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BOAL AND THEATRE OF THE OPPRESSED:
A PERFORMANCE-CENTERED INQUIRY OF EATING AND BODY IMAGE

A Dissertation

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
Louisiana State University and
Agricultural and Mechanical College
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

in

The Department of Speech Communication

by
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December 1995
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Endeavors that are the magnitude of this project are not conducted in isolation. Many people have influenced and encouraged me as I interviewed people, organized the public performances, documented the process with this manuscript, and completed my graduate studies. I am delighted to have the opportunity to thank them for their encouragement and help.

First, I thank my family for their unflagging support, love, and devotion. My parents, Geri and Mendel Howard, have encouraged me throughout my lifetime to take risks and to take a stance. My parents, as well as my brother, Todd, and my sister, Laura, have also taught me the importance of applying my studies to the "real" world. Their questions and comments have pointed out the necessity of conducting studies that could have impact upon the way people live. My grandfather, James Stanley Howard, has also provided a lifetime of support. My debt to each of them must be implied rather than expressed.

Members of my dissertation committee have provided insight, encouragement, resources, and patience. I owe this project to Michael Bowman, who inspired my thinking about body-centered performance, who allowed me to scream in his classroom, and who prodded me in (un)subtle ways. His belief in this project and in my abilities sustained my motivation to persist during the most trying
times. Mary Frances HopKins was tremendously helpful in the final stages of the writing process. I also thank Paula Geiselman, Emily Toth, and Kenneth Zagacki for serving on my committee and maintaining a keen interest in my research.

Other faculty and staff members at Louisiana State University have also been supportive. Ruth Laurion Bowman has particularly influenced this project and my ideas about performance and pedagogy. Although Patricia Pace now teaches at Georgia Southern University, she influenced me greatly during her year at LSU; she continues to guide me toward essential works about gender and performance theory. Andrew King, Ginger Conrad, and Lisa Landry have also provided assistance throughout my years at LSU.

I also acknowledge numerous friends and colleagues for listening, offering suggestions, and providing assistance as I completed my studies and this manuscript: Stuart Ainsworth, Heidi Brough, Sharon Croft, Michael Dreher, Dan Heaton, Judith Hoover, David Lambkin, Jim Patterson, Lydia Reid, Lynn Ritter, and Marie Smith.

Finally, my thanks to the women and men who shared their lives and experiences during the interviews, and the six women who saw the project through completion. For their honesty and courage, their insights and encouragement, I shall always be indebted.
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ABSTRACT

Building upon the scholarly tradition that performance is a valuable pedagogical tool, I documented how six performers developed personal awareness, critical consciousness, and the ability to take action as a result of participating in a performance process. I designed a three-stage performance process. During the first phase of the process, focus group discussions, participants exhibited little awareness of their specific eating habits or the cultural constructedness of those habits. As they completed the first phase, they became more aware of their behaviors, and they began to identify food’s social function. At the second stage, rehearsal sessions, six performers began to enact their understanding of eating and body image. By watching videotapes of the focus group discussions, performers established distance between their behaviors and the behaviors of others in order to critique and contest their observations. They enacted those ideas by following activities that Augusto Boal outlined in his theories of "Theatre of the Oppressed." At this point performers recognized how their own behaviors were inextricably interwoven with social norms and standards, and they prepared to act upon their understandings. During the third phase, public performance, performers tested their ideas in a public forum. Not only had performers developed critical consciousness, but they became agents who could take critical action.
I also documented the types of knowledge performers obtained. In addition to developing personal awareness, all performers changed their eating habits or how they regarded the habits of others. Some began a more critical examination of how cultural norms influenced individual behaviors. Others increased their levels of self disclosure, or they developed appreciation for the performance process or group interaction.

Chapters two through four include a summary of the process and of the types of information performers acquired during each phase. In the final chapter, I summarize the performance process, evaluate performance as a type of critical pedagogy, and suggest areas for further research.

Appendices include a body image survey, experiment consent form, a list of topics used for the focus group discussions, a description of the performers, and the script for the public performance.
CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

In the past twenty years, performance scholars have advocated a theoretical shift in what they considered texts and in what they considered performance's function (e.g., Fine and Speer; Pelias and VanOosting). For example, in addition to their interests in literary texts and analysis, performance scholars have explored other types of texts; they have embraced all types of human activity as potential performance texts. They recognize that performance is involved when people switch between roles of daughter, student, and friend. They initiate studies of personal narratives and folk tales to supplement more "traditional" studies of poetry and prose. Some scholars have inaugurated studies of cultural performances, such as rites, rituals, and festivals, in order to investigate and process how a specific cultural group establishes and perpetuates cultural meaning. With such an expanded scope, performance studies scholars redefine "performance" to encompass any symbolic activity that involves live bodies and that had the potential for communication.

As performance scholars augment the types of texts they examine, they also extend their comprehension of performance's various uses and functions. Building upon the idea that performance is a process to understand literature, performance
scholars also explore how individuals could use performance to effect more broad-based learning, because it provides experiential and psychological growth, because it encourages individuals to "sense the other" by trying on unfamiliar experiences, or because it helps individuals decode the world in which they lived. In addition, others, such as Dwight Conquergood, Kristin Langellier, Mary Strine, and Kay Ellen Capo, suggest that performance has more revolutionary functions. They posit that performance is not only a mimetic activity, but one that could be used to construct and change social situations. That is, in addition to "doing," "fulfilling," or "furnishing" (Long and Hopkins xiii), performance is "building," "moving," and "changing" (c.f. Conquergood, "Ethnography"). As a result, performance constitutes a tool to change the way people live, think, and perceive.

David Williams and Kay Ellen Capo identify two areas in which performance served as a useful tool for personal and social transformation. Both scholars present performance as a pragmatic, utilitarian praxis. Williams explains that performance practitioners use performance techniques to help individuals cope with change. As a method of self understanding and personal change, performance provides individuals with a tool to express what otherwise might be inexpressible. Williams suggests that performance helps individuals recover what they repress in order to reorient themselves to social norms and networks (423). He cites poetry therapy as one approach to produce such results. Capo also takes a utilitarian stance; however, her interest in performance rests not so much with its psycho-social exploration, but with its socio-political function. She explains that performance could present
pressing issues of the times and ask audience members to take a stance, initiate action, and control their communities.

The perspectives outlined by Williams and Capo have especially influenced my own ideas about performance's function and potential. Using their ideas as a theoretical foundation, I began to speculate about how performance might transform individuals or impact social networks and norms. I became interested in performance as a pragmatic, alternative method of stimulating communication, personal change, and social transformation.

As I explored performance's practical application, I also began to examine theories and stories associated with body image, weight loss, and physical appearance. One of my earliest investigations involved an ethnography of a local weight-loss organization. I concentrated upon the numerous behaviors associated with weekly weigh-ins. These behaviors included how women reacted to weight loss or gain and how members provided support for weight-loss endeavors. In addition to formal interviews for the weight-loss ethnography, I conducted informal interviews with a number of women. We discussed their eating practices and exercise programs, and why they engaged in such activities. In some cases interviewees revealed that they consumed laxatives, starved themselves, or purged in order to maintain the size and shape of their bodies. Many women risked their own health to maintain a culturally desirable appearance. Even those who recognized their behavior as "ridiculous" could not release themselves from the need to diet, exercise, and starve.
As a result of these interviews, I decided to merge my interests in cultural studies of eating and body image with contemporary performance studies research to design my dissertation project. In April 1994, I started to "test" how performance might be used to explore their particular problems and concerns about eating and body image. I structured a performance experiment that would trace how six female students at Louisiana State University used performance as a method to explore problems and concerns related to eating and body image. I wondered what would happen to these individuals if I introduced them to a new tool or language (i.e., performance) to examine their eating practices and how they felt about their bodies. I hoped that the performance process I designed might lead to personal and social change, as Williams and Capo had suggested.

I asked the women who participated to experience a three-part performance process that involved focus group interviews, a ten-week rehearsal process, and three public performances. Since few records of performance processes were available to me, I designed my "experiment" in an eclectic manner. That is, I assimilated various research methods in order to obtain data in an efficient manner, to establish a collaborative tone for the process, and to position ideas of the participants (rather than my own ideas and observations) as the focus for the project.

For the first stage of the process, I drew upon my experience in marketing research and organizational culture to select focus group interviewing as a research method. Focus group interviewing enabled me to obtain large quantities of in-depth information in an efficient, flexible manner. The methods in the second and third
stages stemmed from my work in performance theory and practice. While the theories and studies by Williams and Capo stimulated my interest in performance’s function, the dramatic techniques Augusto Boal developed as “Theatre of the Oppressed” (TO) influenced how I organized the rehearsal sessions and facilitated the public performance. TO is a series of games and exercises Boal developed to give people a new "language" or medium to discuss, analyze, and resolve oppressions. With the premise that theatre is political, Boal maintains that "traditional" theatre oppressed people, since it supported ways of thinking that alienated, immobilized, and muted those not directly attached to lines of power. Boal uses dramatic techniques to subvert the oppressive nature of traditional theatre. He explains that all people— not just professional actors— are capable of using theatre to express their ideas, needs, and opinions. With theatre as a common tool or language, people can work together in a synergistic way to solve problems, share joys, learn about themselves, and take charge of their communities. Boal’s method shows people how to communicate via drama. In my study, Boal’s performance techniques served as the primary mode of expression by the participants. During each of the three phases I observed and interviewed participants in order to chart how they came to understand their relationships to eating and body image, and how that understanding stimulated personal growth and social change.

The purpose of my study is to explore how a certain group of women might use performance techniques to recognize, analyze, clarify, share, and change their attitudes about eating and body image. Performers engaged the process not only to
communicate their understandings to an audience, but to sort their understandings, to determine what they know, how they know, and why they know. Specifically, I wanted to document the performance process performers used to develop an understanding of what, when, how, and why they ate. I expected that their understanding extended beyond their personal awareness to include recognition of society’s role in shaping their personal experiences, a recognition that would empower performers (1) to construct their own identities, (2) to stage their discoveries, and (3) to change their eating practices, perceptions of eating and food, and their acceptance of social standards that govern those practices. Performance would provide a way for the performers to develop their critical consciousness which initiated their critical action. I hoped that performers would develop agency as they took a construction personally (Jay 118), and when they negotiated or constructed their identities, rather than passively accept a culturally prescribed identity.

I argue that each stage of the performance process increased the reflexivity of the performers. Performers made personal observations, distanced themselves from their observations, engaged critical skills, and initiated personal change. I consider each of these behaviors signs of a more complex critical process, reflexivity. Reflexivity occurs when a participant not only recognizes and identifies her actions, but when the performer can critically examine the action, analyze its significance personally and socially, and evaluate its existence. In the first phase of focus group discussions, for example, the women exhibited little awareness of their specific
eating practices or of the cultural constructedness of those practices. They ate what they ate without thinking; eating was "natural" rather than a learned behavior. As the focus group discussions continued, performers developed more awareness of those eating practices and patterns. Individuals recognized that they had adopted a way of eating that all took for granted. That is, while at one time they may have made conscious choices to eat certain foods in certain ways, they had since naturalized those eating behaviors until performers were completely unreflexive about those practices. In later stages of the research, performers became more reflexive about how their eating behaviors meshed with a larger social picture. They understood that social rules governed the types of foods appropriate to certain occasions, the formal or informal etiquette those occasions demanded, the kinds of foods that contributed to "healthy" living, or even what constituted "healthy" living. Individuals learned that their own manipulation or use of food communicated something about their own set of standards or worldviews.

By charting the performance process, I accomplish a number of tasks. Though the idea that performance stimulates personal and social change is hardly new, performance practitioners have done little work to document what people learn from performance and how they learn what they learn. My study stands as one of the few indepth, qualitative reports of how performance can transform individuals and society. Some performance practitioners have conducted quantitative research that reveals that audience members learned from performance, and many studies support how audience members interpret, evaluate, and utilize performances in
relation to the context in which those performances occur. Often these performances attempt to change audience members' perceptions, attitudes, and/or behaviors about social issues, such as homophobia (Fuoss, Kistenberg, and Rosenfeld), step family issues (Miller Rassulo and Hecht), date rape (Mann, Hecht, and Valentine), drug abuse, marital problems, and AIDS (T. Jackson). However, these studies do not identify what information performers learn, determine how they learn, or speculate why the learning is helpful. My own research alleviates this lack of knowledge. By providing an empirical—albeit qualitative—record of how a particular performance process enabled the performers to develop critical consciousness, my project points out how performance can stimulates useful information, skills, and changes. With such specific knowledge about the power of performance, we can learn how to apply performance techniques in settings beyond the performance studies classroom. Performance is a useful tool to teach other subjects, or it can be utilized by corporations, government officials, or community leaders.

I also amplify the need to document how performers use performance as an agency for change. Performance theorists who use quantitative studies that measure change in audience members frequently evaluate performance by its ability to spur change in the audience members who encounter the performance. The performance is the agency of change; audience members are the agents of change. In other words, the focus of these studies lies within performance as a mode of communication and an audience member's "acceptance" of that message. My focus
differs in that I re-examine how a performer interacts with texts, negotiates understanding, and becomes an agent who expresses her understanding, demonstrates her discursive ability, and seeks personal and social change.

By recording the performance process and how performers become agents who use performance to serve their own ends, I answer the call by Strine, Long, and HopKins to measure and record precisely what people learn by performing. I exemplify how qualitative studies can serve as documentation for performance's effects, and how performance is an effective tool to effect personal and social change. With these contributions, I situate the power of performance not only with an audience who may walk away changed, but with performers who use performance to assert personal and social changes they deem appropriate.

Rationale for the Study

Given my own interests in performance as a pragmatic tool for personal and social change, I base my research on two main bodies of performance discourse: (1) the theoretical work of recent performance studies scholars, and (2) the practical example of Augusto Boal's TO methods. My study represents a nexus between such theory and practice, since I illustrate how theoretical orientations are realized in performance, and I infer a theoretical base for TO that Boal has not provided. Furthermore, I position performance as a specific practice that induces personal and social transformation. Performance is a way to move and change, rather than reinforcing and reflecting.
Performance as Kinesis

When Conquergood calls performance "the new frontier for staking joint claims to poetics and persuasion, pleasure and power, in the interests of community and critique, solidarity and resistance" (Conquergood, "Ethnography" 80), he notes that performance is a tool for revolution and change. This perspective, a far cry from a mimetic view of performance, situates performance as a site for decentering power and for renewing commitment for social change. He uses the term *kinesis* to describe this perspective. Performance as *kinesis* implies an urgent motivation for performance to "break" and "remake" social structures that perpetuate an oppressive status quo (Conquergood, "Ethnography" 84). As a tool for social interaction and intervention, performance is a way to enact change in addition to suggesting change. Performance as *kinesis* also intimates that performance is no longer stable and structured, since it changes, fluctuates, and improvises to meet the needs of people in specific situations.

Conquergood’s paradigm for performance as *kinesis* is illustrated in two primary bodies of performance studies research. Both the psycho-social and socio-political areas of study show how individuals use performance techniques to examine their behaviors, evaluate the benefits and the harms, and make behavioral alterations. The idea that performance is *kinesis* suggests that movement or change occurs on a personal level, psycho-social exploration, or a more social level, socio-political praxis. These two perspectives move performance out of the academic setting, away from a purely aesthetic experience, and toward a method of social
interaction. Under the aegis of kinesis, the psycho-social and socio-political perspectives frame performance as a method of personal and social change, a way to tear apart social constructions in order to create conditions for better living.

**Psycho-social Exploration**

As a psycho-social exploration, performance is a method of self understanding and personal change (Williams). Performance provides individuals with an experiential, communicative tool to express what otherwise might be inexpressible. That is, a person’s conscious and unconscious ideas find expression as the individual engages in dramatic techniques. This perspective joins the external with the internal as people use movement and voice to explore mental, emotional, or spiritual disturbances. Individuals learn to sort out who they are, what they want or need, and how to satisfy those wants and needs.

Jacob Levy Moreno was the first to join psychological analysis with theatre when in 1921 he established his theories of psychodrama and sociodrama, methods of therapy that resolve personal conflicts by utilizing dramatic improvisation. Psychodrama moves psychological treatment away from treatment of individuals in isolation and toward the treatment of individuals in a group. "Healing" depends upon how individuals help each other by using roleplaying and improvisation.

While psychodrama's purpose is to aid the individual, sociodrama is based upon the group rather than the individual. Daniel Feldhendler, quoting psychodramatist Jonathan Fox, writes that the "group in sociodrama corresponds to the individual in psychodrama" (89). Sociodrama seeks (1) to find solutions to a
problem that affects every individual within the group, or (2) to examine a problem that hinders how members within established groups (i.e. families, workplace) relate to one another (e.g., Z. Moreno). Both entail "Theatre of Spontaneity," which seeks to free individuals from restraint

... from a predetermined place and a predetermined creative product. Both limit the full, unrestrained emergence of spontaneity. In the legitimate theatre neither the moment nor the place is free. Both are predetermined in the context and form—the written play and the rehearsal production determine the moment and make it free. ... (J.L. Moreno 26).

Moreno declares that spontaneous interaction creates a therapeutic catharsis in the players, as they enact and resolve personal problems, and in audience members, who determine how the dramatic experience relates to them. Drama, then, does not imitate life; it extends life and individual actions. People seek "the opportunity of recapitulation of unsolved problems with a freer, broader, more flexible social setting" (J.L. Moreno 15).

Therapists have routinely used psychodrama and sociodrama in numerous ways, including treatment for abused children (Cattanach), eating disorder patients (Levens; Meillo; Callahan; Root), and marital disagreements (Yablonsky). In addition, psychodrama has been used to ease nurses' fears of HIV contagion (Meisenhelder), to prevent at-risk students from dropping out of school (T. Turner), and to train consultants and counselors (Martin; Urtz & Kahn). In each of these instances, the goal is to assist the individual or group by using collective learning and group support.
Moreno's concepts of psychodrama and sociodrama concentrate upon the therapeutic effects of performance. He suggests that enacting problems leads to increased self awareness, as well as knowledge about group interaction and cultural values. Performance, then, is a comprehensive, experiential tool to examine one's own actions, behaviors, beliefs, motives, and relationships as they exist in relation to cultural and social norms.

A technique related to psychodrama is drama therapy, which emerged in the 1960s from the practice of Robert Landy, director of the MA Drama Therapy program at New York University, and Sue Jennings, director of the Institute of Dramatherapy in London. Although many premises of drama therapy resemble psychodrama, key differences emerge when one compares the two practices. Psychodrama requires a therapist to serve as a facilitator; the person cannot engage in psychodrama without a therapist to interpret and question. Drama therapy emphasizes a more holistic relationship between imagination, creativity, and ability of the person who expresses; the therapist is an enabler who introduces drama as a tool (Meldrum 12-17). Drama therapists explain rules and challenge participants. In addition, not only is drama therapy concerned with a protagonist; all members of the group receive equal an chance to discuss and enact problems within a single session.

Anna Chesner, senior dramatherapist at the Institute of Dramatherapy, marks another distinction between psychodrama and drama therapy when she notes that psychodrama primarily emerged from the work of one man, Moreno. Although
Landy and Jennings have been significant developers of drama therapy, a number of people and traditions have influenced the numerous ways people practice drama therapy. Shamanic ritual, storytelling, creative play, and a variety of theatre practitioners such as Jerzy Grotowski, Bertolt Brecht, Constantin Stanislavski, and Augusto Boal have influenced the theory and practice of drama therapy.

Steve Mitchell’s "therapeutic theatre model" of drama therapy transforms the therapy group into a performance troupe that meets at regular intervals, evaluates problems using dramatic techniques, incorporates the experience into its members’ daily lives and stages their understandings and experiences for a larger public audience. The troupe performs a text, either an established play or a collage of established plays, that can enhance the performers’ understanding of other individuals and problems. Performers change, recognize change, share their growth with others, and (perhaps as a secondary feature) provide an example for others.

While psychodrama and drama therapy focus upon how groups use dramatic techniques and psychology, several performance scholars have examined performance as an individual psycho-social exploration. For example, David Williams grounds performance as a psycho-social exploration when he combines the psychology of Sigmund Freud and Carl Jung with performance techniques. Williams uses Freud’s suggestion that creativity emerges from personal neurosis and Jung’s concept of the artist swept up in an energy of creativity to ground his premise that performance expresses what the individual represses. Williams cites poetry therapy as an exemplar of performance’s psycho-social use. Despite the controversy
about Freudian psychology, Williams makes important contributions when he associates psychology with performance. He grounds performance as a science with useful implications, and he posits performance as a private activity of the performer. The performer uses performance not to entertain or teach audience members, nor to create social change. The performer uses dramatic techniques to re-experience, reflect, or detangle personal issues. Thus, rather than emphasize the relationship between text, context, performer, and/or the audience, the psycho-social perspective of performance as outlined by Williams focusses on the relationship performers have with their personal text (i.e., their personal experience). Social interaction becomes important only after the performer takes the first step toward personal understanding; after they understand themselves, they can begin to function in society.

The correlation between performance and psychology has also been the thrust of Leland Roloff's research. Like Williams, Roloff provides insight to performance as a psycho-social exploration when he asserts that performance does not need to serve the collective needs of society, but induces the performer to "consent" to the process (15). Roloff writes:

There is a nobility to performance, for through it, and inspired by it, that elemental power of the word is given the wings, or, rather, "winged word" is given the power to relate the individual to their essence, that above all being consciousness itself. A performer may become awakened to consciousness, to self, to the formidable reflection that is humankind, and to a self possession that is transcendent. Performance is not tangential to society; it is at the center of society, and shall remain there as long as human intelligence values what the cognition of image is about, what its performing sensibility creates, and ideally, what performance reflects of people themselves . . . (13).
Roloff asserts that performers who "consent" change their modes of perception. They become better able to relate to the world around them. Roloff maintains that performance links the individual to the community as the "oldest of the singing arts," shapes them as it reflects and articulates humanity's "imagined poetic mind," and commits them by providing a cohesive soul (13). Performance is a tool of self expression, self discovery, and social connection. The student taps into personal resources and understandings that lead to meaningful changes in the performer's life or viewpoint.

Although developmental drama theorists do not explicitly specify performance as a mechanism of change, they do emphasize the cognitive elements of performance. They suggest that dramatic techniques enhance the performer's ability to think critically and to enact their understandings. Caldwell Cook first explicated how drama could be used in the classroom to develop problem solving skills, enhance experiential learning, and create social awareness. Developmental drama leads to "deep-felt learning at all ages" (Courtney 4), because it relies upon the dialogic interaction of players who draw from their personal experiences to create meanings.

Usually, developmental drama entails spontaneous or improvisatory performances that affect both cognition (how one thinks) and learning (what one knows). Improvisation encourages players to imagine possibilities and to try out those possibilities as a way to understand. Thus, by working in a creative, imaginative mode they can check their own perceptions of the world with the
perceptions of others. Drama, then, becomes an empirical—not quantitative—test via
direct observation and data gathering (Courtney 13).

The use of performance in developmental drama produces a number of
effects on the participants who perform (Courtney 2-8). First, students become
confident about what they know and in their ability to handle new tasks. They
recognize that they can depend upon intuition, because they know more than they
first believed. In addition, as students practice roles and test ideas they become
aware that they do know what they know. Courtney calls this type of learning
"explicit knowing." Second, because they have practiced the procedure,
performers obtain a practical knowledge or "know how" as they learn to execute
certain tasks. Third, they become more efficient at processing information.
Information processing includes solving problems; recognizing abstract structures,
such as symbols and metaphors; and relating signifiers (signs) with the signified
(meaning). Developmental drama combines the experimental with the experiential to
create an imaginative, open-ended dialogue that encourages transformation.

Psycho-social functions of drama—as practiced by psychodramatists, drama
therapists, performance practitioners, or developmental dramatists—entail how
individuals use drama to engender personal change. This perspective (re)emphasizes
the dramatistic notion that individuals are agents who use performance for specific
reasons, including personal and social change. This perspective is also grounded in
the assumption that the performer uses her or his physical body to express that
which is otherwise inexpressible. The performing body translates and mediates
ideas and emotions. Performance as a psycho-social exploration instills personal awareness, personal change, reflection about change, and how change encourages the individual to interact with society. Psychodramatists and developmental dramatists share Boal’s notion of performance as a rehearsal for change. That is, performers engage the performance process by rehearsing potential solutions to problems or oppressive ways of interaction. As participants negotiate the performance/problem, they are gaining a better perspective of the problem and of what makes resolution possible.

Despite the many benefits one may experience as a result of using performance as a psycho-social exploration, several problems also arise. Much psycho-social praxis involves the individual. Psychodrama, for example, focuses upon the individual who performs in front of a group (and sometimes with the assistance of others). Others in the group become actors in internalized drama, and they evaluate the scene being enacted. By separating the individual/protagonist from others, this type of work does not seem to help individuals assimilate into social networks, nor does it encourage group interaction or support. Another problem area involves the context of the performance event. Psychodrama, drama therapy, and developmental drama are limited to the context of the therapy session or a classroom. Context becomes a limitation when individuals cannot apply their work to "real world" interaction. A third problem involves the goal of psychodrama and drama therapy, as well as the processes outlined by Williams and Roloff. These processes show individuals how to cope with existing systems, rather than to
illustrate how people might change the system. For example, Williams and Roloff concentrate upon "unconscious surrender" or "repressed" action. Neither of these ideas requires the performer to be critical or analytical regarding their social systems. They do not concern themselves with changing a social structure that is (potentially) oppressive. Since these techniques do not link their roleplaying with the "real world," performance becomes a replacement for action since it adapts people to existing social systems rather than enabling them to mold or change the system (c.f., Feldhendler 89; Schutzman 138).

**Socio-political Praxis**

In "From Academic to Socio-Political Uses of Performance," Kay Ellen Capo identifies a historical tendency to see performance in "formal" rather than socio-political terms (437). Quoting Karen Hermassi, she explains that theatre, like rhetoric, serves as a source of collective memory during moments of social change (438). This particular function situates performance, not only as a shared cultural tradition, but as an indicator of social change and revolution. She supports her point by reviewing how agitprop theatre asserted a rhetorical focus during the 1960s in order to dramatize social consciousness and to present pressing issues of the times. In another article Capo explains that some kinds of performance "serves instrumental functions in social order" and maintains "open rhetorical relationships with the audience" ("Social Dialectic" 34). Performance takes a "unique position" to ask "community members to take control of their own lives" ("Social Dialectic" 34). So, performance stimulates critical awareness, but it also challenges individuals
to act upon their awareness. Theatre is a training for political action, a tool for social transformation.

Theatre as socio-political praxis radically shifts our conceptualization of the text, performer, and audience. The text becomes material scripted for advocacy as numerous social concerns infiltrate performance events. The performance becomes an agency of change as it illuminates social problems, encourages social awareness and dissent, and serves as a source of public discussion. This function complements the premise that performance is a pragmatic and utilitarian tool in addition to an aesthetic product. The performer is an agent who realizes and utilizes performance as an instrument of change.

Victor Turner recognizes performance as a tool performers wield for social change. He explains that performance does not simply mirror social systems (Anthropology 21). He notes performance’s "reciprocal and reflexive" characteristics and suggests that performance is "often a critique, direct or veiled, of the social life that grows out of it, an evaluation . . . of the way society handles history" (Anthropology 22). V. Turner writes:

... cultural performances are not simple reflectors or expressions of culture or even of changing culture but may themselves be active agencies of change, representing the eye by which the culture sees itself and the drawing board on which creative actors sketch out what they believe to be more apt "designs for living" (Anthropology 24).

At first V. Turner seems to adhere to an approach that examines or discusses cultural contexts of performances. He explains that performance can be used to ask for social change. However, the second portion of his statement names performers
as agents who use performance as an agency of change. V. Turner situates people as "self-performing animals" who can use performance to critically examine their own activities and behaviors (81). With performance as "sketching" society (V. Turner 24) or "making," V. Turner lays groundwork for performance as "breaking" and "remaking" the social standards that oppress individuals (Conquergood, "Ethnography" 84).

A number of educators and performance scholars have explicated performance as a socio-political praxis and have emphasized audience members as potential agents of change. The British Theatre in Education movement (TIE), as espoused by Tony Jackson and others, provides a qualitative account of how performance changes audience members. TIE consists of performance troupes that travel to local elementary and secondary schools to educate students about social problems such as drug abuse, AIDS, and dropping out of school.

Performance scholars have staged similar projects and used quantitative studies to record how performance alters an audience's perception of social issues. Miller Rassulo and Hecht measured performance's effectiveness to educate and modify attitudes toward stepfamily issues (40). They used carefully chosen and scripted literature to "trigger" specific changes in how audience members altered "unrealistic traditional attitudes" about stepfamilies (52). In an extension of this research, Mann, Hecht, and Valentine recorded performance's ability to modify "sexual attitudes and to develop a model for assertiveness training in a dating context in order to prevent rape or unwanted sexual aggression" (272). Fuoss,
Kistenberg, and Rosenfeld noted that attendance at a performance festival featuring works by and about gays, lesbians, and bisexuals reduced an individual’s homophobia.

In both TIE and performance studies, performance constituted an important tool to educate the audience and to produce behavior modification in audience members. While these studies are effective in terms of disseminating information and empirically proving that performance induces change in audience members, they situate performance as an audience-centered praxis. They emphasize informing audience members rather than analyzing the process of change, the dialogue between audience, performance text, performer, and the performance context. This focus gives less attention to the performer as an agent who knowingly, strategically forms a message for audience change. In addition, this focus provides little detail about modes and methods of change.

Bertolt Brecht’s performance practices position the performers as agents of social change. Brecht explains that performance causes change when performers educate audience members about the need for social change. Performers disturb audience members in a way that initiates their critical thinking. Thus, Brecht is not concerned with confirming audience beliefs, but with changing those beliefs by creating an assembly capable of making change. Esslin writes that Brecht regarded most theatre as "culinary theatre" which is "gobbled up and forgotten" (114). Brecht’s technique revolves around distancing. *Verfremdungseffekt*, often translated "alienation effect," suggests that distance between audience, action, and character
makes one examine that which is familiar or routine in order to make new discoveries or to "enlarge our understanding" (Esslin 117). Brecht asserts that audience members should not be made to empathize with the characters as most theatre espouses, but that audience members should be kept apart, distanced or detached from the action in order for them to be reflexive about what they see. By keeping audience members in a critical frame, theatre exposes social contradictions, dissatisfaction, and inequities.

Other performance practitioners document the interaction between performer, text, performance event, and audience members that occurs when theatre enters a socio-political realm. Recent studies by Shannon Jackson and Kirk Fuoss illustrate performance's political potential. Shannon Jackson, for example, used performance techniques and ethnographic insight to critique the audition process used by Chicago's theatre community. After she observed auditions at four Chicago theaters, she scheduled interviews with a small group of performers and directors. These transcripts provided the basis for an analysis of the audition process and provoked her to question the implicit and explicit rules of auditioning, the panopticism of the audition process, and the strategies individuals used to improve their performance, audition, and attitude. As she compiled the script, S. Jackson juxtaposed stories, edited narratives, and conceived characters who would assist her exploration of the audition process. In doing so, she articulated her evaluation of that process.
In his analysis of 1936 seizure of the New Jersey State Assembly by the Workers’ Alliance of America, Kirk Fuoss asserts that WAA protestors used performance as integral components of their protest. Fuoss explains that WAA members moved into the Assembly’s chamber, occupied legislative seats, and called the "Assembly" to order. The demonstrators proposed a corporate tax bill and defeated a sales tax that would harm "the persons it was designed to aid" (333). WAA members depicted their "ideal legislature" and articulated their perception of how actual legislators perceived the unemployed or relief recipients (334). In the final days of the protest, the WAA organized the Farm-Labor party to represent the laborers in an upcoming election (336-37). Fuoss identifies three performance postures WAA members assumed during the protest: (1) alliance members played the roles of legislators and addressed the labor crisis, (2) alliance members used role-playing techniques to critique legislators, and (3) they became potential candidates for the "real" legislative assembly (338). Fuoss maintains that the first posture demonstrates the way Alliance members believe legislators should behave; legislators should respond to the crisis in an expedient manner. The other two performance postures are "remonstrative" in that they point out what the WAA perceived as "monstrous." Consequently, WAA members used enactment to engage in conflict and change rather than represent or discuss change.

Those who use performance as a socio-political praxis advocate performance as a tool for examining social concerns. As a type of political instrument, performance becomes implicated in a number of concerns and questions. These
questions included whose interests does performance serve? The community? People such as government officials or religious leaders who have historically controlled theatre? How do different groups value performance? What occurs when these values clash? These types of questions problematize performance as a method of social change. As a result of engaging this kind of performance process, people may develop reflexivity about their own behaviors, gain a better perspective of social concerns, and rehearse potential avenues of social and personal transformation.

Performance as *kinesis* connotes a performance with potential to move and change society. This type of performance becomes dynamic, contingent, and relative to specific social circumstances as it activates people who can transform society. Performance as a psycho-social exploration encourages people to make changes to enhance their quality of living. Performance as a socio-political praxis teaches the people about the necessity to assert themselves in society, to solve problems efficiently, and to accomplish social reform. In both cases, performance becomes a starting point for critical awareness. Unfortunately, performance scholars have provided few records of the process, exercises, or techniques they used in order to produce such results. Thus, while individuals may theoretically or hypothetically accept the premise that performance can engender personal and social change, they have little documented proof to support their claims or "instructions" to help others replicate the results.
Theatre of the Oppressed

Augusto Boal's TO techniques are one way of bringing the theories regarding performance's psycho-social and socio-political uses into practice. His methods offer a relatively simple, organized, teachable, replicable system for doing "kinetic" performance. When Boal first developed TO, he sought to liberate people from "concrete, visible oppressions" (Rainbow 8), such as poverty, hunger, and political anarchy, that are prevalent in Third World countries. He explained that people could use dramatic techniques to discuss, enact, and resolve problems that individuals and society faced daily. While his early goals for TO revolved around the need to liberate the oppressed from "visible oppressions," his later uses for TO methods involve combatting different internalized oppressions, which he calls "cops-in-the-heads." As others spread his praxis to North America and Europe, Boal revised TO to confront loneliness, alienation, or discrimination. He called these revisions "Rainbow of Desire."

Boal sought ways to position theatre as a language that people could use to solve problems. He believed that people could enact problems as a type of analysis, then as a way to refigure the problem's existence in a social context. He devised a series of games and exercises to use in changing individuals from passive objects into subjects who could think, critique, contest, and act. Boal explained that the transformation occurred in four phases.

In the first phase performers develop a better awareness of their bodies. Since the body is "the main source of sound and movement," performers need to
understand how their bodies move, how their bodies facilitate their own action. For example, guards who constantly pace during their shift "will develop muscular structures that facilitate walking" (TO 127). Exercises at this phase helps performers identify how they habitually move, how their social roles encourage certain movement, and how to "rehabilitate" the body in a way that utilizes all possibilities for movement.

After understanding how their bodies move, performers move through a second stage. Exercises at this stage enable performers to make their bodies more expressive. This phase eliminates verbal expression to rely upon physical stance and gesture to communicate ideas. All communication "exists" in how the performers mold their bodies as a translation of their ideas.

In the third stage, Boal turns toward language and to specific themes to serve as the focus for exercises. Performers compile a "script" as they improvise a problem or intervene in an action rather than enact something already written (TO 126). One activity at the third stage entails Boal's concept of Forum Theatre, which allows participants to approach the playing area to intervene directly in the action; audience members become "spect-actors" who are no longer content to watch what happens. As the performance generates "spect-actors," it eliminates the distinction between the members of the performance troupe and the audience. As a joint effort, performance becomes a "rehearsal of revolution" as participants practice a real act in a fictional setting (TO 141).
In a fourth stage performers use a number of techniques to create "spectacles" about a social problem. With one technique, Invisible Theatre, performers present a theatrical spectacle in a public location without framing the event as a performance. Everyone in the location becomes involved as a core of performers solicit intervention from those nearby. In the fourth stage, performers search for potential solutions by rehearsing those possibilities. Boal believes that people become liberated when they realize they can take action. He devised this type of theatre to generate liberation for oppressed people and to initiate social change.

Boal's methods represent a nexus for performance-centered inquiry, since his techniques show individuals how to use performance to develop personal and social change. In addition to asking individuals to identify "cops-in-the-heads" and to investigate ways to dislodge them, he extends his methods to a larger context. That is, he asks individuals to extend investigations beyond the personal level to incorporate sociopolitical factors that influence and paralyze individuals. At this juncture, TO methods teach individuals to explore personal problems, link the personal to the social, and resolve issues at the social level. Performance initiates social change as it teaches people to identify internal oppressions, emancipates people from those oppressions, and induces others to follow suit.

Although Boal has written several books detailing methods associated with TO, he has refrained from articulating a theoretical framework for his techniques. He asserts that performance is a useful tool to engender change, and he exemplifies
how his methods can be used, but he never about speculates why his methods work nor explains how he conceptualized those methods.

Boal's methods seem to rest upon the concept of power. He operates on the premise that individuals politicize theatre. First, he suggests that "traditional" performance is "a very efficient" weapon used by ruling classes to dominate; theater separates who can and who cannot act. Only certain people participate, use theatre to speak. Additionally, the spectator delegates speaking power to performers and upholds a passive role in the performance process. Boal appropriates the power of theatre and places it in the hands of all people. Thus, just as performance oppresses, it liberates, since everyone obtains subject status when they use theatre "appropriately." Second, Boal explains that with a common tool such as theatre, people could work together to take charge of their communities. Performance is powerful because it is a type of collective learning. People learn from each other and from the process. Performance balances or distributes power to all individuals. As people engage in dialogue, share actions, inform one another, and change society, all people obtain the opportunity for participation. Performance becomes mutual negotiation and discovery rather than set delineations between who can and who cannot speak.

Boal's techniques offer a practical example of how performance can be a "kinetic" activity. By teaching people to become aware of personal behaviors and their social ramifications, performance enables them to examine their behaviors, evaluate the benefits and the harms, and make behavioral alterations. In other
words, performance techniques encourage personal awareness that leads to personal change. After change occurs on the individual level, social change becomes a possibility since (1) social change results from the collective change of many individuals, and (2) individuals can take further measures to address or rally the public about the need for social change.

**Project Design and Procedures**

In order to test performance as a mechanism of personal and social change, I designed a three-stage rehearsal process. In April 1994, I approached undergraduate speech courses at Louisiana State University to solicit student volunteers to participate in the first stage, focus group discussions. Thirty-one men and women participated in focus group discussions. Five of these women continued with the project by engaging in the second stage, rehearsals, and the third stage, three public performances about eating and body image. These five women were undergraduates from either the College of Arts and Sciences or the General College. An additional cast member was a first-year graduate student in speech communication; she did not participate in the focus group discussions.³

During the first phase, I organized focus group discussions so that participants could discuss their eating practices, relationship with food, and feelings about their bodies. This discussion included what participants ate, why they ate, and what emotions and memories emerged when they thought about eating or food. They also recognized that although they once adopted their eating practices to consciously shape their identities, they had since "naturalized" their eating practices
so that they were unconscious routines. During the focus group discussions, performers took the first step toward critical awareness.

Focus group methodology enabled me to accomplish a number of tasks. I created a space where strangers could assemble to share their stories and experiences about eating and body image. In addition to accumulating large amounts of information and thought-provoking narratives, I was able to assess how women positioned food in their daily lives and how that position compared to their feelings about the body. I observed whether women were conscious or unconscious about their eating practices and body image, determined whether or not that consciousness extended to social standards and norms, and compared their stories with their actions. These observations contributed to my assessment of how the performer developed reflexivity and initiated change.

The second stage of the performance process, the rehearsals, led to three public performances. During this phase, the group, now a performance troupe, watched the videotapes of the focus group discussions and adapted August Boal's games and exercises to analyze their ideas about eating practices and body image. The troupe used three types of games to illustrate prominent ideas from the focus group discussions. First, they engaged in a series of body-movement exercises that started rehearsals. Then, they began to solidify the movements into images that reflected oppressions surrounding eating and body image. In the third phase of the rehearsal session, the group "tested" its work by preparing a banquet for one another, by engaging in Invisible Theatre, and by watching and discussing several
television shows that presented issues and concerns similar to those of the troupe. During this phase, performers displayed critical skills by conducting their own analysis of eating practices and the standards that surrounded those practices. Furthermore, they began to enact those understandings.

In the third phase of the performance process, the public performance/forum, members of the performance troupe enacted their ideas by following Boal’s concept of Forum Theatre. Performers initiated discussion about eating and body image at three public performances. They illustrated how they could discuss and question their knowledge. With this transformation from “victims” of cultural constructions to agents who (re)write constructions, performers used performance as a pedagogical tool. Performers and the audience/spect-actors simultaneously learned from each other.

Limitations

I have already detailed how I contribute to knowledge of performance by documenting the process, by providing a qualitative study, by suggesting that the power of performance can stem from the performers who use performance as a mode of communication, and by showing how performance can be a pragmatic tool for change. However, hindsight often reveals limitations that affect research and interpretation of that research. Consequently, I must explain some of the caveats of the study and recognize the limitations. As with any research endeavor, these limitations should be kept in mind when reading this study.
Over the course of this research, many have confused my studies about food and body image with studies about eating disorders. This study does not seek to provide a profile of people with eating disorders, nor does it seek to make generalizations about how women, college women, or the women who participated in this project felt about their bodies. In short, I do not "diagnose" the participants. Instead, I seek to illustrate how individuals learn—about eating and otherwise—as a result of performing. I posit that my offering a place for these women to speak helped the participants question and clarify their own relationship to food and how they use food to construct their identity.

Selection and demographics of the performers also present limitations. The women in this study are self-selected, college-aged women. I used volunteers because I did not want to presume that certain people would be interested in discussing food, because I wanted participants who wanted to contribute to the discussions, and because the time commitment necessary to the study required participants genuinely interested in the project. For instance, focus group participants agreed to meet for five, one-hour sessions over a four week period, and the performers in the second stage of the project committed to rehearsals several nights a week over a semester, as well as another public performance during the following semester. All performers, except for one, participated in the focus group discussions.

College-aged women are appropriate for several reasons. I used college-aged women not only for practical reasons (i.e., accessibility), but also because food and
appearance are important concerns for most college-aged women, who move into an environment where social comparison is particularly rampant. At this age most have already developed clear eating habits and eating practices. Many college-aged women support a $33 billion weightloss industry by incorporating diet and exercise plans into their daily lives (Wolf 17; for more information about eating practices of college-aged women and adolescents, also see Sciacca et al.; McNamara; Vincent). Furthermore, most eating disorders occur in college-aged women and young girls. Often, women learn to binge, purge, and fast in the college dormitory. Psychologist Hilde Bruch explains that many women develop eating disorders when they leave familiar surroundings. New experiences, environments, and people cause feelings of inadequacy; consequently, an individual embarks on a plan that boosts the impression of how she perceives herself and of how others perceive her.

Other limitations concern performance as a pedagogical process. First, I do not predict or measure any longitudinal effects performance has upon the participants. While I can chart the change in attitude and behavior of six women over a seven-month period, I cannot assess the permanence of that change. Also, I do not present the definitive word of performance as method of inquiry or as an active way to affect societal norms. Building upon performance's rich pedagogical tradition, I contribute to a scarce body of research that documents how the performance process works. I provide one example of how performance creates individuals who can think critically, position themselves in cultural discourse, and initiate social dialogue that may lead to social change. I demonstrate how
performance empowers these women to construct their own stories about eating and
food—even if their story "defies" cultural norms and standards.

In this chapter I explained that performance is a valuable tool for personal
and social change. I explained how different scholars, educators, and practitioners
use drama for therapeutic purposes, in addition to a method of literary analysis.
With this foundation, I previewed the process I used in documenting performance as
a pedagogical tool that stimulates critical awareness and critical change. This
particular performance process followed the performance tradition of Augusto Boal,
who encourages performers to solve problems by enacting those problems and
potential solutions. Finally, this chapter presented several factors that may limit the
results/interpretation of this research. While I do not answer all questions about
performance's role in pedagogy, I do believe that this research endeavor establishes
a foundation performance scholars can use to build a body of research that
documents the type of knowledge performance generates and how it generates that
knowledge.

Notes

1 British practitioners use one word.

2 Cook's theory of developmental drama has influenced contemporary figures
in developmental drama including Peter Slade, Brian Way, Dorothy Heathcote, and
Richard Courtney. Supporters of the developmental drama have used its roleplaying
techniques, not only to teach literature and composition (Blake; Richmond; Rocklin),
but also to enhance multicultural awareness (Mahala) and to explore feminist theory
(Burroughs). James Butler, furthermore, argues that drama is useful in science
classes as it creates a supportive environment for learning and enhances cognitive
processes.
For a more detailed discussion of the selection process, see Chapter Two; for a description of the six-member performance troupe, see Appendix D.
CHAPTER 2

TAking the first steps: interviews, actions, and experiences

The first phase in examining performance as a tool for personal and social change involved focus group discussions. Over the course of four weeks, female members of the focus groups became more conscious of their eating habits as they shared their personal experiences and ideas about food, eating, and body image. The focus group discussions identified eating as a problem for the participants and served as an intermediary between experience and theory, since discussions frequently confirmed or contested some of the ideas set forth by other scholars. In addition, the focus group discussions encouraged participants to be more reflexive about their eating practices.

When this phase began, participants were unreflexive about their eating habits and the cultural context of those habits. They had naturalized certain behaviors. Every day, they selected certain foods and ate in a particular manner without asking "why" or without discerning the social implications and relevance of those acts. As the discussions continued, participants became more aware that their eating practices were learned responses to situations, feelings, and events; that they executed certain behaviors because they knew they had an audience who watched and interpreted those eating behaviors; and that they may have first adopted their
eating practices as a way to shape their bodies, create an identity, or join a society that values exercise and fitness. Participants recognized that they had routinized their behaviors until they seemed "normal." The focus group discussions encouraged them to become more reflexive about the personal and social implications of their actions.

In addition focus group participants confirmed, contested, and supplemented some of my assumptions about the problematic of eating, as well as those of other scholars who theorize concerns about eating and body image. Scholars have written numerous books and articles addressing eating and the body in connection to theoretical issues of gender, feminism, psychoanalysis, philosophy, cultural production, and economics. Many of the theorists, however, contradict one another as they present their own perspective of eating, weight control, or body image. Most of these perspectives originate in concerns about physical health or psychological well-being.

Brownell and Rodin note that health officials have always debated the desirability of a lean body, and the benefits of exercise and dieting given the increasing rate of eating disorders and dieting relapses. Some doctors, such as cardiologist Henry Solomon, claim that many people have "the mistaken idea that strenuous activity promotes health and longevity" (Solomon 24). Solomon writes:

Some people who exercise live a long time, some don’t; some sedentary people die young, others live to their biological limit. There is about the same relationship between activity and longevity as you might find if you were to compare the amount of chocolate pudding children eat with the likelihood of their coming down with chicken pox—that is, no relation at all (28).
Other doctors maintain that although the connection between eating disorders and dieting has not been proven, many eating disorder patients usually cite dieting as the first step toward their disorder. Medical professionals have also studied the "discouraging rates of relapse" in those treated for obesity, as well as question if "obesity should be treated at all" (qtd. in Brownell and Rodin 782).

A second perspective outlines psychological elements of eating and body image. Psychologists frequently use quantitative methods to evaluate self-management behaviors while losing weight (Lichtenstein and Sherman; Bolocofsky, Spinter, and Coulthand-Morris), to monitor depression and food intake (McNamara), to relate body mass index with the status of perceived weight (Sciacca et al.), or to gage attitudes and moods of dieters (Parham, et al.; Wing, et al).

Other psychological studies about hunger and food emerge from a physiological standpoint. By studying laboratory animals with diets similar to humans, Geiselman, for example, collects data about physiological causes of appetite, hunger, and satiety, and generalizes her findings to a human population. These data reveal important findings about how our bodies respond to and process certain types of food, as well as how sex hormones effect our eating patterns. With these types of studies, one can see that eating is a behavior frequently motivated by the physiological makeup of each particular body, in addition to the individual's state of mind.

Clinical psychological research has also revealed that a preoccupation with body image and excessive monitoring of food intake often constitutes a concrete
symptom of deeper concerns, including personal identity and inadequacy. Thus, clinical research involves a wealth of information about eating disorders, identity, and empowerment. These studies indicate that women use food to control bodily size and shape, to assert individual power, and to create an identity they deem desirable. Often these actions lead to eating disorders. Clinical psychological research frequently traces the prevalence of eating disorders, diagnoses the disorders, and describes therapy and treatment of those with eating disorders.

Although anorexia often begins when someone who is overweight by cultural standards diets, anyone who perceives herself as fat and embarks on a plan to reduce that fatness can become anorexic. For example, frequently someone with anorexia encounters a new experience (e.g. summer camp, a new school) that makes her feel inadequate in comparison to others. She becomes afraid of not making friends, not being athletic, or not being the best student in their class. Without familiar support systems she alters her weight to boost the impression she makes upon others. After receiving praise and admiration, she decides that more weightloss will bring more respect and praise (Bruch, Eating Disorders 55). As anorexia nervosa progresses and the body becomes emaciated, she transforms; the "good girl" becomes secretive, deceptive, and hostile; she no longer seeks admiration from others, because she becomes estranged from the outside world (Spitzack, "Spectacle" 9). Bodily pleasure is privatized as she eats (or does not eat) to please herself, as she reveals her body only to herself (Spitzack, "Spectacle" 9). Hiding her body from others allows her to hide what she considers her inadequacies.
Some feminists describe anorexia as an active political protest. The female who refuses to eat, writes Orbach, engages in a hunger strike (101-02). Anorexia empowers her by sounding her voice and displaying her strength. Bruch concurs. She emphasizes that most anorectics engage in a "desperate fight against feeling enslaved and exploited" and that being thin gives them a "sense of pride, power, and accomplishment" (The Golden Cage x and 2). Through body transformation the anorectic is able to express nonverbally what she cannot express verbally.

Bulimia, another eating disorder, entails a circular situation in which the person gorges large amounts of food, then tries to "undo" the binge by vomiting, exercising, fasting, or abusing laxatives and diuretics. The bulimic eats, then "beats" herself for the eating; purging is the solution. Unlike anorexia which has occurred primarily in upper middle class females, bulimia occurs in a more diverse population. Reports from the National Association of Anorexia Nervosa and Associated Disorders indicate that bulimia affects all classes and ages of females. Other differences between anorexia and bulimia involve the amount of food consumed and body size. While both the anorectic and bulimic are obsessed with food, the bulimic eats large amounts of food quickly, while the anorectic consumes very little food over a period of hours. In addition, whereas anorectics maintain less than a healthy weight and frequently stop menstruating, the bulimic is often considered a "normal size." This difference leads to greater harm, since the bulimic frequently has the disorder years before someone discovers it.
Eating disorders, such as anorexia and bulimia, involve adopting specific eating practices to shape a body that serves as evidence for a new identity. Eating disorders are coping mechanisms people use to handle a body they see as undesirable. Those with these disorders feel that they will be happier if they are thin, that they are in control, that appearance is important to social interaction. Both disorders operate from privacy: the anorectic takes private pleasure in her control, while the bulimic hides her binging and purging. Both obsess to obtain or maintain a body size and shape that society deems standard.

Many theorists do not view reducing body size as a sign of power and control (see Schoenfeld and Wieser; Chernin). They posit that refusing food to create a smaller body size reduces the power of women. Kim Chernin (qtd. in Tisdale 53) indicates that women’s spaces are always smaller and inadequate. Tisdale exemplifies Chernin’s statement by comparing a woman’s chair to a man’s chair. The larger chair allows men to relax, spread out, take space. The smaller chair confines women, and those who “sprawl” face negative connotations. Feminists like Chernin fight physical smallness, because it correlates with political and social invisibility, something most feminists fight.

Vivian Mayer and other members of the fat liberation movement agree with Chernin’s assertions about female size and power. In Los Angeles during the 1970s members of the Fat Underground outlined five components of their philosophy: (1) biology rather than eating habits causes females to be heavy; (2) health problems, including heart disease, high blood pressure, and heart disease, are not linked to fat,
but to the stress and selfhatred of chronic dieting; (3) weightloss efforts damage health and never succeed except as temporary measures; (4) food binges are natural responses to dieting; (5) one should work to feel good about herself, regardless of cultural pressures to engage in programs that may psychologically and physically cause harm (Schoenfeld and Wieser xi). The Fat Underground combined a radical feminist agenda with "radical therapy," which relates ordinary "personal problems to broad social injustices" (Schoenfeld and Wieser xi). As Schoenfeld and Wieser write, "[b]eing round is being female--that's why men have asked us to go away. They want us to be little, smaller than they" (20). Unlike Orbach and others who suggest that fasting brings women power and control over their bodies, members of the Fat Underground believe women can gain power only by defying the cultural norms that restrict and confine women.

In addition to groups who decry dieting as succumbing to cultural pressures, others view dieting as a spiritual display (Bringle 61), because dieting focusses on the body rather than spirit. This position seems very closely aligned with classical philosophy and religion; however, this perspective advocates bringing mind and body together by attuning ourselves to hunger. People eat what they want until they reach--but do not exceed--fullness. Fasting and feasting comprise two undesirable extremes: fasting is a disciplined act of the mind that uses the body to express devotion, rationality, or strength, while feasting sacrifices discipline altogether to appease the body. Only in moderation can one overcome the extremes and achieve spiritual well-being.
In this chapter I examine how the focus group participants described eating as a problem and how participants displayed little critical awareness of their eating practices during this phase of the rehearsal process. First, I describe focus group methodology. I explain the rationale for focus group interviewing, how I obtained participants for the study, and the general format of the focus group interviews. Then, I analyze the focus group discussions. Following James Spradley's process of ethnographic research, I organize data into two broad domains, unconscious reports and reflexive reports, to guide my analysis of how the participants began to develop critical consciousness. These domains include subdomains, such as what female participants ate, how and when they ate, and how they regarded certain foods. With each domain, I provide a "thick description" of the discussions in order to decipher "webs of significance" behind their behaviors and reports (Geertz 4-5), and I relate some of their remarks to ongoing scholarly discussion about eating and body image. With this analysis I suggest that the focus group interviews centered the participants' thoughts so that they could begin careful consideration of their eating behaviors.

Methodology

As the first step to study how the performance process generates personal awareness, critical consciousness, and social activism, I organized a series of focus group discussions. During these discussions participants discussed and debated concerns related to eating, dieting, exercising, and social norms. They isolated eating as a problem rather than a biological imperative. Their discussions served as a foundation for the rehearsals that comprised the second stage of the performance
process and for the three public performances that constituted the final phase of the performance process. In this section I explain the theoretical basis of focus group interviewing, the subject selection process, and the general format of the discussions in this phase of the performance process.

Focus Group Interviews

I adapted the focus group method of research, outlined by Byers and Wilcox, in order to generate a flexible, free-flowing dialogue about eating. Focus group methodology offers researchers the opportunity to actively participate in the action, provides data not obtainable through self-report measures, and allows participants to express their concerns in a specific, directed context (Byers and Wilcox 64). With this methodology I could structure a consistent format for every group without restricting or shaping the specific ideas of the participants.

Focus group interviewing is a method that empowers both researcher and participant. Byers and Wilcox (following Lederman) explain that this method of research assumes: (1) that people are valuable sources of information; (2) that people can articulate their thoughts, feelings, and behaviors; (3) that the moderator can guide—not control—the interview in order to obtain information; (4) that group dynamics generate information rather than instill group conformity; and (5) interviewing in a group rather than interviewing individuals produces a wider range of topics, ideas, and perspectives related to the topic under discussion (65). As a result, focus group interviewing instills a balance between researcher and
participants. Dichotomies that separate researcher and participants blur as both learn from each other by becoming "co-producers" of knowledge.

Getting Participants

I obtained participants in two steps. First, I visited undergraduate speech classes at Louisiana State University to obtain a list of individuals who would be interested in a study about eating and body image. When I approached undergraduate speech classes to obtain participants, I briefly explained that I wanted their help in collecting information about eating and body image. In return, they could receive one hour of speech communication credit for their participation. I asked each student to complete a brief body image survey obtained from a high school education module (Giarratano 39; see Appendix A). The survey only served as a solicitation tool, since I did not tabulate statistics on the data. Those wishing to participate completed a contact form at the bottom of the survey. I received forty-two responses.

Although I wanted females for this project, I did not wish to discriminate against male students in the classes. In addition, I felt that all students should have access to the credit hour and the extra credit that many of the instructors volunteered to give students participating in the discussions. Consequently, I divided the surveys based upon sex and contacted every person who responded. Thirty-one people (five males; twenty-six females) agreed to participate. Ages of participants ranged between seventeen and twenty-nine years-old. In addition, participants represented a variety of majors, including mechanical engineering, elementary education, dietetics,
English, business administration, and general studies. Only four majored in speech communication. Most participants were white females, although two African American males, one Vietnamese-American female, and a female student from England also participated in these focus group discussions. I organized five focus groups that met five times over a four-week period. With this procedure I positioned participants as persons with information to share, rather than base selection upon my own hypotheses about who would be interested in such a project, and I obtained dedicated volunteers who committed to the project because of their own keen interest.

While Byers and Wilcox suggest that eight to twelve people should comprise each group, I organized smaller groups of five to six participants because of the personal nature of the topic. I organized four female focus groups and one male focus group, although I used only the information generated by the female groups to conduct my analysis of agency and critical consciousness, and as the basis for the rehearsals and public performance. After participants signed a consent form (see Appendix B), I conducted the focus group sessions in the speech communication department's conference room. I acted as moderator for each group, and I audio- and videorecorded each session.

Format for Group Discussions

Over a period of four weeks, five groups of participants gathered for five, one-hour sessions to address a specific topic related to eating and body image. I brought a list of topics and questions for the group to explore in each session (see
Appendix C). Topics and questions, as well as my own assumptions prior to the interviews, were based upon a survey of literature addressing weight reduction, health, eating disorders, and food, as well as television, film, and literary representations of bodies. Group members were not restricted to these topics. Participants were able to raise their own questions, topics, and ideas based upon their individual experiences.

Each focus group interview combined a general interview guide approach, an informal conversational interview (Patton 197-198), and an ethnographic interview (Spradley). This approach allowed me to ask "descriptive questions" that could guide me in making observations (Spradley 75), and to create an open, flexible atmosphere. Indeed, the focus group discussions resembled a free-flowing conversation with equal participation by each member. After the first few minutes of the first session, most participants seemed to forget that they were being videotaped and that they were part of a research project. They revealed personal—often distressful—experiences. Members recounted experiences with name-calling or told how a relationship "soured" because they had gained extra weight. Group members seemed to trust other group members and the group process. They volunteered personal information, gave advice, comforted each other, and displayed an extraordinary knowledge of weight control techniques, although few recognized their knowledge until they had discussed the techniques in the focus group sessions.

Focus group interviewing provided an efficient and expedient method for generating knowledge about eating and body image. The interviews framed eating
as a problem these women encountered daily. The participants had carefully selected strategies to cope with their "problem," and naturalized the strategies until they became unconscious habits.

Focus group methodology provided an experience that strengthened this study of agency, since focus group interviewing favors interaction and participation. Participants acquired the opportunity to tell what they knew in a supportive and democratic process. Thus, not only did they generate information about body image, participants learned from each other and established a degree of critical consciousness as they engaged in this stage of the performance process.

Focus Group Analysis

Every focus group participant encountered problems with food—either in terms of weightloss, weightgain, etiquette, or social perceptions. Many of the accounts seemed to indicate that participants' surveillance of their eating practices had engendered a way of life that all took for granted. While they critically examined diets, they never questioned "dieting."

In conducting my analysis, I sorted the data according to the participants' growing reflexivity about dieting as a discourse. The first "cultural domain," or "category of cultural meaning" (Spradley 88), entails ways participants demonstrated an unconscious or semiconscious understanding of their eating habits. According to participants' early reports, their activities have little connection to social standards and norms; they eat as they do because it is their "normal" mode of eating. This first domain, unconscious reports, usually includes data from the first several focus
group sessions that addressed what, when, where, and how participants ate. Reports from later focus group discussions indicate that participants exhibited more reflexivity about how their eating practices affect their body image and how those practices relate to social standards that govern eating and body image. The second domain, reflexive reports, categorizes how participants became more cognizant of their eating practices and about the relationship between those practices and their body image. Participants also revealed a connection between eating and body image as they explained strategies they used to create a specific body. In this report, I explain that focus group members knew a great deal about dieting, but that they had never thoroughly examined dieting in terms of social standards or questioned how they were affected by those standards. When participants discussed their feelings about food, how they felt about their bodies, and what events/people affected those feelings, they began to make discoveries about themselves and society. These discoveries provided the foundation for a fledgling critical consciousness. They began to analyze "dieting" and social standards. Critical consciousness enabled them to act upon their expanded understanding of problems associated with eating.

Exhibiting Unconsciousness

When the focus group discussions began, participants explained that they ate what they ate because "it's normal." While a few admitted that what one considered "normal" may vastly differ from another person's idea of normality, all talked about their eating in a way that defined it as an unconscious or semi-conscious behavior. Yet, their eating habits seemed to be deliberate behaviors evolved from their
particular lifestyles. Some participants ate in their manner because they lived hectic lives or earned little money. In other cases, they ate certain foods because they had learned to eat healthy or because they feared gaining weight. Participants may have at one time consciously changed their eating habits to cope with their schedules and income, to adhere to medical guidelines of wellness, or to conform to society's ideal body type, but they had since incorporated these habits into their lives to such an extent that they no longer consciously ate to serve those "original" motives.

Throughout this description of what and how the participants ate, I demonstrate that participants displayed little current contemplation of their eating practices, although their reports suggested prior awareness and choice about those practices. Most explained what and how they ate as "normal," and they took little time to reflect critically upon those patterns.

What They Eat

Although one might expect twenty-six individuals to disclose many different food preferences and eating patterns, group members were very similar in their eating practices. As they described what they ate, their attitudes suggested that they all followed specific rules about breakfast, lunch, dinner, and snacks. Also, their reports implied an uncritical acceptance of the social standards that surrounded those meals.

Participants placed a high value on the importance of breakfast. Most ate breakfast as a strict rule. Only one female explained that she "can't eat when I first get up." Two experiences particularly revealed the unconscious value the group
placed upon breakfast. In addition, participants positioned themselves as unable to break the "breakfast rule." Lara’s experience revealed breakfast as a "must." She explained, "I’m addicted." She described how she felt when she first learned to eat breakfast:

I must eat breakfast or my stomach growls when I am in class. I felt sick for a while when I first started eating it, but now it’s totally normal. Like I don’t feel nauseous anymore, and if it’s 6:00 a.m., then of course, I’ll get sick, but if it’s 7:30 or 8:00, I have to eat.

In this instance, Lara had disciplined herself physically and mentally to eat breakfast until it was part of her daily routine. Yet, she explained this discipline—which also enabled her to wake up earlier, to get to school or work, and to stay productive until she could eat dinner later in the day—as a conditioned response to the nausea she felt in the morning. Lara abdicated control of eating breakfast. She had no control in the matter, since her body physically demanded breakfast.

Pam’s report also showed that she surrendered control over her breakfast habits. Pam said that she rarely had time to eat breakfast, but "I try to eat a bowl of cereal, but usually it’s just a glass of milk. I at least try to do that.” In this discussion, Pam revealed that she believed she should eat breakfast, even though she preferred to skip the meal altogether. However, instead of structuring her eating patterns according to her own preferences and time schedules, she forced herself to eat breakfast. She used the phrase "at least" to acknowledge her adherence to the importance nutrition and health experts place upon "starting the day right."

Participants also demonstrated that they had very specific ideas about what foods they considered appropriate breakfast foods. One person said that she
preferred a "full meal, the works, with eggs, toast, and juice." Others ate quick foods, such as instant grits or bagels. Most ate cold cereal because it was quick to eat and easy to make. Terry also explained that some cereals had an extra bonus; for example, she liked "Rice Krispies® because it looks like you are eating a lot when they are fluffy in the bowl." Thus, not only was this cereal quick and easy, it made the eater feel that she was consuming a large quantity of food. Participants often chose a "more natural cereal without lots of sugar," or Lucky Charms®, because of its low-fat content. In contrast, Mary said she would not eat a cereal like Raisin Bran®: "I need more than flakes, like I eat Fruit Loops®." While Mary defied the focus group and cultural norms about nutritional cereal, she affirmed what many cereal companies espouse or contest in their advertisements: Mary believed nutritional cereals to be "boring."

Participants valued breakfast as an important part of their day. Their discussion of food choices implied that they had very specific ideas of what breakfast should include. Only one participant skipped breakfast, and the others insisted that they had to eat breakfast, although few could provide a rationale for their insistence. Lara and Pam were able to discuss their breakfasts with more specificity than others, yet they said that they had no control over their breakfast habits. This discussion revealed that individuals either ate breakfast as an unconscious gesture, or as something they could not control. In either instance, participants demonstrated little awareness about their actions or an inability to position themselves as agents with choice about their actions.
Reports about lunch varied more than the discussions of breakfast. Participants were more likely to skip lunch than breakfast, and types of lunch foods represented a wider variety than their list of breakfast foods. These two factors intimate that the group attributed less importance to lunch than they did to breakfast. They ate lunch with less regularity, and they were more flexible about what they ate for that meal.

Participants admitted to consuming a wide variety of foods for lunch. Mary said that she ate different things on different days; on that particular day, she had consumed pizza, strawberry pie, and Dr. Pepper®. Lara told us that her lunch was always "chips or a snack, then noodles with onions or cheese." Tuna fish and crackers; baked potatoes; turkey salad and a Diet Coke®; milk, fruit, and vegetables; and Taco Bell® foods were other favorites. Lunch usually consisted of "quick-fix" items, easily eaten "on the run" or between classes. Participants were more flexible in choosing the types of foods that they would eat for lunch.

Dinner, however, was a different matter. Whereas lunch was usually one or two items grabbed "on the go," dinner was "not fast food," but a "well-rounded meal." The group’s report suggested that dinner, like breakfast, was an important daily activity. They insisted that dinner necessitated more than a one-course meal, and the meal always included vegetables. "Dinner foods" included salad and soup; "at least a meat [any "meat" that was not red] and a green vegetable"; a microwave meal; shrimp [not fried]; spaghetti; grilled chicken; and a "cottage pie," meat and vegetables covered with a potato-flake "crust." Just as focus group members
considered some foods appropriate for breakfast, they considered certain foods appropriate for dinner. They insisted that dinner needed to include certain food groups, although they allowed for flexibility in the food choice for each group. They also took more time eating and preparing their dinners. Dinner, unlike breakfast or lunch, was not a quick meal they grabbed while heading to school or work.

Only Pam and Donna contradicted this group norm in their reports of what they ate for dinner. Pam and Donna explained that their schedules determined what they ate. Pam said that she liked to eat a "real meal," but her time schedule prevented her from doing so:

For dinner, I eat, gosh, whatever I can get my hands on. Sometimes it's a peanut butter sandwich, sometimes it's a salad and chips or something like that. And when I get extravagant it's a pizza, but I don't have much time to do much, because I have to spend all my time studying. I don't have time to eat, really.

Donna said that her eating patterns varied from week to week depending on her work schedule:

When I think back on eating, I know, well, I model sometimes at fashion shows. So on a week when I know a fashion show is coming up, I'll eat my dinner of peas and rice, and I don't know, it just seems normal to me. And I'll eat it. I might put a little dill weed, or spices. . . .

Pam and Donna revealed that they could not completely control what they ate, because their work schedules regulated their food choice.

In a later session, Donna returned to this conversation. She became aware that her "normal" eating habits seemed odd to others. She defended her actions as
she explained how she felt when someone else noticed her "peas and rice dish." She said:

I found out they [her sister and sister's friend] were laughing at me. Like, "Oh, are you on the 'pea diet'?" It doesn't seem like a diet to me, but it's just not dieting. It's what I like to eat. It's pretty hard when you don't eat red meat, and I don't like to eat a lot. You sort of have to choose. It's hard, it's hard when you don't eat red meat and you're watching how much fat you eat.

The reactions of her sister and her sister's friend very much surprised Donna. She sounded confused and hurt as she described the incident. Others in the group began to support Donna by explaining how good peas and rice tasted, how they also ate the same thing, or that they would like to try that dish some time. The group rallied to support Donna, to assure her that her eating habits differed little from their own. They tried to establish identity with Donna to compensate the hurtful remarks of Donna's sister and sister's friend.

While a few said that they rarely ate snacks, others described various items they ate between meals. Usually some type of soda--diet or regular--replaced food as a snack. Several snacked upon something--a baked potato, for example--before exercising, whereas others would eat "something greasy" after a workout. Terry liked to snack on pretzels, "but I have to get the ones without salt, because salt makes me sick." Mary ate milk and cookies every day, while Lara alternated between cheesefries, a po-boy sandwich, or a pita bread sandwich to "tide [her] over until morning." Theresa said, "Growing up I'd eat jellybeans, but usually sunflower seeds or granola. Now, if it's there I will eat it."
When the participants discussed what they preferred to eat for each meal, they revealed that they adhered to specific ideas about the types of foods appropriate for each meal, and that they placed a particular value on the type of meal. An analysis of their reports reveals a high value for breakfast and specific ideas about the types of foods that one should consume at breakfast. While they never skipped breakfast or dinner, they frequently skipped lunch and reported more variety in the types of foods they consumed. Overall, they assigned fewer rules for lunch than they did for breakfast. Dinner was another meal that entailed specific rules for the group. Never fast food, their dinners nearly always consisted of vegetables or a protein. Usually participants sat at a table when they ate dinner, rather than assume a position in front of the television, on their beds, or in a car. At any rate, as participants described each meal, their reports implied that they unconsciously adhered to specific rules, values, and norms that surrounded those meals. They were more likely to discuss eating as something they had given little thought, even though they seemed to be influenced by specific family traditions, cultural practices, and social norms.

When, Where, and How

When participants described where, when, and how they ate, participants discussed their behaviors as "natural." That is, they ate in front of the television because "it was turned on" or because they "always" ate there. Like their discussions of foods, the participants' summaries about when, where, and how they
ate were factual reports on behaviors rather than an attempt to understand or question those behaviors.

When and where the participants ate was less diverse than what they ate. Most ate on their beds, in front of the television, or in a car. Theresa always ate at the health club where she worked, even though she broke company policy by doing so. Theresa said, "I work from 4:30 p.m. until 9:00 p.m., and I can’t eat that late at night." Although Theresa did not indicate her reason explicitly, she prefaced this comment by indicating how eating at night left little time for the body to digest food before sleeping; thus, she believed she would gain weight if she ate later in the evening. In addition, rather than recognizing that she chose to defy company policy, she positioned herself as choiceless. She had no choice but to eat while she worked because gaining weight was not an option.

Wendy explained that she hid from others while she ate: "I can’t eat in front of other people, so I have to eat in the bathroom, and when I am at home I eat in my bedroom with the door locked." Wendy maintained that she ate in the bathroom, where no one else watched her. With this report, Wendy offered more than a factual report. She offered a reason for her behavior. She did not, however, critically examine why she did not want people to watch her eat, what she feared others would say or think. She implemented a plan to cope with her fear, rather than seek ways to eliminate it.

Despite these instances, the discussion of locale marked an important turn; participants began to consider their behaviors in a more in-depth manner. They
began to develop an understanding about the role location played in teaching them their eating practices. Many participants stated that they had gained weight upon entering college, or that they became concerned about how they looked in comparison to other females in their dormitory. According to participants, this weight gain and concern caused them to adopt specific practices to solve their problem. These practices—including purging, taking laxatives, and running up and down the dormitory stairs—were also learned in the college dormitory. During a discussion of locale, Peg began to question one of her eating practices. She confessed that she often felt uncomfortable eating around others who could watch her: "And I am so clumsy. Isn’t that funny? I mean don’t take me to a restaurant on my birthday and feed me spaghetti." She also observed, "I notice that I eat like this [she covered her mouth with her hands]. I eat with my hand over my mouth. I guess that’s a pretty peculiar habit. Isn’t it funny how you think you are so normal?" In this discussion, Peg not only focused upon a behavior that she previously performed unconsciously in order to hide her eating, but she was also able to step back and remark upon the behavior. Peg started to distance herself from her behaviors in a way that encouraged her to critique and question her attitude, beliefs, and behaviors.

A discussion of time also indicated that participants were becoming more thoughtful about their eating practices. While a few said they ate "whenever," meaning at no particular time, some recognized that they ate according to the television show airing at the time. "I eat at 12 noon, because that’s when my soap
opera is off," Mary explained. Rarely did regular meals fall after 7:00 p.m. Karen said that she liked to eat dinner at 6:00 p.m. or 6:30 p.m. so that she could go to the gym afterwards. Lisa said that she was "hungry all the time. Sometimes I eat because I don't have anything to do." Mary added, "Food is good to pass the time." One of the groups discussed how they were always hungry around 3:30 p.m. or 4:00 p.m. Theresa attributed this hunger to after-school snacks typically served throughout their elementary and high school days. She explained, "All my life I have always been hungry after school when you go home and get your treat." Pam added, "I ate [the snack] at the same time. It was like a ritual-thing." In making this observation about the after-school snacks, Theresa began to explore reasons for her hunger. By linking her hunger to habits, she recognized that eating served as more than a biological imperative. In this case, eating was a learned routine.

During discussions of time and place, participants began to become more aware of their eating behaviors. They became more precise in their descriptions, and they became aware of the habits they had unconsciously acquired. In addition, some participants began to distance themselves from their behaviors. They asked "why?" rather than report "what."

As participants recognized that they routinely ate in certain places and at certain times, they began to identify other habits concerning how they ate. Participants recalled whether or not they ate foods in particular ways. At first, they talked about eating pie for dessert, using table manners, eating slowly, and cleaning one's plate. But as the discussion continued, eating rituals became more elaborate.
For instance, participants said they would eat peas one at a time, or potatoes by "turning the fork upside down so that I can taste the butter, cheese, and sour cream at the same time," or macaroni and cheese by placing the noodles on fork prongs. In some cases, participants would remove foods they did not like or hide them under their plate. Several said that they did not like their foods to mix, so they kept them separated on the plate or ate the items one at a time. They would eat all of the carrots, for instance, before moving on to the meat. Mary said, "Last night I was so mad because the rice and gravy were touching." Nearly everyone had an idiosyncracy about how they ate some food.

One particularly interesting story involved stuffed crawfish, a Louisiana favorite consisting of crawfish tails, breadmeal, and spices stuffed into a crawfish head. Felicia explained that her family played a version of "Spoons," when eating stuffed crawfish. Her grandmother froze huge batches of the crawfish to eat throughout the year. When her family gathered, they competed to see who could eat them the quickest. As they ate them, they lined the shells around the edge of the plate, and the person who finished first placed the last head on his/her nose. The other competitors followed suit. She said that her family has done this longer than she can remember. Participants noted the play and tradition that underscored the game in Felicia's family. They said the game seemed fun and asked Felicia how others reacted to their tradition. She said that her boyfriend was shy at first, but after two or three times, he joined in the game.
Other rituals involved events. Eating—particularly pizza and Taco Bell items—were associated with alcohol consumption. Donna said, "After I drink I want something to eat. The other night I ate a whole pint of Blue Bell [ice cream] by myself. I felt so guilty, so I watched what I ate today." Some events were not "complete" without certain foods. The participants explained that football games needed nachos; movies needed popcorn; carnivals needed cotton candy; baseball games needed hotdogs; and every gathering at the dormitory needed food, because "people don't come for the speaker; they come for the food," as Elaine explained. Particularly in the instance of dorm meetings, participants realized that food had a social function. Food drew a crowd and enticed people to participate.

At the first focus group session, participants exhibited little awareness of how their eating practices followed certain social norms. They implied that they ate as they did because it seemed "normal." As the discussions continued, participants also reconsidered their eating practices. During discussions about where, when, and how they ate, participants began to comment on those practices and to realize the cultural and social import of food and eating. They had started to abandon the idea that eating was "just normal," and they began to realize that their eating practices included routines that others might consider "odd." This realization encouraged them to be more thoughtful during later discussions about their feeling for food, their bodies, and social interaction.
Approaching Reflexivity

As focus group members participated in focus group discussion, they became increasingly aware of their eating practices and more explicit about eating as a problem. While at the beginning of the discussions, they simply reported what they ate, in later sessions they began to distance themselves from the behavior so that they could also examine those behaviors in more detail. Subsequent discussions asked them to delve deeper, to examine feelings and behaviors that lay beneath those eating practices. Only in the last session, however, did they distance themselves from their actions enough to develop the beginning of a critical consciousness. While they never thoroughly questioned the social implications of their behaviors nor took the kind of critical action that involved change, they had become more aware of their personal practices as well as the social function of food.

Participants also reconsidered their eating practices. Rather than a normal activity, eating became a problem they faced daily when they considered how food affected their attitudes about their bodies and influenced the numerous diets, exercises, and plans they followed to create a more desirable body. Participants exhibited their ability to "manage" food when they described how they made decisions to change their appearance or when they evaluated various diet plans. Diet plans and exercise were their ways to cope with the problem.

Feelings About Food

When I asked participants to discuss how they felt about food, participants described eating as a "problem." They explained that they were "not always
hungry," "that they would eat in spells," or that they had trouble finding time to eat because of homework and job pressures. In other cases food and eating generated specific emotions and feelings, including anxiety, fear, guilt, or excitement. Frequently, these feelings affected their food choices.

Dining out caused anxiety for many participants. Peg said, "Wendy's used to scare me because they put 'mayo' on the hamburgers." She found the food at Wendy's frightening because she felt that she could never be sure how they prepared hamburgers; even if she asked them to cook her a plain burger, she feared that they might mistake her order. Other participants also said they were leery about the types of ingredients restaurants used. For others, dining out meant that they had to eat in front of others who might think they were "pigs," so they often ate only a portion of their order. This additional pressure caused them to exert additional caution about their order.

When discussing eating out, the women framed food as something to control—whether by monitoring how it was cooked or served or by eating a small portion of their order. This type of control also helped them regulate what others thought. By eating small amounts or by choosing low-fat items, participants felt that they could regulate what others thought. These observations confirm Orbach's ideas about self presentation. Orbach posits that at some level all women accept the importance of self presentation. They engage in weight control programs, exercise camps, and cosmetic surgery as a way to articulate identity. The body is an acceptable form of female self expression and self involvement since women have historically
been aligned with the bodily (e.g., see Bynum; Bordo; Dallery; and Schoenfeld and Wieser).

The participants considered food simultaneously a friend and a foe (Meisner 142) as it builds and reduces stress, provides comfort and discomfort, brings satisfaction and guilt. Participants often labelled certain foods "bad" or "illegal," because they were deemed unhealthy or because they made people gain weight. Eating "bad" foods caused participants to feel guilty, especially if they consumed what they considered to be a large amount of that food. Ironically, "bad" foods were those they enjoyed the most. Focus group members felt they could have these foods only after they "had been really good," and then only occasionally. While this list continued to grow throughout our sessions, participants ranked any item from Taco Bell®, any fat, cheesefries, chocolate, and ice cream near the top of the "bad-food list." Theresa, for instance, said:

I don’t eat butter. I don’t eat salt. I mean I don’t miss it. My mom has always cooked really healthy all my life. And I don’t miss fattening things like oil and butter. I don’t miss it, because I never really had it. The only thing I miss is mayonnaise. I used to eat a lot on my sandwiches. It’s so good. But you just can’t eat it anymore. It’s unhealthy for you.

Theresa eliminated a food she enjoyed because she had learned that mayonnaise was "unhealthy." With this choice she revealed some agency in that she made the choice to eliminate mayonnaise; however, she never went so far as to examine or evaluate what "healthy" meant, who defined the term, or the rationale behind calling foods "unhealthy." She acknowledged health or medical officials as value-free, neutral seekers of progress (Orbach 192). Theresa accepted information put forth by the
scientific community as evidence for a strong, fat-free body. She changed her way of life because scientists purported fats as unhealthy deterrents to fitness.

Vera explained that she did not deprive herself of anything: "The more you say, 'I'm not going to eat it, I'm not going to eat it,' the more of it you'll eat when you do eat it." Vera, instead, ate very small portions of foods. Rather than exclude foods from her diet, she reduced the portion to a fraction of what she might eat. As a result, she neither deprived herself, nor felt guilty about her eating habits. Like Theresa, Vera exhibited her ability to make decisions, when she described her food choices and her manipulation of those choices. But, also like Theresa, Vera never analyzed the motives behind her behavior. She did not question why she felt guilty for eating these "bad" foods; she only knew that her manipulation ended her guilt.

Participants found other foods "exciting." As they talked about these foods, focus group members became more animated than usual. They began to "compete" to name the "best" food. Twix® and Snickers® candy bars were favorite items, as were KitKat® bars that they could savor layer by layer. Cheese and anything greasy were other favorites, mainly because they were "forbidden" foods that participants felt they could eat only on rare, special occasions. Chicken and Italian foods were also popular. Lara said, "When I eat Chinese, good Chinese food, I feel like I am 'Queen of the World.'" Leah said that homemade baked goods—cobbler, cheesecakes, pies—"make [her] nuts"; they relaxed her: "These kinds of foods are quaint and small town. I'm the girl that a guy takes her out, 'Hey, yeah, I'm going to get some dessert and coffee.'" Lara and Leah were better able to articulate how
they felt about certain foods. Lara explained that she associated Chinese food with special occasions; Chinese food was a rare treat that meant some type of celebration, that she was special. Leah linked baked goods with the comfort of the small town where she grew up; these foods offered the safety, comfort, and support of home.

Participants often correlated foods with specific emotions, including guilt, fear, comfort, and excitement. In some cases food brought feelings of shame, guilt, or anger—particularly in the aftermath of an uncontrollable "pig-out" or when they broke their daily diet routine. For them, as for other women, "cheating" on one's diet caused additional feelings of inadequacy, and food became a corrupting force (Tisdale 51). These emotions frequently induced the participants to adopt additional dieting or exercise strategies, or invigorated their weightloss attempts. In addition, food brought satisfaction as a reward for a job well-done or for adhering to a strict diet. Participants realized that food was more than a way to fuel or shape the body. They noted how food made them feel. They realized that certain foods made participants feel certain ways. They linked feelings of glamour, comfort, and safety to some foods. They regarded food as more than something to satiate physical hunger; food affected their mental well-being.

Thinking About Their Bodies

The focus group participants also talked about their feelings for their bodies and about what they did in order to create a better appearance. Participants modified their early reports about eating when they discussed eating in relation to the body. Early reports were factual, almost disinterested, accounts of food. When
participants began to discuss their bodies, however, they imbued food with more significance. Because they felt that their bodies were abnormal, they adopted specific measures—including diets and exercises—to mold their body into a look they believed to be more acceptable.

Most focus group members indicated that they thought about their bodies frequently. Lisa said she thought about hers twenty-four hours a day. Lara added, "You know, when you wake up and think, 'Okay, what am I going to do with myself today?'" Others thought about their bodies when they looked in the mirror, put on clothes, saw soap opera stars, ate, or, as Nancy said, "When I cross my legs, and I [have to] even out the fat." In all of these reports, participants indicated that they could do something to affect how their bodies looked. For them, the body was an object they believed they could manipulate in order to look a certain way.

Most women described their bodies in very derogatory terms or in a detached manner. Many said they felt that they had recently gained weight or acquired a "little pudge," that they felt guilty for not working out, that they needed toned muscles, or that they needed to "lose the cottage cheese effect." They called their bodies "short," "stubby," "marshmallowy," "disproportioned," and "beyond buxom." Although a few bemoaned their small breasts, Lisa said, "I would like to be like a stick—no breasts, nothing hourglass." With this remark Lisa affirmed the value placed upon the boyish figure that many current fashion models have. When Wanda suggested that "beautiful" did not mean "thin" and that "females should have curves," few participants agreed with her. Those who did agree still wanted smaller
body frames with narrow hips and larger breasts. These reports resemble what other scholars have noticed. Silverstein and Perdue (qtd. in L. Jackson 183) argue that women who are particularly concerned about achievement are motivated to avoid the curvaceous body because of its association with traditional female roles of wife and mother. By pursuing a thin body, women can achieve personal success. They negate femininity by denying food, and they embody masculine virtues of discipline, strength, and logic.

Every focus group member conveyed a dissatisfaction with her body. They used derogatory terms to describe their bodies, and they wished to change it in some way. Spitzack suggests that such disdain is necessary for the woman who is determined to achieve a new appearance ("Body Talk"). Nearly all of these women affirmed that the socially ideal female body meant an ultra thin body. They also affirmed the notion that the body can be shaped and molded if the person exercises enough discipline (Brownell and Rodin 782). They committed themselves to working toward that ideal.

Shaping Their Bodies

An intense preoccupation with their bodies caused participants to engage in a number of activities to "shape" their body to a desired form. Everyone had tried something to create, change, or mold her body in some way. These practices encompassed exercise, dress, diets, pills, laxatives, or purging.

To shape their bodies into a look they wanted, participants said that they engaged in some form of exercise, whether it entailed walking to class, stretching
before sleeping, or visiting the gym several times each week. Karen said that she started lifting weights in high school, and that she worked out regularly three times every week. Vera explained that she did "butt exercises" every night. Participants mentioned other exercise programs, including Jane Fonda's video workout, "Buns of Steel," and Cindy Crawford's video. Vera said that she followed Cindy Crawford's video, "even though it's not good for your back." Vera seemed willing to experience pain and to risk later problems to achieve a better body.

Exercise for these women was routine. Leah, for example, said that she consciously started climbing the stairs by walking on the balls of her feet; this movement enabled her to tone her calves. She said that nowadays, she did it without thinking. In addition, when these women skipped their exercise regimen, they often felt "bad": "If I don't do my situps before I sleep, I feel bad," said Tina. Nancy said, "It's hard to find time, but it [exercise] makes me feel better; I haven't exercised in two weeks, and I feel fat." By not completing the exercise ritual, what they felt was a "natural" activity, these women explained that they felt "bad" or "guilty" for not doing what was expected or for breaking their own rules.

The women also talked about wearing or not wearing specific items of clothing in order to look a certain way. Several said they would not wear shorts or stripes in public, because they felt that shorts and stripes divided the body into sections. This division hindered their attempts to create a long, lean appearance. Others sought to hide parts of their bodies. Lisa, for example, said that she always wore a jacket or blazer to hide her hips, while Lara stipulated that she would wear a
shirt or jacket tied around her waist if she chose to wear shorts. Others noted that, often, their clothes were black, untucked, and oversized in order to look thin. In some cases, they would buy smaller clothes, "suck in the stomach," or tighten their belts so that they looked smaller in the waist. Each of these tactics conveyed the illusion that the individual was smaller than she actually was. Felicia summarized the general feeling about clothes when she said, "I try to wear things that flatter. It's okay to be aware, to know not to wear things like sleeveless shirts, for example." Choosing what to wear daily was not a random activity for the participants. Whether while shopping or dressing for the day, each woman always exerted caution and care when selecting clothes.

Dieting was another important technique participants used to shape their bodies. This discussion presented many contradictions, in that dieting obviously entailed food. In early focus group discussions, participants described their eating practices as though they never thought about them. When framed within the context of dieting, eating became more problematic. Participants exhibited reflexivity as they talked about food as something they could control. As Elaine said, "It seems like I have always been on a diet--either my Mom placed me on one or I placed myself on one." "Diets" included "eating right"--which meant salads, no butter or salt, and fish or chicken instead of red meat--but they also included such things as drinking SlimFast®, joining a NutriSystem® plan, following a medically supervised program, attending Weight Watchers®, consuming Dexatrim®, counting calories and fat grams, and trying magazine diets such as "lose ten pounds in two weeks."
Every participant had engaged (and continued to engage) in a hunt for a foolproof plan to lose weight.

Although participants never critiqued "dieting" during this phase of the performance process, they did level critiques at various diet plans. For example, Theresa promoted Susan Powter’s "Stop the Insanity" program: "she’s smart . . . practical and inspirational." According to Theresa, Powter "goes about it the right way . . . and she’s talking about feeling good." Theresa advocated Powter’s plan as the best diet she had ever tried. A few participants said that they did not diet, but only ate "fat-free" items or foods with fewer than three grams of fat per serving. Members decided that, while not a formal plan, eating fat-free or low-fat foods constituted a diet because they were ways people manipulated what they consumed to control their weight.

In contrast to others in the group, Ellen said that she did not diet any more: "I always diet without seeing the results, or I gain back the weight, so it’s not worth it. It’s not that I don’t care. I just got burnt." Ellen’s remark suggested another underlying theme to the diet discussion. These women believed that dieting indicated how much (or how little) they cared about themselves. An absence to conformity (in Ellen’s case nonconformity to her group’s dieting norm) could have generated comments about her lack of self love or self esteem, since people frequently believe that women who love themselves can regulate their bodies to cultural norms (Spitzack, "Spectacle" 7). Overeating or obesity also points to a character defect, rather than an expression of painful and conflicting experience
Perhaps in order to ward off any "moral judgments" associated with her dietless diet (Iggers 45), Ellen qualified her contribution to the discussion; she explained that she cared about herself and her appearance, even though she did not currently follow a diet plan. Ellen positioned herself as a critical thinker who had examined the efficacy of dieting and discarded the practice as ineffective for her.

In a few cases, participants resorted to diet pills, laxatives, and purging to lose weight. Lara tried pills issued by the Baton Rouge Weightloss Clinic:

It doesn't matter who you are . . . they have an orientation session, because [patients] come in groups of thirty, and they measure you and prescribe you pills . . . . They give you, well it's like ten times more than Formula One [natural caffeine tablets often used to lose weight]; it's speed I think it is . . . my roommate was going there, and she said, "You're never going to fit the weight." I go in there and these women were like 300-400 lbs. I'm talking about people who couldn't even fit in a seat. I'm sitting there, and they are all looking at me like "Are you in here for anorexia or something?" I felt so embarrassed, so I played up like I was in here because I don't eat. I really saw how stupid I was being, but I had already paid my money, and I thought, "Shit, I'll get the pills." I was 115. . . . The doctor just looked at me and said, "I think you need to lose about five pounds, but on a lower speed." So I go home and take the pills and I get down to ninety-nine pounds.

Lara's story illustrates how people frequently regard science as truth (Orbach 192). Lara had decided to get diet pills even though she did not plan to take them after encountering other clients at the Baton Rouge Weightloss Clinic. When the doctor told her she needed to lose weight, she decided that her first response—to lose weight—was correct because the doctor advised her to lose weight. She took the diet pills even though the pills made her nauseous.

Lisa discussed her own experiences with laxatives: "I've only taken it once. But if you eat Ex-Lax® for a week straight, you'll lose it [the weight]. I ate too
much, and I felt gross. I lived in the dorm at the time." She said that she felt better, but didn't do it again, because her friend yelled at her. Without her friend to scare her, Lisa said that she would have taken laxatives again to eliminate food.

Participants also eliminated food by purging. Donna said that she purged herself of food two or three times during her sophomore year: "I said never again. My eyes watered, and I would look in the mirror and see that I had broken the blood vessels in my eyes. I couldn't believe that I had done it. I thought I had done it wrong." Donna said that she learned this "trick" from a friend in the dorm. The friend would "get drunk, throw up, and come back for more." One night Donna and her best friend ate pizza "until we were sick. And then we would go eat a sorority house dinner. I got depressed, and I remember thinking, 'I could really do it.'" Only one other person, Nancy, had purged food: "I never made myself throw up over food. I just felt nauseous, maybe because I was drinking, and I needed to throw up." Others, however, had friends who were bulimic. Lara recounted the time her friend ate a whole pizza, then left the room: "We knew she was doing it, but we never said anything to her. We were in the next room."

While participants considered laxatives, diet pills, and purging "extreme" behaviors, they felt justified in adopting them in order to rectify another "extreme" behavior--breaking their diet, overeating, or gaining weight. Laxatives and purging, in particular, indicate ways to assert power and control. Women can cover any dieting mistake by consuming laxatives or by vomiting. They are in control since they eliminate evidence of their lack of control. Elimination also provides women
with a guilt-free way to eat what they want since they can eliminate any damage later. Forgetting potential harms, they determined that the end justified the means when considering their weight or body.

Participants explained that they frequently thought about the size and shape of their bodies. Usually, they felt that their body needed improvement, and they had tried a number of ways to create a body they considered to be more desirable. They believed they could alter their bodies through rigorous discipline that marked them as subjects in control of themselves and in love with themselves. They have the ability to wrestle and conquer their "weakness" as they adopted different plans to achieve the appearance and lifestyle they desired. These plans included exercising, dressing in certain ways, dieting, purging, and consuming pills and laxatives. While participants did not question why they felt compelled to change their bodies, they did take action to create a look they wanted.

Affecting Self-Perception

Another main topic of discussion involved how someone else affected what participants felt about their bodies. For example, many explained that childhood events, shopping, intimate relationships, friends, family members and customs, and cultural norms affected their feelings. With each of these instances, participants began to isolate events that contributed to the way they felt about eating and about their bodies. As a result, they began to reflect upon their actions and to notice how society influenced those actions.
Nearly every participant could recount an event from their childhood that affected the way they felt about how they looked. Peg said:

My whole life people have made jokes about my hearty appetite . . . about how I could eat anything and not gain weight, NaNaNaNaNaNaNa. In high school, like, "Give it to Peg; she'll eat anything," like I was the "Mikey" of the group. "Just give it to Peg; she'll eat it." And I don't even eat as much now as I used to. And they still say it.

Theresa was told that she could not be a dancer, because she was too short and her "legs were not good enough." Family members and friends called participants names, such as "Chubby Checkers," "the Stork," "Bertha Butt," or "Thunder Thighs." Many of the remarks occurred when participants were eight- or nine-years-old; yet, they vividly described the incidences. Comments—even those that may have seemed like an off-hand remark—deeply affected the way the women regarded their bodies.

Shopping also created anxiety in the women. "When I shop with my friends and see stuff I like but not in my size, I know I want to diet," Elaine said. She said that after a shopping trip she was encouraged by those in the dorm to run up and down the stairs all afternoon to lose weight. Participants also discussed how swimsuits posed particular problems. Lara said, "Whenever I have to buy a bathing suit, I starve myself. I live on Lucky Charms®, any fat-free cereal." Donna called shopping for a swimsuit a "nightmare": "I have to sneak swimsuit sizes; tops fit but bottoms don't." Disappointed with their expeditions, these women frequently returned home to renew their endeavors to reduce their body size.
Friends, partners, and family members also affected their eating and body image. Lara explained that her roommate's weight loss renewed her attempts to lose weight:

She's looking good, getting down to my size. Since she's on a diet, she feels guilty about eating, and I feel guilty that she's losing weight and getting my size. So, we hide food from each other. I don't want her to think she is smaller than I am, or that I'll be as fat as she is. She doesn't want me to know that she is cheating on her diet. I feel guilty eating greasy foods because I think they'll tell me something. They think I am so skinny so that I don't want to eat greasy foods around them.

Participants assumed that others around them noticed, perhaps monitored, their food intake as closely as they did. Lara believed that her roommate watched and (perhaps) critiqued Lara's eating. She believed that she was being judged according to the amounts and types of food she consumed. To limit such perceptions and judgments, Lara exerted extra caution while eating. Her comment also illustrates Igger's claim that food has become "... fetishized, and invested with symbolism and moral power..." (54). People can point to the eating practices of others and mark the difference as a sign of inferiority in the other. This comment reflected a theme that pervaded the discussion of all of the focus group members.

Discussions about intimate relationships or dating situations especially revealed how others affected their eating patterns. Several women insisted that they be smaller than their partners, and they monitored what they ate at social functions so that they ate less than their partners. Kathy ruled, "His thighs must be bigger than mine or I won't date him." As she asserted her rule, Wendy described an incident in which her date compared her legs to his own:
I just knew his were bigger, but he noted that mine were bigger. I said, "Don't say that!" and I hit him. . . . We went on to Coffee Call, and I didn't eat. I said I wasn't hungry, and they didn't believe it. They knew I was compulsive and didn't want to eat in front of them.

As she recounted this tale, Wendy exhibited mortification (1) that he would think that her legs were bigger than his, (2) that he would verbalize his observations, and (3) that he would behave in such an insensitive manner. Wanda explained that when she had boyfriend problems, she became more weight-conscious: "When my relationship is really good and really comfortable, I tend to eat more and exercise less, and we get fat and lazy together." She continued, "And when I feel like I could very easily lose him, I get this hole in the middle of my stomach that feels so empty that I can't eat; I can't hold anything down." Intimate relationships frequently affected how these women felt about food and their bodies. While they chose dates based upon a comparison between their bodies and their potential date's body, they became angry when they believed that their dates conducted a similar comparison. They carefully watched the amount of food they consumed so that they always ate less than their dates. When relationships suffered, they frequently monitored their consumption, as though they could save the relationship by having a better body.

Family members also influenced the eating patterns of the participants. Lara said that as a child she would not eat until 9:30 p.m. or 10:00 p.m. when her mother brought food home from business meetings. "She had this huge purse," Lara said, "and she would sweep food from the layout into it." Lara said:
If you got a TV dinner, you were lucky. . . . And she either brings home things from an after hours "spread." Little mufalettos, you know, finger food. We always had finger sandwiches, because she steals all the food—whatever was at the layout at the meeting. Or, sometimes TV dinners or she'd go pick up a pizza. But she never cooked. When I say "never," I mean the only meal I had cooked was when my brother tried to cook, or when my father did the "gender thing" and did barbecue. And it was awful. We never sat down as a family. Me and my brother would eat in front of the TV, and Mom would wait until we went to sleep and then she would eat. It was chaos. It was really weird. We never had a homecooked meal.

Lara, furthermore, attributed her own eating habits and lack of cooking skills to her mother’s inability to cook. She believed that she never learned to cook because her mother did not cook.

Others talked about the special foods that appeared on the dining room table when they went home. When Terry visited her home in England, her mother cooked her favorite meal of roast beef, two or three vegetables, bread, and dessert. Tara’s father baked her an Italian Cream Cake about once a month, while Felicia’s grandmother served her stuffed crawfish. When these participants visited their families, they felt special because of the special meals their family members prepared. In Donna’s case, though, the dining room table became a battleground: "My dad likes to cook me meals, but they are hard for me to eat. He loves to cook pork, brisket. They can't understand that I can't eat it; they wonder what is wrong with you. You almost feel ashamed." Donna said that she has explained her eating preference to her family, and that after two years, they now try to fix foods that meet her requirements.

When three participants described how their culture affected their eating and body image, they displayed more critical awareness about their eating practices and
about how eating was culturally specific. They began to move toward a critical consciousness in addition to personal awareness. Terry explained that in England, "people eat cheap. Especially students. No one in England would pay for 'fat-free.' You don’t see that on the food labels." She said that grocery stores in England sell few fat-free or low calorie products. Terry explained that by comparison Americans were more preoccupied with their bodies and the fat-content of foods than the English. She also asserted that people in England seemed healthier than Americans. Wendy, a Vietnamese-American, also discussed the impact of culture on her body image and eating practices. She said, "Compared to Oriental girls 110 pounds is large. I’m about the largest one in my whole congregation at church. I am the biggest, fattest, muscular girl." Then she discussed how her friends call her "Chung Li," a character in the video game, "Streetfighter." Wendy said that this character had "huge, huge thighs. It’s my nickname . . . . It’s a lose-weight hint." Wendy believed that she was fat because she was larger than other women in her ethnic group. She believed that others observed her size and suggested that she lose weight when they called her "Chung Li." As a fashion model, Donna explained that societal standards about models affected her eating practices. Donna explained, "You must stay aware so they will call you. The week before the show is the worst time--it’s peas and rice time. Then I panic about eating the way I do. . . . These girls are so perfect; they are so much more firm." Like Wendy, Donna compared her body to the bodies of other members of her social
circle. When she knew she would be in a social situation with other models, she ate so that her body and eating practices would conform to that situation.

In the final focus group discussions, women discussed how certain events and/or people influenced how they felt about their bodies. Childhood incidents, shopping expeditions, name-calling, intimate relations, family and friends, and standards of specific socio-cultural groups affected their eating practices. Participants became more aware of how their own behaviors—which they had once considered "normal" or "natural"—were intertwined with the actions, behaviors, and standards of others. They began to consider society's role in their behaviors. With these observations, participants exhibited a critical consciousness that did not appear in previous sessions.

In this chapter, I demonstrated that the first stage of the performance process, focus group interviewing, identified eating as a problem and initiated personal awareness in the participants. After explaining why I used focus group interviewing as a methodology, how I selected participants, and what comprised the interview's format, I demonstrated how these women began the focus group discussions with little consciousness of their eating practices. At first, the participants were eager to explain their eating as "normal." However, as discussions continued, they began to reconsider these practices. They began to question why they ate in certain ways and how the environment shaped their eating practices—whether the behavior was learned in college dormitories or adopted in response to someone else's actions. They moved toward a more reflexive position.
Throughout this analysis of the focus group discussions I indicated that the participants identified eating as a problem they faced every day. These women wished to manage perceptions about their bodies, to assert their identities, and to adhere to cultural norms. To accomplish this task, they had adopted eating strategies that helped them adapt to their social circumstances. Additionally, they had incorporated these strategies into their life to the extent that they seemed part of a natural mode of behavior.

During the focus group discussions participants also became more reflexive. They began to extend their knowledge beyond evaluations of diets and exercise to consider dieting as a discourse with social ramification. In the first stages of the sessions, participants described their eating as "normal" and indicated that their eating practices were so routine that they thought about those actions very little. They had to diet; no questions asked. Theresa summed up the discussion, "I don't think I eat strange; I just eat the way that's normal for me. Others just don't understand it." As discussions continued, participants displayed more personal awareness about their eating practices and body image. They became more aware of the feelings associated with eating or what they did to shape their bodies. They distanced themselves somewhat from their own actions, and they began to correlate those actions to social and cultural norms that may have influenced those actions. They considered how they adopted certain eating practices in order to look a certain way or to prevent others from remarking upon their eating or appearance. And, they realized that they had "naturalized" their behaviors until their eating practices
became unconscious components of their lifestyle. Thus, not only did they become more aware of their own personal behaviors, but they observed food's cultural significance, in addition to its role as fuel for the body. Participants moved toward a more reflexive stance. In addition, the women identified several components of the "eating problematic." Their knowledgeable discussions about the numerous diets, exercises, pills, and plans suggested the complexity of dieting.

Focus group discussions served as an important component of the performance process. On a practical level, the focus group discussions supplied "building blocks" in the form of performers, narratives, ideas, and experiences for the other stages of the performance process. Five of the focus group participants volunteered to continue their exploration of eating practices and body image. They examined topics and transcripts in an extensive rehearsal process that further increased the reflexivity of the participants. This rehearsal process offered them the opportunity to use performance as a critical methodology to sort problems concerning eating and body image and to identify potential solutions to those problems. The focus group discussions also centered the thoughts of the participants. They could assemble in a supportive environment to discuss an issue important to their self perception, social perception, and mode of living. In addition, the focus groups helped me examine my own theoretical assumptions and those of other scholars. Participants affirmed a number of my ideas about their problems associated with eating, and they raised additional areas of concerns. With their stories and explanations they pointed out the extreme measures women will
implement to cope with their social circumstances. Women articulated eating as a problem that deeply affects their physical and mental well-being.

Notes

1 This analysis did not include the data generated by five males who were interviewed. I limit this study to women not only because of my own interests in feminist theory but also because previous research has shown that men are generally more satisfied with their bodies than women (qtd. in Hickson and Stacks); that men and women emphasize female attractiveness more so than male attractiveness (Tavis); that women are primary consumers of the cosmetic surgery and dieting industries (American Academy of Cosmetic Surgery; Wolf) and that only five to ten percent of those with eating disorders are male (National Association of Anorexia Nervosa and Associated Disorders).

2 All names are pseudonyms in order to provide anonymity in accordance with the Experiment Consent Form (Appendix B) each participant signed.

3 When Peg calls herself "Mikey," she refers to the boy in a television advertisement for Life® cereal. In the advertisement, other children acknowledge that "Mikey" will eat anything, and they give him a bowl of the cereal to eat. He likes the cereal so much that he refuses to return the bowl to the other children. When people call Peg "Mikey," she felt they implied she would eat anything and that she ate large amounts of food.

4 "Spoons" is a fast-paced card game that challenges players to collect four of a kind before the other players. To play, each person receives four cards. They place a spoon for all but one player in the center of the group. The dealer draws from the top of the deck, and if the card does not match one that she holds, she passes it to the next player, who then can choose to keep the card or pass it along. The game continues until someone holds four queens, for example. That person grabs a spoon. The person left without a spoon loses the round, players remove one more spoon, and the game continues until only one person holds a spoon.

5 Everyone in Vera's group except me knew exactly what a "buttock exercise" was. To demonstrate this exercise, Vera laid on her back, knees bent and feet flat on the floor. Then, keeping her shoulder and head on the ground, she lifted her buttocks off the ground.

6 Throughout the sessions Wanda's relationship with her boyfriend deteriorated. By the end of the fourth session, she had ended her five-year relationship and reported that she had only eaten a salad and two pieces of pizza in the previous four days.
CHAPTER 3

THE REHEARSAL PROCESS:
PERSONAL AWARENESS TO SOCIAL DISCUSSION

Focus group discussions, the first phase of the performance process, identified eating as a problem or an "oppression" in Boalian terminology. The next phase offered those who were interested and had time the opportunity to continue their exploration of the problems associated with eating. This second phase consisted of a ten-week rehearsal period during which six performers extensively debated, discussed, examined, and reflected on their eating practices. Performers identified themes and narratives from the focus group discussions and began to articulate their understandings of those themes by creating scenes and still images to assemble a performance about women, eating, and food. By engaging in the types of exercises and games Augusto Boal outlined and by watching videos of the focus group discussions, six individuals formed a cohesive performance troupe and created a collaborative script for Beauty and the Feast.

Rehearsals in the context of my study can be examined from a number of perspectives. On a simplistic level, rehearsals mean practice, exploring possibilities that may or may not be realized in a public performance. As the performers identify themes and narratives, performers prepare to meet a public. Rehearsals from this perspective mean a pragmatic instrument that culminates in a public
performance. Boal, however, offers a different slant to the definition of rehearsal when he appropriates the term from a "traditional" performance paradigm. Boal insists that individuals can rehearse, repeat, or practice everyday behaviors in addition to those a performer might present to a public audience. Boal contends that individuals can use enactment to identify potential social change. Repeating the enactment, individuals make adjustments that enhance the feasibility of change. Once individuals agree that they have isolated the most suitable solution to the problem, they stand ready to implement the change in their daily lives. A rehearsal in Boal's terms is a "rehearsal for revolution" (TO 141). While the Boalian and a traditional definitions of performance situate rehearsals as a process that leads to a product, Boal's "product" differs from the traditional product, since he calls for social change rather than an aesthetic event.

Finally, rehearsals in the context of this study also comprise a specific performance event. Schechner cites "restored behavior" as a primary characteristic of performance (35-116). Schechner explains that restored behaviors are strips of behavior. . . that are independent of the causal systems (social, psychological, technological) that brought them into existence. They have a life of their own. The original "truth" or "source" of the behavior may be lost, ignored, or contradicted--even while this truth or source is apparently being honored and observed. How the strip of behavior was made, found, or developed may be unknown or concealed; elaborated; distorted by myth and tradition. Originating as a process, used in the process of rehearsal to make a new process, a performance, the strips of behavior are not themselves process but things, items, "material" (36).

Schechner's definition posits performance as an act that can rearrange and reconstruct material, items, behaviors. Obviously, my application extends beyond
Schechner's context of ritual performances. However, when the performers in the rehearsal phase of the performance process assemble narratives or characters from the videotapes, they make choices to store, transmit, manipulate, transform, recover, remember, and rehearse previous behaviors. They rearrange and reconstruct "strips of behavior" (i.e., focus group discussions) to create a new product for a different context and audience. In association with Schechner's definition, rehearsals are not merely sites of poiesis, constructions for an audience, but sites of kinesis, a re-making, re-doing, re-constructing texts and the social, psychological, or political forces that pertain to those texts.

Throughout the rehearsal phase (as well as throughout and after the public performance), I used group and individual interviews to obtain the performers' evaluation of the performance process. At each individual and group interview, I asked performers to summarize and assess the performance process, to describe their role in the performance process, and to describe what they thought the performance process enabled them to accomplish and how. In addition, performers kept a journal of directed and nondirected writings throughout the second and third stages of the performance process. I used their responses as data that indicated the change performers experienced as a result of their participation.

In this chapter I describe and interpret the rehearsal process that led to three public performances of Beauty and the Feast. First, I explain how I organized the performance troupe and present an overview of the rehearsal sessions. Second, I detail the activities and discussions associated with reviewing the videotapes of the
focus group discussions. And third, I explicate how the group adapted Augusto
Boal’s games and activities to address issues associated with eating and body image.
This third section includes three types of activities: body movement exercises, image
theatre, and activities that test their discoveries. The video discussions, combined
with Boal’s techniques, helped the performers move from awareness about their
eating practices toward a critical consciousness that challenged their own behaviors
and cultural assumptions about body image. In addition, this stage of the
performance process indicated that the performers began to prepare for critical
action in a larger social context with a public performance.

Organizing the Performance Troupe

During this second phase of the performance process, I organized a six-
member performance troupe to explore some of the key ideas and issues raised in
the focus group discussions. Before the semester began, I contacted all female
participants from the focus group discussions to ask whether they wished to continue
work with this project. Since I wanted to examine the experiences of women, males
were ineligible to participate. Although several women had graduated, were
employed, or unable to fit the performance into their schedules, eight expressed an
interest in joining the performance troupe even though none had ever performed
before a public audience.¹ Two, Paula and Vera, wanted to work on technical crews,
and the others—Felicia, Terry, Kathy, Lara, Theresa, and Donna—wanted to
perform. We worked out a ten-week rehearsal schedule consisting of two hours for
three nights each week. Also, the participants renewed their consent forms and enrolled for two additional hours of speech communication credit.

During the first several sessions the number of performers in the performance troupe fluctuated. I began with six performers, but before the second session, Felicia withdrew from the performance troupe and decided to work behind the scenes. Tina, another focus group participant, joined the group. When Tina realized the time commitment that the performance required, she withdrew from the troupe. Since no one else from the original focus groups could participate, I asked Harper, a graduate student in the speech communication department, to replace her. Harper had more extensive public performance experience than other members; however, she had never engaged in this type of collaborative, improvisatory rehearsal process.²

Harper's addition generated several practical and ethical issues. First, the group already had established some cohesion; so, integrating Harper into the group took several weeks. Harper would often sit by herself or on the fringes of the video sessions. To ease her integration into the troupe, I selected games and exercises that required them to work in collaboration, rather than as individuals. Harper remained distant from the others until the end of the third week, when we began to plan a dinner/feast. She began to volunteer more information, and the others seemed more receptive to her ideas. Harper's addition also raised an ethical question. I wondered if Harper had the "right" to see the videotapes when she had not participated in the same kind of self-disclosure that the others had. To partially
resolve this situation, I encouraged Harper to concentrate on how experiences others revealed on the videotape resembled or contradicted her own experiences. In addition, I emphasized the dialogic nature of this rehearsal process; that is, I explained that the performance did not seek to replicate the experiences so much it sought to provide a forum to discuss, enact, and critique the experiences.

Each rehearsal session followed a similar pattern. First, the troupe worked through six to eight of Boal's games, then we adjourned to the seminar room to watch videotapes of the focus group discussions. Participants also kept journals of directed and non-directed writings during the rehearsals and public performances. I used these journals, along with the group and individual interviews I conducted throughout these two stages, to assess how the performance process contributed to the critical consciousness and agency of the performers. The rehearsals positioned performance as more than a reflection of knowledge in the mimetic sense; it regarded performance as a way to produce and contest knowledge.

Throughout rehearsals performers enacted problems about eating and body image. Then, they created images and scenes that helped them make sense of the problems, that offered ways to handle problems, or that presented a picture of how the world would be without the problem. Performers contributed to decisions, rather than acting and speaking according to a director's instructions. This rehearsal process required the performers to position themselves as agents or subjects of the performance rather than instruments of the performance. Instead of reflecting what
others knew, they constructed a better understanding of eating and body image by reconstructing previous understandings generated in the focus group discussions.

Despite a few early trials when performers resigned because the performance required a significant amount of time, I organized a troupe which set aside its fears about performing in public and doubts about its ability to write a script. The members of the performance troupe committed themselves to this project and embraced the process. As rehearsals progressed, performers assumed more ownership of the project. They developed confidence in their abilities to compile a script, to make decisions, to assert their opinions, to enact their ideas, and to confront critical issues.

**Reviewing the Videotapes**

For the first six weeks of rehearsals, the troupe reviewed the videotapes of the focus group discussions. By watching these discussions, performers established a critical distance. They saw each other on tape, drew conclusions about behaviors, located inconsistencies, and questioned the testimonies. Performers analyzed their own behaviors as the videotapes showed them what they had not previously noticed about themselves. In many sessions, performers asked me to stop the videotape so that they could solicit information from a performer who belonged to the focus group on the videotape. In other cases they sought amplification; they wanted an explanation of why a person might behave in certain ways or might reveal certain experiences. During this part of the performance process, performers honed their critical skills in preparation for action in the game/exercise sessions.
Reviewing videotapes of the focus group discussions comprised a key element of the rehearsal phase. These sessions presented a variety of texts, stories, and experiences to ground the performers' more in-depth exploration of eating and body image. Since the texts, stories, and experiences were on videotape, performers could distance themselves from the information. Rather than regard what they saw on the tapes as "me," performers could consider what they saw as "not really me" (c.f. Schechner 36-116). Performers could (1) justify the experience as "me" in another time, place, and psychological state; (2) reinvent or clarify what they were thinking, feeling, and meaning during the focus group discussions; (3) combine several personal experiences with someone else's experiences to create a "me" but a "not me" dichotomy; (4) refigure experience in a way that conceals and reveals their "me-ness." While restoring behaviors from the focus group discussion, performers achieved distance. Their distance enabled them to re-write the experiences they discovered in focus group discussions in a way that critiqued and questioned issues associated with their eating problematic.

When the performance troupe began their review of focus group discussions, they preferred to watch the videotapes, rather than analyze what they saw and heard. They interrupted viewing several times to remark upon how sensitive women were about their bodies and how insensitive men are about women's bodies. Terry exemplified this observation with a story about her friend. This friend's boyfriend tried to guess her weight:

He said, "Oh, you're a tall girl, you must weigh 165 pounds or 155." And her face dropped to the floor, and she was so insulted. . . . She was like,
"Get your ass out of here," so he went and bought her a bunch of flowers, looking really sad. And even though he gave her the flowers, she stood there in shock because she still couldn’t believe what he told her. She was really crushed. She’s really self-conscious. I mean, she’s the type who to go out will change her clothes five different times. She’d put something on and say, "Does this make my bum look fat? Honestly? Can you see cellulite in my legs?"

Others added to this story and the experiences on the videotape when they told stories about how they knew men who would "evaluate any girl who walks by."

Theresa said one year "guys in the Quad [at LSU] would hold up cards like judges as girls passed by." Performers isolated an important issue concerning how different genders perceive bodies. They maintained that males did not understand how females were frequently sensitive about their bodies. They implied that men regarded bodies as objects, rather than as a constituent of a person’s entire being—socially, mentally, physically. This analysis underscored many subsequent discussions that placed body image and food as a woman’s issue.

Also during these early sessions, Lara elaborated upon her experience with the Baton Rouge Weightloss Clinic. Others in the performance troupe knew people who had obtained weightloss pills from the clinic: "If you want to lose weight, it's The Place to be. Everyone goes there." Lara credited the Clinic’s popularity to the easy availability of the pills: "They don’t say, 'I can’t prescribe them because you’re too thin.' You’re in and you’re out." Despite Lara’s bad experience with the Baton Rouge Weightloss Clinic, she accompanied a friend who "was really overweight" there. Lara said, "She would not listen, but I didn’t want her to go there by herself. But I told her the 'lowdown' on that place. People are psycho when they get it in
their heads that they are going to do this . . . .‖ In this particular discussion, Lara revealed that she had distanced herself from her own visit to the Baton Rouge Weightloss Clinic and from others who might go there. After watching the tape, she amplified her prior discussion to insinuate that she would not go to the clinic as "Lara who wants to lose weight," but as "Lara the friend." She also distinguished herself from those who go there without considering the consequences. Lara positioned herself as a rational, logical person, not a "psycho." Even though her actual visit to the Clinic had occurred only six months prior to the focus group discussions and eleven months prior to the rehearsal, Lara described her experience with the Clinic as though it had taken place years ago. an inability to act prior to the performance process.

In addition, when presented with the opportunity to prevent her friend from (perhaps) suffering in the same way, she did not act. Perhaps she did not feel that her own experiences could be used to intervene in her friend's actions. She took her own knowledge and experiences for granted by insisting that supporting her friend's decision was all she could offer. She believed that her friend made a poor decision, but she did not try to influence her decisions. Nor did Lara alter her attitude about dieting. In later sessions, she revealed that she occasionally ingested Formula One®, a "natural vitamin" in a powder form that "speeds up your metabolism." Lara said that she used Formula One® powders when she has "the crave to eat some greasy food. I have been three days without taking one, but when I have the strong urge to eat some greasy food, like cheese fries or hamburgers, that's when I take one."
Although her bad experience with weightloss pills made her cautious of the Baton Rouge Weightloss Clinic, the experience did not prevent her from trying other measures.

This discussion about the Baton Rouge Weightloss Clinic initiated debate about the advantages and disadvantages of Minithins®, another product group members used. Donna likened Minithins® to No-Doz® or Vivarin®. She said she took Minithins to stay awake, and others said that they knew people who took Minithins® to lose weight. In a later session, Donna recognized the "weightloss potential" of Minithins®:

After we talked about all that, the night of the game it was raining and everything. And I had some Minithins with me but seriously, I take them to stay awake. . . . I took two to stay awake; I was falling asleep. So it was raining. And I took it even after we talked. You all, I felt horrible. Usually when I take them I don't feel horrible, but we went out after the game, and I didn't eat anything. I couldn't eat anything. So, I just sat there and everyone thought I was a big ole freak. But I couldn't eat. And I thought, "That really would work."

In this instance, discussion stimulated awareness of a distinct side effect from consuming Minithins®. The product abated a person's hunger as her metabolism increased. Also, this discussion provoked a number of questions about Donna's "unawareness" of its weightloss potential. Everyone else knew that Minithins® produced weightloss. Was it possible that Donna, usually knowing about weightloss, was unaware? Throughout the study, Donna maintained that she took Minithins® to stay awake; yet, her journal emphasized how important weightloss was for her. She indicated that weightloss was "easy" and that she almost "unconsciously" refrained from eating. Possibly, Donna assumed ignorance because
everyone else had confessed that they "once" took diet pills, but now they "knew better." To maintain credibility with the group, perhaps Donna felt that she needed to testify that her own intake was not related to weightloss; she, too, "knew better."

During the video sessions, performers also speculated about the number of diets they had followed. Theresa said, "I bet everyone here has been on five or six. I couldn't count mine," and the performers listed their diets. Lara critiqued definitions of "diet": "Even if I starve to fit into a bathing suit, then that's a diet, or when I eat lowfat to fit into The Gap clothes." Harper also explained to the group that she would rather smoke a cigarette than eat: "When I start a meal I stop eating when I start craving a cigarette. I think, 'Okay, I've had enough food.' So if I stop smoking I'll keep eating." Smoking, too, joined the list of diets, since it helped regulate food intake. Performers recognized that any monitoring of their consumption—even if it is not an established program—is a type of diet. This discussion particularly indicated a shift in how performers considered diets and dieting. While in previous discussions performers evaluated the effects of different diet plans, performers began to consider the variations of dieting. They broadened their definition to encompass behaviors other than food regulation.

Performers also admitted their fear of weight gain while reviewing the videotapes. While in previous sessions they could admit their fears, at this point they articulated why they feared weight gain. Terry, Lara, and Donna confessed their fears. Lara said, "My mom was lighter than me at her age... and now she's plump. But my grandmother is huge and she was smaller than my mother at
her age. And I don't want to get like that... I'm just really scared about that."

Terry stated:

I've never been skinny or real thin... I guess my mum never helped, she's always trying to feed us—my brothers and I and any of our friends. I don't think she's trying to be horrible, she just wants to show how much she cares, and she's a good cook so it's one way she can. My mum is also very overweight, and I know she tries to lose weight, but I think it's hard for her. My biggest fear is to get as she is even though I love her dearly.

Terry and Lara feared becoming "like" their mothers. Their reports contradicted Chernin's studies about women and identity, which indicated that eating disorders and food obsessions enabled women to stop their movement in society (21). A woman evaded the demands of modern society by retreating from society, leaving school, and ending social relationships to "spend her days pouring over calorie charts, weighing chicken breasts, ... measuring waist and ankles and thighs ... " (21). She returned to the kitchen, where women traditionally stayed. In contrast, Lara and Terry monitored their food because they feared they would repeat traditional roles exemplified by their mothers. They watched their food intake and exercised to insure that they participated in a modern society that valued fitness. Lara and Terry feared that they would "repeat their past." Donna, though, feared gaining weight because of her future. She worried about how her boyfriend would react to her weight gain:

I constantly think Stephen's going to leave me if I don't look a certain way... With all the talk about men being unfaithful, it's a scary time to be getting married... I think I always think if I can stay really thin and young looking he won't cheat.
Even when she admitted that she knew that he would not leave her, Donna maintained that she still "feels the pressure." In the focus group discussions, Donna always insisted that her eating was "normal." Toward the end of the focus group discussions, she began to admit that her job as a model required her to watch her weight. Donna admitted that she felt compelled to eat very little because of Stephen. During the rehearsal process, Donna wrote in her journal:

> If I go over 115 [pounds], I panic. I don't consider myself anorexic like someone commented. I know I have a psychological eating disorder, but I don't know what it is. I think it's a fear, a phobia of fat and becoming fat. I don't really know how I got this way . . . .

At this point, Donna had distanced herself enough from her behavior to consider that she might have an eating disorder. She no longer considered her diet "normal," but something extraordinary, something governed by fear. While she was not ready to name her problem, nor seek assistance, Donna was better able to discuss her concerns rather than continue to deny her concerns.

After three weeks several performers were frustrated with what they saw on the tape. Harper felt that the focus group participants were "silly" or "insensitive." Lara became angry at the tape and the performance troupe during one story. On the videotape Pam said she once weighed 115 pounds and was 5' 8" tall; she then gained forty pounds. Lara said that the story made her feel terrible because she was 5'5" tall and weighed the same amount. When the troupe tried to clarify the tape, Lara directed her anger to the group. She said that she understood what Pam said, but that she was angry because she weighed what someone taller than she weighed.
Donna said that the discussion also made her feel bad because she weighed 110 pounds at 5'8" tall.

Lara’s and Donna’s experiences illustrated two important ideas. On one level, their stories point out how the women frequently compared their bodies to other women. They frequently assessed their appearance—and perhaps their own character—and ability according to the appearance and behavior of others. Also, the incident revealed how participants fluctuated between a reflexive stance and an unreflexive stance. Lara—despite recognizing how "psycho" her friend was about her weight—now exhibited anger about her own size-four body. Thus, while she was able to critique her friend’s decision to go to the Baton Rouge Weightloss Clinic, she was unable to examine her own response to the videotape. She was unable to puncture her perception of her body or to question why she felt as she did.

Donna also demonstrated the mixed reactions of the performers about their weight. She felt compelled to diet, she became anxious when she gained weight, and she feared what she considered potential consequences of weight gain. Donna also felt scared about weighing so little. In her journal she wrote:

> It’s really scary, because we were just in the video room and people were saying that 115 lbs. for someone for 5'6" or 5'7" was not normal and that you should weigh more. Someone even made the comment that would be anorexic. This past summer I got down to 107 lbs. and I’m 5’8" tall.

Donna wondered if she was at a healthy weight for someone so tall. She worried about her "disorder" and described her worries about weighing so little. A few pages later, though, she felt guilty for eating sweet foods, for "devouring" four
bowls of cereal, and enjoying a huge family meal. Donna immediately started dieting to "makeup for it."

While watching videotapes later in the rehearsal process, performers distanced themselves from the experiences (their own included) that they saw on the videotape. Theresa observed, "I think I have changed. By not worrying about what I am eating so much; I have learned a lot." Perhaps Theresa's comfort level was also demonstrated in that she was the only performer to eat during rehearsals. While most drank soft drinks—usually Diet Coke—during the rehearsals, Theresa regularly ate hamburgers, popcorn, or other snacks.

In addition, performers began to analyze and joke about what they saw on videotape. For instance, they noticed that Pam always discussed "gross stuff" or "bodily functions." They predicted Pam's remarks as they asked, "Wonder what strange thing she'll say?" They referenced discussions where Pam talked about a tough piece of meat and a bad experience with red punch when they pondered, "More gristle and kidney trouble?" Also, the performers became comfortable enough with each other that they could label different people—even those in the performance troupe—"strange" or "psycho."

One of the jokes that emerged from the videotape involved the number of times Lara referred to cheesefries. Until the group started counting the number of times Lara said "cheesefries," Lara had not realized how frequently she discussed this food. Lara defended herself, "I haven't had them in a while, you guys," but she then launched a conversation about how to eat cheesefries, how good they were
with gravy, and which restaurant has the best ranch dressing for dipping cheesefries. At one point she wanted to fastforward through part of the tape because she knew she was about to say "cheesefries." A few seconds later Lara on the video talked about cheesefries. Everyone laughed, and Lara responded, "I knew it was coming, so I asked you to fastforward. I think I need therapy." Lara also began to call cheesefries her "obsessions." At this point the group decided to incorporate cheesefries in the show. Performers felt that everyone had some type of food obsession. They all talked about fulfilling their own craving for red velvet cake, ice cream, or chocolate, for instance. While they all thought Lara's obsession was more extreme than their own food cravings, they immediately identified with what Lara felt when she raved about cheesefries. Performers began to question their food obsessions. All confessed to some food obsession as though they revealed a deep, dark secret. Their confessions created an additional group bond, as they intellectualized the emotional. In other words, in one sense performers insisted that their cravings were uncontrollable; they felt that something inside of their bodies demanded assuaging with certain foods. In another sense, performers realized they did not "hide" their obsession and that their craving was indeed something they could control. They seemed to have more fun, however, by believing their craving was a "force" of its own.

During the sixth week we ended the video sessions, although several performers borrowed copies of the tapes to assist them as they assembled their scenes for the public performances. At this stage in the rehearsal process,
performers demonstrated the beginnings of critical action. They began to assemble their understandings of the experiences on the videotapes into scenes.

Many of the personal narratives that appeared in the final performance stemmed from these video sessions. Lara decided to tell about her visit to the Baton Rouge Weightloss Clinic, and Theresa wanted to tell how her ex-boyfriend demanded that she lose weight. Terry, too, worked from a personal narrative about how her swimming coach demanded that the athletes maintain a certain weight and size. However, in her performance she wanted to show the discrepancy between her coach's advice to them and his own behavior. So, rather than perform her side of the story, she told her story by assuming the persona of the coach who read the paper and yelled at them to "lose that cottage cheese!"

Donna, in contrast, wanted to work with another person's narrative about being afraid to eat in front of others. This particular narrative provided controversy in the video sessions, because many of the performers considered the story "too sensational." They felt that the focus group participant seemed "proud" that she ate her lunch between classes in the bathroom stalls in LSU's Agriculture Building or that she "made the story up" because she was on video. Two performers who belonged to the same focus group argued that although the participant laughed as she told her story, they believed what she said. They cited how her stories supported one another, that she resisted snacks others brought for the sessions, and how she rushed to the gym after each session as indications of her truthfulness. To make
these arguments, the performers analyzed the story and her mode of storytelling. They compared this story with her other stories and rendered a decision.

Donna's decision to perform this particular story was also an instance of a performer bridging the movement from "not me" to "not not me" (Schechner 110). By performing this particular text, Donna could explore an experience that entails feelings similar to her own (i.e., "not not me"), while using performance as a guard. Within the frame of "performing," she could maintain that those experiences were not hers at all. Donna could safely explore her personal concerns in a manner that protects or preserves her impression as a controlled, sensible person.

While some performers worked with narrative, Harper wrote a poem combining her experiences with drinking and gaining weight with those on the videotape. She wanted to show how women often obtained confidence in their size and appearance when they drank, even if alcohol, ironically, caused them to gain weight. Harper not only had to examine her own experiences and correlate those experiences with those of others, she had to reshape those expressions from a narrative account into a more abstract expression of the experiences. Harper demonstrated personal awareness, analytical thinking skills, and the beginnings of a critical action as she re-constructed those experiences into a new form.

Lara's "obsession" with cheesefries became the basis for Kathy's solo performance. As Kathy and I discussed how Lara seemed obsessed or addicted to cheesefries, we turned our conversation to how various weightloss programs
sounded like seven-step programs that "cured" members through guilt. We discussed Weight Watchers* and several programs that middle school and high school teachers used to teach students better eating habits. For instance, one high school course included an activity called the F.B.I., Fat Bottoms Incorporated. High school students monitored how each other ate. When a student "caught" someone eating "junk food," the person placed an F.B.I. sticker on the body of the "rulebreaker." The "rulebreaker" had to wear the sticker for the remainder of the day. With these ideas, we began to generate ideas that could be used for an Alcoholics Anonymous*-like confessional about cheesesfries.

By viewing the videotapes of the focus group discussions, performers could distance themselves from their own ideas and experiences and learn what other people had thought about eating, food, and body image. They could watch and listen to the discussion then question those actions—especially their own. Performers frequently said, "I can't believe I said that" during the video sessions. Also during the video sessions, they extracted personal narratives, collected experiences, or recontextualized experiences to level a critique of the information. By watching the videotapes, the performers could identify personal concerns they wished to explore in a context that offers a safety net because they are "only performing."

Additionally, the videotapes, in concert with Boal's games and exercises, developed their critical skills and enabled them to act upon their analysis.
Playing Games

After watching videotapes of the focus group discussions, performers established a distance between their actions and ideas that enabled them to critique those actions and ideas. They began to analyze what they saw and heard and to articulate new understandings. The second activity of the rehearsal process required performers to synthesize information from the videotapes using some of the games and exercises Augusto Boal described in *Games for Actors and Nonactors*. Performers began to enact their understandings and criticisms.

Enactment followed three stages. First, they performed body movement exercises that encouraged them to trust their bodies’ ability to express. These experiences focused their attention toward how they moved and what they could communicate without using words. Second, they began to direct their movement toward a theme about eating and body image. Following what Boal calls Image Theatre, performers used their bodies to construct still images that conveyed their ideas and concerns. Third, the remainder of the activities of the rehearsal stage helped performers "test" their ideas. By organizing a feast, staging an Invisible Theatre experiment, watching television programming, and creating Forum Theatre, performers developed unity, connected their ideas with social issues, raised their critical consciousness, and emphasized the importance of their project. The rehearsal stage required them to hone their analytical skills, to develop their ability to express, and to seek communicative forms other than speaking. Additionally, this phase of
the rehearsal sessions further developed a performer's critical consciousness and provided each of them a way to act upon their discoveries.

Body Movements

As the "main source of sight and sound," the "first word of the theatrical vocabulary is the human body" (TO 25). In order to produce theatre, Boal stipulated that a person should be able to control her own body, to understand how it moved "in order to be capable of making it more expressive" (TO 125). Only with this capacity could the performer structure herself as one who practiced theatre that initiated social change. Thus, during the first three weeks of rehearsal, the performers executed simple, general exercises that forced the performer to become more aware of how her body could serve as a tool for communication. Each performer studied her own body movement, and her body's relationship to other bodies, space, and movement. They learned to identify habitual--perhaps restrictive--ways of moving and communicating. As Boal contends, the exercises helped individuals discover the body's "limitations and possibilities, its social distortions and possibilities of rehabilitation" (TO 126). Once the performers recognized how their bodies had adapted movements in accordance with their lifestyles, performers analyzed why and how those adaptations governed their bodies, and they sought ways to undo those adaptations.

Given the diversity of the performance troupe, the group needed to establish unity as soon as possible since the rehearsal process heavily relied upon collaboration. When the performers began these body exercises, they said that they
felt "silly" or "ridiculous," but they later said that the exercises had helped them relax. Theresa also said, "I think the exercises did create a bit of comraderie because everyone acted at ease with each other. I felt really comfortable with everyone, and I definitely believe that's important in this project."

The first two exercises are categorized by Boal as general exercises. Boal suggests that these general exercises assist the performer to "dissociate" different parts of the body so that the individual can exercise "cerebral control" over every muscle (Games 62). For example, one of Boal's exercises requires performers to "draw" a circle with one hand and a cross with the other. Slowly, the performers began to realize how difficult this task was to complete. They could not perform both activities at first. After about six or seven minutes, a few were better able to synchronize their movement, but none were ever able to achieve complete syncronicity. The performers enjoyed this activity; they treated the game as a competition--one that caused much laughter--but that had no definite "winner." Part of the laughter stemmed from the fact that this game seemed so simple from the description, and that the individual components were very easy; however, together the actions were nearly impossible. The performers could hardly believe themselves incapable of conducting two simple movements.

The second general exercise required the performers to make minimum contact with the surface of the floor. They altered their body positions to explore the different positions they could assume in order to complete the task. As a final phase of this exercise, they formed pairs and established minimum contact with the
floor and with their partners. This activity required performers to study the numerous configurations they could make with their bodies. At first, they easily shaped contortions, but as the exercise continued, they had to stretch their imaginations and bodies to devise a different picture. In many cases, the performers tried configurations that seemed impossible. Performers were rediscovering parts of the body that they rarely used.

Other exercises involved some of the different walks that Boal described (Games 73-75). Boal asserts that walking is an individual's most mechanical movement. People have a particular gait that they use. Boal's walking exercises seek to disrupt that habitual gait. By walking like a crab, a camel, and an elephant, the performers concentrated on moving in awkward, unnatural gaits. These games forced the performers to exert every effort to move in such unfamiliar ways. They positioned their bodies in ways that caused them to use muscles that they did not use every day. Performers said that these exercises "hurt" and "felt funny." They had a difficult time moving from one walking pattern to another, and they frequently tumbled at first. Performers heartily disliked their new walks. They explained that "no one walks this way" and wondered how animals moved so much faster than people.

A favorite exercise was "seawaves" (Boal Games 77). With this activity, partners stood back to back and locked arms. One partner leaned forward until the other, eyes closed, lay on her back. Then, the partner gently bounced up and down so that the person with her eyes closed felt that she was floating on water. Theresa
said this exercise "gave a really odd feeling. It feels like you are definitely on rough water, but when you open your eyes, all really comes back." Boal suggests that this type of exercise is similar to a massage, a "personal dialogue" between individuals that induces participants to release muscle tension and knots. The performers confirmed Boal's description of the exercise. All of the performers enjoyed "seawaves" because the exercise made them relax.

In addition to providing a means to explore their bodies expressive ability, these types of games created unity within the group. Lara explained that with these exercises, the group became one physically:

> These exercises we do for *Beauty and the Feast* are supposed to make us more aware of our body, recognizing our own existence, presence, and being. It's amazing to think our bodies can act uniformly when we are all different beings. Everyone doing the same exercises, our bodies are creating the same images. We are all clones of each other following the instructions correctly for these exercises. Even though we're different, in these exercises we move and function as one person instead of six.

In other cases, performers described unity as being able to "feel comfortable with each other, as we all laugh at each other and no one seems offended," as Terry said. By engaging in these "silly" games, performers quickly became unified. Despite their different personalities and backgrounds, the games provided a common identity for the performers. This shared identity established the basis for the type of collaboration necessary to the project.

Boal believed that the body, in "its battle with the world," adapted itself in order to accomplish necessary tasks (*Games* 61). As a result the body lost touch
with the senses. By restructuring their movements performers developed a better understanding of how they could control their bodies as an expressive medium.

Rhythm and sound exercises, troupe favorites, were also effective in accomplishing this purpose. Many of these exercises operate on the principle that when individuals move or speak in a way that mimics someone else, they break their own mechanization. Performers are restructuring their own way of being to relay their vision of someone else (Games 89). One rhythm-movement exercise entailed making a rhythm machine. One person started a movement and a sound, then the others joined until all belonged to the "machine." At first, they formed disconnected movements and sounds. However, over the course of the game, they began to form more cohesive entities, such as a locomotive engine, typewriter, and a fast-food, food preparation line. Then, they decelerated and accelerated their machine, or one of them controlled the machine by determining its speed and how long the machine lasted. This game forced participants to consider how they moved as individuals and as components of a group. They regulated their individual bodies into a rhythm and sound, then they integrated the bodies into the machine.

After several rehearsal sessions, we began to direct our sound and movements toward eating and body image. The "Vampire of Strausbourg" (Games 110) and "siren's song" (Games 115) were two such transition games. These two games, examples of Boal's "blind series," required performers to deny their sense of sight. This denial forced performers to rely upon their other perceptions, ones that frequently received less use because individuals primarily use sight to perceive the
world (Games 106). Both exercises required performers to move and speak without looking. For the vampire exercise, each performer covered her elbows with her hands, closed her eyes, and began to walk about the performance space. As I touched one performer's neck, she screamed in terror, and became a vampire walking with arms extended. She, then, could "vampirize" others. If a vampire touched another vampire, she screamed with pleasure and became human again. Reactions to this exercise varied. Kathy said that she felt "domineering" or "in charge of the game, kind of powerful" after she became the vampire. She had a "sense of terror at first," then she felt safe because she was "the one doing, not having to run away." They all said they felt more free because they could "put their arms out," "open up," and "take up more space." This exercise emphasized how much individuals rely upon sight. Performers said they felt vulnerable because they could not see who or what they approached as they walked around the space. In addition, this exercise emphasized the benefits of taking action or being the one who acted. They all felt liberated when they were responsible for acting in comparison to when they were potential victims of the vampire.

Boal described the "siren's song" exercise as [v]ery difficult, very delicate" (Games 118). While the exercise may seem "magical," the exercise operates effectively because people use sounds to "speak" to others. With the "siren's song" exercise, performers determined an oppression they had experienced in terms of food and eating. Each walked to an isolated part of the room, closed her eyes, and made a sound that "translated" the oppression she felt. Slowly sounds echoed
around the room. Then, performers gravitated toward the sound that seemed most closely related to their own sound/experience. After they moved, performers recounted their stories.

Donna and Terry moved toward one area. Donna's story involved not wanting to tell her boyfriend that she did not wish to dine out because of an impending modeling job. She was angry and frustrated because she did not feel she could discuss her feelings with him. Terry's sound was a reaction to feeling sick when her mother made her eat semolina and jam, a meal she disliked. While Lara moved toward Terry and Donna she never joined them, and she said that none of the sounds seemed similar to her feelings. She said her sound was a "process of going on pills" and "frustration" at not being the weight she felt "comfortable with--never fat or thin, I'm just medium." She said that she felt "bad" on pills because she had low energy, but without them she felt "puffy."

Harper, Kathy, and Theresa also formed a group. Harper said that she expressed anger at "guys or boyfriends who breakup and call me 'fat bitch.'" Kathy told about "bad feelings" when her grandmother commented on her breasts, "because at ten [years-old] it's because you're fat, not because you are supposed to have them." Theresa's sound was connected to the time her sister's boyfriend speculated how she could fit in her sister's clothes since her sister was "'so much smaller.'"

While the experiences of performers in each group were not identical, their feelings were similar. Those in the first group shared feelings of frustration, while
those in the second group conveyed anger toward others. Performers "spoke" to each other without observing gestures, facial expression, or words.

Although the purpose of this stage of rehearsal was to provide a foundation for scene building, it also produced several direct contributions for the public performance. One night as we waited for the performers to arrive, some of the performers began to talk about how they felt that day. Harper began to walk in a slouch, and then each tried to outdo the other in terms of who could walk the "slouchiest." The performers began to file about the room. The troupe discussed how "nice" life would be "if we could always walk this way, no makeup, not caring." I asked Theresa what she meant by this remark, and she explained that women always looked different when they were around men. I asked them to show me the difference; they immediately straightened their bodies and plastered a smile on their faces. Following Boal's techniques, I asked them to exaggerate their stances to place their bodies in a precarious, straining position. This stylized movement became a frame for the public performance.

These games were also helpful in developing poses for Harper's poem, "Liquid Mask." I asked performers to maneuver a "party position" or a seductive look when I counted to three. We repeated this exercise eight or nine times, and each time they intensified the look or complicated the body position. After they had created a number of images, we picked the best poses from each statue round. Performers used these poses to "decorate" the set for "Liquid Mask."
Body movement exercises accomplished a number of tasks. First, as a result of the games, this stage produced two scenes for the public performances. These games enhanced the "Liquid Mask" scene and developed an opening and closing for the production. However, a second, more fundamental task accompanied this scene building. Performers spent time becoming attuned to their bodies and to each other. These exercises encouraged unity and togetherness and highlighted habitual movements, sounds, and rhythms. In this early stage of rehearsals, we can see the power of Boal's techniques to encourage discovery and cohesiveness. These games made performers focus their thoughts about how and what the body expressed. Performers became aware of themselves and others by performing.

Building Images

As we moved into a second stage of rehearsals, the performance troupe constructed images following Boal's Image Theater techniques (TO 135-42; Games 2-6, 164-91). This technique encouraged performers to make "realistic, allegorical," "surrealistic," "symbolic or metaphysical" images of actual oppressions that people faced (Boal, Rainbow 77). Image theatre techniques allowed the performer to "speak" by constructing images with the bodies of other performers. A performer isolated a problem pertinent to the group, and sculpted an image that depicted that problem. Once the performer was finished, the group discussed whether or not they agreed with the image. Other performers gained the chance to modify the image in a way that would better represent the problem the troupe faced. Once everyone agreed that the image accurately reflected their "oppression," the
troupe constructed an image that presented a better image, a solution, to the problem. Again, group members modified that statue until all agreed. The last step in Image Theatre involved creating "transitional" images to show how the problem evolved from the first image (the "real" image) to the second image (the "ideal" image). These transitional images served as a pattern for social change by showing how individuals could move from "reality" (as depicted by the "real" image) toward a more desirable "reality" (as depicted by the "ideal" image).

The performers molded other performers into images that portrayed a problem related to eating or food. One image depicted a woman standing on a block away from the others; she looked at two other women in an envious manner as she held her stomach. The performance troupe decided that the image suggested social comparison of body types. The troupe believed that the woman on the block wanted to look like the other two women, and that she held her stomach in despair. Performers formed an "ideal" image that countered this problem. They positioned three people in neutral positions with everyone standing on the same level. Then, they sculpted transition images that could connect the "problem" image and the "ideal" image. To start they brought the woman holding her stomach downstage to raise her arms in a questioning gesture. With this movement, the performers positioned the woman as if she wondered why she felt as she did. The second transition required the other two figures to look at her and notice "how proud she is" of her appearance. This image suggested two factors: the woman no longer postured in a way that suggested that she had poor self-esteem, and her own attitude
caused the others to notice her. The last transition brought the three closer together; all looked at each other in curiosity. This arrangement suggested that individuals should value everyone for their individuality instead of how they compare to other women.

Another image attempted to show the various feelings women experienced about their bodies. Donna stood on a block in a stylized "modeling" pose. This position indicated that some women were more confident about their bodies; they "boasted." Kathy sat on the floor with her head down. Kathy's pose was supposed to read "I'm sick that I don't look like she does," Lara explained as she molded the image. Harper sat on another block with her legs crossed; she ate something and was "looking at Donna like 'I shouldn't, but I will.'" Harper's image represented how women wanted to look good, ate anyway, then felt guilty about eating. Terry stood downstage left, also in a pose, but with an "I am satisfied" expression on her face. Then, the troupe worked a solution/ideal image. The alterations to this image did not entail changing positions of the figures, but changing who was in each position. They rearranged the image by switching Donna and Kathy, so that Donna was dissatisfied with her appearance and Kathy was the model. This change showed the group's belief that thin people were also dissatisfied with their bodies, and that larger women were often happy with their appearance.

This transition marked another key shift in how the performers thought. In the focus group discussions and in early video sessions, performers believed that all women disliked their bodies. At this stage, the troupe acknowledged that some
women felt comfortable with their body shape—large or small. In addition, they decided that people frequently moved through phases of like or dislike depending upon specific circumstances. Performers worked a transition to convey this new understanding. They placed Harper downstage in the "proud" position, while Theresa took Harper's former position. Their image still did not please them. So, they added movement; each person moved through the four stations or phases to show how women perceive their bodies in different ways.

A third image showed one person eating happily while another person played with her food. The solution, of course, presented both eating happily. Until this image, I had guided performers through different stages. I served as a moderator who insured that everyone liked the images, solicited people to change the image, or asked them to create "ideal" or "transitional" images. This time Theresa asked for transitions, because she thought their solution was too easy and highly unlikely. With this action performers began to direct the others rather than rely upon my guidance. Under Theresa's instruction, the other troupe members worked through some transition images. One of these showed a person forcing the other to eat. Not satisfied, the performers devised another image that entailed "teaching, training, and enticing" as Kathy described the solution. However, the group debated the practicality of this solution as well. They questioned if people had the time to go through such a process if someone was "deathly anorexic."

Particularly with the third example of Image Theatre, performers began to take charge of their ideas and actions. I had served as a leader and organizer of the
rehearsal until this point. I called rehearsals to order, explained the games, suggested movements and themes to explore. From this point forward, I distanced myself from the project so that the participants could question their personal assumptions and enact problems and potential solutions. They could use the performance as a process to work through their personal concerns, to locate ideas that influenced their own attitude, and to meet their specific needs.

Like the body movement phase of the rehearsal process, these image games produced several scenes for the public performances. As the troupe reviewed the videotapes, they noted how often people said they ate fat-free products and how often they used foods to describe their body parts. Lara, Terry, and Donna devised a scene about fat-free products. They created an image with three stations. At one station, a model advertised fat-free items while consumers in the other two stations watched. A person at the second station drank SlimFast® and ate fat-free foods, then she weighed herself. She was shocked by what she read on the scale, and she returned to her diet. The same thing happened at the third station. The models advertised the foods again, and the action repeated. They used this scene to illustrate a number of concerns, including "yo-yo" dieting, despair over weight gain, consumerism, and idealized images of the female body. Performers felt that women were entangled in an elaborate network. They believed that women feel compelled to resemble the models and movie stars they see on television. Women engage in dieting syndromes that often "make them gain more weight." Women continuously seek product and exercise equipment to assist them in their "battle"; they always
hope to find the solution to their body size. Performers depicted their belief in the never-ending battle women wage against their bodies, their scales, and food.

While performers could empathize with this battle, they had also distanced themselves from the dieting syndrome as focus group participants presented on the videotape. They recognized that dieting is a cycle or pattern of dieting, that the diet industry always produces a better product, that dieting does not bring satisfaction, but (perhaps) the need to continue dieting. Performers had reached an understanding about diets that had differed from their prior understanding.

Kathy and Theresa developed another scene from the videotaped discussions. They focused on how participants referred to their bodies as food items. Their scene entailed two shoppers at a local grocery store buying various foods, represented by the other performers. As they wandered through the store, Kathy and Theresa talked about cottage cheese and marshmallows—two foods that focus group members derogatorily used as metaphors for body parts. These performers recontextualized the videotaped discussion. During the focus group discussions, participants used food items to cast a negative shadow on their bodies. Rather than indicate the shame focus group participants implied with their use, the performers brought the food-body connection to the center of attention. They seemed to celebrate the body's connection to food.

As the end of this stage of rehearsals drew to a close, Donna was still trying to develop a performance that involved idealized images of beauty or beauty pageants. She had made no decisions. Again, we turned to Image Theater. I asked
Donna to create a statue of what beauty queens looked like. She configured a stereotypical image involving walking down a runway, accepting a crown, turning at the end of the runway, and waving to an adoring crowd. Then, I asked her to think about those images and to consider what each contestant might experience prior to competition. She molded herself into images that suggested many stories beneath the ideal beauty pageant image. These stories included enduring cosmetic surgery, applying makeup for that "natural" look, and developing eating disorders to achieve an ultraslim and svelte look. With this line of thought, Donna began to "deconstruct" beauty pageants. We might regard pageants as contests that identify the most beautiful participant. The pageant winner is supposed to be the exemplar of natural grace and beauty; yet, contestants inundate themselves with beauty products and cosmetic surgery, they tape parts of their body into specific positions, and coat their teeth with petroleum jelly so that they shine. As a result, the contestant hardly resembles anything "natural." When Donna reversed the makeup process, she illustrated how far pageants had traversed from "natural" beauty.

At the image building stage of the rehearsal process, Theresa remarked upon their progress at this stage of the process: "The images are starting to show a number of themes we’ve seen in the tapes such as choice about foods and perception of our self image and also the way fat women are viewed as not being "normal." Performers recognized that they could use their bodies as a tool of expression. Performers learned how slight alterations in body positions and facial gestures changed the way they interpreted the experiences the images represented. In
addition, this stage offered performers a way to reconstruct their knowledge. Performers began to tear apart experiences in the focus groups to assemble scenes that constituted a more indepth exploration of a particular area of concern. They tested ideas and changed opinions as they explored potential solutions to problems. Performers had demonstrated that they had distanced themselves from their prior experiences or from those on the videotapes. As they enacted their understandings of the experiences on the videotape, they frequently "rewrote" the experiences. Rather than replicate the experience, they offered a critique or developed a new way of regarding the issues. Performers also showed a change in attitudes and perceptions. For example, they began to consider that some women are satisfied with their bodies. This realization contradicted their former opinion that all women wanted to change their bodies. In addition, the performers further developed their critical thinking skills as they formed opinions and determined the "accuracy" of the images. Many times performers changed their opinions because someone pointed out a consideration they had neglected. Finally, the performers began to take action. They enacted their experiences and tested their ideas. Moreover, they began to take responsibility for the rehearsal sessions, as well as for their ideas, experiences, and images.

Testing Their Ideas
The last phase of rehearsals encouraged the performers to test their images and ideas with several activities. On a practical level, this stage added variety to the isolated games they had previously played. However, this stage also pointed out the
social relevance of their work. Performers could move beyond the confines of their experiences on the videotape and the performance space to observe whether or not other members of the community shared or contested their ideas. They wondered about the social impact of problems associated with food and/or body image and how society interpreted various behaviors.

The performance troupe planned a group dinner; watched a Murphy Brown episode and two episodes of the talk show, Marilu; and encountered Boal’s concepts of Invisible Theater and Forum Theater. With the group feast, Invisible Theatre, and Forum Theatre, the troupe engaged in a type of "rehearsal theatre" (TQ 142). Performers created a spectacle without knowing the outcome of the plan. They responded to the people, place and action of the particular moment. Boal explained that these types of performances required the performer to respond to “the real needs of a popular audience” (TQ 142).

The Feast

Four weeks into the rehearsal process, the performance troupe planned and prepared a feast for one another. I hoped this rehearsal activity would help performers mark their eating practices as learned behaviors. By framing their everyday practices within a different context—as part of a performance process—I hoped they would begin to see how their eating behaviors compared to and contrasted with others. With this recognition, they could discuss how they learned to eat as they did. Also, I felt that if I framed eating as a learned behavior,
performers might recognize that they could re-learn any behavior that caused them mental or physical harm.

The feast was important to the group because it constituted one of the first "scenes" that involved everyone. While other activities used three or four performers to construct images, this activity allowed everyone to act. This event also signalled Harper's integration with the group. Although she had previously joined the games and constructed images, she offered few suggestions to the group. Her contributions stemmed from her willingness to play, rather than her willingness to direct. As the troupe planned the feast, she began to make decisions and to assert her ideas.

Everyone had ideas and suggestions about the feast. All had collected pictures of foods and dinner tables to illustrate their ideas about what they wanted to eat and how they wanted the dinner to look. Harper volunteered to provide flatware, stemware, and dishes. Then, talk turned to what foods to eat.

The conversation about food was the liveliest session we had. People began to talk over one another, interrupt each other, pass recipes and pictures back and forth. They talked about their favorite foods. While one person disliked vegetables, another fought to have them on the menu. As one performer mentioned how good something tasted, others clamored in agreement or disagreement. Theresa, perhaps verbalizing the fears of many, said that she feared we were "going to have really good, fattening food." Theresa, like others in the group, was conscious about definitions for "feasting." "Feast" meant eating without control, worrying about the
consequences, and a large selection of fatty, sugary foods. One performer replied that "fattening foods are fine with me," while another suggested how to cook foods to reduce fat and sugar. Each suggestion about food brought forth additional comments about how to keep foods warm, what to drink, or how good the meal would taste. Kathy volunteered to bring a red velvet cake so that everyone could participate in her latest "obsession."

The next session was feast time. Performers decorated one table with a lace tablecloth, fresh flowers, candles, stuffed artichokes, and an assortment of glasses, plates, and flatware. Terry brought music to play during dinner. They decided to set up a sideboard for a buffet so that everyone could choose what they wished to eat. In addition to stuffed artichoke hearts, the meal consisted of black bean soup, salad, shrimp creole, green beans, rolls, red velvet cake, fat-free chocolate cake, champagne, white wine, red wine, coffee, and tea.

When they planned the session, performers predicted that they would "all go crazy" with the food since they planned a feast. However, the tone of the group dinner differed greatly from their expectations and from other rehearsal sessions. Right away, the performers altered their behavior from previous rehearsals. They attempted to act in a way they felt "proper." They attempted to use the proper etiquette by placing their napkins in their laps and by using the correct fork. For example, before we started to eat, Lara asked if anyone wanted to say a prayer. Troupe members likened this feast to other formal meals, such as Thanksgiving dinner. They followed a pattern similar to the ones used when their families
celebrated special meals. Blessing the food was another way to associate their feast with something special. No one wanted to lead the prayer, so after justifying their exclusion of prayer with a few mumbles about how "family elders" always said it, they ate the meal. Another example of propriety arose with the first course. Everyone started with a salad or soup. Those who ate the soup finished first, and they washed their bowls before filling their plates with other foods. Those with salad decided to stack dishes to wash later. "It's what we do at home," as Theresa said.

For Donna and Theresa, the meal was "just like home with full-course meals, tablecloths and cloth napkins." Others said that everything seemed very formal. I noticed that conversation was different from the usual sessions. Though relaxed, everyone seemed especially determined to have a good time and to engage in "polite" or "dinner" conversation. Theresa talked about receiving a graduation present from Bill Clinton, and others followed with stories about their own "brushes" with fame. Terry had met Margaret Thatcher, and Kathy's friend went to a party with Johnny Depp and Juliette Lewis. The formality of the feast seemed to call for more formal discussion as opposed to their everyday conversation and activities.

In addition to formal conversation, the performers were a bit unsure about how to act with one another. Their old, casual rules for interaction disappeared as they grappled for new rules for this new situation. Terry, for instance, watched to see where people placed their flatware. Everyone was careful not to spill food, to
cut food into small portions, to use manners described in etiquette books. Only when they reached across the table for part of an artichoke did they defy the new rules. They explained, however, "We have to eat the artichokes with our hands" and "this is the way we always eat them at my parents' dinner parties."

After the meal, everyone remarked about how full they were; this comment seemed expected. While they probably were "full," they also needed to express the recognition/regret about the amount of food consumed. For example, many had broken their diets by choosing the fat-full salad dressing over the fat-free one.

For awhile after the meal, no one wanted dessert. Even though they had enjoyed discussing this final course more than anything else, no one wanted to be the first person to cut either cake. Finally, Lara declared that she wanted dessert. Her tone implied that she would eat it even if no one else would. As she started for the desserts, the others joined her. Now that one person had volunteered, the rest would finish the meal as well. All descended upon the desserts, rather than assemble a line like they did for the rest of the meal. At this point performers relaxed more; they licked icing from their fingers. They acted as though they could behave less formally since they as a group had decided to break their usual rule of "no dessert." Dessert signalled an end to the feast, and it unified the group as they "transgressed," indulged in the forbidden—chocolate, icing, and cake.

The evening passed quickly. After two hours, no one seemed eager to leave despite the midterm exams they faced in the following days. When someone realized that we had "rehearsed" for nearly three hours, we cleared the space.
This activity provided a very clear example of the rules and norms that surround eating practices. Performers noticed how people changed their behaviors for this event. They noticed how everyone adopted "proper" etiquette while eating. They noticed differences in what each considered "proper." The episode with the dessert created a shared identity for the group as they all indulged their desire for something sweet. They validated each other's impulse to enjoy a course they usually avoided. The feast also created group unity since all planned, prepared, and consumed food together. This activity offered performers the opportunity to test social rules and personal habits by experimenting with each other. The feast allowed the performers to conduct their own observations; as they participated, they could also watch.

**Television**

Another type of testing helped the performers connect their work to the concerns of others. For this part of the rehearsal period, performers watched television. I included this activity in the rehearsal process more for pragmatic reasons than for what the performers might learn. For instance, performers were still unclear about how an entire show could be built around their experiences. They did not think a simple collage of narrative performances would be interesting—to themselves or others; yet, they were unable to visualize other options. The *Murphy Brown* episode offered them an example of four story lines that dealt with different food concerns, many which had emerged in the focus group discussions. Also, performers had encountered discussions about food and body image outside of the
troupe's discussion. They talked about shows that featured related topics and about an episode of NBC's *Dateline* that told the story of Kristie Heinrich, an American gymnast who had recently died of anorexia nervosa. Several had also seen *For the Love of Nancy*, a fictionalized account of actress Tracy Gold's battle with anorexia. Performers came to each rehearsal eager to discuss such shows. I decided to substitute some of the videotaped interviews for some of the shows they had seen. I hoped they would relate what they saw to their own experiences and speculate about eating as a social issue.

The first show the troupe viewed was an episode of *Murphy Brown*. Murphy and her friends stopped at a grocery store so that she could buy her son's favorite baby food. She discovered that the company no longer made this particular kind, and she launched a search for the ingredients. As she searched, the others wandered into the store. Corky saw a picture of her ex-husband attending a Hollywood party with a famous entertainer, and she launched her own junk-food eating binge throughout the store. Frank tried to pick up a woman—whom he later discovered was a nun—by using food as "decoy items." For instance, he chose capers because they revealed that he was "unique and continental," and one-cup coffee filters because they said "I'm single." Jim discovered that the store carried a type of ham that reminded him of his boyhood. With specific orders he requested the deli worker to make him a sandwich. As the show drew to an end, Murphy bought another type of baby food, Corky paid for a cart filled with empty cartons,
Frank apologized to the nun, and Jim showed the deli worker how "real sandwiches" were made.

This show initiated numerous themes to discuss. The performers first commented upon Corky's situation; they said that her emotions were making her eat. "She was depressed and she thought it would make her feel good," Harper explained. They also talked about how grocery stores are frequently pickup places and about what one could tell about people by "reading" their groceries. Most of them confessed to studying the foods others buy. Theresa said, "If they are overweight I'll see what they eat, if they are eating right." Donna also related to Murphy's saga: "Do you know what it's like to find out what's in what you eat? Or, how you go to the grocery to pick up one thing and come out with a cart full?" Kathy added that Murphy tried to cook food so that she would not feel badly about spending little time with her son. Jim and the ham story-line made them laugh about certain eating rituals. "Jim was so methodical about how he built his sandwich; he really wanted it done right," Lara said. And the performers talked about the nostalgic values of food: "You know how much better food tastes when your grandmother makes it," Kathy said.

While the performers could identify with each Murphy Brown character, they also felt that every person could. This episode, then, reinforced their own ideas and experiences and indicated to them that everyone had similar concerns. Theresa said that just about every woman she knew had a misconception about weight and had
eaten because she was depressed. Theresa used Murphy Brown to construct an
image for the group to explore in subsequent rehearsal sessions.6

The group also watched two talk shows that Donna’s mother had recorded and sent to the group. The shows, episodes of Marilu hosted by actress Marilu Henner, addressed body image, weight loss, and cosmetic surgery. For example, one show featured someone who wanted a plastic surgeon to remove skin sagging as a result of rapid weight loss. The second episode explored how the relationship women have with their mothers influenced how women feel about food.

The talk shows generated more conversation about their own eating practices. Some performers endorsed cosmetic surgery for the guest if she would feel better about herself. Other performers ridiculed the idea that a mother could influence her daughter’s eating patterns. Participants identified ways in which these television shows were relevant to their own lives. Donna said that she was troubled that her own eating habits affected her younger sister’s eating practices. She discussed her unexpected visit home the previous evening:

As soon as I walked in my mom was trying to put something together for me. ... So I sat down ... and I looked at my sister and she looks mad. And I said "what’s wrong?" And she said "God" and she looked at my plate and she looked at my mom. "Will you look at how you feed me and how you feed Donna." My mom was like, "What?" And it made me feel bad because it was like for my sister, "You’re feeding Donna different from what you are feeding me. ... If you put these on the table, I’m going to eat these. I’m not like Donna." So I was telling her, "Look don’t be weird. I’m the one who’s weird. If I have some kind of complex, don’t be like me. ..." And about a month ago my Mom looked in her purse and found Dexatrim®. I just want to shake her and say, "Don’t." And I feel so guilty. If anything, if I’m the cause of this. ...
Group members suggested that Donna contact a campus psychologist who specialized in eating disorders. Donna offered little response to this suggestion.

These shows served several purposes. The television shows exemplified how a number of stories focused on one topic (food) could be combined to create a cohesive show. Furthermore, while "consuming" these media images, the performers used their analytical skills in the same way they needed to use them as they watched the video tapes of the focus groups. Performers had to synthesize data. These shows stimulated further analysis and interpretation of the videotaped focus group sessions as performers thought about their own experiences, as well as the public production. While watching television enhanced the rehearsals, this activity did not connect the discussion of the focus group participants or the performance troupe to a broader, social concern about eating. That is, I had thought performers might move from personal discussions toward remarks about eating's social aspects or questions about why they noticed the media's attention to eating. Performers, however, were content to explore their personal problems with eating, rather than (as Boal suggest) to use those shared personal problems as an indicator of a social problem that needs resolution.

**Invisible Theater**

The Invisible Theater project was the most exciting part of the rehearsals. Invisible Theater, theater "performed in a place that is not a theater" (Boal *Games* 6), requires that performers to choose a topic of "burning importance, something known to be a matter of profound and genuine concern for the future spect-actors"
in order to stimulate involvement from those outside of the performance group (6). Performers improvise scenes that enable them to explore potential endings that depend upon the place and the people at that place. After performers rehearse a number of scenarios, they go to another location—a place where their improvisation could actually occur—and "run" the scene. Others at the location are unaware that they are audience members. As the scene progresses, performers try to involve the audience members in their scene. Performers work to transform audience members from passive observers to active participants.

We began Invisible Theatre by visiting The Chimes, a restaurant near campus, to determine its suitability for our purposes. Performers noted the eating habits of others; the relationships between the servers, the bouncer, and the bartender; how women ate when they ate with men in comparison to how they ate when they were with other women; the noise levels; the locations of tables; if tables were conducive for eavesdropping or talking to other patrons; and what foods they could order or throw on the floor without spending too much money. Participants decided that The Chimes was adequate, since many college students dined at The Chimes, since it was close to campus, and since we could watch events from any table.

Next, we brainstormed possible scenarios. These ideas included having no one order food, someone eating off someone else's plate, asking for fat gram and calorie content of food items, and bringing in "Deal-A-Meal" cards to consult before placing orders. They also determined ways to involve others. For instance, they
suggested that someone could ask those at other tables what they were eating, then
exclaim she could not eat so much fat. Or, they could place a specific order to
servers, typically rude at The Chimes, then send the order back to the kitchen.
Harper said, "Wouldn't it be funny if we had a major freak at each table and the
waitresses could all be [saying], 'God, I have this person . . . and the others would
reply, 'Me, too.'" The group became even more excited as they anticipated
numerous reactions from potential spect-actors.

As we discussed potential reactions, I suggested that some performance
theorists and practitioners raised ethical objections to Invisible Theater. All of the
performers dismissed my suggestions and said that as long as no one was hurt,
Invisible Theater was "fine." I explained that some of the objections stemmed from
the lack of choice others have about their participation. Performers still did not
perceive any problem.

When I arrived at The Chimes the next evening, Lara, Harper, and Terry
had already taken seats. Donna and Kathy arrived as I waited for a table. When
Theresa entered, a server guided the two of us to a table that would allow us to
overlook the restaurant.

As Theresa and I ordered, the server clearly understood we wanted "lowfat"
everything. Theresa asked for low-calorie salad dressing--even though she knew
they carried none--then settled for honey-mustard dressing placed in a container on
the side of her salad. Then, she ordered the catfish po-boy (sandwich), but she
wanted it grilled with no butter rather than deep fried, as po-boys typically were
served. The server interrupted her and said, "You want everything 'no-fat.'" My diet soda arrived flat, so I sent the drink back three times, before I substituted water. About thirty minutes later, the server apologized that the kitchen was taking so long in cooking our order. She explained that the cook did not know how to cook catfish "without frying it." Twenty minutes later, she brought two sandwiches.

As we waited for our food, Harper ordered a salad, deep fried mushrooms and zucchini, jambalaya, gumbo, and a large pitcher of diet soda. About ten minutes later she asked her server about the "raw oyster special," and she added a half-dozen to her meal. She also requested that all of her dishes be served at one time, so that she could have huge plates of food filling a very small table. When her food arrived, she constantly ate, smoked, and drank. She never stopped. We wondered what the server thought of this huge order. A man drinking beer as he waited for a friend was fascinated with Harper's eating. After a while he even stopped trying to be covert about his fascination.

At this same table, Terry ordered very frugally. She ordered only a serving of french bread—usually served on the side rather than as a regular menu item. She figured that this item was the cheapest one she could order. After a while Terry left her table and approached a table close to ours. She asked the eight people at the table if she could have the rest of their carrot sticks. The people told her to help herself, and she went back to her table where Harper continued to gorge. Fifteen minutes later Terry approached the table a second time; this time they asked her if she wanted the celery. She said yes, then asked, "And could I have that chicken
wing?" They gave her the entire platter and a handful of napkins. Terry later said, "I was so scared the first time. Then they offered up, so I was like, 'Okay. . . .'"

At this point Theresa leaned toward the eight people to ask, "Did that girl ask y'all for your food?" They began to tell Theresa the entire story. One person at the table remarked that Terry was "odd" and another said that she was in class with Terry (who never recognized any of them).

Not long after she acquired the celery, Terry noticed that two females behind Harper had left their breadsticks; she grabbed them before someone cleared the table. By this time those at the large table were studying Terry. One person leaned over to point out her actions to Theresa. Also, a different female saw her take the breadsticks. She pointed out Terry to her two friends. We later speculated about the server's reaction to the numerous glasses and platters Terry had acquired in the hour she was at the restaurant.

At the last table Lara ordered a sandwich, Donna ordered hush puppies and a small salad, and Kathy had already eaten so she smoked. Donna proceeded to wrap the food in napkins on her lap. She was so covert that Lara and Kathy never saw her drop food. Indeed, they told her to be more obvious, so she scraped food; they still never saw her. Kathy approached two men sitting near them; she explained that she needed help watching her friend who was recovering from an eating disorder. She explained that she did not want Donna to think she was spying, and she would appreciate their help. They ignored Kathy's request. So, Kathy approached an
older woman at another table and repeated the same story. This woman agreed, and the scene proceeded to unfold.

I crossed to Lara and started to talk to her; Kathy excused herself and went to the bathroom. Donna immediately began dropping food; she dropped six napkins on the floor. After the first few napkins, the woman Kathy had approached left her table. Kathy described the results of their scenario:

I went to the bathroom and she comes after me, like "hey, hey, hey." We get in the bathroom and she says, "I didn't see her, but my friend Mary saw her put stuff in a napkin and there were two napkins up under her chair. And is she in therapy?" She's like, "Well, she's putting stuff up there, and I didn't see her but I know it had to have been her. It just breaks my heart." And so a few seconds later she says, "because, because my daughter was bulimic and she tried to kill herself by jumping off a building at Tulane. Even after we found out that she was going to live, we thought she would lose her foot." And then [the woman] started crying. Then she started to tell me how ninety-nine percent of all eating disorders, the root of them all is like sexual abuse and stuff. So she was like, "Well has she admitted it? Does she know what's happening to her, what's going on?" And I was like, "No, she's not admitting anything." She's like, "This is really serious. You need to take her to the Rader Institution in New Orleans... You have got to be her friend."

Donna said that she also thought the bouncer watched their table the entire time.

Lara added that as soon as she, Kathy, and Donna walked toward the door to leave, he motioned several servers to come clear the mess.

With this activity performers became encouraged to enact their ideas. They achieved results they did not expect. Kathy realized the "power of performance" when she said "we are all going to hell." We had caused someone emotional distress. Other performers realized the pervasiveness of eating disorders in our society. Because of Invisible Theater, Donna said, "Probably half the people in
[The Chimes] have some kind of story, I feel like." Theresa added, "We don’t even realize how big of a problem this is." We began to recount other tales and impressions of the evening in a story-round fashion.

The group also discussed whether or not they should have told the woman that the entire napkin scenario was a performance. They decided that the woman would have been either hurt or angry. Harper said, "It’s really funny that yesterday you were trying to have this ethical discussion and we were like, 'No. Fuck it.'" Lara said, "And I said that if it doesn’t mentally or physically hurt someone then it’s okay." These performers problematized a situation that seemed simple the previous night. Kathy explained that "it wouldn’t have been bad if the lady hadn’t had a real problem"; however, the performers agreed that the experience would have had less impact in that case. They constructed other ways to look at the woman’s reaction. Donna thought, "Maybe the woman feels she helped someone. Like 'I noticed this because of this, and I helped someone.'" Theresa agreed, "If she got so upset about this, then maybe she had a lot of feelings to work through about the situation with her daughter." Kathy told us:

She kept saying the reason I needed to take care of Donna now is because she didn’t handle her daughter the right way. She didn’t take care of it, give her daughter the support she needed. She [the daughter] was abused in junior high school, and they kept telling her to get over it . . . I mean like tell me more as if I didn’t feel bad enough . . . I didn’t want to know. I was like, "Shut up. Too much disclosure!"

Kathy’s story caused them to re-evaluate ethical implications of Invisible Theater. They noted that while the woman could have been pained and we could all "go to hell since God was paying us back," the woman also could have felt helpful rather
than helpless. In addition, they decided that she, like the men Kathy approached, could have refused to participate. Performers decided that she could have refrained from saying so much.

At the end of the discussion, Theresa said that she was afraid they would see people from The Chimes, and Donna said, "Or, that I’ll see that woman and she’ll say, 'Honey, are you okay now?'" All agreed that the experience was challenging, fun, and thought-provoking; however, they were not ready to repeat the performance soon, nor did they want to eat at The Chimes for a few weeks.

For this group, Invisible Theater was the "ultimate" test. Performers executed in a public place behaviors that break norms; then they measured reactions to those deviations. With this exercise, performers recognized that the games they played during rehearsal connected to events and people outside of the performance space. They began to position their work as important as a result of the woman’s reaction. Before Invisible Theater, the performers neglected to realize the prevalence of eating disorders. Never did they expect to encounter someone affected by eating disorders, because members of society did not typically discuss such problems with friends, much less with strangers. While individuals lamented weight gain, exchanged diet ideas, and lusted for food, they did not talk about this "darker" aspect of food.

**Forum Theater**

Invisible Theater's impact influenced the troupe to use their experiences from The Chimes to create a scene for the public performances. They improvised
possible adaptations of the Invisible Theater scenario for Forum Theatre (Games 17-26, 211-47). In Forum Theatre participants improvised a ten to fifteen minute skit based upon a social problem. After they presented the skit to a group, performers explained that they were repeating the scene, and they invited audience members to help them improvise potential solutions to the problems presented. After the repetition, performers asked audience members if they liked the way the scene ended; they asked those who said they did not like the way the scene ended to approach the stage to show a better ending. The performers enacted the scene a third time, and this time audience members replaced performers to redirect action in a way that seemed to resolve the conflict. All audience members could participate if they carried out action, rather than initiating conversation (Games 139). As audience members replaced performers and became "spect-actors," the other performers faced a new situation, and they had to respond to new possibilities that the "spect-actor" generates (Games 139).

Usually, a "Joker" figure presides over Forum Theatre (Games 167-94; Games 232-34). Boal calls the "Joker" a "contemporary and neighbor" to the spectator (Games 175) because this figure moves away from other performers to help audience members question, doubt, and analyze what they see on stage. While "Jokers" make no decisions and refrain from manipulating the audience, they always open the possibilities for debate (Games 232). Jokers refer to the audience, seek the audience's evaluation, and guard against "magical solutions," those that seem too easy or inadequate to explain the resolution.
At first the troupe tried Forum Theatre as a way to "write" an end for the "Restaurant" scene. Harper played the server as Terry and Theresa entered the space where Lara, Kathy, and Donna already sat. After reproducing their experiences for two rather than three tables, performers at each table began to improvise their lines or conversation pattern. We repeated the scenes several times. Everyone in the group suggested ways Lara and Kathy could handle the situation. We first worked on a scene that posed Lara and Kathy confronting Donna, but that scene produced denial and anger in Donna. Another scene required Donna to return to the table and to control the scene by paying the entire check; thus, she prevented the others from initiating a conversation about the food they discovered. The last "solution" that we tried demanded that Lara and Kathy do nothing. None of these scenes seemed adequate, so the troupe decided to return to this scene at a later time.

Toward the end of rehearsals, the troupe decided to conclude the public performance with Forum Theatre. Earlier in the rehearsal process when I made this suggestion, the performers resisted the idea. They were afraid to take the risk. By the time they experienced Invisible Theater, the troupe felt more cohesive and confident of their abilities. They decided that Forum Theater could solicit audience members' help in sorting through the "Restaurant" scene. So, we constructed a type of Forum Theater.

Many of our adaptations to Forum Theatre entailed the "Joker." In addition to facilitating a solution to the final scene, our "Joker," Terry, interrupted the other scenes in the production by pausing action and pointing out contradictions to the
performers and/or audience members. The interruptions established an
improvisatory, impermanent, unfixedness to the performance that might encourage
audience members to participate in the Forum. In addition, I thought these
interruptions might distance audience members from what they saw on stage. I
though such distance would encourage them to analyze what they saw and heard and
to search for alternative endings/solutions to the problems performers posed.

Performers quickly adapted to Terry's interruptions, although at first they
were a bit unsure about how to handle them. They soon realized that if they were
not certain where to start after the break, they could ask Terry for a cue. They
recognized that they had the same power Terry had. This stipulation made them
feel more comfortable, although several begged Terry backstage not to interrupt
them. Terry and I worked on possible interruptions in an individual rehearsal. We
planned several interruptions that would occur each evening. Occasionally, she
darted across the stage explaining to the audience that she had little time to eat.
These blurbs served as transitions between scenes, and they prepared audience
members for other interruptions.

Rehearsing the forum proved nearly impossible with no audience
involvement, so the forum always dwindled in rehearsals. During the final weeks, I
solicited sympathetic people to attend rehearsals so that performers could practice
Forum Theater. Two of my students, Andrea and Charlie, attended one rehearsal
session. Since I had discussed Image Theatre and Forum Theatre, as well as used
some of the techniques in class, they were somewhat prepared. At one point during
the rehearsals Terry asked Andrea a question. Andrea was quick to respond with her opinions. The rehearsal continued until Terry organized the Forum Theatre. The performers replayed the "Restaurant" scene, then asked Andrea and Charlie about their ideas for another ending. Charlie did not participate, because he "did not know what he would do." As Andrea began to talk, Terry asked her to join them on stage. Andrea approached the performers to direct them. The performers revised their performance using her ideas. Then, Terry asked her to take the place of one of the performers. Andrea chose to take Lara's role, which she played in a less belligerent manner than Lara had. Andrea said that she did not believe that such a confrontational manner encouraged Donna to confide in her friends. This enactment initiated discussion about what one would do in such a situation.

This rehearsal of Forum Theatre was more successful than others. Performers faced an audience—albeit a small audience—who joined them on stage. Terry overcame one of her largest fears when she succeeded in stimulating discussion during the production and when she succeeded in soliciting Andrea's help on stage. Distinctions between performer and audience blurred as a result of the interaction. Had they continued to act their ideas rather than discuss them, the rehearsal/forum would have more closely resembled Boal's description.

Several months later in preparation for the third performance at the 1995 Southern States Speech Communication convention, performers used another series of games to enhance Forum Theatre. First, performers played the "Restaurant" scene as they had previously practiced. Then, they replayed the scene exaggerating
all of their lines and gestures. Each performer intensified expression and gesture by carefully considering each sentence and word they said. Finally during a third run-through audience members acted as "Jokers." They placed the characters in a "hot seat" by directly questioning the performers-in-character about their reasons for acting in a certain way. For example, they asked Selia why she was reluctant to question Donna or why was she uninterested in what happened to Donna. They questioned Lara about her anger, about how she "knew" that the food was Donna's, or about what right did she have to involve herself in Donna's business. This technique helped the performers develop more thoughtful performances. Instead of "playing" anger, for instance, Lara said that she actually became angry during the incident. They began to see the scene as more than lines they had written, as something that could actually occur to them.

During the last weeks of rehearsal, the performance troupe improvised a forum that would conclude the show. This forum offered performers a chance to explore ideas that had not surfaced during the focus group discussions or previous rehearsals. They learned to connect the roles they played to ideas, feelings, and issues about real problems. They learned how to use performance to "write" a scene. They learned about the complexity of interactions when they sought solutions to the "Restaurant." Performance stimulated discussion, action, and debate.

As performers used the games Boal associated with TO, they drew upon their physical and vocal resources, as well as their mental abilities, to resolve social problems. Frequently, these games generated new ideas and different perspectives
to problems. Performers first completed exercises that drew particular attention to how they usually moved. This awareness helped them understand the expressive capabilities of their bodies. They also used Image Theater to conceptualize, explore, and contest their ideas about eating and body image. They used one another to create images, depicting problems about eating and body image. The games also forced the performers to extend their personal ideas/oppressions into a larger cultural framework. As performers feasted in the performance space, watched television, executed Invisible Theater, and established a forum, they correlated the personal with the social. As group members worked through the games and exercises, they taught one another and developed a more thoughtful perspective of social problems. Furthermore, they acted upon their knowledge by planning a public performance.

In this chapter I explained the ten-week rehearsal process that comprised the second stage of the performance process. After the women identified eating and body image as a problem during the first stage of the performance process, performers used enactment in the second phase of the process to continue their exploration. Performance became their tool for expression.

Reviewing videotapes of the focus group discussions and playing Boal’s games for "Theatre of the Oppressed" were two central components of each rehearsal session. Each of these components forced them to enact social problems. The videos served as a tool that focussed the performers' thoughts and ideas. They
also created distance between the person and behavior; they had to view themselves on the videos as someone else, someone "me" but "not me."

Boal's games and exercises helped performers learn a new form of expression. Performers could not use verbal expression. No longer could they speak their ideas; they had to show them without using words. Performers resisted this concept at first. They wanted to shape images by telling people how to move. Once they understood that they were not to speak, they tried to write directions. Finally, they resorted to showing the other performers what to do. Sessions after they had accepted the "no words" rule went much more efficiently than previous sessions. Performers began to concentrate upon the dialogue between their experiences and gestures. They exerted more effort in interpreting the images than when they waited for someone to tell them what to do. They acted as though they did not have to be "vessels" for someone else's ideas; they seemed to recognize that they, "the receivers," were also instrumental in what an image expressed.

Although the performers worked well together throughout this phase, they also engaged in a bit of friendly competition with one another. For example, during the body movement exercises and image building sessions, they tried to "outdo" each other by determining who could stretch their bodies into the most precarious position or design the "best" still image. Their competitive attitude also arose when they recounted their observations of the Invisible Theatre experiment; they tried to "top" each others' stories as they pieced together their experiences. This attitude, according to Boal, does not belong in TO exercises. In *Games for Actors and*
Nonactors Boal writes that the participants should not "try to achieve great feats of strength or to out-perform others. No heroism. No risks" (65). He implies that a competitive attitude produces two effects that hinder the group process. Competition might compel individuals to make choices that they do not wish to make; rather than doing what they want, they make choices that result in a good picture. The second effect hinges on the first. When performers engage in competition, they no longer focus on the topic of concern or worry over the most effective way to express that concern, because they seek personal attention or validation for their own talents. While competition produced these effects to some small extent in our rehearsal sessions, I believe that the attitude enhanced our rehearsals. In many cases, a performer tried to "outdo" herself. She would stretch her body, thoughts, and ideas, rather than try to defeat someone else. In addition, performers worked with, not against each other. That is, they did not try to "win" but to perform their best. In every session, every performer offered suggestions to others, changed images so that all shared in the product by the end of the session. They congratulated each other on their collaborative work.

During the second stage of the rehearsal process, performers became a cohesive unit. They became aware that performing involved more than memorization; performing required the performer's physical, vocal, intellectual, and emotional resources. They learned that they could work together to find solutions to social problems; they used performance to test their solutions. They learned to value their own ideas and to recognize that people chose to take action or—like the
men from the Invisible Theatre experiment—to remain uninvolved. Performers learned that they could be agents who could intervene.

Notes

1 Only Lara had participated in a full-scale theatrical performance before a public audience. Kathy had performed at a Performance Hour for students enrolled in Introduction to Performance of Literature. Others had participated in other types of public performances. Donna modelled for a local department store; she also had experience singing before an audience. Terry, an athlete at LSU and an Olympic contender on Britain's diving team, had also competed in diving events.

2 For a more extensive description of the members in the performance troupe, see Appendix D.

3 Lara worked at The Gap, a nationwide clothing chain that targeted men and women between the ages of sixteen and twenty-four. The Gap required all sales associates to wear their brand while working.

4 Although I have divided the activities into three stages, many of the exercises in this description/interpretation of "building images" and "testing ideas" occurred in conjunction with one another.

5 Dateline NBC, October 24, 1994; For The Love of Nancy ABC, November 3, 1994.

6 We watched Murphy Brown before she constructed her images dealing with misconceptions about body size. Review the "Building Images" section of this chapter for an account of her image about this topic.

7 After the two public performances at LSU in November, Kathy accepted an internship in New York. Selia replaced her in the performance at the Southern States Communication Association convention.
During the focus group discussions, performers identified eating as a problem for them. They moved from an unreflexive position about eating toward a stance that indicated more reflexivity. Rather than regarding their eating practices as "normal," performers began to question why they felt as they did and to locate society's influences upon those practices. Rehearsal, the second phase of the performance process, offered performers the opportunity to continue their exploration. Performers described, rationalized, analyzed, and critiqued their eating practices as well as the practices of others. During the third stage, public performances, performers demonstrated how to take action by taking their ideas to the public. They assembled their findings and observations into three public performances of Beauty and the Feast, a performance about women, eating, and food. Resembling a Brechtian performance, Beauty and the Feast constituted a cultural story, rather than the story of a single protagonist. Performers used their own narratives and experiences— as well as those of the focus group members— to present some of the problems women face as they try to meet cultural norms or to resolve conflicts about social standards.
Since performers wrote the script and designed the scenes in Beauty and the Feast, the public performance represented the conclusions and questions performers developed after their extensive discussion of eating and body image. The performers were not simply those who followed a script, but agents who analyzed and interpreted a social text and inserted themselves into that text. Beauty and the Feast offered the performers a space to express self discoveries and to connect those discoveries to a larger cultural framework. Beauty and the Feast was their way to take action upon those ideas and to convey their understandings to a larger group of people.

In addition to using performance to illustrate the troupe's collective understanding of eating-related problems, I thought the public performance might provide an additional opportunity for personal growth and social interaction. Many of the performers had never participated in a public performance. Furthermore, those who had engaged in performance activities had done so within the confines of the classroom. With public performance, performers could expand their range of experiences by taking their exercises out of the classroom to test their abilities before a public audience.

Beauty and the Feast played two nights in the Performance Studies Lab at Louisiana State University and was reprised at the 1995 Southern States Communication Association convention in New Orleans. The audiences at the LSU productions were more diverse than the third audience. Most were students in the introductory performance class at LSU. Other audience members included
undergraduate students, graduate students, faculty, performance studies students, as well as members of the general public who had learned about the production from radio and newspapers. In contrast, audience members (approximately 40 members) at the convention were primarily academics who taught performance studies or other speech courses at the college level.

In this chapter I describe Beauty and the Feast. I indicate how performers created a public performance consisting of two stylistic movements which framed nine group and solo performances related to eating, food, body image, or cultural standards concerning those topics. I explain that performers used a variety of performance styles—narrative, abstract, pseudorealistic, and parody—as they rewrote the experiences from the videotaped focus group discussions into images that conveyed empathy, sympathy, or criticism about issues related to eating and body image. In addition, I explain how the troupe used Boal’s "Joker" figure to interrupt scenes throughout the evening. After the last stylistic movement, the "Joker" broke the actor-audience frame to solicit ideas and suggestions for alternative endings to one of the scenes. At this point, Beauty and the Feast created a type of Forum Theatre, and the production became a collaborative effort of audience and actor as both struggled to discuss the problems the show highlighted in the "Restaurant" scene.

The Public Performance

Bertolt Brecht’s ideas about critical distance influenced the style of Beauty and the Feast. One technique involved the performer’s use of placards that label her
character. The production opened as the six performers, wearing costumes that labeled their characters, maneuvered around a cluttered set. Each costume served as a type of placard. That is, rather than represent individuals, performers represented types of individuals. Costuming suggested that women with diverse interests, styles, habits, lives, and bodies were implicated in the story. Depicting two obvious roles/stereotypes of women, Donna, for instance, wore a tiara and a bright, tangerine, chiffon ball gown, and Terry donned LSU purple and gold athletic wear. Lara and Theresa also caricaturized female stereotypes by illustrating the virgin-vixen dichotomy. Lara's costume consisted of a floral, wide-collared, "prim and proper" dress, while Theresa's very short jumper, in contrast, followed a "naughty schoolgirl" tradition. Kathy, wearing blue jeans, an oversized sweater, and black boots, and Harper, wearing a flowing casual dress, appeared less costumed than the others. Kathy's costume resembled a youthful, teenage "grunge" look, and Harper's dress suggested a more elegant, twenty-something character.

Another Brechtian technique that performers utilized entailed their ritualized, stylized, or mechanical manner. Performers hoped that their movements--those that worked against naturalistic or representative modes--would break illusions of reality, draw attention to specific events, actions, or relationships.

The set also served as a distancing technique. We created a montage of settings rather than a unified locale for the action. Behind five tables, walls exhibited pictures of food, diet advertising, models, and parts of the body. The space also accommodated three, white, female mannequin bodies scattered
throughout the set, and a large set of scales defined the border between set and audience. Tables, though, formed the primary set pieces as they partitioned the stage into areas. We wanted each area to represent the numerous private and public spaces where eating occurs. For example, one table decorated with a bright tapestry occupied the center stage. This table served multiple purposes as a kitchen table, a produce stand, and television set. Two chairs and a table painted with geometric shapes indicated a living room as well as a booth in a public restaurant. Another table elevated on a platform toward the back of the stage formed a second restaurant table. A long wooden coffee table provided a stadium bleacher, a bathroom stall, and a bakery. A wrought iron table and chair sat next to a clothing rack filled with hats, scarves, shoes, and colorful clothing; performers regarded this area as a boudoir where women "prepared" to face those other places. By the end of the show, each tabletop was covered with food, food cartons, dishes, and makeup. With this performance choice, performers indicated not only that a show had occurred, but also that the performers were leaving everything out for the audience to examine. No longer were they hiding their personal experiences; they wanted audience members to consider the issues before them.

Stylistic Movement

When the performers entered this playing area, they walked about the stage in a very stylized slouch. They emerged briefly from their droopy position every four steps to pose provocatively—hand on hip and a large smile—to "greet" a fictitious male that they "encountered." As the performers adopted identical poses,
moved in the same rhythm, and filed about the space in a mechanical fashion, they fell into a familiar routine that broke when they noticed a male. After the male "left," the performers returned to their routine until they encountered another. This slouch reappeared later as the show ended. Again, the performers slouched/circled about the space until Terry interrupted them to begin the forum part of the show.

Performers used the stylized slouch to cue the audience that the presentation about to unfold ignored naturalistic dramatic conventions and to establish a playful tone, despite the serious issues that underscored the evening's performance. They also believed that the movement indicated how women postured or enacted a certain look—one that cultural standards "demanded" they perform—for men. In addition, they reprised the movement at the end of the performance to indicate closure to the audience.

Nine Foundation Scenes

The slouch framed nine different solo and group performances. Each of these performances fell into four different categories. The first category involved narrative performances of experiences told during the focus group discussions. In some scenes performers told their own stories; others, however, told someone else's story. A second category, abstract performances, combined visual performances, performance art, and abstract poetry. In each of these scenes the performer chose a method of telling that differed from "traditional" narrative performance. The restaurant scene comprised the third category, a pseudorealistic performance. Since this scene evolved directly from the Invisible Theater experiment, the scene
paralleled reality on some level. In addition, the scene's presentation adhered to a "realistic tradition" more than any other scene in the performance. However, the exaggerated performance style, as well as the scene's failure to offer resolution to the conflict, prevented its firm placement in a representational/realistic tradition. Two parodies rounded out the performance styles. One critiqued seven-step programs, while the other addressed the irony of using food metaphors to discuss our bodies. Each of these performance styles challenged the performers who wanted to provide audience members with diverse images.

Narrative

*Beauty and the Feast* featured three scenes that allowed performers to recount one of their personal experiences or an experience that deeply affected the performance troupe as they reviewed the videotapes of the focus groups. The first narrative scene entailed a collage in which Harper and Terry alternated telling their personal experiences. Harper described her indecision when choosing clothing. Despite "fifty-eight shirts, eleven sweaters, nine pairs of jeans, nine pairs of shorts, six pairs of slacks, fifteen dresses, nineteen skirts, three blazers, five vests, four jackets, two heavy coats, and twenty-three pairs of shoes," she struggled with her clothing to create a flattering look appropriate for specific occasions. While Harper told her story in first person, Terry spoke created a dramatic monologue from her personal narrative. Rather than telling her story from her perspective, she adopted the persona of her male coach and addressed "the girls"--the athletes she watched with a careful eye. Throughout this scene, she read a newspaper while haranguing
the female swimmers to "look after" their weight. She told the athletes that if they "don't do something" then she would. She pleaded that they have a "responsibility" to themselves and "the team," threatened them with dire measures, and watched them sweat up and down the stadium bleachers. Yet she, the coach, remained inactive. She chose this persona to point out the inequity between what the coach said and what the coach did. In addition, this dramatic monologue emphasized the food "sacrifices" people make when they choose specific careers, including modeling, dancing, and athletics.

Both performances insinuated that individuals could take charge of their looks--either by finding the "wonder outfit" or by removing "that cottage cheese." One speaker actively searched for a solution, while the other actively demanded that others strived to reach goals she established for them. In addition, this scene emphasized that people felt pressure to look good. Whether the pressure was self-applied or stemmed from someone else—a coach or a boyfriend—they desired to look their best. Their self-consciousness about their appearance caused them to diet and exercise, binge and purge.

This scene was important to Terry. When she first told us about her coach, she did so in an indignant manner. She resented this coach who told athletes to run while he read the campus newspaper. She wrote a scene to illustrate his behavior. By the end of the performance process, however, Terry had obtained a different perspective on the coach's attitude. She said in a post-performance interview that perhaps this coach had the right to demand that athletes lose weight that hindered
their athletic abilities, because the coach’s livelihood depended upon their abilities. She also asserted that athletes accepted this type of instruction when they decided to become athletes. Terry had moved from an indignant response to a more empathetic consideration of the coach’s behavior.

Another scene of narratives occurred toward the end of the performance. Lara and Theresa gained the opportunity to describe one of their personal experiences, and Donna explicated the experiences of one of the focus group participants. Lara’s narrative detailed her attempts to lose weight with help from the Baton Rouge Weightloss Center. She ended her story on a gleeful note; she tricked the doctor into prescribing diet pills and took pride in her weightloss despite their effect on her 115-pound body. Theresa explained how her previous boyfriend demanded that she lose weight to save their relationship. Her struggle ended with her realization that weightloss was a personal issue, that one could not lose weight because of someone else’s demands, and that self love must come before any other type. Donna performed a narrative in which the speaker did not eat in public; indeed, she hid in the bathroom when she ate. Donna’s performance ended similar to its start; she ate a gallon of ice cream in the bathroom of her home.

These three narratives addressed outrageous measures women undertake in order to gain someone else’s approval. Theresa and Lara dieted to please boyfriends, while Donna’s character concealed her eating to prevent disapproval from her family. In addition these narratives—despite the comic undertone that occasionally surfaced—were highly charged with emotion. Theresa’s struggle for a
better self concept, Lara's pride in her deception, and Donna's character's hopeless entanglement between her desire for food and her family's wishes coexisted with what many performers regarded as "unbelievable behaviors"--eating in bathrooms, ingesting "speed," and demanding that love be connected to body size.

The performers used sensationalized or extravagant language according to the degree of reflexivity the speaker maintained. For example, Theresa's narrative used the least sensational tone and language. Although in the performance she said she was caught in a "horrible cycle of despair" and that she "would do anything to save the relationship," Theresa tried to present the story in a detached, matter-of-fact manner, as though the experiences she recounted were not her own. Theresa had detached herself from her own experience to construct a very factual, unemotional account of an emotionally charged experience. This manner was less "performed" than the two other narratives.

The behaviors of Donna's speaker were more dramatic, perhaps more outrageous than Theresa's. This speaker refused to eat in front of people. She ate if she was "lucky," and "lucky" meant when she could be alone. Donna's character also exhibited reflexivity as she explained her own actions; she hid to prevent others, mainly her family, from commenting about her food intake. She also questioned family traditions that demanded a birthday cake even if no one wanted to eat it, and she admitted that others might think her behavior "weird." Yet, unlike Theresa, Donna's character did not really attempt to resolve the behavior. She continued to eat in hiding without considering any alternative. Donna worried about
this scene and the “Restaurant” scene more than any other. She feared that people would think that she—not the speaker—really hid in the bathroom to eat. Several weeks before the public performance, she said that she was afraid of who would be in the audience; she did not want any family members or friends to see her perform. Donna gained more confidence in her performance by opening night. Not only did she invite her mother, but she asked her boyfriend to come. Both of these people played roles in Donna’s fears about the performance, and she felt more comfortable with the idea that they attended.

Lara’s performance, however, exhibited the most exaggerated tone and the least amount of reflexivity about her actions. She exaggerated that her “life would be over” if she did not lose weight, that people lied about her appearance, that she deceived the medical profession to reach her goals, and exclaimed with pride that she obtained diet pills with “no trouble.” Lara ignored the fact that the exam took less than ten minutes, and that the pills caused serious side effects. This speaker did not consider the reliability or validity of the program. She only knew that the means, diet pills (a.k.a. “speed”), justified the end, weight loss. The end was one she found satisfying. At previous stages of the performance process, Lara revealed that she knew that her behaviors were “extreme” and unwise. In this performance she exhibited more reflexivity by levelling a critique of her own actions. She used a very extreme, exaggerated performance style to match her description of her previous behaviors.
By performing personal narratives, performers "make themselves both the material and the sole agents of their presentation," as Park-Fuller and Pelias note (127). Performers carefully constructed tales to indicate their suffering without wallowing in self pity or soliciting sympathy from others. In addition to relaying a message, performers wanted to entertain. They wanted audience members to laugh at the unseemly behaviors, actions, experiences, and words.

Abstract

Performers built more abstract performances by forming visual and verbal metaphors about eating and food. For example, Donna, Lara, and Terry created a Brechtian-like "diet machine." They synchronized individual movements and sounds to create a mechanical image of dieting cycles. Lara sang various diet food and diet program jingles as she unpacked various fat-free, low-fat, and sugar-free products from a large basket, while Terry and Donna drank SlimFast® and ate fat-free popcorn, pretzels, and diet pills. After a moment, Donna approached the scale to weigh herself; she was horrified by what she read. She walked back to her seat and renewed her consumption of diet foods. Then, Terry grabbed her blue jeans only to discover that they were too small. She, too, resumed her diet. Lara, meanwhile, sang louder and faster, and the scenario with Donna and Terry continued. This cycle, increasing in speed each time, repeated for five more cycles. Each time, Donna and Terry seemed more distraught about what they did and saw, although neither attempted to break the cycle.
Despite Lara's jingle, Donna and Terry illustrated that the battle was not easy. And, the more they tried with fervor to follow the rules of the diet industry, the less success they had in reducing the size of their bodies. Instead, they worked themselves into a frenzy that unsatisfactorily ended when Lara approached the audience. Using the same jingle, she altered her attitude from upbeat and encouraging to a sarcastic and disbelieving tone in order to point out the contradictions in what the diet industry promised and what it really provided.

In another visual performance, Donna dismantled her beauty queen appearance. As lights faded and INXS's song "Beautiful Girl" provided a soundscape, she removed her tiara, fake eyelashes, earrings, and makeup. With all traces of her makeup washed away, she removed her ball gown to reveal a bodysuit covered with photographs of food. Placing the tiara back on her hair--now loose from its french twist--she walked down a runway singing the theme song for the Miss America Pageant.

Performers believed that this scene also encouraged different interpretations. First, they believed that Donna used this scene to provide a backstage glimpse of public life. She peeled through the layers of makeup, clothing, false eyelashes, and hairstyles that comprised public faces. The gesture suggested that people rarely see the "real" persona beneath outer trappings. Another interpretation suggested that beauty queens--with their glitz and glamour, fake nails and eyelashes, chiffon and rhinestones--truly hide their cravings for food to conform to specific standards. When Donna removed her dress, she revealed a body covered with pictures of food.
She suggested that even those who look "normal" may have an eating disorder. These women suppressed their likes and sacrificed themselves for an image. A more positive interpretation implied that the beauty queen shed the accoutrements society demanded of women, took control of her life, and accepted herself as she was. When Donna discarded the "trappings," she released herself. Rather than being controlled by her appearance, she controlled it.

Performers usually supported the first interpretation. They explained during rehearsals that very thin women have as many—if not more—problems with food as larger women. They also asserted that the person "beneath the crown," who often seemed self-assured, was in actuality very insecure about her abilities. The performers recognized that thin was not always "good," nor did it always bring good things. Performers asserted these ideas with the "Miss America" scene.

"Lucky Charms" was a performance art piece that performers categorized as abstract, because the scene relied only upon action, rather than a combination of action and dialogue. Lara painstakingly set the table for breakfast as she carefully placed four set of bowls, spoons, napkins, cups, and saucers around the table. Then, she positioned a bowl of grits, a box of Lucky Charms® cereal, and a gallon of milk in the center. Sitting at the table she flourished the napkin to her lap and carefully poured the cereal into her bowl. She refolded the box liner with great precision, determined the proper portion of milk for the amount of cereal, and picked up her spoon. After hesitating a second, she looked around the room, laid the spoon back on the table, and buried her head in the bowl to eat the cereal. She
also drank from the carton of milk, which gushed down her face, and she scooped grits into her mouth with her hands. After she satisfied her hunger, she wiped her mouth primly with a napkin.

The performers believed that this scene raised several issues, including the rituals associated with food preparation, the consequences of adopting or breaking certain rules, and the implication that one gorged only when no one looked because overeating was not a "lady-like" behavior. They believed that the scene's unexpected ending also suggested that one never knew how and what people ate when no one watched. Furthermore, they liked the disruptive ending when Lara buried her head in the bowl to problematize the scene with overtones of binging and compulsive eating. They also believed that this scene drew attention to the secrecy associated with eating. Many focus group participants said that they preferred to eat in public because "public eating"—whether entailing eating manner or the types and amounts of food—differed from "private eating." Also, the performers associated secrecy with eating disorders, since such disorders frequently entail hiding food.

Lara's performance choices also indicated her change. She first designed the scene during the focus group discussions to present to her advanced performance class. She explained that she originally concluded the scene with "I hate breakfast" to illustrate her dislike of formal breakfast tables. When she restructured the scene, she eliminated all words; she had learned to trust her body's expression. Lara recognized how the scene could speak about a number of social issues rather than her own dislike for breakfast. She recognized eating as a ritualistic behavior, and
she extended interpretations to include eating disorders. Lara had used her personal experiences to talk about problems that others might share.

The fourth abstract scene, "Liquid Mask," shifted to a lyrical mode in which the performer focused upon revealing personal emotions, feelings, and reactions to a certain event. To help mark the shift, "Liquid Mask," the only poem in the *Beauty and the Feast*, began with flashing lights and Madonna's song, "Vogue," blasting through the performance space while performers danced onto the stage. As lights became more subdued and the music faded, the cast members took positions as "dolled-up" mannequins. Then, Harper used a performer/stage metaphor to describe the self-alienation she felt as she prepared to go out for the evening. She donned her "costume, a thickly woven tapestry of fantasy and frustration"—enhanced in her mind by the alcohol she consumed—and hit the club scene where everyone flowed through specific "pick-up" rules and motions. The next day when the "house lights rise" the character faced the frustration that started the prior evening; alcohol and sex cured nothing.

While many of the scenes contained elements of humor, "Liquid Mask" differed. In addition to using a different mode of performance, Harper concentrated on darker, perhaps frightening aspects of the problems *Beauty and the Feast* addressed. She used images of darkness, glaring lights, chaotic movement, and elevated language to establish the seriousness that, until this point, had remained on the fringes of the performance.
"The Restaurant," the longest and most naturalistic scene in the production, also formed the basis for the Forum Theatre discussion that took place later in the production. In this scene, performers explored food problems within the context of dining out. At one table, Terry ordered very little from the menu, while Theresa ordered soup, salad, sandwich, cheese fries, boiled shrimp, dessert, and a pitcher of diet soda. At the other table Kathy ordered no food, Lara ordered food but wanted to place it in front of Kathy, and Donna ordered a salad and hush puppies. Harper played the server who good-naturedly tried to accommodate their very specific orders. Throughout the meal, Terry supplemented her dinner by visiting the other table. Also, Donna surreptitiously scraped her food into a napkin on her lap and dropped it to the floor. Later in the scene Donna left the table, and Lara noticed the food on the floor. She and Kathy argued about their course of action; the discussion and scene ended abruptly as Donna returned to the table.

Performers used this scene to present a number of problems associated with "appropriate" restaurant behavior. First, they focused on rules insisting that people order food when frequenting restaurants, and how those rules governed how and what people ordered. For example, when Kathy substituted cigarettes for food, she ignored the primary purpose of her surrounding (i.e., an eating establishment) and reinforced the social component of restaurants. Terry also defied the rules. First, she ordered breadsticks—typically served as a side dish. In this case, Terry lacked the funds to order more, and her search for food prevented her from really enjoying
Theresa's company. Consequently, she forfeited both dining and social components of restaurants. Furthermore, her scavenging was particularly surprising and inappropriate for the setting. Kathy called her a "freak of nature"; eating someone else's food—especially food served to strangers—was taboo, even though "strangers" usually own the restaurant, prepare the food, and serve it at the tables.

Performers also pointed out certain rituals associated with placing orders. Each patron ordered items with extreme precision—no butter, no mayonnaise, salad dressing on the side—almost mechanically, or without a second thought to this practice. Additionally, Terry magnified reactions to Theresa's order of large quantities of food, and Lara exhibited self-consciousness about her own order when she asked Kathy if she could put her sandwich closer to Kathy.

When Harper served the food, performers showed more rituals about how to eat. Theresa explained how to eat boiled shrimp, and that the "only way to eat cheesefries" was to dip them in gravy. Donna pretended to eat while dropping her food into the napkin and onto the floor. Harper presented an additional perspective of restaurant rituals from her "backstage" vantage as a server. At one point she told audience how "weird" people were about their food. She concluded saying that patrons "do the strangest things" since they pay to do so.

While this scene seemed more naturalistic by virtue of its dramatic mode and because the scene parodied actual events from a rehearsal exercise, the performers believed that the exaggerated delivery and Harper's direct address allowed them to keep audience members in a critical position, rather than an empathetic one. For
example, the performers offered a series of unlikely events (food dropping and begging) and distorted restaurant rituals to defamiliarize the all too familiar scene. Harper's direct address to the audience emphasized the absurdity of certain actions, while letting them off the "etiquette hook" for those actions. In addition, Lara and Kathy amplified their reactions to the food on the floor to heighten indecision about what they perceived as "Donna's problem." The scene ended without settling the dispute, so characters and audience members were left in the middle of the conflict. Thus, although they loosely grounded the scene in realism, the performers chose a presentational style—melodrama, direct address to the audience, and distortion—for the style's ability to achieve distance between audience, character, and action.

By including this scene in the performance, performers re-enacted their experiences at The Chimes. While many of the scenes included experiences that individual performers had experienced, this scene was the culmination of a shared experience. All had "written" this scene with the Invisible Theatre experiment. This scene was their collective experience and understanding. Performers used performance to experiment with Invisible Theatre, to construct their understanding about what happened, and to reconstruct that understanding for a larger public audience.

**Parody**

Parody, a final type of performance in *Beauty and the Feast*, involved a group performance and a solo performance that underscored some of the irony the performers discovered while watching the videotapes. For the group performance,
two performers visited a grocery store, filled with food items, depicted by the other performers. Chatting about The Light, their favorite soap opera, Kathy and Theresa picked their way through various foods personified by the others. First, they encountered Terry/Bread, and they discussed the merits of hard, firm "buns" over the "mushy" ones. Their second and third stops took them to the produce section, where they found Lara/Cantaloupe. In awe of the "size of those melon," the two exclaimed how very important "melons" were to their husbands and, hence, to their own well-being. Then, they saw Donna/Green Beans. After a debate about size and nutritional value, Kathy grabbed two bags because of their low caloric content. Their final stop occurred in the dairy section where they found Harper/Cottage Cheese. They regarded this food as disgusting because it was "lumpy," "unappealing," and "runny." Moreover, one "can’t cook with it" so it "sits around doing nothing." As they noticed the time, the performers rushed offstage to catch their soap opera.

As the performers constructed this scene, they transformed experiences from the focus group interviews into a more abstract representation of their observations. Performers identified how frequently focus group participants described their bodies using food metaphors. Performers recontextualized these metaphors, as well as those they had heard males use, to describe female bodies. They appropriated the stereotypical male and female terminology to show how women and men frequently comment about the opposite sex, how males regard female bodies as a consumable item they can enjoy, or how the body can be praised or rejected because of its
appearance. In each instance, performers wanted to depict the body as a product or object that could be bought, sold, or consumed.

The last scene in the show was a parody of seven-step programs. Kathy based this scene on Lara's "obsession" with cheesefries. Sitting in the spotlight, Kathy confessed her addiction to cheesefries and how she owed her "life to the F.B.I. and air-popped popcorn." When she first came to LSU, she said she ate cheesefries once a week, but soon she skipped class to eat cheesefries, and she applied for a student credit card to purchase cheesefries. Audience members heard that she was "on the road to recovery" because the F.B.I.—Fat Bottoms Incorporated—showed her how to break the cheesefry habit by eating popcorn. Popcorn accompanied her every activity. Kathy revealed that she had conquered her obsession, but she implied that she had become "addicted" to popcorn. As she finished her monologue, the lights on stage slowly rose as other performers followed the seven-step format to admit their own "eating sin."

Kathy parodied a number of behaviors and programs. She took the most obvious punch at seven-step groups that assisted people by emphasizing guilt, "illegal" foods, and abstinence as control. Kathy believed that these organizations frequently suggested substituting one item, in this case popcorn, to gain control over another. Of course, this substitution often created a new problem or "obsession." Kathy believed that Lara would do most anything for cheesefries. By using parody she could create a critique that would not disrupt her position in the group or her relationship with Lara. By playing up the humor of the cheesefries obsession, Kathy
could critique obsessions and Lara's behavior without being offensive. Furthermore, the scene playfully critiqued the F.B.I., an actual program used in one school to teach youth to "manage their weight" (Osguthorpe, Winterton, and Stone). The "Cheesefry" scene also highlighted the number and intensity of food cravings that each person experienced, and what that person would sacrifice to soothe that craving.

Performers believed that different performance styles worked with and against each other to keep the audience thinking. That is, they used several styles to keep audience members from settling into fixed interpretations of the scenes, characters, experiences, and performers. They used the styles and modes of presentation, the routinized, mechanical gestures, the songs and chants, to defamiliarize audience members with eating and body image concerns, topics that obtained more and more attention in the media every day.

In addition, they used these styles to recontextualize a serious topic within a comic realm. They defied most media accounts that position women as victims of eating problems. The performers did not agree with such depictions, nor did they view themselves as victims. They created a performance that focussed on eating-related issues rather than attributing blame or casting themselves as victims.

The Joker

The troupe also incorporated Boal's concept of the "Joker" figure into the show. Jokers "personally decide nothing. They spell out the rules of the game, but in complete acceptance from the outset that the audience may alter them" (Boal,
Games 232). With these actions "Jokers" create a public forum by constantly seeking audience response and asking them to decide the "success" of the scene. However, Boal is very vague when he describes how this technique works; thus, we as a troupe were unclear about the practical implementation of the "Joker" figure. Terry agreed to serve as the "Joker" by questioning events that appeared on stage. She frequently interrupted the dialogue and served as a transition tool between scenes and events. She also facilitated the forum discussion at the end of the ten primary scenes. In some cases though, Terry offered her personal opinions, which defies one of Boat's main rules about the structure of the "Joker." In addition, Terry seemed very nervous about her role; she worried about how audience members and other performers would react to her interruptions. Her nervousness about leading discussion also caused her to prematurely end the discussions at the LSU performances.

To assist the audience to notice underlying social issues and to remain reflexive about what they saw and heard, Terry paused the action and drew attention to what others did on stage. Each night Terry as the "Joker" stopped performers during the scenes to ask them or the audience questions about the action. Neither audience members nor performers knew where Terry would interrupt. The first night during the "Liquid Mask" poem, she asked Harper if she wanted some of the popcorn that had remained on stage after the "diet machine" scene. Harper replied "not in the middle of my poem, maybe later," and she went on with her poem. Later in the show she interrupted "Miss America" by poking fun at Donna for
"trying to impersonate Julia Roberts." After a moment she contradicted herself by
telling Donna that she was doing a "good job."

In rehearsal, we planned for Terry to interrupt "Miss America," because the
music track was short; however, performers never knew when Terry would stop the
action within the scene. For example, the second night Terry interrupted later in the
scene, and rather than addressing Donna, Terry asked the audience if they thought
she could look like Cindy Crawford if she put on a dress and makeup like Donna's.
As she asked this, Terry assumed poses that exaggerated positions models used in
advertising and runway shows. Then, she turned to Donna to ask Donna her
opinion. In rehearsal and the first public performance, Donna always handled the
situation by ignoring Terry, despite the direct questions and despite that her
soundscape had stopped. This time, Donna shook her head and conversed with
Terry, who finally demonstrated at least she could "do the wiggle" before she
exited.

The last interruption the second night took place during the "Lucky Charms"
scene. Terry entered the space and sat in the front row with the audience. She fed
some audience members Lucky Charms®. Then, she engaged the audience in a
conversation about how they prepared the table for a meal. After Terry said she
found Lara's behavior annoying, someone in the audience spoke in Lara's defense;
this person said she set her own table with such precision. After a brief
conversation Terry packed away the cereal, but not to Lara's satisfaction. Lara
broke her own frame to give Terry a scorching look and said, "No. Fold it [box liner] three times."

In addition to interrupting others, Terry had several moments where she briefly darted across the stage and muttered about how busy she was. These, unlike the other interruptions, occurred in the same place both evenings. These two brief interruptions foreshadowed a larger break toward the end of the performance. Terry entered the area carrying grocery bags and told the audience about her busy schedule. Noticing the time and complaining that she did not even have time to eat a microwave meal, she quickly exited.

Terry sought either to clarify points for the audience or to cause them to extend their examination of the scenes at hand. Frequently, she posed questions to stimulate ideas and to connect social themes dealing with women, eating, and food with the behaviors of the characters. She tried to act in a way that stimulated reflexivity in the audience and that caused them to consider the serious ideas that surrounded the laughter.

The Forum

Terry’s final break in the performance took place in the last stylistic movement. Performers used the stylistic movement that started the show as a framing device to indicate closure. Terry interrupted the movement, stopped the show, and approached audience members. The performers relaxed as Terry solicited help from the audience to rework "The Restaurant." To show the audience
what she meant, she set up an ending that entailed confrontation and explained how
the "solution" did not seem satisfactory in rehearsal.

The first night Kathy asked Terry to clarify what she meant, and they started
the scene. Donna began the scene by remarking that she was "so full." When Lara
wondered aloud "How can that be?" and showed her the napkin, she initiated an
argument about the food contained in the napkin. Kathy and Lara accused Donna of
dropping food into the napkin rather than eating it. Donna immediately denied the
accusations. As the argument mounted, Terry stopped the scene to ask the
audience's opinion.

One audience member said that Donna was in denial because she was caught.
Terry encouraged the audience member to tell what she would do if she were in that
situation. The audience member suggested that the performers delay discussion until
the three left the restaurant, because "you don't want to embarrass her." Terry
asked the performers to run this scene to resemble the suggestion. Kathy and Lara
asked the new "director" questions to clarify what she wanted them to do. They
briefly discussed a new "plan of attack," then Kathy called Harper to "bring the
check" so they could run the scene again. During this second run, Donna denied
that she dropped food when Lara showed her the napkin. Both Kathy and Lara,
however, told Donna that they understood and wanted to help her if she agreed to
talk about the problem. Donna paused, then she confessed that "it's just so hard."
When Terry sought the audience's opinion about this scene, people told her that
Kathy and Lara should be more compassionate. Two males joined the discussion by
saying that Kathy and Lara should get Donna into therapy and to give her air-popped popcorn. With these suggestions, Terry ended the forum.

The second night, with one run to ground their experiences, the performers exhibited a more playful, relaxed attitude about the forum, which lasted longer the second night. Again, they showed the confrontation, but this time jokes appeared throughout. Kathy, for instance, grabbed Donna’s soft drink before she "throws it on the floor too." Terry turned to the audience. One audience member suggested that Lara and Kathy show more compassion. When Terry queried for specific direction, one audience member entered the playing area to direct the scene. The players ran her scene, which involved Kathy and Lara in more compassionate roles. At one point the audience-director interrupted to tell Lara to "grab" Donna’s hand. Again, Terry turned to the audience to ask whether they were satisfied with the improvisation. One audience member expressed dissatisfaction; yet, she refused to enter the scene to direct the show or to replace them in any way. This person suggested that the scene could take place outside of the restaurant, but she was not sure that this would produce an effective end. At this point Lara entered the discussion to ask this audience member if she wanted to see "let’s discuss it later" or a "to be continued" scene. The scenario ended as Donna said she would seek therapy.

After this scene, however, another audience member wanted to see a scene in which Donna confronted her friends about their own problems, since one "chainsmokes so she won’t be hungry and the other won’t allow herself to put food
on the plate in front of her." This audience member said, "They all have problems and they all need therapy." Of all of the improvisations, this scene provoked the greatest anger between the characters. Lara and Donna left Kathy in the restaurant. After seeking more "solutions," Terry called for the curtain when audience members voiced no other ideas.

Despite the various improvisations, on both nights audiences seemed dissatisfied with all of the solutions they developed. When Terry tried to get an audience member to replace the performers, audience members declined and recoiled from further discussion. Audience members did view the show, overall, as a very positive experience. Many enjoyed the comic overtones that prevented the show from becoming another "we are the victims" production. They enjoyed seeing topics related to eating and body image presented in a manner that did not indicate hopelessness, passivity, self pity, or shame. The most frequent comment by audience members involved how the show spurred further discussion. Some told me that they wanted the Forum to continue. Others told me later that they continued to discuss the Forum Theatre scene for hours after the performance.

Although audience members did not replace the performers, the Forum was successful according to the performers because they had convinced people to listen and consider their ideas. In addition, the Forum enhanced the performers' view of their work. Prior to opening, performers revealed that they did not think people would enjoy or understand the show. As they judged reactions to the scenes, they became more confident of their work. In addition, those reactions--especially
laughter—caused performers to re-examine certain scenes. Performers tried to
discover how audiences reacted to scenes and what caused those reactions.

Academic audiences at a third performance reacted differently. Like a few
of the audience members at the LSU performances, these audience members
expressed dissatisfaction at the performance style. Rather than accept the
performers' choices of comedy and parody, they seemed to want a show about the
seriousness of eating disorders; a serious show for a serious topic. One audience
member said that she "resented" the show because it did not address the harmful
effects of eating disorders. She felt that we raised ideas, but left no instructions
about how a person could receive help. Another audience member said that she did
not enjoy watching the performers "trivialize" an important social issue. Both of
these audience members seemed to want a show that offered a message about eating
disorders, rather than a presentation or critique about eating practices or social
norms. Another audience member said that she could not take the show seriously
because she could not sympathize with characters. Since they were smaller than
she, she thought these characters seemed foolish when they talked about weightloss,
diets, or food-related problems.

Members of this audience did raise important questions about this
performance. They wanted to know if some of the other focus group members had
seen the production and if so, how they had reacted. Audience members seemed
somewhat surprised to learn that some had seen the show and responded with
enthusiasm. Other audience members questioned how the performance might effect
audience members, who might have an eating disorder. These respondents felt that the performers should have provided audience members with the name of a counselor to call.

This audience—more so than the LSU audiences—regarded discussion as the Forum’s function, rather than a way to show actions that might resolve social issues. Audience members wanted to address how they had handled personal problems, rather than the problem performers presented. This occurrence kept the focus upon individual testimony that supports a social problem associated with eating and body image; however, it prevented the group from offering suggestions about how society might resolve the problem. Rather than recognizing a social problem, audience members buried the social by emphasizing the personal.

In addition to focusing upon personal issues rather than social problems, this audience also favored discussion over action. They were less eager to act and more eager to talk than the LSU audiences, who focussed on the scene or approached the stage to direct the performers. None ever left the "safe" seat of an audience member to become a director or actor in the scene.

Performers utilized Brechtian techniques that defamiliarized audience members with the action in specific scenes and Boal’s Forum Theater that relied upon a “Joker” figure to remind the audience why they were there. Performers used Beauty and the Feast to showcase different perspectives and problems about women, eating, and food. They adopted very specific performance choices in order to speak about what had been unconscious behaviors or about unfamiliar topics. In addition,
the performance allowed them to reconstruct perceptions of women and food. Their performance choices involved an unexpected medium, comedy, to relay a message usually presented dramatically, tragically, or sorrowfully. These women did not see themselves as tragic victims of food and society; therefore, they did not choose a performance style that situated them as such.

Performers believed that their choices stimulated some degree of reflexivity in audience members, because audience members had to decipher the message by critically examining how each scene correlated to others. They wanted audience members to "read" the performance by sifting through an unexpected performance style and conflicting codes to render an interpretation. While much conflict resulted from the comedy, the comic tones also made the forum accessible to males in the audience. Several--dragged, perhaps, by spouses and girlfriends--joined the forum discussion at the end of the performance. The Forum Theatre that concluded each show exemplified how the public performance encouraged reflexivity in both audience members and performers. Both needed to think quickly during the Forum Theatre in order to suggest ideas and to enact these ideas. Audience members were empowered as they helped the performers search for solutions. Only one audience member joined the performers on stage during the public performances, and none ever replaced a performer. Yet, the performance did succeed in getting audience members involved. Audience members broke a norm of most theatrical productions by talking to performers.
Although Boal’s concepts dominated the rehearsal process of *Beauty and the Feast*, they also comprised important portions of the public performance. Boal’s TO defies rules of "traditional" or realistic theater by placing theater in the hands of people who can make concrete changes in society. Boal suggests that theatre can provide a way to rehearse social change; thus, he uses theater to find solutions to the problem. Performance, thus, offers audience members the opportunity to change. Boal advocates that the audience participate in the performance; he wants them to enact change. Audience members test ideas to the problems outlined on stage by taking part in the production. The audience, hence, becomes "liberated" as they make their own theater and resolve conflicts.

**Notes**

1. See Appendix E for a script.

2. The music video draws attention to the prevalence of eating disorders.
CHAPTER 5
CONCLUSION

Throughout this study, I have espoused performance as an important pedagogical tool that stimulates personal and social change. Individuals who engage in enactment obtain the opportunity to show their respect for others as they "try on" another person's experiences or put aside their own self interests to immerse themselves in unfamiliar ways of thinking and knowing. Those who perform personal narratives also develop a more thoughtful perspective of their personal experiences. By framing their own experiences as a performance (i.e., recontextualizing those behaviors from everyday behaviors to acts that are deliberately executed), performers can hold their own behaviors up for examination. They distance themselves from those behaviors, ask what they accomplished, and identify alternative ways to achieve.

During the first stage of the performance process, performers began to recognize eating as a problem. In early focus group discussions, they described their eating in a very perfunctory manner. They ate as they did because it was "normal"; their descriptions indicated that until the interviews, they had given little thought to their practices. Over the course of the interviews, performers began to explain how food created problems for them. They talked about how they used
eating practices to shape a more desirable body and how they felt when that
succeeded or failed to accomplish that shape. Additionally, they began to make
observations about how social norms influenced their behaviors. They noted that
certain foods, manners, and beliefs were culturally specific. Participants began to
articulate possible causes and harms for their behaviors. Participants moved toward
a more reflexive position. As part of the focus group process, participants reflected
upon their personal actions, questioned why they engaged in those actions, and
linked their actions to certain social norms.

The second phase of the performance process, rehearsals, offered some of
the participants the opportunity to continue their exploration of problems associated
with eating and body image. First, this stage involved reviewing videotapes of the
focus group discussions. As performers watched themselves and others reveal
stories and experiences, performers distanced themselves from those stories and
experiences. They criticized, clarified, and contested what they saw.

The second part of this phase also required performers to use their bodies to
express their problems, feelings, and experiences. They could not rely upon
discussion. They had to communicate by doing or showing. These rehearsals also
placed performers in the position of executing roles and rehearsing life-like
experiences. They had to make specific performance choices that would help reflect
ideas or experiences they deemed important. With this second stage, the performers
positioned themselves as agents who had analyzed a social script as revealed in the
experiences on the videotapes, had interpreted and evaluated components of that
text, and used performance as a tool to assert their stance.

In the third phase of the performance process, public performances, the
performers revealed their conclusions to audiences. Some of the performers
reinforced ideas that they had gleaned from the focus group discussions. For
instance, in addition to affirming that all people have food obsessions, the
performers used the "Cheesefry" scene to validate those obsessions. Performers
recognized that food cravings were funny perhaps, but not something that frequently
threatens one's life. In other scenes, the performers undermined ideas from the
focus group discussion. When Donna removed her makeup, she contested
definitions of beauty, for instance. Furthermore, by structuring so many comical
elements throughout the show, the performers resisted typical images of women,
eating, and body image that situate women as passive, diseased, and dis-eased.

In the rest of this chapter I discuss more specific results of the performance
process. First, I explain the different ways performers changed as a result of the
performance process. In post-performance interviews I asked performers to share
and speculate about whether or not they had changed. Some noted how their
attitudes and behaviors concerning food had changed, while others acknowledged
that they felt more socially aware. After I summarize what the performers learned,
I articulate several broad concerns and conclusions about the performance process.
These issues regard Boal's method as well as "general" performance practice.
Then, I conclude the chapter by suggesting a number of specific questions that performance scholars and practitioners need to address.

**Pedagogical Theater**

After the public performance, performers acknowledged general understandings about "how different people view things" or about the different ways people reacted to this topic. Moreover, they asserted that they had changed or learned in numerous ways. Some performers recognized that they were more aware of their own eating practices, as well as more considerate of the practices of others. Some insisted that they had changed their eating patterns, felt that they could now talk to family and friends about their eating habits, or that they practiced more patience with others. Some performers expressed a better understanding of the cultural influences that affected the way people behave/eat. While they linked these discoveries to eating, they also indicated that they learned more about disclosure, group work, and performance. Thus, even though everyone did not make major dietary changes, all acquired some knowledge and changed as a result of participating in the three stages of this particular performance process.

**Personal Awareness**

Every performer stipulated that her overall awareness of her eating habits or the habits of others increased as a result of the performance process. Donna revealed that the journal, especially, helped her "write and think about things I didn’t think I thought about." Harper, too, indicated that she no longer casually dismissed what she considered extreme behaviors: "I think I have thought it out
more. I have always recognized, but I have never thought about it to the degree, so I never really did anything for my friends to help them. And now, maybe I'll do something. . . ." Donna also admitted that she was "up and down" about the topic: "Sometimes I was okay, like 'this [eating] thing is so ridiculous.' I mean it's always on my mind. But I'd be 'I'm okay.' And then I'd feel really insecure." Donna continued to explain that after writing in her journal she realized that she ate more than she did before she joined the performance troupe: "I wondered why I was eating so much. I wondered if I was feeling more comfortable about it, because we are talking about it and performing it. Maybe I feel more in control." But she also mentioned a "downside": "Then when I started writing in my journal. When you have to write it down you feel guilty. So I started eating less." Thus, while Donna on some level recognized her behavior as "ridiculous," she could not completely release herself. These performers exhibited self recognition as they became more aware of their behaviors and thoughts. They also began to assess those feelings, to question why they felt as they did. No longer did they casually dismiss or blindly ignore their thoughts and actions. Performers held them up for examination.

Lara, though, explained that not only had she increased her awareness, but that she had also made changes in her eating practices. Lara had reached a level beyond critical consciousness. She had taken critical action because of her critical consciousness. She described going to the Baton Rouge Weightloss Clinic as "ludicrous," and said:
I mean I had a candy bar today. I just get over it. . . . I always used to look at myself in the mirror and say this and that and the other. But I don’t do it any more . . . . Not that this play, this experience, really, is a "miracle" cure about this topic, but I’m just not as anal about it. I mean before this play I was very careful about what I ate; if I didn’t exercise, I felt guilty all day. But now, if I don’t, yah, who cares?

Before the performance process, Lara had carefully monitored her eating habits. As a result of the performance process she had relaxed her surveillance. Lara added that she still cared about looking good and that she occasionally wanted to "lose one more pound in the pooch," but she attributed that to "human nature, especially with women." Lara’s use of "nature" was a bit problematic. Through the performance process, Lara implied that she could change her looks and shape her body. She was an agent who controlled her body. "Nature," in this context, suggested that while she could control her activities, while she could choose what to eat or what to weigh, she could not control her "natural" feelings about her body.

Theresa’s awareness took a different form. While Lara and Donna said that they had reconsidered their own behaviors, Theresa said she considered how others regarded her behavior: "I’ve done crazy things. . . . I just never realized I was doing things that other people thought were crazy." Theresa thought that since she considered her behaviors "normal," everyone else would. Theresa also decided that dieting was "bad," depending upon why one dieted. She felt that dieting really had less to do with eating than with confidence and self image. She explained that for her dieting for someone else "was what it was about for so long." And while she still ordered her salad with dressing on the side because "that’s the way I eat," she asserted that she no longer had a poor self image. Theresa, like Donna, began to
articulate interpretations of her eating habits. She regarded eating patterns, in some cases, as symptoms of other personal problems, such as low self esteem. She no longer regarded eating as a physical necessity, but as an emotional imperative.

Kathy, Terry, and Harper revealed less self awareness and more awareness of the eating habits others displayed. Kathy said that she learned that

Everybody in the world has some weird eating habit or obsession. I suspected it, but I couldn't say I'd discussed it outside my circle of friends, and my circle of friends certainly isn't representative of the entire world. Not that the group is. But it encompasses more than my circle of friends.

And, while this experience did not affect her own eating habits, she felt that she was more sensitive to those who do behave "weird":

I think that when I see other girls picking at their food when they are with boys, I won't laugh or make fun of them any more... I guess I sort of understand some of it now. I don't think that any of these girls I worked with were weird. Maybe some of the things they did were a little foreign to me, but if they do something like that and they seem normal--whatever normal is--then it's just a little quirk. I won't make fun of them anymore.

Because of the performance process, Kathy had reached some understanding about why others felt and acted as they did. Rather than interpret behaviors as "silly" and "ridiculous," she considered them consequences of a society that demands a certain physical appearance, and part of a person's individuality rather than an eccentricity.

Terry explained that the performance instilled more empathy toward her coach. While his criticism still caused anger and hurt, she recognized that "their job depended upon how we athletes perform. They have a job they could lose any minute because of our performance." Thus, while she did not agree with her coach's mode, she could better understand his motives.
For some participants awareness stimulated confidence to talk to friends and family about their eating habits. Donna, for instance, imparted that the most important thing she obtained from the performance was discussing her eating with her mother:

Before the tapings [focus group discussions] or performance, we didn’t talk about it. . . . she knew for a long time that I wouldn’t eat things, but we wouldn’t talk about it . . . But during the performance we’d talk about it more. I’d say I’m doing this speech project, and the performance would bring it up . . . .She’s really interested. She’s always taping things on TV, and it’s made me think that she wanted to tape them for me before, but now we are a lot more open.

Donna explained that the performance has also affected her relationship with her husband. She developed confidence to talk about food and her feelings. During the focus group sessions, she frequently shared that she and Stephen fought over food, but she never told him why she was so concerned. After the performance, she said she noticed change:

That night [after the performance] I got this tension from him. He acted aggravated about anything to do with food. He didn’t want to talk about it, but it would come out in other ways . . . . I said something about food--like I always say about food . . . but now because of seeing me in this performance it just made it bigger, like "Donna, this food thing is out of hand." It made him think "Is something wrong? . . . I think he even said "You and this eating disorder."

She echoed one of her roles in the performance: "He always makes comments."

Sometime after the performance she tried to explain her feelings:

I remember saying to him, "You know, Stephen, sometimes you say things that make me feel bad," but he’s clueless . . . "Like when you tell me about this girl at the office who has a big butt. I just don’t want to hear it." And he’s like, "Well what does it have to do with you?" And I was just "It does. God forbid if I ever get a big butt." I just don’t want to hear about it.
Donna also remarked that prior to the performance she would have never discussed these feelings, but "being in the performance made it possible to talk." The performance moved Donna to act upon her knowledge. First, she obtained confidence to discuss her work with her mother. Second, she obtained enough confidence in herself to ask her mother and Stephen to attend the performance; she was ready to risk their reactions. Third, she acted upon that new confidence by confronting Stephen about the comments he made about appearance.

For Lara, in contrast, the performance underscored eating as "taboo." Her parents came to the performance, but she felt they were "on the edge of their seat" with fear, because "they never got the whole story [about the Baton Rouge Weightloss Clinic]." She said that they enjoyed the performance, but never mentioned the narrative:

> Not one comment. But I think that they think that if they say something, it's going to bring the whole deal up. And my parents are that way. They don't like to look at things like that . . . . They acted like it was all a performance. I was just acting someone else's deal [even though they knew she performed a personal narrative].

The performance enabled Lara to tell her parents about her experience at the Baton Rouge Weightloss Clinic. In addition, her parents' reactions confirmed her understanding of her family's pattern of communication; they avoided talking about anything emotional and anything personal.

*Beauty and the Feast* developed self awareness or a better understanding of others in every performer. Moreover, the awareness spurred change in each. Even those who did not change their own eating practices remarked that they would alter
their reactions to others. Performance, in this study then, exemplified a mechanism for personal education and activism.

Cultural Observations

In addition to stimulating various levels of awareness, performers often extended their personal views to a cultural critique. For example, several performers noted how one's environment determined one's behavior. Harper explained that during the performance she "worried more" about her eating. She noticed how much she ate and consciously ate less:

All of a sudden I was in a group of people who were always talking about it. I started carrying on like them. But the way I was raised, you ate what you wanted. So, maybe people who do have problems come from backgrounds that emphasize [watching one’s weight] more than I did.

Harper directly attributed her weight loss to the circumstances of the performance troupe/culture in which she had been submersed. She believed that people frequently shaped their behaviors to match their peer and social groups. Prior to the performance she believed that those who watched their weight "performed" for attention, rather than adapted behaviors to meet cultural norms. Harper had developed a new, more tolerant perspective toward those concerned about their weight.

Donna also discussed how specific social settings and groups affected one's behavior. Donna explained that her mother could not believe that Donna removed her makeup during the performance:

[She said] "I can’t wait to tell all my friends. At first I thought you were pretending. Then I saw makeup on the rag." And she was like, "How dedicated to the project you were to take off your makeup." And I told her
she shouldn’t be saying this because I’m going to tell the girls. And she was like “Oh, I don’t care.” But that shows you something about how the way you are raised and body image. We were brought up to not go out without makeup. . . It’s not just me, but all of my friends. We say, “If our Mom’s could see the way we go to class. . .[she trailed off in a hushed tone], but if we are in Slidell, you have to [wear makeup]. I have thought about that so much since she said that.

Donna exhibited reflexivity when she observed a conflict between two of her social roles. Donna’s "daughter" role at home mandated makeup. Yet in a "student/performer" role she felt justified in ignoring the mandate; thus, during the performance, the roles collided as she transformed herself from one to the other.

Performance, then, also offered her a space to negotiate these roles.

A final cultural observation that many performers pointed out entailed inconsistencies and double standards. Harper mentioned how "feminists say 'don’t let culture, society dominated by men tell you you shouldn’t diet dadadadada.' Then five minutes later they are worried about their weight." She extended this observation by also noting that men also sent mixed messages when they "say 'Why don’t you break out of it?' But then they’ll say 'I’ll only date a pretty woman.'"

Donna said that if they dined alone, Stephen frequently told her to eat; yet, if they eat with another couple, "he’ll turn to them and explain that 'that’s the way she likes it.’ I get the feeling he’s proud of me. Like 'This is my wife and isn’t she cute?’"

Terry found such contradictions "hypocritical":

They’ll say one thing and do another. Or, they’ll be critical. You have people who lose weight and make fun of people who are still overweight. . . That’s very wrong. It’s also not right for heavy people to criticize thin people.
Performers exhibited the ability to evaluate what they saw and heard. They noted when people contradicted themselves, and they sought explanations for "breakdowns" or moments of incoherencies in the discussion.

Many remarked that "men just don’t understand," and they placed eating and body image as a woman’s issue. They noted that men frequently affected the way women felt about their bodies. They believed that men viewed female bodies as objects; yet, men never thought "about their own bodies." Nor did they monitor "how their comments affect women." They also believed that communication provided no help, since males "can’t relate to how psycho we are about our bodies."

These performers described personal discoveries, then elaborated those discoveries to make broader cultural comments. They noted that specific social circles influenced one’s behaviors, and they posited eating and body image as a woman’s issue. Thus, Beauty and the Feast not only generated personal awareness and change, but the performance also initiated a critique of cultural norms and rules.

Additional Observations

While the most significant changes in the performers revolved around personal awareness and cultural observations, performers also mentioned other changes. For example, Lara observed that as a result of the focus groups and the rehearsal process, she felt that she disclosed more to others. Sharing her ideas and thoughts came to her more easily than they did before she started the focus group discussions. The focus group sessions and the rehearsal sessions offered Lara a place to practice discussing her thoughts and feelings. The performance provided a
public forum for those thoughts. Harper admitted that because of the performance process, she felt more trusting of the group process:

I don’t like working in groups. My experience is always bad. . . I’m like 'Nobody listens to my ideas, but I have the best idea,' so I just say, 'screw these people,' and I work on my own . . . Now I have more faith.

This process taught Harper that groups are valuable sources of information. She learned that when conducted in an open, flexible manner, groups succeed because everyone shares responsibility to ensure success.

Several performers claimed they learned more about performance. Theresa, for instance, decided that as her first show, Beauty and the Feast helped her understand what such productions required from participants: "Everything was very positive. Learning how to do the thing, the things that went into a show. This is a very time-consuming event; I didn’t realize how time consuming it was." Since most of the performers had little knowledge about performance and the rigors of production, the performance process taught them to appreciate the time and effort behind such productions. Performers realized that people worked hard so that others could enjoy.

Even though two performers had performed in public prior to this show, this performance was everyone’s first experience with audience participation. As the main facilitator/"Joker," Terry admitted that she was nervous: "I kept thinking, 'What can I do to get them more involved?' I felt that I had tried to draw it out as long as I could. That I gave people the opportunity to talk if they wanted to; it was there for them to talk about." She also described her reaction to an audience
member who claimed that we had no time to discuss the problem: "I was like, 'Why? Hey, we've got the time. We've got the place.' I just wasn't willing to close until I got more feedback." Although all were "unnerved" by the interruptions and audience participation, many performers said that these two items generated more fun and energy for them, since the show was "new" each time.

Harper also confessed that until Beauty and the Feast she hated any kind of improvisation, but by the end of the performance she said, "I felt better, more comfortable" about improv work. She said that while she still preferred "everything written out, prepared, and structured," she had more faith in her ability to ad lib and improv.

Beauty and the Feast taught this group of performers information about themselves and others. Each performer increased self awareness, gained a better understanding of others, identified cultural norms and their own adherence/defiance of those norms, worked in close proximity with individuals who differed in numerous ways, and/or expanded their public performance abilities. While the performance, as Lara mentioned, was not a "miracle cure," each person obtained valuable insight and experience as a result of their participation and cooperation. Furthermore, the public performance offered them the opportunity to share their insights with others outside of the focus groups and performance troupe. Lara summarized this characteristic: "We learned basic stuff from each other, from the groups and videotapes. Stuff you were trying to teach us, that we were trying to teach the audience. We don't recognize what we do, and maybe we need to."
Personal awareness, cultural observations—as well as information about self
disclosure, group process, and performance—figured predominantly in the types of
knowledge performers obtained during the performance process. Performers learned
that they could take actions to alter their lives or the lives of others. The
performers became agents who could think and act critically. Performers acted upon
their knowledge; they became agents with the opportunity to change society just as
they had changed. The performance process built the troupe's understanding from
the focus group discussions and the rehearsal sessions into a public forum.

**Performance and Pedagogy**

In addition to noting that the performers experienced personal change and
social awareness, I also believe that the performance process revealed a number of
concerns related to Boal's methodology and to performance practice in general.
Almost ironically, this process utilized a method that relies heavily upon surveillance
to encourage women to discuss problems associated eating and body image. Some
of the performers intensified their surveillance of their bodies or emphasized how
bodies are objects of surveillance.

Early in the performance process, for example, Donna noted that Boal's
games and exercises made her aware of how she looked when she moved. As Boal
encourages, she became observant of every move, muscle, and motion. Boal asserts
that such attention liberates the performer by illustrating the body's capabilities for
expression. Donna, however, was all too aware of what her body "expressed."
Donna explained that the exercise made her think about "how my body looks when
it moves. I always make sure when I bend certain ways cellulite doesn't show."

For Donna, these exercises served as an additional spotlight for her body. They made her aware of not only how her body moved, but how it looked. Given that the performance troupe organized to explore eating and body image problems, including self-surveillance, the process seemed to reinforce, not contest, her need to monitor.

Boal's Forum Theatre and "Joker" figure also emphasized surveillance. "Jokers" place the performers under surveillance as a component of their function, and they encourage audience members to do the same. They convince audience members to watch actions carefully in order to critique, join, and explain staged events. Audience members must monitor to participate.

However, the "Joker" might also be a tool to subvert the gaze, to appropriate visibility to achieve specific goals. "The Miss America" scene exemplified such an appropriation. In the scene prior to "Miss America," performers ignored the audience, recognized a fourth wall between themselves and the audience members. Audience members peered into the restaurant where Terry begged for food and Kathy chainsmoked. When the "Miss America" scene began, audience members still peered, only this time they had access to a private place where Donna dressed and undressed. At this point, audiences members moved from inspection toward voyeurism. They were placed in the position of not being content with what happened in public; they became "Peeping Toms" who "followed" Donna. Usually, when Terry interrupted this scene, she questioned audience members; however, one evening she addressed Donna. As Donna answered, she disrupted the voyeuristic
feel to the scene. That is, if we consider a voyeur someone who watches without permission, then audience members could not be voyeurs because Donna indicated awareness that she was being watched. She became an exhibitionist playing to the audience. Donna controlled the scene and the audience.

The "Miss America" scene also raises important questions about the politics of visibility. For many, visibility means power. In *Unmarked: The Politics of Performance* Peggy Phelan presents an alternative view as she explains her caution of visibility politics. She asserts that often there is power in remaining "unmarked" because visibility poses a "trap" as it induces fetishism or colonization. She suggests that performances that offer visibility are not transformational or revolutionary because they lead to "me-ism" (11). However, performance is inherently "visible." Those who perform make themselves and a text visible to themselves or others. If, as Phelan asserts, we are to believe that public performance leads to voyeurism, then we seem to have two reductive options: (1) we can perform for ourselves in isolation. This type of solitary activity also leads to "me-ism" since the individual and how that individual relates to the text is the only component of performance; (2) we should not perform at all. Donna's action indicates a third option: performers can appropriate visibility for their own purposes. That is, performers accept that they are the focus of attention and use the opportunity to assert themselves. Donna, for instance, (re)appropriated her scene from the "Joker" who had interrupted the scene and from the audience members who seemed to peer at her. Without the "Joker" figure to interrupt Donna, to ask
questions, and to solicit a response, Donna would have remained the object of audience voyeurism.

The performance process also encouraged me to reconsider Dwight Conquergood's paradigm of performance as mimesis (imitating), poiesis (constructing), and kinesis (moving). Throughout this study I have asserted that constructing and moving are key components of personal and social change. However, a large part of the constructing and moving began with imitating. Performers worked to reflect the experiences of others or to encourage other performers to mimic actions. As performers assembled the "Restaurant" scene, they attempted to replicate their collective experiences with Invisible Theatre. While the outcome of this performance process resulted in kinesis, since performers became agents who asserted their own ideas, and required poiesis since performers constructed those ideas, the process relied upon mimesis. As a consequence of my experiences with Boal's methods, I suggest that performance practitioners "dust off" the concept of mimesis. Rather than regarding mimesis as less important than doing and changing as Conquergood seems to do, we should re-examine ways to capitalize upon its strengths. Boal's methods provide one example of how to benefit from mimesis. Boal asks performers who engage Forum Theatre to imitate a problem or oppression they face. Once they have imitated the problem to the satisfaction of all participants, they move to re-work the scene. His Image Theatre techniques also requires imitation. To build some images, he encourages performers to show what they wish others to do. Imitation becomes a "language" for theatre.
The performance process also caused me to question how performance helps individuals explore another person’s experience. Performance practitioners have long discussed how performance enhances empathy of a textual–literary or otherwise–subject. Performers suspend their own interest to “try on” another experience. With Donna’s increased surveillance of her body because of the games and exercises or with Harper’s inability to understand how someone might eat in the bathroom, I must wonder “what happened?” After engaging in the process the performers were unable to leave their own beliefs or interests to “try on” a new way of thinking. Donna and Harper were so immersed their ways of viewing the body-eating problematic, that they could not consider other alternatives. In these instances, performance was not helpful. Performance practitioners need to obtain a better understanding of why and how performance “works” and “fails.” We need examine how to overcome such obstacles, and if such an action is beneficial.

Another concern I developed as a result of the performance combines issues of visibility, “sensing the other,” and the context of the performance event. That is, if we want to use performance as a way to explore someone else’s experience, why choose a public performance? My answer to this question lies in Martin Buber’s concept of dialogue (see Arnett) and in performance’s role in human communication. Simplistically stated, performance scholars espouse performance as a type of communication, as a way to engender and construct understanding. This communicative process requires two parties; otherwise, we would only talk to
ourselves. While talking to ourselves may be personally fulfilling, I doubt that such an action takes us—as a field or as society—very far.

To paraphrase Buber’s philosophy, an individual’s ideas need to initiate collective conversations about the future of human community (Arnett 6 and throughout). Public performance is one such way to initiate collective conversations. As a site where the community can gather to share experiences, contest understandings, and leave changed, public performance represents what Buber calls the "narrow ridge." Here, people remain sensitive to all aspects of an issue, embrace another person’s perspective, remain true to their own ideas, and locate ways to reach community members.

Rather than question the benefits of public performance, I suggest we (re)consider how performance might constitute Buber’s "narrow ridge" or a dialogue between performers, audience members, academics, critics, and texts. For example, some performers who use public performance of ethnographic research do not encourage a dialogue because they do not provide the ethnographic culture the opportunity to respond, participate, create the performance (see Olsen). While such performers may develop respect, they do not create a dialogue between the performers and "textual subjects." One way to resolve this problem involves encouraging people to write and perform their own texts. Another strategy might entail a two-part performance structure, where ethnographers and cultural members both perform their interpretations of the cultural interaction. A third suggestion entails the public performance as a foundation for dialogue between performers and
audience members. This type of performance would situate performance as an
unfixed, impermanent text that defies cultural prescriptions since all participants
analyze and offer insight.

The first and third strategies are ones that the Beauty and the Beast
performance troupe employed. Most members of the troupe told personal narratives
or assembled personal experiences into a scene that reflected a social issue. Each of
the scenes varied in text and texture at every rehearsal and every performance.
Performers adapted to Terry's interruptions, as well as audience reactions and
responses to Terry's questioning. Many other focus group participants attended the
performance and responded to what they saw and heard—especially as they
recognized bits of themselves in the performance.

Rather than question benefits of public performance, I suggest that we
reconceptualize the public performance. We should consider how to transform some
public performances from fixed, finished products to sites of dialogue between
people. We need to consider ways to involve members of diverse audiences in
order to open possibilities for human communication.

As performance practitioners position their work as dialogue, they promote
collective learning and understanding. This dialogic perspective implicates
performance as a type of critical pedagogy that encourages individuals to analyze
and question concerns, theories, and practices. Elyse Pineau calls this type of
practice "critical performative pedagogy," which "situates the performing body at
the center of theory and practice" ("Critical" 1). Critical performative pedagogy
shifts education from an informative mode in which teachers provide students with information, toward a performative mode that encourages students to explore ideas through enactment. Students do more than absorb information; they become producers of information as they use all of their resources to test knowledge and to learn.

Critical performative pedagogy builds upon the educational discourse of Peter McLaren, Henry Giroux, and David Trend. These educators advocate pedagogical methods that extend beyond supplying knowledge. They posit that education should encourage students to think critically, to analyze social structures, and to evaluate information.

To establish critical pedagogy, educators must create an educational culture that empowers students by leveling the teacher-student power structure. Teachers and students learn from each other. Rather than establish themselves as experts, teachers become "transformative intellectuals" (Trend 25) who facilitate students and who value student experience as an insightful accumulation of knowledge. As a result education expands from the teacher-student relationship in the classroom toward how the teacher and student relates to the outside world (Pineau, "Critical" 3). Knowledge is no longer theory detached from culture and context. Knowledge is applicable to individual experience. Knowledge is valuable and valued because of its direct application to how students live and interact. Critical pedagogy, then, emphasizes the practical application and relevance of "theoretical abstraction" (Pineau, "Critical" 16).
I affirm the value of critical pedagogy—in combination with performance praxis—to explore how social knowledge is constructed and shaped and to examine how those constructions are implicated by political, social, and cultural structures. When Pineau describes the function of critical performative pedagogy, her words resemble many of the ideas Boal promotes. Pineau asserts that pedagogical practices are a type of cultural politics that can oppress by "perpetuating the vested interest of the dominant class" ("Body Talk" 2) or subvert that domination by offering a way and place to contest ideologies and to value difference. Boal asserts that theatre is also political. We could rephrase the previous statement substituting "traditional theatre" for "pedagogical practices" to offer a key assumption behind Boal’s method: Traditional theatrical practices are a type of cultural politics that oppress by perpetuating the interest of the dominant class; he calls for a different type of theatre to subvert and contest that domination. Performance is a useful tool to explore cultural and political struggle. Performance as a method often helps students to identify structures that oppress, and enables students to refigure those structures and human experience. Critical pedagogy and critical performative pedagogy is an "idealistic praxis" that is agitated by a gnawing disturbance at the inequities that plague our society, funded by a deep compassion for those who stand outside the circle of power and privilege, cognizant of its own complicity in perpetuating that circle, and driven by a committed vision that our world can be other than it is (Pineau, "Critical" 20).

While critical pedagogy creates citizens who think, analyze, and act, educators are slow to embrace the praxis (Pineau, "Critical" 1). Some educators
avoid critical pedagogy because of its political nature. Others may avoid critical pedagogy because of its difficulty. For example, students entering college have spent twelve years learning to "absorb" knowledge. Many are not trained to analyze information. A teacher who embraces critical pedagogical methods must adjust students to a different way of thinking and learning, and facilitate understanding of the curriculum.

Critical pedagogy also causes problems. First, this type of "radical education" (Giroux, Border 10) romanticizes political struggle. It upholds struggle as a never-ending quest that all must join. Critical pedagogy also seems to suggest that teachers can change the world, since teachers are the leaders of the struggle. While I do not doubt their influence, I do not believe they can accomplish this task singlehandedly. In addition, critical pedagogy raises numerous questions about the ethical responsibilities of teachers. When teachers encourage students to dismantle power structures, are they advocating a type of political agenda? Do they abuse their position as a "shapers" of young minds? Are they replacing one oppressive structure with another?

I faced related problems when organizing the performance process. I grappled with a number of problems, including how to conduct the focus groups and rehearsal sessions, how to obtain information without shaping that information, and how to facilitate the process so that performance contributed to the critical skills and actions of the performers.
Resolution to these dilemmas relied upon two factors: (1) how I positioned myself in the learning process, and (2) the method or process I used to establish an open flexible, supportive environment that instilled critical thinking. First, I embraced the philosophy of critical pedagogy. I learned to facilitate rather than guide students. By "facilitate," I mean "to enable," "to empower," "to make activities easier." This action contrasts with "guide," meaning "to direct," "to point out," "to train." Many times I stepped back to allow students to make decisions. I encouraged students to make discoveries rather than tell them what they "should" discover.

Facilitation also provided the foundation for a second solution to these issues and another tenet of critical pedagogy. Facilitation suggests collaboration. I worked with students to create a democratic "classroom," one that did not teach them what to think, but how to analyze information and messages they encounter. I did not advocate a particular agenda, but allowed students to establish their own agenda and their own discursive authority. Furthermore, by focusing upon the changes in performers, I did not romanticize the effects of this particular performance process. While I have some indication that performance stimulated critical thinking and discussion on the part of the audience, I have data to show specific personal and social changes that occurred to the performer. I did not seek to change the world or even the audience. I sought to explore how performance creates agents who can enact change.
Facilitation is not easy. Many times throughout the performance process, I became frustrated because they were not "reading" their scenes and images in the same way that I did. I frequently wanted them to interpret their social significance or their political ramifications. In other cases, I wanted performers to explore the multiple interpretations associated with the images. The performers, though, were more likely to settle into one or two interpretation rather than continuing to stretch their ways of thinking. Throughout this project I worked hard to keep many of my ideas and interpretations to myself so that the performance process represented the collective learning of the performers, rather than my own impositions.

Areas for Further Study

In addition to concerns about how performance practitioners conceptualize performance, empathy, dialogue, and audience, I faced other problems. At each turn in the process, I made my own discoveries, ones that usually opened more questions or provided additional problems to decipher. I add these questions and problems to my suggestions for further research.

Performance practitioners need to explore the performer. First, we need to know more about the experience of the individual who engages in performance. We have little data about what occurs to the performer, how individuals process and /or change texts to meet their purposes. We also need more studies about the performance of self. How do people construct themselves? How do they "translate" or "reconstruct" that construction for the public performance? How and why do people chose to tell what they tell, and how and why do they change those stories
for a public performance? What do the alterations allow the performer to accomplish?

We also need more studies about how performers "try on" the experiences of another person. This information would strengthen performance's role in human communication, since it could engender dialogue or empathy. How do performers construct a performance/speaker based upon the stories of another person? What are the assumptions that affect their constructions? For example, had Harper performed the story about eating in the bathroom, how would the performance have differed from the one Donna constructed? I would guess that Harper would have levelled a critique rather than an empathetic response. Performance practitioners need to know about the specific choices performers make during the performance process.

Furthermore, we need to continue to establish the relationship between performance choices and agency. That is, once performers establish critical consciousness, how do they act upon that consciousness? These types of studies not only document what students learn and how they learn by performing, but they position performance even more strongly as a tool, an assertion, as a powerful way to create and change.

Another key area performance practitioners must continue to analyze is performance's role in change. More information about performance's role in social change would reinforce its position as an pragmatic, utilitarian tool, in addition to an aesthetic event. Furthermore, performance and social change rely upon group effort. Neither performance nor social change occurs as a result of one person's
action. However, as a collective and collaborative group, people can affect change, even if they begin the process by affecting personal change. Performance practitioners need to demonstrate how performance stimulates personal and social change, and how one acts after establishing critical consciousness. How is performance a practical tool to better society? We also need to continue explorations of the political implications of change. Who benefits from change and what motives does change serve?

Since August Boal grounds his theories upon their ability to stimulate social change, I suggest that performance practitioners more closely examine Boal as a way to sort through the process and implications of social change. We need more studies of how practitioners utilize Boal's concepts and activities. We need to understand the conditions which enable Invisible Theatre, Forum Theatre, and Simultaneous Dramaturgy. For example, during our performance of Beauty and the Feast, audiences refrained from approaching the stage or replacing the performers. I believe a smaller audience would been more conducive to Forum Theatre than the two eighty-member and one forty member audiences at our public performances. Also, we need to understand how to situate Forum Theatre as a way to generate discussion and action pertaining to a scene/problem, rather than generating personal comments and reactions. Boal's concepts are empowering to audience and performer; we need to understand how that empowerment works and how to "produce" it. As a tool for social change, performance can have real-world impacts.
A third area of research that performance practitioners need to supplement involves critical performative pedagogy. Performance practitioners need to document how enactment enhances learning processes and cognitive development. This type of research illustrates how performance techniques might be implemented to effect more broad-based learning. Performance techniques, for example, could be used to teach subjects other than performance studies, or to train people for employment. We need to explore further the benefits of collaborative learning, and the benefits of dialogic learning that suggests that teachers and students learn together. Furthermore, we need to encourage more instructors to embrace critical pedagogical praxis. This type of praxis not only teaches students information, but it teaches students how to think, to use information, and to take action. Critical pedagogy encourages students to use their abilities and their experiences, and to make a mark upon the world.

Longitudinal studies—qualitative and quantitative—comprise the fourth body of research that performance practitioners need to develop. We need more qualitative investigations of performance processes and effects. Scholars have conducted a few quantitative studies that note how audiences change; however, quantitative studies are based upon self reports and instruments that researchers collect and administer immediately after the performance. Their instruments measure immediate effects. In order to obtain a richer perspective of how performance effects change, we need to extend our research with follow-up studies at one, five, and ten-year intervals.
We need to know if performance generates long term effects and what those effects are.

A fifth and final area I identify for further study includes ethics and evaluation of performance. Performance practitioners need to continue to ask whose needs are met or served through performance. We need to ask whether we should let performance choices be swayed by audience reactions. For example, when performers concentrate upon the audience's reaction, they may sublimate their own ideas and instincts. Performance may become disempowering for the performer. Performers no longer become agents who act or enact because they react to meet the needs of the audience. Yet, what are the implications and ethics of performing material that could potentially harm an audience member? Does the threat mean that we should not perform? Alter the performance? Or, should we perform only for certain publics? Following the tenets of critical pedagogy, I believe performers have the responsibility to be critical and make people aware. By refraining from speech and action, performers only encourage ignorance and blindness. This protective position also disempowers audience members; this position forgets that audience members can empower themselves by leaving if the performance gets "dangerous." While I acknowledge the benefits of audience analysis, I also caution performance scholars about engaging in a hyperreflexivity that disempowers performers and audience members alike. Such hyperreflexivity causes paralysis that prevents any type of action.
Performance practitioners must also consider how to evaluate and critique performance. Evaluation can follow a number of paths, but two types frequently used involve aesthetic values and theoretical implications. The first path entails evaluation based upon aesthetic values. A person judges performance based upon the performance style—representational, presentational, avant-garde, and so forth. Aesthetic values also involve how a set looks, or how music, lighting, and costuming create an atmosphere. Theory is a second way we frequently evaluate performances. We ask if or how performance supports or dismantles theories about feminism, Marxism, modernism, postmodernism, for example. However, the academic audience members of Beauty and the Feast frequently combined the two. That is, some audience members responded negatively to the parody and humor that proliferated the performance. They insisted that this style trivialized issues. To justify this aesthetic response, they pointed out how certain images were "antifeminist." They combined two different modes of evaluation. This combination forms a type of reductive reasoning, rather than an attempt to "build theory." Audience members generated an opinion, then used theory to support the opinion. They turned theory inward rather than going forth, asking what "new" forms of knowledge do we gain from the experience. As a result of how several audience members reacted and evaluated the public performance, I not only suggest areas for further research, but I suggest we re-consider what we consider "theory building." We need to examine what are beneficial activities for academics. Is our job to notice trends and make connections, or to label and re-label?
By charting how a performance process created agents capable of personal and social change, I supply what I hope will be one of many answers to Hopkins and Long's call to record how and what people learn by performing. I support a long scholarly tradition that stipulates performance as a way to construct and to alter knowledge, in addition to represent knowledge in a mimetic sense. Furthermore, I advocate performance as a unique kind of knowledge and experience in its own right. Whether by conducting more systematic studies of the performance process or by reconsidering how we theorize about that process, performance practitioners face a great deal of work. In this century, performance scholars have seen performance obtain recognition as a valuable type of experiential learning. People recognize performance as more than an imitation of life, a reflection of knowledge; they recognize performance as an important experience in and of itself. Performance is complex, and what the performance process does is complex. But until performance practitioners understand the complexity, we cannot fully appreciate the power performance wields.

Notes

¹ Donna was engaged to marry Stephen when she started this project. They were married two weeks prior to the third public performance.


APPENDIX A

BODY IMAGE SURVEY

Using the following scale place a number next to the body part or characteristic that best describes feelings about yourself.

1 = I have strong feelings, and I wish I could change this.
2 = I don't like this, but I can put up with it.
3 = I have no particular feelings about this
4 = I am satisfied with this.
5 = I consider myself fortunate with this.

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Sex  M  F (circle one)

I am interested in participating in your project about body image. I understand that my identity will be protected should I choose to participate, and that I am eligible to receive one hour speech credit upon completion of this project.

Name ________________________________________
Phone _______________________________________
Address _____________________________________
Signature ____________________________________

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APPENDIX B

EXPERIMENT CONSENT FORM

TO BE RETAINED BY THE INVESTIGATOR

My signature, on this sheet, by which I volunteer to participate in the experiment on eating and body image/"Beauty and the Feast" conducted by Leigh Anne Howard.

Experimenter indicates that I understand that all subjects in the project are volunteers, that I can withdraw at any time from the experiment, that I have been or will be informed as to the nature of this experiment, that the data I provide will be anonymous and my identity will not be revealed without my permission, and that my performance in this experiment may be used for additional approved projects. Finally, I shall be given an opportunity to ask questions prior to the start of the experiment and after my participation is complete.

Subject’s Signature
APPENDIX C

FOCUS GROUP FORMAT AND TOPICS

Meeting One
1. Project explained—goal of the focus groups, how material will be used.
2. Procedures distributed to each group.
3. Paper work completed—release forms for data, consent forms, speech credit application.
4. General discussion of body image and eating using the survey they completed when I solicited their participation.

Meeting Two
Topic: Eating
1. Describe a typical day of eating; give examples.
3. How do you eat around other people?
4. Does food or a food have any significance—physically or emotionally— for you?
5. What eating patterns exist in your family?
6. What eating patterns have you observed in your own experience? Rituals?
7. What role does food play in social interaction?

Meeting Three
Topic: Bodies
1. Describe your body.
2. What is the most significant experience (or experiences) that have effected how you feel about your body?
3. How did you react to that event?
4. What role did food have in this reaction?
5. How do you use food to "create" a body you desire?
6. What role do others have in determining how you feel about your body?

Meeting Four
Topic: Cultural Representation of Women, Eating, and Body Image
1. Show television, film, literary, artistic representations of eating and bodies.
2. Describe the images they see.
3. How are these images similar to your own eating practices? Body?
4. How are these images different from your own eating practices? Body?
5. What social statements do these images make?

Meeting Five
Topic: Cultural Standards
1. EXERCISE: Imagine two women; one is deemed attractive by cultural standards and the other is considered unattractive.
   a. Describe each woman.
   b. Should the unattractive woman restructure her attractiveness?
   c. How can she reconfigure her appearance?
2. What cultural standards for beauty do you know?
3. Why do you think they exist?
APPENDIX D

DESCRIPTION OF PERFORMERS

All students who participated in this research were students at Louisiana State University. In addition, all volunteered to participate, although each received speech credit for their participation. Ages of performers ranged from nineteen to twenty-five years old. Most were unmarried and without children. In addition, most wore clothing in sizes ranging from four to twelve (misses or juniors).

A model for one of the local department stores, Donna was very concerned about her appearance. Her normal diet entailed eating less than fifteen grams of fat per day, when nutritionists generally recommend that females consume about thirty grams of fat per day. Her weight fluctuated during the rehearsal process, much to her concern. Donna indicated the most interest in this project; she always brought television programs that she taped or articles from magazines to share with the group. Donna was an English major with a speech communication minor. She was also the only performer who was married. Her family was a very well-known, upper-class family from Slidell, a town near New Orleans.

Lara had participated in several productions sponsored by the speech communication department. A speech communication major, she used her work with the focus group discussions to create a scene for an advanced performance class
at LSU. She adapted this scene, "Lucky Charms," for Beauty and the Feast. In addition to this project Lara worked two jobs and carried sixteen hours. She was also a member of a national social sorority. Lara said this show helped her "be less anal" about her eating habits; she no longer "worried so much."

Theresa worked as a server in a local restaurant in addition to being an aerobics instructor at a local health club. One of three children from an upper-middle class family from Alabama, Theresa was an English major. Theresa’s performance experience included one introductory performance course. Theresa said that she had been on "every diet the world had to offer."

An international student from England, Terry was a former student of mine. A general studies major with a speech communication minor, Terry also was a student athlete. In addition to belonging to LSU’s Diving team, she also planned to compete in the 1996 Summer Olympic Games as a member of the British Diving Team.

A former student of mine, Kathy, joined this project after taking my Introduction to Performance of Literature. Kathy joined the group because she liked "working in this way" and "I like working with women so we can talk about men."

Kathy had weekly food rituals that she conducted each week. For instance, every Wednesday she and her friend would purchase a red velvet cake and a two-liter bottle of diet soda to consume while watching Beverly Hills 90210 and Melrose Place. Kathy did not participate in the last performance at the Southern States
Communication Association convention because she had accepted an internship with David Letterman’s show, *Late Night*.

Harper graduated from LSU in 1993 with a degree in speech communication. After working for a year as a waitress/hostess in a restaurant located in a one of the local mansions, Harper returned to LSU to study performance in the department of speech communication. She was the most experienced performer in the troupe. Harper said that for most of her life she ate what she wanted to eat; however, after she graduated, she lost forty pounds. Harper was the only member of the "original" performance troupe who did not participate in the focus group discussion.

Selia joined the cast in April 1995 as a replacement for Kathy. Like Harper, she had extensive public performance experience, including a one-woman show. Selia graduated from LSU in December 1994, after she completed her student teaching at a local high school. Selia also had a seventeen-month-old child. Like Harper, Selia did not participate on the focus group discussions.
APPENDIX E

SCRIPT FOR BEAUTY AND THE FEAST

Throughout this performance, Terry plays "the Joker," a character devised to interrupt the performance in order to clarify, articulate, and question actions and behaviors of the other characters. She addresses the audience directly and encourages discussion about the scene or the characters' behavior. Neither the performers nor audience members know when Terry plans to interrupt.

[Theresa enters in a slouch. On third count, Lara enters. On fifth, both straighten as Theresa says hello to Bob. Sequence continues: Harper, Terry, Donna, and Kathy. Performers make circles around the set. At first circle, Terry peels off to take her position for the first scene; at second, Lara peels off; at third, Donna peels off.]

[Lara as the TV model in advertising--gestures with different food items taken from a basket. As Lara models foods, Donna mixes and eats SlimFast, and Terry eats fat-free chips.]

Lara [singing a jingle of weight control labels, etc.]:

You always wanted to lose that weight
Call 1-800-94-Jenny
It's so easy the Jenny way
1-800-94-Jenny
You won't just lose you'll win
1-800-94-Jenny
1-800-94-Jenny

Give us a week we'll take off the weight.

I did it; you can do it; I lost 35 pounds without dieting.

Reduce your thighs with thigh cream--in just 1-1/2 weeks, you too can have great looking thighs.

Weight Watchers--this is living.
[Again, Donna drinks, approaches the scale with excitement and reverence. She
weighs herself and is visibly disappointed as she reads the scale. She goes back to
her SlimFast.]

[Terry, eats and tries on a pair of jeans, and visibly disappointed at the scale, she
goes back to the television and fat free items.]

[The cycle is set. This cycle repeats 7 times; each time, the speed increases to
fashion a "diet machine. As Donna and Terry repeat, they become more frustrated
each time.]

[As the eighth cycle begins, Lara slows down the jingle and approaches the
audience. She repeats her song; this time she sings in a disbelieving tone, adds,
"Yeah. Right," and exits.]

[Terry and Harper take places for scene 2.]

Harper: I own a lot of clothes. Specifically in my closet right now, I have 58
shirts, 11 sweaters, 9 pairs of jeans, 9 pairs of shorts, 6 pairs of slacks, 15 dresses,
19 skirts, 3 blazers, 5 vests, 4 jackets, 2 heavy coats, and 23 pairs of shoes. Yet
everyday, it takes me two hours to find something to wear. Not because I don’t
have nice clothes; I know I have nice clothes; people tell me everyday how much
they like my clothes. It takes me this long, because I am looking for the "Wonder
Outfit." The perfect ensemble that will make me look like I have a body like Linda
Hamilton in Terminator II.

Terry: Look girls. You really need to look after yourselves. You’re working
really hard in the gym, but are you doing all you can outside of practice? You need
to make sure you eat right.

Harper: So, I put on a shirt. Then I put on some jeans. The jeans look good, but
might look more flattering with another shirt. So I change my shirt. Then, I realize
that this shirt would make me look really thin when paired with a skirt. So I try it
on. It doesn’t.

Terry: You’ve got a responsibility to yourself and your team—how can you expect
to give it all you’ve got and do your best when you are still 7 lbs. overweight? The
best athletes in the world only have 12% body fat and some of you have 24. I just
don’t understand how we can be this far into the season and you’re still 7% over
your goal weight. Don’t you want to be a better athlete?

Harper: Then I put on a dress. My stomach pokes out if I stand like this so I put on
a sweater, then a blazer over the dress. Then I remember that it’s 95 degrees
outside. I yank it all off and take a cigarette break.
Terry: Come on girls, you need to work harder if you want to get rid of that cottage cheese.

Harper: When I am ready to try again, I start with another shirt. This whole process repeats several times and usually ends with me giving up and putting on the outfit I started out wearing. By the time I leave the house, I'm late, overheated, and frustrated. So, I go to school, or wherever it is I am going, and immediately afterwards I go to the mall to buy that one piece of clothing I'm missing to create the 'Wonder Outfit.' Let's say this one item is a blouse. Well I go to the mall. Go to any and every store that sells women's clothing, try on everything in stock. Hours later, I leave the mall with a dress, a skirt, a vest, and two pairs of shoes. No blouse. Now, I own 58 shirts, 11 sweaters, 9 pairs of jeans, 9 pairs of shorts, 6 pairs of slacks, 16 dresses, 20 skirts, 3 blazers, 6 vests, 4 jackets, 2 heavy coats, and 25 pairs of shoes. I still don't look like Linda Hamilton.

Terry: It's gotten to the stage where I feel I have to do something about your weight since you still aren't at your goal. If you haven't lost weight when we weigh you next week I'll see that you lose the weight. How would you like to run 30 minutes—a hard run, now—while everyone lifts weights? I know, you can run up and down the levy. You'll see, I'll make you a better athlete yet.

[Everyone "vogues" on, takes places scattered around the stage. Harper takes center stage.]

Harper: I don my costume, a thickly woven tapestry of fantasy and frustration. The illusion I create weighs heavily on my mind. The liquid masks I wear are my tenuous vitality, blanketed both by hopes and despair. There, the stage is set. Places everyone. We, the actors, take long great drafts of our motivation. And then, the inevitable rise of the curtains. We play our parts well. They are too familiar to us. The motions, the words almost mechanic, but the automation is veiled by the feelings we genuinely Fake. My mind wanders. I call it back just in time for the Grand Finale. Sometimes, there is an encore. Always, there is a curtain call. The house lights rise. I shiver in the exposing glare. There are conflicting feelings of sadness and relief. Tomorrow there will be a new leading man.
[As Harper finishes, Theresa and Terry exit, Donna, Kathy, Harper and Lara take their places for scene 4.]

Harper to TABLE ONE: Hi! How are ya’ll doing. Can I get you something to drink?

Kathy: A diet coke

Lara: I’d just like some water, please.

Donna: A diet coke, please. [Harper leaves; discussion continues]

Lara: I think I am just going to get the grilled tuna and a side order of steamed vegetables. What are you going to get?

Kathy: I couldn’t holdout. My roommate made a vat full of spaghetti and I ate it.

Lara: Well, Donna, what are you going to get? I’m going to look like a big fat pig if I’m the only one ordering.

Donna: [Agonizing] Well, I don’t know. I think I am just going to get a tossed salad and a small order of hush puppies, because I had a huge bowl of cornflakes today, and I’m not that hungry.

Kathy: If I only had a bowl of cereal, I’d be starving.

Lara: I just don’t want to be the only one with food.

[Terry enters and seats herself. Harper brings drinks and takes order at Table One; Theresa enters, crosses to Terry]

Harper: Are ya’ll ready to order?

Kathy: I’m not hungry.

Lara: I’d like the grilled tuna, no butter or mayonnaise and a side order of vegetables with no butter.

Donna: I’d like a tossed salad with honey mustard dressing on the side and an order of hush puppies.

[TABLE TWO]

Terry: I haven’t seen you in a while. Been busy?
Theresa: Oh, a little, but I am finally getting caught up after exams. How about you?

Terry: Fine, I guess. My roommates and I cooked tonight; it's the first time we have done any relaxing together in a while.

Theresa: Tell me about it. I had three midterms and two papers due within three days of each other. Plus, Murphy called me in to work.

[Harper crosses to Table Two]

Harper: Hi! How are you doing this evening? What can I get you to drink?

Terry: I'd like a glass of water.

Theresa: I'd like a diet coke. Hey, could you just bring a pitcher? [Harper leaves]

Terry: What are you going to get?

Theresa: Um... I don't know. I wonder.... What looks good. I'm starving.

Terry: Well, the cheese fries are good. Fried mushrooms are good. Salads are good. Sandwiches are good. Everything is really good—it depends upon what you are in the mood for.

Theresa: I'm really hungry. [Harper crosses to take order.]

Harper: Are you ready?

Theresa: I think I will have the soup and salad with honey mustard dressing—does it have a lot of pepper?

Harper: The dressing? No its not spicy at all.

Theresa: OK, then I want that and on the side. And I want the larger soup with plain saltines--none of those buttery wafers. And I want cheesefries with gravy--also on the side. A turkey sandwich with no mayonnaise but creole mustard.

Harper: Um, okay. And what can I get for you?

Terry: You know those garlic bread sticks that come with soup? Is it possible to get one of those?

Harper: Sure.
Terry: Well, how much would that be?

Harper: About fifty cents?

Terry: Great. I'll have an order of those.

Theresa: Are the boiled shrimp still on special?

Harper: They sure are; it's $2.50 for six jumbo shrimp.

Theresa: Well, bring that too.

Harper: [Repeats order] OK, that'll be a soup and salad with honey mustard dressing on the side with saltines. Cheese fries with gravy on the side, a turkey sandwich hold the mayo, add creole mustard, and an order of boiled shrimp. And for you, a side of garlic bread.

Terry: Could you put extra garlic on that bread.

Harper: Sure. Now what would you like me to bring first?

Theresa: Oh, why don't you bring it all at once.

[Harper agrees and leaves]

Harper: [Repeats order again backstage, this time letting us hear what she think of these two.

[TABLE ONE]
[Harper brings food to Table One; as conversation develops, Donna begins to drop food.]

Lara: So what are you doing this weekend?

Kathy: I have two freakin' midterms on Monday, so I have to study all weekend.

Donna: I have a modeling job this weekend, and you should see the clothes I have to fit into.

Kathy: Like that will really be a problem for you.

Donna: [quickly changing subject] Well what are you doing this weekend?

[Harper brings food to Table Two]
Lara: My boyfriend is taking me out to eat; then, we are going to see the Stones. This is a lot of food; let me slide some of this over in front of you, Kathy. I don't want anyone thinking I'm a pig.

Kathy: Well I don't care. Just shove it over here in front of me.

Lara: Hey, there's Kelly. I'll be back in a second. [As she leaves, Kathy and Donna "discuss" Kelly. Terry crosses to get a hush puppy.]

Terry: Hey, would you mind if I taste one of your hush puppies?

Donna: Sure, take as much as you want.

Terry: Thanks. Hey, these are really good. Cheers. [Terry takes food and crosses back to her table.]

Kathy: I can't believe you let that girl have your food.

Donna: I don't mind; I still have a lot of food.

TABLE TWO
Theresa: Would you like some cheese fries?

Terry: Sure [as she grabs a few and eats them].

Theresa: [correcting] No. you need to put them in the gravy first. Watch. Dip and spin and eat.

Terry: Are you sure about that?

Theresa: That's how everyone eats cheese fries--its the only way.

Terry: Okay, I'm game [as she gets another].

Theresa: Have you ever had the shrimp here?

Terry: No but I like fish.

Theresa: Well try one.

Terry: What's all that stuff?

Theresa: First you peel it. Then you have to take the vein out.
This part is kinda messy. Some people don't; they just eat them, but....[makes a face]. Then you mix some of this horseradish with this ketchup. And dip it in the sauce. We need some crackers.

Terry: Hey could she get some crackers?

[Harper brings crackers]

Theresa: Oh, could I get another salad? I ordered my dressing on the side. [The lesson continues] So, you put them on a cracker and chow down.

Terry: That looks great. Messy though. [Looks around.] I have to go to the restroom. I'll be back.

[Terry crosses to TABLE ONE to ask for more food]

Donna: Did you have a good time at The Chimes the other night?

Kathy: I guess. Everything seemed kinda dead for a Thursday night, though. Were you there when Sheila bumped into that waitress who was balancing seven beers. . . .

Terry: Hey again. You know I couldn't help but notice that you have more food on your plate. Do you think I could have another carrot?

Donna: Sure, would you like a hush puppy?

Terry: Thanks, do you want the dip?

Donna: No, no. Why don't you take it.

Terry: You guys are great.

[Terry leaves and Table One keeps focus and Kathy and Donna talk about Terry]

Kathy: What is up with that girl?

Donna: I don't know......she is the strangest thing I have ever seen.

Kathy: She was in one of my classes, and I don't remember thinking she was weird. But FREAK 'O NATURE!!

(TABLE TWO)

Theresa: This is great. Where did you get that hush puppy?
Terry: From that table over there. They were just sitting there going to waste. I hate to see people waste good food, don't you?

Theresa: Why didn't you order more food?

Terry: I'm really not hungry, and I had a big lunch and another snack before I came. Besides, they would just throw it away.

Theresa: Well, do you want some of my turkey sandwich?

Terry: No, but are you going to eat your pickle?

Theresa: Sure. Here. This is so good. But I feel like I have been eating so much since these exams started. I am definitely going on a diet tomorrow.

[During this scene, Donna excuses herself. Harper enters the stage area to address the audience.]

Harper: When you are a waitress, you really start to notice how weird people are about their food. Some people are so anal. They sit up straight with their hands in their laps. They don't want any of their food to touch. They eat their food in little bites one at a time and when they are done, they clean off their whole table and pile everything on their plates. Then sometimes, you get people who are total slobs. They lean across the table and shovel food into their mouths while they are talking. They'll even smoke while they are eating. Those kinds of people are usually easier to deal with while they're here, but they are hell to clean up after. I remember one night these people were in here and they had this guy with them who would eat almost anything. And to prove it to me, they put all of their leftover food onto one plate and mixed it all up. Then they emptied their ashtray onto it, and he ate it. It was truly the most disgusting thing I have ever seen. They left a big tip, though.

[On last line, Lara returns. She notices the food on the floor.]

Lara: What is that? Where did Donna go? What the hell is this?

Kathy: She's in the bathroom. What are you talking about?

Lara: This crap under her chair? This is food. It's food wrapped up in napkins.

Kathy: Gross...what is that?

Lara: It's pieces of lettuce and hush puppies. That's what Donna was eating.
Kathy: What are you saying? That she has been shoving her food under her chair. Get real. It could have been there before we sat down. Like Donna would do that.

Lara: HELLO!!! She did say that she had to fit in those clothes this weekend. It's hush puppies and salad—that's what she was eating. She's probably in the bathroom throwing up.

Kathy: So, what are you saying?

Lara: I think she has a problem and I think we need to confront her.

(TABLE TWO)

Theresa: I am so stuffed, but I would really like dessert before I start my diet tomorrow.

Terry: That sounds good. What are you thinking about ordering?

Theresa: Either the brownie, the cheesecake, or the sweet potato pie.

[Harper returns.]

Theresa: I was wondering. Could I get the brownie fudge sundae to go. But, of course, without the ice cream, but with whipped cream—lots of whipped cream.

Terry: And could you bring the check.


[As Harper gives the bill and brings the dessert, Terry and Theresa leave. TABLE ONE.]

Kathy: Well, I'm still not convinced she has a problem.

Lara: She's only had a bowl of cereal today. Now, she just orders hush puppies and salad, and they end up on the floor. She's always trying to fit in clothes for some shoot. Come on you read about this stuff all the time.

Kathy: Yeah, but we don't know anyone like that.

Lara: Oh yeah. How do you explain that.

Kathy: Wait. Here she comes.
[As Terry enters stage left, other begin to leave. Terry crosses stage right walking fast, wiggling hips.]

Terry: Hi, Can't stop, gotta go!

[Donna moves to the center and begins to remove her makeup for scene five. When makeup is removed, she brushes out her hair, then removes her ball gown. Underneath she wears a leotard with food pictures and labels on it. She puts on her crown, and does a runway walk.]

Donna [singing]: Here I am, Miss America. Here I am, our ideal. I am such a beautiful lady, because I am, Miss America.

[Donna exits. Lara enters on line with her narrative to start scene 6.]

Lara: You may be looking at me thinking, "boy is she fat." Why shouldn't you be saying that--last week my boyfriend called me "Thunder Thighs." You're right. I do have a weight problem. Yesterday someone told me I looked great, but I know they only said that to be nice. So I went to get help. I thought my life would be over if I didn't. I was overweight to the point I was willing to starve, so I went to the Baton Rouge Weight Loss Clinic.

Theresa [enters on line]: I was so in love. I thought we had the perfect relationship. We had dated for three years, and we were almost inseparable. Then my little paradise started to change.

Donna [enters on line]: I love the feeling I get when I come in here. It's so quiet and peaceful. This is a great place to eat, and no one has found me yet. If someone comes in, I sit Indian-style so they won't see me. I just don't like to eat in public. If I get lucky, I can find time to be by myself and eat. If I'm not lucky, I have to come all the way over here, just so I can eat. No one, except one friend, knows I do that. Just yesterday he stopped me, laughed, and said, "Hey, you've been eating in the bathroom again, haven't you?"

Theresa: I couldn't really figure out what was going wrong, but I got so frustrated that I began using food as comfort. The more we fought, the more pizza I ordered. I didn't even notice that I had gained weight. But he did.

Lara: Right when I walked in I saw a room full of really overweight people who weighed 200-300 lbs. I mean I can relate to that. So, I got in line to get my pills to lose weight. When I saw these women, I didn't think they would give me pills, because most people can't see how fat I am. I thought that the doctor would turn me away. I felt everyone staring at me, so I told them--including the nurse--that I was there for bulimia just so I could see the doctor.
Donna: At least in here my family can’t make comments. They always make comments. For instance, every time someone in my family has a birthday, we get a birthday cake and candles, and we celebrate. It’s a tradition. My family usually ends up pushing the cake in front of me and saying, “We know you’re really the only one who really wants and likes cake, so you can have the whole thing.” It wasn’t even my birthday. Why did they buy the cake, if they don’t want it? Just because it’s someone’s birthday doesn’t mean you have to have a cake, does it? I think they just like to see me eat the whole thing.

Lara: The only person I confessed the true reason for my visit was the doctor. People were looking at me in disgust, saying, "I can only hope for a body like that. I could floss my teeth with those arms." How could they say that to me? I was so embarrassed, but I was determined to get the diet pills I came for. As my appointment drew closer, I got even more nervous. What if I didn’t get those pills? But, as it turned out, I had no trouble at all, and I was out of there in less than ten minutes. The doctor looked me over and gave me the pills—and I was on my way.

Theresa: Things just seemed to get worse. But I still loved him so much that I would do anything to save the relationship. He told me that if I wanted things to work out, I had to lose 10 lbs. I thought, "This is an easy solution." But instead of becoming the solution, it became a problem. I thought I was fat. I became extremely depressed and frustrated. The more I dieted, the more I hated myself, which led me to binging and weight gain instead of the loss I so desperately wanted. He told me I disgusted him because I was fat.

Donna: My family, really, is the only group of people I eat around. Or if my boyfriend takes me out. He would think it weird if I don’t eat, so I always order and try to eat as much as I can. But other than that, I don’t eat in front of people. If I’m with my friends and I can’t sneak away, I’ll pop a piece of hard candy in my mouth and suck on it until it disappears; I never chew it. I like to savor the flavor. But usually I can sneak over here to the Ag building and come into this bathroom stall and eat the lunch I hid in my purse.

Lara: For the next week I was buzzing all over the place. I had so much energy that I needed hardly any sleep. In fact, I couldn’t have slept if I tried. I was so wired.... But I lost ten pounds that week.

Theresa: We never did work things out. I couldn’t lose enough weight to make him happy. It was a horrible cycle of despair. I’d make myself sick with dieting, just to gain more weight back. I eventually got over him and realized why I couldn’t lose the weight he expected me to lose. I came to understand I had to lose weight for myself, instead of for a boyfriend. I had to love myself.
Donna: Lately, I even eat in the bathroom at home. Even if my roommate is not home, I lock myself in the bathroom, sit on the toilet Indian-style, and eat. Last night, I went home and my family had finished eating. So, I grabbed a gallon of ice cream from the freezer and started eating. They asked me if I wanted a bowl. I said, "No, what do I need a bowl for?" I mean, I was going to eat the whole thing anyway, so a bowl would be a waste of clean dishes. I took it to the bathroom so no one could watch me eat the whole thing.

Terry [rushing across stage]: Hey, Love to stop but I'm running. Talk to you later?

[Lights fade. Lara, Harper, Terry, and Donna takes places for scene 7. Lara holds cantaloupe, Terry holds buns, and Harper holds a container of cottage cheese. As lights go up, Kathy and Theresa enter as shoppers.]

Theresa: Did you see "The Light" yesterday?

Kathy: I sure did. Can you believe that Alan Spaulding?

Theresa: You know. And he's gonna get Alexandra. She done took his job away, and his money.

Kathy: She better watch out--they way she turned out Alan Michael...

Theresa: She deserves it.

Kathy: Damn...Look at those buns. So many different kinds--flat and round and long, and twisted.

Theresa: Don't they look good? But I like the hard kind so much better than the soft. Gives you something to sink your teeth into.

Kathy: Yeah, and not so mushy when you give them a tight squeeze.

Theresa: But you know, there's really nothing better than hot buns. All nice and steamy, with the butter just melting all over top and down through the creases.

Kathy: You don't have to tell me, girl.

Theresa: You know who's really hot? Dylan.

Kathy: Oh, yeah. If I was Bridget, I'd tell my little construction worker that I had something he could work on.
Theresa: Oooh. Like these melons. I can’t think of a man who doesn’t love them—especially when they are firm.

Kathy: My husband really, really, I mean, really, likes melons—especially when they are firm. You know, they are an essential ingredient of every woman’s diet. You can’t really survive without them.

Theresa: Did you see that love survival last week as Vanessa and Bridgett’s brother were doing the dance of love?

Kathy: She has it all. I want to be just like her. She shapes her man exactly how she wants him by getting him young.

Theresa: Do you think those green beans look okay? They look pretty healthy, don’t you think.

Kathy: Well, they are long and thin; they are almost too skinny.

Theresa: Maybe, but I don’t like them when they are plump, with all that bean inside of them. They just don’t snap as easily.

Kathy: They are probably okay, but you never know how they are by looking sometimes.

Theresa: That’s true, but there’s nothing to them; you can eat as many as you want and not get fat.

Kathy: Give me two bags full.

Theresa: I do know that I’m all out of milk. Last night I went to give Jody a snack and the carton was all dried up. Oohh—look at that cottage cheese.

Kathy: I can’t believe they put that stuff out for us to see. So unappealing.

Theresa: I agree. Disgusting and lumpy and runny. Besides, there’s nothing much you can do with it. You can’t cook, so it just sits at my house doing nothing.

Kathy: Don’t you wonder how they make that stuff. Do they just let milk get old and sour until it forms big lumps?

Theresa: Now why would I know something like that?
Kathy: After that sight, let's get outta here. [Looks at watch.] We had better hurry. Guiding Light is on in 15 minutes and today, Vanessa plans to tell . . . [They talk as they exit].

[Lights dim for scene 8; Lara begins to set another table with extreme precision. She always moves in the same circular motion around the table and returns to the sideboard for the next item.
Bowls
Spoons
Napkins
Small plates
Box of Lucky Charms® and milk
Bowl of grits
She sits down, puts her napkin in her lap, pours cereal into her bowl and pours milk. She takes her spoon, then hesitates, puts it down, and buries her face in the bowl. She drinks from the carton of milk, which gushes down her face. Then, she scoops the grits in her hand and eats while chewing the cereal. Once she is finished, she wipes her mouth with the napkin.]

[Scene 9: Terry enters from stage left with sacks of groceries. She begins to unpack them; all the time she watches the time]

Terry: It's always go-go-go, busy-busy-busy, no time to rest or play. I've gotta go here, go there, go everywhere. No time, no time. Have you ever had a day where you are so busy you can’t sit down? Well, everyday is like that for me. I mean, look at my hair....I'm wearing a cap because I didn’t have time to take a shower. Food...the dilemma...the time...the choice...the pressure. I just can't cope. (she looks at the microwave meal) This takes five minutes. Too long. Ooops, look at the time, can’t eat gotta go.

Scene 10
[Kathy enters to tell cheesefry story; others enter and assume statue position; spotlight on Kathy: I owe my life to the F.B.I. and air-popped popcorn. See those cheesefries in front of me? Five months ago I wouldn’t have been able to resist them. It’s not a problem for me any more. Really. They weren’t even a problem for me until I came to college. The devil, himself, must have put The Chimes so close to L.S.U. I started out eating cheesefries with my friends, maybe once a week. By the end of my freshman year, I was eating cheesefries three or four times a week. I started skipping class to eat cheesefries. I would even eat cheesefries alone. It wasn’t just cheesefries from The Chimes. It was just cheesefries. I quit smoking and drinking so I could afford cheesefries. I eventually became a two-order a day cheesefry eater. I applied for one of those student Discover cards just to charge cheese fries. Thank God I found the F.B.I.--Fat Bottoms Inc. The F.B.I. is a great organization; they saved me from a life of
eternal damnation. We're just like a family. Whenever we see another member eating something illegal, we march up and put a stop to it. They introduced me to air-popped popcorn with imitation cheese sprinkles, and it's really good. Really. Now, when the girls get together to talk about guys, we gotta have popcorn. When we go to the movies, I'm getting popcorn. When we all layout in the sun, I'm bringing the popcorn. So now I am twenty-two years old, $5,000 in debt, and seven semesters away from graduation. But I am on the road to recovery, and by the time I graduate, my seven-year credit history will be up. So things are looking better. Today, I hardly ever think about them. And, I'm okay with that.

[As Kathy finishes, lights up and Donna starts her story. Other fall into place so that we have a chorus of F.B.I. members. Donna—Blue Bell® ice cream; Theresa—chocolate; Harper—Taco Bell; Lara—cheesefries; Terry—fried chicken.

Lights fade.]

[Lights up, and once again performers to the "Oh, Bob/Tummy Tuck. Theresa enters in a slouch. On third count, Lara enter. On fifth, both straighten as Theresa says hello to Bob. Sequence continues: Harper, Terry, Donna, and Kathy. This time, though, Terry breaks off to initiate Forum Theatre discussion. Something along the lines: "Hey, you know I really don't like the way we left that restaurant. Let's see if we can't come up with something better"; or, "we didn't know how to end that sketch; can you give us some possible solutions. When we last met our players they were .... Then, she begins to "direct/sculpt" other performers based on audience suggestions.]

[From this point, we can launch discussion of any of the other images as well. When discussion seems exhausted, Terry organizes the curtain call.]
VITA

Leigh Anne Howard is a native of Kentucky. She and her family moved from Owensboro to Louisville to Bardstown, where she graduated from Nelson County Senior High School. In the fall, she entered Centre College of Kentucky. After graduation, she joined the staff at the Kentucky Center for the Arts Magazine in Louisville, and a year later she was named managing editor for the publication. Her responsibilities included overseeing the production of nine monthly arts magazine; supervising in-house and freelance writers, photographers, and artists; coordinating sales brochures for the advertising department; and consulting on special communication projects. After four years, she resigned from her position to enter the M.A. program at Western Kentucky University. She received her degree in Communication in 1991. In the fall of 1991, she entered the doctoral program in Speech Communication at Louisiana State University. In addition to her primary focus in performance studies, she also studied gender theory, cultural studies, rhetorical theory, and mass communications. Several of her papers have received awards at conferences and have been published in Theatre Insight and American Behavioral Scientist. She began a tenure-track position as assistant professor of communication in the College of Arts and Sciences at Spalding University in Louisville, Kentucky in August 1995.
DOCTORAL EXAMINATION AND DISSERTATION REPORT

Candidate: Leigh Anne Howard

Major Field: Speech Communication

Title of Dissertation: Boal and Theatre of the Oppressed: A Performance-Centered Inquiry of Eating and Body Image

Approved: 

Major Professor and Chairman

Dean of the Graduate School

EXAMINING COMMITTEE:

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Date of Examination: August 2, 1995