Merging Worlds: Place, Politics, and Play in Martin McDonagh's *The Pillowman*

Miriam Haughton

Introduction

If Martin McDonagh's dominant dramaturgical style has been reliant on the performativity and theatricality stemming from notions of regional place as one may observe from his Leenane Trilogy (1996-1997) and Aran Island plays (1996-2001), then the absence of a specified geographical location in his later play *The Pillowman* (2003)[1] becomes a significant dramatic choice. Gay McAuley's assertion, "[w]hile theatre can indeed take place anywhere, the point is that it must take place somewhere" (3), maintains that space constitutes a fundamental concern in the construction, deployment and reception of meaning in theatre. Thus, McDonagh's removal of a specific geographical region may initially appear to constitute a fundamental concern in an analysis of this play. However, Anne Ubersfeld reminds us that plays do not offer representations of real places, but socio-cultural coordinates that influence communication, ideologies and tensions: "[t]he spatial structures reproduced in the theatre define not so much a concrete world, but rather the image people have of spatial relationships and the conflicts underlying those relationships in the society in which they live" (97). In *The Pillowman*, it is "the conflicts underlying those relationships" that McDonagh ruthlessly dramatizes. By placing the action in an unspecified totalitarian state, immediate recourse to established narratives of specific national identities or histories are halted but a dialectic is foregrounded between notions and practices of official authority and individual agency. Even without the identification of dramatic locale then, the politics of place have determined the power relations at work.

Opening in a police interrogation room, *The Pillowman* initially resembles a manhunt as the detectives try to establish the guilt of brothers Katurian and Michal in recent child homicides that mirror the format of infanticide depicted in Katurian's mainly unpublished fiction writing. Stories within the play-story explode and multiply, complicating any sense of dramatic reality and denying neo-classical dramatic unities of time, space and action. By the end of the play the detectives have their written

1 While *The Pillowman* was published in 2003, the play was substantially drafted in the 1990s. *The Pillowman* premiered at the Cottesloe Auditorium of the National Theatre England on 13th November 2003. It was directed by John Crowley, set design by Scott Pask, lighting design by Hugh Vanstone, music by Paddy Cunneen and sound design by Paul Arditti. Tupolski was played by Jim Broadbent, Katurian by David Tennant, Ariel by Nigel Lindsay, Michal by Adam Godley, Mother by Victoria Pembroke, Father by Mike Sherman, Boy by James Daly and Girl by Jennifer Higham.

confession, yet notions of guilt and innocence, story and reality become blurred and inconclusive. The final scene also presents the brothers' reappearance to conclude the play, alive and breathing after their deaths, brutally reminding the audience that the play is a *play* and the place of it is in the theatre. In the program note for the Royal National Theatre Premiere of *The Pillowman*, Irish critic Fintan O'Toole mentions the fluidity and theatricality of McDonagh's previous dramatic places: "McDonagh's habitual landscape has the name of a real, terrestrial place: Leenane, Inishmaan, Inishmore. But that place is also way out there in the planetary space of the imagination, in a chaotic region shaped by myth and exile where trapped lives wait for the warm tide to release them" (386). While *The Pillowman* remains true to McDonagh's gritty comedic style informed by a wealth of Hiberno-English linguistic exchanges and the odd red-haired mother, gone are the eccentric twentieth-century parishes of the west of Ireland with their kitsch locals and desperate clergymen. Yet McDonagh and his default comedic style remain firmly grounded in an Irish tone and temperament and the places he does identify— the police interrogation room and the family home—are still dramatizations of social places invested with the authority to regulate, manage and protect. Here, McDonagh unleashes a tragedy that is informed and influenced by the prevailing structures associated with these places, not the places themselves. This play critiques the ideas that serve human exchange and manage social interaction; the structures and practices of the family, law and nation and all their associated myths, traditions and dogma that haunt the places they embody.

This article will investigate the dramatic encoding and employment of space in *The Pillowman* which moves between official, legitimate and naturalistic places to places of the imagination depending on the performativity of story. Initially a clear distinction, by the end of McDonagh's play, he has indeed played with this point of demarcation. Through McDonagh's play on place, the structures, strategies and regulations of these places become heightened and exposed. While *The Pillowman* affirms that their social purpose and power have been normalized and legitimated through the construction of narrative, it also conveys that narrative can be deconstructed and reconstructed. In this narrative maze, one story is quickly replaced by another story, officials of the law become as ridiculous as the judiciary they represent and social trauma is the inevitable consequence of social oppression. Comedy may carry McDonagh's stories, but his stories are certainly not about comedy. The present investigation is based on the outline of dramatic space derived from McDonagh's playtext and the design of scenic space in *The Pillowman*'s premier production directed by John Crowley at the Cottesloe Auditorium of The Royal National Theatre which played from 13 November 2003 to 17 April 2004.

The Places of a Play: Dramatic and Scenic Space

Taxonomies of space in theatre reveal a tense and conflicting discourse which McAuley attributes to the physical, social, phenomenological and fleeting nature of

performance, "[b]eing an event rather than an object, performance is radically unstable in the meanings it generates and in the activities it engages" (16). Performance cannot be read in a linear fashion similar to a text as the mechanics of visibility and observation operate alternatively in the socially foregrounded and bodily experience of theatre. The embodied experience of observing a theatre space will frame what is heard, and thus, the construction of scenic space will frame the dramatic narrative in performance. Indeed, McDonagh opens *The Pillowman* with a jest on the dynamics of sight. The stage directions stipulate "*Police interrogation room. Katurian sitting at a table, centre, blindfolded*" (3), removed thereafter by detective Tupolski, saying: "Who left this on you? . . . Why didn't you take it off? It just looks stupid" (3). From the outset therefore, visibility and power are intertwined.

Before an examination of dramatic space ensues, it must be observed that contemporary definitions of dramatic space do not precisely converge. "Dramatic space" according to Christopher Balme refers to "the spatial coordinates fixed in and evoked by the theatrical text" (49). McAuley's reading of Ubersfeld's theorization expands on this definition however, maintaining that dramatic space does not solely refer to space evoked by the text but is "made up of both textual and performance signs" (19) and is more than "fictional place" (19), culminating in "the dramatic geography of the action as a whole and is indeed a means of conceptualizing the whole action or narrative content of the play" (19). According to Ubersfeld, the dramatic space of the play can include signals of space created through a production that are not solely evoked by the playtext. From these similar but not identical theorizations, I read dramatic space as the possibility of space(s) conjured by the map of the playtext, established onstage through scenic design and performance, though not always existing as a visible or material space as it includes the idea of space(s) created through playtext and performance, which a reader or audience member can create or interpret subjectively. Therefore, for the purpose of clarity, when examining a text-based dramaturgical style such as *The Pillowman*, one must first observe the dynamics of dramatic space designated by the playtext and then continue to an analysis of how the dramatic space of the text is engaged with by the scenic space in performance. The analysis of dramatic space will be undertaken according to Balme's subcategories:

> Dramatic space can be divided into two broad subcategories: *mimetic* and *diegetic* space. Mimetic space refers to space depicted on stage and visible to the spectator, while diegetic space is only described or referred to by characters in the play. Mimetic space can also include space evoked by acoustic signs such as off-stage noises, but is mainly connected with scenography and the visual design of a stage space. (57)

Thus the distinction between what audiences can see and are told forms a significant part of meaning-construction. From Balme's analysis, the mimetic subcategory of dramatic space also refers in part to the scenic space of a production while the

diegetic space can refer to an idea of space conjured up by instances in performance or references in the playtext. Examining both McDonagh's playtext and Scott Pask's design, this analysis will focus on the mimetic space of Michal and Katurian's police cell, the diegetic space of Michal's "special school" (13), and the merging of mimetic and diegetic spaces evoked by Katurian's stories.

In the playtext of *The Pillowman*, McDonagh cites only two locations to be definitively staged in performance, an interrogation room with a cell next door (act 1, scene 1, 3) and Katurian and Michal's childhood bedrooms (act 1, scene 2, 31). Both are places of official and legitimate power, the state police and the family home, and the brothers are subject to the rules of these institutions. These are enclosed and isolated spaces; the brothers are locked in the cell in the police station and their family home is in a forest, signalling a sense of permanent imprisonment and subjection throughout the span of the brothers' lives. Thus, in this unspecified state at an unspecified time, through dramatic space, McDonagh has still specified hierarchies and histories. However, due to the level of play infiltrating the detectives' dialogue and Katurian's stories, the dramatic reality of these places is in question.

Moreover, while the text demands only these two places to be staged, it offers an abundance of places that *could* be staged through the play's micro-narratives narrated by the characters, such as Katurian's fiction stories; "The Little Apple Men," "The Tale of the Three Gibbet Crossroads," "The Tale of the Town on the River," "The Little Green Pig" and not forgetting Detective Tupolski's story, "The Story of the Little Deaf Boy on the Big Long Railroad Tracks. In China." According to the stage directions "The Little Jesus Story" *should* be enacted, adding another dimension of place to the production; however, there is no instruction to enact the remainder of Katurian's fiction writing. It is worth noting that by staging "The Little Jesus Story," McDonagh ensures that the excesses of religious narratives play a visible and thus visceral part in the production, alongside the abuses of state and family. Though the horrific acts of child abuse are often reported in national media, it is not often that one observes the suggestion or recreation of such an act in a shared real time and space. Being witness to the dramatization of a criminal event inevitably highlights political issues of complicity and social responsibility and also, theatrical questions concerning the limits of representation.

"The Little Jesus Story" in *The Pillowman*
National Theatre Premiere 2003
Photograph courtesy of Scott Pask

As outlined above, the notion of dramatic space includes the space on stage; however this space will vary from one production to another, and so while there may be a staple sense of dramatic space emanating from the playtext, the mimetic space on stage will be particular to each production of the play. Christopher Balme pithily summarizes the scope of scenic space, "Scenic space (or stage space) designates space where the actors perform, and includes the set design" (48). The scenic space of *The Pillowman* in the National Theatre premiere, designed by Scott Pask, presented a complex set design that depicted the police interrogation room and police cell corresponding to the dramatic reality of the characters. However, Pask's "upstairs"

design also depicted the two bedrooms that Katurian describes in his narrative childhood reflection in act 1 scene 2. This upstairs space, that Pask described as "the story space, so that Katurian could be held in his cell, and the stories could float above him, visible to all" (Pask) is only visible by lighting in act 1 scene 2 during Katurian's narration of Michal's childhood abuse, his parents experiments and the enactment of "The Little Jesus Story" in act 2 scene 1. During the remainder of the play the lights focus on the main stage space of the police interrogation room and police cell, and the "story space" is not visible. Depending on lighting then, the audience may observe a naturalistic set or a merging of realities, times and places.

The image below of the empty set interprets McDonagh's playful yet serious engagement with these systems and structures of the law and the family. Initially, the set appears as a giant doll's house with the front wall removed. With full lights, one can directly observe all the rooms, however this complete clarity of observation is not offered to the audience at any point in the production, reminding us that the act of spectatorship can be framed and monitored. While there is a sense of play present, equally pervasive is a sense of threat. Pask's design of a grotty police room juxtaposed with the childrens' bedrooms simultaneously foregrounds unease and playfulness. The functions of these rooms include the protection of innocence and the identification of guilt. Pask's design hints that the transition from one notion to the other will be a painful journey.

The Pillowman set in the National Theatre Premiere 2003
Photograph courtesy of Scott Pask

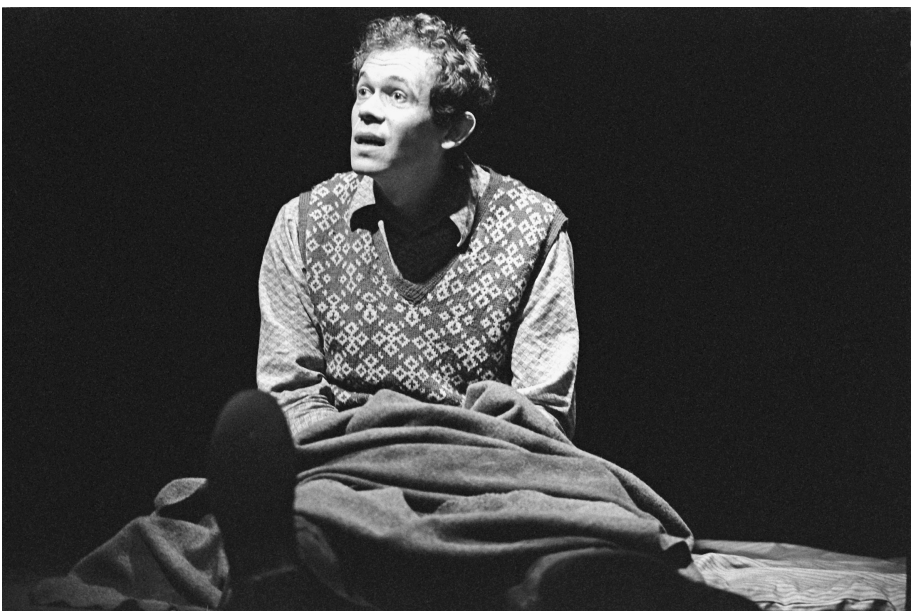
The scenic space remains faithful to the mixed realities of the play in that depending on the focus of the lights the place of the play altered from the dramatic reality[2] of the brothers in the police station to the enactment of Katurian's childhood memories and one of his fiction stories. The police interrogation room initially appears naturalistic; high drab walls that have been witness to many decades previous, and functional but sparse furniture—a table, chairs, and a filing cabinet. Two small windows stage right and left almost escape notice. They are too high for a prisoner to look through and offer no daylight or opportunity to observe an exterior world. When the police interrogation room was in performance, the window stage left was lit to signal the cell where Michal was stationed. When the cell was in performance, the window stage right was lit to indicate the interrogation room. When the scene changes from the police interrogation room to the holding cell, the furniture was removed through a masked door stage right and replaced with a single chair, a thin mattress and pillow. One visible door upstage left marks the point of entry and exit, a particularly powerful point in the world of the play, as the interrogation will decide if the brothers have access to that exit. In this drab room however, with the greyish-green walls and a lino-tiled floor with a few tiles missing here and there from the wear and tear of the years gone by, the furniture centre stage breaks this sense of old, uncared-for space.

The three chairs on set are bright yellow surrounding the bright white table, each strikingly out of place in the overwhelming drab and neglected room décor. These bright colours reflect the bright yellow walls of Katurian's childhood bedroom in the "upstairs" set stage right, while the grey-green cell walls match the tones of Michal's childhood bedroom. Pask's design therefore, relates the colours of the varied spaces of the set as McDonagh merges the brothers' current reality with their childhood memories and fantasy stories. The scenic space is ultimately characterized by an overwhelming sense of isolation and darkness due to the towering presence of the high drab walls and sparse furnishings, without access to daylight, a television set or radio and the omnipresence of the heavy-bolted door. In this space therefore, the outside world does not exist. The characters are physically and viscerally imprisoned by the conflicting stories of past and present that have led to their arrest and impending execution. These alternative worlds increasingly merge and blur, preventing access to a singular truth or conclusion of events. In this sense, the scenic space facilitates the dramatic space of the play, where the point of demarcation between fact and fiction, narrative and reality, innocence and guilt becomes impossible to identify. All these notions are stories. As Ondrej Pilny concludes, "If there is no consistency of genre and theme in *The Pillowman* . . . what is it that holds the play together? Clearly, it is the mere power of story" (216).

2 I use the term "dramatic reality" to refer to the detectives' investigation of Katurian and Michal for murder which appears as the basic premise of the three acts. However, in the final scene, both Katurian and Michal appear alive on stage after they had been killed, without explanation, showing that McDonagh has not presented a unified dramatic reality.

Mimetic Space

In act 2 scene 1, brothers Katurian and Michal are thrown together in the same cell following separate interrogations. This cell is dimly-lit and almost bare, containing only a wooden chair, a thin mattress, a blanket and a pillow, as stipulated in the playtext. However, it is through observing the general emptiness of the cell in performance that the sense of solitude and isolation is effectively translated from page to stage. The visual effect of the empty locked cell reaffirms and strengthens their social isolation in this dangerous predicament. The cell becomes effectively performative through staging the absence of objects as the characters are not surrounded by personal effects or comforts. There is no work to complete, leisure to enjoy or opportunity to contest their life-threatening situation. The windows are too high for the characters to look out of and the walls are disproportionately high in relation to the square meters of the cell, appearing to almost close-in on them. Ultimately, the loss of personal power and a public voice in the forthcoming proceedings becomes apparent, which is of course, the purpose of a prison.



The Pillowman's National Theatre Premiere: Michal (Adam Godley) in the police cell
By kind permission from the Archive of Ivan Kyncl

In Michel Foucault's *Discipline and Punish* (1975), the organization of social space becomes fundamental to the management and regulation of useful citizens and "others," which was first developed in *Madness and Civilization* (1961) concerning the establishment of mental institutions. Of the purpose of prison design, Foucault details:

> Thrown into solitude, the convict reflects. Placed alone in the presence of his crime, he learns to hate it, and, if his soul is not yet blunted by evil, it is in isolation that remorse will come to assail him . . . Isolation provides an intimate exchange between the convict and the power that is exercised over him. (237)

The strategy of the prison is not only to prevent the free movement of the citizen then, but to manage the individual's internal development to correspond with the dominant ideologies of the social hierarchy. While Foucault's theorization may be lost on Michal, who can't sleep because of his "itchy arse" (42), the solitude and confinement of the cell successfully informs Katurian's perception as he digests the magnitude of the situation and considers the possibilities of resolution or escape remaining to them. However, their complete and unbreakable isolation in imprisonment denies any chance of negotiation or communication with another authority or external mediator; their options have been limited and as indicated by Foucault, are entirely dependent on their inner experience of engagement with their isolated surroundings:

> In absolute isolation . . . the rehabilitation of the criminal is expected not of the application of a common law, but of the relation of the individual to his own conscience and to what may enlighten him from within . . . It is not, therefore, an external respect for the law or fear of punishment alone that will act upon the convict but the workings of the conscience itself. (238)

According to Foucault then, power aims to inform the inner conscience of the individual through the overwhelming isolation provided by this punitive social space. Initially Katurian ponders the unstable boundaries between fact and fiction, as being a writer himself, he is acutely aware of the constructedness inherent in narrative, regardless of its author or mode of deployment. Once he discovers his brother had not really been tortured as the detectives had led him to believe, he declares, "Why are we being so stupid? Why are we believing everything they are telling us? . . . This is just like storytelling" (39). Suddenly the prison may not mean imprisonment, but represent a strategy of fear and control employed by the detectives to achieve their desired results. However, following Michal's admittance that he was guilty of the crimes being investigated, Katurian quickly comprehends the almost inevitability of execution. It is at this moment that both he and his brother turn to story and the diegetic space it offers to escape their reality of imprisonment and impending execution. Richard Kearney

notes this traditional capacity of storytelling in society, observing, "Stories served to address psychic as well as physical suffering" (6).

From the moment Katurian comprehends that execution is imminent, he begins to narrate his eclectic utopian stories such as "The Little Green Pig" and "The Pillowman" to Michal, to himself and to the audience, foregoing his previous reflective stories concerning child abuse that resonated with his and Michal's upbringing. Katurian's stories do not solely constitute a way to forget the current crisis at hand but are embedded with messages of social justice and familial harmony, stories that have not been realized throughout the brothers' social experience. It is in this way that the brothers search for mythical resolution from their past and present horrors, relieving their inner conscience from the despair and fixity of the police cell. Kearney expands, "For just as the body releases endorphins to cope with unbearable pain, so too the human psyche has all kinds of denial mechanisms . . . what is unpalatable and unspeakable in life is not so in fiction" (26). In the move from the mimetic space of the cell to the diegetic space of story, the characters have the opportunity to access agency in their lives, challenging the dominant forces of authority and their oppressive boundaries. Physical escape is denied to them, but psychological escape, comfort and healing can be accessed, and it is through story that they discover them.

Through the place of the police cell, the audience are faced with the oppression of these high walls and caged cell space, the waste of life locked up, the torture inherent in strategies of individual isolation and the harsh realities of justice systems that operate a power dynamic of transgression/punitive isolation and imprisonment. However, imprisonment is not a punitive system solely associated with a totalitarian state which directly denies independent political power, but a modern method of regulating and managing the social body. In Foucault's map of the development of power strategies from the Classical to the Modern Age, he summarizes the purpose of the prison "Stones can make people docile . . . The old schema of confinement and enclosure" (172).

Diegetic Space

A dramatic diegetic space evoked by the playtext but not visualized in the scenic space that highlights a significant relationship between narrative, power and place is the issue of mental health and mental ability. In act 1 scene 1 Detective Ariel asks Katurian about his presence in the Jewish quarter, as Katurian travels through there to collect Michal from school. According to Katurian, Michal's school is "a special school. It's a learning difficulties" (13). Hence, one can also recognize that this totalitarian state appears to follow the modern system[3] and tradition of segregation from childhood between people considered of sound mental health and those who

3 According to Foucault in *Madness and Civilization* this segregation becomes apparent from the Classical Age. This spatial structure developed from the previous tradition of isolating and segregating leprosy victims from the social body. With the almost extinction of leprosy in Western Europe, the leper house became the first asylum.

experience learning difficulties or mental health problems. Indeed the distinction between learning difficulties, mental disability and insanity which are significant and various appear reduced to "other" by the detectives.

Clarification regarding Michal's condition does not occur and this in itself is significant, perhaps reflecting general societal discomfort and insufficient mainstream discourses of mental health, psychological and cognitive issues. According to Part 1 Section 3 of the Irish Mental Health Act of 2001, "mental disorder" includes mental illness, severe dementia and significant intellectual disability. Distinct definitions concerning learning difficulties, disabilities and mental health illnesses are not disclosed, though this is currently under review. The difficulties the Mental Health Commission face in establishing specific definitions results from the limits of binary categorization; to determine mental illness or intellectual disability, one must first confirm a definition for mental health and intellectual ability.

Of Michal's condition, Katurian informs us that "He's slow to get things" (9) and he goes to "a special school [for] learning difficulties" (13) in the vicinity of the Jewish quarter; interestingly, while McDonagh denies naming a real locale in the play, he makes a connection between religion and region. Katurian also claims that Michal "is just a child" (24) and in his memory of his discovery of Michal, he narrates he found him "alive, as such, but brain-damaged beyond repair" (34). However, according to the detectives, Michal is "backward" (9) and "a spastic" (24). Here, McDonagh provides a strong dramatic portrayal of how "normal" and "other" people can sometimes be characterized. His characterization seeks to unsettle and discomfort such prejudices and misconceptions, particularly by allotting the role of murderer to Michal, despite his "difficulties." Michal's performance informs the audience that he has a wonderful sense of humour, making light of their precarious situation to relieve his brother of stress and thus displaying his sensitivity. In light of multiple child homicides that involved considerable strategy, the play foregrounds his intelligence and capacity to do wrong as well as right, and of course his efforts to shift part of the blame to Katurian in his attempt to escape or lessen accountability demonstrates his cunning. Ultimately, these instances prevent the audience from concurring with Katurian that Michal is "just a child" and any automatic association of innocence that would underlie such a description.

This spatial configuration of "special schools" derives from historical and current prevailing attitudes to "other." The evidence remains physical, in the spaces "they" occupy as outlined in Foucault's *Madness and Civilization*. To locate a possible origin for this impetus, Foucault details that two or three centuries previous, vacant leper houses throughout Europe required inmates:

> Leprosy disappeared, the leper vanished, or almost, from memory; these structures [buildings to house leprosy victims] remained. Often, in these same places, the formulas of exclusion would be repeated, strangely similar two or three centuries later. Poor vagabonds, criminals and "deranged minds" would

> take the part played by the leper, and we shall see what salvation was expected from this exclusion, for them and for those who excluded them as well. (5)

The organization of separate and distinct places for people according to their mental health status, which can similarly affect the social place and purpose for those with learning difficulties particularly in the realm of education and occupation, highlights the oppressive binary of sane/insane and intelligent/intellectual disability, enabling a milieu of disconnection, misunderstanding and hierarchy between individuals and communities. From Foucault's research, these binaries have affected the spatial distribution of society according to mental ability and health since approximately the eighteenth century. This division he outlines in *Madness and Civilization* concerning the establishment, management and normalization of psychiatric institutions develops into a discourse of power, punishment and control of the social body by *Discipline and Punish*. Ultimately, he looks to the architectural design of social buildings as visible evidence of power relations at work: "The constant division between the normal and the abnormal, to which every individual is subjected, brings us back to our own time, by applying the binary branding and exile of the leper to quite different objects." He concludes, "Is it surprising that prisons resemble factories, schools, barracks, hospitals, which all resemble prisons?" (Foucault, *Discipline and Punish* 199, 228). Once more, the performative power of dramatic space demonstrates the connections between "important categories of stage space with categories of the spectator's perception of social space" (Ubersfeld 104), highlighting that places which embody restrictions, borders and limits of the human body and mind can operate as a form of visible and visceral imprisonment. According to the work of both Foucault and McDonagh, this type of imprisonment not only exists in prison cells, but interrogation rooms, educational facilities, health institutions, and family homes.

A Merging of Worlds

The Royal National Theatre premiere of *The Pillowman* presented Katurian's narrative of his childhood in act 1 scene 2 in a mode I would argue is a merging of mimetic and diegetic space. This scene presents Katurian's narration of his childhood, including his discovery of the existence of his brother Michal and his parents' abuse of Michal. During this narration, the "story space" is lit and visually dominant. However, the adult Katurian is also lit remaining visible onstage, though the detectives and the police room are in darkness. We observe some of the action narrated by Katurian, so in a sense the scene is mimetic, but the entirety of the story is not presented or enacted and in that sense it remains diegetic. Indeed, the reason to break the mimetic depiction of the dark text and instead evoke a diegetic space raises the issue of the power of representation.

The scenography, the "dynamic combination of visual image, lighting and space" (Balme 55) which "is always incomplete until the performer steps into the

playing space and engages with the audience" (Howard xix) took account of the stage directions which stipulate the presence of Katurian's mother and father and the presentation of Katurian's childhood bedroom and "another identical room, perhaps made of glass, but padlocked and totally dark" (31). However, in Pask's design, the reference to a glass room did not materialize, with the tone, texture and colour of Michal's room instead matching that of the police interrogation room and police holding cell. Through this design, there is a visible connection between the naturalistic set of the police rooms and the non-naturalistic "story space," enforcing a direct link between Katurian's memory and Katurian's present.

The scope and limits of representation are indeed significant in the staging and telling of Katurian's stories. They centre on Katurian's memories of familial trauma, in particular, when he discovered his parents' abuse of his brother Michal and his other fiction stories, the majority of which contain further instances of child abuse. While Katurian narrated his horrific memories of his parents' deception and abuse, the performance style enacted by his parents in the "story space" evoked the tradition of pantomime or cartoon—grossly exaggerated movements that deny any frame of naturalism or realism to the action. The scenic design of the "story space" also facilitated this non-naturalistic aesthetic. The bright yellow of Katurian's room, juxtaposed with the dark gritty tone of Michal's room displayed opposing worlds and lives. By deploying a performance style that posits the spectator at a critical distance from the action, McDonagh has highlighted the significance of visual and visceral critical engagement with the story. The audience cannot maintain a clear sense of real or unreal, past or present. The dramatic space has the capacity and power to converge these supposedly distinct elements.

The movement of the performers was exaggerated and cartoon-like and the audience's focus was constantly in flux, alternating between Katurian narrating and "the story space." The content of Katurian's narrative told of a childhood with all the scenography such a state is supposed to contain—loving parents, toys, warm lighting, a sense of security, and free imagination. Yet this exaggerated performance of childhood bliss simultaneously suggests that this narrative is under threat. It highlights its state as a fictive construction. Therefore, this picture of childhood is both represented and defied through the scenography. While in Katurian's bedroom "He wanted for nothing: all the toys in the world were his; all the paints, all the books, papers, pens" (31), in the room next door his brother was imprisoned and not found until years later, "alive, as such, but brain-damaged beyond repair" (34). Here we are presented with the main purpose in presenting the space as both mimetic and diegetic. The dramatic and scenic space constituted mimetic space in that "it was depicted on stage and visible to the spectator," however it also constituted diegetic space which "is only described or referred to by characters in the play." The scenography of the NT premiere did not fully visualize the childhood home as Katurian spoke of it in his narrative or as outlined in McDonagh's stage directions. The audience did not directly observe physical child abuse and a child corpse, but the suggestion of these actions

through Katurian's story and the horrific design of Michal's room. The horrors of child abuse cannot be easily digested. The physicality of pantomime-like performance and ruptured scenographic design removed the audience from engagement with a unified coherent dramatic reality, while simultaneously facilitating the audience to consider the traumatic issues that can occur in the domestic sphere, a space traditionally informed by culture as safe. The fragmented scenic design and stylized performance merged elements of mimetic and diegetic dramatic space facilitating non-naturalistic performance and non-naturalistic scenography, limiting the visual representation of the play's dark content. In doing so, the dramatic space has facilitated the narration of the horrific stories of child abuse, but has also provided the audience with a sense of distance by clearly framing the narratives as fictional *story*.

Conclusion

In *The Pillowman*, the relationship between story and space has shown the "way the space of performance mediates the playtext and the socio-political, sociocultural, context of both text and performance" (McAuley 18). McDonagh's postmodern fragmented narrative offers multiple and unresolved meanings, with the space of each story signalling a new place and time. The playtext offered various places to be staged and various places that could be staged and thus, one must interrogate the action that is *narrated* and the action that is *staged*. As these micro-narratives contain varying levels of child abuse and human violence, it is crucial to note these distinctions. Pask's design presented a dark doll's house, where the people in each room were being engulfed and manipulated by social forces that should protect, not punish. Eamonn Jordan notes the precarious time of this play's premiere at the National Theatre London in 2003 as the "War on Terror" was unfolding in Iraq, led by the U.S and the U.K, and indeed not long following the high-profile child kidnappings of Holly Wells and Jessica Chapman that shook the UK (Jordan 174-79). The promises of democracy and civilized society were being tested on the international stage and though McDonagh drafted *The Pillowman* in the 1990s, it maintained the capacity for significant cultural reverberations in 2003.

Foucault argues that by analyzing how space has been organized, categorized, managed and encoded, one could "write the whole history of a country, of a culture, of a society" ("The Stage of Philosophy" 312-32). *The Pillowman* does not identify a country, culture or a society but presents established institutional places for action to unfold in and for audiences to decode. McDonagh's dark dramatization of these social spaces—the family home, the police station and a special school, alongside references to religion—questions the ubiquitous authority inherent in these normalized and historically established structures and their narratives. These are places and ideas that manage the social body in modern democracies, not only fictional totalitarian states. However, *The Pillowman* also details that stories are fluid; they change shape and purpose over time, and indeed shape time and space. In McDonagh's stories, place

only becomes as real as the characters allow it for a fixed time, by the end as *The Pillowman* abruptly depicts, Katurian and Michal stop playing and these performers exit the stage. Ultimately it seems that while McDonagh looks to the histories and narratives that have informed the management of place, whether mimetic or diegetic or "the image people have of spatial relationships" as Ubersfeld outlines, McDonagh's tales are firmly embedded in the act of play and the merging of these worlds.

Works Cited

Balme, Christopher. *The Cambridge Introduction to Theatre Studies*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2008. Print.

Foucault, Michel. *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*. London: Penguin, 1991. Print.

---. *Madness and Civilization: A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason*. London: Routledge, 1989. Print.

---. "The Stage of Philosophy: A Conversation Between Michel Foucault and Moriaki Watanabe." *New York Magazine of Contemporary Art and Theory* Issue 1.5 *Scenes of Knowledge* (1978): 312-32. Web. 12 September 2011.

Howard, Pamela. *What is Scenography?* London: Routledge, 2002. Print.

Jordan, Eamonn. "War on Narrative: *The Pillowman*." *The Theatre of Martin McDonagh: A World of Savage Stories*. Ed. Lilian Chambers and Eamonn Jordan. Dublin: Carysfort, 2006. 174-97. Print.

Kearney, Richard. *On Stories*. London: Routledge, 2002. Print.

McAuley, Gay. *Space in Performance: Making Meaning in the Theatre*. Ann Arbor: U of Michigan P, 2000. Print.

McDonagh, Martin. *The Beauty Queen of Leenane*. London: Methuen, 1996. Print.

---. *The Cripple of Inishmaan*. London: Methuen, 1997. Print.

---. *The Lieutenant of Inishmore.* London: Methuen, 2001. Print.

---. *The Lonesome West.* London: Methuen, 1997. Print.

---. *The Pillowman*. London: Faber, 2003. Print.

---. *A Skull in Connemara.* London: Methuen, 1997. Print.

O'Toole, Fintan. "*The Pillowman* Program Note" at the Royal National Theatre, London, 2003. *The Theatre of Martin McDonagh: A World of Savage Stories*. Chambers and Jordan 385-89. Print.

Pask, Scott. Unpublished Interview with Miriam Haughton. Email Correspondence: February 2011.

Pilný, Ondřej. "Grotesque Entertainment: *The Pillowman* as Puppet Theatre." Chambers and Jordan 214-23. Print.

Ubersfeld, Anne. *Reading Theatre*. Toronto: U of Toronto P, 1999. Print.