Moisés Kaufman:
The Copulation of Form and Content

Rich Brown

> Theory and practice should fuck, and their children should be the plays.
> The result should be the plays..
>
> —Moisés Kaufman

Moisés Kaufman's explorations over the past ten years have led to his Tectonic Theatre Project's current mission to produce innovative works that explore theatrical language and forms and to foster, through their art, a dialogue with their audiences on social, political, and human issues. Tectonic's creation of new work centers around the "copulation of form and content" (11 Nov. 2002). Kaufman explains:

> I think the most important thing for Tectonic is this binary focus that we have. Whenever we do a play, we have two interests in mind: form and content. This is something that happens not only in our theoretical meanderings but in our work. Whenever we're in rehearsal, we deal with both of those issues and pose questions about both. We do exercises that explore subject matter, and we do exercises that explore form. . . . The way we think about it in Tectonic is that we want form and content to copulate. We want the offspring of that copulation to be the play. We think about it in binary because we like to devote time to each one individually. And that is a theoretical as well as a pragmatic way of working. (11 Nov. 2002)

To foster this copulation, Kaufman has developed a technique for creating theatre called Moment Work. In Tectonic workshops in which new work is formed, each artist who signs on for a project becomes what Kaufman calls a "performance writer," meaning he uses all the tools of the stage to generate individual theatrical Moments. Similar to homework assignments, the Moments are individually formulated outside of the workshop, and then presented to the other ensemble members; this is when collaboration begins. Kaufman defines Moment Work in the introduction to *The Laramie Project* as, "A method to create and analyze theatre from a structuralist (or Tectonic) perspective. . . . A Moment does not mean a change of locale or an entrance or exit of actors or characters. It is simply a unit of theatrical time that is then juxtaposed with other units to convey meaning" (xiv). A Moment can be as simple as a single gesture or breath or as complex as an entire scene complete with multiple characters, scenic pieces, lights, props, and sound. Most importantly, Moment Work is a tool for collaboratively discovering new theatrical forms while using all the languages of the theatre in equal interplay. In this article I investigate the particular devising methods used by Kaufman and Tectonic, and through tracing Kaufman's key influences, examine the origins of his "Tectonic techniques" for creating new work.

Tectonic Theater Project was founded in November 1991 by Kaufman and Managing Director Jeffrey LaHoste as a laboratory in which structural and theoretical questions of the theatre could be posed—"Tectonic" means "relating to the art and science of structure." The company's main objective is to "explore new theatrical vocabularies and theatrical languages that use the full potential of the stage" (Tectonic Theatre Project home page). Today, Tectonic begins each new project by conducting workshops—exploring existing texts or investigating new works through rigorous experimentation and collaboration over months, even years. Kaufman believes the rehearsal space is a place for collaborative questioning and exploration that may or may not lead to the creation of a new piece. He states,"This is what we do in rehearsal. We learn as we go. We get into a room, pose some questions, and we ask the theatre to help us discuss it" (9 Dec. 2002).

This way of working is directly connected to Kaufman's first artistic home with the Thespis Theatre Company in his native Venezuela, where he acted under the direction of Fernando Ivosky, whose influence on Kaufman cannot be overstated. Ivosky was influenced by the same ground-breaking artists Kaufman had seen and admired as a teenager at the International Theatre Festival in Caracas. At this yearly festival, he witnessed Jerzy Grotowski's Laboratory Theatre's *Acropolis*, Peter Brook's company's *Ubu Roi*, and Tadeusz Kantor's Cricot Theatre's *The Dead Class*. He was deeply struck by the fact that these artists did not pretend to imitate reality. Kaufman states:

> They created new worlds—strange and wonderful worlds that could exist only on the stage. Every aspect of these productions—sets, acting, movement, blocking—helped create a reality outside reality. The stage as a medium behaved entirely in the service of the discourse underlying the text. At some point during the festival, I decided that I was going to be in the theater. ("Cal Arts")

Under Ivosky, Kaufman had the opportunity to study the methodologies of these directors. Ivosky also rigorously dedicated time and effort to the rehearsal of each piece, instilling in Kaufman the idea that "theatre could only be made in the context of a theatre company. You weren't an actor for hire; you were part of a dialogue" (9 Dec. 2002).

After five years of acting with the Thespis Theatre Company, Kaufman was ready to move forward artistically. He had come to understand the method of creating within a company but had not grasped the "why" behind it. He notes, "I grew up in the theatre using all of Grotowski's exercises, but I didn't know why we were doing those things" (11 Nov. 2002). Kaufman was hungry for theory and also eager to study directing. Both needs led him to The Experimental Theatre Wing (ETW) of New York University's Tisch School of the Arts in 1987. Here Kaufman was introduced to the theory of other practitioners, most notably Master Teachers Stephen Wangh and Mary Overlie, and was also provided a laboratory with actors-in-training with whom he could put into practice his own developing theoretical questions.[1]

A Foundation of Theoretical Questioning

Studying with Mary Overlie, the originator of the Six Viewpoints Theory, instigated Kaufman's first step towards developing his own theoretical questions. Her approach to theatre, which revolves around a "horizontal" dramatic structure, served as a major impetus for Kaufman's search for new theatrical forms. In the horizontal, text becomes an equal element of theatrical performance rather than the dominant element, as is the case in most narrative drama. Kaufman applied the concept of the horizontal to what he calls the "elements of performance," which include text, scenic and costume design, blocking, acting, lights, and music. Kaufman sketched the concept of the vertical theatre—where text serves as the foundation upon which all other elements are added in order to illuminate the meaning of the dominant word—as follows:
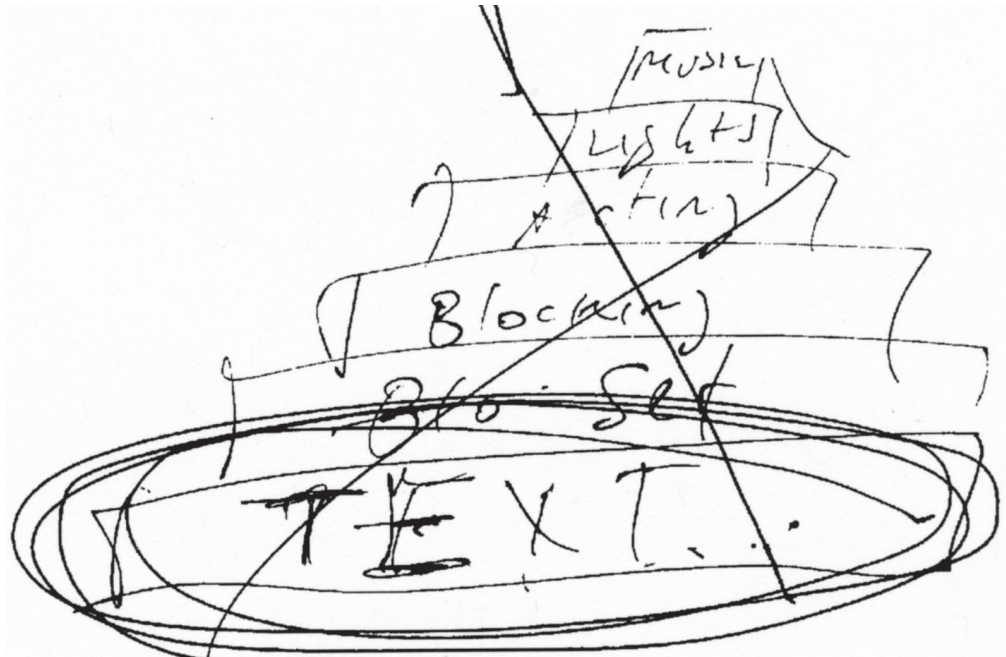

FIG. 1. "Vertical Theatre" diagram as sketched by Kaufman. Reproduced with permission.

According to Kaufman, in today's theatre directing is misunderstood to be the art of creating a world on stage which makes the text believable, a definition he calls "the most reductionistic of all conditions of directing or writing" (11 Nov. 2002). It limits communication by forcing all of the other theatrical elements to serve the text, rather than allowing each element to contribute independently to the work and to create meaning for the audience—indicative of the horizontal approach that Kaufman prefers. Explaining Overlie's influence, Kaufman states:

> It's not like we get in there and do Six Viewpoints and then create Moments, but what Mary taught me was more than that. Mary's influence on me was a theoretical one. The way she posed the theoretical pillars of dance and theatre was something that I immediately reacted to. That inspired me

to create my own way of creating and analyzing theatre, which is Moment Work. Hers was a theoretical influence as opposed to an aesthetic one. (13 Nov. 2002)

The work of theoreticians such as Overlie and Tadeusz Kantor, the Polish director who Kaufman names as another key influence, toppled the vertical hierarchy of the text to build theatre around the equal interplay between all of the theatrical elements in order to construct a world on stage represented by the following diagram:
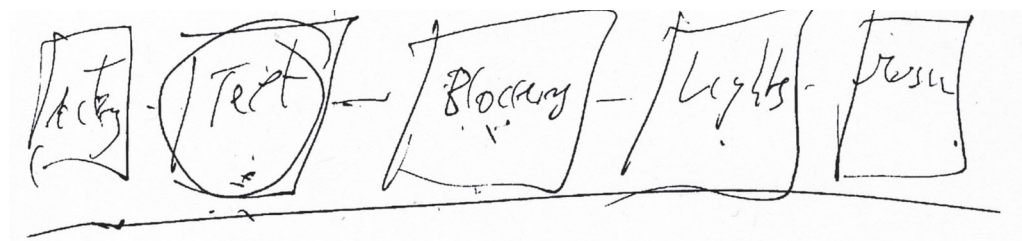

FIG. 2. "Horizontal Theatre" as sketched by Kaufman. Reproduced with permission.

What occurs when the text is no longer the single dominant organizing principle? In *A Journey Through Other Spaces*, Kantor writes: "[The] totality is achieved via the process of balancing the contrasts between diverse scenic elements, such as motion and sound, visual forms and motion, space and voice, word and motion of forms" (qtd. in Kobialka 41). Kantor's influence on Kaufman is couched in this idea of contradictions. Kaufman states:

> Kantor said that one goes to the theatre to see these elements fighting each other to determine who is going to be the next "text." So you have actors march in, then all of a sudden music comes in really loud and takes over the central role in the theatre, and then text comes in, and the tension between each of these elements with each other is where theatre is made. The conversation between them is the play. This encouraged me to think about what is uniquely theatrical. The answer has to be in the vocabulary of the blocks [the elements of performance]. That's where the idea of Moment Work happened, because you can have a Moment that deals only with lights, or a Moment that deals only with blocking or costumes, or sets, or music, or a combination of any of those. In doing that, we become very aware of the narrative potential of each theatrical element. And in doing so, reiterate their authority. (11 Nov. 2002)

When text is replaced as the dominant organizing principle, a new approach to making theatre must take its place. According to Kaufman, the play should no longer be written by a single playwright in an isolated room, which privileges the power of the word alone. Theatre should communicate through new forms, new containers that reflect the impulses of a work's creators. In his book *The Open Door* Peter Brook offers a similar model of theatre making through his identification of each element as a theatrical language itself. He writes, "In the theatre, there are infinitely more languages, beyond words, through which communication is established and maintained with the audience. There is body language, sound language, rhythm language, color language, costume lan-

guage, scenery language, lighting language—all to be added to those 25,000 words available" (113). Therefore, in order to discover and access these additional theatrical languages, the formative process for new work must occur in a workshop space with collaborating artists for whom all the theatrical elements of performance are equally available as tools for creation. Kaufman's work embraces this approach and uses Moment Work to isolate smaller units of performance that incorporate all of these elements. In short, the defining characteristic of Moment Work as a creative technique is that a group of collaborating artists uses it to write performance rather than to write text.

Complicating this question of the text's role in the creative process, however, is the fact that *Gross Indecency: The Three Trials of Oscar Wilde* and *The Laramie Project* both rely heavily on text. Like Kantor and Brook, Kaufman looks for specific theatrical logic and language beyond the text, but not in an Artaudian replacement of it. Thus, the emphasis for creating new work lies equally within the development of the text and the form which will contain it. For example, Kaufman's search for the most fitting textual form while concurrently incorporating all the theatrical languages led to what he calls his "über-form" for *Gross Indecency*: "a group of actors come on a stage, and with all these books they try to figure out what happened to Oscar [Wilde], with all the different versions" (19 March 2003). This "über-form" is both textual form and stage action. The central formal device for *Gross Indecency*, spontaneously created during one of the collective developmental workshops, is the action of an actor picking up a book, presenting it to the audience, and stating, "from this book," or "from this newspaper." The actors invite the spectators to construct Wilde's story by presenting them with carefully selected yet conflicting accounts. This simultaneously puts the actors and audience in the action of uncovering evidence in an attempt to discern the truth(s) of Wilde's trials. This textual and physical form also forces the audience to remain aware of performance—objectively distancing them from Wilde's story. An actor citing a text's source immediately before he or another actor re-enacts that text generates a kind of Brechtian dramaturgy in which the actor constantly shifts between demonstrator and character. Hence, the textual form not only supports the direct content of the quoted material, but also visually encompasses the play's theme of questioning and investigating.

The horizontal combines the different theatrical elements with varying emphasis to supply potentially limitless forms. Kaufman examines, or sees, dramatic material in terms of these theatrical elements and how they combine to make forms which communicate meaning through their patterns and relationships. He assigns meaning, or content, through their context—how each form initiates a dialogue between the preceding and following forms. For Kaufman, the meaning lies in the tension between each individual theatrical element and the forms that their combinations create. Stephen Wangh, another influential instructor from ETW who has been collaborating with Kaufman for the past fifteen years, describes Kaufman's reception of theatre:

> He experiences a piece of text or a relationship between two characters in a graphic sense, so that his mind is always making a puzzle out of what the rest of us might see as events or emotions or story. In his mind these things become elements to be played with. It's like people who have magnetic words on their refrigerator that you can move around, he experiences dra-

FIG. 3. Michael Emerson as Oscar Wilde. Photograph courtesy of Tectonic Theater Project.

matic material that way, as things that come apart pretty easily. I suppose that one could call it deconstruction and reconstruction. (10 Dec. 2002)

Wangh's reference to the arrangement of these elements through "deconstruction and reconstruction" describes Kaufman's use of contextualization to marry form and content. Kaufman fashions meaning and personal narrative from the tension that exists between each individual form, experienced as an isolated building block—or Moment—of the total performance.

The Process of Creation

Kaufman and Tectonic Theater Project have rigorously developed a constantly evolving process of collaboratively creating theatre. Their process results from the interplay between established creative techniques and the theoretical questions which are specific to the content of each new project—the search for theatrical languages and forms which will best contextualize the content. This search for new forms, based on a series of questions, constitutes the driving impetus in Tectonic's work. Kaufman explains:

I always say that there are some theoretical questions that you pose and answer only through the work. They're not questions you answer; they're questions you go into a rehearsal room with: What is a theatrical language? What is a theatrical vocabulary? How does theatre speak? And the main concern of the company is that, while all other art forms have abandoned their nineteenth century relatives, theatre stays in naturalism and realism, which are forms that in my mind, at this stage of the game, under use the medium. Film and television do realism and naturalism better. So what are the vocabularies? What are the forms? (11 Nov. 2002)

According to Kaufman, if theatre simply remains a facsimile of life, it dies. If, however, new forms are discovered, which Kaufman defines as "arbitrary constructs that encompass any stylistic devices that allow presentation of material," then theatre can remain an important, vibrant art form (9 Dec. 2002). To explore this question of new forms and the interplay between texts and forms, Kaufman and his collaborators ask: how does content dictate form and how does form dictate content? How do the two fuse?

Before answering, it must be noted that Tectonic Theatre Project is not a theatre collective. Kaufman practices a unique approach to the workshop space with what he calls his "fluid company." Rather than maintaining a permanent resident company, he hires actors and designers on a per-project basis. Often, he has worked with these artists in the past, and they share a common language and theatrical interest. He explains:

> People come in and out [of Tectonic] because they have a kinship with some of the questions the laboratory devotes itself to—both in terms of subject matter and formal issues. It's very organic. We do hold auditions periodically, but we hardly ever hold auditions for a production. We hold auditions for a reading or for a workshop. So people enter the ranks by being in one of these developmental phases. We get to know them; they get to know us. It requires a very special kind of person to be in this company. It took us two years to put *The Laramie Project* up. If you are the kind of actor who wants somebody to give you a text and go onstage and do a play, we're not for you. (13 Nov. 2002)

This emphasis on perceiving the actors (and designers and dramaturges) as creators rather than as interpretive artists exemplifies a direct link to Kaufman's ETW training. ETW focuses on training theatre-makers rather than reinforcing the more specialized roles of actors, designers, and playwrights. Part of ETW's mission statement articulates, "Our goal is to facilitate the development of young artists who have the skill, vision, courage, and will—as well as the personal, social and conceptual consciousness—to create new theatre art" (ETW home page). Kaufman cites this particular goal as being important to his studies there.

At ETW Kaufman learned from Stephen Wangh the value of experimental theatre and actor-initiated work in developing and creating original works. Wangh writes in *Acrobat of the Heart*, "The central idea of experimental theatre is that this process of 'stumbling around' is, in fact, an excellent way to proceed. It can lead us to discoveries we might never have made if we had confined our explorations to those pathways for which we had maps [. . .]." Kaufman's acceptance of and investment in "stumbling around" has been best displayed both by taking a group of actors to Laramie, Wyoming, to investigate a murder as possible subject matter for a new work and by beginning each workshop based on a "hunch," a technique which will be discussed later in further detail. Wangh continues, "It instills in us a willingness to enter each new project with an open mind and with the (supremely important) courage to make mistakes" (xxxvii–xxxviii).

Kaufman returned to ETW in 1989 after finishing his coursework in order to assist Wangh on a student-created project titled *Transit Mass*, which dealt with public transportation in New York City. Kaufman's research of trial transcripts during the developmental phase of the project allowed Wangh to create

his first verbatim scene from historical documents for the piece. Wangh states, "I don't know if that later affected his wanting to do trial texts again [referring to *Gross Indecency* and *Laramie*], but I had him research—find the text. He's an amazing researcher" (10 Dec. 2002). As the director and "writer" of the piece, Wangh used methods that can be linked to similar techniques Kaufman later used to create *Gross Indecency* and *Laramie*, including: collecting trial transcripts and transforming them into scenes; studying people in life and presenting them to the collective as potential "characters"; and asking devisers to bring in scripted scenes that would be rewritten or restaged to fit into the larger work. Wangh continues, "The way in which I allowed actors to bring in their own ideas and then shaped those ideas through my vision is not unlike his present methods."

Kaufman took this approach of asking actors to bring in self-generated material and developed it into his Moment Work technique. Using the structural form of stating aloud, "I begin . . . I end" as they start and stop the performance of their Moments, the performance writers bookend, or frame, each Moment they present.[2] This establishes clarity for the other workshop members watching the Moment and helps the creator of the Moment stay aware of dramatic time.

Kaufman is the first person to acknowledge that he could not have written *The Laramie Project* alone. His reliance on collaborators exemplifies a central trait of his leadership. The combination of collaborators, technique, and content in *Laramie* formed an ideal situation for the use of Moment Work. The first segment of the workshops consisted of each company member portraying the Laramites they had interviewed to all the members of the company through presenting Moments. This initial step is also similar to the process Wangh used for devising *Transit Mass* in which his students portrayed the commuters whom they had interviewed for the class. The next step in the creation of *Laramie* involved the creation of Moments around Kaufman's hunch; he wanted to tell the story of the town of Laramie, not the story of Matthew Shepard. Much like the amassing of interviews during the research phase, the initial phase of Moment Work consists of compiling individual Moments—essentially gathering a number of building blocks. The emphasis during this developmental phase of the process remains on exploration, on investing in the search. Tectonic Theatre Project member Barbara Pitts explains, "Even if the Moment doesn't turn up in the play, you might find your way to a new form, and that's really what the Moment Work is about—finding new theatrical forms. So it's important to let it be that open, because you never know who is going to come up with something" (9 Dec. 2002). This openness encourages the collaborators' creative intuition to compose through theatrical languages rather than through text—to be writers of performance.

Through Moment Work the interplay of form and content occurred during the original writing of each Moment, because the performance writers created theatrical forms to communicate specific content—an interview, a hospital report, a live news broadcast. Additionally, the discovery of a staging or textual form spurred the search for new content. The emphasis on form and content, however, continually fluctuated throughout the workshops. At times, Kaufman simply assigned a theme for the next day's workshop—homophobia, the perpetrators, the town's response to the Russell Henderson trial—and asked the collaborators to return with Moments which they would create that night. At other times the company was instructed to search through their interviews for content

relating to a particular theme. Still other workshops explored questions of form—searching collectively in a room for the correct form into which content could be placed. As the company discovered new forms through the presentation of Moments, they were written down on a large list posted in the workshop space on butcher paper, which acted as a constant visual reminder of the narrative forms at hand for the collaborators. Each narrative form could contain variations. For example, numerous workshops focused on interviewing. Company members presented Moments which experimented with playing taped interviews with handheld microcassette recorders; other Moments combined playing the recorded interviewer's questions, then performing the character's responses. These explorations led to the final form (and its numerous variations), which contained the content for the interviews—the actors played both the citizens of Laramie and themselves.

The openness with which the workshops were conducted allowed a continual vacillation between collectively searching for the proper forms and locating the specific content to plant into those forms. Unlike staging a newly written text, where discoveries in the rehearsal process could lead, at most, to a playwright making dramaturgical alterations through rewrites, the dialectic established in the Tectonic workshops—partially because Kaufman acted as both director and one of the writers—allowed form to dictate content and content to dictate form. The way in which "Moment: the Fence" at the end of act one of *Laramie* was created displays this dialectical and collective exchange—form and content dictating one another. Tectonic member Greg Pierotti originally created the Moment. He culled numerous opinions about the fence to which Shepard was bound from the collected interviews, which he arranged in a specific order. Then he directed his fellow collaborators to come forward with a chair, sit down, and read their bit of text. All the characters came from different emotional and intellectual places in regard to their feelings and thoughts about the fence, so he directed the actors to come from different areas on the stage.

At the end of the Moment, the actors stood and spun their chairs around, causing the backs of the chairs to form the visual image of the fence. Pierotti recalls, "If I had created the piece without putting all of the Moment Work ideas into it while I was writing it, it would have just been this intellectual conversation about a fence. There is an extra level that is only brought about because of the form" (12 Dec. 2002). The originally created Moment, however, did not make its way to the final script. The company embraced the visual form of the fence but wanted to find different text to replace Pierotti's initial content. Only a few of his lines remained; the rest were removed or replaced. So the visual form remained, but the majority of the content changed. Pierotti sums up, "It may be the text that ends up mattering and the form needs to be replaced. On the other hand, form might actually determine what text goes in there" (12 Dec. 2002).

In the workshop phase, the role of "performance writer" subsumes the traditional theatrical roles of actor, designer, director, dramaturg, and playwright. At times the collaborators wrote Moments for the entire company; they also wrote smaller solo and duet Moments. Because everyone was completely immersed in the creative process, they knew the characters around which they were creating Moments, as well as the actors who would most likely be performing those Moments (if they remained in the final script). Even Kaufman's role as director was complicated by the technique because the performance

FIG. 4. "Moment: the Fence." Photograph courtesy of Tectonic Theatre Project.

writers were also directing one another during the creation of Moments. For example, during the developmental stage, a dialogue of negotiation regularly occurred after the presentation of each Moment. Kaufman, assistant director and head writer Leigh Fondakowski, or at times the whole company, would often respond to a Moment, or re-direct it, or play a different Moment up against it in order to discover the conversation between the two Moments.

During the developmental phase, Kaufman includes all of the performance writers, actors and designers alike, in the formation of the piece. Including designers in the workshop process makes the languages of the stage ever-present in the performers' minds. In the Tectonic workshops designers write their own Moments, collaborate with actors on Moments, or give feedback on Moments during discussion sessions. Although not necessarily unique to Tectonic's process, including all the artists in the early workshops is a recurring Tectonic technique. Fondakowski states, "I think it's a technique to invite everyone in the room, whether you're an actor, writer, or designer, to leave those titles or roles at the door and enter the room as a theatre artist" (13 Dec. 2002). The technique results in a collection of artists who are conscious about the way in which the entire piece is created, who are aware of the whole world of the play, not just their individual role within the play. It is a metaphysical adjustment, a different way of seeing theatre altogether.

Kaufman alone, however, makes the choice of when to make the major transition from the developmental phase of the workshop to the rehearsal phase for the production. As a piece nears the end of the developmental phase, dictated by Kaufman's determination of completeness, traditional roles are reinstated for the rehearsal process—actors are assigned roles, designers focus on their specialized areas, and Kaufman concentrates on directing and writing. Kaufman believes that the commercial theatre context in which he works necessitates this transition. The financial realities of the commercial theatre drive Kaufman to use forms of hierarchical power in the later stages of developing and rehearsing a piece. It should be noted, however, that many professional devising groups do not make this choice.[3]

The Tectonic formula relies on a per-project-based community of artists trained in the Tectonic techniques. Kaufman believes that the idea of a group of artists coming into a room and developing ideas over a long period of time is essential to his way of working. Of his company members, he states, "We're all on the same wavelength. We have developed some theoretical questions over the course of the last ten years that guide us. I think there's a way in which having a company or artistic community begins to develop certain ideas that feed on each other. You create a community that is interested in a certain kind of work" (9 Dec. 2002).[4] As the facilitating director of that community, Kaufman observes and leads the hunt for new theatrical languages. He continues, "You get the thrill and excitement of being in an artistic laboratory in which the form is being experimented with; it's a laboratory where everyone is doing their own research and that is thrilling." In regard to devising for college theatre, the creation of such an artistic research laboratory in which students are encouraged to experiment with form is arguably the main reason for devising's educational efficacy.

As a deviser, Kaufman can be categorized with Caryl Churchill, Mary Zimmerman, or Tadeusz Kantor in that he initiates each project and the final production is strongly guided by his artistic vision and the techniques he has developed. He begins with a hunch. Influenced by Peter Brook, it is the leaping-off point for each new project and is couched in Kaufman's embrace of "not knowing." Kaufman defines a hunch as "something you know before you know that you know it" (9 Dec. 2002). A hunch is the unformed impulse that pulls an artist into a rehearsal space where he can unpack it. Sometimes the hunch takes him and his collaborators into a workshop space where they open it up and discover that they are not interested in it[5]—other times they are completely interested. Kaufman explains, "Hopefully, what I try to do in a rehearsal room is try to discover what is inside the hunch and how does it speak?" (11 Nov. 2002).

Although Tectonic projects are director initiated and led, Kaufman has not yet created a play by himself. Kaufman initiates work through his hunch, but he does not know exactly what the piece will entail until the company has explored it through extensive workshopping with Moment Work. But it is not a process without tension—a tension bred of Kaufman's approach to theatre making which relies on his company's collaborative investigation into the forms and content that his hunch may possess. Since the process leads to him needing collaborators to create a piece, while also needing to control the direction of the work's overall development, tension arises regarding both authority and authorship.[6]

Kaufman has developed practices to address these tensions. The hunch leads Kaufman to create what he calls his organizing principle—a tool against which the work is measured to determine whether or not individual Moments fit the scope of the overall project and should be included in or excluded from the final piece. "The most important thing for a director to say is, this is our organizing principle" (Kaufman, 9 Dec. 2002). The organizing principle which Kaufman generated for *Laramie* was a town looking at itself in the year after Shepard's murder. From the organizing principle, formal questions arise, such as, how do you tell this story? During the early developmental workshops, Kaufman establishes through-lines for the piece from those formal questions. For *Laramie* three through-lines developed: the story of Laramie, Matthew Shepard's story, and the story of the company. Like the list of forms, the orga-

nizing principle and through-lines were also posted in the workshop space as a constant reminder to the company. Kaufman elaborates on the effectiveness of this technique:

> Then you can turn to somebody and ask, "Where does that Moment fit in the through-lines? There's no room for it." So you are educating a group of actors about how to tell a story, and you are being very clear about what story you think should be told. And you make compromises and you talk. But it is very important that everyone agrees on the organizing principle, then you spend two years peeling away what that organizing principle is and how you want to present it. (9 Dec. 2002)

As the director of a collaboratively created project that spanned such an extensive period of time, Kaufman had to be very clear about the organizing principles in order to lend objectivity to his decisions of which Moments to include and which to let go. Referring to the creation of *Laramie*, he continues:

> When you have fifteen people in a room who have all conducted interviews, who have invested themselves over the course of a year in their characters and their interviewees, unless you have a very strong organizing principle, how do you determine what text makes it into the play and what text doesn't make it into the play? How do you convince your cohorts into what works and what doesn't work? There were people who spent up to an entire year working on characters that got cut out of the entire play. (11 Nov. 2002)

This technique is not simply characteristic of Kaufman's control. The nature of devising has, it seems, a need for over-collection and ruthless cutting. In *The Performer's Guide to Collaborative Process*, Sheila Kerrigan writes, "When we butted heads, we referred to the statement of the piece. If a part didn't contribute to the statement, we axed it" (79).

During the creation of *Laramie*, much of the company's conflict centered on the inclusion or exclusion of Moments following their initial presentation to the company; this process was organic and ever-changing. At times, Moments would receive great interest and attention from Kaufman and/or the entire company and be worked immediately in a variety of ways—adding to the Moment, Kaufman or Fondakowski restaging the Moment, lively discussion, etc. On other occasions, however, collaborators presented Moments, but nothing was sparked for Kaufman or the company. Two important reactions occurred in these instances: first, Kaufman's specific communication to the Moment presenter, and second, the company's agreement that any Moment could be altered and reshaped at home and presented again countless times in order to try to ignite excitement in Kaufman about that Moment. In the following quote, Kaufman details his specific verbal responses to the presentation of Moments and clarifies how the company collaborated to include or exclude a Moment:

> After a Moment is presented, I often ask, "How did that go?" And they will usually say, "Well this part worked, and this part. . . ." Because in the creating of the Moment, some things will go well and some won't. If I'm not getting it, instead of saying, "I'm not interested." I can say, "How did it go?" Then I can figure out what they were trying to do. Ultimately, it is true that

it is my final decision if I'm not interested in something. But what would happen invariably is that we would keep talking about it until I was finally interested in it or I wasn't. Although I was the ultimate arbiter, hopefully I created a world in which we knew where we were going. It's a very delicate and interesting thing. Yes, it was my final yea or nay, but it hardly ever got to that point because it was clear when it was working or wasn't working. (9 Dec. 2002)

A portion of this conflict involves the concept of "the right idea but the wrong Moment." For *Laramie*, Kaufman was not the only one subjectively responding to each Moment; the whole company took part in responding to and discussing the material presented. The company, as audience, also varied at any given time because some collaborators would be away working on their Moments while others were simultaneously presenting. So the company audience—that day's authority—shifted constantly. It was up to Kaufman and other members of the company to look within each Moment to find something of value that could be retained and worked. If the focus of a Moment did not interest Kaufman, he could still pull a segment out of it—a piece of text, a bit of action, or even simply a gesture or body rhythm. After the presentation of a Moment, any company member could ask Kaufman's question, "How did it go?" in order to gain clarification from the performers' perspectives. Pitts explains the meaning behind this question:

> That meant you had to explain what you were after because it didn't really read at all. I think that's a great way to create a dialogue and not go, "Well, that failed—next!" So it was always flattering when your Moment got like twenty minutes of, "Let's try this or let's do that." So a lot of what he would do is give you free reign and then direct it. So then we would go after it again working on something else. (9 Dec. 2002)

The second significant characteristic of Kaufman's response to Moments—and one used to temper potential rejection—is his willingness to see Moments presented time and time again. Because he was open to the diversity of his collaborators' interest in certain material and they were persuasive in their dedication to certain Moments, powerful character through-lines and thematic content made it into the script that might otherwise have been dropped. The company members had to employ both their intuition and dedication to their characters' voices in order to find the strength to incessantly reshape, rewrite, and re-present their Moments in hopes of having them included. This was especially true during times when the rest of the company wanted to keep a Moment but Kaufman was not convinced. This technique—his encouragement to re-present Moments multiple times—displays a significant contribution to the pedagogy of devising. This concept of trying an idea by doing it, receiving response from the collective, then adapting that idea and trying it again and again lies at the heart of devising.

Working in Moments is also applicable to other creative scenarios. Such work allows the artists to think about theatre from a structural perspective, to view and understand theatre as consisting of individual blocks that are constructed and put together. This method encourages the Tectonic members to think through the structural approach determining which Moment should follow another, while also considering how meaning is assigned through that

contextualization, which is the second phase of developing a new piece. Kaufman explains his theory:

> We spend a lot of time just creating Moments, then we spend a lot of time putting those Moments together, then we deal with structuralist ideas like context. If you have a Moment and put another Moment in front of it, does it alter the first Moment through context? Can you create narratives using not story but context? How can you create narrative using context as opposed to story telling? (9 Dec. 2002)

The positioning of the Moments creates meaning through context, just as the contextualization of content in relation to its form creates meaning within each individual Moment. Form and content copulate through contextualization.

Although I have focused mainly on Kaufman's work with his Tectonic Theatre Project, most recently as a director, Kaufman demonstrated how Moment Work can be used to collaborate with a single playwright during the writing process. Doug Wright, author of the Pulitzer Prize–winning play *I Am My Own Wife*, invited Kaufman to the Sundance Theatre Lab to workshop the piece with actor Jefferson Mays. On the first day the three men convened, Kaufman assigned Moment Work based on critical segments of transcripts that Wright had collected over years of interviewing Charlotte von Mahlsdorf. For this process, Kaufman himself participated in the creation of Moments; that evening all three men created short Moments to present the following day.

First, Kaufman doffed his clothes, then slowly donned a dress. Wright explains, "In full, feminine glory, he smoothed his skirt, and smiled a smile of sheer transcendence. In some nether region between masculinity and femininity, he seemed to locate his true self" (xix). Next, Wright performed his Moment, titled "Charlotte Goes West," by reading from a gay German guidebook (xx). Finally, Mays took a shoebox and from it pulled miniature replicas of Charlotte's museum furniture that he had spent the night building from shirt cardboard, using a razor from his toiletry kit. Wright continues, "Soon an entire room was arrayed before us like a dollhouse. My sense of theatrical possibility exploded, and I suddenly saw countless new ways of dramatizing my existing text" (xx). Wright eventually included all three Moments in the final draft of the play. Indicative of Kaufman's approach, the three men individually wrote performance, then collectively met in a rehearsal room to explore those theatrical forms and search for appropriate content to fuse with the form.

For Kaufman, the relationship between theory and practice should follow the same model as the relationship between form and content—in copulating, "the result should be the plays." Tectonic techniques are similar to rehearsal practices already in use. It is difficult, at times, to separate specific techniques from what is simply Kaufman's approach to directing and facilitating a creative workshop. Often, when Tectonic members were asked to identify techniques used to create *Gross Indecency* and *Laramie*, they could only name Moment Work. But after numerous meetings with Kaufman and his long-term collaborators, four specific Tectonic techniques—including workshopping collaboratively over long periods of time to experiment with the copulation of content and form; encouraging collaborators to write performance rather than text; Kaufman's hunch and his specific approach to the workshop space with his "fluid company"; and, of course, Moment Work—can be said to form the basis of a creative

process that is distinctive to Kaufman and Tectonic Theater Project. Although Kaufman uses these similar techniques in the majority of the pieces he generates and/or directs, it must be noted that he does not subscribe to one set method. The content of each new work dictates its means of creation—its unique investigation of form and content. And perhaps it is here, with this constant emphasis on experimentation and exploration, where we see the continued extension of Kaufman's days at ETW along with vestiges of Ivosky, Kantor, and Brook.

Studying Kaufman's theatre-making journey, with specific emphasis on the creation of *Laramie*, reveals two very different yet related impulses that lead to devised work. The first is an artistic impulse that says, "I'm not a writer. I need other people to help me make a play." At its foundation, devising consists of a continued artistic dialogue that celebrates plural perspectives. Kaufman, like many devisers, needs to be surrounded by artists in a workshop environment who are willing to unpack a hunch through questioning and experimentation and who are engaged by conflicting ideas. The second is a political impulse that says, "Actors are not 'the talent'; they are creative artists." By refocusing traditional areas of specialization—actors, designers, directors, and dramaturges—to collaborate as "performance writers" or "theatre-makers," Kaufman has extended the concept of horizontal theatre into the reality of horizontal theatre making.

Kaufman inspires us to engage this "undoing" of the separation of labors and to avoid the marketplace requirement of proper crediting, choosing rather to celebrate the collective creation of new theatre. This empowerment of "theatre cross-training"—as referred to by John Schmor in his article "Devising New Theatre for College Programs" (263), which describes experimenting with theatrical form in a collaborative workshop environment—should be the foundational ideal that drives the configuration of devising groups.

Kaufman's theatre education had a very potent balance and blend of theory and practice. Devising forces theory into the practical light of day where, educationally, it is more productive. Politically, it celebrates the plurality of perspectives that should be represented on our stages. Perhaps most importantly, devising empowers theatre artists by giving them the means—both theoretical and practical—to create their own work, rather than being forced to rely on the power of the traditional theatre hierarchy of directors and producers to hire them to practice their art.

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Notes

1. Master Teacher is a Tisch School of the Arts title for full-time, nontenure track instructors who have taught for the university for a number of years, and who have applied for and been granted "master teacher" status based on their teaching and professional work

experience.

2. This framing device is Kaufman's creation. During the making of *Transit Mass*, Wangh's students did not use such a form while presenting their original material to the class.

3. For an interesting discussion on the director's role in other devising groups, see chapter one in the recently published *Devised and Collaborative Theatre: A Practical Guide*, edited by Tina Bicat and Chris Baldwin, or part two of Sheila Kerrigan's *The Performer's Guide to the Collaborative Process*.

4. To clarify and remind the reader, Tectonic is not a fixed company of devisers. Kaufman's "fluid company" is rather difficult to define. Once an artist has worked with Tectonic, she is considered a "company member." Yet that does not necessarily mean she will be invited to work on subsequent Tectonic projects. Kaufman retains authoritative control partially through his power over inclusion or exclusion on a per-project basis.

5. This occurred between *Gross Indecency* and *Laramie* with a piece that explored the connections between Galileo's trials before the Inquisition and Brecht's HUAC hearings. Kaufman's hunch was unpacked, he and his company lost interest, so the project was dropped—a classic example of Tectonic's way of working.

6. Authorship of the play reads "by Moisés Kaufman and the members of Tectonic Theatre Project."

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