North Whitehead, see Margaret Mahoney, “The Opportunities and Constraints for the University and the Arts,” *Arts in Society* 10 (October 1973): 118-124.
22. Robert E. Gard, “In Education: Educational Theatre,” *Theatre in America: Appraisal and Challenge for the National Theatre Conference*, eds. Robert E. Gard, Marston Balch, and Pauline Temkin (Madison, WI: Denbar Educational Research Services, 1968) 78.
23. For a concise summary of Habermas’s theory of knowledge constitutive interests, see Jürgen Habermas, *Knowledge and Human Interests*, trans. J. Shapiro (Boston: Beacon P, 1971) 191-194; 301-317.
24. 11-12; 21-29.
25. 12-15; 79-99.
26. 18; 121-140.
27. Berkeley 12.
28. Jürgen Habermas, “Modernity—An Incomplete Project,” *The Anti-Aesthetic*, ed. Hal Foster (Seattle: Bay P, 2000) 9.
29. 9.
30. “Modernity.”
31. “Modernity.”
32. Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*, trans. Thomas Burger (Cambridge, MA: MIT P, 1989).
33. Jürgen Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action, Volume One: Reason and the Rationalization of Society [TCA I]*, trans. Thomas McCarthy (Boston: Beacon P, 1984) and *The Theory of Communicative Action, Volume Two, Lifeworld and System: A Critique of Functionalist Reason [TCA II]*, trans. Thomas McCarthy (Boston: Beacon P, 1984).
34. In teleological (alternately, *strategic*) action, the actor accomplishes an end or brings about a desired effect by choosing means that promise to be successful, if applied in a suitable manner. Teleological action, which gave rise to the scientific method and logical positivism, presupposes one world—an objective world that can be known through means-end, or instrumental, reasoning. Presupposing two worlds, subjective and social, *normatively regulated action* is applied not by the solitary actor but by members of a social group. Functioning as a normative force in society, it expresses the formation of common values and rules of behavior. Presupposing two worlds, internal and external, *dramaturgical action* is the outward expression of subjectivity, that domain of reality to which only one individual has access. See *TCA I* 85-6.
35. *TCA II* 118.
36. 124.
37. *TCA I* 232.
38. *TCA II* 311, 317.
39. 330.
40. *TCA I* 86.
41. 69-70.
42. 10.
43. 287.
44. 43-75.
45. 48.
46. 52.
47. 223.
48. 214.
49. Habermas, “Modernity” 13.
50. For surveys of “the engaged university,” see Thomas Ehrlich, ed., *Civic Responsibility and*

Higher Education (Phoenix: Council of Education/Oryx P, 2000), and Tracy K. Soska and Alice K. John, *University-Community Partnerships: Universities in Civic Engagement* (Binghamton, NY: Haworth Social Work Practice P, 2004).

51. Carol Geary Schneider, "Educational Missions and Civic Responsibility: Toward the Engaged Academy," *Civic Responsibility and Higher Education*, ed. Thomas Ehrlich (Westport, CT: The American Council on Education and The Oryx P, 2000) 106.

52. Habermas, "Modernity" 13.

53. Schneider 112.

54. See, for example, Richard Bauman, ed. *Folklore, Cultural Performance, and Popular Entertainments: A Communications-Centered Handbook* (New York: Oxford U P, 1992); Dwight Conquergood, "'A Sense of the Other': Interpretation and Ethnographic Research," *The Jensen Lectures: Contemporary Communication Study*, ed. Isabel Crouch (Las Cruces: New Mexico State U P, 1983); Elizabeth C. Fine and Jean Haskell Speer, eds., *Performance, Culture, and Identity* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1992); Shannon Jackson, "Ethnography and Audition: Performance as Ideological Critique," *Text and Performance Quarterly* 13 (1993): 21-43; Carol Simpson Stern, and Bruce Henderson, eds., *Performance: Texts and Contexts* (Cartersville, GA.: Longman Publishing Group, 1993); Nathan Stucky, "Unnatural Acts: Performing Natural Conversation," *Literature in Performance* 8 (1988): 28-39; Nathan Stucky and Cynthia Wimmer, eds., *Teaching Performance Studies* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois U P, 2002); and Yordan, Judy E. *Experimental Theatre: Creating and Staging Texts* (Prospect Heights, IL: Waveland P, 1997).

55. Anne Elizabeth Armstrong, "Paradoxes in Community-Based Pedagogy: Decentering Students Through Oral History Performance," *Theatre Topics* 10 (2000): 113-128; Diane Brewer, "West Side Silence: Producing *West Side Story* with Deaf and Hearing Actors," *Theatre Topics* 12 (2002): 17-34; Les Essif, "(Re-)Creating The Critique: In(tro)ducing the Semiotics of Theatre in the Foreign Language Performance Project," *Theatre Topics* 12 (2002): 119-143; Gagnon, Pauline D. "Acting Integrative: Interdisciplinarity and Theatre Pedagogy," *Theatre Topics* 8 (1998): 189-204; Bruce McConachie, "Approaching the 'Structure of Feeling' in Grassroots Theatre," *Theatre Topics* 8 (1998): 33-54; J. Schmor, "Devising New Theatre for College Programs," *Theatre Topics* 14 (2004): 259-274; M. Schutzman, "Guru Clown, or Pedagogy of the Carnivalesque," *Theatre Topics* 12 (2002): 63-86; Chris Anne Strickling, "Actual Lives: Cripples in the House," *Theatre Topics* 12 (2002): 143-162; and Phillip B. Zarrilli, "Between Theory[es] and Practice[es]: Dichotomies or Dialogue," *Theatre Topics* 5 (1995): 111-122.

56. Jonathan Neelands, "Agendas for Change, Renewal and Difference," *Drama, Culture and Empowerment: The IDEA Dialogues*, eds. John O'Toole and Kate Donelan (Brisbane, Australia: IDEA Publications, 1996) 20-32.

57. 24-25.

58. 20.

59. 23-24.