Theatre Research in Canada
Recherches théâtrales au Canada

Making Knowledge/Playing Culture
Theatre Festivals as Sites of Experiential Learning

Antje Budde et Sebastian Samur

Citer cet article

Résumé de l'article

(Un projet du laboratoire de dramaturgie numérique du Centre for Drama, Theatre and Performance Studies, Université de Toronto) Cet article s'intéresse à un cours de premier cycle sur le thème des festivals en tant que plateforme pour l'apprentissage expérientiel. Offert en 2017, le cours « Theatre Criticism and Festival Dramaturgy in the Digital Age in the Context of Globalization—A Cultural-Comparative Approach » était programmé par le Centre for Drama, Theatre and Performance Studies de l'Université de Toronto et partait des principes mis de l'avant par son laboratoire de dramaturgie numérique. Les étudiants devaient assister au festival Fringe de Toronto et au festival d'Avignon pour ensuite comparer et analyser les performances individuelles et la programmation de chacun des festivals. Budde et Samur font valoir que les modes d'apprentissage expérientiel axés sur le lieu dont font usage des projets comme celui-ci peuvent contribuer de manière importante aux discours actuels sur la festivalisation et la culture événementielle en alimentant la recherche effectuée par des étudiants au premier cycle. Leur analyse cible trois modes d'engagement : l'apprentissage nomade (en déplacement, en mode numérique), le savoir incarné (par la participation, l'expérience et le sentiment) et la réalisation critique (par une combinaison de pensée critique et de réalisation physique). Les auteurs proposent un bref survol du cours et des théories qui y ont été présentées, pour ensuite examiner des conceptions de l'apprentissage expérientiel dans le contexte des arts de la scène, parmi lesquelles figurent des théories avancées par Burnet Hobgood, David Kolb et Ronald Fry, et Nancy Kindelan. Ils présentent ensuite l'importance des festivals comme site d'observation et montrent comment ils ont pu appuyer les trois modes d'apprentissage expérientiel. Des échantillons de travaux réalisés par les étudiants servent d'appui à l'analyse.

Making Knowledge/Playing Culture: Theatre Festivals as Sites of Experiential Learning

ANTJE BUDDE AND SEBASTIAN SAMUR

(A project of the Digital Dramaturgy Lab at the Centre for Drama, Theatre and Performance Studies, University of Toronto)

This article discusses the 2017 festival-based undergraduate course, "Theatre Criticism and Festival Dramaturgy in the Digital Age in the Context of Globalization—A Cultural-Comparative Approach" as a platform for experiential learning. The course, hosted by the University of Toronto's Centre for Drama, Theatre and Performance Studies, and based on principles of our Digital Dramaturgy Lab, invited a small group of undergraduate students to critically investigate two festivals—the Toronto Fringe Festival and the Festival d'Avignon—in order to engage as festival observers in criticism and analysis of both individual performances and festival programming/event dramaturgy.

We argue that site-specific modes of experiential learning employed in such a project can contribute in meaningful ways to, and expand, current discourses on festivalising/festivalization and eventification through undergraduate research. We focus on three modes of experiential learning: nomadic learning (learning on the move, digital mobility), embodied knowledge (learning through participation, experience, and feeling), and critical making (learning through a combination of critical thinking and physical making).

The article begins with a brief practical and theoretical background to the course. It then examines historical conceptions of experiential learning in the performing arts, including theories advanced by Burnet Hobgood, David Kolb and Ronald Fry, and Nancy Kindelan. The importance of the festival site is then discussed, followed by an examination of how the festivals supported the three modes of experiential learning. Samples of student works are used to support this analysis.

(Un projet du laboratoire de dramaturgie numérique du Centre for Drama, Theatre and Performance Studies, Université de Toronto)

Cet article s'intéresse à un cours de premier cycle sur le thème des festivals en tant que plate-forme pour l'apprentissage expérientiel. Offert en 2017, le cours «Theatre Criticism and Festival Dramaturgy in the Digital Age in the Context of Globalization—A Cultural-Comparative Approach» était programmé par le Centre for Drama, Theatre and Performance Studies de l'Université de Toronto et partait des principes mis de l'avant par son laboratoire de dramaturgie numérique. Les étudiants devaient assister au festival Fringe de Toronto et au festival d'Avignon pour ensuite comparer et analyser les performances individuelles et la programmation de chacun des festivals.

Budde et Samur font valoir que les modes d'apprentissage expérientiel axés sur le lieu dont font usage des projets comme celui-ci peuvent contribuer de manière importante aux discours

actuels sur la festivalisation et la culture événementielle en alimentant la recherche effectuée par des étudiants au premier cycle. Leur analyse cible trois modes d'engagement : l'apprentissage nomade (en déplacement, en mode numérique), le savoir incarné (par la participation, l'expérience et le sentiment) et la réalisation critique (par une combinaison de pensée critique et de réalisation physique). Les auteurs proposent un bref survol du cours et des théories qui y ont été présentées, pour ensuite examiner des conceptions de l'apprentissage expérientiel dans le contexte des arts de la scène, parmi lesquelles figurent des théories avancées par Burnet Hobgood, David Kolb et Ronald Fry, et Nancy Kindelan. Ils présentent ensuite l'importance des festivals comme site d'observation et montrent comment ils ont pu appuyer les trois modes d'apprentissage expérientiel. Des échantillons de travaux réalisés par les étudiants servent d'appui à l'analyse.

<center>⚬⚬⚬</center>

This article discusses the undergraduate summer 2017 course "Theatre Criticism and Festival Dramaturgy in the Digital Age in the Context of Globalization—A cultural-comparative approach." We argue that site-specific modes of experiential learning employed in such a project can contribute in meaningful ways to, and expand, current discourses on festivalising/festivalization and eventification through undergraduate research. Our course did not simply look at and experience two theatre festivals—the Toronto Fringe and the Festival d'Avignon—by comparing similarities and differences. Rather, we were interested in how both festivals are conditioned by, but also play into, global neo-liberal economies of festivalization/eventification and a society of digitized spectacle in the larger context of cultural commodification. We were also interested in the question of what social functions theatre festivals could or should perform. We encouraged our students to become informed observers, critical analysts and, in the process, producers/makers of alternative ideas—or prototypes for change.

What is at stake pedagogically is the question of if and how we engage younger generations of theatre scholars and artists to produce active, deep, embodied knowledge. How can undergraduate students not only be informed, but start shaping current scholarship on paradigm shifts in our field and in the greater cultural economies that directly affect them? How can we encourage students to achieve a level of digital literacy and competency that will help them to become knowledgeable agents of social change and responsible citizens in the arts? We identified *nomadic learning* (learning on the move, digital mobility), *embodied knowledge* (learning through participation, experience, and feeling), and *critical making* (learning through a combination of critical thinking and physical making) as key facilitating agents for our course's learning objectives.

These three modes and their applications through students' work will be described in greater detail below. But first, some context.

Course Context: On Planning a saFAri

The course was designed as a summer intensive half-credit course [1] coinciding in July 2017 with the local Toronto Fringe Festival and the international Festival d'Avignon.[2] We chose two festivals in different cultural and linguistic contexts and put them in an experiential and analytical dialogue in order not only to better understand such festivals as individual cultural occurrences in specific local contexts, but also to better understand different modes, economies, and politics of cultural production. At the same time, we situated both of these festivals within the framework of shared conditions such as globalization and digital culture.

Seven second- and third-year undergraduate students participated, six women and one man. Two had recent immigration backgrounds, one from South-Eastern Europe, one from the Middle East. One had never travelled internationally, and most had never travelled to Europe. While the selection of students was to a certain extent governed by funding requirements, students interested in taking this course had to submit a statement of interest outlining their expectations and learning goals to the instructors in the Spring. Students with a grade average of B+ and higher were accepted. Bi-linguality or multi-linguality was encouraged but not a condition. Knowledge of French, even on a beginner's level, was an asset, but again not a condition. Most of the students were involved in extra-curricular theatre activities as performers, directors, designers, playwrights, or technicians.

The course was envisioned as part of the saFAri series of the Digital Dramaturgy Lab (DDL),[3] which is one of the DDL's interconnected learning platforms:

> sAFari is our urban nomadic travelling project. We discover local and international performances and critical discourse that help us to better understand the multiplicity and complexity of making performance with, against, or beyond digital technology in relation to living bodies, space, time and machines. It also helps to make connections, meet new friends and build our network through doing and critical making rather than just talking. (Digital)

The course was designed and taught as a collaboration between a faculty member (Antje Budde) and a doctoral student (Sebastian Samur) who had collaborated on previous DDL projects.

Critical Contexts: Conceptions of Experiential Learning and the Performing Arts

The pedagogy of experiential learning at its core involves looking for alternative power relations between instructors and students. Learning by doing, for both instructors and students, is an important part of this, though this term can only serve as a shortcut for the complexities of experiential learning pedagogy. Both the experience—the doing—and its critical reflection are crucial in order to develop new ideas and active learning processes. The doing and its critical reflection are integrated in what Matt Ratto calls "critical making" (252-60).

Classrooms: Students learned while walking through a Park in Paris, sitting on a hostel patio in Avignon overlooking the Rhône, in a seminar room in Toronto, or during group dinner outings on a busy street. Photographer: Antje Budde.

In 1970, as a product of increased student protests demanding more participation as citizens and students, Burnet Hobgood made a strong argument for employing experiential learning strategies in North American theatre education, in particular in theatre history and dramatic literature courses. At the time, these were dominated by lecture-style teaching. This left students in a passive position as simple receivers of information. Students were told what to learn, rather than actively engaging with the *how* of learning. In addition, Hobgood noted that "A notable grievance is warranted against instructors who rely upon lecture presentations despite their lack of talent as performers" (49). A valid alternative is an instructor who *facilitates* active learning processes in structured ways rather than imposing content on passive (and, consequently, bored) students. Students' engagement is activated by moments of effective surprise (50). This was often the case, for example, in Avignon, when students experienced repurposed performance spaces, radical physical forms of acting, or noisy and passionate audience reactions.

A second principle Hobgood identifies as crucial to experiential learning is the discovery of central principles (46), which one student affirmed in a vlog at the course conclusion:

> I would say that the course gave me a lot of opportunities to see theatre that I would otherwise never see in my life and experience storytelling in ways that I didn't think was possible. [...] I finally understand concepts that I read about and I learn about all the time in school, and it was a fantastic way to put education into practice. (Student 1)

Students discovered central principles of festival curation, funding, identity politics, outreach strategies, politics of representation, aesthetic diversity, accessibility issues, and dynamic interplay between diverse sets of theatre shows when experienced in a festival setting.

Festival Avignon: The diversity of indoor and outdoor performance spaces and shows in different languages situated in a medieval European city offered exciting learning experiences. Photographer: Antje Budde.

Collaboration is the third key feature of engagement that Hobgood mentions (51). This took place regularly as students assisted each other both with logistical issues and course assignments. They collaborated on producing their vlogs, navigated new urban environments in small groups or pairs, and assisted each other in developing their prototype projects for the final symposium. The need to adhere to set travel and performance schedules also promoted accountability among students, who supported each other (in one case during a minor illness) so the group could make the most of their experience abroad. Collaborative modes of learning were a built-in and very much encouraged feature of our course pedagogy.

Later in the 1970s, David Kolb and Ronald Fry (33-57) conceived their well-known four-part experiential learning model further developing a classic study on collaborative leadership undertaken by K. Lewin, R. Lippitt and R.K. White in 1939. Human growth process, according to Kolb and Fry, is "divided into three broad developmental stages," "acquisition, specialization and integration" (41). Based on the implications of these stages they developed their cycle of experiential learning that includes concrete experience, observations and reflection; the formation of abstract concepts and generalizations, and the testing of the implications of concepts in new situations. In our course, with regular performance attendance, follow-up discussions, and written assignments we found there was a constant iteration akin to Kolb and Fry's cycle. At the same time, students frequently wrote about what surprised them most in performances or festivals, and their collaborative effort was central to the course's success, as was their discovery of central principles inherent in the production, execution, and perception of theatre festivals as a form of global "playing culture" (Sauter 19). Kolb and Fry's idea of "testing implications of concepts in new situations" comes closest to Ratto's concept of critical making that leads to alternative "prototyping" (253). Although a course

like ours cannot provide the opportunity for students to organize their own festivals, they did develop awareness, knowledge, competence, and confidence to develop their own ideas and prototypes, and test them through discursive critical exchange in the course symposium.

Discussions about experiential learning have continued to broaden. Nancy Kindelan makes a strong case in 2010 against assumptions that theatre and performance education solely serve the purpose of developing technical skills as opposed to operational ones (31-37). For Kindelan, there is still a need for demystifying experiential learning in performing arts education at universities. And in 2012, *Canadian Theatre Review* devoted an entire issue to a manifesto-style pulse-taking of Canadian theatre artists and scholars. Included is Louis Patrick Leroux's brief manifesto on "Theatre Production, Experiential Learning, and Research-Creation in the Academy: An Anti-manifesto of Sorts" (97-99). We agree with his statement, that

> There needs to be a fundamental interest in process and in reclaiming ownership over artistic discourse, process, and its impact on future generations. Experiential research relies, in this case, on understanding what it is we have done in part, because we set out to do it specifically in such a way (as with the experimental method, where one element is withheld or altered). The experience in itself, for its own sake, probably isn't enough. It is happening or has happened. Post-mortem lessons learned are fine, but there needs to be actual identification of deliverables, of process, and understanding of what was accomplished, how, and why. (98)

Leroux is specifically concerned with practice-based research in artistic processes and how this relates to experiential learning and risk-taking. In our course, through the design of specific assignments,[4] we facilitated reflective group discussions and individual feedback, as well as accountable forms of collaboration which enabled our students to learn, both as individuals and as a group, how the learning process unfolded, and what they had or had not accomplished. In our discussions as well as in their writing and responses, they also reflected on their own process of learning. For instance, on the multiple ways of seeing and experiencing festivals, one student stated in a vlog:

> The most interesting thing to me is how different everyone's presentations were. We looked at theatre as festivals, as events, with [an] economic lens [...] through sound, through set, all these different things, and I think that's so representative of what I got out of the course as a whole [...]. This idea of experiencing this thing that I've devoted my life to, but in so many different ways, and with mindsets that I could've never imagined before. I've seen theatre and types of theatre that I couldn't have pictured before I went away, before I experienced this course, and I'm now also able to think about them in new ways. (Student 2)

It was particularly helpful that students took what they learned about the Toronto Fringe to Avignon and soon realized, in this new situation, that they had to assess more carefully what they had learned in Toronto, what they learned in Avignon, and how they might develop their own concepts when back in Toronto.

The course engaged comparatively with the Toronto Fringe Festival and the Festival d'Avignon. It involved collective outings to festival performances and events both in Toronto and Avignon, with additional visits to Paris-based companies such as the Comédie Française, the Lecoq International Theatre School and the Théâtre du Soleil, as well as a trip to the Roman theatre in Orange, near Avignon.[5] The urban and transatlantic travel experience provided a core opportunity for nomadic learning, reflecting on the accelerating mobility of people, information and cultural commodities in the age of globalization. At the same time, it stressed the need for multilingual engagement in a world of increasing multicultural diversity and fragmentation. Critical participation in festival environments encouraged embodied learning in students, who experienced the combined effects of the cities, crowds, physical and digital publicity, and, of course, performances. They also had the opportunity to shape course content by assisting with the selection of Fringe festival shows. Finally, through critical making, students had an opportunity to gain digital literacy and awareness of the challenges of digital culture when using forms of digital publishing or analyzing digital platforms of festival programming and audience outreach. Digital literacy helps students cope with an increasingly ubiquitous world of digital data and virtual worlds. At the same time, students were working towards a prototype project to be presented at the concluding course symposium.

Festival Contexts: Playing Culture
On the Festival Site as Classroom

Willmar Sauter defines "playing culture" as "a mode of expression through which a society communicates its value system," and he lists theatre, along with film, music, dance, sports, and games, as examples of cultural performance. For him, "The playing culture contains typically strong physical elements, which have to be learned by doing" (19). Theatre festivals are both artistic events and cultural performances through which we make, experience and reflect on the societies and cultures we live in.

Crucial to experiential learning in our course was the festival site as a classroom. First, there is the immediate visceral experience of attending performances outside a university setting. The opportunity to attend two contrasting festivals in Toronto and Avignon encouraged students to embrace contradictions and to take risks, often moving them out of their comfort zones and confronting them with linguistic and cultural challenges. For instance, attending director Frank Castorf's *Die Kabale der Scheinheiligen. Das Leben des Herrn de Molière* in Avignon—a discombobulating historical examination of the difficult relationship between theatre and its appropriations by political power—exposed students to a theatre aesthetic that typically goes against a "well-made" play format, as it featured overlapping scenes (many hidden from view within tents) and non-linear dialogue, extreme athleticism, and unexpected interactive multi-media dramaturgy, leading to frequent points of confusion (and possibly boredom). This, in addition to its being produced in three languages over six hours, challenged students to take in stark differences from the more familiar theatre aesthetics featured in Toronto. The two festivals also proffered very different embodied senses of environment and atmosphere, both of them very different from a typical university classroom.

Collaboration as a means of community-building and togetherness was similarly impacted by the particular social nature inherent in festivals as heightened space-time. Sauter argues that "the density of a festival carries significance for the spectators' experience as a heightened state of participation and feelings of 'communitas'" (20). The Latin term communitas was introduced by anthropologist Victor Turner "to distinguish this modality of [heightened] social relationship [as is found in ritual and festival, for example] from an area of common living" (96). Our students formed communitas within festival audiences, but also within their own and temporary communitas learning and travelling as classmates. Theatre festivals offer excellent opportunities for building a liminal, nomadic, alternative classroom. Being in this special space-time, where the familiar rules do not apply, was both liberating and conducive to students' learning. In regular meetings, students could discuss their latest discoveries in readings or performances, but also felt comfortable discussing workload issues and helping us adjust some of the assignment expectations. Students took responsibility for their learning process and actively helped shape and facilitate this process. These discussions and negotiations also facilitated "flow," a concept that Sauter, borrowing from Michael Czikscentmihaly, connects to festivals. Flow is "a high degree of concentration, which keeps disturbances away and enables doctors to operate on patients for hours, people to walk in the mountains for days, or patrons to enjoy art festivals" (Czikscentmihaly, qtd. in Sauter 20). Our intensive summer course afforded both our students and ourselves such flow.

Our course asked students to think about theatre festivals beyond the singularity of Toronto or Avignon. As conceptual frameworks for analysis and comparison we offered "festivalization" and "eventification," which speak both to the processes of globalization in post-industrial societies and to their embeddedness in the digital cultures of the information society. These processes shape how the social function of the performing arts is envisioned and practiced. This conceptual framework allowed our students to think more deeply about the role of theatre artists and audiences, and the socio-economic factors that drive festival organization.

In 1993, German urban sociologists Hartmut Häussermann and Walter Siebel coined the term "Festivalisierung" (festivalization). They entitled their special issue of *Leviathan* "The Festivalization of City Politics" (our translation). In their introduction on the politics of festivalization and the festivalization of politics (7-31), they explain shifting paradigms of urban development in post-industrial, event-oriented, and consumerist societies[6]: the development of global tourism and local gentrification go hand-in-hand. This became specifically apparent to our students when they noticed that the Toronto Fringe Club tent, a meeting hub for festivalgoers and artists, was located close to a city park in which homeless people and families of ethnic minorities were gathering. None of these citizens would be found in the tent area, nor were there outreach efforts made for them to attend the festival. Students started to think about the urban situatedness of festivals and the social contradictions that come to light when taking a closer critical look at actual festival sites. One of the students, coming from a working-class background, started to think about matters of inclusiveness in terms of class and later dedicated her prototyping research project to such questions.

Similarly, of the Toronto Fringe Festival's programming, one student wrote in her blog:

Even though the Toronto Fringe works on a lottery system such that, supposedly, no economic or political influences determine the festival lineup, the "Best of Fringe"

and "Patron's Pick" both ensure that there is a pressure to create works that will gain popularity. Fringe shows will often try to steer clear of controversy—almost two thirds of the 2017 Fringe Festival are comedy or dance shows. (Student 2)

Experiencing the Toronto Fringe and also hearing from its outreach coordinator, Kevin Wong, provided students with the opportunity to gauge how its lottery model plays out in practice. While technically the Fringe is open to all participants and curation is minimal, in practice, according to Wong, applicants tend to be predominantly Caucasian males, which results in more shows produced by that demographic. Moreover, in their blogs, students frequently noted Brian Batchelor's argument that so-called "Fringemachines"—well-known Fringe performers (usually soloists) who tour the Fringe circuit frequently—were examples of a sameness that the Fringe model encourages (44). To offset such trends and support its strategic plan to encourage more diversity, the festival has introduced separate lottery categories reserved for those self-identifying as culturally diverse or with disabilities. Applicants to these categories do not need to pay a fee and can also apply for the regular fee-based lottery. The festival's publicity campaign in 2017 also promoted diversity at the festival, shifting away from previous text-based graphics to featuring four models to reflect the diversity of performers at the Fringe. By examining these materials in class and experiencing the festival in person, students could observe this tension first-hand within the Fringe's curatorial model, which purports to be all-inclusive through an indiscriminate lottery system yet practices a form of counter-curation to encourage more participation from under-represented artists.

Greg Richards states that "the critique of festivalization is usually built on two premises: first, that the level of commodification is increasing; and second, that the locus of control is shifting away from the civic and local toward the market and the global" (270). This statement is reminiscent of the Situationist critique expressed in Guy Debord's *The Society of the Spectacle* (1967). It also relates to the findings of Temple Hauptfleisch's analysis of "Festivals as Eventifying Systems" (39-47). The latter two works were included in our course readings so that the students might learn what traditions of critical analysis of spectacle and festivalization existed that informed the works of later scholars. They learned, that is, about the historicity of knowledge and to respect work that had been done before.

Modes of Engagement

We will now turn to the three primary modes of experiential learning engagement that we found central to the course: nomadic learning, embodied knowledge, and critical making. These will be outlined in detail below, illustrated by findings from students' assignments and reflections.

Nomadic Learning

The term nomadic learning has been defined many times across disciplines. Of particular interest for our purposes is Julie Allan's application of Deleuze and Guattari's rhizome metaphor as an important principle of such learning:

> These rhizomic wanderings could help to disrupt conventional knowledge about teaching and learning. It [the rhizome] could also interrupt the dominant knowledge of *special needs* and enable student teachers instead to experiment with responding to difference in ways which are meaningful to the young people. [...] Student teachers' knowledge and understanding might be fashioned as a series of maps, "entirely oriented toward an experimentation in contact with the real." [...] These maps do not replicate knowledge, but perform and create new knowledge. (Deleuze and Guattari, qtd. in Allan 121; emphasis in original)

Deleuze and Guattari's rhizome metaphor lends itself well to nomadic learning, as it not only concerns the movement of ideas between teachers and students, but the role of physical movement as well. At the same time, it helps us to think beyond disciplinary boundaries and to network knowledges and methods of learning across disciplines.

In our course, we applied the concept and experience of nomadic learning as it has been established in the works of the Digital Dramaturgy Lab. The idea of nomadic learning for the DDL pertains to the ever-changing constellations of learning collaborations that exist within the networked research of DDL members, but also to learning-on-the-move and digital mobility, such as practiced in the DDL's saFAri series—a playful learning series based on travel experiences outside the university. Previous saFAris have included, for example, visits to media exhibitions and performances featuring digital technology. These past research travel events served as concrete experiences for observation and reflection to inform choices made for our course in 2017. A previous summer course offered at our centre, which took students to the Edinburgh Fringe Festival, served a similar purpose. And our course would itself eventually serve to inform a follow-up research travel experience to New York in fall, 2017.[7]

Mobility, both physical and digital, has accelerated enormously in the last two decades. It is likely not a coincidence that many major publications addressing new paradigmatic changes in theatre production/circulation/presentation, embedded in modes of festivalization, eventification, and globalized theatre festivals also appeared within this time frame. Our students are constantly "on the go," and digital gadgets are attached to their bodies at all times. This is their real-world experience. Yet, the apparent promise of infinite freedom and flexibility causes many problems, an alarming rise of mental health issues, anxiety and attention problems among them. Our course addressed such challenges head-on by incorporating social, digital and professional skill development into the course pedagogy.

In addition to learning digitally and on-the-move, nomadic learning informed our decision to travel to more than one festival. The benefit of being able to attend a second festival in the course provided an additional opportunity for reflection by students. One student notes in his blog the differing festival-city relationship in Avignon and Toronto:

> I argue the appropriation of space is reduced substantially as the festival and city are working in tandem to satisfy economic and cultural "forces" that can produce a more appropriated [sic] utilization of space, as outlined in Hauptfleisch's model (Hauptfleisch 43-45). Furthermore, the mayor of Avignon is the vice-president for the festival, meaning citizens are given political levy [sic] through their elected representatives to influence legislation that affects their community. (Student 3)

Although difficult to organize logistically, enabling students to attend multiple festivals produces another layer of experiential learning possibilities. Students can better consider how different production conditions result in different programming choices and formats. The disparate budgets of the Toronto Fringe and the Festival d'Avignon made financing a frequent point of discussion. One student focused her final essay on festival financing, questioning whether in most cases financial concerns have superseded artistic vision. She writes:

> Susan Bennett, in discussing tourism in theatre, [cites Simon Shepard and Peter Womack who] asked "when is a play not a play? When is it a financial phenomenon?" (Bennett 428). Although there are certainly innovative, daring, culturally grounded shows that still come up at theatre festivals, these productions are becoming more and more rare, and perhaps even more worryingly are not the shows being supported by government and corporate funding. (Student 2)

In making nomadic learning central to the course, it was possible to enable students to both gain and produce knowledge through the development of physical and digital networks, much like Deleuze and Guattari's rhizomatic mapping. Connections made through their travels and digital exchanges resulted in unexpected information links in the students' work. Nomadic learning, then, is useful in discovering insights that are inaccessible in a classroom setting.

Embodied Knowledge

Both the students and course instructors can be thought of as scholar-artists, as they are theatre practitioners who are also critically reflecting on and communicating about their work. Making theatre and performance requires visceral engagement. Leroux writes: "Learning to do theatre, learning to think theatre; living, breathing, sweating, crying theatre; hating theatre's limitations; not being able to function without its crises, its bonding, and its heightened sense of reality... Theatre's inner-workings and strategies can only be truly understood [...] viscerally, emotionally, through body memory" (97). Kolb and Fry insist that the integration of cognitive and socio-emotional processes is what fundamentally defines experiential learning. For theatre people, artists and scholar artists, this is anything but a surprising statement. Within our fields of drama, theatre, and performance studies, learning strategies prevalent in practice-as-research approaches (for example, Riley and Hunter 125-53); the Brechtian idea of theatre for learning that critically activates audiences, encouraging them to prototype what could be rather than what is (Brecht 21-28); and Diana Taylor's discussion of embodied performative practices as repertoire that speaks to notions of "playing culture" all point to the lived and living real-life aspects of critical learning as a central aspect of human existence, cultural identity-making, and artistic expression. While embodied learning in our course was not based on creating theatre, but on critical participation in festival environments, our students and faculty are accustomed to embodied learning through their various artistic practices, which made them particularly receptive to discovering the course subject matter with all their senses, and through their embodied experience as spectator-critics responding viscerally to what is on the stage.

Festival Fringe: We explored many facets of the local Toronto Fringe, including artistic, political, and socio-economic. Photographer: Antje Budde.

Reactions to Emma Dante's *Bestie di Scena* (in Avignon) illustrate the students' embodied learning experience well. The show, which features sixteen performers who gradually strip naked and are put through a number of physically challenging scenarios, purported to have "no text, no set, no costumes, no music" (Festival d'Avignon website). Yet students, drawing from their artistic experiences, were quick to point out the fallacy of this claim. One student and set designer argued in her blog that "to leave the stage intentionally unmarked, yet have modern bright brooms hanging in a circle and a floor littered with peanuts, is a failure to acknowledge the potential for guided meaning in the shape of a circle" (Student 4). While another student, a sound designer, citing John Cage, argued that there was always sound in the environment (Student 5). These examples illustrate how spectatorship, though not performance creation in itself, engages the senses in a similar fashion, and is arguably an embodied learning experience. This was certainly the case in Dante's piece when the naked, sweaty actors began taunting some audience members with peanuts, challenging them to treat them like angry monkeys. The affective response of the live audience could not be replicated in a classroom setting.

Further to their own experience, students learned different processes by which they and theatre artists generally might engage in embodied learning. One of the readings that we included for our students to ponder was Kim Yasuda's description of action research (125-27). She defines the term in a way that reads similarly to definitions of experiential learning.

The union of action+research implies a level of "activation" in the acquisition of knowledge—an inherent sense of experimentation with new forms of knowledge production. The traditional separation between theory and practice moves towards new forms of critical engagement that are not necessarily singular or focused in pursuit, but are complex, public, and collaborative in nature, providing a level of social

engagement within the investigative process that influences and is influenced by a potential set of outcomes. (Yasuda 125)

In a video blog, one student cites action research as one of the course's central elements "because it basically talks about how when you actually experience a performance or when you actually experience something and learn about it at the same time [...] you reflect much more upon it, and you understand much more the concepts [...] that you were taught" (Student 6). Students were not only learning about theatre artists and theory but were reflecting on their learning process as well. They further noted how certain theatre groups themselves were involved in such research processes. One student wrote in her blog, "Castorf incorporates action research in *Die Kabale* in a way that allows every member to contribute their knowledge into a greater work that builds a collective foundation of dramaturgical understanding of the performance text" (Student 1). The festival-based course thus allowed for integration of theory and practice on a number of levels.

Ric Knowles's tripartite performance analysis model considering the mutually constitutive poles of conditions of production, conditions of reception, and performance text, transposed to analysis for festivals-as-performances, served well to identify key elements affecting the students' embodied experience of the festivals. For instance, tangible materials, such as posters, programs, tickets, and so on arguably contribute to the festival's "performance text," as well as any performances taking place in between programmed performances, such as street performances. Conditions of production might include elements such as festival budgets, staff and volunteers, pre-festival schedules, and the physical space of the festival. And conditions of reception would centre on who the festival's target audience is and how they experience the festival and its performances on a particular day. The above conditions all engage festival-goers' senses in different ways. How, for instance, does one react to holding a well-designed paper ticket to a highly coveted show versus a digital ticket printed at home for an amateur performance? A festival's budget and target audience will determine how festival volunteers or paid staff engage festival goers—a casual greeting from a t-shirt clad volunteer, or a more formal welcome from a well-dressed usher? All of these factors have an impact on the physical composure of festival-goers. The three facets of Knowles's model sometimes overlap. The festival space, for instance, will shape how festival curators program the festival, but it will also affect the conditions of reception, as audiences will choose the shows they see based partly on venue distances. In the Toronto Fringe Festival, for example, it is unlikely many festival-goers will go directly from Tarragon Theatre to the Theatre Centre (roughly five kilometers away). Students readily applied Knowles's model and other readings to performance and festival analysis in order to better clarify the influences on their embodied experience. Writing on Israel Galván's *La Fiesta* at Avignon, one student wrote in her blog:

As a novice sound designer myself, my conditions of reception were moulded by my affinity for sound and how it is incorporated into a performance. I was particularly enthralled by the unique use of the actors' bodies, the set (including the ground, tables with loose objects, and chairs), and unconventional instruments to create the soundscape. (Student 5)

Galván's flamenco performance focused more on sound within the vast Palais des Papes space than on traditional flamenco choreography. Its deviation from tradition elicited boos and hissing from a number of audience members and later some bravos, proving an apt performance for student analysis, as they contemplated why the performance received such strong reactions (rare on Canadian stages). Another student cites Christina S. McMahon in her analysis of the performance:

> Much like the case study discussed in McMahon [in which a Cape Verdian audience walked out of a performance, *Trabanca Tradiçon*, by visiting troupe Ramonda], it seemed that the audience walking out was rejecting the staging of a religious practice (McMahon 10) that was indeed their own, but perverted in a way they did not like. (Student 4)

The visceral experience of dozens of spectators booing and hissing can scarcely be reproduced in a classroom setting. Similarly, students noted the endurance required in seeing some of the longer productions in Avignon. Of Castorf's *Die Kabale der Scheinheiligen*, one student wrote: "[it] lasted a daunting six hours and was not for the faint of heart" (Student 5). Such performances provide an example of how even watching a video of a performance can significantly limit students' analytical opportunities, as they miss out on the details and embodied experience of taking part as a live audience member.

Experiencing the festivals first-hand equally benefited students' analyses of festivals-as-performances. In one blog, a student notes the density of the Avignon festival's performance space:

> Last night after seeing Les Parisiens, [we] went to dinner at a restaurant in the square and wandered through the walled city. It was packed full of people and lights all gathering around food and drinks, vendors selling toys and sweets, a carousel, and street performers. I saw a tap dancer who had been dancing for hours, a classical dance group, breakdancers, folks setting up for a fire show, a saxophone and drum team that were nearly impossible to walk away from, and a guitarist. All of this among a festival of both high-tier plays and the hundreds of off-Avignon, Fringe-like shows being advertised in the street. People were revelling in the event of the festival—were engaging in the "unbridled sociality" that gives these events "their distinctive quality as spaces of celebration and escape from the mundane, orderly nature of everyday living" (Bakhtin, ref. in Bennett and Woodward, 11). (Student 7)

In the case of Avignon, the old town's limited physical space (only approximately 1.5km in diameter) actually works to the festival's advantage, as the audience is forced into only a few major gathering places, which in turn encourages street performers, show advertisers and vendors to frequent those places to cater to them. The density of the festive atmosphere is again one that is difficult to reproduce in a classroom setting and contributes significantly to the students' embodied learning experience. A dense festival setting may serve to heighten the experience of an otherwise "average" show, its reception becoming tied to the excitement of the atmosphere outside. By contrast, the festival context may weaken one's experience of

performances attended in relatively quick succession. The aforementioned Castorf show, for example, was the first students experienced at Avignon and set the bar quite high for their expectations. The reception of subsequent shows may have been diminished as a result (in comparison with how the shows would have been received individually, outside a festival setting).

Finally, seeing shows within a festival-context also allowed students to reflect on how reception changes in each festival setting. Students can examine how different festivals work to heighten the experience of its shows through festival promotion or added content, such as interviews and related artistic content. In Avignon, for instance, Olivier Py, who directed *The Parisiens* (a stage adaptation of his own novel), provided a VR experience for audiences, who could watch an extract from the show from an on-stage perspective. The shared festival context also encouraged students to compare Py's production with Papaioannou's *The Great Tamer,* as they were both set at the La Fabrica venue in Avignon. Despite Py's "home advantage" (he is Artistic Director of the festival), students generally found Papaioannou's show dramaturgically more compelling. Barring the festival setting, these shows would not otherwise have been compared. Festival settings allow students to easily consider the different technical and aesthetic possibilities of a single space. This is particularly the case in Fringe festivals, where a single venue may host over a dozen shows. The embodied experience involved in physically witnessing performances allows students to better reflect on how a festival framework changes one's perceptions.

Critical Making

Both for the course design and for student assignments and readings, we employed our understanding of Matt Ratto's concept of "critical making" (252-60). Its three stages include:

1. A review of the literature and relevant concepts;

2. The design and construction of technical prototypes by scholars and students;

3. The reconfiguration of the prototypes, which encourages conversation and reflection.
(Ratto 253)

Any of these stages can initiate a research project, and while Ratto focuses on technology studies, he does note affinities with art and design. The cyclical nature of critical making resonates well with Kolb and Fry's experiential learning cycles. Both models involve a period of observation and reviewing, but in Ratto's model this review informs the active creation of prototypes. We found this particularly important to our course design as the students all had backgrounds in artistic practice.

Examining Ratto's three stages in our course, the review of concepts included ideas from the readings, but also looked at how festival artists and curators used technology or featured elements of digital culture. This was an on-going process that began before festival attendance but continued throughout the course. At the start of the course, for instance, we looked at

digital festival documents, such as programs and tickets, historical archives, and social media as used for promotion. We also examined earlier tech-heavy shows by Castorf, as well as Katie Mitchell's multimedia working methods in performances such as *Waves*, which featured a split focus for the audience, and an alternative script format for the actors that incorporated media cues. Then, during the Toronto Fringe, students considered productions such as Caryl Churchill's *Love and Information* and Sam Steiner's *Lemons, Lemons, Lemons, Lemons, Lemons*, which looked at how technology is encroaching on and changing our way of life.

Students' reflections on the influence of digital culture and the use of digital technology in these shows informed their writing and creations, as they created their own archive of information, to be housed on the course website. Initially their contributions were fairly simple, focused on class discussions, blog and vlog creations, and creating/collecting research documents. However, through class discussion and continual reflection, these small creations and pieces of information eventually became integrated, informing their final presentations and essays—their own "critical makings." Some of these were quite performative, involving soundscapes, or in one instance a maquette based on Dimitri Papaioannou's *The Great Tamer*. Others extended their digital coursework through individual multimedia websites (See Digital). In addition to essay material and useful links, these sites frequently feature the students' photo documentation from the festivals, and even sound clips of the festival atmosphere. They work well to aggregate some of the earlier prototypes generated in the class, and now serve as a digital archive available as reference material for another class to begin yet another critical-making cycle. In addition to their academic work on theatre and performance, then, students had the opportunity to hone practical skills with digital technology as a practice-as-research component and to consider the best medium to capture their research.

Conclusion

There are many facets of experiential learning in the performing arts. Festivals offer unique sites to focus on a number of learning objectives, including discourses on festivalization, which might otherwise be missed in the university classroom. The mobility inherent in festival attendance encourages risk-taking and cross-cultural comparison. The busy and eclectic atmosphere of festivals works to provide fuller, more embodied engagement from students. And by incorporating critical making through multimedia documentation and prototyping, students can learn practical skills, which concurrently influence their performance reception and their understanding of their own learning processes. The benefits of experiential learning through festival-based courses can further be compounded when such courses are not isolated, but are part of a regularly programmed cycle, so both students and teachers can learn and reflect on past experiences in order to enrich the content of future courses.

Notes

1   More specific information can be found in the "About," "Who," and "Research" sections of the course website (see "Digital").

2   The Toronto Fringe is a small, low-budget theatre festival (employing less than half a dozen full-time staff), open to all performing artists using a lottery model and taking place in a large city. Festival d'Avignon has far greater financial support and programs international companies selected by the artistic director. Concurrent to the Festival d'Avignon is the immense open-access Avignon Off, hosting over 1000 shows and taking place in a small town.

3   The spelling of saFAri indicates that this is not a safari of the regular tourist type. The unusual spelling simply invokes attention to the irregular use of the word. The DDL was founded in 2012 by a group of scholar-artists of diverse backgrounds. Its main purpose is to engage critically and in experimental ways with the impact of digital technology in/on performance. More information about the DDL can be found on their website, https://ddlarchive .wixsite.com/main/safari, and the course website is https://idhipdigital.wixsite.com /drm398course2017.

4   In addition to overall participation, these included creating web posts and video blogs, bibliographical annotations of festival documents (including multimedia documents, such as recordings and photos from festivals), a final presentation, and final paper.

5   These sites were selected as they provided different theatre production models for the students to consider, as well as additional insights into unfamiliar or repurposed spaces. The Comédie Française performs in the opulent Salle Richelieu. The Lecoq International Theatre School offers a two-year program in physical theatre, mask, and movement; its venue is a former boxing ring. The Théâtre du Soleil works out of the Cartoucherie (an old bullet factory), on the outskirts of Paris. Finally, the Roman theatre at Orange is an ancient, outdoor theatre space.

6   In 2014 Andy Bennett, Jodie Taylor, and Ian Woodward developed the theory of festivalization as it applies to culture. For "eventification" and its relationship to "the experience economy" see (for example) Jakob, Pernecky.

7   As a result of visiting Théâtre du Soleil in Paris, we organized a trip to New York to see the company's production of "Une chamber en Inde" ("A Room in India"), including a talk-back with director Ariane Mnouchkine. It was rewarding to see that all students who had participated in our summer course also traveled to New York to follow up on something we had started in Paris.

Works Cited

Allan, Julie. "Nomadic Learning to Teach: Recognition, Rupture, and Repair." *Rethinking Inclusive Education: The Philosophers of Difference in Practice.* Dordrecht: Springer, 2008. 117-30. Print.

Bakhtin, Mikhail. *Rabelais and His World.* Trans. H. Iswolsky. Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 1968. Print.

Batchelor, Brian. "This Beer Festival Has a Theatre Problem." *Theatre Research in Canada/ Recherches théâtrales au Canada* 36.1 (2015): 33-51. Print.

Bennett, Andy, Jodie Taylor, and Ian Woodward, eds. *The Festivalization of Culture*. Farnham: Ashgate, 2014. Print.

Bennett, Susan. "Theatre/Tourism." *Theatre Journal* 57.3 (2005): 407-28. Print.

Brecht, Bertolt. "Theatre for Learning." Trans. Edith Anderson. *Brecht Sourcebook*. Ed. Henry Bial and Carol Martin. Abingdon: Routledge, 2000. 21-28. Print.

Debord, Guy. *La Société du Spectacle*. Paris: Buchet-Chastel, 1967. Print.

Deleuze, Gilles and Félix Guattari. *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. Trans. Brian Massumi. London: Athlone, 1988. Print.

Digital Dramaturgy Lab. "sAFari." Web. 5 Nov. 2019.

—. "Theatre Criticism and Festival Dramaturgy in the Digital Age." Web. 8 Jan. 2019.

Hauptfleisch, Temple. "Festivals as Eventifying Systems." *Festivalising! : Theatrical Events, Politics and Culture*. Ed. Temple Hauptfleisch, Shulamith Lev-Aladgem, Jacqueline Martin, Willmar Sauter, and Henri Schoenmakers. Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2007. 39-47. Print.

Häussermann, Hartmut and Walter Siebel. "Die Politik der Festivalisierung und die Festivalisierung der Politik. Grosse Ereignisse in der Stadtpolitik." *Festivalisierung der Stadtpolitik: Stadtentwicklung durch große Projekte*. Ed. Hartmut Häussermann and Walter Siebel. *Leviathan* 13 (1993): 7-31. Print.

Hobgood, Burnet M. "The Concept of Experiential Learning in the Arts." *Educational Theatre Journal* 22.1 (1970): 43-52. Print.

Jakob, Doreen. "The Eventification of Place: Urban Development and Experience Consumption in Berlin and New York City." *European Urban and Regional Studies* 20.4 (2013): 447-59. Print.

Kindelan, Nancy. "Demystifying Experiential Learning in the Performing Arts." *Experiential Education: Making the Most of Learning Outside the Classroom* 124 (2010): 31-37. Print.

Knowles, Ric. *Reading the Material Theatre*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2004. Print.

Kolb. D. A., & R. Fry. "Towards an Applied Theory of Experiential Learning." *Theories of Group Process*. Ed. C. Cooper. New Jersey: John Wiley, 1975. Print.

Leroux, Louis Patrick. "Theatre Production, Experiential Learning, and Research–Creation in the Academy: An Anti-manifesto of Sorts." *Canadian Theatre Review* 150 (2012): 97-99. Print.

McMahon, Christina. *Recasting Transnationalism through Performance*. Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2014. Print.

Pernecky, Tomas. *Approaches and Methods in Event Studies*. Abingdon: Routledge, 2016. Print.

Ratto, Matt. "Critical Making: Conceptual and Material Studies in Technology and Social Life." *The Information Society: An International Journal* 27:4 (2011): 252-60. Print.

Richards, Greg. "The Festivalization of Society or the Socialization of Festivals? The Case of Catalunya." *Cultural Tourism: Global and Local Perspectives*. Ed. G. Richards. Philadelphia: Haworth, 2007. 257–80. Print.

Riley, Shannon Rose and Lynette Hunter, eds. "Cartographies. Terms for finding/charting the way(s)." *Mapping Landscapes for Performance as Research: Scholarly Acts and Creative Cartographies*. Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2009. 125-53. Print.

Sauter, Willmar. "Festivals as Theatrical Events: Building Theories." *Festivalising! Theatrical Events, Politics and Culture*. Ed. Temple Hauptfleisch, Shulamith Lev-Aladgem, Jacqueline Martin, Willmar Sauter, and Henri Schoenmakers. Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2007. 17-25. Print.

Taylor, Diana. *The Archive and the Repertoire: Performing Cultural Memory in the Americas*. Durham: Duke UP, 2003. Print.

Taylor, Jodie "Festivalizing Sexualities: Discourses of 'Pride', Counter-Discourses of 'Shame'" *The Festivalization of Culture*. Ed. Andy Bennett, Jodie Taylor, and Ian Woodward. Farnham: Ashgate, 2014. 27-48. Print.

Turner, Victor. *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-structure*. Berlin: Aldine de Gruyter, 1995. 96-97. Print.

Yasuda, Kim. "Action Research "Cartographies.—Terms for Finding/Charting the Way(s)." *Mapping Landscapes for Performance as Research.—Scholarly Acts and Creative Carthographies*. Ed. Shannon Rose Riley and Lynette Hunter. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009. 125-27. Print.