

# Innovation and Experimentation in the Fringe Rhizome:

## The Fringe Festival Model in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Theatre

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This may contain material that will shock or offend,  
It's not a stunt or some attempt at a trend.  
There are no rules only exceptions,  
And exceptional acts challenging perceptions.  
Stand-ups standing up for what they believe,  
Uppercuts to the upper classes, quick jabs at the masses.  
Shows without boundaries or even a stage,  
Crossing lines, becoming headlines on the front page.  
The Audience can become the cast of a show,  
basking unexpectedly below a spotlight's glow.  
A song may have no words or even rhythm,  
nothing is certain, nothing's a given.  
Here anything goes, anything can happen,  
The greatest show on earth, entertainment heaven,  
The Edinburgh Festival Fringe, defying the norm since 1947.

*-from the front page of the 2015 Edinburgh Festival Fringe Programme.*

## Introduction

Arts festivals provide a lucrative environment for artists to present, develop, and distribute their work widely while simultaneously offering the opportunity for an audience to consume art more rapidly than usual, in a more concentrated environment. Historically, these festivals generally functioned to situate the arts prominently in society, culture, and the quotidian existence of the population. Considering it a civic duty, Ancient Greece expected its citizens to attend public theatre festivals, which were didactic and worshipful in intent. Similarly, cycle plays taught religion to the people of Medieval England by theatricalizing Biblical stories on mobile pageant carts throughout the city. In Early Modern France, Rousseau, who distrusted mainstream theatre institutions, argued for “open-air festivals,” because “a happy and free people needs festivals more than theatre houses” (Carlson 32). Additionally, plenty of economic opportunities accompanied the social and societal benefits, stimulating the local economy as the festival temporarily took over its city—and these same socioeconomic benefits of arts festivals exist today.

Referred to as a “festival city,” Edinburgh, Scotland hosts numerous arts and cultural festivals annually, collectively referred to as the Edinburgh Festivals. During “festival month” in August, multiple festivals occupy the city at once, including the Edinburgh International Festival (EIF) and the Edinburgh Festival Fringe (EFF). In “Cultural Effects of the Edinburgh International Festival: Elitism, Identities, Industries,” Jen Harvie describes the positive impacts of the EIF, both artistic and economic, and its influence on Scottish theatre, both directly and indirectly. Having suffered less destruction from WWII bombings than most other European cities, the EIF was founded in 1947 as an attempt to heal the “badly damaged sense of European identity by supporting the post-war revival of European arts and culture” (Harvie “Cultural

Effects” 14). Successful in this goal, the EIF is now over 70 years old and often criticized for being elitist as it is meticulously curated and endeavors “to present a wide range of performances from the world’s leading artists,” thereby excluding any lesser-known artist. Presenting largely mainstream performance styles and genres, long-standing arts festivals function as prestigious cultural institutions and wield great power in the global arts community

However, the increasingly popular fringe festival model offers an alternative platform to the juried, curated festivals by being “open access,” allowing any artist who applies (and pays a fee) to perform in the festival. This model emerged in the same year as the first EIF when eight uninvited companies performed during the official festival, in various non-traditional spaces nearby. Its growth continued into the 1950s. In 1953, the Fringe created its first program of show listings. In 1958, the Edinburgh Fringe Society appeared, their constitution decreeing that “there be no artistic vetting of the program” (EFF Review 15). By 1994, it had become the largest arts festival in the world; by 2003, one million fringe tickets were sold; and by 2010, the Fringe earned £173 million of the £250 million generated by all of the Edinburgh festivals combined. Further demonstrating the rapid growth and extensive proliferation of the fringe model, in July 2017, the Fringe Society held the first World Fringe Day, a “digitally-driven celebration” of over 200 fringes across the world (“Fringe Review 2017” 17). Now the largest arts festival in the world, the Edinburgh Festival Fringe originated and epitomizes the fringe model.

In *Fringe and Fortune*, Wesley Monroe Shrum Jr. explains the “temporal concentration [of performances] creates a momentary art world bounded by time and place” (87-88). This concentration invites an altered, more rapid consumption of live performance and the immersion of all participants—performers and audiences—into a festive atmosphere. Fringe festivals compound the energy and mindset of an arts festival by promising space for artistic risk,

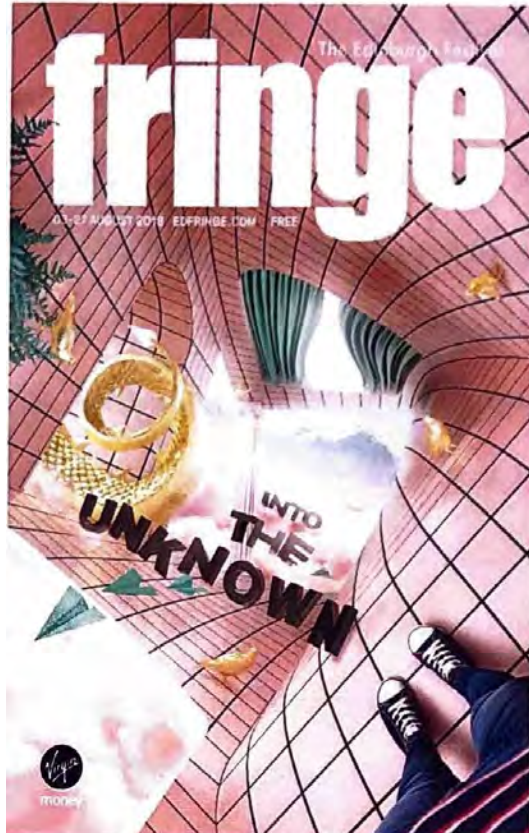
opportunity, and discovery to all participants.

In this thesis, I will argue that the fringe model is best suited to encourage innovation and experimentation in postdramatic theatre, primarily due to its open-access selection process and non-traditional use of space. The flexible term "postdramatic" is applicable to the range of contemporary theatre that is experimental or innovative in some manner. **Part I** outlines a theoretical framework to understand the structure and operation of the fringe. Contextualized with postdramatic and rhizomatic theories, I will demonstrate that the fringe model's strength derives from its open accessibility and non-traditional use of space. **Part II** narrows focus to analysis of case studies from the 2018 Edinburgh Festival Fringe. Through semiotic and phenomenological lenses, I demonstrate how fringe performance works in non-traditional spaces and connects to the larger fringe structure. **Part III** points to the effects of the fringe model on artists, audiences, and the theatre as an art form. Contextualized with my experience as a producer and director of a show in the Tucson Fringe Festival, I will show how the fringe model encourages new forms of theatre to emerge. Furthermore, it offers the opportunity for theatre as an art form to not only survive, but to revitalize and resituate itself in the 21st century.

## I – The Fringe Rhizome

*“[the Fringe] brings us closer to a world in which art is integral to life, invading our space and our awareness”*

*-Wesley Monroe Shrum Jr., Fringe and Fortune*



*2018 Edinburgh Festival Fringe Programme (Fringe Society).*

From the beginning, the EFF has resisted all forms of management and containment. According to Alistair Moffat, former director of the Edinburgh Festival Fringe, the festival in its early days “was thought to be anarchic, something to be contained or ignored or complained about” (12). In 1958, the Fringe Society was created to “formalize the presence” of the increasing number of fringe performances by providing information to the artists, creating a programme, and managing the central box office (“Learn: Fringe Society”). These remain its primary functions today, but its most important tenet states, “[the Fringe Society] shall do no

vetting of the Fringe program. [It] is shaped by the very initiative and vision of performers willing to showcase their work here.” Unlike the conventional tree structure of curated festivals with an organizing curatorial entity, the non-cohesive open-access model of the fringe results in a vast, decentralized, and rhizomatic web of performances. Due to the open accessibility, the EFF and other fringe festivals are unpredictable in terms of quality, but there is always the promise of artistic risk, opportunity, and discovery. The fringe model and its influence on contemporary theatre are worthy of wider attention from professional artists, producers, scholars, and critics as we endeavor to revitalize the medium for the digital age. Therefore, a practical vocabulary is required to increase the prevalence of the fringe model in scholarly discourse.

Because the fringe operates differently, it requires a non-traditional theoretical framework for analysis. I propose rhizomatic theory, as outlined in *A Thousand Plateaus* by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, provides the most flexible and appropriate lens. In the foreword to *A Thousand Plateaus*, translator Brian Massumi explains the pragmatic goal of Deleuze and Guattari’s rhizomatic theory: “[Rhizomatic principles and concepts] pack a potential in the way a crowbar in a willing hand envelops an energy of prying” (xv). Applying this theoretical lens helps elucidate the proliferation, operation, and structure of the Edinburgh Festival Fringe, illuminating its most distinctive and essential components. Additionally, a non-traditional performance theory framework is also required to critique the performances produced by the fringe model. Hans-Thies Lehmann’s postdramatic theory is the ideal companion to rhizomatic theory.

Many fringe performances display postdramatic qualities, specifically decentering the element of text and balancing the signifying power of the five postdramatic elements: **text**, **media**, **body**, **space**, and **time**. Lehmann’s intended use for postdramatic theory is “to serve the

conceptual analysis and verbalization of the experience of this often ‘difficult’ contemporary theatre and this to promote its ‘visibility’ and discussion” (19). Descriptive rather than prescriptive, postdramatic theory provides, according to translator Karen Jürs-Munby, “an invaluable theoretical vocabulary for reflecting on this work and for articulating its aesthetics and politics” (Jürs-Munby 14). As products of European philosophy, these theories provide tools for analysis through a Western lens. While they may not satisfactorily describe all global performance traditions one might see at an international arts festival, together they allow flexibility and inclusivity for varying aesthetics, theoretical lenses, and cultural perspectives.

### 1 and 2. Principles of connection and heterogeneity

According to Deleuze and Guattari, a rhizome naturally resists definition but encourages connections. Therefore, the first and second principles of a rhizome are connection and heterogeneity, respectively: “Any [line] of a rhizome can be connected to any other and must be. This is very different from the tree or root, which plots a point, fixes an order” (Deleuze and Guattari 7). In contrast to the fixed order of points in a tree structure, in a rhizome “there are only lines,” which in the fringe rhizome are the dramatic and theatrical elements of performance. These lines can be prevalent thematic ideas that address contemporary politics. For example, at the 2018 EFF, many performances related to the #MeToo movement directly or indirectly. Written, directed, and performed by women, Power Play Theatre’s series of four site-specific shows explicitly addressed the #MeToo movement by theatricalizing stories of women in a domestic space. As a line of the fringe rhizome, the prevalence of #MeToo shows was not intentional, and therefore, not fixed in an order or position within the fringe rhizome. Because the fringe rhizome, “ceaselessly establishes connections between semiotic chains, organizations of power, and circumstances relative to the arts, sciences, and social struggles” within and



beyond the EFF, the heightened discourse surrounding gender parity arose naturally as a response to a global movement, revealing endless connections between performances (7). Most fringe goers see multiple shows during the festival and will naturally identify these and how they relate to broader conversations in global politics.

In addition to subject matter and thematic lines in the fringe rhizome, lines of theatrical storytelling elements also emerge and tend to reoccur in multiple shows, such as movement interludes, direct address, seating configuration, projections, etc. Most of these aesthetic elements can be described in postdramatic terms: time, body, space, text, and media. As the fringe rhizome encourages artistic experimentation and risk, many fringe performances experiment with formal elements and the successful ones tend to replicate elsewhere in the fringe rhizome. For example, the number of site-specific shows increases every year. In 2018, Power Play's site-specific series connected with Dante or Die's *User Not Found* performed in a café, which further connected to *Trainspotting LIVE* performed in one of the many underground vaults of Edinburgh (a very common type of venue at the EFF). In addition to the endless connections formed by lines of recurring dramatic and theatrical elements, the variety of genres and number of performances (4000+ in 2019) demonstrate the heterogenous nature of the fringe rhizome, the second principle.

The theatre as an art form is itself heterogeneous, according to Hans-Thies Lehmann *Postdramatic Theatre*, because it “embraces the whole scale of human work, activity, and possibilities of expression ‘in a nutshell,’ as a microcosm” (132). The “heterogeneously structured ‘rhizomatics’” of theatre, as described by Lehmann, is compounded in the concentrated fringe festival (132). A direct result of the open-access model, heterogeneity is seen in the wide variety of performance media, genres, categories, and styles. And while the fringe

rhizome is not exempt from patriarchal, white-supremacist, Euro-centric imbalances, it remains the best suited model to foster cultural diversity in arts festivals.

### 3. Principle of multiplicity

A multiplicity, the third principle of a rhizome, occurs “when the multiple is effectively treated as a substantive” (Deleuze and Guattari 8). In 1948, Robert Kemp first used the term “fringe” in a newspaper review to describe these auxiliary performances, thus creating a multiplicity (EFF Review 14). Though the EFF began in 1947, it was not until the following year that these shows were considered substantial enough by critics to warrant a name. Once a multiplicity is formed, according to Deleuze and Guattari it “has neither subject nor object” (8). The EFF does not show an obvious preference to the artists or the audience— both are essential constituents of the fringe rhizome. Without a subject or object to orient towards, a rhizome has “only determinations, magnitudes, and dimensions that cannot increase in number without the multiplicity changing in nature” (8). In other words: because the elements of the fringe rhizome are continually shifting, each change in the dimension, determination, and magnitude annually produces a unique “assemblage” every August.

For example, Power Play’s stated goal was to, “[carry] out the first ever statistical study of the Fringe’s gender breakdown, accompanied by a site-specific takeover of an Edinburgh flat to stage four brand new plays written by women and featuring predominantly female casts” (“Data Activism”). Results were then presented to the Fringe Society, exemplifying the efficacy of the #MeToo conversation in changing the 2018 assemblage, moving the fringe rhizome closer to balanced gender representation. Each year’s assemblage is created by participating artists changing the fringe rhizome “as it expands its connections” beyond the Fringe (8). Always in

conversation with the current moment, each fringe assemblage relates to the world beyond differently than the last, continually resituating performing arts in relation to global society.

#### 4. Principle of asignifying rupture

Despite the changing dimensions over the last 71 years, the fringe rhizome survives and proliferates, never destroying itself. Asignifying rupture, the fourth principle, is perhaps the most important in explaining the proliferation of the fringe model worldwide because, “a rhizome may be broken, shattered at a given point, but it will start up again on one of its old lines, or on new lines” (Deleuze and Guattari 9). If one or many productions fail artistically or financially (or both) the fringe rhizome does not die but continues with old, “proven forms” of performance or new innovations. The definition of success at the EFF is relative, but most consider a successful show to either be profitable or well-reviewed, and often these coincide. The critic’s influence is powerful in the fringe rhizome as reviews are the most trusted source for selecting quality shows among the thousands of options. However, this proves only slightly more effective in finding a good show than picking one at random as reviews are highly subjective. Occasionally, a show will receive a “review rainbow,” an unofficial term used by fringe critics and artists when a show receives a one-star, two-star, three-star, four-star, and five-star review from five separate critics.

Critics provide some curation in the open-access model in attempting to guide participants through the fringe rhizome. Reviews often decide the fate a show’s success and have great potential to spark an asignifying rupture. Yet, though reviews are somewhat helpful as an audience enters the fringe rhizome and may be the cause of a show rupturing, critics are incapable of permanently fixing an order or taming the chaos. It is this principle of asignifying rupture that assures no matter the critical, financial, or artistic success of individuals shows, the fringe rhizome will never fully shatter. Artistic risk is welcome and asignifying ruptures are

expected in the fringe rhizome, encouraging constant development, innovation, and experimentation.

#### 5 and 6. Principle of cartography and decalomania

A rhizome is fertile ground for experimentation, as illustrated by the fifth and sixth principles: cartography and decalomania. Deleuze and Guattari distinguish the cartographic qualities of a rhizome from the reproductive qualities of conventional tree structures: “All of tree logic is a logic of tracing and reproduction. [...] The tree articulates and hierarchizes tracings; tracings are like the leaves of a tree” (12). A map, which “has to do with performance,” differs from a tracing, which “always involves an alleged ‘competence’” (12-13). The tree-like EIF selection process decides what is quality, competent theatre worthy of presentation in prestigious venues, thereby articulating a hierarchy of theatre aesthetics. While EIF productions are not entirely redundant or void of originality, most of the work presented reproduces, or traces, mainstream styles and canonical plays. Prestigious productions of classics, like the Abbey Theater’s 2018 production of *Waiting for Godot*, are often staged in traditional, purpose-built theaters, further affirming the hierarchy of theatre artists and aesthetics through use of traditional theatrical space.

However, the fringe rhizome is “a map and not a tracing” (12). According to Deleuze and Guattari, a map is “entirely oriented toward an experimentation in contact with the real” and “susceptible to constant modification” (12). Relying on consistent experimentation by fringe artists, the fringe rhizome operates “by variation, expansion, conquest, capture, [and] offshoots.” Its constant shifting renders it incapable of articulating what theatre is or how it should be hierarchized. Though other elements within the fringe rhizome may temporarily establish a hierarchy, it cannot remain permanent as the lines connect, develop, and innovate autonomously

in many directions. Considering the fringe rhizome as a map not only illustrates how the model incubates innovation and experimentation, but also emphasizes the importance of space to the fringe rhizome.

### Transforming space

In *Henri Lefebvre: A Critical Introduction*, Andy Merrifield explains Lefebvre's

“radiant dream” of the powerful potential of space:

“To know how and what space internalizes is to learn how to produce something better, is to learn how to produce another city, another space, a space for and of socialism. To change life is to change space; to change space is to change life” (Merrifield 108).

As Lefebvre suggests, a knowledge of how space operates in the fringe leads to the ability to change space and life. Lefebvre's “unitary theory of space” encompasses three interacting components of space: “*physical* space (nature), *mental* space (formal abstractions about space), and *social* space (the space of human interaction)” (Merrifield 104). Venues of the fringe rhizome are rarely purpose-built theatres, but instead are converted spaces used for various other purposes eleven months out of the year. Because the fringe model requires non-traditional use of space, an understanding of interacting modes of these space reveals the inner mechanics of the performance.

In “Festival Fringe: Spatial Tactics and the Politics of Smooth Space,” Ian Munro and Silvia Jordan use Deleuze and Guattari's concepts of smooth and striated space to analyze the use of public spaces in the thousands of street performances. Through interviews of 30 street performers, they demonstrate that “space is actively constituted through the activities of its users and the tactics that users have developed to create their performance spaces” (1501). The performers used a loosely shared vocabulary for the street spaces (such as “pitch” for the space

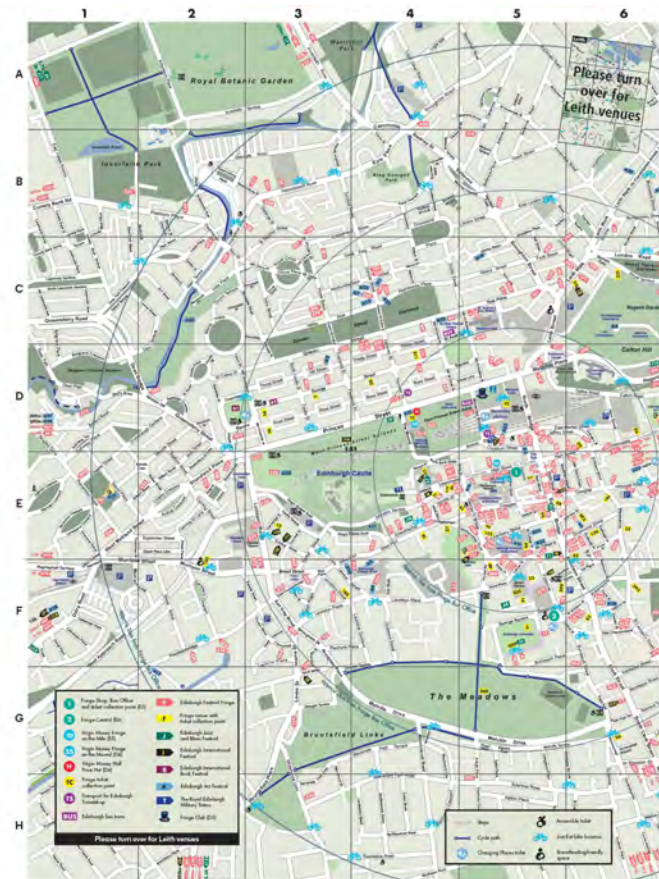
marked by the “edge”) to describe the spatial tactics at work, resulting entirely from the artists interacting with their audience” (1504). Through their analysis of performances and interviews, Munro and Jordan explain in spatial terms the “ephemeral creation” of space and the cyclical smoothing of striated space (1509). However, this “ephemeral creation” of smoothing public space into a temporary performance space is enacted by performers indoors as well.

Complementing rhizomatic striated and smooth space with Lefebvre’s unitary theory of space further unlocks the fringe rhizome.

Non-traditional spaces include almost anything, such as abandoned churches, drippy basements, large warehouses, private homes, underground vaults, and shipping containers. It is common for performances to take place in one of the many underground vaults of Edinburgh, particularly at The Underbelly, a supervenue with many converted vaults. The history of these vaults shows the oscillation of smooth and striated spaces below the city—the vaults’ purposes have been anything from storage to drug dens to haunted tourist attractions. In Lefebvrian terms, “the potential energies” of artists and their work are “capable of subverting homogeneous space for their own purposes, a theatricalized or dramatized space is liable to arise. Space is liable to be eroticized and restored to ambiguity” (qtd. Merrifield 115). To put in Deleuze and Guattari’s terms, various spaces across Edinburgh go through an oscillating process of smoothing and striating in their conversion from everyday function to Fringe function.

In *A Thousand Plateaus*, Deleuze and Guattari call Amsterdam “a rhizome-city” for its non-tree-like network of canals (15). Edinburgh is also a rhizome-city, centered around the Edinburgh Castle and expanding outwards without logic through history. Edinburgh’s interconnected streets were built up over time, etching history into the infrastructure and infusing city spaces with complex sociopolitical meaning. A map is the most useful tool in visualizing the expansive connections between the Fringe rhizome and the rhizome-city. Below is a map printed on the back page of the 2019 programme. While the goal is to provide a competent visualization of Edinburgh

for navigational purposes, this map is “an experimentation in contact with the real” experience of the fringe rhizome within the city space.



*Fig. 1 (2019 Fringe Programme)*

In *Fringe and Fortune*, Wesley Monroe Shrum Jr. explains that the Fringe is “suited to the twisting passages and secret closes of Edinburgh’s Old Town” (64). The fringe map is not a realistic tracing of Edinburgh’s winding, multi-level streets and passageways, but a representation of the macro-performance of the fringe rhizome situating itself in the rhizome-city. Additionally, it depicts the “multiple entryways” into the festival, “one of the most important characteristics of a rhizome” according to Deleuze and Guattari (12). There is no correct place to enter the fringe rhizome because a rhizome “has neither beginning nor end, but always a middle from which it grows and which it overflows” (21). Without a hierarchy or clear beginning point, the fringe model is only about the middle: “A plateau is always in the middle, not at the beginning or the end” (21). Deleuze and Guattari conclude their approximation of the characteristics of a rhizome by describing a

plateau: “A rhizome is made of plateaus” (21). In the fringe rhizome, each individual performance is a plateau, “a continuous, self-vibrating region of intensities whose development avoid any orientation toward a culmination point or external end” (22). Because the Fringe is not curated by a central entity, each performance operates autonomously while remaining connected. Artists need not orient their work towards any end, overall message, or theme as in some curated, tree-like festivals.

Identifying the lines, connections, heterogeneity, multiplicities, asignifying ruptures, maps and plateaus of the fringe rhizome pries open the fringe model like a crowbar. This analysis exposes its most unique and important elements: its endless connections of lines of theatrical and dramatic elements; its multiplicities with neither subject nor object; its yearly expansions during the annual August assemblages; its immunity to individual failures; and its cartographic qualities and spatial relationship to Edinburgh. Together, these principles encourage experimentation and innovation, interrogate existing and emerging aesthetics, ideologies, and structures. The fringe rhizome becomes a site for reinventing theatre and resituating it in our everyday spaces, benefitting artists, audiences, and theatre as an art form in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.



## II-Case Studies from the 2018 Edinburgh Festival Fringe

Distinguished by its open-accessibility and prevalence of non-traditional venues, the Edinburgh Festival Fringe is a particularly well-suited platform for postdramatic theatre. Of the 22 shows I attended at the 2018 Fringe, most fall under the flexible umbrella of the postdramatic, as described by Hans-Thies Lehmann in *Postdramatic Theatre*. Without the guidance of formal curation, I approached selecting based on my prior experience attending the EFF in 2015 and 2016. The first tool for navigating the Fringe is the Fringe programme, a hefty magazine-like document organized by categories of performance media: cabaret and variety, children's shows, comedy, dance, physical theatre and circus, events, exhibitions, music, opera, spoken word, and theatre. In the Fringe programme (available in print and online) each show is labeled with descriptors that are self-applied by the artists.

I purchased a few tickets for shows I felt I could not miss based on early reviews, then left most of my schedule open to fill with shows I heard about via word of mouth, first week reviews, and performances labeled “devised,” or “site-specific,” or “immersive.” With a focus on space in performance, I also looked to my favorite venues, the Traverse Theatre, CanadaHub, the Underbelly, and ZOO, which each have interesting spaces and tend to programme high quality shows. Though the Fringe Society does not curate, venue managers possess much curatorial power at the Edinburgh Fringe Festival. Processes and criteria differ, and selection can be based on recommendation, application, samples, or mere ability to pay the fee. “Supervenues,” locations with multiple venues hosting performance and sometimes multiple locations in Edinburgh, curate entire programs with the intent to keep audiences in their spaces (and buying beer from their bars). theSPACE on the Mile—a supervenue I avoid after seeing several mediocre shows staged in sterile conference rooms—programs almost anything that has a bit of credibility and, most importantly, the cash to rent the venue. The most prestigious of the fringe venues is the Traverse, which, according to Ric Knowles, is “the site at which the EIF and Fringe most clearly converge” (370). In “Festivals: What Good Are They? What Are They Good at?” Knowles looks at the pros and cons of fringe

festivals. While the Traverse is the “least predatory of the Fringe's corporate venues,” its program “is the most explicitly curated and[...] is an extension of its year-round mandate dedicated to new writing” (Knowles 370). The Traverse offers excellent quality and some interesting new forms, but its work tends to be closer to the mainstream and the EIF both in aesthetic and location. Yet, many of its shows are also innovative in form. In 2018, the Traverse branched into site-specific, immersive theatre with *User Not Found*, performed at the Jeelie Piece Café outside of the Traverse's facilities. Site-specific and immersive theatre are increasingly prevalent at the fringe festivals, but the terms are used loosely and somewhat interchangeably in describing the performances. Also labeled “site- specific” and/or “immersive” were Power Play Theatre's site-specific series, titled Power Play and performed in a private flat; *Trainspotting Live*, performed in an underground vault; and *Sit With Us for a Moment and Remember*, performed on a park bench for an audience of one.

#### Spatial theory and postdramatic theatre

To effectively analyze the use of space in the site-specific genre, a flexible theoretical lens is required. In *Great Reckonings in Little Rooms*, Bert O. States argues for “binocular vision” in performance analysis by combining a semiotic focus on sign systems with phenomenological emphasis on “the essence’ of things” (States 21). The semiotic approach involves identifying in a text the signifier/signified relationship, decoding the operation of sign systems, or interpretation of various types of signs (including icon, index, and symbol). This approach is particularly useful in analyzing dramatic theatre. However, in experimental work that innovates form, the semiotic approach becomes less useful with unconventional sign systems which are not as readily readable. As States argues, the uniquely theatrical “corporeal presence” of performer and audience demands “rounding out a semiotics of theater with a phenomenology of its imagery—or, if you will, a phenomenology of its semiology” (States 29). While semiotics mines performance sign systems for meaning, phenomenology—the study “of the world as it is lived rather than the world as it is objectified, abstracted and conceptualized”—illuminates the visceral, theatrical experience.

When an innovation is discovered, States describes: “the whole phenomenal floor of the theater illusion [...] cracks open” (States 34). This is not a shock resulting from a plot twist or dramatic action, but “shock in the sense that birth, or exposure, or discovery are shocking ...” (40). It is “shock not only for the audience but for the medium itself which has, as it were, stumbled onto something with an unknown potential,” which could offer something new to the art form of theatre (States 40). Combining semiotics and phenomenology in “binocular vision” offers the best way to analyze these moments of shock and discovery in fringe performances.

While States provides an excellent description of binocular vision, he does not provide much advice on how to apply it. To activate binocular vision in performance analysis, specifically fringe performance in non-traditional space, incorporating concepts from Hans-Thies Lehmann's *Postdramatic Theatre*, Gay McAuley's *Space in Performance*, and Lefebvre's unitary theory of space provides tools to support both the semiotic and phenomenological.

For Lehmann, postdramatic theatre is phenomenological nature more so than semiotic primarily due to the new role of the audience: “the task of the spectators is no longer the neutral reconstruction, the re-creation and patient retracing of the fixed image but rather the mobilization of their own ability to react and experience to realize their participation in the process that is offered to them” (134-135). Analyzing the postdramatic aspects—text, media, time, body, and space—begins in the semiotic lens, then binocular vision leads to the phenomenology of space and the audience experience of space in site-specific theatre. In *Space in Performance*, Gay McAuley describes the “Terminological Minefield” of spatial studies in theatre with overlapping and contradicting terms, concepts, and theories (18). According to McAuley, the postdramatic emphasis on the theatrical over the dramatic or textual demands “rethinking the role of space” (5). Referring to Lefebvre, McAuley explains “The space is, of course, not an empty container but an active agent; it shapes what goes on within it, emits signals about it to the community at large, and is itself affected” (41). McAuley approaches analyzing space holistically by looking at: “descriptive and critical analyses of performance, accounts of rehearsal process, [and] attempts to reconstruct historical performance, all

provide convincing evidence of the centrality of the spatial function in the construction of meaning”  
(32).

McAuley provides the following taxonomy of spatial terms demonstrating the various modes of space and their relationships:

- I. The Social Reality
  - Theatre space
  - Audience space
  - Practitioner Space
  - Rehearsal Space
- II. The Physical/Fictional Relationship
  - Stage Space
  - Presentational Space
  - Fictional Place
- III. Location and Fiction
  - Onstage Fictional Place
  - Offstage Fictional Place
  - Unlocalized in relation to Performance space
  - Localized in relation to performance space
  - Contiguous/Remote Spectrum
  - Audience Off
- IV. Textual Space
- V. Thematic Space

(McAuley 25).

These concepts reflect Lefebvre's unitary theory of space, or what he called the "rapprochement" of the three "modes" or "fields" of space: physical, mental, and social (Merrifield 104). According to Lefebvre, space is a living entity "Space has a pulse, and it palpates, flows, and collides with other spaces" and encompasses these three modes of space (Merrifield 105). Multiple definitions of space, McAuley points out, can be treacherous. However, Merrifield explains, "relations between conceived-perceived-lived spaces aren't ever stable, nor should they be grasped artificially or linearly" (111). Instead, using these intrinsically linked modes is essential in understanding how art, space, and life interact in the digital age where artists, audiences, and performance oscillate between the physical and virtual worlds.

Therefore, I propose the following combination of these theories for fringe performance analysis:

SEMIOTIC

**Postdramatic**

**Physical & Social Reality**

**Conceptual & Physical/Fictional Relationship**

**Lived & Thematic Space**

PHENOMENOLOGICAL

*With definitions:*

SEMIOTIC

*sign systems*

**Postdramatic**

*Text-Media - Body- Time -SPACE (as defined by Lehmann)*

**Physical & Social Reality**

*Lefebvre's "material space" which echoes McAuley's definition of social Reality being the "real experience of attending a show in the performance space" (McAuley 28).*

**Conceptual & Physical/Fictional Relationship**

*Lefebvre's "abstract space" which parallels McAuley's descriptions of "Physical/Fiction Relationship" being the relationship between the performance space and the fictional setting (McAuley 28).*

**Lived & Thematic Space**

*Lefebvre's "social space" which correlates to McAuley's "thematic Space" defined as when meaning fully emerges with interaction of all spatial functions (McAuley 29).*

PHENOMENOLOGICAL

*Analyzing the world as it is lived*

This analytical process demonstrates how semiotic analysis organically leads to phenomenological analysis. However, my analysis of the following case studies does not strictly address each component. Instead, this serves more as a menu of theoretical concepts for analysis when looking at the fringe model.

Power Play

Site-specific theatre, in Lehmann's terms, is a flexible descriptor of a performance in a location that does not necessarily correspond explicitly or literally “to a certain text but because it is made to ‘speak’ and is cast in a new light through theatre”:

"The space presents itself. It becomes a co-player without having a definite significance. It is not dressed up but made visible. The spectators, too, however, are co-players in such a situation. What is namely staged through site specific theatre is also a commonality between performers and spectators. All of them are guests of the same place" (Lehmann 152).

In site-specific theatre, any space can be a venue. In *Places of Performance*, Marvin Carlson points to a site-specific venue's ability to imbue the performance with “its own spatial and cultural connotations, which the sensitive producer will seek to draw on to maximum effect” (Carlson 36-37). In an impressive example of site-specificity, Power Play Theatre's series, *Power Play*, maximized spatial and cultural connotations to stage four new plays focused on women's stories: *Funeral Flowers* (by Emma Dennis-Edward), *Somebody* (by Matilda Curtis), *Next Time* (by Jess Moore), and *Empty Chair* (by Polly Creed).



*Francesca Isherwood in Power Play: Next Time. Photo: Polly Creed.*

Each play stood alone, but the series depicted characters diverse in race, class, and sexuality in a domestic space.<sup>1</sup> Performed in a private flat on the northside of Edinburgh, the series of postdramatic plays occupied a “heterogeneous space,” removed from the bustling city center. Lehmann explains that this “heterogeneous space” is “the space of the everyday, the wide field that pens up between framed theatre and ‘unframed’ everyday reality as soon as parts of the latter are in some way scenically marked, accentuated, alienated, or newly defined” (Lehmann 152). As a domestic space, the site-specific venue brought the audience into a non-traditional, removed environment to experience women characters and interrogate the gender inequity of the Fringe. As a “co-player” in the play's meaning, the 2-bedroom flat at 21 Broughton St. on the north side of Edinburgh activated the audience, eliminating any barrier between performer and audience. The project sought to expose women’s issues through stories by women about women located in a domestic space. Because the series articulates such a political activism, the experience as an audience member of walking 15 minutes beyond the city center and entering a private space made the influence of space in the series particularly palpable and brought a focus to women’s stories in alternative spaces outside of the Fringe, but still within it.

### *Trainspotting LIVE*

In an underground vault beneath the Edinburgh International Conference Center, I first attended *Trainspotting Live* at the 2017 Fringe. The King's Head and InYourFace's 2018 Fringe production, presented by James Seabright, played in the same venue. The site-specific and immersive theatrical adaptation by Harry Gibson of the 1996 film *Trainspotting* (itself adapted from

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<sup>1</sup> In *Funeral Flowers*, Angelique shares her passion for floristry and reveals her experience in foster care because of her mother's incarceration. Angelique becomes a victim of sexual assault which is captured on video and posted online, thus destabilizing her education and her life in her foster home. In *Somebody*, a 28-year-old woman in her mother's home confides in the audience her reaction to her boyfriend's recent proposal. She articulates her confrontation with societal expectations and her personal desire to be “somebody” through a regression in time from 28-years-old to 22, then 16, and finally at age 10. *Next Time* depicts a young woman's attempt to escape her abusive husband. The character is unaware of the audience's presence, unlike the other three plays, and the script includes very little spoken text. She speaks in fragmentary whispers while seeking help on the phone as voicemails from her husband flood in. Ultimately, she is unable to escape before he returns, uttering “next time” while crawling into bed as the audience hears the flat's front door open. The only play of the series with multiple characters, *Empty Chair* portrays four people in the entertainment industry sitting in a dining room. Over late-night drinks, three women and one man discover each has been sexually abused, assaulted, or harassed by the same well-known and respected man in the industry.



Irvine Welsh's 1993 novel) capitalizes on name recognition while maximizing theatricality by staging in an alley configuration with the audience sat along the walls on either side.



Trainspotting Live in “*The Tunnel*” at the 2018 Edinburgh Festival Fringe (Geraint).

In this postdramatic production, text remains the most important postdramatic element but not the sole element. If this performance were considered a conventional example of dramatic theatre, then the criticism would be that the adaptation suffers from an overly abbreviated script with rapid transitions and a rushed dramatic arc. However, the text is not “a linguistic re- presentation of facts,” as the text of the novel or film (Lehmann 146). Instead, it adapts the source text into a theatrical text of “tones, words, sentences, sounds” (146). In *Trainspotting Live*, the proximity of the actors and audience highlight the bodies of the performers and their magnetic presence. The actors use heavy accents (sometimes at the expense of comprehension for non-Scottish audience members), to aurally locate the fictional place in relation to the physical space, which here is both Edinburgh. In the postdramatic “the boundaries between language as an expression of live presence and language as a prefabricated material are blurred” and the actors of *Trainspotting* emphasize

their live presence in the physical space and Edinburgh (149). The postdramatic text relies less on communicating meaning and more on signifying authenticity in “the scenic composition, by a visual, not text-oriented dramaturgy” (Lehmann 146). By focusing on the scenic, visual dramaturgy of this performance, its strengths as a theatrical event are highlighted beyond dramatic storytelling. Configured in alley seating, the minimal set design consists of a bed on one side of the alley, a couch on the other, and a toilet in the audience seating.<sup>2</sup> In this production, it is the scenic and spatial dramaturgy that are the most effective.

Attending *Trainspotting Live* is a very social and exciting adventure. Once on the underground level of the EICC, a large performing arts complex, the audience is given glow sticks and the opportunity to buy drinks before being led into a loud, dark tunnel pulsing with club music and vibrating with energy. The actors ushered the audience into very tight seating on benches along the tunnel walls. The physical space allows for the audience to be visible and the actors to be close, providing a visceral, social experience essential in adapting the literary story to live performance in the dark, drippy vault lined with bricks. In the Tunnel, the “basic architectural features” of the venue “provide a physical grounding for the performances that is a crucial part of its meaning” (McAuley 29). Sight lines were not always ideal, but director Adam Spreadbury-Maher maximized the Tunnel by moving the actors fluidly and quickly through the space so every part of the audience had a good view at some point.

According to McAuley, the physical/fictional relationship of space is reliant on the “presentational space,” or the fusion of the “stage space” of the actors with the “fictional place” of the characters (29). While the underground tunnel does not correlate literally to the story, it is crucial to its meaning conceptually by immersing the audience in the physical undersides of the most iconic city mostly known as a tourist destination. With sparse scenery, the presentational space is flexible enough to signify the many different fictional locations adapted from the film and novel.

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<sup>2</sup> In the marketing materials for the show, the audience is warned not to sit next to the toilet. This piece of advice makes much more sense when Mark flings human waste from a public toilet into the audience during a particularly rough day struggling with withdrawal symptoms from heroin.

It is not a literal or realistic relationship between the stage space of the Tunnel and the fictional places of the story, but the physical features of the tunnel effectively evoke other places of Edinburgh. These underground vaults host many Fringe shows, but few use the space to draw attention to the layers of history etched into the city's infrastructure as well as *Trainspotting Live*.

The conceptual relationship of physical/fictional space, in addition to the physical characteristics of it, combine to create a visceral lived experience for the audience by emphasizing atmosphere and live actors over realistic representation of fictional place. Thematically, the space in this performance comments on the effects tourism and the festival have on the population of Edinburgh. In a scene on a train, the characters complain loudly about the festivals and ignorant tourists who invade the city once a year. It is not an overt criticism but contributes to the overall thematic space of the performance which emerges through signs the people and places of Edinburgh and the energy. As part of the fringe rhizome, this show's use of site-specific and immersive space theatricalizes the rhizomatic history of the city evident in its infrastructure. In Lefebvrian terms, this performance exposes the “different layers of time ... inscribed in the built landscape, literally piled on top of each other” in the space of the city (Merrifield 105). This show's success is due partially to its name recognition, but its use of space is what makes it a “vibrating region of intensity,” or plateau, in the fringe rhizome.

### User Not Found

Nearby, another plateau, *User Not Found*, created by Dante or Die and written by Chris Goode, was performed at the Jeelie Piece Café as part of the Traverse's programme and labeled as “site-specific” and “new writing.” Upon entry, the audience sat at the tables of the small café and each person was given a set of headphones and a smartphone. Through the headphones, a voice is heard belonging to Terry, played by Terry O'Donovan (co-Artistic Director of Dante or Die). Through his text messages which are displayed on the smartphones, Terry discovers his ex-boyfriend Luka has suddenly passed. Before their break-up six months prior to his death, Luka appointed Terry his “Online Legacy Executor” through a company called “Fidelis.” This company

offers a platform for loved ones to sift through social media accounts and choose what should remain online after death. The play begins when Terry emerges from his seat at a table in the corner, previously unnoticed by the audience. Terry initiates the conceptual connection of the venue to the play by explaining a café is a place where people are together physically, but isolated in their own minds and virtual worlds.

As Terry directly addresses and engages the audience, moments of deeply tragic language are balanced with plenty of humor in O'Donovan's masterful performance of processing grief, love, and loss in the digital age. The juxtaposition of sensory separation with close interaction between audience and actor creates a sense of isolated intimacy in the café. In the end, Terry asks the audience to remove the headphones and invites us to touch hands with each other a moment of physical connection. This transition into the real sensory experience of the café is somewhat startling after an hour of auditory isolation, emotionally and theatrically punctuating the ending with tangible closeness.



*Terry O'Donovan in User Not Found. Photo: Sid Scott*

This solo postdramatic show is entirely reliant on transmedia storytelling. Terry's voice is projected via body microphone to the audience's headphones with the live noise of the café and the street outside in the background. Media in postdramatic theatre, as Lehmann explains, falls into three different modes:

Either media are *occasionally* used without this use fundamentally defining the theatrical conception (mere media employment); or they serve as a source of *inspiration* for the theatre, its aesthetic or form without media technology playing a major role in the productions themselves; or they are *constitutive* for certain forms of theatre (Lehmann 167-168).

For this performance, the media was constitutive in communicating meaning through images appearing on smartphones. Text messages, photos, and a digital clock, to signify transitions in time and place. In addition to its semiotic function, the use of media in *User Not Found* is constitutive of its phenomenology, heightening the feeling of social separation in a physically shared space.

The Social Reality, as defined by McAuley, is the real experience of attending the show in the “performance space” comprised of the audience and practitioner space, where the “two constitutive groups meet and work together to create the performance experience” (26). *User Not Found* was performed at the Jeelie Piece Café, located on Leven Street, demanding the audience move outside of the normal venues. The site-specific experiences starts when the audience enters a functioning café. The café literally relates to the fictional café Terry visits regularly, fusing the physical space and fictional place into a tight relationship. However, the performance did not entirely take place within the café but shifted to other fictional in the story like Terry's home, a hospital, a park, all signaled through media. The stage space of the café hosted a congested presentational space populated with tables, a ledge, narrow spaces in between the audience, and the sound scape projected through the headphones. Dante or Die, a company known for site-specific theatre, maximizes the venue in the play's meaning. While the story does not take place in the café entirely, by beginning there, returning several times during the play, and ending there, the venue conceptually supports the play's portrayal of human connection-both virtual and real, both living and dead.

The thematic space encompassed the café, a communal space where we can be together but also separated and absent in real life by means of virtual presence online. This last term brings McAuley's spatial terms together because "meaning only emerges when all these functions are seen structurally as parts of the whole" (33). Stressing *thematic space's* "importance in the construction of meaning [and] its globalizing function," she also provides another diagram that demonstrates the encompassing nature of *thematic space* to the functioning of a performance. The thematic space demonstrated the tension between real world existence in the same space and existence in a virtual space. The tension between virtual space and real space, embodied in the café where we all are present but often lost in devices, spoke to the larger themes of the play including grief, death, and loss. The tension between virtual and real space and physical and fictional space effectively created a cohesive thematic space, demonstrating "the centrality of the spatial function in the construction of meaning" (McAuley 32). In the larger fringe rhizome, this production by the Traverse demonstrates a mainstream acceptance of site-specific, proving that innovation will eventually leak into the mainstream.

*Sit With Us for a Moment and Remember*

Another site-specific performance utilizing city space, *Sit With Us...* was a 10-minute performance for a single audience member, produced by The Lincoln Company and directed by Michael Pinchbeck. Seated on a park bench in Deaconess Garden with a striking view of Arthur's Seat, this performance maximizes the quiet spot away from the bustle of the Fringe. Escorted by an usher from the box office on the street, I arrived at the bench and was greeted by another usher who provided me with a pair of headphones (and an umbrella in the case of rain). This postdramatic performance was highly reliant on media with the text comes entirely through the headphones. It began with a woman's voice asking me to read the plaque on the bench: "*Sit With Us for a Moment and Remember.*"



*Sit With Us for a Moment and Remember. Photo: Rebecca Fallon.*

"Consider the words," she says, then asks if am willing to take the moment with her to remember. She explains she can see me, though I cannot see her. She is not there yet but will be and always has been. The text continues with a non-specificity that allows personal memories to populate the story. Then, she instructs me to close my eyes and count to ten. When I open my eyes, the actor is sitting silently beside me, her voice continuing through the headphones as we share the bench and the view. She asks me to lay my hand out and she gently places her hand on mine. Then, once again, I am asked to close my eyes, and she disappears, leaving me alone on the bench with the distant noise of the city taking the place of her voice. After a long moment, I returned the headphones to the usher (who I forgot was behind me). The brief and simply executed performance was deeply moving and conjured memories that transported me to past experiences in Edinburgh and beyond.

The venue of *Sit With Us*... was a small park on the south side of the city with a view of Arthur's seat. The *performance space* was limited to a single bench, with the *audience space* being the left side of the bench and the *practitioner space* on the right side of the bench. The social reality

of the space, being in the city, but in a quieter area by trees with a view of the iconic Arthur's seat, created a liminal, calm space contrasting the bustling city center. McAuley explains that the performance space is the most essential element of the performance because it is “fundamental to, even constitutive of, theatre” (26). In *Sit With Us...* the park bench outside the city center was essential for conjuring the memories of the audience. The text did not specifically name a city, allowing the audience member to easily make connections to other city spaces. By using the generic physical features of the park, the fictional place was malleable for each audience member and predicated entirely on their experience of Edinburgh, or any other city living in their memory.

The evocation of other spaces through the audience's memory creates a physical/fictional relationship that is different for each audience member and lives only in their mind. The thematic space of *Sit With Us...* can be characterized as reliant on memory, comprised of the mental construction of fictional place (the audience's memory of any city) and the reality of the bench in the park as the performance space. The thematic space in this production lives entirely in the audience's memory and, unlike most site-specific theatre, is a space not shared with the performer. This performance demands an awareness of space physically, conceptually, textually, and thematically. Delivering an intense experience and summoning memory, this performance is very well-suited for the fringe rhizome in any city.

### Abolish the stage

Site-specific performance effectively dislodges theatre from traditional performance architecture and conventions. The fringe model's use of non-traditional space is a manifestation of an Artaudian revitalization of space and performer/audience relationship. In *Theatre and Its Double*, Antonin Artaud demands a new configuration of space to foster a more active relationship between performer and audience:

"We abolish the stage and the auditorium and replace them by a single site, without partition or barrier of any kind which will become the theater of the action. A direct communication will be re-established between the spectator and the spectacle, between actor and spectator,



placed in the middle of the action, is engulfed and physically affected by it. This envelopment results, in part, from the very configuration of the room itself” (Artaud 96).

Artaud's call for a reconfiguration of venue is realized at the Fringe where Edinburgh's spaces, both privately owned buildings and public streets, are converted to house the thousands of performances every year. Experimental and new work is most effectively introduced in a fringe setting because it is outside a traditional architecture and offers the performers a chance to exist without comparison to conventional theatre. For Wesley Shrum, “the Fringe represents the True Spirit of Art,” through “innovative effervescence [and] the sensation of limitless artistic freedom” (82). The fringe artist's freedom to innovate in non-traditional space has the potential to realize Artaud's vision for revitalizing theatre from the 20th century in the 21st century, has the potential other artists and the contemporary theatre.

### III - Artists, Audience, Theatre, and the Fringe Model

World Fringe Day was held on July 11<sup>th</sup>, 2017, as a “digitally-driven celebration” of over 200 fringes across the world, where “everyone [was] invited to celebrate in whatever way they wished, from celebratory tweets to stories, images and videos” (“Fringe Review 2017” 17). With over 200 festivals using the fringe model worldwide, the fringe model is worthy of critical attention. While the fringe rhizome is epitomized in the EFF, the rhizomatic structure is replicated in other cities, which can also serve as a testing ground for theatrical innovation. In *Fringe and Fortune*, Wesley Monroe Shrum, Jr. explains that “festivals are essential distribution systems for the arts” (87). As such, fringe festivals benefit three entities: the artist, the audience, and the theatre as an art form.

In *Theater Festivals*, Lisa Mulcahy provides advice for the process of presenting new work at a festival: “[The festival world] is all about creating opportunity,” she explains and “[it] is set up to reward the worthy individual” (Mulcahy 14). Opportunity and success are defined by the individual artists, but most use the festivals as a platform to expose their work. According to Mulcahy, fringe festivals attract producers and “Artistic power brokers on today's fest scene actively compete with each other for the most exciting, outrageous, and artistically significant pieces of work” (Mulcahy 15). While being “discovered” is not usually the result, especially in smaller fringes, the artist may also use the fringe model as a testing ground for new work or experimenting with new forms.

#### Tucson Fringe Festival

As a scholar-practitioner, I produced and directed a site-specific production of Caryl Churchill's *Love and Information* in the 2019 Tucson Fringe Festival. The Tucson Fringe Festival takes place annually in January in the downtown and 4th Avenue areas of Tucson, Arizona. The non-profit organization led by Director Maryann Greene relies on volunteers and interns to staff the festival. The Tucson Fringe Festival (TFF) describes itself as:

“An unjuried, uncensored performing arts festival. Following international fringe tenets, the festival provides artists with low-risk, low-cost opportunities to performers economies of scale to reduce venue rental costs and by taking 0% of the artist s earnings. Additionally, the festival also provides the Tucson arts community with avant-garde, non-traditional performing arts at very low-ticket prices. Finally, the festival does not curate or select the performance, maintaining an environment in which everyone and anyone can perform. This ensures that underrepresented artistic voices are championed in our community” (“What is Fringe?”).

This description points to the economic benefits for the artists and the audience. However, “low-cost” is subjective and the TFF offers no funding. Tickets cost \$10, and for each audience member attending the Fringe, the purchase of a \$3 Fringe button is required, and proceeds go directly back to the TFF. Artists pay a participation fee of \$100 per performance which covers among other things the venue, technical requirements, box office management, and marketing as part of the festival. Artists receive 100% of the tickets sales. The TFF relies on a lottery selection process. Anyone can apply with a \$15 application fee and a description of their show via a Google Form online. The submitted proposals are all put in a hat and drawn randomly at a kick-off event. All TFF venues are purposefully all within walking distance, allowing audiences to see as many performances as possible. Venues include the Steinfeld Warehouse, a large warehouse recently repurposed and renovated for artists to perform, present and display work and Hotel Congress, a historic hotel in downtown Tucson.

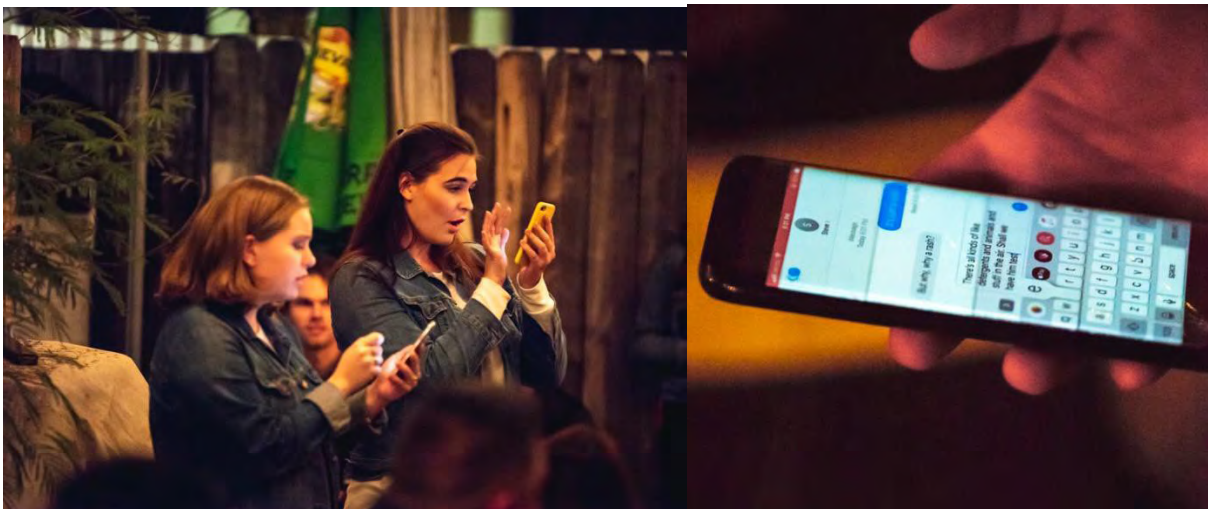
In September 2018, I applied to present. Luckily, the show was selected in the lottery drawing and from October to November, I began planning for the Fringe Festival in January 11-13, 2019. My goal for this production was to experiment with my research on fringe festivals and use of space. Somewhere between a set text and a devised process, Churchill's script allows rearranging the order of scenes and provides no specific characters or setting. This postdramatic text leaves much space for artists to create new meaning in their productions. When approaching this play, its thematic ideas of love and information in the digital age echoed those of *User Not Found*. Dante or Die's site-specific production used a café as a venue relating conceptually to the play as a place where we are physically together but isolated in our own digital worlds. This spatial form was so

effective in reorienting the actor/audience relationship in space that dramaturg Fly Steffens and I utilized it for our production of *Love and Information*. We secured Passe Bar & Café on 4th Ave. in Tucson for the venue and relied on its layout and physical qualities preliminary dramaturgical conversation about structure and in rehearsals with the eight actors of the cast.

Passe Bar & Café shaped the dramaturgy of the production, and with Steffen's ground plans and some crayons, we identified its most distinctive physical characteristics and used those in rehearsals to guide the structuring and blocking of the play. I began with a draft order and labels for the various areas: "Power Zone," "Main Stage," "Ledge," "Our table," "sidewalk," "Shed," "Aisle 1," and "Aisle 2." I first decided where each of the 50 scenes of the play should take place, trying to use each space once in each section. After blocking those scenes in the draft order, the individual physical areas of the space informed the final order of the scenes. We ordered the scenes as we staged to create an emotional arc and compelling flow of performance in the entire space.

### Results

Ultimately, the venue was a large part of the dramaturgy of the performance and our artistic and financial success. In return for a \$100 per performance participation fee, the TFF artists receive 100% of the box office (among other logistical support). With an \$800 grant and \$1200 in box office return, we made a profit, which is very rare in the fringe world indeed.





*Back patio of Passe Bar & Café during a performance of Love and Information.*

Though we were not reviewed or “discovered,” the show was a success financially and artistically. It provided an opportunity for me as an artist to experiment with the theories of non-traditional space in a manageable way.

#### Benefits to artists, audience, and art

The fringe model benefits the artist by providing a platform to experiment with new ideas, foster network building amongst artists, and offer a higher exposure through reviews. If

the fringe model offers the artists exposure, then it similarly offers the audience the chance to discover something at the fringe. The tagline for the 2018 Fringe encourages audiences to “Leap Into the Unknown,” promising the audience in classic fringe style an adventure and an experience of the new. The fringe audience seeks those shocking moments States discusses that contribute to the overall phenomenon of the fringe. As Wesley Monroe Shrum, Jr. explains in *Fringe and Fortune*, “the temporal concentration of resources in a local setting enables the recruitment of nationally and internationally known performers and promotes increased interest in types of art represented” (87). The temporal and spatial concentration of the fringe festivals benefits all participants, performers, and audience, but with so many concentrated options, tools for navigation are necessary.

Though exciting at first, a fringe goer can find themselves in a condition I call “Fringe Panic,” or the feeling that there is too much to see and nowhere to start. This side effect of the fringe rhizome being comprised entirely of middles—it’s difficult to decide where to enter or start, which is the first obstacle an audience faces. The main tool for navigating the festival is the official Fringe programme, an impressive but entirely unhelpful document that is also available online and through the Fringe app. The Fringe programme provides classifications of medium, genre, and style to aid audiences in selecting shows to see. Performances are labeled with descriptive terms such as “drama” or “experimental” or “classical.” The classifications, which are applied to each show by the performers themselves, constitute a useful but inconsistent set of terms, or a “set of cultural objects that are generally recognized as having significant similarities” (Shrum 72). Classification is a “social construction” that creates expectations, might reveal intended meaning, and “facilitates criticism” (Shrum 72). With the wide variety and diversity in medium, genre, and style of performance, it’s clear the Society privileges “diversity

claims rather than quality claims” (Shrum 73.) Diversity here means diversity in genre and style, not necessarily diversity in artist demographics.

Many audience members rely on reviews at the three-week long Edinburgh Fringe Festival, but reviews at festivals that are shorter have less impact. In Edinburgh, however, critics function as powerful curators of the Fringe experience. In the months leading up to the Fringe, many performing arts critics write articles providing titles of shows not to be missed. These are usually groups or performances that have appeared elsewhere and are on the radar of critics writing for prominent platforms. Additionally, these often include higher-priced shows at more "reputable" venues. In the first week of the Fringe, hundreds of critics busily take in the performances and write reviews which are published and then cited by performers in marketing materials. Good reviews can sell-out a show; bad reviews can lead to empty audiences. While reviews are certainly a helpful resource for audiences (and artists if they are positive reviews), it remains a highly subjective form of curation and only slightly more effective than randomly picking a show to attend. For example, one 2018 fringe show titled *Nina's Got News* received what is referred to as a “rainbow of reviews,” receiving a one-star, two-star, three-star, four-star, and five-star rating from various critics.<sup>3</sup> Therefore, while critics are helpful in entering the fringe rhizome, they still do not ensure a quality show.

Many professional theatre artists avoid fringe festivals for their reputation of being mostly bad performances. However, Shrum explains the perception that “the Fringe consists mainly of lowbrow material produced by students and amateurs” is now false (Shrum 76). While students and amateurs are certainly attracted to the non-juried selection process, professionals perform, too. Furthermore, amateur doesn't necessarily mean lower quality than professional. At

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<sup>3</sup> After I attended, I found this one to be most worthy of the two-star review.

the level of the Edinburgh Fringe Society, though it is meticulously organized to facilitate a smooth operation of the festival, no information is given regarding the quality of a production: “Artists come [...] at their own risk [...]. Any form of quality control is either by the artists themselves or the public, in a direct, immediate on-to-one relationship, with no middlemen. The essential quality of the Fringe is its spontaneity and complete artistic freedom” (qtd. Shrum 80). This raw, social experience is part of fringes worldwide and essential to its popularity.

For the audience, the benefits of the fringe model come from the concentration of arts in one city for more rapid consumption. The fringe model sells the possibility of discovery and adventure in the overall experience, but sometimes this experience suffers from the overwhelming experience navigating the festival. Yet, as an audience member who is willing and open to the experience, the fringe model offers an experience of theatre in a new context within everyday spaces, outside the elitism of art with high cultural value. In *Staging Place*, Una Chaudhuri argues, “If a ‘rule of disorder’ could be found to explain the mysterious function of the theatrical apparatus, it would surely be a spatial rule, a practice or policy of relation people to place” (21). Chaudhuri suggests the mysterious power of theatre derives from its use of space, but it is difficult to articulate the specifics of a “spatial rule” in theatre. In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, “everyday” interaction with space is morphing as we increasingly work and play in virtual worlds. Chaudhuri posits that the virtual reality signals a “returning to a nomadic form of existence wandering over vast global distances daily” (Chaudhuri 4). Contemporary theatre offers entertainment in the physical reality, and as Chaudhuri demonstrates, the “prevalence of space-based studies ... is a response to an increasingly complex cultural experience of space and place” (Chaudhuri I). These experiments are underway in many spaces, but especially fringe festivals which rely on non-traditional use of space. Indeed, the fringe is not the only site for



spatial innovation, but more professional, academic, and critical attention reveal ideas for the survival and revitalization of the art form globally.

### Global theatre

To market to audiences with a wealth of entertainment options, the fringe rhizome tends to commodify art in a way that makes it more reflective of a consumable product in the capitalist marketplace. In her discussion of globalism, Jen Harvie identifies two specific ways in which the Fringe reflects a product of a neo-liberalist economy: “the Fringe as a market is seen to be ‘McDonalized’ and Edinburgh, as a city, is perceived to be ‘Disneyfied’” (Harvie, *Staging the UK* 90). According to Harvie, the marketing and packaging of Fringe shows resemble that of fast food. Harvie cites George Ritzer's term “McDonalized” to explain the concerns of “efficiency, calculability, predictability, and control” in marketing the fringe productions and the festival more broadly (90). This process negatively effects the shows which are sometimes simplified or “homogenized” to be sellable products (90). However, this process also streamlines the audience's navigation of the festival. Harvie believes that while the Fringe's "McDonalized" marketplace commodifies art, the fringe rhizome is ultimately irrational and unpredictable. No amount of rationalizing, homogenizing, or commodifying the Fringe will tame the experience into a predictable one for the artist or the audience—the rhizome continues to expand and evolve.

The Fringe experience is ephemeral, much like the theatrical experience. Herbert Blau states in *The Audience*, “the theater resists commodification through an ontology of disappearance” (Blau 323). The fringe rhizome resists all forms of management, including commodification. Of course, as Harvie demonstrates, it can be commodified to an extent, but never fully in capitalist terms. Theater's “insatiable appetite” leads to its success. Theatre “eats itself up,” and above all, is most concerned with “*the appetite that consumes it*” (Blau 323). Blau

is using terminology similar to Deleuze and Guattari's rhizomatic theory to describe the theatre's relationship with the audience. He also points to the need for constant innovation and production as well as the primary concern with the audience's appetite.

The fringe model is uniquely poised to operate both locally and globally by emphasizing local spaces for performance while creating a global network of artists and festivals. By using non-traditional spaces within the city landscape, fringe festivals celebrate the local arts community by inviting others in. Celebrating Edinburgh and Scottish culture is a significant component of the EFF. Similarly, in Tucson, the Tucson Fringe Festival occupies spaces surrounding the 4th Avenue and downtown areas. Not only does this keep everything within walking distance for the audience, but it also highlights Tucson's most lively and artistic spaces. Certainly, the EFF is the most global of all, but the emerging alliance of fringe festivals exists, made possible by the digital age.

On a macro level, Edinburgh in August reflects the old notion of the *theatrum mundi* in its representation of many cultures and the constant presence of some sort of performance. In fringe festivals we can look at the theatrical experience "in a more global way [...] as a sociocultural event whose meanings and interpretations are not to be sought exclusively in the text being performed but in the experience of audience assembled to share in the creation of a total event" (Carlson 2). This global way of looking at theatre is inherent in the Edinburgh Festival Fringe and fringe festivals worldwide. The audience and the artist gather to share in the fringe rhizome, expanding the multiplicities, creating new assemblages each year, and making connections between performances and beyond to revitalize the 21<sup>st</sup> century theatre in all spaces.

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