

never fallen down the stairs in my house or any other set of stairs. My words describing what might happen if he fell had created the image in his mind. As I continued to think about the incident, I also realized that my impulse to warn Nathan was not based on actual experience. No child had ever fallen down the stairs in my house; indeed, I had never actually seen any child fall down any stairs. I was simply responding to a possibility I knew existed: an eighteen-month-old child could fall down the stairs and be seriously hurt. The entire incident occurred because all humans, young and old, have an innate ability we call the power of the imagination to see things they have not actually seen, think thoughts they have not previously heard or read, and even understand concepts they have not been specifically taught.

Nathan's experience, although terrifying for him, was an ordinary; garden-variety encounter with imagination. It is the kind of projected imaging that occurs somewhere in our heads (which is where we intuitively place such events) all the time. We do not, for example, have to have been involved in a head-on car collision to imagine ourselves in one. We know the potential for head-on collisions exists even if we have never seen photographs, films, or videotapes of such collisions. Not only do we understand that collisions are possible, we can readily imagine what a collision might do to our automobiles and to ourselves. On the other hand, we are also equally well equipped to imagine ourselves traveling safely down any and all roads, avoiding every potential collision.

Even though imagination is part of our basic human apparatus, the ways in which imagination works remain mysterious. What incites the imagination? Where do the mental pictures—the images—come from? What is the relationship between knowing and imagining? Do we know the potential results of collisions because we can imagine them? Or do we imagine the results of collisions because we know what can happen to cars and human bodies? Is it more important for the safe driver to imagine collisions or the absence of collisions?

Most important of all, since the subject of this book is designing for the theatre, what in the world is the relationship between the mental phenomenon called imagination, which appears to help protect us from falling down-stairs and engaging in head-on car crashes, and the mental phenomenon called imagination, said to be the engine that sparks, fuels, and motivates creativity?