'Faces of the Captives'

Aesthetic Distance and Emotional Absorption in Young Children's Engagement with Theatre.

By

Catherine Swallow

A thesis
Submitted to Victoria University of Wellington
in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts
In Theatre

Victoria University of Wellington
2012

Abstract

When Captain Hook has the lost boys tied up on his ship he cannot recognise that the sparkle on the 'faces of the captives' is the thrill of mimesis. It has been suggested that if young children cannot distinguish between reality and illusion then instead of suspending disbelief in the stage world, they will actually believe and therefore experience a dangerous level of emotional absorption. Using *Peter Pan* as a frame of reference, this thesis examines responses to three contemporary theatre works, Capital E National Theatre for Children's *Songs of the Sea* and *Boxes* and Scottish company Catherine Wheels' *White* to challenge the idea that aesthetic distance provides a necessary protective function. Instead, it will be argued that the imagination, empathy and emotion contagion provide the conditions in which children can capably enter the aesthetic space of fictional worlds on stage.

Acknowledgements

Table of Contents

List of Figures

Introduction

> *He cannot interpret the sparkle that has come into the*
> *faces of the captives, who are cleverly pretending to be*
> *as afraid as ever. (Barrie 130)*

Towards the end of J.M. Barrie's *Peter Pan, or the Boy Who Would Not Grow Up* (1928) Hook has the Lost Boys tied up on his ship, but unbeknownst to him Pan has appeared and is about to bring Hook's comeuppance. Hook does not recognise that the sparkle on faces of the Lost Boys is the thrill of mimesis, the double knowledge of pretence. The actor playing Hook can certainly see it in the young actors on stage and if he is observant, he will also sense the sparkle reflected on the faces of those watching from the auditorium. Pretence is as rife as swordplay in *Peter Pan*[1] and the fact that Barrie so explicitly refers to play acting and imagination leads his audience to a heightened awareness of theatricality, while at the same time encouraging belief in the fantastic. At their own assertion, the Lost Boys are *pretending* to be afraid. They understand, or at least claim to, that the context requires them to outwardly express a particular emotion whether or not they genuinely feel it.

Aesthetic distance has often been regarded as necessary not only for the enjoyment of theatre but for theatrical and artistic communication *per se.* When it comes to children, aesthetic distance is often invoked as providing a protective function that means viewers do not become so emotionally absorbed that they lose sight of reality. The concept of distance has a long history and can be traced back to Aristotle. In *On Poetics* he wrote that tragedy is 'an imitation of an action' (17). By recognising that drama has two distinct components, the action and what it represents, Aristotle points to a fallacy: the fact that at some point there is a disjunction between what is 'real' and the fictional world that it is representing. We have to choose to accept the illusion, while understanding that it is mere representation.

In his famous statement, Samuel Taylor Coleridge put it another way,

> It was agreed, that my endeavours should be directed to
> persons and characters supernatural, or at least romantic, yet

---

[1] When referring to *Peter Pan* hereafter I refer to the 1928 published manuscript unless otherwise specified.

so as to transfer from our inward nature a human interest and a semblance of truth sufficient to procure for these shadows of imagination that willing suspension of disbelief for the moment, which constitutes poetic faith (147).

When we consciously choose to 'suspend disbelief' we again acknowledge that what is fictional cannot be real; that there is a distance between reality and the imitation of it. Edward Bullough's essay of 1912 *'Psychical Distance' as a Factor in Art and an Aesthetic Principle* further determined that distance is a necessary condition for the appreciation of a work of art. Bullough's conception of distance is related to objectivity and he describes the phenomenon using the metaphor of a fog, in which familiar things are filtered so as to be seen anew. It is not impersonal, rather it is 'often highly emotionally coloured, but *of a peculiar character'* (97). In terms of the characters of drama he says, 'They appeal to us like persons and incidents of normal experience, except that that side of their appeal which would usually affect us in a directly personal manner is held in abeyance' (97) and this comes about due to the fact that the characters are unreal.

This gap between the 'real' world and fictional worlds in art has since been upheld in discourse on theatre appreciation. Aesthetic philosopher Susanne Langer in *Feeling and Form* (1953) took up Bullough's argument and used it to explain her frustration with the 'central fallacy' of theatre (318). In a widely regarded statement, she expressed her extreme frustration as a child watching the moment of Tinkerbell's resurrection in *Peter Pan*. In the scene, Tinkerbell has consumed poison intended for Pan. Peter steps outside the fiction and appeals to the audience, saying that if they clap to show their belief in fairies, Tinkerbell might be saved. Langer attributed her frustration at this moment to her prior lack of understanding about aesthetic distance. She argues that 'The whole conception of theatre as delusion is closely linked with the belief that the audience should be made to share the emotions of the protagonists' (317). Up until that moment in the play she had been emotionally absorbed but in being asked to take a personal stance, she felt suddenly outside the performance and did not then experience a desire to clap for Tinkerbell (318). This was a ruinous moment for Langer, but one which made her realise the artifice of theatre and appreciate the concept of distance. While she might

have made a necessary discovery in this moment, she does not express a desire to return to the assumed naivety of her previous relationship with the world on stage.

Daphna Ben Chaim provides a comprehensive historical account in her *Distance in the Theatre* (1984). Referring to the evolution of the concept particularly in twentieth century theatre, Ben Chaim too notes the fact that viewers realise that what they see on stage is an imitation and therefore not 'real' (73). Reality is of course a challenging term, especially when applied to theatrical situations where a living, breathing actor is present on stage. Like those before her such as Bullough, Ben Chaim points to the vicarious nature of theatre viewing in which, because of distance, emotions are only seemingly experienced on behalf of the fictional characters (71).

The breaking of identification between audience and characters is perhaps best associated with mid-century German playwright Bertholt Brecht. Brecht's *Verfremdungseffekt* (V-effect), originally translated as alienation-effect, encouraged actors to 'exhibit', rather than genuinely embody the emotions of his characters[2]. Through the V-effect 'there is not the same automatic transfer of emotions to the spectator, the same emotional infection' (94). Spectators' emotions therefore become conscious, rather than empathetic and subconscious, as Brecht noticed was the case in Aristotelian theatre (91). When objects and characters are made strange, they are raised above the level of the automatic and the spectator is able to realise his own position outside the event (92-93). In order to do this though, as mentioned above, spectators must first realise that theatre is a place of imitation. One of the central questions in this thesis is to what extent young children are able to use this faculty of distance to manage their emotional response to the fiction on stage.

When applied to children as viewers, the protective function of distance has been especially prevalent in analysis. It is often said by practitioners, though less often documented by theorists[3] that children are an honest audience.

---

[2] The translation of '*Verfremdungs*' to 'alienation' has been the cause of much constenation amongst theorists, particularly because of the negative connotations not present in the original. Contemporary writing therefore often uses the original German, or its abrieviation 'V-effect.' (Schnecher 146)
[3] See for instance Nellie McCaslin and Jeanne Klein

Their emotional reactions are transparent and their attention (or lack of it) is often both overwhelming and highly rewarding for actors. This transparent reaction could be considered a symptom of a lack of distance, of children who are entirely absorbed by the fiction without the temperance of reality. Shrifa Schonmann, provides perhaps the most avid advocacy for ensuring aesthetic distance is maintained. In her 2006 *Theatre as a Medium for Children and Young People,* she argues that if children do not have a thorough grasp of the difference between reality and illusion they cannot maintain aesthetic distance. She assumes that before the age of three, children are still developing skill in make-believe contexts such as play, so therefore would struggle to understand theatre (23). Schonmann analyses responses to perfomances looking for moments of high or low distance. She found low distance occurring when participants were so absorbed by the ficton that they did such things as running on stage to 'wake the Sleeping Beauty' (65), in other words they could not detach themselves from the fictional world on stage. In contrast, Schonmann determines high distance moments as those when viewers are not engaged at all. She therefore argues for artists and children to develop an 'optimal distance' between viewers and the fiction on stage (90). She argues that if children cannot distinguish between illusion and reality then, instead of a vicarious emotion, they will become involved to the point where they lose the necessary aesthetic distance. This is dangerous, Schonmann asserts, because in the case of frighteneing characters, instead of a 'mere thrill' children will actually be afraid (90).

Aristotle also wrote, 'They [philosophers and everyone else alike] are pleased in seeing images because in their contemplating there is a coincidence of learning and figuring out what each thing is… If by chance one has not seen it before, it will not qua imitation produce pleasure except on account of its workmanship or colour or on account of some other cause of this sort' (9). It seems likely that children, with a more limited experience of the world may encounter many a representation before encountering the thing itself, so this would indeed alter the nature of the 'pleasure' of viewing. This is somewhat

different to Schonmann and others'[4] contention that young children often appear to confuse reality with illusion. Nevertheless, the process of working out how imitation operates is enthralling, and often visibly challenging for young children.

In his examination of perception in theatre, *The Theatrical Event*, Willmar Sauter discussed a study in which he examined a group of young children (aged three to five years) participating in a marionette show in which prior to the performance children met the puppeteer and were given a thorough opportunity to explore the artifice of theatre – the puppeteer, the strings, the lights and so on. Sauter had wondered whether children of this young age (three to five years) were able to fully comprehend both the artistic (or material) and symbolic (or fictional) levels of the performance on top of their immediate sensory experience (190). In their day-care settings after the performance the children were then asked to depict the performance through drawings which, according to Sauter, showed that they indeed could grasp these multiple layers. What was especially interesting however was that only the oldest children (five years up) depicted any elements of the theatre in their recreations, while the younger children focussed only on the fiction. Sauter suggests that the children's introduction by way of exploring the 'real' elements first, was a key factor in their understanding the different layers of the performance (195).

Sauter's short study has become somewhat of a benchmark for studies in reception of children's theatre. Matthew Reason, for instance takes a similar approach in his more comprehensive book *The Young Audience* (2010). Like Schonmann, he argues in favour of theatre that allows both reality and illusion to co-exist for young audiences. He uses the example of Father Christmas to highlight the way that children oscillate between the real and imagined qualities of performance.

---

[4] Jeanne Klein for instance also notes that children's 'failure' to distinguish reality and illusion has been an issue for discussion, but she sidesteps the point by arguing that what matters more are viewers' perceptions of reality rather than their understanding of it. She describes the way that fact and fiction are often blurred in contemporary media, so that whether viewers believe content to be 'real' is more salient. She notes that middle childhood is the age at which children are most concerned with ontological status (48).

> The tension, indeed the power of the experience [of Father Christmas] resides in the balance between faith and doubt. … My own anecdotal experience suggests that this often resides in a fluctuating position of belief and disbelief, faith and suspicion. The continued balance between these positions, rather than assertion of certainty in one or other, seems to me to be a radical, liminal and perceptually sophisticated act (*Young Audience* 83).

Reason is very cautious of performances that exploit children's willingness to believe by not allowing them to experience the full capacity of their perceptions. His studies analysed the drawings and post-performance conversations of children to see which aspect they prioritised. The fact that children evidently prioritise the fictional (over the materially real) elements of the performance in their recreations could demonstrate both the success of the production as well as the power of children's imaginations. He argues however, that this too simplistic view is both disempowering and patronising. He says, 'Assertions about protecting the magic of theatre for children by not destroying the illusion are in effect disempowering actions that use adult authority to underestimate and patronise children' (*Young Audience* 83).

Anthony Jackson too addresses the complexity of aesthetic distance for young audiences. Jackson notes that some practitioners of children's theatre, for instance well-regarded American children's playwright Aurand Harris, have argued against participation, claiming that participation itself restricts the necessary aesthetic distance, but Jackson challenges this by reasoning that all theatrical engagement is fundamentally metaphoric and therefore detached from reality (146). Cognitive science is now beginning to acknowledge the way that the imagination, emotions and empathy are embodied processes that are not supplementary, but rather fundamental to all human activity. Towards the end of his career Brecht was beginning to wonder about the role emotion and empathy had on spectators. Bruce McConachie (2008) argues in his *Engaging Audiences: A cognitive approach to Spectating in the Theatre*, that Brecht was working in a time when the general approach of both psychology and philosophy was that reason and emotion were entirely separate mental functions (76). Empirical evidence now proves that emotions are indeed

rational, being produced through the cognitive process of empathy (McConachie 76). McConachie's use of cognitive science provides a challenge for the concept of distance itself. He draws on Conceptual Blending Theory (CBT) to describe the way the real and the imaginary are combined in the mind/brain[5] of the spectator. It can therefore be argued that the imagination is fundamentally connected to both emotion and the process of empathy, so it seems not only impossible, but also undesirable to eradicate empathy between spectators and audience.

This thesis looks at young children as spectators of theatre produced *by* adults *for* children. The most commonly used term for such work is 'children's theatre'. Such work can also be referred to as 'Theatre for Young Audiences,' (TYA), 'Theatre for Young People' (TYP), or 'Young People's Theatre' (YPT). These terms are often used synonymously, as identified by Schonmann, but all refer to theatre that is created and performed by adults with children as the intended audience (10-11). 'Children's theatre' is slightly problematic as it can be confused with 'child drama' or 'creative dramatics' which involve children as participants in the creative process. When children are involved in the creation of work, the term 'process drama' is also used. Process drama is closely related to the Theatre in Education (TIE) movement which involves professional actors who tour and workshop plays in schools. In this thesis, 'children's theatre' is the term used most frequently because much of the discussion makes comparison with children's literature, so it seems the most appropriate term.

In general, this thesis does not cover children as dramatic players or performers, although there will be some discussion about the crossover between mimetic understanding of pretence in play situations and the understanding of pretence in theatre. In his still widely referenced 1967 book *Child Drama,* Peter Slade examined the distinction between dramatic play and theatre,

> The child, if unspoiled, feels no such differentiation, particularly
> in the early years- each person is both actor and audience… The

---

[5]The term 'mind/brain' is borrowed from cognitive science and is a useful amalgam of the biological and cultural functions of mental activity (McConachie 4).

experiences are exciting and personal, and can develop into
group experiences. But in neither the personal nor the group
experience is there any consideration of theatre in the adult
sense unless *we impose it.* (2. Italics in original).

Slade here recognises an important aspect of children's understanding of
theatre: that it is established on a set of conventions which must be learnt.
Before children are taken to theatre they naturally enjoy drama and pretence
through play. Theatre is a formal structure in which some participants (actors)
pretend, while others (audience) watch. It seems likely that children's
understanding of pretence from their own experiences would influence their
behaviour as spectators, but that the experience of watching theatre uniquely
sits within its own parameters.

This thesis is interdisciplinary in nature, bringing together strands of theatre
scholarship, children's literature, pedagogy, child development and cognitive
psychology. The academic study of children's literature now has a sturdy basis,
but children's theatre is just beginning to find its feet in academic disciplines.
Although the main focus here is audiences of children approximately between
the ages three and five years (and their families), observations will be drawn
from children in infancy to middle childhood. Contemporary views of
childhood and pedagogy often reject developmental models that rely on age
and milestones. Nevertheless development and the changes that occur
cognitively for children do play a significant role in comprehension. Cognitive
psychology has not often sat well with theatre scholarship either. McConachie
notes that theatre studies have often preferred approaches taken from
semiotics or behaviourism, in which even the activities termed audience
'response' or 'reaction' assume passivity on behalf of the viewer (3). However
he suggests that just as it would be incredible to ignore scientific discovery in
other disciplines, ignoring the wealth of evidence recently garnered through
cognitive and neuroscience would be erroneous in audience studies (13).

Cognitive science is beginning to shed new light on the phenomenon of
aesthetic distance and the nature of spectating for adults, but there is still very
little research which addresses young children as theatre viewers. Relying on
both this new evidence and more traditional theories of spectatorship, I will

examine how young children are both cognitively and emotionally involved while watching live performance and how this influences the aesthetic distance between them and the representational worlds on stage.

Methodology

This thesis combines primary research of one main and two secondary case studies in performance with a review of current literature. *Peter Pan* as a classic text of children's theatre provides a background against which to compare contemporary performance. Evidence is therefore a synthesis of a wide range of source material from literature, textual analysis of performances, interviews with artists, observation of audiences, questionnaire responses of caregivers and teachers and anecdotal evidence. Patrice Pavis calls this kind of data collection 'analysis as reconstruction' which consists of an attempt to recreate the aesthetic experience by collating a range of sources (10). The primary research was qualitative in nature and grounded in theory. Because of the young age of audience members, techniques often used in ethnographic theatre research, such as interviews and post-performance discussion are not feasible. Therefore behavioural observation is the main method of data collection and is supported with evidence from other primary sources. As Jeanne Klein notes, the fact that young children are often unable to articulate their responses simply means we need to use other behavioural methods to understand what is happening for them (42).

Matthew Reason's studies, described above, encouraged children to draw and discuss their thoughts about the show. Drawing has often been recognised as a safe and comfortable way of opening conversations with children and as Reason notes, children very rarely perceive themselves and others as incompetent at drawing (48). However Reason's study looked at children in the primary school years, so his technique seems more difficult to use for younger children who are still developing both skill with the medium of drawing and verbal competence. The assertion that children must feel comfortable to participate in interviews and discussions is particularly valid, so in this study I sought methods that were as unobtrusive as possible. These included observation in theatre environments and post-performance survey responses of caregivers and teachers, who are in the best position to recognise and understand the reactions of their children.

Case study performances, described below, were sought which met the criteria of being pitched at children of the appropriate age. Capital E National Theatre for Children (hereafter Capital E NTC), based in Wellington was an obvious choice because they are one of New Zealand's few fully professional children's theatre companies.[6] As a 'National' company, Capital E's reach extends to the whole country through mandated national tours (Capital E Website). Capital E's reputation for high quality theatre means they maintain a regular and reliable audience base which was a necessary requirement for this study. Actors, directors and crew members were interviewed (see Appendix A) and their opinions are integrated throughout the study. In addition the work of a variety of other companies was examined and this more anecdotal evidence is used to support discussion.

Audience participants who had chosen to watch performances were approached primarily through the theatre companies. Teachers and parents of children attending were invited to complete a questionnaire the week following the performance (see appendix B). Because the focus was on children in the pre-school years, the main target for audience participants were Early Childhood Education (hereafter ECE) centres and Kindergartens, although some responses were sought from those with children in the early years of primary school and families attending public performances. While completing this research I was teaching part-time in a Kindergarten in Karori, Wellington. This experience inevitably influenced the research. This Kindergarten is located in an affluent community in which families frequently attend theatre performances. While the Kindergarten as a group did not attend any of the main case study performances a few of the families saw public performances. Discussion with these children and parents was particularly useful and is also referred to anecdotally throughout. Every possible effort has been made to keep the identity of individual children private through the use of pseudonyms and the removal of other identifiable characteristics.

---

[6] Other professional children's theatre companies include Tim Bray productions and Time-Out (at The Edge Theatre) in Auckland and Little Dog Barking (Wellington). Calico Young People's Theatre (Hawkes Bay) and Massive Company (Auckand) are youth focussed companies that also work with professional actors.

While observing performances I was looking primarily for signs of engagement and evidence of children referring to layers of reality. In a 2009 research report for the Starcatchers project in Edinburgh[7] Susan Young and Niki Powers identified three distinct forms of engagement: absorbed, interactive and non-engagement. Absorbed engagement was characterised by children with attention and physicality silently directed to the appropriate actions on stage. Interactive engagement includes when viewers placed themselves in the action, for instance by physically moving or verbally responding. Finally non-engagement was when children were visibly distracted and focussed on phenomena unrelated to the performance (24). These three forms of engagement served as the starting point for my observations of audience participants during primary data gathering. In addition, I also sought to observe and record any highly emotional responses as well as any that showed children making connections between the performance and events of the known world that might demonstrate an awareness of fictionality.

The Case Studies

The main case study performance was *Songs of the Sea,* produced by Capital E NTC. The show is a contemporary New Zealand puppet musical for children that weaves various stories and myths of the sea in a cultural pastiche. Written by Peter Wilson, *Songs of the Sea* was first performed in 2004, revised in 2007 and again in 2011. The most recent version, directed by Kerryn Palmer and Bill Guest, includes the Wellington harbour formation myth of Taniwhas Ngake and Whataitai[8]. The show has been marketed for families with children from the ages of 2 and 7 years and has also extensively targeted schools and ECE centres. *Songs of the Sea* incorporates a range of puppetry and acting styles, including direct address and audience participation so the potential audience response is particularly varied.

Boxes, also by Wilson, is a simpler, gentler puppet production co-produced by Capital E NTC and About Face Productions (Melbourne) and is also marketed

---

[7] Starcatchers is an ongoing research project funded by the Scottish Arts Council which produces and studies theatre for infants and toddlers. This is discussed further in chapter two.
[8] The myth tells how two taniwha, Ngake and Whataitai, lived in a lake until Ngake broke through rocks to open a channel to the sea, forming the Wellington harbour. Whataitai was stranded on the rocks and turned into the hills of the eastern suburbs. In Capital E's version Ngake and Whataitai are joined together and Whataitai dies when Ngake breaks away.

for children under seven years of age and their families. Performers Annie Forbes and Tim Denton play a cleaning lady and a delivery man who move two puppets, Bernie and Elton, into a home which they unknowingly share with one another. This strange scenario leads to conflict before the puppets find a way to live together harmoniously. The light-hearted and quirky tone proceeds with almost no spoken language and is emphasised by a musical score by Thomas Press. For much of the production the actors are masked, making the puppets the protagonists. There is very little solicited interaction with the audience, but the warm and inviting nature of the performers often generate verbal response nonetheless.

Both *Songs of the Sea* and *Boxes* make use of techniques that bridge the gap between the fictional world inhabited by characters and the real world theatrical machinery of the actors and puppets. Like *Peter Pan* they also implicitly and explicitly draw attention to the fact that the theatre is a place where audiences, like those on stage, must indulge in make-believe. All these texts include features that alert the viewer to the fact they must accept things on stage as being both real and imaginary.

A third production to be considered is *White*, by Scottish company Catherine Wheels, which is currently touring internationally. The production is specifically pitched for two to four year olds (and families) and tells the simple story of two characters whose job it is to incubate eggs. Their world is exclusively white, until a red egg appears and forces them to accept colour. While the production is marketed for children, its metaphoric appeal allows adults watching a level of enjoyment not often found in children's theatre. Audience feedback was not sought from participants at *White,* but its specifically Early Childhood focus, the high quality of its production values and its international popularity make it a useful case.

The shadow of Peter Pan has loomed over the study of both children's literature and children's theatre since the play's first performance in 1904 but as elusive as his shadow has always been, so too has been pinning down the genuine nature of children's participation in that play or in children's theatre at large. The play is recognised as a milestone in the development of children's theatre, particularly for the revolutionary way it addressed the young Victorian

audience without being patronising, as had been the case of contemporary

pantomime inspired work at the time. (Jackson 61). Jacqueline Rose's seminal

work *The Case of Peter Pan, or The Impossibility of Children's Fiction* (1994)

makes the assertion that children's literature is fundamentally flawed by the

fact that adults hold the power by controlling the means of both production

and consumption while children are the passive and often vulnerable

recipients (1-2). Although Rose's argument has been well scrutinised and the

story of Pan's evolution makes the play particularly open to critique, it

remains central to the canon of children's literature and one of very few

classics of children's drama. Having been recreated in almost every possible

medium from stage to book to screen and even to online gaming[9], *Peter Pan*

and its reincarnations continue to draw a largely young audience so it is indeed

a useful case to bear in mind. This thesis will explore the dramaturgical

potential of Barrie's 1928 published text of *Peter Pan* as a frame of reference

to consider and compare contemporary children's theatre productions.

I would like to leave the introduction with two examples from entirely

different performance events. One Monday shortly before Christmas last year

James (4yrs) came into Kindergarten and conveyed his experience at a Santa

Parade, saying enthusiastically 'I saw the real Santa!' What made this Santa the

real Santa (and by opposition other Santas not real)? Perhaps James' physical

proximity to the parade Santa meant that he had less opportunity to see the

artifice. Perhaps he was beginning to question his own belief in Santa and the

believability of the Parade Santa was so greatly achieved by the actor that the

James' belief in the fictional character was reaffirmed. Perhaps something else

in the parade was less believable so in comparison the reality of Santa was

heightened. Seeing the 'real Santa' at the Christmas parade seemed to have

---

[9] The character Peter Pan first appeared in a novel for adults called, *The Little White Bird.* From there Barrie drafted the stage play, *Peter Pan or the Boy Who Would Not Grow Up,* which premiered at the Duke of York's Theatre in London in December 1904. Subsequent rewrites altered the script, which was not published until 1928. Between the premiere of the play and its publication, Barrie published a novel of the story, entitled *Peter and Wendy* (1911). The play was performed yearly as part of the Christmas season in London for much of the twentieth century and first appeared on Broadway in New York in 1905. A silent film was produced by Paramount pictures in 1924, then a full length Disney animation in 1953. More recently Stephen Spielberg's *Hook* (1991) rewrote the story to feature a Pan who had indeed grown up and P.J. Hogan (2003) directed a more faithful live action feature film *Peter Pan.* Currently, a very popular version is Disney's television series and related web content, *Jake and the Neverland Pirates.* In addition, countless amateur productions, home dramas, literary, comic and film adaptations have been made in the years since Pan's first appearance. For further detail see Peter Hollandale's chapter 'One Hundred Years of Peter Pan' (2009).

been an enlightening experience for James and one which would have been very different if he had seen signs of the artifice of the parade Santa, such as an actor transforming into Santa.

Another time at the kindergarten, Alex (3yrs) was watching her peers act out the story of the Three Billy Goats Gruff. None of the children wanted to perform the Troll, so one of the teachers volunteered. When the teacher loudly exclaimed, 'Who's that trip trapping over my bridge?' Alex burst into tears, apparently terrified of the Troll/Teacher. Like James, Alex seemed to have momentarily lost track of reality. However unlike James, Alex knew full well that it was her teacher and not a 'real' Troll. Alex was reassured and over the course of the following weeks the children re-enacted the story several times until Alex herself felt comfortable enough to perform the Troll. Just as Schonmann suggests, the teacher worried that she had played the Troll 'too realistically' yet her transformation had none of the more elaborate theatrical elements such as costume, lighting, sound, music and so forth.

Both these examples challenge the assumption that children must be shown the illusion and the reality in order to appreciate the theatrical experience. Alex could clearly see both and was terrified, while James was thoroughly absorbed and this made the experience especially gratifying. Although these performance events fall outside traditional theatre, both situations involved children using emotions to blend concepts of objective reality and make-believe. At four years of age James was not only subconsciously employing the faculty of conceptual blending, discussed further in chapter two, but his statement also demonstrates a conscious process of understanding. Conceptual Blending Theory perhaps provides a challenge to the very idea of aesthetic distance, suggesting that mentally we do not perceive works of fiction separately from everyday objects but rather we employ the imagination to accept both simultaneously.

Before looking more closely at the way aesthetic distance and emotional absorption function it is useful to look at what characterises children's theatre and what distinguishes this audience from adult theatre audiences and child audiences in other media. Analysis of case studies is woven throughout the chapters. Chapter one will focus on the characteristics of child audiences,

examining the power relations between adults as producers and children as receivers of fiction. Chapter two will look at the development of pretence understanding and how fictional worlds can be understood by young children through brigdes created by artists. Finally the third chapter will examine the empathetic work of the emotions and suggest how absorption and the imagination connect with concepts of aesthetic distance.

Chapter 1 – Captivity and the Nature of Child Audiences

> WENDY. … all the children flew away. They flew away to the Never Land, where the Lost Boys are.
>
> CURLEY. I just thought they did; I don't know how I know how it is, but I just thought they did.
>
> TOOTLES. Oh, Wendy, was one of the Lost Boys called Tootles?
>
> WENDY. Yes, he was.
>
> TOOTLES (*Dazzled).* Am I in a story? Nibs, I am in a story!
>
> *PETER (Who is by the fire making Pan's pipes with his knife, and is determined that WENDY shall have fair play, however beastly a story he may think it.)* A little less noise there (Barrie 106-107).

Wendy is telling a story to the Lost Boys. Peter, despite his obstinacy, shows consideration to his 'children' the Lost Boys by teaching them the conventions of performance; to enjoy they must sit quietly and listen. In contrast to Tootles, Peter is fully aware of the rules of performance, but is also conscious of his own attitude and position towards the text. The story Wendy tells describes life at home in the Darling family and culminates in the future with her own emergence as an elegant woman upon a railway platform. Peter first came to know Wendy by hovering about her bedroom listening to fairy stories but being a boy who refuses to grow up, he likes neither the realism of this story nor the reality of Wendy's growing up.

In theatre, as with other media, there is a distinctive sphere of activity that is referred to as 'children's theatre'. Artists who create work for children are even more explicitly aware of their specific audience than those who create work for adults. One of the unavoidable arguments in such a discussion of children's material is that work must on some level be 'good' for children. This educational function has of course been challenged, but it will always be an issue because of the mediating effect of adults. The role adults play in both the production and consumption and their censorship therefore bears a huge impact on how work is received by children themselves. Perhaps the biggest

issue is whether, considering the mediated decision making process, children still have autonomy as viewers. It is for these reasons that children are often referred to as a 'captive' audience. In this chapter I look first at some characteristics features of children's literature, as described by Myles McDowell, and discuss whether these are applicable to theatre.

Regardless of the involvement of adults, children's theatre thrives because of the way that successful artists have recognised the characteristic features of child audiences. The second half of this chapter will focus on what these characteristic features might be. While of course, children are as diverse as adults in their tastes, there are certain features that distinguish them as a group. Among these are limitations, for example the fact that children are still learning the conventions of how to watch a play at the same time as developing their identity as individual viewers. Another of the key considerations, especially for theatre, is that children do not watch alone so the interaction between adults and children in the audience becomes just as significant as the interaction between the audience and the stage.

While very little parallel work exists for children's theatre, there has been significant attempt to define the limits of children's fiction within the academic discourse of children's literature. It is worthwhile therefore to take a brief look at what characteristics might define children's fiction in the novel and whether these are also applicable to theatre. In many ways *Peter Pan* incorporates all the elements of good children's fiction-- it is action and incident driven, fantastic, full of adventure, features child protagonists, is composed with language which is simple yet rich and it contains aspects of morality: good must conquer evil[10]. These characteristic distinctions of children's fiction are drawn from a chapter by Myles McDowell (first published in 1973) entitled 'Fiction for children and adults: some essential differences'. McDowell acknowledges that because of limitations in their cognitive development, certain features of adult texts would be difficult for children to appreciate (56), however he also refers to an often cited statement by C. S. Lewis, that if a children's book could not be enjoyed by an adult it would not be a very good

---

[10] Certain aspects of *Pan's* morality, especially those concerning gender and race relations must of course be viewed within the cultural context of their time and do not always equate with contemporary morality.

children's book (53). McDowell uses the analogy that adults fed purely on a diet of children's fiction would never be entirely satisfied and similarly while children may take bites from adult fiction it would not be wholly fulfilling (53).

McDowell's point that action driven, straightforward narratives are preferable in the children's novel is supported by children's theatre theorists. Nellie McCaslin in her seminal, *Creative Drama in the Classroom and Beyond* (1996) for example says of children's theatre that, 'Action, for instance, is particularly important: The playwright writing for children must remember that it is more important to 'show' than to 'tell'' (153). Jeanne Klein, in her 2005 analysis of children as theatre viewers, similarly argues that it is not until much later in childhood, more like nine or ten years that children are capable of discerning connections across episodes. Dream sequences and flashbacks, she claims, are often confusing for younger viewers (47-48). Klein also advocates for a slow pace so that children have a chance to absorb the content at a rate which is appropriate to their cognitive development. This is in contrast to often held assumptions that theatre for children ought to be fast-paced in order to hold their attention (48).

One key difference however between reading a novel and watching a play is that unlike with other media, viewers of theatre do not have the option of repeat reading. Young consumers of other media can re-read a book, rewind or re-view a film and even if a particular episode of a television show cannot be viewed twice, the structure and style of the programme mean that patterns will be familiar should viewers tune into a different episode. This lack of repeat reading in theatre perhaps means that any repetition or reinforcing of ideas must be built into the narrative. One way contemporary children's theatre companies often solve the challenge of theatre's inability to be reviewed is by retelling classic tales, fairy stories or fables. There are significant advantages to this, primarily the fact that children are less likely to miss salient plot details if these are already known. The disadvantage, however is that adults in the audience often know them too well, so the companies must come up with inventive and often insincere ways to amuse the adults who paid for the tickets.

White, by Scottish company Catherine Wheels, which is currently touring as part of the international festival circuit, is a good example of a production that is extremely well pitched for young children and includes innovative, amusing

Figure 1: Cotton and Wrinkle prepare a house for an egg in *White*. (McBride)

and well-executed content to occupy the adults. Perhaps part of *White's* success is because of this clarity in narrative structure. The show tells the story of two characters, Cotton and Wrinkle, who care for eggs in their exclusively white world. The eggs fall from the sky and appear magically in the characters' aprons. One day a mysterious red egg appears and throws the purity of the white world into disarray, forcing the characters to accept colour. The singular, linear story is clearly told but paced in such a way that elements are reinforced where necessary without becoming didactic. For example, in one beat, the two characters move from a recognisable morning routine of breakfast and brushing teeth into 'work'. If the young children miss the significance of the word, 'work' it becomes evidently clear through the actors change of physicality, pace and rhythm. From a slow sitting position they abruptly rise, each pulls a wand from his pocket and they begin examining the contents of their white environment, looking for intrusions of colour. As they

examine, they enter into a strict, abrupt rhythmic pointing in which they affirm each object in turn as 'white'. The world established is interesting and unique, but essentially there is only one dramatic action. A red egg appears and creates tension between the characters who must solve the problem.

In addition to narrative clarity, McDowell also recognises that child protagonists are a key feature of novels for children. He asserts 'there are complexities of adult being that are beyond the comprehension of a child' (61), but that it is possible to show complexity or the fullness of a character in a child protagonist. While of course many stories for children, such as fairy tales, do feature adult characters, they often only show one aspect at a time: for instance the greedy king is really just a representation of greed. In children's fiction, adults are often simply just adults, 'they have the common quality of being an adult, which perhaps looms larger than all their differences in a child's eye.' (McDowell 61)

In terms of theatre for children, the use of child protagonists is a particularly interesting challenge because without the ability to employ child actors, child protagonists are extremely difficult to portray. It is not common practice and would be ethically questionable in contemporary children's theatre for companies to employ child actors. As McCaslin observes, the demands of performance are very rigorous and likely to result in exploitation if extreme caution is not taken (9). In Victorian times and earlier child actors in professional theatres were common. When *Peter Pan* was first produced a mixture of adults and children were often used in a company to maximise the authenticity of child characters, while ensuring adequate skill level across the cast. Throughout the nineteenth century there was a continuing fashion for child stars, despite growing concerns for ethics of child labour (Gubar *Artful Dodgers* 165). By the time *Peter Pan* was written the trend was on the wane and instead of Tinkerbell being played by a child actor, as had been the convention for fairies, she was instead a visual effect of a moving light. Marah Gubar in her *Artful Dodgers* (2009) discusses at length the Victorian use of child actors. She describes how Barrie and his peers were grappling with the problem of subjectivity and authorship and therefore found collaboration with children appealing. Child actors 'modelled a form of non-autonomous agency

in which being scripted by adults did not necessarily preclude them from functioning as intelligent, creative individuals.' (159)[11].

Maria Nikolajeva is another children's literature theorist who analyses the nature of the child protagonist. She, however, questions the practice, arguing that children's literature is fraught with what she terms the 'identification fallacy' (188). She argues that children's literature is especially concerned with the subject positioning of readers in relation to protagonists, a concern that is not shared by general literary studies (188). Nikolajeva contests however that in order for children to mature as readers, they must in fact be able to detach themselves from the point of view of the protagonist. For example the narrator of *Secret Garden* initially paints the protagonist Mary as a horrible child who must reform throughout the course of the novel. As Mary's behaviour dramatically improves, those reading must review their opinion not only of the character, but also of the position the narrator has put them in. This questionable narration and unreliable depiction of character forces the reader to actively choose a position in response (192). Another such figure is Alice who, through her torturous experience in Wonderland becomes so entirely displaced and lacking in agency that the reader cannot identify and similarly must step outside the text to adopt a position (194-5). Nikolajeva recognises that when multiple protagonists are written, readers have the choice whether to adopt identification with one, or vary positions, which also leaves readers open to choose the 'wrong' position, such as identifying with a villain (192-193).

This breaking of identification might be what is happening in *Peter Pan* when viewers must choose a position to save the thus far spiteful Tinkerbell during the poisoning scene described in the introduction. Up until the point of rescue, it is more likely that viewers' sympathies would lie with Wendy, especially considering Tinkerbell's jealousy towards the heroine. However because we are directly implored by Peter to choose a position by clapping, most

---

[11] Interestingly, while contemporary children's theatre has all but completely avoided the use of child actors, the casting of children is not such a problem in film. Peter Hollindale observes that part of the success of P J Hogan's 2003 film version of *Peter Pan* lies in the casting of children in the core roles of Peter and Wendy (162). Bazalgette and Staples discuss child actors in American family films who must be both sexually appealing to adults at the same time as being recognisable as ordinary children to young viewers. Shirley Temple is the ultimate example (96).

spectators act in support of the fairy. As Barrie himself acknowledges though, some do choose to 'hiss' (119). This is perhaps what Nikolajeva suggests when she identifies that some readers actively choose the 'wrong' position. Whether we choose to clap or hiss, we are forced to step outside the narrative to do so.

Although Nikolajeva's analysis of identification in children's literature is relevant, identification in theatre is essentially different, owing to the fact that audience members encounter the physical bodies of actors on stage. This issue is addressed by Bridget Escolme in a 2006 article entitled, 'Authority, Empowerment and Fairytales'. Escolme draws on Bruno Bettelheim's psychoanalysis of fairy tales in which he suggests that fairy tales speak directly to children and that parents reading them are rendered invisible (Escolme 167). Escolme argues however that the readers are implicitly part of the story and that performers in contemporary theatre for children often overtly draw attention to the theatricality of their performance. In so doing performers challenge the assumption that the stories hold the power while the children passively receive them. One way that Escolme has observed this being achieved is through actor/ storytellers who continuously switch between telling the story objectively, embodying the characters and endowing objects with characterisations. This technique allows children the freedom to empathise where they personally feel most inclined (Escolme 167-168).

If, as children's literature theory suggests, child protagonists are necessary, then in theatre we are faced with a dilemma. Contemporary children's theatre tends to use a number of strategies to get around the problem of a child protagonist. One is to write adult characters who are playful and childlike in manner. The human characters in *Songs of the Sea* fit into this category. The actors are all in their twenties, refer to each other using their own first names and act in youthful ways. At one point Carl appears carrying a mug which might be read as a cup of tea and therefore cast him as an adult, but we are told it is 'milo', so his childlike status is reaffirmed. Near the beginning of the play the actors mime splashing each other and indulge in games of make-believe. The characters in *White* are similarly childlike. Unlike those in *Songs of the Sea,* however, Cotton and Wrinkle are definitely adults. Their reference to work, and the way that they produce and nurture the eggs in their care defines them thus. However their bickering, giggling, over-sentimental cooing and traits such

as their fondness for particular colours are distinctively child-like. Through costuming and set design a world is established that is distinctively their own. This otherworldliness perhaps removes the need for a defined age or other recognisable features. Although in all productions they have been played by male actors, they exhibit feminine characteristics, such as cooing over the eggs and occasionally issuing high pitched vocal exclamations. Since the eggs simply appear rather than being born in either a human or birdlike fashion, the necessity for any specifically human age or gender status for the two characters is removed. They are simply people. Though they are identifiable as such to both adults and children in the audience, their other-worldly qualities perhaps allow a level of sympathy that more distinctively assigned characters might not achieve.

Another strategy for breaking identification and avoiding the problem of child protagonists is to use puppets or animal characters. Nikolajeva asserts that 'the use of a zoomorphic child character as a design seems more likely to subvert identification rather than support it since the animal shape creates alienation and enhances an independent subjectivity.' She continues, 'In the company of toys and animals, the child can feel strong, clever and protective.' (197). In theatre, as well as being a convenient way around the problem of casting an adult actor as a child protagonist, the abundant use of both human and animal puppets could perhaps be explained in relation to this notion of detachment from identification. Although she does not refer to Brecht or the V-effect, Nikolajeva does use the term 'alienation' and it seems we are getting very close here to the idea of aesthetic distance that will be discussed at length in later chapters.

Margaret Williams is one theatre commentator who acknowledges a supposed affinity between children and puppets. Drawing on the work of French theorist Annie Gilles, Williams says,

> If young children have a special affinity with puppets, it is
> perhaps based in something more complex than naively
> mistaking a puppet for a living being. It is often said that young
> children believe puppets are really alive; perhaps it is truer to

say that they are prepared to believe a puppet *might* be alive
(126).

She goes on to suggest that the reason for this could be to do with our, both adults and children alike, fascination with the 'self' versus 'other' (126). There is, as Williams discusses, a fundamental difference between the act of puppeteering and of spectating but both depend on a relationship towards an inanimate object with an imagined life. Williams does not discuss children's play but children acting out or creating stories with dolls is perhaps no different from puppeteering. It would be very hard to argue in a play context that children even *might* believe their toy to be alive. Whether children can, do, or might perceive puppets as really alive will be discussed at length in chapter two. In my current discussion of content though it is enough to say that puppets are extremely common in theatre for children and one reason for this might be that they eliminate the need for child protagonists.

McDowell also recognises that another key difference between fiction for children and fiction for adults is the level of complexity, particularly emotional complexity, available to readers and the way that writers address this. Although it is indeed possible for children's fiction to portray complex emotion, such complexity must be written in a way that makes the emotion visible, rather than needing the reader to apply their own developed understanding. McDowell says, 'a good children's book makes complex experience available to its readers; a good adult book draws attention to the inescapable complexity of experience.' (56) He uses two examples to illustrate; one is from a children's novel, Philippa Pearce's *Tom's Midnight Garden* and the other from an adult book, Angus Wilson's *Night Call*. Both the passages deal with a protagonist's experience of regret. In the children's text each stage of the character's development of regret is made clear in the writing; we are shown a series of events that lead explicitly to the regret, culminating in the line 'He [Tom] hoped that Peter had now got over the bitterness of this betrayal.' (Pearce in McDowell 55). In the text for adults, to contrast, we are only given access to the character's actions, not her feelings so that we have to interpret these actions by applying our own understanding. The closest to a statement of regret is: 'It was little enough she had done, God knew, but it was something.'

(Wilson in McDowell 55). In each example, the reader's understanding about regret might be heightened, but there is significant difference in how this is achieved for children and adults.

Emotional complexity is an area which might be significantly different between fiction in the form of a novel and a play since theatre viewers have the additional elements of the physical, sensual engagement. In a play, we can see an actor's emotional state through their physical and facial expression. Consider, for example, Cotton's regret in *White* when he is told by Wrinkle that he must put the red egg in the bin. We know from the actions so far that Cotton's sympathy for the egg has lead to his regret, but we do not need verbal language to reinforce it because the actor's physicality of a hunched back, downcast head and sad facial expression tells us enough. This emotional engagement of the audience through the physical activity of the actors will be a main focus of the third chapter.

After examining emotional complexity of texts, McDowell then recognises another distinguishing feature of children's fiction is the frequent use of magic, or what he calls, 'improbability'. He suggests that adults will search for rational explanations to irrational or fantastic aspects of a story while child readers will simply accept them as a necessary aspect of the story (65).[12] Jeanne Klein recognises a similar tendency towards the fantastic. She usefully draws on developmental studies in television reception theory to conclude that to younger viewers fantasy is more acceptable, while older children, for instance those in middle childhood, 'the stage of literal realism,' are particularly concerned to compare representations with the factual, knowable world (48).

One potential challenge of magical content for children for is that, like metaphor and mythology, it relies on two layers of reality, a literal and metaphysical, (or figurative) level. Elizabeth Cook discusses the connection between children and mythology, legend and fairytales. Like McDowell, she argues that when readers genuinely attend to a story they need only the words of the story itself, and any preconception or theoretical interpretation comes from the reader. She offers the example of a Freudian analysis of the god Zeus

---

[12] McDowell's line of thinking here can be challenged. Findings such as that of Paul L. Harris suggest that children are just as likely to use plausible, pseudo scientific explanations to describe inexplicable phenomena as 'magical' explanations (166).

being a terrible father. Only those with a background knowledge of Freud's theory would make such an interpretation (207). Cook also observes that it is only in the twentieth century that the primitive nature of fairy tales and mythology has been associated with childhood (210). Prior to this time myths were viewed as primitive rationale for concepts that were later explained by science and deemed unnecessary. For example Thor was no longer necessary once thunder was understood as an atmospheric system. By this logic children accept the magic in stories literally only because they have not yet learnt any supplementary information. Nevertheless, Cook does concede that the relationship between children and fairytales is strong. One possible reason she identifies is that magical tales allow children access to a spiritual experience; the word Cook uses is the Latin *Religio* (religious). She says 'Magic is not the same as mysticism, but it may lead towards it; it is mystery "told to the children"' (209). If we accept metaphor and moral understanding as a separate, additional layer to the literal then it does seem likely that children might only grasp the first, literal level while adults will appreciate both. The fact that children readily identify with fantasy is, of course an adult presumption. If so much fantasy were not put in front of them they may not have such an affinity for it.

One final characteristic of the children's fiction identified by McDowell is that children's novels usually feature clear morals. Several more recent commentators however have emphasised that this narrow focus on morality is extremely limiting. Matthew Reason for one observes that it is, 'both condescending and dictatorial to perceive theatre for young people as being primarily about the communication of moral lessons' (106). Similarly, Bazalgette and Buckingham state, 'Debates about what children should and should not know, what they should be protected from or compulsorily taught, inevitably act as a focus for much broader moral, political and social concerns' (2). In his book *Moving Images* (1996) David Buckingham argues that violence on television is widely over-regarded as being the cause of violence amongst youth. He cites Martin Barker, who says, 'the principle effect of watching a horror film is to be horrified, not to become horrifying' (in Buckingham 6). It is therefore too simplistic to say that being exposed to violence, especially in overtly fictional contexts such as cartoons, leads to violent behaviour.

Moralistic content is not simply transferred to viewers from media in a submissive way, but is actively created through wider social activity.

The same must be true of theatre. While Peter Wilson's work with Capital E does not shy away from difficult content such as death, he takes great care to present it in a non-threatening way. To illustrate, at one point in Wilson's *Kiwimoon* (2008) a Kiwi is violently attacked by a dog. In this case, the dog becomes a villain, so the character's morality is not questionable, but the scene was indeed difficult for young children. Kerryn Palmer, director of *Songs of the Sea,* shared an example of her son watching this scene. Already with his hands over his eyes, he turned to his mother and said, 'cover my ears mummy.' (Personal interview 11 October 2011). The play also depicts a fire which is lit intentionally to clear the bush in which the Kiwi live. While the violent content of the work was challenging for young children and might draw their attention to these violent acts, it would be a stretch to say that it would influence behaviour after the performance.

McDowell ends his chapter with the statement, 'Adults, indeed, may make intrusive interpreters for the child reader, for it would seem that a child's book (and I hope I have established that there is such a thing) is one a child can enter and need no other guide than the author.' (66) What McDowell suggests in the first clause, though, is that as readers, children are hugely influenced by those around them. If adults are the holders of the power of creation, then it could be that children are simply putting their trust in what we say. If we say that taniwha exist and eat people, children will believe it. If we say that Captain Hook really lives in Neverland, then he does. If we do not make our trickery explicit, then its imaginative effect will be all powerful. In theatre the role of adults is perhaps especially significant because children are always, to some extent, accompanied by adults. So far I have looked at what characteristics of children's fiction in other media might be transferrable to theatre, however there are some fundamental ways in which theatre is distinct. The social nature of theatre and the fact that viewers have a chance to respond immediately is fundamental to this difference.

Ulike other media, theatre is social not only in that audience members interact with one another, but also with the performers. In children's theatre it is

almost irresistible to practitioners to incorporate some element of audience participation. Schonmann, for instance, recognises that while contemporary theatre for adults is more frequently challenging the boundaries between the stage and the audience, this is an old idea in children's theatre (54). Generally, Capital E NTC is not an especially participatory company, however *Songs of the Sea* incorporates several instances of guided audience response. Earlier works such as *The Farm at the End of the Road* and *Kiwimoon* feature almost no audience participation. Peter Wilson, the former artistic director and writer of these earlier works for young children, suggested in an interview that dramatic action and the momentum of the story can be severely compromised by the intrusion of audience participation (personal interview , 10 June 2008), which is likely to explain the company's continuing tendency to avoid overt audience response.

Aside from the most famous scene, that in which the audience must clap to save Tinkerbell, Peter *Pan* lacks significant audience participation. Nonetheless Barrie's description of the way the story was developed through games with children and the ongoing recreation of the story in dramatic play suggests that children are in fact at the heart of the text. As we shall see in later chapters, participation therefore extends beyond the immediate theatrical event. Marah Gubar details the involvement of children in the development of Victorian children's theatre to suggest a more legitimate claim for *Peter Pan* as a work of children's entertainment (*Peter Pan as Children's Theatre* 477). In spite of this, definitions of children's fiction almost invariably ask whether material can indeed ever be considered exclusively for children.

The author, like the adult in relation to the child, is a supreme being. In her seminal work, *The Case of Peter Pan, or The Impossibility of Children's Fiction* (1984)*,* Jacqueline Rose takes up such an argument, suggesting that because of the biased power relationship between adults and children, fiction can never be classed as 'for' children if it is produced by adults.

> Children's fiction is impossible, not in the sense that it cannot
> be written (that would be nonsense), but in that it hangs on an
> impossibility, one which it rarely ventures to speak. This is the
> impossible relation between the adult and the child. Children's

fiction is clearly about that relation, but it has the remarkable

characteristic of being about something which it hardly ever

talks of. Children's fiction sets up a world where the adult

comes first (author, maker, giver) and the child comes after

(reader, product, receiver) (1-2).

In the years since publication, her work has undergone much scrutiny,[13]

however it is worth some attention. In theatre, more so than in literature and

especially more so than in television[14], children are always to some extent

accompanied by adults, so in addition to having the decision to attend made

for them, viewing itself is often mediated by adults. This relationship between

adults and children is one of the defining features of both the material itself

and the way it is received.

Having looked at what some of the characteristic features of fiction for

children might be and how these are distinct in the social medium of theatre, I

can now turn to the audience and what characterises child spectators. If as

McDowell suggests the child needs no other guide than the author (though this

is where theatre perhaps departs from the novel), it could be that Jacqueline

Rose perhaps simply does not trust Barrie. Or, rather, does not care to entrust

children with his texts. Rose, like others[15] addresses the power relations

between adults and children, positioning child readers as the vulnerable

recipients of adult produced literature. Her argument continues to hold sway.

Rose refers to a 'glorification of the child' (8), in which children are exemplified

as representing a pure original state which adults desire to return to. She says

that literary interpretation seeks to find the 'meaning' of a text, through

discovering some original idea or concept hidden in the text. In children's

fiction this search is problematic because the child becomes confused with this

issue of origin. 'It is as if the child serves to sanction that concept of a pure

origin because the child is seen as just such an origin itself'. (19) Here she

seems to be addressing the Romantic idea that children are pure and innocent,

---

[13] One example is Marah Gubar (2011).

[14] Bazalgette and Buckingham note that children's television is often explicitly designed to exclude
adults so that in reality it is very unusual for parents and children to watch together (7).

[15] Matthew Reason, for example in his 2010 book on child audiences similarly identifies the power
imbalance between adults as producers of the work and children as consumers (17). Bazalgette and
Buckingham also discuss the way this power dynamic inherent to the texts influences perceptions of
themselves as readers (5).

which arose in opposition to earlier views that children represented original sin (Bazalgette and Buckingham 1).

Peter Pan, Rose suggests, is the ultimate example of such glorification. She uses the history of its development to show that it was not in fact originally written for children, with major plot points appearing first in Barrie's novel for adults, *The Little White Bird* (Rose 6). In this first version the narrator is trying to kidnap a child, David, and Rose interprets the kidnapping as an act of sexual desire for a child by the grown narrator (27). This extreme example not only challenges *Peter Pan* as a text for children, but sets up the child as a spectacle for adult gaze in children's fiction at large (29). Once children are seen in such a position then it becomes 'impossible' in Rose's opinion for texts to be genuinely *for* children.

In this light, children as readers are then lacking in agency, being merely the passive recipients of adult texts. This issue of agency was raised in relation to *Peter Pan's* audience even in early criticism. George Bernard Shaw commented in his review of the 1904 play, 'children cannot go alone to theatre. An adult must accompany the over-excited party. Naturally the adult tries to persuade himself that, in choosing the entertainment least likely to bore himself, he is choosing also that which will most enrapture his dear little friends' (in Gubar *Artful Dodgers* 488). In comparison to young readers of books and young viewers of television, young theatre viewers are indeed likely to have less control over the material they view. It is because of this lack of choice that child audiences have been labelled a 'captive audience'.[16] Jeanne Klein labels school audiences 'kidnapped'. She observes that teachers' motivations for taking students to a performance significantly influences the attention paid by students during the performance and therefore impacts on the levels of gratification they receive from the performance (44-45).

This line of argument that children are merely passive recipients can be challenged. Marah Gubar for instance, in her historical analysis of *Peter Pan,* refers to the development of children's theatre in the nineteenth century, culminating with *Pan,* as a response to home theatricals that were increasingly popular throughout the period. While she acknowledges the sentimentality

---

[16] The term seems to originate in an essay by Jonathan Levy, cited in Schonmann (60-61).

and essentialism with which childhood is portrayed in *Pan,* she repositions children as being fundamental to its creation in light of Barrie's clam that the origin of the work lay in the make-believe games Barrie observed with his adopted sons, the Llewelyn Davis boys (481-482)[17]. She also refers to Barrie's reputed delight at reports that children readily recreated the play at home and that the story he created was becoming a myth through its continual retelling. Children were therefore fundamental to both the creation and ongoing success of the work. If children are genuinely involved in the creative process, as Gubar describes, then it seems unlikely that they can be considered 'captive' in the sense of lacking in autonomy.

The fact that adults are always present is a characteristic feature of young theatre audiences, so artists must find appropriate ways to address both adults and children together. In children's literature studies this is known as the 'dual audience,' a phrase coined by Barbara Wall. Wall says, 'The challenge is to find a way not merely to be acceptable to, but to address both children and adults simultaneously, to find, in fact, not a double, but a dual audience.' (22).Wall identifies three different modes of address in children's literature. Firstly is the single or individual address, in which only the children are spoken to. Second is the double address, in which writing oscillates between the children and adult readers. This is the mode employed in pantomime, but is carried forward in contemporary works of theatre and is often characterised by the 'wink' to adults or overt reference to subject matter that children have no hope of understanding. Thirdly, and in Wall's opinion most difficult but most desirable, is the dual or simultaneous address (35).

In a dual address the same passage can be read by both children and adults, but each will take a slightly different meaning. The example Wall uses is a passage from T.H. White's *Mistree Masham's Repose.* The character has just found a Lilliputan baby and contemplates keeping it. White then asks the audience directly, 'Think to yourself, truly, whether you would have returned a live one-inch baby to its relatives, if caught fairly in the open field?' (White in Wall 34). Here the author is directly instructing the audience to take a position,

---

[17] Barrie met and befriended the Llewelyn Davis family at Kensington Garden in London and the five boys were later adopted by him following the deaths of their parents. Barrie maintained that their pretend games together inspired the story of *Peter Pan* (Barrie *To the Five* i.)

but Wall observes that children will interpret the passage in quite different ways to adults. Children will interpret the instruction literally and attempt to put themselves in the character's shoes, while adults will recognise the complexity embedded in the question and appreciate both the dubious morality and the fantastic nature of the scenario (34).

Generally speaking, Catherine Wheel's *White* uses this dual address. Each element in the production can be interpreted in more than one way. Take for instance the birthing of the eggs. The characters look to the sky then catch eggs in their aprons. Although Cotton and Wrinkle cluck and brood over the eggs, they remain human characters; this is simply how birth is achieved in their world. We never see the eggs hatch, so at the end of the performance we are left wondering what they might become. Indeed, after one performance I observed a child (aged around 6) from the audience ask one of the performers, 'why don't they hatch?' This was a particularly good question, and one which the actor, Tim Lacata, managed to carefully avoid answering.[18] The ambiguity of what is inside the eggs leaves space for whatever interpretation each individual viewer may make. While acknowledging a real world myth that storks bring children, the world created is unrecognisable so we are forced to accept that it is neither myth nor erroneous belief, this is simply how eggs are laid here. As adults we might interpret the mistaken use of a myth as drawing upon some childlike naivety, but because the entire situation is so absurd, we are instead rendered no more knowledgeable than the children we accompany. In this way we are addressed as a dual, but united audience.

Compare this to an early scene in *Peter Pan* in which the Darling children play out their own births.

> WENDY. Now let us pretend we have a baby.
> JOHN (*good-naturedly*). I am happy to inform you, Mrs Darling, that you are now a mother. (WENDY *gives way to ecstasy.*) You have missed the chief thing; you haven't asked, 'boy or girl?'

---

[18] This question and answer session was a particularly useful way of allowing the children to participte and adults to take photographs without disruption during the performance. Lacata perhaps did not have an answer to the question, or perhaps felt that giving an answer might change the interpretation and would therefore be more appropriately addressed by the director, or better left to the child's imagination.

WENDY. I am so glad to have one at all, I don't care which it is.

JOHN (*crushingly*). That is just the difference between

gentlemen and ladies. (9)

The Darling children's naivety about birth is made all the more obvious for what they leave out, rather than what they include. Children in the audience would likely recognise the scenario of playing their parents, and indeed this might be amusing. However the entertainment generated for adults in the audience is quite different. For them, it is amusement at the ignorance of the children, supporting Rose's contention that here Barrie has exploited childhood innocence for adult entertainment.

Peter Wilson's work for Capital E uses a combination of dual and individual address. The main story of *Boxes,* for example, involves two puppets with distinctive likes and dislikes who find themselves living together. Bernie likes flowers and Elton is allergic; Bernie likes spots and Elton stripes; Bernie likes coffee and Elton tea. They fight (with oversized toothbrushes) before realising it is better to share and live together harmoniously. Adults watching can see a clear moral emerging over and above a simple story, so although only one story is told, we can see two layers; the layer of plot and a deeper, moralistic layer. It could be the case that children only read the story while adults can read both the story and its moral application. This will be further explored shortly.

Another of Wilson's works for Capital E, *Songs of the Sea* changes between the three forms of address discussed by Wall. Occasionally there are moments directed more specifically at adults such as references to marriage. In contrast, towards the end of the play is a chase scene between a taniwha and a small fish in which the characters refer to each other as 'big bum' and 'little bum'. While adults in the audience might vicariously enjoy the excitement of the scene on behalf of their children, it is definitely more appealing to children, so is perhaps an example of individualised address aimed at the child audience. One way the dual audience is addressed in *Songs of the Sea* is through the use of mythology, which like the use of Neverland in *Peter Pan*, enables two distinct layers of interpretation; literal and metaphoric. For example the scene

in which Ngake breaks through the rocks can also be used to explain the formation of Wellington Harbour. Several parents and caregivers identified in survey responses that they felt their children had become confused or did not understand the full complexity of the mythological aspects of the show. These children may have understood the more literal event, that Ngake broke the rocks, however they did not seem to recognise that the story was intending to provide a supernatural explanation for a physical phenomenon.

Holding the attention of both adults and children is potentially difficult, but attention itself is not necessarily as straightforward as it might seem. Klein argues that young children do not necessarily have any more limited an attention span than adults, they simply have not yet learnt that convention dictates they ought to sit still (46). McConachie discusses the cognitive nature of attention and the fact that it requires conscious effort. He argues interestingly that the convention of quietude is a historical anomaly and that in previous eras or cultures, for instance France of the eighteenth century when houselights were not dimmed, audiences were frequently loud and inattentive and this was socially acceptable (23-24). While other commentators point to an especially physical reaction that distinguishes children as theatre viewers (McCaslin 346, Schonmann 55), this could be related to the fact that they are still learning the convention of quietude and stillness so that their physical movement cannot necessarily denote lack of attention.

Attention is also bound up with several factors surrounding the event, particularly motivations for attending and expectations for gratification. Klein argues that different media make different demands on consumers and she asks whether theatre is perceived as a more cognitively demanding form to other media. While Klein acknowledges she does not have enough research to answer this question, perhaps the more salient point she makes is how viewers' attention, directed by their motivations for viewing, makes a significant impact on their construction of meaning (46). If viewers have not themselves made the decision to attend, then they may have less invested in the performance. One particular case is the school audience. If teachers have booked the performance to meet a curriculum requirement, then students may perceive the material necessary for course work and only pay attention to

that content which they deem relevant. On the other hand if they do not have any curriculum needs from the performance they may perceive it as unnecessary escapism and similarly not pay appropriate attention (44-45). What this suggests is that the way children are prepared for the event will play a significant role in the way they attend during the performance.

Cognition also plays a part in the understanding of the moral or metaphoric content of a performance, which may be another way child viewers are distinct from adults. As was mentioned in the above discussion of metaphor, young children often find it difficult to grasp these two layers of fiction. Klein, for instance, observes from her post-performance interviews that regardless of age very few children, (she claims approximately quarter to one third), infer metaphoric or universally applicable thematic concerns, for instance by reviewing it in generally applicable terms such as 'you', or 'people' (51). She goes on to suggest that children are more likely to recognise concerns they are familiar with, for instance from their own lives, rather than learning anything new. This is hardly surprising, but Klein then identifies a conundrum. She says, 'plays are more likely to affirm and reinforce conceptual ideas *already learned* than 'teach' youngsters any 'new' information' (Italics Klein's 51). To return to the example of *Kiwimoon,* when children see fire threatening the kiwi, they are not likely to learn that fire is dangerous, but if they already understand this then the concept might be reinforced. Similarly when the dog attacks the Kiwi, if children already have a preconceived notion that dogs are frightening, then watching the attack might reinforce that fear, but it is unlikely they would develop a fear from watching the play.

Metaphor seems an even more difficult level to grasp than morality. Neverland for example can easily be read by adults as a metaphor for death since Peter Pan is the boy who does not grow up. In an autographed addition to the 1908 draft script, Barrie wrote 'You see, I think now- that Peter is only a sort of dead baby- he is the baby of all the people who ever had one.' (in Rose 38). If one use of folklore and mythology is to explain otherwise irrational concepts, the death of a baby might have been explained to children in Victorian England as theft by a fairy. Barrie himself had a brother die in childhood and it is often suggested that Pan is an exploration of his brother's death and otherworldly

existence. The line that ends act three is most often cited as evidence of this interpretation: 'To die would be an awfully big adventure' (91). Barrie seems to associate fairies with children inexorably. In *Peter Pan in Kensington Gardens*[19] he writes, 'It is frightfully difficult to know much about fairies and almost the only thing known for certain is that there are fairies wherever there are children' (55). Neverland has also been accepted as a metaphor for childhood itself. Wall cites Michael Egan, whose psychoanalytic interpretation of the play identifies Neverland as a representation of the child's id (Wall 23). While adults readily attend to these moral and metaphoric layers, if what McDowell (and Klein) suggests is correct, a child reading (or viewing) *Peter Pan* will simply accept Peter to be a boy living on a forgotten island, rather than looking for any other explanation.

As many reviewers notice[20] it is possible to read *White* as a metaphor for racial diversity. As the eggs are 'born' Cotton and Wrinkle place them in cups. They then examine each egg and state either 'girl' or 'boy'. At one point they cannot tell, so simply say 'egg'. They accept this gender-neutral egg, so the discrimination becomes exclusively about colour. The red egg is initially banished to the bin, but is rescued by Cotton. As the play progresses, the two characters must come to accept the red egg and in doing so accept that they hold distinct opinions. Without conducting a thorough audience survey, it would be difficult to tell whether children extrapolated similar metaphoric understanding, but the fervour with which they gathered the 'colour' (small pieces of coloured confetti that fell on the audience) at the end of the performance suggests that they at least appreciated the colour. Indeed, I heard several children eager to share their favourite colours with the actors during the post-show discussion. By asking whether the eggs ever hatch, the child discussed earlier is perhaps showing evidence of searching for a literal answer, while the actor's refusal to answer suggests he wants to leave the show open to (a metaphoric) interpretation. This difference between literal and metaphoric interpretation does seem to be a difference between adults and children as viewers.

---

[19] Published in 1906, this was the first published version of *Peter Pan* specifically intended for children.
[20] For instance John Smythe on the website, *Theatreview*.

Another distinguishing characteristics of young children as readers in any medium is that they are developing their sense of identity and their particular fictional tastes at the same time as learning how to understand the conventions of each medium. Perry Nodelman addresses this in his analysis of the way that picture books create implied viewers from real viewers. His article, 'The implied viewer,' first published in 2000, outlines the way that simply by reading picture books infants and young children become aware of themselves as readers of particular texts as well as their exclusion from texts they are not yet capable of (Nodelman 266). If adults did not introduce young children to picture books as objects which are designed to be read, children would not realise that such objects are endowed with certain symbolic properties. The same must be true of children watching theatre. Even though children enter their first theatrical experience with some understanding of mimesis through symbolic play, theatre has a particular set of conventions that must be learnt. The only way to learn these is through experience. As children experience texts, they develop ideas about themselves and their particular identity as readers or viewers in relation to those texts.

Just as it is adults who introduce picture books to children, it is adults who initiate children into the conventions of participating in a theatre audience. J.A. Appleyard comprehensively discusses the development of fictional awareness for young children in his book, *Becoming a Reader: The Experience of Fiction from Early Childhood to Adult* (1990). While Appleyard's work specifically addresses the practices of book reading, his general approach to the relationship between the reader and fantasy is applicable to theatre especially regarding the understanding of fiction in the early childhood years. Of particular significance is the way he describes reading in the early years as a social phenomenon. He draws on the work of socio-cultural theorist Jerome Bruner, who describes the way caregivers act as interpreters and guides for children in the process of learning to read. Bruner describes the scene of a mother reading with a child and through this conversation the child learns both the convention of the medium as well as linguistic habits. The mother, Bruner says, stays 'forever on the growing edge of the child's competence' (77).

Within reader-response criticism it is often acknowledged that reading occurs within a community. The notion of a community of readers comes from the work of Stanley Fish, who developed the idea of an interpretive community to explain the way that particular academic institutions make recognisably distinct interpretations of texts (Bennett 43). Susan Bennett in her book *Theatre Audiences: A Theory of Production and Reception* (1990) applies Fish's interpretive communities to explain the way that theatre audiences come together as a spontaneous interpretive community through their shared knowledge of the conventions of theatre and their physical proximity to each other (149). The notion of community is particularly relevant to an audience of children, families and caregivers because the experiential background is likely to be especially similar. As Bennett recognises 'The milieu which surrounds a theatre is always ideologically encoded' (134). When it comes to school audiences it would seem that the particular institutional environment they have come from would make an impact on the way they receive a performance as a group.

School audiences can therefore be viewed as an example of an interpretive community. As mentioned earlier, students' and teachers' motivations for viewing are likely to influence reception, but what is perhaps just as significant are students' reactions to their peers. Response to *Songs of the Sea* is a good case in point. Cast and crew identified that there is an overwhelmingly different response between public audiences and school audiences. While on tour the company often performed to large auditoriums (up to 300 seats), which were filled with school groups of children in years zero to three (ages five to eight). The crew observed that often these largely homogeneous audiences were utterly silent in the early stages of the play until the point at which they are encouraged to verbally interact. They then very quickly pick up on the cue to respond and explode with loud and appropriate reactions.

Although the performances I observed were all in the McKenzie theatre at Capital E (capacity 110), I did notice this stark contrast between school groups and public audiences. In public performances and also those performances with a mixture of ECE centres, there was a general level of chat throughout. In these audiences there was often one or several children upset by aspects of the performance and this distraction perhaps explains why they were slower

to react to cues for verbal response. In contrast the two performances I observed with solely school groups, children sat with incredibly silent attention until the appropriate moment of interaction. While this seems most likely to suggest children were thoroughly absorbed by the fictional content, it could also suggest that schools as institutions had passed on the conventional requirement of quiet, still attention.

One particularly interesting group reaction occurred when a chant spontaneously developed amongst a group of students and quickly spread to almost the whole audience. This group was from a co-educational, suburban school whose students were mostly from affluent families. The moment happened in response to a scene in the *Songs of the Sea* in reaction to a character called the Shaper. In the scene the Shaper has caught the Moonfish, another character, in his net. He asks the audience hypothetically, though it is usually answered, 'Shall I eat her?' While of course the anticipated answer is 'No', it is fairly common for some children to shout, 'Yes'. In the school group described, I estimated more like half the audience (mainly boys) shouted, 'yes.' Then the chant developed with most children loudly repeating, 'eat him, eat him' which was finally quashed by the teachers proclaiming 'enough.' With such a strong demonstration of collective response driven entirely by the students' genuine reaction to the performance it would be hard to argue that these students lacked agency. They were indeed swept into the fiction through the collective nature of viewing but once there they were able to enjoy the freedom of an especially active collective response.

The distinguishing characteristic of these school audiences was that children were all of a very similar age. Schonmann discusses this homogeneity at length. She sees heterogeneity as a problem in children's theatre because the necessary presence of *adults* means that an audience will never be truly homogenous. Theatre for very young children, she argues, is particularly inflicted by this problem (64). Schonmann views the presence of adults as a 'distorting the authentic ways in which the child will react to the performance' (63). While I agree that the presence of adults has a significant effect on children's responses, I would argue that the adults' presence is an absolutely necessary part of the 'authentic' experience. Young children will always be accompanied by an adult and it is adults who not only ensure that the

entrance to the theatre is smooth, safe and comfortable but are also a necessary part of the performance itself by supporting children through the more emotionally and cognitively demanding aspects.

As acknowledged by several commentators[21], space is also likely to have a profound effect on audience engagement. Again, this is related to the notion of an interpretive community in which the social and physical environment influences the more immediate reception. Tim Denton, one of the creators of *Boxes,* described in depth the way space influenced the relationship developed between the performers and audience in his work. He identified a difference in reception between when performers come into a space that belongs to the audience, for instance a school, and when audiences come to a public performance space. Acknowledging the power dynamic between audiences and performers based on who owns the space, he said, 'Space alters according to the power of the performer.' In public performance venues, however audiences are generally more respectful of both performers and the space (Personal interview 20 July 2011). Within its mandate, Capital E NTC prioritises the complete aesthetic experience that theatre provides and it therefore tours nationally *for* schools but not *in* school venues, instead performing in theatres or public auditoriums. This is a conscious decision to prioritise the artistic over the educational function of their work.

This split between the educative and the artistic (or aesthetic) purpose of theatre is especially prevalent in discussion of children's theatre and is related to aspects of morality described above. Antony Jackson's book *Theatre, Education and the Making of Meanings: Art or Instrument* (2007) focuses on such a debate. He outlines the contemporary scene, particularly in British Theatre in Education and asks whether theatre can ever be separated into two distinct categories of pedagogical and artistic. He argues,

> the dichotomy that so frequently plagues debates about theatre for young people and whether or not it should have an educational or 'interventionist' agenda may be misconceived, that the use of theatre in 'applied contexts'…and driven by agendas other that artistic, *can*

---

[21] While not part of his primary study, Matthew Reason also observed a significantly higher participation in performances staged in a theatre as opposed to a school auditorium and he attributes this to the quality and power dynamics of the space (94-95).

be both interventionist and aesthetically appealing, indeed that the artistic and the instrumental are – at least in best practice-interdependent (27).

Jackson cites Brecht and others who have applied such an amalgamation to their work in theatre for adults. By conceding that all theatre is on some level educational and that educational theatre can also be aesthetically rewarding, it is possible to argue that this is not an issue distinctly for children's theatre. Nevertheless, when companies sell work to school audiences, whether they are performed in schools or public venues, it is unavoidable that there is an educative aspect to the work.

There do indeed seem to be certain characteristics of young audiences that distinguish them from adult audiences and this emerges in response to the particular characteristics of the often fantastic and frequently moralistic material they are exposed to. Through interaction with texts, particularly those that appropriately address the dual audience of adults and children, young viewers can either create or inhibit identification with the texts at the same time as establishing an awareness of themselves within their particular community and institutional environment. While there is potentially an inequitable power dynamic between adults and children, artists who engage children in the creative process and produce work that appropriately addresses children can mitigate the effects of this imbalance.

Theatre is by nature a particularly social activity, however while acknowledging that children are initiated into the conventions of a media through their social experience, it is important to remember that an audience remains a collection of individuals, each with their own tastes, developmental and emotional requirements, so as a consequence reactions can vary hugely. This experience is therefore likely to be influenced greatly by whether children have the ability to draw a metaphoric level of understanding, or the inability to distinguish reality from illusion in a production. Keeping the social nature of theatre viewing in mind, I can now look at how children might understand pretence both in theatre and in other situations such as dramatic play.

Chapter 2: Pretence and Double Knowledge

> *He sits on the floor with the shadow, confident that he and it*
> *will join together like drops of water.* (Barry 27)

Peter Pan does not understand shadows. Being a supernatural character, he does not realise that soap will not act as an adhesive and that shadows are nothing more than a trick of light. Peter is lucky enough to meet Wendy who can sew the shadow back on. Although he is a child, Peter is not simply naïve; J.M Barrie has made up a game and asks us to play along. When we watch this scene we know full well that a shadow cannot really be separated from that which cast it. We are asked to suspend objective reality and believe in a world where shadows can be sewn, children fly and mermaids exist. Even young children are likely to recognise the fallacy of an independent shadow, but when faced with a hook that actually glints in the stage lights and a fierce looking crocodile their seemingly terrified reactions often suggest they have forgotten the game. This chapter will examine the pretence understanding of young children and attempt to determine how young children manage aesthetic distance in transactions with theatre.

When children participate in pretend play, they happily maintain a 'double knowledge', that is, belief in both the pretend and real qualities of an object (Kavanaugh 155-156). When they participate as spectators in theatre they must similarly maintain this double knowledge, but the significant difference is that, unlike in their own play, the pretence is controlled by someone else: the theatre artists. In his 2008 study, Matthew Reason used children's post-performance drawings to determine what they had perceived during performances[22], extending the analysis to include children's discussions about their drawings. Reason observed that in the drawings children focussed primarily on the fictional elements of the performance, however their discussions showed that they were indeed able to hold both the real and imagined qualities of the puppets in mind simultaneously (2008, 353). Reason borrows the term, 'Double Vision' from puppet theorist Steve Tillis and concludes that children are certainly capable of seeing both the fictional and material content of the performance. The children in Reason's study were all in

---

[22] Reason looked at responses to three performances: *Them with Tales,* a story-telling piece for children by British company, Tall Tales; *Psst!,* by Danish company Teater Refleksion; and *Martha,* by Catherine Wheels. All of the Reason's workshops were conducted with primary school aged children.

the primary school age group (6-10 years old), but very little research has yet been conducted that observes whether this double vision can also be maintained by pre-school aged children.

The double nature of theatre is of course not limited to puppetry. Bruce McConachie challenges Julia Walker's description of theatre spectatorship as a 'double consciousness' in which spectators oscillate between emotionally identifying with the fiction and an awareness of the theatrical event as a construction. McConachie asserts that spectators are able to see both aspects at once. His argument relies on the Conceptual Blending Theory (CBT) as outlined by Gilles Fauconnier and Mark Turner. Blending is learnt in infancy and involves the ability to combine ideas in the brain/mind to create one image (McConachie 42). In theatre theory, it is most often used to explain the way that the image of an actor and a character are blended by the audience to form one entity. In this light, what we see on stage is not an actor and character separately, but instead we perceive the actor/character as a blend of the two. McConachie writes, 'conceptual blending structures and enables all role-enacted games of make-believe, from playing with dolls to professional tennis' (43).[23] The fact that he mentions dolls in particular seems pertinent to this study. When children use dolls to enact scenes in pretend play they are blending concepts garnered from both the material world of the toy and the social world of human interaction to create an imagined blend. Considering conceptual blending it is then, as Rhonda Blair also observes, possible to view the imagination as the overriding system at the core of discussion about perception in theatre (Blair 94).

Doubleness is also referred to in child development discourse to describe children's experiences in pretend play. As in theatre, while playing a child must be able to keep in mind the two distinct qualities (real and imagined) of an object. However, they must do significantly more than this. Paul L. Harris, in his seminal book, *The Development of the Imagination* (2000), concludes that two

---

[23] McConachie uses the comparison of rule-based sports (also a form of spectatorship) to illustrate the way that we must hold multiple ideas in mind including both physical and mental structures. The comparison challenges the notion that fictional theatre is *only* imitation, because in watching both sport and theatre spectators must use the imagination to hold multiple realities in mind. This mode of thought is known as 'counterfactual thinking' (50). While watching the Olympics, we visualise Valerie Adams winning gold in the same way that we visualise Peter Pan beating Hook at a swordfight.

year old children are certainly capable of understanding four key aspects of pretence: pretend stipulations; casual powers; the suspension of objective truth; and a causal, unfolding chain. His primary example is a scenario of Teddy in the bath. In Harris' study an adult play partner verbally established a cardboard box as a bath then proceeded to 'bath teddy' with the child's help. The two year old children easily accepted the *stipulation* that a block was as a bar of soap and responded appropriately by using it to wash teddy. When given a towel they dried Teddy, thereby *suspending objective truth* (that Teddy is in fact dry) and accepting the *casual power* that Teddy was wet. Finally they were able keep in mind several steps of pretence-- *a causal unfolding chain* in order to accept the final outcome (Harris 20-21)[24].

Harris acknowledges that children younger than two years have difficulty responding appropriately to the types of scenarios just described, although pretence is evident earlier than two. At as young as sixteen months old children exhibit the beginnings of pretend play, for example by placing their head on the floor in imitation of sleep.   It has been suggested that when playing children create a quarantined version of the object to justify the pretence. This quarantining seems analogous to 'suspension of disbelief' in that the child must momentarily hold objective reality in abeyance to accept the new scenario. The example R D Kavanaugh refers to is a young child pretending a banana is a telephone. The child knows a banana is a yellow, curved edible object but *this* particular banana can stand in the place of a telephone. However if a banana were to become a telephone the child might suffer what Kavanaugh describes as 'representational abuse' (155). This is a particularly negative sounding term for a phenomenon that is necessary for learning, but there are certainly instances when a child is visibly confused by these two distinct qualities.

What happens if someone else, for example an adult, is controlling the pretence as in theatre? Take for example a child who has not yet developed metarepresentation (the ability to hold a separate mental state in mind) watching an adult using a spoonful of sand to pretend to eat. While the adult

---

[24] Harris' work, which begins in childhood, goes on to describe the condition of the imagination throughout life and explains how the imagination is fundamental to our involvement with fiction generally.

puts the spoon near to her mouth, if the child is passed the spoon she may well put the spoon inside her mouth and express surprise at there being sand instead of food on it. In other words, she has failed to keep separate the real and pretend qualities of the sand and perhaps suffered the representational abuse referred to by Kavanaugh, but she has also learnt a valuable lesson. The difference between watching and participating would seem to be of fundamental significance in resolving this kind of confusion. If the adult does not pass the spoon to the child and the child simply watches, then the scenario becomes an act of theatre with the adult as the performer and the child the audience. Unless the adult specifically stipulates that the spoon holds both sand and food, the sand can only have one property for the child. It can be sand, or food but not both.

Mental state awareness and the ability to recognise that others have a different state of mind to oneself is referred to in psychological discourse as the Theory of Mind (TOM). TOM develops over the first four years of life and involves the acquisition of the awareness that thoughts and beliefs are representational. Children's competency is often established through a false belief test. In the test a child watches a scene in which a doll places a favoured object in a particular place then leaves the scene. While the doll is absent the object is moved and when the doll returns she looks for it. To pass the test, the child must realise that the doll will still look in the original position for the object. In other words the child realises that the doll has a different mental state (belief) to her own regarding the object. Children find this test very difficult before the age of four (Kavanaugh 154-155). TOM development is useful here because when watching theatre, children must similarly identify that the figures on stage exist in a state independent of their own understanding. Additionally, apart from certain situations involving audience participation, characters on stage act according to their own intentionality and are not influenced by the motivations of the audience.

If before four years of age children have difficulty identifying the false beliefs of a doll, how do these young children understand theatrical figures such as actors, puppets and characters? One of the key aspects of mental state awareness is that of intentionality. Research in the development of TOM and empathy has shown that children between 9 and 15 months of age are able to

identify the intentions of an adult play partner (Meltzoff 17-18)[25]. Children of this age are also capable of determining between animate and inanimate objects by using featural and dynamic cues. For example at as young as 7 months, children seem able to distinguish whether an object is capable of self-directed movement (Gelman and Opfer 155).[26] According to another study discussed by Gelman and Opfer, children at 9 months old became visibly distressed when watching inanimates moving on their own. They identify dynamic cues, such as self directed movement, as particularly relevant for establishing abstract conceptual information like intentionality.

Research into TOM development has also signalled a link between the understanding and practise of pretence and the broader function of representational understanding. Several studies have shown that children who engage in pretend play, especially role play, perform better on false belief tests. Harris says,

> Various types of pretend play will facilitate an understanding of mental representation, including the representational nature of belief. This is because pretend play alerts children to the potential gap between a representation of reality and reality itself. (41)

The fact that children must learn to realise that all thought, not just pretence, is representational becomes interesting when discussing theatre. To the extent that we can consider theatre a form of pretend play- albeit watching the pretend play of the actors on stage- what happens on stage may to an adult be recognisable as representation, but to a child it is often simply taken as reality. If a young child's first experience of a fish is as a puppet, and at the same time their first experience of a puppet is a fish puppet, then the child's

---

[25] A behavioural re-enactment procedural test is used to determine whether infants can guess another person's intentionality. One example of such a test is children watching an adult fail to pull apart a toy which the child is capable of pulling apart. If the child watches the failed attempt and then attempts to complete the task, it is believed that the child has understood the intention of the adult (Meltzoff 17-18).

[26] This has been established by a test in which infants are shown video-tapes of a person (or object) moving out of sight behind a screen and then a second person (or object) emerging from the other side. Infants looked significantly longer (and were therefore confused) when the second object moved without being propelled by the first. They also looked significantly longer when the second person needed propulsion. (Gelman and Opfer 155)

understanding of both fish and puppets could be informed by this first experience. The consequence would be that the child's understanding is that the puppet *is* a fish, rather than being a representation *of* a fish. When the child leaves the theatre and conjures up the thought of either puppet or fish, the image from the stage will prevail. It seems a stretch from this example that the child's understanding of pretence itself would be informed through theatre, but when the child next encounters a fish the nature of representation may be brought into question.

Pretence and the representational nature of theatre might be more easily recognisable if, for example the child observes a performer making specific reference to the fact that he or she is entering into a role. In this case it seems more likely that the young audience would need to draw on an existing understanding of representational thought and recognise the act as pretence. Harris (and the studies he draws on) uses very particular contexts of children engaging in role play within their familiar environments, so it would be problematic at best to suggest that watching theatre is the same experience. If children are able to recognise theatre as a form of pretence then Harris' work offers useful parallels. Some examples of children demonstrating an understanding of pretence in theatre will be examined later in this chapter.

Dynamic cues also seem particularly relevant to children's understanding of theatre as an art form that relies on vision and movement. Puppets are an especially interesting case in point. Puppets must be animated, yet often the illusion is so greatly achieved that they seemingly move of their own accord. If a young child watches a puppet moving without seeing the puppeteer, does she see it as an animate or inanimate object? In *Songs of the Sea,* one of most potentially challenging characters is Ngake, the taniwha. When he first appears on stage he is behind a screen and the audience only sees his floating head. This appearance is thrilling but also often disturbing for younger children. I observed that it was fairly common for children younger than four to become visibly distressed at Ngake's first appearance and this could be caused by a genuine confusion about whether it is an animate or inanimate object, an animal or puppet. Unlike the dog in *Kiwimoon* the taniwha characters were not intended to be villainous. However immediately after appearing Ngake reprimands the actor/character Jen for disturbing his sleep, but when she

apologises he turns into a more genteel character. He is described as the 'stronger' of the taniwha and his destruction of the rocks is a powerful act, but throughout the course of the play he becomes a friend to the actor/characters. It therefore seems likely that the fear generated arises both as a result of his physical strength and the stern nature of his character, as well as from some ontological confusion on behalf of younger viewers.

On one occasion during Ngake's first appearance I heard a boy (3yrs), saying, 'I don't like it'. To me the 'it' was most interesting. This child could not find a word such as 'taniwha', 'monster' or even 'puppet' within his existing mental schema to describe what he was seeing and therefore his alarm was very likely based on his lack of understanding about what this mysterious floating figure was. Not long after this first appearance Ngake comes on stage and we see his means of animation- he is a rod puppet in the style of a Chinese dragon manipulated by two unmasked performers. He also has a second head at the opposite end which we learn is his brother, Whataitai. The child described seemed to relax a little when he could see the actors, especially when his caregiver pointed them out, but he again repeated, 'I don't like it.' The taniwha puppet therefore seems to have dynamic features that did not correspond with this child's existing understanding of animacy and in this case the

Figure 2: Ngake the taniwha appears behind a screen in *Songs of the Sea,* frightening the actor/character Jen.

uncertainty seemed to result in anxiety.

Another way of describing this same double vision/knowledge experience is to say that the child was not able to suspend disbelief (quarantine the object) in the same way that the sand/food discussed above could cause representational abuse. Here, the child has perhaps simply believed the taniwha to have life, rather than a puppet acting as a taniwha. According to Schonmann if a child simply believes in the fiction while watching theatre, without maintaining, (Coleridge's expression), a 'willing suspension of disbelief', it ceases to be theatre: 'For the play to succeed the spectator must accept the deception; s/he must be willing to believe both believe in the action of the play and at the same time, acknowledge that it is fiction' (89). According to Schonmann, the critical factor in children's participation as viewers of theatre is that an optimal aesthetic distance is maintained between the children and the fictional world presented on stage. Aesthetic distance relies upon the spectator's awareness that what she or he is perceiving is not real (Ben Chaim 73). Ben Chaim, drawing on the writings of Arthur Koestler, acknowledges, 'It is precisely because the viewer remains tacitly aware that the theatrical production is fiction that he or she can experience emotions without danger' (74).[27]

The problem for young children, as Schonmann sees it, lies in the fact that instead of retaining detachment, children appear to be so absorbed in the action presented on stage that they lose control of their personal emotions. Instead of the thrill of fear, they are actually afraid (90):

> Young children, inexperienced in theatre, tend to become
> immersed in the world of make–believe; for them, the illusion
> of reality is sometimes understood as reality instead of as
> illusion. When distance disappears art does too.[28] Therefore, it
> is essential to envisage the audience's reactions so that the
> aesthetic distance will be maintained. Children who are unable
> to perceive the distance between real and fictional worlds will

---

[27] The emotional understanding of theatre will be explored at length in chapter three.
[28] Susan Bennett also uses the phrase 'When the distance disappears then art does too' (Bennett 16)

find it difficult to distinguish between real life and the life in the theatre (89).

Schonmann is of the opinion that children younger than approximately three years of age have difficulty distinguishing fact from fiction.

> It would be reasonable to make an analogy and assume that, if at the age of three a child can actively *play* the sort of 'as if' games, he certainly can *observe* these 'as if' situations on stage and understand and enjoy the theatrical situations as both situations contain very similar features. So we can assume the earliest age children are able to enjoy theatre would be three years old. (Schonmann 23. Emphasis in original.)

However, as Kavanaugh asserts, children younger than three years old are indeed able to participate in pretence and should therefore be able to gain some satisfaction from participating in theatre. Schonmann's assertion might also make questionable the practice of theatre for infants and toddlers, of which there is currently a growing appreciation world-wide[29]. Such theatre is often playful and thematically based, but does not necessarily follow conventional, narrative or story-based structures. While such thematic explorations are extremely interesting, and the responses of infants and young toddlers are fascinating, the behavioural methods needed to study the responses of children in infancy are beyond the limits of this study.

Despite debate around the age at which the competence in fictional awareness develops, it is clear that aesthetic distance is informed by the individual child's developmental and emotional understanding, which also depends hugely on the decisions made by the artists. Sauter's example, described in the introduction, is quite exceptional in that the artist explicitly demonstrated every transformation in the puppet show so that the audience could see both the artifice and the illusion. In his description of what happens in the theatrical

---

[29] One example is the excellent work in Edinburgh entitled 'The Starcatchers Project', established in 2006. Along with other such projects, Starcatchers has been part of ITYARN, the research branch of Assitej (The International Association of Theatre for Children and Young People is a global organisation was established in 1965 as a global network uniting those involved in children's theatre) which has in the last few years dedicated several presentations to research into theatre for infants and toddlers. Starcatchers' work uses playful illusions but narrative is interpreted in a very different way, for example a game of peek-a boo is an example of infants understanding a narrative structure.

event, Sauter does not specifically address aesthetic distance, but instead refers to three layers of perception: the sensory, the artistic and the symbolic (31-33). If, as Sauter implies, the children in his study were only able to understand the performance on all three levels because they had been introduced to both the fiction and the reality, what happens when children do not have such a thorough view of the mechanics of the stage? As Reason argues, the fact that children evidently prioritise the fictional (over the real) elements of the performance in their recreations does not mean that they only see the fiction. The prevalence of fiction in their drawn recreations could demonstrate both the success of the production as well as the power of children's imaginations but it does not prove a lack of complex perceptual thought. He argues that this too simplistic view is both disempowering and patronising (*The Young Audience* 83). Children, even very young children, are perceptually capable of holding both the illusion and reality in mind and it is therefore up to the theatre artists to present a style which allows them to do so.

If the artists frame the event in a way that draws attention to the construction of theatre, then children are given the chance to employ all the necessary perceptual abilities. Susan Bennett describes the two frames of the theatrical experience. The outer frame of the theatrical event refers to all those things that make up the physical experience- the props, the actors, the auditorium and so forth, while the inner frame refers to the fictional elements of the story. The physical setting of the theatre naturally affects the way the fiction is received.

> While the outer frame (cultural background, audience and production horizons of expectations, social occasion) will always mediate and control receptive strategies available, an audience's conscious attention is to their perception of the physical presence of a fictional world. (155)

The framing of the Santa Parade discussed in the introduction is particularly interesting because although definitely a performance event, it is not strictly theatre. The particular parade in question also featured embodiments of well known cartoon characters such as SpongeBob Square Pants, which, while they

could still physically be seen, may not have the same degree of reality as the flesh of the 'real Santa' because of both the unrealistic costuming and the fact they are representations of inhuman characters. It is likely that the physical environment- the road, the crowd and so forth- was less conducive to perceiving a fictional world and therefore Santa (with more of the human being visible) was perceived by James as real, while the very unrealistic cartoon characters were perceived as fiction.

Harris explores at length the relationship between reality and imagination when a child enters into a pretend scenario in play, which seems parallel to entering the fictional frame created on stage by the artists. While the objective world remains physically present, it recedes into the background. When we engage in make-believe, Harris asserts, the mind does not merely distort or represent the real world, rather an entirely different framework exists in the mind. Harris disputes the earlier claim made by Jean Piaget that when pretending children merely reproduce elements from reality. Harris says, 'It is certainly plausible that real episodes and real objects inspire children's pretend play, but that does not mean that pretend play is intended to signify reality' (Harris 24). He extends the logic though the example that while *War and Peace* might have been inspired by the Napoleon's invasion of Russia, it would be wrong to say that it is a real, historical account (24). Once a make-believe framework is established, certain 'flags' exist which allow events to be interpreted according to this framework. For example in Harris' bathing Teddy scenario described earlier once the block has been established as soap whenever the block subsequently appears it is flagged as soap and can be used as such.

When it comes to the role of the imagination for spectators engaging with works of theatre (and other art forms), aesthetic philosopher Kendall L. Walton argues that representational works of art function in the same way as props in games of make believe. When children pretend, especially collaboratively, they establish rules that certain propositions are true within the particular game. Walton's primary example is a game in which tree-stumps are props intended to represent bears. Once the proposition has been established, whenever a tree-stump is encountered, it is accepted as a bear and thus within the game it is fictionally 'true' that there are bears in the woods (35-36).

This is akin to an idea presented in theatre discourse by Augusto Boal which he calls 'aesthetic space'. The connection between aesthetic space, aesthetic distance and 'doubleness' is discussed at length by Jackson. (153-154). Like Harris' notion of the imaginary framework and Walton's fictional truths, Boal's concept of aesthetic space describes a metaphorical platform on which things have particular properties that are distinct from their real world qualities. Jackson refers to the communication between the actors and audience (and vice versa) being a bridge. He says 'Aesthetic space, then, implies a bridge between the two worlds: a communication involving not only the signals emitted by the actor to an audience but the reverse too: a series of responses that will be detected either implicitly… or explicitly' (154).

Although physical space of the performance does effect the reception of the event and the audience response, aesthetic space remains a separate, mental area in which the fiction exists.In contrast to the Santa parade example above, all of the case-study texts are designed to be staged in a conventional theatre environment. Entering into a theatre we, at least as adults, draw on our previous experiences to recognise the stage as a place of representation. The 'conscious attention' (Bennett 155) is directly achieved by seats that face a fixed, front-end stage. The artists are therefore free in other ways to address and emphasise the presence of a fictional world and allow their audiences to balance the inner, imaginary frame with the outer, material frame. *Peter Pan*, for example appeared at a time in Victorian drama when the very nature of representation was frequently being questioned (Davis 58)[30] and Barrie's narrative often draws explicit attention to the fallacy of the stage world. The first character we meet is the dog, Nana who is played by a human actor and has been given the role of the children's nanny. From the outset we are alerted to the make-believe and the fictitious nature of the event. Also in the opening scene the children do 'an act' (9) in which they take turns at playing their parents at each child's birth. This notion of playing remains with us as we travel to Neverland, where the imagination is probably the primary mode of both thought and action.

---

[30] Davis identifies Barrie's use of fairies as an example of the way that belief in the supernatural was being questioned at the same time as artists were experiementing around the ambiguity of representation (58).

Cognitive science proposes another way of looking at aesthetic space through CBT discussed earlier. The notion of a conceptual blend removes the concern about things being either fictional or real, because the mind is able to blend them together into one. It can also provide a challenge to the very concept of distance. McConachie paces Coleridge's assertion about the suspension of disbelief with blending theory, saying,

> Coleridge emphasised the 'willing' suspension of scepticism, but blending theory states that oscillating in and out of blends is mostly unconscious. Some 'willing' may occur at the start of a performance and intermittently throughout, but it is clear that spectators do not need to make conscious decisions about blending and unblending. As viewers, we oscillate millisecond by millisecond among blends and singular identities, not between scepticism and faith (44).

McConachie argues that conceptual blending and counterfactual thinking (the ability to hold multiple ideas in mind simultaneously through the imagination) happen throughout a performance, concluding 'performance, it seems, mixes up our usual categories of actuality and make-believe all of the time' (48).

Certain features of texts seem to reinforce or strengthen notions of make-believe and it may be the case that in emphasising such processes functions of the mind/brain move from being subconscious to being conscious. In both *Songs of the Sea* and *Boxes* for example we are first introduced to human performers before we meet the more fictitious puppets. Near the beginning of *Songs of the Sea* one of the performers, Carl, adopts a one-legged pose with hands splayed awkwardly in imitation of a crab. 'What am I?' he asks. Another performer initially guesses, 'Carl'. Carl replies, 'Well yes, but no. What else?' They guess various things, such as scarecrow, aeroplane and eventually work out that he is Carl playing at being a crab. As in *Peter Pan*, this game tunes the young audience into the fiction and prepares them for the more challenging make-believe to follow. This is a particularly clever device because it also alerts children to the nature of representation itself. In order to appreciate Carl as a crab, the audience must be able to conjure up images in mind of the various creatures suggested. In the performances I observed, children often joined the game by guessing what Carl is imitating. This demonstrates that, not only are

they are successfully able to hold both a real and imaginary states in mind simultaneously, but they are able to enter into the imaginary scenario and extend it in their own mind by recalling images that might fit within the aesthetic space created on stage. During the performances I observed, the suggestions by children concurred appropriately with the pretend stipulation, for instance on one occasion a child guessed, 'seagull', which was more appropriate to the seashore setting than the actors' abstract guesses.

Another scene in the play that was potentially more challenging in its treatment of reality was that of the Shaper. The company used two puppets to represent the Shaper: a miniature and an almost life-sized puppet. During the scene the small puppet is flown across upstage in his sky-boat to provide a perspective of distance before the large puppet appears downstage in the 'foreground'. Both puppets wave, the smaller one with a more rudimentary gesture operated with a rod and the large one with hands belonging to the puppeteer. At the conclusion of the scene the large puppet exits and the small puppet crosses back in the 'sky'. On all occasions I observed, the large Shaper puppet was greeted with especially audible gasps and exclamations of 'wow.' Interestingly though when the small puppet reappeared in the 'distance' to exit, very few children (regardless of age) continued to wave.

There are several possible reasons for why children were less willing to wave to the small puppet. Firstly, they may not have realised that the small puppet and the large puppet were representations of the same character. The illusion was especially well executed and great care was taken by the company to ensure the puppets were accurate representations of one another, so this seems unlikely. Secondly, children may have been confused about issues of scale and distance. It may be the case that children did not realise the small size was intended to show distance, or perhaps they were genuinely deceived into believing that the puppet had originally been far away. Either way, the audible gasps on the large puppet's arrival suggests that this illusion was believed. Director Kerryn Palmer suggests another reason why children generally did not wave when the small puppet crossed the second time: which is that having been caught out by the illusion the first time they were then attempting to figure out *how* it had been achieved (Personal interview 11 October 2011). This to me seems the most likely explanation, however the

artistic convention of perspective that places small objects high in the background to represent distance is indeed an optical illusion which if not previously encountered might prove a challenge for young children. The entrance and exit of the Shaper was a moment in the play when audience members, both children and adults, were skilfully forced to undertake a reality check. Moments such as these satisfactorily blend reality and illusion and in doing so not only address the dual audience (discussed in the first chapter) but also bring awareness to the gap between reality and illusion.

Like the crab guessing game at the beginning of *Songs of the Sea,* Wilson, Forbes and Denton, the creators of *Boxes,* also begin with a bridge between the real world and the imaginary world of the puppets to reinforce the co-existence of fiction and material representation. According to the company,

Figure 3: Annie Forbes as the Cleaning Lady first meets the puppet Elton. This is the only point in the show we see the puppeteer unmasked while manipulating the puppet.

bridging is a device used to provide the emotional safety required for their young audience to accept both the real and imagined lives of the puppets (Personal interview 20 July 2011). Initially distance is created in *Boxes* through Annie Forbes' Cleaning Lady character. The Lady is the only character who speaks directly to the audience, indeed speaks at all, and she speaks as if part of the real world rather than the make-believe world of the puppets. At the very beginning of the show, the house lights dim and she appears on stage dressed in black with a broom and yellow gloves. 'This isn't the show,' she says, 'Someone has to sweep the stage, you can keep chatting'. In all four performances I observed however, the audience did not go on chatting. That is to say, they did not chat to each other; in all audiences children did respond with statements or questions to the Lady. In an interview, Forbes and Denton agreed that they have never observed an audience who do 'keep chatting' as if she were not there (Personal interview 20 July 2011). Instead we (at least as adults) recognise the theatricality of the performer and that it is of course part of the show's fiction. Whether the children recognize her as a real cleaning lady or a theatrical figure would require further investigation and it is likely that children generally follow the lead of the adults in the audience who remain quiet. In one performance I observed a boy (around three years old) call out, 'I have a big broom too', which perhaps indicates that he genuinely perceived her as a cleaning lady and not an actor. As adults we willingly suspend our disbelief to accept that she is a cleaning lady, but this boy at least seemed to genuinely believe she was one. Denton plays a removal man who is shifting the puppets into a house which they unknowingly share with each other. While his appearance is perhaps more realistic than the Cleaning Lady's-- his costume for one thing is more accurate-- he is very theatrical in his movements and gestures. He performs a highly choreographed, slapstick routine with boxes and a trolley which would be difficult to interpret as realistic. Although the artists attempt to position the Cleaning Lady and the Removal Man as belonging to the real world, they are clearly still within the fictional frame. This introduction successfully serves as a bridge to the more theatrical world of the puppets to come.

Later in the show Forbes opens the box to reveal the first puppet, Elton (See figure 3). Forbes is already manipulating Elton when he appears from the box;

we never see the puppets lifeless. However after his immediate appearance, Elton demonstrates to Forbes how to operate him by showing where to place her feet and hands. Once Forbes has figured it out Elton pulls a black head cover from the box and gestures for her to wear it. From that point on, Forbes's face is obscured and only her black-clad body is visible so both the Cleaning Lady and Forbes become background to Elton in focus. Consequently our bridge to the puppets ceases and the distance is reduced. Denton, who operates the second puppet Bernie, is masked throughout his puppeteering so Bernie does not have this bridge.

If young children are in danger of becoming too immersed in the fiction then this bridging introduction is a device of distancing, reminding the young audience that Bernie and Elton are puppets over and above their imagined life

Figure 4: With Forbes fully masked, the Removal Man helps Elton unload his belongings.

as people. At one point the removal man is startled by a box that seemingly moves of its own accord. During one performance Denton was comforted by a young member of the audience (estimated at around 3 or 4yrs old). 'Don't worry', she said, 'It's just a Lady in black and an Elf in there'. In this regard, the word 'Elf' is particularly interesting. The creators identified that generally, in discussing performances with actors after the show, children refer to Bernie and Elton as either puppets or men (Personal interview 20 July 2011). In a similar way to the child calling the taniwha Ngake 'it' in *Songs of the Sea*, the fact that this young viewer identified Elton as an elf suggests that she is not drawing on prescribed knowledge that Elton is a puppet. She has also not (at least yet) identified him to be a grown man, so she has found a term from her own life experience, assimilated it into her schema about elves and correctly identified Elton as a small and somehow magical-story-type figure. By describing him as an elf, she is also perhaps favouring a perceived life over his real existence as a papier mache puppet.

If the effect of these bridging techniques is to highlight the artificiality of theatre, then they also possibly enable the young audience to make comparisons and recognise inconsistencies between the stage and the real world. While the creators of *Boxes* assert that the intention of the distance is to provide emotional safety, it has the added impact of restricting emotional absorbtion. In the Brechtian sense, the V-effect serves to heighten the audience's awareness of theatricality and thus motivate social change. Brecht says, 'Everyday things are thereby raised above the level of the obvious and automatic.' (92). In both *Boxes* and *Songs of the Sea* real objects are certainly decontextualised and the effect is a heightening of awareness for the audience. The boy described above who mentioned his 'big broom' made a comparison by relating the stage world with his known home environment. Near the end of the *Songs of the Sea* the actors describe through song how various creatures of the sea were created. In one performance I heard a discussion between two children, both three years old, which was prompted by the mention of 'crayfish' in the song.

'Crayfish?!' Said the first child,

'Yeah, crayfish.' Confirmed the second.

'Ew, Crayfish! I wouldn't eat crayfish, I only eat fish and chips.'

Earlier in the play one of the puppets, the Shaper, had played a game with the audience in which he threatened to eat a central character, the Moonfish. It therefore seems likely that the earlier mention of a fish being eaten had raised the child's attention so that it was at the forefront of her mind during the crayfish conversation. In each of these instances the children have taken an image from the play and incorporated them into their known world and have additionally been able to create a fictional or hypothetical context of their own. The immediate audience response to *Songs of the Sea* suggests that even very young children can engage in counterfactual thinking to blend what is seen on stage with their known reality.

Audience participation is another technique that children's theatre practitioners often use to break the illusion and enhance aesthetic distance. In pantomime participation is often used to exploit the young audience's willingness to respond by using patronising features, such as the dramatic irony when a supposedly naïve heroine does not know the villain is behind her. The scene described earlier, in which the Shaper asks whether he should eat the moonfish, is a somewhat similar appeal to the audience as Peter's appeal to save the dying Tinkerbell. The Shaper's question, though, is perhaps rebellious in that his provocation to eat a fellow character goes against the expected outcome for the Moonfish, who by now has become someone we ought to sympathise with. The fact that so many children vote for her to be eaten perhaps indicates that they have not been able to identify particularly strongly. Unlike the Shaper, we never see the Moonfish without her puppeteer and this seems to heighten her artificiality. The Shaper is the only puppet whose mechanism or puppeteer we do not see and he consequently reads as the most lifelike of the puppets (See figure 6 in chapter 3).

Tracy C. Davis examines thoroughly the participatory moment in *Peter Pan* and entitles her article, ''Do You Believe in Fairies?': The Hiss of Dramatic License' The 'hiss' she refers to is indeed those who do not clap to save Tinkerbell, and in *Songs of the Sea* a similar response is from those who encourage the Shaper

to eat the Moonfish by shouting 'yes.' Dramatic license as Davis defines it is a phenomenon in which:

> The spectator is aware of conventions sufficiently to know they are invoked, but responds in something other than the customary way to the artist/instigator's invitation to actively suspend disbelief while depending explicitly upon the awareness of how an event is framed by narrative and then altered by a disparate frame (57-58).

It is therefore not surprising that it is the older children, who are well aware of the theatrical frame, encourage the Shaper by taking dramatic licence to hiss, 'Yes.' This is akin to Nikolajeva's ideas about subject positioning discussed in the previous chapter. The children who encourage the Moonfish to be eaten have not only chosen the 'wrong' position in relation to the text, they are aware of their powerful and autonomous role as viewers with the ability to confront the artists directly.

Techniques that allow children to choose their own position in response to the text by making theatre's artifice explicit not only provide viewers with agency, but also demonstrate ways in which children are free to explore the aesthetic distance between themselves and the stage. It seems evident that although employing double knowledge in a theatrical setting is not easy for children in the early years, it is possible when the conditions of the performance are used appropriately. If we incorporate Harris's findings that even two year olds have a fairly comprehensive understanding of pretence and the responses to both *Boxes* and *Songs of the Sea*, then it might be possible to argue that young children, like adults, successfully use conceptual blending to understand the representational nature of theatre. However it cannot be ignored that these representations are often emotionally overwhelming for children and this is indeed a challenge for both artists and caregivers, especially when material is met with the negative emotions of fear or sadness.

Chapter 3: Emotional Involvement

> WENDY. Don't go, Peter. I know lots of stories. The stories I
> could tell to the boys!
>
> PETER. (*Gleaming)* Come on! We'll fly.
>
> WENDY. Fly? You can fly!
>
> *(How he would like to rip those stories out of her; he is*
> *dangerous now)* (Barrie 37).

Stories can indeed be terrifying; that is part of the fun. Shrifa Schonman argues that, 'When an actor plays his role too realistically it might arouse real fear in young audiences. For example, the actor playing a wicked role may trigger genuine fear instead of mere thrill' (90). Peter Pan is of course the hero not the villain, but if he too can be 'dangerous', should the actor playing Pan disregard Barrie's stage direction and create distance by making his or her portrayal less believable?

Putting aside the fact that we have seen how very young children are capable of distinguishing between reality and illusion, Schonmann's statement that children ought only experience a 'mere thrill' implies that what we adults (who definitely can tell the difference) feel when watching a play is not a genuine emotion. If not a genuine emotion then what is it? One line of reasoning suggests that because we know it to be fiction we lack the necessary belief required for emotion. Kendall Walton considers such a response a quasi-emotion. He aligns engagement with fiction to children's games of make-believe. Walton's argument is based on the idea that it is only fictional that we feel afraid because we neither believe in, nor act upon the threat of danger. His now well known illustration is of Charles watching a film about a life-like green slime coming towards him.

> *Was* he terrified of it? I think not. Granted, Charles's condition is
> similar in certain obvious respects to that of a person frightened of a
> pending real-world disaster. His muscles are tensed, he clutches his

chair, his pulse quickens, his adrenaline flows. Let us call this physiological-psychological state *quasi-fear.* But it alone does not constitute genuine fear. (196)

Walton argues that Charles' fear is fictional because he has become a prop in a game of make-believe in which he plays at being afraid while not believing he is actually in danger.

Ben Chaim, referring to Roger Scruton's *Art and Imagination*, takes a similar viewpoint, saying 'The aesthetic response rests on the imagination and is divorced from belief because the aesthetic object (the 'object' of aesthetic perception) is nonexistent. Aesthetic emotions, then, are not founded on belief but on the entertainment of unasserted propositions' (69-70). Accepting that distance is a necessary characteristic of artistic appreciation, she too questions whether the emotions felt might only be projections directed at the objects presented rather than being genuine emotions experienced by the viewer. The experience is therefore one of 'pseudo-vicarious emotions' (71). When Peter Pan is trapped by Hook, we might fear for him, but we do not fear for ourselves.

The idea of a quasi (or pseudo) emotion is readily contested, notably by the work of Derek Matravers, *Art and Emotion.* Matravers disassembles Walton's thesis thoroughly and argues that what we (adults) feel when engaging with artworks is indeed emotion, aroused by the work of art. 'The argument that beliefs are an *essential* component of emotions… relies on the claim that emotions must have certain properties which only a belief could give them: in particular a connection to action' (7). Matravers sees no reason not to accept as being genuine Charles's attestation that he is afraid of the slime. According to Matravers, Charles has been manipulated into a heightened sensation in which his reaction is beyond what might be expected even considering he knows it to be make-believe (76).[31] If belief requires action, then there are certain instances in which we experience belief but are still not lead to act. For example when we watch a documentary film we believe the contents to be a

---

[31] Matravers observes that this manipulation is easier in film and theatre which he describes as more 'vivid' media, than the 'detached, cognitive world of a book' (76).

representation of reality, but can experience emotion in the same way as if we were watching fiction. Belief, therefore is not a pre-requisite for emotion. Instead, once the imagination is engaged the propositions within the narrative can be taken as true. What is perhaps more significant is the motivations for reading (or in theatre's case viewing), which lead the viewer to experience the fiction in particular ways (80).

To look at it in a slightly different light, Harris too argues against the idea of quasi-emotions in fictional encounters and suggests that emotion is imaginatively directed towards the fictional character, rather than oneself as viewer, and this is true even for young children. He describes an appraisal process in which when we experience an event we can either consider its reality status, or we can appraise its emotional impact. Our consideration of the reality status might influence the appraisal of emotional affectivity, for instance if we consider it possible (believe it) we might be more emotionally aroused. (73) Harris asserts that adults regulate whether to be involved, by imagining events are happening to themselves, or whether to be detached by using the appraisal system to remind themselves of the fictional status (76).

Real? Fictional? Possible?

Event ⟹ Appraisal ⟹ Emotion
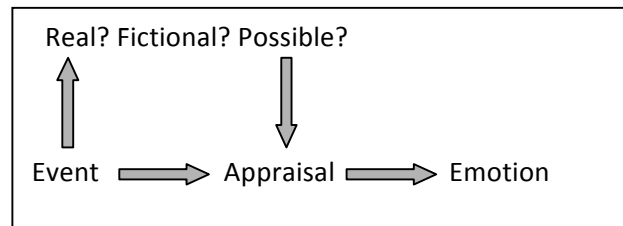
Figure 5 Harris' model of the appraisal process (73)

Young children, regardless of their ability to distinguish fantasy from reality, firstly become involved and only later develop the ability to regulate their involvement as they learn how to manage the appraisal process (78-79). According to Harris,

> Preschool children can distinguish between reality and make-believe. They realise that an object that they can see is real and is open to inspection by others, whereas an imaginary creature is not, even if it arouses feelings of fear or attachment, and even if it has been part of their imaginative life for weeks or months… when children show an

emotional reaction to an imaginary creature, it is not because of any

confusion on their part about what is real and what is imaginary.

(Harris 65)

Imaginatively identifying with a protagonist's emotional situation is analogous

to empathy. Theatre theorist David Krasner, like Harris, asserts that an

empathetic (and therefore emotional) response to theatre is indeed rational

(255) and this further challenges Schonmann's claim that an extremely

emotional reaction will inhibit the perhaps more rational process of distancing.

Referring to Matravers, Krasner describes the way emotions, empathy and

understanding operate concurrently. He critiques the Brechtian notion of

distancing, which maintains that in order for audiences to become socially

activated by theatre they must be made continually aware of the artificiality of

theatre. Krasner asserts that Brecht possibly does not give enough credit to the

audience's basic understanding about the theatrical illusion (260-261). Going

into the theatre we know that what we are watching is fiction. He says, 'We

accept the artifice and choose whether or not (and to what degree) we accept

the events unfolding on stage as correlative to the real world' (260). In

opposition to Brechtian distancing, Krasner draws on Merleau-Ponty's

phenomenological concept of embodiment to contend that if consciousness is

embodied, then it is not only within one's own mind, but constantly exists in

relation to the world around it (270). Krasner argues that reason and empathy

operate simultaneously, saying, 'Empathy enters understanding by way of

emotion' (262-263). Bruce McConachie, in his more recent work concludes

that Krasner has this argument back to front. Using cognitive simulation

theory,[32] McConachie contends that empathy is occurring naturally all the time

and it is through empathy that the emotion is aroused (72). Either way, when

theatre is viewed as an encounter, it is perfectly reasonable for an adult

spectator to become emotionally involved in the performance without losing

sight of their own consciousness. As Krasner asserts, when audiences 'care' for

the performance they experience a heightened emotional (and thereby also

cognitive) state which leads more naturally to social action than distance (272).

---

[32] Simulation, often used synonymously with empathy, is related to TOM and involves the ability to recognise mental states in the self and others through mentally *simulating* perceptions, intentions and beliefs (McConachie 223).

Cognitive science can also support the claim that what is experienced is indeed emotion. In fact, emotion can be viewed as the primary way of understanding the world at large, let alone representational art. McConachie synthesises research in cognition and neuroscience and outlines how we empathetically 'catch' emotions. This type of emotional transference is known as 'emotion contagion,' a term coined by E. Hatfield, J.T. Cacioppo and R.L. Rapson in 1994 (McConachie 67). Emotion contagion involves the physical sensation of mimicking others through the recreation of observed gesture and expression. This empathetic reaction can be observed in infants who will cry in response to other crying infants in the same room. As McConachie identifies, emotional contagion in theatre not only occurs between the actors and audience, but also amongst audience members. This contagion is responsible for the collective response of an audience, the fact that generally speaking audiences gasp together and laugh together (97).

More recent neuroscience research has identified that the Mirror Neuron System (MNS) plays a significant role in the development of identification and social interaction. What is particularly relevant here is the way that emotions are learnt by infants and young children through mirroring the expressions of others. Mirror neurons were first discovered in 1996 by Vittorio Gallese and his team at the University of Parma in Italy (Hurley 29, McConachie 70). These neurons appear in the premotor cortex of the brain and are activated both when the subject performs an activity and when they observe the same activity in others. Even before the widespread acknowledgement of mirror neurons, neuroscientists recognised the significance of mirroring to emotional development. For example infants develop neurological pathways by mimicking what they see in adults. When they witness a smile infants instinctively mirror this and as they do so establish patterns in the brain that identify the expression with the emotion, thus for example continually associating the facial feature of an upturned mouth with happiness. When children then make such a facial feature, companions respond similarly and so begins a cycle of reciprocally developing emotion (Schore 162).

In his analysis of theatre spectatorship, McConachie does not specifically address children as viewers, however he too discusses the reciprocal transference of emotion between parents and children. McConachie refers to

the work of Ellen Dissanayake who proposes that the proto-musical rhythmic conversations between parents and infants are fundamentally both emotional and artistic. This line of reasoning has even been used to suggest a more innately significant function of the role of artistic activity to human nature (78).[33] Erin Hurley is another contemporary theatre theorist who looks at the MNS in relation to the act of watching a play. She sums it up nicely by suggesting, 'The brain then operates like a small theatre, producing representations of actions and emotions that are not necessarily *executed* by their audience but are nonetheless electrically *experienced* by them.' (31).

This automatic reaction can then explain the way that actors' gestures are understood, at least for adult spectators. When we watch the mundane scene of the Darling family taking their medicine, most people (adults and children alike) would recognise the scenario and this familiarity allows us to experience the action as if participating. Through watching the gesture of medicine being taken, we might even bring to mind the foul taste of medicines we have had. We watch the scene and use the MNS conjure up a 'small theatre' in our mind which recalls our own experience of such an action. If we have an emotional connection with such an action, such as horror at the taste of foul medicine, then we empathetically experience this emotion.

As we saw in the first chapter, children will attend to that content that they are familiar with, before attempting more difficult content matter (Klein 47). Barrie may have consciously written such a domestic scene to contrast with the highly fantastic, action packed scenes of Neverland. When we watch Hook and Pan sword fighting we must vicariously experience actions with much higher stakes both physically and emotionally. Even for adults watching at the turn of the century, sword-fighting was not an everyday action, so watching a stage fight might have the effect of both creating and affirming understanding about the action. In this regard, Barrie's gradual easing into fantasy through a domestic frame works particularly well. The domesticity in *Boxes* is perhaps similar. Recall the young boy who verbally responded to the Cleaning Lady's broom. This child clearly recognised and responded to her action of sweeping. *Songs of the Sea* has even less obvious, familiar content. With the human

---

[33] Protomusicality will be discussed further later in the chapter.

frame story being set at the beach, the scene is already exciting and potentially dangerous. It is made more so when the fantastic and challenging taniwha appear. Carl's appearance with the mug of Milo is a satisfactory exception, but the actors' gestures of jumping and swimming are all physically demanding and therefore imaginatively demanding for the audience. If children cannot recognise the actions of the characters, then it is perhaps harder for them to build an empathetic relationship.

The general consensus in contemporary psychological discourse treats emotion as a transactional combination of both the inner state of an individual's brain/mind and the external environment. In contrast to earlier notions of emotions as intra-personal, contemporary approaches, for instance that of developmental theorists Witherington, Campos, and Hertenstein (2001), hold that emotions are extra-personal because they are brought about by conditions outside the individual's control or produced in order to elicit a response from an external factor (428). They are, 'a fusion of external event and internal intent.' (Witherington et al 429). Furthermore, Witherington et al also question the reliability of action as a symptom of emotion, for instance by recognising that both changes in physiological condition and facial expressions can be emblematic of things other than emotion (432). For example an increased heart rate can be induced by exercise and a smile can represent any number of emotions. Emotions can then be regarded as transactional and discussed in terms of goal attainment. Witherington et al therefore present the following definition, 'Emotions are the processes by which an individual attempts to establish, change or maintain his or her relation to the environment on matters of significance to the person' (429).

This view allows for the experience of emotion to be treated similarly at any age, as a transaction between the individual and the environment. Each emotional state correlates to a particular goal. When there is congruity between an individual's striving for the goal and the external event the result is a positive emotion, such as joy or relief. If there is incongruity, then the emotion produced will be negative. For anger, an obstacle to achievement is present but for sadness there is no way of resolving the challenge (Witherington et al 431). Like Harris, Witherington et al acknowledge that emotional regulation is something that must be learnt during childhood, but

that even infants are capable of both controlling perceptual input, for instance by avoiding a threat, and inhibiting or amplifying emotional displays (434).

If we are genuinely emotionally involved with the characters then we might feel sadness for example when Tinkerbell drinks the poison because we can see no way of resolving the situation. When Peter offers us a solution, clapping, we have been offered a resolution to our goal so our emotion might switch to hope. If we return to Susan Langer's famous expression of 'acute misery' (319) at this moment, we could use this lens of emotional goal setting to see her misery in a new light. Recall that Langer recounted being disturbed as a child when her thorough involvement in Peter and Tinkerbell's emotional well-being was shattered by what she saw as an intrusion of reality, by being asked to step outside the fiction and clap. She had then realised the 'central fallacy' of theatre and attributed it to the aesthetic distance described by Edward Bullough (318). Perhaps Langer had indeed been feeling sad as was intended because Tinkerbell was about to die and she could see no resolution. However when Adams/Pan spoke directly to the audience and Langer's belief in the character was brought into question, her goal was no longer related to Tinkerbell but instead shifted to Adams/Pan. She was then presented with a huge obstacle that she could not overcome: Adams is not Pan. Langer was no longer emotionally involved with either the actor or the character. She perhaps then experienced a change in goal orientation and rather than the hope that was intended she felt frustration because she had been presented with a new dilemma. Had she been more aware of the artificiality from the beginning, she suggests that she would not have been so let down by the sudden intrusion of reality. To use Harris' framework, instead of moving straight through the appraisal process and experiencing the intended emotion (hope), she instead deemed the event impossible by examining its reality status and as a consequence her emotional relationship to the event was altered.

One useful point to note is that certain emotional responses are more innate, or evolutionarily based than others. Studies from as early as 1930 have shown that infants very quickly learn to fear certain objects and not others and this has become known as 'biological preparedness for learning' (Witherington et al 436). Infants are not innately afraid of certain objects but once these objects become associated with an emotion, they develop lasting associations and

correlative actions. One study examined laboratory raised monkeys' first experiences of both a snake and a flower. Although initially the monkeys were wary of both new objects, it was only the snake that they continued to avoid. While initially both were frightening, infants very quickly learnt what they ought to fear and this became ingrained (Witherington et al 436). Similarly eighteen month old infants examined in another study were able to identify positive emotional security towards mechanical stimuli but not to snake-like stimuli. (437). This suggests that there is an evolutionary predisposition towards negative emotional responses to certain dangerous stimuli. Considering this, whether or not children have prior experience of taniwha, it is not surprising that they should quickly learn that Ngake is something that ought to be feared, especially when given such clues as an actor with a frightened expression saying, 'taniwhas eat people (sic).'

If we accept that children experience emotion in the same way as adults (but in a slightly less regulated way) and also that adults do not necessarily believe what we see to be real and yet still feel a genuine emotion, then perhaps it does not matter whether children believe or suspend disbelief. By viewing emotion as a transaction between the self and the environment and applying Matravers' arousal theory we perhaps have a contention to Schonmann's argument, that when children cannot suspend disbelief watching theatre is potentially dangerous. If the content of the performance generates a genuine feeling of fear, for example, then whether the child perceives what they see as real or not becomes less relevant than the degree to which the child is able to regulate that fear. Consider for example, a young child who is terrified of Captain Hook. She may believe she is seeing a real pirate and that Peter Pan may well be killed in front of her eyes, or she may willingly suspend disbelief and realise she is still in a theatre and therefore Hook is not a real pirate and Pan simply an actor. She may even be astute enough to realise that Hook is played by the same actor as Mr Darling and therefore one or both of them must be acting. Whichever way she looks, Hook wields a sharp and frightening sword and the fear she feels is genuine. If we accept that what both children and adults experience is indeed a real emotion, we can then consider how these emotional reactions are managed, for instance by the scale and content

of the effects, the relationship established by the performers and by the actions and reactions of the audience.

It is then possible to break down the emotional experience into different components and apply these more specifically to theatre. Summarising existing research on emotion and audience reception, Erin Hurley (2010) identifies three main types of feeling present in the theatrical exchange- affect, mood and emotion. Affect is the immediate physiological sensation experienced in relation to a stimulus, such as the quickening of the pulse or an increase of adrenalin (13). Hurley says emotion comes later and is the recognition of the feeling through the employment of memory. Emotion is therefore relational and occurs in theatre when an audience experiences a recognisable feeling in response to performers (19-20). As we have seen emotion can indeed be viewed as transactional, but also involves the immediate deployment of embodied mirror reactions. Thirdly Hurley identifies that mood is the background state that underlies the experience of affect and emotion. (21). By looking more specifically at each of these states we can suggest what might be occurring in the case study performances.

Although Hurley describes these conditions in the above order, it might be more useful to look at mood first because as an underlying state, it perhaps provides a basis for reception and the onset of affect and emotion. Susan Bennett similarly identifies a phenomenon called 'Receptive Mood'. She recognises that the audience's first impression when entering the auditorium, and indeed in the period prior, has a significant effect on the play's reception as a whole (142). This incorporates the anticipation of the performance by such elements as the trip to the venue, the ease of acquiring tickets, the influence of read reviews and so on. Mood is therefore closely allied with expectations. As touched on above, motivations for viewing not only influence the decision to attend, but also the way viewing occurs throughout. When we treat empathetic employment of the mirror system as responsible for transferring emotion from person to person then it seems that parents and caregivers play a significant role in encouraging positive emotional reactions, especially in the time leading up to a performance.

From my observations of audiences for *Songs of the Sea* reception during the show was significantly influenced by children's emotional state prior to the performance beginning. Children who expressed the strongest fear during Whataitai's death scene, for example, had often shown some anxiety moving from the bright foyer to the darker auditorium. On one occasion I had observed a child (approximately two years old) clinging tightly to his caregiver and looking for reassurance while entering. The family was sitting near me so I was able to observe his unease as he cried when the house lights were dimmed. His caregiver reassured him when the stage lights were lit, but he cried again when the taniwha first appeared. On another occasion an ECE group of under-two year olds were seated near the front of the auditorium and during the wait for the show to begin I could see several children holding their caregivers tightly and similarly, when the house lights were dimmed, could hear several cries from this group. This apprehension occurred in both public and educational performances and was most pronounced in children approximately two to three years of age. On the other hand, dimming the house lights did not seem to be a concern in the two audiences made up entirely of school groups for *Songs of the Sea*. Of all the audiences, the schools only groups were perhaps the most attentive throughout and generally responded appropriately with loud laughter and fixed silence.[34]

The performance with the most visible and audible anxiety occured when the group of infants and toddlers described above were seated near the front of the auditorium. Several children in the group appeared frightened both while entering the auditorium and during the performance, resulting in their caregivers either moving to the back of the auditorium or requesting to leave. The caregivers in this group were particularly responsive to the non-verbal cues of the children. For example at one point a caregiver holding a crying child (approximately 1 yr) moved to the back of the auditorium as if to leave. She stood for a while at the back and the child settled down slightly. The child was still looking at the stage and once she was significantly calmer, they sat back down. So it looked as if the caregiver had given the child an option to leave but by continuing to look at the stage the child was still engaged enough that the

---

[34] Unfortunately I only received one survey response from participants in a schools only performance. I also did not question teachers on their motivations for attending.

caregiver interpreted a willingness to persevere. The caregivers in this group identified in their post-performance response that they felt that the taniwha and the dim lighting contributed to the sense of fear experienced by the children. For this group, a significantly anxious mood was established very early on in the experience. The emotional response of a few was 'caught' by others and this became disruptive not just for the particularly upset children but for the whole audience. During this performance I observed a significantly higher level of discussion between children and caregivers and there was less absorbed engagement on the whole.

Social referencing, referencing the expressive signals of others, plays a significant role in the regulation and experience of emotion (Withington et al 450). In the case described here, children took clues for their well-being from caregivers, and vice versa. Generally speaking this was achieved by caregivers who allowed children to decide for themselves as much as possible what they were capable of tolerating. When the caregiver mentioned above decided to stay she acknowledged that the child was clearly still absorbed by the performance even though distressed. In this exchange, the child was learning how to manage her emotional response and the caregiver trusted the child's natural moderation. Later in the show, during the sequence in which Whataitai dies, the caregiver and the child did decide to leave. The example described is one in which the full combination of emotional experiences, mood, affect and emotion lead to a decision to abandon the performance.

On one occasion during *Songs of the Sea* I observed the following conversation between a child (approximately 3yrs) and his caregiver as they entered the auditorium:

> Child: 'It's Scary'
> Caregiver: 'No, it's exciting'
> Child (grinning): 'No, it's scary!'

In this conversation we can see the active construction of emotional response. The child exhibits an awareness of an emotional state, and in response to the caregiver he has appraised and regulated his state so that although by the time he repeats the statement he is grinning and therefore perhaps not in the

slightest bit scared, he has regulated his statement according to what he sees as socially appropriate. While we perhaps do not have enough evidence to prove it, this suggests that adults play a significant role in establishing or moderating the mood of children going into a performance. When adults focus on the positive, exciting or even exhilarating nature of the coming event, then children might be more likely to enter in an open and enthusiastic mood. Considering the way that emotions are passed from person to person through the phenomenon of 'emotion contagion' discussed above, it could be the case that if adults are aware of the effect their own mood has on children and purposefully establish a positive mood, the experience will be more positive.

Once the show starts audiences' emotional well-being is shared between caregivers and performers on stage. Unlike other media, theatre has the potential advantage of a reciprocally adaptable relationship to be established between the artist and the audience and this is perhaps one of the most powerful aspects of live performance. This relationship can be established very early on in a performance and depends on several factors. One obvious way seems to be through actors directly addressing and assessing the emotional well-being of the audience. Early on in *Songs of the Sea,* before the actors appear on stage the houselights dim and three circular transparent screens are moved on stage seemingly of their own accord. Music is played throughout and the effect is somewhat mystical. The three female actors then appear on stage and Carl from the auditorium behind the audience. This entrance is perhaps intended to seem as if Carl is part of the audience, but it is amply clear from his costume, exaggerated voice and the speed with which he runs on stage that he is a theatrical element. Actors face the audience but only directly address each other during the show. As identified by the response of the group mentioned above, the darkness at the beginning perhaps contributed to the apprehension developed in the audiences. The mysterious objects, dim lighting and music perhaps provoke both mystery and uncertainty, but the actors' enthusiastic and boisterous entrance and opening dialogue seems intended to set a tone of excited anticipation. Through quick conversational language, the actors establish they are at the beach and the objects are rock pools.

> Jen: Wow rock pools!
> Helen: Look at all these coloured fish!

> Chelsea: Wow they are so fast!
>
> Girls: Zoom, Zoom, Zoom
>
> Chelsea & Helen: Jen!
>
> Carl: Rock pools!
>
> Helen: Hey Carl
>
> Chelsea: Tides out!

Already there are two contrasting tones, one of mystery and one of energetic enthusiasm. Even though they face the audience, actors are clearly absorbed in their own world.

In contrast, as discussed in the previous chapter, Forbes entering as the cleaning lady in the opening to *Boxes* directly addresses the audience directly and in doing so she quickly assess the emotional needs of the audience. In an interview, both Forbes and Denton acknowledged that as performers for young audiences they have developed skill in recognising where in the audience to focus attention by working with the individuals who are happy to play along while giving space to those less confident (Personal interview 20 July 2011) Forbes as the Cleaning Lady character makes little attempt to alter her voice or her posture and her conversation with the audience appears natural and warm. This welcoming and unthreatening appearance allows the young audience to feel at ease with the character. In these opening moments of the performance, while the houselights are up, Forbes very quickly assesses the audience for confidence and sensitivity. In each performance I observed she made eye contact with particular members of the audience who were willing to participate.

Denton described a similar technique of assessing the audience when performing schools as a roving clown.

> When I ran onto the stage … I would always be really aware of
> the audience and spot the kids that would be sort of going 'ooh'
> [he imitates a child shying away] … So I'd keep away from them
> and use other kids and slowly I'd watch that they would start to
> warm up and feel safe. (Personal interview 20 July 2011)

As discussed in the first chapter, Denton acknowledged that ownership of space influences audiences' comfort levels. He identified that when he is performing in schools children usually feel particularly safe, to the point where they can even demonstrate animosity towards performers. Denton recalled a particularly threatening audience when performing at a school. He was due to follow another clown act who had reputably been chased into the school pond by the young audience. When Denton took the stage the children sat as close as possible to his feet, which he felt was an attempt to intimidate him. He described the way he had to win the audience over through the skill of his performance and as he did children slowly moved back and he was able to leave without ending up in the pond (Personal interview 20 July 2011).

Bert O. States, in his phenomenological analysis of theatre, identifies three modes of actor/audience relationships. First is the self-expressive mode in which the actor exhibits his or her virtuosity; second is the representational mode in which actor immerses himself in character and thirdly is the collaborative mode in which actor emphasises commonality with audience 'we're all in this together' These modes are different to theatrical style, which are historically specific and actors move seamlessly between modes in a performance (States 160). The third collaborative mode is perhaps most important for children's theatre. It must be established early on that performers and audience are playing a game. If the first, self-expressive, mode predominates it seems possible that actors will not win the trust of the young audience. If adult performers do not at least attempt to make a sincere connection with the audience, it seems likely that children, especially those who are naturally shy, will be wary. The second mode is especially risky if the character presented is a challenging one. Perhaps Hook works *because* he is double cast with Mr Darling. When we put this together with the fact that make-believe is subtly highlighted from the very start of *Peter Pan*, children potentially could realise that this is a game being played between them and the actors. Similar to Barrie's theatrical bridging, what Denton is doing as a clown during his initial assessment of the young audience is to establish the game by setting up a framework of collaboration. Only once this collaboration is established can he enter into a more representational mode of the clown character and the self-expressive mode of virtuosity.

An important aspect of this type of audience assessment and response by performers is that it enables audience members to mirror the feeling of the performers, through imaginative recall in their own brains and vice versa. I witnessed a good example of mirrored feelings at a performance of KidzStuff theatre's production of *Rumplestiltskin* in September 2011. The performance was at a community hall, with minimal lighting and scenic effects. The show was a retelling of the classic fairytale, with a minor change that it was the heroine, rather than her father who exaggerated an ability to spin straw into gold. During the performance the protagonist, Millie, a child played by an adult actor, becomes guilt-stricken at having deceived the king and at one point slumps to the ground and wails melodramatically. Adults were easily able to recognise the overly theatrical nature of the cry and very few exhibited upset facial expressions. Some older children in the audience had visible smirks on their faces, perhaps employing dramatic license to acknowledge the insincerity. Younger children however generally exhibited a look of concern. What was most interesting however, was the extreme reaction of one infant (between 11-15 months old). Throughout the performance, this child had sat contentedly with largely fixed attention directed to the stage (apart from a few moments of distraction such as looking around the room or attempting to get her caregivers attention). As soon as Millie launched into the loudly vocal cry, the infant mimicked it exactly, with a very loud and clearly distressed cry. Once the character stopped, the infant immediately settled down. The child's distress was clearly sincere and her reaction one of mirroring what she could see (and hear) on the stage. While being thoroughly sincere, such a reaction is vicarious in that the infant entrusted its emotional state to the character, as demonstrated by her also mirroring the end of the cry.

As discussed above, recent theatre theorists have begun applying research in mirror neurons to the vicarious nature of theatre watching. Amy Cook examines mirror neurons and their role in the relationship between imitation and performance. Referring to Aristotle's *Poetics,* she suggests that actors 'perform' actions, rather than 'imitating' actions so that what becomes more important than verisimilitude is how the audience perceives the action. The

consequence is that it is the *audience* who imitate the perceived action via the neurological pathways in their brain (590-591)[35].

In order to imitate an action if only mentally, the audience must of course perceive and recognise the action, if only on a neurological level. Cook refers to an example from a study by MNS theorist Gallese and cognitive linguist George Lakoff combining their theories. They ask us to consider the phrase, 'Harry picked up the glass.' In order to comprehend the sentence we must both recognise the linguistic meaning of the words and recall familiarity with the action, so that language is not simply a matter of communication, but rather of experience (Cook 589). If the same proposition were given to an infant or young child with neither the experience of 'picking up' or 'a glass' is would seem impossible for the sentence to mean anything. The advantage of theatre is that such actions are not simply linguistic abstractions, but are usually accompanied by an embodied expression or gesture. A good example would be the gesture of swimming in *Songs of the Sea.* Near the beginning of the show, one of the actors, Jen, leaps behind one of the circular forms and mimes breaststroke. We are not given a verbal description of the action, but we have the sound effect of a splash to assist with recognition. It seems unlikely that many of the three and four year old children would have mastered the breaststroke, but it was very common for children in the audience to mimic the action. Several respondents to the questionnaire said their children had imitated swimming after the performance. These children certainly recognised the action as representing swimming, but without more sophisticated tools of analysis it would be impossible to say whether the children's mirror neuron systems were activated and whether this also occurred for those children who did not obviously recreate the action.

It is especially interesting to consider mirror response and reciprocity to investigate theatrical devices such as mask and puppetry. Peter Wilson has suggested that masks can be particularly intimidating for young children (Personal interview 10 June 2008). One reason for this could be that unlike actors, neither masks nor puppets are able to change expression in response to

---

[35] Cook does express a very valid caution in that it is very easy to overestimate the powers of the MNS especially considering the alluring use of the word 'mirror', which has been employed both metaphorically and throughout history from Hamlet to Lacanian psychoanalysis (590 footnote).

the audience. Annie Forbes and Tim Denton shared in interview an example of a young child who was terrified of a large puppet. This child knew Forbes and Denton well and even knew the puppet to be one of their creations, however when Denton 'put the puppet on' the child was visibly upset, even though he knew full well that Denton was operating. (Personal interview 20 July 2011). This reaction suggests that puppetry and mask could be an area where the aesthetic dimensions of knowing and feeling become separated. Another example is the distress that many children showed upon the Taniwha's first appearance behind the screen in *Songs of the Sea.* As discussed in the previous chapter, without any visible means of manipulation this illusion was likely to be disturbing for the fact that the puppet appeared particularly animate, but also it perhaps because it could not respond in a recognisable way.

McConachie touches on this, describing the puppetry of Julie Taymor in *The Lion King*. He says that puppetry, 'engages and stretches our mirror systems and other parts of our minds to puzzle out how human beings can co-ordinate their muscles for such curious purposes' (84). When we return to the findings of Gelman and Opfer discussed in the previous chapter, that even seven month old infants seem able to predict what ought to move independently (has animacy) and what ought not (inanimate), it could be the case that the distress evident during the taniwha's first appearance is due to the fact that he is both animate and inanimate. This might well be caused by a mirror system being stretched beyond capability. Additionally, if there is an evolutionary predisposition to fear snake-like creatures we can see legitimate cause for alarm. *Songs of the Sea* also incorporates mask; at one point Carl briefly wears a scuba mask and at another point the sun and moon characters appear as masks held in front of the actors faces. On at least one occasion I observed a child (who had already shown some anxiety) upset when Carl put on the scuba mask, and a few times children showed some distress at the sun and moon masks. It seems likely that these reactions are related to the fact that both masks and puppets are not dynamic and therefore cannot respond in the same way as human actors.

Audience response to Ngake and the Shaper provide a good illustration of the difficulty of responding to gestures from puppets. As discussed in the previous chapter Ngake the taniwa was often met with fear in the observed performances. Over the six performances at least five children and their caregivers left while Ngake was on stage, most often during the scene in which Whataitai is stranded and dies. In contrast the Shaper puppet was much more favourably received. The Shaper was recognisably human and generated significant physical response, particularly the gesture of waving, discussed previously, despite the fact that we could not see his puppeteers. It seems possible that at least in representing a human, his gestures were slightly more familiar. The Shaper provided the most overt audience participation in the play,

Figure 6: The Shaper Puppet calls forth the sea creatures in *Songs of the Sea.*

by greeting them directly asking questions such as the aforementioned 'shall I eat him?' The farewell was also accompanied by mirrored gestures of waving from both the large puppet and the audience, as discussed in the previous chapter. While the small puppet still waves as it crosses the stage, its

rudimentary hands could be another reason why children did not mirror the gesture as readily as they did the large puppet.

Interaction with actors, or the emotional expression of the actors, was cited in post-performance responses most often as emotionally engaging. Additionally, I observed that often when children were scared by the puppets, they often calmed down when the performers were visible. If puppets and their gestures are unfamiliar, the reality of the humans seem to be reassuring. One scene I observed in which performers often very effectively responded to an anxious audience was the entrance of the second Taniwha, Whataitai. In the script, Whataitai is referred to as 'shy' and is reluctant to appear on stage, however being joined to Ngake he has little choice. In performance the puppeteer, Helen, demonstrated more or less fear from Whataitai in response to the feeling of the audience. Although Helen was offstage, we could see the puppet shaking and hear a non-linguistic refusal. Carl was onstage manipulating Ngake and often improvised lines such as, 'it's ok, come on'. In reassuring his fellow puppet he also seemed to alleviate some of the tension shown by children in the audience. While the facial expressions of the puppets did not change, this more human emotion of the performers expressed sympathy with their audience. Whether the emotion was successfully conveyed as coming from the taniwha is hard to say, but the genuine emotion in the Carl's voice did seem to have a pacifying effect probably because the actor's comfort was caught by the audience through emotion contagion.

In their interview comments, the actors of *Songs of the Sea* overwhelmingly mentioned the word 'energy' to describe the way the show altered according to the audience. They cited examples of when audiences listened fixedly without moving as influencing their own energy levels. Performer Helen Grant concluded, 'Reading the audience lets us see how we can play the show.' (Personal interview 11 October 2011). They also described the ways that audience participation, for example responding during the interactive parts, lead to changes in the script through improvisation. As described in the introduction, Young and Powers identify two types of engagement between young children and theatre, absorbed engagement and interactive engagement (24). The Starcatchers project was primarily looking at theatre made for infants and toddlers, nevertheless certain findings are relevant to the

present discussion of 3 - 4 year olds. Powers and Young observe that when actors were able to directly engage children through eye contact and emotive facial expression children were more engaged (26). Either type of engagement requires energy to be directed appropriately to the stage. The actors acknowledged how difficult it was to engage audiences when children were crying or loudly distracted. One challenge for the cast of *Songs of the Sea* was that because the house was not lit, they were unable to see the audience and had to rely solely on aural cues.

The most obvious instances of children being restless or distracted occurred in *Songs of the Sea* during larger sections of dialogue between the actors. One scene in which children were particularly restless occurred immediately after Whataitai's death. Throughout the telling of the taniwha myth eerie music, lighting and the impressive puppets had largely held the children's attention. At the end of the story, the stage lights returned to the basic wash and the actors reappeared on stage. Language during the storytelling sequence was very different to that used during the actors' dialogue. During the puppet storytelling, the language was delivered at a slow pace and was rich and descriptive.

> My brother was dead and the great freshwater lake
> where we had lived for many happy years was now a
> harbour of sea water. Tired and exhausted, I dived to the
> bottom of the sea.' (Wilson 2011, 9)

In contrast the language during the actors' sequences was fast paced and conversational:

> Helen: What is it?
> Jen: It's a Conch Shell.
> Helen: What are you doing with it?
> Jen: Listening. Here. If you listen carefully, it will
> sing you a song of the sea.
> Helen: Hey guys, check this out. (Wilson 2011, 9).

The reasons children appeared restless during this passage are multifarious. Firstly, they had likely just experienced a heightened emotional state in which they had witnessed the death of a taniwha, made all the more effective by the elements of puppetry, lighting, music and the rich language of storytelling. Thus the sudden break into mundane, conversational language perhaps enabled a switch from sadness to something more like relief, then perhaps to a less emotional and therefore less attentive state. Admittedly, during this scene children were often looking around the auditorium, perhaps interested in trying to work out how others were feeling. A significant amount of the chatter exhibited during this scene was related to the content of the performance. I heard a number of children asking caregivers questions such as, 'What's happening?' and 'Did it die?' To use Susan Bennett's idea of framing discussed in the previous chapter, what seemed to be happening here was that although participants were still involved with the show, they had moved from the inner frame of the fiction to the outer frame of the event because they were searching for answers from parents and caregivers rather than from the story itself. Interestingly, the two school groups observed were far less restless during this scene. Apart from some very quiet discussion and a few glances around, the children remained fairly attentive to the stage. Being a well-known local myth, it could be that these children already knew the story, but without evidence from teachers about prior learning this is not possible to prove.

In *Boxes,* to contrast, apart from the few words issued by the Cleaning Lady, there was no spoken dialogue at all. Attention was readily granted and despite the fact that the main protagonists were puppets, they were easily able to connect in gesture with the audience. At one point in the show Elton comes in and rearranges the furniture that Bernie has just set up. During one performance I observed a child directly ask Bernie, 'what is he doing?' He did not get a verbal response, but a while later this same child desperately tried to get Elton's attention by silently standing and pointing. It seemed that he had first tried to use verbal language to communicate with the puppets but very quickly realised that gesture was a better mode of communication. Eventually, having received no direct response from the puppet, the boy gave up and reverted to simply watching the show.

While interaction with actors was often cited in survey responses as emotionally engaging, colour was mentioned most often as the most captivating element. *Songs of the Sea* starts off reasonably dark and with the minimal stage scenery, near the beginning it is lighting that provides the colour. Throughout the play, as we are introduced to the various creatures of the sea more colour is introduced. Near the end of the show the Moonfish and Sunfish express sadness that all their children are yellow and through song it is told how the fish catch colour from the rainbow to become the various, colourful creatures of the sea. The sudden appearance of the rainbow was also very favourably received with gasps of 'wow', perhaps due to the recognisability of this symbol.

Figure 7: Towards the end of *Songs of the Sea* a colourful rainbow appears.
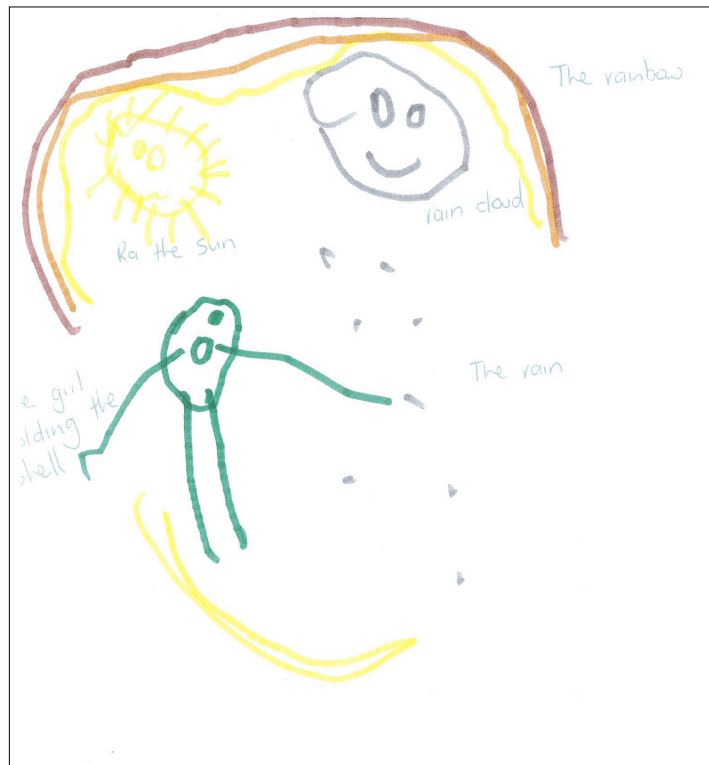
Figure 8 A child's rendition of the Rainbow scene. Several respondants identified colour as being the most emotionally engaging aspect of the show.

In *White*, colour was also obviously a very powerful symbol. At the end of the show Cotton and Wrinkle decide to accept colour into their world, stating how much they like each colour. As mentioned above, during the question and answer sessions it was very common for children to share their favourite colours with the actors. In both *White* and *Songs of the Sea*, children seemed to show a particular appreciation for the differentiation and use of colour, which is perhaps not surprising considering the emphasis that is often placed on learning colours for children of this age.

Lighting was also often cited in survey responses as emotionally engaging. The effect of lighting has been discussed previously, especially in relation to the fact that many children find the darkened auditorium to be challenging, but more can be said about the affectivity of light. At the beginning of *Songs of the Sea,* unusually for a children's production, the houselights are dimmed completely in order to direct focus to the stage. While this darkness at the beginning did indeed lead some children to feel afraid, the majority of children observed reacted to the darkness with seemingly excited anticipation. In all performances there were exclamations of 'ah' and murmurs of 'it's starting.' McConachie, argues that, 'darkened houselights inhibit emotional contagion'

(97). He suggests that in previous eras of Western theatre, when houselights were not dimmed emotional reaction was more uniform as spectators could respond physically and therefore emotionally to not only the stage but also to each other. In *Songs of the Sea* the dimming of the house lights perhaps meant that audiences could receive fewer visual clues from each other, so audience members had to rely on aural cues for emotion contagion. As with colour, more light is introduced through the course of the show, culminating at the end with a mirrorball that projects light around the auditorium. This particular lighting effect was especially favourably received, with many gasps of 'wow' and children following the light with their eyes. As they did so I often observed audience members looking at one another joyfully, perhaps proving McConachie's point that house lighting enables emotion contagion. Not long after the mirrorball effect, a particularly lively song and dance routine occurs, during which disco lighting flashes on both the stage and in the auditorium. I observed that children often looked to each other before dancing along to the music, so again it appeared that lighting enabled the transfer of joy between audience members.

 Music and song was another element often cited as both captivating and emotionally engaging, which is not surprising considering the well acknowledged connection between music and the experience of emotion. Recent studies into the neurobiology of music, for instance that of Panskepp and Trevarthen (2009), find that the connection between emotion and music is evolutionary because both infants and animals use intersubjective sounds, such as vocal call and response, to fulfil emotional needs. (107). This *protomusicality* (the precondition to musical understanding) has been mapped in both the human brain and in other species and is likely to come from the sub cortical region of the brain which is responsible for both emotional and reflexive impulses geared to meet particular survival needs (107-108). Consider for example the way birds use sound to indicate to each other the presence of a threat. Panskepp and Trevarthen identify two things that separate human appreciation of music from animals. Firstly, the human engagement is connected to imaginative recall, mimesis and metaphor and secondly it is systematic and acquires learnt patterns of rhythm and melody (112). In humans, musical intersubjectivity is initiated very early in infancy with tonal

communication between parents and children. Panskepp and Trevarthen show that the human brain recognises musical-emotional signals long before linguistic-propositional signs (107).

Schonmann recognises the semiotic nature of music when she acknowledges that children must learn to read the signs of theatre, for instance that a particular musical soundtrack is added to a production to induce a particular atmosphere (90). However this perhaps does not give enough credit to children's existing musical awareness. When we apply the notions presented by Panskepp and Trevarthen, that musical affectivity is present from birth we have a counter argument which positions infants as already musically competent.

Both *Boxes* and *Songs of the Sea* feature a pre-recorded musical score but *Songs of the Sea* also features singing actors. McCaslin observes that criticism has been made about the abundance of the musical as a genre in theatre for children, however she notes that this is perhaps simply a trend of the time and what is more pertinent is the taste and credibility of the work (342). It is perhaps also true that theatre at large is more often punctuated by pre-recorded musical soundtrack, and this may be simply following trends in the film industry. One of the challenges of a pre-recorded score for theatre is that it can limit the variability of pace that is such an asset for live performance. The cast of *Songs of the Sea* identified in an interview that the pace of the show changed significantly according to the 'energy' of the audience but they also acknowledged that because of the pre-recorded score changes in pace were limited.

Panskepp and Trevarthen mention that music often induces spontaneous physical movement (131), and this definitely appeared to be the case for children watching *Songs of the Sea.* As previously mentioned there were always at least a few children attempting to dance along to the music, particularly the more lively pieces towards the end. For some children the response appeared to be spontaneous and intra-personal, but other times children observed each other and joined in.

Parents and caregivers who identified these captivating and emotionally engaging elements were engaging in post-performance reflection on behalf of

their children, thereby establishing memories of the performance. In the forward to Hurley's book, Anne Bogart says, 'We go to the theatre for the direct visceral experience but also for the anticipated memories.' (Bogart, xii). In order to 'anticipate' memory, one must firstly understand memory itself and secondly one must be aware that theatre operates in the realm of the memory, or perhaps more appropriately, imaginative reconstruction. In the previous chapter I discussed that when watching theatre we utilise an imaginative framework in the mind, which is analogous to the theatrical concept of aesthetic space. McConachie, relying on the psychology of consciousness proposed by Gerald Endelman, reports that 'human consciousness depends foundationally upon memory: we construct images (combining sound, sight, smell etc.) in our mind's eye (and its ears and muscles etc., too) primarily by integrating immediate stimuli with past categories of the mind/brain' (35). So every new piece of information is incorporated into the existing framework and makes sense only through the relationship to remembered information. For many children attending *Songs of the Sea*, this was their first experience of theatre. If anticipation and memory are such important functions of theatrical emotion then how children felt prior to the event would be crucial to their feeling during the event. Unfortunately I was unable to ascertain from teachers and caregivers what had drawn them to attend the performance. As mentioned above, however, during the immediate moments before entering the auditorium a level of anticipation, whether positive or negative, was definitely visible for all participants and this probably influenced their mood and emotional responses during the performances.

Assessing how young audiences emotionally relived and remembered the experience of theatre after the event is also problematic because I was unable, within the scope of this study, to spend time with participants immediately after the event itself. However parents and caregivers shared a few interesting observations that suggest that events after the performance encourage ongoing emotional understanding through the deployment of memory. One of the responding groups for example provided a worksheet for children to complete the week after the performance.
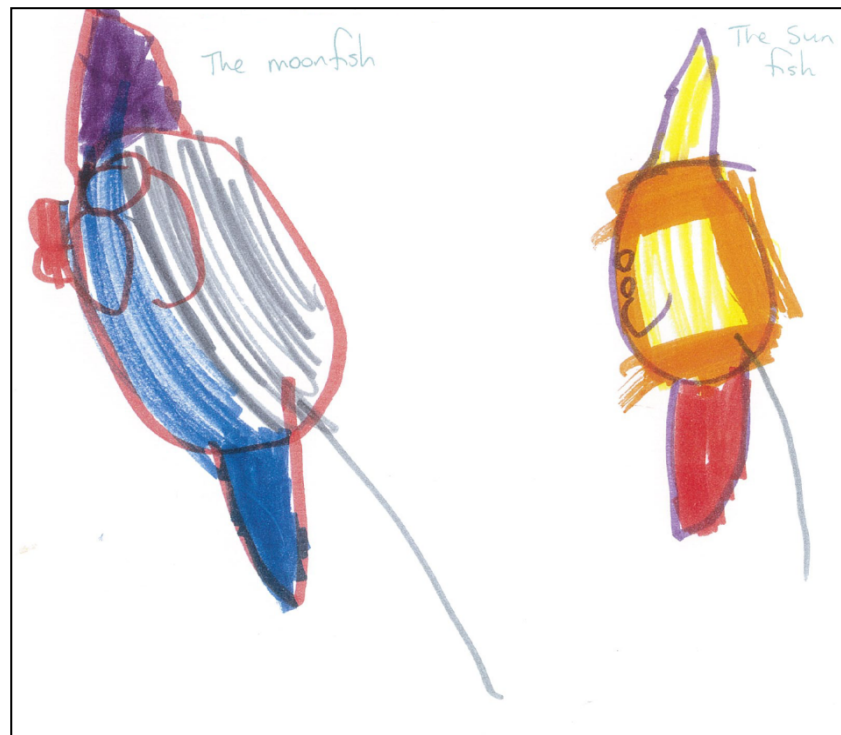
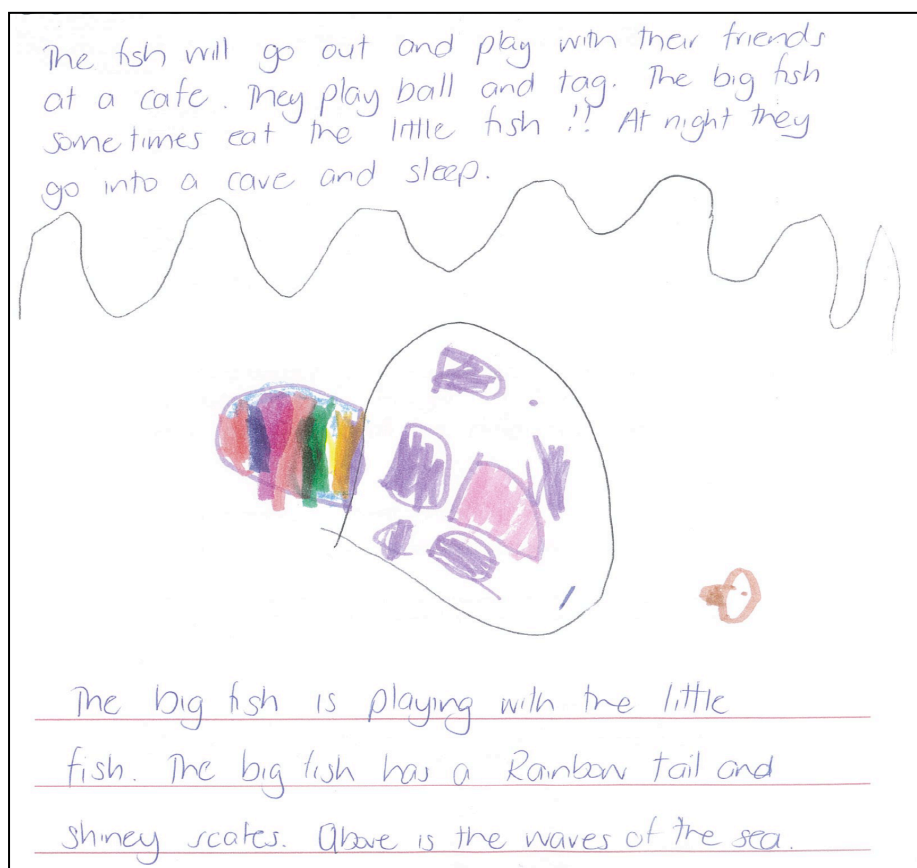Figure 9: A child's depiction of the Moonfish and the Sunfish showing the actor's rods

Figure 10: A child's story made up in response to *Songs of the Sea.* The child has used memory to extract elements of the show and incorporate her existing knowledge.

In concurrence with Reason and Sauter's studies discussed in earlier chapters, the four sample drawings they provided generally showed children recreating the fictional content of the performance, specifically moments of the plot, rather than referring to elements of theatrical construction such as the mechanics of the puppets. The first drawing above (figure 9) is an exception because the child (4) has clearly shown the puppets' rods. In these drawings there were no specific references to emotional recall, but teachers had asked children to depict the aspect of the show they 'liked the best'. Even through this exercise it seems likely that children are being encouraged to create a positive memory of the event. Another of the drawings (Figure 10) shows a fictional story the child has made-up in response to the show.This drawing is particularly interesting because it not only shows the child (4 years old) re-engaging with the show, but transforming them into a new story by incorporating her own knowledge. The child (and caregiver) have obviously had fun with this recreation. Humour is present in the line, 'the big fish sometimes eat the little fish,' which seems to be a reference either to the scene in which the Shaper threatens to eat the Moonfish or to the final 'Big Bum' chase scene between Ngake and a small fish.

The construction of memory through emotional regulation could clearly be seen in the responses of parents and caregivers. In their survey responses caregivers almost always reported enjoyment before mentioning any negative feelings. For example a group whose children had to leave the auditorium first mentioned how most of the children had been 'spellbound' before acknowledging the fear of a 'few' of the children. To return to Walton's hypothetical scenario of Charles and the green slime, Charles' testimony that he was afraid of the slime also says something about Charles' confidence in the fact that he would gain sympathy from such a response. David Buckingham observes this same phenomenon in his investigation of children's emotional responses to television. He identifies that children will rarely admit that they themselves have been afraid, but will often project such feelings onto others, for instance younger children. As they respond, children are establishing an identity about themselves as social and emotional beings and these are informed by and informing the 'narratives of self' they have thus far developed

(59). Similarly, caregivers construct ideas about both themselves and the children in their care through their responses.

One boy, Adam (4 yrs) who I spoke to immediately after a performance of *Songs of the Sea* admitted, 'The start was a little bit scary for me,' but when I asked how he felt at the end he said 'That wasn't so scary.' Adam then recounted that his favourite part was when 'the fish changed into things.' When asked how he thought they changed he said, 'the people went like this…' and mimicked with his hands the way the actors spun sea creature puppets on mobiles to create movement. Adam had a very thorough understanding of his own emotional response. The performance (and possibly his caregiver) had mediated his fear so that by the end he had a favourable impression. Like Charles of the green slime, Adam readily admitted feeling afraid and there is no reason to assume this was anything other than genuine fear. Like the children in Buckingham's study, who often moderated their emotional recall according to their social surroundings (88-89), Adam is undergoing a process of constructing a narrative about himself and his relationship with fiction. In describing the actors spinning the puppets, he shows an awareness of the theatrical construction, but has either failed to grasp the mythological idea (that the creatures had been made by swimming through the colours of the rainbow), or has simply prioritised the theatrical in his reconstruction. To use Sauter's terms, on top of his sensory experience, Adam has a thorough grasp of the artistic level of the performance but is still working to realise the full depth of the symbolic.

One way in which audience members of *Songs of the Sea* created memories and understood the complexity of the show was through dramatic recreation. Part of the enduring success of *Peter Pan* seems to be in the way the mythological characters so readily lend themselves to dramatic play. Marah Gubar, for instance describes in detail how pleased Barrie was to hear that so many home versions were performed in response to the play (Gubar *Peter Pan as Children's Theatre* 485). Immediately after one of the school performances I observed of *Songs of the Sea* teachers had to restrain students from a vigorous game of tag in which children were calling each other 'Big Bum,' and 'Little Bum' in reference to the chase scene. Respondents also described various ways their children had recreated the performance. Several mentioned

children attempting to sing the songs. Four mentioned children pretending to swim and one described how her son had been so thrilled with the actors swimming caps that he found and wore his around the house when he got home.

One caregiver described the way her child, Alex (4yrs) had been scared by the taniwha, but during the performance adults had been able to reassure her. Alex was the child who, as discussed in the introduction, was terrified of the Troll/Teacher at kindergarten. In response to *Songs of the Sea,* Alex's caregiver suggested that the dark lighting and loud voices had contributed to Alex's fear, reporting, 'While Alex says she does not like the taniwha, she has been most interested in the taniwha.' In the time between the performance and response (approximately five months) Alex repeatedly asked for a taniwha song to be sung at both playcentre and home and has chosen to wear dragon dress-ups at kindergarten. At the time of the response Alex said she still does not 'like' the taniwha, but her caregiver described it as an 'absorbing memory'. Alex's caregiver said that Alex had particularly liked the puppetry and the bright colours of the Sunfish and Moonfish. Alex also commented, 'I didn't like the sun 'cos he told the cloud to go away.' The Sun, Moon and Cloud were characters represented by actors with hand held masks. The Sun was especially loud and at one point calls the cloud a 'sooky baba' (Wilson 2011 23). Interestingly Alex liked the Sunfish and Moonfish, which were puppets, but did not like the Sun, which was a mask. While we could interpret this as suggesting that she found the masks more frightening than the puppets, her rationale, 'cos he told the cloud to go away' suggests that she simply did not approve of the behaviour of his character within the context of the fictional framework. Alex's experience of taniwha in different contexts appears to have helped her to work through the memory of what was initially a frightening experience. Five months after the performance she was clearly still fascinated by the taniwha, although she remains adamant that she did not 'like' it at the time.

Another response, received approximately a month after the performance came from an Early Childhood Centre group, whose children (all less than two years and three months) had expressed anxiety during the performance and several had requested to leave. This was the group described above who were

seated at the front of the auditorium. In her survey response the teacher said, 'The other day I saw one of our children with a big plastic fish, making scary noises and 'swimming' it near our fish tank by the other fish.' This reaction is particularly interesting since by using the word 'scary', the teacher seems to have associated this behaviour with the emotional experience of the performance. The fact that at least some of the very young children were still revisiting the performance a month later does perhaps demonstrate how affective the performance had been. Admittedly, there is no way of proving that this behaviour was directly related to the show but the teacher has identified it as such in her feedback. It seems that not only has the child's conception of 'fish' been influenced (she was able to connect the plastic fish toy with the real fish in the tank), but in her play she is also working through notions related to the emotion of fear. She is perhaps coming to terms with her own, or her peers' fear (during the performance) and is working through this in a play situation. In response to which aspect of the performance the children found most engaging, this caregiver said, 'The actors were lovely. Really fun and friendly and engaging- I saw lots of response to them.'

These post performance recreations demonstrate ways in which the children's memories have been established, and that the process of working through the experience, especially on an emotional level is ongoing. Even children at around two years of age found ways of working through the emotionally challenging aspects of the performance. As Harris suggests, it does seem to be the case that children will be emotionally absorbed, rather than detached, but this seems irrespective of their understanding of the distinction between reality and illusion. The two-year-old child playing with the plastic fish at the fish tank clearly understands that the puppet she is playing with is not real. It seems highly unlikely this same child would have mistaken the fish puppet on stage for a real fish.

The taniwha could be a different category. As a mythological creature, its ontological status perhaps requires more work. Children will not encounter a taniwha in everyday life. The taniwha's first appearance was a particularly well presented illusion, but the company made no attempt to hide the puppeteers

later in the performance. If the children had mistaken the fist image of the taniwha head for a real, living creature they were later given a chance to modify their thinking. Nevertheless, the taniwha was particularly frightening. But let us not forget that Whataitai dies on the rocks. When we also factor in the genuine pathos of the scene and sad music it seems likely that children, like adults were actually saddened by Whataitai's death whether they believed him to be real or not.

Just like adults, young children exhibit genuine emotional responses to theatre, however one crucial difference is that they are participating in an on-going process of developing the ability to manage and regulate these emotions. The primary way this occurs is through the transference of emotions from person to person, especially from caregivers. Certain aspects of performance, such as colour, lighting and music contribute to emotional well-being, but the actors, as recognisable human beings, appear to provide the largest amount of security during performances when focus is directed to the stage. When children feel comfortable and excited by the performance these expressions are passed through the audience so that the experience becomes a thrilling and satisfying experience.

Conclusion

Peter Pan the character is dangerous. He fights with a sharp sword and Wendy is truly hurt by his refusal to grow up. If the actor who plays Peter does not allow us to see this danger, he (or she) is doing a discredit to the character. Although Schonmann's concern that an actor who is too realistic will induce real fear is directed more towards villains, Peter cannot be exempt. Perhaps because he is the hero we are likely to forgive Peter's violence while we can never forgive Hook, but in either case if the actor is not sincere in his or her portrayal character our empathetic bond with the character will be compromised. If the actor playing Hook is entirely believable, then it does seem to be the case that young children will indeed be genuinely afraid. However, when they express this fear in some observable way, it does not necessarily mean that they have failed to achieve a necessary degree of aesthetic distance. It simply means that they have not yet learnt to regulate their emotions in a way that fulfils the convention that when watching theatre audience members should sit quietly and listen. The process of developing identity as both readers of texts and as individuals is on-going and does not stop once children have learnt both how to distinguish reality from fiction and how to regulate emotional involvement with fiction.

When authors and theatre artists find appropriate ways to address the dual audience of adults and children, it seems they establish the conditions in which viewing involves both being held captive in the fictional world as well as being free to explore using the imaginative capacity that the brain/mind provides. In certain circumstances, this individual response includes the dramatic license to respond in ways that are unpredictable and this makes theatre, where artists are immediately confronted by their audience, all the more exciting. Young viewers are empowered when texts enable them to take a position that is both empathetic but without assuming emotional identification with protagonists. The Shaper puppet in *Songs of the Sea* achieves this. While the illusion of his creation is thoroughly maintained (we could not see his puppeteers), his question to the audience whether he should eat the Moonfish encourages children to step outside the text and choose their own position. The varied

responses to this scene demonstrate not only the honesty and transparency that characterises children as viewers, but also signify that children are anything but passive or captive recipients.

In contrast to the Shaper, Ngake the taniwha puppet was intimidating for several reasons, despite the fact that we could see full well the mechanism of his operation. Firstly, he hovered between life and lifelessness. From the evidence gathered it is impossible to conclusively say whether young children believed him to be alive or whether they knew for certain that he was a silk puppet. However, owing to the fact that two year old children can easily distinguish between reality and pretence in other situations and that the puppeteers were clearly visible, it seems highly unlikely that they would mistake him for a 'real,' living being. Secondly, Ngake depicted a taniwha. Evidence from developmental studies has shown that frightful reactions to snake-like creatures are evolutionary and a symptom of biological preparedness for learning. Thirdly, children in the audience could both see and mirror the frightened physicality of an actor. When all these factors are put together, it is not surprising that many children found Ngake intimidating. Most though, who were able to work through such fear were rewarded by a playful game of chase at the end of the show in which Ngake was recast as a hero. Emotion is infectious and this scene proved that excitement, like fear, are easily transferred between the performers, caregivers and the young audience.

Considering the social nature of theatre it is especially significant that both adults and children alike are addressed in sincere ways. The use of mythology and metaphor are two ways that companies allow audience members to enter the fiction on separate levels. In Catherine Wheels' *White*, a fictional world is established that is both a representation of recognisable human reality and a new, completely unique scenario and can therefore be interpreted by either an adult or a child in whatever way each decides apporpriate. Neverland, similarly is at once a theatrical illusion, an imaginary, world and a metaphor for childhood itself. Children and adults continue to work through these layers as they re-encounter the text throughout life.

While metaphor does seem to be difficult for young children, even infants are capable of certain functions of representational understanding, such as the ability to distinguish between animacy and inanimacy and the ability to recognise the intentions of others. Before the age of two children can pretend and as Paul L. Harris shows in his bathing teddy example, at two children are able to use the faculty of the imagination in increasingly complex pretend scenarios by creating a cognitive framework which is discrete from the everyday. It therefore seems difficult to argue that children of around the ages three and four would confuse reality with illusion when watching theatre. Instead, the real and the fictional are blended together using an imaginative framework. Conceptual Blending Theory provides a contention to the very notion of aesthetic distance. As McConachie asserts, Coleridge's statement that poetic faith involves a suspension of disbelief assumes a subtraction, that reality must temporarily be put on hold. However blending allows separate notions to occur simultaneously so that what we actually achieve during an aesthetic encounter is a sum of combined ideas. The fictional and the real co-exist in our minds when we enter the aesthetic space.

Figuring out the layers of a performance is an activity in which children and adults work together. When children are afraid, they turn to their fellow audience members and this is because emotions do not occur independently in individual brain/minds but are interactional and embodied through mirror systems. When we recall an experience we actively create the emotional memory through a process of self-regulation. Young children who express fear or anxiety while viewing are not necessarily confusing reality with illusion, rather they are looking for physical signs from those around them that this is a safe environment. Story and the sensory elements of a performance such as lights and music can be especially provocative emotionally, however it is probably the people present who play the largest role in both children's perceptions and their emotional well-being. In the first instance, parents and caregivers who carefully attend to children's reactions can assist with the development of emotional regulation by being aware of the influence their own embodied emotions have on those nearby. Demonstrating expressions of enjoyment and satisfaction can induce such feelings in others. Performers can also make a difference, but it seems difficult for puppets and masks which do

not have the same flexibility of expression to moderate the emotional needs of children. These emotional reactions do not stop when the houselights are lit. Parents, caregivers and teachers assist in the on-going process of emotional construction by providing activities and environment where children can explore the production in their own time and space.

The thrill of mimesis is both exciting and terrifying but together, participants create an environment that is emotionally stimulating for all involved. Young children do have some characteristics that distinguish them as a particular audience, but they experience fiction in the same way as adults: as a work of the imagination that allows a transcendence of the everyday. When children cry at a villain, they are genuinely afraid. When adults jump or recoil at a gruesome scene in a horror film the reaction may not be as visibly extreme but it too is an expression of sincere emotion. Captain Hook's sword does glint in the light and might indeed be very sharp, but embodied emotion is learnt by children through the playful use of the imagination not only during immediate dramatic encounters but in the ongoing fabrications of the mind.

Works Cited

Appleyard, J.A. *Becoming a Reader: The Experience of Fiction from Childhood to Adulthood.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990. Print.

Aristotle *On Poetics.* Trans. Seth Benardete and Michael Davis. South Bend Indiana: St Augustine's Press, 2002. Print.

Barrie, J. M. *Peter Pan, or The Boy Who Would Not Grow Up.* London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1928. Print.

--------'To the Five: A dedication' in Barrie, J. M. *Peter Pan, or The Boy Who Would Not Grow Up.* London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1928. Print

------- *Peter Pan in Kensington Gardens* New York: Charles Schribner's Sons 1906. Web. 24 June 2012.

Bazalgette, Cary and Buckingham, David. 'Introduction' in Bazalgette, C. and Buckingham, D. *In Front of the Children: Screen Entertainment and Young Audiences*. London: British Film Institute, 1995. Print.

Bazalgette, C. and Staples, T. 'Unshrinking the Kids: Children's cinema and the Family Film.' in Bazalgette, C. and Buckingham, D. *In Front of the Children: Screen Entertainment and Young Audiences*. London: British Film Institute, 1995. Print.

Ben Chaim, D. *Distance in the Theatre: The Aesthetics of Audience Response*. Michigan: Ann Arbor, 1981. Print.

Bennett, S. *Theatre Audiences, A Theory of Production and Reception*. London: Routledge, 1990. Print.

Blair, Rhonda. 'Cognitive neuroscience and Acting: Imagination, conceptual Blending and Empathy' *TDR: The Drama Review,* 53 (4) Winter 2009. MIT Press, pp.92-103. Web. 13 December 2011.

Bogart, A. 'Forward' in Hurley, Erin. *Theatre and Feeling.* Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010. Print.

Boxes. By Peter Wilson. Devisors Annie Forbes and Tim Denton. About Face Productions and Capital E National Theatre for Children. 30 July 2011. Performance.

Brecht, Bertholt. *Brecht on Theatre: The Development of an Aesthetic* Edited and translated by John Willet. London: Eyre Metheun, 1964. Print.

Bruner, Jerome. *Actual Minds, Possible Worlds.* Cambridge MA: Harvard U. Press, 1986. Print.

Buckingham, David. *Moving Images: Understanding Children's Emotional Response to Television.* Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1996. Print.

Bullough, ''Psychical Distance' as a Factor in Art and an Aesthetic Principle' in *Aesthetics: Lectures and Essays.* Ed. E. Wilinson. London: Bowes and Bowes, 1957. Print.

Capital E *Mandate.* Web. 29 June 2012.

Coleridge Samuel Taylor. *Biographia Literaria.* London: Dent and Sons, 1949. Print.

Cook, Amy. 'Interplay, the Method and Potential of a Cognitive Science Approach to Theatre' in *Theatre Journal* 59 (2007). pp.579-594. Web. 24 June 2012.

Cook, Elizabeth 'Myths, Legends and Fairy Tales in the Lives of Children.' In Hunt, Peter (ed.) *Children's Literature Volume 1.* London : Routledge, 2006. Print.

Davis, Tracy C. '"Do you Believe in Fairies?": The Hiss of Dramatic License' *Theatre Journal* 57 (2005). John Hopkins University Press. Pp. 5-81. Web. 24 June 2012.

Boxes creators. Denton, Tim, Forbes, Annie and Wilson, Peter. Personal Interview, 20 July 2011.

Escolme, Bridget. 'Authority, Empowerment and Fairytales: Theatre for Young People' in Ed. Joe Keller and Nicholas Ridout. *Contemporary Theatres in Europe: A Critical Companion.* New York: Routledge, 2006. Print.

Gelman, S. A. a. Opfer., John E. 'Development of the Animate-Inanimate Distinction' in *Blackwell Handbook of Child Cognitive Development.* Goswami, U (ed). MA: U. Maldon 2002. Print.

Gubar, Marah *Artful Dodgers: Reconceiving the Golden Age of Children's Literature*. Oxford: Oxford U. Press. 2009.

----------- '*Peter Pan* As Children's Theatre: The issue of Audience'. In *The Oxford Handbook of Children's Literature.* Mickenberg, Julia L. and Vallone, Lynne (eds). Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011. Print.

Grant, Helen. Personal Interview, 11 October 2011.

Harris, Paul L. *The Work of The Imagination* Malden, MA : Blackwell Publishers, 2000. Print.

Hollandale, Peter. 'A Hundred Years of *Peter Pan'.* In *Children's Literature: Classic Texts and Contemporary Trends*. Montgomery, Heather and Watson, Nicola J. (eds). Milton Keynes: Palgrave MacMillan, 2009. Print.

Hurley, Erin. *Theatre and Feeling.* Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010. Print.

Jackson, Antony. *Theatre, Education and the Making of Meanings: Art or Instrument.* Manchester: Manchester U. Press. 2007. Print.
Jake and the Neverland Pirates. Disney Corporation. Web. 28 June 2012.

Kavanaugh, R. D. 'Pretend Play and Theory of Mind' in *Child Psychology: A Handbook of Contemporary Issues*. L. Balter and C. S. Tamis LeMonda. New York: Psychology Press, 2006. Print.

Kiwimoon. By Peter Wilson. Dir. Peter Wilson. Capital E NTC. MacKenzie Theatre, Wellington. 2008. Performance.

Klein, Jeanne. 'From Children's Perspectives: A Model of Aesthetic Processing in Theatre' *Journal of Aesthetic Education,* Vol. 39, No. 4, Winter (2005), pp. 40-57. Web. 24 June 2012.

Krasner, D. 'Empathy and Theatre' in *Staging Philosophy: Intersections of Theatre, Performance and Philosophy*. Krasner, David and Saltz, David Z (eds). Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2006. Pp. 255-277. Print.

Langer, Susan. *Feeling and Form.* London: Routledge and Kegan Paul Limited, 1953. Print.

Matravers, Derek. *Art and Emotion*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998. Print.

Meltzoff, A. 'Imitation as a Mechanism of Social Cognition: Origins of Empathy, Theory of Mind and the Representation of Action.' In Goswami (ed.) *Blackwell Handbook of Cognitive Development*. Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2002. Print.

McBride, Douglas. *White (9).*Catherine Wheels. Web. 20 June 2011.

McCaslin, Nellie. *Creative Drama in the Classroom and Beyond, sixth edition.* White Plains, N.Y: Longman: 1996. Print.

McConachie, Bruce. *Engaging Audiences: A cognitive Approach to Spectating in the Theatre.* New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008. Print.

McDowell, Myles. 'Fiction for Children and Adults: Some Essential Differences' in Hunt, Peter (ed.) *Children's Literature Volume 1.* London : Routledge, 2006. Print.

Nikolajeva, Maria. 'The Identification Fallacy: Perspective and Subjectivity in Children's Literature.' In Ed. Michael Cadden, *Telling Children's Stories: Narrative Theory and Children's Literature. Lincoln: U. Of Nebraska Press,* 2011. Web. 24 June 2012.

Nodelman, Perry 'The Implied Viewer: Some Speculations about what Children's Picture Books Invite Readers To Do and To Be' in Hunt, Peter (ed.) *Children's Literature Volume 1.* London : Routledge, 2006. Print.

Palmer, Kerryn. Personal Interview, 11 October 2011.

Panskepp, Jaak and Trevarthen, Colwyn 'The Neuroscience of Emotion in music' in *Communicative Musicality: Exploring the Basis of Human Companionship.* Malloch, S.and Trevarthen, C. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009. Print.

Pavis, Patrice. *Analysing Performance Theater, Dance and Film.* Trans. David Williams. Ann Abor: U. of Michigan Press, 2003. Print.

Reason, M. 'Did You Watch the Man or Did You Watch the Goose?': Children's Responses to Puppets in Live Theatre." In *NTQ (New Theatre Quarterly)* 2008 24.4: pp. 337-354.Web. 24 June 2012.

------------ *The Young Audience: Exploring and Enhancing Children's Experiences of Theatre*. Stoke on Trent (UK) Stirling (VA, USA): Trentham Books, 2010. Print.

Rose, J. *The Case of Peter Pan or The Impossibility of Children's Fiction.* Revised Edition. Houndsmlls, Basingstoke: Macmillan Press, 1994. Print.

Rumplestiltskin. By Rachel Henry. Dir. Jane Waddell. Kidzstuff Theatre Company. Tararua Tramping Club, Wellington. 29 July 2011. Performance.

Sauter, W. *The Theatrical Event: Dynamics of Performance and Perception.* Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2000. Print.

Schonmann, S. *Theatre as a Medium for Children and Young People*. Dordrecht, The Netherlands: Springer, 2006. Print.

Schore, Allan N. 'The Self-Organisation of the Right Brain and the Neurobiology of Emotional Development.' In *Emotion, Development and Self Organisation: Dynamic Systems Approaches to Emotional Development.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000. Print.

Slade, Peter. *An Introduction to Child Drama.* 6th ed. London: U. of London Press, 1967. Print.

Songs of the Sea By. Wilson, Peter. Dir. Kerryn Palmer. Puppetry Dir, Bill Guest. Composer. Stephen Gallagher. Capital E National Theatre for Children. MacKenzie Theatre, Capital E, Wellington. 23 September -21 October 2011. Performance.

Smythe, John. *White* review. N. pag. Web. 23 March 2012.

States, Bert O. *Great Reckonings in Little Rooms: On the Phenomenology of Theater.* Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985. Print.

Wall, Barbara. *The Narrator's Voice: The Dilema of Children's Fiction.* New York: St Martin's Press, 1991. Print.

Walton, Kendall L. *Mimesis as Make-Believe: On the Foundations of the Representational Arts*. Cambridge MA. Harvard U. Press, 1990. Print.

White. Dir. Gill Robertson. Devisors Andy Manley and Ian Cameron. Catherine Wheels Theatre Company (Edinburgh). Capital E, Wellington. 10 March 2012. Performance.

Williams, Margaret 'Including the Audience: The Idea of 'the puppet' and the Real Spectator'. In *Australasian Drama Studies* 51: Oct 2007 pp. 119-132. Web. 24 June 2012.

Wilson, Peter. Personal Interview 10 June 2008.
-------------*Songs of the Sea.* TS, 2011. Capital E National Theatre for Children.

Witherington, David C., Campos, Joseph J., and Hertenstein, Matthew J. 'Principles of Emotion and its development in infancy.' In *Blackwell Handbook of Infant Development.* Bremner, G. and Fogel, A. Oxford: Blackwell, 2001. Print.

Young, Susan and Powers, Niki. *Starcatchers Final Report,* 2009. Web. 24.6.2009.

Appendix A: Interview Questions for Artists

What do you consider to be your ideal audience?

Which theatrical devices have you included, excluded or emphasised due to the audience you are creating for?

How would you define the relationship between actors and the audience in your work?

How do you monitor whether children are 'with you' through the performance?

How do you think reading puppetry is different from reading other forms of theatre?

What are your favourite audience responses?

These questions are intended as a guide and further questions are likely to arise out of the interview itself.

It is anticipated that artist interviews will take no longer than 30 minutes each.

Appendix B: Questionnaire for Teachers and Parents

(To be completed 1-2 weeks after the performance)

What aspect of the performance do you think was most captivating to your child/children?

What aspects do you think were most emotionally engaging for your children?

Were there any aspects of the performance that you think children did not understand?

What (if any) incidences have you observed of your child/children acting or playing scenes from the performance

What (if any) conversations have your child/ children initiated about the performance?

What age/ages are your children?

Have your children had much prior experience of theatre?

Please feel free to include any other comments or artefacts such as drawings, learning stories or examples of children's work that relate to the ways that your child/ children have been revisiting the performance.

Many thanks for completing this questionnaire. If you have any questions or would like to discuss any aspect of the research please feel free to contact either myself, Catherine Swallow, or my supervisor, Bronwyn Tweddle. Contact details are included on the information sheet.