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The environmental theatre of Jerry Rojo

Carey, Linford Francis, Ph.D.

City University of New York, 1990

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A

THE ENVIRONMENTAL THEATRE OF JERRY ROJO

by

LINFORD F. CAREY

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.

1990

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This manuscript has been read and accepted for the Graduate Faculty in Theatre in satisfaction of the dissertation requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

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Abstract

THE ENVIRONMENTAL THEATRE OF JERRY ROJO

by

Linford Carey

Advisor: Professor Stanley A. Waren

There is not a great volume of literature covering the life and work of Jerry Rojo. He has been mentioned in publications on contemporary scene design and his work has been discussed in articles in scholarly journals; however, there is not a single book which chronicles his unique contribution to American scene design.

Since there is little written material on this subject, most data results from personal interviews with directors and theatre people who worked with Rojo. Brooks McNamara, Robert MacDonald, Andre Gregory, Leo Shapiro, Richard Schechner and Joseph Chaikin offered personal reflections on their working relationships with him. The designer's unpublished writings are also included in the study.

Extensive interviews with Rojo himself provided a reservoir of information, and three years of personal experience, working with him, facilitated the completion of this dissertation.

This evaluation of the work of a groundbreaking contemporary American environmental designer contains an

overview of the times and career of Rojo, his important productions, awards and distinctions. Chapters 2 and 3 discuss Rojo's early years, his beginnings as a university professor, his return to graduate school and the subsequent, initial meeting with Richard Schechner which resulted in their work on Victims of Duty. Chapter 4 is devoted to Dionysus in '69, probably their most significant collaboration. Chapters 5 through 7 focus on Rojo's designs for Makbeth and other Performance Group plays, his designs for Andre Gregory's rendition of Beckett's Endgame at the Manhattan Project, and Section 10's production of The Great Hoss Pistol. Chapter 8 examines Rojo's work with director Leo Shapiro; Chapter 9 analyzes his design for the recent Public Theatre production of Vaclav Havel's Temptation. Chapter 10 deals with construction of Rojo's first permanent Environmental theatre. Chapters 11 and 12 examine Rojo as a consultant in theatre architecture and design, and his further activities and academia. A concluding evaluation comprises Chapter 13. Appendices include personal reflections based on years of work with Rojo as student, workshop participant and assistant director; a chronology of Rojo's work.

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The single most important contribution, however, was made by Jerry N. Rojo. Jerry was always ready to provide valuable information and endured long hours of interviewing. He was always just a phone call away and was willing to stop whatever he was doing in order to facilitate my progress. At one point, he allowed me to interview him during his 30 minute break in the construction of the set for Temptation (The New York Shakespeare Festival, Public Theatre, 1989). This dissertation was not only a labor of love but also an interesting and fulfilling study of a versatile artist.

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Chapter 1. INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this study is to trace the career of Jerry Rojo, a designer-director who has worked in the New York area since the 1960s. The performance theories and techniques introduced by Rojo have had far-reaching effects upon modern theatre production. Jerry Rojo's most significant impact has been in the field of stage design. In addition, however, he has introduced new techniques in the fields of actor training, these techniques tested particularly at the university level.

This study of Rojo's work will both reveal and analyze his special contribution to the American theatre. Rojo was the principal designer for Richard Schechner's Performance Group for several years. He received considerable attention for his original set constructions for Dionysus in '69, which won an Obie award. (He was nominated for the Obie on two additional occasions for his work with the Performance Group.) Rojo was also highly praised for his work with the Manhattan Project, receiving the 1973 Drama Desk Award, for his set designs in Endgame. He has been invited to lecture at universities around the world, thus influencing a broad spectrum of theatre designers. I worked with Rojo essentially for three years--1973 to 1975--at the University of Connecticut, studying stagecraft, and acting and performing in two of his productions, Our House and The Big Enchilada.

On The Big Enchilada, I was also his assistant-director. During these years I developed a keen interest in Rojo's concept of an "alternative theatre"--as Rojo himself puts it,

An alternative to Broadway, a radical theatre...a theatre that explores and even breaks down the barriers and limits of production and performance of the conventional stage.¹

He shared many of his ideas with me and we established a close working relationship. Since 1976 I have maintained contact with Jerry Rojo both orally and through correspondence, and this relationship facilitated my research on his life and contributions to the theatre.

As a leading environmental theatre designer Rojo worked with many companies, such as the already mentioned Performance Group, the Manhattan Project, and the Shaliko Company. Since 1961, he has been a faculty member at the University of Connecticut. In 1970 he approached the then head of the Department of Theatre, David Heilweil, with his concept to construct an environmental theatre, incorporating designs for the Performance Group's Makbeth.²

In earlier years, Rojo had trained at Tulane University, New Orleans, as a basically traditional designer in what he has referred to as the "Scene painting" school of design.

Traditionally, young designers are taught to be jacks of all trades. They are taught to be capable of a range of design styles and problems--musicals, box sets, scene painting, decor, portrait painting, electronics, props, etc.³

It is Rojo's belief that a designer who has worked on a variety of styles and problems should eventually focus on what he wants to do. He views productions as problems to be solved within the framework of a personal concept.

The strongest work evolves from an individual artist who possesses a private unique vision about what he does. He spends a lifetime in pursuit of that vision. The stage designer, therefore, needs to view himself not as a someone in servitude to every play and project that comes along, but as someone capable of accepting only those aspects that foster a sense of vision and discovery within himself.⁴

While working with other directors at the University of Connecticut, Rojo became interested in the concept of open theatre space. During a leave of absence in 1966, he returned to Tulane University to attend a workshop with Richard Schechner, who was already known for his work in environmental theatre. Rojo--the only "technical" person involved in the seminar--and Schechner became friends. In his book Environmental Theatre, Schechner says of Rojo,

He is in my opinion, the world's leading environmentalist. A large portion of his genius is in solving all the formidable artistic-technical problems we put to him in requiring a flexible, transformational space without the encumbrance of heavy or expensive machinery.⁵

During the course of the Tulane seminar, Rojo solved a technical problem involving the stage set for Victims of Duty, by Eugene Ionesco, Schechner's current project. It was during the following year that Schechner telephoned Rojo in Connecticut and invited him to assist with the environmental designs for Dionysus in '69 which was to be presented at the Performing Garage in New York City.

During his career in the theatre, Jerry Rojo received a considerable number of awards and distinctions. Besides the Drama Desk Award for Endgame, which was directed by Andre Gregory, and the "Obie" for Dionysus in '69, Rojo received additional "Obie" nominations for Tooth of Crime and Endgame. His most important written work includes: "Some Principles and Concepts of Environmental Design," an essay contribution to The Making Of Theatre, by Robert Corrigan; and Theatres, Spaces, Environments, by Jerry Rojo, Brooks McNamara and Richard Schechner. Rojo also contributed an essay entitled "Contemporary Stage Design" to the periodical Environmental Theatre (1974), and an article, "Four Concepts of Environmental Theatre Lighting," for Travail Theatril (1974).

Rojo has worked extensively as consultant in the area of Architectural Design, converting many "found spaces" into theatres with permanent fixed environments. He has worked as well on other projects involving building and/or renovating and adapting theatres and spaces. One of these projects is the design of an Environmental Theatre for Sarah Lawrence College, which he undertook with the assistance of Wilford Leach. Another is the fixed unit stage for Stage West, a professional regional theatre of Springfield, Massachusetts. In 1972 he designed a touring environmental stage for the Phoenix Theatre in New York City. A fixed environmental theatre space for the "Section 10" Theatre Company was designed by Rojo in 1974. Still other designed

spaces by Rojo include environments for Eastern Connecticut State University; Manchester Community College, Connecticut; American University, Washington, D.C., and for professional theatre companies, such as the Denver Center Theatre at the Performing Arts Center in Denver, Colorado; the Brooklyn Academy of Music, The Open Space Theatre in New York; and the Murray-Lewis Dance Company. His favorite theatre is the Mobius Theatre at the University of Connecticut, which he designed and built and in which he has subsequently directed many plays. Richard Schechner describes the Mobius Theatre as

the best fixed environment, environmental theatre that he has ever seen.⁶

Future plans include designing the environments for a Shaliko Company production of a "Circus-Opera" that is slated to be presented on the Boston Common in the spring of 1990.

As a scene designer Jerry Rojo credits, in addition to what has been mentioned above, include sets for over twenty productions in Off-Broadway and Regional theatres, over 60 main-stage productions at the University of Connecticut, 20 productions at the Avondale Theatre in Indianapolis, In., and several productions at the University of Omaha, Nebraska.

As a director Rojo's productions include All Bright Wings, by Tom Dulak, Emigres, Storyville Portraits, The Big Enchilada, Our House, A Work In Progress and Baal Games, all

of which were produced at the University of Connecticut. At the time of the writing of this dissertation Mr. Rojo has plans to direct a production at "The Ensemble Studio Theatre" in New York City.

Jerry Rojo also served as a participant on many distinguished panels and has received some invitational residencies. For example, he served on the Director's colloquium presented by the International Theatre Institute of Poland in Warsaw, along with Lloyd Richards, Alan Schneider and Arthur Wagner in the Spring of 1980. He was selected along with Richard Schechner to serve in a colloquium on space at the IV Session Nundial De Teatro Naciones, Caracas, Venezuela during the summer of 1978. Invited by the Salzburg Seminar in American Studies to teach theatre at Salzburg, Austria in the summer of 1974, Rojo joined a distinguished panel including Brendan Gill, Tom Moore, and Joseph Walker. With the Performance Group, he was in residence at the University of British Columbia; 1972, the University of Rhode Island, 1971; and at the State University of New York at New Paltz, 1970.

There have been many exhibitions of his work. He has contributed to shows at Lincoln Center, Preston Art Gallery of the College of White Plains in New York, the Hudson River Museum, The Wadsworth Atheneum in Hartford, Connecticut, the Norwich Academy in Norwich, Connecticut and had his own one-man show of his work at the Jorgensen Gallery at the University of Connecticut.

Appointed by the Dean of the School of Fine Arts, Rojo served as the Department Head of the University of Connecticut's Dramatic Art Division for eight years. He inherited the chairmanship during a particularly tempestuous period at the University, which turned into one of the most challenging periods in his career. He acted as the Producing and Artistic Director of the UCONN Nutmeg Theatre, Winter from 1978-1985, presenting forty-nine productions. In addition, in this same period he was the Artistic Director for the UCONN Nutmeg Summer Theatre, selecting and coordinating all artistic developments for twenty-one shows, and he acted as producer for seventy subscription productions.

He says:

Being chairman of the University's Theatre Department was a great challenge for me. I could no longer concern myself solely with my own projects. Now I had to be concerned with the growth development and even the happiness of all of my department's Professors. I learned a great deal more about educational theatre, and the business and administration of running a very large university theatre program. I was no longer able to take on outside projects. I just stopped doing it, and when you stop doing it, they stop calling you.

The above list of accomplishments is a testament to Jerry Rojo's position as designer-director nationally and internationally. According to Brooks McNamara:

That Jerry Rojo has heavily influenced the stream of design since the sixty's and seventy's is a given. What Jerry did was to take a certain kind of "modified realism" that was so popular in this country in the fifty's and early sixty's, like Death of a Salesman. He took this accepted convention and juxtaposed it with his radical approach and created a new convention. If you go to the scene design show at New York University every

year, and look at what the new scene designers are doing, that idea, that convention is such a central one, with young designers. This sort of engineering approach to design, a kind of constructivism and letting the seams show....He really marks a moment in scene design.⁸

It is also accurate to say that Rojo was one of the innovators in the avant-garde movement of the 60s and 70s. Although groups like The Living Theatre were around and experimenting with space arrangement and set design they were not as developed as the environments that Rojo was building.

The first, first class designer to work this way was Julian Beck, his work on the Frankenstein design, with its pipe frameworks and metal scaffolding. There is a relationship here but in the case of the Living Theatre they were working with actor platforms and not actor-audience platforms. Jerry's articulation of those ideas is very distinctive, his own, a very singular "heavy equipment" look, that nobody else did.⁹

The mid-sixties to the mid-seventies was an era of socio-political upheaval in the United States. Fueled by the controversy surrounding the Vietnam War, the "counter-culture," as it was called, manifested itself in many diverse areas of American behavior. In movies, music, political marches and demonstrations, in fashion, and of course, theatre, the spirit of rebellion and the quest for new forms of expression were apparent.

It was an especially exciting time in theatre. Companies like the Open Theatre, the Living Theatre, the Bread and Puppet Theatre, Mabou Mines, Michael Kirby's "Happenings" and the Performance Group were attracting some attention internationally. It was a time when American

practitioners of the dramatic arts were considered to be on the cutting edge of the avant-garde.

The Mainstream theatre was also somewhat under the influence of "Pop" culture. Jerome Ragni and Carl Rado's Hair, was more than a big hit on Broadway during the 1968-69 season. It was a cultural statement that became an anthem for the "hippie" generation. Richard Schechner was bringing Off-Off-Broadway to the New York Times. In a recent interview, Rojo stated,

To the established theatre world, Richard was an outrageous beast. The time was ripe for people like him to declare their manifestos for a new theatre. Richard would never have stirred as much controversy, nor would he have been given so much room to do so in any other time in American history. He was telling the world to go "suck," and they all stood up and took notice. Today there is no room for an outrageous beast.¹⁰

Schechner was one of the well-known critics of the day as well as editor of an established theatre journal, The Tulane Drama Review, later The Drama Review. Suddenly he was a controversial director with a series of hit plays on his hands. Perhaps it would be no less fantastic were Clive Barnes to become an overnight success as a director. Like him or hate him, people came to see his shows and had opinions about him and his work. Concerning influences such

as the Open Theatre or Grotowski, Richard Schechner is very clear on that when he states,

Although I greatly respected the Open Theatre, their work was never the kind of work that I wanted to do...it was too much on the end of the stage which it always was, it never really involved the audience, it was too distant...I could not conceive of The Open Theatre allowing their mise-en-scene to be bent or influenced by the audience the way we did in Dionysus, or to serve food directly to the audience as we did in Mother Courage, or to play sexually with the audience as we did in The Balcony.¹¹

Mr. Schechner feels that Grotowski was an influence on his work in the area of actor training, but not in environment development.

My spatial orientations came from "Happenings" and compartmentalized performances and performances in multiple spaces...I think that our spaces are basically more exciting and more radical and three dimensional, actors can work on vertical planes, as well as horizontal ones. Grotowski's spaces are flat, in this area I don't think he made any particular advances. I was not familiar with the work of Meyerhold or Okhloppoff, or even the Living Theatre. I did not see any of Julian Beck's work, the Living Theatre had gone to Europe by the time I was doing this work. I was doing Environmental theatre at Provincetown in 1958 and 1961.¹²

The study of the work of Jerry Rojo will reveal the formulation of some seminal theories of design and directing that were unique to theatre of the 60s and 70s, years when the American theatre was achieving a degree of international status as an innovator in theatrical techniques. This study will demonstrate that many of these innovations, which were developed by Richard Schechner and/or Jerry Rojo and the Performance Group and others, in acting, directing, but particularly in environment, influenced conventional theatre and moved into the mainstream of popular entertainment.

Chapter 2. FAMILY LIFE AND OTHER EARLY INFLUENCES

Jerry Neal Rojo was born in Alton, Illinois on January 10, 1935. His father was Guadalupe Rojo, a native North American born in Mexico. Guadalupe had emigrated to the United States during the Pancho Villa revolution, claiming that his family's large estate had been confiscated. Jerry, himself, holds that there was never any real proof that his father's family had any money.

There are alot of Rojos and as far as I know all of them were from low class society.¹

There were never any theatre people in Guadalupe Rojo's family. Jerry remembers his father as a self-taught man, who was very quiet and spent most of his free time tinkering in the basement.

He had an incredible mind, he taught himself physics, he also had many patents. He had one for a machine gun, a fishing pole and even one for a nuclear war game.²

It comes clear when talking to Jerry that he admired his father a great deal and he was the son's central role model. The qualities in his father that he admired most were his ethical nature and his ability to work for long periods of time.

Guadalupe had cousins in Alton who assured him that, as he was bilingual, he would be able to find work. He did find employment at a glass works plant and remained there until about 1941. It was in Alton that he met and married Dorothy Roman, Jerry's mother. She was a first generation

immigrant from Ukrainian Russia. Jerry remembers her as an extremely strong force in the household, but she did not try to dominate the family. Decisions were made by the family together. She always kept an approving eye on Jerry's theatre career, and when he was in college, she felt it her duty to support him since he was the first Roman or Rojo to attend university classes. She sent him \$35 a month out of her own savings. This even caused mild jealousy among Jerry's siblings. In his own words,

I've always had strong emotional feelings toward my mom, she played a major role in making my childhood environment a safe, happy and loving one.³

One other matter is worth mentioning in the light of Dorothy's attitude towards Jerry's career. Although she states that there were never any people in her family connected to theatre or show business, there was a period in her life when she herself lived in Hollywood. To this day Jerry is not clear as to what exactly she was doing there. She was not married at the time, but it seems to have bothered her son to the point that he still mentioned it with some trepidation.

As an environmentalist I have to consider all things that happened to me at different points in my life. My mother ran off to Hollywood, she wasn't married yet but what was she doing there? Maybe she should have been preparing herself to become a good wife and mother. Those were the ethics of those days.⁴

This may say something about Jerry's attitude towards women.

Jerry, the second oldest and first male child in a family of five children, states that his formative years coincided with the late phase of the Great Depression. Fortunately the Rojo parents always seemed to manage to have jobs, and there was always food on the table. Indeed suppertime seems to have been an important event towards which the entire household gravitated.

We were close and comfortable with each other but dinner was the only time we all spent together. Besides that we all pretty much went our own ways with our own separate groups of friends.⁵

The Rojos were only mild participants in the Catholic church. Jerry did attend parochial school until the third grade after which he went to public school.

Around the year 1941 the Rojos moved to Waukegan, Illinois. His father went ahead of the rest of the family, by car to secure living arrangements, and he took young Jerry with him.

It was the only time in my life that I spent time with my father alone. I'll always remember the great feeling of warmth and security I had being with him.⁶

It is from that trip Jerry dates his first long lasting impression of a created environment outside of his own home. His father would stop at a bar for a beer or a sandwich, and young Jerry retains to this day his happy reaction to the place. He loved the smell, the wooden bar, the jovial atmosphere, in fact the whole mise-en-scene.

Jerry spent the next ten years of his life living in Waukegan. Both of his parents worked at Abbott's

pharmaceutical firm. Guadalupe Rojo had obtained a job of great responsibility for a man who had no college education. It was his duty to receive formulas from various chemists and turn them into medicines by mixing chemicals in great vats. He seems to have done a singularly impressive job for when he took ill with heart disease near the end of his life, the chemical engineers at Abbott's rushed to his bedside to learn the methods for mixing chemicals which he had kept secret.

Those years in Waukegan turned out to be among the happiest in Jerry Rojo's life. Living on Lake Michigan he became interested in boating and building.

I built rafts from pilfered oil drums and lumber from factories. I built go-carts. I was always building stuff; I had an instinctive need to build and construct like my father.⁷

When he was fifteen, he became fascinated with the singer Gene Autry.

My first interest in the theatre grew from him and his films. Since we were depression babies the films were our great escape. Theatre was thought of as something you did until you could get into the movies. There was no such thing as art in my mind, what was in my mind was the movies.⁸

At this stage of his life he began to develop his entrepreneurial skills. Like his parents he always had some sort of job, whether a paper route or the responsibility of setting bowling pins. He saved his money and bought a home movie camera. He searched through war surplus catalogues and bought uniforms. He made props, he even carved guns from wood. He went out to the fields and dug foxholes. He

wrote battle scenarios and rounded up local youths for his movie casts. He made two films which he has to this day.

Even then I was directing and designing and working on mise-en-scene. I was always an instigator.⁹

Gene Autry remained a major influence in his life. Autry's strong moralistic sense reminded Jerry of his father; he carried a gun but never used it.

I liked his tough disposition toward women. His horse was trained to nudge women on ahead of Autry as he sang. He never kissed a woman on screen, as a matter of fact the only scene in which he ever kissed a woman was cut right out of the movie before it reached the public.¹⁰

Today Rojo is still a collector of Autry memorabilia although he fully realizes that Autry was far from brilliant and that his films are mediocre. When Autry made the shift from radio to television, young Jerry followed right along and was exposed for the first time to popular entertainment. He taught himself to sing and to play the guitar. He sang and played at school assemblies and clubs, at times with a classmate friend of his, Jerry Orbach (of Broadway fame). Having attracted a group of fans, Rojo discovered what it was like to have some small degree of fame,

Girls I didn't even know would call me at home or write to me, for a while I thought, this is what I wanted to do. My mother always encouraged me to keep singing, and maybe even go to Hollywood and be a star.¹¹

His interest in film, which was steadily growing, led him to become a drama major in high school, something that is possible in Midwestern secondary schools.

I never liked the good films of the day; I was more into cowboy movies and war films and especially Marx Brothers comedies.¹²

He started to aim his career in the direction of acting. He wanted to be more like two of his other boyhood heroes, Robert Cummings and Hugh Marlowe.

Melba Wixam, his first drama coach, did not like his acting very much and told him so, but she was in constant need of males of any level of talent to fill the casts of her shows. Reading many plays for Ms. Wixam was a great learning experience, but Jerry soon realized that acting was not one of his strong talents. He decided to try building sets instead. This, he soon discovered, was something that he truly excelled at, much to the delight of his little drama group, which quickly made Jerry technical director. He knew nothing of mechanical drawing, but planned and drew in his own way, and conceived and built all the sets needed by his high school.

Upon graduation he joined the Navy Reserve for an eight year hitch. He went to the Great Lakes Naval Training Base and marched around in a uniform for several weeks, but he soon tired of the idea of military life and began to skip the reserve's meetings and weekends. Finally the Navy brass called young Rojo on the phone and asked in a loud bark if he still wanted to be a sailor. Jerry retorted,

Well, I really don't, I don't think I like it. I hope that doesn't mean that I have to go to Leavenworth.¹³

The belligerent officer bellowed that he should turn in his duffle bag at once. Oddly enough, seven years later ex-cadet Rojo received a packet from the U.S. Navy asking

him if he would like to re-enlist now that his term of duty was over. The packet even included a good conduct medal and a full naval citation, stating that he was a model cadet, being officially mustered out of the navy as a veteran in good standing.

The high school drama coach had urged her "technical director" student to apply to Lake Forest College and study there with John Converse. On a lark, Jerry applied and was accepted. He did not have a major career goal in mind; he felt that, at this stage, he would just go to college and get educated. Lake Forest, however, proved to be a real turning point in Rojo's life. It was there that he had his first contact with the upper class.

I was taken in by the rich, and for the first time in my life well-educated and well-moneyed people influenced my way of thinking.¹⁵

He slowly began to change his mind about theatre as just a poor substitute for the movies. Lake Forest had a small speech department with about 20 to 25 students. Jerry was hired as technical director for the resident theatre repertoire group, "The Garrick Players." He designed and built four sets for the winter season and four sets for the summer season, over a period of four years. The group worked primarily with the classics of drama; consequently, Rojo learned much about the history of the theatre and many of its great writers.

I received excellent on-the-job training, but I also acquired a solid background in humanistic thinking.

This is where I turned radical. At last I knew the difference between Robert Cummings and Bertolt Brecht.¹⁶

Jerry's parents were very enthusiastic about his college career. As mentioned earlier, Mrs. Rojo had made it a point to support her son financially. Guadalupe Rojo had no opposition to Jerry's going to college and studying theatre; he wanted his son to become educated. The senior Rojo, who rarely if ever, went to the movies and certainly not the theatre really did not have a clear idea of what his son was studying. In 1967, with Jerry's career as scenic designer in full bloom and he, himself, involved in a losing battle with heart disease, he was still convinced that his son designed movie theatres.

Half-way through his undergraduate career Jerry realized that he wanted to go to graduate school and train as a scene designer. The Speech Designer at Lake Forest College did not offer any courses in scene design, so Jerry decided to enhance his curriculum by taking courses outside the department. He took classes in painting, art history, sculpting and graphics. Rojo feels that his training as a painter made his artistic eye as a designer more confrontational.

Painters learn to approach their work from a more artistic, personal, even radical intent. Scene designers are trained to work within the established mode of the director's concept, not to strike out on their own. I never liked taking a back seat in my designing.¹⁷

In true Rojo fashion he also taught himself drafting, becoming an excellent draftsman and earning money

in graduate school when fellow students hired him to do their drafting projects. Perfecting this mechanical drawing techniques through the years he discovered how to take this craft to distant horizons (literary) by learning how to do seascapes with compass and ruler.

He believes that his drafting ability is definitely many levels above that of most other professional scene designers.

In the hopes of attaining an M.F.A. in design he applied to several graduate schools. On the basis of his renderings he was accepted to several. Tulane University offered him a well-paid assistantship; the fact that it was in New Orleans piqued his interest and he decided to go there for his graduate work. He knew little about this school except for the fact that Robert Corrigan and the Tulane Drama Review were in residence there. He studied with George Hendricks, who as Jerry puts it, was of the Donald Oenslager school of design. Hendricks was very critical of young Rojo's work, but he inspired a strong working ethic and had a profound effect on his students in general.

He was a brilliant designer but not a very good teacher. He would look at one of my drawings and after pondering it for some time he would say, "I don't like it." He would not say why or how to improve it, so there was little if any criticism.¹⁸

There was a lot of work, a design a week and each student was required to do at least 50 renderings.

Jerry was again hired as the technical director of the resident theatre company. In three years he designed, built and painted sets for the university's productions, a total of twelve sets. While he obtained on the job experience he also read every book on theatrical design that he could get his hands on. This was the period during which he became more involved in a scholarly way with the theatrical process. He came to know the work of people like Robert Edmond Jones, Lee Simonson and Norman Bel Geddes. Rojo had never seen a Broadway play or even the work of a top-notch professional company, so he learned about the then current influential designers from books. His reading had an enormous effect on him as he had never seen anybody's work but his own. He began to realize that his own interests and work were very much different from those of other theatre designers.

My ideas were always conceptual. My training as a sculptor and painter had made me more individualistic, confrontational and uncompromising. I could see that their work was much more conservative.¹⁹

It was at Tulane that he met his future wife, Carolyn Shields, a directing student at the school. It was also at this time that he began to look for professional work in summer stock. He landed one position at the Abendale Professional Summer Theatre as set designer and technical director. The theatre had an Arena stage and his job was to design as much scenery into each production as possible. He designed and built the sets and lights for 10

shows in 10 weeks, for two years. This was his first paid job and it was at the very least, hectic.

In 1960 he graduated with an M.F.A. from Tulane University. In the same year he was married to Ms. Shields and procured a full-time, tenure track instructor's position at the University of Omaha, where he was hired as a scene designer, technical director and speech teacher. Rojo worked for one year at Omaha, built and designed three sets there, and because of the work load describes this period in his life as very "traumatic."²⁰ Later that year, Monroe Lipman from Tulane informed him of an opening at the University of Connecticut. Jerry was greatly interested in the job because it entailed set and scene designing only. He would not have to be the technical director or teach any courses in speech. He sent all of his renderings to Dr. Cecil Hinkel, then the head of the Dramatic Art Department at the University. It was on the basis of these drawings that Rojo was hired; there was not even an interview.

Jerry Rojo began his long residency at the University of Connecticut in 1961. In that same year the school hired another professor, Michael Gregoric. It was with Gregoric that Rojo began to experiment with "alternative theatre." The two worked together on many productions and began to develop an interest in such current trends as Happenings, the work of Grotowski, and of Richard Schechner. It was through the Tulane Drama Review that Rojo learned about "radical" forms of theatre.

I disdained the Broadway theatre and I rarely went to shows there. I emulated none of the new designers such as Ming Cho Lee; they had nothing new to say. I felt that I was as good as they were.²¹

It was through the Tulane Drama Review that Rojo learned about people like Genet and Artaud. The whole concept of designing changed for him. The play's setting became more important in his eyes and not just a backdrop to the action. In confrontational theatre, the setting was part of the mise-en-scene. This all seemed to make sense to a young designer who was seeking new forms. Rojo wanted design to be a very aggressive part of any production. He did not go along with many designers who believed that one should not be able to see the design.

Jerry decided that he would not work with directors who wanted his work to remain in the background. This decision was in relation to his professional work. University interdepartmental required that he produce what he termed "the Walt Disney stuff." With all of his conventional training, he could work in the latter mode very well. Privately, he thought,

Light entertainment and Hollywood escapist films seemed...to be totally irrelevant. I also had a natural distrust of something that everyone likes. Concerning history, I have always loved it but at the same time I have always distrusted it. I wanted to find new ways to express contemporary ideas.²²

Although he seldom went to New York to see shows, he did occasionally manage to view one or two. Almost concurrently he saw The Unsinkable Molly Brown and Grotowski's The Constant Prince. He felt that there was no

reason on earth to support the existence of a show like Molly Brown. The Constant Prince, on the other hand was a revelation to him, and he knew that he would have to seek out more of this man's work.

Around the year 1965, social unrest in the United States really began to boil over as a result of national and, particularly, student dissention over the Vietnam war. Theatre people across the country were beginning to explore many new techniques to express their outrage at America's involvement in this "dirty little war." Multi-media productions were gaining popularity and Rojo thought that he would try to produce one at the university. His production of The Run Off, directed by Mike Gregoric turned the university's conventional proscenium arch theatre into a multi-media environment. The play was enhanced with the use of film, slides, live television, actors running up and down the aisles; even the lobby was included in the game plan. The showcase window which usually contained photographs of the actors involved in the production was converted into a three-dimensional space in which one of the female performers was placed dressed in a bikini bathing suit. The Rojo interest in contemporary forms was building.

In 1966 while on sabbatical from the university, he returned to Tulane ostensibly to work on his doctorate. His real intention was to study with the person he regarded as one of the great innovators of the day, Richard Schechner. Schechner was teaching at Tulane and was editor of The

Tulane Drama Review, but he was not allowed to direct within the university. Other Tulane professors thought of him as a terrible director. Therefore Rojo took courses with Schechner in dramatic literature. Schechner was very demanding of his students and made them read endless numbers of plays. According to Rojo,

He's a brilliant teacher and just keeping up with him was a real challenge. He taught me how to analyze and conceptualize a play and how to write about it. If he felt that someone was not keeping up with the rest of the class he would mortally embarrass him in front of the whole class.²³

Prior to this time Jerry had been solely crafts-oriented; now he felt he was attaining a true scholarly background. He was beginning to look at the theatre from an intellectual's point of view. Schechner was also working on a theatre production outside of the University, attempting to create a New Orleans version of Off-Off-Broadway at the Le Petit Theatre du Vieux. Schechner was aware of Rojo's technical abilities and asked if he would help him with the set for the play. In his own words,

I knew Jerry Rojo from classes at Tulane. I asked him to come down and solve some problems for us. He did and we've worked together ever since.²⁴

The play was Victims of Duty by Ionesco, and together Schechner and Rojo built an environment for the production. "We were using Grotowski techniques and we did not even realize it."²⁵

Although Schechner as a teacher had been a "ballbuster," he relied on Rojo's skills to handle the

technical aspects of the production. The two turned a small proscenium arch theatre into an environmental space. Other designers helped in the conceptualization: Franklyn Adams, Paul Epstein, and Edmond Seagrave. They used platforms, step units, flats; and they even had a television set on stage. The centerpiece was a spiral tower of chairs that Jerry designed and built. In true environmental theatre fashion, the lobby too was also converted into part of the environment. There were films, tape recordings, collage hangings; lines from the play were painted on the walls like graffiti.

This to a great extent prefigured the graffiti motifs in the Performance Group's production of Makbeth and Mother Courage.²⁶

The door to the street was used for the entrance of the actor playing the detective to make his entrance. As the audience entered it would see the actors having their dinner on the set and audience members were invited to join in. Later the actors would try to shove bread down the throats of the audience members in what Schechner admits was one of his most non-audience friendly pieces he ever put together. During the play the lobby was transformed into a kind of obstacle course, and in order to leave the theatre the audience had to duck under a poster of Adolf Eichmann, on which were inscribed the words of his famous pre-execution statement: "I'm a victim of obedience and duty to others." The tower of chairs that Rojo designed is of

particular interest in that it is a precursor to the many towers that he designed for the Performance Group.

I created out of plastic covered steel cable a kind of Christmas tree using table clamps to fasten the legs of the chairs to the cable. I created a spiral effect with them, 12' tall and with an 8' diameter. There was some sway to the essentially fairly rigid tower.²⁶

This was a time when avant-garde groups were working very aggressively with audience members. Groups like the Living Theatre symbolized the shakeup taking place within universities in the 1960s; with the youth in particular it was a time of open hostility toward the establishment and the military. People were beginning to become suspicious of the goals of modern technology. Symbolically, performers might offer to feed the audience members, but if they did not accept the food it might be forced down their throats.

Chapter 3. DIONYSUS IN '69

Rojo came back to UCONN a changed man. He had learned a lot from studying with Richard Schechner.

The university did not have any [theatre] professors who were scholarly oriented. I felt that now I was prepared to approach a play from an intellectual point of view. I really learned from Richard how to analyze a play and to conceive and conceptualize a set.¹

Rojo was charged up with new ideas, and he was eager to try out his new methods.

That year, 1967, Schechner and Robert Corrigan left Tulane University because the school would not give them a theatre in which to present their work. Schechner took the Tulane Drama Review with him. Tulane was not at all sorry to see them go because Schechner had virtually transformed The Drama Review into a left-wing activist publication protesting America's involvement in Vietnam. Schechner took up resident at New York University, but he was not permitted to direct any university performances. Consequently, he decided to form his own group which would work on productions based on Grotowski's principles. It was in 1967-68 that the Performance Group was formed consisting mainly of students in the NYU acting program. It immediately began to work on a production tentatively titled Dionysus in '69. The script for Dionysus was formulated from the group's exploration of William Arrowsmith's translation of The Bacchae by Euripides. Through the use of

theatre games and improvisation the group adapted the text to fit its own personal performance needs.

The original designer for the production was Michael Kirby, but he and Schechner had difficulties. In 1968, Richard Schechner asked Jerry Rojo to help create an environment for his play.

I said that I would like very much to work with him again, and that was how we really began our serious working relationship.²

There existed only sketchy notes on preliminary designs, but Rojo took over the designer function, and conceived and built the entire set.

Much has been written about this particular production. It was probably among the most commercially successful projects that Rojo ever worked on.

I think personally that it was probably the single most important production in New York City. It revolutionized the theatre. It was the first time in history that Off-Off-Broadway received mainstream interest and approval.³

By 1968 The Performance Group was in residence at the Performing Garage, a former factory in New York City's rapidly developing SoHo district. The first production with a fully-developed environment created by Rojo was the loosely adapted version of Euripides' the Bacchae, Dionysus in '69. It opened on June 6, 1968, and in Schechner's words,

Dionysus was the most commercially successful production for the group. Commercially and in terms of what people recall it was a very important production.⁴

The original concept for the basic design of the play's two central towers evolved from collaborative work between Richard Schechner and Michael Kirby. According to Schechner,

Basically I did not want an autonomous design...I did not want a designer's personality, I wanted a design to emerge out of the mise-en-scene, I meant that is my basic thing.⁵

It was at this point that Schechner called Jerry Rojo in Connecticut to see if he could and would assist him. Rojo agreed readily, and constructed the two towers, which in reality were scaffolds.

The design expanded into the whole kind of modular design that we used in Commune, Macbeth and Mother Courage, and it eventually formed the basis of the Mobius Theatre.

I wanted the space to be plush...a place where performers who wear very few clothes could feel warm and keep from getting hurt on the cement floor...I wanted the room to have the tone of a Persian pleasure palace, because Dionysus has that kind of feeling.⁷

There was agreement between Schechner and Rojo to let the audience and the actors share the same space, and to get all participants away from the floor using vertical space to its fullest extent. The first step in the creation of the environment was to discover an initial impulse dictated by the script and the performers. When painting the garage, the group had used painters' scaffolds, these had become an integral part of the group's rehearsal rhythms.

Rojo states,

I designed those towers, I gave them that oriental look and it was also quite a feat of engineering. I had a parallelogram that sat between the floor and the ceiling without any crossbars. It was an unconventional and heretofore unprecedented approach. There is no way Richard could have come up with that. Then again, this was not a design I did at home by myself. Richard conceived some parts, while I conceived other parts, but I made it all work. Of course it would have to be something that Richard could accept. These scaffolds were not merely functional, they were elements of design. I even wasted space to achieve this certain oriental look.⁸

The scaffolds facilitated the development of the Artaudian concept of an actor-audience relationship. Members of the audience could sit down on the main floor and practically participate with the performers, or they could withdraw up into workings of the scaffolds and merely observe the action.

There were other underground movements evolving and working in New York City, among them, The Ridiculous Theatre Company, and The Open Theatre, but Dionysus seemed to bridge the gap between underground and mainstream audiences. It popularized the sexual and cultural revolution symbolized by young America's rejection of the Vietnam War. Dionysus ran for a year and then toured various cities in the United States and Canada, leaving a trail of controversy wherever it went. In an interview Rojo stated,

Schechner popularized confrontational theatre. What you have is Off-Off-Broadway hitting the New York Times and Life Magazine. That to me was a revolution. Everybody saw the production, everybody knew about our work. Dionysus really turned the heads of most theatre people, even though they wouldn't admit it.⁹

Concerning the design concept, there are some varying points of view concerning its finalization. Rojo feels that he played a greater role in this than he is credited with by the New York press and in other historical accounts. Schechner believes that, in all of his productions, the basic ideas for the environment were always his own. Brooks McNamara states,

In certain ways, when anyone works with Richard Schechner, his ideas dominate. It may very well be that the whole environmental idea that Jerry Rojo developed in his earlier work was Schechner's idea. However, Rojo took these ideas and was able to generate a look, a sort of expressionist constructivism, in that space [The Performing Garage], that was uniquely his own, a look that Schechner would not have been able to come up with on his own. The idea of a complex theatrical landscape which is associated with Richard Schechner and Jerry Rojo really began with Dionysus.¹⁰

One point on which most will agree is that the environment of Dionysus was a work of collaboration from conceptualization to realization. Rojo states that the basic "Oriental" look and intricate engineering of the towers were things that he wanted and that only he could design and build.

Richard was a literary person. He trusted my sense of conventional theatre styles. He did not trust himself in conventional terms. Richard is one of the most brilliant directors in America, but he would not know how to take a Tennessee Williams play and make it theatrical in a conventional sense. He comes from the radical side of the theatre and he cannot run both ways. He trusted my skills to bring theatrical conventionality and solid engineering to our environments, and I did this in an unconventional way.¹¹

Rojo feels that Schechner was best at psycho-physical work with his actors and that most other directors cannot achieve what Schechner did with his performers.

A detailed technical account of many of the environments that Jerry Rojo and Richard Schechner designed and constructed together is contained in their book, Theatres, Spaces, Environments: Eighteen Projects.¹²

In general, Dionysus received favorable reviews. The Village Voice said,

Environmental theatre is the wave of the future. This is truly a significant production, specifically its mise-en-scene. Dionysus is the best designed and most creative casebook for an American production.¹³

William Raidy of the Long Island Press claimed that,

Dionysus is vital theatre and is one of the most unforgettable evenings in the theatre that I have ever experienced. I sat in a unique observation platform which I shared with a hippie and an uptown drunk, I thought that I was in a cage. This is raw beauty.¹⁴

Ross Wetzsteon of the Village Voice, wrote of Dionysus,

I saw it four times, it was good for the actors, it was good for us too. The differences between the Living Theatre and the Performance Group is religion versus therapy. The ideas fostered in Dionysus should be with us for years.¹⁵

Clive Barnes, then with the New York Times, praised Dionysus on November 19, 1968.

Dionysus is the strangest hit even Off-Off-Broadway has ever achieved. By conventional terms this is a disaster, but convention does not pertain here, they attempt to exhaust the range of theatre. Jerry Rojo has built an environment that actors and audience can travel all over...you can only become involved. It is an attempt to reproduce for a contemporary audience something of the effect that Euripides might have had in

his own time. It plunges you into Greek tragedy with an intensity that no conventional version could match. There is nothing like Dionysus anywhere in the United States or even in Europe. Its effect is healthy and liberating, it shocks in a good natural way, like Tom Sawyer trying to be Jean Cocteau. Go see it with an open mind and a pure heart, I loved it.¹⁶

Dan Sullivan, also of the New York Times, wrote,

Dionysus offers us a unique environment. Richard Schechner's theatre says not to sit down, I'll tell you a story, but rather stand up and we'll play a game. I think in this environment the audience is the chorus and this is as faithful a production as The Bacchae could have received since its original performance. It came close to the guts of the play. Schechner's actors are highly disciplined craftsmen. Anyone who wants to know where the modern theatre is going must see this play.¹⁷

Maurice Blanc of the Village Voice (January 30, 1969) stated,

I danced with frenzied abandon. The spirit of Eros was strong. Dionysus in '69 communicates to me something much more of the possibility of theatre. They are bringing about things Artaud dreamt of.¹⁸

Even Life Magazine reviewed Dionysus and stated that,

...the environment is justified as a device to heighten unrepressed frenzies of revelers.¹⁹

These reviews changed the entire situation of the group. It now had some money and its members were certain that any future productions would receive attention from the media. Joseph Papp expressed an interest in a Schechner project and plans were made for a workshop production with a budget of \$800,000 dollars. Rojo, who was then teaching at the University of Connecticut, received considerable attention from his peers. He was provided with funds to conceive an Environmental Theatre curriculum within the

University's Dramatic Arts Department. He would be able to direct shows that he himself would formulate. The concept of a fixed environmental theatre space at the department's Fine Arts Center began to take shape. Few University level educators of theatre have had the free reign that he would have over his projects. As Jerry put it,

People at the University were very impressed with the reviews that I had received in the New York Times. The university was very receptive to any suggestions I had in the way of bringing "Environmental Theatre" to the Dramatic Arts program.²⁰

The United States tour of Dionysus in '69 caused quite a stir in each city when it played. In Ann Arbor, the group found itself arrested and in the custody of local authorities on charges of indecent exposure. The entire affair was covered extensively by The Michigan Star, which even issued an extra edition with headlines focusing on the matter. From the pages of Life Magazine, Schechner protesting against artistic censorship, exclaimed, "They won't let me take my clothes off."²¹

After Michigan, the group was to perform in Minneapolis. Their publicity preceded them and before the opening night performance could begin, two members of the audience arrived sans clothing and the performance was cancelled. The controversy touched off a nation-wide debate as to whether a university could do things which were not done in public.

Commonweal Magazine stated that Dionysus in '69 was "clean and graceful."²²

The Toronto Daily Star said,

Dionysus in '69 has similarities to religious fundamentalism, which has long been a feature of American life. It was thoughtful and provoking.²³

The Houston Post, February 2, 1969 quipped,

A year ago with Victims of Duty, Richard Schechner shocked New Orleans out of its Blanche Dubois mind: now the world should be ready for the same shock with Dionysus in '69.²⁴

Dionysus won the "Obie Award" for the 1968-69 season, for best production. For Richard Schechner it was doubly sweet. Already the editor of a prestigious theatre journal, The Tulane Drama Review, later The Drama Review, his accomplishment was similar to that of a respected art critic who suddenly draws world attention by creating a great painting.

It is unfortunate that the Performance Group should have received its greatest level of public approval and highest critical acclaim with its first production. Although subsequent shows received considerable attention from the New York theatre world, the group never again produced a play that earned such unanimous praise.

Chapter 4. MAJOR THEATRICAL INFLUENCES ON ROJO

In an interview, Rojo stated,

I look at theatre not as sitting in seats watching a play. When I go to a carnival, that's theatre; when I go to a parade, that's theatre. To me theatre is a continuum of events.¹

Rojo's approach to theatre is to allow each piece to exist on its own and to let it grow out of a natural organic progression. Rojo finds the option to explore a piece to be one of the more exciting aspects of environmental theatre. It is his opinion that a director begins with a central image, but in the end, "the group has to discover the play because that's the most direct, honest thing."²

In his own words,

Environmental theatre has come to mean...an organic production process in which an ensemble of performers, writers, designers, directors, and technicians participate on a regular basis in the formation of the piece through workshops and rehearsals. The ensemble may itself compose the text or mise-en-scene, as in the Performance Group's Commune.³

Rojo's idea of a theatre which places greater emphasis on physicalization than on verbalization smacks of Antonin Artaud's metaphysical theatre of gesture. As an environmental theatre designer, Rojo speaks of two different categories of theatre space--"open space," where the space changes and adapts to each production, and "fixed environmental theatre," in which space adapts itself to many productions. It is the duty and responsibility of the environmental designer to arrange and organize the total

space involved, to choose the materials needed and make decisions concerning construction methods, as well as to consider the "associated and intrinsic value of each aspect of design."⁴ Rojo rejects the idea of pictorial renderings of a scene in environmental theatre:

This is because these productions exist in concepts which rely on transactions among audience, performers, text, time, and space, and are therefore only perceived internally during production.⁵

As for audience reaction, Rojo's views are certainly similar to those of Artaud, who wished to elicit strong, visceral reactions from the spectator. In Rojo's words, it is necessary to "push the audience to do more, to become more a participant in the event."⁶

The environmental actor finds motivation and association with the mise-en-scene from many non-matrixed methods. An example of this would be the representation of the tyrant in the Big Enchilada, an adaptation of Ubu Roi by Alfred Jarry, performed at the Mobius Theatre of the University of Connecticut in 1975.

The Dictator carried a flash camera instead of a weapon, and his Mexican bandit's crossed bullet belt was loaded with flash cubes. This presentation was intended to combine aspects of Madison Avenue public relations, Watergate themes, and a military complex all in one character.⁷

Anyone who works with Jerry Rojo will very quickly discover the main influences on his work. One is given a reading list compiled from three main sources: writings by Antonin Artaud, Jerzy Grotowski, and Richard Schechner. In the paragraphs that follow, I will discuss briefly some of

the major principles espoused by these theorists and how Rojo has applied their theories in the development of his own.

From Artaud,

We must have done with this idea of masterpieces reserved for a self-styled elite and not understood by the general public...Masterpieces of the past are good for the past; they are not good for us.⁸

Rojo feels that if classical works are produced in the twentieth century, they must be adapted to fit a contemporary frame of reference. I remember Rojo's asking a group what possible value an unadapted version of Richard III could have for a twentieth-century person. He believes that all plays should be developed and adapted to the needs of the group.

If the play becomes personal to the performer, it will become personal to the audience.⁹

According to Artaud,

We need above all a theatre that wakes us up: nerves and heart...In the anguished catastrophic period we live in, we feel an urgent need for a theatre which events do not exceed, whose resonance is deep within us, dominating the instability of the times. The theatre must give us everything that is in crime, love, war or madness, if it wants to recover its necessity.¹⁰

Rojo is acutely aware of the fact that the theatre must change with times and audience in order to survive. He stresses total physical involvement by his performers.

Strenuous warmups precede any rehearsal. As Artaud put it,

Everything that acts is a cruelty. It is upon this idea of extreme action, pushed beyond all limits, that theatre must be rebuilt.¹¹

Rojo believes that actors should be as physically adept and agile as professional athletes in order to function correctly in the environmental theatre.

The actor is an athlete of the heart...to make use of his emotions as a wrestler makes use of his muscles.¹²

It is in his concept of space, however, that one realizes even more the profound effect that Artaud has had on Rojo. The following statements by Artaud seem to describe some of the spaces designed by Rojo.

It is in order to attack the spectator's sensibility on all sides that we advocate a revolving spectacle which, instead of making the stage and auditorium two closed worlds, without possible communication, spreads its visual and sonorous outburst over the entire mass of the spectators.¹³

We abolish the stage and the auditorium and replace them by a single site, without partition or barrier of any kind, which will become the theatre of the action. A direct communication will be re-established between the spectator and the spectacle...from the fact that the spectator, placed in the middle of the action, is engulfed and physically affected by it.¹⁴

Like Artaud, Rojo is strongly influenced by the concept of a metaphysical theatre, strongly influenced by the power of gesture and movement. Rojo wishes to break down the barriers between actor and spectator, enabling his audience to become more actively involved, and thus to participate in the theatrical event.

Jerzy Grotowski's concepts of Poor Theatre are another strong influence on Rojo. Rojo's actors, like Grotowski's, do not hide behind makeup and costumes. His actors are stripped to the bare necessities (usually denim cutoffs).

The actor's act--discarding half measures, revealing, opening up, emerging from himself as opposed to closing up--is an invitation to the spectator. Here we can see the theatre's therapeutic function for people in our present-day civilization.¹⁵

Rojo attempts to realize Grotowski's views on the function of the director-producer.

An actor can only be guided and inspired by someone who is wholehearted in his creative activity.¹⁶

Grotowski's views on the ensemble approach to acting also influenced Rojo's attitude toward his group.

An actor has no right to mould his partner so as to provide greater possibilities for his own performance.¹⁷

Like Grotowski, Rojo believes in order and harmony within the group and within each actor. Rojo's actors are prepared, both physically and mentally, to create a particular atmosphere and to interact with the group. The discipline of the daily warmup exercises demands care of the performer's bodies, even outside the workshop.

In this respect, his health (the actor's), physical condition, and all his private affairs cease to be just his own concern.¹⁸

The highly trained body, then, is the starting point for the artistic creativity of the actor. As a director, Mr. Rojo is interested in an actor's developing "signs" with his body to articulate non-verbal communication. Grotowski points out,

...as the actor's material is his own body, it should be trained to obey, to be pliable, to respond passively to psychic impulses.¹⁹

There is one last statement by Grotowski which is worth quoting:

Before a man decides to do something, he must first work out a point of orientation and then act accordingly and in a coherent manner.²⁰

This describes Rojo's attitude toward the training of scene designers and the training of artists in general.

Traditionally young designers are taught to be jacks of all trades. They are taught to be capable of a range of design styles and problems...However soon a selective elimination process should take place. One in which the designer begins to focus and become committed to a style of work. Taking a cue from painters who spend long periods of their life exploring specific problems...the stage designer needs not to see himself in servitude to every project that comes along, but only those that foster some discovery.²¹

Similarly, the performer must first orient himself to the space and the script before he can truly bring himself to begin a long rehearsal process. Like Grotowski, actors to Rojo are the principal components of the theatre. The space, lights, props, costumes, even the script should serve him and bring out his purity as the focus for the audience.

Richard Schechner and Jerry Rojo have worked on several projects directed by Schechner and presented at the Performing Garage in New York City. As mentioned earlier, Rojo met Schechner at Tulane University in 1966, but he had previously developed an interest in Schechner's work through the director's writings. Public Domain is a collection of some of Richard Schechner's essays. The concept of "non-matrixed" art seems to be one of the central themes of Schechner's writings. This concept is at the heart of a Rojo production. The chapter, Six Axioms for Environmental

Theatre, 1968, might just as well serve to express Rojo's views as well as Schechner's.

The Six Axioms:

1. The theatrical event is a set of related transactions.
2. All the space is used for performance: all the space is used for audience.
3. The theatrical event can take place either in a totally transformed space or in a "found space."
4. Focus is flexible and variable.
5. All production elements speak in their own language.
6. The text need be neither the starting point nor the goal of a production. There may be no text at all.²²

The Axioms also relate to Artaud's and Grotowski's notions of space, language and performance content. Jerry Rojo's approach to a production is so like Schechner's that at times it is difficult to separate one's work from the other's. In Chapter 1 of Schechner's book Environmental Theatre, he describes the close and long working relationship between director and designer when developing ideas for the use of space. Individual concepts of both evolved into one unified whole, a culmination of their combined efforts.

Chapter 5. MAKBETH AND OTHER PERFORMANCE GROUP PRODUCTIONS

The next environment that Rojo had a hand in designing for the Performance Group was the setting for a loosely adapted version of William Shakespeare's Macbeth, which was re-entitled Makbeth.

I saw Macbeth combining theatre, games and electric circuitry. This was how the play was staged finally. We took the script apart and assembled it in many ways. We tried to find the main thread of action from both individual and group points of view. We got the text down to a basic fifteen scenes.¹

Schechner wanted the conceptualization for the environment to come from the daily work on the play, to develop from workshops, discussions, drawings and models. Rojo and McNamara sat in on numerous workshops and many different models for the setting were proposed. The show opened on November 20, 1969. The environment consisted of two distinct units. The "upstairs" compartment was designed by Brooks McNamara and took the shape of a long dark tunnel with mirrors on the walls. On these mirrors were lines from the text which were scrawled "graffiti" style. McNamara claimed,

The idea was to create a mental cityscape in which people were confined in very small cages or cabins. I borrowed from the traditions of Madame Tussaud's Wax Museum and from the Carnival's House of Mirrors.²

Schechner stated his own views on the set,

The maze was designed to introduce the spectator to the nature of the performance, that fragmented quality...then down the winding staircase to Rojo's environment, the effect being of going from a first

floor into a gigantic subterranean chamber, a huge white basement.³

This "downstairs" unit was designed by Jerry Rojo as a multi-level complex of ladders, stairs and towers. A series of rectangles, tightly connected, rose from a central rectangle. On this central rectangle much of the major action took place, but scenes were also presented high in the ramparts, out of sight in the corners. The audience in Makbeth was restricted to a thirty-inch rim along the edge of the platforms. In an interview, Rojo stated,

This was my version of an environmental castle, with a main hall, anterooms, chambers, and passageways. This environment really confronted the audience in a massive total way.⁴

Brooks McNamara himself stated,

The two environments complemented each other. As you passed through the upper tunnel glass house carnival style you experienced the feeling that you were going underground from a dark space to a warm and brightly lit space. The dark tunnel helped to enhance the light and the size of the Jerry Rojo space.⁵

This would be the first time, for the "Group," that an environment would be designed, built and then presented to the performers in its finalized state. The actors were in Yugoslavia rehearsing the play, while in New York the set was developed and constructed within the Performing Garage. This time, only the actors would be able to move freely through the space. After the audience entered the performance area through the tunnel they were expected to remain stationary.

Concerning this design Rojo states,

I really loved this environment and it served as the basis for the space that I created for the Mobius Theatre at the University of Connecticut and the space at Sarah Lawrence College.⁶

This play also had over fifty light cues, the largest number ever used for a Richard Schechner production.⁷

Schechner had the following to say about Rojo's design concept,

Rojo's environment had one supreme quality. It incorporated the tensions he sensed in the 'Group,' conflicts that eventually led to the dissolution of the Performance Group early in 1970. The rehearsals of Makbeth coincided with the undoing of the 'Group'. Daily, heavy personal things came down, and although no one said so out loud, I think we each knew that Makbeth was our last play together. Because of the way The Performance Group works our conflicts fed into the structure of Makbeth. It became an angry play of blood, power, struggles, betrayals, fleeting contracts, brief flashes of quiet punctuated by screams. All of this is in Shakespeare's script. It also characterized the environment. Gone were the soft carpets and diffused lighting of Dionysus, replaced by a concrete floor, bare wood platforms framed by iron piping, lighting that came in fitful bursts. The bare feet of Dionysus gave way to boxing shoes, nakedness to unisex costumes of crushed corduroy.⁸

There is no doubt that Schechner's Makbeth was in no way the success that Dionysus had proved to be. The show received considerable attention; however, most reviews were unfavorable. The one aspect of the production that garnered substantial praise was the Jerry Rojo environment. The following sample of reviews testifies to this.

Clive Barnes in The New York Times on November 20, 1969 wrote,

Makbeth is a stimulating failure,...it is theatre with guts and theatre that looks forward instead of sideways.

Jerry Rojo's environment is a wonderful setting and gives the impression of a haunted and whispering castle.⁹

Walter Kerr in The New York Times (November 29, 1969) generally disliked the entire production, but loved Jerry Rojo's environment and expressed the belief that "A director with any valid instinct for the possibilities of theatre might have done wonders with it."¹⁰

The review in The New Yorker on December 3, 1969, found fault with many aspects of the direction but praised the lights and costumes, stating that "The Jerry Rojo set is a marvel."¹¹

The Village Voice's John Lahr loved the entire evening, and on November 25, 1969, he claimed that "The Performance Group's production is an exciting collage from Shakespeare's tragedy." On the subject of environments he was even more complementary. He wrote:

Jerry Rojo's environment haunts like Bosch's "Garden of Earthly Delights", and becomes an infernal peeping gallery.¹²

Mr. Lahr stated that Makbeth was "sustained, thorough and accomplished theatre," and that The Performance Group members were "wily radicals and intelligent creators."¹³

The reviews were mixed, but the audiences for Makbeth grew smaller and smaller. The play opened in November and closed at the end of the following January. There were many factors that contributed to a lack of spectator attendance; one of these, perhaps was that in

winter the Performance Garage gets very cold. The play's closing also heralded a schism within the Performance Group. Richard Schechner later stated, "Makbeth was a winter of discontent play...It was not only a white, bright hell, but a cold hell."¹⁴

One other result of Rojo's design for the Performance Group production of Makbeth should be mentioned. As already stated, Rojo claimed it was the Makbeth environment that was the basis for his subsequent designs for the Mobius Theatre at the University of Connecticut and the performance space at Sarah Lawrence College. The progenitor of the Shaliko Company, Leo Shapiro, also noted in an interview that

Ellen Stewart, the artistic director of the La Mama theatre company, informed me that she designed and built her 'La Mama Annex' theatre space based entirely on the Jerry Rojo design for Sarah Lawrence. She claims that it is a direct imitation.¹⁵

COMMUNE

The split within the Performance Group at the conclusion of the run of Makbeth left few original members of the company ready to begin a new project. Concerning this, Richard Schechner stated,

The only people who continued were Joan MacIntosh, Steve Borst, Spalding Gray (who had come in at the very end of Makbeth), and me. With us were Jerry Rojo, of course, and Paul Epstein, both of whom had worked with the group but weren't into day-to-day work.¹⁶

The new project was entitled Commune. It was a conglomeration of words and ideas inspired by the activities of the Charles Manson family and atrocities committed by

American soldiers during the Vietnam War. Schechner and Rojo began meeting in the spring of 1970 to discuss the play and to initiate a process for developing a suitable environment. This time Schechner wanted the space to evolve slowly and wanted the actors to contribute as many suggestions as possible.

We decided that the space should be a terrain--it needed sky, water, hills, pueblos...Commune was the first work we composed from scratch. We were using materials from American History, the Manson story, and scenes from Shakespeare and Marlowe, but without starting from a given play as we had with Macbeth, and The Bacchae.¹⁷

The Group was in residence at the State University of New York at New Paltz, conceiving and building the script for the play. Rojo visited these workshops many times; he brought renderings and three-dimensional, scale models of possible settings for the production. He believes that he and the actors learned a great deal from these meetings.

In contrast to the preparations for Macbeth, many rehearsals, open and closed, were held in the partially completed environments. Writings, maps, figures and routes were marked on the floor; as Schechner put it,

It was like the police marking out the scene of a crime or a stage manager marking entrances and exits for performers...It was like the ancient Greek theatres where different colored stones were used to trace dance routes...at any given moment the whole dance is known and the dancers are seen as figures somewhere on the course.¹⁸

By the middle of summer the idea to have a "wave" constructed in the center of the space had been accepted by the Group and was actually built. Rojo formulated the

concept of placing small pueblo-like structures in the corners of the space; these would also surround the environment, with the wave in the center. The pueblos were to be used by both the actors and the audience. According to Schechner,

He also created the ambiance of the environment with curves, ramps, overhangs, diving boards, ellipses, cubbyholes: the pueblo feel. Of all the environments, I think I love Commune the most...We wanted everyone, performer and audience barefoot, but I didn't want rugs...it was extraordinarily flexible and beautiful. It was an environment that I wanted to keep in the Garage permanently. That never seems to happen.¹⁹

This was also the first production in which Schechner asked for a general illumination, with only a few high spots. The graffiti idea was used again, but this time it was applied to the ceiling of the Garage, and the Group thought of it more as "sky-writing." In Theatre, Spaces, Environments, Rojo makes a thought-provoking comment concerning his work on Commune.

In an orthodox theatre situation, the director has all the information about a room that comes from its traditional associations...living rooms are associated with certain blocking patterns...but an environmental space has few of those associations. You have to create them organically out of the performers' and the director's inner feelings.²⁰

Commune opened on December 17, 1970. Again the reviews were mixed and audience attendance was moderate. All of the critics were complementary about Jerry Rojo's environment. Mel Gussow of The New York Times, wrote a December 21 review which echoed the sentiments of most critics who saw the performance.

It is in the conception and performance that Commune is disappointing...Commune is not very revealing about communal life (or, for that matter life today).

He was enthusiastic, however, about the work of Jerry Rojo.

The 'environmentalist' Jerry Rojo may be the only genius in residence with the Group. For the purposes of Commune, he has constructed a rolling, rippling stage-used to simulate hills, and seas, and a burial ditch in Vietnam...you can lean, recline, walk around, walk out, join the actors, eat peanuts, scribble with chalk. This theatre makes you forget that you are in the theatre. It might be anything, even a commune; what a perfect setting for a performance!²¹

THE TOOTH OF CRIME

The next endeavor by the Performance Group opened on March 7, 1973. It was Schechner's version of Sam Shepard's play, The Tooth of Crime. At first Sam Shepard had serious reservations about a TPG production of his play that would not include electronic background music. After several persuasive letters from Schechner, who assured Shepard that his group would make up for this loss with music produced by the actors and their bodies, the playwright allowed Schechner to proceed with his work.

This was the first time that the Performance Group chose to employ such conventional acting techniques as having one performer play one character in accordance with the script. Schechner felt that the play was essentially a territorial battle and that each character should have his own turf to defend. There would be no central playing arena. Three tower-like modules resembling telephone booths dominated the central playing area; Schechner wanted to

experiment with a new approach to staging. It was a conscious move away from his habitual use of a central arena. There would be a 'city-scape' with alleys, streets, windows, doorways and roofs.

There is much more direct address to the audience in Tooth. The audience must move around; there is no way to stay in one place and see everything.²²

The setting was designed and built by Rojo at the University of British Columbia in Vancouver, where the Performance Group was in residence for the Summer of 1972. This design was part of a project to develop a basic modular system for constructing environments that could be easily broken down for storage and shipment. It was even theorized that the basic components could be taken apart and used differently for other productions. During the early stages of planning much work was done with three-dimensional models to tailor-make these initial modules to fit the needs of The Tooth of Crime.

The modular system is a system of two-dimensional units. The simpler the component...the better the modular system. But that simple component should be able to be expanded into a very complex environment if necessary...The unit had to come out of Vancouver and go to New York City, which is three thousand miles away.²³

The modular system consisted of plywood panels with holes cut in them. The holes served two purposes. First, they reduced the overall weight of the structure; secondly, they enabled the audience to see into the phone-booth-like structure. The units could be taken apart and put back together many times. The overall effect of these modules

within the Performing Garage was that of "a kind of microcosm of a cityspace."²⁴ Each character in the play was associated with a certain station within the space. From their spaces they could spy on the other characters, move out to different places within the environment, and return to their headquarters with ease. Windows were also cut into the cubicles so that scenes could be framed within set boundaries. Pockets of lighting, cleverly worked into the rigging, added a whole new scenic element. The floor of the environment was painted black to further the atmosphere of mystery.

The space was also set so that some of the audience would not be able to see all of the dramatic action of the play. Unfortunately, these members of the audience included gentlemen of the press. Among this group was the distinguished critic Stanley Kauffmann. Richard Schechner writes:

As usual, some of the critics were recalcitrant. Stanley Kauffmann sat on the stairway in the northwest corner, and didn't see half of the play...critics seem to have an occupational distaste for anything but the orthodox situation. They fix themselves in one space and then complain about the staging.²⁵

Reviews for the Performance Group's production of The Tooth of Crime were generally positive for all aspects of the show. They again lauded the work of Jerry Rojo. On March 8, 1973, The Village Voice called Rojo's environment

Stunning...[it] contributed favorably and even enhanced and heightened the dramatic action of the play. Rojo's set makes the talky first act of Shepard's script a dramatic game of hide and seek.²⁶

In his review in the New York Times of March 8, 1973, Clive Barnes indicated his appreciation of the setting by Rojo.

The playing area is an open space filled in part with stairs, ramps and various climbing structures, an environment that makes the average jungle gym look positively pastoral. It is fun, valid and interesting...it is a tribute to its designer, Jerry Rojo.²⁷

Finally, on March 18, 1973, Walter Kerr's New York Times review claimed that Rojo's setting had a significant effect on the dramatic action.

You are free to move as you wish...either trailing the actors closely as they rove in and on and about Jerry Rojo's bridgework structure, supported by pylons and pocked with open spaces or keeping your distance by climbing to roped-off balcony platforms where you can let your feet dangle over the arena. There are no fixed 'audience' positions and, on the night I attended, the audience did dissolve, billow, reform freely as the action shifted turf, sometimes settling itself on stage properties that had to be quickly vacated when headlong performers charged at them. (sic)²⁸

MOTHER COURAGE

The next production on which Rojo collaborated with Richard Schechner was The Performance Group's version of Bertolt Brecht's Mother Courage and her Children. The play, in the Manheim translation, opened on February 24, 1975. For this design Rojo was assisted by James Clayburgh, who served as co-designer.

In Mother Courage there were two designers, Jerry Rojo and Jim Clayburgh. It was Jerry's job to design the basic modular environment for the set, and Jim did the rope riggings. But again, it was I who came up with the ideas of the ropes, of acting out ropes, acting out mechanical advantage through ropes and pulleys. I also said no wagon, but then I wanted to get Mother Courage's work ethic in. It was through this idea of mechanical

advantage, and Jim Clayburgh, who developed this elaborate rope and pulley system, that we would realize this concept in a threesome design. Of course we always worked together as a threesome on all aspects of design, but it was primarily Jerry's role to design all the different spaces within the environment in Mother Courage.²⁹

Clayburgh had worked on other projects with members of The Performance Group and was no stranger to the production concepts and methods of director Schechner. This was the only project worked on by the group from beginning to end within the confines of the Performing Garage. The entire space was used, the Garage itself being used as a metaphor for Mother Courage's wagon. The garage's door would be the proscenium arch, framing performers who sang with the frigid waste-lands of Wooster Street as their backdrop. It was Clayburgh who developed the details of the complicated block and tackle system used to simulate everything from the yoke of Mother Courage's wagon to devices which would facilitate the rapings and murders of the various characters. Richard Schechner states:

The audience moved three times in the course of the production, and each movement is related to the basic movements of the play...Supper is the second movement and it brings almost everyone down on the floor. It looks like the picnic on a battlefield.³⁰

Indeed, Mother Courage's "Supper Break" was probably one of the most unusual intermissions in New York City theatre history. The play's director manned a cash register and served a "soup-line supper" of cheese, soup, bread, butter, beverage and fruit. The sound of the cash register's bell added to the mise-en-scene.

The original idea was to have three spaces, a private space near the west wall, a big space opposite the open pit, and a green room that the audience could see into in the northwest corner. Costume changes took place in the green room and performers relaxes there.³¹

The construction of the space was drawn completely from parts of environments used in other shows.

The space is totally cannibalized wood from Dionysus, things off the street, ladders from Tooth, the blue ceiling from Commune, the black floor of Tooth shows through at some points as does the raw wood from Commune...It gives the feeling of war surplus...I [Schechner] believe in collage and in group history.³²

The rope rigging involved was as complex as any ship's rigging. These ropes, which were used to define and re-define space, re-enforced the central imagery of the entire space as "Mother Courage's" wagon. The ropes were also used as support systems in complex machines that were used to "fly" actors and to implement the suspension of performers whose characters had been killed in the play.

At one point the character "Swiss Cheese," played by Spalding Gray, was suspended for twenty-five minutes in a specially designed harness.

The script used by the Performance Group for its version of Mother Courage and Her Children was very close to the text as written by Bertolt Brecht. The director allowed a "classic" play to remain untouched and unedited in its form, content and chronological dramatic action. According to Schechner,

We were looking for a play that had good roles for women, one we could enjoy working on, and one that had a political core...We worked from beginning to end entirely in the Garage. We designed "Courage" as we

were building it, action design--rather than conceptualizing it then building it...We wanted lots of open space that could change...did not want a wagon, everytime we pulled something that rolled, we inevitably got thrown back on the Berliner Ensemble's production...I did not want to stick to that staging...The rope and pulley system and harness would help promote master and slavery imagery...We have been working together many years in a space that we know. Instead of working through drawings, models, and construction and so on, a lot of things happened in bursts, impulsively...We drop two towers into the space again, I love to force the audience to look through the equipment, it exercises their attention--they have to work a little to see. A pit in a peripheral area, about fifteen feet open, a mass grave, a garbage dump and the open wound in the space.³⁵

In Theatres, Spaces and Environments, Rojo commented on the set.

The attempt was to find a physicalization in ropes for each scene. They were used to pull...and they divided the space...and were used as active instruments of work and war...Since "Tooth" we have been working with the idea of a modular system-to find a very flexible scaffolding system that can develop shapes that are rectilinear, polygonal and other odd shapes. Initially I thought that Courage's wagon might be the scaffolding...concerning the lighting the only general element was that we wanted the scene shifts to be in the brightest light possible. We lit from inside to outside.³⁴

The reviews for Schechner's concepts and direction were mixed. However, once again all critics praised and admired the work of Jerry Rojo. It seems that in the eyes of most of New York's critics, the one consistently positive and innovative aspect of a Performance Group production was the Jerry Rojo environment.

Richard Schechner's production of Mother Courage was the best production of Brecht that I have ever seen in the United States. I think Richard got very close to Brecht's vision as he writes it. The directing and the design and the acting were just brilliant. I think it was one of the most important productions that I have

ever been associated with, and I think that all the people who saw that production, and everybody did, that they all probably got the same feeling about it that I had; thereby it had an impact, and they learned something from that.³⁵

Clive Barnes in his generally unfavorable review of the production had the following to say about the play's setting, and the Performance Group's use of space in general, in The New York Times on March 26, 1975.

The Performance Group is an Environmental Theatre. It spurns the proscenium arch quite reasonably and invites its audience to occupy the entire space of the Performing Garage. There are galleries and platforms around the side of the space, where the audience can perch, sit, lie or stand, and it can also squat around the floor, which is the main playing area, where it (the audience) will obviously have to move around more with the action. The Group rebuilds its basic setting (or auditorium for they are one and the same) for each production...for certain productions with a strong ritualistic content this concept works admirably. Mr. Schechner does some clever and occasionally effective things with all the ropes and tackles that seem to characterize the production,...[and] the production has environmental ingenuity, which did not bore and maintained its scholastic interest, and the fabric and fiber of Brecht's play.³⁶

In his February 28, 1975 Village Voice review, Arthur Sainer vigorously defends all aspects of the performance. About the design, he stated:

For all its heavy machinery, ambiance--credit Jerry Rojo and Jim Clayburgh. They are responsible for rigging the space with ropes, hoists and clamps...The marvels of technology and engineering which convey both people and merchandise efficiently along the path from discrete character to undifferentiated garbage, are seen in lurid detail. The murdering of a soldier is accomplished by hoisting him in the air and then slackening ropes to a sudden descent of the now-twitching body; his burial is accomplished by lowering him, still clamped to the ropes, into a pit which effectively serves to take him both out of the scene and out of this life.³⁷

The Hartford Courant on July 27, 1975, made the following mention of the production.

The environment's construction and scaffolding designed by the University of Connecticut's Jerry Rojo effectively uses a series of ropes and pulleys to replace the traditional wagon.³⁸

THE PROMETHEUS PROJECT

The most recent production of the Performance Group to involve Jerry Rojo was The Prometheus Project. This work opened at the Performing Garage in December of 1985, and was the Group's first play in six years. It had been developing in a workshop situation since early 1983. Schechner was interested in exploring Aeschylus's play Prometheus and he asked Annie Sprinkle, a pornography performance artist, to work with him. Another theme dealt with in the play was drawn from Pica Don, a book about the bombing of Hiroshima by Renzo Hiroshima.

In The Prometheus Project I came in after Richard had already done the piece in Texas. I more or less helped him to remount it in New York. I only had to bring it all together, rather than being part of the original process for the design. Richard and Annie Sprinkle had already put together their stuff: the slides and her presentation. All the slides that Richard chose were from children's books. I helped to arrange all this in the space. I created a screen or curtain that had built into it this forced perspective look; the idea involved with this curtain was that it was a projection screen but the performers could also pass through it because there were slits in it. When it was hung straight you could not see the slits but still the actors could easily slip through them. This curtain also worked to make a kind of green room or backstage area where the actors could come and go before, during and after the show. Some even dressed back there. It made a lot of sense; it was a simple solution but it served many functions in the piece.³⁹

The environment for the play was a very simple one. There was a black floor, with a completely frontal seating arrangement comprised of raised tiers. By this time, the Wooster Group was sharing the Performing Garage with the Performance Group. Rather than change the fixed seating used by Liz LeCompte, Schechner decided to work within this framework. The performing area was completely bare except for Rojo's curtain, which was movable and helped to redefine the space. This was the first time since he formed the Performance Group that Schechner used a proscenium arrangement for a production. Rojo said:

The frontal view worked well for this show. Since the original concepts for the piece were so "media-esque" and the play had a lot to do with performance, a frontal approach was appropriate. We used the play Prometheus, which was a lot to do with the history of the past, but we used this in a contemporary manner. We tried to make the analogy of comparing the discovery of fire to the power of the atomic bomb. This was the main focus of the play, but there were also aspects of the story of Io and Zeus and their tragic affair. This all tied into aspects of male-female relationships. This was represented by Annie Sprinkle's performance. That was only one small unit of the play. An interesting scene featured a chorus of women whirling around in place like dervishes and all the time delivering monologues talking about how they had been raped or abused in some way in real life.⁴⁰

Rojo helped to organize the special lenses that were needed for the slide projection screen in order to obtain a forced perspective look.

The piece was divided into four movements with the later stages placing heavy emphasis on burlesque, sex education and voyeurism. This was all accompanied by an x-rated film, and rude noises from a chorus of dirty old men

who framed the stage. In this manner, Schechner was able to capture the frequently bawdy atmosphere and flavor of Aristophanic Greek comedy.

Walter Goodman reviewed the piece in The New York Times on December 28, 1985.

In The Prometheus Project, Mr. Schechner is making connections between Hiroshima and pornography, between pornography and rape, between rape and political torture, between torture and Hiroshima...Despite the clever stage effects, the connections remain dubious.⁴¹

Tish Dace of New York Native, commented on Rojo's design work in her review of February 20, 1986,

There is an interesting environment, but Schechner fails to realize his concept theatrically. The stage is set up very well in that you would have to cross in front of Miss Sprinkle in order to leave.⁴²

In The Village Voice on December 31, 1985, Alisa Solomon wrote,

We cannot see what Richard Schechner is trying to illuminate.⁴³

Marilyn Stasio wrote a review for this production in The New York Post on January 3, 1986. In it she claims,

Prometheus is bound to disappoint, Richard Schechner labors mightily...shoving naked breasts in our face and then implying we are guilty of prurient attention to women...This is a lot of bull.⁴⁴

In a recent interview, Richard Schechner talked about his work with Rojo on this production.

I knew I wanted these two screens. What Jerry did was to design these two screens and make it work within the confines of the Garage. He also allowed a scene to emerge from behind those two screens. He solved a very difficult technical problem for me. I wanted to project on something that had a room, a room that had no walls. So we had to make cloth to have projecting surfaces. Rojo made the idea work but I had had this idea since I

was working in Dallas many years before this project even began. Jerry was always best at technically realizing all of my ideas.⁴⁵

Chapter 6. MANHATTAN PROJECT: ENDGAME

Jerry Rojo began his work with Andre Gregory's Manhattan Project in December of 1972, in a performing space at New York University's School of the Arts. The play was Samuel Beckett's Endgame. As he has stated:

My first ideas were to try and discover what Beckett wanted environmentally...I came up with the idea of putting the spectators in the same kind of situation that the characters were in, which was very isolated. I felt that somehow the audience needed to be isolated from the performance because I feel that they want to understand, but they do not want to participate in the action of the play. The final solution was a transformation of two ideas. One had to do with a fence and the other a circle.¹

Rojo devised an environment, hexagonally shaped, with a twenty-eight foot playing space, surrounded by a gallery for the audience, rather like a two-story merry-go-round, or rotunda. The gallery was on two levels and was divided into compartments, each about six feet wide. These "booths" resembled small opera house boxes or small viewing areas at "peepshows," and each compartment held six to four spectators. The fronts of the boxes were covered with chicken wire, which when lit from above acted as a scrim. An audience member in a box could be seen by neither the performers nor other spectators.

The space was framed by a plywood floor covered with aluminum sheets to give it a metallic hard reflective quality. there was only one way into the area, through a door that only the performers use. There is only one door because I felt that a sense of incarceration was an important element. There is a kind of murky quality as you look across the playing area. It is unlike any ordinary arena theatre. Only in a few places are you to

see able faces distinctly...This is accomplished through the use of small floodlights on each of the six sides. These are focused partly on the screen and partly on the performing area, so that the entire inside of the arena is very bright. The original idea was that the actor could see as much or as little as they wanted and leave without the actors knowing they had left...From a design point of view it was successful for me because here was a design in which the entire theatre was integral to the context of the play, the theatre was the play. Any good set does the same thing, it evokes a feeling of the play, but rather than being something that the audience observes, as in the proscenium or thrust stage design, this design was something the audience occupied.²

In a recent interview (February 1989) Andre Gregory stated,

Endgame was one of the most physically extraordinary productions that I have ever done. I did another Endgame years before in Philly. This was designed by Eugene Lee. Even back then I wanted a steel cage; it was a proscenium stage there so you had to look at a steel box that was floating in space. In Jerry's design the actors and the audience got inside the cage. I think that Jerry and Eugene Lee are two very good designers, but their work is very different. These two designers were very representative of their era. In Jerry's version of the set, having the audience all around and on two levels was wonderful because it allowed the audience to sit in little opera boxes, made of steel. Only six or seven people could sit together, so anyone could leave anytime they wanted. Of course you know in Endgame you should be able to leave anytime you want. The relationship of the audience to the piece was completely Jerry's idea.³

Many members of the audience did move around during the performance. There was a corner of the environment in which you could get a cup of coffee and a doughnut. Two-by-six planks were used to construct the companionway that led to the audience seating area. These planks were intended to create a carnival-like atmosphere.

Jerry's design helped the audience to understand the play better. To understand the relationship between the play and their private world. The audience was more

involved. What Jerry's set did was that I think that it allowed each member of the audience to think and feel for himself, to see his own personal relationship to the work that was taking place. It gives the audience space within which to be an individual.⁴

Except for the set for Dionysus in '69, the Endgame environment probably attracted more attention than any other project designed by Rojo. Among the people interviewed, the setting for Endgame was well remembered. Brooks McNamara said,

I loved the environment for Endgame. To me it seemed a cross between an Elizabethan bear-baiting arena and a Forty-Second Street 'peep show.'

Richard Schechner stated,

I thought the Endgame set was a brilliant idea. It really excluded the audience.⁶

Leo Shapiro was even more eloquent in his praise of Rojo's work on this production.

I loved the Endgame set. I liked the fact that it made an active challenge for the audience. They had to respond to it, it challenged their passivity. Some people criticized it because they felt that it overwhelmed the production. That is the normal criticism for a strong set. If a production cannot stand up to the set, that is the production's fault.⁷

Joe Chaikin stated,

I did not like the play, I did not like Gregory's angle at all. I did like Jerry's environment, it was really wonderful and marvelous.⁸

Rojo himself wrote,

This set was a theatre which was integral to the context of the play. The design was something the audience occupied. It was one of my favorite designs. I transformed the entire room and I was able to bring the audience into it organically. Andre was the director who had the vision to allow that to happen. It was non-scenery, but it was functional, I mean I have seen a lot of Broadway shows that you could take the scenery right

out and nobody would miss it; what good is that. You could take away all of Eugene Lee's factory and you would still have the play. In Endgame you could not take anything out of it, if you did you would die. A set has to reach that kind of importance.⁹

The most ardent admirer of Rojo's work on this production was the director of the play, Andre Gregory.

The theatre should, through spoken word and the theme and style of play, reflect the reality of the times in which we live. I see nothing in the theatre today in New York City that does that...The thing that was always exciting for me about working with Jerry Rojo was that he was a designer whose work reflected a specific period of time, and directors working within a specific time and space. He was able to create a suitable space in which the actor's body could reflect the time in which we lived. The Sixties and early Seventies were a very physical period; in real life people's bodies were physically engaged in action. In the way they went on marches, and the way they danced, and the way they went to war in Vietnam and died. Bodies were more actively alive. They, as audience, needed a certain kind of space. The plays, the texts, the times needed a specific kind of space, in which to be compartmentalized or framed. Of all of the designers of that period Jerry Rojo was best able to do that. Jerry as a designer is so strong and unashamed. He has extraordinary clarity and boldness. There is a dream-like quality to his work, which I always love. His work is outrageous and unafraid and very personal. He handles space beautifully. The Endgame set helped the audience to understand better the relationship between the play and their own private world. What Jerry's Endgame set did was allow each member of the audience to think and feel for himself. To see their own personal relationship to the work that is taking place. It gives the audience space within which to be individual. I loved working with him.¹⁰

Critics fully appreciated the work done by Jerry Rojo on this production. Clive Barnes in his New York Times review on February 7, 1973, wrote:

It is a lovely production and the entire environment has been designed by Jerry Rojo, and incidentally, this is one of the best things in the American theatre here and now.¹¹

Walter Kerr did not approve of Andre Gregory's directorial approach. He was, however, impressed with Rojo's environment. In the New York Times on February 11, 1973, he wrote:

Beckett would not be happy with much down on Second Avenue, except perhaps with the setting. The arena is a cage, and we ourselves are seated in cubicles that amount to individual cages, as isolated in space as the four actors. The environment is interesting and stabbing.¹²

John Lahr of The Village Voice thoroughly enjoyed all elements of the production. He claims that the performance was an evening in the theatre that "you'll never forget." He was particularly complementary on the work of Jerry Rojo. In his review of February 14, 1973, he stated:

Jerry Rojo's environment is brilliant...this astonishing two-tiered construction of wood and wire is an uncompromising, challenging event. In Rojo's spectacular design, we are literally the world outside Hamm and Clov's window, the world that dies, the desolation, the death-the very facts we've come to the theatre to forget. Rojo and Gregory are meticulous in their use of space...The stage is a luminous closed field, and the unrelenting luster evokes the monotony of time.¹³

Another important positive comment was made regarding Rojo's work for Endgame. He was the recipient of the 1973 Drama Desk Award for best design.

Chapter 7. THE GREAT HOSS PISTOL: SECTION 10 THEATRE COMPANY

The Great Hoss Pistol was the only production that Jerry Rojo designed for the Section 10 Theatre Company. The central figures of this group were Omar Shapli and Andrea Balis: they and other members had met at a New York University School of the Arts class on Introduction to Theatre. The working theatre company which they created in 1972 took its name from the course listing of this particular class, "Section 10." A ballroom at the school was used as the setting for the environment designed by Jerry Rojo; he was assisted in the building of the space by Technical Director Marty Kapell. The production opened March 4, 1974.

The script was conceived and edited by Omar Shapli. The play consisted of a verbal montage taken from the writings, letters and public speeches of Alexander Hamilton and Aaron Burr and focused on the personal conflict that arose between these two 18th century gentlemen. The conflict led, in 1789, to a duel which resulted in Hamilton's death. Rojo said:

Hoss Pistol is a pastiche of scenes about the Revolutionary War period...It shows America going from an isolationist period to an imperialistic one. It is a very free-flowing non-linear play with less of a sense of scenes, as such, than of a collection of images. The effect is of historical flashbacks, dealing both with archetypal and uniquely American situations. The scenes or images are spread out over the entire environment, although some are rather specifically localized. For example, Burr's headquarters were set up in the same spot for the entire play. There are two ways to work in

environmental theatre; one way is to set the space up so that at any given time all of it is used for all the scenes. A second way is to give identity to a particular space for a time and then move to another as the locations demand, a sort of moving proscenium arch. Section 10 chose, for the most part, to identify spaces within the total environment. This environment did not attempt to relate metaphorically to the play as in the case of Endgame. Here, the audience was not integral to the concept of the production. This kind of environment is similar to the Elizabethan theatre, in that there is a separation of audience and performer space; the audience views from a fixed position and the performers use a formalistic or standardized playing area.¹

The production was part of a theatre festival held at New York University, which also included two productions from the Manhattan Project, Endgame and Alice in Wonderland, a production by the Shaliko Company and one by the NYU Dance Ensemble. Each production was mounted in a separate room within the confines of the School of Arts. The designer, Jules Fisher, implemented about eight tiered, modular seating units for each of the rooms. Each individual unit was independent so that it could be used alone and still have a functional stairwell and exit aisle spacing. Approximately thirty people could be accommodated in one of these units. The units could also be used together in different groupings. The room itself could be used as an end stage, thrust, or as an arena theatre.

Rojo wrote about his work on this project in his book Theatre, Spaces, and Environments.

I couldn't get rid of the seating units because they were so massive, and I thought it would be a challenge to try to make some new kind of use of them. I take particular delight in going into a space and finding a new use for it. I felt that an integral design would make use of these units. There was also the fact that

the Section 10 company was not really interested in environmental theatre, in the sense of relating to the audience in new ways. The relationship of the audience to their work is basically frontal. They were more interested in using complex performer space than in sharing that space with the audience. I felt that I could suggest some kind of arrangement that would expand their concepts about space but still use the modular seating units...I wanted to build another autonomous theatre within the theatre, to construct a totally separate chamber...I'd seen their previous production, The Monster Show, and in it there were some penetrations into the audience area. I felt that the space for Great Hoss Pistol might take that penetration even further...Section 10 was interested in the modules, however, because they wanted tiered seating...The effect was similar to a football stadium with a pair of grandstands on two sides of the performing area. The stage itself was a square with a kind of point, leading into the bridge. The opposite side became a facade behind the performing area, similar to an Elizabethan stage. This so-called facade was a platform with stairs leading up to different levels...It had "inner-below" and inner-above as well as walkways that actors could use above the main performing area. In addition, there were two side-areas that penetrated the audience areas on the far right and left near the facade. There was also a jungle-jim [sic] unit used by the performers, but not by the audience.²

The type of actor-audience relationship attempted here was similar to that which, it is believed, characterized the Elizabethan theatre. The audience area was penetrated by the performers, but there remained a separation between actor and audience.

Julius Novick reviewed The Great Hoss Pistol for The Village Voice on March 7, 1974. He appreciated the dialogue used by the actors but felt that the performers themselves had little or no verbal skill. Concerning Jerry Rojo's environment he stated,

The set is attractive and useful, a twentieth century multi-leveled bare plank stage.³

In an interview, Leo Shapiro expressed his ideas about Rojo's work on this project.

I saw Jerry's work with Section 10. I liked it very much. It was wooden, and a sort of constructivist. I think it shows that Jerry is influenced by Francis Bacon, the English painter.⁴

In a recent interview Rojo reflected back on his work for Omar Shapli.

The Great Hoss Pistol might have been a little too esoteric, but it was a valuable learning experience for me, especially since I got a chance to work in all those rooms at the University's School of the Arts.⁵

Chapter 8: GHOSTS: THE YELLOW HOUSE: FAUSTUS: SHALIKO COMPANY

Jerry Rojo and Leo Shapiro worked together first on the Shaliko Company's production of Ibsen's Ghosts, which opened in April of 1975, at the New York Public Theatre, with Joe Papp as producer. Shapiro knew of Rojo's work with The Performance Group and with Andre Gregory's Manhattan Project, and Rojo had become interested in the Shaliko Company when he saw their production of Children of the Gods. Shapiro described their collaboration:

We were working with somewhat similar concepts. He was blown away by my design for Children of the Gods. He said he thought it was the only American show that used this kind of extreme physicality that Grotowski used. We decided to work together. We began to collaborate very early on in the process for Ghosts.¹

Jerry Rojo's patient, quietly determined temperament was a perfect foil for Shapiro's inexhaustibly analytical energy as a director.

I began rehearsal in early Spring 1974. Jerry was there right in the beginning. It took us nine months just to figure out the ground plan, which we finished on Christmas Eve at his house in Connecticut. I'm very tough on designers...He had some early sketches which I just hated, but he always followed through, and he was always willing to throw his design away if I didn't like it. He never got offended, we went through a lot of things. With the work we did on Ghosts I would have gone through the equivalent of four other designers. They would have quit, one after the other. The job that Jerry did on Ghosts was great, the best design collaboration that I have ever had. I had the best working relationship that I have ever had with anybody, in the work I did with Jerry Rojo on Ghosts, without exception. I can't think of another design with anyone else that was so exhausting or so complete.²

The lighting for the production was done entirely through the use of practical fixtures controlled by the

actors. The unobtrusive lighting would help to promote the soft, safe and lush space of a Victorian mansion. This womblike effect was one of the central metaphors for the play decided on by the director and the designer.

In an interview, Rojo stated:

In the very early stages of the work Leo and I wanted to clarify the spatial and material metaphors. I really latched onto the imagery of the Victorian mansion. There are all these compartments and closets with skeletons in them. I also tried to separate the audience into different compartments around the space. This would help to promote this feeling of alienation. I had to transform a Victorian mansion into an environmental theatre set. This was hard to accomplish when we moved into a smaller ground floor space at The Public Theatre. It was only about forty feet by twenty-five feet, with a seventeen foot ceiling. Ibsen sets most of the action of the play in the parlor, but Leo and I decided that bits and pieces of the play should happen in various parts of the house. Shapiro wanted to give the audience the impression that characters in the play did not know what was happening in other parts of the house. Leo had hoped that this would heighten his expressionistic slant on the drama. We worked closely together on the building of a model for the set, which Papp had demanded before he would release funds for the actual construction. The room had an interesting shape we could exploit.³

Oswald returns to his mother's womb; Ghosts is very sexual. The room has a soft, round womblike end to it. The floors and walls are covered with carpet, the furniture is very plush. Everyone, all the characters are involved in a sexual way. The entire setting gives us the sense of a museum to the production--a sexual museum.⁴

They took the grid out of the little theatre, deciding that it was too masculine. As mentioned, only practical fixtures were used for the lighting. Rojo wanted the lighting to come from within rather than from without.

You could see what the instruments were doing...I don't hide the lighting...others do. The performers literally used the heat off those lights. These lights were used

to stimulate a direct response, especially from the actors. We had white light coming from the green house and the spill gives the effect of a furnace, the intensity of whiteness is a metaphor of irony and hope. The light comes up full at Oswald's death to symbolize hope. Leo really understands the irony of space, the seeds of Shaliko's style are in physical work. Leo dealt with Ghosts on an expressionistic level...actors...I mean the actors really use their own lives as catalysts for the roles. As far as the fire codes are, I always submit a design which pushes the law, so there is compromise here and there. I always overshoot, because if you are conservative, you'll never get anything done. Environmental Theatre is different from furniture in a conventional sense. In conventional theatre it is decorative. Leo uses it as staging areas, the actors confront the furniture, put their feet on it, they jump on it. Their rejection of Victorian reality is expressed in the way they treat the furniture. The actor's front line is himself, second is his costume, third are his props and fourth is furniture; then even the architecture is used. A good environmental actor is conscious of this on all levels and in any production the order of priority might change.⁵

In many ways Rojo's design for Ghosts was reminiscent of his work for Richard Schechner on Victims of Duty. No single member of the audience, no matter where he or she sat, could see the whole set. Scenes were viewed through doorways. Many of the conversations that took place among the actors could be overheard by the audience but not directly seen. In an interview Richard Schechner claimed:

The Ghosts set was a version of the Victims of Duty environment. It is a complete interior of a living room, expanded and exploded out so that the audience is inside this room, which is both highly naturalistic and surrealistic at the same time. In Victims, we had an upstairs where things happened and the audience could only hear things running around on the ceiling, and we had things underneath where the audience could hear things going on in the basement. Ghosts was a variation on that idea, and it was very well executed.⁶

Leo and I decided to use the theatre plus its adjacent rooms. For instance, the lobby becomes Mrs. Alving's study. The greenroom has become the dining room. The

hallway leading to the Public Theatre's main foyer has become the greenhouse.⁷

This production received substantial critical attention most of which was negative. "Shockingly bad...Grotowski inspired chaos...horrendous details...insensitive...clownish...officious ineptitude...arrogant and stupid."⁸ These words and phrases are from reviews published in the New York Times.

In an interview, Mr. Shapiro claimed that "I have never been liked in New York."⁹

Once again it is important to note that although the production was sharply criticized, the work of Jerry Rojo was praised. In his New York Times review of April 25, 1975, Clive Barnes stated,

On entering the theatre one searches for a place to sit, perched amid the scenery...This kind of environmental theatre can be rewarding for certain plays.¹⁰

On April 28, 1975, Julius Novick wrote the following in his review for The Village Voice:

Jerry Rojo has designed for the occasion a pleasant environmental setting, with the spectators seated on carpeted steps interspersed among several acting areas. This is an intimate, cheerful and comfortable environment.¹¹

The next collaboration between Rojo and Shapiro was entitled The Yellow House, a work in progress, begun as a workshop project at the annex of the La Mama Theatre Company in New York City.

According to Shapiro, he had begun work on this project while he was teaching in Canada in 1984. The first

designer to be involved in the project was Joseph Svoboda.¹² Of his decision to involve Rojo in his company's work again, Shapiro said:

I had already been through a couple of designers and several workshops and I realized that I was not getting what I wanted. It was Christmas time again in 1985 when I finally called Jerry. I had not talked to him for a while, but he came right aboard and saved the show, he really understood and loved the script. Maybe because the play is about a painter and Jerry loves painters. He really seemed to have a personal involvement in the production. It was if it were a show that he was directing. He made me understand that I could use all the space in the theatre, even the space behind the stage; he really turned the whole thing around for me. He did all the work and made it work. He really did some incredible things.¹³

The play was a stylized, imagistic interpretation of the troubled life of Vincent Van Gogh. The artist's letters to his brother Theo were the primary source for the dialogue used in the production.

Jerry really loved and understood the script. I was trying to do too much with the space. I had cancelled the production two years in a row. That space was just too small. I wanted that small space to do too many things. Then I finally just had to do it. Anyway, the thing that Jerry made me understand was that I could use the back space behind the theatre, the rear fire escape, and we could even take the door off the hinges, and think about the whole room more. We did not have to assume that because it had fixed seating and an end stage I had to treat it that way. We had a lot more room as a result. That was an amazing insight into what I had been doing my whole life in terms of design, and he really turned that whole project around for me. I mean I was always trying to use too much stuff, and Jerry showed me how to do a lot with a little. I had very fixed ideas about the shapes of the performing space. I wanted them based completely on Van Gogh pictures and perspective, and Jerry and I worked very hard in terms of designing the space along these lines. It was Jerry who really created the idea of space and the idea of depth along these lines. He demonstrated a fine working knowledge of Van Gogh's painting in his use of space.¹⁴

The work was to be part of a 1985 theatre festival in Baltimore, Maryland, entitled Theatre of Nations. Rojo was funded to build an entirely new theatre design. This design was very much different from the comparatively spartan environment used at the La Mama Annex. Shapiro claimed:

The set in Baltimore was much more an Environmental theatre set, with ramps and platforms and staircases. Jerry did all the work and made it work. However I liked the set he designed for me at the La Mama Annex even better. The thing that was so great about the New York set was that when you looked at the design there was not set, if you looked at the room there was nothing there. But scene by scene it was transformed; the actual built set was this little archway which was stuck into the open doorway. We had this sail gimmick that was inspired by the moving curtain used by Gary Lubimov in the Tongonka Hamlet. I wanted this sail to define and redefine the room. I also wanted slides to be projected on it. Jerry played a large role in selecting the slides used to be projected onto this sail. He worked very hard on making all of this work. He really rolled up his sleeves on this project, and he even painted everything himself. He did wonderful things with this cage. In one scene it was an elevator going down a mine shaft. In another scene the cage was a jail that they locked Vincent up in.¹⁵

The reviews for the Baltimore production were positive. On July 4, 1986, John Strausbaugh described the set in his review of The Yellow House in City Paper, a Baltimore newspaper.

Jerry Rojo has totally transformed the performance space in the North Hall of Peabody, with an ingenious environmental set of scaffolds, runways and platforms. The staging made brilliant use of the entire room, from floor to ceiling, surrounding the audience and incorporating us into the action.¹⁶

The remainder of the review was complimentary about the production, and particularly appreciative of Mr.

Shapiro's work. Shapiro said,

My work has always been appreciated more in places other than New York.¹⁷

David Bergman who also reviewed the show for City Paper on July 11, 1986, greatly enjoyed the production. He wrote,

I have never seen schizophrenia so convincingly staged, at one point the set suddenly rises of the floor and dangles in midair. In one of the most beautiful stage images I have ever seen, an actor climbs up the scaffolding constructed throughout Peabody institute's North Hall, on which the lighting is suspended. Across the ceiling, as though it were the Sistine Chapel, were projected slides of Van Gogh's "The Starry Night." Van Gogh dabbed against the ceiling like a god responsible for placing the stars in the heavens.¹⁸

I was fortunate enough to see the La Mama Annex version of The Yellow House. The viewer felt as though he were thrust into the center of Van Gogh's madness, reinforced by the staging of the action throughout the theatre space. The actor who played the protagonist for most of the performance bore a striking resemblance to the actual artist. However at other times during a particularly moving scene, three different actors play Van Gogh, portraying the painter himself, his mirror reflection, and his self portrait. At another point the room was filled with actors portraying Van Gogh, on the ceiling, among the audience, encircling the space. I attended the performance with a group from the City University of New York and

afterwards asked Professor Albert Bermel for his opinion of the environment. He stated,

I loved the environment and it really enhanced the dramatic action of the play. Every bit of it worked and the company used every bit of it.¹⁹

Rojo expressed his own thoughts on his work for this production as follows:

I like to work with Leo Shapiro. He is tough and aggressive, but he always has an interesting way of working and he is always exploring. I would work with him for free.²⁰

Richard Schechner also saw The Yellow House in Baltimore and said of Rojo's work:

I thought it was a brilliantly executed design similar to environments used at the Performing Garage or the Mobius Theatre at the University of Connecticut. There you have, basically, an arena stage set-up with scaffolds, the audience sitting on the scaffolds, and in the center a set of spatial arrangements that can change during the performance, with some of the scenes happening in the midst of or close to the audience. There was a wonderful use of vertical space, which I am very, very concerned with. Not only should a play not take place on a stage, it should occur in a three-dimensional environment that uses up and down as well as side to side.²¹

The latest project designed by Jerry Rojo for the Shaliko company was an environment for the company's production of The Tragical History of the Life and Death of Doctor Faustus, by Christopher Marlowe. The play was presented at the La Mama E.T.C. and opened on April 4, 1988. Shapiro said:

Jerry really helped me to straighten out my ideas about the use of space in Dr. Faustus. I wanted a space where we could explore the universality of the themes in Dr. Faustus across time and space. I needed a room that could be transformed into many different times and settings. I'm not comfortable with the kind of theatre

where all the values come from the ideas, I'm not comfortable with the kind of theatre that does not have a strong aesthetic component, and those things are not really part of Richard Schechner's aesthetics. If the idea is right it does not really matter to him what it looks like, and it does not matter much to him what it reads like; there is no concept of theatrical time or theatrical values. However Jerry is the kind of designer who can work many ways with many different directors. We have a wonderful working relationship. There is no doubt that Jerry's designs enhanced all of the shows that he worked on for me. In Dr. Faustus he really sorted out all of the space for me and helped to create an environment that was flexible and one that could be constantly redefined.²²

Shapiro himself had mixed feelings about his company's version of the great Elizabethan drama. In a 1988 interview he described the construction of the set,

We used scaffolding for the set of Dr. Faustus; it was very big, rough set. At the time Jerry seemed to be really into decorating things. There were these two angel doors and he spent a great deal of time on them. They were sort of cuckoo-clock doors that opened, and two angels came out. Jerry painted and re-painted those doors until they were perfect. It was a hard show, and I don't know what to say about it. It didn't get good reviews. I usually don't get good reviews. When I was able to run shows I would get good reviews in magazines. I never got one kind word in the daily newspapers or in the Village Voice. After reading those reviews I'm not sure that I even liked Dr. Faustus.²³

Shapiro cut the classical text to an intermissionless eighty minutes. The production features many directorial additions and effects which were labeled "toothless" by New York critics. These effects include a rhinestone harness for an otherwise naked "Good" angel, and a pair of bat wings used to designate a "Bad" angel. Dancing devils appear wearing skeleton outfits with Nazi accessories. Faustus' costumes include a medieval doctor's

robe, a modern businessman's suit, and an astronaut's paraphernalia.

Royo commented about the director,

Leo Shapiro is a very aggressive and tough director and his work is always poorly reviewed. He's not radical enough or conventional enough. He sort of falls through between the cracks.²⁴

The reviews of the production unanimously condemned the directorial concept. Words and phrases used in describing Mr. Shapiro's work include: "Predictable, toothless," "noisy, listless," "I felt like I was stuck in traffic," "There were low comic points bungled to the point of embarrassment," "a spiritless affair."²⁵

The only aspect of the production to receive praise was the Jerry Rojo environment. In his Village Voice review on April 26, 1988, Jonathan Kalb wrote,

The set is well designed but poorly utilized...The set consists of a raised, cruciform platform extending backstage behind a low curtain---a fine spacious construction with far more possibilities than Shapiro discovers...generally the platform is neglected in favor of cramped scenes near the curtain and gratuitous gymnastics on the annex's seating tiers.²⁶

Mel Gussow of the New York Times described the environment, "an unadorned but intriguing wood-planked set designed by Jerry Rojo."²⁷

The relationship between Leo Shapiro and Jerry Rojo was profitable for both. Shapiro selected a designer who greatly enhanced his productions, while Rojo gained valuable experience and exposure in New York City. Concerning this relationship Shapiro stated,

I had the best working relationship with Jerry that I ever had with a designer, although I feel his best work was with Richard Schechner. Jerry is very susceptible to Richard's ideas, and Richard was one of the most dominant figures in the American theatre during the 60s and the 70s. Nobody can tell you which aspects of the design concepts and the formulas concerning the mise-en-scene were Richard's and which were Jerry's. That's how closely they were able to work together. All designers since that period have been influenced by Jerry Rojo. It seems to me that it was Jerry who influenced people like Eugene Lee and Tony Straiges. Also, Jerry's work in bringing environmental theatre to the university is a very important contribution to the educational theatre. The Stanislavski "Method" is dead, to train for the mainstream is a waste of time, there will be no mainstream in ten years. It was Grotowski who followed through on the "Method" and improved and modernized the interior tradition of acting. The "Method" does not work on stage anymore, you can't re-create the past, live in the future or the "now" real time. If the theatre is going to continue as a live form then Environmental theatre will be one of the forms that survives; consequently university actors should train in Environmental theatre techniques. I'm always ready to work with Jerry, and I think students should be honored and anxious to study with him. After all he is one of the progenitors of environmental theatre concepts in design, directing and actor training in this country.²⁸

Shapiro and Rojo have plans to work together again in the future. A "Circle-Opera" tentatively entitled Mystery, History, Bouffe, Goof is scheduled to open on the Boston Common in the Spring of 1991. Mr. Shapiro said,

I like to work with Jerry. I think his single biggest talent was his sense of the possibilities of irregular space, which is good for me because I tend to be very symmetrical...The shows that I did during that period [the 70s-80s] demanded a very specific actor-audience relationship, and Jerry greatly assisted in helping me to achieve that for each show.²⁹

Chapter 9. TEMPTATION

Temptation, a new play by the Czechoslovakian dissident Vaclav Havel, premiered on March 16, 1989 at the Martinson Hall of The New York Shakespeare Festival's Public Theatre. Directed by Jiri Zizka, designed by Jerry Rojo, Temptation contains a combination of images from the Dr. Faust legend.

Frank Rich wrote in The New York Times on April 10, 1989,

The dialogue, as translated by Marie Winn, is often rapid-fire bureaucratic double-speak demanding the hard-edged style of a Terry Gilliam satire-like "Brazil."¹

The setting Rojo designed for this production was in the box-set, Off-Broadway proscenium arch tradition rather than an environmental shared actor-audience space. Still, the more conventional-style setting played as active a role in the performance as the actors, fulfilling a basic Rojo principle. The small stage was crammed with flats, furniture and props. A large crew waited in the wings to carry out the complicated set changes for each scene. Scene changes were masked from audience view by a scrim upon which slides were projected.

In Temptation, the design was all mine. Jiri paid close attention to me but he pretty much got into whatever suggestion I made. I mean there was no part that he designed; as a matter of fact I don't recall that he changed anything. We talked about materials and things like that, but the idea of him coming to me and saying let's do this or that just did not happen. It was more like we would talk and I would go away and think about it and come back to him with something. Right from the beginning he accepted and liked my basic concepts for

materials and the basic set design. Everything was accepted.²

The centerpiece of the set was a large cylindrical chamber made of steel, chrome and plastic which extended from the stage floor up into the fly loft.

The basic idea was that the whole thing takes place in Faustus' head. My center unit in the piece became a metaphor for the mind of Faustus and also for the collective mind of mankind. In all the scenes the scenery used would come out from or was centered around the unit. The set also had a crown of lights on the top of this centerpiece, which was kind of like Christ's thorns. Of course the whole thing was made out of plexiglass and it was painted to look like steel so that it had a sort of high-tech look, theatrical high-tech.³

The chamber served a variety of aesthetic functions. In one scene it was an elevator to the subterranean research laboratory. In another scene it served as a gazebo at an office party. In addition it functioned as the home office of Faustus--known in the play as Dr. Fouska--and as the headboard of a bed in the apartment of his mistress. This chamber helped to represent major images created by Rojo to express his ideas of the play. He stated,

If you read the script you'll find that none of that stuff is in there; we put all of those ideas in there ourselves. The elevator was all my own invention. It was used in many different ways, but ultimately it was always used to give someone the shaft symbolically. It also represented the concept of the fetal head, or the head of pride. That chamber was the major metaphor there and the rest of the set grew out of that.⁴

Rojo had mixed feelings about the director, Jiri Zizka. Early on, Rojo seemed excited about working with him. In an interview on February 27, 1989 he claimed,

I like working with director-designer types like Zizka. he is very visual in his conception of a play, and he

takes a strong hand in all aspects of the technical production. He is a real "auteur" director. Zizka is of the Serban-Schechner bailiwick. There is even less process than in Schechner. Zizka really works a play. He is not one of those directors who is just sitting there hoping the set and the lights will all go away. He works expertly on developing mise-en-scene, and the scenery takes a vital role in this kind of constructivist style with Russian roots of the Meyerhold school.⁵

The relationship changed by the end of the run of Temptation. When Rojo was again interviewed concerning the outcome of the project on April 18, 1989, his view of Zizka was less positive.

The problem with Temptation was that it never became entertaining. The ideas were good but unless they become entertaining the play becomes too tedious. Jiri Zizka does not work with actors very well. He was fantastic in rehearsal, but when he moved into the theatre he spent too much time on all of the technical stuff. He spent a week in the theatre without the actors ever having a complete run-through. He never really got into the production. The actors began to resent the fact that he was not giving them enough attention. It all went downhill from there. I knew that the critics would not like it. However, I still think that Temptation is a valuable piece. Jiri seemed more interested in technical aspects of the play. He was very much in touch with the man who did the slides and the sound engineer. He worked long and hard on the props, he said he wanted them to be like actors. He had very specific ideas and the props expressed his made strong commentary. I did help him out with some of that material, like that hobby horse. With that we were trying to point out that scientists are playing like children. The props were both benign and sinister, they were out of place yet they seemed to fit everywhere, and they were also very anachronistic. Their helter-skelter arrangement also suggested a kind of madhouse. As though the scientists did not know what the hell they were doing. They would explore one thing for a while, then they would abandon that and start another project. In fact, science is moving in a chaotic fashion rather than in an orderly way.⁶

To say that the New York critics did not like Temptation would be an understatement. The director and the

playwright were severely attacked for work which Edith Oliver of The New Yorker described as "hateful."⁷

Frank Rich of The New York Times wrote,

It's hard to know whether to blame the director or the cast for the poor quality of the performance...The listless production only accentuates the author's repetitions and the laborious setup of his less-than-startling final twist...Temptation is lesser Havel.⁸

Gordon Rogoff of The Village Voice stated,

Havel takes the hindmost...the play careens out of control from its first moments, pushed not only by Havel, but by Jiri Zizka's noisy cartoonish production.⁹

Again, though many critics did not like the play or the director, they were appreciative of the scenery by Jerry Rojo. The last sentence of Edith Oliver's angry tirade against Temptation attests to this.

The entertaining and stylish settings were designed by Jerry Rojo.¹⁰

Mr. Rogoff also praised Rojo's work:

[Zizka is] lucky to have Jerry Rojo's brilliantly versatile scenery as a diversion, a shiny black-and-chrome grouping of movable pieces that makes the changes between Havel's 10 longish scenes look more lively than the play itself.¹¹

David Strathairn, who played the leading role of Dr. Fouska gave his actor's reactions to performing on a Jerry Rojo set. Mr. Strathairn was interviewed backstage at the Martinson Hall on April 25, 1989, the night that the production closed.

This is not the kind of set you would initially bring to mind when you think of a Jerry Rojo environment. The sets completely filled the bill as far as realizing the symbolic message of the play. The sets covered every necessary symbol you ever wanted to have concerning the piece. This was not anything like a Performance Group

environment, it was done in an Off-Broadway proscenium arch tradition; it was well done and Rojo can certainly work very effectively that way. I myself would have enjoyed a little more space to work with, as in one of his more wide-open environments. Those sets were crowded and almost impeded the pace of the show. He was able to take a realistic situation and put it in a futuristic place and still fulfill the needs of a farce. The sets were a lot of fun to play on. There were a lot of toys and actors love toys. It was actually a fantasy playground. Rojo was able to serve the playwright and director and fully realize their conceptions but at the same time he really interjected many of his own ideas and beliefs. Any actor working on a Rojo set would get first-hand experience in the concept of scenery as performer.¹²

When Strathairn was asked whether he felt that Zizka was an effective director he answered firmly, "no comment."¹³

Chapter 10. THE MOBIUS THEATRE

A Mobius surface -GEOM- A surface both sides of which may be completely traversed without crossing either edge: made by joining the half-twisted ends of a rectangular strip of paper or other flexible material strip of paper or other flexible material. Also Mobius strip. German mathematician and astronomer: August Ferdinand Mobius.¹

In the late sixties Jerry Rojo was enjoying an international reputation as one of the world's leading theatrical environmentalists. He was not only designing sets for groups like The Performance Group, The Manhattan Project and the Shaliko Company, he was designing and building performance spaces within existing spaces for Colleges and Universities as well as for regional theatre groups. The list includes Sarah Lawrence College, the College of White Plains and Stage West in Springfield, Massachusetts, and of course the Mobius Theatre at the University of Connecticut.

In a May 5, 1973 issue of Newsweek, Jack Kroll wrote an article concerning the most influential designers of the day,

Designers like Santo Loquasto, Eugene Lee, John Conklin and Jerry Rojo have created a new era in American stage imagery in which anything goes and the lines between real and abstract, between object and environment, have been shattered.²

Rojo's colleagues at the University were very much impressed with his professional achievements and decided to let Rojo design and build a "fixed" environmental space adjacent to the Dramatic Arts Department's Studio Theatre in

the Fine Arts Complex. The construction of the Mobius Theatre began in 1970 at the University of Connecticut.

The theatre was built under the technical direction of Robert McCaw and architect/advisor Richard Swibold. The project was fully completed in the fall of 1971. Basically the theatre was a "fixed" environment of platforms and staircases comprising different levels that were all interconnected, within the confines of a "black box." There was a fully equipped lighting grid suspended from the ceiling. A system that could employ and support a good number of modern illumination equipment. The Mobius cost only six thousand dollars to build, because of student labor, and after a few years and several productions it had paid for itself. In an interview in Performing Arts Journal, Rojo described the Mobius.

It is a neutral space but the arrangement is given life by the specific production that comes into it. So that while it is a configuration of platforms, ramp, steps in the room it has a rhythm of its own, an aesthetic value of its own. When you look at it, it looks the same all the time but as you develop a built piece in there, which is the way I work in that theatre, you discover the play. Each time we use the theatre in a different way. I find that it lends itself to actors in space because it allows them a physical extension that they can't normally have...We work in "poor" theatre, conceptual ways. You don't spend a lot of money for each new production-all you need are people. I find that's very valuable in terms of actor director training because they learn honest skills, the basic skills.³

In 1973, Rojo was given the go-ahead for conceiving and formulating an Environmental Theatre training program for actors. He was to use the Mobius theatre to conduct his workshops and to present his productions to the public.

Truly Rojo was in a unique situation. Few other theatre directors, at a professional or university level, were ever given such leeway. Here was a director who was designing his own theatre and space in which he would envisage and formulate "built" productions that he and his group would completely originate on their own.

Other professors within the department soon recognized that this environment was also adaptable for presenting more conventional texts ranging from the Greeks to Shakespeare to cabaret style. Some professors prefer to hold their Stanislavski approach to acting classes within this space, finding it beneficial for teaching student actors. Thus, I appeared there in two "Summer-stock" style productions, The Great White Hope and The Emperor Jones. I found the close proximity of the audience added to the excitement produced by sudden or protracted dramatic entrances or exits through secret passageways in the space or even down main staircases. The space was suited to the episodic dramatic structure of these two plays. Other productions I viewed as an audience member at the Mobius include Waiting For Godot, The Double Dealer and The Fantastics. The Hollywood and Broadway character actor Arnold Moss at first planned to hold his Shakespearian acting classes in the Studio-Theatre, which is a small proscenium-arch theatre used exclusively for student productions, but after seeing the Mobius he received permission to hold his classes there. We all learned a

great deal from Dr. Moss and he often commented on how the space itself readily adapted itself to Shakespeare, whether it was a tragedy, or comedy.

The Mobius theatre was indeed a unique and multifaceted educational tool. In his book, Theatres, Spaces and Environments, Rojo wrote,

Any theatre should have the potential for vertical, diagonal, as well as horizontal action. In proscenium arch they never deal with the space above the audience's head. The Mobius is a total use of space...The floor can be left open for dance productions as well as for cameras used in video-tapings. In the Mobius, I have developed a style, an Environmental Theatre performance that emphasizes the actor's body in the real time and space with few if any props or costumes. This fosters organic living theatre with no historical precedents, a non-matrixed theatre form.⁴

Other theatre artists were impressed with the Mobius theatre. Richard Schechner stated,

I've seen the Mobius theatre. I don't generally like permanent theatre settings, but this one as a permanent theatre had so many possibilities. I saw one production there, and I enjoyed it very much. Of that kind of theatre, the Mobius is the best I have ever seen, and Rojo demonstrated that he can direct and create good productions in that space.⁵

Leo Shapiro said,

The Mobius theatre pays glorious tribute to the look of experimental theatre. It makes the University of Connecticut truly a unique place to study theatre.⁶

According to Brooks McNamara,

The building of the Mobius theatre was truly a landmark in American theatre at the University level.⁷

Andre Gregory agreed,

The Mobius theatre is lovely and I think working there would be beneficial for student actors and directors.⁸

Bob MacDonald, a professor of acting and directing at the University of Connecticut and for seven years associate chair to Jerry Rojo, directed several shows in the Mobius. He reported,

The Mobius is a fantastic space, great for Shakespeare and great for doing Greek plays. It awakens a tremendous aesthetic response in both audience and actors. Even students who are touring the Fine Arts facility here trying to decide if UCONN is the place for them to study acting, are most taken with this space more than with any other of our theatres. Even more than the fully equipped main-stage, Broadway style proscenium arch theatre at the Jorgensen auditorium. They will walk into the space, and I've seen it hundreds of times. They will say "OH! Now what is this? Tell me about this and why is this such a great space, and what do you do here?" They will also ask many other stimulating questions about this theatre. It is easy to see that they have been greatly moved by this performance space. Many times I have felt that this theatre was the main reason that many many students came to this university to study acting.⁹

Rojo, many years after the construction of the Mobius, feels that the space has stood the test of time and has survived the professional scrutiny of many members of the Theatre Department faculty.

It is important to mention that a fairly conservative faculty all came around to using this s one way or another. Many taught their classes in the theatre as well as directing productions for public viewing. It has been used many different ways by many different people and I think most of them have been successful. Theatre is alive and three dimensional, you can really get in there and teach the craft of theatre as a three dimensional living art form. It has always works well for Shakespeare and the Greeks but especially well for by Brecht and of course "built" pieces. I have even seen Irish pieces presented very effectively in this space. I am very proud of that theatre.¹⁰

Chapter 11. ARCHITECTURAL CONSULTING AND DESIGN

Throughout his career, Jerry Rojo has worked as a freelance architectural designer of theatres and spaces and as an independent theatre consultant. In 1969 Rojo, along with Richard Schechner and Brooks McNamara, decided to form a theatrical consulting and construction firm. The enterprise was called The Environmental Theatre Company. Given the early success of the Performance Group and the general acceptance by the public of the "environment look," the trio believed that there was a market for converting existing spaces into Environmental Theatres.

[In Environmental Theatre] it's particularly indigenous and natural for Americans to get involved in this kind of work...the whole idea of action and activity is very American...we come to environmental theatre like ducks to water. Carnivals, football, love of spectacle-environmental theatre has only begun to touch on those things. Theatre is going to come to be a kind of football or sports event...Monday Night at the Environmental Theatre.¹

The Environmental Theatre company completed several projects before they disbanded the company. Rojo said:

The Environmental Theatre Company only lasted a couple of years. The concept would require all of us to work together at the same time, which was difficult considering our busy individual schedules. I began to get work on my own and these projects did require the work of not five people. Our only real project was for The Good Council College. At Good Council we actually planned, designed and built the theatre; on most other projects I served as consultant. We felt that we were really not up for this sort of thing. We were not actually architects or contractors. We are artists, philosophers and thinkers, not builders. I must admit, though, that for a while there I really thought that Howard Johnson's was going to call and want us to redesign every one of their restaurants.²

As a freelancer, Rojo became involved as theatre consultant in a variety of projects. A complete list of Jerry Rojo's work in the area of architectural design and/or theatrical consultation is contained in an Appendix. There follows here a discussion of the more important ones.

THE THEATRE AT SARAH LAWRENCE COLLEGE

Jerry Rojo was selected by Wilford Leach, then head of the Theatre Department at Sarah Lawrence, to design an experimental theatre space as part of the school's Performing Arts Complex. The space completed in 1974, is basically a fixed environment of wooden platforms, small stages, galleries and staircases; there is no fixed seating arrangement for the audience, which can range in number from 150 to 200 spectators. The shop area is contained within the theatre. According to Rojo, this space was the first permanently fixed environmental theatre at a University.³ About the materials used, he writes,

The right materials were very important to Will Leach...Finally we got around to wood. Its softness and the fact that it's an organic material were the predominant reasons why the theatre became a wood-beam structure...there is also a "poor theatre" concept here. I like to go to ordinary places--the local lumber yard--and get materials that are immediately available...I find it is a beautiful notion to make ingenious statements using commonplace things.⁴

Rojo believes that Wilford Leach and the rest of the Sarah Lawrence College Theatre faculty were completely satisfied with the "re-developed" space. The theatre is still in use today. Rojo said,

After this project, I suddenly began to get all these calls. People wanted me to go to various places and turn their odds and ends of free space into Environmental Theatres. I became known as a person who would come in and take a space like a church or a gym or even a basement apartment and turn it into a theatre. I was very busy in those days.⁵

As mentioned earlier Leo Shapiro claimed that;

Ellen Stewart designed and built the La Mama annex based on the design that Jerry Rojo did for Sarah Lawrence College. It is a direct imitation.⁶

THE PHOENIX BUS

During the summer of 1970, Gordon Duffy, then the Artistic Director of the Phoenix Theatre Company in New York City, commissioned Rojo to conceive and design a multi-stage complex that would use a 1967 GMC school bus as its "base." Assisted by Technical Director George Lindsay (son of former New York Mayor John Lindsay), Rojo developed a concept using platforms, ladders and stair units made of steel and plywood which would be attached to the exterior of the bus and stabilized during performances by hydraulic jacks. Units were collapsible and could be stored within the bus during transit. In Theatres, Spaces and Environments, Richard Schechner stated,

I think the bus presents a contrast to a project like Sarah Lawrence, where the edges are fixed and the center is what's reconstructed...When you enter an environmental space where the walls contain you, you're in a "heated" environment...but outdoors it's a more remote experience because at any moment you can leave.⁷

This kind of street-theatre-vagabonding with a company traveling from street to street in a vehicle which

could be transformed into a performance space is in the tradition of the Commedia dell' Arte, medieval and early Renaissance traveling performing groups.

They would drive around New York City, stop and unfold their environment and climb all over it, in it, and through the scaffolding. I made it so it would be safe and durable. I think the bus is still around some place. It was a project that was subsidized by the City of New York.⁸

THE UNIVERSITY OF CONNECTICUT INNER AUDITORIUM

The Albert Jorgensen Auditorium at the University of Connecticut is the main concert hall at the university and has a seating capacity of 4,000. In 1970, Jerry Rojo was retained by the school to develop and design a smaller "inner auditorium" which could fit within the main space. This "inner auditorium" would facilitate the creation of a more intimate concert setting, such as would be needed for a solo performer or a small ensemble group such as a string quartet.

Rojo designed and built a small, complete concert setting including stage, acoustic band shell and spectator seating. The complete work is composed of 2,000 platform units which, when lashed and clamped together, form a riser system.

Setting up a theatre that uses 2,000 platforms and 700 chairs is an immense job for any crew. It takes 12 people about one 8-hour day to make the transition. The units are stored in a room adjacent to the auditorium...The whole theatre goes in there (Jorgensen's main auditorium), rolled carpets and all, so that there is absolutely nothing left on the auditorium floor. Often there has been a 700 seat

auditorium with a thrust stage and then, two days later, the whole thing was gone.⁹

As a student at the university, I attended a performance by the guitarist John Williams. I remember thinking that I had never before seen the school's smaller concert hall within the Jorgensen complex. It was not until the next day that I realized that I had been sitting in Rojo's portable concert hall.

STAGE WEST

Stage West is a small regional theatre in Springfield, Massachusetts. In 1973, when the company was twenty years old, the then Artistic Director, Rae Allen, entrusted Jerry Rojo with the task of turning her thrust stage theatre into an environmental theatre space. Rojo convinced her that the best solution was to create a "fixed environment." He theorized that the space within the theatre could be re-articulated for each new production by the director or designer.

The "Stage West" space is even more flexible than an Elizabethan type of space, which cannot be re-articulated. Also my space is not multi-level. I had the notion that designers could change space values to represent different concepts, as with the dining room in Sleuth, or the mountainside in When We Dead Awaken, but the basic space would never change. At the time there was no other theatre like that in the country.¹⁰

The space was used by different directors and designers for the next two years. Rojo himself designed six productions there. When he became busy with other projects,

the job fell completely into the hands of visiting designers, many from New York. Rojo stated,

The whole idea behind this set-up is to save money. Most of the visiting designers ended up working around the space. I think the word of mouth on this theatre was not good especially amongst these designers. Even after they had left some wrote back to bad-mouth it...I think a lot of people grew tired of using the same setting. When you go to New York you get a totally new space and setting for each production. Americans want something new and different for each work. I can see how some people could feel limited in this space.¹¹

In 1975, Rae Allen left Stage West, and the space was re-converted back to thrust stage theatre. Rojo feels that had a good designer remained in residence at the space, it could have been made to work.

What was needed was an in-house designer; someone who really understood the space. Someone like Eugene Lee, who works at the Trinity Repertory Company. I was teaching full-time, so I could not work that kind of commitment into my schedule. They needed someone to get in there and worry about the space and make it work for all situations, good or bad.¹²

Chapter 12. EDUCATOR: ADMINISTRATOR: WORKSHOP LEADER

Rojo's career as an educator has spanned more than twenty-seven years, including eight years as chairman of a theatre department at a large university, where he was also producer of the summer stock company. Jerry Rojo has always considered himself first and foremost a teacher.

Based on my own experience, Rojo is a sympathetic but demanding instructor, one who likes to be addressed by his first name. In no way did this interfere with the respect that Rojo easily commanded from his students. The work required for his undergraduate course was very heavy.

When he was receiving great public attention from his work, he was presented with the alternative of leaving the university.

In those days when my work was really hot, my phone rang off the hook with all kinds of offers to work on all kinds of different projects, some of them very interesting. Yet it never crossed my mind to leave the university setting. I certainly believe that university people should work in their respective professional worlds. This is a process that allows a professional to increase his own expertise, and in this fashion he is able to bring more to his students. I knew very early on in graduate school that I wanted to be a teacher. I went right into that profession immediately after completing graduate studies and I've been working in that area ever since. Richard Schechner had a great influence on me in that respect. I went to Tulane to study with him. Richard is a brilliant teacher. He is very learned and hard working, and he expects no less from his students.¹

In the first half of Rojo's teaching career he was involved only in courses dealing with the technical aspect

of theatre. These courses ranged from Introduction to Stagecraft to graduate-level classes in Scene Design.

It was in 1972 that he began to become more and more absorbed in creating an Environmental Theatre curriculum for the University of Connecticut. This was to be the first of its kind at an institute of higher learning. Rojo's professional reputation, along with his wide spread support from the theatre students, facilitated the university's approval of the program, which lasted for over fifteen years.

One of Rojo's strongest assets as a teacher is his ability to respect students' views and his willingness to work with them.

I'm a very tolerant person; I like people and there is something really exciting about working with theatre students. They are idealistic, hard-working and ready to devote their lives to learning a profession that involves complex skills and difficult training: a profession that offers at best a highly restricted marketability of those skills and training.²

Robert McDonald, Professor of Acting at the Theatre Department of the University of Connecticut, a colleague of Jerry Rojo's, when asked about Rojo's ability as a teacher responded:

Jerry is a caring and yet very demanding teacher who is extremely well-organized and disdains procrastination. You can use any type of language you choose with Jerry. He always listened to students and was acutely aware of their needs. He was constantly frank with them. He was always ready to help by asking challenging questions that would enable a student to discover more about his or her work. Jerry is at his best when he works one-on-one with his advanced design students, and I feel that design students should learn to work this way themselves...In a study of Jerry Rojo as educator we

would certainly learn something in the area of perception. I'm constantly struck by the way he can look at a play or a student project and come up with the simplest and most fundamental perceptive analysis. He always approaches a problem from a visually-oriented point of view rather than any intellectual garbage. He then offers a student a constructive criticism that would invariably assist him or her in improving his work. Jerry has always been able to help me straighten out many of my projects with such an analysis. I learned a great deal myself from working with Jerry Rojo. My relationship with him was one of the highlights of my professional life. I treasure our ongoing friendship, and I still seek his opinion concerning my current projects whenever I can. Most other professors I have worked with deal with students from the perspective that Mount Rushmore is out there somewhere and you had better live up to it. Jerry is the kind of teacher that measures each pupil individually in the area of skill, talent and intellect, and also in the area of psychological personality. He then works with his students to help them to discover things about their work on their own and to become the very best they can in their respective fields.³

There has been much positive feedback concerning Rojo's inception of an Environmental curriculum at the university. Richard Schechner claimed:

This work is absolutely beneficial to the college student. I think that as there is a domination of text over performance, so is there the dominance of the proscenium flow of information over the spectator. It is necessary to cultivate a counter-tradition, the performance tradition that can use a text, rather than be dominated by it. Not only do I feel that this work has a place at the university, I think that it should sweep a lot of the shit out. Environmental concepts can be applied everywhere. In actor training they are not contradictory to Stanislavski. They help an actor get in closer touch with himself and deal with a close audience performer interaction. Performers feel closer to their work when they help to construct the text. In most conventional theatre departments, they teach that in directing the main principle is to put something on stage. Directing should be taught as an art of arrangement, the interaction between performers and spectators; through this arrangement of interaction you create a space. In Environmental Theatre the space should start as a neutral and it should evolve, itself, organically. It should not be presupposed to be limited

to the stage...Design should be taught as an active, three-dimensional ingredient in the performance. It should be thought of as physical and concrete. It should never be reduced to drawings or paintings. If it starts there, it will end there, and it will look like a photograph.⁴

Director, actor and writer Andre Gregory is also an enthusiastic supporter of college level Environmental theatre.

I've never really liked to categorize things. I've always tried to step away from that, but Environmental training helps to open students to other things besides naturalism (realism) and this is of enormous value. This training also makes students aware of style and heightened reality or reality abstracted; this experience is invaluable.⁵

Leo Shapiro set forth his view;

Environmental Theatre at college is an excellent idea. "The Method" is dead. If a young actor is going to survive and make it today then Environmental training is what he needs, not some bullshit about re-creating the past. Actors should learn to live in the present and deal with the now.⁶

Professor Robert McDonald has had years of first hand experience with Environmental Theatre at a college level. He reported,

This work is very beneficial to the student actor. They learn to go past their limit, to test their points of fear and judgement and then go past and through these points, or at least to try. You come to know a great deal about yourself and your personality and to know where you are as an actor. Here you are asked to sacrifice your fears, judgements and insecurities on the altar of theatre. This leaves you free to explore character through a much more in-depth approach. You have to have the right kind of students. This work is not good for the puritan, the uptight or the judgemental. This work is for the most sensitive, most potential-filled people. These are the people who will really influence the future of the theatre. Environmental Theatre was once in the mainstream and I believe it will be mainstream again someday, maybe soon.⁷

The director Joe Chaikin commented:

University students should study Environmental Theatre concepts. Especially with someone like Jerry Rojo, because he was one of the original progenitors of the movement. He is also a very talented teacher and this is very important. This is a very good opportunity for a student to learn. A student should study all the great people who have gone before like Shakespeare, Stanislavski and Brecht. They should also study the important and marvelous people who are alive today, like me and Grotowski and Peter Brook. "The Method" was useful when I was a kid. It was useful when I was a beginner. Then I advanced and went on to other things. I think college students should study both Stanislavski and Chaikin.⁸

In 1978, Jerry Rojo was appointed chairman of the Theatre Department at the University of Connecticut. To faculty, students and Alumni, this appointment came as a shock. Certainly Rojo was highly respected by his colleagues and the students at the university, but he was also regarded as something of a maverick and avant-gardist. The department he was to supervise was almost solidly traditional, a conventionally oriented program dedicated to the classics. In the years preceding Rojo's appointment the university's theatre department had witnessed a considerable degree of conflict between rival faculty members. Two previous department chairmen had been dispatched from office in as many years. The department was in fact in such chaos that the Vice President of Academics for the university intervened and took matters into his own hands. He knew Rojo to be a tolerant and sympathetic individual, and he felt that as department head Rojo would have a soothing effect and help heal the wounds inflicted by inter-

departmental squabbling. He therefore used the power of his position to appoint Rojo over everyone's head and without benefit of a faculty election to confirm this decision. Many among the faculty were offended or hurt, having been passed over, and at first Rojo was reluctant to accept the appointment. However, he soon realized that his first commitment had always been to the university. He had never refused the school anything previously; he could not refuse now. This change of position had a considerable impact on his professional career. No longer could he work outside of the university environment. No longer could he be absorbed solely with his scene design programs. He was now faced with a department of students and faculty who were going to depend on him to run things and make all of the important decisions affecting the future of the theatre program. With the position of department chairman came the responsibility of selecting plays for production in this complex and now-thriving theatre environment. He would also have to act as producer of the university's summer stock company. This would require Rojo to visit New York City frequently in order to discover plays worthy of production at the school. He would have to pay particular attention to the latest musicals, a form of theatre that Rojo had previously regarded as highly distasteful.

Rojo's administrative abilities would also be taxed to the limit. He had never envisioned himself as a bureaucrat, but he decided to do his best to be successful

in an area in which he felt himself to be particularly weak. He stopped taking on outside employment in order to meet the demands of the new situation. In his own words,

Once you stop saying yes to outside work, very shortly the calls stop coming in. So I began to lose contact with the professional world...There was a lot of animosity in the department towards the previous two chairmen. I was a little unsure as to how they were going to accept me. They all knew me and liked me personally. They did think that I represented a kind of radical leftist theatre. I did not know how they would react to the fact that I had been appointed over their even: even the Dean of the School of Fine Arts had nothing to say about my appointment. I did not want the job but there was no way I could say no; when the Vice-President of the university asks you to do something, you do it.⁹

Rojo had questioned that decision ever since. At the time, his friends and connections in New York were strongly encouraging him to move to the city and be solely a designer.

I had fantasies about that, but I never made any real plans. Frankly I don't think that I could have made a living at it. The university was always there with the big paycheck, and was always ready to subsidize my work if I needed it. Even when I was receiving all of those accolades, I never thought to abandon my life at the university. I was involved in a popular movement, Environmental Theatre. It was a kind of revolution and I knew there would be some kind of end to it. Besides, I did not want to uproot my nine-year-old son and drag him down to New York City. In addition, I have always felt that I did my best work in a university situation.¹⁰

Rojo's first concern as chairman was to attend to the many bruised egos and conflicting personalities within the faculty. The students needed attention as well. They had suffered through a period of great dissension and confusion. Rojo worked hard at creating a more hospitable

environment for all concerned with the program. He developed a plan and, as any good designer would, he put this plan down on paper.

There was no way that I was going to lead a program that included 50 to 60 graduate students, 130 undergraduates and 20 faculty members and not have a concrete plan in mind. I was not an entrepreneur. I was not going to turn the whole department into an environment theatre class, or into my vision of the theatre. We had many tenured people from varied schools of theatre. I felt it was my duty to respect each faculty member and what he or she was doing, even though I might not agree with it. That is what a university is all about, different points of view.¹¹

Rojo did not want to clear the decks of undesirables, or to flood the program with his own people. There was no need to build a department, it was already there. These were new and different times for Rojo. He would have to go to the theatre--both Broadway and regional--as a spectator. He would have to consider the needs of everyone, not just a small number of Theatre Design students. The only professional contacts that he maintained were those involved with his free-lance architectural work.

This did not make me resentful at all of the position. I would still be able to teach my Environmental Theatre workshop class. This, I believe, was my special contribution to the department. I didn't want to bring in new faculty members. I wanted to use the people that were present and to help them to be the best that they could be in their respective areas.¹²

Obviously a theatre department has to come together to produce plays, and people must collaborate on these projects. Rojo made a special effort to allow all of this to happen without incident. He also urged the faculty to explore the world outside the university.

I believe that one of my best solutions at the university was to encourage my colleagues to pursue activities in the professional world. People like Jim Franklin, Jim Sabbatini and Valerie Shore--I arranged their schedules so as to allow time for them to become involved in the regional professional theatre. Now they work outside all the time. Alicia Finkle is another case in point. Before I was chairman she was a costume designer in the shop. Now she has a career as a professional writer. I helped her to develop this career because I gave her the time and the encouragement to pursue this. I think I played a large part in helping these people to realize success in their professional goals. There were five or six teachers in that department whose careers really blossomed because of the way I ran the theatre program. I did not put in things that I thought would fit my vision of the theatre. I supported them in what they thought they could do. As long as they were doing research or performing or something in the professional theatre, as long as they had student support, they confirmed to my criteria for a good faculty. I think I accomplished that much.¹³

Bob McDonald served as Rojo's associate department head. He expressed strong feelings concerning Rojo's years as chairman.

The first thing he did was to become completely proficient in all that academic nonsense that a department head needs to know. He had his whole plan for the school drawn up on paper. He had a structure, and everyone was a cog in this mechanism. He rewarded people as they passed tests of work. If you did not pass the test then you did not get any more work. I passed the test many times, maybe too many for my own good. Other people were looking out of their windows literally; many people did not pass Jerry's test. Eventually Jerry was undone by politics. Too many people felt they were being ignored and they wanted a change. This is not to undermine Jerry's contribution to the program. Actually, at the time he was just what the department needed. The place needed to just quiet down after David Heilweil and John Herr had served as chairmen. Jerry's work with Environmental Theatre enabled him to be very frank with people in an honest way. He was a good listener, something the previous chairmen were not. His workshop skills served him well. The department faculty were very quiet during his seven year term. He instilled a feeling of cohesiveness, which was rare here at the university. It may not have

been all that exciting, but deep wounds were given a chance to heal. He also kept a close eye on the department by means of an executive committee that met every week. The nuts and bolts were taken much better care of and there was far less procrastination and a lot more organization. Jerry Rojo was a great department chairperson.¹⁴

WORKSHOP TECHNIQUE

A Jerry Rojo Environmental Theatre workshop is in many ways different from a class in conventional acting methods. Most generally, in a conventional acting course the student is taught first to think and then, to do, whereas Rojo encourages his actors to do, and then to think about what they did in order to learn about their own capabilities. Rojo wants his actors to attain self-realization, to understand the boundaries and limits of their own personalities, and to bring this self-knowledge to their performances. A student in Rojo's workshop is urged to be active; he does not spend long hours listening to lectures and watching other actors perform. In an Environmental workshop an actor performs at every class meeting. As soon as the performers enter the space their behavior is governed by the protocol of the workshop; while they, themselves, are part of a live performance.

Rojo gleaned some ideas for his workshop from his collaborations with Richard Schechner and the Performance Group. His work with Andre Gregory also influenced his approach as a director. There are, however, subtle differences between Rojo's work and that of his colleagues.

Mainly these stem from the capability and status of the student-university performer as opposed to the capability and commitment of the professional actor. Schechner explained this when he visited the University of Connecticut Environmental workshop in 1975. He was explaining how his New York based group met every day from 10:00 A.M. until 4:00 P.M. in the afternoon. When asked if his actors received a break in the course of the day, he replied, "Oh, of course, before 10 and after 4."¹⁵ College students take other courses besides Rojo's. Also, at UCONN Rojo includes non-theatre majors as members of his group. Rojo works his students to the possible limit, demanding a three-hour session each day. Anyone who misses a total of three of these sessions is expected to leave the group.

Rojo has written a book, as yet unpublished, on his ideas concerning the establishment and the conducting of an Environmental Theatre Workshop. This unpublished manuscript, along with the many interviews, and my own personal experience, is the basis for the following examination of Rojo's workshop theory.

The goal of an Environmental Workshop is to teach the philosophy of Environmental Theatre, performance training and production techniques. Productions are to be developed by members of the group rather than from existing scripts, a result of individual actions and personalities. Rojo concentrates on the actor's exploration of his own personality and personal history of body-mind experiences.

He lays great emphasis on the relationships that exist among the performers, and between the performers and members of the audience. His next concern is with space, time and finally the text. A group is formed, and introduced to the philosophy of the work. Individual transactions and dramatic actions are then developed, and the group decides on the form of production which has the greatest possibilities for performance.

The performers use spontaneous games and exercises and improvisations selected by the director to begin an exploration of themselves and develop relationships with the other members of the group. The performers learn a great deal about themselves and the other members of the group through these games and improvisations. Actors are instructed to be tolerant of one another's behavior, to minimize competition and not to be judgmental. The creation of a safe space is another important task for the group. In a fear-free environment, performers remove social masks, impulsively discover emotional blocks and learn to challenge their abilities to the utmost. Actors strive to understand and perform with the right blend of impulse and discipline. Impulse encourages creative spontaneity, yet discipline is necessary to develop acceptable performance techniques. This is, after all, theatre, and Rojo is aware that the spectator's needs must be considered; the Environmental actor must learn to communicate to his audience. However, the method of communication must be discovered through

experimentation, not through imitation or pretention. This type of training is known as "psychophysical theatre" and focuses on the actor's own personality and body-mind experiences from his own personal history. "Psychophysical" refers to the concept of the mind and body functioning as one.

...it is the interdependent relationships of the mind and the body that leads to the development of an individual's personality. This association of the body's experience with the mind's power of remembering and defining experience continues throughout life, as we build up volumes of remembered history. Our work is simply to lay bare and explore the body and mind as they are, rather than change them. Our work is not to change the psyche, it is to reveal it as a theatrical tool. If you understand your psyche and psychophysical history, you can always bring this to the stage. We do research on ourselves in a systematic way...Anyone can be in the workshop...being in it is like being in a living theatre piece. You learn about acting but you also learn about design, confrontation, ensemble, mise-en-scene and how to build a play; you also learn about poor theatre techniques. Of course I only wanted people who really wanted to be there. It is important that this course not be a requirement or an easy grade. People have to be aware of the fact that they can leave anytime they want or finish the credit with some kind of independent study.¹⁶

Rojo feels that it is important that all actors have a solid knowledge of themselves. The psychophysical actor explores and creates his own character. He trains his actors to learn by actually doing, short, of course, of improper criminal activity. Rojo believes physical experience of action has a far greater effect on a performer than an intellectual connection.

As a producer of a conventionally-oriented summer stock theatre, I have been to a lot of Connecticut-type auditions. I've seen a lot of actors on stage who are sick. Sick in the sense that they do not know what they

are doing, or what they are about. I could not trust that person as an actor. If they don't know who they themselves are, how are they going to show me anything as a performer, or show me anything about the character in the play. Of course this premise of knowing yourself is not the only way to good acting. Richard Burton did not use this system, and he is a good actor. But it does make sense that if acting is putting together skills, one of those skills should be the unification of mind and body. This way an actor knows what he can contribute personally to a role.¹⁷

In Environmental Theatre, it is surmised that the body controls the personality and therefore that personality's relationship to the "universe," i.e. the world of the senses. Workshop participants are encouraged to push their bodies to their own individual limits.

I make demands on an individual basis. For example, in the marines everybody has to do one hundred push-ups. In my workshop, I want the fat, weak person to do one push-up, while the guy who is in great shape to do three hundred push-ups. This process helps to create joy and enlightenment in the body's role in our lives.¹⁸

A Rojo workshop also concerns an actor's developing the ability to establish a rapport with his audience. Rojo calls this talent "personal Magnetism" and "stage-presence."¹⁹ An actor should learn to be centered within himself. Exercises and games help to eliminate shyness, excessive aggressiveness, nervousness and speech difficulties. These games are not necessarily geared to change individual personality traits, but to teach the actor to accept them and be better able to communicate them to an audience.

When self-knowledge and self-acceptance are achieved, the personality is disarmed. What results is attractiveness, because when an actor feels centered in

self-knowledge and self-acceptance an audience will feel confident and safe with that actor.²⁰

Performers are also encouraged to create "grotesque" behavior. The goal is to be truthful rather than socially acceptable. Rojo considered all actors to be criminals in that they are allowed to perform actions that would normally be considered anti-social. The actor, through creativity, should challenge all laws and conventions.

We have no desire to evoke craziness or cruelty for their own sake...our ground work is actually humanism. Art is ultimately a search for truth, and in exploring the truth of human nature we often play out the inhuman trappings of society that de-value and suppress individual human qualities. One of the primary reasons we go to the theatre is to witness or experience life's worst scenarios, whether in the form of comedy or tragedy...the theatre provides us with a safe and relatively vicarious look at the grotesque aspects of life...it is better to relieve pain by engaging it...it is better yet if we can experience the thing itself in the quasi-real environment of the theatre. This is the well-known theatrical purging experience known as catharsis.²¹

Another interesting concept of Rojo's Environmental Theatre is that of the "Holy Actor," or the actor as scapegoat. For example, an actor may be forced to suffer the mental anguish of the character in the play. This at times can be very real for an Environmental performer. In this way, the actor explores the extremities of his or her own personality and then offers this experience to the audience in the form of a dramatic action. The actor endures pain and self-sacrifice, yet he insulates the audience from these horrific events. The distance between

actor and audience here is very close--at times even dangerous--but it has its rewards.

When an actor is playing out a role by using his or her own personality, a deeper level of credibility may be established because the role is grounded in the real personality of the actor, enhancing the bonds that develop between actor and audience.²²

Rojo does not promote self-indulgence or sensationalism. He does not want to shock or frighten his audience. Rather, curiosity and enlightenment are his chief objectives. Self-transcendence is another goal: personal emotionalism combined with discipline and impulse, coupled with signs and gestures that comment on the performer's relationship to the social environment.

The actor's craft always embraces the whole human condition: the duality of impulse, egocentered individualism on one hand and disciplined, rational social consciousness on the other hand.²³

Rojo feels that the actor's body is both his instrument and source of inspiration; it should be free of inhibitions so as to more easily reach the extreme limits of physical action, and be able to fully explore the entire realm of human experience, serving an aesthetic purpose. He believes that this training is one of the systems through which an actor can attain "total body freedom."

Each workshop session is considered a live performance and part of the theatre piece. Though a performer learns a great deal about himself and perhaps

feels better and more whole this system is not to be confused with therapy.

People invariably get into better physical shape after even a short time working in this method. Many claim that they feel mentally stronger and that they are completely new people. This is not my goal. I am not trained as a therapist. I am a theatre worker, I want to achieve a theatrical end. I don't want my actors to psychoanalyze action but rather to act instinctively. I don't want to change anyone's personality. My system skirts the realm of therapy very nicely. I set games in motion and provide a safe environment and set people together, in a control situation. I want my actors to make a commitment to themselves, not to me. People will change, but that is not my goal. My goal is to set up a beehive. A beehive that anyone can get through and contribute to if he wants, even Ronald Reagan.²⁴

In an Environmental workshop there is little or no distinction made between the words "game" and "exercise;" they are used interchangeably. A psychophysical actor incorporates the dramatic scenario into his exercise. He might, for instance, try to hold a headstand for as long as his body will possibly allow him to, later acting out any inner feelings he might associate with his accomplishment or his failure. He connects himself personally with any activity, no matter how simple or routine. Spontaneity and discovery occur when performers find themselves in situations and they must draw upon their realm of experience and emotional history. In Environmental games actors do not try to play the personalities of the characters within the confines of the script, but try to remain true to their own experiences. Therefore, character development proceeds from the inside out rather than from the outside in.

A long term commitment should be planned for any Environmental Theatre group. The group needs time to perform many different types of games or exercises in order to develop psychophysical awareness and to promote the ensemble effect. Games will help the group develop a schedule for exploring and mounting play scripts. Actors develop individual psychophysical warm-up routines that help them to attune their minds to the space of each rehearsal and to approach the personality of the character they are trying to explore. This helps the actor to stay in touch with his own inner life.

The games fall into three separate categories: individual, one-on-one, and group transactions. Individual exercises are included in the performer's initial warm-up period. Fifteen to twenty minutes is the preferred time for the actor to work alone in preparation for the workshop.

One-to-one exercises are designed for two people to perform. They come at the end of the individual warm-up session, and often it is necessary for the entire group to watch two people working together. These games give an actor the chance to confront another performer, and, in turn, to be confronted by that actor. Actors learn about one another and the rest of the group may watch the process of discovery taking place.

The third form of game or exercise is the group transaction. This is the most demanding form of exercise.

All people tend to shy away from group activity because of the fear and tension associated with this complex form of social behavior. Groups demand that individuals be out-going, giving, and tolerant, characteristics that tend to be unnatural to the ego-oriented personality. But of course, being aware and able to function in groups is a requisite of our inner health, as citizens and especially as actors. These games are designed to train actors to divest themselves of a self-centered posture in favor of a neutral or unified group-oriented way of being.²⁵

There is a special protocol (or mood) which must be maintained in an Environmental workshop. At times, the work may seem threatening or even dangerous. The actors assume responsibility for the creation of ideas and dramatic action, and the invention of characters to be portrayed. The director's urging "to create on-the-spot" often steers actors into manifesting aspects of their own personalities which were previously private, guarded or even unknown. Characterizations become truly unique because they are so personal.

In an Environmental game the outcome is always unknown. In a Rojo workshop, nothing concerning character, emotion or plot idea is predetermined; the action derives from flexible conditions described above.

Finally, the strict protocol of the workshop serves to diminish fear and insecurities and to engender trust between group members. This promotes natural creativity and loosens inhibitions.

The central core of Rojo's ideas concerning the role of the director in a workshop could be summed up by the line, "Never ask your people to do something that you

yourself wouldn't do." Rojo feels that the director, as the central figure of the group, should maintain the strictest standard of ethics. One of the director's main functions is to choose and describe the exercises to be worked on by the group. Rojo himself personally demonstrates each exercise and is an active participant in each workshop session. The director also observes the work in progress and takes notes so that later he can help the performers to re-focus or re-channel their energies. As director he is not interested in changing a performer's personality. Rather, he seeks to help reveal the performer's inherent personality to himself.

Although the design is the central figure of the workshop, he maintains a passive rather than aggressive role during the progress of the exercises themselves. This attitude also applies to the pushing of actors to reach the limits of their physical abilities and stamina. An actor is not forced to partake in any activity that he or she is not ready to engage in fully.

If a performer repeatedly violates the protocol of the workshop, it is brought to his attention. This is not done in a harsh manner which threatens the harmony of the group. Such harshness would serve to make individuals in the group insecure and concerned about their own status within the workshop, and it might even dampen any desire to explore new and "risky" ideas.

The director should also become aware of any serious conflicts between individuals within the group and be

responsive to individual needs. The director's own problems (e.g. he will need to spend time on business, he has a handicap, etc.) should be related to the group immediately.

Dating other members of the group or carrying on intimate personal relationships outside the workshop is not permitted. A director never uses his power within the group to tip the scales in one direction or another concerning conflicts between members of the workshop.

A director, according to Rojo, should periodically examine his own motives concerning the work and his own personal behavior in the workshop.

If the director is able to confront himself or herself truthfully, maintaining an observer's distance even while plunging into the heart of darkness, he or she will be a stabilizing influence for actors in their encounters with their own hidden motives and passions. Actors will feel freer to let loose their inhibitions if the director has created an atmosphere that can be trusted.²⁶

Rojo turned to directing because of his need to be the prime mover of his theatre productions. After years of creating interiors for directors and observing how these directors worked with his spaces, he felt he could do better himself. He further developed the idea that actors' bodies could bring dramatic concepts to the mise-en-scene that even the most complicated of scenic effects could not.

Every one in the group works, but it is up to the director to give the work that special conceptualization, theatricality or magic moment. This is especially true in the use of built plays, derived from the mise-en-scene of this particular workshop group. Only in these circumstances can a director reflect that this theatre piece is something no one had ever done before and it will truly never be repeated

again. This, to me, is what good directing and good theatre are all about.²⁷

Here follows a summary of Rojo's criteria to be followed concerning every aspect of the workshop.

1. Focus on Inner Experience:

These workshop techniques provide actors with methods which will enable them to explore the uniqueness of their own personal characters. The actor, of course, must be willing to respond fully to the demands of each individual exercise. Each must do his best to maintain rigorous self-imposed standards of behavior. If this is accomplished, the performer can expect results that are truly creative and can establish for himself a code of self-discipline which can be used in any form of endeavor.

2. Associations:

Private mental images, ideas, memories, issues, judgements or fantasies that the actor conjures up while engaging in an activity or game. They come either from the subconscious or the conscious thinking process...[and] they should be triggered by physical activity.²⁸

Rojo feels the best inspirational source is some form of physical activity. The body prompts the mind rather than vice versa. If an actor concentrates completely on a physical activity, sub-conscious thought patterns are set free; associations will occur with previously unexplored areas. Environmental actors use the warm-up period to concentrate on associations. This is a time of solitude when a performer is free from outside distractions. The

warm-up session is frequently referred to as the associative exercise.

3. Signs and Gestures:

Once an actor begins to accept the flexibility of his body, the body becomes the instrument through which associations can be expressed through the language of body gestures and psychophysical signs.

Simply put, signs are physical gestures or contortions that convey information, make comments, and express emotions...Ideally, a sign conveys something about the personality or inner life of the performer...It conveys a commentary or an attitude about something, and is so utterly unique and unprecedented that it evokes curiosity and surprise in an audience.²⁹

As performers adapt to and become at ease with the performing of psychophysical exercises they are able to communicate in non-verbal and non-literary modes of expression, rather than through more conventional methods. Rojo uses the contemporary English painter Frances Bacon as a model of an artist who works with the use of signs.

Bacon paints contorted images of people...innards pouring out, drunk or stoned, looking like sides of beef as they make love. But rather than being simply ugly, the images convey a sense of honesty. They are at once grotesque and poignant...These images are not ultimately shocking, for the outer signs mirror the people's inner life.³⁰

4. Non-Matrixed Performing:

It was Michael Kirby, author of Happenings, who introduced the term non-matrix. To understand it, we must first understand the word matrix: the historical, common pattern for action.³¹

While working with Rojo on his production, The Big Enchilada, one actor developed a unique and "non-matrixed"

costume. He wore military khakis with the traditional cross-chest ammunition belts. Instead of bullets, the belts were loaded with instamatic flash cubes. His holster contained an instamatic camera. He also used chest-straps and other parts of his costume to lash himself to the sets. Rojo remarked that this garment combined cross-blended images and associations of the military complex, the mass media and sexual bondage in one fell swoop.

The psychophysical actor must explore every activity and physical object in this non-matrixed fashion, to avoid any conventional pre-conceptions.³²

5. Avoidance of Linear Talking:

During the workshop period, actors should avoid discursive discussion or verbal justification of their actions. Rather, they should trust the realization provided by physical actions. Cutting off verbal explanation forces an actor to rely on his body as the principal of expression. This helps to free an actor's creative impulse, and encourages the invention of unique dramatic metaphors. Description of the games to be played by the group does, of course, involve linear discussion; the director also sets aside time to talk with actors about their discoveries, but this most often occurs outside of workshop hours. Conventional dialogue should be used as little as possible during the workshop itself. A period of at least 24 hours should pass before any aspect of a particular workshop is discussed, if it is discussed at all.

6. Transformations:

Many of the games--and the rhythm of switching from one game to another--involve gradual shifts that we call transformations.³³

This is not to be confused with the term "transition," associated with shifts in action within the script. Here, games are structured to include transitions between extremes in personal behavior. For example, two games are juxtaposed so that an actor transforms himself from a sensitive, loving person into a grotesque embodiment of hatred.

7. Neutrality:

It is imperative that workshop participants learn how to neutralize their personalities within the confines of the workshop space. Since actors must occasionally step out of an exercise, the individual performer should develop a neutral body posture or sign that will clearly signal to the other performers that, for the time being this actor has physically stepped out of the live performance mode that pervades each workshop session. This neutrality also helps actors to become more self-disciplined, as much can be learned by denying intense emotional impulses at a time when they seem entirely appropriate. An Environmental actor should be able to conjure up intense emotional involvement but at a moment's notice be able to step outside of this intensity, or drop his or her involvement completely. This neutrality, used in an actual performance, helps an audience to follow the flow of a play in and out of personal revelation and commentary.

Neutrality does not mean blanking out...by not permitting the body to be in a state of, or show signs of emotion. Through neutrality, emotion is controlled but not eliminated. The actor conveying a state of neutrality is still involved, if only on a more intellectual, reasonable level.³⁴

8. Emotion and Idea:

A psychophysical actor is to become involved emotionally in a dramatic action; however, he should at the same time be able to comment on and evaluate intellectually all activity taking place. This encourages self-perception and self-realization, and also acts as a safe-guard against emotional self-consumption. Such an approach also encourages objectivity, a must for any theatre experience--in both actor and audience.

9. Work Clothes and Nudity:

This is perhaps one of the most important aspects of workshop protocol. Clothes should be minimal and neutral in color. Since the body is the primary subject of the psychophysical actor, there must be easy access to it, for the actor himself and for the other participants in the workshop. A state as close to nakedness as possible is preferable. The clothes should also be as plain as possible, making no statement about an actor's personality or economic or social status. Underwear, make-up, jewelry and jock straps should not be worn. Boxer shorts or cut-off jeans and tank tops are suitable for both sexes. Nudity is not a requirement in a workshop, nor is it prohibited; this is left up to the individual performer, and his or her

decision on this matter should be accepted by all other members of the group.

10. Via Negativa:

A Rojo workshop attempts to follow the "poor theatre" process as much as possible, and strip away all non-essential aspects of the theatre.

Grotowski's term, Via Negativa, describes the process of stripping and even scattering the defenses we have developed. He says our personalities become like blocks which we must explode or confront, or defenses are scattered and thus defused...we confront the myths about ourselves we have heretofore created. In the process, we allow more of our innate capabilities to surface and be used as theatre.³⁵

11. Pain:

In the workshop actors are expected to push themselves to their personal physical limits. At times this results in real mental or corporal pain. An actor should seek to build up his or her tolerance to pain, becoming more daring and flexible in the process of exploring the self. Most actors will make progress in this process, and although they should not actually endanger themselves or another performer, they should never stop pushing themselves to attain a higher level of tolerance.

Actors are scapegoats for the audience, offering mind and body in what Grotowski calls "Holy Sacrifice." This sacrifice includes allowing oneself to be used in painful ways, which has the effect of engendering trust on the part of the audience; an audience will respect someone who will experience pain on their behalf. It is, after all, the psychophysical actor's mission to explore the extremes of mind and body. Some pain may be encountered, but this can certainly promote growth as an artist.³⁶

12. General Ethics and Rules:³⁷

a. A specific time, place and schedule for meetings should be clearly established by group consensus and rigidly adhere to. A workshop should be cancelled if a previously stated quorum is not met.

b. Games and exercises should be performed in the presence of everyone in the group.

c. Some type of clearly defined and rigid system for suspending group members should be used, whether for reasons of absenteeism or inappropriate conduct.

d. Visitors should not be allowed at workshops as a rule; exceptions are permitted by consensus. Consensus means that everyone does not necessarily agree with a proposition, but they all accept what is proposed.

e. Group consensus should be used for determining external structures, i.e., for establishing rules, time-frames and general goals.

f. Periodic sessions for discussions and discursive activities should be set apart from purely psychophysical workshops.

g. Discussions should be avoided during the psychophysical workshops. Talking should be limited to directions and descriptions of games given by the leader.

h. Private sessions between the leader and individual group members should be held. Each member of the workshop should hold such a session in order to receive feedback about personal growth and goals.

i. It is permissible to discuss the content of games and exercises outside the sessions; however, if outside people (nonparticipants) are present, group members' names should not be used.

j. During the psychophysical sessions individuals should not judge other actors, the leader, or the work being done in relation to artistic or moral standards. Special sessions are held for this purpose.

k. Each member should, as early as possible demonstrate an ability to assume a neutral position. He should also indicate that he is capable of expressing sincerity, passivity, or positiveness, humility and emotional control.

l. Demonstrations of performers' subconscious, emotional, and intellectual lives are limited to games and not permitted during periods of transition during a daily workshop session.

m. Sessions should be regarded as performances and begin when actors arrive in the work-space; dressing and undressing for the workshop is part of the workshop performance.

n. Respect for and care of the room/space is the responsibility of the group.

Chapter 13. CONCLUSION

This study of the life and work of Jerry Rojo reveals many specific aspects of Environmental Theatre, and some general aspects of the avant-garde theatre of New York City from the late sixties to the early seventies. Rojo was an influential figure in the area of scene design from the beginning of his work with the Performance Group until the mid-70s. Influences of the Environmental Theatre of this period may be seen in the theatre of Broadway and Off-Broadway in the late 80s.

One may not immediately associate Broadway shows such as Dreamgirls, Cats, Starlight Express, Phantom of the Opera and Nicholas Nickleby with elements of Environmental scenography. Yet in these shows the set plays as active a role in the evening's entertainment as the actor or even the music and book. This is an application of the Environmental concept of the set as active contributor to the overall theatre experience. Rojo has said,

I don't want my designs and sets to take a back seat to any other aspect of the production. In Dreamgirls, they even might have gone a little overboard on the dominance of the set. They used those two central light towers in many different ways in all of the scenes and these were very similar to the towers I designed for the environment in Dionysus in '69...In Starlight Express, the set is practically the star of the show.¹

Elements of the set design for Starlight Express and Nicholas Nickleby are reminiscent of the Environmental concept of surrounding the spectator. In both situations

the environment completely encloses the audience, and the dramatic action flows throughout the entire space. It is necessary for audience members to adjust their seating, if only slightly, in order to follow the action completely.

About this concept Richard Schechner stated:

I felt that Nickleby was definitely influenced by Environmental Theatre. That show had a lot to do with what I was doing scenically. There was a kind of weak audience participation, and it had this kind of long narrative, but of course it had to be watered down to please a mainstream audience. I also think that Environmental Theatre concepts have had a big impact on many forms of popular entertainment today. Examples include Disney World and the living museums stuff like the Plymouth Plantation and Colonial Williamsburg, where there is inter-action with the audience, and the environment surrounds the spectator. In those places there is also an attempt at a suspended reality and a transformation that includes the audience...in other words it is not the spectator looking at another reality; the spectator, in a certain sense, is included in that other reality.²

Regarding Nicholas Nickleby, Brooks McNamara claimed,

Nickleby was definitely caught up in the avant-garde...my own theory is that the avant-garde percolates down rather quickly to the more conventional theatre. In Nickleby there were all kinds of uses of directorial devices that were reminiscent of Environmental Theatre and the experimental theatre. There was the grid that ran around the entire space, filled with objects like those crummy iron gates. What you find is a kind of mediation between letting things be the real things they are and an artistic re-shaping of things. Now the difference with Jerry is that he would never do anything to make a 4-by-4 look like anything other than a 4-by-4 such as an Ionic column. Those ideas of using simple structures has really caught on today...this is a kind of cross-pollination of artistic ideas, a kind of impressionism and a constructivism of letting the seams show through at certain points. Structures are being allowed to come through as structures. This is a wonderful juxtaposition of contexts, a kind of modified realism that was so popular in the fifties and sixties. Jerry's work helped this movement to progress to what it

is today. If you go to the scene design show at New York University every year and look at what the new designers are doing that convention is such a central idea with young designers. That convention was one in which Jerry Rojo was a primary contributor.³

Rojo received much attention for his work as an environmentalist for The Performance Group. It was he who helped to bring this kind of alternative design to mainstream acceptance. At the time, many important and well-known critics who were more at home in the Broadway theatre district found themselves roaming obscure areas of New York's SoHo to review the work and admire the environments of one of Off-Off-Broadways' most innovative companies. Rojo was singled out by Newsweek's Jack Kroll as one of the most important designers of the day.⁵ In fact, in all of the reviews collected for this study there was not one unfavorable critique of a Rojo set.

Leo Shapiro points to Rojo as one of the prime movers of scene design during this period.

Jerry Rojo is probably the singular most influential designer in creating the experimental or environmental "look."⁶

Joe Chaikin likens Rojo's designs to the work of one of the most innovative artists of the 20th century.

Jerry Rojo's work is a little like Picasso to me. Picasso's art is brilliant, but it is not clear to me, it stirs the imagination and makes me think. This reminds me of Jerry.⁷

It is clear that Broadway designers are interested in state-of-the-art technical theatre. Musicals like Cats, Starlight Express and Phantom of the Opera have scenic

effects that rival any Hollywood extravaganza; the willingness of more and more designers to explore and use the entire theatre space, along with directors' increasing willingness to let the set take center stage, reveals the influence of Environmental Theatre. In some instances these high-budget Broadway box-office-busters have relied on their sets rather than the dramatic content of the shows to keep the audience lined up and purchasing tickets.

Andre Gregory stated,

In traditional theatre the spoken word and theme, and the style of the play reflect the reality of the times in which we live, but I see nothing in the theatre that does that today--in New York City that is...I'm sure that a lot of shows, especially musicals, which are in their very nature theatrical and not naturalistic, must have been influenced by both designers' and directors' work of the sixties and seventies. Naturally Jerry Rojo has a substantial place in the History of that genre of scene design.⁸

It was through his work as director that Rojo came to think that the theatre should and must belong to the actor. He thinks that the theatre is the medium of the actor, whereas film is the medium of the director.

In the beginning, during my training and the formative years of my career, I naturally focused more time and energy on the conceptualization of the set or environment. I was always an actors' designer in that I planned and built sets with the actors' needs in mind not just the realization of the director's concept. When I started to direct my own actors, I began to believe more and more that the actor's body contributed more to the overall mise-en-scene than any other single facet, including the design. Environmental and "Poor" theatre art, more than any other form of theatre, is truly the realm of the actors, and they are the center of all focus..⁹

Environmental Theatre more than any other form of theatre becomes a celebration of the actor. Emphasis is placed on those aspects of personality which are especially unique to the individual actor and not to the character in the play. An environmental actor is more concerned with serving the needs of his own personality than the needs of the playwright or play.

The use of the "built play" enables an Environmental group to achieve its goal of unique and individualized theatre. Rojo is a whole-hearted believer in the concept formulated by Artaud, which states that there are "no more masterpieces;" he therefore trusts in the importance of the "built" play. The Performance Group and The Open Theatre did much to give legitimacy to and to popularize the concept of the "built" play, and indeed this form of drama has found its way into the mainstream of American theatre. A classic example of this is the longest running-musical on Broadway, Michael Bennett's A Chorus Line. In this production the dialogue, dramatic action and even the songs were developed in workshops by the performers at the New York Shakespeare Festival. The "one-actor" production has also enjoyed a small but steady rise in popularity since the early seventies. Gilda Radner, Lili Tomlin, Whoopie Goldberg, Jackie Mason and Bill Irwin have enjoyed success as the stars of plays based on material that showcases their particular outlooks on life, material that they themselves have personally developed and edited.

Edwin Drood, the Royal Shakespeare Company's Broadway success, encouraged at least some degree of audience participation through its use of an audience-selected ending.

The "earthy" content of material presented in "built plays" performed by Environmental groups has certainly encouraged the mainstream theatre to take more chances on works which, prior to the late sixties and middle seventies, would have been labeled excessively "risque" or obscene.

Playwrights like David Mamet, David Rabe, and Sam Shepard were found to be commercially successful. Had it not been for the ground-breaking work done by the New York avant-garde of the 60s and 70s these playwrights possibly would not have been given a hearing. Plays like A Lie of the Mind, Glenarry Glen Ross, and Hurly Burly reflect a post-Environmental willingness to present truly "adult," if marginally vulgar or morally ambiguous themes.

Environmentally trained actors are enjoying some success in the professional worlds of theatre and cinema. Performers like Willem Dafoe, Spalding Gray, Joan MacIntosh and even Andre Gregory are enjoying solid careers in both media. Some even bask in the "movie star" status, while others seek out roles in important and controversial films, or Broadway plays. Joe Chaikin still finds himself in demand as a director, and at the time of this writing was planning a production of Waiting for Godot, to open at the Mark Taper Forum in Los Angeles in early 1990.

The Environmental Theatre movement used many concepts of Artaud and Grotowski. The radically unconventional concepts of space, the role of the actor, actor-audience relationship and script notions were popularized.

Joe Chaikin believes that the socio-economic trends inspired by the Republican presidency of the 1980s have dampened Environmental Theatre activity. In his words:

Because of the current and recent presidencies there is no [advance in] culture at all and no impulse toward culture. It is all missing; we are totally missing culture. In the early sixties and seventies there was more of a sense of culture as well as opportunity for expression and change--in addition to experimentation...there is no theatre today that resembles the Environmental Theatre of the sixties and seventies. However, it is like the Phoenix-bird: it had died but it will rise again, it will suddenly be born again. When we change our government the Environmental Theatre will be born again. Now, we are perceived as being slightly suspicious or subversive.¹⁰

Director Leo Shapiro revealed similar sentiments.

Environmental Theatre is transforming and keeps going. We are, however, being forced out of the culture by the ruling class; they have taken away our funding. It has been a conscious effort on their part. I'm too controversial now, so it is very tough for me to get support. The counter-culture has almost been wiped out but we survived and somehow will go on.¹¹

On the future of Environmental Theatre, Richard Schechner feels that it has already been absorbed by present-day culture.

The basic idea of Environmental Theatre is not only that the performer is telling somebody else a story, but that the performer is also telling his or her own story; it is not done for an audience, it is done with an audience. This has irrevocably changed the modern theatre. The six axioms of Environmental Theatre, to a certain extent, have been taken over by popular

entertainment, i.e. rock concerts, professional wrestling and theme parks...Environmental Theatre cannot be completely absorbed by mainstream theatre because the mainstream theatre continues to be reactionary and conservative...but the idea of a play as an exercise-- "stand up and let's play a game," as opposed to the old method of "sit down and I'll tell you a story"--is now completely accepted in the mainstream. That was some of Environmental Theatre's influence...An important progenitor of that movement was Jerry Rojo, and if one were to study him one would learn how to make theatrical spaces that express and contain mise-en-scene, and include audiences in a way that is cubic and 3-dimensional, post-modern and participatory and fully expressive of popular culture. Very few people today are involved in 2-dimensional elitist theatre as opposed to the millions who are participating in the popular kind of stuff that grew out of the type of theatre that Jerry and I made and helped to develop.¹²

Rojo's development and formulation of an Environmental curriculum and training method for the University of Connecticut students of the theatre has influenced other schools, e.g., Wesleyan and Villanova, in the formulation of such programs. He has designed theatre spaces for many other schools as well. Many other colleges and universities, among them the State University of New York at New Paltz and Villanova University, have begun to show interest in initiating an Environmental Theatre curriculum, and the "Black Box" type of theatre is being included in many Fine Arts complexes across the country.

In many respects the Environmental form of theatre, with its unique approach to actor-audience relationship and actor-character relationship, has seeped into American culture and done much to influence main-stream proscenium-oriented theatre. Since the late sixties, much of conventional theatre has generally changed in presentation

and style, in story content, in actor performance and especially in its handling of space and mise-en-scene. The work of Jerry Rojo has certainly encouraged experimentation in the theatre world.

Rojo also had a very productive career as a theatre architectural consultant, and was active as a designer and builder of alternative theatre spaces. When he acted as a consultant, he provided a service which entailed appraising existing theatrical and non-theatrical buildings and evaluating all possibilities of converting these spaces into working theatres. In this capacity he worked on a variety of projects. These included creating fixed environments or designing a system within which a space could easily adapt to the needs of different kinds of performances, i.e., Theatrical, Musical, etc. Despite his versatility and the diversity of these projects, there is a certain "Rojo-look" to any environmental setting with which he has been associated. It was this style that helped to establish what was in vogue in the theatre of the late 60s and early 70s. Many regional university theatres which experiment with environmental theatre production techniques utilize his architectural approach as a "watershed." The fact that Rojo was in such demand in the area of architectural consulting to some extent mirrors the general public acceptance of alternative theatre forms. Many of the facilities on which he worked as consultant are still functioning theatre complexes. Today Rojo feels very confident that his

"Environmental Theatre Company" design group could have become a thriving business, had he and his associates been willing to devote the time to this demanding project.

Rojo currently is beginning work on designing a dance environment for the Korean National Dance Company, which is scheduled to perform in Stamford, Connecticut in March of 1990. He is clearly and definitely not putting any restrictions on his future activities in the theatre.

Appendix A. MY WORKING RELATIONSHIP WITH JERRY ROJO

I first met Jerry Rojo at the University of Connecticut in the fall of 1971. He was, as a matter of fact, the first professor I met during my first semester at the Storrs campus of the university. "Introduction of Stagecraft" was the first theatre class that I had, and I was not really ready for it. Rojo was very quiet and reserved but extremely demanding and required a great deal of work from his students. Many of his assigned projects included mechanical drawing, which was totally foreign to me. After class on the first day I went to him and informed him that I did not know anything about drafting techniques. Professor Rojo quietly said, "Gee, that's too bad. I guess you won't be able to pass the course." The class was mandatory for any theatre major at the university. I spent the next three weeks studying with my brother, who, fortunately for me, taught industrial arts at a nearby secondary school.

My first exposure to a take-home exam came from Professor Rojo. At the time, I thought that we were finally getting a much-deserved break. With the help of two other students in the class, it took me three straight days to finish the work and a large case in which to carry the drawings, renderings, papers and scale-model sets into Rojo's office.

The most memorable experience in the class for me, however, was my final project. For this, I staged a

"Happening" during one of his class periods. I dressed up in a costume reminiscent of Little Lord Fauntleroy, and I placed children's books and games at various locations around the classroom. I had set up a film projector by means of which I showed some of my favorite cartoons, including Bugs Bunny and Daffy Duck. My fellow classmates had no idea that they would find their classroom decorated with objects that I hoped would stimulate memories of their childhood. Rojo had stipulated that I could in no way direct the students in their activities; I could present myself and the materials, but whatever happened as a result had to be structured by my surprised fellow students. It took about ten minutes for the class to realize that this would be no ordinary session and that they were free to explore the room and use the materials to whatever end they wanted. Slowly the "Happening" built in intensity until everyone was involved in some type of activity involving the objects I supplied. At the end of the period, the class consensus was to remain another hour or so to finish working with a puzzle or playing some game and to watch more cartoons. I felt that this meant my experiment had been a success. This experience was the one event that I really enjoyed during my studies with Jerry Rojo in the area of stagecraft.

I did not take any course with Professor Rojo for another eighteen months. We were friendly, but I kept what I felt was a safe distance. I was studying with the more

conventional professors in the department and was making, I felt, little progress in my development as a performer. I bumped into Jerry one day and he invited me to observe a workshop production which he was directing, a loosely adapted version of Bertolt Brecht's Baal.

The Mobius Theatre, which Rojo had designed and was constructing within the University's Fine Art Center, was not quite finished. Consequently, Ball Games, as Rojo called it, was presented in the art studio annex adjacent to the main complex.

My own previous experience in the theatre was limited to my high school dramatics club and about three semesters of the traditional training in acting and directing, mentioned above. As I entered the art studio space, I wondered where the stage was. The space was wide open, brightly lit, with a few mats placed randomly about the environment. I was told, before entering, to be willing to move about freely during the performance, as I might find myself within an acting area. The actors already in the environment appeared to be in a trance-like state, mumbling curse words and undulating to some mysterious rhythm as they moved about the studio. I was a bit apprehensive: was I going to see a play or witness some sort of Gestalt therapy group?

Without warning, the play began. The performance vindicated my apprehension in many ways. The performers practically ignored the script, seeming to use it only to

serve their personal needs as they stormed about wearing nothing but cut-off denim shorts. At one point, a scowling actor confronted me, exposed his genitals, and spat in the general direction of my feet. Heeding the usher's earlier warning, I moved quickly to the back of the space. I will never forget the look on the face of the very straight-laced and elderly female voice instructor as the still scowling performer dangled his genitalia not two inches from her face.

Leaving the theatre that evening, I recall wondering what the whole thing was truly about. I was frightened, excited and shocked; these were sensations that few previously observed theatrical productions had elicited from me. I was highly impressed with the way the actors had seemed to be completely connected with their work; and they took many chances willingly and easily. I wanted to be able to work like that. There seemed to be little that I could hold onto when I was playing King Lear for my more traditionally-oriented acting class. These performers were portraying themselves, and I felt that this would be a good way for me to explore my potential as an artist.

The very next day, I talked with Rojo. I told him that I was confused but excited. He informed me that he planned to continue his workshop in the fall of 1973. The group was going through substantial personnel changes, and he invited me to join the group "workout" with his actors to determine whether my interest would grow.

In September of 1973, I began an intense two-year relationship with Jerry Rojo and his group, and witnessed first-hand the process of rehearsing and producing environmental theatre pieces. The following semester, the group was to move into its new home, the Mobius Theatre, which had been completed in the fall of 1971. Its technical director was Robert McCaw; its architect-advisor, Richard Swibold.¹

The first year was spent primarily in learning Rojo's process of production. We did not touch a script for the first three months. The group met every day for three hours, five days a week; we spent that time learning warm-up routines, improvising and playing "theatre games." The three-hour workshop would begin with a period of about forty-five minutes during which actors would spend time "getting into themselves" by doing warm-up routines that were half structured by Rojo and half structured by the individual performer. When that was finished we would all come together in a circle and discuss our feelings about anything the group had been working on, what we might work on in the future, and any personal problems anyone might have. This usually took about twenty minutes, and copious notes were taken at each discussion. The rest of the time was spent working at improvisational theatre games. The whole process afforded me a true sense of awakening. I felt connected to the work and that I was on the right path to

developing my artistic sensibilities. At times it was very athletic and at other times it was downright vicious.

The "Meal Game" was one of the more violent improvisations that we participated in during our beginning months. All of the lights in the theatre were turned out except for one, a pin-spot which shone directly over the middle of the theatre's central platform. All the members of the group would retire into the darkness and the nooks and crannies of the theatre. One at a time, an actor would come down onto the center platform and lie down in the tiny pool of light. In the meantime, the rest of the group would be recreating their "psych-animals," characters developed in earlier workshops. The group sounding like a pack of wild beasts, would slowly converge on their meal, center stage. It would then "devour" our fellow actor in a savage fury. We were allowed to get quite wild and rough, instructed to take things as far as we could without actually drawing blood. We could bite and claw and some of the ensemble members would be physically hurt or just mentally unable to continue in the exercise. I myself found this to be a truly terrifying experience. On the other hand we had games in which we would learn to love one another and to give each other as much pleasure as we could. "The Ultimate Caress" was one such improvisation. One at a time each actor in the group would choose five of six members of the ensemble to hold them and caress them in a way that would afford total comfort and pleasure to that individual. The group would

allow the selected performer to actually lie upon the rest of the actors in a posture of total relaxation. He or she would then be literally stripped and stroked until a state of total pleasure could be attained.

There were a number of such games that were explored by the group, and many times blood was drawn and erections were raised. At first they seemed to have no connection to theatre. With the long hours of strenuous warm-up routines it seemed more as though the students were preparing for some athletic event. I slowly realized that we were building a form of group understanding and discovering our home, the Mobius Theatre. At the end of the first three months, my body was in the best shape that it had ever been in. Jerry quietly inspired a strong work ethic and as usual was very demanding in a loving, parental fashion. An individual was not allowed to miss more than three workshop sessions, and to the best of my recollection nobody missed a single day. I felt genuinely connected to the work and believed that I had at last found a way to explore myself as a performer. The workshop became the centerpiece of my life and I spent most of my time, when not actually in the workshop, thinking about what had occurred at previous sessions and wondering what to expect at the next. I did not care at all if we ever performed in front of a live audience; the training process was all that mattered to me. I had found my niche and felt that I was beginning to grow as an actor.

After workshop Jerry would occasionally take the whole group out to a local bar for sandwiches and beer. I would not truly understand the significance of this ritual until I began to research Rojo's life. (This was of course reminiscent of earlier visits to bars with his father.) What I did notice at the time was that work within courses along more conventional lines, like classes in "Shakespeare for the Actor" and Voice, began to steadily improve. Professors who had had little respect for my previous work made comments to the effect that I was showing a strong improvement in my abilities to perform in more classical roles. Consequently I was even cast several times in the department's main-stage productions. Some roles I accepted, and others I did not because they would have interfered with my workshop schedule. One production that I participated in was The Mandrake by Niccolo Machiavelli, for which Rojo designed a magnificent Italian Renaissance village as the set. I was kept very busy during those years (1973-1975), and through working with Rojo I felt that I could now tackle any type of role.

After several months of getting to know the work and each other, the group began to look for suitable scripts. There was a long period of deliberation, after which we finally decided to work with the Oresteia by Aeschylus.

Rojo is not a man to be hurried, and we worked at paraphrasing scenes or adapting and presenting scenes in ways which could facilitate a more personal involvement for

the group. Each actor would select a scene and study it at home. Then, during the workshop, he or she would direct it according to his or her unique vision of how the scene could be presented. Anybody who witnessed these loose adaptations would have had difficulty in recognizing much of the original script by Aeschylus, although the fundamental essence of the scene was clearly retained or even enhanced. We would spend long hours working and re-working these scenes. The fact that Rojo would actually allow me to direct a scene that was to be performed in front of the entire university's audience gave me great confidence.

Jerry felt that the piece was not truly ready for the performance dates set by the University's theatre department. Unabashed, he entitled the piece Our House, A Work in Progress, and presented it for two weeks so that the group could acquire some actual performance experience. The production was a total success from the group's point of view, and many from the university's academic community completely agreed. There were, however, a number of more conservative professors who felt that this piece worked against the very grain of theatrical endeavor, and I will never forget the expressions on the faces of these people when they finally found out what we had been up to for all of those months.

The closing of this production coincided with the completion of my work for a bachelor's degree. I felt that there was a great deal more to learn from this talented

director, and accordingly I applied to the Theatre Department of the Graduate School to study the history of theatre, but primarily to work with Rojo. He had said that he would be thrilled to have me back for another year and would do all that he could to help me to be accepted by the department as a graduate student. I was admitted unconditionally. I think that it is important to note that during the summer between my first and second year with the group, I had found work with a professional summer-stock theatre group, the Mount Washington Valley Repertory Company, as an acting apprentice. (This group included many talented professionals who are today still working extensively in film and theatre.) Even though I was hired as an apprentice I managed to secure several fine roles, including leading parts in the company's productions. They were very impressed with my ability to feel completely at home and at ease on stage and to take chances as a performer. To me this was proof positive that Rojo's training had enabled me to grow as an artist. It was a far cry from the year before, when I was unable to get cast in any of the amateur productions at the university.

In the fall of 1974, I began my studies toward a Master's degree. I also began to work with Jerry Rojo on his next production to be presented in the Mobius Theatre. I was fortunate in that Jerry had selected me to be his Assistant Director. Consequently, I was able to spend more time with him, evaluating the work that went on in rehearsal

sessions and workshops and helping him plan for future projects. The group was composed of about 12 performers--four "holdovers" from the previous year and eight new members. The fact that so many new actors had joined the group made it necessary to practically begin the ensemble process all over again.

As we had the year before we spent three hours a day, five days a week, exploring the space and each other without the use of a script. As always, Rojo demanded total commitment and tough physical training. In the course of the first three months, four actors dropped out for one reason or another. At the end of this period, with what the group considered to be its final core, we began to look at possible scripts. Ubu Roi by Alfred Jarry was chosen as one source for words and themes. The actors were again instructed to select scenes and form a "directorial concept;" then, using members from the group, each actor directed his or her scene in the workshop.

The group also developed an interest in the Nixon Watergate tapes, as they were much in the news at the time, and the political scandal seemed analogous to some of the concepts Jarry presented in Ubu Roi. The group began formulating scenes that included aspects of both works. Each member of the group would direct his "composite" scene as it suited him, and we spent months working on adapting these scenes to the group and the space.

The final production consisted of a sequence of the best-developed scenes presented in the order that the ensemble felt to be most effective, paying no attention to linear plot line. The group wanted a name for the piece that conveyed an image of the original sources of inspiration (Ubu Roi and the Nixon tapes), but one which was unique to us, as we were certainly not presenting these works in any way close to a traditional approach. The Big Enchilada, an appellation frequently used by John Mitchell on the Nixon tapes, seemed appropriate to many of the images that our workshop had developed.

As Rojo himself has said of some of the non-matrixed work developed in one of the scenes from the production in his book Theatres, Spaces, Environments,

In the production a performer playing a ghost-like seductress performed a ballet nude with flashlights strapped to her wrists. Delivering fragments of Shakespearean ghost dialogue she danced among the audience with only the lights from the flashlights reflecting off her body and the space around her. As in this production, lighting effects used in this performance are generally discovered in progress of workshops and rehearsal rather than being logically preconceived at the outset. In effect, such "unnatural" non-matrixed use of lights is an act of confrontation or transgression because the "unnatural" effect initiates a trauma that ultimately draws attention to itself. Here one thinks of Brecht's concept of alienation and Grotowski's idea of transgression.²

The performance, then, was a non-structured presentation of scenes. Each member of the group developed one theme, and the group interacted in the presentation of the mise-en-scene. Like Our House, the production opened many eyes within the university's theatre department,

dividing students and professors into two camps, those who considered it a complete success and those who felt that it was not even theatre.

It is unfortunate that the research material connected with this production is scant and difficult to find. A videotape of the production of The Big Enchilada made the following summer does exist; however, it is not readily available to the public.

Richard Schechner had been asked to attend a performance of The Big Enchilada, and afterwards he was invited by Jerry to lead the group in a workshop. It was a big day for me when I realized that a famous New York director was going to conduct a session with our ensemble. Jerry decided that he would remain completely in the background, and Schechner took over with ease. It was clear that we were all speaking the same language; it was also plain to see that he was a completely different personality from Jerry. If Jerry could be viewed as a benevolent father, then Schechner would be the relentless mercenary. He worked furiously at every turn to confront the actors and to push them to their limits. I was very much more reserved than usual at this session and felt that I had better stay out of his way. At one point we had a hand beauty contest, and as I pushed my hand into the already formed ring of hands, Schechner turned to me and said sternly, "Hey, you, we don't need any stars around here." That shocked me a little but it was nothing compared to another incident

during which one of the group members said that she felt that she had discussed her relationship with her mother in enough detail. Schechner stopped everything and focused on her. He pushed and probed and prodded until the actress was completely in tears and asked, for the first time ever, to leave a workshop. Schechner quickly followed her out the door, apologized and told her that he would like to work with her in New York. "Work with you," she retorted, "I don't ever want to see you again."

This reminded me of a story Jerry told about Richard, which took place when he was studying with him at Tulane. Schechner was in the middle of one of his customary bouts of belittling one of his students for not keeping up with class, when she threw a bottle at him. I would say that the main difference between a Rojo and a Schechner workshop was that Jerry let the actors do their own work within the discipline of the workshop ethic, whereas Schechner completely dominated his actors and fiercely drove them towards his own goals.

I was truly sad when my two years of working with Rojo came to an end. On the other hand, I felt that I was truly prepared to compete and to face the rigors of the professional theatre in New York City.

As I made the rounds my first year in New York, everybody knew who Rojo was when they asked where and with whom I had trained. I secured a position with a group that was produced and directed by Ann Bogart, then a fledgling

director, who deeply admired the work of Jerry Rojo. She worked in a similar manner and was always ready to take any suggestions I had concerning the structure of a workshop or how to approach scripts that we were working with. I also managed to procure several paying jobs on the side, with children's theatre groups and summer stock companies.

After working with Bogart for nearly a year I decided that I would try to approach acting from a different point of view. I began to study the Method at the Strasberg institute, with Ernie Martin, and I also worked with people from the Actors Studio. Dr. Michael Shulman had been a director there but had struck out on his own and formed his own acting school, The Performing Gallery. In college, I had always been interested in Stanislavski's Method and had worked with several professors who taught this technique of acting. Although I enjoyed utilizing my Method training, I was not able to get cast in many paying jobs, and it seemed that the training I had received working with Rojo had somehow made me a more marketable actor. The more time that passed between my studies with Jerry and the present, the less I was able to work in the "real" theatre world.

I should like to mention, at this point, some of the major differences between these two approaches to preparing a theatrical performance. In the Method, one of the most important goals of an actor is to present the character as it fits into the scheme of the play and the way that it is presented by the playwright. In the Rojo system, the actor

himself and his personality are of the utmost importance. In other words, in the Method, the actor brings himself to the role; in the environmental approach, the performer brings the role to himself. While both systems are concerned with the actor's subconscious mind, they utilize very different techniques for reaching into the inner depths of the mind. The Method approach is highly cerebral. Actors, using exercises involving emotional recall and sense memory, try to re-create real emotions buried within the subconscious. They explore themselves mentally and attempt to control and harness their own emotions. The Rojo system is more physically oriented. "What I'm interested in is the body and the life that is around it and the life that has been around it in the past."³ The exercises Rojo's actors use are extremely physical. The performers exert their bodies to the limit in order to explore situations which their bodies have never known; thus they elicit newly discovered emotions. They attempt to create emotion and then to explode it to see how far they can take it.

Grotesque physicalizations, or signs, as we call them, are an outward expression of the body of some deep rooted emotion. When they are good they make me wonder, what the hell was that.⁴

This, in a way, is the exact opposite of the Method's inner monologue. A Method actor is always concerned that he/she fulfills the demands of the script.

In the environmental theatre of Jerry Rojo, the script is used to fulfill the demands of the actor. In the

well-known Method exercise, "Magic If," the goal of the actor is to imagine what it would be like if he were in the situation of the character in the play; in effect, you must always try to be the character. Rojo's actors never think in terms of someone else's situation or experiences, but rather think in terms of how or by what means the circumstances in a play can lead them into some discovery about themselves. Rather than be the character, they try always to be true to themselves. A good Method actor must learn to fit into a director's overall central metaphor for a play. Method actors must learn to take direction, and learn how to use it to adapt their performances to fit in with the rest of the actors. Rojo's actors, with the help of a thoroughly trained ensemble behind them, give directions to the group to help the individual to attain the personal goals he is trying to achieve through the script. (Shades of Zen!)

A Method actor must inevitably work with a set that is conceived and built by the director and the designer. He must learn to work only in areas that are specified as acting areas. In Rojo's environmental approach, the actors explore the entire theatre, and are constantly trying to change the values of the space to improve on their own personal vision of a scene. In the Method, there is also an attempt to bring out and develop one's personal charisma: the old "use everything that you have" approach. Ensemble work is important in the Method, but how can an ensemble

truly mature and develop when its actors are only together for a few months. Although the individual's needs are very important, in a Rojo production, these needs are usually achieved through the work and cooperation of an ensemble that has been carefully and meticulously formed and developed over thousands of workshop hours. In the end, one must always give over to the group in a Rojo theatre piece.

A Method actor is supposed to know how to work with different costumes and to allow them to inspire certain physical mannerisms; from an environmental point of view, an actor's body is his costume and his body itself must change for each new project. A Method actor works from a matrixed approach, and endeavors to build on work that has gone before. The work of the director, the designer, and even imitation of the work of another actor in a major role (e.g., Laurence Oliver's Hamlet) are employed. An environmental actor always works from a non-matrixed interpretation and tries to achieve an idea or expression that is completely new. Finally, I feel that in a number of respects an environmental actor is better prepared to face the rigors of the professional theatre. He is always ready to perform in every moment on stage. Time spent endlessly improvising enables him to create easily; his life is a performance.

I have worked for many years as an actor and director, in Off-Broadway, Off-Off-Broadway, university and community productions. It is a fact of life that in this

business people come into your life and go out of it with regularity. Sometimes I encounter people I have worked with, and they do not remember me. At other times I may run into people I cannot remember. What I will always remember are the people who were in the groups that worked with Rojo. They are probably the professional equivalent of old army buddies. Whenever I see them, which these days is very seldom, we pick right up where we left off, just as though we had never been apart. In many ways I feel that I know them better than my own family.

Appendix B. A CHRONOLOGY OF THE WORK OF JERRY ROJO

DESIGNER/DIRECTOR/PROFESSOR/THEATRE ARCHITECTURE

<u>EDUCATION</u>	MFA, 1960, Tulane University; BA, 1957, Lake Forest College.
<u>UNIVERSITY EXPERIENCE</u>	Professor Emeritus of Dramatic Arts; Professor, University of Connecticut, 1978. Head of Department of Dramatic Arts; Professor, University of Connecticut, Storrs, Connecticut, 1978 to 1985. Associate Professor of Dramatic Arts; University of Connecticut, Storrs, Connecticut, 1961 to 1978. Instructor of Theatre; University of Omaha, Nebraska, 1960 to 1961.
<u>STAGE DESIGNS</u> (Off-Broadway; Regional Theatre)	Designed set for <u>Friar Bacon/Bungay</u>, R. Green, for Wesleyan University; Connecticut, April 1989. Designed set for <u>Class C Trial</u>, R. Cornish, for Stamford Theatre Works; April 1989. Steve Karp, Director. Designed set for <u>The Three Sisters</u>, A. Chekhov, for Trinity College; Hartford, Connecticut, October 1988. Designed set for <u>Temptation</u>, V. Havel, for the Public Theatre; New York City, March 1989. Joe Papp, Producer; Jiri Zizka, Director. Designed set for <u>The Misanthrope</u> for the Blue Heron Theatre; New York City, May 1988. Designed environment for <u>Dr. Charcot's Hysteria</u> (original play) for Theatre/Dance Department, Trinity College; Hartford, Connecticut, April 1988.

Designed set for Dr. Faustus for Shaliko Company at La Mama; New York City, April 1988. Leo Shapiro, Director.

Designed set for The Misanthrope for the Blue Heron Theatre; New York City, May 1988.

Designed set for Virgin Forest, the Judy Dworin Dance Company, Austin Arts Center; Hartford, Connecticut, October 1987.

Served as environmental theatre consultant to Arthur Kopit on The Bell Witch Variations, Austin Peay State University Center for Arts; Tennessee, May 1987.

Designed setting for The Yellow House (revised), Shaliko Company; Theatre of Nations (international festival by invitation); USITT, Baltimore, Maryland, June 1986.

Architectural design for Fleet Colonial Faire-Providence 350; Providence, Rhode Island, June 1986.

Designed setting for The Yellow House; Van Gogh Project; La Mama ETC and Shaliko Company; New York City, February 1986. Leo Shapiro, Director.

Designed environment for Prometheus Project, Performing Garage; New York City, December 1985. Richard Schechner, Director.

Designed scenery for Norman. Is That You? for Silhouette Dinner Theatre; Hartford, Connecticut, September 1983. Henry Thomas, Director.

Designed scenery for Front Street for Silhouette Dinner Theatre; Hartford, Connecticut, July 1983. Bob Dio, Director.

Designed scenery for A Body of Bricks at the ART ON PARK Theatre; New York City, September 1980. Joan Evans, Director.

Environment for The Balcony, J. Genet, Performance Group; New York City, November 1979. Co-designer with Richard Schechner.

Set for Scapino, Summerstage; Hartford, Connecticut, 1978. R. Shoemaker, Director.

Set for Three Sisters, A Chekhov, Stage West; Springfield, Massachusetts, 1978. Rae Allen, Director.

Set for A Christmas Carol adapted by Rae Allen and Timothy Near, Stage West; West Springfield, Massachusetts, 1977. Timothy Near, Director.

Set for In the Well of the House, C. Marks (author), Public Theatre; New York City, 1977. Joe Papp, Producer; Davey-Marlin Jones, Director.

Set for When We Dead Awaken, H. Ibsen, Stage West, West Springfield, Massachusetts, 1977. Rae Allen, Director.

Set for Sleuth, A. Shaffer, Stage West, West Springfield, Massachusetts, 1976. Grover Dale, Director.

Set for Ghosts, H. Ibsen, for Shaliko Public Theatre; New York City, January 1975. Leo Shapiro, Director.

Co-designer, environment for Mother Courage, B. Brecht, for The Performance Group; New York City, 1974. Richard Schechner, Director.

Environment for Endgame, S. Beckett, the Manhattan Project; New York City, 1973. Andre Gregory, Director.

Environment for A Great Hoss Pistol, Section 10; New York City, 1973. Omar Shapli, Director.

Environment for The Tooth of Crime, S. Shepard, The Performance Group; New York City, 1972. Richard Schechner, Director.

Environment for Commune, The Performance Group; New York City, 1971. Richard Schechner, Director.

Environment for Makbeth, The Performance Group; New York City, 1970. Richard Schechner, Director.

Environment for Dionysus in '69, The Performance Group; New York City, 1969. Richard Schechner, Director.

Scenery for Sourball, R. Shure, Provincetown Theatre; New York City, 1969. James Kerans, Director.

SCENE DESIGNER, SUMMER
STOCK AND EDUCATIONAL THEATRE

Designer, scenery for 62 major productions at the University of Connecticut, Winter and Summer, 1961 to 1985.

Designed scenery for 20 productions at Avondale Summer Theatre. Equity, Indianapolis, Indiana: summer 1959 and 1960.

Designed scenery for three major productions at the University of Omaha; Omaha, Nebraska, 1960 to 1961.

ARCHITECTURAL DESIGNS

Designed performing arts facility in an existing space at Eastern Connecticut State University under construction, 1987.

Designed thrust stage seating for the Clockwork Repertory Theatre; Watertown, Connecticut, 1981.

Designed fixed unit stage for Stage West, Professional Regional Theatre of Springfield, Massachusetts, 1976.

Designed Environmental Theatre for Section 10; Waverly Street, New York City, 1974.

Designed Environmental Tree House for Department of Child Development, University of Connecticut; Storrs, Connecticut, 1973.

Designed Portable Thrust Theatre for University of Connecticut; Storrs, Connecticut, 1972.

Designed Environmental Theatre for University of Connecticut; Storrs, Connecticut. Architect Consultant: Richard Sweibold, 1971.

Designed Open Space Theatre for College of White Plains, 1971.

Designed Touring Environmental Stage for Phoenix Theatre; New York City, 1970.

Designed Environmental Theatre for Sarah Lawrence College; Bronxville, New York. Architects: Warner, Burns, Tone, Lunde; New York City, 1970.

ARCHITECTURAL DESIGNS (STUDIES)

Designed theatre complex for Performing Arts Center of Hartford. Plan to convert the Webster Theatre, Hartford, Connecticut, 1988.

Designed performing arts facility in an existing space at South Central Community College; Connecticut, June 1984.

Developed design concept for performing arts complex for Manchester Community College Foundation; Manchester, Connecticut, 1982.

Designed experimental theatre in the Space for Denver Center Theatre Company at the Performing Arts Center; Denver, Colorado. Ed Call, Artistic Director, 1981.

Designed and consulted on feasibility study for a proscenium theatre complex in an existing space for American University; Washington, D.C., June 1980.

Designed Outdoor Touring Environmental Theatre for Arthur Kopit and Jack McQuiggan; Bicentennial Production, Wesleyan University, summer 1978.

Designed a combined environmental and thrust theatre for American University; Washington, D.C., August 1975.

Modular Theatre System for Brooklyn Academy of Music; Brooklyn, New York, 1973.

Open Space Theatre for The Space, New York City, 1972.

Convertible Environmental Theatre for Murray-Lewis Dance Company, New York City, 1971.

DIRECTING

Directed True West, S. Shepard, for Worcester Forum Theatre; Worcester, Massachusetts, October 1987.

Directed Buried Child for Nutmeg Theatre, University of Connecticut, February 1987.

Directed Agnes of God for Nutmeg Theatre, University of Connecticut, October 1985.

Directed premier production of Ah Bright Wings by Tom Dulack, at the Mobius Theatre, University of Connecticut, December 1984.

Co-directed Emigres, University of Connecticut, September 1979.

Storyville Portraits, an original production based on The Balcony, Mobius Ensemble, University of Connecticut, 1977.

The Big Enchilada, an original production based on Ubu Roi, Mobius Ensemble at Mobius Theatre, University of Connecticut, April 1975.

Our House, A Work in Progress, based on the Oedipus myth, an environmental theatre ensemble production at the Mobius Theatre, University of Connecticut, April 1973.

Baal Games, an environmental theatre ensemble production at Mobius Theatre, University of Connecticut, March 1972.

THEATRE CONSULTANT

Developed a Fine Arts utilization plan for the Higher Education Center, Fine Arts Complex, with J. Franklin; written report, Waterbury, Connecticut, Summer 1988.

Evaluated the Center for the Arts at Austin Peay State University, Tennessee; written report, May 1987.

Evaluated theatre arts projects, grant proposals for Connecticut Commission on the Arts, May 1987.

Evaluated design, faculty member for Tufts University, November 1986.

Evaluated grant proposals for New Works Performing Arts Program, Connecticut Commission on the Arts, September 1985.

Evaluated Sharon Playhouse and Westport Playhouse for Connecticut Commission on the Arts, August 1984.

Evaluated Theatre Department at Wesleyan University, Middletown, Connecticut with Gordon Rogoff and Michael Britwhistle, Fall 1983; written report.

Evaluated the Technical Management position at Center for Arts at Wesleyan University, Middletown, Connecticut, Spring 1983.

Evaluated the graduate theatre program at Villanova University, Pennsylvania, Spring 1983; written report.

Served as advisor to develop existing space into theatre at Emerson College, Boston, Massachusetts, 1981.

Evaluated theatre department at Brooklyn College, Brooklyn, New York, 1976; written report.

Museum of Contemporary Art, architectural planning; Chicago, Illinois, 1976.

Cabaret Theatre at Westbeth, New York City; DMZ Theatre, architectural planning, 1972. Isaiah Schaffer, Director.

University of Delaware, Department of Theatre; architectural planning, 1972.

Educational Facilities laboratories; architectural planning, Allan Green; New York City, 1970.

INVITATIONAL
LECTURES, RESIDENCIES

Invited to serve on director's colloquium by the International Theatre Institute of Poland in Warsaw, with Lloyd Richards, Alan Schneider and Arthur Wagner, Spring 1980.

Selected with Richard Schechner to serve in a colloquium on space. IV Session Mundial de Teatro Naciones, Caracas, Venezuela, Summer 1978.

Invited by Salzburg Seminar in American Studies to teach theatre in Salzburg, Austria, June 1974; U.S. faculty:

Brendan Gill, Criticism, The New Yorker Tom Moore, Directing, Grease, Broadway Joe Walker, Playwriting, Broadway Jerry Rojo, Design, Off-Broadway.

Selected as American Scene Designer to speak at the Third International Organization of Scenographers and Theatre Technicians at Avignon, France, 1973.

With the Performance Group directed a workshop in environmental theatre at American University, Washington, D.C., July 1975.

Delivered lecture series on Environmental Theatre at New York University, October 1973.

Served on Panel to discuss Theatre Space at 37th Annual American Theatre Association, New York City, August 1973.

With the Performance Group in residence at University of British Columbia, Summer 1972.

With the Performance Group in residence at University of Rhode Island, Summer 1971.

With the Performance Group in residence at New York State University at New Paltz, Summer 1970.

EXHIBITIONS

"One Man Show - Retrospect IV
Environmental Designs of Jerry Rojo,:"
Jorgensen Gallery, University of
Connecticut, April 1978.

The Hudson River Museum, Theatrical
Evolution 1776-1976, four of Rojo's
designs selected, Summer 1976.

Contemporary Stage Design, USA, Exhibit
at Lincoln Center, New York City, and
International Tour; invited to exhibit
his design of environment for Makbeth.
Gallery Under Glass, New York City,
1966.

Connecticut Watercolor Society,
Wadsworth Atheneum; Hartford,
Connecticut, 1965.

Norwich Art Show, Norwich Academy;
Norwich, Connecticut, 1964.

PUBLICATIONS

Rojo, Jerry. "Some Principles and Concepts of Environmental Design." In The Making of Theatre, edited by Robert Corrigan. Scott/Foresman and Company, 1981.

Comments published in Symposium on the Training of Theatre Directors, Polish ITI Center. Warsaw, May 1980.

Rojo, Jerry, Brooks McNamara, and Richard Schechner. Theatres, Spaces, Environments. New York: Drama Book Specialists, 1975.

Rojo, Jerry. "Environmental Theatre." In Contemporary Stage Design USA. Middletown: International Theatre Institute of the United States, Wesleyan University Press, 1974.

Four concepts of Environmental Theatre Lighting, Travail Theatril, La Cite, Hiver 1974.

GRANTS

Connecticut Commission on the Arts Grant to develop performing arts center at South Central Community College, 1984.

Connecticut Commission on the Arts Grant to develop seating design for Shetucket Stage Company, 1982.

Connecticut Commission on the Arts Grant to develop a design for an arts center in Manchester, Connecticut in association with Manchester Community College, 1982.

Graduate Research Foundation, University of Connecticut, grant to make videotape of Storyville Portraits, 1977.

Graduate Research Foundation, University of Connecticut, grant to make videotape of The Big Enchilada, June 1975 (completed).

National Endowment for the Arts, grant to do environment for Mother Courage with the Performance Group, New York City, 1975.

HONORS OR DISTINCTIONS

Received the Drama Desk Award for the design of Endgame, New York City, 1973.

Nominated for "Obie" for designs of Tooth of Crime and Endgame, New York City, 1973.

Received with Performance Group, "Obie" Award for Dionysus in '69, New York City, 1969.

Invited member of Phi Kappa Phi, Honorary Fraternity, University of Connecticut Chapter.

ARTISTIC DIRECTOR/
PRODUCING EXPERIENCE

Producing Director of University of Connecticut Nutmeg Theatre, Winter. As Head of Department, served as producer for subscription series; seven productions each year (49 productions) as part of a larger production program, which includes a guest artist series. Budget \$60,000 per annum, 1978 to 1985.

Artistic Director for University of Connecticut Nutmeg Summer Theatre; Storrs, Connecticut; from 1979 to 1985. Three musical and straight plays each season, company of 70. Budget \$90,000-\$115,000.

ILLUSTRATIONS



Figure 1.



Figure 2.



Figure 3.



Figure 4.



Figure 5.



Figure 6.

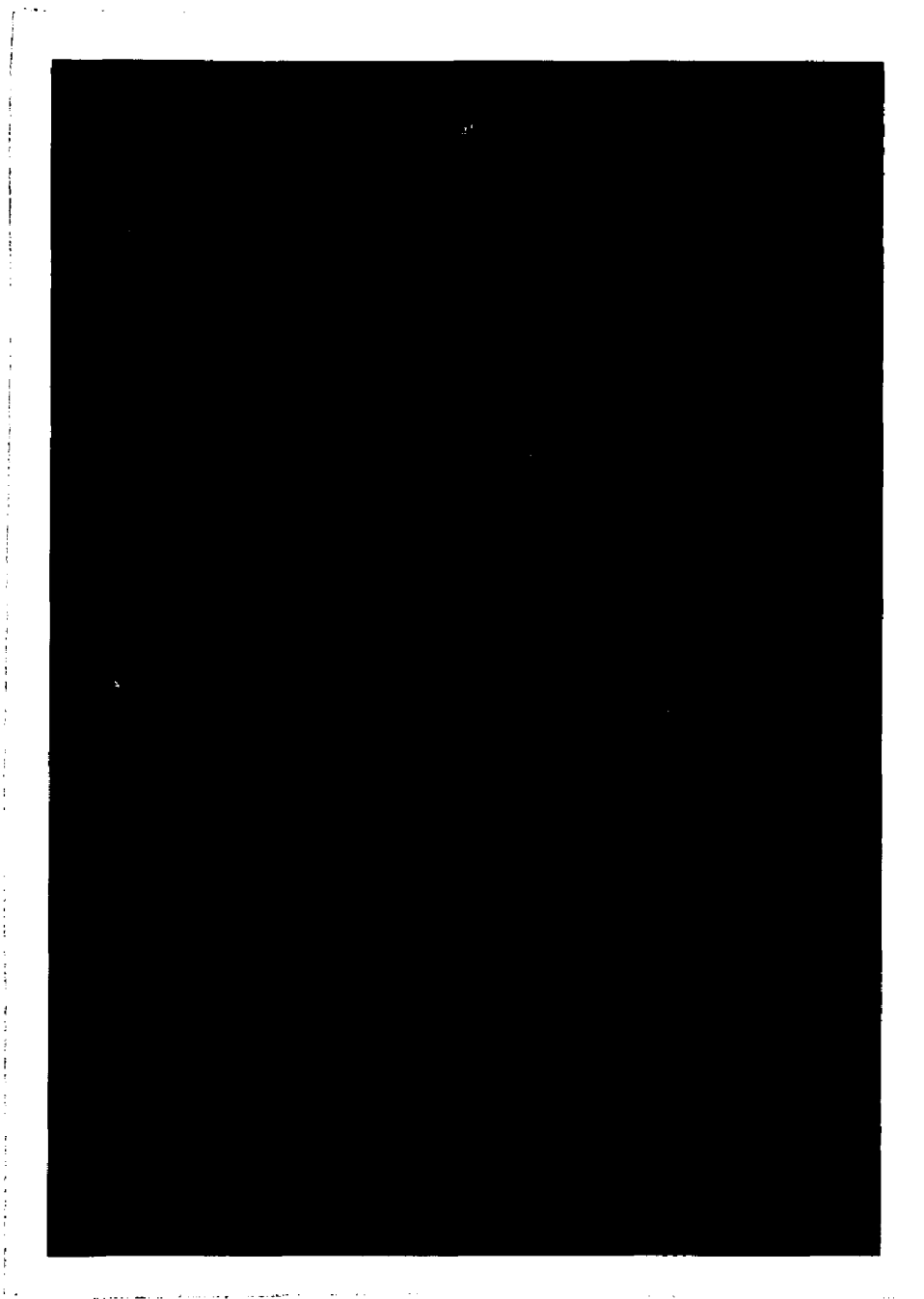


Figure 7.

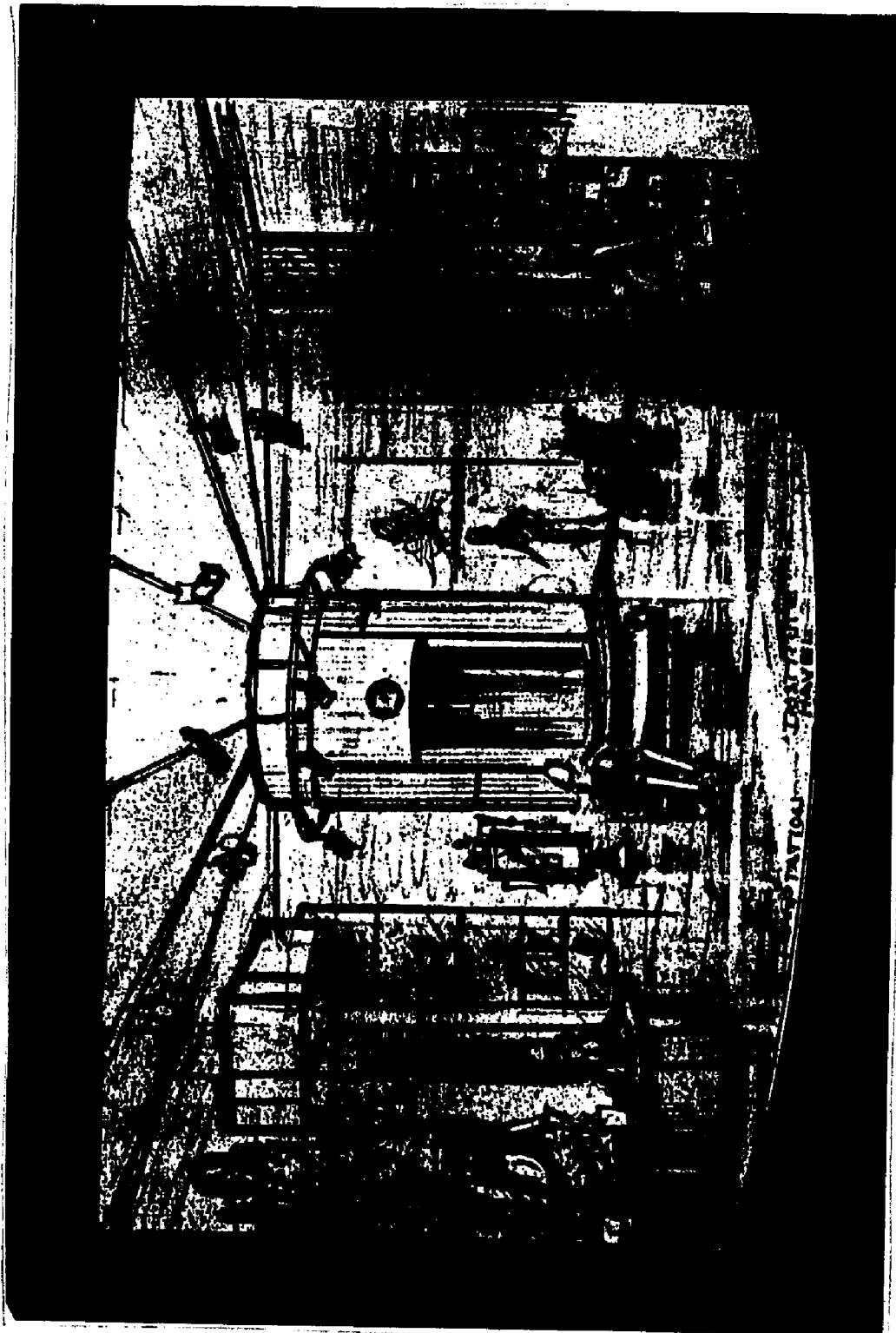


Figure 8.

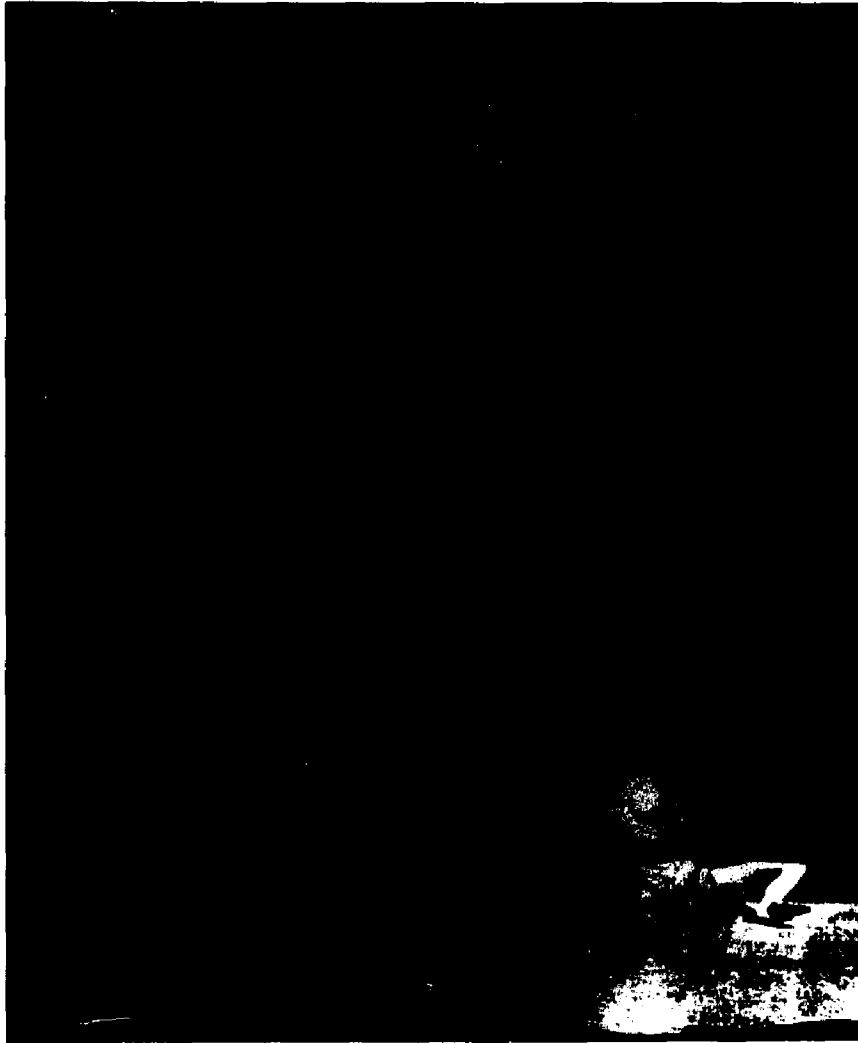


Figure 9.



Figure 10.



Figure 11.

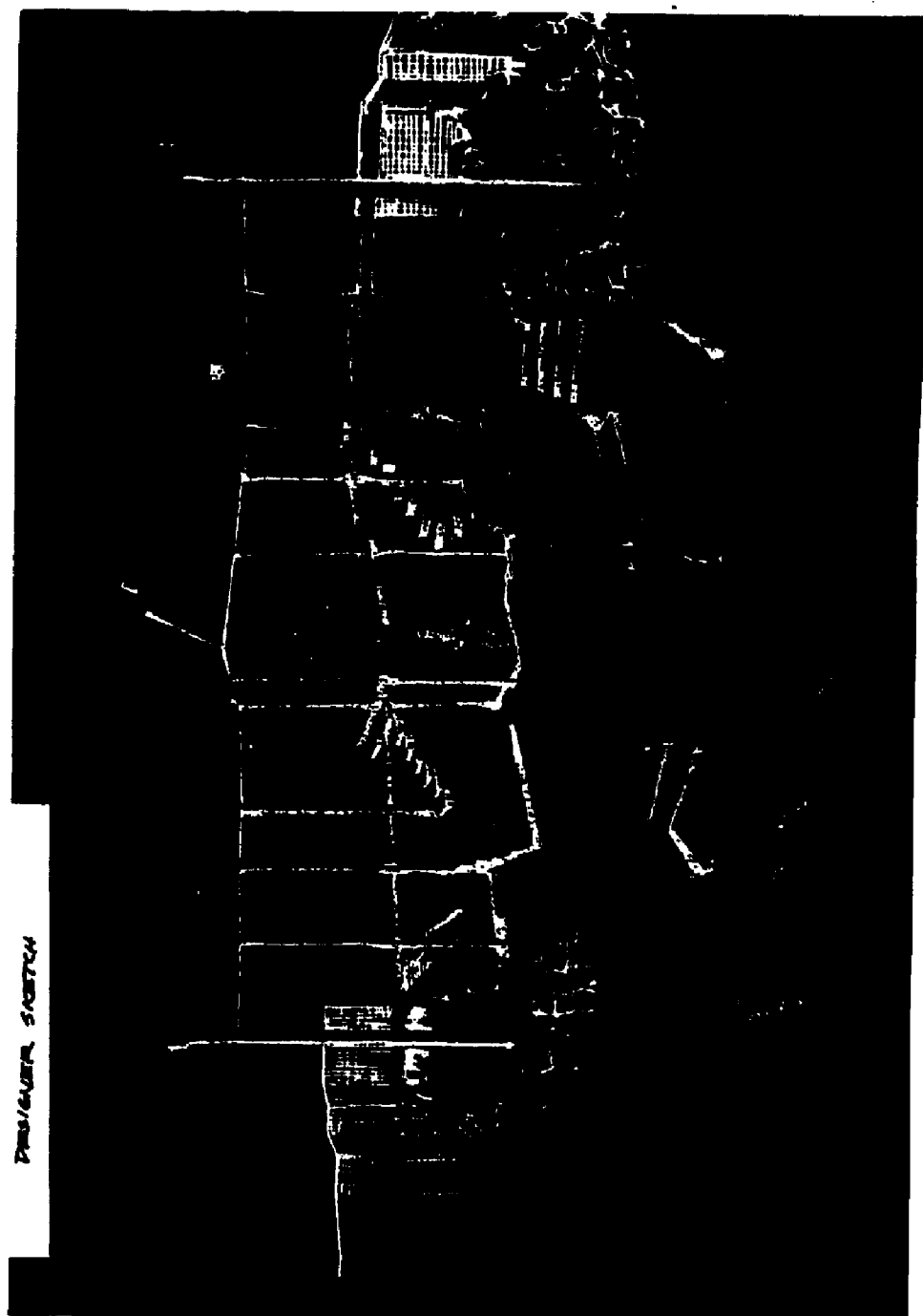


Figure 12.

ENDNOTES

Chapter 1. INTRODUCTION

1. Jerry Rojo, interview with author, Storrs, CT., 10 July 1985.
2. Brooks McNamara, Jerry Rojo, and Richard Schechner, Theatres, Spaces, Environments: Eighteen Projects (New York: Drama Book Specialists, 1975), 20.
3. Ibid., 21.
4. Ibid.
5. Richard Schechner, Environmental Theatre (New York: Hawthorne Books, Inc., 1973), 8-9.
6. Richard Schechner, interview with author, New York, NY., 15 October 1988.
7. Jerry Richard, interview with author, Storrs, CT., 10 July 1985.
8. Brooks McNamara, interview with author, New York, NY., 28 September 1988.
9. Ibid.
10. Jerry Rojo, interview with author, Storrs, CT., 10 July 1985.
11. Richard Schechner, interview with author, New York, NY., 15 October 1988.
12. Ibid.

Chapter 2. FAMILY LIFE AND OTHER EARLY INFLUENCES

1. Jerry Rojo, interview with author, Storrs, CT., 10 July 1985.
2. Ibid.
3. Ibid.
4. Ibid.
5. Ibid.

6. Ibid.
7. Ibid.
8. Ibid.
9. Ibid.
10. Ibid.
11. Ibid.
12. Ibid.
13. Ibid.
14. Ibid.
15. Ibid.
16. Ibid.
17. Ibid.
18. Ibid.
19. Ibid.
20. Ibid.
21. Ibid.
22. Ibid.
23. Ibid.
24. Brooks McNamara, Jerry Rojo, and Richard Schechner, Theatres, Spaces, Environments: Eighteen Projects (New York: Drama Book Specialists, 1975), 157.
25. Jerry Rojo, interview with author, Storrs, CT., 10 July 1985.
26. Brooks McNamara, Jerry Rojo, and Richard Schechner, Theatres, Spaces, Environments: Eighteen Projects (New York: Drama Book Specialists, 1975), 154.
27. Ibid., 158.

Chapter 3. DIONYSUS IN '69

1. Jerry Rojo, interview with author, Storrs, CT., 10 July 1985.
2. Ibid.
3. Ibid.
4. Richard Schechner, interview with author, New York, NY., 15 October 1988.
5. Ibid.
6. Ibid.
7. Brooks McNamara, Jerry Rojo, and Richard Schechner, Theatres, Spaces, Environments: Eighteen Projects (New York: Drama Book Specialists, 1975), 21.
8. Jerry Rojo, interview with author, Storrs, CT., 10 July 1985.
9. Ibid.
10. Brooks McNamara, interview with author, New York, NY., 28 September 1988.
11. Jerry Rojo, interview with author, Storrs, CT., 10 July 1985.
12. Brooks McNamara, Jerry Rojo, and Richard Schechner, Theatres, Spaces, Environments: Eighteen Projects (New York: Drama Book Specialists, 1975), 21.
13. John Lahr, The Village Voice, 13 June 1969.
14. William Raidy, Long Island Press, 14 June 1969.
15. Ross Wetzsteon, The Village Voice, 14 November 1968.
16. Clive Barnes, New York Times, 19 November 1968.
17. Dan Sullivan, New York Times, 7 June 1968.
18. Maurice Blanc, The Village Voice, 30 January 1969.
19. Life Magazine, 4 April 1969.
20. Jerry Rojo, interview with author, Storrs, CT., 10 July 1985.
21. Life Magazine, 4 April 1969.
22. Commonweal Magazine, 24 May 1969.

23. Nathan Cole, The Toronto Daily Star, 16 January 1970.
24. Houston Post, 2 February 1969.

Chapter 4. MAJOR THEATRICAL INFLUENCES ON ROJO

1. Jerry Rojo, interview with author, Storrs, CT., 10 July 1985.
2. Ibid.
3. Brooks McNamara, Jerry Rojo, and Richard Schechner, Theatres, Spaces, Environments: Eighteen Projects (New York: Drama Book Specialists, 1975), 14.
4. Ibid., 16.
5. Jerry Rojo, interview with author, Storrs, CT., 10 July 1985.
6. Ibid.
7. Brooks McNamara, Jerry Rojo, and Richard Schechner, Theatres, Spaces, Environments: Eighteen Projects (New York: Drama Book Specialists, 1975), 19.
8. Antonin Artaud, The Theatre and its Double (New York: Grove Press, 1958), 74.
9. Brooks McNamara, Jerry Rojo, and Richard Schechner, Theatres, Spaces, Environments: Eighteen Projects (New York: Drama Book Specialists, 1975), 21.
10. Antonin Artaud, The Theatre and its Double (New York: Grove Press, 1958), 74.
11. Ibid., 85.
12. Ibid., 134.
13. Ibid., 86.
14. Ibid., 96.
15. Jerzy Grotowski, Towards a Poor Theatre (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1968), 256.
16. Ibid., 258.
17. Ibid., 259.

18. Ibid., 260.

19. Ibid., 261.

20. Ibid.

21. Richard Schechner, Public Domain: Essays on the Theatre (New York: Bobbs-Merrill Co., 1969), 157.

22. Richard Schechner, Environmental Theatre (New York: Hawthorne Books, Inc., 1973), 9-10.

Chapter 5. MAKBETH AND OTHER PERFORMANCE GROUP PRODUCTIONS

1. Richard Schechner, Environmental Theatre (New York: Hawthorne Books, Inc., 1973), 242.

2. Brooks McNamara, Jerry Rojo, and Richard Schechner, Theatres, Spaces, Environments: Eighteen Projects (New York: Drama Book Specialists, 1975), 103.

3. Richard Schechner, Environmental Theatre (New York: Hawthorne Books, Inc., 1973), 100.

4. Jerry Rojo, interview with author, Storrs, CT., 10 July 1985.

5. Brooks McNamara, interview with author, New York, NY., 28 September 1988.

6. Brooks McNamara, Jerry Rojo, and Richard Schechner, Theatres, Spaces, Environments: Eighteen Projects (New York: Drama Book Specialists, 1975), 104.

7. Richard Schechner, Environmental Theatre (New York: Hawthorne Books, Inc., 1973), 108.

8. Ibid., 28-29.

9. Clive Barnes, New York Times, 20 November 1969.

10. Walter Kerr, New York Times, 29 November 1969.

11. The New Yorker Magazine, 3 December 1969.

12. John Lahr, The Village Voice, 25 November 1969.

13. Ibid.

14. Brooks McNamara, Jerry Rojo, and Richard Schechner, Theatres, Spaces, Environments: Eighteen Projects (New York: Drama Book Specialists, 1975), 109.

15. Leo Shapiro, interview with author, New York, NY., 5 December 1988.
16. Richard Schechner, Environmental Theatre (New York: Hawthorne Books, Inc., 1973), 273.
17. Brooks McNamara, Jerry Rojo, and Richard Schechner, Theatres, Spaces, Environments: Eighteen Projects (New York: Drama Book Specialists, 1975), 116.
18. Richard Schechner, Environmental Theatre (New York: Hawthorne Books, Inc., 1973), 21.
19. Brooks McNamara, Jerry Rojo, and Richard Schechner, Theatres, Spaces, Environments: Eighteen Projects (New York: Drama Book Specialists, 1975), 116.
20. Ibid., 129.
21. Mel Gussow, New York Times, 21 December 1970.
22. Richard Schechner, Environmental Theatre (New York: Hawthorne Books, Inc., 1973), 59.
23. Brooks McNamara, Jerry Rojo, and Richard Schechner, Theatres, Spaces, Environments: Eighteen Projects (New York: Drama Book Specialists, 1975), 130.
24. Ibid., 133.
25. Ibid., 136.
26. John Lahr, The Village Voice, 8 March 1973.
27. Clive Barnes, New York Times, 8 March 1973.
28. Walter Kerr, New York Times, 18 March 1973.
29. Richard Schechner, interview with author, New York, NY., 15 October 1988.
30. Brooks McNamara, Jerry Rojo, and Richard Schechner, Theatres, Spaces, Environments: Eighteen Projects (New York: Drama Book Specialists, 1975), 144.
31. Ibid.
32. Ibid., 147.
33. Ibid., 138-145.
34. Ibid.

35. Jerry Rojo, interview with author, Storrs, CT., 6 June 1986.
36. Clive Barnes, New York Times, 26 March 1975.
37. Arthur Sainer, The Village Voice, 28 February 1975.
38. Hartford Courant, 27 July 1975.
39. Jerry Rojo, interview with author, Storrs, CT., 11 December 1989.
40. Ibid.
41. Walter Goodman, New York Times, 28 December 1985.
42. Tish Dace, New York Native, 20 February 1986.
43. Alisa Solomon, The Village Voice, 31 December 1985.
44. Marilyn Stasio, New York Post, 3 January 1986.
45. Richard Schechner, interview with author, New York, NY., 15 October 1988.

Chapter 6. MANHATTAN PROJECT: ENDGAME.

1. Jerry Rojo, interview with author, Storrs, CT., 11 November 1988.
2. Brooks McNamara, Jerry Rojo, and Richard Schechner, Theatres, Spaces, Environments: Eighteen Projects (New York: Drama Book Specialists, 1975), 168.
3. Andre Gregory, interview with author, New York, NY., 30 January 1989.
4. Ibid.
5. Brooks McNamara, interview with author, New York, NY., 28 September 1988.
6. Richard Schechner, interview with author, New York, NY., 15 October 1988.
7. Leo Shapiro, interview with author, New York, NY., 5 December 1988.
8. Joseph Chaikin, interview with author, New York, NY., 4 June 1989.

9. Jerry Rojo, interview with author, New York, NY., 18 April 1989.

10. Andre Gregory, interview with author, New York, NY., 30 January 1989.

11. Clive Barnes, New York Times, 7 February 1973.

12. Walter Kerr, New York Times, 11 February 1973.

13. John Lahr, The Village Voice, 14 February 1973.

Chapter 7. THE GREAT HOSS PISTOL: SECTION 10 THEATRE COMPANY

1. Brooks McNamara, Jerry Rojo, and Richard Schechner, Theatres, Spaces, Environments: Eighteen Projects (New York: Drama Book Specialists, 1975), 168.

2. Ibid., 172.

3. Julius Novick, The Village Voice, 7 March 1974.

4. Leo Shapiro, interview with author, 11 December 1989.

Chapter 8. GHOSTS: THE YELLOW HOUSE: FAUSTUS: SHALIKO COMPANY

1. Leo Shapiro, interview with author, New York, NY., 5 December 1988.

2. Ibid.

3. Ibid.

4. Brooks McNamara, Jerry Rojo, and Richard Schechner, Theatres, Spaces, Environments: Eighteen Projects (New York: Drama Book Specialists, 1975), 178.

5. Ibid., 180.

6. Richard Schechner, interview with author, New York, NY., 15 October 1988.

7. Brooks McNamara, Jerry Rojo, and Richard Schechner, Theatres, Spaces, Environments: Eighteen Projects (New York: Drama Book Specialists, 1975), 178.

8. Clive Barnes, New York Times, 25 April 1975; Julius Novick, The Village Voice, 28 April 1975.

9. Leo Shapiro, interview with author, New York, NY., 5 December 1988.

10. Clive Barnes, New York Times, 25 April 1975.
11. Julius Novick, The Village Voice, 25 April 1975.
12. Leo Shapiro, interview with author, New York, NY., 5 December 1988.
13. Ibid.
14. Ibid.
15. Ibid.
16. John Strausburgh, City Paper, Baltimore, 4 July 1986.
17. Leo Shapiro, interview with author, New York, NY., 5 December 1988.
18. David Bergan, City Paper, Baltimore, 11 July 1986.
19. Albert Bermel, interview with author, New York, NY., 16 April 1986.
20. Jerry Rojo, interview with author, New York, NY., 11 December 1989.
21. Richard Schechner, interview with author, New York, NY., 15 October 1988.
22. Leo Shapiro, interview with author, New York, NY., 5 December 1988.
23. Ibid.
24. Jerry Rojo, interview with author, New York, NY., 18 April 1989.
25. Jonathan Kalb, The Village Voice, 26 April 1988; Mel Gussow, New York Times, 28 April 1988.
26. Jonathan Kalb, The Village Voice, 26 April 1988.
27. Mel Gussow, New York Times, 28 April 1988.
28. Leo Shapiro, interview with author, New York, NY., 5 December 1988.
29. Ibid.

Chapter 9. TEMPTATION

1. Frank Rich, New York Times, 10 April 1989.
2. Jerry Rojo, interview with author, New York, NY., 11 December 1989.
3. Ibid.
4. Jerry Rojo, interview with author, New York, NY., 26 February 1989.
5. Ibid.
6. Jerry Rojo, interview with author, New York, NY., 11 December 1989.
7. Edith Oliver, The New Yorker, 17 April 1989.
8. Frank Rich, New York Times, 10 April 1989.
9. Gordon Rogoff, The Village Voice, 18 April 1989.
10. Edith Oliver, The New Yorker, 17 April 1989.
11. Gordon Rogoff, The Village Voice, 18 April 1989.
12. David Strathairn, interview with author, New York, NY., 18 April 1989.
13. Ibid.

Chapter 10. THE MOBIUS THEATRE

1. New Comprehensive Encyclopedic Dictionary of the English Language, Encyclopedic Edition (New York, 1978).
2. Jack Kroll, Newsweek, 4 April 1970.
3. "Interview, Jerry Rojo," Performing Arts Journal (Volume 1): 25.
4. Brooks McNamara, Jerry Rojo, and Richard Schechner, Theatres, Spaces, Environments: Eighteen Projects (New York: Drama Book Specialists, 1975), 55.
5. Richard Schechner, interview with author, New York, NY., 15 October 1988.
6. Leo Shapiro, interview with author, New York, NY., 5 December 1988.

7. Brooks McNamara, interview with author, New York, NY., 28 September 1988.

8. Andre Gregory, interview with author, New York, NY., 30 January 1989.

9. Robert McDonald, interview with author, Storrs, CT., 21 March 1989.

10. Jerry Rojo, interview with author, New York, NY., 26 February 1989.

Chapter 11. ARCHITECTURAL CONSULTING AND DESIGN

1. "Interview, Jerry Rojo," Performing Arts Journal (Volume 1): 25.

2. Jerry Rojo, interview with author, New York, NY., 11 November 1988.

3. Ibid.

4. Brooks McNamara, Jerry Rojo, and Richard Schechner, Theatres, Spaces, Environments: Eighteen Projects (New York: Drama Book Specialists, 1975), 40.

5. Jerry Rojo, interview with author, Storrs, CT., 10 July 1985.

6. Leo Shapiro, interview with author, New York, NY., 5 December 1988.

7. Brooks McNamara, Jerry Rojo, and Richard Schechner, Theatres, Spaces, Environments: Eighteen Projects (New York: Drama Book Specialists, 1975), 44.

8. Jerry Rojo, interview with author, New York, NY., 11 November 1988.

9. Brooks McNamara, Jerry Rojo, and Richard Schechner, Theatres, Spaces, Environments: Eighteen Projects (New York: Drama Book Specialists, 1975), 59.

10. Jerry Rojo, interview with author, New York, NY., 26 February 1989.

11. Ibid.

12. Jerry Rojo, interview with author, Storrs, CT., 10 July 1985.

Chapter 12. EDUCATOR AND ADMINISTRATOR

1. Jerry Rojo, interview with author, Storrs, CT., 10 July 1985.
2. Ibid.
3. Robert MacDonald, interview with author, Storrs, CT., 21 March 1989.
4. Richard Schechner, interview with author, New York, NY., 15 October 1988.
5. Andre Gregory, interview with author, New York, NY., 30 January 1989.
6. Leo Shapiro, interview with author, New York, NY., 5 December 1988.
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Chapter 13. CONCLUSION

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Appendix A. MY WORKING RELATIONSHIP WITH JERRY ROJO

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