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Food Security & the Environment

Performing Dearth

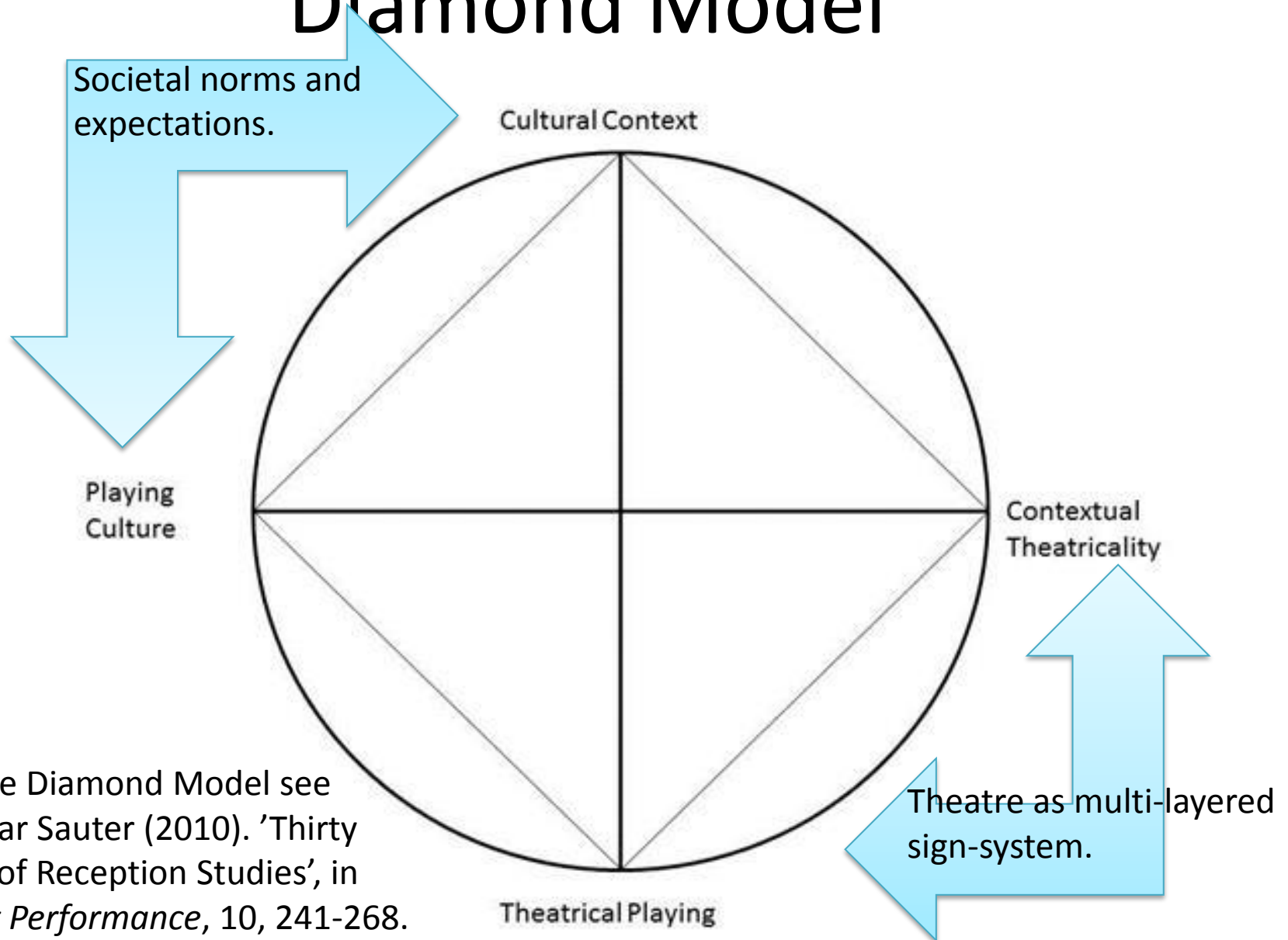
Eco-theatre - Definitions

- 1. Directly depicts consequences of breakdown in the relationship between human society and the ecosystem.
- 2. Threads of ecological meaning woven through.
 - E.g. From the polluted streams of Dr. Stockman's town to Beckett's ash cans and beyond, a largely negative ecological vision permeates the theater of this century. Pervasive though it is, the specifically ecological meaning - as opposed to the mere theatrical presence of this imagery - has remained occluded [...].
- Source: Una Chaudhuri (1994). "'There Must be a Lot of Fish in that Lake": Towards an Ecological Theater', in *Theater*, 25:1, 1994, 25-31 (p. 23).

The Skriker

- 1995: ‘*The Skriker* incorporates the gender bending phantasmagoria of *Cloud Nine*, the exploration of class and gender of *Top Girls* and the social critique of *Serious Money*, but its politics are far less conspicuous (...). (Ralf Erik Remshardt, 1995, Review in Theatre Journal, 47, 1 (March), 121-123.)
- 2015: “It’s about what we’re doing to the environment.” (Unidentified spectator, Manchester 2015).

Diamond Model



For the Diamond Model see Willmar Sauter (2010). 'Thirty Years of Reception Studies', in *About Performance*, 10, 241-268.

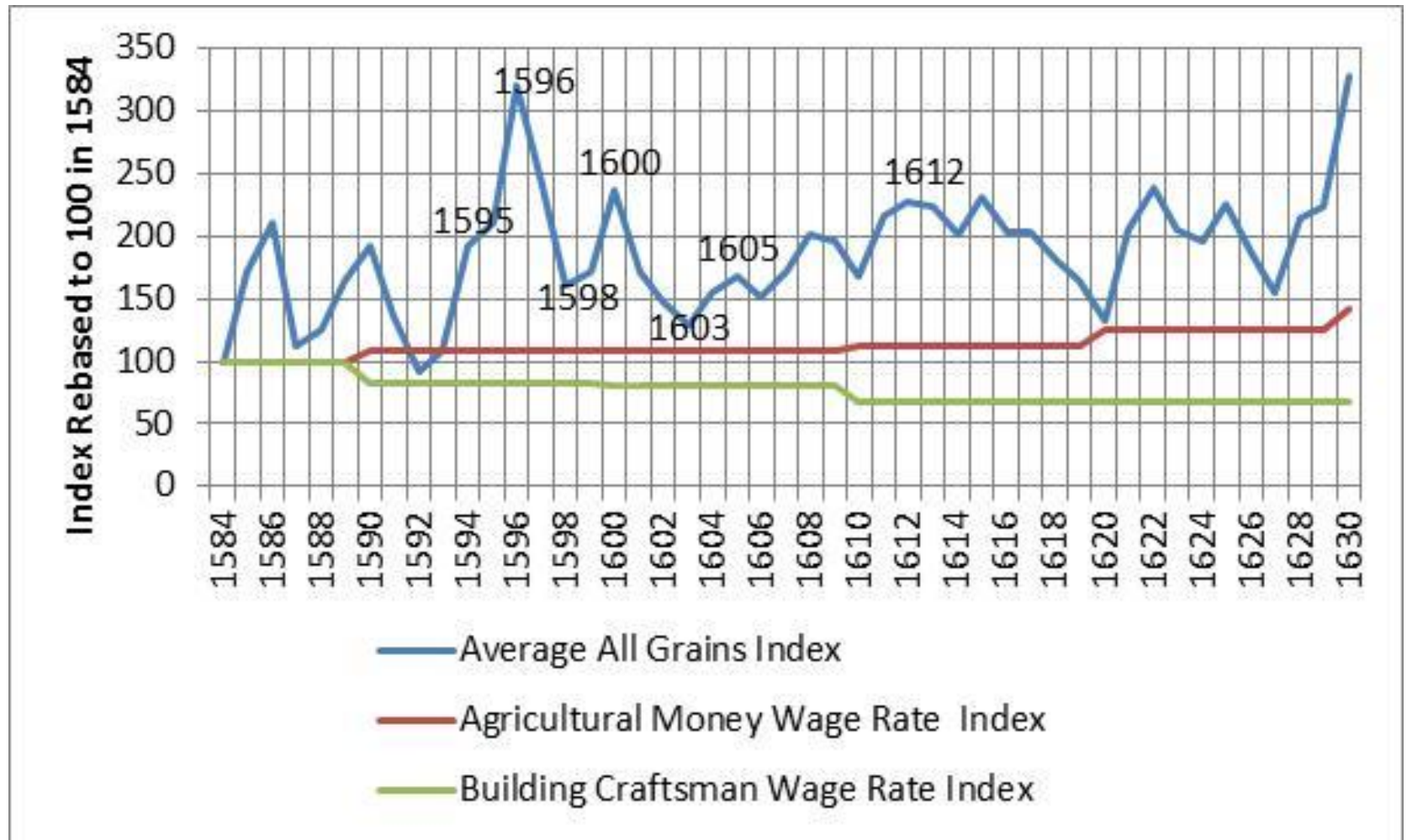
Does the Context Sensitize Spectators?

- *The Skriker*, Manchester
 - The programme contains an extract from Naomi Klein's *This Changes Everything*.
 - The same programme describes the (character of) the Skriker as 'environmental fury in extremis'.
 - IPCC reports: 1990, 1995, 2001, 2007, 2014.
 - UNFCCC COP 21, December 2015, Paris.

Semiotics: Production and Reception

- Texts do not signify in any ‘pure’ way , but rather in ways which are determined by their historical, geographical and cultural contexts. (Stephen Purcell,2013. ‘Making Sense of the Stage’, in *Shakespeare and Audience* (London: Palgrave Macmillan), p.33.)
- De Marinis describes his model spectator as a strategy of interpretive co-operation, foreseen by and variously inscribed in the performance text. (Marco de Marinis (1993).*The Semiotics of Performance* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indianapolis University Press),p. 158.)
 - Meaning inscribed in the text , or aspects of production? Yes.
 - Meaning foreseen by the production team ? Not if it reflects a “covert cultural belief” specific to the production team. (c.f. (Sue- Ellen Case. (1988). *Feminism and Theatre* (New York: Methuen), p. 117))

Brutally Sensitising Context: Hunger



Source: Thirsk

Research Process (1): Identify Key Plays

e.g. Early Modern Dearth Plays

- *The Merry Wives of Windsor* (1597)
- *King Lear* (1605-6)
- *Macbeth* (1606)
- *Pericles* (1607-8)
- ***Coriolanus*** (1607-8)
- *A Chaste Maid in Cheapside* (1613)

Research Process (2): Excavate the Archive

Coriolan, Bertolt Brecht, 1959

- Food shortages woven through power-politics: topical post-WW2.
- In Brecht's 1959 adaptation of the play, the opening scene put more emphasis on the plebians, and hunger:
 - Addition of dialogue with The Man with the Child ready to flee the city for '**water, fresh air and a grave**'.
 - 'Absorbed as we may have been by the compelling personal and psychological realm, we were never allowed to forget where we were. [...] Less concerned with the tragic hero or the indispensable individual, this production [infused with Bertolt Brecht's 1950s adaptation] "demanded of us that we think politically again".'
 - Source: Bloggingshakespeare.com/years-of-shakespeare-coriolanus-shakespeare-brecht
Review by Harry Fox Davies, Goldsmiths, Univ of London, 14th Sept 2012.

Coriolanus, NT, 1984-5

- The well-known Buerk interview was broadcast on October 23rd. *Coriolanus* rehearsals had begun three weeks beforehand, and opening night was December 15th 1984.
- ‘Hunger’ is word much bandied about, especially at the opening of the play, yet it issues solely from the mouths, not the souls and bodies of the rebellious plebians. The attire of several citizens plants them firmly in the ranks of the middle class; [...]. [This] dissipates the tension of acting ‘in hunger for bread, not in | Thirst for revenge’
- Source: Kristina Bedford (1992). *Coriolanus at the National*. “Th’ Interpretation of the Time”, (Selinsgrove: Susquehanna University Press; London and Toronto: Associated University Press), p. 31.

Directed by Peter Hall. Caius Marcus Coriolanus: Ian McKellan.

Coriolanus, RSC, 1994

- Corn '[poured] like gold from the flies when the play [opened] and [was] carried off in wooden bowls after the protagonist's banishment'
- Source: Benedict Nightingale (1994). 'Coriolanus' Review, in *The Times*, 26th May.
- Thacker's second innovation – to stage the play in France in the years leading up to the French Revolution, in which food insecurity brought out by crop failures in the summer of 1788 was one of the catalysts for social unrest - seems a reasonable direction in which to take the food (in)security discourse.
- Reactions: 'fatuous', 'irritating', 'incongruous' and 'quite the wrong setting'.

Directed by David Thacker. Caius Marcus Coriolanus: Toby Stephens.

Coriolanus, RSC, 2002/3

- [In] today's economic climate, when two is a retinue, and three's a crowd, this play's inclusion of an angry mob as a main character can make it extremely difficult to stage with the sort of naturalistic violence for which its street scenes call.
- Source: Michael Dobson (2004). 'Shakespeare Performances in England, 2003', in *Shakespeare Survey Online*, 258-289 (285).
- Sub-text: the plebs were cut back more than the patricians. The hungry are less important than the well-fed patricians in this production. The well-fed patricians have access to food / resources. Capitalism's (power-based) relationship with the ecosystem seems to be deeply embedded in the culture represented here.

Directed by David Farr. Caius Marcus Coriolanus: Greg Hicks.

Coriolanus, RSC, 2007

- Last ever production before the three-and-a-half year, one million man-hour, £113million refurbishment of the Royal Shakespeare Theatre.
- It 'cluttered the stage with a big old-fashioned set' and, recalling the 1984 production of *Coriolanus* discussed above, featured 'woefully clean and polite plebians [...] dwarfed by the set and unable to make up in energy of menace what they lack in numbers'. *
- An emasculated mob in the presence of plentiful production resources. An unthinking unawareness of the imbalances of power at the core of the play.
- *Source: Michael Dobson (2008). 'Shakespeare Performances in England, 2007', in *Shakespeare Survey Online*, 318-350

Directed by Gregory Doran. Caius Marcus Coriolanus: William Houston

Coriolanus, Barbican, 2007

- As the house lights faded this immense, precipitous structure [resembling an oriental ziggurat] was suddenly populated by an entire brown-clad plebeian riot, twenty strong and doubled and redoubled again by the side mirrors, converging down the centre of the stairs, and all shouting at [enormous] volume.*
- Frugal magnification of the mob.
- *Source: Michael Dobson (2008). 'Shakespeare Performances in England, 2007', in Shakespeare Survey Online, 318-350

Directed by Yukio Ninagawa. Caius Marcus Coriolanus: Toshiaki Karasawa.

Coriolanus, Shakespeare's Globe, 2012

- The use of baguettes as props was [a] notable feature of this production. All cast members brandished the baguettes as weapons while their constant consumption of the bread reflected not just greed, but the destruction and emasculation of Coriolanus (the baguette, after all, can be a phallic symbol).
*
- My reaction to watching on video: Someone speaking powerfully and brandishing bread as a sword could look strong and vulnerable at the same time (a good description of Coriolanus); conversely a hungry person armed with a baguette (and brandishing it rather than eating it) reminds that hungry people can bring down governments.
- The entire cast (not just the plebs) was played by a Chorus.
- *Source: Adele Lee (2012). Review, in *A Year of Shakespeare*, Edmondson, Prescott, Sullivan (eds)

Directed by Motoi Miura (Chiten Theatre Company). Caius Marcus Coriolanus: Dai Ishida.

Coriolan/us, National Theatre Wales/RSC, 2012

- ‘Brecht welded to Shakespeare’.*
- As the massive hangar sliding-door slid open and the 300-strong sell-out crowd who’d been huddling outside, buffeted by a Welsh wind driving straight down the open valley, surged forward, we met ourselves coming towards us. We were being filmed. We were being projected, onto the big screen on the far wall and two smaller screens closer to us.*
- Frugally magnifying the mob.
- Source: Carol Chillington Rutter (2013). ‘Shakespeare Performances in England (and Wales) 2012’, Shakespeare Survey Online, 66, 354-394 (390).

Directed by Mike Pearson and Mike Brookes. Caius Marcus Coriolanus: Richard Lynch.

Research Process

- 1. Identify play-texts written under ecosystem- or socio-economic-duress or both (e.g. famine, war, climactic disturbances), that also thematize a relevant issue such as dearth. Identify pivotal scenes – e.g. Act 1 Sc. 1 in *Coriolanus*, *Lear*.
- 2. Excavate the modern production archive. Historicize productions of such plays to identify contexts likely to sensitize production teams and audiences to ecosystem + social system risk.

Questions and Implications

- What does the available evidence say, in aggregate, about the social and cultural positioning of food (in)security?
- These findings are consistent with the following:
 - Human society trapped in a wasteful, fragile, inequitable food system.
 - Early modern dearth in performance on the modern stage suggests cultural change is sorely needed to meet food (in)security challenges.