2000


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THE CHILDREN OF MOLEMO: AN ANALYSIS OF JOHNNY SIMONS' PERFORMANCE GENEALOGY AND ICONOGRAPHY AT THE HIP POCKET THEATRE

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 Theatre

by

Tony Earnest Medlin

B.F.A., East Carolina University, 1975
M.F.A., Trinity University, 1982

August 2000
DEDICATION

I dedicate this work and my theatrical accomplishments during the last twenty years to Diane and Johnny Simons. Thanks are also due to my wife, Community Coffee, as well as state and federally funded educational programs. Their assistance meant that I am not unloading air conditioners from a box car today. I thank them all.

Besides the Simons, I received guidance from other extraordinary mentors which include Paul Baker, Irene Corey, Les Wade, Bill Harbin, Gresdna Doty, Bill Sosa, Ricky Adams, Terry Rich, Don Biehn, Jim Thomas, and Don Lawler.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to acknowledge the contributions of my advisor, Femi Euba, and the esteemed committee involved in the shaping of this document. I appreciate David Madden's assistance in structuring the form and Les Wade for his guidance and mentor-ship. Bill Harbin contributed continuous support and Lynn Keisker was a valued friend during the process.

This is also an apology for robbing the Hip Pocket of its vitality and spirit by codifying it into unfeeling academic prose. These words are little more than bone fragments and an affront to the wild energies that haunt the dale where the Hip Pocket stands. This text must stand on its own since it can not recreate the magic of a Simons' performance and begin a new mythos, sung into being by a new mythmaker. Critical appreciation of the Simons is possible only by observing where their imaginary universe intersects with the myths of contemporary criticism. Through this process, Johnny and Diane dealt gracefully with my errors and prying into their psyche.

There are innumerable poseurs in the theatre and true genius is rare. Johnny Simons designs, builds, directs the production, writes music and lyrics, choreographs, and dares to take full responsibility. It is daunting to compare personal artistic successes with the Simons' achievements and surely as difficult for them to tolerate followers that seem incapable of finding their own means of creative expression. I hope they found the time we spent together as valuable as I do. More than any other artists, they profoundly affected my artistic identity.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

**DEDICATION** .......................................................................................................................... ii

**ACKNOWLEDGMENTS** ........................................................................................................... iii

**ABSTRACT** ............................................................................................................................ vi

I. **MOLEMO, KING OF THE SEWER RATS: JOHNNY SIMONS' AUTO-CHTHONIC REINCARNATION IN AN ALTERNATIVE UNIVERSE** .....................................1

II. **RECREATING THE LAKE WORTH MONSTER** ......22

III. **THE BODY AS TEXT: THE CORPOREAL DIALECTICS OF THE LYRIC GROTESQUE IN JOHNNY SIMONS' PERFORMANCE DISPLAY** ......37

IV. **THE TEXAS RENAISSANCE AND PAUL BAKER'S "INTEGRATION OF ABILITIES"** .....................76

V. **THE COMMEDIC ICONS IN SIMONS' SECONDARY THEATRICAL REALITY** .....................98

VI. **"I SING THE BODY DIALECTIC:" INVERSION AND SATIRE IN SIMONS' MULTI-VOICED, PERFORMANCE DISPLAYS** .......................................126

VII. **CONCLUSION: THE CHILDREN OF MOLEMO** ....172

**BIBLIOGRAPHY** .................................................................................................................... 178

**APPENDIX**

A: **A SELECT PRODUCTION HISTORY OF THE HIP POCKET THEATRE** ..........................................................192

B: **RESUME FOR JOHN TOWNES SIMONS, JR. (1995)** ............199

C: **DERIVATION OF THE ARCHETYPAL FORM OF ARLECCHINO** .........................................................205

D: **DERIVATION OF THE ARCHETYPAL FORM OF PANTALONE** .................................................................206

iv
E: DERIVATION OF THE ARCHETYPAL FORM OF CAPITANO.........................207

F: DERIVATION OF THE ARCHETYPAL FORM OF DOTTORE.................................208

VITA.................................................................................................................209
ABSTRACT

Johnny Simons is a *Commedia Dell'Arte* master who brought contemporary commedic movement theatre to the American Southwest and deserves academic attention. Simons and his collaborators, Diane Simons and Doug Balentine, founded the Hip Pocket Theatre to explore original theatre that reflected their chthonic identity. Simons is an *auteur*, serving as playwright, lyricist, director, choreographer, designer, and technical director for his productions. His works synthesize classical forms with the archetypal associations of his childhood.

This study examines Simons' pedagogical approach to his "lyric grotesque" genre of movement theatre. A documented recreation of Simons' most definitive work, the folk/rock operatic-ballet, *The Lake Worth Monster*, provides access to a Hip Pocket Theatre experience. Paul Baker's "Integration of Abilities" philosophy serves as a model for the examination of Simons' creative vision. Baker analyzes theatrical tension through the vocabulary of space, silhouette, rhythm, texture, sound/silence, and line.

This study provides comparisons between the genealogy of Simons native characters and the iconic models from the *Commedia*, the Arlecchino, the Pantalone, the Capitano, and the Dottore. It also discusses the contributions of Simons' mentors, David Preston, Walther Volbach, Jacques Lecoq, and Bill Garber, to his definitions of the Commedic character forms.

The work briefly discusses theoretical and philosophical perspectives as applied to Simons' commedic performance displays and the Hip Pocket Theatre. The examined viewpoints include the mythic, corporeal dialectics, "inversion," Christianity, alternative religion, the "Other," "liminality," Foucault's "episteme," "Chaos" theory, and secondary realities.
I. MOLEMO, KING OF THE SEWER RATS: JOHNNY SIMONS' AUTO-CHTHONIC REINCARNATION IN AN ALTERNATIVE UNIVERSE

Visitors pass the Grace Baptist Church, turn right off Las Vegas Trail at the Oak Acres Barbeque, and travel down a dusty road that ends a "stone's throw" from Lake Worth to reach the canopy of oak trees that shelters The Hip Pocket Theatre, a theatre handbuilt by founders Johnny Simons, Diane Simons, and Doug Balentine.

Before performances, dogs and children play outside and Texas barbeque scents the air. The regular, beer-happy crowd turns silent when the band cranks up and meticulously ragged actors take the stage to personify Simons' lyrics, accompanied by cicadas, crickets, and the unpredictable Texas weather. Johnny Simons uses Commedia Dell'Arte, pantomime, and dance to bring life to his creative vision.

Perry Stewart wrote in the Star-Telegram that Johnny Simons' production of Lake of the Apes was "a trip filled with the kind of raw, kinetic simian choreography that is a signature of Johnny Simons."1 Johnny Simons manifests versions of himself in dozens of wild, self-created, Commedia-derived characters in plays such as Tarzan of the Oaks, Tarzan of the Apes, Old Tarzan, Molemo, The Wildman of Navidad, The Creature, The Lake Worth Monster, Billy the Kid, and Old Coots Read Genesis.2

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2Tarzan of the Oaks (Hip Pocket Video archives 1979).
After twenty-five years of continuous production, the Hip Pocket's distinctive vision of the *Commedia Dell'Arte* remains a vibrant force in the Fort Worth community. The characters of their rural *Commedia* productions at the Hip Pocket Theatre reiterate ancestral European archetypes, yet remain connected to their native soil. Samuel Hudson of the Fort Worth Star-Telegram describes the physical aspect of the theatre:

"Scene: The Hip Pocket's amphitheater, 13.7 miles west of downtown Fort Worth. Usually described as undescrivable, this structure is built largely of used lumber (main sources: driftwood from Lake Worth and old fences torn down by Allied Fence) and does resemble a one-fourth scale model of a Roman amphitheater--had same been run over by a giant lawnmower, rained on for years, polychromed here and there with house paints and rigged out with semi-modern lighting and sound equipment. . . ."³

John (Johnny) Townes Simons, Jr., born August 3, 1939, is a working-class *Commedia* master, whose populist performances become cow pasture "joy explosions" in the Texas scrub-country. The exuberant grotesqueries of *Commedia*’s essential characters, the Arlecchino, Pantalone, Capitano, and Dottore, grace every Hip Pocket Theatre production staged. The forms reappear in all his works, from the first production of Leon Katz’s update of Goldoni's *The Three Cuckolds*, to the world premier of Ariel Dorfman's *Widows*. Dan Hulbert described a typical "Simonized" commedic

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³Samuel Hudson, Hip Pocket Theatre promotional material (In-house publishing).
performance as "double entendre over double entendre," especially when applied to their world premiere of Bernini's *The Impresario*:

"... At bottom, a human Punch-and-Judy, an excuse for cleavage oglings, brickbat-smackings, buttock bootings and pelvis-pumpings. Gorgeous costumery provides a feast for the eyes. Cow bells simulate bonks on the head. Drums simulate bumps on the rump. And some other amazing percussive instrument faithfully recreates the music of flatulence."

Simons' grotesque doppelgänger and nemesis, "Molemo," led him to adopt the traditional characters of the *Commedia* as personalized creations. Simons' modeled Molemo after the archetypal trickster, Arlecchino. Molemo is the self-created god and puppetmaster that rules the universe of his commedic, "secondary reality." Simons often incites his actors during warm-ups by prancing about in his commedic alter-ego of "Molemo, King of the

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6*Molemo* is one of many plays inspired by Johnny's family. In this installment, the family is driving near Grandpa's farm when they nearly hit a mysterious human-like shape in the road. Soldiers stop the family and stopped question them to see if they saw anything unusual. The play relates to a Fort Worth "urban myth" that the government purportedly kept alien bodies at nearby Carswell Air Force Base. The omnipresent jets above the lake appear in other works such as *The Lake Worth Monster* when "Thunderbirds scream across the sky." Later in *Molemo*, the family dog, played by Ellen Mahoney, drags an alien carcass home causing complications for the family.

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sewer rats," and intoning maliciously in falsetto, "here kitty, kitty, kitty!"  

Simons' uses the efficient and functional commedic traditions to communicate his personal visions of these forms to his ensemble, creating hundreds of Commedia-inspired works at the Hip Pocket Theatre. Often he manifests these traditional characters as a spoken or sung text accompanied by pantomime. This dissertation examines the Johnny Simons' contributions toward the rebirth of Commedia in the American Southwest.

In the eighties, despite the Hip Pocket Theatre's remote location, Simons garnered positive reviews from major American papers and received the admiration of influential, commercial theatre critics such as Jeremy Gerard, Dan Hulbert, and Ben Krywosz (a representative from the National Endowment for the Arts, who attended the theatre's restaging of The Lake Worth Monster in 1989 and was responsible for NEA funding for the theatre). Lou Hancock, a veteran stage, screen, and television actress, was a fixture at the theatre during its heyday and introduced Simons work to anyone that would listen with the simple interjection, "He's a fuckin' genius!" 

Though most academic and avant-garde critics ignored them or criticized them for their "anti-art" politics, adoring regional

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7Johnny Simons, personal conversation (artistic residency at The Hip Pocket Theatre, Summer 1989).
8Hip Pocket Theatre promotional material (personal archives) 1995.
9Lou Hancock, audience member of Raggedy Farm (June 1982).
critics adored the "barnyard bohemians."\textsuperscript{10} For the sake of brevity, this study includes a fragment of the local critics' responses to Hip Pocket productions. Diane Werts, who wrote in \textit{The Dallas Morning News} that Hip Pocket captures "the spirit of the circus as seen by a child."\textsuperscript{11} Dan Hulbert championed the theatre in \textit{The Dallas Times Herald} for years with terms like "wild and wooly," and "earthy-but-graceful."\textsuperscript{12} Perry Stewart described them in \textit{The Star-Telegram} as "absurdist, child-like, merry pranksters," and "Fellini-esque."\textsuperscript{13} Another local writer, Samuel Hudson of \textit{The Star-Telegram}, wrote "the Hip Pocket's productions are equal to the best work of any popular, avant-garde, or folkloric troupe that in 20 years of theater-going on two continents, I've ever seen anywhere."\textsuperscript{14}

Most of their reviewers seem "taken" with the Hip Pocket experience, \textit{The Dallas Observer} touted them as the region's "most tight-knit theatrical troupe," and as a restorative, "if you're looking for an antidote to the many slick and soulless entertainment emporiums the Metroplex has to offer put the Hip Pocket on your list."\textsuperscript{15} \textit{The Dallas Observer} also acknowledged the theatre in a sidenote to their "Best of the Year" listing:

"A startling thing hit me when I started to compile my listing--half of what I wanted to cite..."

\textsuperscript{10}Hip Pocket Theatre, promotional material, 1992. 
\textsuperscript{11}promotional material, 1995  
\textsuperscript{12}promotional material, 1995.  
\textsuperscript{13}promotional material, 1995.  
\textsuperscript{14}promotional material, 1992  
\textsuperscript{15}promotional material, 1995.  

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wasn't eligible. Much of the best work I saw last season took place in Fort Worth . . . At Hip Pocket, director Johnny Simons did more hard, fascinating work than anyone in the area except Dale Rose (a director at SMU).\textsuperscript{16}

Reviews during their Edinburgh visit were likewise encouraging: "two minutes and the Hip Pocket Theatre have you in their pocket, an hour and they're eating out of your hand," wrote Robert Thomson in \textit{The Edinburgh Evening News}, and Bonnie Lee of \textit{The Scotsman} admired their "anarchic charm."\textsuperscript{17} \textit{The New York Times}' Peter Applebome recorded "the theatre has built a strong regional reputation from broad farce to Italian \textit{Commedia} to darker works."\textsuperscript{18}

Negative reviews are rare; more damning than bad reviews are the reactions of individuals that "burned out" on the Hip Pocket Theatre experience. Though not a founder, James Maynard was a major contributor to the identity of the theatre. During the 1980's, he contributed as a puppeteer, actor, playwright, designer, and artist when the theatre reached its zenith of success. Now Maynard refuses to speak to any one of the theatre and practices none of his theatrical skills.

John Murphy, with a connection to the theatre of over twenty years, performed dozens of roles for the Hip Pocket. He believes the Simons "use" people and manipulate their emotions. He holds no animosity towards them and still considers the Simons as friends and

\textsuperscript{16}promotional material, 1992.  
\textsuperscript{17}promotional material, 1995.  
\textsuperscript{18}promotional material, 1995.
mentors, but has no interest in further collaborations. Mark Walker, a well-known local scenic designer and scene painter, gave up the theatre after his long-time association with the Hip. Though he occasionally works with the Hip Pocket, Doug Balentine left the theatre in the early 90's to pursue more personal visions.

Commedia Dell'Arte roughly translates into "comedians of the actor's guild" and flourished in Italy from the second half of the sixteenth to the latter part of the seventeenth century as an accessible people's theatre. Born in the marketplace, it focused on an audience that was ambulatory, noisy, illiterate, and easily distracted. The zenith of the Commedia's formal codification occurred when Italian players of the seventeenth-century refined the comic types to specifics such as costumes, postures, masks, and stage business. Though Simons does not use masks in his personal fiabes, he follows Molière by implying their presence through makeup and distorted facial expression.

Often vulgar, insipid, and yet inspired, the classic Italian Commedia consists of improvised domestic and situational comedy following a plot outline with topical frames of reference, improvisation, dialects, and vernacular language. The simple plot outlines of the scenarii keep the improvising actors in control. The masks of the actors instantly identify recognizable characters during outdoor performances or dimly lit interior stagings.

Commedia actors perform under less than ideal circumstances, competing with fellow entertainers, bellowing merchants, animals.

19 John Murphy, personal conversation (2 May 2000).
and the coarse voices of real-life Zannis in the marketplace. Engaging a mobile audience requires a physical process of character delineation that leaves little time for exposition.

Each character’s iconic nature (essential replicable behavior) radically telescopes the play’s exposition, and allows audiences to recognize immediately the character’s social station and dramatic function. Clowns and minstrels from succeeding generations used Commedia-inspired white and blackface personas (masks) to signify a character’s dramatic purpose. All comedy must deal with exposition in an efficient and lively manner, since excessive circumstantial details quickly lose an audience’s attention.

Traditional Commedia troupes typically consisted of two sets of lovers, a servant girl, a Capitano, two Zannis (servants such as Arlecchino), and two old men, the vecchi (such as Pantalone, Capitano, and Dottore). Stock, rhetorical speeches and dialogues (burla), were an essential aspect of the Italian troupes repertoire. However, when performing for a culture that did not share their language, the troupe’s relied on lazzì and the "figurative clichés" of the community to communicate essential elements of comedy and plot.

20 Zannis are the servant characters in the Commedia.
Richard Andrews defines *lazzi* as "modular," physical comedy, comparing it to Mardi Gras beads on an elastic string. The demands of the moment permit the beads to be restrung in any order, and stretched or compressed to fit the circumstance. "Figurative clichés" function as a communally shared system of denotative, gestural signs and pantomimic iconic referents describing what a subject "is" or "is not."  

An international theatrical movement is underway to rejuvenate the *lazzi* of the archetypal clown, the vestigial remnants of the commedic, "grotesque fool" in contemporary culture. Current practitioners of the *Commedia*’s constructed formlessness often describe themselves with the term "movement-theatre." Due to an interest in European style, the popularity of "Movement-theatre" surged during the last thirty years. However, the Hip Pocket Theatre and its creators, Diane Simons (1944-), Johnny Simons, and Doug Balentine (1949-), received little critical attention within academic circles for pioneering a rebirth of the *Commedia Dell' Arte* in the southwestern United States.

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24A linguistically "deep" structure of a hidden, dance language existing for each Commedic archetype, it consists of an ever-changing tableau of "figurative clichés." These poses (or signs) depend on contextualization and constant redefinition by not only the performer, but the audience as well. An exact codification of the "figurative clichés" of the medium means stagnation and death to improvisational creativity. Visual language is a fluid medium, reinvented by the actor and the audience for each performance.
Part of the difficulty in the theatre's struggle for critical acceptance is the persona of Johnny Simons. He appears to be reclusive and a throw-back to the sixties with his Texas drawl, long hair, and brogans. This superficial representation is self-created and belies his education. Simons holds, an MFA in Theatre and a BFA in Theatre/Ballet from Texas Christian University (TCU), where he trained under instructors connected both directly and indirectly with influential, European theatrical theorists and practitioners. This document shall investigate his performance genealogy and its subsequent connections with the origins of commedic, social stereotypes.

The theatre's seedy appearance projects yet another barrier to critical acceptance of the theatre. The theatre's avowed poverty is by Simons' artistic choice. The theatre is purposefully ascetic, embracing Jerzy Grotowski's notion of "poor" theatre, and Peter Brook's concept of "rough" theatre. The theatre derives its name from Johnny Simons: "I always seemed to be diggin' in my 'hip pocket' whenever something had to be paid for," and "I carry it (the theatre) around in my 'hip pocket' (indicating its portability)."25

The Hip Pocket Theatre is a non-profit organization with its own board and a charter stipulation that the Simons are the permanent artistic directors. The theatre expanded its funding beyond the founders' original "hip pockets," but Diane Simons still produces the theatrical season, and the Simons remain personally responsible for any shortfalls.

25Johnny Simons, personal interview (20 May 92).
Simons and the Hip Pocket Theatre premieres seem relegated to Lake Worth's backwaters, despite international performances, impeccable credentials, collaborations with institutions of international reputation, the numerous accolades of "big city" critics, together with twenty-five years of imaginative new works. Inspired by previous successes, The Hip Pocket made a pilgrimage to perform in London and at the Edinburgh International Festival during the summer of 1983. Outside Fort Worth, the Hip Pocket is a part of the avant-garde while in their home town they are an institution. This dissertation seeks a redress of that issue by establishing critical evidence of Simons' artistry, and by documenting his work for future researchers.

In spite of Simons' backwoods appearance and his "poor" theatre, he is comfortable in collaborating with elitist art forms. Besides performances staged at handmade theatres on Highway 80 and at Oak Acres in Fort Worth, Johnny and Diane expand the scope of the Hip Pocket to include the high-brow world of visual arts. They collaborated, not only with the Kimbell Art Museum, but also with the Duke University Museum of Fine Art to perform numerous productions accompanying related exhibits. Dan Hulbert wrote in the *Dallas Morning News* concerning their collaboration:

"No stranger bedfellows could be imagined, than the renowned and very reputable Kimbell Museum and the renowned and very disreputable Hip Pocket Theatre, two of Fort Worth's leading cultural institutions." 26

In a separate article Hulbert again reported on the theatre "invasion" of the Kimbell:

"The mad Bolsheviks known as the Hip Pocket Theatre have stormed the Winter Palace of culture known as the Kimbell Museum to stage a wonderful outrage there called The Impresario, and this war correspondent is happy to report that civilization itself may be imperiled, and that utter chaos and anarchy reign . . . The Trotsky behind this theatrical coup d'état is Johnny Simons . . . ordinarily he performs in a dilapidated wooden amphitheater on Route 820, where he presents no immediate physical threat to himself or society."\(^\text{27}\)

Bringing the Hip Pocket Theatre Company into the Kimbell Art Museum was not without difficulties. For example, during the staging of The Spanish Brabanter and The Second Shepherd's Play, livestock complicated the production process, enacted in a space never designed for live performances. The security staff, noticeably distraught over the presence of unsavory-looking characters with farm animals in the museum after closing time, unconsciously fingered their sidearms as the troupe entered for rehearsals. Perry Stewart describes the impact of the "Hip's" assault on the Kimbell, Fort Worth's exalted bastion of cultural elitism, "For museum guards, it means time to stock up on Rolaids and Valium as they contemplate what fresh assaults on serenity will accompany the Hip Pocketers' winter residency . . . What'll it be this year?

\(^{27}\)Hulbert, "Bernini's Play is a Riot of Fun," \textit{Dallas Times Herald}, F 1.
Wombats?" 28 Michael Mezzatesta spoke during a telephone interview about the inspiration that led to collaboration with Simons:

"I used to hang out at La Mama and the Ridiculous Theatre Company. When I lived in Italy, I saw some pretty interesting Commedia Dell'Arte troupes. When I came to Ft. Worth, it was a revelation to discover the artistry and energy of the Hip Pocket Theatre." 29

After becoming curator for the Duke Museum of Art, Mezzatesta arranged for Johnny and Diane to act as guest artists for joint productions between the University drama program and the museum. The success of their plays enabled Johnny and Diane to continue this partnership for long term residencies.

The personal connection of this author with the theatre spans a period of over twenty years and provides the most important contribution to this research. The greater body of research employs original sources, with supplemental material coming from published works. Other sources of information used for research include interviews, the Hip Pocket Theatre archives, private archives and videos, together with various letters and documents.

In 1979, this author was a student in Johnny Simons' Commedia classes at the Dallas Theatre Center's Professional Actor's Training Program. The association continued in later positions with the theatre as professional actor and director. Friendship with the Simons developed through these collaborations; the continuing amity serves to enhance this academic analysis with first-hand observation,


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uniquely a unique observing and recording the backgrounds, methods, and history of the Hip Pocket Theatre.

Not only a friend and business associate, Johnny Simons served as my mentor for over twenty years, providing opportunity to a simple "craftsman" to become a journeyman within the realm of dramatic "art." His training provided specific movement-techniques interrelating the disciplines of acting, mime, pantomime, stage combat, and stage movement. Participating in such a uniquely creative process was a necessary experience for framing his artistic creations within a contextual and analytic perspective.

This study documents the Simons' process of creation in a truncated form to serve as a guide for other movement-theatre practitioners interested in establishing a Commedia-based ensemble for a working-class audience. This paper also presents the Hip Pocket Theatre as a contributing element to theatre culture in the Southwestern United States. Finally, the appendix of this work presents a production history of the Hip Pocket from its early years to its current success.

The Hip Pocket Theatre achieved its greatest successes between the years of 1980 and 1990; nevertheless, it remains the most influential force in the Southwest for Commedia. Simons' impact on regional theatre is difficult to estimate, since many of their ensemble members sought out new careers as artists and artisans after leaving the nursery of the Hip Pocket theatre to participate in a more global, artistic community. Some of Simons' students included Avner the Eccentric (clown), Alan Mintz (mime), Randy Quaid (film actor), Trey Wilson (film actor), Brent Spiner (film and television actor),
Lake and Lorca Simons (theatre actors), and academics such as Danny Robbins and the author.30

To place his contributions in perspective, it is first necessary to examine the history of the Hip Pocket Theatre, Johnny Simons' most important theatrical venue. Founded, funded, and directed by Fort Worth's own Johnny and Diane Simons, and Air Force "brat," Douglas Balentine, their dedication to movement oriented theatre brought hundreds of original, *Commedia*-inspired works, scores of classical *Commedia* pieces, and modern works to the Hip Pocket's stage. During the most creative period, Johnny became the philosopher, poet, artist, scenic designer, lighting designer, and master carpenter of the troupe. In coordination with his efforts, his wife, Diane, became the costume designer, business manager, producer; occasionally, she was also the voice of reason. Douglas Balentine completed the ensemble as the necessary musical voice and composer.

The personal visions of these three founders fused tightly through years of constant collaboration. It is difficult to separate their contributions; however, this dissertation necessarily focuses on Johnny Simons as the driving force behind the Hip. It is his vision of traditional Fort Worth characters in the alternative universe of the *Commedia Dell' Arte* that gives the theatre its unique personality. It remains imperative to Simons that he maintain artistic integrity in his productions by attaching his characters to his childhood roots. Each character from his personalized commedic universe is home-grown.


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and comes from the shores of Lake Worth or "Cowtown" (his own, selective vision of Fort Worth).

During Simons' formative years in Fort Worth, Johnny made friends with the family of Flora Reeder, the well-known founder of Reeder's Theatre. The bond with the Reeder family, both personal and theatrical, continues to inspire and support the Simons family. The Hip Pocket Theatre's roots also connect with Johnny's early "pass the hat" pantomime performances in the public parks of Dallas and Houston. Simons described these years in a newsletter:

"I worked at Casa Mañana . . . off and on forever. During that lifetime I met up with Douglas, and lusted after Diane Rowand, who successfully resisted my throbbing member until years later during . . . "the Houston Chronicles." There on Saturdays and Sundays, we used to perform in a gulley at the foot of a hill somewhere in Herman Park. Stringing ropes between trees, we'd hang blue lake drapes, oh so artsy, then pantymime before stunned hip-pie, sprawled top to bottom up and down that hill. What a wonderfully crude situation that was. I've consistently attempted to retain such textures at Hip Pocket in every way possible. For me it's a unique yet simple thing, a rustic twinge that refocuses on something primitive and important within."\(^{31}\)

During Simons' first residency in Houston, he staged children's theatre and acted at the Alley Theatre while it was still in the "fan factory."\(^{32}\) A residency in New Orleans provided Simons'
with an opportunity to stage works for the Hysell Ballet. Simons returned to Houston for a second residency to teach pantomime classes at Rice University, while Diane built costumes for the Alley. During a phone interview, Johnny condensed his life before founding The Hip Pocket:

"TCU (Texas Christian University) tried to force me to graduate . . . I escaped to New York to become an actor . . . I went back to school, left again, and went to work at Casa Mañana in Fort Worth, directing and writing children's plays. I then moved to Houston where Diane was working at the Alley Theatre and I was doing mime in the park."  

Diane, Simons' wife and business manager and an artist in her own right, grew up surrounded by the theatricalism of Christianity, as well as a family with an appreciation for the dramatic arts. She is the daughter of a pastor (father) and an ordained minister (mother). Her parents participated in college theatricals and were among the charter members of the first American chapter of Alpha Phi Omega, a theatrical service fraternity. Early in her career, Diane acted, directed, designed, and stage managed. Further, non-secular drama at Fort Worth's University Christian Church involved a deep commitment of time. She moved to Houston to work with Nina Vance during the Alley Theatre's inaugural season at its downtown facility. Later she returned to Fort Worth to work at Casa Mañana, becoming friends with Johnny and his first wife. Diane and Simons

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33Johnny Simons, interview.
34Johnny Simons, interview.
35Diane Simons, interview.
married when he returned from his New Orleans' residency with the Hysell Ballet.

Johnny met his composer, Doug Balentine, while guest-directing at Casa Mañana in Fort Worth. He cast the sixteen year-old actor in a supporting role for *Huckleberry Finn*. Simons then left Fort Worth for his first residency in Houston. On his return, Johnny Simons discovered Doug performing at a local piano bar called "The Red Slipper." Johnny asked Doug to perform the role of J. Frank Norris, a "rock 'n rollin', piano-playin'" preacher in a new play, *Out Where the West Begins*. A production based on the history of Fort Worth and staged by Simons for audiences of bussed-in school children. During rehearsals for *Out Where the West Begins*, a local band was to compose music for Johnny's lyrics and accompany the action.

Johnny blocked the show according to cues to in the lyrics of the text. To illustrate the movement, he sang the lyrics to the play as demonstrated the choreography for his actors. Doug accompanied him on piano when not involved in stage action. As he sang, Douglas found that Johnny had perfect or near-perfect pitch and composed music around Johnny's phrasing and melody. When the band appeared, they presented one inappropriate song; Johnny then told the band to play Balentine's versions. Doug pitched his arrangements in the keys Johnny sang them, making simple guitar accompaniment difficult; the band quit, leaving Doug to take over as principal accompanist and composer. Johnny, thereupon invited

36An early version of *Cowtown*.
Doug to become the resident accompanist and composer, and the
"Showbiz" marriage of Simons and Balentine began.

After the success of this production, Douglas Balentine became
involved with the other founding members of The Hip Pocket
ensemble. These were: Jimmy Joe Steenbergen, Grover Coulson,
Dick Harris, Peggy (Bott) Harris, and Gary Cunningham, among
others.37

Over the course of his ten year residency with the Hip Pocket
Theatre, Balentine supported himself primarily from the
construction trades as a carpenter, roofer, and electrician. It is
Johnny whom Balentine credits with the creation of the Hip Pocket,
an artistic venture that managed to survive principally on "love." In
a telephone interview, Douglas remembered Johnny as the most
important influence on his life and discussed their collaborative
relationship:

"I was just a technician and helped an intelligent,
innately gifted musician realize his remarkable ideas.
His work is noble and important because it is dedicated
to working through the past and vividly exposing his
soul. He has a willingness to stand naked before the
world and say, "Here are my faults and my point of
view."38

In 1975, the trio began a hectic series of performances in an
old motel courtyard on Highway 80 West, an establishment
converted by Tom and Shirley Grissom into a craft center, the
Grisom and Friends Artists Compound. In its courtyard was
"George's Back Door," a tiny restaurant where the Hip Pocket was

37Doug Balentine, personal interview (20 Oct. 99, 2:30 p.m.).
38Balentine, interview.
"formally" born with a production of *The Three Cuckolds*, performed in the audience since there was no room for a stage.\footnote{Balentine, interview.} On an audio tape entitled *Molemo*, Simons' description of the Hip Pocket Theatre's birth sounds like a poetic mystery:

"Hip Pocket was born crazy, wide-eyed, and green. Squalling and kicking from the womb of one persistent mama and two lost papas and immediately adored by numerous aunts and uncles, papaws and grannies, who rallied around the idea of such audacious birthing for reasons beyond my understanding. All needing, somehow, to feel part of that wiggle."\footnote{Molemo, audio cassette (personal archives 1998)}

Finding the old motel too constricting, the trio discovered the cow pasture behind Oak Acres Barbeque and built the Oak Acres Outdoor Amphitheatre on its four acre compound. Twenty-five years later, the theatre is still producing *Commedia*-inspired works. Johnny Simons gave another poetic description of the theatre's inception on the same audio tape:

"Whenever I'm asked how it all started I say this:

**Jimmy's Chili**

Take several brazen huzzies,  
Mix with some down and out road dogs,  
Add a dash of childlike wonder.  
Stir, but not too long, leave the lumps, texture is important.  
Point them towards a center, focus is the key.  
Blend in equal amounts of tenderness, roughness, beer, faith, and a distant longing for something intangible.  
Strain out anyarty pretension that rises to the top.

39Balentine, interview.  
40*Molemo*, audio cassette (personal archives 1998)
Pour this mess onto a bare wood stage and let it run free. If it don't scorch the boards, it ain't right."\textsuperscript{41}

Johnny Simons' philosophy of movement and his pedagogy of instruction serve as valuable tools to the theorist, scholar, and practitioner. However, without academic recognition, his art is in danger of being forgotten as a series of minor events in a remote location. This dissertation's objective is to document the reproducible process that Simons uses to construct his "western" \textit{Commedia}, and to distill a philosophy of movement from his creative vision. This author's direct participation in numerous projects with the Simons allows for an in-depth view of their process of theatrical creation.

\textsuperscript{41}Molemo, audio cassette.
II. RECREATING THE LAKE WORTH MONSTER

For the purposes of this study, it is important to recreate the experience of a "Simonesque" performance and establish the "texture" of the Hip Pocket experience that Simons finds essential. Of the hundreds of performances staged by Simons, his operatic folk-rock ballet, *The Lake Worth Monster*, may be its most exemplary product and self-defining of Simons' career. Organizers of the Edinburgh Festival invited the Hip Pocket to perform after viewing a videotape of the play and found parallels with their own *Loch Ness* myth. The Hip Pocket was the first Texas theatre to receive this honor.

According to local legend, a half-man, half-goat *el chupacabra*, a Texas version of "Bigfoot," roams the shores of Lake Worth, thus providing inspiration for the story. Simons wrote the Jungian fantasy to fulfill his MFA playwriting and directing project for TCU. The play's most important function was as a personal "vision quest" for Simons. His iconic characters struggle for self-knowledge in a hallucinogenic hyper-reality. When its anti-hero, When Cowboy Billy, the anti-hero, confronts the tragic flaws inherent in his own personality through a self-induced haze of alcohol and drugs, the play's climax occurs. In the local community, Simons is synonymous with various characters from the play, such as Cowboy Billy, Grandpa, Wiley Shakespeare, and the "monster." The "monster" is another manifestation of Simons' Molemo persona, his dark side.
The Lake Worth Monster is a production intimately associated with the conception of the Hip Pocket. The first performance was a seminal moment for Diane, Johnny, and Doug, as they watched their vision crystallize into the "Hip." Doug Balentine called it, "Wagnerian in scale."

The Hip Pocket Theatre restaged the show several times after its first incarnation at the Fort Worth Art Museum's Solarium in 1975. The most unorthodox staging of the play took place in a rock and roll club called "The Speakeasy." One of those performances was in conjunction with TCU as their entry into the regional American College Theatre Festival. The author performed the roles of Grandpa, Wiley Shakespeare, and the Monster for its remount during the summer season of 1989.

After the first production closed, the founders and core ensemble drank beer, roasted wienies, and played theatre games around an open fire at the Simons' lake house. These recruits from the rebellious youth culture of the early seventies contributed a sense of community to their following productions that were more akin to a "tribe" than a theatre group. Simons fueled the group's desire in their quest for personal expression and rebellion against authority by providing them with a theatrical medium to express their political and creative frustrations. Their newfound kinship collapsed the

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43 Balentine, interview.

44 Hip Pocket, promotional material 1989.

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barriers of the "other" that previously existed between them and forged the ensemble into an extended "showbiz" family.

The ensemble consisted of working class individuals who performed as amateurs, and normally ostracized from Fort Worth's elitist theatrical community. Without the usual academic prerequisites for performers, Simons taught "the body as text" through improvisational pantomime, commedic forms and a gestural language of "figurative clichés."

Simons' casting of his ensemble functions as a visual display of his visions of the commedic characters. He chose performers for the ensemble according to physical transformational ability and resemblance to commedic character types. Simons then encouraged the actors to explore and define their inherent, physical commedic identities. The roles were highly physical, often requiring the development of specialized skills such as dance and mime. The highly skilled dancers and pantomimists, such as Alan Mintz, David Yeakle (dancer/mime), Avner Eisenberg, and Jennifer Garrison (ballet), all evolved from Simons' ensemble work.

The principle cast in the 1989 staging of *The Lake Worth Monster* included David Yeakle (Cowboy Billy), Lorca Simons (Belstar), Tony Medlin (Monster, Wiley Shakespeare, Grandpa), Joan Buttram (Luna Moon), Grover Coulson (Rue Royal), and Jennifer Langenstein (fairy). A dancing, pantomimic chorus of approximately fifteen "lake maidens" (including my wife, Pem Price Medlin) completed the cast.
THE VENUE

After choosing a text and casting the play, the next major challenge to a dramatist is the manipulation of space and the interfacing between performance and audience. The 1989 staging was the first outdoor production of the play. The play’s reputation and the choice of the Oak Acres Amphitheatre for an "under the stars" staging precipitated its mood. Many Hip Pocket Theatre veterans recount their first exposure to the theatre in poetic terms. John Murphy, a long-time collaborator with the Hip Pocket Theatre, recorded his first impressions of the theatre’s rag-tag outdoor amphitheatre in his unpublished journal:

"... Rode out to the edge of town and ... down an old, dirt road, ... pushed through one last dust-puff cloud and there ... was that wooden stage, purposely haphazard, laid out amongst tall, bushy trees stretching toward those wonderful stars ... Old boards sagged, held higglety-piggelty by rusty nails.

Years of paint and show-biz ... oozed from every crack and crevice ... Multi-level dilapidation ... A large-breezy sheet of cheesecloth hung between two warped and raggedy wooden poles as the wind off the lake made it swell back and forth ...

... hopeless, perverse, intractable, spastic marionettes--waltzing along the very edge of disaster ... one of the misfit-wonderful people ... his hands floating like silks ... moved to one side of the wooden stage as several, beautiful girls entered dressed as "wild minnows on the run" ... strands of multi-colored ribbons flowed and danced from their slippery bodies as mouths puckered, swelled, and sucked in great mouthfuls/soulfuls of Lake Worth air ...

It all remains very unpretentious and honest with that marvelous group of people flowing out of that big aorta and into the hearts of the audiences, ... close around that old wooden stage after the sun starts to sink, slow and red, into the lake ... little, tin-cans bathe that
wooden wonderland in steaming, mad colors and myriad attitudes . . . vibrating melodies scream from the musician's piano.

Finally the whole thing sets the actors in motion on a canvas—a blur of sight, sound, image, and emotion. The whole thing freezes, long after the final chord and the final laugh, reluctantly, into an invisible throbbing, like an infinite heartbeat . . . Even now . . . I can feel the pulsation of that big invisible aorta . . . 

. . . "You'll never see another play the same way," Charlie (Simons) would say.45

Shredded banners decorate the gaudily painted theatre facility and move with the hot Texas breeze. The musty, damp, open-air dressing room is an old shed that appears to be an old livestock barn. A mildewed, mud-encrusted carpet covers the dirt floor. A ramshackle table supports the cracked and fragmented makeup mirrors. From one point of view, everything is tawdry and disintegrating; yet, from a different perspective the theatre has every element necessary for production of a Peter Brook-styled "rough" theatre.

Behind the theatre, the detritus of past productions and the ensemble's whimsy lie in disarray. Rusted metal shapes, an old console radio from the thirties, obsolete lighting equipment, lumber, pipe, paint buckets, and empty metal drums create a visual syncopation behind the stage. The theatre appears to contain many layers of historical significance, much like an archaeological dig. A mantle of rough construction piled on to a previous layer that decomposed, no longer able to support itself.

45 John Murphy, Unpublished Manuscript. 2, 4, 36.
"Charlie Nose" is Simons' Equity, stage name.
A shelter, off upstage right, protects the band from the elements. Its roof is a catwalk providing entrances from above right; the catwalk crosses down a series of ramshackle platforms curving around the back of the stage, and continues down to stage left center. Balentine coaxed one more season from an elderly, upright piano during the summer season of 1989, despite its deteriorating condition, weathered from many seasons spent outside, and its lack of a top and cover. Muslin sheeting stretched across the back of the stage, ripples in the wind and served as projection screens for film and slides, an important element in the show. A slightly raised twelve foot diameter octagonal platform sits up left center.

Barefoot actors risk being cut on splinters and nails that protrude from the old lumber of the stage, a wide semi-circle that covers approximately sixty feet across its lip, and is nearly twenty-five feet deep (See Illustrations #1 & 2). An old oak tree marks the boundary of the stage, up right, and contains a tree house/acting platform accessible from on-stage and backstage. A four-foot wide pier lit as a playing area extends from the front of the stage to the light booth, a distance of approximately twenty feet. The pier allows entrances and exits through the audience. Torrential rains once washed through a shallow gully running under the lip of the stage, but now a more efficient drainage system helps direct the runoff away from the theatre. Both stage and the audience seating area conform to a modified-Greek style: the seating consists of bleachers, roughly sixteen feet in length, built from two by sixes; old church pews also serve as seating.
ILLUSTRATION # 1, GROUND PLAN OF THE HIP POCKET

(All measurements are approximate.)
ILLUSTRATION # 2, OVERVIEW OF HIP POCKET
(All measurements are approximate.)
Earlier, a spider-web of airplane cable between trees formerly supported home-made lighting equipment made from coffee cans. Now only a few home-made lights still remain in the lighting system; but pipes attached to the cables now support more professional lighting instruments, albeit antiquated. The engineering of the theatre's lighting system evolves as designer to designer salvages equipment from renovations; gradually replacing each previous layer of modifications. The sound-and-light booth appears to be a large outhouse behind the audience. Several steps down from the booth's landing, the pier extends to the front of the stage.

The "front of house" is a neat, well-clipped lawn serving as a gathering place for the audience to play with dogs and babies, throw Frisbee, drink beer, and eat barbeque before the show. Johnny Simons is nearly compulsive in his care for this green. James Quave cooks the barbeque, a sullen and mercurial landlord known to cancel performances by locking the only entrance to the theatre.

Quave constructed a roofless pier to the right side of "front of house." Log cabin walls surround the pier on three sides where beer and barbeque are available. Quave's restaurant, a rough-looking, cinder-block, Texas roadhouse, stands at the head of the unpaved road leading to the Hip Pocket. Patrons use this dirt road as they drive past the theatre to park in its lot. The road marks the boundary of the "front of house."

During the 1989 performance of Monster, a large sculpture installation once graced the grounds, but now replaced with a pre-fab office. It sits beside the dirt road that marks the theatre's south border. A small block building with bathrooms sits in a direct line
between the sculpture and the theatre. Continuing that line brings the patron to an old-fashioned porch swing on the left and the box office/main entrance/concession stand opposite the swing. Behind Quave's barbeque stand in the "front of house" area is a dusty, parking lot with several rusting vehicles on blocks. An odd collection of Quave's personal junk and Texas scrub brush litters the open space of the lot.

THE REHEARSALS

Johnny's rehearsal schedules are short, but intense. Often, he creates a title and scenario months in advance and then releases them as publicity materials; next he sequesters himself for three to four days before the first rehearsal to create the script. This intense creative period continues to the rehearsal period; the inception-to-execution a time usually lasts no longer than three weeks.

Like most productions at the Hip, Simons conducts rehearsals for *The Lake Worth Monster* at night and on weekends to accommodate the actors' needs for day jobs. Night rehearsals further compress the tight rehearsal schedule because performances take run on the stage from Thursday through the weekend. Temperatures often exceed 110° during the day at weekend rehearsals. Generally, Simons restricts these rehearsals to principals, to keep chorus members from enduring the heat. Simons is a director of details, and spends considerable time orchestrating the choreography and gestures of both chorus and principals.

Simons' temperament is unpredictable; he reduced Lake Simons to tears during one difficult rehearsal for *Monster*. It was not that Lake disgraced herself during the rehearsal, Simons was angry...
with the entire ensemble, he felt that since his criticisms of applied to
the whole cast, and because "she could take it," he targeted Lake. By
using Lake as a victim, he motivated the entire ensemble through
their empathy with her.

THE PERFORMANCES

The production invited its first audience to a preview on July
27, 1989, at 9:00 p.m. The play formally opened the following night
and ran for six weeks, closing on September 3. The late show time
permitted time for the summer sun to set and the stage lights to
become effective. It also allowed for a leisurely dinner schedule and
more beer sales before the show.

The eleven-piece band consisted of the Balentine family and
pick-up musicians. They played audience favorites during a warm-up
set that featured numerous compositions by Simons and Balentine.
The play begins with the character of Wiley Shakespeare, a poetic
narrator who bridges the action between scenes. Performing Simons'
narration, the author used American Sign Language to
simultaneously express its poetic images. I include this portion of the
process only to indicate one aspect of the production's style.

The production warranted inclusion of sign language into its
pantomimic style. Studies of American Sign Language reinforced
this author's belief that commedic gestures survive in the sign-mime
of American Sign Language (ASL). ASL shares at least 26.5%
percent of its structure with Old French Sign Language (OFSL).46

46 Robbin Battison, "Cross-Cultural Communications with
Foreign Signers," Sign and Culture: A Reader for Students of
American Sign Language, ed. William C. Stokoe (Silver Springs:
OFSL is a language created in the 1750's during the organization of the first deaf school. The founding of the school coincided with the neo-classic academies' codification of pantomime and gesture.

The French deaf preserved a window into their gestural past when they organized their own language from contemporary natural gesture, pantomime from the commedic theatrical tradition, and home sign. I employed ASL purely for theatrical effect during poetic narrations and did not interpret the entire performance. Collaboration with Joel Hill, a state-certified, interpreter for the deaf, determined the effective translations for the poetry. A transcript of sections of the narration reads as follows:

English poetic version
narrated by Wiley Shakespeare:

. . . up from the deep
the monster creeps stealthily upon his belly
over smooth, stony bones amongst reeds and weeds blowing very Zen in the wind
ah, what a picture imagine it now
and imagine Luna the moon hanging low and seductive over the mad water licking her Fellini lips breasts exposed and glistening

Billy floats skyward

ASL poetic version
simultaneously signed by Wiley Shakespeare:

monster appear monster overlooked crawl (icon up forearm) bones water plant-grow (index crawl between weed fingers of base hand) body blend wind mental-visualization (forefinger, double hand finger flutter slow, directional emphasis) awful imagine L. same-as-moon moon-low (r. hand) water (l. hand) call tempt fuck (circular) bare breasts glistening B. float (l. palm up as base hand, r. hand "legs" float away)
The electrified orchestra underscored all of Wiley's unmiked narration and performed lyrics that carried the plot and dialogue of the opera. As many as six lead singers performed with the band to assist the audience in delineating character changes as the actors pantomimed the roles.

The plot is non-linear, shifting back and forth in time. Wiley and the chorus of approximately fifteen lake maidens "set" the first scene through pantomime, dance, and narration. Cowboy Billy appears, introduces himself, and begins to describe the magical nature of his lakeside home. Time shifts to the past as the Monster appears and debates with Billy concerning where Billy "belongs." Billy agrees to return home to his beloved lake. A memory appears in the form of Billy's first love, Belstar. She then exits and the character of Billy's alcoholic Grandpa, a reminder of Billy's culpability in his death, enters. A sickly Grandpa begs the young Billy to get him a drink, Billy acquiesces and the drink is too much for the benevolent Grandpa. He ascends the steps circling upstage left before getting into a primitive swing and being drawn up to heaven.

The Monster appears, prompting Billy to face his guilt. Billy performs a dance of refusal and desperation. Belstar appears and they recreate their romance and the birth of their child in dance and pantomime. "Luna, the Moon," appears, and seduces Billy during a provocative lyric-ballet that is also part topless-bar pole dance. Belstar then leaves Billy. He becomes enraged and embraces the dissipation of alcohol. The first act ends with a comic choreographed number performed by the chorus and Wiley Shakespeare.
Act two begins with a ballad accompanying projected images of Belstar, Billy, and the lake country. Billy travels to New Orleans to forget his sorrows and drown himself in substance abuse during a French Quarter Mardi Gras. The lake maidens dance in Mardi Gras disguises as Rue Royal, holds court. Grover Coulson, an athletic, black dancer performs a "perverse" drag striptease as Rue Royal. The character represents the hedonism of Mardi Gras and the self-destruction Billy embraces.

The image of Belstar re-appears to further agitate Billy's conscience. Tormented by a dream of "Snake Island," a metaphor for the brutality of his sexuality, Billy emerges from his drug-induced stupor with a new understanding. He confronts the Monster and the beast comforts him. Billy understands that he must return to his roots and his beloved lake to become whole. His return is a pantomime of joy, echoed by the support and caresses of the lake maidens and crowned with the ritual consumption of beer. The band follows the performance with a jam session that lasts into the early morning hours with the cast and willing audience members dancing on the stage.

COMMUNITY RESPONSE TO THE PRODUCTION

*The Lake Worth Monster* remains a popular vehicle for the theatre and may yet receive another mounting. Although the poetic and metaphysical imagery of Simons' text is difficult for the audience to process into a linear plot, the audience responded enthusiastically during performances. This author performed in several Hip Pocket productions, attended many, and viewed video tapes of many more. The productions all appear to succeed through
the communication of a shared "mood" that draws the audience into the communal and celebratory experience of the ensemble, while the spectacle of the performance is entertaining and the atmosphere of the experience recalls "happenings" from the 1960's.

The performance of *Monster* is a hybridized form of entertainment consisting of equal parts rock concert, dance concert, pantomime, picnic, block party, and street dance. The theatre seats over two hundred. The third mounting of the show received solid attendance but did not sell out. The audience members usually consist of the cultured Fort Worth arts community, a "second line" of the Hip Pocket's extended family, and working class revelers. While the alternative lifestyle of the theatre's creators and ensemble raised eyebrows in the mid-seventies, the Hip Pocket Theatre was an established and respected entity by 1989, though some critics considered it staid and past its prime. Perry Stewart wrote about the stalwarts that supported this production:

"... For the longtime fan of this troupe, a trip out to the beer meadow--is nothing short of a holy pilgrimage ... 

If you discovered Hip Pocket in recent years, this show (*The Lake Worth Monster*) will be tantalizing merely because it was the genesis of this remarkable theatre phenomenon."47

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III. THE BODY AS TEXT: THE CORPOREAL DIALECTICS OF THE LYRIC GROTESQUE IN JOHNNY SIMONS' PERFORMANCE DISPLAY

During script analysis lectures at the Dallas Theatre Center, Professor Mary Lou Hoyle (former chair of the theatre program at Texas Women's University) referred to Simons' poetic creations as belonging to a dual-voiced dramatic genre of the "lyric grotesque." The "lyric grotesque" fuses the lyricism of ballet theatre with the "rough" and grotesque Commedia from street-fairs, carnivals, pantomimes, clownwork, and popular culture.

The "lyric grotesque" genre capitalizes on its technical limitations and is extreme, rough, and crude. Simons' paratheatrical productions challenge the audience with its limitations, similar to the necessary "Salt, sweat, noise, smell . . . " that Peter Brook describes in his description of "rough" theatre:

"The Rough Theatre deals with men's actions, and because it is down to earth and direct—because it admits wickedness and laughter—the rough and ready seems better than the hollowly holy." 49

Johnny gives the credit to David Preston, his principle mentor, ballet, and pantomime teacher at Texas Christian University, for awakening his sense of the "lyric grotesque." Preston introduced Simons to the notion of pantomime performed to a spoken or sung text in a critically acclaimed ballet choreographed by Preston, The

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48Mary Lou Hoyle, MFA Class in Theatre Philosophy (Dallas Theatre Center, Jan.-May 1979).
The lead dancer, Harvey Hysell, became ill forcing Preston to take over. The performance was Simons first encounter with the iconic character (essential behavioral nature) of Arlecchino. Preston's performance contributed an important lesson to Simons' understanding the style of "rough" theatre. Simons remembers Preston's performance during a phone conversation:

"I saw him perform in Till Eulenspiegel's Merry Pranks. He slapped on his make-up, threw on an orange wig and looked like an insane person, yet his performance on stage looked precise and wonderful. Till then, everybody I saw was precise in applying make-up and he just smeared it on. That was a breakthrough for me as far as rough theatre goes."51

Simons' "rough" theatre is similar to the Greek phlyax or the pantomimed Roman readings of Terence's comedies. Johnny's "found" actors improvise freely in pantomime and dance, while the band performs Johnny's librettos. The entire performance evokes a

50Johnny Simons, interview.

A production, co-sponsored by the San Antonio Opera with additional support from the New York City Opera, which follows Rimsky-Korsakov's intent of using only pantomimed sets instead of real scenery. Jamie Greenleaf, a close friend of Simons, designed the costumes. It is the only production staged in the twentieth century that followed these directions. Norman Triegle and Beverly Sills sang the leads from the pit while dancers pantomimed the narrative. Johnny Simons performed as King Dodon. Preston presented the opera, first, at TCU, then again in San Antonio, and finally in Houston.

Institutionalized before his death, Preston died from an incurable brain tumor. Margaret Moar danced the Cockerel in the original production and remounted the piece in Houston from Preston's notes. Another remount took place in 1967 in Los Angeles, where the opera featured traditional "hard" scenery with operatic stars on-stage singing the roles.

51Johnny Simons, interview.
meditative and timeless quality that allows Johnny to explore the farthest reaches of his childhood memories.

Above all, Johnny Simons demands that his "rough" theatre maintain his inviolable, moral principles. During a personal conversation, Johnny asserted that his magnum opus, *The Lake Worth Monster*, ought to be on Broadway since most commercialized American theatre seems incapable of producing relevant theatre and relies instead on the pseudo-realism of "artsy" drama or the spectacle of "theme park" special effects. Current, commercial fare seems to pale in comparison to the performances of Simons' wild entourage.

Simons seeks a presence of "texture" in his works that connects his plays with human experience. A subsequent chapter discusses the element of "texture" as defined by Paul Baker in his "Integration of Abilities" philosophy. Simons' honest textural theatre requires actors to satisfy the immediate need of play through creative and transformational substitution. This substitution reiterates a statement on rough theatre made by Peter Brook:

> Putting over something in rough conditions is like a revolution, for anything that comes to hand can be turned into a weapon. . . .52

PEDAGOGY

Johnny Simons taught mime, movement, pantomime, and *Commedia*, for multiple institutions: Rice University, the Dallas Theatre Center, Duke University, Casa Mañana, Texas Wesleyan University, Stevens College, Tulane University, University of

52Brook 73-80.
Houston, Tarrant County Junior College, University of Houston, and the Alley Theatre. A variety of teaching experiences, his many performances, and directing credits, qualify Simons as master teacher (see resume in appendix B).

The craft of comic gestural expression passes most directly through personal contact between mentor and student. The evidence for this approach lies in the direct relationships between teachers like David Preston, Walther Volbach (1898-1996), Bill Garber (1930-), Jacques Lecoq (1921-1999), and their student, Johnny Simons. Movement-theatre is experiential, relying on demonstration, mimicry of essential movements, and constant repetition, all of which come under the instructor's immediate critique.

Though educational media may achieve minor development in the performer, neither videotape, film, nor written description replaces moving in tandem with a master. Simons bases his pedagogical approach on person-to-person communication. Other mimetic, gestural, and movement oriented languages such as dance, mime, the martial arts, and American Sign Language depend on the effectiveness of this approach. It is impossible to translate the artistry of Simons' live instruction into a few reproducible techniques; however, his craft is accessible through examination of the philosophy of movement that underlies his practice and pedagogy.

CHAIN OF FOOLS: THE SURVIVAL OF THE ICONIC CLOWN FORMS

The Hip Pocket as a human circus bases its community-derived satire on historical and mythic forms of the Commedia Dell'Arte, the
dynamic tension of oppositional movement, and emotional polarity. By focusing on the essential, iconic and mythic, comic social stereotypes (the Arlecchino, Pantalone, Dottore, and Capitano), Simons taught his ensemble to reinvent themselves within the alternative universe of Commedia. Through the characters of these universal, reiterative comic forms, the Hip Pocket Theatre exposed their working-class Dallas/Fort Worth audience to hundreds of classic works and original plays.

By applying topical communal values and local color to the comic social stereotypes, post-modern Commedia practitioners like Simons, Lotte Goslar, and Bill Irwin hybridized an "ancient" yet new commedic form. This is not a recent discovery; each theatrical era returns to the archetypal forms for inspiration. Shakespeare recreated the archetypal forms into acceptable Elizabethan images. He placed an Arlecchino in the Gravedigger's pit in Hamlet, just as Johnny Simons relocated the Commedia characters to "deep in the heart of Texas."

Besides studying the classical forms, the Commedia types seeped into Simons' psyche through survivals in contemporary American pop culture. Simons' commedic world recombines fragments from 1940's minstrel shows, circuses, medicine shows, films, television, radio, popular music, theatre, pulp novels, with his community's "figurative clichés." The homogenization of American pop culture dilutes the forms and immortalizes them within the mass subconsciousness, thus guaranteeing their survival through the conduit of popular culture.
In contemporary culture, Scrooge defines the category of Pantalone; the television sitcom character, *Frasier*, that of Dottore; Warner Brother's cartoon character, Wiley Coyote, the role of Arlecchino; and the Cowardly Lion from the film, *The Wizard of Oz*, epitomizes the braggart. Simons described his process of delineating the universal commedic forms in a program for *Circus Cervantes*, his adaptation of four of Cervantes' commedic interludes:

"Imagine old man Cervantes, born in 1547, as a boy of ten or twelve standing in a square gazing with delight at the crude and boisterous farces enacted by a little company of strolling players. Shift focus, then, to another time and space, recalling Fellini as a child ooching under tent flaps to encounter circus worlds of clowns, freaks, and beautiful women floating in mid-air. At this point, Fellini, the Italian mystic, merges with old man Cervantes and his memories. This production is that union in my mind. So... thar y'go."53

Simons discovered the forms of these archetypal clowns contain specific movement tendencies yet allow for individuation by each performer. Performers define their own personal postures for each character, extrapolating the archetypal identity through highly polarized, oppositional movements.

An important distinction in the forms is their transitive nature. These iconic clown characters don an instantly recognizable persona through a "mask," a surface representation that possesses specific and expected character traits; however, each of the characters is able to impersonate or instantly assume the normative and implied behavioral pattern of another commedic form. The audience

53Johnny Simons, program for *Circus Cervantes* (Duke University School of Drama, personal archives).
anticipates the behavior of the classic *Commedia* types through their immediate identification with the "mask," but the character's modes of behavior often include elements from one of the other forms. For example, the braggadocio *Capitano* may also exhibit miserly tendencies or be plagued with the impotence usually ascribed to Pantalone. In Simons' *Huzzytown*, Meema (a Pantalone) must disguise herself as a "Huzzy" sneak into "Huzzytown" (an action befitting an Arlecchino) to rescue her daughter, Jane, from this libidinous lifestyle.

The character forms integrate through a process of transformational identity that is essential for the flow of comedy. Their transformational nature intrinsically links their behaviors; however, discernible behavior allows for classification into the four iconic and comic types: the glutton (Pantalone), the braggart (Capitano), the shaman (Dottore), and the trickster (Arlecchino). The commedic forms refuse codification based on a wider range of behavior. Concerning the commedic character's obstinate rebellion against any conformity to a discrete epistemology, Michael Quinn observed:

"So long as comedy is based in contradictory perceptions and surprise, proponents of uniformity will find occasions to object. . . ."54

The forms retain their individual and personal tendencies, but contain other characters' vices to differing degrees. Quinn wrote in a revealing article concerning the *Commedia* that its performative

mode is "a system that never rests because it is designed for the constant advancement of a transformational artistic style, a pragmatics of theatrical performance."\textsuperscript{55}

An exact form of traditional \textit{Commedia} defined simply through period costume, posture, dialect, behavior, or movement, robs the medium of life. "Classical" performing artists left no record of specific body "sets"; however, visual records by eyewitness artists provide images of the classical \textit{Commedia} actor's continuous body tension and the oppositional postures of its stock characters.

The spirit of \textit{Commedia} lies in its anarchy. Static, formulaic structures of the body are antithetical to the spirit of \textit{Commedia}. Such concrete definitions based purely on the character's historical origins are not as important as the evidence of their continuous and symbolic reoccurrence throughout performative history. The types survive through particulars of behavior, not through precise forms. One of Simons' heroes, Jean-Louis Barrault, expressed this notion when he wrote, "Formulae entail a certain rigidity and fixity, and anything that freezes is anti-theatre. . . ."\textsuperscript{56} John Bloom described the orchestrated anarchy of a Hip Pocket performance in \textit{The Dallas Times Herald}:

"What roisterous revels are these! What riot! What mad carousel on the outskirts of Cowtown USA, full of buff-bellied clowns, strummers, mummers, and rampant silliness! . . . It's called the Hip Pocket Theatre and it's full of the energetic lunacy you might once have

\textsuperscript{55}Quinn 26.
found in vaudeville, or before that in the itinerant stock companies of provincial America."\textsuperscript{57}

It was the Commedia players of Renaissance Italy who refined the comic types to specific postures, masks, costumes and stage business. The postures became as significant as the mask for the early Italian audiences' recognition of character. In Ferdinando Taviani's opinion, the postures and oppositional movements of the Commedia became as distinctly codified as their counterparts in Eastern drama.\textsuperscript{58} Such an impression of rigid codification is understandable since visual artists such as Recuil Fossard (at the French court from 1575 to 1589) drew the frozen action of Commedia performers with extreme dynamic tension; however, the postures were not rigid forms of behavior but instead an actor's expressive process, capable of extreme transformations.\textsuperscript{59}

The physicalized archetypes varied from performer to performer. The postures, gestural life, walks, dialects, rhythms, and voices, were and are aggregates drawn from the sign systems of popular and traditional culture. The unifying physical elements in the construction of the Commedia types are their general behavioral tendencies, social relationships, and the use of "oppositional movement."

Simons' characters and the classical, Italian Commedia Dell'Arte depended on three types of characters infinitely

\textsuperscript{57}John Bloom, Hip Pocket Theatre promotional material (Inhouse publishing).


\textsuperscript{59}Taviani 148.
recombined within domestic, situational comedy. These types were the lovers or ingenues (Amoroso/Amorosa and the Inamorato/Inamorata), the magnificos or Vecchi (middle class), and the Zannis (servants). The ingenues did not wear masks, but the character masks of most Zannis and Vecchi delineated their identity at a glance.

The Vecchi and the Zanni depicted the foibles of humanity through its four types of fools, each mythic in proportion. The four characters appear as archetypes in virtually all cultures as the braggart (Capitano), the shaman (Dottore), the glutton (Pantalone), and the trickster (Arlecchino). They appear inclusively in African, Native American, Eastern, and Western theatrical forms as agents of satire who poke holes in the pretensions of existing power structures.60

Eastern drama also contains character types that exhibit the behaviors of the glutton, braggart, shaman, and trickster. Such types appear in the comic Japanese kyogen, and in drama dealing with serious concerns.61 David Griffiths, in Mask, A Release of Acting Resources, Vol. III: The Italian Commedia & Please Be Gentle, expresses a compelling argument for the similarity of Noh theatre


and Commedia. A tricky servant is also the driving force in Korean comic folk-dance/dramas.

Each representative of these archetypal commedic forms asserts an identity within the performance displays of Johnny Simons. Lake Simons aligned her father's iconic clown types with these four archetypes of Commedia during a telephone interview. She also added the type of a feminized Arlecchino, such as Smereldina or Columbina.

The most popular surviving character is that of Arlecchino, a synthesis of comic forms, principally Brighella, Pulcinella, and Arlecchino. Aristotle differentiated between the bomolochai (buffoon) and the agrikos (rustic, rube, hayseed, or churl). Northrup Frye wrote that these opposites "polarize the comic mood." In classical Commedia, Brighella is a wily servant from Northern Bergamo and Arlecchino is a rustic stooge from the South. The same polarization of characters appears in Simons' re-interpolation of classic American fools, Tom Sawyer, Huck Finn, and their friend Joe, in his Tom Sawyer, a Banjo Commedia.

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63Great Tales of Asian Art, dir. Perry Miller Adato (Kultur International Films, 1995).
64Lake Simons, personal interview (17 March 1999, 2:00 p.m.).
66Tom Sawyer, a Banjo Commedia. (Hip Pocket Video Archives, 1990).
Arlecchino is the eternal trickster, satirizing the foibles of the community and the excesses of the gods. The Dottore is the eternal shaman, with his soul stuck between the worlds of gods and men. His travels to divine realms subject his body and character to the insults of corporeality. The braggart warrior is the archetypal coward, rash and daring in his cups, yet timorous and quaking in the face of danger. Pantalone is a living anachronism, his desperate existence substitutes gold for life and his failing virility and physical disintegration mark him as the ultimate cuckold. The Amoroso and Inamorata provide the Commedia's plot, and unite to end the comedy with a communal hope of connubial bliss and fecundity.

There may be a commedic echo in the character of Johnny Funny in English mummer's plays. The name may derive from the Italian Commedia's Gianni, meaning Johnny. The Zanni (a contraction of Gianni), represented Bergamese laborers and their oafish behavior. Such an accident may have no connection to Johnny Simons’ identity but he does credit a mystical connection with his conception of the archetypal characters.67

Simons' commedic models find a precedent in the characters of ancient Grecian drama. Classical Greek characters evolved from a meta-theatrical language of sign and symbol that embodied the ideals of the city-state. For ancient Greece, histrionics were a way of life. The Athenians founded their Polis on a system of trial by jury; and the ability to construct a convincing argument determined an individual's personal success.

67Johnny Simons, interview.
Attic comedy contains a structure that parallels the formal debate, trial, or ritual combat. Victor Turner compared theatrical displays this structuralist form in his book, *From Ritual to Theatre*:

"Theatre is, indeed, a hypertrophy, an exaggeration, of jural and ritual processes;... There is, therefore, in theatre something of the investigative, judgmental, and even punitive character of law-in-action. ..."69

A similar structure exists in plays such as Simons' *Women in Slips*.70 The "women" are Grecian muses who decide if Jimmy Molemo endangers humanity by materializing his fantasies. In a plot echoing Aeschylus' *The Eumenides*, the muses pass judgment on Jimmy's efforts, and return control of the play’s creation to him. After his self-imposed exile in his abandoned childhood home to conquer writer's block, Jimmy’s wife picks him up and the play ends with their happy reunion.

According to Francis Cornford, Greek comedy began as improvisations based on the foibles of grotesque fools, representing the four archetypal and comic human stereotypes involved in a formal trial. The four, mythic icons recognized in the Greek comedy with re-emergents in Simons' *Commedia* are the buffoon (Arlecchino), the chorus leader and foreman of the jury (Pantalone).

the antagonist or blustery companion of the Agon (Capitano) and the shaman, (Dottore).

The Antagonist, the archetypal braggart of comedy, vocationalizes into the soldier and the doctor. According to Comford, the first characters to be satirized and become grotesques were these professional types. Prone to self-inflation, they were, "fake pretenders (alazons) to superior courage and more than mortal wisdom."71

Simons' commedic forms also align with the first farcical scenes of western theatre originating in the Peloponnesus, an area that included Megara, the nearest neighbor to the Doric and Attic state. Referring to this point of origin, Aristophanes calls old jokes "Megarian."72 Megaran comedy featured comic slaves, the old man, the doctor, and standard plots with braggart warriors like "Herakles cheated of his dinner."73

These forms emerge from human consciousness as models of recognizable community members with exoticized and grotesque identities. This "otherness" permits public ridicule and further, the opportunity to ridicule with relative impunity. Due to the "fools" liminalized status, institutions of power allow the powerless "other," or "holy" fool, to be a more strident satirical voice than that permitted in the general public. The clown embraces an ecstatic madness viewed historically as closer to a divine state.

71Comford 202.
73Nicoll 30.
Simons' folk-Commedia resonates with Ur-drama's hybridization of numerous folk rituals into a single form. As seen in illustration #3, the two agents of vegetable fertility at play in ancient Greek drama are the Heaven-father, provider of life-giving sun and rain, and the Earth-mother, whose womb provides sustenance for the community. In his theory, the most important vegetative festivals (the harvest of midsummer and the sun's renewal of midwinter) formalized into a body of dramatic presentations. In Simons' commedic universe, the Earth-mother corresponds with Lake Worth and the Heaven-father with "Cowtown."

A ritual figure of a king personified the process of rejuvenation through his combat with a young rival. The action symbolizes the decay of his power by the coming of winter. The ancient Greeks assimilated the dramatic action of Ur-drama (the celebration of birth, death, and resurrection) into Dionysus' symbolic death and rebirth through the communal consumption of sacrificial wine and meat. Two repeated motifs in Simons' compositions are self-sacrifice for the community's benefit and the contest between the "old" king and the young agon (as seen in Tarzan of the Apes).

The iconic clown forms (plus the "yankee" and the blackface minstrel, descendants of iconic trickster figures) link Johnny's
### Illustration # 3:

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chthonic Realms:</th>
<th>Heaven-Father</th>
<th>Earth-Mother</th>
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<tr>
<td>Alazon/Parasite</td>
<td>Eiron/Parasite</td>
<td>Chorus Leader</td>
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<tr>
<td>Agonist Mock King</td>
<td>Companion Young Rival Antagonist</td>
<td>Old/Young</td>
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<td>Companions</td>
<td>Ingenue/Groom</td>
<td>Chorus Leader</td>
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<td>Young Rival Antagonist</td>
<td>Chorus Leader</td>
<td>Chorus Leader</td>
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<tr>
<td>Buffoon</td>
<td>Shaman Chorus Leader</td>
<td>Chorus Leader</td>
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<td>(Cornford/Frye/Aristotle, origins and reiterative semiotic forms)</td>
<td>(Nicoll)</td>
<td>Heracles Xanthias Antagonist</td>
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<td>Bucco</td>
<td>Pedant/Book</td>
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<td>Maccus</td>
<td>Pappas</td>
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<td>Ingenue</td>
<td>(Plautus) Miles Maccus Ingenue Senex</td>
<td>(Plautus) Miles Maccus Ingenue Senex</td>
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<td>(Bettelheim) Giant Jack</td>
<td>Mother Stranger</td>
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<td>(Mummer’s) Turk Johnny St. George</td>
<td>Beelzebub Doctor</td>
<td>(Mummer’s) Turk Johnny St. George</td>
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<td>(Religious) Satan Hellikin Everyman Beelzebub Priest</td>
<td>(Religious) Satan Hellikin Everyman Beelzebub Priest</td>
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<tr>
<td>(Commedia) Capitano Arlecchino Amoroso Pantalone</td>
<td>(Shakespeare) Falstaff Touchstone Proteus Shylock Holyernes</td>
<td>(Religious) Satan Hellikin Everyman Beelzebub Priest</td>
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<td>(Commedia) Boatman Zip Coon Snowball Jim Crow</td>
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<td>(Dickens) Present Past/Future Fed Scrooge</td>
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<td>(Mark Twain) Huck Tom Jim Pap</td>
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<td>(Silent Film) Arbuscule Chaplin Linder Turpin</td>
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<td>(Oz) Lion Scarecrow Tinman Witch Oz Monkeys</td>
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<td>(Faulkner) Jewel Vardaman Cash</td>
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<th>Chthonic Realms in Simmons' Alternative Commedic Universe:</th>
<th>Goat/Snake Island</th>
<th>(Casa Manana) House of Tomorrow</th>
<th>Huzzytown</th>
<th>Lake Worth</th>
<th>Underworld The &quot;Lake&quot; RedRiver</th>
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<td>Lake Worth Underworld</td>
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<td><strong>Commedic Archetypes Reinterpreted as Characters from Simmons' Past:</strong></td>
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<td>Ducky (the Pucy)</td>
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<td>Boy</td>
<td>Jimmy Molemo</td>
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<td>Pig (Crumb's conscience)</td>
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<td>Luna Moon</td>
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<td>Arlecchino</td>
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"little" plays with Ur-drama's principles of self-sacrifice and resurrection. Like audiences through the centuries, The Hip Pocket Theatre's patrons first recognize the fools of the Commedia solely through surface representation. Their social stereotype and societal masks depict their immediate function within dramatic structure and their cultural significance.

THE HISTORY OF SIMONS' LYRIC GROTESQUE

Jean-Louis Barrault (1910-1994) said, "Tell me who influences you, and I will tell you who you are." Simons derives his Commedia style from the French model. The Ballets Russes reintroduced the classic forms to early modernists.  

The most influential artist to affect Simons' creative sense was his dance and pantomime teacher at TCU, David Preston. Preston's training in the pantomimic arts reflected his dance background in the classical Russian ballet of the Kirov-Mariensky school and his high ranking in the Cecchetti dance system.  

Preston principally trained under Constantin Kobeloff, a famous teacher and graduate from the Russian Imperial School. The Ballets Russes and Kobeloff shared the commedic forms Preston learned from the Cecchetti system.

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76 Enrico Cecchetti was Sergei Diaghilev's ballet master, as well as ballet teacher for Nijinsky and Pavlova.
77 Harvey B. Hysell, III, personal interview (8 Feb. 2000).
78 This is TCU (Dec. 1959) 7.
79 Preston established the first undergraduate ballet degree in the United States in 1949.
THE FRENCH CONNECTION

Jacques Lecoq was an important influence on Simons' alternative commedic universe, but his contributions to Simons' artistic vision came after Simons was already a mature artist. Johnny's contact with Lecoq occurred during workshops at Rice University. Though the workshops were brief, they validated and underscored the lessons learned from previous teachers.78 Lecoq provided the critique to Johnny as a mature artist that he was, indeed, "holdin' his mouth right." Johnny commented on his experience in Lecoq's workshop:

"I knew what Doc' Volbach and David Preston told me was true about the theatre, but it took Jacques Lecoq to say, "they were right."79

Instead of a principle source, Lecoq serves this dissertation primarily as a parallel, comparative example to Simons, providing a well-defined and equivalent model of commedic pedagogy. To find equitable comparisons with Simons' canon of work, it is necessary to examine the parallel development of Lecoq or the European ensembles derived from Lecoq's teachings; there is hardly a canon existing among all the practitioners of American Commedia.

Any contextualization of contemporary Commedia must include Lecoq as the twentieth-century practitioner and educator most responsible for the contemporary rebirth of the French commedic social stereotypes in European and most North American communities.

78Johnny Simons, interview.
79Johnny Simons, interview.
The critical attention paid to Lecoq-inspired, movement ensembles in Europe dwarf that given to the Hip Pocket Theatre by American critics. Simons presents an Americanized version of Lecoq's pedagogy, yet, teaches similar precepts to those of Lecoq but from his reprobate Texan point-of-view. Therefore, Simons deserves the same degree of critical attention as that given to his European counterparts.

Lecoq studied mime under his masters, Jean Dasté (son-in-law of Jacques Copeau, 1898-1996) and Jean-Louis Barrault, before founding his own school in 1956. Simons studied under his masters, Preston and Lecoq. For most performers seeking commedic instruction in the Southwest, Johnny Simons remains the master teacher.

When students sought European commedic instruction during the last forty-four years, Lecoq was the source. John Vidal, artistic director for the British Theatre for the Deaf, placed Jacques Lecoq at the center of the European school of movement theatre:

"For years, many English actors and dancers have gone to Paris for an alternative finishing course to their theatrical training, and for many of these the most influential teacher of his time is Jacques Lecoq."  

Lake Simons, Johnny and Diane's daughter and heir apparent to the Hip Pocket's performance style, attended the last classes taught by Lecoq at his Ecole de Mime and found their pedagogical approaches equivalent. During the classes, Lake Simons observed

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that her father's technique of carefully "layering" the commedic character and his performances in the character of Arlecchino were nearly identical to Lecoq's versions.

In Johnny's pedagogical approach to teaching the four postures (Arlecchino, Pantalone, Dottore, Capitano), he reflects the oppositional movement and attitudes found in Lecoq's "mask/counter-mask" exercises. In that dual-voiced exercise, the face contorts into a distinct attitude and the lower platform of the body expresses its opposite emotional polarity. Lecoq challenged students to find oppositional postures during that exercise with, "wearing the face of a fop, display humility. Wearing the mask of a miser, show generosity."

A central credo of Lecoq's method is that the performer is an active participant in authorship, not merely a conduit for the writer or director. Although Simons' Commedia is script-driven, his actors improvise freely in pantomime. In contrast to careful scripting and choreography, Simons' allows the actors nearly complete freedom in finding their own language of "figurative clichés" or pantomime/sign-mime/symbolic gesture to physicalize their roles. An independent and personal understanding of each "sign" contained within the moving tableau of "figurative clichés" is necessary for the performer to communicate highly compressed, comic exposition.

Instead of specific rules governing gesture, postures, and voice, Lecoq and Simons distill the actor's identity to find the

82 Johnny Simons, MFA Classes in Commedia Dell'Arte (Dallas Theatre Center, Aug.-May 1979).
commedic character and assist the actor to find further definition through observation of human interaction. In Lake Simons' perception, both Simons and Lecoq defined the characters through the disruption of set patterns and rules instead of blind adherence to form. Commedic characters, hide-bound by inhibitions, become unbelievable and are no longer comic.

Through observational exercises, a disciple constructs a commedic character through "layering" without resorting to clichéd emotional expressions. Distinctly removed from the language of figurative clichés are a culture's clichéd forms. Figurative clichés mirror a community's shared, symbolic gestures and require emotional honesty in their performance. Clichéd forms rely on pre-existing emotional content created by previous users of the sign. The most outrageous comic actions must have logical roots in the character's psyche. The ultimate effect is one of multiple physicalized "voices" within a "Simonized" character.

Both artists used similar exercises in their pedagogical approach. Simons twists the torso during a David Preston-inspired, standing, slow-motion, warm-up exercise that begins in a relaxed state and slowly twists, taking as much as fifteen minutes to reach the greatest degree of spinal torque before another fifteen minute return to neutral. In comparison, Lecoq uses a warm-up exercise consisting of seven stages of tension and seven stages of relaxation.84 Collapsing on the floor in a catatonic state is the most relaxed mode


58
of Lecoq's drill, while the most bound condition is that of standing in total tension.

In the process of learning the postures for expressing the Commedia types, Johnny claims only by observation and personal experience, can an actor get "it." Simons approach echoed the theoretical discipline of constructivistic semiotics when he explained that to get "it" refers to the moment the performer looks into the alternate universe of the Commedia and perceives their own mirrored identity:

"You can't really teach anybody anything. You can surprise them, shock them, stun them, delight them, and make them angry; perhaps something will creep into their heads and they will get it. You go into a rehearsal and you're silly. The director says be sillier, so you do it. Then he tells you to be even sillier, so you open it up and one day it clicks. You get it." 85

In one of his classes, Lecoq made a statement nearly paraphrasing that of Simons when he assured his class that, "A buffoon must divine the future ... find your magic and then make fun of it. Eventually, there will be a total eruption of buffoonery and you will all find your magic." 86

Born in 1921, Lecoq's career in movement began when he majored in physical education in college. His education led to a job as a teacher of swimming and athletics before becoming a physical therapist, rehabilitating paralytics during World War II. His experience as a physical therapist, like other theatrical innovators such as Decroux, F. M. Alexander, Moshe Feldenkrais, and Robert

85Johnny Simons, interview.
86Levy 59.
Wilson, dealt with "the body as text." Dealing with the body as text allowed Lecoq access to expressive gesture. Through the mechanics of the body, he came to admire movement-theatre and to begin his study of mime. Lecoq learned his forms by traveling the countryside, interviewing and observing retired commedic performers from older generations. Simons, on the other hand, came to commedic pantomime through studying ballet as a child to offset the crippling effects of polio.

Besides David Preston, the Ballet Russes inspired modernist movement pioneers that were Lecoq's mentors, such as Jean Dasté (b. 1904), Étienne-Marcel Decroux (1898-1991), and Jean-Louis Barrault. Suzanne Bing (Jacques Copeau's mistress), taught pantomime at Copeau's Vieux Colombier, and became a mentor for Decroux, Charles Dullin (Barrault's first teacher), and Dasté. Copeau and Bing gave the "lyric grotesque" new life, popularizing it among the next generation of Parisian performers that included Lecoq, Marcel Marceau, Decroux, and Barrault.

Lecoq studied pantomime under Barrault and Decroux, bringing traces of their work to Simons. David Whitton recognized the physical dialectics within Barrault's dual-voiced philosophy of movement as a practice that:

". . . distinguished two branches of mime, one which is an applied technique and the other, an art complete in itself, through which a transcendent metaphysical dimension is attained." 88

87 Levy 49.
After Barrault's split with Decroux, he became the protégé of Antonin Artaud, another major inspiration to Simons. In an odd occurrence of palimpsest, Molemo, Johnny's alter-ego, is an anagram for le Momo (the madman), Artaud's alter-ego.

Simons' performance genealogy must include the influence of the performances of Jean Gaspar Deburau (1796-1846), a model for Lecoq, Decroux, Barrault, and Marceau. Deburau reunited the dual-voiced, corporeal dialectic of the "lyric" and the "grotesque," a dialectical division that occurred during the neo-classic split between the high arts of balletic pantomime and the low-brow Commedia.

During the French neo-classical era, body language and gesture became associated with a golden age of the "ancients" when they possessed a system of communication closer to that of the heavenly kingdom's. Linked to the French idea of enlightenment was the notion that "utopia" was possible only through the rediscovery and practice of such a "natural" language.

Cultures turn toward the body and its expressive ability of gesture for "truthful" communication when its social fabric seems stretched to bursting, rudeness and disorder rules public protocol, and language seems meaningless. The same conditions that prompted the neo-classical reevaluation of gesture against the duplicity of words also prompt the culture of contemporary theatre to a renewed interest in gestural expression. John Vidal, the artistic director of the


British Theatre of the Deaf, is a long-time proponent of Jacques Lecoq's movement theatre methods. Vidal gives this explanation for the resurgence of movement-theatre's popularity:

"Theatre needs a heightened sense of movement because when the spoken word cannot express itself fully, it returns to the language of the body, when you are lost you must return to nature." Jacques Lecoq stated eloquently, "Pantomime is the theatre's lost child."

Politicians, philosophers, and artists of neo-classical France applauded linguistic manipulation and a return to the symbology of pantomime, sign-language, rhetorical gesture, and the natural language of the body as a means to promote beneficial change. These theorists considered the regeneration of the French political system possible only through the elimination of the inherent prejudices contained in spoken and written languages. This polarization between the "logos" and the "bios" seems to be the first conscious manipulation by a culture of "the body as text."

The creation of a national French gestus came from the blending of many disparate elements of popular culture. The Italian troupes' performances for the French populace introduced iconic referents and "figurative clichés" that became essential elements in the mimetic gesture of the French populace of the neo-classical period. Eventually, these elements within the European commedic forms passed to Simons through direct and peripheral influences.

During the French neo-classical era, pantomime evolved into elitist gestural forms such as opera, dance, and iconic sign language. The rough carnality of the Commedia continued to survive in the

90John Vidal 32.
fairs, boulevards, and markets. This corporeal split created a
dialectical polarity in the use of dramatic, expressive gesture. On one
extreme was the Commedia, the Boulevard performer’s rough
theatre of the flesh, and on the other, the formally sanctioned
expressive gestures of the French, neo-classical aesthetes.

The neo-classic, French intellectuals borrowed the "rough"
pantomimic techniques of the fair theatres in an attempt to sublimate
them into a reverend and heavenly, gestural language inspired by the
ancien régime. Ballet and opera assimilated the commedic forms of
pantomimic and expressive gesture and attempted to free it from the
carnality of the marketplace: the Commedia continued to search for
new ways to satisfy fleshly hungers.

This bifurcation in the art allowed the pantomimic story-
telling of ballet to develop into a mimetic, acrobatic revolt against
gravity. Ballet attempted to free the body’s center from the bonds of
gravity, while Commedia’s domestic, though acrobatic comedy
remained tied to the earth. This political separation of gesture
allowed the further development of each genre by refining and
restricting each form to discrete investigations of specific ranges of
motion. It also permitted more extensive development through the
focused concentration on separate and distinctive movement patterns.

French Commedia languished in the clownwork of circuses,
pantomimes, private salons, amateur theatricals, music halls, and art
theatres until the character of Pierrot (Gilles) created by Jean-Gaspar
Deburau, recombined the physical dialectics of "elite" lyricism and
the rough theatre of the Boulevard into his performances at the
Funambules. First created by Giuseppe Giaratoni in 1682, the character of Pierrot was a melancholy permutation of Pedrolino and Arlecchino, but Deburau syncretized a streak of ruthless cruelty with the normally hapless protagonist.

The elevated liturgical gesture, the mimetic dance, the natural gesture of the French commoner, the rarefied natural gesture and mimesis that distilled into FSL, the new permutations of pantomime by the English, and the fatuous and silly physical buffoonery of the Italian Commedia, all synergized in the performances of Deburau. The recombination of the two poles of the dialectic body, the aesthetically "utopian" and the "rough," resulted in a new, dual-voiced genre for the French Commedia, the "lyric grotesque."

Deburau was the father of modern French pantomime and Commedia performance. His work directly inspired the Modernists of the twentieth century and culminated in Lecoq's development of a contemporary pedagogy of the Commedia. The fin de siècle found the movement toward the corporeal dialectic ("body as text") growing with the Modernist rebellion against illusionism.

The leaders of this theatrical revolt were: Adolphe Appia's sculptural designs of sets and lights (1862-1928), Gordon Craig's anti-realistic sets and modernist philosophy (1872-1966), Jacques Dalcroze's applications of the primacy of rhythm in theatrical performance (1865-1950), and Jacques Copeau's practical applications of modernism (1879-1949). In theory and practice, Johnny Simons is a reincarnation of Deburau. He directly credits

91 Born Jan Kaspar Dvorak in Bohemia.
Jean-Gaspar Deburau as an important influence on his art through his contact with Michel Carne's film based on Deburau's life:

"Obviously Chaplin, the Marx brothers, and all those guys are Commedia influenced, but then I saw Jean-Louis Barrault and Étienne Decroux in the movie, Children of Paradise." 93

After joining the Funambules in 1816, Deburau synthesized the utopia-inspired fluidity of ballet and opera with the eccentric, disturbing, macabre, and aggressive behavior of the Boulevard Commedia; he gave Pierrot an edge missing from the Commedia since its days in the fair theatres. The trait that continued its refinement in Pierrot through the person of Jean-Charles, Deburau's son (1829-73). Deburau combined the grotesque, oppositional movement of Commedia, the "figurative clichés" of commedic communication, and the lyricism of ballet to recreate the "lyric grotesque" in a new, completely French, commedic format.

As Americans applauded their firstborn Americanized Arlecchino in the form of "Jim Crow," Deburau was making Pierrot an immortal addition to the pantheon of commedic permutations by creating a new and inherently French form of the art. 94 Théophile Gautier, scenarist for Giselle, novelist, poet, and critic from the mid-nineteenth century, said that Deburau was the most important actor that ever lived, central to the entire idea of Commedia, and consolidator of previous ideals. 95

93Johnny Simons, interview.
Green & Swan 5.
95Green & Swan 5.
The notion of the "lyric grotesque" continued to develop in the French theatre until formally recorded as a "romantic" credo in Victor Hugo's preface to *Cromwell*:

"...The ugly exists beside the beautiful, the misshapen beside the graceful, the grotesque beside the sublime, evil with good, darkness with light...the body and the soul, the animal and the intellectual...on the one hand it creates the deformed and the horrible; on the other hand, the comic, the buffoon."96

Simons' commedic connection with the French *Commedia* may seem obvious, but questions of continuity between French and Italian classical *Commedia* may come into question. In French culture, the physical aspects of the Italian commedic expression fell on fertile soil and began the independent tradition of a French school of movement oriented *Commedia*. The Italian and French culture shared enough mimetic signs to allow the Italian *Commedia* entrance into French popular culture.

The Italian troupe's foreign language made the dance of figurative clichés the only means of comprehending the intricacies of plot to their French audiences. The shared iconic referents between the audience and the performers consisted of iconic masks, outlandish dialects, familiar story-lines, actions of the play, and the non-verbal communication skills of the actors. An unscripted code of gesture became a part of the discourse of both the French and Italian *Commedia* performers. This "visual declamation" was a concoction

of natural gesture, monastic sign, rhetorical gesture, codified sign, and mime.

French performers interpreted the Italianate *lazzi*, into their own shared gestural language of figurative clichés and adapted the physical forms to their own pre-existing commedic archetypes. Their shared universal definitions of the character's comic functions allowed the French practitioners to add their own interpretation.

**OPPOSITIONAL MOVEMENT AND EMOTIONAL POLARITY**

Simons' expression of the contradictory natures of the commedic characters depends on oppositional movement. Oppositional movement is a continuum of physical and corresponding emotional tension with the neutral body at its center. On one extreme, a section of the body displaces through muscular inhibition as far as the mechanism allows, while adjoining sections displace in opposite directions. On the other extreme of the continuum, the sections reverse their movement and emotional polarity. The spine develops a serpentine shape and movement during extreme gestural expressions.

By developing character through oppositional movement, the body expresses extreme polarities corresponding to the character's mental states and behavior. Using physical polarities in this manner allowed Simons to bring the characterizations of the commedic characters to the level of grotesque physical and emotional expression and allow for extreme physical hyper-extension during moments of lyric action. Perhaps one of the best examples of "frozen" moments that depict oppositional comic movement is seen in Robert Crumb's cartoon characters, adapted to the stage by
Simons in *R. Crumb's Comix*. Cartoons are distillations of the commedic archetypes expressed in sequenced tableaux of oppositional movement.

Action dominates character and content in commedic performance, with the mask's distortion of human features providing the impulse for oppositional, "grotesque" expression. The tunnel vision of the mask dictates a complete physical readjustment of the spine by forcing a shift in the actor's visual field. The actor's spine, and consequently his body, moves oppositionally and dynamically to accommodate the "forced perspective" of the mask. This overcompensation develops into a distinct, and individual language of contextualized physical attitudes that increases expression and assists the actor in communicating a character type to the audience.

Using oppositional movement as the basis of commedic, physical expression, the vertebrae of Simons' performers must move with great fluidity. Their oppositional body movement supports the communicative ability of the mask and adds expressivity to the body. When performers use oppositional movements as the central means of expressing a contextual, physical language of figurative clichés, they add the "tic, toc," or "click," to accent the beginning of a movement. These onomatopoetic sounds refer to the pantomimic device that highlights a movement by first generating a movement pulse in the opposite direction.

Simons uses oppositional movement to illustrate characters in a presentational and non-realistic manner. An essential aspect of Simons' version of the characters involves a forward shifting of the pelvis, particularly in the characters of Arlecchino and Pantalone.
This adaptation seems to align with the notion of Commedia players "large" characterizations in the marketplace and the need for effective vocal production.

Bending at the waist, as in the "clichéd" contortions of playing an old man, sharply angles the vertebrae at the base of the skull. Two disadvantages to the use of this posture are that: 1) bending at the waist causes the neck to arc upward, restricting the field of vision through the holes in the mask, weakening the power of an actor's characterization and causing the mask to tilt down, causing loss of eye contact with the audience and 2) the angle of the skull places pressure on the vocal folds and robs the voice of resonance and tonal support.97

By rotating the pelvis forward and underneath the character, as in the Alexander technique, and aligning the vocal production mechanism with the pelvis, there is no loss of vocal power and the mask is open displayed.98 Examples of Pantalone's posture with a pelvis arced under the spine appear repeatedly in the etchings of Fossard.

A torso aligned with the pelvis allows the body to move fluidly, frees the mask for a greater range of movement by returning it to a presentational position, centers the torso over the pelvis allowing for a more fully supported use of the voice, and reduces

97 Randy Moore, Diction Classes at the Dallas Theatre Center (Dallas, November 1978).
Marge Barstow, Alexander Technique Workshop at the Dallas Theatre Center (Dallas, Feb. 80).
98 A popular system created by F. M. Alexander, a turn-of-the-century Australian actor, that uses spinal alignment to relieve problems in vocal production for the stage.
tension in the neck. The zannis' "S" shaped posture supposedly originated from their perpetual slump, a posture developed from years of carrying a sedan chair. However, the "S" shaped posture also allows for greater physical and vocal expression. The character of Pantalone retains the "S" shaped posture of the subservient zanni, but with advanced age and financial security.

A forward pelvis is not necessary for every character. Each character requires a different pelvic alignment, either through arcing the pelvis forward or backwards as needed. The critical relationship is the relationship between the mass of the torso and the pelvis. If the pelvis arcs back, the torso moves forward and the head moves back and maintaining the body's alignment over its center of gravity.

The key element to the commedic postures is not the mimicry of a specific form, but the extreme polarity of oppositional movement during the expression of character. The emotional and intellectual natures of the characters are as highly polarized as their physical expressions, instantly shifting from crafty to stupid, witty to dull, pedantic to astute, and so forth. The ability to shift from one polarized, physical extreme to the other assists the audience in perceiving a shift in the mental acuity or emotional state of the character.

DEPOLARIZED SEXUALITY

The theatre games experienced while "playing" around a bonfire at the Simons' lake house expanded the ensemble's physical expressive ability and allowed the participants to explore movement efforts beyond normal cultural boundaries. Extreme, oppositional manipulations of the pelvis, suspect in normal cultural applications,
form the foundations for the physical constructs of commedic characterization. The ensemble's liberation of the pelvis resulted in a rediscovery of the dialectic performative body, repressed since early childhood.

Rediscovery of previously taboo forms of movement often result in an ecstatic state, at least in comparison to the wooden, performances dictated by the dominating plastic space of realistic drama. The "plastic" space of realism forms the social boundaries and prejudices of dominant culture, inhibiting the individual's personal expression instead of liberating it.

In the pedagogy of realistic drama such as "method" acting, an individual's culturally acceptable movements and expressions occur in a formalized space that dictates proscribed patterns and behaviors; thus, inhibition governs expression in realistic theatre. In opposition, the inverted world of Simons' Commedia expresses itself through exhibition. Donning the Commedia mask liberates his actors from conventional social boundaries governing bodily expression. A principle maxim in Irene Corey's pedagogy is, "To mask is to unmask." 99 The formalized space of realistic acting is conducive to the dramatic word and concept; however, it is limiting in the theatrical and commedic world of flesh.

The manipulation of the pelvis is at the core of the oppositional physical movement necessary for the delineation of commedic characters and in Simons' pedagogy for teaching the character forms. The center of an individual's sexual movement

99Irene Corey, Classes in Scenic and Makeup Design at the Dallas Theatre Center (Dallas, August-May 78-79).
identity lies in the abdomen at the body's center of gravity. Located about two finger-widths below the navel and three finger-widths within the abdominal cavity, the center of gravity is the Japanese *hara* (the root of the soul). 100

The body's center provides an axis for the manipulation of maximum force and power during any activity. Initiating movement from the center allows for greater opposition, elongation, extension, and application of potential energy in the execution of any gesture or action. Generating movement from the "hara" results in efficient use of the abdomen, legs, and feet, and expends the least amount of energy. Extending the weight of the torso in front of the center breaks the alignment of the pelvis and the upper body weight. In this posture, the performer loses the stability and power of the body's lower platform. 101 Physical manipulation of the center is essential for the dynamic, oppositional movements of the *Commedia* and for conserving strength during the extreme expenditures of energy required during commedic performance.

The first information an individual receives that relates to their personal identity concerns gender. Personal definition of acceptable pelvic movement is one of the first gender markers adopted during social interaction. A child has a limited sense of the sexual self and attaches itself to different models of sexuality during

100 Ricky Adams, Classes in Shito-Ryu Karate (Leesburg, Sept.-June 93-95).
Bill Sosa, Aikido classes at the Southwest Aikido Institute (Dallas, Nov.-May 80-82).
Terry Rich, Classes in Kenpo Karate at the Clinton School of Martial Arts (Clinton, Nov. 86-88).
101 Bill Sosa.
early development. When the individual's sexual sense of self emerges during early development, a limited range of socially appropriate, sex related movement inhibits expression of pelvic movement.

Simons taught his ensemble to free the pelvis through manipulation of the center, or "hara" during performance of the Commedia characters. The ensemble's explorations of alternative sexual identities allow for a temporary and harmless gender inversion. Manipulation of the body's center lies at the heart of the clown's comic inversions and is the seat of the body's greatest potential power for satire and ridicule.102

By using extreme pelvic movement, the characters may be feminized, masculinized, or in the most dangerous satirical form, carry the dual voice of androgyny. Cross-gendered character portrayals are the most powerful satirical constructs. The androgynized form reiterating the hermaphroditic nature of the archetypal trickster is both holy and suspect. In Gender and Performance, Laurence Senelick describes the dangerous nature of bisexuality: "Liminal roles like the androgyne, highly revered in the divine world, are seen as dangerous and anarchic in the human."103

Through the Commedia character's liberated pelvic expression, actors explore the sexual politics of physical expression. The inversion and blending of the sexes through "socially"

102 BM Sosa.
inappropriate movement also serves to compound the performer's liminal identity and bring their satiric power to the forefront.

A wide, swaying, animalistic walk is acceptable within the bounds of commedic expression and allows for a sense of androgyny within the character, particularly in that of Arlecchino. Ron McIntyre Fender, a theatre director, is fond of saying, "Arlecchino has slept with every member of the company." Arlecchino's character derives from the "trickster," a mythic figure handed-down in the oral traditions of numerous cultures. The "trickster" often appears as hermaphroditic or androgynous and a character of immense power due to the simultaneous presence of male and female energies.

It is interesting that numerous individuals connected with the Hip Pocket Theatre, such as Bill Garber and Henry Hammock (former chair of the drama department at TCU), interpret the Monster from The Lake Worth Monster as representing Simons' beloved mentor, David Preston. Surely, the "monster" is a voice in Simons' consciousness that constantly reproves, admonishes, and praises. Preston once revealed his sexual attraction to Simons. This confession may link the monster with the power of androgyny. The Monster functions as a "trickster" figure to reveal reality's cruel truth but also represents Simons' ensemble, a chthonic manifestation of the theatre itself, and by proxy, the voice of Simons' beloved teacher. The ensemble is Simons' trickster, crucible, and trial,

\[104\text{Ron Fender, dir. personal conversation (artistic residency at Southern Appalachian Repertory Theatre, July 1994).}\]
\[105\text{Johnny Simons, interview.}\]
exposing his human faults to the scrutiny of a jural process. The ensemble/monster is Molemo's adversary and prosecutor while the audience functions as jury.

Polarized sexual identities are the easiest for social orders to organize and control. Androgynous manifestations of magic in primitive cultures verge on the dangerous and uncontrollable. Simons' ensemble movement often depicts a "hungry" androgynous physical identity that represents a "wild" and nearly feral group persona to the audience. The mainstream cultural authority permits the exploration of such "feminized" states of expression if they result from immersion in a "liminal" process like that of the Hip Pocket's ensemble.

SUMMARY

The commedic archetypes of the Arlecchino, Pantalone, Capitano, and Dottore have historic precedents in the French and Italian Commedia, and in the stock comic figures of ancient Greece and Rome. Johnny Simons derived his commedic definitions from David Preston, whose training derived, in turn, from the Ballet Russes. The Czarist ballet troupes re-popularized the traditional French Commedia characterizations with the European modernists. Simons pedagogic approach employs a variety of manipulative techniques to add multiple voices, or "layers," to his commedic character forms. He uses the building blocks of oppositional movement, emotional polarity, and depolarized sexuality, to explore the genre of the "lyric grotesque," a form typified by the Jean-Gaspard Deburau's performances in Paris during the early 19th century.
IV. THE TEXAS RENAISSANCE AND PAUL BAKER’S "INTEGRATION OF ABILITIES"

Simons benefited from the artistic renaissance experienced by central Texas during the post-World War II years. The region was the extraordinary recipient of theatrical influence originating with some of the most original minds trained in European theatre. Until the post-World War II era, Texas and much of the Southwest were, artistically, "third world" countries. The sea of rural Texas surrounded isolated urban centers, such as Fort Worth, San Antonio, Dallas, and Houston. With Margo Jones, new life came to the Dallas Little Theatre, Nina Vance transformed the Alley Theatre from an old Fan Factory to its current facility, and Sydney Berger moved to the University of Houston, where he is still chair of the department (see Illustration #4).

Texas Christian University gained the leadership of Doctor Walther Volbach, Max Reinhardt's protégé, as Chair of the Theatre Department. David Preston followed Volbach to TCU in 1949, establishing the nation's first undergraduate degree in ballet. Henry Hammock, a student of Glenn Hughes at the University of Washington, took over the chair position when Volbach retired. Primed with "old money" from Fort Worth's oil boom, the region's artistic exploration exploded.

Simons majored in ballet at Texas Christian University to study pantomime under David Preston. An avid fan of Marcel Marceau, Preston brought him to Texas Christian University in the early sixties and promoted Marceau's style of mime that featured

106John Gaston, personal interview (2 Feb. 00, 5:30 PM).
ILLUSTRATION # 4, JOHNNY SIMONS' PERFORMANCE GENEALOGY
prominent facial expression (in opposition to Decroux's neutral and "holy" mime). According to Harvey Hysell, a friend of Simons during undergraduate school, Simons spent countless hours in front of the mirror attempting to master the mimetic techniques he observed in Preston and Marceau.

Preston taught Simons his essential definitions of the lyrically grotesque commedic characters. Preston, a charismatic instructor over six feet tall and a veteran of World War II, appeared more like an insurance salesman than a ballet master. A demanding teacher, Preston did not waste time with students who exhibited little potential. 107 His habit of calling everyone, "little one," seems to continue in Diane Simons' affectionate use of the term, "little hon," for any one within their intimate circle.

Preston was an American citizen born in Brazil to an architect father that was "only interested in building expensive homes and churches." Preston moved to the United States with his parents at the age of five and possessed no English skills. 108 After completing rigorous training, he became a professional dancer in New York, appearing in numerous Broadway shows, including Cole Porter's Jubilee. He studied at the Worchester Academy, the Carnegie Institute of Technology, the American Academy of Dramatic Arts, and the Cecchetti Advanced Grades school. He was ballet master of his own private studio and a guest teacher and choreographer for the Chicago National Association of Teachers of Dancing, the Dance

Masters of America, the Cecchetti council of America, the Fort Worth Civic Opera, the Fort Worth Civic Ballet, and the Fort Worth Opera Association. 109

The second most important European influence on Simons was that of Walther Volbach, a well-respected scholar and devotee of Adolphe Appia, Edward Gordon Craig, Jacques Copeau, and Jacques Dalcroze's Eurythmics method (a significant influence on Lecoq's methodology). Volbach, chair of his department at TCU and one of Simons' principle teachers, often said, "No theatre program today should be printed without a credit to Adolphe Appia and Gordon Craig for sets and lights." 110

Born in 1898, Walther Volbach, son of the musicologist, Chapelmeister, and conductor at the University of Tübingen, grew up with the music of Liszt, Strauss, and Wagner as a part of daily life. He knew Wagner, Strauss, and Mahler, personally, but found Wagner offensive due to his proto-Nazi perspective. Volbach, an apprentice to Max Reinhardt (Volbach gave Teo Otto his first professional job), appeared as Oberon in Reinhardt's production of A Midsummer Night's Dream in 1929. This production was the inspiration for Reinhardt's famous film version. During that staging, Volbach met Claire Neufield, a Jewish Viennese actress that portrayed Titania. They married a year later and fled Germany in 1936.

Moving to TCU in 1946 as head of the theatre department, Volbach helped organize the Fort Worth Theatre Council, an extant

109Greenleaf, interview.
organization in the form of The Live Theatre League. Volbach's main interest was opera. In 1960, he participated in a heated debate with David Preston at the Fort Worth Public Library. The two diametrically opposing personalities and philosophies could easily represent the conflicting discourses present in Simons' performance displays. Though intimately familiar with the work of Jacques Dalcroze (1865-1960), Volbach worshipped the text (he founded the "Great Books" division of the American Educational Theatre Association). He believed that ballet and movement could not adequately present narrative, preferring instead the *ballet blanc* or the more abstract forms of dance. Preston, on the other hand, presented the viewpoint that the body as text presented a more affective theatrical experience than the abstraction of the word.¹¹¹

Simons experienced an educational environment rich in contemporary European artistic theory and practice. As a result, Johnny Simons' synthesis of his influences and his resulting creation of the Hip Pocket Theatre created an artistic nursery that fed the growth of the region as members of his ensemble left the "liminal" universe of the Hip Pocket Theatre to be reassimilated by mainstream culture.

**PAUL BAKER'S INTEGRATION OF ABILITIES**

This author's personal artistic epiphanies involved two recipients of Texas' cultural renaissance, Johnny Simons and his theoretical "cousin," Paul Baker. Studies at the Dallas Theatre Center, where Baker served as founder and artistic director for over twenty years, included his theatre philosophy lectures. Paul Baker's

¹¹¹Gaston, interview.
training involved rigorous analysis, theory, and practical application of his "Integration of Abilities" performance philosophy. His disciplines became my personal window into the pedagogy and performance of Johnny Simons. Baker's modernist approach best describes Simons' process of creation, since Simons' creative methods are idealistic and spiritual.

Baker derived his modernist doctrines from the unpublished writings of Edward Gordon Craig. Both Baker and Simons received their guidance and direction from great mentors. Elsie Fogerty and George Pierce Baker directly inspired Paul Baker, while David Preston, Jacques Lecoq, Bill Garber, and Walther Volbach helped shape Simons' creative vision. 112 Though not a direct influence on Simons, Baker recognized a kindred creative spirit in the younger artist, and encouraged his efforts. Baker provides a parallel philosophical discipline that best reveals the depth of Simons' art.

Though only peripherally influenced by Baker's productions and philosophy, Johnny Simons and Baker exhibit similar independent natures nurtured by their native Texas soil. Baker sprinkled his lectures with references to the "twenty-five mile" mainstreet of his native Waco, Texas. Similarly, Simons roots his commedic universe to the shores of his beloved Lake Worth.

In another parallel, Baker presented a ground-breaking production of Hamlet, entitled Hamlet, ESP on May 28, 1957.113 In that production three actors, roughly equivalent to the ego, id, and

112Paul Baker, personal interview (2 Feb. 00).
113Paul Baker, dir. and adapter, Hamlet ESP (Baylor University: Word Recordings 1957).

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super ego, portrayed each of the major characters. Early in Johnny Simons' career, he presented an *Everyman* on the loading-dock of Texas Christian University theatre, based on a similar, tripartite character.

Instead of emphasizing "talent" within his pedagogy, Baker believed creativity was a learned process and reproducible through the practice of his specific disciplines; contemporary research on the continuous cognitive mapping of brain function in primates seems to support his premise. Simons' uses a similar attitude in that he uses "found" actors instead of "talented" professionals and develops their own creative voice, rather than expecting familiarity with a privileged artistic discourse that is the exclusive property of the aesthetically elite. This aspect of the "found" actor, similar to the found space or prop, contributes to Simons' concept of "rough" theatre.


Baker's philosophy allows the analysis to determine how the manipulation of an "element" amplifies the moment within a performance display. Baker's "Elements of Dramatic Form" describe

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114"Scientists Discover Human Brain Continues to Grow in Adulthood," *The Advocate* (16 May 00) 7A.

82
dramatic tension through his analytic vocabulary of line, texture, space, sound/silence, silhouette, and rhythm. The exercises in this approach focus on developing an individual's creativity through the understanding of those elements of form and constitute a formal pedagogy for the stimulation of creativity.

An essential element of Baker's pedagogy involves the performer's re-experience of their childhood "space"; Baker's element of "space" is also the most important in Simons' productions. The first decision faced by any theatrical practitioner is the manipulation of the spatial relationship between the performer and audience. Baker's exercise of "the childhood space" provides the most revealing insight into the creations of Johnny Simons.115

Simons recreated his childhood play space at the Hip Pocket Theatre as a playground for his actors. To construct his fantasies, Simons repeatedly returns to the magical world of childhood. Baker refers to the artist's exploration of the "childhood space" as a basic tool for artistic creativity.116 To explore the individual's personal creativity, the participant in the exercise re-experiences an environment filled with personal archetypes.

Simons often finds his muse by psychologically returning to the environment of his childhood. Simons constructed the Hip Pocket theatre from memories of family experiences while growing up on the shores of Lake Worth and populated that world with hybrids constructed from his past and the classical Commedia Dell'Arte.

During *Underneath the Top Down (A Cowtown Brigadoon)*, Johnny refers to the Hip Pocket Theatre when he sings as the narrator, "On a stage made of wood, glorifying childhood. . ." 117

The method-derived approach to acting pedagogy creates a performance space that is inhibitive and oppressive. Since the popularization of realism, invisible forces restricting personal expression fill the stage space. This methodical organization of oppressive societal forces as they manifest in physical behavior is a useful tool to the performer, but that tool may be a handicap if it limits exploration to inhibited expression alone. Through the re-experience of the childhood space, as taught by Baker and practiced by Simons, the theatrical space reopens to the performer and allows the return of the exhibitionistic expression of unhindered childhood. The "childhood space" lies at the core of Simons' creative mystery and he uses its archetypal experiences to liberate his actors:

"The spirit of play is very important, it should resemble primitive ritual. Texture is so important. I like to get people out in the woods and make 'em act silly, get nasty, filthy and sweat. Take sticks and play with them." 118

There is nothing more serious than child's play because there are relatively few limits on the degree of expression it generates. Exploration of the archetypal memories of childhood play lies within the liminoid process and is accessible only through membership in a

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118 Johnny Simons, interview.
subaltern group. As explained by Victor Turner, childsplay exists as an essential mode of free expression:

... Play, the enemy of work, was reluctantly and charily permitted only to children ... Only certain types of children's games and play are allowed some degree of freedom because these are defined as structurally "irrelevant," not "mattering."119

The objective of Simons' performance is that the audience becomes a "part" of the Hip Pocket's extended family. The feeling of kinship with the performers results from their vicarious experience of the ensemble's performative childsplay and the re-experience of their cultural similarity with Simons' past. Simons appeals to his audience by dramatizing the chthonic identity of topical locations. The explorations of his archetypal childhood include experiences in chthonic locations such as Lake Worth, Fort Worth, Azle, Dallas, and Cowtown.

The Hip Pocket Theatre performs in numerous venues: stages at The White Elephant Saloon (the oldest continuously operating saloon in America), a motel courtyard, warehouses, bars, and even exalted facilities such as the Kimbell Art Museum and St. Cuthbert's Hall at the Edinburgh Fringe Festival. However, the location behind Oak Acres Barbeque remains the most conducive for Simons' work. Johnny recreated his childhood space in this playground for actors. In Johnny's autobiographical The Lake Worth Monster, he reveals his preference for a "holy," outdoor space for "play":

"... this place in space is all of holiness
this place in space is all of sacredness

119 Turner, From Ritual to Theatre 39.
this place in space we mortals
mere humans being
dare disgrace
through our life comings
and our death goings..."120

Near a "haunted" castle, transported stone-by-stone from Europe by another Lake Worth eccentric, the Oak Acres Amphitheatre sits under the stars not far from the shore of Johnny's beloved Lake Worth.121 A copse of ancient live-oaks forms a grotto around a stage/playground constructed from driftwood, junk, scrap lumber and castoffs. It resembles a child's "clubhouse" more than a formal theatre. The choice of the outdoor space is a conscious one. In Van Gogh/Gauguin, Johnny's lyrics reveal his preferences for performance:

"... don't hand me no baloney
'bout no time and place
some thing's have to happen in an open space.
close to home
close to mind
close to my heart
sometimes I find
the answers to the questions I long to hear
I'm running from the devil that I dearly fear..."122

The stage features an on-stage tree house, porch swing, and structures that resonate with the dock, boathouse, beach chairs, pier, lake house, and lake of Johnny's childhood memories. One of Johnny's daughters carries the name of Lake and almost every Hip Pocket production contains a large blue cloth manipulated through

120Lake Worth Monster.
121"Castle Fire," The Advocate (1 March 2000) 20C.
122Van Gogh/Gauguin (personal audio cassette, 1987).

86
dance that represents Lake Worth's waters. In *Huzzytown*, June speaks for Simons when she says to Arthur Clinton Bostic, "I love my lake, Bostic."123

**SILHOUETTE**

In order of dominance, Baker's element of "silhouette" follows the element of "space" in Simons' stagings. Baker's element of silhouette is of particular importance in analyzing the commedic social stereotypes and, by extension, all the creations of Johnny and Diane Simons. Syncopations of rhythm, manifesting as straight, broken, and curved segments, create the line of a character's silhouette. The manipulation of the actor's silhouette through...

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In *Huzzytown*, the character of "the old lamplighter" begins and ends the play. The character performs an improvisatory pantomime to Bing Crosby's recording by the same name. At the play's conclusion, the lamplighter snuffs out the stage lights, one by one, as the memories and fantasies of Johnny's childhood fade away.

The play depicts the breakup of June's marriage and the troubles in Odessa Faye's relationship with Townes, who appears wearing the Molemo signature clown nose, and features a frustrating dance of seduction performed by "Dessie" (Odessa Faye) to provoke Townes. Dessie and Townes dance a pas-de-deux, a romanticized version of courtship inspired by the movies.

The basic family structure appears with a brief mention of Margaret Jane Bostic, who is a grand-baby by Arthur Clinton's older brother. Arthur serves the function of Jane's' confidante. In the play, Arthur Clinton reveals that he uses his theatrical career in a therapeutic manner to counter the difficulties he experiences due to his homosexuality, "Art absorbs pain, lives on it." Meema, June, and Arthur Clinton, disguise themselves as "huzzies," to free Jane from the evil influences of *Huzzytown*, providing the play with a stock character of Arlecchino (Arthur Clinton) in a dress.
oppositional movement to create interesting rhythms in line lies at the heart of creating the commedic clown forms.

Eugenio Barba helps to define silhouette in a simple exercise in his *The Dictionary of Theatre Anthropology*. Effective movement becomes obvious when standing in front of a bright light projected against a flat surface. The shadow's closed movement hides the expressiveness of the body, while open expansive movement becomes equally apparent.\(^{124}\) The shadow reduces the performer's shape to an essential line drawing, constructed from the building blocks of line and rhythm.

The element of silhouette strongly influences Diane's costume designs for the *Commedia*-inspired denizens that inhabit the shore of Lake Worth. Her designs, often described by local critics as ragged cast-offs, are painstaking works of detail that produce silhouettes to communicate the character's "core."

The silhouette is at its most expressive when it reaches the frozen moment of tableau, equivalent to the Kabuki "mie." The frozen attitude at the core of Johnny Simons' personal vision of himself (the human, not Molemo), is that of a religious ascetic in worshipful reverence, "I'm just a lonesome Cowtown yogi, sittin' cross-eyed on my pier. . . ."\(^{125}\)

Such a spiritual tableau, or photograph of the soul, recalls a quote from Faulkner's *As I Lay Dying* and his use of silhouette and tableau in reiterating an essential, expressive gesture that contains the


\(^{125}\)The *Lake Worth Monster*, Video.
entire nature and life history of a character, "In sunset we fall into furious attitudes, dead gestures of dolls."126 This frozen posture is the crystallization of the "pre-expressive want" described by Jerzy Grotowski.127 In another interpretation of the eternal frozen moment, Dr. Winston O'Boogie (John Lennon, another of Simons' oft-referred-to mentors) sang in The Ballad of John and Yoko, "Oh boy, when you're dead, you don't take nothin' with you but your soul."128

The connective tissue of movement links one of Simons' frozen moments to another. Through the communication of these frozen images, Simons shares the characters from his childhood and his fantastic vision of the lake and Fort Worth with his performers. Simons' daughter Lorca, an actress schooled in realistic drama and now embracing her father's forms through the study of "ritual drama," described her father's commedie performance style:

He would stop and start until he found the "edges" of shape and freeze. Take it right to the boundary, as if he would fall off, then go on to another shape.129

The satirical, physical construct of clowns is universal and exists in all cultures, from tribal units to utopian communities. Oppositional movement, emotional polarization, and depolarized sexuality define the essential elements of the lyrically grotesque commedie forms. The principle types, such as the Arlecchino,

126William Faulkner, As I Lay Dying. 191.
127Barba and Savarese 237
129Lorca Simons, personal interview (6 March 2000, 8:36 a.m.).
Dottore, Capitano, and Pantalone, reincarnate endlessly as frozen moments or "masks" in the popular discourse of culture, in the manner of replicating nodes within a Mandelbröt series (a self-replicating computer model based on a mathematical formula). Each successive permutation of a replicated node suffers from minor mutations, but retains its essential nature. The replication of the archetypal commedic forms along a syntagmatic axis of "silhouette" for a temporal continuity in semiotics, a commedic "Mandala" of identity.

Baker constantly quoted William Faulkner's manipulation of tableau in *As I Lay Dying* as an artistic example of character analysis. The Faulknerian tableau distills the personality into one essential posture containing all the historical elements of a personality. This frozen silhouette is analogous to the regenerative nature of the commedic forms within popular discourse and applicable to dramatic models inspired by chaos theory. Faulkner's quotation could easily be a correlative to the existence of Commedia's continuous replication as semiotic forms within popular human discourse:

"How do our lives ravel out into the no-wind, no-sound, the weary gestures wearily recapitulant: echoes of old compulsions with no-hand on no-strings: in sunset we fall into furious attitudes, dead gestures of dolls."130

The tableau or frozen posture communicates the essential, physical and mental polarity of a character's nature. The communication of this commedic form lies at the core of Simons'
pedagogical process. His frozen postures resonate with the commedic archetypes that reincarnate through numerous intertextual sources, such as television sitcoms, Recueil Fossard's etchings of the Italian players, and ancient Grecian vase paintings.

These frozen gestures, poses, and tableaux serve as theatrical signs for Johnny Simons to communicate his forms of the characters to his actors. By reducing the characters of the *Commedia* to a series of iconic, coded forms, and employing a communal language of "figurative clichés," Simons teaches either inexperienced actors or professionals the essential nature of the commedic types.

From each static posture, the student extrapolates the character's behavior in time. Simons demonstrates the "body as text" through teaching students oppositional movement between frozen forms in space. He demonstrates the essential frozen posture before applying the appropriate behavior and intensity of expression. Simons functions as a receiver tuned into the semiotic commedic forms contained within popular discourse. He offered his own perspective on this process:

"Occasionally something will flare up and put things together. *Commedia* evolved, or devolved, into other forms and is lurking just below the surface."^1

**RHYTHM**

Rhythm is the third most important element in Simons' manipulation of Baker's elements. Inherently, there is a vernacular rhythm in Simons' dialogue, yet he uses rhythmic movement to create lyrical, subjective depictions of human consciousness, as well.

^1Johnny Simons, interview.

91

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Created scenes recall flashbacks, slow-motion, cinematic camera shots, hallucinatory fever-dreams, and otherworldly fantasies. His style of lyrical movement is visual music with theatrical moments, either intensely focused in the present or heavy with nostalgia. Critics often confuse the lyricism of the Simons' movement theatre with Tai-Chi Chuan; but the lyrical nature of the Simons' productions is a product of Johnny's classical ballet training and the movement efforts that are an integral part of the French *Commedia* style.132 The critic, Gary McDonald, dismisses the "grotesque" aspect of rhythm as "children's theater impersonate-an-animal exercise(s)."133 In contrast, Perry Stewart compared Simons' use of rhythm to cinematic manipulation by a film director:

"The choreography is unabashedly cinematic—not in a grand Hollywood style, but in the manner of an experimental short by a student filmmaker newly infatuated with stop action, slo-mo and reverse. Director Simons seems to realize this and to stroll casually at times into self parody."134

Simons' performance displays are not all flowing and diaphanous. His characters also retain their grotesque natures, carnal drives, and physicality of the archetypal commediac personas. This "grotesque" and rough movement manifests as eccentric movement that communicates the most basal of human desires. The mixture of the two forms prompted Mary Lou Hoyle to name his particular creative genre, the "lyric grotesque." Dan Hulbert described the

132Johnny Simons, interview.
133Gary McDonald, "Stage" *Dallas Observer* (Hip Pocket Theatre Archives).
134Stewart, "Street Stories," *Fort Worth Star-Telegram*.
frenetic nature of the ensemble's movement in his review of The Impresario:

"Now the Hip Pocket is such a geyser of comic energy that sometimes it's difficult to understand what they're saying and doing; they've shaken up this play like a bottle of Asti Spumante, and we got so much bubbles and gas that we can't quite savor the wine. But still, it would be a shame if Simons told his troupe to hold anything back. Their comic instincts are too good, and their sense of freedom too infectious." 135

TEXTURE

Diane constructs the actor's ragged costumes with infinite care, careful choosing materials, shapes, and colors to enlarge the character's image through texture. Dan Hulbert described the vibrancy of her costumes in the Hip Pocket's production of The Impresario:

"But how, how, how to describe the costumes of Diane Simons? If any costumes could sing, dance and turn somersaults by themselves, without the benefit of any bodies inside them—these costumes would be the ones to do it. Each outfit is a riot of color, and seeing them alone would be worth the price of admission." 136

By Johnny Simons' own admission, the element of texture is of great importance to his creations. The feeling of sweat on the skin and raw wood under bare feet sets the mood for his "rough" theatre performances. A principal contributor to the texture of the Hip Pocket productions is the brutal heat of outdoor performance during


93
an oppressive Texas summer. It is impossible to remain clean during rehearsals or performance. Daytime rehearsals, sometimes held with temperatures topping a hundred and twenty degrees, cause actors to sweat profusely. Each drop disappears as it hits the bleached wood of the stage. The "dirty" nature of the theatre's performances provides a distillation of the liminal experience and an inversion of the manicured world of Fort Worth's theatrical elite.

Simons incorporates aural texture through his choice of musical genre. Carefully scored pantomimic movement sequences align with music or lyrics. Often, regional folk-music accompanies his lyrics; however, his use of musical genres may range across a wide continuum of ethnographic choices. For Rider of the Purple Sage, Simons employed a group called "Salt Lick," a contemporary western string band; transversely he hired the musical group of "Sungarden," who specializes in recreating Celtic and medieval music to accompany The Second Shepherd's Play and Tales of the Arabian Nights. One critic compared Sungarden's contribution to the performance of Arabian Nights as:

"... a cross between Bolero and a Middle Eastern version of A Horse with No Name, the hauntingly repetitious rock odyssey of several years back. Whatever name you assign it, this song of Sinbad is as compelling and innovative as anything in the show . . . they turn out to be trans-ethnic."137

SOUND/SILENCE

Music is a hallmark of Simons' productions at the Hip Pocket Theatre and he uses live musicians whenever the budget and the


94
production allow. The use of organized music provides a manipulation of rhythmic energy and mood for both the ensemble and audience. The musicians are not just accompanists; rather they become contributing members of the ensemble. They must observe and adjust the accompanying score to not only the performers' needs, but needs of the audience as well. Simons' use of pantomimic movement accompanied by either music or silence, provides an effective manipulation of this element.

The region's vernacular speech patterns affect Simons' dialogue as well. Simons uses inherent dialectical rhythms to accentuate the element of sound/silence. Balentine reflected these innate rhythms in the musical phrasing of the Monster's score. Idiosyncratic speech forms indicating the rhythms of Texas dialects include words such as "hollerin'; ain't"; the dropped "g" on nearly all "ing" suffixes; dropped prefixes as in "'cause"; contracted articles, such as "n" for "and"; and the dropped d in "ol"; provide evidence of Monster's internal rhythmic scheme. Simons also manipulates the Bakerian element of "sound/silence" through directorial choices that enhance the rhythm of diction inherent in his writing.

Last in order of importance in Simons' productions is the element of "line." Simons Obviously delineates this element through the blocking and orchestration of stage pictures, but his use of line has deeper significance. The entire process of rehearsal takes place on a formal pattern of invisible lines that constitute the play's choreographic movement, blocking, and design. The ensemble's
constant repetition of the linear form of Simons' lyrically grotesque movement in space is similar to the practice of a martial art "kata." Continuous repetition of these lines of movement during the rehearsal process is congruent to a meditation on a physical mantra like that of the "kata." Exact adherence to its form combined with repetition allows Simons' unskilled performers to develop creative intuition and experience the sublime spark that generates art.

This process is synonymous with the "nature object" exercise of Dr. Baker's "Integration of Abilities" exercises. In that process, as taught by Irene Corey and Dr. Baker, the student chooses an organic form to explore the senses and begins drawing the essential "line" contained in the object. There are no limits on the number of repetitions of the drawing. The only stipulation in the exercise is that it must spark a creative urge. Once the students reach the next stage of exploration, they begin to walk the line in space and repeat this section of the exercise until the next creative "charge" occurs. At this point the student "creates" in any medium the definitive line of the object suggests and shares the outcome with the class.

This aspect of using the inherent lines contained in organic surroundings to stimulate creativity echoes the principles of bifurcation in Mandelbröt/chaos models; these models illustrate population behaviors, the organization of turbulence, or the mechanics of randomness. The models reverberate not only with the study of Complexity Theory, but also with Taoist philosophy, which that state that interacting forces create their own system of classification and hierarchy.
SUMMARY

Johnny Simons was the beneficiary of an educational renaissance resulting from the region's financial security due to the oil boom. The apogee of the post World War II years occurred during the sixties and early seventies when Simons was a student of Bill Garber, David Preston, Walther Volbach, and Jacques Lecoq (respectively). This explosion of dramatic culture on the Texas frontier brought another seminal educator to the forefront, Dr. Paul Baker. His disciplines of "The Integration of Abilities" and his "Elements of Theatrical Form" established an artistic and spiritual methodology for the analysis of Simons' production of *The Lake Worth Monster*. Paul Baker and Irene Corey were personal mentors of the author and provided a window into Simons' pedagogy. Without their patience and insight, the complexity of Simons' performance displays would be inaccessible.
V. THE COMMEDIC ICONS IN SIMONS' SECONDARY THEATRICAL REALITY

As a result of the Texas renaissance in theatre, impressive lines of European theatrical influence culminated in Simons' creation of a commedic alternative universe. Simons synthesized the disparate forms of the French *Commedia* and their American counterparts, the "Yankee" and the blackface minstrel, with indigenous forms from his native southwest. These include personal history, topical references, family values, nostalgic sentiment, local politics, and pop culture. The synthesis created Texanian clowns who maintained not only their regional identity, but also their European origin.

The most influential and important reiterative type appearing in Simons' version of the *Commedia* is that of Arlecchino. As in previous European incarnations of the commedic ensemble, Arlecchino is the most reoccurring form in Simons' interpolations of the characters. Simons manifests Arlecchino as his alternate persona of Molemo, the most telling example of Simons' conflation of "pop" culture and classical form. "Molemo, King of the sewer rats," is a slightly demonic puppet-master. During vocal warm-ups with his actors, Simons often prances about in this malevolent character, intoning in falsetto, "Here kitty, kitty, kitty!" The character of Molemo naturally corresponds with the iconic identity of Arlecchino, the trickster and archetypal driving force of the *Commedia*. Variations on the Arlecchino type such as Pulcinella, the Yankee, the blackface minstrel, and the Chinaman, also appear in other productions by Simons.

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138Johnny Simons, artistic residency.
Johnny appears in his "memory" plays most often as the character of Jimmy Molemo. This particular character appears in many plays, such as a playwright with a writer's block in *Women In Slips*, as an old sewer-rat, the owner of the carnival in *Clown Alley, Circus Days*; and as the title of a separate play, *Molemo* (a part of the 1990 Hip Pocket season).

Simons' personal connection to the chthonic "Molemo" legend, and his self-identification with Arlecchino prove to be central metaphors within his commedic universe. Simons' identity of "Molemo" in this alternate commedic universe is a frightening persona, as much a part of his personality as his real world identity. His alter-ego of Molemo provides a touchstone for Simons to enter this self-constructed reality.

Numerous plays like *Adventures with June and Scotty, Huzzytown,* and *Molemo,* mention the legend of Molemo, Johnny's childhood arch-enemy. Johnny terrified childhood friends with stories about "Molemo" and his search for the monster in the storm drains that honeycomb the subterranean Fort Worth. 139 Most likely, Johnny's over-active imagination and the reverberation of sound in the concrete conduits contributed to the character's mysterious nature. 140 In *Huzzytown,* Dodson and Jane's boys (Dan and David) become lost searching for Molemo in the sewers and Townes (Johnny's real life father) must crawl into the sewer to rescue them.

Molemo represents Johnny's fears, the dark part of his nature, or his *kundulini,* the raw feminine creative energy of his art.

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139 Simons and Balentine, television interview.
140 Johnny Simons, interview.
Johnny's art allows his identity to explore the darkness of his soul through the vehicle of Molemo. The dark side of Johnny/Molemo figuratively appears as the monster in his magnum opus, *The Lake Worth Monster*. A performance journal kept by actor John Murphy, contains his impressions of the internal struggles depicted in a Simons performative display:

"That night, . . . we were about to witness, *Return of the Creature*. A captivating, disturbing happening about one man's struggle against eternal odds—a man who finally loses his battle and sinks together with his soul into the mossy waters of Lake Worth."[141]

In turn, the play *Women in Slips* deals with the bestial nature of the alternate commedic universe that borders on Johnny's reality.[142] In *Women in Slips*, a "blue baboon ballet" torments Jimmy Molemo in his abandoned childhood home. In an odd reversal of human nature, reality becomes a refuge for Simons, while fantasy

[142] In the play, Jimmy confesses that he killed a hoptoad mowing the grass, and that it traumatized him. Neighbor B. B. Ruebottom bonds with Jimmy when he confides a similar harrowing story of a crazy boy with a hatchet who killed kittens; and his feelings of helplessness in being too small to stop him. Johnny explores brutality and a realm of horror that is sensed, yet not directly experienced. These brutal allusions, together with the attacks of the blue baboons depict the terror lurking within the alternate universe. The baboons tempt Pinky Ruebottom to seduce Jimmy Molemo. The baboons carry Pinky away after they dance a wild tango. The play is self-referential, with B. B. complaining about being a part of a play he doesn't like. The muses appear as the "women in slips" and defeat the baboons. B. B. takes over the play's creation from Jimmy, banishes the baboons, and tells the scantily clad women to stay. The muses consider his offer and give control of the script back to Jimmy.
becomes the threat. The Blue Baboons begin to overrun Simons' real world and destroy friends and family. Here, Simons apparently serves the myths of his self-created universe.

Another self-referential, Arlecchino-like substitution for Simons in his alternate universe is the identity of Charlie Nose. This nom-de-plume is Simons' stage name in Actor's Equity Association, an organization he despises. Nose appears as a character in several inversions of the Simons Universe, such as The Nose Show, and by sporadic references in works like The Lake Worth Monster.

The character of Bud is another manifestation of Johnny Simons' alter-ego in the world of Commedia. John Murphy often wore a red rubber nose as a trademark his performance of the character. A red clown nose also appears in other Molemo-like characters such as Townes (Johnny's/Jimmy's father in Huzzytown) and "Dad" (Underneath the Top Down: a Cowtown Brigadoon). Johnny's alter-ego of Molemo often sports the red rubber nose, a headband, a worn and stained gimmie-cap, old jeans and tee-shirt, and is barefoot or wears brogans.

Johnny signs his correspondence with "Molemo" and during face-to-face conversation, often referring to himself in the third-person. During the last staging of The Lake Worth Monster in 1989, when asked who would build the set, he replied:

"Jimmy."
"Who?"
"Jimmy Sims."\(^\text{143}\)

\(^{143}\) Johnny Simons, artistic residency.
In previous productions, a core group of character actors portrayed Johnny's alter egos and serving as his mouthpiece. The actors who portrayed aspects of Simons include Dick Harris, David Yeakle, John Murphy, and the author.

The Arlecchino type invariably functions as a trickster and "imprecator of fate," like the Yoruban god, Eshu. In Return of the Creature and The Lake Worth Monster, the "monsters" rise from the depths of suppressed consciousness and feminine sensuality to simultaneously represent opposition, destruction, and salvation. They become Johnny's megalomaniacal alter-egos during a staged trial of personal ethics. The "monsters" both served as Arlecchinos, tricksters representing neither positive nor negative forces, but instruments of fate that reveal things the way they truly are.

The trickster archetype appears in Hip Pocket Theatre productions in various forms, from Johnny's boyhood dog that acts as narrator in an installment depicting young Jimmy's family, The Real Story of Ducey the Pucy, to an Arlecchino in full garb (Philostrate, the master of Revels in A Midsummer Night's

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144 B. B. Ruebottom in Women in Slips and Attack of the Bee Girls. The real Ruebottom was a childhood neighbor.
145 Cowboy Billy in The Lake Worth Monster.
146 Jimmy Molemo in Nova's Shady Grove and Women in Slips.
147 Wiley Shakespeare, Grandpa, and the Lake Worth Monster in The Lake Worth Monster
Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* obviously draws from Italianate comedy and features Pantalone (Ageus), Capitanos (the heroic Theseus and boastful Bottom), a Dottore (Peter Quince), and three sets of ingenues (Theseus/Hippolyta, Demetrius/Helena, and Lysander/Hermia).

Lake Simons found an affinity between Johnny's performances of Arlecchino in *The Three Cuckold*, and Lecoq's rendition of the character. Unfortunately, she was never able to explore the character under Lecoq's instruction. Lecoq did not permit women to perform in the mask of Arlecchino. Her only personal experience of the character at Lecoq's school occurred under the surreptitious tutelage of a female instructor.

The Arlecchino type appears in numerous forms in other Simons' creations, but the forms do not necessarily reflect his personality. In *Tom Sawyer, a Banjo Commedia*, Tom is a classic yankee clown, outsmarting his friends into whitewashing the fence. Arlecchino and Brighella go to a graveyard in the forms of Tom and Huck and watch Injun Joe (a braggart and Pantalone), stab a large puppet of Dr. Robinson (a Dottore). Mark Twain's Mississippi River resonates with the lake of Johnny's youth when three zannis, Joe (a young naive friend), Huck, and Tom, hide on an island and play pirates. These three zannis could easily play the Larry, Curly, and

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149 John (Jimmy's Father), Jimmy, Odessa (Jimmy's mother), Ducey the Pucy (the dog), and Mr. Weaver (a neighbor and Jimmy's protector), all appear in a play that relates Jimmy's coming of age. Young Jimmy meets an "Injun" maid, a relative of Mr. Weaver's and has his first kiss.

Lake Simons, personal interview (March 17, 1999. 2:00 p.m.).

150 Lake Simons, interview.

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Moe, of *Commedia* corresponding to Punchinella, Arlecchino, and Brighella. The character of Pap supplies a malicious Pantalone to this retelling of Twain's classic.

The double-voiced and blackfaced American commedic forms, plus the stock characters of the Chinaman, and the yankee, all appear in Simons' performance displays. The classic *Commedia* types crossed the Atlantic and reincarnated as early minstrel show and blackface entertainments. The independent Americans created their own grotesque commedic characters from stock commedic types. Blackface figures such as Jim Crow, the Boatman, Juba, Snowball, Sambo, and Jumbo Chaff, together with an Americanized Arlecchino in the form of the comic "yankee" or "Jonathan," replaced the Eurocentric figures of the *Commedia*.

Traditional minstrel fare contained a satirical dual-voice, a dominant voice symbolizing blackface stereotypes, and a passive voice carrying a hidden but "signifyin," derogatory message towards whites. The white parodists of early African American life unknowingly incorporated the behavior of the African trickster figure into their comic characterizations. Mainstream white culture, in its creation of the "otherness" of the blackfaced fool, assimilated the "signifyin" satirical voice along with the stereotype of the "devilish" black man.

Simons used minstrel figures as a cultural and dramatic device to incorporate African Americans into the commedic dialogue as trickster figures. Characters derived from black-faced minstrel prototypes appear in numerous works by Simons. Generally, he uses these characters as commedic functionaries to represent exotics or
primitive forces; he does not investigate their inherent bias. During the first installment of *R. Crumb Comix*, the script (cartoon panels from Crumb's comic books) contains traditional blackface speech as the character of Whiteman has his pants pulled down by "Niggers." Simons sanitized this scene by having the integrated ensemble portray the blackface characters and removing any racial slurs; however, the syntax and rhythm of the minstrel dialect remained, indicating its origins. 151

Grover Coulson, an athletic black dancer, usually portrays roles exploiting blackface origins. Coulson appeared as *Rue Royal* in *The Lake Worth Monster*, a metaphorical and parodic, "drag" entity symbolizing the Mardi Gras' demented, libidinous carnality of flesh that drags Cowboy Billy to the depths of personal dissipation. Coulson also plays another "drag" character in *Van Gogh/Gauguin*, Chocolat, the café dancer.

Another character drawn from blackface minstrelsy appears in James Maynard's adaptation of *King Kong* for the Hip Pocket. Though never a blatant reference to African Americans, the original film grew out of the "Negro chic" of American popular culture of the 1930's. A yellow-faced Arlecchino or "Chinaman," appears as Charlie Chan in Simons' *Charlie Chan and the House of Tomorrow*, an obviously borrowing from American yellow-face minstrelsy. 152


152 Casa Mañana (House of Tomorrow) is an equity arena stage and a Fort Worth institution—the only theatre designed by Buckminster Fuller. Both Diane and Johnny spent a significant
Simons occasionally uses characters derived from black-face minstrelsy to cut against the grain of the stereotype and examine the bias. In a self-referential parody that echoes the Zulu Parade during New Orleans' Mardi Gras festivities, Simons cast Grover Coulson in the role of Sam Spade for *The Maltese Falcon*. Coulson also appeared as the hero, Ely Green, in a "Simonized" local legend, *Ely Green and the Flying Air Corps of Cowtown*.

A dual-voiced, minstrel-inspired character appears in *The Wildman of the Navidad*, a historically accurate tale set in 1836, concerning an African prince that escapes slavery to live in isolated freedom for fifteen years along the shores of the Navidad River north of Houston. Grover Coulson also performed the title role in this fable. In the "Wildman's" solitude, the Navidad River anthropomorphizes into his lover. Once recaptured, he spends his remaining days as a slave named Jimbo. Simons' auto-chthonic identity as the "Wildman of Lake Worth" parallels the life of the escaped African prince. It is probable that Johnny/Jimmy Molemo identifies with the outlaw nature of this character, because Simons sees the "Wildman" as an African Americanized version of the Tarzan myth. Simons is an avid fan of Edgar Rice Burroughs and Tarzan is a central legend in his "Molemo" mythos.

The reiterative comic character of Pantalone is second in importance to the iconic pantheon of types used in Simons' performance displays. Most commonly, the type appears as a feminized Pantalone named "Meema," Johnny's grandmother, Stella portion of their artistic careers creating original scripts for Casa Mañana's children's theatre to trim production costs.
Mae Dowdy. Meema is a central, family figure and usually functions as the narrator and "foundation" of the "memory" plays. Peggy Bott Harris, an actress often hired to appear in the character at public events, invariably portrays Meema. In true commedic fashion, many of the lines in Huzzytown appear ad-libbed.

The image of Pantalone appears as Roy in Daughters of Zeeack. The song "Ugly Old Man" highlights the grotesque nature of Pantalone/Roy/Simons. Simons wrote and recorded the music for the play, making his alternate identity in the commedic universe of Zeeack even stronger. "Ugly Old Man" paints a picture of an aging Johnny Simons, and intones an old man's search for meaning in life's decay.

The braggarts Capitano and Dottore share equal billing in Simons' alternative universe. The braggart characters surface frequently in Simons' performative displays. "Whiteman" is an overblown and repressed Caucasian male that cannot withstand the artificial structures of his world in R. Crumb Comix. Tarzan of the Apes features a bullying, old silverback as the youthful Tarzan's nemesis. The author performed as Coviello, a Capitano in The Impresario for the first collaboration between the Hip Pocket Theatre and the Kimbell Art Museum. The author also performed a braggadocio version of Mr. Peachum for of John Gay's The Beggar's Opera. Other notable braggart types include: Brom Bones (The Legend of Sleepy Hollow),\textsuperscript{153} Cowboy Billy (The Lake Worth

\textsuperscript{153}Sleepy Hollow, a Headless Tale, adapted by Simons & Rogers (Hip Pocket Video Archives, 1992).
Monster), Roy (Nova's Shady Grove), Huck (Tom Sawyer, a Banjo Commedia) and Mak (The Second Shepherd's Play).

In Kerouac, a play Simons co-authored with John Murphy in a rambling stream-of-consciousness manner, a pair of Dottores appear in the guise of literary critics. Simons' and Murphy's "Kerouac" seems a madman Pierrot with a death wish, spewing poetic language as if illustrating Shakespeare. In an interesting parallel, Kerouac views America as a poem, while Simons sees "Cowtown" as a lyric, if grotesque, version of Fort Worth.

In Nova's Shady Grove, Simons describes the character of Roy/himself as "Goatman Roy, a zombie James Dean," and "old Jack Kerouac." This play chronicles the transformation from a buffoon (Roy as a drunken janitor) to prophet (Roy as an Elvis/Angel), crucifying himself on the side of the Shady Grove Boat House.

"Good, old girls," usually referred to as "Dowds" or "Dowdys," function as a chorus of Columbias (feminized Arlecchinos) providing provocative movement, or as the characters of saintly relatives. Originally inspired by Johnny's beloved aunt June Dowdy and "Aunt" Scotty, the "Dowdys" appear in scripts like Women in Slips, Huzzytown, Girls from Girdleville Meet Men in B.V.D.'s, R. Crumb Comix, and as the lake maidens from The Lake

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155 Raggedy Farm (personal audio cassette, 1980).
Nova's Shady Grove (Hip Pocket Video Archives, 1977).
156 The Second Shepherd's Play (personal video archives of John Murphy, 1985).
Worth Monster. It is almost a certainty that any female chorus in a Simonesque legend will contain elements of the "Dowdys." A scantily clad chorus of "Dowdys" often provides a "leg show burlesque" for male members of the audience and an opportunity for Johnny to stage personal fantasies.

These "dowdys" may range in behavior from the "whore-dogs" of Huzzytown, to the powerful muses of Women in Slips, to his beloved aunts, June and Scotty, who appear in Young Dowds, Daughters of Zeeack, and Adventures with June and Scotty. They are soubrettes, affected prissy Texas "good old-girls" that end almost every sentence with "hon, yaais," or "precious." Lake Simons referred to them as "Smereidinas." In Brazen Huzzies, Barbeque Joints, and Chili Dogs, the dowds are strippers backstage during their break. Simons recorded the banter between professional ecdyziasts and used it as inspiration for the script.

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157 Young Dowds features the characters of June, Jane, and Dodson out on the levy on their prom night, when June has to intervene on behalf of Jane after Dodson becomes overpowered with lust. Though the situation in the play does not result in rape, there is an implication of brutality.

158 June Marshall also appears in Adventures with June and Scotty, and Huzzytown. The real character of June Marshall was a neighbor of June and Scotty's and not mysterious at all.

159 Barbeque Joints, Brazen Huzzies, and Chili Dogs. Meema and Arthur Clinton Bostic go to "The Smokepit," a local barbeque joint. The brazen huzzies come from a backstage recording Johnny taped at a local "titty" bar. The strippers, or huzzies, are character types Johnny calls "dowdys." A character type often portrayed by Dena Brinkley. The brazen Hussies were women leading rough lives, doing a factory-like, repetitive job. The chili dogs in the title refer to "good, old dogs that sleep under the porch."
A male chorus is often present to appreciate the charms of the "Dowds" and express masculine longing for the comfort they might supply. Johnny Simons also uses the two choruses as a mixed ensemble, consisting of a variety of minor hybrid-commedic types that assume different characters as needed.

Sociological stereotypes determine Simons' casting choices for his ensemble. He often wrote plays to fit the commedic types of specific actors. Simons' most artistically satisfying productions occurred when he created roles for specific personalities already present in the core troupe and already commedic by nature. Doug Balentine said of the troupe, "They are like big stars in movies who play themselves, like Jim Carey or the Marx Brothers."

Johnny also typecasts actors that resemble or carry an essence of his real life relations. Lake Simons credits a large part of her father's success with casting from type, "The thing that is so beautiful about the clown is showing yourself, opening yourself up, showing who you are, and showing all your faults." Doug Balentine, a co-founder of the Hip Pocket, recalled:

"He not only created the characters but cast people he knew to fit those roles, like Jimmy Joe and himself. Because those roles were natural to those particular people, they were able to play themselves and that's why it became so lifelike. . . ."

Simons used the personal attributes of his company members as a basis to cast the principal commedic roles in his creations at the

160 Johnny Simons, interview.
161 Balentine, interview.
162 Lake Simons, interview.
163 Balentine, interview.
Hip Pocket Theatre. The core ensemble from 1970 to 1980 included:
John Murphy, David Yeakle, Jimmy Joe Steenbergen, Gary Cunningham, Pat Diaz, Peggy Harris, Dena Brinkley, Gene Woods, Grover Coulson, Linda Boydston, and Dick Harris, among others.
The casting of these individuals equates identity with performance.
David Yeakle is a svelte dancer and talented mime, often cast as an Arlecchino. A Dottore in reality, John Murphy, a tall, angular
dentist and part-time filmmaker, often portrays Molemo/Arlecchinos and Dottores.

Grover Coulson provides an African Americanized, double-voiced Arlecchino in the ensemble. Johnny also employs the talents of Hip Pocket Theatre co-founder, Doug Balentine, in numerous capacities. Doug is a large man with a cherubic face, rich baritone voice, and the ability to play the four basic commedic types.

Jimmy Joe Steenbergen, often cast as Pantalone, is a bearded and long-haired ordained minister, as well as a biker, a college professor, and a retired trapeze artist. Peggy Harris is a stout singing comedienne who portrays feminized Arlecchinos (Columbinas) and Pantalones (Meema, in particular). As a bewhiskered toothless troll, the late Gene Woods provided Johnny with a grotesque Pantalone. Dena Brinkley is a husky-voiced, red-headed Texas diva that often portrays ingenues and Arlecchinos. Dick Harris is a stately, balding engineer, often fulfilling the roles of Dottores and Pantalones.

Diane's costuming choices reflect the commedic identities of the Hip Pocket ensemble. Diane's costumes contribute to a child's sense of "dress-up," and repeat costume elements to identify reappearing character types. The costume for Roy in \textit{Nova's Shady
Grove, played by Jimmy Joe Steenbergen, bears compelling similarities to costumes worn by Jimmy Joe in other roles, such as an ape in Tarzan. Dena Brinkley appears in a leather biker outfit as Rose in Nova's Shady Grove; she wore the same outfit as "wild chili-pie," a hot-blooded waitress in the play, Raggedy Farm. Diane also used Dena's biker outfit in Nova's Shady Grove, when Dena wore it for her portrayal of a crow, the metaphoric figure of death.

SIMONS' PERSONAL HISTORY:

Johnny Simons' creation of hybridized American versions of traditional characters positions the work of the Hip Pocket Theatre within the fusing of contemporary Commedia's topical and pop culture icons with traditional forms. The works of Antonin Artaud, Bertolt Brecht, and Jerzy Grotowski induced Johnny's "bastard" cross-breeding of traditional European character types and iconic Fort Worth figures. The films, radio, comics, and pulp novels of Simons' youth exerted a powerful effect on Simons' independent study, wrapping his plays in the nostalgic atmosphere of a lakeside "Cowtown," set in the late 1940's. Johnny stated during a videotaped interview for public access television:

"I like to use foundations of reality which are my experiences with my family, then build on top of that, layer it in certain ways. So it has a basis of truth to it..."

As a playwright, Simons uses personal archetypes to reflect his understanding of the commedic medium. Johnny inverts family and friends from his "Cowtown" childhood to become recognizable,

164 Simons and Balentine, television interview.
representations of childhood figures in his personal universe. Characters from Johnny's childhood re-emerge in commedic identities such as Meema, Pinky Lee and B. B. Ruebottom, Jimmy Pyrex Poote, *Tarzan*, June and Scotty, and Ducy the Pucy (a family dog).

The extrapolation of his personal history provides Simons/Molemo with minions for his secondary reality. Molemo/Simons is king of the liminalized ensemble of "show trash" in his alternative universe and his lakeside theatre. For example, in Johnny's *Huzzytown*, a vortex transports characters/actors from a familiar world of friends and family to the "Bizarro," the commedic world of "Cowtown."

Another instance of Simons' interpolation of the familiar into the grotesque exists in the play *Women in Slips*. That play features Jimmy Molemo as a playwright with writer's block who must return to his abandoned childhood home to regain his muse. B.B. and Pinky Ruebottom are also neighborhood characters based on real individuals. B.B. and Pinky appear in other Simons' epics, such as *Attack of the Bee Girls*. The play is also rife with topical allusions to Ft. Worth, with names such as the Belknap Bridge, Jacksboro Highway, and Haltom City.

The characters in Simons' alternative universe grew like Jason's "dragon's teeth," eternally connected to the soil that nurtured them. Two central chthonic realms serve as heaven-father and earth-mother to the Hip Pocket mythos, the masculine Cowtown, "where the west begins," and the feminine Lake Worth (see Illustration 2). There are many minor chthonic realms in Simons' commedic
alternate universe such as the despised "Dalleese" (Dallas), Casa Mañana, Azle, and Panther City.\(^{165}\) John Murphy's journal mentions Simons mystical connection to Lake Worth:

"The lake was and still remains a very magical-strange place... Forever... projecting some indescribable fantastic feeling... It was this very body of strange water that so affected and plagued the unbelievable founder-guru of Hip Pocket--Charles Nose-and stirred great demons and angels inside his head; many of the resulting Hip Pocket phenomenon-experiences came crawling right out of Charles' experiences on the lake, out of his fantastic head, and into a recognizable and easily assimilated form."\(^{166}\)

THE FAMILY:

Johnny peoples his plays with characters that represent his own personal mythos and arbiters of fate that include angels, devils, muses, gods, and monsters. Cowboy Billy and Belstar from *The Lake Worth Monster* are mythic versions of Johnny and his first wife and the self-destructive tendencies within Billy that manifest the Frankenstein-like character of the Monster. Reoccurring characters in Simons' memory plays, together with their relationships include:

The older generation (Pantalones, Capitanos, and Dottores):
Meema or Stella Mae Dowdy (Jane, June, and Odessa's mother)
Roy Dowdy (Jimmy's grandfather and Meema's husband)

\(^{165}\)A motorcycle mechanic told the story that the suburb got its name from escaped circus cats during a train wreck. Johnny Simons said that when Fort Worth really was "Cowtown," it was so tame that a panther could sleep on Main Street and not be disturbed.\(^{166}\) Murphy, *Unpublished Manuscript* 6.

114
Grady (Meema's brother-in-law and the second husband of Odie)

Rose

Odie (She was the first Odessa. She is Meema's sister and the mother of Arthur Clinton Bostic)

Immediate family (Ingenues, Arlecchinos, and Columbinas):

Odessa Faye Townes (Jimmy's mother and Meema's oldest daughter)
John Townes (Jimmy's father)
Jimmy Molemo (Johnny's alter-ego)

Aunts, Uncles, and Cousins (A Mixture of forms):

Jane Dodson (June and Jane are the "jello toe" twins see synopsis of Huzzytown)
Dodson (Jane's no-account husband)
David and Dan Dodson (Jane's two boys, once reanimated as female twins)
June Dowdy
Scotty (Johnny's "aunt")

Arthur Clinton Bostic (The son of Odie and her first husband. Bostic is a gay, professional, Shakespearean actor, puppeteer, cousin from New York, and confidante of Jane, June, and Scotty's)

Neighborhood figures (A Mixture of forms):

June Marshall (a metaphoric "dark" figure)
Mr. Weaver (a neighbor)
B. B. and Pinky Ruebottom (Jimmy's neighbors as a child)

Brother Swank (the preacher at the family church, Sagamore Hill)

Nova's Shady Grove features one of Johnny Simons' most self-critical personas. He appears as Bud/Molemo, a drunken playwright, who "draws pictures and makes plays." The Nova production that reveals the self-created gods from Johnny's personal mythos. Set and performed in a lake-side bar, Nova's Shady Grove contains the characters of: Nova (a "Dowd" without a heart of gold), Roy and Rose (mirrors and mouthpieces for the Simons) portrayed by Jimmy
Joe Steenbergen and Dena Brinkley, Bud (a Simons' doppelgänger played by John Murphy), and the omniscient and the omnipresent character of Lake Worth (present in the staging of every familial Simons legend).

The characters do not line up linearly from play to play, but mutate with each incarnation. The characters may appear as one type in one legend and change types in the next retelling. At times, the changes are minimal but other figures experience a radical rebirth. Roy from Nova's Shady Grove is not the grandfatherly Pantalone found in Daughter's of Zeeack, or the retired railroader from Raggedy Farm, but a worthless, drunken braggart. The Roy of Raggedy Farm bears little relation to the grandfatherly incarnation found in Daughter's of Zeeack, sharing little other than his fixation with trains. The line of continuous characterization remains a suggested ghostly sentiment in Simons' radical inversions of the characters. The continuance of their identities parallels the continuous reiteration of the commedic types behavioral tendencies in popular culture.

A childhood friend and fishing companion, Mr. Weaver, probably contributed elements to the "Grandpa" figure in The Lake Worth Monster and the Roys of Nova's Shady Grove, and Raggedy Farm, as well as the neighbor in Daughters of Zeeack. Johnny's grandfather did not share characteristics with any of these creations, yet Johnny describes Mr. Weaver in terms that relate to these characters, an "old Indian man . . . big, red, mean, threatening, fat,
alcoholic, dangerous, a hair-triggered tower of masculinity and love." 167

A particular example of Simons' use of his relations appears in Adventures with June and Scotty. A synopsis of the action of the play reads:

"The characters are Jimmy, June and Jane, June Marshall, Scotty, Bostic, Meema, Irene and Irena (Jane's twins), and John. In family fun, June, Jane, and Arthur perform a dance number for Jim.

Meema doesn't want young Jimmy swimming in the lake because she "Don't want him to catch polio." The play explores Odessa's drinking problem and June's fixation on her "Scottie" dogs. Arthur dresses the dogs in costumes, performs a "folk-myth" with a mermaid marionette for Jimmy, and June gives Jimmy his first beer (with salt like Meema likes it). Jimmy begs to spend the night with his beloved aunts and sleeps on their dock.

A 1940's radio show plays during intermission. After intermission, June and Scotty explore their romantic relationship during a slow dance. June Marshall swims to the dock as a metaphoric, malevolent mermaid. Jimmy touches her breast the way Arthur taught him to touch the breast of the mermaid puppet, illustrating a rite of passage.

Jimmy contracts polio, evidently from his contact with June Marshall; June Dowdy, a physical therapist, recognizes the symptoms in young Jimmy. 168

Simons' play Huzzytown explores another familial legend and centers on the day that led to the breakup of the marriage of Jimmy's aunt, Jane Dowdy. 169 At a bar, June Marshall, a shadowy, 167Molemo, audio cassette.

168Simons' living relatives shun him, due to his affectionate portrayals of the lesbian relationship between June and Scotty.

169Huzzytown is the story of the day that led up to the actions of another play, Adventures with June and Scotty.
metaphorical figure that appears in other plays, intimates to Jane that she was a "real close" friend of June's before she met Scotty and gives Jane a gift. The gift is an orb containing a vortex, the entrance to Huzzytown. The actress playing Jane pulls the orb to her breast, opens the vortex and descends into Huzzytown.

Jane: I was sucked into the vortex of the shadowlands of Huzzytown. 170

_Huzzytown_ is an alternate universe filled with commedic "whore-dogs, beat-down road-dogs, and brazen huzzies." 171 It is a world of the living burlesque that precipitated the breakup of Jane's marriage due to Dodson's frequent visits there. A world where, in the words of one huzzy, "Old Chickens make better stew." 172 In a sexually provocative scene, the "huzzies" enjoy revenge on Dodson, when on his back, powerless and prostrate, they frog-hop over him in a tantalizing, chorus line. Another instance of symbolic sexual substitution in the play has Grady (Meema's brother-in-law) fixated on the perfect grilling of wiener.

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170_Perry, Jim (Director). Huzzytown. (Hip Pocket Video Archives, 1993).

171_A line from _Elder Oaks_. Elder Oaks is the title of another family inspired Simons original and the Meema's rest home. Jimmy Pyrex Pootee, a telephone lineman (played by Dennis Runge, a former technician for Jim Henson's Muppet workshop), turns feral with a group of no-count "road dogs" as a mid-life rebellion against the constraints of responsibility. These "road dogs" take him to a road house and, eventually, cause him to get thrown into jail. The most probable personal connection for Johnny with the play is the failure of his first marriage. Pyrex is probably a reference to June's "Jello toe." The result of dropping a large Pyrex bowl of Jello on June's big toe and causing her to have a "Jello" big toe with a ridge across its middle, the only way to tell the twins, June and Jane, apart.

172_Perry, Jim (Director). Huzzytown. Video.
Roy and Rose appear in another auto-biographical installment entitled *Raggedy Farm*. In *Raggedy Farm*, the assimilation of Rose and Roy's home by the Azle landfill parallels Johnny and Diane's loss of their lakeside home by fire. *Raggedy Farm* relates the story of a foundling, Ruby Ann, and her "found" parents, Rose and Roy, as she transforms them through her natural innocence and child-like beauty.

Though Johnny's parents lived in a middle-class neighborhood in Oakhurst and he grew up in suburbia, his Dad's family maintained a Jersey Cow farm, where he worked during the summers. *Raggedy Farm* reflects this bucolic and Arcadian setting where a mean, old chow dog named Teddybear, accompanied Johnny and his "grampa" during visits. A part-time accountant for the dairy farm, the real Ruby Ann, was the object of the young Simons' fantasies.

Ruby Ann in *Raggedy Farm*, shares origins with the Creature (*Return of the Creature*) and the Monster (*The Lake Worth Monster and Underneath the Top Down, a Cowtown Brigadoon*) as children of the lake. Roy and Rose discover Ruby Ann in the garbage and raise the child until outside forces take her from them. In *Return of the Creature*, Roy discovers a mysterious pod on the shore and, similar to the character of Roy that adopts the abandoned Ruby Ann in *Raggedy Farm*, nurses the pod until it becomes a creature. In turn, the creature kills one of Roy's close friends, Jackie Bostic. In the real world of Ft. Worth, on this side of the comedic vortex that serves as entrance to "Cowtown," Jackie Bostic was Johnny's uncle. In *Underneath the Top Down, a Cowtown Brigadoon*, a benevolent

173 *Raggedy Farm* (personal audio cassette, 1980).
"monster" that inhabits Lake Worth travels to visit his "kin" at Loch Ness. The story faintly parallels the Hip Pocket Theatre's trip to Scotland.

TOPICAL REFERENCES

Topical references to the history of Fort Worth connect Johnny's mnemonic family with the community and the typically blue-collar audiences that attend his plays. Stella Mae Dowdy (Meema), mentions during Daughters of Zeeack that she met Vernon Castle. In Johnny's script of Ely Green and the Royal Canadian Flying Corps of Cowtown, he tells the story of Ely Green, a black man during the twenties that wanted to fly. The famous dance team of Vernon and Irene Castle, celebrities living in Fort Worth at the time, befriend Ely. Vernon promises to fulfill Ely's dream of becoming a pilot by teaching him to fly but dies in a plane crash before fulfilling his promise.

Simons based The Return of the Creature on a local folk-legend concerning a monster that lives in Lake Worth. The creature is a metaphorical sibling of another Johnny Simons' alter-ego, the monster from The Lake Worth Monster. In Return of the Creature, Simons satirizes the foibles of local politics. The play features the mayor of Fort Worth as a character and a plot that concerns the issueless Rose and Roy and their longing for the comfort of children.

Lakeside settings reappear from play to play. "Snake Island" and "Goat Island" are mythical locations associated with spiritual transformations, as well as unbridled, narcissistic, masculine sexual aggression and lust. Characters often travel to these islands to exorcise personal demons and burdens of guilt. In Nova's Shady
Grove, Goat Island is the location of Roy’s spiritual epiphany. *Adventures with June and Scotty* mentions Goat Island. June swims there for exercise and the subsequent personal cleansing. Snake Island appears in *The Lake Worth Monster*, where Cowboy Billy goes to experience his guilt and endure the torture of his selfish carnality.174

Johnny represents his fantasy of a raucous, frontier Cowtown in his works and not the reality of Fort Worth. His play, *Huzzytown*, contains an important paradigm for the commedic incarnation of an "alternative" Ft. Worth that exists only in Johnny’s memory. It is an inverted and grotesque land accessible through the inter-dimensional portal.175

The plot of *Return of the Creature* connects the "Creature" to the real-life disappearance and mysterious death of a Fort Worth politico found floating in Lake Worth. The farcical *Sex Kittens Go to College* use another topical reference. According to local urban myth, a past professor at Texas Christian University abducted several coeds and chained them in his basement as sexual captives. In Simons’ version, the brutal kidnapping became a springboard for a comedy when the sex slaves turn the tables on their captor.

**NOSTALGIA**

Simons’ goal is a theatre accessible from any class perspective. In that regard, his productions are subversive in that they use popular culture to reach across social boundaries and relish identification with working class iconography. His original works

175Molemo, audio cassette.

121
divide, roughly, into four categories: adaptations of traditional works, fantasies, memory plays, and plays based on nostalgia. The most personal and dominant form in his repertoire is the memory play, inextricably bound to the popular culture of the late 1940's. Simons' rebellion against commercial and intellectual theatre led him to seek inspiration in his childhood familiarity with the "Cowtown" of the late forties that forged his personality and now serves as a springboard for his art.

Simons' peripheral explorations of his childhood culture allow him to harvest inspiration from "B" movies, popular music, radio drama, pulp novels, and comic books. Iconic figures from the era appear regularly in his fantastic familial installments. Hula girls, a masculine fantasy from the late forties and early fifties, are the masculine grail of sexual fulfillment for Roy in Nova's Shady Grove. Simons often refers to characters from the "funny papers" or period cartoons, mentioning cartoon characters such as Alley Oop and Little Nemo in Huzzytown.

An important element in the Hip Pocket staff's creative success is their ability to remanufacture pop culture into a unique brand of theatre. Hip Pocket productions that typify the feelings of nostalgia inspired by Johnny's peripheral, memory plays include:

- War of the Worlds
- Shazam (the true story of Captain Marvel)
- Even if You Can Stop the Yellow Claw, My Deadly Tidal Wave Will Still Destroy New York! (Pts. 1, 2, &3)
- King Kong (adapted by James Maynard)
- The Wizard of Oz
- Charlie Chan and the House of Tomorrow

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Johnny said during a television interview that, "Radio was a prime factor in the development of my imagination and storytelling form." Radio requires a sense of imagination to participate in its fantasy and radio broadcasts during the forties' affected Johnny's creative vision. In *Adventures With June and Scotty*, Scotty listens to her "little plays" on the radio while outside on the dock, old-fashioned "thirties' music from a nearby honky-tonk drifts in and out of the score. The presence of "period" radio is everywhere in Simons' plays. Nostalgic music and popular broadcast characters accompany much of *Huzzytown*. The influence of radio also appears in productions like *The Adventures of the Shadow* and *Riders of the Purple Sage*. Silent film, pulp novels, "western" art, and radio-plays, meld in Johnny's staging of Zane Grey's western, *Riders of the Purple Sage*.

Besides being a full-fledged stage play at the Hip Pocket, *The Wildman of the Navidad* received an added venue as a radio play and a television documentary. The Public Broadcasting System aired a version of the play recorded at the House of Dreams in Fort

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176 Simons and Balentine, television interview.
Worth, televised a documentary of the production, and released clips of the production for broadcast on local television newscasts. 177

The characters of the Commedia are real-time examples of the grotesqueries found in the cartoons of film and early television that exerted power over the formation of Simons' childhood character. Like the Commedia, the appeal of cartoons cuts across social barriers. Cartoons are, by nature, satirical of the stereotypes they represent. Simons often uses cartoons for inspiration, calling them, "an exaggeration, a distortion, an embellishment of something that's real. Anything on stage is not real, the more you layer it, the more Commedia-like it becomes." 178 The Hip Pocket quotes the Ft. Worth Star-Telegram's Samuel Hudson's description of "Simonized" productions as "cartoon-like" in their promotional materials:

"... The products of the industrialized storytelling industry; from top-of-the-line-schlock movies like King Kong, Tarzan of the Apes, War of the Worlds and The Wizard of Oz to unforgettable ooze like the Charlie Chan movies and exploitation flicks like Sex Kittens Go to College and Eat--Em--Up monster movies... it will be part of your psychic scenery for the rest of your life... The problem with this stuff is that it's always better in memory than it is in fact. Oh, if only this stuff had been made by artists with talent, integrity and a wild sense of humor!... all who saw these transformations now carry around inside their heads gleaming truthful myths where before they possessed only fondly-remembered dreck and dross." 179

177Simons and Balentine, television interview.
178Johnny Simons, interview.
Nova's Shady Grove is a Lake Worth soap opera about the seedy patrons of a lakeside bar, staged in the same environment. The character of Rose narrates needed exposition and explains the resolution of the drama at its beginning to stimulate interest. "But right now, life is just one big commercial," is the way Rose prefaces the unfolding action. Later in the play Rose decries, as if critiquing the character's existence in their alternative world, "Hallelujah, here we are. Locked in the moment together, torn like pages from a mad book." Most probably, Johnny is referring to the popular, cartoon-based, humor magazine of the fifties, Mad Magazine, famous for its warped and grotesque view of reality.

SUMMARY

Simons synthesizes the beloved personal archetypes from his family history, his childhood, and the culture of a post World War II "Cowtown," with the characters of the classical Commedia Dell'Arte. By swirling these disparate forms together, he peoples the "internal landscape" of his alternative vision of the universe with characters that resonate with the elements of his emotional psyche. It is an expressionistic and sometimes surreal fantasy world that allows Simons to "test" himself against its inherent conflicting forces in a public arena.
VI. "I SING THE BODY DIALECTIC:" INVERSION AND SATIRE IN SIMONS' MULTI-VOICED, PERFORMANCE DISPLAYS

Simons' performance displays must exhibit relevance to contemporary theatre culture to warrant continued critical examination. There is little need for further research on The Hip Pocket Theatre or the Commedia if the forms they articulate are no more than artifacts. This chapter briefly explores contemporary theoretical viewpoints as they apply to Simons' plays and their inherent possibilities for research and practical application. A discrete replication of his methods is not possible through adherence to specific technique, since it is impossible to communicate "technique" through the written word. However, Simons' methods are reproducible through understanding his movement philosophy and approaching his forms through theoretical analysis.

THE MYTHIC

The manifestations of Simons' personality in his plays describe a spiritual binary equivalent to the conflict between the Olympian/Chthonian. The continuum of the "light" personifications of Simons' character, range from the spiritual asceticism described in the Lake Worth Monster of "a lonesome, Cowtown yogi sittin' cross-eyed on his pier," and the innocence of the young and wide-eyed Jimmy Molemo, to the stark contrast of the "dark" character continuum that contains Molemo, King of the sewer rats, and the monster from LWM. Simons' identification with his alter-egos, "Molemo, King of the sewer rats," and the "lonesome Cowtown yogi," forms a chthonian/Olympian binary and describes the polarized, physical dialectics of the lyric and grotesque:
"Chthonian: Designating, or pertaining to, gods or spirits of the underworld; . . . The characteristics of the chthonian worship are propitiatory and magical rites and generalized or euphemistic names of the deities, which are supposed to have been primarily ghosts. The classical mysteries developed from this worship.

. . . their worship consists not so much in honorable sacrifice as in ceremonies of riddance. . . ."180

The observance of chthonic ritual predates the aesthetic sensibilities of classical Grecian drama and lies at the heart of folk-plays and the impulse that generates all dramatic performances. Markedly removed from the formal, theatrical tributes to the Olympian deities, the deep, ecstatic religion in ancient Greece involved the worship of the dead and fallen heroes, and the Chthonian gods.181 H. P. Lovecraft used these mysteries as inspiration for his novels where his Cthulic entities require hideous ceremonies of riddance.

In numerous plays, the character of Jimmy Molemo represents Simons as a child and his attempts to confront his chthonic double, Molemo, in the storm drains that honeycomb subterranean Fort Worth. His childhood and fantasy explorations of this nether region, conducted in the darkness of these fearful tunnels, were metaphors for Simons' exploration into the darkness of his soul.

Simons' visions divined the dark and fearsome side of his personality into the persona of Molemo, and used his plays as vehicles of psychotherapy to understand and exorcise the demons

181 Webster's 396.
inhabiting his "internal landscape." Any reference to Molemo in his plays is, in some way, a chthonic, ceremony of riddance.

A chthonic spirit in the form of a mermaid puppet also appears in Adventures with June and Scotty. Huzzytown features a landlocked manifestation of the mermaid in the form of June Marshall. Marshall seduces Jane to climb through the portal into Huzzytown. The actress used pantomime to define the portal to Huzzytown as a vagina-like shape. Jane climbs in through the portal and sacrifices herself to the beast hidden in her own heart.

Simons created an alternative vision of his childhood, his family, and the culture of a sprawling "Cowtown" within his own substitution of reality. Myth, morality, and archetypes, give this "virtual" commedic universe structure. Simons' alter-ego of "Molemo, King of the sewer rats," personifies Arlecchino, a trickster god and creator of this auto-chthonic universe. Explorations of this surrogate existence enabled Simons to explore the dark recesses of both his psyche and his memory.

THE CHRISTIAN

Christian influences and images of crucifixion abound in Simons' plays. Johnny's personal quest for meaning included experiences of spiritual chaos, human brutality, and the horrors of man's inhumanity to man. Simons' spiritual rebirth and quest for order began while assigned to a burn unit at the Naval hospital in San Diego after joining the Navy. The visions of suffering, disfigurement, and personal heroism he encountered as an orderly changed his life.

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182 Molemo, audio cassette.
A second epiphany occurred during a fit of dissipation in New Orleans after his failed first marriage and loss of visitation privileges for his children (the event staged in *The Lake Worth Monster*). These experiences animate Simons' conflict with a personal "darkness" that his characters must confront within his alternative commedic universe.

The strongest social force that held sway over the development of Simons' personality was his Southern Baptist upbringing in the congregation of the Sagamore Hill Baptist Church. As in Christianity, the disruptions through inversion within Simons' "alternative universes" resolve through redemption, a renewal of spirituality, and an awakening to the promptings of a higher power. Christian cosmological form lies at the core of Simons' alternative commedic reality. Often, autobiographical works such as *Nova's Shady Grove*, culminate in a central metaphor that is a Christ-like self-sacrificial "performance of waste."

In *The Lake Worth Monster*, Grandpa self-destructs through whiskey. His grandson, the young "Cowboy Billy," another alter ego for Johnny Simons, nearly ends his life in a haze of alcohol and drugs during a New Orleans' Mardi Gras celebration. *The Saga of Billy the Kid* also includes a Christ-like self-sacrifice. Roy's self-crucifixion during *Nova's Shady Grove* is an example of messianic structure. Snatches of melodies from *Van Gogh/Gauguin*, a previous self-sacrificial work, drift in and out of the score of *Nova's*. The uneasy alliance between Van Gogh and Gauguin in *Van Gogh/Gauguin* paralleled the stormy, yet fruitful, collaborations.
between Johnny Simons, Diane, and composer, Doug Balentine. Van Gogh fulfilled the role of sacrifice in that production.

In *Nova*, a Simons alternate identity named "Bud" is frantically writing a play, a text exploring artistic creativity, spirituality, sacrifice, and collaboration. If he ever needs it, Bud carries his own self-crucifixion with him in the form of an old Colt .45. A black angel played by Grover Coulson takes the Roy of *Nova's* to Goat Island where Roy experiences a "dark night of the soul," as blackbirds perform a "crow" death ballet. Coulson appears as Roy's personal angel in the guise of a fancy-dressed pimp. Blackbirds and grackles also appear as symbols of death in *Van Gogh/Gauguin* and *Daughters of Zeeack*.

In *Nova's Shady Grove*, the character of Roy displays personal symbols associated with an alienated American male living out the fantasies of the sixties. Roy wears a headband made from an old American flag necktie, a stained undershirt, and torn jeans during his first appearance in the play and his life revolves around his ever-present mop bucket. The pimp/angel prepares Roy for death and tells him that he is a prophet to lead the lost out of confusion. After his heavenly visitation, he metamorphoses from a sodden, old janitor into a prophet, minister, and witness, dressed in a red, bell-bottomed Elvis-style jumpsuit, replete with rhinestones, medallion, and spangles.

In a moment of Dickensian redemption, Roy understands his purpose and crucifies himself. He becomes a scapegoat for the community and dies for their blindness. His death is an all-consuming "joy explosion," an orgasm of self dissipation. Roy's
Christ-like self-sacrifice lifts the community's blinders and forces Bud to acknowledge his child by the barmaid. The character of the barmaid and her baby represent the creative spirit at the heart of Simons. Rose sums up their plight by saying that we were "blind to beauty that surrounds us."

In *Daughters of Zeeack* (a biblical name), Roy experiences an angelic vision of his lost daughter while taking a short-cut through the forest. The angel is a metaphor for Roy's illegitimate daughter from an affair with a fortune teller, "Miss Fortune." He makes a vow to honor the angel, but breaks his promise to sell trinkets at the fat stock show. Roy sacrifices himself in the forest as penance for his sin.183 The rediscovery of the innocence of childhood, as found in *Zeeack*, is the epiphany that releases Roy from the bonds of the shadowy and menacing forces that lurk within Johnny's alternate universe. In *Nova's Shady Grove*, Roy crucifies himself, "Though how he drove that last nail is a mystery." Roy's sacrifice and the birth of Bud's child prevent the frustrated writer from committing suicide.184

A messianic quest is the driving force behind characters like Roy in *Daughters of Zeeack*, and the Roy in *Nova's Shady Grove*. In *Nova's Shady Grove*, Video.

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183 Johnny's boyhood family of Roy, Stella May Dowdy, Odessa Faye, June, and Jane, appears in *Zeeack*. Roy is a retired railroad man dealing with advancing age and the regrets of missed opportunities. There are appearances by Mr. Weaver and Brother Swain. Johnny's father, Townes, is an agricultural student and June experiences a prescient revelation concerning her future relationship with Scotty. Linda Boydston portrays a spirit figure that functions as a silent narrator and Eastern style, stage manager/performer.

184 *Nova's Shady Grove*, Video.
both texts, the character of Roy experiences an epiphany and returns to a state of childlike innocence. Though the two characters are permutations on the figure of Johnny's grandfather, they are extreme in variation and, most probably, reflect facets of Johnny's personal life. The Roy of *Nova's Shady Grove* is the janitor of a road house and the other is a retired railroad engineer.

In 1978, the Hip Pocket Theatre produced "the Who's" rock opera, *Tommy*, featuring Johnny in the lead role. The plot of the opera parallels the Christian/Pagan death and rebirth cycle. Other Hip Pocket productions that feature elements of self-sacrifice for the good of the community are *Return of the Creature*, *The Saga of Billy the Kid*, and *When Worlds Collide* (adapted and directed by James Maynard). The Christian connection between plays like *Everyman*, *Adventures with Jesus, Luke 1-24*, and *Old Coots Read Genesis, 1 through 8 (King James Version)* are obvious. Old time religion affects a stronger pull on the alternate *Commedia* universe of the Hip Pocket than any other cosmic model.

In Danny Robbins dissertation on the Hip Pocket Theatre, he finds that Johnny's use of popular culture creates a Brechtian sense of "umfunktionerung" (refunctionalisation).\(^{185}\) As in the comic "refunctionalisation" of a prop when it transforms or takes on surprising qualities or functions, objects on stage take on a sociological symbolism beyond their utilitarian usage in an attempt to prevent absorption into the theatrical moment. In a metaphoric sense,

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Robbins and Brecht applied "refunctionalisation" to the relationship between the play, the performers, and the audience.

According to Robbins, this refunctioning occurs in Simons' work because he uses pop culture and the readily accessible resource of mass cult to generate what Marshall Fishwick describes as folklore, fakelore and poplore. Through the process of "umfunktionierung," masscult materials sublimate into effective art due to the paucity of popcult resources. 186

If this is an effect generated by "Simonized" productions, it is incidental to the purpose of Johnny's creations. It is more likely that the inspirations for his works are metaphysical in nature and derive more from his strict Baptist upbringing and personal Buddhist soul-searching than Brechtian analysis. Central metaphors within his dramatic structures often seemed based on Christian symbology. The waters of the lake always seem to offer a baptism and cleansing of the soul. In practical application, the most believable and enthralling moments in Simons' theatre occur during such obvious theatricalized, and refunctionized scenes.

Simons' plays do, however, contain Brechtian devices of distancing and self-reference. In Huzzytown, the actors assume roles at the beginning of the play in a manner reminiscent of Brecht's "distancing." In the play, Jimmy refers to his own creation of the play later in life. The boys, (Jimmy's cousins), attack him for writing such lies in a play he has yet to create; using the same

reasoning, Jane blames Jimmy for being sucked into Huzzytown. Meema often comments on the action of that play self-referentially, explaining that it happens in the future and that Jimmy is guiltless in the present.\textsuperscript{187} To conclude the play, Meema helps Jimmy write the ending so June can rescue Jane from the vortex.

Meema: (to audience) This is an abstract situation, yaaais, very abstract . . . why, I am even dead . . . What I have to say is true even if I'm only an actress . . . Just not let it worry you whether it makes a lick o' sense or not.\textsuperscript{188}

**ALTERNATIVE RELIGION**

Eastern mysticism and Christian symbolism are present in Simons' performances. The lyrically grotesque world of Johnny Simons' *Commedia* universe contains highly polarized, spiritual elements that resonate with Taoist philosophy, or from a more academic perspective, structuralist binarisms. Reflecting the polarities of time, the purest light is in the heart of a child and the deepest night in the regrets of adulthood. Cowboy Billy in *The Lake Worth Monster*, is another character that experiences a spiritual awakening to the essence of childhood and retrieves his life from the brink of self-destruction. In *The Lake Worth Monster*, the monster

\textsuperscript{187}In *The Meema Sextet*, Jimmy and John have a car accident and visit Meema in heaven. The sextet consists of Meema and her daughters (Odessa Faye, June, and Jane), all victims of an early grave, and Arthur Clinton Bostic. Guilt over the problems with his wife, Odessa, plagues the highly conservative John. His visit results in an attack on Meema as the cause of his problems. He torments her during an angelic "bondage" scene.

\textsuperscript{188}Huzzytown, Video.
reveals the solution to Billy's quest is that, "Unless ye be as children, you may not enter heaven." 189

THE OTHER

The unique ability of the artists at the Hip Pocket Theatre lies in their talent to synthesize the traditional forms of commedic art with the commonplace. By placing family relationships, topical characters, situations, dialects, local humor, and community politics in the satirical mode of the Commedia, the Hip Pocket players defamiliarize the characters within an exoticized "otherness." This defamiliarization allows the audience to distance their identities from the performance displays and reassess their personal relationship with their home community through self-effacing humor.

Each of the iconic commedic forms defamiliarizes through their association with "otherness." Each form has distinct ties to foreign or distant origins that allow the audience to indulge in a "safe" form of ridicule as the performers satirize a particular mode of behavior. The association of the iconic stereotypes with a "distant" land is an essential element for satire to occur. The subject of satire must be an outsider, victim, or pawn of the dominant culture to defamiliarize serious concerns into comic situations.

An important element of all comedy involves the establishment of an "other" as a target for ridicule. A community's discourse provides the dual-voice necessary for comedy to differentiate between us/not us with the "other" as the distillation of "not us." The Commedia always lampoons the "other," either through the peculiar nature of foreigners, foibles of an undeserving middle-class, or the

189 The Lake Worth Monster, Video.
idiocy of ridiculous servants. If the common folk laughed at the depiction of the middle-class in *Commedia* displays, it is because the gentry behaved foolishly, lacked common sense, and excluded “others” from their society purely on the merits of wealth. For the middle class, *Commedia* defamiliarized satirical attacks on the audience’s own iconic figures by creating an “other,” that exoticized their behavior with distant origins, outlandish costumes, actions, masks, and dialects. For the lower classes, even the most incompetent of servants could not equal the idiocy of the zannis.

A social structure is inherent in the organization of the Italian *Commedia* characters with the lower class (or servants), such as Arlecchino and Brighella, attempting to outwit and embarrass the middle class characters, such as Pantalone, Dottore, Capitano and the ingenues. The *Commedia* leveled the playing field by allowing common people the freedom to laugh at the foibles of a grotesque version of their own class and exoticized the foolishness of the *bourgeoisie*. The character of the Pantalone was the satirical representative of the prosperous merchant class, while the Capitano and Dottore referred more specifically to middle-class vocations. The middle-class characters, usually ignoble, often claimed preposterous links with aristocracy. The tricky servants formed the lowest social level in the *Commedia* and are the theatrical descendants of comic Greek and Roman slaves.

The “other” is a victim, and is necessary for all comedy to exist. The Atticans created an exoticized, chthonic "other" when they laughed at the foolishness of the distant Megarans and Dorians, the Oscans' and Atellans' foreign "other" were the rustic Greeks, and the
Romans found humor in the rural "otherness" of the Atellans. The Atellan Farces featured characters from Atella, a city of "queerness," where they performed all things in an odd way. The satirist often uses self-effacing humor by placing their own person in the role of the "other."

By distancing the characters through the creation of an "other," delineated by their provinciality, the humor was defamiliarized to prevent the audience from direct self-identification with the characters. Simons' creations serve a similar function by using Commedia inspired "show trash," or "lake trash" (commedic rednecks), and the satirical "otherness" of a fictionalized middle-class and elite Fort Worth authority in his visions of social and domestic comic conflict. In his performance displays, Johnny creates an "other" that allows the local audience to laugh at itself, but more specifically, to laugh at whoever is on the 'other' side of the tracks.

The audience of Commedia observed a "defamiliarized" culture, distanced from their own, through the character's chthonic origins and eccentricities. These commedic displays evoked the power of satire by creating an "alternative reality" or independent world peopled by "others" that reflected the politics of the time as a target. The ridiculous situations of the "other" and their antics during their extrication from complications with obvious answers, elicited laughter even from those skewered by the humor. The creation of the "other" must involve their attachment to the earth through custom, dialect, costume, posture, movement, or persona. The chthonic realm of the "other" may be synonymous with our
own, but its removal to an exotic location allows the audience to respond with humor that ultimately, may be self-effacing.

SATIRE

The term "subversive," often used to describe the satiric dual-voiced nature of commedic or carnivalesque displays such as Simons', is a misnomer. *Commedia* is intrinsically parasitic. The satirical voice exists only if firmly entrenched within the existing power structure and is inversive in nature. Satire, though a powerful weapon, exists only within the specific boundaries of established authority. In turn, satire possesses the power to deconstruct hegemonic order, by "singing" things into being."

The Greek, Roman, Irish, Islamic, African, and Native American cultures placed great importance on the power of utterances. Contemporary authorities corroborate the power of utterance through their continuing use of propaganda, i.e., leaflets dropped from bombers, and broadcasts such as "Voice of America" and Tokyo Rose. Television commercials are contemporary example of utterances of power that "sing things into being."

Femi Euba defines the satiric as lying within the efficacious imprecation, or power of utterance, as in a curse. In some African cultures, the utterance of a single word is capable of killing. Though a dangerous tool in the hands of the irresponsible, the existing power structure endures satire, providing the orchestrators of its use remain within strict, community standards that limit its

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191 Euba 46-51 & 57-58.
danger. Victor Turner defined satire as a highly conservative genre since:

"... It is pseudo-liminal. Satire exposes, attacks, or derides what it considers to be vices, follies, stupidities, or abuses, but its criterion of judgment is usually the normative structural frame of officially promulgated values... indicating that disorder is no permanent substitute for order... The liminal phases of tribal society invert but do not usually subvert the status quo, . . . reversal underlines to the members of a community that chaos is the alternative to cosmos..." 192

Simons' satiric depiction of the over-riding power structure is a gentle goading instead of a call for revolt. The theatre throws cream pies at public figures instead of brickbats and aims at revealing the "emperor" in his underwear instead of fomenting for political change. The politics of the troupe never extend beyond the goal of embarrassing public figures into more seemly conduct. Like the Commedia, the Hip Pocket always represents a physical, universal, human truth independent of the ironic existence of a post-modern world and the grey ethics of politics. It is a theatre of bodily functions.

Simons defamiliarizes community symbols and empowers his troupe members with the weapon of satire; however, the satirist and the hegemonic authority exist in a critical balance of power, both sides existing at the other's behest. Though severely limited in the use of this socially lethal weapon, satire may elevate the performer to the level of a sanctified and "holy" fool. In their book, Pretend the

192Victor Turner, Ritual to Theatre 40.
World is Funny and Forever, Seymour and Rhoda Fisher discuss "holy" clowns similar to the Hip Pocket satirists:

"... Numerous cultures maintain clown societies whose members have license to behave in outlandish, funny ways, but who simultaneously participate in religious ceremonies and have implicit or explicit priestly powers... His ugly singularity is a badge of his guild... (the clown is) typically regarded as a potent healer... The ritual clown excites a mixture of laughter, awe, and fear."

The "holy" clown lampoons pretension and promotes the social healing of a community. From Hopi clowns frightening recalcitrant children, to the fools in mummer's plays, to the Hip Pocket's "show trash," clowns determine their identity by what is necessary to satirize existing hierarchical structures and to bring communal relationships in line with acceptable limits of civil behavior. Though the iconic characters exhibit specific behavioral tendencies, comedy and satire dictate their transformational nature.

Inversions of power lie at the heart of the Commedia and its most influential figure and model, Arlecchino, the archetypal trickster. Simons' alter-ego of Molemo follows the form of the "trickster." The author asserts that the archetypal "trickster" character is nearly universal and appears in disparate cultural sources, such as the Grecian Hermes, the Yoruban Eshu, the Native American coyote myth, and the African folk-tales of Ananzi the spider.

In the *Commedia*, the comic stereotype fulminates into the character of Arlecchino. The androgynous, mythological trickster serves the function of an iconic fool that circumvents authority, pokes fun at hegemonic pretension, and facilitates the workings of fate through the satirization of the truly foolish, by presenting an accurate image of reality. For Robert Elliot, satire rings true when the dominant social order and the subaltern groups recognize the inadequacies of their relationship through, "a bitter, cold tragic laughter." 194

According to Lake Simons, Johnny considers himself an Arlecchino-like outlaw on the fringes of Fort Worth's society, satirizing its inadequacies. 195 Within his plays, Simons establishes himself as an artist/mystic/trickster chiding the pretensions of mainstream culture and satirizing his own shortcomings through self-effacing humor. In *The Lake Worth Monster*, Douglas Balentine sang narrations that served as a direct mouthpiece for Simons in the characters of Cowboy Billy, the Monster, and Wiley Shakespeare. These narrations are often self-referential and depict Simons as a backwoods philosopher/fool:

... like a desperado clown,
baggy pants fallin' down
he's retiring to the country like a cowboy
put the phonies out to graze
let them bask in the waves
he's retiring to the country like a cowboy

he's returning to recharge a rundown battery

194 Elliot 226.
195 Lake Simons interview.
and get away from all that phony show-biz flattery

let the holy rollers finger their false nosery. . . .196

Simons used another self-referential work to satirize his own weakness in Old Tarzan. The play depicts a thinly veiled Johnny Simons in the character of a geriatric Tarzan and includes the characters of Old Jane, Old Boy, and Old Cheetah.197 In that play, Simons/Tarzan uses the vehicle of the "Tarzan" myth to recount the reunion with the grown son he had not seen since infancy.

Though satire contains the power to destroy, it must remain a Socratic gadfly confined within the normative power structure. The satirical voice is not anarchic and remains dependent on the conventions of communally shared signs and symbols as well as the financial support of the mainstream culture. Simons considers himself a social outcast and outlaw; yet conforms to community standards by hiding his political critiques within the text of his works. When staging the original production of R. Crumb Comix, Robert Crumb asked Simons how far he could go in depicting the provocative script. Simons, mindful of the theatre's position next

196 The Lake Worth Monster, Video.
197 Lake of the Apes is not as much a memory play as a projection of events concerning the safety of Johnny's daughter, Lake. Upon returning to their home on Fairmount Street in downtown Fort Worth, Johnny and Diane discovered a bullet hole in one of their windows. The experience disturbed Johnny to the point that he fantasized about what would happen if a stray bullet from a drive-by shooting killed Lake. In the play, Lake returns to a forgotten land after her death. It is the land her father described in childhood stories. Commedia-style apes from the Tarzan novels raised Lake in those stories. The "Lake" in the title refers to where the apes live.

142

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door to the Grace Baptist Church admitted, "we could have some Snoids (Snoids live up people's "assholes") runnin' around, but we may not be able to tell where they came from." 198 Simons set a final limit with, "everything but penetration," revealing some degree of consciousness of institutions of power such as the church. 199

LIMINALITY

The Commedia exists as a formed formlessness based on the immediate and personal need of the performer and the audience. Rigid structures are antithetical to the creation of a believable clown. If the realistic world is complex, the clown is naive. If life is straightforward, the clown's life is infernally intricate. If reality is complex, the clown's desires are simple. If life is hopeless, the clown is eternally optimistic. The forms result from a sincere depiction of personal identity within an inverted universe.

Though Simons' personal creative spirit is revolutionary by nature, his theatre inverts social structure instead rebelling against it. Temporary reversals of power, or inversions, provide a harmless release of social pressure to the community and allow for the subsequent reunification of its most polarized elements. Johnny Simons' performative displays provide temporary inversions of power by disrupting traditional roles of class, gender, and race. These disruptions approximate Victor Turner's theoretical paradigms of communitas and liminality.

The positive value in identifying a liminal voice is in its doubling or mirroring of contemporary culture. Theoretically,

198 Hip Pocket Newsletter.
199 Johnny Simons, interview.
through self-examination in the mirror of a liminal voice, the ruling hegemony identifies a more objective view of the inequities inherent within its system. This principle of self-examination through the eyes of society's disenfranchised subaltern cultures permits a more objective vision by reflecting the inherent prejudices of its hegemony. Once the hegemony defines the disparities, the channeling of resources towards positive societal change can begin.200

Joseph Roach used the term "selvage edge" in his essays on the Mardi Gras Indians of New Orleans to describe a subaltern voice that satirizes the mainstream. The most subversive aspect of Simons' artistic power lies within his satiric, double-voice as playwright/auteur; where he directly attacks public figures. However, his principal satirical voice is one of inversion where his ensemble temporarily speaks from the "selvage edge" of culture. Within his performance displays, Johnny Simons seeks a position on the fringe, or jagged edge of mainstream culture to function as a liminal satiric voice.

Simons' commedic creations also fit within Roach's notion of the inversions of the carnivalesque, giving credence to the ancient definition of comedy as revel-song.201 The carnivalesque state is not an embrace of political radicalism, but a temporary inversion of the hegemonic order to allow venting of frustrations. Simons' ensemble and characters assume temporary residence on the selvage edge of culture, but remain bonded by the common social order of the


201The Cambridge Guide to Theatre 221.
larger, shared community of Fort Worth. Victor Turner states the carnivalesque elements in society want to temporarily discard social barriers and embrace a human community without boundaries, "To break through the constraints of structure into the euphoria of communitas, to discard social norms in favour of human contact."\textsuperscript{202}

The initiation into The Hip Pocket Theatre's ensemble is a liminal harrowing that results in the group bonding into "communitas." The ensemble inverts their lives by embracing a marginal way of life, that of Simons' "show bizniz." Through a rite of passage, Simons teaches his followers how to represent his lyrically grotesque commedic forms. The assimilation of these expressive forms provides the ensemble with an inversive satiric voice capable of mocking authoritarian structure through what Quinn referred to as "anti-semiotics."

The Hip Pocket ensemble members adopt the "showbiz" lifestyle and enter into a carnivalesque world of displaced barriers and tribal bonding. Their new lifestyle exists on the boundaries of mainstream culture and involves altered states of consciousness (drugs and alcohol), promiscuity, reduced social status, a sense of temporal stability through commitment to a shamanic personality, a chthonic reattachment to the earth, and a spiritual epiphany resulting from embracing an artistic tradition perceived as greater than the contributions of the individual.

In form, Simons' productions are similar to the Olympian/Chthonian rites of supplication to a vegetative deity that gave birth to western theatre. According to \textit{The Cambridge Guide to Theatre} \textsuperscript{161}.

\textsuperscript{202}The Cambridge Guide to Theatre 161.
Theatre, these early folk-plays, "Celebrate their community through a ludic representation of its definitions, including the parody of the dominant culture's institutions."203

The communal atmosphere of the entire Hip Pocket Theatre ensemble and support staff functions as a subaltern group that satirizes hegemonic structure without confronting its power structure in open rebellion. Through personal empowerment with the tools of satire, Commedia, and alternative lifestyles, Simons became the leader of his own "tribe." Victor Turner states that liminal states, such as the Hip Pocket Ensemble, are reaffirmations of the existing social structure:

"All human societies implicitly or explicitly refer to two contrasting social models. . . . The first model is of differentiated, culturally structured, segmented, and often hierarchical system of institutionalized positions. The second presents society as an undifferentiated, homogeneous whole, in which individuals confront one another integrally, and not as "segmentalized" in statuses and roles."204

One of the most important elements constituting Simons' dramatic process concerns the liminoid experiences of his ensemble in their indoctrination to the Hip Pocket's creative process. Some members of Fort Worth's subaltern "hippie" movement found expression in Simons' guru-like leadership. The quest for a liminal state usually accompanies a culture in severe flux from one social order to another, as reflected by the youth subculture of the late sixties and early seventies. The members of this subaltern group that

participated in the theatre games at Simons' lakeside home and found they satisfied their desire for personal expression and sensual experience formed the ensemble, which later coalesced into the "tribal" structure of the Hip Pocket Theatre.205

Victor Turner analyzed the structure of one of his ritualistic, anthropological, performance "workshops," calling it a liminoid inversion of status. Turner's liminal process bears comparison with the process undergone by Hip Pocket Theatre's ensemble members during their indoctrination into the troupe. The ensemble endures grueling rehearsals under the Texas sun at the Oak Acres Amphitheatre, a symbolic and magic realm with Simons as resident shaman. The heat during the process is intense as well as athletically trying. The resulting process bears parallels to the purification endured in a Native American "sweat lodge." The ensemble's personalities dissolve and are regrown in this new purifying crucible.

"In liminality, profane social relations may be discontinued, former rights and obligations are suspended, the social order may seem to have been turned upside down, but by way of compensation cosmological systems (as objects of serious study) may become of central importance for the novices, who are confronted by the elders, in rite, myth, genres, such as dancing, painting, clay-molding, wood-carving, masking, etc., with symbolic patterns and structures which amount to teachings about the structure of the cosmos and their culture as a part and product of it... . . ."206

205 Turner, *From Ritual to Theatre* 80.
206 Turner, *From Ritual to Theatre* 16 & 27.
The Commedia Dell'Arte provides an appropriate vehicle for novice performers seeking self-expression, personal development, and cosmological self-definition. The identities of the commedic forms are easily accessible in the performative and discursive voice of pop culture. Due to its improvisational nature, the buffoonery of its grotesque satire, its innate theatricality, and the simplicity of its principal types, the behavioral comic forms are relatively easy to learn. Revelers at the Parisian saloons during the neoclassical era adopted them as a common "party game."

The Hip Pocket Theatre defamiliarizes the familiar personal identities of the ensemble by conflating their natural "masks" with the grotesque alternate identities of the Commedia they resemble. Turner discussed the importance of the grotesque and defamiliarization in his work, From Ritual to Theatre:

"... Elements of culture may be recombined in numerous, often grotesque ways. ... In other words, in liminality people "play" with the elements of the familiar and defamiliarize them. Novelty emerges from unprecedented combinations of familiar elements."207

Through its performance displays, the "found" ensemble of the Hip Pocket Theatre experience personal development, and an increased social respect normally prohibited to performers lacking in formal education and training. The experience of an improvisatory ensemble may take on quasi-religious overtones to its participants as Rhoda and Seymour Fisher imply:

"The actor's religious experiences seem to create a need for merging with that which is greater than self,

207Turner, From Ritual to Theatre 27.
about maintaining the forward movement of forces from the past... part of a long term, time-locked process which exceeds the duration of any single individual."208

Many of the ensemble members became devotees, orbiting Simons' self-admitted charismatic personality, relieving themselves of some aspects of personal judgment and responsibility. The ensemble became the center of their existence through what Turner calls "communitas." The ensemble becomes a liminal identity removed from the mainstream, and it offers an enhanced spiritual "value" for each of its members. Turner's analysis of adherents as they embrace a liminal construct seems particularly relevant:

"An extended liminal phase in the initiation rites of tribal societies is frequently marked by the physical separation of the ritual subjects from the rest of society. . . (they are) sacred and holy, and therefore untouchable and dangerous, just as gods would be . . . dead to the social world but alive to the asocial world."209

Empowered by the expressive abilities of the Commedia and the powerful instrument of satire, the previously dispossessed ensemble members experienced a personal growth of self-worth. The power of satire provided the ensemble members with a powerful tool that enhanced their social importance, Turner defines communitas as:

. . . An alternative and more "liberated" way; of being socially human, a way both of being detached from social structure . . . Here we may have a loving union of the structurally damned pronouncing judgment

208Fisher 158-161.
209Turner, From Ritual to Theatre 46.
on normative structure and providing alternative models for structure."\textsuperscript{210}

The ensemble's performative experience of, what Turner calls the "flow" state, enhances its sense of identity and contributes to tribal bonding. The shared experience of performance gives the ensemble a sense of mutuality and redefines the "other" for them as the privileged, but misdirected, hegemonic structures of Dallas or Fort Worth. This mutuality or "communitas" occurs when each person fully experiences the existence of another.\textsuperscript{211} This, mutuality, springs from the heightened emotions of individuals involved in spontaneous improvisatory theatre, and generated by what Turner describes as "a flowing from \textit{l} to \textit{Thou}".\textsuperscript{212}

"Here it is not team-work in flow that is quintessential, but \textit{being} together, with \textit{being} the operative word, not \textit{doing} . . . The solitary artist creates the liminoid phenomena, the collectivity experiences collective liminal symbols."\textsuperscript{213}

Simons bases his performances on the contributions of the ensemble and concentrates on group warm-ups and exercises to form unskilled performers into a collective. John Murphy described his impression of Johnny's theatre games in his unpublished, Kerouacian journal:

"It's hard to explain the feeling that one gets when you play ensemble, when you are ENSEMBLE. All is one . . . your body becomes their body . . . minds become one, big kettle-drum brain sending out

\textsuperscript{210}Turner, \textit{From Ritual to Theatre} 51.
\textsuperscript{211}Turner, \textit{From Ritual to Theatre} 72.
\textsuperscript{212}Turner, \textit{From Ritual to Theatre} 51.
\textsuperscript{213}Turner, \textit{From Ritual to Theatre} 48 & 51-2.

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pulsations, distributing them to all at the same instant . . .
. . . you do not need eyes; they become unfocused except
on the indescribable sensation—every move is mirrored
by the others; you can feel them move with you, . . . no
wondering/wandering sideways glance, no
fears. . . ."214

Liminal states are temporary, at best, and mark a transitional
movement for both individuals and culture. The urge to return to
archetypal childhood experiences eventually gives way to
reintegration and reassimilation within "adult" mainstream culture.
When Simons talks about the zenith of the Hip Pocket Theatre, he
concludes by simply saying, "We all grew up." Simons recorded,
somewhat prematurely, what he perceived as "the death of the Hip
Pocket" on a very personal audio tape of poems, songs and stories
entitled Molemo:

"It was the exit of childhood and innocence. The
withdrawal of spirit, and magic, and muse and whatever
else those mystery things are that challenge one and
makes the soul quiver, and choke, and exclaim,
"something's got to be done and now or we're gonna
explode." Like so many baked potatoes cooking on a
fire, blowing out our jackets."215

Johnny creates for an ensemble of types that assist in defining
the characters. Most performers leave the ensemble after satisfying
their personal needs. Though disturbing to Simons, since he seems to
lose his best collaborators, departures of valuable, core ensemble
members from the "communitas" of the Hip Pocket tribe did not
signify the demise of the theatre. A new stream of seekers
continuously refill the depleted ranks of his ensemble.

214Murphy, Unpublished Manuscript 17.
215Molemo, audio cassette.
His former adherents reintegrate into mainstream culture after their liminal experience at the Hip Pocket. Not unlike a boot camp, disciples replace former adherents as the existing, central, hegemonic structure re-assimilates the veterans (providing Simons has the endurance to indoctrinate a new set of faces).

Turner posits that the rules and the individuals change, and that communitas is momentary and not a permanent condition. Before experiencing the liminoid process, the individual was only a marginal participant in the hegemonic order; after the "rite of passage," the individual re-integrates as a completed and more useful contributor to mainstream culture.

Diane's costuming of the ensemble supports their liminal status. The costumes appear ragged and fatigued though made from quality materials. The costumes have a Godot-like shabbiness, or appear to belong to a down-and-out, traveling Commedia troupe. Diane expends a great amount of energy on achieving just the right, eccentric appearance. Turner supports the idea that a kind of uniform exists for members of a communal, liminal state:

"Their dirty and ragged condition, "ripened" to the point of disintegration, is a sign of status that reverses the "neat and clean" standard of "citizens" trapped in status and structure."217

Simons' fireside theatre games liberated the actor's bodies through the traditional forms of the Commedia and improvisational mime by instilling them with physical, expressive ability. Simons returned creativity to the actor by manifesting the "body as text" to Turner, *The Ritual Process* 47.


152

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his ensemble. By returning power to the performer through liberation of the body, Simons' commedic theatre stimulates his ensemble through a further inversion of power. By empowering his actors through physical expression, Simons continues to occupy the position of puppet-master/shaman by writing plays that create a secondary/parallel reality energized by satire and peopled by his own eccentric characters.

THE EPISTEME: THE INVERSION OF THE AESTHETIC DISCOURSE OF POWER IN SIMONS' ANTI-ART

Besides the subversive voice contained in Simons' writings, his approach to aesthetics and the creation of art is subversive by nature. According to Michel Foucault's paradigm of the "episteme," it is possible to plot culture according to its exclusionary shifts.218 The existence of the Hip Pocket Theatre and its anti-art politics functions as a self-imposed episteme, a subversive act that often alienates Simons from academia and the privileged discourse of the aesthetically elite.

His aspirations of a "working-class" theatre are in direct opposition to the established power structure of elitist arts groups. It is not art, per se, that alienates Simons, but the "art of making art" that he resents.219 Simons exploits the fissures in Fort Worth's power structures by placing himself outside the serious concerns of Fort Worth's "artsy" set. Johnny often says, referring to the

219A lyric from Stephen Sondheim's *Sunday in the Park with George*.
pretensions and problems that accompany a large budget, "I don't want this to get too beeg."220

Artaud, an artist Simons freely admits affected his work, expressed similar objections to those voiced by Simons' concerning the pretensions of art:

"There are a certain number of topical words we cannot use now since their meaning has been so distorted. One of them is the word "art." There is no worse, one might almost say more shameful job today than producing art."221

Artaud provides an interesting model for Simons' approach to creation. Simons' alternative universe resonates with Artaud's concept of the double. In words that easily apply to Simons' pantomimic, rough, performance displays, Artaud critiqued his protégé, Jean-Louis Barrault (another artist Simons admits inspired his commedic universe) in his review of Around the Mother, "Barrault endlessly travels between mind and matter."222

Making judgments about cultural influences on the Hip Pocket is difficult since Simons views intellectual debate as anathema to the integrity of his theatre and limits conversations concerning the intellectual nature of his craft to a few, limited, and defensive statements. In an interview for American Theatre, Comic strip artist

220Johnny Simons, interview.
222Artaud 188.
Robert Crumb shared his impression of Simons, "He didn't say a lot. He was a laconic guy, a brooding ectomorph like me."223

A reticent individual, more prone to demonstration than articulation, Simons says the inspiration for his "illegitimate community theatre" derived from a melange of sources:

"The actors are from the community, though we have interns now from several universities and professionals, that come in, for god knows why . . . It's 'illegitimate' because it's 'bastard' theatre."224

Simons becomes antagonistic when conversation concerning his art leans towards the feels is pretentious. John Murphy recorded such an incident when he probed too deeply in Simons' artistic psyche:

"I just witnessed a miracle, because he wrote that damn play in just four days. Four damn days, I couldn't believe it.

And then I did it-I made a horrible mistake.

"You must have really been inspired," I said and JESUS CHRIST, he stopped dead cold, right there in the middle of popping another crisp catfish tail thru the pink slit in his beard. He stopped and looked at me... with the cruellest eyes I have ever seen... . . .

"Inspiration," he leaned close enough for me to feel the ends of those gray-black whiskers, suddenly bristly hard, "INSPIRATION DIDN'T HAVE A GODDAMN THING TO DO WITH IT."

Finally, he turned aside and finished off his beer . . . He didn't say another word but got his wife and kids, saying, "Come on, dameeet, we're leaving!" . . .

Gene Woods held his cue stick up next to his stump of an index finger and broke the rack with a loud pop. Balls rolled in colored blurs, "You know, there's

224 Johnny Simons, interview.
one thing you'll learn about the Nose, . . . No one goes crawling around too deep inside that skull of his."\[225]

It is an understatement to say that Simons is wary of academicians. It is necessary to abstract and deduce most clues concerning his work from observation. He is suspicious and scrupulously avoids being fragmented and vivisected by academicians or the press. He often says, "I've heard lots of Ph.D.s and scholars talk and lecture about the Commedia, I've also seen damn few of 'em that can do it."\[226]

By keeping their "illegitimate community" theatre small, based on grass-roots organization, and using a "found" ensemble of the untrained, semi-skilled, and professional, the Simons eke out an existence and attract a working class audience, as well as admirers of "elitist" culture. The ability to perform the art is paramount to Simons, while academic analysis of creation seems pointless.

Simons promotes a creative voice in his ensemble that dismisses academia and "high" art. Simons' empowers the performer through a pedagogy that encourages their own interpretations of the commedic forms inherent in popular culture. Simons' trained his ensemble to respond to the body as text and to dismiss the elitist authorial discourse of art and academia.

The Commedia's focus on the carnal and the limitations of the human organism guarantees its survival in popular discourse. Mimicry that communicates the limits of human physical boundaries is universal. The comic archetypes struggle with their inadequacies

in dealing with the laws of physics. Their grotesque characterizations occur while dealing with the intractability of objects. These exaggerated efforts of frustration replicate the comic archetypes in the human consciousness as the "body as text."

Discretely defining the "body as text" is impossible, except with pragmatic semiotics. Each individual must come to their own understanding of the communally shared language of "figurative clichés." The social dance of signs in human communication is continuously mutating and replicating; however, theatrical signs that connote the most basic needs of human survival, as depicted in the Commedia, retain their essential identity. Signs are arbitrary in the choice of signifier; however, pantomime contributes a universal element to human communication by delineating the universal physical laws that govern flesh through the medium of gesture.

A subversive nature is inherent in Simons' blue-collar theatre of the people that scoffs at intellectualism, pretension, and elitism. His performance displays return aesthetic power to popular culture by inverting the power of the critic. Such performance displays remove control of the arts from aesthetes (i.e., academics, newspaper critics, and the "theatre" snobs established by intellectual circles) and empowers an audience and cast consisting of working people.

Amateur actors, unschooled in elitist disciplines, access the Commedia's physical expressivity as the body as text. Simons' theatre is not word-worshipping drama, it glorifies carnality. It is not surprising that the Hip Pocket does not receive its appropriate share of critical attention, since some critics take umbrage at the liberation of performance from their control.

157

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As a form of people's theatre, Commedia incarnates extraordinary feats of intellect combined with the basest, scatological buffoonery. Johnny's stagings demonstrate a contemporary emergence of a similar rough theatrical environment from other people's theatres. In a form similar to the ancient Grecian phlyax, Roman mimes, and the pantomimed performances of Terence's plays, Simons' actors perform athletic, fantastic pantomime to original music and lyrics that carry the plot. Such persistence of form is a testimony to the survival of a people's theatre in Simons' lakeside productions.

Fraught with obstacles, usually of their own creation, attempts at a people's theatre rarely prove successful. Erwin Piscator, creator of "Epic Theatre," admitted failure in his attempt to create a theatre for the proletariat. Instead, he only found a following among the intelligentsia. Piscator came to understand the formalism of commercial and intellectual theatre, but never reflected the politics of the street.

The Simons' syncretizations of traditional clown types in Fort Worth cut across social barriers and attract a loyal following while maintaining the satiric nature of its comedic origins. A principal element in the success of these inversive performances depends on the audience's connection with shared archetypal childhood experiences, drawn from the well of Johnny's memory.

227 Phyllis Hartnoll, The Concise History of the Theatre 32.
The theatre endears itself to its working-class patrons by turning the restrictions of desperation, poverty, and deprivation into virtues. Simons uses the limitations of his "poor" theatre as a resource by applying creativity and simplicity to stage rustic illusions. Simple props often set an entire scene. Simons created his mythic "goat island," the site of Roy's spiritual epiphany in Nova's *Shady Grove*, by placing a tiny, pink, plastic palm tree on a bar table while Roy warmed his hands over a lit can of sterno that represented a camp fire.

During *Riders of the Purple Sage*, John Murphy and Linda Boydston created an elaborate calf-roping scene in a similar manner, Boydston pantomimed a cowgirl lassoing the animal, and Murphy performed a hand-mime of the cow. In *Adventures with June and Scotty*, June Marshall uses bubble gum to blow a bubble and pantomimes its movement as if it was floating under water.

Simons uses the poverty of his rough theatre to its best advantage. Common objects appear in a new and unexpected usage. The human body substitutes for special effects, while poetry and music provide mood and setting. John Murphy often quotes the Hip Pocket's resident troll, Gene Woods, in his journal of his experiences at the theatre, "You have now entered the world where your choices suddenly become very limited." In this aspect, Simons'

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229 *Riders of the Purple Sage* (personal video archives of John Murphy, 1985).
A staging of the Zane Grey classic as a live silent movie with projected scene titles, a pantomime ensemble, and two miked actors voicing all the roles.

corresponds to Brechtian "Umfunktionierung" as Danny Robbins' proposed in his dissertation.231

Simons used small props to represent biblical creation in Old Coots Read Genesis. In that play, a trunk full of stuffed animals, toys, fabric, and kewpie dolls serves to reenact the entire Biblical creation cycle. Other hand properties used in the intimate presentation included a rainbow cloth made from knotted, colored, "cowboy-style" handkerchiefs (in substitution for the omnipresent "lake" cloth), a doll stuffed with a dead fish to simulate the smell of rotting flesh (he shook it under the audience's noses and said, "bad babies" when God expresses his displeasure with Adam and Eve), and incense to indicate heaven. A fan, with the sun on one side and the moon on the other, depicted the heavenly bodies.

The elitist attitudes of critics and the established arts community have no relevance in his work. The most important "quality" Simons' seeks in his stagings is personal moral integrity. Nothing disturbs him more than pretension. Simons finds the trappings of commercial "show business" repugnant, preferring to conduct the theatre's affairs on a personal and intimate manner. In a recent discussion concerning the author's desire for a contract, Simons responded, "So you've just got a contract up your ass, tell me do you still have any affection for me?"232 Diane explained in a company newsletter the Simons vexation with commercial theatre was the result of many years of dealing with the "star system":

231 Robbins, abstract.
232 Johnny Simons, personal conversation (11 May 00).
"...Really the whole basis for Hip Pocket Theatre, is and was, that ALL participants—whether they be the actors, the technicians, the designers, directors, musicians, writers, and so forth—are an ensemble working towards a common goal, and that there is no star on anybody's dressing room door. In fact, in our case, there isn't even a door."233

In a similar vein, Simons' outlaw philosophy attempts to avoid the controversies of "art" and "showbiz" that lay claim to the intellectual and commercial theatre that presents style over substance. Simons elaborated on the objectives of his rough theatre during an interview:

"It's very important for the Hip Pocket to retain its texture; a rough-hewn quality that is comfortable. I like to term my theatre 'illegitimate community.' I want to steer clear of legitimate theatre. We're not interested in being famous or infamous . . . I try to steer away from the pretentious trap of 'art.' It's stupid to sit around and say, 'let's make art.' I just want to put on a play. They call these things plays because they have the sense of play—the children in these people getting together and playing . . . (We were forced) to use found spaces, found objects . . . found actors . . ." 234

Baudrillardean images of contemporary culture are too threatening to Simons' sense of self, forcing him to retreat into his "alternative world" of mnemonic characters. Lake Simons premiered her new play, Dogman, based on her father's life at the Hip Pocket Theatre on September 3, 1999. She explained to an interviewer from American Theatre Magazine that her father's quest for artistic

233 Hip Pocket Newsletter (personal archives).
integrity is the driving force behind his work and supplied the plot for *Dogman*:

"... An army of computer-heads robs people of their memories, causing a frightened man and his dog to tunnel deep into the earth to escape. Surrounding her puppets with projections, masks and movement, Simons sends her hero and his canine pal on a journey of discovery, restoring bits of the man's memory through encounters with buried artifacts of his life. . . . (Lake Simons) "It's his world versus the computerized world we are going into."235

**ALTERNATE REALITY**

Simons' life and his auto-chthonic alternative reality are living examples of semiotic constructivism. As a boy, Simons lived in a world of make-believe, and even now his visionary sense is so strong that imaginary visits with friends seem real to him.236 The *Commedia* universe of his imagination exists as a "Bizarro World," similar to the one seen in the *Superman* comic books of the 1950's and 1960's. His secondary reality is a Möbius strip where rationality and propriety invert; an alternate universe that satirizes all forms of power with skewed logic.

Dr. Don Lawler defined "secondary/parallel reality" during his lectures on science fiction and fantasy at East Carolina University, as an artistic work that contains its own mythology, history, and its own languages.237 Simons' fictive constructs of the Texanian *Commedia* certainly contain their own history, mythos, and

236Molemo, audio cassette.
237Don Lawler, lecture on science fiction and fantasy, East Carolina University (Greenville: May 1975).
use of a corporeal language of gestural and topical "figurative clichés" permitting the inclusion of his creations within this definition.

Simons raised his boyhood archetypes to legendary, mythic proportions in his "secondary/parallel" alternative, commedic reality. All organized religions contain an alternate reality that reiterates the world of its creators on a cosmic scale. The creation of such a world filled with symbolic puppets is the ultimate transgressive act, providing the "author" with divine power and displacing the hegemony of commonly accepted dogma.

Artistic utterances manifest reality for Simons in his construct of an independent secondary reality. Artaud wrote that, "We ask ourselves why not find poetic symbols on the illusory, imaginary level of theatre such as would lead to the effective apparition of spirits." William Blake provides argument for the efficacy of the poet when he asks the prophet Isaiah, in The Marriage of Heaven and Hell, "does a firm perswasion that a thing is so make it so?" Isaiah replies: 'All poets believe that it does, & in ages of imagination this firm perswasion removed mountains. . ." The greatest works of fantasy and "alternative reality" contain their own historical and mythic structure, as seen in works such as Tolkien's fantasy writings and science-fiction/utopian fantasy Star Trek, both containing their own independent languages. The Lake Worth Monster displays an inherent, self-contained mythic structure. Examples of successful films, television, dramatic, and

238 Artaud 169.
239 Elliot 292.
literary works that maintain a secondary/parallel reality are many, and include interactive computer games that contain their own mythic structure such as *Myst*, *Doom*, *Dune*, and *Quake*. Popular entertainments that qualify as secondary realities include: *Pokemon*, *Beast Wars*, *Tron*, *Disneyland*, *Dark Realm*, *Star Wars*, *The Matrix*, *The Thirteenth Floor*, *Johnny Mnemonic*, *Beowulf*, *The Lawnmower Man*, and *eXistenZ*. A character in the film *eXistenZ* by David Cronnenberg describes a virtual reality game within a game as, "ArtgoD, capital 'A,' capital 'D.' Thou, the player, art god." *Robot Wars*, a television show on the BBC features a cyber-reality where remote masters (cybergods) manipulate robots (human surrogates) in combats to the death (dramatic jural displays).240

Bill Joy, chief scientist and co-founder of Sun Microsystems, considers the creation of alternative cyber-realities to be the greatest challenge to the survival of the human species. In recent writings and interviews, this respected and august co-chairman of the President's Commission on the Future of Information Technology expressed his profound disturbance at credible projections that allow for computers millions of times faster than contemporary versions; nanotechnology that allows for self-replicating "smart" machines existing on an atomic level; the avalanche of progress in the field of genetic engineering; and the interaction of all these forms. In his opinion such alternative, man-made realities may decimate the earth's entire human population.241

240 *eXistenZ*, dir. David Cronnenberg (Serendipity Films, 1999).

The creation of an alternate universe from an individual artist's imagination lies at the core of constructivist semiotics; the only true relationship humans experience is through the exchange of signs and symbols. Artistic creations based purely on a community's mutual acceptance of semiotic conventions are as real as any manifestation of the material world. In a hundred years, most of the earth's current population will be dead and forgotten, but as long as human beings continue to use signs and symbols to communicate, Hamlet will continue to agonize over how to "Do the Right Thing."242

The characters, plots, atmosphere, and settings, contained in Johnny's alternative to reality are amalgams of Johnny's flights of the imagination, childhood memories, and the stock characters of the Commedia. The grotesque, alternate universe of the Commedia has alternate identities for Johnny and his family and often the inversion is a dark one. This alternate universe surrounds Johnny with dark, dangerous presences that cross the borders between surreality and the real.

June Marshall represents such a conjured entity from Simons' alternate universe. In Adventures with June and Scotty, she is a metaphoric mermaid figure and vehicle for Jimmy's loss of innocence. She infects the young Jimmy (Johnny's childhood alter ego) with the dreaded polio. In Huzzytown, she is the temptress that gives Jane the vortex and beckons her to enter. June Marshall is a typical "dark" figure in the Simons' mythos, a point where the lines blur between myth and reality, archetype and perception.

242Referenced from Do the Right Thing, a film by Spike Lee.
The creation of alternate realities has much in common with Chaos theory and its computerized depiction of the Mandelbröt set. Each alternate universe is a magnification of the detail of a larger one; the magnification eventually becomes a mirrored, slightly mutated, replicated image of the original form. In the Simons' self-created universe, the slight changes in the "wearily recapitulant" essential forms are the result of human free will within a spiritually ordered and motivated cosmos governed by a traditional Baptist credo.243

Like the most successful versions of other self-contained literary and dramatic universes, Simons' alternate dimension contains a delineated, personal mythos that is part-Christian, part-pagan, part-Eastern philosophy, and part-Humanist. In a reiterative function applicable to chaos theory, secondary/parallel realities usually require the sacrifice of a hero in a literal or spiritual death and rebirth similar to Ur-drama.

The hero must symbolically die for his or her community to initiate rebirth and reunification. The Passion of Christ or the reincarnations of Rama represents the regenerative personal mystery contained in the self-sacrifice of a Corn/Fisher King for each individual's personal alternate universe. The death and rebirth of the metaphoric King of vegetation may be the ultimate reiterative symbol in human consciousness.

A constructed, alternate universe mirrors the faults and virtues of its creator. Cyber realities now define a new sense of cultural ethics and morals and pose difficult questions concerning the

243Faulkner 191.
responsibilities of the creators of enclosed, self-created systems. Exponentially expanding cyber-consciousness and synthetic intelligences may become gods that create their own "toy" worlds. In these virtual constructs, their human origins may seem no more than distant gods and the objects of myth.

Depicting himself often with savage honesty, the characters are not perfect in Simonsland. His personal doppelgängers are often less than likable; however, there is always a Christian sense of responsibility and reckoning in their actions. As computer games reflect the essential nature and social responsibility of their creators, so do the characters in Simons' parallel reality. The ultimate gods within such a construct, both virtual and non-virtual, are its creators.

SEMIOTICS

A binarism that pits "the body as text" and the word/mind applies to Simons' genre of the "lyric grotesque." It is an eternal struggle. Saint Augustine fought the insurrection of his body against the purity of the mind and spirit. Jerzy Grotowski (1933-1999), an inspiration for Simons, delineated human expression in a similar declension between the logos and the bios, the word and the body.244 Grotowski believed the logos expresses analytic reasoning necessary for verbal expression and understanding while the bios is an instinctual, "pre-expressive" want. Such a declension of performance displays into the logos and the body as text is apparent in contemporary post-modern theory. Nicholas Mirzoeff observed

244Barba 237.
The body talks, "—but it does so in mysterious ways. In representation, it appears not as itself but as a sign."245 The "pre-expressive" want is at the heart of theatre, such as that of the Commedia. The essential carnal elements of survival, satisfaction, and comfort are at the center of human concerns in Simons' theatre. The universal nature of these desires defines humanity's "Sincere and Intense Desire to Communicate."246 The movement forms of the Commedia represent this absolute, pure, and rarefied, survivalist objective to the spectator through interconnected frozen postures (gestural signs) contained within a shared language of "figurative clichés." Erika Fischer-Lichte related the importance of theatrical semiotics in her book, The Semiotics of Theater:

"Gestural signs can, in other words, substitute for other sign systems in theater whereas they themselves cannot be replaced, a theatrical code without gestural signs is inconceivable."247

As the authority of the spoken and printed word deconstructs, the postmodern body becomes the focus in the performative arts. In some post-modern criticism, critics deconstruct spoken and written language to expose their inherent hierarchical prejudices and behavioral control. Postmodern critics consider performances concentrating on a body as text that deconstructs the authorial voice

246Mary Pern Price Medlin, "The Sincere and Intense Desire to Communicate: Paul Baker's Use of the Elements of Form as a Tool for Creative Expression," (thesis: Trinity University, 1985) i.
247Fischer 58
is a more open and honest artistic expression. The emergence of a physical dialectic, or body as text, is nothing new. It predates contemporary discussions and derives from such disparate ancestors as Renee Decartes, neo-classical philosophy, and the modernist rebellion against the confines of realism and naturalism.

These archetypal commedic characters, recognized universally as objects of humor and derision, manifest through the actors' bodies and exist as "text." The comic types serve as iconic referents and resemble what they symbolize. The physicalization of the types provides a semiotic form, easily interpreted by the audience. The trickster "sneaks," the braggart is "puffed up," the old man is "gnarled," and the shaman has his "head in the clouds." Each character provides an easily interpretable comic sign through the surface representations of physical silhouette, dialect, costuming, and oppositional movement.

Scholars do not disagree that universal human reactions to physical needs, desires, and emotions exist. There is also no disagreement that there are accompanying expressive gestures that assist in communicating these basic needs; the problem facing any proponent of a universal language of the body is that each culture has a radically different contextualization and codification of gesture.

Gestural semiotics deals with the question of "how, when," and "why," analogic universal gestural signs exist. Each culture and, for that matter, each human interchange of communication forms its own matrix of socially acceptable movements and a continuum that gauges the appropriateness of gestural intensity.
On the extremes of the continuum are unacceptable modes of behavior, while the middle area contains relatively appropriate gestural social responses. In western culture, a short, cursory bow at a formal occasion is appropriate; however, a sweeping cavalier flourish with a plumed hat provokes nervous laughter. There is a literal "dance" of signs, as semiotic representations continuously restructure themselves through a never-ending system of bargaining. The bargaining occurs during the interaction and performance displays of human communication. All linguistics involve an ongoing dynamic of quid pro quo.

Each culture fashions its own physical discourse or dialectic. Signs (linguistic "deep" structures) exist within all corporeal dialectics as common languages of "figurative clichés," a socially acceptable dance of shared iconic, gestural images. All cultures have their versions of iconic, commedic figures (universal humorous agents that satirize gluttony, pride, greed, and inappropriateness). A culture's comic figures perform polarized behaviors from the extremes of a continuum of gestural, expressive intensity. Within the discourse of a culture, a deep language of recognition exists for commedic figures that perform "figurative clichés" through the medium of highly polarized, oppositional movement.

Simons' Texican Commedia reflects the emergence of the characters as semiotic signs of universally recognizable human behavior contained in popular Southwest American discourse. Though his creations do not conform completely to "classical" models, they resonate with the essential nature of the braggart,

Taviani 146.
trickster, shaman, and glutton. The forms of the characters are plastic and depend on the contextualization of a language of "figurative clichés" constructed from popular culture.

Simons is not sure where his visions of the archetypal _Commedia_ characters originated, but he credits a self-induced meditative state that allowed him to distill the essences of the iconic forms from popular culture. The existence of the comic forms as semiotic, discursive signs may explain Simons' epiphany:

"They evolved from my imagination and a little bit of research, but, really, I was there. I saw them, when they were being performed. I don't have any belief or non-belief in re-incarnation, but for some reason I felt it was inherent in my being. I felt close to those characters... one just needs to sensitize themselves to it and the types seem to emerge."249

If authors are, as deconstructionists posit, no more than human conduits or intellectual pipelines for cultural trends; then, commedic stereotypes represent semiotic functions with a continuous existence in social discourse that consistently reappear in popular culture through "the body as text."

249 Johnny Simons, interview.
VII. CONCLUSION: THE CHILDREN OF MOLEMO

The creations of Johnny Simons, Diane Simons, and Douglas Balentine, are of inestimable value to the cultural history of Fort Worth. By combining traditional commedic figures with iconic Texas imagery, Johnny, Diane, and Doug Balentine midwifed a new genre of the Commedia Dell'Arte for the Southwest United States at the Hip Pocket Theatre. There is not a theatrical venue in the Dallas-Fort Worth area unaffected by their innovations; yet, their contributions to the theatrical culture of the American Southwest remain largely unexamined. It is essential that academic critics examining the regional dramatic culture come to appreciate the artistry and creativity of this open-air theatre and subject it to closer scrutiny.

The rebelliousness of the sixties' counter-culture, combined with a sincere desire for integrity and aesthetic exploration, led to Johnny Simons' auto-chthonic creation of The Hip Pocket Theatre and its ensemble. Simons, the theatre's resident guru, produced his lyrically grotesque clown shows to "cock a snook" at authority. The primitive nature of the productions only added to their charm.

Functioning as an elder "shaman" to his ensemble, Simons constructed an alternative cosmology in his productions that drew heavily from his Baptist upbringing, his childhood on the shores of Lake Worth and in the suburbs of Cowtown, and disparate philosophical sources such as Taoism, Paganism, Zen, and Hinduism.

The four transformational iconic comic characters (Arlecchino, Pantalone, Capitano, and Dottore) formalized in the Italian Commedia Dell'Arte found rebirth with the French players.
The genealogy of the forms stretches forwards and backwards in time from the frozen moments of their classical definitions. The continuously bifurcating images of the four iconic types reiterate the specific behavioral types within Simons' performance displays and share connections with the universal characters that surfaced in the theatrical forms of Ur-drama, Megaran farce, Attic Comedy, the phlyax, Atellan Farce, Roman comedy, Elizabethan drama, circus clowns, silent film comedy, vaudeville, and cartoons.

The grotesque clowns plied their trade for centuries until neoclassical philosophers separated the pleasures of the flesh from the spirits of the air by initiating a schism between the "rough" performances of the streets and the "lyric" style of the elitist arts of ballet and opera. The "evil twin" of high-brow theatre would not recombine with its exalted sibling until Deburau's paradoxical Pierrot in the early 19th century and later in the romanticism of Hugo. A direct line of influence connects Deburau to the turn-of-the-century, modernist infatuation with Commedia, the pedagogy of Jacques Lecoq, and subsequently, Johnny Simons' dramatic displays of the "lyric grotesque."

Jacques Lecoq was the most important influence in the popularization of movement-theatre and the Commedia during the last thirty years and exerted a direct influence on Johnny Simons' creative perspective. Continental movement-theatre groups inspired by the teachings of Jacques Lecoq, like Theatre Complicité, and Footsbarn, receive well-deserved international critical attention for following an artistic path that parallels the development of the Hip Pocket.
Johnny's study under Bill Garber, Walther Volbach, David Preston, and Jacques Lecoq, as well as peripheral theories derived from other influential European movement practitioners and theorists, allow him to create a secondary/parallel commedic universe on the other side of an imaginary vortex that separates his private world from reality. The waters of Lake Worth surround his alternate universe and fill it with friends and family, the cultural effluvium of the 1940's, metaphoric mythic structures, and Baptist structuralism. The lake is the threshold between his worlds. It is the concrete center and representational anchor for Simons. Invariably, his actors' reflections in its waters resemble the images of the four, commedic archetypes.

The exploration of childhood space through Paul Baker's "Integration of Abilities" exercises and the application of his analytic elements of theatrical form allowed me to understand how Simons used his childhood to construct his alternative commedic universe. Simons turned his childhood memories into theatrical fables that unite the blue-collar community of Fort Worth through the consecration of song, pantomime, dance, verse, and music. Johnny's characters are chthonic by nature; defamiliarized "others" that allow the community to laugh at itself and its hierarchy in a gentle, self-effacing manner through their exotic dialects, movements, and situations.

The children of Molemo are Johnny's creations in an alternative universe of Texas Commedia existing on the other side of a vortex that separates reality from his world of fantasy, his ensemble, and his talented daughters. Within his alternate universe,
"Molemo, King of the sewer rats," Simons' childhood nemesis, adult preoccupation, and alter-ego, reigns supreme. It is a topsy-turvy, bizzaro, "Cowtown" universe that allows Simons to explore his personal failings and quest for grace when the "virtual" world of Ft. Worth seems incomprehensible.

The four iconic clowns appear repeatedly in Simons stagings as principle figures. Dodson, Meema, Brother Swank, and Molemo, are typical representatives of the universal commedic braggarts, gluttons, shamans, and tricksters that inhabit Simons' alternate reality. The characters from Simons' childhood, fantasies, and popular entertainment of the 1940's, recapitulate as original commedic forms with a Southwestern, chthonic connection.

The Hip Pocket Theatre serves as a rite of passage and "liminal" proving ground for its ensemble. Placed on the selvage edge of Fort Worth's hierarchical structure, the mainstream rewards the Hip Pocket ensemble for their sacrifice with the power of satire and the ensemble's "communitas." Its actors embrace the deprivation and depravity of existence in the world of "show trash." The Hip Pocket is a community of artists that found their own place and moment within the continuous process of the reiterative bifurcation of the iconic clown forms.

The ensemble gains a sense of "belonging" by becoming outcasts. They enter a carnivalesque world of inversion led by a charismatic, backwoods guru who allows them to explore through expressive gesture the boundaries of gender, race, and culture. They became "as little children" and went "out in the woods and . . . act
(ed) silly, . . . (got) nasty, filthy and sweat. (Took) sticks and play(ed) with them. . . . "250

The contributions of the Hip Pocket gypsies are only now being evaluated from a critical standpoint in academia, though they receive praise locally, nationally, and internationally. Scholars are only now taking notice of the contributions of the Hip Pocket Theatre to Southwestern American culture. As the Simons near retirement, it seems tragic if their work becomes forgotten minor events performed in remote locations.

Simons authored hundreds of original works and adaptations, as well as functioned as the choreographer, composer, lyricist, director, designer, and producer. In a manner similar to a keyboard musician or a director manipulating elements of cinematic construction, Simons manipulates the disparate and discursive voices of popular and classical culture into double-voiced performance displays. Only by analyzing the entire canon of Simons work can his manipulation of popular culture's discursive voices be truly discerned.

Simons' disparate "assemblages" appear similar to other post-modern approaches to artistic construction; however, the Simons have more in common with Andrew Sarris' "auteur theory" of film than with post-modernism.251 Sarris' "auteur theory" maximizes the authorial voice by not only examining a director's overall canon of work, but also the director as the ultimate creator of the art.

250Johnny Simons, interview.
Instead of passing judgment on an episodic basis, an "auteur" approach to criticism examines the artistic control and personal integrity of the individual displayed by the creator and the artist's entire body of work.

It is impossible to investigate the contributions of Johnny Simons to the culture of the American Southwest and to the international world of movement theatre in a few writings. Simons is an auteur with a massive body of self-produced work covering a period of over forty years. An accurate understanding of the Simons' contributions and the workings of his Hip Pocket Theatre will be accessible only by reading between the lines of numerous scholarly writings. It is the author's hope that the Simons' auteur legacy continues with Lake and Lorca Simons as they mature as individual artists.

Simons' impact on the region's theatre is inestimable. The Hip Pocket Theatre and its progenitors inspired ensemble members to participate in a more global, artistic community after leaving the nursery of the Hip Pocket Theatre. These artists and artisans alter the nature of regional theatre and art through their individual contributions after concluding their liminal residencies in the Hip Pocket ensemble. By proxy, their individual contributions carry the voices of Johnny Simons, Diane Simons and Doug Balentine.
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---. program for *Circus Cervantes*. Duke University School of Drama.


Simons, Lorca. personal interview. 6 March 2000, 8:36 AM.


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185


186

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APPENDIX A:
A SELECT PRODUCTION HISTORY OF THE HIP POCKET THEATRE

1977
(# COWTOWN! by Johnny Simons & Doug Balentine
(# MAD DOG BLUES (Shepard)
(# A FUNNY THING HAPPENED ON THE WAY TO THE FORUM (Sondheim)
(#* TARZAN OF THE APES (Burroughs) adapted by Simons and Balentine)
(#* TOMMY (Townsend) adapted by Johnny Simons
(#* IN WATERMELON SUGAR (Brautigan) adapted by Simons
(#* NOVA'S SHADY GROVE by Simons & Balentine

1978
(#* "EVEN IF YOU CAN STOP THE YELLOW CLAW, MY DEADLY TIDAL WAVE WILL STILL DESTROY NEW YORK!"
Collaborative script
(#* THE LOVE OF DON PERLIMPLIN AND BELISA IN THE GARDEN (Lorca)
(#* OLD MOTHER WEST WIND (Burgess) adapted by Simons & Balentine
(#* PETER PAN (Barrie)
(#* VAN GOGH/GAUGUIN by Simons & Balentine
(#* LAKE WORTH MONSTER by Simons and Balentine
(#* A CHRISTMAS CAROL (Dickens) adapted by Simons

1979
( THE CLUB (Merrian)
( TARTUFFE (Molière)
(#* THE VELDT (Bradbury)
(* PRINCE REYNARD by Larry Oliver and Art Davis
(#* ANTAMOSO AND THE BEAR by Simons & Balentine
(# THE WIZARD OF OZ (Baum) adapted by Simons
(#* TARZAN OF THE OAKS by Simons & Balentine
( THE FROGS (Aristophanes)
(#* THE BILLY-CLUB PUPPETS (Lorca)

1980
(#* RAGGEDY FARM by Simons & Balentine
(#* CAPTIVE WILD WOMEN by Simons & Balentine

192

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(* CHARLIE CHAN IN THE HOUSE OF TOMORROW  by Simons & Balentine
(# WAR OF THE WORLDS (Wells) adapted by Maynard

1981
(* RETURN OF THE CREATURE  by Simons & Balentine
(# PINOCCHIO COMMEDIA (Collodi) adapted by Simons
(* THE BUTTERFLIES EVIL SPELL  (Lorca)
(* HEARTS OF THE CITY by Simons & Maynard
(* KING KONG  (Cooper) adapted by Simons & Maynard
(* A SAGA OF BILLY THE KID by Simons & Art Davis

1982
(# RAGGEDY FARM by Simons & Balentine
(* CLOWN ALLEY, CIRCUS DAYS by Simons and Balentine
(* SEX KITTENS GO TO COLLEGE by Simons & Balentine
(# COWTOWN!  by Simons & Balentine

1983
(* ELDER OAKS by Simons and Balentine
# TARZAN OF THE OAKS  by Simons and Balentine
(* ELY GREEN AND THE ROYAL FLYING CORPS O' COWTOWN!  by Simons & Balentine
  WORKSONG  by The Talking Band
(* "EVEN IF YOU CAN STOP THE YELLOW CLAW, MY DEADLY TIDAL WAVE WILL STILL DESTROY NEW YORK, II" collaborative script

1984
(* BARBEQUE JOINTS, CHILI DOGS, AND BRAZEN HUSSIES by Simons
(# COWBOY MOUTH and COWBOYS #2  (Sam Shepard)
(* MIND MIMES by Simons
(* THE HEAD, HANDS, AND TOE SHOW by Simons
(* THE MALTESE FALCON  (Hammett) adapted by Simons
(* UNDERNEATH THE TOP DOWN  (A COWTOWN BRIGADOON) by Simons
(# MIRANDOLINA (MISTRESS OF THE INN)  (Goldoni)
(* ABBOTT AND COSTELLO MEET FRANKENSTEIN adapted by Maynard

1985
(* ADVENTURES WITH JUNE AND SCOTTY  by Simons
(## KEROUAC: A REMEMBERANCE  by John Murphy & Simons
(## RIDERS OF THE PURPLE SAGE  (Grey) adapted by Simons & Maynard
(# THE HEAD, HANDS, AND TOE SHOW  by Simons
(## R. CRUMB COMIX  by Robert Crumb & Simons
(* WHEN WORLDS COLLIDE  (Wylie & Balmer) adapted by Maynard

1986

(* THE MEEMA Sextet  by Simons
(## FREAKS  adapted by Maynard & Simons
(# RIDERS OF THE PURPLE SAGE  (Zane Grey) adapted by Simons and Maynard
(# PETER PAN  (Barrie)
(## ON BEAST BEACH  by Simons
(## OLD TARZAN  by Simons & Balentine
(# IN WATERMELON SUGAR  (Brautigan) adapted by Simons

1987

(* LUCY AND DESI VS. THE KILLER SHREWS  by Maynard
(# NOVA'S SHADY GROVE  by Simons & Balentine
(## THE REAL TRUE STORY OF DUCY THE PUCY  by Simons
(# OUR TOWN  (Wilder)
(## WOMEN IN SLIPS  by Simons & Balentine
( VAN GOGH/GAUGUIN  by Simons & Balentine
(## A BOWL OF RED  (Tolbert) adapted by Simons & Balentine
(* PUPPETMASTER  by Balentine

1988

(* THE LADY VANISHES  adapted by Maynard
(* LIVE FROM FT. WORTH, IT'S SATURDAY NIGHT!
  collaborative script
(## WILD MAN OF THE NAVIDAD  by Simons and Balentine
(# TARZAN OF THE APES  by Simons & Balentine
(* WIDOWS  (Dorfman)
(## A LIL' GREEN FALL  by Simons & Balentine
(# MAD DOG BLUES  (Shepard)
(## OLD COOTS READ GENESIS I through 8 (KING JAMES VERSION)  adapted by Simons
(* PETERUSHKA  adapted by Davis & Davis

1989

(* THE SCARECROW  (MacKaye) adapted by Buchanan & Newman
(ADVENTURES OF THE SHADOW STARRING LAMONT CRANSTON AND MARGO LANE by Simons
(* DREAMS, SCHEMES, AND IMAGININGS by Davis and Davis
(** YOUNG DOWDS by Simons & Balentine
(** ATTACK OF THE B-GIRLS by Simons & Balentine
(# LAKE WORTH MONSTER by Simons & Balentine
(** EVEN IF YOU CAN STOP THE YELLOW CLAW, MY DEADLY TIDAL WAVE WILL STILL DESTROY NEW YORK, III" collaborative script
(LA FONTAINE'S FABLES IN MIME AND SONG adapted by Simons & Balentine

1990
(** R. CRUMB COMIX by Crumb & Simons
(** SHAZAM! by Simons & Balentine
(** KURU by Josh Manheimer
(A COVEY OF ONES (an evening of one-acts)
(** MOLEMO! by Simons
* BLOB by Balentine
** TOM SAWYER (A BANJO COMMEDIA) (Twain) adapted by Simons

1991
(# COWTOWN! by Simons & Balentine
(PINOCCHIO COMMEDIA adapted by Simons
(PICNIC (Inge)
(THE BUTTERFLY'S EVIL SPELL (Lorca)
* THE BRIDE OF FRANKENSTEIN (Shelley) adapted by David Yeakle

1992
(# A SAGA OF BILLY THE KID by Simons
(# A MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM (Shakespeare)
(** BABY DOLL (Williams)
(** NIGHTMARE ALLEY STARRING TYRONE POWER by Simons & Carter
SLEEPY HOLLOW, A HEADLESS TALE (Washington Irving) adapted by Simons & Rogers

1993
(** HUZZYTOWN by Simons
(THE TEMPEST (Shakespeare)
(# ST. JOAN OF THE STOCKYARDS (Brecht)
(#* THE SCARFISH VIBRATO by Simons & Hinkle
  ( EVERYMAN (Anonymous)

1994
  (** HARLEQUINADE by Simons
  (** THE NOSE SHOW! - A One-Man Pantomime by Simons
  (** FLYING SAUCERS, A MODERN MYTH OF THINGS SEEN
      IN THE SKIES BY C. G. JUNG - Adapted by Simons
  (** GIRLS FROM GIRDLEVILLE GREET MEN IN BVD'S, A
      Ballet with Some Talkin' by Simons
  (** LAKE OF THE APES by Simons
  (** ADVENTURES WITH JESUS, LUKE 1 - 24 - Adapted by
      Simons
  (# THE THREE CUCKOLDS - Adapted by Leon Katz
  (* HUBCAPS AFIRE OVER HOLLYWOOD, The True Fantasy of
      Ed Wood, Jr. by Gooch & Carter
  (** THE BIG FAT CHRISTMAS GOOSE by Mike Pierce

1995
  ( THE HEAD, HANDS, AND TOE SHOW by Simons
  (** DAUGHTERS OF ZEEACK by Simons, Musical arrangements
      by Michael Appleby
  (** MOUNTEBANKS CHANGING PLACE A Harlequinade by
      Simons
  (# TREASURE ISLAND (Stevenson) adapted by Simons
  (* SWANK CITY by Pete Gooch and Jim Toler
  (* THE DAY THE EARTH STOOD STILL (North and Bates)
      adapted by Maynard
  (# A BOWL OF RED (Tolbert) adapted by Simons and Balentine

1996
  (* FOLK MIME TALES by Gary Cunningham
  ( RIDERS OF THE PURPLE SAGE (Grey) adapted by Maynard
      and Simons
  (* "EVERY MAN HIS OWN FOOTBALL!" THE DIVINE
      MADNESS OF DADA CABARET by Pete Gooch and Steve Carter
      LYSISTRATA (Aristophanes)
  ( THE SKIN OF OUR TEETH (Wilder)
  (* EGGHEADS by Joseph Skibell

1997
  (** THE NOSES AND THE TOESES AND THE SHOULDA,
      COULDA, WOULDAS by Simons

196

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(# DAUGHTERS OF ZEEACK by Simons, Musical arrangements by Appleby
(# ADVENTURES WITH JUNE AND SCOTTY by Simons
(# THE MEEMA SEXTET by Simons
(# OLD COOTS READ GENESIS, 1-8 KING JAMES VERSION adapted by Simons

1998
(A FROG IN HIS THROAT (Feydeau)
(RHINOCEROS (Ionesco)
(* FATTY IN BABYLON by Gooch
(* INKYPOD written and directed by Lake Simons
(# IN WATERMELON SUGAR (Brautigan) adapted by Simons, with original music by James Hinkle

1999
(# COWTOWN! "A BUNCH O' WILDERNESS" by Simons and Balentine
* SUCH AND SUCH FESTIVAL an evening of original works
(# * OLD RIVER HIGH by Simons
(# * R. CRUMB COMIX 3 by Crumb, adapted by Simons
*( DOGMAN written and directed by Lake Simons
(#* LILITH OF THE LAKE by Simons

2000 (Projected)
PINOCCHIO COMMEDIA directed by Lake Simons
SUCH AND SUCH FESTIVAL
THE RAINMAKER
WAITING FOR GODOT directed by Tony Medlin
TOBACCO ROAD
THE BUTTERFLY'S EVIL SPELL (Lorca)

PRODUCTIONS AT THE KIMBELL ART MUSEUM
(#* THE IMPRESARIO (Bernini) English premiere in conjunction with a Bernini exhibit, 1982
(#* SPANISH BRABANTER, PART I (Bredero) English premiere in conjunction with a Dutch Masters exhibit, 1982
(#* LA FONTAINE'S FABLES IN MIME AND SONG adapted by Simons in conjunction with an Oudry exhibit, 1983
(#* SPANISH BRABANTER, PART II (Bredero) English premiere in conjunction with a Dutch Masters exhibit, 1983
(* A CHRISTMAS CAROL (Dickens) adapted by Simons, 1983
(# THE BEGGAR'S OPERA (Gay) adapted by Simons &
Gary Meyer, in conjunction with a Hogarth exhibit, 1984


(## THE SECOND SHEPHERD'S PLAY (Anonymous) in conjunction with a Krespe exhibit, 1985

(## THE THREE CUCKOLDS adapted by Leon Katz, in conjunction with a Cavallino exhibit, 1985

(## THE MANDRAKE (Machiavelli) in conjunction with an exhibition, Italian Renaissance Sculpture in the Time of Donatello, 1986

PRODUCTIONS AT DUKE UNIVERSITY, 1987-1993

CIRCUS CERVANTES adapted by Simons in conjunction with a Spanish "Old Masters" exhibit

THE COLLECTED WORKS OF BILLY THE KID

OLD COOTS READ GENESIS 1-8 KING JAMES VERSION adapted by Simons

THICKETS

R. CRUMB COMIX adapted by Crumb and Simons in conjunction with an exhibition of Crumb's cartoons

THE SECOND SHEPHERD'S PLAY (Anonymous)

THE BUTTERFLY'S EVIL SPELL (Lorca) in conjunction with a Lorca exhibit

THREE CUCKOLDS adapted by Katz

MAD DOG BLUES (Shepard)

VAN GOGH/GAUGUIN by Simons and Balentine

THE ORIGIN OF THE DABLOIDS (Tischov) English premiere in conjunction with a Tischov exhibit

* World Premiere Productions

# Directed by Johnny Simons

( Designed by Diane Simons

1977-1979, Productions performed at Hip Pocket Theatre, Highway 80, Fort Worth

1980-1994, Productions performed at Hip Pocket Theatre, Oak Acres, Fort Worth

Other performance venues included Casa Mañana, White Elephant, Caravan of Dreams, First Night Fort Worth, Imagination Celebration, Dallas Museum of Art, Edinburgh Fringe Festival, Queen Elizabeth Hall

198
APPENDIX B:
RESUME FOR JOHN TOWNES SIMONS, JR. (1995)

HIP POCKET THEATRE
Co-founded the theatre in 1977; served as Artistic Director and Playwright-in-Residence; frequently designed sound, media, and sets
Artistic Director and playwright, 1983 Tour, Edinburgh Fringe Festival and Queen Elizabeth Hall, London; presenting three original plays in repertory: Elder Oaks, Ely Green and the Royal Flying Corps O' Cowtown!, and Tarzan of the Oaks by Johnny Simons and Douglas Balentine
Directing and Playwriting:
Directed 111 plays; authored 41 original scripts and 21 adaptations.
Performance:
Cowtown (singer)
Tarzan of the Apes (singer)
Tommy (Tommy)
Lake Worth Monster (singer/mime)
Antamoso and the Bear (Magician)
Pinocchio Commedia (Arlecchino)
BARBEQUE Joints, Chile Dogs, and Brazen Huzzies (Narrator)
Underneath the Top Down (Jimbo)
Three Cuckolds (Arlecchino)
Old Tarzan (singer)
The Real True Story of Ducy the Pucy (singer)
Old Coots Read Genesis I Through 8, King James Version (God)
The Nose Show! A One-Man Pantomime by Johnny Simons
Daughters of Zeeack (singer)

DUKE UNIVERSITY
1987-1993 Assistant Professor:
Teaching, directing, with occasional playwriting, scenic, and sound design responsibilities
Teaching:
Ensemble theatre, acting, movement, directing, Commedia dell'Arte-Drama Program and Institute of the Arts
Directing:

Drama Program and the Duke University Museum of Art
Circus Cervantes
The Collected Works of Billy the Kid (movement)
Old Coots Read Genesis I Through 8, King James Version
Thickets
R. Crumb Comix
Second Shepherd's Play
The Butterfly's Evil Spell
Three Cuckolds
Mad Dog Blues
Van Gogh/Gauguin
Dabloids

Playwriting:

Thickets
A Lil' Green Fall
R. Crumb Comix (with Robert Crumb)
Old Coots Read Genesis I Through I, King James Version

Performance:

The Collected Works of Billy the Kid (Pat Garrett)
Old Coots Read Genesis (God)

CASA MAÑANA THEATER
1964-1976
Casa Mañana Playhouse: artistic director, teacher, director, playwright, actor, dancer, sound designer
Artist-in Residence: Casa Mañana Musicals

Directing and Playwriting:

Ali Baba and the Forty Thieves
Babes in Toyland
A Christmas Carol
A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court
Cinderella
Hansel and Gretel
Hiawatha
Huck Finn
Johnny Appleseed
Legend of Sleepy Hollow
Many Gifts, One Spirit
The Midnight Ride of Paul Revere
Robinson Crusoe
Winnie the Pooh
Tom Sawyer
Raggedy Ann and Andy
Treasure Island

Performance:
Actor/Dancer-1963-1972
West Side Story
The Sound of Music
Irma La Douce
Mr. President
The Unsinkable Molly Brown
Finian's Rainbow
Oklahoma!
My Fair Lady
South Pacific
The Most Happy Fella
The Music Man
Roberta
Camelot
110 in the Shade
A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum
The King and I
Show Boat
Lil' Abner
Flower Drum Song
Once Upon a Mattress
On a Clear Day You Can See Forever
Oliver!
Can-Can
Funny Girl
Gypsy
Fiddler On the Roof
1776
Anything Goes
Paint Your Wagon

Ballet and Opera:
La Gioconda (Fort Worth Opera)-Director and Choreographer of Pantomime
Le Coq D'Or (Texas Christian University Opera, Houston Grand Opera, San Antonio Opera)-Kind Dodon
{performed with Norman Triegle and Nathalie Krassovska}

*Coppelia* (Fort Worth Ballet)-Dr. Copelius {Directed and choreographed by Alexandria Danilova}

*Mathias Der Maler* (TCU Ballet, San Antonio Opera, Houston Grand Opera)-Mathias

*Samson and Delilah* (Forth Worth Opera)-Dancer

*Boris Gudinov* (Fort Worth Opera)-Dancer

*A Masked Ball* (Forth Worth Opera)-Dancer

*Antamoso and the Bear* (New Orleans Ballet)-playwright, composer, choreographer

*Lil' Red* (Ballet Concerto)-playwright, choreographer

*Old Mother West Wind* (New Orleans Ballet)-playwright, composer, choreographer

**MUSIC PRODUCTION:**

"Nights Like This Are Rare"-LP album of selected songs by Johnny Simons and Douglas Balentine

KERA Blockbuster, Dallas (National Public Radio)-12-hour live studio broadcast of songs and music by Simons and Balentine

"Dreams Do Not Care"-an album of songs written and sung by Johnny Simons, accompanied by the Elementary Orchestra (1992)

**PUBLICATIONS:**


**TEACHING:**

1971-1995

Texas Wesleyan University-mime

Texas Christian University-mime

Stevens College-Artist in Residence

Tulane University-Artist in Residence

University of Houston-mime, group theatre, movement, acting

Tarrant County Junior College Northwest-established Drama Department in 1976, taught acting, mime, movement

University of Texas, Arlington-Artist in Residence

Dallas Theater Center-mime, movement

Kimbell Art Museum-movement

Fort Worth Museum of Modern Art-mime

Casa Mañana Playhouse-acting, mime, movement, ensemble theater

Alley Theatre-mime, acting

Southern Writers Conference-playwriting
MASTER CLASSES (Additional Training):
Jacques Lecoq—movement, mime, and mask seminar—Rice University
Joseph Chaikin, Open Theatre and Talking Band—seminar—Fort Worth Modern Art Museum

OTHER
Alley Theatre:
Tom Sawyer Goes Abroad (play adaptation)
Pinocchio Commedia (playwright)
Right You Are If You Think You Are (actor)
Ah, Wilderness (actor)

University of Houston:
Snakes (director)
Baba Mimes (playwright, director)

University of Texas, Arlington:
Blood Wedding (choreographer)

Tarrant County Junior College, Northwest:
Godspell (director, choreographer)
Pinocchio Commedia (director, adapter)
The Butterfly's Evil Spell (director)
York Cycle of Mystery Plays (director)

Houston Music Theater:
Playwright and Director:
Tom Sawyer
Pinocchio
The Ugly Princess
A Saga of Billy the Kid
Sinbad the Sailor

Gallery Circle Theatre, New Orleans:
Playwright and Director:
A Saga of Billy the Kid
Pinocchio Commedia

MISCELLANEOUS:
Fort Sam Houston, San Antonio—Man in the Dog Suit
(director)
Church Women United National Convention, Cincinnati, Ohio—
Many Gifts, One Spirit (playwright/director)
Sojourner Truth Players, Fort Worth, Texas—Down to the Roots (playwright/director)
Street Theatre—New Orleans French Quarter (performer)
Mime in the Park—Houston, Hermann Park; Dallas, Lee Park
(performer)
Six Flags Over Texas (choreographer)
Astro World, Houston (choreographer/mime)
Costume Assistant, Greenleaf-Hysell Designs, New Orleans

WORKS IN PROGRESS:


*Some Works Collected*-a collection of plays by Johnny Simons (for SMU Press).
APPENDIX: C, THE DERIVATIONS OF THE ARCHETYPAL FORM OF ARLECCHINO

APPENDIX D: THE DERIVATIONS OF THE ARCHETYPAL FORM OF PANTALONE

APPENDIX E: DERIVATION OF THE ARCHETYPAL FORM OF CAPITANO

APPENDIX F: DERIVATION OF THE ARCHETYPAL FORM OF THE DOTTORE

VITA

- tony: an old English word meaning fool, (OED).
- Antonio: a fat-faced character mask in the Commedia.

Tony Medlin's wife, Mary Pem Price Medlin, is a director, actress, and singer in her own right. He holds degrees from Trinity University (MFA, Acting/Movement-mime) and East Carolina University (BFA, Drama and Speech). He trained under Paul Baker at the Dallas Theatre Center's Professional Actor's Training Program and under Johnny Simons at the Dallas Theatre Center and at the Hip Pocket Theatre. He attended an extended "Interpreting for the Deaf" seminar at the University of Tennessee in Knoxville. He continued his ASL studies during classes in Dallas and Baton Rouge.

In the past, Mr. Medlin either directed or appeared in over a hundred plays in the South and Southwest United States and performed leading roles in several national touring companies. In Florida and North Carolina's prestigious Visiting Artist Programs, he held six year-long residencies as an actor, director, and playwright.

The disciplines of Clownwork and the Commedia Dell'Arte are a significant part of Mr. Medlin's professional career. He investigated and trained extensively in the disciplines of American Sign language, Shito-Ryu Karate, Aikido, and Tai Chi. Mr. Medlin also worked in the fields of radio, television, and motion pictures in numerous capacities. In August, 2000, Medlin will receive the degree of Doctor of Philosophy from Louisiana State University.
DOCTORAL EXAMINATION AND DISSERTATION REPORT

Candidate: Tony Earnest Medlin

Major Field: Theatre

Title of Dissertation: The Children of Molemo: An Analysis of Johnny Simons' Performance Genealogy and Iconography at the Hip Pocket Theatre

Approved:

[Signature]
Major Professor and Chairman
[Signature]
Dean of the Graduate School

EXAMINING COMMITTEE:

[Signatures]

Date of Examination:
April 26, 2000