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# Utopia on Tour: exploring a generative relationship between dramaturgy, devising, touring and utopia

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## Abstract

This practice-as-research thesis proposes a novel understanding about the relationship between utopia and theatre, by investigating it as a question of *method*. Via the devising and touring practices of a small ensemble, the research asks: how does, or how might utopia operate in the making of a theatre work? How might this provoke new ways of approaching the generation and composition of theatre? What does this reveal about the creation of utopia?

Through an emphasis on method, the research rejects the need for theatre-makers to predetermine rational utopian content, arguing instead that idealistic and romantic desires might be harnessed and grappled with through the generative structures of making and performing, bringing once-vague ideals to greater consciousness over the course of a production.

In Part One, chapters focus in turn on practices of dramaturgy, devising, and touring, developing utopian framings that both prompt a reconsideration of existing works and propose original generative methods. In doing so, it advocates for the value of the carnivalesque as a utopian dramaturgical tool; explores devising practice as an act of opening and closing spaces of contingency; and proposes several structuring principles and generative techniques that can mobilise ideals in touring theatre. In Part Two, a discussion of a practical research project - *Travelling Show* - explores how these different approaches can work together and thus significantly expands understandings about how utopia operates in theatre practice. The interdependence of dramaturgy, devising and touring, which constitutes *Travelling Show's* creative method, encounters utopia in both the structural properties of the work's dramaturgy and the openness of its devising process, while subjecting ideals to continual movement and encounter over the course of a tour.

In its innovative investigation of the relationship between dramaturgy, devising, touring and utopia, the research uniquely demonstrates how utopia can be understood as at once ideal, unknown, and unfinished; operating in theatre practice as a dream of a better life that is ever-becoming.



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## List of Accompanying Material

Available at: <https://utopiaontour.tumblr.com/>

### Video clips

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2. *Starting the Search*: human clay experiment
3. *Travelling Show*: edited clips from 'By the Light of the Moon'
4. *Travelling Show*: edited clips from 'The Travels of Mouse-Dog'
5. *Travelling Show*: edited clips from 'They Rolled into Town'
6. *Travelling Show*: edited clips from 'Ginger and the Peanuts'
7. *Travelling Show*: edited full performance of 'The Worm in the Glasses Case'
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11. *Travelling Show*: 'Doing Nothing'/ Act 2 Opening
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13. *Travelling Show*: Andy's tape measure scene - performance

### Audience gifts

Photographs of gifts collected at:

1. University of Glasgow (initial set of gifts)
2. Collective Encounters Youth Theatre, Liverpool
3. Imaginarium Theatre, Prescot, Knowsley
4. Gilmorehill Centre, University of Glasgow
5. Darnick Village Hall, Scottish Borders
6. Cove Burgh Hall, Argyll and Bute
7. The Space, Glasgow



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# 1. Introduction

This is a practical interrogation of utopia and theatre.

Utopia is a dream of a better life. It is an imagined way of being that is not necessarily a coherent image of a future society, but an expression of a desire for change; an expression that need not be fixed but whose structures deliberately welcome dialogue, experimentation, critique, and a revelation of its own limitations. This thesis considers a theatre practice that is similarly structured by both a longing for something better and an openness to exploring what that something is. By investigating these points of connection between utopia and theatre, I develop a model of theatre-making in which utopia operates as an ever-becoming possibility.

An increasing interest in utopia can be observed in the field of theatre and performance studies. Significant scholarly works have recently approached utopia, not as a subject of overt representation, but as a means of conceptualising the affective dimension of performance (Dolan 2005), or theatre's construction of political and social ideals (Turner 2015). I find much agreement with these studies and am similarly concerned with utopian framings that exceed the representational. However, this thesis shifts the discourse away from questions of affect or interpretation, towards questions of creative process: how does, or how might utopia operate in the making of a theatre work? How might this provoke new ways of approaching the generation and composition of theatre? What might this reveal about the creation of utopia?

In approaching these questions, I draw on sociologist Ruth Levitas's (2013) proposal that utopia can itself be understood as a method, and I explore a model for theatre-making with utopia at its methodological core. Thus, I propose a novel understanding about the relationship between utopia and theatre, by investigating it as a question of method.

As a theatre-making method, I suggest utopia operates to channel hopeful, anticipatory, even idealistic impulses, and grapple with them; a constructive

grappling that provides a means to generate performance material and discover previously unimaginable possibilities that supersede those initial desires. I argue that my proposed method enables theatre makers to productively harness their desire for improved circumstances, without the need to predetermine representational content or presume the work's affect, allowing those things to emerge and be reflected upon as part of the process.

Building on my areas of professional specialism, my research focuses on practices of dramaturgy, devising and touring, creating a new touring performance called *Travelling Show* that forms part of this thesis submission. This practical focus elucidates a creative method that encounters utopia in both the structural properties of its dramaturgy and the openness of its devising process, continually evolving via an iterative exploration made possible by the mobility and repetition of touring. Thus, while utopia provides a generative theatre-making method, my creative experiments in turn provoke a new way of conceiving of utopia. The relationship I explore between dramaturgy, devising and touring, unfolds an understanding of utopia as necessarily constituted by both structure and openness, by the familiar and the unfamiliar, and by continual movement and encounter with different contexts. In making explicit the interdependence of these creative practices and their relationships to utopia, the research uniquely demonstrates in practical terms how utopia can be conceived as at once that which is ideal, that which is unknown, and that which is ever-becoming.

### **Utopia as method**

Sociologist Ruth Levitas (2011, p.9) encourages the broadest possible understanding of utopia when she defines it as 'the expression of the desire for a better way of being'. As such, she recognises utopia not as a coherently imagined place or society, but a longing for things to be otherwise, whether taking the form of rational proposals, fantastical imaginaries, social struggles or subjective experiential concerns. Building on this inclusive understanding, Levitas (2013) proposes that utopia can be treated as a dialogical method for the imaginary reconstitution of society; a method that draws on a range of expressions of

desire and explores them through dialogue, critique and ontological experimentation.

Approaching utopia as method means embracing 'provisionality, reflexivity, dialogue and an element of inevitable failure' (Levitas 2013, p.124). At the same time, Levitas cautions against an overemphasis 'on process, openness and impossibility' (*ibid*), preferring utopias that imply a 'dialectic of openness and closure' (*ibid*, p.103). As such, Levitas proposes a method comprised of three *modes* of utopia: the archaeological mode in which previous images of the good society are excavated; the ontological mode which considers proposals in relation to lived experiences, needs and desires; and the architectural mode which seeks to piece together fragments and imagine what a reconstituted society might look like (*ibid*, p.153). While the architectural mode implies closure, it operates in dialogue with the other modes so that any fixity is always subject to further critique and archaeological excavation (*ibid*).

Levitas's proposals come from a sociological perspective, but represent a trend within the broader field of utopian studies, whereby utopia is rejected as a static blueprint in favour of its function in the process of historical change. This is a dynamic and diverse field of study, encompassing literary, sociological, political and theological discourses, growing out of a renewed attendance to utopia in these arenas in recent years. Levitas attributes the urgency of utopia to our historical situation:

The economic and ecological crises mean that change is both essential and inevitable. [...] We need to think about what kind of social and economic system can deliver secure and sustainable livelihoods and ways of life for all. For those who still think that utopia is about the impossible, what really is impossible is to carry on as we are [...] Our very survival depends on finding another way of living.

(Levitas 2013, p.xii)

This frames utopia's present salience, although the concept has been inspiring significant works of literature, art and theory, for much longer with many of these works feeding into the current discourse. In my research, I draw on Levitas's notion of utopia as method alongside a range of literary, cultural and



political theories, from the Renaissance to the present day, that help conceptualise how utopia might operate in theatre practice.

Key to my understanding of utopia is Ernst Bloch's (1986, p.116) notion of the 'not-yet-conscious'. This describes thoughts that are not yet fully formed, where content is only just emerging. The not-yet-conscious is 'the psychological birthplace of the New' (*ibid*) and while it is necessarily elusive, it manifests in what Bloch calls the 'wishful images' of fairy tales, literature, music, and theatre. According to Bloch's theory, such expressions do not provide readily implementable plans, but contain powerful anticipatory energies that exceed their wishful imaginaries and spur movements for change. This principle is referenced in many contemporary discussions of utopia, including Levitas's and other's that I draw upon in this thesis. Bloch's 'wishful images' can be seen to relate to Levitas's 'images of the good society', which prompt the imagination of different ways of living. I am especially interested in applying the not-yet-conscious to understand how theatre practice can work positively with images and experiences that are anticipatory but not-yet fully formed. For me, this provokes an exploration of theatre practice as a means of not merely presenting wishful images, but working productively with them; harnessing both a longing for something different and the uncertainty of specific content as part of an active creative method. Bloch's theories thus encourage an understanding of utopia as an expression of something good that nevertheless remains unknown. This might be considered a break from the commonly accepted notion of utopia as a perfect society, but in fact it elaborates on an ambiguity that has always been central to the concept.

The word 'utopia' was coined by Sir Thomas More when he wrote *Utopia* in 1516 to describe an unknown island of the same name. The word conflates two Greek terms: good place (*eu topos*) and no place (*ou topos*), designating the island as something ostensibly good, but more profoundly as something unfathomable. As Fátima Vieira (2010, p.4) argues, More's choice of the word Utopia, rather than the more straight-forwardly translatable *Nusquam* meaning 'nowhere' in Latin, names a place that derives its significance from its otherness. This no place is not merely non-existent, but unknown and other. This otherness enabled More to

propose a radically different society which, for contemporary literary scholars, is seen as more important than the specific proposals contained within the text.

Literary theorist Tom Moylan (2014) reads contemporary literary utopias as 'critical utopias', which for Levitas (2013, p.111) function as examples of utopia as method, via 'the self-conscious promotion of interrogation of possible alternative futures from a position which registers [...] the necessary indeterminacy of the future'. Both scholars agree that such readings can be applied to older texts as well, and for Moylan it is essential to read utopias not as blueprints but as politically important acts of imagination. According to Moylan (2014, p.3), More's *Utopia* did not provide specific plans to be supplanted on reality, but rather the beginnings of a dialogue around current problems.

Utopia is therefore constituted by both its goodness and its unknowability, while Bloch's wishful images express something desired but not-yet-conscious. I argue that theatre practice enables a similarly dynamic interplay between the ideal and the unknown, facilitated by the complex understandings of utopia that are implied by the different constituent practices within my inquiry; namely dramaturgy, devising and touring. Dramaturgy, a compositional practice concerned with the organisation of ideas in both time and space, is sometimes understood as architectural. This can, as Cathy Turner (2015) demonstrates, conceive of dramaturgy as a practice that constructs utopian ideals, particularly in relationship to the places and spaces theatre inhabits and comments upon; a proposal that understands dramaturgy, architecture and utopia as necessarily implicating ideal blueprints. However, bringing dramaturgy together with devising and touring problematises this understanding. Devising, the practice of creating original performance collaboratively through the rehearsal process without a pre-existing script, operates via principles of dialogue and indeterminacy to generate the previously unimaginable; similar principles that emerge in the contemporary discourses around utopia as method. Touring, the act of taking a performance to different locations, introduces considerations of mobility, and dramaturgy's ability to shift in response to changing contexts. From this perspective, utopia becomes something much more fluid and responsive, entering into dialogue with the everyday world in a way that is less about the built environment (as in Turner's discussion of dramaturgy) and more about

quotidian practices; striving not so much for the unimaginable as for the need to feel at home in the world.

In one sense, dramaturgy seems to be about the construction of ideals, while devising and touring practice might open up and mobilise those ideals. However, devising and touring are also idealistic practices themselves, embodying what some might recognise as a utopian lifestyle, or a desire for a utopian community. Devising encapsulates ideals of equality, proposing a shared endeavour that distributes responsibility for both the tedious and satisfying elements of the creative process; while touring points towards a life that is freer, richer, more creative, adventurous, and satisfying, implying ideals of universalism and unity in its promise to take theatre to different communities across the country, continent, or world. As not entirely accurate images of the practices they describe, these idealised models might be recognised as examples of what Bloch calls 'wishful images', expressing a not-yet-conscious desire for something better. In my proposed model, dramaturgy then becomes a practice that attempts to bring such desires to consciousness, experimenting with the possibilities they hold through embodiment and exposure to reality.

Utopia is revealed within this practice as that which is at once ideal, unknown, and ever-becoming; deliberately stopping short of describing utopia in terms of fixed ideals. I acknowledge that this results in something Levitas (2013, p.124) is especially wary of: the 'sidestepping' of 'the substance of imagined alternatives'. In the interests of the detailed specialist research required of a PhD project, I set out with the deliberate intention to investigate form rather than content, hence my emphasis on method correlates with a concern for the *formal* relationship between utopia and theatre. This does not mean I advocate complete avoidance of representation or specificity when it comes to engaging with utopia. As I discuss, particularly in Chapters 4 and 6, my methodological approach results in the unexpected emergence of utopian content that supersedes the 'not-yet-conscious' romantic desires that initially spur the work, although this does not meet the same level of substance that Levitas's sociological method insists upon.

My formalist method can be seen to instigate change and development within the work's own utopian ideals but not, at this stage of research, within society. I explore some of the political consequences of my dramaturgy in terms of its provocative relationship with the status quo and the gesturing towards a utopian community (see Chapter 6), but I certainly do not claim that this practical model in itself achieves concrete change on a broader societal level. Further research would be required to position this formal approach within the politics of social change, including the development of conceptual frameworks and the use of audience research methods that have not been a feature of this project.

The thesis should thus be recognised as an initial investigation of utopia from the perspective of a theatre practitioner; an investigation concerned with a method of productively grappling with the desire for change that involves an exploration of the generative, in terms of the structures of making and performing, but does not go as far as implementing social change. Similarly, while the research is interested in the role of the audience within this generative model, it should be made clear that the conceptual framework I propose is intended to be of interest to theatre practitioners and it is not anticipated that an audience member would necessarily recognise 'utopia' within the performed work.

The practitioner perspective of this research thus presents some limitations but also marks its originality; expanding upon the scholarly precedents for thinking about utopia in performance, to take up this interpretive lens in a way that uniquely approaches utopia as a theatre-making method.

### **Utopia as theatre-making method**

This research interrogates what it might mean to treat utopia as an operational or generative concept in the creation of original theatre. This marks a significantly different approach from the most influential English language text of recent years to consider the relationship between utopia and theatre, which is Jill Dolan's *Utopia in Performance: Finding Hope at the Theater*.

Dolan proposes a theory of *utopian performatives*, which demonstrate theatre's potential to engender hope, create community and gesture towards a better future. In describing examples of this in practice, Dolan (2005, p.5) focuses on

'small but profound moments' that give rise to affective feelings through which utopia might be imagined or experienced, if only fleetingly (*ibid*, p. 39). For Dolan, utopia describes the experience of a better world that is made possible in theatre (*ibid*, pp.2-3), evidenced by her own experience as a spectator.

Utopian performatives often arise from 'intersubjective moment[s]' (*ibid*, p.54) between performers on stage, between performers and audience, or indeed between audience members, and the notion has an affinity with Victor Turner's anthropological definition of *spontaneous communitas* (*ibid*, p.55). Discussing feminist solo performance, for example, Dolan sees utopia in the generosity and vulnerability of the performers' address to the audience. As performer Peggy Shaw comeslingles with her audience, she shares 'her hands, her heart, her desire, with an audience of friends and strangers' (*ibid*, p.54). For Dolan, these gestures of shaking hands and looking into another's eyes perform a sharing of longing and a temporary break with anonymity, constituting 'a glimpse of utopia' (*ibid*). In Mary Zimmerman's *Metamorphoses*, Dolan identifies the utopian performative in the moment the work "clicks" for the audience 'because something true, something recognizable, something felt and mutually believed, even though only imagined, passes among those present' (*ibid*, p.157). As with Victor Turner's notion of communitas, these moments seem to hold an existential quality that suggest all problems could be resolved if only this momentary 'intersubjective illumination' felt among this group could be sustained (Turner cited in Dolan 2005, p.55).

I find Dolan's arguments persuasive and exciting. I agree with her about theatre's ability to lift us out of our present moment (*ibid*, p.5) and as a theatre-maker who wants to have a positive impact on audiences, it is encouraging to read such an optimistic argument in favour of the role theatre can play in engendering hope. In the later chapters of this thesis, Dolan's concept has been useful in considering the affective utopian dimension of the work I have created. However, Dolan focuses on performances that do not themselves purport to engage with utopia, so it is not immediately evident how utopian performatives might be helpful as an intentional *starting point* for a devising or dramaturgical methodology. As I note in Chapter 6, utopian performatives seem to emerge

unexpectedly in the work, and thus I am concerned with how a dramaturgical process can open up opportunities for that emergence.

Utopian performatives has proven to be a highly influential concept, providing an analytical frame for a range of plays and performances (see Dolan 2004), as well as performative events happening outside theatres, at intersections with migration and activism (Jestrovic 2012), religion (Llana 2011), queer performance (Muñoz 2009) and contemporary festivity (Bowditch and Vissicaro 2017). While these tend to remain within the realm of performance analysis, others have found the theory relevant in arguing for new practical approaches, for example to drama education (Prendergast 2011), critical performance ethnography (Spry 2016) and, as I discuss in Chapter 3, devising practice (Magnat 2005).

This facilitates some conceptual movement from Dolan's theory towards a creative methodology. Additionally, there are scholars who have taken different approaches to Dolan altogether, most notably considering the relationship between utopia and theatre from a dramaturgical perspective. Dragan Klaić (1991) identifies explorations of utopia and dystopia in dramatic literature, and Cathy Turner (2015) undertakes a study of dramaturgy and architecture that reveals different ways utopia is constructed through theatre practice. I return to Turner's work in Chapters 2 and 4. Klaić's study, with its focus on plays, is of less relevance to mine, although it is interesting to note that he locates very few examples of utopia appearing as a dramatic setting. The desire for something better more commonly appears in plays as 'a topic of discourse' (Klaić 1991, p.43) suggesting that, dramaturgically, utopia might operate as a possibility that motivates action, rather than as something to be represented. In fact, in all the literature I reference, there is a tendency for utopia to be understood in terms other than representational ones.

Such a tendency is similarly evident in comments from theatre practitioners themselves, which are particularly illuminating in terms of how utopia might be understood as operating within the theatre-making process. An especially diverse range of artistic perspectives is provided by a 1995 special edition of the journal *Theater*, which asked its contributors to 'describe a utopian theatre

project, and the utopian context in which it could be created and experienced' (Munk and Sellar 1995, p.6). The contributors include playwrights, theatre directors, producers, and devising practitioners, as well as theatre scholars, providing a fascinating plurality of utopian visions, which not only imply vastly different projects and contexts, but also hugely different interpretations of the word utopia(n) and what it means in relation to theatre.

Very few of these contributors consider utopia as a subject of representation, but rather imagine what theatre might be within a perfect society. In some instances, 'utopian theatre' thus means the best kind of theatre one could imagine: what Klaić (1995, p.60) describes as 'the perfection of the artwork' or Schmidt (1995, p.162) recognises as "visionary". For many though, it simply amounts to the ideal conditions in which to make theatre. These contributions tend towards bemoaning the current state of arts funding (Garson 1995; Landesman and Garrett 1995) and of theatre in general (Hamburger 1995; Rogoff 1995), providing some insights into the condition of theatre-making in 1995 and ideas about how it might be improved. These are certainly expressions of desire for a better way of being, but they do not tend to ask, as this thesis does, how the concept of utopia itself might be useful in any attempts to improve conditions or develop new forms of practice. In fact, Tony Kushner (1995, p.9) questions the relevance of the concept at all at a time when utopia is so out of reach and 'hope is only torture'. A cynicism towards the possibility of change is evident when Clinton Turner Davis (1995, p.117) concludes his vision with the words 'a place I doubt I will see in my lifetime'. Thus, that which is deemed 'utopian' is deemed unrealisable, straying into a pejorative application of the word to dismiss a proposal as unworkable or even naïve. In similarly dismissive contributions, Eric Bentley suggests that in a perfect society there would be no need for theatre (Bogart *et al.* 1995, p.184), while Munk (1995) points to the limited mentions of theatre in existing utopian visions.

Such static conceptions of utopia can understandably make the notion seem irrelevant to theatre. I see the potential of a more productive engagement with the concept in contributions to this special issue that move beyond an assumption that 'utopia' means a blueprint for a perfect society, or a perfect theatre. For example, John Sullivan is among those who propose that while

theatre might become redundant in a utopian world, it *is* increasingly necessary in the 'very dystopian world' (Bogart *et al.* 1995, p.182) we currently live in. For these contributors, utopian theatre does not belong to an imagined future but is something needed now. A contemporary utopian theatre is necessary to 'resist' (Bogart *et al.* 1995, p.182) and to reclaim the idea of performance from a world of pretence (Smith 1995, p.50). Other contributions in this strain include an optimistic outline for the ideal role that theatre might play in society (Coigney 1995), visions of a theatre that ignites change (Bogart *et al.* 1995, p.188), and the suggestion that theatre can 'enact utopia' (Malina and Reznikov 1995, p.71). Utopia here appears to provide an oppositional force within the present, which might be comparable to the way certain radical and avant-garde performance practices have been interpreted as utopian, as I discuss in Chapter 2.

Some practitioners offer proposals of how to stage utopia. This is not about representing a utopian blueprint, but rather about how a theatre production might discover utopia in a more metaphorical or experiential way. Richard Foreman (1995, p.99), for example, proposes that utopia might be 'the moment of breakthrough' in a rehearsal process, which could be staged 'again and again' in a utopian theatre. Dipankar Mukherjee proposes a theatre that strips away to reach 'point zero' or 'the center', for that is where utopia is (Bogart *et al.* 1995, p.188). This might be compared to the way postmodern performance has sometimes been understood to uncover utopia through processes of deconstruction (see Auslander 1997, p.60; Bailes 2011, p.114), which I build upon in Chapter 3.

Writer Kathy Acker conversely describes a desire to move away from deconstruction. In an interview published in the special issue, she discusses how her work is a process of discovering 'new methods of constructing', driven by a desire for pleasure (Acker and Garrett 1995, p.170). She looks for 'not only what to write but how to write', or 'how to construct pleasure' (*ibid*, p.171). Here, utopia might be recognised as an impulse harnessed by the creative practitioner; a desire for a better way of being that leads Acker to explore new creative forms. In another example, Rustom Bharucha (1995, p.37) expresses a desire for an 'as-yet-unrealized' way of being in the context of post-colonial India. He describes his theatre practice as being part of a 'quest' concerned with 'intra-



cultural links' (*ibid*, p.44) and the 'translation of difference' (*ibid*, p.37). Bharucha proclaims that imagining utopia demands 'more than a blueprint' (*ibid*) and suggests that utopia might be something within him: 'an inner point of reference guiding particular processes of struggle' (*ibid*, p.33). I am drawn to these examples where practitioners treat utopia as a desire, an impulse, and a possibility that is worked out in the course of their creative experiments. Here, utopia is not a completed idea, but is provisional, dialogical and implies the possibility of failure, reminiscent of the sociological, political and philosophical engagements with utopia I will draw upon in the coming chapters.

It might be in that failure where a constructive and a deconstructive relationship to utopia collide. 'Failure is an inevitable part of the process of trying to think utopia' (Levitas 2013, p.120), and such failure also contains 'regenerative capabilities' (Bailes 2011, p.111), suggesting an ongoing interplay between construction and deconstruction, or what I explore as structure and openness. There is much more to say about this in the coming chapters, where I will reference further examples as I consider utopia's relationship to specific practices of dramaturgy, devising and touring. Already though, the complexity of utopia as a theatre-making method is becoming evident. The interest in working constructively with unrealised desires, and with remaining open to their potential failure, underscores my own approach to utopia; operating as part of a dramaturgical model that oscillates between the ideal and the unknown.

### **The theatre-making model in brief**

In this thesis I propose an approach to theatre-making that proceeds from two major principles: the ideal and the unknown. The entire creative methodology is predicated on structures and generative techniques that both embody a sense of idealism and open up previously unknowable possibilities.

The ideal does not begin as a fully formed idea. It is not a blueprint for a utopian society, or a utopian model of theatre. It begins as a not-yet-conscious belief that things could be better. I argue that in the case of theatre, the roots of this idealism are not found in a rational utopia akin to the literary tradition that began with More, but rather in an earlier trend of folk culture that expressed a desire for emancipation via collective and participatory forms. I

describe this, borrowing the term from Kendrick (2004, p.74), as a carnival utopia and draw on Mikhail Bakhtin's (1984b) discussion of Renaissance carnival to deepen my analysis (see Chapter 2).

I argue that carnivalesque aesthetics act as wishful images that signify utopian longing, while simultaneously incorporating principles that sustain an indeterminacy in terms of the specific content implied by those images. In the practice submitted as part of this thesis - *Travelling Show* - this can be seen in the visual aesthetic of the production that self-consciously alludes to a nostalgic imaginary of touring theatre, while drawing on the carnivalesque principle of 'ambivalent laughter' to adopt a self-mocking performance attitude that disrupts that wishful image.

Additionally, the principle of change, embedded in carnival images of death and rebirth, provokes a dramaturgical strategy that continually conceives new theatrical worlds. Thus, carnivalesque utopian principles are brought into dialogue with both a rethinking of touring practice and with the open-ended and collaborative nature of devising practice. In *Travelling Show*, each performance concludes with a gathering of gifts from audience members, to inspire a new set of stories that are shared with an audience in the next location visited. The gathering of gifts therefore ignites a rebirth of *Travelling Show*, facilitated by its journey to different places and encounters with different audiences. Each rebirth relies on the collaboration of audience members, and an openness to the unknown; introducing unexpected elements into the creative process, which take the performance in previously unimaginable directions.

I conceive of the realm of the unknown as what Anil K. Jain (2009) calls 'a space of contingency'. Dramaturgical actions open and close this space, always aiming to push beyond the possible, expanding into what Jain (2009, p.411) calls 'the (utopian) space of contingency provided by the impossible'. The invitation to share a gift opens new spaces of contingency, facilitating not only the creation of new narratives, but a constantly shifting sense of the performance's ideals. What begin as not-yet-conscious desires, become more evident in each new story that is told; stories that not only respond to audience stimulus but to the performers' experiences of the tour.

This contingent dramaturgical structure is facilitated by the mobility of touring practice, providing a material movement from place to place, which impacts on the dramaturgy's figurative movement between the ideal and the unknown. In keeping with my rejection of utopia as a static blueprint or totalising vision, I resist a definition of touring as a practice that provides the same event in each location it visits. Instead, I propose a dramaturgy that allows the performance to change in response to its encounters, allowing its ideals to emerge in dialogue with its journey.

In the course of its journey, *Travelling Show* reveals both a desire for fluidity, and a need for stability. As these contradictory ideals become more evident, the structures and generative techniques evolve to be less about the ideal and the unknown, and more specifically about familiarity and unfamiliarity. Thus, in its later iterations, *Travelling Show* develops a repeatable dramatic structure that provides a sense of comfort for the artists, and simultaneously facilitates greater indeterminacy as the artists can commit more fully to an open and improvisational performance attitude.

In short, this is a constantly evolving creative methodology, instigated by a wholehearted embrace of the images and actions that signify a not-yet-conscious desire for a better way of being, imbricated with a commitment to encountering the unknown and the unfamiliar. The model relies on the ongoing development of both dramaturgical structures and devising exercises that seek to sustain a mediation between the ideal and the unknown, demonstrating their interdependence in constituting utopia as method.

### **Research methodology**

This thesis comprises this written component and two practical outputs, titled *Starting the Search* and *Travelling Show*. Documentation of this work is provided on an accompanying website.

Throughout my practical research I have worked with two artistic collaborators - Andy Gledhill and Maria Malone - who are co-devisers of the performed work, and contributors to this research. For the final performance of *Travelling Show*, a fourth co-deviser - Anna Saxberg - joined the company, taking on a technical

and stage management role. Both performances were presented under the banner of The Suitcase Ensemble, a theatre company I co-founded with Andy Gledhill in 2008.

*Starting the Search* was a week-long devising experiment taking place in July 2017 at Gilmorehill Halls, University of Glasgow. I had initially hypothesised that theatre practice might be considered a *search for utopia* and that the concept of *contingency* might be an important feature of such a search. This week-long experiment took this hypothesis as a starting point for exploring devising practice and its relationship to utopia. This process is discussed in Chapter 3, and the conclusions drawn went on to inform the dramaturgical framework explored in *Travelling Show*.

*Travelling Show* was a much larger practical project, initially developed as a week-long touring experiment, investigating how principles of contingency and collaboration might be widened out from the devising process to the dramaturgical framework of a touring production. *Travelling Show* is a collaboratively devised touring performance that gathers 'gifts' from audience members in one location, to inspire the performance shared with an audience in the next location visited. It invokes the contingent and the encounter with the other, but in a necessarily different way from *Starting the Search*, exploring ways of implicating its audience.

The initial touring experiment involved staging three performances in three different locations over a very short time frame. These performances were shared with small audiences in informal contexts that were relatively familiar to the three artists, in order to experiment with this new idea in a low-pressure environment. Audience groups were: a youth theatre group in Liverpool, a community drama group in Knowsley, and an audience of PhD colleagues and supervisors at Gilmorehill Halls.

Following this, three further performances took place, again in three different locations, with more rehearsal time allocated for each, and with much more reflection time in between performances, providing for detailed exploration of the research inquiry. These performances were shared with public audiences in

venues that were unfamiliar to the three artists: Darnick Village Hall in the Scottish Borders, Cove Burgh Hall in Argyll and Bute, and The Space in Glasgow's East End.

Very broadly, the first three performances focused research on the dramaturgical framework of *Travelling Show*, while the second three were more concerned with the devising process. Additionally, in between the fourth and fifth performances, my collaborators and I undertook a short series of *Devising Development Sessions*, held in Liverpool, in order to focus on the devising process outside of the pressure of creating a public performance.

In all of these phases of research, I have been involved as a performer, deviser and dramaturg, as well as leading the project as a researcher. My focus has primarily been on my dramaturgical role within the devising process, and it is worth clarifying the nature of this role. As dramaturg I am not an outside eye, which is more commonly the case, but a core member of the ensemble. I set tasks and generative exercises, guide their development, and take a lead on shaping material for performance. At the same time, I am one of three people responding to those exercises, generating material, and performing in the show. Andy and Maria also take on creative leadership tasks, with Andy taking responsibility for musical composition and musical direction, while Maria leads on choreography, movement direction, and stage composition. We have largely shared responsibility for design, although technical design became the responsibility of Anna when she joined us for the final performance. The nature of this creative relationship requires more consideration than is possible here and has not been my primary focus during this research. However, the collaborative ensemble approach can be seen as part of the utopian myth *Travelling Show* both imagines and attempts to embody, as I allude to in Chapters 2 and 6 especially. The conclusions I come to draw, regarding the need to alleviate stress within this process (see Chapter 6), have implications for re-thinking this working arrangement. Were I to continue developing this research, I would take a step back to focus solely on a dramaturgical and directorial role.

The collaborating artists have contributed to this research by working as part of group activities, responding to exercises derived from my research inquiry, and

taking part in reflective conversations throughout the process. I have kept collaborators informed of the evolving inquiry, often beginning rehearsal periods with a summary of my current thinking in order to set clear intentions for each phase of practice. In between periods of working together, my collaborators have been less involved, as I used this time to evolve the research inquiry and the dramaturgical model in a more independent, or traditionally academic, process in discussion with supervisors and through the delivery of conference papers, for example. However, collaborators have been kept informed through a private Facebook group, set up to stay in touch throughout the project. Here I have occasionally posted updates on my thinking, asked for feedback on ideas in progress, and shared important reminders such as photographs of our gathered audience gifts. Collaborators have also used this space to share their own photographic and video documentation of the process. Additionally, I have undertaken extended conversations with Andy about the evolving inquiry, building on our long-term collaborative relationship as co-founders of The Suitcase Ensemble. This has taken the form of discursive phone calls, Andy providing comments on drafts of chapters and articles, and a more formal interview, which is referenced in Chapter 6.

Rehearsals and discussions have been documented either through video, note taking, or both. I have kept a notebook throughout the process, reflecting on the practice in response to the evolving inquiry. All performances have been documented through video, and in some cases through photographs.

Two performances - Liverpool and Gilmorehill - included a post-show discussion with the audience, gathering impressions of the experimental dramaturgy in the early stages. In other contexts, I did not hold a formal discussion, but some informal discussions with audience members were noted and have fed into the evolving conceptual framework. These comments, from either formal or informal discussions, are not held up as conclusive evidence of the performance's impact on audiences, but rather noted as part of the constellation of gathered data that has impacted on my thinking in developing the dramaturgical model I expound here.

I have explored dramaturgy as a necessarily critical and research-oriented practice. Thus, my research methodology can be conceptualised in the same terms as my dramaturgical theatre-making methodology; the influence and analogies I draw with notions of utopia as method, are equally applicable to both my creative practice and my research. As I set out in the coming chapters, my research has started from a hypothesis, which has been tested, re-conceived, and re-tested throughout the process. This is similar to the practice-as-research methodology advocated by Melissa Tringham (2002, pp.58, 56), in which hypotheses are made explicit as part of a hermeneutic spiral that 'constantly returns us to our original point of entry but with renewed understanding'. I enrich this approach with a utopian perspective: my hypotheses represent ideal but not-yet-conscious wishful images (Bloch 1986), which have been tested, as Henri Lefebvre (1996, p.151) suggests, through a process of *experimental utopianism* that studies the implications of utopian proposals on the ground. Lefebvre's proposal to incorporate the intellectual operation of transduction to introduce 'knowledge in utopia' might also be applied to my practice-as-research methodology, proposing 'an incessant feedback between the conceptual framework used and empirical observations' (*ibid*). Additionally, as I propose in Chapter 6, my methods might be seen as akin to Levitas's (2013) three modes of utopia as method: archaeological, ontological and architectural. This reflects my methods of excavating existing theory and practice (archaeological), testing out ideas experientially (ontological), and constructing a conceptual framework (architectural), which is then subjected to further critical excavation and experimentation.

The not-yet-conscious (Bloch 1986) sits at the heart of the practical research, expressing the embodied exploration of practical propositions that are initially only loosely defined by conceptual frameworks. Phases of practical research have not attempted to demonstrate theory, but as Robin Nelson (2013, p.33) suggests, allow relevant theoretical ideas 'to circulate freely in the investigative space'. As I argue in Chapter 3, an essential approach has been one often advocated within devising and collaborative practice: allowing an element of the unknown to guide what happens, with analysis happening later. In exceptional cases, this leads to clarification of the conceptual framework, but most of the time practical experimentation has problematised the initial hypothesis to the

extent that it takes many months of further reflection to arrive at a new understanding.

Most interestingly, some initial hypotheses have been entirely abandoned because they were not borne out by practical experimentation, but have returned much later in the research project, enriched with new understanding. For example, my initial hypothesis about the *search for utopia* was reconsidered after *Starting the Search*, in favour of the notion of opening spaces of contingency, as a more appropriate way of understanding the practical discoveries made during that week (see Chapter 3). However, as discussed in Chapter 4, considerations of touring practice brought the notion of a *search* back to the conceptual framework. In another example, I hypothesised the existence of two dramaturgical 'registers' that would structure *Travelling Show*, although it was unclear how this was related to questions of utopia. Unable to resolve this intellectually, I abandoned the hypothesis after the initial touring experiment, only to return to it over a year later, when I realised they were not 'registers' but 'chronotopes' (in Bakhtin's sense) which implied different conceptions of utopia, as I discuss in Chapters 4 and 5. This demonstrates an aspect of my research methodology that is decidedly dramaturgical, recalling Turner and Behrndt's (2016, p.182) description of the dramaturg's role in devising processes as a 'map-maker' who documents the process in order to refer back to earlier starting points, enabling devisers to 'take stock and reconnect with their original intentions'. In this process, I have provided those reference points for devisers but also for myself, consistently referring back to and refining the conceptual framework as I develop the practice.

### **Touring theatre: industry context**

Having outlined the research context and methodology, I want to briefly contextualise this project in terms of discussions that are happening outside of academia, specifically in relation to touring practice. For the past ten years I have been running a theatre company - The Suitcase Ensemble - that operates within the UK's small-scale touring network. We have produced three tours of our work, and our experiences echo those of the wider industry, which recognises the need to develop new models of touring practice. This is



demonstrated, for example, by the 2012 'Getting It Out There' symposium on the 'future of touring', held at Lancaster University in response to 'changing circumstances in the ways that performance work is commissioned, produced and toured in the UK' (Paterson and Schmidt 2012, p.4). This event raised issues with the financial models that underpin touring, which continues to be discussed by artists and producers in blog posts and articles suggesting that very little has changed over the past decade (see Kimmings 2013; Parsonage 2015; Mooney 2017; Scottee 2018). The need to reform the way touring happens has been recognised by both Arts Council England (ACE) and Creative Scotland (CS), who launched targeted funding schemes in 2011 and 2018 respectively, that in different ways aim to address strategic and infrastructural issues that inhibit touring. However, discussions documented at the 2012 symposium, as well as in the reports feeding into and emerging from these funding schemes point to not only financial and strategic reform, but a need to rethink what touring is and what it might be for.

In her 2012 keynote, Artsadmin producer Judith Knight noted that 'for many artists it is more interesting and more satisfying to have a longer deeper relationship with a place, with an audience, with participants, with a locality' (Paterson and Schmidt 2012, p.9), leading to some artists moving away from touring altogether, and others incorporating elements of participation and site-specificity into their tours. Similarly, Rajni Shah identified the motivation behind her project *Glorious* (which I discuss in Chapter 4) as a 'frustration with the current touring system and a commitment to making a show that could genuinely engage with the people and places we encounter when we tour' (Paterson and Schmidt 2012, p.22). This resembles a recommendation in an evaluation of The Suitcase Ensemble's first national tour, to 'explore ideas for a new touring structure that gives us more time to connect with audiences and venues, touring to fewer areas' (Buddle and Hill 2012, p.34). Similar recommendations are made in the evaluation of ACE's strategic touring fund, suggesting that efficiency would be improved by 'encouraging touring companies to focus on a smaller number of localities, where they can have a deeper impact' (Annabel Jackson Associates 2015, p.7); and a report into touring commissioned by Creative Scotland identifying drawbacks to the 'one night stand' model of touring, and suggesting alternative models 'of deeper local connection and engagement'

(Dow and Baxter 2017, p.27). CS's report references a model dubbed 'slow touring' in Australia, involving longer stays and deeper engagement in each touring location (see also Jennings 2014).

These recommendations arise from a recognition that existing models are financially, ecologically, and socially unsustainable. For me, this rethinking of touring practice is in line with the need to reimagine societal structures more broadly in a time of economic and ecological crisis. Reconstituting touring practice is part of a utopian project to reconstitute society. The utopian thinkers I reference in this thesis propose that responses to the current situation should not only sustain our planet, nor merely prolong the current economic and societal models, but work to radically improve the world and ensure that humans and the planet not only survive but flourish. I see a similar impulse among theatre practitioners who propose these 'slow touring' models; a holistic rethinking of touring practice, driven by a desire for something more economically and ecologically sustainable, at the same time as being profoundly more satisfying and meaningful.

The utopianism of this proposal is not only contained within its avowed goodness, but also in its otherness; its present incompatibility with funding and touring structures. Despite the recommendations in their own reports, there was no subsequent encouragement towards working in a smaller number of localities in Arts Council England's (2017) 'Guidance for Applicants'; and Creative Scotland's new touring fund only briefly mentions 'longer stays' (Creative Scotland 2019, p.7) whilst appearing to discourage such a model by insisting on a definition of touring that involves visiting a minimum of 12 venues (*ibid*, p. 6). Developing a touring project within the framework of a PhD has given me a certain freedom to innovate outside of these structures. The touring model I explore pushes boundaries even of the slow touring proposition by exploring not only connections between touring work and locality, but between the different places a touring work visits.

My approach to touring might be considered a utopian provocation that largely bypasses the debates about financial and strategic models (although it is nevertheless implicated in an economic relationship), in order to push the

boundaries of existing artistic models, drawing on utopia as a dramaturgical tool to reimagine the possibilities of theatre touring in ways that productively seize upon the form's idealism.

### Thesis structure

In Part One, chapters focus in turn on practices of dramaturgy, devising, and touring, developing utopian framings that both prompt a reconsideration of existing works and propose original generative methods.

Chapter 2 outlines a generative starting point by considering dramaturgy in relation to an understanding of utopia as something good or something to be desired. While existing dramaturgical models focus on how utopian ideals might be represented, discussed, or constructed through dramaturgy, I propose a model that recognises the differing organisational principles and compositional textures that structure different utopian expressions. Here, I make an argument in favour of carnival, via reference to Bakhtin and others, as a utopian expression that shares a root form with theatre. I distinguish between *classical* and *carnival* utopias, and between *classical* and *carnival* dramaturgies, demonstrating that dramaturgy and utopia find common ground in carnival. I situate my own practice in a lineage of carnivalesque performance, and specifically discuss theatre companies People Show, Welfare State and 7:84, drawing on carnivalesque framings of their work to identify dramaturgical strategies such as the embodiment of not-yet-conscious ideals and self-mocking critique, which suggest compositional approaches that might signal a desire for utopia while acknowledging its limitations.

Chapter 3 offers an alternative starting point, by considering devising in relation to an understanding of utopia as *no place*. I explore how notions of impossibility, collaboration and contingency operate in devising practice to implicate an unknown no place as being responsible for the generation of original performance material, reflecting on the devising processes adopted by Goat Island, Welfare State and Forced Entertainment to explore existing discourses and approaches. I focus in particular on contingency, drawing on Jain's (2009) notion of 'a space of contingency' to understand how actions in the devising process work to open and close this space, aiming to expand into the impossible,

which Jain equates with the utopian. I discuss this notion in relation to my week-long devising experiment *Starting the Search* which can be seen to open and close spaces of contingency, resulting in a mediation between reality and utopia.

Chapter 4 begins an exploration of how the two starting points proposed in Chapters 2 and 3 might work together, by considering touring practice in relation to an understanding of utopia as something that operates in motion. I note that the definition of touring as the presentation of the *same* performance in different locations, relates to a restrictive understanding of utopia as something universal, totalising or imposed. I therefore advocate a processual and dialogic approach that emphasises change and difference, both in its approach to utopia and to the content of touring work. I outline dramaturgical models that might proceed from not-yet-conscious ideals and seek to interrogate them via the mobility of touring. I draw on examples encompassing literary representations of touring, an ethnographic study of touring musicians and recent touring works by Rajni Shah and Action Hero, to identify a range of strategies that problematise the idealism of touring practice, while remaining open to the possibility of an as-yet-unknown utopian alternative. I proffer Bloch's notion of *Heimat* as one such alternative: a kind of utopia that is sought in the experience of touring, related to the quest to feel at home in the world. The mobility of the tour is thus proposed as the site of a utopian methodology whereby ideals are tested and altered through material encounters with the real.

In Part Two, a discussion of a practical research project - *Travelling Show* - explicitly brings together the carnivalesque principles discussed in Chapter 2, with the act of opening a space a contingency explored in Chapter 3, and the mobile methods proposed in Chapter 4. Over the course of Chapters 5 and 6, I explore how these different approaches can work together, significantly expanding understandings about how utopia operates in theatre practice.

In Chapter 5 I describe the dramaturgical structures established over the first three performances of *Travelling Show*, demonstrating how the aesthetic performance register and the overarching framework initiate an embodiment of not-yet-conscious desire, while establishing a generative method that proceeds

by opening and closing spaces of contingency. *Travelling Show* creates a new performance in each new location by gathering gifts from audience members in one place and using them to inspire the performance shared in the next. This framework incorporates all the understandings of utopia that have been explored in the preceding chapters, embodying carnival's principle of rebirth as each new performance is conceived within the last, pivoting on the act of gifting that opens a space of contingency, and encouraging change and development in the work's ideals as they are given room to emerge over the course of a tour.

Chapter 6 goes into more detail on *Travelling Show*, by reflecting on the devising methods explored in the second half of the tour. These strategies represent the activities taking place within the spaces opened up by the dramaturgical structures described in Chapter 5. Here I outline specific approaches that might be of interest to theatre practitioners exploring utopia as a devising strategy such as: how we created new content in response to audience gifts, moving through archaeological, ontological and architectural modes (similar to Levitas's three modes of utopia as method); how we engaged with place, allowing our fragmented and fleeting encounters to promote a utopian vision of geographic identity as plural and uncontainable; and how we developed a critical performance attitude that incorporated amateurism, reflexivity and optimism to both embrace alternative values and highlight the shortcomings of our own utopian project. I also draw attention to certain moments of creative struggle in the process, which illuminate new knowledge about the operation of utopia in theatre practice, and indeed about utopia in general. Such examples reveal an interest in continuing to find ways of opening up to the unexpected, but time and again demonstrate imperatives towards closure, clarity, the formulaic, and a need to feel at home in the creative process; promoting an understanding of utopia as both familiarity and unfamiliarity.

In the concluding chapter I summarise my dramaturgical approach as one that proceeds from a meeting of the ideal and the unknown, while emphasising the importance of recognising utopia in both the familiar and the unfamiliar. Thus, I advocate for structures that provide comfort and stability, as well as opening up to the previously unimaginable. I reflect on unexpected discoveries made and propose potential developments of the research that might delve deeper into

questions of social change, temporality, otherness, place, and the value of touring practice. These suggested continuations acknowledge not only the limitations of the current research but the necessarily unfinished character of the theatre-making model, in which utopia operates as a dream of a better life that is ever-becoming. Even as its ideals become more evident, and its structures more formulaic, this only opens up new questions and areas of investigation. Continuing to grapple with these hopes, desires and uncertainties is essential in a theatre practice that is uniquely placed to reveal the contradictions and impossibilities of utopian proposals without ever destroying the anticipatory and generative energies that ensure a better world is possible.



## Part One





## 2. Dramaturgy and utopia: carnivalesque compositions

Dramaturgy and utopia share common ground in their status as multifaceted and highly contested terms. This chapter introduces a mutual investigation of dramaturgy and utopia, leading towards practical exploration to illuminate new understandings about both. I begin by reviewing the way dramaturgy has been discussed in relation to utopia by theatre and performance scholars, before moving on to a historical contextualisation of, firstly, utopia and then dramaturgy. In these contextual accounts, I propose that the starting point for a dramaturgical investigation of utopia is not the classical literary utopia, nor a classical text-based dramaturgy, but rather in the utopian compositional textures found in the collective, participatory form of the carnivalesque.

In the final section of the chapter, I propose dramaturgical readings of avant-garde and alternative theatre practices that are sometimes described as carnivalesque. My readings of these practices illuminate carnivalesque dramaturgical strategies that are developed in my own practical research.

### **Dramaturgy and utopia**

In this thesis, dramaturgy encompasses analytical, compositional and critical practices involved in the creation and reception of performance. At its most basic, dramaturgy can be understood as 'the general composition of a work' (Turner and Behrndt 2016, p.4), and refers to the compositional textures and organisational principles that hold a performance together. I allow the word to function as both a noun and a verb: dramaturgy is the practice of composing, constructing and organising ideas; and it is the compositional logic that constructs the resulting piece of work. Accordingly, dramaturgy denotes both process and structure, often comprising an interaction between these, revealing resonances with both processual and spatial understandings of utopia.

Dramaturg David Williams' definition resonates with my practice, when he proposes that:

Dramaturgy is about the rhythmized assemblage of settings, people, texts and things. It is concerned with the composing and orchestration of events for and in particular contexts, tracking the implications of and connective relations between materials, and shaping them to find effective forms.

(Williams 2010, pp.197-198)

Williams goes on to clarify that in devising practice, 'dramaturgy is uncovered, worked and articulated *through the process of making and rehearsing*, rather than being predetermined' (Williams 2010, p.198). In devising, dramaturgy is thus processual, although it retains a concern with the whole: organising ideas, tracking connections, and finding effective forms. It is also generative, concerned with the creation of new material at the same time as material is being shaped (Turner and Behrndt 2016, p.174).

This interest in the processual connects with contemporary engagements with utopia, and Dolan's (2005, p.6) affirmation of a 'utopia always in process'. Rather than thinking of dramaturgy as a means of representing utopia, I am interested in both dramaturgy and utopia as methods; perhaps as intersecting generative methods. However, when Dolan clarifies that she is 'not interested in constructing a utopia' (*ibid*, p.39), this indicates a break between her processual approach and the practice of dramaturgy (see also Turner 2015, p.16). To think of utopia in dramaturgical terms, it is certainly possible to reject it as a subject of representation, or as a blueprint of a possible society, but it becomes less easy to completely reject the project of construction.

As a compositional practice, dramaturgy can be understood as a kind of architecture. Cathy Turner's *Dramaturgy and Architecture: Theatre, Utopia and the Built Environment* considers this relationship in detail, arguing that this necessarily implicates dramaturgy as 'a project upon the world, as world-building, socially and aesthetically' (Turner 2015, p.16). Turner figures utopia as an ideal that is often expressed through architecture and hence reveals how dramaturgy too reflects and constructs utopian ideals, often in dialogue with the places and spaces it represents, inhabits, and comments upon. Such dramaturgies reveal an interdependence of spatial and temporal construction, drawing upon Mikhail Bakhtin's notion of the *chronotope*, literally 'time-space',

to conceive of the relationship between architectural themes and narrative structures (*ibid*, p.18).

In Ibsen's *The Master Builder*, for example, Turner (2015, p.27) draws out the theme of utopian longing, which is 'developed through the metaphor and practice of architecture'. The play's two main characters embody a tension between two chronotopes implying different approaches to architecture and dramaturgy: one a 'utopia of form' and an Aristotelian poetics, where change is understood as a logical progression (*ibid*, p.32); the other more fantastical but implying a synthesis of object and action, where dramaturgy, in common with architecture, is 'generative of change' (*ibid*, pp.41, 47). Utopia is not only a theme or character motivation, but actually moves and is moved by the dramaturgical structure of the play in synthesis with its architectural narrative. This provides an example of utopia operating within modern drama and although my project is focused on devising practice, I offer this example to demonstrate that utopia can play a generative role within a work's composition, exceeding its representational function. I return to the notion of chronotope in Chapter 4, to further consider the generative potential of both Bakhtin's notion and Turner's dramaturgical application of it.

The generative aspect of Turner's frame can also be applied to less *overtly dramatic* dramaturgies. In discussing the work of the Situationist International (SI), Turner acknowledges that the notion of dramaturgy would go against the SI's very opposition to aesthetics, but nevertheless proposes that the constructed situation, *détournement* and *dérive* - key performative approaches for the SI - can all be understood as dramaturgy, defined in this instance as 'the playful construction of disruptive events' (*ibid*, p.164). As with Dolan's utopian performative, these gestures open up spaces where 'different ways of living temporarily become possible' (*ibid*, p. 168), but in contrast to Dolan this is understood as a specifically dramaturgical intervention, seeking 'out the gaps and weaknesses in the spectacle' (*ibid*, p.169).

This approach to performance and utopia is more closely related to spatial conceptions of theatre's utopian potential, often discussed through reference to Michel Foucault's notion of *heterotopias*. Foucault's (1986, p.24) theory describes

heterotopias as concretely realised places, perhaps even 'effectively enacted utopia[s]', which 'exist in reality', but are 'absolutely different from all the places they reflect and speak about'. Foucault identifies the theatre as one such heterotopia, a space that juxtaposes several incompatible places in a single real space (*ibid*, p.25). Some have therefore found this concept helpful in discussing theatre's role as a 'counter-site' (Pearson 2010, p.141), and in analysing its place in society (Primavesi 2013). Turner herself makes some reference to heterotopia, proposing *critical heterotopia* as a dramaturgy that engages a *détournement* of existing architectures to produce alternative possibilities (Turner 2015, p.193). Heterotopia certainly has a pertinent critical function, conceptualising the political potential of theatre's spatiality. An especially important study in this regard is Joanne Tompkins' *Theatre's Heterotopias: Performance and the Cultural Politics of Space*, in which heterotopia enables a spatial analysis of how theatre and performance construct alternatives. While this is connected to utopia, Tompkins is specifically concerned with the spatial expression of utopian ideals, and how their presence in the here and now can offer 'reflective agency for change or commentary in contemporary society' (Tompkins 2014, p.18).

As Turner identifies, there is 'some overlap' between uses of the terms heterotopia and utopia, and as spatial notions they become particularly blurred in Henri Lefebvre's use of utopia to describe 'a consciousness of totality... imagined and real' (cited in Turner 2015, p.17). Both terms seem to provide a way of capturing something aspirational about performance: as both real and imagined, concretely happening in the here and now while constructing potentialities that belong to an unrealizable 'fictive cosmos' (Fuchs in Turner 2015, p.8) that nonetheless has a bearing on the present. For both Tompkins and Turner, this aspiration has a particular spatiality, which Tompkins recognises in spaces in performance, and Turner recognises in dramaturgy.

Such spatial framings of utopia have their relevance to my project, particularly when it comes to considering touring theatre in Chapter 4. However, I do not consider concrete spatiality to be a requisite for the exploration of alternatives, as I am also interested in the kind of *felt* utopia discussed, for example, by Dolan. Furthermore, focusing on dramaturgy I am concerned not only with

constructions in space, but in time. Turner's approach allows for temporal considerations of dramaturgy, architecture and utopia, in a way that differs from, and offers more breadth than, other framings of utopia in performance. For Klaić (1991), the temporal dimension of utopia ties it to the future, whereas for Dolan (2005, p.13), utopia's temporality is more to do with 'a process of spending time'. Through her use of Bakhtin's chronotope, Turner's approach encompasses examples of both as well as considering narrative temporalities of dramatic action and the psychological movement through a text, offering a range of ways of understanding the 'spatio-temporal dynamic' (Harvey cited in Turner 2015, p.17) of social transformation and of dramaturgy.

I too have found chronotope a pertinent notion, alongside other literary theories that open ways of thinking about dramaturgical relationships between utopia, the theatre event, and the contemporary social world. Like Turner, I also find Lefebvre's architectural approach to utopia useful, as well as other utopian theories that stress the not only critical but transformative and generative role of utopia. In the rest of this chapter I will begin carving a path through these concepts, to lay the foundations of my own dramaturgical engagement with utopia. The roots of my dramaturgical proposal lie in the very origins of utopian thought and expression, and are necessarily informed by my own sense of what utopia might be.

I do not seek to represent, or even build, an ideal state or something approximating it. And yet, any engagement with utopia necessarily involves an 'expression of the desire for a better way of being' (Levitas 2011, p.9), which is not merely a negative judgement on the inadequacy of the present. No matter how open-ended and processual I claim my starting point to be, it is underpinned by certain ideals about what such a better way of being might consist of. Such ideals are not readily representable or articulable and might, as Dolan argues, be more concerned with what utopia *feels* like.

As I outlined in Chapter 1, I find Dolan's utopian performative a valuable analytical concept, but it is limited when considering dramaturgy. In seeking how utopia might operate as part of a dramaturgical method, I begin with a mode of utopian expression that resonates with an affective experience of

utopia, while suggesting an approach to composition that might invigorate new forms of theatre-making.

While I do engage with literary theory, I identify a utopian expression that differs considerably from the classical utopian literary genre. Instead, it is derived from a collective and embodied enactment of a better world; an enactment identified in ancient popular festivities that continues to be felt in performance today. This utopian expression, I argue, has its roots in carnival. Thanks to Mikhail Bakhtin's discussion of the carnivalesque, performance scholars and practitioners have found carnival a useful frame for understanding certain aesthetic practices, many of which I cite as influences in my own approach to devising, dramaturgy and touring. In what follows, I draw attention to the relationship between carnival, utopia and theatre, to argue that the carnivalesque not only expresses an ideal way of being, but provides a means of thinking about the dramaturgical operation of utopia within devising and touring practice.

### **Utopia: the classical and the carnival**

The utopian literary genre was born at a time of major social transition, as European economies began shifting from feudalism to profit-driven capitalism. Writing in 1516, Sir Thomas More was responding to this new economic and social reality when he imagined the island of Utopia, in his book of the same name.

*Utopia* describes a fictional nation state, found on an island in an unclear geographic location. Presented in stark contrast to the England of 1516, the book served to criticise present social conditions, and raise questions about the type of society that might be desired, in a world open to new possibilities. This concept of an imagined place where the contradictions of the present are resolved was not new. As Vieira (2010, p.5) notes 'although he invented the word utopia, More did not invent utopianism', referencing a tradition of thought traced back, at least, to ancient Greece. However, the literary form of More's text, in which the fictional land is described by a visitor from an equivalent present society, would spawn a new literary genre. Additionally, the title of the text not only gave a name to this genre, but to that very image of desire that

had persisted in human consciousness. Utopia, itself a pun that conflates the Greek terms for the good place (*eu topos*) and no place (*ou topos*), became the ideal word to describe such a desirable and absent reality.

Prior to More's book, a popular English name for this desired place had been *Cokaygne*. This is what A.L. Morton (1969, p.16) describes as 'the utopia of the folk'; a dream of a better life which is expressed through popular stories and songs. This folk myth is captured in the 200-line poem 'The Land of Cokaygne', which describes a fantastical land of plenty where eternal pleasure is to be found in ludicrous abundance, joy and peace.

In Cokaygne we drink and eat  
 Freely without care and sweat,  
 The food is choice and clear the wine,  
 At fourses and at supper time,  
 I say again, and I dare swear,  
 No land is like it anywhere,  
 Under heaven no land like this  
 Of such joy and endless bliss.<sup>1</sup>

Morton argues that this folk utopia is closely connected to carnival. The poem reflects a popularly held medieval belief in communism as the true form of society. In common with popular medieval festivities, this belief manifests in images of both abundance and equality, expressed as inversions of present realities. A sense of justice via reversal is present in both 'The Land of Cokaygne' and a popular festival such as the 'Feast of Fools', both of which could be seen to express a desire for a better and more just life for ordinary people (*ibid*, pp.27-29).

Michael Bristol (1985, p.88) describes 'The Land of Cokaygne' as a preservation of the utopian understanding of Saturnalia. The ancient Roman winter festival of Saturnalia celebrated the reign of Saturn, commemorating 'a time in which an undivided human collectivity enjoyed the riches of the earth without exploitation or struggle' (*ibid*, p.88). Saturnalia anticipated abundance in the

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<sup>1</sup> From the modern English translation of 'The Land of Cokaygne' in Morton (1969, pp.279-285)



coming seasons of growing, harvest and consumption; an abundance that is also wished for in 'The Land of Cokaygne'.

These associations lead Christopher Kendrick (2004, p.74) to term this image of desire a 'carnival utopia', which I borrow to distinguish this manifestation from later literary utopias, which take a more classical form<sup>2</sup>. Cokaygne has been recognised as a source for More's *Utopia* (Vieira 2010, p.5), and the way More reformulates the concept tells us something of his attitude towards social change. Indeed, it can be seen to characterise a philosophical shift that underscored the Renaissance, and constitutes a key difference between the carnival utopia and what can be described as the classical or humanist utopia.

Towards the end of the fifteenth century, the development of a bourgeois class and the doctrine of humanism brought a new attitude to history and progress. In feudal society, a better life was imagined as existing in the past. Cokaygne and carnival expressed a desire for a primitive communism; a golden age located in the imagined ancient roots of human history. Conversely, humanists no longer looked to the past, but saw a future full of possibilities opening out before them (Morton 1969, pp.51-52). This glorious future would serve the wishes of an intellectual, propertied class<sup>3</sup>, which could hardly be achieved by the popular uprisings implied by the collective form of the carnival utopia. The potential for societal change now lay in the hands of princes and statesmen, who needed convincing (*ibid*, p.62). This attitude is clear in More's book, where the secret to Utopia's success is credited to the conqueror Utopus who 'brought the rude and uncivilised inhabitants into such good government, and to that measure of politeness, that they now far excel all the rest of mankind' (More 1901, p.86). For More, it was not the desires of common people that would drive the world's transformation. Rather, *Utopia* suggests the world would be improved by the calming and transformation of their desires.

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<sup>2</sup> By 'classical' I refer to the establishment of an authoritative and officially sanctioned form, related to Bakhtin's definition of the 'classical canon' on p.50 here

<sup>3</sup> See 'The Class Wish: Humanism as Would-Be Smallholding Culture' in Kendrick (2004, pp.70-73)

Kenrick (2004, pp.82-85) proposes the utopia implied by carnival practices was reformulated in More's text as a utopia that would satisfy the growing bourgeoisie, based on a labour-process that is in line with the views of the state, and presented in a classical form to lend the concept a dignity missing from its popular form. A key distinction between the classical and carnival utopias should therefore be recognised as a matter of social class, in terms of the authorship, intended audience and attitude to historical change. The classical utopia is authored by those in positions of relative privilege and authority in relation to the society being critiqued, and the good place imagined is one that attends to the desires of the bourgeoisie, placing the agency for change in the hands of the present aristocracy. The carnival utopia, on the other hand, 'is the cogent expression of the hopeful desires of unprivileged men and women' (Bristol 1985, p.89), and whether in the form of a folk poem or carnival pageant, is collectively authored by and belongs to the people.

While Levitas (2011, p.220) argues that 'The Land of Cokaygne' does not contain any real 'hope' for social transformation, because the image of desire is so fantastical and unrealistic, Morton (1969, p.20) suggests this fantasy image could never have arisen without hope. By the fourteenth century, the growth of trade, and the development of agricultural technique, brought with it the possibility of an end to serfdom. Working long hours and scraping a bare living was no longer an unquestionable necessity for the common people, and 'The Land of Cokaygne' emerged in this changing landscape. Although the image of possibility is expressed in fantastical terms and appeals to an ideal of primitive living, it nonetheless springs from a belief in change.

Morton (1969, p.45) proposes therefore that the popular mythology and upheaval embodied in Cokaygne foreshadowed humanism and the ideals that would drive progress in the following centuries. The static conception of history, which constituted the official medieval world view, precluded any serious philosophical discussion of progress. The hope of the common people was thus an essential seed enabling humanism to flourish. Carnival, as Mikhail Bakhtin (1984b, p.73) argues, was in turn inflected by humanism to become the expression of a 'free and critical historical consciousness' during the Renaissance. For Bakhtin (1984b, p.73), the emergence of hope in the Middle Ages enabled a new expression of

carnival to flourish in the Renaissance. Central to this flourishing was carnival's incorporation into great literature, exemplified in the work of Renaissance writers such as Cervantes, Shakespeare and Rabelais (*ibid*, p.2).

In *Rabelais and his World*, Bakhtin studies the work of humanist writer François Rabelais, primarily focusing on the four books that constitute *Gargantua and Pantagruel* (c. 1532-1552), a story following the adventures of two giants. Bakhtin argues that to properly appreciate Rabelais' work, it must be understood as part of a culture of folk humour. This culture includes carnival festivities, rituals, marketplace spectacles, oral and written parodies, and popular curses, collectively referred to in generic terms as simply 'carnival' (*ibid*, p.5). Bakhtin associates carnival with the literary grotesque, and distinguishes this from the classical: the grotesque is an aesthetic form that has been present in human culture for thousands of years, prevailing in 'antique literature' and dominating modern-day European folklore; by contrast, the classical canon that is more commonly associated with literature 'today' (that is, the 1930s when Bakhtin was writing) has only been in existence for four hundred years (now five hundred) (*ibid*, p.319). Bakhtin draws particular attention to the differing conceptions of the body and the use of language in the two canons. The grotesque body emphasises the cycles of life, and its imagery fills the familiar speech of grotesque literature, while the classical canon 'presents an entirely finished, completed, strictly limited body' through the 'verbal norms of official and literary language' (*ibid*, pp.318, 320).

Although Bakhtin's study is not specifically about utopianism, his use of the term 'utopia' supports my distinction between carnival and classical humanist utopias. Just as Bakhtin differentiates the grotesque from the classical, his analysis reveals a contrast between the carnival and humanist utopianism in Rabelais' work. Rabelais' most obvious utopian offering is *The Abbey of Thélème*, built according to the anti-monastic ideals of the titular Gargantua. In this fictional Abbey, inhabitants live not according to rules but 'their own free will and pleasure', being spurred to honour because they are free and 'well-bred' (Rabelais 1994, p.157, Book 1, LVII). Rabelais demonstrates an overt awareness of More's text by referencing the island of Utopia as a fictional land in his story, lending credibility to the assertion that the Thélème episode is intended as a

response to *Utopia*, and constitutes Rabelais' own contribution to the humanist utopian tradition<sup>4</sup>.

Bakhtin (1984b, p.431) dismisses Thélème as less relevant to his study, being as it is 'essentially a humanist utopia' with sources in the classical literary canon. This reference comes in the penultimate chapter of Bakhtin's book, but before this point, he has used 'utopian' time and again to describe the space opened up by carnival. Bakhtin does not explicitly compare these utopian expressions, but his dismissive attitude towards the humanist utopia of Thélème and other examples of his disdain for conservative utopian discourse (see Gardiner 1992, pp.32-33), contrasts with his affirmative description of the utopian aspects of carnival and the grotesque. Carnival feasting, for example, is valorised as a 'utopian realm of community, freedom, equality and abundance' (Bakhtin 1984b, p.9), and Bakhtin stresses the 'utopian element' of 'bodily' participation 'in the potentiality of another world' (*ibid*, p.48). Nevertheless, he clarifies it is not his intention to assert the superiority of the grotesque over the classical, and that they experience a mutual influence in the Renaissance, especially in Rabelais (*ibid*, pp.29-30). The new literary utopian genre spawned by More, and the new carnival utopia with its 'critical *historical* consciousness' (*ibid*, p.73), might then be seen as differing, albeit cross-fertilizing, aesthetic responses to an era of deep change.

Although the Renaissance context is central to Bakhtin's argument, his utopian vision of carnival need not be confined to this point in history. As Gardiner (1992, p.22) argues there is a significant rapprochement between Bakhtin's utopia and contemporary developments in utopian thought, which depart from proposals of totalizing blueprints and instead stress the role of the utopian impulse in social transformation. Gardiner draws a particular connection with Tom Moylan's notion of the 'critical utopia', which refers to certain examples of utopian literature written after 1968. This literature is 'critical' both in the Enlightenment sense of *critique*, expressing oppositional thought that debunks the historical situation and the utopian genre itself, and in the nuclear sense of

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<sup>4</sup> See Chapter 2 of Kendrick (2004) for a detailed discussion

the *critical mass* required to make the necessary explosive reaction (Moylan 2014, p.10). For Gardiner (1992, p.33), these critical properties are evident in Bakhtin's carnival, which is not a utopia of 'organic order and harmony' but 'rather a ceaselessly dynamic one, always remaining confrontational, unpredictable and self-mocking'.

Bakhtin's (1984b, p.12) notion of 'ambivalent laughter' is central to his characterisation of carnival, describing a mockery that is directed at the whole world, including 'those who laugh'. Nothing is beyond this 'comic aspect'; all is 'incomplete', will die and be 'revived and renewed' (*ibid*). Viewed as a 'critical utopia', carnival contains a self-mocking reflexivity that laughs at, not only the present society it is opposed to, but its own potentiality. Carnival images of death and rebirth are pertinent metaphors to think of this utopia as one that dies as it grows; that conceives itself as it witnesses its own decline.

Carnival expresses both a desire for a better way of being, and the incompleteness of its own vision, evoking something of the 'dialectic of openness and closure' that Levitas (2013, p.103) identifies in the most successful of postmodern utopian texts. For Levitas, this dialectic signals a treatment of 'utopia as method', which embraces provisionality and dialogue in a dynamic re-imagining of society. A comparison might also be noted with Henri Lefebvre's understanding of utopia as experimental: carnival experiments with a 'new mode of interrelationships' (Bakhtin 1984a, p.123) and allows participation in another way of life (Bakhtin 1984b, p.48); much like the utopianism that Lefebvre (1995, p.357) describes as 'testing itself out' and 'becoming a lived experience'.

Criticisms abound when it comes to Bakhtin's characterisation of carnival, in terms of both its historical accuracy and its implications for the enduring relevance of carnival forms. I therefore find it useful to read carnival alongside contemporary understandings of utopia, drawing out the potential for a complex and nuanced engagement with utopia. However, I will summarise the most common flaws identified in Bakhtin's argument, as they cross over with the potential weaknesses I either pre-empt or acknowledge within my own practice. My contention is that adopting a dramaturgical approach to carnival, imbricated

within a contemporary conceptual framework of utopia, can offer a means of negotiating these contradictions, and working productively with them.

Bakhtin's idealised view of carnival has attracted accusations of unrealistic populism. His characterisation unquestioningly prizes folk culture as critical, inclusive and regenerative, and assumes 'the people' are inherently pro-universal (see Docker 1994, pp.186-187). Further, Bakhtin supposedly ignores the presence of class disunity in carnival, and fails to recognise carnival's hostility to outsiders, nor does he attempt any consideration of non-European identities (*ibid*, pp.190-192). Additionally, the *safety-valve* theory flies in the face of Bakhtin's belief in the indestructible, regenerative power of carnival. This theory suggests that the space of carnival was intended as a temporary release for anti-authoritarian tendencies, preventing their build up into a full-scale revolution; and that by acknowledging this as a time of temporary reversal, carnival in fact reinforced society's dominant norms (*ibid*, pp.193-194).

These concerns surface in my exploration of notions of community in Chapter 4, where I propose dramaturgical models that might address them via the materiality and mobility of touring. However, I also argue that these criticisms serve as further verification that Bakhtin's carnival ought to be designated a utopia. Utopias are, as Moylan (2006, p.10) reminds us, images of a 'fictive quality' that serve to illuminate the gap 'between what is and what could be' (*ibid*, p.5). They are not states that can be readily implemented or pieced together as observable historical realities. They are, by their nature, located at a considerable imaginative distance from the world as it currently is. The distance from what appears to be immediately achievable results in anti-utopian reaction; the attitude that imagining alternatives is not only pointless but, some would argue, dangerously totalitarian (*ibid*, p.2). This is the implication behind the pejorative use of the word 'utopian', intended to dismiss a vision as unworkable and/or undesirable. This is the same dismissal expressed in poetic images such as Aristophanes' 'cloud-cuckoo-land', and later in Joe Hill's 'pie-in-the-sky'; images that would not be out of place in the carnivalesque 'Land of Cokaygne'.

The word utopian can be associated with the unrealistic belief in a better world, as much as with the positive act of creating one. However, I like Angelika Bammer's proposal to reclaim 'the utopian', not only as a positive impulse but as one that sets out with a belief in real change.

My goal is to replace the idea of "a utopia" as something fixed, a form to be fleshed out, with the idea of "the utopian" as an *approach toward*, a movement beyond set limits into the realms of the not-yet-set.

(Bammer 1991, p.7)

In Bammer's use, utopian comes to mean an open and exploratory attitude towards progress; the utopian is not a 'comprehensive' vision of what a better world might be, but a 'partial' one 'that moves and shapes history' (*ibid*, pp.4, 7). Bakhtin's carnival is utopian in both the unrealistic and transformative definitions of the word. Carnival's utopian *content* might be unattainable, but it implies a utopian *process* that is engaged in growth and renewal.

The utopian element of Bakhtin's carnival might be recognised as an essential combination of anticipation and falseness, which has been identified as central to utopia's function in historical change. Utopian philosopher Ernst Bloch (1986, p.155) argues there is 'an anticipatory element in the false'; a claim he associates with Marx's assertions in an 1843 letter which advocated 'the *carrying through* of the thoughts of the past' (*ibid*). In this letter, Marx (1978, p.15) proposes there is no *new* work to begin but rather the conscious accomplishment of old work, which will be achieved by 'analyzing the mystical consciousness' which is evident in previous religious and political struggles but is yet 'unclear to itself'. This analysis, Marx proposes, will show that 'the world has long been dreaming of something that it can acquire if only it becomes conscious of it' (*ibid*). Bloch (1986, p.156) seizes upon this assertion to argue that the utopian plans of the past are not confined to their historical context. On the contrary, they stretch far beyond the limits of their own perfection, producing a surplus that is carried through into the dreams of a better life that persist in the present.

This theory of surplus concurs with Bakhtin's claim that a history of laughter and carnival imagery can be traced through ancient festivities, medieval folk culture and renaissance literature. The repeated return to the carnivalesque might be evidence of a 'mystical consciousness' that is not yet clear to itself; a desire for a better way of being that is inconclusive about its exact content.

This dream of a better life relates to Bloch's (1986, p.115) notion of the 'not-yet-conscious': a kind of non-lucid awareness that exists at the threshold of consciousness, where something 'not previously conscious' is about to *dawn*. The not-yet-conscious is daydream-like, oriented towards 'the new' and revealed in 'all productive states which are giving birth to what has never been there' (*ibid*, p.116). This might be recognised in Bakhtin's (1984b, p.81) discussion of carnival feasting, expressive of 'the people's hopes of a happier future'. The feast is not an assertively conscious proposal for a different society, but presents a 'future of a general material affluence, equality and freedom' (*ibid*) reminiscent of what Bloch (1986, p.368) calls an 'immature, but honest substitute for revolution'.

Thus, I am interested in carnival as a starting point - a potential 'birthplace of the new' (Bloch 1986, p.116) - where deeply held but not-yet-conscious desires can be embodied and experimented with. Similarly, when I identify similarities between carnival and contemporary utopian theory, or carnival and contemporary performance practice, I am interested in the surplus of utopian longing that proliferates in these differing expressions. I am less concerned with the historical accuracy of Bakhtin's vision, or the readily traceable lineage between these modes of thought and practice, than I am in finding a way to productively seize upon the anticipation for a better way of being, which the carnivalesque seems to embody.

### **Dramaturgy: the classical and the carnival**

The term dramaturgy was first used to refer to dramatic structure by the German playwright and critic Gotthold Ephraim Lessing, whose *Hamburg Dramaturgy* was published in 1769 during his time as resident playwright at the Hamburg National Theatre. As with utopia, we can identify the moment the word 'dramaturgy' came into usage, but this did not constitute the invention of an entirely new concept. Dramatic works had always had structures, and



concerns with theorising and analysing those structures could be said to have started with Aristotle's *Poetics* (circa 350 BC). Consequently, dramaturgy has historically been associated with the structural principles governing questions of plot, character and dialogue within dramatic literature, whether through reference to Aristotle, Shakespeare, Lessing, or to later developments in, for example, naturalism (Ibsen, Shaw) or epic theatre (Piscator, Brecht).

The term 'dramaturgy' might have a text-based root, but forms of non-literary performance can also be said to contain dramaturgies, as per my focus on dramaturgy within devised theatre at the start of this chapter. Non-verbal, highly visual, non-linear, improvisatory forms, are organised by principles that constitute a dramaturgy, even though these principles might not be dramatic in the conventional sense. This expanded understanding of dramaturgy is made possible by post-dramatic and post-modern readings of contemporary performance (as discussed by Hans-Thies Lehmann (2006) for example), but can, I argue, be applied to earlier forms that pre-date the development of dramatic literature. Performance that is associated with what Bakhtin calls the carnivalesque or grotesque canon, has its own dramaturgy that, as I will discuss, is quite different from the 'bourgeois dramaturgy' (Stegemann 2015, p.46) that emerged from Lessing's project. Just as I have distinguished the classical from the carnival utopia, I use 'classical' to refer to this bourgeois, text-based, and more conventionally dramatic dramaturgy, distinguishing this from what I conceive as 'carnival' dramaturgy<sup>5</sup>. I suggest these are distinct, while not entirely separate, forms.

Bakhtin (1984b, p.30) suggests the classical and grotesque canons experience a 'struggle, mutual influence, crossing and fusion' during the Renaissance. In the work of Shakespeare this could be understood as a mutual influence of classical and carnival dramaturgy, accounting for the seemingly contradictory values assigned to the Shakespearean canon. Lessing, for example, valued Shakespeare as a model appropriate to a 'serious and significant theatrical art' (Turner and

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<sup>5</sup> My use of 'classical dramaturgy' is not related to its use in a French theatre context, as by Jacques Scherer (1950), to refer to dramaturgy within the 17<sup>th</sup> century classical period

Behrndt 2016, p.24), while Brecht later admired Shakespeare specifically for his 'sprawling narrative structures' and 'lack of concern for the classical "unities"' (*ibid*, p.57). Brecht's is also a prime example of a dramaturgy combining classical and carnival elements. Brecht sought a textual exposition of the contradictions within society, centred around the dilemmas encountered by his characters, in a dialectical story development. This dramatic structure evolved from classical dramaturgy, but was accompanied by other formal elements that can be seen to return to principles more associated with what Bakhtin would call 'folk carnival humour'. As Stegemann (2015, p.47) states, Brecht's removal of the fourth wall re-establishes the 'once direct contact, which characterized folk theatre'; while Brecht's emphasis on narration rather than plot is more related to oral storytelling than classical drama (see Wilson 2006, pp.48-55, and Chapter 6 here).

My understanding of carnival in this context is therefore closely related to what is more commonly described as popular or folk theatre. Bakhtin's use of 'carnival' refers to a range of cultural folk practices, including forms of theatrical presentation such as ritual spectacles, puppet shows, and clowning. His definition crosses over with a list of western incarnations of popular theatre (in Schechter 2003, p.6), which includes itinerant minstrelsy of the Middle Ages, carnival clowning, *commedia dell'arte*, farce and stage jigs of the Renaissance period, vaudeville, circus, pantomime, Punch and Judy, and melodrama. Therefore, there is some shared taxonomy in what is understood to be theatre and what is understood to be carnival. Even when claiming that the carnival spirit became a purely literary manifestation after the Renaissance, Bakhtin (1984b, p.34) nonetheless recognises *commedia dell-arte* as a form that retained its link to its carnival origins.

Michael Bristol argues that theatre and festive life were closely related forms in the early Renaissance, and that the growth of theatre as an institution was a continuation of popular festive activity.

The public playhouse, then, must be considered a politically significant *mise-en-scene*, where the energy and initiative of collective life are

forcefully manifested in texts, in performance convention, and in the reception and appreciation of theatrical spectacle.

(Bristol 1985, p.5)

While Bakhtin proposes that carnival was renewed in the Renaissance by being incorporated into literature, Bristol's account suggests it was more concretely preserved in theatre; a theatre that was becoming more literary, but that reflected the social purpose of carnival in its form more immediately than through its texts (*ibid*, p. 4). While Bristol goes on to discount later forms of popular and social theatricality as further continuations of this trajectory, other scholars have noted that the theatrical legacy of carnival might be recognised in Mummers' plays (Green 2004, p.130), vaudeville and music hall performance (Docker 1994, pp.202-210), pantomime (M. Taylor 2007, pp.15-16), 'red nose' clowning (Radcliffe 2017, p.38) fools and *bouffons* (Mason 2016, p.21), as well as what Bim Mason (2016) describes as provocation in popular culture, evident in street theatre, activist performance and burlesque.

I propose there are dramaturgical principles within these forms that derive from carnival and establish the basis for the dramaturgical operation of utopia in performance. The difference between the classical and the carnival here is key. As I will discuss, the classical utopia and the principles of classical dramaturgy might be considered quite incompatible; as forms they remain distinct from one another. However, I argue that the carnival utopia and carnival dramaturgy are closer in form, sharing principles that make this the ideal creative realm through which to explore utopia's operation as a dramaturgical tool.

It has been noted that 'utopia, as a subject for representation, is inherently un-dramatic' (Bottoms 2013, p.72). As a finished state of perfection, utopia supposedly offers no room for dramatic conflict, and there are few examples of dramatic literature that depict a utopian society, compared to an entire genre of such representations in novelistic literature. However, as Klaić (1995, p.61) argues, utopian drama can explore conflicts when it 'presents its utopian arguments as a blueprint, open to opposition, rather than depicting the consequences of their implementation'. Thus, utopia might appear in drama as the 'futuristic dream' described by a character (Chekov's Vershinin for example),

rather than an onstage representation (*ibid*). Conflict might also arise between the idealism of a proposal and its impossibility, exposing the contradictions that hinder the realisation of utopia. I discuss this kind of conflict further in Chapters 4 and 6, but rather than exploring this as a conflict created within the dramatic text, I investigate how such a conflict arises in the *context* of a utopian performance. In my practical research, these contradictions and impossibilities are not woven into the dramatic structure via classical dramaturgical principles, but are revealed via an improvisatory and critical performance attitude that emerges in the adoption of carnivalesque strategies derived from clowning and storytelling.

Turner's (2015) architectural frame also provokes an analysis of utopia in dramatic structures, without getting caught up in considerations of representation or dramatic conflict. Drawing primarily on architectural understandings of utopia, Turner's approach has little to do with the classical literary utopia, further confirming the incompatibility between classical dramaturgy and classical utopia.

Conversely, the carnival utopia is defined by its maintaining an oppositional relationship to the status quo, its reversal of norms, its collective authorship, intended popular appeal, and participatory form of engagement. All of these features can also be seen as elements that might define the carnivalesque elements of a dramaturgy. However, the dramaturgical feature that I am particularly interested in is a compositional nuance that expresses the carnival utopia's orientation towards change. While the classical utopia sets out a proposal for a better society, the carnival utopia embeds the potential of change into the fabric of its aesthetic consciousness.

For Bakhtin (1984b, p.10), carnival is a feast of 'change and renewal'. It offers the chance to 'realize the relative nature of all that exists, and to enter a completely new order of things' (*ibid*, p.34). The temporary reversal of hierarchies in festivities such as the Feast of Fools highlights the changeability of, not only the ruling elite, but the entire hierarchical order. The election of a mock king is a mockery of 'the high and the old', casting the present order to the lowest depths to signal its 'death and rebirth' (*ibid*, p.82).

Principles of change and rebirth are especially notable in Bakhtin's distinction between the classical and the grotesque body. While the classical canon presents the body as 'entirely finished' and 'strictly limited', the grotesque emphasises the cycles of life, celebrating a body that is inseparable from the earthly cycles of seasonal changes, vegetation, harvest, sun and moon (*ibid*, pp.318-319). The grotesque body 'is a body in the act of becoming', where the beginning and end of life is interwoven in images of orifices and convexities that present another, newly conceived body (*ibid*, p.317). This grotesque body contains an 'ancestral aspect' (*ibid*, p.323); an emphasis on humanity's innate connecting force, expressed in the body's capacity for reproduction. In Rabelais, images of copulation, conception, and birth are imbued with 'the preservation and perpetuation of humankind' (Rabelais in *ibid*, p.324).

In the Renaissance, the 'cyclical character' of grotesque images is superseded by a 'mighty awareness of [...] historic change' (*ibid*, p.25). The reproducing body becomes intimately related to historic progress, where 'the human race is not merely renewed with each new generation, it rises to a new level of development' (*ibid*, p.324). In the Renaissance grotesque concept of the body, an act of copulation, a pregnant body, even a single sperm, contains the possibility of a rebirth of humanity; such images are interwoven with 'the change of epochs and renewal of culture' (*ibid*, p.325).

Such emphasis on bodily orifices is evident in, for example, the comic scenarios of *commedia dell'arte*. However, the principle of rebirth is not only a representational trope but can be seen as a structuring principle in carnivalesque theatre and performance. Bakhtin draws attention to Shakespeare's 'logic of crownings and uncrownings' as evidence of 'the essential carnival element' that organises his drama (*ibid*, p.275). Additionally, the notion of *Saturnalian comedy* as a dramatic form is proposed by C.L. Barber (1959), and developed by Oliver Hennessey (2010, p.11) to argue that Shakespeare's 'carnavalesque treatment of chronicle history' is characterised by the conflation of 'a utopian future with a recently past golden age', offering the promise of 'social vitality' and 'renewal'. The ritual killing and subsequent resurrection that structures the English Mummers Play, provides a later (18<sup>th</sup> Century) example of this enduring dramatic form in folk theatre. In my own practical experiments, I

have investigated rebirth as a generative principle that might propel a work's dramaturgy together with acts of devising and touring, discussed in Chapter 5.

Other compositional features of the carnivalesque such as the role of mockery and parody, lived participation and the openness to indeterminacy, all ultimately return to principles of rebirth and renewal. Ambivalent laughter is intended to degrade and revive, while the participation in an entirely different way of being signals the inadequacy and imminent death of the present order, in a living embodiment of its future rebirth. These elements feature strongly in avant-garde, alternative and contemporary performance practices that can be understood as carnivalesque, establishing a lineage of practice that my own work sits within.

In the next section I consider three examples of performance practices that have been discussed in relation to Bakhtin's carnivalesque, building upon these readings to specifically demonstrate how carnival can illuminate a dramaturgical relationship with the process and possibility of change. Existing readings of carnival in performance sometimes adopt the carnivalesque as a critical tool for considering the political or utopian dimension of the work. For example, both Jan Cohen-Cruz and Christopher Innes propose that carnivalesque performances 'critique official social organization' and subvert 'social, moral and aesthetic categories' (Cohen-Cruz 1998, p.167), while evoking 'the potentiality of an entirely different world' (Innes 1993, p.8). I go further by expanding upon Baz Kershaw's (1992) analysis of carnivalesque conventions in three British alternative theatre companies, who have influenced my own practice: People Show, Welfare State and 7:84. I consider such practices in relation to the compositional features of the carnivalesque that I have discussed here, to demonstrate that carnival dramaturgies not only evoke the potentiality of an alternative, but act critically, generatively and experimentally in their relationship with such ideal imaginaries.

### **Carnival utopia as dramaturgical tool**

People Show, formed in London in 1966, display 'an anarchic celebration of creativity', which Kershaw (1992, p.70) has identified as carnivalesque. Their ethos was (and still is) one of non-hierarchical creation, bringing together

actors, dancers, musicians, visual artists, designers, and occasionally non-artists, to create new theatre from scratch. As their website states 'each of our shows becomes an expression of whatever and whoever arrives at the rehearsal room' (People Show, 2019)<sup>6</sup>.

The carnival realm is the ideal incubator for this pluralistic creativity. As John Fiske suggests, carnival is 'able to absorb contradictory practices within a single expressive domain' (cited in Kershaw 1992, p.72). This alludes to the experimental nature of carnival; a 'place for working out [...] a new mode of interrelationships' in a 'concretely sensuous' form (Bakhtin 1984a, p.123). This experimental utopia, 'half-real and half-play-acted' (*ibid*), allows People Show to try out ways of relating and working together that are 'counterposed' (*ibid*) to the social hierarchies in the everyday world. Thus, the company experiment with the possibility of an entirely different way of being. In Bakhtin's (1984b, p.48) terminology, it is their 'bodily participation' in such a possibility that gives this practice its utopian element. But this possibility is, as Bakhtin reminds us, not entirely future-oriented but rooted in an imagined past.

For Bakhtin (1984b, p.48), the Roman Saturnalia is the utopian carnival par excellence, because of its embodied enactment of the return of Saturn's Golden Age. Although the historical line of influence between Roman Saturnalia and later carnival manifestations is questionable, Bakhtin proposes that this utopian element is always present in folk humour and the grotesque in one form or another. People Show demonstrate that this mythical golden age recurs in theatre practice as well. People Show's longest serving member Mark Long (2016, p.27) has described them as a 'bunch of strolling players' suggesting a practice steeped in a history located far beyond living memory, which might be thought of as an attempt to enact a theatrical golden age.

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<sup>6</sup> Throughout this thesis I refer to any collaborative/ ensemble theatre company in the plural, i.e. with the pronoun 'they', rather than the grammatically appropriate 'it'. This is to reflect the fact that I am almost always referring to practices and values that have arisen through collective processes, undertaken by specific groups of people. Treating these companies as plural entities recognises the heterogeneity of such practices, and is therefore a consciously applied and politically important grammatical misdemeanour.

The golden age evoked via the imaginary of the strolling player is not entirely ancient, and is perhaps that same era Bakhtin focuses on as the high point of carnival expression: the Renaissance. Long's reference to strolling players performs his own association with the carnivalesque, imaginatively connecting People Show's spirit of non-hierarchical collaboration and unconventional performance approaches with the oppositional spirit, collectivity and freedom of carnival. Bakhtin (1984b, p.106) identifies the company of itinerant actors as a 'popular festive image' that continues to recur in literature, offering examples by Scarron (17<sup>th</sup> century) and Goethe (18<sup>th</sup> century), before stating that 'the utopian fascination with the theatre is still felt in our time'. This continuing attraction to travelling theatre might be seen to contain a surplus of anticipatory desire for a better way of being, while its rooting in a historical imaginary implies that perhaps this better way of being was once experienced in the past.

This is a performance of nostalgia, but one that notably differs from what Susan Bennett (1996, pp.11-12) identifies as the nostalgic performance of history that is concerned with tradition and the immutability of the nation. Bennett's study on nostalgia is largely focused on contemporary performances of Shakespeare, which has some relevance to my discussion here. Bennett's argument treats Shakespearean texts as emblematic of the literary canon and thus intrinsically associated with a conservative theatrical tradition (*ibid*); a reading perhaps concerned only with the classical elements of Shakespeare. Consideration of such texts' carnivalesque character reveals a utopian nostalgia embedded within them. Shakespearean dramatic form can be read as itself 'saturnalian' (Barber 1959), and as Hennessey (2010, p.11) argues, entails the nostalgic staging of 'festive forms that were disappearing from English popular life', conflating them with a potential future society. The desire to imagine oneself as part of 'a bunch of strolling players' performs an imaginative association with this same period of theatrical history, situating not so much what Bennett (1996, p.7) calls a desire for a more authentic past, but rather what Hennessey (2010, p.11) identifies as the 'mocking laughter and revel' contained in festive life, and its promise of social renewal. This is a not-yet-conscious embodiment of a desire for change; as Long (2016, p.36) asserts, 'we were committed to something new, without much idea what'.



This nostalgic desire for renewing level is perhaps a carnivalesque inflection on the notion of the 'romantic anti-capitalist', advanced by Michael Löwy and Robert Sayre (2001), which disputes the conservatism of romantic notions of community and aims at 'a *detour* through the past on the way to a utopian future' (Löwy cited in Ridout 2013, p.8). This figure is related to Nicolas Ridout's (2013) 'passionate amateur'; a 'theatrical variant' on the romantic anti-capitalist (*ibid*, p.6) and referring to

those who work together for the production of value for one another (for love, that is, rather than money) in ways that refuse - sometimes rather quietly and perhaps ineffectually - the division of labour that obtains under capitalism as usual.

(*ibid*, p.15)

People Show's relationship to a romantic ideal of strolling players invokes a desire for this passionate amateurism. People Show's own collaborative ethos, which sees artists working against their specialisms to create theatre regardless of prior training, is reminiscent of what Nadine Holdsworth *et al.* (2017, p.15) have called the 'shared endeavour' and 'creative spirit' that can be seen at the heart of amateur theatre communities. People Show's chaotic ensemble approach, and insistence on anti-hierarchy, performs a desire not for a professional life in a classical theatre company, but for a pre-capitalist egalitarian community, imaginatively conceived as a ramshackle troupe of amateur players. Of course, People Show are not an amateur company, and historical research into the tradition of strolling players quickly dispels any golden-age myths that might associate such a lifestyle with an anti-capitalist one (see Chapter 4). However, Long's (2016, p.27) reference to strolling players is offered as part of 'a version' of People Show's history, in a gently irreverent self-parody that simultaneously produces and acknowledges its own mythical status. In the intellectual tradition of romantic anti-capitalism, the anticipation signified by this myth is more significant than the accuracy of it.

A different approach to this mythologizing occurs in the work of Welfare State International. Founded in 1968 and ceasing operation in 2007, Welfare State self-consciously located their work in the folk and carnival tradition, producing many outdoor and site-specific spectacles. One of the defining features of

Welfare State's ideology was challenging the received tradition of carnival, and of the notion of myth specifically. Recognising the way that myths have been claimed by elites as justification for their rule, Tony Coult (1983, p.3) asserts that for Welfare State 'myths and archetype have to be discovered and re-made, not simply revived'. The task of the company was 'the reclaiming of myth and its theatrical enactment for the whole community' (Coult 1983, p.3). Hence, while there was a sense of reviving a lost tradition, there was also a commitment to remaking it in a way that held meaning for those participating. This work is, as Kershaw (1992) attests, rooted in 'a collectivist, egalitarian utopianism' or even, as Bennett (1996, p.60) notes, a 'leftist nostalgia' for community. However, I suggest that understanding Welfare State's attitude to myth helps to wrestle this utopianism from nostalgia, and recognise its anticipatory element instead. In this practice, the ideals of collective life are not found by appealing to an imagined past, but by generating them within the present community. Consequently, perhaps the golden age is yet to be discovered. This generative carnivalesque continues in the spirit of Bakhtin's carnival, embracing a process open to indeterminacy and renewal, to produce celebrations collectively authored and owned by the people.

Like People Show, Welfare State have a tendency to describe the company in half-mythical, half-real carnivalesque terms, as 'dissident clowns' (Fox 2002, p.17) or 'jesters' (*ibid*, p.105), accompanied by a sense that this myth is being worked out in the course of their endeavours.

Increasingly dissatisfied with the transience of touring and still searching for some kind of Utopia, the jesters needed to settle in a community and develop a more holistic work over a long period

*(ibid)*

This echoes those concerns outlined in Chapter 1 - that touring is unsatisfying and hinders a sense of community - and explicitly connects these concerns to a desire for utopia. As with People Show's continued negotiation of anti-hierarchical collaboration, Welfare State's decision to settle in Barrow-in-Furness in 1983, might be considered part of their experimental utopianism. Where the company once imagined utopia would be found on the road, they subsequently

felt drawn to settle in a community. Thus, the experiment is not only a case of testing out the possibilities, but adjusting their sense of what utopia might mean in accordance with their lived experience.

The self-parodic tone evident in both People Show's and Welfare State's descriptions of themselves is reminiscent of the self-reflexivity shared by carnival and the contemporary critical utopia (Gardiner 1992). Similarly, this can be recognised in their performance attitude, which frequently involves breaking the fourth wall and commenting on the action. While Kershaw (1999, pp.10-11) associates the 'self-referentiality' and 'reflexive irony' in Welfare State's work with the 'post-modern' elements of their dramaturgy, I see this as an integral part of both company's carnival dramaturgies, arising from a deliberate engagement with popular entertainment forms. Indeed, it is my experience of working with these companies that brought references such as *music hall*, *vaudeville* and *the folk tradition* into my own practice, so prolific are they as citations during the rehearsal processes of both.

My practice is heavily influenced by People Show and Welfare State, having worked with both companies in 2007-8, alongside artists with whom I would go on to form The Suitcase Ensemble. My practical research builds on the practices and framings I describe here to explore not only an experimental utopianism, but to consider how the act of collaboration sets up a mediation with a 'no place of possibility' (Chapter 3); how the making of new myths might act as a provocation that disrupts the imaginaries of the official culture (Chapter 6); and how a self-reflexive performance attitude can enable a critical commentary on the utopianism of the strolling player myth, embedded within the dramaturgy of a touring show (Chapter 6).

My final example in this chapter considers how an alternative to the nostalgic strolling player myth might be embodied by a carnival aesthetic. 7:84 (Scotland) was formed by John McGrath when he moved from London to Scotland in 1973, having founded 7:84 (England) two years earlier. The first play written for the Scottish company was *The Cheviot, The Stag and the Black, Black Oil*, which used the format of a ceilidh to tell the story of the 19<sup>th</sup>-century highland clearances and illuminate contemporary (in 1973) questions around the

ownership of Scottish oil. For McGrath (1996, p.37), popular cultural forms are valuable because they draw on a new audience and introduce new experiences that have been denied to the working classes but also to theatre. The use of the ceilidh format can be seen as establishing a familiarity and a grounds for solidarity between performer and audience (Kershaw 1992, p.153) as well as introducing a new type of theatre event. The solidarity signified by a social event like a ceilidh might make an audience more amenable to the performance's argument, but it also contributes to that argument. Aiming to encourage a revolutionary response based on class interests, it is significant that so much of the play's context relies on collective solidarity and communal endeavour. This is evident in the devising process and the ceilidh format but also, as Kershaw (1992, p.156) proposes, in the 'rhetorical conventions of the tour itself'.

*The Cheviot...* initially toured to 27 venues across the Scottish Highlands. The hard graft of the tour was evident to the audience, both as a consequence of playing in small communities where 'this amount of effort rarely goes unnoticed', and through the staging of the show itself where final preparations were made as the audience arrived, actors played several characters, spoke directly to the audience as 'themselves', and transformed into a band at the end of the evening, playing music until well after midnight (*ibid*). The collective endeavour of the company, Kershaw suggests, represents the collective voice of 'the people', which is valorised within the performance text as 'the basis of an oppositional ideology' (*ibid*, p.163). This is extended to the audience in the post-performance dancing, which becomes a carnivalesque 'celebration of collectivism, egalitarianism and a will to self-determination' (*ibid*, p.164). The dancing might constitute a utopian performative, but more significantly it reinforces the ideological stance of the performance so that this celebratory release is not gesturing towards a vague sense of unity but to the revolutionary action that the performance has indicated is necessary.

This draws upon, but updates, the romantic myth of the travelling theatre company. Rather than the haphazard company of players enjoying 'certain rights and freedoms of carnival', which Bakhtin (1984b, p.106) identifies in the literature of Scarron and Goethe, *The Cheviot* presents a hard-working company

who might be opposed to the establishment, but are in absolute solidarity with their working-class audience, enjoying no more freedoms than they do. Here, the tour might spread something of a 'festive carnival atmosphere', as Bakhtin (*ibid*) suggests, but more importantly it spreads an atmosphere of solidarity and determination. This creates a different kind of myth about a company of itinerant actors, which is less about a carnival lifestyle and more about the incitement of revolution.

This associates 7:84's carnivalesque with the critical and revolutionary aspects that emerge in Bakhtin's analysis of the Rabelaisian carnival, more so than what Norman Franke (2017, pp.890, 886) calls the 'realised utopia' of the 'good life' that emerges in Bakhtin's reference to the carnivalesque of Goethe. Franke argues that these two aspects of carnival - revolution and realised utopia - 'belong together' (*ibid*, p.890), and perhaps they experience a mutual revelation in 7:84's touring practices. A meeting of these two carnivalesque ideals is also explored in *Travelling Show*, investigating a different means of connecting them to the practice of touring. As discussed in Chapter 5, they are taken up as generative chronotopes that not only reflect utopian ideals, but move the dramaturgy forward, evolving the work and its ideals along with its movement through space.

The practices discussed here demonstrate how carnival can operate as part of a critical dramaturgy. In 7:84's *The Cheviot...* carnival celebration critiques the economic system and embodies what Moylan (2014, p.10) calls the critical mass needed to ignite change. A subtler reflexive critique emerges in People Show's and Welfare State's irreverent descriptions of themselves in half-mythical carnivalesque terms, as well as in the self-referentiality of their performances. These practices can be recognised as enacting experimental utopias, embracing the carnival realm as one that accommodates a coexistence of difference and a space in which to generate something new.

There are correlations between these critical dramaturgies and those proposed by Turner (2015, p.194), who similarly identifies *experimental utopia* as one of the ways utopia operates dramaturgically in theatre practice. Additionally, her notion of *critical heterotopia*, which engages a *détournement* of existing

architectures to produce alternative possibilities (*ibid*, p.193), might be relevant to 7:84's use of touring practices to solidify a critical relationship to the status quo. However, these categories are also limiting. Focused on architecture and the built environment, Turner understands all of these dramaturgies as responding to the real. In other words, their starting point is the present, and they elaborate potential alternatives by constructing ideals that have an experimental or critical relationship with existing architectures. By contrast, my discussion of People Show proposes that the starting point might be *anticipation* - a not-yet-conscious dream of a better life, which struggles to find a place in overly architectural thinking. This is a practice interested in 'something new, without much idea what' (Long 2016, p.36); a practice invested in an excitement about the unknown. In the next chapter I further explore how devising practice enables a dialogue with the unknown. My proposals problematise the notion of a constructive dramaturgical relationship with reality, while extending ideas about indeterminacy that I have begun to consider here in relation to the carnivalesque.

In this chapter I have explored the critical, experimental and generative potential of the carnivalesque; processual aspects that suggest a dramaturgy that is, like Bakhtin's grotesque body, unfinished, never completed, and forever in a state of becoming. This sense of indeterminacy, of the provisional, and the not-yet-set, is central to much contemporary utopian thinking. In rejecting utopia as blueprint, and as a finished state of the world, utopian scholars have become more interested in notions of process and method. So too in theatre-making, and in devising practice in particular, where dialogue, contingency and an embrace of the unknown are foregrounded. As a dramaturgical tool then, carnival might itself enter into dialogue with creative practices that reach beyond the present, into the realm of the unknown. In this way, carnival might not only produce a critically reflexive dramaturgy, but experiment with, critique and generate the currently unimaginable. In the next chapter I consider this realm of the unimaginable as itself a utopia, understood not as that which is to be desired, but that which is no place; unknowable, unfathomable, other.



### 3. Devising and utopia: opening a space of contingency

This chapter adopts utopia as a conceptual frame to understand how devising practice opens up imaginations and perceptions. Utopian texts expand understandings of what is possible through the imagination of something beyond our present sphere of reasoning. I argue that in devising practice, this happens not through the representation of utopias, but by enabling participants to experience alternative ways of perceiving and knowing. As discussed in Chapter 2, performance can be thought of as a lived embodiment of a better way of being. In this chapter, I discuss the way performance, or specifically devising practice, can embody different ways of knowing. However, *what* is known is less crucial than the very act of opening up the possibility that there are things beyond our present comprehension. Conceiving of this practice in relation to utopia, this chapter is less concerned with utopia as something *good*, and more with an understanding of utopia as *no place*.

I begin with a review of devising and utopia in existing theatre and performance scholarship, before building my own conceptual framework through reference to specific devising practices and theories of utopia. Finally, I discuss how this conceptual framework was developed in my devising experiment *Starting the Search*.

#### **Devising and utopia**

Devising is the practice of creating theatre through the rehearsal process, without a pre-existing script. In this thesis it is understood as a collaborative practice that involves several artists working together to evolve a theatre performance by using a range of generative exercises, and engaging in dialogue with each other. While 'devising' is a common name for this practice in the UK, in other countries it is sometimes referred to as 'collective creation' or simply 'collaboration', and therefore I reference scholarship that encompasses these terms as well.



The emergence of devising in the 1960s can be recognised as a reflection of the desire for participation, collectivity and democracy that was expressed in political movements of the time (Heddon and Milling 2006, p.17). This is an era often characterised as containing a "'revolutionary" zeal' (*ibid*, p.18) that is sometimes looked back on as utopian in the sense of being a time when change felt possible but failed to really take hold. This sentiment comes through particularly strongly in the 'Utopia' issue of *Theater* (initially referenced in Chapter 1), when Kushner (1995, p.10) dismisses his own proposal as sounding 'too much like the sixties'. Maybe that was 'as close as we're likely to get' to utopia, he muses, but 'it went away before it managed to become perfect' (*ibid*). The devising experiments of this time enacted 'ideal (and idealised) models' (Heddon and Milling 2006, p.15) that offered a 'politically acceptable alternative' to the mainstream model of 'hierarchy, specialisation and increased professionalisation' (*ibid*, p.17). In practice these ideals reveal themselves to be just that: ideal, even utopian, models that cannot be realised. Many have pointed out, for example, that devising companies rarely retain a complete lack of hierarchy, with most operating with a clear artistic director (Oddey 1994, p.9; Heddon and Milling 2006, p.5; Murray 2016, p.38). When the word 'utopian' is used to describe the experimental work of the 1960s/70s<sup>7</sup>, it can carry a sense of failure; suggesting these experiments belonged to a time and a revolutionary zeal that has since been discredited. I do not think 'utopian' or 'utopia' are inaccurate descriptors, but I am interested in instances when more detailed investigations of the concept reveal it as a productive idea at work in devising and collaborative experiments.

Virginie Magnat (2005, p.82) proposes that devising practice 'reflects the desire to engage in a mutual endeavour', leading to the emergence of utopian performatives within the embodied creativity of devising (*ibid*, p.74). Magnat's paper 'Devising Utopia, or Asking for the Moon' is an honest critique of the challenges encountered in devising practice, advocating for recognition of the utopian dimension of devising as well as the need to find a practical balance between collective creation and authorial/directorial leadership. Magnat (2005,

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<sup>7</sup> For example, Wiles (2003, p.3) refers to Richard Schechner's work in 'the utopian 1960s'

p.84) stresses the role of devising as a practice that enables 'access to the unknown'. She defines devising as 'the art of losing one's moorings to the familiar' (*ibid*, p.74), and a practice that 'opens the door to unforeseen possibilities' (*ibid*, p.77). The risks inherent to devising are exactly what enable such utopian performatives to emerge, and Magnat argues that these risks must be embraced.

Although Magnat cites Dolan's utopian performative to describe the transformative properties of devising, utopia is not confined to a potential future or as something that is momentarily felt among participants. Magnat's paper seems to imply that utopia operates as a concept at the very heart of devising practice. Utopia is a desire that is given creative embodiment by devising; an ideal of collective participation and 'the active involvement' of each person in the process (*ibid*, p.82). Meanwhile, utopia is also the 'unforeseen possibilities' that are opened up (*ibid*, p.77); the 'impalpable' that participants gain access to through their involvement (*ibid*, p.84). I connect these unforeseen possibilities to the unfathomable otherness of utopia's no place. Magnat's formulation suggests that utopia is a desire and a possibility, which is given form by devising's practical methods. These methods are scrutinised by Magnat who advocates for openness and trust among an ensemble, stressing the importance of allowing things to unfold without pre-determined ideas. The risk of not knowing and the genuine desire to actively involve all participants must retain prominence; this, for Magnat, is the 'utopian dimension' of devising (*ibid*, p.82).

Performance artist Guillermo Gomez-Peña similarly understands the challenge of collaborative creativity in utopian terms, describing his practice as 'navigating the minefields of utopia' (Gomez-Peña and Welford 2002). In this case, it is not only an openness to involve every participant, but to approach the challenge of involving participants from diverse cultural backgrounds. Performance is held up as a 'laboratory of experimentation' (*ibid*, p.67) that expresses the desire for, and demonstrates the possibility of, cross-cultural dialogue and communication across multiple borders (*ibid*, p.68), while taking 'tiresome years' and 'a lot of mistakes' to develop a model that works (*ibid*, p.69). Likewise, Simon Murray (2016, p.44) argues that a 'contemporary collaborative utopianism' might be defined by the disposition towards sustaining a 'lack of certainty about outcomes', 'a relational lightness' and a 'critical generosity' between

collaborators. Exemplary models that 'lay claim to a productive but grounded utopianism' involve collaborations 'marked by difference and distinction in skill, discipline, art form, age, culture, (dis)ability, ethnicity, faith or location' (*ibid*, p.45).

These allusions to utopia acknowledge the utopian nature of devising and collaborative practice, but move beyond simple recognition towards a generative relationship in which utopia perhaps becomes a creative operative in the practice, opening up new possibilities.

Another interesting provocation suggests there may be something utopian in the compositional logic of devised work. Discussing Uninvited Guests' devised piece *It Is Like It Ought To Be: A Pastoral*, Stephen Bottoms (2013) identifies devising's predisposition towards exploring utopian possibilities in its tendency towards collage-like juxtaposition. Such assemblage of 'contrasting elements' (*ibid*, p.72) might 'beguile audiences with gardens of earthly delight', and generate 'spaces' for critical reflection more easily than narrative drama (*ibid*, p.73). This relates to questions of composition and dramaturgy within devising, as discussed in Chapter 2. In fact, the often fragmented nature of devised performance can be considered another aspect of its carnivalesque character. As Ihab Hassan (1987, p.171) has proposed, carnivalization 'riotously embraces indeterminacy, fragmentation, decanonization, selflessness, irony, hybridization'. For Hassan, this demonstrates the close relationship between carnival and postmodernism (*ibid*), but it might also be seen to establish a connection between carnival and the organisational principles of devising practice - particularly postmodern devising practice.

I return to questions of composition, as well as the relationship between devising and dramaturgy, in my reflections on *Travelling Show* in Chapters 5 and 6. In this chapter, I am more concerned with the earlier stages of a devised production: the collaborative activities that generate performance material *before* it is shaped, composed, and edited. As with the scholars I have referenced so far, I am interested in the way devising practice engages with the unknown, and how this relates to an understanding of utopia as no place.

In what follows, I examine three principles of devising practice that implicate an engagement with an unknown no place, as a strategy for creating performance material. Firstly, *impossibility*, the deliberate attempt to undertake tasks that are not theoretically possible. Secondly, *collaboration* as a practice that encourages the opening up of the self to the unknowable other. Thirdly, an embrace of the *contingency* of the process. In each case, I suggest that a no place - an unfathomable realm of otherness - is invoked as being responsible for the creation of original performance material. I draw on a range of theories that help conceptualise this no-place, ultimately coalescing around the notion of a 'space of contingency'.

Proposed by Anil K. Jain in a short but complex article, this notion conceives of contingency as a space of possibility, which contracts and expands as reality unfolds. According to Jain (2009, p.411), the limits of this space are defined by impossibility, just as the limits of reality are defined by utopia; impossibility is the other of the possible, as utopia is the other of reality. By taking action, we might push at the limits of this space (*ibid*, p.413) and expand into what Jain considers is 'the (utopian) space of contingency provided by the impossible' (*ibid*, p.411). I adopt this notion to think of devising practice as something that attempts to expand into the unknown, taking action to discover possibilities that are entirely other to our present reality.

### **Impossibility**

Goat Island was a Chicago-based performance company<sup>8</sup> who have become particularly well-known for the group's exploration of impossibility, which is a central principle in their approach to devising. Their Impossible Task exercise is a common workshop-based example that students of devising encounter when learning about approaches to non-narrative composition. I base my discussion here on my own encounter with the exercise, which was first introduced to me during my Theatre Studies degree at Lancaster University in 2004-5. The exercise begins with each participant writing down an impossible task on a piece of

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<sup>8</sup> For an introduction to Goat Island's practice see Bailes (2001) and a more detailed discussion in Bottoms and Goulish (2007)

paper: we were instructed to first write down an "everyday task" and then to make that task "impossible". Each piece of paper is passed on to another member of the group, and then each participant attempts to, mimetically, undertake the impossible task; they use this as an instruction to begin a movement improvisation. There are various directions in which the exercise can go from here, but in my encounter we got into pairs to create a duet using the movements generated during the improvisation<sup>9</sup>.

Through reference to Ernst Bloch's writings on hope, Sara Jane Bailes (2011, p.125) proposes that impossibility in Goat Island's work can demonstrate a concrete and even 'utopic' presence of hope. Bailes identifies the intrinsic relationship between imagination, possibility and hope in Bloch's writing, summarising that 'one has to *imagine* something as possible in order for hope to be summoned' (*ibid*, p.116). Imagination is conceptualised as the presence of not-yet-conscious thought, which maintains an openness in asserting that which is possible. This suggests that the realm of the possible is 'an unsettled and yet-to-complete territory' (*ibid*, p.117), which Bailes argues is further expanded by the inclusion of the impossible.

Bailes draws on Bloch's (1986, p.224) discussion of the 'formally Possible', one of several layers of possibility outlined by Bloch and the one that is, although not named as such, closest to what might be considered 'impossible'. Through this reading, Bailes suggests that impossibility might indicate 'a *different approach to possibilization* in which contradiction and paradox persist' (*ibid*). The formally possible rests on relations that are, however incompatible, nevertheless 'formally describable', thus making them 'conceptually possible' (*ibid*). In Goat Island's Impossible Task exercise, I can see how such formally describable relations are invoked in the devising process: participants must identify a task that is not possible and yet they must be able to write it down. Bailes suggests that this 'countersense' (Bloch's term) 'helps to redefine the limits' of 'the "possible" world' (*ibid*, p.118), further proposing that hope emerges from the act

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<sup>9</sup> Detailed instructions are provided by the company in their *School Book 2* (Christopher 2000, p.12)

of persevering with this expanded world (*ibid*, p.125). The determined embodiment of the countersensical instruction, and its evolution into new performance material, can be recognised as a strategy of hope. Impossibility is not rejected, and nor is it quelled in order to make the task more *realistic*. By pursuing the logic of the paradoxical, new relations become realised in performance, and the realm of the possible is expanded.

The inclusion of countersense does not necessarily suggest that these formally possible tasks are actually realisable. To cite an example of an impossible task, the attempt at 'swimming while asleep' (Christopher 2000, p.13), does not function to represent an expanded world of potentiality where swimming while asleep becomes, to use Bloch's term, 'factually-objectively possible' (1986, p.225). As Bailes (2011, p.118) notes, the valuing of 'irresolvable contradiction' not only changes what is represented, but more crucially changes 'the way in which representation is conceived of'. This rendering the 'invisible visible' can expose the indeterminacy of our experience of the world (*ibid*, p.114), recalling the function of Brechtian epic theatre. However, while Brecht intended to demonstrate the changeability of the present through estranged representations of the social reality, this practice rests on an act of imagination that reaches *beyond* the social reality. I therefore move beyond Bailes' argument to propose that the Impossible Task shares something of the particular form of defamiliarization produced by utopian literature. This is what Fredric Jameson (2005, p.287) has described as 'lateral perceptual renewal'; a process created by images of other worlds that 'restructure our experience of our own *present*' in 'ways distinct from all other forms of defamiliarization' (*ibid*, p.268). This interest in the process of estrangement is identified by Levitas (2013, p.119) as common to several contemporary utopian critics. What makes Jameson's analysis particularly interesting among these, is his focus on the role of impossibility, which I will draw upon to unfold a different understanding of the Impossible Task.

Jameson (2005, p.212) emphasises a relationship between the political crisis of utopia and a more general crisis of representation, both of which can be 'attributed to the advent of postmodernity'. Noting a break occurring in the 1980s, he references the rise of Thatcherism, the fall of communist parties, and

the advent of late capitalism, as being accompanied by both a decline in utopian literary production and a questioning of the viability of radical social alternatives (*ibid*, pp.212, 216). British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher, who is also cited by Moylan (2006, p.2) as contributing to the widespread rejection of utopia in the West, favoured the slogan "there is no alternative" to cement the argument that free-market capitalism is not a *preferred* model of economic organisation, but the *only* one. Any alternative to this system becomes impossible to imagine; 'it is easier to imagine the end of the world than to imagine the end of capitalism' (Jameson 2003, p.76). Jameson (2005, p.212) proposes a resonance between the impossibility of imagining utopia, and the fact that representation in general is, in postmodernity, conceived as an impossibility. This interest in representation is therefore particularly relevant when considering aesthetic engagements with utopia.

Impossibility, for Jameson (2005, p.289), arises from 'systemic, cultural and ideological closure'. Utopia can function to disrupt this closure, by defamiliarizing the present through the pretext of an imaginary alternative (*ibid*, p.288), but the attempt to represent utopia always leads back to impossibility. Jameson is less concerned than Bloch with discerning the relative realism of any possibility, and more with the imaginative atrophy of utopian images. For Jameson, utopian Science Fiction ultimately demonstrates 'our incapacity to imagine the future' (*ibid*, p.289). With this framing, the Impossible Task exercise also betrays the limits of our ability to imagine beyond our current empirical reality. The tasks remain bound by their describability so that just as 'the effort to imagine utopia ends up betraying the impossibility of doing so' (*ibid*, p.290), the attempt to describe something impossible is revealed as itself impossible. Engaging with impossibility becomes a 'contemplation of our own absolute limits' (*ibid*, p.289). However, my proposition is that these limits are transcended when the exercise moves beyond narrative representation.

Despite it being over 13 years since I first encountered the Impossible Task, a certain instruction remains in my memory because it profoundly destabilised my perception of representation and of possibility. When we began working in pairs, we were instructed to discover a "logic" that brought our two movements together. This should not be a narrative logic, we were told, but might be a

visual or movement logic. 13 years later this seems completely unremarkable. We were simply being instructed to adopt choreographic principles in the creation of a duet that brought together two pieces of movement. However, what was profound for me was that the movement had arisen from a narrative starting point, which could now be departed from. The original impossible task written on a piece of paper, instructed me to undertake a mimetic action which, although theoretically impossible, related to objects or processes in my familiar world, and was suggestive of a dramatic objective, no matter how irrational. This action, and its narrative associations, was still in my mind, but I was asked to discard all knowledge of it in order to create this duet. I embraced this instruction, working with my partner to identify a visual logic in our movements. This produced something completely new, exceeding the two written tasks, and exceeding that which is 'formally describable'.

I do not remember the impossible task I was working with 13 years ago, but consider the example *fly through solid rock*. This suggests the action and objective of flying, and an encounter with solid rock. Having explored this task mimetically, I conceive of my body as being in flight, and I imagine my body encountering solid rock. In the movement duet, I extrapolate my body's physical response to this action, while discarding the notion of flying or the imagined presence of solid rock. Extrapolated from this narrative, the movement is free to take on entirely new meaning, as it encounters another's movement, also extrapolated from *its* original narrative context. I do not remember exactly what that new meaning was, and yet the sense in which it opened up my perception of what is possible, has stayed with me.

The new content produced by the Impossible Task is thus less crucial than the task's very opening up of perception, just as Jameson (2005, p.286) stresses that the process of defamiliarisation is more important than the particular 'images of the future' offered by utopian literature. However, a key difference must be noted in that utopian literature is nevertheless a representational genre. The defamiliarised present and impossible future arise from 'utopian figures and narratives', which Jameson (2005, p.291) argues are ultimately contradictory and limited. The transgression of representation that is made possible in the choreographic evolution of the Impossible Task, might therefore signal a



formalist solution, which is sought by Jameson. In the absence of reliable utopian content, Jameson (2005, p.212) hypothesises a formalism 'in which the new content emerges itself from the form'. Rather than proposals of alternatives, he praises texts in which 'the impossible and inexpressible' emerges unexpectedly (*ibid*, p.295). Analogous with the inexpressible and indescribable, the impossible is now restored as radically other. In the Impossible Task, the emergence of the unexpected is made possible by the discarding of narrative representation. Returning to Bailes, it is the act of un-doing, or the 'hollowing out [...] of expectation', that 'makes way for other potentialities' (Bailes 2011, p.114).

This opening up to the unexpected could be recognised as central to much creative activity, and it is my attempt to examine the particular implications of this within devising practice. In what follows I will consider principles of collaboration and contingency, to further explore this unexpected emergence, proposing that devising opens up spaces that are, to borrow Bloch's terminology, 'not-yet'. Bloch (1986, p.116) conceives of the 'not-yet-conscious' as a space where content is only just emerging; 'the psychological birthplace of the New'. In a similar vein, I recognise that collaborative devising relies on an engagement with something that is not-yet-perceptible, produced by acts of collaboration and engagements with contingency.

### **Collaboration**

Collaborative creativity is sometimes recognised as a practice that can model forms of community and social organisation; models which might be considered utopian or at the very least better ways of being. Discussions, for example, of theatre as communism (Ridout 2013), improvisation as anarchism (Bell 2014), and collaboration as democracy (Kolb 2016; Ruhsam 2016), contribute to a rich and fascinating area of study, which variously incorporate, resist and/or reformulate notions of utopia within their conceptual frameworks. My key focus here, however, is not in the utopian *good place* that might be prefigured by collaborative models, but rather in the *no place* that is implicated by acts of collaboration.

The rhetoric around devising and collaborative creativity often acknowledges that the practice involves an opening up and a letting go; 'losing one's moorings to the familiar' (Magnat 2005, p.74), and actively 'embracing [...] the unknown' (Colin and Sachsenmaier 2016, p.16). As discussed above, in the Impossible Task exercise, something new thus arises through the collaboration that would not have existed without it. Alan Taylor (2016, p.571) identifies a sense that the material generated through collaboration is not attributable to any single author and seems to come from elsewhere; an imagined 'third person' other than, in his example, the two individual collaborators. Magnat (2005, p.77) calls these the 'unforeseen possibilities' that are opened up. Citing Dolan, she suggests that devising practice fosters utopian performatives, which 'catapult' participants 'into a no-place of possibility, where we might gladly expect the unexpected' (in Magnat 2005, p.84). In my own experience of devising, it can be common to look back on a piece of performance material and be unable to attribute it to a particular deviser. No one can quite see their own thought-process or creative signature evident in the work, and yet it definitely happened when we were all in the room. Attributing the work to an imagined person or 'no-place of possibility', enables collaborative artists to conceptualise this surprising emergence of new ideas. Valuing the possibilities of giving in to this unknown space, some collaborative practices work to continually displace creative ideas and responses, adding to the sense that the work is emerging from an unidentifiable no-place and not any particular individual.

Goat Island's process involves sharing, interrogating and continually altering material between participants, to the extent that finished performance material bears little relation to the original source. This practice has been described as a 'complex collective conversation', which seeks the 'discovery' rather than 'delivery' of meaning in the work (Heathfield 2001). Stephen Bottoms (2000, p.77) identifies the antecedents of this work in collaborative dance practice such as the Judson Dance Theatre. This legacy can be seen in the choreographic nature of devising exercises such the Impossible Task, and the use of 'ordinary, everyday movements and found objects' in both companies' working practices (Bottoms 2000, p.77). More crucially though, Bottoms (2000, p.75) recognises that both companies offer models for collaboration that encourage individuals to 'risk learning something new'. This is particularly the case when collaborating

across artistic disciplines, which is an especially prominent feature of Goat Island's Summer Schools (due to the artistic diversity of those who sign up), and of a project that saw the Judson dancers collaborate with the Judson Poets Theatre in 1963 (discussed in Bottoms 2000, pp.77-81). Such approaches can enable collaborating artists to 'push and pull at each other's ingrained habits and assumptions, in order to move themselves in unexpected directions' (Bottoms 2000, p.81). In my experience of the Impossible Task, my usual habits towards narrative and mimetic acting (coming from my background in theatre), were helpfully shaken by an introduction to working with choreographic principles. The sharing and altering of material in this practice therefore involves both an openness to other collaborators and to different artistic approaches. As I have noted, this embrace of difference is identified by Murray (2016, p.45) as the very marker of contemporary collaborative utopianism.

Returning to an example from the previous chapter, a similar collaborative energy is fostered in the work of Welfare State International, despite this involving a considerably different approach to narrative. In 2007 I worked with several Welfare State artists<sup>10</sup>, alongside colleagues with whom I would go on to form The Suitcase Ensemble. I offer this example of an exercise led by John Fox, which has, despite its simplicity, been hugely influential on The Suitcase Ensemble's working methods. Each participant was instructed to sculpt an object out of newspaper, and then tell a story inspired by this object. Despite my being more experienced in storytelling than sculpture, the practice of starting from the visual produced a story I would not have otherwise imagined. These objects and stories went on to inspire songs written in groups, and individual movement improvisations. A richness of performance material emerged from this exploration across sculpture, storytelling, song and movement. This interest in working dialogically across artistic disciplines has influenced The Suitcase Ensemble's approach to collaborative devising, and is particularly evident in the process employed for *Yuletide Paradise* (2013-2015)<sup>11</sup>.

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<sup>10</sup> This was as part of the project *Lock*, directed by Welfare State artists for the 2007 Hope Street Limited Apprenticeship of which I was a participant

<sup>11</sup> This project formed part of my MA in Contemporary Arts, at Manchester Metropolitan University

In *Yuletide Paradise*, the performance concept and narrative evolved through what could be seen as a 'complex collective conversation' taking place between artistic collaborators and across artistic media. In an initial week of research and development, six miniature model landscapes were created by two visual artists towards the end of the week, somewhat out of desperation, as the work-in-progress performance was approaching. In a reflective commentary I observed that although these models did not arise from specific narrative or thematic cues, they were 'inevitably informed by things we'd been doing in the rehearsals' (Buddle 2014a). Visually, they captured the atmospheres, abstract concepts and emotions that had been flying around the rehearsal room all week. They were so evocative, that they provided the stimulus for the next stage of the project.

For the next stage, each collaborator chose one landscape, and spent the next year responding to this visual stimulus in a variety of ways: writing songs, creating characters and narratives, going on journeys, exploring poetry, movement, installations, and producing films. We collaborated on each other's artistic explorations, working across artistic disciplines, and often bringing something of our chosen landscape to bear when being involved in someone else's. For example, when collaborator Andy was directing a play inspired by his landscape, I used my chosen landscape to inspire my character in this play. In this way, we became deeply immersed in each other's worlds, and were influenced and inspired by each other's creative responses to them. As these worlds became more fully-formed, they went on to inform the entire structure of *Yuletide Paradise* when it was performed again the following year. Our characters, who were initially inspired by those original landscapes, now inspired new design ideas as the landscapes were re-made, along with new costumes and items of set. The performance thus emerged from an ongoing dialogue between visual, poetic, narrative, and choreographic responses.

Conceptualising this dialogue now, I propose that it relies on an openness to the emerging performance, which is not-yet-known but somehow shared. The first *Yuletide Paradise* development week was fraught with challenges arising from the lack of a shared artistic background and our inability to find a common vocabulary that made sense for an artistically diverse team. Despite these difficulties, when those landscapes appeared, they provided something we could

all connect to. They seemed to bring together everything we had been talking about and exploring, but with a visual, rather than verbal, vocabulary. What is more, they opened up new possibilities to take the work in a new direction, requiring an openness from collaborators (and particularly from me as the project lead) to what this emerging performance might be. Ultimately, this performance became relatively narrative-driven (compared to, say, a Goat Island performance), but the narrative emerged from these non-verbal and non-narrative explorations that appealed to an impossible-to-articulate shared connection, which I see as the 'no-place of possibility' produced by such collaborations.

Reflecting on the process I noted that 'we discovered where each other's approaches intersected and where they diverged' (Buddle 2014b, p.7). The collaboration involved recognising 'themes and motifs that were evolving, as well as points of difference and tension' (*ibid*, p.8). I suggested that alongside this collaborative negotiation, 'a fiction was emerging, almost organically' (*ibid*). I now conceptualise this organic emergence as a no-place, suggesting a space that holds both the similarities and differences of the group. This is not an actual physical place or space, but an unquantifiable gap in between self and other; it is a no-place produced between the multiple selves and others implicated in the particular collaborative process at work.

Later in this chapter, I will discuss this space between self and other through reference to a more recent devising project titled *Starting the Search*. Before moving on to this practice though, I will discuss a third devising principle: contingency.

### Contingency

Contingency, in classical philosophy, describes 'everything that is, but is not necessarily as it is' (Jain 2009, p.409). It is a mode of thought recognising that events could be otherwise, and do not proceed from a rational necessity (Mackay 2011, p.1). Etymologically stemming from *contingere* - to befall - contingencies tend to be understood as things beyond our control, that happen to us (*ibid*, p.2).

Devising practice has always been entwined with contingency. Emerging as a practice that sought to distribute authorship more equally amongst the creative team, devising produces work that is, whether conceived as implicating a no-place (as above) or not, notably contingent upon the group of people who make it happen. Following the experiments of historic avant-garde movements, devising practice involves an embrace of the indeterminate and the unknowable, throwing itself open (to varying degrees) to the contingency of what takes place in the course of rehearsal and performance.

In my above examples of Goat Island and Welfare State, devising exercises begin with a simple starting point: an everyday task, an object. Preconceived ideas that accompany these starting points are destabilised as the material is shared between collaborators, and individuals encounter unexpected new stimulus. In their 'collaborative methods', Goat Island suggest coming to rehearsals 'with a fragment not a completed idea', allowing the idea to become completed through the group process (Christopher 2000, p.51). This requires an openness to the contributions and responses of others, and to the contingencies that might occur. It requires an acceptance that you do not know what is going to happen, and an embrace of things happening that take your initial idea in an unexpected direction.

As Colin and Sachsenmaier (2016, p.16) assert, an 'embrace of the unknown' in art-making, 'entails an inherent premise of the accidental, the contingent and chance'. I will briefly consider these three notions because they can be observed at work in devising practice and, although they crossover and interact, they are also quite distinct operations.

Chance is perhaps the most commonly invoked, whether discussing the use of deliberate chance operations as a compositional principle (see Iverson 2010, pp.16-20), or the description of unexpected moments as happening 'by chance' (see Heddon and Milling 2006, pp.197-198). In the first case this can be seen as a play of probability, and in the second an embrace of the seemingly improbable, but in any case to understand events as happening by *chance* is to, as Robin Mackay (2011, p.2) summarises, 'hallucinate a universe in which - at least - the *parameters* within which events may take place can be circumscribed'.

The accident, defined as 'something that happens by *chance*' (OED 2018) shares this ideology, although more clearly suggests the arrival of something from outside of the *expected* parameters of the work. In relation to devising, accidents are embraced when they appear to be unexplainably fortunate; as Heddon and Milling (2006, p.198) identify, the apparent randomness is accompanied by a sense of 'appropriateness'.

The contingent, on the other hand, is an event that could have been otherwise. In one sense, thinking of events as contingent as opposed to accidental or random, enables a more reasoned consideration of the conditions that brought them about. However, contingency also 'overflows [...] compartmentalisation and management' (Mackay 2011, p.2). Understanding that things could be otherwise entails an acceptance that those other possibilities are beyond measure. Contingency, unlike chance and accident, implies the possibility of an *infinite otherwise*, which - in two related ways - can be connected to utopia.

In one sense, contingency can free us from 'dogmatic modes of thought' that subordinate events to 'predestined necessity' (*ibid*, p.1), which I propose enables us to recognise utopia as a complex interplay of unknowable potentialities. This suggests a *contingent* understanding of *utopia*, but we might also consider a *utopian* understanding of *contingency*, as proposed by Anil K. Jain.

Jain (2009, p.411) discerns a utopian 'space of contingency' from the commonly recognised presence of contingency in our everyday reality. This utopian space of contingency is infinite and impossible, but must be approached in order to unfold any 'real potential' (*ibid*, p.413). Conversely, in the 'contingent society' the 'increase of freedom and choice' is, following Herbert Marcuse, 'a mere ideology' (*ibid*, p.410). This 'surface' of contingency (*ibid*, p.409) obstructs the possibility of becoming a different society and, I suggest, might therefore be considered anti-utopian. This anti-utopian 'surface' of contingency shares with 'chance' and 'accident' an adherence to the existing parameters of the social reality. These principles therefore do not necessarily open up radically new possibilities, but merely enable a playful existence within the constraints of the status quo.

Dramaturg David Williams (2010, p.201) describes a practice of paying attention to the organic direction a work is going in, following '*what's there* rather than what's desired', concurring with my description of the organically emerging fiction of *Yuletide Paradise*. However, Williams' phrasing here throws up a conundrum around devising and utopia, suggesting that this practice might, through its embrace of the contingent, reject what is desired; that is, it might reject utopia. This links to Jain's (2009, p.408) argument that we live in a society that creates 'regime' out of contingency. Is attending to 'what's there' the same as accepting 'what is'? Is this an implicit acknowledgement that "there is no alternative"?

If utopia is understood as itself contingent, the devising process might be understood as *shifting* what is desired, rather than abandoning it altogether. Williams (2010, p.201) is careful to characterise this as a strategy that 'displaces the location of the desired', transferring it into the artwork as an 'autonomous organism' that has its own needs and wants. This subtle clarification is useful, and correlates with my proposal of a no-place that is beyond pre-conceived or individual desires for the work. However, this does not necessarily answer the question of whether this practice really opens up new possibilities, or merely plays around within the limits of existing parameters.

Certain devising practices are framed to suggest the latter, such as the emphasis on the role of 'accidents' in the work of Forced Entertainment, a Sheffield-based experimental theatre company who formed in 1984<sup>12</sup>. In this practice, accidents are unexpected occurrences, which sometimes have nothing to do with the original intention behind the task being undertaken, but can take the work in more interesting directions. Forced Entertainment's Robin Arthur suggests accidents 'give rise to leaps of logic', which for Terry O'Connor, 'give you the opportunity to see something that you wouldn't have thought of by yourself' (cited in Heddon and Milling 2006, p.198). Accidents are not only events, but unexpected associations formed between different elements or fragments in an

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<sup>12</sup> See Helmer and Malzacher (2004) for description and further analysis of Forced Entertainment's work



evolving performance. However, despite an apparent avoidance of intention, I argue that there is nevertheless a conceptual framing for any creative practice that guides the particular interest taken in any accidental occurrences and associations. As the subtitle of the 2004 Forced Entertainment symposium attests: 'We are searching for a theatre that can really talk about what it's like to live through these times', a framing that is markedly different from a practice concerned with a no-place of possibility. Etchells (2004, p.84) himself makes clear that the work is 'less concerned with some "poetical" elsewhere and more concerned with the here and now'. With this framing, it seems perfectly appropriate to recognise that Forced Entertainment's accidents remain within the circumscribed parameters of the existing social reality. But for a practice that *is* concerned with an elsewhere, the accidental might be recognised as limiting, in the same way that Jain (2009, p.411) sees the 'surface' of contingency as pointing to reality's limits.

In what follows, I discuss my own devising experiments to demonstrate how devising practice might resist these limits, by taking action to open spaces of contingency. As Jain (2009, p.409) insists, this is not a space in which to merely 'welcome the increase of possibility', but a space in which to take action, thus opening up new possibilities and further extending 'the contingent space for action' (*ibid*, p.413). This is a utopian space because it retains a quality of radical otherness, of impossibility. The 'regime of the possibility' (*ibid*, p.408) confines possibilities within strict limits. With an emphasis on action, devising practice can push at these limits, towards the impossible.

### **Starting the Search: devising in a space of contingency**

*Starting the Search* was a week-long devising experiment undertaken in July 2017, in the first year of my PhD. The research consisted of daily warm-up and devising exercises, working towards an informal performance shared with a small audience of PhD colleagues at the University of Glasgow. I worked with two collaborators, Andy Gledhill and Maria Malone, with whom I have an existing working relationship. At this stage, I knew that my PhD would explore touring theatre, an interest building on previous touring projects delivered with Andy and Maria. However, I had not yet identified how I would create a performance

to take on tour. My original PhD hypothesis was that a theatre practitioner might consider their practice a *search for utopia*, and so in thinking about how to start the process of creating a new piece of work, I began my practice-research with the question: how do you start a search for utopia? This question provided the starting point - the 'fragment not a completed idea' - that would initiate our group work.

We began on Sunday evening with a meandering discussion, which produced a flipchart (Figure 1) with some initial thoughts.

By the end of the evening, we made a decision about how to start the next day. We agreed that we should each bring three things (again - fragments not completed ideas) to start our search:

1. an object
2. a song or other artistic inspiration (poem, image etc.)
3. an activity/ exercise that would explore one of the ideas on the flipchart paper

The words 'Desert Island Discs' on the flipchart paper, reference a BBC Radio 4 programme in which a celebrity guest proposes a number of songs, and a book, that they would want with them on a deserted island. This suggested a concrete way for us to begin a search for something unknown. Without knowing anything about the final destination, we could at least identify some things we would like to bring with us. The object and the song, therefore, would be related to our sense of what we might want with us in utopia. The activity/ exercise would provide a practical way in to our devising. The allusion to Desert Island Discs provides familiarity and a shared reference point for the collaborators, but is not a text we intend to explore further in the process. This use of something *known* is intended to open up to the *unknown*, just as the Impossible Task begins with the identification of something everyday, or a Welfare State storytelling exercise begins with a simple object.

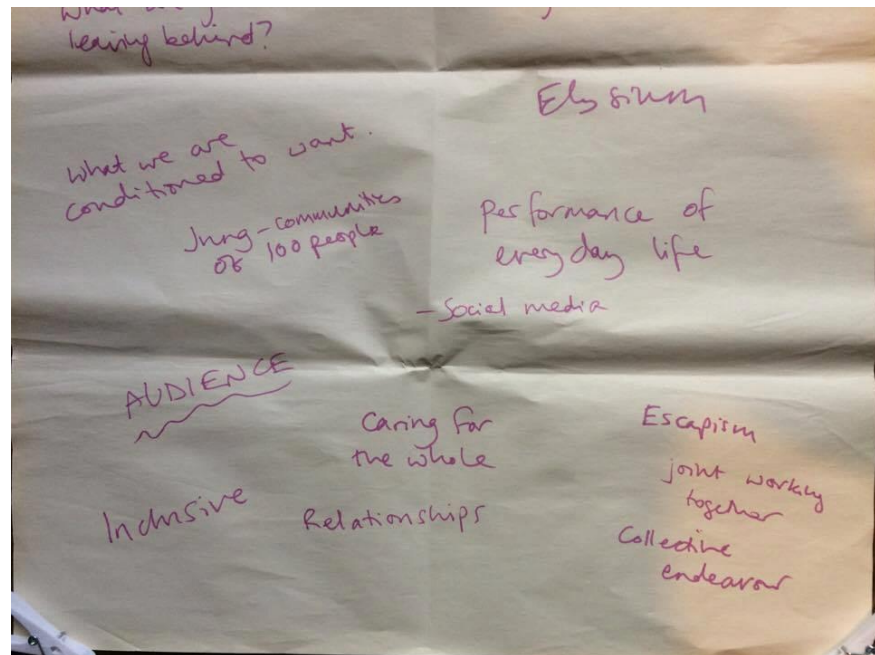
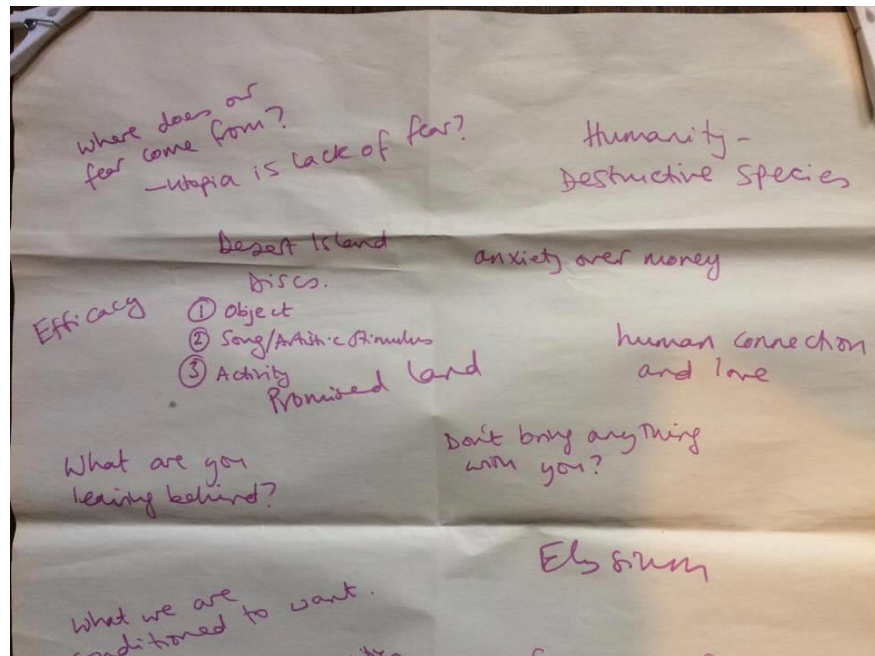


Figure 1: Starting the Search flipchart notes

On Monday, we warmed up together, and we started by sharing our exercises. Maria's was about overcoming fear, Andy's about leaving things behind, and mine about performing in everyday life. These exercises and the various directions they took us in, saw us to the end of the day. I will discuss some of them in more detail, but first I want to draw attention to what I wrote in my notebook on Tuesday morning, reflecting on our first day:

There seem to be endless possibilities. We are full of optimism. All those contingencies are still in play. Many possible futures are still present. The field of possibility has been, theoretically, narrowed now that we have developed some material. But actually, this narrowing has enlivened the possibilities. The future seems richer than it did at this time yesterday.

(researcher notebook)

As Jain (2009, p.413) contends, 'any reality and any action [...] creates new possibilities, opens up new spaces of contingency'. In the rehearsal room, as soon as we make a choice to pursue a certain creative idea, we close off the possibilities of others. On the first day, we decided to each bring in an object, a song, and an exercise. This action closes off all the other possible starting points we could have chosen. In Jain's (2009, p.412) words, a 'punctualization of contingency' occurs. But without delimiting these possibilities from all others, the process would have remained impossible and nothing would have happened. Action is necessary to open a space of contingency.

Each of the exercises also opened up a new space of contingency where, through play and experimentation, we generated new performance material which, in turn, suggested previously unimaginable possibilities. Thus, a 'depunctualization' of contingency also occurs (*ibid*, p.413). The 'dialectics of punctualization and depunctualization' (*ibid*) continues so that by the end of the day, 'the future seems richer than it did at this time yesterday' (researcher notebook). These new possibilities were always theoretically *possible*, but they were not *imaginable* to us. Effectively then, they were impossible. They remained beyond our reality and beyond our imagination. It is only through our expansion of the space of contingency that these impossibilities become possibilities.

Impossibility is here understood differently from Bloch's notion of 'countersense' and is more philosophical than the 'ideological closure' that Jameson discusses. Following Jain's logic, impossibility is a space of infinite contingency that is not yet perceptible. For Jain (2009, p.411), this space is also conceived as utopia, 'which represents the sphere of the impossible in the imagination'. Understood in this way, utopia is not defined by its desirability, but by its alterity to reality. In this conception, utopia might be everything that is not reality; utopia is the

infinite possibilities that await realisation, but utopia itself will never be realised.

This provides a different perspective on the occasional description of utopia as a 'horizon'; something we may move towards but never reach. Devising practice, too, embraces this notion as it moves towards but never reaches a finished performance. Even at the stage of being encountered by an audience, there is a sense that the devised performance is never completed; in Williams' (2010, p.201) words it remains 'a made thing still being made'. It was this sense of moving towards a horizon that inspired my original hypothesis that theatre practice might be understood as a search for utopia. However, this conceptualisation unhelpfully implies a dialogue with a *future*, which is firstly an inaccurate way of describing what is happening in a devising process, and secondly returns me to Jameson's (2005, p.290) assertion that any attempt to imagine the future betrays the impossibility of doing so. In *Starting the Search*, we are not attempting to imagine a future or a finished performance, but rather to open a space of contingency where the as-yet-unknown performance can come into being. In the earlier sections on Collaboration and Contingency, I alluded to a 'no-place of possibility', an ongoing engagement with a shared but not-yet-perceptible space, and a commonly articulated sense that when devising, the work is not made, but discovered. Utopia, in common with the unfinished devised performance, is not so much a horizon as it is a space of infinite contingency, waiting to be concretised into reality through a 'punctualization of contingency' (Jain 2009, p.410).

In many ways this process is unremarkable. Our devising process merely provides a clear elucidation of Jain's theory of how reality unfolds. What is particularly interesting, though, is the decision-making process behind the moment of 'punctualization'. By paying attention to those moments and unpacking the logic underpinning our actions, I suggest we demystify the notion of there being 'a work to be discovered' and recognise the extent to which pre-conceived ideas, or conceptual frames as discussed in the previous section, might continue to guide our actions. To discuss this, I will attend to a particular moment of punctualization, which took place on our second day of devising.

On Monday, Maria shared an exercise with us. She asked us to create five movements to help overcome fear. In one of Andy's five movements, he stood with his legs slightly apart, breathed in, then bent his legs as he breathed out into a plié. His hands came down below his groin, scooped and gathered back up as he returned to standing. It was not until the second time Andy repeated his movements that I saw what was happening. He was miming giving birth, and then cradling the 'baby' in his arms.

Andy cannot rationalise why he did this or how it related to the overcoming of fear. He needed five movements and is not an experienced choreographer. In a moment of desperation, this image came to him. He maintains that he does not know why.

On Tuesday, in an improvisation, I asked Andy to keep repeating that movement (see video 1). I was intrigued by the image and wanted to see it again, and again, and again. I was trying out different combinations of movement and sound, and I asked Maria to make a different sound at the baby each time it was born. But the sounds were not really what I was looking for; I wanted this image of giving birth over and over. Of the myriad of responses generated by Maria's exercise, I chose to focus in on this one image in detail, shrinking the space of contingency to a single point. Why?



Figure 2: Andy's birthing image

Devising practice commonly involves responding to intuition. In fact, resisting the need to rationalise decisions often forms part of advice given to emerging performance makers. Goat Island suggest that collaborators should 'not expect to understand everything intellectually or rationally while creating' (Christopher 2000, p.51), while one of John Cage's rules is to 'not try to create and analyse at the same time. They are different processes' (cited in Marshall 2018).

Practitioner-researcher Eline Kieft (2018, p.466) has drawn on the concept of a 'soulful space' from clinical psychology, to advocate for a place where we can 'let go of what we think we know' and risk letting in the unknown. This is a space where we can access more instinctual ways of knowing that might strengthen our capacity for knowledge, alongside our rational abilities (*ibid*, p.457). This is similar to my conception of the no-place accessed during collaborative devising processes; a realm of possibility that is not-yet-perceptible, where the potential for creating and knowing something new arises precisely from its inability to be articulated. Accessing this soulful space is essential in creative processes, although none of those cited here suggest doing away with rational analysis altogether.

Andy's image arose precisely because he was not attempting to rationalise his response to the task, and neither was I in my subsequent directorial interest in the image. However, in analysing this moment, I am interested in understanding more about what it is that leads me to claim something *works* in the course of our devising. Heddon and Milling (2006, p.199) suggest that the sense of 'appropriateness' in devising practice in fact comes from familiarity; something that is 'already learnt, is anticipated, or is being looked for'. Reflecting on this moment and asking myself why the image 'worked', this assertion has traction. I *can* rationalise why I wanted to see it over and over again.

The image chimed with a personal preoccupation with fertility. Because it was in response to an exercise about fear, it seemed to embody the fear of childbirth, the fear of unwanted pregnancy and the fear of never bearing children, all at once. The idea of this as a 'movement to overcome fear' was intriguing. Was this a way of facing your fear? Or does it propose that having a baby would help overcome other fears? Why might that be? The fact that there was no clear answer contained within the image was what made it work for me. And because

it was performed by somebody who will, by biological necessity, never in reality perform the action he was signifying, it connoted a sense of empathy for other's fear. In my response to Maria's exercise I had already started to imagine these as ritual movements, performed daily to keep fear at bay. The idea of this birthing movement as part of a community ritual suggested that the fears bound up in reproduction might be a burden to be shouldered by the whole of the community. Was this a beautiful idea or a hugely problematic one?

These thoughts take me to potential futures, or even utopias. There are resonances with future societies represented in utopian and dystopian fiction such as Marge Piercy's *Woman on the Edge of Time* (1976), and Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985), as well as evoking something of the debates bound up in queer futurity. In the light of Lee Edelman's (2004) critique of what he terms 'reproductive futurism', the image might be seen to follow the heteronormative promise of the Child to absurd conclusions. This opening up to the unknown therefore has the potential to open up to alternative futures and the debates surrounding them. This does not happen through the attempt to imagine a particular future but rather through the embrace of moments that unexpectedly signify them.

These thoughts would not have occurred to me had I not seen Andy perform this movement. Although fertility was on my mind, I am not sure it would have occurred to me to bring this theme into our devising process, and certainly not in this form. I had been reading *Woman on the Edge of Time*, but this association only occurred to me once I had seen the image. The resonances with the *Handmaid's Tale* and Edelman's *No Future* were made by others; I was not overly familiar with these texts at the time. Andy had no idea that this movement would strike such a chord with me. For him, it was an add-on; something to make up his movements to five. It might be considered an 'accident' in that it appeared unexpectedly, forcing a 'leap of logic'. However, that leap importantly took me beyond 'what is', or what I already knew, marking this process as one that does not only engage with the accidental but that is open to the unknown, the other and the contingent.



A non-rational openness to the space of contingency is important in allowing such possibilities to enter our imagination. However, a rational knowledge of what is happening here can also help to clarify what we are looking for during the course of devising; a way of articulating how decisions are being made about what works. Although it might only become apparent after a period of non-rational experimentation, it is possible to identify a principle that governs the active punctualization of the space of contingency. Tim Etchells (2004, p.3) describes a moment when devising Forced Entertainment's *Bloody Mess* that came about 'quite by chance' but became key to the dynamic of the piece. Looking back he is able to identify that it was the 'absolute unreadability' of the moment that he liked, which enables him to recognise the entire piece as an exploration of the pleasure of watching 'unresolvable combinations of things' (*ibid*). Although this explanation may not have been articulable in the moment of devising, it is evident that a principle of 'unresolvable combinations' governed the choice of which images and moments to pursue in devising *Bloody Mess*. So, what is the governing principle at work when I choose to focus on Andy's birthing image?

This was an image that resonated with me, but its resonance came unexpectedly. It worked because it held both a familiarity and an otherness. It was not entirely divorced from systems of signification, but nevertheless destabilised them, allowing a plurality of possibilities to emerge in its play of signification. Far from being unreadable, the image contained hopes, fears, questions, and confusions; it released personal stories, political debates, and potential futures; it had connotations of life cycles, time cycles, starting again, renewal, repetition, the internal and the external, the impossible and the possible. The governing principle might be identified simply as contingency: that is, the moment works because it opens up a new space of contingency where a plurality of imaginative possibilities enter. However, it must be clarified that the action is not opening up to the *complete unknown*, but rather to a space that is positioned between what is known and what is unknown; between reality and utopia.

In the rehearsal room, when I am looking for images and ideas to pursue, I am drawn towards those moments that are not so abstract as to be completely

meaningless, and neither so literal as to close down all play of contingency. In *Starting the Search*, we are reaching into a realm of infinite contingency, but bringing back only that which is perceptible according to what we know in this reality. As well as opening up a new space of contingency, something works when it embodies a sense of mediation between the abstract unknown and our concrete social reality. In my next example, I will demonstrate how this principle is applied in a more deliberate attempt to mediate between these realms.

In the final hours of Monday's rehearsal, I led a sculpting exercise. This is based on a common activity used in drama and physical theatre, which I tend to refer to as *Human Clay*, in which one person 'sculpts' an image in another's body. This exercise is familiar to my collaborators and I, often used as a warm-up exercise in the early stages of our workshops and rehearsals, with various developments and modifications depending on the particular themes or performance modes we are exploring.

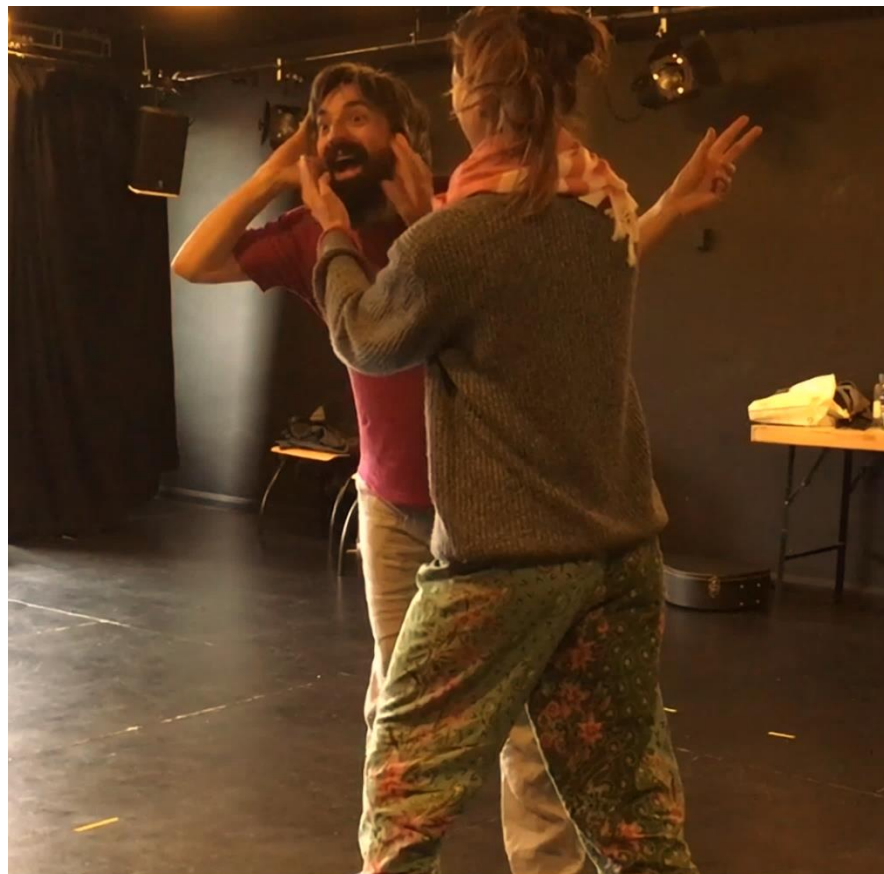


Figure 3: Human clay

On this occasion, the exercise required the sculptor to create an image relating to a personal memory: a memory of 'performing' in everyday life. The sculptor recalled a time they have found themselves 'putting on an act' in a certain scenario: in a work situation, a relationship, or any everyday interaction. They imagined who the character was that they were performing as, and created an image of this character, using another's body as 'clay'. The image made use of the entire body, including the face, and was an exaggerated idea of this character. They did not tell us anything about the character or the scenario. They only sculpted the image.

The person who had been sculpted was then asked to find their own connection with the image they had been sculpted into. They were asked to create a character, with the only information being the physical position in which they had been placed. This happened through a slow process of discovery, as the sculpted person began to move, bringing the still image to life (see video 2). In this movement, I suggest there was a dialogue taking place between the internal self of the sculpted performer, and the external abstract otherness of the sculptor.

In this moment, the performer is in a state between self and other, simultaneously searching for an inner connection and an external character that belongs to the realm of the unknowable. It is necessary for the performer to let go of any psychological approach to character, or even any pre-conceptions they may have about the kind of character *they* would have created if the exercise had been asked of them, or the kind of character they *think* their collaborator might have had in mind. The exercise requires the performer to set aside such cognitive approaches to generating performance, and to instead engage in a somatic connection with the physical image in which their body and face has been placed.

This again resonates with Kieft's (2018, p.466) soulful space that risks 'letting in the new, the unknown, the other'. Drawing on her experience of shamanic practice, Kieft (2018, p.467) references 'shamanic ways of knowing', evoking a space in between body and mind. I am drawn to this notion of an in-between space, which is accessed by the shaman; a mediation between the worlds of

matter and spirit that could be analogous to the mediation between the known and the unknown, or between the realms of reality and utopia, taking place in *Starting the Search*. However, while the shaman may access this space through meditation, trance, or drug-induced hallucination, I am describing a space that is accessed specifically through the act of collaboration. The unknown is not a mystical realm, but is produced by another. The physical image is not one the performer has created themselves, nor discovered by accident (through movement improvisation, for example); it is a stance they have been deliberately placed in according to someone else's memory and imagination. The performer cannot know exactly what image was in the sculptor's mind, nor why. For this reason, they must allow an element of the unknown to govern their movement, and their discovery of the character.

In this space of contingency, the performer, who cannot know what and why their body has been placed as it has, is open to an infinite number of possibilities. As they move, they are mediating between this realm of infinite possibility, and the realities of what their body can do. They are mediating between this realm of infinite possibility, and the way their body wants to respond to the physical position in which it finds itself. They are mediating between this realm of infinite possibility, and the emotional state being invoked by the physical positioning of their body and face. They are mediating between this realm of infinite possibility, and their own capacity to embody a character. They are mediating between this realm of infinite possibility, and a realm of emotional and physical familiarity.

This example demonstrates how the act of collaboration can open up a space of contingency, positioned between our concrete reality and a no-place of infinite possibility. However, while the presence of another is essential, the mediation nevertheless seems to be contained within the individual performer. As an individual, somatic, improvisatory, non-rational practice, this is quite far from those other key practices at the heart of my research inquiry, namely: dramaturgy and touring. The principles extrapolated from this exercise go on to guide the dramaturgical decision-making in the touring performance *Travelling Show* but, as I will discuss in Chapters 5 and 6, these principles take on a notably different character in this context.

In this chapter, I have demonstrated that devising practice can open up perceptions and expand what is thought possible by transcending the impossibility of representation; instigating dialogic encounters with the other; and deliberately opening and closing spaces of contingency. Conceiving of this in relation to utopia reveals how devising practice might both reach beyond the parameters of our social reality, and remain perceptible within it.

However, the extent of this perceptibility is relative to the perceiver's position within the process. The performer might open up a new possibility by reaching beyond their initial position; but is this necessarily evident to an observer? The process of opening a space of contingency is not coded into the movement produced by the Impossible Task or Human Clay exercises. An audience sees the resulting movement, but they do not see the transcendence of mimetic representation, nor the mediation between the known and the unknown, unless they are given explicit access to the process used to create the movement. Inviting an audience to access this experience, then, requires a different dramaturgical approach.

In the next chapter, I begin to think about the way audiences might be implicated in a work's exploration of utopia by turning to the practice of touring. I consider how the materiality of the tour, including its encounter with different people and places, can imply, reproduce, challenge or destabilise utopian ideals. This develops a new perspective on utopia and its relationship to performance practice, proposing ways that utopia might operate as part of a mobile and dialogic practice.

## 4. Touring and utopia: mobile methods

In seeking a starting point for a utopian theatre-making method, my experiments in *Starting the Search* recognised that devising practice can aim at opening a space of contingency, instigating a dialogue or mediation with the realm of the unknown. In Chapter 2, I identified carnivalesque practices that seem to proceed from a not-yet-conscious desire for a better way of being; embodying the carnival utopia as a starting point to anticipate something before being sure what. In this chapter, these approaches begin to coalesce in my exploration of utopia in relation to touring practice. Despite my rejection of the notion of 'a search for utopia' in the last chapter, my discussions here reveal a more search-like quality in understanding both touring and utopia as mobile methods, propelled by mediations between ideal imaginaries and material encounters.

Touring can be defined as presenting a performance in two or more locations, assuming a different audience will encounter the work in each place. Arts Council England (2017, p.67) advises its applicants that touring should be 'fundamentally the same event offered to all, but may involve some adaptation to suit the different spaces and contexts in which it is being presented'. As I expand upon in this chapter, the relationship between touring and utopia has a lot to do with the notion of *sameness* that sits at the heart of this definition; a notion that I argue can and should be questioned in the exploration of utopia as a theatre-making method. The idea of offering the same event to all has connotations of theatre being universal or unifying; qualities I question just as I question the idea of utopia as a totalising blueprint for society. In asking how utopia might operate in the creation of touring theatre, I suggest it is necessary to shift touring's definition away from sameness and focus more on difference, dialogue and change.

I begin this chapter by reviewing some of the ways the relationship between touring and utopia has been approached in existing theatre and performance scholarship. Here, I note a tendency for the utopian or the idealistic to be associated with a supposed sameness produced by the act of touring as well as the idea that touring practice represents a site of contestation that is somehow

positioned beyond the everyday. I critique these frames, while drawing out an intriguing debate about flexibility and adaptation in touring practice, which can be seen to have implications for a work's relationship to utopia. Following this initial literature review, I investigate this in more detail by proposing several dramaturgical models that might frame an adaptive or responsive approach to touring practice. Here, I argue that dramaturgy and touring might work together to facilitate a productive engagement with the ideals bound up in touring practice, not from a position beyond the everyday but on the contrary by virtue of touring's material encounters with the real.

### **Touring and utopia**

Mikhail Bakhtin (1984b, p.106) identifies a 'utopian fascination' with the world of theatre, and itinerant actors in particular, in works of literature such as Goethe's *Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship* (1795) and Scarron's *Roman Comique* (1651). Bakhtin suggests that in these works, travelling theatre troupes are depicted as 'removed from the sphere of conventions and binding rules' and that life on the road is pervaded with 'a festive carnival atmosphere' that the company spreads as it travels (*ibid*). As I argued in Chapter 2, this understands utopia as a not-yet-conscious anticipation, found in what Bloch (1986) calls the 'wishful images' of the past.

This idealised image is wishful in that it differs from the one emerging in archival and scholarly investigations of touring's historical reality. Evidence suggests, for example, that motivations for touring were primarily economic (Palmer 2005), that touring was largely considered an act of vagrancy outside of that sanctioned by the crown (Grice 1977), and that the system of royal patronage was ultimately a means of legitimising the status of the monarch (Tennenhouse 1986, p.39; Forse 2014), with touring providing a means of confirming power and hierarchy throughout the nation (Greenfield 2009, p.296). The 'fascination' identified by Bakhtin tells us less about the material reality of touring, and more about how the idea of touring - even in its falseness - anticipates a desire for a better way of being.

Bakhtin's reading of Scarron suggests that this better way of being constitutes freedom and adventure, but more significantly proposes that the itinerant

bandwagon creates its own carnivalesque 'microcosm', opposed to the official culture (Bakhtin 1984b, p.106). The conception of the touring company as a tiny world 'contrasted to all the well-ordered and established world', is reminiscent of certain spatial tropes, which could be said to meet in this imaginary, specifically: the heterotopia and the space of the nomad. Heterotopias are actually existing spaces that are separated from, but remain in relation to, all other sites. They function to 'designate, mirror or reflect' other sites (Foucault 1986, p.24), and as identified in Chapter 2, this is often seen as a valuable frame for exploring what theatre does. However, Bakhtin's discussion of itinerant theatre companies is less about the theatrical event and more about the everyday world lived by the actors. This cannot be understood as a bounded space in the way that a heterotopia appears to be. What makes the strolling players' cart a point of contrast and opposition, is not only a spatial separation from the everyday world, but its peripatetic nature, which differentiates it from the dominant way of life that is supposedly more sedentary. This interest in itinerancy as an oppositional possibility is reminiscent of the philosophical enthusiasm around notions of deterritorialization and nomadism arising from the influential work of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari (1987). According to their conception, the nomad is of interest for the radically different *subjectivity* arising from a lifestyle of eternal passage, which evokes the possibility of a totally different kind of politics. As Sadie Plant (1993, p.92) observes, nomadic politics imagines a subject who refuses 'to settle within established codes and conventions'. Similarly, the strolling player is imagined as 'removed from the sphere of conventions and binding rules' (Bakhtin 1984b, p.106). Together, nomadic subjectivity and heterotopic alterity combine in the image of the itinerant bandwagon to imply a phenomenon that is uniquely placed to explore utopian alternatives to the status quo.

Again, material evidence does not support the conception of touring theatre as somehow separated from the everyday. As Palmer (2005, p.291) argues, early modern touring did not represent a break from established society, but emerged in 'an economy marked by mobility' in a society where 'movement rather than stasis is a cultural norm'. Despite this, the nomadic imaginary of travelling theatre remains powerful and nomadism is often invoked in discussions about touring theatre and mobile artworks, particularly in relation to the political, or



indeed utopian, potential of this practice. However, when reflecting on actual practice, rather than Bakhtin's literary abstraction, the conclusions are more nuanced.

Sam Trubridge (2013), for example, understands 'nomadic' performance practices as those that inhabit different spaces with a fluid approach to scenic design and dramaturgy. For Trubridge, the utopian element of this practice is its inhabitation of empty space. Drawing on the idealisation of the empty space in the work of Peter Brook and others, Trubridge suggests that nomadic performance can inhabit 'spaces of notional emptiness', such as unclaimed land and disused buildings, to produce 'new architectures or spatial strategies' (*ibid*, p.149). However, Trubridge concludes by problematising the empty space approach, acknowledging the 'colonial imposition' associated with designating a site as *terra nullius* ('nobody's land') (*ibid*, p.153). Instead, he advocates a 'dialogue' between performance work and site (*ibid*), which suggests the alternative possibilities opened up by a nomadic engagement with space do not arise by virtue of some dislocated utopian subjectivity but on the contrary in the material meeting point between a mobile artwork and its site.

A similar conclusion is proposed by Miwon Kwon when considering the opposing narratives of nomadism and site-specificity in contemporary art practice. Kwon (2002, p.160) is suspicious of 'the seductive allure of nomadism', querying the embrace of destabilised identities and the mobilised cultural worker, which romanticises conditions that in fact make us more vulnerable. At the same time, Kwon acknowledges that embracing fluidity can be positive, suggesting that Deleuze and Guattari's ideas provide a 'powerful theoretical tool for the dismantling of traditional orthodoxies that would suppress differences' (*ibid*, p.165). Thus, she proposes thinking 'contradictory desires' for nomadism and sedentariness together, embracing both fluidity and stability in mobile artistic practices that must have a 'relational sensibility' to transform 'passing intimacies' into lasting social marks (*ibid*, p.166).

In a more overtly idealistic conception of touring, Dragan Klaić (1995, p.66) invokes nomadism to propose that the mobility of theatre expresses a 'utopian' and 'spiritual ideal' of universalism: 'the freedom to create and communicate

without physical or cultural boundaries'. This is more related to the oppositional character of touring imagined by Bakhtin: suggesting that mobile artistic practices might, in their commitment to cross-cultural communication, anticipate a different kind of world. Here, utopia is associated with a possible future state of the world that is prefigured by the act of touring. This future is defined by the notion of the universal, which is equated with touring's supposed sameness. Thus, Klaić does not advocate a fluid approach to performance, but rather a 'totalizing theatrical utopia' (*ibid*).

This somewhat rigid conception of utopia and its relationship to touring practice, is both politically and practically problematic. As Jennifer Harvie and Erin Hurley (1999, p.307) argue, a touring company's 'universalist aspirations' might in fact mean the promotion of 'a Western metropolitan elitism in pursuit of major and diverse commercial investment'. In their discussion of Ex Machina, an international touring company led by Robert Lepage and based in Québec, Harvie and Hurley argue that performances incorporating multiple dialects and national settings are, on closer scrutiny, less concerned with cultural pluralism and more with the proliferation of international production investment from the different nations whose languages and settings are used (*ibid*). In another example of Lepage-led touring work, Harvie and Hurley's critique of Cirque du Soleil's 'unified production aesthetic' (*ibid*, p.313) could just as well be a critique of Klaić's 'totalizing theatrical utopia'. While the internationally renowned touring circus features performers from across the world, their acts are assimilated into a tightly choreographed, visually cohesive aesthetic that deterritorializes everything from its original context and reterritorializes it in the logic of the Cirque's own "imagi-nation"; an imagined community of international performers and audiences created for each touring show (*ibid*, pp.313, 309). This might allude to a post-national, trans-cultural utopia, but it involves 'the aggressive and virtually wholesale sacrifice of cultural difference' (*ibid*, p.314).

Another critique of this approach points to its practical impossibility. Adopting a materialist semiotic reading, Richard Knowles (2004, p.90) argues that theatre can never be divorced from the specificities of a place or community and thus the same production will be 'read' differently depending on the context in which

it is presented. Knowles suggests this results in the crafting of a 'fuzzy universalism' in touring work (*ibid*, p.89), which can in practice find itself subject to 'free floating signifiers', which are appropriated beyond the intention of the touring production (*ibid*, p.91).

The fluid nomadic approach advocated by Trubridge offers a less rigid strategy. Rather than seeing touring theatre as potentially universal, Trubridge (2013, p.149) draws on Romeo Castellucci's characterisation of mobile performance as 'an organism on the run' to suggest it is something that continually grows and changes in communication with its journey. For Trubridge this is about conversing with different terrains and constantly keeping moving, avoiding 'telling the same stories over and over again' (*ibid*, p.153). David Overend's advocacy of a 'relational touring practice' has a similarly dialogic relationship with site, but to a different end. Overend (2015, p.45) is interested in replacing Knowles's 'fuzzy universalism' with 'a different sort of universalism that seeks points of connection and common ground with people from different places and different cultures while on the move'. Thus, while Overend is interested in dramaturgical flexibility, his conception of touring nevertheless relies on an assumed sameness, or what he calls common ground, that can be found in the encounter with different places.

I am instinctively drawn to this tendency towards an embrace of shared humanity. However, I am nevertheless cautious about an overemphasis on unity. To prioritise 'common ground' is perhaps to ignore potential inequalities and uneven power relationships that exist in the meeting point between touring company and local context. To return to an example of early modern touring, in Helen Ostovich's fascinating study of the Elizabethan Queen's Men, an historical analysis of touring theatre is brought together with contemporary concerns around place and identity in a way that demonstrates exactly why the notion of common ground should be approached with suspicion.

Ostovich argues that the Queen's Men's 'mission as touring players was to transform the nation of England into a place of romance' (2014, p.107), by localising a national ideal and 'metaphorically bringing their patron Elizabeth with them' (*ibid*, p. 101). Through references to the romance literature in their

repertoire, Ostovich argues that the portrayal of chivalric knighthood and romantic representations of women were intended to perform an ideal of 'love of queen and country' (*ibid*, p.107), which was 'made local' in each touring performance (*ibid*, p.116) by adapting to local playing spaces (*ibid*, p.103), maintaining spontaneity (*ibid*, p.105), using local amenities as props, and involving audience members as extras (*ibid*, p.104). The touring players thus have an adaptive approach, but this is understood by Ostovich as a means of 'bringing home' a national ideal.

Such an analysis of Renaissance touring again challenges the heterotopic imaginary of strolling players as carriers of an oppositional carnival atmosphere, and conversely suggests that touring's atmosphere of romance and adventure contributes to fictions that strengthen the imagining of the official culture. This is a reminder that the sense of togetherness fostered in performance does not automatically entail a carnivalesque embodiment of what Bakhtin (1984a, p.123) calls 'a new mode of interrelationships between people', but might be symbolically associated with the unity of the nation. In this case, the act of touring aims to solidify an ideal imaginary of England, transforming the specificities of place into a sameness that is imposed by the production.

Such constructions of national unity return to the kind of nostalgia I sought to distance myself from in Chapter 2; this is a nostalgia that, as Bennett (1996, p.9) proposes, is prepared through 'the dissemination of a collective history' and is strongly related to the imaginaries that, as Benedict Anderson (2006, p.7) identifies, conceive of the nation as 'a deep, horizontal comradeship' with finite boundaries. Such fictions promote the exclusion and suspicion of those who are not part of its imagined community, making it possible for millions to 'willingly [...] die for such limited imaginings' (*ibid*), and can lead to horrific attempts to remove the threat of the other in the name of restoration (see Boym 2001, pp.41-48). The imagining of communities might thus be approached with some trepidation, not only in relation to imaginaries of the nation, but any tendency towards fictions of unity. These not only exclude those outside of such imaginaries, but disregard power imbalances and the continued exclusions and oppressions that might exist within communities.

As Jen Harvie (2005, p.3) has discussed, performance is a cultural activity through which people might 'imagine their communities', but this need not presume a singular or coherent imaginary. In *Staging the UK*, Harvie emphasises the multiplicity of identities that arise across a range of examples of British theatre from the 1980s into the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. However, her examples do not specifically consider how the act of traversing the UK - through the practice of touring - might itself work with such complexities. Ostovich's study, despite focussing on a much earlier historic context, inspires consideration about how touring theatre might perform exactly what Harvie cautions against in her analysis: the assimilation of 'multiple identities into one coherent UK identity' (*ibid*, p.7).

If techniques of connecting a touring performance to the immediate locality can be read, as in the Queen's Men's touring practices, as a means of connecting local to national (Ostovich 2014, p.101), this raises a question about the agenda being privileged when a touring production makes a deliberate effort to strengthen its relationship with a local audience. The Queen's Men's efforts to connect with the locality of a touring visit suggest an instrumentalisation of signs at the local level which is less an act of site-specificity, and more the attempt to strengthen a pre-determined interpretation based on an imaginary of national unity.

However, I note that Overend's sense of unity is decidedly more open and indeterminate. His universalism is something being sought rather than a predetermined ideal. Overend (2013, p.369) notes that the 'desire to reach out and connect' and 'an impulse to connect across borders' often influences touring and journey-based artistic practice. For Overend, the works that emerge from this impulse often involve the generation of relational realms, suggesting a dramaturgy that not only adapts to different contexts but responds to them; enters into dialogue. In a relational and responsive practice, sameness is perhaps not applicable to the content of the touring production, but might nevertheless refer to the common ground sought in the act of travel.

Like Trubridge, Overend (2015, p.37) is interested in the implications of mobility on the dramaturgy of touring works. However, rather than simply advocate

fluidity, Overend (2013, p.376) argues that dramaturgy can hold journeys 'up for scrutiny', exploring the ideals and desires that drive an act of travel through the content of the performance itself. This suggests that the dramaturgy of a touring work need not only be open and responsive, but that it has a role to play in questioning the work's own utopianism. However, Overend's examples of how such a dramaturgy might operate in practice are not especially instructive. Discussing a production he went on tour with, Overend describes compromising the 'original aesthetic' in response to local conditions (2015, p.47); notes a 'relational' moment that is built into the performance (*ibid*, p.42) and explains that the narrative reflects the company's desire to connect with other people (*ibid*, p.45). It is difficult to identify dramaturgical principles to extrapolate from this, that might differentiate it from the more conservative approach apparently taken by the Queen's Men. Overend's conclusion announces an aspiration 'towards smaller-scale, culturally "rooted" and relational performance events', defined not so much by a precise dramaturgical strategy but by the need to 'think carefully' about how to engage in a culturally sensitive way (*ibid*, p.49). It is my intention to do just that, through the development of specific practical strategies and approaches.

The debates emerging in theatre and performance scholarship provide pertinent frames to question both assumptions of sameness and acts of adaptation in touring practice, demonstrating that both can play into totalising visions of utopia. So too can the false notion of touring's heterotopic or nomadic separation from the everyday, which imagines a spatial and subjective alterity that does not exist in the reality of a production that inevitably shifts and adapts through its material encounters with different places and contexts. Conclusions frequently point to the need for 'dialogue' and 'relational' sensibilities that explore the meeting point between touring work and site and, in Kwon's (2002, p.166) words, the 'contradictory desire' for both nomadism and sedentariness. I want to take these conclusions as my starting point and explore, in more specific detail, the dramaturgical implications of these calls for dialogue and responsiveness.

In the rest of this chapter I propose three models for a touring theatre that seeks to operate in a fluid but materially responsive way in relation to both its own

ideals and the real world it exists within. Firstly, I explore structural principles that might enable a dialogue between the utopian imaginaries of touring and its material reality. Secondly, I propose an approach to the content of touring work, arguing that this might focus less on nomadic ideals of travel and instead on the tour's ontological engagement with questions of comfort and belonging. Finally, I identify specific strategies for both generating and registering a critique of imaginaries of unity.

### **Between utopia and reality**

As I have suggested, Bakhtin's reading of the itinerant company in Scarron's *Roman Comique* as a 'microcosm', imbues the theatre tour with the quality of a heterotopia. Heterotopias reflect and critique other spaces, but they do not interact with those spaces. Nor does their critical function necessarily translate into the generation of something different. The microcosm reading thus relegates the theatre tour to a site of contestation detached from reality, ignoring its very material interaction with the world at large and thus overlooking any capacity to ignite change.

However, in an earlier essay on Goethe's *Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship*, Bakhtin's (1986) reading more fully acknowledges the interaction between the life of the touring company and the material world it moves through. Here he does not talk of microcosms or oppositions, but proposes a concept that acknowledges the deep relationship between the touring company and its material context. He calls this concept *chronotope* - literally 'time-space'. For Bakhtin, chronotope provides an analytical frame for considering the interrelationship of spatial and temporal elements in literature. As I referenced in Chapter 2, the notion has also been used by Cathy Turner (2015) as part of an architectural consideration of dramaturgy and its construction of utopian ideals. Following both Turner's dramaturgical interest in chronotope, and Bakhtin's use of it in relation to a literary representation of touring theatre, I argue that chronotope offers a dramaturgical approach that can be used in touring practice. My proposed model not only implicates an interaction between the tour and the everyday world, but its emphasis on temporality links it to narratives of change. Hence, it is not merely critical but generative.

Chronotope is the name Bakhtin gives to 'the intrinsic connectedness of temporal and spatial relationships that are artistically expressed in literature' (Bakhtin 1981, p.84). Spatial and temporal indicators are fused in the chronotope, so that time 'thickens', becoming 'artistically visible', while space becomes 'responsive to the movements of time, plot and history' (*ibid*). As Simon Dentith (1995, p.50) identifies, a distinctive example of chronotope is that of the road, 'in which the course of an individual's life is fused with his actual spatial course'. *Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship* follows the literal and metaphorical journey of its central character Wilhelm, assimilated with what Bakhtin refers to as 'real historical time' (Bakhtin 1986, p.20). Driven by a desire for a life of romance and adventure, Wilhelm joins an itinerant company of actors and his travels represent the character's 'emergence' along with 'the historical emergence of the world itself' (*ibid*, p.23).

The travelling company move through and dwell in spaces that impact on Wilhelm's journey, altering the course of his life and conception of self. The theatre is presented as a desirable, even utopian, way of life, but not according to a fixed ideal. Initially, Wilhelm is inspired by his love of the puppet theatre he watched as a child and spurred by his romantic association with an actress. His resolve to embark on a life in the theatre anticipates a 'liberation' that might be found in the 'bright lights of the theatre' (Goethe 1983, p.21, Book 1, Ch.11), and is based on 'his idealized concept' of the theatrical profession as a poetic calling (*ibid*, p.31, Book 1, Ch.15). As this idealism is challenged by the reality of his work, the significance of the theatre shifts, and becomes important for the education it offers him. Unlike the classical 'novel of ordeal' in which there is 'no quality of emergence in the ideal' (Bakhtin 1986, p.13), Wilhelm's sense of what he desires changes as his spatial, historical and social context changes, eventually moving beyond the theatre as part of his development.

In *Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship*, the theatre tour can thus be understood as a chronotope, in which the character's spatial course is entwined with his psychological development and evolving ideals. For me, this inspires consideration about how dramaturgy and touring might work together to explore narratives of change. Turner proposes that identifying the chronotopes in works of theatre can enable analysis of



the intersection of spatial concerns (visual, architectural, environmental, geographic) with temporal ones (narrative, dialectical, all forms of process, conflict and change)

(Turner 2015, p.54)

In the act of theatre making, I propose seizing hold of chronotope not only as an analytical frame, but a practical dramaturgical tool that fuses the temporal organisation of ideas with the spatial context in which those ideas take place. As in Bakhtin's reading of the chronotopes in *Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship*, this means a touring theatre in which narratives and ideals are not fixed, but evolve as the performance travels. In terms of utopia, chronotope provides a framework for exploring the desire for a better way of being, through process and change, rather than the representation of a fixed ideal.

From a practical perspective, what might be a deliberate dramaturgical strategy for encouraging the evolution of narratives and ideals? At the heart of the chronotopes in *Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship* is an openness to change, in response to material circumstances. Wilhelm's spatial and temporal movement through the novel necessitates an interaction between his imagined ideal of the good life and the material reality in which this ideal is negotiated. The idealism attributed to the theatre is brought in stark relief when compared to the economic and social reality of the actors' lives, where the desire for a liberated life of romance, adventure and poetry, is continually hindered by the necessities of the historical present. As well as the relevance of chronotope, the notion of porosity is pertinent here. I propose that the relationship between the ideal and the material in *Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship* has implications for how we might conceive of a *porous dramaturgy* in touring practice, related to, but notably different from, the porous dramaturgy discussed by Turner (2014) and others (Thiarai 2011; Radosavljević 2013).

Turner (2014, p.200) summarises that the 'porous' is 'expressive of theatre/performance that creates a space, or spaces for what is beyond itself and is brought to it by an audience', but not only by an audience. Turner is particularly interested in how porosity operates in performance taking place in public space, where 'porous dramaturgy' describes a compositional structure that 'contains space for intervention, habitation or contribution' by audience

members or other aspects of the space itself. I am proposing a porous touring theatre that, like Wilhelm, is open to the material world it moves through, creating spaces for what is beyond itself, allowing its very conception of self to be altered.

Turner describes the porous as invoking a kind of 'mediation' (*ibid*, p.205) - a term I used in Chapter 3 to describe the relationship created between the known and the unknown as a result of acts of collaboration between devisers. In *Starting the Search*, I conceived of the improvising performer as a mediator, while Turner notes that in a porous dramaturgy, mediation might be contained within the performed work: in the case of site-specific performance this can be observed in the way a work 'mediates the relationship between site and audience' (*ibid*, p.206). Turner is especially interested in the porous voids within a site-specific work that represent the moment the work 'steps back from mediation' and 'prompts the audience to become the mediator' (*ibid*). I too am interested in creating space for moments of audience intervention, which I discuss later in the section on imagined communities. Here, I want to think more specifically about the kind of porous mediation that might be made possible in the dramaturgy of touring theatre *before* the moment it 'steps back'. Audience involvement aside, I am describing a mediation that is qualitatively different from that which Turner describes, and this requires clarification before considering how an audience might become the mediator.

In Chapter 3, I proposed that the act of collaboration opens a mediation between reality and utopia. Might the act of touring achieve the same but on a bigger scale? Certainly, the notion of porosity can be applied to a mediation with utopian alternatives. In *Dramaturgy and Architecture*, Turner (2014, pp.195-196) proposes a dramaturgical model of *transductive utopianism*, which proceeds from the real to imagine 'what a rebuilt city might look like'. She references a performance by Stephen Hodge 'which invited participants to reimagine their city' (*ibid*, p.194), and draws connections with the Situationist *dérive* and constructed situation, noting that all of these are also examples of 'porous dramaturgy' (*ibid*, p.196). In these examples, the work opens up a porosity within the real to invite alternative possibilities to become apparent; the dramaturgy facilitates a mediation between reality and utopia. However, in the

example of *Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship*, I argue that this mediation is reversed. Here, the experience of the touring company opens up a porosity in the utopian ideal whereby the social and economic reality of the actor's lives becomes apparent and alters their conception of the utopianism of life on the road. The materiality of touring facilitates a mediation between utopia and reality.

How might this happen in actual touring practice? I propose this involves both an overt acknowledgement of the utopian ideals and desires driving a piece of theatre, and the creation of dramaturgical structures that allow the real to seep into and disrupt those ideals. This overt acknowledgement need not be a matter of defining, articulating or readily representing a utopian ideal, but rather of exploring the 'wishful images' - to return to a notion introduced in Chapter 2 - that signal a not-yet-conscious anticipation of a better way of being.

In the case of touring theatre, I am advocating for a wholehearted embrace of the kind of images I have critiqued: the itinerant bandwagon enjoying 'certain rights and freedoms of carnival' (Bakhtin 1984b), or the nomadic theatre artist expressing their 'spiritual ideal of universalism' (Klaić 1995). These wishful images can signal the desire for a better way of being, but rather than presuming to represent that better way, I propose treating them as a starting point for seeking it out. My practical research has sought a way to neither uncritically celebrate nor entirely reject such false imaginaries, but to grapple with them; using the creative process as a means of investigating what it is that draws me to these falsehoods, and asking whether there is anything to be gained from exposing them to reality.

As I proposed in Chapter 2, rather than dismissing a romantic relationship with the past as conservatively nostalgic, I am concerned with harnessing the surplus of utopian desire that is present in the utopian imaginary of the travelling theatre troupe. Through my practical research I discovered that the very aesthetic crafted to embody this imaginary provides the porous openings necessary to critique it. As I discuss in Chapters 5 and 6, my practice embodies a nostalgic imaginary of touring theatre with an aesthetic style that references an imagined past and a lineage of popular performance. This style, which could be

described as carnivalesque, also opens up a means of disrupting those imaginaries through practices of clowning and storytelling that in different ways allow the real to seep into the performance. Alongside the use of chronotopes to structure the work, detailed in the next chapter, this porous dramaturgy opens spaces in the utopian ideal for intervention and habitation by the material reality of the tour.

Opening up utopia to reality is related to Lefebvre's (1996, p.151) notion of experimental utopianism, introduced in Chapter 2. Lefebvre's (1995, p.357) approach to utopia is sympathetic to the romanticism that instils a desire to 'make a reality' of that which has been 'glimpsed in [...] youth', pertinently reminiscent of Wilhelm's longing for the joy and adventure glimpsed in an early theatrical experience. Lefebvre states it is impossible to realise that which is romantically longed for, but utopianism can explore 'the dialectic between the possible and the impossible', superseding romanticism and incorporating rationality (*ibid*). In exploring how such a dialectic might operate in theatre practice, I borrow the notion of a porous dramaturgy, which itself offers a 'negotiation between fluidity and structure' (Turner 2014, p.210). Opening up a porosity in the utopian image enables a playful and productive negotiation of its possibilities, revealing unexpected new understandings of its values and ideals.

As I detail in the next chapter, by structuring the narrative of the performance via chronotopes, these values and ideals can shift and change as part of the changing content of the performance. Here, I will now consider the kind of content that might emerge as a result of such changing ideals, departing from the nomadic or liberatory ideal of touring, and indeed from Goethe's idealisation of the educational function of theatre, exploring instead the tour's potential to explore the quest to feel at home in the world.

### **Staging the quest for *Heimat***

In my literature review at the start of this chapter, I identified several common framings that arise in discussions of touring theatre and utopia. These include nomadism as an idealised act of eternal passage, giving rise to a fluid subjectivity and the ability to produce new possibilities; a universal oneness made possible by touring theatre's capacity to communicate across borders; and

a desire to seek out connection with different people and places. These positions can be critiqued but they nevertheless represent utopian themes that are bound up in touring practice, and might provide a starting point for a practice aiming to grapple with its own utopianism; perhaps uncovering alternative framings that supersede these impossible and romanticised imaginaries.

In this section I will discuss one such alternative framing, inspired by a recent ethnographic article about touring musicians. The article, by Anna Lisa Ramella (2018), is not about utopia but about conceptions of home, and I have found her discussions useful in critically reflecting on what has emerged in my practice-as-research. As I will demonstrate, the notion of home can be connected to Ruth Levitas's ontological mode of utopia as method, in particular via Levitas's use of Bloch's notion of *Heimat*: the home to which no one has yet been. This relationship between home and utopia can be seen to not only frame an experience of being on tour, but for both Ramella's touring musicians and the artists of my own *Travelling Show*, it frames the process of creating performance material and is thus generative of the work itself.

Ramella identifies the notion of a 'home on the road' as a common representation arising in 20<sup>th</sup> Century North American Folk, Blues and Rock music. Ramella explores this notion via an ethnographic study of North American touring musicians, identifying two related senses of home that are enacted during their travels: the imaginative and the embodied.

In the imaginative sense, enacting home is

related to the imaginaries of touring and influenced by romanticisations or devaluations of a mobile lifestyle that musicians are confronted with by their social contacts

(Ramella 2018, p.334)

Ramella points to the expectations of others as well as the touring musician's imagined sense of other's relative stasis or immobility, as contributing to an ambivalent experience of home, which is different for each of her participants.

The embodied sense of home refers to the tactics that help the musicians to feel 'at home' while on the road; the routines and benchmark practices that are related to structure, homemaking and a 'state of being in tune' (*ibid*, p.328-329). This embodied sense of home is not located in the tour's temporary dwellings, but in the work. Setting up, rehearsing and playing music provides structure and familiarity for the touring musicians, while everything else comprises a 'strenuous phase of waiting, feeling out of place and out of control' (*ibid*).

Ramella concludes that the narratives of her research participants reveal 'certain ambivalences regarding one's own hopes, desires and framing of experiences' (*ibid*, p.337), which I propose demonstrates a relationship between the tour and Bloch's (1986, p.1376) notion of *Heimat*. Literally translated as homeland, *Heimat* for Bloch is the home to 'which no one has yet been' (*ibid*). Its indeterminacy resists the more conservative connotations of homeland, such as in Svetlana Boym's (2001, p.41) definition of 'restorative nostalgia', which represents a homeland that has been lost and casts suspicion on those perceived to be a threat to its restoration. Conversely, Ramella's research participants do not define home as a specific place that might be returned to, instead identifying it in needs and desires that are different for each individual. Similarly, Bloch's *Heimat* is not about returning but about something which is yet to come, arising in the world when the 'working, creating human' (Bloch 1986, p.1375) is able to grasp themselves 'without expropriation or alienation' (*ibid*, p.1376). *Heimat* is the 'community where longing does not anticipate the matter nor where the fulfilment is less than the longing'; a situation in which being and hope are one and the same (*ibid*, p.1375).

As Levitas (2013, p.12) summarises, *Heimat* expresses the 'desire for a settled resolution' of the alienated condition under capitalism, and is echoed in Roberto Unger's (cited in *ibid*, p. 185) characterisation of the human condition as a quest for the basic freedom of 'being at home in the world'. The complex notion of home in Ramella's study fits well with this conception and, in its ambivalence, appears related to what Levitas (2013, p.177) describes as the 'ontological mode' of utopia as method, grappling with the questions of what constitutes happiness and human flourishing. As Ramella (2018, p.335) notes, referencing an auto-ethnography of migration, home might be conceived as a 'reservoir for one's

situative needs'. When home is displaced or defamiliarised by migration, this 'shifting reservoir' carries one's 'hopes, desires and dreams' (Raman in Ramella 2018, p.334), and perhaps makes them more palpable. That is, the estranging effect of enacting a home away from home can magnify what is held to be central to one's sense of self and what is necessary for human flourishing.

Ramella's is an ethnographic study, and its conclusions cannot be extrapolated to all experiences of touring. Indeed, the touring that comprises *Travelling Show* is quite different: working periods comprise short intense bursts of activity in one place, unlike Ramella's research participants who are almost constantly on the move. What is more, much of our tour has been structured around the fact that two artists live in Liverpool, and I live in Glasgow. For each performance, either city has acted as a base, enabling us to perform at a venue in the city itself or a short drive away. During a period of working together, members of the team thus have materially different relationships to conceptions of home and tour, and this pattern of working produces its own complexities and ambivalences that negotiate ontological questions in a different way from Ramella's study. An auto-ethnography of the *Travelling Show* tour would thus be fascinating, but is beyond the scope of my research. Rather, what is especially relevant in Ramella's reflections, is the way both the imaginative and the embodied sense of home come to interact with the band's creative output. This inspires analogous means of thinking about the dramaturgical interaction between the ontological experience of *Travelling Show's* journey and its performed content, suggesting that the tour has the potential to stage the quest to both embody and imagine the home to which we have not yet been.

Ramella briefly draws a connection between one participant's imaginative sense of home, and the lyrical content of their music:

Change and transformation, in his definition, are more linked to comfort and lightness than he imagines a life in stasis to be, namely because it is what he has become more used to. Just like his band mate Adam sings: "I've been gone so long, it seems like home to me."

(Ramella 2018, p.336)

Here we are alerted to the fact that the participants' complex narratives of home and travel are poeticised within the creative output of the touring band. Additionally, the embodied sense of home is strongly reflected in the musical form, comprising a rhythmic structure that 'is co-established by both repetition and improvisation' (*ibid*, p. 330). The relaxation achieved by rehearsing and performing the familiar songs within the band's repertoire produces a feeling of being 'at home' (*ibid*). In this way I propose that it is not only the labour of touring but the music itself that produces the band's experience of mobility; an experience that is also expressed in the content of that music. Thus, there is a feedback loop between the creative medium and the sense of home it both embodies and imagines. The band's music opens up a porosity that mediates between the romanticised mobile lifestyle and its actual lived embodiment.

Similarly, *Travelling Show* produces original songs and stories as it travels, most of which explicitly engage with themes of mobility and immobility, place, identity and belonging. As I discuss in the following chapters, the songs and stories of *Travelling Show* reflect ambivalent experiences of being in motion, which are emblematic of the experience of the company on tour. *Travelling Show* reveals travel and storytelling as intertwined in expressing a yearning for purpose and a sense of belonging in the world, which emerges from a mediation between the imaginative and embodied experience of the theatre tour.

Searching for a sense of home on the road is part of a broader 'spiritual quest to understand who we are, why we are here and how we connect to each other'; a quest that can be described as utopia (Levitas 2013, p.12). Poeticising this quest, its tensions and ambivalences, provides a way of exploring answers to these questions.

### **Mobilising imagined communities**

The two models I have proposed thus far have focused on the artist's experience of the theatre tour, exploring strategies that might both challenge their own utopianism and share a sense of their changing ideals over the course of their journey. As I suggested, the notion of a porous dramaturgy can also encompass the encounter with an audience. Here I consider a model that does just that,



while extending a disruption of utopian ideals beyond the ontological experience to broader imaginaries of community.

A pertinent model for considering such disruption arises in Fiona Wilkie's analysis of the mobility of performance practice. In *Performance, Transport and Mobility*, Wilkie (2015, p.11) builds on the 'new mobilities paradigm' in the social sciences to consider how mobility is 'created, tested and reimaged' in performance through the lens of different modes of transport. Wilkie draws attention to performances that work to register, resist, defamiliarise and critique spaces of transit, identifying how tensions are produced and articulated in the meeting points of performance and transport. Although she does not specifically discuss dramaturgy, Wilkie proposes that these works collectively produce an effect of *making passage* (*ibid*, p. 17), which I suggest could be understood as a shared aspect of their dramaturgy.

In Wilkie's examples, the performance's political dimension is often recognised in the way transport is factored within the work. In Kutluğ Ataman's *Küba: Journey Against the Current*, a river barge literally moves against the current of the Danube, carrying a DVD installation that visits villages along the route. Its physical movement reflects its political aim: to 'move against the current of official rhetoric about European identity' (*ibid*, p. 140). In Mike Kelley's *Mobile Homestead*, a truck carries a fabricated house around various neighbourhoods to act as a community space for both public and private arts activities. The work's mobility serves both a social and a symbolic function: reaching remote and rarely accessed locales, while mobilising ideas about home, community and belonging; 'inviting us to loosen the fixity that might be associated' with such notions (*ibid*, p.101).

Issues of identity recur in many of the works discussed by Wilkie, particularly collective identities tied to various geographic constellations (local, national, continental, for example). This might be compared to some of the touring works I discussed in the early part of this chapter that can, as in the case of Cirque du Soleil and the Queen's Men, be read as constructing or privileging particular imaginaries of collective identity. By contrast, in Wilkie's examples such constructions are contested and subverted in the act of making passage. While I

have expressed my concerns about the totalising and dogmatic utopias implied by touring's tendency towards sameness, Wilkie's notion of making passage suggests a way that touring works might resist and defamiliarize totalising ideals, opening up opportunities for the more processual and exploratory approach to utopia that I am interested in.

In all Wilkie's examples, making passage is tied to the particular mode of transport that makes the work mobile. However, touring practice commonly occurs in a less clearly defined space of mobility. Touring productions might travel via road or rail or air (or other modes), but this transport is rarely evident in the encounter with an audience, nor factored within the artistic conceit. There are exceptions to this, as Wilkie's book demonstrates, but I am interested in whether the more widespread model of touring can also work to make passage in some way.

Beyond the symbolism provided by a mode of transport, *how* might a touring artwork set up strategies to mobilise and disrupt notions of collective identity? I propose that dramaturgy is key. As Overend (2015, p.48) states, building on Nicholas Bourriaud's claim that the modern question par excellence is 'where should we go?', the more significant question might be 'what do we do when we get there?'. Reflecting on his own touring work, Overend points to the importance of engaging with the communities encountered on tour, by running activities such as workshops and post-show discussions (*ibid*). In other examples, practitioners are finding ways to make such engagement activities an integral part of the tour's artistic concept. Rather than merely accompanying a performance, participatory activities might feed into, or even replace, the touring production. As I will argue, this kind of dramaturgical strategy can work productively with the desire to connect with different people without uncritically privileging the notion of common ground. Instead, it can extend a porous dramaturgical approach to open the touring work up to frictions and inconsistencies, in a mutual negotiation of touring work and context.

Such potential is demonstrated by Rajni Shah's *Glorious* (2011-2013), which spent an extended amount of time engaging with local stakeholders and participants in each area it toured to in England, producing a large-scale community musical

that retained the same basic structure in each location but featured local musicians and monologues written by local people. Shah (in Paterson and Schmidt 2012, p.22) identifies the motivation behind this model of touring as a 'frustration with the current touring system and a commitment to making a show that could genuinely engage with the people and places we encounter when we tour'. The project can therefore be seen to be driven by a certain impulse to make connections and explore a better and more meaningful way of touring.

In each location, the creative team facilitated a participatory process beginning with interventions in public places such as shopping centres, inviting people to undertake a letter writing activity. Those interested in being involved further were invited to take part in a series of workshops, which gave rise to the writing of monologues. At the same time, musicians were recruited through local colleges and music groups, who worked with the musical director to create their own versions of the production's music. All participants came together to rehearse and perform *Glorious* for a public audience.

This process involved the gathering together of people who, although they live in the same area, were unlikely to meet. This is noted in the evaluation report as an important aspect of the project, which allowed the 'quiet interrogation' of questions of community: 'how we feel part of one and how we can be part of one' (Lynch 2013, p.34). These questions arise from the participatory process, but are also felt in performance. As Geraldine Harris (2013) reflects, participation in the early 'run up' activities 'very much reflected my experience of the final production', which appeared dedicated to 'bringing a wide mix of very different people together in a spirit of openness and generosity'. Interviews with project participants reveal more complex experiences of community, in which the opportunity to mix with strangers opens minds but also gives rise to frustrations and reveals local tensions and inequalities (Lynch 2013, pp.19, 23). The engagement with the locality and the writing of personal monologues allows these issues to be confronted in the artwork. Rather than an enactment of a utopian community then, external evaluator Elizabeth Lynch (2013, p.34) suggests this process 'holds up a mirror to the community it gathers together and asks its people to take a fresh look at who they are, what they see and feel, and what might be missing'.

Engagement with the local context is not a means of making the broader themes of the work more relevant. Rather, it allows the local context to raise its own questions. In exploring 'how [people] experience the places where they live' (Lynch 2013, p.22), *Glorious* incorporates locally meaningful issues, such as the relative inequality between different local communities and the perceptions that gives rise to (*ibid*, p.23). While these experiences and issues might differ from place to place, they are accommodated within the framework of *Glorious*.

*Glorious* encounters place as something constituted as much by tensions as by unity. The performed material is not the same in each location, and nor is there an implied sameness in the sense of connection it fosters. *Glorious* tours a basic dramatic framework and a method of engagement which, in its openness to differing contexts, welcomes shifts in meaning. As with Wilkie's notion of making passage, this touring production makes a virtue of its mobility as an opportunity to resist static notions of identity, exploring its questions anew with each new group of participants. In its openness to what is brought to it by the people and places it encounters, *Glorious* is an example of a porous dramaturgy that, as Turner (2014, p.201) suggests, embraces that which 'is incidental, frictive, contradictory, or [...] produces meaning in unforeseeable ways'.

The incidental and the unforeseeable returns to the notion of opening a space of contingency, which I explored in Chapter 3. In place of any idealism about what community might be, the materiality of the touring performance's encounter with different locations, opens a space of contingency on the move. This is a space in which to, as *Glorious* does, 'take a fresh look' at who we are and 'what might be missing' (Lynch 2013, p.34). To relate this back to utopia, I suggest this is a means of setting utopia in motion. The production might set out with a desire for connection, but it does not dogmatically cling to a predetermined notion of what community, connection or unity *is*. Rather, its dramaturgy is constituted by its ability to ask that question again and again, in dialogue with different people in different places.

*Glorious* reveals a complexity of place, although this is perhaps only apparent to those who have access to the broader metastructure of the tour: that is, the touring team who directly experience the changing content of the work, and

people like myself who make an effort to read about the project. Whether this is accessible at the level of audience encounter, is related to questions raised by Wilkie:

Is an artwork on tour experienced by the spectator as fixed or as mobile? Does its mobility matter in its reception: do the travels of the work register in the spectator's encounter? And how do the pragmatic processes of touring play into the themes of the work itself?

(Wilkie 2015, p.138)

These questions of reception bring together the mobile, the relational and the dramaturgical aspects of the touring artwork and are therefore central to my investigation into the meeting points of devising, dramaturgy and touring. Additionally, Wilkie's proposed answers to these questions, open a path to thinking about how utopia might factor in this relationship.

Reflecting on Ataman's *Küba*, Wilkie suggests that the touring barge facilitates an encounter with an 'elsewhere' - in this case an Istanbul shantytown that is recounted through 40 talking heads interviews (*ibid*, p.139). Further, in the decision to programme the touring artwork alongside a local companion piece it 'stages a dialogue between a "home" and an "away"' (*ibid*, p. 140). Although Wilkie is talking about a place that really exists, it is a place that is never fully graspable by those who encounter it and I propose that this 'elsewhere', this place that is not-quite-knowable, has implications for how mobility might be understood in relation to utopia. The elsewhere in this context might not relate to the *good* of utopia, but it reaches close to the elusive otherness of utopia's *no place*, and is reminiscent of the dialogue between a here and an elsewhere that structures a typical utopian novel.

The same language is used by Wilkie to describe the social dimensions of Lone Twin's *The Boat Project*; dimensions that might more closely correspond to a sense of the performance's *goodness*. This project involved constructing a boat from donated wooden objects but the actual 'work' for Lone Twin is in the moments of donation and not the finished 'deliverable' (*ibid*, p. 129). The work is, Wilkie suggests, 'located elsewhere' (*ibid*, p. 129); somewhere that is only symbolically present in the physical object produced. In both examples,

'elsewhere' suggests that these mobile dramaturgies are constituted by something beyond themselves, and that the intangibility of this elsewhere is fundamental to the artistic, social and political premise of the work.

Again, there is a sense of porosity implied; remembering that a 'porous dramaturgy' makes space for 'what is beyond itself' (Turner 2014, p.200), these mobile dramaturgies make space for that which is beyond the present event space, inviting the elsewhere to register even as it remains intangible and unknowable. Thinking about how touring work can incorporate this sense of elsewhere is essential in my development of a theatre-making methodology that not only explores an openness to imagining the geographical community it encounters, but extends that openness to a broader audience as part of its ongoing tour. My final example in this chapter does exactly that.

In 2018, Bristol-based performance duo Action Hero - James Stenhouse and Gemma Paintin - began the first phase of their touring project *Oh Europa*. The duo travelled around Europe in a motorhome incorporating a recording studio, inviting people to share love songs. They also erected beacons across the continent, transmitting the recorded songs 24 hours a day, which are accessible via a smartphone app. *Oh Europa* arose out of an interest in exploring European identity. The project's openness to what this might be is reflected in its openness of dramaturgical form. The simplicity of the invitation and the gathering of whatever people choose to share in response to it, suggests an openness and a genuine desire to explore connections and complexities between people occupying the same continent. The request for love songs implies an optimism about the possibility of something that might be shared, at the same time as opening up to countless differing responses and interpretations. Love is proffered as an antidote to the divisions within the continent, while retaining a joyously uncontainable and complex character. The work might signal a desire to unite, but it does so by welcoming difference, without deferring to simplistic imaginaries. It is, as Paintin says 'a massive act of hope' (in Trueman 2018), while revelling in the uncertainty of what might emerge from that hope.

The initial *Oh Europa* journey was well-documented online, with Action Hero providing updates on their journey via 'video postcards' from the road (see Action

Hero 2018). Following the initial tour, the duo continue to share the work at festivals and venues across Europe. Now, they not only invite participants to share a love song, but include opportunities to encounter the broader context of the work through an exhibition within the motorhome, and in *RadiOh Europa*, a durational performance and 'act of collective listening' (Action Hero 2019) in which the songs recorded by the project are played for a live audience. Along with the beacons installed as part of the original tour, this evolving constellation of dissemination activities demonstrates a dramaturgical commitment to the work's resonance beyond the initial encounter between artist and participant.

The motorhome evokes its own utopian imaginaries of nomadism, romanticising the road as a means of connecting people, and of the motorhome or campervan as a symbol of freedom and adventure. The seductive allure of the lifestyle implied by *Oh Europa* is, I argue, an essential part of its dramaturgical framing; similar to the 'overt acknowledgement' I advocated when introducing the notion of porous dramaturgy earlier in this chapter. Along with the love songs, the romantic imaginary of life on the road signifies a longing for something lacking in the everyday imaginary of relations in Europe. The openness of the invitation, and the evolution of plural means of dissemination - which in turn promote contingent interpretations and associations in their reception - contribute to the sense that the longing implied by the journey's frame is not-yet-conscious; a dream which is yet unclear to itself. This is less an attempt to spread love, and more to seek it out; a searching for optimism and a European comradeship at the same time as asking what that might mean.

When I visited the *Oh Europa* beacon at Hadrian's Wall in Northumberland, I felt strangely distant from the songs I heard. In unfamiliar languages, I struggled to imagine the places they came from, and nor could I instantly connect on an emotional level. One song was especially difficult to place, sung in a language that sounded as though it might originate in an African, rather than European country. On the one hand, I experienced this distanced *encounter with an elsewhere* as hopeful, gesturing to the boundless richness of European identity that can never be fully grasped. On the other, it was a reminder of the imperial relations that complicate the notion of what Europe is; that the continent and its identity cannot be separated from its historical and ongoing relationships

with Africa and other continents. *Oh Europa* does not explicitly ask us to consider these histories, but its porosity allows them to register within its nevertheless optimistic longing for a shared human love across a vastness of cultural difference. It performs a desire for unity without attempting to manufacture it; a not-yet-conscious dream of togetherness, porously problematised by its encounter with elsewhere.

Like *Glorious*, the work could be said to hold up a mirror to the community, though *Oh Europa* successfully extends this reflection beyond the locality of the immediate encounter to reflect more broadly on European identity. In both cases, the mirror metaphor suggests the performances operate like heterotopias, although they exceed a merely critical function through their interactivity and fluidity. They implicate complex representations of community that not only reflect society but resist the imaginaries of the official culture, while the long-term local engagement (in the case of *Glorious*) and the wider reception (in the case of *Oh Europa*) ensure that the ripples of this resistance are felt beyond a fleeting moment of performance. Thus, they also avoid being only a 'safety valve' to release anti-authoritarian tendencies (as per the critique of carnival noted in Chapter 2). Instead, performances such as these leave what Kwon (2002, p.166) calls 'indelible, unretractable social marks'; traces of a more open and complex imaginary of community that continues to resonate.

*Oh Europa* belongs at the extreme end of what might be described as touring theatre. The initial act of gathering stretches definitions of theatre, and the subsequent activities, with their myriad evolving nature, continue to stretch a definition of touring as 'fundamentally the same event offered to all' (Arts Council England 2017, p.67). As I have observed, there is nevertheless a dramaturgy at work, and a consistent awareness of an audience that exists beyond the immediate artistic encounter. My own touring experiment, *Travelling Show*, represents an attempt to explore a similarly open approach to geographic identity, and a dramaturgical awareness of the journey's mediation to an audience, within a form that is more recognisably *theatre*. My comparatively conventional dramaturgical practice enables explorations of narrative structure, devising methodologies, and performance attitudes that



illuminate new knowledge about the potential of the tour as a utopian method in motion, expanding upon the proposals made in this chapter.

Questioning the value of touring as an act that implicates sameness, I have proposed approaches for a more dialogical and responsive touring theatre practice. My suggested models incorporate: Bakhtin's chronotope as a compositional device that fuses the spatial and the temporal to provoke a way of setting narratives in motion; Turner's definition of porous dramaturgy to open up a dialogue between the touring production's imaginaries and its material conditions; Bloch's notion of *Heimat* to understand how the experience of the tour might be reflected in its performed content; Wilkie's notion of making passage, to conceptualise touring practices that open up imaginaries of place and identity; and the building of structures that facilitate an audience's encounter with an elsewhere.

Running through all my proposals is the idea of utopia as unfixed and in a state of becoming; a better way of being that might be anticipated by performance, while touring practices allow that anticipation to be tested, critiqued, and to enter into dialogue with material conditions and with different people and places. In developing such approaches, touring might cease to be defined as a practice that offers the same event to all. Instead, touring might be understood as a negotiation of its own utopian imaginary, opening up its ideals to the realities of its material conditions. Touring might both embody and imagine a quest for *Heimat*; a searching for a sense of meaning and purpose, and the right to feel at home in the world. And, touring might be a movement through imaginaries, opening up complex conceptions of identity and belonging, that offer hope in their unknowability.

These models draw upon some of the proposals I made in earlier chapters, incorporating the sense of not-yet-conscious anticipation bound up in the carnival utopia, and problematising it through an embrace of the frictive and uneven experience of the theatre tour, using a porous dramaturgical approach to open a space of contingency where new understandings of the ideal become apparent. Over the next two chapters, I bring these approaches together more explicitly as I discuss my own touring experiment *Travelling Show*. I describe the

performance's frameworks and strategies, which combine the carnivalesque dramaturgical principles discussed in Chapter 2 with the models of mobile dramaturgy discussed here, operating to open spaces of contingency that are both generative and critical of the work's utopianism.



## Part Two



## 5. *Travelling Show*: dramaturgy on tour

On 25 October 2017, I met with four of my Theatre Studies PhD colleagues at the Gilmorehill Centre, University of Glasgow. In advance of the meeting I had asked them to each bring something they would like to gift to a group of strangers. These gifts would provide the starting point for my major practical experiment: *Travelling Show*, a touring performance that at this stage remained a not-yet fully-formed idea, which involved gathering gifts from audience members in one place, to inspire what is performed for audience members in the next location visited on the tour. Over the following two years, I would collaborate with professional theatre practitioners to devise and perform *Travelling Show*, visiting six different venues in Scotland and North West England. Documentation from this project, including videos of all the performances and photographs of all the gifts gathered, can be found on the project website that accompanies my discussions here<sup>13</sup>.

Over this chapter and the next, I provide a description of *Travelling Show*. I balance accounts of process and critical reflection, to demonstrate how this practice affords new insights in relation to my research inquiry; focussing in on the learning that pertains to an exploration of a generative relationship between dramaturgy, devising, touring and utopia. I draw upon concepts and practices referenced in the preceding chapters, aiming to make explicit certain dramaturgical and devising principles that derive significance from their positioning within this conceptual framework.

The principles described here demonstrate a dynamic theatre-making method that brings together the three practices proposed in Chapters 2-4: harnessing the carnivalesque as both an aesthetic and a dramaturgical tool; opening spaces of contingency; and treating the mobility of the theatre tour as an opportunity to mobilise ideals and imaginaries.

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<sup>13</sup> <http://utopiaontour.tumblr.com>

As a practitioner-researcher I was involved in *Travelling Show* as a performer, deviser and dramaturg, but my research focuses on this practice from a largely dramaturgical perspective; concerned with the formal structures, compositional textures and conceptual framings that not only hold the performance together but propel its ongoing creation. Over the next two chapters I provide a more or less chronological discussion of *Travelling Show's* development and its six performances. In this chapter, I attend to the broader frameworks established by the performance, while the next chapter considers some of the more specific exercises and techniques that have been employed in the ongoing devising and performing process. This reflects the structure of the research, which was initially concerned with establishing what might be called a 'metastructure' for the work, before concentrating on the practices that could take place within this structure. I have titled these two chapters 'dramaturgy on tour' and 'devising on tour' respectively, but the actual practice could not be so clearly separated. Developing the dramaturgical metastructure required acts of devising, and that structure has continued to be refined and altered even as the research shifted focus towards the devising process. This interdependent relationship of dramaturgy and devising remains evident throughout the coming discussion, articulating an understanding of my theatre-making model, and indeed utopia, as comprised by both structure and openness.

This chapter begins with a definition of *Travelling Show's* genre, or performance register, as 'the carnival utopia mode', describing how this mode emerged from early ideas. I then provide an overview of the dramaturgical structure of the work, describing this as being constituted by two intertwining chronotopes that establish both the spatial and temporal changes bound up in the work's travel. I then discuss the generative framework of gift exchange, focussing on the invitations to audience members and how they have changed in response to the evolving conceptual framework. In all cases, these structures can be seen to establish dual generative starting points: expressing a not-yet-conscious desire rooted in the carnival utopia, while opening spaces of contingency that might reveal the previously unimaginable.

## The carnival utopia mode

My practical research set out with an acknowledgement of the nostalgic imaginaries of touring, by offering my own anticipatory, and deliberately utopian, vision of touring theatre. This mythical ideal was written for a conference abstract submitted in April 2017, and shared with my artistic collaborators - Andy Gledhill and Maria Malone - around the same time; some three months before we began working on *Starting the Search*.

Troupes of travelling players move freely across the land, with neither ties nor restrictions, taking their universal tales to the people of every city, town and village. Transgressing borders, these nomadic artists gesture towards a post-national utopia, connecting disparate communities as they invoke a common humanity that unites us all. Theirs is a journey of endless discovery and growth; a journey without a destination. They are searching for a kind of utopia, but they find it every night, as they settle down to share stories, songs, dances, drinks, joys and woes with new friends in wondrous new places.

Posting the statement on our shared Facebook group, I asked whether we should 'go full Medieval travelling troupe' as a starting point to then 'critique and question' the utopian myths bound up in such an image. Both collaborators responded positively to this suggestion. Andy's reply reads: 'I'm in. I'll dust off the hurdy-gurdy.', while Maria responded 'That's the life for me!'. Something in this ideal vision resonated with all of us, despite our own experiences of touring being something quite different. In addition, we all instinctively accepted the proposal that appearing as a Medieval touring troupe, complete with hurdy-gurdy, could function as a signifier for the myth constructed in the passage, despite that passage having nothing to do with Medieval theatre. Indeed, the ideals expressed here are perhaps not to do with theatre at all, but a desire for something missing from life in general.

Although the passage is an articulation of sorts, there remains something incomplete and out of reach about my utopian vision. As discussed, Bloch's notion of the 'not-yet' helps conceptualise the presence of a desire for something that one is not yet able to fully articulate. The passage is deliberately utopian, in the unrealistic sense, and yet the ideals are genuinely desired. It is acknowledged as a myth, but nevertheless expresses something that is longed for; insufficient words for my desire for a better life, and a better world. Bloch's



theory of surplus, introduced in Chapter 2, helps to explain why a nostalgic - and largely inaccurate - image of itinerant theatre provides the basis of a utopian proposal that myself and my collaborators recognise as something we desire, even while we are able to acknowledge its distance from something realisable. We know that *this specific proposal* is not exactly the utopian end point we desire, and yet it provides a concrete starting point for expressing our dream of something that is unclear to itself.

My collaborators' and my interest in an imagined golden age of travelling theatre is an expression of longing for qualities such as freedom from restrictions and connection with others, which are lacking in our real experiences of touring (and indeed, from everyday life). The nostalgic image that we draw upon is not, however, rooted in what we truly believe the past to look like, and nor is it exactly what we wish for our future. It is associated with the utopian dimension of nostalgia that Boym (2001, p.xiv) suggests is neither directed towards the past nor the future, 'but rather sideways'. It is a longing that is carried with us; a dream that is yet to possess consciousness of itself. This desire is not located in the past as such, but we grasp hold of this self-consciously false imaginary of the past, as a means of expressing that which we cannot yet articulate.



Figure 4: Costumes in *Starting the Search*

In *Starting the Search*, we do not consciously address the touring aspect of the project, focussing on the devising process and largely setting aside - for now - the ideals expressed in that utopian passage posted in our Facebook group. However, when it comes to share the results of our devising experiments with a small audience of colleagues, we opt for costumes that summon the utopianism of travelling theatre: Maria and I wear long, full-skirted, black and white striped dresses, while Andy wears a white shirt and flat cap. We do not dress as a Medieval troupe, as originally proposed. Instead, these costumes are reminiscent of Victorian music hall, partly because these are the costumes we have to hand, and partly because Medievalism was never the point anyway. We do not wear these costumes to refer to a specific era, but rather to conjure the anticipation bound up in an imagined golden age of travelling theatre, which becomes a referent in *Starting the Search* by virtue of this aesthetic choice.



Figure 5: Publicity image for *Travelling Show* (photographer: Ingrid Mur)

When it comes to start work on *Travelling Show*, this aesthetic style is developed further, as part of an overt embodiment of our imagined ideal as we literally travel as a company attempting to forge connections with the different communities we encounter. The music hall-style costumes are joined by bunting that adorns the stage, a chalk board announcing the title of tonight's performance, and small brown vintage suitcases carried on stage by the performers. These visual signs are enhanced by a performance register that

could be described as a heightened informality, incorporating a verbose rhetorical style, direct address, and narration, while the stories told are mythical, in the style of folk and fairy tales. Together these performance elements evoke a range of referents including music hall, circus, wandering minstrels, travelling fairs, and variety nights. In addition, the use of live music, spontaneity, ensemble playing and a low-tech, handmade aesthetic, might be associated with the alternative and community theatre movement of the 1960s and 70s, including companies like Welfare State and 7:84 referenced in Chapter 2. Taking *Travelling Show* to non-theatre spaces and village halls signals a political interest in reaching alternative audiences, while invoking a nostalgia for the radicalism of the era that pioneered this approach to touring. The performance thus references a whole history of popular and political entertainment, from which it derives its imaginary of itself. As per my discussions in Chapter 2, this style can be described as carnivalesque, evoking a lineage of popular performance that can be traced back to Medieval Europe.

This range of 'old-fashioned' references, not anchored in a particular historical context, shares characteristics with what Jameson (1991, p.203) calls 'the nostalgia mode'. Identified by Jameson in 'the nostalgia film', this mode is not about the representation of historical content, but rather conveys "pastness" through stylistic connotation (*ibid*, p.204). Thus *Travelling Show* appears to evoke a *sense* of medieval or renaissance strolling players, despite there being no specific signs that point to that era. At the same time, the performance does not pretend to be taking place in any time other than the present. References to contemporary events, technology, brand names, and so forth, are included in the performance without being incongruous. So too in the 'nostalgia film', which might be 'set' in a contemporary town, but contains aesthetic signs (Jameson's example is of the 'art deco scripting' of the opening credits on screen), which 'programme the spectator for the appropriate "nostalgia" mode of reception' (*ibid*).

Jameson is critical of this mode that envelopes spectators in an eternal 'pastness' (*ibid*), but I argue that something different is happening in *Travelling Show*. Here, what might be recognised as a nostalgia mode does not work to convey pastness as such. The costumes might refer to a Victorian-ness or Elizabethan-

ness, but more specifically they point to an itinerant theatre-ness, which in turn signifies the utopian imaginaries bound up in travelling theatre. In other words, *Travelling Show's* aesthetic signs function as signifiers that point to the presence of anticipation and longing. The style of the performance signifies utopianism, or a consciousness that is not yet clear to itself, temporarily materialised in the guise of the past. Rather than the nostalgia mode, I describe this as the utopia mode, or more specifically the carnival utopia mode; a carnivalesque performance register that operates as an essential referent within the work's dramaturgy.

The company's literal embodiment of their own imaginary might be recognised as a Saturnalian 'bodily participation in the potentiality of another world' (Bakhtin 1984b, p.48). The embodiment is carnivalesque not only in style but in essence; for Bakhtin the 'living' of this possibility is key and differentiates these earlier carnivalesque expressions (be it Saturnalia or Renaissance carnival) from Romanticism in which the golden age is of interest only 'for the sake of abstract thought' (*ibid*). This concurs with Lefebvre's interest in an experimental utopianism, which is sympathetic to romanticism 'as a way of living' (1995, p.355), but believes that when utopianism becomes a 'lived experience', it supersedes the romantic (*ibid*, p.357). Similarly, in *Travelling Show* the visual signifiers might point to a nostalgic or romanticised vision of the past, but the lived experience of the tour supersedes it.

Experimental embodiment allows the utopian ideal to be mobilised, literally and metaphorically. The embodiment is porous, allowing the impossible, not-yet-conscious ideal to come into contact with the possible, in the material reality of life on the road. This material reality seeps into the performance in two main ways: implicitly in the stories and songs created by the team as they travel from place to place; and explicitly in audience asides, informal dialogues, and self-parodic scenes that share aspects of the performers' creative process, their visits to different places and their relationships with each other. I discuss this content in more detail in Chapter 6, to demonstrate how the openness of both the devising process and the improvisational performance attitude perform an essential dramaturgical function as part of *Travelling Show's* porosity. In the remainder of this chapter, I discuss other aspects of the dramaturgical structure

that are intended to open up and alter this utopian ideal, welcoming shifts and changes to the performance as it travels.

### Chronotopes of rebirth and travel

In Chapter 4, I identified the value of chronotope as a model that represents the change and development of ideals over time, as in Goethe's *Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship*. This prompts a means of testing and altering the utopian imaginary signified by *Travelling Show's* aesthetic, but this presents a challenge in terms of dramaturgical practicality. The whole point of the literary chronotope is that ideals emerge unexpectedly, taking the protagonist(s) beyond their preconceived imaginaries. In a theatre production attempting to critique *its own* ideals, there would be no real emergence if these changes were pre-determined and *written in* to the dramaturgy. Thus, the notion of encountering the unknown, of opening a space of contingency, as discussed in Chapter 3, remains important. But this is not only about what happens in the devising process; this is about enabling ongoing change over the course of a tour. To this end, the principle of rebirth - the compositional heart of the carnival utopia discussed in Chapter 2 - becomes a dramaturgical strategy in performance. I will briefly describe how rebirth operates as a structuring principle before explaining how it facilitates a shift in ideals.

The carnival utopia is characterised by 'change and renewal' (Bakhtin 1984b, p.10), with images of death and rebirth proliferating in the representation of what Bakhtin calls the 'grotesque body' (*ibid*, p.317). *Travelling Show* would not be described as grotesque in aesthetic terms, but the principles inherent to this carnival imagery operate at the level of the work's dramaturgy, in what I call its chronotope of rebirth.

The grotesque body encapsulates not only the cyclical nature of life, but the continual renewal of human culture; the death of the old era and the birth of the new. Norman Franke (2017, p.890) suggests this establishes carnival as an embodiment of revolutionary time, defining what could be understood as the chronotope - the time-space - of carnival. Chronotope describes an interrelation of spatial and temporal elements, and in carnival this can be seen in the temporary spatial reconfiguration that enacts a desire for a totally transformed

way of life, pivoting on the moment of change. For Franke this is contrasted to Bakhtin's discussion of the chronotope in *Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship*, which is rather concerned with 'realised utopia' and 'organic time' (*ibid*). Here, time and space are encountered moment by moment, upholding the 'notion of the fullness, harmony and beauty of "the good life"' (*ibid*, p.886).

Franke is careful to clarify that these chronotopes ultimately 'belong together' in Bakhtinian theory (*ibid*). I build on this proposal of two distinguishable, but complimentary, conceptions of time-space, to describe two chronotopes that structure *Travelling Show*. On the one hand, there is a chronotope of rebirth, related to the revolutionary time of Bakhtin's carnival utopia and realised within the tour's shifting from place to place. On the other, there is a chronotope of travel, related to the organic time of the good life, realised in the gradual ongoing movement of the tour through space and time.

Dramaturgical intentionality is contained in the chronotope of rebirth. This represents a deliberate and decisive shift in the narrative, occurring with each spatial shift in the tour schedule. This extreme transformation provokes a subtler change in the production's overarching ideals; a change that takes place in the chronotope of travel. The detail of this change becomes evident in subsequent analysis, rather than being explicitly *written in* at the time of devising. Thus, rebirth is a principle that propels the actual creation of *Travelling Show*, while ideals emerge in the stories of travel that are prompted by this generative framework. To explain this further, I will describe the first two performances of *Travelling Show*.

Each performance of *Travelling Show* is different. Each audience experiences a unique performance, created by the company taking inspiration from 'gifts' offered by the previous show's audience. Towards the end of each performance, an invitation is made for the attending audience to share gifts, to inspire the performance for the next group who will encounter *Travelling Show*.

"This evening, for one night only" announces the narrator, "The Suitcase Ensemble's Travelling Show is delighted to present: 'By the Light of the Moon'". The title is never the same and neither is the story that follows. As promised in

the narrator's announcement, the audience will enjoy a "one time only performance, created just for you".

'By the Light of the Moon' was the first ever performance of *Travelling Show*, taking place at a youth theatre in Liverpool, and created with the initial set of gifts offered by my PhD colleagues (see clips from this performance in video 3). The performance begins with the introduction of a character called Moon:

Once, there was a moon who wanted to build a home. Turning and circling, rising and setting, her cyclical movements allowed her to illuminate life across the land. And sometimes that life left traces... little discarded remnants that the moon would light upon. And when no one was looking, she would gather them up. These mementos were hoarded in the moon's suitcase, as memories for a home, all of her own.

(*'By the Light of the Moon'*, The Suitcase Ensemble, Liverpool, 12 Dec 2017)

The central character's collection of memories provides a frame for the telling of several short stories. At the end of the performance, audience members are invited to share memories of their own, to inspire the next show.

The next performance is thus conceived within the world of 'By the Light of the Moon'. Audience members place their gifts into the moon's suitcase, optionally sharing a memory attached to it. They drop their gifts directly into the world of the performance, which now bulges with new additions. The gifts are full of imaginative potential, symbolically reaching beyond the world of this performance like the 'various ramifications and offshoots' of the grotesque body, revealing 'a growth that exceeds its own limits' and the 'ever creating' nature (Bakhtin 1984b, p.26) of *Travelling Show*. The suitcase full of gifts is an opening in the performance that presents 'another newly conceived body' (*ibid*, p.317), or a newly conceived performance at least; the gifts are the conceptual seeds that give birth to the second iteration of *Travelling Show*, titled 'The Travels of Mouse-Dog'.

'The Travels of Mouse-Dog', performed for a community drama group in Prescott, Knowsley (13 Dec 2017), again involves the telling of several short stories, this time framed by the regular train journey of a Mouse and his alter-ego, Dog (see clips from this performance in video 4). This story is inspired by a train ticket

gifted in the previous performance. This gift, offered by audience member James, was accompanied by a story about James's regular train journeys between two stations<sup>14</sup>. The company combines this story with an existing character - Mouse - who was first introduced in 'By the Light of the Moon'. Mouse's canine alter-ego is inspired by a gift from Sara, who offered a receipt for some dog food. The remaining gifts inspire a series of short stories, taking place in Mouse-Dog's imagination as he sits on the train. Each performance not only tells a new set of stories, but creates a new world within which to tell them. Each new world is conceived within the last; 'a point of transition in a life eternally renewed' (Bakhtin 1984b, p.318).



Figure 6: *Travelling Show's* suitcase full of gifts

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<sup>14</sup> Audience member names have been changed



The spatial transition to a new place is thus entwined with the creation of a new theatrical world. While devising the very first performance, I considered the notion that each new performance might constitute a continuation of the last; building upon the story, or telling the next part. Vestiges of this possibility remain in first three performances when the narration refers to them as "chapters", as if they might constitute evolving parts of the same narrative. However, what actually happens is that when it comes to devising the second performance, I approach it less as a progression and more a rebirthing of the previous performance. Partly, the dramaturgical thinking is that with a limited amount of devising time and a collection of unexpected new gifts, it is more productive to create a new story than attempt to fit new gifts into an existing story. Besides, our new audience have not seen the previous performance so what is the dramaturgical benefit for them of experiencing only one chapter in an evolving story? Instead, the performance offers a narrative and a world that is meaningful on its own terms, although the performance does remain connected to the previous one in ways that are perhaps more profound at the level of audience encounter.

In *Travelling Show*, the act of exchanging gifts and creating a new world embeds the audience in the continual rebirth of the performance. This active dramaturgical structure constitutes *Travelling Show* as an ever-growing collective entity that connects all those who have ever, and will ever, contribute to it. The dramaturgy contains its own 'ancestral aspect' (Bakhtin 1984b, p.323). One audience member (in Glasgow, 18 Dec 2017) commented that they felt 'like a link in a chain', connected to both the previous audience (who provided the gifts for the performance they enjoyed) and to the next audience (who would enjoy the gifts they provided). This is the same language used by Bakhtin (1984, p.26) to describe the grotesque body as 'the link in the chain of genetic development'. As audiences contribute to the birth of a new world, they impact on all future rebirths, becoming an integral part of the ancestry of this ever-growing entity.

Each rebirth creates a new world with new possibilities, but one that carries traces of what has come before. Just as Bakhtin proposes that carnivalesque rebirth represents humanity's rising to 'a new level of development' (*ibid*, p.324),

*Travelling Show* aims to enrich and improve itself with each rebirth. Another reason for rebirthing the story, rather than evolving it, is I felt uncomfortable placing so much weight on that first performance: a story and a set of characters created with only one day of devising, and inspired by a very small set of gifts. Additionally, I was not happy with the way I had framed the initial invitation. Suggesting examples of 'a favourite poem, song or film', my colleagues unsurprisingly gifted poems, and a scene from a film (as well as one physical object: an egg timer). These offerings were useful devising stimulus, but I soon realised I had been gifted copyrighted material and had to be careful about how these were reproduced in the performance. Rebirthing the performance allowed us to move beyond this initial story and devising approach, re-thinking how to frame the invitation next time.

In the next section I will discuss how this invitation has changed and developed with each new rebirth, but my point here is that continual change and renewal is embedded in the compositional sensibility of *Travelling Show*, just as it is in carnival. In its chronotope of rebirth, the performance's movement forward in space and time is synchronous with a reimagining of the world. This dramaturgical structure represents an optimistic vision of the possibility of change. But what does that change ultimately lead to? That is, what does *Travelling Show* represent in terms of the content of these reimagined worlds?

I propose that the rebirthed worlds do not constitute utopias, in terms of an identifiable *good place*, but they do engage with utopia as a search for the *good life*. The narrative structure adopted in the very first *Travelling Show* became established as a common framework for each performance: centring the story around a protagonist whose journey enables the telling of several short stories, each related to a different audience gift or set of gifts. This storytelling framework offers a means of accommodating the diversity of audience offerings, while the central protagonist's story does something previously unexpected in terms of the performance's relationship to utopia. In these stories, protagonists' physical journeys are intimately connected to their personal objectives and attempts to find purpose in the world. Thus, they enable an exploration of utopia in what Levitas calls its 'ontological mode', and constitute chronotopes - not of rebirth, but of travel.

A moon gathers other's memories in a suitcase, stuck following a circular trajectory, but desperate to find some way of making a home for herself. A mouse travels back and forth on a train allowing him to take on a new persona and imagine weird and wonderful stories along the way. These framing stories are inspired by gifts and anecdotes from audience members, but they also resonate with the experience of the artists on tour, reflecting the character of *Travelling Show* itself. Materially, *Travelling Show* enacts a relatively closed journey, operating according to a pre-determined and tightly controlled schedule, as is common in theatre touring. Its approach to audience engagement attempts to open up spaces within that closed experience: spaces to connect with people, spaces to share and exchange, spaces to imagine new worlds. This experience of mobility appears in *Travelling Show's* stories of travel, where characters are constrained within their journeys, but find different tactics of survival that enable them to glimpse alternative possibilities. Stories of making a home while on the move, and using travel as a means of exploring one's own identity, emerge from the real (though largely unspoken) life experiences of the performers. If the arrival in a new place combines with the creation of a new theatrical world to enact a chronotope of rebirth, the newly birthed world enacts a chronotope of travel, correlating with a quest to feel at home in the world.

These chronotopes operate as part of *Travelling Show's* porous dramaturgy, opening the work up to both explicit and implicit interventions from beyond itself; whether in the form of audience offerings or the less consciously incorporated experiences of the tour, which influence the stories crafted by the performers. This porosity not only affects the content of the performances, but alters the work's utopian ideals, revealing a desire for a better way of being that is underpinned by a different set of values to that implied by my 'troupes of travelling players...' passage quoted at the start of this chapter. If that passage expresses a longing for a nomadic life free from constraints and a world beyond nations and borders, the performed content expresses a longing for a more fundamental need for belonging and purpose; or the *Heimat* described in Chapter 4. This becomes more evident in later iterations of *Travelling Show*, as I discuss in relation to the development of the devising process in Chapter 6.

In the first two performances, the central framing journey has a circular motion, ending with its protagonist declaring they have learnt something that will enable them to move forward, but with little sense this will really happen, as the narration invites gifts from the audience that imply the persistence of the protagonist's circular journey: more memories for the Moon to gather as she circles the earth, more items for the Mouse-Dog to find on his train as he travels back and forth. The act of gifting, then, while opening up a new world, seems to necessitate a narrative structure that prevents the protagonists of the current world from escaping their constrained journeys. Thus, to use Bakhtin's words, these early chronotopes of travel contain a relatively weak 'quality of emergence in the ideal' (Bakhtin 1986, p.13). However, as the invitation to gift is altered in subsequent performances, the act of gifting comes to both strengthen the chronotope of rebirth, and allow the chronotope of travel more scope for development; opening the protagonists, the narrative and the dramaturgy to the possibility of something new.

### **Gifting as a generative framework**

Although referred to as gifts, each offering from an audience member functions as 'a fragment not a completed idea'; that is, they are effectively akin to simple devising stimulus. Gift exchange is popularly associated with the festive, and is therefore in keeping with the performance's carnivalesque register, as well as providing a familiar reference point for audience members (perhaps more familiar than the notion of devising stimulus), in a similar way that Desert Island Discs provides a shared reference point in *Starting The Search* (see Chapter 3). The use of the word 'gift' alludes to the gratitude with which these offerings are received by the creative team and frames the transaction as one based on generosity.

I understand generosity in *Travelling Show*, similarly to artists Laurie Beth Clark and Michael Peterson (2018, p.3), as an ultimately generative possibility. In utopian terms, generosity could be understood as an impossible ideal: either from a poststructuralist perspective that insists the gift ceases to be a gift when it enters any system of reciprocity or exchange (Derrida 1994a, p.12), or from anthropological evidence that societies based on gift exchange reveal structures

of self-interest and domination (Mauss 2002). *Travelling Show* does not hold up gift exchange as a perfect ideal, nor is it based on the possibility of an alternative to capitalist economic exchange in the way that, for example, Situationist potlatch was (Martin 2012; Sansi 2014). Gift exchange rather functions within the dramaturgical methodology; giving and receiving gifts is not a merely symbolic act but a generative one that gives birth to an ever-becoming world. Rather than dismissing reciprocity as inherently coercive, this values the fact that 'generous acts trigger generous responses' (Clark and Peterson 2018, p.3).

A similar practice of requesting gifts from audience members and/or participants generates work such as Action Hero's *Oh Europa* (2018-ongoing; see Chapter 4), Deirdre Heddon and Misha Myers' *The Walking Library* (2012-ongoing), Haworth and Hayhoe's *Citizen's Exchange Bureau* (2013-2014), Elspeth Owen's *Looselink* (2005), and Lone Twin's *The Boat Project* (2010-2012). As with *Travelling Show*, gifting functions in these performances to generate encounters involving travel. The travelling artwork becomes a vessel, quite literally in *The Boat Project*, for transporting gifted items and ideas between people in different places. Attending *The Walking Library*, I borrow a book about foraging, whose donor is unknown to me; at the *Citizens Exchange Bureau* I am taught a song, originally gifted to the bureau by an audience member in another location. In both cases the gifters are unknown and absent, but their offerings come to structure my entire experience of the performance. Such generosity prompts what Heddon and Myers (2017, p.40) describe as 'mutual and layered attentiveness' to the gifter as well as to those elements implicated by the offering (the book, the landscape, the song).

There is a symbolic resonance in this mobility of gifts between different places. Anthropological studies of 'circular' gift exchange among island societies suggest that gift-giving is a symbol of wealth and greatness, bestowing renown on those who receive, providing they uphold the convention of passing the gift on after not too long a time (Hyde 2006, pp.13-15). In an especially relevant example, it has been argued that when crown-sanctioned theatre companies toured in early modern England, the performance functioned as a 'gift' from the royal patron, and the acceptance of this gift affirmed the patron's authority (Greenfield 2009,

p.296). But something different is happening in *Travelling Show*. By gathering and transporting gifts between *anonymous* individuals, authority is displaced and never able to settle. What is more, because these gifts are responsible for generating the audience member's experience of the performance, the authorship of the work is also displaced. The gifts function to introduce unexpected and unpredictable elements into the dramaturgy, shifting authorial control away from the artist, and opening up new possibilities in the artwork's encounter with different people and places. Gift-givers and receivers are thus implicated in the generation of the performance. It is this generative aspect of *Travelling Show's* gift exchange that I am concerned with, returning to my previously discussed notion of contingency to understand this process, and its relationship to utopia, in more detail.

In Chapter 3 I introduced Jain's notion of the 'space of contingency'; a space in which to take action, thus opening up new possibilities and further extending 'the contingent space for action' (Jain 2009, p.413). *Travelling Show's* generative framework can be seen to hinge on the opening and closing of spaces of contingency. This is centred on the moment of gifting, when audience and company members enter into what Jain calls 'a dialectics of punctualization and depunctualization' of contingency (*ibid*). Punctualization is the shrinking of contingency to a single point; the process by which the abstract space of possibility becomes crystallised into reality. This is accompanied by the creation of new possibilities, and the opening of new spaces of contingency - hence a 'depunctualization' also occurs.

At the end of 'The Travels of Mouse-Dog', the audience in Prescott are invited to leave an item on Mouse-Dog's train, to provide a gift for the next audience. On making this invitation, we enter a dialectics of punctualization and depunctualization of contingency. The invitation is not completely open, but contains a specific imaginative cue. Of the myriad of possible invitations we could have made, we opted for this one. Contingency shrinks to a single point. But this also opens up unknowable responses. An item left on a train encompasses a huge range of possibilities, and the artists cannot predict what we will receive. As an audience member rummages around their bag and pockets to select an item, they choose just one. Contingency shrinks to a single point.

But as they offer it to *Travelling Show*, they do so knowing it enters an unknown realm. The audience member has no control over how the gift will be used by the artists. This act of gifting opens up an unknowable range of possibilities. A depunctualization of contingency occurs.

In the third performance, 'They Rolled into Town' (Glasgow, 18 Dec 2017), this notion of opening and closing becomes a trope within the performance itself. An audience member in Prescott gifts a small door knob. In 'They Rolled into Town', the knob takes on magical properties and is used to open doors to unknown realms (see clips from this performance in video 5). This notion is carried through into the moment of gifting at the end of that performance. In the first two performances, gifts were invited from within the world of the performance. On this occasion though, the invitation involved opening a (metaphorical) door out of the world of the performance, and into something better.

I invite you all to imagine stepping into that Tesco Express [...] scouring the shelves [...] then you find yourself at the till [...] and while you're stood there, struggling with the self-service till, I want you to just picture anything else you could be doing in that moment, anywhere else you could be [...] instead of standing in Tesco Express spending money that you don't need to spend [...] one thing you'd rather be doing in that moment. And that, dear friends, is what we would like you share with us as your gift for our next audience

('They Rolled into Town', The Suitcase Ensemble, Glasgow, 18 Dec 2017)

This might be seen as a restrictive invitation. In the first two performances, we provide a narrative context for the invitation, but ultimately allow audience members to gift whatever they want. In those cases, the narrative context offers a creative trigger to help audience members select something - a memento, an item left on a train - but in this case it is a more specific request for a place or activity. Perhaps this restricts the expansion of the contingent space for action. On the other hand, perhaps it expands it in an unexpected direction. Those early invitations are over-reliant on chance and randomness; audience members can simply offer whatever they have to hand. The invitation above requires a more active consideration that might expand the contingent space beyond the limited range of options presented by the objects in the audience's bags. Here they are guided away from a reliance on chance, and towards the opening up of the

imagination. This invitation expands the contingent space in an unknown direction. The audience are thus more directly implicated in the depunctualization of the space of contingency, and with it the rebirth of the performance.

In the first two performances, the invitation was a means to gather stimulus for the next performance. The invitation did not implicate its audience in opening up a new world. In fact, it could be seen to portray an illusion of structure and stability. In 'By the Light of the Moon', there was an implicit suggestion that the audience's gifted memories, placed into the Moon's suitcase, would be treated *as* memories in the next performance; that the next performance would retain the same broad storytelling structure as 'By the Light of the Moon'. In a post-show discussion, most audience members indicated that they assumed this was our plan. At this stage, we had no plan. We made it clear during this discussion that anything might happen with the gifts, and that nothing of this theatrical world would necessarily remain. However, the dramaturgy of the performance was potentially misleading. In 'They Rolled into Town', there was no need to make such an assurance post-show, because the dramaturgy made its intentions clear - it opened up the possibility of a new world.

In subsequent performances, this opening up becomes essential in all invitations to gift. Requiring an imaginative response from the audience is less important (although invitations attempt to retain this as a possibility) than the dramaturgical opening up of a new and entirely unknown world. The wording of the invitation is therefore a key focus of my dramaturgical research.

The fourth performance, 'Ginger and the Peanuts' (Darnick Village, 7 April 2018), follows a pop group who have been placed under a curse (see clips from this performance in video 6). By the end of the story the curse is lifted and this prompts the invitation to the audience:

As the curse lifted, our performers no longer had to roam the countryside seeking people to perform for. They were free!

But they found themselves suddenly without direction, not knowing what their purpose should be. And so we invite you our dear friends to help our performers. Could you reach into your hearts? Your pockets, bags, whatever



you've brought with you? And select a gift, an offering of some sort that might help our performers find some inspiration, rediscover some direction, some sense of purpose, for the next stage of their journey.

(‘Ginger and the Peanuts’, The Suitcase Ensemble, Darnick, 7 Apr 2018)

This invitation succeeds in leaving open the possibility of what will come next, moving the story beyond the constrained journey that has just been presented. However, it also suggests a continuation of the same characters, and the "next stage" of their journey. Invitations in the following performances are more explicit about it being the *performers* who are travelling to a new place, while the character(s) in the story are given an ending:

As Leslie sits in Jim's back garden, dreaming of this place, we ask you to bring this worm's dreams to life, by sharing a gift of Cove. Our worm may not have had the chance to see this place, but the Travelling Show lives on. And whatever you share with us, will allow us to take something of this place with us to the next audience we meet.

(‘The Worm in the Glasses Case’, The Suitcase Ensemble, Cove, 23 Feb 2019)

In this case the central character - a worm - ends their story as they come to the end of their life, dreaming of the places they never had the chance to visit. The character's death is thus entwined with the birth of the next performance, embedding the notion of rebirth more explicitly into the narrative, the tour, and the act of gifting, which all become part of its generative framework.

In the wording of the invitation, the dramaturgy enacts a dialectics of punctualization and depunctualization of contingency, in a way that is notably different from my exploration of these notions in Chapter 3. No longer located in the individual body of the improvising performer, this is now embedded in the body of the performance in a way that is perceptible to its audience. In the Human Clay exercise in Chapter 3, the performer mediates between the known and the unknown; a mediation that is not perceptible in itself to an observer. However, at the end of *Travelling Show*, the suspension between the known and the unknown - between the familiarity of the gifted offerings and the unknown world they might open up - is integral to the relationship established between

the audience and the work; the audience are not merely observers to this mediation but are implicated within it.

All the structural aspects I have discussed in this chapter can be seen to contribute to this opening up in a way that is perceptible to the audience, functioning in both semiotic and generative ways. The carnival utopia mode is constituted by a carnivalesque performance aesthetic that operates as both a utopian referent and an open and improvisatory performance attitude that porously welcomes the real to challenge the limitations of its imagined ideal. Chronotopes of rebirth and travel represent desires for both revolutionary change and the allure of travel, while establishing the porosity through which new stories and new theatrical worlds can be generated on the move. Gift-exchange functions as part of the signs pointing to the carnival utopia mode, as well as implying a symbolic function that subverts the precedents of mobile gift-giving. But most significantly, gifting provides the framework for opening up new possibilities and implicating the audience in this.

The dramaturgical metastructure is self-consciously utopian, at the same time as generating new stories, continually evolving its own conceptual framework, and opening up a critical reflexivity, which I discuss further in the next chapter. The generative aspects of *Travelling Show's* metastructure thus work to supersede the nostalgia or romanticism signified by their utopian referents. Chapter 6 looks in more detail at what happens in the generative spaces that are opened up, exploring the strategies, exercises, and approaches that my collaborators and I have developed over the course of six performances, while reflecting on how this devising activity further enhances the conceptual framework proposed here.



## 6. *Travelling Show*: devising on tour

In this chapter I explore the activities that inhabit the dramaturgical structures presented in the previous chapter. The practical processes I describe build upon generative approaches and exercises referenced throughout the thesis, to illuminate a theatre-making method that seeks to both refine its structures and open up new possibilities. These devising strategies explore how to generate the new in dialogue with the unknown, at the same time as seeking forms and connections that clarify conceptual frameworks and the work's utopian ideals.

This chapter separates the devising methodology of *Travelling Show* into three categories: firstly, the process of generating new material in response to audience gifts, which is considered in relation to Ruth Levitas's sociological *utopia as method*; secondly, the engagement with place, tracing the implications of the work's site-responsive practice in relation to the imagining of community; and thirdly, the critical properties of the carnivalesque performance register. In all these examples, utopia operates as both structure and openness, instilling a sense of comfort and familiarity in the increasing coherence of the dramaturgical framework, while continuing to open up spaces of contingency that allow the unexpected to emerge.

### **Utopia as method: responding to audience gifts**

Just as *Travelling Show's* tales of travel can be seen to reflect the character of its tour (see Chapter 5), the centrality of objects and artefacts within these stories is emblematic of the project's treatment of the audience's gifts. In both 'By the Light of the Moon' and 'The Travels of Mouse-Dog', the gathering and interpretation of artefacts forms the central conceit of the story, and in the fifth performance - 'The Worm in the Glasses Case' - this narrative proposition takes on a particularly self-referential character (the full performance of this show is available in video 7). In this story, Leslie the Worm travels the country in a magic glasses case, visiting a series of raffles. At the first location, the worm encounters a curious new approach to the raffle, in which a resident theatre company has prepared a "creative response" to each raffle prize. Raffle winners

may choose to keep a prize, which are all "local artefacts" (i.e. they are actual items gifted by the previous audience), or they may choose to enjoy a "creative response". A similar approach is encountered in the subsequent raffles visited, setting up a parody of the devising process and its engagement with locally gifted stimulus.

This parody reveals the archaeological nature of the devising process, or indeed reveals the devising process as itself a parody, or a carnivalization, of archaeology. This is an archaeology that is not so much concerned with recreating the past, as it is with using fragments to provoke the imagination of something new. I cite the notion of archaeology, partly because there is some precedent in thinking about site-responsive work in this way (Pearson and Shanks 2001), and because it forms part of Ruth Levitas's (2013) method for the imaginary reconstitution of society; an approach that understands utopia itself as a method, and can be seen to map onto *Travelling Show's* devising process and in particular its treatment of audience gifts.

Utopia as method moves through three different modes - archaeological, ontological and architectural (Levitas 2013, p.153). This can be understood as a more formalised version of the experimental and anticipatory utopianism I have been advocating throughout this thesis. The archaeological mode is concerned with seeking out valuable fragments from previous utopian proposals in a gesture that is consistent with, if more consciously sociological than, Bloch's interest in the anticipatory 'not-yet' contained in the wishful images of the past. My identification of utopian tendencies within the practices I have referenced might be seen as an archaeological excavation of my creative influences and practical lineage. The ontological mode, as I discussed in Chapter 4, provides a way of grappling with the material realities of utopian proposals, similar to Lefebvre's advocacy of experimental utopianism, and of asking what is necessary for human flourishing. Such ontological exploration could be seen as constituting the entire experimental practical phase of my research. The architectural mode is about composing these fragments and experiments into a reconstructed world, reflected in the dramaturgical practice that dominates my research inquiry, my construction of a conceptual framework, and my insistence on not only the

processual but on acts of closure, as in my discussion of the punctualization of contingency.

Levitas's utopia as method perhaps frames my entire research methodology, but here I propose these three modes as a way of conceptualising my devising methodology at a micro-level, in the treatment of audience gifts. The three modes are neither separate nor linear processes. The architectural mode of constructing society is not the end point. Rather, any construction is always subject again to the archaeological: a mode of critique that exposes complete proposals as provisional, fragmented and inconsistent (*ibid*). Similarly, *Travelling Show* is always moving between its own architectural construction and archaeological critique, while its stories and its engagement with (im)mobility, grapple with the ontological mode.

As archaeology, the act of gifting in *Travelling Show* offers partial impressions of a group of people gathered together on the same evening, while this gifting also serves to excavate and critique the world of *Travelling Show*. Audience members offer their gifts at the same moment that the temporary theatrical world created for "one night only" comes to an end. Their gifts instigate a rebirth of this world, bringing with it an opportunity to enrich or expand it in its next incarnation. Some choose to gift things that retain something they like about this world, while others introduce something to improve it. A train ticket, for example, is offered after watching a performance that involved a train journey. Striking a chord with James, he chooses to share his own train journey story along with the gift of a ticket. Following the next performance, in which James's train ticket inspires the storytelling structure of a train journey, Sid gifts *his* own ticket accompanied by a personal anecdote, ensuring the continuation of the theme of travel. After the third performance, at Gilmorehill in Glasgow, some audience members say they want a stronger sense of place and to know more about the location the gifts have come from. They offer gifts that come with a strong sense of Glasgow and Scotland, introducing a place-based specificity to the world of *Travelling Show* that was previously weak. By the sixth performance, in the East End of Glasgow, audience members are more explicit about their desires for improvement. They gift stories, both imagined and real, that announce themselves as starting points for dramatic stories and scenes;

they accompany their gifted objects with suggested creative interpretations; and in one case simply gift a piece of paper with the words: 'I think that there should be a car chase next time'.

While this might not equate to the kind of archaeological excavation Levitas (2013, p.154) is interested in - i.e. seeking out images of the good society that have been buried or suppressed - the act of gifting nevertheless provides signposts to stories that feed into an understanding about how people curate meaning in their lives. I cannot make assumptions about the motivations underlying someone's choice of gift, but I venture an interpretation to suggest that in many cases the gifted item represents the story one wants to tell, perhaps of oneself, or the place one comes from. Very often the gifted items are bound up with simple, everyday stories, that contribute to a snapshot of life in this place on this day. What sometimes seem like mundane offerings such as shopping receipts, old raffle tickets and half-completed coffee shop loyalty cards, actually capture an impression of everyday life and open up imaginative possibilities that lie beyond their existence as everyday objects. Even at the end of 'They Rolled into Town', when we invite our audience members to imagine "anywhere else they could be right now", we are offered simple solitary experiences; yearnings for relaxation or adventure that are not images of the good society, but personal experiences that feel broadly within reach.

These snapshots of life open up new imaginative realms, but the stories they lead to do not speculate on alternative societies so much as they interrogate life in the here and now, presenting characters who are searching for purpose, meaning and, as discussed in Chapter 4, *Heimat*. These stories contribute, not to an image of how life *could* or *should* be, but rather to utopia in its ontological mode. The artist's own connections and experiences are necessarily of relevance in the creation of this material, which enters into dialogue with the original gift(s) to produce a rich ontological interrogation that it is hoped will resonate with the next audience.

An example of this dialogue is in the creation of a song that was composed in response to those simple solitary experiences gifted by audience members at Gilmorehill. Reading the gifted experiences, Andy surmised that many of them

were basically 'doing nothing': sitting with a cup of coffee, looking out over the mountains etc. This resonated with ideas Andy was already thinking about and inspired him to write a song titled 'Doing Nothing', which followed the premise of finding joy in doing very little:

I've got my feet up again  
 I've got a list of things I haven't done  
 There is a lot to be said  
 For sitting around all day  
 Then going back to bed

(*'Doing Nothing'*, The Suitcase Ensemble)

Andy (in an interview on 3 July 2019) explains that the idea for the song began in the 'down time' between performances, and was not particularly related to the gifted objects. Rather, he cites films and creative projects that engage with the notion of inertia, along with his own feeling of being creatively 'blocked'. However, many of the lyrics in the song are directly influenced by the audience's gifts. Lyrics such as "falling down and getting up again is not easy" and "it feels like time moves differently here" contain phrasing that is borrowed from the wording on the audience gifts, pictured in Figure 7.

Andy says that these words provided phrases that sat well in the lyrics, and would have taken him 'days to come up with' on his own. The audience gifts thus help poeticise a feeling that the artist is already grappling with.

Andy stresses that the artist is not 'just an interpreter of objects' and the process is about finding 'a commonality between yourself and these objects, and what they mean emotionally'. Contemporary critical approaches to archaeology might argue that interpretation is, anyway, 'always informed by present interests and values' (Pearson and Shanks 2001, p.11), but such an overt privileging of the emotional thrust of this interpretation locates this aspect of the practice in *Travelling Show's* ontological mode. Authentic personal connection from the artists can produce performance material that resonates beyond the set of stories and experiences presented in that particular show, capturing the complexity of being. 'Doing Nothing', for example, questions the value placed on productivity, as well as poetically describing a state of unwelcome inertia:



I can't explain that I'm just waiting for the rain to stop  
Before I can dream again

(‘Doing Nothing’, The Suitcase Ensemble)

The song takes us on an emotional journey that starts with deriving enjoyment from laziness, and ends with a longing to dream again, a journey that is bound up in the process of *Travelling Show*. The framework requires artists to continually generate new creative material in short spaces of time, which can induce an overwhelming sense of being creatively ‘blocked’. At the same time, it can be the audience gifts that help the artists out of these creative ruts, generating unexpected perspectives and resonances with their own experiences.

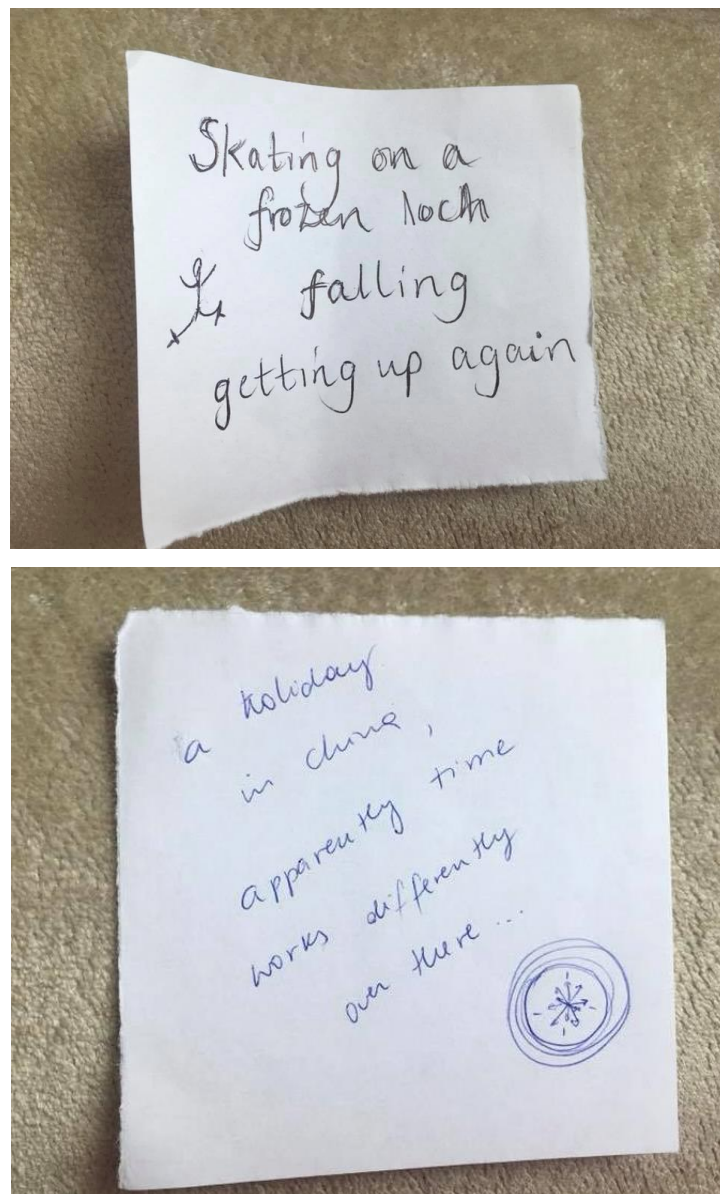


Figure 7: Audience gifts that inspired song lyrics

I share Andy's valuing of material that emerges from a place of genuine emotional connection on the part of the artists. However, I am also interested in what is gained from opening ourselves up to these outside stimuli, and letting go of our personal stories and obsessions through an attendance to the integrity of the gifted material. Additionally, from a dramaturgical perspective I am concerned with how the audience will decipher the interpretive process. I want to ensure that an artist's personal response to a gifted object is not claiming to represent the original gifter's intention.

Ultimately we cannot know that intention, and are once again suspended between the known and the unknown, as in *Starting the Search*. In Chapter 3, I spoke of a 'complex collective conversation', inspired by the work of Goat Island and others, that leads to the creation of something new and unexpected, often bearing little relation to the original stimulus or starting points. I proposed that this happens because the act of collaboration opens up a space of contingency; a space that experiences a 'punctualization' in response to moments that seem to crystalize a mediation between the known and the unknown. However, *Travelling Show* requires a major alteration to this principle.

Watching back footage from one of our *Devising Development Sessions* (Nov 2018), I am struck by how differently I respond to this material in comparison to my responses during *Starting the Search*. In the footage, Maria is leading us in an exercise (Figure 8). The three of us are standing in a line. Maria is clicking her fingers. On every third click, we writhe and spasm. It is very strange but very watchable. I have no idea how we got to this point, or which gift(s) inspired the starting point that led to this. In another process, this might be exactly what we are looking for - a 'complex collective conversation' that has evolved so far from the original starting point that it belongs to the autonomous evolving performance. If this had happened during *Starting the Search*, I might have leapt on it in the way I did Andy's birthing image. Perhaps it sparks connotations of pleasure and pain, of ageing, and of struggle. I am not sure. All I can think when I watch it back is: which gift or gifts does this relate to? How will the audience in our next location associate this image with the place we have travelled from? Does it have any connection to that place? Or at least to our experience of that place? I am getting nothing. I do not think this image will be revisited.



**Figure 8: Discarded devising exercise**

This illustrates one of the major differences from the process explored in *Starting the Search*. While I want to create something new or discover something unexpected, I do not want to drift so far from the gifted stimulus that it is no longer visible in the performance. When looking for moments to pursue, and enact a punctualization of the space of contingency, I am looking for those moments that both open up a new space of contingency, and remain anchored to the originating gift(s).

One strategy has been to open up a space *adjacent* to the original gift. In our fourth performance, in Darnick Village (Scottish Borders), audience member Ann gifts a glasses case, with a small piece of green plastic inside it. She tells us a story of her father-in-law, who once used his glasses case to transport an errant garden worm found in the street back to his garden. This gift sparks a number of personal associations and responses from the three devisers, generating stories, poetry, and mythical characters that relate to themes ranging from climate change to the housing crisis. These responses are evocative and, as with Andy's birthing image discussed in Chapter 3, open up the imagination to utopian and dystopian futures. However, their relationship to the original gift is somewhat tangential. A possible way forward from this conundrum is discovered in an exercise explored during a *Devising Development Session*. In a storytelling

improvisation, I begin telling the story of the glasses case. Maria becomes the worm, and Andy provides musical accompaniment (see video 9). In the improvised story, the glasses case takes on magical powers and enables the worm to travel the world before settling down in the father-in-law's garden. During the improvisation, we do not take on the position of Ann nor her father-in-law, but by adopting the position of a storyteller, and the worm, we are able to open up a space adjacent to the original gift. In this space, the integrity of the original story remains intact, while we can explore new worlds and possibilities.



**Figure 9: Storytelling improvisation**

The fantastical presence of a talking worm and magic glasses case can signal to the audience that this is not what *really* happened, but is our imaginative development of the original story. Taking up this adjacent position allows us to incorporate personal responses and abstract imagery that have arisen in our devising, whilst retaining the frame of the original story and ensuring the audience are able to remain connected to the performance conceit.

I attempt to embed this principle more explicitly into our devising process by asking collaborators to set tasks for each other that 'open a space of contingency adjacent to the gift'. However, this rarely produces material that achieves that

balance of generating new possibilities while remaining anchored in the gift. A far more successful approach has been to allow collaborators to, as Andy says, 'dream with or around the gifts', opening up authentic responses that evolve as part of *Travelling Show's* ontological mode. Opening the space adjacent then becomes a dramaturgical intervention that happens later, in the architectural mode. Here, the dramatic structure of the story is perceptibly composed by the gifts, which open spaces in which to house our creative responses, whose relationship to the original gifts is less obvious.

For example, in the structuring of the 'Ginger and the Peanuts' story, the audience gifts provide the architecture of the story: that is, the protagonists and the places they visit. The things that happen to the protagonists, the songs and other acts they perform, are tangentially connected to the gifts, but it is here that the more emotional content lives. Thinking of this in architectural terms recalls Cathy Turner's (2015, p.6) identification of dramaturgies that activate 'a social space between dwelling and plan'. Activating such a space in *Travelling Show* enables us to make room for the richness of material generated in the ontological mode, while the architectural construction that connects audience gifts with elements of the story becomes overt and even formulaic.

In the fifth and sixth performances, this formula is fixed so that there is always a central protagonist(s), there is always a journey, and there is always a series of locations; audience gifts are assigned to each element to form the architecture of the story. We also add a second act, which introduces an interruption into the journey (also inspired by a gift), and an eventual death (literal or metaphoric) that brings together the narrative of the story with the death and rebirth of the performance, as in the example of the worm lying in the garden at the end of their life. This strengthens the chronotope of rebirth, as well as the chronotope of travel, by giving the stories a clearer dramatic structure and evolving them beyond a closed journey. Having a relatively repeatable structure also frees up more devising time for the development of material in the ontological mode.

Ramella (2018, p.330) suggests that the touring artist embodies a 'home on the road' through a mixture of improvisation and repetition, and a similar process can be seen to establish *Travelling Show's* mobile dramaturgy. This sense of

home is related to comfort, relaxation and familiarity, and as I argued in Chapter 4, corresponds to a notion of utopia as *Heimat*: a 'settled resolution' and a home we have not yet been to. The building of a repeatable dramatic structure can be seen as part of a yearning for this familiarity. Holding onto structures that have worked in previous performances reduces the anxiety that can come from attempting to devise a brand-new performance in just a few days.

The 'Doing Nothing' song has come to play an instrumental role in this repeatable structure, by providing the opening song for the second act, used in a very similar way in both the fifth and sixth performances. Although the narrative content differs, in both cases the song establishes an emotional turning point in the story and, through the insertion of a musical interlude, provides a dynamic underpinning for the exposition that takes the narrative towards the death and rebirth denouement. Watching back the video of the fifth performance (see video 11) I find this musical number satisfying and, on making the decision to re-use this at the same narrative point in the sixth performance, I feel a sense of relief and relaxation. That is one less moment that needs devising; a moment that we already know is successful, and enjoy performing. Finding these moments of stability contributes to an experience of feeling *at home* in the creative process, establishing a kind of utopia that is counterpointed to the *no place of possibility* that this process also attempts to open up. Thus, the process oscillates between utopia as familiarity and utopia as unfamiliarity, similar to Ramella's conception of the structuring of a home on the road as being 'co-established by both repetition and improvisation' (*ibid*).

In establishing flexible repetitive structures that accommodate openness and improvisation, *Travelling Show's* iterative method is a means of this performance coming to understanding itself as it travels. The continual construction of new stories, each one seeming to reflect the character of *Travelling Show* itself, and the continual refinement of the dramatic architecture, represent an endless becoming in which each new rebirth represents a new level of development; an ongoing dialogue between the work and its own self-conceptualisation. As the work's framework becomes clearer, so too do its ideals, as the utopia it seeks reveals itself as a combination of familiarity and unfamiliarity, of structure and

openness. The performance's rebirth means that any ontological questions or reflections raised by *Travelling Show* are continually challenged by the introduction of new audience gifts and, as I will discuss in the next section, the encounter with new places.

### Encounters with elsewhere

In the third performance of *Travelling Show*, 'They Rolled Into Town', the narrator explains that this evening's gifts have come from a place called Prescott. "Has anyone here heard of Prescott?" the narrator asks. The audience shake their heads. No one has heard of Prescott. The narrator explains it is a small town in Knowsley, in Merseyside, just a few miles outside of Liverpool. "You will find out more about it in due course" the narrator promises; an improvised assurance that is not entirely borne out by the performance. In the post-performance discussion, some audience members express their disappointment that they did not get more of a sense of Prescott.

The audience's frustration at the lack of connection with this place mirrors the experience of the company on tour. It echoes those sentiments referenced in Chapter 1, that the usual model of touring restricts the depth of engagement with tour locations. A common solution to this - the 'slow touring' proposition - involves spending time in each touring location in the run up to the performance and undertaking engagement activity that might sit alongside or feed into the performance presented in that location. However, *Travelling Show* proposes something different. Rather than self-contained engagement processes in each touring location, *Travelling Show* enacts a chronotope of rebirth, which results in the audience engagement in one location feeding into the performance presented in the next. This sets up an inevitable expectation that audience members might gain some impression of the previous place visited. The premise of devising each new show based on gifts from audience members means that this impression is ultimately guided by the items people choose to gift, which have complex and ambiguous connections to the locations in which the performance has taken place.

In the first two performances, *Travelling Show* playfully pre-empts this expectation within the lyrics of an opening song, initially written to anticipate the promise bound up in a set of 'gifts from Glasgow' (see also video 10):

If you were hoping for some haggis or a ceilidh  
Some bagpipes or a dram of whisky too  
If you were hoping for a deep fried mars bar  
Rennie Mackintosh, or "och aye the noo"..  
Tough! That's not what we've got.

('Oh What Did They Bring' in 'By The Light of the Moon', The Suitcase Ensemble,  
Liverpool, 12 Dec 2017)

These lyrics irreverently dismiss the imagining of Glasgow as a communion of identifiable cultural markers, in the face of a set of gifts that actually include German, English and St. Lucian poetry; a Russian film; and a generic egg timer. In the next performance, these lyrics are re-written to evoke a stereotypical image of Liverpool, in both cases deriving humour from the audience's recognition of these *as* stereotypes. However, for the performance based on gifts from Prescott, knowing that the audience are unlikely to have any previous associations with this place, the song lists some of the gifts we *did* receive, ironically suggesting that these are the items one would associate with this place:

If you were hoping for some Shakespeare or a lipbalm  
Prescot Cables or an origami bird  
If you were hoping for a coffee shop loyalty card  
A Merseytravel pass, or a doorknob in a bag..  
Great! That's just what we've got.

('Oh What Did They Bring' in 'They Rolled Into Town', The Suitcase Ensemble,  
Glasgow, 17 Dec 2017)

This sets up the conception of place that emerges in *Travelling Show*: fragmented, incomplete, and comprised of inconsistent stories. Again it points to the archaeological nature of the work: places are encountered fleetingly via the interpretation of contradictory types of evidence - objects, memories, historical data, personal anecdotes - which much less imagine a bounded and cohesive community than one that is connected to other places in multiple ways. When audience members ask for a stronger sense of place, we are left asking



ourselves: what is a place? What is it that would provide an audience with such an impression? And what might it mean to share something of one place with another? How does this relate to a conceptual framework of utopia?

These questions require much more investigation than has been possible within the course of this research project. *Travelling Show's* premise instigates a novel way of engaging with place, via theatre, and has significant implications for how existing models of site-specific practice might shift in response to this context, asking what new understandings about place might emerge from this practice. Such an investigation deserves a full research project in its own right, and might be considered a potential continuation of this research. However, I will describe one of our site-responsive activities: a post-performance devising day, taking place in the same location where the gifts have been gathered. I share this partly as a means of introducing the research we have begun, even as it remains in its infancy, but more significantly because it demonstrates the potential connections between *Travelling Show's* engagement with place and other aspects of its dramaturgy.

The morning after our performance of 'The Worm in the Glasses Case' (Cove, 23 Feb 2019), the three performers check out of their accommodation in Cove. We drive along the coastal road to Kilcreggan, the village that neighbours Cove on the Rosneath Peninsula. This small village centre has become familiar to us, as we spent the past few days rehearsing in a scout hall here, eating lunches at the café, and enjoying a post-show drink in the pub. Today we have returned to the café to look through the gifts we received at the end of last night's performance.

Each artist chooses three gifts:

- one that will guide an exploration of the local area
- one that might 'open a space of contingency'
- one to inspire a short meditation

We set an intention for our exploration, related to the first gift. For example, I select a drawing of a painted stone that stands on Kilcreggan beach, which I intend to find.



**Figure 10: Looking through audience gifts**

We write a question intended to open a space of contingency adjacent to the second gift and give this to another artist. I give Andy a child's dummy that has a picture of a crown on it, along with the question: "where does the baby queen rule?"

We write an instruction for a short meditation to accompany the third gift and give this to the other artist. I give Maria an emery board, with some prompts of things to think about while filing her nails.

The artists then set off on their explorations, with instructions to stop at some point and:

- read the question they have been given, responding to it by writing non-stop for 4 minutes
- follow the instructions for the meditation for approximately 3 minutes
- make a 2-minute video
- return with a phrase that might provide a starting point for a character, story, song or other piece of performance material

We meet back at the café an hour later and share our experiences.

These tasks can be seen to draw on practices of opening up the imagination through the imposition of limits; creative practices that have antecedents in the historic avant-garde, and can be recognised in the more recent devising methods of Goat Island, discussed in Chapter 3. The use of an object to guide an exploration of a locale follows in the lineage of Situationist *dérive*: dropping the usual motivations for movement, and allowing oneself to be guided by the terrain and the things one finds there (Debord 1958). While the *dérive* might be considered a dramaturgy in its own right (Turner 2015, p.164), here it is consciously adopted as a means of generating material to be shared with others. As devising practice, strategies such as opening a space adjacent to the gift might relate to the 'sideways glance' that Pearson and Shanks (2001, p.60) suggest performance shares with forensic science; asking oblique questions to reveal new information.

When we come to share our experiences, they reveal the impossibility of capturing this place. Andy tells us about walking around randomly, guided by his own invented system that uses a tape measure (his chosen gift) to dictate direction and distance, reminiscent of Surrealist chance procedure. On this walk he encountered a horse, and his writing about the baby Queen turned into something sounding like a cowboy film. He has returned with a lyrical starting point for a country and western song. Maria tells us about visiting a spot near the Cove Sailing Club, where she decided to go swimming. Her writing and her reflections on her experience are poetic and philosophical, seeming to belong to another plane of existence. I tell the group about my experience of searching for and failing to find the painted stone, with my writing attempting to transform my failure into an imaginative exercise. My meditative connection with a tealight with a face drawn on it has left me with the phrase: 'his smile was crooked and his light was fading'.

We watch each other's videos, which seem to have a more grounded and concrete connection to the locations than our abstract and poetic imaginings that were prompted by the landscape. I have noted some potential narrative starting points, among a plethora of philosophical musings about the sea, and interesting tangential ideas that I struggle to connect back to the gifts or this place. As dramaturg I am wondering which threads to follow, and how to channel

these poetic musings into devising exercises. I had already suspected that the videos would provide something more concrete, and watching them back only confirms this.

Our experience is reminiscent of geographer Doreen Massey's (2005, p.130) proposal that place is elusive, and impossible to fully grasp. Our interpretation of Cove approaches space as what Massey calls 'a simultaneity of stories-so-far', continuing the process by which it is always 'being made' by bringing our own associations and values to our imagination of it (*ibid*, p.9). The short video documents provide a way of visually anchoring these personal subjective experiences in the physical environment, providing a semblance of stability that allows the observer *something* to grasp on to as they attempt to imagine this place. As Massey admits, while place might be constituted by people and their stories, it is also strongly evoked by the landscape (*ibid*, p.131). Bringing some of this landscape with us, both in the form of video documentation and poetic reflections on it, is an attempt to communicate a sense of place that extends beyond the performers' private encounters.

Two months later, we are back in Glasgow to devise the performance inspired by these gifts from Cove. As we explore stories and structures, write new songs and rehearse old ones, we activate our memory of Cove. We rely on previous notes taken, creative writing generated, photographs and videos, and of course the audience gifts, but the immediacy of this place has faded and we inevitably find ourselves drawing upon that which feels more current for us: recent inspiration from films or books, personal preoccupations, responses to things in the news, and all that has happened in the intervening time. Cove is *elsewhere*; somewhere we cannot quite recapture. This feeling is reflected in the narrative of the story we produce. In 'The Secret of the Crooked Smile', a sea-dwelling Queen returns to the land to a village she cannot recognise, while its heritage and mythology is being reinterpreted by a visiting theatre company (this full performance is available in video 8).

The artist's journeys made in Cove are re-told as fiction in the resulting performance. As the sea-Queen navigates the village, she attends three activities, each one a parodic reconstruction of the artist's exploration of Cove.

The performance imagines this place through the re-telling of our journey within it. Video documentation and humour allow elements of the real to porously seep into the performance, building an impression of each scene as a parody of something that really happened. This is related to the reflexive nature of the dramaturgy, which I discuss in the next section, and contributes to the performance's attempt to facilitate an encounter with an elsewhere. As discussed in Chapter 4, this is proposed by Wilkie (2015, p.139) as one way that the mobility of a performance becomes evident to its audience. 'The Secret of the Crooked Smile' facilitates such an encounter via the exposition of the performers' encounter with an elsewhere.

However, this elsewhere is only one of the elements that feeds into the performance and the story that is told. The new story is constructed by our fleeting engagements with the landscape, but also, as discussed in the previous section, by our responses to the previous audience's gifts and by our personal preoccupations and experiences, which might be only tangentially related to those gifts or that place. Additionally, the audience gifts are rarely, if ever, bounded by the imagined confines of the place in which they were gifted. *Travelling Show* creates new stories out of the contingent meeting points between gifted stimulus, artist response, encounters with place and the accidents of the tour schedule, which bring all these elements together in a new location for a new audience. The story shared does not attempt to represent the place it references, but imagines a fictional, mythical, place as a result of the artists' subjective and fleeting encounters with both the actual location and the gifts gathered there.

This imagined place announces itself as a fleeting fiction. The elsewhere referenced in the performance is both Cove - the place we visited - and the mythical village visited by the sea-Queen in the story we construct for performance. At the end of the story, the village disappears; the Queen can no longer imagine it, as she watches the visiting theatre company drive away to their next location. At the same time, the story told "for one night only" comes to an end, never to be repeated. And yet those video documents perform an interruption of the real that provides a visual reminder that Cove is still out there, open to endless encounters and interpretations.

The elsewheres encountered in *Travelling Show* are not utopias, but by playfully constructing a temporary myth, emerging from a constellation of subjective experiences of place, the dramaturgy proposes a utopian understanding of place and identity as plural and uncontainable. Thus the impossibility of coherently imagining a place, becomes a utopian performative, freeing a sense of local identity from the fixity of imagined communities, reminiscent of Dolan's (2005, p.53) discussion of performances that 'free the actors from the fixity of identity'.

To compare this to my historic example of the Queen's Men, where touring is a means of constructing a unified sense of national identity (see Chapter 4), *Travelling Show* instead celebrates a multi-layered and uncontainable geographic identity. It uses the fragments offered by the inhabitants of a locality to construct temporary myths, which make way for new ones at the end of each performance, and each visit. Releasing varied and unexpected stories as it travels the UK, the mythology that emerges is never able to coalesce around a coherent imagining of the land it traverses. This act acknowledges the fictions and myth-making that underpin the imagining of communities, and asks its audience to be part of the imagining of alternative fictions; fictions that reveal, and indeed revel in, their own contingency.

In its constant rebirthing of its theatrical world, *Travelling Show* proposes a utopian vision of place and identity, while its 'ancestral aspect' (as discussed in Chapter 5) connects its participants in a carnivalized imagined community. While the nation 'concerns itself with the links between the dead and the as yet unborn' in the name of 'continuity' and fixed meaning (Anderson 2006, p.11), carnival rather reveals such genealogy as a state of becoming, emphasising humanity's incompleteness, the body's lack of limits and borders, and - as a chronotope that encompasses time and space - the open-endedness of both human history and geographic identity. This again underpins the distinction I make between the classical and carnival utopia: while More's *Utopia* represents a proposal for an ideal nation state, the carnival utopia that operates at the heart of my dramaturgy disrupts the very fictions that constitute the concept of the nation, celebrating instead a joyously ambivalent state of being and becoming.

Generating this alternative through a material encounter with place, there is perhaps an element of Cathy Turner's critical heterotopia, alluded to in Chapter 2, at work here, while the nature of the critique operates according to decidedly carnivalesque principles. The making and re-making of imagined communities in *Travelling Show* can be seen as a provocation within a system that largely takes for granted the existence of 'the nation' which, as Anderson (2006, p.6) argues, is itself an 'imagined political community'. The principle of rebirth might then be extended from *Travelling Show's* dramaturgical structure to understand its relationship with the world at large. As Bim Mason (2016, p.66) proposes, such provocation can be seen as itself an act of renewal; a healthy opposition to the present system that moves it forward.

However, this utopia, and its critical potential, is limited by the dramaturgy's reliance on the interpretive labour of the artists. As long as we filter these places through our personal associations, we privilege particular resonances and experiences at the expense of others. A further development of this research might ask how, given the short amount of devising time, this dramaturgy can make space for those stories and experiences that lie beyond the artist's own; stories located elsewhere. For example, audience members have gifted objects that are associated with homelessness, AIDS and the navigation of one's sexuality. With limited personal experience of such issues, we have struggled with how to incorporate these offerings into our imagined worlds. As partial offerings these gifts do not in themselves contain enough testimony to provide a verbatim account, for example, and nor does the brief devising period allow for the depth of research that the topics demand. However, this dramaturgy cannot consider itself properly porous until it is challenged and changed by such difficult material, offered by the people and places it visits. Given the proliferation of personal stories gifted by the audience at The Space, such considerations would be likely to frame the next devising phase of *Travelling Show*, seeking new porous strategies in a dramaturgical method that is always unfinished and ever becoming.

### Critical carnivalesque strategies

I have described a certain self-referentiality in the way travel, objects and imagination are treated in *Travelling Show's* stories, revealing the chronotope of travel as a porous mediation between *Travelling Show's* fictional world and its actual traversal of place and space. In the sixth performance, 'The Secret of the Crooked Smile' (The Space, Glasgow, 2 May 2019), this connection becomes more overt as scenes signpost their basis in reality.

*Travelling Show's* self-referentiality allows the dramaturgical sharing of its context and methodology with its audience. Parodic reconstructions work alongside techniques such as performers reading aloud from sections of script, visibly pinned up on bunting around the stage; and constructing props out of gifts in full view of the audience, with no attempt to hide the artifice of the endeavour. Such techniques recognisably derive from a Brechtian interest in 'preventing an unwanted element of illusion' (Brecht 1964, p.141). In *Travelling Show* this offers the audience access to elements of the project that might otherwise not be perceptible. The adoption of a Brechtian performance attitude therefore has an important dramaturgical function in bringing *Travelling Show's* journey onto the stage.

This performance attitude might derive its dramaturgical significance from the theories of Brecht, but we draw our rehearsal techniques more directly from popular performance traditions such as clown, music hall and oral storytelling. As referenced in Chapter 2, such practices can be recognised within a lineage of carnival and in Chapter 5 I suggested that *Travelling Show* explores both a dramaturgical framework related to the principle of carnivalesque rebirth, and a decidedly carnivalesque (albeit not grotesque) aesthetic, which itself contributes to the dramaturgy. In this section I discuss some of the rehearsal and performance approaches that constitute this aesthetic, and how they contribute to a critical dramaturgy. As Gardiner (1992) finds a convergence between the literary theories of Bakhtin's carnival and Moylan's 'critical utopia', my practice-as-research discovers this as a dramaturgical convergence in a carnivalesque performance attitude.



The kind of performance attitude I am talking about arises from techniques that might be considered the domain of actor training, which is outside of the scope of this research project. However, I identify three key principles that demonstrate how essential this acting approach is to the devising and dramaturgical practice of *Travelling Show*, and its engagement with utopia. These principles are: amateurism, reflexivity, and optimism, which I will discuss in turn.

Firstly, amateurism. *Travelling Show's* premise necessitates a letting go of virtuosity and perfection, accepting and embracing the rough, unfinished, amateur quality of a performance that has been assembled in a matter of days (or indeed hours in the case of 'The Travels of Mouse-Dog'). My reference to amateurism here is not a judgement on the quality of performance produced within actual amateur theatre, but refers to the performers' own sense that the necessarily unfinished quality of their performance is at odds with usual standards of professionalism. My focus on amateurism as a deliberate technique became necessary because performers were initially resistant to approaches such as reading aloud from sections of script rather than learning lines, pinning up the running order on the wall during the performance, and allowing choreography and musical performance to be less than perfect, even when this could be seen as essential for the mental health of the company. The stress associated with trying to memorise a performance and to perfect songs, dances and scene transitions became clearly unsustainable in a project that creates a new performance every few days; not to mention that some carefully written lines of dialogue were lost because performers could not remember them, but did not want to be seen reading from a script onstage. I encouraged lowered standards of perfection, and the presence of written reminders, which might contradict the impulse to appear *professional*, but contribute to that sense of comfort and familiarity that is associated with utopia as a feeling of 'being at home in the world'. This approach is therefore essential in developing *Travelling Show* as a tourable project, while the figure of the amateur has a more profound significance in the work's politics.

In Chapter 2 I referenced the 'passionate amateur' (Ridout 2013), a utopian figure who exists within capitalism but whose non-economic motivation for being

involved in theatre reveals a love for, and the possibility of, something different. In *Travelling Show* our economic relationship to capital and the work cannot be characterised as amateur in this sense (we are all receiving payment for undertaking this project), but the aesthetic of *Travelling Show* nevertheless arises from the genuine material conditions of its production. Although performers are being paid, the limited budget dictates the limited amount of time available to spend in each location, or to create each new performance. Thus, the performance's rough quality is not only a deliberate 'use of amateurishness as an aesthetic strategy' as Holdsworth *et al.* (2017, p.13) identify in the 'amateur turn' of 21<sup>st</sup> century contemporary performance. More than this, it is a revelation of the actual circumstances that structure the performance's context. As Bailes (2011, p.34) demonstrates in her discussion of amateurism, the failure to complete an action reveals the contingencies that surround that action. *Travelling Show's* inability to present a polished, well-rehearsed product reveals the resources it lacks (time, money), indexing its economic context as part of its aesthetic presentation. This is not an 'impersonation of amateurishness by professional artists' (Holdsworth *et al.* 2017, p.13), but a self-conscious embrace of the performance's necessarily unfinished quality.

Brecht (1964, pp.149, 151) argues that the amateur theatre is of interest because its 'rudimentary, distorted, spontaneous efforts' portray different 'kinds of ideal[s]' and 'ways of behaving' to that of the bourgeois theatre. As Bailes (2011, p.33) suggests, the 'inability to do something might overwhelm ability and radiate different values and beliefs'. In *Travelling Show*, with limited time available, care for the artist's wellbeing leads to an insistence on 'rudimentary, distorted, spontaneous efforts', rather than an insistence on high production values. This radiates an ideal of care, which is valued above competence. There is thus a resistance to capitalist values, or a reimagining of what it means to work. This is not necessarily a desire for pre-capitalist relations, but a form of creativity that values human flourishing above profit. This attitude rejects values associated with professionalism and specialism, instead locating quality in the quality of life of its workers, and the quality of relations produced with its audience.

In common with my observation of People Show's approach (see Chapter 2), in *Travelling Show* both onstage and backstage roles are shared amongst the company, regardless of prior experience, promoting ideals of equality and anti-hierarchy. For example, all members can be seen to undertake supposedly menial tasks of tidying up, as well as enjoying creative roles such as musical performance or dancing, despite limited technical skill and prior training. This can be seen to produce a disarming and informal tone to the performance that welcomes audience participation. Following our performance in Darnick, an audience member overheard a performer expressing concern that their movement skills were of insufficient quality; the audience member interjected to insist this was 'part of the performance's charm'. A similar conversation took place in Cove as an audience member told us how much they related to the 'imperfection' of the performance. These moments of genuine amateurishness - performing against one's professional specialism or sharing a passionate but incomplete creation - help to break down perceived barriers between audience and performer, perhaps contributing to a utopian performative that envelopes the entire room in the spontaneous and anti-hierarchical community implied by the performance.

The idealism of this community is not only produced through the amateur aesthetic, but is signalled by the entire premise of the travelling performance. *Travelling Show's* introduction sets up the idealistic promise of a theatre company traversing the land, meeting different people, gathering inspiration, and creating new stories, facilitating a sharing between people who might never meet. Over the course of the performance, the artists reveal the impossibility of this task as their inability to live up to it seeps through via the spontaneity and direct address enabled by the informal performance style. Struggling to incorporate every gifted item (as in the various admissions and apologies in 'They Rolled Into Town'), revealing the mistakes they made along the way (such as failing to find the painted stone in 'The Secret of the Crooked Smile'), and questioning each other's interpretive choices (such as Maria's interjections during Tessa's storytelling in 'The Worm in the Glasses Case'), demonstrates the performers' distance from the horizon of their own ideal.

Bailes identifies how the amateur wavers between 'the horizon of that which *would* be achieved, and the horizon of that which *is* being achieved' (*ibid*, p.93), demonstrating the capacity to extrapolate the potentiality bound up in an action. While Bailes and Walter Benjamin, on whom she draws, are interested in the failure of representation bound up in the amateur's labour (*ibid*, p.33), I am more interested in how the evocation of 'that which *would* be achieved' is connected to utopia. *Travelling Show* reveals itself as amateur, not only in terms of the standards of professional theatre, but in terms of its own ideals. The performers, and by extension their entire operation, might be considered an amateur rendering of utopianism, revealing the idealism of what *would* be achieved, even as it contrasts to what *is* being achieved.

*Travelling Show's* amateurism therefore gestures towards an alternative society, simultaneously facilitating a dramaturgical mediation with the impossibility of fully attaining that alternative; what Ridout (2013, p.138) recognises as the illumination of 'both the possibilities to which the work of passionate amateurs is directed and the impossibility of their realization, even within the imaginary worlds of theatrical production'. For Ridout this occurs in a theatrical moment that transgresses 'codes of theatrical or dramaturgical viability' (*ibid*), reminiscent of my discussion of the Impossible Task in Chapter 3. However, in *Travelling Show* such impossibility does not appear as a break with or transgression of logic, but is woven into the work's dramaturgical logic via the amateur presentation enabled by the carnivalesque performance register; that is, the open and improvisational attitude of our performances, sustains a mediation between the possibility and impossibility of the utopian community we gesture towards. *Travelling Show's* amateurism thus reveals a distance between the ideal and the reality of its premise, which is strongly related to the second principle I will discuss: reflexivity.

The importance placed on reflexivity is demonstrated in *Travelling Show's* rehearsal warm-ups. These are limited due to our short devising time, but we nevertheless prioritise some kind of physical warm-up (led by Maria), a vocal warm-up (led by Andy), and what I call a 'clown' warm-up. This involves simple

clown exercises, based on Lecoq and Gaulier training methods<sup>15</sup>, aimed at building group complicity, spontaneity and playfulness. These are exercises that The Suitcase Ensemble regularly work with, but in this case they carry a dramaturgical imperative. Performers are encouraged to develop a playful and informal relationship with each other, and with the audience, in the interests of opening space for the emergence of improvisational asides and self-reflexive commentary.

In 'The Secret of the Crooked Smile', Andy performs a scene based on his tape-measure-guided exploration of Cove, in which he portrays a character proposing a tape-measure-guided alternative to a heritage trail (see video 13). The scene was devised during a rehearsal in which performers were instructed to explore a 'clown' version of their journey (see video 12 for an extract of this rehearsal). Following some initial improvisation, the scenes were developed using a directorial approach borrowed from simple clown training, in which the observer (in this case, me) takes on the role of 'provocateur' (see Wright 2006, p.187). This aims to provoke the performer into finding playfulness in their scene, keeping it 'alive and funny' (*ibid*). Provocations frequently invoke criticisms disguised as jokes ('I think that's the best tape measure toss I've ever seen', for example), designed not to deflate the performer, but - if it raises a laugh - give the performer 'more energy to try the game again' (*ibid*) and generate that laughter themselves. Thus modern-day clown training demonstrates a continued impulse to explore that self-mocking and ambivalent carnival laughter described by Bakhtin (1984b, p.12). This leads us to devise a scene which treats Andy's own 'tape measure' methodology as a figure of fun, mocking mainstream tourism products such as the heritage walk, as well as the artists own - perhaps pretentious - attempt to subvert it.

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<sup>15</sup> My training in these techniques has amassed over many years of attending workshops and working with Gaulier-trained directors and collaborators. Our most regular warm-up exercise involves putting on a clown nose or silly hat and dancing with each other, prioritising optimism, playfulness and complicity. It was taught to me by clowns Mark Winstanley and Alice Robinson.

On the morning of the performance, some narrative adjustments are made to the scene, partly in order to include a reference to one of the audience gifts, which has not yet been incorporated. Andy has already written the script for his scene, but we decide it is ok if he does not remember to mention the gift. In fact, it is better: providing an opportunity for comic reflexivity. During the scene, Andy is interrupted by Tessa, reminding him to mention the gift. "Where are you from?" she asks, holding and pointing to a 'Nakd Apple Danish' snack bar. "I'm here from Nakd Apple Danish theatre company" Andy announces. The audience laughs. This interjection allows the revelation of an aspect of the devising process as well as a certain dynamic in the relationship between the performers, exposing the arbitrariness of some of our choices, the difficulty we have in incorporating all the gifts, and the fact that we cannot always remember what we have planned.

Laughing at and commenting on our own process in this way is a form of Brechtian *gestus* which, Michael Wilson (2006, p.55) argues, is at the heart of Brechtian epic acting and its connection to storytelling. Wilson demonstrates that the complex notion of *gestus* can be recognised in the storyteller's ability to 'adopt an interrogative stance' towards their material. This can be seen in *Travelling Show's* use of parody and improvised asides, which allow the artists to 'question [their] actions' and comment upon what is being portrayed (*ibid*).

Adopting a self-reflexive stance within a utopian proposal is, according to Moylan (2014, p.45), a defining feature of its critical character. Jameson (2005, p.216; Levitas 2013, p.124) similarly notes the prevalence of reflexivity in underlining the element of inevitable failure in any utopian proposal. Jameson's characterisation of the contemporary utopia as, not 'the representation of Utopia' but, 'the story of its production and of the very process of construction' (*ibid*, pp.216-217), relates to *Travelling Show's* revelation of its own context and methodology. In short, reflexivity reveals two things about a utopia: the process of constructing it, and the contradictions that hinder its potential. This reflexivity can reveal utopia's impossibility, but Jameson proposes it has a paradoxically hopeful function, citing works such as Ursula Le Guin's *Lathe of Heaven* and the Strugatsky Brothers' *Roadside Picnic* that are 'determined by the structural impossibility of producing that Utopian text' which they 'nonetheless

miraculously become' (*ibid*, p.295). Out of the self-referential acknowledgement of its own failure, the utopian text can open up the 'unexpected emergence' of something else; an 'impossible and inexpressible Utopian impulse' (*ibid*).

*Travelling Show* does not attempt to represent a utopia, but allows utopian possibilities to emerge in its failure to embody one. It is here that Dolan's utopian performative becomes relevant to my dramaturgical model, framing those unintentionally hopeful gestures performed by the work. As I suggested in the previous section, the performance's encounter with place is a utopian performative that opens up notions of identity and belonging, connecting its audience in a carnivalized imagined community, which is not bounded and cohesive, but indeterminate and ever-creating. Moreover, its unfinished performance quality is a utopian performative that radiates ideals of care and connection among performers and audience. The ambitious intention to continually create new stories, in response to gathered gifts, while facilitating virtual encounters between people who might never meet, is revealed as a flawed and inconsistent ideal. However, as Jameson argues, even as the utopia reveals its impossibility, it allows alternative potentialities to emerge. Reflexivity alone is not enough to ensure this emergence; it requires an attitude defined by the third principle in this critical dramaturgy: optimism.

Optimism is central to clown training and performance, generally in the face of repeated failure. As Bailes (2011, p.41) notes in her analysis of slapstick performance, prevailing with optimism enables the protagonist to drive the narrative forward through their ability to creatively reinvent the situation. She suggests the effect on the spectator is both frustrating and satisfying (*ibid*), while Dave Peterson (2016, p.154) proposes that finding optimism allows clown performers to share with the audience a world where failing to live up to standards can be liberating. In the *Travelling Show* devising process, optimism is invoked at desperate moments when we are faced with what might be considered catastrophe on the project's own terms.

On the final day of devising 'The Worm in the Glasses Case', we are faced with three objects which we have no idea how to interpret. They are supposed to represent the "raffle prizes" that each promise a "creative response" in the show,

but no such responses exist. We are hours away from running out of energy to continue rehearsing. I instruct each performer to choose an object, and to approach it *with the optimism of a clown*. Within a matter of minutes we have three new scenes. Only one of these makes it into the actual performance the next day, but the attitude of optimism permeates our entire presentation. Ever since, reminding performers to approach the show with the optimism of a clown has become a mantra uttered just before each performance begins.

Optimism is thus generative of the work, as well as instilling a sense of hope that radiates throughout it. Our parodic reflexivity allows the work to laugh at its own optimism, without destroying that optimism altogether. It exposes the impossibility of its own ideals, and those bound up in the imagining of communities, nevertheless remaining open to the possibility of discovering a sense of genuine human connection. The performance approach is very different, but this relates to the way *Oh Europa* sustains a desire for unity while remaining open to the complexities that problematise that desire, as discussed in Chapter 4.

Amateurism, reflexivity and optimism perform several functions in *Travelling Show's* dramaturgy. They are expositional techniques that share aspects of the process that would otherwise be hidden from the audience; they radiate alternative values; they contribute to the relational realm of the audience-performer dynamic; and they provide a porous mediation between possibility and impossibility. *Travelling Show's* carnivalesque performance register thus operates as a 'critical utopia', just as Gardiner (1992) argues that Bakhtin's carnival does. In common with Gardiner's discussion of carnival, *Travelling Show* is self-mocking and oppositional, remaining at odds with the official culture, while attempting to embody the possibility of an alternative.

As with the devising methodology discussed in the first section of this chapter, the carnivalesque performance register demonstrates an ambivalent understanding of utopia as both familiarity and unfamiliarity; valuing a need for comfort as well as an impulse towards indeterminacy and the unknown. The spontaneity of this performance style eschews perfectionism and gives performers permission to fail, at the same time as opening the process to



unexpected possibilities in the course of performance. Enabling performers to improvise and admit mistakes, as well as read from sections of script when necessary, operates in tandem with repeatable narrative structures and satisfying performance material (such as the 'Doing Nothing' song), to develop a dramaturgical model for touring theatre that values its performers' wellbeing. At the same time, the dramaturgical principle of rebirth ensures that this ontological sense of what it means to be comfortable, to be at home and to belong, are not fixed ideals but are in a continual state of becoming. The rebirth of the performance is entwined with the tour's mobility, whereby the failed attempts to reconstruct different places via offerings from people who live (or indeed do not live) there, problematise what it means to belong, revealing home as a place we have not yet been to; a longing for *Heimat* and an endless reimagining of what utopia might be through the opening of spaces of contingency.

## 7. Conclusion

This thesis has investigated how utopia, understood as a method not a subject of representation, might operate within theatre practice. I have considered how practices of dramaturgy, devising and touring grapple with better ways of being in the world, by embodying ideals and opening up to previously unimaginable alternatives, via specific practical methods that are understood within a conceptual framework of utopia.

My practical research has investigated a theatre-making model that proceeds via a dialogue between the ideal and the unknown: structuring itself around what might be considered idealistic referents, while deliberately opening up spaces within that idealism for both critique and the influence of unknowable occurrences that might disrupt and even reconfigure its ideals. This dialogue is facilitated by a coming together of dramaturgical principles derived from a utopian expression - carnival - and devising principles derived from an interest in embracing the unknown, or what I have described as opening a space of contingency. This dialogue could be explored over the course of a rehearsal process for a new performance, but the act of touring extends it beyond the rehearsal room, implicating audience members and the material contingencies of mobility. In this meeting point, a whole range of polarities become troubled as the practice oscillates between familiarity and unfamiliarity, being and becoming, punctualization and depunctualization, possibility and impossibility, construction and excavation, nomadism and sedentariness. The dramaturgy creates frameworks that open up new possibilities, while the devising process generates new material that in turn reflects upon, critiques and refines its compositional structures.

The interdependence of these practices contributes to an original demonstration of utopia's complexity. The practical research reveals utopia as that which is at once ideal, unknown and ever-becoming, encountered in the structural properties of the work's dramaturgy and the openness of its devising process, while its ideals are subject to continual movement and encounter with different material contexts.

In terms of specific methods, I proffered the carnival utopia as a dramaturgical tool, exploring principles of rebirth, 'bodily participation', and self-mocking laughter as compositional approaches that might act generatively, experimentally and critically in the embodiment of not-yet-conscious ideals in theatre. I proposed Bakhtin's chronotope and Turner's porous dramaturgy as strategies for opening ideals up to change via the spatio-temporal movement of touring practice. I considered how Levitas's three modes of utopia as method might provide a devising framework that cycles through construction to critique, while generating content that reflects on what it means to feel at home in the world. I explored an approach to devising practice that proceeds through the opening and closing of spaces of contingency, arguing that actions of closure might seek to open up new possibilities, while nevertheless remaining anchored in something more familiar, mediating between the known and the unknown. I demonstrated an approach to implicating audiences in this mediation, via a generative framework of gift exchange that both invites contributions from audience members and facilitates encounters with elsewhere. And I suggested that strategies of amateurism, reflexivity and critique, can reveal the inevitable failure of a practitioner's utopian project, while generating unexpected alternatives that might be best understood by returning to the interpretive and affective frames provided by theatre scholars such as Dolan and Turner.

Thus, while I have consciously departed from these existing explorations of utopia in performance, I do not consider my research to be incompatible with them. I have proposed an approach to theatre-making that intentionally engages with utopia, while attempting to open up spaces where utopian performatives (Dolan 2005) might emerge unexpectedly, or where the tensions held in its dramaturgy paradoxically demonstrate that a reinvented world is possible (Turner 2015, p.192). Dolan's project is perhaps more overtly optimistic than mine, emphasising theatre's gesture towards a reanimated humanism (Dolan 2005, p.20), whereas my dramaturgy emphasises the necessity of self-critique and the revelation of utopia's impossibility. Meanwhile, my approach can be seen as implicating a more open and processual approach to utopia than is possible in Turner's architecturally bound conception; where she proposes that dramaturgy always comprises a 'tangible whole' (2015, p.192), *Travelling Show* seems composed by its own contingency. These frames offer ways of reflecting back on

elements of the work, even if they do not capture the full complexity of the utopian method that is ever-creating and ever-questioning.

This analysis - and subsequently this practice - might be deepened by engaging more closely with Silvija Jestrovic's work on utopian performatives. Jestrovic (2012, p.210) explores examples of performances and interventions in the public realm where the utopian moment is 'a genuine experience of openness' that 'reverberates and cumulatively shapes communal realities' long after the initial encounter; exceeding the fleeting glance that characterises Dolan's framing. This relates to my reading of *Glorious* and *Oh Europa* in Chapter 4 and could prove valuable in investigating *Travelling Show's* connections with and between the communities it visits. In any continuation of my practical research, I would consider this a necessary first step in developing the conceptual frame in order to position it within the politics of social change.

I have proposed a creative methodology that allows for the anticipatory desire that drives a performance to be reconstituted as it encounters new people and places, and rebirths its theatrical world. My early articulation of the performance's utopianism anticipated a 'nomadic' or 'post-national' idealism solidified through the act of sharing 'universal' tales with different people and places. Even as I acknowledged, from an intellectual position, the flaws of such a vision, I embraced its anticipation of a better way of being, while proposing a framework that would open spaces for self-reflexive critique and the possibility for an alternative to emerge. As I will now discuss, several unexpected discoveries *have* emerged from this process, which shift my initial utopianism as well as my understanding of what the value of approaching utopia as a method might be.

Perhaps the most significant shift to emerge has been the importance of familiarity as a feature of the creative method, and by extension of utopia. In its chronotope of travel, *Travelling Show* shares stories in which characters are searching for a sense of purpose and belonging in the world, while the dramaturgy's evolving imperative towards the formulaic can be seen to provide a much needed sense of comfort and familiarity for the touring team, enabling them to feel more at home in the creative process. This desire for familiarity

also guides the process of punctualization; the moment during devising when the space of contingency is contracted to a single point, and a decision is made that something works. Through my reflections on this practice, I have found that such comfort and familiarity is not counterposed to utopia, but reflects a desire for *Heimat* and the basic freedom of being at home in the world. Asking what it is that makes us feel at home might be an important part of a dialogue about the kind of world we want to create; Levitas (2013, p.185) proposes it is part of the ontological mode of imaginatively reconstituting society. My research demonstrates that dramaturgy, devising and touring practice can contribute to this ontological question, by not only insisting on openness, but paying attention to moments of punctualization. While these practices open up perceptions and imaginations, they should also recognise what is grasped hold of, and the ideals and values that might guide that grasping. This might be in order to critique and disrupt those ideals, but it might be simply to register them as important. Just as *Travelling Show* embraces its unfinished aesthetic, this might radiate alternative values that critique capitalist society and promote care and equality.

Valuing both the familiar and unfamiliar as important aspects of utopia has been a surprising development within my research. However, it can be seen to relate to processes of social change whereby demands for better conditions in the here and now need not be incompatible with radical social reform; for example, it might be necessary to campaign for improvements in workers' rights, even while proposing utopian visions of a world beyond work. *Travelling Show* demonstrates that introducing more structure and stability can reduce anxiety and open up more opportunities for experimenting with alternatives: as our narrative structures have become more formulaic, our spontaneity in performance has increased, opening up to unexpected and previously unimaginable possibilities that might exceed those structures.

This recalls an anecdote shared by Action Hero about a moment of unexpected, but hopeful, audience encounter that occurred in their performance *Watch Me Fall* (2009-ongoing). James Stenhouse (2014) writes about how an audience member unexpectedly intervened during a moment of pause to help his co-performer Gemma pick up a lot of golf balls that littered the stage. This simple gesture happened in a performance for the first time after years of touring

*Watch Me Fall*. Since then, it has happened again and again. Now, it happens more often than not. Stenhouse suggests this now happens because that initial gesture has left open a door of possibility, but I am also interested in the fact that this opening happened in the first place after many repeated performances of the same show. Perhaps something in the familiarity of this performance - in the extent to which it enables the performers to feel at home in one of their most popular works - allowed the unexpected to happen; opening a little space of contingency that generated a 'little act of hope' (*ibid*).

Valuing elements of familiarity can also be seen to relate to the principle of using something *known* to open up to the *unknown*, and the way the devising process opens up a space *adjacent*, rather than a space that entirely supersedes its point of origin. This adjacency can also be seen in the 'sideways glance' (Pearson and Shanks 2001, p.60) initiated by some of our devising exercises, and in the sense of nostalgia that is not so much an appeal to the past, but rather a utopianism that is directed sideways (Boym 2001, p.xiv) and carried with us on our journey. This speaks to theatre's ability to explore alternatives to reality, while existing within that reality, reminiscent of its carnivalesque and heterotopian character, and also of what Dolan (2005) describes as the performative *gesture* to a better way of being. Ensuring the audience can register both the starting point(s) - the previous audience's gifts - and the new possibilities they have opened up - the story being shared - reveals the generative process, and enacts what Turner (2015, p.194) calls a 'shimmering between levels' of the real and its transformation. Similarly, a dramaturgical exploration of utopia might not attempt to entirely supersede its romantic starting points, but allow their presence to disclose the mediation between possibility and impossibility that is yet in process. This adjacency might be especially unique to theatre's engagement with utopia, marking out the importance of this artform in negotiating the contradictions and problematics of utopian proposals, while maintaining the optimism and anticipation that a better world is possible.

Thus, these particular research findings regarding notions of familiarity and adjacency make a significant contribution to knowledge in terms of utopia's operation in theatre practice; further demonstrating the complexity of utopia as

method, as well as the importance of theatre to the utopian project. The practice I have presented here might not achieve material social change, but my research suggests principles for engaging with the desire for social change via a method that mediates between the familiar and the unfamiliar, registering idealistic starting points as well as their inconsistencies, while continually opening new spaces of contingency.

My practical research has enabled my discovery of these principles, though I would not claim it to be a perfect demonstration of them. Further practical exploration of these claims would be welcomed, alongside other findings that prompt further research.

For example, *Travelling Show* instigates a complex questioning of local and national identity, revealing place as ungraspable and unknowable, at the same time as registering a desire for connection, and never quite seeming to destroy a utopian ideal of commonality. Future developments of this research might explore this complexity further, investigating questions of place, identity and belonging, as well as the limitations of the existing framework, which places so much emphasis on the interpretive labour of the touring artists.

Additionally, this interpretive labour has highlighted another surprising discovery, which is the extent to which *Travelling Show* generates a sense of responsibility to the absent other. I noted this in relation to the way we worked with the audience's offerings, finding ourselves asking whether our interpretations were appropriate and feeling as though we had to guess the intention behind certain gifts. This could be seen to relate to the imaginative reconstitution of society in its archaeological mode (Levitas 2013, p.153); its relationship with the excavated ideals of the past, and the sense of responsibility to realise the anticipatory surplus that, as Bloch (1986, p.156) identifies, we find in wishful images. It has been suggested to me that Jacques Derrida's discussion of ghosts and spectres might be pertinent in exploring this further. I have not delved into this here because it opens up a much larger area of research. However, since Derrida (1994b) makes his observations in relation to dealing with the 'spectres of Marx', there is clearly some value in considering how such spectral responsibility might continue my engagement with Marx's

(1978, p.15) notion of a 'dream that is yet unclear to itself'. Furthermore, this engagement with ghosts could more directly address the temporal implications of utopia in performance, acknowledging the performativity of both the past and the future in ways that might develop the current research.

As well as exploring the concept of utopia as a theatre-making method, I have attempted to advocate for the value of certain scholarly and practical approaches to dramaturgy, devising and touring, which are not especially widespread. I have highlighted the potential of the carnivalesque as a dramaturgical tool, encouraging an appreciation not only of popular performance modes, but of their dramaturgical properties, which might facilitate new understandings about utopia. I have valued devising as a practice that opens up perceptions, while advocating for more attendance to its acts of closure; moments that punctualize the space of contingency and the conceptual frameworks that govern that punctualization. In my discussion of touring theatre, I hope my research contributes to the emerging scholarly interest in this area of practice, proposing ways of framing the idealism of touring, and advocating for innovations in the form that push at definitive boundaries.

Future research into touring theatre might delve into the question of what the value of this practice is. While touring is commonly valued as an act of distribution that enables more people in different places to experience a performance, many practitioners also describe touring as an opportunity that benefits the artist: allowing them to explore connections with different people and places. My research proposes touring's value is in its dialogic possibilities, where the artist's drive to connect is also an openness to being changed by the touring performance's encounters. I have explored a form that not only changes in response to its encounters but finds ways for that sense of change to register with its audiences. Investigations of other innovations in touring practice would be a valuable continuation of this research and might look to engage more closely with arts policy. I have enjoyed undertaking this research outside of the confines of touring networks and funding systems, but were I to continue researching touring theatre I would want to work with artists whose work *is* conditioned by those structures, exploring questions and proposals that seek to



both advocate for the value of touring practice, and for improvements in conditions.

My touring model has opened up questions about the kinds of generative exercises that take place on the move, while uncovering a complex and fleeting engagement with place that differs from usual site-specific practice and has the potential to uncover new understandings about place, identity and belonging. This potential again speaks to the value of touring practice and signals valuable future directions for practice-based research.

Above all, I hope I have successfully argued in favour of embracing the utopian, the anticipatory and even the romantic, in practices of dramaturgy, devising and touring. While I do not advocate an uncritical embrace of idealism, I argue that ideals and desires should not be dismissed as nostalgic or naïve, but rather excavated for the anticipatory energy that might be harnessed as part of a theatre-making method. I have articulated ways that theatre makers might approach the idealistic and utopian aspects of their work in a productive way: not uncritically reproducing nostalgic imaginaries, nor avoiding them altogether, but critically and porously interrogating them, in dialogue with audiences, in the hope of uncovering something new. Building on the work of Dolan and Turner, critics and scholars might similarly work productively with those hopeful aspects of theatre practice, seeking to articulate what that something new, that not-yet-conscious possibility gestured to in performance, might be. I propose that dramaturgical investigations of utopia in performance might look for evidence of anticipatory desire, asking how the performance's compositional textures are working to experiment with that desire. And while my research has emphasised utopia as a *method*, it remains essential to keep asking what is revealed in this experimentation with utopia. After all, those values that shine forth from compositions of a better way of being will provide the anticipatory surplus that generates the dreams of a better life that create the future.

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