Forward Theatre and Causal Layered Analysis

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Abstract

Storytelling may be useful for communicating futures content to newcomers. Performance is a richly illustrative story demonstration that engages the audience through a greater variety of the senses; it can show scenarios existing in a functioning world, if a temporary one. Causal layered analysis reveals a story's depth of innovation, offering spaces to examine dialogue and action that display behaviour informed by discourse and underlying beliefs and metaphors. Particular emphasis is given to the link between individual balancing behaviours of power (described here as high and low status transactions) and the discourses they represent. Other aspects of communication are briefly examined.

Keywords: Causal layered analysis, Forward theatre, Storytelling, Power, Status transactions

Introduction

Isaac Asimov's (1997, p.13) introduction to robotics was a negative one; in his youth he became interested in them but tired of reading about fictional robots who were "created and destroyed their creator", a theme that persisted until he rendered them mostly harmless with his three laws of robotics, whereby they were built to be incapable of harming humans. Robotics as a topic then developed a richer literary potential. Similarly, common media perceptions of the future often brand it dystopic. Theatre performances can follow Asimov's lead; they too can render future situations, like robots, as 'not always harmful'. Performers can bring to life a range of possibilities, opening the field to include other ways of representing futures informed by futures concepts, research and visioning techniques. The mood can even be a creative,

playful one, as Arthur C. Clarke (1999, p.2) says: "Even if 'future studies' (sic) are merely a form of play, they can be very useful, like play itself. They stretch the mind…"

Carl Barks when creating the 1949 Donald Duck comic "The Sunken Yacht", raised the ship by filling it with ping pong balls pushed through a tube. In his drawings play, communication and foresight converged: the capsized freighter Al Kuwait was raised in 1964 using the same method in Kuwait's harbour. Play can presage reality. Clearly the futures studies field includes many vital and profound areas besides play, but Clarke's description of mind stretching is useful, as this is one aim of Forward Theatre, which is a genre dedicated to presenting performances that offer scenes from scenarios on stage, for audiences to think about and debate (and play with) as they ask the question "how are we to live?' It is possible to discover the extent of mind stretching in a performance by using causal layered analysis on the dialogue and action. The CLA matrix can be used to reveal at what depth of thought we may feel the stretching. It may be felt when ideas challenge the beliefs and framing metaphors that we are comfortable with – how we see the world; or if it suggests power struggles between discourses that we represent and have internalised.

This paper is partly in response to the issue outlined by futurists Jarratt and Mahaffie of communicating their work to their clients and the public. Thompson (1992, p.12), describes the ability of great communicators to "build bridges, or create common ground" with their audiences. Stories are an effective bridging device. In this article I examine some storytelling techniques, and a particular type of storytelling, or story showing: theatrical performance, examining three examples through the lens of CLA to discover the levels of 'stretching' provided by the playwright in the performance.

Storytelling

The value and relevance of stories to futures work with the general public is partly due to the observation that "we more easily identify with events unfolding than we can with philosophical principles", according to Thompson (1992, p.37), who adds that people remember material if they are told stories rather than hearing abstract content. McCarthy and Hatcher (2002, p.104) go further, advising speakers to use stories as "strategies for committing pieces of their presentation to listeners' memories". Thompson emphasises that "…parable, anecdote and storytelling are really the most powerful form of communication, in the sense of the audience being most easily able to project itself right into the story" (1992, p. 38). The author Stephen King (2000, p.125) supports this: "when the reader hears strong echoes of his or her own life and beliefs, he or she is apt to become more interested in the story".

Furthermore, Jarratt and Mahaffie (2009, p.8) recognise that there are already powerful stories "lodged in people's subconscious", suggesting that the notion of reframing take this into account, proposing that "we need to have equally powerful new stories to gain people's attention" (ibid). These need to "make strong enough connections to people's worldviews, that they succeed against the frames and stories that people already have" (ibid). Then it is possible to encourage people to think differently. In working with their clients, Jarratt and Mahaffie have made the story more central to communicating about the future.

McCarthy and Hatcher (2002, p.70) emphasise the need when addressing an audience, to lead the listener clearly "from word to image, image to idea, idea to concept", reminding us that "verbal images also have emotional power" (ibid. p.31). The same structure may be used in storytelling. Thompson also (1992, p.36) suggests that if a "well-told story" involves feelings, then "people will remember what you say". He regards emotional energy as a main ingredient in the historical success of "great social movements, great businesses and great ideas" (ibid. p.28). Kenny (ibid.) advises setting up an "emotional field or tone" in order to "arouse people", outlining a broad emotional smorgasbord available: "all the way from irritation, anger, resentment and conflict on one end, down to the nice emotions like sentimentality, patriotism, goosebumps; the sort of things which happen in soap opera. Any kind of emotion will do" (ibid. p.29). McCarthy and Hatcher (2002, p.191) advise: "do not be afraid to explore any emotional appeals you can incorporate", since not only do listeners respond with feeling to ideas, but also "as we all suspect at certain times, most important decisions are made on the basis of emotional, not rational, commitment" (ibid. p.192).

But stories should not be complicated, particularly if the audience is only listening and viewing without repeated access to a printed copy. Thompson (1992, p.47) advises that "the simpler the story, the clearer the point you make", and further to that, "the right story can make the profound simple, not simplistic", a point worth considering since some futures content tends to the abstract and profound. Considerable effort is necessary to achieve this simplification, however, and Thompson (ibid. p.48) notes that "a communicator is always on the look out for the right way of expressing something, the right story". This also applies to stories that are performed.

One essential tool for simplicity and clarity is the metaphor, which can "cut to the essence of what you're saying", according to Thompson (1992, p.23), adding that a measure of great communicators is the ability to develop great metaphors. One famous example of an archetypal visual metaphor is Ghandi's "traditional loincloth" which communicated a powerful message and mobilised "the emotional commitment of the Indian masses" (ibid. p.28). This example also illustrates the culturally specific nature of some metaphors, to be used in a given context with sensitivity. They can carry the kernel of the message to be imparted through the story. Visual metaphors can not only provide essential detail, but add to the richness of meaning.

Thus stories encourage people to relate more closely to the innovation or scenario presented, and create new frames of reference for audiences to experience them imaginatively and emotionally. They offer a description of events that unfold in front of the audience, with the necessary ingredient of emotion included in the action. It appears more solid if demonstrated in three dimensional movement, with people interacting and showing the story rather than telling it, but still the events have been created, crafted and chosen for the presentation. The stories that we can actually view, use the visual unfolding of the event 'as it happens' to engage us, a rich experiencing of the story – a more concrete, theatrical event.

Stories as performance

Kenny (in Thompson, p.30) reveals the limits of persuasive speech by referring to the strategies of the environmental movement: "you have to do showbiz. It's

no good just putting a rational argument in a cool way. You have to go out in public and put on some kind of show", as demonstrated by the activist members of organisations like Greenpeace, who gain media coverage, so that "we're going to watch it; it's going to get to us" (ibid.). More specifically, screenwriter William Goldman (1985, p.134) describes "what makes a movie work" in terms of moments, suggesting that if the performance can give the audience "half a dozen moments they can remember, and they'll leave the theatre happy". The same applies to live theatre; memorable moments, if attached to the most important elements of a scenario, will stay with the audience, though, as Goldman warns, luck and skill have a lot to do with it.

Putting future stories on stage for audiences is a way of building a bridge to them, partly because it contains specific and concrete elements, such as these described by Klaic (1991, P.46): "live protagonists, spatial organisation, a determined duration, and the degree and kind of lighting." He stresses the physicality of stage performance, showing the world presented as a "functioning world" (ibid.) on stage. It achieves a temporary realism. But although the situation may suggest a functioning world, this realism needs help to reach an audience. As Shurtleff (1980, p.249) says, a dramatic performance must have "heightened reality, selective truth, made dramatic by … the actor". Goldman (1985, p.145) agrees: "Truth is terrific, reality is even better, but believability is best of all. Because without it, truth and reality go right out the window…" Believability enhances the bridge between story and audience. Thompson (1992, p.39) notes that "actors are professional story tellers. They are specialists in bringing life to a bare stage." The stories they show can be scenes from a futures scenario, and they may present innovations that require new ways of thinking at different depths. Causal layered analysis creates a space to examine any new thinking, and offers levels for categorising depth of thought.

Causal layered analysis for analysing performance

Causal layered analysis may be used in a dramatic context to analyse the actions, reactions and dialogue of characters (individual and group) in a crafted performance. Characters are recognised as taking part in, and affected by *events* at the litany level. Their actions, past and present, may be part of the level 2 individual and social *causes* that influence the events at level 1. The characters also have at level 3 their own various *worldviews* (often in conflict with each other), allied to power structures that are institutionalised or struggling, depending on which discourse is dominant in the storyline. Supporting these worldviews are the characters' own separate beliefs at the fourth level of *metaphor*. The institutions with their belief systems portrayed and represented by individuals in any drama, may bear no resemblance to actuality: therein lie the possibilities of challenges and offering new ways of building human relationships, behaviours and organisations.

Here CLA is applied to three pieces – two short plays and one extract from a longer work. Each play may be seen as a future scenario in action, offering a picture of new possibilities to audiences at the time of their first production. CLA is used to examine the level of critique and challenge made to the existing social context, as well as the future one if it happens. The plays critique partly because their situations are new, suggesting that change is possible, and partly through inviting contrast to the status quo at the time. The chosen plays explore change at deeper levels of the CLA matrix, rather than merely offering a new technology unexamined in its

implications, with current patterns of thought, behaviour and beliefs, as is often the case in futuristic films today.

But the application of CLA has been modified a little for use in the analysis of dramatic action: the focus of level 3 is seen as active when it is used to display the power each individual uses to perform the conflict that arises when discourses clash, as they often do.

Power – The engine of discourse at level 3

Inayatullah (2004, p.44) suggests creating new CLA categories "if a discussion does not fit into our neat categories of litany, social causes, worldview, and metaphor and root myth". He also (ibid. p. 530) states that "CLA, as developed, is a sociological tool. However, it can be used to unpack individual perspectives". Terminology more closely related to individual perceptions and behaviour (real or fictional) includes that of "precipitating action" for level 2 (ibid. p.12), and "actionable steps … [that] are easy to note at the first two layers" (ibid. p.16).

The level of worldview/discourse has also been labelled here as 'power/ influence' to include more specific reference to the actions of the individuals and their wielding of power in the story. According to Weedon (1997, p.110), "Power is a relation. It inheres in difference and is a dynamic of control, compliance and lack of control between discourses and the subjects constituted by discourses, who are their agents." Performers clarify and simplify the relations for audience understanding, not necessarily in the abstract, but through action on stage. We see enacted by individuals, what Weedon (ibid.) describes: "Power is exercised within discourses in the ways on which they constitute and govern individual subjects." The term power/influence is useable in the CLA matrix because it applies to individuals who are influenced personally by the social forces of discourse, and who make efforts to influence others. It seems more practical, applicable to action here, than the societal term 'discourse', which includes the broader, large-scale field of ideological assumptions. Foucault (1987, p.18) suggests that power relations may be understood as "a means by which individuals try to conduct, to determine the behaviour of others". In this article power is accepted as an integral part of discourse, the energy by which it acts upon others to impose its views. In terms of human interactions, Shurtleff (1980, p.250) states that "competition is the life and breath of all relationships".

Power as status transactions between individuals

Sawicki (1988, p.185) notes that "Foucault defines discourse as a form of power that … can attach to strategies of domination as well as to those of resistance." The use and display of power by individuals in relationship is also described by Johnstone (1981, p.36) as "dominance and submission", or rather as fluid levels of "status". He states that "in reality status transactions continue all the time. In the park we'll notice the ducks squabbling, but not how carefully they keep their distances when they are not." (ibid. p.33) Power relations between individuals or groups, according to Johnstone (ibid. p.37), are so much a part of human interaction, that "there (is) no way to be neutral", and that in human behaviour, "every sound and posture implies a status" (ibid. p.72). Power relations as described by Foucault, then, are echoed in Johnstone's status transactions, which continually demonstrate

what he terms the 'see-saw' principle: "I go up and you go down" (ibid. p.37). Similarly, Johnstone says that one should "understand that we are pecking-order animals and that this affects the tiniest details of our behaviour" (ibid. p.73). Status transactions between individuals are one of the basic features of character relationships, and are constantly changing; the gaps are sometimes small, sometimes large. Maximum status gaps (and their swift reversals) are highlighted in broad comedy, featured in the third play analysed in this article.

Thus the term power/influence is used to describe the actions and dialogue of characters in scripts, as representatives of different discourses. It is used for individual application and perception of the effects of discourse as they are felt and seen by individuals, and as they are felt and seen by audiences who watch individual characters constantly moving on the see-saw of status transactions, continually rising and falling, engaging audiences by the portrayal of Foucault's (1987, p.18) strategic power 'games' in action, the ever-changing flow of energy among personalities.

The ingredients of character include status, purpose, and attitude. Status may refer to the broader social class and related discourse of the character, but it may also refer to the way a character behaves towards others in personal interaction; their personal sense of self-importance related to others (Johnstone, 1981, p.37). High-status behaviour (such as a firm voice, upright stance, direct eye contact, deliberate movements) is shown to demonstrate the superiority of the person relative to the other; similarly, low-status behaviour (such as a downcast head, hesitant speech, infrequent eye-contact, slumped shoulders, and fidgety movements) shows that the person is under-confident and sees the other as more important – but only in this situation. Later, the same people may swap behaviours, if events warrant it. Thus the shy apprentice lacks confidence with a workmate, but assumes a higher status than the same person when showing considerable expertise in a sport outside the work environment, demonstrating Johnstone's (ibid.) "see-saw". In life and in performance, it governs how a character 'plays the game'; how they relate to others in their games.

If I am glowing with success after a well received presentation, my status will be raised relative to my colleagues. If, on the way home in my car, I am pulled over by a police officer, my status will lower considerably relative to the officer. If I only get a warning instead of a fine, my status raises a little in relation to the officer, but not higher than them, and so on. The status of each of us is constantly changing, usually only by small increments throughout the day. Audiences are interested in seeing characters affect each other's status, even if it is only by making a slight difference. We are interested in watching the ebb and flow of power, the competition for gaining it, and the swing of the seesaw as characters vie for a higher position in their activities. Status itself may be the main story topic or not, but it is always involved in human interaction, and status transactions (the competition for higher status) are a vital ingredient of any story.

I will apply CLA to three different works to show its flexibility in performance analysis. Status is given particular attention as a focal point of discussion relating to level 3, that of discourse/worldview. Of necessity this analysis is done only with reference to the written script of the plays, but here a script is assumed to be a set of instructions for a performance; dialogue plus action. All scripts function as demonstrations of future scenarios. Stage directions are physical actions specified by the playwright and appear in italics.

Causal Layered Analysis applied to the final scene from "A Doll's House"

This play written in 1879 by Henrik Ibsen centres on Nora, a seemingly typical housewife who awakens from her previously unexamined situation as wife to Torvald and mother of three children. During the play she becomes disillusioned and dissatisfied with his patriarchal attitudes and controlling behaviour, and her own naiveté.

CLA is used to analyse the progress of the final climactic conversation between Nora and Torvald; as the scene progresses, their discussion travels down through the upper CLA layers until finally the fourth level of metaphor is exploited by the playwright. Nora and Torvald begin exchanging their contrasting interpretations of events at the litany level. Nora describes her view of the cause for her complaints (his control over most aspects of her life). Although these pertain to her in particular, her story was a universal one at the time in their social context (middle-class Norway in the late 19th century). Thus level two, social causes, form this arena. Neither understand each other here either; the discussion then progresses to level 3, that of worldview. At this point, the dominant patriarchal discourse he embodies is newly challenged by her fledgling feminist discourse, as she questions his authority and that of the legal system and church which support it. However there is no mutual understanding until each describes their beliefs at level 4: she sees herself as an individual first; he sees her as a wife and mother first. To complete the picture, they discover they are emotionally at odds with one another; she does not love him any more, and he understands that the marriage is over despite his love for her. There is no more to discuss, and she leaves him immediately. This analysis does not include the complexities of their arguments, but it serves to demonstrate the application of CLA to this short section. It could be applied to other aspects of the work, perhaps one character's behaviour and attitudes; perhaps the entire plot; perhaps to the Norwegian legal system at the time. The possibilities with CLA are rich in furthering an understanding of the play and its considerable effect on the social context.

Status in "A Doll's House"

The status transaction seesaw shows Nora at the start of the play placating and submissive (playing low status) while Torvald (high status), treats her as his adorable but silly minion. The audience watches the seesaw reversing in the final scene as Torvald's status sinks; he grows more submissive as Nora's status goes up, culminating in the final act of very high status – his complete exclusion from her life, which he does not want or expect.

The characters' status is drawn from the playwright's observations of middle class society, though he uses the precepts espoused by Goldman and Shurtleff and heightens reality, presents selective truth, and aims for believability, at least until he smashes this by having Nora stand up for herself and question Torvald's authority. The action at the time, was unbelievable to many in the audience. Status portrayed in the play reflected real life with its marital power relations, which represented a larger scale patriarchal discourse. Thus at level 3 of the CLA matrix, power is embodied and brought into focus by the dominant discourse and its challenger. The play raised a storm of controversy in its first production, and was banned in at least one country; another insisted that ending be rewritten so that Nora repented and stayed. However, this kind of impact is rare in theatre, especially in a highly mediatised postmodern

climate.

The futuristic features of this play are limited to the final scene, when Nora takes the shocking (in 1879) step of valuing her individuality above that of her role of wife and mother, making the metaphor powerful by acting upon it and leaving the entire family, probably for ever. This discussion had never been made public in her social context, and certainly had never been performed in a theatre to be shared with audiences. In this regard it was futuristic, and certainly the extreme reactions showed its radical effect of 'stretching' the middle class mentality at a deep level. The fact that it happened in a naturalistic domestic setting does not detract from its futures orientation.

Causal Layered Analysis applied to "A Number"

In the play "A Number" by Caryl Churchill (2002), cloning has been carried out using a human boy as the original and multiple copies have been made, with varying effects on the willing (and unknowing) participants. At level 1, the litany of events begins the play as the 35 year old Bernard (B2) confronts his father Salter with his discovery from hospital records that he is one of a number of clones, and that he is not Salter's original son but a copy, apparently created in a deal between Salter and the hospital. In scene 2, the original 40 year old Bernard (B1) visits his father to discover the reason for his rejection (it transpires that Salter was a neglectful and at times abusive parent) and subsequent emotional difficulties that made him resentful, vindictive and violent. Salter gave up B1 as a four year old, and paid for a copy of him using the new cloning process. B1 calmly announces that if B2 had any children he would kill them. In scene 3, B2 plans to run away because after meeting B1, he is afraid that his life is in danger. He discovers that his mother killed herself, leaving the two year old B1 with Salter, who couldn't cope with the child, gave him away, and tried again with a new genetic copy. This time he improved his parenting skills and B2 developed a healthier personality. In scene 4, B1 visits Salter to inform him that he has indeed killed B2. Salter confesses his poor parenting and contempt of B1 as a child, and an alcohol problem at the time. In scene 5, B1 has killed himself as well by now and Salter meets another clone, 35 year old Michael, who cheerfully welcomes him, happy with his own life and origins.

At level 2, the social causes (new) are improved technology that makes for healthy genetic copies, and the passing of laws that permit multiple human cloning for individual requests (despite Salter's inadequate parenting history). He changes his story frequently, but claims that "one was the deal" and that he had been "ripped off" (ibid. p.28). At level 3, it appears that replication of a human being may be carried out for payment, and that legal and medical systems permit and undertake the replication of humans. There is no evidence that other human cloning programs have been carried out; if so, they are not part of this story. At level 3 also, we see status transactions between the characters as they grapple with the consequences of the cloning. These are on a personal level, and are not linked to the discourse closely, as seen in the previous play; they are, however, part of the fallout as the sons question what individuality is worth. For each clone, the answer is different. How they deal with the future situation forms the interest in the drama.

The status transaction seesaw shows Salter constantly playing lower status to two of his sons as he tries to avoid admitting the truth about his complicity in rejecting B1 and cloning him. Salter is submissive towards B1, who threatens

violence to raise his own status, and B2, whose knowledge of Salter's guilt raises *his* status. The status gap between Salter and Michael is not as wide as it is with the others; he has no guilt about his actions, only a need to know that others have suffered as he has suffered. He allows himself to show anger (a high status behaviour) because Michael does not understand his questions. Human behaviour is shown to be normal, at times selfish, ignorant, and lacking insight, much as Kenny in Thompson (2001, p.29) describes the kind of emotions that are shown in soap operas – the story is interesting and engaging when emotions are involved. However status transactions here are not a part of the future scenario suggested by the playwright; but used to tell a story that demonstrates some of the effects if the scenario should come to pass. There is no particular challenge to a dominant discourse, but questions are raised about the innovation portrayed –its effects are given strength and meaning through a story well told. What questions does the performance suggest? Perhaps those pertaining to the value of human individuality, the rights of replicated humans, the rights of copies, the financial implications of the process (clearly available in the play to a person who is not rich), and probably many others.

At level 4, we see new metaphors that show the replication of individuality as purchasable by another (not necessarily the individual being replicated). Humans are seen as commodities in this context; human rights issues include the right to create them for research, rights of access to other clones, the right to refuse cloning, and others. The future is seen as ordinary in its setting, a lounge room. The audience is given food for discussion at levels 3 and 4 on the implementation of a legal system that supports medical intervention in the processes of creating new humans, and on the metaphors presented above. The playwright has presented the audience with a situation about which they may think, share their responses, and perhaps even take action to encourage this new technology, prevent it, or shape its management processes in some way.

In terms of futures thinking, the final scene turns the picture of a possible dystopia upside down when Salter meets the third clone, Michael. Salter expects a similar litany of tragic consequences, but Michael contentedly describes his love for his wife and family. He is "fascinated" (Churchill, 2002, p.60) at the news of his origin, finding it "funny" and "delightful" (ibid.), and pleased that he shares his genetic makeup with other humans, as well as 90% with chimpanzees, and 30% with a lettuce – "it makes me feel I belong" (ibid. p.62). He realises that Salter misses his other two sons. Though he jokes about the number of clones, "there's nineteen more of us" (ibid.), he feels the need to apologise when asked if he is happy and likes his life: "I do yes, sorry" (ibid.). For him, the scene ends on an optimistic note and dystopia is not applicable to his life. A balanced interpretation of the scenario is shown in the playwright's choice of characters: the weak money-hungry father, who rejected his first son, probably made money out of the cloning and misrepresented his actions and selfish motives (the audience sees them clearly); the unsuspecting clone B2 shocked by the news; the resentful and vindictive original B1; and the placid, easygoing Michael, excited and charmed at the discovery. The futures aspects are limited to the cloning process rather than the day to day business of living; this is presented as an average western lounge room, and references to the outside world offer nothing new in terms of setting.

Causal Layered Analysis applied to "Socks Go in the Bottom Drawer"

In this half-hour comedy "Socks Go in the Bottom Drawer" (Booker, 1991), two women and their daughter visit a zoo cage to see a most interesting exhibit – a man. He shows off for them and flirts with the girl, who is interested but unimpressed by his attempts at seduction. His keeper then entertains him with a story from the distant past, in which "once upon a time, the world was ruled by men" (ibid. p.15). She then tiptoes out, leaving him to sleep.

This discussion focuses on the play's links with sexual mores twenty years after its first production. The plot does not progress through the levels of CLA in its futuristic aspects; rather, the audience is presented with detailed visual information on the new situation at all levels before a word is exchanged. The play opens with this image: a man in a business suit, with a chair, table, wardrobe and an exercise bike; all in a cage under a sign reading "Homo Sapiens Sapiens (male)" (ibid. p.1), and another reading "Do not feed the animals" (ibid.). The visual metaphor at level 4 is startling, even shocking, but obvious. Men are rare curiosities, controlled and kept apart from the rest of the population, which presumably is female. The implication is that they are powerless but worthy of public display. Which audience members would be amused and entertained by this vision? Who would be deeply insulted, even before the dialogue begins? What would be the audience response if the gender of this character was reversed? In what social context would the image be acceptable, or banned, or laughed at? Certainly the litany of events would give many men cause for complaint. Furthermore, he shares the cage with a life-size inflatable doll, whom he patronises in a one-sided conversation, inventing her contribution (apparently she has complained about his holiday plans) and responding to it with impatience: "Oh for God's sake don't sulk Samantha. You know it gets right up my nose… It's my money. Get it? Mine. (*puffs himself up*) I'm the one who wears the trousers, see. I'm the breadwinner, I'm the bossman, I'm … (*triumphant pause*) … God. (*a self-indulgent tone*) A benevolent God. A God who cares." (ibid.). The contrast of metaphors is extreme, perhaps offensive to some audience members. However, the overriding mood is comic, rendering the content ridiculous and light-hearted. At the metaphor level, his superior beliefs are voiced in public, but inside a cage; the verbal and the visual are in clearly drawn opposition; and the visual metaphor is the more powerful. Adam is stuck where he is; all his posturing will not allow him any freedom. His discourse is made to appear ridiculous by exaggeration.

The causes of the disappearance of the male population are not specified in the text; questions about any history of the situation are unanswered. Adam himself accepts it but at level 3, childishly maintains the fiction that he is 'in charge'. The keeper panders to this perception and comforts him after Lucy good-naturedly rebuffs his advances. He is upset: "She thought I was harmless." The keeper replies, "Of course you're not, Adam. Why else do we keep you in a cage?" He seeks reassurance: "I am dangerous, aren't I?" She agrees: "Yes, petal; you are" (ibid. p.15). Adam clings to his traditional patriarchal discourse, using it to subdue his wife/doll, and also to attempt to seduce Lucy. His behaviours are thrown into strong relief by the unexpected responses of Lucy, who has a detached and curious attitude towards him, and the keeper, who punishes him and mothers him, as if he is a small child. Their responses portray a matriarchal discourse that keeps him firmly under control. He must give up his doll before the visitors arrive to view him, and when he refuses, he is zapped into submission by remote control. The status transaction

seesaw here shows great status gaps; the seesaw moves to extreme highs and lows, but within a context of being caged. Adam shows high status behaviour towards the doll and occasionally towards the keeper. The keeper shows high status towards him, threatening physical retribution if he does not comply. He demonstrates maximum gaps as he changes from ultra-boss to pathetic little boy and back again at dizzying speed. The visitors show high status as they treat him like an animal in the zoo. He shows high status to them by ignoring them or flirting with them, though they trump this by regarding his behaviour with mild curiosity. In this play, the status transactions have everything to do with the story, which is based on a maximum status gap and a reversal of the patriarchal discourse. Adam's behaviour is tightly controlled by his female zookeeper, who "patronises" or "matronises" him, offering small rewards for good behaviour, though he is expected to exhibit masculine superiority behaviours for the entertainment of the (female) zoo visitors. In this play, the status transactions are intended to be comic, to make the audience laugh.

The metaphor throughout is one of man as a quaint curiosity, of no actual use but seen as a pet to be occasionally indulged in small ways, including the pretence that he is powerful and dangerous. Clearly women control the world; they are beings of power and influence, functioning without men. The metaphors are pushed into contrast in an extreme reversal of traditional male and female roles, throwing macho male behaviour into the spotlight. The effect of any metaphor in carrying meaning directly from the heart of an issue depends on the audience. Metaphors are contextual entities; whether historically established and widely accepted, or ephemeral and created for a particular occasion; visual or verbal (often all of these types appear in a single story), they form a bridge between the presenter and the audience, but the interpretation of their meaning can be a free and individual process. A feminist audience may interpret Adam's incarceration as anything between a humorous critique of patriarchal behaviour, and a utopia of sorts.

One prescient aspect of the play deals with gay marriage and parenting. Written in 1991, it portrays Lucy and her parents Mama one and Mama two; the inference is that this is the norm in the play's context. The lesbian partnership here may be legalised, though the script does not specify this. The issue of sexual orientation is not explored but accepted; the metaphor is that women are sexual partners and parenting partners, apparently the only option since males are almost extinct. To an audience in the 1990's, the viability of this type of relationship may have seemed unusual or unlikely, or perhaps not. Cynthia Nixon, an actor in the TV series "Sex and the City", explained to New York Times magazine interviewer Alex Witchel (2012, p.) that she is "gay by choice", and cites some strong reactions from the gay community that suggest that this orientation by choice is not a realistic situation. However she responds that "you don't get to define my gayness for me" (New York Times Magazine, p. 3). The play portrayed a somewhat similar social context twenty years ago; this could be seen as futuristic, depending on audience interpretation. Perhaps there is no choice in the play's context; women are gay by default. Certainly the only heterosexual encounter occurs between the man behind bars and his would-be conquest who is interested in him for only a few minutes.

Bridging and distance

The emotional tone or mood created in a communication encounter can contribute to its success by creating a bridge to the audience and inviting them to

engage with the material and any ideas they might share. As recommended by Kenny (above), the range of moods used may be quite large. "A Doll's House" is a serious work. The battle of the sexes is not taken lightly; historically it almost begins with this play that portrays a new threat to the firmly established dominant patriarchal discourse of the time. Although no-one's health or safety is compromised, the mood is grave. Its first performance may well have been labelled a dystopia, so severe were the reactions to it. The second play "A Number" is mostly serious in tone; although in the final scene one character makes jokes, the other character is still distraught at the death of two of his sons and does not see the humour. His actions have resulted in their deaths, and the mood is tragic, though the end note is positive. It is neither utopia nor dystopia, since the third son is quite content with his genetic heritage and finds it comforting. The third play "Socks Go in the Bottom Drawer" is both utopian and dystopian in its extremes, again depending on interpretation. It shows a storyline in which probably billions have died, or even died out completely; yet it is a broad comedy with ridiculous situations and satirical dialogue. The mood is firmly comedic; it may even invite laughter from those who feel the sting of the jokes directed at them, as it pokes fun at patriarchal behaviour towards women, even putting it behind bars for show. As Shurtleff (1980, p.209) says, "Comedy is rarely based on kindness". This does not devalue the use of humour for communication with audiences; rather, humour in general has special properties.

According to Mackay (in Thompson, 2001, p.47), in laughter audiences are giving an emotional response "almost in spite of themselves' as they are "caught up in the message" through laughter. He recommends humour for "unlocking the emotions", and beginning with amusing touches to "get people into the mood of relaxation". Telling a story with humour in it, "finding the absurd in ourselves and the world" works well because it is "the most infectious communication technique. It bonds the speaker to the audience through the sharing of laughter", and more: it can also function as "our way of dealing with problems" (ibid.). Shurtleff (1980, p.208) makes the point that "One of the things that amuses us about comedy is to watch a character making life-and-death importance out of something we normally do not find important". In the third play, Adam quotes a wartime speech of Winston Churchill's after he loses his scuffle with the keeper and his doll is stored while the visitors are there, a ridiculous contrast between the epic and his personal self-indulgence. Further to this, Shurtleff (ibid.) describes another technique that Booker uses: "Opposites are at the heart of comedy. What makes us laugh is the playing of one emotion *immediately and unexpectedly* against another". Adam's grandiose speech of battling nobly is followed by a request at the opposite level of importance: he begs weakly for his doll to be wearing frilly panties when she is returned to him, and the keeper kindly complies; here Booker demonstrates Shurtleff's advice to use not just extremities in acting, but to take "even more extravagant risks" in comedy (ibid. p. 212). In this case, extravagance creates an improbable situation that is intended to be funny; and along with the emotional response of laughter, a comic distance is maintained and the audience can appreciate the social comment and critique.

Distance renders the content of communication less challenging for audiences, allowing access to ideas without necessarily involving them personally. They are merely listening to a speaker or viewing a performance, and need not get too close. If a play is set in the future, Klaic (1991, p.71) reminds us that this sets the "time

of action as a distancing device, so that already a future setting may become less confrontational and further from 'reality'", though it may invite "questions about the quality of this future and its nature" (ibid. p. 47) and questions about current situations if they are compared with this future. In Booker's play, the parents are gay females. If the situation is more extreme and different from today, the greater will be the distance between the story and the audience. And comic distance makes the future literally laughable – audiences see it as worthy of ridicule. The ideas are still presented, however, and the audience has responded emotionally to them, even if satirically. Thus humour has a twofold function: that of providing distance between the audience and the situation through laughing at it, and creating an emotional bridge with it at the same time.

Distance and bridging in the plays

Bridging and distancing elements are balanced in the three plays; they invite an emotional response and interpretation, and yet place the action under surveillance for observation and comment. Bridging devices in Ibsen's play are those elements familiar to audiences at the time. The play was set in current times, offering no innovations but reinforcing the common ground of the domestic social context through incidents well known in the audience's experience. Ibsen did not set the play in the future, bringing home the possibility that situation could happen any day, at the time of that first production, and onwards. Distancing devices include the theatrical frame, the proscenium arch behind which the action happened, and the "missing" fourth wall of the scene which renders the characters and their actions visible to the audience, yet not the reverse. Distance is also provided by the presentation of two characters' different viewpoints on the same issue, so the audience has a choice as to who they find more sympathy for. In the play "A Number", bridging devices include a mundane inexpensive domestic setting that does not particularly suggest a future time or an exotic location; the play takes place in Salter's home in London, or somewhere with underground trains. The distancing features include a more sophisticated extrapolation of existing cloning technology, new ways of defining human reproduction, the rights of human clones, and more than one viewpoint on same situation, so the audience has the opportunity to compare one viewpoint with another. Some bridging aspects of Booker's play as first presented in 1991 include familiar (though heightened) stereotypes of masculine sexual behaviour towards females, accepted as 'normal' in an English speaking western context, with females as carers for males in a domestic setting (though not in complete physical control), mundane characters with matter-of-fact attitudes about the situation accepted as an everyday one in this functioning world. Distancing aspects (comic or otherwise) include bizarre combinations such as a domestic setting in a zoo cage, having the male accept this while living his domestic fantasy with a doll, and using a female zookeeper as a professional carer who provides information on species 'habits'. Booker also uses extravagant comic elements in dialogue and action, implying that the writer is not really serious about wiping out half of humanity; rather, she is isolating some of its sexual and domestic behaviour for critical examination through distancing it behind bars and putting it under quasi-scientific examination.

Finding a balance

The performance must find a balance between the bridging that encourages audience involvement, and distance that invites a cool understanding and appraisal of the events and issues portrayed. Then the audience is armed with knowledge and understanding based on their involvement and interpretation of the performance. The job of the performers is done. After this, as Mackay (in Thompson, 1992, p.28) says: "It's what the audience does with the message that determines the outcome, not what the message does to the audience".

In a performance the characters can bring the focus on to selected details and individual responses in stories; we can see more easily how we might manage the use of innovative technologies and ways of living. So the actors perform a story that builds emotional engagement, creating bridges that find common ground with audience experience and perceptions, while creating distance that allows the audience to look at any proposed changes dispassionately and thoughtfully, having seen in action some of the many aspects to be considered. This is a considerable challenge to futurists and others who seek to initiate or foster change. The plays discussed may make the present appear remarkable; equally important, they make the future debatable. The story ideas generate public response: condemnation or approval, but above all, debate. Encouraging playwrights to add to these few works is a project worth pursuing if they can inform a broad democratic process.

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