

WOMAN'S WORK:  
RUTH MALECZECH AS MABOU MINES PERFORMER, DIRECTOR & MANAGER

by

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A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in Theatre in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, The City University of New York.

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## Abstract

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This project identifies key elements of Ruth Maleczech's body of work, tracing a central and enduring point of view of the American avant-garde theatre company Mabou Mines. As co-artistic director, Maleczech created an original environment enabling her to exert control over her own artistic choices. This freedom is particularly rare for a performer, as is the ease with which Maleczech moves among the various responsibilities of performing, directing, and producing. Relying upon Mabou Mines's emphasis on the development of new work and its human resources and institutional structure, Maleczech uses the company as the context for creating a cohesive body of work with a highly individualized artistic point of view.

By considering Maleczech's production choices thematically, and by juxtaposing original interviews with published reviews, production archives and critical analysis, I establish patterns in Maleczech's body of work highlighting the inter-relationship between process and product. Chapter One focuses on Maleczech's performances in Beckett's *Happy Days* and Franz Kroetz's *Through the Leaves*, revealing her interest in making ordinary women important onstage. Chapter Two examines how Maleczech uses an historical angle in the productions *Dead End Kids*, *Lucia's Chapters of Coming Forth by Day* and *Bélen* to experiment with representations of women onstage. Chapter Three juxtaposes two productions about fathers, *Hajj* and Mabou Mines's *Lear*, demonstrating Maleczech's interest in destabilizing traditional notions of the father figure, and by extension, all family roles. Chapter Four investigates Lee Breuer's *Shaggy*

*Dog, Red Beads, and Summa Dramatica* alongside Beckett's *Imagination Dead Imagine*, productions on which Maleczech collaborated with her daughter, Clove Galilee, to examine Maleczech's challenges to notions of familial and artistic hierarchy. The conclusion briefly traces *Imagining Imaginary Invalid* and includes views of her longterm collaborators as they ponder the significance of her work.

I argue that Maleczech creates a distinct point of view in her work with Mabou Mines and in her position as a feminist, downtown New York theatre artist. By focusing her choice of material on unexpected representations of women and by consistently taking artistic and production risks she has promoted and pursued radical and revealing artistic choices.

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**CAST of FEATURED CHARACTERS (in order of appearance):**

RUTH MALECZECH, *founding co-artistic director of Mabou Mines, performer, director and manager. Tenaciously dedicated to the company, to avant-garde theatre and to her collaborators. Rigorous and exacting in her work. Described by one of her collaborators as “precise with words” and by many of them as generous and loyal. A risk taker as an artist and a producer.*

JOANNE AKALAITIS, *founding former co-artistic director of Mabou Mines, director. Serious, straightforward and tough, Akalaitis is the only woman to have served as Artistic Director of New York City’s Public Theater. Has developed a reputation for controversy. One of Maleczech’s longest term collaborators, she has continued to have a fruitful collaborative relationship with her after leaving Mabou Mines, and considers it an honor to know and work with her.*

LEE BREUER, *founding co-artistic director of Mabou Mines, he describes himself as “a writer who directs.” Maleczech’s longest-term collaborator and father of her two children. Assertive, imaginative and provocative.*

JULIE ARCHER, *current co-artistic director of Mabou Mines, designer. Thoughtful and mild in her manner but wildly inventive in her stage designs. Originally a sculptor, Maleczech drafted Archer into set design. According co-artistic director Sharon Fogarty, “Julie and Ruth have a bigger shorthand than anybody else.”*

SHARON FOGARTY, *current co-artistic director of Mabou Mines, director and producer. Caring, unassuming and approachable but also gutsy and determined. Fogarty manages a substantial portion of the company’s daily operations. Her productions demonstrate a substantial investment in Irish history.*

CLOVE GALILEE, *Mabou Mines associate artist and daughter of Maleczech and Breuer. Extensive training in intercultural dance and founder of her own theatre company, Trick Saddle, with her partner Jenny Rogers. Galilee describes her first two languages as “English and experimental theatre.” She is warm, intelligent, accomplished and talented.*

KAREN KANDEL, *Mabou Mines associate artist and breathtakingly talented performer. Kandel is soft-spoken, modest and fiercely devoted to Maleczech. Kandel recalls that after being recommended by a mutual friend, Breuer and Maleczech cast her in Lear with no formal audition, after speaking with her briefly about the project at the ToRoNaDa studio. She has worked with the company since then and feels most at home working in Mabou Mines’s collaborative, performer-oriented environment.*

DOUGLAS STEIN, *freelance set designer who collaborated with Mabou Mines on Through the Leaves and Happy Days, both of which featured Maleczech. He continues to wonder about how his adaptation to the set for the New York City version of Happy Days, which premiered at La Jolla Playhouse, impacted Maleczech’s performance.*

PAUL KANDEL, *performer, married to Karen Kandel. Lively, loquacious and self-assured. Served as the chorus leader for Maleczek's production of Song for New York and performed as James Joyce in Lucia's Chapters of Coming Forth By Day. He also won a Tony award for his performance as Uncle Ernie in the original production of The Who's Tommy. He is a great admirer of Maleczek's willingness to collaborate with artists with vastly different aesthetic points of view and of her flexibility in performance.*

GREG MEHRTEN, *performer and former Mabou Mines company member. Mehrten has collaborated closely with Maleczek, working with her in the office during his tenure with the company, feeding lines into her ear through a mic during a complicated section of The Shaggy Dog Animation and playing the Fool to her Lear. He continues to perform with the company on productions such as Breuer's Porco Morto. Merhten admires Maleczek's tenacious and detail-oriented approach in both her performance and managerial roles.*

CATHERINE SASANOV, *poet whose fascination with Mexico City's Belén, originally run by the Catholic Church as a "home" for women and later a prison, sparked Maleczek's own interest and led to their work together on Belén: A Book of Hours. Sasanov describes the highly collaborative experience as one of the "great events" of her life.*

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## **INTRODUCTION**

All my work deals with women. It just does.  
—Ruth Maleczech

This project identifies key characteristics of Ruth Maleczech's body of work, tracing one of the enduring artistic points of view of the American avant-garde theatre company Mabou Mines, which Maleczech founded in 1970 with co-artistic directors JoAnne Akalaitis, Lee Breuer, Philip Glass, and David Warrilow. The company exists today under the guidance of co-artistic directors Maleczech, Breuer, Julie Archer, Sharon Fogarty, Terry O'Reilly, and, until his death in December 2012, Fred Neumann. Each of the co-artistic directors provides the company with an independent yet interrelated artistic approach and Maleczech's position as founding co-artistic director has enabled her to develop a distinctive body of work within the context of a company over the span of forty-two years. As co-artistic director, she has created an environment in which she is able to exert a great deal of control over her own artistic choices. This freedom is particularly rare for a performer, as is the ease with which she has moved among the various responsibilities of performing, directing, and producing. Relying upon Mabou Mines's emphasis on the development of new work, as well as its human resources and institutional structure, Maleczech has used the company as the context for creating a cohesive body of work with a particular artistic point of view as a performer, producer, and director. The projects on which she has chosen to collaborate outside of Mabou Mines have served to further

define this point of view, and the consistency of the company has meant that she has taken on outside work on a highly selective basis.

Maleczech has contributed a specific artistic point of view to Mabou Mines, as well as to feminist, downtown New York theatre, by focusing her choice of material on the representation of women who might otherwise be overlooked or ignored in daily life or who are notable in history and literature. Maleczech has found roles for women in ones originally intended for men, and she has taken on performances and projects that challenge traditional notions of family roles and relationships. Using the company's emphasis on new work, its stress on a highly collaborative process, and her autonomous position of power as a founding co-artistic director, Maleczech has dedicated her work to confronting audiences with complex, challenging and particularized representations of women on stage and in her own life. Maleczech has complicated the way in which she herself is represented by using the company's structure to shift roles as performer, producer, and director, and she has blurred the boundaries between art and life by co-habiting the roles of mother and collaborator on a number of productions.

She has worked with both of her children, Clove Galilee and Lute Ramblin', at Mabou Mines, and the father of those children, Breuer, is Maleczech's longest standing collaborator. Maleczech was born in Cleveland in 1938 and grew up in Arizona. She met Breuer in college at the University of California, Los Angeles. The two spent several years in San Francisco working with groups there including the Actor's Workshop and the Mime Troupe before relocating to Europe, where they lived in Paris and traveled extensively to learn about groups such as the Berliner Ensemble and artists including Jerzy Grotowski. Breuer and Maleczech returned to New York to found the company and raise their family, and although they are separated, they continue to make theatre together. I include a more extensive discussion of Maleczech's

biography and its influence on two key performances in Chapter One, and I explore the relationship between Maleczech's family collaborations and her art in Chapter Four.

Maleczech's agility as a theatre artist extends to the intellectually and spiritually acrobatic approach with which she represents women onstage as a performer and a director. Her work forces audiences to flex their individual mental muscles to grapple with women who appear as their own fathers; famous fathers who appear as mothers; historical figures we have barely heard of; historical luminaries as individualized and contemporary people; and everyday women as mythical figures. Maleczech has established collaborative relationships that have endured for over fifty years, and she has agreed to work with near strangers on projects that enticed her at the suggestion of savvy producers. She has created and maintained an artistic family in Mabou Mines, where she has collaborated with her daughter, her son, and the father of those children, thereby challenging traditional notions of family both on stage and off. For Maleczech, Mabou Mines is a collective, artistic family that she helped to create. She is both its mother and its daughter. She invented it with her co-founders, and it, in turn, has given her the flexibility to repeatedly reinvent her own role as a theatre artist. Mabou Mines's marriage between process and product has meant that the women Maleczech has put onstage retain a similar elasticity, stretching and reforming the relationship between how we might expect to see them and how they actually appear to us.

Although she is best known for her performances in Mabou Mines productions such as *Lear* (1990) and *Haji* (1983), Maleczech has also been the most sustained producer of the company's work, having participated continuously in the company's daily operations and its fundraising although her responsibilities in this area are now shared with General Manager Joe Stackell and co-artistic director Sharon Fogarty. In addition, both Maleczech and Akalaitis

moved from performing to directing within the first ten years of the company's existence. Maleczech's first venture into directing came with *Vanishing Pictures*, which premiered in 1980. Maleczech also co-designed that production with Julie Archer, and the pair won an Obie for their work. *Vanishing Pictures* was quickly followed up with her 1981 multi-media adaptation of Jim Strah's *Wrong Guys*, which premiered at the Public Theater. In *Wrong Guys*, the all-male cast appeared nude in one scene, while an all-female technical crew worked from the edges of the stage, visible to the audience. Her 1984 staging of the Beckett short story *Imagination Dead Imagine*, which featured the first large scale hologram onstage, is part of Mabou Mines's tradition of inventive and avant-garde use of technology. It is also a manifestation of the company's interest in adapting prose for the stage, which they have done in a number of productions including *Dressed Like an Egg* (1977), which featured text by Colette, and with other Beckett texts such as *Mercier and Camier* (1979) and *The Lost Ones* (1975).

In addition to moving among the roles of performer, director, and producer, Maleczech has also used her position as co-artistic director to initiate projects as a performer as she did with the company's production of Mabou Mines's *Lear* and which she is doing with her one-woman production of *The Imaginary Invalid*, slated for a second developmental workshop in December 2012. That she has been able to do so testifies to the autonomy and agency of performers in Mabou Mines productions. Although not all of the artistic directors agree on the success of wearing multiple hats, it may be that Maleczech's extensive experience as a producer and director has helped to instill the confidence and competence that allows her to create the kind of self-driven performance she is known for. Maleczech's position has precedence in the role of the Actor-Manager, one that has nearly disappeared from contemporary theatre. Of Maleczech's ability to craft her own performances, Breuer, her collaborator since 1957, says "I think Ruth is

best in the stuff that she practically does herself, and that goes for me and for other directors. I think what I can offer Ruth are good ideas, and sometimes other good directors can too, but probably not as good as the ideas she can come up with herself.”<sup>1</sup>

As well as developing an extensive body of work within the company, Maleczech and other co-artistic directors have also produced notable work with outside collaborators, such as Maleczech’s 1996 collaboration with director Robert Woodruff on *Happy Days*, which was first produced by La Jolla Playhouse. Maleczech’s American training includes work with R.G. Davis and the San Francisco Mime Troupe and Herbert Blau at The Actor’s Workshop. Maleczech and Akalaitis trained with Jerzy Grotowski in the 1960s, and Maleczech also cites a visit with Breuer to the Berliner Ensemble in the 1960s as deeply influential. Maleczech has received numerous prestigious awards for her work, including Obies for her performances in *Through the Leaves* (1984), *Hajj*, and *Lear*; the Otto René Castillo Award for Political Theatre; TCG’s Zeisler Award for contributions to American not-for-profit theatre, and a USA Gracie Fellowship.

By examining the characteristics of Maleczech’s roles as performer, director, and founding co-artistic director of Mabou Mines, I hope to contribute to an understanding of the significance of her work in feminist theatre and to identify her aesthetic as one of the enduring points of view that guides Mabou Mines.

### **A Brief History of Mabou Mines**

After working and studying in Europe for several years, the Mabou Mines founding co-artistic directors scattered to several cities, where they planned to explore the feasibility of starting a company. Akalaitis and Glass were in New York, and, finding fertile artistic ground

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<sup>1</sup> Unless otherwise noted, all quotations by Breuer are taken from interviews with the author conducted in July 2011 and May 2012.

there, Akalaitis encouraged Maleczek, Breuer, and Warrilow to join them. Mabou Mines's first production was *The Red Horse Animation*, written by Breuer and performed in 1970 by Maleczek, Akalaitis, and Warrilow, with music by Glass. The company's name comes from the town in Nova Scotia where they rehearsed *Red Horse*. Although written and directed by Breuer, the production was created with substantial input from the performers, setting the stage for the deeply collaborative development process that is a hallmark of the company.

With the help of Ellen Stewart, who granted a La Mama residency to the fledgling company, *Red Horse* premiered at the Guggenheim in New York. *Red Horse* was later performed in art galleries around the country, helping to establish a trend of American performance in non-traditional theatre spaces. It was also a foray into the technically ambitious staging that the company is known for; in this early production, Glass amplified the specially designed flooring so that the movements of the performers could be aurally perceived by the audience as well. Mabou Mines is also known for its extensive work with plays by Samuel Beckett in the 1970s and early 1980s, including a production of *Come & Go* (1971), which took place under the Brooklyn Bridge and in which Maleczek performed, along with Akalaitis and Ellen McElduff, under Breuer's direction. Mabou Mines's work with Beckett's texts is evidence of an interest in language, which has endured throughout the company's history in their work with a variety of writers, including Breuer. Their work with Beckett's texts (discussed in more detail below) is also responsible for landing the company's long-term sponsorship by the Public Theater; after Joseph Papp attended Mabou Mines's program of short Beckett plays, which included *Come and Go* and *Play* (1971), he invited the company to work in residency there. Maleczek negotiated the terms of this agreement with Papp, which lasted through the early 1980s.

In the 1970s, the company also enjoyed the support of the organization Arts Services, which helped Mabou Mines and other artists to manage funds and secure touring engagements that would pay their bills. Mabou Mines also benefited early on from substantial support from the National Endowment for the Arts and other government agencies, but they have seen those funds dwindle in recent years and their development processes and production budgets have suffered as a consequence. The company was also successful at securing some private funding from corporations such as AT&T and Sony, especially in the late 1980s and 1990s. Mabou Mines has enjoyed a home base at PS 122 in the East Village since the mid-1990s, where their offices and the small ToRoNaDa studio space are located. The ToRoNaDa has provided the company with a rehearsal and an occasional performance space, but they will find themselves homeless once again for an unspecified amount of time as the building undergoes major renovations. This will ultimately provide Mabou Mines with improved office space and a larger, newer performance space, but in the context of decreased public and private funding, this temporary displacement will create challenges for the company's day-to-day operations and for the five productions currently in development, at least one of which is slated to premiere in 2013.

Despite these financial obstacles, Mabou Mines has continued to create groundbreaking work, sometimes adapting their productions to suit the needs of the company, as they did in developing a version of *Lucia's Chapters of Coming Forth By Day* (2007) that would be attractive for touring engagements, and sometimes flying blindly in the face of financial obstacles, as they did in *Song For New York: What Women Do While Men Sit at Home Knitting* (2007), which Maleczech insisted be performed free of charge for audiences and without corporate strings attached despite the daunting costs of renting the barge on which it was performed. It is important to note that when Mabou Mines has chosen to create work on a

smaller scope, it has always been with a mind first and foremost to artistic concerns. When Fogarty adapted *Cara Lucia* (2003), with three performers, to *Lucia's Chapters*, with two, her decision was guided primarily by aesthetic considerations.

The changing constellation of artistic directors has also impacted the work, both practically and artistically. Starting in the mid-1980s, Maleczech began to take on an increasing number of featured roles in projects such as *Hajj* and *Lear*. Although Mabou Mines has continued to emphasize the importance of creating an ensemble of performers, this work of Maleczech's marks the emergence of a pattern of productions that emphasize particular performers, begun in the 1970s with Neumann in *B. Beaver* (1974) and Warrilow in *The Lost Ones*. This continues in recent work as such as *Peter and Wendy* (1996), which features Mabou Mines artistic associate Karen Kandel, and *Lucia's Chapters*, which features Maleczech.

The company has, since its founding, been structured as a collective; the founding members—Akalaitis, Breuer, Glass, Maleczech and Warrilow—were co-artistic directors, a structure that remains intact though the composition of the company has shifted. The members of Mabou Mines have continued to eschew the notion that the company promotes a single, unified artistic voice, although Maleczech complains that the press has repeatedly attempted to identify the company's "guiding intelligence."<sup>2</sup> This artistic independence and autonomy extends to the creative and producorial roles some company members have been encouraged to take on.

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<sup>2</sup> All quotations of Maleczech are taken from interviews conducted by the author between July 2011 and March 2012.

## Founding and Current Co-artistic Directors

Although Mabou Mines is organized as a collective, not every artistic director participates in every production, and pieces have resulted from collaborations of almost every imaginable combination of artistic directors and associates. There are, nonetheless, a shared set of concerns among the co-artistic directors, such as a highly collaborative development process that both integrates design elements with performance and gives performers real power to make artistic choices; a dedication to language and research; an interest in a multi-media approach to storytelling (though not necessarily conventional narrative); and a blending of comedy and sentimentality. These characteristics, however, have tended to influence the approach to making the work rather than resulting in a “house style;” though Breuer and Maleczech are both founding artistic directors, it is hard to imagine two productions more dissimilar in mood, style, and scope than her 1999 production of *Belén: A Book of Hours* and his 2003 *DollHouse*, despite the fact that both call representations of gender into question. Breuer, who does not believe that the company has a house style, suggests that if there is a common stylistic thread among productions, it may come from the sheer number of them that Julie Archer has designed since she began working with the company in late 1970s. “I honestly don’t think there is a discernable Mabou Mines style that spreads to a number of different people,” Breuer says, “just like there is no Wooster Group style—it’s just Liz.” Mabou Mines is distinct from the Wooster Group, of course, because of its structure of shared artistic directorship, but Breuer is pointing to the distinct nature of the aesthetics of the Mabou Mines co-artistic directors.

As Maleczech points out, the company is collective but not necessarily democratic. This extends to the way in which it approaches aesthetic as well as producing concerns. Co-artistic directors have the power to turn down a collaboration on a production that does not interest

them, and performers have a great deal of leeway in choosing which avenues to explore during development, but since the late 1970s the director has usually had the final say on artistic choices. Because not every co-artistic director has worked on every production, because the composition of co-artistic directors is not the same today as it was at the time of the company's founding, and because collaborators are given permission to develop production work with a great deal of autonomy, it is possible, even important, to isolate enduring artistic concerns among individual artistic directors in order to treat individuals in the collective with the complexity that each artist's work deserves.

Breuer is the only other co-artistic director aside from Maleczech who has remained with the company since its founding, and his work has garnered the most critical attention. This is likely due to the visibility, quantity, and quality of his contributions—his work as a writer and director is prominently featured, especially in a theatrical context where substantial contributions of the kind Mabou Mines expects from performers is anomalous. Since 1970, Breuer has written nearly fifteen plays for the company and directed more than twenty productions, not including extensive revivals and tours. His most well known works as a writer are his animations, the first of which, *The Red Horse Animation*, was followed by many others including *B. Beaver*, *Shaggy Dog* (1978), *Sister Suzie Cinema* (1980), *An Epidog* (1996), *Ecco Porco* (2002), *Summa Dramatica* (2009) and *Porco Morto* (2009). The animations have now been collected into the epic *La Divina Caricatura*, part of which is slated for production in 2013. Widely known directing works for the company include Samuel Beckett's *Come and Go*, *Play*, and *The Lost Ones*; Mabou Mines's *Lear*; *Peter and Wendy*, and *DollHouse*. High profile directing projects outside of Mabou Mines include *The Gospel at Colonus* (1985) and a production of *A Streetcar Named Desire* at the Comédie Française (2011). Breuer's work is characterized by his interest in

popular culture and interculturalism, his incorporation of live music in production, and his surprising inversions of classic texts.

JoAnne Akalaitis was the first Mabou Mines co-artistic director to shift from performing to directing. After performing in *Red Horse, Come and Go*, and *Play*, Akalaitis made her directing debut with Beckett's *Cascando* in 1976, which she followed up with *Dressed Like an Egg* and which received an Obie Award for Distinguished Production. She continued to perform with Mabou Mines in *B. Beaver* and *Shaggy Dog*, but had made a permanent move to directing by the 1980s, when she directed *Dead End Kids* (1980) and *Through the Leaves* for the company. In the early 1990s, Akalaitis resigned from Mabou Mines and spent a brief and tumultuous tenure as Artistic Director of the Public Theater after being named by Joseph Papp as his successor. Akalaitis has had a sustained career as an independent director working at such high profile theatres as the American Repertory Theatre, Lincoln Center, the New York City Opera, The Goodman Theatre, the Mark Taper Forum, the Court Theatre, and the Guthrie Theater. In addition to teaching at Juilliard, Akalaitis was a Professor of Theatre at Bard College from 1998-2012, where she now holds the Wallace Benjamin Flint and L. May Hawver Flint Professor Emerita of Drama. Among other prestigious awards, Akalaitis has received an Obie for Outstanding Achievement and a Guggenheim Fellowship. Akalaitis's work has a reputation for controversy, although little in recent years has generated the storm of her 1984 production of *Endgame* set in a subway car, to which Beckett objected (via a surrogate) because he felt it circumvented his stage directions. The ART production was eventually allowed to go forward, with the caveat that the program must contain a copy of the first page of the play where Beckett's stage directions appear, along with statements by the playwright, Robert Brustein (the ART artistic director at the time) and Barney Rosset (president of Grove Press at the time). Critics

have characterized Akalaitis's work as feminist, a label the director eschews. Akalaitis acknowledges the influence of Mabou Mines on her work with actors, in which she asks for the sort of full participation that she herself helped to establish in her early work with the company.

Philip Glass, who was married to Akalaitis from 1965 to 1980, composed and sometimes performed music for the company in the 1970s and into the 1980s, mainly on projects directed by Breuer and Akalaitis, such as *Red Horse*, *Music for Voices* (1972), *The Saint and the Football Player* (1973), *Cascando*, *The Lost Ones*, *Dressed Like an Egg*, *Shaggy Dog*, *Mercier and Camier*, and *Dead End Kids*. Before co-founding Mabou Mines, he founded the Philip Glass Ensemble. He has composed a number of important works for theatre and opera outside of Mabou Mines including *Einstein on the Beach* (1976), directed by Robert Wilson, and *Satyagraha*, which premiered at New York's Metropolitan Opera in 1980 and was remounted there in 2007-08, and he has collaborated with choreographers such as Twyla Tharp, filmmakers such as Woody Allen, and musicians as diverse as Yo-Yo Ma and Paul Simon. He composed *Overture for 2012*, which was part of a commemoration of the War of 1812 and premiered simultaneously in his hometown of Baltimore and in Toronto. His music has been extraordinarily influential across the fields of art and academia. Although critics have referred to his work as minimalist, he has regularly described it as "music with repetitive structures."

David Warrilow, the only foreign co-artistic director of Mabou Mines, was born in Staffordshire and began working with his co-founders in Paris, where they first tried their hands at Beckett. He performed in a number of early productions including *Red Horse*, *Play, B. Beaver*, and *Mercier and Camier*. Warrilow was widely acclaimed for his performances of Beckett's texts in both English and French, the first of which was his one-man staging of *The Lost Ones*, on which he collaborated with Breuer. Warrilow won rare approval from Beckett for

his performances of the writer's work, and Beckett wrote *Piece of Monologue* for him, which the actor premiered in New York in 1979. Warrilow left Mabou Mines in the late 1970s and worked regularly with the well-known American director of Beckett, Alan Scheider, on productions including *Ohio Impromptu* (1979), *Catastrophe* (1983), and *Born in What Where* (1983). He also collaborated with Maleczech on a 1987 production of Khlebnikov's *Zangezi*, directed by Peter Sellars, in one of the few projects outside of Mabou Mines that Maleczech elected to take on. Warrilow performed with Billie Whitelaw in *All That Fall* in 1989 and was awarded Obies for his Mabou Mines work in *Dressed Like an Egg, Southern Exposure* (1979) and his revival of *The Lost Ones*. He died of AIDS in 1995 at the age of sixty, performing regularly even during illness in the last year of his life.

Fred Neumann began working with Breuer and Maleczech in the 1960s in Paris, including a staging of *Mother Courage*. He began his formal relationship with Mabou Mines in 1971, becoming, as with Warrilow, a noted interpreter of Beckett's texts. Neumann met Beckett in 1976 and the two remained in communication about Neumann's staging of the writer's works for the remainder of Beckett's lifetime. These stagings included *Mercier and Camier*, which Neumann performed in and also directed; *Company*, which Neumann co-directed with his late wife and former Mabou Mines artistic associate Honora Fergusson; and *Worstword Ho* (1986) which was given to Neumann by the noted Beckett scholar Ruby Cohn with Beckett's approval. Neumann also performed in an extensive number of Breuer's animations, most famously in *B. Beaver*, but also in *Shaggy Dog*, *The Warrior Ant* (1988), and *Ecco Porco*. In 1984, he and Maleczech were awarded Obies for their performances in Franz Xaver Kroetz's *Through the Leaves*, which played at the Public under Akalaitis's direction. Neumann has also performed

widely outside of Mabou Mines; those projects include Robert Wilson's *The Civil WarS* (1984) and José Quintero's 1985 Tony award winning production of *The Ice Man Cometh*.

After seeing Mabou Mines perform in Memphis in 1971, Terry O'Reilly became fascinated with the company. He joined them in New York in 1973, becoming a co-artistic director in 1974. O'Reilly has been as a performer and puppeteer on projects including *Shaggy Dog*, *Wrong Guys*, *Dead End Kids*, *Pretty Boy* (1984), *In the Jungle of Cities* (1991), and *Red Beads* (2005). He is also a writer and a director; his plays include *The Bribe*, an adaptation of several radio plays directed by Maleczek in 1990, and *Animal Magnetism (A Live Cartoon in Animal Drag)*, which Breuer directed at St. Ann's Warehouse in 2000. O'Reilly is currently developing a new puppet play for Mabou Mines entitled *Brer' Rabbit In The Land of The Monkey King*, which draws on folklore from Asia, Africa, and the American south. O'Reilly's training is in dance and his work is particularly engaged with internationalism, a strain of interest he shares with Breuer and, to some extent, Maleczek. Away from Mabou Mines, he has collaborated regularly with the Creation Company and on plays by Jim Neu, and he has taught extensively at colleges across the country.

Sharon Fogarty became a co-artistic director of Mabou Mines in 1999 after working with the company for more than ten years on projects such as *Cold Harbor* (1983) and *Lear*, in which she performed such odd jobs as holding down Gloucester as her eyes were gouged out and picking up the dogs for each performance. Upon returning to New York from Ireland, where she pursued graduate work, Fogarty took a job managing the Mabou Mines office. In 1996, she became a producer for the company, taking on projects such as *Belén: A Book of Hours* and *Song For New York*, directed by Maleczek, and Mabou Mines's *DollHouse* and *Red Beads*, directed by Breuer. Meanwhile, she spent several years as the artistic director of Daedelus

Theater Company, specializing in Irish plays. Fogarty's first project as a Mabou Mines co-artistic director was to write and direct *Cara Lucia*, later re-imagined as *Lucia's Chapters of Coming Forth By Day*, featuring Maleczek and based on the life of Lucia Joyce. The production premiered at HERE Arts Center in New York in 2003, and has been produced a number of times since, including as part of New York's 1<sup>st</sup> Irish Festival at PS122 in 2011. Next, Fogarty directed *FINN*, also rooted in Irish culture and based on the stories of the Irish folk hero Finn McCool. *FINN* premiered New York University's Skirball Center in 2010, where the company had produced *Red Beads*. Fogarty is on the faculty at Barnard College and has also taught at New York University and elsewhere in the U.S. and abroad.

Although she has been working with Mabou Mines since the late 1970s, Julie Archer is the most recent artist to become a co-artistic director, which she did in 2005. Archer has designed a vast number of productions with the company, starting with the Obie award winning *Vanishing Pictures* in 1980, which she co-designed with Maleczek, also the director. Following this, Archer designed a combination of sets, lights, and projections for productions including *Wrong Guys*, *Sister Suzie Cinema*, *Ecco Porco*, *Hajj*, *Peter and Wendy*, *Belén*, *Red Beads*, *Lucia's Chapters*, *Song for New York*, and *Summa Dramatica*. She is currently developing *would find landscapes* with longtime Mabou Mines collaborator Liza Lorwin. Archer conceived of and is designing this project based on the landscapes of cornfields surrounding Minneapolis that she remembers from her childhood. Archer has received numerous grants and awards for her designs, such as Obies for *Peter and Wendy* and *An Epidog*, An American Theater Wing Award for her puppets in *An Epidog* and *Summa Dramatica*, and Best Design in the 1<sup>st</sup> Irish Festival for *Lucia's Chapters*. Away from Mabou Mines, she collaborated with Breuer on *Gospel at Colonus* and on *The Civil WarS* with Robert Wilson, among other works.

The other former, non-founding co-artistic directors of the company are Bill Raymond, Ellen McElduff, L.B. Dallas, B-St. John Schofield, and Dawn Gray. Current artistic associates are Clove Galilee (daughter of Breuer and Maleczech and founder of her own company, Trick Saddle), Karen Kandel, and David Neumann (son of Fred Neumann and Fergusson and founder of his own company, advanced beginner group).

A number of Mabou Mines collaborators and artistic directors suggest that no one has had more sustained influence on the company than Maleczech. “Ruth has the power of being the elder statesman,” Breuer says, “If you have to come down to it, it’s Ruth’s company. It’s not my company. And that’s unquestionable. I think if anything came up that Ruth said no to it wouldn’t happen. And most things that she says yes to will happen.” Fogarty concurs. “Ruth is the reason that the company has stayed together,” Fogarty says,

she thinks of Mabou Mines as this thing outside of her and outside of all of us. ... Ruth’s opinion is very important to the organization in terms of whether or not we take on something. She’s got such a huge heart, but she’s tough as nails. She has extremely high standards about work and she’s committed to this idea, which the company began with, of making art and not entertainment, not commerce, not conventional theatre.

### **Existing Scholarship**

Iris Smith Fischer’s 2010 book, *Mabou Mines: Making Avant-Garde Theater in the 1970s*, is the first and only full-length study on the company. Smith Fischer covers the company’s founding as well as giving comprehensive accounts and insightful analyses of processes and productions in the 1970s including the animations *Red Horse* and *B. Beaver*, the early Beckett pieces, *Dressed Like an Egg*, and *Vanishing Pictures*. She also offers an in-depth examination of Mabou Mines’s first mentorship program, Re.Cher.Chez, and engages with the

work of each of the founding artistic directors and a number of early artistic associates. This project is indebted to Smith Fisher's research and ideas.

Bonnie Marranca is one of the first scholars to consider Mabou Mines's work in depth, and her introduction to Breuer's *Animations: A Trilogy for Mabou Mines* (1979), which Marranca co-edited with Gautam Dasgupta, as well as their treatment of *Red Horse* in *The Theatre of Images* (2005), are crucial considerations of Breuer as a writer.

Major works on the American avant-garde movement have tended to overlook or misrepresent Mabou Mines as the subject for case studies. Arnold Aronson's *American Avant-Garde Theatre: A History* (2000) mentions the company only in passing. Theodore Shank does include a discussion of Mabou Mines in his 2002 edition of *Beyond the Boundaries* (they were excluded from the book's first incarnation in 1980) in the context of his chapter on self-reflective work, which also includes consideration of the Wooster Group and Richard Foreman. He argues that the artists he includes in this category make work about the process of making art. In direct contradiction to the company's explicit insistence on collective structure, Shank describes Breuer as the group's primary director. He goes on to discuss Breuer's animations and, despite citing Breuer's primacy, he examines *Dressed Like an Egg* and *Dead End Kids*, both directed by Akalaitis, and *Hajj*, developed collaboratively by members of the company. Curiously, he also includes *Gospel at Colonus*, which had been developed by Breuer outside of the company, in his discussion of Mabou Mines's work. Although he notes that the work he discusses was developed collaboratively by the company, he does little to elucidate the nature of that collaboration.

Richard Schechner's important collection of essays on the state of the American avant-garde, *The End of Humanism* (1982), contains an insightful dissection of Mabou Mines's *Shaggy*

*Dog Animation* as part of his chapter “The Natural/Artificial Controversy Renewed.” Schechner describes the way in which this piece walks the line between the natural and the artificial, reading the personal relationships of some of the collaborators along with the play itself. Breuer wrote and directed the piece and Maleczech performed in it, alongside Breuer and Maleczech’s daughter Clove Galilee, who was a child at the time. Schechner writes that this production and the others he discusses trouble the audience by blurring the boundary between life and art.

A disproportionately high number of articles on Mabou Mines focus on *Lear*, although some of them contribute important points about the company’s process, such as Smith Fischer’s “Mabou Mines’s ‘Lear’: A Narrative of Collective Authorship” (1993), in which she argues that collective authorship extends beyond the company’s collective structure to all of the collaborators in the piece. Smith Fischer’s expansive definition of collaboration includes the organizations that provided financial backing. She examines the geographically based mixed reaction of audiences as well as public reactions to Mabou Mines’s reliance on corporate funding to support a demanding production with a large cast. Smith Fischer suggests that Maleczech and Breuer had different notions of the gender-switching framework: she saw gender as the main obstacle preventing her from having played Lear while he saw it as one obstacle among many. Smith Fischer notes that Breuer refers to watching the developments of feminism, emphasizing that he has watched these developments as an outsider.

Several anthologies and books devoted to cross-gender casting and feminist performance have also focused on Mabou Mines’s *Lear*, including Lesly Ferris’s chapter *Feminist Theatrical Revisions of Classic Works*, edited by Sharon Friedman (2009), and P.A. Skantze’s “Unaccommodated Woman” in *Shakespeare Re-Dressed: Cross-Gender Casting in Contemporary Performance*, edited by James C. Bulman (2008). Ferris reads *Lear* as a tactic for

addressing the dearth of roles for women and cites Smith Fischer's position that while Breuer saw gender as one of many possible destabilizing interpretations, Maleczek thought it was her gender in particular that barred her from playing the role. Skantze reads *Lear* from her perspective as a feminist spectator. She recognizes a feeling of empowerment in the experience of witnessing a classic tragic role enacted by a female performer. She also notes the complexity in power relationships that is created by the intersection of mixed-race and cross-gender casting, and argues that the feminist spectator is implicated in upholding concepts of universal representation, although adapted ones, in her desire to identify with a female Lear. *Feminist Theatrical Revisions of Classic Works* also contains an essay on Mabou Mines's *Dollhouse* by Amy S. Greene entitled "Nora's Journey through a Century of Feminisms to the Postmodern Stage of Mabou Mines Dollhouse" in which Greene tries (probably fruitlessly, alas) to definitively establish the play's feminist impetus and uses Breuer's tall women and small men to underscore the power relationships and the assumption of the constructed nature of gender she argues are implicit in the play.

Alisa Solomon, who served as dramaturg on *Lear*, provides a particularly useful approach in terms of methodology and theoretical framework in *Re-dressing the Canon*. Solomon's 1997 book suggests that there is room in classical, canonical plays for feminist interpretation, and in her cogent case study of *Lear*, she is one of the few scholars to underscore the fact that Mabou Mines has no single artistic director and no single guiding aesthetic. Solomon argues that the company was one of the earliest to epitomize American postmodern theatre, not only because of their collective structure but because they drew inspiration from a broad swathe of high art and popular cultural sources. Solomon also suggests that Mabou Mines asks audiences to make contact with their performances in new, different, and challenging ways. In her discussion of

*Lear*, Solomon takes aim at Schechner's claim that we have arrived at the end of humanism by suggesting that perhaps, instead, we have arrived at "the end of the patriarchy."<sup>3</sup> Maleczech as *Lear*, Solomon argues, removes universalism from its presumed association with the male perspective and forces audiences to consider the constructed nature of gender, while the casting of black actors in the roles of Gloucester and Edna/Edgar challenges its link to whiteness.

Elinor Fuchs also considers the company's work from a feminist point of view, although she treats a different production. In her article "Staging the Obscene Body," which appeared in *TDR* in 1989, Fuchs considers, among other productions, the link Akalaitis makes in *Dead End Kids* between misogyny and military power.

As noted above, a number of scholars who have written on Mabou Mines position their analyses of the company's work within a feminist theoretical framework. This is no accident; the political and social leanings of the company members place a portion of their work in a leftist context and Maleczech, among others, acknowledges that the work of the company is intentionally socially engaged, though she notes that only certain pieces are intended to be overtly political.

Lee Breuer's brief 1976 article/poem, "Mabou Mines: How We Work," provides crucial insight into the collective artistic process and lives of the company in its early years, introducing such subjects as the communal childcare funding policy Mabou Mines would come to adopt at Maleczech and Akalaitis's insistence. Deborah Saivetz's *An Event in Space: JoAnne Akalaitis in Rehearsal* (2000) draws heavily upon interviews with the director in which she discusses the foundational nature of Mabou Mines's philosophy and approach on her work, particularly as it relates to the empowered role of the performer. Lois Oppenheim's anthology, *Directing Beckett*

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<sup>3</sup> Alisa Solomon, *Re-dressing the Canon: Essays on Theatre and Gender* (New York: University of Michigan Press, 2002), 137.

(1994), provides useful information about David Warrilow's performances of Beckett's work. Breuer is also quoted in the anthology, explaining in conjunction with a discussion on Akalaitis's infamous production of *Endgame* that he and Mabou Mines had moved away from working with Beckett's texts because the playwright (and later the estate) had not given them enough flexibility in approaching the text. It is important to note, however, that Beckett repeatedly granted Mabou Mines rare permission to stage his short stories and one of his radio plays in the late 1970s and early 1980s.

Despite the fact that several scholars who write on Mabou Mines note the impact of the company's collective structure on producing work that does not follow a guiding, unified artistic point of view, there is little writing (save for Smith Fischer's) that engages with the multiplicity of views encompassed in each production or the process and collective structure that encourages and incorporates these contributions from individual collaborators. Generally, scholars acknowledge the collective process before going on to credit the choices of a single artist (usually Breuer) for the production. Although several scholars (Smith Fischer, Solomon) do refer to Mabou Mines's insistence on collectivity and varied artistic viewpoints, it would be difficult, using these extant sources, to reconstruct sustained, individual artistic trajectories of any of the company members besides Breuer and perhaps Akalaitis (who is no longer a member of the company), within existing scholarship. Finally, very little scholarly writing has focused on Maleczek's directing work for the company or her co-artistic directorship, although Ruby Cohn refers briefly and approvingly to *Imagination Dead Imagine* in her discussion of Mabou Mines and Beckett in the anthology *Samuel Beckett and the Arts* (1999) and Smith Fischer examines Maleczek's first directing project, *Vanishing Pictures* in her book. This positions several vital productions, such as *Bélen: A Book of Hours*, almost entirely outside of critical

discourse on the company and leaves a blind spot in place of the trajectory of a foundational and guiding artistic vision of the company.

### **Methodology, Scope, and Structure**

Because Maleczech's crucial and distinctive contribution to downtown theatre in general and Mabou Mines in particular has not been given the critical credit it deserves, this dissertation will function in part as a recuperative history. The project is a feminist one insofar as it is my premise that the full significance Maleczech's work has been ignored because she is a woman. She and Breuer are the only founding artistic directors remaining in the company, and yet Breuer is credited with contributing substantially to the company even as Maleczech's contributions have been largely overlooked. It is no accident that Maleczech's body of work on women appeared in my decidedly feminist line of vision.

Feminist theatre critics such as Lynda Hart and Sue Ellen Case were among the first to use analyses of the live body onstage to zero in on questions of gender and sexuality, as Jill Dolan notes in her introduction to *A Sourcebook of Feminist Theatre and Performance* (1996). This interpretive strategy will be crucial to my work, as is my conscious position as one of Dolan's feminist spectators. Hart's anthologies *Making a Spectacle* (1989) and *Acting Out*, (1993, co-edited with Peggy Phelan) challenge readers, artists, and audiences to expand possibilities for who is seen, how s/he is seen, and who sees him/her. The art and artists theorized in these anthologies confront and defy traditional representations of gender, identity, and truth, paving the way for my close reading of Maleczech's work.

Solomon's *Re-dressing the Canon* will also provide an invaluable model as she uses this approach to talk about Mabou Mines's work on *Lear*, as mentioned above. Solomon positions

herself in line with Elin Diamond's proposal for a feminist mimesis, as will I, though Solomon eschews what she suggests is Diamond's over reliance on Luce Irigaray and Julia Kristeva. Solomon's analyses, which rely upon feminist theory but emphasize close readings, are an important model for this project.

Because I will be focusing on Maleczech's directing and artistic directorship in addition to her performance, the project that Anne Fliostos and Wendy Vierow undertake in *American Women Stage Directors of the Twentieth Century* (2008) also provides an important model for my work. This book draws attention to the paucity of female directors in the United States and suggests a systemic exclusion based on such well-known causes as doubt or discomfort surrounding women in positions of authority, the resistance to hiring women for high-profile, big budget productions, and the difficulty of simultaneously raising children and pursuing a career. Perhaps most importantly, Fliostos and Vierow establish a lineage of female directors, which revises the prevalent history that usually begins with Duke Saxe-Meiningen, Antoine, and Stanislavski to include women such as Carolina Neuber, Madame Vestris, and Laura Keene.

Another recuperative history, though not primarily a feminist one, is Stephen Bottoms's 2004 rewriting of the founding of the off-off Broadway movement, *Playing Underground*. Bottoms draws a more accurate and complex picture of 1960s downtown theatre by filling in a vast swathe of plays and people who have been overlooked in theatre history, due, he asserts, to latent homophobia. The central figure to which Bottoms brings overdue credit is Joe Cino, and this belated examination of Cino's contribution provides inspiration for what I hope to accomplish with this project, though Maleczech begins as a more widely known figure than did Cino.

Finally, David Savran's 1988 book on the Wooster Group, *Breaking the Rules*, provides a model for interspersing critical analysis with interviews with the artists themselves. Savran is able to use his interviews with the artists to shed light on their process and product while maintaining a critical distance, which enables him to incorporate the words of the artists themselves without allowing these interviews to overshadow his own analysis of the work. I am fortunate to have been in regular communication Maleczech and have used her as a resource while at the same time forming my own judgments about her work. Savran's organization of the book also provides an alternative for addressing work thematically rather than chronologically.

The Mabou Mines archives are housed at the Fales Collection at NYU's Bobst Library and I have relied heavily on these materials. More recent material has not yet been given to or catalogued at Fales, and has been made available to me at the Mabou Mines offices. A small number of video recordings related to my research are also available at the New York Library for the Performing Arts's Theater on Film and Tape collection. The most crucial archival materials are video recordings of performances, but I have also relied upon production photographs, company-generated publicity material and grant applications, programs, letters, and reviews. I have also relied heavily upon interviews with Maleczech and many of her collaborators.

This study is structured thematically. Considering Maleczech's production and performance choices in this context has allowed me to establish patterns in her body of work that relate to both process and product, as well as the inter-relationship between the two. All of the work I examine in depth was created between 1980 and the present. This may be because Maleczech emerged in the 1980s as an artist independent of the collective of performers she had worked with at Mabou Mines in the 1970s. She began directing in the 1980s, and she also began to take on featured roles in Mabou Mines productions with increased frequency in this period.

The first chapter focuses on Maleczech's performances in Beckett's *Happy Days* and Franz Kroetz's *Through the Leaves*, which highlight her interest in making ordinary women important onstage. In these two productions, Maleczech's ordinary women achieve the status of Everywomen in spite of, or perhaps because of, the individual particularity with which she invests them. I also discuss Maleczech's biography in some depth here as an ordinary woman who made herself important in the downtown theatre scene, tracing the connections between her background and training and her performances in these productions. I also turn briefly to the question of whether the non-Mabou Mines context of *Happy Days*, which was initially produced by La Jolla Playhouse, influenced development and performance. This chapter explores the way in which Maleczech transforms these ordinary and seemingly powerless women into characters of near-mythical stature.

Chapter Two centers on Maleczech's predilection for resurrecting extraordinary women from history and finding their contemporary resonances. Sometimes these women were already famous, as in the case of Marie Curie, who Maleczech played in *Dead End Kids*, and sometimes they have been more dimly lit, as with Lucia Joyce, played by Maleczech in *Lucia's Chapters of Coming Forth by Day*. And in *Bélen: A Book of Hours*, directed by Maleczech, she and her collaborators uncover and imagine the history of women who were consigned to remain inside the walls of an infamous building in Mexico City where prostitutes and pregnant, unmarried women were imprisoned by the Catholic Church. This chapter treats these productions as history plays, exploring the ways in which Maleczech has used an historical angle to experiment with representations of women on stage. This brings up questions about how representations of the known figures Marie Curie and Lucia Joyce challenge pre-existing ideas about figures we recognize and how uncovering unfamiliar aspects of Lucia Joyce's history and the unknown

stories of the women of Bélen contributes to an understanding of our contemporary context. I also investigate the way in which the politics of these productions contributes to an understanding Maleczech's vision of the purpose of performance.

The third chapter puts two productions about fathers in conversation with each other. *Hajj*, performed by Maleczech, features (among other stories) Maleczech's relationship with her father at the time of his death. In Mabou Mines's *Lear* Maleczech transforms the canonical tragic father figure into a mother, thereby turning notions of universalism on their ear, as Solomon describes. Maleczech transforms herself into her own father onstage in *Hajj* and bases her performance in *Lear* on an inspirational version by Michael O'Sullivan that she saw in San Francisco in 1961. These productions reveal an interest on Maleczech's part in troubling the traditional notion of the father figure, and by extension, all family roles and relationships. They also reveal Maleczech's interest in pushing against the boundaries of what women are allowed to say, on stage and in life, taking up questions about what Maleczech's insistence on saying these words in public tells us about her ideas on the role of performance in confronting gender and familial stereotypes, how her enactment of her father and her embodied recollection of O'Sullivan's performance serve as both homage and confrontation, and how the collective, autonomous process in each of these projects relates to Maleczech's empowerment in performance.

The final chapter engages with *Shaggy Dog*, *Red Beads*, and *Summa Dramatica* alongside Beckett's *Imagination Dead Imagine*, all productions on which Maleczech has collaborated with her daughter, Clove Galilee, taking up, in part, a line of questioning begun by Schechner about the boundaries between art and life in his essay "The Natural/Artificial Controversy Renewed." Often these collaborations have involved Breuer (Galilee's father) as

well. By looking at the ways in which Maleczek has positioned Mabou Mines with regard to family relationships, this discussion opens up questions about how a collaboration with her own daughter challenges our notions of both familial and artistic hierarchy and how the physical and emotional intimacy of these family ties might impact the development and product of the productions for both the artists and their audiences. Finally, this chapter investigates what the collaborative bond Maleczek has developed with Galilee tells us about Maleczek's view of the relationship between family and collaborative partners, and in turn, the ideal interaction between theatre and life.

The conclusion touches briefly on one of Maleczek's current projects in development, *Imagining the Imaginary Invalid*, and reflects upon the points of view of a number of her long term collaborators on the significance of her work, drawing together the patterns identified in individual chapters into a portrait of Maleczek's social, political, and emotional aesthetic for the theatre.

## Chapter One: ORDINARY WOMEN

It's just damn hard for a woman, that's all, but I did it!

—Martha, *Through the Leaves*

What is it to be abroad?

—Maddy Rooney, *All that Fall*

Maleczech's performances in Samuel Beckett's *Happy Days* (1996) and Franz Kroetz's *Through the Leaves* (1984) demonstrate her interest in making ordinary women important onstage. In these performances, Maleczech's ordinary women achieve the status of Everywomen because she allows them to retain their individual particularity; Douglas Stein, the set designer for both productions, says that what struck him most about Maleczech's performances in these plays was "the extraordinary detail of her work."<sup>1</sup> Maleczech is well positioned to bring the daily concerns of ordinary women to the stage; she grew up in a working-class family in the Mid- and Southwest, earning international distinction as a result of hard work, dedication and determination. This chapter traces the influence of Maleczech's personal history and professional training on her political and social proclivity for acknowledging the significance of commonplace women onstage.

*Through the Leaves* was a collaboration with director JoAnne Akalaitis and performer Fred Neumann, both co-artistic directors of Mabou Mines at the time of the 1984 production, which premiered at the Women's Interart Theatre and transferred to the Shiva Theater at the Public. Akalaitis, Neumann and Maleczech received Obies for their work, and *Through the Leaves* earned the award for Best Production at the Festival of the Americas in Montreal the

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<sup>1</sup> All quotations by Douglas Stein come from email correspondence with the author March-May 2012.

following year, where Maleczech also picked up the award for best performer. The production travelled to the Israel Festival in 1986, before returning to the Public Theatre in 1990, shortly before Akalaitis resigned from Mabou Mines and commenced her brief tenure as Artistic Director of the Public. *Happy Days* was directed by Robert Woodruff and first commissioned by and produced at La Jolla Playhouse in 1996. Despite its origins, this was not a conventional regional theatre production, which may account for Maleczech's involvement. It was produced in New York at Mabou Mines's ToRoNaDa studio in 1999. In her portrayals of Annette and Winnie, Maleczech's rich and detailed depictions of these ordinary women make them more important on stage than they would be in real life. Maleczech, taking her cue from the writers whose voices she interprets, brings our attention to bear on the daily struggles of these women.

It is unsurprising that Maleczech gravitated toward Winnie; by the time of the La Jolla production she had established an important history of performing Beckett with Mabou Mines. Winnie is a significant milestone in Maleczech's reputation for putting noteworthy roles for women on the stage. *Happy Days* marks Beckett's first foray into a highly detailed and expansive female role for the theatre.<sup>2</sup> It also requires just the sort of vocal acrobatics for which Maleczech's training and Mabou Mines's interest in what Akalaitis calls "different ways of speaking" prepared her.<sup>3</sup> As Enoch Brater notes,

Although *Happy Days* is a two-character play, the work is, in effect, Beckett's first female solo . . . Beckett once said that he selected a woman for this role because the contents of a handbag would provide an immobile character with more "business" to do onstage. And yet this statement belies his growing fascination with the vocal range of a female player, the quality of sound he was able to get from an earthy Maddy Rooney, an ethereal Miss Fitt, or a sentimentally "canned" but philosophically correct Nell. . . *Happy*

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<sup>2</sup> Maddy Rooney in *All that Fall* marks an earlier expansive female role for radio.

<sup>3</sup> All quotations by JoAnne Akalaitis in this chapter are taken from an interview conducted by the author in December 2011.

*Days* exploits the higher timbre of Krapp's female counterpart, a vocalizer whose rising action climaxes in a song of songs, the waltz duet from *The Merry Widow*.<sup>4</sup>

It is no coincidence that Maleczech, who had honed her instruments on *Play* and *Come and Go* (both 1971), wished to tackle this sophisticated, middle-aged Beckett woman as a more mature performer.

Furthermore, Winnie's middle-aged, middle class—in short, ordinary—concerns are likely to have appealed to Maleczech's interest in treating everyday women with dignity on the stage. Linda Ben Zvi writes:

Winnie could well be described as a caricature of the middle-aged woman from Borough Green, but Beckett prevents this interpretation by allowing her an awareness of her own predicament and her own limited means to ward off the despair she experiences. . . . Beckett's Winnie is thus not only a woman; she is the physical embodiment of the condition of being a woman in her society. Not a stereotype, she is the result of stereotypic views of women. Beckett suggests what culture offers as ballast for a woman like Winnie. Not much.<sup>5</sup>

Winnie can't rely on her cultural context to extract her from her circumstances, but a performer such as Maleczech can bring her predicament to bear on our cultural consciousness, reminding us how little has changed for Winnie and her ilk in the thirty-odd years that transpired between Beckett's writing and the La Jolla production.

Kroetz too provides a meaty role for a mature female performer—another rarity on stages across the globe. Both Annette and Otto are working class characters with lower to middle class concerns. Annette's tastes are the more elevated of the two: she serves caviar at dinner and likes to go to the movies while Otto prefers drinking beer and flipping through girlie magazines. And instead of taking the vacation Annette dreams of, the pair plant themselves under sun lamps on

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<sup>4</sup> Enoch Brater, *Why Beckett* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1989), 102.

<sup>5</sup> Linda Ben Zvi, ed., *Women in Beckett* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1990), xiii.

the floor in the back room of her shop. Roger Downey argues that Kroetz's concerns with the stark realities of everyday life made him attractive to the post-war German world in which he emerged:

The postwar German theatre had been explicitly designed as a sanctuary, a place devoted to the classics, to Goethe and Schiller, to Shakespeare, Shaw and Sophocles, to the "poetic realism" of Williams and Miller, the enameled fancies of Giradoux and Fry. If critical attitudes to contemporary society were expressed at all, it was allegorically, through the neo-Expressionism of writers like the Swiss authors Frisch and Dürrenmatt. But by the mid-Sixties, a post-war generation full of nothing but contempt for *Kultur* and its smug consumers was ready to take on contemporary reality again. In Franz Xaver Kroetz they found a dramatist eager not only to portray reality, but rub his audience's nose in it.<sup>6</sup>

Akalaitis, too, was drawn to *Through the Leaves* because of her admiration for Kroetz's affinity for blue-collar daily life. "I was very struck by his tremendous empathy for the working class," she says, "there's almost no playwriting about that that's not folkloric, that's real. And his writing is really real." She knew immediately that she wanted Maleczek and Neumann to play the roles. "They are both working class people. They both have that great roughness that comes with the working class and I thought they could handle the material to do it," she explains.

Maleczek's representations of Annette and Winnie are symptomatic of her sustained commitment to engaging with ordinary women on the stage. Iris Smith Fischer links Winnie to yet another of Maleczek's representations of a not so stereotypical everyday woman, Mother in Patricia Spears Jones's play of that title:

Like the character Maleczek played in Patricia Spears Jones's play *Mother*, inspired by Gorky's novel, Winnie is difficult. She is full of prosaic grouching, as was the Mother when she packed up her I-love-New York shopping bag and left her old life behind. Winnie has fewer options than the Mother; yet she too occupies a new

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<sup>6</sup> Roger Downey, "Introduction" in Franz Xaver Kroetz, *Through the Leaves and Other Plays*, trans. Roger Downey (New York: Theatre Communications Group, Inc., 1983), ix.

world. In a sense Winnie's situation mirrors that of Mabou Mines—a company that speaks in the multiple voices of the postmodern while remaining defiantly modernist, i.e. avant garde.<sup>7</sup>

The material Maleczech chooses and the energy, technique, and texturing with which she invests her performances elevate these women from commonplace to archetypal. Along with Rose in *The Shaggy Dog Animation* (1978), and, but for their historical significance, the women of *Bélen* (1999), representations I will discuss in detail in Chapters Four and Two, respectively, her roles in *Through the Leaves* and *Happy Days* establish a pattern in which this performer dedicates her energies to making glaringly visible on the stage the concerns of women whose ordinariness makes them nearly invisible in daily life. Maleczech has wielded her background, training, and determination to put herself in a prominent position from which to do so. Maleczech uses the political influence garnered from her theatrical platform to advocate for the significance of working- and middle-class women—a group Maleczech would herself be part of, but for her power to reach theatre audiences.

### **Background, Training & Influences**

Ruth Maleczech was born in Cleveland in 1938 to Yugoslavian immigrants. Her father was a steel worker and her mother was a homemaker and trained seamstress who made every item of clothing worn by Maleczech and her sister except for underwear, hats, and socks. After Maleczech completed the second grade in 1947, her family moved to Phoenix for her father's health. The story of this cross-country journey would later be dramatized in Mabou Mines's *Hajj* (1983). In Phoenix, Maleczech appeared on stage for the first time as the witch in *Snow*

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<sup>7</sup> Iris Smith Fischer, "Happy Days," review of Beckett's *Happy Days* by Mabou Mines, ToRoNaDa Studio, New York, 1999, in "Women, Nations, Households, and History" special issue, *Theatre Journal* 51, no. 1 (March 1999): 97.

*White*. Her mother made her costume and Maleczech says, based on a sound recording, that she gave a very effective performance. “I was a great witch,” she remembers, “I can tell by the voice. Very high pitched and scary.”<sup>8</sup> In high school Maleczech excelled in dance, performed in *Blithe Spirit* and *Taming of the Shrew*, and was a cheerleader and a drum major. She did very well in biology, but almost failed math and home economics, the latter of which required that she make a chartreuse-colored dress and subsequently model it in a fashion show. Her seamstress mother told her that it wouldn’t be fair for her to help, so Maleczech made and remade the dress three times in order to pass the class. “Oh God! It was murderous,” she says, “I remember coming home and cutting it up into a millions pieces.”

Maleczech studied theatre at the University of California, Los Angeles, where she met Lee Breuer, the first and most sustained collaborator of her career, and departed before graduating to join Breuer when he finished his studies. Breuer remembers being struck by Maleczech’s intensity and dedication at UCLA. “She had a lot of emotional accessibility and she seemed to have a higher dedication of performing than any of the other students. She was a little more obsessed than the other students,” he recalls.<sup>9</sup> Up the coast in San Francisco, Maleczech was cast as Emily in a production of *Our Town* by the Interplayers. The main focus of her time in San Francisco, however, was her four years of work with Ronnie Davis and the R.G. Davis Mime Troupe (later the San Francisco Mime Troupe). “It was very thrilling work and I really wanted to do it,” she says,

I wasn’t trained enough to actually do it, but Davis was really rigorous, so I learned. He was a marvelous teacher. . . We trained for hours and hours every day, and we did standard Commedia

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<sup>8</sup> Unless otherwise noted, all quotations by Maleczech in this chapter are taken from interviews conducted by the author between July 2011 and March 2012.

<sup>9</sup> All quotations by Breuer in this chapter are taken from interviews conducted by the author in July 2011 and May 2012.

dell'Arte, from people like Goldoni. We did a little bit of pantomime, because it was good for physical training, although we didn't ever use pantomime. We used American mime, which is when the body becomes the object, rather than pantomime, which is pretending that you have the object. Instead of everyone pretending that they had a sword, your arm would become the sword. It was based in Chaplin.

This physical training continues to have crucial resonances for Maleczech. “Although I’ve never been a dancer,” she says, citing her early work with Davis, “I always take great pleasure in and get great information from movement.”<sup>10</sup>

In addition to training with Davis, the students worked with him to put together pieces and performed them in parks or other public spaces. One particularly influential project for Maleczech was *The Black and White Mime Show*, which Davis co-created with his wife at the time, Judy Davis, a visual artist. “That was the first time that I had the experience of working with a visual artist,” recalls Maleczech,

which I have done ever since. Judy Davis made these shapes and we tried playing with them. Ronnie tried to make a story from them but a narrative didn't work, so he started developing approaches to movement with us that could contain these shapes, or in which the shapes would contain you—you would be inside the shape. It was really eye-opening.

Iris Smith Fischer notes that *The Black and White Mime Show* was “the first abstract piece . . . in which Maleczech ever performed.”<sup>11</sup> The performance style Maleczech first encountered at the Mime Troupe was to find resonances in the first original work created by Mabou Mines, *The Red Horse Animation*, first performed in 1970. Written and directed by Breuer, the three performers, Maleczech, Akalaitis, and David Warrilow filled in, respectively, the heart line, out line, and

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<sup>10</sup> Maleczech in conversation with Nick Westrate at “Process and Performance” at New York Theatre Workshop, April 23, 2012.

<sup>11</sup> Smith Fischer, *Mabou Mines: Making Avant-Garde Theater in the 1970s* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2011), 33. For a thorough discussion of the pre-history of Mabou Mines, see Smith Fischer’s chapter “Coming Together.”

story line of the horse in a concept and technique similar to the non-narrative based way in which Maleczech had been asked to approach the shapes in *The Black and White Mime Show*. “David looked for strong narratives, JoAnne looked for strong conceptual ideas. And I looked for strong emotional ideas. And that’s how we broke it down.”

Another important forerunner of *The Red Horse Animation* and the Mabou Mines productions that followed was the San Francisco Tape Music Center, where Maleczech worked with the composers Pauline Oliveros, Mortin Subotnik, and Ramon Sender, and with the dancer Anna Halprin. “They were looking for actors to be part of their music,” Maleczech explains, “maybe to talk while the music was being played or maybe to walk through a series of objects while the music was being played, various things like that. Very discreet, very minimal . . . that was another big education for me.” Oliveros reappeared in Maleczech’s collaborative purview when she composed the music for Mabou Mines’s *Lear* in 1987.

Maleczech’s work with multi-disciplinary artists in galleries had an impact on where Mabou Mines produced their early work. With Ellen Stewart’s backing as producer, *The Red Horse Animation* opened at the New York Guggenheim, and it subsequently toured to galleries around the country. Maleczech explains that their early work was not considered to fall under the auspices of theatre by producers at the time and the company was far more likely to be programmed by visual and music departments at universities and by independent galleries. Early letters to potential producers around the country reflect the company’s struggle to develop a vocabulary with which describe their work.

The other crucial component of Maleczech’s theatre education in San Francisco came from Herbert Blau, Jules Irving and the San Francisco Actor’s Workshop, where Maleczech also met Akalaitis, then a graduate student at Stanford. The Actor’s Workshop “was the first place

where I ever read Genet or Beckett or Ionesco or Dürrenmatt,” Maleczek recalls. In order to observe Blau’s work on plays that were different in style and structure than anything she had encountered before, Maleczek took on whatever work was available to her at the Actors Workshop, which included her job as a dresser on a production of *King Lear* starring Michael O’Sullivan, which was her first experience with the play that would later figure so prominently in her own career.<sup>12</sup> In 1961, she was also cast in a small role for a production directed by Alan Schneider of the play *Twinking of an Eye* by H.W. Wright and Guy Andros, which treated themes of nuclear warfare within the milieu of a domestic comedy. O’Sullivan was also part of the cast on this production.

Maleczek says that Blau was interested in “over the top, very explosive” performers, which suggests his affinity for O’Sullivan’s work. Of the differences she discovered in the work of her San Francisco mentors, Maleczek explains:

Herb did not link acting to psychology, but to what you were using the play to say. And that’s very important to me. He was the first person I ever encountered who did that. Ronnie was interested in fulfilling his idea of what the play meant politically, always. Not that Herb wasn’t, but Herb also saw the theatre as a way of connecting to the audiences’ intellectual life, or teaching the audience that it could have an intellectual life. Ronnie was very skilled at using theatrical representations to elucidate his political agenda. Maybe because Herb’s agenda was very complicated, it included more than just politics. He had a philosophical agenda. It was very interesting to see a play being used to do something other than it was written to do.<sup>13</sup>

Maleczek’s own point of view about the relationship between the performance and the audience would later come to bear a close resemblance to the priorities she identifies in Blau’s agenda.

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<sup>13</sup> Quotation taken from a recording of an unpublished interview with Maleczek by Iris Smith Fischer, October 2001.

During their years in San Francisco, Maleczech also performed in a number of productions directed by Breuer, including *The Maids* and *The House of Bernarda Alba*, in which she played Martirio. Breuer remembers that Martirio was the first major role Maleczech performed under his direction, and, he says, as part of the professional cast “she was very grand, she was brilliant, and everyone noticed.” He also recalls that Maleczech performed Grusha from *The Caucasian Chalk Circle* for an audition for the Actor’s Workshop. “She was a great Grusha,” Breuer recalls, “from that point on it was clear that she was ready to do leads.”

Maleczech has said that she “realized the importance of language” in San Francisco, not only because of her exposure to avant-garde plays at the Actor’s Workshop but also because of the social and political context that surrounded her. “San Francisco was full of poets,” she says, and she remembers seeing Bob Dylan play acoustic guitar in coffee shops, as well as performances and readings by Miles Davis, Allen Ginsberg, and Lawrence Ferlinghetti.<sup>14</sup>

Following their years in California, Breuer and Maleczech went to Paris, where a number of Americans had already established a thriving theatre scene. Maleczech earned income there by doing voice over work in English for French films, frequently providing the voice for Catherine Deneuve. Both Smith Fischer and Breuer suggest that this early voice over work laid important ground for Maleczech’s subsequent vocal work.<sup>15</sup> “She has a lot of vocal technique and media vocal technique,” Breuer says, citing Maleczech’s early experience in film work as foundational. Perhaps the avant-garde plays and beat poets Maleczech had encountered in San Francisco provided a subtle influence in Maleczech’s facility for film work.

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Smith Fischer makes this suggestion to Maleczech in the unpublished interview she conducted with Maleczech in October 2001.

When the Bertolt Brecht translator Ralph Manheim learned that they were planning to stage *Mother Courage and Her Children* at the American Theater of Paris, he suggested that Maleczech and Breuer visit East Berlin to observe rehearsals of the Berliner Ensemble. Helene Weigel greeted them when they arrived. “We said, ‘we’re here,’ and she said ‘what do you want to know?’” Maleczech remembers,

and we asked if we could just watch and she said “sure.” We watched rehearsals of *Mann ist Mann*, we went to their canteen, we met Ekkehard Schall, who is sort of the doppelganger for Brecht—smoked a cigar and had close-cropped hair, and was married to Brecht’s daughter and was a big star in the Berliner Ensemble. We saw the plays that were duplicates of the way Brecht had done them.

Maleczech was deeply impressed by the way Brecht had done these plays, and when she returned to Paris, she and Breuer went ahead with their own production of *Mother Courage*.

A defining characteristic that Maleczech identified in the work of the Berliner Ensemble was a certain precision that characterized the gestures and the movements of the performers. The actors performed “with great skill,” recalls Maleczech, “Exactitude. Timing that was so exact. No wasted gestures. Very economical in terms of the gesture that was used.” And the productions were “different than any Brecht that I had seen done or that’s been done since,” she says,

they were always revealing of the person. Not even the actor, but the *person* who was on the stage. The opinions, or the feelings or the history of the person playing the part, who the role is then a part of. So it was twice removed from the role. It’s very hard to do it. I think Brecht tried often to give them the signals, the signs, the gestures, that would do it for him, say for him how Ekkehard Schall should play that moment in *Ui* or how Helene Weigel should play saying goodbye to Coriolon in *Coriolon* or how Aufidius and his wife should say goodbye. . . I think he directed the alienation. I’m not sure that the actors had all that much to do with it.

This precision of gesture and the exposure of the performer that Maleczech identifies would become crucial to her own approach to performance, although she would adapt this technique to Mabou Mines's distinctive collective, pastiche, and research-oriented approach.

Mabou Mines's collective approach to development is also likely to have been influenced by the time Maleczech and Breuer spent at the Berliner Ensemble. Maleczech recalls the impact of watching rehearsals in which several assistant directors would call actors to the front of the stage to discuss aspects of the reconstruction of Brecht's staging. These conversations, among several sets of actors and directors, would occur in the open, rather than with the privacy typical of certain approaches to the actor-director exchange. This open expression of a range of points of view about the process would have resonances in the deeply collaborative exchange of ideas that characterizes Mabou Mines's way of working.

Shortly after returning to Paris from East Berlin, Maleczech went to the south of France to study with Jerzy Grotowski. After he had narrowed the list down to forty or fifty out of the hundred or so applicants for his course, Grotowski asked everyone who was not "good enough to do the work" to step back against the wall to observe. Maleczech did not step back against the wall to observe. The physical work, she says,

went on for hours and hours and hours. Endless hours. It was really, really tiring. Exhausting. And then around the end of the fourth day we started doing other kinds of things, taking the plastiques and integrating them into some way of talking or some way of waiting or some way of listening. Other things started to be incorporated into what had been purely physical, learned stuff. After the sixth day there was no more gymnastics. It was just performing. And he would give a scene, you had to learn some speech and come out and give it and he would criticize you and he would do things to you to make you do it better—in his terms, better, but you weren't quite sure what his terms were, so it was a very mysterious sort of process to go through. I remember there was a French movie actor there—wonderful actor—this woman, and she really worked so hard on this thing and Grotowski kept

saying, “no, not like that, no, no,” and he would tell her some other thing to do, some other way to approach it and she would try again, she would try again, she would try again. And he kept saying to her, “is it that you can’t do it, or you won’t do it?” And she said, “oh I can’t, I can’t.” He would say “ok,” and then he would go again. And this went on until about four o’clock in the morning. There was never any end to these classes until he ended it. And towards the end he said “is it that you can’t do it or that you won’t do it?” and she said “it’s that I won’t do it.” And he said, “leave, and don’t ever come back.”

Maleczech was willing to do it, and Grotowski told her that the Lady Macbeth “out damned spot” speech she had prepared was “‘a proposition.’ I thought I’d died and gone and to heaven,” she says, “that was a huge compliment coming from him. That was major.” In response, Maleczech asked if she could study voice work with him. Not knowing she was pregnant, she says, “he pulled me around the room and punched me in the diaphragm.” Grotowski was quite surprised when a visibly pregnant Maleczech arrived in Poland shortly thereafter to see his work in production. Maleczech and Akalaitis went on to teach what they had learned from Grotowski to Breuer and David Warrilow, and Maleczech has continued to teach these techniques and to use them in her own work with Mabou Mines.

Samuel Beckett’s work played an equally important role in shaping the approaches of the founding co-artistic directors as did their experiences with Blau, Grotowski, and the Berliner Ensemble. Maleczech and Breuer were lucky to have their first taste of Beckett at the San Francisco Actor’s Workshop; it was the first theatre in the United States to produce his plays. In her chapter on the company’s history with Beckett, Ruby Cohn notes that the San Francisco Mime Troupe (then the R.G. Davis Mime Troupe) also worked with Beckett’s texts during the time that Maleczech and Breuer were in San Francisco. Describing the various European theatrical influences on the members of Mabou Mines, Cohn suggests that

they evolved an approach to acting that Breuer called Mr. [sic] Outside (Brecht) combined with Mr. Inside (Grotowski). Less schematically than this contrast would suggest a Beckett play became the linchpin of their exercises—*Play*, the very play that occasioned Beckett's own step into a new dramatic phase.

Prior to the famous collaboration between the playwright and David Warrilow, the latter collaborated with Maleczek, Akalaitis, Breuer, and Philip Glass on this production of *Play* in their Paris days. Work on *Play* began as an experiment in acting, one that, according to Cohn, would help them to “work their way through and beyond realism.”<sup>16</sup> Although Cohn credits Breuer with this initiative, according to Maleczek work on *Play* began shortly after she and Akalaitis returned from the South of France and occurred during the period during which she and Akalaitis taught what they had learned there to Breuer and Warrilow. This suggests that the search for a non-realistic approach was a group endeavor, and one in which each individual collaborator was already engaged. In Maleczek's case, the journey had begun when she sought out artists such as Davis and Oliveros in San Francisco in the 1950s.

*Play* evolved into a production in which the performers adorned their faces with pancake batter and oatmeal, which Cohn reports “flaked off in the rapidity of their delivery.”<sup>17</sup> Mabou Mines's *Play* premiered in Paris at the American Cultural Center in 1967, before there was a Mabou Mines, and was performed in New York City under the imprimatur of the newly minted company. The New York production ran in tandem with *Come and Go*, which premiered under the Brooklyn Bridge in 1971 featuring Maleczek, Akalaitis, and Ellen McElduff under Breuer's direction. Along with Warrilow's performance of *The Lost Ones* (1975), these productions later formed a program entitled “Mabou Mines Performs Samuel Beckett” at Theater for the New

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<sup>16</sup> Ruby Cohn, “The Becketts of Mabou Mines” in *Samuel Beckett and the Arts*, Lois Oppenheim, ed. (New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1999), 219.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 220.

City, which at that time occupied space at the Jane West Hotel, an SRO (Single Room Occupancy) on Jane Street. This evening of Beckett is what drew Joseph Papp to see Mabou Mines, leading him to offer the company a residency at the Public Theater. Maleczech recalls that “he came and he said afterwards, ‘why don’t you come over to my place.’ And that was the first inkling that maybe we could do this kind of work in a theatre.”<sup>18</sup>

Despite an undeniable embarrassment of influential riches, perhaps the most important lesson Maleczech learned was from Grotowski on the importance of using the principals and techniques she had learned from him, from the Berliner Ensemble, from Blau, from her first great acting teacher, Davis, and from the group’s experiments with Beckett, to establish her own aesthetic approach. Grotowski “said that he didn’t think that people should take his aesthetic, that the ideas behind it were for everyone to use but that it shouldn’t come out looking like him,” and, says Maleczech, “I took that very much to heart.”

### **A Process of Her Own**

One aspect of Maleczech’s training that she particularly advocates is the rigor with which her various teachers approached their work. Today’s students of acting, she suggests, might do well to study classical theatre to find a similarly strict system of training. “Sometimes when things are very prescribed, defined, outlined and narrow you can bang against them,” she says,

It’s the resonance of doing something that is other than the thing itself. Lots of rules, lots of strictures, lots of insistence on form and content are all good things because you will formulate your own aesthetic response. First you’ll have to experience it, then you’ll respond to it, and then it will be part of your skill set. It can be very

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<sup>18</sup> For a thorough account of Mabou Mines’s early experiments with Beckett, see Iris Smith Fisher, *Mabou Mines: Making Avant-Garde Theatre in the 1970s* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2011), 28-59 and 99-119.

valuable to study things that are antithetical to what work you might end up making.

The rigid training Maleczech advocates is in service of establishing technical tools that will allow artists to develop and articulate a point of view, as Grotowski suggested Maleczech and others who followed his training should do. Maleczech also promotes classical training or other similarly strict approaches as a strategy for developing the kind of dialectical theatre that Breuer and Maleczech generate themselves:

Classical work also teaches you counterpoint and opposition, which I consider to be very important in creating any kind of work. I hate one-to-one correspondences. I really don't like that. I think that the audience isn't well served by that kind of work because they don't really have work that *they* do. It's more or less the sense that "we did this for you and now we put it in your lap for you to enjoy."

This view is undoubtedly influenced by the time Breuer and Maleczech spent at the Berliner Ensemble, and one they took into consideration as they began to make work under the auspices of Mabou Mines in 1970.<sup>19</sup>

Maleczech and Mabou Mines have continued to consider the audience as a crucial element of the performance during the development process. "Mabou Mines has always had the idea that the way an audience looks at a piece is as important as the piece itself," Maleczech has said.<sup>20</sup> Contrary to what she and Mabou Mines advocate, Maleczech complains that

almost all contemporary theatre is done to please the audience. Not only Broadway. And of course the artists assume in the making of this work that they know what the audience would like to eat for dinner that night.

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<sup>19</sup> Both Maleczech and Breuer are now careful to acknowledge that many of the ideas they took from Brecht find their origin in one of Brecht's influences, Erwin Piscator.

<sup>20</sup> As quoted in "Ruth Maleczech," DVD. Mabou Mines Archive, Fales Library & Special Collections, New York University, Series IX, Box: Media.

As part of her inheritance from Brecht and Blau, Maleczech advocates for theatre that challenges the audience to engage intellectually and politically with what they see on stage. Maleczech “leaves it in audience’s hands to make their own judgment,” Breuer says, “it does make the audience work.” But Mabou Mines, and Maleczech in particular, also wants to reach the audience on an emotional level. Maleczech brings to her performances “one hundred percent honesty, real emotional honesty,” says Breuer. Hence her role as the heart line in *Red Horse*. Maleczech’s pairing of intellectual rigor and emotional engagement is one of the unique aspects of her aesthetic, one that she brings to bear in both her physical and vocal approach to the text.

Mabou Mines’s famous first production, although written and directed by Breuer, was very much an ensemble piece influenced by contributions from the acting company throughout the development process. But the company’s early forays into Beckett’s precise text encouraged Maleczech to develop a technique for approaching the work of a writer who was not in the room while she was working; one that combined her training with Ronnie Davis and Grotowski and her observations at the San Francisco Actor’s Workshop and the Berliner Ensemble. The result, as Grotowski advocated, is distinctly Maleczech’s.

Maleczech describes her approach to language and narrative in non-naturalistic, non-linear plays as a three-tiered process, meant to address “levels of language which are not natural to us.” Her first point of entry is with the writer. Maleczech tries “to hear the voice of the writer—not what the writer puts on the page, not the character—the voice of the writer. I don’t play roles,” Maleczech says. “I don’t even know what that is. I try to imitate the voice of the writer with my voice and physically. That’s what I do.” Maleczech’s method for identifying this voice is related to her emphasis on research; she relies on other text by the writers whose works she performs, as well as critical examinations of these texts. Maleczech describes production

research as her favorite aspect of the development process, citing as examples visits to see the Joyce apartment in Paris and Nora Joyce's "awful apartment in Sligo" in preparation for the 2003 premiere of *Cara Lucia*. "You can get a lot of things by osmosis that way," she says. In addition to helping Maleczech to locate the writer's voice, research also guides her in making determinations about the "music and pitch" of the language.

Maleczech describes her second point of approach as "what the collective artists make." She responds to "how all the other people, the objects, the light, and the clothing impinges on me." In addition to these tangible contributions, Maleczech relies on her collaborators to generate "ideas about what the writing could mean. This is rarely questioned in the normal theatre," Maleczech argues, adding that, in the case of what she describes as avant-garde plays, "they are *your* conclusions about the language." Maleczech's reliance on the contributions of collaborators is particularly fruitful in the context of Mabou Mines's development process. Maleczech argues that "most of the work of this company is about ideas" and those "ideas can be turned into theatrical moments." She likens Mabou Mines's theatricalization of ideas to football:

you throw the ball and you know somebody's going to catch it because they're in the right part of the field. So you throw the idea out and somebody catches it and runs with it all the way to the end zone and makes a big touchdown. A touchdown being an idea from a previous scene or an idea you know well but might have seen done in a different way before. That kind of process is very unwieldy, very ungovernable, and difficult for the director too, because there are so many strains going all at once and so many electric spin offs from one person's idea or another.<sup>21</sup>

Finally, Maleczech suggests, the meaning of language can only be determined in performance with an audience:

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

The third thing has to do with the audience. This is more difficult because the audience is changeable, fickle. If you care about them, and I do, you have to be on your toes.

For Maleczech, the audience is a crucial component in the equation to decipher meaning. The interpretation of a given production, she says, is “what is in a very brief, very ephemeral moment what it *does* mean on a given night, to a given audience.” Borrowing from Grotowski’s terminology, Maleczech says of the relationship between audience and performance, “that is the proposition—our work has to meet their work.”

In performance, Maleczech says, the three levels she describes are “bouncing around. It’s very athletic. And that’s why so many avant-garde artists gravitate to movement. Meyerhold and American Naturalism are after the same thing: the elimination through performance of this text.” According to Maleczech, it is the means to this end that differ. In a naturalistic play, she contends, one might see an actor who plays a British character sipping a cup of tea in a manner that is particularized by the context and history of the play. In biomechanics, by contrast, the audience may derive meaning from a performer standing on her head. If the Mabou Mines process is football to Maleczech, avant-garde performance, she says, is closer to basketball. “It happens really fast. You’re running the whole time, and you get really tired.” Performance for Maleczech is “a three-hundred and sixty degree experience,” requiring that the player have an understanding of what is happening everywhere on the court at all times, without necessarily being able to see it all.

Although, for Maleczech, the process for deciphering meaning requires an audience, she insists that she does not make adjustments to her performance based on audience response. “No,” she says, “that would be a deep dark, black hole in the universe that you never get out of. I wouldn’t even know how to do that.” She does, however, describe an interaction with the

audience that positions them as key players in performance. In order to attract their interest and attention, Maleczech explains, “you startle them or you push what you are doing so far that you get them to laugh, or you do the opposite of what you’re doing, and you have them for a second, and then you lose them again.” Paul Kandel, who performed with Maleczech in *Lucia’s Chapters of Coming Forth By Day* (2007), suggests that Maleczech possesses a quality of liveness onstage. “If you care about what you do,” says Paul Kandel,

you have to come to the theatre each evening a blank slate ... you have to find a way to come to this material that you already know fresh, as if you don’t know it. That’s hard to do. Ruth is very good at it. ... She’s incredibly flexible. She is not a creature of habit. I don’t think we’ve ever done *Lucia’s Chapters* the same way twice, nor would it be in her to do that.

Maleczech’s ability to remain in the present moment allows her take the kind of risks in performance that will jolt the audience into paying attention. The distinction between making adjustments based on audience response and engaging their concentration may appear slight. The contrast, however, lies in the difference between playing *to* the audience and playing *with* them. Maleczech tries to pass the ball to the audience as well as to fellow performers, casting the audience as players in the game of performance.

As Maleczech suggests, one of the best techniques for startling an audience is to make them laugh, and comedy is central to the work Mabou Mines makes, especially when Maleczech is involved. “Most of what we do is comic,” Maleczech explains, and “I’m not so sure there’s that much difference between comedy and drama. I think it must be the distance to which you take it—how far you’re willing to go.”<sup>22</sup> As noted above, Maleczech likes to take risks on stage, and her concept that comedy necessitates extremity explains her affinity for that form. Breuer agrees with Maleczech’s assessment that Mabou Mines has had a sustained interest in comedy—

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<sup>22</sup> Maleczech at “Process and Performance.”

“dark comedy,” he notes. “She’s a great comedian,” Breuer says, “I actually think that’s her forte. She’s aggressive, and most great comedians are aggressive.” Maleczech’s forceful exploitation of comedy is another aspect of her inheritances from Beckett and Brecht, and Maleczech and Breuer in particular use it as a counterpoint to the emotional honesty in their work. “Mabou Mines uses comedy to cut through sentimentality,” says Mabou Mines artistic associate Clove Galilee, Maleczech’s daughter with Breuer.<sup>23</sup> Thus, comedy functions as part of the dialectical strategy that Maleczech and Breuer advocate.

Maleczech’s deployment of humor is also related to her advocacy of strict and rigorous forms that provide structure for the performer. Her facility with comedy is part and parcel with her attention to detail and emphasis on mechanics. “Ruth knows funny,” says Mabou Mines artistic associate Karen Kandel, “She knows how to be funny. She says, ‘well, you know it won’t work if I say it only two times. I have to say it three times.’ It’s amazing.” It is Maleczech’s paradoxical juxtaposition of this carefully calculated approach with her ability to take the risk of coming fresh to each performance that elicits the audience’s surprise. This works particularly well with comedy, which won’t work if the audience anticipates the joke.<sup>24</sup>

Maleczech’s emphasis on process is particular to avant-garde productions, which categorically invite artists to collaborate in giving meaning to text in production. What is specific to Mabou Mines, however, is, as Maleczech suggests, the egalitarian nature of that collaboration; each artist is expected to contribute ideas to the production, and although in most cases (particularly in the company’s more recent history) the director is the final arbiter of these contributions, each artist has, during the development process, left an indelible mark on the

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<sup>23</sup> All quotations by Galilee in this chapter are taken from an interview conducted by the author in August 2012.

<sup>24</sup> Maleczech and Mabou Mines’s relationship to comedy is a fruitful avenue for further consideration in a later iteration of this project.

production—especially the performers. “In the case of this company,” Maleczech explains, the actor “is central.”

Furthermore, although Maleczech is outlining her technique in relation to what she describes as avant-garde text, a similar approach is in evidence with scripts of a more naturalistic style, such as Kroetz’s *Through the Leaves*. “This company is very involved in language,” she says, and the performer is at the crux of this relationship. “The idea is, how does the performer meet the language,” Maleczech says of Mabou Mines’s performances, “It’s like the language just sits out there and until you can sort of put your hands on it and eat it, you can’t perform it. The language is the mysterious part.”<sup>25</sup> Maleczech’s rehearsal process allows her to invest her language with specific ideas; Douglas Stein, who designed the sets for both *Through the Leaves* and *Happy Days* describes Maleczech as “precise with words.” In performance, Maleczech juxtaposes concepts that have been carefully considered and thoroughly debated in the development process with certain inscrutable gestures, expressions, and intonations, providing sign posts for the audience and at the same time preserving the mystery of the language. This strategy is aimed at tantalizing the audience into drawing their own conclusions about what they see and hear.

Stein’s comment that Maleczech is precise with words applies both to her performance and to her way of working. Maleczech has said of Mabou Mines, “We don’t really do plays here, we make work,” indicating the existence of a shared, collective approach to material regardless of stylistic concerns. In this way, Mabou Mines has developed an aesthetic that blends abstract ideas with tangible traces of the discussions that have given the production meaning for the artists we see on stage before us, or estranges language we may take for granted

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<sup>25</sup> Maleczech in conversation at “Process and Performance.”

by coupling it in production with traces of the development process. “The process itself is very complex,” Maleczech has said,

and usually it is the process that ends up being the piece. In fact, that’s what you see when you go to the theatre. You see the distillation of the process. That’s why it’s very often non-linear. The narrative is often very deep in the piece so it doesn’t surface so readily as it does in other people’s work.<sup>26</sup>

Here Maleczech alludes to texts that have originated with the company, such as *Hajj* and *Red Horse*, both written by Breuer, but the sentiment applies to the company’s work with non-original scripts as well, with productions such as Mabou Mines’s adaptations of *King Lear* and *A Doll’s House* (Mabou Mines *DollHouse*, 2003) in which new contexts and surprising metaphors explode audience’s preconceptions about these well-known plays. This approach also makes its collaborators particularly adept at interpreting plays with abstract and non-linear text in production, as the company has done repeatedly, albeit using a range of styles, with Beckett since its founding. In *Happy Days* and *Through the Leaves*, Maleczech deploys the technique she developed through her training and her work with Mabou Mines to turn ordinary women into extraordinary ones on the stage.

Before turning to the ways in which Maleczech marries her biography with her technique to invest her portraits of ordinary women with particularity and significance, I will begin by contextualizing the history of each production within Maleczech’s own.

### ***Happy Days: Production History & Maleczech’s Winnie***

Beckett’s influence on Mabou Mines extends well beyond the founding artistic directors’ experiments with his text in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Although the company’s work with

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<sup>26</sup> As quoted in *Ruth Maleczech*, DVD.

Beckett's early plays and Warrilow and Neumann's presentations of Beckett's prose for the stage are perhaps better known, in the early 1980s, Maleczek sought and received rare permission from Beckett to stage his short story *Imagination Dead Imagine* for the stage, which she did in a 1984 production that premiered at the Performing Garage, which I discuss in depth in a subsequent chapter. *Happy Days* is unique among Mabou Mines's Beckett productions, however, because it was first commissioned and produced by La Jolla Playhouse during Michael Greif's tenure as Artistic Director there, and Maleczek worked with Robert Woodruff rather than with one of her regular Mabou Mines collaborators.<sup>27</sup>

Maleczek says that the Mabou Mines co-artistic directors struggled early on over the question of whether or not to take on outside work, ultimately deciding that they would do so in cases where they could bring something back to the company. In some cases, outside collaborations have meant that Mabou Mines could reconnect with former collaborators, as Maleczek did on behalf of the company when she performed at the Guthrie Theater in Akalaitis's production of Jean Genet's *The Screens* in 1989. Mabou Mines General Manager Joe Stackell recalls that this production was a particular point of pride for Maleczek because of the play's notoriously and intentionally difficult staging. Maleczek has been attracted to other outside projects because of the collaborators involved; among other productions, in 1987 she co-directed *Fire Works*, featuring traditional Chinese music, with Valeria Vasilevski in 1987 and, also in 1987, she performed in Peter Sellars's production of *Zangezi*, which featured her longtime collaborator Warrilow, at MOCA in Los Angeles. In this case, Maleczek had an opportunity both to work with a new collaborator whose work she

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<sup>27</sup> Michael Greif served as Artistic Director of La Jolla Playhouse from 1995-1999.

admired and to bring a production back to the company; *Happy Days* was produced at the ToRaNaDa studio in 1998, two years after its premiere at La Jolla.

By the time of the La Jolla production, Maleczek had wanted to play Winnie for some time; she recalls discussing the possibility of taking on *Happy Days* with Akalaitis while they were working on *Prisoner of Love* at New York Theatre Workshop in 1985 (an outside project that Maleczek does not recall with fondness), but that production never materialized.

Maleczek remembers that Akalaitis wasn't so keen on the idea. As for collaborating with Woodruff, Maleczek "didn't know him at all." She remembers, "I'd only seen one thing that he had ever done—an adaptation of Dostoevsky's *The Devils* at NYU, five hours long, divine. I mean really, really good. People were just complaining—you had to sit on these little plastic chairs at Tisch on Second Avenue. And I thought, 'he can really work it.'"

Maleczek isn't sure how the process unfolded from La Jolla's point of view, "but the next thing I knew, they were saying, 'do you want to do this with Woodruff.'" It might seem an unusual choice for a regional theatre to cast a major downtown New York theatre player rather than a more commercially minded actress, but it seems that La Jolla's artistic director was looking for ways to stretch its regional theatre boundaries. In August of 1996, Greif told the *Los Angeles Times*'s Jan Breslauer that Maleczek's "acting 'is extreme in many ways.'" He continues, perhaps in an attempt to contextualize his comments for his regional theatre audience, "'she has great technical precision and makes really bold choices, but it's always informed by a detailed and deep emotional life.'"<sup>28</sup>

Pairing Woodruff with La Jolla also proved to be atypical of the regional theatre milieu, particularly in terms of the development process. Maleczek remembers that Woodruff

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<sup>28</sup> Michael Greif, as quoted in Jan Breslauer, "Beckett's Her Hole Card," *Los Angeles Times*, August 4, 1996.

negotiated for a rehearsal period that extended far beyond the six weeks usually allotted by regional theatres, recalling, “he’s a wonderful director, but I thought ‘what are we going to do in a room alone together for all that time?’” As it happened, the time was spent on something close to Maleczech’s heart: research. The production boasted several dramaturgs, who supplied Maleczech with what now amounts to an overstuffed binder of material that includes excerpts of Linda Ben Zvi’s *Women in Beckett*, Stanley Gontarski’s chapter on Beckett’s “vaguening” of *Happy Days*, interviews with Billie Whitelaw, Beckett’s essay on Proust, and even a short essay by Maleczech’s old mentor, Herbert Blau.<sup>29</sup>

Maleczech’s exposure to Beckett’s several drafts of the play (at least via Gontarski’s chapter and possibly also via other research material) is likely to have influenced Maleczech’s project to find the voice of the writer in preparation for her performance, providing her with a nuanced understanding of Beckett’s “vaguened” final draft. “He cut part of the sentences out,” Maleczech says, “he took out the connective tissue so you don’t know how to get from one to the next. Winnie has all these weird jumps.”<sup>30</sup> References to previous versions of the text would undoubtedly be useful for the purposes of filling the syntactical gaps to which Maleczech refers because, as Gontarski puts it, “the earlier version. . . is in places more concrete and reveals more clearly the sort of images with which Beckett began, then grew away from . . . toward an abstract clarity, an image free of cluttering detail.”<sup>31</sup> This evidence of Beckett’s decision to move from

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<sup>29</sup> Maleczech’s production notebook for *Happy Days* includes dramaturgical research and her notes from Woodruff. It is stored in the Mabou Mines office archive.

<sup>30</sup> Beckett’s production notebook from *Happy Days* is available in an edition edited by James Knowlson: Samuel Beckett, *Happy Days: Production Notebook*, James Knowlson, ed. (London: Faber and Faber, 1985).

<sup>31</sup> S.E. Gontarski, *Beckett’s Happy Days: A Manuscript Study* (Columbus: Publications Committee, Ohio State University Libraries, 1977), 43.

the “concrete” to the “abstract” provides a crucial clue to the performer seeking to understand the playwright’s intentions.

Accordingly, Maleczek relied upon documentation of Beckett’s interest in musicality and pacing in shaping her performance. “It’s important to know that he cared about the music, only the music. The sense will make itself clear,” she says. These comments echo Billie Whitelaw’s, whose interview with Linda Ben Zvi on the subject is included in Maleczek’s production notebook. Whitelaw explains that ““it is so important to get the music right in Beckett, and I do think of the parts in terms of music. Beckett sometimes conducts me, something like a metronome.””<sup>32</sup> Maleczek herself notes that the pacing in *Happy Days* is ““clearly set out. Pause means one thing, period means another, and dot-dot-dot means another. The precision is part of the challenge, actually.””<sup>33</sup> The physical approach to Winnie is also demanding. “It’s a very tricky play because you’re trapped. You can’t move at all by the end—no shoulder movement. You have your face, your voice, your being.” The precision required of the Beckett performer—both vocal and physical—that Maleczek identifies here likely appeals to her interest in rigorous systems of training and preparation.

An examination of the performance notes from Woodruff that survive in Maleczek’s production notebook give us a valuable glimpse into the performer’s and director’s shared priorities in their representation of Winnie. These notes reveal that the director was as equally concerned as Maleczek with precision in performance; a substantial number are concerned with the sort of minutiae that Beckett is so careful to outline in his stage directions. In her record of Woodruff’s notes from the third preview at La Jolla on August 8, 1996, Maleczek has written,

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<sup>32</sup> Billie Whitelaw, as quoted in Linda Ben Zvi, “Interviews: Billie Whitelaw” in *Women in Beckett*, 6.

<sup>33</sup> As quoted in Breslauer.

among other notes, “small gesture to collar bone for ‘strange feeling’ touching” and “further extension of arms, deeper for ‘perhaps the moon.’” For the third performance on August 14, Maleczech has written, “‘What claws!’ smaller reading, look up length of arm to nails.” Such detailed engagement with Maleczech’s physical script reflects Woodruff’s underscoring and interpretation of Beckett’s intricate stage directions. Other notes from Woodruff reflect his commitment to building an overall arc in performance. In a direction that gets at one of Winnie’s repeated physical tropes, Maleczech has noted on August 9 “smiles—only whisps throughout.”

Woodruff was concerned with vocal precision as well as physical rigor. On August 13, Maleczech has written “sounds—don’t use upper register—keep it low and fierce.” This is quite clearly an overarching vocal direction from Woodruff, whose specific vocal instructions for particular lines such as “brighter,” “flatter,” “whispered,” “more separated” and “up to down” pepper Maleczech’s notes. Woodruff’s emphasis on the rigor and music of the text indicates that he and Maleczech were well matched in this pursuit.

Maleczech’s reliance on rhythm and research and her insistence that she doesn’t “play characters” is also a good spiritual match for a text that makes much of pacing and punctuation.

“‘Winnie could be anyone,’” Maleczech told Breslauer,

but she can't be anyone, because she speaks in this very broken kind of a way. So if you just speak that way, you learn more things about her than by trying to investigate her psychology. It's surprising what you find out about her just by saying it the way Beckett set it out. Sometimes deep things are revealed just because of the way it's punctuated.

Her concern with rhythm and pacing is evident in performance as well; in his review for *Daily Variety*, Julio Martinez notes a “music-like pacing to Maleczech’s dialogue.”<sup>34</sup> Laurie Winer’s review for the *LA Times* extols Maleczech’s “extraordinary rhythms,” making a case for her success as a comedienne, which links Maleczech’s performance to Mabou Mines’s penchant for the comic. Citing Maleczech’s take on Winnie’s *lazzo* with the toothpaste, Winer writes

in Maleczech's hands, Winnie's inability to read those next words is a delicious little vaudeville; they seem to contain the meaning of life, these words on her toothbrush. As frustrated as she is, she performs a delicate, resigned “ah, well” shrug each time she fails.<sup>35</sup>

Here, as Winer describes, Maleczech takes her cue from Beckett, using rhythm in service of comedy that lends poignancy to the misery of Winnie’s situation. As Nell says in *Endgame*, “nothing is funnier than unhappiness.”

Maleczech’s advocacy of rhythm at the expense of traditional character development was not successful for everyone, however. Writing for the *New York Times* on the ToRoNaDa production, Wilborn Hampton complains that Maleczech “occasionally appears uncertain of her character.”<sup>36</sup> In retrospect, Maleczech too wonders about some of her choices. “The problem with that play is, who is she talking to? Because she talks continually and there’s nobody out there. I just talked. I didn’t have a goal. That might not have been right. Maybe we should do that play again.” Beckett’s text indicates that Winnie is talking to Willie, at least for part of the time, even if he is only “on the semi-alert.” Maleczech’s question indicates a calculated choice on the part of the performer, whether or not it left her entirely satisfied.

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<sup>34</sup> Julio Martinez, “Happy Days,” *Daily Variety*, August 13, 1996.

<sup>35</sup> Laurie Winer, “Love and Marriage, According to Beckett,” *Los Angeles Times*, August 13, 1996.

<sup>36</sup> Wilborn Hampton, “When Everything’s Normal, And All of It Is Absurd,” *New York Times*, March 24, 1998, The Arts/Cultural Desk, 13.

There were some adjustments that Maleczech and Woodruff were able to make between the La Jolla premiere and the New York production that Maleczech found satisfying, however. At La Jolla, Stein's set was a thirty-foot-high mound of sand (despite Beckett's specification that the mound is made of earth). Maleczech recalls having to walk up stairs to get inside it: "It was really tall and I was really tiny at the top of it. The audience was very far away. There was no question of being in touch with them." This is likely to have complicated Maleczech's proposition for the audience. At the Mabou Mines studio, Stein re-conceptualized the mound into one made of glass, significant for Maleczech because sand itself is finely ground glass. Constructed of old car windows and built over steel, this hill was smaller to accommodate the reduced scale of performance at the ToRoNaDa. In photographs it contrasts sharply with the stark La Jolla setting—an enormous mound of scorched sand. No recording of this version survives, but Iris Smith Fischer describes the ToRoNaDa scene:

Douglas Stein's set for *Happy Days* . . . filled one corner of this space. A scalloped, sand-colored curtain rose to reveal, as though in her boudoir, Winnie slumped over her mound. Yet this hillcock, in which Winnie was embedded to the waist, was itself spiked down with a pile of cracked and broken windshields that seemed the deadly detritus of a wrecked civilization. Like Winnie, these vehicles are mobile no more.<sup>37</sup>

Although Stein notes that his decision to alter the set was dictated by the more limited financial resources available for the Mabou Mines production, Maleczech says she preferred it artistically, and, although neither design provides the grass that Beckett describes in the text, Stein notes that the glass of the windshields in the ToRoNaDa set was green. Maleczech also seems to have preferred the more intimate setting in New York to her separation from the audience in California. "The lights were so hot they burned me," Maleczech recalls of her proximity to the

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<sup>37</sup> Iris Smith, "*Happy Days*," 86.

ceiling at the ToRoNaDa. Sharon Fogarty remembers that the alarm was so loud that it caused Maleczech ear problems. “Everything is set up to be exaggerated,” Maleczech says. Perhaps this sense of hyperbolic expression is easier to communicate in the small space of the ToRoNaDa. Maleczech’s desire for proximity to the audience marks a crucial distinction between her work in the regional theatre and her priorities for Mabou Mines’s productions and audiences.

Aside from the possible attraction of bringing a production back to Mabou Mines and Maleczech’s probable interest in revising a production (which she and Mabou Mines do regularly) *Happy Days* probably appealed to Maleczech on a thematic as well as linguistic level. Maleczech’s comment that “Winnie could be anyone” but for her syntax is revealing because, thanks to the condition that finds her up to her waist in a mound of earth that is rising at an alarming rate, Winnie is an ordinary woman in an extraordinary stage situation. The objects she handles—a handbag, a toothbrush, an umbrella—are ordinary ones. Indeed, Beckett warned one director “not to make Winnie too capable a woman.” She is “a mess,” according to the playwright, who was careful to specify that the mess should nevertheless be “organized.”<sup>38</sup> By all rights, Winnie should be commonplace to the point of mundane. But Beckett’s meticulous language and Maleczech’s musically precise delivery elevate Winnie to someone whose ordinariness is astonishing.

Although Beckett describes Winnie as being in her fifties—middle-aged—he doesn’t specify Winnie’s social class, and actors and directors have approached this in a variety of ways in the play’s production history. Here Maleczech treats Winnie as a woman with bourgeois aspirations, if not bona fide credentials. In her review of the New York production, Smith

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<sup>38</sup> As quoted in Enoch Brater, 102.

Fischer writes that Maleczek's Winnie "is matter-of-fact but never simple in her brutal doting over Willie. It seems almost a portrait of a working-class woman who aspired to a middle-class respectability that she never quite achieved."<sup>39</sup> As with *Through the Leaves*, in which she plays the working class, middle-aged Annette (who might also be characterized by her "brutal doting" over her paramour, Otto), here Maleczek makes someone who might not be terribly interesting or important in real life into a fascinating, large-scale portrait.

Maleczek is by no means the first performer to find Winnie's behavior in the face of her predicament heroic; Whitelaw has said that

Winnie is terribly brave, terribly courageous. She is marvelous; she hangs on and hopes things will be better. . . Who's to say that just sitting and opening your bag and taking out your lipstick and this and that isn't courageous—perhaps the most courageous thing one can do.<sup>40</sup>

There is also a certain bravery required of the performer playing Winnie, at least as far as Maleczek is concerned. Of tackling non-naturalistic text she says, "You just literally jump. You don't think about where you'll land, and then you're in some other structure." Woodruff gave Maleczek a note along much the same lines, extolling her to have "no fear about going to another place" during the La Jolla previews.<sup>41</sup> Although they are talking about structure rather than subject here—

Maleczek's comments are about playing language while Woodruff's come in the context of staying ahead of the audience in performance—these impulses also apply to the idea of what it means to represent Winnie, as articulated by Whitelaw. Although Maleczek notes her corporeal

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<sup>39</sup> Smith, "*Happy Days*," 87.

<sup>40</sup> Billie Whitelaw as quoted in Linda Ben Zvi, 7-8.

<sup>41</sup> This and subsequent notes from Woodruff are from Maleczek's production binder.

dissimilarity to Whitelaw—she is “delicate” and, despite the touch of cockney in her voice, “has a cultured way of speaking”—there is a kindred spirit in their shared respect for Winnie.

Maleczech seems rarely to feel completely satisfied with past productions, which likely influences the regularity with which Mabou Mines revisits projects. Of Winnie, she says, in addition to her desire to re-examine her strategy of speaking without a goal, “I think it would be interesting to see somebody younger stuck in the hole. She’s about fifty-five, but you can be twenty years old and have a very long past.” Even after two productions of *Happy Days*, Maleczech continues to ponder interpretive possibilities, part of Mabou Mines’s emphasis on process. Maleczech also had an opportunity to revisit her role in *Through the Leaves*, which was remounted six years after the production’s premiere. Maleczech says that Winnie “never stops talking, and that’s important in itself.” In *Through the Leaves*, she takes on another loquacious lady.

### ***Through the Leaves: Production History & Maleczech’s Annette***

*Through the Leaves* began as a co-production between Mabou Mines and Women’s Interart Theatre, which was founded in 1970, the same year that Mabou Mines came into existence. The relationship appears to have soured, however, when, according to a letter from Akalaitis to Women’s Interart, the latter withdrew funds from a joint production account causing a check to Kroetz to bounce and damaging Mabou Mines’s relationship to him.<sup>42</sup> The partnership between Mabou Mines and Women’s Interart further deteriorated when Margot Lewitin, the Interart Theatre Artistic Director, began to negotiate directly with Kroetz, circumventing both producer Spence Halperin and Mabou Mines. This prompted Halperin to ask

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<sup>42</sup> Letter from JoAnne Akalaitis to Margot Lewitin dated March 6, 1985, Mabou Mines Archive, Fales Library and Special Collections, New York University, Series IIIA, Box 10, Folder 424.

Lewitin to cease further negotiations with the playwright without him and a representative of Mabou Mines present.<sup>43</sup> Despite these difficulties, Women's Interart Theatre is credited as a co-producer and the production premiered at Interart Theatre on March 13, 1984. The recording that exists of the production is from the 1990 iteration at the Public. Logistical troubles continued to crop up in the revived version; in a letter dated September 19, 1990, written during the show's previews, Kroetz expresses his displeasure at not having received a signed contract from Mabou Mines.

The trail of reviews suggests that there were subtle but significant changes to the performances in the years that transpired between Mabou Mines's premiere and the revival. If there is any consistent refrain among the reviews however, it is one of inconsistency—some find praiseworthy what others critique. Kroetz himself appears to have been unhappy with the 1990 production. In the same letter in which he requests a signed contract, the playwright complains of noisy audiences during previews, who appear to have laughed uproariously in response to comic moments on stage.<sup>44</sup> Comic moments seem not to be what Kroetz had in mind. For at least one critic, this was one of Akalaitis's most striking interventions: "What is good about this evening's theatre is its brevity and its strangely memorable quality. What is surprising is its humor. We laugh at the predicament of that these middle-aged, overweight lovers are in," wrote Robert McNamara for the *Washington Review*.<sup>45</sup> The wildly contrasting opinions of critics, audiences, and the playwright are typical of the stir Akalaitis's work has by now developed a

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<sup>43</sup> Letter from Spence Halperin to Margot Lewitin dated December 19, 1984, Mabou Mines Archives, Fales Library and Special Collections, New York University, Series IIIA, Box 10, Folder 424.

<sup>44</sup> Letter from Franz Xaver Kroetz to JoAnne Akalaitis, n.d., Mabou Mines Archive, Fales Library and Special Collections, Series IIIA, Box 10, Folder 424.

<sup>45</sup> Robert McNamara, "Franz Xaver Kroetz: A New Voice from Europe," *Washington Review*, August/September 1985, Mabou Mines Archive, Fales Library and Special Collections, New York University, Series IIIA, Box 10, Folder 453.

history of inciting. Akalaitis's intervention is also linked to Mabou Mines's inclination toward comedy. Once again, Maleczek and company rely on humor to expose the profound desolation of Annette and Otto's circumstances.

In another of Mabou Mines's interpolations, this production transports Kroetz's German context to Queens, changing Maleczek's character's name from Martha to Annette. "We make American work," says Maleczek, noting that from her point of view, the transposition fit "like a glove." There is indeed a definite stylistic suitability for Kroetz's terse language to be found in the Queens accents employed by Maleczek and Neumann, and a gritty realism enhanced by our familiarity with the context. The choice to use accents is also typical of Akalaitis and Maleczek's collaborations; in *Dead End Kids*, Maleczek adopted an invented accent for her rendition of Marie Curie.

*Through the Leaves* had its English-language premiere at the Empty Space Theater in Seattle in March of 1982. The play, translated by Downey, follows the emotional life of a female butcher, who struggles to reconcile her role as an independent businesswoman with her desire to maintain a relationship with a macho and less professionally successful boyfriend, Otto. Annette runs her own butcher shop, although Otto disparages it because the cuts she sells are used for pet food. She is described in the stage directions as "between 30 and 40 years old, dark-haired, moderately ugly; usually wears a butcher's smock."<sup>46</sup>

Otto's profession remains unspecified, although Downey notes, "he appears to work indoors on some kind of packing line. Construction worker would seem to fit better with his casual working habits."<sup>47</sup> Maleczek recalls that she thought of Otto as an out-of-work truck

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<sup>46</sup> Franz Xaver Kroetz, *Through the Leaves in Through the Leaves and Other Plays*, trans. Roger Downey (New York: Theatre Communications Group, Inc., 1983), 4.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

driver. Whether or not he is currently employed, Otto turns down Annette's repeated offers to come and work for her in the shop. He hates Annette's dog, and disappears for weeks at a time. The audience is privy to Annette's diary entries, which she reads aloud, sometimes sharing them with Otto, and sometimes, in this production, in voice over. Despite Otto's erratic behavior, Annette is determined to coax him into staying at her side. As Michael Feingold puts it in his review of the 1984 production, although Annette is "terrifically clearheaded as a businesswoman, she is an unawakened romantic of the most old-fashioned kind in her private life."<sup>48</sup> At the end of *Through the Leaves*, Otto has neglected to make contact with Annette for more than two months.<sup>49</sup>

Feingold suggests that the inclusion of the diary entries in *Through the Leaves* "makes the play more distinctly" Annette's,

as well as dramatizing the disparity that is the source of their conflict: the man would never commit the unmanly act of sharing his inner feelings with anyone else . . . we get to gauge her honesty from the way her monologues reaffirm her behavior in the scenes. She becomes familiar and dear to us; he, in effect by his own choice, remains aloof.

In addition to making us privy to her inner life, Annette's diary entries give her access to much more air time than Otto has. As with Winnie, we come to know Annette largely because of what she tells us about herself. Otto remains a bit of a mystery, both to the audience and to Annette. Even Otto's description in the stage directions is less flamboyant than Martha/Annette's—he is "a worker, about 40 years old, average"—and though Maleczek is careful to note that Annette

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<sup>48</sup> Michael Feingold, "Lover's Meatings," *Village Voice*, April 3, 1984.

<sup>49</sup> *Through the Leaves* is the fourth and final treatment of the same material by Kroetz. The first version, *Man's Work*, "ends with an almost expressionistically extreme scene of double murder/suicide." Kroetz, *Through the Leaves*, 3.

and Otto are “awful to each other,” refusing to lay the blame solely on him, it is difficult not to feel more empathy for Maleczech’s Annette as the action unfolds onstage.

There are correspondences between the way in which Maleczech currently describes her approach to text and the way she described her performance in 1984 in an interview with Alisa Solomon about *Through the Leaves*:

“The only way to perform Annette,” she explains, “is to find a parallel between what I think the fantasy of the playwright was when he wrote the character, and my response. So there’s his Annette and there’s my Ruth, and when you put them together, they make my Annette—it’s a combination of him and me. But not in the sense of trying to get inside of his character because I don’t think that’s what actors in the theatre should be doing.”<sup>50</sup>

Although Maleczech explains her approach in different terms here, the contemporary description of finding the writer’s voice as her entry point to the text reverberates with her 1984 description of discovering the fantasy of the playwright. Maleczech has also maintained a strikingly consistent point of view about character. The 1984 position that Solomon records regarding the actor’s relationship to character is nearly identical to her more recent contention, quoted above, that she does not play roles.

Maleczech’s performance as Annette is a major source of the conflicting opinions that surfaced among critics, particularly in the 1984 production. A recurring refrain in these critiques concerns her vocal approach. In his otherwise positive review, Feingold praises Akalaitis as director, citing her “perfect control of Kroetz’s material,” but goes on to express concern over one element of Maleczech’s performance:

My one minor reservation about it, ironically, concerns what is actually its strongest and most gratifying element, Ruth Maleczech’s performance. For certain key moments, Maleczech uses a gratingly shrill voice (homage to Helen Hanft) and a

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<sup>50</sup> Alisa Solomon, “Parallel Fantasies,” *Village Voice*, October 2, 1984, Off-Stage.

stereotype dumb-broad laugh to underscore the woman's fallible side. My complaint is that these are used inorganically, as mere alienating devices, not integrated with the rest of her portrayal; they obtrude a sense of directorial effect which slightly mars what is otherwise a full and enrapturing performance.<sup>51</sup>

Feingold's consternation over Maleczek's voice is echoed by Frank Rich, who writes that "Miss Maleczek affects a mannered, distracting laugh that recalls Thelma Ritter's."<sup>52</sup>

This critical quibble about Maleczek's voice opens the door to an important point about her application of process in performance. As mentioned earlier, Maleczek's vocal approach results from the research she uses to identify and imitate what she perceives to be the voice of the writer, establishing the music and pitch of the language she uses in performance. The attention surrounding Maleczek's vocal approach by these reviewers is also striking given Mabou Mines's interest in "different ways of speaking," part and parcel with the use of accents and a point I will return to in Chapter Two. Downey's translation of the play begins with Martha "giggling," a direction that may have seemed significant to Maleczek and Akalaitis. That reviewers of the 1984 production make note of this aspect of Maleczek's approach suggests that it was both noteworthy and intentional, whether or not it was successful for critics.

The criticism of these reviewers about Maleczek's tinny vocal delivery, coupled with Maleczek's stated intention to locate the writer's voice brings to mind the notion of theatrical performance as ventriloquism. What Maleczek describes in her own process positions her as a sort of vessel by which the writer's voice is channeled to the audience, much as the dummy functions as a mouthpiece for the ventriloquist. Perhaps what Feingold and Rich identify in Maleczek's shrill voice and mannered delivery point to a false note in Maleczek's positioning as medium for the writer's point of view, or an unsettled relationship between Kroetz's Annette

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<sup>51</sup> Michael Feingold, "Lover's Meetings."

<sup>52</sup> Frank Rich, "Through the Leaves," *New York Times*, April 6, 1984, Stage.

and Maleczech's presence. It is important to note, however, that the complaints of these critics were not universal, which Maleczech's Obie for performance demonstrates. In any event, the 1990 production may have given Maleczech the opportunity to make adjustments to the correlation between the character of Kroetz's fantasy and her own appearance on stage. Indeed, the recording of that version bears little trace of a shrill voice or grating laugh, and a review of this version describes Maleczech as "less brassy, but tougher."<sup>53</sup> In answer to the script's call for Martha/Annette to laugh repeatedly, here Maleczech's approach is full-bodied and throaty, dissimilar to the one Feingold describes. It seems, then, that once again, Maleczech has used the opportunity of remounting a production to reevaluate her approach, tinkering with her vocal relationship to the writer's point of view.

Maleczech's carefully calculated point of view about her technical approach expands beyond a straightforward evaluation of the effectiveness of her technique into an ideology about the political efficacy of the performer's training and methodology. This philosophy gets at the heart of Maleczech's investment in Mabou Mines. As a co-artistic director, she says,

You get to call some of the shots without people questioning your authority to do so, which is important to me because I don't think I would function very well in the world at large—the theatre world at large, where you try to get a job and somebody says no a million times. . . . I don't like the idea of working for somebody else. I've never liked it.

This sensibility of Maleczech's is one she shares with Annette/Martha, who prides herself on her ability to provide self-employment. Annette has a dream of a shared life with Otto (one that echoes the overlap of life and work at Mabou Mines's, especially in the company's early days) and repeatedly suggests that he come and work at her shop. In the first such exchange, Otto

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<sup>53</sup> D.J.R. Bruckner, "A Revival of 'Leaves,' Grimmer Than Ever," *New York Times*, September 18, 1990, Theater.

insists that he earns more than she would be able to pay him. Martha proceeds to one-up Otto, telling him that she can “do better” than the fourteen hundred he receives from his employer after taxes, which may be a savvy negotiation tactic in the world of business, but makes her, as Otto will repeatedly tell her, sorely lacking as a female specimen. But it isn’t just the money to Martha:

MARTHA: On top of that, I’m my own boss, and you’re not.

OTTO: Who needs independence, it don’t buy you a beer.

MARTHA: You never been your own boss, if you were you’d talk different.

Otto accuses Martha of counting her pennies, which she readily admits to: “Sure,” she tells him, “because every penny’s mine!”<sup>54</sup> Not only does this philosophy echo Maleczech’s own in establishing a framework for making independent career choices, it also resonates with her guiding role in a financially strained, non-profit theatre company. In other words, Maleczech too is an experienced penny pincher, and her concerns about finances and head for figures spill over into the themes of *Hajj* and Mabou Mines’ *Lear* as well (discussed in detail in Chapter Three).

For Annette and Maleczech, work is a family business. Breuer was the father of Maleczech’s two children, and both Clove Galilee and Lute Ramblin’ have collaborated with her at Mabou Mines, while Annette inherited her shop from her parents. When Otto derides her for selling pet food rather than “steak,” Martha explains that her father was also in the “utility” meat business, basing her argument on a precision of terminology only available to a specialist. Maleczech herself takes a calculated approach to the terminology she uses to describe the work of Mabou Mines, characterized by the precision Stein describes; she resists describing the

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<sup>54</sup>Kroetz, *Through the Leaves*, 12-13.

company as “experimental,” explaining that the term may suggest that “you don’t know what you are doing.” Language matters to Maleczech, both on stage and off.

Maleczech treats Annette’s profession with the same seriousness with which she treats Mabou Mines’s; both Akalaitis and former Mabou Mines member Greg Mehrten remember that Maleczech wanted actually to acquire the skill set Annette would have required for her work. “She went to a butcher and learned how to chop the meat there,” Akalaitis recalls. Mehrten elaborates:

she had this real butcher teach her how to sharpen knives (and then she had to do it for me once because I didn’t really know how to do it). And she learned exactly how, she was so conscientious about not faking it, really doing it the real way, which wasn’t easy. That’s what I remember about her most—going for it, not taking the short cuts. She’s going, “oh, well, I’m playing the butcher. I guess I have to learn how to be a butcher.”<sup>55</sup>

Maleczech, taking her cue from the text, takes Annette as seriously as a butcher as Annette takes herself. This approach paid off with critics as well; among production elements that Feingold finds “unbetterable” is “the professional way Maleczech deals with activities like dicing a beef heart.”<sup>56</sup> Maleczech honors Annette’s career choice and professionalism by recognizing its complexity and imbuing it—and by extension, Annette—with significance onstage by means of her detailed and knowledgeable portrayal.

After Annette/Martha successfully parries Otto’s jab to undermine Annette/Martha’s credentials as a “real” butcher, he takes another tactic:

OTTO: But a woman butcher, that’s not normal, say what you like.

MARTHA: There’s nothing not normal about it, it’s just damn hard for a woman, that’s all, but I did it!

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<sup>55</sup> Interview conducted by the author in July 2011.

<sup>56</sup> Feingold, “Lover’s Meatings.”

The two can agree on one thing: it is easier to be a man. But Annette/Martha, seeking to establish mutual understanding, wants Otto to comprehend and appreciate the context for her dedication to her profession. Otto, interpreting Annette's efforts to communicate as braggadocio, interrupts Annette/Martha:

OTTO: Listen to her talk, nothing feminine about her!

MARTHA: I say what I think, that's all.

OTTO: But a woman's got to be female. Sometimes you got to look to be sure.

When Otto becomes overwhelmed by Martha's business acumen, he attempts to humiliate her sexually by calling both her gender and sex into question. "I read it on the sports page," he tells her, "where they got these Russians who dress themselves up like women so they can win gold medals. Lift up the old apron there and let's have a sex check."<sup>57</sup> Otto's comments make it clear that his discomfort with non-traditional gender roles extends beyond his dislike of Martha's role as a businesswoman.

Despite Otto's protestations, we know that Annette is a woman because Maleczech strips down to the buff on stage. There are several sex scenes in Akalaitis's staging of *Through the Leaves*, all of which are consensual, but few (if any) of these encounters seem to be particularly pleasurable for Annette. This is because Otto uses sex and desire to humiliate Annette and to put himself, for once, in a position of power. McNamara describes these copulation scenes: "at times, as they furiously cavort making love, they resemble beached whales or merely the brute animal force that is trapped in all humans."<sup>58</sup> In the recording of the 1990 production, it appears that the "brute animal force" is all Otto's. Although Maleczech plays Annette as an eager and

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<sup>57</sup> Kroetz, *Through the Leaves*, 14-15.

<sup>58</sup> Robert McNamara, "Franz Xaver Kroetz: A New Voice from Europe."

willing participant, sometimes even an instigator, she lapses into passivity even before the act commences. Early on, Annette complains that Otto is hurting her. Next he threatens that she “won’t get any loving” from him if she refuses to get rid of her dog. The game of chicken escalates until, refusing Annette’s repeated pleas to come home with her and spend the night (the two pass their time in the back room of Annette’s shop—the stage left half of Stein’s bifurcated set), Otto gives her an ultimatum. “Here or nowhere,” he tells her, “You never know, it might be a long time until the next one.” She consents. The humiliation escalates: “Just get rid of the underpants, that’s good enough,” Otto advises. Maleczech starts to take down her underpants. She freezes for just a moment, and we see that something just barely perceptible has shifted. “I don’t want to do it after all, I thought it over,” she says. Otto wants to be sure she has considered the consequences. She tells him she has. After he exits, Maleczech’s Annette tells herself, “you were right.”<sup>59</sup>

This moment of resistance is not an isolated incident. Although Annette/Martha repeatedly tries to placate Otto, she never sets her own agenda aside completely. Having no one else from whom she can expect real consultation, affirmation, or constructive criticism, she uses her diaries as an outlet for expression. Maleczech’s Winnie functions similarly. Somehow, through sheer force of will, both women are able to keep themselves going. Maleczech herself never sought the affirmation of the audition system for casting that so many other actors are after. Instead, she started her own company and selected her own roles, approaching them with aspects of the technique she developed in consultation with her collaborators but never according to the whims of what Akalaitis describes disparagingly as the all-powerful director.

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<sup>59</sup> Kroetz, *Through the Leaves*, 17-18 and 29-30.

Maleczech's point of view about what she is doing on a technical level dovetails with her assertion that Mabou Mines is interested in the theatricalization of ideas. Solomon ties Maleczech's technical approach to the ideas the performer has about the meaning of the play and the performance, writing that Maleczech's

distanced stance allows for a heightening of the feminist aspect of the play. "I think of the performance as feminist," she says, "but I'm not sure if the play is. I try to let the audience know that Annette, or my Annette anyway, is not to be taken for granted. By texturing moments, and actions, and physical business, and spatial relationship to Fred, and tone of voice, and quality of accent, and the way that I stand or sit or move, I let them know some things that Annette doesn't know. But not so much that they wouldn't be able to believe his Annette."<sup>60</sup>

Maleczech's assertion here suggests that her performance is political, right down to its technical details. Maleczech's reliance on her process to invest Annette with particularity invests her with power on stage that she wouldn't have in every day life. Solomon lauds Maleczech for what is, in her terms, a feminist performance technique. And despite Maleczech's doubts about Kroetz's intentions, the production itself, with her performance and Akalaitis's direction, comes across as feminist as well.

## **Conclusion**

The politics of Maleczech's approach and aesthetic are inextricably tied to her founding role at Mabou Mines. As a co-artistic director, Maleczech has wielded a rare amount of control over her own career as an actor. Maleczech, along with Akalaitis and other founding members of the company, were in a position to develop a philosophy about the role of the performer, one that goes against the grain of the audition and casting system at work in most professional

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<sup>60</sup> Solomon, "Parallel Fantasies."

theatre. Accordingly, Maleczech has sought projects outside of the company only when they appeal to some aspect of her aesthetic. Maleczech's determination to carve out a position of theatrical power for herself is what gives her the means to speak out on stage on behalf of the Winnes and Annettes around the world.

In her book on Akalaitis, Deborah Saivetz reports that the director credits Mabou Mines with establishing an “empowerment of actors” who are not merely consigned to “execute the director's divine vision.” Saivetz describes Akalaitis and Maleczech's position on the performer this way:

Mabou Mines's perception of the actor as an autonomous, intelligent being able to function creatively both onstage and off contributes to what Akalaitis describes as the “strong sense of performance” that permeates the company's work. It is not surprising that the members of Mabou Mines more often refer to themselves as “performers” than as “actors,” particularly when speaking about their work within the company. Asked whether she thought there was a difference between performer and actor, Maleczech replied that she thought most people who call themselves actors tend to think of themselves as interpreters. In her view, performance is a kind of active, public mediation in which the performer moves out of self into the performance of self. “Every once in a while,” says Maleczech, “it does happen that you are only performing the performance. That's the ideal.”<sup>61</sup>

Though Maleczech hasn't sought approval from casting directors at auditions, Mabou Mines is deeply invested in the audience's perception of their work. “We want them to like it, to love it,” she says. But Maleczech wants the audience to love on their own terms, to do the work it requires to establish a relationship with the performance—that is the proposition that she offers us. As for her mixed reception from critics, Maleczech once mentioned that she used to keep a post office box where she would mail her reviews, unread. Kroetz play opens with an apropos

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<sup>61</sup>As quoted in Deborah Saivetz, *An Event in Space* (Hanover: Smith and Krauss, 2000), 36.

epigraph of a Bavarian proverb: “If you go walking through the leaves, you’ll have to put up with the rustling.”

Maleczech hopes it is the audience that will hear the subtle rustling of the ordinary women she portrays. And in Maleczech’s performances of Winnie and Annette, the sound of rustling reaches to a roar. She recalls an encounter with an audience member after a performance of the 1984 production of *Through the Leaves* at Interart:

There were no dressing rooms, so I was in the bathroom trying to wash the meat off my hands and the makeup off my face. There was a woman in the bathroom in a beautifully tailored suit, beautiful hair—glamorous in a New York way—she looked fabulous, the way a New York woman can look really fabulous. And she was crying. And I said “are you ok?” And she said “oh, this woman’s life, it’s like mine.” And I thought, “with that suit, that hair?” And she said, “it doesn’t look like my life, but it *is* like my life.” Then she patted her face, and she left.<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> Maleczech in conversation at “Process and Performance.”

## Chapter Two: EXTRAORDINARY WOMEN

History is an archive of deeds undertaken by men, and all that remains outside history is forced to the realm of conjecture, fable, legend, or lie.

—*Belén: A Book of Hours*

Maleczech's commitment to making ordinary women important on stage pairs with another of her political preoccupations: re-examining historical female figures in a contemporary context. In 1980, Mabou Mines premiered one of the most famous productions in the company's history: *Dead End Kids*. This production was conceived and directed by JoAnne Akalaitis and produced during Mabou Mines's extended residency at the Public Theater where it premiered in November of 1980. It was adapted into a film in 1984. The company of actors, which included Maleczech, researched, wrote, and helped to develop scenes and text. Maleczech played Marie Curie. This was her first foray into representing a notable woman in history onstage, a pattern she would return to as a director in with *Belén: A Book of Hours*, which premiered in March of 1999 and for which she commissioned Catherine Sasanov to write poems. Maleczech took on a woman from history again as a performer under Sharon Fogarty's direction in *Cara Lucia*, which premiered in 2003 at New York's HERE Arts Center. The adapted version, *Lucia's Chapters of Coming Forth By Day*, premiered in 2007 and has toured the United States and traveled to Ireland's Kilkenny Arts Festival, appearing in 2011 as part of the First Irish Festival at New York's PS122. *Lucia's Chapters* has been scheduled to travel to Finland in late 2012. *Belén*, too, was performed internationally, premiering in Mexico City as part of XV Festival del Centro Storico at El Claustro de Sor Juana in Mexico City and opening in the United

States in April of 1999—a month after its world premiere—at Mabou Mines’s ToRaNaDa studio. It subsequently toured to Chicago, San Francisco, the University of California at Northridge, and back to Mexico City, this time to Rodriguez and Felipe’s Teatro de La Capilla. This chapter puts the development processes and productions of Maleczech’s three history plays into conversation with one another to investigate the ways in which she resituates the role of historical women onstage to consider their social and political resonances.

In contrast to Marie Curie, one of the most famous female scientists of all time, the lives of the women in *Belén* have been lost to history. The research, development, and production of this piece functioned as an excavation of sorts, unearthing fragments of personal histories and daily living and then inventing characters and stories that tell us who these women were and how they spent their days. The Catholic Church built Belén in 1683 as a refuge for prostitutes and pregnant, indigent women. It gradually underwent changes that made life for the women there increasingly restrictive. The *Belén* production program notes that, “once a woman entered, she could never leave.” Belén was converted into a prison in 1860 by the Mexican government and became so notorious as a site of torture that it was torn down in 1935.

Unlike the women of Belén, Lucia Joyce, while a known figure, is an underestimated one. Raised across more than three countries including Italy, France, and Ireland, the young dancer some suspected was the true inheritor of her father’s genius began to exhibit eccentric behavior in her teens and was eventually committed at the urging of her brother after an outburst in which she threw a chair at her mother. Lucia Joyce was in her early twenties at the time of the incident. Save for a few years spent shuttled between family, friends and various hospitals in France and Switzerland, she spent the rest of her life in mental institutions. She died in 1982 at the age of seventy-five. As with Belén’s women, there is limited documentation about Lucia

Joyce's life, in this case because much of it was destroyed in an attempt to protect her father's image. However, some evidence about her feelings, interests and health does survive. Because James Joyce and his writing are so intricately wound up with the life of his daughter (many scholars suggest that the writer took the portmanteau language of *Finnegan's Wake* directly from his conversations with Lucia Joyce), this discussion would fit nearly as well in the chapter on Maleczech's family dramas. What separates it, however, is the significance of James and Lucia Joyce as historical figures and this production's emphasis on revisiting and revising records of the past.

In the case of each of these productions, Maleczech's dedication to putting historical women onstage developed because a window had been opened into their lives by female collaborators: Akalaitis in *Dead End Kids*, Sasanov in *Belén* and Fogarty in *Lucia's Chapters*. This speaks to Maleczech's engagement with the interests of her collaborators, her openness to new ideas and her ability to recognize the potential for theatricality in historical research material.

*Dead End Kids*, *Belén* and *Lucia's Chapters* are history plays that establish an interrogative relationship with the past. The nature of this relationship is different in each case; each production establishes a distinct methodology particular to the way it positions itself in relation to the history it investigates. Nonetheless, these productions have certain characteristics in common. They are not realistic attempts at historical reconstruction. Neither do they pretend to be objective. They are, as Peter Weiss described his documentary drama, frankly "partisan."<sup>1</sup>

In *Past Performance: American Theatre and the Historical Imagination*, Roger Bechtel writes that his aim is to

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<sup>1</sup> Peter Weiss, "Notes on the Contemporary Theater," tr. Joel Agee, in *Essays on German Theater* (New York: Continuum, 1985), 294.

investigate and understand what I perceive to be new and complex theatrical strategies for representing—or perhaps a better word might be *engaging*—history. History, in the plays and productions I examine, is not understood as a mere reference to the historical record; rather, these productions marshal historical reference to interrogate history—the idea of history, its uses and abuses, as Nietzsche would have, rather than its facts alone—and our relation to it.<sup>2</sup>

This is a useful framework for examining *Dead End Kids*, *Belén* and *Lucia's Chapters* within the milieu of historical drama. These productions take an energetic and muscular approach to wrestling with their respective histories, inserting themselves assertively into the record of the past and insisting that we do not take the idea of history or the figures and stories it has documented for granted.

*Dead End Kids*, *Belén*, and *Lucia's Chapters* make use of poetic language and imagery, manipulate our perception of space and time and invoke the art of good, old-fashioned entertaining to stage histories that have been previously overlooked, pointedly ignored, or willfully repressed. The subtitle of *Dead End Kids* is “A History of Nuclear Power,” signaling that Akalaitis and Mabou Mines are selecting certain thematic historical episodes and weaving them together with imaginary ones to shed light on the rise of nuclear power in a politically engaged way. Neither *Belén* nor *Lucia's Chapters* confront so-called hot button issues. But these productions are no less committed to righting historical wrongs by shining a light in the dark corners of the past (*Belén*) and refocusing it to show us a subject from a previously unexamined vantage point (*Lucia's Chapters*).

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<sup>2</sup> Roger Bechtel, *Past Performance: American Theatre and the Historical Imagination* (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 2007), 16.

These productions actively engage the audience with history by asking them to integrate new perspectives into their understanding of the past. “I like work that requires of the audience that they do something other than witness,” says Maleczech,

Grotowski’s thing was witness, and I think that’s very important, but it’s not enough. It would be good if the audience actually had work that they needed to do in order to take that piece of work that they’re watching into themselves and think about it and talk about it and go home and bat it around a little bit.

*Dead End Kids*, *Lucia’s Chapters*, and *Belén* seek to establish a historical discourse with the audience about the subjects they stage. They lend weight to the importance of the histories with which they engage by going through the motions of representation night after night, for different spectators. As Freddie Rokem writes of the repeated appearance of the ghost in *Hamlet* in *Performing History: Theatrical Representations of the Past in Contemporary Theatre*,

What can be seen in *Hamlet* is how a burden (some kind of unfinished business from the past) becomes transformed into an actor’s being and doing ‘this *thing*’ on the stage, appearing again in tonight’s performance, continuously performing a return of the repressed on the theatrical stage. History can only be perceived as such when it becomes recapitulated, when we create some form of discourse, like the theatre, on the basis of which an organized repetition of the past is constructed, situating the chaotic torrents of the past within an aesthetic frame.<sup>3</sup>

Likewise, the figures and stories in these productions haunt the stage to remind us of those who have been ignored, such as the women of *Belén*, those who have been misunderstood, such as Lucia Joyce, and those whose discoveries unwittingly led us to tragedy, such as Marie Curie.

Maleczech’s interest in alternative history is characteristic of her work. “I think a woman’s perspective of history is something that is important to Ruth,” says Fogarty:

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<sup>3</sup> Freddie Rokem, *Performing History: Theatrical Representations of the Past in Contemporary Theatre* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2000), xi.

she's looking at our world and saying, where's the woman's voice in this point of view? What can women add, especially women who have been repressed or kicked aside or left out of the conversation, as in *Belén*. . . . And I suppose Lucia Joyce is one of those. Marie Curie was a very brave female scientist, but her exploration also brought her in contact with things that ultimately killed her. So, it's the bravery of being an individual, whether you're male or female. And especially for those who've been sidelined or oppressed or warehoused. . . . these are hot buttons for her, I think.<sup>4</sup>

The processes for developing the stories of these warehoused women, in addition to the stories themselves, are all highly characteristic of Maleczech's intuitive connection with her collaborators and of Mabou Mines's signature brand of collaborative development. The commitment to putting these histories onstage and the process that put them there point to an enduring set of priorities in the method and meaning of Maleczech's work. This discussion begins with an examination of the collaborative relationships at the root of these development processes before moving to situate the three productions as history plays, zeroing in on the performances themselves.

#### CHARACTERISTIC COLLABORATIONS

##### *Dead End Kids*

Akalaitis created *Dead End Kids* as a “response to the tremendous political movement in the country” surrounding the use of nuclear power.<sup>5</sup> “It seemed kind of natural to me that Ruth would play Marie Curie,” she says, describing the similarity in looks between the women and Maleczech's facility with accents. Akalaitis recalls that Maleczech's vocal approach to Marie

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<sup>4</sup> All quotations by Sharon Fogarty in this chapter are taken from interviews conducted by the author in October and November 2011.

<sup>5</sup> All quotations by JoAnne Akalaitis in this chapter are taken from an interview conducted by the author on December 18, 2011.

Curie “was a kind of comedic Polish accent. It was very, very funny and I have no idea how she did it, but she did it. I think it is because Mabou Mines is very interested in accents and different ways of speaking.” Maleczech also remembers the role fondly. “I loved doing that part,” she says, echoing Akalaitis’s emphasis on the vocal approach to Curie,

because she had a Polish-French accent, and of course I’d never heard Polish, so I would make it up! And then in the Faust section, which was done in German, I was the translator—Marie Curie was the translator—and so I had to translate Goethe’s Faust. . . . But it had to be funny, so at first it was improvised and eventually it was scripted because I said the same thing over and over.<sup>6</sup>

Akalaitis and Maleczech’s mention of comedy in the approach to Marie Curie is indicative of *Dead End Kids*’s emphasis on a strategy that Mabou Mines has relied on regularly for the purposes of distancing and juxtaposition. *Dead End Kids* avoids the polemical by incorporating satire and parody as well as visual gags, as when Marie Curie appears with a black poodle (on a walk through Central Park in the film version), book-ended by scenes of Faust and Mephistopheles (the latter in human form). Akalaitis even parodies comedy by including the decidedly unfunny stand-up comedian played by David Brisbin. But Maleczech’s performance *is* funny, and her ability to control the comedy invests her Curie with power.

Although Maleczech suggests that it was Ellen McElduff who played the more crucial role in *Dead End Kids*, Akalaitis insists “Ruth was at the center of the piece.” Curie provided the fulcrum for Akalaitis, and the director used the opportunity of adapting the work to film, which she did in 1984, to augment Maleczech’s role. Curie was, Akalaitis says, “a woman who was a pre-eminent scientist and basically killed herself doing her work, who was incredibly important in a world where women are not important.” Greg Mehrten, a former company member who also

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<sup>6</sup> All quotations by Ruth Maleczech in this chapter are taken from interviews conducted by the author between July and September 2011.

performed in *Dead End Kids*, remembers that Maleczech was intent on learning the science behind the activities in which she was engaged onstage as the Nobel Prize-winning scientist. “She had this scene where she was taking the radioactive elements and she really learned how to do that,” Mehrten says. This attention to detail is typical of Maleczech’s method for creating particularized portraits of women for the stage, and she was to take a similar approach to playing a female butcher in *Through the Leaves* (1984), also directed by Akalaitis, which I discuss in detail in Chapter One. Curie was important in her contemporary context in a way that Lucia Joyce and the Belén women were not, and the science that secured Curie’s entry into the historical record was crucial to Maleczech’s performance.

Akalaitis is often credited with writing as well as directing *Dead End Kids* in reviews of the production, as she is in the film version, although the Mabou Mines website attributes the text to Akalaitis “with the company” with excerpts from other documents written by a lengthy list of figures from Paracelsus to General L.R. Groves. Akalaitis agrees that the script was indeed written “with the company.” The collaborators recall that the performers engaged in the research process alongside Akalaitis. The subject was “too vast for one person to do all the research,” Maleczech says, “it needed all the people in the piece to do it.” Mehrten recalls a highly collaborative process that led to what was, at the time, an unusual production:

Originally it started out as a workshop where a lot of people who weren’t in Mabou Mines were invited to think in collaborative ways—musicians and film makers, all kinds of people—because it wasn’t meant to be like a normal play. It had all these vignettes from different periods in history all around the subject of nuclear power.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> All quotations by Greg Mehrten in this chapter are taken from an interview conducted by the author in July 2011.

The confusion in the press surrounding the authorship of the piece may have something to do with the pioneering nature of the project; *Dead End Kids* was what might be described in contemporary terms as collective creation or devised theatre.

The form of development, however it is described, with its heavy emphasis on research, was one to which Maleczech readily responded. According to Maleczech, she developed a performance that eventually became scripted, while Akalaitis remembers the performance as “always slightly improvised.” Curie’s representation, so central to the director’s interpretation of the piece, was “all Ruth,” Akalaitis says, crediting the creation and representation of the role entirely to Maleczech. Maleczech’s engagement with the research that facilitated her creation of Curie is an early example of her continued investment in this phase of the process, which she describes as her favorite part of development. Her costume for Curie, Maleczech recalls with relish, was copied from a dress that she and Akalaitis had seen slung over the back of a chair when they visited the scientist’s former home.

Akalaitis, Maleczech recalls, would select what she felt should be included in the piece from the research brought in by the company and put it in order. “JoAnne is a structuralist,” Maleczech says in describing Akalaitis’s directorial approach,

she structures everything. She doesn't ever want anything on the stage that isn't a structure. It can be an emotional structure, it can be a physical structure, it can be a movement structure, it can be a language structure, but it's got to be structured. That's where her heart goes. When we made *The Red Horse Animation* we each had a part of the red horse. David Warrilow's part was the storyline. My part was the heart line, and JoAnne's part was the outline. And it's very appropriate that that was her part.

Mehrten’s description of the gathering of collaborators who did not necessarily come from the theatre world in the process Akalaitis led for *Dead End Kids* is also characteristic of Maleczech’s directorial approach. But where Akalaitis actively shapes the contribution of her collaborators,

Maleczech works with what she gets. “Julie Archer could have made any set for *Belén*,” Maleczech says, “it's up to her what she makes. I'll work with it, she makes it.”

### **Ruth Maleczech and Julie Archer**

Maleczech's directing style blends her taste for an eclectic mix of artists with an intuitive approach to gathering collaborators and an openness to what they bring into the room. Nowhere is this more apparent than in Maleczech's (and Mabou Mines's) collaboration with Julie Archer. When Archer first met Maleczech in the 1970s, she was living in the apartment below the one Maleczech and Lee Breuer shared with Akalaitis and Glass and the children of both couples on Avenue A. Archer was a babysitter for the children, and, Archer says, Maleczech “would come down after the kids were in bed and we would smoke cigarettes and talk.”<sup>8</sup> During one of those conversations, says Archer, “I said that I think of myself as a sculptor.” Several months later, during rehearsals for *Dressed Like an Egg* (1977), which was directed by Akalaitis and in which Maleczech was performing, the company ran into trouble with a sculpture of a dog they had commissioned with the help of a CAPS grant. The sculpture had begun crumbling, says Archer, and “this eleventh hour panic about this thing set in, and out of that statement to Ruth that I think of myself as a sculptor, Ruth went to JoAnne and said ‘let's let Julie do it’ and JoAnne said ‘what!’ You know, ‘why would we do that?’” But Maleczech insisted, and Archer had her first job with Mabou Mines. “That's how Ruth rolls,” says Archer, “she's really not afraid of putting one hundred percent in somebody with very little evidence—obvious evidence anyway—that they're up to the task.” Archer was not the first visual artist with whom Maleczech collaborated—her comfort with collaborating with artists whose work was based outside of

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<sup>8</sup> All quotations by Julie Archer in this chapter are taken from an interview conducted by the author in November 2011.

theatre has its roots in her early work in San Francisco at the Tape Music Center and on *The Black and White Mime Show* (both discussed in more detail in Chapter One).

Soon Maleczech drafted Archer to design the set for *Vanishing Pictures* (1980), Maleczech's directing debut. Archer had moved to Los Angeles, and Maleczech and Breuer were visiting when Maleczech approached Archer to propose that she design the project. "Ruth came to me and said 'will you design the set,'" says Archer,

and I said I'd never done anything like that. She said, "but you are a sculptor." And so I said okay—if you think I can do it then I think I can do it. So that's how that came to be. It wasn't an isolated way of working. . . . she believes in casting that line out and then sort of seeing if it will play out to her satisfaction.

In Archer's case it most certainly did. Maleczech and Archer won an OBIE for the design on *Vanishing Pictures*, which premiered in 1980, and the pair have sustained their collaboration over the thirty-two years since, working together on Mabou Mines projects including *Wrong Guys* (1981) and *Belén*, both of which were directed by Maleczech, as well collaborating on *Lucia's Chapters* and *Hajj* (1983), in which Maleczech performed. Archer became a co-artistic director of the company in 2005. "Julie and Ruth have a bigger shorthand than anybody else," says Fogarty of their communication as collaborators.

### ***Belén: A Book of Hours***

Maleczech gathered her *Belén* collaborators in the same characteristically intuitive manner. In 1995, Maleczech was in Mexico City on a National Endowment for the Arts fellowship to observe the work of performer Jesusa Rodriguez. Maleczech was at El Habito, the political cabaret that Rodriguez ran with Liliana Felipe, when Maleczech first saw Felipe perform songs she had also composed. Maleczech knew that she wanted to collaborate with

Felipe, though on what she was not yet sure. Maleczek was staying in the same hotel as the American poet Catherine Sasonov, who was also in Mexico City on an NEA fellowship. As Sasonov recalls,

I wanted to stay downtown, in the area of the Zocalo, and not in the suburbs of Coyoacan where everyone else pretty much went. It was where I wanted to do my work, and it was wonderful, but rather lonely, too, at times. Then, one evening I came back and found a note under my door from another NEA recipient who was also in the hotel, in fact, had been in the hotel almost a week before she was told there was another kindred soul in the hotel as well. She gave me her room number and asked if I'd like to have dinner. And so, Ruth and I met.<sup>9</sup>

Over lunches and dinners in the following weeks, Maleczek and Sasonov talked about Mexico City. "One night," says Sasonov,

I told Ruth about something from Mexico City's history that interested me greatly, and that I was sleuthing around, trying to find out more about, el Recogimiento de Belén (the sanctuary of Bethlehem), a Catholic run sanctuary for women without means of support, run like a prison, and eventually, turned into a secular prison.

As in her casual conversations with Archer, Maleczek had been paying careful attention, and what began as an earnest personal conversation with an artist working in a different medium blossomed into a theatrical collaboration at Maleczek's urging.

Sasonov left Mexico City on December 13, 1995. Maleczek saw her off, Sasonov remembers, and Sasonov left Maleczek with a copy of the galleys of *Traditions of Bread and Violence*, her first book of poems. Maleczek "liked Catherine's writing a lot," Fogarty recalls. Six months after parting ways in Mexico City, Sasonov remembers, Maleczek contacted her to say that she was interested in Belén and to ask her if she would like to write a libretto for a

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<sup>9</sup> All quotations by Catherine Sasonov in this chapter are taken from email correspondence between Sasonov and the author, November and December 2011.

theatre piece about it. Maleczech's recollection varies slightly; in her version of events, it was Sasanov who suggested Belén as a topic. Both women remember that from the beginning the idea was that Felipe would set the poems to music that she would sing live, and Rodriguez would perform. Because Felipe didn't speak English, Sasanov would work with a translator so that Felipe could compose the music and perform the poems in Spanish.

Maleczech recalls that Sasanov sent her a number of poems, almost all of which Maleczech promptly returned because she thought Sasanov could do better. Sasanov recalls an interactive fluidity in the early days of the process:

I would write a poem, then pass it by Ruth for her blessing. We might talk about a type of poem she would like to see in the piece (or a tone, a viewpoint), and I would go back with that and see what I could do (this became more common as the piece began to take form; at the beginning, I was free to see what I came up with). If she liked the poem, it then went to the translator.

Maleczech worked in a similar manner with the five writers she gathered together to create the poems for *Song for New York*, which premiered in 2007.<sup>10</sup> The artistic team on *Belén* worked by mail until being granted residencies in 1998 at the Sundance Theatre Laboratory in Utah and the Rockefeller Foundation's Bellagio Center at Lake Cuomo in Italy, where they spent concentrated time working with each other and with Archer, the designer, who had done her own visual research in Mexico. Sasanov and Maleczech had difficulties with the translator, Alberto Blanco, and they eventually returned to Bellagio with a new translator, Luz Aurora Pimentel. *Belén* was developed in a series of intense three and four week sessions, and via mail. According to Maleczech, during the residencies, Sasanov and Pimentel worked in the mornings, handing translations off to Felipe in the afternoon. Maleczech and Rodriguez worked throughout the day,

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<sup>10</sup> *Song For New York* featured poems by Migdalia Cruz, Maggie Dubris, Patricia Spears Jones, Karen Kandel, and Imelda O'Reilly.

developing a scripted series of gestures and movements depicting household chores that would unfold in a non-verbal parallel track as Felipe performed the songs. Sasanov, who is nearly fluent in Spanish, recalls working closely with the translators “to make sure each translation was as close as possible to the original.” When they were satisfied with the translation,

it was passed to Liliana to set to music. Amazingly, it was rare that Lili needed to make much of any change in wording for the music to fit. Once she had a song ready, we gathered around her and listened (or, if we were all scattered long distance, we listened via cassette tape). At this point, Jesusa and Julie Archer, came in, thinking about movement and visuals. I was exceedingly lucky to be present at all the rehearsals as *Belén* was created. I loved how the work came together, all very organic. I didn’t just write a finished piece and pass it on to Ruth. Each of us had our part with each individual song/poem that I created. At times, I might make suggestions of images I had seen that my collaborators might be interested in working with or incorporating into the visuals or as part of the movement of the piece. Or I might bring up one of my obscure details that we’d consider working into the piece.

This overlapping interchange—cultural, linguistic and multi-media in nature—was crucial to *Belén*’s development. It also proved to be characteristic of the final product. A note in the relatively sparse program is devoted to describing the process:

A challenge in developing a theatre piece with artists that speak different languages is to work in a way that the collaborators are not struggling with language as they create. Catherine Sasanov wrote the twelve poems in English. Ruth Maleczech suggested they be translated into Spanish so that Liliana Felipe could freely set them to music. Julie Archer then worked to integrate the English of the poems into the visual life of the work. Ruth Maleczech wrote a silent scenario for Jesusa Rodriguez to be understood by all. By this process *Las Horas de Belén - A Book of Hours* became a truly bi-lingual, bi-national, bi-cultural collaboration.”<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Program, *Belén: A Book of Hours*, presented at Teatro de La Capilla in Mexico City in 2000, Mabou Mines office archives.

This international, intercultural exchange was successful for audiences and collaborators alike; Felipe and Rodriguez were given OBIE Special Citations for their performances, becoming the first Mexicans to receive the award, and Sasanov says warmly “working on *Belén* was one of the great events of my life.”

Maleczech gives her collaborators a lot of room to breathe. Contrasting her own directorial approach to Akalaitis’s and Breuer’s, Maleczech explains, “neither one of them gives their collaborators the leeway I do, but it’s not leeway really—that’s not the right word because it sounds like permission. No, neither one of them involves their collaborators at the level that I do. The collaborators have completely free reign.”<sup>12</sup> Perhaps this is why Maleczech is drawn to collaborators with backgrounds in more independently created forms of art, such as sculpture and poetry. And perhaps this is why Sasanov, a poet, and Archer, who began as a sculptor, respond so keenly to Maleczech’s directorial inclinations. Maleczech seeks out collaborators who bring a strong point of view into the room. “I like it when it’s feisty,” she says,

and I like it when things are messy for a long time. I trust that a lot. I’m not much one for “let’s get this all organized and put together and let’s get it up there.” Not that I haven’t done that, but I’m not very satisfied by the results when I’ve had to do that. I’m a real appreciator of people kind of rooting around and coming up with whatever comes to mind and then trying to figure out why exactly that came to mind and how does that cross with somebody else’s mind and how does that feed into somebody else’s passion.

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<sup>12</sup> While an in-depth analysis of Breuer’s and Akalaitis’s processes is beyond the current scope of this project, which centers on Maleczech’s process, an examination of the ways in which the three directors collaborate and the fruits of those collaborations in performance is an important area of investigation for a future iteration of this project.

**Sharon Fogarty and Lucia Joyce**

In the case of *Lucia's Chapters*, Fogarty's passion for Lucia Joyce led to Maleczek's interest in playing the role. It may also have cemented Maleczek's interest in making Fogarty a co-artistic director of Mabou Mines. Fogarty had seen *Dead End Kids* and had begun working with the company on *Cold Harbor* (1983), in which she played a role in the touring version. She got to know Maleczek in their shared dressing room. Fogarty also worked on Mabou Mines's *Lear* (1990), first as an understudy for Gloucester and Albany as the company developed the project, and later in various minor roles when the production premiered in New York. "I held down Gloucester when she was getting her eyes gouged out," Fogarty says. She also brought the dogs who played Lear's entourage back and forth to the theatre and helped Maleczek with her wig. "She trusted me," Fogarty remembers. Fogarty recalls that she appeared on the scene during "a bad time in the company." Akalaitis had just left Mabou Mines, and Mehrten, McElduff, and Bill Raymond departed following *Lear*. But Fogarty liked working with Mabou Mines anyway, and in 1994, after receiving a master's degree in Ireland, she returned to New York to find that the company was looking for someone to work in the office. Fogarty applied for the job. She interviewed with Maleczek and board member Esther Fortunoff. Maleczek, Fogarty remembers, was confident that Fogarty possessed the requisite business skills for the position, although she herself was uncertain that this was the case.

Fogarty took the job as company manager. "I arrived the first day," she says,

and I'm the only one there. There had been nobody in the office for eight months. There was mail, boxes and boxes of mail that nobody had opened. And there was some bad stuff in the mail, tax letters and things that needed attention and nobody had been dealing with it. It was in terrible shape. I spent the day opening mail and trying to get the desk in order and trying to figure it out.

Fogarty hired someone for a development position and soon “things started happening.” She paired her organizational work at Mabou Mines with directing work with the Irish-American theatre company Daedulus. The office work was “not fun,” but she began to realize that she liked being part of an organization. “I liked having a home,” Fogarty says, “and it came to me that what I wanted was to be an artistic director.”

She became one at Daedulus, but the situation was far from ideal. Fogarty sensed a misogynist streak in the executive director of the company, finding that she was not given credit for the substantial contributions she made and that he consistently “undercut” her at meetings. “I have an Irish temper,” Fogarty says ruefully, and the situation was “getting a little contentious.” As Fogarty began to consider leaving Daedulus, the Mabou Mines co-artistic directors began to consider the future of the company. It was “Ruth mostly,” says Fogarty, “she’s the one who thinks about the personality and cohesion of the organization. She’s gifted at that.” As Maleczek, Breuer, Fred Neumann and Terry O’Reilly began “fishing around to cast somebody” as co-artistic director, they began to discuss the idea of offering the position to Fogarty. “It all came about in casual conversation over a long period of time,” Fogarty says,

and finally they were ready to bring it up in discussion within the board, so they brought me into Lee’s tiny office. I remember sitting in there and Lee said, “so we’ve been talking about inviting you to be an artistic director and we all know about the organization and how we run and how it works and doesn’t work” and all that. But Ruth says, “what kind of work do you want to make?” And it sounded like such a loaded question. I felt like I was in front of the firing squad or something.

Fogarty and the Irish playwright Elizabeth Whyte had been researching the life of Lucia Joyce and Fogarty was deeply struck by what she had learned. She knew that the material had incredible potential, but she wasn’t certain she wanted to continue her collaboration with Whyte.

“In the Irish theatre world,” says Fogarty, “it’s pretty much realism or even magical realism, but it’s pretty stuck in straight drama. And I felt there was more to explore.”

When Maleczech asked Fogarty what kind of work she wanted to make, Fogarty told them about her research. Fogarty’s interest in Lucia Joyce tied in with the company’s history with Samuel Beckett’s work and “they all got very excited,” she says. Fogarty became a co-artistic director and began work on what was to become *Lucia’s Chapters*. As for the developmental process she envisioned, “I had seen Mabou Mines in action,” Fogarty explains,

with *Lear* and with *Epidog* and a few other things, but it didn’t seem like anybody was the author per se. I mean, Lee was the author of *An Epidog*, but it certainly felt like other people had some authorship and certainly with *Lear*, everybody in the room was rewriting this thing. So, I didn’t feel too worried about the writer part.

Fogarty embarked on an extensive research phase. “And then I had all this material,” Fogarty says, “and here’s the composition part and I don’t know what the hell to do. I was trying to channel JoAnne Akalaitis.” Eventually Fogarty discovered that, despite the fact that she was working with artists of such high caliber, “we weren’t going to sit around the table and hash it out together, although we had come up with some decisions together. Really it was my job to go off and figure it out.” So Fogarty went to Ireland to work with dramaturg Jocelyn Clark, and returned with one script and three Lucias: a young dancing Lucia, an old incarcerated Lucia, and Anna Livia Plurabelle from *Finnegans Wake*.

Fogarty suggests that Lucia Joyce became important to Maleczech as she came to believe, through the research process, that Lucia Joyce had been shut away “because she was too much trouble.” Although Fogarty hadn’t known she would be writing the piece she was proposing to Mabou Mines, she knew right away that she wanted Maleczech to play Lucia, even

before she knew that there would be three of them. Maleczek “could take Lucia’s extremities and make them reachable or accessible to the audience,” says Fogarty,

and she’s a great comedian and I found this woman to be really funny, whether she was really crazy or she wasn’t. She’s crazy like a fox. There’s someone in there laughing at everybody in a way, even though she’s suffering. I thought Ruth could get the darkness, the anger and frustration, she could embody that and help us to connect with Lucia, to Lucia’s anger.

As with Akalaitis in *Dead End Kids*, Fogarty made a conscious effort to incorporate comedy into the representation of Lucia, and she was confident that Maleczek, a dexterous comedienne, would be able to pit humor against the more somber aspects of Lucia Joyce’s story. By investing their Lucia with humor, Fogarty and Maleczek emphasize her strength, playing against preconceptions about this figure as frail and hysterical.

As with *Dead End Kids*, accents figured largely into the vocal approach to *Cara Lucia* and *Lucia’s Chapters*, and the one Maleczek and Fogarty developed both enhances Lucia’s humor and works to establish her as a particularized character. “We spent a long time trying to figure out if she had an accent,” says Fogarty of Maleczek’s Lucia character. If she did, Fogarty, Maleczek and their collaborators decided, it certainly wouldn’t be an American one. Lucia Joyce’s parents were both Irish, of course, but Fogarty suggests that Lucia herself might have had more of a “polygot” accent:

her dad probably spoke a more proper, almost English Irish. And she lived in England for twenty-five years. She might have had a slight French accent, but that didn’t seem right. We ended up going with a British accent, a very light old lady British accent.

Maleczek figured largely into these discussions, as she did when Fogarty decided that she wanted to adapt *Cara Lucia* to feature a single Lucia, doing away with the roles that had been performed by Rosemary Fine and Maleczek’s daughter, Clove Galilee, and making James

Joyce, played by Paul Kandel, physically present onstage. Despite the addition of the Joyce character, this meant that *Lucia's Chapters* became almost entirely a solo piece for Maleczech.

“I really do most of the work in the performance,” she says,

Paul doesn't come in—except as a shadow, an important shadow but a shadow—until later in the piece when he speaks. But for a long time it's just me. And there's not a lot of blocking. I mean, the chair flies and rocks, but there's not a lot of blocking to divert the audience.

Maleczech continued to hear the voices of Fine and Galilee as she read the lines now assigned to her, and she decided, rather than memorize the new material, that she would prefer to have the lines fed to her through an electronic earpiece as she performed. Maleczech had done this once before, when Mehrten read Rose's lines to her in *The Shaggy Dog Animation* (1978).

Mehrten recalls that Maleczech had an exceedingly complicated sequence in which

she was manipulating the puppet and she was talking in this puppet voice, and she was doing all these things, and she just couldn't remember the lines. . . . I was doing live sound effects on the side. . . . and we came up with the idea that she would have a little earphone and I had a little mic and then a wire connected to her, and I would feed her the lines in this one scene that was so complicated.

Maleczech enjoyed what the dual tracks of the voice in her ear and her own live action did for her performance. Perhaps it allowed her to let go of her engrained memory of Fine and Galilee's performance of the same text. It is also likely to have introduced an element of surprise, leaving Maleczech occasionally unsure of what text was coming next. Maleczech places a great deal of value on arriving at unexpected discoveries in performance, as a number of her collaborators suggest. “I never felt that if I had an instinct I wanted to follow that Ruth wouldn't come for the trip,” Kandel says of performing with Maleczech in *Lucia's Chapters*, “and same way the other way around. If Ruth needed to make a right, I would go. And that's why we have such a good

time onstage, because each night is unexpected.”<sup>13</sup> In *Lucia’s Chapters*, though, Maleczech spends most of her time onstage alone. Thus, her use of the ear bud fulfilled one of the functions that a partner such as Kandel might in other scenes, taking Maleczech by surprise.

The development processes for *Dead End Kids*, *Belén*, and *Lucia’s Chapters* demonstrate Maleczech’s proclivity for strong minded collaborators, her openness to contributions by those collaborators, her commitment to research, and her dedication to bringing historical women to the stage. For Maleczech, the personalities of her collaborators are paramount in process and performance. While she identifies Akalaitis’s emphasis on structure, Maleczech’s process and aesthetic are distinguished by who she chooses to work with. Her point of view about the subjects she stages is shaped and enhanced foremost by the personalities of those with whom she has chosen to work. Maleczech’s dedication to Mabou Mines’s theatre of ideas, in which concepts are thoroughly aired and debated as part of the development process (which I discuss in Chapter One), means that she is committed to engaging with the perspectives of her collaborators on a profound level and working with them to develop a shared vision of performance for each production.

I will now turn to an examination of the ways in which these productions demonstrate Maleczech’s interest in material that engages with history using distinctive approaches and intentions.

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<sup>13</sup> All quotations by Paul Kandel in this chapter are taken from an interview conducted by the author in August 2012.

## STAGING ALTERNATE HISTORIES

### A Staged History of Nuclear Power

Much of the critical attention surrounding *Dead End Kids* centers on the notorious scene in which Brisbin's sleazy male stand up comedian leads an excessively naïve female audience member, played by McElduff, through a series of sexually exploitative manipulations of a raw roasting chicken as he reads excerpts of a document regarding the consequences for livestock in the event of a nuclear war in a suggestive manner. In "Staging the Obscene Body," Elinor Fuchs describes her own discomfort as an audience member during this sequence and the widespread disdain with which critics greeted the scene in the press. In the end, however, Fuchs writes, "most critics, sympathetic with the director's political intentions, finally 'allowed' it on political grounds." Fuchs also documents an audience walkout during a presentation of the scene:

In an interesting sequel, the nightclub scene was presented as a single excerpt at a joint anniversary celebration of the War Resisters' League (WRL) and Performing Artists for Nuclear Disarmament in May 1983. . . . women in the hall began to shout to the female character, "Don't do it honey, don't let him do it to you!" Within moments, accompanied by mounting booing and hissing, there occurred a full-scale feminist walkout from the hall. . . The performance was broken off and an angry confrontation with the director followed.<sup>14</sup>

Though it is important to note that the melee Fuchs describes followed a presentation of the scene outside of the context of the play, Akalaitis subsequently developed a reputation for controversy—she is now the veteran of a showdown with the Beckett estate over her production of *Endgame* (1984) and an infamous ousting by the board of the Public Theater which ended her brief and tumultuous tenure as the only female Artistic Director the organization has ever had. It

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<sup>14</sup> Elinor Fuchs. "Staging the Obscene Body," *TDR* 33, no. 1 (1989): 36.

should come as no surprise, then, that this earlier, intentional provocation was so wildly successful.

The confrontational nature of this scene makes it an excellent microcosm for examining the larger patterns at work in the piece because it is directly related to what Akalaitis and company are up to in the first place. *Dead End Kids* puts familiar figures, images, and histories together in a provocative and deeply uncomfortable way. The result disrupts what we think we know about the appearance of nuclear power on the political landscape, and it forces the audience to “do something other than witness,” which is exactly the relationship Maleczek advocates between performance and spectator.

Although no video survives of the stage production, the film adaptation is now readily available for streaming through a number of library systems. It opens with a scientist drawing on a chalkboard and delivering an enthusiastic explanation of the atom. Less than five minutes later, Fred Neumann’s cigarette-smoking armchair intellectual sets the stage for a historic reconstruction of medieval-looking attempts at the alchemical transformation. An evening talk show dedicated to pseudo-scientific inquiry (“Welcome to the incredible, unbelievable world of alchemy,” one co-host beams) in which a magician makes a handkerchief into a dove and enacts other improbable feats and the co-hosts discuss the history of alchemy. Then, of course, there is the stand up comedian. These narrative threads establish unexpected juxtapositions between familiar situations and figures, pairing birthday party magicians with ancient alchemical theory.

Unusual though they are, juxtapositions such as the one between the stand up comedian and the history of alchemy are the clue to what *Dead End Kids* is after, because they point us to another unlikely and ultimately lethal pairing: the United States government’s macho and jingoistic attitude and its access to science with the capacity to create an atomic bomb. As Fuchs

notes, despite her discomfort with the too-stupid audience member and the too-seedy comedian, she “recognized . . . the most unsettling version of the connection Akalaitis had been making all along between the war state and the sexist state, male nuclear fantasies and the exploitation of women . . .”<sup>15</sup> Thus, *Dead End Kids* develops two trains of thought. One has to do with the abuse of nuclear power, both in the real world and in male fantasies (worlds which are, more often than not, rather too closely tied together for the comfort of feminists). The other has to do with how we ended up with the capacity to make a nuclear bomb in the first place.

This question, how we ended up with the capacity to make a nuclear bomb, takes us all the way back to Aristotle and other Classical proponents of alchemy. The first third of *Dead End Kids* functions as a sort of history of alchemy, or a history of the gestational period of science. Alchemy and modern science collide with the introduction of Marie Curie, and once she appears on the scene in *Dead End Kids*, she continues to lurk around the corners of the production, demonstrating the centrality of this character to Akalaitis’s conception of the project. In the film version, we first spot Maleczek as Curie strolling through Central Park with a black poodle (Mephistopheles) on a leash. As she walks, she recounts the story of Faust in a voiceover. This imaginative coupling of real and fictional scientists of the past elucidates why *Dead End Kids* is “a story of nuclear power” instead of a *history* of it.

Later Curie tells her own history, which resonates with an overlapping of interconnected personal and professional triumphs. She describes meeting her husband, Pierre Curie, not in the traditional language of romance, but in terms of a shared commitment to science. “A conversation about science began between us,” says Maleczek’s Curie, “soon he caught the habit of speaking to me about his dream of a life consecrated entirely to scientific research and

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

he asked me to share that life.” This sense of an integrated professional and personal life is present exclusively for Curie among the *Dead End Kids* cast of characters, and Maleczech and Akalaitis are careful to imbed this intersection throughout Curie’s story in the film.

Curie and her husband Pierre worked in a shed that served as their laboratory, just outside the home they shared with their daughter, we learn. In a continued voiceover in the film, Maleczech continues, “it was in this abandoned shed that the best and happiest years of our life was spent entirely consecrated to work.... This period was for my husband and myself the heroic period of our common existence.” It is in this shed that Curie decided to “devote” herself to the purification of radium. “In 1902 I possessed one decigram of radium. It had taken me four years to produce it,” she continues,

The baby had been put to bed and cried again. I stayed with her until she feel asleep then I went down and tried to sew, but I was too restless. I suggested to Pierre that we go the laboratory. We opened the door in the dark I begged Pierre not to light the light. The reality was more entrancing than we had wished. It was spontaneously luminous.<sup>16</sup>

Here, Curie’s husband, child, and scientific innovation are linked together in the pride she feels for her accomplishments. Maleczech’s voice is warm, and we have the sense of Curie as a particularized individual because of the slightly untraceable yet charming accent Maleczech uses. She describes the qualities of radioactivity, its ability to make images on photographic plates through black paper and to disintegrate the paper in which it is wrapped in the tones a proud parent talking about a precocious child. “What could it not do?” she asks.<sup>17</sup>

Marie Curie is the only character in *Dead End Kids* whose view of science and domesticity are so irrevocably interwoven. This makes her the ideal figure to haunt the later,

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<sup>16</sup> *Dead End Kids*, directed by JoAnne Akalaitis (New York: Cinema Guild, 1986), VHS.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*

post-Hiroshima and Nagasaki scenes. As a mother, she is a poignant presence in the doorway of the auditorium where she watches the schoolteacher played by Ellen McElduff read eyewitness accounts of the horrors of Nagasaki aloud to children in a singsong voice. The schoolteacher holds a large picture book and pauses occasionally to make sure the children understand the more difficult words. “Those people who managed to get out by some miracle,” she reads in a sweet, soothing voice, “found themselves surrounded by a ring of fire and the few who did make their way to safety died twenty to thirty days later from the delayed effects of the deadly gamma rays.”<sup>18</sup> Marie Curie looks on with a mixture of regret and wonder.

The sinister intermingling of sophisticated nuclear activity and innocent daily life also inserts itself into a scene in which high school girls, played by Maleczech and Akalaitis’s daughters, Clove Galilee and Juliet Glass, demonstrate the wonders of nuclear power in their science fair exhibit. They admiringly describe a nuclear powered coffee pot, plutonium heated long johns, and a nuclear powered pace maker. “Radiation is the most recent step in man’s ancient quest to preserve food,” they extol, eating irradiated hamburgers.<sup>19</sup>

We see Marie Curie in the film version staring out the window at a nuclear power plant as she travels past it in a train and again, sitting in an armchair and watching another television program in which McElduff plays a crazed mother who helps her son to assemble a hydrogen bomb as a scout project. Curie’s repeated appearances, in which she silently observes the consequences of her scientific contribution, are infused with regret. They leave the impression that Curie is haunting the history she handed down, unable to detach herself from her beloved radium and the series of consequences that have spiraled completely out of her control in a direction she could not have foreseen but wishes she had.

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

Although Marie Curie may be at the center of the drama for Akalaitis and for the audience, *Dead End Kids* is, without a doubt, an ensemble piece. It makes use of the pastiche that has resulted from its process of collective creation, presenting its story of nuclear power as a collage of fact, fiction, science, and stage magic. By blending selected history with imaginative invention, *Dead End Kids* suggests that we can alter the course of the future. The juxtaposition between Curie's maternal presence and the "manifestations of the sexist state" Fuchs identifies is a unifying motif that functions to humanize a political problem of colossal proportions and to provoke the audience into taking action.

### **In Search of Lost Time: Belén's Book of Hours**

In *Belén*, the indignities perpetrated against Rodriguez's character are unfurled in the guise of normality, unfolding as part of the rhythm of daily life. The sense of the quotidian surrounding episodes of oppression and abuse underscores the production's explicit message that subjugation is, in fact, part of habitual life for many women. The subtitle of the play, *A Book of Hours*, refers both to the religious origins of the institution in which these women find themselves and the hours that made up the days and years spent there in captivity.

Sound, light, projection and performance are all calculated to invoke this reference, astonishingly clear even in a recorded version of the performance at the ToRoNaDa. Before the lights come up on stage, a projection appears on the wall: "like certain refined forms of torture, household chores must be repeated as soon as they are done."<sup>20</sup> The words disappear abruptly, accompanied by a jarring aural effect that seems a cross between thunder and the door to a prison cell clanging shut. This aural trope will recur throughout the performance. As the play begins,

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<sup>20</sup>*Belén: A Book of Hours* (Mabou Mines, 1999), DVD. Copy provided to the author by Mabou Mines.

four distinct tracks emerge. Felipe, at a piano, sings Sasanov's poems in Spanish while the English translations are projected on the wall. Meanwhile, Rodriguez enacts a variety of household tasks—the ones we were warned about in the opening projection. Sometimes she is the woman in the poems and sometimes she is another woman, engaged in routine work that parallels the lines of the poem in some way, and who, according to Maleczech, may not even know the women at Belén. All of this is punctuated by outbursts in English delivered by a woman, our contemporary, who is looking back over the past history of Belén. The fourth track is provided by Archer's design. Images collected by Archer of saints and photographs of women line the walls. Projected outlines of plants and flowers, giant in scale, infiltrate the stage with a mysterious menace.

In her review of *Belén* for the *Village Voice*, Alisa Solomon writes “sound, text, and movement follow separate trajectories that sometimes intersect, sometimes run parallel, and sometimes, by contradicting each other, collide.” The clash and confluence of these events,” Solomon describes results in

a complete, disquieting universe. More associative than narrative, the performance never actually tells the history of Belén. Rather, it summons Belén's ghosts—and their cousins from all the places women have been tormented—for a ghoulish yet gorgeous encounter.<sup>21</sup>

Space is crucial in the encounter Solomon describes; although Rodriguez and Felipe are near to each other, it is clear that they inhabit separate areas. The outbursts come from a lofted space above and away from Rodriguez and Felipe, while the projections appear on every available surface, including Rodriguez's body.

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<sup>21</sup> Alisa Solomon, “Prison Prayers,” *Village Voice*, May 25, 1999.

In one particularly arresting scene, Rodriguez sets out flour and whisks together eggs. We expect her to make bread. Instead, she undresses, smears herself with egg, and covers herself in flour, whitening herself up before our eyes. “Without speaking a word during the play,” writes Solomon,

Rodriguez enacts women's timeless chores—ironing, sewing, cooking—in exacting ways, sometimes transforming these labors into stark images of women's subjugation. Her movement, neither realistic nor romantic, jerks and sputters ever so slightly, as if to emphasize the archetypal nature of this endless drudgery. Maleczech likens it to Meyerhold's biomechanics; Rodriguez says she found inspiration in watching stop-action films of growing plants.<sup>22</sup>

Rodriguez’s distancing style of performance is juxtaposed with Felipe’s impassioned singing and the tortured outbursts. Maleczech’s use of binary tension, the alienating style of Rodriguez’s performance, and epic storytelling techniques force the audience to confront a brutal history of women without sentimentality.

Maleczech and Rodriguez also use comedy to create a sense of alienation, rejecting any temptation to romanticize or victimize the women Rodriguez represents. Rodriguez’s physical interaction with the objects onstage has an air of the macabre, and her use of comedy occasionally sets up an unnerving feeling of subtle confrontation with the audience.

Both *Dead End Kids* and *Belén* make use of every day life as a backdrop for the horrors that Maleczech and company require the audience to acknowledge. In *Dead End Kids*, manifestations of daily life appear as distinct episodes, such as the high school science fair. Other scenes, such as the one in which Mephistopheles appears to Faust with nine heads, are infused with a magical feeling. In *Belén*, there is no escape from the ominously ordinary. Every day elements may take on surreal qualities, but this is because of the way in which Rodriguez

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

and Maleczech manipulate familiar objects. A trench coat on a hanger begins as a sewing project and becomes a dance partner and later a rapist. Here, elements of every day life morph into monstrosities.

As if nightmarish versions of recognizable objects weren't enough, a calculated strategy of interruptions further unsettles the audience. Flashes of light, the clanging sound that repeatedly signals the end of an episode, and the outbursts from the chained contemporary woman above our heads create a feeling of disjunction. Even Rodriguez's stop motion movement style keeps the audience from settling in. For the United States audience, the singing in Spanish and outbursts and projected words in English also amount to an interruptive strategy; although the projections of the poems mean that non-Spanish speakers can understand the words, the simultaneous use of two languages also establishes a more complex reception process. These interruptive techniques unravel narrative threads and disrupt our sense of time.

Maleczech's unmooring of linear time gives the audience a taste of what it might be like to spend life in prison; routine days, with little to distinguish one from the next may have deprived Belén's women of their sense of progression—a problem that Fogarty's invocation of Lucia Joyce's "chapters" suggest she encountered as well. Maleczech's strategy of interruption is also a practiced method of undermining Aristotelian structure, one that has long been advocated by feminist critics as a tactic for promoting non-patriarchal representation onstage.

Motherhood is as poignant a role in *Belén* as it is in *Dead End Kids*. In one sequence, we see Rodriguez bundle a watermelon as if it were an infant and try to climb the walls of the theatre, as if to escape. The episode is prefaced by this projection:

If a mother was arrested, no one was left to take care of her children. But if she brought them to prison, she lost them to the

worst examples of criminals, or the frequent epidemics of typhus.  
Nothing made her wilder to escape than the suffering of her child.<sup>23</sup>

Later Rodriguez slices open the watermelon and sews it back together again. As with many of the images that unfold, the exact significance of this rending and sewing remains elusive, but it nevertheless communicates a feeling of violence, loss and inadequacy.

### **The Resurrection and Reclamation of Lucia Joyce**

In *Lucia's Chapters of Coming Forth By Day*, Lucia's Joyce mother is utterly absent. Her father, however, looms large. Because *Lucia's Chapters* is concerned with correcting a historical record that positions Lucia Joyce only in relation to her father, Fogarty's and Maleczek's production provides Lucia Joyce with a point of view, albeit an imagined one. The real Lucia Joyce had a point of view too—as a young woman, she painted her face black, declined to wear under garments, and spent six days on a friend's couch in a near-catatonic state after quarrelling with her parents because they had invited her ex-boyfriend Samuel Beckett to her father's fiftieth birthday party. It is this excess of attitude that landed Lucia Joyce in trouble in the first place, at least according to critics such as Carol Loeb Shloss, who proposes that this young woman may have been a moody young artist, highly anxious and probably depressed, but perhaps not the full-fledged mentally deranged menace her brother Giorgio feared she was. Shloss cites, among other evidence, largely unheeded advice from a number of Lucia Joyce's doctors.

Shloss's book, *Lucia Joyce: To Dance in the Wake* (2005), was heavily influential on Fogarty as she researched and developed *Lucia's Chapters*. The production does not, however, stand on a soapbox to proclaim Lucia Joyce a wrongfully incarcerated victim (nor does the

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<sup>23</sup> *Belén: A Book of Hours*, DVD.

book). Rather, *Lucia's Chapters* paints a complex portrait of a person who has been physically shut away against her will but who has such a vivid imagination and a rich store of memories that she can travel exhaustively in her mind. This sets the character of Lucia apart from the woman or women Rodriguez portrays in *Belén*. Lucia's unfettered imagination and extensive creative resources have been nurtured by an upbringing that, while highly unorthodox and possibly neglectful, provided her with privileged access to art, literature, languages and travel. It is this sophisticated and promising young dancer who Shloss describes.

Most of Lucia Joyce's life was spent in confinement and, in contrast to Rodriguez's imprisoned woman who is engaged in a controlled frenzy of physical activity in *Belén* it is Lucia's frenzied mind that roams in response to her captivity in *Lucia's Chapters*. The historical Lucia Joyce is linked to the women of *Belén* because of the stigma, forced on her by others, of being a disturbed and undesirable woman who should be shut away. And, as with the women of *Belén*, Lucia Joyce's incarceration only worsened her condition; "the harsh, regimented lifestyle caused some women to go insane or commit suicide,"<sup>24</sup> the *Belén* program notes. Lucia Joyce and the women of *Belén* are also historically connected because their confinement is associated with sexual deviance. This is more straightforward in the case of *Belén*'s women, who were prostitutes or unwed mothers. Discomfort with Lucia Joyce's sexuality played a more ambiguous but no less insidious role in her eventual incarceration. The young woman espoused an open attitude toward sex, she was known to have lovers, and for a brief time she and her parents feared her mental illness might be the result of syphilis brought on by her promiscuity (this proved not to be the case). Not to mention the allusions to incest critics have found in Joyce's novels and the unnatural desire Lucia supposedly harbored for her brother.

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<sup>24</sup> Program, *Belén: A Book of Hours*, presented at Teatro de La Capilla.

But in *Lucia's Chapters*, the remnants of a lively and accomplished young woman are refracted through the memories of an older woman who has been robbed of the possibility of maturity. Her incarceration has denied her any measure of professional, creative, and emotional development.

In the first version of this production, *Cara Lucia*, the three versions of Lucia effectively sever the tie with her father. Despite the fact that one of the Lucias we see is Anna Livia Plurabelle of *Finnegan's Wake*, James Joyce's absence and Lucia Joyce's presence onstage make the words of that text more hers than his. In this way, *Cara Lucia* takes words that James Joyce may have taken from his daughter and gives them back to her. *Lucia's Chapters* condenses the three Lucias into one played by Maleczek, and the result is a more intricately woven character and a more harrowing experience for the audience. Because James Joyce is physically present in this version, the text from *Finnegan's Wake*, spoken mostly by James but also occasionally by Lucia, takes on joint ownership. The notion of a shared possession of text is heightened by our impression that the author, who first appears in shadow through a scrim, is a figment of his daughter's memory and imagination.

All three of the personas in *Cara Lucia* have come home to roost in a single character in *Lucia's Chapters*, creating a more nuanced and complex character for Maleczek to play.

"While the other two were interesting pieces of the Lucia puzzle," Fogarty says of the young Lucia and Anna Livia Plurabelle

Ruth's character was the one that I understood the best, because the young Lucia was really taken from reports. People would quote her in various reports about what she did and said. Whereas the basis for all of the language for the older Lucia was directly from her writing, from her letters, her memoirs, kind of a biography.

Centering the text more directly on Lucia Joyce's own words allows Fogarty and Maleczech to present a figure guided largely by what she said about herself instead of what others said about her. *Lucia's Chapters* provides Lucia Joyce with a retrospective power, privileging her own point of view over the opinions she was subjected to during her life in a challenge to the official historical record.

This solitary Lucia is simultaneously more powerful in her ability to draw so suggestively upon her memory and creativity and lonelier because the only other character she can summon is her long dead father. Maleczech and Fogarty find a deep bond between father and daughter in James and Lucia. But instead of overshadowing his daughter here, James appears only in relation to Lucia Joyce rather than the other way around. Less than a minute into the play, Lucia tells us, "My name is Lucia Joyce. My father is James Joyce, the famous Irish writer. I am seventy-five years old, I like to smoke, and it costs a lot."<sup>25</sup> Lucia introduces her father to us on her stage, along with two other characteristic aspects about herself that she wants us to know. She then begins to read aloud to us from her own book, not from one of his. She calls this book her "chapters of coming forth by day." The title suggests an emergence from darkness into light (her namesake), from obscurity to prominence.

Although we know that James Joyce was deeply conflicted about his daughter's confinement and was the only person to visit her regularly, the figure Lucia conjures for us here is distant and a little frightening. "I really felt like Joyce was there, however the hell I tried to keep him out," Fogarty explains. "He was this big shadow that hovered near her to the end of her life. So I decided to make him a shadow and then bring him out at the end to help her cross the River Styx, or whatever you want to call it." As Fogarty describes, Joyce first appears to us

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<sup>25</sup> Sharon Fogarty, *Lucia's Chapters of Coming Forth By Day*, 2. Script provided to the author by Sharon Fogarty from the Mabou Mines office archive.

as a sharply outlined shadow on the scrim, appearing in full form only towards the end of the play, and we aren't sure what to make of him when he eventually appears before us. As it turns out, he is there to usher his daughter into the hereafter, as he has already done with Nuvoletta in *Finnegan's Wake*.

*Lucia's Chapters* sharpens what Fogarty describes as "the afterlife metaphor" that she had hoped to communicate in *Cara Lucia*. Inspired by Lucia Joyce's habit of prefacing communications with the phrase "bad news," Fogarty decided to begin *Lucia's Chapters* with a line that combines orienting exposition with the words of the lady herself. "Bad news. I'm dead," are the first frank words out of Maleczek's mouth.<sup>26</sup> Perhaps, then, the time Lucia spends on the stage before us amounts to a sort of purgatory for her. If it is, though, it is hard to distinguish this from how she likely spent her days at Saint Andrews hospital, where she spent the years between 1951 and her death. This is precisely the point. *Lucia's Chapters* gives us a heightened sense of purgatorial existence. "She's looking back," says Fogarty, and

fearfully looking forward, and the thing that helps her transition is this language that her father wrote for her. She's at the end of *Finnegan's Wake*. I believe he wrote it for her because it's all about, "I go back to you my cold father, my cold, mad father." So that to me is where they sort of come together. He truly understood her and she was somewhat free in his thoughts.

In Fogarty's afterlife metaphor, James Joyce appears as a release for Lucia and an escape from her confinement in hospitalized purgatory.

But the impression that Kandel's Joyce as a menacing figure remains. That might be because, in addition to appearing as the father she so dearly loved, he also haunts Lucia's stage as the embodiment of the regret she feels at having been robbed of her chance to fulfill her artistic potential. Lucia Joyce was forced to give up her career as a dancer because her parents

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

believed it was the source of the stress and strain that caused her state of severe anxiety. Meanwhile, James Joyce's literary achievements have gone down in history as his alone, regardless of the inspiration he derived from his daughter. Maleczech and Fogarty manage to convey the profound sense of frustration and fury that the intensely creative and talented Lucia Joyce must have felt at the circumstances that conspired to ruin her life and at the same time paint a portrait of Lucia's potential. When one wants to be a modern dancer, it is probably of very little comfort to be a muse.

### **Virtuoso Performance**

Where *Dead End Kids* makes use of ensemble playing to re-envision the past and present of nuclear power, *Belén* and *Lucia's Chapters* rely on virtuoso performances to magnify the lives of women who have been swept aside in history. Maleczech plays a Lucia Joyce of mythical proportions. This eccentric figure is the motor for the entire play and we see her story unfold strictly from what Fogarty and Maleczech imagine as her own point of view, amplified by symbols of the afterlife and invested with dreamlike qualities. In *Belén*, larger than life performances run on several tracks that occasionally cross but remain distinct under Maleczech's direction. *Belén* features a striking performance by Jesusa Rodriguez, forceful and exuberant cabaret style music composed and performed by Liliana Felipe, and prominent and arresting projections by Archer that appear and disappear as if they have a life of their own. Sasanov's poems permeate the stage. They are sung by Felipe, projected on the wall, and wordlessly enacted by Rodriguez. Maleczech and company make the history and lives of their subjects in *Belén* and *Lucia's Chapters* as large in performance as they have been small in recorded history.

Maleczech's direction in *Belén* creates a space between the performer and her enactment and between the performers and each other, thereby augmenting the scale of presentation. The space between performers is emphasized by Felipe's singing and Rodriguez's near silence, the fact that Rodriguez appears not to be aware of Felipe's presence, and by placing Monica Dionne in an entirely separate area above and away from Rodriguez and Felipe for the outbursts. The projections, which give an impression of giant, two-dimensional puppets, seem driven by an unseen exterior force and help to create a sense of hyper-reality in which images and emotions are invested with acute intensity.

It is Rodriguez and Felipe's performance styles that establishes room between each of them and the audience. Rodriguez, Maleczech notes, is a seasoned cabaret performer and her natural instincts were for a broad, bold, and fluid physicality. Maleczech worked with Rodriguez to circumvent her physical routine, breaking her movement down into a precise unfolding of tiny gestures that add up to a larger picture. This is typical of Maleczech's interest in unmooring performers, herself included, from their routine physical and vocal patterns, paving the way for unanticipated discoveries. What results here, a physical landscape that seems to unfold in time lapse, has a jarring effect on the viewer. Felipe's singing and piano playing are so ferociously forceful that they prevent the audience from slipping into the easy comfort that performance by such an accomplished musician can induce. Felipe's passion and volume in the small space of the ToRaNaDa juxtaposed with Rodriguez's finely tuned alternation between stillness and hyperactivity and the grim humor that is incorporated into most of her scenarios keep the audience engaged but at bay, providing them with room to process what they are experiencing on an intellectual level.

Although Fogarty's take on the life of Lucia Joyce initially incorporated the three versions of Lucia, it became apparent to Fogarty after *Cara Lucia* that Maleczech's performance should be featured more prominently. Paul Kandel remembers lobbying Fogarty for a revised production that would do just that. "I made a big push with Sharon that *Lucia* should be done in New York, that Ruth should be seen in New York in a solo piece," he says. He initially suggested remounting the production as a fundraiser for Mabou Mines. "It would be a special event that would be centered on Ruth," Kandel says,

I wanted it to be about Ruth and this stunning performance she was doing. . . . I wanted people in New York in the theatre community to see her at the center of a piece, which she has done already, but this would be a triumphant return. . . . She's an extraordinary artist and creative performer and deserves that kind of attention, I think.

Mabou Mines has a history of mounting productions that feature individual performers, Maleczech included. In the 1970s the company produced Breuer's *B. Beaver Animation* (1974), which featured Fred Neumann's performance as well as David Warrilow's solo performance of Beckett's *The Lost Ones* (1974). And although the role of Rose was divided among the company in *Shaggy Dog Animation*, Galilee points out that Maleczech's Rose was without a doubt the center of the piece. As the composition of the company changed over the years and regularly featured performers such as Warrilow, McElduff and Mehrten left the company, Maleczech has taken on an increasing number of featured roles, though they have also occasionally gone to artistic associates such as Karen Kandel in *Peter and Wendy* (1996). Thus, Fogarty's decision to augment Maleczech's role in *Lucia's Chapters* is part of a Mabou Mines tradition—one that is now tied to Maleczech's central position in the artistic life of the company.

Maleczech's performance in *Lucia's Chapters* relies on a subtle set of performance strategies to make Lucia Joyce a star in her own right. Balancing at least three Lucias requires a

sort of juggling act on Maleczech's part. It also allows her to blur the lines between one persona and another. Fogarty describes Maleczech as an intuitive performer; indeed, Maleczech is adept at communicating these delicate internal shifts to the audience. Her performance in *Lucia's Chapters* is a constant push and pull that plays luring the audience in against keeping us at a calculated distance. Here, however, Maleczech establishes this distance with strategic shifts of internal focus. The tension the audience senses is rooted in the non-linear text and Lucia's portmanteau language and in Maleczech's muscle memory of performance history—shifts in focus were largely externalized in *Cara Lucia*, moving from one performer to another.

Maleczech's sensitive and understated shifts between personas insist that almost as soon as we are engaged with one version of Lucia, we are redirected to another. This rerouting of our attention means that even though Lucia isn't able to disappear from us physically (or the hospital caretakers we presume are lurking somewhere on the periphery), she is able to keep some part of herself private. This gives Lucia Joyce some power; she has access to information that she can choose to share or keep to her self.

Another aspect of Maleczech's performance that is both intriguing and alienating is her accent. Although, as Fogarty describes, she and Maleczech finally settled on a gentle, "old lady" British accent, there is a trace of something else hovering just beneath. It might be the "polygot" accent they considered that combines various traces of Lucia Joyce's multi-national upbringing. As with Maleczech's accent for Marie Curie, this one combines familiar qualities of accents with invented ones. The result, in both cases, lends an air of sophistication and complexity to the women Maleczech portrays. Both accents attract the attention of the audience with pronunciations that are faintly and unidentifiably familiar and sustain our interest by combining these familiar sounds with ones that are mysterious and strange. Maleczech's accent for Lucia

Joyce is one we hear almost continuously for the hour-long performance, because, for most of the time, she is the only person talking. This accent enables Maleczech to augment her presence in performances, just as Rodriguez's nearly unbroken silence in *Belén* augments hers.

Archer's projections in *Lucia's Chapters* take their cue from the play's title and are influenced by Egyptian symbols of the next world, inspired by James Joyce's reliance on the Book of the Dead in *Finnegan's Wake*. They contribute to the unreal and dreamy (sometimes nightmarish) qualities of the world we see before us, providing the context for a mythical Lucia. Another scenic element that facilitates this feeling of the fantastical is set designer Jim Clayburgh's flying chair. In *Cara Lucia*, Maleczech's pas de deux found a counterpoint in Galilee's fevered dancing as she struggled against a tether that bound her to the floor. Although the solo Lucia dances a little in *Lucia's Chapters*, it is clear that the aged, incarcerated woman we see before us has lost the physical agility and elegance of her younger and freer self. Maleczech's limited choreography also draws our attention to the physical condition of the performer herself, who is no longer capable of executing the sort of intricate dances with which the young Lucia Joyce thrilled her Paris audiences. When Maleczech's Lucia orbits her place on the stage in her chair, however, she is swooping and airy, whimsical and surprising. Lucia's flying, dancing chair is a graceful and masterful expansion of her physical presence in the space. We aren't sure whether she is controlling the chair or the chair is controlling her, but either way, she seems to enjoy the ride. Lucia's duet with the chair parallels her mental and emotional travels, which wander far and wide and sometimes seem to catch her unawares. It also makes her one and the same with her environment, as with the images projected directly onto Rodriguez's body in *Belén*.

In *Belén*, however, the images projected onto Rodriguez's body are part of a pattern of tactics underscoring her corporeal presence. The episode in which she whites up with flour and the one in which she dances in her underwear with a knife, holding its glinting form against her skin, are also associated with this trope, as is her nudity in such close proximity to the audience. These images serve to spotlight Rodriguez's body, making it appear to be hypersensitive to stimuli and emphasizing its subjectivity to outside forces. These forces are what consigned the women of *Belén* to be prisoners. "The hand that stretches out to strangle operates in full daylight and has many names," a projection warns us, "Oppression, Poverty, Injustice, Dependence."<sup>27</sup>

Both productions are conscious of the relationship between physical scale and social significance. In one of Sasanov's poems, a young girl makes herself smaller by speaking of herself in diminutives. In *Lucia's Chapters*, Lucia advocates for her own full-fledged personhood by insisting "I'm a grown woman and I don't need looking after!" By putting these women and the history surrounding them in letters and images writ large on stage, Maleczech and her collaborators insist upon their value for both the past and the present. Their productions bear the ghostly imprint of the women who suffered and died unacknowledged and misunderstood, opposite negatives of the women who were free to make these pieces.

## Conclusion

The close of the first poem in *Belén*, "A Memory of Things to Come," reads

From Belén, I can see  
how they'll lock prisoners away  
in the arms of a star

Rats will nest in the archives:

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<sup>27</sup>*Belén: A Book of Hours*, DVD.

Our history nibbled into beds.<sup>28</sup>

Here Sasanov speaks simultaneously to a desire for acknowledgment of lost histories and the improbability of recovering records that would make such recognition possible. In *Belén*, *Dead End Kids*, and *Lucia's Chapters*, Maleczech and her collaborators sift through scraps of the past and piece them together to revisit forgotten episodes or reconstruct them from a point of view that has been relegated to the off-site storage of history. What these artists lack in historical documentation they make up for with political conviction and theatrical imagination.

Although each production is characterized by a distinctive and particularized engagement with history, all require that the audience, in Maleczech's words "do something other than witness" what is unfolding before them on stage. Each production asks its audience to formulate its own "idea of history." This is no less than what the highly collaborative development process for each production demanded of its co-creators. The eclectic artistic backgrounds of these collaborators makes them particularly suited to such a task, providing them with a variety of approaches with which to interrogate research and respond theatrically. Maleczech's openness to the ideas of her collaborators makes her distinctly suited to capitalize on the expansive possibilities these artists present. It is no coincidence, then, that these productions are characterized by Maleczech's instinctive ability to recognize theatrical potential in collaborators of varied disciplines, the trust she places in these collaborators as fully invested creative partners, and her dedication to resurrecting outcasts of history. Maleczech insists upon a place for these figures and stories in the collective historical record by assuring their place on the stage night after night in performance.

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<sup>28</sup> Catherine Sasanov, *Belén: A Book of Hours*. Printed in production program supplement by Mabou Mines, Mabou Mines office archives.

While Maleczek's project is in part a recuperative effort to revitalize forgotten and misunderstood figures, her engagement with the famous scientist Marie Curie demonstrates that her initiative is a more expansive one. What distinguishes Maleczek's staging of history from that of her fellow artists is the degree to which her interpretations are shaped by the contributions of her collaborators. The result are representations that encompass a range of points of view about Maleczek's subjects, underscoring the suggestion that our understanding of history must acknowledge the multiple perspectives of its players and storytellers. Rather than present her audiences with neatly bundled packages, she hands them a puzzle to take home, inviting them to construct yet another possible configuration of the past.

### Chapter Three: FAMILY DRAMA

Love is money, Alex  
—*Hajj*

Twenty years before Maleczech took on the Joyce family drama, Mabou Mines produced *Hajj* (1983), which features (among other stories) Maleczech's relationship with her father at the time of his death. And, as with *Lucia's Chapters of Coming Forth By Day* (2007), *Hajj* is a solo piece for Maleczech. Here, however, she plays a version of herself as well as a version of her father. In Mabou Mines's *a Lear* (1990) Maleczech transforms the canonical tragic father figure into a mother, thereby turning notions of universalism on their ear. These productions reveal an interest on Maleczech's part in unsettling the traditional notion of the father figure, and by extension, all family roles and relationships. *Hajj* and *Lear* demonstrate Maleczech's interest in pushing against the boundaries of what women are allowed to say and do, on stage and in life. These productions also prod the uneasy relationship among women, art, power, and money.

Alisa Solomon, the dramaturg for *Lear*, takes aim at Richard Schechner's claim that we have arrived at the end of humanism by suggesting that perhaps, instead, we have arrived at "the end of the patriarchy."<sup>1</sup> Maleczech as *Lear*, Solomon argues, removes universalism from its presumed association with the male perspective and forces audiences to consider the constructed nature of gendered behavior.

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<sup>1</sup> Alisa Solomon, *Re-dressing the Canon: Essays on Theatre and Gender* (New York: University of Michigan Press, 2002), 137. Solomon also argues that, likewise, the choice to cast black actors in the roles of Gloucester and Edna/Edgar challenges *Lear's* link to whiteness.

If *Lear* disentangles universalism from patriarchy, then *Hajj* unravels the tie that binds paternity and power. *Hajj* began as a poem, not a performance piece. Breuer wrote it about a friend who had committed suicide before Maleczek could pay her back for a loan of forty dollars. Later, when Maleczek's father took his life before she could repay her debt to him, Breuer adapted the poem into a performance piece for Maleczek. In it, Maleczek dresses up as her father by putting a latex mask of his face over her own, which we recognize from a projected photograph we have seen earlier. Shortly thereafter, she rips off half of the mask to reveal herself. Maleczek puts her father's words in her mouth as she simultaneously resurrects him and takes possession of him. These permutations chart a course over the bumpy terrain of a father/daughter relationship, ultimately unmooring it from its traditional power dynamics.

This project, first produced in 1983 at the New York Shakespeare Festival's Public Theater, epitomizes Mabou Mines's collective structure and independent thinking. According to Maleczek, the collaborators worked with a striking degree of autonomy on their various contributions—she on her performance, Breuer on his text, Julie Archer on her installation, and Craig Jones on his film and projections. And although Breuer maintains he was the director of the project, according to Maleczek, the original credits for the production did not list a director (a claim that is supported by archival publicity records). “There couldn't be a singular decider of things” in *Hajj*, says Maleczek, “because it was so complex.” The piece came together because “eventually we all bent our efforts to realize the writing.”<sup>2</sup> Archer affirms Maleczek's contention that the collaborators worked without a director. “We all worked on it,” she says “and, with the exception of the writing, we all weighed in on all aspects of it. We moved forward

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<sup>2</sup> Unless otherwise noted, all quotations by Ruth Maleczek are taken from interviews conducted by the author between July and September 2011.

collaboratively. We worked by sort of piling on and pulling off and piling on and pulling off.”<sup>3</sup> Karen Kandel, a Mabou Mines artistic associate whose first project with the company was *Lear*, suggests that the conflicting opinions about Breuer’s role may be a question of semantics. The question, she says, is “what does a director mean to Ruth.” In any event, the process that Maleczech and Archer describe indicates that each of the creators, Breuer, Archer, Jones, and Maleczech, worked on separate tracks, putting their contributions in conversation with each other in the rehearsal room.

After embodying her own father on stage, Maleczech took on King Lear in the company’s 1990 production, in a project also highly characteristic of Mabou Mines’s collective process. While this production undoubtedly had a single director in Breuer, it was Maleczech who initiated the process. She wanted the right to put Lear’s words in her mouth, having thought about them for years after spending every performance of the play backstage as wardrobe mistress for Michael O’Sullivan’s performance at the San Francisco Actor’s Workshop in 1961. Once again, Maleczech took possession of a man’s words and performance, not only by playing Lear, but by basing her approach to the role on O’Sullivan’s. This time, the father figure was a fictional one.

*Hajj* and *Lear* are perhaps the two projects that best epitomize Mabou Mines’s overarching artistic approach: *Hajj* began without a director and *Lear* was initiated by a performer. In addition, *Hajj*, in referencing Maleczech’s first directing project and in its use of a collective process, tells a kind meta-history of the company. “People were quite independent in the pursuit of what they were doing” on *Hajj*, Maleczech says, “I felt quite independent as a performer.” This is deeply connected to the company’s commitment to artistic autonomy and

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<sup>3</sup> All quotations by Julie Archer in this chapter are taken from an interview conducted by the author in November 2011.

flexibility. Mabou Mines “didn’t want people to feel that they were stuck in whatever their initial artistic role was,” Maleczech explains, “whether it was as a director or as a performer.” The company wanted “to formalize the fact” that actors could initiate projects, as David Warrilow did with productions such as *The Lost Ones* (1975) and as Maleczech did with *Lear*. If *Lear* formalizes the idea that performers could originate productions for the company, *Hajj* formalizes an earnestly autonomous and collective process for the company, even if Breuer did, as he suggests, fulfill certain directorial functions. This autonomy within the collective allowed Maleczech to explore what, by the time *Lear* was produced, had become enduring artistic concerns about money, power, family, and gender. Thus, the nature of the collaborative—in some instances collective—processes in *Hajj* and *Lear* present structural as well as aesthetic challenges to patriarchal conventions.

### **Money Problems Are Family Problems**

If *Hajj* and *Lear* are both about fathers, they are also both about money. In *Hajj*, Maleczech is a female performer whose “name is debtor.” In *Lear*, she begins as a rich matriarch with the luxury of playing favorites in the division of her earthly possessions and ends in penniless misery. This financial trouble is part of the family autobiography of Mabou Mines, not to mention part of the autobiography of almost every artist. “My life is about money,” said Breuer, when asked whether it was significant that both *Hajj* and *Lear* concern wealth, or a lack there of.<sup>4</sup> In these productions, money troubles are also gendered. *Hajj* engages with aspects of Maleczech’s career as well as with her life. Maleczech, a female artist, borrowed the money she needed from her father in order to protect her Mabou Mines family against the possibility of her

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<sup>4</sup> Unless otherwise noted, all quotations by Lee Breuer are taken from an interview by the author conducted in July 2011.

financial failure in her directing debut, *Vanishing Pictures*, and this is the debt she owes to him at the time of his death. In Mabou Mines's cross-gendered *Lear*, the matriarch suffers for her presumption that she has the power to amass and redistribute land and goods. She has doubly emasculated her sons, first by having served as the provider for her family, and then by having bestowed upon her male children their inheritances from her. In *Hajj*, the patriarch holds the purse strings and the power until the performer repossesses both.

Several years before *Hajj*, Maleczech offered to work with Beverly Brown, who was developing what became *Vanishing Pictures* (1980) at ReCherChez, an early version of what is now Mabou Mines's resident artists program, Mabou Mines/*Suite*. ReCherChez, founded by Maleczech, Breuer, and Bill Raymond was, according to Maleczech, the namesake of Ray Charles, Cher, and "chez moi." But it also harkens to the notion and act of research.<sup>5</sup> Maleczech suggests that her work with ReCherChez artists taught her how to look at the work of other artists productively. As a mentor, Maleczech explains, "you learn how to encourage and critically respond to work that is not your own. And in fact, to work that you probably wouldn't ever make, maybe even a kind of work that—not that you didn't like, but that wasn't intrinsic to your artistic growth as you saw it."

One of the artists whom Maleczech mentored was Beverly Brown. Predominantly a French art song chanteuse, Brown had created a story for the songs that she performed based on research into the murder of Mary Rogers, New York's "beautiful cigar girl," upon whom Edgar Allen Poe had based his story "The Mystery of Marie Rogêt." Brown's piece, as Maleczech

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<sup>5</sup> In Iris Smith Fischer's thorough account of ReCherChez, she quotes Maleczech as tracing the name of the program to the "colloquial French," meaning "a bit old-fashioned." The two descriptions by Maleczech are not, of course, mutually exclusive. For Smith Fisher's discussion of ReCherChez and *Vanishing Pictures*, see *Mabou Mines: Making Avant-Garde Theater in the 1970s* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2011), 163-99.

describes it, “was good—really good,” but it needed work. Maleczech saw a way she could help, and offered to direct. Wary of spending company funds on her first directing project, she borrowed the money to produce the show from her father. Maleczech also co-designed the project with Julie Archer, and despite Maleczech’s initial trepidation about the potential for the project’s success under her directorial purview, the pair won an OBIE award for their design of the show.

Maleczech’s choice to take on the role of director in *Vanishing Pictures* can be read as a parental act—she saw potential in one of her pupils and wanted to nurture and support it so that it could blossom. Maleczech’s decision to move from outside observer to direct participant deepened her relationship to the project. When the family of collaborators on *Vanishing Pictures* needed money to produce the project, Maleczech turned to her biological family, a decision that highlights the profound connection Maleczech makes between her art and her life. For her, the process of making theatre is a family drama. When Maleczech’s father died before she could fully repay her debt for *Vanishing Pictures*, it paved the way for the creation of *Hajj*, which blends Maleczech’s artistic family with her biological one.

In a 1982 document describing *Hajj*, Breuer writes that the performance poem is “a simultaneous pilgrimage into the future and the past...concerned with the relationship between emotional and fiscal debt.”<sup>6</sup> Maleczech borrowed three thousand dollars from her father to produce *Vanishing Pictures*. When he died, she had paid him back ninety percent of what she had borrowed—all but two hundred and fifty dollars. But her failure to return the whole sum casts her in a disgraceful light in the eyes of her father, or so believes the performer in *Hajj*, who probably sees herself the way Maleczech thinks her father saw her. Maleczech, as the daughter

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<sup>6</sup> Production Files, Mabou Mines Archive, Fales Library and Special Collections, New York University, Series IIIA, Box 9, Folder 368.

in *Hajj*, is angry that she has dishonored herself by failing to pay her father back. Or maybe she is angry that she has had to borrow the money in the first place. “We usually don’t have enough money to do what we want to do,” says Breuer of Mabou Mines, and

usually we get a little bit desperate about trying to put our concepts together because of the lack of funds. And everybody has to learn to deal with that—to cut down or to go into debt or whatever—and I’m really bad at that and Ruth’s really bad at that. We both want to have everything, you know, our cake and eat it too.

In life, the money Maleczek borrowed from her father was the means to a highly desired end. In *Hajj*, it becomes a source of desperation. Once borrowed and now never to be repaid, it has carved out a space of longing and regret—a sort of buyer’s remorse—through which the performer must navigate.

The sons in *Lear* are frustrated that they are beholden to their dominant mother for their inheritance. In this case, their acts against her become vengeance for having placed them in a subservient position. Breuer contends that, in *Lear*, power “is perceived in economic terms.” Although Breuer also suggests these power dynamics are not tied to gender, stating “the idea and the fundamental question in *Lear* is whether power has its own behavior or whether it is tied to sex or race. My position is that power has its own behavior,” I argue that the economics in *Lear* are, in fact, gendered.<sup>7</sup> As the male Regan and Goneril begin to chip away at their mother’s remaining assets—her retinue, for example—they seem to perceive their own actions as setting the universe right. In Shakespeare’s text, they use Lear’s age as an excuse to edge their father out. The reverse gender casting here tells a second story. It isn’t just Lear’s age, but her gender

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<sup>7</sup> Lee Breuer as quoted in Gabrielle Cody and Lee Breuer, “Lee Breuer on Interculturalism,” Special Issue, *Performing Arts Journal: The Interculturalism Issue* 11, no. 3-12, no. 1 (1989): 62-63.

that makes her unfit to reign. Patriarchal though aspects of this staged society may be, Regan and Goneril still see their mother's economic power as unnatural.

Maleczech and Breuer are no strangers to the drama of financial strain. Their focus on this theme in these productions echoes their constant concern over economics throughout the company's forty-two-year history. Iris Smith Fischer's article, "Mabou Mines' *Lear*: A Narrative of Collective Authorship," outlines and analyzes the financial complexities the company faced during its development process for *Lear*. She argues that collective authorship extends beyond the company's collective structure to all of the collaborators in the piece, in which she includes financial ones. The artistic process for *Lear*, Smith Fischer suggests, took on characteristics of the financial development process. Work on *Lear*, she notes, was slow and disjointed because Mabou Mines lacked the funds to keep such a large company of actors together. Smith Fischer also points out that although Mabou Mines was criticized during *Lear* for embracing corporate sponsorship by companies such as AT&T, they, and other downtowners such as La Mama, had been receiving corporate and government sponsorship for quite some time.<sup>8</sup> Mabou Mines had, in fact, also received corporate sponsorship from Sony for *Hajj*, which allowed them to work with the expensive technical equipment they needed for rehearsals.

The staged anxiety over family finances in *Hajj* and *Lear* find a real life parallel in Maleczech and Breuer's longtime frustration and worry over Mabou Mines's finances. Maleczech reports that the year after their residency at the Public Theater ended in the 1980s, the company lost \$70,000. "We've sometimes had big, big deficits," she says, and those concerns have only grown with time, despite occasionally covering costs with earned income as the

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<sup>8</sup> Iris Smith Fischer, "Mabou Mines's 'Lear': A Narrative of Collective Authorship," *Theatre Journal* 45, no. 3 (1993): 279-302.

company was able to do by touring Mabou Mines's *Dollhouse*. "We really like earned income,"

Maleczech explains,

but you can't always manage it when you are wrestling with these works that are so hard to make and that take so long to develop. And now there's no institutional support for anyone, unless there are subscribers or unless you are really a big multi-million dollar company. We used to get significant support from the NEA and NYSCA, neither of which you can get now at a level that would be commensurate with artistic excellence over such a long period of time. I mean, we've had some duds, but for the most part this company is very well respected worldwide. Now you can only really get funding for a specific project from the NEA and NYSCA. This makes it really difficult to continue the operations that make those projects possible—  
we sometimes don't have the money to employ the right number of staff, for example, or at the right level, so that's become really, really difficult.

For his part, Breuer argues that downtown theatre plays a vital role in New York's economy, one for which Mabou Mines has never been financially compensated. "The city lives on tourism," he says, and

theatre is a gate to tourism and downtown is the key. It's kind of like the laboratory for uptown. Whenever they can come down and steal anything that was invented downtown, they'll take it uptown. So the point is, we should be paid a research and development fee by Broadway. But we're not and that's the whole point. If we were in the car industry and we were inventing a bumper, we'd be paid a research and development fee. But we're not. So that's a little bit of the problem.

Breuer's comments are part of a lineage of complaints of this nature that originate with the establishment of off-off Broadway.<sup>9</sup> The artistic treatments of financial strain in *Hajj* and *Lear*, taken together with Maleczech and Breuer's very real concern about keeping the company solvent during difficult economic times establish what is an enduring concern for the company.

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<sup>9</sup> See Stephen Bottoms's extensive discussion of this subject in his book *Playing Underground* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2004).

## Rip offs

“I rip you off,” says Maleczek as she peels the mask of her father off her face in *Hajj*. This refers to the activity in which she is engaged as well as to her father’s perception of her failure to pay back in full the money she owes him. But it also refers to Maleczek’s stage enactment of her father: she impersonates him by putting his face on hers, she interprets his feelings about her debt and presents them to us, and she puts words in his mouth by speaking in character as him. And because he is dead, he can’t respond, so we are left with the version of events she and Breuer present to us in *Hajj*. She owns the character she has created for him in this staging, and she says so: “here in the dark box of my throat I bring you back to life.” In any case, as she points out, she has always carried him around anyway—she shares his DNA. “You can’t leave me; that plan has a flaw/We’ll never sort each other’s atoms out,” she says.<sup>10</sup>

In a sense, the process for creating *Hajj* mirrors the grieving process of a family who has lost one of its own. Just as each family member mourns both individually and collectively, each of the *Hajj* collaborators worked autonomously on his or her artistic contribution to the piece, conscious that there were others working independently alongside. Throughout the process, the separate tracks would repeatedly converge, as collaborators met to discuss the project and to rehearse. Because *Hajj* rehearsed in front of audiences as a stipulation of a grant from Sony providing the expensive technical equipment the company needed to use in rehearsal, the convergence of separate artistic tracks in rehearsal became parallel to an act of public grieving. Indeed, the final portion of the performance poem is a eulogy for Maleczek’s father, Alexander

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<sup>10</sup> Lee Breuer, “Performances: *Hajj*” in *Sister Suzie Cinema: The Collected Poems and Performances, 1976-1986* (New York: Theatre Communications Group, 1987), 122.

Lujak, who “killed himself with a deer rifle /In the bedroom of his home” at the age of seventy-one.<sup>11</sup>

While Brown pieced together a narrative for her series of songs, the collaborators on *Hajj* created a series of multi-media scenes, images and sounds that wove in and out of the narrative of Maleczech’s life. Mabou Mines’s relied on Sony for video cameras and television sets that would broadcast a live feed of Maleczech. This kind of equipment has, since the 1990s, been regularly incorporated into theatrical performances, but Mabou Mines’s relationship with Sony provided what was, at the time, rare and expensive equipment, demonstrating the ground-breaking nature of their incorporation of technology on this production. This technology is used for emotional effect, juxtaposing Maleczech’s projected image against her live presence so that it reveals aspects of her history to us and to herself. A company project description suggests “through the medium of performance, it is a poem come alive. The story begins simply: an actress sits at a make-up table and discovers clues to the meaning of her life in the implications of her reflection. She finds a metaphor for her art in terms of ‘a pilgrimage of the heart (Hajj)’ into her memory and her spiritual history.”<sup>12</sup>

*Hajj* refers to the annual pilgrimage to Mecca. It is a trip, Maleczech says, “to try to repay an un-payable debt.” The pilgrimage in the Mabou Mines production is based on a journey Maleczech took as an eight-year-old girl. Smith Fischer describes Maleczech’s move from Cleveland to Arizona as “a defining moment.”<sup>13</sup> Indeed, the most unusual journey would make a strong impression on any child. Maleczech made the long drive with her father. Lujak, concerned that his daughter would be afraid to sleep in the truck at night, arranged the furniture

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 119. Hereafter cited as *Hajj*.

<sup>12</sup> “*Hajj* Project Description,” Production Files, Mabou Mines Archives, Fales Library and Special Collections, New York University, Series IIIA, Box 9, Folder 367.

<sup>13</sup> Smith Fischer, *Mabou Mines: Making Avant-Garde Theater in the 1970s*, 37.

in the back of the vehicle exactly as it had appeared in Maleczech's bedroom in Cleveland. This father-daughter road trip is adapted in Jones's film in *Hajj* to one featuring Phil Schenk as the father and Lute Ramblin', the son of Maleczech and Breuer, as the child. Breuer explains that the decision to use their son was based on his physical likeness to Maleczech rather than an attempt to scramble gender signals. But despite Breuer's contention that the choice has nothing to do with gender, in practice it serves as a subtle introduction to the way in which gender is played against personal history to reveal cracks in the traditional family structure, posing a challenge to the gender identities that a conventional family configuration promotes.

Maleczech eulogizes her father with his mask on her face. She pays homage to Alexander Lujak by delivering his eulogy and simultaneously rebels against him by holding him hostage to her version of his life. Maleczech pulls a similar hijacking maneuver in Mabou Mines's *Lear* as she resurrects Michael O'Sullivan's performance as the tragic father figure, honoring his performance while at the same time taking possession of it. As we shall see, putting *Lear*'s words in her mouth was personal as well as political.

Although it was Breuer who reaped the more immediate artistic benefits during the time the pair spent at the San Francisco Actors Workshop in the early 1960s, Maleczech was deeply and tangibly influenced by what she experienced there as well. While Breuer served as Blau's assistant director and even directed a few small-scale productions himself, Maleczech was putting in hours as a production coordinator and wardrobe mistress. There was a highly active theatre scene in San Francisco in the 1960s, but, says Maleczech, the Actor's Workshop "was serious—very serious, and they investigated European theatre. That was the first place where I ever read Genet or Beckett or Ionesco or Dürrenmatt." The distinctive approach to theatre cultivated by Blau and Irving was what prompted Maleczech to serve in technical roles she had

never before undertaken. She was performing in the Bay area—as Emily in *Our Town* with the Interplayers—but the European late avant-garde plays promoted by Blau were different than anything Maleczech had encountered. “Those plays,” she says,

don’t fit American realism in the way *Our Town* does, even though *Our Town* is a very great play. It is a different requirement from the performer. So I got very steeped in trying to understand what Herb was trying to do. He has a very intellectual and a very brilliant mind, and it was very difficult to get how to apply what it was that he was interested in making these pieces talk about as an actor and a performer.<sup>14</sup>

It was her role as a dresser that provided her with particularly potent material for later use.

Each night, Maleczech sat backstage and watched Michael O’Sullivan perform as *King Lear* under Blau’s direction in a production she describes as “wonderful.” It was so wonderful, in fact, that she memorized it. Breuer, who served as Blau’s assistant director on *King Lear*, describes a concept inspired by Keltic Ireland and set in a tribal world of 600 AD. Echoing Maleczech’s praise of O’Sullivan, Breuer calls the performance “genius.” O’Sullivan’s approach, Breuer explains, was “a very large classical interpretation that moved toward Expressionist. He used a lot of Michael Chekhov-ish styles—symbolic gesturing and things like that. He was like a great big spider throughout the stage—a senile spider—and he was quite brilliant.”

There were barriers to the dresser Maleczech enacting such a performance, however. One was that, as Maleczech explains, she “wasn’t considered good enough to be an actor” at the Actor’s Workshop, or a paid professional of any kind. “I didn’t ask for money to buy soap,” she says. Although she performed in several small roles there, including the production of *Twinkling*

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<sup>14</sup> Although elements such as Thornton Wilder’s use of the stage manager distinguish *Our Town* stylistically from realism, Maleczech is suggesting that the acting approach of the performer in *Our Town* has more in common with what is required for realism than with what is asked of the Beckett performer, for example.

*of an Eye* directed by Alan Schneider, Maleczech wasn't one of the company members who received a living wage, and although she was committed to being a part of the Workshop regardless of financial compensation, this may have contributed to a feeling of being a second-class citizen. The other, more obvious reason is that she is a woman.

Inspired by O'Sullivan's performance, "I just wanted to say the words," Maleczech says, "and of course I realized very quickly that there wasn't a way for me to say those words—there wasn't a provision for any woman, not only me, but any woman to say those words." The memory of O'Sullivan's performance, which fueled Maleczech's desire to say words with no provision for her to say, was the impetus for Mabou Mines's *Lear*. The context for Maleczech's initiation of this project makes it clear that the resulting gender-reversed production was not the brainchild of Breuer alone, to whom the artistic vision of the production has been almost universally ascribed. In fact, Breuer, according to Maleczech, "asked if he could direct" the production. Maleczech, in her role as co-artistic director, created an opportunity for herself to "say those words."

But Breuer contradicts Maleczech's assertion that her performance was based on O'Sullivan's. "The interpretation that I was interested in," he says,

had almost nothing to do with Michael O'Sullivan's interpretation of that part, and though I think Ruth's was very brilliant and Michael's was very brilliant, I think the concepts were so totally different that any real imitation of Michael O'Sullivan would be destructive to Ruth's performance.

Breuer suggests that imitation on Maleczech's part would be incongruous both in the way in which it would relate to his directorial conception for Mabou Mines's *Lear* and in the context of Maleczech's physical presence as a performer:

Michael was six-foot-six and Ruth is five-foot-three and that, in a sense, means that because of their movement structure and their

character build, one cannot be an imitation of the other. Plus one took place in 1954 in Georgia and the other took place in 600 AD in the Keltic world. I think that what I really feel is that both of us were inspired to do *Lear* by Michael, but as far as imitating any of his stuff, as good as it was, it would be wrong for this concept.

Maleczech's description of her own development process, however, tells a different story.

During the rehearsal process for *Lear*, an early stage of which is captured on film in Jill Godmillow's documentary film, *Lear '87 Archive*, a reporter from the *Atlantic Monthly* asks Maleczech why she wanted to play Lear. "Because I saw a very great performance of the role," she tells him,

I saw it fifty-three times in 1962, at a time when performances in the theatre were as ephemeral as the theatre truly is. There were no videotapes and very few pictures, so no one knows about this performance, but I do. And I wanted to repeat it.

When Michael O'Sullivan played the role of the mythical aging patriarch, he was a gay, twenty-seven year old man who, according to Breuer, completely dwarfed Maleczech physically. He is, perhaps, an improbable font of inspiration for a female performer in her late forties. How much will she copy, the reporter wonders? "I'm going to steal as much as I can remember," Maleczech tells him, and I can remember a lot."<sup>15</sup>

Karen Kandel recalls a rehearsal process for *Lear* that contextualizes, to some extent, Maleczech and Breuer's contrasting recollections. Kandel says of the workshop sessions that marked the first phase of the process, "lots of people said things like, 'I don't think that's right, I disagree.'" Kandel's memory is borne out by the portions of this phase that were recorded on film for Godmillow's documentary. Furthermore, Kandel suggests, it was Maleczech and Breuer

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<sup>15</sup> Ruth Maleczech in *Lear '87 Archive*, disk 1, hour 2, directed by Jill Godmillow (Laboratory for Icon & Idiom, Inc., 2001), DVD.

who set the tone for this open dialogue among collaborators. “It’s a very old relationship, so there was an understanding between them that is clear,” says Kandel,

They would have discussions, differences of opinion, disagreements about something, but it was always very smart and respectful. But it could get heated, and sometimes she would take him out of the room to talk about the project. But the reason they work so well together is because Lee trusts her. He would sometimes get her to go further or do something crazy, which sometimes she would try. It was like short hand. . . . Sometimes he would try to convince her, he would try to come at it another way, but sometimes she would say no.

As Kandel’s comments indicate, the divergence between Breuer and Maleczech’s points of view about the same project is characteristic of the Mabou Mines process. In Deborah Saivetz’s book on JoAnne Akalaitis, the former Mabou Mines co-artistic director describes a typical process as one in which everyone gives feedback on everything which, while occasionally frustrating, empowers actors and designers to do more than simply execute the director’s divine vision.<sup>16</sup> While Maleczech has clearly tempered her approach so that it exists within the universe Breuer conceptualized for the production, the degree of control and manipulation she exerted over her source material and her development process speaks to the freedom and independence of the Mabou Mines performer—values promoted by Maleczech herself as co-artistic director.

Maleczech’s *Lear* is an homage to an artist from whom she drew inspiration. But Maleczech simultaneously upends O’Sullivan’s performance, along with the tradition that established what she saw as her primary obstacle in “saying those words.” Maleczech honors O’Sullivan, but she also rips him off, utilizing her interpretation of his performance to promote her own politicized theatrical agenda. The value Mabou Mines places on empowerment and

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<sup>16</sup>Saivetz, Deborah. *An Event in Space: JoAnne Akalaitis in Rehearsal*. (Hanover: Smith and Kraus, 2000), 63.

autonomy for the performer means not only could Maleczech initiate a project in order to play a particular part, she is also free to decide how she will approach the role. In this context, the choice to produce a gender-reversed *Lear* isn't at all the "arbitrary gender change" Elin Diamond describes in her 1990 review.<sup>17</sup> Smith Fischer points out that Breuer saw gender as only one obstacle among many that prevented Maleczech from playing Lear, while Maleczech saw it as *the* obstacle.<sup>18</sup> Privileging Breuer's view of the production over Maleczech's goes against the grain of the collective process and the autonomy of the performer that Mabou Mines's work has promoted. Reading the production from Maleczech's point of view posits *Lear* as a sort of coming of age for Maleczech as an artist who had travelled a long way from her Actor's Workshop days, when she was not considered one. It also means that her initiation of this project established a context for a production in which many women could say words for which there had been "no provision" for them to say.<sup>19</sup>

With *Lear*, Maleczech leverages her fascination with O'Sullivan's performance into a political statement about what words women have access to onstage. In *Hajj*, her muscular adaptation of her father's character and their family history puts her into the position of power in their relationship.

### **Performing the Gender Gap**

In 1989, Richard Schechner argued "for a dance and theatre where several different kinds of responses are possible: times when perceiving the race, gender, etc., of performers matter; and times when it should not even be perceived...because spectators have been trained to be

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<sup>17</sup> Elin Diamond, "Review," *Theatre Journal* 42, no. 4 (December, 1990): 484.

<sup>18</sup> Smith Fischer, "Mabou Mines's 'Lear': A Narrative of Collective Authorship," 279.

<sup>19</sup> Maleczech's creation of this provision even garnered an OBIE award for Karen Kandel's performance of Edna, who is the Mabou Mines's *Lear* version of Edgar.

race, gender, age, and body-type ‘blind.’”<sup>20</sup> Maleczek’s performances in *Hajj* and *Lear* fall into Schechner’s first category: in each case, the perception of gender matters; in each case, we perceive what Schechner refers to as the “gap” between the performer and the role she plays.

But this strategy is employed differently in each production. In *Hajj*, we see a woman enacting her father and we are aware of the gender gap we perceive viscerally in the moment of performance. Here, Maleczek’s presence and her enactment of her father present the gap. In *Lear*, the gender gap exists because of assumptions the audience has inherited about the role of Lear. Breuer describes himself as a “dialectical director,” explaining that “you’re supposed to think and feel two different things and then you’re supposed to sit back and analyze the difference between your feeling and your thinking and that is the synthesis.” The gender gap in these productions functions as one of Breuer’s dialectical strategies. It functions similarly for Maleczek. “The kind of performance that Ruth gives in *Hajj*,” Breuer explains, “is too complex to say that it is directed toward having a particular effect,” he says. Instead, Breuer suggests, she engages the audience by requiring that they do the work of interpreting her representation. This is typical of Maleczek’s approach. “Ruth does understand and work with on this dialectical method,” Breuer says.

In *Lear*, the gap exists between the audience’s preconceptions, supported by Shakespeare’s text, and the space of Maleczek’s female *Lear*. Without our knowledge of this history, the gap between Maleczek and her Lear would be less potent (although we still might register the staged presentation of a matriarchal society as subversive). Rather than present the gap between her presence and the text, Maleczek’s approach to the performance is to absorb the adaptation wholly. Solomon writes that, while “the play first sets up a back-and-forth between

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<sup>20</sup> Richard Schechner, “Race Free, Gender Free, Body-Type Free, Age Free Casting,” *TDR* 33, no. 1 (Spring, 1989): 9.

what I see on the stage and what I recall in my mind,” what she describes as “the imposing image of the tradition” quickly gives way to “the live stage experience. The comparisons stop. Lear becomes every inch a woman.”<sup>21</sup> This attests to both the seamlessness of the adapted text, which replaces pronouns, changes references to royalty, and tailors the Fool’s jokes for contemporary humor; and to Maleczech’s ability as a performer to suspend disbelief. It is in the moments when the audience member simultaneously registers Maleczech as performer and confronts the way the role was originally written and has traditionally been staged and that the gender gap exists in *Lear*.

Attempting to suspend the audience’s disbelief is a calculated performance choice. While it might be more overtly political to play a female Lear at arm’s length, employing alienating strategies that make it plain that a gap exists between the text/history and the performance or perhaps utilizing the feminist gestus advocated by Diamond, Maleczech’s choice to enmesh herself in the role fully is in fact equally political. Breuer’s point of view about casting, although less idealistic than Schechner’s, supports Maleczech’s methods here. “I don’t believe in color-blind and gender-blind casting,” he has said, “you can’t say you don’t see what you see. But I do believe in the idea of conceptualizing a particular production to allow for various races, actors, actresses to take part in this representation.”<sup>22</sup>

Maleczech’s acting approach, and indeed that of the entire cast, makes her (and them) a part of the representation rather than placing them outside of the representation in order point to it. As Greg Mehrten, a former company member who created the production’s drag queen Fool, recalls, “we tried to play the real part. We had the real lines and of course Lear is such a famous

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<sup>21</sup> Solomon, 139.

<sup>22</sup> Lee Breuer, “Lee Breuer on Interculturalism,” 62.

part, and we had to seriously try to play the part and let Lee deal with the overall concept.”<sup>23</sup>

Maleczech’s decision to establish heightened emotional reality, to “be” Lear, gives her full possession of the role, the play, and its history for the interval of her performance.

The cross-gendered production is nonetheless dialectical (in Breuer’s sense of the word), because the audience is confronted with a Lear who was written as a man but is played by a woman. Breuer argues that, in this production, Lear’s “power moves” have the “aura of male movement, not the aura of female movement” because Lear has obtained “power in a male-oriented world.” Further supporting a dialectical experience for the audience is Mehrten’s suggestion that

Mabou Mines’s style of acting is not the kind of acting where the actor disappears and you believe that this person is really in the 1950s South but somehow speaking Shakespearian English. It’s more that the actors try to find something within themselves that they can grasp onto to portray the character. It’s not really showing that thing but it’s using it; it’s using yourself.

Thus, the audience must process the biologically female Maleczech playing a behaviorally male Lear in performance. The challenge to the audience is couched subtly because the production does not exaggerate Lear’s maleness or Maleczech’s femaleness. Rather, Breuer and Maleczech invite the two sides of this Lear to coexist.

Maleczech’s approach in *Hajj* takes a more directly confrontational tack by relentlessly reminding the audience that even though Maleczech isn’t her father, she can’t get him out of her system. In *Lear*, Maleczech cradles her fictional son Cordelion, played by her biological son with Breuer, Lute Ramblin’, in her lap in a rocking chair on the porch as she weeps over his unconscious body. In *Hajj*, Maleczech associates herself with the child we see in the film, also

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<sup>23</sup> All quotations by Greg Mehrten are taken from an interview conducted by the author on July 28, 2011.

played by Ramblin', by speaking the text along with him, her voice sometimes replacing his as he appears to mouth her words on film. The child in *Hajj* is cradled in his father's arms as he talks in his sleep on screen, but Maleczech is alone on stage and the audience is made painfully aware of her solitary state as she sings a lullaby and cradles herself in her own arms. In *Hajj*, the flickering of Ramblin's eyelids as he talks makes us aware that he is only pretending to sleep, while in *Lear*, the adolescent performer adroitly feigns Cordelion as corpse, remaining limp as Lear keens over him. The formal difference in each production allows Maleczech to expose the theatrical devices used to portray emotion in *Hajj* and to deploy similar but this time invisible devices in *Lear*.

The diverse formal strategies that allow Maleczech to portray a character in *Lear* and present a range of characters in *Hajj* dictate the way gender plays out in each production. At the end of *Hajj*, when Maleczech simultaneously eulogizes and enacts her father, her voice is gradually electronically lowered, passing from her own vocal range, through the range of a man's voice, and down to a level we can only imagine is the range in which monsters, aliens, or robots might speak. The electronic alteration moves back up again too, finally leaving us with Maleczech's natural voice for the closing lines of the play. This aural play underlines the fact that Maleczech isn't her father and isn't trying to make us think she is, even as she shows a version of him to us on stage. It also exposes the superficiality of our associations with gender at the most basic level—men have low voices; women speak in a higher register. Theatre can change all of that, Maleczech seems to taunt, as she dances around the stage in a latex mask of a man's face, sporting an oversized man's jacket and speaking in impossibly low tones.

In *Lear*, however, costume and physical choices make the most of Maleczech's naturally feminine physique. Her *Lear* wears a flowing skirt topped by a business-like jacket and a dainty

hat as if she were born in them and stomps around the stage in sensible black heels like a female CEO in a china shop. “Look at every powerful woman CEO in New York,” Breuer says, “because you’re looking at Lear.” Maleczek’s physical presence, which Diamond describes as a “stocky body” bearing “witness to its own maternal history,” is emphasized to make us believe that she is every inch the aging matriarch the production says she is.<sup>24</sup> While her voice lowers to a growl when she tells us of her “darker purpose” or rises to cloying sweetness when she urges Regan to take her side against Goneril, it is never presented as anything other than a finely honed natural instrument utilized to express potent character choices. Breuer’s choice to employ body mics further enhances the use of Maleczek’s natural voice by allowing her to make subtler choices than would be possible were it necessary for her to consistently project in order to be heard. Here the body mic is put to much different use than is the hand held one in *Hajj*.

Although the means to the end in each case are different, these gendered performances point to a key characteristic in Maleczek’s work. Her choices don’t erase gender or create gender ambiguity. Rather, the roles she takes on and the way she plays them out subtly reveal and challenge power relationships by playing constructs of masculinity and femininity against each other to reveal a false binary. In each production, Maleczek’s choices are supported and enhanced by Breuer’s dialectical directing strategies.

### **A Mythological Father Mother and a Fool in Drag**

In *Lear*, Maleczek’s is a subtly subversive rebellion, devoid of fiery rhetoric or political posturing. Her insurrection lies in doing the thing in the first place, and doing it convincingly. Maleczek’s persuasive performance, taking its cue from O’Sullivan’s, musters a high tragic

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<sup>24</sup> Diamond, 483.

approach, capitalizing on charged gestures and utilizing the extreme ranges of her natural voice to express heightened emotional states. “I remember her roar,” says Kandel, “and I remember her vulnerability. Those extremes were exciting and also different. Where she roared, how she roared, and also how Lear was manipulative with her vulnerability—Ruth just worked every angle of her being.” Greg Mehrten remembers that some of Maleczek’s choices were derived from O’Sullivan’s performance:

I remember Ruth saying that Michael had used a lot of Delsartian stuff, and she just kind of lifted it from his performance and she did them in the show because they were very classic—kind of grand theatrical gestures. I remember asking her once, “are you doing that on purpose to look like that?” And she said yes; that it was this system of gestures that that came from him, from Michael’s performance.

Maleczek’s physical vocabulary is sometimes reserved and sometimes abandoned, but always controlled. We sense, lurking within her, a certain energy and readiness. Her entrance displays confident bearing, regal but a bit stooped. She leans on a cane but moves as if she owns the space, which, until the close of this opening scene, she does. Maleczek’s Lear maintains her steadiness as she metes out Cordelion’s sentence from a lawn chair, looking as entitled as a business executive letting go of a longtime employee. She moves happily and busily as she multitasks feeding her dogs and breezily hiring Kent, played by the excellent Lola Pashalinski. But her physical state begins to change as Lear registers the newly reduced position her sons have designed for her. At the first sign that Goneril will enforce a drastic limitation on the dogs in Lear’s entourage (here dogs replace men), she staggers forward as if the air has been knocked out of her but has the wherewithal to swat him on the side of the head using a rolled newspaper. This swat displays a swift economy of movement, but we see this physical pluckiness drain out of Maleczek’s Lear as the events of the play unfold. By the time Cordelion comes back to her

she is nearly catatonic, sitting in a rocking chair in a stunned sleep on the front porch of the home she does not recognize.

The vocal landscape with which Maleczek pairs her physical vocabulary follows the peaks and valleys of Lear's emotional trajectory. Maleczek uses a tone so low and gravely that it could be considered a growl to tell Cordelion that "nothing can come of nothing." Moments earlier, just after entering, her voice dripped with saccharine sweetness as she invited her sons to express their love for her. When she greets her eldest after he deigns to appear before her, "how now, Goneril?" rings with the too-bright cheeriness of a mother who is embarrassingly happy to see her child. When she meets the blind Gloucester, her voice is quiet and feeble, almost gentle, and drained of the hoarse raging we hear in the mad scene.

Maleczek's vocal and physical choices carefully chart the rise and fall of Lear's temper and fortunes. They convey a complex emotional life and a complicated, increasingly conflicted, and ultimately ravaged consciousness. Breuer describes Lear as a "mythological mother," and Maleczek manages to balance the mystery of this mythical figure, who we can't ever know intimately, with intensely rich flashes of expressive behavior.<sup>25</sup> Breuer suggests that the characters in Mabou Mines's *Lear* may blur the lines between cartoon characters and real people. Indeed, Maleczek presents a detailed portrait of a larger-than-life figure in her performance, creating for herself (with Breuer's help) the opportunity to play a role she long coveted.

As it turns out, a female performer creating an opportunity for herself to play Lear wasn't enough to assuage concerns about Shakespeare's misogyny in some feminist critics. While praising the company for elevating maternal misery to high tragedy, Diamond is concerned that the production doesn't do enough to demonstrate the distance between the company's point of

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<sup>25</sup> Lee Breuer in *Lear Archive '87*, disk 3, hour 5.

view and that of the patriarchal play they are presenting. One of Diamond's major critiques concerns the portrayal of Lear's madness. Lear's breakdown becomes apparent in the storm scene when Maleczech, hair loosed, adeptly interpolates the grand tradition of tragedians. She hangs from a telephone pole with her long robes flowing around her, the jaunty jacket and formal skirt now discarded. Her voice is hoarse and breathy and her movements are disjointed as she rolls her head and moves her eyes from side to side. Lear dismounts the telephone pole only to circle it on her knees as Kent trails after her with an umbrella. Her attention is drawn to Karen Kandel's Mad Marie (a female, Rastafarian version of Poor Tom that earned Kandel an OBIE award) in whom she recognizes what she believes to be kindred insanity. "Thou art the thing itself," she tells Mad Marie with wonder in her voice, the "unaccommodated one." Maleczech's Lear seems relieved to have found something she thinks she recognizes. Edna, of course, is only pretending. Lear, we know, is not.

This ranting and raving comes too close, in Diamond's estimation, to hysteria.

"[M]adness is tricky," she writes,

and Breuer and company can be charged with reinforcing rather than debunking some pernicious social stereotypes. When Shakespeare's Lear complains of womanish "hot tears," he invokes the immemorial equation of women and weakness; when he speaks of "the mother, the "hysterico passio" that "swells up toward my heart" he fears being overtaken by the female *hysteron*....<sup>26</sup>

In Shakespeare's text, Lear says to Goneril after she tells him that he must rid himself of his followers is that he is "ashamed/That thou hast power to shake my manhood thus,/That these hot tears which break from me perforce/Should make thee worth them."<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Diamond, 483.

<sup>27</sup> *King Lear*, edited by R.A. Foakes (London: Arden Shakespeare, 2001), 1.4.288-91.

In Mehrten's estimation, Breuer intentionally employs stereotypes in order to critique them. Invoking the example of Regan and Goneril who are played, respectively, by former Mabou Mines company member Bill Raymond and Ron Vawter, as "southern, good old boy types," Mehrten argues that "those are clichés or stereotypes, and Lee is deliberately using them, but I think it's pretty obvious that it's a critique of that through the mask of the stereotype." However, he says, "you can sometimes sympathize" with these cartoonish figures because the performers must find something in them with which to connect in order to bring them to the stage. "You have to find some way in," Mehrten says.

Breuer describes a distinction between motherhood and matriarchy that is crucial to Lear's interpretation in this production. In describing Lear's position in relation to her children and to society, Breuer explains, "Lear is queen and mother figure of an extended family and she has neglected the nuclear aspects of being a mother tremendously in order to be a powerhouse in the extended family. . . . This is a person who is more a king than a father. Or more a queen than a mother."<sup>28</sup> In this context, Lear's fear of the mother that swells up in her heart may reveal apprehension about a potential shift in her priorities, her position in society, and perhaps even in her personality.

Misogynistic as some references in Shakespeare's text may be, an interpretation that links Maleczech's high tragic approach to hysteria establishes a double standard between the way she is allowed or expected to present Lear and the way a male actor is allowed or expected to do so. While Maleczech's mad scene is unusual because it is being performed by a woman, her acting choices are certainly in the range of what might be expected in a contemporary production by a male actor. And of course, if Maleczech is drawing inspiration from O'Sullivan, we may assume

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<sup>28</sup> Lee Breuer in *Lear Archive* '87, disk 2, hour 3.

her interpretation has something to do with the way he played this scene. Keith Fowler describes O'Sullivan's performance as similarly hyperbolic, calling him "preening, deranged, screeching," and "imbued with primordial divinity."<sup>29</sup> If O'Sullivan can show that to us, why can't Maleczech?

"Maleczech's Lear," Diamond argues,

made no attempt to frame or foreground what patriarchal science has made of her woman's body. A male Lear can argue dialectically against invasive female signs but this female Lear could only struggle against her already flawed (read: female) body.  
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Mabou Mines's *Lear* does not engage with the way in which female biology and psychology has been characterized in the history of science, and Maleczech's approach merges the performer to the character's reality rather than creating distance between the two. Nonetheless, Maleczech and Breuer are asking audiences to look at a reversed-gender Lear differently than the way audiences are expected to respond to a traditionally cast production. In this case, however, that doesn't mean that actors must play their reverse-gender roles differently than their traditionally cast counterparts. Mabou Mines's *Lear* isn't, perhaps, as aggressively revolutionary as a production in which the gender swap is trumpeted in triumph or underlined using distancing devices. Rather, Maleczech and Breuer's approach here is subtly subversive. They lure the audience into forgetting, as Solomon did, that Lear wasn't written for a woman in the first place while leaving them to sort out, or, in Breuer's terms, "synthesize," what they may know about Maleczech and the Lear of Shakespeare's text, and what they feel as they watch her perform it. This approach provides Maleczech with the opportunity to play an emotionally engaged Lear, by

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<sup>29</sup> Keith Franklin Fowler, *A History of the San Francisco Actor's Workshop* (DFA dissertation, Yale University, 1969), 512.

<sup>30</sup> Diamond, 483.

turns simpering and raging—a Lear upon whom she had been fixated since seeing O’Sullivan’s performance. Maleczek plays the role, not the gender.

Diamond points to Greg Mehrten’s transvestite Fool’s “gestic use of the dildo,” which in this production replaces the coxcomb, as a “disruptive” act that contrasts with what she perceives as a passive female Lear struggling from within against the biology that binds her. The dissimilarity Diamond identifies between Mehrten’s alienating strategies and Maleczek’s high tragic approach goes to the heart of the way the gender gap manifests itself onstage here.

In an early rehearsal for the production, captured on camera in Godmillow’s documentary, Breuer suggests that Mehrten and his Fool adopt the strategy of impersonating Maleczek and her Lear. Besides existing in a sort of meta relationship with Maleczek’s acknowledged impersonation of O’Sullivan’s performance, this direction of Breuer’s suggests an early acknowledgement that Maleczek’s Lear will be sufficiently detailed and earnestly presented so as to make such an impersonation possible. It suggests that there will be little distance in performance between Maleczek and her Lear. This proximity between performer and character is what makes Mehrten’s parody possible—it is difficult, if not downright impossible, to parody a character already foregrounded with distancing techniques.

Not only does Mehrten impersonate Maleczek’s Lear and Lola Pashalinski’s Kent; Godmillow’s documentation of the rehearsal process shows Mehrten trying drag icons Judy Garland, Tallulah Bankhead, and Bette Davis on for size. Mehrten’s work in rehearsal provides Maleczek with a mirror to her own behavior as Lear as well as presenting her with stereotypically feminine behavior (preening, vamping, sashaying) in which Maleczek’s Lear does not engage. Maleczek notes the effectiveness of this strategy: “you really get the position that the fool is trying to keep Lear in balance by making her laugh, by making her look at herself,

by pushing,”<sup>31</sup> she says. The performance captured on video at the Triplex Theater in New York reflects a Fool Mehrten has created with an alchemical mixture of impersonations of Maleczech, of his movie star inspirations, and the stuff of his own imagination. By presenting the audience with behavior we understand to be borrowed from Maleczech’s Lear as well as behavior we recognize as stereotypically feminine, Mehrten is able to fulfill the function Maleczech describes—forcing Lear to examine herself. The position of Mehrten’s Fool is critical in establishing the gender gap in this production, which exists both in the distance between Shakespeare’s male character and Mabou Mines’s female performer and in Mehrten’s ultra-feminine behavior and Maleczech’s performance as Lear. Maleczech’s Lear is the woman herself, while Mehrten’s Fool plays a constructed femininity.

Mehrten’s transvestite Fool shows us the trappings of femininity that are hardly to be found in Maleczech’s female Lear. At his/her entrance, Mehrten’s Fool wears a sequined gown, elbow-length gloves, a blond bombshell wig, a boa, strings of pearls, and frighteningly high white heels. Emerging from an outhouse, s/he minces and sashays, providing a stark contrast to Maleczech, who stamps around in low, sturdy heels. And while Mehrten captures Maleczech’s mannerisms, such as the stooped stance s/he adopts for his/her tap dance on a suitcase upon discovering Kent in the stocks, what the Fool shows us reveals as much about who Maleczech’s Lear is as who she isn’t. In Shakespeare’s III.iii, which Mabou Mines’s script folds into a continuous opening scene, the Fool provocatively swings a dildo (his coxcomb) at crotch level. Lear, picking up on this movement seemingly subconsciously, engages in a similar rhythm and movement with a rolled up newspaper. But while the Fool’s dildo never sees any real action, appearing as a an impotent double of what Mehrten actually does have under his dress, Lear’s

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<sup>31</sup> Ruth Maleczech in *Lear '87 Archive*, disk 1, hour 1.

rolled newspaper becomes packed with real power when she uses it to beat Goneril on the head when he tries to deprive her of her dogs.

Maleczech's Lear is aggressive, and she doesn't need a penis to prove it. Mehrten's Fool presents us with superficial signs of femininity, which turn out to have little to do with the traits we see in Maleczech's biologically female Lear. But while Lear may never have been the nurturer her sons hoped for, she displays a touching tenderness for the Fool. During a table work session early in the process, Maleczech wonders if the fool in drag could be the daughter Lear never had.<sup>32</sup> Even so, the Fool fares no better than Lear's biological children. S/he is caught up in the storm caused by Lear's actions. S/he is swept away, killed in what in this production is staged as a gay lynching, because of his/her status as one of Lear's hangers-on. We might also interpret this killing and Lear's downfall as consequences of failure on the part of these figures to adhere to conventionally gendered behavior.

The consequences that befall Lear are all a result of the choices she has made and actively pursued. Mehrten's Fool, a biological man whose behavior is supposedly feminine, plays an ultimately passive role in the action, while the dynamic and demanding behavior of Maleczech's Lear would be traditionally marked as masculine. But Maleczech's Lear doesn't look or sound masculine. Her clothing and physical and vocal choices make her recognizable as the matron Diamond identifies. Maleczech's Lear is a woman who is powerful because of circumstances in the society in which she lives. Here, Breuer, Mehrten and Maleczech expose the gender gap in exploiting gender stereotypes to reveal faulty foundations.

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<sup>32</sup>Ibid.

## Dressing Up as Daddy

In his 1983 review of *Hajj*, Gerald Rabkin compares the production to the Wooster Group's *Rumstick Road*, first produced in 1977, in its autobiographical exploration of family suicide. "But where *Rumstick Road* never relinquishes the documentary spine of Spalding's mother's suicide," he writes, "*Hajj* does not confront the fact of the suicide of Ruth Maleczech's father (except for premonitory outbursts) until the piece is half over."<sup>33</sup> Indeed, the performance poem guides us through juicy slices of a number of alternate narratives before the multiple frames freeze and we zoom into the heart of the ritual that is enacted before our eyes: the performer's delivery of the eulogy for Maleczech's father, her donning of the mask of his face, her transformation, and her re-emergence. We are, however, immediately clued in to the ritualistic nature of the activities we see and hear. The title itself invokes a religious rite, and Rabkin describes the performer's repetitive activities at the dressing table as a "meditative makeup ritual" which "transforms into a solemn, at times frenzied, ceremony for the dead."<sup>34</sup>

It is apparent very early on in the performance that the audience is bearing witness to a ritual that is personal in nature, though it is publicly enacted. The purpose and meaning of this ritual, however, remains a mystery for some time. If Maleczech's first line, "I have /nothing to /hide," is a clue that we are going to be taken for a bit of a ride, we don't know it yet. This opening statement sets us up for a series of red herrings that come our way prior to the eulogy. Although the video documents the trip Maleczech took with her father as a girl, it is a boy we see with his father on screen, played by Breuer and Maleczech's son, Lute Ramblin'. When Maleczech puts on a blond wig and gold teeth, it seems perhaps that this costume will unlock the secret of what we have seen so far, but instead she drops hints about intimate moments to which

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<sup>33</sup> Gerald Rabkin, "Review," *Performing Arts Journal* 7, no. 2 (1983): 57.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 58.

we are not privy and shines a light on the faces of audience members she catches with her flashlight, deflecting self-illumination.

The choice to use a male child in the film alters Maleczech's actual family history to create a staged drama in which the father-son relationship we see in the film plays retrospectively against the damaged financial relationship we later learn existed between the performer and her debtor/father. The faulty parallels between life and art are further echoed in the casting of the video, in which Maleczech's son plays the boy, while the father is played by Phil Shenck, a non-relative. The subtle gender-switching sleight of hand in the film foreshadows the culmination of the live performance in which Maleczech dons a latex mask of her father's face and takes possession of his thoughts, feelings, and history as she delivers a eulogy for him. Maleczech approaches this takeover from two directions: she hijack's her father's presence by enacting him on stage and she commandeers his memory by delivering his eulogy, ensuring that the audience, who has never met her father, perceives him from her point of view.

The tantalizing flashes of other histories serve to present, among other narratives, possibilities of other, potentially preferable family relationships. What we see in the video, for example, suggests a wishful parallel to Lujak and Maleczech's positioning as father and daughter. Would the bond between Maleczech and her father have been different if she had been a son? The film does not present the father-child relationship in an especially rosy light—the scenes of Ramblin' and Schenk have an eerie, distanced quality. But there are also moments of tenderness, such as when, two thirds of the way through the performance, the child is “held in the FATHER'S arms, being rocked to sleep.”<sup>35</sup> Despite the alienating effects of the film, both in its essence as a mediated form and in the distant quality created by the cinematography, these

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<sup>35</sup> Lee Breuer, *Hajj*, 115.

moments serve to underscore the absence of any sort of physical interaction in the live performance. Instead, the performer attempts to create tenderness for herself. Just after we see the video of the child being rocked to sleep by his father, the performer, now made up to look like the child, “appears to hold herself in the same position.” We know this is a poor substitute for having a loved one to do this for her. She speaks in unison with the child in the video, perhaps in an attempt to make contact with another human being. These scarce moments of tenderness in the film and in the live performance set a minimal range for live, emotional interaction. Rather, it is the interaction with memory that is given full gamut here, suggesting that what Maleczech must do is come to terms with family history as it is, not as it might have been. But memory is mutable, and Maleczech can stack the deck in her game of solitaire.

According to Breuer, “there’s nothing in *Hajj* that’s about gender except the father-daughter relationship.” Of course, the father-daughter relationship is what is most crucial about the production. Breuer also suggests that without knowing that the child in a video is a boy, one might think it is a girl. With program in hand, however, it would be difficult to remain ignorant of the fact that the child is played by a boy. And after all, as Breuer said himself of cross-gender casting as noted above, “you can’t say you don’t see what you see.”

Maleczech’s performance in *Hajj* presents an explicit gender gap to the audience. Here, in stark contrast to her emotionally engaged approach in *Lear*, Maleczech holds each of the characters she plays at arm’s length. The performance itself begins with the art of artifice as she sits before a three-way vanity putting on make up. She recites numbers in a dry, world-weary tone, using tape to give herself a temporary face-lift, and casually sings a verse of a jaded lullaby: “the man that I marry will come cash and carry.” Suddenly the ground seems to shift and Maleczech’s calculated confidence gives way to a nervous, suppliant character, who

negotiates a schedule for paying back monies owed. In a flash, Maleczech shifts once again to the low, serious tones of someone giving a deadline for payment. As Maleczech plays out brief flickers of the power relationship between debtor and lender, she continues applying cosmetics. The litheness with which Maleczech shifts roles (an early example of what she will later do in *Lucia's Chapters of Coming Forth By Day*) and her literal act of making up signal a premeditated superficiality in the presentation of these power positions. The casual demeanor with which these roles are adopted and discarded belie the rigor with which they will be interrogated as the performance progresses.

As the production unfolds, the representation of gender becomes entangled with representations of power and money. A little more than halfway through the performance, Maleczech yells her father's name—"Alex!"—during a blackout. When the lights come back up, she is putting on a big blond wig—similar, in fact, to the bombshell wig Mehrten wears as the Fool. Maleczech's attitude is sexy. "I ain't a good guy," she says, in a matter-of-fact tone of voice. She continues making up. "Love is money, Alex," she says next, in a tone that manages to be both casual and provocative. We would never know that she is, in fact, talking about the fraught financial relationship she had with her father at the time of his death. She puts on lipstick, followed by gold teeth. "Once you die you live forever," she says. There is an abrupt blackout, and suddenly Maleczech is holding a flashlight, pointing it at the audience, her gold teeth flashing. She points it at different men in the audience, "holding and releasing them with the flashlight beam." Maleczech explains that she was looking for the man in the film, who took her on a childhood journey. She lists a number of seemingly disparate places as flashes from the past—the Via Fiorello; Champagne, Urbana; Coldwater Canyon. Each is punctuated by the word "fuck." The places are listed in a relaxed voice, flushed with warmth. Some of the

memories seem to recall love-making—“in the hottub, under the water, in front of the fan.” The word “fuck” interrupts each flashback as if it is an intermittent twitch or a different personality breaking through. Partway through this sequence, Maleczech begins to dance, placing the flashlight between her legs as she “seduces the audience with its beam.”<sup>36</sup>

This dance is uncomfortable to watch. This may be because, as Breuer explains, “her father is always a lover.” Maleczech flaunts an adopted, over-the-top female sexuality by moving suggestively and flirting with individual audience members as she picks them out with the glow of her flashlight. Perhaps the men Maleczech pinpoints feel uncomfortable too, illuminated and exposed as they are in the otherwise darkened theatre. If she is looking for her father, it is certainly an unusual tactic to take. Maleczech talks about sex. Her movements, set to jingling music, recall those of a belly dancer. But at the same time, by placing the flashlight at her crotch, Maleczech has given herself a phallus. Maleczech asserts her power by employing two conflicting strategies: she shows us the size of her penis while simultaneously channeling Salome.

Maleczech’s flashlight/phallus dance pre-dates Mehrten’s scene with the dildo by seven years. The acting approach in each production is different, and yet both scenes scramble the stereotypical signs of male and female sexuality and power. In a coy sleight of hand, Mehrten’s drag queen fool presents us with an artificial phallus even though we know he is in possession of the real thing. The Fool is powerless, and in the matriarchal world of Mabou Mines’s *Lear* it is clear that being in possession of a penis can leave a man without a pot to piss in. In *Hajj*, however, money and male genitalia are assurances of authority, and ones that Maleczech must

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 116-17.

possess symbolically in order to transcend the patriarchal power that has subverted her autonomy.

Maleczech plays dress up several times throughout *Hajj*. First she gives herself a facelift with scotch tape to appear younger—more like the child we see in the video. Later she prepares for her belly dance with the flashlight by putting on a blonde wig and bejeweled false teeth. The final transformation we witness makes her over as her father. Each of these permutations reorients Maleczech's position with regard to gender. In the first, she suggests her physical likeness to the boy in the video, who we know is her son. In the second, she displays signs of stereotypically feminine sexuality (blonde wig, sexy dancing) while flaunting a phallus. Her final play of dress up gives her ownership of her father's physical presence.

The scene leading up to Maleczech's impersonation and eulogization of her father is designed to startle and intimidate. We see images of the landscape speeding by from inside the truck, then the video screens go blank. The stage directions tell us that the performer makes "a sign of the devil with her fingers," which is "superimposed over the windshield—the image is of the child riding in the truck. She growls in a devil's voice." Her words are ominous: "ready or not, Al, here I come with cash/My check's no good, dead man/I come to sodomize you with a roll of Jacksons."<sup>37</sup> The performer begins to dance wildly, spinning, as sounds of the truck engine rip through the space. She waves a noise stick. Her voice, electronically altered, is frightening. It rises to a scream as the truck veers, swerving, off the road. The screens go black again, in an ominous presage to Maleczech's usurpation.

In enacting her father, Maleczech takes possession not only of male sexuality but of paternity. Maleczech's temporary custody of fatherhood plays out much differently in *Hajj* than

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<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 114.

it does in *Lear*. In the latter, the rules of Mabou Mines's gendered takeover are apparent from the start of the performance because Shakespeare's original text is already familiar to the audience. In *Hajj* we don't know what is coming, and the production is designed to obfuscate the rules of the game. Furthermore, Maleczech's performance style in *Hajj*, which, in contrast to *Lear*, exposes the theatrical apparatus, makes it possible for us to witness a transformation of gender before our eyes. Maleczech's takeover in *Lear* gave her custody of a mythic father; in *Hajj* this occupation becomes personal.

This strategy upends the parent-child relationship, allowing Maleczech to untangle herself from her father's influence. This shift is also significant in terms of gender as Maleczech extricates herself from a personal instance of patriarchal authority in which her father held financial power over her. As Breuer describes, an uneven power dynamic is

part of the father/daughter relationship. It's always who controls what power. And it was all on a very primitive level, of course—this was hunter-fisher-gatherer. You know, this is \$200—this wasn't two million. And yet it produced the same inner, spiritual conflict that, of course, it was intended to produce.

Maleczech's performance tilts the balance of power in her favor, disrupting what Breuer describes as "the mythical father-daughter relationship."

With such a powerful ending in store, why divert us with snatches of alternative narratives, rather than engaging early and directly with Maleczech's autobiography, as in *Rumstick Road*? Perhaps these hints of other stories are wistful fantasies of what personal history might have been, if only. Or do these invitations into other lives subtly suggest that there is more than one way to live your life? As Maleczech takes possession of her deceased father's life story, she presents a version of the past that can't be contradicted, suggesting that memory is mutable and that history belongs to the survivors. Using makeovers as a metaphor for spiritual

and psychological transformation, Maleczech tries on a number of characters, possessing and discarding each one as she journeys through personalities and power relationships to tell a story that leaves her in control of the way she understands her own family history. This final revelation exposes the fragility of the foundation upon which the power dynamics of traditional family relationships are based.

### Conclusion

Fischer Smith, describing the way in which *Hajj* fits into Breuer's artistic trajectory, writes that "*Hajj* intertwines a recurring theme in Breuer's work, indebtedness, with that of a pilgrimage taken into a person's history to discover the source of that life and the difficult debts owed the past."<sup>38</sup> *Hajj* combines the indebtedness and pilgrimage that Fischer Smith articulates as themes in Breuer's work with two overarching preoccupations of Maleczech's that are also at play in *Lear*: the development of artistic work as an autonomous process within a collective and collaborative artistic team and the hijacking of male stage (and societal) power. She does the latter by taking men's words and making them her own; by dissecting and reconfiguring the economy of power, gender, art, and money; and by disrupting the representation of traditionally gendered family relationships.

In *Lear*, Maleczech and Breuer ask audiences to synthesize a male character and a female performer. "We're unlocking what's already *here* [in the room]," says Maleczech in Godmellow's documentary, "and we're putting it together with what's already there—that is the play. So we're making a new play. But we're not going to change [Shakespeare's] play...."<sup>39</sup> What Maleczech and Breuer do with Shakespeare's *Lear*, they also do with Alexander Lujak,

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<sup>38</sup> Smith Fisher, *Mabou Mines: Making Avant-Garde Theater in the 1970s*, 37.

<sup>39</sup>Ruth Maleczech in *Lear '87 Archive*, disk 1, hour 2.

pairing his life story with Maleczech's memories to expose the conventionally structured family as deeply flawed, perhaps untenably so. When Maleczech takes control of the mythical father in *Lear* and her biological one in *Hajj*, she ruptures the connective tissue that binds paternity to money and power. She shows us ways in which women can maneuver within male-dominated theatre, family, and financial worlds in order to explode the faulty logic that sustains them. In the wake lies the potential for a new equilibrium, on stage and in life.

## Chapter Four: MOTHER DAUGHTER COLLABORATION

Who's in who's scenario.  
—*The Shaggy Dog Animation*

Richard Schechner's 1982 essay, "The Natural/Artificial Controversy Renewed," begins with a question: "Where does 'natural' life leave off and 'artificial' life begin, and what's it got to do with theatre?" As part of a wider ranging examination, Schechner engages with two productions, Mabou Mines's *The Shaggy Dog Animation* and Squat Theater's *Pig*, that cast children of the creators in crucial roles, and he reads the personal relationships of the collaborators into his interpretation of these productions. *The Shaggy Dog Animation* (1978), written and directed by Lee Breuer, featured Ruth Maleczek performing alongside her six-year-old daughter with Breuer, Clove Galilee. Schechner writes that "children are to be seen more than ever" in the avant-garde performance of the late 1970s and early 1980s, and "these children are woven into the fabric of their parents' lives."<sup>1</sup> Furthermore, he argues, the productions he discusses blur the boundary between life and art, serving as an

answer theatre colleagues are giving—maybe not consciously, but still strongly—to the ethical question, the one about the hook of this current century (of atrocities): natural and artificial are transformable/interchangeable quantities. Yes, quantities—like quanta in physics: bundles of relations. And it is natural for theatre artists whose work it is to manipulate behavior across (psychological, cultural, architectural) boundaries. . . .<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Richard Schechner, *The End of Humanism* (New York: Performing Arts Journal, 1982), 79 and 91-92

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 91-92.

Over its forty-two-year history, Mabou Mines has repeatedly paired parents and children in collaboration, most frequently Maleczech and Breuer with Galilee. This chapter focuses on the ways in which Maleczech has blended and blurred the line between family and collaborators, primarily in her work with her daughter and with the father of her two children, Lee Breuer. Although the work generated by the Maleczech-Galilee duo and the pair's collaborations with Breuer are not autobiographical, the impact of the audience's knowledge of these personal relationships augments the significance of what appears on stage. It also demonstrates Maleczech's investment in a new generation of theatre and the artists, one of whom is her daughter.

It is Mabou Mines's history of blending their philosophies and practices of life and work that set the stage for Maleczech and Breuer's collaboration with their daughter. One of the first major disagreements among the members of the newly founded Mabou Mines was on the subject of childcare. Maleczech and Akalaitis felt it wasn't fair that so much of their meager salaries went to babysitters when other company members didn't have to account for this expense. Maleczech and Akalaitis emerged from the debate victorious, and Mabou Mines began budgeting for childcare, often bringing children of collaborators and their caretakers on tour with them. Years later, Akalaitis negotiated a similarly progressive arrangement in order to have Maleczech perform in her Guthrie Theater production of *The Screens*, and she and Mabou Mines continue to advocate for community structures that assist working parents in providing care for their children.

The proximity of Mabou Mines children to their parents' work has meant that several of them have stepped into the creative process, easing naturally across the divide between the natural and the artificial. Clove Galilee describes her two first languages as English and

experimental theatre.<sup>3</sup> In answer to Schechner's question about where natural life ends and the artificial begins, Galilee says

There wasn't in my family much separation between art and life. . . . I joke that I grew up in a fundamentalist religion, and the religion was art. And my parents were priests. I knew how to walk into a theatre, and I knew how to be quiet and sit in the back.<sup>4</sup>

As a small child, Galilee performed in *The Shaggy Dog Animation*, alongside her mother and directed by her father in a piece he also wrote, for which he won the Obie for Best New Play in 1978. Then, Maleczek cast Galilee in her 1984 production of *Imagination Dead Imagine*. Maleczek's adaptation of Beckett's short story pairs the adolescent Galilee's body, in the form of a hologram, with the elderly Ruth Nelson's recorded voice. The hologram of Galilee rotates above a bier in which remains of daily objects appear to have atrophied. Nelson's disembodied voice amplifies the disjunction between live presence and performed absence. Maleczek and Galilee's roles as mother and daughter resonate with the juxtaposition between youth and age represented by Galilee's body and Nelson's voice. The real life roles of the creators enhance the story and relationships hinted at in Beckett's words and Maleczek's staging. Here Maleczek pairs her investment in technology with her commitment to the next generation of theatre artists.

Maleczek and Galilee appeared together under Breuer's direction in Mabou Mines's 2005 production of *Red Beads*, which began as a poem Breuer had written years earlier for Galilee. Based on a story by Polina Klimovitskaya, *Red Beads* treats the tension that arises in many mother-daughter relationships as daughters enter puberty, only here what is usually minor friction is inflated to epic proportions with wind puppetry, opera singers, and aerial performance.

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<sup>3</sup> Paraphrase of Galilee taken from my notes on the concurrent paper panel "Staying Power: Mabou Mines after Forty Years" on November 21, 2010 at the 2010 ASTR/CORD conference "Embodying Power: Work Over Time" in Seattle, WA.

<sup>4</sup> Unless otherwise noted, all quotations by Galilee in this chapter are taken from an interview conducted by the author on August 7, 2012.

The knowledge that the performers are a mother and her daughter, trained for the stage by the experience and example of her mother, establishes another meaningful and, this time, uncomfortable parallel between stage and life.

The most recent project on which this trio has collaborated is the development of Breuer's *Summa Dramatica*, which premiered in 2009, and, along with *Shaggy Dog* and Breuer's other animations, makes up *La Divina Caricatura*, which Breuer published in 2003 and which is currently in development for a full production. In *Summa Dramatica*, Galilee developed the choreography for the hind legs of her mother's professorial Holy Cow, aka Sri Moo Parahamsa, while sitting underneath her mother who is perched on a chair. The physical position, which remains hidden from the audience beneath Sri Moo's academic robe, oddly recalls birthing. The role of the hind feet was taken over by another performer following Galilee's move to the West Coast, but the intimate development process remains a crucial aspect of the performance.

These family collaborations trace important developments in the history of the company as well as in the individual careers of the artists involved. *Shaggy Dog*, *Red Beads*, *Summa Dramatica*, and *Imagination Dead Imagine* are characterized by the collaborators' evolving practice of engaging vocally and physically with design elements and technology in performance, which range here from choral performance to caricatured accent and from Bunraku-style puppetry to holographic visualization. Each adaptation in physical and vocal approach is marked by a shift in influence among the family collaborators Maleczech, Breuer, and Galilee, pointing to the sort of interaction between theatre and life that, as Schechner suggests, "manipulates behavior across boundaries" of the natural and the artificial.

## Parents, Children, Childcare, & Collaboration

Unbeknownst to Jerzy Grotowski, Maleczech was pregnant with Clove Galilee when she and Akalaitis trained with him in the south of France. And the subterfuge was not limited to Maleczech's pregnancy: Akalaitis had brought her baby daughter Juliet along and was giving herself unauthorized intermissions to breastfeed during the two-week workshop. No one was allowed to leave the room once daily training sessions had begun, Maleczech explains, and no one knew when the sessions would end. "The door was locked with a key, and you could only leave to go to the bathroom," she recalls. So Akalaitis and Maleczech devised a scheme: Akalaitis would climb out of the bathroom window to breastfeed, and "I had to guard the door," Maleczech remembers ruefully.<sup>5</sup> After the Mabou Mines co-founders settled on New York as the location for their company, the Akalaitis/Glass and Maleczech/Breuer families lived together in their early days in the East Village, and their shared childcare was often provided by Julie Archer, who lived upstairs. These are early instances in which the female collaborators teamed up to create an environment in which parents could make work and children could be cared for—a pattern that would be repeated throughout their continued collaboration.

Maleczech reports that the cost of childcare was "our first sort of confrontation in Mabou Mines. It happened in Nova Scotia when we realized that Ellen Stewart was paying fifty bucks a week each" for their work on *Red Horse Animation* (1970). "And so," Maleczech explains,

we each got the same amount of money in our hands but JoAnne and I always had to have a babysitter in order to be able to work. So we pooled our babysitting money and she paid half and I paid half and Juliet and Clove (who at that time were the only children) got to spend time together with the babysitter. And then we realized, gee, we were working for half of what the guys were working for and that didn't seem right to us. So we said, 'well,

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<sup>5</sup> Maleczech in conversation with Nick Westrate at "Process and Performance" at New York Theatre Workshop, April 23, 2012.

we're going to have to pool all the money and pay the babysitter out of all the money that Ellen gives us— fifty bucks each, five people, is two-fifty a week. We're going to pool all that money and then we're going to take fifty dollars a week, which is what it was costing to pay the babysitter, and we'll split the two hundred dollars that's left five ways so everybody gets forty bucks a week. And there was a big tangle about it. It was really difficult for a little bit but eventually everybody came around.<sup>6</sup>

Glass and Breuer, the fathers of these children, were, as one would expect, less resistant to this idea than David Warrilow, who did not have children of his own. During the debate, Maleczech recalls,

David said—and I thought it was a great argument—“why should I pay for your chosen lifestyle? I don't ask you to pay for mine.” And we said, “well it really comes down to this: if we don't have the children taken of, we can't rehearse and if we can't rehearse we can't do the play. Now, if you want to work with us you're going to have to help us get the children take care of.” And then later on, when we were touring more and David was really important in the mix, it became clear that there might be things that we could do for him that would be sort of the equivalent. Like he could bring a friend on a tour, someone could bring a girlfriend or a boyfriend, there might be a really even Steven exchange.

Despite Warrilow's initial objections, the policy was put in place in the company's first year of existence. “And still is that way,” says Maleczech, despite occasional financial obstacles.

“Sometimes parents haven't taken advantage of it,” Maleczech says, and

usually it's because the parent feels differently than we felt. They feel that they should be individually and personally responsible for the care of their children. Sometimes it's a matter of ethics, sometimes it's a matter of pride, sometimes they take advantage of the support. Sometimes their kid comes along on tour. And if the other parent comes, then that parent is regarded in the same light as the babysitter would be, so we pay for them to come. It's a way for a family to stay together in touring situations. I had a rule at one time that we wouldn't tour for longer than four weeks because we thought that that was as much as the children could stand,

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<sup>6</sup> Unless otherwise noted, all quotations by Maleczech in this chapter are taken from interviews conducted by the author between July 2011 and March 2012.

whatever the configuration was. And then eventually when the kids got older they preferred not to come along.

Despite Mabou Mines's progressive philosophy about and practice of providing childcare, Akalaitis is quick to point out that the conditions of touring with children are far from ideal. "I didn't like it," she says, "it isn't some kind of heavenly situation where you have a little child in rehearsal."<sup>7</sup>

In *American Women Stage Directors of the Twentieth Century*, Anne Fliotsos and Wendy Vierow propose some causes for the paucity of female directors in the professional theatre. They cite Deborah Tannen's studies on gender and communication that point to an association between authority and masculinity, the politics of hiring policies, and the difficulty of balancing a career with motherhood—all cross-disciplinary complaints.<sup>8</sup> Akalaitis, however, rejects the idea that parenting adversely affected her career, saying, "it has not affected my work at all because it was basically a brief situation, and it got resolved." Maleczech points out that the relative difficulty of balancing family and career is tied to the relationship between parents and their ability to share the responsibility of childrearing.

Although the ideology Akalaitis and Maleczech put into practice by supporting child care resolves one of the concerns about women in the workforce identified by feminist scholars such as Fliotsos and Vierow, Akalaitis eschews the notion that there is anything feminist about her approach to this issue. "It's simply common sense," she says,

that a company, any kind of company—academic, artistic—takes care of its community, and that includes its children. If you have a child, let me know. I'm going to make sure you're taken care of.

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<sup>7</sup> Unless otherwise noted, all quotations by JoAnne Akalaitis are taken from an interview conducted by the author in December 2011.

<sup>8</sup> Anne L. Fliotsos and Wendy Vierow, introduction to *American Women Stage Directors of the Twentieth Century*, ed. Anne L. Fliotsos and Wendy Vierow (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2008), 13-27.

Man or woman. And it's not a feminist issue. I think it's a humanist issue.

The ideology Maleczek and Akalaitis developed on the issue of employer support for child care and their effort to establish a system for keeping families together on tour extends, to some extent, to their work outside of the company as well. When the Guthrie Theater hired Akalaitis to direct the 1989 production of Jean Genet's *The Screens*, Akalaitis wanted to cast Maleczek as the Mother. When a representative of the Guthrie called Maleczek to ask her to take the role, Maleczek told him she would only agree if the Guthrie could cover expenses for her to visit with her children during her three months away. "He said no," Maleczek recalls,

And I said, "okay, well you just tell JoAnne that I very much want to do it. I'm not going to call her and tell her that you won't give me the money I need so I can't do it. You tell her." So we hung up very cordially but, you know, at a deadlock. And maybe a couple of hours later he called back and said, "no, JoAnne wants you, I'll pay it." I gather that JoAnne was the one who got it put through.

So Maleczek went to Minneapolis for several months, leaving her teenage children with a caregiver. She returned to New York once during that time and her children also visited her in Minnesota.

For her part, Akalaitis resists the idea that her position is anything other than a practical one: "it is just common sense," she says, "I don't think we're doing good. I just don't put up with that kind of crap." Maleczek echoes Akalaitis's statement that touring situations are far from ideal from the point of view of parents and children alike. "It was tough," she remembers of her stint in Minneapolis,

It was hard on them. Those things were never entirely successful even though I tried them—we all did—many times. The most successful—for the adults anyway—was when they got to come along. I'm not sure that it was the most successful for them, but it was the most comfortable for us.

Mabou Mines's approach to supporting childcare is financially collective in a way that mirrors the company's collective artistic structure. This community and family-oriented philosophy has also meant that children of artistic collaborators have often become collaborators themselves. Galilee first appeared on stage with Mabou Mines in 1973 at the age of three in *The Saint and the Football Player*. Lute Ramblin', Maleczech and Breuer's second child, also made his stage debut at three years of age in Jean-Claude van Italie's *Naropa*, directed by Breuer at Yale in 1978, and, also outside of Mabou Mines, he performed in Robert Wilson's *Einstein on the Beach* (1984) at the age of nine. With Mabou Mines, he played the Child in the film made as part of *Hajj* (1983) and Cordelion in *Lear* (1990), and has since developed a career as a puppeteer, which he has utilized in various recent Mabou Mines productions. The Akalaitis/Glass children, Juliet and Zachary Glass, appeared in the stage version of *Dead End Kids* (1980), and Juliet Glass appeared alongside Galilee in the film version (1986). Galilee and David Neumann, the son of Fred Neumann and Honora Ferguson, are both current Associate Artists with Mabou Mines (as was Ferguson). Galilee notes, however, that among the Mabou Mines children, it was she and David Neumann who were most enthusiastic about their participation. Significantly, both Galilee and Neumann have founded their own theatre companies.

Galilee's work with Mabou Mines is the most extensive among the group of offspring. Aside from *The Saint and the Football Player* (1973), *Shaggy Dog*, and *Dead End Kids*, she also appeared in versions of *The B. Beaver Animation* (1990), *An Epidog* (1996), *Animal Magnetism* (2000), and *Ecco Porco* (2002). Galilee performed with her mother in *Cara Lucia* (2003), an earlier incarnation of *Lucia's Chapters of Coming Forth by Day*, and played France in *Lear* (1990). She has also provided choreography on *Red Beads*, in which she performed with

Maleczech, and choreographed Maleczech's cow in *Summa Dramatica*, in which Galilee also worked as a performer early in the development process. Galilee has even appeared on stage virtually as the hologram in *Imagination Dead Imagine*.

Maleczech has been a longtime supporter and promoter of her children in performance, obviously proud that they are carrying a family business forward. That they are doing so makes them part of a theatre tradition stretching back at least to Commedia dell'Arte's family troupes. As part of Maleczech's correspondence with Samuel Beckett regarding *Imagination Dead Imagine*, she included the fact that Galilee was "the young woman in the hologram" and told him that Ramblin' had performed in the American Festival of the Radio Plays of Samuel Beckett production of *All That Fall* with Warrilow and Billie Whitelaw, directed by Robert Frost. Of her collaborations with Galilee, Maleczech says,

It's great. She's a wonderful performer and she's got ten times the equipment I had. She's got a great voice, a great body and great training specifically in movement.

Galilee's training in dance began when she was a child and includes ballet, the traditional Indian form Kathak, and Japanese Ningyoburi. It is no coincidence that her parents have capitalized on her abilities as a mover and choreographer in projects such as *Imagination Dead Imagine*, *Red Beads*, and *Summa Dramatica*.

Galilee has produced and created her own experimental work under the auspices of Trick Saddle, the company she co-founded with her wife, Jenny Rogers, a visual artist, and both parents point out the strength of that work. Maleczech also describes Galilee's increased interest in "vocal acrobatics," which indicates a growing concern for an area that has been a sustained priority for Maleczech. Although Galilee is trained in European and Chinese Opera (the latter of which she studied as a high school student with the internationally renowned Ye Shaolan) she

says, “My singing voice is very different from my speaking voice.” She notes that her studies in Kristin Linklater’s technique have been helpful in her vocal work.

Galilee’s background in the American avant-garde does not necessarily mean that she has no interest in naturalistic forms of theatre, however. Breuer and Maleczech note Galilee’s interest in more commercially viable avenues of performance. Says Maleczech of Galilee’s desire to work in a mode strikingly different than that of Mabou Mines:

she wants the opportunity to play in classical plays with a lot of form and where maybe more attention is paid to the form of the piece in a more predictable way, more attached to the text. I find it difficult to talk about this because Mabou Mines’s work is quite formal and very attached to language. But I know what she means—she means these plays where you play a role first of all. Because we don’t usually do much of that in our work, where there’s a role and maybe eight people have played that role before and that role has a history in the American theatre and the British theatre, the Irish theatre. . . . the playwright often provides you with a lot of direction, a lot of blocking. There are sets that people know about and lighting designs that people know about and characters that people are familiar with. And it’s different—it’s just different.

Galilee suggests that working in this way might give her “a feeling of legitimacy,” noting that it wasn’t until her first year of college that she took an acting class in which she was asked to do scene work. She also recalls that in her first year at Brown University she performed in a main stage production of *Hecuba* as part of the chorus. She was proud of her work and encouraged her parents to attend. Afterwards, she remembers, she was disappointed by their unenthusiastic response. “Ruth and Lee are amazing,” she says with a smile, “but they do have their opinions.” Although these ruminations reflect a struggle to find her own point of view, “Recently,” she says, “I’ve been turning a corner and feeling, well, this is what you’re good at.” Maleczech has brought Galilee on board as the choreographer for Mabou Mines’s upcoming production of *Imagining the Imaginary Invalid*, based on Molière’s play, in which Maleczech will star. In fact,

Maleczech says, she initiated the project at Galilee's suggestion. "I really came into my own with the Molière," Galilee says of her participation in a recent period of work on the project.

### **A Family Trio of Collaboration**

The *Shaggy Dog Animation*, *Red Beads*, and *Summa Dramatica* catch the collaborators Galilee, Maleczech, and Breuer at different moments in their careers with Mabou Mines, but enduring artistic concerns of the company are evident in each iteration of the trio's collaboration. Particularly are the vocal acrobatics that have been so important to Maleczech since the founding of the company and in the repeated use of what Maleczech describes as "gestural extension"—a technique that Mabou Mines has explored since their first production, *The Red Horse Animation*—and the performers' interaction with physical production, also an inheritance from *Red Horse*.<sup>9</sup> The impulse for extension relates to a number of ways in which Mabou Mines has approached staging, evident in these productions in the use of movement, voice, and puppetry. All feature texts and direction by Breuer and performances by Maleczech. Galilee performed in *Shaggy Dog*, performed and provided her own choreography for *Red Beads*, and performed in early versions of *Summa Dramatica*, for which she also provided choreography.

In her chapter on *Cascando* (1976), *The Saint and the Football Player*, *The Shaggy Dog Animation*, and *Dressed Like an Egg* (1977), Iris Smith Fischer criticizes Randy Gener's 2007 cover story in *American Theatre* for its simplistic characterization of Mabou Mines's production history as beholden to the personal and collaborative relationship between Maleczech and Breuer. While Smith Fischer notes the importance of Breuer's assertion in the article of

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<sup>9</sup> Quotation taken from a recording of an unpublished interview by Iris Smith Fischer, October 28, 1994, side 1.

Maleczech's crucial position in his life and work, she also points out that "in treating Mabou Mines as 'the avant-garde of coupledness,' . . . Gener overlooks other couples that were central to the company's longevity and plays into Breuer's tendency to place himself at the center of company relationships." Smith Fischer argues for a more complex company history given the "shift in the company's working methods and character" that "began as early as the mid-1970s when Akalaitis, Maleczech, and Neumann developed their own preoccupations and styles."<sup>10</sup> I'd like to take up part of Smith Fischer's argument here by suggesting that, in addition to the couples and individuals who made up the company, Maleczech, Breuer, and Galilee form an important trio, whose collaborations trace important developments in the life of the company as well as marking significant moments in the careers of these artists as individuals. Smith Fischer's chapter includes an extensive discussion of *Shaggy Dog*'s process and production, and I will focus here on several aspects she has discussed as they relate to the interaction among the members of this trio, suggesting that this production sets significant precedents for *Red Beads* and *Summa Dramatica*.

### ***The Shaggy Dog Animation***

*The Shaggy Dog Animation*, Maleczech has said, "is about a dog who wishes she was a woman because she's in love with her master, or she's a woman who feels herself to be a dog because she's slavishly in love with her master."<sup>11</sup> This dog/woman is called Rose, and she first appeared on stage in the form of a Bunraku-style puppet operated by four performers with a voice generated collectively by the the company—Maleczech, Akalaitis, Linda Hartinian, Fred

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<sup>10</sup> Smith Fischer, *Mabou Mines: Making Avant-Garde Theater in the 1970s* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2011), 120.

<sup>11</sup> Interview by Smith Fischer, October 28, 1994, side 1.

Neumann, Terry O'Reilly, and the six-year-old Galilee. Although everyone played Rose, Galilee notes, Maleczech's version was central. "Ruth was without a doubt the star of the show," she says. In a technique that Breuer and Maleczech would later use in *Hajj*, the performer's voices were distorted by means of an electronic synthesizer.

Despite the fact that the characters and situations in *Shaggy Dog* bear resemblance to people and events in Breuer's life and Breuer himself suggests that the performance poem is "a prototypical love affair circa 1957-1977" —the same years that mark his relationship with Maleczech—Smith Fischer argues that

it would be a mistake to identify the events of *Shaggy Dog* too closely with the lives of Breuer, Maleczech, or Leslie Mohn, the namesake of Rose's rival, Leslie. Breuer's insistence on peopling *Caricatura* with characters resembling those to whom he is attached, personally and professionally, constitutes "social archetype," not family history.<sup>12</sup>

Bonnie Marranca made a parallel argument in 1977, suggesting that in the animations

Breuer's use of autobiography . . . goes way beyond a purely narcissistic approach; he is self-projected, not self-centered. By that I mean he situates himself in a social context, and what he writes in his plays relates to the world around him. It is the I in "the world," not the 'I' in its own world.<sup>13</sup>

These arguments can be extended to *Red Beads* as well. Breuer says that many of his romantic partners have been muses to him—so have his collaborators. "Every writer has a base reality to the characters he puts together," he says, "and some characters are built on two or three of these people. Every writer uses his own family. But I think more important is that you don't see these

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<sup>12</sup> Smith Fischer, *Mabou Mines: Making Avant-Garde Theater in the 1970s*, 138.

<sup>13</sup> Bonnie Marranca, introduction to *Animations: A Trilogy for Mabou Mines*, Lee Breuer, ed. Bonnie Marranca and Gautam Dasgupta (New York: Performing Arts Journal Publications, 1979), 7.

people, you see your fantasy.”<sup>14</sup> *Shaggy Dog*, dedicated to Maleczech and Bill Raymond, is an early example of this approach, which Smith Fischer characterizes as “autograph” rather than autobiography.<sup>15</sup> Galilee agrees with the assessment that Breuer’s work is not autobiographical. “Lee is a really easy target,” she says,

because he’s so open with his references in his writing. And he uses animals, so people can say, “oh Leslie was a cow in *Epidog* and Ruth plays a rabbit or a dog—his wife is a dog.” But I don’t think that’s really what he’s saying (laughs). I think he uses animals because he’s looking for a metaphor to speak through.

Although these texts and productions are not autobiographical, that they were indeed inspired by family members and developed collaboratively with them is, as Schechner points out, significant for audience reception.

In addition to marking the first collaboration among Breuer, Maleczech, and Galilee, *Shaggy Dog* featured the company’s first extensive use of puppetry in performance (Mabou Mines had already used a puppet in the *B. Beaver Animation*, activating the beaver’s robe with sticks held aloft by performers on their backs). Development for *Shaggy Dog* was begun in 1975 at the Old Prop Shop at the Public Theater and the production premiered there in 1978, making the three-and-a-half year development process the longest in the company’s history, beating out *Lear* by six months. For Breuer, the process was characterized by his desire to exert more control as a director than he had done previously in order to retain authorial control over the text. “I felt that this group collaborative thing was fine for me as a director and not so fine for me as a writer, and when it came to *Shaggy Dog*, I really wanted more control over the thing,” he says.

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<sup>14</sup> Unless otherwise noted, all quotations by Breuer are taken from an interview with the author conducted in May 2012.

<sup>15</sup> Smith Fischer, *Mabou Mines: Making Avant-Garde Theater in the 1970s*, 137-38.

Breuer's text was published in 1979, along with *Red Horse* and *B. Beaver*, as *A Trilogy For Mabou Mines*, edited by Marranca and Gautam Dasgupta.

In her introduction, Marranca notes Breuer's orientation as a writer toward choral performance, a point that Smith Fischer takes up as well. In fact, Mabou Mines's early orientation toward choral performance extends beyond Breuer's page to a number of performances, indicating that it was as much a function of Breuer's priorities as a writer as it was of the composition and approach of the company, which was in those days what Maleczek describes as an intensely close-knit "troupe." In *Dressed Like an Egg*, which premiered in 1977, Akalaitis divided lines taken from Colette's writings among the company and, according to Maleczek, the three female performers represented young (Ellen McElduff), middle-aged (Akalaitis), and older (Maleczek) versions of the writer—a sort of chorus of Colettes.<sup>16</sup> As with the collective approach to delivering Rose's dialogue in *Shaggy Dog*, the division of Collette's text serves to amplify the language. As for *Shaggy Dog*, Maleczek, has said that the production "used the company of actors that was at the time Mabou Mines, and that company of actors had already worked together for several years, so the coded ways of speaking and working on things were . . . common knowledge."<sup>17</sup> This group of performers was marked by one significant difference from that of previous productions, however: David Warrilow had recently left the company.

The "group collaborative thing" to which Breuer refers began with the company's inaugural production, *The Red Horse Animation*. Although Breuer wrote and directed *Red Horse*, the production was developed in a highly collaborative manner with a great deal of input

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<sup>16</sup> For more extensive discussion of *The Shaggy Dog Animation* and *Dressed Like an Egg*, see Smith Fischer, *Mabou Mines: Making Avant-Garde Theater in the 1970s*, 120-162.

<sup>17</sup> Interview by Smith Fischer, October 28, 1994, side 1.

from the performers (Akalaitis, Maleczech, and David Warrilow), setting the stage for Mabou Mines's ongoing commitment to inviting—even requiring—performers to bring their intellect and point of view into the room. Breuer notes that although he began to seek more directorial control over the process at this time, he has continued to value the input of performers:

Most actors I work with for the first time are shocked by how much input I do want from them. Most directors don't want to hear a thing from them. You've got people with great ideas, how can you possibly not want to hear them? What I want is permission to say, I'd like to do this, but not that. And sometimes in a totally collaborative situation I don't have that permission.

Maleczech herself has noted on several occasions that collectivity and collaboration do not necessarily equal democracy—someone has to make a final decision. This signals an evolution from Mabou Mines's early days, when, as Breuer says, the director could be out-voted by the rest of the company on creative decisions.

Although the company's early roots in collective development were complicated, they did result in a highly cohesive company of actors, capable of activating the choral performances that Marranca and Smith Fischer describe. In fact, Mabou Mines's interest in chorus extends beyond the humans onstage to all elements of production. Smith Fischer has noted the importance of the company's use of design and media in storytelling. Maleczech herself says that

there are moments when you would like a light to say something—not an actor, not a line—or you would like a piece of music to take over some moment. It's mysterious how those judgments are made. It's a kind of eclecticism but it's not arbitrary. It's heartfelt and integrated into the conceptual life of the piece—the existence of elements that make up a piece.

This way of working, Maleczech contends, transcends the various styles of writing, performing, and visual approach that have characterized the many productions in the company's history.

“One of the things that marks the company besides its intense devotion to the language,” she says, “is this way of looking for how to say a moment, whether it’s said through a gesture or a sound or a piece of video. How the telling takes place.”<sup>18</sup> For Mabou Mines performers and directors, collaboration extends to design elements. This way of conceptualizing performance suggests that the company’s transition into puppetry, which can be used to extend the physical presence of the actor or to create a different sort of corporeal presence altogether, was inevitable.

The company has also had a habit of exploring the ways in which performers can interact with technology and media that do not necessarily appear to the audience as design elements. In *Shaggy Dog*, Smith Fischer describes a process by which performers “listened to recordings, taking verbal tonalities or phrasings indicative of certain singers, and then left the recordings behind” after developing a vocal and rhythmic approach to each of the three sections, which were influenced, respectively, by rock, country-western and jazz.<sup>19</sup> In an unpublished conversation with Maleczech, Smith Fischer suggests similarities between Maleczech’s role and approach in *Shaggy Dog* and in Patricia Spears Jones’s *Mother*, which premiered in 1994 and in which Maleczech played the title role. From a thematic point of view, both women, Maleczech says, are “trying to think their way out of the situation they are in.” During performances of *Mother*, Maleczech listened to music through headphones that was so loud that audience members in the environmental theatre staging by John McGrath could hear it as she passed by. According to Maleczech, at certain points the music even prevented her from hearing her fellow performers and she had to rely on their gestures and facial expressions to know what was happening. Maleczech notes an important distinction between aural and performative interaction in *Shaggy Dog* and *Mother*: the performers relied on music to shape their work in advance of

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid., side 2.

<sup>19</sup> Smith Fischer, *Mabou Mines: Making Avant-Garde Theater in the 1970s*, 135.

performances for *Shaggy Dog*, while Maleczech continued to listen to music during the actual performance of *Mother*.<sup>20</sup> Both strategies are typical of the way in which Maleczech engages with media, using it to extend and expand her own body and voice.

In addition to relying on musical inspiration for vocal rhythm, tone, and style during the *Shaggy Dog* rehearsal process, Maleczech relied on another sonic device during performance. Greg Mehrten, who provided sound effects, fed lines into Maleczech's ear during a particularly dense and lengthy section of text, a strategy Maleczech repeated in *Lucia's Chapters of Coming Forth By Day*, as I discuss in "Extraordinary Women."

As for the collaboration with Galilee, Breuer says, referring to his idea that the people around him serve as bases for fiction in his writing, says that his fantasy of his young daughter, who represented the "little dog," was probably quite reductive. Schechner puts it another way. "Maybe," he says, "the grown-ups project on the purer screens of their own children—for these kids aren't actors picked from open calls—clouded (sexual) strategies the better to see them (and work them through)." Schechner notes the complicated reception process for audiences who take in performances featuring parent-child relationships, citing Mel Gussow's morally outraged review of Squat Theater's work in *Pig*, which placed their children in similarly complex systems of representation. Schechner describes the way he viewed Galilee in *Shaggy Dog* in uncomfortable terms:

dressed as a grown woman, in a shiny gown, parading on high-heels: there's something not the-child-at-play in this scene: after all, Clover [sic] does it as part of a performance, repetitively, for or at least in front of an audience. Sometimes Clover [sic] utters dialogue not made from an eight-year-old head. There's something porny about it . . . but not in the 42<sup>nd</sup> Street way. It's this double action-double agent thing artists feel strongly towards kids.

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<sup>20</sup> Interview by Smith Fischer, October 28, 1994, side 1.

Distressing though this description may be, Schechner argues for the effectiveness of creating this sort of unease in the viewer, insisting that although the “grown-ups” may project ideas onto Galilee, she remains an autonomous entity. “Obviously she is the synthesis—the only possible synthesis—of her parents; and she is herself too,” he writes.<sup>21</sup>

From Galilee’s point of view, her work on *The Shaggy Dog Animation* paved the way for her career in the theatre. “The experience of being inside the play was the most fun I’ve ever had,” she says,

I’ve never forgotten anything I got to do in that play. I got to learn how to make cream puffs—JoAnne taught me how. Everything worked on stage and everything was my size because it was for the puppets. Everything in the kitchen worked and I could cook. . . I loved it. I really felt the Prop Shop was like home. We would go there every day and we would make the play happen. It was a very magical place for me. Everyone worked a lot and worked really hard and I felt like part of that.

Galilee was five when rehearsals began and eight when the show premiered, and she viewed the company members she was working with as her extended family. Rather than feeling uncomfortable with her role in the production, she actively enjoyed her participation, both because of her level of comfort with the company that surrounded her and because of the activities her job required. From a little girl’s point of view, the opportunity to wear the costumes Schechner describes was a dream come true. “I was so excited,” Galilee says, “I got to wear this gorgeous sequined dress that was made for me, I got to wear high heels, I got my makeup done and I got to look beautiful and dance.”

In addition to the little dog, Galilee played a twenty-seven-year-old version of Rose—hence the heavy make up, which she remembers took the entire third act to apply. This mature

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<sup>21</sup> Schechner, 86-87.

Rose takes a bubble bath onstage and is lifted out of the tub and carried away by John.

Although the content is, as Schechner describes, mature, Galilee was unaware of any sexual undertones. Galilee remembers

Lee never said “say that with a sexy voice.” He would never say, “this is a come on.” He would just say, “say it like you’re saying goodnight to me.” . . . I don’t think I was aware that I was behaving like an adult, but I was taught. Ruth and Lee taught me from a young age that when you first meet someone you ask them about themselves immediately—what were they working on—so people used to say that I asked these very adult questions. And I used to wear these long black dresses and high heels on a regular basis, all the way from the time I was five, and I still dress like that. It might have been me and it might have been my upbringing.

But Schechner’s perception that there was “something not the child-at-play” in Galilee’s performance is not wholly inaccurate from Galilee’s point of view either.

“I felt very special—I was the only child,” she says, “but I also felt a huge responsibility to act like them, to be a real professional person who thinks about the work. . . . I really felt akin to the people around me who were forty.” Galilee enjoyed the responsibility that came with participating in a professional production, even if she may not have been completely equipped to take it on. “I fell asleep onstage a couple of times,” Galilee recalls,

and missed my cues, but it wasn’t that big of a deal—it wasn’t the kind of high pressure situation I see kids go through now. I imagine that if I really hated it and didn’t want to do it, they wouldn’t have made me do it.

As Schechner points out, Galilee’s participation is complicated because she is doing something natural and artificial at the same time—she is a little girl taking on the responsibilities of a mature artist in the development process. And perhaps more importantly for the reception process, in performance she is a little girl playing an adult woman.

The paradox of Galilee's performance goes to the heart of *Shaggy Dog*'s entangled representation of femininity and feminism. *The Shaggy Dog Animation* and *Dressed Like an Egg*, which premiered in 1977, represent the company's first direct engagement with questions of gender, an issue that would come to dominate Maleczech's point of view on stage. Smith Fischer suggests that "gender issues that were filtering into the company members' lives and work process" had a major impact on Breuer's work on the animation. She points out that *Shaggy Dog*, with its female narrator, is Breuer's "take on a woman artist's perspective" and deals with "the formation of Rose's feminist consciousness and identity." Breuer's interest in taking up issues of gender coincides not only with the social context surrounding the work but also with his first collaboration with his and Maleczech's daughter. This suggests that while the gendered and sexual aspects of *Shaggy Dog* are not autobiographical, they may be personal. In a related argument, Smith Fisher suggests that, for all of *Shaggy Dog*'s engagement with nascent feminism, Breuer "may have been less interested in the feminine than in how female characteristics participate in forming masculinity."<sup>22</sup> Maleczech had yet to initiate a project with Mabou Mines, but the period during which she worked on *Shaggy Dog* is an important prelude to her own full-fledged feminist approach to performing and directing. The young Galilee would continue to incorporate puppetry in her work with the company, and take on representations of gender in much of her work with Trick Saddle.

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<sup>22</sup> Smith Fischer 134 and 138. Maleczech suggests to Smith Fisher in the October 28, 1994 interview, side 1, that Breuer continues to examine incarnations of the female perspective through Rose in *The Warrior Ant and An Epidog*, which, along with *Shaggy Dog*, constituted a trilogy. That trilogy is currently incorporated into *La Divina Caricatura*.

***Red Beads***

While Breuer dedicated *Shaggy Dog* to Maleczech and Raymond, he wrote the poem “Red Beads” for the twelve-year-old Galilee. It was based on a short story by Polina Klimovitskaya, one of Breuer’s former partners, and published, along with the performance poem version, in Breuer’s collection *Sister Suzie Cinema* in 1987. The performance poem received its first workshop production in 1982 at Seattle’s Empty Space, the same theatre that premiered the English-language version of Kroetz’s *Through the Leaves*, which Mabou Mines later produced under Akalaitis’s direction featuring Maleczech in 1984. The 1982 workshop, directed by Breuer, featured Frank Corrado as the Father, Susan Heldfond as the choreographer and the Mother, Clare Dewey as the Daughter, and Marjorie Nelson as the Narrator. Music was by William Spencer and design by Thom Cathcart. A photograph of the workshop that is printed in Breuer’s anthology reflects a spare production, distinct in scale and scope from the 2005 Mabou Mines premiere at New York University’s Skirball Center for the Arts, though the text of the performance poem is nearly identical. Breuer views the workshop in Seattle as a “preliminary inroad” into the work. “I always do much better when I do something twice,” he says, echoing Maleczech’s interest in revisiting work, “in fact, I don’t think I’ve ever done anything really good the first time.”

The Mabou Mines production, also under Breuer’s direction, is described on the company’s website as

a gothic, coming-of-age fairy-tale/opera, choreographed aerially. Lee Breuer’s performance poem . . . explores the eerie family dynamic of a daughters’ transition into womanhood and the gift, from mother to daughter, of the red beads, a metaphor for the passage of power and sexuality. Using only wind, Basil Twist transforms swaths of fabric into luminous, quivering, ephemeral sets and puppets . . . challenging our perception of space and proportion. Ushio Torikai’s haunting, dissonant score swells and

ebbs, driving the story while evoking the psychological tension one equates with Hitchcock.<sup>23</sup>

Mabou Mines developed *Red Beads* with a 1999 residency in Minneapolis at the Walker Arts Center and Red Eye in association with Three Legged Race and two residencies at Mass MoCA in 2001 and 2002, with music rehearsals sponsored by a TCG/MetLife Foundation Extended Collaboration Grant. The cast for the full production featured Maleczech as the Mother, Galilee as the Daughter, and Rob Besserer as the Father. Torikai composed and arranged the music, with “animated design and puppetry” by Twist, for which he was selected to be represented at the Prague Quadrennial in 2007. Galilee created her own choreography.

During development for the project, Maleczech had provided the voice of the Mother but had not been physically present onstage. When the show was scheduled to premiere at the Skirball Center, however, Galilee reports that Breuer approached Maleczech and asked her to take on the Mother’s physical presence as well. “It was really difficult for her to do it physically,” Galilee says, but, she remembers, Twist told Maleczech, “I’m going to make you look incredible.” Indeed, when Maleczech first appears, she dangles from the ceiling of the theatre, voluminous silken robes blowing in the wind and draping to the floor. On opening night, this entrance garnered an extended standing ovation.

Although it was Galilee who first inspired the poem, Breuer says that it was his desire to collaborate with Twist, whose work on *Symphonie Fantastique* (1998) had impressed him, that served as the impetus for this production. Breuer and Twist have since collaborated on several projects, including the 2011 production of *A Streetcar Named Desire* at the Comédie Française. While Breuer’s collaborative focus in *Shaggy Dog* was on a group of performers who were

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<sup>23</sup> Webpage: “Red Beads,” Mabou Mines digital archive, accessed June 21, 2012, <http://www.maboumines.org/productions/red-beads>.

responsible for creating the vocal and physical world of the play, here Breuer's major collaborator was Twist:

The piece was written for Clove. It had been twenty years since I wrote it, and it was good that she still looked young enough to do it. Ruth was a little too old to fly, but she was a great mother. It was fun for her to play the witch. But the real key there was, we wanted to extend puppetry to incorporate décor, and we wanted to use air the way Basil used water in another piece.

Another crucial piece of the puzzle for Breuer was Torikai's music, which, in keeping with Breuer's aesthetic, was, as Breuer describes, "on the pop edge." The work of the *Red Beads* creative team was favorably viewed by a number of critics. In her review of the production for the *New York Times*, Margo Jefferson lauds it as "theater as sorcery; it is a crossroads where artistic traditions meet to invent a marvelous common language. It is a fairy tale, a puppet play and a chamber opera," noting that the four-performance run was "not nearly enough."<sup>24</sup>

*Red Beads* tells the story of a girl, who, at the approach of her thirteenth birthday, lays claim to what she and her father insist should be rightfully hers: the strand of thirteen red beads that her mother wears around her neck. The beads are an obvious metaphor for female sexuality and fertility, and the Mother is loath to give them up. The Daughter experiences a loss of innocence in several stages—her dog dies, then her cat, and she is locked outside of her parents' bedroom door while they have (aerial) sex. Finally her mother tries to strangle her with the beads, but her bird—the canary in the coal mine—warns her father and he rescues her, telling her that her mother "was a witch/and I in thrall. Your mother's lost." The Mother's sexuality and primacy in the family are subverted as father and daughter, at the Father's insistence, "vow a

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<sup>24</sup> Margo Jefferson, "A Girl Caught in an Eternal Family Triangle," *New York Times*, September 22, 2005, Theater Section.

vow of fealty/To the rightful lady of the land”: the Daughter, now in possession of the beads.

Father and daughter promise to look for the Mother, who, we are told, they will never find.

*Red Beads* features vocal as well as aerial acrobatics. In keeping with the conception of production on a vast scale, the three characters have doubles—Chelsea Bacon as the other Mother, Zoe Phillips as the other Daughter, and Terry O’Reilly as the other Father. Not only do the characters have body doubles—their words are doubled aurally. In a variation on the choral dialogue performers used to approach Rose in *Shaggy Dog*, opera singers repeat the lines spoken by the Mother, Father, and Daughter in song, sometimes multiple times, varying the length of words and syllables to draw ten short pages of verse into a performance that lasts nearly an hour and a half.

In addition to opera singers, *Red Beads* requires live musicians and teams of puppeteers and aerial operators. When the company assembles onstage for the curtain call, more than seventy people stand before the audience to take a bow. In fact, the company was comprised of eighty-five people, twenty-four of them students at New York University. In an interview for an article about the piece that ran in the *New York Times* shortly before opening, Breuer described his stylistic intentions:

I wanted to find this meeting ground where the symbolist take of Edgar Allan Poe that goes all the way back to these wonderful high camp ladies on mountains, with ravens on their shoulders and stuff like that. You know, this is Freddy in *Friday the 13th*, when the father comes up with the pick and spade and pulls his daughter down into the grave. So in a way it’s a Tim Burton kind of spoof, in a way it’s camp, as well as being a very serious operatic statement.<sup>25</sup>

Everything in *Red Beads*—the music, the colors, the giant projected face, the swaths of wind-

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<sup>25</sup> Phoebe Hoban, “An Allegory Unfolds in the Air,” *New York Times*, September 18, 2005, Theater Section.

blown silk that hang to the floor from the limbs of performers dangling from the ceiling of the cavernous Skirball Center—are colossal in scale. This strategy supports the style of the poem, which zeroes in on the tensions between mother and daughter on the eve of the Daughter's ascension to womanhood, making the Daughter's arrival at puberty into a battle of epic proportions—for life or death, good or evil.

The staging is also, as Breuer indicates, fairly creepy. So is the poem. This spooky quality stems in part from a deceptively simple story, which allows the gothic ornamentation to take the audience rather by surprise. Because we think we understand so clearly what we are getting—a story about a mother's fear of displacement in her husband's affections as her daughter becomes an adult becoming fully realized—the haunting impact of the eerie phrases and images sneak up on us. And, of course, there is the implication of incest to unsettle us. "Incest?" Breuer told Phoebe Hoban for the *New York Times*, "Of course, it's about a transference of sexuality from the mother to the daughter at puberty."<sup>26</sup>

The family relationships at the heart of the production only enhance the strangeness of the experience. While *Red Beads* certainly isn't about the Breuer-Maleczech-Galilee family history, our knowledge of these familial relationships heightens the eeriness and discomfort that the production elicits.

Although a number of Mabou Mines co-artistic directors and collaborators have insisted that there is no major difference in collaborating with family members than with any other members of their close-knit circle of artists, the significance of these family collaborations is keenly absorbed by outside observers, whose reception of the performance involves reading real

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

life stories into staged scenes. Indeed, it is a discussion about this set of relationships that opens Hoban's article, which she describes as a "family parable":

Some families spend Sunday afternoon going to the mall. Not the artistic and biological family at the core of Mabou Mines. Ms. Galilee, a trained dancer who choreographed her own part, is being put through her dangling paces by her father, Lee Breuer . . . . The performer Ruth Maleczech who . . . plays her real-life role as the Mother in the piece, is in the audience, observing the action . . . . And then there is the extended family. Polina Klimovitskaya, who wrote the original fairy tale from which Mr. Breuer adapted this "performance poem," is also in the audience. Mr. Breuer first heard the story of "Red Beads" over 20 years ago, when Ms. Klimovitskaya, with whom he lived at the time, told it to their son, Alexander.<sup>27</sup>

Here Hoban easily elides Maleczech's "real-life role" with the one she plays in *Red Beads*.

While the woman and the role she plays are certainly not the same—it is doubtful, to say the least, that Maleczech was tempted to strangle Galilee with a necklace when the latter approached puberty—Hoban's enthusiasm for these correspondences suggest the attraction for audiences in drawing parallels between theatre and life. In her review for the *Times*, Margo Jefferson also notes the biological family at the core of the production, making reference to them in her title, "A Girl Caught in an Eternal Family Triangle," blurring the lines once again between staged fantasy and real life relationships.

Maleczech, Breuer, and Galilee have also occasionally acknowledged the significance of familial ties on their work. Although she reports having had mixed feelings about the poem when it was first written, Galilee was enthusiastic about the production. She told Hoban, "It's incredible that I have the greatest gift a child can have, which is to grow up and have your parents become your mentors." Breuer agreed, saying in the same article, "It's critically

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

important that I worked with the mother of my child and my child. I couldn't have done the piece the same way with other people where I did not have these references.” Maleczech further assented, telling Hoban, “there is a ground base of trust, It’s in the air and it’s going somewhere and you can trust where it’s going.” This doesn’t mean that we should read autobiography or family history into Breuer’s text or this production, but the audience’s acknowledgment of these biological ties most certainly enriches our reception process. For example, Galilee bears a striking physical resemblance to Maleczech, and it is exciting to realize this as the two are sitting on stage side by side. And while the trio’s coordinated response to such predictable questions about the significance of family relationships may have been part of a marketing campaign for the piece, it seems likely that this collaboration is indeed meaningful to the participants in the way the press (and audience) hopes that it is.

Galilee also says that collaborating with Maleczech helped to enhance her emotional and motivational stage life. “There was no comparison with having my actual mother be the scary mother,” she says. Although it might seem that the vast scale of the production would render motivational acting choices ineffective since the audience can’t see the performer’s faces closely, “Lee doesn’t like you to just dial it in,” Galilee says. She recalls that Breuer wanted her to actually weep when the Daughter loses her dog. “It was very hard to do because there’s so much technical stuff going on,” she explains,

there’s all these people saying, “clip her in!” and I’m saying, “oooooh my dog,” and I can’t see through the wig... Lee is really a stickler for combining very real emotions with being surrounded by these hugely extravagant situations. And *Shaggy Dog Animation* was no different.

Maleczech excels at remaining emotionally vulnerable during technically ambitious staging, as she also does in *Hajj* and *Lucia's Chapters of Coming Forth By Day*. “Even though her part was small,” Galilee says, “she just took over. I learned so much from her.”

Not only does *Red Beads* mark the continued collaboration among Maleczech, Galilee, and Breuer, it also engages with the company's history with puppetry, which appears to have had a profound effect on both Galilee and her brother. Ramblin's career as a puppeteer has meant he has worked with Mabou Mines and on productions such as the American premiere of *War Horse* at Lincoln Center, and Galilee has integrated puppetry into her work with Mabou Mines in a variety of ways since sharing the stage with Rose in 1978. In 2004, Galilee received an Asian Cultural Council grant to study Ningyoburi puppetry in Japan, and she brought this expertise to her choreography and performance in *Red Beads*. Ningyoburi has its origins in Bunraku (the style in which the company worked with Rose in *Shaggy Dog*) and is used in Kabuki, especially by Onnagata. In *Red Beads*, as well as interacting with a puppet dog, cat, and bird, Galilee herself becomes a puppet in the tradition of Ningyoburi, performing an intricate dance at the close of Act II, aided by two puppeteers who stand behind her and appear as if they are in control of her movements. This dance underscores the Daughter's distress by linking her to Onnagata, who typically use Ningyoburi as a form of expression in moments of emotional turmoil. The connection between the Daughter and Onnagata figures also juxtaposes the Daughter's, caught in her last prepubescent moments, with the gendered history of the Onnagata. The Daughter must also face sexually charged adversity—albeit of a different nature—as she undergoes the transition from child to woman.

The use of puppetry, body doubles, aerial performance, and the choral relationship between spoken dialogue and opera in *Red Beads* are techniques that allow the performers,

director, and designers to extend and expand expressive gesture and voice. First, there is Maleczech's grand entrance. Later in the performance, the Daughter sails across the stage, strapped into a giant, vertical bed that trails silk bed sheets. The body doubles introduce another way to amplify physical presence through the use of perspective—when we see Galilee glide off stage left only to see Phillips appear stage right on the same plane, tracing the same path across the stage, we have the sense that the Daughter's body is everywhere on the stage, haunting and encircling it. The operatic repetitions of text serve to heighten and underscore certain words and phrases, such as “Save me, Daddy, save me,” which is repeated by both Galilee and the singers as the Daughter hovers on the stage, waiting for her father to release her from the trap laid by her mother.

In *Shaggy Dog*, Breuer and Maleczech naturally wielded greater influence as collaborators than did the young Galilee. Here, however, Breuer and Galilee's collaborative contributions are more readily apparent than Maleczech's. Though Maleczech's vocal performance—gravelly and electronically amplified—is both characteristic and striking, it is layered within a rich texture of music, voice, wind puppetry, and choreography. In *Summa Dramatica*, the composition of collaborative influence among Maleczech, Breuer, and Galilee would shift once again.

### ***Summa Dramatica***

*La Divina Caricatura*, Breuer's epic cycle of animations, includes re-workings of texts, including a musical version of *Shaggy Dog*, as well as new material. *Summa Dramatica*, a more recent addition to the *Caricatura* canon, currently makes up the first part of the second half of the epic (although its placement appears to have moved at least once) and takes up self-

referential questions about performance and animation. In his review of the published version of *Caricatura*, in which *Summa Dramatica* appears at the tail end, Arthur Sabbatini writes

Far more than a zoo story, Breuer's batty vision is at once biotoonic (biology + cartoons) and mythopreposterous. It is conceived with a concoction that mingles Hinduesque cosmology and snatches of sociobiological hypothesizing with nods to Dante, Disney, and Nietzsche. . . he has . . . been engendering a substantial mytho-theatrical cycle of plays and a singular approach to acting and performance that brings together world theatre traditions and American pop culture. Moreover, his *comédie animale* descends from a lineup of notable thinkers, most of whom he merrily misreads.<sup>28</sup>

Maleczech plays the academic acting guru and cow, Sri Moo Parahamsa, whose lecture, Sabbatini notes, “ranges freely into the fields of theory, genetics, spirituality, physics, addiction, and cartoons.”<sup>29</sup> *Summa Dramatica* premiered in January 2009 on a double-bill with *Porco Morto*, performed by Greg Mehrten, as *Pataphysics Pennyeach* at the ToRoNaDa studio in the Public Theater's Under the Radar festival. *Pataphysics Pennyeach* was also presented in 2010 at New York Theatre Workshop. Galilee performed in early versions of *Summa Dramatica*, including a 2005 workshop at the Flea Theatre, and provided choreography for the cow, who is now performed by Maleczech with Jessica Weinstein.

This animation, described by the company,

features the pontifications of the “eminent acting guru and erstwhile Holy Cow, Sri Moo Parahamsa,” on the sorry state of the acting profession. Performance is in crisis due to “the number one health concern of the free world”—animation addiction. What exactly does that mean? It means a four-armed, multi-voiced holy cow, musing on the nature of

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<sup>28</sup> Arthur Sabbatini, “From Dog to Ant: The Evolution of Lee Breuer's Animations,” *PAJ: A Journal of Performance and Art* 26, no. 2 (May 2004): 52-53.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 59.

performance, bovine pearls of wisdom, and a stunning testimonial from recovering animation addict Marge Simpson.<sup>30</sup>

Leslie Mohn, who played Sri Moo in *An Epidog* in the 1996 premiere at HERE Arts Center in New York, provides the voice of Marge Simpson. Jay Ansil composed the music, Eamonn Farrell provided the projections, the lighting design is by Jason Boyd, with sound design by Ken Travis, costumes by Meganne George, and animation by John Infantino. Julie Archer created the mask for Sri Moo—an imposing, bejeweled cow head that obscures most of Maleczech’s face.

The use of puppets and masks have taken an increasingly central place on Breuer’s stage in his direction of his own texts, where their presence has served to extend gesture, expand vocal presence, and redirect attention from the performer to the text, perhaps functions of his desire to exert more control over the performance of his texts. In this case, Maleczech’s mask deflects attention away from her physical presence, but in small theatres with a sparse scenic design, this can be somewhat frustrating for the viewer, especially given Maleczech’s ability to manipulate facial expressions aimed at creating a big impact in an intimate space. For one meta-theatrical monologue, however, she does remove the cow’s head from her own and talk directly to the audience as a version of herself.

Music has also played an increasingly crucial role in Breuer’s staging of his own texts, as with *Red Beds*, and in his adaptations, as with *Gospel at Colonus* (1983). In Breuer’s reworking of *Shaggy Dog*, in development through 2013, the singer Bernadine Mitchell performs Rose’s text. Of the shift from choral performance to pop music, Breuer explains that

The original Mabou Mines company had no musical ability whatsoever. They couldn’t even carry a tune. I remember Philip Glass tearing his hair trying to write a piece of music that Mabou Mines could sing. So if I was going to go into music I was a little

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<sup>30</sup> Webpage: “Summa Dramatica,” Mabou Mines, accessed June 21, 2012, <http://www.maboumines.org/productions/summa-dramatica-pataphysical-acting-lesson>.

limited. But little by little I felt that my writing needed music to be realized. It was more likely that it would work if you sang it than if you said it. So I started getting more and more interested in musical performance.

Breuer suggests that he and Maleczech diverged artistically on this score. Although he agrees with assessments by Maleczech and Akalaitis that Mabou Mines is intensely interested in language, Breuer explains that from his point of view, this interest is “pretty literary.” Of his move into popular music, he says, “In the 1970s we were meeting contacts of Philip Glass. We were kind of moved into the art world and by moving into the art world we were moving into the new dance world and the new music world. And as exciting as all that was, I wasn’t really ready to go there.” He sees his post-1970s movement into a variety of musical styles—“anything but avant-garde and classical”—as more evocative of his own aesthetic. From Breuer’s point of view, his new, pop music *Shaggy Dog* fits more naturally into *La Divina Caricatura*, which also includes *Sister Suzie Cinema*, originally conceived as a “doo-wop opera.”

But unlike the *Shaggy Dog* and *Sister Suzie* portions of the *Caricatura*, *Summa Dramatica* and *Porco Morto* are spoken, not sung. That they are performed by Maleczech and Mehrten, veteran Mabou Mines collaborators of Breuer’s from the company’s non-singing days, means that *Caricatura* spans Breuer’s career as a writer/director. Sri Moo, Sabbatini writes,

applies physics to the soul, eventually concluding that the soul is receptive to light, but behaves like a quanta-particle until it attaches to a role, at which point it becomes animated. Plays, Moo explains, are the cultural entities where roles, in the form of knowable characters (heroes, fools) appear, with historical and social variations.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Sabbatini, 59.

As Sabbatini suggests, Breuer links playing a role to having a soul. And who better to play the part of the acting guru who spouts this philosophy than Maleczek, his performance collaborator and sometime muse of fifty-five years?

Maleczek is “wonderful in terms of her phrasing,” Breuer says, explaining that in the earlier years of their collaboration, he “was very interested in verbal phrasing. And Ruth’s a master of it.” Although Breuer suggests the divergence in paths that occurred when he became more interested in blending his words with music, he notes the musicality of Maleczek’s delivery. “As a speaker, she’s very musical,” he says. This may be part of Maleczek’s inheritance from her work at the Tape Music Center in San Francisco, where she collaborated with musicians who wanted performers “to be a part of their music.” Critics have also remarked upon the musicality of Maleczek’s speech, particularly in her performance of *Happy Days* (1996), an idea I take up in “Ordinary Women.”

Maleczek’s obscured face and stationary position in *Summa Dramatica* direct focus to her vocal work, indicating that Breuer’s decision to deflect focus from Maleczek’s physicality is intentional. Breuer believes that Maleczek’s recently limited physical vocabulary has “forced her to become more of a vocal performer.” Breuer, capitalizing on the musicality of Maleczek’s phrasing, has conceptualized the staging of *Summa Dramatica* for the performative qualities he feels are now Maleczek’s greatest strengths. Aside from her vocal prowess, Breuer emphasizes Maleczek’s affinity for and skill with comedy, agreeing with her assessment that Mabou Mines has had a sustained interest in utilizing humor on stage.

Maleczek’s facility for vocal acrobatics and comedy are evident in the accent she uses for Sri Moo, a stereotypical sort of Indian one that we recognize from television characters such as Apu from *The Simpsons*. This brings Sri Moo and the projected figure of Marge Simpson into

a shared world of animation. This accent, Breuer explains, is a “caricature.” Though Maleczek has used accents in a striking number of her performances—*Through the Leaves*, *Dead End Kids*, *Lucia’s Chapters of Coming Forth By Day*, to name a few—this one, Breuer says, is different:

The Sri Moo accent is a caricature accent. The Polish accent in *Dead End Kids* is not—it’s a character accent. The difference is that a caricature accent leads you to a cartoon. The reason for a cartoon is that it is a simplification—it’s a parody of that particular life. The other accent is a sociological simplification. In other words, you’re classifying yourself with a particular cultural group. Any characterization is an internal, personalized characterization and a social characterization. You have to bring the two together.

Greg Mehrten suggests that Breuer’s use of stereotype is always part of a complex network of signals. In *Lear*, the company used southern accents as part of an overall effort to create fully fleshed out characters. Here, Breuer is moving toward an intentionally simplified caricature of a creature that is not even fully human, let alone Indian. Sabbatini suggests:

By inhabiting animals, Breuer’s ideas on sex, gender, love, identity, class, family, creativity, and the self-destructive tendencies of human beings are held in arrested development, and comic relief—suspended animation. His animals. . . can love, suffer, complain, even die, but the level of self-knowing that they ultimately demonstrate, or the amount of responsibility that they have, is not accountable in fully human terms. After all, what can you expect from a pig?<sup>32</sup>

Or a cow? Maleczek’s use of what Breuer calls a caricature accent allows Sri Moo to remain in a sort of no-man’s-land between the human world and the animal kingdom, which may be what Breuer means by “cartoon.”

By contrast, the use of a character accent, Breuer explains, requires a performer of Maleczek’s caliber in order to deliver an accent as only part of an intricately detailed portrait:

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 58.

A good use of an accent is always double. You have to get the social character, and you have to get the personalized character, which is how the social character is different than other members of that social class. The Sri Moo accent is different because it is about being an animated cartoon. Accents are very dangerous because you can stop at having a good accent and you will have a good, generalized theatrical caricature. If you want a real accent, you have to get specific . . . the southern accent from upper Mississippi is very different from the southern accent from lower Mississippi, and it usually has to do with social class. An accent is a quick fix on how to direct yourself toward a character. If you stop at an accent, you're dead. It's called caricature. It's a lousy acting choice. Ruth is good enough that she can put a personalized aspect into her accent. But if you don't put a personalized aspect into it it's a caricature accent. That's why accents work for her and they can kill other actors.

Maleczech's accent for Sri Moo is funny. So is the cow's head she wears, and the four hooves she, in concert with Weinstein, wields. She uses her voice and her minimal range of movement to maximum effect, creating a cartoon that, by the end of the performance, we seem to know as well as we know Marge Simpson.

Galilee moved to California in the midst of development for *Summa Dramatica*, but prior to her departure she played Sri Moo's bottom half, developing the choreography for the cow's four legs, used for gestural effect as if they are four arms. "That was so easy—easy, easy, easy," says Galilee of the choreographic process, "We just went in and made it." Weinstein performed the bottom half after Galilee's move, but her face is hidden and her moves, choreographed by Galilee, still resonate with those of the original performer, evoking the presence of the daughter no longer crouched beneath her mother on the stage. Sri Moo's choreography in *Summa* is imbued with Galilee's influence. For Sri Moo's gestures, Galilee relied on her training in Kathak. "As her daughter, I have a very good feeling for her body," Galilee says, "I would riff on her voice. She had to act above me, so I could do all of the silly illustrative stuff."

Acknowledging that Maleczech has a history of being skilled in movement herself, Breuer notes

that “Clove knows a great deal more about movement than Ruth does, so I think she adds a certain level of sophistication” to the physical landscape. Maleczech, he suggests, knows how to exploit Galilee’s choreography to create a major impact, even (and especially) with her limited movement palate in *Summa Dramatica*.

*Shaggy Dog*, *Red Beads*, and *Summa Dramatica* present distinct permutations of the collaboration among Maleczech, Breuer, and Galilee, as well as marking an evolving range in the way these artists relate to movement, voice, and media. In process and production, Galilee’s work under Maleczech’s direction and the resulting production, *Imagination Dead Imagine* is yet another incarnation of Maleczech’s family collaborations.

**Mother, Daughter, and Holographic Visualization:  
*Imagination Dead Imagine***

While *Shaggy Dog*, *Red Beads*, and *Summa Dramatica* trace the Maleczech- Breuer- Galilee trio’s evolving interaction with puppetry in performance, in *Imagination Dead Imagine* Maleczech was interested in using technology to transform the relationship among performer, audience, and performance. Years after Galilee appeared onstage alongside Maleczech in *Shaggy Dog* and years before they appeared together in *Red Beads*, Maleczech cast her daughter to appear virtually in *Imagination Dead Imagine*, a three-page story by Beckett. In an unusual example of the writer’s willingness to allow artists to repurpose his texts—which he granted on more than one occasion to Mabou Mines—Beckett gave Maleczech permission to stage this prose piece. *Imagination Dead Imagine* was written in French as *Imagination morte imaginez* in the early 1960s, and originally published in 1965 in *Les Lettres nouvelles*. As he always did with the texts he wrote in French, Beckett translated the story into English himself, after which it was

published in London in the *Sunday Times*, also in 1965. J.M. Coetzee writes that Beckett's short stories of this period follow "the narrative premise of *The Unnamable*, and of *How It Is*" in which

a creature constituted of a voice is attached, for reasons unknown, to some kind of body enclosed in a space more or less reminiscent of Dante's Hell, condemned for a certain length of time to speak, to try to make sense of things. It is a situation well described by Heidegger's term *Geworfenheit*: being thrown without explanation into an existence governed by obscure rules.<sup>33</sup>

Accordingly, Mel Gussow describes the story in his review of Maleczech's production for the *New York Times* as a "futuristic tale of a man and woman confined in a white rotunda."<sup>34</sup>

Mabou Mines had already produced a number of Beckett's works in the early 1970s, including *Come and Go* and *Play* (both 1971), in which Maleczech performed. Fred Neumann's staging of Beckett's novel *Mercier and Camier* premiered in 1979. Maleczech began working on *Imagination Dead Imagine* in 1981, after writing Beckett for permission to stage his story "as a holographic visualization with the complete text on tape. This would be an installation in a gallery or museum," she explained, "and would not involve any live performer."<sup>35</sup> Galilee was to provide the movement sequence for the hologram. Maleczech had erroneously included a comma in Beckett's title in her letter to him, to which he responded, on one of his tiny and immaculate white note cards, "no comma, I beseech you." Also on the note card: "help me to visualize 'holographic visualization'" and, "I'll consent."<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> J.M. Coetzee, introduction to *Samuel Beckett: The Grove Centenary Edition*, Volume IV, Samuel Beckett, ed. Paul Auster (New York: Grove Press, 2006), ix-x.

<sup>34</sup> Mel Gussow, "Pretty Boy' and a Beckett," *New York Times*, June 15, 1984, Theater Section.

<sup>35</sup> Samuel Beckett, December 16, 1981, Mabou Mines Correspondence, Mabou Mines Archive, Fales Library and Special Collections, New York University, Series IA, Box 1, Folder 8.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, December 24, 1981.

Maleczech wrote to Beckett again on March 12, 1984 to describe two possible approaches to this holographic visualization:

Process #1—A high contrast black and white film is taken of a figure brightly lit and slowly turning against a black background. The film is developed and projected onto a rear projection screen which then refracts the image through a holographic optical element. As the image passes through this optical element, it takes on the characteristics of a three dimensional body. This three dimensional image appears in mid-air rather than projected onto any surface. The body floats and gently turns above a bier.

Process #2—A film is taken in the same manner as above. The film is then cut and transferred to five 360° celluloid cylinders. These cylinders rest on top of a turning mechanism and are lit by a special high-intensity light. The turning mechanism and the light are both hidden inside the bier. The figure will again appear to be three dimensional and will seem to float in the air, detached from and slightly above the bier.

Anxious to emphasize the artistic concept behind these technicalities, Maleczech added, “If all this sounds very complicated it is, but the goal is a very simple and pure one; to suspend a body made of light above a simple bier, to have it turn gently and seem to emit speech in rays like light is emitted.”<sup>37</sup> Beckett responded on March 23, 1984, to assure Maleczech of his support, writing “It is all too technical for me to be of any help. I can only say that you have my full support. . . I greatly appreciate the pains you are taking with this project.”<sup>38</sup>

The twenty-minute long production premiered upstairs at the Performing Garage in 1984. In his review for the *Times*, Gussow wrote that “the starkness and mystery of the vision stimulates visual and aural imagery from Miss Maleczech. . . . On its most immediate level, the current adaptation is the equivalent of hearing poetry read to sculpture.”<sup>39</sup> Gussow’s impression signals another inheritance from Maleczech’s experience at the Tape Music Center, when she

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<sup>37</sup> Mabou Mines Correspondence, Samuel Beckett, March 12, 1984, Series IA, Box 1, folder 9

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, folder 10

<sup>39</sup> Gussow, 1984.

and other performers walked around an art gallery to music by composers such as Pauline Oliveros. Maleczech's idea for holographic visualization also has resonances in her sustained interest in collaborating with visual artists, as she did with the R.G. Davis Mime Troupe (now the San Francisco Mime Troupe) on *The Black and White Mime Show* with visual artist Judy Davis and in her first collaborations with Julie Archer, who initially thought of herself as a sculptor. These non-narrative pieces, rooted in visual art and music, as well as Maleczech's extensive collaborations with musicians and visual artists, helped to establish the genre in which Maleczech is working in *Imagination Dead Imagine*: performance installation. "Because Ruth works so visually," says Galilee, "her work often should be in museums, especially small pieces like *Vanishing Pictures* and *Imagination Dead Imagine*."

Maleczech's major design collaborator was Linda Hartinian, who worked with Maleczech on the hologram of Galilee. In the installation, a quiet, strained female voice and a slowly turning hologram of a woman's body divided into thirds and suspended over a bier, designed by L.B. Dallas, communicate the eerie and contemplative impression of a space-age reliquary. John Lennon's "Imagine" fades in and out subtly, as do the lights. The movements of the body in the hologram and the manipulation of sound and light are delicate and subtle, sensitive to Beckett's restrained and minimalist text. In his review, Gussow describes some of the visual effects that are lost in the installation's transition to VHS, reporting what the audience of the live performance saw: "a beam of light falls on a catafalque and the intricate design on the exterior changes color and texture as we watch it—from gold to bright white, from sandstone to marble. Faces and objects seem to appear on the surface."<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

Narrators in Beckett's prose are often ambiguous in gender, and Maleczech's female one coincides with Billie Whitelaw's 1981 performance of the prose piece *Enough*, directed by Alan Schneider (with whom Maleczech had worked at the San Francisco Actor's Workshop).<sup>41</sup> Maleczech's decision to hand the voice of eternity over to a woman places *Imagination Dead Imagine* within Maleczech's tradition of putting strong female voices onstage, evident from the very beginning in her directing work. Maleczech's first directing project, *Vanishing Pictures*, was a one-women show performed by Beverly Brown, developed under Maleczech's mentorship at ReCherChez before the latter offered to direct it. This interest in making room for powerful women onstage translated during the same period—the early 1980s—to her performances, with roles such as Marie Curie in *Dead End Kids*, developed with Akalaitis under her direction. Both productions are discussed in more detail in earlier chapters.

*Imagination Dead Imagine* was Maleczech's third directing project. Maleczech's second directing project, an adaptation of Jim Strah's detective novel *Wrong Guys* for the stage, premiered in 1981 and established an important precedent for translating prose for the stage, one that Maleczech quickly followed up with *Imagination Dead Imagine*. *Wrong Guys* was produced at the Public Theater in the same year as *Dead End Kids*, during Mabou Mines's residency there. Maleczech's adaptation featured an all-male cast that included Breuer, O'Reilly, and Bill Raymond, full frontal male nudity, and an all-female crew of technicians. Maleczech's adaptation of Strah's book tells the story of two tough guys, Jack (Raymond) and Johnny (Breuer), who are separated in a car crash, and Jack's quest to find Johnny. Jack eventually finds Johnny in a bathtub, only Johnny has become a cold-blooded killer. An original pornographic film is interspersed with the live action, as in Elizabeth LeCompte's pornographic

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<sup>41</sup> For a further discussion of Beckett's narrators of ambiguous gender, specifically in *Enough*, see Enoch Brater, *The Drama in the Text* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 58-61.

intervention into *Our Town* in the Wooster Group's *Route 1 & 9*, which premiered in the same year.

*Wrong Guys* was not recorded on video, but the photographs show a highly visual interpretation experimenting with Julie Archer's designs of light and shadow (a technique Maleczech built on in *Imagination Dead Imagine*) projected text, and careful and subtle use of props such as naked light bulbs, beer cans, a bathtub, and a typewriter in a set design by Michael Kuhling. A number of photographs reveal nearly nude men in sinewy poses, which contrast sharply with the tough, gangster language in the script. One picture captures all of the gangsters together in a bathtub, wearing suits, and a projection on the wall of words mixed with scribbles that gives the impression of a gunshot. Another vivid photo depicts the all-male cast lined up downstage in costumes designed by Greg Mehrten, dressed as gangsters with stockings over their heads and holding typewriters instead of guns.

*Wrong Guys* did not receive the attention and critical acclaim enjoyed by *Dead End Kids*. The few reviews are mixed. David Sterritt of the *Christian Science Monitor* praised the production for its attempt to recreate film techniques for the stage, such as "fading and dissolving and jump-cutting from one episode to another. The stagecraft is magical, and its complete visibility—every trick is pulled right before our eyes—makes it all the more ingenious." However, the review goes on to criticize *Wrong Guys* for its equally "visible problems," such as overly "sleazy" characters, nudity, and a convoluted plot.<sup>42</sup> This critique reveals expectations expressed about the purpose, style, and approach of experimental performance that may not be in keeping with Maleczech's or with Mabou Mines's. Another review written by Frank Rich for

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<sup>42</sup> David Sterritt, "A play that tries to be a movie, and pulls lots of stage tricks to do so," *Christian Science Monitor*, Boston, May 22, 1981.

the *New York Times* seems perhaps to have a better sense of Maleczek's intentions, though it isn't necessarily more favorable. Rich first praises the dazzling visual techniques in the piece, describing it as

a precisely designed mixed media circus in which black-and-white movies combine with live actors, flying lights and a complex network of rope and wire pulleys to take us on a manic descent into a volatile, imaginary criminal underworld. . . . When we're told of a malevolent black limousine streaking up Eighth Avenue, the cinematic image whips across the wide stage space like a rocket. Rolls of white paper—either dropping from above or ascending from the floor—materialize and disappear in an instant to pick up projected images of the view from a car windshield. . . .

Rich praises the feminist message communicated through the juxtaposition between male performers and the female technicians who serve them (though one wonders if the message might be just the opposite—that women technicians also have the power to pull the strings) and in the representation of women serving men in the film clips. He criticizes the production, however, for resorting to what he describes as overly obvious techniques, for dull text, and for failing to present anything “terribly new,” ultimately comparing *Wrong Guys* unfavorably with *Dead End Kids*. Some of Rich's critiques have to do with Maleczek's choice of material as well; he describes the language of Strah's novel as “sophomoric.”<sup>43</sup>

Despite some amount of critical disdain for the project, a number of Mabou Mines collaborators remember *Wrong Guys* as one of the strongest pieces in Maleczek's repertoire. “*Wrong Guys* was a huge turning point in her work artistically,” says Galilee, “She really knew what it was she was making, and she was surrounded by a bunch of really, really talented people who helped her make it.”

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<sup>43</sup> Frank Rich, “Wrong Guys: A Mixed Media Circus at the Public,” *New York Times*, May 15, 1981.

Interested, perhaps, in stretching herself as a director in a mode rather different than that of Strah's wise guy milieu but also in finding a way to maintain her emerging feminist perspective and interest in mixed media performance, Maleczech turned next to Beckett's prose, using a number of similar directorial approaches but with pointedly different effects. As she did in *Wrong Guys* by juxtaposing fully clad female technicians with nude male performers, in *Imagination Dead Imagine* Maleczech is once again playing with opposites. Gussow identifies a sensory binary in his review, writing that "Beckett himself could have been describing the eerie effect of Miss Maleczech's stage piece when he wrote in his text about the striking contrast between the 'absolute stillness and the convulsive light.'"<sup>44</sup>

Although it is difficult, in the recorded version at least, to take one's eyes off of the hologram, Maleczech says that she conceptualized a "body" of the piece in two distinct parts—the hologram and the bier. The voice would emanate from speakers hidden inside the bier, which was made from a poured plexiglass mold. When Dallas asked Maleczech what should be in the mold, she told him that she wanted "things from her life: a clock, a glass, one glass, a shoe; things from the life of the voice." Some of these items were, in a meta-theatrical turn, from Galilee's life: "L.B. [Dallas] put in a high heeled shoe and a princess telephone," Galilee remembers, "and I had a red princess phone, and I was attached to this phone, I used it all day long, so it was very special to me that there was this phone cord and telephone—that the things in her life were the things in my life."

The other part of the body—the hologram—was four feet, three inches long—the largest of its kind for the theatre at the time it was created. Maleczech and Hartinian worked with Hart Perry, "who had something called the Holographic Museum and was the only person working in

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<sup>44</sup> Gussow, 1984.

holography that any of us knew,” Maleczech explains. The museum was in Soho and, Galilee remembers, “It was a pretty funky little scene up there.” Maleczech had initially wanted Galilee to be naked as the hologram, but, says the latter, “when we met these people, it was me, Ruth, and Linda Hartinian and these two old hippie dudes in this little room with books every where and holograms—it was intense. And Ruth said, ‘absolutely not you’re not going to do this naked.’” Instead, Galilee was costumed a vintage Victorian slip and wore her hair in the style of Marie Curie, a habit she and her mother and formed with Maleczech’s work on *Dead End Kids*. “One of the reasons Ruth wanted me naked,” Galilee explains, “was a practical issue, because they had to connect my body in three—they had never made one image that big—that wasn’t possible, and just connecting it in three was going to be difficult.” Galilee remembers the experience as “incredibly technical. I had to hit the same marks every time.” In order to do so, she stood on a stack of books as she rotated herself in a circle and the technicians filmed a third of her body at a time.

Maleczech knew from the beginning that she wanted to pair a recorded voice with the hologram she intended to create with Hartinian. She had been careful to clear her choice to use a recorded voice with Beckett, explaining to him in the same letter in which she described the approaches to making a hologram that

The text of *Imagination Dead Imagine* will be put onto a digital tape system, with the machine and speakers concealed in the bier. This sound system has an extremely expanded range and very low inherent noise, so the voice will sound as close to live speech as is now possible, rather than the quality normally associated with taped speech.<sup>45</sup>

This approach falls squarely within Mabou Mines’s tradition of the kind of sonic and vocal experimentation discussed above in the context of *Shaggy Dog*, first established when Philip

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<sup>45</sup> Mabou Mines Correspondence, Samuel Beckett, March 12, 1984, Series IA, Box 1, Folder 9.

Glass designed the flooring in *Red Horse Animation* so that it would amplify the sounds of the performers as they made contact with the floor.

Maleczech sought to achieve a sense of alienation in her vocal work with Nelson, which was, according to Maleczech, more cultured than what she envisioned for the recording.

Maleczech describes Nelson as having been “a starlet in the Group Theater.” The actress was eighty-two at the time she recorded the voice for *Imagination Dead Imagine*. Her experience in the theatre had been rather different than that of the usual Mabou Mines collaborators, Maleczech explains:

This very cultured, very talented, sort of uptown sort of person came here and I don't know how she managed to feel okay about being in this studio, such as it is. But somehow she did. She was very honored and thrilled to be saying Beckett's words. And she said them in a very cultured way, much too cultured for me. When you see yourself as a performer in a certain way over many, many years, it's very difficult to change that. And she was really so lovely and her diction was so precise and her voice was so modulated and liquid and it was great. But it wasn't what I wanted.

Perhaps Maleczech was after a voice that would evoke a more ordinary woman—the kind of woman she herself established an interest in playing in her later performances of Winnie in *Happy Days* and Annette in *Through the Leaves*. Maleczech certainly appeals to a sense of the plebian in her use of John Lennon's popular ballad and the outlines of everyday objects that appear in the bier. Maleczech ultimately attempted to unmoor Nelson from her high-class intonations for the recording by asking the performer to lean backwards over the back of a chair as she delivered the lines “so she was always under strain,” while the recording was being made, Maleczech explains. “It's all under a lot of strain. It's still a beautiful, beautiful voice, but under a lot of pressure, a lot of strain, because it's a difficult position to maintain if you're forty, and if you're eighty-two, it's really hard,” Maleczech says. In the recording, Nelson's voice retains

some vestiges of its cultivated quality, but it also sounds fractured and overwrought, as if it does not quite belong to the speaker.

Just as Maleczek establishes a distancing quality in Nelson's voice for the recording, the division of Galilee's body into sections in the hologram also creates a feeling of alienation. These sections rotate independently of each other, sometimes turning in contrasting directions and occasionally rotating the segments one at a time. As a result, the body in the hologram is distanced from itself, as the recorded voice appears to be. It is not until fourteen minutes into the twenty-minute piece that Galilee's body, suspended in beams of light, makes any significant movement on its own. We see Galilee's hologram pick up her leg as she rotates and put it back down in subtle, ballet-inspired move as "Imagine" begins to play again. This time the entire song plays out. Galilee's hand, which is cupped in front of her face, begins to move slowly around her face. The hologram is the last thing to fade out on stage.

As Breuer does in *Red Beads*, here Maleczek plays with contrasts in age, juxtaposing the recorded voice of the elderly Ruth Nelson with the body of the fourteen-year-old Galilee in the hologram. By playing youth against age, Maleczek heightens the sense of distance already established by separating the body from the voice. She also suggests the outlines of a visual and aural narrative that complements Beckett's story without overpowering or distorting it. Maleczek, says Galilee, "loves to work with poetry, with language, and her work is very subtle, and that's a perfect example of an incredibly subtle idea taken from an incredibly complicated piece of writing." Perhaps this creature of Beckett's (there are two mentioned in the story—a man and a woman, though here only a female figure is represented) who is not quite dead, not quite alive, was at one point alive, and now the essences of her youth and age, as well as detritus from her daily life, have come to rest together in this purgatorial space. Our knowledge of the

cyclical nature of Maleczek and Galilee's mother-daughter relationship augments these aspects of the staging.

Where Breuer uses puppets to redirect attention from the performer to the text, here Maleczek uses the hologram to the same effect. In *Shaggy Dog*, *Red Beads*, and *Summa Dramatica*, the introduction of puppets and puppet-like elements establishes a triad of interaction among puppet, performer, and audience while in *Imagination Dead Imagine*, Maleczek removes the live performer from the equation, forcing the audience to confront design elements and text without mediation. This makes *Imagination Dead Imagine* into something of a landscape play, where, Gertrude Stein suggests, "the landscape does not have to make acquaintance. You may have to make acquaintance with it, but it does not with you, it is there . . . ." <sup>46</sup> Just as Sabbatini argues that in *La Divina Caricatura* Breuer holds human impulses in "suspended animation," Maleczek does the same for her staging of Beckett's purgatorial world by virtually capturing Galilee's body and consigning it to rotate for the duration of the performance.

Ever invested in the future possibilities of theatre, Maleczek continued to work on *Imagination Dead Imagine* after its New York premiere. She and Hartinian received a grant to work with scientists in an MIT laboratory to try to alter the hologram from rainbow color to black and white, "but we never could," Maleczek says. "But they got to blue," says Galilee," which was pretty beautiful."

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<sup>46</sup> Gertrude Stein, "Plays," *Gertrude Stein: Writings 1932-1946*, Gertrude Stein, ed. Catherine R. Stimpson and Harriet Chessman (New York: Literary Classics of the United States, Inc., 1998), 263.

## Conclusion

*Imagination Dead Imagine* was at the very forefront of technological experimentation in the theatre in their use of the hologram onstage, anticipating by nearly twenty years the techniques of cyborg performance currently being explored by groups such as the Builders Association. What they were doing, in fact, was so new that when Ellen Burstyn visited the Performing Garage during the run of the show as a representative of Actor's Equity, she was flummoxed to discover that there were no live actors present for the performance. "She came," says Maleczech,

and afterwards she looked in the hallway where these plexiglass drums are that sit on top the mirror for the hologram and she said, "there is no actor there." I said "no, it's a hologram. It's a hologram in four parts. There was an actor, a dancer." "Did she get paid?" Ellen wanted to know. "Oh yes." "And there is a voice?" "Yes, there is." "Did she get paid?" I said "oh yes, of course."

Maleczech's investment in technological innovation and in her daughter as a theatre artist stem from the same impulse—the one that makes her, as she likes to say, cannon fodder, forging ahead in the avant-garde. Maleczech is a theatre pioneer, forward in her thinking and dedicated to leading the way into uncharted theatrical territory. Her commitment to fostering a new generation of theatre makers is evident in her investment in Mabou Mines's mentorship programs, begun with her co-founding of ReCherChez in 1979 and continued today in a different incarnation with the company's resident artists program, Mabou Mines/*Suite*. She has also demonstrated this commitment in her willingness to consider her daughter as a full collaborator in the artistic process, shepherding her into the future of theatrical creation.

Although there are personal disagreements about the success of these collaborations, some of Maleczech's most adventurous work has been created in the company of her daughter

and the father of her children. Galilee continues in the family tradition by making her own work with her wife and by collaborating with her Mabou Mines family, where, at least since *The Shaggy Dog Animation*, the trio Maleczek, Breuer, and Galilee have been blurring the border between natural and artificial, working, as Schechner says, to “threaten the peace of mind of those of us who would like to think.”<sup>47</sup> Maleczek and Breuer are currently teaching Maleczek’s performance of *Hajj* to Galilee, ensuring that the trio’s engagement with their non-traditional, meta-theatrical family history will continue.

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<sup>47</sup> Schechner, 92.

## CONCLUSION

*Prenez bien garde, vous, à vous déhancher comme il faut, et à faire bien des façons. Cela vous contraindra un peu; mais qu'y faire? Il faut parfois se faire violence.*

[Be sure, you, to attitudinize well, and observe a good many formalities. That will constrain you a little; but it cannot be helped. One must sometimes do violence to oneself.]

—*L'Impromptu de Versailles*

Mabou Mines has five projects currently in development and Ruth Maleczech is artistically involved with three of these upcoming productions. One of them is *Imagining the Imaginary Invalid*, which Maleczech conceived and in which she is the featured performer supported by a team of dancers and actors. The piece juxtaposes Molière's *Imaginary Invalid* with *Union of Hypocrites*, Mikahil Bulgakov's book about Molière's life, and incorporates texts from the history of medicine as well as original writing on that topic.<sup>1</sup> As with *Hajj* (1983), Maleczech is personally invested in her subject. She explained:

Since I spent six weeks in the hospital having a titanium rod put inside the femur of my leg and dealt a lot with doctors and nurses, I want to make the *Imaginary Invalid*. Molière did it on the commode because he couldn't walk. I can walk, thank god. I know it's everybody's college play, but I still want to do it. And I've never done Molière, so that's a great adventure for me to think about. And I want to do all seven ballets.<sup>2</sup>

Mabou Mines presented a workshop of the production in July 2012, which is slated to premiere at the Ellen Stewart Theater at La Mama in 2013. As usual, Maleczech has put together a team that includes longtime collaborators and newcomers. Clove Galilee provides choreography and

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<sup>1</sup> Bulgakov also wrote a play with the same title.

<sup>2</sup> All quotations by Maleczech in this chapter are taken from interviews conducted by the author between July 2011 and March 2012.

also performs, and Julie Archer is designing the sets. Valeria Vaselevki, with whom Maleczech co-directed *Fire Works* in 1987—one of her collaborations away from Mabou Mines—is working on dramaturgy and original text. Maleczech is collaborating for the first time with composer Belinda Reynolds, who will create new Baroque-style music, and Maleczech is consulting with Elaine Elliot as an advisor on classic texts. The supporting cast, at Galilee's urging, is made up entirely of young performers working with Mabou Mines for the first time.

*Imagining the Imaginary Invalid* brings together a number of Maleczech's enduring social, aesthetic, and developmental concerns. Maleczech, one of the few actor-managers of her time, has finally come around to taking on Molière, one of the most famous actor-managers in theatre history. And not only is she performing portions of Molière's play, here Maleczech is doing what Lee Breuer says she does best: crafting her own performance. For Sharon Fogarty, *Imagining the Imaginary Invalid* falls perfectly in line with what she sees as Maleczech's investment in considering history from a female perspective. Maleczech is "taking this classic play," Fogarty says, "and making a commentary on current medical practices and the history of the medicine."<sup>3</sup> As in *Belén* (1996) and *Dead End Kids* (1980), here Maleczech takes on an issue of pressing contemporary concern by offering a historical view of the topic from a previously unexamined angle. In addition to examining history from a female point of view, here, as she did in *Lear* (1990), Maleczech is engaging with a canonical text and taking possession of words originally intended to be spoken by a man. And, as she did in *The Shaggy Dog Animation* (1978), *Imagination Dead Imagine* (1984), and *Red Beads* (2005), Maleczech is collaborating with her daughter. Once again, she is taking a woman's ordinary concerns—this time medical

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<sup>3</sup> All quotations by Sharon Fogarty in this chapter are taken from interviews conducted by the author in October and November 2011.

treatment—and turning them into an extraordinary theatrical experience, just as she took on women’s every day preoccupations in *Happy Days* (1996) and *Through the Leaves* (1984).

Maleczech’s take on hypochondria and medicine derives inspiration from another of Molière’s works: *The Versailles Impromptu*. Preparations for a production of the *Imaginary Invalid* serve as the frame for this production, and each of the performers has a dual role as him or herself and as the character in Molière’s text that he or she plays. Maleczech and Galilee have three roles: Maleczech appears as herself, as Molière’s character Argan, and as the actor-manger himself. Galilee, meanwhile, appears as herself, as Argan’s maid Toinette, and as Mademoiselle Béjart. We see actors rehearsing scenes and doubling as technicians to make costumes and build sets, and dancers in full-fledged, Baroque-inspired costumes flitting across the stage. On an afternoon leading up to the workshop presentation, the ToRoNaDa studio reverberated with the noises of a whirring sewing machine, the thudding of electrical cords dropping from a lofted storage space, and the hammering of nails into wood in a carefully orchestrated soundscape that competes with Maleczech’s delivery of Argan’s opening monologue. The company weaves in and out of scenes from the *Imaginary Invalid* and interactions that reflect the realities of developing a production, punctuated by the concerns of every day life—lovers’ quarrels, unrequited passions, and access to medical care. In the rehearsal room, it is so difficult to discern the difference between the staged rehearsal scenes and the rehearsal itself that the company has instituted the use of what Galilee jokingly describes as a safe word, “Oklahoma,” so that they can keep things straight. The atmosphere is gloriously chaotic and at the same time piercingly focused.

*The Versailles Impromptu* provides a fitting structure for Maleczech to adopt; she has spent her career blending her stage life and personal reality into interlocking worlds, thereby

deconstructing traditional hierarchies of family and theatre, and she seems to thrive in the confusion that arises from this fifty-year project. “She’s very brave,” says Archer,

she loves to say that she likes things messy and she’s really not kidding. I don’t think she is interested in following a straight line. I think she’s interested in surprises and in uncovering something unexpected. It’s incredibly courageous of her. She really puts herself out there.<sup>4</sup>

*The Versailles Impromptu* and the messiness it brings, Galilee says, provides an intentional metaphor for Mabou Mines:

what this company has been through, and what this company faces, and how this company used to make work. It used to be just like that—no director—and they were very insistent upon that. Five artistic directors, and how the press and grant givers tried to pinhole everybody and put them in categories because it’s easier for them. So it’s a way to talk about all of these issues and in a very funny way and a scatological way.

The early working method of Mabou Mines that Galilee describes is clearly in practice in the development process for *Imagining the Imaginary Invalid*. During a rehearsal notes discussion session, several performers made suggestions that were incorporated into the structure of the piece, and Archer and the stage manager proposed blocking and ground plans that were also implemented. Several other proposals from performers, Galilee, and Maleczech herself were considered and subsequently rejected.

Maleczech’s intuitive process for choosing collaborators—evident in the way in which she drew Archer into collaboration with Mabou Mines and Catherine Sasanov into work on *Belén*—allows her to identify people who will bring a striking and valuable point of view to the process. In turn, artists with strong artistic perspectives and have gravitated to her. Archer says of her work with Maleczech

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<sup>4</sup> All quotations by Archer in this chapter are taken from an interview conducted by the author on November 11, 2011.

there is never any resistance to any idea . . . Any idea is worth trying. . . . She's not intimidated by something that she didn't think of. In fact, she's courageous enough to welcome it into the mix. It's sort of, "bring it on." She's a dream to work with in that light.

Maleczech values the contributions of her collaborators, even if they disagree with her.

Although they had already known each other for nearly twenty years, Paul Kandel's first collaboration with Maleczech occurred when she brought him on board as the chorus leader in *Song for New York: What Women Do While Men Sit at Home Knitting*, which she directed in 2007. He explains that, though he was happy to defer to Maleczech's wishes as the director of the project, the two would frequently disagree about how to proceed aesthetically. Paul Kandel describes this interaction during their residency at the Ucross Foundation in Wyoming to develop the project:

It was Ruth and my artistic getting-to-know-you session. The weather was terrible so Ruth and I would stand under the eave of the house at two o'clock in the morning with a glass of wine and a cigarette having an argument. . . . She wanted an aggressive, alternative point of view that she respected.<sup>5</sup>

Maleczech's comfort with healthy disagreement in the rehearsal room also stems from Mabou Mines's early days of collaboration, when, as Galilee describes, the entire company participated democratically in sculpting the direction of the work, even with a director in place.

Karen Kandel identifies Maleczech's generosity as a crucial aspect of her collaborations. The pair is currently collaborating on another of Mabou Mines's projects in development, *we would find landscapes*, conceived by Archer and Liza Lorwin. In a structure that also hearkens to the early days of Mabou Mines development, *we would find landscapes* has no formal director. Instead, Karen Kandel says, she and Maleczech were responsible for developing their

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<sup>5</sup> All quotations by Paul Kandel in this chapter are taken from an interview conducted by the author on August, 2012.

own performances within a collaborative framework for the June 2012 showing at the ToRoNaDa. The work, Karen Kandel says, was characterized by “large fluctuations within a structure and a willingness to play. Ruth said in rehearsal, ‘the choices are crazy, but I’m not afraid—I’ll do it.’ And I think that’s how she goes about working, and there are not a lot of people who do that.” For Karen Kandel, Maleczek’s bravery is inspiring and extroverted. In *Lear*, she says,

I was young and intimidated by Ruth’s amazing lack of fear—just going ahead and trying something even if it was completely crazy. Just not saying no to something that seemed outrageous. I had so much respect for Ruth as an artist. I was a little shy, but absolutely amazed by this extraordinary woman with a lot of power, a lot of life force, and she easily shared that with me even in my incredibly shy state. I learned how to grow bolder from my scenes with Ruth and the whole process.<sup>6</sup>

Here Karen Kandel notes, in addition to the energy Maleczek offers to her fellow performers, a willingness on Maleczek’s part to extend trust even when she is working with an artist for the first time. Maleczek has confidence in her collaborators’ ability to rise to the challenge she presents.

The proposition that Maleczek offers to her collaborators—perhaps the same one she offered to Grotowski—is, as Karen Kandel describes, generous in nature, and Maleczek extends it to audiences as well. Perhaps because Maleczek’s scope of sources for the work she makes includes her own life, the performances she shares are characterized by a combination of emotional availability and intellectual awareness. Breuer suggests that Maleczek brings “real emotional honesty” to her performances, comparing her “vulnerability and transparency” to Laurette Taylor’s, who, Breuer argues, was the greatest actress of her own generation. Breuer

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<sup>6</sup> All quotations by Karen Kandel in this chapter are taken from an interview conducted by the author in August 2012.

suggests that it is Maleczek's ability to pair transparency with intellectual capability that enables her to create great performances. "The real outstanding thing about Ruth's performing," he says,

is her intelligence. She's really bright, she's really observant, and it makes a special performance. Great performances mean great choices, and if you don't have the chops to make great choices, you can have all the intensity in the world and you're not going to be able to make choices that astonish people. Really great performers make great choices. This is her number one attribute. . . . It's ultimately because of these qualities of honesty and smarts that she has this coterie of admirers.<sup>7</sup>

Maleczek's freedom to craft performances that reflect her own point of view on the material—to make great choices for herself—is part of a framework that she helped Mabou Mines to develop, promote, and extend to the many performers who have worked with the company throughout the years.

This approach to performing, Greg Mehrten says,

demands that the actor take charge of his or her performance. . . . They try to have you, the actor, connect so deeply to something—you don't even have to tell them what it is, but there's something in the role, in the performance—that you are confident. And you know what you're doing and they just help you get there, and help you be able to get there over and over again, which is not always easy.<sup>8</sup>

Maleczek's choice to refer to herself as a performer rather than an actor calls further attention to her power to shape the work that is presented to audiences. This terminology underscores her position as an autonomous collaborator, emphasizing her substantial creative significance and dovetailing with her insistence that she does not play roles. Maleczek's decision to call herself a performer also highlights her presence as an active element of what the audience takes in during

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<sup>7</sup> All quotations by Breuer are taken from an interview with the author conducted in May 2012.

<sup>8</sup> All quotations by Greg Mehrten are taken from an interview conducted by the author on July 28, 2011.

performance. As part of her inheritance from Brecht, Maleczech chooses not to retreat from confrontation with the audience by disappearing into the roles she plays. Although she presents characters to us, she wants her audience to remain aware that she is up there too.

Maleczech emphasizes her presence onstage by using the development process to ground herself physically and vocally as well as intellectually and emotionally. Maleczech, says JoAnne Akalaitis, “is very much in her body and needs to know exactly how her body is in the space. I never have to talk to her about that and I never will. . . . She is ferociously dangerous—she’s willing to do all kinds of physical feats without question.”<sup>9</sup> This is an aspect of Maleczech’s approach that she derives from her early training in mime as well as her work with Grotowski in the South of France. Maleczech takes a similarly multi-dimensional approach to speech. Karen Kandel says of this interest in a varied vocal approach, “We both love playing with voices—dancing in our voices.” Maleczech’s musical approach to text, vocal flexibility, and affinity for accents and different ways of speaking derive from her voice study with Grotowski, her experience dubbing French movies during the time she spent in Paris, and the early efforts she made with her Mabou Mines co-founders to grapple with Beckett’s words on stage. Her nimble and energetic approach to movement and voice make her work onstage exciting for spectators. Her concept of the 360-degree awareness that performance requires means that Maleczech remains physically expressive even in recent productions during which she has mostly remained seated, such as *Lucia’s Chapters* (2007) and *Summa Dramatica* (2010).

As with much of Maleczech’s work, though *Imaging the Imaginary Invalid* isn’t overtly political, it is certainly socially engaged. Amid a staged lunch break, the actors sip from water bottles and share stories of childhood medical conditions and difficulties with insurance coverage

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<sup>9</sup> All quotations by JoAnne Akalaitis in this chapter are taken from an interview conducted by the author in December 2011.

as someone passes around a carton of red and yellow cherry tomatoes. One performer tells another that her divorced parents decided to remarry so that her father could receive coverage for the new set of teeth his dentist told him he needed. Maleczech, says Fogarty,

keeps a pretty close watch on what's going on in the world. She's a voracious reader. She always knows what's going on in the news. She's not in her art world ignoring the outside world. But she's not necessarily directly political. She's not saying, "oh, this is going on politically in the world, so let's make this piece." The politics are there and they filter through but she's still operating more on a humanist level.

Maleczech has likened her emphasis on research to Brecht's insistence that his actors educate themselves about the political issues at work in his plays. But with notable exceptions such as *Dead End Kids*, the majority of Maleczech's work does not employ the stage strictly as a political platform. Rather, her interest in exploring a wide range of areas has resulted in a body of projects and performances that run a similarly broad gamut.

Paul Kandel echoes Fogarty's description of Maleczech as an insatiable learner. "She's a polymath," he says, "I mean, you pick a topic and she'll be able to talk about it in depth. I have never hit on a topic that she doesn't know something about." Maleczech's commitment to research is, in addition to a method for uncovering source material that provides inspiration for new work, a crucial element of her preparation for performances, allowing her to deliver the sort of intellectually oriented performances that Breuer describes. "I work pretty well dramaturgically," Breuer says, "but Ruth goes through these incredible studies. She does an incredible amount of background reading." The depth of Maleczech's research instills the subjects she takes on with richness and detail that enhance their intricacy. "It seems deceptively like things just come out of Ruth," Galilee agrees,

but there's a lot of practice that goes on. When she first did the first monologue for Aragn, we all thought "where did that come

from,” and I thought back over the week and remembered here sitting up at night with the towel Aragan wears on her head and thinking “ok, she’s been working her ass off to find that voice, to figure him out.” She works very methodically through the language. Elaine Elliott tells her the Latin meanings of all the terms. She really wants to understand it. And because of that, the depth of her performances is astronomical. And they’re always different because she knows all the different ways that she can work with words. You don’t expect it because she’s very elegant about how that stuff comes out of her.

Maleczech’s work revels in graceful complexity. Maleczech’s performances and productions go out on a limb by resisting tidy interpretation—the one-to-one correspondence that Maleczech says she dislikes. Instead, she dares the audience to join her in unraveling the elaborate knots her work presents and she hopes they will be surprised by what they discover.

A crucial element in Maleczech’s ability to astonish in performance is her capacity to come to her work fresh each night. Maleczech has an uncanny ability to put herself in the present moment with her fellow performers and with her audience. “When Ruth is in the middle of a script,” Akalaitis says, “she’s very critical of it—critical of the writing. And then that goes away.” Maleczech’s process and performance are characterized by the paradoxical combination of her dedication to developing an armature of analysis and her ability to arrive to each live experience free of preconceptions about what will take place.

Maleczech’s willingness to come to her work fresh each night means that she takes risks onstage. Her careful preparation for each production, her collaborative spirit, and her ability to remain physically and emotionally present in each moment onstage enables her to unearth new ideas in performance and to share the thrill of these discoveries with her fellow performers and her audiences. During *Lucia’s Chapters*, Paul Kandel recalls,

Sharon would watch the show and she would give notes, some bold changes, and the next night we would just put them in. Sometimes they were a right turn, and if I turned right, Ruth went right to the

right. It was never a question. . . . you take that little trip and you don't know where it's going to go. . . . That is essential to her. It's an extraordinary part of what makes her such a dynamic performer.

In addition to uncovering unexpected successes in performance, this gameness for uncertainty can create unanticipated wrinkles. "It also leaves you the possibility that you're going have a night that's funky," Paul Kandel suggests, "It can happen. You go left, and you hit a wall, and then you get a little bruised and you've got to find your way out. That happens." As an artist who has worked to establish the independence to craft her own performances within a collaborative context, Maleczech is courageous enough to face the consequences of such calculated risks, and she challenges her audiences to confront the terms of this engagement as well. Rather than attempting to satisfy the expectations of the strangers who gather for her performances, Maleczech raises the stakes. She dares us to take the chance of live performance along with her.

Maleczech also dares to be funny. Her emotional accessibility makes her adept at comedy as well as pathos, and Maleczech wields humor in service of social commentary, knocking audiences off balance by surprising them with laughter so that they can process the complex situations her staging presents. Maleczech mingles comedy with the emotionally engaged performance Breuer describes. This juxtaposition prevents sentimentality from sliding into indulgence for herself or for her audience.

Nearly all of Maleczech's performances incorporate humor and, with the possible exception of *Imagination Dead Imagine*, all of the works she has directed do as well. Maleczech's facility for comedy is something else she shares with Molière. As the young performers around her sorted out the choreography of their movements and score of background noise with Galilee in rehearsal for *Imagining the Imaginary Invalid*, Maleczech sat in a chair

center stage trying to sort out which iteration of “ding-a-ling-a-fucking-ding,” “bring-a-bring,” or string of “dings,” “lings,” and obscenities was funniest for summoning Toinette. Here, Maleczech’s emphasis on developing a detailed and textured performance is apparent in her dedication to the mechanics of comic timing.

Maleczech’s thorough approach is also evident in her meticulous work as a manager of the company. Her commitment to Mabou Mines is manifested, among other ways, in her sustained involvement with the nuts and bolts of running a theatre company. For Maleczech, producing responsibilities and artistic work are two sides of the same coin. “I’m sure there’s a great deal of overlapping,” says Breuer. Karen Kandel agrees that Maleczech’s performance and producing work intersect. “I don’t think they’re different. I think all of those things are happening all the time. She’s wearing all those hats, and it’s there all the time when she’s working.” Mehrten, who worked with Maleczech in the Mabou Mines offices in the mid 1980s and 1990s, recalls that

she was so devoted, and I’m sure she still is, to the idea of Mabou Mines. She had been a legal secretary so she knew how to work in the office, and I did too, and some of the other people didn’t. And so it just evolved that we would work in the office. It’s like the Soviet system, each according to his needs and to each to his abilities. Wherever your strengths were they tried to utilize those and so Ruth’s ability to go to a million readings and really talk about the plumbing or getting the loan or whatever, kind of mundane things, she would do it. Even I would say “oh, can we go home now?” I got to really hate meetings and we had so many. But I never heard her say, “I’m bored, I want to go home.” Never. She wanted to fix the problem—she wanted to work. And that’s how she approached her theatrical work too. There were these problems that you were trying to solve in the production, and that’s what she would work on.

In Breuer’s view, this methodological tenacity on Maleczech’s part in both her artistic and producing work may not have always been an ideal combination. He recalls that rehearsals for

*Hajj* were repeatedly interrupted as Maleczech broke to field calls regarding funding for the project. But Breuer also notes that Maleczech has earned her role as the “elder statesman” of the company as a result of the time she has dedicated to managerial concerns. “I don’t put in the hours Ruth does just sitting in the office,” he says. And it may very well be Maleczech’s position of power in the company’s organizational structure that has provided her with the license to take such a striking degree of control over her performances.

After all, without the funding that Maleczech has worked so desperately and devotedly to secure, there would be no Mabou Mines productions in which to perform, or to direct, especially in a political context that has grown increasingly hostile to arts funding. Paul Kandel notes that Maleczech’s attention to detail extends to her directing work as well. “If you’re Mabou Mines and you’re directing,” he says, “you also have some producing shoes on. You also have some organizing shoes on, because a tremendous amount of directing is organizing, especially if you’re not the kind of person who delegates that to a stage manager, and Ruth is not.” It is no wonder, then, that one of the enduring tropes that emerges in Maleczech’s artistic work is a preoccupation with dollars and cents. *Imagining the Imaginary Invalid* is no exception. Molière’s play opens with a scene in which Argan itemizes his medical bills and ends by exposing the avarice of Argan’s wife. The added material exposes further links between money and medicine. The performer who relates the anecdote about her parents’ decision to remarry in order to provide insurance for her father’s new set of teeth also says that after the dentist removed the crowns from her father’s old teeth, her father gave them to her brother. “Gold’s worth a lot right now,” Galilee says knowingly in response, wondering why her companion does not want a share in this bounty. “He’s the eldest,” the young woman says of her brother, by way of explanation.

This deceptively casual conversation reveals Maleczech's long attention span for what she sees as an unhealthy association between financial power and masculinity, especially as it relates to family and stage dynamics. Maleczech's point of view in *Haji*, *Lear*, *Through the Leaves*, and now in *Imagining the Imaginary Invalid* has worked to expose the traditional correlation between patriarchal and financial structures and to propose alternatives with a more balanced distribution of power. The stage worlds Maleczech presents show us that women, too, can be the heads of households. In real life, the powerful role she has taken on with Mabou Mines flies in the face of what remains a largely male-dominated field of theatre producing, although it goes without saying that managing the finances of a small avant-garde theatre company in downtown New York is a far cry from executive producing on Broadway. Nevertheless, Maleczech has consistently leveraged her position in the company to promote equality in the work place, repeatedly supporting the work of female collaborators and helping to institute and maintain Mabou Mines's progressive policy on childcare.

Indeed, Maleczech's concern for the financial wellbeing of her company goes hand in hand with her notion of Mabou Mines as an artistic family and with her staged representations of female financial managers. Fogarty recalls a conversation she had with Maleczech about companies and families on the eve of Mabou Mines's fortieth anniversary:

Ruth said, "how do companies sustain, how do they survive?" And she was talking about the Comédie Française and this other company in Japan that had started out as families, whether they were literally or whether they end up becoming family—how these families operate over time and how that tends to be a recipe for longevity. And they're usually being sidelined. But usually the ones that have considered themselves family or they actually have some family involved, they end up surviving. Family is really important to her, whether it's artistic family or personal family. That's key.

As Maleczek has pointed out, Mabou Mines's effort to provide support for childcare has meant that families could travel together during tours. And her commitment to working with her daughter as well as maintaining long-term relationships with her collaborators means that Mabou Mines is made up of artistic as well as biological family. "She's very faithful," says Breuer. For Maleczek, this means putting her money where her mouth is. "She saved my butt with a personal loan on *Dollhouse*," says Breuer, "We wouldn't have gotten it off the ground without that." Karen Kandel also notes Maleczek's support—emotional and financial both—of fellow artists. "She has been an incredible supporter of whatever I want to do," she says, "I love how she gets excited about young people who are trying to make work. She's generous, offering support. Encouraging. I'll never forget that. She changed my life." Maleczek continues to nurture fellow artists and bring new members into her artistic family in her work with Mabou Mines/*Suite*, the company's residency program that provides rehearsal space, funding, and, most importantly, mentorship.

Although Maleczek is mindful of Mabou Mines's financial position, she doesn't lead with her purse. Maleczek likes to remind people that "avant-garde" is a military term for the soldiers who were the first to be shot and killed in battle. "I think that she's a pioneer," says Fogarty, "she embraces the pioneer spirit. She doesn't mind trying new things, whether it means that you'll never work again or never be funded again, it doesn't matter to her. She will follow her artistic and intellectual instincts wherever they lead."

Despite the adversity that every pioneer is bound to face, or perhaps because of it, Maleczek marches on. Her encouragement of young artists in Mabou Mines/*Suite* and her regular initiation of and involvement in new work demonstrate that her passion and commitment to exploring uncharted theatrical territory has not dimmed with time. "As you grow older, you just get

tougher,” says Akalaitis, “That’s what I will say about Ruth. She’s tougher in the best way. That’s a compliment. I feel very blessed to have worked with her.” The joy Akalaitis has taken from working with Maleczech is one that is staunchly and heartily echoed among a striking number of her collaborators. “Ruth is, in fifty different ways, a singular human being,” says Paul Kandel

She’s at the same time very specific, demanding, and insistent, and within that same person exists the capacity to leave enormous room for other people to do their work in the way they need to do it. She has a huge respect for other artists’ process even if it’s different from hers. You have this incredibly bright person who brings an enormous spontaneity and passion to her work who has strong opinions and who at the same time can leave room for people who don’t agree with her. She’ll say, “well, you’re wrong,” and then she’ll leave them room to do the thing she’s just told them is wrong. It takes an extraordinary person to coast through life in that way, and happily. So she looks like a one off, she is a one off. There’s only one Ruth. There’s not another one.

Maleczech has deployed her intellectually engaged, emotionally vulnerable, and excitingly live approach to present women onstage who are as unusual and original as Maleczech is in life.

These women of Maleczech’s are surprising in their behavior, in the way they speak and move, in what they reveal to the audience and what they keep to themselves, in the questions they raise, and in the way they unmoor traditional representations of gender. Maleczech wants her audiences and collaborators to meet the women she presents halfway, and she is audacious enough to agree to disagree with what anyone else thinks about them in the rehearsal room or on the stage. What is truly original about Maleczech’s contribution to the theatre is the extremity to which she is willing to go in bringing these women to the stage. The risks she takes in collaboration, performance, and producing are unparalleled. “When Ruth has the range to come up with a lot of ideas, she comes closer to brilliance,” says Breuer. Maleczech has, as an actor-manager of her own making, assured herself of the power to do just that

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