Transforming Public Spaces Through Performance

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Transforming Public Spaces Through Performance

by

Anthony G. Valentine

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts Department of Communication College of Arts and Sciences University of South Florida

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Transforming Public Spaces Through Performance

Anthony G. Valentine

ABSTRACT

This thesis is a study about how public spaces can be transformed through performance within them.

More specifically, this study involves two public venues: The Museum of Science and Industry (MOSI), Tampa, FL and The University of South Florida (USF), Tampa, FL in that within these public venues, not only do performances take place, but they transform the space they are performed in and the spaces in-between the public spaces into performance spaces.
Chapter One

Introduction

In the winter of 1991 a stranger came to New York’s Central Park. He possessed a special power that transformed the heart of the city from something artificial into something real. The stranger was a red-tailed hawk that was unlike any others in history for none had attempted what he would achieve and his coming would change more than Central Park. It would awaken something almost forgotten in the many New Yorkers who followed his story. And it all began when they named him Pale Male (Lilien, 1992). Figure 1 shows the hawk on the balcony above 5th avenue (WWW.palemale.com, n.d.).

*Figure 1. Pale Male above 5th Avenue.*

Shortly after Pale Male arrived to this public space, a crowd of regulars began to gather to watch this scene and this public space became a performance space.

Central Park, for the most part, is a façade. The trees and water bodies were all
created (WWW.centrparknyc.org, n.d.) to allow not only people, but also animals to enjoy everyday activities among each other in this public space. And when this new character emerged into this scene, the area was transformed into a stage whereby Pale Male and his observers enacted a drama as the people gathered to watch the everyday, mundane routine of this new character who was making a living in an environment that was not meant to sustain him. Consequently, as they intently watched him hunt, bathe, fly and even attract a mate and produce offspring, the public space, the observers and the bird were transformed.

People who usually never conversed with each other joined together near the boat pond to set up telescopes and watch this bird of prey hunt, thus changing the park from a public playground into a space whereby nature took center stage and the hawk and his family became educators. And New Yorker’s got excited about something that normally takes place on other stages: farms and open natural spaces; not in the middle of one of the world’s busiest cities. “When he arrived, I sensed something unusual in him,” commented observer Marie Winn (Lilien, 1992).

Shortly after the bird’s arrival, he made a home 1500 feet up in one of Manhattan’s luxurious apartment buildings at 5th Avenue and 74th street in the upper west side and something even more miraculous happened. He attracted a mate. The regular observers then joined together to call her First Love. As the word about Pale Male and his mate spread, more people took interest and became regulars in the bird-watching ritual. They interrupted their daily routines to make friends with others they would usually not even acknowledge. “I am currently not working, but today I had a terrific conversation with a guy who makes a half of million on Wall Street,” said a
regular (Lilien, 1992).

After three years of intently watching the pair of birds mate and build nests, the audience was introduced to three more characters in this drama and a first for the area. The hawks produced three offspring. And tension built as the babies grew and began to flap their wings in preparation for their fledgling flights. For three weeks people clung to the scene in anticipation of watching the first hatchling, which they named Number One (Lilien, 1992), practice on the ledge near the safety of his nest and his parents. Usually this toddler would practice with short flights from tree branch to tree branch and not from a nest 15 stories up. But Pale Male hovered near the ledge with a rat in his clutches attempting to lure Number One to take his first leap of faith, as seen in Figure 2 (WWW.palemale.com, n.d.).

*Figure 2. Pale Male luring chicks with bait.*

“I can feel his fear. He wants to jump,” commented one regular called Janine (Lilien, 1992). Another, Dr. Alexander Fisher, who died in 2004 said, “This taught me that parents are necessary to bring up kids in the correct way.”
(WWW.palemale.com/drfisher, n.d.). Regulars made bets on the time the first flight would take place and eventually all of the babies successfully flew from the nest. Charles Kennedy, who rescued the first baby from a tree and in the process got bit said, “Now we’re blood brothers.” Kennedy has since passed on, but the crowd of regulars is seen in Figure 3 (WWW.palemale.com/charleskennedy, n.d.).

*Figure 3. Group of regulars observe Pale Male from Central Park.*

As of April, 2005 (WWW.centralparknyc.org., n.d.), Pale Male attracted four mates and produced 26 chicks in front of an audience that experienced an escape from their everyday lives. And for a while, Central Park became a stage that turned one of Nature’s daily activities into a drama that usually happened not far away on the traditional theatrical stages of Broadway.

I came to know about this story through the documentary film entitled *This Is The Story Of Pale Male.* And through viewing this piece, I began to think about the space in the park through a dramaturgical and organizational lens of how people collaborated to
watch this scene and to become part of it. Consequently, I thought of how this all could
relate to performance theory in public spaces. First, I thought of Erving Goffman and his
theories of performance as a social/cultural aspect of everyday life. I also thought of
Richard Schechner and how he relates cultural performances to drama. Further Victor
Turner with his anthropological view on performing ritual could also lend support. These
theorists used dramaturgical analogies and terms to describe social/cultural performances.
And this is the area of literature I choose to study in order to answer some questions I
pose. Through literature I hope to establish a ground on which I could build more
specific research questions and how I could apply these theories to a study for some
answers.

Also the performances in the film lead me to consider some implications of
performing in public spaces. For example, I have questions about how, through
performance, a space changes. Furthermore, if performance indeed changes the space and
its participants, how would that happen? In the case of Pale Male, the Central Park space
was transformed from a public park to a stage. As a result the participants became
performers and audience members. Consequently, I will seek theorists of public space to
combine their reasoning with that of the performance authors I mentioned. This leads into
some general questions for study. For example: How did the red-tailed hawks and the
audience transform the public space? Were the participants also transformed and in what
manner? Can I then apply this to a study of performances in public spaces? These
fostered a general research question I seek to answer in this study: Can performance
transform public spaces and if so, how?

In the study, I write using a narrative style that tells a story. It includes my
experiences from a participant--observer point of view while including participants’ involvement in the process. Also, I include concepts that I learned as a result of class participation at The University of South Florida (USF) and my own staged performances in public spaces.
Chapter Two

Review Of Literature

I began looking into theories of public space, performance, and performance in public space and I learned that there was very little under the heading of my general question of how public space is transformed through performance. Most of the literature about performing is framed through either a theatrical or a managerial task performance lens. However, in combining the theories of public space and performance, I hope to find a frame by which I can answer the question, or pose a new one.

Most definitions of public space emphasize the necessity of access, which can include access to a place as well as to the activities within it. For instance, space is defined as a definite place: a period of time: a limitless area in which all things exist and move (Webster 1997, p. 696).

Madanipour (1996, p. 148) defines public space as emphasizing open accesses to either the space or the diversity of activities, most notably the social interaction, taking place in it as caused by this open access. A public space can therefore be defined as space that allows all the people to have access to it and the activities within it, which is controlled by a public agency, and which is provided and managed in the public interest. Public places and spaces are public because anyone is entitled to be physically present in them. The people watching Pale Male in Central Park were in a public space with the common interest of, during their lives, coming together to watch a bird. Access to places, however, is often aimed at access to activities within them. “But it’s possible to
have access to a place without activity going on there,’” says Madanipour (1996, p. 112). He also claims (1996, p. 126) that a public sphere is the place where individual masks are displayed, compared and reshaped. Was the Pale Male audience performing through masks? Were they reshaped? Madanipour (1996, p. 2) says, “The division of space and society into public and private spheres affects individuals’ mental states, regulates behavior and superimposes a long-lasting structure onto human societies and the spaces they inhabit.”

We can identify two ways of treating space for performance, focusing on the relationship between auditorium and the stage: one that keeps them separate and reduces their relation to mainly visual; another that brings the two together and creates participation and two-way communication (Madanipour 1996, p. 129). Both these trends can be found in the design of public spaces: one that treats public spaces as a backdrop, where display is the primary function; and another that treats space as a place for communication and social encounters, where the space is understood to have an active part in the performance. Public space, therefore, is treated as a backdrop and a setting: as part of a social front to perform various tasks by individuals and institutions as well as the container in which these acts take place. In both cases, the space is required to offer a degree of flexibility and neutrality.

Madanipour (1996, p. 235) further asserts that public space is the institutional and material common world, the in-between space that facilitates co-presence and regulates interpersonal relationships. Therefore, by being present in the same place with others, shared experience of the world becomes possible and a link is made with previous generations who experienced (or future generations who might experience) the same
physical reality. This connecting role bridging time endows public space with permanence.

Public space then is a place for interaction and for interpersonal relations to take place. People are in a situation where they are around other people. Consequently, face-to-face meetings and interactions are possible. And for Thomas Nagel (in Madanipour 1996, p. 125), it is the social space, in which multifarious individuals who are enormous and complex worlds in themselves, have to fit, is severely limited. People could feel they should adjust their behavior to fit social expectations. The more the public space becomes crowded, the more pressure there is on trying to control it. Interpersonal contact takes place. People are forced to negotiate the space for their personal use. They may, for instance attempt to arrange a formal group relationship much like the Pale Male audience cooperated to become an organized audience.

Consequently, with interpersonal contact a public space becomes a stage for human interaction. And with human interaction there is performance. Therefore, we can use dramaturgical concepts to define and understand performance in public spaces. For instance, Bauman (1984, p. 43) says that part of the essence of performance is that it offers to the participants a special enhancement of experience, bringing with it a heightened intensity of communicative interaction, which binds the audience to the performer in a way that is specific to performance as a mode of communication.

Performance space is framed as such as spaces organized so that a large group can watch a small group and become aware of itself at the same time (Schechner 2003, p. 14). Schechner asserts, “Certainly, more than elsewhere, these places promote social solidarity.” And citing Goffman (in Schechner, 2003) he says that there is an expressive
rejuvenation and reaffirmation of the moral values of the community where reality is being performed. In Central Park the audience cooperated without unrest and supported each other.

Pelias (1997, pp. 100-101) gives 25 definitions of performance citing, for example, “Performance is a way of giving shape to haunting spirits, putting into form what disturbs, what fascinates; an act of becoming, a strategy for discovering oneself by trying on scripts to test their fit; a mundane activity of being, actions familiar as peas, that take us through the day; a public unveiling of one’s understanding; a masking of the real.” In fact, Pelias (1991, p. 8) contends that all human communication can be defined as performance, dramatic in nature and possessing dramatic features, it allows for explanations of all human action, and helps us to understand the nature of performance itself.

Performance also provides some language or vocabulary that helps explain how people communicate. To understand human action requires a vocabulary or method of seeing behavior in its dramatic nature (Pelias 1991, p. 47). The scholar (Pelias 1991, p. 47) further suggests that the life/drama offers a way of explaining human behavior. So he too describes human action with reference to theatrical terms. This is found in scholars of social or cultural performance as they relate it to aesthetic performance and drama. According to Shepherd (2004, p. 60), there is a distinction between drama as art--aesthetic drama--and the performance of social interaction in everyday life. But the distinction tends to get blurred. “The pervasiveness of theatricality in social life, the playing out of roles, the affinity of society and theatre; the social ceremonies, and the individual collective roles which we play in them (sometimes without knowing it),
present an analogy with what we call theatre,” says Madanipour (1996, p. 45). Even so, artistic performances encompass a considerable variety of communicative acts (Pelias 1991, p. 8). Pelias also says that human action is motivated. This action then implies conflict, and conflict implies drama. Relating to Burke, all human behaviors are actions based in conflict and dramatistic in nature (Pelias, 1991, p. 47). Consequently, based on this literature we can use dramaturgical terms to explain social drama, which in this case describe the theatrical elements of the Central Park event, which include a scene or stage, which is the space, characters that are the birds and onlookers, and props such as telescopes audience members use to get a better view of the birds. As a result, it is in this vocabulary where theatrical drama and cultural performances meet.

For example, Goffman (1959) suggests that performance is part of everyday life and that there is performance in the mundane, everyday activities we as humans do. And Pelias (1991, p. 3) says, “In its most general sense, performance is the executing of an action.” Goffman’s (1959) theories suggest that all social interactions are shaped by an intention, conscious or otherwise, to construct and maintain the impression of one’s self given to others. A sociologist such as Goffman is less interested in what is explicitly performed and rather more interested in the concealed or unconscious performances of everyday life. Consequently he draws on the language of drama and theatre to analyze everyday life. For instance, he uses the term ‘front region’ as the place where the performance is given (Goffman 1959, p. 107). His analogy of ‘back region’ or ‘backstage’ is a place hidden from the audience (Goffman 1959, p. 112). Performers then assume a front in the presence of an audience and perform what they wish the audience to see or, as Goffman (1959, p. 77) says, “The personal front of the performer is employed
not so much because it allows him to present himself as he would like to appear but because his appearance and manner can do something for the wider scope.” This could relate how the Pale Male audience performed a cooperative front to maintain order. In contrast, the back region is hidden from view. In the public realm things are shown and in the private realm things are hidden (Madanipour 1996, p. 168). This is the space for preparation, rehearsal and where performers can remove their public mask. The bird-watchers in New York prepared to enter the public space for observing the hawks in their home or workplace, which in this instance would be their back region. When they appeared at the boat pond in the park, they portrayed the personae they wished the other observers to see, which was as an audience member. And in doing so, they followed cultural rules of audience behavior in which they cooperated with others to watch the drama play out.

In describing human action in basic theatrical terms, scholars such as Burke follow a more systematic approach. Pelias (1991, p. 48) citing Burke describes five fundamental concepts called the Pentad as a basis for a dramatistic explanation. Pelias (1991, p. 48) describes the pentad as comprising the elements of agent, purpose, scene, act and agency, offers a flexible model for analyzing human action. And in using dramatism to analyze aesthetic texts, performers discover specific clues for their presentation. Each dimension of the pentad corresponds to a fundamental question that can be asked of all human action: Agent-Who?, Purpose Why?, Scene- Where? When? To Whom?, Act-What? And Agency-How? Therefore, when applied then to aesthetic communication, these questions, according to Pelias (1991, p. 48) lead to some general answers. A speaker (Who?) with an aesthetic intent or motive (Why?) in an aesthetic
context (Where? When? To Whom?) presents aesthetic communication (What?) in an aesthetic manner (How?). Performer then refers to a speaker who presents aesthetic texts within a theatrical frame. Using such a frame, we can explain the behavior of the characters involved in the Pale Male scene. Nature, in this instance creates the text for the birds to perform and the observers to assume the role of the audience who responds to the performer’s actions. The audience, however, is engaged as a performer who performs a response.

In addition, according Shepherd (2004, p. 60), there is a distinction between dramas as art--aesthetic drama--and the performance of social interaction in everyday life. Social drama, termed by Turner (Shepherd 2004) to a unit of social process, which arises out of a conflict situation. These four phases are: Breach of regular norm-governed relations; Crisis, during which there is a tendency for breech to widen; Redressive action ranging from personal advise and informal mediation or arbitration to formal juridical and legal machinery--to the performance of public ritual, and reintegration of the disturbed social group, or of the social recognition and legitimation of irreparable schism (Turner 1988, pp. 74-75). Under the influence of Turner, anthropology analyzed social events such as rites, wedding celebrations and funeral ceremonies, which, while not ordinarily seen as theatrical, were still explicitly performed.

Also, Schechner as with Goffman and Turner embraces a disengagement from analysis of the formal art of the artwork. Schechner (2003, p. 192) says, “The key difference between social and aesthetic drama is the performance of the transformations effected. Some social dramas such as feuds, trials and wars effect permanent change. In other kinds of performance, which share qualities both of social and aesthetic drama--
rites of passage, political ceremonies--change in status are permanent.” He further asserts that aesthetic practice works its transformations on the audience, because the audience is separated both actually and conceptually from the performers. In social drama all present are participants, though some are more decisively involved than others. “What social drama does for its participants, however, is provide a place for transformation, “ says Schechner (2003, p. 193).

Using dramatistic terms to further describe the cultural/social performance in Central Park, we see that the scene indeed possesses components of a performance with an audience that participates, performers which include the birds, the onlookers, and the space. And as a result of this social performance, all involved are transformed, including the space. In fact, Bauman (1984, p. 43) says that through performance, the performer elicits the participative attention of the audience. Consequently audience members may allow themselves to be caught up in it. The performer gains control. “And when this happens the potential for transformation of the social structure may become available to him as well” (Burke 1969 (1950), pp. 58-59 in Bauman, 1984, p. 44).

Furthermore, according to Schechner (2003, p. 192), transformance is a basic performance structure, which includes gathering, performing and dispersing. The hawks turn from wild birds into performers and the park patrons into performers as audience members. “The transformation happens,” as Schechner (2003, p. 174) says, “With writing on the space.”

So then performance studies is concerned with anything that is framed, presented, highlighted or displayed and actively regards phenomena and objects not traditionally considered performances, in their performative aspect: for instance, how a painting
interacts with viewers. Furthermore, Schechner (2003) argues that cultures represent themselves to themselves in cultural performances such as rites and ceremonies; and individual social behavior and then identity have been thought of in terms of theatre.

But is Central Park not only a public space; is it also a performance space or a stage for cultural performances? Shepherd (2004, p. 19) says, “The stage but echoes back the public voice.” Certainly Pale Male, while not human, displayed performative behavior. And his observers, while performing activities such as walking, picnicking, running and sitting, also performed as an audience for the bird. They came together in a public space to perform these activities. Is this a performance space? Schechner (2003) contends it depends how the space is framed.

In addition, Pelias (1991, p. 51) claims that there are four speakers of aesthetic communication and each play a communicative role: Creators produce the aesthetic act. The personae speak the creator’s words. Performers produce all communication. All communicative acts are performative, says Pelias (1991, p. 54). The audience responds to the performance through communicative acts such as verbal and non-verbal responses. So creators compose the personae that are staged by performers and responded to by audiences. Pale male then was performing the text of nature to an audience in the park. Nature writes the script and Pale Male performs it.

It is clear that, at least in this instance, performance can transform a public space. Certainly the park patrons were transformed from park pedestrians into an audience of bird watchers. The space was changed from a public gathering area to a theatrical setting. It already had the set in place with the false front of man-made fountains, statues and open spaces. As a result, Central Park became a stage for a performance enacted by a
group of birds and witnessed by humans who gathered in an orderly fashion to cooperate to view this. How then could I use the Pale Male drama to answer questions about transforming public space?

I think the question leads into one of how can I design a study to see first-hand how public space is transformed by performance. But in order for the performance to take place, there must be teamwork. With this, individuals of the same team will find themselves in an important relationship to one another (Goffman 1959, p. 82). Therefore, teammates must join together and rely on each other. This then fosters what Goffman (1959, p. 82) calls, “A bond of reciprocal dependence linking teammates to one another.”

The bird–watchers in Central Park collaborated with each other, the environment and the birds to foster a definition of the situation.

I though how this incident could apply to a question I had formulated about how public space changes under certain influences through performance and I decided upon a study whereby using dramaturgical terms from Goffman, Schechner, Turner, Pelias, Madanipour and others I could answer the question of how, through collaboration, can a performance transform a public space, thus bridging organization studies with performance studies. These scholars set the precedence I use for describing and analyzing social performance in these terms. However, Goffman seems to be the only one of the performance scholars I cited who makes an obvious attempt to describe and define cooperation by using the term teamwork. What follows is a method of study that is designed to answer this question. The Pale Male example shows that collaboration is central to staging a performance and I hope to demonstrate that in this thesis.
Chapter Three

Method Of Study

This is the story of how this method of studying collaboration to transform a public space through performance came about and of what the actual study involves, including the people who participated. Also, I describe how and why I chose specific spaces for observation and why I chose to study from a participant--observer perspective. This was guided by literary research and by mentors in my educational pursuit at the University of South Florida (USF). I include the names of the participants and tell the story through a narrative style.

The method of study came about over a year--long process of working with three professors in the communication department at USF: Dr. Marcy Chvasta, Dr. Elizabeth Bell and Dr. Fred Steier. In collaborating with Chvasta in the spring of 2004 about the communication department’s performance for the following year, I suggested to her an idea I called Private People Public Places, which would be a staged performance whereby members of the department could perform four or five short one--act plays around the concept of what people do in public places and how the everyday ordinary things they do are interesting topics of study that relate to interpersonal communication, organization and performance.

The scenes, which would be staged in an inside space at USF would be set on a park bench, in a restaurant or coffee shop, in a library or anywhere simple sets could be used to convey the messages. And in using a dedicated performance space, audience
members could participate. The professor then suggested that I could do this project as a Directed Research and write about the experience, thus ending up with a possible thesis idea.

After consideration, I agreed. However, through collaboration and brainstorming with the professor, the project changed direction to one where I realized that I did not want to depend on others to complete the project. As a result, I formed the idea of group performances that included myself so that I could apply Goffman’s (1959) teamwork theory and some organizational theory. I then could study this as a participant--observer. Goffman (1959, p. 80) says, “Teamwork refers to a team performance as one given by more than one performer.” This can, according to the theorist, only involve one person and an audience. He further states, “A performance team refers to any set of individuals who cooperate in staging a single routine (1959, p. 80).

The project is a compilation of five group performances in public spaces at the University involving myself as a participant--observer and other participants over the course of the fall 2004 semester. When choosing the spaces, I took into consideration the fact that students would be readily available for me to approach about joining in this project. Also, since USF is open and available all day, access would not present an issue. The USF spaces include a classroom, spaces in-between buildings and hallways. The times for performances would be when people were available to implicate as audience members. I look at issues of teamwork, collaboration to stage a performance as well as audience involvement.

In addition, in the fall of 2004 under the direction of Dr. Fred Steier, I formulated a study of performance space at the Museum of Science and Industry (MOSI) in Tampa,
FL., whereby I would observe how the museum uses its public space for performance through interacting with guests and educating them on the various displays and what they mean. This space offers a captured audience of paying guests and employees who are dedicated to engaging patrons as audience members by offering explanations of the exhibits. This added a sixth performance. By studying these events as a participant-observer, I could experience firsthand the process of staging a performance in public spaces.

With the results of these studies then the question of how public space is transformed may be answered. Therefore in the process, the professors, my performance teammates and I collaborated to perform social acts leading up to the actual performance. This then lead to the question: How can people collaborate to use performance to transform a public space? This is one that was not obviously addressed in the reviewed literature and offers an opportunity to bridge performance theory with organization. I present the results in narrative form from a participant-observer point of view using dramatistic language to explain the behavior in these social performances with photos of the spaces, team members and I, which further document the process.
Chapter Four

Observations

This section is a narrative of how I chose specific spaces and participants for observation. I was looking for public spaces that were accessible to myself and the participants and those that allowed for the application of concepts gained from my review of relevant literature. For example, spaces at USF allowed for easy access because I was there three to four times per week. Also, students were readily available to participate in this study, as previously mentioned. In addition, I chose (MOSI), because it offered the unique situation of employing people called interactors to perform in the spaces in and around exhibits for the purpose of engaging patrons in the learning of science. As a result, the spaces used in this study reflect the presented definitions of public space. I include the names of all participants to show their relationship to the project and to demonstrate the process they and I experienced to enact performances for observation.

When I approached Dr. Chvasta with my idea of doing Private People Public Places, I had to perform a proposal in which I appeared very interested and cooperative, which I was. Also, I submitted an outline for the project that she in turn presented to the communication department for approval. This was a team performance on our part in that we collaborated to propose how this project would be staged. Schrange (1995, p. 33) claims, “Collaboration creates a shared meaning about a process.”

Furthermore, we had to perform online personas as we collaborated through email. When she said this could be a Directed Research project, I had to talk to her and
say, “Yes I’d like to do it,” thus performing my student persona, and be interested, which I was. When the professor saw my email, she only experienced the words and missed out on non-verbal cues to see if I was excited or not, which refers to Turkle (1995) who asserts that in cyberspace you can be anyone.

The whole key in the process was how I approached students in the department and pitched or sold the idea of doing a team performance with me. This was a performance in itself. I had to present a positive attitude that said, “This is something that you’ll want to be part of and these are the reasons why. Professors will be impressed, you’ll have material you can use as students later on,” for example.

I realized soon after I talked with people about organizing performances that the real story here was not the actual performances, but the process of collaboration to stage them. Goffman (1959, p.104) terms this as teamwork in saying, “A team may be defined as a set of individuals whose intimate co-operation is required if a given projected definition of the situation is to be maintained.” And Schrange (1995, p. 29) defines this as collaboration in saying, “It is a purposeful relationship with a desire to solve a problem, create, or discover something.” “The overarching purpose,” he continues, “is that the success of the collaboration can be measured by its results” (Schrange 1995, p. 30). For our purposes as performance artists, there must be some kind of coherence to be successful. Through this collaboration, we create a shared meaning about the process.

In addition to the previously mentioned pre-project performances, I staged the performances that were defined as such by my framing these events as a performance by setting aside a special time and place for the event as Schechner (2003) would say.

What follows is a description of the staged performances in narrative form using
names and documenting them with photos.

Performance #1: Holy Kisses

I came up with the idea for kissing in the pew of a Catholic Church and pitched it to my girlfriend Kathy Anderson. At first she said, “I’m not going to do that. What if someone I know sees me?” I replied, “Let’s go to a church in another city.” After a week of prodding her, she succumbed.

Consequently we drove to a church in Dunedin, FL., but the published mass schedule was incorrect and in order to do this performance, we would have had to wait two hours for the next mass. So we ended up going back to the church near our house, Espiritu Santo Catholic church as seen in Figure 5.

Figure 5. Espiritu Santo Catholic Church

As we walked up to enter the sanctuary, she backed down and I told her, “Let’s
just go in and see what happens. We don’t have to do anything.” She agreed. As mass progressed, she said to me, “What the hell!” “An interesting comment to make in church,” I thought.

As the celebrant made his way to the pulpit to begin his sermon, we decided that we would start kissing soon after he began speaking. Consequently, about two minutes into the speech, we began our performance and kissed non-stop for about three minutes. Needless to say, we heard whispers from those seated around us. “Look at those two.” “They should be ashamed of themselves.” “This is great,” I thought. When we broke, I looked around at the people seated near us and no one would return my gaze.

I realized that by kissing passionately in church we were violating cultural codes. Culture says that when we are in church, particularly a traditional Catholic one, there are norms of behavior such as proper dress and voice tone. Kissing, or at least more than a friendly peck on the cheek, is not what is considered normal or acceptable behavior in this setting. I would say that we disrupted the normal behavior expected by performing an everyday, yet unacceptable behavior in this public place. And the church became our theatre within a theatre. I feel that a church becomes a theatre during a mass since it is as Schechner (2003, p. 174) says, “A place whose only main use is to stage or enact a performance.” And our space within the church space was Goffman’s “front region” (1959, p. 107) referring to the place where the performance is given. This could be interpreted as the back region because we were inside the church where a performance of a mass was occurring. However, within our space, which was within the church, we as performers were in our front region and in the back region of the mass performance.

The celebration continued and at one point after the sermon and before the end of
the mass, the celebrant asked everyone attending to turn and greet his neighbor. The normal response is to shake hands with strangers or give a little hug to the people with whom you are attending. However, when we turned to shake hands with those strangers around us, they were hesitant not only to shake our hands, but also to once again return our gaze. I guess Kathy and I created boundaries framing us as the performers in our own space with the other church members, including the celebrants as the audience.

On the way out of church after mass ended, Kathy commented that she felt very naked and on parade for the spectators. I thought that it was fun and that I would like to try it again. She had no further comment.

Through this performance the church became a stage whereby we collaborate to rewrite the space from a sacred public space to a performance space within the established performance space and within the existing performance of the mass. Consequently, the audience became implicated within two seemingly contradictory performances at the same time.

*Performance #2: Bushwhacked at Bell’s*

The next performance involved collaboration between myself, Wren Colker and Mike Merrill. It was an assignment for Dr. Bell’s Performance Theory class, which was designed to be a heuristic performance based on Goffman’s *Performance in Everyday Life.* I had reservations about using this class project as an observation for study, however I realized that this performance made me rethink some of Goffman’s (1959) concepts about teamwork, collusion, and front and back regions. Consequently, I deemed this as a viable source for research.
I realized that once again it was a performance on my part to get my partners together in talking with them to find out how we could coordinate meeting, and appearing very excited about doing it, even if I wasn’t.

The first rehearsal consisted of the three of us coming to terms with how to organize the performance and negotiating power in that who will be in charge or direct. I wanted not to be disruptive so we could maintain collusion (Goffman, 1959). When I interjected my idea of using Goffman’s (1959) notion of dissention, whereby one member would break character to his real self when he intentionally misses a line, my teammates agreed that it was a good idea, because this would demonstrate the theorist’s notion.

As a result, we decided that during the performance, I would break character and intentionally forget a prop, which in this case was my skullcap, as seen in figure 5. This in turn would prompt my scene partners to break their characters and appear to create what Goffman (1959, p. 87) calls, “A false note as a result of an open disagreement in front of the audience.” Then nature in the form of a hurricane interrupted our rehearsal schedule.

*Figure 5. Wren Colker (Left) and Tony Valentine (Right) rehearse.*
When we returned to rehearsal after a week, Merrill assumed the role of director suggesting that we perform the farce allowing the audience to see what goes on inside the Lincoln bedroom at the White house with Colker portraying Laura Bush and Merrill portraying George Bush thus giving the audience a glimpse of back region behavior (Goffman, 1959). I would portray Dick Cheney.

*Figure 6.* Mike Merrill (Left) and Wren Colker (Right) rehearse for “Bushwacked.”

Merrill and Colker are featured in Figure 6, which was taken during a rehearsal. Colker and I followed along without dissention (Goffman, 1959), just adding our thoughts and preserving a cohesive unit, which we did not plan ahead of time.

During this rehearsal, we had observers, but we closed the door to maintain front space and backstage separation, unlike Brecht’s process of often including the audience in rehearsals by giving them a backstage view (Schechner, 2003). We finally formulated a performance with the premise of Bush (W) and Laura home in the Lincoln bedroom watching a pornographic video. Dick Cheney knocks at the door to the bedroom to
discuss the content of W’s speech. At the end of the sequence, the Bushes leave for the Rose Garden where the President gives his speech on fundamentalist values. A man in the crowd (student Bob Gonzalez) subsequently interrupts the president’s speech by lamenting his violations of the Christian doctrine and announcing he’s had a love affair with W. The crowd (classmates) lead by Gonzalez begins singing and praying for his soul, while Cheney escorts him from the garden. The notion was that the audience would see the president and first lady in a private moment with their public personas off. The scene involved the couple engaging in pornographic videos and adult role-playing while getting ready for Mr. Bush to deliver a speech about family values. What follows is an excerpt from the actual script we used in this performance.

Sample of The Script: Int. – Lincoln Bedroom – Day

The Bushes are watching three televisions. One is running an adult movie, the second a biblical movie and the third war footage.

W: (Wearing boxer shorts, cowboy boots, cowboy shirt, dog collar and leash. He hoots and hollers.) Laura look. Ain’t this a great video? Clarence Thomas lent it to me. That Charlton Heston would ‘a made a fine porno actor, don’t ya think?

LAURA: Now, you settle down George —— don’t make me use this whip on you.

W: Hey, Laura. I bet if you were in charge of the Pentagon their missiles would be shaped a lot different, eh?

LAURA: You’re bein’ a real bad boy, George —— and you know what teachers do to bad little boys…

(Persistent knocking at the door. Laura and W ignore it and continue with their play)
CHENEY: (Knocking) Mr. President. Mr. President! Are you in there, Mr. President? We need to talk about your speech.

W: Who’s making all that racket? —— Aw, it’s that damn Dick!

LAURA: (Goes to the door and lets Cheney in.)

CHENEY: (Wearing a skullcap that’s positioned on his head, but it resembles a condom. Startled at first, he strides toward W intent on going over the details of W’s speech.)

LAURA: (Intervenes) I’ll take that Dick —— Here! (She hands him a large model of a penis.)

CHENEY: (He fumbles with it and sets off the vibrator.)

LAURA: (To Cheney) This whole part’s wrong here —— You’ve got to make a stronger connection between the Old Testament and homosexual taboos. This, now…

CHENGY: …It’s —— well —— he’s got to be taken seriously --- got to make them believe he’s full of that compassion crap all the while rammin’ the ten commandments up there asses! (Cheney exits.)

Once we transitioned to the Rose Garden for W’s speech, I re-entered the set without my skullcap and my performance teammates broke character and said, “Tony! What are you doing? You forgot your…” “Oh, no!” Merrill interrupted as I and continued to say, “Wren, I’m sorry.” They then said, “That’s O.K. Go get your cap.” I then went behind the curtain and re-entered with the cap in place. We continued the scene in our character’s respective public self.

As Bob Gonzalez interrupted he was implicated as an audience member to become part of the performance team. As a result, we completed the performance. It turned out well and the audience voiced their approval with applause.
The entire process of this performance effectively demonstrated cohesiveness, regions, front, back, signs & symbols and collaboration. Afterward, the audience commented that they thought I really messed up when I forgot my prop and that we were trying to cover-up the situation the best we could. This was a twist on Goffman (1959, p. 89) where he claims, “Immediate corrective sanctioning would often only disturb the interaction further and make the audience privy to a view that ought to be reserved for teammates.”

Also, the use of pornography came up in conversation. The class discussed whether or not they as audience members were offended by the adult video, but the consensus was no. In addition Dr. Bell commented, appropriately in this instance, on how she wished we scripted the action in the scene, instead of it appearing to be an improvisation. At that point we handed her a copy of the text we used as a guideline.

*Performance #3: Take Me For a Ride On Your Suzuki*

Next, USF Student Arri Stone and I collaborated to perform a Tadashi Suzuki ritual (Suzuki, 2002), which involved walking around fiercely beating the floor with our feet in a semi-squatting posture. We chose as our performance space the courtyard between the Communication and the Cooper buildings at USF, as seen in Figure 7.

*Figure 7. Arri Stone (Left) and Tony Valentine (Right) perform “Suzuki.”*
This collaboration provided interesting perspectives on organization of team members. For instance, it took Stone and I seven weeks to coordinate schedules and to agree on a topic. I first suggested we perform Suzuki in front of the library. He subsequently suggested the student center. Then Stone found out Presidential Candidate John Kerry was coming to the Sun Dome and suggested we should do a political performance there. I would pass out fliers that would read Arri For President. As a result, we became frustrated about agreeing on our theme, but I explained to Stone that, “This is the process. And my project is more about the process than the end result,” I continued as I gave my teammate inside information away from an audience (Goffman, 1959). He agreed that it was a good idea and we decided on performing Suzuki whereby I would follow his lead with him as the teacher or director during the scene. We then announced to some fellow communication students the time and place of our activity thus framing it as a performance.

Upon arriving to USF on the day of performance, some students asked what we
were doing and where it was going to take place. We just said there was going to be a performance in five minutes and directed them to the space, which by never really letting them inside our group kept them separated as the audience. The audience expected a performance, because we, in addition to they, framed it as such even before they knew all of the particulars.

We made our way to the space and proceeded with our performance. The audience consisting of seven gathered around and watched, kind of included, but creating a separation between us, the performers and themselves, the audience.

As Stone and I began, 30 or 40 people passed by and consciously moved around us careful not to infringe into the performance space they framed within themselves. We proceeded to take little half steps stomping on the ground as hard as we could. As a result, we created a cohesiveness, a unity of a team (Goffman 1959, p. 104) whereby as I was following and walking next to Stone, we stepped and moved in unison.

After a few minutes of stomping, we paused and stood on our heads and did a child’s pose from yoga, which is documented in Figure 8.

*Figure 8*. Tony Valentine (Close) and Arri Stone in child’s pose.
We then walked back, stood on a semi-circle shaped bench and expressed a symbolic gesture, which was Stone’s idea, to the university. This is seen in the next photo, Figure 9.

*Figure 9.* Tony Valentine (Left) and Arri Stone (Right) offer symbolic gesture.

Since the audience had preconceived notions about my partner, they saw him as himself performing rather than a character in the drama. According to Graver, (1997, p. 221), “Both character and actor are present but in their own particular ways.” Furthermore, as Graver (1997, p. 222) contends, “We do not really see the character in a drama in addition to the actor representing that character; rather, we see the actor as a character within drama’s universe of discourse.” The audience did not see this as a breach of conduct, rather they accepted it as normal behavior from Stone.

Throughout the performance I was very conscious of the audience. At the point before delivering the gesture, one student from the public speaking class I teach walked
by. I whispered to my partner, “Let’s hold off on the gesture, because that’s one of my students.” This was an example of Goffman’s (1959, p. 177) team collusion, which he says is, “Any collusive communication which is carefully conveyed in such a way as to cause no threat to the illusion that is being fostered.” Even though he says that whispering during a performance interaction is considered improper, because it portrays dissention among the team” (Goffman 1959, p. 176). After she passed, we performed the gesture. People attending laughed and clapped.

In speaking with the communication student audience after the performance, they noticed that others who stopped and watched were very conscious of the performance space that the team together with the audience defined. It was not evident to me that, during the scene, the audience enjoyed the actual performance, but they voiced that they did enjoy taking part as observers.

Conversing with Stone afterward, he claimed Suzuki was definitely a ritual, but had some freedoms for interpretation, as shown in the gesture. And Suzuki (n.d., p. 3) says, “The stomping or beating the floor with feet originates in ancient Japanese rituals.”

Audience members suggested different venues for the performance, such as in front of the library or at a busier time of day with more potential audience members. Consequently, they took interest and became collaborators in the project, or in the formation of another performance of the same kind in a different space. They suggested that another space would definitely offer potential for more audience involvement and a different reaction to the gesture.

Schecher (2003, p. 157) says, “Theatre moves to ritual when the audience is transformed from a collection of individuals into a group of participants.” The core
audience felt inside because of knowledge we were performing and that they were framed as audience members and participants. They did not infringe upon the space. Audience Member Wendy King said she felt compelled to join in, but respected the fact that she was the audience and not supposed to be on stage. And Mike Merrill said, “Yea! I was here to see it happen.” Wren Colker and Daniel Bleuer took the photos of Stone and I, which are documented within the text.

*Performance #4: Thumbprint For President*

The fourth performance involved an impromptu collaboration between Wren Colker and myself. It was just before the 2004 presidential election and we were talking about it and we formulated the idea to do something around this event. We brainstormed and 15 minutes later came up with the idea of Thumbprints for President, whereby we would engage audience members to cast their vote for president by placing their thumbprints on a poster. Consequently, we taped a large blank paper on the wall at the entrance of the performance lab in the communication building at USF and offered passersby a chance to cast their vote by dipping their thumb into some paint and fixing their print under either the Kerry or Bush name.

*Figure 10.* Tony Valentine (Right) and a student casting a vote.
Figure 11. Tony Valentine (Right) and Wren Colker at “Thumbprints for President.”

As we were attaching the paper, people got involved by affixing their prints to the page, as seen in Figures 10 and 11, and audience members offered suggestions. For example, USF Student Daniel Blaeuer commented. “Someone should imprint his entire hand on the paper.” He further suggested that we write Green Party on the page for those who sided with that group and to give them a voice. The most common audience comment was that they had a voice and said it. Once again, this was framed a performance by audience members who saw what we were doing and they wanted to be included.

The event lasted about 20 minutes, but the paper remained at the entrance of the performance lab for two weeks, making it an installation.

This was a very simple act and provided opportunity for team collusion and audience participation, accepting them into the performance region (Goffman, 1959). And this was an example of how two people could successfully collaborate to stage a performance in a very short time.
Performance #5: Are We Ever Going To Do Something?

Next, with Jen Erdely, another USF student, there was no actual staged performance. However this was the most interesting to me because in collaborating, we performed still roles.

When I announced my project to a group of students at the beginning of the semester, she offered to take part. She said she was open to almost anything. As the semester continued, we met once a week to brainstorm about a performance. Erdely suggested that we go to the beach and throw a Frisbee. I suggested we go to the Starbucks on campus during a busy period and stage a disruption. Another idea was to argue aloud in the library.

After a few weeks, I realized I had a chance to do something different here. Therefore I, without informing Erdely, decided that we would never actually stage a performance. Instead I would continue to approach her with new ideas never having the intention of actually staging something. In this process, I was performing a student eager to collaborate with her and include her in a performance. I was providing information control (Goffman 1959, p. 141), because if I disclosed this secret to Erderly, the performance of not performing could have been threatened.

With a few weeks to go until the end of the semester, I approached her and gave her inside information (Goffman, 1959) that, by not staging anything, she actually helped me in my research. I explained that it was the collaboration I was investigating more then actual performance and, in not staging an actual scene before an audience, I accomplished my goal. Also, even though we didn’t stage an actual live performance, we
were linked together as teammates in a bond of reciprocal dependence (Goffman 1959, p. 82) just as much as my other performances. She commented that this was great and that she felt a sense of accomplishment as a result of this process.

The common thread in these five performance observations, except the church, was the venue of USF and the collaboration with USF students and faculty. Teamwork and collaboration was central to the success of formulating and staging the events and the organizational aspect of scheduling affected not only when, but also how these were staged. Also, dramaturgical terms served as a vehicle for explanation and description of these social performances. Much like the Pale Male scene, the spaces were transformed into performance spaces as a result of performers and audience members writing on the space.

The next performance took place in a completely different venue at MOSI.

*Performance #6: Mingling At MOSI*

The final performance for observation was set in a different location at MOSI. I chose this space in collaboration with Dr. Fred Steier so that I could observe situations that offered a different audience and different participants while collaborating to stage performances in a public space. In this instance, the audience was comprised of mostly paid museum visitors. And my performance collaborators in addition to these audience members were MOSI employees and volunteers. Consequently, this provided a frame by which I had to adapt. For example, the museum space is open for study during business hours only in contrast to USF, which is available almost anytime. Also, the employees at MOSI had a different code of conduct mainly because there were paying guests. As a
result, the performances had to be staged and observed without disrupting the general
flow of events at the museum. For instance, while I was allowed to enact as a participant-
observer, I had to follow the rules of appearing as a member of MOSI’s staff so that I
would appear as an insider as opposed to an outside observer.

The results are presented in a narrative manner applying performance and
organizational theory, which mirrors the framework for explanation I established in the
previous observations. This section also names participants and describes their
involvement with me in this process through a story using photos I took for record.

This performance consisted of myself performing as a participant--observer at
(MOSI), whose interactive exhibits foster learning about science. MOSI is a not-for-
profit, community-based institution and educational resource that is dedicated to
advancing public interest, knowledge, and understanding of science, industry, and
technology. The museum’s core ideology is to make a difference in people's lives by
making science real for people of all ages and backgrounds (http://www.mosi.org.).

MacCannell, (1989, p. 78) says, “The function of museums is not entirely
determined by what is shown; the way in which objects are shown is also important.”
And that re-presentation aims to provide the viewer with an authentic copy of a total
situation that is supposed to be meaningful from the standpoint of the things inside of the
display (MacCannell 1989, p. 79). He further states that a representation is an
arrangement of objects in a reconstruction of a total situation (MacCannell, 1989, p. 78).

Within MOSI are exhibit stations that represent scientific experiments that invite
patrons to interact with the display. Some examples are a Hurricane Chamber that allows
visitors to feel what it’s like to be in the middle of a 75 mph storm, a High-wire Bicycle
that allows guests to ride 30 feet above the ground and The Amazing You, which is a tour of the human body. Others include an IMAX theatre, a Butterfly Garden, a Challenger Spaceship Control Center. These interactive exhibits are all designed to reveal the inner workings of the place and to invite visitors to experience science as opposed to just looking at. Consequently, outsiders are allowed further in to a backstage, or rather a staged backstage to contribute their sense-making of the experience. Also, there is a staged quality to the proceedings that lends to them an aura of superficiality MacCannell (1989, p. 98). Figure 12 below shows people interacting with an exhibit.

*Figure 12. MOSI patrons interact with Exhibit.*

This four-month process began during a brainstorming meeting with Dr. Fred Steier in his office at USF. We came up with the idea of studying what happens in the spaces at the museum in and around the science exhibits when interactors relate to the museum’s
guests. He said he would look into the possibility with the staff at the site. In performing the role of the eager student, I had to appear very enthusiastic about the idea in general, which I was, and about the plan to use MOSI as a place of study. After thinking about it I emailed Dr. Steier asking for another meeting so we could discuss this further.

During our next meeting, which was at the museum, the professor and I walked around the facility to get a sense of the space and how I could approach this study. He spoke about the spaces in-between the exhibits and showed me an area with large steps. Normally it serves as a space to get from one place to another. However, Steier explained to me that it becomes a performance space when guests use the steps as seats and observe presentations by interactors. He suggested that this could be a primary space of study, because it afforded me an opportunity to observe performers in action with a captured audience. I went home and emailed him a thank you message and suggested another meeting with him.

After another week, we met in his office and he informed me that he spoke with one of the managers in charge of the interactors, Darren Frazier, and that I should call him to arrange a meeting. Also that he framed it so that Frazier and other staff members knew my purpose was to perform a study in which the outcome could possibly result in some suggestions for their practice. At this point I became very enthusiastic about this project, because I would be able to combine research for this paper with my experience as a professional actor and acting teacher. I then contacted the MOSI staff through phone and email. As a result, it took about two weeks to get an initial response, because, as I learned upon meeting with Frazier, he was in a car accident and absent from work for a week. I was glad to see that he was not hurt.
Next, along with Steier, I met with this MOSI supervisor and he introduced me to Joel Bates, who is in charge of volunteers. Professor Steier suggested to Bates that he afford me volunteer status so that I could freely observe in the space and the museum could receive matching funds for my volunteer service. As a result of this meeting, I gained volunteer status allowing me to observe as a member of the MOSI staff. This was only accomplished through collaboration and through the reputation of Steier. Consequently, Frazier then said he would train me and give me a volunteer handbook. Well, to date I haven’t received the book, but the status allowed me to study performance in this public space as a participant--observer.

On the way to my first observation day I was stopped and cited by a Hillsborough County Sheriff for having an expired tag on my car. Despite my attempt at explaining my way out of this, I was fined $76.

I arrived at the museum a few minutes later, proceeded to the volunteer dressing room and signed in. Then, in this back stage region (Goffman, 1959) I put on the volunteer purple vest, my costume letting people know I was a volunteer. I had no nametag. I searched for Bates to let him know that I was there and I began my observation by just walking around and getting familiar with the facility. As I made my way to the step area, I noticed that above the space was a sign that read: Stair Stage Demo Area, thus framing it as a set, a space for performances to take place. MacCannell (1989, p. 100) says that the characteristics of sets in this context are: the only reason that needs to be given for visiting them is to see them--in this regard they are unique among social places; they are physically proximal to serious social activity, or serious activity is imitated in them; they contain objects, tools and machines that have specialized use in
specific, often esoteric, social, occupational and industrial routines; they are open, at least during specified times, to visitation from outsiders. Based on this definition the entire museum functions as a set, or rather an interactive set. Further, Madanipour (1996, p. 126) refers to space as no more than a stage set and a backdrop. Yet space plays a crucial role in these encounters because, “The social encounter takes place within the physical space. But often it appears to be a formless, universal space that has little impact on the encounter, as it is mainly regulated through masks and performances.” This space is usually an in-between space whereby people pass through when they move between exhibits. However when interactors position themselves in front of the steps, spotlights turn on and the space is then a place for performance consisting of interactors, their costumes, props and an audience.

After an hour of observing this area and waiting for an official performance to take place, when none did I decided to walk around and observe patrons interacting with exhibits as they pushed buttons and played with the displays. As a result, I noticed that parents assumed the role of educator in attempting to explain the exhibits to their children. The kids, however, were for the most part interested only in interacting with the exhibit by pushing buttons that demonstrated science. Schrange (1996, p. 60) asserts, “We use technology a means for creating productive environments.” Also tools create and enhance value (Schrange 1995, p. 61).

Within 20 minutes of walking around observing what people were doing in the space, 12 different patrons ask me for directions to exhibits, particularly the IMAX theatre. The costume that framed me as a staff member worked.

Consequently, I decided to attempt, without direction, to pose as an interactor and
approach people to see if I could engage them in a conversation about the display they were at. As a result, I found that all of them were defensive as they either backed away or turned and walked away from me, but they did see me as part of the staff. Perhaps I did not have the correct attitude when I approached these audiences. After all, Pelias (1997, p. 8) says, “The speaker’s attitudes influence communication and, in doing so, set in motion a developing relationship between speakers and audiences.” I guess I’ll have to work on that!

I then moved to the exhibit called Space: A Journey Into Our Future, which is designed for visitors to learn about the discoveries and the history of the study of outer space and I observed the Interactor T.J. McGinley dressed as Galileo, preparing to enter the exhibit to describe to guests how he invented the telescope. He explained to me that the costume helps him to suspend disbelief and present himself as the inventor. Madanipour (1996, p. 135) explains that what makes a performer in this instance is a mask as a boundary between his public and private role. After a couple of hours of observing McGinley, I retreated to the volunteer dressing area, put my vest away and left, because no one passed by him during that time.

During my next visit, which was two days later, I met with Kurt Kuechenberg, one of the interactor supervisors, to whom I was introduced by Steier. He remembered me and spoke with me about the performers. He told me they have some scripts as guidelines to follow, but that most of the skill comes from experience and training by learning from an experienced interactor. I reflected to myself about Schechner’s (2003, p. 87) theory that the script is not necessarily what is written, rather it is an interior map of the production; a guide for performers to follow. As a result, these performers use their
texts as a guide to perform interacting with visitors; thus involving them in the experience of learning about science. Kuechenberg was enthusiastic about my study and explained that Steier informed him about it. This made the supervisor and I team members, as Goffman (1959) would say, because we shared inside information about the performance as a participant–observer in a study.

After leaving his office, I looked for interactors and all I could find was one working an exhibit allowing visitors to experience a space bike that astronauts used to keep moving. He said that it was not accurate because it wasn’t stationary. “You have to be a certain height so small children can’t ride it,” he said. As the guests were seated he told them to buckle themselves in and to hold on tight. He then advised me that another reason it really was not an accurate representation of the bike the space travelers used was because it was more like a ride with four bikes visitors sit in and pedal. MacCannell (1989, p. 78) tells us that, “The function of museums is not entirely determined by what is shown; the way in which objects are shown is also important.” He also asserts that representation aims to provide the viewer with an authentic copy of a total situation that is supposed to be meaningful from the standpoint of the things inside of the display (MacCannell 1989, p. 79). So then, according to MacCannell (1989, p. 78), a representation is an arrangement of objects in a reconstruction of a total situation. But the ride host controls the ride by stepping on a button that starts and stops it. And I noticed that when adults rode, they waved to onlookers, performing as kids on a merry-go-round.

The next visit, I went once again to the space area and observed Galileo interact. There were more patrons in the area this time and he was very active in getting people involved in his performance, as documented in Figure 13. To the adults he asked, “Do
you have any swing with the Pope. I’m locked in her and I can’t get out.” To the kids, he would say, “Come here. Let me show you how this works.”

He then proceeded to use his own hand-made props to interact with them and to demonstrate gravity in what he called a “fun” way. Once this interaction began, people of all ages gathered around to observe.

*Figure 13.* T.J. McGinley (Galileo) interacting at MOSI.

![Image of T.J. McGinley interacting with children](image)

The performer said that it was easier to attract a group when he already had some guests involved in the process. Also he added, “You can’t approach people. They approach you.” He is seen as Galileo in Figure 13.

After this I met with Kuechenberg, who suggested that I observe a training session the following week at their Challenger exhibit, which is a simulation of a Mars space travel whereby a team of up to 30 people, through a simulated mission, cooperate to launch and land the spacecraft on the surface of the planet and return safely home. In
addition to serving regular guests, this exhibit is used by corporations as a team-building exercise. This is an example of how we use technology as a means for creating productive environments (Schrange 1995, p. 60).

The space is divided into two areas. One group enters the mission control section and the other the spacecraft area. The interactors, who act as captains of the mission, assist the visitors throughout the experience. They began by telling us to use the bathroom now if needed, because there was none at the site. Tanja Diederich, another interactor supervisor in backstage behavior (Goffman, 1959) told me they do have a bathroom there, but that they advise guests otherwise so that guests taking a break wouldn’t interrupt the mission.

Upon entering this space, the interactors framed the experience by informing us that we would participate in the mission that would divide us into two groups. After the briefing, as they called it, we dispersed to our respective areas. At this point, Diederich asked me if I would like to actually participate. She assumed I was there only to observe. Consequently, I eagerly jumped at the chance, thinking to myself that this would be a great opportunity to witness as a participant--observer how staff and visitors cooperate to stage this performance.

My first assignment in the mission was as a navigator. My task was to listen to instructions from a team member who was in the other section in mission control and then carry out his orders and to follow the outlined printed guide, which they called a script. Upon direction, I would enter information into the computer. We successfully landed on the planet then retreated to the entrance area while interactors prepared the spaces for the second phase of the mission.
At this point we were told that we would switch roles. Consequently, I was to be in mission control giving instructions this time. Deiderich gave me more inside information (Goffman, 1959) explaining to me what they tell participants at this point. We proceeded with this phase returning the craft safely, and we moved out to the entrance. The entire mission took about three hours.

I took about another hour to ask Diederich and another interactor some questions. One was how they successfully suspend disbelief to make the participants believe they were actually performing a space mission. They replied that, in addition to setting the scene with explanation, they use props and dialogue to enhance their performances in the scene. “We have to be committed to the character,” she said. She also explained that sometimes during a mission they press a button that sounds an alarm. At that point they will exclaim, “We have a meteor heading our way. Change course.” Or they turn off power and see how the team reacts to the situation. Goffman (1959, p. 74) assumes that when an individual appears before others, he will try to control the definition of the situation by controlling the impression they receive from them, which is his claim as to what reality is. “Kids are easier to fool than adults,” she said. “But when we have corporate teams in here and something like this happens, it’s interesting to see how the people relate their real-life positions in their company to this situation.” For example, she told me that sometimes someone who is normally a manager would take orders from someone who is a subordinate at his workplace. “Often, the subordinates are hesitant to take charge and give the manager, who is now acting as a subordinate, orders,” she claimed. Schrange (1995, p. 29) says, “Collaboration is supposed to produce something—a purposeful relationship. In this instance, the purpose is for the patrons to work together
to complete the mission and for the interactors to collaborate to stage a believable event.

As a participant--observer in this exercise, I found it difficult to completely assume the role of team member, because I was cognizant of what was going on and involved in observing behavior while I was participating at the same time. Also as a team member, I was given information that is usually dispersed in a backstage arena, which is used to promote solidarity, according to Goffman (1959). However, I realized that this performance depended on collaboration among the interactors, the set, props, the guests and participants to succeed. Schrange (1995, p. 4) says that there is no escaping interdependence and that success comes largely from collaboration.

It was also interesting to see how the interactors used technology to enhance the mission experience. "We use media technology to share an experience rather than create a shared experience," notes Schrange (1995, p. 23). He further states that the quality and quantity of meaningful collaboration often depends on tools used to create it (Schrange 1995, p. 27). Also that those tools are a way people come to grips with their work (Schrange 1995, p. 60). And Schrange (1995, p. 28) cites Playwright David Mamet’s comment, “Collaboration is a creative process of equals.” All who participate then share equally in the process for success. That’s what the Challenger mission fosters. It takes collaboration with the interactors and the audience who becomes part of the performance as performers in the mission.

As a result of this observation, I started thinking about how I would institute a system whereby interactors could learn how to perform their role better, or more convincingly. This leads to a formulation of a proposed method of training the employees in basic performance and presentation techniques.
Chapter Five

Implications For Practice

Through this process of becoming a participant--observer in collaborating to stage performances, I realize that, based on my observations, performance can transform public space into a performance space. I affirm through The Pale Male event, along with my participatory performances shown in this study, that this indeed is the case. Furthermore, by using dramatistic terms as a means of explaining the observations, I show that these social interactions are in fact performances. Also that teamwork and collaboration is central to their success.

In formulating a theory for practice, I focus on the interactors at MOSI. Therefore, I propose a workshop interaction with the MOSI interactors that prepares them for performing with the public in the spaces within the museum and outside the institution in outreach programs. Hopefully these practices could extend into almost any organization, particularly public venues such as theme parks and museums. Another area these could apply is in sales organizations where performance is not only a common practice, but in economic terms a measurement for achievement.

Some concepts for this proposed plan are based on my 25 years experience as a professional actor and 15 as an acting teacher. Also, I hope to draw on my graduate studies in performance as well as my work as a graduate teaching assistant in the communication department at USF and my 17 years sales experience. In addition, the work of scholars of performance and acting will serve as some precedence.
In forming a workshop for the MOSI interactors, the first thing I must consider is my performance as a presenter, or as an expert in the field. I must appear credible and design workable exercises for their involvement. Therefore, citing my work experience and my observations from this research, I should frame myself as someone who is not only an expert, but also one who is eager to collaborate, therefore adjusting my instructions based on individual experience and need. In addition, I must recognize that, since these interactors practice their job every day, I should appear eager to learn from them.

After spending some time as a participant observer at MOSI, I realize that, from the perspective of the interactors, the set functions more like a theme park than a museum. For instance, the performers interact with patrons by assisting them in understanding and experiencing exhibits such as the Hurricane Chamber and the Space Bike. These are more like rides in that employees assist customers in preparation by providing protective gear for the chamber and adjusting seat belts at the bike. In these examples, the interactors have a captive audience with which to interact. However in most of the space, people wander between destinations and experience them on their own. The challenge then is how to capture these guests to form an audience for a performance presentation. As the Galileo interactor said, “They have to come to you.” Before doing this however, interactors need to have a mindset that they are always on stage. When I worked at Busch Gardens in the 1970s, our motto was, “Smile, you’re on stage!” Consequently, they must consider themselves a performer.

I believe a workshop should consist of instruction in presence, purpose, interpersonal communication and public speaking. Furthermore, some acting techniques
such as breathing for projection, listening, annunciation, learning text and believability. Also some character development and establishing credibility.

I can also draw upon sales training techniques that teach salespeople to utilize attention, conviction, desire and action to engage customers, but they first must gain the audience’s attention. And at MOSI, there are many distractions for guests to be involved in.

Examples of proposed workshops could serve as a continuation of this project. This would afford not only training for the MOSI staff, but also a frame for further observation of the process as a participant observer. In this proposed section, I would display designs for actual performance workshops that include the previously mentioned concepts for study and training. Consequently, the observations could be documented and presented as a continuation of this thesis. However, for the purpose of this document, I include one example of a proposed workshop for the MOSI interactors and offer some concluding remarks about my experience examining how to collaborate to transform public space through performance.

*Workshop Suggestion: Attention, Interest and Presence*

In speaking about presence, I will point out that it begins in the mind. You have to realize and believe that the audience will notice you and that they will also recognize you as someone they will want to pay attention to. For MOSI, interactors have to gain attention first.

In attempting to gain the attention of the museum patrons for the purpose of engaging them in the exhibits, interactors are posed with an interesting situation.
Sometimes patrons are a captured audience. For instance, at the Hurricane Experience, guests line up to enter the space with the expectation they will be in a re-creation of a hurricane. On the other hand, while moving between exhibits, guests aren’t necessarily organized in their pursuit. This is much like walking through a fine art museum and stopping to look at paintings. In this case, however, the installations are framed as interactive inviting people to become more involved with them. It is in the in-between spaces, however, where interactors have an opportunity to approach guests. When the performer portraying Galileo said, “They have to come to you,” he was in an area where people pass by him anyway, offering him a potentially captured audience. But in the other spaces, interactors must approach the visitors first. This is analogous to a cold call in sales whereby a salesperson enters a business and attempts to sell his products or services. To gain the attention of museum patrons, performers could try a few approaches.

The first suggestion is to approach with a specific question. For example, “Did you know that human arms act as levers? Let me show you.” An even better type of question would be one that is open--ended to invite a response. For instance, “How many bones do you think are in your hand? Let me take a moment to show you.”

Another more direct approach would gain attention and lead the visitor to the exhibit. An example could be, “Hi. I’m here to explain this experiment to you. Push that button and see what happens.”

Once an interactor has the patron’s attention, he or she has a captive, or semi-captive audience. In order to sustain attention, however, he or she must employ basic public speaking and interpersonal communication techniques. For instance, good eye
contact with the observer may keep him or her in the scene longer. Also, interactors should employ effective voice projection and diction. This begins with proper breathing techniques, which are commonly taught to stage actors, singers and public speakers.

When an actor breathes to project his voice, he or she fills the stomach with air to resemble filling a balloon. This allows more air that typical breathing, which is concentrated in the chest area only. When he or she lets the breath out while speaking, his or her voice carries across the room thus projecting volume and confidence. An exercise for this is to lay down face up, put his or her hands on the stomach around the belly button and fill the area with air. Hold it for a count and release. By projection the voice, the MOSI interactor can portray confidence and hold the attention and interest of the guests.

This technique also assists in establishing and portraying presence or stage presence as it is known in dramaturgical circles. Another basic reason actors do this is that it saves the voice during a two-hour play. That’s because the actor doesn’t have to yell to project. And in the case of MOSI performers, they may have to speak for a full day.

When discussing presence, most will say that you either have it or you don’t. Through the use of these simple techniques, however, performers can gain and establish themselves as ones to be noticed and watched.

One further suggestion to gain and hold the attention and interest of MOSI visitors is for the performers to use a team approach. This entails teams of two or more approaching a guest. Or they could stage an event together, thus creating a scene for onlookers to visit. For instance, at the High-Wire Bike, one could act as a Barker by
announcing, “Step right up folks. Take the ride of your life on our high-wire bike.” Or, “Get a birds-eye view of the museum from our bike.”

In addition, the interactor should engage in active listening. For instance, when asked a question or when a visitor offers his own explanation of an exhibit, the interactor should listen intently not only to appear interested, thus engaging the audience, but also to listen for cues of what the guest really wants to know. This common sales technique also employs eye contact to gain trust. Also, rather than saying, “Hey. I have something you want. Let me tell you about it,” one could ask what it is the other wants. At MOSI, an interactor could approach the guest and ask, “What about this station would you like to know more about?”

This is an example of one possible workshop for MOSI interactors. Once again a more lengthy study would lend itself for further examples.

One implication resulting from this workshop could be that the MOSI employees, specifically the interactors, would think of themselves as performers in the sense that they entertain guests within the museum. As a result, they could approach their work from a perspective that they could enhance the guest’s visit by helping to engage them with the interactive exhibits. This then could result in a more engaging experience for the patrons, because they would be involved with the interactor in learning about science, which is the interactor’s objective.

Another implication could be that, as a result of performing these workshops at MOSI, I could be employed to conduct further seminars, and this could lead to adapting these programs to other organizations where I use performance as a basis for training in sales, customer service and management, for example.
Finally, this MOSI workshop could lead into a more detailed study of how people collaborate to stage a performance. Consequently, more data from this study could be used to answer some of the questions I pose in this thesis and some questions for further study I include in the final chapter.
Chapter Six

Conclusion

Just like Pale Male, we have flown far together on this journey of discovery into performance and public spaces. I showed how, based on established literature that social performances like the Pale Male scene and my staged performances can be explained and defined using dramaturgical terms as cited through performance scholars such as Goffman, Schechner, Pelias and Turner. Furthermore, Madanipour’s insights into public spaces assist to affirm these theories. And Schrange’s thoughts on collaboration lend themselves to demonstrating that it is necessary for organizing a performance. I show that through observation and participation, collaboration is a key element in successfully enacting these performances and that all who participate are implicated in the process. Performers, the audience and the spaces act as a cohesive unit to stage and to make sense of the actions.

According to Conquergood (in Gilbert 2004, p. xvi), “An ethnographer must be a co--performer in order to understand the embodied experience of people from disparate cultures.” Consequently, with this work I serve as, according to Conquergood (in Gilbert 2004, p. xvi) “An ethnographer; a participant--observer who reports field-work findings.” In this participation I am implicated in the performance of observing and writing about the performances I observed. Therefore, I am transformed into each role not only through performance, but also through observation and documentation. This is seen in that I enact the roles of student, ethnographer, performer, audience and observer throughout and as a
result of this process. As an observer of the Pale Male scene, I migrated from observer to ethnographer. In the process I became implicated as a participant—observer by documenting my interpretation of the events. This parallels what happened to me as a result of participating in and observing my staged performances. In these scenes, I shifted between the roles of performer, participant, observer and ethnographer. And the common thread through the different performances, including Pale Male is collaboration.

Also, I would have to say that even though I was often frustrated during this project trying to schedule meetings and collaborate with classmates, this entire process was fruitful, enlightening and fun. I was able to relate performance theory such as Goffman’s teamwork and regions as well as some organizational theory like Schrange’s collaboration to construct a bridge between performance and organizational communication. I surmised that it was really the process and not the final product that provided insight into collaboration and teamwork to stage a performance. And it was through this collaboration as a participant—observer that I learned more about my teammates than I probably would have if I just watched them enact their scenes, rather than becoming implicated as a participant myself. Even though just observing would implicate me in the process, however.

In addition, I realized that a performance is one by framing it so. For example, when I announced to a potential audience that there was going to be a performance, they behaved as an audience would by not infringing on the space, as in the case of the Suzuki scene and by becoming part of the space and literally transforming it into an installation in the Thumbprint happening. And at MOSI, interactors and their supervisors began to think of their tasks as performance after I gave them inside information about what my
project was about. As a result, they became further implicated as participants in not only their performances, but my study as well.

Finally, Pale Male continues to flourish and New Yorkers follow his progress. In the process they, just as I demonstrated in my performances, showed that the process of collaborating to perform transforms public space. As a result of this collaboration, their space evolved from a park to a stage for their everyday lives to interconnect with that of the hawks’. Consequently, in doing so they became performers of a process that continues to transform their park into a performance space in which their behavior can be described in dramaturgical terms and one in which their everyday performances can be associated with a theatrical performance, with Pale Male, the audience and the park as the set.

This evokes some questions for further study. One is about how I think about public space differently through the lens of a participant—observer. One difference is that before this process, I didn’t critically think about public spaces as potential performance spaces. They just seemed to be places for gathering or for moving between one area to the next. As a result of this study, however, I see that all public spaces are potential performance spaces not only for people to perform, but, as an observer, I can be implicated as a participant by watching them. This could be as an audience member or as an ethnographer collecting data, for example. Also, by becoming more aware of this potential, I, upon entering a public space like USF see myself as someone who is performing the social roles of student and teacher. This promotes a feeling of being on stage to perform expected and accepted behavior in these situations. Consequently, I often adhere to guidelines or pre—conceived notions of what is expected of me. In doing
this I have to ask myself if I am presenting the real or the rehearsed version of myself. And this leads to thinking about how I collaborate with others and with the space to stage this social performance.

Another question for further investigation could be: What are the cultural implications of transforming a public space through performance? This is a rather general question, but one that could be partly answered through my research and further answered through additional studies. One answer is that the space becomes a place for social order or re—order in that people collaborate to perform various roles within the space. This is seen in the Pale Male scenario when observers collaborated to become a structured audience to participate in and to watch the scene. There were some, like Charles Kennedy and Dr. Fisher who became organizers by participating in the creation and maintenance of a website about Pale Male. Other audience members continued this after the passing of Kennedy and Fisher. Also, in documenting the Pale Male story on film, Lilien and Hess enacted the roles of director and producer while engaging in ethnography. While they didn’t stage Pale Male’s actions, they did, however, create a formal audience from onlookers by recording their behavior on film. By introducing a camera to the scene, the onlookers behaved as an audience. And by recording audience member’s reactions, audience members became performers. All of this was accomplished through collaboration. As a result, everyone in the park scene adapted to roles and conformed to expectations by behaving as an organized audience. This affected how they presented themselves to the other audience members and to the potential audience on the other side of the camera lens. Consequently, the Central Park space at the boat pond became a stage to enact these performances. And that implicated them as performers and
participant—observers, which added responsibility to their actions.

This study raises many other questions, but they will be tabled for presentation in another more detailed and lengthy study, which I may continue in the near future. Engaging in MOSI workshops could answer most of them. As for now, I will close this thesis with an expression of gratitude to Professors Fred Steier, Marcy Chvasta and Elizabeth Bell for their encouragement, guidance and patience throughout this project. Also, I should recognize my staged performance participants from USF and MOSI. This venture has impacted how I approach performance and performing in public spaces. And I hope something fruitful, if only a further investigation into this theme results from this project. I look forward to continuing the journey. After all, it’s all about the journey.
References


