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Scenography as Process
in
British Devised and Postdramatic Theatre

by

Rebecca J Hickie

A Doctoral Thesis

Submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements
for the award of

Doctor of Philosophy of Loughborough University
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ABSTRACT

The term scenography is an increasingly popular one within the worldwide theatre making community, becoming the term of choice to refer to the visual, spatial and aural aspects of theatre production. In her book *What is Scenography?* (2002) Pamela Howard suggests that we should consider the term scenography as referring not only to those aspects of the theatre *product*, but also to the collaborative process through which the product is created. In the context of her study, Howard refers to scenography as process within her own work, grounded in the production of literary texts. But what are the implications of scenography as process within non text-based and postdramatic theatre? This thesis will consider the place and process of design within devised and postdramatic theatre, and how this fits with Howard's conception of scenography as process.

The change and development in all aspects of the theatre making process that occurred through the twentieth century, with the growth of devising methodologies and collective-based companies, necessitated the emergence of a different type of theatre designer. Howard cites an emphasis in collaboration and the scenographer's presence in the rehearsal room as distinguishing factors between a scenographic and more orthodox design process, and as such this need for a collaborative design methodology can be seen as having arisen from the development of collective and devising working processes.

Considering the historical importance of figures such as Appia, Craig, Meyerhold, Brecht and Svoboda in the revolution and development of stage design and scenography through the twentieth century, this thesis documents the scenic practice of Complicite, Improbable, Forced Entertainment, Fevered Sleep and two recent productions by Katie Mitchell at the National Theatre, considering scenography as an integral part of the process of writing the performance text. Out of the work of these practitioners various models of scenographic practice are drawn, offering a variety of methodologies that can be used individually or in combination as a starting point for developing scenography in a devised or postdramatic context.

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INTRODUCTION

In 2002, Pamela Howard published a book addressing the fundamental question 'What is Scenography?' The term scenography, or *scenografika*, has been in use since the time of Aristotle to describe a particular form of perspective scene painting, but over the course of the twentieth century there was a marked increase in its use as a term referring to the visual, spatial and increasingly the aural aspects of theatre production. In her book, Howard suggested that it was not so much a specific form or style of theatre design that is now referred to as scenography, but theatre design that has been achieved through a more collaborative, rehearsal room-based process.

Simultaneous with the increasing interest in and utilisation of the term scenography, from the 1960s onwards there was a well-documented explosion in both the theory and practice of theatre making, that led to the development of a variety of new forms of theatre and new modes of theatre making. Politically driven collectives became increasingly popular. Although a truly collective mode of theatre making proved difficult to sustain, the notion of a collaborative process of creation to which each member of a company or ensemble could contribute equally remained at the forefront of alternative and experimental theatre practice. Devised and collaboratively produced theatre is now an accepted part of the British theatre establishment.

Postdramatic theatre, too, arose from the experimental arena of the nineteen sixties. As posited by Hans-Thies Lehmann in his seminal text *Postdramatic Theatre* (1999), the overt beginnings of the postdramatic, in events such as the Happenings and Performance Art of the 1960s and '70s, can be seen as being closely tied to political, economic and social events of the era, and were very much a product of their time. These types of event are no longer very much in evidence, but it is possible to trace a through line from the early works by practitioners such as Allan Kaprow, John Cage, Anna Halprin, Pina Bausch and Kenneth Dewey to more contemporary work by Meredith Monk, Tadeusz Kantor, Richard Foreman and Robert Wilson, and from the Living Theatre, Performance Group and The People Show through to the Wooster Group, Mabou Mines, Forced Entertainment and DV8, developing from events and off-off-off Broadway performances to what can be visibly categorised as a strong postdramatic theatre at the beginning of the twenty-first century.

Even taking into consideration the small number of practitioners mentioned above, there are already encompassed within that number vastly differing approaches to theatre making. Lehmann himself acknowledges that there are many variations of postdramatic theatre, centred around the extent to which narrative 'is pushed back in postdramatic theatre – in degrees ranging from an "almost still dramatic" theatre to a form where not even the rudiments of fictive processes can be found any more.'¹ At one end of the

spectrum can be placed companies such as (Théâtre de) Complicite, who would seem to occupy the borderline between the dramatic and postdramatic theatres, the “almost still dramatic” theatre. At the other end can be positioned the work of auteur directors such as Kantor, Wilson and Foreman, in whose work the traditional narrative fiction of theatre is wholly indiscernible.

Whilst these changes in both form and process have been widely acknowledged and documented in relation to directing and acting in particular, to date there has been comparatively little theoretical consideration of the design implications of the development of devised and postdramatic theatre. The impact of these new processes of theatre making on the work of designers and how their own approach to making work has had to be adapted and altered has been little documented. The place of design within these modes of theatre making is important for the same reason that it is little documented: most design theory focuses on orthodox theatre production because it follows a more fixed process and structure, and is therefore easier to record and analyse. Within devised and postdramatic theatre there are a myriad of both forms and processes, and often each new process will generate some change in method or approach. The theatre making process as a whole is more difficult to document, and therefore identifying and documenting the place of design within that process is also more challenging. This means that for the drama or theatre studies student trying to research methods of devising performance, there is little or no theory on which they can draw to find a way into the design aspects of a devising process.

A number of companies that may be considered as being at the forefront of current devising practice, both in the UK and further afield, have published books documenting various aspects of their practice. In the United States, the Wooster Group has been one of the leading proponents of devised and postdramatic theatre for over thirty years, and a number of works have been published by and about them, including Andrew Quick’s 2007 publication *The Wooster Group Work Book*. This publication in particular seeks to address ways of documenting the Group’s work that reflects their practice, and a large part of the book is made up of photographs, choreography notation and other sketches of the Group’s work in progress.

Similarly, *Certain Fragments* and *Not Even a Game Anymore* are examples of just some of the work that exists documenting the work of Forced Entertainment in the UK. These texts, which not only document the work created by these companies but also chart some of the processes through which their work is created, are an invaluable resource to the student of devising, allowing otherwise impossible access to the rehearsal room practice of these companies and providing an insight into the way in which scenography can be utilised as a tool in the rehearsal room and become an integral aspect of writing a performance. However, of the five companies and practitioners included in this study it is

only Forced Entertainment that has a significant body of published material concerned specifically with the company, although the processes of both Complicite and Improbable are included in other works taking a more general view of contemporary British theatre making. (There is a case study of Improbable's process for *70 Hill Lane* in Gill Lamden's *Devising: A Handbook for Drama and Theatre Students*, for example, whilst Complicite is documented in works such as Jen Harvie's *Staging the UK*.)

Giving a broader overview of devised work, Heddon and Milling's recent work *Devising Performance: A Critical History* (2006) charts the development of devising over the last four decades of the twentieth century, but pays scant attention to the place of design process within the history and development of devising. Any consideration of design is focused on the changing aesthetic of the design product without consideration of the impact on the attendant processes and methodologies of these changing aesthetics. In *Devising Theatre: A Practical and Theoretical Handbook*, Alison Oddey attempts to provide a more detailed guide of how to approach devised theatre from a practical perspective, illustrated with examples from contemporary practice. Although Oddey considers space as an important element within the devising process, there is little attention paid to the process through which space may be shaped and manipulated through the devising process. The Model of Practice presented in Chapter 7 suggests that the set can be designed at a point in the process where neither scenario nor characters have been fully developed, reducing the possibility for the environment to change and develop alongside the construction of the performance and seemingly suggesting that the set can be designed in isolation, separate from the performers' rehearsal room process.

In *Devised and Collaborative Theatre - A Practical Guide* editors Bicat and Baldwin have drawn together writings by various theatre practitioners to provide a clearly delineated "How To" guide covering each element of the devising process, including a chapter covering Set Design written by Haibo Yu. This book is one of the few current publications that clearly and succinctly addresses not only the role of design within the devising process, but also how that role and process differs from the usual designer's process within the staging of literary texts. However, despite addressing this difference the writer still struggles to locate an appropriate vocabulary through which to articulate it, describing the alternative to designer as '*visual adviser, co-director and designer*' – a combination of roles that may be considered as representative of the function of the scenographer.

This lack of clear vocabulary through which to articulate the design process within devised and postdramatic theatre making may also contribute to the lack of theory and documentation available concerning this particular aspect of production. In *What is Scenography?* Howard acknowledges the development of a more collaborative process of designing for the theatre, which she terms as scenography, in order to differentiate this

collaborative mode of working from the more orthodox and isolated process of theatre design. Although concluding that 'Scenography is the seamless synthesis of space, text, research, art, actors, directors and spectators that contributes to an original creation',² this text is written specifically in relation to Howard's own work within the text-based theatre, work that essentially deals with the staging of texts, and it is therefore difficult to draw from it a model of practice that can be readily applied within the devising context.

In practical terms, there is little published material which specifically addresses the processes of scenography within devising, beyond chapters such as that by Haibo Yu in *Devised and Collaborative Theatre* discussed above. Indeed, research into theatre design and scenography is something of a recent phenomena, as discussed by Joslin McKinney in her essay 'Scenography: Practice, Research and Pedagogy' in the SBTD publication *Exploring Scenography*. Texts that are devoted in their entirety to scenography, or most usually design, are for the most part either historical surveys, such as Crabtree and Beudert's 1998 volume *Scenic Art for the Theatre – History, Tools and Techniques*, photographic collections that document the visual aesthetic of a performance at a given moment, such as the Society of British Theatre Designers exhibition catalogues *2D > 3D: Design for Theatre and Performance* (2002) and *Collaborators: UK Design of Performance 2003 - 2007* (2007) or Peter Docherty's *Design for Performance: from Diaghilev to the Pet Shop Boys* (1996), or step-by-step guides to building and painting scenery and props, such as Michael Holt's 1988 *Stage Design and Properties* or Francis Reid's *Designing for the Theatre* (1996).

On a more theoretical level, in *Theatre, Performance, Technology: The Development of Scenography in the Twentieth Century* Chris Baugh presents an historical overview of the changing role and nature of scenography, and the impact of new technologies on its development. Although Baugh heavily emphasises the importance of collaborative practice in the development of scenography for performance, he stops short of joining Howard in applying the term scenography to the process through which the product is created, although he makes clear distinction between the making of performance, and directing a play, and the differing stagecraft required by the two activities. Arnold Aronson's *Looking into the Abyss – Essays on Scenography* is also of some interest to the devising scenographer, as Aronson too addresses the issue of changing design practices and terminology and the implications of the term scenography in his introduction to the volume. The main body of work, however, is then largely concerned with the aesthetic of the scenographic product rather than the approach or methodologies of the scenographic process.

Gay McAuley's *Space in Performance – Making Meaning in the Theatre* presents a detailed consideration of the implications and functions of space as an entity in its own right. However, the emphasis is again placed on the performance rather than the process

through which it is developed, and is mainly concerned with the staging of literary texts rather than devised theatre. *The Potentials of Spaces: The Theory and Practice of Scenography and Performance*, a collection of essays edited by Alison Oddey and Christine White, is also mainly concerned with scenographic practice and aesthetic in performance, although essays such as Scott Palmer's 'A Place to Play' present interesting documentation of a specific process of computer-generated scenographic development, whilst Pamela Howard's 'Directors and Designers: Is there a different direction?' questions the accepted relationship between director and designer in the conventional theatre hierarchy.

For the student scenographer, texts such as Josef Svoboda's *The Secret of Theatrical Space* and Jarka Burian's *The Scenography of Josef Svoboda* offer a clear insight into the theories, working practices and performance aesthetics of one of a relatively small number of theatre design practitioners who have redesignated themselves as being scenographers. Useful too are texts such as Tony Davis' publication *Stage Design* which presents useful description of the work and processes of a selection of 12 designers and scenographers including Guy-Claude Francois, scenographer with Theatre du Soleil. Similarly, Natalie Rewa's *Scenography in Canada* offers a consideration of the work of a number of Canadian designers including Michael Levine, included in this study for his work with Complicite. However, here still the term scenography remains problematic – Rewa utilises the term, but Levine himself does not.

The intention of this thesis then is to consider the implications of changing theatre-making methodologies for designers and their design processes, investigate current design practice within British devised theatre, and ally this changed and distinct process of design with Howard's notion of scenography as collaborative design methodology. On mainland Europe theatre systems differ to those in the UK, with differing levels of government subsidy and funding and greater opportunities for, and understanding of, the inclusion of scenography as an integral aspect of the rehearsal process. 'Continental European theatre has a significantly different literary tradition – including, for example, German expressionism – that incorporates not only different dramatic features but different expressive *theatrical* effects as well. It is also a different *theatre* tradition that places stronger emphasis on multiple aspects of production.'³ Therefore, although the influence of European practitioners on the development of scenography as a theatre-making process will be considered in the early chapters of the thesis, the main focus of the thesis is concerned with UK-based theatre, where there is less clarity and greater inconsistency in the differentiation between design and scenography and the acknowledgement of the differing practices of scenography as a rehearsal room design process. 'British theatre's entrenched emphasis on its own literary history limits it by

neglecting theatre's material aspects of production, especially [...] directing, but also scenography, movement, and performers' bodies.'⁴

Part One of the thesis will present a historical overview of both design practice and the development of scenography in relation to devised and collaborative theatre making practice, whilst Part Two considers the possible application of a scenographic process within text-based, postdramatic and devised theatres. Part Three will then document the work of five companies or practitioners currently producing devised and/or postdramatic work in Britain. This documentation is based on a series of interviews with various members of the five companies, both performers and designers of all disciplines, focused on the use of design elements in the devising and rehearsal process and the place of scenography within the overall creative process. In the concluding chapter the various methodologies discussed are then utilised to suggest a set of processes or models for the development of scenography as a process within collaborative devising practice.

The methodology adopted for the thesis – to work from accounts of practice outwards – has been chosen to enable the work to remain focused on the basic principles and underlying working processes of the companies considered. Whilst close readings of published play-texts or performances and the analysis of images may be useful in a consideration of the intellectual and aesthetic content of a company's work, in this instance it is the *process* through which that content has been created that is under scrutiny, and neither a still image of a fixed moment in time nor a "finished" performance can necessarily provide a great insight into that underlying process. One of the prerequisites for the adoption of a scenographic process is the willingness of all those concerned to work in this manner, and through the utilisation of practitioner accounts as the primary source material for the thesis, it is possible to explore individual attitudes to collaborative scenography in the rehearsal room.

OVERVIEW OF THE THESIS

PART ONE

In order to fully comprehend the shift in scenic practice over the twentieth century that culminated in the emergence of scenography as collaborative practice, it is necessary to consider the history of design as decoration and its development through the work of a number of different practitioners. Chapter One will therefore provide an outline of the place of design within nineteenth century theatre and the way in which the role of the designer developed into the twentieth century. This chapter will explore the contributions of Appia and Craig to the revolution in stage design and the development of the role of designer within the theatrical hierarchy, and will also consider the contributions of other practitioners such as Georg Fuchs and Vsevolod Meyerhold to the changing design

practice during the first part of the twentieth century. The chapter will culminate with an appraisal of the unique working process of Caspar Neher and Bertolt Brecht, the way in which their working relationship can be seen as the beginning of scenography as process, and the importance of finding a terminology to differentiate between differing processes of theatre design, explored through a consideration of Neher's preference for the term *Bühnenbauer* over *Bühnenmaler* or *Bühnenbildner*.

Chapter Two is concerned with the continuing development of a collaborative design practice through the latter half of the twentieth century, considering the scenographic developments of practitioners such as Jerzy Grotowski, and his work on Poor Theatre; Eugenio Barba and his notion of the Third Theatre; and Josef Svoboda, and his preference for the term scenographer and the working process it implies.

PART TWO

Part Two of the thesis will consider the extent to which scenography as process can be seen to work across different modes of theatre. Chapter Three will consider the possibility for scenography to function as a process within text-based theatre, and the implications of the utilisation of a literary text for the scenographic process. Beginning with a consideration of both structuralist (Hornby) and poststructuralist (Barthes and Derrida) literary theory, this chapter addresses the notion of how rigidly or flexibly a text may be approached and interpreted into performance, and the possibility for a collaborative scenographic process in this context.

Chapter Four will introduce in more detail the notion of the postdramatic as posited by Hans-Thies Lehmann, and the area of devised theatre, and consideration will be given to the opportunities for collaborative scenography present in the varying forms and processes of these two differing approaches to theatre. It will be argued that it is within these two forms of theatre – the non-narrative, often visually-based content of postdramatic theatre and the inherently collaborative process of devised theatre – that scenography as process can most effectively contribute to theatre-making practice.

PART THREE

Part Three is concerned with the investigation of current design practice within contemporary British devised theatre. Chapter Five will introduce the five companies or practitioners chosen for inclusion in the research: Complicite, Fevered Sleep, Improbable, the director Katie Mitchell, and Forced Entertainment. In this chapter a brief overview of the history and development of each company will be given, along with a discussion of their work and the reasons for their inclusion in the research. This chapter addresses the nature of the work produced by each company, and where they can be considered as fitting along the postdramatic spectrum.

Chapter Six will consider the processes of devising of each of the companies, with sections addressing stimuli, sources and starting points; processes of creation; and documenting, structuring and shaping work. This processual overview will then be followed in Chapter Seven with a specific consideration of the role of scenography within each company's creative methodology, and how their practice may be considered as representing the notion of scenography as process. Included in this chapter are discussions of both visual and aural scenography.

In the concluding chapter, the commonalities drawn from the processes documented in Chapters Six and Seven are used to suggest a number of models or processes that may be utilised in developing the use of scenography as a process of collaborative theatre making. The models of process suggested cover a number of different approaches to making work, including the analogy of a theatre ensemble as jazz band, and the utilisation of games and toys in the devising process. This chapter also examines roles and relationships within the scenographic process, and the more fluid delineation of responsibilities within the collaborative ensemble. Finally, the chapter addresses how both existing practitioners and students approaching devising for the first time may apply these models to their own practice in order to facilitate a more fully integrated scenographic perspective in their work, and how this integrated design process may be usefully articulated through Howard's conception of scenography as process.

Note: throughout the thesis masculine gendered language is utilised to refer to the abstract scenographer. This does not imply a gender-bias to the thesis, but rather uses generic pronouns to avoid the clumsy and repetitive use of s/he and him/her.

PART 1

CHAPTER ONE

PIONEERS OF CHANGE

The twentieth century was one of radical development and change for the theatre, both inside and out, physical and intellectual. Buildings, stages, plays, playwrights, actors, audiences: all changed to some degree, reacting to the social and political upheavals of a world in turmoil. Dictatorships and militaristic regimes exterminated as political dissidents theatre makers who voiced unauthorised opinions, while political and social struggles of more democratic nations became the catalyst for a new generation of domestic dramas, documenting the class struggle and the restructuring of society in general in the post-First World War environment. In the UK, 'throughout the inter-war period a series of politically inspired and engaged theatre groups emerged through the Worker's Theatre Movement and, later, the Unity Theatre',¹ whilst on the European mainland directors such as Erwin Piscator 'sought to create a "proletarian drama," as opposed to merely producing standard plays for a working class audience'.² Vsevolod Meyerhold in Russia and Bertolt Brecht in Germany, (discussed below), were two of the most well-known exponents of political and agit-prop theatre, making theatre that acknowledged and addressed many of the issues facing the general populous of their countries, taking theatre out into halls and working men's clubs to reach the audiences for which the work was intended.

A restructured order also began to emerge within the hierarchy of theatre production. Under the nineteenth century star system, the theatre was run very much by the leading actors in each particular theatre, the director being little more than a stage-manager, though even that description exaggerates his role in today's terms. However, with the rise of the artistic director given overall responsibility for the coherence of a production, uniting physical performance and visual aesthetic, the scenery became less of a stand-alone piece of visual art displaying the talents of its creator without necessarily relating to any other part of the production, and more an integral, sometimes pivotal aspect of the production as a coherent whole.

Indeed, the role of the designer *per se* was largely introduced as a result of this change in the hierarchical structure of theatre making; until this point the design of scenery was often the responsibility of the scenic artist employed to execute the painting of the scenery. Many artistic decisions regarding both scenery and lighting were somewhat arbitrary, left to the judgement of the technician responsible for the realisation of the design. It is over the course of the twentieth century that set design, and more especially lighting and sound design, have come to be considered as specific roles in themselves, separate from the technical role of executing the designs.

It was not merely the restructuring of the theatrical hierarchy that affected the development of the role of the designer and scenographer through the twentieth century, however. The explosion of new, often non-naturalistic forms of theatre required new styles of design with which to stage these works, encompassing not only the development of styles related to the evolution of artistic movements such as Symbolism and Expressionism but also an increasing desire on the part of directors to explore and experiment with the theatre space as a whole, reconfiguring the relationship between performer and spectator.

The move from two-dimensional stage painting to three-dimensional plastic settings was a fundamental shift that deeply affected the work of the designer, changing his role from that of (fine) artist or painter to someone working with corporeal objects in space. This transition from art to space is also reflected in the development from designer to scenographer, indicating the shift from pictorial to plastic emphasis. The negotiation of the role of scenographer can be seen as heavily tied in with the development of new working methodologies, in turn a response to the emergence of new forms and styles. It can be argued that it is here that the distinction lies between designer and scenographer - those who consider themselves designers have retained a mode of working akin to that of the nineteenth century, creating a stand alone design in isolation from the rehearsal process, whilst those who consider themselves scenographers have adopted a more organic and collaborative method of working, utilising the actor as a three-dimensional object within the performance space.

In order to understand the present plethora of theatrical forms, methodologies and theories and the place of design, or scenography, within those forms and theories, it is necessary to consider where, how, and why the restructuring and revolution began and the ways in which theatrical reforms put into place then still shape the theatre which we are making today.

DESIGN IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

The nineteenth century was one of considerable change and development in scenic art in Britain. Until this point scenic art in Europe generally had been dominated by the Italian Baroque style of perspective painting, created on a series of wings and shutters run in grooves on the stage. However, beginning with the work of Philip De Louthembourg, who spanned the transition from the eighteenth to nineteenth centuries, scenic art in Britain especially began to move away from the fixed Baroque style and developed a new style rooted in the emerging Romanticism. De Louthembourg (1740 - 1812) was one of the first scenic artists to experiment with cut out scenery, exploring the aesthetic possibilities of asymmetry on the stage. With symmetrical series of wings no longer a prerequisite of

scenic art, theatres began to use counterweight flying systems for scenery as well as for special effects. Where the Baroque scenic art had consisted of coloured line drawings, so the Romantic scenic artists began to develop more illusionistic methods of painting, moving towards the eventual Naturalism that would take over the theatre by the end of the century.³

The scenic artist often created his own designs in the nineteenth century, and 'little thought was given to the unified expression of a play's meaning through the scenery in the way it is understood today. It was common practice that several scenic artists would work on one play, each creating in their own style without regard the overall style [sic].'⁴ With the emphasis strongly on the pictorial nature of theatre, the scenic artist could be as famous as the leading actors. Scenic spectacles were developed that made no use of the live actor at all, with dioramas being particularly popular.⁵

The advent of gas and then electric lighting allowed for vast developments in the realm of stage lighting, with the possibility to both colour and focus light for the first time, also exploited to full effect by De Louthembourg. Magic lanterns and phantasmagoria, early forms of image projector, were also popular, although they presented difficulties for use in theatres as they often required near darkness in order for the images to be visible, and at this point the lights remained bright in the auditorium as well as on stage.

Through the nineteenth century the increasing preoccupation with illusion painting and painted images of real locations as scenic backdrops, in conjunction with a general interest in archaeology and historical accuracy, inevitably led to the development of Naturalism in the theatre and the advent of fourth wall theatre, with 'the first attempt at literal place description in the form of a box setting in 1832.'⁶ Although built-out scenery had already begun to make an appearance, with three-dimensional scenic elements sculpted from papier-mâché used in conjunction with flat painted scenery, by the end of the nineteenth century with the arrival of Naturalism came the arrival of the real object on stage. Furniture was no longer painted onto flat canvas, but the three-dimensional object itself was brought into the theatre.⁷ However, for some critics neither Romanticism nor Naturalism were suitable for the stage. Romanticism and its two-dimensional painting failed to take account of the three dimensions of the actor, whilst Naturalism and its cluttered, "slice-of-life" stage failed to take account of the inherent theatricality of theatre.

REVOLUTION IN THEORY – APPIA AND CRAIG

It is widely acknowledged that the scenic revolution of the twentieth century began with the work and theories of Adolphe Appia and Edward Gordon Craig. The writings of these two practitioners can be seen to have influenced theatre on a global scale,

particularly the work of the Russian and German avant-garde and through them other early twentieth century practitioners.

ADOLPHE APPIA (1862 -1928)

Appia's main concern with reforming scenic presentation was with the use of light and its possibilities for the creation of atmosphere. For him the actor was central to the notion of theatre and all else must be made to serve him and his physical form. Light was the key to successful staging, in tandem with an outright rejection of traditional stage painting. This two-dimensional theatre art Appia saw as being absolutely irreconcilable with the three-dimensional form of the actor, an illusionistic attempt merely to represent objects that could not be shown in solid form. 'The principle of illusion produced by paintings on vertical flats, and the illusion produced by the three-dimensional and living body of the actor, are entirely contradictory.'⁸ He believed this method should therefore be jettisoned in favour of solidly constructed sets which would allow for the artistic use of light, rather than merely the illumination of painted chiaroscuro effects. 'Light, no longer forced to illuminate the painted flats, can radiate, carrying form into space, filling it with living colour and the limitless variations of an everchanging atmosphere.'⁹

The hierarchical order in which Appia saw the elements of theatre had at its top 'the actor presenting the drama', followed by 'space in three dimensions, in the service of the actor's form'; and lastly '*light* giving life to each'.¹⁰ For Appia, a simple non-representational setting in three-dimensions (which allowed for action on varying levels) was the ideal solution; adding colour to a scene through light allowed the creation of atmosphere, reducing the need for painted replication of specific locations.

In his work on the Wagnerian music-dramas, and later in collaboration with Jacques Dalcroze at the Institute in Hellerau, Appia was the first to notate a lighting plot as we would recognise it today, using colour and intensity of light to illustrate the atmosphere and emotional plot and subtext of a performance. Important not only to his work but to the continuing development of theatre, Appia never attempted to create illusionistic theatre convincing the audience of the reality of a world on stage which continued beyond the boundaries of their visibility, but acknowledged the actuality of the space of the theatre and invited the audience to create their own interpretation. Essential to his theory was the notion that audience should be brought into closer contact with the performers, and encouraged to use their imaginations. According to Walther Volbach, 'Appia was, no doubt, one of the two dominating theatre artists and certainly the greatest theoretician of the modern theatre.'¹¹

EDWARD GORDON CRAIG (1872 - 1966)

The other of those dominating theatre artists was Edward Gordon Craig. Like Appia, he determined to simplify the nature of scenic presentation and bring about a more

equal balance between the various elements of theatrical presentation to bring forth a coherent whole. In these elements he included the performer himself, whom Craig considered to be no more important than any other component of the performance, frequently advocating the use of the Über-marionette. Initially a determined petition for the use of almost life-size wooden marionettes, Craig later retracted this theory, claiming that he was not calling for the abandonment of the human actor but rather was aiming for a new breed of performer, a dispassionate representation of the human figure that could present a character without living it, evoking emotion without experiencing it. 'The Über-marionette will not compete with life – rather will it go beyond it. Its ideal will not be the flesh and blood but rather the body in trance – it will aim to clothe itself with a death-like beauty while exhaling a living spirit.'¹²

Aside from his demotion of the importance of the actor, Craig was in many ways working simultaneously along similar lines to Appia, although without the same preoccupation with the music-dramas of Wagner. Craig too was working towards an ideal of non-representational, three-dimensional scenic presentation, creating different environments through the use of light and colour. Nothing should be included on stage that was superfluous and that did not serve a purpose - again, the spectator's imagination was of key importance to the performance, allowing him to 'fill in the gaps'.

Craig believed that the scene should express the ideas of the play, create the mood, and serve the acting and movement. In his London productions, he eliminated not only all the merely decorative elements, but the whole notion of a realistic representation of place and time. Instead, [...] he *suggested* time and place, ideas and moods, and created the illusion of a distinct level of reality.¹³

Craig's work eventually led him to the designs presented in *Scene*, published in 1923 but containing sketches and designs developed over the preceding two decades. These sketches were not intended for a specific performance but as a general scenic environment that could be adapted to any script. *Scene* consisted of designs for a kinetic stage consisting of three-dimensional 'cubes' which could move vertically as well as horizontally, creating varying volumes of space on the stage. The closest Craig came to realising these designs consisted of a number of large screens in neutral tones, which could be moved about variously to create new formations denoting new locations, and could be coloured through light to create atmosphere.¹⁴

Due to a lack of financial and material resources much of Craig's ground-breaking work remained as theory rather than practice. However, much of that theory is as forward thinking as Appia's prescience concerning the possibilities of lighting with modern technological advances, with Craig not only advocating an über-director who would have knowledge of all the theatre arts and have control over all aspects of production, but also foreseeing the possibility that the theatre would no longer be reliant upon the playwright but could create pieces of its own art through the abilities and talents of the performers

and technicians. In his dialogues *The Art of the Theatre* Craig states that 'the theatre must not forever rely upon having a play to perform, but must in time perform pieces of its own art.'¹⁵ He expands on this in a letter to Ellen Terry, 1908 -

I believe that the great actors possess the power of creating pieces of work without assistance from anyone else; that is to say, I believe that you, or one of the others, could, taking some theme or some two themes - let us say the idea of meeting and the idea of parting - out of these things, by movement, scene, and voice, put before the audience all the different meanings of all the joys and sorrows that are wrapped up in the idea of meeting and the idea of parting.¹⁶

REVOLUTION IN PRACTICE – 2-D TO 3-D

Appia and Craig were not the only practitioners at the turn of the twentieth century to realise that the theatre was in dire need of reform. Also significant in the development of theatre in the early twentieth century was Georg Fuchs, whose works *Die Schaubühne der Zukunft* (1905) and *Die Revolution des Theaters* (1909) proved influential not just on German theatre but all over Europe and Russia, as were the productions at the Munich Künstlertheater of which he is widely regarded as the founder. Initially a theatre critic, Fuchs was an interesting blend of both director and designer, inaugurating the Munich Künstlertheater in collaboration with Max Littman, an architect, and Fritz Erler, a designer. Fuchs' prime concern was for the actor above all things, and heavily influenced by Goethe, he proposed scenic reforms which would combine the talents of the scenic artist with those of the architect to create a more three-dimensional environment.

Fuchs advocated the use of the relief stage, a stage much narrower than those in use contemporaneously. This stage was divided into three areas, the proscenium, middle scene and back stage, allowing separate areas for the performer and painted scenery. As much as possible, Fuchs advocated the use of a stylised scenic environment reflecting the inner nature of the play, and used coloured cycloramas instead of traditional painted backdrops. Although his focus was on the physicality of the performer and the most effective methods of making him visible to the audience, the relief stage with which he experimented was perhaps too two-dimensional for a theatre attempting to break free from the constraints of flat perspective painting.¹⁷

Whilst the experiments in staging at the Munich Künstlertheater were somewhat brief, Fuchs' theoretical writings have had a more far-reaching and longer lasting impact. In his two books, Fuchs argued that theatre was not merely a synthesis of other art forms, but an art form in its own right which could then be augmented by the addition of other art forms. In line with Appia, Fuchs considered the actor as the most important element, that which makes a drama come alive, and placed increasing emphasis on the importance of light for the creation of atmosphere. 'Light is, and will continue to be, the most important factor in the development of stage design.'¹⁸

Fuchs was, alongside Appia and Craig, a strong activist against naturalism. But he was also strongly against the idea of detached-from-life symbolism and aestheticism, preferring a simplification and distillation of the elements *needed* to present performance - 'stage design should be based on the functional requirements of the theatre, not upon abstract theories of aesthetics, not upon historical erudition nor upon pleasure in the reproduction of antiquity. Everything should be simple as to color, line and architecture.'¹⁹ Fuchs argued that stage naturalism was an oxymoronic impossibility, for a stage set could never be anything but a stage set no matter how 'real' its detail, and therefore invited stylisation as an alternative mode of presentation.

THE WORK OF VSEVOLOD MEYERHOLD

Whilst Copeau, Piscator and others were developing a variety of new techniques and forms in Europe, similar developments were happening concurrently in Russia. Vsevolod Meyerhold (1874 - 1938), one of the most influential experimental Russian directors whose experiments with Constructivism were landmark, was largely unknown by his contemporaries outside of Russia. However, as a stage-director who insisted on control over the happenings on stage, Meyerhold was the first in the theatrical institution as it was to propose the role of artistic direction as we know it today, wresting control from the star performers of the day.

He clearly synthesized the ideas of Craig, Appia and Fuchs as no other theatre director in the world did, and he carried the theory of Craig's über-marionettes to its apotheosis. Indeed, it was a weakness of his theatre, for in the end every actor and every role was but a reflection of the puppet master. Meyerhold was the *régisseur par excellence*, the director, the dictator.²⁰

Meyerhold's groundbreaking work developed out of that of Stanislavski, who in 1905 asked Meyerhold to set up his own research-based theatre company to experiment with the new and developing theatrical forms. From this beginning, Meyerhold's work grew to encompass the new ideas of Symbolism, Expressionism and Constructivism, mirroring closely the development of styles in both literature and art. 'Nobody realises that instead of rebuilding the stage (a most expensive undertaking), it is the fundamental principle of the naturalistic theatre which needs to be broken down. It is this principle alone which has caused the theatre to commit such absurdities.'²¹

Meyerhold experimented with every aspect of performance - the stage space (including early experiments with Fuchs' bas-relief stage), the scenic architecture (including attempts to break down the proscenium arch barrier), lighting, sound, and the actor's performance style. His work under the pseudonym 'Dr Dapertutto' in large part focused on the use of the human body as performance tool, placing an increasing emphasis on the physicality of his actors and the rudiments he considered lacking in the current training of actors - dexterity, precision, balance and heightened expressiveness.

He also developed theories regarding the use of mask, not the half-mask of the *commedia dell'arte* but a metaphorical mask, a style of acting using the entire body to create an external, physical manifestation of a character from which the actor himself remains emotionally and psychologically detached. These ideas clearly mirror those of Craig, and are also reflected in Brecht's notion of *Verfremdung*, as discussed below.

In his work at the Imperial theatres, Meyerhold focused more on the scenic environment. Working within a more conventional theatre context, his primary concern was with the establishment of harmony between the painted flats, three-dimensional surfaces, and the human figure. 'Usually, with the construction of scenic flats and "practicables" the stage-designer's work is finished. But beyond that, it is important to establish harmony between the surface on which the actor's figures move and the figures themselves – not to mention harmony between the figures and the painted flats.'²² He firmly believed that if an artist was to be responsible for the stage design they must also be an architect - neither art nor architecture alone encompassed all the skills necessary for the stylisation and harmonisation of the stage picture.²³ Meyerhold too, then, subscribed to Craig's ideal of an *über-director* who would control every aspect of the performance, preferably with detailed knowledge of every art form which contributed to the whole.

One of the most striking features of Meyerhold's scenography was his use of three-dimensional forms. In his early Soviet period he experimented widely with Constructivism, which made muted reappearances throughout the final years of his life, and from his very early career through to his last Soviet productions there is a visible through line of the use of three-dimensional constructions. Also striking was his use of the human body as a plastic element of the stage picture. He was, quite literally, the sculptor of moving pictures in which he used a synthesis of human bodies and stage constructions to realise visual compositions illustrating the essence of a text; more often than not this was the unspoken sub-text as he interpreted it, and not the dialogue that accompanied or followed the visual image.

In one sense it would be possible to consider Vsevolod Meyerhold as the father of modern scenography. If one considers the arguments put forward by Craig for a single architect of the stage picture it can be argued that, at least in the productions for which he created the stage plan as well as directing, Meyerhold represented this new breed of hybrid directors-cum-designers. And indeed he encouraged those designers with whom he collaborated to discover new methods of working themselves, to step away from the traditional and find solutions that better fit the problem. However, it could also be argued that it is difficult for Meyerhold to be considered as the instigator of a new process of scenic design, (other than subsumed within the role of the *régisseur par excellence*)

being, after all, a director, not a scenic designer. In *What is Scenography*, Pamela Howard asserts that it was in fact Caspar Neher who 'was in retrospect the progenitor of what is now understood as scenography.'²⁴

CASPAR NEHER: PROGENITOR OF SCENOGRAPHY?

Brecht and Neher sitting next to each other at rehearsal. [...] They are rehearsing 'by interjections'. Each interjection is prefixed by Neher or Brecht naming its originator. 'Neher thinks . . .', 'Besson thinks . . .', 'Brecht thinks . . .', 'Monk thinks . . .'. The interjection is listened to, then tested. If a detail works, then Brecht giggles with pleasure and Neher gives him a look of amusement; if it doesn't, the next interjection follows; if the idea was a mistaken one, but the best that can be thought up for a moment, then a profound silence sets in.

[...]

Nearly all the blocking of the Berliner Ensemble productions derived directly from Neher's sketches. If there was a particular scene, or a particular moment within a scene – a 'nodal point' as Brecht and Neher would call it – that had no sketch, or if Neher for once was not there (a rare occurrence in the first years of the Berliner Ensemble), then that rehearsal might well be broken off. As for instance when the last scene but one of *The Tutor* was being rehearsed: 'Engagement in a Snowstorm'. This had to appear as an idyll, amiable at first but gradually undermined by malice.

On stage, a large number of actors, glasses in their hands, drinking a toast (yes, but how?). Projected behind them, falling snow. Brecht rehearsed somewhat indecisively, asked first one then another of his aides to try blocking the scene, looked helplessly at the actors on stage, who looked equally helplessly down at him, then finally said: 'It's no use, we'll have to wait till Cas gets here'.²⁵

So Egon Monk described the working relationship of Bertolt Brecht and Caspar Neher. Both Brecht's writings and his methods of staging had an important influence on the evolution of the theatre through the latter half of the twentieth century and on the subsequent development of scenic practice, space, and aesthetics, due in part at least to his close collaboration with Neher. The collaborative co-direction that occurred when the two men worked together led not only to their development of the style of Epic design referred to as Selective Realism (as discussed below), but also brought about a new perception of the place of the designer (or scenographer) and his work within the process of staging theatre.

The question of process as well as product can be seen as an inevitable one to have arisen out of the turbulent atmosphere of the theatrical reforms of the first half of the twentieth century. With both the emergence of new styles and forms and the re-ordering of the theatre-making hierarchy, for some theatre makers the stage space became the equivalent of another actor in the ensemble. With space, shape, colour and light afforded greater significance within the performance product, it became necessary to find a process through which these spatio-visual elements could be created *alongside* the actors' performance, rather than in isolation from it, and a new, collaborative design process was born. However, other theatre makers continued to utilise the more orthodox

methodological structures, with design created in isolation often prior to the actors' rehearsal process. It is this duality of collaborative and non-collaborative design that often remains unarticulated, and which therefore recommends the consideration of scenography as process.

We should conceive of the making of theatre (the rehearsal process) as the constructing of a machine for performance: a machine that naturally includes the physical elements of scenography – settings, costumes, wigs, make-up, properties, furniture – but also a machine that includes the less tangible elements of performance such as idea, tension, repose, movement, light, sound and time. Since all these elements and more operate variously and concurrently during a performance, the *processes* of their creation must surely reflect this.²⁶

THE EPIC AESTHETIC AND SELECTIVE REALISM

Brecht and his collaborators stepped away from the traditional and found their own solutions to the problems of staging both Brecht's own work and other play texts. One of Brecht's main objectives in his theatre work was the use of the *Verfremdungseffekt*. Developed in Russia as *ostranenie*, this idea originated in the ancient traditional theatres of the East, and was influential on both Meyerhold and Brecht. (Both witnessed the same performance of Mei Lan-fang and his Chinese actors in Moscow in 1935) The fundamental concept of *Verfremdung*, or *ostranenie*, crudely translated into English as "alienation", is not so much an alienation of the audience but a *disallowing* of the suspension of disbelief. Brecht did not want a passive audience for his theatre, but rather an audience that was stimulated to engage intellectually with what was being presented on the stage. In order to achieve this aim Brecht had to train his actors in a style of performance that demonstrated characters, simultaneously allowing an actor to represent and comment upon the character and his situation, rather than using the more common naturalistic acting in which an actor 'became' their character.

In order to facilitate this new style of performance Brecht also developed a new stage aesthetic in partnership with his good friend and stage designer Caspar Neher. This new aesthetic included elements that have since come to be considered Brechtian 'trademarks', such as the use of the half-height curtain to divide the playing space, and the use of projections, screens and placards to create a theatre of montage.

What Neher had contributed specifically was, first of all, the flimsy, half-height curtain for scene changes within an act, [...] along with the visible light fittings and the accompanying wires. Then for the 'little' *Mahagonny* [...] he made a boxing-ring stage of unpainted wood, outside which non-actors could stand informally, and accompanied each song with projections that combined written comments with satirical drawings. [...] For *The Threepenny Opera* he put the small orchestra on stage in front of an ornate organ and rigged up two screens overhead for the projection of the song titles and occasional sententious phrases by Brecht. From these particular innovations came a number of principles which Brecht incorporated in his theatrical theories, with which they clearly accorded: the 'separation of the elements', with words, music and images each telling the 'epic'

story in its own way; the 'literisation of the theatre' by use of inscriptions; the visibility of the scene changes and the sources of light.²⁷

Brecht himself described Neher's approach to designing in "The Fourth Night" of *The Messingkauf Dialogues*:

These small objects which he puts in the actors' hands – weapons, instruments, purses, cutlery, etc. – are always authentic and will pass the closest inspection; but when it comes to architecture – i.e. when he builds interiors or exteriors – he is content to give indications, poetic and artistic representations of a hut or a locality.²⁸

According to Eric Bentley, 'spectators were often surprised how drastic the logic was. For example: if the action, though set in a room, makes no use of walls, you present a room without walls. Not naturalism, but Brecht called it realism.'²⁹ John Willett elaborates, 'the method can be called one of Selective Realism, aiming to provide only what was directly needed by the play and the actors.'³⁰

Despite these credited innovations, it has been argued that there is little in Neher's work that can be considered uniquely innovative enough to earn him the distinction of being considered the father of modern scenography in terms of a new movement in the aesthetics of design; many of the scenic devices used by Neher and Brecht were simultaneously being developed and used by practitioners in other parts of Europe, particularly Russia. Indeed, according to John Fuegi, 'so complete would become the destruction of even our memory of the Russian avant-garde that stage techniques developed by Meyerhold in Russia before Brecht was in his teens, are now imprinted in our memory as Brechtian theory.'³¹ This being the case, it is possible to interpret Howard's assertion in a different manner; that is, that it was Neher's collaborative practice with Brecht that was the foundation of a new *process* of scenic practice that we now refer to as scenography.

THE BRECHT-NEHER WORKING PROCESS

The working relationship that developed between Neher and Brecht was something new amongst theatre practitioners of the time. The profoundly collaborative method by which the two men went about their theatre making together led to a dependence on the presence of Neher for rehearsals to take place; similarly, Neher did not try to force his designs from pure aesthetics but relied upon the physical forms of the actors in rehearsal to guide and inspire him, relating the objects he placed in a space to the human interaction which inhabited that space.

This more integral mode of designing for theatre performance changed the hierarchical structure of the creative team. Neher became a permanent feature in Brecht's rehearsal room, allowing the movements of the performers themselves in rehearsal to inspire his designs for any production. In *The Messingkauf Dialogues* Brecht recalled that

'we often began rehearsing with no knowledge of the set design',³² and that 'in his designs our friend always starts with "the people themselves", and "what is happening to or through them". He provides no "décor", frames and backgrounds, but constructs the space for "people" to experience something in.'³³

Throughout Neher and Brecht's collaboration there occurred an intense overlap of roles. As described by Monk, Brecht often struggled to begin a rehearsal without Neher's presence and his sketches of the characters and possible groupings of them on stage. Neher 'seemed to work with Brecht as with nobody else, acting less as a designer in the conventional sense than as a co-director, almost a co-author, working through a visual medium to attain something more than a purely visual result.'³⁴ In essence, Brecht was playwright, Neher designer, and between them they fulfilled the function of director. In some instances, this partnership would be expanded to a triumvirate as they worked with the composer Kurt Weill, or another of Brecht's collaborators.

Neher and Brecht's developed practice of creative collaboration in making theatre exemplifies a practical scenography standing side by side with a practical dramaturgy. As the text of performance slowly emerged, component parts within the overall machine were built up by confrontations between actors and scenographic material.³⁵

Brecht's main need for several collaborators would seem to stem from his notion that theatre should in fact be the antithesis of Wagner's *Gesamtkunstwerk*. Each individual element - text, music, scene - should be separated out and allowed to tell the epic story in its own way. The aim of the designer was to organise the space in such a way as to facilitate the progression of the drama and the movement of the actors, while simultaneously adding to and commenting upon the content of the performance.

Noticeably, the change in Neher's practice was most visible in his work with Brecht; in his work for the large opera houses of Germany and further afield, he continued to work in a more traditional mode, in partnership with the director but away from the rehearsal room and performers. This would seem to indicate that, at least at that time, the nature of scenography as a collaborative theatre-making process was only suitable for working within a specific mode of theatre, an experimental, smaller scale type of theatre which allowed for change in both product and process.

What kind of stage designs has Caspar Neher made for other playwrights? Often, very good ones, but in what way? Either in his Brecht style or in some established mode that would not mark off his work from that of any other eminent modernist. The "originality" of Neher is concentrated in the work he did for Brecht. Since that work was inspired by Brecht, it is clear that the word originality is in need of redefinition.³⁶

Eric Bentley's comments raise an interesting question about the inseparability of Neher's work from Brecht's, and consequently how much one can be credited with the development of modern scenography without taking into account his collaboration with the other.

If a broad view of scenography is taken, encompassing every visual aspect of the performance including the actor and the lighting, then Brecht can indeed be considered as influential as Neher in scenographic terms. It was the process of neither one nor the other individually, but the two together that was so innovative, and that can be seen to contain the beginnings of what can be considered as scenography as process. 'The ability for director, writer and scenographer to consider all aspects of theatre without following an established theatre etiquette of "areas of responsibility" lies at the heart of the collaboration between Brecht and Neher.'³⁷

BÜHNENMALER, BÜHNENBILDNER OR BÜHNENBAUER?

The necessity of having a suitable vocabulary through which to acknowledge and express the subtleties of scenic design and scenography is an important one, that can be traced back as far as Neher and his search for a term that accurately reflected his collaborative process and the three-dimensional emphasis of his work. Neher disliked the terms *Bühnenmaler* (stage painter) and *Bühnenbildner* (stage picture maker), preferring the term coined by Brecht to describe his friend's working process, *Bühnenbauer*, stage builder. In a letter to Brecht, complaining about an enquiry about '*Das realistische Bühnenbild*', or the realistic stage picture, Neher wrote,

Mightn't it be better to think a bit about the word itself? No other language talks about the 'stage picture'. *Scenografico* or *scenografica* is drawing the elevation of the stage. *Décor* is something else again, and comes a lot closer. *Stage designer* means a stage draughtsman, but no *picture*.

The words 'picture' and 'stage' are incompatible, except perhaps in the ballet. A picture is never realistic, the stage is always realistic. That's why I maintain that the 'realistic stage picture' is a nonsense.³⁸

From this letter, which is unfortunately undated, it is apparent that the term scenography had not yet been assimilated into the German language to describe the more collaborative practice through which Neher and Brecht worked. It is however now utilised in both France and Spain to refer to what is translated into English as Stage Design, and German as *Bühnenbild*.³⁹ It is also apparent that Neher was vehemently opposed to a vocabulary that defined his art in two dimensions (stage painter or picture maker), insisting on a term that recognised the three dimensions of what he did. In a sense, then, Neher's distinction between the two dimensions of the *Bühnenmal* and *Bühnenbild*, and his own three dimensional *Bühnenbau*, can be seen as representative of the distinction between design and scenography; in one an emphasis on the illustrative, pictorial, in the other on the representational, plastic.

CHANGING SCENES

One of the most essential reforms to take place early on in the twentieth century was then the move from two-dimensional to three-dimensional scenery as advocated by Appia and Craig. According to Theodor Komisarjevsky, 'Gordon-Craig and George Fuchs were, after Appia, the most important innovators who advocated three-dimensional settings'.⁴⁰ But there were a number of other practitioners whose experimentation with stage space impacted on the re-evaluation of and development of stage design through the twentieth century. Lugué-Poë, Copeau, Reinhardt, Piscator and Leopold Jessner were all practitioners whose use of space made them influential in the development of modern theatre. Andre Antoine must also be credited in some way with the instigation of reform; whilst his excessive naturalism was the cage from which many scenic reformers were trying to escape, the transition from painted furniture and even people to the use of three-dimensional 'real' objects on the stage was an important step in making the stage a more suitable environment for the actor.⁴¹

In the last 60 years, [1873 – 1933] the change from the perspective painted decorative scenery has been extraordinary. Having passed through the waves of various *-isms* – Naturalism, Symbolism, Stylism and Expressionism, the advance-guard theatrical workers in Europe came to Constructive and Synthetic-Realistic methods of production and completely destroyed the decorative principles of the painters of illusionistic perspective scenery.⁴²

Three-dimensional scenic space quickly became a popular innovation amongst a generation of theatre practitioners who were beginning to acknowledge the limits of the stage in its contemporaneous form and look for suitable alternatives. Taken for granted in the theatre today, three-dimensional scenery was one of the most significant developments for a theatre in which it was usual for furniture and even extra people to be painted onto the flat scenic canvas. Lee Simonson documents that 'in 1890, Antoine exclaimed, "We are still using ridiculous back-drops which have no atmosphere or depth, on which we do not hesitate to paint furniture or even a staircase within three metres of the footlights".'⁴³ whilst Fuerst and Hume, on seeing the work of Léon Bakst in the theatre, found it 'a little astonishing to see Ida Rubenstein enter the scene on the stage level instead of using the painted stairway of the back-drop which was hanging behind her'.⁴⁴

The introduction of three-dimensional scenic components was crucial to the development of the modern stage for two reasons. Firstly, the rejection of flat perspective painting and the provision of three-dimensional objects with which the three-dimensional performer could interact allowed for a new kind of realism – not that of the illusionistic but patently unreal painted scene, complete with painted chiaroscuro, but the realism of a human being interacting with real three-dimensional objects and light. Secondly, the removal of the painted perspective scenery freed the stage from the necessary end-on,

proscenium arch convention, opening the way for experiments with various shapes of stage and auditoria and the spectator-performer relationship.

The use of three-dimensional forms spread widely across genres and forms of theatre, ranging from the minutely detailed furniture-filled Chekovian interiors created by Stanislavski and Nemirovich-Danchenko at the Moscow Art Theatre (founded 1898) to the non-representational Constructivist structures utilised by Meyerhold. Experiments with static architectural settings, notably by Jacques Copeau at the Théâtre du Vieux-Colombier (founded 1913), whereby a single construction of rostra, ramps and steps was made to fit every production with the addition of props and light, were somewhat unsuccessful; there were a finite number of permutations of light and set dressings with which to invoke new locations and settings, after which the stage became restrictive and immutable and could offer nothing new to its audience. Other experiments with alternate modes of staging were more successful, although according to Denis Bablet,

While the architecture of the Vieux Colombier proved to be too rigid, the idea of a permanent stage (*dispositif fixe*) dominated the scenographer's thinking for many theatrical productions of the twentieth century. It became apparent that each play required its own setting and that predetermined architectures were not always suitable, especially when a new formula for decorating was required.⁴⁵

Many practitioners experimented with the relationship between spectator and performer, beginning with the removal of the proscenium arch and the footlights and culminating with the development of thrust, traverse and in-the-round stages and auditoria, capable of transforming from one stage shape to another.

FROM REPRODUCTION TO REPRESENTATION

Almost hand-in-hand with the shift from two-dimensional to three-dimensional scenery came a move away from the facsimile reproduction of life on the stage, as exemplified by Stanislavski and the MAT, towards a more representational approach. While for some practitioners and their theatres a lack of scenery was born out of financial necessity, in large part this development was inextricably linked with the parallel developments in both the fine arts and playwriting. The appearance of Symbolism, Surrealism and Expressionism during the early part of the twentieth century all helped to develop a concept of theatre and the stage as a place in which a part could represent the whole, and an object could represent something else entirely.

Director of the Théâtre de l'Oeuvre 1893-99, Aurélien Lugné-Poë was a forerunner in the presentation of Symbolism on the stage, the first director to present the plays of Maeterlinck. Maeterlinck also assisted him in the Symbolist presentation of other authors such as Ibsen and Strindberg. Lugné-Poë's was a poor theatre out of financial necessity, but 'he demonstrated how much more an actor can suggest than he actually says, and how little the stage needs to furnish for the spectator to picture a world in his

imagination'.⁴⁶ In his presentation of Symbolist writings and performance style, Lugné-Poë was a decade ahead of Craig, Reinhardt and Copeau, but it was not until these other practitioners discovered for themselves the possibilities presented to them by the new Symbolism that it became widely put into practice on the stage.

Whether from financial necessity, artistic conviction or revolutionary zeal, the shift from naturalistic reproduction painting to both two- and three-dimensional representational settings was an important one for the development of the scenographer. Though none of the practitioners above individually accomplished a comprehensive shift in practice, through tracking the changes made to the separate elements of performance – innovations in lighting by Appia, kinetic staging by Craig, sculpture of the human body by Meyerhold, the collaborative mode of working pioneered by Brecht and Neher – it is possible to identify a common trend towards an aesthetic shift in practice that laid the groundwork for design as a collaborative rehearsal-room based theatre-making practice.

Whilst no common coherent language of practice was forthcoming through which this pioneering work could be disseminated to others, nonetheless fundamental aesthetic issues had been raised which could not be ignored by successive generations of practitioners. The necessity for placing the body of the human performer in a setting of three dimensions placed new demands on the designer/scenographer for an interaction with the rehearsal process and negotiation with the director of how performers could be sculpted within the space. With this need for a close involvement in the rehearsal process came political implications for the hierarchical power structures within theatre. The ultimate authority of the director was challenged and a more democratic mode of working pursued, reflecting the changing balance of power in the broader social context of the time.

CHAPTER TWO

CONTINUING DEVELOPMENT AND THE EMERGENCE OF SCENOGRAPHY

Despite the first half of the twentieth century being a time of exploration and experimentation in the theatre, it was the combination of innovative experimentation in various art forms, including theatre, after the end of the Second World War that initiated the plethora of theatre and performance styles and forms present at the turn of the twenty-first century. At the turn of the twentieth, the theatre of the director was only just wresting control from the star-system of actor-managers, and there was therefore little room for contemplation of other structures or hierarchies within the theatre. It was only Edward Gordon Craig who seemed open to the future possibility of collectively-created theatre. There remained (and indeed still does into the twenty-first century) a West End/Broadway tradition which represented a direct descendent from the nineteenth century Theatre of Spectacle, alongside which came the development of the 'kitchen sink' plays of Naturalism and the dramas of Symbolism and Expressionism. Even so, the newly developing genres and styles were still largely dependent on the written text, and produced within the stable context of director-led theatre; although various experimenters and would-be reformers tried to explore new approaches to theatre making, for the most part they remained within the boundaries of a production hierarchy, and maintaining the sanctity of the written text experimented more with form and content than process. As Hans-Thies Lehmann describes it,

the undoubtedly deep caesura caused by the historical avant-gardes around 1900, despite their revolutionary innovations, largely maintained the essence of the 'dramatic theatre'. The newly emerging theatre forms continued to serve the – now modernized – representation of textual worlds; they plainly sought to save the text and its truth from a disfigurement through a theatre practice that had become conventional; only within limits did they question the traditional model of theatrical representation and communication.¹

It was only really with the explosion of experimentation that occurred within music, art, live art and performance in the 1950s and 60s, particularly in post-war America at institutions such as Black Mountain College, that a real plethora of forms began to appear, and boundaries between art forms and practitioners began to blur and disappear.

SCENOGRAPHY AND THE EXPERIMENTAL THEATRE

Many of the theatre companies and other groups (such as the music group Fluxus) who began to form emanated from centres of experimentation such as Black Mountain, where like-minded individuals met and formed groups to make the type of work they felt needed to be made, finding their own content, form and

process. Each new form or group who emanated from this period of experimentation in some sense demanded, and answered their own demand by creating, a new scenography and scenographic process which suited the particular aim and content of the work.

The processes by which fringe and experimental theatre was created became as diverse as the number of companies making work – each found their own particular method and structure according to the work they were creating and the purpose driving them. The developing postmodern theatre, performance art and other new genres and forms allowed for a greater use of techniques such as collage, pastiche, and the inclusion of multi-media technology. Work became freer in its form, and therefore became freer in its creative process. The abolition of a strict form and structure to which a performance text should adhere, and indeed the abolition of the need for a text altogether, opened the way for a jettisoning of strict rehearsal room hierarchy and the development of a collective creative process focused around the creation of an entirely new piece of work, the purpose of which was often unique and highly personal to the company.

Discussed below are two pertinent examples of the development of scenography as a collaborative, rehearsal-based theatre making process. Firstly, the Polish director Jerzy Grotowski, whose theatre work in the 1960s was focused around the removal of all surplus elements in the creation of a suitable aesthetic for his physically vigorous style of theatre. Secondly, the Italian director Eugenio Barba, whose treatise concerning the nature of the Third Theatre identifies a form of theatre in which scenography as collaborative process is an expected part of the social experience of creating theatre.

GROTOWSKI AND POOR THEATRE

Despite Grotowski's orthodox training through the state theatre school, from the outset he ran the Theatre of 13 Rows in Opole as a laboratory theatre, concerned with experimentation and the exploration of the actor-spectator relationship. Working in Communist Poland in the 1960s, the company had only the smallest of state subsidies with which to maintain their activities, and therefore financial restraint was a necessity in their early performances. Through this forced economy an aesthetic value was discovered which ultimately retained a 'poor' quality despite the growing popularity and world renown of Grotowski and the company. As James Roose-Evans explains, 'he found that while theatre could exist without make-up, costume, décor, a stage even, lighting, sound effects, it could not exist without the relationship of actor and spectator. This essential act, this encounter between two groups of people, he called Poor Theatre.'² As their work developed and the actor-spectator relationship took on an ever-more central position, so

the plastic scenographic elements were removed, until the final theatrical performance, *Apocalypsis cum Figuris*, was presented in an empty room in which both actor and spectator occupied the same space.

Grotowski provided a detailed explanation of his term Poor Theatre in an interview with Margaret Croyden documented in *The Grotowski Sourcebook*:

“Poor theatre” gives up the trappings used in the other visual arts. It is a theatre that concentrates on human actions only, and the relationship between the actors and the audience. It gives up all conventional stage effects like lights, music, scenery, make-up, props, and spectacular effects because they are not essential. These effects are mechanical and often autonomous and can be used separately outside the metier. Make-up, for instance, is unnecessary, because the actors are trained to use their facial muscles like masks and, thus, actors have a variety of masks to choose from. We do not need elaborate and expensive props either. In *Akropolis* we use pieces of scrap iron, two wheelbarrows, a bathtub and a rag doll. We use these props in any way we choose; we make of them what we wish. Material things prevent our real confrontation with art. We wish to confront our art without costly devices or commercial accoutrements. We want to use ourselves only; we want to work through our own impulses and instincts, through our own inner beings and through our own individual responses. To be poor in the biblical sense is to abandon all externals. And that is why we call our theatre “poor theatre”.³

For Grotowski, the absence of materials with which to fill his theatre allowed him to focus on and appreciate the full value of the one commodity that was available to him – the human body. Realising that cinema could do everything better than theatre in terms of plastic materials, special effects and the detailed recreation of everyday life, he therefore focused on the one thing cinema could not provide – the live presence of the performer and his interaction with the audience. ‘The theatre must recognize its own limitations. If it cannot be richer than the cinema, then let it be poor. If it cannot be as lavish as television, let it be ascetic. If it cannot be a technical attraction, let it renounce all outward technique. Thus we are left with a holy actor in a poor theatre.’⁴

The main implication of this approach to theatre making in scenic terms was to create a mode of working in which only scenography, and not design, could facilitate the development of the work. The fundamental plastic material available to the scenographer was the actor’s body in space, and its manipulation could only be achieved therefore by the scenographer’s presence and collaboration in the rehearsal room. It was only the development of the work itself, both physically and conceptually, that could guide the scenographer to the need for, and aesthetic of, any further plastic elements to be introduced into the playing space.

Although Grotowski moved slowly away from what he later termed the Theatre of Productions, and towards para-theatrical work in which the spectator no longer spectated but became participant and co-creator of an event or encounter, the term Poor Theatre has continued to play an important role in the acknowledgment and articulation of a

theatre in which enforced poverty inspires a particular performance aesthetic. Another Polish director, Tadeusz Kantor, although as an *auteur* director working very differently from Grotowski, also developed a Poor aesthetic from financially enforced poverty.⁵ Peter Brook, founder of the International Centre for Theatre Research in Paris, has also been a vocal advocate of 'the empty space', removing the unnecessary clutter and congestion on the stage caused by bulky sets and large numbers of props, and playing with the bare minimum deemed essential for performance.⁶

Brook lauded the work of Grotowski:

Most experimental products cannot do what they want because outside conditions are too heavily loaded against them. They have scratch casts, rehearsal time eaten into by the need to earn their living, inadequate sets, costumes, lights, etc. Poverty is their complaint and their excuse. Grotowski makes poverty an ideal; his actors have given up everything except their own bodies; they have the human instrument and limitless time – no wonder they feel the richest theatre in the world.⁷

VISUAL AESTHETIC OR CREATIVE PROCESS?

For Grotowski and many others, then, the poor aesthetic is not something that they have chosen to adopt as a superficial exterior facade. Forced by economic necessity to rely on the human performer as the mainstay of the performance, through experimentation and research they discovered that the human performer *is* the mainstay of the performance, and that many of the trappings with which the commercial theatre is encumbered are superfluous and unnecessary. 'The acceptance of poverty in theatre, stripped of all that is not essential to it, revealed to us not only the backbone of the medium, but also the deep riches which lie in the very nature of the art form.'⁸ Although perhaps driven initially through a need for fiscal economy, directors and companies continue to develop this poor aesthetic for the resonance and emotional memory that develops and is attached to objects, and the value and depth that this can bring into a performance.

Whilst access to vast resources may enable the designer to create complex and fantastic effects and spaces, these may be need to be finalised before rehearsals have even begun, risking locking the actors into a scenario which blocks the development of their physical performance. The development of a true Poor aesthetic, on the other hand, can lead to an approach to theatre making in which a handful of resources are used in a more organic and creative way, allowing the actor's physical form to inform every decision. It is possible for an organic, rehearsal-room based scenographic process to take place within other forms of theatre, not only Poor Theatre, but Poor Theatre provides a useful illustration of the fact that it is *how* resources and objects are used creatively that is important, not the value, quality or quantity of resources available. The ability and

willingness to include scenography as part of the overall creative and rehearsal process is paramount to its success; in his book *Theatre, Performance and Technology* Christopher Baugh points out that

If theatre artists have believed (as they progressively have throughout the twentieth century) that the art of theatre is indeed a *Gesamtkunstwerk*, one that represents a compound and composite of stimuli – aural, visual and temporal – then to determine the visual (or indeed any other) qualities in advance totally contradicts the theoretical meaning and purpose of the rehearsal.⁹

Can a rehearsal process be truly valid if elements of the performance are preconceived?

EUGENIO BARBA AND THE 1ST, 2ND AND 3RD THEATRES

Barba first mooted his theories concerning the First, Second and Third theatres in 1976 at a conference in Belgrade, followed by publication in a French journal article (the paper was later included in English translation in his book *The Floating Islands*).¹⁰ Initially he defined the Third Theatre by means of what it was not – the First and Second theatres. He identified the First Theatre as being the traditional, institutionalised, commercial theatre, the spectacle that fills many of the West End and Broadway theatres; the Second Theatre he considered as consisting of the established avant-garde and experimental theatre, companies seeking to 'make it new', but able to access sources of funding and relatively mainstream audiences (contemporary examples might include Peter Brook and his International Centre, Theatre de Complicite, Ariane Mnouchkine and the Théâtre du Soleil, amongst others). And therefore the Third Theatre consisted of all those companies and practitioners whose work did not fit into either of the other two categories.

Far from being a fixed and unchanging style or form of theatre, Barba uses the term 'archipelago' to define Third Theatre as consisting of any number of small companies world wide, making work not for a commercial audience but largely for themselves, to fulfil their own needs. Many of these groups are untrained in an orthodox sense, and unfunded, but spend their time creating theatre or performance that reflects and suits their own style and purpose in making the work.

The difficulty in understanding what the Third Theatre is depends on the search for a unitary definition which fixes in one mould the meaning of a theatre reality which is different. But the Third Theatre may be defined precisely by the lack of a common unitary meaning. It is the sum of all those theatres which are, each in its own way, constructors of meaning. Each of them defines in an autonomous way the personal meaning of their doing theatre.¹¹

In many ways, much of what may be considered to constitute the contemporary Second Theatre can be seen as having developed from those groups that Barba deems to constitute the Third Theatre. Practitioners such as Brook can be seen to have started on a Third Theatre basis (after his departure from mainstream theatre, his experiments in Africa were very much about exploring the impulse and necessity to make theatre and

communicate on a level beyond language) but through their development and exploration have become well-known and popular, invited to bring their work to larger audiences and thereby 'progressed' into the category of Second Theatre. This is where the main difference can be seen to lie between the work of Brook and Grotowski – although both discovered the importance of the human body and voice in performance through experimentation and research with the Poor aesthetic, their work then took opposite directions. Brook used the lessons he and his company learned from their early experiments to apply to the production of more traditional texts and theatre, to facilitate better communication with their audiences, ultimately utilising the performer as a tool of the performance. In contrast, Grotowski focused his attention on the experience of the performer during the performance in order to facilitate better communication not between performer and audience but between the performer and himself, thus enabling performance to become a tool of the performer to the exclusion of audience.

Despite the criticism Barba received for the amount of negativity both implicit and explicit in his definition of the Third Theatre, (in the opening paragraph of his article in the *New Theatre Quarterly*, he defines theatre as 'not a theatrical style, nor an alliance of groups, still less a movement or international association; nor is it a school, an aesthetic, or set of techniques')¹² and concerns that it may be adversely associated with theatre in the Third World (a concern of his critics not shared by Barba) these early definitions of the Third Theatre are still of use when considering the effect of purpose and intent on the theatre making process, and thereby the role of scenography.

The emphasis within Barba's Denmark-based company, *Odin Teatret*, is more on *how* they work together than on what is created. As Ian Watson documents in his book 'Towards a Third Theatre', the company has an 'internal ethic of collective creation and responsibility';¹³ their work is not only focused on creating a performance product, but also on developing the relationships which form between the individual company members during the creative process. According to Barba there are two social phases involved in the theatre making process; the actors' encounter with an audience is in fact the *second* of these two phases: the first social phase is made up of the encounters between collaborators that occur during the creative/rehearsal phase of working. The actors do not only act, but take on full responsibility for the staging of a performance: 'the actors play a major part in creating *mise-en-scènes* during rehearsals, and they also help design and build the sets for each production, as well as design and make costumes, and assist with publicity.'¹⁴

The work of Grotowski's Polish Laboratory Theatre and Barba's *Odin Teatret* were influential examples of the new questions concerning theatre makers in the 1960s. Aided in the UK by the 1968 abolition of precensorship by the Lord Chamberlain's office, the

new emphasis on the importance of *doing* theatre – being a part of the creative process rather than merely witnessing or experiencing the end result as a passive observer – developed through the 1960s to a peak in the late 1970s/early '80s, resulting in the emergence of

actor-centred groups who were trying to experiment outside and beyond the mechanisms of the cultural establishment [and who] were in tune with the rhetoric of participatory democracy and the evidence of the power of massed political protest. The socialist ideal of the workers' co-operative or collective was linked to the recognition of the actors as theatre workers, and opened up a discussion about their ownership of the means of production.¹⁵

The notion that 'how theatre is made takes precedence over what is produced'¹⁶ offered exciting possibilities for the inclusion of scenography as a methodology within the creative process, and the utilisation of visual and three-dimensional stimuli alongside textual and verbal elements. The freedom of structure and form and emphasis on collaborative relationships made it possible for scenography to be taken to the very heart of performance creation, with companies such as The People Show, Welfare State International, Hesitate and Demonstrate and Impact Theatre Co-operative in the UK and The Living Theatre, Open Theatre, Bread and Puppet Theatre and The Performance Group in America working with space and object as prime components in their creative process.

SCENOGRAPHY IN THE COMMERCIAL THEATRE

Within both the theatre profession and theatrical theory there is much difficulty in defining the term 'scenography' and its development from and relationship to more traditional/hierarchically based theatre design. One cause of this difficulty is the wide spectrum of definitions and uses attributed to scenography by both practitioners and theoreticians; in each context of use 'scenography' can mean something different depending on the mode of theatre or performance making, ranging from an alternative terminology for referring to a set design, to an all-encompassing piece of visually-based performance art and the process through which it has been created. Throughout history, 'theatre design' has been a relatively easily defined term, referring to the visual product created for a theatrical performance. It is usually created in isolation in a design studio, through a process running parallel to rather than simultaneously with the rehearsal process, and will generate a finished product of set, costume, light, and sometimes sound, to be added to the actors' performance in the final stages of rehearsal.

Scenography has proved more difficult to define, then, because it can refer not only to an end design product, but also to the process by which that design has been created. A collaborative, organic process through which the visual and spatial elements of a performance space are allowed to develop and change simultaneously with the

performance itself would seem to be one of the fundamental differentials between scenography and theatre design that practitioners have managed to identify or define. However, by taking into account the rehearsal and development process, we therefore necessarily broaden the spectrum of what is encompassed by the term scenography and thereby make it more difficult to define into a simple, single concept. Different scales and modes of theatre will each have their own rehearsal processes and methods of working; the way in which scenography can fit into each process will differ, and therefore the notion of what constitutes scenography will also be affected.

There are many varied factors which influence the theatre making process as a whole, and therefore by default also impact on the place and success of the scenographic process within the bigger picture. Factors such as genre, scale, budget, location and so on all influence the way in which a production is put together and rehearsed, and consequently the place of scenography within that process. A dance piece, or movement-based performance, for example, will have very different spatial requirements to those of a text-based drama. Large-scale commercial theatre, while usually having a fairly healthy budget with which to work, is constrained simply by its sheer size and the amount of time needed in order to create and build items of a suitable dimension. This factor of time, alongside budget, is one which inevitably affects the possibility for an organic developmental scenographic process across all theatre; the availability of, and budget to pay for, rehearsal time and space and the required personnel will indubitably determine the feasibility and viability of a process which allows for the organic development of the visual and spatial elements alongside the work of the performers.

In *What is Scenography* Pamela Howard attempts to describe this rehearsal-based collaborative scenographic process, detailing it as she has found it within her own experience in the theatre profession. Much of Howard's own scenographic work has taken place within the mainstream, commercial, text-based theatre, and her findings as to what constitutes a scenographic process can therefore (arguably) only be applied within theatre-making processes of that nature. But to apply wholly scenographic principles within the pre-existing hierarchical structures of the commercial theatre would place a great demand on those theatres and theatre makers for a restructuring of their personnel and process, which although called for since the turn of the twentieth century as discussed in Chapter One, has still in many ways remained unresolved. Although this is due in part to resistance from some of those working in the theatre profession who retain the 'old school' mind set of hierarchies and status, it must also be seen as indicative of an economic climate in which financial viability and technical feasibility are paramount, and a structure that creates the required product within the available time and monetary constraints cannot easily be supplanted by one which necessitates a rise in man hours and rehearsal periods.

MATERIAL RESOURCES

One of the most challenging pressures faced by contemporary theatre, as with many other sectors of business and society, is that of being financially viable in an increasingly competitive global market. Space, time, and material and human resources all cost money, investment that needs to be returned on through successful ticket sales and merchandising. The commercial theatre can therefore be seen as being constrained both in its choice of repertoire and its production process by the need to create theatre that is both popular and economically viable. Creating a theatre with little or no means presents its own problems financially, such as ensuring sufficient funds to pay for personnel and material resources prior to ticket sales revenue being available, but can offer a significantly greater freedom of form, content and artistic expression.

It is easy to criticise the commercial theatre for a lack of openness to more collaborative methodologies and changing working processes. However, the commercial theatre is not entirely without innovation, and there are many contributing factors that ensure it sustains the notion of design rather than theatre. Time and money play a large part in the continuance of more orthodox design structures. For shows taking place in large theatre spaces, or which are spectacle based, the length of time needed to build a set is simply incompatible with the possibility of the designer holding back from finalising designs until he can work with actors in the rehearsal room, which may happen for only four or five weeks before opening. Similarly, the length of time that a designer would need to spend in the rehearsal room in order to work collaboratively with the company far exceeds the number of hours required to create a design on paper in a studio, and consequently would entail a far higher fee. Producers are most often either unable or unwilling to provide this further investment, and the designer must therefore work within the timescale allowed by the fee available, or be prepared to work for nothing.

The personal preference of both directors and designers also contributes to the continued inclination toward design rather than scenography in the commercial theatre. Whilst some practitioners enjoying working collaboratively and actively seek out those with similar inclinations, and others may vary their approach depending on the type of production, there are still a significant number of practitioners who prefer to work in a more traditional hierarchical structure, perpetuating that mode of working. The type of work being produced in the commercial theatre may also be considered as contributing to that perpetuation: the staging of texts would seem to lend itself more easily to design, requiring a process focused more on interpretation than original invention.

This is not to say that scenography can play no part in the commercial theatre. The National Theatre's 2003 production of *His Dark Materials*, in which puppets were used to

portray animal characters that interact with human characters, is one example of mainstream theatre that broke new ground scenographically through its use of puppetry, which necessitated a close collaboration with the performers to create both the puppets and the show itself. The use of puppetry in *His Dark Materials* capitalised on techniques developed during the staging of *The Lion King*; which is perhaps one of the most successful examples of puppetry being brought on to the commercial stage on a large scale, opening on Broadway in 1997 and in London's West End in 1999. Director Julie Taymor trained at the *Ecole Jacques Lecoq* for a year, working with both masks and puppets, and also spent several years in Indonesia observing local puppet and other theatre forms, and these experiences can be seen as having directly informed both her choice of medium and the consequent level of involvement of the actor in the staging process. As will be discussed in Chapter Seven, there are small numbers of practitioners who are beginning to bring collaborative scenographic processes into larger venues such as the National Theatre. However, the main obstacle to being able to bring these working practices to every production they work on is the increase in financial investment it requires. Taymor is open about the fact that it was only the financial backing of Disney that enabled her workshop experimentation with *The Lion King* to take place.¹⁷ It would seem to be this economic factor above all else that continues to sustain the notion of design rather than scenography in the commercial theatre.

JOSEF SVOBODA: NEHER'S HEIR?

Despite Howard's assertions of Neher as the progenitor of scenography, as has been shown above the term only rose to popularity during the second half of the twentieth century, and was not a term that either Brecht or Neher utilised to refer to their own practice. Another designer, at least according to Christopher Baugh, popularised the term in relation to the development of a more collaborative mode of stage design. It was the Czech Josef Svoboda whose work

became synonymous with the establishment of the word 'scenography' where hitherto 'stage designer' or 'theatre designer' or even 'stage decorator' had been the most commonly used terms. The word scenographer is now universally accepted and is used to describe the artists who have responsibility for all the visual and aural contributions of theatre and performance.¹⁸

According to this description then, it is Svoboda's design *product* and its all-encompassing nature that earns it the title of 'Scenography'. However, in his own writings Svoboda considered there to be a fundamental difference in *process* as well as product that distinguished his work as scenography, and he can therefore be seen as something of an heir to Neher, as important to the development of the art of scenography in the latter part of the twentieth century as Appia, Craig, Meyerhold and the Brecht/Neher partnership were to its emergence in the early part of the century. Importantly, too, Svoboda was able

to follow in the footsteps of Meyerhold and Neher and work in the mainstream commercial theatre, introducing his mode of collaborative working across a broad range of styles and forms of theatre.

Svoboda, born in Czechoslovakia in 1920, rose to become both a Professor of Architecture at the School of Fine and Applied Arts in Prague, and also the chief designer and technical director of the Czech National Theatre, where he designed a broad range of productions including plays, opera and ballet. His early study of both carpentry and architecture resulted in his becoming 'an architecturally trained stage designer or, as he prefers to be called, scenographer',¹⁹ placing a strong emphasis on three-dimensional kinetic staging. 'He sees *dynamism* as fundamental to any work of theatre art; [...] Svoboda abhors a fixed, static stage, which strikes him as being a perversion of the essence of theatre.'²⁰ This dynamism of his stage was created not through continuously moving plastic elements, but through considerable use of lighting and projection technologies with which he continuously experimented.

Much of his work concerning the use of light to shape and define space can be seen as directly descended from the work of Craig and more especially Appia, developing their theoretical treatise into concrete practice. According to Jarka Burian, echoes of Meyerhold's constructivism, Piscator's documentary theatre, and the work of the Bauhaus school of the 1920s can all be identified in Svoboda's work, brought to new levels of sophistication and complexity by his 'full-scale artistic exploitation of the latest mechanical, electronic, and optical devices, many of which he and his staff have developed themselves'.²¹

In his memoirs, *The Secret of Theatrical Space*, Svoboda explained his own inclination towards the term scenography:

The designer's participation in production has had the most varied designations. The Germans and we Czechs, following them, have referred to stage "outfitting" (*Ausstattung* or *Výprava*, respectively); in English-speaking countries "stage design" is the usual term; in France, "decoration". These terms reduce a designer's collaboration to "framing" the dramatic work, rather than sharing in its complete creation. But if we consider the experiences and history of Italian theatre and its designers (e.g. Serlio, Palladio, and Galia da Bibiena), we discover that they were joint authors of the theatrical action. [...] To render a more precise, more complete, and more meaningful designation of our artistic role, I prefer the term "scenography."²²

From this short passage, it is possible to discern several of those key aspects of practice that Svoboda considered as indicative of scenography rather than design. Firstly, he considers that stage design reduces the possibility for collaboration, suggesting that the scenographer must participate in a high level of collaboration within the rehearsal room. He suggests that design is merely a 'framing' of the stage action, where scenography implies involvement in the 'complete creation' of a performance, becoming an integral aspect of the performance text. Finally, he recalls the early Italian Baroque designers as

'joint authors of the theatrical action,' suggesting that this is the role too of the contemporary scenographer, to work alongside the director in the rehearsal room as a joint author, writing through shape, space and movement.

Like Neher, Svoboda too was irritated by the use of terms such as *Bühnenbildner* and *décorateur*.

they imply two-dimensional pictures or superficial decoration, which is exactly what I don't want. Theatre is mainly in the performance: lovely sketches and renderings don't mean a thing, however impressive they may be; you can draw anything you like on a piece of paper, but what's important is the actualisation. True scenography is what happens when the curtain opens and can't be judged in any other way.²³

Denis Bablet firmly believed that the scenographer should not become trapped by a specific theory or style of design, but should use whatever is best suited to a particular production. This view is echoed in the work of scenographers such as Svoboda, who combine not only design styles but also media such as painting, architecture and sculpture. According to Jarka Burian, Svoboda's work 'represents a synthesis, a refinement, and a masterful application of the theories and practical experiments that are considered the coordinates of modern stage design and production'.²⁴ Burian attributes Svoboda's success to the fact that 'supplementing his basic synthesizing method is an inherent pragmatism: he has not committed to any single production mode or design theory',²⁵ which enables him to combine aspects of any style or media that fit the ambience of an individual production.

FROM DESIGN TO SCENOGRAPHY

Many of the practitioners discussed in this and the previous chapter, regarded as great theatrical reformers, began not with an idea for something new but with the intention of eradicating that which they deemed as bad in the old, offering an alternative to what they perceived to be the flaws in contemporary theatre practice. From Appia and Craig to Grotowski and Barba – all developed their own models and theories of a new theatre, in reaction to the established mode of theatre as they saw it. Out of all of these varying practices and modes of theatre have come the group of innovations, now become conventions, which we would largely consider to constitute theatre in this post-modern era. Through the twentieth century came numerous developments in stage shape, size, position within the auditorium, stage technologies, theatrical hierarchies and the types of work made into performance. All of these developments placed increasing demands on the skills of the designer, who in some instances adapted to a much more flexible and collaborative mode of working by metamorphosing into what can usefully be termed the scenographer.

One of the continuing difficulties with the term scenography is that few theatre

practitioners can agree on exactly what can be defined as or constitutes scenography. It seems to be generally accepted that scenography involves a more collaborative approach to theatre making, and a stronger focus on the needs of the performer when creating performance environments. In the opening pages of *What is Scenography* Howard offers the responses of a selection of 44 scenographers and stage designers to the question 'What is Scenography?' The interpretations expressed range widely:

A spelling mistake. Tomas Zizske, Czech Republic

The visible design for the stage: set, costume and lighting. Maija Pekkanen, Finland

Choosing what the audience will see. Richard Hudson, UK

The interplay of space, time, movement and light on stage. Josef Svoboda, Czech Republic

The physical manifestation of the collective ideas. Michael Levine, Canada

Not one entity. It only comes to life when the dynamism of the human body penetrates the space. Luciano Damiani, Italy

Searching for visual images with the performer to create dramatic and plastic solutions for the space. Efer Tunç, Turkey.²⁶

However, in many contemporary discussions of theatre-making the term scenography is used almost interchangeably with the terms scenic environment or set design, without mention of a difference in approach or product. There seems to be little or no suggestion of or agreement on a definition that highlights the differential between the arts of Scenic Design and Scenography. The term is increasingly popular and frequently used by practitioners and theoreticians alike, such as Arnold Aronson who 'despite this lack of agreement on the meaning of the term, [...] still find it far more useful, more encompassing, and more inclusive than the word design, which, particularly in the United States, refers to a very specific and limited aspect of the spatiovisual experience of performance.'²⁷

If scenography as a theatrical design process is that which was instigated by the work of Neher and Brecht, as suggested by Howard, it can be seen as a more collaboratively based methodology and approach to theatre making. It comprises not the physical or aesthetic changes visible through the twentieth century, but the changes in attitude and working processes which occurred, embracing a more collaborative mode of working and exploring all the possibilities available through the intertwining of aesthetic styles and new and flexible spaces.

This development of a more collaborative mode of theatre-making can be seen to have influenced theatre making throughout the rest of the twentieth century, with a steady increase in the number of companies and ensembles making theatre collaboratively and collectively, working both with and without pre-existing texts. The size and scale of performance required to fill large opera houses and other large theatre buildings

logistically restricted the possibility for collaboratively made performance to smaller venues, where the structure and hierarchy allowed for the presence of the scenographer in the rehearsal room. This necessity for hierarchical restructuring led not to the acceptance of collaboration within established companies, but to the creation of new companies and collectives whose aim was to realise this new mode of theatre making.

As the members of these collectives grew professionally and moved on to bigger spaces and companies, so too the notion of integrating scenography with the organic development of a production became more widespread as directors and scenographers struggled to maintain the aesthetic values they had developed in their experimental company. John Bury, a scenographer who began work with Joan Littlewood and the Theatre Workshop, 'wanted to work so that the set would grow organically out of the rehearsal process.'²⁸ But on moving to the RSC at Stratford, Bury was confronted with

a new world, very different: huge stage, the need for planning three months ahead, before the director could possibly commit himself. How was one to preserve the flexibility we had achieved at Stratford East? How was one to find the precise texture of each play when the organic growth of a set was made difficult by having to be laid down so far in advance?²⁹

It is precisely this question that has formed the basis of work by practitioners such as Svoboda, Howard and Peter Brook, who have all worked to bring a collaborative mode of theatre into larger companies and spaces. With his company at the Bouffes du Nord theatre in Paris, Brook develops space and movement as an integral aspect of his productions, allowing collaboration and experimentation with the actors to inform and drive the scenographic vision.³⁰

With many practitioners utilising the word scenography in different and often opposing ways, it is impossible to determine a single, unarguable definition of the word. 'Many shades of opinion, it is safe to say, still exist and will persist into the future concerning these terms [Scenographer and Scenic Designer]'.³¹ What is unarguable, however, is that the twentieth century produced not just radical alterations in aesthetic values and product, but also in the process by which these new modes of design were produced, and it is these changes in theatre-making attitudes and process that would seem to be most adequately defined by the term scenography.

The devised and collaborative mode of theatre that emerged through the twentieth century restructured both the hierarchy and process of theatre making, allowing roles to overlap and merge. Devised theatre, in particular, offered the possibility for a less rigid approach to theatre making, with collective authorship allowing scripts to be derived from a multiplicity of stimuli and resources. But if the way in which theatre is made has been reconsidered and reconstructed, then surely there is a necessity for an accompanying reconsideration of the appropriate design methodology for these new forms and modes of theatre making?

Aristotle's ancient Greek *Skenographia* is often translated as scene writing, or the writing of the stage space: it is *process* that is referred to by this translation, and not product.³² The writing of the stage space can therefore be considered as requiring an equivalent process to that of writing the text; if the text is an historical one, or one which has been written by a playwright in isolation, (i.e. it is theatre according to Richard Schechner's definition, 'the staging of written dramas')³³ then a design process in which the designer works alone, away from the rehearsal process, can be perfectly satisfactory to provide a suitable stage space for performance. But if a text has been written collectively, devised, or collated from improvisations and other material, then the stage space must be too; the scenographer must allow the performers to improvise, play and reshape the space through their movement in the same way in which the text was shaped and reshaped by their speech.

Here then would seem to be the essence of scenography: a collaborative process, which allows the organic development of a scenic environment appropriate to the individual performance. The organic development of an environment allows actors to work with the objects surrounding them, utilising them to their fullest and discarding those which are obsolete. Aristotle, writing 2500 years ago, recognised that 'a thing whose presence or absence makes no visible difference is not an organic part of the whole,'³⁴ a view which would seem to be shared by many modern scenographers whose prime concern is the needs of the actors and their presence in space.

The necessity of the presence of the scenographer in the rehearsal room is underlined by Howard, who expresses the view that 'there has to be a structure that enables them to be in rehearsals as a partner to the director, so the literary mind and the visual mind can work together. The scenographer needs to be part of the process, and to understand the actors' performances and how to sculpt them in space.'³⁵ Burian, considering the work of Svoboda, also stipulates the necessity of an integral organic process -

the setting should evolve with the action, cooperate with it, be in harmony with it, and reinforce it, *as the action itself evolves*. Scenography is not a background, nor even a container, but in itself a dramatic component that becomes integrated with every other expressive component or element of production.³⁶

If scenography is utilised in this manner, to develop appropriate performance space in tandem with the development of the performance itself, it is possible to consider scenography as a methodology for performance making in its own right, allowing visual and three-dimensional elements to stimulate and guide the development of a performance.

PART 2

CHAPTER THREE

SCENOGRAPHY AND TEXT-BASED THEATRE

As we have seen, scenography can be considered as a different phenomenon, or as playing a different role, relative to the type of theatre in which it is being practised. Pamela Howard's *What is Scenography?* discusses scenography from the specific perspective of literary text-based theatre, and it is the benefits and limitations of scenography within this context that will be considered in this chapter. In her work, Howard's main distinction between scenography and design is the collaborative nature of the process, and the greater involvement of the scenographer in rehearsal room practice. The use of more integrated, scenographic development as opposed to a more detached design process has many benefits for the creative process, but also bears its own pressures: the collaborative nature of the process means that the scenographer must develop a deeper relationship and work more closely with both the director and the actors and the text itself, being more alert to the need to facilitate a creative relationship between the actors and their environment.

Working with a literary text also places greater demands on the scenographer than collaborating with a company to devise work, in the sense that he is not free to follow his own creative impulse at will in whatever direction it may lead him but must consider, if not adhere to, any 'given' within the text, requiring a level of interpretation as well as invention. In this sense, then, the role that scenography can play in the process of realising a script is dependent on the freedom or limitations within that process, and the extent to which it is intended to remain faithful to the original script. Before considering the role of scenography within text-based theatre, it may therefore prove useful to consider some of the various approaches to textual analysis and interpretation, and the literary theory which underpins those approaches.

AUTHORSHIP AND OWNERSHIP OF THE LITERARY TEXT

The dispute over ownership of the literary text can be seen as one of the fundamental debates amongst contemporary literature and theatre practitioners and scholars. It must be acknowledged that if an author has chosen to write a playscript, rather than a novel or other form of prose, then that text cannot be considered to be fully complete unless and until it is performed on stage. However, this does not address the issue of interpretation; should a play text be created on stage with slavish adherence to every stage direction and description provided by the author, or does ownership of the text, and therefore right of interpretation, belong to those putting the text into performance?

It is certainly less problematic to put forward a case for director/performer ownership of historical texts. The plays of Shakespeare, to take an obvious example, were written in a different style of English, for a different style of playhouse and for a different audience than would be receiving them today. The ability of the writer, director or performer to 're-invent' a text allows it to be made more accessible and relevant to a contemporary audience, addressing the issues that Shakespeare attempted to bring to his audience rather than presenting an historical throwback. The plays of Brecht present an interesting example of this approach to textual appropriation. As Richard Hornby explains in his book *Script into Performance*,

there is a significant difference between Brecht's approach to a text and those of most playscript jugglers today. It has to do with the fact that we speak of Brecht's *Antigone* or Brecht's *Edward II*, and not merely Brecht's *production* of Sophocles' playscript or Brecht's *version* of Marlowe's. That is, Brecht changed classical texts for the same reason that he changed his own, not to find a modern form for an old content but rather to create an entirely new work [...] through reworking, profoundly changing the script's significance; [...] There is nothing wrong with making a new playscript out of an old playscript. In fact, the history of playwriting shows that it is almost the norm; [...] Brecht's productions really had brand-new playscripts, even though they were based on old ones, with new focus, new meanings, new purpose.¹

However, this process of reinventing and readdressing a text becomes more problematic when it is a contemporary text that is the subject of such treatment, as Michael Billington notes: 'With living writers, the situation is far trickier. Is the text sacrosanct or does the author forfeit all rights once he or she hands over the script to its interpreters?'² Taking a cue from literary theory, this question can be articulated through reference to the 'intentional fallacy':

The 'intentional fallacy' is to confuse what the author intended in the writing of a poem (or other work of literature) with what is actually there on the page. The actual *text* should be our guideline, not what the author has perhaps wanted to say. [...] in other words, when we interpret a literary text, the author's commentary, or what we know of the author's intentions, is of secondary importance. It is not only that the author does not have full control over the text's meaning because in the actual writing process things may slip in of which the author is wholly unaware [...] but that the author has in a sense officially relinquished control over the text: it has, after all, been made public and been distributed. The text has become a freestanding object and the rest is up to us.³

This then is a fundamental issue for companies working through a process of collective, collaborative creation, who want to be able to use dramatic literary texts as another stimulus or resource in the same way as they may use space, objects and the human body. They do not want to be tied to a specific dramatic form or structure, but to utilise aspects of a script or scripts to create a new text and structure that reflects more accurately their aims and the needs of both themselves as performers and those of the spectator. The desire to utilise a text in this way has been well documented throughout the twentieth century, an early example being found in the work of Vsevolod Meyerhold and

his production of Gogol's *The Government Inspector* (also translated as *The Inspector General*). This production, in 1926, is considered by many to be one of Meyerhold's most important: 'the highest achievement of one man's personal vision of theatre art,'⁴ while for others, it is 'possibly, one of the most important stage productions of the twentieth century.'⁵

Until this point in his career, Meyerhold had remained more or less faithful to the written text of any play he chose to stage. However, with *The Government Inspector*, for the first time he took it upon himself to restructure and 're-author' the text. Instead of the five acts that Gogol had originally written, Meyerhold transposed the text into a series of fifteen episodes, which he then used to create a montage, reflecting the episodic structure of the text in the physical staging. According to Nick Worrall in an article attempting to recreate Meyerhold's production, Meyerhold made use not only of the published Gogol text, but in total six different drafts of the play, as well as drawing on other completely separate works by Gogol. 'As self-styled "author of the production", Meyerhold felt justified in restructuring the content of a work familiar to almost every Russian. In a sense, he sought to free the work from the familiarity which encumbered it and to share with others his sense of the play's truly radical form.'⁶

Meyerhold also wanted to be free to develop and emphasise certain themes which he saw as crucial to the play; he wanted to draw subtle parallels between the corruption in the contemporary Communist Party through the presentation of the corruption under Czarist rule; and he added or expanded various characters, such as the Mayor's Wife, through whom he developed the sexual theme of the play. The entire performance was approached through his work on Commedia dell'arte, utilising not pantomime but the grotesque elements of his previous work to underscore the tragi-comic nature of the play.

Meyerhold had very specific ideas about the way in which this production should be staged, with most of the scenes set on small trucks, which appeared through doors in a curved cyclorama. Lighting and sound also played important roles, with a continuous specially-composed score and the utilisation of dark as well as light, spotlighting areas and characters for dramatic effect. Indeed, the entire staging of the production was indivisible from Meyerhold's reconception of the text, and as such can be taken as an early model of scenography as process. Despite this being a product solely of Meyerhold's direction rather than a collective effort, it nonetheless illustrates the successful way in which a text can be 're-authored' to facilitate its presentation to a contemporary audience. According to Edward Braun 'it established once and for all the creative autonomy of the stage director.'⁷

More recently, the Wooster Group has utilised dramatic literary texts in many of its productions: *Nayatt School* (1978) is based on *The Cocktail Party*; *Point Judith* (1980) on

Long Day's Journey into Night; *Route 1 & 9 (The Last Act)* (1981) on *Our Town*; *L.S.D...* (*Just the high points*) (1984) on *The Crucible*; and *Brace Up!* (1991), based on Chekhov's *Three Sisters*, are just a few examples. However, these interpretations of literature do not faithfully reproduce the text in its original form, but take extracts and use them in juxtaposition with contrary and conflicting images, texts and movement sequences. 'Frequently, these conflicts are amplified by corresponding contrasts in style, heightening a sense of quotation, where texts, sequences and images are set against each other in such a way that they come to stand on uncertain and unstable ground.'⁸ It is this heightened use of scenographic elements to intentionally create discord rather than synthesis that underpins the notion of scenography as process within the staging of a dramatic text – the creative process must be synthesized, i.e. the development of the various elements occurring simultaneously in the same space, in order to achieve an intentionally fragmented performance.

As Nick Kaye comments on the use of blackface in *L.S.D.*,

through their presentation of a black role conventionally played by a black actress by a white performer in blackface, the Wooster Group mount a critique of both Miller's unselfconscious reference to stereotype and an unthinking acceptance of this treatment and its implications. In turn, as the white performer goes on to play 'white' roles while still wearing the remnants of her blackface makeup, the conventional meanings and references of the blackface are challenged through an overt disjunction between its history and the roles the blackfaced performer takes up.⁹

Unfortunately this treatment of *The Crucible* was not appreciated by Arthur Miller, who presented the company with Cease and Desist orders, complaining of reviewers' interpretations of the piece as a parody and the 'mangling' of the aesthetics of his work.¹⁰ It is here that problems of taking a work by a contemporary author and 're-authoring' it are to be found; whilst critics and audiences may dislike the reinvention of a 'classic' text, such as Meyerhold's treatment of Gogol and the Wooster Group's treatment of Chekhov, nonetheless the artists are free to create their own interpretation of the work, to 're-invent' it according to their own needs and the needs of their audience. LeCompte did not present *The Crucible* to court controversy, but simply as a means of making the text accessible and relevant to herself and the cast. As she comments in interview, 'I'm making a new thing out of old material. I'm not just redecorating an old script. I'm not just going to do Chekhov. I'm trying to – I'm trying to make it present for me. Which means literally reinventing.'¹¹

BARTHES AND THE DEATH OF THE AUTHOR

In an essay published in 1967, Roland Barthes announced to the world the death of the author. By removing the author-ity of the author, he asserted, 'the claim to decipher a text becomes quite futile. To give a text an author is to impose a limit on that text, to

furnish it with a final signified, to close the writing.¹² The imposition of limits, closing the text with a final and definitive interpretation and meaning, is precisely what Barthes went on to ascribe to the 'classic' readerly text, setting against it the writerly text, freed from authorial control of interpretation. The writer becomes merely a 'scriptor', unable to imbue his work with a single authoritative meaning. 'With the death of the author, a text becomes untethered from its author such that the author can no longer be considered the transcendent source of meaning of a text and the authority for how a text must be interpreted.'¹³ The death of the author, therefore, is in order to enable 'the birth of the reader' as an independent co-creator in the writing process without whom the work remains unfinished.¹⁴

Working with this assumption that the author has no authority over his script once it is released for general consumption through publication, it is possible to argue that each theatre company that chooses to stage a particular literary work is assuming, however briefly, the authorship of that work. Although the words on the page may remain (more or less) fixed, with each new staging comes a new authoring of meaning, a re-authoring of the possible interpretative limits signified through the text. Not only the director but actor and scenographer too may claim authority to ascribe their own layer of meaning to the staging of a text.

However, as with the concept of readerly and writerly texts, or the differentiation between Work and Text, Barthes approaches the notion of author-ity from the perspective of literary theory, an individual reader authoring his own interpretation in a private engagement with the text, and not from the standpoint of theatrical practice. He does not address the problems inherent in the application of this theory to theatre-making, where living authors may complain about radical treatments of their texts, performances of which are by their very nature public in a way that the individual reader's interpretation of a novel, poem or even play-script is not. The death of the author is rooted firmly in linguistic and semiotic theory, and although can be taken as a theoretical advocacy for the ownership of the text by those staging it, this advocacy nonetheless remains implicit.

Philip Auslander takes the concept of the death of the author a stage further than is even implied in Barthes' work, finding that 'his concept of the death of the author suggests that it is the audience that ultimately determines the meaning of a performance, not its creators, and that reception is therefore an important object of study.'¹⁵ This interpretation allows for a multi-tiered understanding of the possibilities for ascribing meaning, not only for theatre-makers to ascribe their own meaning to an author's text, but for spectators to then ascribe their own meanings to the new performance text created through the process of staging. This theory can be seen as especially pertinent to much of the theatre to be discussed in the following two chapters under the headings of Postdramatic, and Devised, theatre, in which the audience is expressly intended to take

the part of co-author through the presentation of work without obvious or explicit meaning, approachable only through the authorial engagement of the spectator.

THE STRUCTURALIST APPROACH: HORNBY'S 3 MODELS

In *Script into Performance*, Hornby presents three models of textual criticism and dramatic interpretation with regard to staging a text: one of complete textual fidelity, one of complete textual freedom, and the third a middle ground between the two extremes. The complete separation of these three distinct models can be seen as somewhat artificial, with a more accurate model perhaps consisting of a single continuum or spectrum with complete fidelity and complete freedom at its opposite ends. Most production processes will then fall somewhere *between* the two extremes, rather than at either end, depending on the circumstances of production and the decision to exercise more or less freedom in the interpretation of the text.

The first model Hornby suggests is the Symphony model. Drawing an analogy with the performance of a symphony orchestra playing the work of a great composer, in this model he presents a method through which an exact recreation of every notated aspect of the text is brought about through slavish devotion to the printed text and no allowance made for creative interpretation. 'The symphony model views the playscript and the performance as essentially the same thing. One is the direct mirror of the other; while of course variations occur from production to production, because of different actors and settings, such variations are of minor significance.'¹⁶ This model can be seen as reflecting the processes of long-running West End and Broadway musicals, for example, where despite changes of cast and sometimes theatre, audiences can see much the same show that opened ten or even twenty years ago.

The second model of Hornby's theory is the Cinema model. Representing the opposite end of the spectrum from the Symphony model, here the script is treated not as an unchangeable reified entity, but as a completely re-writable scenario for performance, which can be interpreted as loosely and freely as a film scenario. Directors working in this mode see no need to be faithful to the text in any way, and feel free to cut or add lines as they see necessary, and to reorder lines and scenes as suits their purpose.

The cinema model is widely heard among the proponents of the new theatre, who see performance as an independent art form, often requiring no script at all. Such practitioners prefer to use the word *scenario* for the script, stressing that, like a film scenario, the playscript is just one variable among many in the theatre, including performers, stage (or "space"), and designer. As in a film, the director is really the guiding force, not the playwright, and the script is likely to be changed at any time under the director's guidance, in the same way that an actor can change his performance or a designer his settings.¹⁷

Hornby is scathing of this approach to theatre, finding that creative energy 'goes most often today into the "concept" production, the "updated" play, the "rearranged" text.'¹⁸

He finds that 'the very idea of a playscript is often under attack today as being too intellectual, too "literary". Improvised or collectively evolved performances are put forth as a more creative, purer form of theatre than one based on a text, as if playscript interpretation and creativity were opposites',¹⁹ and further argues that 'a new approach to classical playscript interpretation might push excessive creativity in production back where it belongs, namely, to the writing and performance of new scripts'.²⁰

For Hornby, neither the symphony nor cinema models, representing the extreme opposite ends of the textual analysis and interpretation spectrum, presents an acceptable method for creative interpretation and performance of a text, although there are visible examples of both models in practice. It is in order to provide an alternative to these two flawed models that Hornby presents his third option, a seeming middle-ground between the two extremes that he terms the Sculpture model. The analogy he provides is that of a sculptor working with a block of marble: he cannot create a finished sculpture that is bigger than the original block, but marble is expensive and therefore neither should he make something significantly smaller thereby wasting the marble; he must combine his inspiration with the qualities of the marble in order to fully realise the potential of both in combination with each other, allowing the shape, colour, and texture of the marble to inform and guide the sculptor's idea of how to shape it into a polished form.²¹

Similarly, the director (and therefore scenographer, and even actors, in partnership) must find the shape and form inherent in the text that fits their own unique set of variables.

Slowly, through the process of rehearsals, chip by chip one might say, the director releases the idea from the theatre company, an idea that "fits" it. A performance is thus always an adaptation of a text, but the adaptation is to the particular company and stage rather than to the director's ideas about life, politics, modern society, the energy crisis, capitalism, fascism, or any other externality.²²

For the scenographer, this means interpreting and creating the world as defined by the playwright, rather than inventing his own completely new location or setting; the play can have a far more powerful effect if its setting is taken both from the details provided in stage directions and dialogue, and also from the ideas and themes that can be discovered through a close analysis of the text. However, Hornby nonetheless advocates a production process that is more akin to scenography rather than design, finding that

it is not enough just to be aware of the spatial and temporal aspects of a script. They must be treated as *artistic* elements, which means integrated into the overall, unified complex, rather than as something extra or special. [...] That is, the setting is not just some decoration to be applied after the fact to please the audience or provide illusion, but instead is part of a unified, aesthetic process, embodying meaning through the construction of a "virtual space" that has specific, telling attributes.²³

Despite the artificiality of Hornby's separation of the three models of practice, and the negativity with which he views the two models at either extreme, these models can

nonetheless provide a useful starting point for a consideration of the multifarious ways in which texts may be utilised in production. Although in his book Hornby focuses on interpretation and staging from a directorial perspective, the ideas he puts forward are equally applicable to the work of the scenographer, or the work of a theatre company as a whole when working in an ensemble manner.

BARTHES'S READERLY AND WRITERLY TEXTS

Roland Barthes, a key figure in the development of French structuralist and poststructuralist literary theory, moved away from early work concerning theories of theatre towards literature and the development of a structuralist critique informed by developing Saussurean linguistic and semiotic theory. His work *S/Z* (1970), a critique of Sarrasine's story *Balzac*, is posited by many as standing at the crossroads of his structuralist and poststructuralist phases, and is important to the development of theatrical critique and theory for the idea he presents concerning the notion of '*lisible*', or readable, and '*scriptible*', or writerly, texts.

Why is the writerly our value? Because the goal of literary work (of literature as work) is to make the reader no longer a consumer, but a producer of the text. Our literature is characterized by the pitiless divorce which the literary institution maintains between the producer of the text and its user, between its owner and its customer, between its author and its reader. This reader is thereby plunged into a kind of idleness – he is intransitive; he is, in short, *serious*: instead of functioning himself, instead of gaining access to the magic of the signifier, to the pleasure of writing, he is left with no more than the poor freedom either to accept or reject the text: reading is nothing more than a *referendum*. Opposite the writerly text, then, is its countervalue, its negative, reactive value: what can be read, but not written: the *readerly*. We call any readerly text a classic text.²⁴

In creating an active reader, who takes his own part in 'producing' the text, Barthes subscribes to the notion that there is no specific meaning inherent within a text, but that it contains a multiplicity of meanings that can be interpreted and written anew by each new reader of the text. 'To interpret a text is not to give it a (more or less justified, more or less free) meaning, but on the contrary to appreciate what plurals constitute it.'²⁵ Where writerly texts are in effect put into production each time they are read, readerly texts are fixed and unchanging, 'products (and not productions), [that] make up the enormous mass of our literature.'²⁶

In his 1971 essay *From Work to Text*, Barthes goes on to differentiate between the concepts of work and text in a way that relates them specifically to the notions of readerly and writerly texts. A 'work' he posits as being analogous to the 'classic' literary, readerly text, whereas the new conception of 'text' he puts forward builds on the idea of the writerly text, something which can be '*experienced only in an activity of production*.'²⁷ The work may be contained in a book on a shelf, where the text comes only into existence through a reader's engagement and attempted interpretation. 'If the work is a tangible thing that can

be placed on a shelf, the text is to be understood rather as something indeterminate, unfixable; it is less a thing than a process of reading and interpretation. A text is multiple, contradictory, ambiguous, and its meaning uncontrollable.²⁸

The notion of the writerly text, or simply Text, is a useful one for considering textual analysis or interpretation for performance. In the same way that Barthes allows for each individual reader to bring his own reading and possible interpretations to a text, so too can each member of a theatre company bring their own reading of a script to its interpretation, rehearsal and performance. The dramatic text in performance can therefore be seen as the generation of a new text, an intermingling of each individual process of interpretation and production that may be presented as a multiple semiosis and not synthesis of ideas. The scenographer's visual reading of a text may therefore take its place as a co-writer of the new text, rather than being bound to a representational mimesis to be synthesized into a unified singular "meaning".

THE POSTSTRUCTURALIST APPROACH: PERFORMANCE AS SUPPLEMENT

In an article for the *Theatre Journal*, Marvin Carlson considered several standpoints of theatrical theory from which the staging of texts into performance might be approached.²⁹ Firstly, performance as illustration, rooted in the principle of organic unity, a concept in which 'staging may add to the attractiveness of a play but not to its essence.'³⁰ Secondly, performance as translation, an approach in which text and performance are theoretically equal, with the message contained in one 'translated' into the communication system of the other. However, Carlson finds that this 'model is conditioned by the normal presuppositions of theatrical production, in which this so-called translation runs always from script to performance and not vice versa; such a situation necessarily privileges the script as defining the originary parameters of the translation and makes performance subservient.'³¹ And finally, in opposition to the notion of performance as illustration, Carlson considers the idea of performance as fulfilment, the completion of a heretofore incomplete work: 'organic unity is achieved *only* in performance, and [...] the text as written is incomplete.'³²

Thus far, the theoretical positions considered by Carlson might be seen to parallel those of Hornby: performance as illustration akin to the symphony model, as translation echoing the sculpture model, and as fulfilment approaching the cinema model. However, Carlson finds all of these approaches problematic in their own way. 'The two approaches to performance, as fulfilment and as illustration, pose opposite theoretical problems. The one privileges the unity of the written text, thereby undermining any parallel claims by performance, but the other, by privileging performance, similarly undermines the written play.'³³ Carlson therefore posits a fourth, 'more fruitful way of expressing this problematic relationship'³⁴ from the work of Jacques Derrida concerning the notion of the supplement.

Discussed in his work *Of Grammatology*, particularly in relation to the writings of Rousseau, Derrida's concept of the supplement presents a complex contradiction of two separate yet inseparable significations. Firstly, 'the supplement adds itself, it is a surplus, a plenitude enriching another plenitude, the *fullest measure* of presence. It cumulates and accumulates presence.'³⁵ And yet, simultaneously, 'the supplement supplements. It adds only to replace. It intervenes or insinuates itself *in-the-place-of*; if it fills, it is as if one fills a void. If it represents and makes an image, it is by the anterior default of a presence.'³⁶ Derrida states, quite definitely, 'this second signification of the supplement cannot be separated from the first.'³⁷

Performance illustrates admirably this double dynamic. Illustration theorists have stressed the first signification, performance as something 'added on' – a supplement joined to the already existing plenitude of the written text. Fulfilment theorists have stressed the other signification, of performance as supplement in the sense of filling a void, perhaps even a void not apparent until the performance was created. Like the supplement, performance is necessarily engaged in this subversion of the illusion of plenitude in the written text.³⁸

For Carlson, then, 'the concept of the supplement, as theorized by Derrida, provides a new way of thinking about several of the key paradoxes which bedevil theories of performance as illustration, translation or fulfilment.'³⁹ Where these theories may attempt to ascribe plenitude, organic unity and thereby dominance to either text, performance, or indeed equally to both, 'the concept of the supplement makes the counter-assumption, denying plenitude to either written text or performance.'⁴⁰ Through this denial of plenitude, neither aspect is privileged and both may function simultaneously as both originary idea and supplement.

Carlson suggests that the notion of performance as supplement 'forces an adjustment of perception in both directions.'⁴¹ Not only does performance reveal retrospectively an incompleteness in the written text made visible only through the supplement of performance, but also 'its very existence suggests that further supplements are now possible and probably inevitable.'⁴² Indeed, Derrida himself suggests that 'through this sequence of supplements a necessity is announced: that of an infinite chain, ineluctably multiplying the supplementary mediations that produce the sense of the very thing they defer: the mirage of the thing itself, of immediate presence, of originary perception.'⁴³ Each new staging propagates the 'mirage' of the existence of 'the play' as the thing itself, and yet the plenitude of 'the play' exists only in the simultaneous supplementarity of text and performance.

SCENOGRAPHY IN TEXT-BASED THEATRE

Within contemporary theatre practice it is possible to identify a broad range of approaches in the work of companies staging literary texts, from the dogmatic textual faithfulness of Hornby's structuralist symphony model to the freedom offered by the

poststructuralist perspectives of Barthes and Derrida. Hornby bemoans the attitudes of practitioners such as Richard Schechner, whose

sloganeering only increases the prejudice already existing in the theatre against literature: the idea that theatrical performance has nothing whatsoever to do with literature, that playscripts have only a shadowy existence except in performance, that the methods used for analyzing literary works are incompatible with those for a play, and so on. With Schechner, the prejudice runs even deeper. He treats the playtext as just one out of many performance elements, including performers, space, audience, and so on. Instead of the text being seen as the generating idea of the performance, it is merely a single aspect of no special importance. (The next step, which thank goodness Schechner does not take, is to see it as having actually *less* importance than the other elements.)⁴⁴

However, Hornby's preferred sculpture model can become somewhat problematic once differences in style of playscript and writing are taken into account, placing differing demands on director, actors and especially scenographer. The naturalistic details provided by authors such as Eugene O'Neill, through the detailed absurdity of Beckett to the complete lack of any detail provided by scripts such as Martin Crimp's *Attempts on Her Life* (1997), all present varying challenges to the creative scenographer. The level of detail provided in stage directions and notes can paint an extremely vivid naturalistic picture to be realised on stage through the work of the designer.⁴⁵ Often the detail offered can be too much – how will the audience know what books have been placed on the shelves and if they are the ones specified by the playwright? – and the challenge for the scenographer is to find a more creative, less pedantic means of interpreting them. Rather than taking each description or stage direction as a given which must be recreated unaltered on stage, it is possible rather to interpret these details as *indication*, intended to give an idea of the *atmosphere* to be created on stage rather than the precise specifications to which it should adhere e.g. shabby, faded grandeur; claustrophobia; cluttered homeliness etc. The core essence of the scenographer's task is to read and interpret without verbatim reproduction, and to include in that reading the lines of dialogue in addition to any stage directions and descriptions.

Texts such as those created by Beckett and others working in the Absurd style can sometimes offer less freedom to the scenographer in comparison with the detailed naturalistic texts, rather than more. Partly this would seem to stem from the fact that the authors of this genre tend to be either still alive or relatively recently deceased and therefore still have an active estate guarding the integrity of their text. Indeed, the Beckett estate as an example is extremely vigilant about ensuring productions abide by the letter of his texts – neither dialogue *nor stage directions* may be altered or removed, but must be reproduced faithfully from the script, enforcing a mode of production which must be more aligned with Hornby's Symphony Model than his Sculpture model. Director Deborah Warner fell foul of the Beckett estate and had the rights to tour her 1994 production of *Footfalls* (1975) to Paris withdrawn, because she had created an environmental staging

for the play that did not fulfil Beckett's instructions, and had reassigned some of the lines of dialogue. (A case in point of the conflict concerning authorship and ownership of the text as discussed above) It is easier with some of Beckett's longer plays to find a creative approach to staging, for example the well-known *Waiting for Godot* (1949) has received myriad interpretations whilst still managing to remain within the letter of Beckett's text. However, some of the shorter one-page playlets, which often contain as much stage direction and description as verbal dialogue, can be more difficult to interpret creatively while still fulfilling Beckett's directions.

At the complete opposite end of the spectrum from both the level of detail in a Shaw or Ibsen play, and the insistence on adherence to detail of the Beckett estate, plays such as Martin Crimp's *Attempts on her Life (Seventeen Scenarios for Theatre)* presents a scenographic conundrum of a different sort. Although his script is divided into scenes, and uses a series of dashes to indicate each time there is a change of character speaking, that is the extent of the stage directions he includes, providing no indication whatsoever of the playing conditions for the text in performance. This text can be seen as representative of a new mode of writing and theatre making, the postdramatic, a topic that will be explored in detail in the following chapter.

ENGAGING WITH THE TEXT

If we follow Hornby's *Sculpture* model as a helpful method of transposing text into performance, it therefore necessitates a deep and lengthy exploration of and engagement with the text, not only for the director and actors but also, or even especially, for the scenographer. As mentioned above, Hornby suggests that the scenographer need not only work with the explicit and concrete details of a text that can be found within dialogue and stage directions, but also through the application of colours, atmospheres and other elements which can be found to be implicitly contained within the text as a whole. When working in this way, the scenographer is advantaged over the designer by his presence and collaboration within the rehearsal room; he is not limited to an engagement with the text on the page, or at best in discussion with the director, but is able to engage with it aurally as well, listening to and seeing the performers breathe life into the words on the page. The scenographer is therefore enabled to be inspired two-fold – by the interpretation and physical actions of the actors whilst exploring the text, and equally by the playwright's script itself, both as a printed text and through the vocal/aural medium of the actor. As Hornby argues, 'I see no reason why a rehearsal should not be an *exploration* rather than just the working out of a preconceived interpretation, or why critics or directors cannot be allowed to learn about a playscript from watching it in real space and time rather than just in their own heads.'⁴⁶

Similarly, if we follow the poststructuralist models of the writerly text, or performance as supplement, these too require a direct engagement with the text. Here the text does not offer a plenitude to be discovered by director, actors, scenographer, but is partial, awaiting completion through the staging of performance. With a text that is equal to, rather than privileged over, performance, the illustrative function of the scenographer becomes interpretative and creative, no longer searching for a staging to reflect the one 'true' meaning as intended by the author but creating a supplement based on their own reading and interpretation that completes and in some ways replaces the text. 'A play on stage will inevitably display material lacking in the written text, quite likely not apparent as lacking until the performance takes place, but then revealed as significant and necessary.'⁴⁷ The scenographer's work can be guided by his artistic response to a text, rather than dominated by the elements inherent within that text. Aesthetically and intellectually, the scenographer derives a far greater creative freedom from these poststructuralist approaches to literary texts, but as Hornby argued in relation to his structuralist approach, this freedom must be coupled with rehearsal-room exploration of the ideas it permits rather than the imposition of a preconceived spatial construct. The use of body in space can be seen as an integral element of performance as supplement, with the actor's body the primary three-dimensional resource available, and this too can only be developed fully through a collaborative, exploratory rehearsal-room process.

SOME CONCLUSIONS

Literary theory offers a number of possibilities for approaching the interpretation of a text into performance. Although primarily focused on the means of interpreting a text as reader, those methods can to some extent at least inform the reading and interpretation of text for performance. Barthes' declaration of the death of the author can be seen as an articulation of a shift in the balance of power away from the literary author and towards not only the director, with whom a certain measure of power already lay, but towards actor and scenographer too. The traditional hierarchical structure within the theatre, in which director replaced star actor as the authorial figure responsible for the ascribing of a definitive meaning or interpretation, has been displaced by a more democratic model in which each individual is empowered to ascribe his own meaning.

Hornby's structuralist model offers a useful mode of articulating different approaches to textual interpretation from a specifically theatrical standpoint. He too addresses the power balance between author and interpreter, finding a continuum with total author-ity at one end, complete interpretative freedom at the other, but preferring a negotiated middle ground in which both author and interpreter may co-exist. From the scenographic perspective, Hornby's Symphony model is too prescriptive to allow a model

of scenography as process to flourish, its dogmatic nature allowing only for the recreation and representation more suited to a traditional mode of design. The Sculpture model, preferred by Hornby as offering a middle ground, allows the possibility of independent interpretation whilst simultaneously referencing the author's intent. This mode of interpretation still allows for the existence of the author and privileges his author-ity to some degree, without the dogmatism of the Symphony model.

Alongside Barthes' differentiation between the readerly and writerly texts, Carlson's model of the text-performance relationship based on the poststructuralist notion of the supplement posited by Derrida also articulates a useful approach to textual interpretation for the theatre. Suggesting that neither text nor performance is complete in and of itself but is dependent on mutual supplementation to achieve an overall plenitude, this model offers a greater creative freedom than Hornby's preferred sculpture model, allowing for original creativity alongside illustration and interpretation. Despite its greater freedoms, the notion of performance as supplement simultaneously places greater demands on the scenographer, for although no longer dependent on the text, neither is he independent of it entirely, but must allow his creativity to be partnered by that of the author. Aesthetically, he is no longer bound to the dictates of the text, yet must negotiate his creative position through engagement with the text as written and in performance.

Hornby's final model, the Cinema, takes the approach to literary text in performance beyond the freedoms offered by Barthes' writerly text or the Derridean notion of the supplement, offering the potential for radical interpretation and a process that suggests that to stage a text is in essence to rewrite it. Each individual member of a company may bring to the staging his or her own reading and re-writing of the text. Although Hornby himself is scathing of the cinema model for its subjugation of the rights of the playwright to the whims and wishes of the artistes presenting it on the stage, this 'free' interpretation of a script can nonetheless offer rewarding opportunities both creatively and collaboratively to the scenographer. He is able to develop strong collaborative relationships with his co-creators (director, actors, sound designer, lighting designer, etc.) engaging in two-way creative dialogues, and also has a greater freedom of expression to invent rather than merely interpret, developing his own original ideas and feeding them into the creative rehearsal process.

The freedom offered by this model allows the greatest potential for scenography as an integral creative process within wider theatre making practice. Without restriction to the recreation of scenic elements dictated by the author, a new aesthetic freedom is granted to the scenographer to create an environment based not only on his own interpretation of a text, but also taking into account the individual interpretations of those around him. Multiple possible meanings become inherent in the visual as well as the

textual aspects of a performance, drawing in the audience as co-author of not only the text but the production as a whole.

However, this freedom is only inherent within certain processes and approaches to theatre making, and more often than not the traditional staging of a literary text will fall under the category of a readerly text, its staging approached through the structuralist symphony model. As Christopher Baugh articulates, "the "making of performance" has become a significantly different activity from that of "directing a play" and has required new practices, new technologies and a new stagecraft."⁴⁸ This being so, it is perhaps of more use to consider modes of theatre focused on the making of performance, which can offer a more open and fluid structure within which Scenography as a methodology can be incorporated. Therefore, the following chapter of this study will look in more depth at two areas of theatre that would seem to offer more opportunity for the experimentation and exploration of scenography as process: firstly, that which Hans Thies-Lehmann has termed the Postdramatic; and secondly, the practice of devising theatre.

CHAPTER FOUR

SCENOGRAPHY IN POSTDRAMATIC AND DEvised THEATRE

In his book *Looking into the Abyss* (2005), Arnold Aronson chooses the term scenography over design because he finds 'it implies something more than creating scenery or costumes or lights. It carries a connotation of an all-encompassing visual-spatial construct as well as the process of change and transformation that is an inherent part of the physical vocabulary of the stage'.¹ He goes on to explain that 'despite [the] lack of agreement on the meaning of the term, I still find it far more useful, more encompassing, and more inclusive than the word *design*, which, particularly in the United States, refers to a very specific and limited aspect of the spatiovisual experience of performance'.² There are various other texts like Aronson's which choose scenography over design as the term of preference. These texts for the most part use the variation of terminology to acknowledge the changes wrought to the nature of designing for the theatrical stage by the shift from the predominantly painted perspective scenery of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries to more three-dimensional plastic settings through the course of the first half of the twentieth century. Texts such as Reid Payne's *The Scenographic Imagination* (1993) recognise the need for enhanced interaction between actor and environment now that both are acknowledged as occupying the same space, and that there is therefore a corresponding need for a deeper involvement by the scenographer in helping to develop that interaction. Payne goes so far as to assert that 'the scenographer's most significant function, then, is that of manipulator of stage space in its relationship to the human actor'.³

Despite a number of theoreticians beginning to adopt the term scenography in relation to a more collaborative and interactive mode of design for performance, nonetheless their work predominantly refers to the text-based, literary or dramatic theatre. Indeed, Pamela Howard states that 'Working from an existing text is my starting point and inspiration for finding the visual solution for the play'.⁴ What these texts do not take into account is the ever-expanding genus of non-text-based and non-dramatic theatre. In his seminal text *Postdramatic Theatre*, Hans-Thies Lehmann has shown there is a vast body of theatre and performance work that has emerged over the last four decades which can be considered as *postdramatic*, i.e. no longer dominated by the interpretation and staging of dramatic texts. In this type of theatre, there is no longer a dominant literary text on which the scenic realisation can be based, and the theory of scenography as proposed by Howard can therefore no longer be considered wholly applicable or relevant. This lack of privileged dramatic text means, if anything, that there is in fact *greater* scope for the application of scenography as a visually-based methodology for creating work, and it is

therefore necessary to undertake a separate theoretical consideration of a definition for scenography within the postdramatic theatre.

Various texts in which the term scenography is appropriated in connection with dramatic text pay scant attention to the differing and greater demands placed on both scenography and scenographer by the move away from a literary text-dominated theatre, and similarly the main text that posits the theory of postdramatic theatre does not examine its wider implications for the process of design/scenography. In *Postdramatic Theatre* Hans-Thies Lehmann utilises the term scenography in preference to design, but neglects to consider either what the term itself may imply, or what the nature of postdramatic theatre may imply for the role of scenography within the theatre making process. This chapter will therefore give a broad overview of postdramatic theatre, its development and theatre-making processes, and its implications for scenography and the scenographic process.

POSTDRAMATIC THEATRE

Although the term postdramatic is a comparatively new one, it is already becoming accepted as an important addition to the language of theatre-making to articulate these changes in impetus and focus. Christopher Baugh finds that

'Postdramatic' is a useful term that embraces a wide range of contemporary performance practice and is generally used to refer to works that have been created from the perceptual elements and materials of theatre and which serve their own artistic purposes, not primarily those of the structuring device of pre-existing dramatic texts.⁵

Within the scope of this definition of the term postdramatic, there is a vast array of work that can be considered as belonging in this classification: the Happenings of the 1960s (through which the emergence of the postdramatic can be traced back to the work and ideas of the historical avant-garde at the turn of the twentieth century); the theatre performances presented by companies such as The Living Theatre, The Performance Group, The Wooster Group, The People Show and Forced Entertainment and individuals such as Robert Wilson, Tadeusz Kantor and Richard Foreman; and texts such as those by Sarah Kane and Martin Crimp.

POSTMODERN OR POSTDRAMATIC?

Lehmann's choice of terminology is at odds with much of the establishment, with practitioners across a broad range of creative disciplines (art, music, literature, architecture and so on) utilising the terms postmodern and postmodernist in reference to work across the latter part of the twentieth century and into the twenty-first. Although according to Colin Counsell, key postmodern theorist Jean-Francois Lyotard considered the postmodern to be 'not an epoch but a moment in which we recognise the limits of

representation',⁶ for many the term *postmodern* is seen as defining the era from the second world war onwards, and more particularly from the late 1960s onwards (for some theorists the emergence of the postmodern era can be tied even more specifically to the social upheavals of 1967/68)⁷, a 'cultural epoch' marked by 'a pervasive loss of faith on the progressivist and rationalist discourses of Enlightened modernity'.⁸ Much postmodern writing is intended to undermine or destabilise what the reader or audience previously took as being inexorable, and is characterised by fragmentation, discord, pluralism, a lack of distinction between high and low forms of art, and 'the indeterminacy of language and the unreliability of the text or of anything that is meant to communicate meaning'.⁹

Despite the fact that Lehmann opts for the term "postdramatic" instead of "postmodern" to describe the new theatre, his theory of postdramatic theatre is of course resonating with many aspects of postmodernist and poststructuralist thinking.¹⁰ If the main thrusts of Lehmann's argument for the paradigm of the new theatre to be termed "postdramatic" are so similar in many respects to those traits and characteristics identified as being symptomatic of the postmodern, the value of introducing yet another term into the complex and difficult-to-define melting pot of literary and theatrical theory may be questioned by some. However, the key to the usefulness of the term may be found quite clearly in the previous sentence: it is a specifically *theatrical* theory. Where, despite Lyotard's assertions to the contrary, postmodernism is often utilised as an epochal term encompassing late twentieth-century trends in a number of creative arts or an even broader "general cultural concept", and postmodernist and poststructuralist literary theory is precisely that – *literary* theory – Lehmann's work attempts to create a postmodern theory of *theatre*, deriving from the visible and documented developments arising in theatre practice over the past five decades.

Karen Jürs-Munby, Lehmann's English translator, documents that:

apart from a problematic inflationary and often superficial use of the term 'postmodern theatre' or worse 'postmodern *drama*', and apart from the difficulties surrounding any categorical definition of what the 'postmodern' actually is [...] scholars and practitioners have sometimes expressed unease about the fact that these discourses originated outside of theatre and performance.¹¹

By attempting to formulate a discourse that has its origins *within* theatre practice as opposed to pinning the tenets of literary theory onto theatrical practice, Lehmann attempts to address the concerns of the above-mentioned scholars and practitioners whilst simultaneously addressing the impact of wider postmodern concerns onto that theatrical practice. As Lehmann articulates, it is important that he is able to

read the realized artistic constructions and forms of practice as answers to artistic questions, as manifest reactions to the representational problems faced by theatre. In this sense, the term "postdramatic" – as opposed to the "epochal" category of the "postmodern" – means a concrete problem of theatre aesthetics.¹²

THE NOTION OF THE POSTDRAMATIC

Lehmann considers that for many, including academics and theoreticians, the notions of drama and theatre have become synonymous with one another to the point where 'despite all radical transformations of theatre, *the concept of drama has survived as the latent normative idea of theatre*.'¹³ It is precisely this exchangeability of drama and theatre that he attempts to address with the notion of postdramatic theatre, addressing the extensive modes of practice that have developed outside or "beyond" the tradition of staging literary dramatic texts.

Lehmann finds that many critics and theoreticians have defined the "new theatre" by what it is not, 'but there is a lack of categories and words to define or describe what it is in any positive terms.'¹⁴ His work is therefore an attempt to find these positive terms with which to define the paradigm of the new theatre. He posits the term postdramatic not as one which negates the existence or necessary history of the dramatic theatre, but rather as a vocabulary through which to define a theatre 'that feels bound to operate beyond drama, at a time "after" the authority of the dramatic paradigm in theatre.'¹⁵ Parallel to the postmodern destabilisation of the notions of perception and representation, so Lehmann's theory of the postdramatic considers the impact of this destabilisation on theatre, questioning 'in which way and with what consequences the idea of theatre as a representation of a *fictive* cosmos in general has been ruptured and even relinquished altogether'.¹⁶

Lehmann himself acknowledges that there are many possible forms that the postdramatic theatre may utilise, for example

Post-anthropocentric theatre would be a suitable name for an important (though not the only) form that postdramatic theatre can take. Under this heading one could assemble the theatre of objects entirely without human actors, theatre of technology and machinery [...] and theatre that integrates the human form mostly as an element in landscape-like spatial structures.¹⁷

Another form that he sees as being central to the development of the postdramatic is that of ceremony, a form embodied in the work of Tadeusz Kantor whose work 'leads far away from dramatic theatre: a rich cosmos of art forms between theatre, happening, performance, painting, sculpture, object art and space art and, last but not least, ongoing reflection in theoretical texts, poetic writings and manifestos.'¹⁸ This form of postdramatic theatre

...liberates the formal, ostentatious moment of ceremony from its sole function of enhancing attention and valorizes it *for its own sake*, as an aesthetic quality, detached from all religious and cultic reference. Postdramatic theatre is the replacement of dramatic action with ceremony. [...] What is meant by ceremony as a moment of postdramatic theatre is thus the whole spectrum of movements and processes that have no referent but are presented with heightened precision.¹⁹

Ceremony as theatre is one of a number of forms of postdramatic theatre that allow for the creation of performance without recourse to narrative, creating rather a series

of 'states' focused on formation rather than action.

Theatre here deliberately negates, or at least relegates to the background, the possibility of developing a narrative – a possibility that is after all peculiar to it as a time-based art. [...] The state is an aesthetic figuration of the theatre, showing a formation rather than a story [...] Postdramatic theatre is a theatre of states and of scenically dynamic formations.²⁰

With the relegation of narrative to a background possibility arises the opportunity for other elements of theatrical composition not only to come to the fore, but also to be liberated from the duplication of one another. Lehmann finds an important precursor to the 'decomposition' of the elements in postdramatic theatre in the aesthetics of Gertrude Stein: 'it is often tempting to describe the stagings of the new theatre as landscapes, this is rather due to traits anticipated by Stein: a *defocalization* and equal status for all parts, a renunciation of teleological time, and the dominance of an "atmosphere" above dramatic and narrative forms of progression.'²¹ This landscape theatre he now finds epitomised in the work of Robert Wilson, in whose work 'we find a *de-hierarchization* of theatrical means connected to the absence of dramatic action in his theatre.'²²

This de-hierarchization of theatrical means, or parataxis, is one of Lehmann's fundamental tenets, 'a universal principle of postdramatic theatre. This non-hierarchical structure blatantly contradicts tradition, which has preferred a hypotactical way of connection that governs the super- and subordination of elements, in order to avoid confusion and to produce harmony and comprehensibility.'²³ Visual aspects of performance are no longer subordinated to language and speech, and within this non-hierarchical theatre 'different genres are combined in a performance (dance, narrative theatre, performance, etc.); all means are employed with equal weighting; play, object and language point simultaneously in different directions of meaning and thus encourage a contemplation that is at once relaxed and rapid.'²⁴ Elements are no longer 'linked in unambiguous ways'²⁵ – there is a constant uncertainty surrounding the relationships between the individual aspects constitutive of the performance, and meaning cannot be immediately ascribed or deciphered but 'remains in principle postponed.'²⁶

THE PALETTE OF STYLISTIC TRAITS

Lehmann does not claim any specific style for postdramatic theatre, rather he considers parataxis as just one of a 'palette of stylistic traits' any or all of which may be identified within a performance of postdramatic theatre. Lehmann lists this palette as including 'parataxis, simultaneity, play with the density of signs, musicalization, visual dramaturgy, physicality, irruption of the real, situation/event.'²⁷ Lehmann acknowledges within his 'palette of stylistic traits' the contributions of both aural and visual aspects to the theatre of de-hierarchized theatrical means.

Within the paratactical, de-hierarchized use of signs postdramatic theatre

establishes the possibility of dissolving the logo-centric hierarchy and assigning the dominant role to elements other than dramatic logos and language. This applies even more to the visual than to the auditory dimension. In place of a dramaturgy regulated by the text one often finds a *visual dramaturgy* [...] Visual dramaturgy here does not mean an exclusively visually organized dramaturgy but rather one that is not subordinated to the text and can therefore freely develop its own logic. [...] *A theatre of scenography* develops.²⁸

Lehmann highlights here the potential for scenography within postdramatic theatre as a maker of meaning in its own right, through the technique of parataxis freed from subordination to the "higher" meaning of a text. Many of the techniques listed in his palette of stylistic traits are wholly or at least in part governed by scenographic principles: simultaneity and play with the density of signs utilise a plethora or absence of both visual and aural elements to work against the expected norms presented in dramatic theatre; musicalization allows for the prioritisation of aesthetic over intellectual qualities of speech and the emergence of 'an independent *auditory semiotics*';²⁹ physicality allows the foregrounding of the actor's body 'not as a carrier of meaning but in its physicality and gesticulation. [...] [It] refuses to serve signification';³⁰ and the irruption of the real brings a level of indecidability into the theatre space itself, blurring the boundaries between the real and the fictive.

The blurring of the borderline between real and fictive experience to such an extent has far-reaching consequences for the understanding of the theatre space: it turns from a metaphorical, symbolic space into a *metonymic space*. [...] we can call a scenic space metonymic if it is not primarily defined as symbolically standing in for another fictive world but is instead highlighted as a part and *continuation* of the real theatre space.³¹

Within that which Lehmann refers to as Performance Art, it is often the presentation of the real itself that constitutes the matter for performance. However, within postdramatic theatre 'the main point is not the assertion of the real as such [...] but the unsettling that occurs through the *indecidability* whether one is dealing with reality or fiction. The theatrical effect and the effect on consciousness both emanate from this ambiguity.'³²

In much postdramatic theatre, and especially that in which the irruption of the real is foregrounded, we can see reflected Jean Baudrillard's cultural theory concerning simulacra, simulations and the hyperreal. According to Baudrillard, the hyperreal world (in which we currently exist) is one in which the boundaries between reality and the imaginary have been eradicated entirely, and it is impossible to distinguish between the real and the imagined. A simulacrum is an image or representation of reality that, in Baudrillard's terms, has replaced the original object it represented, and it is therefore now possible for images to precede the reality they supposedly reflect. The world becomes a simulation, images pre-existing the "real" world they purport to present, and theatre therefore no longer needs reflect and represent the world as inhabited by the spectator but is free to construct its own (hyper)reality.

The irruption of the real, alongside parataxis, physicality, and simultaneity/play with the density of signs, can be seen as traits identifiable in many contemporary experimental companies in the UK. Forced Entertainment, one of the foremost British devising companies, can be seen as showcasing many of the stylistic traits Lehmann claims for postdramatic theatre. Their work often displays a visual dramaturgy juxtaposing any textual or narrative overtones, with multiple simultaneous physical and textual actions demonstrating the simultaneity Lehmann claims as a means for 'overstrain[ing] the perceptive apparatus.'³³ Density of sign may range from the empty space to the overfull one, while the irruption of the real is often a key feature of their work. Performers will often retain their own names into the fictive work, and the spectator has to face the indecidability of how much of what he is witnessing is the "truth" and how much is a fictive construct for performance.

Irruption of the real is also visible in the work of companies such as The People Show, Gob Squad, and Improbable, while physicality is the prime concern of companies such as DV8 and Frantic Assembly. Improbable also demonstrate Lehmann's notion that the postdramatic theatre space can be far more flexible in size than within traditional dramatic theatre, which 'has to prefer a medium space' in order for the spectator to be able to identify himself within the mirrored representation of the world on the stage. It is possible for postdramatic theatre to utilise both small spaces, (resulting in the centripetal effect of focusing both actor and audience inward, creating a close dynamic which involves the spectator in the dynamic of the performance), and large spaces, which have a tendency to create a centrifugal dynamic in which all other elements of the performance are dwarfed into insignificance by the overwhelming size of the space. In this manner, the attributes of the space itself may be utilised to add another conflicting layer of sign to the (in)coherent whole. All of the companies mentioned above, and many others, work through paratactical methodologies that allow visual, physical and aural elements to be conceived with their own determining logic, unconstrained by the fictive logic inherent in a textual narrative.

Lehmann's notion of postdramatic theatre is useful to the discussion of scenography as process in two ways. Firstly, it identifies an aesthetic based on a variety of stylistic traits which are predominantly concerned with visual and aural scenographic elements. To create performance in which scenographic aspects challenge and repress the dominance of narrative text, those aspects must be allowed to play and interact with one another, to "write" the performance through collaborative rehearsal-room practice. Changing power dynamics amongst the aspects of performance themselves result in changing power structures in the rehearsal room, and the presence of the visually-minded practitioner – the scenographer – becomes as essential as the presence of the textually-

minded practitioner, the director.

Secondly, Lehmann's assertion of the necessity for claiming a specific theory of theatre rooted in contemporary practice creates a precedent for acknowledging new modes of theatre-making as being fundamentally different to methods of working that have gone before and finding a specifically theatrical vocabulary through which to articulate those changes. The term scenography acknowledges both the rehearsal-room collaboration inherent to the process, and also the paratactical approach that foregrounds scenography as a driving force in performance creation, neither of which aspects of practice can be adequately expressed through the vocabulary of 'design'.

DEvised THEATRE

Devised theatre is defined not by any aesthetic concerns of form or style, but is rather concerned with the *processes* by which theatre and performance may be created. On one level it is possible to define devised theatre quite clearly

as a process of generating a performative or theatrical event, often but not always in collaboration with others. [...] 'Devised theatre' or 'devised performance' is sometimes used as a collective noun to indicate that it is an original piece of work developed by a company or sometimes by solo performers, but it would be misleading to suggest that this umbrella term signifies any particular dramatic genre or a specific style of performance.³⁴

Devised theatre, then, is the creation of an original piece of theatre or performance work, usually by a company but occasionally by either a solo performer or auteur director. Within the parameters of this broad process, however, there is an abundance of approaches that may be taken and techniques that may be adopted; 'devising is most accurately described in the plural – as *processes* of experimentation and sets of creative *strategies*.'³⁵ 'Although the material for devised performances may be generated through spontaneous improvisation, the processes of working are also likely to include an eclectic and experimental mix of playing, editing, rehearsing, researching, designing, writing, scoring, choreographing, discussion and debate.'³⁶

As a set of processes for creating an original performance, it is possible that devised theatre may create both dramatic and postdramatic works. Lehmann considers that postdramatic theatre can range 'from an almost still dramatic theatre to a form where not even the rudiments of fictive processes can be found any more.'³⁷ Similarly, a devising process may result in anything from a performance which is inherently dramatic, creating fictive characters who 'live out' a narrative action through the performance, to profoundly postdramatic theatre without character, narrative or action. The positioning of the performance product along this post/dramatic spectrum can be seen as almost entirely independent from the devising processes utilised, and the same techniques, when employed by two separate companies, may result in vastly differing types of performance.

Parallel with postdramatic theatre, the devising process is most often one which does not include, or certainly which does not privilege, the pre-existing dramatic text as the central constitutive of performance, although this has now become a question of aesthetic freedom rather than radical politics.

Although breaking the authority of the written text is not generally held to be a political ideal by contemporary theatre-makers, and many no longer prefer to work outside the mainstream, the practice of generating, shaping and editing new material into an original performance remains a central dynamic of devised performance.³⁸

This lack of textual dominance can be considered to ally the devising process more keenly with the notion of postdramatic theatre, but as noted above it is possible to achieve many forms of theatre and performance through a devising process.

In scenographic terms, devising processes are of fundamental importance to the possibility and definition of scenography as a process, as it is within the parameters of this mode of theatre-making, akin to Hornby's Cinema Model as discussed in Chapter Two, that scenography may be allowed to come into its own not merely as the addition of a decorative or representational element but as an aesthetic tool capable of adding its own layer of meaning to the theatrical performance, and indeed fundamentally influencing the form and content of the end performance product.

A recently published volume entitled *Devising Performance: A Critical History* (2005) gave infrequent consideration to the impact of a devising process on the design needs of a performance, and did not mention the term scenography once within the entire text. Although the change and development in theatre making practice is acknowledged and documented, there would seem to be an omission of any specific consideration of the scenic implications and more pertinently a lack of terminology through which to recognise these implications and their differentiation from the scenic requirements of traditional dramatic theatre.

DEvised THEATRE: ENSEMBLE/COLLECTIVE CREATION

In this type of theatre-making, the entire company - actors, director, scenographer, and others - are responsible for the creation and shaping of the performance product. As Deirdre Heddon and Jane Milling observe,

devising or collaborative creation is a mode of making performance used by many contemporary theatre companies [...] who use 'devising' or 'collaborative creation' to describe a mode of work in which *no* script – neither written playtext nor performance score – exists prior to the work's creation by the company. Of course, the creation and the use of text or score often occur at different points within the devising processes, and at different times within a company's *oeuvre*, according to the purposes to which they intend to put their work. However [...] devising is a process for creating performance from scratch, by the group, without a pre-existing

script.³⁹

Texts that develop through such a mode of performance making can be either taken from the company's own improvisations around the subject or stimuli of the devising process, edited highlights of pre-existing (dramatic) texts, or 'found' texts, for example answer-phone messages, television adverts, or song lyrics. There can be a high level of narrative developed, in the form of narrated story-telling or third person description of events, which may then be juxtaposed with unrelated actions and images. Physicality, sound, colour, space, costume and props are all given equal status and voice in the creative process; none serves the text, but is there for its own intrinsic value.

As such, this approach can be seen to be demonstrated in the work of companies such as Complicite, and can often be identified in their dramatic as well as postdramatic work. As David Williams has documented in relation to the work of Complicite,

At the outset of the rehearsal process, particular emphasis is placed on the establishment of a play space, with all sorts of objects, materials, research documentation, games and other rule or event-based practices available for individual or collective exploration. McBurney (Complicite's director) has used the word 'playground', and often reiterates a connection with team sports. The precise nature and use of texts, music, objects and other scenographic materials within a production, as well as the detailed texture of its compositional weave, are all determined over time in the studio according to a pragmatics of what seems to support and feed the emergence of a shared, deep-breathing 'world'.⁴⁰

McBurney himself records on the Complicite website that their devising process

is often extremely unstructured, though paradoxically quite disciplined. The room is crammed full of stuff; on the walls pictures, text, photographs, videos, objects, clothes and paper everywhere... But this is by no means a consistent picture. Often we reach a moment when there must be nothing in the room at all. It has to be bare, empty and uncluttered. So when rehearsing a piece I do not have a method, no single approach. Ultimately the material dictates each rehearsal.⁴¹

Allowing the material to shape the development of each performance, he also acknowledges that

a piece of theatre is, ultimately, in the hands of those who are performing it. The actors. It is they not the director who must have the whole piece in their every gesture, hearing the meaning in each word. And to do that I think, as an actor, you have to feel that you possess the piece. And to possess the piece you have to be a part of its creation. Involved intimately in the process of its making.⁴²

When collective theatre began to emerge in the nineteen sixties and seventies it was heavily related to the politics of the time, representing the ideal of a non-hierarchical anti-establishment mode of working. According to Heddon and Milling,

many theatre workers throughout the 1970s actively sought to create organisations that did not promote or support the bourgeois ideology, in particular the hierarchical structure of boss and workers. This desire to implement models that ideally enabled the practice of 'participatory democracy' initially led, in most cases at least, to the use of devising as a means of production.⁴³

The difficulties of making work in a completely equal, non-hierarchical group meant that

the political ideal was gradually abandoned, not in favour of any other hierarchy or structure specifically, but simply because each collective company developed its own internal structure and way of working that suited its own particular purposes. Despite this move away from the ideal of participatory democracy, 'it is interesting that, in the USA, this aspect of theatre-making is often described as 'collaborative creation' or, in the European tradition, as the product of 'creative collectives', both terms that emphasise group interactivity in the process of making a performance.'⁴⁴

COLLECTIVE AUTHORSHIP: A MANY-VOICED PROCESS

Bakhtin's concepts of dialogism and heteroglossia are concerned with the multiple voices contained within a text and the way in which those voices function in relation to one another and the to the reader/spectator. Relatively unknown outside of Russia during his lifetime, Kristeva's use of Bakhtin's theory of dialogism to develop her own theory of intertextuality brought his work to wider prominence. Although Bakhtin himself only applied his theories to the novel, being especially concerned with the work of Dostoevsky, and found drama to be essentially monologic, within a new era of theatre-making it is possible to find the theories of both dialogism and heteroglossia to be wholly applicable to certain modes of theatre making, to both process and performance product.

The concept of heteroglossia, similar to polyglossia, refers to the many voiced-ness of a text. These voices may take a number of forms – dialogue spoken between characters; the inner thoughts of characters; different speech genres such as professional language or class idioms; and the dialects and languages found both within a single culture and with the inclusion of multiple cultures within a single text. Dialogism refers to the resulting discourse generated by the interaction of these multiple voices, languages and dialects. As Sue Vice explains in *Introducing Bakhtin*, 'dialogism is the organizing principle of both polyphony and heteroglossia. In the latter, social registers of language interact in a friction-filled way to produce meaning. ... Dialogism describes the way the languages of heteroglossia are arranged within a text.'⁴⁵ Bakhtin proposed Dostoevsky's novels as dialogical in that they contained many voices without being subordinate to a single unifying voice, whilst he considered drama to be monological in that the many characters were usually unified in their world vision through the dominant authorial voice. However, 'even if one concludes that high tragedy is a monologic form, by no means as certain as Bakhtin suggests, there is clearly a vast range of drama that falls outside this genre, much of it as disruptive of the represented world as anything in the novelistic tradition.'⁴⁶

The parataxis and simultaneity of postdramatic theatre in particular offer strong possibilities for the effective harnessing of dialogism into the theatrical aesthetic. Forced

Entertainment, already discussed above in relation to the stylistic traits of postdramatic theatre, can also be seen to demonstrate the notion of dialogism, epitomising Carlson's drama that disrupts the represented world. In recent productions, their creative process has consisted of the bringing together of the voices/personas of the "characters" created by the performers together with fragments of found text from any number of sources, and the performance has been structured around the interactions of these many and varied voices. In *Bloody Mess* a disparate group of personas assembled on stage, each inhabiting their own individual performance world, and encountering one another in clashes and juxtapositions rather than in any sense of unified narrative vision.

Considering contemporary theatre-making practice, Marvin Carlson finds that:

the theater's inevitable heteroglossia has been to an important extent controlled and qualified by the emergence of the director, whose monologism in production may replace that of the author in the written text.

[...]

Even so, one clearly may speak of directors who are essentially monologic, subordinating the entire production to their own voice and often accused of turning their actors into puppets, and those who are dialogic, allowing the voices of other to enter into full conversation with each other and with themselves.⁴⁷

What Carlson would seem to suggest here is that not only can theatrical performance itself be both heteroglot and dialogical, but so too can the process through which that performance has been created. Indeed, as Carlson goes on to observe, 'even more evident phenomenologically in the theater is the heteroglossia created by the physical presence of a group of actors.'⁴⁸

One of the most important elements of devised practice is the openness with which ideas may be brought into the rehearsal room – all members of a company have an equal right to contribute creatively, bringing suggestions of music, object, verbal text or physical action into the devising process. And whilst there may be an artistic director making decisions towards the end of a process about the final shape of the performance, the essential process through which material is produced is dialogic, with continuing group debate regarding the artistic merits of the work being produced.

THE PLACE OF THE SCENOGRAPHER IN DEVISED THEATRE

It is perhaps in the context of devising or performance writing within a collective or ensemble approach that scenography can make its most original, collaboratively creative contribution. With this loosening of the creative hierarchy, and the development of the role of director as facilitator rather than dictator, there is far greater freedom of methodology and form available to the scenographer, allowing scenography the possibility of inclusion as an integral part of the devising process. Using visual, three-dimensional tools an environment can be created in which the actors can 'play', utilising objects, colour, shape, and space as stimuli for performance creation in the same way that text, narrative,

concepts and ideas may also be used as a starting point for the devising process. The scenic environment can develop and change at the same pace and in the same way as the creation of the performance text, and elements that seem to impede the development of the work may be discarded in a way simply not possible with a more orthodox approach to design.

As the director can be described as working more in the manner of a facilitator to the creativity of others than an autocrat dictating the realisation of his own personal visions, so too can the scenographer be seen as a facilitator or collator, but working specifically with regard to the visual and spatial ideas that emerge from the work of the ensemble as a whole. This role could be considered a form of visual dramaturgy, facilitating the development of the performers' physicality within the stage environment and their creative utilisation of the objects and space around them. The effective absence of someone working in this role is documented by Scott Graham and Steven Hoggett of Frantic Assembly, in relation to their production *Zero* (1997):

We had strong reservations about a set that represented the inside of a house. All pre-rehearsal conversations regarding the look and feel of the house and its room or rooms proved fruitless. This was at a time when there was no designer employed on our productions, and in this instance we strongly felt the lack of that individual who provides expert input on aesthetic issues, practicality and possibility.⁴⁹

Scenography should influence not only the physical form of a production but also its content, developing the impetus and emotional resonance created through the relationship between performer, object and space.

CREATING A PERFORMANCE TEXT

The level to which each member of an ensemble may be individually and collectively responsible for the creation of a performance in a devising process very often leads to a strong sense of both authorship and ownership of the work within that ensemble. Indeed,

the essence of devised theatre is a group of people working and rehearsing together over a period of time to create a performance text. Its excitement and challenge is the freedom to bring ideas, creativity, knowledge, exploration of dramatic form and the unique dynamic of a group of people working together to create a production, which is an expression of a group of people's views on their topic at a particular moment in time.⁵⁰

The work resulting from a devising process is inextricably bound up with the identities of those who have created it, and 'contemporary devisers are ... likely to have an expectation that the work will be performed by those involved in the devising process, at least in the first production.'⁵¹

In some instances, an original creator of the work may be unavailable to continue performing their role, and a new performer asked to take on that role in order that

performances might continue – for example, Simon McBurney, artistic director of Complicite, will often be involved as a performer in the creation of a new piece of work, but after the first performances will hand the role he has created to another performer. However, for other companies, such as Forced Entertainment, the performance is so inexorably linked to those who created it that it is very rare for them to allow anyone else to perform their works. 'This suggests an approach that, while questioning the authority and authenticity of textual construction, values the creative collaboration of theatre makers in the devising process. This builds a language of performance that uniquely suits the actors' particular identities, strengths and abilities.'⁵²

The annotation of such performances can be a major concern and difficulty facing companies such as Forced Entertainment and Improbable, working through a mode of collective performance creation in which a text is only one element among many which are indistinguishable and inextricable from the performance as an entire, singular entity. If a piece has been devised utilising a range of physical stimuli and movement, or even using a reassembled pre-existing dramatic text whose new form is entirely dependent on the physical structure of the performance, it is difficult for such a piece to be adequately documented and recorded in such a way that it can be accurately reproduced. American companies The Living Theatre and Performance Group published 'scripts' of their various works, but as Christopher Innes notes,⁵³ a high percentage of the material published consisted of photographs and descriptions of the physical actions that should accompany the text. Is there a need or even a real desire to document performances in such a way, or is each performance a product of its environment, its creators and its place in the space-time continuum, that cannot therefore be reproduced but merely imitated?

The question of whether a piece of devised work can be performed by anyone other than its original creators is part of an ongoing debate concerning the ephemerality of performance and the (im)possibility of recording and repeating such work. The outward physical appearance of the performance may be documented through photographs, sketches, plans, even video recordings. Similarly, textual and aural elements can be recorded as script or audio recording. However, all that can be recorded through any of these media is the outward appearance of the various aspects of a performance, the external sign. What cannot be captured is the human element of liveness that gives theatre its purpose and meaning. 'Performance practice [is] ephemeral – temporary, unrepeatable (even when repeated) and therefore unrecordable, because to record it is fundamentally to change it.'⁵⁴

The notion of performance being unrepeatable even when repeated, as suggested by Harvie above, has been articulated by Jacques Derrida through his theory of *iterability*. Iterability brings together the notions of repetition and difference, acknowledging the inherent contradiction that to repeat a thing is also to change it, simply by virtue of the fact

that it must exist in a different time space to the original event and is therefore fundamentally different while seeming fundamentally unchanged.

Iterability does not signify repetition simply; it signifies an alterability and, indeed, and alterity within the repetition of the same: a novel is a novel, generically, but every novel will inevitably differ from every other; therefore, the novel cannot, by definition, be defined even though there is that which amounts to the traces of an identity which are available for recognition, and by which the 'novel' as such is understood.⁵⁵

Derrida himself explains the development of his idea in *Signature Even Context*: '*iter* ... probably comes from *itara*, *other* in Sanskrit, and everything that follows can be read as the working out of the logic that ties repetition to alterity.'⁵⁶

This "tying together" of repetition and other-ness can be seen as fundamental to the articulation of the inherent difficulties of recording devised performance. The essence of the work is not an authored script that privileges the written word above the live elements of performance with which it is surrounded, but is an (w)holistic conglomeration of all the elements of the process brought together in performance in a specific moment in time and space. Whilst the same work may be performed more than once, each repetition becomes a new work in its own right, occupying its own space in time and authoring new readings through a change in spectator/receiver. The recording of a work, in words, pictures, even captured on film, brings a fundamental otherness to it which prevents it from being a "true" repetition of the live theatre event, translating into another medium an echo of that which has been and can never be revisited. Theatre is of the moment; once that moment has passed it cannot be repeated, although the external manifestation of its physical appearance may be echoed through the "repeated" performance of the "same" work.

THE IMPORTANCE OF OBJECTS AND SPACE

Within both a devising process and the myriad processes attendant to creating postdramatic theatre, the nature of the objects utilised within the creative process is of the utmost importance. (In this context, the term 'object' is used to denote any thing that may be used in the act of performance, from a chair to a hair clip, a wardrobe to a cup.)

The importance of utilising real objects in both rehearsal and performance is centred on a recognition of the importance of the relationship between the performer and his environment, and also in some part between the spectator and both his own environment and the performance environment. Objects that are used during the rehearsal process become imbued with a sense of performance, developing a history through their association with the performers during the rehearsal process. Added to this, real or found objects also bring to the rehearsal process and performance the history of their existence before their appearance in the theatre, an emotional history or resonance

that can arouse or evoke an emotional response in the spectator quite separate from that aroused by the context of the immediate performance context. These responses will be unique to each individual, performer or spectator, and the dual layering of the object in its immediate performance context and its prior history and associated emotional resonances ensure that each person who experiences that performance will do so from a fractionally different perspective.

The Polish auteur director Tadeusz Kantor, despite working largely as an *auteur* director, nonetheless utilised the inventiveness and resourcefulness of his actors while devising as he documented in his book *Wielopole, Wielopole An Exercise in Theatre* (1990); 'An actor's rehearsals, which are essentially active, possess all those elemental qualities without which no creativity is possible'.⁵⁷ Despite having a varied career that encompassed fine art as much as theatre, he realised very early in his encounters with theatre making the necessity of working with real objects in order to amalgamate a profound sense of reality with the fiction of theatre, that theatre should not be a fiction but must stem from the reality of everyday life and therefore everyday objects. He first discovered this importance of reality in the productions of *Return of Odysseus* which were presented in Cracow during the Nazi occupation of World War II, which was presented not in a theatre but in a war-torn room:

I was not making decorations in this room, there was no division between the stage and the audience, and so in fact there was no boundary, where the stage – the space of illusion – began... I said then that the room must be real. So I created a room destroyed by the war – which was reality, because there were thousands of such rooms in Poland at the time.⁵⁸

Within this room, 'Specially provided objects dominated. These were not theatrical props, but "found objects" that had been discovered among the realia of the immediate surroundings.'⁵⁹

Kantor originally assigned the term 'Poor Object' to the objects which he imported into his theatre from everyday life, a term which now has resonances and connotations of the work of both Grotowski, with his conception of Poor Theatre, and Peter Brook, with his notion of Empty Objects. However, Kantor later translated this idea into the phrase 'Reality of the Lowest Rank', which he describes in an essay, or manifesto, entitled 'Reality of the Lowest Rank' dating from 1980:

the need to

ACCEPT THE REALITY THAT WAS WRENCHED OUT AND SEPARATED FROM THE EVERYDAY
AS THE FIRST ELEMENT OF THE CREATIVE PROCESS;

SUBSTITUTE A REAL OBJECT FOR AN ARTISTIC OBJECT;

AN OBSERVATION THAT

A DISCARDED OBJECT, WHICH IS AT THE THRESHOLD OF BEING THROWN OUT,
WHICH IS USELESS, GARBAGE,

HAS THE BIGGEST CHANCE TO BECOME THE OBJECT OF ART AND THE WORK OF ART. I CALLED IT THEN " A P O O R O B J E C T . "

TEN YEARS LATER, THE ADJECTIVE " P O O R " WAS EXPANDED AND TRANSFORMED INTO

A NEW AND SHARPER PHRASE:

"THE REALITY OF THE LOWEST RANK." ⁶⁰

In his essay 'My Work – My Journey' Kantor provides the simplest of justifications for his determined use of those objects which for him constituted the Reality of the Lowest Rank – '... In theatre, one must do everything possible to discard external justifications and total expression and to allow the audience to experience the sphere of imagination...'.⁶¹ Eventually, through the utilisation of these objects and his work with the actor in the rehearsal room, Kantor defined something which he described as a 'Bio-Object', an organic combination of object and actor which provided the stimulus for the physical form of a performance.

BIO-OBJECTS were not just props that the actors made use of.

Nor were they bits of the décor that you could play around with.

They formed an indivisible whole with the actors.

They emanated a life of their own, self-determining, independent of the FICTION (the content) of the drama.

It was this 'life' and the ways in which it was made that constituted the *real* content of the performance. Not the *plot*, but the actual *materials* of the show.⁶²

As discussed in the previous chapter, Hans-Thies Lehmann finds Kantor's work to be one of the most explicit examples of postdramatic theatre, and Lehmann finds that Kantor's work with Poor Objects, or the Reality of the Lowest Rank, is one of the key components in his work contributing to the de-hierarchization of theatrical means. The Reality of the Lowest Rank

...manifests an intention found in many postdramatic forms: to valorize the objects and materials of the scenic action in general. Wood, iron, cloth, books, garments and curious objects gain a remarkable tactile quality and intensity. How this effect is achieved cannot easily be explained. One essential factor here is Kantor's sense for what he called the 'poor object' [...] In this state they can reveal their vulnerability and thus their 'life' with new intensity. The vulnerable human players become part of the whole structure of the stage, the damaged objects being their companions. [...] In Kantor's theatre ... the human actors appear under the spell of objects. [...] We can speak of a distinct thematic of the object, which further de-dramatizes the elements of action if they exist.⁶³

Also employing the found object in their work is the New York-based Wooster Group, under their artistic director Elizabeth LeCompte. In some ways LeCompte can be seen to work in a similar manner to Kantor, employing not just inanimate objects, text, sound and light but also the performers themselves as 'found objects' from which to mould the performance. In his book *Breaking the Rules: The Wooster Group* (1988) David Savran documented five types of found object from which the Group's performances were

created: tape recordings of interviews etc.; pre-existing dramatic texts; pre-recorded sound; the performance space or environment as it was left from the last performance; and what he refers to as 'improvised action-texts' – short fragments of gesture, dance or language. From his study of their performances and rehearsal room techniques, Savran concluded that

all of the Wooster Group pieces begin with a body of found "objects" [...]

Like a maker of collages, LeCompte takes up a found object, a fragment, that comes onto the scene without fixed meaning, and places it against other fragments. The interwoven network of objects that results is a text, within which the component object is newly produced (or reproduced), the result of active process, fabrication, work. A sense of the object's arbitrary nature is preserved, however, by virtue of its *dislocation* within the text.⁶⁴

In contrast to the work of Kantor, for the Wooster Group it is not the history or reality within everyday life of objects which is their main concern but the history of objects within the context of Wooster Group performances; costumes are often recycled from one piece to another but worn by different characters, while the scenic environment is often created from the 'leftovers' of the previous show or contains the same scenic shape or device but on a different scale or from a different perspective. Although each performance is different, there are nonetheless self-referential visual links between them; Arnold Aronson documents the process of LeCompte and the Wooster Group in his book *American Avant-Garde Theatre* (2000), and notes that

Rumstick Road also began another kind of autobiographical performance, one that might be called "group autobiography". It involved the conscious reuse of props, set pieces, costumes, scenographic shapes, and motifs from one production to the next. [...] the Wooster Group did something virtually unknown in theatre history: it created an ongoing body of work that flowed from one production to the next and that was consciously self-referential and reflexive.⁶⁵

Bonnie Marranca notes that 'LeCompte, a visual artist, starts with the construction of space as a way of conceiving design as structure.'⁶⁶ Whilst text may be used as another 'found object', the physical environment and objects, and their connotations and history within the Wooster Group, are of equal import in the creation of both structure and content of a performance. LeCompte herself notes that

when I go downstairs I don't have any thematic ideas – I don't even have a theme. I don't have anything except the literal objects – some flowers, some images, some television sets, a chair, some costumes I like. In the last piece, something someone brought in by mistake. That's it. And then ideas come after the fact. It's a total reversal of most of the processes.⁶⁷

Whilst most companies may reuse and recycle their material resources, in many cases such reuse may be out of financial necessity only, and attempts are made as far as possible to adapt and disguise these reused materials in order to avoid carrying forward echoes and connotations from one performance to the next. For the Wooster Group, as Aronson noted above, it is an intentional attempt precisely to create and evoke those associations and memories from one performance to another, creating a palimpsest on to

which each new piece of work adds an additional layer. The history of the group is the history of their work; therefore work and history are inextricably linked, and are presented as such.

For some performance creation, it is not just the physicality of performer or object that is the most significant stimulus, but the performance space itself. In site-specific theatre it is the location that provides one of the main sources of inspiration – indeed, if the performance does not originate and develop from unique aspects and attributes of the chosen site, then it cannot be considered to be truly site specific. Assuming however that the location is taken as a main stimulus, the creation of a piece of site-specific theatre can be considered as a wholly scenographic process – it is the physical form of the space from which the creative process stems, whether it be a shape, a colour, an object or light source within that space which inspires. This site-specificity means that a performance that has been created in and for a specific place cannot be transplanted, but can also be seen to extend to performances created in and for a specific community. As Peter Brook relates in *There are No Secrets*, when in the early 1970s the Shiraz Festival of the Arts in Iran tried to present the Ta'azieh, a local form of theatre, they attempted to present the 'best' performance they could by taking the most talented performers from a variety of villages, providing them with new costumes and expecting them to perform in a theatre building under spotlights, rather than the village square in daylight. As he documents,

the long trumpets hooted, the drums played, and it meant absolutely nothing.

The spectators, who had come to see a pretty piece of folklore, were delighted. They did not realise that they had been conned and that what they had seen was not Ta'azieh. It was something quite ordinary, rather dull, devoid of any real interest, and which gave them nothing. They didn't realise this because it was presented as 'culture', [...]

The meaning of Ta'azieh starts not with the audience at the performance, but with the way of life experienced by that audience. This way of life is permeated with a religion that teaches that Allah is everything and in everything. [...] Out of this essential unity can come a totally coherent and necessary theatre event. [...] When the nature and motivation of the audience changed, the play lost all of its meaning.⁶⁸

A THEATRE OF SCENOGRAPHY

As has been demonstrated over this and the previous chapters, whilst it is possible for a scenographic approach to be taken to the staging of literary texts, although Barthes' notion of the writerly text or Derrida's concept of performance as supplement, the potential for scenography as an inherently original creativity is still limited by the dominance of a literary text. No matter how "open" the approach to it, the text is omnipresent as a pre-existent article. In contrast, the postdramatic and devised theatres, as aesthetic and process respectively, offer forms of theatre where scenography is free to develop its own

logic. The new representational possibilities offered by these hybridised forms of theatre allow the originality of the scenographer to remain unfettered by concern for textual accuracy, and with dependence on a verbal text removed other texts – of music, action, movement and kinetic space – can be explored as alternative means of structure and form.

From the outlandish and challenging experimentation of the 1960s and '70s has emerged a visual and physical theatre that has become accepted and understood by a broad spectatorship world-wide. 'What might once have seemed bewildering or confusing is now largely accepted and common place,'⁶⁹ as spectators have become more closely attuned to the visual semiotics of a non-narrative theatre. This acceptance of a theatre in which body and object may be valorised for their inherent aesthetic values rather than as carriers of a greater meaning is indicative of a fundamental shift in the possible and permissible meaning of theatre. No longer expected to compete with the narrative naturalism better fulfilled by cinema, theatre has become its own subject, investigating the ways in which the elements available for its composition can be deployed in exploration of their own substance.

PART 3

CHAPTER FIVE

THEORY IN PRACTICE: CONTEMPORARY BRITISH DEvised THEATRE

It has been suggested in the previous chapters that with the significant growth of experimental theatre and performance through the last four decades of the twentieth century, beginning with the Happenings of the 1960s, new methods of making work and modes of working have developed that have resulted in new methods of design emerging. These new design modes have emerged not as methodologies for generating stand-alone works of art, but as a response to the demands of creating theatre design for work produced in a less hierarchical and more collaborative environment.

As yet these new methods of design have had scant attention paid to them in theoretical and critical works discussing the art of making theatre, and there has been little attempt to distinguish between differing modes of design. The main work in which the point is directly addressed is Pamela Howard's *What is Scenography?*. However, the limitation of this work, as discussed previously, is that Howard focuses on text-based theatre, whereas much of the work in which a more collaborative approach to design is necessary is not text-based but devised and/or postdramatic. Other writers have acknowledged the new sense of collaboration between set, light, and sound disciplines in terms of the performance *product*, but still do not address the implications of this collaboration for those creating the performance product and their rehearsal room process.

The purpose of this study therefore is to document and evidence that this new mode of practice is occurring within contemporary British theatre, that practitioners struggle to articulate these ways of working, and that there is a need to find a terminology that acknowledges these differences in process, in order to facilitate more effective communication of working practices and methodologies.

Within the context of this part of the study, the term 'design' is understood as referring to a specific mode of working, usually studio based, in which the design product is something that is created apart from the actors' rehearsals and may be completed before those rehearsals begin. However, the term *designer* will still be utilised as the term that practitioners and companies use to describe that particular function. Through interviews with set, lighting and sound designers and performers, it is hoped to establish that collaborative scenography and pre-conceived, fait-accompli design work are in fact quite different processes; *scenography* as process refers to a different, specific mode of working, not simply a more collaborative attitude to orthodox theatre design. This being the case, the single term *design* cannot be utilised to designate both processes, and it is

hoped to demonstrate that scenography is therefore a useful alternative in differentiating between the two modes of working.

The following chapters discuss the work of five contemporary British theatre companies and directors. This discussion draws on interviews with designers and performers who have worked on the productions discussed, as well as secondary sources already published by and about the companies and directors. The companies/directors that have been chosen for discussion in this thesis represent a broad spectrum of current devised and postdramatic theatre, with varying emphases and usage of text within their processes. They are: Complicite, Forced Entertainment, Fevered Sleep, Improbable and Katie Mitchell. The table below details the designers and performers from each company that have been interviewed.

COMPANY	PRODUCTION(S)	DESIGNER(S)	PERFORMERS
Fevered Sleep	<i>And the Rain Came Down</i>	David Leahy (sound)	Carl Patrick Laura Cubitt
Complicite	<i>Mnemonic</i> <i>A Disappearing Number</i>	Michael Levine (set) Gareth Fry (sound) Paule Constable (lighting)	Tim McMullan
Forced Entertainment	<i>Bloody Mess</i>	Richard Lowdon (set)	Richard Lowdon
Improbable	<i>Satyagraha</i>	Julian Crouch (set) Paule Constable (lighting)	
National Theatre	<i>Waves</i> <i>Attempts on Her Life</i>	Gareth Fry (sound) Paule Constable (lighting)	Michael Gould Paul Ready Jonah Russell

The remainder of this chapter will consider the general history and work of the companies, including discussion of a specific recent production or productions, and the reasons why the company has been included in the study. The following two chapters will then examine the working processes of the companies, and the place of scenography within both their processes and performance products.

COMPLICITE

Complicite have been chosen as a company representing the cross-over between text-based and non text-based theatre, with a theatrical style which utilises a significant amount of language and text oscillating between the production of pre-existing play-texts and devising their own texts based on various narrative sources. As such, they can be seen to represent in practice the notion of Barthes' writerly text, or the notion of performance as supplement: text and narrative is not abandoned in their work, but neither is it allowed to dominate, with the development of independent visual, auditory, and textual semiotic lines.

Théâtre de Complicité was founded in 1983 by its current artistic director Simon McBurney and three other theatre practitioners – Annabel Arden, with whom McBurney had acted at Cambridge, and Marcello Magni and Fiona Gordon, who had been studying at the Lecoq school in Paris at the same time as McBurney. Although the name has been shortened and anglicised over the past two decades to become simply Complicite, the original choice of name is explained by Dominic Cavendish as ‘partly in homage to their teachers, the mime gurus Jacques Lecoq and Philippe Gaulier, who encouraged an overt display of “complicity” between performers, and partly because they imagined they’d be working in France’.¹ Though the company ended up working not in France but with a permanent administrative base in England and multi-national casts producing work internationally, the influence of Gaulier’s thoughts on complicity have had a profound effect on the development of the company and its mode of working. Simon McBurney has said:

Philippe Gaulier always used to say that when he sees a piece of theatre he would like to feel a complicity between the actors on stage – not only between the actors on stage but between the actors and the audience. So there is a common joke, if you like, a sense of common understanding which exists in that room for the evening...

Unless the performers on stage were in greater control of the material they were performing or had in some way had a more creative hand in it than was generally accepted, this sense of shared understanding was not palpable. So I deliberately set out to work with people collaboratively. It seemed the obvious way to work, to me. It seemed the natural way within the context of the theatre. To wait and be told what to do seemed to me to be the unnatural thing.²

This emphasis on collaboration to create complicity has remained the focusing drive of Complicite’s work, and each piece that they create has a basis in collaborative devising and improvisation.

The company did not set out to become one of the most well-known and popular companies on the British experimental scene, bringing their devised work to the stage of the National Theatre. As McBurney explains,

in the beginning it was a project for a year. And then it grew into a second year and into a third and into a fourth. Then with each show I thought: “Well, we’ll give it up now”. And then another one and then I thought: “We’ll give it up now”. And then a season and I thought: “Well, that’s enough of that”. And it just sort of went on...³

As such, there is no fixed company that is Complicite; the only constant is McBurney himself, as artistic director, and the full-time administrative team. But over the course of more than two decades of making theatre, the company has accumulated a large number of artistic collaborators – actors, directors, writers, musicians, and designers of all disciplines – from whom McBurney can draw the talents that suit a particular show. Thus, although a different creative team and different group of performers may work on each

show, often a large number of them are already members of the Complicite "family", and *au fait* with their mode of working.

'Complicite's work ranges from adaptations of writings and short stories through reinterpretation of classic texts to major devised pieces.¹⁴ There is a broad approach to the use of text in their productions, ranging from the staging of Shakespeare (*Measure for Measure*, 2004) and Brecht (*Caucasian Chalk Circle* 1997), through adaptations and appropriations of written texts that are not necessarily play texts, such as the stories of Bruno Schulz, which formed the basis of *The Street of Crocodiles* (1992), and the writings of Daniil Kharms, which became *Out of a House Walked a Man* (1994), right down to disparate fragments of text or narrative that through the devising process are brought together and used to create interweaving narratives, in pieces such as *Mnemonic* (1999) and *A Disappearing Number* (2007).

MNEMONIC AND A DISAPPEARING NUMBER

The two most recent completely devised pieces by Complicite are *Mnemonic*, premiered 1999 and revived 2002/03, and *A Disappearing Number*, premiered 2007. Although there is a period of eight years separating the creation of these two pieces of work, during which time the company has staged a range of other texts, devised pieces and revivals of previous shows, there is a tangible connection between the two shows in both style and subject matter. Both pieces are concerned with memory, remembering, and relating tales from the past alongside stories from the present, interweaving several seemingly disparate narratives until eventually it becomes clear how each is somehow related to the others.

In both pieces a central storyline recounting the relationship between McBurney's character and his wife or girlfriend is presented through a dual narrative, one thread concerning the present state of their relationship, and a second thread presenting an account of their past together. In between these glimpses of both past and present, which through repetition and expansion eventually build into a coherent story, there are fragments of other stories and other relationships that are eventually found to be interrelated with the story of the central characters in some way.

In *Mnemonic*, Virgil and Alice are separated; she has gone off to try and locate her long-lost father in Eastern Europe, leaving Virgil alone, waiting to hear from her. As the play progresses, we hear more and more of a phone call from her, telling Virgil where she has gone, and why. This narrative is juxtaposed with that of a taxi driver from Greece who has moved West in search of employment and security, and the discovery of the Ice Man, a 5000-year-old corpse unearthed in the Austrian Alps, as well as glimpses of other lives and other stories. As Tim McMullan describes it, 'the Greek taxi driver's travelling West looking for his future, she's travelling East looking for her past. ... so one's going East and

one's going West and then there's a vertical line through it, which is the story of the Ice Man'.⁵

In *A Disappearing Number*, Al and Ruth are also separated, although this time by her death. However, the relationship is presented in such a way that it is ambiguous to start with as to whether she is simply away on a trip to India, a trip on which it is eventually revealed that she died. But again we see McBurney's character in the present, coping with the absence of his wife, whilst simultaneously reliving the entirety of their relationship and the circumstances of her death. This narrative is interwoven with the story of Srivinas Ramanujan, an Indian mathematical genius brought to England to study at Cambridge despite his low caste. It is here, eventually, that the two stories collide, as we discover that it was Ramanujan who inspired Ruth, a maths lecturer, to make her ill-fated trip to India.

Neither of these pieces is text-based in the sense of originating from either a pre-existing play-text or the stories or writings of a particular author, as has been the case in some other Complicite shows, but rather utilises narratives drawn from a variety of sources. The company then devises their own text and means through which to convey those narratives, creating work that is concerned with the telling of stories through language as well as image and action.

FEVERED SLEEP

Fevered Sleep have been included in this study as an example of visually-focused devising in which both narrative and text are often omitted, and the visual image and aural landscape supplant verbal communication. Although barely postdramatic in content, the approach to theatrical elements taken by the company is illustrative of Lehmann's notion of parataxis, of the displacing of text as a dominant force and the possibility for any other aspect of performance to guide the evolution of the work.

Fevered Sleep was set up in 1996 by David Harradine and Samantha Butler, who met during their time at Middlesex University. Harradine and Butler, along with the company's General Manager Ghislaine Granger, are described on the company's website as constituting a 'core team of three',⁶ who then work 'with an informal ensemble of performers, designers, technicians and musicians'.⁷ Although Harradine and Butler set up the company on equal footing and both directed, designed and sometimes performed in the early shows, Harradine now takes the lead as Artistic Director on most projects, initiating and directing most of the work. Butler has small children and therefore less time to devote to the company, but still works as an Associate Director, giving an outside eye to pieces as they develop.

The work the company makes encompasses a range of interrelated media; they 'make visual theatre, installation and site specific performance'.⁸ Both the visual theatre

and the installations that the company creates are in some sense site specific; although they could be transferred to other locations, the original development of each piece of work is very much informed by the location for which it is being created.

VISUAL THEATRE: Theatre pieces include *And The Rain Falls Down* (2006); *The Dreaming Place* (2005), a piece devised to celebrate the opening of The Egg theatre for young people in Bath; *Some Short Exercises in Love* (2004), devised to celebrate the opening of The Performance Gymnasium at Winchester University; and *Written With Light* (2002), a piece that combined performance and installation in the Undercroft, the maze of tunnels underneath The Roundhouse in London.

None of these theatre works are text-based, but are devised by the company through physical and visual means from an initial idea provided by Harradine. The devising process does not necessarily develop a narrative or language based performance, as the main components of that process are light, sound (not speech) and music, and the physical object, environment and body. Verbal communication is not always a necessary ingredient in the shows, and the most recent pieces have had little or no speech in them. As Laura Cubitt, performer, describes, 'all the pieces I've been in I haven't spoken in it really. And that's not, it's kind of not a conscious effort, but it's always a bit more like we'll try and do it without words, like there are infinitely more ways of creating an atmosphere and engaging with people and playing games than speaking.'⁹ In earlier shows, 'if there was kind of a text involved he [David Harradine] would write it and it's always quite poetic language'.¹⁰

INSTALLATIONS: in 2005 the company were commissioned to produce an installation as part of the inaugural season at the Artsdepot in London, for which they created an interactive installation drawing upon the story of Pinocchio, called *Field of Miracles*. Their most recent installation, as part of the exhibition "The Art of White" at the Lowry (November 2005 – May 2006), was titled *Fleet*, and consisted of a visual installation of suspended paper boats with a specially commissioned soundscape audible only to those who chose to take an infrared receiver as they entered the exhibition. Harradine is currently in receipt of an AHRC Research Fellowship for a project that he has titled *Written With Light*, picking up on the company's earlier work at The Roundhouse and comprising of a variety of projects 'exploring the connections between photography, light and performance'.¹¹

The work created by Fevered Sleep presents a crossover and blurring of boundaries between visual art, installation and performance; their installations are usually either interactive, requiring a performative interaction from the viewer, or have an accompanying sound track, which adds an aural performative dimension to static visual art. It is these same components of visual object, physical environment and aural

soundscape that the company uses to create their performance work; through the addition of the live performer the work becomes performance rather than installation, but without privileging the performer over any other production element.

AND THE RAIN FALLS DOWN

The most recent piece of theatre toured by the company, *And The Rain Falls Down*, was a piece for two and three year olds, 'inspired by the idea of the significance of children's bathtime, ...[that] tries to capture the spirit of joy that comes from playing with water, and the sadness felt when it trickles away'.¹² 'Performed on a watertight stage, with drips, trickles, puddles, a fountain, a flooded floor and a lot of rain, and with a specially commissioned soundtrack, the piece is a visually striking and poetic celebration of water.'¹³ The watertight environment included risers for the audience to sit on, and had been specially designed to fit within studio theatre spaces, with integral plumbing and drainage that allowed the space to both fill with and empty of water. The space was designed to hold no more than about twenty-five to thirty children and accompanying adults, with a performance space of just a few square metres, so the entire space was very intimate and allowed close contact between the performers and audience.

This was an entirely devised piece with no story or narrative, a conscious decision made by the ensemble during the devising process.

It would have been a really easy way to go, just have a narrative, and put that on, and have water involved, and quite simple maybe. But I think for the sort of show that we were trying to make, and David always does make, when it's more about the experience and the atmospheres, and people being able to have their own experiences in it... that just to put it in a narrative would seem quite, would seem a bit sort of superficial.¹⁴

It was also almost entirely without text, or verbal communication, again a conscious decision not just for this piece but for much of the work developed by Fevered Sleep.

REBECCA: Is that something that runs through David's work, not using very much verbalisation?

CARL: Yeah, he tends not to use... that piece you did at the Egg, you didn't say anything did you?

LAURA: nor in Winchester...

CARL: No, there was no language, and because often... again like what we kind of said before about not finding a narrative and not trying to tell a story, I guess with language it kind of...

LAURA: well it's really defining, isn't it...

CARL: I mean, words, words sometimes, they can sometimes get in the way, anyway. And they limit you in a way...¹⁵

The decision to include a line of text was not one that was made easily:

CARL: Even with that one line of: Oh, I'm really wet, I have to get dry, he [Harradine] kind of struggled with whether we should say it, and it kind of got put in, and then taken out, and then David said: oh, do it without the line... And then, it got to the

point where he just decided that actually... it just needed it, to really kind of put a full stop on that little bit.¹⁶

The simplicity and openness of the performance is intentionally non-prescriptive, allowing the audience to make their own story of what is happening, adults as well as children, without dictating or patronising. As Laura explains, 'It was quite a thing in all of our minds, but especially David's, not to patronise, not to impose, not to feed them too much, not be too prescriptive... to be as open as possible.'¹⁷

IMPROBABLE

Improbable, like *Complicite*, oscillate between the production of pre-existing texts and their own purely devised, often improvised live shows. Their devised work often has a focus around puppetry, and combines the visual emphasis of *Fevered Sleep* with the concern for narrative of *Complicite*. The irruption of the real is often at the forefront of their devised work, and performers frequently blur the boundaries between self and character on stage. The specific production discussed below is text-based, a Philip Glass opera that may be approached as being postdramatic through its lack of plot or character development within the libretto. The libretto itself is in Sanskrit, reflecting Lehmann's notion of an independent auditory semiotics based on the musicalisation of vocal elements, and the level of narrative conveyed through the staging of the opera is entirely at the discretion of the practitioners creating that staging. It is therefore the company's ensemble devising approach to this text that is of particular interest within the context of the present study.

Phelim McDermott, Julian Crouch, Lee Simpson and creative producer Nick Sweeting formed Improbable Theatre Company in 1996, or as the company prefer to phrase it, the company 'sort of muddled into being'.¹⁸ McDermott, Crouch and Simpson were all working theatre practitioners, and had worked together 'in various combinations for some years, and had successfully resisted the urge to formalise their relationship into a "theatre company". In the autumn of 1996 we gave in and formed Improbable.'¹⁹ Lee Simpson explains how he and McDermott began to collaborate with Crouch:

Phelim and I have worked together since around 1986-7. We did a show at Nottingham Playhouse, *Doctor Faustus*. Julian was at Leicester with Julia Bardsley. Someone told Phelim that Julian was lazy and we'd never get a set out of him, and Phelim thought: "That's a person I can work with", and because Julian was improvising in making design.²⁰

This improvisatory design process is what Crouch feels allows him to collaborate so successfully with McDermott and Simpson:

Improbable's probably like a partnership, I would say, they're like a chaotic partnership. ... What had marked me out maybe was my speed as a maker ... that I could work really fast, and both Phelim and Lee come from improvisation which

has got to be fast, it's immediate ... they want the work to be kind of fluid, and fast, so basically it was kind of a marriage made around that, actually, around improvisation, I think, about not making decisions until the last moment.²¹

Simpson explains, 'We got together because we found we were solving the same problems again and again – how to make something alive, in a Rep structure and theatre, which is not usually built for that'.²²

The company has now produced 12 shows under the Improbable banner, although all three partners continue to work separately and in combination both on Improbable shows and other freelance work. The type of work Improbable produces is extremely diverse in content, structure and source material. As Adrian Heathfield explains,

Phelim's work with Improbable over the last ten years has been remarkably diverse – I think at its heart there have been a set of concerns regarding the creative potential of improvisation within theatre structures, how one might lay open narrative through improvisation, what storytelling might look like and feel like when reconnected to things like the theatrical life of objects, or a kind of heightened visual or scenographic drive. And I think in terms of text Phelim's work has drawn on a whole range of sort of non-theatre sources which it's adapted and transformed from people's life narratives to cautionary tales to film scripts.²³

Improvisation and devising form an integral part of all the work created by the company, although the final structure of each piece and the amount of improvisation within the finished show may only become clear through the process of devising.

Sometimes our shows are totally improvised, sometimes they are devised through improvisation, sometimes they are improvised and become fixed, sometimes they are a script that is improvised with. The common thread is the spirit with which they are performed. A scripted show should feel as alive and vital as a totally improvised show. We sometime don't know which of these a show will be at the start of a process.²⁴

There are two main types of work that the company produces, as Julian Crouch explains:

the big shows, that we do for theatres, we tend to be asked to do, and so we've been asked to do *Satyagraha* ... the kind of shows that someone else asked us to do, and even *Shockheaded Peter* we were asked to do, it wasn't our choice to do it. I think they're one kind of show, and the other kind of show where it's just me, Phelim and Lee, pretty much, doing the smaller shows, usually with them we sit in a room and we have no idea what we're gonna do. And actually usually they end up very personal.²⁵

It is the smaller, more personal shows that tend to include a far greater proportion of improvisation during the live performance, and will therefore produce different performances each night. The larger scale shows tend to be more script based works: *Theatre of Blood* (2005) at the National Theatre was an adaptation of a horror film from the 1970s, *The Wolves in the Walls* (2006) is an adaptation of a children's book by Neil Gaiman and Dave McKean, and their most recent production, *Satyagraha* (2007) a Philip Glass opera. These larger scale shows also tend to invite more collaboration: *Satyagraha*, at the London Coliseum, was a co-production with English National Opera, and *Stars are*

out *Tonight* (2005), at the Lyric Hammersmith, was a collaboration with AMICI Dance Theatre Company.

Phelim McDermott explains the way in which the company tends to oscillate between these two types of work:

I think probably part of the journey about doing stuff which is... say you call it your own work, so if *Improbable* were to do their own work, it would probably happen in venues like this [the Riverside studios], say. And then every now and then you go: "Is it possible to take *this* kind of work into a place, can you push it a bit, in a place where they think they're gonna see a play, and then they get something else?"... And then, when you've done that and you've experienced what that journey's about, and very often most of the time your energy goes into dealing with the fears of the building, rather than getting on with creating the show, you go: "Oh, I've had enough of that, let's just go and make one of our shows and the people who like us will turn up". And then you get a bit bored with that, and you go back to dealing with that question again.²⁶

SATYAGRAHA

Satyagraha: M.K.Ghandi in South Africa very loosely tells the story of Ghandi's time in South Africa, and the *satyagraha* ('truth force') passive resistance movement he instigated to fight the racial discrimination suffered by Indian immigrants. The opera moves backwards and forwards through the years Ghandi spent in Africa: 'It's multi-layered and non-linear; you could almost enter the piece at any point and experience the whole thing'.²⁷ The libretto of the opera, by Constance de Jong, is based on the *Bhagavada-Gita*, an episode from the *Mahabharata* which as Julian Crouch explains, is 'a meditation on how to prepare oneself spiritually for combat',²⁸ written in Sanskrit.

This Sanskrit verse forms the entirety of the text sung in the opera, and therefore there is no plot or character development present in the sung text. These elements are only made clear through the accompanying list of characters and synopsis of each scene printed in the programme alongside the translation of the Sanskrit verse. Although Glass wrote some detailed directions regarding the staging of the opera, because of the open nature of the text itself it is possible for these directions to be interpreted very liberally.

This Philip Glass opera, we're in the eighties, you know, when, it was a particular time when people liked to cut up their work, so it's not in chronological order, as a story, there's also not really a story to it, the people on stage are singing from the *Bhagavada Gita* in ancient Sanskrit and they're not singing what they're doing, and then above each scene are three icons not from the period of time that the opera is set in, so you have Martin Luther King, and Tolstoy, and this Indian poet called Tagore, so really on almost every level it's inaccessible in a way, and you've got the Philip Glass music kind of goes round and round and round and it goes on for three and a half hours, and... So to be honest, to be honest with something like that there's not really a text that you would make any sense of, so really we can do what we like. So it does tend to be made around images.²⁹

KATIE MITCHELL

To some extent Katie Mitchell is the most orthodox or mainstream of the companies and directors discussed here, with much of her work concerning the staging of pre-existing literary or dramatic texts. However, two of her most recent productions at the National Theatre, Virginia Woolf's *Waves* and Martin Crimp's *Attempts on Her Life*, can most definitely be placed within the field of postdramatic theatre, and it is therefore her staging of these two radical texts within such an orthodox establishment that led to her inclusion within this consideration of scenography as process in contemporary British devised and postdramatic theatre. Part of a longer cycle of work exploring the use of digital media on the live theatre stage, these two performances explore postdramatic tenets of staging, as well as being postdramatic texts in and of themselves.

Katie Mitchell is a freelance director and Associate of the National Theatre. Although she does not work with a fixed company or theatre, in the same way that Complicite has increasingly become 'a loose alliance of collaborators'³⁰ Mitchell has also developed a group of collaborators with whom she tries to work repeatedly over a number of productions. As she explained in a platform event at the National Theatre,

I've reached a point where I couldn't do some of my stuff, if, every time I started to work on a project I had to have a new relationship with the actors. Because it wastes a lot of time, if in a six week rehearsal period, two of those weeks you're having to get to know each other and learning whether to trust each other or not, etc, etc, and learning your process, and you've wasted two weeks. Also perhaps I've had some less comfortable experiences with actors, and so I made a decision in my own mind, that I would work with, as much as possible, a fixed group of performers.³¹

She also works repeatedly with the same set, lighting and sound designers. Having met set designer Vicki Mortimer at university she has worked predominantly with her ever since, working with only two other designers in over twenty years.³²

Mitchell produces work encompassing a broad range of texts, styles and genres, ranging from the staging of classic texts such as *The Seagull* (2006), *Iphigenia at Aulis* (2004), and *Three Sisters* (2003), at the National Theatre, through a new rendering of Strindberg's *A Dream Play*, on which she collaborated with Caryl Churchill, to her most recent work staging two distinctly postdramatic texts, a devised adaptation of Virginia Woolf's *The Waves*, and Martin Crimp's *Attempts on Her Life*, both at the National Theatre 2006/07. Mitchell is also well-known as an opera director, staging Bach's *St Matthew Passion* at Glyndebourne in 2007. Across this broad range of work, it is always text based with differing levels of devising occurring in relation to different scripts.

Despite working repeatedly with the same collaborators, there is no single 'Katie Mitchell' style that can be identified through her creative output. Rather, as she herself describes it, her work moves through 'sort of two or three year arcs, through several

productions. So if you saw my opera work, as well as my theatre work, you'd go: "Ey, cheeky, very cheeky!" Same ideas being worked out but in a different medium.³³ What is identifiable in her work, although simultaneously indefinable, is the sense of the different form of theatre that she was seeking during her time studying in Eastern Europe. 'I decided to go to Eastern Europe because I was looking for a different type of theatre to what I saw in Britain. There was something – and I couldn't put my finger on what it was – that was absent, if you like, here. And I had a hunch that I would find it in Eastern Europe.'³⁴ As Gareth Fry describes it, 'for both Simon and Katie they're both interested in seeing more than just actors standing around on stage saying lines to each other'. 'In a way Katie's *not* very text oriented, she much more interested in the whole communication that's going on, and for her in a way the text is what's being said, and isn't as important as what the characters are conveying through their body language to each other.'³⁵

The emotion and action of a play are of more interest and consequence to Mitchell than the content of the spoken text, and it was this dethronement of the spoken text that she sought in the Eastern European theatre.

Much mainstream theatre here is very preoccupied with words and hearing them spoken clearly. There is less interest in representing human behaviour accurately, where words take more of a back seat. Expressions of human behaviour in theatre tend to be either exaggerated or too discreet or made up of self-conscious and artificial gestures and sounds. This type of theatre does not interest me. When I went to Eastern Europe in 1989, I started to see another type of theatre that was not interested only in speaking words clearly or characters behaving artificially.³⁶

WAVES AND ATTEMPTS ON HER LIFE

Waves and Attempts on Her Life are two of Katie Mitchell's recent productions at the National Theatre, staged in 2007. Although two very different texts, both can be considered as postdramatic, and both sit outside of Mitchell's usual text-based output in terms of the level of devising undertaken by herself and the company. Both productions also form part of Mitchell's arc of work concerned with the exploration and use of multimedia as a theatrical language. The texts were approached through this multimedia language in which light, sound and video projection were all operated live by the performers, creating a composition that was 'neither theatre nor cinema nor television nor radio, so it's a complete hybrid, it's none of those things and it's all of those things'.³⁷ The audience could see the video shots that were being filmed being projected live onto big screens and hear the sound effects and music that were being created and played, but could simultaneously watch the process of the performers creating that aural and visual material. This resulted in a strange duality to the performance of the live and the mediated, leaving the audience unsure as to what they were watching or were meant to watch, and with an undecidability as to the level of fiction and reality on the stage exacerbated through the use of technology as an intermediary medium.

Virginia Woolf's novel *The Waves* tells the life stories of six characters from nursery school to death, through the thoughts of the six characters rather than through any spoken dialogue or external narration. A seventh character in the novel, Percival, is present in the thoughts of the others, but his thoughts are not included in the narration. Rather than trying to present these characters on the stage, the actors developed new characters that were video and Foley artists, who were in turn making the adaptation of *The Waves* for broadcast. The excerpts of text that were used were illustrated through the combined use of visual image, narration and sound effect, all created live on stage through the video and Foley artist conceit.

Attempts on Her Life, subtitled *17 Scenarios for Theatre* by Crimp (although in this case actually only 16 as the first scenario was cut) includes scenes such as a series of answerphone messages, and satires of car adverts, Hollywood movies, MTV type glamour, and the world of Modern Art. The conceit laid over the text was more convoluted than that in *Waves*, due at least in part to the necessity of fitting the conceit to the text, rather than being able to adapt the text to fit with the conceit. The basic tenet was that 'the characters have all been head-hunted to appear in the first episode of a new BBC competition in which teams of people are put together and given a topic around which they must improvise live'.³⁸ Each of the sixteen scenarios was therefore a fresh attempt at improvising on their given theme, A Satire on the Ills of Western Consumer Society.

FORCED ENTERTAINMENT

Forced Entertainment is often considered to be one of the foremost experimental devising companies currently working in Britain. Although many of their shows contain text and spoken material, it is usually created as part of the devising process; the company rarely stages a pre-existing script. When text is created it is very often of a non-narrative nature, and the company can be seen to work through Hornby's cinema model with fragmentary text brought into the rehearsal room as one of many starting points for their devising process. The work the company creates can therefore be considered as not only devised but also in many ways postdramatic, as discussed previously in Chapter Four in relation to Lehmann's notion of the postdramatic and his palette of stylistic traits. It therefore seemed essential to include the company in any consideration of scenography as process within devised and postdramatic theatre, of which they would appear to represent the epitome.

Tim Etchells and Richard Lowdon formed forced Entertainment in 1984 with several other performance collaborators they had found during their time as students at Exeter University. The young group was very much influenced by established companies

such as Impact and the visual and cinematic forms of theatre they produced, and the company now considers its heritage to have been shaped by both the Live Art scene and the development of experimental work in both theatre and dance:

In one sense our work can be seen in the context of the UK Live Art scene. As part of this, since the 1980s, artists have tried to find new performance and theatre forms with which to describe contemporary urban life. In broader terms what we do connects both to the historical development of 'experimental' theatre, to the emergence in the UK of groups like The People Show in the '60s or Impact Theatre in the 1980s – and to more contemporary developments in mainland Europe and the USA in theatre, performance art and dance.³⁹

The core company of Forced Entertainment now consists of 'a group of six artists'⁴⁰: Tim Etchells, (artistic director and writer), Richard Lowdon (designer and performer), Robin Arthur, Claire Marshall, Cathy Naden and Terry O'Connor (all performers) who work with 'a growing network of artistic collaborators',⁴¹ including music and sound designer John Avery and photographer Hugo Glendinning.

The work the company makes is created collectively, and encompasses a wide range of performance media, styles and genres.

Our work spans theatre and performance through digital media, video installation and publication. It is original, contemporary work which develops new forms and old to find the most effective articulation of ideas. Work is shown in a variety of contexts, appropriate to the individual projects, ranging from theatres to public sites and art galleries.⁴²

Each piece of work develops its own form and structure to suit the material or content that has been created, drawing on, but without being bound by pre-existing theatrical modes and conventions.

...there are no strict rules that govern the form of a completed work. Some have large amounts of spoken text, others none. Some are high-energy, brash and chaotic, others are very still, highly focused and minimalist. Many of the performances are collage-like in structure – combining and colliding types and layers of material from different genres or sources.⁴³

For the first ten years of the company's existence, almost all of the work created was non-durational theatre performance. It was only after this initial period of theatre making that the company really began to explore and push the boundaries of form, with performance installations (*Red Room*, 1993), site specific performance (*Dreams' Winter*, 1994, *Nights in this City*, 1995) and durational pieces. 'After years of making theatre, where some part of the need was to rehearse and fix things – to make the same performance function the same way over and again – we yearned for a different approach, for something more on the edge. The long performances have been a set of steps in this direction.'⁴⁴ As technology has become more easily and cheaply available, so the company has added this to its stockpile of resources, creating video installation (*Filthy Words and Phrases*, 1998), performance videos (*Starfucker*, 2001, *Erasure*, 2003), an internet project (*Paradise*, 1998) and an interactive CD-rom (*Nightwalks*, 1998).

Although the work the company makes is created through a collective devising process and is non text-based in the sense that the process does not start with a finished script to be staged, text still plays an important part in their performances. The sources for these texts are varied; some arise out of the improvisations of the rehearsal room, others are "found" texts, fragments of overheard conversations, answerphone messages, cuttings from newspapers and magazines, or text that Etchells writes, usually in response to, or collating ideas that have come out of, the devising process.

Despite the fact that text and language seems predominant in some shows, often it is not the content of the text itself but the juxtaposition of what is going on around the text and its delivery that makes the presence or usage of text interesting to the company.

Text gets made in the rehearsal room alongside everything else, and therefore our interest in a particular text will often be that X or Y or Z is being said *whilst* a bunch of other things are happening. And those other things will be maybe interrupting, or *nudging against*, or rendering inaudible, or, you know, doing all sorts of things to that text. And, so there's a matter in the sense of the words, but it's also in a way as much about the kind of dynamics, the conditions under which that text, that thing is happening.⁴⁵

Text that is created through the devising process is not necessarily narrative or character driven, reflecting the company's emphasis on the physical and psychological dynamic between performers as the crux of their performance:

We are very interested in 'live' performance dynamics such as play, competition, upstaging, duress, exhaustion, pattern making and alliance forming. These things operate between performers in real time, and are often the 'engine' of the pieces, functioning in place of the more traditional 'engines' of character and plot.⁴⁶

BLOODY MESS AND THE WORLD IN PICTURES

The two most recent theatre performances developed by Forced Entertainment, *Bloody Mess* (2004/05) and *The World in Pictures* (2005/06) are a continuing exploration of genre, space and scenography, 'alternating between chaotic spectacle and fragile intimacy and continuing the company's exploration of theatre as a unique space of encounter between performers and audience'.⁴⁷

There is an important continuing line of exploration concerning the mode of performance, the relationship between stage and auditorium, performer and audience, and the exploration of a new way of using genre(s) to create and sustain that relationship.

Bloody Mess seemed to open a door on something else. Because, although it references numerous genres of performance (clowning, opera, heavy metal gigs, cheerleading) none of them is allowed to set the basic frame for the performance as a whole. Each of the performers comes from a different genre (if you like), or each of them (more or less) has a different understanding of what it is they are here to perform.⁴⁸

Bloody Mess is, at least superficially, exactly what its title suggests: a mess in which all of the performers think they are performing a different show, providing constant conflict

as they continually interrupt and compete with each other for the right to speak and have the audience's attention. The title of the show 'started for us as a way of defining what our ambitions for the new piece might be',⁴⁹ encouraging the company to rediscover a more visual and physical way of working more akin to some of their earlier shows, rather than the more recent single-genre based shows in which the activity of the show was defined 'by a single rule or activity', and the visual and physical aspects of the show were 'very simple and ordered and structured'.⁵⁰

Towards the end of *Bloody Mess*, a clown sits down to try and tell the story of the history of the world from a scientific perspective, explaining the Big Bang and how the planets were created and indeed how the world will end. Through the constant interruptions and distractions of the other performers he is never able to get to the end of the story, and it is here that the content of the two shows meets, as *The World in Pictures* picks up this story. 'Of course at some point in all this we start realising that in this work on the piece we're somehow trying to "tell" the part of the story of life on earth that John omitted in *Bloody Mess* (i.e. the bit with people!)'.⁵¹

The World in Pictures maintains the looseness of form and genre developed in *Bloody Mess*. Although it presents a narrative – the history of man – it is not a narrative fiction in which the performers inhabit characters and try to persuade their audience that the events unfolding are happening to those characters in a location other than in a theatre. Rather, there is an emphasis on narrated storytelling and enactment, as the performers as their twentieth-century selves demonstrate the characters and events from the story.

I think we're always searching around, in a way, to sort of say who are these people on the stage, and often we tend to cast ourselves as kinds of performers on the stage, we don't build another fictional world, these people are definitely in the theatre in front of you, so what kind of performers are they, what show do they think they've come to do?⁵²

This use of personas who are a blend of the fictive and the real performer are indicative of the way in which the company actively seeks to lay bare the mechanics of theatre, acknowledging and foregrounding the presence of both themselves and audience in a theatre space for a specific duration. It is this foregrounding of the real over the fictive, and the encounter between themselves and audience, that provides the basis for their theatrical performance.

SOME CONCLUSIONS

The companies that have been included in this study have been identified as representing a range of different uses of and approaches to devising, text, space and the performer-spectator relationship, whilst simultaneously sharing key commonalities. Two companies, Complicite and Fevered Sleep, have been chosen as specifically representing

devised theatre; two more, Improbable and Katie Mitchell, have been chosen as representative of the staging of postdramatic texts; and the fifth company, Forced Entertainment, can be considered as illustrative of the way in which postdramatic work may be not only staged but first created through a devising process.

DIFFERENCES

There are various differences between the five companies chosen for discussion within the parameters of this thesis. Firstly, the extent to which devising and improvisation are utilised within their process. Although this will be discussed in greater detail in the following chapter, the five productions chosen illustrate a spectrum ranging from the use of devising to stage a pre-existing, postdramatic text, to the creation of an entire show through devising and improvisation, with sections left open for continued improvisation during the performance. The level of devising and improvisation present in the five processes is somewhat linked to their usage of text. Three of the companies work with pre-existing scripts on occasion, although not necessarily on every show that they create. For Complicite and Improbable, these scripted shows are usually interpolated with productions of their own devising, which may or may not utilise text, and therefore may or may not result in a fully transcribed script or text. For Fevered Sleep, very little text is created through the devising process, although the content of a piece is usually fixed in visual form through a process of storyboarding (as discussed in the following chapter).

Space and scale are other important variables amongst the five companies discussed. Venues for their productions range from small studio spaces such as the Riverside Studios and Warwick Arts Centre, to the large stages of the National Theatre and London Coliseum. This use of centrifugal and centripetal spaces can be seen to reflect the ideas of Lehmann concerning the use of space, and the possibility for postdramatic theatre to inhabit both very intimate and very large spaces, unrestricted by the 'medium' theatre space he sees as home to the dramatic theatre. In some sense this range of spaces also reflects the level of concern of the company in crossing the proscenium arch and communicating directly with their audience: for Forced Entertainment and Fevered Sleep, for example, it is much more important to work in smaller venues in order to retain the intimacy and direct relationship with the audience of the metonymic space, values that may be lost in staging a production at the National Theatre. For Improbable, their scale oscillates with their shows: their 'own' work needs the intimacy of small studio spaces, whilst their text based work is often created for much larger spaces and audiences, as with *Satyagraha* at the Coliseum.

COMMONALITIES

There are two important commonalities between the companies that would seem to be essential in enabling scenography to function within the wider creative process. Firstly, all of the companies would seem to fit the description of 'a loose alliance of collaborators'. Although each company has one or more full time members, each is then supplemented with a number of other collaborators for each production, creating a network or family of performers, scenographers and technicians who are familiar with the devising processes of that company. It is noticeable that many of the scenographers, lighting, sound, set and video designers have worked with more than one of the companies discussed, suggesting that it is not only each individual company but the devised theatre community as a whole that is developing a loose alliance of collaborators, who can work together knowing that their processes and approach to theatre making will be understood.

Secondly, each company, regardless of structure and hierarchy, shares Gaulier's sense of common understanding and complicity that Simon McBurney found so influential in his approach to theatre making. The notion that each member of the company, regardless of their specified role, is equally responsible for the creation of the piece not only allows each to feel a sense of ownership over their performance, but also to cross the boundaries of delineated hierarchical structure and collaborate more effectively on every aspect of the show rather than focusing specifically on their own demarcated function. In scenographic terms, this allows performers to feel they have more control over the development of the environment in which they will be expected to perform, and can therefore negotiate a more integrated relationship between themselves, their performance and their environment. The scenographer is able to work with the performers as they develop their performance, and can therefore not only shape the space to enhance the work as it develops, but also shape the development of the work through the introduction of scenographic elements.

Both the differences and commonalities between these five companies are fundamental to the central tenet of this thesis. The sense of complicity and collaboration is essential to the very notion of scenography as collaborative process. However, through demonstrating that the visual and aural elements of the work of all five companies can be considered as the result of a scenographic process, it is hoped to demonstrate that scenography can be equally applied to the production of both devised and postdramatic theatre, text-based and non text-based, in a variety of forms and styles, and that regardless of the end performance product it is indeed this collaborative process that can be found in common amongst all five companies, thereby demonstrating certain fundamental models of scenography as process.

CHAPTER SIX

PROCESSES OF DEVISING

Having identified five current British companies or practitioners who represent a broad spectrum of work produced through collective devising processes, this chapter will consider the working processes of the companies both in general terms and with specific reference to the recent productions discussed in the previous chapter. The intention is to provide an overview of the creative processes of these companies and how they make their work in order to ascertain the role of scenography in that process. Closer analysis and discussion of the scenographic process itself will take place in the following chapter.

It is important to develop an understanding of the creative processes utilised by these companies in order to comprehend more fully the way in which scenography may function as process within their particular model of practice. It is hoped that by considering the working methodologies of these companies, who work through a range of different processes to create a variety of types of work, it will be possible to identify certain commonalities of practice that will allow the construction of a model or models of scenography as process. In order to construct models of practice from the working methods and processes discussed, it is important to identify to what extent the model presented by each company is transferable or replicable. If the mode of working is dependent on the specific personalities and relationships present in a company it may be more difficult to extrapolate a model or set of processes that can be imitated or replicated by other devising companies, although a symbiotic relationship between director and scenographer may in itself provide a model of practice.

STIMULI, SOURCES AND STARTING POINTS

Any creative process must have a starting point. The initial impetus to start a piece of work may be an invitation to stage an opera or simply 'talking about, around what you're interested in, or what's happening in your life ... you start talking about some themes maybe, and you make some jokes about those themes and you, slowly you maybe think of an idea'.¹ On the Complicite website, Simon McBurney addresses the question of where, and with what, their process starts:

We always begin with a text. But that text can take many forms – I mean it can equally well be a visual text, a text of action, a musical one as well as the more conventional one involving plot and characters. ... Action is also a text. As is the space, the light, music, the sound of footsteps, silence and immobility. All should be as articulate and evocative as each other.²

This statement can be seen as equally applicable to all five of the companies discussed here, not only Complicite. Two of the five staged pre-existing written texts for the specific productions discussed: Improbable's production of *Satyagraha* and Katie

Mitchell's *Waves* and *Attempts on Her Life* are all text-based works, although none can be considered conventional dramatic texts but are more postdramatic in their lack of explicit plot and character development, and therefore require a visual and physical text to be devised. This type of text is explicitly created in a style that invites an approach akin to Hornby's cinema model, and the utilisation of this type of open text is a common ground between two quite different companies or practitioners. In terms of Mitchell's output these texts can be seen as the least conventional and most open to a devising process, whilst for Improbable, working with an open script that they can devise around is as close as their work comes to the conventional staging of texts, more usually being a completely devised process.

The other three companies have utilised a variety of visual, aural and physical texts to begin their processes. Complicite, although on this occasion working on an entirely devised basis, represent a crossover between staging text-based and non text-based narrative works with their productions ranging from the staging of conventional texts such as Shakespeare, through the adaptation of other literary but non-dramatic texts, to the use of open texts of action, music and visual elements as indicated above. Even in their non text-based devised work, a stronger element of character and narrative is developed than is present in the postdramatic texts staged by Mitchell and Improbable. In this sense, their work can be seen as in the vein of performance as supplement, creating a 'complete' work through a negotiation and balance between textual narrative and physical and visual staging.

The two pieces discussed in the preceding chapter, *Mnemonic* and *A Disappearing Number*, were both completely devised pieces that began with a number of fragmented and disparate ideas. McBurney explains the texts that came together to create *Mnemonic*:

the root of the piece in this instance was our own experience. It was about what we remembered, about where we came from. That was our text. But it became more complicated. I had also been fascinated with the discovery of the 5000 year old Neolithic corpse in the Austrian Alps, written up by the archaeologist Konrad Spindler as 'The Man in the Ice'. And Rebecca West's journey to Yugoslavia in the 1930s. And Hans Magnus Enzenberger's musings on civil war at the end of the 20th century. And without knowing exactly how we would do it we began to connect these and many other texts together... until the piece emerged.³

A Disappearing Number is similarly a construct of many texts and interwoven narratives, such as string theory, infinity, and the mathematical achievements, life and experience of Srivinasa Ramanujan.

Unlike the previous three companies, Forced Entertainment do not work with conventional dramatic texts, but begin each new project with a completely improvisatory process. Nothing complete, text or otherwise, is brought to the table, only fragments and ideas that can be explored and developed. The process will often start with a debrief or

analysis of the previous show, and the starting point for each show varies. There is less emphasis on text or narrative, and a stronger emphasis on scenographic elements as stimuli, often comprising a miscellaneous collection of items: pieces of music or sounds, costumes, objects, spaces, or even simply the detritus from the previous show. Forced Entertainment's performance environment is often a metonymic space, with an indistinguishable blend of the real and fictive cohabiting.

For the early theatre pieces that Forced Entertainment created, the process would often begin with the design and creation of a set, or a mock-up of a possible set. 'We would build something to basically play around in, to muck about in, and part of that mocking-up things in the rehearsal space was in some ways building an environment that you could feel like you could play in.'⁴ The process would begin with the creation of a space, followed by the exploration of it by the performers, a process Lowdon describes as designing 'from the inside out, because you're thinking a lot about "if I create a space like this what does it make me feel I want to do?"'⁵

For *The World in Pictures* the initial stimulus was a 7-inch spoken word record titled *The Triumph of Man*. 'Combining a huge melodramatic soundtrack, copious sound effects and a very serious movie-trailer narrator, the record took you, in a matter of minutes, from the Birth of Man to the Space Race.'⁶

I think what we're looking for in those early weeks, and months, sometimes, is a taste of something that we can then exploit. And that might be, you know, that you find five lines of text, or it might be that you find a bunch of costumes that you like, or a set of actions or processes that people are engaged in, that you think are exciting. But I think the fundamental thing is that we're not looking for anything in the abstract, and we're not looking for anything outside of the rehearsal room, it's kind of all about being in that room, with everybody, and trying stuff.

[...]

the beginning is very much that process of trying to find something that has a kind of heat to it.⁷

Similarly to the space-led processes of Forced Entertainment, the work of Fevered Sleep is developed from a strongly scenographic perspective. 'All our work is design-led, devised collaboratively, and grows through improvisation and play from an initial idea.'⁸ The artistic director David Harradine provides this initial idea, although 'often it will be as little as: "I want it to be about water. That's all I know".'⁹ Much of the work the company produces is site specific in some way; the piece devised for the opening of the Performance Gymnasium in Winchester used the history and previous function of the space as the stimulus for developing the performance, thereby developing a connection to the theatre that would be irrelevant elsewhere. 'We did one to open a new theatre which was called the Performance Gymnasium, so we were like, well it's called a Performance

Gymnasium, and David went: “so, uh, something about gymnasiums, something about school, and something about that”.¹⁰

All of these companies then are more open to the text that may stimulate their process. It does not necessarily have to be a literary or dramatic text, but may be space, action, object, sound or light, opening the way for scenography to be integral to the process from the very outset.

PROCESSES OF CREATION

In considering the work of the five companies included in this study, they can be divided into a group of companies creating completely devised work – Complicite, Fevered Sleep and Forced Entertainment – and a group utilising devising and improvisatory techniques to stage postdramatic texts – Improbable, and Katie Mitchell. Although Improbable would fit equally well into both categories they have been grouped according to the specific production(s) discussed, hence Improbable’s grouping with Katie Mitchell in discussion of the staging of postdramatic texts.

The companies have been thus divided into two groups not because there is a marked difference in process between the processes of creating devised work and the processes of staging these postdramatic texts, but precisely to illustrate that there is not. Once past the initial difference in process of beginning with or without a text, the postdramatic text is so open in all aspects of its staging that the process can be treated as being akin to that of devising from scratch, and there are many commonalities to be found between the two processes.

CREATING DEVISED PERFORMANCE

Complicite work through a collaborative, devised methodology, in which all of the theatrical elements are utilised as much as is possible from the beginning of the process. ‘When Complicite start rehearsals for a new production the responsibility for creating the work is taken on by the whole Company. This includes performers, directors, designers, stage managers, writers and other specialists such as composers and puppet and mask makers.’¹¹ Although Simon McBurney is the artistic director of the company, he does not necessarily direct every production, and particularly on shows in which he also performs there is often an Associate Director, providing an outside eye completely disconnected from the stage. There are other supportive roles such as Literary Associate and Artistic Collaborator that occur within some processes and not others, depending on the demands of the piece and the direction the work takes. ‘For devised work Complicite usually employs a writer who will work on the text before the rehearsals begin. This work often involves dividing a text up into events that the actors can begin to work with. The writer is

involved at every stage of the rehearsal process and gradually develops a script from improvisations.¹²

Designers too are involved at every stage of the rehearsal process, helping to shape and develop the world in which the piece exists. Michael Levine, designer for *Mnemonic* and *A Disappearing Number*, explains how important it is for the designers to be able to work alongside one another and feed into each other's work:

...in previous productions I've worked on with Complicite you begin to introduce something into the rehearsal room, but based on something that somebody else has been doing, or you just introduce something you think would be *interesting* to put into the room, that comes from the various themes that are being discussed. And as soon as something is introduced into the room then the other designers will make use of it in some way, projecting on it, sound coming out of it, or, it sort of becomes an element which everybody begins to use. So it's a very *live* process.¹³

Having designers of all disciplines in the rehearsal room alongside the performers allows Complicite to have an organic process in which everything stems from the people present in the rehearsal room, and sound and space are given equal weight with narrative and text within the writing process.

McBurney often reiterates that there is no single process through which the company works, and that 'there is no Complicite method. What is essential is collaboration. A collaboration of individuals in order to establish an ensemble, with a common physical and imaginative language, ready to create work.'¹⁴ However, in establishing this ensemble with its common language, there are certain elements of the Complicite process that seem to remain consistent. The Complicite devising process is always a very physically based method of working, in which the first goal is to achieve a common physical language through which the piece itself can then be created. Regardless of the intended content of the piece,

always, the aim is to try and find a physical and theatrical language, and so there's lot of games and lots of exercises that we do, ... so that we're all working in the same way, physically, and we create a kind of theatrical shorthand, if you like, a physical, theatrical shorthand so that you can put things together very, very quickly.¹⁵

The creation of a physical, theatrical language that the performers all understand and share is paramount to McBurney:

I am adamant about unifying people through a common language. Parameters of communication are essential in the rehearsal room. You can't make assumptions. Once you've built up a common language you can work very fast. By language I mean a physical, vocal, musical and architectural language: all those elements which make up a theatre language.¹⁶

However, he is also careful to reiterate that 'the theatre language you move towards is not a constant one, it is defined by the material in front of you. ... there is not one single theatre language or, worse still, a single Theatre de Complicite language which we move towards'.¹⁷ As Tim McMullan explains, 'you don't want to do the same thing that you did

before, so you have to find a way of making a *new* physical language, for a new play, a new piece'.¹⁸ Text or spoken language may not necessarily have a large role in this part of the devising process; although 'words are obviously important to try and articulate things, in terms of presenting work they're less important, at some points, than trying to find the right image'.¹⁹

Once a new, shared language has been developed amongst the company, they are able to begin to improvise and create work based around the ideas, themes or fragments of text on which the premise of the show is to be built. This again is a mode of working which recurs in the Complicite process. According to Tim McMullan,

what I've always done working with Simon, and I know that it is what he always does on other productions that I haven't been involved in, is that you work in small groups, and you might spend a day or even anything up to two days, working on an improvisation, just amongst yourselves, two, or three or even four people, which you then present. And they can become *incredibly* elaborate, we have a sound designer working with us all the time, so that we can use sound effects, and a number of props and a limited amount of technology.²⁰

Within the Complicite working process it is possible to identify several practices that may contribute to the development of a model of scenography as process for creating devised theatre. Designers of all disciplines are often present during the devising and rehearsal process, and as illustrated above this allows them to engage in a constant dialogue with performers through which the work of the designer is incorporated into the work of the performer and vice versa. This dialogue allows the writing of the piece to be a single integrated process, simultaneously composing verbal, visual and aural aspects of the performance, and the writing and design processes are therefore all but inseparable.

Forced Entertainment 'are committed to a collective practice, to building and maintaining a group which shares a history, skills and an equal involvement in the creative process. Alongside this we involve collaborators from diverse disciplines, introducing fresh approaches and ideas, invigorating our practice.'²¹ Five of the six core members of the company have been there since its inception or very soon after, as has John Avery their sound collaborator, creating a shared history spanning nearly twenty years of collaboration and development of a common skills base and theatrical language, whilst still seeking out new collaborators and partnerships. Their work is still created collectively through a process in which all members and collaborators of the company are afforded equal creative input.

Within this process of collective creation there is some semblance of structure or hierarchy, with Tim Etchells designated Artistic Director and sometimes writer and Richard Lowdon as Designer. Both sound and light are the responsibility of artistic collaborators, rather than full-time members of the company. The decision for Etchells to stop performing

and take over full time the role of director was made early on in the history of the company,²² whilst Lowdon's route into designing for the company was less official:

...it started off collaboratively like everything else, and then as things went on it sort of ended up that I started taking responsibility for that aspect of it. So it was almost more by accident in a way... very early on, Huw [Chadbourn], who used to be part of the company, who was much more of an artist than I was, Huw and I would design things together, and then Huw left and I sort of got a bit left with it, and that was ok, so that's how it sort of ended up being me.²³

Being designated as responsible for the aspects of direction and design does not in any way privilege the ideas of Etchells or Lowdon in the rehearsal process; the job titles are more concerned with organisation and facilitation than the right to bring ideas to the table. Lowdon relates that

I think sometimes Tim would describe his job as being like a chair person, like he has to summarise where we've got to and where we think we might go, after a day of rehearsing, and then together we sort of make, we argue with each other and say: "oh, maybe we should push down this line, or this line, this line". And I think in some ways it's similar with the set.²⁴

Although Lowdon is nominally responsible for 'the design', he emphasises the lack of a role-specific hierarchy within the devising process: 'I think as a company we're really not actors and a director and a designer, in that sense. We're all making the thing, so whenever you do something you are of course also thinking about how it looks and how it works, as much as Tim is.'²⁵

The process of devising and rehearsing a Forced Entertainment show can be a long one, with often four or five months work actually creating the show spread out and interrupted by tours of other shows and work on other projects. 'The company's work is emphatically a group creation – made in a combination of rigour and free-play, during long months of improvisation and discussion.'²⁶ The interludes between each period of work on the devising process allow for extensive reflection and contemplation of the ideas explored and work created thus far in the process, and also allow for completely fresh material to be brought to the table for the next period of work. A lot of time is spent gathering fragments and short excerpts of material that have something interesting about them, identifying possibilities for later development and shaping.

As with *Complicite*, there are elements of Forced Entertainment's practice that may be useful in the construction of a model of scenography as process. Not only is the designer usually present in the rehearsal room during the devising and rehearsal process, but with the role being consistently fulfilled by Richard Lowdon the designer also functions as performer, allowing him a unique perspective on the work as it develops and being able to design "from the inside out". The verbal, visual and aural aspects of the performance are all composed simultaneously, and Lowdon considers that the scenographic elements 'are like writing the piece in some ways because they become something that you interact with'.²⁷ Being a founder member of the company, Lowdon has a long and well-established

relationship with artistic director Tim Etchells, and this familiarity allows them to blur the boundaries between their two roles. However, if it is this familiarity and the longevity of their relationship that allows them to work together in such a manner, does this preclude their working method as a model of working for other devising companies to follow?

Fevered Sleep does not have a set rehearsal period, but works intermittently on a project through a series of research and development weeks or workshops, before beginning a period of devising and rehearsing a piece. Research and development weeks are used not only to create ideas and material for the content of a show but also to try out some of that material on potential audiences, and for developing the technical aspects of a show, exploring how creative ideas coming out of the work with performers can be realised technically.

In both the R&D weeks, and in the later devising and rehearsal process, the emphasis of the process is on play and improvisation, interacting with and using both the performance environment and props and objects. In the second R&D week for *And The Rain Falls Down*, the performers were provided with 'lots of things to play with like goggles, balloons filled with water, and we had the actual set, we had the stage. And so we could flood it, we could make it rain... we could play with different types of water, and we tried out all sorts of different things.'²⁸ The emphasis of this play and improvisation is on the physical and visual, rather than the verbal, creating images rather than text. Cubitt describes the improvisation process as being 'about plucking out images and then building those images and then structuring them into a coherent fashion'.²⁹

Sound and light are also used as a part of the improvising/devising process; both David Leahy, the composer, and Joseph Manser, the lighting designer, have worked with Fevered Sleep for several years, and have collaborated with Harradine on projects as part of *Written With Light* as well as on Fevered Sleep productions. Having them present during the devising process ensures that both sound and light are integral to the finished piece, and for the performers 'to have everyone there that's really important'.³⁰ Leahy in particular will improvise sound and music alongside the performers as part of the devising process: 'you spark off each other and it might be that something that David plays on his double bass inspires us to go in a certain direction with what we're improvising, or just, David [Harradine] will put a light on the stage and say: "see what that does, see what that makes you think of"'.³¹

Although much of the company's recent theatre work has been aimed specifically at children, the approach to the work and the process through which it is developed are exactly the same as when they are making work for an adult audience although the way in which the material is then structured or shaped differs according to its intended target audience. 'When it comes to rehearsals and to the process of devising, it's approached in

exactly the same way as it would be if it was material for adults. And, you know, it doesn't matter who it's for, the work is approached in exactly the same way when you work with David's company. It's about... coming into a space and reacting to what's there.³²

In all three of these companies, then, there are identifiable common elements to their practice that may be helpful in the development of a model of scenography as process within the context of devised theatre. The working process of *Fevered Sleep* is slightly different to that of the other companies, in that the artistic director David Harradine also fulfils the role of designer, assisted by the company stage manager, and therefore all of the direction comes from a visual perspective. Nonetheless, it is important not only that the designer is present in the rehearsals, but also that design elements are realised and brought into the rehearsal room as soon as possible; as with both *Complicite* and *Forced Entertainment*, it is the relationship between performer, space and object that is fundamental in the visual writing of the piece, and thus in the writing of the piece as a whole.

STAGING POSTDRAMATIC TEXTS

Like many devising companies, *Improbable* do not have a single 'Improbable process', but allow the nature of the work and those making it to shape the process differently for each new production. Julian Crouch explains:

I suppose there's various different models for shows and we have different processes, and on the whole I guess each show has its own process, and I think that's what we intend to do, to kind of bring the show out of each of its, each process, you know, so that the show centres on process, to bring the right show out of the people that are in the room.³³

Within that, it is very difficult for the company to try and identify the individual components of that process and how it works, or even on occasion does not work: 'it seems such an organic process, and each show's different, that it's almost impossible to say how it's done. And I don't think there is a way of doing it, and sometimes, there are also sometimes when it just doesn't work, and we do a really bad show.'³⁴

The one component that is easily identifiable and provides a common thread running through all of the company's work is improvisation, and the key role it plays in the development of all of *Improbable's* work. 'Improvisation is a part of the making or the performing of all shows.'³⁵ The level of improvisation that may remain in a show is variable, but even for shows which become fixed in form and content improvisation is the main tool in developing the material from which the show is shaped. According to Lee Simpson, 'really we never rehearse, we only make theatre. Rehearsals are making all the time.'³⁶ Accordingly, it is also very important to the *Improbable* process to have an audience in the rehearsal room to watch and comment upon the theatre that is continually

being made. 'The audience are in the rehearsal room from day one. Watching other performers and contributing as an audience is as important as rehearsing.'³⁷

Much of Improbable's process is governed by games, and playing: 'Play is an essential part of our creative process although sometimes it looks like we don't take things seriously this is because we are true artists who know that great ideas only come when you have persuaded the gods that you do not care'.³⁸ As Julian Crouch explains more seriously, 'I think most of it is about that, it's sort of about playing games ... you're trying to help people forget that they're individual people, you're trying to dream them into some kind of world that the stuff they're using is real'.³⁹

The company prides itself on working through an ensemble-driven process: 'We believe that a lot of people talk about wanting to create ensemble in theatre however this is often lip service. We believe we are good at creating a genuine sense of ensemble.'⁴⁰ The creative involvement of the performers is paramount to the successful creation of a show: 'There are two stories in our shows: the story the performers are telling and the story of the performers putting on the show. This second story is the most important to us. If it is not present then the telling of the story will be pointless.'⁴¹

Director Phelim McDermott is highly interested in scenography and the organisation of the visual and physical on stage - 'I like interacting with materials and seeing what they can do and how they can speak'⁴² - and designer Julian Crouch often co-directs, enabling him to follow his design work through into rehearsal and onto the stage. 'Often the designer is a separate thing in a different room, whereas I have always been around actors so I guess that is how I ended up directing. I learned very early not to finish my work in the studio before rehearsals start and I guess that is what lured me into directing as that is really the only way to do that.'⁴³

The fact that Crouch is often cited as co- or associate director in the credits of shows is testament to the way in which role demarcations are not merely blurred but more or less ignored within the structure of the company. As Crouch explains, 'the writing and the design and the direction is, and everything, the music, all of it, is all... I don't really see the differences, I don't see the dividing line very clearly, and so I think I work better when they're all a bit blurred'.⁴⁴ The labels the company attaches to their various roles within a production process are often for the benefit of outsiders rather than themselves: 'sometimes you'll see me co-designing with someone else, co-directing with Phelim, sometimes you'll see me as associate director or whatever, and often what we're called is to do with keeping a building comfortable'.⁴⁵

Many of the elements of scenography as process that are visible within the Improbable process are the same as those that have already been drawn out of the processes discussed in relation to devised theatre: the designer is present in the rehearsal room working in constant dialogue with the performers, and fulfils the roles of both director

and performer on different projects. There is a long and well-established relationship between Crouch and McDermott, which again allows the distinction between their different roles to blur significantly, but again raises the question as to whether a company without such well-established relationships would find the Improbable process a useful model.

Unlike Simon McBurney and Complicite, Katie Mitchell readily admits to there being a “Katie Mitchell process”, explaining that ‘there are very concrete simple, practical steps that normally I take in every process that I do’.⁴⁶ She accredits the development of these steps to the teaching of Tatiana Olear and Elen Bowman, and asserts that it is ‘a very concrete methodology’.⁴⁷ However, she does find that ‘it is hard to talk about process because it involves so many simple, concrete tasks’.⁴⁸ The key word in all of these three sentences would seem to be *concrete* – her directing process is very much concerned with *doing*, getting performers on to their feet and making work.

Although all of Mitchell’s work is text based in some form, there is still a high level of improvisation and devising that goes on through her process, working with the performers to create back-stories for their character. For *Waves* and *Attempts on Her Life*, her rehearsal process had to be slightly adjusted from its usual pattern. Both of these productions were devised by Mitchell and the company, *Waves* being adapted from Virginia Woolf’s stream of consciousness novel with additional text taken from letters and diaries, and *Attempts on Her Life* a staging of Crimp’s postdramatic text. In staging these two productions there was therefore a necessity to devise the structure and presentation of each piece, rather than filling out the details and back history of an already detailed narrative script.

Much of the process of devising and rehearsing these two productions, particularly *Waves*, was devoted to the need to find a new theatrical language through which to present the plays, with *Attempts* continuing the experimentation and exploration begun with the multimedia language of *Waves*. However, only half of the cast of *Attempts* had been involved in *Waves* and there was therefore a necessity to teach the language to those who hadn’t worked with it before, as Gareth Fry describes:

in the early devising stages of *Attempts* people who’d done *Waves* were sort of straight away going into the multi-media world, and sort of going, ‘oh, you know, we could have three cameras on it and, you know, projection screens there and there to help tell that story and to give multiple angles, and, you know, you could Foley some footsteps and you could do some breathing’ ... whereas the people who hadn’t done *Waves* were sort of going, ‘oh, well, I’ll act this bit, and you can act that character, and maybe we’ll have some music in the background’ sort of thing, so there was a marked difference between the people who’d done it before and had experience of working in that way, and people who hadn’t. ... we had to sort of ease those people in to this new language and expand their sort of rehearsal vocabulary.⁴⁹

'Quite early on in the rehearsal process, Katie realised that a clearer framing device was needed for the production. There had to be a reason why a live performance of *The Waves* relied on Foley and video.'⁵⁰ Conceits were written for both shows, not to be made explicit to the audiences but to provide the actors with something 'to use to anchor their performances'.⁵¹

For *Waves*, in addition to the characters that Mitchell created within the Foley artist conceit each of the performers was given a character from Woolf's novel to work on, a process Mitchell referred to as 'caretaking'.⁵² Paul Ready, a performer in both productions, explains how the process worked:

We'd be given sections of the book of the cut down text, and we'd take it away and go: ok, how would you do this, how would you represent this bit, and so we'd come up with ideas like, ok, this bit I want a close up of Neville's face, I want somebody else making this noise, and we broke it down like that. And we basically worked all the way through it.⁵³

As the actors brought their ideas for staging each section into the rehearsal room, 'Katie, Leo [Warner, video designer] and Gareth would suggest how the pieces could be sharpened up to more accurately convey what the actors wanted. In this way the group began looking at practical solutions to staging the text from very early on.'⁵⁴

The devising process that occurred on *Attempts* was based around a text already in play form, and was therefore concerned with the creation of a world in which the play could convincingly sit. As with *Waves*, a conceit was devised creating characters who were in turn performing the text of the play, and as with *Waves* 'this set of circumstances was created predominantly for the actors' benefit so that they could have a secure understanding of the situation their character found themselves in and could respond accordingly.'⁵⁵

the process isn't, it isn't just a sort of mechanical choreographed thing of lights and cameras and projectors, it's not just a hotchpotch of images, it's all born of something, and hopefully we all understand what it's born of, in the company, we know where that particular image has come from, through discussion, through improvisation, through experience and so on. It's a very complete process.⁵⁶

Working with Crimp's text meant that the process was more text-driven and less flexible in terms of structure than the *Waves* process had been. Whereas with *Waves* 'if you were struggling to capture something you could transpose a different piece of text into it, so it, in a way it was more open to other possibilities... because we had this complete script with *Attempts* then we were trying to find the things that fitted that'.⁵⁷

According to Lucy Kerbel, staff director, 'the process was highly collaborative, during which much of the creative team spent a great deal of time in the rehearsal room with Katie and the actors'.⁵⁸ Mitchell acknowledges the importance of the input of both performers and creative team in this work:

It says devised by me and the company and it should sort of be the other way round, because I mean they make the most exceptional work. And this sort of

work, really also there's a whole other team, there's a designer, a sound designer, video designer, lighting designer, exceptional stage management team, it's very sophisticated. If you walk into the rehearsal room for the *Waves*, I mean the amount of banks of equipment and people that create this work are exceptional.⁵⁹

However, she also acknowledges that at some point in the process she has to take overall control over what is being created:

of course at some point I become an autocrat, and they seem to accept that because they know that a lot of their work is integrated into the picture, so they've generated say 60%, 70% of the work. I've organised it and then I've pushed them to do 30 to 40%. But we are a group of adults working. We're not like I'm the boss and they're somehow children, or lesser in some way. So that's the joy of working with people again and again, is you're just a group of adults with a problem: how to do *The Waves*. And then you have to solve it.⁶⁰

Despite the fact that Mitchell does not work regularly with the same company she has nonetheless managed to develop a long-standing relationship with a single designer, which allows her the same tacit trust and understanding shared between regular company members such as Crouch and McDermott, or Lowdon and Etchells.

If you observed an early meeting that we had, myself and Vicki Mortimer, you wouldn't really be able to tell who was the director and who was the designer. So it's a hard process for me to unpack and talk about, really. Again, we're just collaborators with problems, trying to solve them, in a way that's beautiful, and legible.⁶¹

This description of the symbiosis between designer and director neatly highlights the crux of the notion of scenography as process – no one individual is entirely responsible for any single aspect of the production, but the company as a group of collaborators must collectively solve the problem of mounting the performance. Individuals may have a responsibility for facilitating or co-ordinating particular aspects of the show, but only in collaboration with the rest of the company and the work they are creating.

DOCUMENTING, STRUCTURING AND SHAPING WORK

In all five of the processes discussed the companies create their work in short episodes or sketches that are then pieced together to create the finished show. The structuring and ordering of these shorter segments of work is often a process of trial and error, trying different combinations and sequences of scenes. Complicite develop a bank of material from which a performance can eventually be shaped, usually more material than can be included in the finished piece. The process through which it is sorted and structured is difficult to define, as Catherine Alexander, associate director, explains:

the final structuring of a piece of theatre is difficult to pin down but the crucial element is experimentation. Trying scenes in various ways and orders. This is impossible if you haven't improvised and created scenes in the early stages of the process. The worst thing you can do with devised theatre is to structure everything before you start playing and improvising.⁶²

Steven Canny, associate director for *Mnemonic*, explains that 'by trying things in many different ways it is possible to make a judgement about what is essential and what should be omitted. It is quite difficult to describe this process because it so often comes down to instinct.'⁶³

Material being selected and a performance order agreed does not necessarily preclude further work and refinement on a show. Discussing the early work that Complicite produced, McBurney relates that shows 'would be in constant development and by the time it hit first night, you know, it was a total mess but, on the other hand, that didn't faze us, we'd just carry on until it started to cohere. So the ethic was one of continuous work rather than designed product'.⁶⁴ This state of continuous development is something that applied to both *Mnemonic* and *A Disappearing Number*. Tim McMullan, performer in *Mnemonic*, explains that

what we had when we first started, ... was very, very different to what we ended up in finally in the Riverside Studios ... by then the play had really made itself up and had actually genuinely become whole, and a complete thing, which it wasn't at the beginning. It was more genuinely chaotic at the beginning, and it kind of worked itself out, really, over the years that we performed it on and off, it became more cogent, more articulate.⁶⁵

More radically, *A Disappearing Number* was remade entirely between its first performances in Plymouth and its second showing at Warwick Arts centre. Although it had the same designer as *Mnemonic*, Michael Levine, and a production team who had worked on other Complicite shows in addition to *Mnemonic* and/or *A Disappearing Number*, none of the performers had worked with Complicite before. As Gareth Fry describes it, 'the latest number is a bit of a departure because that's the first one they've done in a long time where nobody has done a previous Complicite show. So for Simon that's been very traumatic as he's had to introduce the whole bunch to the Complicite process.'⁶⁶ Once it had been remade, the piece was then allowed to continue to coalesce and cohere through four performances in Europe, with the show being refined and changed every day.⁶⁷

Similarly, in Forced Entertainment's work 'once the various sections, textures and texts of the piece are more or less established it is the sequence of things that comes to the top of the agenda. The last month or so is often an attempt to order the material in a way that's not narrative (necessarily) but which creates a satisfying shape.'⁶⁸ The finished show is slowly put together out of the shorter sections of material that have been developed, sometimes independently of another, over the previous months, with sections being re-ordered, discarded and reinstated in the search for "productive" combinations of the material. On some shows this process may also include work-in-progress showings to invited audiences, in order to gauge the impact of the work on an audience and its responses to it. For most shows, a final, scripted version is eventually developed that can be toured and performed with a certain degree of consistency.⁶⁹

Although for Mitchell and her company the structure of *Attempts* was fixed by Crimp's text, devising an adaptation of *The Waves* provided more freedom for shaping and structuring the work as they felt it should be. They created a large number of short scenes depicting moments from the text, creating a body of work from which the piece could be composed. 'Over the rehearsal weeks the company continued to devise material until they had created nearly 80 sketches. Many of these were abandoned, but those that were kept were reshaped and honed so that they worked together to form a coherent whole, rather than feeling like disparate snippets of material.'⁷⁰

In this sense although it is text-based, the process can be seen as similar to that through which Complicite and Forced Entertainment work. The performance had to be pieced together from short sections of devised material as in any other devising process, and although the order of scenes was dictated by the order in which they occurred in the novel, the company had to decide which material to use and what should be cut, what fitted coherently together and what did not fit. This process of fitting scenes together continued up until the production opened, with the company 'still devising it on the final day of rehearsals',⁷¹ and during the preview week 'the actors performed in the evening and continued rehearsing in the day. This time gave them the opportunity to test out their work in front of an audience whilst still making changes.'⁷²

The process of structuring and shaping a piece of work can raise the issue of how to document work that cannot be adequately recorded through the writing of a conventional script and once again raises the question of what constitutes a text, as discussed in Chapter Four in relation to the Derridean notion of iterability. The words that are spoken do not alone provide an adequate record of the visual and physical text of these performances, and even textual description of these elements is often inadequate. The visual focus of much of this work necessitates the formulation of other modes of documenting and recording work that can more accurately reflect the nature of the performances. Sketches, annotated scripts and video recordings are all methods of documentation that can more accurately capture the physical structure of a performance, and may be used to order and re-order episodes of material.

In order to capture and be able to recreate the moments of improvisation and creation that the group finds interesting and wishes to develop further into material for the show, almost all of Forced Entertainment's devising and rehearsal time is videotaped. Documenting their devising in this way allows them to document and recreate "hot" moments, circumnavigating the frailty of human memory, and the difficulties and frustrations that arise from trying to recreate such moments from the performers' memory of them alone. Each performer has a separate recollection of what they said or did, where and to whom, and the tempo of the improvisation can change as they try to recapture what

was exciting the first time around. Although the documentation process can be a pedantic one of describing in excessive detail the actions and interjections of each performer, it is the stutterings and accidents that make the original improvisations interesting, and which can only be recreated through the laborious process of transcribing the original improvisation.

The process through which Fevered Sleep structure material into a coherent performance is one of storyboarding, involving the whole company. 'We'll set out with a storyboard, so storyboarding it basically, with pictures, and put all the pictures out on different bits of paper, and any bits that we disagree with, we'll take out, and move around, until we collectively come up with something.'⁷³ Leahy describes the process as analogous to his own method of composing:

The way that we work, I do the same actually with music now, I sort of stole the idea, and John Dawn, a New York-based, a New York saxophone player, he has this way of composing, where it's just a whole lot of little vignettes of ideas, and he basically just puts them on, each idea on a catalogue card, and puts the idea on a catalogue card and then at the end of it, and we do it the same with David, and it's just like, *this* idea, *this* idea, *this* idea, and then we all sort of stand against a wall with these all stuck to the wall and we just go, that worked, that didn't work, that worked, that didn't work, how did people feel about that?⁷⁴

Because scenography and the visual aspects of performance are so integral to the work that Improbable develops, their process is quite often governed by those elements: 'on the whole I think we tend to work visually rather than verbally.'⁷⁵ They too utilise storyboarding and pictures to document and record the work, rather than writing a language-based script.

In our writing process, those junction moments, those kind of 'hot' moments, we tend to storyboard them. So if we're creating a show we'll, we'll be playing with stuff and we'll draw a picture of 'Ah, that'. And actually, in a *certain* way, drawing a picture of it is more likely, I think, to capture the essence of what was in there, than trying to, often, trying to write it down. So you get the kind of essence of what was in that moment. And then you'd storyboard it, and you've got some gaps in there, and you go 'What's missing there?', or 'That's really not in the show, throw it out', or whatever, so that, as a process that's what we, how we write with those kind of shows.⁷⁶

This pictorial rather than verbal emphasis in documenting work can be seen as reflecting the visual rather than textual emphasis of both the process and the work, and emphasises the scenographic nature of the devising process as a whole.

SOME CONCLUSIONS

There are various aspects of the working methods and practices of the five companies that can be seen as illustrative of scenography as process within a system of creating devised work:

- Scenographers/designers are usually present in the rehearsal room

- Designer/s may carry out more than one function i.e. also be a director, performer or carry out other technical roles
- There may be a long, well-developed relationship between designer/s and director with an overlap or blurring between the two roles
- The writing of both the visual and aural landscapes is an integral part of the writing or composition of the performance as a whole, and as such the different writing and design processes are inseparable from one another
- The designer is often involved in directing or rehearsing the show, assisting the performers to occupy the performance space and realise their ideas for visual and physical imagery
- Storyboarding, videotaping and other methods of visual documentation are often employed to record work in a non-textual manner
- All of those interviewed from these companies described how different this process was from any process they had been a part of in a more orthodox or traditional theatrical setting.

In all five of the processes described above, scenography is a critical element in the writing or composition of a piece; it is written as a whole, not as separate elements created independently of one another and brought together at the end of the process. The importance of this cohesive writing and design processes is underscored by Katie Mitchell's production of *Attempts on Her Life*, where the utilisation of Crimp's text placed certain creative restraints on all those involved in staging the production:

Waves we were able to totally adapt the source material to the conceit that we came up with, and adapt and edit, and we weren't allowed to change a single word for *Attempts*. We wanted to change quite a lot, cut vast swathes of it, rearrange the scenes, and all that sort of stuff, and in the end I think the conceit and the play don't quite sit together.⁷⁷

With a pre-existing textual component dictating the shape of the performance, the ability of the performers and creative team to devise freely was immediately curtailed, forcing them instead to work within the confines of a pre-determined structure. Although Mitchell, Mortimer and Fry were able to utilise scenography and the multi-media language as an approach through which to make the text accessible to the performers, ultimately the imposition of this structure compromised their devising process and thereby the end performance. The use of scenography as a tool for devising and its place within the devising process will be more closely examined in the following chapter.

CHAPTER SEVEN

THE ROLE OF SCENOGRAPHY IN PRACTICE

Having gained an overview of the general processes of the five companies included in this study, this chapter will consider the notion of scenography as process in relation to the work of each of the companies and practitioners. As can already be seen from the discussion in the previous chapter, the work of all five companies is in some respect design led with the scenographic elements of the work shaping and directing the construct of the end performance product. It is this writing of the stage space through the devising and rehearsal process that fulfils Howard's notion that 'to be called a scenographer... demands parity between creators, who each have individual roles, responsibilities and talents'.¹

In both devising and the staging of postdramatic texts there is an openness of form, content and process that allows for this parity between creators and the presence of the scenographer in the rehearsal room, perhaps more so than in the staging of pre-existing literary and dramatic texts that Howard describes. The intention of this chapter, and indeed the thesis, is not to suggest that scenography as process offers a new method of designing for devised and postdramatic theatre, but rather to acknowledge the changes wrought to theatre design by devising practices, and suggest that the use of the term scenography in reference to process as suggested by Howard is a useful articulation of those changes and differences in practice, and to illustrate those changes in practice and the concept of scenography as process within the work of contemporary British practitioners.

The consideration of scenography presented in this chapter will be divided into two sections, concerning processes of Visual Scenography, and processes of Aural Scenography. As Gareth Fry, sound designer and operator, explains, 'sound design is existing in the same aural space as the spoken word, so often my relationship is more closely tied to the writer and the director and the performers than it is to the other design elements'.² The discussion of processes of visual scenography will be further divided into Devising Space and Objects, and Devising with Light, considering each element as an individual component in the overall scenographic process. These divisions are not intended to reflect any separation within the processes of the companies themselves but merely to serve as a framework through which the scenographic process may be explored.

PROCESSES OF VISUAL SCENOGRAPHY

The process of creating visual scenography can be seen as being at the core of the devising process. The writing of the spatial and physical aspects of a performance

often takes place simultaneously, or even prior to, the writing of any spoken text and the development of any shape or narrative. This *process* of spatial writing is therefore of the utmost importance to the devising process as a whole (irrespective of what it produces): decisions made prior to or in isolation from the devising work of the performers can inhibit or close off completely what may otherwise have been fruitful avenues of exploration, trapping the work into a certain shape or space. Richard Lowdon of Forced Entertainment acknowledges the difficulties created by shutting down spatial options too early:

We really got our fingers burnt early on, I think, in the days when we did design sets and play in them afterwards, and we built this huge house, which we worked with, and we couldn't make *anything* happen in this house at all, and we ended up loathing the thing, and cancelling the show, because we just couldn't get it to do anything; it was a nice object, but it was like an impossible thing to play in. And in a way after that, I think, we got to be a bit more careful about letting things grow alongside the process.³

It is crucial then that the spatial and visual scenography are allowed to develop organically through an integrated process, informing and being informed by the creative work of all those involved in making the work.

DEVISING SPACE AND OBJECTS

For all five of the companies included in this study, the devising process as a whole often begins with the scenographic elements of space and/or objects. In some instances (usually concerning larger scale work), early design decisions may have to be made, then providing the performers with a ready-made world to inhabit and be inspired by. In other, smaller scale work, rehearsals may begin with an empty space and a collection of found objects for the performers to play with and utilise in creating their own world. As discussed in the previous chapter, there is no single method of devising used by each company, and therefore the starting point of space or objects will vary not only from company to company, but also from show to show as each determines its own process.

FEVERED SLEEP

All of the work produced by Fevered Sleep, whether theatre or installation, is visually based, and blurs the boundaries between a variety of visual forms and media. This crossover between art and performance therefore means that the main impetus into their work is the scenographic, with text or verbal communication only added if absolutely necessary. The development of a performance piece always starts from the visual and physical elements, in a process very much governed by play and improvisation. The performers' bodies are an integral part of the scenography, rather than manifestations of text that must then somehow be integrated into their physical environment, and the emphasis is therefore on finding ways in which the performer can interact with and

manipulate his environment in order to make beautiful and engaging images rather than developing character and narrative.

Much of the company's work is in some way site-specific, and therefore their process will often start with a space as a "jumping-off point" for the work. For *Fevered Sleep* this space can therefore be taken as the equivalent of the dramatic literary text as the fixed given in a more traditional process of staging plays. Although *And The Rain Falls Down* was a touring piece, rather than the company's more usual site-specific mode of working, it was nonetheless space driven. The set comprised a complete theatre space in itself, with simple risers for audience seating and watertight performance area complete with plumbing and plugholes. Although the space had been not only designed but built by the time the devising and rehearsal process began, the idea was formed from the work undertaken in two Research and Development weeks spent playing with water and water-related objects such as goggles, umbrellas and plastic ducks. The design was therefore informed by how the performers had interacted with and used the water, and how they wanted to be able to take those ideas forward. Having the resultant performance environment built between the R&D weeks and the final devising and rehearsal process allowed the performers to utilise fully the potential offered by the space in creating the final show.

The production manager, who has collaborated with David Harradine on several projects and is also co-designer for some of the performance pieces, tries as much as possible to realise design ideas as they emerge from the devising process, enabling the performers to work with real objects as much as possible. It is an important part of the process for the performers to be able to work with things that are real, rather than having to "act" or imagine things, enabling them to have a direct and truthful response to their environment and the objects within it.

I've been in lots of site specific stuff with David and its kind of about, it feels like you go into a place, and you... everything that you interact with is real... it's all authentic. So you're not having to sort of act on top of it, or act with it, or imagine it. It's a direct response to whatever's there. ... So you're always kind of responding quite truthfully, which kind of helps when you're trying to find things that are good games to play and good, sort of bits of play, that can make a piece. ... I would find it hard to work in any other way now, I think...⁴

There are two key aspects of scenography as process that are exemplified in the work of *Fevered Sleep*. Firstly, there is a parity between company members that allows each individual to contribute equally to the making of the work, with both visual and aural scenography being created in the rehearsal room, both developing from and shaping the development of the performers' work. Secondly, props, objects and larger pieces of set are made and brought into the rehearsal room as soon as possible, enabling the performance to be shaped around real space and objects.

IMPROBABLE

Although each Improbable show is different and unique, it is nonetheless possible to group them scenographically into two broad categories: shows in larger scale spaces that require sets to be built in the theatre's workshop, and smaller scale shows that tend to focus more on object than space, functioning without large elements of set or scenery. Shows in the first category might include *Theatre of Blood* (NT, 2005), *Shockheaded Peter* (although not strictly Improbable it was directed and designed by Phelim McDermott and Julian Crouch) and *Satyagraha* (ENO, 2007). Shows in the second category would be those such as *Sticky* (1999) and *Animo* (1996).

Animo is a totally improvised show, where you go on stage with nothing except some sticks and some bits and bobs, and I might make a mask on stage, but it's, literally there's nothing, you go on stage with nothing ... improvised shows like *Animo* and *Lifegame*, where you're going on stage with nothing ... there often I'm making on stage or designing in the moment. I have a technique kind of using this foam actually, where you can build straight on people's heads and on their hands or whatever, and we do a lot of puppetry just with sheets of newspaper, where you can do that live. So that's, those are an example of design absolutely in the moment.⁵

As the company explains on their website, *Animo* is a show that is very important to them, reflecting the way in which they prefer to work and the general ethos of the company towards making theatre:

ANIMO has always been of great importance to the company; this work is at the heart of the Improbable philosophy. Newspapers become swans, bristle brushes become creatures from the swamp and actors are constructed before your very eyes. ... Instead of a script or set, ANIMO has a range of everyday materials and found objects. From these, the company construct an hour of improvised theatre. There is no pre-set structure to the show, not even an intention to create a structure. Each ANIMO invents itself as it goes along.⁶

For the smaller shows such as *Animo* visual scenography is often the dominant writing process: 'Sometimes it's the only writing in a piece, so something like *Sticky* is absolutely just visual, there's no words, there's no acting as such',⁷ while the larger scale shows are often adaptations of a pre-existing text of some kind. Julian Crouch, artistic director and also for the most part the company's designer, explains how the process works on the larger scale shows:

the first show I did was a show called *Dr Faustus*, and the problems of that show are pretty much the problems of any show, including the one I'm doing at the moment, is that no-one wants to really decide how we're gonna do it and what we're gonna do, but I kind of *had* to decide because I had to make some stuff, so usually what I do is design some kind of set that is a world, usually a very strong world, so we make some decisions at that stage, decide what the world is, often decide what materials we're going to use, this [*Satyagraha*] is a newspaper and corrugated iron show, you know, *Dr Faustus* was just all books, everything was books, and paper... so because I have to hand in a set model or make some decisions, because I am in a way working slightly more closely with the building than anyone else in the company, something has to be decided, so usually I'll

force that first decision of what the world is, in this case, a library... and make the model, they'll make the stuff and I'll make sure it's got flexibility so I know you can do a certain number of scenes. I don't know exactly why or where those scenes are going to be.⁸

Because these design decisions have to be made comparatively early in the process, the actual devising of the show is then led by those decisions and the world that has been created for the performance and performers to inhabit. As Lee Simpson explains,

You have to decide on the set before the show, so you make some bold decisions. So for *Shockheaded Peter*, we wanted a little theatre, for *Hanging Man* we said let's have ropes and pulleys and trapdoors. The show is made from the kit. With *Hanging Man* we had a completed set and no idea how we were going to use it. We said: "Let's have a trap door here", without knowing why we wanted it. It was really made in the technical rehearsal. We arrive and go: "What haven't we used yet?" in the technical rehearsal and the set becomes the story of the show. "We haven't used that seat that goes up in the air on the pole yet, let's use it in this scene."⁹

Once the large-scale design decisions have been made, Crouch then turns his attention to smaller scale objects that can be played with as a part of the improvisation and devising process, creating a 'kit' that can be taken into the rehearsal room as a source material for the performers' work.

I'll usually start making some kind of puppetry kit, and this in a way I think is what Improbable invented ... with this idea of making different heads and bodies and limbs and wings... I make them independently like I'm doing here, and then when you work with performers you start putting those things together with other things, with junk, and objects, so there's always, there's always something that's not me in the work, it's not like I'm just designing everything and laying it out, but there's a real process with other people involved as well... and that generally is, I suppose was our general process for the bigger building-based productions.¹⁰

This puppetry kit does not contain finished articles, but is intended more as a collection of items that the performers can work with as they choose. 'What I'm doing with the making stuff is I'm making, it's almost like making found objects, I'm making, I'll make this, I'll make that, make this and make that, and then you're going to use it like you're putting together found objects.'¹¹

The use of space and objects is an important part of any Improbable process; puppets and puppetry are used in a large percentage of the company's work and the construction of puppets is therefore an important element in the development of any piece of work. The company has a unique approach to developing work with the actors and the puppetry kit:

What we did there [*Shockheaded Peter*], and we have done several times, sort of as a joke, but it's a very useful joke, is Phelim and myself will set out a table and we'll sit round the table like we're traditional West End directors, and you literally say: "Next!" and the actors'll have to, they'll go and get like a head, and they'll sling something together... and we'll audition what they've made, so we won't speak to them as performers we'll speak to the thing they've made.¹²

The development of these smaller scenographic elements is allowed to continue for as long as possible through the process:

there's not actually a real cut-off point, well certainly on this [*Satyagraha*], I don't think the making's gonna stop, actually, the team of people we've put together will be making and using the stuff, and they'll use the stuff and then they'll say 'actually we should go back, we should put this clip on there', so they'll actually be doing some designing and making, so that won't stop.¹³

Working in this way not only allows for a significant emphasis on the visual and physical during the devising process, but also allows all members of the company, and not just Crouch, to have a hand in the development of the scenographic construct of the show. As with *Fevered Sleep*, there is a distinct sense of parity between all of the collaborators working on an *Improbable* show, and there is a constant dialogue between Crouch and the performers, many of whom are involved in the process of making the puppets before then using those puppets to make a show. With the emphasis on puppetry in their work, visual scenography can be seen as the driving process in the creation of much of their work.

FORCED ENTERTAINMENT

The working process of *Forced Entertainment* too is very scenographically oriented, with props, objects and costumes featuring prominently in the devising process from day one. At the start of early projects where a substantial set was to be used for the performance, a mock-up of the set would be introduced very early in the devising process. 'The group consider these early rehearsal room 'mock-ups' or constructions not so much as sets but as spaces to be played in, discovered and explored.'¹⁴ This process of exploration, discovering or establishing a world for the performers and performance to inhabit, was the main starting point for the development of behaviours and texts for the performers, and as such can be considered as much a part of the writing process as the creation of text.

Space on stage isn't viewed as a decorative addition to an existing performance – but rather as a fundamental activity in the creation of the work – a kind of writing or creating of frameworks, that always have deep implications for what is possible in the performance, and for defining the kind of relationship/s the performers may have to each other and to the performance.¹⁵

As the work and interests of the company have developed, so too has their approach to space and its place within their process. Design elements have become smaller and more easily manipulated, and the devising process now is not about finding a performance inspired by an environment, but about using props and objects to create the world of the performance as the performance itself unfolds. In the most recent works the company have tended to use less and less constructed scenic elements – preferring in *Bloody Mess* and *The Voices* to leave the theatre stages bare and stripped to the walls –

so that actions and images created by the performers have to build their own context with only the barest, most minimal support from the environment.¹⁶

A lot of the 'design' that is Lowdon's task is not then about actively creating a set, but about shaping the performance space; bringing in objects that add a different quality or dimension to the space, or making decisions about size, shape and colour. Many of the objects that inhabit the Forced Entertainment stage are the 'real' and everyday – chairs, lamps and clothes bought from charity shops, old lorry tarpaulins, ordinary wooden kitchen chairs. Although they also make use of conventional theatrical scenery, artifice is only created if there is nothing "real" that will serve the purpose, and the real and the theatrical are mixed indiscriminately. Nothing is immune to use on stage, with the industrial heaters being used to warm the rehearsal room dragged into play as the cavemen's fire in *The World in Pictures*.

The company's entire working process follows a very collaborative model, and Richard Lowdon, designer, describes his role as being much akin to that of Tim Etchells, artistic director, a "chair person". In this sense his role is one of collating and editing the ideas of the entire group, 'taking care ultimately for how it works visually.' 'In a way you're building a series of pictures... in a way that's like a picture dramaturgy of the piece... I find it impossible to talk about one strand without talking about the others, because all those things are always interrelated.'¹⁷ Lowdon feels strongly that by being in a space and interacting with the objects placed in that space, performers are therefore engaged to some extent in the design process and that by being involved in the making process each performer takes a share of the responsibility for how the piece develops. 'Whenever part of the visual making process of a piece is, you might say, bringing things onto the stage, or the performers on stage having a task where they're rearranging objects, then they are always involved effectively in designing the show.'¹⁸

The performers' bodies themselves are an integral part of the scenography of any performance, usually for the ways in which they are juxtaposed with the text. It is often the physical circumstances of where and how the text is delivered that is equally or more important than the content of the words. 'Forced Entertainment's texts don't all sit naturalistically or even comfortably with the figures that speak them, the situations they are spoken in or the style of delivery – often a good result has been in unlikely combinations.'¹⁹ In some instances the physical actions of a scene may be kept but different text found or written to replace the text originally created in improvisation. 'It's not uncommon for the group to discover a good texture or position for a text (a whispered text, or a text delivered from the very edge of the stage) and only subsequently find the content to go with it that they are happy with.'²⁰

The process of Forced Entertainment, alongside that of Improbable, offers the best example of parity between creators with the company working for the most part in a

collective manner. The writing of the visual space is an essential and central part of their devising process, and the configuration of the space and the nature of the objects within it is often determined not by Lowdon but by the company as a collective, shaping the space through inhabiting it.

COMPLICITE

The theatre of Complicite offers a meeting point between the traditional and the experimental, text-based and non text-based, verbal and non-verbal theatre, where physical theatre is overlaid with narrative storytelling. Because the physical language is developed before the verbal, the spoken text supports rather than dominates the visual narrative. Their working process places a strong emphasis on the plasticity and physical presence of the performers within the performance space. Design elements are present in the devising and rehearsal room as much as possible and all are used to feed into the writing or composition of the piece, ensuring that each element is integral to and inseparable from their theatrical language.

Michael Levine explains the way in which the scenographic process works for him when designing a Complicite show, as opposed to his more usual occupation of designing for Opera:

The work that is done with Complicite is at the complete opposite end of the spectrum, you start off with nothing, there might be a few themes and ideas on which the piece might be based, but in fact all of the work comes out of the improvisations that take place in the rehearsal room. So I can't begin my work until the piece has developed to a certain extent, and so I start with nothing, everyone starts from zero.

[...]

I develop the work, I develop alongside the actors, and also everyone else who's in the rehearsal room.

[...]

When you work on a process like this you have to be hyper aware of the work that everyone else is doing, and so everyone is quite attentive to each other... And it becomes, it's very interesting work in that respect, because something will emerge out of the darkness, and that will be a direction in which the group will follow ... visually I'm dictated by the precarious nature of the process, and so... what comes out of the rehearsal room is very surprising, and in turn I think the design is influenced by that, so it takes me into new directions, in which I would not normally travel.

[...]

it's a much longer rehearsal period. Now in opera you're given maybe four weeks rehearsal period, here we have three months rehearsal, which you need, because you're actually writing the piece as you go along. ... I'll start to *make* some of the ideas on the model, but I'll also start to introduce design ideas into the rehearsal room, an example would be, on this project, [*A Disappearing Number*] I wanted to introduce a chalk board into the rehearsal. So I would make a chalk board, make it do certain things, we then see what it does in the rehearsal room and then it gets taken back to the workshop and reworked, and then re-introduced to the rehearsal room in its new form... so we can continually kind of refine, also because there are

other media working on the production at the same time, sound and video and lighting, you can all react against, off each other.

[...]

You know, when I work in the theatre with an existing text, you design something in advance again, and the actors work on the set that you've designed, so you don't have that ability to bring to the piece, visually, the kind of seamlessness that might occur when all of the elements we're working on talk to each other. You know the *intention* is that you don't know where the text began and the visual images, where the text and the visual images begin, everything overlaps, you have no idea what comes out of anything else, ... and that's a kind of process that I enjoy, because I think it's lovely to introduce something visually into the rehearsal process, into the text, and that a piece would come of that. So there's this overlap which takes place, which is really for me essential, because theatre *is* a visual medium, it's also an aural medium, so everything really has to work on the same level, I think, to, in order to tell a story.²¹

For the actors this interaction between themselves and the designers is an essential part of the devising process. Tim McMullan, who has performed in several *Complicite* shows, believes that

you can't do it any other way. ... Because the things you end up with are a consequence of what you have in the room. ... it's completely essential that the designer's on hand, because then he can see what we need, and we can feed off what he provides, and that is going to end up by defining what the design's going to be, to a large extent. And also what we do.²²

The presence of the set and prop designer is essential to the development of the piece, as is the early introduction of the elements they are designing. As McBurney explains,

when you have more and larger objects, such as in *Out of a House Walked a Man*, the convention is that you get them late in the process and inevitably they don't function as you thought they would. It is important that everything you wish to play with in the performance is present during the creative process, otherwise it's impossible to make it live when you get on to the stage. For me the objects I use are like words on a page; the rules of their movement are like grammar and syntax. The way they are integrated makes them articulate.²³

When the company was devising *The Three Lives of Lucy Cabrol*, a piece set in the French Alps, the performers 'had lot of buckets and old bath tubs and chairs and tables and different things to play with, and throughout the improvisations those were the things that we had to use, so they started to make up the landscape of what we were performing, or the play we were devising'.²⁴ In *Mnemonic*, a movement sequence was inspired by a particular photographic style:

...the image of the people, the man on the table, and then rolling over the table at the end. Now that image was inspired by the photography of Eadward Muybridge, who did those kind of frozen images of people running and horses walking and people standing up and sitting down ... they're Victorian photographs, they're in black and white, and they're usually quite muscular men, kind of walking, and you would try to find the mechanics of bodily action. So they're like little freeze frame moments, initially, and then the whole thing is speeded up.²⁵

The integration of the design or scenographic process into the writing of the piece is essential, then, for the way in which it both informs and is informed by the work that the performers do, again necessitating a continuous creative dialogue between designer and performers, and allowing the work of the performers to guide and shape the final spatial and visual configuration of the performance space.

KATIE MITCHELL

Although *Waves* and *Attempts on her Life* were both staged by Katie Mitchell at the National Theatre, neither production had a large set that required building time in the workshop but rather made use of an empty space as a functional impetus into the devising process, allowing the design to remain flexible and grow alongside the company's interpretations of the texts. Because of the multimedia language through which the company approached these two productions, for these particular rehearsal processes scenography was central to the development of the performance and the ability to sustain the conceit. The development of the multimedia language for *Waves* stemmed from the need to find a way to express the qualities of Woolf's text, as Mitchell explains: 'all the text is thoughts inside character's heads, so we *knew* we weren't going to be able to speak any of the text live, like you normally do. We had a hunch that we would use film and video as a way of articulating that.'²⁶ In addition to the difficulties of presenting thought rather than speech, the company also had to contend with the long time span and range of locations described in Woolf's novel. 'A design that accurately captured the myriad settings of the novel yet avoided lengthy scene changes would be hard to conceive. ... it was clear from the start that there wouldn't be space nor budget to literally recreate everything in the novel.'²⁷ On this basis, 'the company began exploring how showing an audience visual fragments of events and characters from *The Waves* could actually create a more satisfactory telling of the story than trying to depict everything,' supplementing these visual fragments with 'live and recorded sound to create a very full aural world.'²⁸

It was these two problems then, of presenting people's thoughts rather than their speech, and the need to encompass a large number of locations, which led the company to the multimedia language. And it was this language that then determined the Foley artist conceit on which the performance was based. According to Gareth Fry, sound designer for the production,

Waves is actually a very good example of sort of design pointing the writing in a certain direction. We were sort of, I remember, sat round with Katie, very early on, we did a first workshop for it, and we did it in a very sort of Complicite style, but the performers aren't movement specialists, so it wasn't very good Complicite, and we were like, well, we need to find a different way of doing this, so we started investigating, started talking about different ways of sort of expressing people's thoughts, and that led to sort of a voice-over convention, and that was what eventually led to the Foley artist convention. So it was sort of the design decision

there that eventually formed the whole writing of the piece and the whole creation of it.²⁹

From the performers' perspective,

it just made sense that that's how we were gonna do it. ... one of the improvisations really early on was well, how do you think, how do you portray that. And that made sense then to have something on screen, someone else voicing something, seeing a shot of something else, because your thoughts are all over the place, all the time.³⁰

The integral nature of scenography to the development of *Waves* is demonstrated by Lucy Kerbels' description of rehearsals:

The whole eight-week rehearsal period took place in the same rehearsal room at the NT. From day one, part of the room was set up to replicate how the stage would look in performance, complete with a large screen, shelving units at either side of the playing space, microphones and desk lamps. This meant that from the earliest point, the actors were working within an environment identical to the one in which they would perform. At one end of the room there was a pile of props and costume rails containing different types and styles of garments. As the company devised the material, they would go to this prop and costume store to select items they wanted to try using in a scene. Once an object was agreed on it was moved onto shelves at either side of the stage space to demonstrate that it would be in the performance. At the other end of the room sat the creative and stage management teams. From here they could see all the work the actors were producing from the same perspective as the audience.³¹

Within all five of these processes, then, it is evident that there is a much more collaborative approach to the development of visual scenography than may be possible in more traditional forms of staging texts. Decisions regarding spatial and visual configurations are left as open as possible through the devising process, enabling performers to contribute to the shape of their performance environment. Space and objects are not presented as definite givens, but as stimuli and possibilities for the development of work. The presence of the designer in the rehearsal room and an open dialogue between designer and performers is essential to facilitate this mode of working, and can therefore be seen as one of the key factors in enabling the use of scenography as a devising process.

DEVISING WITH LIGHT

Light is a more difficult aspect of production to be able to bring into a devising process. As Paule Constable, lighting designer, explains, 'the ultimate very, very boring issue about rehearsing is that if you are a sound designer you can put a sound technician into a rehearsal room and create sound in the rehearsal room. Rehearsal rooms *don't* have lights.'³²

You can do an element of trying to add light, but ultimately there is no rehearsal process, the only way to rehearse with light would be to rehearse in the theatre.

And the problem with rehearsing in a theatre, unless you have a group of actors who are really used to it, is that you're rehearsing in a performance space. And it changes the way people behave. And there's a really complicated issue that a lot of the time, if you put light on people it changes the way they rehearse. Because it becomes about production rather than about process. So it's quite frustrating to work in an area of theatre which ninety nine percent of the time is completely production driven, when you're interested in process. It's a kind of huge contradiction.³³

However, this does not prevent Constable from being present in the rehearsal room during the devising process, in order to 'absorb everything I can about a production, which involves really keying in to what a designer's doing, and the smell and the taste of that, and also really keying in to what a director's doing, and absorbing how they're working in the rehearsal room.'³⁴ In order to facilitate this very collaborative mode of design, boundaries are blurred between different roles on the production team:

when we [Complicite] did *Street of Crocodiles*, I was employed as the ASM when we were first at the National, purely so Simon could have me in the rehearsal room all the time. I was also the production manager for the show when we toured it, so the sort of seam between Paule as a lighting designer and Paule as just a member of the kind of creative team who made the work was completely blurred.³⁵

Constable has worked not only with Complicite, but also with Katie Mitchell and Improbable, lighting *Waves*, *Attempts* and *Satyagraha*. She arrived at lighting design in the theatre through lighting for the music industry, moving from there into circus and devised theatre before beginning to work in conventional theatre spaces. As she herself describes, 'I think what I've done is I've taken a devising methodology and I've applied it to everything I do.' '...a lot of what seems to be the major difference is to do with the management of time, and I've always grown up, as a lighting designer, spending a lot of time in rehearsals. I'm very bad at looking at a set model for a show, and going: this is what I'm going to do with it. What I need to do is see actors in space, and respond to that.'³⁶ It is perhaps this commitment to a devised methodology, even in text-based work, which makes Constable attractive as a potential collaborator as well as lighting designer. As she explains, 'with that kind of work all our roles become very blurred'.³⁷

For *Attempts*, with the lighting of the video shots being such an integral part of the actors' work, the company 'rehearsed with no lights on in the rehearsal room, just the TV lights we were using all the way through, so we could achieve the shots'.³⁸ One of the frustrations for Constable were the creative restrictions imposed on her by the conceit and multimedia language through which the pieces were played:

the thing about devising is that, sometimes it can be incredibly liberating and really, really creative, and sometimes it can become purely about logistics, which is something like *Attempts*. My role in that situation was to make sure they could all achieve the lighting that the shots needed. ... it was *really* difficult for me to sit on a project like that for four weeks where I couldn't have a single creative thought.³⁹

Nonetheless, her presence and contribution to the devising and rehearsal process is much valued by Mitchell, a collaboration that they are hoping to expand with Mitchell's next opera production:

we're in development for a production of *Dido and Aeneas* at English National Opera, and we're trying to budget it so that all of us are always there. But the budgets that are involved for that to be possible are absolutely astronomical. So then I think we should look at going back to the Complicite model, where we kind of multi-task, so you're not purely there to do the lights, but you're there to kind of enable the rehearsals to happen.⁴⁰

For Forced Entertainment and Fevered Sleep too, the lighting designer is brought into the rehearsal room during the devising process, allowing them to try out ideas and absorb the ambience of the work that is being created, even if they are not able to be there for the entirety of the process as a creative collaborator. By including a lighting designer in the devising and rehearsal process, the companies can ensure that the lighting created towards the end of the process is also born out of the weeks of experimentation and improvisation, reflecting the qualities of the world that the performers and other artistic collaborators have created.

PROCESSES OF AURAL SCENOGRAPHY

As mentioned earlier in the chapter, aural scenography can be seen as existing in a separate plane to visual scenography, occupying the same space as the performers' voices rather than their physical presence. Music and sound can be equally important as spoken text in the aural landscape of a piece, and as Gareth Fry, sound designer and technician, relates, 'I find being in rehearsals is the best way of achieving that collaboration'.⁴¹ 'If you're in rehearsals then the performance will allow space or air in the piece for the sound to exist. If you're not there then they close up all the gaps.'⁴²

Fry has worked as sound designer and engineer with both Complicite and Katie Mitchell, working on *Mnemonic*, *Waves* and *Attempts*. Working in this collaborative devising mode, a soundscape is allowed to develop organically alongside the piece, contributing to the creation of the world that is developing. The presence of sound in the rehearsal room is not something that all performers are used to, particularly those who have not worked through a devising methodology before, and the sound designer can have to be 'really quite sensitive in the first weeks about when I use sound and how I use it'.⁴³ However, once they are used to the idea of having a sound designer or operator working live alongside them in the rehearsal room, 'a lot of performers ... find it quite helpful to have in the rehearsal room 'cause it means they don't have to act so much, in a way, in the way that they probably won't have to act so much in the final production, because there's other design elements doing a lot of the work'.⁴⁴

Sound as a scenographic component was particularly important to the development of *Waves* and the Foley artist conceit; with the performers acting the parts of Foley artists creating a live radio broadcast, sound was crucial to the success of the concept. 'With relatively few objects, and the support of the production's sound designer, Gareth Fry, the company learned to create complex soundscapes that could instantly, effectively – and economically – transport the audience from one location or historical period to the next.'⁴⁵ Fry worked closely with the performers, helping them 'to consider using sound more creatively in their devising and to appreciate how it could be used to convey or evoke emotion, than purely indicating time and location.'⁴⁶

Fry enjoys the fact that 'the sound designer may often be part of the devising, you know, if the group of actors are sort of split off into scenes, quite often with Katie she'll put myself with one of those groups and Leo the video designer with another of those groups, and we'll have to sort of devise a scene together with the performers.' 'I like to be in rehearsals jamming along with the performers, rather than somewhere else creating something that may or may not relate to what the performers are doing, and then bringing it in and saying: this is a finished (ish) product, incorporate it into your performance somehow.'⁴⁷ Having collaborated with Mitchell on several productions over several years, Fry has developed a methodology whereby 'with Katie I work over quite a long stretch of time, now, and I sort of paint in quite broad brush strokes, initially, and then sort of over the weeks as the scenes get more detail I'll add more detail to the sound design.'⁴⁸ Having a sound designer present in rehearsals has also allowed not only the performers but also Mitchell herself to more fully appreciate the creative possibilities of sound in performance: 'We have worked for many years together and realized, over time, that you can use sound as powerfully as visual information or acting. It is another tool to work with on creating emotion in the audience and, therefore, communicating the idea of the play.'⁴⁹

Music is also an integral element of Forced Entertainment's scenography, another element that is present in the devising and rehearsal process from day one. Within their mode of making work there is not such a clear delineation between the visual and aural scenography, and an eclectic mixture of music ('Mullholland Drive score, Peaches Felix Parts, some instrumental stuff from 21 grams, Booker T Bootlegging, The Eagles of Death Metal Already Died'⁵⁰) and other sound fragments (such as the seven-inch record *The Triumph of Man*) are brought into the rehearsal room as found objects to be utilised in much the same way as props and costumes form a resource of found objects out of which the the visual scenography can emerge. 'Davis asks for "the injured man music", and I play something suitably doomy.'⁵¹ With *Bloody Mess* there is a return to a much larger use of music in performance, a language that the company felt they had moved away from in previous pieces. During the devising process the group 'had discussions about music,

about how to use music, about whether it was possible even to use music anymore. Again, another tendency in recent years is that there's been less and less music in the pieces. This time we were saying: What happens now if we go back to that language?.'⁵²

In the work of *Fevered Sleep*, sound and music have an equally important place within the process as any of the visual elements of production. David Leahy is usually in the rehearsal room with the performers, participating in their creative process and simultaneously devising his own compositions. 'The music... is very integral to the sort of way that he [Harradine] works now, and he keeps on coming back to me because we've built up a relationship over the time we've been playing, working together.'⁵³ It is very much a 'trial and error' process of composition, reflecting the improvisatory process of creating the performance as a whole, but working in this way enables a greater interaction between Leahy and the performers, allowing each to spark off the other. The musical ideas he creates are integral to the sections of material created, and are included in the "vignettes" that are pictorialised and storyboarded towards the end of the devising process.

Leahy prefers to perform live where possible, integrating his musical score into the overall performance.

I am a composer, but at the same time I'm probably more so a performer, so that really live relationship and that live responding to whatever's happening, I find I respond to that a lot more, and I appreciate it a lot more as well... I suppose through experience I've sort of built up a vocabulary and understanding of these art forms.⁵⁴

Although for *And The Rain Falls Down* he had to record the soundscape, being unable to tour with the show, he dislikes recording as it does not allow for a response or reaction to things that may happen differently in any given performance.

I like playing live, and it's always second best actually to record something, and to be out of the room... no two performances are the same, so if something happens, I'm there to respond, maybe it's slightly later or... the water doesn't come out, or water gushes all of a sudden or something like that, I can respond to that and it doesn't become something that's incongruous to the soundtrack.⁵⁵

There would appear, then, to be two main ways in which aural scenography is developed through the devising process: firstly, pre-existing recorded music and sounds are brought into the rehearsal room as an additional found object resource, and secondly, a sound designer or composer is present in the rehearsal room and creates original music and sound design as an integral element in the development of the work. The presence of sound as a resource in the rehearsal room is essential if, as Gareth Fry described, the performers are going to "allow space" for it within the work, enabling it to play a functional rather than illustrative role.

SOME CONCLUSIONS

A final example from the work of Forced Entertainment may serve both to summarise and epitomise the notion of scenography as a process of devising as suggested and illustrated in this chapter. As Alison Oddey has suggested, 'Forced Entertainment's working practice reveals the importance of a developmental process over time, as well as a sharp critical awareness and analysis of the relationship of process to product'.⁵⁶ The process through which their 1997 show *Pleasure* was created provides a good example of the ways in which text and scenography can be created simultaneously, and can co-exist within a devising process without the implication that visual and scenographic elements of production are there merely to serve the needs of the textual or narrative. The show was originally devised from visual and aural scenographic elements, as Lowdon relates:

The starting point for that is really a good example of how shows can begin, which was Terry had seen three wedding dresses in a charity shop window, and thought 'oh, three women could wear them', and then had found this record which looked like it was a party record, with like loads of people in 70s gear with pint pots, we played it and it was absolutely awful, and then we turned the speed down to 60rpm, and it was great, and it gave you this drunken, underwater feel, and we'd had a whole bunch of tarpaulins that had come off lorries for some project, I can't even remember what we'd used them for, and I put those up as a set of curtains, and that was all we had, we had the record, the curtains and the wedding dresses. Oh, and this pantomime horse costume, that we'd used in another project for kids, and in a way the show really was born out of just those things lying in the space, and this opening and closing of the curtain.⁵⁷

This specific process illustrates the broader Forced Entertainment approach to scenography; objects, costumes and sound are brought into the rehearsal space as starting points for the work, items that may or may not eventually prove to be useful to the process and the developing work, and which may or may not make it into the performance. The main concern is that all the elements of the performance are allowed to develop and grow organically alongside one another, rather than any element being 'tagged on' at the end of the process. Even the lighting designer, Nigel, is brought in during the working process to 'try things out', rather than being presented with a finished show to light shortly before it opens to the public. Working in this way the visual and physical scenographic elements are given equal weighting with text, and neither is privileged over the other.

Although this is a specific example from just one of the five companies being discussed, it can be taken as illustrative of the centralised position of scenography as process within the working methodologies of all five companies. As with the general methods of making work discussed in the previous chapter, there are certain

commonalities of scenographic process that can be seen in the work of several or all of the companies:

- The designer/scenographer attempts to create a world for the production that the performers can inhabit in rehearsal, and can therefore lead their devising process in some way
- There is often a two-way dialogue in process between the designer/scenographer and the performers: the designer/scenographer will bring objects into the rehearsal room that fit with the ideas and themes that the performers have been improvising around, and the performers will then take new directions according to the objects they have been provided with
- The eventual configuration of space and the nature of the objects within that space is often determined by the performers and the way they have interacted with both space and object during the devising and rehearsal process
- The performers themselves are involved in creating the finished visual shape of the piece, working with the objects provided by the designer/scenographer as raw materials from which to design the show in performance
- Sound is an integral part of the process, and can shape the way the staging is approached
- Having a composer, sound designer or technician present in the rehearsal room is therefore also an integral part of the process. Lighting is more difficult to incorporate into the devising process; however, the designer is often present at some or all of the rehearsals before working on lighting the show

These commonalities would seem to suggest that despite each company developing its own methodologies and working practices, there are certain aspects of scenography as process that are duplicated amongst the different methodologies, and may therefore be extracted from these individual processes and put together to create a model, or models, of scenography as a devising process. These models will be presented in the following, concluding chapter.

CHAPTER EIGHT

CONCLUSIONS: MODELS OF SCENOGRAPHY AS PROCESS WITHIN DEvised AND POSTDRAMATIC THEATRE

The previous three chapters have provided an overview of the work of five companies and practitioners who work in different ways and with differing emphases to produce a variety of styles and forms of theatre. The most significant common aspect of each company or director's methodology is their rejection of what may be described as an "orthodox" design approach, that is a process of creative interpretation forced by a variety of pressures to be largely completed before rehearsals have even begun. As Francis Reid explains,

the designer's contribution to a production arises out of a visual response to the dramatist's words and/or the composer's music. This response will be influenced by discussions with the other members of the creative team. Ideally it would also be a response to observation of character and ensemble development during rehearsal. However, the realities of scheduling normally require irreversible design decisions to be made before rehearsals even start.¹

It is in part this scheduling that is challenged by the notion of scenography and the scenographer working collaboratively in the rehearsal room, but as Pamela Howard makes clear,

in order for the scenographer to be part of the *mise en scène* there has to be a structure that enables them to be in rehearsals as a partner to the director, so that the literary mind and the visual mind can work together. The scenographer needs to be part of the process, and to understand the actors' performances and how to sculpt them in the space.²

Rather than design being something else that happens somewhere else away from the work of the performers, all of the companies and productions discussed in the preceding chapters utilise some form of process that includes visual and aural design and designers in the devising and creative process of a show, resulting in a composite process and performance. The need to find a vocabulary through which to articulate this different, composite process is expressed by Alison Oddey:

In devised experimental theatre where the body is the primary signification of text, the gestural language (through the combination of narrative, text, and physical movement) is the performance vocabulary for the work. It is made up of visual images, movement, music, and use of objects or props in new ways. It is a different means of using a performance language, which in turn requires a critical language that relates to the work's vision and frames of reference. The body and the use of physical visual imagery are the focus of the performance. Thus, a form of critical language or vocabulary is needed to analyse work that integrates different kinds of 'text', whether physical, visual, or verbal.³

In Chapter Two of *Devised and Collaborative Theatre: A Practical Guide*, Haibo Yu presents a table of design tasks in which he makes a comparison between the job of designer for Scripted Theatre and for Devised Theatre. Under the heading "Designer's

Role” for scripted theatre he describes the role as simply ‘Designer’; for devised theatre, however, he describes it as ‘Visual adviser, co-director and designer’.⁴ Or in other words, scenographer. But as yet Yu is restricted by the accepted vocabulary to using the same term to describe these two very different roles and processes. Articulating the difference in approach necessitated by the two modes of theatre, Yu states that ‘the most significant point about designing for devised theatre is that the designer sets up a loose framework of scattered ideas rather than a finished design product’⁵ – an entirely different process to the irreversible decisions of design as described by Francis Reid above.

This thesis does not propose a new method of working therefore, but provides evidence that this changed mode of design practice is already very much a part of British devised theatre, the implications of which, in terms of theory and vocabulary, have not yet been fully acknowledged and discussed. As quoted above in Chapter Six, the labels attached to the various roles and functions within Improbable Theatre are often for the benefit of a theatre building and its programme notes than because they accurately represent the way in which the company work together. And Complicite have resorted to employing designers in other roles, such as assistant stage manager, to ensure that they are able to be involved in the full length of the devising and rehearsal process. There is a need here then for a vocabulary that allows theatre-makers to explain their working process not only to audiences via the mass media of the programme, but also to the buildings and institutions to which they are bringing their work. As such, there is no common or coherent language of practice beyond the word ‘devised’ through which these theatre-makers can articulate their modes of working to be understood by those working in a more traditional, hierarchical theatrical environment.

If the word ‘design’ is to be utilised to designate the “something else, somewhere else” approach of the orthodox theatre design process, then an alternative term must be found to designate the process of collaborative design within a devising methodology such as those discussed above. Using the same term – ‘design’ – to refer to both processes makes difficult a clear distinction between the two processes, which are markedly different and should therefore be distinguished as such. Without acknowledging the differences between the two processes, it is difficult to appreciate the value of the collaborative, scenographic process. As a rehearsal-room methodology based on democratic creative expression, scenography allows the visual dramaturgy of a work to be developed simultaneously with the textual and narrative dramaturgies, allowing for a coherent, holistic process even when the governing aesthetic of the work is an intentional fragmentation. This holistic process facilitates the free flow of ideas, allowing the work of both scenographer and actor to be inspired and guided by the work of the other. The presence and development of the scenographic elements in rehearsal removes the very real possibility that a finished set-design may conflict with the performance created by the

actors in rehearsal, and empowers the performer with a sense of ownership that enables him to interact more fruitfully with his environment.

INFLUENCES AND THE EUROPEAN TRADITION

The genesis of devised theatre and the modes of working that accompany it can be traced, as discussed previously, to the experimental theatre, art and performance explosion of the 1960s. It is noticeable in discussions both public and private that members of the companies discussed here and other contemporary companies, being second or third generation “experimental” theatre makers, cite many of the same references, sources and influences in the desire to make the work they do. Impact, Lumiere and Son, The People Show, Wooster Group and Hesitate and Demonstrate are names that are frequently cited as having produced visually stimulating performances and breaking new ground, which strongly impacted on and influenced the current generation of theatre makers.

There would seem to be then a particular community of theatre makers who, whilst not creating the same kinds of work, have been influenced in their working practices and methodologies by the same predecessors and who are now working through similar processes, albeit with very different results. The same names recur amongst the programmes of various companies: Leo Warner of Fifty Nine Productions Ltd. (video design) worked with Katie Mitchell on both *Waves* and *Attempts*, and also with Improbable on *Satyagraha*. Paule Constable lit these same three shows, working repeatedly with both Mitchell and Improbable, and has also worked with Complicite. Gareth Fry, sound designer, has worked with both Mitchell and Complicite on a number of productions. There is a visible network of theatre makers who are becoming known for working in this mode and who seem actively to seek out this manner of working, sharing a common skills base and a common heritage.

There would seem to be a much greater precedent for this mode of working in mainland Europe, where both the word scenography and this more collaborative approach to making work are more widely used and more generally accepted than is the case in Britain. On his website, Gareth Fry explains that ‘where appropriate I design using a mainland-European process, which essentially means that I spend a lot of time in rehearsals and create most of the work in situ, responding to the performers and the space’.⁶ In his writing on Complicite, David Williams describes McBurney’s work with the company as being ‘distinctly European’.⁷ During a Platform event at the National Theatre discussing *Waves*, Chris Campbell explained to Katie Mitchell that ‘some people describe you as more in the European tradition. Do you recognise that, or is that meaningless to you?’ Her response, ‘I’m not sure exactly what it means’,⁸ would seem to be indicative of the apparent divide between the British and European theatres and their assimilation of

the term scenography as a useful distinction between processes when describing the more collaborative and rehearsal-room based processes of designers such as Fry.

MODELS OF SCENOGRAPHIC PROCESS

Considering scenography as process does not enable the definition of a single model or system through which devised or postdramatic theatre can be created and staged, but rather acknowledges a set of processes that can be adapted to suit a particular company or project. As Heddon and Milling acknowledge,

One difficulty of writing about devising processes is that they are precisely that, *processes*, and as such they are fluid. Moreover, they are located in specific times and places. In light of this, it becomes problematic and disingenuous to propose the existence of 'models'. Even those groups who have existed for many years, such as the People Show, deny any set model of devising, instead working with different processes appropriate to different contexts and to different collaborations.⁹

There is a fluidity inherent in a devising methodology that enables new languages and processes to be developed for each new piece of work, and this fluidity must therefore be similarly reflected in any model of scenography as devising process. As Alison Oddey asserts, 'there is no single theory that can embrace this amorphous subject [devising]; no formula or prescribed methodology can be applied that guarantees a particular product every time'.¹⁰ There are, however, various practices and methods of working that are common to some or all of the companies, directors and processes discussed in the preceding chapters:

- The scenographer/designer is present in the rehearsal room as much as possible from as early in the process as possible
- The scenographer works in dialogue with the performers as well as the director, building on the ideas created by the performers in improvisation, and bringing in objects and creating worlds with which the performers can play
- Working with real objects and materials rather than ideas, sketches and models is essential for the space to become an integral component of the living performance
- The final detail of the performance space is often determined by the performers and not the scenographer – "she controls the boundaries but must let go of the specifics"¹¹
- Sound, video, and where possible light, are all integral to the devising of a piece rather than decorative add-ons
- Writing the aural, visual and physical scores or landscapes of a piece are aspects of a single simultaneous process, not three (or more) separate processes to be combined at the last minute

Further consideration of these commonalities can provide some guideline models for a collaborative, scenographic process within devised and postdramatic theatre, not fixed models of the sort that Heddon and Milling reject but rather a starting point or approach from which an individual process may then be developed. They are skeleton models – the process for each company and in some cases each show will be different according to the people involved and the show to be staged, and it is ultimately each individual scenographer who must negotiate their own process and place within the wider process of the company as suits each new production and process. These models or methods are not mutually exclusive, and several or all of these practices may come into play when developing a performance. As Alison Oddey explains, although ‘it is possible to define models of practice based on the work of established companies, [...] even then a change of personnel or project can entirely alter the way a group devises its next piece’.¹²

THE JAZZ BAND ANALOGY

Several of the designers interviewed in conjunction with the current research used the analogy of a jazz band to describe their experience of being a designer in the rehearsal room, participating in a collaborative process. According to Michael Levine, who designed both *Mnemonic* and *A Disappearing Number* for Complicite,

it's bit like working in a, I would *imagine*, being part of a jazz quartet or a jazz band, where everybody is listening to the different strains of music and trying to work off of each other, within that. And it's very interesting work in that respect, because something will emerge out of the darkness, and that will be a direction in which the group will follow.¹³

This ability to listen to, or see, what others are doing in the devising process is an essential element of creating something, whether visual or aural, that can be interwoven as a part of the performance as a single composition, rather than a collection of stand-alone design elements. Gareth Fry, a sound designer and engineer who has worked with Complicite and Katie Mitchell, finds it imperative to be in the rehearsal room rather than separately in a sound studio away from the performers and their devising and rehearsal process.

I can't stand doing stuff in studios, it's so removed from the context of the... I don't understand why people do it! I can sort of see why, sometimes it's good to get away, and get some peace and quiet, and be able to focus on something that you need to do, but on the whole I find it much easier for myself to sort of be there in, getting the vibe of the space, sort of thing. Sounds a bit jazz, but, you know, getting the vibe of it, and the pace and all that sort of stuff. So I guess it's sort of, it's creating a performance together. Going along with the jazz analogy, I like to be in rehearsals jamming along with the performers, rather than somewhere else creating something that may or may not relate to what the performers are doing, and then bringing it in and saying: “this is a finished (ish) product”, you know, “incorporate it into your performance somehow”. You know, I like to be there doing it there and then, as much as you can.¹⁴

He also finds that his presence in the rehearsal room engenders a trust between himself and the performers, without necessarily having to build an individual relationship with each performer: 'If you were performing with them, they'll come on board with you without having to know you, like jazz'.¹⁵

There are two similar but different ideas contained within these short extracts, the idea of a jazz band performing, and the idea of jamming. Although the two concepts are closely allied and part of the same musical culture, there are significant differences that can allow the two ideas to be related to the separate ideas of devised performance, and the devising and rehearsal process that creates that performance. The public performance of jazz music is usually very tightly structured, often based around earlier, well-known songs and other pieces of music, and the order of who will improvise when and the chord sequence around which they can improvise is well defined and rehearsed. In this sense then the performance of a jazz ensemble is not so much akin to the rehearsal room process of creating a devised show, but more the process of actually performing that show. There may be sections of the performance that are left open to be improvised on a nightly basis, but those sections are usually contained within a predefined structure with particular themes, ideas or objects to be improvised around and a beginning and end point in the more fixed material of the show.

By contrast, the idea of jamming is a much freer one, the rehearsal process that leads to the jazz performance. The popular definition of jamming as set down in the public online encyclopaedia Wikipedia describes that 'jam sessions are often used to develop new material, find suitable arrangements, or simply as a social gathering and communal practice session'.¹⁶ From this definition it is both easy and obvious to draw parallels with the theatrical devising process rather than the end performance product it creates. Under this definition, the devising process becomes an arena in which *all* members of the company, director, performers and designers of all disciplines, can try out ideas and develop material concurrently and collaboratively.

In a sense then, the beginning of the rehearsal process can be seen as consisting of jamming sessions in which material is created and developed, and as the work progresses it therefore moves more towards the notion of a jazz ensemble performing together. Each member of the ensemble must be aware of the rise and fall of their individual element in the overall texture, when it takes centre stage, when it falls back into a supportive role, and how it needs to be adjusted as the work progresses in order to keep the balance of the ensemble. Both the idea of jamming and of the jazz band are analogies that can be applied to create a useful model for collaborative scenographic creation of both visual and aural elements; a group of individuals each with responsibility for creating their own specific part of the piece, but yet who are interdependent on the work produced by one another in order to produce a cohesive performance. This analogy and model can

be applied not only to the development of the scenographic elements, but also to the process of devising as a whole.

GAMES, RULES AND PLAYING WITH TOYS

As with the jazz band analogy above, this model is not limited to the scenographic elements of performance and a way of working individually as a scenographer, but encompasses the entire ensemble and the ways in which the scenographer can integrate the visual and physical aspects of performance in the company's theatre making. By the very nature of games and toys, exercises focused around them are concerned with people and objects interacting in and with space. There is therefore an innate emphasis on the scenographic, which can be used as a tool within the concept of scenography as process, enabling the scenographer to work with the performers to develop their engagement with space and the visual aspects of performance.

Many of the practitioners interviewed for this study talked about, or have previously talked about, the idea of games and playing with toys as fundamental rehearsal room activities. Tim McMullan, who has worked on a number of shows with Complicite, explained that

when we did a show called *The Three Lives of Lucie Cabrol* ... it was set in a sort of peasant community in the French Alps so we had lots of buckets and old bath tubs and chairs and tables and different things just to play with, and throughout the improvisations those were the things that we had to use, so they started to make up the landscape of what we were performing, or the play we were devising.¹⁷

This would seem to be a common approach to the development of many Complicite shows; in his discussion of McBurney's work, David Williams describes that 'at the outset of a rehearsal process, particular emphasis is placed on the establishment of a play space, with all sorts of objects, materials, research documentation, games and other rule or event-based practices available for individual and collective exploration'.¹⁸

It is not only Complicite who work in this manner, providing 'toys' with which the performers can explore and experiment through the devising process. Richard Lowdon, performer and designer for Forced Entertainment, finds that the choice of objects brought into the rehearsal room helps shape the development of the work: 'early in the process you can propose a number of different things to put in the space, and that can have a huge impact if we all agree that it will be a fun thing to play with'.¹⁹ The objects brought into the rehearsal room might reflect the interests of any or all of the company members at that time: 'because you're always starting with what are the objects you want to play with, because those are the things that actually *give* you something, then those are the things that you're interested in pursuing. It's kind of *toys*, in a way.'²⁰

Shaping the work through play, and from a visual perspective, is also important in the work of Fevered Sleep. The following extract is from an interview with Carl Patrick and Laura Cubitt, performers in *And the Rain Falls Down*:

CARL: the second week Laura and I did together, and that was more David [Harradine, Artistic Director] coming in with lots of things to play with like goggles, balloons filled with water, and we had the actual set, we had the stage. And so we could flood it, and we could make it rain, and we had all the plumbing intact, well not all of it, but enough that we could play with different types of water, and we tried out all sorts of different things, and David would say: "let's just go with that", and reflections and shadows, lights...

LAURA: literally just to play with everything...

CARL: and just to play...

LAURA: everything we could possibly think of...

CARL: We'd just play for hours. And it was brilliant.²¹

Working not only with objects but also a pre-designed space is another method used by some of the companies, such as *Fevered Sleep* for *And the Rain Falls Down*, and also *Forced Entertainment* in some of their early work. 'We would build something to basically play around in, to muck about in, and part of that mocking-up things in the rehearsal space was in some ways building an environment that you could feel like you could play in.'²² However, this methodology has become less popular with *Forced Entertainment*, and would seem to be more prescriptive and therefore less suited to the type of devising process utilised by most of these companies. 'The process that we have now is really pretty much the same as we've always had, which is to assemble a bunch of things in the room that we're interested in, and then sort of start working from those and playing, and adding things, and taking things away.'²³

For the work created by *Improbable*, game playing is an important feature in enabling performers to work effectively with the puppets Julian Crouch makes. 'You sort of play a game that things you're making are real, for the moment you're doing that exercise.'²⁴

You play a game really, and I think most of it is about that, it's sort of about playing games, so when you're working with ensemble and bits of newspaper you try not to... what you feed in, you try to sort of encourage and keep it going but you're trying to help people forget that they're individual people, you're trying to dream them into some kind of world that the stuff they're using is real ... whatever they've made, even if it's really crappy, for that period of time is real.²⁵

The ability to engage the performers' attention and support their belief in the work they are creating is also fundamental in the games played during the creative process of *Fevered Sleep*:

as a performer, it always feels like David kind of sets up games, so you know... like, we'll always trying to find the game, and... you really know what you're playing, and if it's a game that's fun and can engage you can play it properly every time. So for an adult, for a performer, it's still fun to play that show for three year olds even though it's a really gentle show.²⁶

Although the terms 'play', 'game', and 'toys' can have childish or childlike connotations, and indeed some practitioners do describe their process in terms of 'playing like kids',²⁷ much of this play is intended to reawaken and excite the imagination as it was

in childhood, stimulating the creativity necessary for an effective devising process. But it is also about finding ways for the performers constantly to re-engage with the material and find new and interesting ways of developing their performance. As Paule Constable explains, 'It's about a play of things... I don't mean play in a kind of light, in a kind of childish way, or childlike way. It's about play as in throwing things up, keeping them alive. Not about fixing things.'²⁸

The utilisation of terms such as toys, games and playing can be seen as a way of expressing a process that involves exploration, experimentation and improvisation with bodies and objects in space. These are ways of working which allow director, performer and scenographer, both individually and collaboratively, to try out different ways of using things, different ways of moving, and different ways of occupying space. In other words, a process of visual and spatial improvisation as opposed to a necessarily verbal interpretation of the term improvisation. Working in this manner allows the scenographer to present a variety of options for the shape and content of the performance space, offering choices to the performer to stimulate the devising process and tailoring the construct of the final performance environment to fit with the ideas emergent from that devising process.

INTEGRATING SOUND AND LIGHT

One of the key features evident in all of the processes documented here is the extent to which sound especially but also light are integrated into the devising and rehearsal process.

The sort of more conventional directors, like for example Max Stafford-Clark, or Peter Hall, really don't want any sound in the rehearsal rooms at all, they see it as a distraction from rehearsing the acting, and things like that. They're not really interested in adding those elements until the technical rehearsals, not really interested in talking very much about them 'til very late in the process, and so ... the sound tends to be less integral and less developed. ... Whereas Katie [Mitchell] and Simon [McBurney] increasingly will have some full sound support in rehearsals from the first day of rehearsals ... when things are being devised the music and sound will get devised very much at the same time as the rest of the scene, and because it's there as a tool in the rehearsal room when people are having ideas about how to create or devise a scene they will try and think of how they can use sound within that.²⁹

Within the devising process, there is the potential for sound and light to be used as a creative stimulus or as a tool in the devising and rehearsal process in much the same way that space, objects, bodies and voices are all present as materials from which the performance can be built. 'You spark off each other and it might be something that David [Leahy, composer] plays on his bass inspires us to go in a certain direction with what we're improvising, or just, David [Harradine, artistic director] will just put a light on the stage and say, "see what that does, see what that makes you think of.'³⁰ Rather than providing a decorative add-on or being illustrative, both sound and light can create

independent layers of meaning, supporting or even juxtaposing with the layers of meaning created by the other performance elements.

As discussed previously in Chapter Seven, there are several ways for aural scenography to be brought into the rehearsal room. Both music and other types of sound such as spoken word or sound effects can be introduced in pre-recorded forms, but can also be created live either by a composer, sound designer or even the performers themselves. There is no set process or model through which sound and music can be integrated into a performance; as David Leahy explained, 'it's just very much trial and error'.³¹ But in order for the process of trial and error to occur, it is imperative that the sound designer or sound facilities are available in the rehearsal room from the outset, allowing the aural scenography to inform as well as be informed by the work of the performers. *Waves* is an extreme example of the necessity of the inclusion of sound in the rehearsal room process. With the entire performance based on the premise of the performers being Foley artists, the creation of the sound effects was one of the central aspects of the devising process that then led the development and creation of the other aspects of the work.

Light can also be used creatively rather than simply to illuminate the stage. It is more difficult to bring into the rehearsal room, but can be done, even if only one or two lights are brought in. Placing lights very specifically, for example placing a footlight to up-light a performer, can give a very specific effect that may influence the way in which the performers inhabit the space and interact with the light. Torches, although simple and small, can provide a useful tool in encouraging performers to engage with the idea of light and the different effects it can have on their appearance within space. Even when it is difficult to bring lights into the rehearsal room, Paule Constable finds that it is still important to be present in rehearsals in order to 'understand the landscape of something, understand the context that we're putting it in, how we're going to tell the story'.³² For her, the key to the process is 'not deciding what it is before you get into the room and then just making it that, but deciding what it might be, and then deciding, looking at whether that's a good thing or not'.³³ By being present in the rehearsal room it is possible for the lighting designer to suggest ways in which light may be able to enhance or augment the work that is being created, even if it is not possible to bring the lighting itself into the rehearsal room.

The incorporation of light and sound into rehearsal room practice is an important element in considering scenography as process. As with the use of toys and games to engage the performer in the development of the spatial environment, the presence and inclusion of light and sound in the devising process encourages the performer to engage with these elements of performance more directly than they might perhaps in a more traditional process. By encouraging the performer to engage with these elements it is then possible for the designer/scenographer to ensure that they are included as integral

elements of the performance and given consideration as alternative means of expression to be used alongside text and the physical presence of the performer, and not left to be decorative add-ons at the end of the devising and rehearsal process.

VISUAL DOCUMENTATION

Another feature that is common to the work of several of the companies discussed is the way in which they choose to document their work as they create it, and how they use that documentation in the structuring of the finished performance piece. For most of these companies, the emphasis is placed firmly on visual modes of documentation rather than textual, using pictures rather than words. Both Forced Entertainment and Improbable use the medium of video to record the improvisation work that they do, allowing them to capture not only interesting fragments of improvised text but also physical actions and interactions.

Several of the companies utilise storyboarding as a method of capturing segments of improvisation through visual representations, which can then be used in sequencing and structuring the show, rather than creating a more orthodox or traditional play text. Although sometimes a play text is created, usually for works that utilise a greater proportion of spoken text, such as the work of Complicite, the staging of such works is still inextricably bound up with the text itself, and is therefore difficult to document in this form, creating a text with long passages of description and stage direction. To other companies, the writing of a play is a concept that simply does not fit with the work they create and the methods through which they create it.

Although these two examples of visual emphasis refer specifically to ways of documenting work, there is a broader implication of this emphasis on visual and pictorial thinking. It is indicative of a generally more visually and pictorially based approach to making work, an approach in which not only the designer/scenographer is concerned with the visual and spatial elements of performance, but also the director, performers and even the sound designer. In the context of the working processes documented, it demonstrates that the companies are already thinking and working in a visually focused mode. In terms of a model of practice, the scenographer can emphasise and encourage the use of pictorial and visual means of recording ideas and documenting work as a method of encouraging a company to engage with work from a visual and spatial perspective, providing an alternative means of expression to verbal discussion.

ROLES AND RELATIONSHIPS WITHIN THE SCENOGRAPHIC PROCESS

SYMBIOTIC RELATIONSHIPS

The key relationship for designers or scenographers working in any discipline is with the director, exemplified by Neher and Brecht as discussed in Chapter One. Within

the companies and productions considered for the present study, several of the same names recurred within different production credits (such as Paule Constable, lighting designer: *Waves, Attempts, Satyagraha*; Gareth Fry: *Mnemonic, Waves, Attempts*; and Leo Warner, video designer: *Waves, Attempts, Satyagraha*), suggesting the development of a community of scenographers and directors who like to work in this manner, creating a network of like-minded practitioners who work through similar methodologies and practices.

Constable, who has collaborated with Katie Mitchell for several years, explains that 'if you're going on a journey and you don't know where you're going, and you don't know what result you want in the end, what you need is people who will go on a journey with you. ... you don't want to be worrying about the relationships, you want to have a certain amount there that you can rely on'.³⁴ For Gareth Fry, who has collaborated with Mitchell several times on productions at the National Theatre, 'it's as much about the way things are shared, language and vocabulary that you've built up over the course of working together ... you become a lot faster and more efficient and better at understanding what the other person is talking about if you've been through a few shows together before'.³⁵ So although Mitchell does not have a fixed company, there is a sense of trust and collaboration important to her style of work that can only be brought about by repeatedly bringing together the same group of collaborators.

Constable has developed a strong creative relationship with not only Mitchell, but also Vicki Mortimer, the designer with whom Mitchell most frequently collaborates: 'Vicki and I, for example, we do a huge amount of work together. I really understand the way she designs, and she really sort of seeks out the way I light. So I know that we have a very symbiotic relationship'.³⁶ There is an element of the chicken-and-egg situation to the notion of the symbiotic relationship, and whether it stimulates or is stimulated by this type of collaborative working process. In the working processes of the companies documented here there is evidence of both models; for two companies at least, whose partnerships began at university, it would seem to be the relationship that has generated the working process, whilst for two others, it is the working process that has engendered close working relationships.

Katie Mitchell met set designer Vicki Mortimer at university, and openly acknowledges that she works almost exclusively with this one designer. The close relationship that they have developed ('symbiotic is a good word for that'³⁷) has enabled Mitchell to bring a more collaborative mode of working into more mainstream and orthodox theatre spaces, such as the National Theatre and a variety of opera houses. Forced Entertainment is also a product of university friendships, and it would appear to be those close relationships that have held the company together for more than twenty years

as they have experimented with a variety of working processes, genres and forms of theatre and performance.

In contrast, *Improbable* was formed on a rather ad hoc basis (as McDermott and Crouch explain it) centred on a particular approach to or style of working, based around puppetry and live improvisatory performance, which has formed the foundation of a relationship in which Crouch often co-directs, and McDermott takes a great interest in the scenographic development of the work. With *Complicite* also, there is a large pool of possible collaborators who have been drawn to working with the company both for the style of work and the process through which it is created, and it is this experience of creating work that has enabled the development of more symbiotic relationships. Gareth Fry, sound designer, often finds that he is able to anticipate the direction a piece of work might take, and already have the resources available in the rehearsal room before McBurney or the performers ask for them.

In this second situation, the notion of the symbiosis is slightly different to that present in the cases of Katie Mitchell and *Forced Entertainment*. Whilst in their case the symbiosis stems from a long-standing close personal relationship that may encompass more areas of their life than simply the work, where this type of relationship develops *from* the work it is more a way of working or mode of thinking that allows for a symbiosis of thought process without necessarily such a deep relationship on a personal level.

The concept of symbiotic relationships is an important one for the development of scenography as process, even though the majority of companies may be working within the latter model and not the former. As has already been demonstrated above, it is important that performers are included in the creative process of developing scenography for devised work, and in order to facilitate this mode of working effectively the scenographer must have a strong and overlapping relationship with the director. The scenographer must also be willing to relinquish some of the control over the visual aspects of the performance, allowing elements to develop through, and be shaped by, the work as it is created collaboratively in the rehearsal room. It is therefore possible to utilise the symbiotic relationship as a mode of working on which a model of scenography as process can be based, whereby the scenographer, although retaining responsibility for overseeing the visual elements of the performance, is in fact simply one in a group of collaborators, all with the same problem to solve but approaching it from their own separate angles depending on their specialist experience.

THE PERFORMER AS CO-SCENOGRAPHER

There are a number of models of working that create a distinct division between the creative team (director, writer, designers of all disciplines) and the performers or

actors, considering them as two completely separate groups not only within more orthodox processes of staging texts but also within devised theatre processes.

A well-known designer, speaking to students about his work on some recent and highly successful musical productions in Australia and Britain, referred to the “creative people” in the production; when pressed to elaborate, he specified these as the director, the designer, and the composer, and he explicitly excluded performers from this group. It is clear that contemporary theatre practice, especially in the larger subsidized companies, endorses this view of the creative process insofar as the design is commissioned and largely complete before the play has been fully cast and certainly before the actors have done any work together.³⁸

Although Gay McAuley is here referring to the role of performers in terms of the staging of texts and not within a devising ensemble, there is evidence that this view is also endorsed by some within the contemporary devising scene. In his article *An Approach to Designing for Devised Performance within Higher Education*, Colin Knapp advocates a method of designing for devised work in which ‘designs are produced before the devising period and rehearsals commence.’³⁹ As he acknowledges,

This approach is in essence the same as that most commonly taken to the production of scripted work in the UK and has the practical advantage of allowing for thorough planning, costing and scheduling. It can also allow design to function fully as a ‘visual text’, materially influencing the development of action and meanings.⁴⁰

Although there may be practical advantages to this model, largely concerning time scale, this process is nonetheless the very same model that Forced Entertainment has moved away from, precisely because of the fixed nature of the design work. Designs may be exactly attuned to the starting point of the work, but make no allowance for the development and shifting of ideas through the devising process. Far from allowing the design to function as a visual text influencing action and meanings, such a fixed design can in fact completely block the creative development of a performance, as described in relation to the work of Forced Entertainment in the previous chapter. As Ali Maclaurin explains, ‘by following such a model we lose a designer who is observant, flexible and adaptable and we gain a design which is ‘fixed’.’⁴¹

It bears no relation to the method by which the piece of theatre is being made; it is as if the two tasks – designing and devising – are discreet and unconnected. ... It derives from a mainstream tradition which separates the physical setting from the performers, allowing them to play (under instruction) in the chosen space, but giving them no control over it.⁴²

It is this element of performer control over their performance space that is fundamental in a successful scenographically-led devising process, and key to the consideration of the performer as scenographer.

The work of all five companies discussed here demonstrates that performers have a vital role to play in the scenographic process and the spatial and visual development of a performance. As discussed in the previous chapter, Richard Lowdon of Forced

Entertainment conceives of the performer as being involved in designing the show at any point in the process or piece of work that requires the manipulation of space or objects. Rather than having to work with a fixed, completed design, by interacting with space and objects that have been offered as options by the scenographer it is possible for performers to make choices concerning the visual elements of the performance, shaping the finished space by how they work in it and with it.

THE OVERALL PARADIGM SHIFT: DEVISING AS CONTEMPORARY GESAMTKUNSTWERK

From the latter part of the nineteenth century to the latter part of the twentieth, theatre makers moved from a complete focus on the theatre product to a complete focus on theatre process, and part way back again. At the turn of the twenty-first century, a balance has been reached where both product and process are acknowledged as being of equal merit and integral importance to each other, although undoubtedly with variations in emphasis on one or the other from company to company and production to production.

It is possible to trace the origins of many of the current forms of devised (and postdramatic) theatre as far back as the historical avant-garde, and to see the theories of Edward Gordon Craig and Adolphe Appia finally being realised in practice as practitioners, audiences and technology advance to accept the concepts that left Craig and Appia so isolated in their own time. As Baugh noted, 'the achievement of such a postdramatic state in performance has been very much a unifying feature throughout the last century. The desire to explore a theatre practice that transcends the interpretation of dramatic literature links the ambitions of Craig, Appia, Meyerhold and Grotowski.'⁴³ Devised, ensemble-based theatre can be seen as the fulfilment of Craig's prediction that theatre would eventually come to produce its own art without relying on that of a playwright:

I believe that the great actors possess the power of creating pieces of work without assistance from anyone else; that is to say, I believe that you, [Ellen Terry] or one of the others, could, taking some theme or some two themes - let us say the idea of meeting and the idea of parting - out of these things, by movement, scene, and voice, put before the audience all the different meanings of all the joys and sorrows that are wrapped up in the idea of meeting and the idea of parting.⁴⁴

At the other end of the spectrum, auteur theatre can be seen as a direct descendant of Appia's notion that the stage should present a synthesis of light, sound and action to express the intentions of one creative mind. The work of Robert Wilson especially would seem to embody Appia's ideals, with his use of sound and light in productions he has termed 'operas' seeming to reflect and develop Appia's ideas regarding the communicability of light and its relationship with sound and music. Craig too expressed a desire for theatre in which the contents of the stage was subject to the creative will of one individual, and auteur theatre would also seem to reflect his vision for a theatre of ubermarionettes. Initially calling for the replacement of the human actor with the wooden puppet, Craig later retracted this demand and replaced it with one for a new

breed of actor, who would provide a dispassionate, yet articulate and mobile performer for Craig's new mode of theatre. This revised ubermarionette, heavily influenced by the performance of actors from Eastern theatre, can be seen in practice in the actors of Wilson's and also Richard Foreman's theatre, required for their autonomous ability to move and speak but without offering any creative input to their actions.

The overriding notion from the turn of the century that inspired much of Craig and especially Appia's work (and that of much of the historical avant-garde, either positively or negatively) was that of the *Gesamtkunstwerk*. Writing various treatises explaining the theoretical concepts behind his new music-dramas, Wagner proposed initially a synthesis of poetry and music, and then of poetry, music and action as the foundation of his new form, and it was this synthesis to which he attached the term *Gesamtkunstwerk*. Appia expanded on this concept to suggest that not only the music drama itself but the *means* of staging it should be subject to the notion of *Gesamtkunstwerk*, a synthesis or blending of light, sound and space, influenced by the emotional subtext, to provide the ideal surroundings for the presentation of the Wagnerian music dramas.

The idea of *Gesamtkunstwerk* as a synthesis that should be applied to the theatrical product was somewhat abandoned over the course of the twentieth century, although with the advent of devised theatre it is finding a new popularity in certain circles, despite the development of many forms of postdramatic theatre being in complete opposition to this notion, allowing each element to provide its own independent contribution to performance with an emphasis on juxtaposition and dissonance between elements rather than synthesis. 'McBurney's work since the early 1990s proposes a distinctly European, multilingual, poetic integrating image, narrative and a choreography of bodies, objects and space to produce a contemporary *Gesamtkunstwerk*.'⁴⁵ However, I would suggest that scenography as it can be applied to devised and postdramatic theatre (i.e. as a visually-focused process of performance making) can be considered a synthesis, or *Gesamtkunstwerk*, of *process*. In this sense, it refers not to a harmonious blending of the various elements in an end performance product, but to a recognition of equality amongst the various elements or resources of theatre, Lehmann's notion of parataxis, and that each has equal need for a process of exploration and discovery through the devising and rehearsal period. Although there may be a hierarchy of personnel within the company, this does not lead to dominance of one element over others: each element is afforded equal status within the creative process, including the actors and text.

To be called a scenographer means more than decorating a background for actors to perform in front of. It demands parity between creators, who each have individual roles, responsibilities and talents. The prerequisite for going forward in this new century of theatre-making starts with all the different disciplines involved in creating a production having a better understanding of each other's work processes and achievements.⁴⁶

SOME IMPLICATIONS

It is hoped that this thesis provides a contribution to the assessment of design and scenographic practice within contemporary British devised and postdramatic theatre, bringing together Howard's notion of scenography as integrated and collaborative design practice with the work and processes of five professional companies currently producing devised and postdramatic theatre. The findings of this research support the idea that the genesis of forms of theatre and performance other than the staging of literary texts has had significant repercussions for the work of designers, resulting in the development of new modes of working distinct from orthodox theatre design. However, the research also suggests that there is a lack of analysis or documentation of these new modes of working, with much theory and critique focused on visual style and the scenographic product with scant attention paid to the differing processes through which it has been created.

The changes wrought to theatre-making practice through the 1960s and 70s in particular has had a lasting impact on the power structures within theatre hierarchies, and as such the shift in practice towards a scenographic mode of working can be seen as part of this wider paradigm shift in models of theatre-making. The decentralisation of power – amongst rehearsal-room personnel, within the British theatrical establishment as a whole, and the dehierarchisation of theatrical means – has challenged the elitism previously perceived to be inherent within the established theatre institution. A new level of democracy has been brought to the rehearsal room, tempered by the experience of the democratic collectives of the 1960s and 70s, empowering all members of an ensemble with a freedom of creative expression. No longer an outsider, unknown to all but the director and perhaps costume or lighting designer, the scenographer has emerged as an integral and proactive member of rehearsal-room personnel, whose contribution may approach that of co-director. This level of contribution from the scenographer has been enabled by, and simultaneously enables, the paratactical approach to the various elements of theatrical production advocated by Lehmann, allowing the historical ideology of textual dominance to be displaced by a more democratic, dehierarchised model of means, not only does the scenographer himself have significant status within the rehearsal room and creative process, but so too does his work, with visual elements permitted to supplant the written text as the dominant form of dramaturgy.

With this challenge to the ideology of textual dominance of the theatre-making process comes a challenge to the fabric and structure of the British theatrical establishment. This mode of democratic theatre-making, with the involvement of practitioners of all disciplines in the rehearsal-room process, is not one which sits easily within the pre-existing structures of most traditional theatre spaces. And yet, emerging from small experimental spaces such as the BAC and Riverside Studios, which themselves emerged to respond to this need, companies such as Complicite and

Improbable are bringing this mode of working into some of the biggest and most visible British venues, bringing an implicit demand for the establishment to recognise their differing structure of personnel and practice and make space for it within the culture of mainstream practice.

The experimental developments of the twentieth century have had a lasting impact too on the aesthetic possibilities of a scenographic process. Gone is the expectation that the stage will necessarily present a coherent fictive world, and gone too is the dominant assumption that scenographic elements are subservient to and illustrative of a narrative text. With the paratactical empowerment of the scenographic elements, the dominance of the text has been successfully challenged and displaced and the visual (and aural) elements of scenography are free to 'create their own logic,' to develop their own parallel semiotics. Theatre space is free to be itself, to become the metonymic space where reality and fiction merge. The technical apparatus of sound and light may be absorbed as part of the functional aesthetic, to be put on display rather than hidden. Space and object become valorised for their intrinsic aesthetic qualities, and not for their contribution to the illustration of narrative or the conveying of a greater meaning.

This separation of the constitutive elements of performance has led to fundamental changes in the possible meaning of theatre. The narration and illustration of a narrative fiction is no longer the dominant mode of theatre, but is one possibility amongst many. Fragmentation and plurality challenge audiences to become co-creators of the theatrical performance, ascribing their own meaning from an infinite diversity of possible readings. Work rooted in a visual dramaturgy has required audiences to learn new modes of perception in order to 'read' the work presented on stage; clarity of meaning is no longer a determining factor in the development of work, and visual and physical languages are freely developed as the primary communication systems.

There would seem to be a European precedent for utilising the term scenography to refer to a more collaborative and integrated design practice that occurs alongside the rehearsal room process of the performers, and one conclusion of this research is therefore to suggest that the notion of scenography as defined by Howard can usefully be applied to designate this set of processes that can be considered as a practice distinct from orthodox theatre design. The models or processes suggested by the data collected in this research may be of use to both devised and postdramatic theatre practitioners and to students approaching the devising process for the first time. For individuals or companies already working in this field, the various processes suggested here may offer methods or approaches through which to evaluate and perhaps broaden their existing practice. By consciously considering the hierarchy, structure and relationships already existent within their practice, the models suggested here may enable a company to

introduce more fluidity to the delineation of roles and responsibilities within their process, and encourage the scenographer to experiment as co-director or the performers as co-scenographers. By introducing one or more of the models of scenographic process to their work, a company may find that they are able to develop a stronger or more integrated visual and spatial aspect to their work, enabling performers to engage more completely with their environment, or find new ways of using space, light and sound within their creative process.

The models or processes suggested above may be of greater use to the student approaching devising as a new process. Although there are many 'how to' guides for orthodox theatre design, scenography as the process of designing for devised theatre is a more fluid, and therefore less easy to document, process, for which it is difficult to write a single model or set of instructions. However, the processes proposed here are based on successful methods of working found amongst current professional practitioners, as suggested by the evidence collected concerning their working practices and methodologies, and one or more of these processes could therefore provide an initial approach to generating an individual process of scenography.

For many students, their experience of theatre making is centred on the staging of plays, and therefore they approach devising with text-focused skills and processes. Improvisation may often be considered as a means of generating text, or lines of dialogue; it is hoped that the models demonstrated in the findings of this research may offer insights into modes of visual and spatially driven improvisation, facilitating strategies through which students may be able to broaden the range of processes available to them in creating devised work.

Students who are used to a mode of working in which the overall aesthetic direction of a piece is guided by the director may find it difficult to access a process in which there is greater emphasis placed on the original invention or creation of ideas and material by each member of the ensemble. Utilisation of the jazz band analogy and consideration of the discussions concerning roles and relationships within the scenographic process may offer guidance towards modes of working that present an alternative to conventional hierarchical structures, whilst the other models of scenographic process offered here provide routes through which scenography can be utilised as the basis for part or all of a devising process. It is hoped that the processes or models suggested here may encourage students of all disciplines to engage with scenography as a rehearsal room process to which all members of a company or ensemble may contribute, and encourage students of design to experiment with a less defined, individual, more collective approach to theatre making.

END NOTES TO THE INTRODUCTION

¹ Lehmann, p69

² Howard, p130

³ Harvie, p117

⁴ Harvie, p117

END NOTES TO CHAPTER ONE

- ¹ Barker, p16
- ² Brockett and Hildy, p416
- ³ For further detail on the development of scenic painting techniques and styles, see Crabtree and Beudert, p261
- ⁴ Crabtree and Beudert, p262
- ⁵ extremely long lengths of scenic canvas painted with a number of scenes and landscapes, that moved slowly across the back of the stage, (being unrolled at one side and rolled back up at the other), creating a moving landscape.
- ⁶ Crabtree and Beudert, p263
- ⁷ for further details of scenic innovation in the nineteenth century see Crabtree and Beudert; Booth *Theatre in the Victorian Age* and "Nineteenth Century Theatre" in *The Oxford Illustrated History of the Theatre*
- ⁸ Appia, p59
- ⁹ Appia, p93
- ¹⁰ Appia, p114
- ¹¹ Volbach, p197
- ¹² Craig, *On The Art of the Theatre*, pp84-85
- ¹³ Eynat-Confino, p101-102
- ¹⁴ for description of Craig's screens, see Eynat Confino, Chapter 8
- ¹⁵ *Craig on Theatre*, p55
- ¹⁶ *Craig on Theatre*, p81
- ¹⁷ For description and discussion of his relief stage, see Fuchs, *Die Revolution des Theaters (Revolution in the Theatre)* and Gorelik, *New Theatres for Old*
- ¹⁸ Fuchs, *Revolution in the Theatre*, p85
- ¹⁹ Fuchs, *Revolution in the Theatre*, pp155-156
- ²⁰ Marshall, p125
- ²¹ Meyerhold, p31
- ²² Meyerhold, p92
- ²³ Meyerhold, p93
- ²⁴ Howard, p31
- ²⁵ Willett, *Caspar Neher: Brecht's Designer*, p111
- ²⁶ Baugh, p75
- ²⁷ Willett, *Caspar Neher*, p18-20
- ²⁸ p85
- ²⁹ Bentley, p255
- ³⁰ *Brecht in Context*, p132
- ³¹ Fuegi, p73
- ³² Brecht, p84
- ³³ Brecht, pp85-86
- ³⁴ Willett, *Brecht in Context*, p133
- ³⁵ Baugh, p78
- ³⁶ Bentley, p92

³⁷ Baugh, p77

³⁸ Willett, *Caspar Neher*, p75

³⁹ Pavis, p352

⁴⁰ Komissarjevsky and Simonson, p11

⁴¹ for further discussion of the impact on scenic conventions of the work of each of these practitioners, see Bablet

⁴² Komissarjevsky and Simonson, p9

⁴³ p15

⁴⁴ vol 1, p75

⁴⁵ Bablet, p70

⁴⁶ Braun, p50

END NOTES TO CHAPTER TWO

¹ Lehmann, p22

² p147

³ Croydon, "I said yes to the past" in *The Grotowski Sourcebook*, ed. by Schechner and Wolford, p83

⁴ Grotowski, *Towards a Poor Theatre* p41

⁵ Kantor, like Grotowski a practitioner working in post-Soviet Communist Poland, also worked to create theatre in which social history and context informed a poverty born out of financial necessity. For further discussion of his work and its scenographic implications, see Kantor, *A Journey Through Other Spaces*

⁶ For discussion of Brook's approach to space in performance, see Brook, *The Empty Space* and Todd and Lecat, *The Open Circle*

⁷ Brook, *The Empty Space*, p67

⁸ Grotowski, *Towards a Poor Theatre*, p21

⁹ Baugh, p74

¹⁰ Barba, *The Floating Islands*

¹¹ Barba, 'The Third Theatre: A Legacy from Us to Ourselves', p7

¹² Barba 'The Third Theatre' p1

¹³ Watson, p21

¹⁴ Watson, p21

¹⁵ Heddon and Milling, p55

¹⁶ Baugh, p74

¹⁷ Schechner, 'Julie Taymor From Jacques Lecoq to The Lion King', p44

¹⁸ Baugh, p84

¹⁹ Burian, pxix

²⁰ Burian, p27

²¹ Burian, pxix

²² trans. by Jarka Burian, p14

²³ Burian, p15

²⁴ Burian, pxx

²⁵ Burian, pxx

²⁶ Howard, pxiii – xvi

²⁷ Aronson, *Looking into the Abyss: Essays on Scenography*, p7

²⁸ Bury, 'Against Falsehood' in Payne, p35

²⁹ Bury, in Payne p35

³⁰ for an example of Brook's process, see his description of *The Tempest* in *There are no Secrets* p102 - 119

³¹ Payne, pxxi

³² Howard et al

³³ Schechner, 'A New Paradigm for Theatre in the Academy: TDR Comment', p6

³⁴ Aristotle, p16

³⁵ Howard p126

³⁶ Burian *The Scenography of Josef Svoboda* p28

END NOTES TO CHAPTER THREE

- ¹ Hornby, p53-54
- ² Billington, p4
- ³ Bertens, p23
- ⁴ Symons, p149
- ⁵ Worrall, p76
- ⁶ Worrall, p76
- ⁷ Meyerhold, p218
- ⁸ Kaye, *Postmodernism and Performance*, p12
- ⁹ Kaye, *Postmodernism and Performance*, p127
- ¹⁰ A cease and desist order is a judge-issued injunction, requiring those to whom it is served to halt a specified activity or face further legal action
- ¹¹ Kaye, 'Interview with Elizabeth LeCompte', in *The Twentieth Century Performance Reader*, ed. by Huxley and Witts, p234
- ¹² Barthes, *Image-Music-Text*, p147
- ¹³ Auslander, *Theory for Performance Studies: A Student's Guide*, p47
- ¹⁴ Barthes, *Image-Music-Text*, p148
- ¹⁵ Auslander, *Theory for Performance Studies*, p49
- ¹⁶ Hornby, p92-93
- ¹⁷ Hornby, p93
- ¹⁸ Hornby, p4
- ¹⁹ Hornby, p6
- ²⁰ Hornby, p5
- ²¹ for detailed explanation of the Sculpture model, see Hornby, p102-104
- ²² Hornby, p104
- ²³ Hornby, p115
- ²⁴ Barthes, *S/Z*, p4
- ²⁵ Barthes, *S/Z*, p5
- ²⁶ Barthes, *S/Z*, p5
- ²⁷ Barthes, *Image-Music-Text*
- ²⁸ Auslander, *Theory for Performance Studies*, p49
- ²⁹ 'Theatrical Performance: illustration, translation, fulfilment, or supplement?' pp79 - 85
- ³⁰ Carlson, *Theatrical Performance*, p80
- ³¹ Carlson, *Theatrical Performance*, p82
- ³² Carlson, *Theatrical Performance*, p82
- ³³ Carlson, *Theatrical Performance*, p83
- ³⁴ Carlson, *Theatrical Performance*, p83
- ³⁵ Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, p144
- ³⁶ Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, p145
- ³⁷ Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, p145
- ³⁸ Carlson, *Theatrical Performance*, pp83-84

³⁹ Carlson, *Theatrical Performance*, p83

⁴⁰ Carlson, *Theatrical Performance*, p84

⁴¹ Carlson, *Theatrical Performance*, p84

⁴² Carlson, *Theatrical Performance*, p84

⁴³ Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, p157

⁴⁴ Hornby, p64

⁴⁵ Eugene O'Neill's *Long Day's Journey into Night* epitomises this utilisation of extremely detailed stage and scene directions, with three pages of notes before the play begins detailing the precise volumes that are contained on the various bookcases prescribed in his description.

⁴⁶ Hornby, p152

⁴⁷ Carlson, *Theatrical Performance*, p84

⁴⁸ Baugh, p217-218

END NOTES TO CHAPTER FOUR

- ¹ Aronson, *Looking into the Abyss*, p7
- ² Aronson, *Looking into the Abyss*, p7
- ³ Payne, p13
- ⁴ Howard, p17
- ⁵ Baugh, p212
- ⁶ Counsell, p207
- ⁷ For example, Harland, p238
- ⁸ Rice and Waugh, p325
- ⁹ Pickering, p238
- ¹⁰ Karen Jürs-Munby, introduction to Lehmann, p13
- ¹¹ Karen Jürs-Munby, introduction to Lehmann, p14
- ¹² Lehmann, p21
- ¹³ p33
- ¹⁴ p19
- ¹⁵ p27
- ¹⁶ p30/31
- ¹⁷ p81
- ¹⁸ p71
- ¹⁹ p69
- ²⁰ p68
- ²¹ p63
- ²² p79
- ²³ p86
- ²⁴ p87
- ²⁵ p87
- ²⁶ p87
- ²⁷ p86
- ²⁸ p93
- ²⁹ p91
- ³⁰ p95
- ³¹ p151
- ³² p101
- ³³ p87
- ³⁴ Govan, Nicholson and Normington, p4
- ³⁵ Govan, Nicholson and Normington, p7
- ³⁶ Govan, Nicholson and Normington, p7
- ³⁷ Lehmann, p69
- ³⁸ Govan, Nicholson and Normington, p6

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- ³⁹ Heddon and Milling, p1 - 3
- ⁴⁰ Williams, on the Complicite website <http://www.complicite.org/about/reviews.html>, accessed 29 October 2006; reproduced in Mitter and Shevtsova
- ⁴¹ Simon McBurney, <http://www.complicite.org/about/message.html>, accessed 29 October 2006
- ⁴² Simon McBurney, <http://www.complicite.org/about/message.html>, accessed 29 October 2006
- ⁴³ Heddon and Milling, p95; for a full account of the impact of politics on theatre, see Chapter 4 'Devising and Political Theatre'
- ⁴⁴ Govan, Nicholson and Normington, p4
- ⁴⁵ Vice, p50
- ⁴⁶ Carlson, *Theater and Dialogism*, p315
- ⁴⁷ Carlson, *Theater and Dialogism*, p319
- ⁴⁸ Carlson, *Theater and Dialogism*, p320
- ⁴⁹ Graham and Hoggett, p27
- ⁵⁰ Lamden, p1
- ⁵¹ Govan, Nicholson and Normington, p6
- ⁵² Govan, Nicholson and Normington, p6
- ⁵³ Innes 'Text/Pre-Text/Pretext' in *Contours of the Theatrical Avant-Garde*, ed. by Harding
- ⁵⁴ Harvie, p5
- ⁵⁵ Wolfreys, p121
- ⁵⁶ Derrida, *Limited Inc.*, p7
- ⁵⁷ Kantor, *Wielopole, Wielopole*, p120
- ⁵⁸ Pleśniarowicz, p41
- ⁵⁹ Pleśniarowicz, p41
- ⁶⁰ Kantor, *A Journey Through Other Spaces*, p118
- ⁶¹ Kantor, *A Journey Through Other Spaces*, p30
- ⁶² Kantor, *Wielopole, Wielopole*, p158
- ⁶³ Lehmann, p72 - 73
- ⁶⁴ Savran, p51
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PAULE CONSTABLE, LIGHTING DESIGNER

DONMAR WAREHOUSE, LONDON 30 JULY 2007

REBECCA HICKIE: I've been looking at, I guess sort of case studies, of two or three companies or productions that are working quite collaboratively and devised, and your is one of the names that keeps cropping up, there seem to be several names in terms of sound design, lighting design, video, that keep cropping up. And I think you started, some of the early professional work that you did was with Complicite, and I just wondered how that had influenced your development as a lighting designer?

PAULE CONSTABLE: I think the thing is, I mean, I started off in the very early days in the music industry, where there's no text, ever, to work with, so you're always just responding emotionally to things. And then my partner worked in it, with People Show, and I started working technically in theatre very much in a kind of circus and devised world, then moving on in various guises, eventually working with Complicite. But I never knew otherwise, I never knew any other way to work. I never... there are, a lot of what seems to be the major difference is to do with the management of time, and I've always grown up, as a lighting designer, spending a lot of time in rehearsals. I'm very bad at looking at a set model for a show, and going 'this is what I'm going to do with it.' What I need to do is see actors in space, and respond to that. So actually in a funny sort of way, devising is all I know, and even when I'm working with a text I suspect I work in a kind of devised method. I think.

R: So do you find that that gives you more of a relationship, or do you find you need more of a relationship with the other designers, or with the performers?

P: Certainly with the designer, the designer and the director are my key relationships, and a lot of the time I get employed by directors. Because obviously if you're working, if you're working that methodology, what I find, I think what I've done is I've taken a devising methodology and I've applied it to everything I do. So, my kind of process to do with making a piece of work is to do with absorbing every element I can of... lighting is a very difficult thing for people to talk about, so I've found this methodology where I absorb everything I can about a production, which involves really keying in to what a designer's doing, and the kind of, the smell and the taste of that, and also really keying in to what a director's doing, and absorbing how they're working in the rehearsal room, and not necessarily sitting down and saying 'talk to me about light', because I think that's the most boring conversation you could possibly have. For me it's like, understand the

landscape of something, understand the context that we're putting it in, how we're going to tell the story, and *then* spending time watching rehearsals, how the story's unfolding. So it's, even if there's a play text now, that's how I work. Does that answer that question? I think it does...

R: Yes, yes. So, I mean I noticed that you work with Katie Mitchell quite a lot, who is one of the people that I've looked at, with *The Waves*, and *Attempts on Her Life*, at the National, and I think this production you're working with Vicki Mortimer as designer, who works a lot with Katie Mitchell, so sort of in that vein of the same names popping up, do you find that there is a sort of community of people who are wanting to work in that way?

P: I think there's an element that if you don't, if you're going on a journey and you don't know where you're going, and you don't know what result you want in the end, what you need is people who will go on a journey with you. So while I would, it's really dangerous if you work with the same people all the time, and those relationships become unhealthy and staid, but at the same time, knowing there's a certain amount of trust, in terms of going into an abyss where you don't know where you're going to come out at the other end, what you want is people who aren't going to be prejudging you, you don't want to be worrying about the relationships, you want to have a certain amount there that you can rely on. Vicki and I, for example, we do a huge amount of work together. I really understand the way she designs, and she really sort of seeks out the way I light. So I know that we have a very symbiotic relationship. And that's very particular to us. Same with Ray Smith and I work very well together. It's about not judging each other, it's about giving each other space to be creative. You know, taken out of context, people can find that very threatening, not knowing what something is going to be can be really terrifying. But actually it's the most exciting thing in the world. And also from, the other thing that's great about it, is it allows you to make decisions that are considered, so the way you light, the way you design, the way you create sound, the way you direct, the way you act, becomes, doesn't become arbitrary any more, it becomes absolutely keyed in to something, and I key in to the same things that they all key in to. Ideally.

R: So, I mentioned *The Waves* and *Attempts*, which obviously are something that, or it's the sort of process that you don't particularly often see at the National, it's quite a large scale to be doing that sort of work on. A lot of it was very technically based, particularly in *Attempts* where it's sort of this television studio, moving stuff around and everything, were you quite involved in the actual physical process of that in rehearsal?

P: Yeah, I mean the really frustrating thing is that, ultimately to design... I mean, with that kind of work all our roles become very blurred. I didn't come into rehearsals in *Waves* or *Attempts* until a couple of weeks before we hit the stage, which is more than most lighting designers would give, but still not essentially enough. What I did with *Attempts* is I gave them the equipment they used, and briefed them about using it, and sort of, gave them a world to work within, that they, you know... the quality of light in *Attempts*, and in *Waves*, is absolutely dictated by the shots. Now I'm not a lighting cameraman, you know, I'm a lighting designer, so it's a funny kind of a contradictory thing, really, with that kind of work. But actually the landscape I have to work with then is very narrow, you know, I have to... I'm not making a world of light, it's not like something like *Coram Boy* or *Saint Joan*, where the landscape is made by me, it's absolutely what lights go on and off, and how, is governed by what shots we're trying to create. And then also, trying to sort of counterbalance the relationship between a shot, and also what story we're trying to tell the audience, so with *Waves* there was a really, really extraordinary kind of under-layer which is how you want the audience to receive a very complex piece of visual information in terms of a vision, an image on a screen, an image being made by a bunch, a group of performers, a performer carrying text which has to kind of, not only act as counterpoint, but it's got to kind of sing out of all that, and somehow you've got to control how the audience receive that information. So with *Waves* it was, it ended up being very, very complex. With *Attempts* it was hours and hours and hours of working with the actors, trying to make sure that they could get the lights into the right place and achieve the images that we wanted. So, the thing about devising is that, sometimes it can be incredibly liberating and really, really creative, and sometimes it can become purely about logistics, which is something like *Attempts*. My role in that situation was to make sure that they could all achieve the lighting that the shots needed. I could turn around and say that was, it was really difficult for me, it was *really* difficult for me to sit on a project like that for four weeks where I couldn't have a single creative thought. But, in the same way that you don't know where you're going to, you don't know where the train's going to take you, that's where that train took me on that particular occasion. And I can't say it was easy, but... making work isn't easy. It's not why we do it.

R: So if, say for example perhaps when you worked with *Complicite*, is that a journey that allows you to be much more creative?

P: Yeah, yeah, absolutely. Anything that has a composite space, set, something like *Saint Joan* at the National at the moment, you know, it's a complete, it's, the Olivier as a theatre machine, it's completely stripped out, it's got one bare platform in the middle of it, the whole landscape is articulated with light. And not in a way where I'm trying to represent a

river or represent a castle, but absolutely where the light's all white, and it's just about the kind of machine of theatre and how it puts this woman in a very kind of patriarchal oppressed environment, and that's completely created with light. Same with *Complicite*. You know, we... something like *Street of Crocodiles* there were no moving scenery, no changes of scenery, every bit of magic is created by sleight of hand, by the quality of an object that you've been looking at for a long time shifting in some way. You know. Devised work, it's so huge, what it can be, it's quite...

R: And would you be able to have a longer rehearsal process with them, are you able to get involved earlier?

P: The ultimate very, very boring issue about rehearsing is that if you are a sound designer you can put a sound technician into a rehearsal room and create sound in the rehearsal room. Rehearsal rooms don't have lights. And it's not like you can put a bunch of lights in a room and employ a technician and go 'oh, just play with these, and I'll...' or, you know, 'this is the world of it, and I'll come in and catch up,' it's not something you can do, so ninety nine percent of the time I have to work live in a theatre. So I have to, when I'm in rehearsals I'm assuming things based on what I'm seeing and how I'm responding to them. So I light the show in my head as I'm watching rehearsals. And occasionally you might get a practical, you know, a kind of real light that you're using in the show, or something like, with *Attempts* we rehearsed with no lights on in the rehearsal room, just the theatre, the TV lights we were using all the way through, so we could achieve the shots. You can do an element of trying to add light, but ultimately there is no rehearsal process, the only way to rehearse with light would be to rehearse in the theatre. And the problem with rehearsing in a theatre, unless you have a group of actors who are really used to it, is that you're rehearsing in a performance space. And it changes the way people behave. And there's a really complicated issue that a lot of the time, if you put light on people it changes the way they rehearse. Because it becomes about production rather than about process. So it's quite frustrating to work in an area of theatre which ninety nine percent of the time is completely production driven, when you're interested in process. It's a kind of huge contradiction. Which is again why I, I mean, in the early days, with *Complicite*, I was, when we did *Street of Crocodiles*, I was employed as the ASM when we were first at the National, purely so Simon could have me in the rehearsal room seven days, you know, all the time. I was also the production manager for the show when we toured it, so, you know, the sort of seam between Paule as a lighting designer and Paule as just a member of the kind of creative team who made the work was completely blurred. And that was a really brilliant way to grow up. It's, you know, I can't afford to do that any more. I really can't. You know. The other very boring truth is that if you, if I go and do a

show like *Attempts on Her Life* in the Lyttleton, I get paid the same amount of money as Pete Mumford doing *The Hothouse*. Now Pete Mumford would do a couple of afternoons in rehearsal, and then go in and light, you know, go in for the technical period. On *Attempts* I did two and a half weeks in rehearsals, and then went in for the technical period. I'm getting paid the same amount, so I'm getting paid the same amount for five weeks work, intensive work, which he's getting paid for sort of ten, twelve days intensive work. The maths just don't add up. So that's tricky. Katie's trying to, we're trying to, we're in development for a production of *Dido and Aeneas* at English National Opera, and we're trying to budget it so that all of us are always there. But the budgets that are involved for that to be possible are absolutely astronomical. So then I think we should look at going back to the Complicite model, where we kind of multi-task, so you're not purely there to do the lights, but you're there to kind of enable the rehearsals to happen. It's tricky.

R: So, waving a little magic wand and taking the finance out of the equation, that's the sort of model that you would like ideally to work with?

P: Not always, it's not appropriate for every show, you know, you have to... like this show, obviously, isn't devised, it's text, but it's devised in terms of doing an evening of three very bizarre pieces of absurd writing, but, you know, I wouldn't have needed to have been in rehearsals for two, three, four weeks on this, it really didn't require it. Although what's also interesting to me is I realised that it's probably the first time in about ten years that I've done a project like that. It's just not the world that I am in, at all. You know, and it's got, ten, twenty, it's got ten or fifteen cues, most shows I do are, you know, *Joan's* got hundreds of cues, *St Matthew Passion* I've just done with Katie it's got hundreds of cues. You know, I'm used to very intense, a very intensive way of working, and a very intense way of telling a story, whereas for this, this, for me, I just stand back, and let them do it. Weird. Quite refreshing, I could get used to it. Much less angst, apart from the angst of 'oh my god, I should be doing more.'

R: I noticed from a list of what you do, you seem to do quite a lot of opera work, how does that work, sort of in terms of process, because I spoke to Michael Levine, who has designed a couple of the very recent Complicite shows, and is also a very, very big opera designer, and he said that they are very different processes, but he's trying to take the lessons that he's learnt from working with Complicite and apply them to opera, and I just wondered how you found that?

P: I think the tricky thing if you're a set or a costume designer and you're working in opera is that everything has to be made so, everything has to be delivered and made so far in

advance, so, you know, the whole lead-in time with opera, I've got bookings 'til 2010, and beyond that actually, and, you know, you're designing most shows at least a year and a half before they're going to go into rehearsal, which in terms of what we know about, you know, theatre, you design and deliver and you, sometimes the set's only being built while the show's being rehearsed. So, I think for a designer it's very complicated. It's actually, for a lighting designer, it's fabulous, because ninety percent of the time, you know, all the British opera companies, the majority of the North American opera companies, are running repertoire. As soon as you start running repertoire, or, even in a *stazione* house, where you're not running a repertoire, singers are not allowed to sing all the time. There's a whole, you know, there's a whole issue about the number of days they can sing, how many sessions they can sing properly, so when you're doing stage and piano rehearsals, with an opera, even if they're not taking the set down in the afternoon, you may only work three or four hours of the day, on that particular piece, and you then have to walk away, and it teaches you this fantastic objectivity of considering where you got to, and actually using the time to feed into your next working session. So, you know, in theatre we sit in a dark room and we watch something for hours, you know, fourteen hours a day, for a technical period, and banging our heads against a brick wall, kind of going 'got to solve it, got to solve it,' and a lot of the time lighting wise you get it in the neck, because you're the one thing that can change, you know, 'oh, make the lights green and it'll be better.' But in opera you *all* have to stop, you all have to walk away from it and you all to have to be... it encourages this fantastic objectivity, plus very, specifically, I have time to achieve notes outside the time when the performers are on stage. So in theatre, you know, you might be able to get a note done in twenty minutes before you start a tech, in opera if you've done a stage and piano, you might have the whole afternoon to actually sit and unpick problems, and sort things out. So, I weirdly find it, find that because my real process, my kind of *actual* process as opposed to my *virtual* process, can only happen in the theatre, with opera I have much more room to manoeuvre than I do with theatre. So it's the opposite of what Michael's problem is in a way.

R: But you're still working from what's going on on the stage, what's going on in the rehearsal room, what the people are doing?

P: Yeah, yeah. I mean, the other thing that's great in opera is that stage rehearsals, you know, you have a series of stage and pianos and then a series of stage and orchestras; stage and orchestras are conductor's rehearsals. You can't stop them. So you *have* to just work live, you *have* to work over people rehearsing. Which is a fantastic way to work. It's tricky if you want to do something that's very, very, very technical. But if you're kind of, if you're, if technically something's quite solid and very clear, and the singers are very well

on top of, you know, very much on top of what they're doing, you've got enormous space to kind of play with what you've got in front of you. Which, the other thing is, stage and pianos, directors tend to be solely worried about the singers, they're running up and down, and they just ignore what you're doing, so you can produce any old rubbish, and then push it to somewhere quite interesting, without a director going 'is it going to be like that?', you know, because they're not noticing. So you don't get that kind of intensity of relationship, so you get a whole kind of technical period where you just quietly go, 'oh, actually that is quite interesting,' and just find out how it's responding to light, and then a whole series of rehearsals where you do the whole thing again, where you've absolutely got the director next to you because they've got nothing better else to do, but you're in a better place to kind of deal with them by then. So I kind of love it. It's why I do so much of it. I mean I wouldn't like to only do it, but...

R: So do you find that there is quite a strong element of play in your work, because this seems to be a word that's coming up quite a lot, whether I'm talking to designers, or performers, the word play and playing in rehearsal seems to come up a lot.

P: It is... well, it's what we do, isn't it. It's about a play of things, it's about a... I don't mean play in a kind of light, in a kind of childish way, or childlike way. It's about play as in, you know, throwing things up, keeping them alive. Not about fixing things. That's for me what it's about. Not deciding what it is before you get into the room and then just making it that, but deciding what it might be, and then, and then deciding, and then looking at whether that's a good thing or not. I mean, the other thing that I think is really interesting about devised work is that you can't go into a devising, a piece of devised theatre, you can't go into the theatre at the beginning of a technical with no idea of what you're going to do, you *can't* go in with a blank sheet of paper. You actually need to give yourself an incredibly structured place to start from. And that was something that opera really taught me, which I've then fed into the devising world, which is don't go in with a blank sheet of paper and a few vague ideas, actually decide for yourself what your ideas are for each moment, and have, you know, and they can be wrong, but if you have a structure to hang things on, then you have so much more space to manoeuvre. So, the first time when I worked in theatre, the first time I went and did an opera, and I worked with this weird schedule and suddenly I couldn't work in the afternoon and I'd work for three hours and then go away, I thought 'this is rubbish, I can't achieve anything,' and then the more I absorbed it into my psyche, the more I went, 'actually it's brilliant,' 'cause it makes you commit to something, and then look at it, and then decide if you, so, you know, you actually had so much more space, so in the same way I realised that the more I decided what I was going to do in a piece of theatre *before* I did it, then the more I could throw all those ideas out in the end

and start again, as long as I knew what the original ideas were. So, it's like... I remember my, I went to Goldsmiths, and the guy who was kind of head of the technical, stage management-y things, Jerry Lidstone, I remember him coming to see *Street of Crocodiles*, and I was very young when I did it, it was a couple of years after I'd come out of college, and I met him afterwards, and I sort of said, 'ooh, did you enjoy it,' you know, 'isn't it amazing,' and he said, 'I really loved it,' he said, 'but the terrible thing is I'm going to spend the next twenty years watching terrible versions, imitations of it.' You know, that sort of sense of, to devise something, or to... it's not about not doing things properly, it's about doing things absolutely by the book, and then throwing the book away. It's about, for me, that is. 'Cause I'm a real, I really love structure and order. And once I've got that there I can go anywhere with it, but for me it's like, you have to know how to do it the most conventional, you know, and opera forced me to do that, opera forced me to use a proscenium arch, and front of house, and things like that that I'd never experienced, as ways of lighting. And suddenly I realised that, you know, there was a way of working, and you could key in to that, and then reject it all and go off and do... which is sort of what I've been doing, but I think it just really got my, it made my technique much stronger. So yes, I have a lot to thank opera for.

R: Ok, well that's been very, very helpful, thank you.

P: It's a pleasure.

R: I don't know if there's anything else, that you'd like to say...

P: No, I mean the best thing is if anything comes up, just e-mail me, if it's gibberish. Which it may well be...

R: No, no, there's some very, very helpful things there. I've already started my writing up process, and there's a few things there that you've said that will be very helpful in what I'm trying to express, about sort of how people are working in different ways but we're not acknowledging it, you know, sort of trying to explain what those different ways are.

P: You've met Gareth, [Fry] haven't you?

R: Yes.

P: He's a marvellous thing.

R: Yes, I had a very interesting conversation with him over lunch in the dining room at the National Theatre, so it wasn't the quietest of locations!

P: It's quite noisy, yeah! Have you met Katie [Mitchell]?

R: No, I haven't, unfortunately she's far too busy to manage to squeeze me in, which is not surprising! But no... I've got quite an interesting flavour of working with her. I've talked to a couple of the lads who were in the plays, so...

P: Did you talk to Mike, Mike Gould? Or Paul?

R: Yes. Yeah, Paul and Mike, and Jonah. So yeah, having talked to Gareth and yourself and the boys I've got quite an interesting picture of working with Katie from several different angles.

P: I think the thing that has to be said is that people who make, a lot of people who make devised work, and I mean the archetypes for me are Simon and Katie, are absolute fucking monsters. They really are. I mean, brilliant and extraordinary and there's a kind of area where she's not, both of them wouldn't be aware, I mean the reason I stopped working with Simon is because he started to feel he owned what I did, and you just kind of go... you know, as soon as this becomes a shorthand, its not interesting for me any more, and I do think that when I see his work now, I sort of think, you're not allowing the people around you to be creative enough any more. And that's what can happen sometimes with Katie, that's what happened with, sometimes can happen with Katie. You know. It, the kind of landscape of what things can be, because of the kind of potential for so many things to be anything, actually becomes incredibly narrow. It's so contradictory, devised theatre. When it's so **not** devised, you know, nothing about theatre is devised, unless you start looking at Phelim McDermott, do you know *Improbable*?

R: Yes. Yeah , I have spoken to Julian Crouch...

P: He's fantastic...

R: Yeah, I went to talk to him at the ENO rehearsal rooms...

P: When they were doing *Satyagraha*?

R: Yeah, he was working on the puppets for that when I went to talk to him.

P: I mean there's that amazing thing with him, which is he is a true artist, and he is truly kind of bonkers, in, you know, what he's doing. All those moments... did you see the show?

R: Yes.

P: I mean the *most* exquisite puppets and they were on stage for like, three minutes. But that, you know, the whole show was like that, really. I mean it was, I mean, how actors... I don't know whether you, I absolutely adored it, but I just thought the whole... you know, the sticky tape moment, and the, everything about what they did with that piece was just so intuitive.

R: Yeah, I enjoyed it more than I thought I would, because I'm not a huge Philip Glass fan, so I wasn't quite sure what I was expecting. I had an awful, awful cough at the time...

P: Oh no!!

R: Which kind of took the, I was like, the last thing I need to do is go to the opera, with a cough, so it was slightly nightmarish from that point of view, but, yeah, I did. And I was right up in the gods, right up in the very top tier of balcony, and I went, I think it was Easter weekend and they did a post-show discussion afterwards, and I went down and sat in the stalls for that, and I sat in the stalls and I thought, I'm so glad I didn't pay to sit down here! Because having watched the show from up there, you've got a fantastic perspective...

P: He did, it was amazing, wasn't it...

R: and some of the perspective things that he'd done, and I sat in the stalls and looked at the set, and I thought, it just...

P: it was very flat downstairs.

R: it would look so much, just... you'd lose so much, sitting down in the stalls, and it just looked so amazing from upstairs, you know. And I wanted to tell all these people who'd sat in the stalls come back and go and sit upstairs!

P: And also it sounds better, the sound in there is extraordinary. I just thought it was so... I mean what was amazing about what those two guys did, they had no opera experience,

they were working in a company that's, you know, clinically depressed, half the people they were working with had been made redundant, you know, had spent their lives in that building, and they made everybody believe in the idea of it. And, you know, it's a piece of Philip Glass, it's incredibly long, it's incredibly complicated, nobody knows where it's going, and then every person in that building went with it. It was just so beautiful, you know, the crew guys at the rehearsal space, at LBH, where you met Julian, who are the most cantankerous bunch of old, you know, would have done, you know, Julian's spreading newspaper and PVA over everything, and they just loved them! They loved their enthusiasm and they loved... and they just somehow... and having that group of skills practitioners with them, as well, they just brought their energy into the building, and rather than people going 'oh, fuck off,' you know, 'you won't let me play in it,' they're not, they don't, they're not territorial like, and Simon is territorial. Julian and Phelim genuinely go kind of go... [opens her arms] like this, they are genuinely kind of going, 'we're open to whatever.' And it was a really beautiful thing, to see them being able to bring that company alive in that way. It was sort of heartbreaking. I grew up there, so, I can't bear seeing the state it's got into. Anyway, yes, sorry, that was a tangent, but yes, they, I think in terms of devised work, I think they're, I think they're really exciting, those two.

R: Yes. I think there's a lot of... physical imagery devising that goes on there that's sort of the key to what they do, and to bring that into opera I think is quite remarkable.

P: I think also the fact that Phelim's also really, really concerned with the how you make work, how you communicate as a group. You know, have you read any of the stuff on the Improbable website about the kind of, you know, like use your feet, if you don't like to be in a group discussion, I you don't like what's being said, you don't have to stay, use your feet, walk away. You know, just things about, don't harbour grudges, and, it's so many years of seeing the damage that can be done by people behaving badly in kind of LeCoq training or whatever it is, that he's developing a method which is absolutely about taking people on a journey, not imposing, and not imposing on them. I thought it was amazing. I think he's a really gifted, I think they're both really gifted. And they do it properly. You know. Devising.

R: Yes. Unless you ask them. I went to, they did a discussion event at the Riverside Studios, with Forced Entertainment, and Phelim was like, 'well, you know, sometimes we do shows with real actors, and then other times the real actors don't turn up and it's just us, and we sit round and smoke and drink coffee and hope nobody goes, oh well we ought to start doing something now.' You know, and you think, well, that's how you describe your process, and actually I can envisage you sitting around drinking coffee and

going 'what are we going to do,' but somehow there's some magic there that somehow they get from that to what they put on stage, you know.

P: Oh, it's completely magical! But also he's completely obsessed with debunking the myth. It's not... you know, anyone can do it. That's Phelim's attitude.

R: Which I think is this thing about sitting round drinking coffee and smoking, you know, trying not to do any work, you know, we can all do that!

P: And we can all make work.

JULIAN CROUCH, IMPROBABLE THEATRE COMPANY
ENO REHEARSAL ROOMS, LONDON 08 FEBRUARY 2007

REBECCA HICKIE: I've jotted a few questions down, but I may well just go off on a tangent from what you say, but I was quite interested in that you started working quite early on with Welfare State, you did quite a lot of work with them.

JULIAN CROUCH: Yeah... actually the first company I worked with actually was with this man here, a company call Trickster, theatre company, and that was the first company, proper company I worked with, and then through that came into contact with Welfare State, worked with them for a bit, met Jo [maker working on this project, in room during interview] there at Welfare State...

R: I was just interested in what sort of process that was for you in terms of the design process, was that quite a collaboratively...

J: It was kind of, sort of fantastic and frustrating in a way, because I suppose the work I've done before, the work I'd done with Trickster, I'd been very closely involved in it, very similar to here where you make and then rehearse almost straight away with stuff, and I was a maker then really rather than a designer, I didn't train or anything, so I don't consider I came, I didn't come as a designer until much later, in a way, I was just a maker, I made masks and puppets and body parts, which is exactly what I've gone back to making here. But actually when I first worked with Welfare State, I found it really difficult because actually as a designer you *weren't* really involved in the writing process, they were doing very big gigs at the time I came in, and they were doing a lot of big gigs in a hurry, so I would end up in like France, or Spain, and someone would say 'you're making this' and... I remember being told 'you're making the back end of Margaret Thatcher' and I remember having a huge row, you know, I had a huge row in the middle of a field about this, because I'd come from a place where I was used to having an opinion about what I made, and an idea, and I think when I first walked into Welfare State, I mean the Welfare State was very different over lots of years, they went through lots of different phases, I was kind of brought in as a big maker on big gigs, and it was quite irritating, I found it very irritating to be told 'you're making this, you're making that' with no input into it at all. And actually as a designer there you weren't really represented in any dialogue. But what happened then is you were thrown into the field basically with it and usually there was too much for people to do in the amount of time allotted, so things would go wrong, and accidents would happen, and great things would come out of the accidents, or you know,

you'd make great discoveries, and you'd work with lots of other great artists. But in some ways I'd say their *process* is sort of... hard to talk about, it wasn't really feel like a process as such, you know it wasn't, basically you've got a job, and you got on with that job, and I think actually that it was quite hard for people who did want to have a say about their art it was actually easier to work with Welfare State if you, you know, if you were just happy to make this or make that or make this. I mean it was strange also cause I think it, you know, the company had existed a long time before I got there, and I needed to go on and do other things anyway with my life, so it's not... I can't really quite sum up what it was like with them, they were obviously on a much longer journey. But for me, it was interesting, the great things about Welfare State were the fantastic people I met, the total madness of it, like you often lived where you were, you know I loved John Fox as a chap but I fought with him over time. And most people who worked with Welfare State had to leave at some point, if you wanted to kind of go on and learn more and do your own thing and make your own mistakes you had to kind of move on, so it was like a very intense... I think I was probably with them for about three years, as one of their sort of chief makers. But it was interesting what happened, you know, cause they were always in a hurry, what I could do well was do one thing and make, you know, two big heads a day, or whatever, you know, I could do big sculptural stuff fast, and so actually what happened is in Welfare State that's almost all I did, because that's what they wanted from me, was to come in, make that big stuff fast, because they had no money, or hadn't enough time, and... So process-wise, you know, all these things they're very different from the outside when you start trying to analyse them or talk about them or write a PhD about them, and, I mean, 'cause most companies exist in a state of crisis management, most artists that I know continually are in a kind of crisis management, rushing from one job to another, never quite got enough time, never quite know what you're doing, so process is often, there's often a lot of chaos in any process. So, that's Welfare State! I'll probably get into trouble for saying those things.

R: So was that something that interested you in forming Improbable with Lee and Phelim, to get that sort of...

J: You kind of, well it's interesting actually, cause I... to be honest, I mean to be absolutely honest I think most of what I learnt I learnt in the company Trickster, I came into Welfare State and learnt a lot of stuff but I didn't really change my style of making, they, I sort of introduced the style of making to them, which they kind of needed at the time, they'd kind of run their... they had certain techniques which in some ways I tried to change, a little bit, the way they worked, and I would say what happened with Improbable was probably closer to what happened with Trickster than it was with, than it was to

Welfare State. Yeah... I mean I think in some ways Trickster was sort of like... I mean it was a man very much in charge but people were very much consulted about what they were doing. Welfare State was a little bit like a monarchy in a way, I mean it was great, but it was run from the top down, however kind of anarchic it was, it was essentially a monarchy I think, whereas Improbable, I don't know, Improbable's probably like a partnership, I would say, they're like a chaotic partnership. So I think it was sort of its own new thing. What had marked me out maybe was my speed as a maker, or speed and quality or whatever, that I could work really fast, and both Phelim and Lee come from improvisation which has got to be fast, it's immediate, and so the challenge... so I was kind of like, and I am still am the right designer for them in a way, because they want to... they want the work to be kind of fluid, and fast, so basically it was kind of a marriage made around that, actually, around improvisation, I think, about not making decisions until the last moment, and some of what I did, and it's interesting now because I'm actually deliberately returning to what I was doing around that time, so it's not hard for me to sit in this room and talk about it because I'm deliberately, in a way, following my path, but what would happen... generally with Improbable as a designer, you were, we were, on the whole, we were in a theatre, so the first job we did was *Dockster*... now actually I'm just talking about Improbable here but we weren't called Improbable then, this is freelance work with Phelim, Lee and myself working as freelance artists, we didn't become Improbable until after we'd been working with each other for quite a few years. But I guess the way of working hasn't particularly changed, um, so the first shows I did with Phelim and Lee, the first show I did was a show called *Dr Faustus*, and it, and the problems of that show are pretty much the problems of any show, including the one I'm doing at the moment, is that no-one wants to really decide how we're gonna do it and what we're gonna do, but I kind of *had* to decide because I had to make some stuff, so usually what I do is design some kind of set that has kind of, is a world, usually a very strong world, so we make some decisions at that stage, decide what the world is, often decide what materials we're going to use for, this is a newspaper and corrugated iron show, you know, *Dr Faustus* was just all books, everything was books, and paper... so because I have to hand in a set model or make some decisions, because I am in a way working slightly more closely with the building than anyone else in the company, we're, something has to be decided, so usually I'll force that first decision of what the world is, in this case, a library, um... and, you know, make the model, they'll make the stuff and I'll make sure it's got flexibility so I know you can do a certain number of scenes. I don't know exactly why or where those scenes are going to be. *Dr Faustus* does have a text, but we really butchered the text, so it had a... we knew where the kind of first scene was and where the last scene, but the middle of *Dr Faustus* is sort of rubbish anyway and everyone says Marlowe didn't write it, so we knew that the middle could be anywhere, um. So... I make something

that the theatre makes, and *then* I'll usually start making some kind of puppetry kit, and this was the first, this in a way I think is what Improbable invented, it was related maybe to Trickster, but, and maybe also scale-wise slightly related to Welfare State, but generally with this idea of making different heads and bodies and limbs and wings and, um... I make them independently like I'm doing here, and then when you work with performers you start putting those things together with other things, with junk, and objects, so there's always, there's always something that's not me in the work, it's not like I'm just designing everything and laying it out, but there's a real process with other people involved as well, um... and that generally is, that's, I suppose was our general process for the bigger building-based productions, and really I suppose that's the model for this production. Except this is more complicated, you have a singing chorus, singing choruses are always very big and complicated. But then I think when we, after a few years of doing freelance stuff like that, we formed Improbable, and with Improbable we did, we started with smaller scale work that we were touring with less resources, you know, not the backup of a building, and often I would sort of be directing those ones because Phelim or Lee would be in, so I'd be involved in the directing, and I suppose I had been co-directing with Phelim on a number of things anyway, and those shows I actually tend to have less of a set or a design, partly because no-one, there's no building to fuck off if you don't get it done, so often we didn't do it, often those shows were kind of more slightly more open or... there was one, *Spirit*, where we just had a kind of ramp, an extreme ramp, and we just worked off that, the *Wedge*, as we called it. But a lot of our shows didn't have a lot of set, we did a show *70 Hill Lane* which was mostly sellotape and poles and wood and, started a whole load of, a series of work that was based around using sellotape on stage, you know, indoors and outdoors, we did this huge outdoorlike a big hundred foot tower outdoors, show called *Sticky*. But I'm not sure... *Sticky* again falls into a different category, because there you can't improvise, it's outdoors, and you don't really get to rehearse and you can't really improvise and So there's, I suppose there's various different models for shows and we have different processes, and on the whole I guess each show has its own process, and I think that's what we intend to do, to kind of bring the show out of each of its each process, you know, so that the show centres on process, to bring the right show out of the people that are in the room, and, does that make sense?

R: Yeah, absolutely. That kind of covers about three of my questions! I mean, obviously if you're doing the more devised shows and you don't necessarily have a set then you're not necessarily having to make these creative decisions before the process, in the way that you are perhaps when you've got to make a lot of stuff like this, but would you say that the visual elements using the sellotape or whatever route you go down, would you say that's

quite a fundamental part of the writing of the piece, would you say that's quite a big impetus to...

J: Mm, like you... Yeah. I mean, certainly in terms of, you know, sometimes it's the only writing in a piece, so something like *Sticky* is absolutely just visual, there's no words, there's no acting as such. Tricky if you don't know the work so well, um... to explain this, I think somewhere in here, but just because we might be using some sellotape in this show, there probably is some... [looking through some sketches and pictures]

R: I have seen what's on the website about the show.

J: Right. About *Sticky*? Ah right, well, oh here it is actually. So something like that, it is the writing, in fact, I think with *Sticky*, we did a, me and Rob we did a kind of workshop up in Stockton, we did a little 15 minute show, really just using puppets and stilt walkers and everything relative to sticky and sticky tape and sellotape and cling film, and we were working with a pyrotechnical company called The World Famous, the idea was sort of for that what happens if you take a roll of sellotape and a sparkler, what if you really take that to extremes, and so really it was still even more of a big scale it was really still about just ordinary sellotape and lots of sparklers, you know, but there was more imagery by the end. We did a little workshop with that, and then on the way back Rob and myself we started looking, actually we were offered a gig in Glasgow, the Year of Architecture, um, and so we were looking at electricity pylons, and thinking actually that looks quite easy, with a crane looks quite easy to build a big sellotape structure. So that show was kind of born like that. And then, you know, like eventually I, because something had to be built, I had to draw a picture of what I thought that might be, and then a really good guy called Flags was also working on the show who was pretty good with flying stuff, and he took that and did technical drawings for what I did. And sort of one team started building that, and really like another team started doing very much what we're doing here, sort of thinking well what other things will fit in with that, and started making imagery that seemed related, and actually it was really a problem only a week or so before we did the show that we actually put together the stuff that we were making with the structure and thought oh yeah, this'll be a big spider and this'll happen, this'll happen, and myself and Rodney sort of clicked together and we storyboarded that. So, and to be honest, that's what I, at the moment I'm trying to do, I'm trying to do as much making as possible and see if, if I, I'm interested in the ideas that come out of making, or... and it's frustrating sometimes, cause, you know, we make stuff and I don't know why we're making it, so I don't know what size it should be, and I don't know whether it should bend here or bend there, whether it should be in proportion. Because I suppose I sort of end up interested in what

happens if you just take stuff and put it together in different combinations. And I think it'll end up better than anything I could design, that way. But there's a kind of funny, it's strange, it's sort of like, it's definitely like a banquet that, like a recipe or something, so you could definitely go wrong, or it could get burnt or, you know...um. But I suppose that's what I'm, that's what I end up interested in. Um. Is that, I can't remember what the question was, I don't whether I answered them. Oh, yeah yeah, in terms of writing. So in *that case...* for a case like *that* the design *is* the writing, pretty much. To be honest, this show, the design for that, this Philip Glass opera, we're in the eighties, you know, when, it was a particular time when people liked to cut up their work, so it's not in chronological order, as a story, there's also not really a story to it, the people on stage are singing from the Bhagavada Gita in ancient Sanskrit and they're not singing what they're doing, and then above each scene are three icons not from the period of time that the opera is set in, so you have Martin Luther King, and Tolstoy, and this Indian poet called Tagore, so really on almost every level it's inaccessible in a way, and you've got the Philip Glass music kind of goes round and round and round and it goes on for three and a half hours, and... So to be honest, to be honest with something like that there's not really a text that you would make any sense of, so really we can do what we like. So it does tend to be made around images. So, you know, I mean early this week... we made..... I started making these heads earlier this week, so you take them and look at them and then, I know they're going to be useful somewhere, and then suddenly you think 'ah, actually maybe we use them here' and suddenly they start, everything starts fitting in. Or yet, you know we've been talking about the image of people taking off their shoes, this chorus taking off their shoes, and then, after a bit you sort of realise 'oh maybe the whole show's about taking off items of clothing, shoes' and sort of not really, it's always like that, different stuff coming from different places. But on the whole I think we tend to work visually rather than verbally. But you know that's changed as well, I mean, that varies. Something like, we did a show called *Shockheaded Peter*, which Joe was involved in, which actually strictly wasn't Improbable, it was, but it was me and Phelim, and that was based on some songs and already, really before we arrived, there was a band called the Tiger Lilies who had, you know, they'd adapted these songs. So that started with these songs. So that was the starting point there. But I mean, we didn't actually know what to do with those songs, I suppose immediately I designed a kind of weird Victorian theatre, like, touring theatre, that was too small for actors, really, so everything was, more like a puppet stage really, and worked out where the musicians might be able to appear, and then we sort of improvised the rest of that show, we slung that together really fast, same kind of thing, we'd have a kit of stuff, I would have an instinct, thinking, cause it's like a little theatre it should have cut-out scenery like trees and furniture, so I'd just think 'well I'll make 6 pieces of furniture for the house and I'll make 7 trees and um'... so often I'll make a decision like that – 7 trees –

and I'll have no idea about where we're going to use those 7 trees, it's almost like a puzzle. We tend to use everything that's been made. Very rarely do we chuck anything out and not use it. And also very rarely do we add much more in, you know, so I suppose... I suppose it's something that... we have done a few shows, we did a show called *Don Quixote*, with a little company called Commotion, years and years ago, one of the very first things I did with Phelim, and we did it with baskets and wicker and we didn't have any making really we just did it with objects, and we put objects together to make things. And I think that had quite a big influence, and I suppose what I'm doing with the making stuff is I'm making, it's almost like making found objects, I'm making, I'll make this, I'll make that, make this and make that, and then you're going to use it like you're putting together found objects.

R: So is that a process, that sort of 'how you use it' process, is that something that you will work on in the rehearsal room with the performers?

J: Mmm... yes.

R: So almost in a sense they almost become... objects... in the writing process?

J: Uh... I don't know necessarily whether objects is the right term...

R: In terms of sort of creating the visual images, the pictures?

J: I think it sort of depends, so for example *Shockheaded Peter*, which was like this, so you have to imagine we have lots of heads and arms and legs and whatever, we *know* there has to be some certain puppets and characters, but we *don't* know which head so, what we did there, and we have done several times, sort of as a joke, but it's a very useful joke, is Phelim and myself will set out a table and we'll sit round the table like we're traditional West End directors, and you literally say 'Next!', and the actors'll have to, they'll go and get like a head, and they'll sling something together... and we'll audition what they've made, so we won't speak to them as performers we'll speak to the thing they've made, so you could do that here, you could grab the crocodile head, and some little body, and you'd say 'ok, it says on your CV that the last thing you were in was *Crocodile Dundee*', or whatever, and, you know, 'p'raps you'd like to tell us a bit about that', sometimes they can speak, some of them can't, I mean... some stringy little puppet does a whole version of *Equus*. Were you there, Jo, when Tony Cairns did *Equus*? [Jo: No] with this stringy little puppet. That was one of the best versions of *Equus* that I've ever seen in my life, it was like fantastic and terrifying and very funny, but it's sort of, it's like that, so

you sort of play a game that things you're making are real, for the moment you're doing that exercise, or whatever. In the case of *Shockheaded Peter* some of those things did sort, you sort of thought, that head worked really well with that body, that can be Conrad, or whatever, you know, you would end up with... So I don't think, the actors aren't like objects within that, but they're sort of, you're sort of dreaming it up together, so really, you're playing, like kids, in a way, you're playing like kids, and it's real, so, whatever they've made, even if it's really crappy, for that period of time is real, and you talk to it, you don't talk to the actors. So you sort of say 'Speak up, speak up!', or you know, like, 'well, it says here you can do a bit of dance, so we'd like to see your...' so you can, you play a game really, and I think most of it is about that, it's sort of about playing games, so when you're working with ensemble and bits of newspaper you try not to... what you feed in, you try to sort of encourage and keep it going but you're trying to help people forget that they're individual people, you're trying to dream them into some kind of world that the stuff they're using is real, maybe a different scale or, you know, 'cause sometimes you might be working with something *that* size [gestures] or sometimes you're working with that size [gestures]. It's a hard thing to explain, I think, unless you've done much puppetry. I mean also 'cause you generally you're, generally you're not a puppeteer on your own, generally there's at least two people puppeteering something, and in our case we'll be trying to use eleven people sometimes to puppeteer something, so if you're only the ankle or whatever, you know, you might just be the ankle of that puppet, somehow you're dreaming the whole thing together. And I think that's sort of like how the whole work should be in a way. It sort of is at the moment, to be honest at the moment what happens, Phelim's not in today, but what happened the last couple of days Phelim's been sitting over there playing the music, we've already kind of gone through roughly the show, 'cause we had sort of 'designs' for it, have you got the page with the designs on it, for this show?

R: I did look at it on the internet, yeah.

J: Cause it's in a different place from our other site, but anyway. So we had that.

R: Yeah, your own site that's linked from the website, yeah.

J: Uh, yes, I think I then linked somewhere else as well, but, uh, yeah! There's a, so there's kind of a design for this show. But we're not really sure what happens for the 25 minutes that it's this piece of scenery, so, and we have a singing chorus, so we have the principals, and we have what we call the skills chorus, which is our puppeteers, so there's about eleven of them, so at the moment, you know, the band's playing over there, I'm making and sometimes Kevin the costume designer's in and, you know, these lot are in,

and sometimes everyone's talking about them and they're kind of joking about what they might do, we've got a joke about Rob coming on on a bicycle, be interesting to see, look out, there's a bicycle in the show, I wonder whether it's gonna get there or not! So, I think we try and keep it like that, we try and keep it light really, and... but it's hard to explain, I mean the whole thing is a lot of work over a lot of months, and as designers and directors I suppose it's your job to know how to conduct that process at that particular time, and I'd say the process shifts all the time, so there's times when we're under real pressure, you know, so there's times when we've had to go to the New York Met and show this model, and you have to decide whether you, how serious to be or not, whether to make jokes, whether to say 'we call it Ghandi the thunder dog' , you know, and whether to say that at the Met. And whether, you know, that's a good joke or whether that's a bad joke to make at the Met. And it's obviously very serious to us and it's important that we don't take it too seriously as well, so it's all... I can't... it seems such an organic process, and each show's different, that it's almost impossible to say how it's done. And I don't think there is a way of doing it, and sometimes, there are also sometimes when it just doesn't work, and we do a really bad show, you know, and maybe this will be bad. I think with this no-one will be able to tell if it's a bad show or not, because it's such a really experimental opera no-one quite understands it, I think no-one will quite know whether it's good or bad. I think it'll have really great moments in it, but it'll be a puzzling piece of work. And it's almost, you know, the way it's written, before we've even got our hands on it, almost seems to suggest that it's coming from a different place. I mean it's not... you generally do a show, there's an audience there and it's about whether they're having a good time or whether they're bored or not. But this is very, this is a kind of deep, mantra-like piece of music, that definitely even, definitely plays on the idea that you zone out into somewhere else, so it's sort of even playing with boredom, with it's repetitious nature really, so, they're all different, these shows.

R: So obviously this one is on quite a large scale compared with some of the Improbable devised stuff, but how does your process transfer when you're working sort of outside of Improbable with things like, I think you did *Jerry Springer the Opera*, and *The Magic Flute* for, was it the Welsh National Opera?

J: Yeah.

R: How do you sort of transfer from this very improvisational process into that more structured...

J: Well, actually I suppose, to be honest with you, with difficulty. I mean, I have tried... it's always nice to do it, 'cause in some ways it's nice to have, to be honest it's nice to work in different ways, and it's nice to *not* have as much responsibility, but I do find it hard. I do find that I don't think my designs are as good, so, you know. I mean, I think *Jerry Springer*, I think it was a good functional design, but it wasn't, but I think I found it hard to get anything inspirational when I'm not a part of, when I'm not a director as well, in a way. I mean I feel I was Associate Director on that, but I kind of, for me, I, the writing and the design and the direction is, and everything, the music, all of it, is all... I don't really see the differences, I don't see the dividing line very clearly, and so I think I work better when they're all a bit blurred. So I find, yeah, I found those other jobs hard, to be honest, and I don't think they're necessarily my best work. Although, you know, it was great to do them, you know, it was good to do them. I mean actually, in saying that, I mean what I did for *Jerry Springer* was what it needed, I mean *Jerry Springer*, *Improbable* would never have done something like *Jerry Springer*, it's just not the kind of thing they'd have done. So I think I found the experience useful. But then I think what I do with them is I fit into what I think the process is, so I don't try and govern the process, whereas with an *Improbable* show I'm part of the governing body. I don't know, thinking about maybe this is not what you're asking, but it might be useful, is that certain shows like this, so the big shows, that we do for theatres, we tend to be asked to do, and so we've been asked to do *Satyagraha*, roughly, I mean it's kind of a long process, it's not something that we've ended up doing because someone else wants it done, as well, and all of those retros that we did, like, there's a, like *Dr Faustus*, all the stuff, the *Improbable* stuff, the kind of shows that someone else asked us to do, and even *Shockheaded Peter* we were asked to do, it wasn't our choice to do it. I think they're one kind of show, and the other kind of show where it's just me, Phelim and Lee, pretty much, doing the smaller shows, usually with them we don't, we sit in a room and we have no idea what we're gonna do. And actually usually they end up very personal, so it's often about someone, someone's childhood or someone's lovelife or someone's, a death in someone's family, or at the moment, you know, we're talking about doing a show, you know, couple of years time probably, at the Barbican, another little show, you know, at the moment we start talking about what, you know, sort of talk around what you're interested in, so, or what's happening in your life, so Phelim has a sort of, got this kind of virus or physical problem called labyrinthitis which makes him very dizzy, so he's kind of interested in that, and the idea of labyrinths, and how that's connected to like shamanism and whatever, he's also interested in he read something about someone who used bees as a divining process, and how also some shamans use beestings as a divining process, they actually get themselves stung by bees in order to go into a different state, and so, you know, he brought those things, I've been, got kind of interested in... you know, I've been interested in *Punch and Judy* for a bit, and

Punch all the way back to Pulcinella, which is kind of, and he's appeared in some of our shows recently, but also like I did a project *The Fire of London*, little projects that I've got more intrigued by, and because the Barbican wants something around London, I was sort bringing ..., and that area sort of where Punch as we know him was born, but also the Fire of London happened, and, you know, you might bring *those* in, so you start bringing those in with the idea of bees and labyrinths to the room when you're talking about it, and this is where, you know, we've got a long way to go, you start talking about some themes maybe, and you make some jokes about those themes and you, you know, slowly you maybe think of an idea. We did a show, actually the other idea that we've got kicking around at the moment is we did a show called *Coma*, a fair number of years ago, which kind of was a, didn't quite gel for us. I never really did a design for it, 'cause I was directing it and was sort of too busy, and you sort of, because I'd not, it was a sort of ragged show. And it tended, it was a very interesting show in a way, because people who'd had coma experiences would talk about it and we used to talk about it in the middle of the show, but then we talked about it at the end, so we'd have a big discussion and really the discussions were often the best bit about that show, because, you know, most people know someone, or have had some experience of it, incredible stories people used to tell, but it was never a well-formed show. It involved one actor really pretty much being on the table for the whole show sort of in a coma state, and so we've sort of toyed with bringing that show back, like reworking on that show, 'cause in some way we sort of pushed it away because it didn't quite work for us, but then we're sort of toying with the idea of what if you bring back a show like that, that sort of has been in a coma for six shows, that never quite toured America like our other shows did or whatever, it sort of was like the show that went wrong and ended up on the hospital bed. And so we're now toying with the idea well what if we revisited it and did a show sort of about that. So that's, you know, and that might mix in with the labyrinthitis thing or, you know, *Fire of London*, whatever, I don't know, that tends to be how the little shows are put together, so usually, and then you know, someone like ... say we'll pay for you to come here for a couple of weeks, and use this as a workshop place, so come and do a bit of writing here, and, you know, they get to put our name in their programme and say that they supported this piece of work and, and often there we'll start doing some exercises and start doing some writing exercises, sometimes. But it's sort of like, those shows are like a divining process, 'cause we can sort of do anything we like in a way, we're not really, if we fail we fail ourselves, we're not letting down a theatre, or, or the English National Opera, in this case, or the Met or whatever. So those shows tend to be a bit different and a bit more experimental, and often a bit more self-indulgent, and not as enjoyable for the audience! [laughs] But there you go, you learn from them, you know. I mean, and that's not true, I mean the great shows have come out of that process, but they do tend to, they run that risk, in a way, they're very

different, but they're also where you sort of learn your stuff in a way, because if you sort of, you feel like if you don't go through that exposing process you start getting nervous about failure, so it's almost like, they're almost deliberately there to have practice in failure, or, you know, there's stuff that's [a bit about in it]. I mean, straight after this, two weeks after this opens, no, one week after this opens, we're in Minneapolis doing a show called *Animo* which is a totally improvised show, where you go on stage with nothing except some sticks and some bits and bobs, and I might make a mask on stage, but it's, literally there's nothing, you go on stage with nothing, so you're really, you know, with those improvised shows, cause there's also improvised shows, I realise it's quite complicated with this, but there's improvised shows like *Animo* and *Lifegame*, where you're going on stage with nothing, and I go on stage as well, sort of as a designer, and a musician, and maybe do a bit of acting if they really force me to but I don't want to, but there often I'm making on stage or designing in the moment. I have a technique kind of using this foam actually, where you can build straight on people's heads and on their hands or whatever, and we do a lot of puppetry just with sheets of newspaper, where you can do that live. So that's, those are an example of design absolutely in the moment.

R: So are those shows quite *dependent* on what you do in a way?

J: Uh, yeah, well they're kind of... yeah, I mean I, they're dependent on what everyone does in the moment, so, and so what I'm doing is an equal part of that, I mean in *Animo* it's maybe a dominant part of that, *The Lifegame* has actually got a kind of format that could survive totally without design, so, or music, in the way that design and music a sort of like the icing on the cake with that show, like *Animo* is totally about, it's, you know, it's 50% I would say, maybe more than that, visuals. Not that, you know, other people in the company can't do visuals as well, but there are certain things that I can do, like the heads, building heads on people, mask people, that kind of thing. So... but I mean I think the thing is it's not, um, as a company we don't really, we're not really separating it out, on the whole. I mean... or when we separate it out 'cause we have to, to function within a building, so design, like this, I mean so if you look back over the credits of the last ten years sometimes you'll see me as a, sometimes you'll see, you know, direction/design Phelim McDermott and Julian Crouch, or whatever, sometimes we'll just mix it all up completely and sometimes you'll see me co-designing with someone else, co-directing with Phelim, sometimes you'll see me as associate director or whatever, and often what we're called is to do with keeping a building comfortable.

R: Right.

J: So on the scale of, when you work with something on the scale of opera, they would get really jumpy if it said, you know if it listed both me and Phelim as it, they really want to know who the designer is, so that if they want to ask, you know, they don't want to be told off for not doing they're job properly, so they want to know *who's* responsible for making the design decisions, and in the case of this also, 'cause it's enormous, 'cause there's a big singing chorus, I had sort of decided that I didn't, I wanted, I'd have to do some directing I always would do some directing, but I didn't really want to be directing a chorus of 40 disgruntled, middle-class white people who'd rather be at home than singing on stage, which is what you get in opera, make sure you write that down. Um... I decided I didn't want to co-direct on this, so I'm designer and *associate* director on this, which means I'll probably be directing some of the puppeteering bits, or, and actually, you know, directing the tech, but I won't actually have to talk to the massed 40 people on stage. So...

R: Is that quite important for the way you work, sort of to follow through, so that the making of it follows through into the directing of it?

J: Yeah, I mean... yeah, because it's not really, it doesn't, there's not actually a real cut-off point, it's not like the, well certainly on this, I don't think the making's gonna stop, actually, the team of people we've put together will be making and using the stuff, and they'll use the stuff and then they'll say 'actually well we should go back, we should put this clip on there', so they'll actually be doing some designing and making, so that won't stop. And also just because that's... it's just... yeah, I mean I can't imagine, in fact we did, actually, we had a big, we had a bit of trouble in the company, I mean we, we've been together a long time, like an old marriage really, and we went through a, you know, we've been through some rough times, but there was a particularly rough time over the show they called *The Hanging Man*, which was originally called *Brass Neck*, because *The Jerry Springer Show* came in, ended up with the same press week, so the dates shifted and so we hit this kind of real trouble within the company because it meant there was a show that I'd designed that I wasn't going to see through to the end. And so, so *The Hanging Man*, I designed but I didn't do any directing on at all, and not much writing on it, so I wasn't part of that putting it together. Which made it a different show, you know, it was a different show because I didn't do that. I mean ultimately it was, it sort of ended up a great thing for the company, 'cause we then have been though a period of time where we've done, we've worked in different combinations and separately, you know mixed it up a bit, 'cause it got to a stage where I was working on every show... but Lee would work on every show, or whatever, you know, like mix around, so I think it was good, you know, for them to do a show where I wasn't there and then they did *Theatre of Blood* which I didn't do, I did another show, another couple of shows, so we've done a bit where we've worked, and I've

worked with Lee on something, so we've sort of done a bit where we worked like that for a couple of years, and now we seem to be coming, I've found myself coming back, and doing a big burst of work, together like we used to in a way. Which has actually been great, it's sort of meant we sort of, it feels quite fresh at the moment because we had that thing. But, so that was sort of, yes it was quite traumatic in the case of that show, not to see that show through. Because I don't, I'm not *really* interested in design, I'm not interested in design at all, I don't keep scrapbooks of interesting textures or, or, and I'm not, I'm just interested in the shows, I'm not interested in how things look in *here* [gestures at room], 'cause it's deceptive all the time, I mean, I mean they would tell you, all the time I know that the work needs to be messed up, otherwise it won't look as good on the stage, and it's, constantly it's really hard to know the difference between what looks good in your hands or on a desk or in here, and what's going to look good when it's moving on stage with a load of other stuff. And that's all I'm interested in, I'm not interested in... I mean obviously I want people to come in and think 'ooh, that's impressive', but, but I'm not interested in the stuff when it's not moving, but then I'd have been a sculptor or whatever, so it is absolutely about how it comes on to the stage and comes off, and the same for design, I'm only really interested in transformation of the stage, I don't, I'm not so bothered what something looks like, I'm interested in that feeling you get when something changes, the feeling you get in your stomach when something changes, and that's... I don't... that's all... that's different every night in a way, so. I mean it's interesting we're just, we're about to do something very commercial I think, both Phelim and myself have been approached by Broadway producers and we're going to do something like *Addams Family* thing, um, and I, you know, for me I got very excited about that because I just, all I know about the States, I mean you kind of know what it has to look like anyway with stuff like that, it's very clear what it has to look like, but I realise that what I'm interested in in that show is I'm interested in huge scene changes, all of which go terribly wrong, so um, you know, so people would get crushed or some of the stuff would come off or go on too far, so that every scene change would be like an accident, where something would break, or get crushed, or where something won't get off the stage, so everything will go wrong. And I realise actually that's what I'm interested in, is I'm interested in the movement of stuff, and I'm not really interested in, I just don't care so much what it's like once it's on, or whatever, I'm interested in that feeling of things changing. Usually with people moving them, rather than machines, you know, so a lot of our stuff will have actors carrying cardboard cut-outs, or... or, I suppose I'm interested in that thing where, is where kind of puppetry and set design meets, which is, it kind of meets actually as it's going on or off, so if you have a cardboard clock, that can enter the stage enthusiastically, even if you don't see the actor, so you just see the cardboard and the actor's standing behind it, that can enter enthusiastically, look around nervously, fall over, stand up, stagger off drunk, I mean, it's

just a piece of scenery, but with someone behind it, the way it moves, you can do all that stuff, you can bring it forward, you know, if it's excited or curious, or back it off scared, and so I'm interested in *that*, stuff moving, really, so that's... so for me it's incredibly important to be... yeah, there in the end. But I mean, in some, and there is no, so sort of something like *Shockheaded Peter* I don't think anyone entering the room would really have been able to tell who, you know, I mean, it wasn't, one person *wasn't* in charge, and we just, we found we would just do that together, and it, you know, it's often, you have to do it all a lot of days, and it gets tiring so it's a bit like a relay race, sometimes like you go through head-burn, and you have to sit down quiet for a bit, and the other person does a big chunk, or whatever, you know, it's done like that really. But it's not, um, it's only if things are going *bad*, when I define, when I suddenly become like a designer. And that's usually on freelance jobs. Or actually on something like *Jerry Springer* or whatever when, you know, you don't like a particular *piece* of the show and there's nothing you can do about it, so, you know, you think 'I'm only a designer' and then, and you, and then you retreat. I did that, I won't tell you what show it was, but I, it was a show that pissed me off so much that I did actually read a book during the tech, which I've never done in my life, but, you know, there were times when I was so pissed off and felt so unheard within the process, and, um, that I would just think, ok, right, I'll be like the lighting designer and the other people now, they've got a technical problem, I'll sit and read the book. But I would never do like an Improbable thing, you know. But I don't, you know, it's hard for me talking about process, and I would be suspicious of anyone who can, if someone can tell you what their process is, I'd be very suspicious of them, to be honest, 'cause I don't believe it's that simple, and if it is that simple, it doesn't seem like heart to me, that's that simple, so. I don't know. I think everything you do in a hands-on process, naturally, I think generally where, the magic is when it starts to break down, so you have a process, it probably gets interesting when your process goes tits-up or something like that, is probably when the real, when the real interesting stuff is happening, I think.

Laura Cubitt and Carl Patrick, *Fevered Sleep*
Warwick Arts Centre, Coventry 10 November 2006

REBECCA HICKIE: I'm just really interested to hear about your process, and from your perspective how it works maybe as opposed to doing a more traditional text-based play, how it might develop in rehearsal, given that you're not working from a text, how you go about putting a piece together without that starting point of a structure.

CARL PATRICK: I mean the initial process for this was that we did two development weeks, research and development weeks with some young children. Laura was involved in the first week, weren't you, at Desford Arts Depot in London, and um...

LAURA CUBITT: That was basically getting in nurseries every day, and quite a lot of them actually, about twenty at a time, in the morning and the afternoon, and maybe one at lunchtime, so getting through quite a lot of kids, just to see what they like really, see what they responded to, what they got bored with, what they hated, what they naturally did, as well. I mean there were lots of kind of patterns that we kept in, just sort of finding how they want to play with it and interact with it and what they naturally do as kids, we kind of kept those in as the start points for our games for rehearsals later. 'Cause Damien was saying that, 'cause a friend did the research but didn't do the play, he said when he watched the play it was amazing to see literally everything that they'd done, but in buckets, really kind of simple, we'd just have some buckets of water and some balloons, and the kind of impetus, where it had gone into making a piece.

C: And then the second week Laura and I did together, and that was more David [Harradine, Artistic Director] coming in with lots of things to play with like goggles, balloons filled with water, and we had the actual set, we had the stage. And so we could flood it, and we could make it rain, and we had all the plumbing in tact, well not all of it, but enough that we could play with different types of water, and we tried out all sorts of different things, and David would say lets just go with that, and reflections and shadows, lights...

L: literally just to play with everything...

C: and just to play...

L: everything we could possibly think of...

C: oh God yeah, we had like swimming races and crazy, we just did loads of crazy stuff,

didn't we, and improvised. We had lots of windows, we were working with this idea of like looking out through a window at the rain, and then going through the window into worlds, and putting the window on the floor and seeing where that took you, and...

L: we did quite a lot of work on... in that week I think David was sort of trying to see what, how it might kind of take shape as a piece, but because there was a question, or a big question at the beginning as to whether it would be a narrative, a story...

C: story...

L: or whether it would be more of an experience that's more open and a bit freer, so that they can actually kind of... because when, we kind of found that when they were coming in for the research weeks, that if we created an image, then they would make their own little stories and see things and be shouting things out...

C: they make up their own minds, don't they...

L: and so sort of we decided, or David decided, with us collectively, that we'd prefer to go down that route, rather than having, you know, a stream that goes down into a this, that does that, da da da da, and a bath, into a river, into a...

R: so that was a conscious decision *not* to have the narrative...

L: yeah

R: but that came out of the work you'd done

L: yeah

C: yeah, that came out of doing lots of work, um, about narrative...

L: and trying both

C: about trying to create a story, and go from one place, kind of magically, through to another one, and um, David just kind of really, well we just found, we were finding it difficult to do...

L: yeah

C: the two of us, and then, and therefore that kind of said to us, this is not the right way to go.

L: but it, I mean it would have been a really easy way to go, just have a narrative, and put that on, and have water involved, and quite simple maybe. But I think for the sort of show that we were trying to make, and David always does make, when it's more about the experience and the atmospheres, and people being able to have their own experiences in it and, and you've kind of got a tangible relationship to... and the water being what it is...

C: yeah, the water is a, is a character really, isn't it, in a way...

L: that just to put it in a narrative would seem quite, would seem a bit sort of superficial and seemed to us... like it was just so brilliant when a great big thing came down, that to have a house and bath time and to make it all complicated was like, no no no, it's too much really, that on its own...

C: too much going on. And also what we found was the kids... like we'd have us doing something with a house, and David Leahy who's the composer, playing his double bass, and then lights changing, and other things coming into it...

L: and the water...

C: and there was just too much for them to take in. Like they'd spend a lot of time just looking at David Leahy playing it, like, the man with the big...big violi... big guitar, the man with the big guitar they called him, 'cos he's a double bass player, and then, and then all of a sudden something would happen over there, like a light would come on, and it was just too distracting, so in the end we went for that really kind of simple, simplistic

R: so was everything developed simultaneously, you were talking about the composer being there in this development week, was it light, and sound, and music, and everything all developing together?

L: yeah...

C: um, it was... yeah, apart from the lighting, where, but the lighting happened in a similar way, like in the final week of our rehearsals, um, before we started the tour, Joe, who's the lighting designer came in and put some lights on, and...

L: but he'd been earlier in the process...

C: yeah...

L: as well, and just tried things out...

C: and tried various lights out

L: so we knew we were doing reflections, and they'd had technical research weeks, so that they knew kind of what... I think they knew that they wanted to do a reflections scene...

C: yeah...

L: and knew that wanted, that possibly you could get water ripples all the way round, so that had been done in research week, so it was...

C: and they were very limited in terms of light because of the set, there's nowhere for light to kind of get in, so they were a bit... had this very narrow window to get light in so Joe knew, knew that and knew the limitations of that and worked very, again very just really simplistic kind of lighting states that just... work.

L: but I mean David does work, I've worked with him a few times, and um, and so he works like that, he'll get a lighting designer in who's there from the beginning of the creative process and a designer in who's around all the time. And David Leahy works with him a lot and he's always there right from the beginning. So it is, to have everyone there that's really important.

C: yeah...that's really important. And you spark off each other and it might be that something that David [Leahy] plays on his bass inspires us to go in a certain direction with what we're improvising, or just, David [Harradine] will just put a light on the stage and say see what that does, see what that makes you think of, or it'll start with like, just us. Ok, do something! (laughs) Do something! Often he'll just like "Ok, here you go. You're on. Do something funny and interesting, or..."

L: "There's five ducks on the stage. You know why they're there. Away you go!"

C: Yeah... away you go! And we'd...

L: Just play really...

C: ...just play around, yeah...

L: for hours really.

C: We'd just play for hours. And it was brilliant.

L: And maybe out of like a really long improvisation there'd be something that you'd go 'oh that's a really nice image' so we could probably build around that image, but, it's more about, I always think, about plucking out images and then building those images and then

structuring them into... a... coherent fashion.

C: that's what David[Harradine]'s brilliant at...

R: So do you think for you as performers if you're working in this sort of way is it important for you to have the designer and the lighting guy and the sound there *for you* as a stimulus in the process?

L: I think so, yes.

C: Yeah, I think it really informs a lot of what you do, yes. Definitely. As opposed to other things where, you know, what the piece is going to be is already there at the beginning in a way, and you just put your kind of style on it, or whatever, if it's a text or, you know, music or a musical or a song you just put your version of it, kind of, on the stage. And you know, lighting people just come in for two days near the end and go, 'yeah ok I'm gonna stick some lights on that bit and make it look nice' and...

L: I think like as a...

C: so yeah, it's important.

L: Previously I've been in lots of site specific stuff with David and its kind of about, it feels like you go into a place, and you... with this one there was a place that they made... but everything that you interact with is real, and kind of what you would... it's all authentic. So you're not having to sort of act on top of it, or act with it, or imagine it. It's a direct response to whatever's there. So if there's... if it's really dark and there's things up the wall, then that's what're there, and... So you're always kind of responding quite truthfully, which kind of helps when you're trying to find things that are good games to play and good, sort of bits of play, that can make a piece. 'Cause otherwise you're... I don't know. Like, I would find it hard to work in any other way now, I think, 'cause I... if it's just, if it's not real, I go "I can't find the fun in that", if it's not... I dunno. For me it has to be real now.

C: Yeah. And that's funny, 'cause I come from a completely different kind of... I have done devising in the past and worked with David's company, but it's been quite a long time since I've done any of that. So at the beginning I just found that it was like really weird and... just. Yeah. I found it really difficult to work in that way to begin with, until I found, I remembered what it was that you do. (laughs)

L: it's really different

C: Which is to let go of all those preconceptions of, you know, trying to be something or

create something and just actually just letting things happen naturally and sort of, you know, not be afraid to do something that's maybe not working or, you know... (laughs)

L: I think though with making things for children as well, like you're trying to find really true and instinctive responses to things because they have them or they don't have them. If they don't engage with it and it doesn't push their buttons, some image or whatever it is, then... you've lost them, kind of instantly. They won't just look at a piece and go 'ooh, that's really beautiful' like an adult audience would, not because there's any less... not for intellectual reasons, just for... they won't indulge you

C: yeah

L: if they're not... interested.

C: if they're bored they'll just look up there, they'll go like that [looking around] or they'll start fidgeting around and...

L: yeah. So if when we're devising everything's sort of there, then if it engages, I always think, if it engages, truthfully, engages you,

L: the stuff that you're playing with, then maybe that's good material that you can think about using.

R: So you've both worked for the company before. This piece was quite specifically aimed at quite small children; would you say that if you're making pieces aimed at adults or other audiences is it a similar process that you go through, that process of playing and creating?

C: I think it's exactly the same, and that's the thing that David really kind of focuses on, when he says, you know, "ok, it's, it is a piece for children", like for three and four year olds, but it's not really, it's for like, it's for everyone. And it... when... when it comes to rehearsals and to the process of devising, it's approached in *exactly* the same way as it would be if it was material for adults. And, you know, it doesn't matter who it's for, the work is approached in exactly the same way when you work with David's company. Definitely. It's, it's about, yeah, all those things that we just said, coming into a space and reacting to what's there.

L: I think that, especially though with this one, it was clearly in mind from the beginning that it, they were three...

C: yeah

L: and there's certain, you know, from having done all the research with them you know what they like, so there was quite a prescribed route, it was quite narrowed down. I think it's the same approach, but it's sort of tailored to who... with them in mind, like all the way, all the way through. And things are still as sort of... I think things are still as authentic as they would be, if anything's naff, or if anything doesn't interest us, if it's boring to us it's boring to three year olds, it's boring to everyone.

C: yeah

L: But... but, 'cause they're three, they're... obviously it's a really gentle show, 'cause they're... and... but it moves on so that they don't get, you know, get bored. But yeah, the creating process, the *playing* process is really different. Playing it, because they're so, so young you have to make, really make sure they're with you. But actually when you have good material it supports that anyway, so you're not having to kind of...

C: And whereas with an adult audience, if you've got a really beautiful image you could just kind of have that beautiful image and have it, kind of stretch it out, and you could still engage an adult audience, kind of longer with just an, with like... not just a beautiful image, because we had lots of beautiful images, didn't we...

L: We did. In the beginning.

C: At the beginning...

L: Well, we still have, but...

C: and, yeah, we've kept some of those, but, yeah, then you realise like for three and four year olds it can only be kind of this, it can only like so long because after that time, they'll start going 'ok, seen that now' and they need something new to stimulate them.

L: Yeah...

C: whereas with adults you *can* kind of stretch that, that feeling, and often, you know, I've seen companies that do exactly that, they just see exactly how long they can, that's their task, is to see exactly how long they can hold an audience with just that, just this one... you know, with kind of almost nothing. And I've seen productions like that, and I find that personally really joyous, when you just see that and it's just like "my God, that's going on and on and on", and that's really interesting, that's really interesting in itself, but I guess a three year old might not have that, that thought process.

L: Like, also, it was quite a thing in all of our minds, but especially David's, not to

patronise, not to impose, not to feed them too much, like, not be too prescriptive so that they're... to be as open as possible.

C: yeah

L: and they can have a really amazing sensory experience, without really... and they'll still... and that will still engage them.

C: Yeah. What I think's really brilliant about the piece is that they all see really different things, don't they, and that's the, the joy of the not imposing kind of anything, not telling... 'Cause a lot of children's TV, I watch a lot of children's TV with my friends kids who I look after, and seen children's theatre as well, and, you know, there's a tendency to kind of *tell* the children what's going to... 'oh, now we're going to do this', and 'now this is going to happen', and 'Why don't we do this?', and kind of *lead* them as it were, instead of... I think what, hopefully what we've achieved is something that says 'here's something – what do you think that is?', or 'what do you make of that?', you know...

L: but I think another kind of side of it, I don't know if this is really maybe not related, but... is that, as a performer, it always feel like David kind of sets up games, so you know... like, we'll always trying to find the game, and... you really know what you're playing, and if it's a game that's fun and can engage you you can play it properly every time. So for an adult, for a performer, it's still fun to play that show for three year olds even though it's a really gentle show, and... it's not kind of, it's not hugely complex, but the games are so clear, that at any given point, what you're doing, that you can still be playing them, so the performer... must be satisfying, 'cause you've always got something that you're trying to get... that you're engaged in... it is important.

R: You don't actually say much, in the performance. I think you have one line, that you repeat a couple of times.

C: Yeah...

R: Was that a conscious decision because you were working with children, or is that something that run's through David's work, not using very much verbalisation?

C: Yeah, he tends not to use, kind of... that piece you did at the Egg, you didn't say anything did you?

L: nor in Winchester...

C: No, there was no language, and because often... again like what we kind of said

before about not finding a narrative and not trying to tell a story, I guess with language it kind of...

L: well it's really defining, isn't it...

C: yeah, it's really like, you're saying something and it's doing that exact thing, and it was... David, even with that one line of "Oh, I'm really wet, I have to get dry", he kind of struggled with whether... whether we should say it, and it kind of got put in, and then taken out, and then David said "oh, do it without the line". You know, just do the same thing but without saying anything. And then, it got to the point where it was like, he just, you know, he just decided that actually just that point, it just needed it, to really kind of put a full stop on that little bit.

L: um, but, yeah, all the pieces I've been in I haven't spoken in it really. And that's not, it's kind of, it's kind of not a conscious effort, but it's always a bit more like we'll try and do it without words, like there are infinitely more ways of creating an atmosphere and engaging with people and playing games than speaking. So, you know, I think it is a... I prefer it, David prefers it... when we can work like that.

C: I mean, words, words sometimes, they can sometimes get in the way, anyway. And they limit you in a way, don't they...

L: yeah, they definitely do.

C: if you've *got* to say this thing, or these seven words, if you've *got* to say them, then it's like you're...

L: and the brilliant thing is that the, then they'll kind of, they always make up their own stories and are really verbal about it and they'll go "you need to get dry" often before you say your line...

C: yeah, yeah, exactly, they know what's coming.

L: or "oh, a boat", and all this, and it's just a much nicer relationship.

C: and if I say it a second time, like "I've got to get..." and they go "What, again? ohhhhhh", "and you do lady" they go...

L: "you do lady"

C: "you need to get dry, you're wet", you know, and they make the story up themselves, yeah.

L: they kind of get drawn in, yeah, instead of just disengaging and listening, they kind of keep going, and being really, so there's a proper sort of relationship going on.

C: yeah, and there's a very specific thing I think with that age group, three and four, it's a very specific thing. It's like, we sometimes get slightly older children in, like brothers and sisters or whatever, and... and it does engage them, but they *know*, they have a different thought process, of like they'll come in and see everything before its even kind of happened, because they're just that little bit older, and they've probably started kind of education, and so they've been in that environment, and they've... and just that three and four year old is very specific kind of, they're just so open, aren't they, to everything that you show, and visual stuff I think works, works really well for that age group.

L: yeah

C: But also, going back to the text thing, David's previous shows that he's done like, quite few years ago, if there was kind of text involved he would write it and it's always quite poetic language. Um... but yeah, recently, just not from any conscious decision I don't think but just the type of work that he's been doing has been very kind of site specific,

L: yeah, visual

C: and visual, much more visual,

L: and physical.

C: and physical, yeah.

R: So is each performance an idea of David's, 'I'd like to make a piece about water', or whatever,

C: yeah

R: and he then takes that to the company, and you then work from that point to create a piece about water?

L: yeah

C: I mean, *Fevered Sleep* is basically David, now, and there's another, a lady called Sam Butler, and she's now, she was a co-, like they were both, they both started the company at the University of Middlesex, and she's since had a family and got kids of her own, so she can kind of, she doesn't have as much time to kind of dedicate to the artistic process, *but*, they still work very very closely together, and Sam's called an Associate Director,

now, and Sam came in and overlooked this and kind of said 'Oh, this is really lovely but you need to think about that', so, um, and put her edge on it, and David always, like will say, they still run the company together, basically, it's just that, you know, David *does* tend to have all the ideas, and then he'll kind of talk to Sam and say 'I've got this idea for this piece', and they'll talk it over

L: but really it's just a start point, isn't it. Often it will be as little as "I want it to be about water. That's all I know". And, kind of, David famously at the beginning of things goes 'Well, we're doing a piece about water. I know nothing else.'

C: but, yeah, 'I don't know what it is'...

L: 'You know as much as I do'.

C: 'but we'll find out'

L: 'and we'll find out and it'll be great.'

C: and that's what's kind of exciting.

L: and it really sort of always is, and... the other ones I've done, we did one in a, to open a new theatre which was called the Performance Gymnasium, so we were like, well it's called a Performance Gymnasium, and David went 'so, uh, something about gymnasiums, something about school, and something about that'. So we had a kind of creative meeting before we started rehearsals for the... , and just went 'All your associations with school. All your associations with that...' literally just everyone brainstorming, and then, from that then David'll go away and go...

C: yeah, he just has massive notebooks with drawings in and things, and just like, crazy, like Michelangelo and stuff... (laughs)

L: but so much input, so so so much input, like you know that the piece you're just all going to be making together, it's not in David's hands, and it, it's kind of as much in your hands, a lot of shared responsibility, I think, with everyone, which also makes for a good working team, so everyone gets going, like 'Right, come on!', and like, musicians are writing music, to...

C: I mean, if you want a kind of analogy... but like, everyone is like a big ball of clay, aren't they, and David kind of shapes them...

L: yeah, yeah, and goes away does lots of thinking

C: and makes sure that the final shape is the one that's right, kind of thing. I dunno, if that's a good... *thing* (laughs) analogy...

L: but even, like, in the structuring, he'll get everything we've done, and then look at the structure that feels good for all of us.

C: yeah

L: like we'll set out with a storyboard, so storyboarding it basically, with um pictures, and put all the pictures out on different bits of paper, and any bits that we disagree with, you know, we'll take out, and move around, until we ... collectively come up with something that...

C: basically just in the last week we had this big long line of like cards, didn't we and pictures, of what... and kind of went, ok, David went, 'Right, which, Laura, which bits do you not like doing, or which do you feel don't work'...

L: 'Which bits feel wrong'...

C: 'Or feel wrong, or jar with the running of it', and so then we'll go, 'Ok, we'll take that out', and David'll go, 'Ok, we're gonna take that out, but it might not stay there, it might come back in over here or somewhere', and that, that's what sometimes happens as well, there's no...

L: But there's no sort of finite... it's really nice, it's all very fluid.

C: No, I mean, it's been really, it's still changed, hasn't it, just this week, David kind of, he'll kind of wake up one morning and phone us and go "I've just realised why *that bit* doesn't work. And I'm really sorry, and like, I've realised it and now I know why it, why it will work" and he'll tell us something and go "And just do it like that, and that's it, it's gonna work, it's good". And it's true as well, we'll kind of go 'yeah, that didn't feel quite right', but you do it.

L: and in rehearsal as well, it'd always be like, ok, well... if we'd always got stuck in rehearsal, on something or other, it's always 'what do you want to do. What do you want. What do you want now, as *you*, as a person, what do you want, rather than sort of having done it, ok we'll do that. What do you *need* to happen next, and if something's not, equally if something's not working, he'll say why is not working too well, you know. So it's kind of, everything comes from your impulses which is sort of guided by David's games, which come from an idea that maybe someone said, you know, so it's all... and get through so much material, that we had *buckets* of material.

C: oh God, we could have done a four hour show, couldn't we? Easily

L: Yeah, like so so much.

C: and so much really, just stuff that we loved doing, as well, but just...

L: just didn't get in.

C: in the kind of shape of the piece that we'd made, it just wouldn't have been right, it would've like just been in for the sake of it, kind of.

L: yeah, he's a very good editor as well, David. Lots of things I go 'Oh just keep it in 'cause it's nice'.

C: 'Yeah, it's nice, we like that bit'. And he'll go "No. Just cut it". Just ruthlessly, he'll take his knife out, cut it. But that's good, that's a good thing to be able to do that, isn't it, I think, with your own work, you know. You've got to have someone who does that, haven't you, 'cause otherwise you would, you would have a four hour show! And I've seen show's like that, as well, where you think...

L: they're just doing everything they like doing.

C: 'Someone needed to cut that. Yeah, that bit didn't work...' or you go '...what's that bit, what's that doing there?' Self-indulgence, isn't it...

R: There were a couple of visual images I really liked, like the building the rainbow at the end out of umbrellas, was that again something that just came out of you playing, or was that specific idea that somebody had?

L: that was just an idea... of David's, I think.

C: that was definitely an idea... David was adamant. And it's funny 'cause at the beginning we didn't have that, because... I can't remember why, why didn't we have that?

L: we had light on the floor...

C: yeah, we had like a rainbow light effect on the floor, and it always felt kind of... and David kind of then had...

L: in Stirling.

C: We need to build a rainbow...

L: 'Cause we got those two umbrellas just stuck in the... No actually it was in Battersea, we were still rehearsing. We'd finished one day and there were two umbrellas like that [gesticulates], and we were just all sat there talking, and suddenly I think Joe and David at the same time went 'Oh my God, look what's on the stage'. They were like 'and you just need chng chng chng chng chng, and then you've got one'!

C: and it was just then finding a way

L: of doing it, yeah...

C: Ali, who's the production manager and co-designer then, she then just had to find a way of how to build it, and eventually one day just came in and went 'this is how it works, it works like that'. 'Cause we tried to build it without the lines, but of course it just went phht, and collapsed.

L: but Ali is a huge, a *huge* part of... of this production especially, 'cause she just makes things, makes images real.

C: and also she taught herself how to be a plumber. She had to teach herself how to be a plumber, didn't she, for this show, and how to plumb things in.

L: but creatively, for a production designer to get that much creative input, is non-existent. They just don't, you know... but like creatively, she's making, building images, kind of every day, and be like...

C: and they'd, you know Ali and David would, I think, discuss things like, well into the night, after we'd finished rehearsing, and kind of have design meetings and they'd talk about what they wanted, and Ali would go 'yeah, I think I can probably build that, that's fine', you know...

L: but yeah, the rainbow was just a kind of... preconceived... image

C: yeah, it was an idea.

C: and it's great! (laughs) it's so simple, it's kind of... so simplistic, isn't it, just putting some umbrellas together, but it's so brilliant at the same time, I think.

R: I just have to ask, those raindrops that came down, what were they made from?

C: they're just balloons filled with water.

R: I thought they were! I was almost expecting them to be water bombs and you to take

them off the little hooks and smash a few!

C: we tried a lot of that, 'cause at first David did want them to come down and to release the water, but there was no...

L: we played with hundreds of them...

C: we just did loads of ideas, yeah

L: we'd just like chuck them at each other, and massive balloons with loads of water in...

C: that we could actually roll on...

L: and walk on

C: all over the stage, like we'd just like balance on them, and put our feet in them, and... but they just didn't fit into the world, did they?...

L: no... they kind of came on stage and they were like alien beings...

C: and, um, yeah, they've got KY jelly on the outside to make them look shiny

L: make them shine...

C: but yeah, they're basically just balloons with water. Which is what a lot of the kids say – "Look – balloons!"

L: balloons! But some images didn't even come together until we got to the first, like, tour venue, Nottingham. Because we didn't know how... it Battersea where we were rehearsing it was a really uneven floor, so the stage never filled up, so we never practiced the reflections or, like the kind of ripples up the side, and the underwater bit, until we were at Nottingham, because we just didn't know how much there'd be there, so we *all* went to Nottingham, lighting designer and everyone, and all kind of had a rehearsal (laughs) and put, just put scenes in. We knew that they would be, you know, *here* there's a reflections scene, but just never knew what it was.

GARETH FRY, SOUND DESIGNER
NATIONAL THEATRE, LONDON 01 MAY 2007

REBECCA HICKIE: So basically I'm just really interested to hear about that process that you have when you're working with Simon McBurney or Katie Mitchell, and a bit about how that's different from a more traditional/hierarchical/conventional structure of working?

GARETH FRY: It sort of all starts in the rehearsal room really, and the sort of more conventional directors, like for example Max Stafford-Clarke, or Peter Hall, really don't want any sound in the rehearsal rooms at all, they sort of see it as a distraction from rehearsing the acting, and things like that. They're not really interested in adding those elements until the technical rehearsals, not really interested in talking very much about them 'til very late in the process, and so for those sort of conventional shows like that, or the conventional directors, the sound tends to be less integral and less developed, and... yeah. More conventional. Old fashioned style. Whereas sort of Katie and Simon increasingly will have some full sound support in rehearsals from the first day of rehearsals, and that often takes the form of having a large sound system, a sound designer and a sound operator in there, pretty much from day one, to sort of develop ideas alongside rehearsals, and come up with solutions to, when things are being devised the music and sound will get devised very much at the same time as the rest of the scene, and because it's there as a tool in the rehearsal room when people are having ideas about how to create or devise a scene they will try and think of how they can use sound within that, or, you know, the sound designer may often be part of the devising, you know, if the group of actors are sort of split off into scenes, quite often with Katie she'll put myself with one of those groups and Leo the video designer with another of those groups, and we'll have to sort of devise a scene together with the performers. And so because we're there and trying to work out how to tell a story, and, you know, it's all about working out what's the best way of, you know, explaining that element, and I can sort of put my hand up and go 'well, you could use sound or music, or, you know, you could do that really close into a microphone or we could foley that or...' you know, so that the gist of production is, I can sort of, if I know in rehearsals I can come up with the solution, the ... becomes more integrated into the whole process. And then quite often in that process the sound is, the recorded sound design is usually reasonably complete by the time we get into the theatre, so when we get into the theatre it's more a case of adapting, in the same way that the performers have to adapt their performance to the space, the tech time is then more about adapting the sound design to the space, rather than creating it from scratch, which is often the case with Max... Stafford.

R: So do you think that's partly to do with the form that you're working with? Because obviously if they're working with something that's more traditional and text based, they're going to have quite a different rehearsal process anyway, to say if Katie's actually devising something, so do you think that's to do with form or do you think that you could just as usefully work collaboratively on something text based?

G: I think it depends, I mean both Complicite and Katie do do a lot of text based works, I mean *Attempts* obviously very text based and *Waves*... *Waves* was the sort of closest we've come to not having a script; you know, we started from the novel and adopted that. But in every other process there's been a script that we've... the way of approaching that script has been sort of devising ways of telling stories and finding out what's happening between the lines, between the dialogue, to find out ways of telling that story. And in a way Katie's very *not* text oriented, she's much more interested in the whole communication that's going on, and for her in a way the text is what's being said, and isn't really as important as what the character's are, what they're conveying through their body language to each other and things like that. So in that way I guess Katie is very physical theatre oriented. Again with *Complicite* a lot of the stuff is text based, it comes from researching bits of text or finding bits of text, completely forgotten what the original question was now, totally distracted myself! ... Yes, it was about the form, yes. Um... yeah. I don't think... I think it's as much about an attitude and an approach as it is to what we're trying to create, and they're... I think it's very much... I think, for example Peter Hall, for example, he's a director I don't get on with at all, I don't like his style of theatre in the slightest, it's very formulaic, and his style of directing was once very revolutionary but now it's very clichéd and formulaic, and it's not much more than say your lines and don't bump into the furniture. And, yeah, he doesn't really invest a lot of himself into shows, he's doing so many of them, and they're all quite straightforward, he's not trying to do anything particularly interesting with the form... Whereas I think both Simon and Katie are both continuously striving to come up with new ways of telling stories, or trying to find, you know, trying to develop their language still, they' haven't perfected their language and they're still trying to develop how to tell a story in a different way and in a more interesting or more beautiful way, or... and I think for them, they're both younger directors than say Peter Hall, or Max Stafford-Clarke, you know, they're more sound literate, they're both very cinematically influenced, and I think for both Simon and Katie they're both interested in seeing more than just actors standing around on stage saying lines to each other.

R: So, you've said on your website you try and specialise in devised and organically created work, and also that you like to use what you call the mainland European process,

of being in the rehearsal room. Did you sort of specialise in devised theatre because it offered you that process, or was it the form, that sort of striving to find these things that attracted you and you've therefore developed that process?

G: It was, when I started off, when I started doing sound design, I started when I was back at Central [School of Speech and Drama], I remember doing various sort of straight projects with the acting course, and then I remember doing, Complicite came in and did a course with the ATP [Advance Theatre Practice] course, and there weren't enough sound designers on that course, so the undergraduate sound designers got involved on that, and I sort of got introduced to that sort of process there, and that, I got introduced to Complicite's style of theatre there, and just seemed infinitely more exciting and imaginative, and, you know, to have just more potential and possibility for doing sound design than the majority of theatre sort of straight styles I'd seen at that point. So I got, my sort of enthusiasm was sparked at that point for it, but I didn't really get to start working in that way as a sound designer for a few more years after that. And I sort of started off, I started off as an operator for Complicite at... I was working with a sound designer who was full-time here [the National Theatre] at the time, so he couldn't be in rehearsals very often, and so I was sort of sat in rehearsals for ten weeks having to respond to the demands of the rehearsal room, which quite often to, you know, come up with stuff in five minutes, and I was really excited by that, I really enjoyed that process of, you know, being part of the rehearsal room, and, you know, being sort of pushed to create very quickly, sort of painting quite broad brushstrokes initially, and then sort of add the detail once it was sort of locked down later on in the process. So that's where I got interested in that process, and that style of theatre, and since then I've been sort of working with lots of different directors to find out who works that way, and who doesn't, and find out what I enjoy doing. And the reason I describe the mainland European process on my website is because... before I started working that way there were very very few people doing it here, and it was, I was looked on as a bit of freak for wanting to do it, and there was a lot of resistance, particularly from producers, to pay for me to be in rehearsals, because that's, you know, it's not something that's been done up until about five or six years ago, and now it's still quite rare and it's still very difficult for me to negotiate to be in, to be paid to be in rehearsals for longer than normal. The normal fee for doing a sound design is based very much on the old conventional format when it was done by a technician or an electrician, and they'd come in for the last three or four days of rehearsals, see a couple of run-throughs, go away and make up a sound tape, be there for the tech and then leave. And of course that amount of money does not stretch to being in rehearsals for eight weeks, or whatever. So there's been a lot of sort of financial negotiating that I've had to take on board to try and make this process work, and so I've had to find ways of sort of

making the process that I do understandable to those people, so that it will then pay me to do it. So the sort of, you know, trying to explain that this sort of thing is done, you know, this is an established way of working in Europe, it's been one of the ways I've tried to make it known to a sort of UK theatre scene which kind of exists in its own little bubble. It's been one of the ways I've been trying to sort of say to people, look, this is, you know, I'm not making it up from scratch here, other people think this is a good idea too, and, yeah, please pay me to be in rehearsals. I can't afford to do it for nothing. So, yeah. It's been an evolution in getting to where I am and being in this particular niche. It's been, you know, it's been the evolution of my sort of career from doing fringe designs, I started off doing a lot of fringe designs, but they didn't pay very much money, so I was having to do operating/technical/engineering jobs to pay the wages, and I managed to get, through, in the operating line of my work I managed to get working with Complicite and companies like that, so I then had to try and unify those two strands, sort of the design and the operating, to get to be doing the design in this niche.

R: So do you find that it's quite a, I guess a sort of a multi-way process, so rather than sort of you being sat down with the director a week before the technical rehearsal with a list of sound effects he wants, it's sort of, do you find you have more of a relationship with the set designer, and the lighting designer, as well as with the performers and directors?

G: Yes and no. Yes, but not with the lighting designer or the set designer. More with the writer. I'd say, in a way, sound design sort of exists in a sort of separate entity from the other design elements, and so, you know, and, you know, often you'll find set, and costume, and video and lighting designer sort of collaborate very closely because they're all dealing in the same very visual world and their work impacts on each other so much. What I play out of my speakers has often, quite often the sound design is using a different conceit from the visual design, so, you know, quite often you'll have a very stylised set, you know, a very location neutral set, and maybe location neutral clothing, and the lighting is used to define a space, but then the sound is used very much to create the location from that location-neutral set. So quite often the sound is doing something altogether different from what the visual design is doing, and what I find is that, you know, the sort of sound design is existing in the same aural space as the spoken word, so often my relationship is more closely tied to the writer and the director and the performers than it is to the other design elements. So I find being in rehearsals is the best way of achieving that collaboration as well. I'm finding, if you're in rehearsals, there's, it's not that, I haven't found the right way of describing this, but it's sort of if you're in rehearsals then the performance will sort of allow space or air in the piece for the sound to exist. If you're not there they sort of close up all the gaps, so there's nowhere to put, you know, sounds that

aren't in the background, in. Whilst if you're there, then you can sort of put sounds that are in the foreground in, and they will incorporate that into the performance, and things like that. And working with the writer quite often, to clarify what they were trying to achieve, or what they're trying to say, sometimes sort of rewriting stuff with the writers to try and get it to work better. Particularly, you know, if you have a writer who has quite a sort of strong aural imagination, sometimes they don't always express what they're trying to get across very well on paper, so quite often it's sort of trying to do that, or... I can imagine having a, you know, if I was doing, working with Chekov, sort of, you know, is it *The Seagull* that's got the, that sort of famous sound effect written into the very end of one of Chekov's plays about 'from the heavens the sound of a cello string is heard breaking', and I'd have been there going, "so, Chekov, what were you trying to achieve when you wrote that down?" sort of thing. So there's a lot of, sort of, trying to work out what they meant, or... a lot of writers sort of write in really sort of obvious cliché things, like 'there's a distant peel of thunder', sort of thing. Which is such a sort of clichéd playwriting device, of, oh, so, you know, it's not important to the writer that there is actually a thunder storm going on, they're just trying to show that there's an increase in tension, and so, well, you know, we can do an increase in tension but in ways less clichéd than a thunderstorm, for example, and stuff like that. So you're sort of finding ways to, yeah, collaborate with the writer, and... yeah.

R: So if you're working on something that's more devised than that, if there isn't necessarily a writer, or maybe even on something that perhaps there is someone who's taken responsibility for drawing stuff together out of the collaborative process, would you say it is more of a *writing* process in essence than it is sort of designing? Because the word design to me always seems to have these connotations of being locked away in a studio, you know, 'designing' something that you can then bring back, and writing to me seems something that's more, on the hoof, or, you know, more of an ongoing process?

G: Yeah, it's, definitely, it's closer, I can't stand doing stuff in studios, it's so removed from the context of the... I don't understand why people do it! To a degree. I can sort of see why, sometimes it's good to get away, and get some peace and quiet, and be able to focus on something that you need to do, but on the whole I find it much easier for myself to sort of be there in, getting the vibe of the space, sort of thing. Sounds a bit jazz, but, you know, getting the vibe of it, and, you know, the pace and all that sort of stuff. And, yeah. So I guess it's sort of, it's creating a performance together. Going along with the jazz analogy, it's sort of, I like to be in rehearsals jamming along with the performers, rather than somewhere else creating something that may or may not relate to what the performers are doing, and then bringing it in and saying 'this is a finished (ish) product',

you know, 'incorporate it into your performance somehow'. You know, I like to be there doing it there and then, as much as you can.

R: So do you think that that actually affects what you produce? In terms of a sort of final product.

G: Yes, on the whole, it's... every play, production, varies considerably about how much sound it needs to tell the story, and so that, I'd like to say that that defines more than anything what I produce. But I'd certainly say that I have, I've been told that I have a style, that you can sort of recognise and that there're, you know, I tend to do a lot of sort of, not similar stuff, but I have sort of a signature that tends to be added. And that comes out of that process.

R: So for example if you were working on something say with Max Stafford-Clarke, would that end product be, I don't know, of a different quality, somehow?

G: Yeah, no, definitely. Yes. Less developed, and less sophisticated, generally. I would say, with Katie I sort of work over quite a long stretch of time, I guess, now, and I sort of paint in quite broad brush strokes, initially, and then sort of over the weeks as the scenes get more detail I'll add more detail to the sound design. With Max there isn't the time to do that, so, you know, and he's not really interested in layers, and, you know, there are other directors who aren't interested in sort of layered sounds, which I guess is my signature, is lots of layers going on at once, and some people like very simple and minimal and the bare necessity. It varies so much from director to director and play to play, it's very difficult to predict.

R: Do you... you've done quite a lot of work with Katie Mitchell, and a few things with Simon [McBurney], and the same names seem to keep cropping up in terms of lighting and sound and video work and stuff, and also they seem to have, not necessarily a fixed company, but certainly sort of quite a specific pool of people they seem to draw on in terms of performers, do you think it's quite important to that collaborative process that you do build up sort of a sense of company, 'cause obviously they're not, none of these are permanent, fixed companies, certainly in terms of performers, but is that sense of company quite important to actually being able to work in that way?

G: Yeah. It's as much about the way things are shared, language and vocabulary that you've built up over the course of working together, it's quite often, you know, it becomes a lot faster, you become a lot faster and more efficient and better at understanding what

the other person is talking about if you've been through a few shows together before. So I'm working with Kneehigh for the first time at the moment, and that, you know, I'm still working out what the director's interests in sound are, whether her taste is for, you know, more layers, or less layers, and, you know, basing that on her reactions to the things I'm suggesting and things like that. So, you know, the first show with any director is always a very tentative process, and it's really a show where you can fully explore all the possibilities because the personal relationship and how you're working together is still not very formed at that point, so it makes it very difficult to communicate effectively with each other, and... So yes, I think Katie particularly, Simon particularly, like working with the same design teams over again because, you know, trust and shared language and, you know, I can, you know, whenever Simon says something in his cryptic way that he does, I can have, I know what he's talking about, or I've pre-empted that he was going to go down that route already, and, you know... I guess a lot of it is sort of pre-empting people, and, you know, Katie and I quite often, we don't really have design discussions throughout the rehearsals at all, maybe, we'll have maybe one chat, over the course, you know, one chat at the very start of the project, maybe a fifteen minute catch-up towards the end, that'll be it, we don't really talk about the sound design at all, because it's sort of there evolving all the time in rehearsals, I know what she likes, I know what she doesn't like, I know what she's trying to achieve most of the time, and so, and likewise for Paule Constable [lighting designer], who she's worked with many times, Vicki [Mortimer, set designer], you know, must have designed forty-odd shows for her by now, cause in a way, we just don't need to talk about it so much because we can pre-empt, or we know with very few words what she's trying to achieve, often. Sometimes not. Yeah, and likewise, Simon, you know, Simon's got one of those family spirits, likes working with the same people over again, and both Katie and Simon get quite anxious when they're working with new people, you know, anxious about whether they're going to get the result that they're going to, that they want, anxious about whether the collaboration's going to be friendly or tricky or awkward or, you know, there's that interpersonal relationship between director and designer that's very important that's very tricky to establish, takes a while.

R: And is it as important for you to have that strong relationship with the performers, or less so?

G: It's less important, the director is the key relationship, and how much of a relationship you have with the performer often develops, or how important that is depends very much on how integrated the show is. But it's not, it's not necessarily so important to have the personal relationship with them. If you were sort of performing with them, they'll come on board with you without having to know you, like jazz.

R: So it's that coming on board process that's quite important, that you're all on the same train.

G: Yeah, yeah. I mean it's very difficult for example on the Kneehigh show there's twenty eight performers, and, you know, there's still a few names I'm sketchy on, and I've been in rehearsals with them for going on for six weeks, and, you know, a good half of them I've not really had a conversation with yet, because, you know, there's twenty eight of them, and design teams, and, you know, so there's just not enough time to form that many relationships, so you sort of take a lot of it on faith that, assume that they're there because they're good at what they do.

R: So if you've been in rehearsal with them for six weeks have you come in at the beginning of the project, or do you tend to come in after a week, or two weeks, or a workshop period?

G: Increasingly, particularly with Katie and Simon, I'll be there from the workshops. Kneehigh are not so, don't use so, sound so much in rehearsals as I first anticipated, so I was, I always had an availability clash, I was always booked to do these Young Vic shows, which took me out for the third and fifth week of rehearsals, or second and fifth, or something like that. So I sort of went into rehearsals very early on, but I was aware that I couldn't really start jamming with them very much because I knew I wasn't going to be there the following week, and then I was going to be there and then not there, so I sort of held back from taking part in it as much, and sort of throwing things in occasionally, but not really fully participating as much as I would normally. But with Katie and Simon yes, workshops, day one of rehearsals onwards.

R: So do you find that you're bringing stuff in to those workshops in the same way that they might perhaps bring in a fragment of text or a visual image or something, are you bringing stuff in that might then be workshopped with or worked through and sort of changes and eventually comes out somewhere in the piece somehow, but sort of bringing stuff in as a starting point in rather than kind of waiting and then reacting to stuff?

G: Yeah, to an... I mean sort of the early stages of rehearsals tend to be sort of related devising projects, so there's very little stuff there that usually makes it through to the end show, but often, for those stages there's sort of a lot of finding music and sounds and helping the actors with their devising and stuff like that. So that quite often is largely reactionary, yes. And then once we start focusing on the show obviously I've usually had

some fairly strong ideas, hopefully strong ideas, about what I want to try and show, so once we start sort of focusing more on the final production I start introducing more stuff that I've prepared or found or stuff like that.

R: So it's more sort of supportive to start with?

G: Yes... it can be, yeah. And quite often it's more a political thing, kind of thing, sort of gaining the trust of the performers where, like particularly with *Attempts* there was a large contingent of the performers who hadn't worked with Katie before and hadn't worked in this style before, so we did a lot of sort of working with them, gaining their trust and sort of bringing them into the style of working. And you have to be quite, it's very easy to disconcert an actor with sound by playing it at the wrong moment, you know, if they're feeling vulnerable, or stressed, or, you know, play it at the wrong moment at the wrong level, and they're trying to 'act', then, you know, it can be very, then they can react badly and that can be quite unhelpful. So you're, I always have to be really quite sensitive in the first weeks about when I use sound and how I use it, and be quite political in a way, so as to, so as to be able to do more, at the end of the day. So it's, yeah, definitely being supportive of them at first, to sort of, if they're wary of the fact that there's, you know, the sound person who they're not used to having in the room with them, and that, you know, there's all these sounds going on around them that they're not used to having in, you know, if they've come from doing lots of sort of TV or Max Stafford-Clarke style shows it can be quite disconcerting for them, you know, to have these other things going on. And a lot of performers once they've got used to it find it quite helpful to have in the rehearsal room 'cause it sort of, you know, it means they don't have to act so much, in a way, in the way that they probably won't have to act so much in the final production, because there's other design elements doing a lot of the work. So yes, so it's getting them on board with that, and making them feel that it's a good thing that it's there, not a bad thing. Yeah, the early days are very often about things...

R: So does that change your process quite a bit, depending on whether you're working with someone who's used to devised work, or whether you're working with people who are completely new to it, do you find you can get into your stride more quickly, when you're working with a group that are all used to that process?

G: Absolutely. And working with *Complicite* every time I've quite often, and the latest number is a bit of a departure because that's the first one they've done in a long time where they've not, where nobody has done a previous *Complicite* show. So for Simon that's been very traumatic as he's had to introduce the whole bunch to the process. With

Attempts there were four people who'd not done a Katie Mitchell show before and hadn't done anything like it before, so it was quite a difficult process making them feel more comfortable. The people who'd been in *Waves* who were in *Attempts*, you know, just slotted straight into it, and, you know, with, so in the early sort of devising stages of *Attempts* people who'd done *Waves* were sort of straight away going into the multi-media world, and sort of going, 'oh, you know, we could have three cameras on it and, you know, projection screens there and there to help tell that story and to give multiple angles, and, you know, you could Foley some footsteps and you could do some breathing and then I'll break the table' and all that sort of stuff, whereas the people who hadn't done *Waves* were sort of going, 'oh, well, I'll act this bit, and you can act that character, and maybe we'll have some music in the background' sort of thing, so there was, you know, a marked difference between the people who'd done it before and had experience of working in that way, and people who hadn't. And, yeah, like I say, we had to sort of ease those people in to this new language and expand their sort of rehearsal vocabulary. And you have to do it quite strategically so they don't get derailed by the whole thing, and I think to a certain degree that we didn't manage to do it entirely successfully with *Waves*, the new people did feel quite overwhelmed by it by the end. They'd never really had time to properly incorporate it, which was a shame.

R: Well I think I've just about covered all my questions. So I should probably let you eat your lunch!

G: Have you got any *Attempts* questions? I'm interested to know what the performers thought of the process.

R: Yeah, I mean, again, because I talked to Michael Gould, who's worked on quite a lot of Katie Mitchell shows, and then I was also talking to Paul Ready and Jonah Russell, who've done *Seagull* with her, but I think that would have been they're first project with her...

G: Yeah, Paul's done a few more, but yeah, Jonah...

R: So they had quite different perspectives, from the fact that, you know, they've not quite worked with Katie so much as Michael had, but, I think even though he'd worked with her quite a lot before, even so I think he still found *waves* quite difficult, I think perhaps maybe *more* so because the other two are obviously sort of fresher out of college, and are perhaps more open to those sort of multi-media modes of working, and they seemed to have got to grips with the whole multi-media thing and sort of finding an "acting" way of

dealing with that, they were talking about, you know, creating characters who were camera operators or lighting designers or whatever, you know, acting somebody who wasn't actually acting. But yeah, I mean, Michael did say he sort of found it quite unsettling, making that transition into this sort of multi-media thing, but that he felt that the fact that he was doing it with Katie, the fact that he'd worked with her so much, was actually really important in that, because he felt that she knew he would be unsettled by it, but she also knew that he would come out the other side of that, and that, you know, because he was used to her way of working he would eventually sort of assimilate the addition of the multi-media, and it would all click together. So, yeah, I kind of felt that that sense of company, or family, or whatever it is, that trust was quite important for them to be able to work in that way.

G: What did you think of the end result?

R: *Waves* I really really enjoyed, I got the novel out of the library, and read it, before I came to see the performance, and, I mean, I could only read a few pages at a time because it's such an intense, constant stream of thought.

G: Most of the people who worked on *Waves* didn't get to the end of it.

R: I did eventually, but it took me quite a long time. So, you know, I was just like, I don't have any concept of how they can possibly approach staging it, and actually when I sat there and I watched it I actually thought it was actually really, really good. Because it's not a story, you know, I mean, yeah, there are the odd bits of narrative in there, but you have to work really, really hard to try and knit them together and stuff, and I thought the conceit that she'd given it and the whole Foley artist thing, I just thought it worked really, really well, because it needed to be something that reflected the fact that the novel isn't your conventional novel, so it needed to be something that wasn't your conventional staging, and it was really good because it was like, 'am I supposed to watch the screen, am I watching people making something for television, which I'm seeing at the same time, I'm seeing what they're making as well as seeing them making it, you know, am I seeing people at work making a radio recording, or, you know, there were all these layers there which sort of, you couldn't really, you couldn't actually say what it was, but... yeah.

G: And *Waves*' actually a very good example of sort of design pointing the writing in a certain direction. We were sort of, I remember sat round with Katie, very early on, after a, we did a first workshop for it, and we did it in a very sort of *Complicite* style, but the performers aren't movement specialists, so it wasn't very good *Complicite*, and we were

like, well, we need to find a different way of doing this, so we started investigating, started talking about different ways of sort of expressing people's thoughts, and, you know, that led to sort of voice-over convention, and that was what eventually led to the Foley artist convention. So it was sort of the design decision there that eventually formed the whole writing of the piece and the whole creation of it. What did you think of *Attempts*?

R: *Attempts*. Um...

G: It's ok to dislike it!

R: It's not that I disliked it, I mean it's a very, very difficult play to digest. I was talking a little bit about this with Michael and Paul, that Martin Crimp sort of denies it's about consumerism and the media and stuff, but then it's quite difficult not to read it in that way...

G: He was very adamant it was, well he was saying it was about consumerism last time he was in rehearsal with us, denying whatever he'd previously said in print.

R: But I think, it is an incredibly difficult play to stage, because there is no way in to it, there is nothing apart from the lines. I think when he first wrote it he did write a sort of preface of stage directions which he later dropped, so all you have got are lines of text, and I think... I think it did work well. I didn't quite get the fact that, the whole reality TV game show they had to keep going kind of conceit, but I did get the basic gist that they were in a television studio, trying to come up with some sort of new programme, or new idea, and running through these various sort of different... interpretations of it. But... I guess I'm still, I still don't quite know what I made of it, if that makes sense. I didn't dislike it, but it wasn't the sort of show that draws you into it in any way, it was almost, there was almost a sort of barrier between audience and stage, it didn't feel like a conventional performance whereby you are performing to the audience, it almost felt like, I guess in a way it really did kind of fulfil the conceit because it did, it almost felt like you were watching reality TV, somehow, you know, you maybe watching CCTV cameras this studio, and seeing what they were doing, or something, so I guess in that way it did actually really fulfil that conceit in a way that I hadn't actually considered 'til now. But, yeah... I didn't feel that it... was as, I guess as sophisticated perhaps, or...

G: That's fair enough. It's not as sophisticated, it's not as sophisticated or as developed as *Waves*

R: Yeah, I think maybe that's more developed. I felt *Waves* was sort of complete, in a way, or, everybody was happy with how it was interpreted and what they were presenting, and there was just something about *Attempts* that didn't quite sit, I don't know what it was, but it didn't quite somehow fit. But whether that was about the performance in multi-media or whether that is more something actually about Crimp's text, and the fact that it is what it is, and it is very difficult to get into in any way, I don't know. I did see a student performance of it two weeks before I came down, which was interesting!

G: It's a very difficult play to do, and it does, I think, one of the things we're sort of aware of is that, in a way it's very difficult to work on that, sort of *Waves* we were able to totally adapt the source material to the conceit that we came up with, and adapt and edit, and, we weren't allowed to change a single word for *Attempts*, you know, we wanted to change quite a lot, cut vast swathes of it, rearrange the scenes, and all that sort of stuff, and in the end I think the conceit and the play don't quite sit together. They wouldn't improvise things in that order, they would shorten scenes, and that. Cool. I'd better dash back to my tech.

MICHAEL GOULD, PAUL READY AND JONAH RUSSELL

NATIONAL THEATRE, LONDON 29 MARCH 2007

REBECCA HICKIE: What I'm quite interested to hear about is your process, because obviously, we were just saying on the way round that it's quite an open script, and obviously with *Waves* it's coming from a novel, so it's not actually intended for performance anyway, so I sort of gathered from reading around the productions that both *Waves* and *Attempts* were quite collaborative kind of devising exploratory processes, so I'd be quite interested to hear about that process, from your perspective, and how that was, sort of in the rehearsal room, how that worked, that process?

MICHAEL GOULD: I suppose there's an obvious difference between the two, in as much as, there *is* a script for *Attempts on Her Life*, I mean, it's, you know, it's a definitive, you know, it *is* a script, so we've got, we've got a starting point there, whereas... which, kind of, you know, which helped, obviously, in a lot of ways, but I mean having the flexibility of a non-scripted piece as well was also, you know, had its advantages as well as disadvantages, and so if you were struggling to capture something you could transpose a different piece of text into it so it, in a way it was more, open to other possibilities, you know, whereas because we had this complete script with *Attempts* then we were trying to find the things that fitted that, so there are, there were distinctions to be made...

PAUL READY: With *Attempts*... yeah... with *Attempts* it was a... there's a concept, you have to have some form of concept to do that play. And so everything has to fit in, there's just basically what you [Michael] said, everything has to fit into that concept, and sometimes some of those things are really tricky, and I think, like, for example, 'The Occupier', which is the fourth, the fourth scene or something like that, we found that really tricky to fit in, and so we had to find, I think we tried two or three different ways of doing that scene, so it would fit, in some form, and it's still very very difficult.

M: 'Faith in Ourselves' too was tricky, the second scenario, where, you know, we do the first one direct to the audience without any cameras or lights or anything, except theatre lights, and then 'Faith in Ourselves' is the first piece of video, and again, we struggled to find that, and the thing is with that part of the process you are definitely aligning a particular set of text to a particular idea, and if they don't come together, then you just have to try another idea, bring another idea in, keep on just testing it with different kind of notions, whereas, with *Waves*, you could try a different bit of text, [laughs], you know, and see if you could capture it that way. And also a lot of this, a lot of devising, it seems, in the

last two projects has been, has, there's been an expedience... expedience-y?
expedience, direction by expedience, which was quite interesting, so if there's a, if we were struggling, you know, to link some material, sort of, you know, in *Waves*, then again, a bit more text, and that would give us a bit more time to do the work on the cameras and the lights and, rather than it necessarily being a sort of coherent expression of something that we all decided to express, sometimes it was just accidental, and a matter of expedience, just a matter of cobbling together bits and then afterwards maybe putting a sort of theory of theatre on to it.

P: You saw *Waves*?

R: Yes.

P: So for example, the Virginia Woolf character who, who was narrator, had got, she was always in it, is that right?...

M: yeah, yeah

P: with the introductions, 'cause it, at the beginning of each chapter in *Waves*, the introduction of the sea and the... but she became a much much bigger character in the last week...

JONAH RUSSELL: 'cause we didn't even know if those were going to be voiced at all at the beginning, if we were going to have those descriptions, were we, or not, we might just have done that through image, so that came quite late on.

M: Yeah. And we didn't actually have permission. At one stage we didn't have permission for some of the text, so we had permission to do *The Waves*, but we were also using extracts from letters and diaries, and it was quite late on that we were given the go-ahead to use those specific, specified pieces of text from the letters and diaries. So they came, they came like a quilt, you know, like a patchwork quilt, and, you know, I, from my own point of view, this work was so engaging, and so engrossing that, and so minute in a way, that your sort of daily occupation is to do with whether you can get a light from one side of the stage to another side of the stage cleanly, quietly, and so on, the mechanical things, that sometimes you're quite a long way as an actor from the idea, you know, from the big idea of the piece, so I found that particularly in *Waves*, less so in this because the piece was ready, you know, the piece was written, so I could have a sense of the thing as a whole before we even started, you know, whereas with *Waves* you really have to make an

effort to get off the set, go out into the auditorium and have a look at it, so that you get, have got a better idea of what it was you were doing, because it's minute, your actual job is really minute, you know, especially in *Waves*, it might be getting a twig, you know, in front of a camera at the right time, it's very very small. And so we had to kind of yield a lot of the responsibility for meaning and... to Katie, and the sound people, and the lighting people, and the, you know...

J: in terms of devising, the similarities between both things, both things we would bring things from our own lives, that would relate to the themes of each piece, and improvise around those and see whether they would fit what we were doing. So they were, that was something in the process which... although the scales were different, the process was quite similar, wasn't it?

P: Katie, who I've worked with a few times, and Michael's worked with a few times, we've all worked with Katie a few times, she has a particular process, all about improvising with back history, she finds the themes of the play and then we have to go away and find something in our own life which would coincide with that theme, and then we act it. Well we don't act it, we just get someone and say, ok, you play my dad, and this is how it goes, and then we do it. But this time, because from the beginning, certainly from when I got involved, I think Katie's been thinking about doing *Waves*, some form of *Waves* for about three or four years...

M: Yeah, definitely, a lot more, since University actually.

P: ok, years, and I did one workshop, just before we started rehearsals, so I was... by then, I think she knew she was going to be multimedia. Right?

M: Mmm...

P: ok. So it meant this time when we came to, normally it would just be like, let's set up our house, here's my couch, whatever, but this time we kind of did the, not so much in *Attempts* but in *Waves* we'd, we would do the improvisations of our life multimedia. So it might be somebody else doing your thoughts in your head, someone else doing a close-up of your face. And so we got into that language really quickly, so then, so then we could use that to... bits of doing the close-up of say Bernard's or Neville's, and then somebody else doing... we had to find the language, and that took quite a while.

M: Mm, it did actually.

P: Not so much in *Attempts*, cause by *Attempts*, after *Waves*, I think, and then going into *Attempts*, Katie's concept was *much* clearer, I think she had to be because she was on a bigger stage, it's like a, almost a bigger responsibility I think, and so her concept's like ok, we're doing this, it's going to be this, we still have to work out some *rules*, but then that bit's clearer, with *Waves* it's like, ok, how are we going to do this. So also, she would give us all a character to look after, because sometimes we'd only be playing the hand of our character, or the face of our, every time each of the charac... have you got to go?

J: I've got to go and have a massage.

M: How awful...

J: I'll see you later.

P: Come back.

J: Yeah, yeah, if you you're still here I'll come back. Nice to meet you.

R: Thank you. Nice to meet you.

P: So. Where was I? Yes, everyone was given a character, and she called it care-taking, so Michael had Bernard, Jonah had Percival and I had Neville. So we'd be given sections of the book or the cut down text, and we'd take it away and go ok, how would you do this, how would you represent this bit, and so we'd come up with ideas like, ok, this bit I want a close up of Neville's face, I want somebody else making this noise, and we broke it down like that. And we basically worked all the way through it.

M: Yeah, we, I mean, it's storyboarding. It was interesting how it developed really, because all of us are theatre, our training is in theatre, and I found this very interesting just because I've spent thirty years in the theatre, and it was quite a challenge for me, *Waves*. This less so actually, just because I suppose I've got the language a bit more in my head. But, like you said, you know, we'd do improvisations which were like we had done on *The Seagull*, you know, which was the last sort of conventional, if you like, theatre piece I did with her. And then it would become abstracted by the, like you say, the sound and the film and the close-ups, on the eyes, maybe, or a hand, and so on, and also the experience of, you know, really personal experiences, and they just gradually, gradually sort of coalesce into the same sort of form, and it was quite subtle how it changed as time went by, and

you'd find yourself, you know, if you go in at a piece through the themes, say one of the themes in *Waves* was childhood, and she asked us to abstract, or extract, an experience from your childhood, I'm just trying to give a specific example... I... because you're starting to think in terms of the book, and you're starting to pick things out of the book, when Bernard talks about being bathed by Mrs Constable, that ignited a memory in *me* of my own childhood, which was of the, of my mother drying my face and hair after a bath, and just this sort of flashing image of my mother, so that then got transposed to the production, so there was a very direct link, actually, between our own personal lives and the piece itself, and I think that's what gives Katie a sort of... it's not necessarily unique, but it roots her work really, in reality, even if it's a ... performance art piece, which in a way *Waves* was, it's still for me got a core reality to it which is reassuring and in *Attempts* you again have characters, you know, that we've created, the audience might not be aware of that at all...

P: they're probably not aware...

M: yeah, but we had a, I mean I know when my character was, the person I'm representing on stage, I know when he was born, I know all his life, you know, in a sort of method kind of way, Stanislavskian type way, I've built a character, you know, who is, who in Katie's sort of *expedience*, with her notions of expedience here it's good that it, she'll say if your character can do all the things that you have to do in the show, so you have to create a character around, pragmatically, what you have to do in the piece, so it's sort of upside down.

P: For example, what you, a lot of what you're doing in *Attempts* is the lighting...

M: yeah, you know, and...

P: other than the acting, so Michael's character that he's created has been a lighting designer for a gig, you know, but not only that, he also has to be able play the guitar, so *how* does he play the guitar?

M: he played it at school, when he was, you know... it's sort of, it means that it's not, I hope, it really means that it's not just a sort of hollow piece of theatre art, it is hopefully pretty grounded in a certain amount of reality, you know, so the process isn't, it isn't just a sort of mechanical choreographed thing of lights and cameras and projected, projectors, it's not just, you know, a hotchpotch of images, it's all born of something, and hopefully we all understand what it's born of, you know, in the company, we know where that particular

image has come from, and, you know, it's through discussion, through improvisation, through experience and so on. It's a very complete process, like that, isn't it?

P: yeah it is, and I think, I think doing that, even if the audience doesn't know anything about it, which I think more or less they wouldn't, just for us, for like a safety net, and not just a safety net, for us to make, to be able to do what we do in it, to have that kind of ok, I know who I am then trying to do this is really helpful, really helpful.

M: you find you can do it better as well, if you're somebody else. I mean that sort of jokily, but also slightly seriously, I don't know, certainly in *Waves* when we were playing Foley artists, you know, who make sounds for films, if I wasn't in the right head space, if I wasn't the character I'd created who was making *Waves*, I found it harder to do. Very curious, it's very curious, but it, I don't know, my, I just wasn't in the right space. Very peculiar.

[interview is interrupted by member of NT staff asking us to move to a different area, Paul goes to buy cup of coffee on the way and misses first question]

R: You've all worked with Katie before, do you think that's quite important? I mean obviously somewhere like the National doesn't have like a resident ensemble, but do you think the fact that she's sort of building up this ensemble...

M: Yeah, I mean she's got... there are a number of people, I don't know how many in this particular show, who have never worked with her before, so I think she... whereas with *Waves* we'd all worked with her before. And because with *Waves* she was really breaking into new ground I think she felt reassured by the fact that she knew everybody, and that there wasn't going to be a part of the process that was simply about getting to know how somebody works, she knew how we all worked, and so she felt she could move forward with the process, the idea, whereas with this, you know, she's sort of trying to balance you need to work with new people, and the idea of keeping a stability to her work, which is about having, you know, I think a lot of directors have a bigger company in their head, you know, a big company of actors that they would like to pick from, and so I do think it was important that we... I think it was very important that she had people she could trust, because... I know for myself that I found it very testing, I found *Waves* very testing, because it was completely sort of counter-intuitive to me, it was asking me to do things that I just simply didn't feel were right, necessarily, and I just had to sort of go with it. I wasn't entirely, at that time, convinced about the place that video image or film image, entirely comfortable with that in theatre, you know, it's, because what you end up with, as I think somebody said, you know, you get that sort of hybrid in the end, it's neither theatre

nor cinema nor television nor radio, so it's a complete hybrid, it's none of those things and it's all of those things. But when we didn't know what *Waves* was going to be, I felt very anxious, sometimes we'd slip too far one way, and, you know, and also because we were principally in that playing Foley artists who weren't necessarily actors, you know, so my character, I was acting a character who wasn't an actor, but having to then create a character as if I were an actor, you know, it's very complicated, really far too complicated!

P: shall we explain... you're in the middle of a thought?

M: yeah, just let me finish, yeah, and it is – I felt like I was being asked to do a whole load of stuff which wasn't actually my job, you know, and so I got cross at times, and I... but I got round it, by just having to, re- sort of structure what I was as a performer, and I tried to broaden my definitions of myself a bit, and you know, that I'm an actor but I'm also this, and able to do this that and the other, and it's made me feel, actually feel more confident and broader, you know, and more able to cope with, you know, different challenges, you know, but, I mean the point is that if Katie had had a new company of people who she didn't know, she probably knew that I was going to go through that slight trauma, and it would all be alright because I'd think about it and come out the other side, but if she had a company, a whole company of people she didn't know, then she couldn't have felt quite as confident to push it in the direction she wanted to push it in. I guess. But, so, yeah, we're just talking about how important it is for Katie to know the people she's working with, really, and how she develops, builds companies, I suppose.

P:er... what was I going to say... Would it be helpful to know the concepts that we eventually had for each one?

R: yeah, that would be really interesting.

P: And do that really as simple, as simply as possible.

M: yeah.

P: cause I get confused anyway about it. So in *Waves*, this is the whole thing about who are the people doing the show. Who are the people doing *Waves*, who are the people doing *Attempts on Her Life*, which is Katie's choice to, Katie's choice to make sure we were people, as Michael was saying, so we're not just doing this thing, we're also people doing it. So the characters, in *Waves* the characters we had to build were: a group of Foley artists and two video artists, which was me and Jonah, and then an artist who had

got a, and the concept was this artist, who played Virginia [Woolf], Kristie, she'd approached us all in our lives, she wanted to do this project on Virginia Woolf, *The Waves*, it's going to be a live broadcast, a live radio broadcast... and she'd approached all these different people to work with her, and the Foley artists were approached because *maybe* they were a little bit like Bernard, or *maybe* they were a little bit like Jinny, and we'd come together and we'd rehearsed for two weeks, and we'd worked with video, and we hadn't had much rehearsal, and then on this night we had a one-off performance. Each night we did it, in our heads we're going ok, we've rehearsed for two weeks, tonight's our one-off performance, live, in front of an audience, with some producers who could perhaps take it on, so that... is that right?

M: Yeah, yeah, I mean that was the, and, yes, it's live on radio, isn't it, that was important.

P: yeah

M: that we were... the very first night we did it of course a lot of the given circumstances were very real for us, you know, because, you know, it was the first night, and it was the, and it was terrifying, and there were people in the audience who counted and mattered, and so we got a lot for free. I mean I actually, I literally can't remember the first night 'cause it was such a frightening experience, you know, and then as time went on, you know, we're recreating that first night, the primary emotion of fear is starting to ebb away and we're sort of having to generate a certain amount of that, so, but like Paul says, we always had this conceit to play from, whereas, well, and in *Attempts on Her Life*, just to state as well, the concept behind that, if I can get it... what is it? [laughs] how does it start?

P: it's set in '97

M: oh yeah, that's right, it's set in 1997, April, just before the election. We have been hired by, probably, is it Channel 4? No, BBC, BBC have a producer called Laura Casey, now an actress came in and played Laura Casey for us one day and brought us all in to the project, and we are all an assortment of sort of media people, all of a sort of left-leaning sensibility, political sensibility, but sort of political without really knowing why, or, you know, just vague as that. So they include Lenny who's a lighting designer, Chris who's a video artist...? film...?

P: I can't believe you don't know...

M: film...

P: I'm a film director.

M: ...director

P: and a writer

M: but we've only just met though, so I don't... there are writers in the group, there are producers in the group, there are...

P: floor managers, photographers, video artists

M: [echoing] floor managers... photographers... video artists. [laughs] two people who have a daytime TV show, well,

P: comedians

M: comedians, a musician, I'm sure you can guess who that was, and we've all been brought together to do, as part of a competition that's being set up, so this is all pre-Big Brother, and pre-reality TV, alright, but it, but just '97, we got, we thought a lot about 1997 and what was going on then, you could just see the start of celebrity, you got a glimmer of reality TV, but it wasn't quite fully formed yet, so this is part of that, this is sort of the time that Spitting Image finished and satire was sort of, had got a bit lost, lost it's way a bit, it had, you know, Spitting Image had been very political, but now it was satirising celebrity and celebrity, the idea of celebrity was coming in. Anyway, the idea was that we had, they'd had this competition, be live on television, so there were cameras in the auditorium, and we have all been brought together and with the incentive that we could win half a million pounds, £500,000 for Amnesty International, if we can just keep going for two hours on a particular theme or subject which we would be given about 30 seconds before the show starts, at 9 o'clock, in the conceit. So we're backstage when those things open, we're seeing the live audience there, but we're sort of waiting for the show to start, and we've only just been given the subject for the evening's performance, and it's a satire on Western Consumer Society

P: and the ills

M: oh and the ills of Western Consumer Society. That's what we're told, at the very last minute, that we have to do. So then, hopefully, you get a sense of the whole thing being spontaneous, you know. And the play is a satire on Western Consumer, the ills of Western Consumer Society, but um

P: did you get that? I mean, I'm not sure, *is that, that's* what it is, right?

M: I think that's what the play is.

P: 'cause Martin

M: would deny that.

P: Crimp would deny it.

M: well, I dunno.

P: I dunno, but if he was so heavily involved when Katie worked, directed it before, and so she would have talked to him, you know, what do you think, and he would have given away what he wanted to give away

M: he does keep his cards quite close to his chest.

P: but, like, I mean if I were watching it, I, and when I read it I thought it was brilliant, but I've no idea what it's about. When you read it what did you get from it?

R: What did I *get* from it?

P: I mean, could you say, oh this is about...?

R: yeah, I... I'm not sure I would have put the consumerist bit in there, but it's certainly the general ills of Western Society as... satire, ironic look at twentieth-century, contemporary life, I mean, that's... you could have quite easily set it in 2007, you know, and not noticed that actually it was written in 1997, I think it completely transposes that 10 years without any problem whatsoever, you know,

M: yeah. I mean I think that the only thing that would be problematic potentially would be the whole idea of terrorism. I mean we had terrorism, obviously, in 1997, but it was sort of

different, d'you know what I mean, the post-9/11 thing. I think they're very keen, actually, to just keep it in '97, because the updating is quite... I know what you're saying, but in fact quite a lot has changed, the mobile phone, you know, there's quite a lot of stuff, Blair, you know, ten years of Blair, and all that, and I think they just very clearly wanted to mark it as a revival and not a modernising of it, you know, just to, I think to keep hold of the thematic thing, rather than to try and date it, and... but I know what you mean, it's quite interesting doing a play which is ten years old, you know, it's really not that long ago, but things have, I think things have subtly shifted.

P: the rest of the concept, also there's a panel out there, consisting of some people we know, like Tracy Emin, or, as in people that are known, there's five of them, and if they get bored they've got some lights in front of them and they'll give us a red light. If we get five red lights we, we're thrown down in the basement where you see us go at the end. The buzzer says that they're bored and we have to move on. But that's what we react, we're reacting

M: over-reacting

P: it's a big over-reacting

M: and all the dresses and things that come in, they're spikes from the producer, you know, they're kind of, you know, could do, you know, they're provocations, I suppose. So we don't know they're going to come, obviously, but it's... but I don't know what it looks like, I think we probably look like a bunch of laboratory mice, you know, struggling away to, for food, or something, I don't know, it's very peculiar.

P: but I think, I mean also I think the whole concept, Katie never goes 'you need to hit it for the first performance', she sets all these things up and then that's what you have to aim towards, because actually the goals are so far, to make that *look* like we're calling the shots, on the screen, which, I mean, we're still so far off from that...

M: mmm, mmmm...

P: you know, to make it look like, oh, that was a, that's, what's this, this is a dress coming down, ok, what shall we do know, it's very tricky, especially because it's so technical.

M: She's quite releasing like that, isn't she, and she releases herself like that too, you know, she sort of thinks of her work in arcs, you know, so this video, multimedia thing is a

sort of two-year project for her, and two or three pieces will come under that umbrella, you know, and then within each piece, like Paul says, you have time to develop, you don't have to hit it straight away. Which is quite, I mean it's basically acknowledging the fact that don't have time in the theatre, really, to make complicated work, you know, we don't, seven weeks is nothing, really, if you really want to be successful

P: each time we really did run out of time

M: each time, in rehearsals, yeah, now, ideally, you'd be in a stage now where you revisit it in the rehearsal room, and build it again, and I'm sure in time she will, she'll be pushing for that, you know, to really perfect and hone a piece of work, you know, so that it just, if you want to challenge what a piece of theatre it, or looks like, you have to give it time, and she'd learnt from *Waves*, she transposed those lessons into this, and she brought five people who had a reasonable amount of experience from *Waves* into this, so, you know, time is the key, really, for that, for this type of work. I'm gonna have to, I'm gonna...

P: go and run

M: go and run, yeah [Michael was in training for the London Marathon]

R: well thank you very much

M: it was a pleasure to meet you, no, not at all

R: it's very interesting, thank you.

M: nice to meet you

R: thank you

P: Um... I don't know whether Michael said, I think it was touched on a bit, but how closely, and how involved, Katie, 1] lets everybody be, but also how closely people work with the sound and the lights and the video, people are in right from the beginning of, or as close to the beginning of rehearsal as possible, which is a real luxury, and is really important in the devising of it. Like for example, Leo Warner, who does the, his company, 59, do the video imaging, he came in, I think we'd been rehearsing for about 2 weeks on *Waves*, and we'd been working with these little cameras, and I have no idea, I have more idea now, having done the, but how to set up a shot, and what would look good, how to light it, and

when those guys came in it completely transformed how we could look at things, and like what was possible. So I had a very basic idea, I can just do a straight on portrait of somebody, but now knowing where to put them in the frame, and it's really... because there's like basically these experts in whatever field, like Gareth, Gareth got the sound, Gareth Fry got an Olivier award for *Waves*, for the sound in *Waves*, I mean people that are just *brilliant* at their job, all working together and Katie kind of gets those people together so she can make these shows as good as she, you know, as good as she can possibly make them, I think.

R: So how much input does Vicki Mortimer have as designer,

P: and Vicki is another one

R: 'cause it sounds like there's actually quite a lot of people in there sort of doing all this stuff together, making all these images, so is there a need for her in there?

P: a massive need, a massive need.

R: How does she sort of fit in to that process?

P: Well I think...

R: are she and Katie quite...

P: they've been working together for...

R: symbiotic, I suppose?

P: yes, yes, I think that's a good word. And Paule as well, who does the lights. I mean this isn't... Katie's worked with people for years, and Michael would have been, Michael's also worked with her for years, I think, Michael could probably answer this question better. But yeah, symbiotic is a good word for that. I mean, she... there was a lot of costume, and a lot of ok, how are we going to, this is what we want, just an arm, we can't afford it, how are we going to do it, how are we going to make it look how it has to look, so I mean Vicki did like an amazing job on *Waves*, I thought, I only, I saw one still of it, 'cause you can't tell, you absolutely can't tell, and I saw a photo in the paper of it, in one of the reviews, and it looked like a period shot, and I couldn't believe it, 'cause it just feels weird standing there with a, you know, one piece of...

R: yeah, it's very effective

P: yeah, and so I don't know exactly how it came about, but obviously Katie would go, ok, in *Waves*, ok, it's going to be like a Foley studio, so they'd visit a Foley studio, but it's also a stage, so we want these shelves, we need the practical sort of, so we need shelves, so we can put all the props on, and we need a screen, and we need chairs, whatever, and Vicki just goes and... Vicki's right there, in there, and goes ok, this will look good, or this'll look right, or...

R: so is it quite important to have Vicki in there, 'cause obviously if you're doing something, a more conventional production, you're not necessarily going to have that luxury of the designer being in the rehearsal room with you, is that quite important for the process for you as actors, to sort of have that link with everybody?

P: well I think... it *is*, I mean, it is... I think when we were coming up with it, in *Waves*, I keep going with *Waves*, really, 'cause that...when we were coming up with that, it did need everybody, so we'd, basically it would be, Vicki would probably be on the perimeter a bit more, 'cause she used to pop in and pop out, she's busy and obviously she has to go and source the materials and stuff. I mean, she'd be in a lot, but like watching, and seeing what was needed, and so if we'd come up with an idea, and idea for something, for example... 'cause budget was, budget is such a big thing, I think, when you're working in the, for example in the Cottesloe, which is a small theatre, it's not going to, there's no way a show in there would ever make any kind of profit, and luckily the National doesn't have to make profit, 'cause if it does, it *can't* make profit, apparently, I don't know how it works. But the technical equipment is so expensive, so... Anyway, you'd come up with an idea, and go that's what we wanna do, can you make it work? And so she'd have to go away and make it work. I think it stressed her out quite a lot, actually, I mean especially 'cause these kind of, to make it look real we had like ten seconds to get into costume so she'd have to cut away the back of the costumes to just Velcro it on, and... I think what was really reassuring was knowing that everyone was going to try and make it work, whatever it is. I don't think there's ever, I don't think there was ever anything that said can't be done. Never anyone. There probably was, 'cause Katie was probably pushing, 'cause she's always pushing for things, but, yeah.

R: So I'm assuming you've done various conventional work as well as this devised stuff with Katie, so do you think that the way that you work creates a different style of

production, or do you think that because you're aiming for a different style of production you then have to find that different way of working?

P: I think with each, ideally with each different kind of show you do there'd be a, there's a new, you should approach it afresh, ideally. I think a lot of times, a lot of time it's down to the director, really, how they divide up the time, and how they, what they put the emphasis on. But I'd certainly say with this, I think as Michael touched on, you have to think much broader than you normally would think, that's what I've found, with these two. Much more broadly about yourself, and much more, I've found myself, I was always, I was taught at drama school to go, ok, what's my part in the play, why is that part, what's my function within the whole of the play, so what, why have I been written in, why's this character been written in, what's he supposed to do, or to make somebody do, but this, on top, it didn't really have that, but on top it made me look at the whole thing as a whole, which I, I mean I have little experience, Katie is amazing at that, she'll take little bits and go that's worked, that's worked, that's worked, and she's so very very very specific. The eye she has for it, which I don't understand, is... I don't, the dance of it, really. What she does, what she lets settle, and, you know, I only got a glimpse of that.

[Phone rings]

Will you excuse me for one second? It's Jonah. Jonah? We're upstairs, in... uh, I don't know how to describe it, hang on...

R: I mean, do you think if you hadn't had that very collaborative devised approach to, particularly to *Waves*, do you think it would actually, do you think you would have found a performance?

P: I don't... say that again.

R: If it had been a sort of more conventional hierarchical structured process, whereby the director comes in and directs the actors, and have a designer who creates a design, do you think you would have actually managed to perform *Waves*, or do you think you would have found such a, I guess such a multimedia approach, do you think it would have been possible without that very devised and collaborative process that you seem to have had where everybody was in there saying will this work, lets try it, how are things gonna...

P: I think because of time I don't know how it would have, how it would have worked, I think everybody, everybody began to like own it, you know, as in... and to understand it,

so everybody was coming from the same place, in the end, so in that way it's vital. And I think as well, we would have felt a bit more like robots, you know, go and move your light, blah blah blah, if we hadn't, if we hadn't've had that kind of... 'cause it has to come from some form of imagination or, from us, I think, from everybody, again, Katie was again very good at giving people space to do something, so she'd, she'll incorporate it, she's not, she's not shy or...

[Jonah arrives]

J: that was like a computer game, I could see you, I was up there. I got you a coffee, I didn't know if you wanted one.

R: oh, thank you.

P: cheers Jonah. That's what a good massage does for you, you become generous.

J: She beat the shit out of me...

P: anyway. The question is,

J: yes

P: about whether we'd come up, you say, you say...

R: just about how important you felt that that devising process was to, I guess the company's ability to perform the play, whether you think you'd actually've ended up with a performance if it had been a more sort of autocratic conventional process...

J: you mean if Katie had said right, we're doing this like this, and this like this, and this like this...

R: yeah

P: I've just had a thought.

J: go on.

P: 'cause in, sorry, in *Attempts*, it was slightly more like that, wasn't it? Not, not really, she had a concept...

J: she had the concept that it was going to be Foley artists, although we got to that through the workshops, didn't we, that it was going to be Foley artists, didn't we, I suppose.

P: Yeah. Anyway, you say what you were gonna say.

J: No, no, I... I don't think it would be, with something like this I don't think it would be anywhere as near fulfilling if you were said, like, you do that and that and that, because you don't, there's no ownership then.

P: That's what I was trying to say, thank God you came back, you're far more coherent.

J: Because... and the great thing is with Katie she doesn't see it as a, it's not just a nod to collaboration, it really is a, it is, it's lovely. I'm not very good with words, I'm probably not the right person at all.

P: no, you're good. You basically said, we were basically saying the same thing, really. We were saying if it was autocratic you'd feel more like robots, just

J: yeah, yeah, yeah.

P: and that's it.

J: particularly with something as technical as this, like myself and Paul did a lot of the camera shots, on *Waves* and in this, that we'd feel... I don't know. But because we've devised that, and characters that we've built, it makes sense that that's what we're doing and that's our activity.

P: Again, I think that's what I think, whether the audience get it or not, that's another reason why these characters that Katie kind of insists on building, within these contexts, are *really* important, 'cause it gives you something, even if it looks cold, even if it looks like oh, well they're just running round the stage doing it, you know, to us doing it it's essential.

J: Yeah. No-one's going to know that I'm married, and my wife's expecting a child, and

P: Congratulations.

J: no-one's going to read that from anything I say, and nor should they, but for me to be able to play certain things, I need that.

P: Which I think is maybe quite, obscure, because they are so technical, that's, I think, almost essential to this.

R: and do you think the imagery, the design concept, the stuff that Vicki's bringing in, or the stuff that Katie's bringing in, do you think that's as important for you developing these characters, because in *Attempts* you've not got any stage directions, you've not got indication of, you know, who's speaking the lines, so

P: it's essential

R: is it *everything* that has to feed in to develop these things, to actually sort of make sense out of it?

P: Everything. Everything. Definitely. I mean, with something like *Attempts* I personally would not have known where to start, I mean... so you have to have, which is why the concept, coming up with a concept in devising, I would say, has, I mean, you have to, if you don't have a concept you don't know what's going to be right, what's going to be wrong

J: there's nothing to hang it on then.

P: yeah, exactly. You've got to start somewhere. Even if you start somewhere and go ok, I can go from there.

J: and we did do that, we did do that, we did bring ideas, in *Waves* and in, and also what we'd so as well, we'd start devising, we'd start on a particular road and then we'd got to the end, we'd have to go back and go, actually, now we've got to the end the language has changed slightly, so we need to rework some of the bits we'd done at the beginning, because we'd got more sophisticated.

P: yeah

J: which was a bit of a pain in the arse. 'Cause you get comfy, and then, but actually for the strength of the piece you need to be very fluid, you need to go actually no, we need to change that, and we need to change that, and have a... I dunno.

P: it's never, like, entirely comfortable, these two pieces, because they're multimedia, it's never... there were a couple of like very smooth performances of *Waves*, it was just like a, like a dance, I guess, whereas at the beginning in *Waves* we were like, how the hell, I don't even know how we can get that over here in this time, it was that, and then you just are somehow able to do it, as you get better you get, like, sharper doing it. Uh... I've lost my thread.

J: it's alright, that's good.

P: it was something you said.

J: can't remember.

P: I can't remember, I'm sorry.

R: that's ok.

J: But I think the themes, Katie, when I did *The Seagull* with her for instance, you still work on the themes, and that, having that, and knowing that these are what you're bringing to it, and these are the things we're getting out of it, I think is really helpful.

P: Another, another...

J: another mark, so we know that this is to do with this, and it... I've lost my thread then. I thought I was going to say something really good

P: I'm really good at starting to say something...

J: I thought I was going to say something really profound, but it didn't happen. I'm sorry.

P: Is there anything, can we be profounder about anything else? What else?

R: I think you've just about covered everything... I thought it was quite interesting, obviously from what you've been saying this multimedia thing is going to be sort of a cycle

of different performances that's going to contribute to this overall project that Katie's doing, but has it ever at any point seemed difficult that that was how she was approaching these texts, or did it actually, did it help to make sense of them?

P: I think, 'cause Michael said that, didn't he, about it's a... I mean I don't think Katie, I think Katie finds one way of working and goes, oh, that's interesting, say multimedia, so she kind of stumbled across multimedia as an idea, and she goes, oh, ok, and then for example, when she told Jonah about *Attempts* and she said do you want to do *Attempts on Her Life*, she said, oh, we're only going to film, just three, just three scenes, but because of *Waves*, she then went, oh, ok, actually... and so it's more like, it's more like, I think she's continually...

J: she is a theatre practitioner

P: she's continually

J: she's developing, she's never going to stand still, and that's the beauty of it.

P: yeah, she's the same, I did a more, kind of more regular straight play with her, about two years ago, and then when I was rehearsing with her, I was like, it was really clear that all she was doing was trying to refine and a way to kind of run a rehearsal room, communicate with the actors, to get the best, to get the best, she would just, just keeps trying, so it's not anything she ever stands still with or, so even with that, so in the same way with this multimedia, it's like, ok, I'll try it here, and then maybe she, it means now when she looks at a production,

J: she can say what she...

P: she's learnt, she can look at that as an option, she can, maybe I can use that, and then...

J: but she, I mean, in the, she's doing a production that starts tonight, actually, ??? it's a Brecht piece, at the Young Vic, two people there, Stacey and Sean, who were in *Waves* as well, are doing that, but there's not, that's just as it is, there's no video in that, so it's not like she's gone 'I must do video in everything I do now', because she wouldn't, I mean she wouldn't, she'd never shoehorn something on something if it wasn't right.

P: No

J: Have you got to go?

P: I've got to go now. I've got to go and have a rub.

J: You go and have a rub. She's being quite vicious today, watch it.

P: Is she?

R: Well, thank you very much for meeting with me,

P: It's a pleasure

R: It's been very interesting to talk to you.

P: Actually, if you have any questions about something maybe I've rambled about, just phone.

R: Ok.

P: You have my number?

R: Yes, yes.

P: Please feel free to do that.

R: Ok. Thank you very much.

P: Uh, pleasure, lovely to meet you.

R: Thank you.

[Paul leaves]

So, yeah, I think the other two have just about covered everything

J: great

R: is there anything you have gotten strongly out of the process, that you'd like to share, you know, anything that sort of really impacted on you?

J: Well I, I think I'm lucky in the fact that I've done three in a row, so, back-to-back, so doing *Seagull* was kind of the pure process, and then the process kind of got adapted for *Waves*, but you, I mean you're obviously not devising *Seagull* 'cause the text's there, but I mean it never really, 'cause I remember devising things at college, and that was really right, so, like we did *The Man Who Mistook his Wife for a Hat*, which actually ended up really well, but you are like floundering around going we could do this, and how do we do, and ooh, let's do some physical theatre, and, whereas because of, because the process is still the same, you've still got all those things to... Katie works, and she is writing a book about directing, that might be of interest, I don't know when it's coming out, and that is *The Seagull* process that she's written. Whether she'll add bits from these two I don't know. But no, *Waves*, it just made sense that that's how we were gonna do it, really really really did, 'cause I don't know how else... like we tried to put, one of the improvisations really early on was well, how do you think, how do, how do you portray that. And that made sense then to have something on screen, someone else voicing something, seeing a shot of something else, and a shot of something else, and, because your thoughts are all over the place, all the time, and how do you, and once you start thinking about how you think you're screwed anyway. It just, that made real sense. And then, I don't know how, I mean technically you could do it without the cameras and the... but you'd virtually do the same scenarios in the same way, but you'd do them for a theatre audience pretending that you were filming them, in a sense. Like the, like the cop thing, you'd still have that in the same set-up, and people would go, ah, yeah, no, that's like something on the telly, but now, now we actually go, ah, yeah, look, that is on the telly. So it does make sense really. I suppose you can't cut anything, which is what we could do with *Waves*, we could tweak. Yeah. I love her. She's great. She's the best.

DAVID LEAHY, SOUND DESIGNER

TELEPHONE 02 APRIL 2007

REBECCA HICKIE: Well, basically, I went to see *And the Rain Comes Down*, the cute little piece that Fevered Sleep did for little kids, and I was just really interested in sort of hearing about your process, not necessarily specifically for that piece but just generally when you're working with David [Harradine] and Fevered Sleep, and how collaborative that process is for you?

DAVID LEAHY: Ok, um, with regards to... well, um, the music was quite integrated, is very integral to the sort of way that he works now, and he keeps on coming back to me because we've built up a relationship over the time we've been playing, working together for about what, two, three years now, um, and that, actually that show that you're talking about, *And the Rain*, was actually the first time that we'd really had some time to work together on something, you know, for a longer period of research and development, because most of the times that I've worked with David it's been very much we'd go in there, we'd work for a week, and we'd have a show at the end of it, for a couple of times. We were doing quite a lot of openings, like the Egg at Bath, which is the ... performance space, we did the opening of a performance space at the Winchester college, so it was very much just go in there, do something quickly, you know, and devise something within a week, and the way that he works you've seen his work, it's very very much, it's sort of a series of little vignettes, and we're sort of playing with ideas, he's playing with ideas, and he sort of gets Laura and whoever else he's working with to actually sort of just come up with stuff, he provides them with a scenario, and, like a starting point, and just lets them improvise. And he just says 'Dave, just do what you're doing' and I just end up improvising as well, and just sort of seeing what... I do a lot of work with dance anyway, so I'm quite, I'm quite used to sort of responding to whatever's happening, and that's what I tend to do. So he basically just says that was good, or that was not so good, and it's just very much trial and error. But it does, it's quite time... but by doing that, it's very very much, um, it's very important that I'm there during the process, it's not something, I think quite traditionally for a lot of composers it's a matter of 'what do you want', you know, X number of minutes material, ok, um, you might get a whole lot of, you know, 30 second or minute samples of what they do, and then they go away and, and then the director says 'actually I'll need it like this, can you elaborate on this, or can you work on this, and I want 30 minutes of music that's like this'. I tend to just be there and then it's just a matter of trial and error, but it is, it is more time consuming but that's just the way I prefer to work as well. And this last show that you saw, was also the first time that I had actually recorded

for him. Generally in the past I've been a sort of performer, musician-performer, for the work, but I wasn't able to do that with some other commitments that I had, for the show, and the length of the show as well, being 3 months on the road, 2 ½ months on the road, I wasn't able to commit to that. So it meant that I was recording. I have actually done similar projects in the past, and it's always a lot more fraught when you've got a recording deadline as well, you know, he needs to be giving a CD to the technician to actually sort be able to know, you know, to be able to cue things up and things like that, it's a lot harder, it's just another sort of dimension. And unfortunately it's a lot harder for me, because I end up sort of having to be there during the process of creating it, and because there's never enough time in the creating time, it just comes to the eleventh hour when he's saying, 'well, I've got to start blocking the show, I've got to start sort of doing tech runs, can you do this, change this music or whatever' and I'm actually saying, starting to say 'well actually I need to have this set, musically, and I need to go away and record this', so it's... I've done this before with groups like ... Dance, and people like that I've worked with, and it's, it's always just a, it's diabolical, actually, if you have to get a CD out of it at the end of it. Does that answer some questions?

R: Yes, yes it does, absolutely.

D: um, and we look like we're going to be doing the same again next year, there's a show that he's doing down in Brighton, and we'll looking at the same sort of process, because I don't think I'll be committing to 6 months travelling, I've got other projects of my own, which I need to sort of be getting on with.

R: So I guess in a way, if you're having to produce this CD for them to be able to work with, just because you're not available to be there, I guess kind of it almost makes it *more* important for you to be there actually during the devising part?

D: Absolutely, just to, I mean, there are things that, the way that, you know, you're playing... the way that we work, I do the same actually with music now, I sort of stole the idea, and John Dawn, a New York-based, a New York saxophone player, he has this way of composing, where it's just a whole lot of little vignettes of ideas, and he basically just puts them on, each idea on a catalogue card, and puts the idea on a catalogue card and then at the end of it, and we do it the same with David, and it's just like, this idea, this idea, this idea, and then we all sort of stand against a wall with these all stuck to the wall and we just go, that worked, that didn't work, that worked, that didn't work, how did people feel about that, and he spends the night sort of thinking about it, ordering it, and he comes back the next day and says, ok, lets try this running order, playing this piece, you know,

this idea then into this idea, and then again it's me playing on my, you know, working over the minidisks things and sort of trying to get an idea about running order, and some, you know, and, for that, you know, changing things all the time, and that piece that you saw, you know, he was still changing, I saw it in the first, I think it was Northampton, the first place he played it, and then he traipsed it around and then I saw it at the Lyric as well, and it was a completely different piece, I mean it got a much much better piece, a much stronger piece, but it's, um, it does take that time, and that... The luxury of time is something that you don't really have in devised processes unfortunately. And it's not completely dictatorial like, you don't have a director who knows exactly what he wants and he's had time to think about it, it's just, you know, it's just, oh, this works, and then he hands it over to the actors and it's what they create, and then he sort of comes back and says, that's good, that's really, what you've actually, now what you've actually created is better and so I want you to change it even further, and it's, that sense of ownership's never really completely given over to the actors because it's always fine tuning and, I mean I went in and when it came back down to Hammersmith Lyric and he actually sort of gave me a whole sort of list of things he wanted to have edited in the music, and I ended up, knowing the material enough I actually ended up doing it at home, and he was quite clear with 'I need this changed, I need more time here, I need less time there, I need this changing a little bit', so... yeah, it's just [laughs] it's feeling as you go, but it works. But I know that some musicians just wouldn't handle it. They're just, it's just too much, it's too much 'look, can you just make your mind up, for goodness sake!' but that's the way it is.

R: So do you find it, I guess quite a different process for you, do you find it quite *helpful* to you to have that creative relationship with the *actors* as well as with the director?

D: I'm very much, I'm, you know, I'm, I am a composer, but at the same time I'm probably more so a performer, so that's, that really live, live relationship and that live, you know, responding to whatever's happening, I find, I respond to that a lot more, and I appreciate it a lot more as well, and I do, with dance as well, it's, I've just built up a sort of a, I suppose through experience, I've sort of built up a vocabulary and understanding of these art forms which I really, I like playing live, and it's always second best actually to record something, and so, and to be out of the room, but, so yes, I do like to actually have that sort of response. And it's, and David I know very much appreciates the fact that, you know, if, and if something happens, you know, no two performances are the same, so if something happens it's, I'm there to respond, maybe it's slightly later or, I mean you have to set things in concrete and you have to sort of identify sound cues quite definitely, but then maybe the, you know, where that's really useful, the water doesn't come out, or water gushes all of a sudden or something like that, I can respond to that and actually it doesn't

become a, it doesn't become something that's incongruous to the soundtrack, there's this like, you know, big splash of water, and I can respond to that by having, having some sort of echo of that, or response, I can create a sort of sonic wave that sort of responds to it, it suddenly becomes part of the performance, and it just becomes, that becomes the magic of the show. I think that's very much how we'd ... to work, anyway, and of course you can't do that if it's not live or I'm not there.

MICHAEL LEVINE, COMPLICITE

NATIONAL YOUTH THEATRE, LONDON 24 JANUARY 2007

REBECCA HICKIE: One thing that I picked up, before we sort of talk about your process, I was reading a couple of journal articles and the authors said that you prefer to use the term Production Designer rather than Scenographer, and in the course of the paper she was using the terms Scenography and Scenographer, and a lot of the books and things that I've found about your work have used the term Scenography and Scenographer, and I just wondered how you felt about the term Production Designer rather than Scenographer, and what that distinction is for you?

MICHAEL LEVINE: Um, well... actually I don't mind any more really, the two terms seem to be fine, scenographer's fine. Scenographer is, is a term more often associated with a film designer... um, and um, it's sort of somebody who has a sort of bigger picture, in a way. Scenographer is really something that is related to designing sets for the stage, but a production designer would, will sort of be in charge of many different categories. Um, but in fact the two are quite similar, it's really not that different. As I don't... as I sort of do less and less costumes, scenographer is probably more appropriate, um as production designer you sort of do sets and costumes. What I didn't really like was being a set designer and a costume designer... it just made more sense to be a costume designer. So it's not a complicated one really.

R: So do you find that you come across people using the term Scenographer, because I've found that within certain circles, particularly Central St Martins and Wimbledon School of Art, they're very big on using the term scenographer and using it in a specific way to denote a collaborative way of working, and yet at other times, when I've been at conferences and stuff, I'll come across people and they'll say 'What is Scenography? What is that word?', and there seems to be a real void between people who do use it and people who don't.

M: Um... yeah... Scenographer, scenography... Um, yeah, I mean it's funny, it's a term that I'm actually not *that* familiar with, scenographer/scenography. I mean I'm... it's um... set design is something that I come across more often, set design and costume design, it's more... Scenographer – it's very similar to production designer, it's just someone who is in charge of... someone who's occupied with how things look on stage, to a certain extent. I guess when you begin to analyse architect and architecture, um... it's – the architect is somebody who's in charge of the architecture of the building, so I guess that

relates to scenographer... I don't know if that's necessarily an answer for you – is that what you're looking for? I mean, do you... when you ask your question I'm not exactly sure...

R: Yeah, no, that's very helpful, thank you.

M: I mean, scenography is really the art of designing for the stage, for the scene. Um... yeah.

R: What really interested me about your work was, obviously you're here working on a new Complicite show, and a lot of your recent work has been for the opera, on the opera stage, which is obviously quite a different thing, and I just wondered how different that process is for you, working between opera, which almost you have a double layer of text, you have the libretto, actual text, but you also have music, and then coming in to working with Complicite where it's completely free, devised work.

M: Well it's completely different, it's a completely different experience. It takes... it doesn't take... the skills aren't necessarily different, but the process is completely different, just on a basic level. Opera you... as you say, you have a double narrative, you have the music and also the text, and so your world is very defined, to a certain extent, and so you can begin from that, because I think as an opera designer, and somebody... and when you work with a director you... your job is to, hopefully *reveal*, and place within context the opera, so that it has some relevance, or brings new light to the piece. But the piece exists as a whole, as a... it has an emotional centre already, and hopefully you will embellish upon that, of the existing qualities within the piece. And so you're, to a certain extent... that work can be done well in advance because the piece exists, there's an emotional centre. I mean the work that's done in the rehearsal room is of course a kind of... interpretive to a certain extent, in that each performer will bring something to a production, and as a designer I should bring something to the production and the director will bring his own point of view, but always at the centre of the piece exists this centre which is the opera, or in fact the play. If you're working on a play it's a little bit different because in fact what comes out of rehearsals is... is the tempo and the music of the piece comes out of rehearsals. But so, it's such a sort of strong undercurrent, the music in opera, that you can't ignore it. So in fact my design work can start much earlier, a year in advance, so it's very good for the technical side of things, so you can prepare so you're ready for the stage, and... so normally the way my process works is that I hand in a design a year in advance, or... six months to a year in advance of the production, and the work will be done *with* the director, and I will work on a series of models and ideas and eventually

develop a piece, hand it in, it's built, and there's a *certain* amount of tinkering you can do once you're in production, but, in fact, it's much more... it's much more of a machine, because you have huge costs involved in everything you do. You're stage time is very very valuable, you have maybe five or six days on stage, seven days on stage, and that... the costs are going to be higher when you start to work with an orchestra, and full crews of opera houses, so, so in fact a lot of what you do is planning for that final period, because you can't... you can't improvise once you get to the final period of the production, it's just – you don't have the time.

The work that is done with Complicite is at the complete opposite end of the spectrum, you start off with nothing, there might be a few themes and ideas on which the piece might be based, but in fact all of the work comes out of the improvisations that take place in the rehearsal room. So I can't begin my work until the piece has developed to a certain extent, and so I start with nothing, everyone starts from zero. So there is no emotional centre, there is no text, there's no music, there's no... there's nothing to start from. We... I develop the work, I develop alongside the actors, and also everyone else who's in the rehearsal room. They're very very different, the processes, they, the different processes. When you work on a process like this you have to be hyper aware of every – of the work that everyone else is doing, and so everyone is quite attentive to each other, because you're... it's bit like working in a , I would *imagine*, being in part of a jazz quartet or a jazz band, where everybody is listening to the different strains of music and trying to work off of each other, within that. And it becomes, it's very interesting work in that respect, because something will merge out of the darkness, and that will be a direction in which the group will follow, and... it's, I think it's a really fascinating process, because you, in fact, visually I'm dictated by the precarious nature of the process, and so what comes out of the process... what comes out of the rehearsal room is very surprising, and in turn I think the design is influenced by that, so it takes me into new directions, in which I would not normally travel. Is that...? Yeah. There's also... I mean, it's a much longer rehearsal period, you know, now in opera you're given maybe four weeks rehearsal period, here we have three months rehearsal, which you need, because you're actually writing the piece as you go along. You know the first month of rehearsal I really can't do anything, and so somewhere hopefully sometime in the middle of the second month I'll begin to kind of implement some of the design ideas on the model, ... implement's not the right word, um, I'll start to *make* some of the ideas on the model, but I'll also start to introduce design ideas into the rehearsal room, an example would be, on this project, I wanted to introduce a chalk board into the rehearsal. So I would make a chalk board, make it do certain things, we then see what it does in the rehearsal room and then I, it gets taken back to the workshop and reworked, and then *re-introduced* to the rehearsal room in it's new form, and then we... so we can continually kind of refine, also because there are other media

working on the production at the same time, sound and video and lighting, you can all react against, off each other.

R: So is that an essential part of the process, because you're writing the piece through *your* work as well as the performers work, is it important that you have that relationship with the other designers, with the light, with the sound, and with the performers as well?

M: mm, yeah. No no no, absolutely, because, you know, all, you know, in previous productions I've worked on with Complicite you begin to introduce something into the rehearsal room, but based on something that somebody else has been doing, or you just introduce something you think would be *interesting* to put into the room, that comes from the various themes that are being discussed. And as soon as, as soon as something is introduced into the room then the other designers will make use of it in some way, projecting on it, sound coming out of it, or, it sort of becomes an element which everybody begins to use. So it's a very *live* process. You know, when I work in the theatre with an existing text, you design something in advance again, and then you, and the actors work on the set that you've designed, so you have... you have, again, you don't have that ability to bring to the piece, visually, the kind of seamless-ness that might, that might occur when Complicite, when all of the elements we're working on talk to each other. You know the *intention* is that you don't know where the text began and the visual images, where the text and the visual images begin, everything overlaps, you have no idea what comes out of anything else, it's... and that's a kind of process that I enjoy, because I think it's lovely to be a part of... to introduce something into, visually into the rehearsal process, into the text, and that a piece would come of that. So yes, there's a kind of, there's this overlap which takes place, which is really, I think... for me essential, because theatre *is* a visual medium, it's also an aural/oral medium, so everything really has to work on the same level, I think, to, in order to tell a story.

R: So in a sense it's almost bringing elements like the physical environment and the light and the sound, it's almost sort of bringing them up to the same level as a pre-existing text in terms of that *impetus* that they put into the creative process?

M: Right. Well, it's *sort of*, in a way what you're doing, is what you talked about earlier in opera... you have an existing emotional centre, which is the music and the text, in this what you're doing is using all of the elements to make that: acting, text, visual imagery, the sound, all come together in order to make that music. So it's a kind of, you're creating a kind of score, but your notes are not just musical notes they're movement and visual

imagery and text and sound, in fact that's what makes your symphony, all of those different elements working concurrently. And if it works it's really, it can be fantastic.

R: I found this quotation from Dany Lyn, designer on the Lion King, who said that you taught, she says that 'Michael taught me you can throw out all the rules except one, which is to read the piece closely.' What would you say in terms of *this* sort of process, because if we take 'piece' to mean the text or libretto or the music, what do you do when that's not there? Where do you start?

M: You... you're keenly aware, I think, you're keenly aware of what's... you try to be as keenly aware of... there's quite a lot of text, there's quite a lot of writing and text to read, so you do as much research as you possibly can, and also you're keenly aware of what's taking place. They're... Simon is an incredible genius... I mean, there's no other way to describe the work, it's really, it works on so many levels, the process. And... and I think the text... the difference is that you're, you are... the reading process is in fact much more a question of observation, you have to be aware of what everybody's doing, and different, the different themes that come to the surface that feel more important, more important than other themes, for example you have to be able to *sort through* a little bit of the mess that's taking place. I'm not sure if I'm very good at that yet, but, you know, you kind of *try*, and everybody is in the same position, what's very comforting is that everybody is in the same position, nobody quite knows what they're doing, which is always quite reassuring.

R: So obviously with your opera work you seem to have, a lot of the commentators seem to suggest that you've been as collaborative as possible within the bounds of that medium. Obviously this is a completely different process and a completely different medium, so do you think that the fact that you have two very different process, is that a result of the fact that you are working in two very different mediums and the different scales that they work in, would you say that there's an interdependent relationship between the scale and medium that you're working with and the process that you have?

M: Err... yes! [laughs] Yes, no, it's true, you know when you work for, when you're working on, of course they're connected, the outcome and the process. When you're working on opera, because there are specific deadlines and specific technical requirements, you have to work in a certain way. This is, this being a different situation it's much more loose, the building process can take place over a period of time, the way the workshops are set up you're able to introduce things into the workshop and come back into rehearsal again, and they go back into rehearsal later on, so we'll be able to try a certain amount of it out, and then rework it. You know, the way an opera exists is that, you know, you do the

production, you work towards those final days of on-stage, your valuable days of on-stage rehearsals, and then it opens and there are six performances and it's over. Whereas this is a, will continue to grow, over a certain period of time, and we'll, might not find itself on the opening night, when we first perform this, we might find itself in it's second or third representation, so... you make your process to suit... I think to suit the... well I try to suit the situation. It's... er... yes.

R: One thing that I came across when I was just researching the work you've been doing recently was *Madam Butterfly*, and I thought it was very interesting that... I don't know if it was you personally who introduced the idea of the puppet for the small child, but I just wondered what impact that had on the process, because it almost suggested that you'd perhaps moved slightly towards that more collaborative devised process, in the fact that you had the three puppeteers on the stage and the fact that that would need to be something that was quite carefully created in conjunction with the puppet manipulators in performance, and I just wondered how that process worked?

M: No, that's a very good question, in fact, a very good question, very well observed. Because in fact when I was asked to work on *Madam Butterfly* I came over to London for a workshop and Anthony [Minghella, director] was already playing with this idea of... it wasn't my idea, he wanted to work with Blind Summit, who mad the puppet, because he felt that there was something about the vulnerability of a puppet which would be somehow more emotionally touching than working with an actor, a child actor, who's... you're never really able to get an actor who's two years old to work on stage. And so he wanted to have some representation of that that would still be quite moving, because in fact the child is at the centre of *Madam Butterfly*. Anyway, he was working with Blind Summit when I came over, and I went back and I had a very fast design process, to Toronto where my studio is, and I realised that Anthony hadn't fully formed his conception of the piece, and he was going to work in fact in a kind of similar way in that he wanted to continue to formulate his piece because of his relationship with theatre, I mean he works in film, so I think in Anthony's mind is that the rehearsal process, out the rehearsal process the piece would emerge, so what I tried to do was create a set that could accommodate that, so that he could create any space that he wanted to, and also at the same time I wanted to reflect the nature of the manipulators who were part of this idea that Anthony wanted to work with, from the beginning, that the manipulators were somehow a part of the process, a part of the – process is not the right word, process too much, part of the... the storytelling of the production, is that there was this evocation of Japanese tradition which wanted to be part of the kind of telling of the story, that somehow an American entering this world of ancient Japanese tradition which was, which surrounded the characters, wanted to be part

of the kind of visual nature of the production. So I tried to make something that was kind of nothing, in which new spaces could be developed, which is in fact what took place, so Anthony was able to in the rehearsal process make rooms and spaces, *and* also have a bare stage, *and* also have different, different qualities without having a design imposed. Yeah, so that's what... that's how, it came out of observation of the work that they were doing in London.

R: So that's quite... I'm not a big opera buff, I don't really go to the opera, but what I understand of opera, certainly in this country, is that it's usually a fairly static staging, and the main thrust of the performance is the music, is the singers coming on and singing the arias and the duets etc., and I guess to have that open space with things that can come on or go off and create new environments, using people and quite small scale objects, that almost seems to represent a sort of middle ground between the more traditional opera production and what you're doing here with Complicite, and almost trying to bring that openness and that fluidity onto the opera stage.

M: Well, it's, you know, its... you know in fact your objective is to try to do that, well my objective is to try to do that as much as possible, to try to bring a certain kind of liveliness to the performance, a fluidity, a kind of openness to the staging. And it's very difficult to do, because it's such a rigid form, technically, it's such a rigid form. Which is a bit of a shame, it's one of the sort of technical limitations I think of working in opera, is that you have to prepare so far in advance, I mean it would be lovely to have a much more open building period with opera, to be able to discover what comes out of rehearsals, but in fact it's very rare when that happens, it's just the nature of the machine, the machine is just complicated because with these opera companies working with huge repertoires of, you know, putting on five or six or seven new productions a year, and also reviving older productions, so your production has to be slotted within a larger picture, and so your technical, so it does really cut your, the way you work. I mean, ideally what you would do is, you'd go into a, your ideal situation is to go into rehearsal of the opera, and to get a sense of what your performers are going to give, and a kind of sense of the direction it goes in, and then you would leave it, go away, design it, then come back into rehearsal again, and use some of the elements, and then you would leave it again, and then you'd build everything, and then come back to rehearsals, and then you'd rehearse on the set, but that's never gonna happen. I mean it's, you know, I mean, you know some operas do do that, and they're beginning to think in that way, because you know the form can be really interesting, and very very exciting, but it's a very expensive process, to a certain extent. It doesn't have to be that expensive, but it just is, because the whole administrative machine is very... it's not necessarily, no, I shouldn't say the administrative

machine, it just is, you know, it's expensive getting all these people together, in a rehearsal room, which is expensive, and... but that's, yeah. That would be nice, it would be thrilling to introduce this sort of process that takes place with Complicite into the world of opera. But it's different, in a way, because you, again, you have that text and music, so you don't really... the level of exploration is not as complicated. It's a different level of exploration.

R: Did you find that having that having the dual strand of working in this devised way with Complicite alongside working on the opera, did you find that impacted on the way you worked on, you directed on of the four of the Ring Cycle, I can't remember which one it was...

M: No, you're good, you've done your research. Rheingold.

R: Rheingold. Did you find that you approached it from quite a visual...

M: Mm, yeah, completely. And also I was very affected by being a part of the work that Complicite does, and how they approach rehearsal. And...yes. I mean, you know it's the funniest thing, you know, I went, it's the first time I, it's my directing debut, and I... was *incredibly* well prepared, I spent, you know, most of the last year preparing for the first day of rehearsals, and I went into the first day of rehearsals sort of slightly terrified, and as soon as it all started I had to kind of throw away all my preparation because here were these live beings in the room which were doing all the wrong things, weren't doing anything that I thought they were supposed to do, and weren't listening to me, so I threw all that away. I mean we kept a certain kind of level of a sort of overall sense of the direction of the piece, but just decided I'd have a really lovely time exploring the piece with the singers, and that was, for me, a kind of revelation, was that... and what was very interesting, which I didn't really kind of become aware of... but what I was hyper aware of, being a director, was that the atmosphere in the rehearsal room is *incredibly* fragile, and all it takes is a little kind of change of atmosphere, and you can kind of ruin your, you can destroy your three-hour period that you had with a singer. And it really is, it's a very kind of fragile environment, and you can make something happen in a rehearsal room, if you create the right sort of comfort, and sense of security, I think. So everyone is, feels comfortable to explore. It's very difficult to do that, because when people feel like they're performing when they're *with* other people, it's just, it's very difficult to let your guard down, and that to me was a *huge* revelation, about the whole process, I mean I was very proud of the work that we did, but the biggest thing for me was not necessarily the sense of trust, but just about the fragility, the fragile nature of that exchange that takes place

between everyone in the room, which can break down, and then people start talking, and uh, and then the whole process breaks down, and you have to have this level of concentration which is very difficult to maintain, even for three hours. We're very funny, as kind of I think Westerners, we're really, we're bored in 2 seconds, and all of a sudden the sort of whole thing breaks down, and you have to keep on kind of... and that was very interesting for me, I think that was really fascinating. And of course I was, you know I'm very interested in the way things work, so that was part of the process I think of putting *Rheingold* on, I feel like, as a designer, you want to, of course I'm interested in the visual, and opera is very visual, and, but I'm also interested in the storytelling too.

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[on way out, discussing term Scenography/Scenographer] **M:** I always feel more like a collaborator on these projects – who just happens to be in charge of the visual elements

RICHARD LOWDON, FORCED ENTERTAINMENT
THE SHOWROOM, SHEFFIELD 01 FEBRUARY 2007

REBECCA HICKIE: My first question I had, just to sort of set the scene a little bit really, is – you're listed as 'designer' on your website and in the credits and stuff, but you also seem to do quite a lot of performing with the company, so did one come before the other, did you start as designer and then start performing, or...

RICHARD LOWDON: No. I mean, we, you probably know a huge amount about our background, but I mean, we, most of us studied at Exeter, doing English and Drama, and when we formed the company, I mean I think, maybe the thing about that course is that it encouraged you to think about yourselves as theatre makers, rather than as actors, or directors, or whatever, actually, you were just people who made theatre. And in that sense when we started making work we, the course we came out of was very sort of minimalist, sort of 60s kind of three white cubes can be a bus kind of school of performing, d'you know what I mean? I think for us when we were students we saw Impact, I don't know if you've heard of them, they were working with kind of very visual, kind of cinematic sets, and we sort of went 'Oh great, theatre could be like this', and we really wanted to make shows that were like them initially. And I suppose the visual side of things was, I mean, you know, it started off collaboratively like everything else, and then as things went on it sort of ended up that I started taking responsibility for that aspect of it. So it was almost more by accident in a way, umm, and I knew a bit about how to build things. I mean it's really pathetic, it's really not a training at all, umm, and that, I suppose I've always had a bit of a visual bent, but I mean not like had any formal training in that whatsoever, so it was kind of quite an *accidental* process, and then very early on, Huw, who used to be part of the company, who was much more of an artist than I was, and Huw and I would design things together, and then Huw left and I sort of got a bit left with it, and that was ok, and um, yeah, so that's how it sort of ended up being me. I mean, I think in a way, from those very early days of making work, I think we, and I think this is to some extent true today, that because of the way in which we worked was quite often, at that time, when we first started, was we would build something to basically play around in, to muck about in, and part of that mocking-up things in the rehearsal space was in some ways building an environment that you could feel like you could play in, it gave you opportunities, like this area feels private, this area feels public, umm, and in just kind of spatially different feels, and I think in that sense often one was kind of designing as much from the inside out, because you're thinking a lot about 'if I create a space like this what does it make me feel I want to do?', and so I suppose in that sense they're quite closely bound to each other.

And that's almost like how you might approach making a site-specific piece, where you look at the space and you go: "Ok, what *could* happen here, what are the nice properties that this space has?" So there's a sense in which the early work was creating environments, and then reacting to them, as much as we might react to costume or music or various small ideas about action or pieces of text or whatever. So I think those things have always been sort of very linked, in a way. And the process that we have now is really pretty much the same as we've always had, which is to assemble a bunch of things in the room that we're interested in, and then sort of start working from those and playing, and adding things, and taking things away. So in a sense the design often looks after itself, I mean it doesn't arrive as a package before the process starts, but kind of sort of slowly it creeps, like everything else.

RH: So, does your design process, or *the* design process, start on that day one of rehearsals, would you start it before? I mean in a lot of more "conventional" theatre you'd have director/designer discussions before that process started, do you have that, or is it literally we come into the rehearsal room and talk about what we want to do?

RL: I mean I suppose because we're an ensemble company who've been together a long time, um, you know, we continue to have discussions about what the next piece is while we're touring the last one, so, I don't know, like at the minute we're talking about a new show, um, and we're searching around for stuff that we're interested in, and just recently I was talking about big mascot costumes, like you know you get a football grounds, those kind of ridiculous big, furry things, and you sort of think 'oh, they're kind of interesting', so in a way, I mean that's something that you might have thought of before you sit down and have the meeting, but in a way it's no more complete than anything else. I think there's a sort of, I don't know whether it's a *rule*, really, or it's just the way we have of being with each other, is that I don't think any of us, we talk about never bringing anything *complete* to the table. Like in a way, like when we sit down to initially talk about a new show and say ok, well where are we going to go next, we'll talk a lot about the past work that we've made, what we feel like the direction of what we want to pick up on, what we definitely don't want to do again. And also like, you know, little inklings of things, like I dunno, these big costume things, they may be interesting, or maybe this piece has got a lot of projection in it, or, I mean in a way sort of feeling towards what all of us feel that we want to pursue. So in that sense nothing concrete arrives. I mean what happens later in the process is you know, you've got a whole bunch of stuff and then you start saying well, actually how do we make this look any *good* in the theatre, and at that stage you're probably more concerned with the kind of pictorial framing of it, and that sort of comes later in the process in a funny kind of way, but because you're always starting with sort of what are the objects you want

to play with, because those are the things that actually *give* you something, then those are the things that you're sort of interested in pursuing. It's kind of *toys*, in a way. It's like at the minute I keep thinking about a revolve, a hand-cranked revolve. I dunno, talked about that for years, you see, and it's sort of like, you sort of figure at some point we will make a show that has that in it, but whether it's this one or not, and whether, and what might we like about it, and what games does it give you to play. I suppose we're not interested in having anything there just for the, just for the beauty of it, somehow, I suppose that's maybe the thing.

RH: I suppose what I find interesting about your personal process is this duality between performer and designer, so do you think that when you're working in this way, sort of when you start the process of improvisations and the talking in the rehearsal room and stuff, do you think it's quite important that, not necessarily you specifically, although it is, but that there is a person there with sort of that 'designer' hat on, sort of looking at what you're doing from that visual perspective?

RL: Umm, I think it's probably important that somebody's there to take care of that, in the same way that I suppose Tim is there to be an eye to see things, you know, in situations where you can't really know. I mean you feel positively about some things you've done in an improvisation but to have somebody to say: "actually, *that* thing is really interesting in this ten minutes, maybe we should pursue that" and... You know, I think sometimes Tim would describe his job as being like a chair person, like he has to summarise where we've got to and where we think we might go, like after a day of rehearsing, and then together we sort of make, you know, we argue with each other and say 'oh, maybe we should push down this line, or this line, this line'. And I think in some ways it's similar with the set, I mean, Tim and I talk quite a bit outside of those meetings as well, about just pushing things around, I mean did you see *The World in Pictures*?

RH: I didn't, I had a ticket, and then we horrible fog, and I just thought 'I can't drive to Warwick'.

RL: Right, yeah, yeah. Did you see *Bloody Mess*, or...

RH: Yes.

RL: Yeah. So, I mean like, in *Bloody Mess* it was kind of just really a collection of things that we had, and in a way it sort of very much looked after itself. I mean, that was kind of pretty easy. With *The World in Pictures*, the whole show really took the sort of dramaturgy

of an empty stage and then things being brought on, and in that I suppose you start thinking about what *kind* of things are we bringing on, like is it just theatrical crap, it's like watching the van being unloaded, d'you know what I mean, so you obviously there's theatre flats being carried in, there's this vague sense that it's illustrating the history of the world and, so nice anachronisms of the cavemen with the TV, and, you know, heaters for the space, and then these plasterers lights that have these fantastic sort of vertical lines to them, d'you know what I mean, those fluoros... And so I suppose in that sense you're making decisions about *shapes* of things, and in... yeah, in that way you're going out and just *shopping*, to be honest. Like going round second hand shops and going 'oh, a sofa would be nice in it, this one would be better than that one', and 'these shapes are nice' and 'standard lamps, we want more things that occupy space vertically'. You know, I think it's sort of important that someone's got their eye out for looking after all of that, um. Cause I think you'd be a bit *stuck* without it, actually. But... yeah, yeah I guess so. But I think it's, I think what's maybe important for us is that, um, which would maybe put us off sort of working with "a designer", is the idea that this thing would come *from_outside*, that wasn't valuable or couldn't change as the work changed, you know what I mean. I think that's, that's actually *more* important to us, is the idea you wouldn't want to be *landed* with something that you discovered after five days of working with it you just didn't want to use it. I went to see a piece recently by Meg Stewart who's a choreographer in Berlin, and for the set it had this *huge* revolving room, which was basically tipped right the way round. I mean, it is gigantic, it's like about, I dunno, 6 metres high? By at least 6 metres wide. And it's sort of this *monstrosity* that sits there throughout the whole performance, and you're waiting for it to spin. That's all you're waiting for, through the whole the performance, and I was talking to them afterwards, and they only got that ten days before they opened the show, so they'd actually made most of the choreography of the piece before the thing arrived, and if that had been us, somebody, we would have put that into the space and we'd have just gone 'no, can't use it now, it's too late'. I find that really incomprehensible, the fact that things aren't integrated, or aren't organic, I think that's really quite strange. Though I have, you know, I mean I have done work with other people where I've designed sets for people before their process begins, but then if they're happy for that to happen, I'm sort of ok with it. [laughs]

RH: That's quite interesting, because I went to the *Rewiring/Rewriting Theatre* discussion event at the Riverside Studios, and they were talking sort of about this writing process, you know, Tim was talking about the fact that text gets made in the rehearsal room alongside everything else, and that quite often it's text being juxtaposed against things happening, or visual things, that's interesting, and I guess I was interested in whether *you*

would describe your design process as a writing process, is it part of the writing of the piece?

RL: I guess in some ways it is, I mean we used to tell this story, about a show that we made called *The Club of No Regrets*, which had this little, like a tiny little box set, and got very interested in black and white movies, and those little sets where everything's sort of very flat and there are loads of people coming in through the window or, there's a fantastic shot from a Buster Keaton movie of a whole load of cops pointing guns through a window, and liking that very much, and we were working with this little box set, and then one day I just took a jigsaw to it and cut out a whole load of windows and doors in it, and actually then the objects started to really become something that in a way bred the piece. So in that sense I suppose those things become... yeah, they are like writing the piece in some ways because they become something that you interact with. I mean, I think at the minute we're going through a phase where we're really drawn to quite big, empty spaces. And I think that's for a number of really quite complicated reasons, that... I think it's partially because we're more interested in the theatrical here-and-now-ness, and in a way when you're in a big theatre you know exactly where you are, and you can't deny it's frame, and in a way you want to relate to that as a site in which you're performing, and so in a way the sets for the bigger stages curiously actually feel *more* ephemeral than the things that we made, which were bulkier, for the smaller spaces because we wanted to sort of dominate and fill them, and create a complete world in them, whereas actually, when you've got a lot of room to breathe, it's almost like you want to take everything away, I think we're slightly on this kick at the minute of wanting to strip things back, to reveal, and always been interested in revealing the process of things, but even more so within the sort of theatrical machinery of the building.

RH: That's quite interesting, because one of the things I've noted down here is that, I came across an interview, I think it was from about 1998, with somebody talking to Robin, Claire and Cathy, and one of the things they said was that several years before that interview you'd reached the collective realisation that you didn't *want* to be working in the bigger theatres, sort of playing to 600 people, and that you preferred the small scale intimacy, so if you're sort of moving away from that towards these slightly larger spaces, do you think that there's an interrelationship there between the fact that in the smaller spaces you had much more of a set in there, and as you're working in the bigger you're sort of clearing it out, is there some relationship between the space and what you do in it, in terms of scale?

RL: Yeah, I think so, I think it's a really interesting question, and I'm not sure that we've really articulated that. But I think in a way it's... like in a small space you can feel me in front of you breathing and speaking and, you can feel somebody's presence in a really simple way, and in the larger spaces you have to work harder, in a way. But curiously I think the way in which you work harder is actually to be a little bit more frail, and a little bit more human scale, and in a way, almost fight against the space that you're in, or it's about pulling people *towards* you, rather than sort of coming at them. I'm not quite sure if that's very clear. But I... I think there's something about, yes, revealing the kind of intimacy that you can actually have in a larger space, and I think maybe we're less scared of them now, I think we were just, kind of, you know, to be honest, a bit scared by the scale of things, and you'd start to discover that actually you can do some quite delicate little things in larger spaces, and that... I mean, no... and I think it's as the work has changed, in a way, because we used to make a whole load of work that was very fictional, almost very genre based, throughout the early nineties, probably up until the point of that interview, that looked to present you with a world that was trying to slightly suck you into it, and I think now we're sort of more interested in what it means to be stood here in front of you, and what does a big crowd of people mean, like to play to, I don't know, 300, 400 people, what does that really mean, and what does it mean for you to be in the audience, and what does it mean for us to be up here, if we're on a stage, or in this frame, like what are all those things about, and in some ways I think the move to working in larger spaces has been as much to do with trying to articulate what that contract is between an audience and a performer, and what are the expectations around all of that, and what are the things that you shouldn't do within it, I mean cause of course that's always a tremendous, a tremendous pull, like, you know, perceived wisdom is that if you're going to move up to the middle scale you'd better have a big fuck-off set and look like you really mean business. But in actual fact the desire to take things away and make things in a way *less*, or even more provisional, is quite strong. Possibly cause it's just a tug in the wrong direction, I think we're always, we're slightly drawn towards things that pull you the wrong way.

RH: Going back to what you said a little while ago, in the same interview I think it was Cathy said something about she didn't think it would ever get to the stage where you would just sit down and design a set and just give it to someone to build, and that you wouldn't want to sort lose that control over the materials and being able to work with the performance as it grows. But would it actually be *possible* to do that, given that, it says something in your artistic policy, I think, about the fact that the company is very much based around collective practice and equal involvement in the creative process, so is it conceivable that within your companies process you could even entertain that possibility

of sort of saying 'Right, I've designed the set, here it is, you build it', and that sort of being the end of story. Would that in *any* way work with your process?

RL: I think it's highly unlike to. I mean, we really got our fingers burnt early on, I think, in the days when we did design sets and play in them afterwards, and we built this huge house, which we worked with, and we couldn't make *anything* happen in this house at all, and we ended up loathing the thing, and cancelling the show, because we just couldn't get it to do anything; it was a nice object, but it was like an impossible thing to play in. And in a way after that, I think, we got to be a bit more careful about letting things grow alongside the process. So I think it's still hard to imagine that. I mean it's a little bit like this conversation that we were having two days ago about me again banging on about revolve and saying that, you know, that could be really good fun, and, you know, thinking of the games that it gives you, and, you know, like you build three little sets on it. I mean the thing you instantly want to do is not use it naturalistically but just turn the thing like this and having people running through all the rooms, so, you know. And it's sort of, as a vernacular it accesses plays as a thing, I mean that's what it seems to be talking about in terms of its theatricality. And that's all quite good fun, but all of us have this thing where we go 'yeah, but I mean, would you wanna *build* it, like first' cause like we're all slightly fearful that you'd build it, you'd put it in the space and then you'd go 'mm, yeah, it does all the things that we think it does, like we like it when it goes round quickly, but actually, the rest of the time we don't really like it very much'. D'you know what I mean? So in a way we're quite good at second-guessing our own doubts about things. Now some people could say that just pulls you back from doing anything, but, I think actually that's sort of important, I mean there's a stage of mocking up things, where you think, ok, if we can mock this up in a day, then we'll do that, or maybe we'll buy two mascot costumes, to have kicking about for the start of rehearsals. Like, in a way, assemble a bunch of things you think you *might* use, but don't go for the finished article until you're sure that that's where you really want to go, I think that's the important thing. I mean, for the last show we did buy a bouncy castle, we had a bouncy castle *made*, which we ended up not using in the piece at all, and what we did use in the piece eventually was the blower that was attached to the bouncy castle. So that's kind of like about how stupid the process can be, like we have this enormous bouncy castle and it really looks like a castle, like, as you would draw a bouncy castle, they don't really look like that any more, cause now they're all like jungle scenes or whatever, so we actually had to get one made, so we have this enormous 'thing' that as yet hasn't found a home. But I'm sure it will show up somewhere in a piece of work. But it's odd, like, say with the bouncy castle, cause the delicious thing about the bouncy castle is watching it inflate, really great fun. Actually the only good thing about watching people on it is to watch them bounce. And then the great thing is when the

plug is pulled and somebody's inside it and just goes... [gestures] like this, and that's tremendously pleasurable, but that's a toy that you really can't use for very long, you know what I mean, that's 20 minutes of action maybe, and, you know... That's sort of interesting, I think, the story of *why* we didn't use that, and it's partially because it's about, like, ok, well if that's 20 minutes, what are you going to do, are you going to drag that off and bring on something else, and if so what goes in the same language of that, and what show is it that has bits of set that are brought on for only 20 minutes, like the idea that you don't *live* with something, and I think for us we're often interested in the fact that the space gets transformed in some way, like in *Bloody Mess* all the tinsel gets shredded and is left all over the floor, so the floor becomes this kind of picture, or, in *Bloody Mess* the smoke is the set, so it's like you're left with these *traces*, of the action that's gone before, but actually it never looks like it's been done by design, in a way, and I think we're quite *distrustful* of those things that state their designed-ness at you. D'you know what I mean?

RH: You mentioned about these big mascot costumes. Is costume, is it something that you would perhaps sort of collect a bunch of stuff with these 'things' that you start with at the beginning, is costume something that you would have in that, or is costume something that you think about through the process and sort of think 'ooh, it would be good if you were wearing x,y or z'?

RL: No, that often comes very early. Um, I mean... I think we're always searching around, in a way, to sort of say who are these people on the stage, and often we tend to cast ourselves as kinds of performers on the stage, like, we don't build another fictional world, these people are definitely in the theatre in front of you, so what kind of performers are they, what show do they think they've come to do? These other people, not us, who, that we can *blame* the show on, and so in *First Night*, which is the show which is all sort of very vaudeville, with, you know, guys in suits and women in spangly dresses, and everybody smiles all the time, and they wear *very* thick make-up. And, I mean that whole piece is sort of, it's just really built around that look, and the idea that these are a bunch of performers who are meant to entertain you for the evening, they've clearly turned up with only their smiles and no idea of what they're going to do and you watch them flounder and become more and more uncomfortable during the show. And that was sort of, that was a very useful look to have found early on in that process, *that*, in a way, gave us the show, like we had to do a photo shoot way before we'd made the show, and we just had this idea about this very thick make-up, and then Claire, I think, went out and bought some dresses, and these really awful platform sort of, kind of stripper shoes, and in a way the sort of look just evolved as the thing, you sort of go 'oh yeah, that's great, and perfect, and hideous', and yeah, absolutely ..., you know. So I think, you know, costumes are

tremendously important, and that's not something that I particularly take responsibility for more than anybody else, I mean, that's something that... we once started a, there was a show we made called *Pleasure*, and the starting point for that was, is really a good example of how shows can begin, which was Terry had seen three wedding dresses in a charity shop window, and thought 'oh, three women could wear them', and then had found this record which looked like it was a party record, with like loads of people in 70s gear with pint pots, we played it and it was absolutely awful, and then we turned the speed down to 60rpm, and it was great, and it gave you this drunken, underwater feel, and we'd had a whole bunch of tarpaulins that had come off lorries for some project, I can't even remember what we'd used them for, and I put those up as a set of curtains, and that was all we had, we had the record, the curtains and the wedding dresses. Oh, and this, um, pantomime horse costume, that we'd used in another project for kids, and in a way the show really was born out of just those things lying in the space, and this opening and closing of the curtain, I mean, which is just all about like, you feel like the opening and closing of the curtain should be 'Ta da!', and in a way it was always about like the curtain's opened and nothing's happening, or the two parts of the pantomime horse are snogging each other in the background, it's like, or, you know, the three women are dancing with the wedding dresses in a rather lack-lustre way, like it should be sort of erotic or something but it isn't, and they don't care, and... I mean, all of those things sort of come out of the mixture of the things you assemble in the room, I think, and I think for us we're quite interested in not knowing sometimes where those things will take you. Like, just put the things in the room and then see. And oftentimes they don't lead you anywhere, like oftentimes you play with things and go 'that's kind of nice', like, one person dressed like that could be fun in a show, but, like, it's not a big coup, sometimes things can come together and feel like actually all these things rub up against each other in a really useful way. And I think that's something that we're not able to predict, in quite a good way I think, cause it sort of takes us to places that can maybe surprise you more, I suppose.

RH: So, I guess that sound is equally important, you know sort of having records and things to put on... I guess to me describing what you do as a "designer" it's kind of misleading in a way; for me, I think I'd describe what you do more in terms of collating images? and just sort of drawing the visual imagery together and jigsawing it, and seeing where things work. Would you say 'collating' is a word that you would...

RL: Yeah, I think that's probably right, I mean I think, yeah, it's collation, and I think it's... early in the process you can propose a number of different things to put in the space, and that can have a huge impact if we all agree that that will be a fun thing to play with. But yes, I think the job is of collating. Collating material and in a way looking at what we have

and then trying to figure out... I mean just taking care ultimately for how it works visually, I think that's the thing. And that's as much about, you know in the latter stages, how we work with Nigel who does all the lighting design for us, and sort of, yeah, like having him come in and try out things as well, while we're working, so in a way you're building, you're building a series of pictures, and you start saying 'ok, well this is very nice', or 'oh it's gorgeous in *The World in Pictures* when after an hour and 45 minutes the stage has been filled with all this stuff, all this junk that sort of theatrically should be put together to make a really beautiful set, but it's all been sort of heaped up and arranged in the wrong way, but somehow it's still all beautiful and then in the last four minutes everything is cleared from the stage and the stage is swept of all this fake snow that's been falling, and you're left back where you start'. And in a way that's like a picture dramaturgy of the piece, d'you know what I mean, like, and so it... I don't know whether that's specifically within, I'm not even sure you'd specifically call that design, but that's about understanding the fact that you're also making pictures when you're making the thing. And that I suppose, I find it impossible to talk about one strand without talking about the others, because all those things are always interrelated. Like when you're a performer on the stage where you choose to *be*... I once did this exercise with a group of performers where I made them all go out the door during the workshop, and I asked them to come in and their only instruction was they had to be invisible, and that was really interesting to watch how they tried to be invisible. 'Cause then you don't occupy space in the same way, you... Like, actually, to come and stand at the front in the middle and just be completely still and nonchalant is also a way of being invisible, as it is both to hide behind the pile of chairs at the back. It's kind of, it's really curious because then you're thinking about how am I perceived, or how am I, how is my presence being read. And how does that working in terms of placement, within the 3-dimensional space. And that's not about being *directed* to do those things, it's about consciously thinking about those things, and I suppose in that sense whenever part of the visual making process of a piece is, you might say, bringing things onto the stage, or the performers on stage having a task where they're rearranging objects, then they are always involved effectively in designing the show. And in a way you have to have a certain kind of mind-set or an understanding of that picture-making process, from inside and also from outside. And so in that sense I need to go back to your first question, it's a little bit like the, being a performer and a designer, those things are very closely related, they're just coming at the problem from two opposite angles. And... ultimately you make some pictorial decisions, like 'it's nicer actually if it works like this' or 'the day we did this, this was a lovely arrangement of the stuff'. It's like in *The World in Pictures* all these flats are brought on, and you see the backs of them first, and for quite a long time I was thinking, oh ok, at some point later they all get turned round, they really make something, and we were thinking, oh, they probably just make a long wall, and it

used that dreadful 70s wallpaper, that's like photographs, and did a forest, like an autumnal forest, very orange and... and we tried putting them as one block and we didn't like it. But actually the lovely thing was to see like three of them turned round, and this intimation that there *should* have been a forest scene, but it never gets completed. And I suppose choosing what goes on those flats is a design... you know, we could have chosen something else, it could have been a beach, or a... it could... d'you know what I mean? But you make those decisions in relationship to what other elements you have, I suppose in that sense you're making some design decisions, pictorial decisions.

RH: So do you find there's quite an overlap there between your role as designer and Tim's role, because if you're designing from the inside out, as it were, by being a performer on the stage, is Tim then in some sense providing that outside eye of what it actually looks like from the outside in, as it were?

RL: Yeah, yeah yeah... no, I mean, for sure. I mean, I mean I think as a company we're, you know, we're really not actors and a director and a designer, in that sense. We're all making the thing, so whenever you do something you are of course also thinking about how it looks and how it works, as much as Tim is and Tim might have a sense from the outside that this is very nice, but then he'll get up on stage and say, you know, or like, see an opportunity for somebody to do something and say: "can you just talk about such-and-such for a bit, and can everyone else just go", and in a way that's also about, you know, somebody crossing the line and making those decisions, as well, so in a way there's this oscillation between the two points.

RH: I think that just about covers all the questions I'd noted down, I don't know if there's anything else you would like to say about your process, or the company, or your work?

RL: Um... Have you got a copy of *Not Even a Game Any More*?

RH: Yes.

RL: There's a nice essay in that about what it is to be a performer in *Forced Entertainment*, and that's kind of worth reading, 'cause I think it's just very good about actually all the things one thinks about all the time, like structuring, design, like, in a way... and that's very much related to the shows, these durational pieces, where you're making live decisions, but actually that also talks in a way about our process in terms of making a show that has a really finite length and structure and shape. And in a way that's the same kind of process that we go through, or the same kind of *thinking*. And I think in a way it's

as much about a kind of approach as anything else. And I mean I think there are certain things that we're drawn to, like the kinds of objects on stage, and I think we're very much drawn towards theatrical vocabulary, and I would say that the process of making shows has leaned towards using things like *curtains*. I mean, like, *allowing* a curtain to be on stage. Like, when we first started making work we wouldn't let anybody speak once they'd come on, 'cause we thought it was way too theatrical, and we put all the speaking on voiceover like it were a film, and in a way wouldn't have anything on the stage that was theatrically made, but only things that were from the real world. And in way slowly, I think, we've come to engage with, like turned round, as performers we've come to face the audience. Also you start engaging with the kind of theatrical machinery like, in really simple ways, like curtains, like, um, wings. Like, you can go off. We made shows where nobody ever left the stage, and now you think, oh, you can go off, what's good about going off, you can come back different. I mean it's really almost pathetic reinvention of the wheel. But I think in a way our broader process has been to strip away in a way theatrical language to start with, and then slowly put those blocks back in place when we understand what it is we want to do with them, rather than accepting them as a given. And maybe it also means we're slightly resistant of anything that looks like an image. You know, a criticism for us would be to say of something that, you know, you're creating an '*im-age*', you know, I mean like, it's really like, 'oh yes, we all know this is beautiful, and I know I'm not to respond to this as something beautiful', and in a way being distrustful of those things. And distrustful of design. We're just distrustful, of all sorts of things. We're, or like, if you're going to use things you have to know why you've got them, and actually that the effects you're producing are not singular but plural, I think that's kind of a must. I don't know if there's anything else to say really.

TIM MCMULLAN, COMPLICITE

NATIONAL THEATRE, LONDON 18 NOVEMBER 2006

REBECCA HICKIE: I'm quite interested in *your* perspective on Simon [McBurney]'s process, and what it's like to work on a Complicite production.

TIM MCMULLAN: Well, um, if I talk specifically about *Mnemonic*, then you can sort of extrapolate from that. I think all of Simon's shows, really, they have quite a long genesis before... as you can imagine, its not just a case of taking a play and saying 'oh, I want to do that', because there are very complex, or often very complex ideas, that are driving the need or the desire to do the show, and in this case it was that Simon was interested in doing a show about memory, and I believe that that was sort of two-fold. One was the sort of bio-physics or bio-chemics of how the brain actually works, and the other one was to do with, sort of, I don't know if folk memory is the right word, but collective memory, you know, what... because, we as individuals, we, our identity, and our consciousness, is defined by our memory. You know, we are, if you like, a sort of composite of our particular memories. And, um... and in modern society that's kind of interesting because our identities are very, are no the same as they probably were a hundred years ago, where your identity would probably have been very connected to the particular place that you lived and that you probably never moved away from. We're now a population in permanent flux, no-one lives in the same place for, you know, their whole lives, it's very seldom that you get people who grow up and live and die in the same locality, and people's parents often come from different places. So in a sense that's a kind of rupture from the past, um, a very very profound rupture from the past. So I think that was something that interested him a lot. And it was also, there were also other things to do with immigration, which are, you know, bound up with those ideas as well, and that John Berger had written quite a lot about, and Simon's close to John and they work together quite a lot. And so, I think that was the starting point. And, um, I mean I would ask you to sort of be sort of slightly delicate with these things because I don't want to put, I can't *really* speak for Simon, but I was, I did talk to him a lot about it, from the very beginning, so I think I know a certain amount about what he thought. And, um, but obviously, you know, it's difficult to think about how you make a show about memory. You can start with the, the bio-physics, or the bio-chemistry rather, of memory, and also you can ask people about their own lives and their own memories, what their first memory's were, and what... which is indeed something that we ask the audience to do in the play, you know in the section where they have to put a mask on and feel a leaf, and then imagine going back to their first memories, but then also to go back before their first memories, and try and imagine their parents

before them, and their grandparents. And that was a very moving experience for a lot of people, and a very *disarming* experience for a lot of people watching. Disturbing too, for some people. So, that is, sort of, although it was quite arduous to try and find a way of doing that dramatically, that sort of more or less straightforward, the other thing is to try and find *stories*, to tell, that would make a piece of theatre. And we started off, there was show, the Battersea Arts Centre ran a season of shows in the dark, where the artistic director of the Battersea Arts Centre asked various people to do either a series of shows or a one off show at the Battersea Arts Centre where the audience wouldn't be able to see anything, and the action would take place around them. And we flung together, I think in a week, just some fragmentary stories, and one of the stories was the story of the discovery of this man in the ice. Because if you're talking about memory and ancestry he goes back, whatever it was, five thousand years or something, and there was something very moving and touching about that, the discovery of that human body, and the human body is something that everybody can relate to, you know when you see the body of a, you know, a dead body or body of another person there's some part of you that identifies that with yourself. And so I think a lot of people felt a kind of strange... I don't know if kinship is the right word, but connection with this man and his lonely death in the Alps. So... and there were various other stories we told at the same time, um, can't actually off the top of my head remember what all of them were, one of them had to do with Sarajevo, and the civil war there, which was still very fresh at that point. And... there were couple of other things we looked at. And we told these stories together, so you'd tell a little bit of one story, and a little bit of the other story, and gradually a sort of jigsaw would start to emerge, and at some point all of the stories merged into one big picture even though they were completely different stories, and there was a kind of synthesis. And so, that was the main achievement of that exercise, and worked really really well. And then there was a number of workshops, I can't remember how many, where we looked at different stories, *Lilac and Black fl... Black Lamb and Lilac Flowers...* or something like that, a book about the collapse of the Ottoman Empire by Rebecca West, was another book we were looking at. And, um... anyway, we eventually got a cast together, and we started, I think we had eight weeks, or ten weeks of rehearsals, and we really didn't know what the stories were going to be, you know, so it was genuinely a devised and collaborative thing at that point. And one of the things that we started looking at was Chaos Theory, um, and as far as I remember there is an element of Chaos Theory, which is expounded by someone called Mandelbrot, which is that in Chaotic systems, if you look at them closely enough, a kind of pattern emerges, and it's something called fractal geometry, so if you look at the pattern on a leaf, for example, if you look closely at the leaf from a distance, and then more closely still and then more closely still and then more closely still, the pattern of the leaf repeats itself in smaller and smaller and smaller dimensions. And the same is true of the

veins in the body, or the structure of the lungs. And all sorts of patterns, and there are books where you get these microscopic patterns, which are really quite beautiful, of things, and the closer you look at something the more complex it becomes, so um a good example is if you look at something from outer space, and you see a delta, for example, you can see that pattern, and then as you get closer it goes into smaller and smaller and dimension, so if you look at the structure of all the springs that make up, that start to feed the rivers that go into the bigger rivers that feed the delta, the little springs, they have the same structure as the delta looks like from outer space, you see what I mean. And there seemed to be something in that that was to do with the pattern of lives and behaviours, memory, identity and things, that there... that however, chaotic things seem to be, the more you identify them. There was... the more they resembled each other. And so there seemed to be some sort of defining *law*, of physics, or behaviour, or whatever, that ultimately makes things conform to a, some kind of pattern. So uh, that, that gave us a clue somehow to the dramatic structure, of the play. We were trying to work out a dramatic structure, so for example at the beginning of the play, when Simon has finished his sequence on the telephone, he's been with the audience and then on the telephone to the character that I play, then you get the, there's a sort of sound montage that's completely chaotic, and it's just lots and lots of different stuff, that then reduces down to one moment, but actually all of those sound components are a kind of chaotic manifestation of the whole play. So, you know, we're sort of playing, taking a certain amount of dramatic licence with those ideas, but they were very influential. And then we looked at, we started investigating other stories. We specifically got the actor Kostas Phillippogolou who's from Greece, he had very interesting stories to tell about his, um, ancestry, cause his parents came from, his *grandparents* came from Turkey, they were Turkish, Greek Turks, or Turkish Greeks or whatever, who were ethnically cleansed, I supposed, in the early twenties, when all the Greeks were expelled from Turkey and all the Turks were expelled from Greece. And, um, there's a story that he tells, which is his own story which is true, of his Grandmother or his Great-Grandmother, being told that she could only take one object, one thing onto the boat, and she was holding a melon in one hand and a baby in the other, and she dropped the baby into the sea, and kept, uh, by mistake, although I can't remember, I think maybe she keeps a clock, maybe she's got a clock and baby, I can't remember, um. Because then his character is an expert clockmaker, even though he's a taxi driver, I don't know if you remember. So he's travelling West, in search of some kind of economic security, and then there's another character, Alice, who discovers one day, at her mother's funeral, that she's got a father that she never knew about, and she has a kind of breakdown, and goes off to look for him, um, which is the, the um, the kind of... the heart of the play, really, the relationship between Virgil and Alice. She suddenly phones him after however many months, to say that she's... I can't remember where she is, you'll have to fill these bits in!

(laughs) I think, I can't remember where she phones from... Oh, she phones from, that's right, she phones right from the very end, she's in a phone box somewhere, having, um... and it's unclear as to whether she's found her father, but at least she's found some kind of truth. So she's travelling East, looking for her past, he's travelling, the Greek taxi driver's travelling West looking for his future, she's travelling East looking for her past. So they're both, they're involved in the way that they talk and the things that they do, they, they're involved in talking about memory, memories of their lives, and uh... his memory of his past and his parents and grandparents and her memory of not having had a past, and a need to try and find one. And uh, she meets a lot of people along the way, and has all these, these episodes happen, um, and then, so that... and then running all the way through that, if you like, is a story that's a vertical line, so one's going East and one's going West and then there's a vertical line through it, which is the story of the Ice Man... and the attempt of the scientists to try and discover who he was and what he was doing on the mountain and how he might have died. And we discovered while we were doing the play that, the script changed in accordance to this, that... that actually he had met a violent death, he had some arrow heads, one or two arrow heads embedded in his body which they failed to pick up on a scan when they first did it, and so he did seem to be fleeing from some kind of fight, or disturbance in his community. And Virgil, in the book, is sort of obsessed, in the play, is obsessed by this story, and all of these things they kind of happen inside his room. They either come out of his television, or out of the radio or down the phone, but basically they all happen inside his room, it's like a kind of, um... his room is like the inside of his head and all these things kind of come out in a chaotic way, in a way that we think his head... you know, you think, you have a hundred different thoughts over the course of an hour, or something... but all of those thoughts make up who you are, and somehow make up a whole. Um... whatever that whole might be. So um... and, you know, there were other stories as well which, you know, you'll know from your knowledge of the play, so there's lots of little stories within um... there's the story of the chambermaid in Berlin, who's left her husband and is working as a chambermaid, or her husband left her. And then there's the story of the Polish family in Warsaw. And then the strange hospital in the Ukraine or wherever it is she ends up. And, um, yeah. So all of those developed very slowly and very painfully, the first... painfully in the sense that they were hard to articulate for a long time, and so the, what we had when we first started, very first performances in Oxford, um... no, I think, no the first performances were in Huddersfield, in a little theatre in Huddersfield... was very very different to what we ended up in finally in the Riverside Studios in 1990...2001...2002. Where we'd lost Katrin Cartlidge and Susan Lynch was playing her part. But by then the play had really made itself up and had actually genuinely become whole, and a complete thing, which it wasn't at the beginning. It was more genuinely chaotic at the beginning, and it kind of worked itself out, really, over the years

that we performed it on and off, it became more cogent, more articulate. And in fact it was, it's easy looking, thinking what we had at the end, it's easy to imagine that that's what we were aiming for at the beginning, but actually it's not really because we didn't know what, at the beginning what was gonna happen. And uh, so um there we are, that's a start, that was a long ramble.

R: So, was, it, did it start out as being a very verbal, language based exploratory process, or did you start with physical images and then discover the stories, or the language that...

T: Um, well... No. It doesn't, I mean it didn't, I mean it started off as a very language-based thing at the beginning only in terms of the discussion of ideas, but what I've always done working with Simon, and I know that it is what he always does on other productions that I haven't been involved in, is that you work in small groups, and you might spend a day or even, anything up to two days, working on an improvisation, just amongst yourselves, two, or three or even four people, which you then present, and eventually... and they can become *incredibly* elaborate, we have a sound designer working with us all the time, so that we can use sound effects, and a number of props and a limited amount of technology. And so one of the most difficult things was trying to find a language, a theatrical language or a physical language for presenting the case of the Ice Man and how to tell his story. But always, the aim is to try and find a physical and theatrical language, and so there's lots of games and lots of exercises that we do, we generally work physically all morning, so that we're all working in the same way, physically, and we create a kind of shorthand, if you like, a physical, theatrical shorthand so that you can put things together very very quickly. But words... are obviously important, you know, to try and articulate things, but in terms of presenting work they're less important than, at some points, than trying to find the right image. Because as you intimated before, you know, it's the images that stay, and it's the images that as much as anything define the work. So you mentioned the image of the people, the man on the table, and then rolling over the table at the end. Now that image was inspired by the photography of Edward Moybridge, who did those kind of, um, frozen images of people running and horses walking and people standing up and sitting down, I don't know if you know those, if you've seen them. You can look them up on the internet and see them. But they're sort of, you will have seen them, they're Victorian photographs, they're in black and white, and they're usually quite muscular men, kind of, walking, and you would try to find the mechanics of bodily action. So they're like little freeze frame moments, initially, and then the whole thing is speeded up and it's like... so Simon's a echo of the Ice Man on the table, 'cause he was the one that was naked, and then all the rest of them rolling over the table and then taking up the same image and going on, and one of us replacing the place of the other, until the whole thing speeded was

a little bit like... I mean it's hard to define those images, exactly what they mean, but it's a little bit like... it was a combination for me of going back in time and the same human action being repeated over and over and over again over the centuries. But also just the commonality of human experience, that what we are is what we are, and we are all the same in that respect, so there are certain things that you can see that resonate very strongly. It's just something to do with being a human being. So finding images like that, they take an awful long time, and you throw a lot of them away. Oddly enough that image, partly came out, that *particular* image, partly came out of a story of, from a book by John Berger about Turkish immigrants in Germany, where they used to share beds, and so you'd have some person, one person sleeping in the bed for eight hours, and then he'd get up and go to work, and the person that had just finished resting in the evening would use the bed for eight hours, and then he would go to work, and then the person that had just... so, you know, there was something about that kind of rather arduous thing of the repetition of human experience in that. That got transpose into another idea. But there was a huge amount that we did and threw away. And you just end up with the things that really work.

R: So did you have a designer in the rehearsal room with you, you mentioned you had the sound designer...

T: Yeah, Michael [Levine] was around a lot, I mean he wasn't around the whole time, a lot of the time obviously he was off... but he, he has to find a design that's going to work in all the different theatres we're going to, so a certain amount of his energy is taken with going through plans and dimensions and trying to find materials, and going away and looking for things, and coming back and talking about them with Simon, but at the same time watching what we're doing and trying to marry what we're doing with what he's discovering, and what he's talking about with Simon. So, again, that's a very *collaborative* process, and... but, you know, and the idea of the technology, I mean it was real, it was, I mean although it looked like a very slick show, I mean it was just, you know the way that the, that the television moved across the stage and the sink with the mirror, the two-way mirror, moved across the stage, they were just being pulled by sash cords from the sides, and they were just going on rollers in specially designed slots. I mean I was really kind of paper and scissors things that we had. And we experimented with flying, but that didn't work. So the designer, yeah, Michael, I mean he'll give you his own version of events, which will be more articulate than mine, but for him it was a very collaborative thing too, of working with what we were doing, and trying to work that in with his ideas.

R: Do you find that quite useful, when you're working in a devised manner, do you think it's quite helpful for you as a performer to have that direct contact with the designer, and the sound designer, as well as with the director?

T: Um, yes. Oh, it's essential – you can't do it any other way. I mean, it's impossible. Because the things that you end up with are a consequence of what you have in the room, you know. So when we did a show called *The Three Lives of Lucie Cabrol*, which you're too young to have seen (laughs), um, which was set in the French Alps, and that was designed by someone else, we had lots of buckets... and it was set in a sort of peasant community in the French Alps so we had lots of buckets and old bath tubs and chairs and tables and different things just to play with, and throughout the improvisations those were the things that we had to use, so they started to make up the landscape of what we were performing, or the play we were devising. And it's exactly the same with *Mnemonic*, you know, we had sound equipment, we had ropes, we had a table, the ubiquitous table. Ubiquitous, the right word? Um, so, um, yeah. But, you know, it's completely essential that the designer's on hand, because then, you know, he can see what we need, and we can feed off what he provides, and that is going to end up by sort of defining what the design's going to be, to a large extent. And also what we do.

R: So, something like, I mentioned the image of the puppet, the chair as the puppet of the Ice Man, was that again something that came out of what you were doing in the rehearsal room, or was that sort of something that Simon had an idea about...

T: Yes and no, I mean, Simon... one of the things obviously that we had to do was try and bring the Ice Man to life. And... but it was clear that we couldn't represent him by human being, because we looked at films of reconstructions of the Ice Man's life, from Germany and Sweden, and, you know, you've sort of got this actor, the actor dressed up in kind of Neanderthal... not, you know, in um, Iron Age or whatever Age he was from, Iron Age clothes, and if... you couldn't have someone walking on to stage like that, 'cause it would be risible. So, at one point we tried making his body up out of paper, so that it would be very light, so that when he was lifted up out of the ice, it would just be kind of absurdly light, and that worked quite well. And we also tried making him out of, a little sort of stick man out of paper that we would sort of manipulate, the scientists would manipulate across the table, with tweezers, and we filmed it so that it would go up on to this big screen, and we thought it was great, it was really, it was like... until someone came and watched it, and said it just looked like something out of Vision On. So that took a... but Simon went to, there's a fantastic puppet make called Simon Oughton, who's made other things for *Complicite*, and... I don't know if you remember in the play but Simon [McBurney]'s got

this chair, he mentions when he's talking to the audience that he's got a chair that belonged to his grandfather, and it's very important to him, to his grandfather. And then we see him back in his room, he's got this chair that's broken that he's trying to mend, and Simon [Oughton] made this fantastic chair that when you look at it, it just looks like a normal chair, 'cause he made it out of a normal chair, he cut it up, but it unfolds so that the, so that when the, when it's unhinged or when it's sort of taken to pieces it extends and has the same frame and the same articulation as the human body. So the back, where you rest your back, is the torso, and the bit you sit on is the pelvis, so there's this kind of... so the rib cage and the pelvis. And then this bit of the leg, and then going back, the bit that goes across there, and that bit, make the, articulate the femur and the knee, and the whatever that... shin bone, and then the foot. So... and it was, but it was fabulously delicate, as well, I mean we had to be so careful with it. I sat on it and broke it once, and it had to be taken away and remade. God, was I in trouble for that! And it was immediately clear to all of us, as soon as it came in from Simon's workshop, Simon Oughton's workshop, and we started looking at it, that this was a very very important part of the play, this prop, and that this really was going to be the Ice Man, and that... but also that it could be unfolded from Simon's flat, Virgil's flat, in a very beautiful way. And it could be married to the idea of this chair that belonged to his father, or his grandfather, and then went back in time to being a manifestation of our deep past. And the other thing about that is that, going back to that it's very difficult to represent, or would have been very difficult to represent the Ice Man, is that the audience can project on to a puppet all sorts of things that you can't project on to a real human being, because, you know, well that's an actor, and you don't buy it. So that in the same way if an actor *dies* on the stage, you know they're not really dead, whereas if a puppet dies on stage, that puppet is completely dead. And we worked a long time on getting the movement right for the puppet. And when it walked across the stage, in it's sort of last few moments, and then slipped and lay down, and it's, it's little chest was still breathing, and then it stopped breathing in the end, there were people in the audience who broke down, you know, they couldn't, they *couldn't* bear it. And that would never have happened if it had been a human, you know. It just wouldn't have been such a... So, you know, I don't know how long Simon had been thinking about trying to make a puppet out of a chair... when... at what point that idea came to him, but it was a fantastically successful idea.

R: I think you've worked with Complicite on quite a few projects, is it a similar process that Simon will take the company through, of this discovery of a visual language of creating images for a piece, is it a similar process, or does each performance start in a completely different direction, as it were?

T: Well, the first thing always is to do is to try, is to try and get the company working together and that means a lot of work. I mean, it's very fun work, and there's a lot of games and a lot of strenuous physical exercise, those exercises have actually become less strenuous with the years, sort of, become more sort of like, kind of a bit more easy now we're all getting on a bit! (laughs) But when I first worked with him, I mean I was, we were super fit, you know, incredibly fit. And playing *very very* competitive games, that... all morning, and then exercises and... So, when we were doing *Lucie Cabrol* we had an awful lot of time doing exercises to try and get the earth into our bodies, you know, so that we really *moved* in a way that was, or *lived* in a way on stage that the audience didn't think 'well, they're just, you know, this is a middle class actor from wherever', you know, although some, most of the actors in that show weren't English. And, you know, no-one ever said that, I think, I think we got to the stage where we fitted into that world, at least for the purposes of the play, very well. And very often you see a play and everyone's in their own version of what they think that play should be, and one of the first things to do is to get everybody all in the same world, and in the same space. And there's always going to be people who haven't worked in that way before, so they have to be brought up to speed, and, um... So there's partly that, and then there's also trying to find a way into the physical life of the play, which is going to be different depending on what you're working on. So working on say *Lucie Cabrol*, or *The Caucasian Chalk Circle*, or *Light*, which was set in Medieval Scandinavia, you know, all... you don't to rep... you don't want to do the same thing that you did before, so you have to find a way of making a *new* physical language, for a new play, a new piece. So it's not always the same. And Simon's obviously leading that, and directing that, but that's always, that's always for *me*, the starting point, the most, one of the most interesting things.

R: So, obviously you're doing quite a lot work at the National at the moment, do you find it quite a markedly *different* process, working in something that's text-based like this, to working with Simon where you're devising a lot of stuff?

T: Yeah. I mean, I, I mean I would say working with Simon completely recalibrated me as an actor. And I've learned more through working with him than at any other time. And I think about things in a completely different way now, as an actor. *But*, you know, and I hope that I carry on having a, you know, a long association with him, but nevertheless it's very nice to go off and be in a talking play, you know! (laughs) And... I mean, one frustration, I suppose sometimes, is that, you know, I... everything is so *carefully* worked out with Simon, and, the staging of everything, and the physical tension on stage between actors and, everything is so beautifully staged and worked out, and you *understand* it as an actor, you know what's, what it is, and what's happening. And, and I find, I sometimes

find it difficult working with directors who have no sense of that. And also, I got so used to working in a collaborative way, that, you know, I sometimes have to bite my tongue in rehearsals, so that I don't... 'cause, you know, I want to make suggestions, I want to be involved in the creative process, beyond just doing my... you know, and I've had to *relearn* how to just sort of be in rehearsal and do my thing, and then go off and have lunch, and not... (laughs) you know, 'cause, you know, directors don't really *like* it, always... sometimes they're receptive to ideas, but, you know, they've got their... and, you know, very often at the National they're great directors, so, you know, it's not your part to do that. But it took a while to get used to that again.

R: I'm assuming working at the National, you wouldn't have that same direct contact with the designers, and the sound designers, necessarily?

T: No, everything at the National, pretty much everything at the National is designed and is a *fait accompli*, you know. You have a look at the design on the first day of rehearsals, and that's what you've got.

R: Do you find that affects how you work as a performer?

T: Yes, because what you do is you have to... I mean this is how I think about things. I mean a good example is a show I did a few, about three or four years ago of *Midsummer Night's Dream*, at the Royal Shakespeare Company, and I was playing Oberon, and I looked at the model box on the first day, and it was the most bleak, black and white, sort of really kind of violent design. And it was very inspired by, sort of, Expressionism, and German Expressionism of the Twenties. So... and you look at that and you think 'Oh, Jesus, Christ, I've got to perform in that!', you know... (laughs) and you, I just looked at it and I knew it was going to be really hard. But at the same time it's a tremendous challenge because you know what you've got to do is you've got to, you've now got to find a character that will realistically inhabit that space. You can't be an Oberon that exists in leafy woods, and the lovely bucolic, Victorian England way of doing the set, you know, you have to be a, you have to find another way of being and performing, so that even if the audience don't necessarily like it, you are a realistic, you have a realistic existence in that world. So...and that was an extreme example, but always you have to do that, you know, you look at the design, and... but I've worked a bit with the designer Mark Thompson, who's a brilliant designer, he did *The Alchemist*, and *Once in a Lifetime* last year, and *Wind in the Willows* a few years ago. And he's brilliant, because he, he can, you can talk to him, and... about what you're going to wear, and between you come up with, you know, some kind of concoction which suits you, and you have some kind of input. But

nevertheless, you're still constrained by, you know, the world that the play's going to be set in and what's been preordained.

R: Whereas I suppose when you're working with Simon and Complicite it's almost the other way round, and the setting's coming out of what you're creating in the rehearsal room.

T: Yes, exactly. Yeah. I mean, obviously, obviously there are, there are constraints, you know, if the play's set in Medieval Scandinavia then, you know, or in the French Alps, you know, in the ?Aut Savere? in the French Alps, then you know that's going to be the world, but it's, it hasn't been, the dynamics of the set haven't been set down in stone, you don't really know quite what it's going to look like and what you're going to need. So, yeah, they are very different things, very different ways of working. But I mean somewhere like the National, they can't, you know, they can't work like that, they have so many different productions coming on and the sets tend to be big and expensive, and they need, they need... they're being built before rehearsals have started. There isn't time to wait and see what's needed, you know. Whereas, the work we've done with Complicite, *mostly*, you know, we've been able to improvise up to a point. You know, there reaches a point where suddenly, you know, the makers, whoever's making the set, is going 'Look, we're need giving your designs within the next twenty-four hours or it won't be ready'.

