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**Empathy and Belief in Documentary Theatre: A cognitive perspective on Mike
Daisey's *The Agony and the Ecstasy of Steve Jobs***

A Thesis Presented

by

Kristin Vieira

to

The Graduate School

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in

Dramaturgy

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Introduction

In the spring of 2012, celebrated monologist Mike Daisey was accused of embellishing the truth and misleading fact checkers on the Public Radio International program *This American Life*. Daisey had performed an excerpt of his theatrical monologue *The Agony and the Ecstasy of Steve Jobs* on *This American Life* in January of 2012. Three months later, *This American Life* aired a retraction episode, claiming that Daisey had lied about many of his eyewitness experiences. Following the retraction, a heated debate ensued about the blurring of lines between entertainment and journalism and about the implied contract between documentary theatre artists and their audiences. Daisey claimed that his main objective was to make people care about the labor situation in China and thereby move them into action. This reveals two underlying assumptions: one: that his narrative required invention and embellishment in order to achieve an empathic reaction in the audience, and two: that audiences will not take action on feelings of empathy unless they believe a narrative is completely factually accurate.

These assumptions are the hallmarks of unethical practices in journalism. Fiction may imitate life, but fiction should never masquerade as fact. The motivation for cloaking fiction in the mask of the nonfiction label is often related to a belief that people care more about “real life” than they do about fictional scenarios. Daisey’s belief that a work labeled fiction will not “touch” audiences has been directly challenged by recent cognitive studies on fiction and empathy. The Mar Lab in Toronto, for example, has focused its research almost exclusively on the power of fiction to shape beliefs and attitudes about the real world. Cognitive scientists Melanie Green and Timothy Brock

have devoted over a decade to analyzing the failure of fiction and nonfiction labels to alter a narrative's persuasive ability. This research is a useful lens through which we can examine the assumptions of effectiveness in nonfiction labeling. The demonstrated efficacy of fiction to change beliefs and attitudes about real world situations offers a solution to the ethical challenges of Documentary Theatre. By developing a narrative based on actual events, an artist can direct attention to factual evidence and even offer resources on acquiring factual information, rather than purporting to exist as actual documentary evidence. Artists need not fear that informing their audiences about their creative process will result in a diminished emotional response. The labels of fiction and nonfiction are too broad to properly inform audiences about an artist's process.

Differentiating fiction and nonfiction has become increasingly problematic in the postmodern era. In the latter half of the 20th century, various forms of media devoted increased energy in the search for "reality" whether it was reality television shows, documentary films, or eyewitness journalism. Nonfictional entertainment has showed no signs of slowing in the 21st century. "[R]eality is everywhere you look, taking dizzyingly protean forms."(Scott, 2010) The litany of labels associated with the nonfiction category has added to the confusion. "Creative Nonfiction", "Memoir", "New Journalism", "Narrative Journalism" and "Gonzo Journalism" are just a few examples of writing that walk the line between fact and fiction. Meanwhile, academics and post-modern theorists began questioning the nature of fact, suggesting that recorded history is subject to interpretation and therefore truth is always relative.

In addition to navigating the various labels included in nonfiction, the public has also lost faith in the form due to multiple controversies in journalism (such as Jayson

Blair and Stephen Glass¹) partnered with controversies in nonfiction literature (such as James Frey and JT LeRoy²). Data is more accessible than ever in the internet age, but the questionable practices of journalists and the lack of information mediation has led to decreasing confidence in journalistic integrity. “In 1985, 34 percent of the public said the media report stories that ‘are often inaccurate.’ By July 2011, that figure had spiked to 66 percent.” (Fitzgerald, 2012) It is clear that the label of “Journalism” has begun to carry less weight when it comes to perceived accountability.

Theatre likewise has a host of labels for its nonfiction works, and the theatre world has also seen its share of controversy as a result. In the 1960s and ‘70s, “Theatre of Fact” became a popular genre, emphasizing factual accuracy over aesthetics. Peter Weiss’s play *The Investigation* caused a stir when a critic accused Weiss of “falsifying evidence.” (Innes, 1972, p.179) In the 1980s, “Verbatim Theatre” was the label for works using verbatim transcripts from court trials and other legal documents as a source for dialogue. Today, there is an even wider array of labels, including “Journalistic Theatre”, “Memoir Theatre”, “Theatre of the Real”, and “Investigative Theatre”. All of these labels fall under the umbrella term of “Documentary Theatre” and many have caused controversies about the line between journalism and theatre. “Investigative Theatre” troupe The Civilians had their objectivity questioned (Zinoman, 2010) but most recently and most publicly, Mike Daisey’s first-person monologue *The Agony and the Ecstasy of Steve Jobs* caused widespread fury because of exaggerations and fabrications.

¹ Jayson Blair, a former *New York Times* reporter and Stephen Glass, a former reporter for *The New Republic*, were both accused of widespread plagiarism and fraud. Blair was fired in 2003, Glass in 1997.

² James Frey was accused of fabricating and embellishing aspects of his memoir *A Million Little Pieces* in 2006, and memoirist JT LeRoy was a fictional identity created by writer Laura Albert. Albert was convicted of fraud in 2007.

The Agony and the Ecstasy of Steve Jobs was a critical and financial success, but it was Mike Daisey's appearance on *This American Life* ("Mr. Daisey and the Apple Factory") that brought his story to the mainstream. Daisey performed a truncated version of his theatrical monologue, highlighting his visit to the Foxconn factory in Shenzhen, China where Apple products are made. Daisey's eyewitness account of labor violations sparked national interest in the working conditions at Foxconn and other Chinese factories. The podcast was the most popular episode in *This American Life*'s history with over 888,000 downloads. (I. Glass, 2012b) Daisey was subsequently invited to appear on journalistic television programs such as CBS Sunday Morning ("The Dark Side of Shiny Apple Products" January 2012), CNET's Reporters Roundtable ("Apple's China Problem," January 2012), HBO's *Real Time with Bill Maher* (Episode 236, February 2012) and MSNBC's *Up with Chris Hayes* (Larsen, 2012).

Marketplace journalist Rob Schmitz had listened to the *This American Life* podcast and found several aspects of Daisey's story hard to believe. Schmitz had been living and reporting in China for two years, and Daisey's mentions of armed guards outside the Foxconn factory and of labor organizers meeting at Starbucks raised red flags for Schmitz. He tracked down Daisey's interpreter in Shenzhen and found that she directly contradicted several of Daisey's claims. Schmitz then contacted *This American Life*, and Daisey ultimately admitted to embellishing the truth of his experience in China during a tense interview with Glass and Schmitz. (I. Glass, 2012b)

The number of factories Daisey visited and the number of workers he interviewed had been exaggerated. Daisey's translator claimed that they never met underage workers, despite Daisey's claim that he had met "workers who were fourteen years old, thirteen

years old, twelve.” (Daisey, 2012c). He also claimed to have met workers poisoned with the chemical n-hexane, later admitting that he had not personally met with these workers. Another contested section of the monologue involved Daisey’s meeting with a Foxconn worker whose hand was disfigured by a metal press. Daisey described showing the worker an iPad, which the injured worker had never seen turned on. The worker supposedly responded, “It’s a kind of magic.” Daisey’s translator remembered meeting this worker, but did not recall that he worked at Foxconn. She also claimed that the moment with the iPad never happened. Many remembered this moment as one of the emotional high points of the piece. Daisey insisted that the exchange with the worker happened precisely as he described.

Although Daisey acknowledged many of the fabrications and expressed regret about misrepresenting his experiences on *This American Life* and other journalistic programs, he made it clear that he believed those fabrications were acceptable in the theatre. In the retraction episode, Daisey attempted to articulate his belief about the nature of truth in theatre: “I believe that when I perform [the monologue] in a theatrical context in the theater, that when people hear the story in those terms, that we have different languages for what the truth means.” (I. Glass, 2012b) The problem with this statement is that Daisey gave his piece a very non-theatrical context when he chose to print the words “This is a work of nonfiction” inside every Playbill.

Daisey seemed to believe that although he had labeled the work “nonfiction” audiences would still understand that his piece was not beholden to journalistic standards because it took place in the context of the theatre. Daisey has maintained that the only crime he committed was a crime of context. He admitted it was wrong for him to appear

on journalistic programs and present himself as a journalist rather than a theatre artist. When it came to the theatre, however, Daisey stated that a theatrical work presented in a theatrical setting will ostensibly cue the audience that this is not journalism and they will therefore not expect journalistic standards. Critics like Charles Isherwood strongly disagreed. “The weight, authority, emotional power and—like it or not, theatricality—of *The Agony and the Ecstasy of Steve Jobs* derive precisely from the assumption that Mr. Daisey is telling the truth about the events he describes.” (Isherwood, 2012) *Washington Post* critic Peter Marks concurred: “I know the difference, for example, between a playwright conveying through a character some moral force or some idea, like a Willy Loman—I understand why my conscience is gripped metaphorically—and I think there is a distinction in that sense between that and a person who’s standing before you saying, ‘This is me, and this happened to me,’ what that means.” (Feldman, 2012) Not only was the label inaccurate, the *mise en scene* of the piece lent Daisey’s monologue legitimacy. Even if the label of nonfiction had not been printed on the Playbill, the experience of seeing Daisey deliver this monologue in the first-person implied nonfiction.

Marks called this controversy a “crime of labeling” because of the “nonfiction” label in the program. (Feldman, 2012) Daisey, however, disagreed with the idea that the work should have been labeled fiction rather than nonfiction. He claimed that the label of fiction would have given the audience an excuse not to care and not to act. He intentionally chose to label the work nonfiction in response to audience members repeatedly asking him after each performance: “Was any of that true?” (Daisey & Teichner, 2012) *This American Life* host Ira Glass expressed his belief that Daisey’s labeling of the theatrical work should be changed: “I feel like that’s what’s actually called

for at this point, is just honest labeling. Like, you make a nice show, people are moved by it, I was moved by it and if it were labeled honestly, I think everybody would react differently to it.” (I. Glass, 2012b) Yet Daisey’s monologue is clearly not fiction. He did in fact go to China and visit Foxconn, he did meet workers and much of the labor violations he described are actually occurring at these factories. An acknowledgment in the program that Daisey did not personally witness everything he described in the show would have made his creative process clear, rather than choosing the either/or of “fiction” and “nonfiction” labels.

Daisey believed that a label of fiction would prevent his art from affecting change. He stated that the label “fiction” communicates that a work “is fictional, that it will not touch you, so do not worry. There’s this sense of toothlessness, I think. I don’t know...but I do know that there is power in labels. There’s power in what we call things.” (Daisey, 2012b) Daisey professed a desire to enact change through giving his audience a new perspective. “If we can see the world in a new way, if we actually see it differently, that is what makes change happen,” Daisey said. “And I believe that’s what art can do, is affect that kind of change, create bonds of empathy between us and people on the other side of the world.” (Daisey, 2012b)

The label “nonfiction” may not have, as Daisey professes to believe, the power to make an audience care. It may, however, cue an audience member on how to respond to an emotional experience. In that sense, the label has ethical significance rather than the power to persuade more effectively than fiction. Multiple studies in cognitive science have shown that the labels of fiction and nonfiction have little effect in changing beliefs

and attitudes. Rather, the narrative quality of a work and its success in making audience members feel “transported” by the story is a better indicator of its persuasive power.

The first chapter of this paper will place Mike Daisey’s monologue in the context of contemporary Documentary Theatre and its history of labeling. Using the guidelines set forth by Gary Fisher Dawson’s book “Documentary Theatre in the United States,” Daisey’s piece will be compared and contrasted to other Documentary Theatre works. The history of controversy in this form will be summarized and various approaches to the labeling of documentary theatre will be considered. Particular attention will be paid to verbal and nonverbal signs that cue an audience on a documentary play’s authenticity.

The second chapter will introduce recent studies in narrative empathy that demonstrate the power narrative has in changing beliefs and attitudes. These studies will be used to support Daisey’s theory that narrative creates “bonds of empathy with people on the other side of the world.” (Daisey, 2012c) The impact of Daisey’s monologue on the labor situation in China will be examined, both before the retraction and afterwards.

Having established that narrative does have the power to elicit empathy, the third chapter will focus on the nature of narrative belief and how the labels of “fiction” and “nonfiction” may not influence that belief. Daisey’s statement that the monologue would have had less impact if it had been labeled fiction will be challenged by multiple cognitive studies in persuasion. It will be suggested that Daisey’s format of first-person narrative had more effect on the audience’s belief than the label of “nonfiction.”

Chapter 1: Documentary Theatre

In the fallout from the retraction episode on *This American Life*, many theatre professionals associated with Daisey's show expressed regret that they had not properly fact-checked Daisey's piece. (Feldman, 2012, Houseworth, 2012) Documentary Theatre was not always held to such high standards of accuracy, but neither were journalists. From its beginnings in Germany and Russia in the early 1920s, Documentary Theatre has sought to present factual information in the hopes of persuading audiences towards a particular point of view. At the time, journalism was similarly engaged in persuasion. "Journalism *was* opinion journalism from about 1700 to 1900," according to Nicholas Lemann, former dean of Columbia School of Journalism. (Moynihan, 2012) American journalists did not officially adopt their Code of Ethics until 1927. From that time on, journalism became increasingly dedicated to objectivity and accuracy, as evidenced by revisions to their Code of Ethics in 1972 and 1996. Changes in Documentary Theatre reflected this shift, as plays made more use of verbatim transcripts and used less invention, particularly in the 1960s and 1970s.

The Documentary Theatre of the early 1900s, however, was primarily rooted in propaganda. German directors Erwin Piscator and Bertolt Brecht created what they called *Living Newspapers* in the 1920s. The primary objective of the *Living Newspapers* was twofold: to disseminate information and to persuade audiences towards a particular political agenda. (Innes, 1979) Although Mike Daisey's objectives may have been similar, his style of performance is more closely related to the *Living Newspaper* of Vienna, in which spontaneous, improvised performances of the news were created under

the direction of Jacob Levy Moreno. Moreno “turned his actors into journalists, sending them into the streets of Vienna to pick up news of incidents there, or bring in national or international events and disasters of all kinds.” (as cited in Casson, 2000, p.110) Moreno emphasized the importance of spontaneity in his performances, which he believed would develop the audience’s ability to be spontaneously receptive. (Moreno, 1947) The technical aspects that were the trademark of Piscator’s version of the *Living Newspaper* were not used, as it was the psychological effect created in both the performer and the audience that was of utmost importance to Moreno.

Like Moreno’s *Living Newspaper*, spontaneity is a principle characteristic of Mike Daisey’s monologues. Without the aid of an actual script, Daisey delivered his monologue extemporaneously from sparse, handwritten notes. He provided no physical documents such as projections or verbatim transcripts to supplement his performance. He sat at a simple desk with no scenery, no discernible costume, and no special effects. His monologue was accompanied by a few simple lighting changes. The “document” that qualified *The Agony and the Ecstasy of Steve Jobs* as Documentary Theatre was Daisey’s own testimonial combined with the text printed in the Playbill, which stated: “This is a work of nonfiction. Some names and identities have been changed to protect sources.” (Daisey, 2012c)

Like Moreno, Daisey was primarily interested in creating a sociological effect in his audience. Daisey has said that he wanted to create theatre “where the story lived in the air.” (Daisey, 2012a) He also specifically stated his objective in making this particular work, *The Agony and the Ecstasy of Steve Jobs*: “I wanted to make people care.” (I. Glass, 2012b) Describing Daisey’s own brand of spontaneity, one critic surmised that

“Daisey wants to show us the way he sees the world, and the way it feels to be him within it. To watch such meaning unfold from what looks like chicken scratch on yellow legal pad paper on the table in front of him is quite astounding.” (C. Glass, 2012) Moreno’s *Living Newspaper* (sometimes called *Dramatized Newspaper*) was the start of Moreno’s theory of sociodrama. Its effect was meant to be therapeutic for both the actor and the audience member. Transmission of the news and propagandizing may have occurred, but were not Moreno’s primary objectives. (Moreno, 1947) “[S]ociodrama has three primary aims: an improved understanding of a social situation, an increase in participants’ knowledge about their own and other people’s roles in relation to that situation, and an emotional release or catharsis as people express their feelings about the subject.” (Eckloff, 2006, p.261) Likewise, Mike Daisey sought to improve audiences’ understanding of their relationship to technology, to increase their awareness of the human lives responsible for manufacturing that technology, and to create an emotional response that would lead to action on the social issue of Chinese labor.

Moreno felt that using a script, especially one based off of a newspaper text that already existed, was only a means of reinforcing cultural biases. By investigating the news in person and then reporting this news in a spontaneous, script-free performance, the actors would theoretically be able to free themselves from social constructs. Moreno calls the spontaneous communication between actors and audience “tele,” which he defines as a “unit of affective energy transmitted from one person to another.” (Djuric, Veljkovic, Tomic, 2006, p.26) Daisey describes his own process as one of communication with an audience, with the specific intention of creating empathy.

Moreno and Daisey’s emphasis on the social experience of reporting was at one

time a primary objective for journalists as well. Yet a major shift towards objectivity and accuracy in the mid 1900s was reflected in a revision to the Society of Professional Journalists' Code of Ethics. Whereas the 1927 version listed the main purpose of a newspaper as communicating "to the human race what its members do, feel and think," the 1972 version states that a journalist's primary duty is to "serve the truth" and further states that "truth is our ultimate goal." (*Society of Professional Journalists*, 1927, 1972) The 1927 version allowed for a journalist's right to advocacy and opinion, as long as these pieces are clearly distinguished from impartial, objective reports. The 1972 version also makes mention of this right, but specifically calls for works of opinion to be "labeled as such." Labeling would continue to gain importance in both journalism and documentary theatre over the next few decades.

The 1980s and 1990s saw a massive upswing in popularity for reality based film, theatre and television. As the lines between journalism and entertainment became increasingly blurred, journalists voiced their concern in editorials. Headlines reflected these fears: "When Docudramas Mix Fact and Fiction They Pollute the News" (New York Times, 1981), "Fact for Fact, the Movies Often Make Bad Historians" (New York Times, 1989). "TV Simulating the News: Can You Depict 'Reported' Testimony About 'Alleged' Events?" (The Washington Post, 1990)

On the other side of the issue, Anna Deveare Smith's documentary work *Twilight: Los Angeles, 1992* was criticized for being too factual to be considered a play. Smith recorded hundreds of interviews in the wake of the Rodney King verdict, and performed them verbatim as a collection of monologues. Smith's play was denied final consideration by the Pulitzer Prize committee because her work was too journalistic.

“The effect Smith achieved onstage was impressive, but what was she doing exactly?” wrote Los Angeles Times’ critic Sean Mitchell. “It was nonfiction, but interpretive nonfiction...” (Mitchell, 1994) The criticism of Smith’s play for its lack of creativity stands in stark contrast to the purported failure of Daisey’s play to live up to journalistic standards. Smith did not label her work as journalism or Documentary Theatre. She did, however, provide information in the Playbill about her creative process, which involved selecting and assembling the interviews for performance. (Smith, 1992) The selection, assemblage and performance of the interviews were what made *Twilight: Los Angeles, 1992* a play rather than a work of journalism. Regardless of how much or how little of the material in a Documentary Play is invented, it is the creative act that separates it from journalism.

This distinction between performance and journalism was important for journalists at this time, as well. In 1996, the Society of Professional Journalists updated their Code of Ethics once more. This time, rather than “serving” the truth, a journalist’s primary objective became to “seek the truth.” The words “honesty” and “integrity” appear for the first time. Further emphasis is placed on labeling, this time not only for opinion pieces, but also for “montages and photo illustrations.” Perhaps the most remarkable addition to the Code of Ethics was the direction that journalists “avoid misleading re-enactments or staged news events. If re-enactment is necessary to tell a story, label it.” (*Society of Professional Journalists, 2007*)

Clarification on the difference between Documentary Theatre and journalism was attempted in the 1999 publication of scholar Gary Fisher Dawson’s book *Documentary Theatre in The United States: An Historical Survey and Analysis of Its Content, Form*

and Stagecraft. This book attempted to provide a working definition for Documentary Theatre in an effort to quell the confusion about Documentary Theatre practices. Dawson suggested three “Unities” of Documentary Drama. They include factual authenticity, the use of primary sources, and the use of Piscatorian stage devices.

It would seem that Daisey’s fabrications would disqualify a claim to factual authenticity. Yet Dawson’s definition of factual accuracy is somewhat vague. He cites British documentary playwright David Edgar’s guidelines for incorporating facts into a documentary theatre piece: “What is important to Edgar is not that facts are directly put into these plays, but rather that factuality is what provides the plays an electric potential.” (Dawson, 1999, p.99) Edgar allows that the facts will be “interpretive” as all history is ultimately interpretive. Dawson suggests that the other two unities—primary sources and Piscatorian stage devices—serve as markers of authenticity. Yet primary sources are not always presented to the audience during a performance. When they do manifest on stage, it is through the use of Piscatorian stage devices such as projections of slides. Dawson does not address the possibility of the performer him/herself being used as a primary source, which is the case in *The Agony and the Ecstasy of Steve Jobs*. This could place Daisey’s play in the realm of Memoir or Autobiographical Theatre, but because Daisey was investigating a social issue and reporting it to the audience, his monologue took on the appearance of eyewitness testimonial.

In terms of factual accuracy, Daisey’s monologue contained several key elements that have been under dispute since *This American Life*’s retraction. The first is Daisey’s claim to have met workers who were underage, specifically “fourteen years old, thirteen years old, twelve.” (Daisey, 2012c) During the retraction episode, Schmitz and Glass

used the testimony of Daisey's translator, Cathy Lee, to call this event into question. Lee said that while some girls looked to be about thirteen, she did not recall any of them stating their age. Daisey later admitted that only one worker actually gave her age as thirteen. Schmitz acknowledges that Apple's own audit of Foxconn did discover underage workers, but it was only "91 workers out of hundreds of thousands." (Glass, 2012b) Yet some Foxconn workers came forward in February of 2012 and claimed that underage workers were hidden from inspections or sent to other departments. (Ong, 2012) In October of 2012, Foxconn publicly admitted they were still employing underage workers as interns. These workers were as young as fourteen years old. (Voigt, 2012) Although some critics of Daisey conceded his story had been somewhat vindicated, they pointed out that no workers as young as twelve had been mentioned in the reports. Daisey responded: "Is it less heartbreaking because the girl may have been two years older? Three years? How do we rate our empathy? At what point do we blame the worker? At the moment they are an adult in our eyes? At the moment the clock strikes, at the second they are legal to work in the country they live in, is the story then about how they should have known better, because they are, after all, adults?" (Daisey, 2012e) Again, Daisey's primary objective is clear: he is concerned with creating empathy for these workers, not the reportage of accurate data. Daisey ultimately removed the mention of meeting underage workers from his monologue, but continues to insist in interviews that he met those workers in the manner he had described.

The other contested event Daisey described is the meeting he had with a permanently disabled worker. The worker was allegedly fired without receiving appropriate medical attention. Daisey described showing the worker an iPad, which the

worker had never seen turned on. “It’s a kind of magic,” the worker remarked. Daisey’s translator recalled meeting this worker, but she did not corroborate Daisey’s claim that the worker was injured at Foxconn. She also did not remember the worker’s response to the iPad. Because the interpreter did not remember these instances, Daisey’s stories about them cannot be confirmed as true by journalistic standards. Yet it is unfair to describe these events as factually inaccurate. They are, however, unverifiable and that is a distinction that Glass and Schmitz fail to make in the retraction episode. Their reaction is justified in the realm of journalism, but problematic when applied to the work as a creative act. This moment delivered a powerful social message, but was removed from the monologue because it did not hold up to journalistic scrutiny. (Daisey, 2012d)

Many critics believed that Daisey should have applied journalistic standards to his work, because he gave no sign to the audience that what he was saying was not factually unassailable. Despite the lack of any primary source other than his own personal memory performed extemporaneously in a theatre, critics like Peter Marks of the Washington Post indicated that they took every word Daisey said as fact: “I just believed every word. And maybe that was because partially I am seduced by his work, by his style, by his presentation, by the compelling force with which he tells us things, so I don’t make the distinction...when people say there’s journalistic truth and theatrical truth, I don’t even know what theatrical truth means. For me, truth is truth.” (Feldman, 2012) The truth is that Foxconn has admitted to employing underage workers (*Reuters*, 2012), that labor conditions have prompted workers to threaten and attempt suicide (Moore, 2010), that workers have been poisoned by the chemical n-hexane (Warman, 2012) and that workers have received insufficient medical treatment in response to injuries incurred on the job.

(Li, 2012) The difference between journalistic truth and theatrical truth is in how this information is presented to the audience. Journalism seeks the truth in terms of objective, verifiable facts whereas theatre seeks the truth in terms of social reality. Like Moreno's brand of Documentary Theatre, Daisey's main objective was to report on an actual social problem in order to create an emotional response in his audience.

The second unity suggested by Dawson is the use of primary sources, including "recorded and remembered eyewitness accounts in conjunction to a play's form." (1999, p.16) Eyewitness accounts, then, are not always recorded but sometimes remembered. Daisey himself was the primary source of information, and it is his own memory of events that we are hearing "verbatim" and unscripted, albeit rehearsed. Whether or not his account of his experience is "factually accurate" ultimately depends upon Daisey's memory, as would any other first-person testimonial. Although Daisey has no archived evidence that these events occurred in the exact manner that he described them, he expressed his intention to "cover the totality of the trip," meaning that he may have incorporated his research into his recollection of the event. "[W]hen I constructed the first version of my monologue I didn't fabricate out of thin air—I went to China, traveled to these areas, and supplemented what I could see with a decade's worth of NGO reports, interviews with labor scholars in Hong Kong, and every piece of writing I could find on the subject." (Daisey, 2012e) Daisey did not present physical documentation of his experiences, and he is clearly not reading from a script. It would therefore be logical to conclude that Daisey is relying on his own memory and nothing else in the performance of this monologue. Despite overwhelming evidence that eyewitness testimony is frequently inaccurate, people who listen to eyewitness testimony find it difficult to

disbelieve the witness, even when provided evidence that contradicts the witness's testimony. The more confident a witness appears to be, the more likely their statements are believed by the listener. Yet because memory is directly related to attention, an eyewitness will remember the event "so as to be consistent with their beliefs rather than the way it actually happened." (Haber & Haber, 2000, p.1063) Studies in eyewitness testimony demonstrate that witnesses of the same event rarely remember the event in the same way. In *This American Life's* retraction episode, it is clear that Glass and Schmitz favor translator Cathy Lee's version of events rather than Daisey's version. It is likely that neither of them remember the event accurately, and that both memories were affected by their perspective cultural biases and prior belief systems.

Dawson's third proposed unity is Piscatorian stage devices, such as "primary source documentation, projections of actuality in the form of photographs, video and film inserts, the use of printed 'documentary' sources such as newspaper headlines and placards, and addressing the audience directly from the stage." (1999, p.xvi) Dawson suggests that somehow the factually accurate primary source material necessary for the first two unities must be made physically present on stage. In some cases, however, this practice can be detrimental to the theatrical experience. The presentation of actual transcripts and newsreels place the dramatic work into the category of evidence rather than art, which leads spectators to view the work from a analytical point of view rather than an aesthetic perspective. An example of this pitfall occurred in the reception of Peter Weiss's 1965 play *The Investigation*. The script was created from verbatim courtroom transcripts of the Frankfurt war crimes trial concerning Auschwitz. The published script proclaims that Weiss "edited and extracted" the evidence into a "dramatic document that

relies solely and completely on the facts for its effectiveness.” (Weiss, 2010) One critic compared the play to a tape recording of the trial, then accused Weiss of falsifying “evidence” because he changed commentary into direct speech. In regards to the Weiss controversy, scholar C.N. Innes remarked that “since the representation of data in an ‘actual’ manner makes ‘truth to the facts’ the primary criterion...Documentary Drama comes to be judged as evidence rather than theatre.” (1972) When evidence becomes the central focus, the social communication a playwright is attempting to convey can become obscured.

Piscator’s own use of these devices extended beyond the communication of facts. His film projections sometimes mixed news reels with clips from stylized films such as *Ivan the Terrible*, creating what Innes called a “credibility gap.” (1972, p.180) In Documentary Theatre, the presentation of factually accurate primary source material is varied and it is often used in conjunction with imagination and invention. The stage device of “direct address to the audience,” however, is clearly observed in Daisey’s performance. As mentioned earlier, the experience of hearing Daisey speak directly to the audience as an eyewitness had tremendous effect on the believability of the piece.

Daisey researched other primary source materials in the creation of the play, such as NGO reports and news articles, but he does not present them or refer to them during the performance. His descriptions of the Foxconn dormitories and cafeterias, while documented in other reports, may or may not have been witnessed by Daisey directly. The primary sources besides Daisey’s own testimony are readily available to the interested audience member, although Daisey does not provide this material himself.

It is worth considering the agency of the audience member in verifying Daisey’s

version of events. The tool that Rob Schmitz used to find Daisey's translator was available to any audience member, without the need for a journalist's credentials. Schmitz simply typed "Cathy translator Shenzhen" into Google search and dialed the first number that appeared in the results. (Milian, 2012) It is unfair, however, to expect audience members to expend effort fact-checking a documentary play. It is unlikely many people would be interested in Documentary Theatre if that were the case. Audiences rely on the artists to provide clear explanations of what is fact and what is fiction.

There was much talk after the Daisey controversy about the "implied contract" between artists and their audiences. (Feldman, 2012) It may be the case that with Documentary Theatre, the contract needs to become more explicit. A label of fiction and nonfiction will not suffice. Some Documentary Theatre artists offer additional information in Playbills and handouts. The program may provide details about where their information was obtained and how it was used in the creative process. Tectonic Theatre Project, for example, uses recorded interviews and other news sources to create their plays. The Playbill for Tectonic Theatre Project's play *I Am My Own Wife* contained playwright Doug Wright's description of his process. He stated that he used transcriptions of interviews he personally conducted with the play's subject, Charlotte van Mahlsdorf, as well as personal letters and newspaper reports. He also acknowledged that he used his "own personal, sometimes selective remembrances" of his interviews and that he imagined some scenes and invented others "for narrative continuity." (Wright, 2003) Other than a short paragraph in the Playbill, these documents did not appear on stage. There were no projections or placards. The performer did speak directly to the audience, but there was no signal to the audience as to which lines were taken verbatim

from transcripts, and which were “imagined” or “invented.”

Daisey’s first-person, flawed account of his trip to Shenzhen may not have been up to journalistic standards, but any work of theatre that meets the requirements of those standards may not be considered a play at all. Dawson quotes researcher Thomas M. Croak’s description of documentary theatre, which he says is “a means to arrive at a better understanding of social and political dynamics in a way standard journalistic means cannot, or do not, provide.” (1999, p.10) Daisey has said that he used “the tools of journalism” as well as his storytelling skills to “create bonds of empathy.” (Daisey, 2012b) Documentary Theatre has never been used solely as a means to present nonpartisan, objective news. It has a long history of political persuasion and social advocacy. As such, it need not be judged by journalistic standards, but rather by its aesthetic quality and its power to persuade. A precise description of the artists’ creative process can clarify to audiences that they should not expect journalistic standards.

Chapter 2: The power of empathy

Mike Daisey has stated that theatre can create change by creating “bonds of empathy between us and people on the other side of the world.” (Daisey, 2012b) Daisey has also stated that *The Agony and the Ecstasy of Steve Jobs* “charges people to examine their lives, their roles in our economic realities, and take action within those frameworks.” (Daisey, 2012c) Despite Daisey’s lambasting by the media after the retraction episode aired, he stood by his work because of the impact it had on the American public. Stories about labor practices at Foxconn became front page news, petitions were signed by hundreds of thousands of people, and protests were held at Apple stores. Daisey believed that narrative can create empathy and therefore create change, but he also worried that the label of fiction would lessen the empathic reaction in his audiences. The idea that narrative can create empathy has been of recent interest to cognitive scientists. The Mar Lab in Toronto, for example, has spent the past decade studying the power of narrative to create empathy. Their results demonstrate that fiction does have the power to create empathy. Some theorists suggest that the label of nonfiction may actually inhibit empathy and subsequent altruistic behaviors.

Narrative and Empathy

For nearly as long as the concept of empathy has existed, theatre has been associated with it. What we mean by “empathy,” however, has changed numerous times over the years. The word “empathy” signifies a range of emotional experiences. Its history originated in Germany with the word “Einfühlung” in 1873. The word was coined by Robert Vischer and originally meant “feeling into,” or applying human emotion onto

the natural world. (Pigman, 1995) Philosopher Theodor Lipps expanded the concept to apply to interpersonal relationships in addition to the visual arts. (Jahoda, 2005) *Einfühlung* was translated into English by American Edward Titchener as the word “empathy” in the early 20th century, using the Greek word *empathēia* (“in suffering or passion”) as a root word. Titchener’s use of the word was similar to that of Lipps, referring to “the centrality of emotions, projection, appreciation and inner imitation.” (Morrell, 2010, p.47) The English word for empathy “gradually appeared in dramatic theory where it became a simple and sovereign explanation for all that was valuable in the theatre experience.” (Gunkle, 1963, p.15)

The modern understanding of empathy remains varied and complex. One widely accepted theory delineates four categories of empathy, including perspective taking (putting yourself “in someone else’s shoes”), fantasy (imagining yourself to actually be someone else), empathic concern (feeling *for* someone else), and personal distress (feeling along *with* someone else). (Davis, 1980) These four categories provide a useful tool for examining the possible effects of empathy and how empathy may or may not lead to action.

The scientists at the Mar Lab have specifically dealt with narrative’s ability to give us another point of view. They claim that fiction’s purpose is to give us social knowledge rather than real world knowledge. (Mar & Oatley, 2008) Mar and his colleagues theorized that during the narrative experience, we suspend our goals, plans, and actions and insert a protagonist’s plans, goals and actions into our “planning processor.” (Mar, Oatley, Djikic and Mullin, 2011, p.824) This ability allows us to “predict the actions and reactions of others by, in part, inferring what they are thinking,

feeling and intending.” (Mar, Oatley, dela Paz, Hirsh & Peterson 2006, p.696) Philosopher Eva Dadlez has posited that experiencing fiction “might be thought to constitute an important adjunct to moral reasoning and intuition.”(1997, p.109) By putting aside, or suspending, our own plans and imagining those of another, we are able to broaden our perspective and “rehearse our moral judgments and...[become] aware of them as newly challenged or substantiated.” (Dadlez, 1997, p.5) Narrative theorist Lisa Zunshine suggests that this process improves our “mind reading abilities.” (Leveredge, 2011, p.3) Cognitive psychologist Keith Oatley refers to fiction’s ability to provide “practice in projecting ourselves into the minds of others, sympathizing with them, empathizing with them, understanding the world from their point of view.” (Leveredge, 2011, p.18) With *The Agony and the Ecstasy of Steve Jobs*, Daisey hoped to create “bonds of empathy” between his audiences and the workers in China. As these studies demonstrate, it is more likely that audiences were taking on Daisey’s point of view.

In his monologue, Daisey described himself as an “Apple fanboy” before his trip to China. He was obsessed with Apple products, taking them apart and reassembling them “to relax.” (Daisey, 2012d) Daisey’s visit to Foxconn left him disillusioned and determined to change the labor situation in China. It is exactly this perspective that Daisey hoped his audiences will take. They empathized with Daisey’s experience, as they heard him recount his personal feelings of disappointment and outrage. Daisey clearly experienced empathic concern for the workers at Foxconn because he met them personally and heard their stories. It is likely that Daisey experienced personal distress when he witnessed their injuries or heard the union workers’ tales of struggle. Yet the audience was not given much detail about the workers as individuals. They were

nameless, faceless workers without history or character. Ultimately, the audience had as little information about people working at Foxconn as they did before the monologue began. They only learned about their working conditions. An audience would have been unable to take on the workers' perspective ("how would I feel if my employer treated me this way?") because they were not hearing the story from the workers' point of view. In fact, they were not hearing the workers' story at all, but rather Mike Daisey's story. Since Daisey's feelings of empathy caused him to take action by creating this monologue, if an audience empathized with those feelings they may have been moved to take action as well.

First-person Testimony and Empathy

The Piscatorian stage device of direct address to the audience, which Daisey uses in his performance, has been considered a signifier for authenticity. David Lodge said that the first-person narrative "creates an illusion of reality, it commands the willing suspension of the reader's disbelief, by modeling itself on the discourses of personal witness: the confession, the diary, autobiography, the memoir, the deposition." (as cited in Keen, 2006, p.213) Not only does the first-person signify authenticity, it also leads to greater identification with a character. This identification lends itself more readily to an emotional response. (Mar, et. al., 2011) One study tested subjects who read two versions of a narrative: one used first-person narration and the other used third-person narration. Researchers found that emotions were more intense for readers of first-person narratives. (Mar et. al., 2011)

The perceived authority and emotional weight of a testimonial has made it especially appealing to the journalism industry. The BBC's definition of "good journalism," involves "bearing witness to events that others may wish to hide or ignore." (cited in Chouliaraki, 2010, p.305) Media theorist Lilie Chouliaraki hypothesized that a journalist who bears witness to an event is "not only reporting on events but also engaging people's potential to care." (2010, p.305) She differentiated between the journalist-as-witness and the citizen-as-witness, however. The journalist prioritizes "an objectivist conception of witnessing" which uses factual accuracy as its foundation, whereas the witnessing of the citizen "is grounded on first-hand testimony and personal opinion." (2010, p.308) She suggested that the testimonial form of reporting is used to elicit an emotional response that would not occur otherwise. Again, a distinction is made between the commitment to factual accuracy and the intention to convey a social message through personal opinion and witnessing.

The assumption is that the testimonial aspect is both necessary for an emotional response to occur in regards to distant suffering and yet problematic when it comes to factual accuracy. In defending his actions, Daisey has repeatedly mentioned that although journalists were covering the news at Foxconn, they had failed to engage the emotions of the American public. "And where was the empathy going to come from, that makes a story leap from the pages to actually resonate? After all, this has happened before—Apple responded to labor issues when people were writing stories about them back in 2006. When there was nothing but journalism alone, the story rose up and died without breaking the surface of our consciousness." (Daisey, 2012e) Daisey acted as a citizen-witness rather than a journalist-witness. His first-person account has authority, but it is

“not ‘galvanized’ by the scrutiny of facts...it is authenticated by the force of conviction.”
(Chouliaraki, 2010, p.308)

Empathy and Activism

There is a host of evidence that empathy does, in many cases, lead to action. Media psychologists Alice Hall and Cheryl Bracken list multiple studies demonstrating altruistic action as a result of empathic concern, including situations “where helping is costly, escape is easy, and there is no social reward for helping.” (2011, pp.90-91) Social psychologist Daniel Batson and his colleagues discovered that people who listened to a recorded interview with a drug addict were more likely to donate to an organization that helps addicts. (as cited in Leverage, 2011, p.19) Social psychologist Jerzy Trzebinki also found that narrative “primed” readers and made them more receptive to requests from help that would normally have avoided. (2005) After seeing Daisey perform the monologue, *This American Life* host Ira Glass invited him to perform on the radio program. Glass was so moved by the theater piece that he dedicated the entire episode to Daisey’s story. After Daisey’s monologue aired on *This American Life*, listener Mark Shields created a Change.org petition asking Apple to address the working conditions at Foxconn. It received over 250,000 signatures. (Shields, 2012) Another petition created on Sumofus.org received nearly 150,000 signatures. (*sumofus.org*, 2012) The petitions’ popularity led to protests in six Apple locations in four different countries. (Peralta, 2012) The Change.org petition’s creator, Mark Shields, was even interviewed by *The Guardian* (Harris, 2012) and *Countdown with Keith Olbermann* (2012).

Personal distress (feeling *with* someone) can often be an intense and unpleasant experience. For this reason, many people avoid situations that they know will create these feelings. (Batson, Shaw & Todd 1994) Avoidance of suffering might be an explanation for the lack of interest in Foxconn stories before Daisey's monologue. This sheds light on why narrative can be a powerful tool in regards to altruistic action. The aesthetic distance created by hearing the story of the labor conditions in China through Mike Daisey, the witness, allows the audience to experience empathic concern without personal distress. Daisey's monologue is entertaining and often comedic in tone. Audiences were not subjected to images of injured workers. They did not have to witness workers jumping out of windows to their death. Instead, they heard the story of someone else's witness to this suffering. They were able to identify with his feelings of distress from a distance. Perhaps most importantly, the audience was given instructions on what they might do to change the situation. Daniel Batson has suggested that the avoidance of empathy may have more to do with feelings of helplessness rather than egoistic avoidance of discomfort. (2011) Daisey handed out sheets of paper after each performance that gave suggestions on how the audience could take action, such as e-mailing Apple CEO Tim Cook, opting not to upgrade their equipment and sharing Daisey's story with others. (Daisey, 2012c) Daisey also published his script online, allowing anyone to perform it or adapt it, royalty-free. *The Agony and the Ecstasy of Steve Jobs* provided an opportunity for people to experience empathy from a safe distance and also receive clear instructions on how the situation might be changed.

Narrative theorist Suzanne Keen posits that the distance created in narrative, and especially fiction, is important because it frees us to have empathetic experiences without

personal distress. The label of fiction can “disarm readers of some of the protective layers of cautious reasoning that may inhibit empathy in the real world.” The “self-protection through skepticism and suspicion” (Keen, 2006, p.123) that prevents us from experiencing empathy is relieved when we are free from considering a narrative as evidence rather than art. In the previous chapter, it was noted that Documentary Theatre ran the risk of interpretation as forensic evidence rather than aesthetic experience. Keen suggests that work labeled “nonfiction” may also run the risk of inhibiting an empathetic experience. This empathetic experience can give us another person’s perspective, change our beliefs and attitudes, and prompt us to altruism. (Keen, 2006)

In this respect, documentary theatre can be seen as a potent adjunct to journalism, rather than a subgenre of it. Professional journalists have a code of ethics and despite occasionally falling short of those standards, their approach to bearing witness is grounded on factual accuracy. This is not to say that documentary theatre does not have an ethical responsibility to tell the truth, but I propose that its primary purpose, as The Mar Lab suggests, is to provide “social knowledge rather than general world knowledge.” (Mar & Oatley, 2008, p.182) If documentary theatre can provide an emotional context for the material evidence of journalism, it can help guide our ethical decision making in response to the suffering of distant others. In this light, Daisey has delivered a social commentary on the factual information he obtained in China. The story of the injured worker who saw an iPad turned on for the first time may not have happened exactly as Daisey described. Yet the information we are to glean from that narrative is not general world knowledge (“a man with an injured hand thinks an iPad is like magic”) but rather social knowledge (“a product I use everyday is not enjoyed by the very people who suffer

in its manufacture”). This moment is essential to the empathetic experience Daisey hoped to create, and yet it was ultimately removed from the monologue because of the controversy over its accuracy.

It is in this sense that the label of nonfiction can be considered detrimental to the intended dramatic experience of documentary theatre. Jessica Blank, creator of the documentary theatre piece *The Exonerated*, believes that nonfiction theatre does exist. “I think it’s asking us to engage with the concrete facts of the world we live in, using a different part of our minds than we ordinarily do, and engaging our hearts in a way that we don’t ordinarily do. That’s the storytelling part, that’s the empathy part. And the power of nonfiction theater, which I do think exists, is in its ability to meld those two things, and, as we all can see, it’s a very complicated and fraught territory.” (Feldman, 2012) Such “complicated and fraught territory” requires more than a label of “fiction” or “nonfiction.” It requires para-texts that describe the process of creation, such as the short description Doug Wright offered in the Playbill of *I Am My Own Wife*. Daisey mentioned in his Playbills that he changed the names of his sources, but he doesn’t explain that his theatre piece is created from memory, without notes or recordings archived as evidence. The label of nonfiction was unnecessary and only created ethical entanglements for Daisey and for those who used his monologue as evidence rather than art. The Mar Lab defines nonfiction as “typically expository in nature, whereas fiction most often takes the form of narrative.” (Mar et al., 2005, p.695) No dramatization of facts, regardless of their reliance on factually accurate source materials, should be titled nonfiction. Daisey once wrote a monologue titled “All Stories Are Fiction,” and he would have been wise to remember this.

I suspect that the primary fear behind letting go of the label of nonfiction has to do with belief: If audiences do not believe that what they are seeing is true, then they will not care and they will not act. In a speech at Georgetown University, Daisey said that the label of fiction would mean that his work is “*fictional*, that it will not touch you, so do not worry. There’s this sense of toothlessness, I think. I don’t know...but I do know that there is power in labels. There’s power in what we call things.” (Daisey, 2012d) Yet the nature of belief, especially when it comes to narrative, is not what Mike Daisey supposes. Comprehension entails belief. Emotion entails belief. Labels do not entail belief.

Chapter 3: Belief and Persuasion

Documentary theatre artists seek to inform the audience of a “real-life” situation, offering them a fresh perspective on an issue that they were probably not informed of through traditional news sources. The artist hopes that the audience’s change in belief will lead to a changed behavior in the real world. This new perspective is achieved through empathy, a persuasive power that allows us to see the world from someone else’s point of view. The documentary theatre artist may believe that the label of nonfiction adds special weight to the performance and will aid an audience member’s belief in the material presented and therefore belief in the tacit suppositions of the work. There seems to be a general consensus that if an audience knows the information in a play is factual rather than fictional, they will have a different, stronger response to the material. Steve Cosson, artistic director of the documentary theatre troupe The Civilians, seemed to think the distinction mattered. He stated that the emotional moments in *The Agony and the Ecstasy of Steve Jobs* “were extra profound, and they were extra moving because you were fully convinced that they were real.” (Feldman, 2012) What Cosson doesn’t mention, however, is whether he was “convinced they were real” because of the narrative quality of the play or because of the label “nonfiction.”

Eric Bentley stated that a lack of clarity about what is fact and what is fiction will jeopardize the audience’s ability to believe any aspect of the performance because “if the viewer is free to think that fictions are facts, he is equally free to think that the facts are fictions.” (Bentley, 1985, p.51) The mechanism of belief in the theatre is not as simple as

Bentley suggests, however. The “willing suspension of disbelief,” as it has long been called, happens not because of para-texts cueing the audience that they should believe what they are about to see, but rather because of the way the brain processes the narrative experience. The “suspension of disbelief” is not a result of the will, but a necessary aspect of comprehension. Disbelief happens after the narrative experience is over, and requires effort on the part of the audience member. This effort seems to be exerted only if the narrative was not compelling or inconsistent. Para-texts cueing the audience members about the veracity of the material will have little or no effect on the persuasiveness of the narrative. If they choose to act on the information received in the narrative process and later come to discover that it was inaccurate or fabricated—as in the case with Mike Daisey’s show—a feeling of betrayal is experienced. This places the fiction/nonfiction label in the category of ethical considerations, rather than being an issue of persuasive power.

Comprehension entails belief

Samuel Coleridge’s famous passage on the “willing suspension of disbelief” was dealing specifically with the realm of fantasy, not with nonfiction. Coleridge and his contemporary, William Wordsworth, were debating two aspects of poetry: “the power of exciting the sympathy of the reader by a faithful adherence to the truth of nature, and the power of giving the interest of novelty by the modifying colours of imagination.” (Coleridge, 1817, p.2) Wordsworth was tasked with writing a poem using everyday people and events, while Coleridge was to write a poem using “persons and characters supernatural, or at least romantic; yet so as to transfer from our inward nature a human

interest and a semblance of truth sufficient to procure for these shadows of imagination that willing suspension of disbelief for the moment, which constitutes poetic faith.” (Coleridge, 1817, p.2) This phrase has been adopted by the theatre world to illustrate what happens when we allow ourselves to be transported by the fictional events presented on stage: we are willing to believe in obvious fictions long enough to engage in the material, giving “a degree of continued attention” that would be impossible if our critical faculties were constantly at work. According to Coleridge, our disbelief is only suspended for the moment. This suspension is an “experimental faith in the Writer.” (as cited in Tomko, 2007, p. 245) This trial allows us to experience perspectives and ideologies other than our own, suspending judgment until the work is over. Once this experiment of belief in the authenticity of the writer’s ideas is over, we are to return to “disbelief,” that is, to our critical mind. “Most importantly, throughout this experimental trial, a reader never surrenders his or her power of disbelief or dissent. This power is suspended, but not relinquished.” (Tomko, 2007, p. 245)

Coleridge was writing about fantasy, however, and Daisey’s piece could hardly fall under that category. He performs using his real name, he sits at a simple desk without a costume or set and he tells an unscripted story. We may be more likely to believe Daisey’s story because of the first person, reportorial form his monologue takes. Yet cognitive science has shown that belief is our automatic first response whenever we subject ourselves to narrative, whether that narrative is fiction or nonfiction. (Gilbert, 1991, Gerrig, 2004 and Holland, 2008) Rather than suspending disbelief, we believe first and then create disbelief later. The will is not involved in a suspension of disbelief, it is involved after we have comprehended the narrative, when we exert effort to critically

reflect on what we have just seen. Richard Gerrig calls this “the willing construction of disbelief.” (2004, p. 267) In other words, disbelief requires effort and will only occur when there is justification for the exertion.

Psychologist Daniel Gilbert’s study of belief was not specifically focused on narrative, but on how mental systems experience belief in general. His experiments were based on the philosophy of Spinoza, who said that “comprehension entails belief.” He makes two important distinctions that are especially significant in considering *The Agony and the Ecstasy of Steve Jobs*. First, he notes that we are even more likely to believe what we hear and see, rather than what we have read. He argues that we are “Spinozan systems that, when faced with shortages of time, energy or conclusive evidence may fail to unaccept the ideas that [we] voluntarily accept during comprehension.” (Gilbert, 1991, p.116) Cognition may have developed in a similar way as perception: it is safer to believe that the lion charging towards you is real and respond accordingly rather than spend time deciding if you believe your own eyes. Taking this into consideration, it is no doubt that the many studies presented here which focus on the persuasive power of narrative are doubly relevant to documentary theatre. The experience of being physically present to hear Mike Daisey tell his story, rather than simply reading the transcript, may make belief even more likely for the audience.

Gilbert also points out the power of autobiographical propositions. The assertion of belief is a convincing form of communication. Decades of studies have “independently concluded that people are particularly prone to accept the autobiographical propositions implicit (or explicit) in others’ words and deeds.” (Gilbert, 1991, p.112) Especially salient for Gilbert is the fact that people accept these propositions despite the extremely

high probability that they are inaccurate. Gilbert again cites the time and energy associated with disbelief as the primary reason for our inclination towards acceptance.

The effort required for disbelief is significantly higher than what is required for belief. It is not, as Coleridge suggested, a matter of returning to disbelief after the narrative experience has ended, but instead it is a question of whether we are willing to expend time and energy refuting what we have already accepted as true. The will, therefore, is involved in choosing to engage in the narrative and then potentially afterwards when reflecting critically on the narrative after the experience ends. During the narrative process, however, our default setting is belief. If we are distracted or fail to exert effort after a narrative experience, we are likely to accept the story's postulations. These studies are not suggesting we believe that the story is actually happening in front of us: we do not believe that Sherlock Holmes, for example, is a real person. The messages in the story, however, may be received as true automatically. We may come away from reading Sherlock Holmes with ideas about Victorian London or the scientific method. We may gain a better understanding of friendships through the trials and tribulations of Holmes and his trusted friend Watson. Disbelief might occur when previously acquired real world knowledge contradicts the story's inferences, or when an audience member seeks out further information after the story concludes. (Gerrig, 2004, p. 268) Yet what reason would we have to disbelieve Arthur Conan Doyle's description of Victorian London? Would it be worth the time and effort to disprove his descriptions?

Not only does seeking out information require effort, it is more likely that an audience member will seek to confirm the story's suppositions rather than contradict them. (Gilbert, 1991, p.115) This may be why audience members asked Daisey "Was any

of that true?” rather than “Did you make that all up?” Journalist Rob Schmitz picked up on false notes in Daisey’s story only because he had prior real world knowledge about Chinese labor conditions. Daisey’s story didn’t ring true because it conflicted with Schmitz’s existing beliefs based on his experiences living and working in China. Schmitz was not expending effort to disbelieve Daisey, but rather seeking to confirm something he already believed to be true.

Daisey’s motivation was not to disseminate falsehood. He was hoping that audiences would begin to think about their electronic devices differently and question the way in which those devices are made. Daisey has said that he added the label of nonfiction to his Playbills because he had experienced audience members coming to him after the show and asking if the story was true. What Daisey failed to understand was that his audience members were seeking to confirm something they had already come to believe. What Daisey interpreted as doubt was actually a natural inclination to confirm newly formed beliefs.

Although comprehension entails belief, it would seem likely that audiences would be more likely to construct disbelief if they have been told beforehand that the story they are about to see is fiction. The label of fiction has little to do with the willingness to construct disbelief. Emotion also plays an important role in whether we accept, confirm or refute a narrative experience.

Emotion entails belief

Although belief might be our default setting, that doesn’t mean everyone who listened to Mike Daisey’s monologue who hadn’t lived in China would have walked

away believing every word. According to the empirical studies of cognitive scientists like Richard Gerrig and David Rapp (2004) and Melanie Green, Jennifer Garst and Timothy Brock (2000, 2004), the audience members who most easily accepted everything in Daisey's story were probably the ones who felt the most "carried away" or "transported" by the narrative. Green and Brock define this feeling of transportation as "emotional involvement in the story, cognitive attention to the story, feelings of suspense, lack of awareness of surroundings, and mental imagery." (2000, p. 702) Green and Brock theorized that the perceived level of "transportation" into a story would result in greater belief in the story's inferred suppositions. They found that transportation aided in perceived suspension of disbelief and reduced "counter-arguing about the issues raised in the story." (Green, Brock and Garst, 2004, p. 168) The emotions experienced by "transported" readers were strongly felt, even when the readers knew that the story was not true. (Green and Brock, 2000, Gerrig 1993) The powerful emotions associated with higher reports of transportation are thought to significantly contribute to changes in belief.

The label of fiction and nonfiction altered the way readers scrutinized the information (they examined the material labeled nonfiction more closely), but it did not affect the persuasive value of the text. (Green, Garst & Brock, 2004) The more that a reader identifies or empathizes with a character, the more weight is given to statements made by that character. It is when we choose to act on this information that we are most likely to look for evidence that supports our newly formed beliefs and attitudes. (Holland, 2008)

Daisey has frequently been lauded for his storytelling abilities. Though the information about Foxconn already existed in some form, Daisey was perhaps most successful in making people care about that information. By capturing an audience's attention, triggering their emotions, and firing their imaginations, Daisey was able to "transport" an audience into another world. The more carried away into that world an audience felt, the more likely they were to believe what Daisey wanted them to believe. Daisey's storytelling abilities combined with our inclination towards belief made the nonfiction label unnecessary. If the emotional experience is present, we are likely to accept what we have experienced to be true. Acceptance depends on emotion. Feelings can make facts valuable, for without emotions our "beliefs are inert."(Mercer, 2010, p.5)

Changing our beliefs and attitudes because of a narrative experience that is partially or wholly fabricated may seem frighteningly close to propaganda. Seth Knox offers an important distinction between persuasion and propaganda: persuasion is an interactive process that is submitted to voluntarily. "The persuader attempts to influence the persuadee to adopt a change in a given attitude or behavior because the persuadee has had perceptions enlarged or changed." (Leveredge, 2011, p.248) The difference is that persuasion is a two-way communication. Daisey has professed an ability to communicate with his audiences: "I can feel from the tenor of the room that we are communicating." (Daisey, 2012a) In his need to "be heard," Daisey may have been afraid to let the audience respond, worrying that their responses might have included disbelief. The pamphlet that Daisey handed out to every audience member at the end of *The Agony and the Ecstasy of Steve Jobs* gave people "concrete steps" to take after they left the theater. One of those steps includes learning more from organizations like China Labor Watch

and SACOM. (Daisey, 2012d) Directing the audience to ways that they can confirm their emotional experience through factually accurate resources is an excellent way to use the power of narrative in an ethical way.

Documentary theatre can provide new perspectives on social problems and engage our capacity to care. An accurate description of the creative process, including the possibility of fabricated elements, will not affect the persuasive power of the narrative. Choosing not to label a work “nonfiction” may give the artist more creative freedom with which to build a narrative that focuses on transporting the audience rather than adhering to journalistic integrity. Honesty about that process will safeguard the artist from ethical quandaries such as the one Daisey experienced. Giving the audience the tools to confirm their emotional experience with verifiable documents is advisable after the narrative experience ends. Though some artists choose to incorporate those documents into the dramatic work itself, it may be most effective after the experience is over and the audience is faced with the decision on how to act. The theatrical experience is one of emotional salience and it may direct an audience’s attention to a social problem in such a way that the audience’s interest in factual material is increased after the narrative. The line between persuasion and propaganda will not be crossed if the artist simply allows the audience to respond rather than deciding how they must respond.

Conclusion

Documentary theatre has always struggled to find a balance between fact and fiction. The wealth of studies in cognitive science dedicated to narrative empathy demonstrate the value of this form of theatre. These plays allow us to experience empathy, thereby drawing our attention to social dilemmas. When documentary theatre artists such as Mike Daisey insist on labeling their work “nonfiction”, they not only risk betraying the trust of their audiences, they also fail to maximize the form’s potential to draw attention to a social issue. By placing emphasis on narrative quality and providing explicit details about their use of creative license, documentary theatre artists can focus their intentions on generating social knowledge rather than reporting factual information. Though audiences may have previously been disinterested in a social issue such as the labor conditions in China, the fresh emotions they experience during the narrative can engage their attention and motivate them to take action. If documentary theatre artists gain a better understanding of how empathy leads to action, they may find it efficacious to provide their audiences documentary sources and possibilities for taking action after the theatrical performance is over. If a documentary theatre piece has been successful in transporting their audiences into another world, they can have faith that audience members will be newly attentive to this factual evidence. It would also be advisable to offer a forum for audience members to respond to the material and ask questions, so that the work functions as a two-way communication rather than taking on the qualities of propaganda.

Having an understanding of cognitive studies on narrative empathy can also be beneficial for spectators of documentary theatre. Audiences can gain new perspectives of the world through experiencing empathy, but they should exercise effort in constructing disbelief after the narrative experience ends. Having had their attentions directed to a social issue, it is imperative that they seek out the factual, non-narrative evidence that inspired the performance they have witnessed. They should be aware of the ability of narrative to change their beliefs and attitudes. While this ability may be beneficial to society, it can also lead to the spread of misinformation. Audiences should reflect on what they have learned from a documentary theatre piece and whether that information is social knowledge or factual information that needs to be verified.

The Agony and the Ecstasy of Steve Jobs successfully provided an alternative perspective on the popular technology products produced by Apple. Mike Daisey engaged his audiences with his talent for storytelling, not with his skills as a journalist. His first-person account of the labor conditions in China made for compelling drama, but he unnecessarily created an ethical dilemma by labeling his work nonfiction. There is robust evidence that much of what Daisey described in his monologue is actually occurring at Foxconn, but by presenting his experience as factually unassailable he damaged his mission to change the situation. If he had been forthcoming about his creative process it would not have impacted the persuasive power of his narrative. The fact that audiences questioned the veracity of his narrative in the first place was something that Daisey should have welcomed, since he had plenty of evidence to back up his perspective on the labor problems at Foxconn. By offering that information to his audiences after the show, he could have allowed the audience to confirm their newfound

perspective. Instead, Daisey presented his narrative as evidence in itself and when it was revealed that some of the monologue had been embellished or fabricated, audience members were left feeling betrayed and his entire story was discredited. His betrayal became the story and attention was diverted from the social cause Daisey had been trying to highlight.

It is impossible to say whether or not the direct action that resulted from Daisey's monologue, such as the Change.org petition that received over a quarter million signatures, would have happened if the audience hadn't believed that Daisey's story was 100% factually accurate. Mark Shields, who created the petition, updated his letter after the retraction episode of *This American Life* aired, stating "Major media outlets from around the world have reported on the terrible quality of life for the workers in these factories... So, while *This American Life* may be retracting 'Mr. Daisey and the Apple Factory,' it seems like the issues and facts at the core of this story are still the same." (Shields, 2012) Shields expressed gratitude that his "eyes were opened" about the labor abuses at Foxconn. The supplement of "major media outlets" seemed to be enough to substantiate Shields' changed attitude towards Apple products despite the revelation that Daisey had fabricated parts of his story. The use of supplemental sources as para-textual material has historically been a successful means for documentary theatre artists to "back up" their claims or prove their authenticity while simultaneously freeing the artists to create work imaginatively, without ethical quandaries such as this one.

If Documentary Theatre artists make clear their objective to communicate social knowledge rather than to present evidence for examination, they can find freedom to focus on engendering empathy in the audiences. By directing an audience's attention to a

social cause and engaging their capacity to care, Documentary Theatre artists such as Mike Daisey have a uniquely effective method for creating change in the world. They can be assured that providing details about the selection, arrangement and verifiability of their evidence they will not damage their capacity to persuade.

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