Title: 'Speak at this': an approach to the completion of speech acts during interactive Shakespeare performances in schools.

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Abstract:

It is 2014 in a secondary school in Scarborough, North Yorkshire. A performance of Romeo and Juliet is taking place in the school hall. An audience of teenagers are sitting on plastic blue chairs arranged in-the-round. During the 'balcony scene' the performer playing Romeo asks a member of the audience, 'Shall I hear more, or shall I speak at this?', this audience member urges him to 'hear more'.

This article interrogates this moment in performance, the process that was required to achieve it and the validity of it as a successfully completed Speech Act. Speech Act Theory has been used as a valuable method for Shakespearean textual analysis but this article investigates the merits of its application as a rehearsal technique: What training methods augment the performative nature of audience address? How can current theoretical concerns in audience studies temper the application of Speech Act Theory in this context to provide an open and interactive Shakespeare performance atmosphere for young people?

In order to address these questions, the argument will draw upon media and data from a large scale PaR project based produced by Hull University and the Stephen Joseph Theatre in Yorkshire in 2014.

It is the 'balcony scene' from Romeo and Juliet. An audience of about forty teenagers sit on chairs arranged in-the-round in their school hall in Yorkshire, England. Mikey Barker, a nineteen year old undergraduate at the University of Hull, is playing Romeo. He looks directly at an audience member and asks her 'Shall I hear more or shall I speak at this?' There is a brief moment of silence before the audience member says 'Hear more'. Barker sits on the ground next the audience member and she pats him on the head approvingly. The audience laugh before Nancy Ackland, playing Juliet, continues the scene.

Throughout the rehearsal process Barker was trained to encourage the audience member to answer the question. Over the course of other performances, there were more moments where other members of the cast had similar interactions with the audience and, by answering questions directed to them in performance, the young spectators were directly engaging with the live event of a Shakespeare play. The drive behind the encouragement of this phenomenon was to open up the enjoyment of Shakespeare's work in performance to include a range of school pupils whose strengths within their education experience did not necessarily include the tools required to analyse a historically distanced text which forms a compulsory part of the UK's National Curriculum. In this sense, the training presented in this research speaks to an urgent moment in the current pedagogical climate - as of 2014, secondary school pupils in the UK are expected to study more, rather than less Shakespeare and performance methodologies are required to enable as broader range of pupils as possible to approach his writing with enthusiasm and, crucially, without fear. This transformative pedagogical atmosphere requires, of course, more than a one-off performance of a Shakespeare play with an emphasis on interaction but, conversely, as a 'first contact' experience with a historically distanced text, the training and work presented in this article serves as an example of how the cultural distance some learners feel when approaching Shakespeare's writing can be bridged in preparation for, or as an augmentation of, an existing programme of study.

This article aims to document the training undertaken to enable defined moments of performer/audience member interaction to take place. Moreover, I aim to use audience responses collected from attendees at performances delivered with this training to highlight how this approach augmented the level of engagement with Shakespeare by these audience members. I will suggest that Speech Act Theory, despite being several decades old, can be used as a training tool as a method of helping to actualise notions of interaction explored within the wider context of Shakespeare audience studies.

Bridget Escolme's *Talking to the Audience: Shakespeare, Performance, Self* (2005) frequently considers the ambiguous position of a performer in an audience's eyes. Most relevant to this study is

her analysis of a moment in Mark Rylance's portrayal of Hamlet at Shakespeare's Globe (pp.63-77) in which 'Rylance comes to the very edge of the stage to ask 'Am I coward? Who calls me villain? When an audience member quips back, Rylance uses the questions that follow to suggest a mock fight with whoever has replied,' (p.71). Throughout her analysis of this account, Escolme refers to 'Rylance/Hamlet' or the 'performer/figure' in order to emphasise the subjectivity at play in the reception of the performance. According to Escolme, these moments of direct audience interaction are an example of 'Rylance's willingness and ability to perform each of these moments for what one might simply call their entertainment value but might be more accurately described as the engagement value of the performance objective,' (p.73). Whilst this virtuosic ability to function in multiple performance modes might be innate to an experienced Shakespearean performer like Rylance, it is not true of other performers and this article seeks to apply Escolme's terminology to a process which explores how this ambiguous role of performer/figure can be established through training to augment the 'engagement value' of performances for young people.

Audiences are not homogenous entities and a training to produce moments described at the beginning of this article should consider the bespoke nature of each moment of interaction. It is therefore important to contextualise my research within the work recently produced in this area by Stephen Purcell and Kirsty Sedgman. Purcell,[1] in *Shakespeare and Audience in Practice* (2013), analyses a moment in four different performances of Tim Crouch's 2011 production of *I, Malvolio* where Crouch asks the audience, 'This is the kind of thing you like, is it?' (p.12-16). The difference in reactions from the audience, from an Edinburgh Fringe crowd to a schools audience, and the different 'ad-libs' (Purcell's phrase) that Crouch performed in response to these highlights how a performer needs to respond to the bespoke nature of direct performer/audience interaction. Like Escolme's terminology, the training proposed in this article responds directly to Purcell's analysis of the individuality of audience member response.

Sedgman (2017) considers more directly the individual experience of audience members who, like the audience member addressed by Mikey Barker, are invited to respond to performers. Most striking about her research with audiences at the National Theatre of Wales are the potential pitfalls of steering audience members towards a specific reading of play or to imagine an 'ideal spectator' (p.161), 'Thus, such works are often implicitly and problematically constructed for an imagined audience, one considered capable of thinking and acting relationally, and hence of responding in the 'right' kind of way.' (p.161). The training documented in this article aims to equip performers to be

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[1] Who acknowledges Helen Freshwater challenge of 'the common tendency to refer to an audience as 'it', and by extension to think of this 'it' as a single entity' (Freshwater, cited by Purcell, 2009, p.5).

flexible not just to the various diversity of responses that an audience member can produce but, moreover, not to privilege one kind of response over another.

Research Contexts

In the interests of clarity I would like to briefly contextualise the practice which informed the research presented. Throughout this article I will refer to a 2014 production of *Romeo and Juliet*, directed by myself and comprised of an undergraduate cast from the University of Hull which was produced by the university and the Stephen Joseph Theatre, Scarborough (UK) for three secondary schools in Yorkshire. Two out of three of the secondary schools all performed below the national average in the attainment of A*- C at GCSE, an important factor in relation to the actor training explored in this article. The encouragement of interaction in the form of question answering in performance was a technique designed to engage pupils who might not consider themselves to be academicallyhigh performing in this particular area. The experience of directly engaging with a performer in performance by answering a question directed to them could be used as a positive learning experience and, to some degree, increase the pupils' confidence and/or enthusiasm when approaching Shakespeare's writing in the future. Data collected from audience members in relation to this area will be explored at the end of this article.

All three schools were state (non-fee paying) schools and all data collected from both the participants and school information was presented in an anonymous fashion. Demographic information about the three schools can be seen below:

Table 1. Demographic Breakdown of Participating Schools. [2] [3]

As demonstrated by the figures below, two performances took place with the audience sat in a specifically constructed, temporary auditorium which enable all audience members to sit at the eye level of the performers and one performance took place with the audience sat at the same proximity but in a semi-fixed space with chairs arrange in a school hall.

Figure One. Temporary Auditorium for Schools 1 and 3 Performances. Photo courtesy of author.

Figure Two. Performance and Audience Space for School 2 Performance. Photo courtesy of author.

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[2] GCSE performance is according to data from the UK Department for Education accessed from http://www.education.gov.uk/schools/performance/ in 2015.

[3] 'Disadvantaged Pupils information is according data, accessed from http://www.education.gov.uk/schools/performance/ in 2015, from the UK Department for Education, 'For the purposes of the table Disadvantaged pupils are considered as those eligible for free school meals and children looked after (ie, In the care of the Local Authority for at least 6 months)'

Why Use Speech Act Theory as a Basis for a Rehearsal Methodology?

At the centre of the training process in question is the linguistic philosophy of Speech Act Theory stemming from notions which J L Austin's explored in *How To Do Things With Words* (1962) - specifically how utterances with an action as their outcome function. He called these performatives, or illocutionary acts, and they eventually became christened as Speech Acts. By doing so, he gave birth to Speech Act Theory which begun an exploration taken up by a diverse range of thinkers across a diverse range of disciplines into how Speech Acts work, how they can be applied and the conditions necessary for their execution.

Theatre's relationship with Speech Act Theory has been historically problematic since, in *How To Do Things With Words*, Austin takes time to explain how he does not consider Speech Acts uttered in a theatre context to be legitimate since performance has a parasitic, rather than genuine, relationship to language and the receiver of the Speech Act in a theatre setting, namely the audience, is aware of the fact that the utterer is not being sincere since an actor, after all, is pretending to be someone else in a fictional environment (1962, p.22).

Despite Austin's reservations, Speech Act Theory has been used as a tool for analysing Shakespeare's work – Stanley Fish's 1976, *How to do Things with Austin and Searle: Speech Act Theory and Literary Criticism* being a case in point and, moreover, Susanne Wofford's pithy explanation of why Austin's exclusion of performance from his theory is not a legitimate reason for theatre scholars to ignore his work[4] is further proof of the appropriateness of Speech Act Theory as a tool for working with, as well as analysing Shakespeare in performance.

The interactive training methodology deployed in the 2014 *Romeo and Juliet* is focussed on Austin's six conditions which he considered necessary for a Speech Act to be happily executed, described by him as the Felicity Conditions:-

> A1: There must exist an accepted conventional procedure having a certain conventional effect, that procedure to include the uttering of certain words by certain persons in certain circumstances.
>
> A2: The particular persons and circumstances in a given case must be appropriate for the invocation of the particular procedure invoked
>
> B1: The procedure must be executed by all participants both correctly
>
> B2: And completely.

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[4] 'A performative utterance is understood to have its conventional force, while the audience understands the staged speech act as a representation of a performative utterance.' (Wofford, 1994, pp.155-56.)

> Z1: Where, as often, the procedure is designed for use by persons having certain thoughts or feelings, or for the inauguration of certain consequential conduct on the part of any participant, then a person participating in and so invoking the procedure must in act have those thoughts or feelings, and the participants must intend so to conduct themselves
>
> Z2: Must actually so conduct themselves subsequently.

<div align="right">(Austin, 1962, pp.14-15)</div>

The most important Felicity Condition, in the context of this study is Austin's fourth (B2), which states that a Speech Act needs to be executed 'completely' (Austin, 1962, p.15). In contrast to the more prolifically applied rehearsal technique of Actioning, a Speech Act is not just concerned with the delivering of an utterance, it is also focussed on the effect of the utterance being completed and final. To return to Sedgman, this notion of completion is also subjective enough for there not to be a 'correct' response when attempted with an audience - the performer is the judge of the 'success' of the Speech Act. How this decision making process is made in performance will be explored later in the article. Whereas Actioning focuses on the application of a transitive verb on the delivery of an utterance, it places less attention to how the deliverer of the utterance should respond to the reception of it. As I will detail later in this article, Actioning can be a useful part of a Speech Act focussed methodology but, from an interactivity perspective, it misses out a crucial detail – what to do after the transitive verb has been delivered.

The Training Process

The 2014 production of *Romeo and Juliet* featured moments when the performers had been trained to focus entirely on achieving the completion of the Speech Act, 'question' even if this required the temporary departure, as executed by the previous examples of Rylance and Crouch, from the play text in order to achieve this. In my case, rather than being able to rely on the lived experience of many decades of professional Shakespeare performance that these two performers had, I was working with an undergraduate cast, some of whom were performing Shakespeare for the first time. How, therefore, could I train them to be able complete Speech Acts by functioning, in the words of Escolme, as a duel performer/figure or, in the specific case of Mikey Barker, function as Romeo/Barker?

In order to do this, I created a game since, as Toby Jones writes of John Wright's process, 'Games are how we make dramatic action real,' (Wright, 2006: p.ix) The dramatic action, in the case of this production, involved cognitive dexterity to shift their focus towards, to borrow again from Escolme (2005), 'the engagement value of the performance objective,' (p.73).

Each of the cast was given four lines of text from the play to learn. These lines were handed to the performers on pieces of paper which split the four lines in to two sections. For example: -

> If I profane with my unworthiest hand
> This holy shrine, the gentle fine is this:
> ///
> My lips, two blushing pilgrims, ready stand
> To smooth that rough touch with a tender kiss. (I.v.93-96)

Performers were paired off and lined up in front of each other. At the completion of the second line of text, the non-speaking member of the pair (B) had to either scratch their nose or fold their arms. The speaking member of the pair (A) then had to deliver a series of physical and vocal tasks dependent on what their partner had done before returning to deliver the rest of text as soon as possible and in as similar way as possible as they had delivered the first two lines. For example:-

> Scratched nose: Count to ten (starting from one) then do five press ups
>
> then tell the partner the name of their first pet.

> Folded arms: Count down from ten (starting at ten) then do five star jumps
>
> then tell the partner the name of the street they live on.

This created a lively rehearsal room and also aided the sense of company building and the gradual loss of self-consciousness that can exist in undergraduate companies. The content of the exercises would change from rehearsal to rehearsal and be thematic to include various up-date factors such as the weather or news events. Beyond this, the game also spoke to several of the theoretical concerns at play. To use Mikey Barker as an example, from Escolme's theoretical perspective, it was raising the experience and confidence of the performer to move from scripted, fictional representations of character (Romeo) to a more ambiguous figure (Barker) with a 'performance objective'. Over the course of the game, on a basic level, the role that Barker created could be seen as Romeo/Barker, in the spirit of Mark Rylance's Hamlet/Rylance. Barker was also, like in the example of Purcell's analysis of Tim Crouch in *I, Malvolio*, tailoring his reactions to individual audience responses - albeit at this early stage of training in a simple, binary fashion.

Links to Austin's Felicity Condition B2 could be found in the development of the game. I asked the A's to add an instruction (or, in Austinian terms, an illocutionary act) for B's to perform. A's could only return to finish their text extract once the B's had completed this act. This was encouraged to be something achievable but be something which their partner would not be in a hurry to complete. Examples of these were; an A telling a B to scratch A's back, an A telling a B to cry like a baby or an A instructing a B to recreate the mating call of a hippopotamus.

In this extension of the exercise, the performers were being trained to seek the completion of an illocutionary act and explore the different methods in which this could be achieved. Discussions were led, in the spirit of Sedgman's research, about the dangers of seeking a 'correct' way of completing the Speech Act and, moreover, about how B felt about the clarity of what was being asked of them. This led to further developments as rehearsals progressed - the A, for example, who requested a back scratch was met with resistance from their B, in response to this, A asked B to point at someone who they would like to perform the scratching - A considered this to be complete enough to return to the text.

This exercise was the beginning of what I considered to be the clearest challenge in working with Speech Act Theory as a training methodology: finding a workable rehearsal language for this process which could help translate an aspect of linguistic philosophy into a method which an actor can access and deliver with ease. This issue was especially relevant since I was working with an undergraduate cast with no experience of JL Austin's theories and who could draw upon an embryonic system of acting approaches.

In order to further bridge the disparity between academic language and practical application, I considered what, for me, were the basics of Keith Johnstone's straight forward but comprehensive performance methodology detailed in his 1979 work, *Impro*. After a period of working in this way, the similarities between Johnstone's system and the principles at the centre of Austin's felicity conditions became clear. Johnstone believes that interaction, in an improvised context, can be considered to be an 'offer' which can be either 'blocked' or 'accepted': -

> I call anything that an actor does an 'offer'. Each offer can either be accepted, or blocked […] A block is anything that prevents the action from developing […] if it develops the action it isn't a block. (Johnstone, 1989, p.97)

One can begin to see a parallel between the Johnstonean act of 'offering' and the illocutionary act: on a very basic level, a completed speech act could be seen as an example of an offer which has been accepted.[5]

Stanley Fish's (1976) aforementioned application of Speech Act Theory to his analysis of *Coriolanus* unintentionally highlights this connection. Fish's exploration of Coriolanus' infelicitous execution of the illocutionary act of 'request', his refusal to accept the speech act 'praise' but his tendency felicitously to complete the illocutionary act of 'refusing' can alternatively be viewed from a Johnstonean perspective as examples of Coriolanus blocking various offers. For Fish, the key

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[5] It is important to note that not every accepted offer is an example of a Speech Act being completed, rather, every Speech Act being completed is an accepted offer.

moment in the play is the banish/counter banishment scene found at III.iii. Coriolanus does not accept several of Austin's felicity conditions: By refusing to acknowledge the convention of banishment from the Rome state from which he has become disenfranchised, he prevents the Speech Act attempted by the citizens and tribunes of Rome from being completed:

> BRUTUS   There's no more to be said, but he is banish'd,
>   As enemy to the people and his country:
>   It shall be so.
>
> Citizens   It shall be so, it shall be so.
>
> CORIOLANUS   You common cry of curs! whose breath I hate
>   As reek o' the rotten fens, whose loves I prize
>   As the dead carcasses of unburied men
>   That do corrupt my air, I banish you;
>   And here remain with your uncertainty!   III.iii.117-124

According to Fish, Coriolanus 'refuses to accept the procedures by which the state identifies (1976, p.991). In acting terminology, the citizens and the tribunes of Rome have made an offer, in Speech Act terms; they have attempted to perform the illocutionary act of 'banishing'. In acting terminology, Coriolanus has blocked this offer and then made his own counter-offer, in Speech Act terms the illocutionary act of 'banishing' has not been completed. It would therefore appear that, during a performance, it is not possible to attempt an illocutionary act without making an offer.

When rehearsing with the acting company of *Romeo and Juliet*, I began this process with time spent exploring the basics of Johnstone's system away from the Shakespearean text. I led improvisations which were based on the eight types of illocutionary act (including Question) which John R. Searle taxinomises in his 1969 *Speech Acts: An Essay in the Philosophy of Language* .[6] This continued the off-text explorations of Austin and Searle's theories that began with the previously mentioned games at the beginning of the rehearsal process. When working in this way, I instructed the actors who were delivering the Speech Acts to focus their behaviour entirely on completing the Speech Act with their partner.[7] Again, in an attempt to avoid the creating of Sedgman's 'ideal spectator' (2017, p.161), I asked the partners to explore a mixture of outcomes with them both accepting and blocking the illocutionary acts in question. Discussions afterwards were focussed on the ideas underneath these completed or incomplete Speech Acts. How can a Speech Act be unsuccessful? In the case of 'question' there were a mixture of Johnstonean blocks which included; the receiver not speaking the same language as the questioner, the receiver not realising that their partner was asking a question

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[6] Request. Assert, state (that), affirm. Question. Thank (for). Advise. Warn. Greet. Congratulate. (pp. 66-67)
[7] In order to avoid confusion in relation to jargon, I neglected to mention Austin, Searle or their terminology.

due to their tone of voice, the partner not being able to hear the question, the partner answering the question but giving an incorrect answer or the partner answering and deliberately giving an incorrect answer by lying.

These opening sessions gave me more frames of reference for the performers in future rehearsals without me having to overload him with the technical, jargon-filled language of Austin and Searle. We began exploring how the questions that Romeo asks in the opening of II.ii could be delivered to an audience member as the Speech Act, 'question'. According to Searle, an essential condition of the completion of the Speech Act, question, is that '*S* [speaker] wants this information' (Searle, 1969, p. 67). Barker and I discussed the best method of conveying this intention and Barker felt most comfortable with there being urgency behind Romeo's request for information from the audience member. These sessions comprised of what I would consider a more traditional rehearsal approach since Barker and I experimented with different transitive verbs to place underneath the line. Perhaps due to the inexperience of the performer, I felt that Barker was at his most convincing when applying the verb 'grab' to the line. Moreover, its physical nature meant I could steer Barker to actualise the action when delivering the line to rehearsal observers - as rehearsals with the scene developed conversation inevitably returned to the notion of the 'ideal spectator' and the need for the performer to have a variety of rehearsed with the line in order to cater for the unique nature of each audience member. 'Grab' might be effective of a way of interacting with one audience member but 'Invite' could be more suitable for another.

The final, and possibly most important, part of the process was to consider how Barker could calculate, in the moment of performance, if the Speech Act, 'question' had been completed by the gauging the audience member's immediate response. By this point, Barker had direct experience of the challenges of portraying Romeo/Barker who moved back and forth from the Shakespearean text as well as having to read an audience member's behaviour. As previously explained, I made it clear to Barker that he was to not move on to the next part of the script until he felt satisfied that this Speech Act had been completed. We reconsidered the improvisationary period at the beginning of the rehearsal process to explore different responses from an audience member and what could be considered a response which sincerely answered the question.

First of all, it was vital that the audience member realised that Barker was both asking a question and expecting an answer so it was important that there was an upward inflection at the end of the line. Also, I encouraged Barker to try other off-text options if the question was greeted with silence. He could gesture towards the audience member or, more directly ask 'What do you think'? My previous experience of delivering Shakespeare performances in schools led me to believe that

silence would not be the problem. If the audience member was to deliver an audible response which was irrelevant to the question or insincere in its answer then Barker was to, in the Johnstonean meaning, accept this response and come back to the original question in the play text. We experimented with this scenario in rehearsal:-

> Barker: Shall I hear more or shall I speak at this?
>
> *No response from myself [as teenager audience member]*
>
> Barker: What do you think... Shall I hear more or shall I speak at this?
>
> Me: I think your costume is rubbish.
>
> Barker: I know, the fancy dress shop is owned by a Capulet so I had to make it myself, but... that isn't my problem: Shall I hear more or shall I speak at this? Seriously, I need to know.
>
> Me: Hear more, I suppose...
>
> *Barker returns to his original position in the performance space and the scene continues...*

Non-verbal answers would also be an acceptable response - the audience members could point to Juliet, shush Romeo or place their hand to their ear in order to signal that he should 'hear more'. If the audience member was to suggest that they were to ask a friend of theirs or another audience member then Barker was to ask both of them. I also gave Barker the option of asking the whole audience if the individual audience member was not forthcoming with an answer to the question.

The audience member addressed by Barker answered the question and therefore completed the Speech Act without the need for improvisation in all three performances. In two cases the audience member said, 'Hear more' and there was one example of 'Speak'. It would be naïve to suggest that this was entirely explicable by the Speech Act focussed rehearsal process; rather, I would suggest that this example of interactivity could be explained by three contributory factors.

Firstly the close proximity, equal eye level, shared light and lack of a physical barrier between the performers and the audience created an atmosphere in which, in the spatial coding at least, the performers and audience members had the potential for direct interaction. The spatial codes behind the temporary auditorium or school hall performances were designed to create this performance atmosphere as the often quote maxim of Henri Lefebvre suggests, 'Social space is a social product' (Lefebvre, 1991) - in this case the space was a product of a desire for the performers and audiences

to interact with each other. The in-the-round setting and shared light between performers and audience members also served to highlight the non- verisimilitudinal nature of the performance event: instead of a backdrop of a fictional Verona, there was a lit audience. In the words of Stephen Joseph, 'On a central stage [theatre in the round], the actors are seen against a background of an audience. They do not have the surroundings of illusion.' (Joseph 1967, p.121). Barker could therefore emphasise his position as Romeo/Barker in a way which did not feel incongruous to the aesthetic of the production.

Secondly the rehearsal process did emphasise to the performers the need for direct and specific interaction with the audience but the focus on the flexibility of responses and the avoidance of the creation of an 'ideal spectator' (Sedgman, 2017, p.161) in rehearsal enabled a confidence in the performers' to not attempt to seek a correct interaction but, instead be open and direct with audience members.

The Reception of Performances: an emphasis on interaction explained.

Having placed focus on performers attempting to receive specific responses to interactions during moments in the play, it is necessary to explore the effect that this approach had on the young people who attended the production. This project was, by no means, an exhaustive study into how the demographically diverse and heterogeneous population that is young people in the UK respond to Shakespeare's writing in performance, but it is an individual example of how a dramaturgy with a focus on interaction can function. The audience data, which I collected in a post-performance questionnaire and extended correspondence with the three teachers involved, helps to demonstrate how sensitive a young audience can be to interactivity and, moreover, the pedagogical and experiential value in a dramaturgical approach with a focus on interaction during certain moments in the play.

In the questionnaire I included an intentionally open ended question about the staging in order to avoid leading the participants towards a particular area of the performance. The third question of the survey was: 'Did anything stand out to you about the staging of the play?' (Bell, 2015). The table below illustrates the twenty four responses which directly addressed the interactivity of the performance, which represents twenty per cent of the people who attended the performances.

Table 2. [8] Answers Relevant to Interactivity, Did Anything Stand To You About the Staging of the Play? (Bell, 2015, pp.194-196)

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[8] Each participant was anonymised and, after collecting the data I assigned each pupil a number.

This table demonstrates that a mixture of age groups across a range of performances all found the level of activity as something noticeable about the performance. I also categorised the comments about the staging by all one hundred and twenty three respondents which demonstrates that the interlinked areas of close proximity and performer/audience interactivity was strongly mentioned by the young audience members.

Table 3.[9] Categories of Answers to Did Anything Stand To You About the Staging of the Play? (Bell, 2015, pp.194-196)

This data would suggest that the audience members were aware of several aspects relevant to the interactivity of the performance - direct address being the most explicit connection but, the ability to be able to see the performers in detail and be close to them can also be seen as contributory factors. This can go some way to illustrate that a teenage audience has a potentially discerning focus on how they are interacted with by performers which could justify the focus which I placed on this aspect of the performance.

One could argue, however, that this approach draws an uneven privilege towards the event of the performance itself over the effect on audience members of the behaviour of characters within the fictional narrative. Data collected in the questionnaire can, again, assist the unpicking of this notion. The first question asked, again provided an open-ended framework for the audience to respond to: What Five Words Would You Use To Describe What You Have Just Seen? (Try to use descriptive words and, if you can't think of five, don't worry, write as many as you like), (Bell, 2015, pp.185-189). I have collated these words into a tag cloud, below with the larger words indicating a greater frequency of mentions.

Figure 3. Tag Cloud of Data Collected from What Five Words Would You Use to Describe What You Have Just Seen? (Bell, 2015, pp.185-189)

The choice of words seemed to involve a mixture of emotional responses to the fictional world of the play and words that indicate a focus on the nature of the performance. 'Interesting', mentioned twenty eight times and 'dramatic', mentioned twenty and 'creative', with ten mentions, would suggest the audience members were thinking more of the effects and staging of the production rather than the events of the fictional world of the play. However there are a similar number of words which suggest an emotional response to the narrative such as 'emotional', with twenty six mentions, 'powerful' with ten, 'shocking' with nine and 'sad' with nine. There are also words which,

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[9] Minimum number of comments for a category was five.

depending on their attention could speak to both the narrative and the staging such as 'amazing' with sixteen mentions, 'entertaining' with twelve and 'confusing' with nine.

The responses from audience members illustrate a contrast to a 2010 survey undertaken by Shelia Galloway and Steve Strand who interviewed two thousand seven hundred and fifty teenagers over two separate surveys in order to highlight trends in teenage attitudes: -

> Only 18% agreed that "Shakespeare is fun" (and 50% disagreed); Almost half (46%) agreed with the statement "Studying Shakespeare is boring. (Galloway and Strand, 2010, p.22)

Despite the inexperience of the audience in relation to Shakespeare in performance, the audience data represented relatively few responses in line with the experience of some audience members in the immersive and interactive National Theatre of Wales productions which Kirsty Sedgman interviewed:-

> The participants with less experience of the kind of theatrical engagement on offer, of anxiety about a performance: a fear of having to fight to keep up, to struggle to orient themselves and get their bearings. Otherwise what risks remaining after such experiences is a retinue of unfulfilled expectations, lingering unease – and perhaps even the worry that it is the audience, and not the performance, that failed. (2017, pp.175-76)

In the case of the 2014 *Romeo and Juliet*, the training described in this article was devised to encourage audience members to speak at the performers: this behaviour could be seen as a method of interaction which assisted the repositioning of Shakespeare's writing in the eyes of young audience members at the three schools which experienced the production. Rather than presenting a performance for an audience to succeed in their understanding of the play like ideal spectators, the acting company were trained to present themselves as both characters and interact with the audience as performing figures. The audience member, therefore, who responded directly to Romeo/Barker's question was invited to engage with what Escolme describes as the 'entertainment value' (2005, p.73) of the moment and interact. Austin's theories applied during the training process encouraged Barker to seek and complete an interaction but, by focussing less on finding the 'correct' completion of a Speech Act and more on finding a form of completion, a performance atmosphere which encouraged responses to questions was enabled. This performance atmosphere led to just 17% of the audience members stating that they were nervous about studying Shakespeare's plays in the future (Bell, 2015, p.176). If Shakespeare remains a compulsory part of the UK National Curriculum, further development of interactive training methodologies are required to engage and excite young audiences of all academic abilities to 'speak at' his work.

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