

Whose Trial is it Anyway?

In the last issue of the newsletter, co-directors Joy Leonard and Chris Nichols addressed some of the Company's artistic interest in returning to Franz Kafka's *The Trial*. Now it seems appropriate to try to answer the question that arises with every production, whether new or revisited - why now? What aspects of American society and today's political landscape are illuminated by or connected to the themes of *The Trial of K*?



First let's take **surveillance**. All over the United States, and especially in metropolitan hubs like New York City, the average citizen encounters surveillance daily. From security cameras in every bank, store, elevator and public park; to machine-gun toting airport guards; to personal records accessed by the government, very few activities escape official scrutiny. What kinds of reading materials, purchases, activities or nonpolitically-sanctioned opinions might bring the FBI or NSA to your doorstep? Who knows these days where caution ends and paranoia begins? In the name of national security, we have given up our



privacy, our rights to assemble and express dissent. We have agreed to spy on our neighbors and been conditioned to look everywhere for "suspicious" activity. We're told that this encroachment on the very freedoms that the nation was founded upon is temporary - we'll get all our rights back when the War ends. Except somehow we've signed on for an indefinite period of War without clearly defined objectives, and therefore without an end in sight.

Closely related to the growth of surveillance is our cultural addiction to **voyeurism**. One has only to turn on the television, pick up a magazine or newspaper

or log onto the web to confirm America's love affair with "real-life" exposure. There is probably no human experience that can't be witnessed right now via webcam - sex is the least of it. Every major (commercial) television network runs hours of reality programming - including arrests, marriages, dates that resemble soft-core porn, physical challenges, hirings and firings, petty conflicts, card games, cosmetic surgery and family breakdowns. Apparently, our desire to press ourselves against the window of others' lives is insatiable. In *The Trial*, Josef K becomes a celebrity once he is accused, and soon everyone wants a piece of him. The eye of the public becomes an inescapable fact of his existence; whether the watchers are

(Continued on page 4)

Returning to K: An Interview with Margaret O'Sullivan



As the Company re-enters the world of Franz Kafka's *The Trial*, the Synaesthetic Viewpoint asked Margaret to share some of her reflections on the 1999 workshop production, **ROT**, and returning to the role of Josef K.

What is your clearest memory from performing ROT?

MARGARET O'SULLIVAN: The clearest moment for me as a performer was during one of the last shows. I was sitting on my chair downstage facing the audience. The film of *The Law* was playing behind me and I was in semi-darkness. That night, I was overcome with how wrong, unfair and inhumane this judgment against Josef K was. I remember getting all churned up like I was going to break down weeping. I felt like an abyss was opening up and I was going to be engulfed by it, unable to return. I had never felt this way before and didn't know what to do with all this emotion. My breathing became shallow and rapid. I think I let out a small moan. All the while, I am trying to remain still and not

steal focus during the film. As the film ended, I didn't know if I should just let it all out and be true to what was going on for me in the moment, or honor the text, in which Josef K is cool and collected.

What did you do?

MO: I made a decision and pulled myself back from the edge -- it sounds so melodramatic but I really did see a black hole at my feet. I continued the scene with all this stuff underneath ... which was the right thing to do. But I am still curious about "the road not taken."

Any favorite moments from performance?

MO: I consistently LOVED watching my filmed scene with Max Frey as femme fatale Leni, and dubbing our voices live.

What's it like returning to the role of Josef K?

MO: It's odd because in some ways I barely remember him, and I really don't want to do an exact replica of the 1999 Josef K. But then in an improv in rehearsal now something will come from out of the blue that's totally him.



(Continued on page 4)

Points of View: The Viewpoints Workshops



The workshops covered the use of Viewpoints in choreography, piece-making and rehearsal, and also delved into improvisation with sound and words. Workshops were developed and co-led by Joy Leonard and Chris Nichols with long-time collaborators and Company members Aubrey Hardwick and Tina West Chavous. A good time was had by all, and returning participants wished each other a fond farewell at the end of the final session in December, having taken an educational journey as an ensemble. One committed participant flew into NYC to attend all 3 workshops. All 4 instructors valued the opportunity to go deeper with the training and exploration, grappling with advanced applications of the Viewpoints and learning from the participants, as well. To all who attended, we'd like to say thanks and great work!

Tina West Chavous: In one of my other

lives, I teach Yoga. At first, I felt rather dis-oriented because I was teaching such a different methodology of movement. However, I was soon struck by the similarities between the teaching practices. Both Yoga and the Viewpoints require intense listening, non-attachment and a full arrival at the present moment. During each session, the participants challenged my notions of what the Viewpoints are and how they work. Most remarkably, the participants reminded me of the fun and playfulness that exist in The Viewpoints.

Aubrey Hardwick: The October workshop, "Adding Sound to the Viewpoints" was a

good choice for my first time leading, since I tend to gravitate towards music and voice. Placing one's voice into a seemingly wide-open space and waiting to see where it lands can be a terrifying hurdle for many improvisers, which is why I was shocked and thrilled at the level of commitment with which the workshop participants tackled this challenge. In particular "Instant Poetry" stands out in my mind. The idea of the game is for the leaders to throw out a line of text and one participant must instantly jump into the center of the space and create a short poem beginning with the words that were given. It was

great fun to watch and I admired the many small masterpieces that were created on the spot! 📷



Working with Wendell Beavers

In November of 2004, Synaesthetic held a **Developmental Movement and The Viewpoints Workshop** led by Wendell Beavers, formerly director of the Experimental Theatre Wing and now Chair of Naropa University's new MFA in Contemporary Performance. Company member Clinton Powell recalls his experience in the workshop.



The two-day workshop offered 10 hours of instruction focused on the developmental stages that the human body undergoes and the ways in which sensation influences perception. Wendell led the 18 participants -- actors, dancers, and at least one performance artist -- through exercises that began by revisiting early patterns of locomotion, such as crawling. An insightful and motivating instructor, Wendell's passion for the work was contagious, and the participants all took to the work strongly and quickly. Many were from out-of-state and considering applying to the Naropa Master's pro-

gram, and the workshop gave them an opportunity to work with Wendell before finalizing their application decision.

This was not my first time studying Developmental Movement with Wendell; however, this workshop allowed me the opportunity to explore and delve deeper. I was better able to think of my head and tail as my fifth and sixth limbs, which freed and opened my body during the exercises. Overall, the unique group of participants and the engaging instructor made the weekend a truly rewarding and enriching experience. 📷



Update from Board Chair Jessica Baker

Winter of 2004-5 finds a flurry of activity here at Synaesthetic central! We are pleased to announce a new workshop entitled **MUSIC OF THE VOICE: Song and Improvisation**. This new program, which rounds out our winter educational offerings, will be held on January 29-30, and offers a rare opportunity for professional actors, singers, and improvisers to study with the incomparable Jonathan Hart Makwaia. Described by the New York Times as possessing "a spectacular display of vocal timbres and techniques," he has led workshops in over 20 countries and returns to lead courses at the Roy Hart



Centre in France every summer. He has been on the faculty of New York University's Experimental Theatre Wing since 1988, and we are thrilled to add Jonathan to Synaesthetic's roster of contributing master teachers.

As the winter workshop season moves to a close, Synaesthetic shifts into higher gear ... show time is almost here! *The Trial of K* has been cast, a design team assembled, and we are heading full steam toward the opening of the show on March 30, 2005. We will be returning to present the show at The Culture Project @ 45 Bleeker, in the 45 Below theater space - and we look forward to seeing all of you at the show.

In other news, we have added another new Associate Company member to our ranks ... Ms. Jo Winarski. Jo designed the set for our last production, *ARCANA: Cycle of the Fool*, as well as Synaesthetic's *Tamatebako {the box}* in '99, and she also collaborated on various pre-Synaesthetic shows. Having finally lured Jo into our ranks, our total company member count is now up to 15. Welcome, Jo!

As we enter the New Year, we say a hearty THANKS to all of our faithful patrons and friends for your continued support in 2004. We promise to keep working hard to provide you with challenging and thought-provoking theatre workshops, multimedia productions, and of course, informative and exciting newsletters. Happy New Year! ☺

Seed Projects 2004, part 1

Included here are 3 short blurbs about new and re-visited concepts for future productions. These 3 groups presented their concepts and images to the rest of the company at our November meeting, and lively discussions followed all of the presentations. Another 2 groups will present new concepts in January. Once again, the process of brainstorming, researching and developing these ideas has provided Company members with opportunities to collaborate in new configurations, and has produced exciting results. If only we could clone ourselves and work on them all at once ...

END OF THE WESTERN WORLD

Joy Leonard, Suchan Voodor



The vast expanses of the American West spawned an enduring mythic symbol -- the Cowboy. The image of the heroic Cowboy, riding out of the dust and blazing sun to set things right appeals to our romantic self-image. In this figure we see an idealized American version of the Arthurian Knight, the questing hero. From Johnny Cash to George W. Bush, many have taken on this identity, usually with great pride. But the Cowboy has a negative connotation as well; he's a man destined for violence, who lives by the gun and brings an apocalypse with him. The Cowboy sacrifices his humanity and does the dirty work we want done, so that we can sleep in our civilized beds at night dreaming of peace.

TRIANGLE

Chris Nichols, Tina West Chavous

"I would be a traitor to these poor burned bodies if I came here to talk good fellowship. We have tried you good people of the public and we have found you wanting."

- Rose Schneiderman, organizer for the ILGWU and the Women's Trade Union League (April 2, 1911)

On March 25, 1911, a fire broke out on the 9th floor of the Triangle Shirt Waist Factory. In less than 30 minutes the fire killed 146 workers, many of them young women, and six of whom were never identified. It was the most devastating labor tragedy to occur in the United States up to that time, and remained the most horrendous single loss of life at a New York City workplace until September 11, 2001. Synaesthetic's Triangle is an attempt at rehumanizing those six unidentified victims - exploring their possible histories and constructing piece-work identities. The burnt-out factory is the backdrop for this process of imagining and bringing together versions of their interrupted lives.

WONDERLAND

David Crittenden, John DesRoches, Paul Hudson

What might have happened after Alice returned from the land Through the Looking Glass? We see Alice Liddle, the original model for Alice in Lewis Carroll's famous books, as she approaches the final stage in her life. Alice is homebound, living with her son and daughter-in-law and coping with the onset of senility or possible dementia. This return to "innocence" allows the Wonderland characters to re-enter her life, and they begin to lure Alice towards a permanent stay in their world. Wonderland and the world of Alice's family begin to overlap, with actors playing parallel roles in each world and the borders of reality blurring. Imagery from Dadaism, Surrealism, and Cubism provide inspiration for design in this fantasy where adventure comes looking for Alice.





external or internalized, K behaves as if his life is a performance for a cynical but easily titillated crowd.

Finally, we come to the sharp-horned dilemma of **authority and accountability**. If those in authority are not accountable for their actions and principles, why do we continue to hand them power? In *The Trial*, everyone that Josef K speaks with has firsthand experience of the hypocrisy and corruption surrounding the enforcement of the Law, and yet no one questions its primacy. Even K, an educated and urbane individualist, falls victim to the pressure of self-doubt inflicted by this unassailable Court. If power corrupts, then who can be trusted to wield it? And if we ourselves gain some measure of power, does that not imply that we have also been corrupted?

Before arriving at our choice of source material for this year's show, Synaesthetic's members spent a long time discussing various dystopian classics. But we were drawn back to *The Trial* by its complexity and ambiguity. In this time where polarized public opinion and virulent pundits have brought us nothing but confusion, misdirection and (for the democratic and pacifist minorities) despair, we chose to return to a work that has the capacity to both represent and implicate each of us. If you have ever felt guilty, persecuted or misjudged, if you've faced the judge and jury in your own heart, if you've squirmed under the scorn (real or imagined) of your peers - then you will recognize something of yourself in K.

To learn more about *The Trial of K* please visit www.thetrialofk.com 

Returning to K *continued from page 1*

Is there anything you are looking forward to changing in your approach to the character?

MO: I'd like to be more comfortable in embracing his ugliness, sexuality and contempt for his "underlings."

Is there stuff that didn't make it into the workshop production that you hope to include this time around?

MO: I always thought it was important that the ongoing proceedings made K begin to accept his own guilt without question. So much so that he tries to draw up a list of everything he has done with the reasons why he did those things and

whether he would do them today. This is crazy.

What excites you in returning to the world of The Trial now?

MO: At the end of *ROT's* run, I felt like I was just figuring out Josef K. So it's nice to go back and try to take it to the next level. Politically, it's so relevant to our current times that it's a little scary. I'm enjoying rehearsals and am very excited by this cast. I like their ideas and energy and they are so out there that I think it's going to be quite a roller coaster ride.



To learn more about *The Trial of K* please visit www.thetrialofk.com 

The Trial of K - Benefit

Dear Accused -

You are strongly encouraged to account for yourself and your crimes at the prescribed date.

- The LAW

Revelry, Dancing and Public Drunkenness will cause The LAW to rule favorably toward you.

Presided over by - Synaesthetic Theatre

Motive - Funding prosecution of *The Trial of K*

Court Date - Sunday, 2/20/05 (7pm-1am)

Location - Upstairs lounge at Tai
223 Mulberry Street
between Prince and Spring

Fine - \$8 in advance // \$10 at door
Additional Raffle Tickets: \$5

Free mugshot for those decked out in Film Noir threads.

Synaesthetic Theatre 

851 Eastern Parkway, Brooklyn, NY 11213

www.synaesthetic-theatre.com

syn-aes-thet-ic, *adj.* characterizes a work of art which produces harmony out of different or opposing impulses.

