

## **“Intimacy” at the Sam Wanamaker Playhouse**

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The Sam Wanamaker Playhouse (SWP) opened next to Shakespeare’s Globe on London’s South Bank in January 2014. The new theater is described, by the Globe, as an “archetype” of a Jacobean indoor playhouse and is based on the Worcester College plans for an unknown seventeenth-century indoor playhouse. Following these designs, the SWP is a U-shaped theater, with galleries surrounding a pit of seating and a small platform stage; it is a candlelit space and holds approximately 340 people. One word has reoccurred in reviews and responses to this new theater and the Jacobean repertory performed in it: “intimate.” This is an “intimate venue,” declared Henry Hitchings in the *Evening Standard*; the theater has a “smallness and intimacy” (Paul Taylor, *The Independent*), or an “intimacy and delicacy” (Natasha Tripney, *The Stage*). Similarly, actors working in the space describe it as “so intimate” (Emily Barber and Fiona Button) and “much more intimate” than the Globe (Dickon Tyrrell). Before the SWP’s opening, theater historians writing on indoor Jacobean theaters were similarly drawn to that word to describe such venues: “smaller, more intimate performance spaces” (White 145); indoor playhouses had a “greater intimacy” than outdoor ones (Sanders 74); the Blackfriars “institutionaliz[ed] intimacy” (Menzer 169).

*Moving Shakespeare Indoors* is an edited collection that marked the opening of the SWP and includes several academics who had contributed to the research for the playhouse’s design; in it Penelope Woods suggests that “intimacy is overdue attention and exposition, particularly from historians,” particularly as we experience the first performances in the SWP (159). Although in this publication Woods and Paul Menzer offer some consideration of intimacy, I want to take up the challenge by examining at length a very complex term that is predominantly deployed by reviewers and historians with too little or no exposition at all. Analyzing what intimacy means at the SWP over the first two years of its use reveals much

about the unique environment of the playhouse, its actor/audience dynamic and modern interpretations of the Jacobean indoor repertory. Moreover, as work on intimacy in performance has arisen from analysis of very recent theatrical trends—immersive theater experiences, site-specific productions, and one-on-one performance—considering intimacy at the SWP demonstrates the distinctive place of this Jacobean archetype in the contemporary theaterscape.

### **Theatrical Intimacy**

“A good working definition of intimacy recognizes that the ultimate definition is unobtainable,” writes psychologist Karen J. Prager (13). Intimacy is a slippery term and one that shifts meaning across space, time, cultural frames, and disciplines. Intimacy has been examined in myriad ways in psychology (Prager; Meares; Mashek and Aron), sociology/philosophy (Giddens; Innes; and Zeldin) and in contemporary cultural studies (Rojek; Illouz). While drawing on these bodies of work, it is important to narrow focus on intimacy in the theater, a comparatively under-examined idea, in order to understand what occurs at the SWP. An intimate “theatrical performance” is defined by the *Oxford English Dictionary* as one that “aims at establishing familiar and friendly relations with the audience” (“intimate,” *adj.* 3.e.); and the entry appears under the meaning of “intimate” as “Close in acquaintance or association; closely connected by friendship or personal knowledge; characterized by familiarity (with a person or thing)” (“intimate,” *adj.* 3). The centrality of “closeness” in this definition reminds us of the original etymology of the word from the Latin *intimus*, meaning “inmost.”

Thus intimate theater appears to denote a relationship between actors and audience members within a given space, one that fosters a closeness between these two agents; a closeness that results in a form of “intimacy” as in “closeness of observation, knowledge or

the like” (*OED*, “intimacy,” *n.* 1.c). Such a definition parallels those in psychology where an “intimate interaction” is defined by the type of close communication it produces; for Prager and Linda J. Roberts these interactions are marked by self-revealing behavior, positive involvement with the other and shared understandings where “both partners experience a sense of knowing or understanding some aspect of the other’s inner experience” (45). “Intimate” as a verb means “to make known,” deriving from the Latin *intimāre* (“to put or bring into, drive or press into, to make known”) and perhaps something of this verbal meaning is bound up with other usages where a pressing kind of communication is foregrounded.

Clearly, though, the kind of intimacy between actor and audience possible in the contained and limited interaction of a theater show and that analyzed by psychologists focused on open-ended personal relationships (between family, friends, and lovers) is very different. Indeed, Prager is clear in distinguishing “intimate relationships” which “involve multiple dialogues over time” and “interactions” that exist “within clearly designated space-and-time framework” (19). The question remains, then, exactly how are intimate interactions created between actor and audience in the space-and-time framework of a given performance? In early usage theater critics point out the spatial dynamics which enabled a particular interaction for audiences. In 1919 Arthur Hornblow described a new trend for building “a smaller house, or *théâtre intime*, allowing of an auditorium with limited capacity so that no seat will be very far from the stage” (*OED*, “intimate” *adj.* 3.e.) . For Roger Pierce in 1968, the first condition of intimacy in the theater is “close physical proximity between cast and audience” (151).

More recent examinations of intimacy have focused on performances where traditional boundaries between actors and audience members are erased. Performance in non-traditional sites where performers and spectators exist and can roam freely within the same

space enable close physical and visceral encounters between these two agents, as can work that draws on digital and technological tools to destabilize traditional separations between audience members and the performance/performer. One-on-one performance, as the name implies, can engender the kind of personal exchange not possible with multiple audience members. From this developing body of scholarship, there are two points that are especially relevant to the discussion that follows. Spatial dynamics, the potential proximity between actor and audience, as in earlier definitions, remains important to intimate theatrical experience. As Josephine Machon points out in one of the most comprehensive contributions to analysis on this topic, “A central feature of immersive and intimate performance is an exceptional awareness of *space* and *place*; a sensitivity explored by the practitioner in the creation of the work and the audience-immersant experiencing that world” (93).

Intimate theater, then, is a medium where the space is particularly central to performance, and offers the opportunity for spectators to be immersed in a world. In addition to space, it is the nature of the spectator’s experience that requires analysis in intimate performance. Maria Chatzichristodoulou and Rachael Zerihan argue that “Sensing intimacy in performance relocates registers of affect from the public sphere to the private experience” (1). Intimate theater can be private, personal and subjective for individual audience members. Bruce Barton’s work offers some idea of what that “private experience” might involve: “the informed spectator anticipates the heightened self-disclosure of increased visibility, engagement, perhaps even interactivity” (46). It is important to note that discussions of theatrical intimacy/immersion—with their focus on the audience’s awareness of space, sensitivity and engagement—exist in the context of a broader conversation about audience’s sensory experience. Seminal studies by Bert O. States (1985) and Stanton B. Garner (1994) encouraged phenomenological examination of performance, the sensory and aesthetic

experience of audience and actor. More recent work has focused intently on audience cognition and the role that all five senses may play in engaging with performance.<sup>1</sup>

Drawing on this eclectic body of work (on intimacy, contemporary immersive theatre, audience's sensory experience), I want to explore intimacy at the SWP first by considering environment, the spatial, aesthetic and sensory characteristics of the theater, and then experience, the type of exchanges taking place between actors and audience members. Before I begin, I want to address my use of scholarship on contemporary theater trends. Discussion of productions from twenty-first century theatermakers (such as Punchdrunk, dreamthinkspeak, or Adrian Howell) appear far removed from an archetypal seventeenth-century theater which has a stage and audiences in rows of seating, and fits many of the criteria of what Machon describes as “[a] ‘traditional’ theatre experience” (54-55). Many critics associate the trend in theatrical intimacy with a millennial desire for human connection in a postmodern world of technological alienation and dislocation (Machon; Chatzichristodoulou and Zerihan). Such thinking parallels analysis of contemporary society and culture which asserts that our intimate relationships and interactions are shaped by modern concepts of self-identity (Giddens), current economic and political trends (Illouz), and even celebrity culture (Rojek).

On the surface, therefore, it appears wrongheaded to associate current thinking on intimacy with the SWP, a theater project so deeply engaged with historic architecture, plays and culture. Yet, like fellow contributors to this special issue (for example, Eleanor Rycroft and Sally Barnden, who draw on spatial theory and site-specific theory, respectively, in their work on medieval/early modern spaces), I want to insist on the value of theorizing the early modern through the modern, and examining both together. Indeed, as I shall suggest, on closer inspection the SWP does share many performance values and ideas with contemporary immersive theater. Moreover, it is unwise to forget that twenty-first-century theatermakers

and audiences exist in this early modern/modern/postmodern space, bringing with them contemporary trends, ideas, and thoughts about theaters. Therefore, concurrent theater remains a crucial, if often overlooked, context for and methodological approach to reconstructed performance.

### **Intimate Environment at the SWP**

Fundamentally the SWP is an intimate theater because it is a space in which there is, to use Pierce's terms, "close physical proximity between cast and audience" (151). In the SWP, no one is more than around nine meters from the stage, and performer and spectator co-exist in the shared lighting, predominately of candlelight. In this way, the SWP parallels its sister theater, the Globe, which has also been associated with the word "intimate" because "nobody is more than ten or twelve yards from the actors on stage" and actor and audience members are "visible to one another," enabling a "direct social encounter" (Gurr 114; Woods 160). Yet "intimate" has been used far more about the SWP; for actor Dickon Tyrrell the "obvious" difference between the two playhouses is that the indoor one is "much more intimate" ("Performance"). At the Globe, audience members closest to the actors are the groundlings standing in the yard looking up at the stage. At the SWP, this vertical distance is removed for those audience members sitting in the stage boxes at the side of the stage: they find themselves sitting on the same level as actors standing on stage. Similarly, when the small area just in front of the stage is used for playing (not a known early modern practice, but one regularly seen at the SWP), audience members seated in the pit find themselves sitting parallel to a standing actor, within reaching distance. Using Edward T. Hall's seminal organizing system for socio-cultural spatial interactions, the closest distance between performer and spectator at the SWP comes under, I suggest, the category of "Personal

Distance,” approximately one and a half to two and a half feet. In this distance, the “kinesthetic sense of closeness derives in part from the possibilities present in regard to what each participant can do to the other .... At this distance, one can hold or grasp the other person” (Hall 119). What we have, therefore, is intimacy created through physical closeness and its potentialities.

“Personal distance” does transition into what Hall defines as “Intimate Distance—Far Phase,” when actors take advantage of the potential to hold, grasp, or simply touch audience members closest to them. At the SWP there is the kind of “interactivity” (Barton 46)—physical touch and interaction—that critics might expect to experience more readily in non-traditional immersive or site-specific performance. And perhaps it is more potent as it occurs in a seemingly “traditional theatre” where the “informed spectator” is not necessarily informed or prepared for such an occurrence (Barton 46). Such moments include *The Knight of the Burning Pestle* (2014), in which Dean Nolan’s George clambered over audience members to exit from the stage boxes. More recently, sitting in the front row of the pit, I have been handed a guitar by James Garnon’s Autolycus in a performance of *The Winter’s Tale* (2016), and, in *The Tempest* (2016), seen Trevor Fox’s Stephano cheekily pinch a pit spectator on the cheek in response to her answering a question. In such examples the audience member becomes, albeit for an instant, a “performing spectator,” a term used about one-on-one performance (Heddon, Iball, and Zerihan 121). Moments of touch and/or very close interaction between actor and individual audience member exemplify a shift from public sphere to private experience, to use Chatzichristodoulou and Zerihan’s terms (1); individual spectators receive a unique and personal interaction with the actor. For those closest to the actors in stage boxes and in the pit, then, this theater is one of touch (I will address the experience of those in the upper gallery, who are more distant, below).

From the perspectives of actors, the effect of the audience in the theater space is palpable in the language they employ to discuss performing there. Describing the opening night of *Cymbeline*, Emily Barber notes “the space is one of the most beautiful things in the world,” but, “It’s also quite disconcerting how close the audience are and how much you can see their faces” (“Performance”). For Hattie Morahan, the “biggest thing to metabolize” about the space during the first few performances “was the sea of faces ...[:] it’s quite startling and discombobulating” (“Tech Week”). For both actors, the proximity of the audience is actually unsettling or challenging (“disconcerting”; “discombobulating”) in the first instance. Such comments remind us that it is not just spectators who are affected by “heightened self-disclosure” (Barton 46) available in intimate theater. Other accounts give a sense of the audience’s almost dominant physical presence in the space: the way in which they “they’re on top of you” (Trystan Gravelle) or how “you’re wrapped round very tightly by the audience” (Garnon, “Pre-Rehearsal”). Gemma Arterton points out “the close proximity of the audience” means that ‘the show is “very easily bashed around by the audience” (“Performance”). Audiences are “[w]rapped round,” “on top,” with the power to “bash” the show around. These words give a real sense of agency to the spectators and we might recall here the etymology of intimate as “to put or bring into, drive or press into.” Actors deliver their scripted communication in an environment where the audience is an insistent presence, pressing into and impinging onto the stage space, and “bashing” the interactions which take place there.

In some ways, with these forceful descriptions of the SWP audience, modern theatermakers oddly echo their early modern counterparts. Writing for the Blackfriars, Ben Jonson complained that actors had to perform “in the compass of a cheese trencher” because of the onstage audience of gallants who “knock us o’ the elbows,” “thrust and spurn,” and ‘leave us no place’ (A2<sup>v</sup>). The opening to Jonson’s 1616 *The Devil is an Ass* exists in a



tradition of indoor play prologues that tease and confront audience members seated closest to the stage action, often requiring actors to pretend to be gallants and/or seat themselves in amongst spectators. These include John Marston's *Antonio's Revenge* (1601), Jonson's *Cynthia's Revels* (1600) and *The New Inn* (1629), John Day's *The Isle of Gulls* (1606), and Francis Beaumont's *The Knight of the Burning Pestle* (1607). While obviously very different in scope and nature, such early modern prologues and modern actors' "disconcerting" and "discombobulating" responses to the SWP suggest the potential tension proximity between spectator and performer can cause.

Nonetheless, it is important to note that in today's theater climate close proximity and interaction is a real selling point, as the popularity of companies such as Punchdrunk demonstrates. Writing on the company, Colette Gordon notes that "For audiences, the ability to interact physically with ... actors' bodies is the core of this hardcore theater experience" (1); her analysis of online comments and reviews of Punchdrunk's work reveals that for spectators "levels of intimacy are evaluated and assigned value" (2). Similarly, Jan Wozniak argues that "Punchdrunk performances are constructed to place the highest value on intimate human contact" (318). The company has been quick to monetize this assigned value, offering "premium tickets" for *The Drowned Man* (2013) that guarantee the spectator direct contact with a performer, an experience Wozniak describes as "similar to a one-to-one performance" (326). It is possible to see a similar valuing of closeness and proximity in the changing seat pricing of the SWP: when the playhouse opened, tickets in the pit were priced at £25, they are now worth £38. This change reflects the way that, not unlike Punchdrunk, the theater industry and spectators find value in proximity.

Intimacy has been prized and commodified in contemporary theater and this context may well be one of the reasons why this very current buzzword was what critics deployed in their response to the SWP. Moreover, the press responses to the SWP reveal the way in which

“intimacy” in this environment is more than just actor/audience proxemics. It is apparent that this theater offers the sense of being immersed and enclosed in a beautiful and historic space. Taylor notes the venue’s “smallness and intimacy .... You feel as if you are sitting in an exquisite little jewel box or doll’s house” (“Gemma Arterton is Luminous”). For Andrew Dickson, it “isn’t just a jewel box of a theatre—it’s also a time machine” (“New Globe Playhouse”). As Sally Barnden’s article for this special issue demonstrates, other reconstructed theatres or projects (the Globe and the Rose) have a complex temporality; they layer and fuse time, they are haunted by the past, and sometimes ask audiences to consider temporal distance.

The SWP, I suggest, does similar work—fusing the early modern and modern. Certainly, the Globe offers theatergoers the chance to experience a re-imagined early modern environment, but its open-air structure lets in the modern world of helicopters, amplified music of party boats on the Thames, and the hustle and bustle of the South Bank. There are no such interruptions at the enclosed and smaller SWP and thus the experience is more intense and immersive. For Machon, writing on contemporary performance, a key characteristic of immersive and intimate theater is that it offers “audience-actor engulfment and interaction with/in the space” (34-35); as a spectator, “You are physically surrounded by another world. You are intensely aware of your habitat and the details of the space” (55). The small U-shaped, wooden, candlelit, and Jacobean decorated interior of the SWP offers spectators a sealed-off, immersive, stimulating, and engulfing physical world-within-the-world.

Actors are not so florid in their language as journalists introducing the space to their readers as a “jewel box” or “time machine.” However, one word emerges in their descriptions of the theater which emphasizes the sense of enclosure: they refer to it as a “room.” “It’s a really nice room to kind of talk to and play with” (Garmon, “Tech Week”); actors must attend

to “the atmosphere in the room” (Gravelle); the performer and spectator exist “all in the same room” (Morahan, “Performance”). This feeling of being “all in the same room” was best exemplified in 2014’s *The Knight of the Burning Pestle*. For this metatheatrical broad comedy, director Adele Thomas wanted “to construct an alternative reality” and “to use the entire theatre as set” to create an “immersive” environment (Thomas, “Beaumont 400”). Indeed, the production made use of not only the upper gallery and pit of the playhouse, but also expanded out into the stage boxes (resulting in interaction with audiences) and the corridors around the theater. For Emma Smith, “it’s the unruly, expansive *Knight of the Burning Pestle*, spreading across the audience and up into the gallery, that best explores the potential of this precise and enclosed space” (“Mirth”). Smith is right to point out that the potential of the SWP is its expansiveness and enclosure. ‘[I]ntimacy builds worlds; it creates spaces’ (Berlant 282), and at the SWP the intimacy of the space enables theater-makers to create immersive, collaborative, and consuming imaginative worlds for audiences that are not interruptible as they are at its sister theater, the Globe.

A notable feature of the theater that sustains the immersive environment is the shared candlelight. For theater critic Catherine Love, the aesthetic effect is “enchanted,” “magical,” and “dreamlike” ; whereas Michael Billington describes its “rich, strange and conspiratorial use”. Considering these adjectives, the reason why “intimacy” is the word recalled in this space may well be result of the modern cultural associations of candlelight. In the era of electric lighting, candlelight is the visual environment of our intimate and personal relationships, of religious sites, of romance, of dinner parties, of celebration. It is a point that the actor James Garnon makes, noting that “We [as modern spectators] have a huge number of associations with candlelight. It’s romantic, it’s sexy ... and it evokes ideas of religious ceremonies and romantic meals and birthday parties and special events to us. Bonfire nights and things” (“Performance”). To be swathed in low-level candlelight, for modern audiences,

therefore, is to recall feelings and events that are personal and intimate in nature; and it is possible that these feelings are projected into the SWP, framing the work seen there.

Nonetheless, beyond modern associations, the sensory experience of the SWP does render it an intimate space. In work on intimate senses in medieval culture, Holly Duggan and Lara Farina argue that “the very term ‘intimate’ renders the self as a being in space, one with an ‘inner’ dimension that is both separate from the world at large, yet at times, remarkably close to it” (374). The five senses are gateways into the internal and stimulation of them thus offers a way to access the “inmost” (intimate’s etymological heritage) person. In this way, heightened sensory experiences may become intimate ones. Entering the SWP, spectators come into a candlelit and highly decorated space, one with a high sensory “information rate” (McAuley 59). Gay McAuley explains the theory that the higher the information rate of a theater space—its use of decoration, lighting, color, shade, image, and form—the higher the psychological arousal levels among inhabitants (59). Alongside the visual aesthetics, audiences might experience the smell of the candles, particularly as they are extinguished and re-lit during performance; the touch of the actor (as established above) and, in the somewhat cramped conditions of the playhouse, even other audience members; as well as the unique acoustics of the space. The predominant material of the SWP is oak, which absorbs and reflects sound very well, meaning that wherever one sits in the playhouse, music, sound effect, and voice seem acoustically close and immediate. For Arterton, the theater “drinks your voice in” (“Rehearsal”), and Max Bennett suggests it is possible to achieve a “very delicate whispered naturalism” in terms of vocal volume (“Performance”). In other words, the way that sound functions in the space enables spectators and actors to experience a close aural connection.

Key performance moments throw the potentially heightened sensory experience of the SWP into sharp relief for the audience; one of the best examples was act four, scene one of

2014's *The Duchess of Malfi*. In this scene, Ferdinand insists on seeing the Duchess, his estranged sister, in the dark before presenting her with the hand of a dead man and then the supposed corpses of her husband and children. At the SWP, extinguishing all the candles created a complete blackout for this scene. As Liz Schafer noted, "the deep, deep darkness after the candles are carried out is uncanny"; and in the darkness the audience relied on their other senses so that, like the Duchess, they track Ferdinand's voice "trying to work out where he is in the dizzying dark" (Schafer). Such moments contribute to the experience of *sensory intimacy* in the playhouse, particularly the emphasis on sound once sight has been removed. "The space traced by the ear in the darkness," Juhani Pallasmaa proposes, "becomes a cavity sculpted directly in the interior of the mind" (50); the architect confirms that sensory stimulation enables access to the interior of personhood. Indeed, David Shearing suggests that "Imaginative listening creates an aural intimacy" (79).

In his discussion, Shearing analyses contemporary productions such as Punchdrunk's *The Drowned Man: A Hollywood Fable* (2013) and *Electric Hotel* (2010); such productions join other recent works, such as Complicité's *The Encounter* (2015) and Fuel Theatre's *Fiction* (2014), which have created "aural intimacy" through headphones, blackouts and extensive sound design. Matt Trueman argues that there is a trend for such aurally focussed work ("Warning"). Having seen, or rather heard, *The Drowned Man*, *The Encounter* and *Fiction*, I think that, while obviously far removed in form and theater technology from this modern trend, the SWP's ability to achieve complete darkness and/or extreme low-level lighting and to force audiences to focus on their hearing means it shares some of the values and experiences of these recent theater projects. The SWP is a "time-machine" to a Jacobean past and yet, I suggest, its actor-audience proxemics, its enclosed nature, and its sensory aesthetic mean that at times it is experientially closer to contemporary immersive and aurally experimental theater than we might think.

## **Intimate Experience at the SWP**

So far my focus has predominantly been on audience members in the pit, stage boxes, and lower gallery who are closest to the stage action and even actor's touch. However, we should note that the experience is very different for spectators seated in the upper gallery who, while certainly closer than in other larger theaters, are more distant than those seated below. Bridget Escolme suggests that the upper gallery is "more detached" at the SWP and the "intimacy" of the space needs refining: "it is a divided, stratified intimacy, not a cheery communality" (210). Overall, I concur with Escolme and want to develop what "stratified intimacy" means. Yet, while recognizing the distance experienced by those in the upper gallery, I argue that key attributes of the SWP already discussed are applicable to these spectators, and serve to create a sense of intimacy parallel to those they sit above. Those in the upper gallery are similarly immersed in the aesthetic and enclosed environment of the playhouse, are also subject to the encompassing acoustics of the theater. Therefore, they experience some level of sensory intimacy, and the closeness of "being in the same room," as SWP actors have put it.

The SWP audience member exemplifies Jacques Rancière's arguments on "The Emancipated Spectator." In this seminal essay, Rancière challenges the notion that spectators in more traditional theater environments are passive; rather, the spectator is always "active" in that "he observes, he selects, he compares, he interprets" (277). While those in the upper gallery cannot experience the actor's direct touch or perhaps even eye contact, we can detect a connection between spectators and stage in this location by watching group movement and gesture. Observing recordings of performances at the SWP, it is possible to see similarities in audience members in the upper gallery (and lower gallery too) physically leaning into and away from productions. When this physical engagement occurs, I suggest, an interaction

takes place between spectators and actors, even at a distance, which might be indicative of an intimate interaction of positive involvement with the other and shared understanding (to draw on psychologist Prager's understanding of intimacy). Bernard Beckerman has defined the "leaning forward in one's seat" as a form of "empathic parallelism" (149). Building on this work, more recently Simon Shepherd, in *Theatre, Body and Pleasure* has identified the cognitive processes involved in such moments of empathy where audiences engage with and mirror the emotional events on stage in their own physicality, through movement, gesture, stillness, tension, etc. Arguably, we might also track the response by audience members using psychologists Prager and Roberts' criteria of "nonverbal cues" for intimate interactions, such as "decreased distance," "increased gaze," "more direct body orientation," "more forward lean," "greater facial expressiveness," "increased postural openness," and "more frequent head nods" (45).

In the small space of the SWP, physical, empathetic mirroring is easier between spectators who sit close to one another and more instinctively parallel each other's movements; and this process is easier for actors and audiences to read and to develop. It is this very subtle and intangible feeling and process that lies behind actors' comments on the audience's presence at the SWP. The "real sense of an audience participating and being eager, eager to hear the play" (Cusack); the audience being "drawn into" the space (Bennett); and the fact that "everybody is in the same room, there isn't a fourth wall, it sort of all feeds through" (Garnon, "Performance"). The experience of the SWP, then, can be one of sharing, participation, drawing in, and immersion, and this occurs to some extent regardless of where one sits in the space.

Nonetheless, Escolme reminds us that sharing is not always what occurs, "cheery communality" is not all pervasive at the SWP (210). The intimacy is "stratified" and, for Escolme, "Peering down through the hazy candlelight," she "felt like a spy" (210). The

verticality of the SWP means that audience members in the upper gallery, wrapped around and peering into and onto the stage, potentially feel that they are spying, or voyeurs. They have a view on a private and intimate fictional world that seems illicit or unwarranted because it is not accompanied by the physical closeness or directness that, for example, those in the lower part of the playhouse might experience. Such feelings of voyeurism have been particularly potent when intimate spaces and relations are staged. Notable examples occur in *The Duchess of Malfi*, act three, scene two, in which Duchess is seen getting ready for bed, teased by her husband and maid; in act two, scene one of *Tis Pity She's A Whore*, where audiences listen in on the post-coital conversation of incestuous brother and sister Annabella and Giovanni; and with Beatrice-Joanna and De Flores's night-time furtive and conspiratorial conversations in act five, scene one of *The Changeling*. In such moments, intimacy in the playhouse is more firmly located on stage in character interaction and the private spaces in which they exist; the audience, especially in the upper gallery, are close enough to observe but distant enough that this gazing can constitute something uncomfortable, a spy or voyeur role.

Other critics have qualified the type of intimate experience at the SWP: the space is “indecently intimate” (Coveney) and offers “confrontational intimacy” (Schafer). Such comments recall Menzer’s point that the early modern Blackfriars instituted an intimacy that one might enjoy *or* suffer (174). Moreover, they alert us to the complexities of the term “intimacy” as realized in theatrical performance. For Fintan Walsh, writing on one-on-one and small scale contemporary performances, intimacy “enables us to consider the various ways by which we are bound to each other and to the world; ties that may include the biological, legal, and political, as well as the more nebulous emotional, affective, and social kind”; “At best intimacy can promote support, sustenance, and responsibility; at worst narcissism, claustrophobia, and individualism” (60). The closeness between spectator and



actor, or, more accurately, *character*, forces the latter to examine exactly who and what they have been temporarily bound to or implicated in. In the case of *The Duchess of Malfi*, spectators found themselves in the worst kind of intimacy: in close quarters with narcissistic and individualistic characters, in a world that does become increasingly claustrophobic.<sup>2</sup>

For me, Duke Ferdinand (David Dawson) most embodied the confrontational intimacy that reviewers noted. His engagement with the audience was increasingly aggressive and physically close. For instance, when Ferdinand first learns of his sister's secret re-marriage, and in his eyes betrayal, his reaction is a violent diatribe against the couple:

I would have their bodies

Burnt in a coal-pit with the ventage stopped

That their cursed smoke might not ascend to heaven;

Or dip the sheets they lie'n in pitch or sulphur,

Wrap them in't, and then light them like a match (2.5.66-70)

Dawson delivered this speech crouched down at the front of the stage, on eye level with those in the pit, spitting the words out at them in fury, almost as if they were stand-ins for his sister and her husband. Towards the end of the play, particularly in his scenes of madness, Dawson launched himself into the stage boxes, forcing audience members closest to the stage to lean backwards to avoid a physical clash. In his final scene he appeared with a handheld candle and went close up to individual audience members, lighting his and their faces as he delivered his lines. In this way, Dawson played out Ferdinand's social, moral, and sexual transgressions with increasingly intense spatial transgressions, creating a closeness and even physical connection to spectators that was uncomfortable: a "confrontational intimacy."

*The Duchess of Malfi* has marked a trend in the programming choices at the SWP. In its first two seasons the playhouse has produced a cluster of Jacobean and Caroline plays that emphasize moral corruptibility, sexual violence, illicit behavior, and claustrophobia: Webster's *Malfi*, John Ford's *Tis Pity She's A Whore* and *The Broken Heart*, Thomas Middleton and William Rowley's *The Changeling*. Having said that, productions of *The Knight of the Burning Pestle*, *The Malcontent*, and Shakespeare's late plays most recently have offered some generic variety. Yet there have been several plays from the latter especially dark early modern canon that have offered, in the words of the Globe's press release for the 2014/15 season, "psychological intensity," "challenging moral territory," and "exploration of the darkest recesses of the human psyche" ("Winter 2014/15 Season"). To some extent, what has occurred at this playhouse defined in its promotional material as "Jacobean" is the production of a repertory that most embodies modern associations of the "Jacobean" canon. As Susan Bennett has argued, the "Jacobean" canon means more than plays written during James I's reign. Rather its "aesthetic use most commonly is a denotation of (moral) decay, excess and violence" (80); it has become a "signifier bound to represent psychopathic violence and deviant desires" (93). Moreover, I argue, at the center of this "Jacobean" canon, and the focus of its moral decay, violence, and sexuality, are doomed, intense, and intimate relationships such as those between Beatrice and De Flores (*The Changeling*), Annabella and Giovanni (*Tis Pity She's A Whore*), and the Duchess and Ferdinand (*The Duchess of Malfi*).

Therefore, it is worth considering that some of the identification of the Jacobean SWP with intimacy, in all its indecent and confrontational complexity, is in part a projection of contemporary associations and ideas around the "Jacobean," and interpretations of its canon. This process would parallel that which has occurred at the Globe where modern idealizations and nostalgia for an "Elizabethan" past, particularly the proto-democratic and communal

nature of that past, have been invested in this theater and inevitably come to shape its repertory and responses to work seen there (see Dustagheer; Purcell; Worthen). At the SWP it is plausible that plays which foreground intimate relationships are obvious programming choices, that “intimacy” and a range of related words are part of the vocabulary around the playhouse and that audiences are likely to conceive their experience as intimate in part because of meanings bound up in the “Jacobean.”

### **Defining Intimacy**

“Intimacy” is a slippery and shifting term that requires defining in each subject area in which it is applied, as the eclectic body of work on the word attests. Yet I want to offer some tentative conclusions here, not least because reflecting on the language we use about theater is a worthwhile exercise. As Machon points out, “it is important to have purchase on the words that are employed to describe the practice in which we are engaged, because the words are there to help us *understand the ideas behind the work*” (xviii). In the case of the SWP, I think that the regular occurrence of “intimacy” in descriptions and responses to the theater certainly is a product of the theater’s physical environment and performer’s/spectator’s experience of a space that feels small, that is candlelit, and that brings the possibility of close interaction and indeed physical connection. Yet we must also recognize that “intimacy” is more than environmental; it is a word loaded with emotional and cultural associations that modern users bring to bear on the SWP. The modern connotations of candlelight; the unique contemporary meaning of “Jacobean”; twenty-first-century understandings of confinement, voyeurism, and privacy are all projected in this space. It is the emotional, cultural and associative significance of “intimacy” at the SWP that will, I suggest, develop over the years of its use, and remaining alert to the deployment and changing meaning of the term will

continue to offer a way into understanding this unique space and audience/actor experience of it.

## Notes

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<sup>1</sup> See Di Benedetto; McConachie and Hart; McConachie, Oddey and White; Shepherd, Banes and Lepecki.

<sup>2</sup> Jean M. Ellis D'Alessandro offers an excellent analysis of the play's claustrophobic spaces.

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