Bakhtin on Site:
Chronotopes in Theatre in the Wild's *Dragon Island*

Theresa Joette May

The audience has been sitting on a hillside, discussing the memories that waft to mind when they crush sprigs of lavender, rosemary, and sage between their fingers. Merlin bursts through the blackberry brambles just behind them. "Blasted vines!" His long purple cape flapping in the wind, he weaves among them like a fire and brimstone preacher preparing his flock for the hereafter. "See those pools of light? Each is a door-way into remembrance! Today, who-you-think-you-are will escape you and you will find yourselves on a beam of light, a glint of sun, a dewdrop. Ever see yourself in a dewdrop?" Later in an old apple grove, knee-deep in wild daisies, audience members whoop it up and wallop one another with sacks of straw, thereby earning their place in the King's hunting party. They are assigned a guide, given parchment maps bearing place names such as Bog of Bog and the Old Roman Road; they must find their way to the Sacred Grove. Ultimately, negotiating a series of footbridges on their way to the river where the dragon has been spotted, some audience members demand to know why the dragon must die; others plot a revolt.

In *Dragon Island*, Theatre in the Wild's site-specific production, the *mise-en-scene* is an immersion experience; the performance takes the audience on a two-mile trek through woods, marshes, and meadows; the land becomes a living text that knits the site with the world of the play; "reality" and "illusion" mingle and marry in the sensu-ous container of the landscape. Consequently, the hope of "reading" systems of signifi-

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cation must be given up at the outset. The polyphony of site-specific work quickly whirls out of control, uncontainable. Meaning-making in *Dragon Island* is best understood in light of what phenomenologist David Abram has called the "potentized field of intelligence in which our actions participate" (260). Bodies, landscape, and narrative blur into a cacophony of being, presences in a field of presencing, layers of stories spun wildly on a "stage" that is all encompassing.

Dragon Island is the work of my own hand, at least primarily. I wrote the script to be staged in the wild, and have twice revised and directed it for two different natural environments. An artist undertaking an analysis of her own work runs the risk of spinning pages of theoretical fancy, and my analysis will, no doubt, be blinded by what amounts to familial bias. Moreover, theory is often like twenty-twenty hindsight. After the fire of creation and production, the unpredicted moments of magic, the unanticipated catastrophes, and the obvious lead balloons, theory fits too coolly and conveniently into a demonstration of what occurred and what was intended. At the time of creation, theoretical concepts are as far from the artist's mind as cleaning the refrigerator. But if theory and practice are to have a rich and reciprocal give-and-take, then an artist too can benefit from reflective theorizing about her own work.

As a practitioner, theory provides me with tools to translate into written language—albeit with unavoidable gaps and slippage—what is primarily an intuitive and kinesthetic process. Doing so allows others in on an artistic decision-making process; and more importantly, provides my actors and I a new way of seeing what worked and what did not, and to some extent why. Here the benefit of theory is direct and material—it can empower the artist by clarifying the workings of the art. The many theorists who have helped illuminate site-specific theatre, such as Bert O. States' splendid discussion of the presence of the actor and the phenomenology of the actor-spectator relationship, as well as Richard Schechner's *Environmental Theatre*, form the ground from which this analysis proceeds. The larger project of understanding eco-theatre and site-specific performances must necessarily build on their work and others. In this instance, however, my purpose as a practitioner is to turn theory on my work to see into it more clearly. In attempting to articulate what I call "inclusive drama," I found Mikhail Bakhtin's notion of the "chronotope" provides a way of talking about the multi-layered aspects of a work shaped by the immediacy of both the natural environment and audience participants. Employing a theoretical model as atomistic as Bakhtin's chronotope in the face of this excess may seem ludicrous to some, a pointless exercise to others, perhaps the work of a fundamentalist semiotician lost in the rarefied world of Russian formalism. But, when combined with David Abram's phenomenology of language as an aspect of our sensuous immersion in the "more than human world," the chronotope is not so atomistic as it might appear. Like the permeable boundaries of the world of the play when superimposed on the visceral world of the land, the chronotope has flex. Gilles Deleuze has called for theory that "is an instrument of multiplication and . . . also multiplies itself" (208). Certainly the chronotope, in referring to those "knots" in repre-

sentation when words leap off the page and "take on flesh" was designed to multiply (84). In the theatre this occurs both materially and metaphorically, and the chronotope provides a bridge between the structural workings of a piece and its phenomenological excess. My use of Bakhtin's chronotope then is neither an academic exercise nor an attempt to pour new wine into an old bottle. It is an extension of the creative process that generated a site-specific performance in which I had to move one hundred people through a physically rigorous and viscerally generous setting, and within which a certain narrative had to unfold sequentially, more or less.

In this analysis I ask myself and my production three questions: How does the narrative of *Dragon Island* interface with the landscape? How are spectators transformed into "participants" and what conventions govern their behavior? In other words, how do we get the audience member to do what we want them to do and not what we do not want them to do? And thirdly, how did the production, as rehearsed representation, cope with the unforeseen intrusions of both audience and natural landscape? This third question refers not only to what the actors do with an unplanned intrusion, or what Bert States has called a "fissure" (States 362). It also explores how the audience copes with anomalies, and how the fictional world and the landscape often appear to *include* the intrusion and put it to narrative use. When discussing the *Mountain Project*, Jerzy Grotowski said descriptions "from the outside" were destined for misunderstanding, and that "only a description from within is possible" (Kumiega 186). As one of the Americans who participated in the Teatr Laboratorium's *Mountain Project* I know this to be true. There simply was no "outside."[1] And yet, the *Mountain Project* had a very specific structure that provided a context for a range of experiences. Likewise, this paper is not meant as a view from the outside, but one from a particular "inside" composed of my directorial viewpoint and to some extent the actors' perceptions of what was occurring in performance. We did not name the structures we employed as they are named herein, yet we employed them consciously for the most part.

Dragon Island is loosely drawn from the Arthurian legends, inventing and bending the myth for a more contemporary purpose—environmental awareness. Some of its characters are familiar—Merlin, Arthur, Viviane—others I invented, and as Tony Kushner says in his introduction to *Angels in America*, "liberties have been taken." Examples in this paper are drawn from our 1995 production of *Dragon Island* at Meadowbrook Farm—a patchwork of prairies, woods and wetlands along the South Fork of the Snoqualmie River in Washington State, about fifty miles from Seattle. The story centers on an adolescent girl's hidden identity, and an Arthurian quest for the "last dragon." The premise of what amounts to an all-day outing is this: Merlin, with the help of several apprentices, transports one-hundred moderns back in time to help King Arthur hunt the dragon. The King's knights see Merlin's grand experiment as a kind of publicity stunt in the face of political upheaval and Arthur's weakening authority. Meanwhile, when nature spirits reveal the girl's identity, Merlin and the Lady of the Lake are implicated in a struggle for power across time and space, and Mordred

and his factions use the travelers to shore up a coup. Scenes are staged in a dozen locations along a two-mile woodland path, requiring the audience to walk into and through the story.

Spatio-temporalities on Site

In *Dragon Island*, as the narrative was inscribed upon and shaped by the living environment, the landscape served as both the material and metaphoric passageway into the world of the play. Meadows, river, mountains, trees, wind, mud, wild roses, and screeching crows were invitations, beckoning on the edge of a threshold to a world beyond the ordinary. Yet *Dragon Island* is materially grounded in the ordinary. The spectator's olfactory, kinesthetic, and tactile senses are not quieted by comfortable seats or darkened auditorium. Instead, the body of the spectator is engaged and challenged. The performance must continually negotiate a path (literally and figuratively) between two worlds, endowing the demands of the practical with the possibility of the miraculous, enveloping the audience in the world of the play, testing the boundaries of the willing suspension of disbelief on which it depends.

In "Forms of Time and Chronotope in the Novel," Bakhtin has developed a shorthand for the way a narrative "takes on flesh" (84). His theory of the chronotope illuminates the reciprocal process of meaning-making in *Dragon Island*, which occurs at the intersection of the material landscape and the representational drama; and among the practical needs of the body, the visceral experience of the senses, and the leap of faith required by the play. Literally "time-space," the chronotope "ties and unties the knots of the narrative," weaving and unraveling its fabric of meanings (250). Bakhtin is speaking, of course, about written narratives. As embodied sensing organisms we have an appetite for the specific detail of the spatial-temporal world, and we respond to chronotopic images in a visceral way. For Bakhtin, the extent to which the elements of a story—characters, settings, actions—come off the page and live in the reader's imagination is a function of the narrative's chronotopes. In reading a text, for example, we respond to the details of a particular tree on a particular hillside in a particular moment in the life of a particular girl who wears a particular pair of shoes. In an over-simplified sense, the chronotopes of a narrative are its sensorial details, its motifs of specific time and space. Yet even as light appears as particle *and* wave, the chronotope must be understood as a both a narrative unit and a process. Chronotopes set up a particular flow, or give and take, between text and reader, and between the narrative and its historical context. Thus, the chronotope is not an image so much as it is a *field of exchange* born of the spatial-temporal images in a narrative.

The chronotopes in a narrative not only resonate with one another, but with the times and spaces of experience outside the story in which the reader lives (including memory), forming a matrix of reciprocity among narrative elements, and between the narrative and the world. As a result of this dialogism among chronotopic images, Bakhtin

explains, a text is re-met by each reader and may be renewed, and in this sense revised, throughout historical time. "The work and the world represented in it enter the real world and enrich it, and the real world enters the work ... in a continual renewing of the work through the creative perception of the listeners and readers" (254). Meanings then, even in written text, are collaborations, dialogic reverberations between reader, text, and world. Bakhtin also notes that minor chronotopes can be contained in larger, more inclusive chronotopic fields. "We may notice a number of different chronotopes and complex interactions among them ... it is common for one of these chronotopes to envelop and dominate the others ..." (252). Chronotopes grow and propagate as meaning-making occurs and their proliferation is apparently limitless.

As a narrative moves from page to stage, meanings previously apprehended through the linear reading of written text become embodied in the all-at-once immediacy of the theatrical event. As Sarah Bryant-Bertail has noted, in theatre "[t]he process of 'taking on meaning'—of signification—is a dynamic one, for the sign in the theatre is always being performed, always in the state of becoming" (1). Meaning-making in the theatre is fleeting, emergent, mutable, never fixed; it is the result of a dynamic flow of signification between audience and performance. While Bakhtin insisted that time is the dominant or fundamental component of the chronotopic image, all his "forms of time" are expressed in spatial imagery (85). His folkloric, chivalric, and biographical time, for example, are characterized by the chronotopes of the road, public square, threshold, and so on. In the theatre, performance squeezes and expands time as if it were a substance. The theatre may serve as a container for several simultaneous present-times, or presences. "Now" and "then" *take place* as "here" and "there" on the stage. The significance of spatiality in relation to performance meanings is compounded in site-specific theatre. Performers and spectators, "reality" and representation, occupy simultaneous times and spaces in the all-at-once/all-around-ness of an inclusive performance. In *Dragon Island*, this emerged as a creative inter-dependence among performers, spectators, and landscape.

Narratives take on flesh in performance, literally. The actor's own emotional, spiritual, physical, and psychological presence give flesh to the textual character, chasing from the page a life heretofore unlived, utterly unique, and ephemeral. As a field of contact between the audience and the narrative, the actor's embodied presence is chronotopic. Likewise, in *Dragon Island*, audience members enter into the enactment not as spectators, but as participants on literal common ground with performers. In *The Empty Space*, Peter Brook has described a relationship between actor and audience in which the distinction between them is "functional" but not "essential."[2] In inclusive drama, Brook's vision of the possible participant is approached and sometimes realized.

The actors, however, have rehearsed; their performance is a result of hours of collaboration in which they have constructed a fragile world that is dependent on their moment-to-moment investment in a fiction. In the absence of this accord, how do par-

ticipants know how to behave? Bakhtin's notion of the chronotope helps explain how *Dragon Island* invoked certain qualities of participation, or "performances," on the part of the audience. According to Bakhtin, certain chronotopes are characteristic of certain genres. *Dragon Island*, for example, employs Bakhtin's folkloric and chivalric genres, characterized by the primary chronotopes of "the road," the "public square," and the "miraculous world." These, in turn, provide contexts for audience participation. In "Bakhtin, Temporality and Modern Narrative," Stacy Burton observes that his literary genres "are not only aesthetic forms, but also *'profound forms of thinking'* about human experience" (44, italics in the original). In other words, according to Bakhtin, genres govern the characters' sense of who they are in relation to the world around them, and what is possible in that world. Bakhtin's genre-chronotopes represent contexts for thinking and being—possibilities of mind—in which certain behavioral archetypes emerge. Consequently, his theory not only illuminates how the fictional narrative of *Dragon Island* was grafted onto the actual features of the landscape, but also shows how certain codes may shape audience participation. On the road there are "chance encounters" and "random contingencies" (93-94). In the public square, where "the common people congregate," the private is "made public," and a person has "the right to be other" (158-63). As the story of a girl's rite of passage, the play also incorporates qualities of what Bakhtin calls the "ancient biographical" form in which a "seeker" encounters a "threshold"—or a "crisis or break in life" and must make the "decision that changes a life" (130, 248).

The Speaking Landscape: A Polyphony of Intrusions

The foundation of audience participation in *Dragon Island* is the landscape in which both participants and performers are immersed, and in which the fictional narrative takes material form. This primary context of common ground provides an ever-present invitation to participants to respond *expressively* within the secondary context—that is, the world of the play. Bakhtin describes "dominant" or overarching chronotopes that are "mutually inclusive" of, and "interwoven" with, all other chronotopes in a narrative. These foundational chronotopes form the substance from which a proliferation of narrative images "show forth" (252). The landscape itself, then, must be seen as the meta-chronotope in *Dragon Island*. Each moss-covered log, tree, gust of wind, birdsong, bush, and branch becomes the "flesh" of the world of the play and embodies its meanings.

There are two interdependent narratives in *Dragon Island*—the text-based story of the imaginary world, and the site-based immersion-ary world—that is, the immediate bodily experience of the environment. The performance meanings generated by the landscape include all the prior cultural and personal layers of association brought by participants, as well as the layers of historic meaning already embedded in the land. A mountain visible from the site figures in Native myth as the birthplace of the Snoqualmie people; wild apple trees signify an abandoned apple orchard from the valley's early

agricultural economy; a railroad trestle is remnant of the first Burlington Northern railroad into the valley; and giant old-growth stumps are reminders of the northwest logging industry of the nineteenth century. These layers of history present in the land speak even as the fictional narrative is introduced. The text-based story and the sensorial narrativity of the site are the two cross threads that form the fabric of the performance experience. The material journey infiltrates the metaphoric quest in such a way that the narrative of the play becomes indissoluble from its sited-ness in the land.

The material landscape weaves into the fictional text-based story of *Dragon Island* in two fundamental ways: as planned inclusion or as spontaneous intrusion. In the first case, collaboration with the environment is designed into the work; in the second instance, the cross-pollination between the fictional world and the material one comes as a surprise to performers and spectators as the landscape emerges as "player." Bert States has identified this break in planned action: "everything is going along 'as written.' But suddenly the flow is broken, a fissure opens, and out pops a new delight . . . a slice of human behavior that exists, in cameo, for its own sake" (362). In site-specific performance, this "fissure" and "delight" can mean not only an actor's fresh discovery, but an audience member's sudden contribution to the narrative—an anecdote, a question, a joke, an interesting rock or piece of moss. Or it can mean the sudden intrusion of the natural world—a birdcall, gust of wind, or dash of a lizard across the trail. Both types are present simultaneously throughout the performance and making a distinction between these two modes of influence and inclusion is, of course, artificial. Just as an actor will try to incorporate a new discovery into subsequent performances, certain spontaneous environmental intrusions were planned on after their first occurrence. For example, in *Dragon Island*'s 1993 production at the Bloedel Reserve (Bainbridge Island, Washington), the Lady of the Lake entered singing and standing atop a small boat rowed across a lake by one of her minions. The regularity with which wild trumpeter swans followed the Lady's boat prompted audience members to ask if we had hired an animal trainer. As actors and director learn through experience how the environment will "perform," these kinds of spontaneous intrusions of the natural world are anticipated.

Textual Connections

Planned inclusion of the natural environment takes several forms—script development, actor improvisation, and staging. From simple references in dialogue, to the structuring of scenes, or the development of characters that seem to emerge out of the land, the script has been shaped and reshaped to meet the land. This process might be likened to collaboration between a playwright and a scenic designer in which the designer has the final say and the playwright must adjust the script to the demands of the set. The environment presents elements that cannot be ignored, and the script of *Dragon Island* is rife with specific references to the elements and details of the land. Final re-writes could not be completed until the specific route of the performance was finalized[3]. In a scene between Mordred and Galahad, a knife-like stump of giant Sitka

spruce split and toppled by wind, rot, or lightening becomes the center of conversation, and a metaphor for the weakening reign of King Arthur. In an early scene where the silhouette of Mount Si looms on the horizon, the priestess Nimune calls up the mountain's historical layers:

> The gods of the ancient people of this land came down from the mountain on a cedar swing, sailed across these meadows to another outcropping of rock across that far meadow—where these ancient ones were born. Snoqualmie—people of the moon—named after a child who would transform their world. It is important to know who has walked the land before you. People come and go, but lines of power remain. (11)[4]

The textual references also attempt to blur the embedded history of the old railroad trestle into the fabric of the fiction. Yet, its fictional identity as the "troll bridge" does not displace the bridge's historical significance as part of the Burlington Northern railroad. Both and more meanings resonate within and between the fictional and material worlds. The railroad trail, named the "old Roman road" on participants' maps, is a remnant of the imperial period of Northwest history when timber was king. This naming does not betray the world of the play, rather it pollinates it with an array of associations. The excesses of the landscape proliferate webs of meaning, spinning stories upon stories.

The logic of the fictional story was tied to the logic of the land by writing the "character" of the landscape into the script. The fictional world then settles onto the land, augmenting, and playing with and into an already-present sense of place. In the process, certain features of the natural world are highlighted, while the fictional world of the play heightens the participant's sensitivity to the environment. Along the performance route, vine maples grow in serpentine shapes in wetlands and under taller trees. The plant propagates by growing up, bending with the weight of winter snow, re-rooting and growing up again, thereby infesting the understory of woods with looping configurations of roots and branches.[5] The character of Nimune points out the vines and warns participants walking with her to "be careful of those fairy arches. This wood is full of them." Walking further back on the trail, the character of Ben explains further:

> Yes, there, look! A fairy arch sometimes occurs in this type of tree. The local people call it Snake Root. It grows up, see there, and then bends to the earth and roots again making an arch. One tree can go on and on, arching and bending, rooting and growing again for longer than you or I will live. Fairies play among these arches, so it's best to go around them. One never knows what spell they have left behind. There are stories of children playing there and slipping away into the fairy world. (21)

Figure 1. "Bog of Bog" with Lilimoss (Dedi Lien) and Mudgewort (Keith Hitchcock) in Dragon Island, *produced by Theatre in the Wild at Meadowbrook Farm, Washington. July 1995. Photo by Greg Nystrom. Courtesy of Theatre in the Wild.*

> Muddly wuddly, bog of bog! You! Curse of earth! She is mother of the seasons. She holds the light in one hand, the night in the other. She churns the clouds, calls the four winds, threads them with thunder, and rains life upon us. She is wet nurse to the tender bud. She eats the dead and makes them live again. . . . You would bring her down! Let me taste your blood! (42)

Actor Keith Hitchcock (Mudgewort) reported that on several occasions a flock of crows perched in the branches of the maples overhead. They created raucous cacophony of screeching, clicks, and caws that seemed to compliment Mudgewort's fury while having a profoundly unsettling effect on participants (7/95).

Meaning-making in *Dragon Island* was made increasingly unstable by the accidental, unintended consequences of artistic collaboration with living landscape. The more-than-human world took on a kind of unpredictable animation in which the landscape influenced the performance and its reception. In contrast to inclusion-by-design, these kinds of spontaneous occurrences—a deer in a clearing, a snake crossing the path, a paw-print in the mud—were none-the-less part of the narrative for participants present

Light may also play a role in creating a sense of fictional place, as in Merlin's Grotto where the pools of light on the ground were said to come from holes in the sod roof of Merlin's abandoned forest retreat (49). Likewise, weather is both a practical and artistic concern. It can influence the tone of a scene—a chill gust of wind can be haunting—as well as scene placement and duration. Wind affects the distance voices can be heard; sun and temperature affect how long a group of spectators can walk without resting in the shade, or how long they can watch or participate in a scene in full sun. In the production's attempt to weave the "natural" with the imagined, the landscape also influences costume design. Nature spirit costumes were drawn from the images of mottled light, decaying leaves, and earthen colors of the location; and clay from a nearby wash was used as body make-up. Other costumes needed to insure that the characters would not get lost in the green background. In addition, the point-blank proximity of the participant to the performer puts an obligation on costumes of raw silk, leather, hemp, and linen fabrics to possess a certain "reality" that is not inconsistent with the rich sensorial detail of the environment. *Dragon Island* must wed the practical to the artistic, the material to the metaphoric, and thus each design and staging choice was a two-fold process.

Scene locations in *Dragon Island* can loosely be divided into exterior and "interior" scenes—that is, those that took place in an open meadow or clearing and those that took place in the enclosure of the woods. Bakhtin's chronotope of the "public square" is operative in the scenes staged in open spaces, where the private is made public, all is "laid bare," and people are open to "public scrutiny" as well as public honor (132-133). In a contained meadow participants undergo "training" in the skills necessary to meet the dragon. The Games include a sack fight, a potato toss, and other activities. While the tone of the scene was set by the knights as they lay out the playing field and shout directions to participants, Bakhtin's chronotope of the public square, concretized in the spatiality of the open meadow, not only permitted but also invoked raucous behavior, ribbing, and competition.

Spontaneous Intrusions from the Other World

Bakhtin's road occurred in the performance in various permutations as trail, path, bridge, and map, and served to link the exterior scenes with the interior ones. The forest interior invoked Bakhtin's "miraculous world" chronotope in which "time is influenced by dreams" and dreams "acquire a form-generating function" (154). Under the influence of the "miraculous world in adventure-time," encounters along the road included "those who are not of this world" (Bakhtin 159). At the Bog of Bog participants encountered molten spirits oozing over the ground near a decomposing stump (*Fig. 1*). Bakhtin observes that the appearance of "the other" must be "grasped metaphorically" (159). In his attempt to get the travelers to call off the hunt, Mudgewort, himself an embodied metaphor, flies into a rage:

exchange with a landscape that is always speaking to us and with us. Language, which Abram notes has been used to separate an experience of self from an experience of the environment, was born of the reciprocity between the imagination, its forms of representation, and the environment. Landscape is a kind of text, Abram claims. "[T]he sensible, natural environment remains the primary visual counterpart of spoken utterance, the visual accompaniment of all spoken meaning. The land, in other words, is the sensible site or matrix wherein meaning occurs and proliferates" (140). *Dragon Island* made use of what Abram has called "the field of discourse . . . embedded in the natural landscape" (140). Staging was not simply a matter of plopping the actors among the trees, but was instead grounded in the notion of the landscape as a living, speaking co-player fundamental to the telling of the tale.

Bakhtin theorized that chronotopic genres are defined by their use of space. For example, in Bakhtin's folkloric chronotope, time is characterized by "profound spatiality" and "is not separate from the earth . . . the life of men and the life of nature . . . are measured by one and the same scale . . . they are inseparable" (208). Furthermore, the generic chronotopes, Bakhtin tells us, are signified by the kinds of space they provide for interaction and experience. In other words, certain types of spaces (which are linked to his genres) ordain and invoke certain types of experience. In the folkloric forms of Rabelais, Bakhtin notes a "public space" that is "under the open sky" where "everything that is valorized . . . must spread out as far and as wide as possible" (167). In contrast, in Balzac's work there is a "fundamentally new space," "the space of parlors and salons" where "webs of intrigue are spun" (246). What is significant for this discussion is that spaces—or more accurately places—provide distinct contexts for being. Different places precipitate different frames of mind and inspire behaviors that emerge from those frames of mind. This is precisely why "audience participation" is doomed in a traditional venue in which the place inspires passive reception. Scene locations in *Dragon Island* were chosen based on the behavioral archetypes that their setting might invoke. Consequently, many audience participation issues were addressed through spatiality alone; and the presence of the participant, as well as the demands of the narrative, was always central to the staging process.

Selecting scene locations and planning the performance route takes into consideration the size and shape of the space; the natural and/or human-made objects within it; sight lines; framing; background scenery; direction of sunlight and wind; types of vegetation; degree of enclosure; soil, surfaces and grade of the path; ambient smells and sounds; as well as participant/performer configurations and proximity. How will a moving crowd flow into a space, and where will people settle? What will the audience see from where they stand, sit or gather? Some scenic backgrounds reciprocate while others may undo the believability of the scene. (For instance, hillsides with clear cuts, or high tension wires were not useful backgrounds for scenes that pretend to occur after the audience has traveled "back in time.") The angle of the sun during performance not only influences visibility, but also the mood of performers and audience.

Whenever vine maple was encountered later on the trail many participants continued to warn one another. The narrative interpretation of the vine maple helped insure that participants did not trip and kept children from wandering off the path into the woods.[6]

Bakhtin notes that the chronotope of the miraculous world in "adventuristic-time . . . provides for the intrusion of non-human forces" (95). Textual inclusion of the non-human world of the landscape shows in certain characters that attempt to blur the boundaries between human and non-human nature. The characters of Lillymoss and Mudgewort appear and disappear on the edge of the path—the edge of the known and prescribed world. As if their identities are rooted in the land, they represent the "other world" of fairies and creatures of the forest.

Naming is one of the fundamental ways that the textual narrative weaves into the landscape. Constructing the landscape within the world of the play, scene references such as "Druid's Circle," "Bog of Bog," "Merlin's Grotto," and "Sacred Grove" are simultaneously wedded to the features that present themselves on location. Naming also extends into the moment to moment choices made by the actors. As actors in traditional venues must relate to their spatial environment, discovering it newly each rehearsal and performance, *Dragon Island* actors likewise found ways to connect to the environment. Actors learned the names of plants and animals, and invented complex character biographies that include memories of the same woods, river, and meadows in which the performance was sited. In the flexibility that the script provides, actors incorporated features of the environment into their interactions with the audience, casting a metaphoric net around the sensorial world, drawing in the infinitely complex chronotopic matrix of the landscape into the fictional narrative. In one instance, walking with the audience over one of the footbridges along the performance route, an actress playing Lady Elaine noted a clump of wild yellow iris blooming nearby. "Look there, these grew near the lake where I took my apprenticeship with Viviane. What do you call them in your time?" She asked the audience members around her. "Iris," someone volunteered. "Ahh, after the goddess!" Elaine responded (Hunt 7/95).[7]

A Living Stage

Staging is another and perhaps even more fundamental way that the fictional story of the play is intentionally embedded in the sensorial landscape. Some theatre reviewers, however, assumed that *Dragon Island* was staged in the wild in order to take advantage of what Misha Berson in the *Seattle Times* has called "killer ambiance" (E1). Inclusive drama, however, is driven by more than the desire to capitalize on the novelty of non-traditional venues. In *The Spell of the Sensuous: Perception and Language in a More-than-Human World*, phenomenologist/ecologist David Abram explores the way language is rooted in our primary reciprocal relatedness to the natural world. He posits the "more-than-human-world" as the living counterpart to human thought. We are embedded in and imbued with the sensorial world, continually engaged in a process of meaning-

Figure 2 "Sacred Grove" with participants in Dragon Island, *produced by*
Theatre in the Wild at Meadowbrook Farm, Washington. July 1995. Photo by Greg Nystrom.
Courtesy of Theatre in the Wild.

at that moment. These spontaneous intrusions indicated a world that speaks back, a
world capable of a kind of utterance.

At the Sacred Grove, the chronotope of the miraculous world continued to in-
voke the speaking landscape (*Fig. 2*). This scene took place in a cathedral-like grove of
conifers bordered by a circle of six decaying old-growth stumps, moss-covered and
fragile as sandcastles to the touch. Air temperature drops and moistens within the
grove; light filters through the trees; and the wind moves and quakes in the branches
overhead. Participants were lead quietly into the grove by a priestess, who instructed
them to "stand close—keep a vigil on this place." After Viviane and Merlin perform
certain ritual actions, Merlin calls for the audience to "Listen!" to the silence of the
wood (64-65). At several performances, as if on cue, a woodpecker's knocking filled
that silence. The voice of the forest had entered the dialogue; the chronotope of the
miraculous world took on flesh—or in this case, feathers. Bakhtin notes that we "en-
dow all phenomena with meaning, that is, we incorporate them not only into the sphere
of spatial and temporal existence but also into a semantic sphere" (257). The intrusions
of woodpecker, wind, crows, mud, moss, lizards, a branch across the path, shafts of
sunlight, and an almost limitless collection of other spontaneous utterances of the more-

than-human world continually fed the performance, and played significantly into the meaning-making process, of *Dragon Island*.

Spontaneous intrusions did not always complement the narrative. Actors can cope with the occasional barking dog or airplane noise; however, depending on the quality of containment that a scene needs, other kinds intrusions from the "outside world" may cause a "fissure" that grows into a crevasse into which the whole mimetic project may collapse. During one performance of the Sacred Grove, reggae music boomed through the trees from across the river where Microsoft was hosting a company picnic. Birds, wind, actor's voices and the fragile ambiance of the chronotope of the miraculous world were pitted against the "real" world of the twentieth century. Prior to the scene, actors were distraught about what to do. Participants however interpreted the intrusion within the "reality" that had been established by the play, making comments to one another in the vein of "those villagers up river are drunk again" (Hunt 7/95). As rudimentary and perhaps self-conscious as their attempt to "cover" may have been, participants attempted to integrate the intrusion into the narrative. When the fictional world is threatened by "outside" stimulus, it seems as if participants will make up just about anything in order to absorb the stimulus and reinstate the world of the play. They have made a creative investment in the world of the play, and it is a world that they take collective responsibility for maintaining.

The Participant

The process by which spectators became stakeholders in the integrity of the performance was also a function of the meta-chronotope of the landscape and the way in which all of the chronotopes of the performance were rooted in the land. As the audience encounters the road, the fictional world of the play becomes a visceral experience. Walking, participants literally committed their weight to the narrative; with each step they invoked and presenced the world of the play. Indeed, the story does not unfold independent of this elemental participation. Bakhtin notes that the road brings together all classes of people with "a collapse of social distances" (243). As participants walked together they encountered one another, conversed, minded one another's children, negotiated steps, roots, rocks, sand, bridges, logs, tall grass, thorny brush, and the up and down of the trail's grade, and in doing so they become meaning-makers in one another's experience of the play. Thus, a new chronotope of "community," or group Bert States has termed this "the collaborative mode" and notes that it "means adjusting the audience's illusionary nearness to the action" (370). From their first point of contact with the ruse of the play, audience members were spoken to and spoken about as if they are characters in the play. Yet they play themselves—"people of the future" who have agreed to accompany Merlin and his apprentices on a journey through time (23). Functioning as fundamental components of the imaginary world, participants embodied the narrative; therefore, like the actor and the land, their presence was chronotopic—one of the fields of exchange in which the narrative took on flesh. The performance relied on

this collaborative interplay, in which actors, who normally count only on one another to carry the illusion, must also trust the participants to hold the story together.

In immersion theatre it is sometimes difficult for audience to know where and when the "play" begins. As participants gathered at the first scene location—a meadow adjacent to the parking area—to wait for the journey to begin, the performance had already begun. Musicians played while Merlin's apprentices mingled in the crowd; making sure everyone had brought water and worn the proper shoes, actors began to establish the relationships between participants and characters that would develop over the course of the play.[8] A "madwoman" named Rose hides among the crowd, hoping to go along on the journey even though she has no ticket. Through this character's de-ranged dialogues with clusters of individuals, participants began to learn about the child whose identity later becomes central to the narrative.

The public square chronotope operative in the Games provided an opportunity for audience members to invest themselves *as players* in the performance, and then to claim their place and their stake in the narrative. Audience members engaged full-voiced and full-bodied, hollering at one another, throwing potatoes, and bopping each other with hay-filled sacks (*Fig. 3*).[9] Bakhtin's folkloric genre is characterized by "the right to be other," exemplified by the fool, clown and rogue; and he indicates a "vital connection" between the chronotope of "the other "and that of the public square. Pub-lic exposure—making a spectacle of one self—is one of the characteristics of the fool in the square (158-59). Making use of these behavioral archetypes, the Games are disarm-ing, exposing, revealing, and participants run the risk of looking like a fool. Bakhtin also characterizes the public square as a location for public acclaim and "official or public evaluation" (Bakhtin 132). When the competitions are finished, the King asks his knights to report on the participants' fitness for the hunt. Galahad indicates that he has doubts, saying, "these people are not prepared for danger . . . Let them return home." Mordred, in turn, makes the private public. "They're dragon bait! Flabby! Flimsy. Look at them! Is this the shape of things to come?" (26). Participants often voiced raucous protest. In one instance, a group of participants rallied behind the knight/ baffoon Sir Ben, who admits that he is no more ready to face the dragon that they are. Staging a spontaneous demonstration in response to Mordred's critique of their phy-sique, participants chanted, "Ben! Ben! Ben!" and refused to let Mordred continue speak-ing until King Arthur had relented, promising them a place in his hunting party.[10]

The chronotope of the "other" functioned throughout the play as an invitation to behave in strange and foolish ways. When faced with the possibility of encountering a troll along the road, participants embody the "lunacy" that Bakhtin attributes to this chronotope. Following the Games, the audience was divided into four smaller groups, each of which traveled with a different character/guide. These groups viewed a num-ber of more intimate scenes in rotation; that is, scenes repeated four times and each group saw them in a different order. The texts of the scenes varied depending on the

Figure 3. "The Games" with participants in Dragon Island, *produced by Theatre in the Wild at Meadowbrook Farm, Washington. July 1995. Photo by Greg Nystrom. Courtesy of Theatre in the Wild.*

point of view of the guide. When the groups encountered the Troll Bridge, their guides explained that trolls hunt by night and, being virtually blind in the daylight, sleep under bridges during the day. In case their footsteps wake the sleeping troll, the participants should be prepared with a "troll greeting," which they must perform before crossing the bridge (10). The Games occurred in timed sequence and the groups were able to watch one another perform the greeting. Like the "others" of Bakhtin's public square, participants seemed to relish the opportunity to play the fool. This lunacy became a performative motif among participants at footbridges throughout the remainder of the journey.

While the actors and stage manager knew the topography of the performance site like the backs of their hands, the performance route was constructed to provoke, for participants, an experience of being lost. Each group was given a map that indicated the route to follow through the rotation scenes. As a permutation of Bakhtin's road, the chronotope of "the map" provided audience members with something approximating a "text" making it possible to "read ahead," to see where the story goes. The map permitted participants to navigate the woods and to learn some of its topography. As a chronotopic device the map oriented participants to the actual terrain while it drew them deeper into the metaphoric landscape. As they placed themselves in their surroundings, participants also "placed" themselves within the world of the play.

One of the "chance encounters" of Bakhtin's road, participants were intercepted by the Lady of the Lake. She appears to have "set up camp," and invites them to rest awhile, to enjoy freshly baked bread, and join her in a ceremony.[11] In earthen bowls of scented water the Lady washes the hands of several participants while she incants a blessing for the travelers. These participants, in turn, wash the hands of others, and so on, as all are brought into a ceremony of washing and being washed (29). The chronotope of "the mother," expressing itself as Viviane, the Lady of the Lake, created a context of caring in which participants poured water over and washed one another's hands while reciting a blessing the Lady taught them. The containment associated with the presence of the mother, as well as the ethereal languid quality of the space, eased the self-consciousness that might accompany washing the hands of a stranger, while it reinforced the chronotope of community.

Conclusion: Inclusive Drama and the Chronotope of the Child

Through the chronotopes of the road, the map, the fool, the mother, and many others, audience participation took shape as a fundamental component of the performance of *Dragon Island*. While there were scenes in which that participation was active and full-bodied, as in the Games, there were other scenes in which it was contemplative and ritualized as in the Sacred Grove. The fictional narrative was constructed to include audience as participant; therefore, whether participants were physically engaged or simply witnesses to the action and dialogue of characters, their contributions to the performance were crucial to its meaning-making process. Participants imposed themselves on the planned performance in sometimes-surprising ways, and this, in turn, placed special demands on performers.

Toward the end of the play, Arthur is wounded and gropes for a handhold as he falls to the ground. In performance, Merlin and nearby participants helped him rest against a tree. The final details of the plot are revealed in the scene that follows as Merlin tells Arthur about the true identity of the girl. When a scene involves a good deal of dialogue and complex emotional transitions, the temptation for actors to take their "private moment" is strong. After all, years of traditional training have made them expert at shutting the audience out. But inclusive drama disallows private exclusionary acting. This is not to say that characters do not have personal moments; however, there is a distinction between private and personal in this case. In one performance of the scene just mentioned, a boy of five or six pushed through the crowd when he heard the King was wounded. He rushed up to Arthur, almost jumping into the actor's arms. "King! King, are you okay?" He exclaimed. "Who will protect us? Should I go find Galahad?" (Hunt, 7/95). In the face of such intrusions—and they occurred frequently in *Dragon Island*—an actor makes choices. The actor may resent the audience member for "stealing focus," attempt to ignore the intrusion, and try to get back to the script as quickly as possible. Doing so however flies in the face of the all that has

lead up to this moment. Or the actor may be able to "be in the moment" with the child, regarding the spontaneous intrusion as an important contribution to his character's experience and thought process, allowing the participant to influence and change him. Inclusive drama requires that actors bring to their work a particular kind of magnanimous regard for participants and for the environment. Rather than constructing the audience as "other," inclusive drama attempts to engage participants as co-players.

The chronotope's power in a literary work is measured by the extent to which the image represented in language produces a visceral response in the reader. Bakhtin's chronotopes invoke frames of mind and possibilities of being that inform audience participation. *Dragon Island* takes on the flesh of its place. The fictional world inhabits the viscerally-experience landscape, and the performance is inexorably bound up with the all-at-once/all-around environment—an environment that also includes the material and metaphoric presence of participants. Through a theatrical convention that constructs performers and participants as collaborators in the project of playing together within a speaking landscape, *Dragon Island* invoked the chronotope of "the child." There, in the play of the play, is a doorway through which something may be recovered—a sense of place, connection, and investment in a reciprocal world.

Notes

1. Whether or not there can be a defined "outside" in any performance, traditionally staged or not, is an interesting discussion that is beyond the scope of this paper. Certainly it seems that it is a matter of degree, which increases as traditional structures, conventions, and venues are dissolved.

2. This is a distinction Brook makes clear in the chapters on the Holy, Rough, and Immediate theatre. See, Peter Brook, *The Empty Space*, New York: Avon, 1969.

3. For a more detailed description of the process of route planning, trail construction, and the influence of landscape features on script development, see, Theresa May, "Doing Theatre in the Wild," *Nature, Environment and Me: Personal Exploration in a Deteriorating World*, M. Aleksiuk, T.M. Nelson (Eds.) Univ. of Alberta. (Submitted)

4. The creation myth of the Snoqualmie people can be read in a recent retelling by Snoqualmie Valley Historical Museum curator, Greg Watson, in "Moon the Transformer," *Snoqualmie Valley Reporter Special Edition*, March 24, 1993: 3.

5. According to Snoqualmie Valley historian, Dave Battey, local Native Americans nicknamed the vine maple "snake root."

6. Such "controlling devices" also served to protect the environment. For more about how the questions of the production environmental impact, see, "Doing Theatre in the Wild" noted above.

7. Meredith Hunt played Lady Elaine.

8. Because the participation in the play is physical as well as imaginative, audience members have been prepared for the experience prior to arrival with a "Letter from Merlin," which provides practical information such as what kind of shoes to wear, how to prepare for weather, to bring water, non-aerosol insect repellent, and directions to the site. This letter of welcome sets up an expectation of adventure, which also prepares the audience for some of the discomforts of a theatre that does not provide plush seats.

9. For descriptions of "the Games" see, John Longenbraugh, "Acting Wild," *Eastside Week*, 12 July 1995: 19. Or Misha Berson, "The Setting Is the Star," *Seattle Times*, 13 July 1995: E1.

10. This incident took place during *Dragon Island*'s 1993 production at the Bloedel Reserve, Bainbridge Island, Washington. Kenny Telesco played Sir Ben; Larry Fried played Mordred, and Greg Nystrom played King Arthur.

11. In addition, the character of Viviane materialized "the convenience" for audience use. In a performance that asks the audience to walk for some two miles over a three-hour span of time, many practical necessities must be folded into the experience, including restrooms, snacks, water, etc. Intermission has a practical function; yet in an immersion experience such as *Dragon Island*, a collective intermission would destroy the "reality" of the play. Portable latrines were placed just off the trail in an area masked from view by thickets. In a demonstration of magical powers that rival Merlin, the Lady of the Lake has manifested the convenience, and audience members use it at their discretion during the hand-washing ceremony. In this way the needs of the audience were "included" in the story.

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