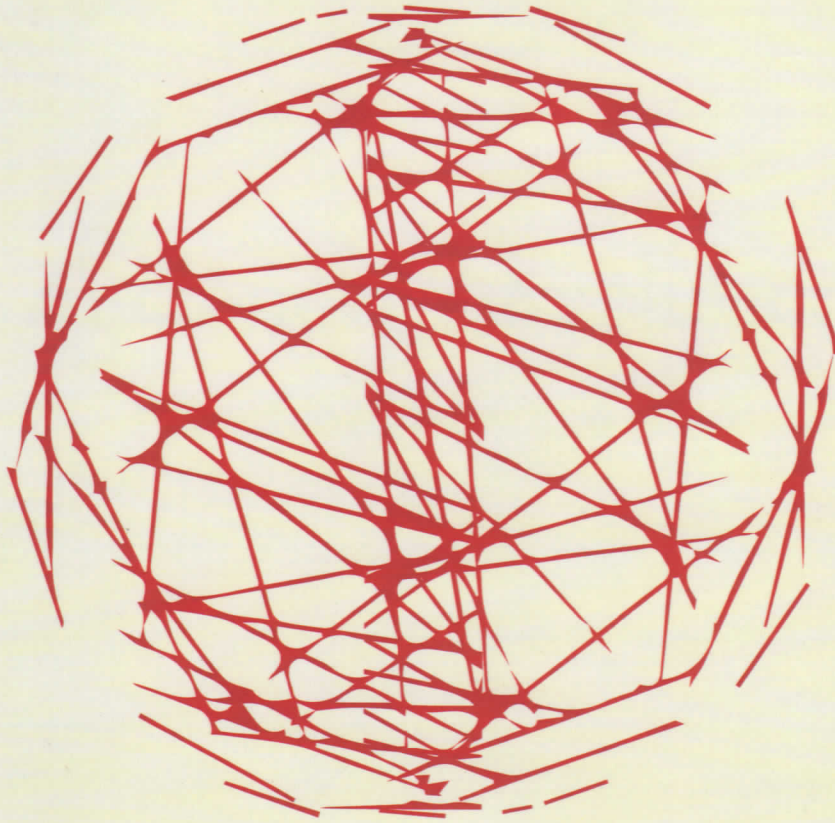


tcg SOURCEBOOK



# Audience (R) Evolution

Dispatches from the Field

EDITED BY CARIDAD SVICH

## NARRATIVE OF PLACE

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Thomas Riccio

The daily world we walk through, that in which we participate as players, is unprecedented, uncertain, fluid, questioned, under constant reevaluation, and full of challenges, distractions, choices, possibilities, threats, and change. We push, pull, and spin, constantly attending to our roles, becoming adept at reading and adapting to narrative terrains, improvisationally moving through the world as a new sort of psychic Paleolithic hunter-gatherers. There are more and more people and diminishing resources. Is it any wonder that games and competition—*Jeopardy*, *Big Brother*, *Top Chef*, *Survivor*, and *The Bachelorette* among them, along with video games and professional and extreme sports—have become such cultural reference, if not allegory, for our time? Out of need, anxiety, insecurity, or overcompensation we have become increasingly self-aware, self-conscious, and self-promoting. Apprehensive in this liminal and ambiguous time of global upheaval and transformation—a time that brings unimagined possibilities and devastation into close alignment—we find ourselves overwhelmed, confused, and distracted in a bifocal, bipolar, ADHD-emergent, and immersive sci-fi world, constellating myth, fantasy, and hyperreality. We survive, disoriented, overwhelmed by the Niagara of images, ads, words, voices, choices, upgrades, and possibilities upon possibilities, uneasy, fatigued, yet sanguine. The creep of increasing social, cultural, economic, and political mediation tightens and quickens in heretofore unimagined ways. We have been hacked, invaded, and we retreat, becoming willing Stockholm syndrome victims taking “selfies” to make sure we still exist. We accept lower, broader, bolder, louder common denominators to steady our faltering walk through jangled reality. Disorder craves order as its tonic, and so we have the rise of fundamentalism-conservatism, while others scramble for security and comfort in so many varied subculture forms.

Technology is no longer a mere extension of human capability, but rather has become semi-sacred—magical objects with wavelength spirits filling once quiet and empty space, enabling us to disembodiment and traverse the unfathomable everywhere ether. Technology is a facilitator and harbinger, like Shiva, the creator, protector, and destroyer, conjuring a new sort of life. Our humanity, hopes, and

dreams are progressively processed, programmed, and datafied; we find ourselves shaped by exponentially efficient, profit-driven, pre-chewed, freeze-dried pabulums of corporatized, franchised offerings of lifestyles, brands, and products. Like numb, drooling, and distracted addicts, we have become narrowly trained to the convenience and the comforts of the known and predictable. What better way, in an uncertain world, than succumb to the efficient fixity of the known, the quick way to momentarily assuage the feelings of anxiety, isolation, and inner emptiness? However, at risk is the flattening and licensing of the imagination and the diminishment, if not deadening, of the mind and the contaminating of the soul. It is a death by small cuts of consciousness, aliveness, and presence in the world, as we sink into a pleasant, warm bubble-bath suicide. The above are some of the swirling subterranean themes coursing, like crossing currents in a broad swelling river, through the narrative of our collective American now.

When performance increasingly shapes the actions and expressions of the everyday, and when the presentations onstage are surpassed by events of the world, the function and viability of theatre must be reconsidered. There are those that maintain the status quo—wittingly, unwittingly, reflexively, and stubbornly—recreating and reconfiguring with variations the conventions, vocabularies, and formulas carried from the past. There is comfort in the familiar, along with a whiff of nostalgia, in established institutions and in known patterns and experiences with variations. After all, theatre buildings and subscription series have been built and organizations, careers, and industries fostered and perpetuated, standing as monuments and testaments, asserting a long and storied history which bequeaths a rightfulness of place and being. Theatre—bigger, more efficient, more comfortable, more technological, more salacious and sensational, and more conformed to corporate ways of being—is symptomatic of a larger degenerative condition: acquiescence in the guise of response. Rather than an antidote, provocateur, and alternative voice speaking to the collective consciousness in time of need, theatre has been commoditized, serving as extensions and affirmations of larger ordering systems. Fossilized, impervious, or willingly ignorant to the foundational, tsunami-like changes washing over the world, theatre has become society's functionary rather than functional. A follower in a time requiring leaders. A place to gather and to reaffirm and reiterate, rather than transcend and reimagine, rebalance, and reorder the world. Rather than the narrative generator of this new place we find



ourselves in, theatre is content to be the equivalent of a cover band serving up warmed-over songs of the past. We are in a time demanding a revolution, a time to challenge all that preceded, a time when form, content, and function must be called into question. It is time to journey into the unknown with the willingness to leave all behind in the effort to recreate our social, cultural, political, and economic systems, the world and self anew.

In so many ways, the events of the world have advanced so far beyond the narrow, self-limiting, and ultimately conservative forms and expressions of theatre. The malaise of theatre is not in its doing—for the need and necessity of theatre is integral to human nature. At issue is the courage to embrace, evolve, and express that which is gestating within and without. Rather than self-marginalizing, becoming a compliant tool for a larger system, theatre can contribute, if not lead, becoming a gathering, the collective brain, and spirit of a community. This is a radical and daunting proposition requiring a fundamental reconsideration of every aspect of how theatre functions, serves, and is operated: its objectives, methods, and expressions. Theatre, with its long and storied lineage, from its shamanic and ritual origins to performance art, is first and foremost a functional and practical human technology able to have real consequences in the world. In order to do this it must reclaim, with confidence, its central place in the mediation of the world's affairs.

The need for performance is expressed everywhere; the world is increasingly performing—becoming “performative”—because theatre has abdicated its role, residing in hospice, and in this way controlled and marginalized from its rightful place at the center of a community. The rise of performance art, immersion and experience performance, dance-theatre, evangelicalism, radical politics far and near, and the preoccupation with gaming—video games, social media, reality TV, and LARP culture—are all expressions, in fits and starts, of a hunger for something else, for real life presence, participation, and community. There is a need to go beyond the artifice of acting and become being, a need to move beyond the human-centric conflict-resolution preoccupations of drama and the antiquated control-command structure of theatre. Descartes's dichotomy, of the mind of the stage controlling the body sitting controlled and inert in the darkened auditorium, is a relic from the seventeenth century. Our society, our culture, our world has moved beyond this form, which stays out of the lazy habit and tradition, not out of necessity.

Globalization is a given and with it has come a myriad of challenges and awakenings. The animated world and mind-body-spirit holism of other cultural worldviews and performance, once dismissed, denigrated, and marginalized, now offer not only exotic content to the novelty-crazed West, but alternatives to how and why performance exists—its forms, functions, and the worldviews that they embody. The rest of the world views the role of performance differently, yet the Western form and expression of theatre, along with its incumbent, economically ensconced production machinery and thinking, remains intransigent to a fundamental reevaluation to make it more vital to a greater cultural, community, and spiritual discourse.

The planet is evolving a new indigenous reality and we are immersed in, and performers of, a narrative of place: a holistic and inclusive planet. No longer is indigeneity simply a framed phenomenon of an isolated, geographically specific location, its societies, and its cultures. We are now all part of a complex coevolutionary process, aware of one another, seeing, communicating, traveling, trading, clashing, and mashing cultures of before, mining them for value and in so doing collectively intuiting a new, never-before-seen way of being. Humans have, since the dawn of civilization, remade the world, and now the world is remaking us.

We are becoming indigenous again, a never-before-seen alive and hyperaware indigenous: We are all becoming earthlings. Each day we become progressively aware of our presence and the fragility of our threatened environment. Each day we become more aware of our relationship with, responsibility to, and the intelligence of animals, insects, flora, the rivers, winds, sky, mountains, and oceans of which we humans are but a small part. The world's cultures interacting have promoted awareness, if not the evolution of a nonreligious way of spirituality. The cycles of seasonal, planetary, and biological evolution have always been in dialogue with human civilization. Yet, our theatre remains stubbornly human-centric, valorizing what is material-objectivist, fixed in a limited perspective, and in so doing hierarchically marginalizing, devaluing, or exoticizing all that is not. The legacy of the human-centric hegemony must be put to rest and understood for what it was, a step in an ongoing evolutionary process.

Our evolution as a species can be characterized by an expansion and consideration of sensitivities and perspectives—racial, gender, and sexual orientation among them—driven by the worthy and noble pursuit of freedom and individuality; but that was then. Our moment

requires a consideration of totality, a presence of being, and the creation of a comprehensive, vibrantly animated community of place. In this we rediscover a way to understand, balance, and give back. Theatre can be a facilitator of human evolution.

Humans, the most enabled and greatest beneficiary of earth's magnificent offering, are responsible for its maintenance and balance. Theatre has the ability to shape thoughts and feelings, to prod and provoke a new consciousness, explore and reveal a reconceptualizing of our relationship with, role in, and obligations to create a world of inclusion, gratitude, and healing. Theatre—its content, form, function, and expressions—can be a vital part of a coevolutionary process, enabling an emergent narrative of place where the voices of humans, animals, flora, spirits, all the elements of the environment, and ancestors “speak,” each in their own way. Our survival as a species depends on it.

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