THEATRICALISING CIVIC SPACES: RADIX THEATRE, BOCA DEL LUPO AND SITE-SPECIFIC PERFORMANCE IN VANCOUVER

by

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ABSTRACT

In 1985, Minimal Art sculptor Richard Serra emphasized that were his sculpture, the Tilted Arc to be moved from its site in New York’s Federal Plaza, it would have been an act of destruction. Since then, his phrase, “To move the work is to destroy the work” has become synonymous with site-specificity, a practice conceptualized in the Minimalist Art era in a bid to redefine relationships between art work and viewer through a heightened sense of site, time and act of viewing. From the fecund experimental, outdoor and street performance work which arose during the late 1960s and 1970s in America and parts of Europe, site-specific performance emerged as a significant form of theatre practice favoured for its potential for sensuous, three-dimensional, and visceral performance environments. Due to its conceptual borrowing of site-specificity from visual art theory however, site-specific performance, inherently different from the sculptural form, has amassed various debates, definitions and models proffered by theorists and practitioners, trying to pin down guidelines and rules for the practice. The main debate at hand is whether theatre artists should stay true to Serra’s statement with regard to anchoring and fixing their performances in specific sites, or can the ephemeral and live nature of performance rework site-specificity into something more open and fluid. To this end, various theatre companies have approached site-specificity in innovative ways and in my study, I have illuminated the creation process and works of two Vancouver theatre companies – Radix Theatre and Boca del Lupo, who have since 1994 and 2001 respectively, been consistently experimenting with site-specific performance in ways which show a positive divergence from site-specificity’s original requirements. My thesis analyses the two companies’ process of creating performance,
body of work and hones in on two key productions from each company, each of which offer examples as to how the theatre artists have engaged with site and site-specificity in innovative ways.
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To the memory of my adventurous, ever curious, talented and lovely aunt

Leung Sui Wa

1933 - 2007
1 INTRODUCTION

Site-Specific Performance and its Sites of Tension

1.1 Introduction and Thesis Aims

I can no longer sit passively in the dark watching a hole in the wall, pretending that the auditorium is a neutral vessel of representation. It is a spatial machine that distances us from the spectacle and that allies subsidy, theatre orthodoxy and political conservatism, under the guise of nobility of purpose, in a way that literally ‘keeps us in our place’. I can no longer dutifully turn up to see the latest ‘brilliant’ product of such-and-such in this arts centre, where I saw the latest ‘brilliant’ product of others only yesterday, a field ploughed to exhaustion.

Mike Pearson (Wiles 2)

This thesis explores Vancouver examples of a primarily western performance movement generated during the late 1960s, characterised by an exodus of art and theatre from the sacred spaces of museums and theatrical auditoria.1 Although directorial and scenographic innovations enabled by technologically advanced theatres cannot be denied, purpose-built theatres structurally designed to keep performers and spectators physically in place – both apart and in roles – became anathema to many artists and theatre practitioners in the seventies. David Wiles, expressing his frustration for these “brilliant products” or what he

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terms commodity theatre in A Short History of Western Performance Space (2003), outlines two key reasons which led to the site-specific performance movement. The first is contemporary theatre artists' dissatisfaction with purpose-built theatre architecture, which performance theorist Mike Pearson calls the "spatial machine", and its commercialist goals. (2) Of this sentiment against purpose-built theatres, Wiles writes, "theatre architecture turned out to be one of modernism's greatest failures, flexible, versatile theatres stripped of social messages proving a conceptual impossibility." (22) The flexibility and versatility of these spatial machines seem to imply that purpose-built theatres are devoid of meaning as a blank canvas starts as a virginal slate for painting, since they house new "brilliant products" one after another.² Accordingly, these commodity productions inevitably lack social agency resulting from their itinerant and rootless natures geared toward capitalist exchange. In a critique with Marxist undertones however, Wiles points out, citing Pearson, that "space is never empty" and "can never be a neutral vessel of representation." (4) Pulling away from director Peter Brook's famous statement in Empty Space (1968): "I can take any empty space and call it a bare stage", Wiles charges purpose-built theatres for their façade of neutrality and emptiness, when they are actually structures upholding theatre orthodoxy and political conservatism. (4) He further writes of Pearson, who in 1998 sensed that "the only way to escape the dead hand of the theatrical past is to work in found spaces that impose given rules." (3) As I shall go on to explore, many theatre artists in the seventies did try to escape the conventions of the theatrical past by moving out of purpose-built theatres to create work

² This view is somewhat extreme however, as even theatre architectures or "spatial machines" can amass their own history and value, albeit as a palimpsest for productions perpetually writing over the past, or as a value construct upholding theatre institutions, canons and orthodoxy. Even though they seem "blank" and stripped of social messages, time passing necessarily endows the theatre space with a life – a history of events, innovations, premieres, and so on. Attending a conference in Toronto, Canada in May 2006, I had a chance to listen to renowned marionette master, Ronnie Burkett, in a new lecture/theatre auditorium. He spoke of the difference between performing or speaking at the new venue, fresh and without any discernible character, and that of a little old theatre, full of atmosphere and narratives – of joy, lost, pain, sorrow, history and so on, thus troubling the idea that the spatial machine is an empty space.
in found spaces. Wiles attributes this movement to be one of the main reasons for site-specific performance’s emergence. In found spaces, the sites’ existing narratives and values can connect with performance to broach more experimental works than commercialist theatre.

Accompanying this repulsion to the politically conservative and unwelcome orthodoxy associated with spatial machines is the second reason that led to the emergence of site-specific performance: the desire to re-embry the eye, which has become separate and distant in its perspectival function as put forth by philosopher, Rene Descartes. (Wiles 4) According to Wiles, Descartes cultivated the detached scientific gaze in order to understand the position of human beings in relation to the universe, based on contemporary beliefs of the classical cosmos. In the Renaissance era in 1588, ideas of the finite and bounded classical and medieval space gave way to the new concept of space as infinitely extensible. (Wiles 4) Since the position of human beings was displaced from the centre of the cosmos as believed in classical times, Descartes assumed a position on the sidelines where he could view reality. The result of this repositioning and Descartes’ explorations into the gaze was his restoring of the “satisfying centripetal order of the classical cosmos” through the eye and brain. As Wiles expounds, Descartes believed that “visual sensation passed through the optic nerves to be mapped onto the [pineal] gland in the middle of the brain, where the mysterious ego could study the image.” (4) Descartes thus, “installed in the centre of the skull a miniature theatre where the self could contemplate reality and decide how to deal with it.” (Wiles 4) Gazing out of the cornea from a miniature theatre in the middle of the brain, the viewer sees through a pseudo-proscenium arch, reminiscent of a spatial machine convention where spectators watch from a “secure place in the darkened seat in the stalls [in this case] within the skull.”
In the changing perspectival climate during the late sixties and seventies in Europe however, critics rose up against ocular primacy, to enable a return to the body as a material whole for experience. As I shall go on to explore in the following chapters, site-specific performance, created outside purpose-built theatres is able to free itself from seating structures which traditionally kept performers and audiences in place and apart. In this way, spectators are able to experience the performance and environment three-dimensionally, rather than from a two-dimensional perspective. Thus, site-specific performance emerged from a need to escape the spatial machine and also the desire to activate sensuous experience for spectator and performers.

Although site-specific performance, sometimes referred to as outdoor theatre, emerged from experimental work in the 1960s and 1970s, outdoor performance is not entirely new to theatre and performance history. Wiles also notes throughout his book, before architectural theatre structures set parameters, rules and theatre-going etiquette for audiences, theatre was created outdoors in open spaces, public places, town-squares, village centres or even by the river bed. While these performances took place in spaces similar to work created in found or unusual sites today, their intentions and meanings are different from site-specific performance, given that they were early manifestations of theatre and culture. The rise of architecture specific to theatre production generated social connotations for both audience and performers and highlighted class division and gender differences mostly in the form of

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3 During my interview with Andrew Laurenson, one of Radix Theatre's artistic directors, he used the word “three-dimensional” to describe audience experience in site-specific performance.

4 This reference is erroneous given that site-specific performances can be produced in indoor found spaces. Due to the number of outdoor site-specific performances however, the terms are sometimes used interchangeably.

5 Theatre architecture existed since the Classical Greek theatre carved by the hillside and Roman theatre, which was built on the Greek tradition. Yet in different cultures, performances were held without rigid structures and could occur in open spaces around a fire for example, or on wagon stages that were mobile. Asian theatre like the Balinese festival and the founding of Japanese Kabuki, all began outdoors without set architectural spaces.
seating arrangements, for example, with the Elizabethan Globe Theatre which divided classes amongst the pit, galleries and boxes. The spatial segregation between performers and audiences also resulted in a code of acceptable behaviour ossified and upheld in various manifestations of the theatrical event. Thus, along with theatrical activity of the late sixties and during the seventies especially within Europe but also in America, seeking a revisionist approach to theatre “out there” – away from the spatial trappings of the theatre building – came a rejection of these conventional codes of behaviour by various practitioners and theorists who contributed to the movement.6 The new ideal was to collapse the divide between performers and audience and take into account the possibilities the environment had to offer. As Wiles cites Pearson, the challenge was to “fold together place, performance and public.” (3) Although the movement saw a range of experiments and practices that can be broadly described and categorised, one main genre to have developed theoretically and practically in this vein is site-specific performance.

In this thesis I focus on two Vancouver theatre companies, Radix Theatre and Boca del Lupo who have, since 1994 and 2001 respectively, been experimenting with site-specific performance possibilities in innovative ways. From their experiments with the form, artists from both companies have developed their own approaches to sites in a range of performances within Vancouver, with Radix’s production, Box2 also touring to Victoria and Toronto. I will consider and analyse how and why these two companies have both taken up the terms and challenges of “site-specificity” in their works. I will argue that while the “site-

6 These conventional codes of behaviour apply especially to indoor theatre spaces that require audiences to remain seated during performances, to react verbally or by applause only in their immobile positions, and to observe a general sense of decorum associated with the theatrical event. Many theatre practitioners’ need to create work outside of spatial machines also seems to imply a rejection of behavioural codes insisting on a passive audience that is “kept in place”. The preference is for a physically and intellectually engaged audience attuned to political and social issues which theatre works illuminate.
specific” label is theoretically linked to the traditional notion that assumes a work’s fixity to a site – based on site-specificity’s origins in the Minimal Art movement mainly involving sculpture in the 1960s – this definition is often reworked in generative ways during the creation process in performance. There is general consensus amongst theatre artists that simply placing a performance in a site with no conceptual connection disrespects the site and takes away from site-specific performance as a form. Indeed, some theatre artists delving into site-specific work begin their creative process with pre-conceived ideas about site-specificity in mind and treat them as guidelines to their practice. In contrast, others work with existing conceptual ideas or with their own understanding of the relationship between site and work, thereby opening up new ways of looking at site-specificity. Radix Theatre and Boca del Lupo both offer vivid alternatives to the traditional notion of site-specificity through their experiments. In order to explore the companies’ choices and address their innovations, I will first define the terms of my analysis and then place them in the broader context of site-specific performance in Canada of “the last decade or so” – since the late 1990s. (Houston and Nanni 7) Canadian theatre practitioners and scholars Andrew Houston and Laura Nanni note in their editorial for the academic journal, Canadian Theatre Review (CTR) that this was a time where “an increasing number of artists [began] to migrate from purpose-built theatres and galleries to spaces of creation”, ranging from “cars to loading dock, swimming pools to waterfronts or houses to factories.” (Houston and Nanni 7) I will follow this with an introduction to both Radix Theatre and Boca del Lupo’s mandates and production histories, before moving on to analyse select productions.

7 The term “fixity” here refers to two things. The first is the work’s physical immobilisation: that it must remain in one specific site. The second refers to the fact that the work must be physically and conceptually derived from the site and therefore created only for it.
While site-specific performance has gained tremendous breadth as a field of research, its uniqueness and richness as both a localised and globalised practice begs for closer analysis. Current scholarship in the field cover practices in the United Kingdom, America, Australia and Canada. In Canada however, not all theatre groups experimenting in this genre have received scholarly attention. Moreover, the thematically-based academic journal CTR which I mentioned earlier has only recently (2006), published an issue with site-specific performance as a heterotopian overview of practices and experiments within the country. Drawing inspiration from the “specificity” in the label, site-specific performance, I hope to analyse specific, localised productions a little more in order to explore how they fit into more internationally determined definitions or alternatively, how they fit into existing conceptual models. In this endeavour, I shall be looking closely at select Radix and Boca productions. While both companies were mentioned in CTR and have been reviewed by newspaper critics, they have not received much scholarly attention beyond this. Given the richness and success of their productions, they are definitely worth reviewing.

1.2 Methodology

I will conduct a largely phenomenological analysis of the productions. In this respect however, I am limited due to the ephemeral nature of performance. Even though I wish to have consciously lived and experienced all the productions I have selected for analysis, it was not possible. Thus, from the range of productions I shall explore, I was only able to attend one of the four works. This casts an interesting angle for my research as I will be at once, archivist, researcher, and in philosopher de Certeau’s terms, both a voyeur and a walker. (92-93) In order to piece together productions I have not experienced, I have interviewed artists,
following the University of British Columbia's guidelines for ethical research, combed through available archival materials and analysed newspaper reviews. For the performance I managed to attend, I have both my memory of sensory details and notes taken from experiencing it as an event.

1.3 Overview

Chapter Two introduces and explores key terms for my analysis: site-specific performance and environmental theatre. I will briefly trace the beginnings of “site-specificity” in visual art, particularly, in Minimal Art terminology and concept of the mid-1960s. I will then move on to survey its appropriation by the theatre medium – site-specific performance and more generally, by environmental theatre. Since site-specific performance has recently been variously termed – a fraternal twin of environmental theatre, or even the new nomination for environmental theatre, I wish to explore the impetus for their emergence as well as compare some of their theoretical bases in order to shed light on their interchangeability as genre names. The focal point for this overview will be intention and ideals that precipitated the movement into what it is today.

The remainder of the thesis treats the cases of Radix Theatre and Boca del Lupo as a means to explore how site-specificity in performance can be open to more open and fluid interpretations. In Chapter Three, I introduce each company’s respective background, mandate and production history. In Chapter Four, I describe and analyse two productions by Radix and in Chapter Five, I analyse two by Boca. I have selected these productions as examples of innovative approaches to site-specific performance, specifically in their level of
engagement with sites. In each chapter, I also review how each company's ideals, mandates and performance concepts fit into or upset parameters of site-specific performance dealt with in Chapter Two. Chapter Six, the concluding chapter, will review my research findings and include suggestions for further study.
This chapter begins with a brief introduction to the era that produced various prominent performance practices including environmental theatre and site-specific performance. The concept of site-specificity germinated from the Minimal Art movement in the 1960s, amidst wide-ranging experimental work aimed at tackling or exposing social problems and questions haunting and burdening society. Part of this chapter explores the original impulses during the late 1960s and early 1970s which led to the performance movement characterised by works in unusual, found or non-purpose built theatre sites. I will give a brief overview of several performance practices aligned with this characteristic, ultimately focusing on site-specific performance as the emerging significant and fecund field of exploration. The overview highlights the idealism and sentiments that gave rise to a spate of fundamentally different practices which nonetheless, shared impulses that generated the movement. These practices, which can be described as early manifestations of site-specific performance, contributed to diverging ideas of what constitutes the practice, particularly when compared to site-specificity’s original usage in Minimal sculpture. The overview is not meant to be exhaustive or all-inclusive. I have focused on key intentions, definitions, ideas and debates surrounding site-specific performance with a purpose of drawing together major points of references, which will ultimately converge on a Canadian, and specifically, Vancouver landscape.
2.1 Brief Background to Era

The disenchantment with commercial theatre paralleled a broader disenchantment with the culture at large, with America as a world power, with material well-being, with the ethic of the isolated figure labouring to merit the approval of society. (Sainer 14)

The era spanning the sixties to the seventies was one of social and cultural upheaval, following the wake of two world wars, the Cold War, the arms race and lasting through and beyond the effects of the Vietnam War. Within the arts and especially in sculpture and theatre, established conventions were questioned and rebelled against, the underlying problem being the commodification of the arts. Products churned out by museums, galleries and theatre architectures fed mindless entertainment to the masses, while "aesthetic and social considerations ran a bad second to the needs of the box office." (Sainer 13) Theatre scholar Arthur Sainer, tracing the avant-garde theatre movement in the United States in his book, The New Radical Theatre Notebook (1997) noted, "playwrights and directors felt that the commercial theatre barely contained vestiges of a serious art form [and] the significant concerns of their lives could not be dealt with in any depth in the commercial theatre." (14) As a result, experimental work within art, sculpture and theatre proliferated, with a focus on collapsing the divide between spectator and art/theatre work, reflecting the Artaudian ideal of

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8 Douglas Crimp argues in On the Museum's Ruins (1993) that the commodification of sculpture in galleries led to the Minimal Art movement, an alternative to mainstream sculptural work, exploring spatial and viewer relationships. David Wiles, as I mentioned in Chapter 1, argues that commodity theatre caused theatre artists to explore performance outside of purpose-built theatres.
assaulting the spectators’ senses and stripping the theatre of superfluous conventions to its minimal needs. One of the main solutions seen in both sculpture and theatre was an escape from the “spatial machine”, a term coined by performance scholar Mike Pearson to describe the theatre auditorium. As I quoted at the beginning of Chapter One, Pearson saw the theatre auditorium or arts centre as emblematic of theatre orthodoxy and political conservatism, selling “brilliant” product after “brilliant” product, which to him, was a “field ploughed to exhaustion”. (Wiles 2) By approximation, the museum or gallery was the visual art “spatial machine” counterpart to the theatre auditorium. As I will mention in the next section, the Minimal Sculptural movement, often credited with originating the concept of site-specificity, sought to rebel against commercialism through marrying sculptural work to specific sites, in order to foreground the primacy of spectator experience. This practice seems fundamentally phenomenological, prioritising the spectator’s conscious, lived, experience of the work, rather than a distanced and objective viewing of an autonomous artwork associated with the divisions kept by spatial machines. The shift from the spectators’ voyeuristic role to their conscious experience can also be seen as an “attack on the prestige of both artist and artwork”, (Crimp 16-17) an inherent privilege associated with exhibitions. In this way, to return to Sainer’s words, the “ethic of the isolated figure [or artist] labouring to merit the approval of society” gives way to communal participation and exploration. (13)

Accompanying this anti-commercialist sentiment was a theoretical struggle within disciplines which theatre historian Marvin Carlson addresses in his book, Performance - A Critical Introduction (2nd Edition) (2004). According to Carlson, the concept of “performance” expanded in the 1960s and 1970s due to terminology and theoretical strategies developed in the social sciences, particularly in anthropology and sociology. In the 1973
issue of the academic journal *The Drama Review*, theorist and theatre practitioner Richard Schechner listed seven areas “where performance theory and the social sciences coincide”.

(11) Thus, performance in everyday life, including gatherings of every kind, ethnography, human behaviour and so on, coincided with the structure of sports, ritual and play. (11) This broadened denotation and connotation of “performance” opened theatre studies to inter- and cross-disciplinary studies. Despite the proliferation of performance ideas and practices within theatre in 1970, Carlson notes that many “performance” theoreticians and practitioners were almost entirely associated with the art world, still dominated by the theoretical interests of minimalism and high modernism. (139) The minimalist attitude in “each separate art reject[ed] the ‘dispensable, unessential’ conventions of its own tradition as well as of other arts to seek its own formal essence.” (Carlson 139) This similar attitude is evident in modernist theatre history where Edward Gordon Craig, Adolphe Appia and subsequently, Artaud, “stripped away accumulated conventions and the borrowings from other arts to discover the ‘essence’ of theatre”. (Carlson 139) However, performance also intruded art territory and, as art critic Michael Fried notes, “a kind of stage presence antithetical to the essential minimalist project” emerged. (Carlson 139) Scholar Nick Kaye also quotes Fried in his book *Site-Specific Art – Performance, Place and Documentation* (2000): “in forcing an incursion of the time and space of viewing into the experience of [art] work, Fried argues that minimalism enters into a realm which ‘lies between the arts’, where ‘art degenerates as it approaches the condition of theatre’” (3) Despite Fried’s despairing of the survival of art against the reach of theatre and performance, this stripping down of conventions and borrowings between disciplines helped to open new perspectives regarding site-specificity in both art and performance.
The incursion of space – surrounding, literal or real – into the viewer’s experience of artwork revealed minimalism’s engagement with different orders of space, which as Kaye notes, challenged the viewer’s privileged position as reader “outside” the work. (25) As mentioned in Chapter One, this privilege is linked to the ocular primacy of the Cartesian subject. In her dissertation Performing World, (2005) scholar Laura Levin elaborates on the “historical operations of perspectivalism”. (91) Using the example of the proscenium stage, she writes, “the picture frame caters to ‘a familiar modern appetite: the desire to view others as theatre from a position of unstaged freedom. By giving the world to be seen without incorporating the spectator within its visual terrain, the picture frame stage installs the audience in a position of perceptual mastery.” (91) Levin, however, charges this perceptual mastery to the “solipsism of the Cartesian subject – the individual who verifies the reality of the external world relative to his [sic] own being.” (119) Reminiscent of minimalism’s efforts to challenge the viewer’s privileged position, Levin draws on phenomenological readings of site to redress the Cartesian posture: by “destabilising the subject”, and “recognising that the environment has a phenomenal or literal existence that is independent or [the viewer’s] apprehension of it.” (119) According to Levin, “by foregrounding visual and other sensory registers of perception, environmental and site-specific performances are uniquely able to facilitate an encounter with what [she terms] the ‘environmental unconscious’, which can render perceptible those aspects of environment that we habitually engage and routinely overlook.” (120) This shift from the spectator’s ocular and perspectival mastery to one that involves the conscious experience of the environment through the bodily forth of space9 is

9 Stanton B. Garner, Jr. uses the phrase “bodily forth of space” in Bodied Spaces: Phenomenology and Performance in Contemporary Drama (1994) to describe performers and spectators literally filling the space with their bodies and therefore experiencing the environment and their relationship to each other.
an integral impulse and ideal of experimental performance during the era, which was imbued with political, economic and social issues that needed immediate and active reception.

This era thus saw anti-commercialist sentiments, a stripping away of non-essential traditions and conventions and the foregrounding of environmental and spatial elements in performance in order to jolt the spectator's senses and unconscious into acting on social change. In the next section, I will give a brief introduction to site-specificity from its Minimal Art movement origins.

2.2 Site-specificity: Origins in Minimal Art Movement

To move the work is to destroy the work.

- Richard Serra, (Kaye 2)

In the mid-1960s, what has now become known as “site-specificity” emerged as visual art theory, used mostly by sculptors of the Minimal Art movement to expose the material conditions of galleries and museums, which art historian Douglas Crimp recognised to be “art’s institutionalisation within the system of commerce”. (155) According to Crimp, “the real material condition of modern art, masked by its pretense to universality [and its precondition of autonomy – belonging to no specific site], is that of the specialised luxury commodity.” (155) This “no-specific-site”, or no-place, as Crimp terms it, was, in reality, the museum – both the “actual museum and the museum as a representation of the institutional system of circulation that also comprises the artist’s studio, the commercial gallery, the collector’s home, [...] the corporate headquarters lobby, the bank vault” and so on. (Crimp
17) Acting as residences for art, galleries and museum spaces effected the “disintegration of culture into commodities” through their elite connotations and business operations. (155) At the same time, art’s institutional exhibition spaces, which Crimp saw as surrogates of the private domicile – for which much art has historically been made to adorn in the bourgeois private interior – were revealed to be determining, constraining, and drastically limiting art’s possibilities. (160) Facing this architecturally-ossified tradition and cultural climate, Minimal artists worked to revive the meaning of art lost in its mindless consumption through site-specificity – a method characterised by the “refusal of circulatory mobility” in the work’s “belongingness to a specific site.” (Crimp 17) In this way, Minimal sculptures were often large or technically un(re)movable, except by physical destruction or destruction by enforced removal leading to its conceptual destruction.

An emblematic example of this conceptual destruction is seen in the famous controversy of Minimal sculptor, Richard Serra’s Tilted Arc. To recount briefly, the Tilted Arc was a 12-foot-high steel-plate wall, 120 feet long structure, inhabiting a “site that is public in a very particular sense” (Crimp 176) – a plaza flanked by a government office building housing federal bureaucracies and by the United States Court of International Trade. According to Crimp, the plaza also adjoins Foley Square, the location of New York City’s federal and state courthouses. In the literal meaning of site, the sculpture was in a plaza; in the figurative sense of site, however, it was situated in the “very centre of the mechanisms of state power.” (176) Moreover, this structure tilted slightly toward the office building and the trade courthouses, swept across the centre of the plaza, dividing it into two distinct areas. In its radical form and material, “the sculpture imposed a construction of absolute difference within the conglomerate of civic architecture.” (Crimp 179) Furthermore, while the
“sculpture did not disrupt normal traffic patterns” — it did “implant itself within the public’s field of vision;” “soliciting, even commanding attention, the sculpture asked the office workers and other pedestrians to leave their usual hurried course and follow a different route, gauging the curving planes, volumes, and sight lines that marked this place as the place of sculpture.” (Crimp 179) Serra’s sculpture faced much opposition from the moment of its installation in 1981, with “the most vociferous [coming] not from the public at large but from the representatives of the state, from judges of the courts and heads of federal bureaucracies whose offices are in the Federal Building.” (Crimp 180) Lengthy discussion amongst opposing parties suggested moving the work to another location. It is this suggestion of his work’s mobility that prompted Serra to say the words, “to move the work is to destroy the work”, (Kaye 2) indicating that moving the Tilted Arc would destroy it conceptually. The sculpture was eventually physically destroyed since the sculptor would not have it moved.

The struggle Serra faced against those in power illuminated the political orthodoxy surrounding conventions of art, while illustrating the power of space, which is never neutral, such as the plaza which became a giant chess-board or metaphorical battlefield, both purported territory of those in power and a public space which could technically be claimed by the people for the people. This controversy in the history of site-specific artwork, led to an important and significant debate in later definitions and practices of site-specific performance, split between two main camps: 1) partisans of “fixed” site-specific work and 2) theatre artists who believe that site-specific performance can tour. As with all extreme antinomies, there are those who settle for a compromise in between. These distinctions distil a range of possible definitions of site-specific performance, ranging from the purist view of absolute fixedness to one more open and fluid, depending on creation process. Thus, these
opposing and in-between “camps” are the basis for my argument that the purist notion of site-specificity in performance can be reworked in positive ways.

In the next section I will briefly trace several performance precedents of site-specific theatre, known under different names and varying in impulses. Given the vast range of potential historical antecedents, I cannot be comprehensive. Instead, I will address several key practices which are reflected in what scholars, theatre critics and the general public assume or perceive to be site-specific performance today.

2.3 Site-specific Theatre: Early Precedents

I am for an art that is political-erotic am mystical, that does something other than sit on its ass in a museum. I am for an art that embroils itself with everyday crap and comes out on top. I am for an art that tells you the time of day, or where such and such a street is. I am for an art that helps old ladies across the street.

Sculptor Claes Oldenburg (Martin 1)

Site-specific theatre is a vast field and practices and productions claiming to be site-specific have also, by nature of their staging aspects, been referred to as outdoor theatre, environmental theatre, street performance, and so on. As such, it is interesting to trace several prominent and influential experimental theatre practices which emerged in the late sixties and seventies that in some way, contributed to site-specific theatre practice today.
Bradford D. Martin argues that with the end of the Cold War emerged a pervasive effort by diverse collectives to “move beyond bourgeois cultural venues such as theatres, concert halls and museums, to democratise culture by trying to communicate with broader audiences where the performer-activists encountered them – mostly in the streets.” (Martin 10) According to Martin, one of the main cultural consequences of the Cold War was the “retreat from overtly political subject matter in the arts”. (8) The McCarthy era, which saw the 1947 House of Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC) “Hollywood” hearings”, greatly repressed cultural expression, so much so that the Living Theatre’s cofounder, Julian Beck, recalled “even the critics would say ‘you cannot mix art and politics’.” (Martin 8) The trend toward “apolitical” art extended to the visual arts, where abstract expressionism became the dominant form, though it was “neutral” and “devoid of ideology”. (Martin 8) Therefore, one of the main impulses for outdoor or street performance in this case stemmed from the need to communicate with broader sections of the public, often with some degree of activist sentiment.\(^\text{10}\)

One of the most prominent theatre companies that emerged during this era was the Living Theatre, founded by Judith Malina and Julian Beck in 1947, the same year as the HUAC hearings. Although the company started off pioneering unconventional staging of poetic drama in the 1950s and early 1960s in New York, they were faced with “a cultural establishment ill-equipped to accept a unique experimental enterprise” and had four of their

\(^{10}\) Martin mentions several important antecedents to groups such as the Living Theatre prior to the Cold War. One such example was the Provincetown Players in the 1910s, which practised “collective creation” and stressed personal liberation and community goals. Many Player participated in the 1913 Paterson Strike in the old Madison Square Garden where fifteen hundred silk workers re-enacted their strike before an estimated audience of fifteen thousand. (8)
performance venues closed down by the authorities over ten years. (Living Theatre website) By the mid-1960s, the company began operating as a nomadic touring ensemble, morphing, while in Europe, into a collective; living and working together toward the creation of a new form of non-fictional acting based on the actor's political and physical commitment to using the theatre as a medium for furthering social change. (Living Theatre website) In the 1970s, the collective also began to create work for non-traditional venues, such as the prisons or Brazil, the gates of the Pittsburgh steel mills, the slums of Palermo and the schools of New York.

In The New Radical Theatre Notebook, (1997) Sainer mentions another prominent company, The Pageant Players, formed by a group of young people who wanted to use theatre as a forum for their political beliefs, of a generally Marxist orientation. Their predominant frustration was that the United States was imperialistic abroad and repressive and smothering at home. In terms of approach, they “wanted no part of a traditional theatre building”, preferring to perform indoors and out, at political demonstrations, schools, parks, on the street and even in a Laundromat. (Sainer 18) Yet another influential company was the Bread and Puppet Theatre, founded at the beginning of the 1960s by German-born Peter Schumann. Both a puppeteer and choreographer, his troupe’s theatre approach combined the “use of massive puppets, at least twice the size of humans, with sometimes grotesque, sometimes noble countenances, tiny rod puppets, and human figures, often masked, with rude humour, lyric gentleness and almost archetypal violence in the stories.” (Sainer 17) The troupe performed regularly in a loft on Delancey Street in New York and also took to the streets, exploring issues such as the US involvement in Vietnam. The troupe later moved beyond the streets to other sites like a mountain. (Sainer 43) For the Living Theatre, The
Pageant Players and the Bread and Puppet Theatre, political statements were important aspects of their performances and the streets and public spaces were used to "disseminate" their messages, which were not possible in the theatre auditoria spatial machine, which together with museums, were linked to the "American military-industrial complex". (Martin 7)

The last antecedent of site-specific theatre I shall mention here is Richard Schechner's The Performance Group. Originally called the New Orleans Group when it was founded by Schechner, Franklin Adams and Paul Epstein, the group moved to New York in 1967 and was involved in staging a guerrilla-warfare piece, simultaneously taking place at twenty-seven locations both in theatres and on the street. (Sainer 20) Eventually, with the number of members dropping to fifteen, the group called itself The Performance Group and moved to a garage on Wooster Street in Manhattan, renovating and calling it the Performing Garage. It is important to note Schechner's approach as he was (as the other companies mentioned here), disenchanted with the theatre auditorium convention, which divided spectators and performers into distinct spaces. He was inspired by artist Allan Kaprow's book, Assemblages, Environments, & Happenings (1966), in which Kaprow, as Schechner summarises, proposed and created environments, based on paintings expanding and escaping from their frames, eventually spilling over to the floor, becoming assemblages and whole constructed environments for spectators or "experiencer" to explore as they wished. Based on this theory, Schechner coined the term Environmental Theatre for a new practice which drew spectators into performance action through spatial innovations within set and seating design and the doing away of the established etiquette of sitting and watching passively. Thus, for the group's performances, "environments" were constructed allowing performers and
spectators many levels throughout the space. (Sainer 43) For example, seating arrangements were designed with several levels, using wooden scaffoldings and platforms. These towered over and surrounded the centre performance space almost like a theatre-in-the-round, but innovative in that they were unevenly spaced, ranging from little nooks for a single spectator to a galley on the highest tier where spectators could sit in a row, with their legs dangling over the side, protected by a scaffold bar across the torso. Moreover, spectators were encouraged to move around during the performance, to change their seats, move closer to the action and sometimes even participate in the action. These unconventional practices and doing away with the rules of theatre event etiquette allowed Schechner to achieve his goal of audience participation, though it also incurred risks, which Levin notes in her study, such as spectators inappropriately touching female performers and even kidnapping one of the performers halfway through a performance.

While environmental theatre as shown in the above example, is not particularly affixed to a specific site for figurative meaning, focusing instead on collapsing performer-spectator divisions through constructed or reconfigured environments, this need to bring the spectator out of their seats into active participation is a common aim for theatre artists producing site-specific performance. Theatre scholar Arnold Aronson provides a deeper analysis of environmental theatre scenography in his book, The History and Theory of Environmental Scenography (1981). According to Aronson, “the word environmental is applied to staging that is non-frontal.” (1) Traditional theatre auditoria configurations such as the proscenium, end, thrust, alley and arena stages are all considered frontal since a spectator “rarely has to look more than forty-five degrees to the right or left in order to view the whole production.” (Aronson 1) While the perspective might vary slightly for each structure,
Aronson notes that in all cases, the audience faces “forward” and is generally focused on the same space and action. (2) However, within this definition of environmental theatre, examples of frontal and non-frontal work differ to the extent that some unlikely works might actually be referred to as “partially environmental”. To address this complexity, Aronson proposed a classification of environmental productions based on the degree to which they move from frontal to non-frontal staging, thereby forming a continuum of environmental theatre as illustrated below: (7)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Frontal</th>
<th>Non-frontal</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Perceived Environment</td>
<td>Experienced Environment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Implied Environment</td>
<td>Surrounding Space</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unified Space</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As can be deduced from the categories, the continuum charts the progression in the spatial relationship between the spectator and the production scenography, from a primarily ocular perspective to one that involves more bodying forth of the space. To explain the continuum briefly, the production in a perceived environment is usually outdoors with no apparent constructed environment. Any thing within the spectator’s perspective can be perceived as environment, including the sky and the ground. This category focuses on mental space within the spectator’s imagination. Productions in the implied environment category physically configure space such that the relationship between performers and audiences reflect contextual significance, an example being the spectators sat in Peter Brook’s Marat/Sade

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11 Aronson gives the following examples: Stanislavski, who represents the quintessential fourth wall illusionistic theatre once said that he wanted the audience at Three Sisters to feel as if they were guests at the Prozorov household, a strange phenomenon for the Moscow Art Theatre which is a traditional proscenium theatre. He then compares this to Grotowski’s Doctor Faustus production where spectators sit with Faustus as his guests and the Performance Group’s The Tooth of Crime in which the spectators follow the character Hoss, from his kitchen to his bedroom in different parts of the theatre. (2)
production. Spectators took on two roles: themselves as spectators at a performance event and also as spectators watching asylum inmates perform as if they were part of their world. The third category, unified space unifies performance and spectator space by transforming the whole space, such as physically reconstructing theatre seating into church pews and creating arches and stained glass windows overhead. The fourth category, experienced environment, focuses on spectator experience, often in a performance space already configured to envelope spectators. Aronson gives the example of the Japanese Kabuki theatre stage, which utilises a ramp (hanamichi) running from the back of the auditorium, through the audience space and adjoining the stage. The last category, surrounding space, is more of an ideal in which the spectator is suspended in the middle of a sphere and is therefore totally surrounded by an environment that does not allow for frontal viewing.² Despite these fascinating categories of environmental staging, Aronson notes that no matter how surrounded spectators are, they are still outside the performance frame or space. A real interaction and relationship needs to be established between performers and spectators. (7)

Levin also criticises the limits of environmental theatre tenets: “while environmental artists eschew the restrictions of Proscenium Theatre, they exchange one kind of enframement – a world ordering system – for another. The problem is not so much the frame itself, but the attitude that the subject takes up in relation to it and the self-oriented uses to which it is put.” (96) Thus, even though environmental theatre seeks to collapse the divide between spectators and performers through a manipulation and reconstruction of space, the spectator-subject’s orientation with regard to space alone is not sufficient in effecting a

² In response to Aronson’s surrounding space category, theatre designer and professor, Ronald Fedoruk notes that a truly surrounding space can be achieved through acoustics and the olfactory sense. Since the visual is always limited by the angle of vision, it is sound and smell, permeating the environment and atmosphere that can allow an environment to totally surround the audience.
relationship with performers. Furthermore, some argue that environmental theatre has today been co-opted by the commercial mainstream. As scholar Steve Nelson notes, “today’s environmental theatre may move the fourth wall around a bit, but no one is put up against or through it.” (93)

Despite these limitations however, environmental theatre does offer an interesting angle with which to study site-specific performance. Indeed, Levin deems environmental theatre and site-specific theatre fraternal twins, (105) implying practical differences yet sharing a definite heritage in theoretical impulses. Thus, environmental theatre and site-specific theatre are similar in that they possess elements found in the other: environmental theatre’s focus, while not necessarily site-based, could well be; site-specific theatre, with its emphasis on site, could make use of the frontal or non-frontal relationship between spectators, space and performers to effect a moving experience for both, bodying forth the space.

There are many other performance practices and companies which could lay claim to being early manifestations of site-specific performance. The four main examples I have described, while fundamentally different in practice, reflect several shared sentiments and impulses stemming from the larger social environment in which the respective theatre artists found themselves. Each bears its own genealogy while contributing to an era of influential impulses. Thus, the political nature of performance, anti-establishment sentiments, dissatisfaction with the traditional, orthodox spatial machine and the need to reach the public for social and cultural change have coloured site-specific theatre’s past. More contemporary studies of site-specific theatre have yielded key definitions, models and above all, debates.
2.4 Site-specific Performance: Definitions, Ideas, Debates, Models

In 1998, theorist Patrice Pavis, in his Dictionary of the Theatre: Terms, Concepts and Analysis offered the following definition of site-specific performance:

This term refers to a staging and performance conceived on the basis of a place in the real world (ergo, outside of established theatre). A large part of the work has to do with researching a place, often an unusual one, that is imbued with history or permeated with atmosphere: an airplane hangar, unused factory, city neighbourhood, house or apartment. The insertion of a classical or modern text in this "found place" throws new light on it, gives it an unsuspected power, and places the audience at an entirely different relationship to the text, the place, and the purpose for being there. This new context provides a new situation of enunciation and [...] leads us to a rediscovery of nature and land use and gives the performance an unusual setting of great charm and power.

(338)

Pavis' succinct and authoritative definition touches on two key criteria associated with site-specific performance. The first involves performance space: site-specific performance occurs outside of established or traditional purpose-built theatres, often in any space in the "real world". When such spaces such as diners, parks, old warehouses or disused car-parks, to give
a few examples, are designated and used as performance sites, they are termed “found space(s)”, (or “found place” as translated by Christine Shantz in Pavis). In these found spaces, architectural theatre frames like the proscenium arch that usually support artistic illusion are absent. Thus, unless productions are purposely whimsical, the line between art and life is usually eschewed, and interesting relationships are created between the spectators, performers and the environment within the found space. As a result of performers working creatively with the space and spectators seeing the space in a different or artistic light, site-specific performance usually produces a group of participants who have become more aware of the nuances of a specific site, having experienced it through a different frame of reference. These participants – performers, theatre makers and spectators will also develop a visual and sensuous memory associated with their experience of the site-specific performance.

According to Pavis’s definition, the second major criterion of site-specific performance is conceptual. He notes that a large part of site-specific work has to do with “researching a place, often an unusual one that is imbued with history or permeated with atmosphere”. (338) Thus, while found spaces can be anywhere in the “real world”, research into the space – whether in its historical background, material aspects or physical possibilities – must accompany the decision to use a particular site. In line with the need for research into found space or a designated performance site Pavis suggests a secondary factor in the conceptual requirements of site-specific performance: text. Pavis notes two types of texts: classical and modern, that can be inserted into found space. In addition to researching, inserting text reflects the active conceptual exercise and intent of theatre artists which he sees at the core of site-specific performance practice.

13 Text here can refer to both the script and the performance text, both of which, according to Pavis will throw new light on the space – conceptually and sensuously.
Some site-specific performance theorists have suggested that the type of text used plays a role in determining how “site-specific” a performance might be – one of the key theoretical debates in the field. For example, to insert an existing classical Greek dramatic text or a modern Beckett play in a found space, such as a park for example, might be seen by some theorists as a superimposition of a play on that site. Since the play is not directly connected with the park in this instance, and could maybe be performed in any other location, the performance is considered not purely site-specific. For these theorists, true site-specific performance is fully inspired by the found space and this should be reflected in new texts developed from researching the chosen site. This recalls the partisans of fixed site-specific work I mentioned earlier, in the legacy of Richard Serra’s phrase: “To move the work is to destroy the work.” (Kaye 2)

Rather than discounting a range of site-specific performance as inferior, others have argued for a heterotopian ideal. CTR editors, Andrew Houston and Laura Nanni did just that in their Spring 2006 issue which had called for articles surrounding site-specific performance as a theme. In their editorial article, Houston and Nanni quote philosopher Michel Foucault’s concept of heterotopia, which to abbreviate, is “a kind of effectively enacted utopia” found in real places, where all the “sites that can be found within the culture are simultaneously represented, contested and inverted.” (5) This is an effective method and as I will go on to show in this chapter, useful for maintaining an open and generative study of site-specific performance.
Having given a generalised concept of site-specific performance, I will now go on to more specific definitions centred on the spatial noun, *site*. Scholar Nick Kaye, in his book, *Site-specific Art: Performance, Place and Documentation* (2000) gets right to the basics, looking at dictionary definitions of the word, site:

''site': substantive. [...] local position [...] The place or position occupied by some specified thing. Frequently implying original or fixed position.

''site': 1. transitive. To locate, to place. 2. intransitive. To be situated or placed.

(Kaye 1)

All these definitions – substantive, transitive and intransitive – connote the literal semantics of site as a physical ground on which a specified thing will occupy, or on which something will be located, placed or situated. Using these definitions, in particular the substantive sense of “frequently implying original or fixed position”, Kaye again recalls Serra’s words in which a site-specific work will be destroyed or made something else if moved.

Where Kaye suggests ways to fix the term “site”, others have argued that the term itself, relying as it does on spatial elements, is ineluctably unstable. In their article “Beyond Description: Singapore Space Historicity” (2004) published in a book with the same title, urban studies scholars Ryan Bishop, John Phillips and Wei-Wei Yeo emphasised the indispensability of the figurative when it came to the nebulous term, *space*. According to them, “this figurability allows us to speak of all kinds of phenomena, which are not strictly
spatial, in spatial terms.” (5) Site, which carries a spatial element in its meaning, is another term that will benefit from the use of both its literal and figurative senses. A key concept running through Bishop, Phillips and Yeo’s article is that phenomena can be beyond description. Back to the all-encompassing space, they cite the Ancient Greek term topos as an example of how “both literal and figurative senses of space emerge[d] from a prior form of conceptualisation, what Immanuel Kant calls the transcendental imagination.” (5) The one term topos gives the following familiar terms: topic, topography, and topology. While the first addresses the space of thought and the second denotes how we map spaces, the third bridges the two by allowing a flexible or conceptual mapping, which is neither literal nor figurative. (5) In this way, Bishop, Phillips and Yeo state that even space is beyond description. In similar terms, site has both its literal and figurative senses and possibly even other uses that are beyond my description here.

To broaden the definition of site in site-specificity to include both the literal and the figurative, I turn to artist/writers Ken Ehrlich and Brandon LaBelle in their editorial introduction to *Surface Tension: Problematics of Site* (2003), in which they contextualise site in several ways. In one sense, “site [my italics] might function as an operative term through which to gauge [artistic] practice – it is both the physical location of presentation and the intrinsic negotiations such presentation entails.” (10-11) This statement shows site’s literal and figurative senses respectively. Moreover, Ehrlich and LaBelle go on to describe:

While the terminology of site appears and disappears in varying attempts to define public art, place-specific interventions, community-based projects, and artistic
services over the last 30 years, site [my italics] continues to provide a location, both real and imaginary, actualised and theoretical, for considering the physical parameters of place and the phantasmic projections of what place may signal. Site thus may continue to describe the intersection of seemingly oppositional terms, and provide a necessary space for their negotiation.

(11)

Based on these literal and figurative meanings of site, which function as both a “physical parameter” for productions in material form and an immaterial space of negotiation between opposing forces, I will go on to describe definitions, ideas and debates surrounding site-specific performance around the literal meaning of the term site, while also noting its figurative operations within the production analyses.

Here it is interesting to note that while the idea of sites imbued with history and atmosphere is fundamental to the current understanding of site-specific performance, it has not always been so. Carlson, giving an overview of site-specific performance in Performance: A Critical Introduction (2nd Edition), (2004) notes the “large-scale outdoor spectacles” of the British company Welfare State during the 1970s. These often utilised fireworks, elaborate costuming and properties and were produced in an almost infinite variety of natural and constructed environments. (117) He offers other examples such as En Garde Arts, founded by Anne Hamburger in New York in 1985 who collaborated with Reza Abdoh, “a major visionary director of large cultural epics in untraditional spaces.” (118) These examples led him to argue that “much so-called ‘site-specific’ performance has only involved the use of
unconventional performance spaces, indoor and out, with particular attention to the physical characteristics of the space and at times, to its social or historical associations [though the latter was not necessary].” (119) According to Carlson, it was in 1993 when the British artistic team of Ewan Forster and Christopher Heighes began “creating site-specific performances designed particularly to reveal the ‘language’ of certain historically, socially and architecturally significant buildings and locations” that history and cultural significance of the site became major criteria of site-specific performance.

From my study of site-specific performance definitions, reviews and debates and productions by Boca del Lupo and Radix Theatre, I would like to suggest three main categories of site-specific performance which will help to discern the differences between and innovative practices of Radix Theatre and Boca del Lupo. Based on how theatre artists view and engage with site in the context of their performances, these are 1) site as anchor, 2) site as value, and 3) site as narrative. These categories are not all-inclusive and will leave some examples of performances out as categorising inevitably does. At the same time, they could offer interesting angles of understanding site-specific performance while maintaining an open and flexible attitude. I should also note that performances need not fit into one category and could overlap; while the categories themselves could support, contest or invert each other, much like the heterotopian approach mentioned earlier.

14 During a discussion on these categories, Fedoruk also suggests two other possible categories. The first is site as vessel, drawing from Helena Goldwater’s model of pure site-specific performance as I will mention later. The second, is a situation where the site and performance are inter-dependent where one cannot survive without the other. This second category taps into the idea of virtual space where perhaps imagination is a site, which depends on performance and vice versa. These ideas will be explored in future work.
The first category, site as anchor, relates to the issue of fixedness. It draws from the legacy of Richard Serra’s words, that moving the work would destroy the work, conceptually and in some cases, physically. Site-specificity’s germinations in Minimal sculpture worked on the basis of a work’s marriage to a site. While it may be easy for sculpture, due to its material and permanent nature to stay “married” to a site until authorities or those in power decide to move it; performance, an essentially ephemeral form requiring live performers, action and spectators to experience the event is a more complicated enterprise. In sculpture, the sculptor completes the work and leaves it for the experience of the passer-by who happens to chance upon the work in the particular site at a particular time. In performance, there can be no permanence when the performers stop performing and go home for the day. As Mike Pearson and Michael Shanks notes in their book, Theatre/Archaeology (2001), “performance survives as a cluster of narratives, those of the watchers and of the watched, and of all those who facilitate their interaction – technicians, ushers, stage-managers, administrators [where applicable].” (57) Based on these factors, site-specificity operates differently due to the material differences between sculpture and performance. Thus, it might be useful to add a cautionary note for transposing site-specificity from Minimal sculpture to performance. Serra’s Tilted Arc sculpture made a political statement and illustrated the power and territoriality that involves space. Sculpture itself is a spatial form – whether solid, large, small, translucent, and so on, the meaning generated with its situation or positioning is fundamentally different than performance created in specific sites, using live performers, action, visuals, sometimes text. If we revert to the question, can site-specific sculpture tour, there might be a hesitation or two before we concede that indeed it can, but only through human transport. The permanent structural form of sculpture and the malleable, alterable
configurations of human structures is a crucial difference in grafting site-specificity from sculpture to performance.

This issue of fixity is dealt with through a survey of site-specific work in England, Scotland and Wales by scholar Fiona Wilkie which she documents in her article, “Mapping the Terrain: a Survey of Site-Specific Performance in Britain.” (2002) The main question we face is “can site-specific performance tour”? To explore this question, Wilkie rephrases the question thus: “does ‘site-specific’ imply ‘site-exclusive’? This switch from the adjective “specific” to “exclusive” is interesting, as if we approach terminology from a semantic point of view, all work is to some extent site-specific since it was made for a particular set of spaces, planned for a particular time, whether it was outdoors, indoors, found space or theatre auditoria. The planning, writing, rehearsals are done specifically with that space in mind. Thus, “exclusive” might be a more effective word for the study. In her survey,

“the responses to this question of whether site-specific implies the performance’s exclusive materialisation in that one site, are divided exactly down the middle: those who believe that site-specific performance can tour (with qualifications such as “with care”) and those for whom the notion of touring such work is a contradiction. The former opinion also notes, “obviously [the touring work] loses something, but it can also carry something else away with it”.

(Wilkie 149)
Back to the issue of whether site-specific performance can tour and the equally split responses, Wilkie notes two ways of dealing with the conundrum: the first is to draw distinctions between levels of site-specificity. She quotes a Brighton company, Red Earth, whose representative offered this opinion:

Some projects are completely site-specific, i.e., they could not take place anywhere else without losing a strong thread of meaning and connection; while other more flexible projects may work around a certain sense of place, i.e., the spirit or concept at the heart of the project would work in several -- but not all -- locations.

(Wilkie 149)

Red Earth company’s quote highlights the “spirit or concept” at the heart of the project, begging the question of creative process: must site-specific performance be inspired completely by a site or can theatre artists have a concept or political statement and then choose an appropriate site to present it? As we shall see, this question will be highly relevant in my analyses of Radix Theatre and Boca del Lupo’s productions.

In a similar vein, Wilkie goes on to cite Paul Pinson, artistic director of Scottish company Boilerhouse who sometimes tours site-specific performance. However, Pinson points out:

That’s not pure site-specificity. You can recreate a work
in response to a number of differing sites, which is
totally valid in itself and is an element of site-specificity
but is different from making a piece of work in response to
one specific site.

(Wilkie 149)

As Wilkie rightly points out, Pinson’s words raise the issue of “purity”, at the same
time opening possibilities of valid performances with elements of site-specificity. While a
pure site-specific performance model as put forth by Helena Goldwater suggests a sort of
relationship between reverence and irreverence to sites:

To make a truly site-specific piece means it sits wholly
in that site in both its content and form, otherwise, if
movable, it becomes more about the site as a vehicle/
vessel.\(^\text{15}\)

(Wilkie 149)

The site as vessel or vehicle in this case, however, is not the same as the spatial machines
supposedly empty of meaning in the theatre auditorium – even if it is imbued with meaning
and memory from past performances, its primary function and purpose to serve commercial
theatre makes it a literal vessel or vehicle of authority. In its non-auditoria meaning, however,
as famed Polish director Tadeusz Kantor – whom David Wiles notes has given the most
powerful call for the primacy of space – says, “space is the ‘ur-matter’ of theatre, alive and
independent of the artist.” In fact, “space is not a passive receptacle in which objects and

\(^{15}\) See footnote 14.
forms are posited ... Space itself is an object [of creation]. And the main one!” (Wiles 13)

Thus, seen from this angle, even if the site becomes more a vehicle or vessel in un-pure site-
specific performance, it is still an important contributor, even a creator of meaning.

Here, it is useful to return to Wilkie’s second proposed way of dealing with the
complexities arising from the issues of site-specific performance touring: to create new
terminology. (149) To aid in this matter is the continuum, drawn up by Exeter theatre
comp any Wrights and Sites’ Stephen Hodge. The continuum seeks to locate a variety of
theatre practices in terms of their relationships to place.

Under the “pure” site-specific performance model at the far right of the continuum, Hodge
also added:

Layers of the site are revealed through reference to:

- historical documentation
- site usage (past and present)
- found text, objects, actions, sounds, etc
As Wilkie explains, the scale reserves the label “site-specific” only for performances in which “a profound engagement with one site is absolutely central to both the creation and execution of the work.” (150) At the same time, we can identify elements of site-specificity as Pinson noted, in all the categories. Also, if we refer back to Wilkie’s choice of distinguishing between “specific” and “exclusive”, all the categories on the scale are site-specific to some extent – for example, Shakespeare in the Park is rehearsed and presented at a selected park, with no doubt, staging requirements and audience space planned specifically for that site. Still, Hodge’s continuum diagram is useful in identifying a range of practices which lay claim to site-inspired work and whether they are termed sympathetic, generic or specific, they are able, through the very nature of the space or site outside of the spatial machine, to effect spontaneous reactions from spectators and “fold together” more readily, performer, place and spectator. It is also interesting to note the extra criteria Hodge assigns to the site-specific theatre category as it reflects the “language” of the chosen site as I quoted from Carlson earlier.

In response to a work’s fixity to the site, Canadian artist Paul Couillard, notes the possibilities of intriguing and visceral experiences for both audience and performer in site-specific work, and moves away from the term “specific” to yet another adjective: responsive.
Couillard’s term “suggests work specifically designed to respond to the particular features of the location in which it is presented.” (32) For him,

in site-responsive work, aspects of location become integral to the overall form and content of a performance, making it impossible to separate the “location” from the “work”. (32)

Couillard’s approach can be aligned with the issue of fixity in that his work and their locations cannot be separated. At the same time, his work also offers an interesting angle to site: locations Couillard and his partner choose for their work tend to act as threshold sites, drawing together both the everyday and any historical, social or cultural meaning into a dialectical relationship and presented to spectators by reconfiguring the gaze and experience. Having cultivated a working method under the title Duorama, under which approximately one hundred performances numbering Duorama #1, #2 and so on have been presented, their works tend to follow this process:

Each piece is conceived and developed on site,
Inspired by factors such as architecture, geography, Climate, traffic patterns, current use, local cultural or social values and the various histories attached to a particular site. (32)
For them, working in a “site-responsive” way presents the possibility of doing site-specific work in “traditional” performance venues by interrogating the properties and conventions of those sites. For example, for Duorama #17 (Calgary, April 2002), they were inspired by a removable metal plate in the floor of the host gallery. Devising a four-hour performance in which they installed themselves in the basement, giving each other artificial respiration, they reconfigured the spectators’ gaze in everyday reality while upsetting the conventions of the gallery. Instead of being a conventionally framed exhibit, they marked the hole in the floor of the gallery with an orange safety cone. Spectators who passed by and chanced to look down expecting construction work are arrested by something else and the work engendered a range of meanings, including “men at work” to “burial”. (33) Thus, site-specificity as a concept has expanded from its original meanings and practices in Minimal Art and acquired alternative terminology of its own. Even with alternative terminologies, the first category of site-specific performance is founded on the notion of a fixed and stable site, where the found space anchors a performance in concept and materialisation.

The second category of site-specific performance, site as value, is linked to the concept of site as non-neutral and non-empty, where it goes through a constant process of erasure and writing over, acquiring layers of meaning and narrative. In this regard, it is useful to look first at philosopher Michel de Certeau’s distinction between space and place. In his influential book, The Practice of Everyday Life (1988) de Certeau outlines: “space is a practiced place”, (117) while a “place is the order (of whatever kind) in accord with which elements are distributed in relationships of co-existence.” (117) By analogy and way of example, he explains, “space is like the word when it is spoken”. (117) Thus, while place seems to be a material, physical reality through which people can walk or move, space is an
intangible concept created and accepted when the place has been moved through enough and identified with a certain function or purpose. Following this idea, scholar and theatre practitioner Cathy Turner, in her article “Palimpsest or Potential Space? Finding a Vocabulary for Site-Specific Performance” (2004) draws together a range of views on the layered site from archaeological theories. One such view, gleaned from Pearson and Shanks' book is that “site is always a material trace of past events and all site work is potentially archaeological.” (376) Another view taken from Julian Thomas’ article, “Reconciling Symbolic Significance with Being-in-the-World” (1995) is that “human beings, in their concerned dealing with the world, restructure their symbolic orders through a process of encounter and forgetting played across time” (Turner 376); therefore, “being in the world includes a sense of the past, [where] there is an archaeological component within everyday life, what Pearson and Shanks call the “melancholic aspect of our social fabric”. (Turner 376) Moreover, Turner cites philosopher Henri Lefebvre who in his book, The Production of Space (1991) wrote:

The past leaves its traces. Time has its own script. Yet this space is always, now and formerly, a present space. Thus production process and product present themselves as two inseparable aspects not as two separable ideas. (37)

In these definitions, site is seen to be non-neutral, literally meaning a place for practising and figuratively meaning a space created by that practiced place. To further the concept of space,
place and site, we can refer back to de Certeau who differentiates between the voyeur and the walker in the experience of the city. He writes of the voyeur:

When one goes up there, he [sic] leaves behind the mass that carries off and mixes up in itself any identity of authors and spectators. An Icarus flying about these waters, he can ignore the devices of Daedalus in mobile and endless labyrinths far below. His elevation transfigures him into a voyeur. It puts him at a distance. It transforms the bewitching world by which one was “possessed” into a text that lies before one’s eyes. It allows one to read it, to be a solar eye, looking down like a god.

(92)

On the other hand,

The ordinary practitioner of the city live “down below,” below the thresholds at which visibility begins. They walk – an elementary form of this experience of the city; they are walkers, Wandermänner, whose bodies follow the thicks and thins of an urban “text” they write without being able to read it.

(93)

While I used de Certeau’s differentiation between voyeurs and walkers in my introduction as an analogy of my reading of Radix and Boca’s productions as a voyeur from a distance, and my experience of one of the productions as a walker, in this context, we see ordinary
practitioners of the city, walking over places and creating spaces which they cannot read, because they are possessed within the landscape.

Unlike site as anchor, which is focused on fixity, site as value challenges the stabilities of site, which is made up of multiple narratives, if we view it as space – the intangible area created through an ordered system of practices in places. Pearson and Shanks provide a comprehensive explication of site-specific performance in their book, which I will quote at length here. While we know that “site-specific performances are conceived for, mounted within and conditioned by the particulars of found spaces, existing social situations or locations, both used and disused,” (23),

They [also] rely, for their conception and their interpretation, upon the complex coexistence, superimposition, and interpenetration of a number of narratives and architectures, historical and contemporary, of two basic orders: that which is of the site, its fixtures, and fittings, and that which is brought to the site, the performance and its scenography: [sic] of that which pre-exist the work and that which is of the work: [sic] of the past and of the present. They are inseparable from their sites, the only contexts within which they are intelligible.

(23)

This idea brings me to a revealing analogy between the ghost and the host of site-specificity coined when Pearson was still a member of Brith Gof, a Welsh theatre company, with director Cliff McLucas. According to McLucas, he began to use the terms “host” and “ghost”
to describe the relationship between place and event. The host site is haunted for a long time by a ghost or new architecture that the theatre-makers create. Importantly, like all ghosts, the work is transparent and the host can be seen through the ghost. (Turner 374) Furthermore, the host and the ghost, from different origins, are co-existent but crucially, not congruent. (Turner 374) In Pearson, McLucas and Shanks’ definitions of site-specific performance, the “performance recontextualises the sites, where the site is not just an interesting and disinterested backdrop”. (Pearson and Shanks 23) In fact, interpenetrating narratives – factual and fictive, historical and documentary, the observational and creative – jostle to create meanings, sometimes without laying claim to accuracy or historical verisimilitude. (Pearson and Shanks 159) This is different from site as anchor whose fixity relates to a stability of site and its meanings. While archaeological approaches to site-specific performance seem to imply fixity on historical past – and although it does to some extent – history is seen as unstable and made up of multiple individual narratives. This then plays out in the definition of site-specific performance.

Site can further be layered through sensoria, Pearson and Shanks suggest. The term sensorium denotes culturally and historically located arrays of the senses and sensibility. (54) According to Pearson and Shanks, the sites of both performance and archaeology constitute sensoria – apprehended as a complex manifold of simultaneous impressions. (54)

For performer and spectator alike the performance event exists as a locus of experiences – spatial, physical and emotional – preserved in the bodies and memories of the varying orders of participants: touch, proximity,
Thus, besides the walking and practising of place in establishing a layered site, the senses and sensibility of the spectators and performers bodying forth the site must also be explored. This is particularly important when paired with the idea of intersections between narratives of performance and the narrative of personal identity. As Pearson and Shanks also outline in their book,

> Audience experiences the performance in a state of preparedness which derives from past experiences and the way in which they have chosen to order them and accord them significance.

(64)

Referred to as the "hermeneutic base of assemblage", Pearson and Shanks note that, "the audience comes to the performance with a "grid of pre-understandings which are partly unconscious or non-discursive, but are also contingent upon autobiography." (64)

Thus, site as value is effected through an understanding of space, place and site, with additional focuses on site complicated by sensoria and pre-conceived notions based on personal experiences.

The third category of site-specific performance, site as narrative, revolves around the everyday and draws back from the importance placed on the historical and cultural resonances of site. In this category, site is usually chosen more for its function and purpose in the quotidian public experience and can be perceived as having its own narrative. In daily life, there is a tendency to walk through landscapes so that sensoria are not properly
experienced but are retained as flurries of blurred images oscillating from the central to the peripheral object of the subject’s gaze. The every-day walker’s loss of experience is described effectively by members of Canadian and American theatre company, Bluemouth Inc., which creates site-specific interdisciplinary artwork, in their contribution to CTR 126, entitled “Please Dress Warmly and Wear Sensible Shoes”. (2006) The article was written collaboratively, taking the form of a collective dialogue sharing the artists’ thoughts and experiences in creating site-specific work. For them, one thing that is so exciting about site-specific performance is the “possibility of re-awakening an audience to space.” (20) They write:

Our lives tend to be focused on what we need to do and the ordinary demands of our particular lives, such that we are rarely allowed to truly live in the moment, seeing rather than experiencing that which is directly around us. We spend the day listening to our own internal noise. Site-specific performance is not just another opportunity to tune out the world. It is the direct opposite. You need to be fully aware in the present moment […]

(20-21)

From their description, site-specific performance could be used to jolt awake the phenomenal senses of the spectator. Levin, whom I mentioned earlier, terms this the “environmental unconscious”. The every-day mundane habit of walking is enriched by the revelation of the theatricality of the landscape and city spaces.
One of the most illuminating writings on site-specific performance focusing on everyday life is scholar Sam Stedman’s article “The Power of Site-Unspecificity”. (2006) In it, he criticises the modernist definition of site-specificity, linked to Richard Serra’s proverbial words “to move the work is to destroy the work”, noting the present cultural climate’s repeated challenge to such reductive thinking. (48) He asks, “if each and every work can be said to have an integral connection to its venue insofar as it is received in its particular context – what can be said of site-specificity?” (48) His words evoke Wilkie’s earlier distinction between “site-specific” and “site-exclusive” work on the issue of touring, which I addressed in site as anchor. Stedman upsets the notion of “specificity”, probing instead, questions about the un-specificity and “generic-ity” of site. He qualifies this to mean not theatre venues that strive for an unspecific quality but,

theatre situations in which a venue’s generic
everydayness has equal or greater interpretive
impact upon reception than the specific narrative
or cultural baggage by which the venue is marked.

(48)

Stedman elaborates, in such works, “the generic everydayness of the venue threatens to exceed containment within the theatrical illusion, thus generating alternative and sometimes competing narratives.” (48) While Stedman’s use of the term site-generic recalls also, one of Stephen Hodge’s continuum categories mentioned in site as anchor, his use of the term transcends Hodge’s “performances generated for a series of like sites”, which is rooted in the touring debate. Instead, he applies the term “site-generic” to works in which the sites’
“generic qualities take on a weight of their own, potentially creating a receptive disjunction between work and site.” (48) Using Toronto-based company, DNA Theatre as case study, Stedman notes the company’s use of generic venues that “vigilantly resist [...] perceived unity between venue and work.” Thus,

Although colonised by theatrical representation,
the venues of these environmentally staged productions
remained explicitly marked by the everyday functionality
of their generic qualities, which often resisted narrative containment by and within the work.

(49)

One example of venue Stedman gives is the street. Even though a theatrical production is enacted upon it, “the streets are undeniably still everyday streets that do not respect the production,” (49) shown by uncontrollable pedestrian and vehicular traffic encountered by performers and spectators as they travelled through the venue. Another example he gives is an apartment housing generic, utilitarian things that one would expect to find in an average Toronto dwelling. Used for the production Paula and Karl, a hyper-realistic performance based loosely on the home life of Canadian serial killers, Paul Bernardo and Karla Homolka, the specificity of the story stemming from the sensationalised criminal case, set off a jarring effect in the generic studio apartment. Stedman found himself drawn to look at the environment, hoping to deduce some truth about what books they read for example, as if these will offer clues to why they committed murder. As Stedman notes, “unlike much site-specific work, in which the specificity of the site feeds cohesively into the work’s narrative,

16 Fedoruk notes that spaces do not “respect” the production, however, they do still affect it.
the generic quality of these sites invited the construction of narratives that actively and productively resisted completion." (52) Thus, Stedman's focus on site-unspecificity and site-generic-ity, injects an interesting angle of reference and comprehension for site-based work, which do not follow the criteria of historical language. Instead, we see positive potential for site-specific performance's illumination of theatricality in everyday life.
3 VANCOUVER’S RADIX THEATRE AND BOCA DEL LUPO

Backgrounds, Mandates, Production Histories

3.1 Vancouver Theatre and Site-specific Performance

It is not my intention to give an in-depth historical background to Vancouver’s theatre scene. It is important to note however, the general trends and practices in order to situate site-specific performance formally in the city’s theatre practice. In her article, “Lotusland in the Limelight” published in the Globe and Mail five years ago, Alexandra Gill notes that Vancouver now has one of the nation’s most vibrant theatre scenes. (15 Jun. 2002) According to some, this has not always been the case and indeed, Gill mentions how Vancouver had once been referred to as “the backwater of Canadian theatre”, whose theatre scene was described as “inordinately depressing” by Bob Allen, an English-theatre officer with the Canada Council. (15 Jun. 2002) According to Gill, the reason for this was a general stagnancy where theatre meant “the same people, had very little movement, almost no coverage by the media and no audience.” (15 Jun. 2002) This situation started to change from 1996 onwards however, when a new generation of diverse young companies emerged and started to claim their place. As Gill notes, these companies “distinguished themselves with imaginative site-specific works, startling visual imagery and highly evolved concepts that use physical movement – tap-dancing and stilt-walking being some examples – to tell their thought-provoking stories.” (15 Jun. 2002) Site-specific performance is not exactly new to

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17 This statement is misleading, and perhaps subjective given Vancouver’s vibrant theatre scene in the 1970s and early 1980s, which saw “infusions of public funding that sustained the established companies and allowed new ones to emerged.” (Todd 63) R.B. Todd notes, in his description of theatre in British Columbia in The Oxford Companion to Canadian Theatre (1989) that “by the mid-1970s Vancouver in particular had acquired a spectrum of theatrical activity catering for all tastes.” (63) These ranged from classics to occasional experimental productions, comedies to thrillers, depending on each theatre company’s expertise.
Canada however, as Gill notes in her article a year later. In “The Play Location’s the Thing”, she mentions the form’s roots in the streets of Europe, and how it had been a fringe element of Canadian theatre since the early seventies. (11 Apr. 2003) Citing examples of site-specific work such as Toronto’s DNA troupe which I mentioned in Chapter Two and the Caravan Farm company in Salmon Arm, B.C., which specialises in theatrical horse-drawn sleigh rides. However, she expresses with conviction that, “nowhere else across the country, it seems, are new site-specific works being devised with the same regularity, scope or ambition and critical acclaim as in Vancouver.” (11 Apr. 2003) An important accompanying definition to this surge in the form’s practice, is the companies’ consensus that “site-specific theatre should involve more than just plunking a script into an offbeat locale,” recalling Helena Goldwater’s pure model of site-specific performance which distinguished between a work created solely for the site and one in which the site is used simply as a vessel or vehicle as theatre artists plunk a script onto it. (Gill 15 Jun. 2002) Instead, companies have “striven to incorporate their unusual sites as a character in itself, allowing the physical contours and hazards of the landscape, building or room to shape the stories, scene by scene.” (Gill 11 Apr 2003) It is in this theatrical environment that Radix Theatre and Boca del Lupo flourished.

3.2 Radix Theatre

Theatre audiences have become lazy. They sit there in their seats, as if they’re watching TV. It’s a flattened, distanced perspective. But when you’re in a site-specific show, it’s a 3D experience, where audience participation is necessary. In a subtle way, we’re trying to instil a sense of
personal responsibility for the audience's engagement in the
show, and thereby, hopefully inspire a deeper level of engagement
of the world around them.

— Andrew Laurenson
(Gill 11 Apr. 2003)

Radix Theatre was co-founded in 1988 in Vancouver by Belinda Earle, Michael
Hirano and Jud Martell. Their mandate was to foster the creation and production of
experimental, socially relevant, and original works of art, presented in a variety of media,
with a focus on interdisciplinary performance. The company is also dedicated to an on-going
investigation of collaborative models of the creative process, continuing to explore the vast
potentials offered by collective creation. For the most part, Radix’s productions are staged
outside of traditional venues in an attempt to highlight the theatricality of unusual sites, and
to look at ordinary spaces with a heightened perception. These site-specific performances
incorporate dynamic physicality, seductive visual imagery, and provocative content, often
experimenting with the audience's role within the performance. Their mandate and
description of performance approach recalls some of the impulses, ideals and practices of the
experimental works of the 1960s and 1970s as mentioned earlier in the chapter. Although not
as explicitly activist as their antecedents, Radix Theatre’s works tend to stem from political
and social commentary and while not necessarily forcing change, allowing spectators to
reflect on their values and assumptions about society and the world we live in. Since 1988,
the inter-disciplinary collective that founded the company has moved on to develop their own
work, which was primarily based in dance. Under the auspices of current artistic directors,
Andrew Laurenson who took up the position in 1994 and and Paul Ternes who joined him
later on, the company continues to create works which, while insisting on exploring new forms and new ideas, continue to be accessible, attempting to lay bare our shared humanity, and above all, inspire audiences. (Radix website) Although Radix was founded in 1988, their body of site-specific work was produced mostly after 1994 and ties in with the shift in management from the founding collective to Laurenson and Ternes.

Andrew Laurenson’s words evoke several parallels with regards to site-specific performance’s antecedents. In particular, resonances of the environmental theatre impulse seem to stem from his emphasis on audience participation and engagement, a major priority for Schechner and his company. Once again, we see the desire to return the ocular, voyeuristic, Cartesian gaze – a flattened, distanced perspective according to Laurenson – to the body, which is then capable of bodying forth the space in order to experience the performance three-dimensionally in the environment. The three-dimensionality recalls Aronson’s differentiation and distillation between frontal theatre and non-frontal theatre, where the scale closer to the latter end meant having the audience physically immersed and surrounded by an environment. There is also a hint of idealist activism reminiscent of the 1970s, manifest presently in a tamer version where social change might be effected through the audience’s deeper level of engagement with the world around them.

From my interview with Laurenson, I learned that Radix Theatre’s original founding concepts were also similar to the anti-commercialist sentiments experienced in the sixties and seventies. According to Laurenson, theirs was a sort of heroic quest, to bring theatre to the public, since “theatre was elitist”, had lost its relevance as an art form and since it was also expensive to rent a theatre. With this three-pronged reason, they strove to bring theatre to the
Laurenson further suggested that another reason why site-specific performance seemed to have fared so well in Vancouver is the Vancouverites’ “adventurous mentality” and their love of the outdoors. In his online review of Boca del Lupo’s summer spectacle, Vasily the Luckless, Jerry Wasserman also comments on this characteristic: “in years past there was usually very little theatre here in summer, the argument being that sun-starved Vancouverites wanted to be outside in good weather, not indoors watching a play.” (Vancouverplays website) However, with site-specific performance as an option, theatre companies can now kill two birds with one stone by providing theatre in outdoor sites. Thus, Vancouverites can enjoy the summer outdoors as well as appreciate a theatre performance.

Laurenson is careful to point out, however, that their choices are not only about catering to Vancouver audience outdoor tastes but also about challenging them to think about important issues. He tells me that one of his complaints about Vancouver theatre is that a lot of it seems “very thin and kind of silly” which to him, does not “address some of the issues confronting us these days.” (personal interview) To this end, Radix members always “try to talk about what goes on in our culture” and ideas for a show will emerge from these discussions. In the two productions I will analyse closely, the company explores a part of Vancouver’s history surrounding cruelty and mob mentality, and also the relationship
between life, destiny and human responsibility for taking charge of their own existence. Moreover, Laurenson notes that the “work is hard” and “there are very little financial rewards.” (personal interview) Thus, they need a strong reason, inspired from social observation to create a performance.

Radix’s “talking it over” approach in response to culture and current issues imply that they usually have a concept or political statement before picking an appropriate site to work in. Indeed, Laurenson informs me that company members sometimes have ideas for which they cannot find a suitable location. This does not take away from the site-specificity of their works however, given that their deciding factor for the site is linked intricately to the suitability of their ideas to the location. In fact, Laurenson criticised certain performances he had come across which “looked like they took a script and just decided to do it under a bridge because it would be fun”. (personal interview) For Laurenson, the site and the performance in these cases neither connect nor make sense. On Radix’s part, they tend to incorporate an attitude of reverence, if not involvement with the site, looking at the environment and finding out what it says, has to say, or could say. In this way, the site becomes part of the performance as a character even though Radix members might have developed a performance concept earlier on. When I asked whether the site or the work comes first Laurenson suggested an analogy with song writing: do we write the lyrics first or come up with the music first? While it could be either, sometimes they occur simultaneously. Thus, it is possible for theatre artists to see a site and be inspired to create a performance, much like Paul Couillard’s “site-responsive” performance. At the same time, it is also valid if the theatre artists have a developed concept but choose a site carefully in order for the site to contribute as an equal element of the production.
The company’s site-specific performances began mostly after 1994 when Andrew Laurenson took over as artistic director from the original founding members. Paul Ternes joined him some time later and they are presently co-directors of the company. Although the company has done numerous performances from 1994 to the present, in what follows I will highlight performances that are emblematic of their various approaches to site-specific performance.

Radix’s first work in a non-traditional performance site was Instruments of Torture (1994) in which they explored issues of addiction, desire and revolution in our increasingly technologically driven society. (Radix website) The performance took place beneath the Burrard Bridge, an Art Deco style bridge built in 1932 to link several districts within Vancouver. Embellished with sculptural details and busts of Captain George Vancouver and Sir Harry Burrard, the bridge was a transportation triumph and was a marker of Vancouver’s progress. Thus, the issues of the piece were worked into the meaning generated by the bridge’s origins. This performance was significant in that it also established Radix’s interdisciplinary aesthetic, where the members re-assessed rehearsal techniques in which they incorporated and explored relationships between movement, text and melody. (Radix website). As an example of their anti-commercialist sentiment, the admission for the performance was a donation to the food bank.

Three performances, The Blind Musician (1996/1997), Absolute Indifference (1997) and All Flesh is Grass (1998) followed the performance under the Burrard Bridge. The Blind Musician is their only performance so far to have used a traditional performance venue, at the
Firehall Arts Centre. While site was not explored “site-specifically” in terms of location, the physical space became a constructed environment with the introduction of fresh lawn turf, linoleum tiles and hanging window frames around the seating area. Performers also “hung” from the ceiling by nooses and the audience had to walk past them in order to get to their seats. This performance, drawing on terrorism as a starting point and converging on the correlation between extreme acts of violence and personal responsibility can be compared to Schechner’s environmental theatre projects, where the staging fits in with Aronson’s “unified space” category on the frontal/non-frontal staging continuum. For the other two productions, Absolute Indifference was created in the streets – specifically, Vancouver Downtown; while All Flesh is Grass was situated in an empty lot just north of Vancouver’s train station – a six-acre field grown over with weeds, tall grasses and wild flowers. The first production was inspired by history as a concept with a focus on memory. The performance took place on the streets around the perimeter of the Vancouver Public Library – site of archival material. The second performance stemmed from social observation, emphasizing hope in Vancouver’s “urban wasteland.” (Radix website) These latter two productions, based on the human and social condition within Vancouver, were site-specific on two levels: in terms of material space and also in terms of the subject matter’s link to Vancouver, itself a site.

With the approaching millennium in 1999, Radix conceptualised Box as an exploration of uncertainty of the future: “contextualised by the awareness of the end of this

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18 Interestingly, the Firehall Arts Centre has its own colourful history, the structure having once been a Firehall building which functioned for Vancouver between 1906 and 1975, when the firemen moved out.
19 Fedoruk observes that scenography can make the traditional purpose-built theatre into a site, thus noting the fundamental difference that while theatre artists impose on purpose-built theatres to create a site, in site-specific performance, the space usually informs and influences the performance with its own narrative.
millennium (the familiar) and the beginning of the next (the unknown).” (Radix website) The performance concept was further concretised and inspired by Austrian physicist, Erwin Schrödinger’s thought experiment, in which a cat is placed inside a box that releases a poisonous gas at some random moment. According to quantum physics, since we cannot see the cat to determine if it is alive or dead till we open to box to check, the cat enters a kind of limbo, in which it is both alive and dead simultaneously. (Radix website) Although the original staging concept broached the idea of performers inside boxes, this was eventually abandoned in favour of something more metaphorical: an old diner that had boxed up three cats: a cook, a server and a bus boy, whose lives seem meaningless drudgery. The performance took place at the Templeton Diner in Vancouver, with its 40’s era character still intact. Dining patrons were informed of the show fifteen minutes before it started and given a choice to stay and watch or vacate. The performance went on as audience members ate. Box was so well received that a patron funded a re-mount for the Fringe Festival that year. This performance was further developed thematically in the next year, resulting in Box2, described as a sequel to the original production. Although the concept and text remained similar, video segments were added to the production, which took place in the Templeton Diner again, before touring to Victoria and Toronto in October 2002 for its Free Fall Festival. The sequel was nominated for six Jessie Richardson Awards, including Best Production, Best Original Play, Best Actor and ultimately winning for Significant Artistic Achievement for Video and Best Actress.

With the exception of The Blind Musician, for all the productions I have described so far, Radix has chosen varied non-traditional sites, both indoor and outdoor for their performances. As they became more established in site-specific performance, the sites chosen
for their performances also became more visceral. In 2001, they collaborated with Boca del Lupo on Bewildered, examining the untamed regions of the psyche: the seat of hidden obsessions, uncontrollable urges, acts of violence, insanity and suicide. (Radix website) This performance responded to its three-level site: a rarely used underground parking garage beneath the ballroom of an old dance hall, merging subject matter and atmosphere into a whole environment. Audiences descended into the lowest tier and as they moved up each level, the subject matter became darker, thereby inverting the traditional hopeful connotations synonymous with ascension.

Even more interesting sites and subject matter followed this collaboration. In 2001, the company experimented with the guided tour form and staged Sniffy the Rat Bus Tour. The performance was drawn from Vancouver’s history. In 1990, local performance artist, Rick Gibson had announced his intention to crush a rat named Sniffy in between two concrete slabs covered in canvas, in order to create art from the resulting diptych. His intention created furore and media frenzy: enraged animal activists, Vancouver citizens, members of the public and press tried to stop him and accused him of senseless cruelty. Gibson’s reasons for the performance art piece stemmed from the assumption that his option of quick death for the rat is more humane than Sniffy’s life in the pet store awaiting death as “snake food”. Recalling the mob sentiment and public event in their performance, Radix made use of the guided tour form to bring audiences on a heritage tour of various relevant sites such as Rick Gibson’s house, the area Downtown where he was chased by a mob and so on. The performance was remounted in 2003 with added locations along the tour and as we will see when I analyse this more closely later on, this production offers an interesting new way to look at tourable site-specific performance.
Following this experiment with “touring” as a form, the company staged The Swedish Play in 2002, in the Swedish furniture store, IKEA. Constituting performance elements such as the radio play, the guided tour, scientific experiment and Greek Tragedy – and exploring the concept of desire and object relations – the performance equipped audiences with tiny radio receivers, from which they could listen to a “low-powered FM signal” transmitted inside the store. Audiences were allowed to choose between tragedy and comedy, after which they followed the story as they journeyed around the store. Thus, in these two productions, site was retained as a character in the performances, although the form and techniques of production changed.

Over the last four years, Radix has continued to pursue curious subject matter and performance forms. One of these was “sex, power and freedom of expression” in SexMachine (2003), based on controversial thinker, Wilhelm Reich’s work on body-centred psychotherapy, linking physical health to mental health; where audiences felt like they were attending a sex clinic, set in an office building. The production of Half a Tank in 2003 and 2004, saw the company tackle the concept of our dysfunctional relationship with the automobile: that “we love our cars but they are killing us”. (Radix website) The show took on the form of “part drive-in theatre, part live radio show” and was situated in a large parking lot near Science World, with audience members in their cars facing inward, encircling and watching a 1978 Dodge Diplomat car about to pass the 500,000-mile mark on its odometer. Inspired by the first Gulf War, which Laurenson thought was largely fought over petroleum resources, the show was conceptualised in conjunction with his worry about the environment, resulting in his decision to give up his car. (Thomas, 30 Sep. 2004)
In 2005, the company presented Final Viewing, a contemplation of sacrifice, good deeds and personal responsibility. The performance revolved around fictional characters, Dan Goodman and John Doe who had saved the former’s life by pushing him out of the way of a taxi, which killed Doe instead. “Trauma, gratitude and survivor guilt have induced Goodman to found the International Centre for Active Goodness, which rewards altruism with cash.” (Thomas 3 Feb. 2005) However, as reviewer Jo Ledingham puts it, “Radix is not about answers. Time is fluid; characters are fluid.” (30 Jan. 2005) The audience first congregated in Gastown’s Lamplighter Pub in which Laurenson’s character, Goodman presided over a wake for Doe. From this location, the site shifted to the next-door building, representing the Centre, in which time and reality were skewed and the performance became “wide open to interpretation”, according to Georgia Straight reviewer, Colin Thomas.

The last of Radix’s works I will describe is the company’s latest and most ambitious undertaking, in which the “themes of wholeness and fragmentation, gathered around contemporary notions of the body, mind and soul” are explored and developed into four pieces over two years. (Radix website) The four-phase project, termed Assembly, has spanned from 2005 to 2007. Thus far it has taken the form of three “experiments”, which will be combined for a performance of the whole. Experiment #1: The Abandoned Body was presented in 2005, as part of LIVE: Vancouver’s Performance Art Biennial. Inspired by the public anatomies of the 15th Century and Dr. Robert D. Romanyszyn’s book, Technology as Symptom and Dream, the performance drew on the image of the corpse as a way of abandoning the body, a new perspective isolating the body from its living context. Experiment#2: The Fractured Mind followed in 2006, as part of FUSE – Vancouver’s leading visual arts destination bringing together art, music and performance – at the Vancouver Art
Gallery. For this performance, four “teams” of three performers each roved through the gallery space, representing divided selves. A simulated severed head was featured in a rolling display case, dragged by an exhausted, mute and blindfolded figure. The third phase, Experiment #3: The Shattered Soul was presented during HIVE 2006, which brought together eleven mostly local and national theatre companies, which presented works inside the Chapel around a common theme. This performance utilised the headset again in which one audience member at a time entered a room with a coffin, contemplating death and the soul. All three experiments, fragments of something larger yet whole within themselves, will be assembled in Assembly later this year.

For the purposes of my thesis, I have decided to analyse two productions from Radix’s repertoire. As my main goal in analysing these productions is to examine how Radix tackles or practises site-specific performance, I have picked productions that I perceive to be most emblematic of Radix’s wide-ranging approaches to the practice. Box/Box² is a useful production to analyse in terms of the use of site and application of performance concepts inspired by Schrödinger. Since it also toured to Victoria and Toronto, the production is a good base from which to examine the key issue of “tourable” site-specific performance. Sniffy the Rat Bus Tour provides an interesting take on site-specific performance, stretching site from a single location to several fragments (Gibson’s old house, Hotel Vancouver and so on) that then make up a whole (the city of Vancouver).) I will examine how the bus-tour as a form can be used to enhance site-specific performance. At the same time, the idea of the “bus-tour” is interesting as it casts new light on the issue of touring in the first place. Perhaps a distinction can be made between “internal touring” within the site-specific performance form where site is fluid or transitory and “external touring” of site-specific performance
where productions are presented in other locations, usually in other countries. For both productions, I have reconstructed an understanding of how the performance took place through performance documentation and clusters of narratives left in archives and from an interview with Laurenson.

3.3 Boca del Lupo

Boca del Lupo is sort of like the MacGyver of the theatre world.

They take a script, some rigging, a handful or two of performers, 
a couple hundred fir trees and come up with a play that defies conventional theatre.

Lynn Mitges, The Province (B2)

Vancouver theatre company Boca del Lupo was founded in 1996 by five theatre artists who studied, trained and collaborated together at the School of Contemporary Arts at Simon Fraser University in Vancouver. The artists: Jay Dodge, James Long, Kevin MacDuff, Tamara McCarthy and Maiko Bae Yamamoto originally set out to “create [their] own work utilising a physical approach”, (Boca website) developed from Polish director Jerzy Grotowski’s concept of a poor theatre. Grotowski’s method emphasised the performer’s body and mind as solely responsible for creating theatre and stripped away other elements such as designs and effects, which were seen to be superfluous to the theatre medium. This is an interesting link to site-specific performance’s origins in the Minimal art movement that also sought to pare down the form to essentials. Boca’s members make use of Grotowski’s

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20 Boca del Lupo is Italian for “mouth of the wolf”, a phrase connoting “break a leg.”
concept in training methods, rather than in actual performances. According to Peter Birnie, theatre critic for the newspaper *The Vancouver Sun* who featured the company in 2003 when it won the largest performing arts award in Canada, Boca members start the day “with more than two hours of a training regimen that can include anything from trapeze work and boxing to drill-formation marching”. (27 Mar. 2003) They also practise “corporels” – near-acrobatic movements – as well as smaller and more specific isolations termed “plastiques”. (Birnie 27 Mar. 2003) Grounded in such physical training, Boca’s performances are often intensely physical and performer-centred; even when set designs or other media are utilised, performer talent, expertise and effort are seen as major contributions to the works’ success.

In terms of working dynamics, the group started off as a collective embarking on collaborative creation. They were joined by Sherry J. Yoon who collaborated on and directed their first performance, *Drained*, in January 1997. According to Dodge when I interviewed him during the summer of 2006, after Boca’s first five years in operation, there was a divergence of opinions within the collective in terms of the company’s creative direction. Dodge emerged as the artistic director to lead the company for two transitional years. As the company became more successful, Dodge transferred the artistic directorship to Yoon who had directed most of Boca’s shows since 1997. He then took on the role of artistic producer himself, appropriate since he had done most of the design, writing, fundraising and organising work since the collective’s years. The transition years also saw members in the collective drifting off to work on their own productions, to work with other companies and even to start their own companies. Thus, in Boca’s later shows, Yoon took on the responsibility of hiring and casting performers who joined the company for specific projects. Despite the shift from a collaborative model to one which operates under an artistic director
and artistic producer, Dodge maintains, “the director is very much in charge of the process, but every actor has input. [...] We search out multi-talented individuals, and they help write the piece.” (Conner 2 Apr. 2003) In this vein, many of Boca’s works begin with a theme that is researched by both Yoon and the performers who then develop a script out of discussions and rehearsals. In a recently released video introduction to the company, Yoon elaborates on Boca’s creative approach: “since [Boca’s] inception, taking creative risks has been a mainstay of its artistic expression, [which also includes] embarking on unorthodox and controversial models of creation, developing technology and combining mediums in innovative ways.” (Boca website) The result of this creative approach has been a string of original productions lauded variously for their innovative use of space, animation, rigging and imagery designed and constructed by Dodge and other collaborators, especially after 2000. These innovations also reflect Boca’s mandate, according to which the company is “dedicated to the creation of new performances using unique processes of collaboration and extraordinary interactions between performers and audiences.” (Boca website) Thus, most of Boca’s productions are unconventional, reflective of interesting collaborative imaginations and as The Province’s Lynn Mitges proclaims: analogous to MacGyver, the television series of the eighties, whose title character, a secret agent, possessed outstanding resourcefulness – making use of any mundane materials around him to create unorthodox solutions to any problem he faces. (Chrisholm IMDB website)

Boca was founded locally and Dodge and Yoon saw fit for the company to join the Spirit of Vancouver campaign, established by the Vancouver Board of Trade in March 2001, which aimed to revive the city’s sense of community pride and spirit. Some of the objectives of this campaign were to promote Vancouver as an exciting and culturally diverse community
for residents and visitors alike; to position The Board and its members as supporters of a strong and vibrant community, rich in arts and culture; to identify issues, challenges and opportunities in Vancouver; and to better publicize Vancouver’s accomplishments and help foster the celebration of community successes. This passionate bid to “harness public and corporate support of the city and region” includes “promoting existing events, creating new ones and bringing back the ones […] lost over the years”. (Vancouver Board of Trade website) Accordingly, one of the reasons for Dodge and Yoon’s decision to join this campaign was to contribute to reviving Vancouver’s community spirit through their work, in particular, through their summer spectacles in Stanley Park – one of Vancouver’s major tourist attractions and local leisure hub – where they wished to establish the spectacle as an annual event. In fact, as outlined on their website, “diversity, interaction with the environment, and community accessibility are key concepts” in their work approach. However, Dodge explains that in approaching the Board of Trade’s campaign, they also strategically received a “brand of approval” for their work and were able to gain private sector funding for their projects, (personal interview) since the Board and its members pledged to support the Vancouver community’s art and culture. This funding is especially important for Boca’s summer spectacles as they are of high quality in both performance and design yet free for the public. The only financial returns from the public are donations at the end of the shows collected in vessels normally cleverly aligned with the theme of the performance. For example, in their latest spectacle The Shoes that were Danced to Pieces, the performers passed around giant constructed shoes for spectators to put in their donations.

Despite their local focus, Dodge and Yoon recognise the benefits of adopting an international perspective, which they state to be one of the company’s core values. Boca’s
practice can be summed up thus: it “operates locally, finds partners nationally and searches for collaborators all over the world.” (Boca website) In their local and national ventures, Dodge and Yoon “mak[e] concerted efforts to find diversity within their collaborators that reflect Canadian culture.” (Boca website) The result of this diversity was already rooted in the core collective which included members of Western Canadian and Asian origin. In their collaborative productions, in particular the summer spectacles, this diversity is further enhanced creatively as seen in one of their many partnerships with talented musician Joelysa Pankanea, who is originally from Kenya, and an artistic associate with the company. From a national perspective, Dodge and Yoon are also aware of their potential for contribution to Vancouver’s global image. With Vancouver’s upcoming role as host for the Winter Olympics in 2010, Boca articulates on their website: “as Vancouver prepares itself to be on the world stage in 2010, Boca’s summer spectacular helps our city to join other world-class cities that offer large scale, free theatre in their major parks.” In this way, the company aims to represent Vancouver’s creativity and theatrical innovation. Furthermore, Dodge and Yoon have expressed on their website that “to inspire their productions, they look to their own experience and histories along with those of their collaborators to “find the heart and personal connection to what they perform and create.” (Boca website) This heart and personal connection can be seen in their international collaboration with Mexican theatre company, Teatro San Banquito in 2004, whose members Dodge saw as kindred souls when he first met them at the International Mexican Cervantino Festival in fall 2002. According to Dodge, “they started around ’96 as well [the year Boca was established] and their method of creating work is very similar”. (Birnie 4 Mar. 2003) The result of this collaboration was a remounting of the controversial play, The Suicide written by Nicolai Erdman in 1928. The play was famously “haggled over by directors Stanislavski, Meyerhold and Vakhtangov” due to
Erdman’s renown as a playwright, though it was eventually censored by the Soviet regime, which accused Erdman of political slander and exiled him to Siberia. The play only opened in Russia in 1982. Dodge tells Birnie that together with their collaborators, they “looked to find a play that represented both Canada’s and Mexico’s relationship to the United States.” (Birnie 4 Mar. 2003) Through their creative connection with Teatro San Banquito, Boca managed to effect a meaningful collaboration on an international scale.

In 2003, seven years after its inception, Boca won the prestigious and largest award for the performing arts in Canada, the Alcan Performing Arts Award, funded by the large Canadian aluminium-smelting company after which the award is named. Larry Campbell, the Mayor of Vancouver praised them:

Your work is transformative. You help us to imagine
how our world can be better, and to dream of new ways
to make it so. (Birnie 4 Mar. 2003)

This win was a major success for the young company – and as Dodge admitted later, “was a huge catapult for [Boca’s] growth”. (Birnie 4 Mar. 2003) The Alcan award rotates through the disciplines of dance, theatre, and music/opera annually and grants a company “selected by representatives of the B.C. Arts Council and the Vancouver Foundation” (Birnie 4 Mar. 2003) a $60,000 production fund for the creation of new work usually performed the following year at the Vancouver East Cultural Centre. Although not part of the Board of Trade’s Spirit of Vancouver campaign, the collaboration between Alcan and the Vancouver East Cultural Centre echoes the former’s similar ties between business and the arts. This
unique collaboration is certainly helpful for sustaining Vancouver's arts and cultural scene: Dodge himself tells Birnie “without the Alcan award, [Boca] may not have survived this long [10 years, by the end of 2006], let alone thrived in the way [it has].” (Birnie 4 Mar. 2003). It is with this financial award that Boca went on to fund its collaborative work The Suicide with Teatro San Banquito, which toured Guanajuato and Leon in Mexico and Calgary and Edmonton. Besides winning the Alcan Award, Boca's other achievements include being named best young company of 2002 by Vancouver Magazine and numerous nominations and wins for the Jessie Richardson Awards which recognises outstanding achievements of the Vancouver professional theatre community.

The reason for Boca's success is perhaps best reflected in Vancouver mayor Larry Campbell's glittering comments on the company's works, from which the key words "transformative", "imagine", "better" and "new" stand out. Indeed, the company constantly strives for innovation, earning them local critics' praises: Birnie notes that "no group loves breaking rules more than Boca del Lupo" (27 Mar. 2003) and imagines they are so consistently innovative that "members must sweat bullets trying to top themselves" (Birnie 12 May 2001); Jerry Wasserman, academic and editor of Vancouverplays.com and critic at The Province newspaper, regards Boca as "one of the darlings of Vancouver's theatre aficionados". (23 Jan. 2006). Although Boca's productions include both indoor performances in traditional spaces and outdoor performances in found space, the latter are most relevant for my investigation of their uses of site-specific performance.

Boca started working in predominantly indoor spaces before moving to outdoor ones in 2001. Early works were performed in spaces that ranged from a warehouse in Vancouver’s
downtown which the collective used when it first started out as a company, to other more orthodox and traditional performance spaces such as the Roundhouse Community Centre, the Firehall Arts Centre and Performance Works on Granville Island. The productions: Drained (January 1997), Real Flowers (March 1998), Terminal (July 1998), Circadia (April 1999), Charge of the Moon (April 2000) and Last Office (May 2001) were original works and explored issues and goals outlined in the company’s mandate. Charge of the Moon in particular, experimented with “extraordinary interactions between performers and audience” by ushering in spectators at the start of the play and guiding them to stand together at the centre of a tent in the performance space, before surrounding them with entering performers. (Birnie 29 Apr. 2000) This is reminiscent of environmental theatre’s focus on collapsing the divide between performer and audience and referring back to Aronson’s continuum, seems to fit into the unified space category where the audience is physically surrounded by an environment, in this case, configured by surrounding performers. This experiment was of short duration however, and the spectators were soon ushered to their seats, which had been arranged in arena configuration after the plot exposition. Thus, the audience still had a frontal perspective of the performance. Drained and Circadia, both performed at a downtown warehouse and site of Boca’s practice could be read as a non-traditional and even found space, given the number of site-specific performances that have occurred in warehouses. However, Boca’s performances there were not intentionally site-specific and the situation was due to financial constraints preventing Boca from securing other venues. Boca’s other five indoor productions after summer 2001 were Hold Your Head Tight (April 2002), The Beginners (April 2003), The Suicide (February 2004), The Perfectionist (January 2006), and the The House of Sleeping Beauties (February 2006).
Despite their beginnings in indoor performance, the year 2001 saw a big transition for Boca as they co-created their first site-specific performance. As I mentioned earlier, Radix Theatre approached Boca to collaborate on Bewildered, performed at Capri Hall, an old Italian wedding hall consisting of a large auditorium and two levels of underground parkade below it, of which the lowest one was disused and dingy. The play began in this dank atmosphere and the audience ascended physically in the space to the upper parkade as the performance progressed, ending with the audience overlooking the auditorium. Yoon directed the play while Dodge designed the set and lighting. The production won the Vancouver Sun newspaper’s Critics’ Choice Award for Innovation at the 2002 Jessie Richardson Awards and also served to provide Boca with another avenue for their innovative approach to performance.

The experience with Bewildered inspired Boca to continue exploring outdoor spaces with the result that six out of its eleven productions after summer 2001 were performed outdoors. The first of these was Inside (September 2001) performed on a grassy knoll surrounded by water on Granville Island, featuring performers inside a Plexi-glass cube expressing four intermingled monologues. Boca’s successful annual summer spectacles constitute another four outdoor performances, all performed in a specific area of Stanley Park – the trails behind the Prospect Point picnic site – except for one, which was performed around the Lost Lagoon. The Lost Lagoon is a beautiful bird sanctuary and a bio-filtration marsh located near one of the park’s entrances from the downtown area. (Stanley Park website) The site has a rich history of its own and its name and past is immortalised in a poem written by Métis poet, Pauline Johnson. As of 2006, Boca’s summer spectacular event is in its fourth year running and sources for the fifth spectacle scheduled for 2007 have
already been revealed. In order, these spectacles are: The Last Stand (July 2002) very loosely based on Italo Calvino’s novel, The Baron in the Trees, befitting the park’s arboreal setting in the park. The plot centres on two brothers, Hal and Bo; the former follows daily and societal routines, while the latter is carefree and defiant much like the Baron in Calvino’s story. Bo runs away to live in the trees and Hal begins his own journey to look for his brother, meeting several characters on the way and finally, understanding his brother’s desire for freedom.

Spectators gathered at the Prospect Point picnic site, a ten-minute walk downhill from Prospect Point, considered the highest point of Stanley Park – and a pit-stop for tourists. After safety instructions and a beginning exposition scene between the two brothers resulting in Bo’s escape, the spectators followed Hal as he searches for his brother within the trails.

Lagoon of Lost Tales (July 2003), the second summer spectacle was based very loosely on Salman Rushdie’s novel, Haroun and the Sea of Stories, was performed around the Lost Lagoon. With its beautiful scenery and a proper walking trail constructed round it, the Lost Lagoon was atmospherically suited for Boca’s work which draws on a story involving the sea. Like Boca’s source and its protagonist Haroun, Lagoon of Lost Tales followed the story of Seymour, who goes on a quest to save his parents’ marriage. Spectators first see Seymour and his father, a famed story teller, crafting fables. This was interrupted when a man in a car on the park drive arrived (played by Paul Ternes, Radix’s co-artistic producer and one of Boca’s collaborators on Bewildered), honked his car horn and emerged to abuse Seymour’s father, before running off with Seymour’s mother. (Birnie 15 Jul. 2003) Seymour’s father became mute and spectators then followed Seymour around the trail as he tried to find his mother to salvage his parents’ union and therefore, preserve his family.
The third spectacle, *Vasily the Luckless*, took place again in the trails behind Prospect Point picnic site after a year's hiatus due to the company's touring of *The Suicide* in 2004. This time the plot was based on a popular character, Vasily the Luckless from Russian folk tales, and his various escapes from the villain, Marco the Rich, who fears the former will one day lay claim to his massive fortune. Spectators assembled at the picnic site and as before, after safety instructions, proceeded into the trails guided by six herders who helped in crowd control: this mainly involved directing spectators to gather in various configurations and to stand, sit, or crouch to watch a scene unfold as they moved around the trail. The herders were particularly important as Boca's summer spectacles had become very popular by this time and the number of audiences had increased significantly. Although the performances were free of charge, potential spectators had to reserve a space by registering on the performance schedule listed on Boca's website. By *Vasily the Luckless*'s showing, the event has become so popular that spaces were "sold out" very quickly and alternative waiting lists had to be established. Furthermore, a survey conducted after *Vasily the Luckless*'s run showed that 41% of respondents attended the show with children, aged between one to twelve and also consisting teenagers. Herders thus ensured further safety precautions for the younger spectators. The spectacle won three Jessie Richardson Awards: for Innovation, Outstanding Production and Performance for Young Audiences (given to Jonathan Young who played Vasily).

*The Shoes that were Danced to Pieces*, Boca's fourth summer spectacle in 2006 unfolded along the same trails behind the Prospect Point picnic site though in the opposite direction of the route planned in *Vasily the Luckless*. Even though they have been using the same trails behind Prospect Point picnic site for all but one of their summer spectacles, Yoon
and Dodge go round the trails for each performance and ask themselves what can happen amidst the rich environment offered by the trails in the form of tall trees, tree stumps, bushes, clearings, large rocks, old, massive logs and so on. Similar to Radix’s approach to site, Boca also engages the site as a character and equal contributor to the performance by allowing the environment to speak to the artists during the creation process. Conceptually, Boca is also similar to Radix in some ways, in that its artistic collaborators, led by Yoon and Dodge usually come up with a performance concept before searching for an appropriate site. For their spectaculars for example, Dodge and Yoon were inspired by Italo Calvino’s novel, Russian folktales and so on. Armed with a beginning concept, they would go to the Stanley Park site, examine its properties and atmosphere and imagine the performance within the site before drafting out a script. Thus, even though multiple returns to the site might have bred familiarity, Boca ensures their ideas are always inspired by what the site has to offer for every new spectacular and story they wish to create. (personal interview) For example, in Vasily, the performance ended at the meadow next to the Hollow Tree – a massive remnant of a tree hollowed out by what was suspected to be lightning and therefore a novelty for tourists. The Shoes that were Danced to Pieces on the other hand, began at this same meadow. Herders led spectators to the site after initial instruction and upon arrival, guided the spectators to sit, crouch or kneel, depending on their choice while the first scene opened with ten princesses singing and playing croquet. The plot is based on a popular fairy-tale outline of ten princesses travelling across by boat every night to an enchanted palace ball, dodging their father’s knowledge through wit and clever machinations. The spectacle’s plot, as seen from the title, is based on the king’s quest to find out why his daughters’ shoes are always in pieces in the morning when he locks them in their shared bedroom every night. He issues a challenge and offers a reward of any of his daughters’ hand in marriage and potential
kingship to any man who could solve the mystery. As in the other spectacles, the audience follows the set trail as the story unfolds.

These productions in Stanley Park, which Boca advertises to be “free, outdoors, all-ages roving spectacles” have become very popular and successful due to several reasons: their innovative use of space within the trails of the park, particularly in the vertical spaces (Dodge uses this term) of the towering trees, their gratuitous feature and their location outdoors since Vancouverites are known for their love of the outdoors in the summer. Stanley Park, being a place of leisure and urban Vancouver’s “oasis”, is the most appropriate site for Boca’s all-ages spectacles since it is a favourite weekend and holiday destination for families wishing to experience nature without travelling out of Vancouver. Right at the heart of the city, Stanley Park has also been termed a “thousand acre therapeutic couch” by an anonymous local writer, whose words are used to introduce the park on Vancouver’s tourism website. Thus, Boca’s spectacles and the Stanley Park site seem to work together for a popular summer entertainment for the public.

Having described Boca’s performance history, I will explain my rationale for including the company’s outdoor works in a study on site-specific performance and also give reasons for choosing Vasily the Luckless and The Shoes that were Danced to Pieces for analysis. In Chapter Two, I delineated links between outdoor and site-specific performance, of which the former can be considered an antecedent of the latter form. Thus, to some extent, the two categories are interchangeable, with outdoor site-specific performance reflecting a more conscious connection to the site or environment. Even though Boca’s Yoon and Dodge have described their park spectacles as outdoor, rather than site-specific, the term’s
currency has seeped into critiques and general usage for reviewers and audiences describing these performances. Some examples are found in Peter Birnie review on Vasily the Luckless “A Wander Through the Woods of Stanley Park” (5 Aug. 2005) and in David C. Jones’ review for the same production in the online theatre web-magazine, The Boards. (1 Aug. 2005) Moreover, given Boca’s engaging approach to the site and environment in Stanley Park for each new production, it is worth analysing their spectaculars from a site-specific standpoint.

In terms of productions, I have decided to focus on Vasily the Luckless and The Shoes that were Danced to Pieces since they are the latest of Boca’s summer spectacles in Stanley Park and therefore, possess a certain established and seasoned confidence. As such, they seem more emblematic of Boca’s increasingly assured creative approach and production results. Moreover, since I experienced The Shoes that were Danced to Pieces live, it is a useful production to explore based on my own memories and sensations from the event. Despite their longstanding and innovative site-specific performance practices and innovations, the work of these two companies has yet to receive sustained scholarly analysis. Other Vancouver companies which create site-specific performance have been examined in these ways. Vancouver dramaturg and director Rachel Ditor has looked at the Electric Company Theatre in CTR (Spring 2006), for example. Given their commitment to site-specific performance and their generative engagement with the problems and debates attending the practice, these companies afford rich opportunities for scholarly analysis. In the next chapters, I will try to situate some of their most striking productions within the matrix of site-specific performance definitions and consider how they both uphold and challenge the premises behind definitions of this kind of work.
Radix began developing the concept for Box late in 1998 to 1999. The original idea "began as a psychological exploration of feelings of uncertainty about the future, contextualised and grounded in an awareness of the end of this millennium (the familiar) and the beginning of the next (the unknown)"). (Radix website) In an unpublished description of the production in Radix's archives which I was allowed access, they delineate: "from the banal to the extraordinary, for the duration of the performance the audience is held captive with the diner employees in the confined space and invited to explore the psychological cages we put ourselves in." (Radix Doc. 1) Inspired by physicist Edwin Schrödinger's thought experiment of a cat's dual or mixture of states as it is locked within a box in which a poisoned gas is timed for random release, the company originally conceptualised constructing "some sort of box" to build the performance work in. (Radix Doc. 1) However, while eating in the Templeton Diner, a then "tired looking" (Fanconi et al 109) local Vancouver eatery, the artistic collaborators were inspired by the space and an eccentric waitress who "launched into a detailed monologue about her life". Because the place was busy, she "would stop mid-sentence to do something else" before returning to their table and picking up where she had left off. (Fanconi et al 109) From that experience, the classic Templeton diner was chosen as the site for their visionary box or "psychological cage", in which the forties and fifties air still remained. Indeed, the site's atmosphere, physical dimensions, seating, counters, open kitchen, and equipment such as juke-boxes and old coffee and milk-shake machines inspired some of the physical and textual aspects of the performance. In their performance notes, Radix describes how the physical size of the classic diner is both inviting and confining.
Critic Colin Thomas also noted how the diner, a metaphor for the box can be either comforting or claustrophobic." (2-9 Nov. 2000) Inspired by the whole environment and its inhabitants: both staff and regulars, Radix created “composite characters that interact with audience members in non-traditional ways”. (Radix Doc. 1) Their main approach was in assuming the roles of diner staff, such as the cook, servers and busboy, from which they interact with diner-patrons who become the audience. Linking their original concept of humanity’s state of awareness and uncertainty of the future to the seemingly limited lives of the diner’s inhabitants, their characters and performance “delve into issues of work, identity, oppression, risk-taking, limitations self-imposed as well as externally imposed, anger frustration, sorrow and curiosity.” (Radix Doc. 1) Metaphorically, the characters “struggle with choices, the safety and dead end feeling of ‘the Box’ and potentially stepping outside the box into a potentially frightening future.” (Radix Doc. 1)

**Box** was considered Phase I of their conceptual project and, after its successful summer presentation at the Dancing on the Edge Festival and a requested and funded re-mount for the Vancouver Fringe Festival in Fall 1999, the Radix artistic team decided to revisit the work in 2000, naming the result of Phase II, **Box**². In their introductory article accompanying the script for **Box**², published in the *CTR* (Spring 2006), the collective, which included Laurenson, Ternes and Kendra Fanconi as production leads, noted that their decision to create **Box**² was not well received and met with “reservations and lack of support from a couple of [their] major funders.” (109) However, the performance was a great success and was nominated for six Jessie Richardson Awards, where it won in two categories: Best Actress for Fanconi and Artistic Achievement for Video. They also subsequently toured the performance in diners in Victoria and Toronto.
In terms of subject matter, form and text, Radix has referred to Box\(^2\) as a sequel to Box. While in Phase I, the performance ended “just at the place where the characters decide they should [literally and metaphorically] throw open the door and risk life outside the box, Phase II strives to “expand the ending and dig deeper into the unknown”. (Radix Doc. 1) Box\(^2\) drops one character from its original four-character performance, employing one server instead of two, and includes additional sequences such as a video clip at the end where the busboy, Albert, seemingly escapes into the open wilderness of a forest in which he is free. To give a brief synopsis of the play, overview of the characters and description of the performance: Doris, a waitress, Phil, the manager and cook and Albert the busboy are “cats” trapped in the Templeton diner, their version of Schrödinger’s box. While “there is not a lot of plot” according to Colin Thomas’ review of the performance, he notes that “[the play’s] characters drive it.” (2-9 Nov. 2000) The show begins with the pre-show segment where Jimmy the busker plays guitar outside the diner, busking for change. He appears to have nothing to do with the show but is later revealed as one of the characters who has a bigger role towards the end of the play. Before the performance begins, Doris, Phil and Albert, all Radix performers in character, work in the diner: greeting and serving customers. Customers unaware of the performance and who arrived earlier for food are informed about the performance fifteen minutes before it starts and given a choice to stay and watch (upon buying a ticket) or to vacate. During this wait, a video showing looping images of manual labour and factories from the forties and fifties is projected on the blinds over the window. When all the customers have been served food, Doris provides the cue to start and the trio begins speaking in unison about the “horse-trick”: they explain that when they had to give blood, “their” mother taught them the horse-trick – when the needle is going in, pinch yourself really hard on the leg. The pain receptors will get confused and it would not hurt as
much.” (Fanconi et al 110) The play, they explain in their CTR introduction “is not about cruelty to animals (nor AIDS, nor drugs) but about sensitive creatures, and the tricks they use to avoid pain.” (Fanconi et al 110) The first scene is explicitly reminiscent of the artistic collaborators' first inspirational encounter with the eccentric waitress. Performers acted as servers and began chatting about the “horse trick”, interrupting customers eating at their tables, stopping to interact with other characters such as Phil asking Doris what she had written on a bill, before continuing to a different table and resuming the story-telling. Constituting approximately twenty-one scenes interspersed with video segments, the performance courses through various issues through the use of song, dance, dialogue and monologue. Some of the issues and concepts explored were ownership and work, encapsulated in the line “cause the customer matters the most,” (Fanconi et al 111) trade knowledge in the form of recognising regulars at the diner, pipe dreams, ambition, loneliness, self-imposed limitations within the diner/box that at once constitutes home and cage, internal struggles, ideals and freedom. The characters are composite wholes representing attitudinal extremes – pessimism in Phil and optimism in Doris, while Albert, a pharmaceutical scientist turned busboy exists in-between these two states. While Doris started off treating and cleaning the diner as if it was her own home, Phil laments about his missed opportunity as a pastry chef for the Hyatt Hotel, his ticket out of the dreaded place. Albert on the other hand, gives up success and numbness (he was working in pain relief research) for something true in life, even if that means feeling pain. The performance ends with Albert expressing appreciation for the easier life at the bottom rung of ambition; Doris taking her first break in years or for the first time and perhaps not returning to the box; and Phil’s search for intimacy within the box.
One of my main sources for reconstructing the Box² performance was the script printed in the Spring 2006 CTR. Radix notes that this version of the script is “primarily as it was produced in Vancouver”. (Fanconi et al 109) Any modifications to the text due to its touring to Victoria and Toronto were minimal, and applied mostly to references to specific nearby neighbourhoods. In fact, the bulk of the work “went into changing the blocking and creating new video to reflect the new location.” (109) From the text then, I gained a sense of the required staging elements and environment: a forties or fifties working classic diner with the original design largely intact, a long counter with stools, several booths, old coffee and milkshake machines, a jukebox and a working kitchen. Atmospherically, the space should feel more of the past than the present. In addition, a window with Venetian blinds that looks out onto the street is required, together with everyday elements such as pedestrians and traffic passing by. While this description of space is based on the Templeton Diner, the company notes from their successful tour to Toronto that “with adequate preparation, planning and creative direction, this script could be presented in other locations”. (Fanconi et al 109) However, it is important to find the right diner and this requires that it still carries echoes from the past and that it has not lost its character to renovations. (109) From this description, it is clear that atmosphere is an important factor in determining site. While the site could be any other diner, it needs to evoke certain sensuous details in order to fit the work and for the work to fit it. Indeed, it is not possible for Box² to be performed anywhere new and without character, as illustrated by Radix’s touring of the show to Victoria. In my interview with Laurenson, I asked him about the changes made to the performance in order to fit its new locations, Victoria’s Sally Restaurant and Toronto’s Stem Diner. Apparently, while the diner in Toronto worked very well, being a vintage restaurant owned by the original family for almost fifty years and therefore, retaining the character of ages past; the venue in Victoria did
not fare as well. According to Laurenson, it did not have very much character, even though this was the best location he could find taking into account such elements as whether the owners were agreeable to a performance, the sight lines, audience size and so on. (personal interview) Earlier, I listed from the script several key staging elements such as booths and a counter with stools that determined performance and audience space. However, the best venue Laurenson could find in Victoria – the Sally Restaurant did not have these elements. Although Radix’s intent was to follow the original script closely, including the required staging elements, the lack of a counter, a big window, jukeboxes and proper seating booths forced the collective to change almost fifty to sixty percent of the show just to fit in with the new staging and space. Even then, Laurenson tells me that the result was unsatisfactory, since the site did not fit the performance and the performance did not fit the site. (personal interview) From this example, we can gather that sensoria is a primary factor in the success of site-specific performance, without which the performance falls flat and may in fact become a superimposition of an existing text onto the space. At the same time, it is clear that the suitability factor between site and performance is reciprocal. Both elements have to contribute equally and be allowed to “speak” to each other in order for the site-specific performance to work.

With regard to performer and audience relationships, Box² seems to explore two interesting levels: 1) diner patrons as audience or audience as diner patrons; and 2) audience as regulars of the diner. The first case is a reversible process where dining patrons were either given a choice to buy tickets to watch the show if they were there fifteen minutes before it started, thereby morphing into audiences or if potential audiences knew about the performance and showed up for it, thereby, becoming default diner patrons. Moreover, food
is not included in the performance ticket price and Radix’s agreement with the restaurants was that business would operate normally with the various locations retaining all income from food and drinks, while Radix would only retain proceeds from ticket sales. In the second case, the audience, by nature of occupying certain spaces within the diner, assumed the roles of regular customers during one of the scenes. In Scene Two: Back at Work, all three characters, Phil, Doris and Albert stand on the countertop, describing the regulars, their characteristics and typical orders of food and drink while pointing to and numbering the different booths and seating where the audiences were. Using descriptions such as “Booth ones skip dessert”, “Booth twos are always breaking up”, “Booth fives are moms and kids in the a.m., teen girls with diaries in the afternoon and hookers and tricks after six,” Radix envelops the audience in the performance, making them part of the atmosphere simply by nature of the physical space and indexical lines. Any study of performer and audience relationship might refer back to Aronson’s continuum of environmental theatre so that a relationship based on frontality or non-frontality between audience and performance could be deduced. In Box2, the audience’s position and role as a “character” in the piece seems to situate it in the “Implied Environment” category. As such, the performance can be considered as veering towards the frontal staging end. However, Laurenson points out that in terms of sight lines, audience members sometimes had to contort themselves a little depending on where they sat in order to see certain scenes. (personal interview) The interesting thing about the booth seating arrangement of the show was that at anytime, the audience had to look sideways at the counter and at the space between it and the booths to watch the performance (except when the characters were right at the booths or tables in a close-up chat). If the performance moved to one end of the counter, it was likely that several audience members would have had their backs to the scene and would need to turn in their seats or crane their
necks if they wanted to see it. Even though this “difficult” sightline was one of the complaints the company received of the production, Laurensen notes that there was actually a balance: some people get to see things others do not, but then those other people will see things that the first group does not see. (personal interview) Moreover, if it was something really important to the performance, they would make sure that everyone got to see it. Thus, Box did fold together place, performance and public, an ideal to which Pearson aspired.

Furthermore, even though the performer and audience relationship seemed to veer more towards a frontal mode of watching, the wall preserving ocularity is broken several times during the performance when characters address the audience. For example, Doris recommends food to audience members twice, the first time liver and the second time, kidneys while Phil contradicts her by saying they have not had any of these items in years. At another point of the play, Doris and Albert carry a cupcake with a lit candle, singing “Happy Birthday” to a random customer who then blows out the candle as they take a Polaroid photograph. The character Phil injects some humour here by demanding “a buck” for the cake from the customer/audience member. Lastly, at a particularly climactic moment, Albert returns from a break – that the audience witnesses on video, following him into a porn store where suddenly he is naked in the middle of the forest – shirtless, which he follows by removing his shoes and throwing them out the door. Ignoring his colleagues, Albert proceeds to list powerful civilisations that have vanished or fallen, before frantically addressing the audience saying, “Stay together friends. Don’t scatter and sleep. Our friendship is made of staying awake” while handing out fruit from his apron. As Doris admonishes him to “pull [himself] together” and that he is “upsetting the customers”, the audience as customers and customers as audience are enveloped in the action. Whether they are really “upset” or not,
they are part of the action and the three-dimensional experience that Laurenson states is the magic of site-specific performance.

Box²’s use of site can be evaluated within the three categories of site-specific performance I delineated in Chapter Two. As a performance that toured to Victoria and Toronto, the issues in site as anchor and the idea of touring naturally comes to the fore. While according to Pinson’s comment on pure site-specific performance, Radix’s Box² only possesses elements of site-specificity and is not purely site-specific, it is more useful to situate the performance on Stephen Hodge’s continuum in which the production could fall under the “site-generic” category – where the performance is “generated for a series of like sites”. (Wilkie 150) Since the performance can be presented in any diner as long as it meets staging requirements, the performance fits the category. Although the Templeton Diner has an air of “history” and the main requirement of site for the production is that it be filled with character through layered and un-renovated sensoria, Box² is not historical nor does it evoke the relationships between host and ghost when it is in the site. Instead, due to the site’s quotidian function as a place of business and food consumption, Box² can be interpreted more from the angle of site as narrative. Just as Stedman argues that everyday elements can seep into the performance, the production collapses the everyday functionality of the diner and the fictionalised lives of the diner staff into a Pandora’s box: both life-giving (in that it feeds customers), yet deadly (a psychological cage and metaphorical Schrödinger’s box). As audiences open the box in order to experience the performance, it is faced with the highly dysfunctional lives of Phil and Doris and experiences their internal turmoil, broaching the idea of hope only at the end. Thus, the diner site in this particular site-specific performance works most poignantly as a metaphor for life’s drudgery, limitations and comfort zones and
should be experienced and interpreted as such. In this way, Box$^2$ is an effective site-specific performance, using the diner as a character in the piece and making full use of its potential as a threshold site, where human issues are examined. Thus, in terms of labels, the site-generic connotation of Hodge’s continuum can be expanded to include Stedman’s “generic-ity” in which the diner site generates more poignant meanings when Radix’s performance heightens its theatricality in response to their own conceptions of everyday life.

Where Box/Box$^2$ grew out of collective creation, Sniffy the Rat Bus Tour originated as Laurenson’s own project, stemming from an individualistic sense of humour which he injected into Radix’s works when he and Paul Ternes took over as co-artistic directors. (personal interview) Having received an individual grant to do the show, Laurenson eventually incorporated it into Radix’s performance repertoire and it became a successful production closely linked to one of Vancouver’s historic moments.

To give a brief background: in 1990, Vancouver artist/provocateur Rick Gibson announced he was going to crush a live, piebald rodent named Sniffy between two canvas-lined concrete blocks. (Dafoe 23 Oct. 2001) His reason for doing so was to create a diptych from the crushed rat’s body and blood, after its quick and painless death, relative to its alternative destiny as snake feed. Due to the public furore and animal activists’ intervention, which involved stealing Gibson’s crushing apparatus, the artist returned the rented rat to its home, the Aquariums West pet store where it was later purchased by Peter Hamilton, founder of the Lifeforce, an organisation dedicated to raising public awareness of the interrelationship of human, animal and environmental problems. (Lifeforce website) When he arrived at the Old Library Square Downtown where he had originally planned to crush Sniffy and told the
crowd of his aborted performance art attempt, Gibson was threatened, hit on the head and eventually chased by a “blood-thirsty” mob down Burrard Street into Hotel Vancouver where he sought safety in the manager’s office. Since the mob continued to demand Gibson from the hotel’s manager, he eventually escaped only when ten policemen ushered him out through the back door of the hotel, acting as human shields to ensure his safety. Based on this incident in Vancouver’s history, Radix presented in 2001, the 10th Anniversary Sniffy the Rat Bus Tour in conjunction with LIVE: Vancouver’s Performance Art Biennial and remounted it again in 2003.

Similar to Box2 and to some extent, Radix’s conceptual process, which usually revolves around ideas and discussion before the seeking out of an appropriate site, Sniffy the Rat Bus Tour did not originate as a physically site-specific piece. Laurenson wrote the play when he was in university, with the assumption that it would be staged in a traditional theatre venue. However, inspired by the company’s practice in site-specific performance and a sudden realisation that the subject matter was part of Vancouver’s heritage and therefore, of interest to both citizens and tourists, he decided to make use of the tourist bus form in order to revisit the issues sparked by the incident. These are namely: the boundaries of art, conformity, mob mentality and the manipulation of the media. Centred around the headline, “for a little while, the world cared about a rat” and the sub-heading “a stunning display of human compassion and stupidity – all at once”, the advertisements for the production promised: “a scenic tour to the sites that made the Sniffy story happen”, “expert analysis, in-depth coverage”, “videos, fascinating unknown facts, meeting people and plenty of photo opportunities”. (Radix Sniffy flyer) Even though the performance is site-specific in that it is specific to Vancouver and also re-enacts an incident in Vancouver’s history, the production
also takes on a contemporary feel. Laurenson notes that reality shows partly inspired the production’s form so that the performance was also meant to parody dramatic re-enactments and play on the audience’s interest in authentic experiences. (personal interview)

Revisiting the sensibilities caused by the incident, Radix wanted to expose and explore the mob’s seemingly senseless rage over the killing of a rat (which Gibson argued, was seen as a pest and bred for snake food anyway). Indeed, despite Gibson’s aborted mission, the mob was so enraged that there were absurd statements made against him and his life such as, “I would put him up against a wall and shoot him. I can’t stand cruelty to animals.” (Thomas 25 Oct.-1 Nov. 2001) The statement demonstrates the twisted ethical dilemma humans face between themselves and animals. At the same time, Radix was also intrigued at how the incident sparked headlines in Tasmania and India and editorials in Jerusalem, Washington, Los Angeles, Texas and Toronto. Thus, the performance was created for audience members to experience these issues through re-enactments and tourist activities with an authentic flavour in terms of visiting sites where the incident transpired.

The main sources for my reconstruction of the performance are draft scripts, reviews, an interview with Laurenson and a video from Radix’s archives. As such, just as Pearson notes in his performance documentation methodology, there are several gaps which I had to contend with. In addition, Sniffy was staged once in 2001 and later in 2003. My research suggests the two productions were relatively similar except for the addition of more material and performance participation in the later version. Drawing from both versions, I will point out useful aspects of the production and analyse how it fares as a site-specific work. The staging for Sniffy is relatively simple, relying mainly on the luxury tour bus, video segments
played on the bus’s video screens, and the various significant sites on the bus tour route. The audience alighted from the bus at several locations for photo opportunities and to walk through the site (coming back to de Certeau’s concept), in order to experience history through authentic place. To give a description of the performance: the audience boards the bus in Granville Island (where rats are a big problem under the docks) and are briefed as if they were tourists and unaware of Vancouver’s social and cultural associations such as the dangerous East-side Hastings area. Parodying the tour-bus convention, everything is treated as unfamiliar for the audience who are told to “use a buddy system”, “not to talk to anyone except for those on the bus tour” and “not to give money to anyone who approaches them”. (Laurenson Sniffy video) After the initial briefing, the audiences are handed yellow garbage bags, called “performance art smocks” and told to don them for the period of the tour. There are three main stops along the route where the audience alighted to experience the sites. These are: the basement apartment just off Knight Street where Gibson lived in 1990, the Railway Club where Gibson and his aides took refuge till the commotion died down and the mob dispersed (the club was open only to members) and the route which Gibson took to escape the mob including Burrard Street and through the lobby of Hotel Vancouver. The rest of the performance was mostly within the bus where performers played the role of tour guide and the Sniffy mascot, complete with mouse ears, nose, sunglasses and a long grey coat as costume. As the driver drove past various significant sites, the video playing on the screens would coincide with information on the various locations, interspersed with footage of Gibson being chased, of him explaining his intentions, interviews with Peter Hamilton, the Aquariums West owner and so on. There was also a comical video 22 Short Films about Sniffy – parodying the title of the high-art film 32 Short Films about Glenn Gould (1993) – an animation demonstrating other ways Sniffy could die; some examples being under a
stiletto, in a juicer, through a vacuum cleaner and burnt at the stake. Several activities
allowed audience participation. For example, the audience was allowed photo opportunities
with the Sniffy mascot outside Gibson's old apartment. Moreover, led by the Sniffy mascot,
the audience also developed a group performance through chanting “Sniffy”, “rat” and “R-A-
T” repeatedly. Perhaps the most powerful image and participatory act is in the audience’s
donning of the yellow performance art smocks. Together with thick sunglasses (similar to the
ones worn by Gibson at the time of the incident) also provided by Radix, the audience were
marked as a potential mob simply through colour and a degree of homogenous anonymity.

Just as the physical location and function of the diner in Box² meant that audiences
were automatically implied to be diner customers, Sniffy’s bus tour form implied and
naturally positioned audiences as tourists who know little, if nothing of Vancouver, its
history, dangers and the Rick Gibson incident. Thus, in terms of Aronson’s continuum, the
environment within the bus ensured a relatively frontal relationship between the performers
and the audience who faced forward in their seats as the tour guide and the Sniffy mascot
spoke. This relationship is complicated however, when the audience is allowed to alight from
the tour bus to experience significant sites. For example, when the audience arrived outside
Gibson’s old basement apartment, the audience’s role as the observer shifts to one of the
observed as residents around the area look out of their windows to watch the yellow-clad
audiences mingling and taking pictures outside the apartment. While the Sniffy mascot
remained in character and therefore, was still performing for the audience, the audiences
themselves became a performing entity for the public or “accidental audiences”, triggering an
interesting experience for the audiences originally on tour. Furthermore, this role of the
observer and the observed oscillates as the audiences get back on the bus and look out the
window. As they travel within the bus, they become once again the observers, both of the actual Radix performers and of the landscape and sites sweeping past the bus window. Due to this oscillation, it is even tempting to situate Sniffy, when the audience is participating outside of the bus, in the “surrounding space” category in Aronson’s continuum. This is most evident when the audiences are “performing” the mob when they walk down Burrard Street chanting “Sniffy”, based on the historical mob chasing Gibson the same way. As the audience is surrounded by a whole environment against and within which it performs, the relationship between audience and performer here becomes non-frontal and even merged.

In terms of Sniffy’s position within the three categories of site-specific performance I suggested in Chapter Two, the historical nature of the piece automatically evokes the site as value’s concerns with site being non-neutral and non-empty. The site within site-specific performance here applies to both Vancouver as the specific site of the subject matter and its physical sites as specific to the Sniffy-Gibson incident. Piecing together a performance tour from clusters of narratives from 1990, Radix wrote a new narrative for the incident, which could be added to the already existing clusters. While the relationship between the host site(s) such as the Railway Club and the Hotel Vancouver and the ghost performance tour seems to fit nicely, given that the performance is geographically specific and authentic, certain elements do reflect the difficulties of layering narratives. For example, Laurenson tells me in the interview that even though Radix approached the Hotel Vancouver in advance about Sniffy and the re-enactment of the mob moving through the hotel’s lobby, when the audience members showed up wearing their yellow smocks, they were only allowed to do it once before the management told them that they are not allowed to do so again. Their reason was that the smock made the “mob” look like it was made up of homeless people and thus, not an
image the hotel wanted. In this example, we also see the everyday narrative creeping into the performance, since it is the present day’s convention and association with the homeless that made Radix’s audience alter its mob performance – removing the bags at the door of the hotel before they went in. Thus, the performance of Sniffy can be viewed from the angle of site as narrative as well, recalling Stedman’s argument that everyday elements can seep into a performance and highlight the site’s theatricality and existing narrative.

Radix Theatre has so far been rather successful in its *modus operandi* and its site-specific performances. Critics such as Peter Birnie from the *Vancouver Sun* has described Radix as “a tiny but highly praised Vancouver theatre company”; (24 May 2002) and the *Georgia Straight*’s Colin Thomas has exclaimed “Thank God for Radix”. (3 Feb. 2005) Others, such as Jerry Wasserman has acknowledged Radix’s innovative drive, writing: “the great thing about Radix Theatre is that you always know you’re going to get something different from your regular experience at their shows.” (Feb. 2005) However, he does caution that “different doesn’t necessarily mean better” and this attitude is reflected in reviews of their past and present productions with different critics varying in opinion about the merits of different productions.

For *Box/Box*², Thomas expresses in his review “Diner Theatre Cooks Up Magic” that while the “wondrous emerges from the mundane in the sequel (which is totally cool)” he preferred the original *Box* where the basic idea was fresher and the “show contained deeper levels of poetic and emotional expression.” As a critique of a repeated production, he notes that in *Box*², “the artists parody their characters more, and, exploring the same space, they repeat some of their movement vocabulary.” (2-9 Nov. 2000) Thomas’ words raise another
question or focus for site-specific performance researchers: whether the repeated use of a site for the same production in different times means the performance might lose its spirit due to a habitualised staging concept. This question is worth exploring and should be included in the cluster of research currently available for site-specific performance.

For *Sniffany the Rat Bus Tour* on the other hand, critiques seemed to help in between versions of the production. In his review of the first version in 2001, Thomas notes that while it is "odd and original", the production is "not entirely satisfying", a sentiment Wasserman reiterates later as I have mentioned. Thomas’ specific criticism of the production was that “driving around [on the tour] mildly enhances the sense of place and historicity, but [he] could have watched the video at home and gotten almost as much out of the afternoon as [he] did on the bus ride.” (25 Oct. - 1 Nov. 2001) Putting forward suggestions such as “if the tour’s creators can figure out how to rely more on the present and less on the past, they might parlay this thing into a deserving cult hit”, (25 Oct. -1 Nov. 2001) he may have directly or indirectly inspired the 2003 version’s more participatory show with more “off the bus” excursions than the first version. Thus, the influence of critics on the performance of a theatre company is a significant one.

While Radix’s approach to site-specific work stems from an interest in highlighting the theatricality of unusual sites and in looking at ordinary spaces with a heightened sense of perception – as described in their mandate – the company also engages with the performance form in order to revitalise audience experience through a three-dimensional experience and to raise awareness of social issues, thereby jolting audiences into thinking about society and human existence. As such, Radix does not deal explicitly with the debates surrounding the
site-specific performance form. Rather, the collective, led by Laurenson and Ternes engage in site-specific performance in order to further their cause for socially relevant theatre for an active audience. Accordingly, the formal worries of site-specific performance passed down from Serra – where to move the work is to destroy the work – does not seem to affect Radix’s approach to site-specificity. Instead, in line with their conceptual discussions, the collective actively thinks of and engages with site as spaces enabling the expression of their concepts, which they share with audiences through performance.

That said, the fact that Box \(^2\) was not as compelling in the diner in Victoria where a lack of essential sensoria took away from the production and forced the company to change a large part of the performance, seems to indicate that Serra might have been right in this case when he said “to move the work is to destroy the work.” Even though the production toured successfully to Toronto, the diner was similar to the Templeton diner in Vancouver and was thus technically the same site, although in a different geographical location. The diner in Victoria, on the other hand, being essentially different, meant that Radix had to respond to the new site, recalling Couillard’s “site-responsive” performance terminology, so that they changed the show according to what the site dictated and allowed. In this way, site-specific performance was definitely informed by the site.

On the other hand, when dealing with issues specific to Vancouver such as in Sniffy the Rat Bus Tour, Radix manages to address historical issues in innovative ways, playing on the tour-bus form, which has become a recognisable convention and leisure activity. Although the production is not suitable for external touring to other countries due to its culturally specific basis, Radix engages with the site of Vancouver as palimpsest, expanding
site-specific performance to encompass multiple relevant sites within one production and writing new narratives for the contemporary audience’s experience. Thus in Sniffy, theatre performance and the heritage tour form are cast in a new light, enabling audiences to think about past issues in unique participatory ways, such as through the “mob” performance.

These examples of site-specific performance show positive ways in which theatre companies can move beyond Serra’s legacy, thus supporting my argument that in performance’s experiments with site-specificity, theatre companies’ creation process can rework definitions of what it means to be site-specific, often resulting in a more fluid and rich idea of the concept. At the same time, it is important not to exclude Serra’s words, as it has proved true in certain instances, for example, in Box when it toured to Victoria.
BOCA DEL LUPO PRODUCTION ANALYSES

Vasily the Luckless and The Shoes that were Danced to Pieces

Boca del Lupo advertises their Stanley Park productions as “free, all-ages, roving spectacles”. (Boca website) As such, the subject matter of these productions tends to appeal to children and families who are the target audiences. Like the other two Stanley Park productions, The Last Stand – about two brothers who find balance in reality and dreams, and the Lagoon of Lost Tales – which shows a boy looking for his mother and hoping to fix his parents’ marriage; Boca’s Vasily and Shoes also speak to the “all-ages” audience about wealth, poverty, greed, the inequality between the rich and the poor, hope and love through a magical setting that nonetheless, parallels very poignant life issues faced by both children and adults. While the productions do not attack contemporary social and cultural issues with as much conceptual depth as Radix Theatre whose target audiences are adults ranging from their twenties to late fifties or sixties, Boca’s priority to entertain the public with a free, professional performance is also a political act, according to Dodge, (personal interview) who notes the elitism of theatre in traditional and commercial venues. As such, in terms of subject matter, Boca’s works do not tie in specifically with their chosen site – Stanley Park’s Prospect Point picnic site, which seems to be a vessel or vehicle in which Boca has integrated its productions. However, due to the park’s central function as Vancouver’s leisure hub and family weekend oasis, Boca’s target audience does match the profile of people who go to the park. In this way, perhaps we can read the performances on the whole as site-specific in the sense of the third category I mentioned in Chapter Two: site as everyday theatricality. In creating their performances in the park, Boca highlights the theatricality of the site, thus
changing park-goers and audiences’ experiences of the particular public space, adding a layer of meaning and fantasy to the otherwise simply functional aspect of the park.

To give a brief synopsis and description of Vasily the Luckless: the plot begins with Marco the Rich, the self-proclaimed landlord receiving a prophecy of Vasily’s claim to his fortune, which he had worked very hard to save. After finding Vasily as a baby – (the baby was a prop made out of a ball wrapped in a baby blanket), and buying him from poor his parents, Marco proceeded to kick baby Vasily into the bushes to get rid of him. A couple, Ivan and his wife, Lizaveta find him on their way to pay Marco back some money. The spectators were made to gather from the couple’s conversation that the world in which the characters inhabit had experienced a war. Lizaveta wants to keep the baby to replace her own son, Alexei, who had died. However, when Marco realises the baby is Vasily, he again buys him off them and attempts to dispatch him by stuffing him in a barrel and floating him out to sea attached to a bunch of white balloons. As the plot unfolds, the spectators are also introduced to other characters: Marco’s five year old daughter Anastasya, who they later see as an adult, an abbot, monks, angels, a ferryman, the dragon king, his companion, Sophia and an old oak tree, represented by the chorus of musicians who accompany the performance live with instruments such as the accordion and singing. All these characters help Vasily in one way or another as the spectators “meet” them, popping out of bushes, appearing from behind trees, swinging down from the forest canopy and so on.

The plot for The Shoes that were Danced to Pieces on the other hand, uses similar themes and draws on a common fairytale trope. As briefly described earlier in Chapter Two B, the evil king’s ten daughters have been breaking their shoes mysteriously, and keeping
silent when their father asks them about their nocturnal activities. The audience meets most
of the characters at the beginning, including the king, ten princesses, the cobbler who is
stressed over the daily shoe repairs, and eventually the Poor Guy who steps up to the
challenge. The rest of the performance revolves around solving the mystery as the audiences
follow Poor Guy who, as a performance device to hook younger audience’s engagement and
interaction, repeatedly asks for reminders as to what his tasks are as he goes to stay in the
princesses’ room to keep watch on their activities. Along the trail, the audience and Poor Guy
also meet two old hags suspended in the trees, who after some riddling and lamenting, help
Poor Guy with some tips (which the audience must help him remember such as: have a nap
before you go, don’t drink the night-cap) and a hat which makes him invisible. In addition, in
a scene when Poor Guy is taking a nap, we see him dream about his family: visually, a small
family saving the last bit of food for each other can be seen through a constructed window
that rotates. Both productions naturally had moralistic endings with the villains Marco the
Rich and the Evil King suffering their demise. While moral issues were not actively put forth,
both productions dealt with the relationship between the rich and the poor mostly by casting
the rich as villainous and the poor as innocent hero. There were nuances however: Marco the
Rich was supposed to have worked hard for his wealth “saving every penny” so that the
audience can understand his anguish at losing the fortune to Vasily; while the Poor Guy, who
succeeds and inherits the kingdom at the end of the play, apparently becomes corrupted by
avarice as described in an afterword.

In terms of staging, Vasily the Luckless begins (like Shoes) at a meeting point where
spectators arrive on foot, by car, or by the Stanley Park shuttle bus. Attendance is taken, the
spectators who have reserved their places online will check in, get their hands stamped with a
sign, usually thematic, and then proceed to wait for the guides carrying long poles and flags
to herd them from place to place. Children are advised to follow their parents and
accessibility is available for the disabled in wheelchairs since the trails are relatively smooth.

On the whole, the performances' trajectories through the trails remain relatively simple: for
*Vasily*, the audience is taken from the Prospect Point picnic site and led along the Raccoon
trail, the Meadow Trail and then finally ending at the clearing near the Hollow Tree. For
*Shoes*, the trajectory proceeded in the opposite direction of the route used in *Vasily*. Within
the trails however, staging elements and additional visual designs create interesting images
and sensations for the audience, while the numerous potentialities of the space allowed fluid
yet varied configurations between performers and audiences.

In *Vasily*, the crowd gathers round a clearing where the spectators are first met by live
singers, led by Joelysa Pankanea, who are in costume as angels narrating Vasily’s birth and
prophecy. At the end of the song, the audience sees Marco the Rich, costumed in brocade
throwing a ball which is assumed to be baby Vasily down a narrow path behind the
audience’s route into some bushes, before a couple with a cart trudges up that very path. At
this point, the audience is surrounded by action on three sides, with the singers in front,
Marco the Rich on their right and the approaching cart from behind. Audience members thus
had to turn around to follow the action. Moreover, since there are no immediately apparent
framing devices, the audience might perceive the whole environment, including the sky and
the ground to be part of the performance. This is reminiscent of Aronson’s frontal/non-frontal
staging continuum in which this scene can fit into the first category of perceived environment
where the audience imagines and brackets the performance environment in their minds. This
configuration is still considered frontal however, as audiences can see all the action by way of turning around in their tracks.

Other dynamic examples of varied performer and audience configurations can be found in Shoes. For example, when the audience follows Poor Guy and arrives outside the “door” to the princesses’ room, it meets the cobbler character, carrying a prop door. After setting the door in the audience’s path, the cobbler waves the audience and Poor Guy “in”, allowing the audience’s perception of the environment to shift from an imaginary world to an imaginary palace room. This imaginary room is further enhanced by a large rope-hammock (representing the bed) suspended from several trees over a clearing. Upon approaching, the herders guided audience members to sit on the ground surrounding the clearing so that audience members formed a circle, looking up at the hammock in the middle. Several princesses beckon to Poor Guy from atop the “bed” and as the scene progresses, the audience sees Poor Guy climbing up a rope ladder dangling from the side and later pretending to sleep to trick the princesses. The interesting angle of staging allowed audiences to see through the hammock to Poor Guy who is lying face down, snoring with his eyes open. Yet another variation of the performer audience configuration is in the “boat scene”. This occurs after the Poor Guy has donned the hat that will make him invisible. When the audience arrives at another clearing watching the princesses get into boats – the effect is achieved through boat-like structures with a hole at the bottom so that the performers can “wear” the boats around their waists with their arms lifting the boat to the right level – the herders beckon the audiences to stoop down. What follows is a powerful image as the princesses turn round and “boat” their way through the field of audience members, before moving off down the path behind the audience.
All throughout both *Vasily* and *Shoes*, the secondary characters do not acknowledge the audience members. However, all the protagonists and lead characters such as Vasily, Anastasya and the Poor Guy “see” and interact with the audience. Vasily speaks to the audience several times including “I’m only sixteen years old”, just before he and Anastasya get married; Anastasya asks an audience member to help her read a note from Marco the Rich, her father, saying she does not have her reading glasses; and Poor Guy repeatedly asks the audience, particularly the children to remind him of his quest and the two old hags’ advice to him. The only times when secondary characters “break the wall” with the audience are when they absolutely need to move through audiences or to ask audiences to move out of the way. For example, Wasserman notes that Marco the Rich “endeared himself to the kids” by saying “excuse me, I’m evil but I’m polite” as he moved through their space. (Aug. 2005)

In my experience of the “boat scene” in *Shoes*, one of the princess characters needed to move past me by stepping over a log; she too said, “excuse me, and be careful”. Thus, in terms of performer-audience configuration and the issue of staging, Boca’s spectaculars mainly operate frontally, as audiences perceive and bracket the whole environment as performance space in their minds. However, the breaking of the fourth wall between the protagonists and audience, followed by the wall’s subsequent reappearance, when the audience watches the secondary characters open the possibility for other configurations such as moments of “implied environment” such as when the audience members are automatically implied to be the lake when the princesses move through them during the boat scene. Thus, Boca’s spectaculars explore the performer and audience relationship in an oscillating way: swinging between a more traditional staging perspective and a more experimental environment enveloping the audience.
As I mentioned earlier, Boca adopts a mainly physical approach to theatre creation. This practice is epitomised in the Stanley Park productions, which employ rigging features allowing performers clad in proper Special Weapons and Tactics (SWAT) harnesses to swoop in and out or up and down trees, surprising spectators following other performers on the ground. This method is used more in *Vasily* than in *Shoes*, since the plot and fantastical characters such as angels and the Dragon King allowed for more movement in the trees. The director, Sherry J. Yoon tells me in an interview that to complement the action, set pieces are constructed around the trails, blended into trees and greenery so that spectators get “a sense that they are entering into a world instead of just watching [from outside, as in traditional performance spaces dividing performer and audience spaces]” (personal interview) This recalls the three-dimensionality that inspires Radix Theatre to do site-specific work. Dodge elaborates that when the artistic collaborators incorporate performers and design elements in the park trails, they try to make it so that the elements fit into the environment, as if they belong there. For example, in *Vasily the Luckless*, a massive bell tower image was constructed by hanging a large bell from a tree in the shape of a tuning fork. Without the suspension of disbelief and perceived from outside Boca’s constructed “world”, this image would be jarring and out of place. However, with the spectators’ total physical immersion into the space – enhanced by the relatively quiet Raccoon, Rawlings, Meadow and Thompson trails in the forest behind Prospect Point picnic site – the “world” or environment envelopes and surrounds spectators who sense that they are part of the worlds in which the stories unfold. In a way similar to Aronson’s description of environmental theatre outdoors, Boca’s Stanley Park productions indeed frame spectators in an environment where they could expand their perceptions of performance space to include the sky, trees, gravel road and grass. Through such a “perceived environment” as Aronson categorises it, the division between
performers and spectators are blurred and both are in an imagined and performed world sustained by the plot, set pieces blended in the trails and the performance.

Furthermore, Boca’s creations, to paraphrase Mike Pearson words, are devised performances, physical theatre, and site-specific work where dramatic literature does not necessarily play a central organising role — nor are they manifest historically, ethnically and experimentally. (xiii) In my interview with Yoon, Boca’s artistic director, who directed both Vasily and Shoes, I asked her if she was ever compelled to address the historical and cultural resonances of the site and she replied in the negative. Instead, Boca uses the site for devised work, making it seem like a character in the play, where tracing the path, looking out for possibilities and feeling the atmosphere is one of the first things they do in the creation process. According to Yoon, they do not, as some companies do, take a script and simply impose it on the site. Instead, during the creation process, which might involve at most, an idea or story on which the production will very loosely be based, Yoon and Dodge would immerse themselves in the trails, seeking out possibilities such as variations in visual imagery, specific areas of vertical space and potential routes so that the eventual performance is atmospherically and physically derived from the site. To seek another term, perhaps Paul Couillard’s “site-responsive” performance can be used to better describe their works where each specific trail, step, bush, tree, corner, expanse and space along the path has been combed for possibilities in how they can or would contribute to the performance. As such, Boca de Lupo’s Stanley Park spectaculars seem illustrative of site as narrative in my groupings of site-specific performance. Using a quotidian public place such as Stanley Park, Boca reveals the park’s theatricality and also creates layers of memory for the audience. Indeed, Boca has a wide audience base that returns annually for their spectaculars. The lasting effect and
memory can be seen in young audiences: as Dodge tells The Globe and Mail’s Jessica Werb: “I’ll meet up with parents six months or a year later, and they’ll tell me that when they walk down the trail, the kids ask them, ‘Where did they all go? Where are all the people that live in the trees?’” (29 Jul. 2005) In this way, Boca spectaculars create and inject narratives and images into the audience’s “hermeneutic base of assemblage”, borrowing Pearson and Shank’s terminology, so that they might bring along these memories and experiences when they watch the next production.

Critics reviewing Vasily and Shoes have expressed opinions ranging from delight, broad interest, to disappointment at what they see has become formulaic in Boca’s spectaculars, a tried and true approach that has seemingly lost its earlier spark of novelty. Whereas Jo Ledingham, critic for the Vancouver Courier notes the works’ continual magic and hold on the audience, especially the children, others like Wasserman at Vancouverplays.com and Colin Thomas of the Georgia Straight have expressed concern and disappointment that the rigging and “flying” possibilities that have established Boca’s signature are now used with no apparent reason nor link to the plot. These critics mostly question for example, the point of dangling a desk in mid-air and hanging a hammock above it (in Vasily), since this set-up does not add to the plot. However, another question I would like to raise is: is plot the only consideration in such magical settings? If the point is experimental staging and a creation of a fantastical world within the site, perhaps such search for meaning might take a back seat.

In this chapter, I have analysed Boca del Lupo’s outdoor performances from a site-specific standpoint. Given Boca’s level of physical and sensuous engagement with the site
and inspirations based on sensoria such as trees, brushes, logs, clearing and the forest canopy, it is useful to situate their spectacles in the site-specific performance matrix. Even though Vasily and Shoes are not explicitly described as site-specific, Boca’s creation process, which entails combing through trails and immersing themselves in the environment in order to establish performance scenes and script structure, makes the company’s spectacles an interesting example of site-specific performance. While the company worked from a generally undefined methodology, except when it is being labelled or described as “outdoor performance”, their unique engagement with the trails within Stanley Park can be described as a site-specific process of creation. In their case, site-specificity becomes a methodology, materialised in their creation process and resulting in innovative examples of outdoor theatre with heightened engagement with its site.
6 CONCLUSION

In the previous chapters, I have explored several issues and debates associated with site-specific performance. Drawing from the creation process and inspiring works of two Vancouver theatre companies, Radix Theatre and Boca del Lupo, I have suggested how site-specificity in performance depends largely on theatre artists' approaches and levels of engagement with the site. In Chapter Two, in order to situate and heighten understanding of Radix and Boca's works in the site-specific performance matrix, I explored some of the key terminologies such as site-specificity, outdoor/street theatre and environmental theatre. I also drew links between site-specific performance and these antecedents of the form.

It is interesting to note that some of the problems that helped inspire manifestations of site-specific performance in the 1960s and 1970s are still extant today, as seen from some of Radix Theatre and Boca del Lupo's intentions for adopting site-specific or outdoor performance. For example, while Sainer argues that theatre companies in the sixties and seventies embarked on reintegrating art and politics; collapsing the divide between performers and audiences, a trait of elitist, traditional theatre; and taking the theatre outdoors to the streets or other indoor public spaces, to show their anti-commercialist and activist sentiments in his book, Radix and Boca also adopted site-specificity as a methodology to deal with similar issues. Radix brought theatre outdoors into unusual sites in order to bring performance to the public as well as highlight the theatricality of everyday spaces. Moreover, it strives to create a three-dimensional experience for its audiences whether in diners, on bus tours, under bridges and in a makeshift clinic. Boca on the other hand, moved to create a "magical world" within the public and well-used trails of Stanley Park.
Despite the innovations and successes stemming from their site-specific works, commercialism is still a problem both companies face. Even though Radix began by offering free performances or requested “payment” through donation to the food bank in order to demonstrate its anti-commercialist ideals, the company eventually had to revert to charging for performances due to a shortage of funding as well as critiques from some funders who feel their shows did not generate enough earned revenue. According to Laurenson, the reason for this was that Radix’s shows were smaller and more intimate, so much so that they did not sell tickets. Currently, the company offers free performances for their “works-in-development” and charges a price for the actual production runs. Although they try to make their shows affordable, Laurenson tells me that it is challenging and “like every other theatre company, ticket prices have been gradually creeping up.” (personal interview) On the other hand, Boca del Lupo’s Stanley Park productions have managed to remain free. However, the company relies heavily on donations, usually collected in vessels appropriate to the theme of the show, for example, a peasant’s hat for Vasily and a giant shoe for Shoes. The company even spells out costs of production such as performer harnesses, pay, and so on, on their website so that patrons know how their donations can help. At the same time, they are also reliant on grants and sponsorship as part of their Spirit of Vancouver membership which help in financing these productions.

Furthermore, tying in with the idea that the company’s works are still effectively commercial, Boca’s free shows also require that potential audiences log-in to the company’s website in order to book tickets. The booking system necessitates that its audiences have access to computers, and because of the spectacualrs’ popularity, the tickets tend to run out fast. Thus, people have to resort to waiting lists in order to get into the show, thereby raising
the stakes for audiences wishing to get tickets for the production. Hence, these two points: the need to charge for site-specific performance for Radix and the reserving system for Boca's spectacles result in the institutionalisation of the form. Laurenson views this trend sadly as site-specific performance has also evolved such that it has become the popular, elitist and commercial entertainment it tried so hard to break away from. (Personal interview)

One of the contributions I hoped to provide with this thesis is a close analysis of some key Radix and Boca works, each of which offer innovative examples of site-specific performance. While they are culturally specific Vancouver companies, Radix and Boca's creation and conceptual processes and productions offer interesting alternatives to site-specific performance debates centred on site-specificity's legacy from Minimal Art, recognised in Serra's maxim – to move the work is to destroy the work, to which purists of site-specific performance adhere. Moreover, to aid my analysis of Radix and Boca's works, I have reviewed some relevant debates and definitions of site-specific performance, which I have pulled together into three main categories for easier reference. These categories – site as anchor, site as value and meaning-laden palimpsest and site as everyday living theatricality, help differentiate and describe Box/Box, Sniffy the Rat Bus Tour, Vasily the Luckless and The Shoes that were Danced to Pieces's level and type of engagement with their sites. Through my analysis of these examples, I am able to argue that the creation process and the theatre artists' approach to site has the power to redefine site-specificity, thus broadening its earliest definition.

The two companies and four productions I have chosen to analyse are not representative of a general Vancouverite approach to site-specific performance. This is most
evident in the fundamental differences between Radix and Boca’s works, and even within their production histories. As I mentioned in Chapter 3, Radix began as a dance-centred interdisciplinary group, which eventually explored site-specific performance in order to expose the theatricality of everyday sites. Boca on the other hand started of as a physical theatre group working in purpose-built indoor theatres before experimenting with outdoor theatre. They are important, however as heterotopian examples of the site-specific performance form’s wealth of potential. Given the varied examples and approaches of both companies’ creative processes and their approaches to site, it is clear that more examples and configurations could be studied to further enrich the theories I have discussed in this thesis. In particular, an interesting example that might be further explored is a site-specific event, as opposed to a site-specific performance performed by one specific theatre company. This is gleaned from my experience at HIVE 2006, a performance event held in Vancouver last year, which brought together eleven independent theatre companies to create “a giant performance installation.” (HIVE website) Drawing from the beehive as analogy, the site or hive was an old funeral parlour with several different rooms or cells in which the companies could perform. Participating companies drew lots for their specific space within the site and had to create a work in response to it, while also following the main theme of life, death and possibly turmoil as evoked by the venue’s historic purpose. Both Radix and Boca participated in the event and it would be interesting to study their approaches to site-specific performance in that context where the site and theme are picked and delegated.

From analysing Radix and Boca’s productions, it is evident that on the whole, existing definitions, ideas and debates on site-specific performance accurately reflect its form and praxis. Interestingly, when the works are analysed against the three categories of site-specific
performance, we see that the approaches to site can overlap such that a performance like Sniffy the Rat Bus Tour can broach issues in both site as value and site as narrative. This further confirms the nuances that go into site-specific performance in practice, which is usually more intuitive and physical than textual as action and intention respond to or are inspired by a site.

Earlier in the thesis, I mentioned Andrew Houston and Laura Nanni quoting Foucault's "heterotopia" to reflect the different practices, theories, and ideas surrounding site-specific performance that are so varied and that simultaneously represent, contest and invert each other. (5) While both Radix and Boca works, which I have analysed, are broadly representative of site-specific performance, both companies' approaches differ. Radix conceptualises performances by discussing socially relevant issues before looking for a site for their productions, thereafter allowing the site to inform and influence their productions. Boca has a set venue in Stanley Park to which they return almost annually and each time, they rediscover the space, allowing the environment to inform their highly visual spectacles. While the former states site-specificity as their mode of performance in their mandate, the latter uses site-specificity as a methodology in performance. Both companies also do not seem to worry about Serra's legacy. Instead, their performances show that his words are sometimes right. From my analysis and the three categories of site-specific performance I created to aid in describing and understanding the practice, it is clear that the best way to approach site-specific performance is one that is open to heterotopian views.
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