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Keepers, Epp, and Serrand unearthed bricks from beneath the fish tank. Like an auto mechanic inspecting the underside of a vehicle, each man lay on a rolling platform and propelled himself into the structure's unseen depths. One by one the men reemerged covered in sand and carrying bricks, the weight of which made their task even more arduous. At one point, Epp held a brick in front of his face, as though studying an archaeological clue, and wondered aloud, "Did the wind blow this in, or conversely, is everything just washing away?" Realizing they have only each other, the men joined forces and used the bricks they found to build a sand castle. Viewed another way, they tapped into their human need to create, to fashion something from nothing, as a way of making sense of the universe itself and coping with its uncertainties and disappointments.

Upon *Jeune Lune's* closing, artistic director Dominique Serrand posited these questions on his company's website: What should a theatre-generating organization of the twenty-first century look like? How can artists create truly groundbreaking art in a fast-changing world? *FISHTANK* was a fitting finale for *Jeune Lune* because it reflected the company's fanciful imagination, quirky sensibility, and—presciently—the difficulty of its "real-life" situation. The triumph of *FISHTANK*, as it turned out, was its call to collaborative action. It invited artists and audiences to engage in the important business of reimagining the future of our relationship and embarking on that creative journey together.

MARK SEAMON

College of St. Catherine

WHO DO YOU THINK YOU ARE. Created and performed by the SITI Company. Directed by Anne Bogart. ASU Gammage, Arizona State University Galvin Playhouse, Tempe. 1 March 2008.

The mission of the SITI Company, founded by Anne Bogart and Tadashi Suzuki in 1992, is to produce innovative new work, train new artists, and encourage international collaborations. Combining rigorous Suzuki technique with the more fluid and ensemble-building Viewpoints training, the company creates thought-provoking and visually compelling work despite the challenges SITI faces in its search for a permanent home that would allow company members to work together year-round. The world premiere of *Who Do You Think You Are*, although early in its development, once again highlights the rigorous training and ensemble work of this remarkable

company. Commissioned by ASU Gammage, *Who Do You Think You Are* was created as part of a three-year residency between Arizona State University (ASU) and the SITI Company. In the performance, Bogart and her company scrambled time and space to explore the fundamental relationship between mind and body, and the piece is indicative of the company's unique process of creating company-devised, performative "theatre essays." Clearly, SITI deserves opportunities to expand on this process.

The SITI website states that like other devised work by SITI, such as *Culture of Desire*, *The Medium*, *Going Going Gone*, and *Cabin Pressure*, *Who Do You Think You Are* is a theatre "essay"—a theatrical form that explores a specific theme using a formula consisting of a question, an anchor, and a structure. In *Cabin Pressure*, for example, the question was about the relationship between actors and audience, the anchor was a group of nontheatre people asked about their specific experiences in the theatre, and the structure was an awkward audience talkback. In *Who Do You Think You Are*, Bogart and company turned their attention to the field of neuroscience and brain science. The question proposed by Bogart was how the human experience and human biology influence each other. They selected as their structure Rainer Werner Fassbinder's early play *Katzelmacher* (and the 1969 film of the same name), featuring a dysfunctional community of people who provide the anchor for the piece.

As part of their process, company members engaged in extensive research in contemporary scientific understandings of the workings of the brain. During their residency in April 2007, Bogart and the company met with a group of ASU faculty specializing in specific aspects of neuroscience, such as the functions of mirror neurons and the mechanics of memory. Following this work, the company continued to develop the piece at SITI's summer institute



Ellen Lauren (Marie) and Barney O'Hanlon (Eric) in *Who Do You Think You Are*. Photo: Michael Brosilow.



Members of the SITI Company in *Who Do You Think You Are*. Photo: Michael Brosilow.

in Saratoga Springs, and for several weeks in December 2007 and January 2008 in their studio in New York City. By this time, Bogart had combined scenes and characters from *Katzelmacher* into a rough draft. Bogart's adaptation of Fassbinder's text provides a lens through which to explore potent psychological issues, including difficulties with human connectedness, origins of physical and psychological aggression, the complexity of memory, intricacies of addiction (both emotional and substance), and the possibility of intentional change. The characters function in an atmosphere of impending violence. Eric (Barney O'Hanlon), for example, is constantly on the verge of lashing out violently against Marie (Ellen Lauren) as he struggles with his narcotics dependency and plots a criminal heist. Marie cruelly criticizes Bruno, her emasculated partner played by Will Bond, whose feelings of inferiority feed his aggression. Leon Ingulsrud played Paul, a greedy bully who will take advantage of anyone to gain money or status. Gunda, played by Akiko Aizawa, falsely accuses the foreigner (J. Ed Araiza) of rape, which leads to a violent community attack on him.

The design team participated actively throughout the rehearsal process, ensuring that the visual elements and soundscape were as integral to the production as the actors or the text. The actors portrayed the monotonous lives of the characters, for

example, within a boldly theatrical setting consisting of a huge white target painted on the floor and a sculpture of flashing florescent lights clustered like brain neurons suspended above. The target later became topography for the company as they circled the target or found themselves at its center. Early in the performance, short vignettes were accompanied by a pulsing tone that built tension and augmented the characters' entrapment within their dysfunctional lives. Later, the sound provided the music for the company's exuberant physical explorations of brain functions, such as "you can't teach an old dog new tricks" and Gunda's rendition of the title song, "Who Do You Think You Are?"

Midway through the performance, time and space became displaced as the performance changed from representational narrative to a series of random snapshots of the interior landscape of each character's struggle with their self-imposed misery. Here, the SITI Company's unique and skillful physical performance style became most evident. Eric began a frantic search for pills as he described the effect of serotonin on brain chemistry. Bruno packed and unpacked a suitcase that seemed to contain fragments of his memory. At one point, the company broke away from their stage characters to describe the biological structure of the brain. This led to a highly choreographed game of charades in which

the performers joyfully enacted a word or phrase that might explain their characters' identity, producing a physical demonstration of mind/body/brain connections. As Eric/O'Hanlon described mirror neurons and how actions we see can literally change the brain, he and the members of the company each performed a choreographed movement sequence.

Who Do You Think You Are is a reminder that a permanent company can achieve a level of ensemble

performance that is rarely seen in American professional theatre. The magic that this company created in a few scattered weeks of research, exploration, and rehearsals points to the SITI Company's potential to develop a new body of work, as well as keep older pieces in repertory, given the time, space, and support that a permanent home would offer.

BONNIE J. ECKARD
Arizona State University