What Just Happened? : Technology, Play, and Redefining Theater

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Abstract

In this thesis, I examine ways in which new, cheap technology has enabled theater practitioners to create performances that redefine what theater is, blur the boundaries of areas not traditionally considered theater, and usher in a period of what Pier Luigi Sacco calls “Culture 3.0”. My work focuses on affordable, “hobbyist” electronics, such as the Raspberry Pi and Arduino, as well as consumer electronics such as cell phones and robotic vacuum cleaners. I look at the work of several artists who use these devices in their productions, and explore how they can empower theater makers to pursue new avenues of creativity. Finally, I illustrate how my process of researching these artists and their work led to me creating my own works, and in doing so I provide a perfect example of Culture 3.0 in action
Dedication

To Tommy Derrah. None of this would have happened if not for you.
Acknowledgments

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PREFACE

THE WHY CHEAP THEATER? MANIFESTO

In 1984, The Bread and Puppet Theater published the WHY CHEAP ART? manifesto.

![The WHY CHEAP ART? manifesto](image)

*Figure 1 - Bread & Puppet Theater's Why Cheap Art Manifesto (Bread and Puppets Theater)*

They make some good points. If nothing else, Art *should* be available to everybody.

When I speak of Art, I like to use a big umbrella, so not only do I think visual art should be available to everyone, but also music, books, film, dance, sculpture, installation art, mime, performance art, animation, anything that could be considered art that I may be
forgetting, and of course, theater. The popularity of home computers and the availability of Internet access have enabled people to gain access to art that they may not even have known existed previously, as well as tools for creating their own art. Windows devices come with MS Paint, a very basic drawing program, and Apple computers come with programs for recording and editing sound (Garageband), video editing (iMovie), writing (Pages), and slideshows (Keynote).

Back in 1984, while Bread and Puppet Theater was spreading the WHY CHEAP ART? manifesto, similar, but perhaps less overt gauntlets were being thrown down in the computer world. Apple released the Macintosh, and IBM released the PC Jr., as well as the PC/AT. Home computers were only just becoming something mainstream America was aware of, and the potential of computers as artistic tools wasn’t entirely established yet. The PC Jr. retailed for $4000 (“Timeline of Computer History”), which not everyone was ready to spend, given that computers were at that time kind of a novelty, or hobbyist device. Nowadays, the computer that is your cell phone is far more powerful than a PC Jr. (it’s even far more powerful than the computers that NASA used for the Apollo missions – by a long shot (ZME Science). You could easily make the argument that cell phones are (or can be) cheap and available to everyone. If one isn’t hung up on the latest and greatest, cell phones can be had for under $20, if you watch for deals. At least on the low end of the spectrum, technology, consciously or unconsciously, seems to have followed the logic of “this should be cheap and available to everyone.1”

What about Art? Specifically, what about theater? I want theater to inspire us in the same way that Bread & Puppets wanted visual art to. But does theater feel available

1 Tech companies’ motivations are possibly more in the service of capturing market share than in making computers available to everyone for the greater good. Whatever their actual intentions may be, technology is getting cheaper, and as a result, more accessible to all levels of society.
to everyone? (It’s kind of expensive, isn’t it? Sometimes it’s hard to get tickets too, right?) Can theater inspire us if we can’t access it? Or if we can only afford to go once a year? Sometimes if you can’t find what you’re looking for, or if what you’re looking for isn’t available to you, you need to make it yourself.

Make theater yourself? Don’t you need, you know, a theater? And actors? And a whole lot of other things? How do you do that yourself?

(Sometimes theater does involve those things, but it doesn’t have to. Keep reading.)

Maybe you think you’ve never done anything like make theater before. Maybe you think you don’t really know how to do it. Anyway, it seems hard, right? Or do you think you’re not an “artist?” (Or actor, director, etc.) Does this matter? While some people might say, “Yes artists are a particular group of people,” many others might say “no, it doesn’t matter.” One of those “no” people was John Dewey, who 44 years before the WHY CHEAP ART? manifesto, wrote, “Art is not the possession of the few who are recognized writers, painters, musicians; it is the authentic expression of any and all individuality . . . In participating in the work of art, they become artists in their activity. (Dewey 118, emphasis added).” If you can express yourself, you can make art. If the art you want to make is theater, express yourself theatrically. Once you’ve taken a step towards creating something, congratulations, you are now a theater artist.

Fast forward to 2011, where Pier Luigi Sacco took the idea that everyone is an artist and created the concept of “Culture 3.0.” This, says Sacco, is a society of artists that “is characterized by the explosion of the pool of producers, so that it becomes increasingly difficult to distinguish between cultural producers and users: Simply, they
become interchanging roles that each individual assumes (Sacco 3).” People, from all walks of life, both consume and create art to the degree that there is no longer a line distinguishing creator from consumer. In a fully realized Culture 3.0, everyone is an artist, but there’s no need to point it out. It’s just something that happens in an engaged culture. How does one get an engaged culture? One person creates something that inspires someone else, so then that person makes something which inspires a third person, who then makes something, and the process continues. When the tools of creation are easily available, and free or cheap, people are able to join the process without any barriers to entry. Eventually, so many people are making things and being inspired by other peoples’ creations, that more and more people experience art and make their own without a second thought. All it takes is people getting access to cultural experiences.

“Accessing cultural experiences increasingly challenges individuals to develop their own capabilities to assimilate and manipulate in personal ways the cultural contents they are being exposed to (Sacco 4).”

But if we’re entering Culture 3.0, what are the previous releases of Culture, and how did they lead us here? Culture 1.0, according to Sacco, was the patronage system. Patrons would pay to support artists, and both groups would benefit from this arrangement. The artists got money to live, buy food, etc., and the rich people got the prestige of having artwork to show off to their friends. “[The rich became patrons] to be entertained as a form of ‘spiritual cultivation,’ creating a circle of friends who want to share [art].” Art’s value came from the social cachet it contained.

Culture 2.0 is where the world, for the most part, is right now. There are gatekeepers (publishers, movie companies, record companies, etc.) that will take artists and share them with the masses, but there has to be profit involved. (He credits box office returns for movies as the catalyst for Culture 2.0 – once there was a model of profitability
to follow, the gatekeepers wanted in.) Culture 2.0 is an industry, which comes with a downside. You can be an amazing artist, but if there’s no way for them to make money from your art, the gatekeepers may not touch you. You can be an amazing artist, but if you aren’t as good a self-promoter as you are an artist (or any number of other possible reasons for not being discovered, including just random bad luck), the gatekeepers might not even hear about you, much less the general public. You need to fit into a viable “cultural market.” Prior to the Internet (and social media in particular), it was very difficult for independent artists to get attention on a large scale without a gatekeeper’s help.

Though Culture 2.0 is still going strong, Culture 3.0 is continually making inroads, if Sacco is to be believed. He actually credits *Star Wars* as being the place where Culture 3.0 began (back in 1977!), in the form of fans interacting with the film and each other while creating their own *Star Wars*-based art. Technology at that time was not in a state where everyone could get in on it, or get their art in front of like-minded fans. The Internet, in particular social media, had yet to connect subcultures from around the world. Presently, Sacco argues, technology has expanded to the point where the ability to create “content” (as the gatekeepers like to call it) is within reach of everyone. Computers are affordable, free software is easily downloaded, and the Internet has made it easy to get whatever it is you create out there where others can discover it. When the means of production are available to everyone, everyone can participate. Sacco also notes that cultural participation leads to improved mental health, which is a nice side effect (Sacco, “Culture 3.0.” In-class lecture.).
When everyone participates, they feed off of each other’s ideas, and that further inspires them. There’s no need for gatekeepers, and there’s no need for profitability. The value comes from the act of participating (which includes both viewing and creating). Since the tools are free, or at least cheap, money doesn’t factor into the process very much, if at all. “Today, one can easily have access to production technology (sic) that allow professional treatment of text, still and moving images, sound, and multimedia with impressively quick learning curves and at very cheap prices – something that, before the explosion of the personal computing revolution . . . would have simply been unthinkable (Sacco 3).” While the elements Sacco lists can be taken as individual art forms, I would point out that all, or any of them can be (and are being) used to create theater. Culture 3.0 is a sort of “remix” culture, and it encourages embracing influences and ideas wherever you may find them. “Remix” originally applied to music producers who would take existing tracks of songs and add new parts, or take away parts, and end up with a song whose source was recognizable, but at the same time, was totally new. In Culture 3.0, people can borrow bits and pieces of things they’re inspired by, and mash them all together to create art. Just because you think some interesting aspect of some other art form isn’t “theatrical,” it doesn’t mean you can’t use it in your theater creations. At one time people thought video projections weren’t theatrical, now they’re fairly common on stage. For that matter, at one time people thought naturalistic speech wasn’t theatrical. If you like something, see what you can do with it. Use the tools you have available to you.

Culture 3.0 is marked by what Sacco calls “active cultural participation.” This is opposed to previous versions of Culture, in which the audience was a passive consumer. As mentioned earlier, a defining characteristic of Culture 3.0 is the lack of any sort of a
line separating producers and consumers. “By active cultural participation, we mean a situation in which individuals do not limit themselves to absorb passively the cultural stimuli, but are motivated to put their skills at work: Thus, not simply hearing music, but playing; not simply reading texts, but writing, and so on. By doing so, individuals challenge themselves to expand their capacity of expression, to re-negotiate their expectations and beliefs, to reshape their own social identity (Sacco 5).” With this in mind, it’s not difficult to imagine how Culture 3.0 might apply to the dramatic arts. At the most basic level, anyone can think of a story and get some people to help them act it out. Then, after people have acted in your play, you can act in theirs, and the cycle continues.

There’s no need to keep it basic, though. The increasingly inexpensive and accessible “production technology” Sacco writes of can be incorporated into theater in traditional ways (lighting and sound) to add some pizazz to the play you and your friends are acting out, but they can also lead you into entirely new areas of theatrical exploration.

Technology has changed greatly since 2011, when Sacco first wrote that technology was bringing about Culture 3.0. In 2018, for between $15 and $25, one can purchase a device called an Arduino, which is what’s known as a “microcontroller.” (Essentially, microcontrollers are parts of computers, but on their own can be used to perform tasks that might not require a full computer to control, or, even more simply, “A microcontroller is a simple computer that can run one program at a time, over and over again (Di Justo).” Arduinos, since they are programmable, are great for controlling things like lighting. Many people use them to control lights in their homes, but they have also been put to use controlling theatrical lighting. In the past, and the present, for many
people/institutions, a device to control theatrical lighting can cost close to $2000, if not more (Barbizon). A basic Arduino costs in the neighborhood of $25 (SparkFun)! And for about $4 per meter, you can purchase LED light strips (basically material that has super-bright and rather small lighting elements spread out across them) that are weatherproof, which means you can take them outdoors, and into conditions you wouldn’t dream of bringing an expensive light board (near a pool, into car wash, even under a waterfall!) (Buckley). The level of control an Arduino provides is perfect for theatrical applications. Connecting LED strips to an Arduino allows you to control the brightness of each light on the strip individually, which also allows you to create any number of effects (lightning, strobe, sunrise, sunset, etc.). In fact, theater makers recognized the possibilities of Arduinos very early on, and the boards quickly found their way into productions (bokaboi).

If you’re willing to spend a little bit more, for the price of a meal at a restaurant ($35), one can purchase an entire computer (called a Raspberry Pi) the size of a deck of cards that can run a full operating system, play video, be programmed to do various tasks, browse the Internet, and the usual things a computer does (Adafruit). Does your production need sound? A Raspberry Pi can do audio, which is a key element of theater. You could have your entire soundtrack available on this tiny device. You could also send your soundtrack wirelessly to a Bluetooth speaker, which is handy in situations where you’re far from electrical outlets or when a full sound system would be inconvenient. Do you want to have projected images or video? A Raspberry Pi can do video. It has an HDMI out jack, but if for some reason or other that won’t work for you, there are also non-HDMI video output options, and it’s even possible to physically modify a Pi to
output other, less common video signals\textsuperscript{2}. If you can do it with a laptop, you can do it with a Raspberry Pi for a fraction of the cost.

In the past, to accomplish even a very basic light show, you’d have not only needed an expensive lightboard, but also a set of lights to go with it, which themselves can cost several hundred dollars and up, which are also heavy, need accessories such as stands, and would have to be transported to your site somehow. An Arduino and some LED lights can fit in a suitcase and have room to spare. This allows someone with a shoestring production the ability to light their set, wherever it may be. High portability, low cost, and battery power are a nice combination.

It is worth mentioning that highly technical theatrical lighting set ups in traditional theater, like many other highly technical pursuits, require a fair amount of training. It’s possible to go to college and/or grad school just to study theatrical lighting. While there is certainly good reason for this (light design is an art form in and of itself), pursuing formal training can also be a barrier to getting involved in actually making theater. A degree in lighting design, such as a BFA or an MFA, can be costly. This isn’t to say that it’s not worth it, but not everyone has the money or the time to attend such a specialized program, assuming they even get accepted into such a program. This particular path tends to filter out a large percentage of people who may have the interest, but not the means. Also, sometimes you just want to hit the ground running, and a Raspberry Pi or Arduino can allow you to do exactly that. The code to control an Arduino lighting setup is freely available on the web\textsuperscript{3}, and is clearly explained. This rig is also

\textsuperscript{2} Two tutorials on different ways of doing this:
2. https://www.makeuseof.com/tag/three-ways-to-display-your-raspberry-pi-on-a-monitor-or-tv/

\textsuperscript{3} Such as here: https://www.makeuseof.com/tag/connect-led-light-strips-arduino
capable of being powered by batteries, so you can take it almost anywhere! Most people who have worked in theater for any amount of time would find this rather astonishing. Lighting is an important part of theater, but it came with a price that is commensurate with this importance. But now, thanks to the ever-shrinking world of silicon chips, the world can be your theater.

Lights are not the only part of the theater that are costly. Tickets to “The Theater” can be prohibitively expensive, particularly if you want to go with any regularity or see something popular (like *Hamilton*, which requires you to enter a lottery to even get the chance to buy tickets, and then if you “win,” the cheapest tickets are $199 each, and can go as high as $1150 (Cox). Part of the overhead in ticket prices is to cover the expenses of the venue, as well as the salaries of a large cast and a crew (who are required to run all the expensive sound and lighting equipment a large budget production requires).

With all this in mind, and in the spirit of being inspired by the art created by others, I present to you the WHY CHEAP THEATER? manifesto.

### The WHY CHEAP THEATER? manifesto

Theater should not just be a plaything for the rich. It belongs to all of us.

(This is not to say that rich people can’t have nice things, but why do they get to have all of them? Didn’t anyone teach them to share?)

“Theater” can exist outside of “The Theater.” That’s just a place. You can make theater anywhere.
No, I’m not joking.

You can make theater in your house. You can make theater in a field. You can make theater in your car. Or in a parking space. Or on your phone. Or in an alley. Or on a computer. Or in a computer. In places no one has ever heard of (not even mapmakers, snoops, or Googlers). Inside of a goat. Outside of a stoat. Merrily merrily rowing a boat.

I seem to have gotten a little excited. This happens. Now back to the topic at hand.

What if, thanks to the tools now available to you, you can make theater that is unexpected, new, shocking, exciting, and just plain awesome? What if you did make a piece of awesome theater, and I saw it? Would I think, “Wow, that was amazing, and all those tools they used are also available to me. I should try this. Maybe I could even do it a little differently. Maybe I could do it very differently. What can I do with those tools?” (This is exactly what I’d think.) Low-budget, DIY tech is opening peoples’ eyes to the possibilities and it allows each person to find a way to adapt the available tools to their own voice. Sometimes all they need is permission. Your spin on theater could give the people that see your work permission, couldn’t it?

Culture 3.0 has been growing little by little since 1977, and is steadily gaining prominence. A hallmark, Sacco says, is that “accessing cultural experiences increasingly challenges individuals to develop their own capabilities to assimilate and manipulate in personal ways the cultural contents they are being exposed to (Sacco 4).” I’ll make the importance of this really simple: If you make good theater, then that inspires me to make
good theater. Which then inspires others to make good theater. Which then inspires you to make even more good theater, ad infinitum, ouroboros, etc. etc.

Figure 2 – Ouroboros evolution as a graphical representation of Culture 3.0.
Culture 3.Ouroboros inspires others and sets off a loop of inspiration.

Waiting for The Theater to pick up what you’re putting down is not the best use of your time. You could be making theater right now. On your own terms. Make them come to you, if that’s what you want. My point is that there is an established theater system, and there is the rest of the world. The rest of the world needs theater too.

Are you seriously still reading this? Why aren’t you out there making theater? Do you think you need permission? You have it. You’ve had it all along.

Now, can I interest you in some examples of what I’m talking about?
Figure 3 - A graphic intended to direct the reader further into the manuscript. It works only if reading on a computer, where one scrolls down to the next page. In a printed manuscript, it should be pointing right.
Please take this into consideration.
What Just Happened?: Technology, Play, and Redefining Theater

It is a beautiful summer afternoon. You step outside of your home, and breathe in the fresh air. “That’s the stuff,” you say. “An early party seems about right, and after that, I think I could even go for a little theater.” You make a mental note to check the listings at some point on your journey.

As you walk down the street, a stranger approaches you. “Not another canvasser,” you think. Rather than jamming a clipboard in your face, they smile and point to a sign on the sidewalk. It looks like something a store would have out front to advertise a sale. “Oh, a huckster,” you scoff. This sign does not alert you to the greatest of deals, however. It instead has a bunch of sentences containing blank spaces printed on it. Then you see that there are a bunch of words printed on small plaques that must go along with this somehow.

“Would you like to help us fill in the blanks?” the stranger asks, gesturing towards the table full of stray words. You try to think of a polite way to decline. Before you can conjure up an excuse, the stranger tells you, “If you do, all we request is that you read your creation out loud while we record you on video. We’re going to put the video on a web page.” It finally hits you what’s happening, but, as this is such an unusual occurrence, you feel taken aback. You
somehow find words to say, “I’m actually late for a doctor’s appointment,” and quickly make your way away from this person. You get about a block away before you’re able to piece it all together in your head. “Oh,” you think. “That actually might have been kind of cool.” You worry you missed your chance, but you really need to get to the party. You feel a small twinge of regret, yet keep walking.

You arrive at your destination. You enter the house, and as you begin to look for the friend that invited you here, you pass a room that has a sign next to it stating, “This room is haunted.”

“Unlikely,” you think. Curiosity, however, gets the better of you. You stick your head inside the “haunted” room. A video projector is shooting spots of light onto the walls. Upon closer inspection, you notice that these spots of light are images of various people and animals. Strange music is playing. You hear voices buried in the music, speaking about the things they miss since they have become ghosts. People with hand mirrors are chasing the spots of light and attempting to reflect them at a lamp in the
corner. Everyone seems to be enjoying themselves. You follow the lights to their source. “That video projector has to be ten years old,” you think. You follow the cables sticking out of the projector to a laptop off to the side. To your amazement, the laptop seems to be even older. “This room is haunted, alright,” you think. “Haunted by the soulless specter of Audio/Visual Past.” Your office would have thrown this stuff out years ago. And yet, here is something completely new being run off of what might be considered by some to be obsolete trash. That feels stranger than the idea of ghosts.

Mulling the haunted room over, you continue to search for your friend, but she doesn’t seem to be there. You find a chair in a vaguely unpopulated room, and take out your phone. “I’ll just text her to find out where she is,” you think. Pulling out your cell phone, you see that your friend has already texted you, but you missed it. You open the message. It contains nothing but a link to a video. “This had better be good,” you speak out loud, though not more than a whisper. You open it. Upon seeing the title, you think, “Ah, Beckett’s Quad. This brings back memories of that “Struggles With Beckett” class I took as an undergrad. If I recall, there’s not a word of dialogue, just choreographed movements for four actors.” You press play, curious to see how well your memory of this has held up. On your screen, four Roombas begin executing Beckett’s instructions.

“Robots? Vacuum cleaners?” you sputter. “Oh, the humanity!”

The last hour has thrown a lot at you, so it’s understandable that you might be a little freaked out. You put your phone back in your pocket and decide you’re going outside to get some air. As you approach the door, a man is standing in the doorway. You can’t help shake the feeling that there is about to be awkward eye contact, especially given how unusual things have been going. You gird yourself, and then head
purposefully for the exit. You look up to give him as friendly a smile as you can muster, and you see that there is a small video screen around his neck. “Have a nice day,” he says, and these same words scroll across it, just barely after he has spoken them. “Wait,” you think. “Was that digital synesthesia? Is that even a thing?”

Having made it out the door, you sit on the stoop and take a deep breath in the hopes of composing yourself. The faint sounds of the haunted room drift out the window and out into the world. The image of Roomba actors runs through your mind. And eventually, you wonder what you missed back on the street earlier. What was on that sign? What did that person want you to do with it? This all swirls around inside your head until you sit up and say, “What just happened?”

After a bit of thought, you know what just happened. You’ve seen into the future - the future of theater. It’s a little hard to grasp fully, but something deep down has convinced you of this. And there’s one more thing you know: you want in.

I’ll Tell You What Just Happened

Everything you have just read about is real. They are all projects that were made by solo practitioners, or small groups of people working together, using inexpensive technology to create innovative new works of theater.

“Theater?” I can hear you thinking. “Where was the stage? Where was the audience? Where was the theater?” For added emphasis, maybe you even took out your wallet and yelled, “Where was the giant hole in my bank account?”

You, like many other people, may be used to thinking that theater is something that happens in a dark room with a stage, and lights, and actors with prepared lines - that sort of thing. And indeed, that is a kind of theater. But theater can be so much more.
“Like the haunted room?” you ask excitedly.

Exactly like that. But that’s just the beginning.

“What do you mean? There’s more? How many types of theater have I been missing?”

Read on. Theater is, and can be, so many different things.

Figure 4 – Is this theater? You’ll find out soon enough.
Getting Theater Out Of “The Theater”

What’s so important about taking theater out of The Theater?

There’s a lot to this question, so get comfortable, this may take a while. First, there’s nothing wrong with The Theater. Plenty of great works of art have come out of it, and it brings enjoyment to loads of people who go there to see plays, to act in plays, and to work on all possible aspects of plays. I am in no way advocating for the destruction of The Theater. The system that exists serves a purpose, but it’s possible, even necessary, for “theater” to be more than just a play on a stage in a building called a theater.

Theatrical experiences that don’t exist yet, or are only just coming into existence, could stand to get a little space in the world. Traditional notions of theater are fine, but we should take some time to consider that this is but one perspective. What I am advocating for is for everyone to take a step away from how they’ve been thinking about theater their whole lives (if they’ve thought about it at all), and ask themselves if they could see there being room for other types of works that are performative that might fall under a new definition of theater. Can you have traditional theater outside of the physical space of a theater? Sure, yes, Shakespeare in the Park. But let’s get even further outside than that.

Antonin Artaud, all the way back in 1938, wrote a manifesto (his first, in fact) calling for a new sort of theater, and laying down some rules for how he thought the whole thing should go⁴. One of the aspects of theater he specifically singles out is the relationship of the audience to the performers. There is a physical barrier separating these

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⁴ You may have noticed that I too am writing a manifesto calling for a new sort of theater. Manifestoes beget manifestoes. Culture 3.0, while not yet able to take full corporeal form, nonetheless grows stronger.
two elements of The Theater, in the form of the stage. This was a huge problem for him, and therefore it had to go.

We abolish the stage and the auditorium and replace them by a single site, without partition or barrier of any kind, which will become the theater of the action. A direct communication will be re-established between the spectator and the spectacle, between the actor and the spectator, from the fact that the spectator, placed in the middle of the action, is engulfed and physically affected by it. This envelopment results, in part, from the very configuration of the room itself. (Artaud 98)

In The Theater there are certain norms. The audience has their role to play (sit quietly and pay attention), and the actors have their own roles to play (which is literal enough that I shouldn’t need a parenthetical to explain it). Artaud felt this was too rigid and codified, and his way to remedy this was to just toss out the whole set up and start fresh. He also has a problem with the fact that plays are written, and the performers go in and recite these things that they have memorized and rehearsed to death. He also doesn’t like the way things are lit. Or the sound effects. Or the costumes. Or, you know, pretty much all of it. But that doesn’t mean that he hated theater.

Artaud wrote his manifesto because he was definitely unsatisfied with the state of theater in his time. But theater was his passion, and he felt it was capable of being so much more than the disappointing productions he saw around him. He used his unhappiness with what he perceived as flaws as the basis, and the springboard for his manifesto. In a similar vein, Matheson Marcault⁵, one of my case studies, used their dismay at what they saw as flaws in the outcome of a recent election as the basis for their Manifesto! piece. One of my own entries into this world of “theater outside of the theater”, called the SmileBox, was also inspired by disappointment in an election, in part.

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⁵ Matheson Marcault may sound like one person, but it is actually two people: Holly Gramazio and Sophie Sampson.
The rest came out of the desire to make people think a little bit about how small moments of happiness are important to think about. This idea was floating around in the back of my mind, and it took a little time for me to figure out how to get it out into the world, but as soon as I stumbled on a way to do it, I was ready.

We all have things we feel strongly about. What could be better than having an outlet to give voice to your own passions? Is the personal truly universal? Why not put that idea to the test? Culture 3.0 revolves around everyone getting excited and inspired about everyone else’s ideas. Cheap technology makes it easy and affordable to find a way to give voice to the things that excite you in ways that can be unexpected, which can then pass the excitement onto the audience.

Let me give you an example of someone who knew how to excite an audience and use this excitement to affect positive change. In the 1990s, Bogota, Columbia had a terrible problem with people not stopping for pedestrians. Laws didn’t seem to help. Nobody was worried about paying fines for running through the crosswalks. It seemed like a problem that couldn’t be fixed with the tools people had at their disposal. So the mayor, Antanas Mockus, decided it was time to use new tools, and new techniques to create the change he wanted to see in Bogota. While he didn’t know for sure what would work, he was willing to experiment publicly, and brought in performers and performances as part of his experimentation. Intentionally or not, he wound up making the streets of Bogota his theater.

When Mockus thought about the issues with pedestrians, one of his ideas was that Colombians were more afraid of looking silly than they were of paying fines. To test this theory, he hired 20 mimes to direct traffic around the city, and they could use everything
in their mime arsenal to express disappointment in aggressive drivers, but they did so playfully. If a pedestrian crossed in an unsafe way, the mimes would tease them as well. As a result, traffic fatalities dropped by half! As if that wasn’t enough, people liked this approach so much that another 400 people signed up to be mimes! Mockus realized he was onto something, and began to look at other problems in Bogota. When he wanted people to think more about preserving the environment, rather than run an ad campaign, or send out mailers, he dressed in a costume and took to the streets as “Supercitizen,” and playfully explained why littering was bad (Hernandez). His most memorable act as Supercitizen, however, involved him taking off the costume. Choosing the inside of an apartment’s bathroom instead of the city’s streets for his “stage,” Supercitizen appeared on television taking a shower. If you turn off the water while you soap yourself up, you end up saving a fair amount of water every time you take a shower. Supercitizen fearlessly demonstrated this technique, and the water use in Bogota dropped from 27 to 20 m³ per month per household between 1996 and 1998 (State Crime).

Why Variety (of Ideas, Voices, Form, & Content) Matters

What Mockus did was to take tools he had available (mimes and TV stations in the provided examples), but he did rather unexpected things with them. This is part of why the public was so charmed by his antics. He used theater in extremely innovative ways despite having no theater experience. Prior to his mayorship, he was an academic with a background in mathematics and philosophy. He was elected mayor despite having no political experience. This brings me back to the idea of “The Theater,” while at the same time approaching it from left field. You don’t have to be an expert to experiment with new forms. Sometimes, such as is the case with Mockus, not being an expert opened him
up to using ideas that many experienced politicians would have found too ridiculous to attempt. But these ideas worked, in part because they were so different from what regular politicians had been doing. The novelty itself was appealing. Doing things the “normal” way is expected, and easy to ignore. This is not only true of politics, but certainly with theater. Why is it important to allow, and even encourage people to attempt new and unusual ideas in theater?

Consider the Irish Potato Famine. Because Ireland relied on one primary crop, the “lumper” potato, they had what’s known as a monoculture. How did they get there? If you take a potato, cut it into pieces, and then plant those pieces, you’ll get a new potato for each piece. Let’s call your original potato Steve. You cut Steve into 6 pieces, and grow 6 new Steves. Then you cut those Steves into 6 pieces, so then you have 36 Steves. You keep doing this. You eventually have over 1000 Steves. This seems great because all you need is one potato, and you can feed a ton of people. Nothing against Steve, but this is a bad strategy. “Evolutionary theory suggests that populations with low genetic variation are more vulnerable to changing environmental conditions than are diverse populations (Understanding Evolution).” When a disease comes along, like potato blight, and Steve is not resistant to potato blight, you no longer have over 1000 Steves. You have 1000 rotten blobs of rancid, inedible potato, and your population begins to starve. Monoculture sometimes called “a single point of failure.” If there had not only been Steves, but also Garys, Lauras, Beyoncé’s, and Marias, there’s a chance that at least one of them might have been resistant to blight. Rather than a famine, you’d instead have a food shortage. This is still less than ideal, but it’s also not a catastrophe on the level of a famine.
I’m in no way trying to make light of a horrible tragedy. This is just a useful way to illustrate the issues that can arise when there is a lack of variety. The dangers of monoculture are not unique to agriculture. To apply this concept to the theater, let’s say that Steve the potato is no longer a potato, but he now represents traditional, big-budget theater. In order to cover his expenses, Steve the big-budget theatrical production needs to bring in a certain amount of money consistently. This means it costs a pretty penny to spend a night out at Steve. This in turn means that the people who are patronizing Steve are either well-off, or unable to experience Steve as much as they’d like. Steve then becomes a luxury product. To maintain his income, Steve decides he needs to cater to the people who come to him the most frequently. He now only produces the sort of material he knows they enjoy (otherwise they may spend their money elsewhere). Steve is now less likely to take risks because he doesn’t want to alienate his benefactors. Because of this need to maximize returns, Steve finds himself having to work with a limited pool of creators, ones that reliably produce the sort of material that produces the highest profits. This effectively cuts off any theater practitioners who are attempting anything even remotely straying from the expected. Many voices, especially those of new or marginalized producers, will find it quite difficult to get heard. There could be people out there with ideas that could change the theatrical landscape who don’t get a fair shake because there’s always that risk that anything removed from the usual fare won’t bring in huge audiences. These same voices that aren’t getting a fair shake from The Theater may be exactly who can fix it. Without giving access to these voices, The Theater remains stuck in one place.
Not all theater is 100% profit driven. There are theaters that are non-profit. However, these theaters are still very affected by financial constraints, just not quite on the same scale as the large, “big name” theaters are. There are also community theaters which are a fantastic resource for people who love theater. These theaters are often quite small, and there is a much lower financial barrier to entry than in “professional” theaters. However, even community theaters are restricted by money concerns. Because of their size, community theaters have limited seating, which in terms means that even on a good night, they may only just barely cover their costs. This means that they too need to put on shows that they know will likely be able to fill the house, or come close. Trying something experimental, unknown, or marginalized could be a great experience, but a night of opening the theater, using electricity, air conditioning/heat, etc. had better bring in enough money to cover those expenses.

We don’t need to be at the mercy of financial concerns. There’s an easier way to engage people that’s novel, doesn’t cost much, if anything, and so can be available to nearly anyone. However, there are certain cultural barriers that need to be overcome before this type of theater can realize its potential to be as vibrant and wide-ranging as I believe it can be.

Not the Prescription You Were Expecting

Though the Brazilian teacher and philosopher Paolo Friere wrote *The Pedagogy of the Oppressed* with the goal of finding a better method of educating students, I think much of what he says can be applied to a larger cultural picture. He frames education in terms of the colonized and colonizer, and to me, this also represents society’s relationship with the Arts in general. Currently, we’re told by the gatekeepers what’s worth our time and
attention. If the only avenues for viewing theater are the large, established halls (with high ticket prices), then this is what the population will end up considering to be theater. This fits Friere’s idea that the relationship of the oppressed and oppressor is one of “prescription” (Friere 47). We, the oppressed, have accepted what the oppressor has told us, and “[we] have adapted to the structure of domination in which [we] are immersed, and have become resigned to it, [and] are inhibited from waging the struggle for freedom so long as [we] feel incapable of running the risks it requires (Friere 47).” Seeking anything outside of what we’ve been prescribed involves stepping out of our comfort zone, which we’re reluctant to do. We read the entertainment section of the paper, or look online, and get a response like, “You want to go to the theater? Well, here are some theaters.” For some people, this is enough. They got what they asked for, and don’t realize there may be other options.

What if there was a way to get beyond these gatekeepers? Friere says that in order to be complete people, we must not only seek freedom, but we must also inspire those around us to as well. We can all create the theater we want to see, for ourselves, and for each other. We can bypass the gatekeepers. Technology is a tool to break free of the oppressor, and to seek alternative methods of creating performances. The more people can be made aware of the sorts of theatrical experiments I’ve mentioned so far, the more people will be inspired to break out on their own. Note how similar Sacco’s ideas are to Friere’s. Culture 3.0 is also about liberating yourself from an oppressor, the gatekeepers who control Culture 2.0. (The fact that Sacco takes an idea like Friere’s oppressor/oppressed relationship and creates something new out of it illustrates his concept of how people’s ideas can feed off each other and create new things.)
For Sacco, technology is the tool by which artists set themselves free. One of his examples is online forums where musicians upload their music tracks, and other musicians take them and create whole new works out of the shared bits and pieces. (Sacco, Pier Luigi. “Culture 3.0.” Cultural Agents, 6 Sep 16, Harvard Extension School, Cambridge, MA. In-class lecture, 4 Oct 16). In another parallel to Culture 3.0, Friere states “When [the oppressed] discover within themselves the yearning to be free, they perceive that this yearning can be transformed into reality only when the same yearning is aroused in their comrades (Friere 47).” Friere says that freedom exists only when you can inspire it in others, who in turn inspire it in more people, and the cycle continues.

The artists in my case studies (which we’ll get to shortly) are also working on the edge of Culture 3.0, using technology, and trying to engage as wide, or varied, an audience as possible. As one example, the creators of Manifesto!, Matheson Marcault, stopped people on the street and asked them for their input and participation. They didn’t ask, “Are you an artist? Are you an actor?” They just approached whoever happened by, invited them into their portable theater space, and art occurred as a result. Anyone and everyone could be a part of it.

The thread that connects my case studies is playfulness. Not only is play fun, which quickly welcomes and engages an audience, but it also opens up your work to a wider group of people. Who doesn’t like fun? If you were confronted on the street by a man dressed as Hamlet, or Jacob Marley’s Ghost, it might be a little unnerving. But if you’re approached by someone offering a bit of fun, your guard comes down. After you’d seen how easy it was for this person to connect with you, you might find yourself thinking, “That was fun. How could I do something like that?” You may then have
thoughts about trying a similar project. Approaching projects from this angle makes the work you need to do not seem like work. You’ve reframed the entire affair as fun, or even play. This reframing can also get you through whatever parts of your idea might be difficult, or in some cases, the difficulty may also be fun in and of itself. Viktor Shlovsky believed that the pleasure derived from reading difficult books was tied into the challenge of making sense of the text. But he also felt difficulty in general was an opportunity for pleasure (Sommer, Doris. Cultural Agents, 18 Oct 16, Harvard Extension School, Cambridge, MA. Class discussion). The technological devices I’m writing about didn’t exist in Shlovsky’s time, but I personally think that the fun of learning any new skill is tied into the challenges you face, and the sense of achievement when you overcome them. Given the accessibility of technology now, affordability is no longer a barrier. You’re free to seek difficulty in the work itself, rather dealing with the financial difficulty of trying to obtain the materials you need to create work you find fulfilling.

The cheapness of the devices used in my case studies demonstrates that you don’t have to raise a huge amount of money to get started. Additionally, the way that the case studies take place in many unusual, or even “normal” venues (like the street), cuts out the need for both the overhead of a traditional theater space, as well as the need to impress the gatekeepers who run such spaces.

*The Restless Spirit Projector* (which lived in that room that was haunted) was presented at a festival (in a house) celebrating games and interactive installations. People weren’t going there to see a performance, but it was the performative aspect of it that got the attention of the festivals’ organizers. Because it was made out of an old laptop, a barely-working video projector, an IKEA lamp, and the sort of hand mirror you can buy
at any drugstore, there was a ragged charm to the whole work. You could probably have
done it with much more expensive gear, in a much more impressive setting, but if you
did, would it have had the same effect? Would people have been tripping over each other
to play it? Would it even have found the same audience? Or would it have felt off-limits
and imposing? If it had been presented in a museum or a theater, would it have felt
different? Would it have felt like there was a “do not touch” sign on it? Would it have felt
like everyone was watching you?

There is a long history of play being just what humanity needs. Friedrich Schiller,
whose writing on the topic were ultimately collected as *On the Aesthetic Education of
Man, in a Series of Letters*, espouses his Kant-influenced thoughts on Beauty, and points
to play as an inherent drive within every person (Schiller 74). Schiller writes that Man is
driven by three impulses. The first two are the “formal impulse” (thoughts) and the
“sensuous impulse” (feelings). The tension between these two impulses creates a conflict
inside humans, as one is strictly in the mind, the other strictly in the body. There’s no
common ground if it’s just these two impulses. What ultimately can unite these two
impulses, and bring peace, is the “play impulse.”

For Schiller, the creative subject thinks, feels and plays. The typical and arduous
labor of the mind in workaday life and stolid social interactions activate only one of these
faculties at a time. We seek freedom from dreary obligation in play (Beck).

Theater itself in many ways is play. As Hannah Nicklin (a British academic who studies games and theater)
says, theater is a game, “it’s just one so old we forgot we

![Diagram](Image)

*Figure 5 - Only play can connect thoughts and feelings, according to Friedrich Schiller.*
made up the rules (Nicklin “Re: Theater + games + robots + more!”).”

But Why Technology?

Technology is more obviously associated with play and games thanks to the ubiquity of video games. A phone or laptop could be the entry point into a theatrical moment, as both items are so commonplace that few would suspect them as a portal into a performative playspace. The play impulse can also open a door for exploration of video games as performance, which is reflected in the playfulness present in my case studies. But long before my case studies came into existence, artists were finding ways to mix theater and technology, some with play, some without. Play is just one way forward-thinking creators have used technology to change the theatrical landscape.

In his book *Entangled*, Chris Salter provides all the ammunition one could ask for to show that technology becoming more accessible to the general public results in large artistic leaps. The book is essentially a history of technology’s use in any form of performance from the start of the 20th century to roughly 2010. Regardless of the milieu, Salter shows how any time a new form of technology is developed, artists will quickly find ways to incorporate it into their work. Video cameras and computers that had now shrunk in size enough to be brought onto the stage made it possible to manipulate sound and video in real time, thus pushing the limits of what anyone had done on stage before. (Salter 142) In one example Salter provides, rather than relying on the static media of film, performers on stage could edit and process video in real time as the audience watched. As they did so, the results of their editing could be projected on a screen at the back of the stage, behind the performers (Salter 177). The relative portability of cameras that ran on batteries, and computers that you could carry yourself, allowed artists to set
up anywhere they could find the space. This in turn led to more experimentation as they discovered ways in which settings outside of a theater could be incorporated into their theatrical works. (Salter 123). Now that there are computers the size of a deck of cards that can run lights, or play video, or basically do anything you can think of.

Experimentation evolves as technology evolves. When a new device or methodology appears, artists are often the first to jump in and test its limits. Now, thanks to silicon chips getting smaller and more powerful, lots of tech can be taken with you wherever you feel like going. Entangled was published in 2010, but the Raspberry Pi wasn’t released until 2012 (Upton), which means Raspberry Pi performative developments are missing from Salter’s otherwise very comprehensive book. Technology changes quickly. I’ll try to get you up to speed before it changes again.

Honour Bayes, in “Could Technology Transform Theatre?” celebrates the fact that when technologies get cheaper, they can be used for activities beyond their original design (Bayes 6). One of Bayes’ interview subjects states that being a pioneer means taking big risks. When you’re working with something extremely new, often you don’t have a template to follow, so you’re flying blind as you figure out how to incorporate new ideas and gadgets into your work. First-generation devices can also be buggy or unreliable, which means things may not work the way you intend them to. A failed experiment can mean an unsatisfying experience for an audience. At the same time, the risks can be worth it. When successful, technology can bring high production values into places previously inaccessible to creators, and “can empower the audience, turning them from passive observers to proactive collaborators (Bayes 7).” This idea further connects technology to a means by which a practitioner can inspire an audience to take action,
rather than to merely sit there and absorb what is wafting off the stage. There are many different ways to address an audience, and technology can help open up new avenues for doing so. If the technology is extremely cheap, these avenues become available to more people, who can bring them to more places that aren’t conventional theaters, which means more audiences can be reached.

And now, let’s look at some examples of what I’m talking about.
PART 2: CASE STUDIES

Case Study #1

Matheson Marcault: No Tech to Low Tech

“We can investigate this communal-competitive space of figuring a game out more clearly because of the visual artefacts that the games create.”
- Matheson Marcault, from their web page about “drawing games”

Before we take the plunge into the exciting world of technology, we should first take a moment to look at ways in which the definition of theater can be expanded using even the simplest tools. Yes, despite all the lead-up about empowerment through technology, I’d like to spend a small amount of time on empowerment through whatever’s handy, even if what’s handy doesn’t contain any batteries. If you have some art supplies (this can even be a pen and/or pencil, along with something to write on), and a set of well thought-out rules, you can bring people together in a way that generates communal art, via theatrical

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interactions, without them even realizing it. The connection between people is the spark that fuels the innovation we’re after. We’re all part of the same world, so let’s get together. When we’re participating in a group activity, we are also watching those around us, which makes us both performers and audience.

Connecting is what happens with *Art Deck*, by Matheson Marcault, a word game combined with a drawing game. Part of the appeal of it, as a drawing game, is that the main thing you need to make it work is paper. “Paper is pretty neat: cheap, portable, foldable, strong, easy to decorate, easy to tear. . . You don’t need to teach players what it does (Matheson Marcault web page).” This is taking the DIY ethic to its most basic level. Nearly everyone has access to paper, either through stores, recycling bins, or stealing
from work (to name a few). You don’t need to know how to turn on paper, you don’t need to know how to program it. Armed thusly, you can go forth and find your audience, or co-creators. *Art Deck* therefore has the appeal of being familiar. If someone approaches you with a strange device, you might be curious about it, but you might just as easily be alarmed by it. If someone approaches you with paper, you might think they’re taking a survey, but your level of concern will be lower than if you suspect they have something beyond the everyday tech we’re surrounded with (i.e. phones, which MM will use to great success in another project later). Matheson Marcault’s intention here is to focus on the game, not the medium.

*[W]e try to stay low-tech when we can, but use technological aspects when we feel it’s necessary to the game. We definitely don’t aim to be at the cutting edge of tech – we’re much more interested in coming in when the rough edges have been smoothed off and we can use tech elements just to make a game for its own sake, rather than to explicitly explore the potential of that technology (Gramazio).

My sense of why they’re successful with this approach is that they view the technology as a tool, rather than a means to an end. If the game calls for some sort of more “modern” technology, such as a way to document the results of the game on video, they use it (see *Manifesto!* below). If it doesn’t, they have no reason to force it. This means that when technology *is* involved, it’s essential to the project, and part of the normal flow of play. This attitude means that the technology will rarely draw attention to itself, and so, as I’ve mentioned previously, the people they approach (or who approach them) don’t think twice about it, and so aren’t made to feel wary of it. In the case of *Art Deck*, the “technology” is something that few people would even refer to as technology. (When was the last time you rebooted a pad of paper?) The goal is to get people playing together, and
for *Art Deck*, pens and paper are up to the task. For other Matheson Marcault games, other tools may be required.

**Bringing in everyday tech – Manifesto!**

Described as “a sugar-coloured game designed to frustrate,” *Manifesto!* is a game resembling what you might get if you crossed Mad Libs™ with the Magna Carta (somewhat literally – the game was designed for a festival celebrating the Magna Carta).

For the most part, it’s an analog game, but with a digital twist:

Players have just three minutes to come up with a manifesto that they’re willing to stand behind if it’s put on the internet forever (assuming tumblr will last until the end of time). They have a limited word set, and fill in the blanks of five sonorous sentences. The game ends with a ritual reading of the sentences, manifestos chanted allowed (sic) by the people who made them. (Matheson Marcault)

The performance aspect of *Manifesto!* is pretty clear. The game ends with a dramatic reading of the participants’ creation, which is recorded and posted to a public website (with the permission of the performer/creator). The technology aspect is quite simple –
the video is shot on a cell phone, and then uploaded to Tumblr, a website that provides free website hosting and creation.\(^7\)

With *Manifesto!*, basically the idea of taking a photo / video and putting it online was to put more pressure on to come up with a manifesto you’re genuinely happy to stand behind, rather than to just rush through things. The game is at its best when people are having to balance the competing requirements to finish fast, and to come up with things they genuinely believe. If there’s no sense of the manifesto being in some sense public, then the pressure not to just put words down at random is less. (Gramazio)

Anyone inspired by *Manifesto!* may already have a phone and an internet connection for posting their results (and if they don’t, most public libraries offer internet access). The sign that serves as the platform for the manifestos is the most expensive aspect of this, as sign makers tend to not work for free, and it’s a pretty nice sign. (There’s no reason someone doing something similar would need to have such a polished template, but it does lend a sense of professionalism to the proceedings.) The reason to have a nicely designed sign in this instance was to “to give the game a strong street presence (Matheson Marcault).” One could easily print out a similar fill-in-the-blanks template on paper, and use a clipboard to support it, which the participants could read off of. That *could* get similar results, but I do think that the sign with moveable words makes it feel more like a game than a sheet of paper would, and it definitely makes it more clearly a public piece of performance.

The sign also lends a sense of ephemerality to the work, since it makes it clear that the next person to come along is going to wipe your manifesto away and create their

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\(^7\) If you’re unfamiliar with tumblr, it’s perfect for people who are not super technical. All you need to do is think of a name for your site - `<yourname>.tumblr.com`. If no one else has already signed up for this name, you’re good to go. Tumblr provides a wide array of site templates, so no web design experience is necessary. You can start writing, or uploading photos and videos, minutes after signing up. It is possible to tweak all sorts of aspects of the site if you want to, but if you don’t, you can have your site out there in the world almost as soon as you conceive of it. The barrier to entry is about as low as one can get.
own. This in turn creates a sense of urgency to document each manifesto on video. The sign is also a reflection of Matheson Marcault’s aesthetics, which are lovely.

The idea of connecting people also presents itself in Manifesto! The participants are just passersby from wherever they have set up shop. At the lowest level, this could be a conversation starter among people in the area. “Did you write a manifesto? Did you see that over there?” By approaching anyone passing by, Matheson Marcault makes it clear that you don’t have to fulfill any set of expectations or criteria to participate, you just need to be willing to give it a try (and appear on the internet). This works on a similar principle as Culture 3.0. Instead of people being inspired to create a whole project riffing on the work of others, the excitement generated here inspires people to participate in someone else’s project. However, since playing Manifesto! results in a piece of writing/theater, creativity is still present. Matheson Marcault provides the platform to riff on, and the participants proceed to erase the line between creator and consumer.

One of the hallmarks of Culture 3.0 is that everyone takes part in the act of creating, and Matheson Marcault designs their games so that everyone can participate, not just self-identifying artists/performers/etc. A deep pool of participants is built into each game.

[M]aking games just for artists would be a pretty narrow audience! And especially given how many works we make for public spaces – if you’re occupying public space then I think there’s some responsibility to try to keep your potential audience broad. (Gramazio)

If you’re tapped to take part in a Manifesto! performance, Matheson Marcault doesn’t ask if you’re an actor, or theater enthusiast. Much like Tumblr, the game is available to anyone, and it’s simple to get involved. And if you do, you may not even realize you’re performing. The web becomes the reinvented stage, and the text is invented on the spot,
reflecting current events. “We made it while the political fallout of the 2015 election was playing out all over the media (Matheson Marcault).” I find giving a voice to anyone to be empowering. As I discussed earlier in regards to The Theater, there is an array of voices that don’t always get a chance to be heard. A game like Manifesto! grants access to people who may not have an outlet elsewhere.

It’s not hard to see how elements of Matheson Marcault’s games create small performances wherever they are set up. While Holly and Sophie consider themselves to be (among other things) game makers, not theater makers, that doesn’t mean their work doesn’t have theatrical elements. It just means that the theatrical elements that are there weren’t consciously put in as such. Much like Antanas Mockus in Columbia, Matheson Marcault begin with an idea, and whatever theater may be hidden inside only comes out as a byproduct of play.

The social aspect of the games, which creates a setting where the players are also the audience, is also there for pragmatic reasons.

[M]aking a game that’s fun and interesting is just so much easier if you’re involving more than one person. You can use other people’s ingenuity and cleverness and sense of humour (sic) to help create the playing space that new players are acting upon. Making something that’s fun on your own? Getting people to even try to play a game in public space on their own is pretty difficult, let alone getting them to enjoy it. (Gramazio)

It’s the playfulness that attracts the audience, who also are participants, and the performance comes out because they are engaged in play. Take note that part of their intention is for people to feed off each others’ ideas. Sounds a little bit like Culture 3.0, doesn’t it? The important thing is that everything is designed to occur naturally – the socializing, the performance aspect, the technology. None of it is forced, which is why it works. People are focused on the game, and that means they’re not being self-conscious
about being watched. People that aren’t used to performing sometimes have a tendency to
become hyper-aware of the audience, which can lead to awkward or unnatural behavior.
Framing the entire affair as a game (including recording them on video) puts everyone at
ease, and so what you witness, as a result, is the purest kind of performance.
“All the tech is so outdated that it does feel... ghostly, I think. And very reliable, which is good.” – Viviane Schwarz, creator of the Restless Spirit Projector (Schwarz. “Re: ghost traps, etc.”)

“High tech” is often what people use to describe something thoroughly modern, and usually expensive, as a way of positioning it as the latest and greatest. Technology also moves so quickly that the amount of time it takes for something to go from high tech to outdated is faster than ever. (Think about the last time you bought a computer, and how soon after you bought it a new model came out that was so much “better.”) This turnover can create a lot of waste. If cell phone plans last for 2 years, and people are persuaded to upgrade at the end of that two years (or less: AT&T lets you upgrade at 12, 18, or 24
months⁸), what happens to those “old” phones if you opt to get a new iPhone every year⁹?

Just because there’s a new version of a device, does that mean that the previous version is worthless?

An upside to this never-ending upgrade cycle is that there is often “old” equipment to be had for cheap, if not free. For someone trying to create theater on a shoestring or non-existent budget, this is a huge boon. Without getting into an argument about whether or not anyone truly needs a state-of-the-art 4k television or video projector, the fact is that there is a market for them, people will buy them, and then these same people will need to unload their previous, newly “useless” bits of gear. HDMI projectors (which you now know will work with a Raspberry Pi, and have all sorts of great theatrical potential) can sometimes be found on Craigslist for under $100, and pre-HD projectors can be found for free sometimes, if you know where to look. If you know anyone who works someplace where they use projectors, chances are these projectors will get “updated” periodically, and the old ones will need to go somewhere. That somewhere could be into your possession. Once something is considered obsolete, it may just end up in the trash. For example, the department I work for, at the time of this writing, has a glut of standard definition (SD) monitors (i.e. the ones that have a screen that’s basically square, as opposed to

![Figure 9 - SD monitor on left, HD on right.](image)

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HD monitors, which have wide and rectangular screens) that were used up until HD monitors became affordable enough that all our computer labs could make the switch. There is a recycling area in the building I work in, and these monitors are left there a few at a time. They are free for the taking, if one grabs them before the recycling group comes through and takes them away. So, if you keep an eye on the “trash,” you can often pick up gear that still works fine. Not everywhere will be this open about what they’re getting rid of, or so laid back about allowing anyone to take it, but it doesn’t hurt to remain alert.

![Figure 10 - Players uses mirrors to capture ghosts in The Restless Spirit Projector. Photo from https://cargocollective.com/joonjoon/Restless-Spirit-Projector. Used with permission.](image)

Viviane Schwarz’s The Restless Spirit Projector manages to combine the old and the new in a way that makes the out-of-date gear seem glamorous again. The “new” gear consists of an Arduino board placed inside an IKEA lamp. Situated thusly, the Arduino is programmed to act as a light sensor. The rest of the setup is an old (10+ years) video projector, a “rather old laptop with free software,” an aquarium tank, inexpensive hand
mirrors, and an audio soundtrack (Schwarz, Viviane. “Re: ghost traps, etc.” Received by Erik P. Kraft, 13 July 2017.). If the end results are impressive, does it really matter how old or obsolete the tools used to create it are? If the results are awesome, does anyone care that “obsolete” equipment was used? Most people who entered the haunted room just got sucked into the thrill of the game.

It doesn’t matter how old your gear is if you can make something amazing out of it. Schwarz already had experience with fooling an audience into thinking that her projector was much fancier than it really was in an earlier production.

I had the initial idea when I was working on a different project . . . One of the pieces was a huge cardboard TV set which used back-projection from an old LCD projector onto a paper screen. It was one of those things that are so silly and low tech that no one can quite work out how they are done at first sight. (Schwarz)

Keeping an air of mystery about the production surely can hold the audiences’ attention, but at the same time, it can also lead you to new and unexpected places (also take note of the spirit of playfulness in her statement).

I was testing the projection distance and asked one of the event organisers (sic)\textsuperscript{10} who was visiting to check on things to hold up a piece of paper so I could measure the projection distance. The projector had a screensaver that was just moving text, and it was striking how fascinating it was to capture that text on a piece of paper as it moved around. (Schwarz)

So even the mere act of working with technology can spur new ideas. In this case, distorted blobs of light caused by out of focus projections struck someone as looking somewhat supernatural. This then led to the Restless Spirit Projector. Limitations can be a great way to force yourself to find interesting solutions to problems, as well as push yourself into discovering new ideas. Being open to possibilities is also a great way to

\textsuperscript{10} Viviane Schwarz lives in London, where they spell some words differently than in the United States.
generate ideas. If she hadn’t taken the time to notice the way the text was hitting the paper, and then taken a little time to think about it, *The Restless Spirit Projector* might never have happened.

*The Restless Spirit Projector* is a fantastic example of finding new forms for theater. Many traditional elements of theater are in there, just not in an expected way. Take story, for instance. There’s not just one story in the game, there are actually quite a few. Here’s what you encounter when you enter the haunted room:

> [T]he Restless Spirit Projector is a mysterious machine in a room haunted by ghosts made of light. A tape recording explains that they were drawn from space into the electric circuitry of the museum. When trapped, they speak. If you listen, you can help them find what they yearn for… Laika the cosmonaut dog missing her stray friend back on Earth… a colony of lichen lost in space, a lonely astronaut, and Kepler’s *Harmony of the Universe* are all present as ghostly fragments. (Schwarz. “Re: ghost traps, etc.”)

There’s a definite narrative here. The duty of the “audience” is to trap the ghosts. Once trapped, the ghosts speak, allowing the audience to find out what the ghosts are
looking for, and help them find it. Much like Culture 3.0 blurring the line between consumer and producer, *The Restless Spirit Projector* blurs the line between games, theater, audience, and actors. Are the people catching the ghosts the actors, or audience? Are the people watching the others catch the ghosts the audience? Are the ghosts actors? They have lines, and back stories, and they interact with people in the room. At the same time, the story’s format is not the typical three-act structure we expect from theater.

Artaud would approve of this tinkering with form. There’s playing with light, strange music, and no stage. There’s absolutely a blurred boundary between the audience and the players.

A direct communication will be re-established between the spectator and the spectacle, between the actor and the spectator, from the fact that the spectator, placed in the middle of the action, is engulfed and physically affected by it. This envelopment results, in part, from the very configuration of the room itself. (Artaud 96)

There’s also the aspect of the strangeness of the projections, which creates an otherworldly effect: “The theater will never find itself again--i.e., constitute a means of true illusion--except by furnishing the spectator with the truthful precipitates of dreams (Artaud 92).”

*Figure 12 - Assorted restless spirits that would be projected on the wall if this room was haunted. Images provided by Viviane Schwarz. Used with permission.*
If we are to look at this project as an example of Culture 3.0, it makes sense to consider who and/or what Schwarz was riffing on when she was conceiving of and designing this project. As I mentioned earlier, Pier Luigi Sacco credits Star Wars as the beginning of Culture 3.0, as the fans took elements of the movie and ran with them, creating their own fan art from George Lucas’ ideas. Movies remain a powerful influence, and this becomes clear when Schwarz discusses her inspirations for The Restless Spirit Projector: “The whole thing was somewhat inspired by Ghostbusters, which I loved as a child, and the movie “Skeletons” (the Nick Whitfield one) (Schwarz. “Re: somehow it’s fall again.”).” And when we think of influences and inspirations, the tendency is to think of things you feel fond of; however, there are other forms of inspiration as well, such as a pushing back against common tropes.

On a personal level, it was also a reaction against ghosts being Victorian/Steampunk styled. It’s been a big issue for me after immigrating to the UK that I keep having to live in old English houses which have absolutely no connection to any of my ideas of what a home might be, instead I have a great yearning for modern and brutalist buildings . . . I’ve been feeling like a ghost myself since I immigrated, and I felt drawn to projecting ghosts I could connect to, and using items I felt I remembered from my childhood, like the tape player, the German school moon globe . . . I didn’t expect the audience to connect to that, it was just a stylistic choice for myself . . . the artwork is inspired by Eastern European illustration from the seventies, again a childhood thing for me, and something I felt I lost in the UK. (Schwarz.“Re: somehow it’s fall again.”)

In the end, it doesn’t really matter how Schwarz got it all to work. The haunted room was packed for the duration of the event. The results would seem to speak for themselves. The “how” is only important for reasons of showing others the options they have in terms of using gear to great effect. The Restless Spirit Projector is a fantastic example of the possibilities tech can offer.
Case Study #3

Matt Gray’s ABCs – Arduino, Beckett, and Cleaning

Say you’re a theater professor who also likes to tinker with electronics. One day, while organizing your Arduino collection, you have an idea. What if you took the work of someone who was already groundbreaking, like, oh, Samuel Beckett, and reinvented it, using Arduinos? Reinventing a reinventor? That sounds like something that might get a lot of attention, doesn’t it? If nothing else, the curiosity factor is high. “Where is this going?”

Figure 13 - The Roombas of Matt Gray's adaptation of Quad maneuver about the stage. Image from https://vimeo.com/27912876
Samuel Beckett wrote *Quad* as a “television play” in 1979, and it was first produced in 1981 (Brits 125). The play contains no dialogue, only directions for movement. All you need are participants who are able to follow a set of instructions. It just so happens that computer code is essentially a set of instructions. While computers themselves are unable to move about on their own, computers\textsuperscript{11} can take these instructions, in the form of code, and use it to control things that can move about on their own, like a robot. Now, “robot” can mean many things to many people, even within the realm of science fiction enthusiasts, so in the interest of specificity, I’ll say you could use a household robot. No, not like Rosie on *The Jetsons*. Less humanoid. Like, way less humanoid. Like, a vacuum cleaner kind of less humanoid. Not vacuumanoid, actually a vacuum. A Roomba, to be exact. Well, four of them, because *Quad* in its original incarnation featured four dancers:

Each dancer wears a different colored hooded robe (red, yellow, blue, or white), which obscures their individual features so that each appears only as a hunched anonymous figure. All of the action of the play conforms to the title: the dancers in turn trace the outlines of two squares—one square inside the other—with their footsteps. (Brits 123)

Beckett was pushed into this place due to his sense that “the word” was no longer adequate to convey his ideas: “Words” [...] “are a form of complacency”; writing was, he said, as if one were “trying to build a snowman with dust”; nothing holds (Brits 123).” Beckett himself seems to be echoing Artaud here, not only by doing away with the stage (by producing this play for television, which, not incidentally, is in the room at the same level as the viewer, in the way Artaud had dictated), but also doing away with the text.

“Instead of continuing to rely upon texts considered definitive and sacred, it is essential

\textsuperscript{11} While Arduinos aren’t computers \textit{per se}, for all intents and purposes let’s say that in this situation they’re playing the role a computer might have prior to the dawn of affordable microcontrollers.
to put an end to the subjugation of the theater to the text, and to recover the notion of a kind of unique language half-way between gesture and thought (Artaud 89).” As if picking up Artaud’s thread, “Beckett said that every word he used seemed to him to constitute a lie and that music (in the sense of rhythm) and image were all that were left for him to create (Brits 123).” From its inception, Quad was already departing from theatrical norms, so what better work for another artist to adapt, and continue to push back with? And, what’s more, by choosing to stage Quad on TV, Beckett was embracing the technology that was available to him at the time.

When you want to create theater that you hope will be welcoming to a wide audience, it’s helpful to think about what factors might contribute to people staying away. One issue is the feeling that sometimes the material is over their heads. Quad isn’t the most accessible piece of work, even for seasoned theatergoers. Matt Gray’s adaptation of it puts it within a more relatable framework. Even if we don’t ourselves have a Roomba (and they are a little pricey), chances are good that we’ve at least seen them somewhere, and we know what they are. And there’s something hilarious about seeing a device meant to free us from domestic drudgery doing a 180, throwing off the shackles of housework, and diving into performance. Perhaps the language of daily chores was no longer sufficient for Roombas, and they needed to seek out a new language halfway between cleaning and thought. Matt Gray at least may have thought so. Regardless of his intentions, even if the viewer doesn’t completely grasp the nuances of the experiments they’re witnessing (both Beckett’s and Gray’s), there are still many levels that one can appreciate this work on. At the very least, just the idea that you can command a Roomba
to follow a series of instructions is a fun surprise, and there’s something oddly charming about these little devices as they scoot about the stage.

If you start to dig in a little more, Gray’s intentions aren’t as impenetrable as one might think. They actually are fairly straightforward. “Instead of spoken text for the actors to learn, Beckett provides stage directions and movement diagrams that he insists the performers follow exactly. This inevitably results in the ‘mechanization’ of the performers (Studio for Creative Inquiry).” So, if the actors become mechanical, why not make something mechanical become an actor? That seems like a fair trade.

[W]e circumvented the process of mechanizing humans by starting with machines \textit{ab initio}\textsuperscript{12}. With the help of an OpenFrameworks-based computer vision system, Xbee RF communications and Arduino microcontrollers, four iCreate (Roomba) robots became the performers of Beckett’s enigmatic play. In the course of so doing, their subtle quirks and characters as individuals are revealed.” (Studio for Creative Inquiry)

\textbf{Figure 14} - Close-up of the iCreate with an attached Arduino (bottom right, at the end of the cable).

What’s interesting is that in a private discussion with Matt Gray, he told me that perhaps too much individuality was revealed in the robots, to the point where people in the audience got angry with him for humanizing the little vacuum cleaners. People confessed that they frequently would become annoyed with their Roombas and kick them as they went by. Now Matt Gray had shown that Roombas are capable of behavior that looked a lot like learning, and this made some audience members angry with him, not themselves! (Gray)

While my other case studies focus on simple tech solutions, or ones where you have options to not have to spend much money, this particular project both had a higher budget than the projects I think are likely to inspire the public at large, as well as a higher level of skill needed to pull off the programming. (The model of Roomba used is designed to be programmed by teachers and artists, and retails for $199.99\textsuperscript{13}). They do come with sample programs, but Quad goes beyond the basics.) My intention here is not to discourage anyone from trying this, but rather to show the heights one can soar to with technology once they have a little experience under their belt.

\textsuperscript{13} https://www.adafruit.com/product/2388
I did a study abroad program in Oxford the summer between my junior and senior years of college. One of the many highlights was getting to know Alistair, the college’s groundskeeper. He was a self-described “space cadet captain,” a Druid, constantly smiling, and also, long before I had realized it, an inspiration for ways you can generate creative ideas in a way that some people might consider a bit backwards. Basically an all-around solid guy.

One day that summer I was talking to a full-time Oxford student. As we talked, Alistair walked past, waved, and kept going. “That guy is really something,” I said. It wasn’t in response to anything in particular he was doing, it was just the general air about him at all times.

“Oh, you don’t know the half of it,” my friend said. “He drives the administration insane because he goes out and buys these ridiculous tools all the time, and only after he’s spent the money does he go looking around for an application for them.” Upon further questioning, the best example provided was a chainsaw that was “possibly five feet long.” I asked around, and the story checked out, but no one could say for sure if Alistair had actually used the saw for anything, but he sure wanted to. And it was at the ready if needed. My dream scenario would be that he gutted an entire dormitory in an afternoon using only the chainsaw, a look of pure Alistairian delight on his face all the while. To the best of my knowledge, this did not happen. But I imagine that having this tool in his arsenal allowed him to look at campus through a different frame – the frame of “would this situation be improved by a giant chainsaw?”
Chainsaws are indeed technology, but they’re not particularly cheap, especially chainsaws of unusual size. So then, how does this at all relate to theater, or the rest of this thesis?

That’s much easier to answer than “Where is Alistair going with that thing, and what does he aim to do with it?” Often, people will approach a creative task with a plan in mind. “I want to write a play about X,” or “I am going to make a first-person-shooter video game where the guns only shoot mayonnaise,” or maybe even, “I should make a movie about Alistair and the chainsaw.” More often than not, people generate their ideas with the end form already in mind. There’s nothing inherently wrong with this, but it’s not the only way of working. Take Alistair. A comically oversized chainsaw a pretty specialized tool. I don’t know what a legitimate use of it is, and I don’t know if Alistair did either. He, in all likelihood, was excited by the potential of the thing. Gadgets can be the same way. How often have you seen some new device and thought, “That’s cool, but what would I really use it for?” Did you ever think about it past that point?

Playing around with bits of random gadgetry that you bump into (or have hanging around) can sometimes lead you to new territory. There are forums on the internet (for what have come to be called “Makers”\(^\text{14}\) dedicated to toying around with devices like the Raspberry Pi and Arduino. People share their experiments, and the process that they went through, so other people can take that idea and adapt it to their own ends. Imagine how many theatrical ideas you could come up with for something like a cell phone. Or, better

\(^{14}\) *Make* magazine, which either spearheaded, or was the first to capitalize on, “Maker” culture, has a super loose definition of Maker, and I think it would make John Dewey proud: “there is no single definition of a ‘Maker’. That would exclude too many people. Humans are, by their very nature, Makers and the movement is one of celebration. We celebrate our humanity by rejoicing in the creative making that our planetary cohabitants partake in (https://makezine.com/2016/04/01/what-is-a-maker-you-are/).” Do it, and do it well!
yet, a Raspberry Pi, which can run apps and be programmed, play music, take video, and more. Browse one of these online forums, find an idea you like, and think about how you might “remix” it. That’s just one way to get started as a citizen of Culture 3.0.

Or, as you’re about to see, it can happen without you even meaning to go this route.

Behold the SmileBox

An example of form creating content that I have personal experience with begins with something called a “PirateBox.” A man named David Darts is the creator, and it’s a form of what’s known as a “dead drop.15” Darts took the idea of the dead drop, and created a sort of wifi hotspot that people can connect to, swap files, leave messages for each other, and stream whatever music or videos people have uploaded. The PirateBox’s wireless access is only to the box’s own network – it’s cut off from the rest of the internet. In that

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15 According to deaddrops.com: “‘Dead Drops’ is an anonymous, offline, peer to peer file-sharing network in public space. USB flash drives are embedded into walls, buildings and curbs accessible to anybody in public space. Everyone is invited to drop or find files on a dead drop.”
sense, it’s very much like a classic dead drop, but it’s a dead drop that can travel with you. It’s designed to be built out of materials that are small, battery-powered, and easy to transport. One of the more popular uses is for file sharing at conventions, so attendees can share their favorite bits of media with other attendees (https://piratebox.cc/faq).

I read about the PirateBox on one of the many Maker sites I read, and it seemed like a fun project. You can make one out of an inexpensive router (that can be powered off of batteries), a cell phone, a laptop, or any model of Raspberry Pi. I chose to use a Raspberry Pi Zero, since it’s the smallest and most inexpensive model ($5-$10). My idea was to take the idea of the PirateBox and change it so it was less about file sharing, and more about fostering positive and theatrical interactions with other people around you. In the wake of the 2016 election (the day after the election, to be precise), I noticed a change in the mood of everyone I encountered, and not a good one. People seemed shocked, saddened, confused, or combinations of these and other emotions. (Remember a while back when I was talking about finding content that’s meaningful to you? Here’s an example of how I did it, or at least how I recognized when content presented itself to me.) Not being entirely sure of what else to do in that moment, I decided I was going to smile and say hello to everyone I passed on the street. It was a small thing, but it was something I knew I could do. (You might recall that Manifesto! came out of Matheson Marcault wanting to do something in response to their feelings about the 2015 UK election. I wasn’t consciously thinking of that in this moment. But somehow the reaction I had to this moment eventually found a way to manifest itself as a bit of Cheap Tech Theater.) I was quite surprised to find that almost everyone I encountered perked up, returned my greeting, and seemed to be better off, mood-wise as a result of such a tiny gesture.
With that in mind, that week I started a website called “What Made You Smile Today?16” where I posted things that had made me smile that day, no matter how small. (This in turn had come out of my attempts to teach my son that even if you had what you considered to be a “bad day,” with a little effort you could find a happy moment buried inside. After doing this enough, your mind can learn to search for these moments, or find ways to create them (Hanson). This act of throwing up a quickie website alone illustrates how having cheap technology at your disposal can lead you to new ideas if you’re grappling with your reactions to current events, but it doesn’t end here. I didn’t do a very good job of maintaining the site, so the flood of user contributions that I had hoped for never arrived. When I discovered the PirateBox, it occurred to me I could repurpose it as the “SmileBox,” retool my “What Made You Smile Today?” idea, and bring it into any number of situations where there would be a lot of people. Then I could see if I could gather any smile-worthy moments.

In this context, I decided the name “PirateBox” would have to go, and something less, er, swashbuckling could take its place. I built the “SmileBox” from its skeleton (lots of web code – though one of the goals of the PirateBox is to teach people coding (https://www.piratebox.cc/goals)), and changed the network name (which is what you’d see if you were on your phone or computer looking for wifi) from “PirateBox – Share Freely” to “What Made You Smile Today?” That, it seemed to me, was a much more welcoming name.

My next concern, since I was trying to keep things positive, was to change the interface you connect with. The file-sharing seemed especially problematic to me. It

16 On Tumblr, because of the reasons I listed in the Manifesto! case study – I had the site up and running in under half an hour – whatmadeyousmiletoday.tumblr.com.
didn’t feel connected to my idea, and I had a fear that someone would fill it with porn, or something that would drive people away (and people in the Piratebox forums confirmed that this did occasionally happen) rather than draw them in. I eventually decided I would have a chat room, front and center on the main page, and then, should people prefer not to chat, they could go to the message board, and post something there. Both the chatbox and the message board use “what made you smile today?” as a prompt. The key “big picture” idea here was to help people interact, and to do so in a way that overtly looks for positivity, which is something I personally feel is worth doing as often as possible.

My goal for this device was to make it available for use on my daily trips on the commuter rail, which has notoriously bad wifi. When you get on the train, you need to look for the wireless network. Rather than there being a specific “MBTA” network that you could connect to automatically, connections are car-by-car, so networks have names like “MBTA_Wifi_Car0209_Box-047,” and you have to choose them manually. This seemed to me to my opportunity to engage with the public. Since a fair amount of people stepping on board would be looking for wifi as soon as they had settled themselves, I would be ready for them with the SmileBox.

Figure 16 - The SmileBox homepage. The wood-like background comes from one of the themes another user created and posted in the PirateBox forums for whoever wanted it (another example of people creating art and offering it up for anyone to adapt for their own use.)
As I mentioned, the SmileBox doesn’t actually provide a connection to the open Internet, it just provides a wifi-based web experience of engaging with other people nearby. The hope was that if they connected and got prompted to talk about something that made them smile, perhaps they wouldn’t get too upset about being trapped inside the SmileBox, and if there were other people on there at the same time, then they could interact with fellow commuters, most likely in the same car, in a way they hadn’t before.

My initial temptation was to make a “GripeBox,” and named the wireless network “Complain about the train” in order to really hook my audience. While that may have worked, it also wasn’t the end result I was after. I was looking to spread positivity, in a time where it felt especially needed. (Though, truth be told, train riders can often turn any conversation towards the shortcomings of the train, and often, in my experience, this perhaps counter intuitively, can bring them closer together. Having a common enemy is a strong bond. Perhaps I shouldn’t have been so quick to rule out this idea, but nevertheless, I did, for that moment.)

![Figure 17 – A sampling of disgruntled Tweets regarding the quality of the commuter rail wi-fi.](image)

The Polls Are Open

My experiment with the SmileBox didn’t quite go as planned. Despite my broadcasting an open network on as many rides as I could (assuming that I had remembered to charge
the battery in between trips). In the first month of running the SmileBox, I didn’t get anyone posting on it. Then one day, someone connected to the chatbox, chose the screen name “Anonimo,” typed a line of gibberish, followed that up with a blank line, and then disappeared into the ether. The anomaly of Anonimo aside, I have a few thoughts about why participation may have been low.

First, the only people who might know that the SmileBox and BeefBox even existed would be the people who actively log onto the train’s wifi system each ride. I don’t know how much use the T’s wifi portals actually get. As many people who seem to be using devices on the train are using their cell phones, it’s entirely possible that they just use their cellular service to get internet access. So they wouldn’t even look at the list of available networks.

Among the commuters who do use the T’s wifi, some might see an open network and suspect treachery. It’s not the best idea to log into a network that is not a legitimate MBTA hotspot. There was a brief period in August 2018 where an open network was being advertised, and while it looked like a real MBTA wifi portal on the surface (following the naming convention MBTA_Wifi_CarX_Box-Y), it actually had placeholders for the numbers, as MBTA_Wifi_CarXXX_Box-XXX, or leaving off the MBTA part of the name, which is how one knows it’s actually the train’s system). Maybe it was a real T-sanctioned portal, and some MBTA IT person just forgot to plug the right numbers into the name, but I was skeptical. It’s a fine line between someone doing a bad job and someone doing just a good enough job to trick unsuspecting computer users to a bogus network and then stealing their data.
Then there are the people who maybe just plain didn’t notice anything other than
the MBTA hotspot. Other than go person to person and let them know about the
SmileBox, there isn’t much I could do about them. I wanted it to be something people
happened upon, rather than were directed to. Plus, going person to person seemed like a
really good way to run afoul of people who try to get a little quiet time on the train, which
could possibly be something that makes them smile daily.

While thinking about the possible reasons no one was connecting to the
SmileBox, I returned to my thought about creating a SmileBox that was specifically for
MBTA complaints. I started to wonder whether it was such a bad idea after all. The
SmileBox was up and running, but people weren’t logging in at the rate I had been
hoping for (which is to say, at all). Since my belief had been that people would be overly
eager to connect if they got to complain, I decided to test this idea, and have a small
competition to see which box would generate more/any interest. (It began to feel like I
was workshopping my ideas. Which one would resonate better with an audience?) I made
a second “SmileBox,” but since it was designed to collect grievances, I decided to name
it the “BeefBox.” Despite my aversion to meat, I made a graphic that combined the MBTA’s logo with a public domain photo of a piece of actual beef. (I have a problem resisting puns, visual or otherwise.)

I decided that the name of the BeefBox network would be “MBTA Complaint Center,” and I would run it at the same time as the SmileBox, and then I would see which, if any, of the boxes got interest from my fellow commuters.

As of this writing, the SmileBox and the BeefBox continue to be neglected by the public. Anonimo has never returned. My new thought is that maybe people don’t look at the wifi names beyond the ones officially for the T, since they’re often password-protected, or it just seems somewhat dangerous to connect to an unknown network. I suppose I could imitate the official MBTA network naming convention for the BeefBox, but that seems a little shady, especially when people are redirected to a T complaint site. Surely they’d have a complaint at that point, but I want it to be clear that it’s in the spirit
of fun, not in the spirit of poking a hornet’s nest. Given that my commute isn’t going away, I’ll have plenty of time to refine my approach regarding these two boxes.

Next steps for the Smile/BeefBoxes

As much as I liked the idea of people having to find the SmileBox on their own, I think if I really want to engage the public at large I might need to make it clear to people that this device is out there waiting for their input. Otherwise, I’m limiting the users to the small subset of people who ride the train, search for a wireless network to use, and are curious enough to log into an unknown network, open a web page, and engage with strangers over chat or message board comments. How we interact with other people in the world is a form of theater, much like what we do every day is essentially improvisation. With that in mind, my probable next step will be to find locations that would let me put up some sort of signage alerting people to the existence of the SmileBox, and requesting that they take a look and provide input. The point of the PirateBox was to share files with a select group of people who were aware it was there. Since what I’m doing is using the PirateBox framework with a different end in mind (not to mention trying to engage an audience that isn’t aware that the SmileBox is even there) figuring out an effective way to attract users is going to take a bit of experimenting. Using a PirateBox as a new form of performance is not anything that was in the PirateBox FAQ. But coming up against these barriers is to be expected when you’re venturing into new territory, and while a barrier is a barrier, it’s also an opportunity. I want to connect with people, and I think on some level people want to connect with each other. Finding a way around the obscurity of the SmileBox will surely lead me someplace good. It just may take some work to get there.
Since the MBTA might not be amenable to my posting flyers on trains about the rogue access point I’m running (especially as far as the BeefBox is concerned), I should probably also consider other venues. (Though I do think that waving the BeefBox under the MBTA’s nose would definitely add some allure to it. The T has a reputation of sticking it to its riders, and presenting this as a way for the riders to stick it to the T could be exactly the way to do it.)

Coffee shops seem like a good option to start with, as people do tend to hang out there and use the shop’s internet connection. A small sign at the register could invite people to take part in the SmileBox if they’re so inclined. I think public libraries might also be receptive to this sort of approach. Again, there’s the issue of “what if someone posts something nasty,” so I could instruct the baristas and librarians on how to log in and delete posts if necessary. I could also modify the webpage, or have handouts available in the venue, with instructions on how to create your own version of the SmileBox, and possibly even explain my hopes of people interacting theatrically. My plan, at least for the SmileBox, is to ask the coffee shop where I am a regular if I could leave the SmileBox with them for a day. I could drop it off in the morning, and then pick it up on my way to the train at the end of the day. Depending on their reaction, and how much interaction I get from the public, I may see if I can get them to take it on for more days, or move on, and try my town’s library and repeat the process.

The BeefBox seems to me to be more of an “under the radar” type of device, since the MBTA is probably not that enthusiastic about allowing a third party to open the floodgates to anonymous complainers. They take enough abuse on Twitter, so I don’t
think they’re looking for even more. In keeping with the idea that this is a clandestine complaint box, I think hanging flyers around train stations alerting people about the BeefBox and telling them to keep an eye out for it might work. It could become something like a Keytar Bear sighting. People are on the lookout, and once there’s an encounter, they post about it on social media, and then others head to the area to see for themselves. I could even establish some sort of method by which people logged into the BeefBox could identify themselves to the other participants, who would be sure to be nearby, due to the limited range of the Raspberry Pi’s wifi. Making the “time out” hand gesture (which is a T) and looking around the room/train car/etc. could be one way, and it’s performative, even if only in a small way. It would require some experimenting to see what works, and/or how much people are willing to do. Logging in and connecting with people in the vicinity is the thing I’m most looking for at this moment.

Both the BeefBox and the SmileBox are small enough, and cheap enough to make that I could easily make multiples of them and spread them around. I could aim to get BeefBoxes on each subway line and each commuter rail route during rush hour daily. I could put SmileBoxes in libraries and coffee shops wherever I go (provided the venues are into it), and periodically check back on how they’re progressing. But first, I’ll try one coffee shop, and base the rest of the campaign on how that goes.

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17 I could be surprised, but as someone who made some local waves by posting train complaints in haiku form on Twitter, I can say that they have a limited amount of patience. If I could convince them that this would be good publicity, that might be my way in.

18 A Boston street performer who wears a bear suit and plays a “keytar” – a keyboard worn like a guitar. He performs infrequently enough that when there’s a sighting, a buzz always follows.
In Which I Find That Boxes Can Hold All Sorts of Different Content

Hannah Nicklin’s PhD thesis on gaming and performance ended up being inspiring in ways I had not expected. The thesis itself was interesting enough, but the part that resonated most with me was the backmatter, which included the transcripts of her interviews with practitioners as well as the description of the steps she took while creating her “Umbrella Project.” She solicited stories from passersby in Bath, England on three different occasions, on three different themes, which she then drew upon for “soundwalks” around the city (essentially audio tours, but with instructions for the listener to follow, such as “Find somewhere, find a place you feel comfortable; you can sit, or stand, lean against a wall, shop front, tree or building. Just find somewhere you feel ok (Nicklin 507).” Rather than just explaining the things they were seeing as they walked, she instead relates some of the stories that she heard, and guides the listener around the city looking for some of the people who shared these stories (such as the kebab man who has worked the same spot for 19 years). One of them (“night-time/edges”) ends by asking the listener to imagine one of the people from the stories in the soundwalk, and it culminates in a message to notice the people who don’t feel as though anyone notices them (Nicklin 507-515).

That got me thinking about how the places we pass through at any time of day are often just the background to us, but, as everyone has their own set of experiences, any given point could be the site of something that someone has a strong memory about. Rather than attempting to set up a similar soundwalk, I had the idea to solicit memories connected to a certain spot from people and set up “MemoryBox”es on the sites of each memory. The boxes would consist of a box mounted to a pole (or something else sturdy
and part of the regular landscape), a “play” button, and a speaker. I would record each participant’s memory, load it into the playback device, and program it so when the button is pushed, the memory plays.

When I first conceived of the idea, the technology part of this project seemed simple enough. I figured I could simply repurpose a bunch of those greeting cards that play songs, or make funny noises, or contain some sort of audio content. The circuit was already there, all I would have to do is figure out how to record over the existing sound, which, based on my limited electronics knowledge, seemed like a case of just “reflashing” whatever chip held the audio content (sort of like recording over a tape that already had something on it). I found that I was not the first person to have the idea of recording over these cards\(^\text{19}\), but it also turned out that they are manufactured in such a way that this is more or less not possible (which makes sense – if it was easy to do, it would only be a matter of time before someone went through their local stationery store and made all the birthday cards shout profanity). So, while that idea was out, it is possible to purchase unrecorded versions of these circuits on eBay. There seemed to be various configurations of these circuits – some could hold four short recordings and had four play buttons, others only had one button but could record up to two minutes of audio. Two minutes seemed like enough time for someone to talk about a memory, but also possibly a bit long to ask someone to stand there listening to said story. If it was a good story, someone might be inclined to wait for the whole thing, but it could depend on how much of a rush they were in, how curious they were about this device, how noisy the street was (if you can only make out bits of the story, why would you listen to the whole thing?) and

\(^{19}\) In 2011, someone wanted to reflash the audio on 100 cards and hang them from a tree so a sound would play whenever the wind moved one of the cards: https://forum.arduino.cc/index.php?topic=59514.0
other factors depending on location or audience. While I was concerned about the length, I did manage to win an auction for one of the two minute models for 45 cents, which seemed like it was a fair price to pay to test an idea. (The shipping was $4, so the whole thing still came in cheaper than the audio greeting cards I had originally considered using.) I wanted one story per box, and even if I had two minutes available, I didn’t see why the whole time slot needed to be filled up.

I figured that to start out, I could solicit memories from friends, and once I had put a couple of these out “in the wild,” I could attach contact information to the box, so if other people wanted to participate, they could get in touch. I announced to my Facebook friends what I was doing, and asked anyone interested to get in touch, and then I waited. I got a decent amount of “likes,” a few comments, but only one volunteer with a story. (It was about being in an ATM and overhearing people talking about putting regular KFC into a toaster oven to make your own “extra crispy” KFC20. A funny story, but I was hoping for at least a couple more.) I volunteered that my memory would be about the time shortly after I moved to Boston, and I went into The Tasty21 in Harvard Square for lunch, and listened to these two old guys talking about having seen Count Basie in Boston “back in the day.” (I was there for at least an hour after I finished eating, just because I was enjoying their stories so much. Being somewhat shy, I didn’t interact with them, I just hung out at the counter within earshot. I wasn’t fooling anyone, they knew I

20 “There's an ATM in Arlington where I overheard the following conversation:
A: Hey lemme ask you a question. What if you took original recipe and put it in the toaster oven? Would you...
B: Yeah, you'd get extra crispy.
A: I thought so (Carmelovich).”

21 A tiny, hole-in-the-wall greasy-spoon diner that was right in the middle of Harvard Square from 1916-1997 (Wikipedia). There is one very short scene in Good Will Hunting that was shot there, and when I saw the movie, it had already been torn down. When the scene appeared on screen, there was an audible wave of excitement, and a few people even called out its name.
was listening, but I could tell they were enjoying having an audience, making this a form of human interaction theater years before I was even thinking about this sort of thing.)

Today, there’s a CVS in the place where The Tasty used to be, so would anyone even stop to think about what had been there before? This memory also got a few “likes,” and one “I miss The Tasty so much” comment, but that was it. I was reminded of the section in Hannah Nicklin’s thesis where she discussed her difficulties in soliciting stories about the city of Bath, England for The Umbrella Project. She learned after a few attempts that many people just seemed to think they didn’t have any stories to tell, or the ones they had weren’t worth telling (Nicklin 500).

In addition to the difficulties of collecting stories, there’s also the issue of how to power such a device. It could be possible to add a solar panel to recharge the batteries by day, but this will add to the overall cost, as well as the complexity of the build. A solar panel to power a Raspberry Pi costs $29 at Adafruit.com, and while I might not need such a powerful one depending on the circuit I ultimately use for this project, that’s a good enough barometer for how high the cost may get, just for powering this. Making a reasonably vandal-proof box to store it in is another expense to consider. The cheap end of things is $14\textsuperscript{22}, and they go up to at least $40. I stopped looking once I hit that price point, as that’s too much money to risk this getting stolen or destroyed.

Figure 20 - A sturdy, waterproof project case. $14.64. If the MemoryBox takes off, that will add up.

\textsuperscript{22}https://www.polycase.com/ml-34f-1508
My last couple of possible ideas to implement aren’t necessarily the most fun ideas of the
group, but they are important to me, as they deal with issues that I face personally. They
are also important in that they address the idea of accessibility in a different sense than I
have addressed it up to this point. If my goal is to make theater available to everyone, this
needs to include people with disabilities. These are my first baby steps into a much larger
conversation.

Subtitling the Real World

For the past twelve years (possibly more, but twelve marks the “official” diagnosis) I
have experienced a slow, but progressive hearing loss. When I first went in for a hearing
test, they found some minor loss in my right ear, but not so bad that there was anything to
be done about it. A year or two later, the hearing in this ear had gotten bad enough that a
hearing aid was recommended. I then started getting annual hearing tests in order to track
the decline. My hearing seemed to hold steady for about nine years, and then in 2017 my
right ear (the “bad one”) had gotten much worse, and my “good ear” was now only my
“better ear.” My doctor said the ear formerly known as “the good ear” was a borderline
case, but given the increasing difficulties I had hearing people speaking, and that
communicating with people is part of my job, I got a second hearing aid to be safe. While
I have never actively identified as someone with a disability, I do recognize that my
experience of everyday life is different than that of people who do not have hearing loss.
I frequently have to ask people to repeat themselves (which some take better than others),
and I have learned that if I watch a movie or TV at home, the closed captioning can make
a world of difference in terms of how well I can follow what’s going on (often ambient
noises or dialogue, especially taking place out of the shot, will slip right past me without
captions). I also learned, just this past year, that movie theaters have portable closed captioning devices, called CaptiView, that you can borrow for the screening. They mount inside the cup holder, and have a tiny screen on a flexible stem, and you can place them in your line of sight while watching. They’re not as good as on-screen captions, but they help, if the theater has remembered to charge them, which is not always the case.

My discovery of the CaptiView for movies got me thinking about how cheap tech might be able to provide captions in other situations. I knew of one non-tech way of assisting the hearing impaired in a live performance setting – ASL interpreters. However, not everyone with hearing loss knows ASL. If there was an inexpensive device that could make events (large or small) more accessible to the hearing impaired, that could expose a whole new audience to theater makers. The simplicity of the CaptiView made me consider a DIY version for roving theatrical performances, or for something like Manifesto!, where it’s an operation of just one or two people.

My initial idea, which would work mainly for scripted theater, would be to have a device that is capable of displaying the script, in time with the delivery onstage. The most minimal means of something like this could just be a tablet with the script on it, and the audience member in need of captioning could follow along. There are some issues I have
with this plan, though. One is that the viewer has to do the work of keeping up with the actors, and scrolling through the script on their own, which means they’re not as focused on the performance as they could be. It feels like this might end up detracting from the experience more than it might add to it. It also assumes the viewer can hear enough of the dialogue to know when to scroll. Then I thought that there might be a way for the tablet to connect to a web page, which someone from within the theater could control, so the lines would move along with the dialogue of the play, and the viewer doesn’t need to do anything but follow along. This felt better, but raises another issue: in a dark setting, the screen may be distracting, as it gives off light. Additionally, the time it takes one’s eyes to adjust from the tablet to the darkened space could result in the audience member missing both action and dialogue. The CaptiView is a small LCD screen, much like an old-school digital watch, and it’s housed in a small rectangular case which limits the amount of light that can escape. However, it’s also only used in a dark theater. If someone was attending a production in a bright setting (such as outdoors, during the day), a device optimized for darkness wouldn’t be helpful. This made me wonder if I would need to design multiple editions of this, to cover all possible settings? Or perhaps provide a way to switch to “dark mode” with a black background for darkened, indoor settings, as well as another color scheme better suited to bright light.

My internet searches for a device that already did this, and for people experimenting with similar ideas that I could use as guidance, weren’t very fruitful. This makes me think that I’ve come up with an idea that could fill a need not currently being addressed. The lack of other projects even in the same neighborhood as mine made it somewhat difficult to even know where to begin, but I kept looking. I finally stumbled
upon a piece of software called Sphinx, which can run on a Raspberry Pi. It’s “voice recognition” software, the kind that allows one to dictate text to a computer. But it also was capable of displaying what it heard onscreen, which seemed like the direction I wanted to go in. There are many types of small screens available for the Raspberry Pi, so I could easily get one similar to the CaptiView or something else that gave off way less light than a tablet, but was still readable in the darkness of a theater. This project (the KraftiView?) is still in the early stages. While I’ve had difficulties with commercial voice recognition software in the past not recognizing my speech with much accuracy, I remain open-minded.

Hearing Is Believing

My final project idea at this moment is called “Do You Hear What I Hear?” It’s an attempt to demonstrate to people with non-compromised hearing what it’s like to function with the degree of hearing loss that I currently experience. Every year, my hearing test provides me with a chart of which frequencies are disappearing, and how far gone they are. My idea is to use this in conjunction with an audio EQ to remove these same frequencies from a recorded audio track to simulate for a non-compromised hearing person the experience of hearing loss for an as-yet undetermined project. And if I wanted to do a live presentation of some sort, I could run a microphone through a mixer, which would handle the EQ, which feeds the sound to headphones worn by the participant. I’m thinking it could be some sort of walking tour, where the listener can’t hear most of the presentation because the sound has been edited to mimic my hearing loss. Then I could see if they were uncomfortable asking me to repeat myself (or replay the audio, if it’s a recording), and I could even begin to get annoyed when they do, which reflects my
experience when I’ve had to ask someone to repeat themselves multiple times. (I’m not sure I want to go this route, since it feels like I’d be inviting someone to take part in my fun activity, and then I’d behave rudely towards them. It might, however, lead to some good discussions about interactions between people with hearing loss and people without hearing loss. It’s certainly a way to illustrate the need for sensitivity during exchanges with the hearing impaired.)

I’m also considering developing this idea as some sort of interactive game where it’s important to follow directions, but because they’re hearing the directions the way I do, it’s very difficult to understand them. Or I could interview participants, and they’d have to try to piece together what I’ve asked, but since they’d be hearing the directions the way I do, they may be very unsure of what I’ve actually asked. The technology for mangling sound is already out there, and should be the easy part. And it is certainly possible to edit and play audio through a Raspberry Pi, so I could load my soundtrack onto one of those, plug in headphones, and hand it to whoever seems game. Whatever form “Do You Hear What I Hear?” ends up taking, I hope for it to be a lighthearted way of showing the difficulties people with hearing loss face regularly.

Figure 21 - The results of my last hearing test.
Ideally, both lines would be above the "20" marker on the sides of the chart. The bottom line is my right, or "bad" ear.
Conclusion

*Performance brings people together in a very intimate, shared experience, which at best can remind you of the powerful shared bond that you can have with other people, and at the same time can remind you of the fragility of social and political relations between people.*

- Tim Etchells, Forced Entertainment (Clugston)

When I first began to think about what I wanted to write about for this thesis, I knew I wanted to highlight various works by artists I admired, and look at them through the lens of readings I had done in Doris Sommer’s “Cultural Agents” class, which I took in the fall of 2016. The class was a survey of different philosophers and artists who had an influence in some way or another on the connection between art and social justice. This was the class where I learned about Antanas Mockus (the former Mayor of Bogota, aka SuperCitizen, discussed here on pages 20-22), read Paolo Freire (*Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, discussed here on pages 24-25) for the first time, and dug deeper into the work of Augusto Boal (who I was slightly familiar with, but more in the context of drama therapy, which in some ways is still a form of using art for social justice, as his techniques were developed in order to help workers envisions ways to interact more productively with their bosses).

An early iteration of a “using tech and theater to create change” idea of mine, was to create a phone app that allowed people to connect with strangers to perform Forum Theater (in which people act out problems they are dealing with, and once their scene is finished, a spectator (or as Boal would say, “spect-actor,” as all witnesses were also participants) could step in, replace anyone on the stage, and change the outcome of the scene in an effort to provide insight into ways one could address the issue at hand).
thought it could function in the same way as a video chat app, and people who were
wrestling with any problems could log in, connect with other spect-actors from around
the world, and get to work. As this idea was mainly for a paper in a theater class, and I
am not a programmer, this never made it past the idea stage. (I was also warned that
“involving the app store in this project is really not a headache you want bring upon
yourself,” which was probably good advice at the time.) But without realizing it, I had
already started down this road. I just thought my app idea was a one-off, rather than the
start of a new path.

Cultural Agents is also where I learned about Culture 3.0, from Pier Luigi
Sacco himself. We read one of his papers, and much to our surprise and delight, one day
he showed up in class to give a guest lecture. The paper we read was a little difficult for
non-economists to comprehend (it was a report for a European arts grant agency), but
being able to listen to his ideas in a casual setting, ask questions, and hear about many
examples of where Culture 3.0 was beginning to take hold was an experience that clearly
made an impression on me. This impression went from “this is an interesting thought,
maybe it’s a good tool to have in my toolbox,” to something much bigger as time went
on.

As I collected case studies to use as examples here, starting with Viviane Schwarz
(who I’ve known since the early 2000s), I fully expected to just look at a bunch of cool
pieces with a performance angle of some sort, then to analyze them as I might have done
in Cultural Agents. But as I read about these projects, and corresponded with their
creators, something bigger happened. I don’t really remember how it was that I came
across the PirateBox website, or what I even was initially searching for that led me there.
But it seemed fun, so I gave it a try. Then my plan to turn it into the SmileBox evolved, and at some point I realized that this was a case of Culture 3.0 in action! (Even before I took the steps of modifying my own PirateBox, the forums on the PirateBox website were already steeped in sharing and riffing on each other’s ideas and modifications. I just tapped into that world.) Without even noticing it, I had become part of the process I was writing about.

While reading Hannah Nicklin’s thesis about her “headphone tours,” I thought about the logistical problems presented by a project where you need to provide headphones, or at least an audio file to the general public, and just by letting my mind wander, I thought, “Why not cut that out of the equation altogether? You don’t even need a smart phone, you just need to happen upon the audio player,” and the MemoryBox was born. Sacco talked about citizens who didn’t just listen to music, but created it. I had become a citizen not just reading about audio tours, but creating them, one memory point at a time. Then, rather than just accept the fact that closed captioning was only available under certain specific circumstances, I built upon what I had learned about single-board computers like the Raspberry Pi, and with a little digging, found possibilities for my own homemade solution that could go anywhere I go.

On the one hand, I’ll allow that I have always been the sort of person who, when finding something interesting, tries to learn as much about it as possible, up to and including participating in whatever that may be. (Within reason – I find sharks fascinating, but I’m not quite ready to hop into a diving cage in Great White territory.) So I may already have been predisposed to the Culture 3.0 mindset long before I knew there was a name for it. That being said, people who were prone to tinkering with gadgets were
the first wave of people to buy home computers, and now computers are almost a necessity to get by in the world today. (This is one of the arguments I often hear in regards to funding public libraries – they offer computers and internet access for those who may not be able to afford them at home, if they even have a home.)

Since these devices I’ve written about are getting cheaper and cheaper, I suspect it’s largely a matter of marketing at this point. Years ago, I was in a band and ran my own record label. After a while, it seemed that we had reached a sort of plateau in terms of reaching music fans. We would get a decent turnout at our shows, but it was obvious that the same people were always coming out, and our audience wasn’t expanding any more. As I thought about it, I figured there might be people out there who would be open to learning about new music, but weren’t sure where to look for it. (This was back before algorithms did all the work for everyone.) These were the people I wanted to reach, but in turn, I wasn’t sure how to find them. We were all wandering around in the dark without ever bumping into each other. I decided to try an experiment. There was a coffee shop close to one of the clubs we played at regularly. Judging everyone based only on appearances, I figured a lot of the clientele of this café might be the sort of people I was looking for. I then made sampler CDs (remember burning mix CDs?) featuring all the bands that were going to be playing at an upcoming show, and set up a small display next to the register. (I knew the owners of the café, so grabbing this prime bit of retail space was not a problem. Interesting how much cafés seem to come into play for my ideas.) The CDs had a funny picture on the cover to get people’s attention, all the information about the show, and it explained that all the bands on the CD were playing just around the corner soon. When it came time to play that show, I noticed a good 10-20 people that I
had never seen at any of our shows before, and I credit the free CD samplers with bringing them out that night. So there was an untapped audience out there, it was just a matter of reaching them (and then retaining them, which, at least for me, was the especially hard part).

My sense is that common/cheap/obsolete tech-based interactive/performative/engaging theater presents a similar challenge. There may be people out there who like to tinker with things that wouldn’t identify as “Makers,” or maybe have never even heard this term. Likewise, there may be people designing computer games who have never considered any sort of interface other than a computer, because in their experience, that’s the way games are presented. Theater people, even if they’re familiar with Artaud, and/or other practitioners who have called for similar revolutions over the years, may not consider themselves very technical, or perhaps think Artaud’s ideas are interesting, but difficult to put into practice, or merely a relic of Dada/Surrealism. (Or they may just dismiss him out of hand.) If this was a Venn diagram, my sense is that there are many separate circles which all in some way touch on one aspect of what I’ve discussed here, but there’s nothing connecting them to the other circles. The difficult step in all this is figuring out how to create a huge Culture 3.0 circle that lays on top of all the other circles, and that somehow builds bridges between all the different subgroups, to facilitate as much cross-pollination as possible, all the better. Currently, I’m not entirely sure how to do this, other than to keep doing what I’m doing. Getting works out into the world, where the general public can interact with them, seems like a good way to cast a wide net. Those people who encounter these unusual devices, and take part in whatever sort of performance they encourage, will hopefully be sent
down a path of reflecting on what just happened, and perhaps, like me, eventually reach a point where they have an idea that riffs on what they saw, and Culture 3.0’s flower opens a tiny bit more.

Since Culture 3.0 in its optimal form involves people coming together and feeding off each other’s ideas, exposing as many people as possible to new ideas is key. This is another argument for getting theater out of The Theater. If I were to put a MemoryBox in front of the CVS that is in the space where The Tasty used to be, the cross-section of people who might come across it is huge. That’s smack-dab in the middle of Harvard Square. The sheer amount of tourists from all over the world who might notice it creates the chance that someone will return home and tell someone else about this funny little thing they saw, and even just between those two people, a new idea could take shape. Then you have all the people who work in the area who pass by, all the people coming out of the T station to run an errand, or go to an appointment, or to just wander around a part of Cambridge that’s bustling and exciting. This could be the Culture 3.0 version of the free CDs in the café, except I’m not limiting the audience to just those people who happen to patronize a certain business. The audience is still limited to people who are in Harvard Square for one reason or another, but that is still a much bigger group of people. If I can successfully solicit memories from all over the city (and beyond), that widens the pool of potential Culture 3.0 participants.

There’s always the chance that someone will experience something like the MemoryBox and not be moved in any way by it. Nothing will ever please 100% of society, but this is not a huge concern. What I do think would be nice would be that they at least take a moment to talk about it with someone else (even if only to complain about
“If you’re feeling satisfied, you’ve been entertained. If you’re feeling edgy, that’s art. If you don’t get it, you start a dialogue (Sommer, Doris. Cultural Agents, 6 Sep 16, Harvard Extension School, Cambridge, MA. Class discussion).” While I’d like to find a way to both entertain people and create art at the same time, I think that getting people to interact about something is the seed of Culture 3.0. This idea can be traced back to Kant, though it can be difficult to grasp the ideas in his writing due to the sheer density of his language. Doris Sommer, in Cultural Agents, put it in a delightfully concise way, explaining that the way to get a democracy working is to take some idea and get people talking about it. (Sommer. Cultural Agents, 13 Sep 16, Harvard Extension School, Cambridge, MA. Class discussion).

Right now, the United States is so hyper-partisan that finding a topic that people can remain civil about is going to be difficult. Yet this is also a moment when we need to be shoring up democracy as best we can. The types of projects I’ve described here are the perfect vehicles for these sorts of discussions, because on the surface, they don’t look very political (even Manifesto!, which was conceived as a political work, is framed as a game, which is disarming). And to add to it, these projects can be created with almost no budget, so voices that may not usually have a platform can create their own. Maybe someone sees a MemoryBox on the street, and likes the idea, but would rather not share their memory face-to-face with a stranger. They don’t have to. The recordable audio greeting card I bought on eBay was less than $5. Maybe there are fancier ways of presenting the material, but the baseline here is cheap, and it works. Anyone could take this idea and do it their own way for less than lunch at Taco Bell. But they won’t be able to if they don’t see the possibilities. They’ll remain in a place where someone else
dictates what should be considered theater and what shouldn’t. Well, it’s time to change that. My prescription is to flood the streets with strange and wonderful devices, and make all corners of society aware of what’s possible. Maybe some of us will have to root through the couch for change in order to afford the raw materials to jump in ourselves, but the barrier to entry is lower than it’s ever been, and will only get lower (barring any impending trade wars). To quote Doris Sommer one last time, “Everything worth doing is art (Sommer, Doris. Cultural Agents, 6 Sep 16, Harvard Extension School, Cambridge, MA. Class discussion).” Giving theater back to the people, even if it’s theater in a form people may not immediately recognize, has never felt more worth doing, or more possible, than it does right now.
Appendix 1.

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