and then, you act

making art in an unpredictable world

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introduction

> I always took for granted that the best art was political and was revolutionary. It doesn't mean that art has an agenda or a politics to argue; it means the questions being raised were explorations into kinds of anarchy, kinds of change, identifying errors, flaws, vulnerabilities in systems.
>
> (Toni Morrison)

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The South African writer Antjie Krog described meeting a nomadic desert poet in Senegal who described the role of poets in his culture. The job of the poet, he explained to her, is to remember where the water holes are. The survival of the whole group depends on a few water holes scattered around the desert. When his people forget where the water is, the poet can lead them to it.

What an apt metaphor for the role of the artist in any culture. The water is the history, the memory, the juice, and the elixir of shared experience. I want to keep this notion in mind while examining the role of the artist in our present climate.

My previous book of essays, *A Director Prepares*, detailed the process of preparation and groundwork for an artist. But preparation is only useful in relation to the ensuing action. This book is about action during times of difficulty, whether personal or political.

Love is not a feeling. No matter how much you feel, love means nothing when unrelated to action. Love is action. In order to engage in effective action you must first find something that you value and

put it at the center of your life. When you put your life into the service of what you value, that action will engender other values and beliefs. Through engagement, things happen. Movement is all. Keep moving and yet slow down simultaneously. In Latin this is known as *festina lente*, "make haste slowly." Inside of this paradox, you make a make a space where growth and art can happen. Within the framework of art and theater you will find a special freedom and the space and time to explore complexities. It does not cost you anything. It costs you your life.

You cannot expect other people to create meaning for you. You cannot wait for someone else to define your life. You make meaning by forging it with your hands. It requires sweat and commitment. Working toward the creation of meaning is the point. It is action that forges the meaning and the significance of a life.

And it is critical to have some direction and be clear about certain impossible goals that you are trying to achieve if you hope to achieve some of the possible goals. And you must be bold enough to speculate, postulate and imagine on the basis of partial knowledge. At the same time you must remain open to the very strong possibility that in fact you are way off the mark.

We are living in very particular times that demand a very specific kind of response. No matter the immensity of the obstacles—political, financial or spiritual—the one thing we cannot afford is inaction due to despair.

In the immediate aftermath of 9/11, people in the United States awoke in a profound and palpable silence. In German the word *Betroffenheit* aptly describes the feeling. Simply translated, the word means shock, bewilderment, perplexity, or impact. The root of the word *treffen* "to meet" and *betroffen* is "to be met" and *Betroffenheit* is the state of having been met, stopped, struck, or perplexed. I see it as the shock of having been met, stopped abruptly in the face of a particular event.

Don Saliers, a professor of theology at Emory University suggests that the silence that follows a violent event is similar in quality to the speechlessness of a powerful aesthetic experience. He describes a space and a time engendered by the shock of the event where language ceases. We are left only with an awareness of the limits of language and the limits of what can be taken in. In this gap definitions disappear and certainty vanishes. Anything is possible—any response, any action

or inaction. Nothing is prescribed. Nothing is certain. Everything is up for grabs.

In the case of post-9/11, patriotism rushed in to fill the gap of this fertile and palpable silence. Patriotism served as a way to replace disorientation and *Betroffenheit* with certainty. And certainty, if taken to its extreme, always ends in violence.

As it turns out, this manufactured certainty did, in fact, lead to violence and more violence. Self-perpetuating aggression became its own *raison d'être* and the battle is worldwide, ugly, and nearly impossible to stop. U.S. citizens were told that any criticism of the War on Terror was unpatriotic. And yet, the concept of an open society is based on the recognition that nobody is in possession of the ultimate truth. When one is in touch with the complexities, it is impossible to be certain. If we fail to recognize that we may be wrong, we can only undermine any action done in the world.

The artist's job is to stay alive and awake in the space between convictions and certainties. The truth in art exists in the tension between contrasting realities. You try to find shapes that embody current ambiguities and uncertainties. While resisting certainty, you try to be as lucid and exact as possible from the state of imbalance and uncertainty. You act from a direct experience of the environment.

Significant political events always drop a lens between the environment and the perceiver. Generations view the world according to the most dominant lens. The Great Depression, for example, permanently altered the way that vast numbers of Americans saw their own lives and fortunes. The McCarthy era produced insidious paranoia and a general suspicion about left-wing political convictions. The events of September 11th 2001 also changed the lens. For many, the event intensified the feeling of separation from the rest of the world. For others, the sense of isolation was replaced with an acute sensitivity to the globe's interconnective tissues. If, as the Buddhists suggest, the art of life is the art of adjustment, then what are the necessary adjustments for artists working in the present climate? What needs to change in light of the new lens? How can we stay connected to our own culture and remember where the water is? How can we work in the theater within an atmosphere of fear and hostility and constantly attempt to reveal the water supply of our humanity? How can we nurture the necessary courage, energy, and expression in the face of adversity?

the results will be richer, denser, and more energetic. The outcome of an artistic process contains the energy of your commitment to it.

Next, recognize the basic necessary ingredients. The classic recipe for effective theater is threefold:

1 you need something to say;
2 you need technique; and
3 you need passion.

Like a milking stool, if one of the three legs is missing, the stool will topple over and be ineffectual. It is as simple as that.

Each chapter in this book considers and examines tools for action—for making the music more intense: context, articulation, intention, attention, magnetism, attitude, content, and time. I hope that my thoughts and digressions are useful in the field of action.

chapter 1

context

> We are here, there, not here, not there, swirling like specks of dust, claiming for ourselves the rights of the universe. Being important, being nothing, being caught in lives of our own making that we never wanted. Breaking out, trying again, wondering why the past comes with us, wondering how to talk about the past at all.
>
> (Jeanette Winterson)

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The crash of empty cardboard boxes falling off a shelf sounds differently to a New Yorker on the day, week, or month post-9/11. The view of a skyscraper causes different associations before and after the brutal event. After that September morning, the lens through which these images and sounds were perceived had altered. The context shifted.

Radio Play is the SITI Company staging of Orson Welles's 1938 radio play *War of the Worlds*. Adapted from a story by H. G. Wells for radio by Howard Koch, *War of the Worlds* was first broadcast on the foggy fall evening of October 30, 1938, as a Halloween thriller, or as Orson Welles put it: "The Mercury Theatre's own radio version of dressing up in a sheet and jumping out of a bush and saying 'boo!'" Welles and his company Mercury Theatre on the Air unwittingly frightened millions of American listeners who took the transmission seriously and thought that Martians had actually invaded Earth. In the context of pre-World War II paranoia, the program terrified a nation. Thousands fled their homes in panic. In New York City, swarms of

I look to history, literature, science, and aesthetics in order to figure out how to function positively and effectively within the present environment. I have found many practical ideas and stimulating encouragement in the process. The research has been helpful and gives me courage and hope in the day-to-day reality of running a theater company and directing new productions.

Leonard Bernstein, the composer and conductor, suggested that a musician's response to violence should be to "make the music more intense." This is what I want to do. I want to make the music more intense. Not just loud but also eloquent, expressive, magnetic, and powerful. I look around at the American theater, and I see it mostly steeped in an old-fashioned aesthetic and performed on weak knees. I want it strengthened, emboldened, wild, persuasive, and relevant to the issues of our time. We need courage and a love of the art form. Powerful theatrical productions, brave writing, and radiant acting can galvanize and profoundly transform expectations about how broad the spectrum of life can be beyond daily survival. In a culture where daily human hopes have shrunk to the myriad opiates of self-centered satisfaction, art is more necessary and powerful than ever.

Rather than the experience of life as a shard, art can unite and connect the strands of the universe. When you are in touch with art, borders vanish and the world opens up. Art can expand the definitions of what it means to be human. So if we agree to hold ourselves to higher standards and make more rigorous demands on ourselves, then we can say in our work, "We have asked ourselves these questions and we are trying to answer them, and that effort earns us the right to ask you, the audience, to face these issues too." Art demands action from the midst of living and makes a space where growth can happen.

One day, particularly discouraged about the global environment, I asked my friend the playwright Charles L. Mee Jr., "How are we supposed to function in these difficult times? How can we contribute anything useful in this climate?" "Well," he answered, "You have a choice of two possible directions. Either you convince yourself that these are terrible times and things will never get better and so you decide to give up, or, you choose to believe that there will be a better time in the future. If that is the case, your job in these dark political and social times is to gather together everything you value and become a transport bridge. Pack up what you cherish and carry it on your back to the future."

Near the end of the twentieth century, the Dalai Lama was asked if he would want to return to the earth in another century, even though it is certain that poverty, pollution, and overpopulation will make the planet a miserable environment to inhabit. "If I could be useful," was his response.

In a violent culture sidetracked by the attraction of fame, success, and individuality, this notion of being useful feels radical. Can art intend to be useful? Art is an exquisite and extravagant waste of time and space and a world complete unto itself. The product contains the process of engagement, struggle, and achievement that made it come to life. And yet the irony is that art is indeed useful in deep and enduring ways.

The poet Joseph Brodsky describes art as the oxygen that might arrive when the last breath has been expended:

> A great writer is one who elongates the perspective of human sensibility, who shows a man at the end of his wits an opening, a pattern to follow... Art is not a better, but an alternative existence; it is not an attempt to escape reality but the opposite, an attempt to animate it.

In the United States, we are the targets of mass distraction. We are the objects of constant flattery and manufactured desire. I believe that the only possible resistance to a culture of banality is quality. To me, the world often feels unjust, vicious, and even unbearable. And yet, I know that my development as a person is directly proportional to my capacity for discomfort. I see pain, destructive behavior, entropy, and suffering. I dislike the damaging behavior and blindness of the political sphere. I watch wars declared, social injustices that inhabit the streets of my hometown, and a planet in danger of pollution and genocide. I have to *do* something. My chosen field of action is the theater.

In order to "make the music more intense," you must first examine your intentions. If the motivation for action does not transcend the desire for fame and success, the quality of the results will be inferior. If your aim is intense engagement rather than self-aggrandizement,

curious and frightened citizens crowded the streets. In the town of Grover's Mill, New Jersey, the local water tower was pumped full of buckshot as frightened believers fired at what they thought was a giant Martian war machine.

During the 1999–2000 season, SITI Company performed *Radio Play* successfully in many cities across the United States. Staged in the fictional setting of a radio broadcasting studio, we wanted to suggest all of the terror of the invading Martians without using any special effects. Audiences enjoyed the story and our austere approach to telling it. A second tour to fourteen cities across the United States was planned to begin in the middle of September 2001. Then came 9/11. As the smoke lifted from downtown Manhattan, the new context transformed the meaning and affect of the play, bringing with it a new intimacy and relevance. The lens radically refocused the fiction. A number of venues around the country tried to cancel the engagement because the content was now too relevant and too close to their communities' present anguish. Even though I managed to convince many theaters to keep their commitments, privately I also was worried.

Several days after 9/11 we began pick-up rehearsals on East Fourth Street in the East Village for the *Radio Play* tour. The studio, belonging to New York Theatre Workshop, filled with smoke that wafted up from downtown. As the actors moved through the play, I heard the familiar lines in a new light: "Now the smoke's spreading faster. It's reached Times Square. People are trying to run away from it, but it's no use. They're falling like flies... Now the smoke's crossing Sixth Avenue...Fifth Avenue...a...a hundred yards away...it's fifty feet..." Previously, these words felt safely at a distance. In the new context, through the new lens, the words touched raw emotions abrasively.

What would our play mean to an audience through the lens of recent events? I wondered if the performance would be helpful or an irritant to the present pain.

As it turned out, the tour was well received and did indeed feel useful. Audiences around the country seemed to crave being in a room together, moving communally through a fictional experience that harmonized with their present ambiguities. The identification of community and the comfort of being together joined with the relevant content stuck a chord. They invariably wanted to linger afterwards and talk. *Radio Play* touched more intimately upon the dark emotional spaces within the context of the present climate. The narrative took on new meaning and seemed to exercise a more useful and necessary role in the public arena.

Semiotics, the study of signs, is useful in understanding the role of context. Semiotics examines how meaning is created and understood. Semioticians classify signs and sign systems in relation to how they are transmitted. Juxtaposition is one of the basic building blocks in the generation of signs. In visual language, juxtaposition of imagery contributes to the creation of context and meaning.

When the Berlin Wall toppled in 1989, the world held its breath for a brief moment while the eastern bloc countries suspended political certainty and were suddenly free to choose their future. Western capitalism was not the inevitable solution to the abrupt lack of political authority. In a moment of mass wakefulness, people stood on the wall's debris in a state of political, social, and emotional arrest. Anything was possible.

I felt a similar potential in the *betroffenheit*—the sense of surprise, powerlessness, and grief after the horrors of 9/11. We awoke, looked around, shared compassion and a willingness to make necessary sacrifices. The doors swung wide open.

Unfortunately, the vulnerable and soulful condition of shock in the fall of 2001 was quickly subsumed by patriotism. Rather than using the psychic arrest to identify a new sense of responsibility in the world, the U.S.A. entered Afghanistan and then Iraq. The perpetuation of violence with violence put an unfortunate stop to a significant look at who we are and our responsibility in the world. The new global context has not yet altered our lives as much as it needs to. Americans were not yet ready for catharsis. We have not made the necessary adjustments. But art can help us to do so. And it is not too late.

In the post-9/11 context, essential life and death issues feel closer to us as we contemplate getting on a subway or an airplane. We seem to be undergoing a profound paradigm shift where religion, values, and meaning must be examined from fresh angles.

Recently I directed *Death and the Ploughman*, a play written by Johannes von Saaz in Bohemia in 1401 during a paradigm shift in human history when the theretofore-accepted medieval sensibilities—faith,

the meaning of life, religious hierarchy, and authority—were suddenly called into question, leading to the start of the Renaissance. Since the premiere of our production in 2004, we continue to tour nationally and internationally because people want and need to see it. We found that in our current context the play speaks directly to present ambiguities and manages to shed light in the dark places of our collective psyche. The story is compelling and universal but also timely. A man loses his beloved wife in childbirth. Bereft, he goes to Death and asks for recompense. What ensues is a profound assessment of why we live, what life is about, and why we die.

The words "Please give my love to Richard," mean one thing in the context of a casual meeting on a street corner and something quite different when spoken by a person on their deathbed. The context in this case signifies the meaning of the words. In the language of semiotics, meaning is born when the "signifier" (in this case, the circumstance) meets the "signified" (here, the words).

Try this experiment: close your eyes and imagine a young man holding a child in the middle of an empty field. Now mentally erase the image. Next, picture a semicircle of soldiers standing, guns poised, in an open field. Again, clean the slate. Finally, put the two images together: visualize a semicircle of soldiers surrounding the man and child in the middle of a field. The meaning has changed radically simply by the juxtaposition of these disparate images. In the language of semiotics, the man with the child might mean, or signify, "family." The soldiers signify "war." When you put the two together, the signified and the signifier, you have created a "sign," or meaning, with a much greater impact and complexity: "the tragedy and human cost of war."

During the worst hours of the Yugoslav conflict, a Bosnian production of the American musical *Hair* became a popular draw in the war-torn city of Sarajevo. Every night, audiences struggled across dangerous bombed-out streets to file into a damaged theater to experience a Yugoslav adaptation of this 1960s anthem of a play.

In 1992, a reporter from the *New York Times* made the trip to Sarajevo to cover the production and its extraordinary impact on audiences. He described the palpable necessity for such a musical within the context of this war-torn country. The song "Let the Sun Shine In" was a particular highpoint of the show. People sang along, emotions

high, with obvious enthusiasm for its message. The song resonated to this audience in the framework of their very particular day-to-day struggles.

At the end of the article, the reporter noted that a Broadway producer had seen the production and was contemplating bringing it intact for a commercial run in New York.

I read the article, astonished at the American producer's lack of imagination. He clearly understood nothing about context. Imagine an audience in a commercial theater in New York City in the late 1990s before the attack on the Twin Towers. This imported production would have none of the meaning that it provided the Sarajevo audiences.

One of the basic functions of art is what the Greeks named *catharsis*. According to Aristotle, catharsis is a purifying and cleansing of the emotions brought about through the evocation of intense fear and pity in an audience. The etymology of the word "catharsis" also suggests, "to shine light in dark places."

Meaningful theater experiences do shine light in the dark places of the soul. To engage catharsis it is necessary to be sensitive to where the dark places are to be found at any particular moment. And this demands sensitivity to context.

The artist's job is to get in touch with the dark places of the soul and then shed light there. Sharing the process with others is the point. Within the context of our post-Cold War, post-9/11 climate, shedding light in newly fecund dark places is a valuable activity. The dark places of the soul that haunt our dreams are understandably matched by the tendency to shut out the issues with the busy work of the daylight hours. But without looking into those dark places, as Carl Jung suggested, we will lose touch with our essential humanity.

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The spirit of liberty is the spirit that is not too certain that it is right.
(Learned Hand)

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The truth does not exist as one thing; rather, it is a tension between opposites. The philosopher Hegel stated that all human development

is driven by the conflict of opposites. He called this dynamic dialectic. It is the artist's job to live in the space between oppositions while articulating compelling fictional worlds from the extreme state of this dialectical uncertainty. A context, in that it is always juxtaposed to a particular event in space and time, further complicates the tensions of opposites. Context is never simple and rarely logical. It can be rife with irrational ambiguities. And yet, the fictions that we create can help us to organize our relationship to the world and find wider clarity and conviction. Hearing the song "Let the Sun Shine In" within the complications of a war-torn Sarajevo made a certain crazy logic and sense to those who experienced it.

Art reimagines time and space, and its success can be measured by the extent to which an audience can not only access that world but becomes engaged to the point where they understand something about themselves that they did not know before.

The fictional world of a play usually differs from the context in which it is performed. *Romeo and Juliet*, for example, is set in Verona, Italy, but when first performed the context was Elizabethan England. The fictional world of *Hair* is New York in the hippie 1960s, but the context of the performance is Sarajevo during a war or Michigan in 2006.

A consciousness of context will significantly impact your selection of themes, issues, and subject matter, as well as choice of venue and community. We always see the world around us through the current lens of our particular cultural and political moment. A lens is the focusing apparatus of a given circumstance. The lens magnifies certain aspects of the environment and obscures others. In late 2001 an entirely new lens replaced the previous one and redefined almost every aspect of life in the United States.

The translation of page to stage is the translation of the logic of ideas and words into the logic of time and space. To imagine and then articulate the fictional world, or context, of the play is helpful to designers, producers, actors, public relations, and everyone involved in the process. In what context does the play live?

When bringing a play into the present moment, try to imagine the fictional context in which it might best unfold. Is it the present? Is it a historical moment in the past? Is it an imaginary country and society? It is this fictional context that will inevitably meet the actual context in which the performance takes place.

A new play is different from one that has a performance history. The framework of a brand new play is the context of the world into which it is born. The task is primarily to make sure that the play can be clearly heard and seen. There is no need to create a context inside of a context. But because classic plays carry the baggage of their own histories, interior context becomes an issue.

Two vital questions to ask in approaching a classic play: "What was the energy of the very first production?" and, "Who needs to perform this play now?" The original New York production of *Hair*, for example, channeled the revolutionary energy of the burgeoning peace and love movement of the 1960s. For *Hair* in Sarajevo, twenty-five years later, the actual context of the war-torn country engendered the energy and vitality that miraculously mirrored the first American version of the play. As for "who needs to perform this play?" it was clear in the Sarajevo production that the Bosnians needed to perform the play. No fictional underpinning was necessary to invoke up the original energy.

To find answers to the two questions, I look at the context of the very first production as a key to finding a corresponding context in which the play might happen in the present climate. What follows are two examples.

I directed Rodgers and Hammerstein's *South Pacific* in 1984. Based on short stories by James Michner, the original musical *South Pacific* opened in 1949 when the United States was still reeling from the experience of World War II. The framework of the musical, the issues, and the situations were well known to audiences of that time. These audiences responded with wild enthusiasm, partially due to the wonderful music and book and also because the work addressed the tension caused by the insecurities and hopes of the moment.

But for me, the question was how to harness the original energy of the first production of *South Pacific* into the context of 1984. I asked myself, what does this musical mean in the contemporary climate? What is the significance of performing it at this time? Once I identified the original force released in the birth of the musical, the question became how to channel that energy?

As it happened, in 1984 the United States sent troops to Beirut and Granada. An international crisis ensued. What would happen, we asked, if our production of *South Pacific* were performed by the actors

as a graduation ceremony at a clinic for young war-damaged men and women? What if this clinic could help these men and women who had suffered traumatic experiences in Beirut and Granada to reintegrate back into American society? And what would it be like if, as a graduation ceremony from the clinic, the clients of this clinic performed *South Pacific*? The roles would be distributed based upon each individual's particular traumatic experience. For example, if a young man had lost his best friend in the trenches, he would be assigned to sing the song "Ain't Nothing Like a Dame," because it is essentially a male-bonding song. The act of performing would serve a therapeutic function. In our production, each actor played a "client" who was then cast by the fictional clinic to perform one or more characters in the musical *South Pacific* as part of a graduation ceremony.

The enthusiastic reception to *South Pacific* surpassed our expectations. We spoke to contemporary audiences, and I wager that our production was also true to the spirit of Rodgers and Hammerstein's masterpiece. We changed nothing in the music, story, or characters, except for the fictional context in which the story unfolded. I believe that we managed in this way to harness something of the actual energy of the very first production. We did not imitate the appearance of the original but, through a careful examination of context, we found an useful container.

I decided to direct Maxim Gorky's *The Lower Depths* because I loved the ensemble nature of the piece and I was interested in its fictional context. The play takes place in prerevolutionary Russia in the middle of winter, which was then an environment of great poverty and struggle and where the characters could express love only through violence. The emotionality and the story drew me to it. I wanted to spend time with the play, learn from it, interact with it, and then share that journey with audiences. But the obstacles I faced were particular. I had the opportunity to direct the play with undergraduates at New York University. How could these young actors tap into the brutal yet beautiful energy of the situations found in Gorky's play? How could these fairly pampered students find the necessary maturity and expressive cruelty to embody such characters and their particular situations?

In the East Village of New York during this time, a brutal skinhead punk scene thrived, featuring hard-core rock clubs, slam dancing, skin-piercing, and late-night carousing. Here, too, I found love expressed through violence. What if, I wondered, a group of skinhead punks found a copy of Maxim Gorky's *Lower Depths* and became infatuated by it? What if they decided to act out the scenes on a deserted outdoor basketball court in the East Village during the winter months? What if each skinhead punk chose their favorite character and came dressed in what they imagined a prerevolutionary Russian/East Village look might be? What would happen when they played out the situations within the play?

And so, the actors played skinhead punks who enacted the play in search of a certain spiritual alchemy. Through the fictional contextualizing of this classic play, I believe that we found a spirit parallel to Gorky's intentions. We entered through the back door in order to get to the front.

Context can be misused. Benetton ads, for example, use shock images that have nothing to do with clothes in order to establish a brand. Emaciated African children, aborted fetuses, a dying Aids patient, and the blooded shirt of a dead Croat soldier make audiences stop in their tracks to pay attention to the name of the clothing company.

Recently, Benetton released a billboard photo of a Catholic priest in full dress kissing a nun on the lips. "It was a joke, to show that the habit doesn't make the priest," says Luciano Benetton, the C.E.O. of the company. It was banned in Italy after Vatican protests but won the Eurobest Award in Britain. "Our photos have a fantastic effect on public opinion." He said, "We wanted to probe emotions and stir debate, and we did."

In 1990, the director/choreographer Martha Clarke worked with writer Charles L. Mee Jr. on a production entitled *Endangered Species* until a dispute about the moral responsibility around contextual issues caused a rift. During the process, Clarke decided to include images of Auschwitz in the production. Mee insisted that the images be intersected by a certain textual responsibility toward the meaning of Auschwitz. This did not interest Clarke and so Mee and she agreed not to continue working together on the production. In the context of collaboration, it is vital that responsibility for the creation of meaning within an artistic framework is shared.

Charles L. Mee Jr. wrote a play for SITI Company entitled *bobrauschenbergamerica* inspired by the visual artist Robert Rauschenberg. We

rehearsed and premiered the play at the Humana Festival of New American Plays in the spring of 2001. Designer James Schuette came up with a striking set design: the entire production would be played upon an immense American flag. In the context of the pre-9/11 world, this seemed absolutely fine. We opened, and the play was successful enough to be booked in several arts centers around the United States and festivals in Europe. And then we learned what the play means in a post-9/11 context. Suddenly doing a play about America on the signifier of an American flag changed the meaning of the play to audiences everywhere. In the United States, the play was experienced as a great relief from the stress of the times. The performances felt like celebrations. On the other hand, in France, in the context of the very left-wing intellectual theater at Bobigny, just outside of Paris, the event was fraught and difficult. French audiences watched the revelation of the set—an American flag in all its glory—and the subsequent high jinks of the performance. For them, it was painful and complex. I do not know if in this context the French saw the flag as a demonstration of patriotism or as a critique of a nation. I do not know if their difficulty was in any way useful or meaningful.

As we continue to tour *bobrauschenbergamerica*, I am hypersensitive to the shifting and clashing contexts that greet every performance. The international festival circuit, for example, is an odd artificial context created where cultures are on view and compared, and meanings become a fluid currency. And yet, I find the confusion of contexts positive and hopeful. The Japanese director Tadashi Suzuki once stated, "International cultural exchange is impossible—therefore we must try." I agree with all my heart. The impossibility of seeing beyond one's own cultural context is a political act in the world and has the potential to break down the rigid assumptions surrounding us.

The charge of our times is to consider context, to consider the context in which we make theater now. Context can shift subtly or tip abruptly. Where are the dark places, the unexamined corridors of the soul now? What are we dreaming about at night but do not dare to think about during the day?

chapter 2

articulation

> Words are too awful an instrument for good and evil to be trifled with: they hold above all other external powers a dominion over thoughts.
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> (William Wordsworth)

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One of the most radical things you can do in this culture of the inexact is to finish a sentence. Notice what a vibrant act in the world this can be. Feel the power of finishing a sentence. And yet, it is difficult to complete a sentence. Worlds conspire against it. Listen to people speaking around you. Inarticulate people are not dangerous to any political or societal systems. Political agenda has conspired against a citizen's ability to speak. Words are dangerous and they can be powerful. It takes effort and stubbornness to finish a sentence.

But words can give access to what now may seem unattainable. Learn not only to use words but also to find your own words. Doors that seemed shut will open with the correct combination of words. Your own words may not arrive easily or immediately but eventually, with stubbornness and sweat, they will appear.

Robert Brustein founded the Yale Repertory Theatre while running the Drama School at Yale University. Ten years later, invited by Harvard to establish a new theater and acting company in Cambridge, Massachusetts, Brustein approached the President of Harvard and described his wish to establish a school to train young theater artists in conjunction with the newly formed American Repertory Theatre.