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Learning to Inhabit the Chair

Knowledge transfer in contemporary
Australian director training

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requirements for the degree of Doctor of
Philosophy

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Labour is blossoming or dancing where
The body is not bruised to pleasure soul,
Nor beauty born out of its own despair,
Nor blear-eyed wisdom out of midnight oil.
O chestnut-tree, great-rooted blossomer,
Are you the leaf, the blossom or the bole?
O body swayed to music, O brightening glance,
How can we know the dancer from the dance?

W.B. Yeats, "Among School Children".

Somewhere along the way, my dear,
You've made an awful error.
You oughtn't blame yourself now
Come along.

You seem to think that people
Like people, what are clever.
It's very quaint, it's very sweet,
But wrong!

People don't like smarty pants
What go 'round claiming
That they know stuff
We don't know.

Now here's a tip.
What you know matters less
Than the volume with which
What you don't know's expressed!

Content has never been less important.
So you have got to be...
LOUD!

Tim Minchin, "Loud" from *Matilda the Musical*.

abstract

How are theatre directors trained today? Although there is a body of work around what directors *do*, little sustained critical attention has been paid to the nature of teaching and learning within director training. Training a director has been called “teaching the unteachable” (Fliotsos, 2004) and leading practitioners assert “no amount of learning will make you a director” (Hall, 2000) – yet training courses do exist, and something, indeed many things, are taught in them. It is a kind of teaching and learning, though, which does not fit dominant models of pedagogy: “practical knowledge(s) [...] have traditionally been hard to capture in meaningful ways and have, as a result, often been represented as a weaker alternative to theory” (Prior, 2012:xxiii).

Using a theoretical framework drawn from the sociology of education, this thesis analyses how knowledge is transmitted and legitimated in creative arts training. This methodology seeks to understand the ‘on the ground’ realities of training, bringing into simultaneous view the official curriculum, institutional aspirations and the messy business of training. Using ethnographic fieldwork to apply this framework to the Directing program at the National Institute of Dramatic Art (NIDA) in Sydney, Australia, this thesis concentrates on the dual questions of *what* is taught and *how* it is taught. Research has been conducted from within the Institute, paying close, sustained attention to what goes on in the room during training.

This work aims to contribute to debates around the accreditation of creative arts training, and the survival of conservatoire-style training. In a regulatory environment where institutions around the world now have to legitimate practical knowledges in systems designed to accredit primarily theoretical coursework, the framework proposed by this research allows trainers to account for the full spectrum of their work.

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Although there is only one name on the cover page, there is no pretending that this document is a solo effort. So many people have made my work what it is today, and I am not going to attempt to pay tribute to them all here. I will simply say this: doctoral research is a struggle, infinitely frustrating and infinitely rewarding, and I am here today with this tome in hand thanks only to the people around me. A few, though, demand special thanks.

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I was lucky enough to tutor and lecture throughout my candidature, and I am certain that this played a large role in keeping me sane. I, and this project, have learnt so much from the teachers with whom I tutored in the Department: Kath, Robin, Paul, Rosie, Katie, Daniel, and Ian. I cannot reiterate enough how important I believe teaching is to the work we do in academia, and I am so proud to have worked alongside such gifted colleagues.

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I certainly have a lot to live up to.

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prologue

And the house lights go out. The audience, a few faces looking mainly indifferent at the prospect of this third paper in a mid-afternoon session, recede into the darkness. Delivering my first paper at my first academic conference, I can't see anyone at all. I expected a classroom, maybe even a small lecture hall, but here at the Australian National University, I'm standing on stage in a black box studio space. The session had started dull and stayed that way: good work, but awkwardly presented and hard to follow at this time of day. Uncomfortable as I had been in the audience, it is much worse on stage – there is a reason that I'm a director. In fact, that is what I am talking about; my paper for the 2010 Australasian Association for Drama, Theatre and Performance Studies recounts the story of a student production of *King Lear* and our futile attempts to convince audiences we were avant-garde.

So I begin. I am getting nothing back. I have no idea whether they can even hear me. I get louder; I start pacing. I go off-script, and become self-deprecating to the point of desperation. In what I will come to understand as a powerful metaphor for the process of writing a doctoral thesis, I am shouting into the darkness hoping I am making sense to someone, somewhere. Eventually, finally, my twenty minutes are up – I have survived. I shuffle back to my bag and dawdle in the front row of chairs, hoping that the audience have left by the time I head out of the theatre for afternoon tea.

“Oh. My. GAWD!” someone yells across the foyer. I concentrate on my friend. I had been warned about the mad aunts and uncles of the academic family, and in the last three days I have become used to such effusiveness in public. I had not expected that it would now be directed at me: Professor Sharon Carnicke, keynote speaker and special guest of the conference is speeding across the room, arms outstretched. Perhaps if I examine my shoes she might pass me by? My hands are full; no matter, Carnicke grabs my forearms and is pumping them up and down for emphasis. “That. Was. So. GOOD!” she exclaims, volume and pitch increasing with each word, “I. Had. So. Much. FUN!”. I am apparently slow on the uptake – it takes quite some time for it to click that she is talking about the paper I just delivered. Having been unable to identify the audience, it had never occurred to me that someone of Carnicke’s stature had been listening.

I don’t recall much of what followed; surely we exchanged a few words about my research and interests, and I mumbled something about the keynote she had given two days previous about new technologies in actor training. I do know that she gave me her business card, squeezed my now exhausted forearms one last time, and disappeared back into the throng. I finished eating, filled a polystyrene cup with the over-brewed tea which seems to haunt conference venues, and allowed myself a moment of self-satisfaction. I scurried off to the final session with a burnt tongue, and thought little more of it.

chapter one

Shooting an Elephant

It is a moment when the desire to know 'how things work' is met by the failure of facts to account fully for the observed event. To know 'how it's done' may force it out of the world of innocence but no less into a world that resists full disclosure. Finally the desire to comprehend the mystery is the desire to have the mystery confirmed

(Cole, 1992:7).

1.1 Introduction

In his 1972 Director's Report, announcing to the Board that director training will be offered at the National Institute of Dramatic Art (NIDA) for the first time that year, John Clark wrote:

The Director in the contemporary theatre occupies a position of greater responsibility and influence than ever before. The quality of a national theatre depends ultimately on the quality of its directors (NIDA, 1972).

Since then, the director has gone on to assume even more importance in contemporary theatre, and courses in directing have proliferated both in Australia and across the world. At the same time, the figure of the director remains enigmatic – beyond roll calls of metaphors like the one produced by Susan Letzler Cole (1992:5), which cast the director as everyone from mother, through psychoanalyst, to gardener, little concrete description exists of what a director might actually *do*. This shrouding of the craft of the director in mystery extends to the question of how one might be trained. Even directors themselves seem unable to articulate precisely how they learnt their craft; Sir Peter Hall, one of the pre-eminent stage directors of the twentieth century, asserts simply:

There is no accepted way to be a director. You have to believe that you can do it, and by training in other disciplines, by practice and by watching others, you become what you have it in you to be. You can learn how to break a scene down into units, you can learn how to light, how to help actors create a character. But no amount of learning will make you a director, any more than intensive training will make a conductor. [...] My conclusion is there are as many ways of directing as there are people (2000:94).

In this thesis, I am interested in interrogating exactly what types of “learning” will “make you a director”, and this question of how to “*be a director*”. Even if director training has been called “teaching the unteachable” (Fliotsos, 2004:65), there is *something*, indeed a lot of things, *taught* when one sets out to train a director, and “although historians have pieced together the history of theatre education, little attention has been given to the education of directors” (2004:66).

This research is therefore excavating an area which has so far escaped much focussed academic attention. As Gail Medford and Anne Flitosis note in *Teaching Theatre Today: Pedagogical Views of Theatre in Higher Education*, despite much general research into the history and function of creative arts training, “very little discussion is given to the art of teaching or the pedagogic aspects of theatre education” (2004:1) and the actual knowledge transfer that takes place within this arena is often elided or kept out of view. This is particularly baffling given “[t]he fact that we find some success in teaching this complex art form should encourage us to give pedagogy some attention” (Medford and Flitosis, 2004:2). The operations of the contemporary field of higher education have reinforced the importance of “thinking about curriculum and how best to teach students” (AUQA, 2010:6), as providers are subjected to more frequent and rigorous accreditation procedures, and required to account for the teaching and learning which takes place in the classroom. This has been a particular challenge for creative arts conservatoires, who face the challenge of legitimating and evaluating what are primarily practical knowledges within systems designed to account for theoretical ways of knowing. This tension between the practical and the theoretical, which characterises the wider field of creative arts education (cf. Jackson, 2004), is drawn out throughout the remainder of my research.

In any discussion of pedagogy, it is crucial to return to accounts of the on-the-ground realities of teaching and learning. Max von Manen argues:

Pedagogy is primarily neither a science nor a technology. Yet it is often treated and researched in a[n] empirically scientific way. [...] Only recently has anyone recognised that education needs to turn back to the world of experience. Experience can open up understanding that restores a sense of embodied knowledge (1991:9).

In order to address this contention that “human interaction, the interaction between teacher and pupil, is key to pedagogical experience” (Flitosis, 2004:71-2), this thesis will investigate

pedagogy as it is actually practised in- and outside the classroom, as well as through curriculum documents and institutional histories. The centrepiece of this research, then, is an ethnographic fieldwork project during which I investigated the contemporary director training program at NIDA. Through both observing and participating in the teaching in the course, I was able to interrogate “the practice of teaching and learning within a creative context” (AUQA, 2010:10). Although I apply it here only to director training, the analytical framework which I utilised throughout this research, drawn from the sociology of education, is offered in these pages as a methodology to produce “a stronger articulation of how teaching and learning can operate in a creative domain” (AUQA, 2010:10-11). There are two primary enquiries, then, that drive this research: *what* is taught in contemporary Australian director training; and *how* is it taught? This leads directly to related questions around who is empowered to decide what gets taught and adjudicate new claims to knowledge, and also what a successful graduate might ‘look’ and ‘feel’ like.

As my research is based on extensive fieldwork across four years at NIDA, I will spend some time in this Chapter detailing the place from which my account sets out, including the disciplinary concerns which have informed the research, and the particular circumstances which allowed me to collect the insider knowledge to which I lay claim. Similarly to Gay McAuley in her work on the ethnography of rehearsal, “in keeping with contemporary ethnographic practice, I make no attempt to disguise my presence as a narrator in this account, for so much of it depends on my own responses” (2012:2). The ‘I’ here is of crucial importance: this research is driven by fieldwork which I undertook, which allows it to build on the accounts by Medford and Fliotsos (2004) and Ross Prior (2010). These valuable accounts draw on historical documents, as well as interviews with teachers; however, it is the sustained

attention to the *Realpolitik* of teaching and learning facilitated by my fieldwork which sets my research project apart.

In the remainder of this introductory Chapter, I will first locate the question of training on the “broad spectrum” (Schechner, 1988:4) of objects of study in contemporary performance studies.¹ In this section, I also suggest a parallel between the study of training and the approach of Performance Studies at the University of Sydney to investigating rehearsal. From there, I turn to a more general survey of the body of work produced around training, particularly in the Australian context. Across all of this work, the criticism is often the one levelled above: even when accounts come from practising teachers, the actual *doing* of teaching and learning is largely absent from accounts of creative arts training. Finally, I will offer a brief narrative of the evolution of my research project, and provide a roadmap of how the narrative and arguments of this thesis will unfold across the next six Chapters.

1.2 Training on the Broad Spectrum

In what has become one of the most widely invoked descriptions of the performance studies approach to research, Richard Schechner wrote in a 1988 editorial for the journal *The Drama Review (TDR)* that “performance – as distinct from any subgenre like theatre, dance, music, and performance art – is a broad spectrum of activities” (1988:4). This claim, which stakes out a broad field of study, has been returned to again and again in the disciplinary turf wars which have characterised the evolution of performance studies as a discipline; one which looks to treat “performative behaviour, not just the performing arts, as a subject for serious scholarly

¹ Although it occurs frequently in academic publications capitalised as Performance Studies, I have chosen to follow the convention of leaving the name of the discipline in lower case, unless referring specifically to the Department of Performance Studies at the University of Sydney.

study” (Schechner, 1988:4). (For a full description of this fractured evolution, see Harding and Rosenthal [2011] and McKenzie, Roms and Wee [2010]). Given the discipline has been “characterised by sustained reflexivity and genealogy from the get-go” (Maxwell, 2013:442), I aim in this section to draw out the ‘family tree’ of this present research. I do so not out of a defensive desire to justify this project as ‘sufficiently performance studies’ but because I wish here to acknowledge my intellectual forebears, and situate this project within a larger lineage of research on training. Schechner in the same editorial also noted that “a working relationship has to exist between those who are training theatre workers and professionals in the field” (1988:4), and it is precisely this relationship that I examine in these pages.

“Genealogical anxiety” notwithstanding, a number of ‘family trees’ have been established across recent decades, which propose a distinctive approach to the doing of performance studies based around different institutions. The most prominent distinction here has been between the New York University (NYU) ‘tree’ and the Northwestern University ‘tree’, headed by their *patres familias* Schechner and Dwight Conquergood respectively. (Schechner in particular has been overtly concerned with lineage, noting in a later *TDR* editorial announcing the expansion of the journal’s editorial staff that those editors now invited to join the team from Princeton University, Brown University and the Shanghai Theatre Academy were all NYU-trained [2010:7-8]). Smaller, though no less distinct, ‘trees’ have been traced from the Universities of Aberystwyth in Wales, and Sydney in Australia (cf. Maxwell, 2006). Geographically isolated from the ideological stoushes in North America, these departments developed distinctive approaches to performance studies based on the idiosyncratic conditions of their establishment. At Sydney, where the contemporary Department grew from collaborations between foreign language academics and the practice-oriented Theatre Studies Services Unit, “the focus of the scholars involved turned from the

product to the process: rehearsal emerged as a key research interest” (Maxwell, 2006:39). A major *distinction* of the Department can be usefully summarised by Ian Maxwell’s phrase, “toward an ethnography of performance participation” (2006:42). Performance training, then, as perhaps one of the very first steps in performance preparation, has found a natural home as an object of study within the Department at the University of Sydney.

There is a persuasive connection, I think, between the study of training and the study of rehearsal as it has evolved at Sydney. In her most recent work on the subject, which brings together almost three decades of experience in rehearsal studies, Gay McAuley produces an etymology of the English word ‘rehearsal’, noting that “nurturing the soil, providing the organic conditions for new growth and providing illumination are obviously relevant connotations” (2012:2). The resonance with training seems very clear here, as a similar site of preparation and careful nurturing. Another point of comparison can be found in Susan Letzler Cole’s description of rehearsal as a “hidden world” (1992), a metaphor McAuley continues:

Rehearsals are traditionally private, a time when artists work intensively together, when actors go further and deeper into their own and their characters’ emotions and need to feel safe to experiment with what they are finding. The demarcation between insider and outsider is very strong in the theatre, and never more so than when it is a matter of rehearsals, for many directors fear the disruptive impact an outsider can have on the chemistry occurring in the room (2012:6-7).

This description could equally extend to the intensive period of performance training, more often than not conducted behind closed doors and requiring an investment and commitment from participants that excludes any and all outside concerns. There is an additional final resonance with the relative lack of academic attention that training, like rehearsal, has received: McAuley notes that “notwithstanding a century or so of scholarly concern with theatrical performance, relatively little has been written about the rehearsal practices from which these performances emerge” (2012:3).

The particular model of rehearsal studies which has developed at Sydney, then, provides a useful point of departure for research into theatre training. The approach turns on careful, discreet research conducted from within the rehearsal room, casting the researcher as an active, although unobtrusive, participant in the process. This spin on contemporary participant-observation ethnography requires “a continuous tacking between the ‘inside’ and ‘outside’ of events; on the one hand grasping the sense of specific occurrences and gestures empathetically, on the other stepping back to situate these meanings in wider contexts” (Clifford, 1988:34). This quest, to understand “who people think they are, what they think they are doing, and to what end they think they are doing it” (Geertz, 2000:16), has been well-articulated in the work of McAuley (2012) and her students, including Kerrie Schaefer (1999) and Kate Rossmannith (2009). It will come as no surprise, then, that the considerable body of work which has been produced from Sydney performance studies in the examination of training adopts a similar, on-the-ground approach. All three of Paul Moore (2004), Mark Seton (2004) and Liza-Mare Syron (2012) were engaged in the actual business of training: Moore as a student; Seton as an observer and some-time student; and Syron as a teacher and occasional observer. It is within this lineage and tradition of work that I situate my project. This emerging thread of study, which has produced some of the only literature to examine training in Australia in detail, suggests that the distinctive Sydney approach to the study of rehearsal can be related to a similar approach to the study of training – one which has profoundly impacted the document which follows.

In setting out to understand that training, to invoke Bertolt Brecht’s epigram about theatre, is “not magic but work” (McAuley, 2012), all three of the authors mentioned above undertook considerable research from within training institutions, before turning to the wider sociological implications of their work. Moore’s (2004) study considers the particular values

and dispositions with which high-profile training institutions inculcate their graduates, and examines whether this provides adequate preparation for working life within the industry. His work therefore engages with ideas of professionalism and how it might be taught and learnt, as well as the potential disconnect between the values of training and the wider industry. Seton (2004) examines the audition process for major institutions and private colleges, and considers questions around the embodiment of vulnerability in acting students. His work is informed by observation of auditions, interviews with those who conduct them, and through participating in auditions himself as a candidate, putting his own body through the process. Finally, Syron's (2012) work builds on these two previous studies in order to consider how contemporary training for Indigenous Australian actors is able to balance tradition, pedagogy and a particularly Indigenous embodiment. She writes as the coordinator of the acting program at Eora College for Visual and Performing Arts, which caters specifically for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. My own research has taken its inspiration from these colleagues, and in particular has adopted their model of participant-observation, as I outline in greater detail later in this Chapter, and below in Chapter 4. Also, each of their projects have influenced my own approach to specific areas: my own examination of professionalism in the student *habitus* (see Chapter 6) follows Moore's work; Seton's work centres on creative arts institutions and the right kind of knower, as does Chapter 5; and Syron's sustained investigation of culture manifesting as pedagogy influenced the contentions of Chapters 5 and 6, which uncover a kind of institutional culture. What distinguishes my work from the above accounts is the sustained focus on what is taught in training programs, and the manner in which it is taught.

In this respect, my research most closely resembles the study undertaken by Ross Prior in *Teaching Actors: Knowledge Transfer in Acting Training* (2012). Here, he notes that "training

remains a unique and mysterious phenomenon of theatre-making” (2012:xix) and suggests his book is “a celebration of the practical knowledge(s) that have traditionally been hard to capture in meaningful ways and have, as a result, often been represented as a weaker alternative to theory” (2012:xxiii). My own work follows Prior’s lead in proposing sustained attention to what actually takes place during a period of training within an institution, and it is for this reason that our projects share the phrase “knowledge transfer” in our subtitles. Where we differ is in the aims of our projects: Prior aims to create a resource for other trainers, in considering “how trainers learn to teach or develop their practice within drama schools” (2012:xxi). My own aim, constrained perhaps by the form of the doctoral thesis, is rather to provide a framework for the analysis of knowledge transfer in training. Both of our accounts share a desire to facilitate “training institutions to further develop existing models for teaching” (Prior, 2012:xxi). The other inspiration for this study, one which takes a primarily North American perspective to complement the Anglo-Australian focus of Prior’s work, is Flitosis and Medford’s edited collection *Teaching Theatre Today: Pedagogical Views of Theatre in Higher Education* (2004). This volume combines accounts from contemporary trainers with a historical survey of pedagogy in higher education. Although it is one of the only sustained investigations of pedagogy in creative arts training to have been published, there is a curious thinness to some of the work contained within; often, the chapters prefer historical overviews to thicker, ‘on the ground’ accounts of training pedagogy. However, my research nonetheless responds to Flitosis’s contention that “we cannot plan effectively for the future if we have not learned from the past” (2004:79) by offering a snapshot of a moment in time, and outlining its historical conditions in comprehensive detail.

Within an Australian context, there are two further samples of work around training which need to be considered, both of which are edited collections of articles in *Australasian*

Drama Studies (ADS). The first, published in October 2008, examined “Lineages, Techniques, Training and Tradition”. The over-arching statement made in the Editorial of this volume is particularly pertinent here: “the question of how most usefully to discuss training and teachers is a challenging one and answers will vary according to the desires and needs of a particular readership” (Rogers and Schafer, 2008:1). The focus in the two articles dedicated to training in this volume is historical: the first reflects on the lasting impact of the drama teaching program at the Rusden State College in Victoria (Eckersall and Prior, 2008); and the second considers the history of indigenous-specific training programs and their relationship to ideas of tradition (Syron, 2008). The article examining Rusden, which is a transcript of a round table discussion, begins with questions surrounding the four key terms of the focus issue. However, it skews quickly towards a consideration of lineage, with a degree of nostalgia which clouds substantial interrogation of pedagogy. In her article, Syron is interested in outlining the critical perspectives which have informed her approach to including indigenous perspectives in the curriculum; she does not, though, go on to detail either the curriculum itself or how she teaches it. In both articles in this earlier volume – and indeed in the majority of literature in the field – there is a particular focus on the personal characteristics of both students and teachers, at the expense of a consideration of what was or is actually taught. For example, Eckersall and Prior provide substantial detail about the type of person produced by the Rusden approach to training, without illuminating what that person might have learnt during their study at that institution. This construction of teaching and learning will become central to my research in Chapters 3 and 4, below.

The later *ADS* collection focussing on “Teaching Theatre, Performance and Drama Studies” appeared in October 2010, and provides accounts of actual teaching practice across a range of Australian and New Zealand institutions – with varying degrees of reflexivity. Each of

these accounts are useful for their methodological concerns, but in the context of this thesis two stand out: David O'Donnell and Lisa Warrington's discussion of teaching directing at New Zealand universities; and Rachel Forgasz's investigation of the relationship between the profession and the theatre studies academy. The utility of Forgasz's work for this study is curtailed by its lack of analysis and reflexivity; her focus is on presenting the words of theatre professionals, rather than interrogating them. Too often, she allows members of the profession to be dismissive of the work of the academy, without a consideration of what might be at stake for them in so doing. In this thesis, I hope to be able to provide a more reflexive account which can reconcile the overly simplistic division between the practical and intellectual which Forgasz's article ultimately risks perpetuating. In particular, my current study is driven by the questions raised by O'Donnell and Warrington in their contribution to the 2010 focus issue of *ADS* regarding the training of young directors at their universities in New Zealand: "[h]ow can one teach this subject, where the student really learns by doing? What is the starting point?" (2010:129).

These questions, of course, connect back to the above material about the study of rehearsal, and more specifically, study from within a cultural institution. Paul Atkinson notes the dearth of studies examining "the social worlds of cultural production as collective work in socially organised setting" (2004:94), and thus advocates sustained research from within cultural institutions of the kind done by Georgina Born (1995; 2004). McAuley further suggests it is possible to bring both the conditions of production and the artwork into simultaneous view: "[i]t becomes necessary to consider the institutional framework [...] that both constrain[s] and make[s] possible the production of the artwork as well as the work itself" (2012:5). Through an examination of the institutional framework in which training takes place, including sustained attention to that training itself, my research addresses the gap in

scholarship by providing a sustained account of pedagogy from within a cultural institution.

The value of this research is in its provision of a framework for analysis as well as a methodology for revealing what is frequently made opaque by the “the myth of mysteriousness of the creative process” (Forgasz, 2011:41) around training. In the following section, I will turn to providing more detail about the selection of the institution which this research examines in detail, including the contemporary conditions of its operation.

1.3 Introducing the Fieldwork

As the previous section on genealogy suggested, it became central to this project to secure a location for sustained participant-observation ethnography, given that the operations of a complex undertaking like training can best be understood by being in the room and observing what actually goes on ‘on the ground’. That left this research project with a limited choice of venues for primary research: not only is there a limited number of conservatoire training schools in Australia, but also they do not all offer director training programs. The Western Australian Academy of Performing Arts (WAAPA)², now based at Edith Cowan University, has concentrated its postgraduate offerings on research degrees, and although this includes practice-led research by directors, WAAPA does not offer a dedicated coursework program in directing. The Victorian College of the Arts (VCA)³, now a Faculty of the University of

² WAAPA was established by Dr. Geoff Gibbs in 1979, under the auspices of the then Western Australian College of Advanced Education (WACAE). When CAEs around the country were granted University status as a result of the Dawkins reforms, WAAPA became an administrative division of the new Edith Cowan University (ECU) in 1991, under the Faculty of Education and Arts. This relationship has not always been smooth sailing, given the government funding for WAAPA now flows through ECU. Upon his retirement, Gibbs launched a broadside at administration he believed was withholding funds; a claim hotly contested by management (cf. Kabruva, 2003a; Kabruva, 2003b; Kabruva, 2004).

³ The Victorian College of the Arts (VCA) was established in 1972 as an independent tertiary college, bringing together some existing and some new training schools in the creative arts. The School of Drama was established in 1975, the first such school to be created ‘from scratch’. In 1991, as a result of the Dawkins Reforms – which fundamentally altered the shape of the field of higher education in Australia – the VCA became an affiliate of the

Melbourne, offers research degrees including a practice-led Master of Fine Arts (MFA) program which can be taken with a theatre specialisation. The VCA has also maintained a coursework offering, which at the time of writing is named the Postgraduate Diploma in Performance Creation. This course offers six different streams, sharing some common elements, and one of these is in Directing. The Flinders Drama Centre⁴, part of Flinders University of South Australia, offers a dedicated four-year Bachelor of Creative Arts (BCA) in Directing, which can be undertaken at either an undergraduate or postgraduate level.⁵ This course admits a maximum of two candidates per year, and the exact program of study depends on the student's interests and previous experience. Certain coursework requirements are also shared with the BCA in Acting.

This leaves the National Institute of Dramatic Art (NIDA), in Sydney, offering a year-long, postgraduate course, entitled the Graduate Diploma of Dramatic Art, with streams in Directing and Writing for Performance.⁶ There is minimal cross-over between the coursework programs; the curriculum for each is essentially independent. Thanks largely to the success of its Acting program – which has produced Oscar-winning performers and some of Australia's

University of Melbourne, and finally in 2007 it became a full Faculty under the administrative control of the University. This resulted in significant protest (cf. Murphet, 2011), and appeared to throw the VCA's programs into doubt, especially when the then-infamous 'Melbourne model' of streamlined undergraduate degrees was introduced. It exists today as the Faculty of the VCA and MCM (Melbourne Conservatorium of Music). There is no apparent link with the University's theoretical program in English and Theatre Studies.

⁴ In 1966, when the Flinders University of South Australia was established as that state's second major tertiary institution, drama was a founding discipline in the liberal arts program. This program was under the leadership of theatre director Wal Cherry, who had led the Union Theatre Repertory Company while John Sumner was with the Australian Elizabethan Theatre Trust (see Chapter 2). "From the beginning, [Cherry] insisted on the importance of practical work" (Parsons, 1995:620), and this focus was recognised by the founding of the Flinders Drama Centre in 1973, which separated the professional training program from the humanities discipline. This model has continued harmoniously to this day – although Parsons alludes to a perceived slip in academic standards resulting in a University investigation in 1981 (1995:620)

⁵ The information available about this course on the Flinders University website and in other documents does not specify how this would work in practice; however, the small cohort of one to two students already necessitates a tailored program of coursework for each. Students with a previous undergraduate qualification, particularly if it is theatre or a related creative field, would presumably have access to postgraduate level coursework units. The degree awarded at the end of the program is the Bachelor of Creative Arts in both cases.

⁶ During the course of this research, the name of this course changed from Playwriting to Writing for Performance. I prefer the latter term as it is the more contemporary, although in keeping with how they are informally known at the Institute, I will refer to the students in this program collectively as "the playwrights".

most recognisable faces – NIDA has developed a reputation as Australia’s pre-eminent theatre training school. (A more comprehensive account of the particular history of the Institute, outlining this distinction, is offered below in Chapter 2.) Although the Directing program at NIDA does not carry the same reputation as the Acting course, it is nonetheless (alongside Flinders) one of the two longest-running director training programs in the country, dating from 1972 in its current form. This dual *distinction* meant that the NIDA course became my preferred site of study for this project: not only is it a long-running, dedicated directing program taught over a short, intensive time; but it is also offered by arguably the country’s most prestigious theatre conservatoire. If ever there were a program which would have a strongly articulated idea of the kind of director being offered to the industry, surely it would be found at NIDA. Given my research was being conducted through the University of Sydney, NIDA was also more geographically accessible than the longer Flinders program based in Adelaide.

Gaining admission to such a highly regarded institution proved its own kind of challenge. Short of auditioning for the program and being accepted as a student, there were very few obvious points of entry to NIDA. Armed with the lessons learnt from undergraduate studies in sociology and anthropology, I was all too aware of the scepticism with which outsiders can be met within large, closed institutions. Indeed, the original proposal for my research project assumed that no institution would allow me to “experience the culture from within” (Born, 2004:16). High-profile institutions, long used to the public spotlight, have often been resistant to scrutiny from that same public, seeking to cultivate an air of mystery which aids their operations (cf. Forgasz, 2011). The 2000 auditionees who line up each year to compete for twenty-four places in NIDA’s Acting program are there as a result of the institution’s mystique, at least in part. Nonetheless, “any large organisation, with its internal divisions, its rituals of self-justification, its management pretensions and disgruntled workforce,

will yield up some of its internal complexities and secrets to anthropological study” (Born, 2004:15); therefore, persistence would be required. And yet, just as I was steeling myself to persist, and planning different angles from which to request access to NIDA, the events described in the Prologue to this thesis took place. In a manner which I would later find was characteristic of NIDA, I suddenly found myself with access to the heart of the beast. My request for more continued access was met with a heady mix of enthusiasm and suspicion, but six months after commencing this research, I had permission to remain.

In a process which my perhaps naïve younger self had thought would be antithetical to academia, a series of phone calls had secured the future of this project. The first had been from Sharon Carnicke to Egil Kipste, the Head of Directing at NIDA. The NIDA program is based on the late-Stanislavkian approach known as Active Analysis (AA), the most comprehensive translation of which has been produced by Carnicke, who also teaches at the University of Southern California. As well as attending the ADSA conference, Carnicke had met and conducted classes with Kipste’s students at NIDA. Kipste, who had been at the conference but left before my own presentation on the final day, then called me. I was, as often during my career as a student, in rehearsal for a production I was directing. He left a voicemail message in which he explained who he was, and that on Carnicke’s and others’ recommendations, he would like me to come and lead a session with his students. Listening to it late at night, outside for the first time in hours, I can only remember thinking, “I know who you are!”. The promised class was set for some weeks later, and after it had been (relatively) successfully completed, Kipste invited me to a meeting to discuss my research plans and how NIDA could be incorporated into them. He then became something of a champion of my work, facilitating a meeting with the appropriate staff to approve access and speaking eloquently to their concerns. That this thesis exists in this form is testament to his persistence and support. Kipste

later invited me to devise a new curriculum, and then teach the seminars, for one of the core coursework subjects for the Directing program, which I did across the three subsequent years of this research. This is returned to in more detail in Chapter 4 below.

I recount this story at length because I feel that it makes apparent some quite persuasive things about the kind of institution with which this thesis is dealing. The first is the scepticism towards outsiders, who might not after all be sympathetic to the needs or peculiarities of those within. Much of the contemporary history of NIDA to which I return throughout the narrative in these pages turns on who can be considered to be an insider and why. Secondly, the story of my project's approval shows the importance of the personal imprimatur: having been recommended by Carnicke, I was then allowed to present my wares to Kipste, who could then recommend me to his colleagues as a trustworthy, or at least a non-destructive, researcher. The idea implied here, of being *the right kind of person*, resonates throughout this research project. Finally, it is important I think to note that I was invited into NIDA at least in part because of my experience as a director in student theatre. My conference paper, and the subsequent first session at NIDA, detailed my experiences on some recent productions, and while my own creative practice was not relevant to the work I went on to do there, it did contribute to opening that first door. Again, the importance of being the right kind of person to be welcome at NIDA is displayed here – not only did I 'know my stuff', but I had the right kind of disposition; as a 'fellow creative' in this limited capacity, I possess the right kind of *habitus* to succeed at NIDA. Even in this small moment of being allowed into the Institute, much is displayed about the logic of practice within the field, as I return to throughout this thesis.

Thanks to the access which this first cautious interaction secured, the NIDA Directing program became the site of the major ethnographic fieldwork which drove this project. The approval which was granted in the first instance was not renegotiated in the years which

followed, partly I suspect because I was able to become an unobtrusive presence in my small corner of the Institute. It is also worth noting that the postgraduate programs operate as something of an independent fiefdom from the rest of the Institute, and by on the whole avoiding the undergraduate side of the Institute, I was able to fly mostly under the radar. There will no doubt be some people within the Institute who will consider this kind of work to have overstepped the boundaries by revealing even these limited operations. I maintain that the account which follows, although both analytical and critical, is not interested in evaluating the program against any imagined standards of success or failure, but rather in exploring the realities of teaching and learning in the creative arts. I would also like to acknowledge here the balancing act which my teaching involvement with the course necessitated in this research: the students whom I taught were invited to become active participants in the project through interview after graduation. Many of them generously agreed, and I have chosen to honour their trust and good faith by anonymising them by a letter and year of graduation, such as Student A (2010). Some interviewees, either at the time of interview or afterwards, requested that their responses not be quoted directly and I have respected that wish – their responses inform what I have written here, but their words do not appear. Like McAuley in her work on rehearsal, this thesis navigates a “fine line between betraying confidences by telling too much and failing to engage with the reality of the practice by telling too little” (2012:18). The cohorts of graduates whose experiences both in the course and afterwards informed this research were the classes of 2010, 2011, 2012, and 2013. In this time there were a total of twenty-six graduates in Directing.

Finally, I should acknowledge here that at the same time as conducting research at NIDA, I was employed at the University of Sydney: both in an academic context, as a tutor then a teaching fellow in the Department of Performance Studies; and in an administrative

capacity, in the Student Services division of the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences.

Throughout this thesis, I incorporate my experiences learning and working at Sydney into the narrative of the Directing program at NIDA. I do this in particular as a way of illustrating how some of the debates and concerns which have been affecting practice at NIDA are resonating through the wider field of higher education in Australia. This is not intended to turn this document into a simplistic comparative study, but rather to provide a constant reminder that these changes and challenges are not confined to a single institution and instead a wider analysis could find evidence of their effects throughout the field. This is the hermeneutic to which this thesis aspires, explored later in the final section of this Chapter. Although I have described how NIDA was carefully selected as a site for study, I want to be very clear that this was not done out of any desire to expose the Institute, or to suggest it is an isolated location of unusual behaviour. Of course, any institution has its idiosyncrasies, but I examine NIDA in particular throughout this thesis as a particular institution whose experiences reveal wider debates playing out in the field.

1.4 A Note on Terminology

Before continuing, it is worthwhile making some brief observations about the vocabulary employed by this thesis. I outline in this section four specific choices that I have made with respect to particular words, and then offer some more general observations about how the terminology used by French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu is infused in the work which follows. Already in this Chapter, the word ‘pedagogy’ has appeared, a term drawn from education which has attracted considerable debate (cf. Emig, 2001). In employing it, I do not mean to court controversy, but rather to suggest the idea of sustained attention to teaching practice. In

this, I am following the *Oxford English Dictionary*, which in its most recent edition defines pedagogy as “the method and practice of teaching, especially as an academic subject or theoretical concept” (2013). This dual focus on method *and* practice is the particular value the word pedagogy has to this thesis, capturing as it does both the thinking about and the doing of teaching. Later in this thesis, as I begin to introduce vocabulary drawn from the Sociology of Education, I use terms including “knowledge transfer” (introduced above) and “knowledge legitimation and transmission”. I define these more specifically in Chapter 3; I note here though that pedagogy is used as an umbrella term which encompasses all of these more specific ideas.

In the previous section, I located the primary ethnographic fieldwork for this research at the National Institute of Dramatic Art, known more-or-less universally by the acronym NIDA. When I refer to NIDA in the remainder of this thesis, I have chosen to use ‘the Institute’ as a contraction, with the capital ‘I’ to indicate that I mean NIDA specifically. Amongst the student body, NIDA is more often referred to as ‘School’ – perhaps given the full-time commitment is similar to, or in some cases even exceeds, that of secondary school – however, I have avoided this unless it has occurred in interview with a student, simply because it is a piece of insider vocabulary mostly inappropriate to my task. Two other words related to education must be noted in passing: I have chosen to follow convention in using ‘the academy’ in referring specially to the university education sector. Some may find this unnecessarily oppositional language, however I have taken care to deploy it only when it is used in this general sense to refer to particularly ‘university’ ways of thinking or being. It is written with a small ‘a’ to reiterate that it refers to a general category not a specific institution. Finally, there is the word ‘conservatoire’, a French borrowing used primarily in British English. The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines the term as follows: “a college for the study of classical music or other

arts, typically in the continental European tradition” (2013). The distinctive feature here is the sustained study of a single art form, in an institution dedicated solely to that practice. I use the term principally to avoid confusion: it refers to a distinctive approach to teaching and learning, rather than a single institution. I often compare conservatoires and universities in this regard, an opposition explored further in Chapter 2.

Earlier in this Chapter, I made some observations about the development of performance studies at the University of Sydney, suggesting the study of rehearsal as a key point of *distinction*. Another important intellectual influence, perhaps reflecting broader movements in critical theory, is the work of Bourdieu, which is becoming increasingly indispensable to scholars in this discipline. Again, my intention here is not to descend into definitional debate, but rather to provide a brief gloss of the meaning this document has ascribed to particular sociological terms. The primary term, encountered already in this Chapter, is ‘field’, defined by Bourdieu late in his career as the social space within which interactions, transactions, and events occur (2005:148). Further, a field is “a separate universe governed by its own laws” (Bourdieu, 2005:7). It is important to note at this point that a field is not fixed in place, and indeed fields are often characterised by a constant renegotiation of boundaries: “A social field is not fixed, and it is possible to trace the *history* of its specific shape, operation and the range of knowledge required to maintain it and adapt it” (Thomson, 2008:70). It is also impossible to generalise about fields, as “fields are shaped differently according to the game that is played on them. They have their own rules, histories, star players, legends, and lore” (Thomson, 2008:69), which necessitates sustained attention to the shape of a given field. Finally, agents⁷ can find themselves operating across different fields; an agent is not fixed in position in one field to the exclusion of her participation in others.

⁷ The words ‘agent’ and ‘actor’ are often used interchangeably in sociological texts; I use ‘agent’ throughout this thesis to avoid any confusion with the creative profession which is also mentioned in these pages.

Two further ideas crucial to this thesis flow directly from an understanding of field, namely *capital* and *habitus*, which are each specific to individual fields. As Thomson notes, “even though a field is profoundly *hierarchised*, with dominant social agents and institutions having considerable power to determine what happens within it, there is still agency and change” (2008:73, emphasis in original). This kind of hierarchy is established through the operation of *capital*; fields are antagonistic sites of struggle, and what is at stake is *capital*. Differing forms of *capital* are valued in different fields, and crucially agents “who begin with particular forms of *capital* are advantaged at the outset because the field depends on, as well as produces more of, that *capital*” (Thomson, 2008:69, my emphasis). The way in which *capital* is valued is also related to another key term: “each social field has its *distinction* [...] which are expressions of the volumes and type of cultural and economic *capital* at stake in the specific field” (Thomson, 2008:71-2, my emphasis). The *distinction* of a field is therefore key in establishing its structure and hierarchy, Finally, agents in each field also display a particular *habitus*, which can be crudely summarised as a the logic of practice within a field. “Simply put, *habitus* focusses on our ways of acting, feeling, thinking, and being” (Maton, 2008:52), which emphasises that a *habitus* is a set of dispositions and interests held by an individual. In keeping with the field, *habitus* is also a dynamic, evolving condition, which changes based on “how we carry within us our history [and] how we bring this history into our present circumstances” (Maton, 2008:52). This thesis returns to considerations of *habitus* in more detail below in Chapters 5 and 6, where I consider how an institution dominant within a field might inculcate a particular *habitus* in agents active within that field.

Finally, I must consider the way in which field and *habitus* might interact, which introduces two further, related concepts: *doxa* and *illusio*. In considering the dynamic, hermeneutic relationship between field and *habitus*, Maton observes that

The two structures are homologous – they represent objective and subjective realisations of the same underlying social logic—and mutually constituting, in that each helps shape the other. Crucially, they are also both evolving, so relations between *habitus* and field are ongoing, dynamic and partial: [...] this allows for the relationship between the structure of a field and the *habitus*es of its members to be one of varying degrees of fit or mismatch (2008:57).

This interaction is characterised by the operation of *doxa*, which Bourdieu defined as “a set of fundamental beliefs which does not even need to be asserted in the form of an explicit, self-conscious dogma” (2000:16). *Doxa* can therefore be understood as the rules of the game, known instinctively to all agents who carry the *habitus* of the field; a fit between field and *habitus* is marked by an attunement on the part of the agent to the *doxa* (Maton, 2008:57). Each agent in the field also carries an *illusio*, or an interest and investment in the struggles which mark that field. This *illusio* has “all the appearances of being natural, while it is indeed a product of the field, as a collective act, apprehended by individuals according to their own socially constructed *habitus*” (Grenfell, 2008:160-1). Agents in the field need to invest in its *illusio* in order to ‘play the game’, and the “smooth running of social mechanisms depends on the maintenance of this *illusio*” (Grenfell, 2008:161). As this section has demonstrated, these ideas are intertwined and interdependent, and I return to them alongside practical examples in the following Chapters. In order to differentiate the latter terms from any potential ‘everyday’ meanings, I will *italicise* Bourdieusian terminology throughout this thesis.

1.5 Mapping this Thesis

Previously in this Chapter, I have considered the inspirations and motivations behind this research project, and provided some background on the terminological and methodological choices which I have made in its execution. It remains for me, therefore, to provide a roadmap for the remainder of this document, one that sets out the broad sweep of the arguments which

I make in these pages, and locates the ethnographic fieldwork that follows. As I outlined earlier, my case studies are drawn from my own experiences both at NIDA and at the University of Sydney, and I will consider in this section how each are embedded within the fabric of my central argument. Finally, I must reiterate here that the analysis which follows models a kind of hermeneutic process: the thesis begins with the macro concerns of the field, describing the global forces which are currently affecting it, then moves into a specific piece of micro fieldwork as an illustration of these debates at play ‘on the ground’, before moving back out to the global level to reconsider wider implications for the field. The utility of this work is therefore confined neither to this particular course, nor to directing training in general, but rather in the broader implications it has for the study of teaching and learning in the creative arts.

Chapter 2 sets out historical information about NIDA, in an effort to contextualise the fieldwork which follows. It begins with a description of the omnipresence of history on the walls of the Institute, noting that this is a very particular history of individual personalities. Although the walls present a great deal of information about who studied at the Institute, this tells nothing about *what* they learnt when they were there, nor indeed *how* they learnt it. To begin considering these questions, the Chapter goes on to provide a different kind of history of the Institute, read through the lens of its relationship with the field of higher education in Australia. I concentrate on three particular moments in NIDA’s history: the first of these is the lead up to the foundation of the Institute in 1959, including in particular the role of the Australian Elizabethan Theatre Trust; the second is the history of director training at NIDA, including the Production course taught from 1960, and the specific Student Directing course from 1972 onwards; and thirdly, the current position, which I argue can be dated to Lynne Williams’s appointment as Director/CEO in 2008. Chapter 2 concludes with some

information about how I encountered the NIDA of 2010 at the commencement of this research, including the shape of the contemporary Directing program which I will go on to examine. This historical background is crucial to understanding the nature of the teaching and learning which goes on at NIDA, and I argue that the role of tradition and history must be acknowledged in any understanding of the present-day Institute.

Chapter 3 begins with an example, drawn from the University of Sydney, of the way in which contemporary debates around pedagogy are influencing practice in the field of higher education. What has been made visible, as this illustration suggests, are the ways in which knowledge is legitimated, as well as how new ways of knowing can be incorporated into a particular field. The remainder of the Chapter goes on to outline a methodology for analysing and understanding precisely these questions: I utilise theory drawn from the sociology of education to outline here different modes of knowledge legitimation. In order to produce the broadest possible overview of this theory, I begin with its antecedents in the work of Basil Bernstein (1990; 2000), who considers how new sets of knowledge can be incorporated into existing disciplines. Rob Moore and Karl Maton (2001) then expand on Bernstein's work by focussing specifically on the way that knowledge is legitimated in intellectual fields, and suggest that knowledge can be specialised with reference either to the epistemic relation (that is, *what* you know), or the social relation (that is, *who* you are) – or, in rare cases, either both or neither. Finally, Moore and Maton contend that these modes of legitimation can also be related to modes of knowledge transmission, and that they can be used to identify the right kind of knower in a given discipline. Throughout the Chapter, I provide practical illustrations drawn from my teaching experience at both NIDA and the University of Sydney. The framework outlined here in Chapter 3 forms the basis of my analyses in the following Chapters.

Case studies become central to Chapter 4, where I begin to draw specifically from the research which I conducted into the Directing program. At this point, I turn from the more public face of the Institute to what goes on behind closed doors. In the opening section to the Chapter, I return to participant-observation research, and consider how

Fieldwork makes it possible to explore the differences between what is said in publicity or in the boardroom and what happens on the ground in the studio, office or cleaning station: it is by probing the gap between principles and practice, management claims and ordinary working lives – between what is explicit and implicit – that a fuller grasp of reality can be gained (Born, 2004:18).

In this work, I am moving between the official rhetoric of the Institute, both in its public documents and in its curriculum planning and design, and the messy reality of the classroom. Chapter 4 is divided between two extended case studies: one of a coursework unit taught each year in the Directing program at NIDA; and the other of a fieldwork expedition to Berlin in 2012. I argue that although, in the former, knowledge could be understood as specialised with reference to the epistemic relation, and the latter with reference to the social relation, the reality of teaching and learning ‘on the ground’ is far messier and necessitates reliance on different modes at different moments. In the conclusion to this Chapter, I consider how NIDA has used its dominant position within the field to broaden the acceptable objects of knowledge in the Directing program to encompass those specialised by either relation – or by both.

Building from this final observation, Chapter 5 proposes that NIDA is now promoting knowledge transmission and legitimation in what Moore and Maton call the *élite mode*; that is, it now matters *both* who you are *and* what you know. In the opening story of this Chapter, I outline some of the recent public rhetoric of the University of Sydney in order to clarify that ‘élite’ is not being used here as a pejorative term, but rather that this coding could be understood as a strength of the program. In order to pursue this argument that the NIDA

program is now characterised by an *élite mode* of teaching and learning, I draw on my fieldwork to consider separate elements of the program which rely on or inculcate an *élite* coding in the students. These elements include: auditions for the course, and the idea of ‘talent’; skills, technique and specialist knowledge; taste; judgment and crisis; and a developed ‘feel’ for it. Finally, I consider a contemporary example of what I consider to be a ‘code clash’, where a knower whose coding previously matched that of the field now finds himself a ‘fish out of water’. This example also returns the broader institutional debates around knowledge to the analysis, reiterating that the issues considered in this thesis are not confined to the specific location of my study alone.

Chapter 6 concludes the fieldwork material by considering the final stage of the directing program under analysis: the graduation productions. As previous Chapters have argued, the course now employs an *élite mode* of teaching and learning, and so Chapter 6 outlines how one of the primary functions of the graduation productions is to demonstrate an *élite* coding in the students. Using the same categories as above, I analyse how successful completion of the graduation production required competencies in these areas. At the same time, the productions are looking forwards and outwards to the industry, and they therefore need to be able to demonstrate an idea of professionalism in the *habitus* of the students. In order to explore this contention, I outline some historical definitions of the professional and then demonstrate how this *habitus* can be related to an *élite* coding, and thereby displayed by students in the course of the rehearsal and presentation of the graduation productions. In this Chapter, the voices of the students become crucial to my analysis, given I am interested in their particular experiences of this process, and contrasting their ‘on the ground’ experience of the process against its official conception in curriculum documents and design. In this way, I am again mining the gap between the public face and the private, lived experience. The Chapter

concludes by speculating that although NIDA has been able to use its position in the field to redraw the terms of achievement, these new forms of *capital* for which graduates are competing may not be recognised or valued by the industry, potentially leading to another kind of code clash.

The final Chapter considers possible conclusions to this project, reflecting the lessons learnt from this fieldwork back onto the wider forces at play in the field of higher education. Chapter 7 considers three key questions: how will NIDA director training proceed in the years to come; what might be the possible ramifications of the changes and debates outlined in this thesis; and how might the research I have conducted here be used in future projects to further explore this under-researched area? As even this brief articulation has suggested, the key enquiry of this thesis has become more and more specific as the research continued – from a general desire to understand what a director might be, to questions of how directors are trained, to an analysis of one particular directing program at a specific moment in time. As well as noting that this is a general phenomenon in doctoral research, this Chapter sets out to emphasise how the specific findings of this thesis might resonate more broadly. All that, though, is a long way off: I provide it here to indicate the destination that this roadmap is leading to, and to indicate how the many pieces of this document will eventually fit together. Without further ado, let us then begin.

chapter two

A Reliance on Tradition

And the reality of course is, that the place of the Arts in Australia, the place of institutions like this in Australia, and the people they have produced, and what they mean to the future of the Australian community, and how we see ourselves, is every bit as emphatic, and every bit as triumphant, as our performance on the sporting field. And that of course, is said by a Prime Minister who's never been shy or reluctant about parading his credentials as either a cricket tragic, or somebody who has a great love of many of the other sports that Australians play

(The Hon. John Howard MP, Prime Minister of Australia, speaking at the opening of the NIDA Parade Theatres complex on 26 October 2001).

2.1 A Story

The history of the National Institute of Dramatic Art (NIDA) adorns the walls of the building throughout the public foyers of the theatre complex, as well as in the teaching spaces accessible only to students and staff. It is a very particular history though; one told through glossy production stills and close-ups of student actors. Much like the group portraits which lined the corridors and common areas of your high school, these photographs are captioned with the names of the productions, the directors, the writers, and the students who featured therein. The age of the photograph is told in the small print; the different generations are only vaguely recognisable through the sharpness of the image, the shifting hair- and costume styles, or the occasional incorporation of audiovisual technology. As you wander through the building, thousands of former students sneer, smile and shout down at you, forever young, obscenely made up and so full of feeling that the glass mounting barely contains it. Amongst the ranks of *ingénues* lurks the occasional now-celebrity, providing the classic “is that...? It is” reaction in visitors. The photographs even shuffle around the walls from time to time, so using them to navigate the building is unreliable.

Other creative ephemera litter the building too: a clapper-board from Jim Sharman’s film of *The Rocky Horror Picture Show*; theatre posters, featuring former staff and students; and posters for upcoming productions. There are signed movie posters from *Elizabeth* and *Hamlet*; these objects are indexical of the presence of famous alumni of the Institute – the signatures of Cate Blanchett and Mel Gibson adorn them – although their placement doesn’t always reflect this. Possibly as a result of his recent public relations problems, Gibson’s *Hamlet* poster, as of November 2012, now lurks on the way from the main theatre space to the men’s bathroom, sandwiched between some anonymous production stills. There are also occasional artworks on the walls, usually painted portraits of former staff, often courtesy of design students. However,

these are far in the minority, and occupy some unusual positions, including on the rear side of the lift shaft in the main foyer of the Institute.

All of these displays, I suggest, are present not for their aesthetic value, but rather because they craft a history of *personality*, suggesting that the history of the Institute can be equated with the personal histories of the students who have studied there. They also make clear promises about the bright futures to which current students can look forward. This presentation of a particular history of the Institute is very much a part then of cultivating a certain *doxa* and *illusio* in the students who study there. By virtue of being immortalised in these photographs, these past students *are* actors, whether or not they went on to have professional careers. This is the *illusio* which is a condition of entry to the field – it can be usefully compared to the way that creatives often talk about ‘wanting it’ as a precondition to a successful creative career. By ‘wanting it’ enough to be studying here, all of these faces are saying, you *will* become an actor despite anything else which might go on. The recognisable faces mixed in with a sea of others become significant here because they act as a reminder that the next Sam Worthington or Judy Davis could well be sitting beside you in class. The photographs are also therefore aspirational – whatever you might be when you enter the building, this place will turn you into a sneering, smiling, shouting professional captured in all your youthful beauty for all of the generations to come. These displays allow the Institute to claim what Pierre Bourdieu terms its *cultural capital* (1986) – moving throughout the building, students, staff, and visitors are constantly reminded that this Institute has trained hundreds of actors, whether or not you recognise their names, and it is them who give it its lustre. In avoiding excessive grandstanding around its most famous alumni, the Institute also reminds you that the stars of today were students like any others, but students who studied at *this* particular place.

Of course, this is a very selective way for history to function, and a particularly dangerous one for the fates of the students, given it privileges individuals over the institution itself. The constant presence of these photographs and historical objects throughout the public spaces of the Institute would suggest a preoccupation with and awareness of the history of training in this place; however, this seems to be rarely the case. Blindness to institutional history is so widespread that, if former long-time acting tutor Kevin Jackson is to be believed, the majority of staff would not have realised that their 2010 Christmas party was being held at the site of NIDA's very first classes (cf. Puplick, 2012). NIDA's history is one told through people, and not only that, but through its most successful actors. Despite their leading roles in the Australian creative industries, there are very few pictures of the exploits of graduates from NIDA's extensive technical programs; although the design students' work is incidentally featured in many production photographs, attention is seldom drawn to it. (This also starts to speak toward the near-ubiquitous assumption that NIDA is an acting school alone, and how the focus on personal characteristics of individuals that this engenders manifests in other areas of life of the Institute, as this thesis will go on to discuss.) This may well be typical of the way creative institutions are being forced to market and present themselves to the world. However, it risks eliding the particularities of institutional histories – although we know Cate Blanchett was taught at NIDA, we have no idea *what* she was taught, nor *how* she was taught it. The scant attention paid to this more complex history can be seen in the fact that there exist only two studies of the history of the Institute, both written by former Directors: Robert Quentin's *NIDA Comes of Age* (1979) and John Clark's *NIDA* (2003).

The fascinating and complex history of NIDA deserves its own book-length study; however, this account will not provide that, choosing instead to concentrate on the Institute's relationship with the wider fields of theatre education and higher education in Australia. To

that end, I have divided this Chapter into three sections, of which the first (section 2.2) introduces the historical background to the establishment of creative arts training in Australia, and the negotiations and machinations which led to the foundation of NIDA. In the second part, section 2.3, I will provide a brief history of NIDA from its foundation onwards, which will concentrate on the relationship of the Institute to the field of higher education, and particularly to the University of New South Wales (UNSW). This section also introduces the development of a specific director training program from its inception to the present day. The last part of the Chapter, section 2.4, will outline the Institute as I encountered it at the commencement of this research in 2010, with a particular emphasis on the Directing program which is the focus of this project. I will finally introduce and analyse two seminal events which I believe have profoundly influenced the future directions of the Institute, and continue to have ramifications through the research which I have conducted there. The purpose of this Chapter then is not to provide a detailed history of the Institute, but rather to contextualise and explore the historical forces which have produced the kind(s) of teaching which goes on there today.

2.2 The Vital Task

Any history of the National Institute of Dramatic Art needs to start with the founding of the Australian Elizabethan Theatre Trust (AETT) in 1954. The Trust was modelled on the Arts Council of Great Britain, whose first chairman John Keynes had secured government funding of the Arts in the years following World War II. The drive to create a body “to provide a theatre of Australians, by Australians, for Australians” (AETT Annual Report, 1957) was led by H. C. “Nugget” Coombs, the then governor of the Commonwealth Bank – a noted Keynesian who had been in public service with the Treasury since 1939. The conservative Prime Minister,

Robert Menzies, was ideologically opposed to a government entity providing direct grants to the Arts, and so the Trust was proposed as an intermediary organisation which would be responsible for distributing funding. In order to secure some Commonwealth funding, Coombs solicited guarantees of donations from major Australian companies (and secured tax-deductable status for the Trust). Approximately 1400 members signed up with a contribution of £5 each, and many “private persons and institutions around Australia [...] became sponsoring members by donating £500 or more” (1957 Annual Report). In the appeal document produced in 1954, the Trust was described as follows:

Intention

To establish a fund to be recognised as a continuing memorial to the visit of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II to Australia and to be used as a basis or a means for helping to promote art, drama, opera and the ballet in Australia on a permanent national basis.

Aims of the Trust

The aim of the trust is to make theatre in Australia the same vigorous and significant force in our national life as it was in England during the reign of the first Elizabeth.

With this purpose the Trust will assist organisations capable of presenting drama, opera and ballet of the highest artistic standards and especially those which give promise of becoming self-supporting within a reasonable time. It will also encourage the establishment of a training school where new talent can be developed (AETT 1, 1954).

At the conclusion of this fundraising drive, the Trust was founded with a budget of £90,000, of which just under £30,000 had been provided by the Commonwealth. Coombs was appointed the Chairman of the Board of Directors of the Trust, and he drove the appointment of the first Executive Director: Hugh Hunt. Hunt had lately been Director of the London Old Vic between 1950 and 1953, and the inaugural Artistic Director of the Bristol Old Vic prior to that.

The early project of the Trust was to set up a national Drama Company. Hunt, seeking assistance from abroad, recruited his former colleague Robert Quentin to head the Drama Company. As Quentin remembers it in interview:

[Hunt] sent me a telegram to come and start a drama company and I accepted and after I accepted he said it would be really better if it was an opera company and not a drama company, which was a bit of a shock (Quentin and de Berg, 1971).

Quentin did as he was told, however, and became the first General Manager of the Australian Opera Company, soon to become the Elizabethan Theatre Trust Opera Company (and precursor to today's Opera Australia). He presented some ambitious programs, but quickly became disillusioned with working as a facilitator in an art form for which he had little affection. His original commitment had been to a creative role, and it had become clear that the General Manager position was solely administrative. The huge costs of touring elaborate sets (it was a core mission of the Trust to present work around the country), and the burden of introducing Australians to an art form for which he believed they had scant appreciation⁸, meant Quentin was actively looking to change the kind of work which he was doing at the Trust. When talk turned to founding a national drama school, Quentin – with his Oxford Masters and experience lecturing in both England and the United States of America prior to coming to Australia – was a natural choice to spearhead the proposal. (Or, at least, he was able to position himself as such, as I go on to discuss below.)

The idea of a drama school did not come out of nowhere; both Hunt and Quentin were responding to a drive gaining momentum around the world towards the professionalisation of creative arts training. In April 1951, the University of Bristol hosted a “Symposium on the Responsibility of the Universities to the Theatre” through its Department of Drama. This Department, founded in 1947, was the first academic drama department in the United Kingdom, although drama departments had existed in the United States at an undergraduate level since 1914 at the Carnegie Institute of Technology and a postgraduate

⁸ In the Australian Elizabethan Theatre Trust archives, held by the National Library of Australia, there are a number of handwritten notes in which Quentin sympathises with correspondents who have criticised the behaviour of Australian opera audiences.

level since 1926 at the Yale Graduate School of Drama (cf. Shepherd and Wallis, 2004; Jackson, 2004). From the published papers delivered at the Symposium, the core debate seems to have centred around whether “drama technique [...] is a specialist occupational study” and the assertion that “such a study belongs not to the University, but in its elementary stage to a technical school, or, in a more specialist form, to the dramatic academies” (Guthrie, 1952:2). This concern, expressed mainly by English academics led by Tyrone Guthrie, was built on a perceived “dangerous tendency of universities to become, not seats of learning, but training centres for jobs” (Guthrie, 1952:2). Their American colleagues countered by asking “what is the use [...] of theory divorced from practice; the validity of theory can only be tested in practice; and, more important, imagination can only be adequately stimulated by practical contact with its subject” (Guthrie, 1952:2). This correlates with Simon Shepherd and Mick Wallis’s assertion that “although it was longer established, American university drama was seen as being rather different from what the British were trying. It was seen as more practice-oriented” (2004:8). In the British tradition, they continue, “there was a sense that, in the mid-1940s, drama was something on a larger social agenda, and the formation of a University Department was meeting a social need” (2004:8).

Hugh Hunt, soon to be appointed Director of the AETT, was in attendance at the 1952 Symposium, and gave a presentation entitled “The Professional Theatre and the Universities”. In it, he anticipates some of the philosophies which would underpin the foundation of NIDA. He suggests, with some prescience, that “[i]n time, dramatic school training will probably become as compulsory for an actor as a degree in medicine is for a doctor” (Hunt, 1952:72). In the paper, Hunt outlines his thoughts on an approach to training, universities and the industry:

Dramatic training, which is at present very far from perfect, should be given all the help that lies in the power of the more experienced teaching professions. By which I mean that where it is possible, the dramatic school and the University department should be closely linked together [...] so that one can help the other (1952:72).

However, he goes on to articulate that “in all of the various crafts of staging a play, the universities can [...] only contribute a general influence. I am convinced that the stage technical schools – although they are as yet far from perfectly organised, are the correct places for our artists and technicians to be trained” (1952:73). This kind of ambivalent environment, where the practical and the theoretical remain separate but are allowed to influence the other fruitfully, would go on to have a defining influence at NIDA.

There is little surviving documentation of the period when the Trust began to consider its involvement with a drama school, perhaps because it fell under the auspices of so many different organisations. Both Quentin and Hunt recall it simply as a productive meeting of minds (perhaps recalling that 1951 symposium), with Quentin declaring in a 1971 interview:

It became clear that it was necessary to start a training school for actors and actresses and directors⁹ in Australia and we began – that is to say Hugh Hunt and myself – began to explore ways in which this could be started, and institutions upon which it *might be grafted*. We tried various universities without success, but the one which immediately accepted the proposal was the University of New South Wales, largely because of the enthusiasm of Philip Baxter [...] who was then Vice-Chancellor (Quentin and de Berg, 1971, my emphasis).

The intention to affiliate the school with a University was apparently present from the beginning of the proposal. In the 1957 Annual Report on the activities of the Trust, Hugh Hunt looks forward to the Trust’s activities in the years to come:

TRAINING: We are pursuing the vital task of establishing a school for actors and technicians. This we expect shortly to achieve *in conjunction with* a University. Our aim is to establish a school of Dramatic Art providing a vocational course for stage aspirants

⁹ This is a very early mention of director training; however, this interview was conducted in 1971, just as NIDA was about to begin the Student Director’s Course. It is for this reason that I do not ascribe further significance to it.

as well as general opportunities for University students to study the theatre (AETT 2, 1957, my emphasis).

In keeping with its stated goal of ‘democratising’ arts practices around the country, the Trust was intent on not just creating a professional school, but also enabling the tertiary study of drama. This was still unusual in the English tradition of tertiary study (although Bristol again provides an exception), and there was no dedicated academic department of drama at any of the universities around Australia at the time. (Quentin later cited his experience of the ‘integrated’ drama schools in America as a model for the proposals that led to NIDA’s foundation.) Official meetings began to take place between ‘Nugget’ Coombs, Hugh Hunt, and Charles Moses, the General Manager of the Australian Broadcasting Commission¹⁰, all of whom were on the Board of Directors of the AETT. Robert Quentin was invited to attend these meetings, although he did not sit on the Board.

The documents which have survived from the period suggest that the Trust was prepared to proceed with this ‘grafting’ with any institution that presented itself. The memorandum around how such an Institution might be founded

sets out proposals for the establishment of a theatre school by the New South Wales Department of Technical Education and the Elizabethan Theatre Trust in co-operation with the University of Sydney and the University of New South Wales. Plans which have already been discussed with the University of Melbourne, the University of New South Wales, the Rockefeller Foundation and other interested bodies have been modified to make education in theatre readily available to widely different categories of student (AETT 1, 1954).

So from all of this early information, we can see two threads emerging: a determination on the part of the Trust that any training institution be hosted by a university; and a sense of public duty to make a dramatic education widely available through the provision of non-vocational programs. The proposal goes through a few different forms, under the name of the Australian

¹⁰ The name did not change to the Australian Broadcasting Corporation until 1983.

Theatre Institute, followed by the Australian Institute of Dramatic Art. This later proposal eventually makes its way to the Dean of the School of Humanities at the University of New South Wales, Morven Brown, who writes a comprehensive submission around the various models of training which the University might be able to offer. In the document, entitled “Recommendations regarding suggested new courses in drama”, he proposes a drama program within the School of English, as well as hosting the Institute on the site.

It is submitted that while the University’s primary concern is and should be the establishment of academic courses of the type described above, there are good reasons why at this point it should go further and accept responsibility for a professional training course in acting for the stage, in radio and in television. The time is ripe for the foundation of such a School in the national interest. Informal discussions have made clear that the Elizabethan Theatre Trust is eager to co-operate with the University in creating a dramatic Institute on a high professional and academic level. In agreeing to such co-operation the University would be making an outstandingly important contribution to the cultural life of the community.

The University would also benefit from having a School of Acting within its grounds. Properly trained students could enhance existing literature and drama courses by offering competent performances of plays and illustrative readings. Opportunities could be found for various groups of students to join with the acting school in dramatic shows and so enrich the whole cultural life of the University. The School of Humanities and the University would gain prestige from sponsoring the public production of plays of high literary and artistic merit.

These advantages are so clear and considerable that a case could, it is believed, be easily made out for the direct establishment of an acting school under the exclusive aegis of the School of Humanities and Social Sciences. This is not recommended, out of deference to the view that the University should not be solely responsible for a course of training that includes some elements such as mime and dancing, or practical stage work that do not seem to be of academic character; and also to the view – which I share with many – that undergraduate diplomas have no rightful place in a University.

An alternative to direct University control – and one that is here recommended – is that the University collaborate with the Elizabethan Theatre Trust in funding an Institute of Dramatic Art. The pattern of Institutes organically associated with Universities is already well accepted in Britain [...]

It is recommended that the proposed Institute should be governed by a Board of Studies comprising three representatives of the University, three of the Trust and possibly two of the Australian Broadcasting Commission, under the chairmanship of an additional University representative. The Senior Lecturer in Dramatic Art [appointed by the UNSW] could, if he [sic] were paid an additional appropriate allowance, act as Director of the Institute, that is as its executive officer. In his dual role

he would associate the theatre school with the academic teaching of the University and particularly with the School of Humanities and Social Sciences (AETT 3, 1958).

Around the same time, another proposal for establishing an academic drama program was put forward at the University of Melbourne, driven by John Sumner, who had recently been appointed theatre manager of the Union Theatre on the campus of the University of Melbourne, and supported by then-Vice Chancellor George Paton. Sumner had swiftly expanded the activities of the Theatre in his first years in the job, and founded the Union Theatre Repertory Company (UTRC) – both with Paton’s outspoken support. Shortly thereafter, Sumner was appointed General Manager of the Elizabethan Theatre Trust from 1955. He was therefore working directly with Hunt and Quentin as the proposal was shopped around the various Institutions.

It is difficult to trace precisely how the proposal was shunted between Sydney and Melbourne, and the timeframe at which it was under consideration at each institution, as there is a lack of accounts written at the time. Some of the major players, though, presented their own version of events in the following decades. Philip Baxter recalled in a later interview the circumstances which led the Institute to the University of New South Wales:

I said I would assist in any way I could. [The Trust] also mentioned that Sir George Paton, Vice-Chancellor of Melbourne University, was very keen that such a school should be established in Melbourne.

When I heard this, I more or less retired from pursuing the proposal because Melbourne University was much bigger than us and, in addition, it had the Union Theatre on its campus. I couldn’t see how we could compete against those odds so I suggested to Sir George, whom I knew very well, ‘go ahead, it’s yours’. A couple of months went by and one morning I had a phone call from Sir George telling me that the Professorial Board had rejected the proposal outright and that one Professor said it was not the duty of the University to train actors...so he suggested that if I was still interested I should feel free to take up the matter. I immediately contacted ‘Nugget’ Coombs, [Hugh] Hunt and [Charles] Moses and in 1958 NIDA was ‘born’ (Baxter and Barclay, 1983).

John Sumner, in his later autobiography, recalls a variation on the same theme:

During 1957 I had launched the idea of a Department of Drama to be attached to the University of Melbourne. I had gone through this in detail and talked with Sir George Paton and some members of the Academic Board. Hugh Hunt took on the negotiations while I was overseas [touring *Summer of the Seventeenth Doll*] and for a while the prospects seemed promising. Eventually, however, negotiations failed because apparently the proposal could not satisfy the Board's insistence on a degree.

The idea had a better reception from Professor (later Sir Philip) Baxter, VC of the New South Wales University of Technology, Kensington (subsequently the University of New South Wales), where I believe Dr. Coombs's sympathies also lay. This initiative was strongly championed by Robert Quentin, who had his eye on becoming head of the proposed school (1993:92).

The natural geographical bias of the Trust, based in Sydney and with the majority of their activities taking place there despite the interstate offices, seems to have sealed the deal, along with Melbourne's insistence that practical training for the theatre had no place in a university context. This debate over the place of a practical course of study in supposedly theoretical halls of learning would go on to dominate the development of the field in Australia.

There remains the provocative question of what the University of New South Wales thought they were going to 'get out of' their affiliation with the Institute, which is partially answered by the Dean's submission quoted extensively above. Baxter's passion for the Institute is another murky area, though evidence suggests that he was a keen amateur dramatist, and had long supported arts practice.¹¹ With Baxter's enthusiastic support driving the proposal from the top, final plans for the Institute came together very quickly. Funding arrangements were formalised whereby the University and the Trust each contributed £4,000 to the running of the Institute in its first year, supported by the in-kind offer of production and technical facilities from the ABC. The University offered the use of "an old totaliser, a beautiful two-storey timber

¹¹ Not only did he meet his wife in the local dramatic society, but he may also have acted in one of the Old Tote's early productions. There is some confusion in the source material around this. Baxter was certainly involved in the Drama program at the University, though whether this was through the Old Tote or the University Drama Club is unclear. He reportedly acted and directed, including the George Bernard Shaw play *The Devil's Disciple*. For more details, cf. Gissing (2007).

house, and a lot of ancient huts” (Quentin, 1979:n.p.). At the last minute, there was a name change – in the Board of Directors meeting on 3 September 1958,

Mr Quentin reported that the Register of Companies would not accept the name first proposed for the Institute, ‘The Australian Institute of Dramatic Art’, since a similar name had already been registered. A new name, ‘The National Institute of Dramatic Art’, was adopted by the Board (NIDA 428, 1958).

So it was then, perhaps, that NIDA was ‘born’. After the Institute was officially established on 28 July 1958, the first meeting of the Board of Studies took place on 18 September 1958 and the first students arrived for class on 23 February 1959.

2.3 A Brief History of NIDA

It seems like everyone has an opinion on NIDA. Any mention of the Institute in academic or even social circles usually uncovers an unexpected *alumna*, or at least someone with a horror story of their NIDA rejection. Like any elite institution, it is treated with a curious mix of reverence and cynicism. However, given the extent to which it seems to have captured the public imagination around the performing arts, it is surprisingly difficult to find information about the history of the Institute. As noted above, Quentin and Clark’s books are ‘insider’ accounts, and they come with obvious weaknesses, not least because they remain very general in nature. Rather than attempt here the valuable task of a full history of the Institute, I will instead concentrate on three particular moments within that story: the foundation of the Institute in 1958, and the relationship with the University sector at that time; the establishment of director training in 1972; and the change agenda which swept through the Institute in the early 2010s. As I will go on to explore in the remainder of this thesis, it is the particular decisions taken in these moments which have affected the contemporary teaching

and learning which goes on at NIDA. This Section argues that the history of the Institute resonates throughout its contemporary operations. The narrative I present here, especially of NIDA's early days, draws on incomplete documentary evidence, as the foundation of the Institute resulted from collaboration between a number of different bodies, and each of their archives tells a different part of the story.¹² I have indicated below where my own speculation has been required to fill gaps.

(a) The National Institute of Dramatic Art at the University of New South Wales

The Institute itself was established after some debate as a company limited by guarantee, with a Board composed mainly of representatives of the three groups who had contributed financially to its establishment. In the "Constitution" of the Institute, given as an extract in the Course Prospectus for 1959, its aims are summarised as follows:

The objects [sic] of the Institute are to encourage the knowledge and appreciation of drama, opera, music, and all the arts of the theatre and, in particular, to train students who wish to make their careers in the theatre, television, radio and film (NIDA, 1959).

From the outset then, as captured in this document, these two aims of the Institute are recognised, although the vocational training is given far greater emphasis than increasing the public profile of the creative arts. Later in the same Prospectus, the "Future Plans" of the Institute are introduced:

In due course, it is proposed that the activities of the Institute will be widened. In addition to the two-year Diploma course [in Acting], other full and part time courses may be offered in acting, production, design, opera, playwriting and the teaching of drama [...] The academic side of the Institute's activities will be increased in step with the development of the School of Humanities and Social Sciences and the establishment of a Faculty of Arts at the University (NIDA, 1959).

¹² As I detail further in the Bibliography, documents quoted in this Chapter come either from the NIDA Archive, held by NIDA, or the AETT's archive, which is held by the National Library of Australia. I have indicated in each quotation from which archive it is drawn.

In line with the proposal taken to the University of New South Wales Board, NIDA's first Director, Robert Quentin, was also appointed a Senior Lecturer in the School of English, with a view to establishing a separate academic drama program.

This division between the practice-led programs offered by the Institute and the theory-led programs at the University, formalised at the foundation of both, would come to define how NIDA interacts with the wider field of higher education, even in the present day. The relationship quickly became confused, perhaps because the same individuals were involved in the management of both; however, Quentin's dual roles also allowed him to carefully manage the distinctions between the different programs. The inaugural Prospectus states that the Institute was "[e]stablished in 1958 *under the auspices* of the University of New South Wales" (NIDA, 1959, my emphasis), and by the time the Department of Drama was established independently in 1963, the two programs were being advertised in a single document entitled "Drama at the University of New South Wales". This document nonetheless maintained a distinction between the two:

The Department of Drama began in 1960 as part of the School of English, and became a separate department within the Faculty of Arts of the University in 1963. The Department offers undergraduate courses in Drama leading to the degree of the Bachelor of Arts, and also postgraduate courses. These courses are concerned with the critical and historical evaluation of the theatre arts and are quite different in purpose from the vocational training offered at the National Institute (NIDA, 1965).

Robert Quentin, in the 1971 interview quoted above, provides some more detail about how the two courses differed at the time when he was in charge of both:

The academic School of Drama [...] is concerned with an examination of drama, with the academic study of drama, with the acquisition of knowledge and taste but not necessarily with the acquisition of skills which lead to the profession (Quentin and de Berg, 1971).

Even if it was sometimes poorly articulated, the men who set up these programs had a clear model in their minds of how the functions of each were to differ. It does seem, though, that there was no intention to separate the institutions absolutely, but rather to allow for fruitful connections and collaborations to inform the study at both.

The relationship between NIDA and the University became even more complex when, as Quentin puts it, the University staff “became rather bored with trying to teach drama in a vacuum” (Quentin and de Berg, 1971). (He refers here not only to teaching theoretical material without practical examples, but also to the same idea that the young Australia was a ‘cultural vacuum’ to which A. A. Phillips had been responding in *The Cultural Cringe* [1950:299] more than a decade earlier.) Quentin’s conviction that theory must be matched by practice led to the foundation of the Old Tote Theatre Company (the Tote) in 1963, which quickly became an important resource for both the University and the Institute. For a brief period in 1963, Quentin was even in charge of all three. In a manner very similar to that described in Morven Brown’s submission in favour of establishing the Institute, the Tote provided an opportunity for students pursuing the academic study of drama and other humanities disciplines to see professional-level work. For NIDA, the Tote became a source of employment for its graduates, providing a kind of trade apprenticeship system, and also a resource for students of the Production Course (introduced in 1960) to gain valuable practical experience during their coursework at the Institute. Supported by both the University and the Trust, the Tote quickly became one of Australia’s most high-profile cultural institutions (cf. South and Scott, 1973). Shortly after the establishment of the Tote, Quentin had handed his position at NIDA over to the new Director, Tom Brown.¹³

¹³ Brown was the Director of NIDA between Quentin and Clark, from 1963 to 1969. He had previously been the Deputy to Quentin, and was the co-founder with Quentin of the Old Tote.

Another staff member crucial to NIDA's development in the early days was John Clark, a young Tasmanian who had been appointed to the staff in 1959 on the basis of his successful production of *Death of a Salesman* for the Hobart Repertory Society. Clark was appointed as a tutor in theatre history, and directed a number of significant productions for the Tote before ascending to the position of Director of the Institute in 1969 – a position he would hold until his retirement in 2004. Shortly after his appointment, he collaborated with founding Director Quentin to produce a document entitled “The Future of NIDA” in 1970. This piece is a comprehensive articulation of the value of the institutional collaboration that had characterised the early years of the Institute, the Department of Drama and the Tote:

1. The Present Position

The University of New South Wales has a drama complex which, in British universities, is unique. Only the largest of American universities can claim the association of an academic school, a training Institute, a professional theatre, and a Drama Foundation. Beginning in 1959 with grants of approximately £10 000, the drama complex in 1970 will receive grants of over \$230 000.

The organisation has a national as well as a regional importance. NIDA is the sole national school for professional theatre training, the Old Tote is recognised as one of the two main national drama companies and the academic school is the largest in the country, with only one small competitor in Adelaide.¹⁴ [...]

2. Advantages of the Present Organisation

A. The units of the organisation, the academic school, NIDA, and the Old Tote, are interdependent and complement each other. The academic school needs the example of performance and close association with the profession and professional training. NIDA needs the Old Tote and relies upon it for its apprenticeship system. A training school divorced from a professional theatre is barren. NIDA also needs contact with the academic school. The Old Tote is greatly enriched by association with NIDA and with the academic school.

B. The staff members of the organisation interchange and participate in the activities of all three, to mutual benefit. [...]

E. An example of the close ties between the separate parts of the organisation is the production in 1968 of a new play by Thomas Keneally, *Childermas*. This play was first commissioned by the Drama Foundation, the script was developed by the author with two staff members of the academic school, the play was then presented

¹⁴ This refers to the Flinders Drama Centre, established under the auspices of the Flinders University of South Australia, which I discussed above in Chapter 1.

by the Old Tote under the direction of a staff member of NIDA (NIDA 579, 1970).

So at the same time as we can see the articulation of distinct identities between the different institutions operating at the University of New South Wales, a very conscious effort is also made to assert their “interdependence”. It is worth noting that this document is a kind of prelude to asking the University to fund new buildings for the Institute, and so the case may be slightly overstated. The next ten years of the Institute’s history would be pre-occupied with this question of facilities, leading to flirtations with the Sydney College of the Arts (SCA) and the University of Sydney¹⁵, before UNSW granted NIDA the use of the Parade buildings on the Western campus in 1981 (cf. Clark, 2003).

From this high point, the close association between the organisations faltered. Partly, this was a natural product of a change of personnel: so much of the historical association had been driven by Quentin himself, who sat on the Board of NIDA even after he no longer served as Director. The Old Tote faltered and spluttered out across the middle years of the 1970s, although NIDA had a close relationship with its successor, the Sydney Theatre Company (STC). This was facilitated through Elizabeth Butcher, Clark’s long serving General Manager (a position she held from 1970 to 2008), who was asked by the New South Wales government to oversee the foundation of the STC on the premises she had suggested in Walsh Bay. Clark too was much more interested than his predecessors had been in the Institute’s independence, and carving a profile for the Institute separate from its academic sponsor’s. Throughout the boom years which followed, NIDA became synonymous with acting training in Australia, and its academic and administrative history faded into the background. In terms of providing the

¹⁵ In particular, the construction of the Seymour Theatre Centre on the grounds of the University of Sydney, and the subsequent debate over how the facility might best be used, provided a fruitful moment where the institutions might have collaborated. Such a union is envisaged by the terms of the Seymour bequest, which specifically cites education as a use for the space. It was ultimately decided that such a move would compromise the Institute’s independence—a far cry from the “interdependence” asserted in the 1970 document.

foundation on which to build a successful theatre industry in Australia, though, the Institute has surely exceeded even its founders' wildest expectations. On leaving his position at the Trust in 1960, Hugh Hunt wrote in *The Making of Australian Theatre*:

If, in my endeavour to make Australian theatre, I have succeeded in no more than helping to bring this School of Acting into being, then this alone will be worthwhile, for upon this foundation the theatre can be built (1960:31).

(b) Director Training at NIDA

Having discussed the conditions of the Institute's foundation as a whole, I will now turn my attention to the establishment of director training at NIDA, as this provides vital context for the fieldwork which follows in the remainder of this thesis. *De facto* director training has existed since the early days of the Institute, given the way in which production experience was incorporated into the original Production Course. The Prospectus for the first year of the Production Course, taught from 1961 to 1971, offers the following description:

Students of production will attend some of the courses already offered to students of the acting course, and will gain practical experience [...] with staff producers in the direction of plays at the Institute (in 1960 ten full-length plays were produced). Main subjects of instruction for students of production will be stage management, lighting, the making of scenery, properties and costume, the interpretation of a text, the direction of actors and the history of theatre (NIDA, 1960).

Even in such a brief articulation, this is a very full offering for a two year course, most especially one which is not being offered at a degree level. At this time, the only two courses offered by the Institute were the Production and the Acting courses, and so the former covered the vast majority of both technical and creative roles in the theatre. (It should be noted of course that the word Production is being used here in the British sense of the position occupied by the contemporary director [cf. Mellor, 2013, personal correspondence].) A year later, the

description of the course offered in the 1961 Prospectus had become even clearer: “[students] will study the problems of interpretation of scripts, the direction of actors and the preparation of productions. Finally, each student will produce a play at the Institute” (NIDA, 1961). With the founding and development of the Tote from 1963, the Production students gained further exposure to professional production.

Aubrey Mellor, who was the staff member in charge of the Student Director’s Course when it was first established and a graduate of this original Production course, asserted that the

Production Course was more successful than what followed because of its demanding training in all areas of theatre (we had to work on Old Tote shows as well as do acting classes and design etc). That was the course that produced Jim Sharman, Rex Cramphorn, Rick Billingham¹⁶, Rodney Fisher, Nigel Triffit, Kim Carpenter and myself amongst others (2013, personal correspondence).

Quite apart from his assertions about the success or otherwise of the courses, the breadth of this training is unique certainly in terms of the training which has followed. (The requirement of producing or directing a full-length play for the Institute has been diluted in subsequent years, as I will explore below.)

The developments in 1972, then, are particularly significant as they mark a kind of specialisation of the training offered at the Institute. Rather than maintain this kind of jack-of-all-trades Production course, the previous content of the course was split across three courses: a three-year undergraduate course in Technical Production, “an expanded version of the Stage-Management [sic] courses to be found in most British schools”; a three-year undergraduate course in Design, which “grew out of an increasing demand by aspirant designers”; and a one-year, nominally postgraduate, Student Director’s Course (NIDA, 1972). At the same time, the

¹⁶ Billingham, perhaps the least recognisable of these names to a contemporary reader, was Associate Director of the Melbourne Theatre Company, and later the first salaried Director of the La Boite Theatre Company in Brisbane.

undergraduate course in acting was expanded to three years of full-time training. These courses remained close to the previous offerings at least in part because of concerns around the ability of the Institute to provide sufficient resources. At the Board Meeting on 23 April 1971, “the Director explained that it was intended to accept only a very limited number of students into these courses [Design and Student Director’s] in 1972 and that they could be put into operation with some additional part time teaching” (NIDA M002, 1971:94).

The rationale behind adopting training for directors at this time was outlined by Clark in his Director’s Report of 1972, presented to the Board after he had completed a tour of theatre schools across the world.

The Director in the contemporary theatre occupies a position of greater responsibility and influence than ever before. The quality of a national theatre depends ultimately on the quality of its directors.

Australia is desperately short of skilled directors at a time when professional theatre activity is rapidly expanding.

The Student Director’s Course (commencing in 1972) is a development of great importance and likely to occupy an increasingly prominent place in the work of the Institute. It follows the pattern already well developed in Poland where the Ministry of Culture recognises the importance and the high cost of training directors; where the courses of study are post-graduate, long, arduous and thorough. A similar pattern is emerging in Great Britain where the Bristol Old Vic School and Drama Centre, London both offer extensive training courses for potential directors (NIDA, 1972).

This report was delivered after the Student Director’s Course had begun, but it nonetheless provides the most coherent summary of why the Institute was offering a specialist course around that time. The necessity of involving the Student Directors with the other courses is made very clear, and confirmed in the 1973 syllabus document. In the Prospectus for the 1972 Student Director’s Course, the Institute asserts that “it is essential for the young director to gain knowledge and experience of acting, design, and stage-management [sic]” (NIDA 654, 1972).

This collaborative focus also reveals that the Student Director’s course was originally conceived of as a kind of ‘top-up’ to the existing training offered by the Institute, as the original syllabus proposed in 1971 states: “Membership of the course will be open to both immediate and/or past graduates of the Institute; and to applicants whose educational background and professional theatre experience would indicate their potential as directors” (NIDA 654, 1972). This stipulation implied that only directors with a solid skills background would be admitted to the course and suggests a rationale for why the course was proposed as a single year of study from the outset, and at least nominally, be offered at a postgraduate level. In the Prospectus for the 1972 course, the nature of the prior qualifications required is made even more explicit: “an appropriate educational qualification (e.g. University, Advanced Education, Technical College or NIDA Diploma)” (NIDA, 1971). Despite being initially pitched to existing graduates of other NIDA courses, in the first decade of its operation, only three of the twenty-five graduates of the Student Director’s course had been admitted on the basis of a NIDA Diploma.¹⁷ Another ambition, never realised, amongst these early plans for the course was the assumption that the course would expand when sufficient scope was available. In his 1972 Director’s Report, John Clark noted that “with further assistance from the Australian Council for the Arts¹⁸ and from the professional theatre, the Student Director’s Course should eventually receive an emphasis at least equal to the training of actors and stage managers” (NIDA, 1972). This is, clearly, a very high aspiration for the course, given it would require substantial funding to service a three-year (or more) postgraduate level course in directing, especially since it would only accept a small number of students. (In courses that offer training of this length, such as the course offered by the *Hochschule für Schauspielkunst* Ernst Busch in Berlin that is discussed

¹⁷ This information comes from the official NIDA Alumni records.

¹⁸ Now known as the Australia Council, this body is the federal agency for arts funding in Australia. Nugget Coombs played a significant role in advocating for its establishment to Prime Minister Harold Holt in 1967. He became its first chairman when it was established in 1968 as a division of the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, reporting to then Prime Minister John Gorton.

below in Chapter 4, considerable teaching and learning takes place through secondment and off-site observation.) Although funding for the Institute has substantially increased since Clark's statement above, so have the number of courses offered, and the director training has remained one year in length until 2013.

The industrial focus of the course – that is, the assertion that the natural progression should be from director training at drama school directly into the industry – is a relatively new development. The 1972 Course Prospectus, for example, after describing the practical coursework and secondments which potential students would undertake during the course, states that “[t]he Student Director’s Course attempts to provide this kind of experience. It does not pretend to equip young people for *immediate* careers as professional directors” (NIDA, 1971:14, my emphasis). Compare this to the equivalent document produced for the 1998 academic year, where the same section of the information on the Directing Course (“Aims”) now reads: “[t]he Directing course provides a foundation on which to build careers in the arts entertainment industry” (NIDA, 1998:26). At the end of the “Admission Requirements”, a new final sentence has been added in the intervening years: “[t]he primary criterion for admission to the Directing Course is evidence of the applicant’s potential to make a career as a director in the Australian arts entertainment industry” (NIDA, 1998:27). There is an identifiable shift in the later document to the immediate industrial potential of candidates. In part, this is because the earlier version of the course was driven by preparing directors to work *within* companies; perhaps a less common working environment for emergent directors in the twenty-first century, who are increasingly required to create their own work opportunities. Although this coincides with a more general shift in tertiary education towards career-driven outcomes, it is I believe significant in marking a shift behind the philosophy of the course, even while the duration and aims of the course remained broadly the same.

Directing practice has been the major focus of the course from its inception, both in terms of the students directing their own work, as well as observing professional production processes. In the “marking and assessment system” for the 1973 Diploma¹⁹, two hundred of the total five hundred marks are allocated to “PRODUCTIONS (Assessed)” (NIDA 654, 1972). This allocation is split 100/100 between a NIDA production and an external production. Although “Members of the Institute staff will be available to advise” on this, the final task required for the award of the Diploma, one of the purposes of the exercise is to “remind the director that he [sic] must find a way to create his [sic] own opportunities in the profession” (NIDA 654, 1972). The shadow of this original task remained in the 1994 accredited version of the Graduate Diploma, for which the final Term is named “Observation and Professional Practice” (NIDA, 1994). During this term, “each student director undertakes a secondment outside NIDA”, which can take place “[a]t some time in the following year” (NIDA, 1998:26). The syllabus suggests that this Secondment – which is one of six nominated “Core” subjects for the Diploma – will be between eight and twelve weeks full-time study, although it notes “[t]he teaching hours are not prescriptive, but an estimated guide” (NIDA, 1994). As I will go on to discuss in greater detail in later Chapters, the current course on which I conducted my fieldwork features no external components at all, and confines the vast majority of the teaching which makes up the Graduate Diploma to the Institute itself. As the direct correlation between the course and the profession is asserted then, the actual contact with the profession required for the award of the qualification diminishes.

In much the same vein, the enforced contact with other students and links with the other departments of the Institute also eroded over time. In the early days of the Production course, and carried through into the Directing course, there was considerable emphasis placed

¹⁹ This is the first year for which the NIDA Archive holds this document for the Student Director’s course.

on experience in broader areas of theatrical practice. For example, in the 1973 Curriculum for the Student Director's Course, it was made clear that the students would study Acting, Speech and Movement with the Institute's teaching staff in those areas (which, as Mellor confirmed, had been the case with the earlier Production course). This focus on a broad appreciation for the different creative arts which make up theatre practice is perhaps explained by the very specific aim of the course as it was conceived in 1972:

The purpose of the course is to provide students who already possess considerable knowledge of dramatic literature and theatre history and some experience of direction in the amateur theatre with an understanding of the procedures normally adopted when directing a play within a highly organised professional theatre company.

The director must learn how to work happily and creatively with other members of the theatrical cooperative [...] The Student Director's Course is essentially practical and concerned more with craft skills than either the theory of directing or the exploration of new techniques. It is assumed that in no matter what aspect of theatre the graduate may eventually work [...] a professional approach to the business of directing will stand him [*sic*] in good stead (NIDA 654, 1972).

This idea of "craft skills" will go on to play a major role in the analysis that follows, however at this point, it is sufficient to note that the course was interested in inculcating a "professional approach" in the students, rather than teaching a particular approach to the art of directing. Later in this thesis, I will explore how this tension of addressing the personal characteristics of a director rather than, or alongside, the knowledge to which she has access, has shaped the contemporary teaching and learning in the course.

Quite extraordinarily, looking back from the current position of regulatory oversight in the field of higher education around the world, the Student Director's course was not externally accredited for the first twenty-two years of its operation. That is, the course was not certified by the changing external bodies responsible for tertiary standards, although it did still result in the award of a self-accredited Diploma of the Institute. In 1983, formal external

accreditation was sought for the first time, but the course was not successful. In the

Accreditation document prepared for NIDA's courses in 1987 it was noted that

Accreditation was sought for the Directors'²⁰ Course in 1983 without success.

The NSW Higher Education Board advised NIDA at that time "that a more thorough re-development of the Directors' Course be undertaken in line with the Institute's proposal for the extension of the course from one to two years full-time duration, so that the re-developed course would:

- i. meet the natural needs for a course to prepare directors;
- ii. be significantly postgraduate in standard and in time;
- iii. be capable of developing directors with imagination and flair; and
- iv. take account of consequent requirements for staff and facilities". (July 4, 1983).

The Directors' Course has been offered as a one-year, full-time postgraduate course since 1971. It has proved professionally effective in so far as the employment rate of graduates is high, and many now occupy influential positions in the profession of theatre.

Over the past three years, the course has undergone considerable change and development. Despite its effectiveness, the Board of Studies is not yet satisfied that it is of a sufficiently high standard (NIDA, 1987).

Accreditation was therefore not sought again for the course until 1994, when the vast majority of the Institute's courses changed from Diploma to Degree status. At that point, the Directors' Course was accredited to result in the award of the Graduate Diploma of Dramatic Art (Directing).

The 1994 accreditation document contains some interesting quirks, including the assertion that "only" the VCA and WAAPA offered directing qualifications despite the long-running Flinders Drama Centre course (see above, section 1.2). "Jim Sharman, Gale Edwards and Baz Luhrmann" are named as prominent graduates, even though Edwards is in fact the only graduate of the Directing course of these three (NIDA, 1994:25).²¹ It provides some further background to the historical aims of the course:

²⁰ In the intervening years, the spelling preferred for the NIDA course has changed from the Student Director's to the Directors' Course. I have adopted the change when referring to this later iteration of the course.

²¹ Sharman graduated from the Production course in 1965, and Luhrmann from the Acting course in 1985.

The NIDA Directing course was established not to fulfil a need, but to provide upcoming artists with sufficient knowledge to move into the community and create a professional stage. This is exactly what has happened. The only objective evidence of the need for such a course is the continuing success of its graduates (NIDA, 1994:24).

The document goes on to provide some statistics to support this claim, although the figure offered of 44% of graduates (of both the Production and Directing courses to 1993) working as professional directors seems depressingly low. The document also states that 16% of graduates “have made a significant contribution to Australian theatre”, although there is no context or further description offered for this claim (NIDA, 1994:25). The course approved in 1994 continues to provide the basis for the Graduate Diploma of Dramatic Art (Directing) taught today, which I analyse in detail later in this thesis. The Detailed Objectives offered might therefore be a useful place to finish this history:

The Graduate Diploma in Directing sets out to provide students with a systematic approach to play production which the individual student may adjust to her or his own artistic requirements and thereby provide a basis for future growth in the profession.

This approach will be supported by an appreciation of the Australian dramatic heritage, a respect for all members of the theatrical cooperative, a regard for language, and high standards of intellectual endeavour (NIDA, 1994:27).

(c) The Present Day

In skating over the next forty years of the Institute’s history, this account risks underestimating the historical significance of the combined tenure of John Clark and Elizabeth Butcher, described at the time of Butcher’s retirement as a “harmonious duopoly” (Neill, 2008). Let there be no doubt however: for better or worse, their stewardship had an extraordinary impact on the way the Institute was run and on its relationships with the performance sector in Australia. Their eventual departures, in 2004 and 2007 respectively, coincided with unprecedented levels of government oversight of the Institute’s activities, along with new

requirements for reporting and accreditation. The Institute that I encountered at the commencement of this research project (see Chapter 1 above) was still negotiating its identity in the face of these changes, and they have continued to affect the work which is done there (cf. *Australian Story*, 16 August 2001).

However, the salient point for this section is the inevitable difficulty that anyone taking over from them would face in advancing change. The man handed that particular chalice after then Board Chairman David Gonski²² convinced Clark to retire in 2004 was Aubrey Mellor, arriving directly from the Playbox Theatre in Melbourne (now renamed the Malthouse). In light of later events, it seems significant that Mellor's appointment was relatively uncontroversial. Mellor had studied in the Production course at NIDA in its early days, graduating in 1969, and was a resident director and then acting tutor between 1970 and 1978. He was then appointed to a series of Artistic Director positions, becoming one of Australia's most renowned theatre directors through his tenures at the Jane Street Theatre, Nimrod Theatre, Queensland Theatre Company (QTC) and then Playbox from 1993 until 2004. Mellor was therefore very much an 'old guard' appointment – in particular as he had worked under Clark in the latter's early years at the Institute and was, as the inaugural leader of the new Student Director's course in 1972.

His extensive industry experience and respect doubtlessly helped the case for his appointment; he was later described as Australia's finest acting teacher by a group of Australian theatre luminaries during the battle for his reappointment (cf. Lawson, 2008a). However, the implication made at the same time that staff and students were declaring themselves to be

²² Gonski has been a key figure in education and arts policy in Australia for a number of decades, including in very high profile roles such as the Chair of the Australia Council for the Arts (2002 – 2006), Chancellor of the University of New South Wales (from 2005 – present) and the leader of a government enquiry into education funding between 2010 and 2013, dubbed the "Gonski Report".

either pro-Butcher or pro-Mellor suggests that Mellor's considerable creative skills were not necessarily equal to the smooth management of the Institute. While Mellor's contract was under revision, industry figures claimed the most effective solution would be for a new General Manager to be appointed to support Mellor administratively and resolve this factionalism. Mellor's artistic qualifications to lead the Institute were never challenged; however, the decision of the Board to combine the roles into a single Director/CEO position (after what Puplick [2012] argues was a failed experiment to do the same at the Royal Academy of Dramatic Art [RADA]) provides further evidence that NIDA were seeking a firmer administrative hand at the wheel. The combining of two executive leadership roles into one influenced two major events in NIDA's history which I will outline below.

(i) Lynne Williams appointed

As a result of an international search, in April 2008 Lynne Williams was appointed to the newly combined role of Director/CEO of NIDA, in the words of the *Sydney Morning Herald*, "despite Cate [Blanchett]'s pleas" (Lawson, 2008a). It was widely publicised in the aftermath of the appointment that the short list had included then Deputy Director Dr. Peter Cooke, the prominent Australian theatre director Gale Edwards, and Williams. A further three internal candidates, the then heads of Production, Acting and the Open Program, were also understood to have applied for the position, and Williams' appointment resulted in the emotional departure of Cooke from the Institute almost immediately. The Board had been split over the decision to appoint, and it was reported that Williams had been favoured by the unlikely triumvirate of Chairman Malcolm Long (former Director of the Special Broadcasting Service [SBS] and the Australian Film, Television and Radio School [AFTRS]), prominent Australian actor and director Pamela Rabe, and the then Chair of NIDA's Board of Studies, Tom Jeffrey.

This suggests that Williams had appeal across the functions envisaged for the new head: she had the organisational and management experience of working on London's Cultural Olympiad and Cardiff's bid for Capital of Culture, creative experience as a trained singer and librettist, as well as educational experience working at the University of Wollongong's Faculty of Creative Arts at its inception (cf. Neill, 2008; Lawson, 2008a; Minus, 2008).

However, I suggest that this very multi-stranded appeal may ultimately have been a disadvantage to Williams, who did not appeal strongly to any one area of NIDA's constituency.

At her appointment it was reported:

According to [Board Chairman Malcolm] Long, the director-chief executive job is a sign that NIDA is "clearly moving into a new era" with a sole chief executive who will attend to specialist training, organisational goals, and the artistic needs of staff and students. Long says Williams won this demanding gig because she "can conciliate, manage and lead, and possesses an artistic background and sensibility" (Neill, 2008).

At the forefront of all of the writing and discussion about Williams' appointment, then, is this language around both the changing role of the head of the institution, and the emphasis on conciliation and negotiation. Williams is characterised in the first line of an extensive profile piece in the *Australian* newspaper as "NIDA's smooth talking new Chief Executive" (Neill, 2008). At the same time, attention is drawn to her outsider-ness as a tool to combat the internal strife of the organisation, referred to as (for example) "the factionalism corroding its heart" (Neill, 2008). Williams herself makes veiled reference to the type of focus she will bring to the institution when she says that "her role will be more about artistic leadership and strategic management than 'getting amongst it' with students in the rehearsal room as previous [D]irectors had done" (Neill, 2008). (Mellor was in fact directing a NIDA student production of *Measure of Measure* at the time of her appointment.) In other sources, Williams hastens to

confirm that she of course *could* be involved creatively if called upon, though this was not seen as a key competence in the coverage of the handover (cf. Lawson, 2008b).

Not everyone was convinced however, and already as the appointment was announced (“despite Cate’s pleas”, remember) there was a degree of consternation that the position had not gone to someone more outwardly artistic or indeed prominent in the Australian industry. For example in the *Australian* profile,

one well-placed insider who does not want to be named, says the Chief Executive role suggests the managerialism that is now endemic in universities has spread to NIDA. “They’ve effectively put a general manager at the top of the chain instead of an Artistic Director,” he says (Neill, 2008).

This is of particular significance because, as the article goes on to point out, “NIDA is essentially a vocational college, where trainees [...] ‘learn by doing’, staging up to 20 mostly theatrical productions a year”. The Board’s choice to appoint Williams was a very clear recognition of two interrelated factors: the culture of the Institute needed to change, and it would take an outsider to achieve that; and the new regulatory environment in which the Institute now operated required a different set of skills on the part of the Director/CEO than had previously been the case. Williams’ appointment, therefore, can be understood as the board’s response to a range of wider macro-institutional changes which were affecting the Institute. Of course, these same issues have continued to dominate Williams’s tenure at NIDA, and will be discussed further in Chapter 5. For now, suffice to say, the arrival of Lynne Williams in 2008 began a profound cultural shift within the Institute.

(ii) Government audit

Increased governmental focus on the activities of higher education providers (HEPs) led to a quality assurance audit at NIDA in 2010, conducted by the Australian Universities Quality Agency (AUQA). AUQA was charged by the government as the “principal national quality assurance agency in higher education, with the responsibility of providing public assurance of the quality of Australia’s universities and other institutions of higher education, and assisting in enhancing the academic quality of these institutions” (AUQA, 2010:27). AUQA has a particular focus on non-self-accrediting institutions, which are required to accredit all of their courses through a government agency, rather than being empowered to do so internally. NIDA is one such institution, regularly accrediting its courses through AUQA’s successor organisation, the Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency (TEQSA), whose “primary aim is to ensure students receive a high quality education at any Australian higher education provider” (TEQSA website, n.d.). Both organisations had their genesis in the recommendations of the 2009 Review of Australian Higher Education, the Bradley Review. Like AUQA before it, TEQSA is empowered to audit “the whole higher education sector, a sample of providers, or a single provider” (TEQSA website, n.d.). In April 2010, they conducted a single provider quality audit at NIDA, which generated a brief but illuminating report.

The audit takes its cues from what the report politely refers to as “the continuity of leadership” (2010:6) which had resulted from the Butcher/Clark years. The report is, on the whole, enormously positive about the change agenda which Williams had been pursuing at the Institute since her appointment. It makes a number of commendations and affirmations of the policies which had been put in place since her arrival with regard to teaching and learning.

There is significant attention paid, however, to the following themes:

It appeared to the [Audit] Panel that there had been a lack of engagement with the changing needs of the student and with industry and there had been *a reliance on tradition* to inform teaching practice. The Panel found evidence that NIDA is becoming more proactive in its relationships with external stakeholders and students and in *thinking about curriculum and how best to teach students* (AUQA, 2010:6, my emphasis).

The general tone of the document and the feedback it offers therefore is very much interested in these twin aims of not only renewing the approaches to teaching and learning which predominate within the Institute, but also looking at what the curriculum itself contains. The audit report also makes important recommendations about student load and casual teaching, which constraints of space prevent me from discussing in sufficient detail; more germane to this discussion are the audit's recommendations on teaching and learning.

The report reiterates throughout that the Institute needs to reassess its approach to learning, suggesting for example that although “NIDA has some established teaching and learning approaches and frameworks in place [...] these need to be rethought to better reflect the current context” (AUQA, 2010:10). Even while it carefully acknowledges the work which has been done since Williams's arrival, the report emphasises loftier goals—“the development of frameworks for effective teaching and learning is a good start, but there needs to be a stronger articulation of how teaching and learning can operate in a creative domain” (2010:10-11). This focus on differing modes of teaching and learning, which I will go on to discuss in Chapter 3, is necessitated, the report suggests, by the “realities of a fast changing arts world” (2010:11). This all forms part of what I identify in the audit report as a clear repudiation of the old model of teaching at NIDA, with its emphasis on tradition and continuity as the cornerstones of arts education. To be clear, neither the report nor I suggest that there is no place for these valuable forms of institutional knowledge, however:

[t]he challenge for NIDA is to balance the philosophies of different industry stakeholders within the framework of the strategic and educational objectives of NIDA,

to manage the debate around the arts and education in the arts to its advantage in order to develop students who are leaders in the artistic community (AUQA, 2010:12).

The audit report offers a very clear characterisation of the challenge with which NIDA is faced, suggesting that the Institute needs to turn its full attention to “the practice of teaching and learning within a creative context” in order to achieve “a balance between industry professional practice and an academic approach to teaching and learning” (AUQA, 2010:10). The question of the “academic approach” recurs throughout the document, including in sections about assessment policy and procedure, as well as a consideration of the integration of work with visiting professionals into the larger teaching and learning frameworks of the Institute. The report continually returns to its theme: “while the curriculum emphasises performance and practice, it could also consider a greater integration of academic subjects” (2010:20). This interacts tellingly with some of the observations which were made at the time of Williams’s appointment, including where she asserts that “in spite of its success turning out stars [...] the drama school’s training needs to be broader” (Neill, 2008). As even this excerpt suggests, with its telling incorporation of “in spite”, it is a loaded mission but one which the Institute has set about with renewed vigour since the release of the AUQA report. The significance of the AUQA report to this project cannot be understated; it is the reason I was invited into the Institute in the first instance, and led to the approval of this research, as I will go on to discuss in Chapter 4.

(iii) Conclusion

The appointment of Lynne Williams, whichever way it is read, marked a seminal event in the history of NIDA. It set in motion a change agenda which is still in progress at the time of writing. The staff of the Institute have changed dramatically: of the more than seventy staff who

were present on Williams's first day, a mere twenty remained by 2012 (cf. Crittenden, 2012; Puplick, 2012). This has meant that there has been a profound cultural shift within the institution, resulting in an examination of teaching and learning practices within a creative context which continues to this day. It is to this renewed focus on what is taught, and how it is taught, that this thesis aspires to make its contribution.

2.4 Encountering the NIDA of 2010

In this section, I will make some observations about the Institute as I encountered it at the commencement of this research project. I offer these here both to flesh out the impact of the change agenda to which I referred above, and also to provide some background for the specific analysis which follows in Chapters 3 to 6. These observations also outline some of the questions which will come to be fundamental to the remainder of this thesis. In particular, they develop the tension between the Institute's efforts to not only make students into the right kind of knower, and adjust their *habitués*, but also grant them access to a specialised set of knowledges. This material is divided into two sub-sections: the first introduces the building itself, and makes some claims about the specific arrangement of space within the Institute; and the second discusses the structure of the Directing program as it was taught between 2010 and 2013.

(a) The Building Itself

In this subsection, I will briefly describe the NIDA building which provided the setting for this research project. An entire ethnography could be written about the social relations being

enacted in this 'backstage' space at NIDA. However, given I have become perilously lost every time I have been out there (despite observing an entire two week rehearsal process conducted exclusively in one of the Courtyard rehearsal rooms), I am very definitely not the ethnographer for the job. I will, though, offer a brief introduction to the layout of the space, with particular reference to three assertions in relation to the Directing program. These are: that the particular arrangement of space echoes the hierarchical position the director typically occupies in the mainstage tradition; that the implicit association of the postgraduate students and theoretical knowledge is spatialised in the layout; and that the institutional separation enacted between the post- and undergraduate students is reflected in the arrangement of their working spaces at the Institute. Finally, the impenetrability of the building and impossibility of navigation for the casual visitor raises the idea that one has to be the right kind of knower even to get around; without passing all of the hurdles for admission to the Institute, you cannot have access to this knowledge. This can be read, I suggest, as a literal illustration of how NIDA inculcates a very particular *habitus* in their students through the process of learning to navigate and inhabit the building. The very precise layout of the building therefore already makes suggestions about the relations enacted within.

(i) *Arrangement of space*

The main entrance to NIDA has a curious set of double glass doors, which function almost as an airlock. There are four doors in a row, about six metres of empty space, and then another four doors. Each is marked with PUSH and then PULL, although no one ever knows which way to pull them, leading to frequent nervous laughter on entry. It is appropriate confusion because, to the casual visitor, the NIDA building is an unclear mix: although the entry proclaims "National Institute of Dramatic Art", the complex itself, or at least the large glass

building which fronts Anzac Parade, is clearly labelled “Parade Theatres”. (To most people, they are one and the same thing, and even within the institution, the exact relationship is unclear, with some members of staff apparently shared across the two.) The Parade complex consists of four venues regularly hosting both externally produced and Institute productions: the Parade Theatre, the large proscenium arch space which dominates the building; the Parade Studio, a square black box studio with movable seating which has recently become the central venue for the NIDA Independent program; the Parade Playhouse, a larger adapted thrust space with a raked, fixed seating bank; and the Parade Space, a more adaptable black box space which sits to the rear of the main complex, and is the only venue without its own foyer. All four spaces are united by the cavernous Nancy Fairfax Foyer, the large open space which is visible from Anzac Parade and leads to visual and metaphorical comparisons to a fish bowl (see student interviews). The Parade Theatre spaces were funded through the Australian Government’s Centenary of Australia Fund, as well as through generous donations including from noted alumnus Mel Gibson. These funding arrangements are noted on plaques situated at the main entrance.

The foyer space is dominated by verticals that draw attention to its extraordinary depth. In terms of signage, there are few directions or markers, and those which are visible pertain to the theatre complex, rather than the Institute. Those that do exist are printed at the top of black display



Figure 2.1: *The Nancy Fairfax Foyer at NIDA, looking out towards Anzac Parade.*



Figure 2.2: *David Niven rests on the stairway to heaven in A Matter of Life and Death (directed by Michael Powell and Emeric Pressburger, 1946).*

poles, directing patrons to the appropriate doors of the theatre spaces and the box office. The other striking feature of the space, which strongly suggest the idea of verticality, is the staircases which frame the foyer. On the internal side of the building, a series of staircases hug the curved outer wall of the main Parade Theatre, leading audiences to the Dress and Upper Circles of the space. (There are also long banners advertising NIDA courses lining this side of the foyer, hanging from the ceiling down to these staircases.) On the external side, this is mirrored by a striking staircase which sweeps down from the south, uppermost level of the building to the northern end of the space next to the door (see Figure 2.1, on previous). Crouched underneath it is a sibling staircase leading from the middle level of the complex down to the ground floor. These staircases continue the metal-and-glass theme of the architecture, with the steel banister and glass safety wall facing back into the space. Although traversing only two stories, the largest staircase seems almost impossibly grand, and standing at the bottom of it, even three years after I first ascended it, still makes me feel like David Niven in *A Matter of Life and Death* (see Figure 2.2). This journey ever upwards reinforces a kind of hierarchy – mirrored in the stereotypical view of mainstage production – where the director sits at the top of the proverbial tree.

(ii) *Association with theoretical knowledge*

If one does ascend this ‘stairway to heaven’, one reaches the Rodney Seaborn Library, which stretches almost the full length of the southern side of the building on that level. The Library is

the only reason that the majority of students in the Institute would have to ascend to this level of the Institute. The connection for the other students is therefore very explicit: the Directing students occupy the same space as the theoretical knowledge symbolised by the library. In the south-western corner of the space, tucked between the library and the backstage area of the Parade Theatre are some recently renovated design studios – a significant gesture because this located undergraduate student classrooms on the top floor for the first time. In the south-eastern corner is a room mysteriously called the Reception Room, to which I've only been invited for full-staff meetings and season launches. (However, during my teaching in the adjoining room, there are more regularly noises of screaming children coming through the walls.) My understanding is that, outside of the Open Program holiday courses which produce the screams, the room exists primarily for NIDA Corporate classes and events which showcase the scope of the Institute: in ascending the staircase and considering the view, attendees are seeing the Institute in its most 'dramatic' light. There is even a lounge lurking at the top of the staircase perhaps for just this purpose (although one of my interview subjects confesses that this was a gift from a cohort of graduating directors and so someone probably feels guilty about disposing of it entirely). There are also some display cases at the top of the staircase, which contain a rotating collection of work from the Properties and Design courses; again, maybe deployed there to distract the visitor into stopping to admire the panoramic view.

Until mid-2012, there was only one classroom on the top level, referred to as the "Postgraduate Seminar Room". This room is tucked away on the southern side of the building, overlooking what is now a carpark, and the UNSW Regiment (a building on the site burnt down during the course of this research). The Seminar Room is reached through a narrow corridor between the Library and the office of the Heads of Directing and Writing for Performance. (As the two heads of postgraduate departments, as of 2013, they share an office.)

The corridor has another glass door at the end, which requires a swipe card for access, although it is intermittently left latched open.²³ The Seminar Room is both a teaching and a social space for the postgraduates studying either Directing or Writing for Performance – a situation which is standard across the Institute in a kind of ‘home room’ arrangement. Again, significantly, this space in which the students spend more time than almost any other in the Institute is literally adjoining the library. The majority of their coursework subjects are taught here, although the construction of new tutorial rooms opposite the entrance to the Seminar Room in 2012 have allowed some variation. These rooms jut perilously into the foyer space off the side of the second and first levels, and feature floor-to-ceiling glass windows which make them particularly vertiginous spaces for teaching and learning. There are four new tutorial rooms, two on each level, which are now used for teaching across the Institute.

(iii) Separation from undergraduate teaching

The construction of the tutorial rooms in the foyer space was a telling development because, until their construction, almost the entire undergraduate student body had been housed in the northern building on the site, called the Courtyard Building. (This was built on the original site offered to NIDA when it expanded in the 1980s.) This building is arranged around two open, atrium-like spaces, one of which has recently been converted into a permanent outdoor theatre space. The eastern side of the building consists, on the ground level, almost entirely of offices, from the Director/CEO on the southernmost end overlooking the foyer, through the HR and other administrative staff, to teaching staff. (The first cohorts of the contemporary Directing course under Kipste were housed at the northern end of the space.) Also along this

²³ In my more than three years teaching in the Directing program, I was never offered a swipe card to open the room, relying on the students who inhabit it to let me in to teach them.

side on the upper level are teaching and social spaces particularly for actors. The western side of the building contains a mixture of rehearsal rooms on the upper level, with teaching and social spaces for the mainly production and design-focussed courses on the ground floor. This side is a labyrinthine series of corridors, running through and around the backstage spaces of the Parade Theatre, Playhouse, and Space. There are no maps or directions, and so unless accompanied by a student, you are almost guaranteed to get lost. The whole area is sealed off by another swipe card door on the ground level, away from prying public eyes, although you can contact staff through their pigeonholes immediately before you reach the door. This area also remains relatively unknown to the students in the Directing program, as their engagement with the building is limited almost entirely to the upstairs space. This separation is not only physical: in limited coursework subjects, the undergraduates are lectured *en masse* or placed in mixed tutorials, while the postgraduate students are never integrated into classes with their undergraduate colleagues.

(b) The Directing Program

In this section, I would like to outline the current Directing program at NIDA briefly, in order to broadly contextualise the observations and analysis which follows. Given the timing of this writing, I will take 2012 as an indicative example. Even though there were a significant number of one-off projects which were pursued during that year, this has become characteristic of the construction of the course. These one-off projects will be outlined along with some others which have been programmed in previous years in section (iii) below. In the earlier part of this section, I will broadly separate the training program into two areas, (i) the coursework components and (ii) the production projects which the students undertake throughout the year. Throughout this structure, I think it is crucial to acknowledge how collaboration between

departments is seeded. That is, there is a particular effort made throughout the directing training at NIDA to encourage the students to work together and at a basic level simply to introduce them to each other. As noted earlier in this Chapter, the focus on collaboration has been a priority of the course since its inception. Furthermore, because the postgraduate courses are the only one-year courses on offer at NIDA, working relationships must be established as quickly as possible; students in the other courses are able to pursue creative (and indeed other) relationships across the three years they share at the Institute. The geographical separation from the other courses (except for Writing for Performance, and now, Design 2) referred to above also makes it imperative that collaboration is fostered with students in other departments (particularly Design and Technical Production).

(i) Coursework components

For Directing students in cohorts between 2010 and 2013, their time was broadly divided from their very first days at NIDA into a morning (9am–1pm) and an afternoon (2pm–6pm) session. These could be classed as having a theoretical (morning) and practical (afternoon) focus, particularly during the first term. This is because, in the first term, students were taught the basics of the Active Analysis (AA) methodology which underpinned the remainder of their training at NIDA. The morning sessions of each day were filled with the more overtly academic subjects which the students are required to undertake, which included: Dramaturgy; Directors & Directing, a course about the history and practice of the director-figure; Advanced Performance History (APH); and Reflective Practice. Dramaturgy and APH were shared with the playwrights, who have their own program of coursework subjects. (My interview subjects often protested that the playwrights were able to take a subject called Repertoire without the directors, but during these years this remained a playwrights-only subject. Directors &

Directing, as the name perhaps suggests, is a directors-only subject.) These subjects were all taught in a traditional University seminar mode, with set readings, written assessments, and structured class discussion. As these subjects were situated firmly in a particularly academic mode, they sometimes became a source of contention for some students who were more practically oriented, or for whom undergraduate study was a more distant memory.

Although this thesis is very deliberately about neither the directing methodology taught at NIDA nor approaches to directing more broadly, it is important to offer some detail here on the terms I am utilising, and how they relate to practice at the Institute. Since being appointed to lead the Directing course in 2008, Kipste has been developing a particular methodology which has become the mark of *distinction* for the course. Throughout this thesis, I refer to this methodology as Active Analysis (AA), as when it was first introduced to the NIDA course, it followed Stanislavski's late work, as recorded by his student-cum-assistant Maria Knebel (cf. Carnicke, 2010). When I observed the methodology in the rehearsal room in 2010, it was driven by the division of text into 'events', each of which were then subjected to a series of *études*.²⁴ In 2011, the methodology was supplemented with Georgi Tovstonogov's approach to identifying the five key story beats that occur across the course of a well-constructed narrative, taught to the NIDA students as 'T5s'. Kipste's methodology develops Tovstonogov's work (1972) by proposing that the breakdown into 'T5s', which Tovstonogov applies to the text as a whole, can be re-applied to each key story beat (in a sense, 'T5'-ing the 'T5s'). Kipste also added another layer, named sculpting, which applied cognitive theory to the discoveries made during the *études* in order to structure the 'T5' moments and make them more memorable for an audience. With these developments, the methodology Kipste is developing at NIDA was

²⁴ As part of my ethics approval for this project, I was able to watch Kipste rehearse a production of Ray Lawler's *Summer of the Seventeenth Doll* with Acting 1 in October 2010. This allowed me to see the process 'on the floor', without potentially interfering with the Directing students coming to grips with the methodology.

renamed 'DI', or 'Directing Inspiration', in 2012; later the nomenclature changed to 'DE', or 'Directing Experience'. Although it is now much more complex than the AA outlined by Carnicke (1998; 2010), the basic structure of his methodology is still drawn from this source, and so at risk of getting lost in a sea of acronyms, I will prefer AA as the umbrella term to describe the methodology Kipste developed for teaching student directors at NIDA during the years in which my research was undertaken.²⁵

There were also a number of coursework units in the course which straddled theory and practice, including: subjects with practice-led teaching and written assessment; subjects with theoretical teaching and practical assessment; and entirely practical subjects. The primary one of these, falling into the latter category, was entitled Processes of Acting, and was broadly divided across three terms into classes on Acting, Movement, and Voice, mirroring the division of work in the undergraduate Acting Program. This subject occupied the majority of the students' time in their first term, because their AA classes required them to act in each other's sample directing scenes. They also undertook subjects such as Directing for the Screen, which combined instruction in how to use particular programs and equipment with a practical project, which between 2010 and 2013 was directing a video clip for the Triple J Unearthed program in collaboration with second-year Technical Production students (TP2).²⁶ There was an Opera subject taught across the first two terms which combines basic instruction in French, German and Italian languages and an introduction to operatic repertoire with a large-scale design project in conjunction with Design 2, the same cohort who will go on to design the directors' graduation productions (see Chapter 6). A practical Multimedia subject involved collaboration between Technical Production, Properties, Writing for Performance, and

²⁵ I am grateful to many the many students whom I interviewed about the methodology for their assistance in untangling the developments of AA, allowing me to present a coherent, brief version of it here.

²⁶ For the three year courses offered at NIDA, cohorts are usually referred to by staff and students with the name of their specialisation and their year of study (1, 2, or 3).

Directing students. There were also seminars arranged with prominent practitioners, both visiting and local, as well as alumni of the Directing course, who were invited to talk to the directors about their specialisations and areas which might have been of particular interest to the cohort, such as independent productions and pitching.

(ii) Production projects

The schedule of production projects has evolved across the years that Kipste has been in charge of the course and it continues to develop. The first event on the calendar was a project with Actors Centre Australia (ACA), which fell at the end of the first term. This two-week project occurred during what is otherwise the Easter break for other students in both institutions, and culminated in the presentation of half-an-hour of material, usually drawn from a canonical play text, to an invitation-only audience. This was the only production project during the year in which the directors were required to use the AA methodology, and indeed they were closely monitored and then assessed on that basis. There was a small week-long project in the middle of the following term with a more experimental focus: in 2011 this was an explicitly postdramatic project at the Queensland University of Technology (QUT); and in 2012, a site-specific devised project with performers at the Aboriginal Centre for Performing Arts (ACPA). The next project ordinarily occurred at the end of the second term, and saw the directors split across two institutions. In 2012, these were the National Theatre School in St Kilda, Victoria, and the Faculty of Creative Arts at the University of Wollongong, in New South Wales. This was a more open project, where students were able to bring their own material into the room in order to rehearse a week-long development. After this, there were smaller in-house projects in term three, including a collaboration with Acting 3 to test graduation show material, and a week-long development of the playwrights' major works.

After this quite piecemeal work, there were two sustained production projects at the end of the year which took up almost the entirety of term four. The first was an assistant directorship, working during the first part of the term on either the Acting 2 end of year productions or the Acting 3 graduation pieces. This schedule exposed the students to professional working directors. In 2012 the students assisted: Tim Roseman, now Artistic Director of PlayWriting Australia; Wayne Harrison, former artistic director of the Sydney Theatre Company (STC); and three recent graduates now working on the mainstage – Sarah Giles (2008), Paige Rattray (2009), and Imara Savage (2008). There is also the chance to work in a professional venue, given the productions were staged in theatres across the Parade Theatres complex, as well as at Carriageworks in Eveleigh. The students often had strong views about who they want to work with and it seemed to be generally possible to pair them with professional directors in whose work they were interested. After working as an assistant, the student directors went straight into the rehearsal room for their graduation production. (This provided another chance to work with a professional director, as each student is paired with an industry member who is available as a consultant on this final project – although my interview subjects suggest the level of engagement with the mentors can vary wildly.) The graduation show had a three-week rehearsal process, but its development had been seeded throughout the year, to the extent that it was a regular topic of conversation in the weekly one-on-one meetings the students have with Kipste from term one. The forty-minute piece was a collaboration between: a student director; a student playwright working as dramaturg; a Design 2 student for whom this was her work's first public showing; and a number of Technical Production 2 students, who ran the shows with support from other departments, and TP1 students. The graduation production functioned as a capstone to the training, as I discuss in greater detail in Chapter 6, with particular attention to the transition from student to professional.

(iii) *One-off projects*

In addition to the accredited curriculum, there were a number of one-off experiences arranged for the directors from year to year. These ordinarily included at least one trip to a major Australian performing arts festival, including the Adelaide Festival of Arts (2010, 2013), the Perth International Arts Festival (2011, 2012), and the Melbourne International Arts Festival (2011). In some instances, even more elaborate experiences were planned, such as the trip to Berlin which formed the centrepiece of the 2012 cohort's year of study. (This will be examined in further detail in Chapter 4.) There were also various tickets and experiences made available to the students throughout the year which differed based on the generosity of theatre companies, the availability of tickets, and the shape of subscription seasons. These *ad hoc* experiences were crucial, and in particular, my interview subjects continually reiterated how critical the early Festival trip was in setting a tone for the year (the Perth and Adelaide Festivals are in February and March respectively). In a higher education context, it is highly unusual that a curriculum is sufficiently flexible to allow this kind of one-off material to be incorporated. I argue that these kinds of experiences can be understood as productive, since they can serve to offer students lessons in both *taste* and specific knowledge gained from contact with practitioners and bureaucrats. I explore the implications of this practice in Chapter 5 below.

2.5 Looking Forward

Throughout this Chapter, I have explored how the peculiarities of NIDA's institutional development, especially its relationships with the Australian Elizabethan Theatre Trust and the University of New South Wales, led it to the crossroads which it encountered late in the previous decade. Crucially at this point, discussions and analyses of pedagogy were thrust to the

forefront of the Institute's strategic policy-making. These discussions must be understood in the context of the historical development of the Institute, especially because increased government regulation is requiring NIDA to conform to a particularly 'university' style of teaching, learning, and administration – one the Institute has long resisted. I have also considered here how director training evolved as a distinct course at the Institute, and the particular relationship between practical and theoretical teaching that was envisaged when the course was first taught. It is to this same relationship which the recent government audit and subsequent internal curriculum review have turned their attention; the ramifications of both drive much of the remainder of this thesis.

The issues which NIDA is currently confronting are substantially similar to those with which the founders of the Institute wrestled during the first decade of its teaching, in attempting to negotiate NIDA's place within the larger macro-educational context. NIDA now faces the challenge of legitimating practical knowledges in a system designed to accredit primarily theoretical coursework, within an increasingly demanding regulatory environment. The AUQA report of 2010 has cast a long shadow, and addressing the issues it raised continued to be a strategic priority for the Institute throughout the course of this research. In the following Chapter, I will therefore propose a framework drawn from the sociology of education through which the teaching and learning which goes on at NIDA, and indeed similar institutions, might be understood. This renewed focus on teaching and learning is by no means confined to NIDA or other non-self-accrediting HEPs, and it is for this reason that the Chapter opens with an analysis of how similar ideas and forces have manifested at a structurally very different HEP. From there, the Chapter goes on to provide some historical background to the evolution of the sociology of education as a distinct discipline, before outlining the contemporary theory from which my analytical framework is drawn.

chapter three

A Sociology of Knowledge

What is our terrible transgression? We commit *pedagogy*, almost as if committing pedagogy is/was somehow just short of committing homicide. What's striking about what is clearly meant as an accusation of intellectual and professional anorexia is that no commentator, critic, or colleague from across campus seems to feel the faintest responsibility for defining just what pedagogy is. *Pedagogy*, in Hayakawa's familiar terminology, represents a snarl word; just hearing the term we know we are in the presence of a BAD THING

(Emig, 2001:272).

3.1 A Story

Curriculum review was a dominant theme at Australian higher education institutions throughout the first decade of the 2000s. In response to a number of government reviews dating back to the 1990s, universities and other higher education providers (HEPs) have been caught up benchmarking their qualifications both internally and against industry competitors. Under then-Gillard government policy, universities and other providers have been, as of 2012, able to offer as many places in their various programs as they feel are sustainable, rather than having to conform to government-mandated enrolment caps. Partly as a result of this change, many HEPs have embarked on vigorous renewal programs, matching their investment in infrastructure and other resources with detailed attention to the structure of their programs. At institutions across the country, this new policy is expected to result in a spike in student numbers. Due to increased competition between courses, institutions will need to communicate as clearly and loudly as possible the perceived benefits of their programs to prospective students. In many cases, these programs are complex and open-ended, leading HEPs to consider streamlining and simplifying the pathways to their qualifications as a key outcome of curriculum review.

The system of university entry in Australia, the Australian Tertiary Admissions Rank (ATAR), functions on the basis of student demand for boutique university courses with limited places. Under this system, school leavers in participating states are awarded a ranking based on their final examination results, with subjects allocated a scaled value in a notoriously labyrinthine calculation. The rank, which is a figure out of 100 moving in increments of 0.05 down from 99.95 to 30.00²⁷, corresponds to the percentage of the candidates in the cohort to

²⁷ 30.00 is the lowest rank released; candidates who score lower than this are reported as “under 30”. Ranks are nonetheless technically calculated all the way down to 0.00, and those under 30 are available on request.

whom the holder's examination results were superior.²⁸ It is then used to make offers to students for the vast majority of university courses: the published ATAR 'cut-off' for entry to a particular course then is the lowest rank attained by a student offered a place, meaning the ranking fluctuates in the first instance not with changes or improvements to the program but rather with student demand. Courses such as the undergraduate Combined Law program at the University of Sydney, with an ATAR of 99.70 in 2014, are in part popular *because* of their high entrance requirement²⁹, and this popularity in turn drives the ATAR ever upward. Relatively speaking, then, the Sydney Law School needs to make little concerted effort to attract students to its programs. With more places in courses and therefore possibly lower entrance requirements³⁰, HEPs have identified a need to become more proactive in promoting their assets to these more demanding and discerning prospective students. One consequence of this push has been a proliferation of reviews investigating the true value of qualifications, ascertaining what can therefore be thrust front-and-centre in order to retain a crucial point of difference for each course or institution. Along with the choice of which smiling group of students to put on the cover of course prospectuses, this has returned modes of knowledge transmission to the forefront of educational debate within institutions.

To take a specific example, the newly-minted Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences (FASS) at the University of Sydney proposed a restructuring of content taught to undergraduates into

²⁸ In the recent change from the University Admissions Index (UAI) to the ATAR, the nature of this calculation was changed. "Cohort" in this context now refers to the entire year group in the state who commence secondary schooling in year seven. Candidates are therefore ranked in relation to students who may not have completed their secondary schooling and final examinations. Previously, the UAI was calculated in relation to the size of the year ten cohort. For this reason, ATARs of graduating students are marginally higher than UAIs, as more of the bottom ranks are taken up by these students.

²⁹ Some of the contentious actions of the Faculty of Architecture, Design and Planning at the University of Sydney, which received media coverage in December 2011 and January 2012, were designed to artificially keep the published ATAR cut-off high. By offering new places to students transferring between courses, who are allocated a combined rank based on their ATAR and their tertiary results, rather than school leavers, the Faculty was attempting to accept more students into the course while still maintaining the perception of high demand. For more information, cf. Rosenberg, 2012.

³⁰ After the change in government policy, the required ATAR for the Bachelor of Arts at the University of Sydney in 2012 dropped almost 4 whole points, a huge drop. It has since begun to creep higher again.

so-called “capstone units” in April 2011. The proposal also suggested the development of a new mode of teaching for these units. An exhaustive enquiry into the points of attraction for the Faculty both nationally and further afield identified the relative strengths of individual disciplines as a key selling point. (This finding was a final nail in the coffin of proposals for combined, compulsory first year subjects, part of a mooted University-wide transition to a more integrated Liberal Arts model.) The BA Capstone Proposal was explicitly designed, therefore, to strengthen further the numerous disciplines within the Faculty. It was also designed in part to address the concern that students were achieving an ‘accidental major’ in a particular discipline – that is, perhaps without having intended to, they had met the requirements for the award of a major. Given the Faculty was looking to market its strength around its distinct and detailed discipline areas, the Capstone Proposal attended to focussing student (and staff) attention on the structure, requirements and meaning of the major.

At the University of Sydney, students are not required to declare a major, nor pass entry requirements to enrol in a particular discipline. With the exception of specialised courses such as Media and Communications, all students enrolled in the Bachelor of Arts (BA) and related degrees are eligible to take subjects (termed ‘units of study’) from any discipline within FASS. In practice, this is not as broad in terms of subject areas as it might sound: students can only take eight discrete units of study (or forty-eight credit points) at a junior, or first-year, level. Successful completion of these units is required to progress to senior units, which effectively limits the seemingly endless choices open to students. The only requirement for the award of the BA is the completion of a Table A Major; that is, a major offered and taught by a discipline within FASS. Additional majors can be completed – as of 2012, a Major requires thirty-six senior credit points, drawn from second- and third-year units. Figure 3.1 (overleaf) shows the ‘degree pathway’ given to BA candidates when they first enrol, illustrating the pathway to the

major in the darker-shaded boxes, each of which represents a discrete unit of study. Students complete ninety-six of these senior credit points across the course of the degree, so there is scope to ‘dabble’ in a number of areas.

	Semester					Credit Points
First Year	S1	Arts(Table A) Major Junior Pre-req Unit	Arts (Table A) Junior Unit Choice	Arts (Table A) Junior Unit Choice	Arts (Table A or B) Junior Unit Choice	24
	S2	Arts (Table A) Major Junior Pre-req Unit	Arts (Table A) Junior Unit Choice	Arts (Table A) Junior Unit Choice	Arts (Table A or B) Junior Unit Choice	24
Second Year	S1	Arts (Table A) Major Senior Unit	Arts (Table A) Senior Unit Choice	Arts (Table A or B) Senior Unit Choice	Arts (Table A or B) Senior Unit Choice	24
	S2	Arts (Table A) Major Senior Unit	Arts (Table A) Major Senior Unit	Arts (Table A or B) Senior Unit Choice	Arts (Table A or B) Senior Unit Choice	24
Third Year	S1	Arts (Table A) Major Senior Unit	Arts (Table A) Senior Unit Choice	Arts (Table A or B) Senior Unit Choice	Arts (Table A or B) Senior Unit Choice	24
	S2	Arts (Table A) Major Senior Unit	Arts (Table A) Major Senior Unit	Arts (Table A or B) Senior Unit Choice	Arts (Table A or B) Senior Unit Choice	24
					Total=	144

Figure 3.1: BA Degree Pathway. Table A and B refer to units from inside and outside FASS respectively.

As the convolution of the previous paragraph perhaps suggests, the pathway to a major can become very murky indeed. It is no small matter, however: any Major is recorded on a graduating student’s testamur, underneath the degree name and class of honours. To combat this issue, the central feature of the BA Capstone Proposal was the new set of “capstone units” referred to above. As the name suggests, the units were designed to sit atop the ordinary course of undergraduate study in order to unite the sometimes disparate threads of teaching offered across the second and third year of the program. In the words of the proposal, “the aim of a capstone experience is to provide students with the opportunity to draw together their learning and engagement in a particular domain in a structured and innovative way” (2011:2). This capstone unit would have to be completed for the award of a major, and would be required in addition to the current major requirements—meaning that under the proposal students would complete forty-two senior credit points in a major area, or seven second- and third-year units. Figure 3.2 demonstrates how a capstone unit would fit into the 2012 degree pathway extracted above. The capstone was also going to be used as a means of furthering other strategic aims of FASS, such as interdisciplinary collaboration and a reduction in the number of low-enrolment, specialised units of study with their more pronounced drain on teaching resources.

Third Year	S1	Arts (Table A) Major Senior Unit	Arts (Table A) Major Senior Unit	Arts (Table A or B) Senior Unit Choice	Arts (Table A or B) Senior Unit Choice	24
	S2	Arts (Table A) Major Senior Unit	CAPSTONE UNIT	Arts (Table A or B) Senior Unit Choice	Arts (Table A or B) Senior Unit Choice	24

Figure 3.2: BA Degree Pathway, showing capstone unit.

Two elements of the capstone proposal stand out in the context of this study. Firstly, there was the question of what material will be covered in these new units. Secondly, there was a strong statement made in the proposal about the mode of teaching which was envisaged for the capstones. The policy leaves the exact content of the units to the discretion of individual disciplines, but it is to be underpinned by the central question of “what do we expect a student to have learnt in the course of a major in [this discipline]?” (2011:2). This driving question was not designed to produce a review unit – this is in fact explicitly not the case. Rather, the aim was to encourage disciplines to consider what might be the truly contemporary, cutting-edge work done in their field. If a prospective student is attracted to the University of Sydney because of the strong role distinct disciplines continue to play in the teaching offered there, how can each discipline best sell itself and its graduates? In sociological terms, the Capstone Proposal asks disciplines to consider what might be their mark of *distinction*, and how might they most efficiently integrate it into the program of study offered to undergraduate students.

The Capstone Proposal was also relatively prescriptive about the teaching and learning environment required. It is described as “an intensive, critical seminar experience, characterised by a collegial, research-engaged exchange [between] peers and teachers” (2011:2). The document identifies a requirement to cap enrolments at fifty students, as well as nominating the “preferred learning situation” as the seminar or workshop rather than the lecture or other models (2011:3). In part, this is driven by a desire to give students a cohort experience at the conclusion (in the vast majority of cases) of their undergraduate studies, in addition to developing in students “the capacity to critically reflect upon their own *and their peers’* grasp of the discipline in which they are completing the major” (2011:3, emphasis in original). The proposal advocates a different learning environment to the lecture and tutorial model which still predominated across FASS in 2011. It also raises the question of what else is

at stake here: the document is an implicit valorisation of a specific mode of teaching, and indeed mode of knowledge transmission.

It may be no surprise to learn that the Capstone Proposal was ultimately defeated before it could be implemented. An entire sociological study could be written about the institutional quirks and allegiances which led to the decision to abandon the proposal, but for the purposes of this Chapter, we shall confine ourselves to reflecting on the questions which the proposal was designed to address and those which it raised. Elements of the proposal have been carried into different areas of the Faculty-wide curriculum renewal process—in particular, the policy document released in November 2011 entitled “Refocusing the Major”, which similarly required disciplines to articulate the pathway to a Major and the particular set of knowledges to which they expected their graduates to have access. Similar processes have doubtless taken place at HEPs across the country, and I have focussed on the Sydney University narrative, as it is one with which I am familiar, in order to introduce my primary concerns in this Chapter.

As a part-time student services adviser within the Faculty throughout the period during which the capstone proposal was conceived, I often found myself at both ends of the issue. Students requiring degree advice over the counter were often surprised to learn that they had met their degree requirements without ever having considered them, and others were genuinely shocked when they were refused graduation because they had not attended to the compulsory requirements. Administratively, the Faculty’s degree structures were turning into a nightmare, often inadvertently punishing students who had attempted to maximise their academic opportunities while at university. At the same time, I was teaching for the first time as a casual tutor for my own Department, Performance Studies, within FASS. The unit in which I was tutoring was the very first into which undergraduate students were able to enrol, which meant

that a great deal of attention was paid to introducing the discipline and explaining to students why we taught *this* content in *this* particular manner. In my own research I encountered for the first time work drawn from the ‘new’ sociology of education, which proposes a theoretical framework about what is to count as knowledge, and how we might go about teaching it.

Just a few suburbs away, the National Institute of Dramatic Art (NIDA) found itself wrestling with similar questions. The new government body charged with overseeing the accreditation of tertiary institutions, the Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency (TEQSA), was making its presence felt with ever-more rigorous requirements for non-self-accrediting institutions, of which NIDA is one. These requirements were asking the Institute, and schools like it, to provide more official and structured curriculum documents, as well as to articulate their teaching and learning outcomes in more detailed and prescriptive ways. As the previous Chapters have explored, this was still something of a culture shock for a conservatoire dominated by a practical culture of teaching, unused to the formalised language of academic curriculum review. At heart though, the same questions were cropping up again and again at NIDA and the University of Sydney. This perfect storm provided a very practical example of the real-world application of the theory on which my research was drawing, and it is for this reason that I have outlined at length this particular narrative in the middle of which I found myself. In the pages that follow I outline a theoretical framework which can enable and assist us in thinking through what is at stake in these institutional debates.

3.2 Theoretical Framework

In order to investigate a real world outcome of the debates raised above, and in particular how these arguments have been taken up and are currently manifesting at NIDA, this Chapter will

examine a framework drawn from the work of Rob Moore and Karl Maton (2001). In some areas, their work – which draws upon categories proposed by Basil Bernstein (1990; 2000) – will be considered in relationship with some key concepts from Pierre Bourdieu (2000; 2005). As this brief roll call suggests, this theoretical framework is drawn from writing most commonly situated within the ‘new’ sociology of education; a discipline which has enjoyed a distinct popularity since the 1970s. The broader field does not concern this study so precisely, in particular as it relates to the education of primary and secondary school-age students. Rather, I am interested in exploring the general theoretical concepts that the sociology of education can offer, including some of Moore and Maton’s specific research in the context of higher education at a tertiary level. The remainder of this Chapter outlines three dominant questions which resonate throughout the thesis. These consider: *what* is taught in any given field, and how it is legitimated; *how* it is taught, and who can be considered a legitimate knower; and how students orientate themselves towards learning in this field.

(a) Theorising Knowledge

Almost all contemporary work within the sociology of education is underpinned in some way by the vast corpus of writing by Basil Bernstein. Across the five volumes of his seminal work *Class, Codes and Control* (1971–2000), Bernstein theorised education as a comprehensive set of understandings about both knowledge and pedagogic discourse. According to Maton:

Bernstein outlines the trajectory of his work as a movement from the analysis of the pedagogic transmission and acquisition of existing knowledge within educational contexts, through a theory of construction of the pedagogic discourse being transmitted and acquired, to the study of the knowledge subject to such pedagogic transmission (2004:219).

In part, this identifies the origin of much of this work in the relationship between the high school curriculum in the United Kingdom and that country's particularly embedded class system. It emerged at a time when the larger numbers of so-called Baby Boomers were moving through secondary and tertiary education, many imbued with a sense of radicalism carried over from the student protests of the late 1960s (cf. Moore, 2009). The insistence, therefore, on the social dimensions of education is a result of a perceived lack of interest on the part of traditional sociology in considering how these broader forces might manifest in education.

The social and historical factors in the study of education, elements characteristically emphasised in the 'new' sociology of education and claimed as its mark of distinction from earlier developments in the discipline, are encapsulated by Bernstein's *pedagogic device*. This Bernstein defines as "the means whereby [agents] are able to regulate the principles and social bases of the distribution, recontextualisation and evaluation of pedagogic discourse" (Maton 2004:219; cf. Bernstein, 1990:165-218). Control of this pedagogic device becomes of crucial importance in pedagogic transmission. As Maton and Johan Muller assert, "[Bernstein's] theory aimed not only to bring together power/knowledge/consciousness but to place this within an account of cultural and social reproduction, transformation and change" (2006:11). Bernstein argues that those agents in control of the pedagogic device are most capable of setting the measure of success in the field, making control of the pedagogic device a key step in legitimating knowledge. This is also where his theory has been taken up to support arguments about the symbolic control and domination of knowledge.

The domination referred to above takes place because the agent in control of the pedagogic device can wield it to set the terms of pedagogic discourse. Later in his career Bernstein asserted that the 'new' sociology of education had

rarely turned its attention to the analysis of the intrinsic factors constituting and distinguishing the specialised form of communication realised by the pedagogic discourse of education (1990:165).

The argument, then, follows that the analysis of contemporary social, historical, and cultural conditions and their relations to education, which had been encouraged by his early work needed to be matched by an analysis of “relations within” pedagogic discourse (1990:165). In addition, as Maton and Muller argue, “while the pedagogic device was the condition for the construction of pedagogic discourse[,] what was still required was to address the forms this discourse might take” (2006:15). In his final contributions to the sociology of education, Bernstein set about addressing what he had identified as this disciplinary blind spot. In so doing, he delineated a new field, which has come to be referred to as the sociology of knowledge. The resulting collection of interdisciplinary concerns has profoundly influenced this study.

Bernstein begins by distinguishing between *horizontal discourse* and *vertical discourse*. The geometrical metaphor in these categories relates to the connections between the various knowledges which make up each pedagogic discourse: horizontal knowledges are “related not by integration of their meanings by some co-ordinating principle, but through the functional relations of segments or contexts to everyday life” (Bernstein, 1999:160). Horizontal discourse thus refers to common-sense, context-specific knowledges where the situation in which the knowledge is performed is what matters. This is opposed to vertical discourse, which “takes the form of a coherent, explicit and systematically principled structure” (Bernstein, 1990:159). That is, vertical discourse is concerned with the hierarchical relations of knowledges in which abstract principles underpin the performance of knowledge. Bernstein takes care to insist that agents in any particular field often move between the two discourses. He further clarifies the distinction by moving away from what he sees as a tendency to divide knowledge into

unequally valued binaries – local/official knowledge, for example, or everyday/school knowledge (2000:156).

In order to provide a more nuanced model, Bernstein proposes a further two categories within vertical discourse. He distinguishes between a *horizontal knowledge structure* and a *hierarchical knowledge structure*. The former is defined as a “series of specialised languages with specialised modes of interrogation and criteria for the construction and circulation of texts” (Bernstein, 1999:162). The term ‘languages’ might be more profitably thought of as ‘knowledges’ to avoid linguistic confusion; Bernstein refers here to the discrete knowledge sets which make up a discipline. These languages sit side by side in a horizontal structure, and they do not necessarily overlap, as illustrated by Figure 3.3. Progress can be made within the knowledge structure only by the addition of a new language which sits alongside its inward-looking colleagues. Using the example from the University of Sydney discussed in section 3.1 to illustrate Bernstein’s theory, imagine a capstone experience for a discipline characterised by a *horizontal knowledge structure*. The unit could teach a single language of the discipline area, perhaps positioned as a new or radical approach, which constructs the world in a way un contemplated by other languages within the knowledge structure. It may well draw upon or adapt features of those languages which preceded it, but the authority of the discipline area is drawn from the uniqueness of its language. As Maton and Muller put it, “in horizontal knowledge structures acquirers are faced with an array of languages based on different, often opposed assumptions” (2006:20).

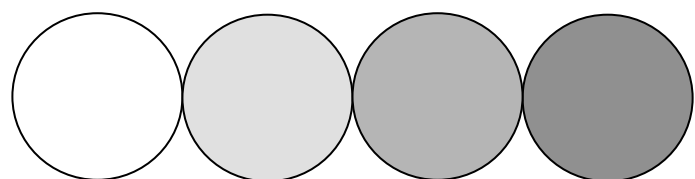


Figure 3.3: *Horizontal Knowledge Structure, illustrating different sets of knowledges with different shades of gray.*

A hierarchical knowledge

structure, on the other hand, refers to “a coherent, explicit and systematically principled structure, hierarchically organised” (1999:161). This structure is characterised by integration, where new

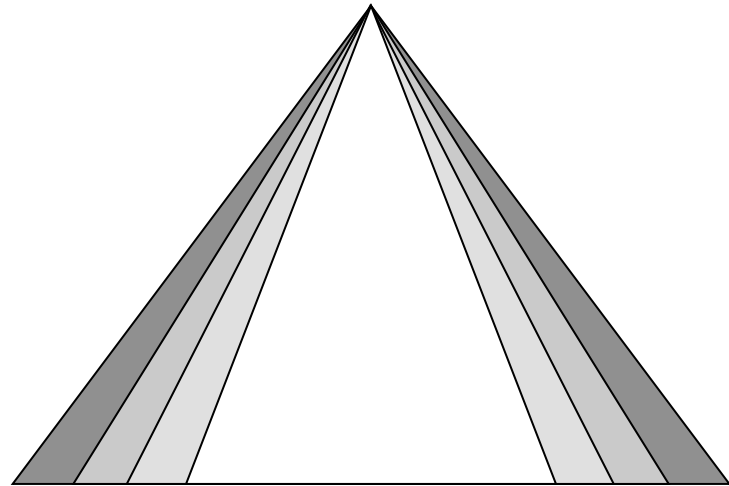


Figure 3.4: *Hierarchical Knowledge Structure, illustrating different sets of knowledges with different shades of gray.*

knowledges envelop previous ones, expanding their capabilities and thus “building an apex of greater integrating propositions” (Maton and Muller, 2006:18). Intellectual progress can be characterised in a vastly different manner in a hierarchical knowledge structure, because the driving aim is streamlining: taking the image of the triangle illustrated by Figure 3.4, then new knowledges within the structure are designed to “widen the base and sharpen the tip” (Maton and Muller, 2006:19). This form, according to Bernstein, is best embodied by the natural sciences, in which fewer theoretical constructs are sought which embrace and explain a wider range of phenomena. If we were to imagine a capstone experience for a discipline characterised by a *hierarchical knowledge* structure, rather than teaching one set of knowledge to the exclusion of others, this unit could perhaps unite the various knowledges taught throughout the undergraduate program. The unit might attempt to demonstrate that through the integration of a wide array of languages, more of the world can be understood. The unit would demonstrate that the authority of the discipline area is thus drawn from its ability to contain and explain the widest range of events. This accords with Bernstein’s description of progress within *hierarchical knowledge structures*: “the passage from one theory to another does not signal a break in the language; it is an extension of its explanatory/descriptive powers” (1999:164).

Following Bernstein, we can therefore employ the categories of horizontal and hierarchical knowledge structures when describing any particular vertical discourse.

Within the commentary on and explanation of Bernstein's theory, and to a lesser but nonetheless noticeable degree in the original work, there is an implicit valuing of the stability offered by *hierarchical knowledge structures*. This arises from the fact that a distinctive feature of *horizontal knowledge structures* as outlined by Bernstein is that "the capacity to create knowledge that builds on and goes beyond existing knowledge is limited" (Maton and Muller, 2006:19-20). This is because any set of new knowledges must reject its predecessors outright, and propose something entirely new. Disciplines characterised by a horizontal knowledge structure, therefore, are vulnerable to sharp changes both in trend and demand, and often fall victim to schism or radical breaks. Some of Maton's early work characterised the humanities in general, and Cultural Studies in particular, as predominantly *horizontal knowledge structures*, and argued that this had limited their disciplinary evolution. As opposed to the natural sciences, where steady progress can be ensured by a hierarchical knowledge structure, an extreme view of the humanities would suggest that progress is impeded by regular schism and justification of new sets of knowledges. An overriding consideration here then is that these two structures do not necessarily exist as a dichotomy: traces of different knowledge structures can exist in the same field. Willmar Sauter, writing about the field of theatre and performance studies, also reminds us that the same field can be characterised in different ways, and that there is a degree of disciplinary prowess involved in staking out these fields: "Pierre Bourdieu would probably describe the situation in terms of a struggle for dominant position in the academic field – by expanding the borders of the field, old positions have to be redefined and new power relations are established" (2000:36). Depending on who is doing the defining and for what purpose, then, radically different readings of fields can be produced.

In particular, Maton and Muller note that it is possible for individual languages within a horizontal structure to display some of the features of hierarchical structures, making them ‘mini-triangles’. As I noted above, they often embrace common terms and may build on some of the insights of previous knowledges. The key difference in this case is that the “authors are not speaking the same language – their assumptions and criteria for legitimate knowledge claims are different” (Maton and Muller, 2006:22). Additionally, while one could expect to see integration of previous knowledges within a language, what differentiates hierarchical from horizontal knowledge structures is what Maton and Muller describe as “the capacity for such development *across* languages” in the former (2006:23, emphasis in original). Bernstein also differentiates the two on the basis of their strength of ‘grammar’, or the extent to which they demonstrate “an explicit conceptual syntax capable of ‘relatively’ precise empirical descriptions and/or of generating formal modelling of empirical relations” (1999:164). In other words, *hierarchical knowledge structures* can have more or less descriptive and explanatory power according to their grammar strength. Within sets of knowledges exhibiting a stronger grammar, new knowledge can be evaluated with reference to whether it delivers stronger results than the existing sets. In weaker grammars of horizontal knowledge structures, “relations between languages or segments cannot be settled by empirical research and are confined to critique” (Maton and Muller, 2006:24). Bernstein also proposes that some horizontal knowledge structures exhibit traces of hierarchical structures in their relatively stronger grammars.

In order to illustrate this perhaps convoluted description, let us return to a practical example. Imagine that the discipline of director training had been asked to create a capstone experience for its students. The knowledges within the discipline area, for those unfamiliar with it, often employ similar vocabulary and concepts (as explored further later in this study). However, each knowledge valorises these terms and ideas differently. For example, character

motivation, which plays a key role in trainings drawn from the Stanislavskian tradition, is almost completely disregarded in Practical Aesthetics. If this discipline was characterised by a horizontal knowledge structure – as is the case with the majority of conservatoire-based training – the capstone experience could be expected to emphasise the particular usage and definition of these terms within one system, to the exclusion of all others. The criteria for achievement in the unit could conceivably assess, for example, how effectively a student utilised the tools of this one system in order to direct a particular scene. On the other hand, the capstone experience for a directing program characterised by a hierarchical knowledge structure might attempt to synthesise elements of the many different knowledge sets within the field. It could examine differing approaches to practice, for example: looking at how Viewpoints and Practical Aesthetics might approach the solving of a similar textual or staging challenge. The aim of such a synthesis would be to enable directors to produce new results, while retaining those offered by each system discretely. “In other words, the new integrating theory includes but goes beyond its predecessors”, thereby demonstrating the stronger grammar of this knowledge structure (Maton and Muller, 2006:24). Criteria for achievement in this unit could assess how comprehensively a student synthesises tools from the languages at their disposal in order to effectively direct a scene.

I have, in this section, introduced Bernstein’s terminology in a necessarily abbreviated form, and provided a brief overview of his later work together with some practical examples. This is necessary groundwork because, in the section that follows, I outline how these terms and concepts have been both broadened and challenged by later scholars.

(b) Modes of Knowledge

In developing Bernstein's sociology of education, Rob Moore and Karl Maton emphasise the ways in which knowledge is legitimated, rather than focussing further on the structures and discourses inherent in that knowledge. In particular, this study is concerned with examining Maton's development of what he calls Legitimation Code Theory (LCT). This addresses the key concerns of both the story which opens this Chapter and the larger study – what counts as legitimate knowledge in the field of director training and, within the training offered at NIDA, who can legitimately make claims in this regard? LCT is driven by examining what Moore calls

the key relationship [...] between the manner in which knowledge has developed within an intellectual field and the manner in which individuals become members, of how it is that, as Bourdieu puts it, the scientist becomes the scientific field 'made flesh' (2009:145).

In order to investigate this driving question, Maton develops a framework of *modes of legitimation*, later re-named 'codes'. I prefer the earlier vocabulary, in part because I believe it captures something active about knowledge transmission. What follows in this section is a brief introduction to some of the most compelling parts of the framework.

Maton begins by "conceiving of educational knowledge as having two (co-existing but analytically distinct) sets of relations, highlighting that knowledge claims are simultaneously claims to knowledge *of the world* and *by authors*" (2000:154, emphasis in original). These two relations he goes on to describe as the *epistemic relation*, the relationship between the knowledge and the object(s) of study, and the *social relation*, the relationship between the knowledge and the author or subject of that knowledge. According to Maton, this equates broadly to *what* can legitimately be described as knowledge in any particular field, and *who* can legitimately claim to be producing this knowledge within the field. These relations can be strong or weak within any particular mode and Maton offers us vocabulary for describing each of the possibilities

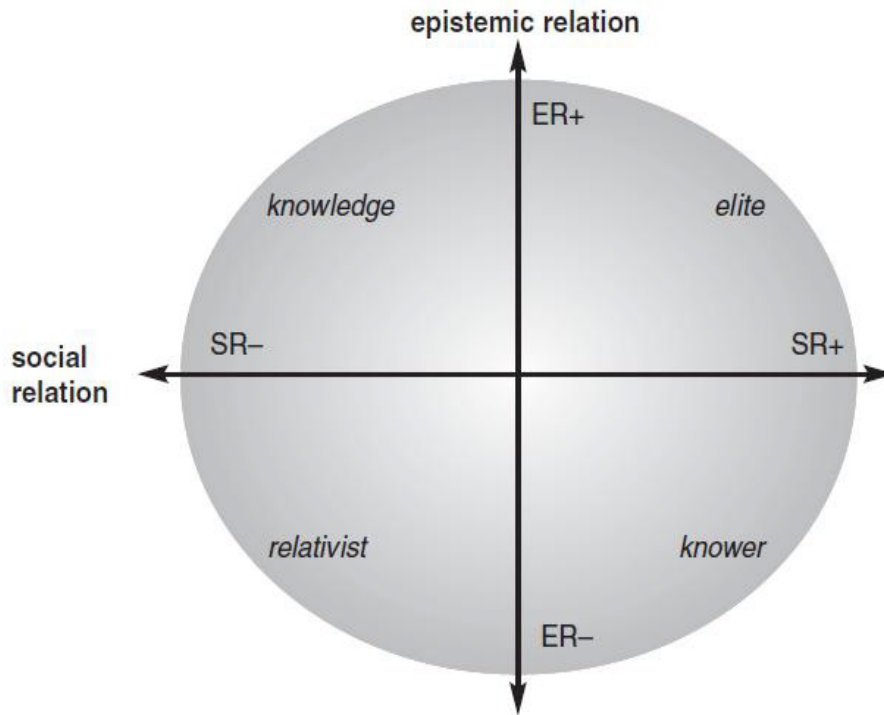


Figure 3.5: Maton's diagram illustrating the different modes of knowledge transmission. (Source: Maton, 2007).

provided by the model illustrated in Figure 3.5. This produces what he describes as “four potential legitimation codes, of which [the first] two were identified as predominant within extant intellectual fields” (2004:220):

- the *knowledge mode* (strong epistemic relation, weak social relation);
- the *knower mode* (weak epistemic relation, strong social relation);
- the *élite mode* (strong epistemic relation, strong social relation); and
- the *relativist mode* (weak epistemic relation, weak social relation).

Across the decade of his work published on this topic, Maton offers some quite comprehensive descriptions of the differing modes and how they might function, summarised below.

The knowledge mode is characterised by its epistemic relation, and fields exhibiting this mode “are legitimated by reference to specialised procedures that are claimed to provide unique knowledge of a specialised, discrete ontological object of study” (Maton, 2000:156). In this mode, then, there is a sanctioned object of knowledge which can be distinguished from

those studied in other fields, and a sense the agents who control this field can determine what is an appropriate object of study (and of course what is not). At the same time, the social relation can be considered relatively weak because “everyone is said to be equally positioned in relation to the educational knowledge and practices of the field, and (it is claimed) anyone can produce knowledge” (Maton, 2000:156). That is, what you know is far more important than who you are. Contested knowledge claims must therefore engage with the object of study itself: new voices can be heard as long as they accept and interact with the previous established discursive field. In Bourdieusian terms, then, as long as you invest in and adopt the *habitus* of the field, you can legitimately produce new knowledge.

On the other hand, “knower modes of legitimation base claims for fields on a privileged object of study, the ‘knower’” (Maton, 2000:156). They are therefore specialised by the social relation, that is they are legitimated by “personal characteristics of the author or subject” (Maton, 2000:155). Unlike the knowledge mode, which has a tightly bounded set of appropriate objects of study, in the knower mode knowers can claim unique knowledge of a potentially endless set. As Maton notes, the “adjudication of competing knowledge claims on strictly ‘intellectual’ grounds is deemed problematic, if not directly renounced”, thereby displaying the mode’s weak epistemic relation (2000:156). At the same time, claims are legitimated by reference to subjective experience or characteristics on the part of the knower. The social relation is therefore relatively strong, because “the aim is to ‘give voice’ to this experiential knowledge, with ‘truth’ being defined by the ‘voice’” (Maton, 2000:157). As I will go on to explore further in the case studies which follow, there is partially an implicit practice/theory divide here. That is, the knower mode is perceived to give voice to practical knowledge usually discounted in traditional theoretical knowledge frameworks. There are many compelling examples of this effect, from celebrity chefs to climate change scientists, some of

whom even go so far as to discredit the epistemic relation entirely in order to assert the “inability of existing educational knowledge to articulate the voice of this previously silenced knower” (Maton, 2000:161). This also means that any claims to new knowledge must contest the right of a knower to speak on the subject, making knower modes inherently more unstable because “the unique knowledge is specialised to the privileged knower such that actors with different subjective characteristics are unable to make claims about this knowledge” (Maton, 2000:157).

Maton has explored the *élite* and *relativist* modes far less comprehensively, perhaps suggesting that they occur less frequently in the early studies which developed LCT. These studies were concerned with tertiary education in the United Kingdom, concentrating on the emergence of cultural studies as a distinct field of study. In brief, teaching and learning in the *relativist mode* occurs where “legitimate identity and insight is ostensibly determined by neither knowledge nor dispositions” (Maton, 2007:98). I will not outline this mode any further, as I believe it has little relevance to a study of the field of higher education. This is primarily, I would suggest, linked to assessment frameworks with which contemporary HEPs must conform—without any ‘strong’ relation in the field, there is no measure by which to judge achievement. A field exhibiting the *relativist mode* would therefore be a practical impossibility at a tertiary level, although it is worth noting that searching for such an extreme case (i.e. an *entirely* relativist mode) might be fruitless in all four of the modes. Finally, fields displaying the *élite mode* of knowledge legitimation exhibit specialisation in both the epistemic and the social relation, that is “where legitimacy is based not only on possessing specialist knowledge but also being the right kind of knower” (Maton, 2007:98). Maton offers a case study of music at a high school level in the United Kingdom, revealing that perceived success in this area was related not only to the knowledge of a specialised set of material, but also in having a “taste, judgement

or a developed ‘feel’ for it” (Maton, 2007:101). Perhaps the more compelling example is that of the gentleman scientist of the Enlightenment: it was not enough to be engaged in legitimate research into a sanctioned area, but for the findings to be accepted as legitimate contributions to knowledge, the scientist had to be from the right social class (Maton, 2007:98). To return to the vocabulary offered above, it mattered both who the gentleman scientist was *and* what he knew. This study will go on to explore the *élite mode* in detail in Chapter 5 below, but even this brief example suggests that, given the implicit standards of *taste* which are being promulgated, the pedagogic device gains an even more crucial importance.

These descriptions of different modes of knowledge are underpinned by what Maton has elsewhere called “languages of legitimation”. Such languages “represent claims made by actors for carving out and maintaining intellectual and institutional spaces within education, i.e. the proclaimed *raison d’être* that provides the condition of existence for intellectual fields” (Maton, 2000:149). That is, the mode in which knowledge is sanctioned constitutes the field itself by delineating areas of common concern. The modes which LCT outlines provide a framework for understanding how new knowledge comes about, and how it is legitimated. The theory is therefore concerned with the same kinds of questions with which this Chapter began. Returning to the University of Sydney example, in asking disciplines to consider what material might logically fit within a capstone experience, and indeed in the subsequent investigations, the Faculty was asking disciplines to consider *what is to count as knowledge*. It provided a unique opportunity for disciplines to consider the mode(s) of legitimation at play in the knowledge they were transmitting to their students, and to propose their own criteria for achievement in the field – exemplified by the question of what the University expects a student to have learnt in the course of a major in a particular discipline. As I discuss below, the tools that Maton

offers for understanding these languages of legitimation are therefore of crucial importance, and have further implications for pedagogy and teaching.

(c) Modes of Teaching

While modes of legitimation indicate the relationship between the knowing subject and the object of knowledge, another of Moore and Maton's important theoretical contributions considers the ways in which that knowledge is imparted. Drawing on the basic principles and vocabulary of Legitimation Code Theory outlined above in subsection (b), this section will introduce three related ideas which focus on modes of knowledge transmission: Maton's concept of the epistemic device; the knower codes of students; and the dominant orientation of teaching.

As an overarching part of LCT, Moore and Maton propose an "epistemic device", which operates in concert with Bernstein's pedagogic device as outlined above. This device is "the means whereby intellectual fields are maintained, reproduced, transformed and changed. Whoever controls the epistemic device possesses the means to set the structure and grammar of the field in their own favour" (Maton, 2004:220). Control of the device becomes important because, as Moore and Maton note (following Bourdieu), "any specific intellectual field is organised in such a way as to make certain things visible and potential objects for knowledge, and other things invisible within its current field of vision" (2001:157). The agent(s) responsible for that arrangement are therefore able to alter the languages of legitimation at play in the field to privilege what they see as acceptable objects of study and knowledge. "In other words, control of the device is access to a ruler and distributor of legitimate claims to new knowledge, legitimate membership of the field (professional identity), legitimate practices and

so forth” (Moore and Maton, 2001:161). Maton argues that the epistemic device affects the relationships between institutions, teachers and learners, and is therefore of central importance to this study. This epistemic device is “an analogue of the ‘pedagogic device’”, and the exact difference between them is still to be explored in further studies (Moore and Maton, 2001:176). However, the basic distinction is that while the pedagogic device controls the fields of knowledge recontextualisation and reproduction, the epistemic device controls the field of knowledge production. “The epistemic device regulates who can produce legitimate knowledge, the ways in which antecedent knowledge is selected and transformed in the course of producing new knowledge, and the criteria for adjudicating claims to new knowledge” (Moore and Maton, 2001:176).

One of the case studies which Maton offers of the *Realpolitik* of the epistemic device is entitled “The wrong kind of knower” (2004), which discusses the spectre of the ‘new student’ in 1960s United Kingdom at a time when the higher education industry anticipated rapid expansion. In it, he argues that the ‘new student’, with her focus on the pragmatic outcome of university study, was said to pose a problem for the dominant modes of knowledge at traditional universities. “While past students were said to owe their position, identity and allegiance to their membership of the university, scholastically minded new students would, it was alleged, focus on their knowledge of the discipline” (Maton, 2004:224). The mythical ‘new student’ – who Maton alleges never arrived – was therefore operating within the knowledge mode, expecting access to a sanctioned set of knowledge, while the institutions maintained a dominant *knower mode* orientation. (Indeed, I would be tempted to go further than Maton does and argue that universities like Oxford and Cambridge at least were operating in a dominant *élite mode* orientation, where it matters both what you know and who you are.) In this example then, Maton outlines how some institutions – most often the so-called ‘new’ universities –

utilised their control of the epistemic device to maintain a dominant orientation to teaching which matched that of the students they wished to attract. Other institutions, attempting to avoid the influx of these differently-coded students, in turn used their control of the epistemic device to position their programs as unattractive.

To take a more local, contemporary example, some of the same ideas are at play within the contemporary Australian push to encourage more students from low socio-economic (LSE) backgrounds to attend university in order to improve future employment opportunities. This forms a key part of the strategic plan of, for example, the University of Sydney, and doubtless other institutions around the country. As part of this drive, institutions are rethinking their code modality, and using their control of the epistemic device to shift it to match that of these potential students. Unlike the students who have come before them, these students don't see tertiary education as the logical next step in and of itself, but need rather to be assured of the real-world knowledges to which they will be granted access – the assumption behind this thinking appears to be that these new students have an eye on their employability rather than just attending university for the 'sake of it'. That is, they are interested much more in *what* a university education can teach them than *who* a university education will make them. HEPs around the country are attempting to ensure that students are not discouraged from attending university simply through an unfamiliar knower code.

Maton's case study demonstrates "the application of the concepts of legitimation code and epistemic device beyond their genesis in the analysis of knowledge production" (2004:229). As outlined above, a key concern is examining the knower codes exhibited by students, akin to their *habitus* or disposition to education. Matching the categories outlined above in subsection (b), Maton argues that each student is disposed to learn in a certain mode. (I appreciate the

vocabulary here becomes confusing – the *code* refers to the dispositions a student brings with her in the classroom, the *mode* to what and how that student is then taught.) For example, one of Maton’s studies (2007; Lamont and Maton, 2008) suggests that students who have the most success in high school music are seen to display an *élite* knower code, matching the dominant mode of knowledge transmission displayed in music pedagogy. Maton suggests that successful knowledge transmission is a result of matching teaching with knower codes. Australian HEPs are currently exploring the implications of these ideas; the introduction of online teaching and learning at many institutions can be seen as an attempt to match new student knower codes. The notion of knower codes will be further explored in Chapters 4 and 5 below.

We can also examine how these ideas manifest in modes of knowledge transmission in teaching. How do agents in the field, in this case teachers, legitimate the knowledge which they teach, and how do learning situations reflect these modes of knowledge? A pertinent example is provided by the BA Capstone proposal outlined at the beginning of this Chapter. In proposing the seminar or workshop as the “preferred learning situation” (2011:3), as opposed to the traditional lecture or tutorial, the Faculty is in fact using its control of both the pedagogic (in setting the terms of achievement in the field) and the epistemic device (in making visible new objects of knowledge) to shift the dominant orientation of teaching from the *knowledge mode* towards the *knower mode* of knowledge transmission. In addition, students are being offered some control of the epistemic device themselves: in traditional lectures, and to a lesser extent tutorials, the epistemic device is wielded solely by the lecturer or facilitator, whether taught in the knower or the knowledge mode. The teacher responsible for leading students through the material is able to make claims and adjudicate as regards legitimate knowledge. In the seminar or workshop though, in particular with the proposal’s insistence that students be encouraged to reflect critically upon *their peers’* learning, the epistemic device is being offered in part to the

students. (This, of course, is the much-vaunted ‘student-centred learning’, which has become an aspiration across the field of higher education in the 2000s.) In inviting students to take some responsibility for setting the parameters of the field, the learning situation detailed in the capstone proposal represents an empowerment, spreading the epistemic device across teachers and students.

Lastly, and to echo Bernstein’s distrust of binaries, there is the question of what might take place when teaching tacks between two (or perhaps even more) modes of knowledge transmission. In a single unit of study at a university level, for example, students may be exposed to a number of different learning situations and different teachers. For example, in the course of a unit of study in which I was a tutor during my doctoral candidature, students were asked to contribute to and attend practical workshops, a performance exchange, traditional lectures, and student-driven tutorials. At times, these were taught heavily in the knower mode: participating in workshops which I led on *commedia dell’arte*, students were asked to blindly follow the material which I was offering them. At others, the knowledge mode was invoked: in tutorials in which we unpacked readings, the students were granted authority to participate and have their knowledge legitimated, as long as they had completed the reading in question. In part then, this is designed to make the unit appeal to the widest possible range of students in terms of matching their own knower codes.

Nevertheless, at the same time the discipline in which I teach has wielded the epistemic device to structure the acceptable objects of study and knowledge within our field, in this case, the seemingly odd coupling of *commedia* and contemporary verbatim theatre. Digging one level further, even the knowledge of the teaching staff is legitimated in different ways: the unit of study coordinator through the *knower mode*, with his twenty years teaching, and professional

experience making verbatim theatre; while my teaching is legitimated primarily through the *knowledge mode*. I know my stuff, and so it should not matter that I am a fresh-faced PhD student. Part of the skill which teachers develop in tertiary education is matching the modes of knowledge transmission at play in their classrooms with the knower codes of their students. These considerations will become increasingly crucial for Australian HEPs to address as contemporary policy changes begin to resonate through institutions in the years to come.

3.3 Looking Forward

The theoretical framework which Moore and Maton offer, drawing and building on Bernstein's pioneering work across the latter half of the twentieth century, provides a powerful tool for understanding and analysing the situation of the contemporary Australian HEP. In this Chapter, I have outlined how Bernstein first considered knowledge as a crucial part of pedagogic discourse, and how his ideas were developed by the later scholars. In offering a vocabulary to describe how and why knowledge might be legitimated in a particular field, this theoretical framework can give us an insight into the ways in which knowledge is made visible and taught. Throughout the Chapter, I offered practical examples drawn from the policy shifts and my own work at a contemporary Australian university. Finally, the Chapter offered some suggestions about how Moore and Maton's framework might allow us to understand the many roles played by students, teachers and institutions in the transmission of knowledge. As this Chapter has established, there are three major ways in which Moore and Maton's vocabulary has been used, and these will continue to be employed in the remainder of this thesis:

- *modes of knowledge legitimation*, that is, how is knowledge legitimated and made visible within any particular field;

- *modes of knowledge transmission*, or how is this knowledge then actually taught, and who is entitled to be a legitimate knower; and
- *knower codes*, that is, what is the dominant orientation to learning displayed by students in any given field.

Moving through all of these is the *epistemic device*, control of which enables one to set the terms for knowledge production and transmission throughout the field. Taken together, these concepts offer us a powerful way of understanding the actual business of teaching and learning, and begin to address the particular blindspots which were outlined above at the beginning of Chapter 2.

In order to illuminate this theory in action, the following Chapter takes two in-depth case studies of recent pedagogical experiments within the Directing program at the National Institute of Dramatic Art (NIDA). The case studies will continue my exploration of the messy educational and sociological contradictions with which tertiary institutions wrestle. In so doing, I hope to offer a further practical illustration of the sociology of knowledge which this Chapter has outlined, as well as suggest ways in which the program is evolving to meet new pedagogical challenges. Each of these experiments has taken place within a very different field, exhibiting different modes of knowledge transmission and legitimation. In each case study, too, the students and teachers involved embody different knower codes, based on both the location and the intended outcome of the experiment. Through recounting each episode in detail, I will investigate how they individually, and taken together, contribute to a revised model of director training, a contention examined further in Chapter 5.

chapter four

Simultaneous View

In ethnography, we atone for the sin of language: to separate words and things. Ethnographies are realities, and their very incongruity reminds us about the plurality and generosity of the world. The fanning out of the modern universe into a collection of flat ideologies and scattered sciences may be reversed on account of this. While the grand Master Narratives lose their authenticity because of their single-mindedness, anthropology flourishes as the postmodern narrative *par excellence*: multi-vocal, heteroglot and essentially inexhaustible

(Hastrup, 1992:129).

4.1 Introduction

In this Chapter, I will introduce two case studies of the modes of knowledge transmission and legitimation which are at work in the Directing program at the National Institute of Dramatic Art (NIDA). These are intended to provide an ‘on the ground’ illustration of the theory which is outlined above in Chapter 3. In particular, they illuminate Moore and Maton’s contention that teaching and learning often tacks between different modes and it is more profitable to identify where and when one or the other predominates. To that end, each case study is located primarily in one mode: section 4.4 details the development of a new coursework unit which was developed with an explicit agenda to move towards the *knowledge mode*; and section 4.5 describes a knowledge transfer between NIDA students and their colleagues from a German academy which ended up situated mainly in the *knower mode*. However, as I argue below, this binary does not always capture the complexity of ‘on the ground’ teaching and learning, which often relies on different modes at different moments. In order to frame these two case studies, the Chapter begins with a story comparing recent developments in assessment policy at both NIDA and the University of Sydney, and the types of teaching and learning they envisage, and then briefly outlines the participant observation methodology which informed both case studies.

4.2 A Story

Adjustments to the University of Sydney’s Assessment Policy in 2011, which came into effect for the 2012 academic year³¹, detail an approach to assessment which brings the modelling of assessment practices to the fore. The three documents which govern coursework assessment at

³¹ According to section 2 of the document, “[t]hese procedures commence on 1 January 2012”.

the University – the Assessment Policy 2011, the related Assessment Procedures 2011, and the Institute for Teaching and Learning’s “Assessment @ Sydney: Principles of Assessment”, which provides a summary of Sections 7 to 11 of the Assessment Policy – each incorporate this focus, in particular in their discussions of communications with students. To begin with the broadest of the documents, this aim falls under “Principle 2” of the Assessment @ Sydney regime: “assessment practices must be communicated clearly to students and staff” (Institute for Teaching and Learning, n.d.). It goes without saying that this is an almost impossibly broad statement, and given it is intended to govern the entirety of coursework assessment across the University this is to be expected, but it does signal a very specific approach to the communication of expectations to students.

This idea of communication of expectations is directly addressed in the Assessment Procedures 2011. In that document, it is specified in the very first subsection relating to assessment standards (5(1)), that “[s]tandards or levels of expected performance should be described for assessment tasks in sufficient detail that students can improve the quality of their work” (Academic Board, 2011b:2). This section of the document, entitled “Assessment standards, design and quality assurance—Principles 1 to 4”, applies to each of the principles outlined in the Assessment @ Sydney document and due to its placement, the quoted subsection affects by implication any reading of the information which follows. There arises therefore some debate over the phrase “sufficient detail”, which is not returned to in the remainder of the document. Further information is provided by subsection (6), which mandates that “[s]tudents should have the opportunity for formative practice or experience on each type of instrument that is used to determine grades” (Academic Board, 2011b:2). Further guidance is provided by Section 7(4) which reads:

- (a) At unit of study level, where possible, examples of students' work should be identified which are characteristic of achievement for at least two different merit grades (benchmarks).
[...]
- (b) When it is not possible to provide samples of work, a suitable description of the task and expected standards associated with different levels of achievement should be provided (Academic Board, 2011b:4).

Although it is again slightly unclear, taken in context, the requirement here is to provide samples of work in relation to each assessment task which indicate expected standards.

In practice, this has led to an effort on the part of Departments and teachers to provide so-called 'model' responses to assessment tasks. That is, for each task set, there is a response provided to the cohort which models good practice, and allows the students to understand what is expected of them to successfully complete the task. Importantly, the policy does not encourage teachers to provide 'perfect' responses, but rather work that is "characteristic" of a certain grade. The intention here, as communicated to new teachers during the Faculty's Teaching Development Program (TDP) for example³², is to allow students to judge the work themselves against the assessment criteria and thereby come to their own understanding of what is expected of them. (The worry with providing 'perfect' samples of course being that they would encourage students to replicate exactly the work with which they were provided.) Due to the complications which arise from providing actual work samples to students, including the requirement to secure permission from students and then store this paperwork over a considerable period, many teachers have responded to the new requirements by writing their own sample responses to assessment tasks and providing these to the cohort.

For example, in the unit I taught in Semester Two 2012, PRFM 2602 (Performance: Production and Interpretation), the assessment regime consisted of three tasks: a short response in relation to performance framing; a tutorial paper analysing an in-class performance;

³² This material was covered in session three of the TDP, which I attended on Friday August 17, 2012.

and a final piece of performance analysis, responding to a professional production. In past iterations of the course, we provided some written samples of previous students' work for the final task; however, for the earlier tasks we were in fact interested in the range of responses produced by deliberately open-ended guidelines. The intention was not to allow students to flounder without guidance, but rather to demonstrate through practical experience the difficulty of capturing live performance on paper, and the many different approaches available. In line with the new Assessment Policy 2011, the 2012 unit coordinator provided students with a written sample, which he authored himself, well in advance of the submission deadline for the first task. This model response became a teaching aid in tutorials, and students' attention was repeatedly drawn to it. As well as practical writing in tutorials, students were asked to produce small homework tasks as formative assessment, which were designed to discharge the policy obligation to provide "experience on each type of instrument that is used to determine grades". Every Department across the University has been faced with similar choices to bring their assessment into line with the new standards, and our own modest efforts doubtless pale in comparison to reviews undertaken by colleagues.

These new policies and procedures, which go hand in hand with a focus on "enquiry-based learning" (Institute for Teaching and Learning, n.d.), again make subtle alterations to the presumed characteristics of the students for whom they were written. In concert with some of the issues raised in Section 3.1 above, they provide further evidence that course design and assessment at the University of Sydney are attempting to place less and less emphasis on the particular qualities of the individual student, in favour of the clarity of an all-encompassing policy which foregrounds the 'right' kind of knowledge. While I do not mean to suggest that there is no longer a place in assessments at the University of Sydney for individual flair (indeed, a similar phrase often remains as a grade descriptor for the higher grades awarded in

coursework units), it seems clear that the University's policies on assessment propose a model by which every student is provided with an equal opportunity to display their mastery of a sanctioned knowledge set, as regardless as possible of any personal characteristics.

At the National Institute of Dramatic Art (NIDA) on the other hand, the rationale for assessment which is provided to students is both less comprehensive and based on a very different model of displaying competence with material. In the 2012 Student Handbook, which is made available to all students upon enrolment in their course, there is a section entitled "Assessment Policy and Principles". While it asserts that "[t]he primary mode of learning within NIDA courses is experiential, requiring students to immerse themselves in a co-operative group environment" (NIDA Student Handbook, 2012:32), this document does not contain significant detail about the conduct of assessment tasks. The crucial observation is made, though, that "[i]n some instances, because of the nature of the learning environment at NIDA [...] the due dates and details of some assessment tasks will change throughout the year" (NIDA Student Handbook, 2012:32). There is also an emphasis in this section, and indeed throughout the document, on the nature of group work and the challenges it presents to both creative practice and assessment.³³ For example, in a following section on "Equal Opportunity, Anti-Discrimination and Harassment" the Handbook notes:

Theatre and drama training is a group activity. All NIDA students are made aware of group dynamics. Students unable to work freely and imaginatively in the group are counselled and assisted. Students who exhibit behaviour detrimental to the creative freedom of the group are given special counselling. If such behaviour continues, the student may be asked to leave the course (2012:41).

The NIDA document thereby demonstrates that it is much more concerned with the characteristics of the students themselves both in its assessment regimes and more generally.

³³ In the context of this project, it bears noting that group assessment is much more integral to the undergraduate courses, particularly Acting. The Directing students on the other hand, are more effectively understood as a cohort, which I go on to discuss below in Chapter 6.

The NIDA document, then, allows more scope for variation, and there is even the suggestion that adapting to uncertainty is as much a part of the assessment as the content itself. In a way wholly unenvisaged by the Sydney document, the NIDA policy grants a large scope to staff members (or others) administering assessment, who are able to change the rules of the game to suit changing circumstances. It is just this uncertainty, and the capacity to deal with it, that I would like to explore in the case study which follows. This Chapter will argue that this is a manifestation of a particular approach to teaching and learning which privileges the development of certain personal characteristics in the student, one which can be usefully analysed by the vocabulary which Moore and Maton offered us in the preceding Chapter. Before proceeding to the case study material, though, I will briefly outline some methodological concerns around how this research was conducted.

4.3 Participant Observation

As part of the distinctive approach to performance studies at the University of Sydney, all students who progress into the Honours year after the three-year undergraduate qualification are exposed to an area of the discipline entitled Rehearsal Studies. The principle underlying the unit is that the embedded study of rehearsal provides unique insights into the nature of performance – the actual presence of the researcher in the “secret world” (Cole, 1992:5) of rehearsal is the key advance of the Sydney model. Across the final year of their undergraduate coursework, students are exposed to writing about the participant-observation approach which dominated late-twentieth century ethnography and anthropology. Following Georgina Born’s masterful application of ethnographic fieldwork techniques to cultural research in *Rationalising Culture* (1995) and *Uncertain Vision* (2004), Rehearsal Studies proposes that we can usefully

apply the ethnographic approach to the specific cultural ‘worlds’ of the rehearsal of performance (cf. Rossmannith, 2009). This very same ethnographic model of participant-observation has been the fieldwork model which the current case studies have followed.

The key complication arising from participant-observation as a research model, as the name implies, is separating the researcher from the research. Of course, this is a false binary, as “any process of analysis must recognise that the observer and the observed each occupy the same field” (Maxwell, 2001:47). Bourdieu’s field theory acknowledges that the observer and the observed also occupy different fields at different times, but this provides a useful understanding of the challenge with which participant-observation confronts the researcher. The solution lies in the ability to transcend these false dichotomies by constantly navigating between them, and this is the task many of the ethnographers writing about methodology have taken on. As James Clifford observes:

the ‘method’ of participant-observation has enacted a delicate balance of subjectivity and objectivity. The ethnographer’s personal experiences, especially those of participation and empathy, are recognised as central to the research process, but they are firmly restrained by the impersonal standards of observation and ‘objective’ distance (1986:13).

In order to achieve this balance, the ethnographer is engaged in “a continuous dialectical tacking between the most local of local detail and the most global of global structures in such a way as to bring both into simultaneous view” (Geertz, 1983:69). My position as casual tutor at NIDA, teaching into the same course that I was researching, allowed me to achieve this task – pairing a closely-observed account of what happened ‘on the ground’ with an appreciation for the macro forces which affected the Institute.

Given I am studying the academic culture of which I am a part, albeit a relatively minor one, this also makes the following account necessarily partial. Clifford asserts that “[i]nsiders

studying their own cultures offer new angles of vision and depths of understanding. Their accounts are empowered and restricted in unique ways” (1986:9). While this seemingly opens the door to endless navel-gazing, Kirsten Hastrup insists that “[t]here is no way of eliminating our consciousness from our activities in the field: it is part of our reality” (1992:118), effectively advocating the swift acknowledgement of the partial truths of insider ethnography. A note of caution is sounded by Kate Rossmanith, who reminds us that “observers must at times struggle for distance and suspend their own taken-for-granted knowledges, instead engaging with how practitioners make sense of what they themselves are doing” (2009:3). Part of the skill of fieldwork, therefore, is identifying these “taken-for-granted[s]”, and allowing the voice of the local to speak louder than the voice of the observer. The voice of the local speaks much more loudly in Chapter 6 where I am interrogating the experiences of students in their graduating productions. In the material which follows in this Chapter, I am more interested in trying to separate out what Born calls my “parallel selves” (2005:16) as a teacher (and therefore participant) and researcher (and therefore observer) at NIDA. This was further complicated by the shift in roles which took place during the second of the case studies, and to which I will pay closer attention below in section 4.5.

Of course, this account is enormously empowered by the access to local details which my status as a teacher, even as a casual tutor in one of the smallest Departments of the Institute, granted me. It is also, though, restricted by that very same status, because not only did I interact with the students in a very regulated environment, but also I am bound in this account to standards of politeness and professionalism. Further, what I see and am told of the students and their activities is filtered through my position as a teacher. To my mind, the most convincing articulation of this conundrum is provided by Clifford Geertz when he suggests “man [sic] is an animal suspended in webs of significance he himself has spun” and

consequently “what we call our data are really our own constructions of other people’s constructions of what they and their compatriots are up to” (1973:3,9). I was there, and this is what I saw – other people doubtless saw it differently, and both the strength and the weakness of this account are that it is wholly mine.

4.4 Directors & Directing

In selecting case studies for this Chapter, I looked for areas where the modes of knowledge transmission employed by the NIDA approach to director training had been made visible. I concentrated therefore on the coursework units which Directing students are required to undertake which, like their equivalents in the undergraduate departments of the Institute, have been required to become more and more explicitly academic. Overall, this is in line with the reporting and accreditation procedures required of non-self-accrediting HEPs, which are outlined above in section 2.5(b), and returned to in Chapter 5 below. To take the Directing program as a paradigmatic example, the coursework units are part of a general move towards foregrounding the academic rigour of the program both in preparation for the next evolution of the qualification and with one eye on the strategic vision of the Institute to introduce a research-intensive arm, perhaps in the form of a Centre for Contemporary Performance Practice (see NIDA website, where this is outlined in the biography of the Director/CEO, Lynne Williams). This section will argue that in the coursework units in general, and with particular reference to the one entitled Directors & Directing (D&D), which I teach, we can see a shift to a self-conscious *knowledge mode* of knowledge production and legitimation. I will mount this argument across three sections: the first details how I arrived at NIDA and how this had and continues to have an effect on my teaching there; the second describes the way D&D

has shifted and changed since then; and the third employs Bourdieu's notion of *cultural capital* to analyse what is at stake for emergent directors being taught this material.

Before this begins, a brief return to participant-observation: I am the protagonist of this section of writing simply because much of the course development and teaching has been done by me alone. Where possible, I refer to the documents and records this has produced, and I have included the voices of my colleagues and students. However, once again this work falls very much at the participant end of the spectrum and I acknowledge the weaknesses that entails. I would observe, though, that this writing is uniquely placed to comment on the conception, development *and* execution of this particular subject, and this strength overrides my concerns around its selection as a case study.

(a) Enter the Researcher

At the 2010 Australasian Association for Drama, Theatre and Performance Studies (ADSA) Conference, held at the Australian National University in Canberra, staff and students from NIDA presented some of their work for the first time. Their very attendance at the conference was a sign that NIDA was reaching out to the theatre studies Academy. Against the background of the increasing demands being made on NIDA to demonstrate their academic credentials, referred to above, an appearance at the conference of the peak regional body for these disciplines could only serve to confirm their seriousness. At the 2010 conference, Karen Vickery (then Head of Performance Practices) gave a paper, and Egil Kipste led a session with three of the six students enrolled in the Graduate Diploma of Dramatic Art (Directing), demonstrating his particular application of Active Analysis (AA). Given that Sharon Carnicke, whose work is the most comprehensive articulation of AA in English, had been the keynote

speaker earlier that day, this provided a fortuitous opportunity for the NIDA staff and students to present a practical demonstration of the theory discussed by Carnicke. This was confirmed by the programming, which situated the NIDA-led session directly after Carnicke's keynote.

As I outlined in the Prologue to this thesis, I presented my first conference paper, examining the role avant-garde discourse played in the promotion and framing of student theatre on campus at the University of Sydney later in the same conference. A few weeks after the conference I found myself standing in front of a class at NIDA, telling them all about avant-garde discourse. In the first instance it was my "personal characteristics" that got me through the big glass doors. The material which I was presenting was arguably of little or no relevance to a group of emergent directors, concentrating as it did on student theatre practice on campus at the University of Sydney – although Kipste did describe it in his emails as my "research on emergent directors". Mostly due to the fact that I was very early in my academic career, with a passing nod to a bit of youthful dynamism and perhaps a touch of first time nerves masquerading as bravado, I cut an unexpected figure. At a time when NIDA was looking to increase the intellectual heft of its teaching to bring itself more into line with standards in higher education, I suspect I was an attractive antidote to the fusty academic cliché. The knowledge that I possessed (such as it was), however, was legitimated almost solely by reference to the social relation, or *who* I was rather than *what* I knew. This incident provides a useful illustration of Maton's contention that the *knower* and *knowledge modes* of legitimation often work in concert. As I have described, my personal characteristics seem to have been an overarching justification for my employment, crucially along with Carnicke's imprimatur as an eminent member of the field and colleague to Kipste. It was as much my access to a particularly 'university' set of knowledges and indeed my institutional affiliation to Sydney University which legitimated what I had to say. This tension continues to play out across the Institute, as

it reaches out to possible *knowledge modes* of learning through association, while still very much working in the realm of social relations.³⁴

(b) Course Development

After I was invited to present the paper to the class, and received positive feedback from the students, Kipste invited me to become more involved in the course. The project on which he wanted my input was a redrafting of a coursework subject compulsory for all students enrolled in the Graduate Diploma of Dramatic Art (Directing). As noted above in Chapter 2, between 2010 and 2012 the students took a mixture of shared coursework subjects across the Directing and Writing for Performance streams and some specific to their specialisation. Originally, he asked me to develop a proposal for a subject to be called the History of Creativity, which would examine key figures in the development of the creative arts through their social and historical contexts. He quickly discovered that such a move would involve a difficult reaccreditation procedure, and so the theoretical framing for that unit provided by Clifford Geertz (1973), Phillip Zarrilli (1995), and Arjun Appadurai (1990) was repurposed to redraft an existing subject called Directors & Directing (D&D). D&D sat alongside Advanced Performance History (APH) in the curriculum, and both explored the historical development of theatre and performance.

Kipste's worry, as articulated to me, was that there was little value for the students in taking two semi-traditional theatre history units, when the course's chief concern is to train directors for industry. His proposal therefore was to leave APH to cover the key historical lessons of the development of performance cultures, and repurpose D&D to give students an

³⁴ The difficulty in appointing and retaining academic staff to the Performance Practices department speaks to this concern, although space precludes a more extensive discussion here.

appreciation for what was, he described in conversation, “hot” and “trendy” in the world of performance studies. As our conversations evolved, it became clear he meant this not so much in an academic sense but rather as a kind of byword for the historical avant-garde and contemporary performance. It is this same association to which Stephen Bottoms draws attention when he writes that “[a]s a descriptor, [p]erformance [s]tudies does, of course, sound ‘cool’: it sounds cutting-edge, contemporary, vaguely scientific even, thanks to its implicit association with ‘high performance’ computers or jet engines” (2003:174). Hailing as I did from the discipline of the “obstreperous child” rather than the “debilitated father” (Savran, 2001:91), the perhaps intentional assumption was made that I would have an understanding and appreciation of this particular kind of work.

This curriculum review was therefore situated squarely in the *knowledge mode* of legitimation, drawing as it was on the idea of a discrete set of knowledges – albeit ‘cool’ ones – to which the students could be granted access. Far from the “personal characteristics” which saw me sitting in Kipste’s office in the first place, the project he asked me to undertake turned sharply away from *who* I was to *what* I knew, or more broadly to the knowledge to which I had access thanks to my disciplinary background. From the very outset, the new syllabus of D&D which Kipste asked me to create was marked as ‘academic’ and linked to ideas of canonicity, of giving the students access to a sanctioned knowledge set drawn from the academic discipline of performance studies. In asking me to research material and plan a curriculum for the subject, Kipste was not suggesting that I personally had characteristics that legitimated this knowledge, but rather that the access I had to a ‘university’ set of knowledges legitimated the choices I would make as to subject matter. Given I was a young doctoral candidate with little access to specialised areas of knowledge but with a general appreciation of what is ‘trendy’ or dominant

in the academic field, Kipste's asking me to undertake this review can be read as an attempt to invoke the *knowledge mode* represented by university teaching in Australia.

Although I can present this analysis now, at the time the brief remained very murky, and my early attempts at developing a curriculum were very inflected with a traditional approach to theatre history. The first two terms followed the lineages of Stanislavski and Brecht respectively, tracing the reception of their ideas primarily in America and in Great Britain. Other figures about whom I knew little (having never actually undertaken any formal theatre history subjects myself) but knew to be influential were included. The third term then turned to the contemporary avant-garde internationally, before the fourth examined the current state of theatre practice in Australia. In discussion with Kipste, the overwhelming concern that arose was one of 'relevance' – that is, were the practitioners and companies under examination still 'relevant' to emergent directors today? The material was therefore reorganised, and arranged much more directly to trace a lineage of the contemporary avant-garde, with the emphasis on the contemporary practitioners rather than their progenitors. (In this way, for example, a class which started by introducing the ideas and practice of Pina Bausch would turn to examining the work of Alain Platel and Les Ballets C de la B, rather than remaining a solely historical discussion). Figures whose work and style had fallen out of favour, such as Howard Barker in the UK, or David Mamet in the US, disappeared from the curriculum, to be replaced by contemporary performance ensembles like Forced Entertainment and Elevator Repair Service, as well as more international practitioners like Ivo van Hove.

This was of particular interest in the development of the course because the final assessment was to produce a Director's Manifesto (itself of course an avant-garde concept), which would appear in both the program for the graduation productions and the glossy showcase booklet which NIDA produces each year about the postgraduates. In order to "give

students a sense of where their practice has evolved from, as well as [equip] them with the tools to articulate where they are going” (D&D Subject Outline [Hay, 2013:1]), the subject needed to emphasise the contemporary – and even more crucially, it needed to reference figures who were actually being talked about. This had a literal focus too: we were conscious of including directors to whose work the students might be exposed during their year of study, both in Sydney and beyond (see section 2.4(b)). In offering the students an insight into what was ‘trendy’ and ‘hot’ in the field of contemporary performance, we were deploying the idea of the avant-garde to legitimate the knowledge taught in the subject. There was also an implicit link being drawn between ideas of the youth of the practitioners whom the course was training and avant-garde practice (cf. Born, 1995:28). Further, in exploring the avant-garde, D&D emphasised what Michael vanden Heuvel describes as “modernism’s combustive and oedipal attitude towards tradition”, and gave the students tools to “[insist] upon their radical departure or separation from the past” (1993:1).

Both of these contentions suggest the centrality that *cultural capital* has to the consideration of what is taught and how we teach it. This begins, too, to illustrate how Maton’s theory might draw on and interact with Bourdieu’s sociology. In D&D, the challenge is to always concentrate on those figures to whom *cultural capital* attaches, and in turn to allow the students to earn their own *cultural capital* by being familiar with the ‘right’ kind of work. So, for example, a figure like Ariane Mnouchkine, who has cast such a long shadow over the contemporary avant-garde, is no longer covered directly in the course, because her work was no longer at the forefront of the imagination of contemporary Australian practitioners.³⁵ There was also little scope in the subject for the inclusion of more mainstream figures outside of the

³⁵ I realise, of course, there are compelling arguments for keeping these kinds of figures in the classroom, in particular to return them to the imaginations of a new generation of practitioners, and my only defence is that in a coursework subject of two hours a week, there are many painful decisions to be made, and the subject’s focus has become more and more the current state of play in Australia.

roll-call of high-profile Australian mainstage directors like Neil Armfield. (One student in 2012 picked this up in feedback: “[h]ad the time permitted enabled our studies to have also explored a more mainstream focus, I am sure that my manifesto may well have been influenced by those who have gone before me in that area” [Student Q, 2012]). The idea of giving directors an introduction to the types of names they would need to drop in foyers on opening nights and at Festival events is a clear example of *cultural capital* at work – the director, as the leader of the mainstage theatre process, cannot afford to look like she doesn’t know what she’s talking about. Or, as one student put it more sensitively in interview:

All the work about Stanislavski was very relevant to the method of directing we were learning, but it didn’t make me investigate the current theatrical culture [...] nor did it make me look at my own practice, and what kind of director I intend to be (Student J, 2011).

Interrogating these ideas of the *knowledge mode* and *cultural capital* further, we can see a covert agenda of *taste-making* at work. That is, in the selection of material and figures in a course like this, we are promoting a particular model of what kind of work the students *should* appreciate. I will devote more attention to this idea in Section 4.5 and then Chapter 5, below.

The coursework subject designed by Kipste and me thus attempted to make a very clear link between the European and North American avant-garde, contemporary Australian practice and the students’ own emergent practice. The rationale proposed to the students was this:

The ability to articulate your process and project as a director is of crucial importance. Starting with this observation, this subject will lead students through a tour of major figures and companies in the history of directing, concentrating on their actual practice. This subject will use historical examples to illuminate the ‘here-and-now’, examining the impulses that inform the work of contemporary practitioners (D&D Outline, 2013:1).

This wording appeals strongly to the *knowledge mode* idea of the sanctioned knowledge set, referring as it does to “major figures and companies”, as does the curriculum design itself. The

work which we undertook on revamping the D&D curriculum is an example of the epistemic device in action, as the “intellectual field” here had been transformed to make visible new objects of knowledge (Maton, 2004:220). These objects can be characterised as legitimate knowledge that rely on what they are, through their inclusion as a sanctioned set of what were perceived to be ‘performance studies knowledges’, rather than relying on the characteristics of the person who taught them for legitimation.

(c) Teaching D&D

After developing the course, I was invited by Kipste to teach D&D during the academic year 2011 and then again in the following years. Throughout this time, he and I have returned to considering the material taught within the subject, and the focus on the avant-garde material has been heightened across the development of the subject. After its first iteration in 2011, student feedback suggested that they wanted to focus even more directly on contemporary practitioners, in particular the Australian directors alongside whom they would shortly be working. This focus, which expanded to take up an entire term in the 2012 version of the subject, came at the expense of further foundational figures such as Ariane Mnouchkine and Robert Lepage (both of whom the students declared were “boring”). This can be seen as a further illustration of *knowledge mode* legitimation at work: the sanctioned knowledge set is becoming more and more specific in this later version of the subject – from a focus on canonical figures throughout the history of directing, it has shifted to include only those whose work is sufficiently experimental and striking enough to be considered part of the avant-garde. There is also a connection here to the *knowledge mode* of knowledge transmission in that the students are empowered to speak about the practitioners to whose work they have been exposed – hence the focus each year on young Australian directors like Simon Stone and

Matthew Lutton, whether or not they are included on the curriculum, because it is here that the students feel like they have the most access to the sanctioned set of knowledges. This effect of figures moving on and off the curriculum further illustrates how NIDA is – in part through me – utilising its control of the epistemic device to match the contents of the subject to the knower code of the students. Not content with an historical survey of the twentieth century director, these knowers want to know about a particular *kind* of director.

Finally, this case study illustrates the contention drawn out in Chapter 3 that the modes of knowledge transmission exist on a continuum rather than in opposition to each other. That is, in the actual teaching of the subject, I often have had recourse to the *knower mode* as well as to the *knowledge mode* to legitimate the material I wish to include. For example, the subject in 2012 included a series of classes on the work of Australian ensemble Back to Back Theatre because of my own personal interest in their work, and the fact that I had seen their recent production of *Hell House* (Arts House Melbourne, 4 August 2012). Of course, I also have recourse to the sanctioned knowledge about Back to Back produced by my academic discipline (cf. McGillivray, 2010). The overriding observation though is that my teaching is not legitimated solely by *what* I know to the exclusion of all other factors; the *habitus* that I bring into the room as part of *who* I am is also a factor which legitimates the knowledge I teach. In particular, this includes a certain ability on my part to gather, interpret and transmit information, and to understand the learning situation required in different contexts, which is key to what NIDA requires of me. Furthermore, in particularly mercenary terms, the personal characteristics of my tertiary degree helped make me the right kind of knower. When the course is submitted for reaccreditation, the more ‘legitimate’ academic qualifications which can be listed amongst the staff who have prepared and will be teaching the course, the better.

4.5 NIDA Goes to Berlin

My second case study details the observations and analysis made possible by a fieldwork expedition to Berlin in 2012. This research was conducted on the ground between May 2 and 20, 2012, as I observed the six students enrolled in the Graduate Diploma of Dramatic Art (Directing) in that year. For the students, the trip had been planned as a knowledge exchange between the NIDA students and their colleagues at the *Hochschule für Schauspielkunst* (literally, Academy for Dramatic Arts) Ernst Busch (hereafter *HfS EB*) in Berlin, Germany. This was made possible through the personal connections of the NIDA Head of Directing, Egil Kipste, and *HfS EB*'s status as an international benchmarking partner for NIDA, as part of its government accreditation process.³⁶ I should make clear at this point too that in the original conception of the project, I was travelling to Berlin only as an observer, to conduct research in part funded by a travel grant from my home institution. I also played no part in the conception or organisation of the trip (apart from making a few suggestions about which shows to see while in Berlin).

I have divided this section into three subsections: in the first, I detail the curriculum objectives which had been set for the project to be undertaken between the German and Australian students; and in the second section I will go on to detail the reality of the project, affected as it was by forces outside of either institution's control. In the final section, I will follow Ian Maxwell's attempt in "Learning in/through crisis" to explore "crises that might be illuminating and productive – rather than adopting crisis and anxiety as a pervasive, consuming *habitus*" (2001:44). That is, I will argue that this seeming crisis was educationally productive, as it encouraged learning in Moore and Maton's *knower mode* (outlined in the

³⁶ During the time in Berlin, Professor Margarete Schulter, an acting tutor at *HfS EB* and leader of its International division, talked to the students about her involvement with the benchmarking of NIDA's Acting course.

previous Chapter), and also provided a de facto training in what Bourdieu describes as *taste*.

Throughout this tripartite analysis, I am giving a real world illustration of the modes of knowledge transmission which were outlined in the previous Chapter.

(a) The Plan

Although the design changes every year in line with the corporate branding, the information booklet for the Directing course which was available to prospective students both on NIDA's website and in the foyer in 2012 featured a very clear statement of the course aims: under the heading "Course Approach" it reads THEORY + SKILLS + PRACTICE = METHODOLOGY. (see Figure 4.1). Further down the same paragraph, it revealed: "[t]he aim of the course is to facilitate an individual directing methodology". Even these brief extracts suggest the centrality of methodology to the program which NIDA offers. The particular application of Active Analysis (AA) methodology, which Kipste has developed with his international colleagues, is regularly cited as the course's mark of distinction, and that which sets it apart from many of its competitors both within Australia and abroad. It is perhaps worth alighting on the equation again – the mathematical implication of that particular presentation is that all that a

COURSE APPROACH

THEORY + SKILLS + PRACTICE = METHODOLOGY

The Graduate Diploma of Dramatic Art, specialising in Directing is designed to enable students to analyse the theoretical underpinnings of the director's craft, to gain competency in the primary skills needed by the director and finally to put all this into practice in a variety of situations and develop a personal directorial methodology. _____ **Theory** The course looks at how theatre and thought go hand-in-hand. To do this, students will examine the Stanislavski system, dramaturgy, the elements and principles of design, as well as the work of leading directors and practitioners. _____ **Skills** An overview is given of the primary skills associated with directing, which include lighting, sound, multimedia and creating designs. The course also looks at directing for the screen, working with other artists and leadership skills. _____ **Practice** Directing students will apply the theory and skills that have been covered in the course, by working with students from the NIDA Acting, Design and Production courses. They will also work with student actors from organisations such as Actors Centre Australia, QUT, National Theatre, Opera Australia and the Adelaide Centre for Performing Arts. _____ **Methodology** The aim of the course is to facilitate an individual directing methodology. The first term is devoted to gaining a competency in Stanislavski's Active Analysis, the backbone of the methodology. Students are then able to tailor this to their own interests. Throughout the year guest speakers from the industry will introduce students to relevant areas of expertise.

Figure 4.1: Extract from the 2011 information booklet for NIDA's Graduate Diploma of Dramatic Art (Directing).

prospective student might undertake in the course is done to facilitate an individual methodology. As the booklet points out, “[t]he first term is devoted to gaining a competency” in AA: far and away the longest period of time in the course dedicated to a single area.

The methodology is taught across the first term in classes which fall under the rubric of ‘Processes of Acting’.³⁷ Each afternoon of the first term, from 2.00pm until 6.00pm (or indeed often later), the directing students are taught the AA methodology through a model rehearsal process. (Over the past years, the chosen plays have tended to be one or both of either Harold Pinter’s *Betrayal* or Alexi Abruzov’s *The Promise*.) From the outset, the students fill the role of performers, directed at first by Kipste, and then by their colleagues as they gain more familiarity and confidence with the methodology. This mode of teaching is a highly prized feature of the course – and the rehearsal room is very, very closed; despite repeated attempts, I have never managed to get inside. Interviews with graduates reveal that although the focus is very squarely on this methodology across the first term, the course does make good on its promise to allow them to “tailor this to their own interests”, which they do across a number of production projects in the remaining three terms. In the words of Student A (2010), “one of the best things that I got out of the course was having a structure that I could destroy, or recreate, or remodel or constantly question”. However, in the first instance, methodology is taught to the students through a collaborative project closed to anyone but them. As the year progresses, they are offered up to three opportunities to practise methodology on the floor with actors from other schools and institutions, including the Actors Centre Australia (ACA) in Sydney and the National Theatre School in Melbourne.

³⁷ As part of government accreditation, the course is organised into coursework subjects. Processes of Acting, while equal in terms of weighting to the other subjects, is by far the largest in terms of contact hours.

Directing

The four year course in Theatre Directing encourages young directors to find their own directorial ›signatures‹ in an increasingly complex world. At the heart of the education is a theatrical understanding that the actor's performance is at the centre of the director's vision. The course is structured systematically. In the two year Foundation course we teach the fundamentals of the craft of directing through practical exercises, scene studies and theoretical reflection. At the beginning, the directing students join the actor's foundation course and learn about the fundamentals of acting (how to action the text etc), and through their own acting work gain an insight into the creative process of the actor. In the directing courses, we teach the importance of ›situation‹, and train the students in different directorial approaches (V-effect, Scene Transformation etc) and offer workshops on Directing Methodology, which is not purely theoretical, but is put to the test with professional actors. Following the analysis of the directing methods of Bertold Brecht, we turn to late Stanislavski with his emphasis on psycho-physical actioning. The courses in acting and directing methodology (which are always practical) are complemented by Performance Analysis, Dramaturgy and Text Analysis. The aim of analysing the dramatic text is to find the situation of each scene and possible suggestions of the action which is inherent in the text. The plays we examine range from Classical Antiquity to the Post-modern. Further subjects taught on the course are: set design, costumes, light and makeup, theatre history, sociology, physical and vocal training, music theory, verse studies, technical aspects of theatre and methods of rehearsing.

Figure 4.2: Extract from the English website for the four year Directing course at HfS Ernst Busch.

Methodology makes up comparatively little of the directing curriculum at HfS EB. The information on the program provided on the English-language version of their website³⁸ (see Figure 4.2) indicates that the course “offer[s] workshops on Directing Methodology, which is not purely theoretical, but is put to the test with professional actors”. This suggests from the outset a markedly different approach from NIDA’s course. There is no official coursework component of the German course – although this is potentially misleading, as the course does not lead towards a tertiary level qualification and is therefore not required to produce accreditation documents dividing its curriculum into neat boxes. I am confident that aspects of the many other classes which the students undertake provide them with a *de facto* grounding in methodology. In a discussion on 7 May 2012 with Britta Geister, a member of the *Studieingang*

³⁸ It is worth noting that the English version of the website is considerably less comprehensive than the German one, although for my purposes it provides a useful summary.

Regie (directing staff) at *HfS EB*, she explained that the German directors are expected to do a short production project at the end of each of their semesters. (The course is taught in two semesters a year over the four years.) In the first year, these projects are undertaken with professional actors. Methodology for the German students then is something which is learnt on the floor, in a room with actual practitioners, rather than as a conservatoire exercise.

The description of the *HfS EB* directing course as ‘four-year’ is also misleading, given only the first two years involve on-site teaching. For the final two years, students undertake a project with *HfS EB* actors for the first time, followed by placements and secondments with professional theatre companies around Germany. The course ends with a final ‘diploma show’³⁹, which has a funded seven-week rehearsal period, followed by a two-week showing. Similarly to the NIDA graduating productions, Geister explained that the aim here is to “get [the graduating students] on the map”. However, this production does not have to take place at the School – indeed, it is more common for a student to direct a show at the venue where she has completed a placement. If this is not possible, the student is offered the use of *HfS EB*’s venue (the BAT-Studiotheater), or the School has a relationship with the Maxim Gorki Theater, whose Gorki-Studio has hosted some diploma shows. Part of the logic of the course, then, is that by preparing for the graduation production with a series of placements and secondments, the students will learn through observation an approach to the actual business of directing which they can then take with them into their graduation production, given it is staged almost two years after their final classroom work.

However, opinions were starting to flow back to the staff at *HfS EB* that the companies where students were undertaking their placements were becoming confused about what the

³⁹ The qualification is described using the German word *Diplom*, which does translate as ‘diploma’. However, it is distinguished from NIDA’s Graduate Diploma given (as discussed above) it is a non-academic qualification.

students were supposed to contribute to the company. In conversation, Geister described the students on placements as ‘assistant directors’, but companies were increasingly finding that they couldn’t be used to fulfil this role. At least in part, this was because companies found it difficult to throw them in the proverbial deep end to lead rehearsals or take on rehearsal room responsibilities, given they didn’t have a strong framework on which to fall back. (This, of course, was precisely what they were supposed to be gaining from working with experienced practitioners.) In order to respond to this perceived ‘gap’ in the training, the first- and second-year students were asked to join a three-week series of workshops led by the NIDA students, and supervised by Kipste and Geister. The dual aims of the project, then, were: allowing the NIDA students to reprise their knowledge of AA, and put it to the test in the role of ‘teacher’; and exposing the *H/S* EB students to a new body of knowledge which might stimulate and challenge their thinking about methodology.

The timing was of crucial importance for the NIDA students: given their year-long course contains effectively only nine months teaching time (from February through October, with November given over to rehearsals for the graduation production), the trip to Berlin would have to fit logically into the progression of teaching. Taking this into consideration, it was placed at the very beginning of Term Two, directly after the students’ first production project collaborating with the ACA. The ACA project was the first opportunity which the students had to put the AA methodology into practice outside of the classroom, and it was assessed on that basis. This experience, therefore, would be very recent for the students as they went into the rehearsal room in Berlin, and the experiment was designed to offer them a further chance to solidify their knowledge of the methodology. Given the setting in a conservatoire, it was also positioned as a chance for them to investigate an area of AA which they might not otherwise get the chance to in a process which had a production outcome.

Positioning the students as the facilitators in this process would also encourage them to reconsider the material in a different light, as they had to take responsibility not just for executing the methodology, but explaining and expanding it at each step.

The trip was also timed to coincide with the 2012 *Theatertreffen*, taking place in Berlin during early to mid-May. This festival, which is amongst the most high profile of the annual theatre festivals in the German-speaking world, is a three-week celebration of the most notable productions to have been staged in the past twelve months. A team of critics and programmers travel across Germany, Austria and Switzerland throughout the year, producing a short list from which ten productions are invited and funded to perform in Berlin during the three weeks of the *Theatertreffen*. (In 2012, five of the productions were from Berlin houses – an anomaly, we were assured, and the subject of much hand-wringing throughout the festival.) There are also associated play readings, lectures and workshops held in and around the main festival venue, the *Haus der Berliner Festspiele*. Due to the scale of the event, each production receives between two and five performances, making tickets hard to come by. After a nervous wait, including holding off making any other plans, Kipste was able to exploit his EB connections to secure tickets for the students (and staff) to all ten of the featured productions.

Before moving on to discuss what eventuated once the students arrived in Berlin, it is worthwhile making clear that this experiment could be seen as operating very much in what Moore and Maton identify as the *knowledge mode*. In inviting the NIDA students to lead their HfS EB counterparts through the AA process, Kipste and Geister had clearly declared through the design of the project that “the personal characteristics of the author or subject” (Maton, 2000:155) were irrelevant – what mattered here was that they were giving the Germans access to “a unique knowledge of a specialised, discrete ontological object of study” (Maton, 2000:156). The NIDA students, as agents who possessed this knowledge, would be valued as

equally as their teachers Kipste and Geister, because it was primarily their knowledge which legitimated them and granted them the authority to speak on this subject. Their “personal characteristics” had a small but compelling role: the timing, straight after the Australians had put AA into practice, suggested that their real world experience with the methodology also helped legitimate their knowledge. In part, the clarity of the set-up resulted from the necessity on NIDA’s behalf to justify the experiment in academic terms, given the students would be taking three weeks out of their comprehensive Australian schedule. This framing of the experiment was further evidence of a wider movement towards legitimating knowledge at the Institute through the *knowledge mode*, given it was designed to give students an experience in which they were passing on a sanctioned set of knowledges to their German colleagues.

(b) The Reality

It was just this finely wrought timing which threw the entire experiment into crisis. The very day that the exercise was supposed to begin, the *HfS* EB students went on strike, staging what they were very self-consciously referring to as a revolution. I learnt about it first through an email from Kipste, as I was preparing to leave Sydney. It was titled “die Revolution”:

Ch,
Greeting [sic] aus Berlin! As you may have heard, we have arrived to the centre of a revolution here at EB. The short version is there will be no classes until next Monday; the [NIDA] students will be filming the revolution as part of their Screen assessment this week. This has actually worked out better than the original plan for us. [...] Let’s talk as soon as you’ve arrived.
E.

It took some investigation on the ground in Berlin before the exact situation became clear to me, both because of the inevitable linguistic barriers (my German, while workable, is by no means perfect), and because the NIDA students themselves were unclear on the exact political

machinations behind the scenes. While revolutionary fervour was felt everywhere, actual details were much scarcer, particularly given the staff were cautiously distancing themselves from the protests. What was clear was the impetus for the revolt: the Berlin state government had withdrawn the funding for a new campus for *HfS* EB; and the students weren't going to accept that without a fight.

Although the School traces a lineage back to the Austrian theatre luminary Max Reinhardt's school at the Deutsches Theater in the early twentieth century, the form that *HfS* EB takes today has its roots in East Germany's State Drama School. A deliberately remote location was chosen in Niederschönewiede in the far eastern suburbs of Berlin in order to allow for a larger campus and more space for the new School than was available in the cramped inner suburbs (cf. Earnest, 1999). The Acting department was still based there in 2012, however the three newer departments of the School – puppetry, choreography, and directing – are situated in very disparate parts of the former East Berlin. The distance between the two furthest departments (ironically, given the stated aims of *HfS* EB, acting and directing) is fifteen kilometres, from the original site to Prenzlauer Berg in the northern suburbs. Since shortly after reunification, there had been talk of uniting the School in a central location



Figure 4.3: *Winning design for the factory conversion for the HfS Ernst Busch Zentralstandort.*

(*Zentralstandort*), and this proposal gained momentum from 2005 when it became a priority of the Socialist mayor of Berlin, Klaus Wowereit. In 2010, the School was granted a former factory site on

Zinnowitzer Straße in the central district of Mitte, as well as a 30 million Euro budget for its conversion, and Berlin architects Ortner and Ortner successfully tendered a design proposal (see Figure 4.3) to convert the site to a central campus in early 2011.

All was going to plan, until the time of the NIDA students' arrival in Berlin. The dominant party in the Berlin State legislature⁴⁰, the *Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands* (SPD), had questioned their support for the funding of the central campus, after an increased budget proposal was put before them. In the context of the austerity measures sweeping Germany and Europe in 2012, the decision to fund a conservatoire acting school to the tune of more than thirty million Euros – particularly when the state of Berlin was borderline bankrupt⁴¹, and could not afford to increase funding to, for example, primary schools – had become highly politically questionable. The right wing of the SPD withdrew their support for the grant to *HfS EB*, which meant the whole project was scuppered until further notice. Without wanting to deal in broad generalisations, German government policy has been very generous to the arts, and to theatre in particular; the State Government, for example, subsidises the major performance companies of Berlin to the tune of three hundred and eighty five million Euros each year.⁴² This left the students with very little precedent on how to respond to what they saw as this government hostility. They had a number of rowdy meetings, complete with hand signals and speaking points, adopted the moniker of 'revolution', and the image of a crudely drawn house as their rallying symbol (see Figure 4.4), and composed chants.

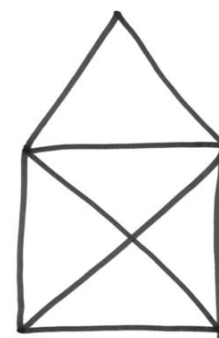


Figure 4.4: *Der Bau*

⁴⁰ Berlin is one of three historically anomalous City-States in Germany where the State Legislature is also the local government. The other two are Hamburg and Bremen.

⁴¹ Mayor Wowereit attracted international notoriety in 2003 with his declaration "*Berlin ist arm, aber sexy*" (Berlin is poor, but sexy).

⁴² *Ex Berliner*, issue 105 (May 2012), pg. 7.

With impressive clarity of vision and purpose and only occasional naïveté, the students devised a plan of attack.

Perhaps predictably, the German students looked towards the Occupy Movement, which had been such a high-profile form of



Figure 4.5: A HfS EB student begins the occupation of the proposed Zinnowitzer Straße site. The banner reads “Build it!”.

protest over the year or so preceding their ‘revolution’. Plans were made, and by the time I arrived in Berlin four days after the announcement of the funding cuts, the students had moved into a vacant lot adjacent to the Zinnowitzer Straße site (see Figure 4.5). The students set up large tents and other amenities on the site in order to make very clear their intention to stay as long as possible. (One hurdle in the plan: the land they occupied was in fact private property, although the owner granted them permission to stay on the site for a week before any action was taken.) Soon after the occupation of the site, the students invited high-profile Berlin artists and companies to join them in offering free performances and discussions in the tents: these included Thomas Ostermeier (*Intendant*⁴³ of the Berlin Schaubühne and alumnus of the HfS EB Directing course), and the actors of the Deutsches Theater (Berlin’s most ‘classical’ theatre company, and recipient of the highest level of State subsidy).⁴⁴ A continuous seventy-two hours of performances were programmed between Friday and Sunday and quickly advertised through social media and beyond.

⁴³ German major companies are run by *Intendants* who perform a role which combines that of the Artistic Director and the General Manager in the English-language tradition, with both artistic and administrative responsibility.

⁴⁴ The Deutsches Theater receives a combined 19.8 million Euros in state subsidy, roughly 126.20€ per seat, per performance (*Ex Berliner*, May 2012:8).

So on my first day in Berlin, instead of the sober rehearsal room I was expecting, I found myself on the side of Stralsunder Straße, watching a group of about one hundred students picket a meeting of the SPD. Everything had a cartoonish, nightmarish edge: the German students all had white face-paint and make-up on, and many of them were dressed in what were clearly theatrical costumes, or holding props and puppets. They had arranged themselves on either side of the driveway entrance, with the majority of students on one side facing a small group of puppetry students manipulating an object they called the ‘spider’. Out the front on the ‘spider’ side was Hans who, I later discovered, was one of the directing students. He did not stop moving or yelling in the more than an hour I was at the protest – he was jumping, singing, beating a drum, twirling... The only word I could come up with when writing it up in my notes the next day was ‘possessed’. Hans was leading the others in a series of chants, which kept returning to a central refrain: “*Bau unser Haus in Mitte / Bitte bitte bitte bitte*” (Build our house in Mitte / Please please please please). The noise was extraordinary, and it reached a fever pitch each time a new SPD member arrived to the meeting, although it was never anything less than orderly, and the police kept a watchful distance throughout. Running around in amongst all of this were the six NIDA directing students, cameras in hand.

During the chaos of *HfS* EB trying to respond to what quickly escalated to threats of amalgamation with their West German counterpart, the *Universität der Künste* (UdK), the planned NIDA project fell quickly by the wayside. To be clear, this was not because we were outsiders or because of any particular feeling the German students or staff had about the project: *everything* fell by the wayside. As the NIDA students were told in discussions with *HfS* EB staff across the ensuing fortnight, they simply didn’t have a way of getting the students back into the classroom even if, as Schuler suggested, their training was suffering because of it. The protest continued with little resolution in sight, even as the locations changed: the students

were asked to leave the land they had occupied and did so, moving instead to HfS EB property at BAT-Studiotheater, via a well-attended march through the centre of Berlin (see Figure 4.6).



Figure 4.6: HfS EB students and supporters march through central Berlin. The visible banner at the rear reads “To be or not to be”.

All of which was

politically fascinating, but left something of a hole in the schedule: having taken six directing students to the other side of the world, at no small expense to the Institute, the NIDA staff now had to find something, many things, to do with them. The official plan for the Berlin trip had, as Ian Maxwell writes of another training context, “constituted one object as [the students’] object of analysis, only to discover that [they] were learning about something else” (2001:55). Just what that “something else” was, I explore in the subsection that follows.

(c) Learning in/through Revolution

As the planned project fell apart it became necessary to improvise some other activities in order to salvage some educational outcomes from the trip. I analyse these utilising two frameworks: the modes of knowledge transmission outlined in the previous Chapter and Bourdieu’s notion of *taste*. Again following Maxwell it is crucial to acknowledge here that throughout this writing “I am also in the picture” (2001:53). The account and brief analysis above were made possible by my presence in Berlin, by the fact that I could be an observer and not a participant in the

protests. (The *HfS* EB staff had first distanced themselves from the action, and then been asked to stay away by the students – and as NIDA staff, both Kipste and I were also subject to this ban.) The shift from a clear-cut rehearsal process to an ad-hoc program of activities also catapulted me from being an observer to much more of a participant. Kipste asked me to continue the program of seminars for the course which I tutored back in Sydney, and also to resume a series of classes on performance analysis which had commenced at the Perth International Arts Festival, analysing the work which the students were seeing each night. I also began to participate in many of the other workshop-style classes which filled the NIDA students' schedule given I was already in the room. These classes were offered by staff with whom Kipste had a personal relationship, and who were prepared to meet with the NIDA students in their own time.

My account from here becomes necessarily partial; obviously, I was not with the students for the entirety of their time in Berlin, as they had their own social schedule, but more crucially for the purposes of this investigation, I was asked to stop attending the classes the German staff were offering midway through our second week⁴⁵, although I remained involved in planning and leading other activities. This was primarily due to a confusion which now arose about my role in the room: now I was no longer an observer, I risked being a disruptive presence at a time when any further disruption could be ill afforded. Like many an ethnographer before me, I thus had to negotiate subjects who were seeking to change the terms of our relationship, inviting me to become a more active participant in some events of which I was an observer, and removing my access to others. As I was much more closely involved with the day-to-day planning of activities, as well as some teaching, I will use the first person plural

⁴⁵ While in hindsight I wish this had been more sensitively handled on all sides, I should be very clear that I agree absolutely with the logic behind the decision.

to delineate these accounts gleaned from a different mode of research; like Maxwell I will, in the material that follows, “report on events as I experienced them” (2001:53).

(i) *Productive crises*

As part of the original plan, referred to above, the NIDA students were to complete an assessment task for their subject Directing for the Screen while in Berlin. Given they were taking three weeks out of their time on campus in Sydney (the remaining two weeks which most of the students spent overseas was designated holiday time), this had been the compromise – instead of completing a short fiction film over a fortnight as their predecessors in 2011 had, this cohort would film a five-minute documentary about their time in Berlin. To this end, the students were travelling with three video cameras, associated equipment, and between them had one copy of a video editing software suite. Shortly after their first meeting with the German students, and before my own arrival in Berlin, the Australians were seconded as the official documenters of the revolution. (There are various stories about how this came about: whatever the specifics, they were volunteered for this job, one the Germans were very eager to see filled.) Across the first three days I was in Berlin, this assignment was causing major headaches: the NIDA students felt ill-equipped to produce what had been asked of them, and under an immense pressure to deliver something as soon as possible.

Of course, this repurposing of the assessment – it was quickly confirmed that these mini-documentaries would replace the official Directing for the Screen assessment – radically altered the amount of work expected of the students: the German students asked them to provide a five-minute video each day, detailing the highlights of the revolutionary action. These videos could then be disseminated through social media, and played back to the students and

supporters at the occupied site in the evenings. It became clear that the Germans had assumed a much higher degree of technical ability on the part of the Australian students than was the case – the planned assessment was in fact to be their first extended use of cameras on the ground, and had been preceded only by theoretical coursework in their first term at NIDA. The Australian students learnt some very quick lessons: their first attempt at putting together a video was removed from YouTube for copyright violations⁴⁶; and editing was made an exponentially more difficult task given none of the students spoke German (ultimately, the majority of the videos produced use the “*Bau unser Haus in Mitte*” chanting as the soundtrack). The German students were often uncertain as to what they wanted from the short films, and after a number of revisions the videos eventually produced were focussed on being entertaining documents for those involved in the protests.

This kind of working through crisis can be understood as productive learning. In fact the NIDA Assessment Policy, which alerts students to the possibility that “because of the nature of the learning environment at NIDA [...] the due dates and details of some assessments *will change*” (2012:32, my emphasis), suggests that an openness to crisis in this sense will be inculcated in their *habitués* by the institution. The “learning environment” here is typified by this kind of ‘on-the-fly’ work – whether in a performance space or not – where the rules of the game may change from one moment to the next. While the brief for the project, and indeed the final product required, shifted around them, the NIDA students were learning how to ride out a crisis outside of their control. They were developing, in the terminology which Moore and Maton offer us, “personal characteristics” (Maton, 2000:156) which were appropriate to the emergent director – that is, the ability to deliver content through crisis, to remain professional under pressure, to make the most of available resources, and so on. The set of

⁴⁶ The German students had asked them to use “Children of the Revolution” by T. Rex as the soundtrack to the video. Germany also has much stricter copyright and licensing law than Australia.

dispositions which they were honing on the ground in Berlin make up a particular *habitus*, in this case, the shared understandings appropriate to professionally trained directors.

Throughout this procedurally messy exercise, which would have been almost impossible to set up and create as a planned piece of work, the students were being given an education in becoming “the right kind of knower” (Maton, 2007:98). This rubric of working through crisis is a powerful influence on the kind of teaching which goes on in the NIDA Directing program, and will be explored further in the following Chapter.

(ii) *Learning in the knower mode*

As it became clearer that the German students would be unlikely to return to class during our time in the country, the students were offered many different options for how they could choose to fill their time in Berlin. Kipste encouraged them to proceed with further explorations in the AA process, but this proved an increasingly unpopular option – many of the students reiterated both publicly and privately that having completed the ACA project and trialled the methodology out on the floor, they were reticent to return to workshopping it amongst themselves. When discussing options of how to use their time in Berlin, the students (prompted by Kipste) seemed far less concerned with *what* they should learn and more with *whom* they should meet. The students here exhibited a strongly *knower mode* engagement with their learning; they were keen to meet and talk with German teachers and practitioners: the ‘about what’ was much less important here than the ‘who’. On the one hand, it could be argued they were simply trying to maximise the opportunities available to them, having travelled to the other side of the world. On the other hand, I believe this evidenced a kind of *knowledge mode* fatigue. Having spent a term doing both theoretical and practical coursework situated primarily in the *knowledge mode*, they were keen to have a chance to experience some

learning in the *knower mode*. This preference also suggests that the students were starting to adapt to the *knower code* of the institution and the field of cultural production more generally (cf. Maxwell [2001:51]), as they had identified the value of ‘networking’, ‘schmoozing’, and meeting the right people while they had the chance.

During the days after the students had moved back to the BAT-Studiotheater and there was less filming to do, Kipste called on his contacts within the *HfS* EB staff to run classes and discussions with the NIDA students. These staff were drawn from different departments of the School, and each introduced his or her specialisation by discussing the place that it had within the wider curriculum. From there, some led further discussions, others did some practical work, but the framework for each of the classes was to consider how a given skill was developed within training, and its place in the wider German theatrical culture. The field of cultural production, and in particular the *habitus* of young artists, was found to be markedly different in the two cultures, as illustrated by this exchange between a NIDA student and Britta Geister recorded in my fieldnotes of the session Geister led on Monday 7 May:

Student: As young directors, we know we’re going to spend a lot of our careers talking about why we should make theatre, justifying that. How do you prepare your students for that?

Geister: Why would anyone ever ask you that?

In other sessions, they received a potted history of (primarily East) German theatre, with a particular concentration on historical links to the work they had seen or were going to see. Each session lasted for approximately two hours. The dominant way in which this learning was legitimated was through its social relation, or the “personal characteristics of the author or subject” (Maton, 2000:156). In their discussions with *HfS* EB staff for example, this was made quite explicit: Holger Teschke, a member of the Dramaturgy department who led the students on a tour of Bertolt Brecht’s house, and later taught a class on the dramaturgy and

performance history of Goethe's *Faust*⁴⁷, was introduced and his knowledge legitimated by Kipste as having "worked with Heiner Müller".⁴⁸

In the final week we were in Berlin, as the revolution ground its way to a halt – by this stage some German students had decided to go back to class, while others were waiting it out – the NIDA students had exhausted Kipste's contacts. The great leftist agit-prop theatre maker René Pollesch, who had been scheduled to make work with the *HfS* EB students well before the revolution, now agreed instead to help them devise a theatrical response to the controversy. The NIDA students were invited to join this process, although Pollesch warned them (in person after his *Theatertreffen* show *Kill Your Darlings! The Streets of Berladelphia*⁴⁹) that he was working at the students' behest and so had little authority to say who could come or go. Pollesch's particular devising process is also renowned for producing linguistically very demanding work (as *Darlings!* demonstrated), which worried many of the NIDA students, although they were reassured by Kipste and Pollesch that this wouldn't be a barrier to their attending the rehearsals. As it turned out, the rehearsals were held in the evenings from 5.00pm, and with commitments to attend *Theatertreffen* events each night it was difficult for them to be involved. The majority of the students stopped attending quickly, although they did each attend at least one rehearsal.

In discussing the chance to observe Pollesch's practice, Kipste said to the students that he felt "it wouldn't matter if he was directing in Mandarin" (Research fieldnotes, Wednesday 9 May 2012). While many of them remained unconvinced, this was a powerful example of the allure of the *knower mode* at work. In deliberately overstated terms, what Kipste was arguing was

⁴⁷ A production of *Faust I & II* from Hamburg's Thalia Theater had been selected for *Theatertreffen* 2012. It eventually won the award for Best Production at the end of the Festival.

⁴⁸ Although Kipste followed this up with an assertion that 'everyone' had worked with Müller at some point.

⁴⁹ This work, commissioned by the Volksbühne where Pollesch has created much of his idiosyncratic, celebrated pieces across the last decades, was devised around a Bertolt Brecht short play.

that there was something to be learnt simply by sitting at the feet of the great Pollesch, breathing in the air in the room, and watching his process – even while, the students pointed out, they might not understand a word he says. Pollesch the great leftist avant-garde director possessed “personal characteristics” (Maton, 2000:155), which legitimated the knowledge he had to offer. He has worked with some of the biggest and best names in German acting – Fabian Hinrichs, the star of *Darlings!*, eventually won the Best Actor award from the *Theatertreffen* – and the chance to work with him is an extremely coveted honour. The fact that the knowledge that he would be imparting to the students would be unintelligible to them is a telling illustration of how the epistemic relation was discounted here: the knowledge itself was irrelevant, it was simply the presence of the knower which made the chance to work with Pollesch the kind of opportunity which, Kipste asserted, “money couldn’t buy”.

(iii) *An education in taste*

To turn to the analytical tools offered by sociology, we can note that *taste*, according to Bourdieu in his landmark work *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste*, “is the basis of all that one has – people and things – and all that one is for others, whereby one classifies oneself and is classified by others. Tastes (i.e. manifested preferences) are the practical affirmation of an inevitable difference” (1984:56). The link to the *knower mode* as explained by Moore and Maton is very clear: an education in *taste* is an essential part of being classified as the right kind of knower. It is important here to note that *taste* refers not to a *liking* for a particular object in question, but rather an *appreciation* of it. Bourdieu also notes that “[i]n matters of taste, more than anywhere else, all determination is negation” (1984:56), highlighting that any declaration of *taste* involves declaring another object outside of *taste*. In terms useful to this project, Bourdieu further notes that the aesthetic sense is “a distinctive

expression of a privileged position in a social space” (1984:56), making it a particularly vital element in any consideration of *taste*.

Later in the same work, Bourdieu further describes *taste* as “the source of the system of distinctive features which cannot fail to be perceived as a systematic expression of a particular class of conditions of existence” (1984:175). He thereby asserts that possessing the right *taste* is a precondition of admission to a particular social class, so *taste* functions here as a kind of yardstick. This same argument can be mounted with regard to the “class” of the emergent director: in order to be admitted to this rarefied class, one must possess the right *taste* in theatre. A young director waiting to make her mark on the cultural scene needs to have an appreciation for exactly the kind of postdramatic *Regietheater* (translated, or perhaps misappropriated, into English as ‘director’s theatre’) that predominates on Berlin stages (cf. Svendsen, 2010). A version of this style has been identified by critics as “the director’s theatre that Sydney audiences have supposedly been experiencing lately” (McCallum, 2012), suggesting it would be ever more crucial for directors wishing to enter the local scene to develop and demonstrate their *taste* for this kind of theatre.

The very selection of Berlin as a destination for this kind of fieldwork for the NIDA students becomes extremely telling in light of the sociological analysis of *taste*. Seeing the productions selected for the *Theatertreffen* – already themselves a statement of *taste* on behalf of the German critics who selected the productions to be remounted in Berlin – can thus be seen as an extended exercise in inculcating the right *taste* in the Australian students. Only five of the ten *Theatertreffen* productions, and very few of the other performance events the students attended, were surtitled in English (even then, often very inexpertly). This becomes of far less importance when the development of an aesthetic *taste* is understood as the overriding goal. As noted above, the particular timing of the trip also meant the influence of this exposure could

be widely felt: the students were required to choose the scripts for their graduation productions shortly after their return, and the resonances of the work they saw in Berlin could be felt and seen across the season of works they produced later that year (see Chapter 6 for further details).

A similar reading can be applied to all of the NIDA students' engagements with the cultural life of Berlin while the planned project was not proceeding. In requiring them to spend time in world-class institutions like the Neue Nationalgalerie and the Jewish Museum, the NIDA staff were attempting to develop in the students a particular "aesthetic sense", to borrow Bourdieu's term. This comes in part from the ability to be in the presence of iconic artwork. The students were able to visit the exhibitions "*Der geteilte Himmel*" (Divided Heaven) and "*Gerhard Richter: Panorama*" at the Neue, which also brought them into contact with some of the most iconic twentieth century artwork, including work by Pablo Picasso, Andy Warhol, Mark Rothko, and Yves Klein.⁵⁰ This work – on the whole, part of the permanent collection at the Neue – is extraordinarily difficult to come across in Australia. I don't mean to suggest a blithe cultural exceptionalism here (that European culture is perforce superior to that offered in Australia), but rather that an appreciation for this work is a form of *capital* in the field of cultural production. There is no coursework undertaken in the Graduate Directing course at NIDA which specifically focusses on the history of other art forms, nor indeed on cultural history or theory, and I would argue that this kind of exposure formed an *ad hoc* education in *taste*. This was augmented in many cases by the undergraduate studies most of the students would have undertaken before they entered the NIDA program, which are most often in the humanities; however, the Berlin trip ultimately provided an opportunity for sustained attention to be paid to the development of *taste*.

⁵⁰ This starts to suggest the idea of the 'grand tour', as taken by the Enlightenment gentleman, for his cultural edification. I return to this image in Chapter 5.

(d) Conclusion

Instead of the *knowledge mode* experience which I had expected to observe in Berlin, the political upheaval at *HfS* EB resulted in a completely different type of learning taking place for the NIDA students. The three weeks of activities which did take place – which we could broadly divide into filming for the Revolution, masterclasses with *HfS* EB staff, and cultural excursions – provided unique educational opportunities for the students which would not ordinarily be replicated in the course of their qualification. This case study has argued that the majority of this learning took place in the *knower mode*, developing in the students certain “personal characteristics” appropriate to emergent directors, including a particular *habitus* and certain *tastes*. Much of the learning done in Berlin also privileged knowledge transmitted and legitimated by charismatic knowers, another hallmark of learning in the *knower mode*. In the Chapter which follows, I will examine another limit case in order to interrogate the modes of knowledge transmission at play in the Directing course at NIDA. There too I will offer examples of my own practice and experience as both a teacher and a researcher in order to provide a detailed illustration of pedagogy.

4.6 Looking Forward

In this Chapter, I have offered two case studies drawn from the enormous variety of teaching which takes place within the Graduate Diploma of Dramatic Art (Directing) in any given year. These studies were chosen due to my own personal involvement and investment in them, which facilitated a deeper and more sensitive portrait of them than might otherwise have been possible. I also took care to explore one case of a subject which is regularly included year to year in the course and is thus very well-documented and supported by observations from different

years of teaching, as well as an unpredictable event which arose in unique circumstances. At least in part, this is designed to introduce the persuasive discourse of crisis, which saturates a great deal of the teaching in the course – a notion I will return to in the next chapter. In each case study, I drew on my ethnographic observation of the teaching and learning which occurred on the ground, and then applied Moore and Maton’s framework to it in order to understand the modes of knowledge transmission and legitimation at play in each case.

NIDA has here used its control of the epistemic device to broaden the field of potential objects of knowledge for directors-in-training in a conscious effort to strengthen the program. These shifts are also a calculated, astute response to the increasing pressures on the Institute to meet the same academic standards as other higher education institutions in Australia. By reframing the material taught into a self-conscious *knowledge mode*, the directing department is able to make visible, and indeed highlight, the academic credentials of the program – a key distinction in one of only two postgraduate programs in the Institute. At the same time, some sets of knowledges key to the program of study remain steadfastly transmitted in the *knower mode*. This includes elements of the training which go towards developing a particular *taste* and *habitus* in the emergent directors. In Chapter 5, I will explore this seeming contradiction in the approach which NIDA is taking to director training, and argue that bolstering one mode of knowledge transmission, without making any sacrifices to the other, represents a reorientation of the course into what Maton characterises as the *élite mode*, the mode with both strong social and strong epistemic relations; in other words, where it matters both *who* you are and *what* you know.

chapter five

Élite but not Elitist

[Q]uality is not just personal but national. A country that discards its talent out of prejudice or poor policy fatally weakens its own productivity. The bad news is that real quality assessment will take hard work by governments, schools and universities. Not slogans. Not simplistic formulas. Just lots more genuine thought and sophistication on the central element of the educational equation. The worse news is that failure will be disastrous. Surrendering to the glib counsels of elitism, as opposed to reaching the élite, will condemn thousands of Australians to a life of under-achievement

(Craven, 2012).

5.1 A Story

In his inaugural address as the Vice Chancellor of the University of Sydney on 22 July 2008, Dr. Michael Spence declared repeatedly that “this is an *élite*, but not elitist, place”. In so doing, he was invoking the problematic history those words have in Australian public discourse – in the country of the under-achiever, where tall poppies are cut ruthlessly down to size, neither are words with which major public institutions often want to associate themselves. It is useful, therefore, to explore Spence’s remarks further to understand exactly the distinction which he was drawing, and indeed whether his understanding of the category of ‘*élite*’ moves beyond the Oxbridge cliché of white-tied toffs sipping Pimm’s in college quadrangles.⁵¹ Particularly telling is that Spence used this declaration as kind of statement of resistance to the increased regulation of universities, and proposed it as a rallying call for how the institution may be able to weather the storms of the years to come. “The university sector in Australia is under thorough review,” he told his audience of colleagues and benefactors,

And so Australia, a country of enormous wealth, has a chance to build upon its fine university tradition. But times of review are of course uncertain times, and we could just as easily undermine as build upon our rich inheritance [...] Only clarity about what we do and why we do it will help us chart a steady course through uncertain times ahead (Spence, 2008).

His catch-cry of “*élite*, but not elitist” was designed to provide such certainty.

Lest he be misunderstood from the outset, Spence aligns the word “*élite*” with excellence, rather than social elitism, and reiterates the University of Sydney’s (hereafter Sydney) commitment to democratising that excellence (despite what current appearances might suggest):

⁵¹ This was particularly resonant at the time, as Spence had arrived back at Sydney (his *alma mater*) directly from a management role at the University of Oxford.

Sydney is unashamedly committed to excellence. This is an élite, but not an elitist, place [...] Sydney is a place committed to finding the best in people of potential from all social backgrounds. Of course the University does not always meet its aspirations, no university does – or at least none with a calling worthy of the name (2008).

To begin to apply the vocabulary introduced earlier in this thesis, Spence was proposing that the personal characteristics of students *do* matter: he was interested in educating “people of potential” after all. Sydney may well be able to help students “find” this quality of excellence, but he presupposed that it existed. The distinction which he was making comes to the fore with the mention of “social backgrounds”, with the implicit suggestion that the University needed to move away from this as a determinant of potential. (Situated as it is in Australia’s wealthiest city, Sydney has constantly battled the perception that it exists primarily to educate the children of the wealthy eastern and northern suburbs.) So here we see the first sign that Spence proposed to use his control of the epistemic device to change the criteria for who might be considered a legitimate knower at Sydney.

It was when he went on to speak about the type of teaching which should go on at Sydney that these ideas were thrown into sharper relief. In discussing what should be the Institution’s core values in this area, Spence noted that “it’s useful to refer to those languages that make a distinction between *education* and *instruction*. I have no doubt that our core value should be *education* in its broadest, in its moral, sense, and not just instruction” (2008). Here Spence started to characterise the modes of knowledge transmission and legitimation which the University should be employing. Rather than paying attention solely to what the students know, a core *knowledge mode* idea, teachers were being asked to look beyond this mere “instruction”. It is important to note, though, that Spence did not dismiss this idea, but rather, expanded it:

This has two parts. First we should be honing fundamental intellectual skills, we should be training, and not merely filling, minds [...] And we should be honing these skills in environments in which understanding is not just disseminated, it is also

created; environments in which the life of the mind is highly prized and where there is excitement about ideas (2008).

These ideas around honing skills suggest the core *knower mode* idea of paying attention to who the students are, and developing certain dispositions in them. Spence characterised this particular valuing of educational capital as a key feature of the kind of university over which he wanted to preside, with the core aim to “equip our students to make the most of their talent. Those intellectual skills, that excitement, these are gifts that will long outlast much of the content we teach” (Spence, 2008).

What Spence was proposing, then, was a learning environment in which the *knower mode* values of who you are, and the *knowledge mode* values of what you know, meet. Happily, he used the same vocabulary as Maton in characterising this as an “élite” experience. This applies throughout his remarks to the *what* of teaching; that is, to how we should go about legitimating the kinds of knowledge students are being taught. Spence went further in discussing the *élite mode* also as a mode of knowledge transmission when he declared that:

We should encourage our students to participate fully in all of the activities that our University has to offer. Drawn as they are from very different communities and with very different experiences, they have at least as much to teach one another as we have to teach them (2008).

Here, Spence anticipated a broadening of the modes of knowledge transmission in use at Sydney to take into account both who you are and what you know – or, to return to Moore and Maton’s earlier terminology, he was suggesting a positive valuation of both the epistemic and the social relation to knowledge. Finally, in invoking “talent” and “potential” as markers of the students whom he wanted to see at the university, he proposed that we should seek out students with an élite *knower code*. No longer should we see just the *knowledge mode* knowers thrown up by the ATAR system referred to above in section 3.1, but rather our classrooms

should be full of students who have these additional personal characteristics. In all three of the arenas contemplated by Moore and Maton in Chapter 3, Spence is advocating a shift to an *élite* mode.

In this Chapter, I will consider how a similar transition is taking place in the Directing program at the National Institute of Dramatic Art (NIDA). In it, I will combine the observations from the two case studies in the previous Chapter – one primarily a *knowledge mode* experience, the other drawn from the *knower mode* – to suggest that the contemporary forces affecting NIDA have resulted in a shift to an *élite mode* of training. This is of particular importance because, to return to Spence’s observations:

It’s hard to maintain in a culture that can increasingly see university education as a kind of employment certification process, but for those able and willing to be involved it can be personally transformative. I should emphasise that there’s now much pressure to see university education, particularly for undergraduates, in very different terms to these. There’s pressure to see it as ‘merely’ instruction, or as preparation for one kind of career or another, but our core value should be education, and education in its broadest sense (2008).

Here, Spence points directly to the notion that a university education is concerned with personal characteristics, and indeed in developing a particular *habitus* (an idea which drives Chapter 6, below). Although, as noted in Chapter 1, they are starting from opposite ends of a spectrum, I argue that a similar shift is taking place at both NIDA and Sydney. I will discuss NIDA’s experience of the shift through a particular incident in the Institute’s recent history which laid bare the mechanics of code shifting when it revealed, to abuse Bourdieu’s phrase, a fish out of water through a particular “code clash” (Lamont and Maton, 2008:273). Before this, however, I will consider *élite* knowers in the literature, before returning to ideas specific to NIDA when examining ‘talent’ as a *knower code*, and the particular ways in which the Directing program at NIDA is moving towards *élite mode* outcomes.

5.2 Élite Knowers in the Literature

As noted above in Chapter 3, the *élite mode* of knowledge transmission is relatively under-theorised. This is in part because it is an extension to the sociology of education penned by Maton, which is not directly connected to the earlier formulations of Basil Bernstein. Maton also suggests in almost all of his writing on Legitimation Code Theory (LCT) that the *knowledge* and *knower modes* predominate almost exclusively in educational knowledge transmission (2004:220). In looking for *élite knowers* identified in past studies, then, we have relatively few places to turn. In the course of the article which devotes the most attention to the *élite mode*, “The Right Kind of Knower” (2007), Maton refers to two specific examples: the gentleman scientist of the Enlightenment; and the successful contemporary high school music student (both referred to earlier). In this section, I will analyse these examples in order to unpack some of the characteristics ascribed to *élite knowers* in previous work.

The gentleman scientist example can be unpacked with relative ease. The pursuit of a scientific career in the late seventeenth century (and for a considerable period thereafter) was an option only for the wealthy – and indeed only for the wealthiest – *of men*. Scientific knowledge was, therefore, only produced by men of a certain social class. In order to be a legitimate scientist, it mattered both what you knew (that is, a grasp of basic scientific principles to which everyone could theoretically have access), but *also* who you were: knowledge produced by this kind of knower was specialised by reference to *both* the epistemic *and* the social relation. “Gentlemen were viewed as the right kind of person to trust because of their freedom of action, codes of virtue and honour. This endowed them with the necessary characteristics that ensured credibility and, hence, compelled assent” (Shapin, quoted in Fontes da Costa, 2002:267). Even in the eighteenth century, the Royal Society would trust the mere word of a gentleman as sufficient ‘proof’ of a scientific discovery or phenomena. Conversely, any woman

who attempted to produce legitimate scientific knowledge would automatically be discounted and excluded simply by virtue of the personal characteristic of sex. In this example, Maton is paying particular attention to the legitimation of knowledge, and demonstrating that in this case it proceeded through the *élite mode*.

Maton's second example of the high school music student delves further into the knower code. His basic contention is that success in this discipline (and indeed in similar creative courses) can be linked to both a grasp of the relevant knowledge, and additionally a "taste, judgement or a developed 'feel' for it" (2007:101). In particular as music is most often taught as an elective, with comparatively little classroom time devoted to it, the perception Maton explores is that the most successful students are those who bring this 'feel' with them into the room. This stands against the logic of the majority of high school teaching, which proceeds by suggesting that any student can have access to the legitimate knowledge of the discipline. However, this is not a simple *knower* versus *knowledge mode* divide, as the music student with the 'feel' who doesn't learn the correct knowledge – scales, composers, composition, etc. – will be as unsuccessful as her classmate who has access to all of the legitimate knowledge, without having a 'feel' for it. That is, students will find success in this discipline by virtue both of what they know, and also of who they are in terms of personal characteristics.

This combination of personal characteristics and a developed 'feel' can be usefully compared to the notion of *habitus*. This is summarised by Maton in an introductory volume on Bourdieu's key terminology:

Simply put, *habitus* focusses on our ways of acting, feeling, thinking and being. It captures how we carry within us our history, how we bring this history into our present circumstances, and how we then make choices to act in certain ways and not others.

This is an ongoing and active process – we are engaged in a continuous process of making history, but not under conditions entirely of our own making (2008:52).

Habitus, therefore, is a way in which we can think about the ‘feel’ to which Maton refers – the student who has the correct *habitus* will know how to react ‘in the moment’, or, to use the vocabulary often used around acting, will display the best ‘instincts’. (That is, performers “make choices to act in certain ways and not others”, and those choices are driven by their *habitus* – as inculcated through training.) In order to identify the *élite* coding of potential knowers in creative training, I suggest that we can combine notions of *taste* and *habitus*, and pair them with a rigorous investigation of *what* these knowers actually know. Bourdieu’s insistence that *habitus* is a fluid, malleable set of dispositions also aids an understanding of how it might interact with creative training: a training program can address itself to developing and challenging the *habitus* of its students and therefore set about crafting the right kind of knower.

In the remainder of this Chapter, I will argue that the developments in teaching in the Directing program at NIDA which I have been tracing throughout this thesis can be understood as shifting the dominant mode of knowledge transmission to the *élite mode*. Throughout the year-long course, attention is paid both to *what* these emergent directors know, and also to *who* they are. I will first investigate how this makes sense of the oft-discussed ‘x factor’ for which conservatoires are searching through auditioning candidates, and suggest that in the case of the postgraduate programs in particular this relates to identifying an *élite* knower code in prospective students. Drawing specifically on the case studies drawn out in the previous Chapter, I will go on to illustrate the *élite mode* in action in the knowledge transmission employed by the course. Finally, I will suggest that this language of legitimation can be seen throughout the program, and specifically in the way the course pairs attention to developing a sense of *taste* in students with a focus on imparting a specific set of knowledges.

5.3 Talent as a Knower Code

In Ross Prior's book-length study on *Teaching Actors*, there is an oft-repeated assertion that the first step in actor training is the identification of talent, or the 'it'-factor. Talent here is read as "an elusive quality that cannot be taught or learned. It seems to exist separately from skill, technique and knowledge" (Rideout, 1995:13-4). However elusive it might be, this notion of "talent" in the way Rideout reads it is one around which the entire industry of creative training is arguably organised: Cohen goes so far as to assert it is the "*sine qua non* of a performer" (1998:12). Throughout his book, Prior quotes innumerable acting teachers who claim that they can identify this talent in seemingly impossibly short periods, and assert that it is the precondition for a successful creative career. Theorists and teachers often tie themselves in knots discussing this quality, although they are united in agreeing that it can neither be quantified nor captured by language. I believe that the observations made in this context about the training of actors can equally be applied to emergent directors.

This notion of talent is most obviously at play in the selection of candidates for admission to the creative courses offered at conservatoires. As Prior observes, "[i]nstitutions spend much time and energy on auditioning candidates in order to find the most obvious talent and select suitable students with the greatest potential for their programmes" (2012:23). The structure of the audition process differs from institution to institution, and indeed can be different between individual courses – the Acting and Directing programs at NIDA, for example, have markedly different audition processes, although each is broadly divided into two stages. In some auditions, the candidate is asked to bring some material to the room, however the majority of the process is given over to working 'on the floor'.⁵² Again, this work is

⁵² In a theatre rehearsal process, there is often a distinction made between work 'at the table' (usually text work, discussion, etc.) and work 'on the floor'. For more information, cf. Rossmannith (2009).

structured in a particular manner in order to allow for the precise qualities the institution has identified as key to success in its programs to be drawn out.

Reading this process in line with LCT as outlined above, we could observe that the audition process is set up to identify a *knower code* in candidates for training. That is, the often complex systems which institutions employ to whittle huge numbers of applicants down to the eventual few accepted for training are designed to identify “the right kind of knower” (Maton, 2007:98). In this case, the “right kind” of applicant is one who already displays the “elusive quality” often referred to under a constellation of terms relating to talent. In a similar manner to the high school music students who form the basis of Maton’s study, it seems that the right kind of knower in this case is one who already possesses a “taste, judgement or a developed ‘feel’ for it” (Maton, 2007:101) before they walk through the audition room door. In this case, the auditionees are being examined for the particular “personal characteristics” (Maton, 2000:155) which will ensure success in training. So at this opening stage, the members of staff conducting auditions are trying to identify a *knower mode* orientation in their students, in that they are testing their ‘instincts’ and how they “act in certain ways and not others” (Maton, 2008:52). However, they are also being examined for the correct *knower code*, when they are asked to blindly accept the guidance and direction offered to them, particularly in the later rounds of the typical audition process. Are they prepared to accept the guidance of the staff running the audition based solely on their personal authority?

We can start to see here how the newly installed *knowledge mode* requirements of conservatoire training might become problematic for students who have been selected primarily on the basis of a *knower mode* coding. It provides some insight too into how and why the audition requirements for courses (particularly those at a postgraduate level) have recently shifted. Much was made in 2012, for example, of the decision to change the audition

requirements of the audition for NIDA's undergraduate Acting program by abandoning the book of monologues from which candidates had previously to prepare two pieces. The new process instead required them to choose their own monologues – a covert testing of the *élite* code, given it examined both the knowledge of the student around repertoire selection, but also their *taste*.

It must also be noted here that an audition process is an enactment of a particular power relation, where those conducting the interviews and auditions control the *epistemic device*. Even though, as Paul Moore notes, actors are drawn to particular institutions because of a perceived alignment in their aesthetic and ideological values (2004:195), Mark Seton reminds us through his extensive observation of audition processes that “it is the teachers who recognise the potential and it is therefore they who know how to nurture or ‘draw out’ what is purportedly ‘in’ the student” (2004:191). These observations expose two key features of audition processes, particularly for creative arts conservatoires: they often result in auditioners identifying and drawing out dispositions or *habitués* in students which are similar to their own; and across the course of an audition, potential students may mimic or replicate what the values they have identified in their auditioners. Seton illustrates both sides of this concern, in not only claiming the conduct of an audition process “will tend to produce certain responses, that will usually tend to reinforce what [auditionees] believe to be the circumstances at hand” (2004:192), but also recounting how in the selection process for a major Australian drama school, acting teachers explicitly identified auditionees comfortable and compatible with the institution's methodology. The ethics approval for my project did not extend to observing audition processes, as NIDA was quite rightly wary of the potential disruption to auditionees made vulnerable in this context, so I am unable to provide ‘on the ground’ detail from the process for admission to the Directing course. I outline below, though, the general pattern of

the interviews and subsequent auditions, and note where the personal characteristics of both auditioner and auditionee are potentially exposed.

In the audition process for the 2012 cohort of the Graduate Diploma of Dramatic Art (Directing), there were many different stages including: a written questionnaire, a verbal interview and a rehearsal room exercise. The rehearsal room exercise, for which the applicants had to direct a scene using student actors, in addition to some of the written questionnaire, could be understood as directly examining the “personal characteristics” of the applicant. The information booklet about the course stated that the interview and audition together are designed to identify “the practical ability, potential and motivation necessary to undertake this level of work in Directing” (NIDA, 2011). Other parts of the questionnaire, though, as well as the verbal interview, are designed to make reference to a “specialised, discrete [...] object of study” (Maton, 2000:156) and examine *what* the student might know. For example, students in cohorts past have been asked to list films or playtexts they admire; a covert assessment of *taste*, but also a moment where the auditioner’s dispositions become important in assessing the response. The same could be said of the design proposal which candidates for admission to the Directing course must present. Additionally, because the course requires “an undergraduate degree, or at least five years documented professional experience in an area relevant to directing” (NIDA, 2011), it further assumes access to a certain sanctioned knowledge set on the part of applicants – confirming Maton’s suspicion that “[é]lite schools [...] may operate with selection criteria based not only on qualifications but also on issues of character and disposition” (2007:104). In practice, therefore, the audition process for this particular program could be understood as searching for an *élite* knower code in the students –that is, identifying those with the talent alongside those with a particular knowledge.

Reliance on talent as a marker of success in training can also allow institutions to downplay the role their training plays in the shaping of a successful performer. If the student does not possess the “personal characteristics” required for success in the program, then there is very little the institution can do to make them the right kind of knower, despite all of the other components of a training program. In Prior’s study for example, one of his informants⁵³ (the former Director of an Australian drama school) speaks quite frankly about the implications of the audition process:

In my experience, the unhappiest students are students who may not have all that much natural talent. We often take in people who are a risk, sometimes it pays off and sometimes it doesn’t. If they find they’re not doing well, they get unhappy and blame other people for their problems (‘Marvin’, quoted in Prior, 2012:173).

Although it is doubtlessly over-stated, ‘Marvin’s’ comment speaks to the crucial importance of identifying the correct *knower code* in students. The implications for teaching presented by this reliance on a particular code will be explored in the following section.

5.4 Teaching in the Élite Mode

In addition to uniting behind the opinion that talent is a requirement for a creative career, the informants for *Teaching Actors* confirm the commonly held anecdotal position that it is a quality which cannot be taught. We have already seen how the set-up of the audition process at conservatoires often serves to ensure that students possess this quality before they begin their study, and teaching proceeds with this as given. For example, in discussing her approach to teaching, Heather (head of acting at an Australian drama school), noted “you pre-suppose that the people in the group have that special sensitivity or emotional volatility that is their art,

⁵³ All of the informants in the book are given pseudonyms, but strangely there remain enough personal details for anyone with passing knowledge to make a good guess at who each of them are.

because you can't teach that" (quoted in Prior, 2012:172). However, we should be careful to distinguish this (as indeed do many of the informants) from the opposite position that there is *absolutely* no teaching in creative programs which pays attention to the "personal characteristics" of the students.⁵⁴ In this section, I will draw out some areas of training which I believe can be read as proceeding in the *élite mode*. That is, those elements of the program which pay attention both to *what* the students know, but also to *who* they are.

Before continuing, it is worthwhile noting Maton's strong caveat in introducing these ideas and placing the 'modes' of LCT in a particular diagrammatic form. He advises:

this is not a set of dichotomised or binary ideal types: strengths for relations are *relative* and represent a continuum; the four legitimation codes are akin to naming directions created by points on a compass to help orientate oneself within the terrain (2007:97, emphasis in original).

In the material which follows in this Chapter, therefore, I am interested in drawing out how the teaching and learning which take place within the Directing program at NIDA are moving into the *élite mode*, rather than asserting that they have reached the limit of this mode to the exclusion of all others. Alongside most conservatoire programs, the Directing program has traditionally been taught firmly in the *knower mode*, and expected a similar coding in its students. However, across the period of time to which this research has paid attention, there has been a shift to include more *knowledge mode* experiences in the training, from the inclusion of more specific methodology to the strengthened coursework units which were discussed in Chapter 4 above. The argument which I will draw out in the sections which follow and the conclusion to this Chapter, is that *taken as a whole*, the Directing program is beginning to employ the *élite mode* as its dominant mode of knowledge legitimation and transmission.

⁵⁴ Seton (2004) provides an account of how this plays out in the training of actors, when he traces the ways in which various 'vulnerabilities' are identified and inculcated in students during auditions and their subsequent training.

The particular methodology which forms the basis of the Directing program, identified above as the late Stanislavskian methodology of Active Analysis (AA), provides a useful illumination of these concerns. As Kipste, and selected students of his early cohorts, have noted in interview, his primary aim in putting his own stamp on the course was to include a specific methodology as its centrepiece, and this has only strengthened across the years since Kipste's first cohort graduated in 2008. The methodology, according to the information provided in the course prospectus, is designed such that the students "gain competency in the primary skills required by the director and finally [...] put this all into practice" (NIDA, 2011). This idea of a fixed set of "primary skills" to which an emergent director can be granted access is a very *knowledge mode* idea: recall that Maton asserts this mode proceeds by assuming "a unique knowledge of a specialised, discrete ontological object of study" (2000:156). At the same time, the methodology is taught through the *knower mode*, casting Kipste as the charismatic knower who can claim a lineage through Carnicke and his German colleagues to the roots of AA (see above, Chapter 2, for details). The teaching also requires that the students use his rehearsal room techniques and replicate them when leading their own rehearsals. In this one key area of the course, then, we can see how the training is seeking *élite* outcomes by providing a certain kind of knower with access to a certain specialised knowledge.

In the survey which provides most of the data for his study on the *élite mode* in British high school music teaching, Maton and his colleagues asked the following question: "[i]n your opinion, how important are these things for being good at [the subject]?" (2007:101). The options offered were:

- Skills, technique and specialist knowledge
- Natural-born talent
- Taste, judgement or a developed 'feel' for it.

This is a development of an earlier survey, designed to separate the two dispositional options in order to account for “well-known debates over, for example, ‘nature versus nurture’” (Maton, 2007:101). In analysing the data produced, Maton suggests that in disciplines with an *élite* coding, all three factors are considered important to success. In reading the NIDA Directing program in this way then, we would expect to see examples of all three (and combinations thereof) present in both the content and the teaching. In the examples which follow, I will draw out some of these traces which my research has identified.

(a) Skills, Technique and Specialist Knowledge

This dimension of an *élite* code is most obvious through the focus the program has on methodology, outlined previously in Chapters 2 and 4. In asserting that the aim of the course is “to facilitate an individual directing methodology”, NIDA makes an overt claim that there is a particular set of “specialist knowledge” to which students in the course will be given access. In the first instance, this is through the teaching of the Active Analysis methodology, and the development of the skills required to master it. (This, of course, returns Kipste to the centre of the teaching which takes place.) However, this kind of “specialist knowledge” is also evidenced in other coursework study: for example, the students are exposed throughout the year to the work of Manfred Pfister, specifically *The Theory and Analysis of Drama* (1988), in a subject called ‘Dramaturgy’. The division of subjects into individually accredited units, which has been the subject of a great deal of hand-wringing throughout the Institute, has effectively drawn attention to the idea of “specialist knowledge”, as it mandates the presentation of material in a way which highlights exactly what quantifiable knowledge to which students can expect to have access at the conclusion of a particular subject. The focus on methodology as the rationale behind the Directing course also necessarily foregrounds the idea of skills and technique.

(b) Natural-Born Talent

As discussed above, talent is sought during the audition process. It is also possible to suggest that the entrance requirement for the course mandates a certain knower code in applicants – that is, those who choose to apply for the course are those who feel they have some talent in the area. This is perhaps confirmed by the experience requirement on application: students who apply for admission to the course are expected to have some background and success in directing at least at an amateur level. To a degree, then, the applicants for the course have already demonstrated some talent before they come through the doors to audition.

(c) Taste

During the previous Chapter, I outlined some of the basic features of the Bourdieusian notion of *taste*; it is to these ideas that I believe Maton here refers. Outside of the Berlin trip for the 2012 cohort, free tickets to shows in Sydney and subsidised tickets to interstate arts festivals are made available to the students to provide a similar experience. In this way, the teaching staff are able to tacitly pursue an agenda of taste. In providing access to certain productions, and indeed to certain practitioners, the Directing staff are able to make clear what they consider to be the most ‘tasteful’ art, and indeed what emergent directors should be expected to know. (It is also worth noting that many of these tickets are to mainstage and high profile touring productions, which would otherwise be inaccessible to many of the students on purely financial grounds.) The same logic applies to the trips which students make to high profile festivals: the 2010 cohort to the Adelaide Festival and Melbourne International Arts Festival; in 2011 to the Perth International Arts Festival and Melbourne; and the 2012 group to Perth. On these trips, as in Berlin, repertoire is chosen for the students and they are thus exposed to a very particular

artistic agenda. (The Perth and Adelaide Festivals often overlap, and so even the decision of which Festival to attend represents a clear choice.) Even further, in 2012 each show was accompanied by a debrief performance analysis class, suggesting that not only was there a lesson in taste provided by attending the show itself, but there was a kind of ‘official position’ provided on the product. Informal discussions after each of the shows seen in Sydney can perform much the same function.

(d) Judgement/Crisis

In this section, I would like to expand on the material in the previous Chapter about learning through crisis, and take this as a paradigmatic example of teaching and learning in the *knower mode*. Although the previous case study was centred particularly on the experiences of the 2012 cohort in Berlin, I would argue that crisis is a pervasive mode of learning throughout the Program, even when ‘at home’. In particular, this idea has affected many of the projects which the students have completed at other institutions. In 2011, a postdramatic project with the Queensland University of Technology (QUT) was thrown into chaos, and in 2012 a similar project at the University of Wollongong, as well as a collaboration with the Aboriginal Centre for Performing Arts (ACPA) in Brisbane, were similarly affected. In all cases, the terms of the project were changed – in one instance quite radically – either shortly before work commenced, or while the students were at work on the projects. In each case, the number of participants in the project changed, and so the artistic brief (and therefore the work the students could hope to explore through the projects) was necessarily truncated.

In these instances, I suggest that far from being pedagogical disasters, these projects were paying attention to developing a sense of “judgement” in the students. Forced in this way

to rapidly readjust their artistic horizons, the students learnt to exercise a sense of judgement which NIDA identifies as crucial to a successful creative career. Anecdotal evidence, as well as that provided by career mapping conducted by McGillivray and Hay (2011) utilising the AusStage database, suggests that these students will spend approximately two years doing fringe and independent work before the relative calm of the mainstage; developing the particular judgement required to deal with creative crisis is a core concern of the course. At the same time, the students are developing and testing a particular set of skills and techniques appropriate to these kinds of scenarios – suggesting that learning through crisis addresses both *what* the students know, but also their personal characteristics. In ensuring a project debrief accompanies every creative project (a Institute-wide policy), the teaching staff in the program are able to bring students’ attention to what might have been learnt outside of a purely *knowledge mode* experience.

(e) A Developed ‘Feel’ for it

There are two main areas in which this criterion is met in the teaching and learning at work in the NIDA Directing program. The first is through the extensive workshop style teaching, in which students observe senior staff at work for extended periods before commencing their own work. This is particularly true in the Directing program of their work with Head of Directing Kipste in the first part of the Active Analysis teaching, during which the students observe Kipste directing all of the scenes of the play being examined before they do so themselves. The same structure is employed in their classes with other staff: in 2012, for example, the students completed a series of classes with Head of Acting Jeff Janisheski, during which he modelled best practices for working with actors (particularly concentrating on his expertise with Anne Bogart’s Viewpoints). In this way, students are encouraged to ‘feel’ a successful rehearsal room

before venturing out into their own. Secondly, I would point to the sheer volume of practical work as another area in which a 'feel' for the job is being inculcated: through being exposed to so many different varieties of performance practice and working with performers from disparate areas, the students will (almost) by necessity develop a strong feel for their work.

(f) Conclusion

Through examining these and other examples drawn out elsewhere in this thesis, I believe that it is clear teaching in the NIDA Directing program proceeds through a strongly *élite mode*.

Instead of solely focussing on broadening the personal characteristics of the students, or indeed on teaching the students a particular set of knowledges, the training program concentrates on both of these aspects, often simultaneously. This, I believe, is a development of the teaching in the program, and I will explore in the following Chapter how it has strengthened and deepened the training which NIDA offers. First, though, I would like to investigate one instance of the consternation surrounding the changing nature of training, which lays bare NIDA's use of the epistemic device to propose broaden the acceptable objects of knowledge within a particular training program. It does so through the example of one individual who misrecognises the changing macro-educational context in which training is now taking place.

5.5 Case Study: Puplick versus NIDA

In what appears to be a biennial tradition (see Lawson, 2008a; Maddox, 2009; Hallett, 2010), in September 2012, NIDA once again hit the pages of the major Sydney newspapers. Writers for the *Sydney Morning Herald* were finally able to wheel out their stores of drama school puns and Shakespeare references – the difference this time being that the ammunition was being

provided not by emails, resignations or hearsay, but rather a soon-to-be-published essay in the Currency House *Platform Papers* series.⁵⁵ In this edition, *Changing Times at NIDA* (Number 33), former NIDA Board Member Chris Puplick makes the case for what he sees as disastrous management decisions at the Institute imperilling both its reputation and future. The Institute responded in kind, deploying many of the same defences as in earlier stoushes. In this section, I will look at Puplick’s essay and the issues it highlights, as well as the Institute’s response, to illustrate this transition in progress to the *élite mode*. At its heart, this debate also encompasses broader questions about the very nature of the field(s) in which NIDA finds itself operating, and this argument is threaded throughout the below observations. That is, in Puplick’s work, I identify an insistence that NIDA operates in – and is therefore answerable only to – the field of cultural production in Australia. NIDA’s response to his argument evidences the Institute’s awareness it is now operating in the field of higher education, both in Australia and indeed abroad, and its attempts to recognise this in its strategic direction.

(a) The Case Against Change

Puplick’s tone throughout the essay is deliberately aggressive, often employing the language of combat. For example, in concluding the paper, he says of Williams and her recent changes to the structure and programs of the Institute, “you don’t spit on its legacy, demean its practitioners, decimate its staff and think that you’ve done your job, like Tacitus – *solitudinem faciunt pacem appellant*” (Puplick, 2012:57). In a footnote, Puplick offers the Bryonic translation of “they make a desert, and call it peace”, but it is worth considering the first half of the sentence: “*Auferre, trucidare, rapere, falsis nominibus imperium; atque ubi solitudinem faciunt pacem*

⁵⁵ *Platform Papers* is a series of long-form essays on aspects of the creative arts, published quarterly by Currency House since 2004. The series has a distinguished history of kick starting and contributing to enduring debates in the Australian field of cultural production.

appellant” (The *Agricola*, Chapter 30). The Loeb edition offers the translation, “they plunder, they slaughter and they steal: this they falsely name Empire, and where they make a wasteland they call peace” (Tacitus, 1914). Whilst I don’t propose to take this overblown rhetoric entirely literally, his choice of image speaks volumes of his opinion of the Institute’s current management. The essay is polemical stuff (as with many of the Platform Papers) – it is easy to see whence the press coverage of the publication took its cues – and this must be borne in mind throughout the analysis which follows.

I have argued in the preceding Chapters that, during the course of my research, NIDA had been in the process of a transition between different modes of knowledge legitimation and transfer, exemplified by the changes to the Directing program. As I explore further in Chapter 7 below, similar changes have begun to flow into the larger, undergraduate courses at NIDA. Throughout Puplick’s essay, he draws attention to the same issues, and I believe approaches them from a *knower mode* position, meaning for example that his writing values staff based on who they are, or the personal characteristics which legitimate their teaching. This is seen in his insistence on professional success as a marker of an appropriate leader for the Institute. Discussing the appointment of the new Director, Puplick asserts that “[h]er CV makes it clear that Williams has never directed a significant theatre performance; taught acting students; supervised theatre training or auditioned students for placement in a training institution or ever earned a living in the professional theatre” (2012:16). The emphasis here is very much on how she is *personally* inappropriate for the role – especially compared to someone like her predecessor Aubrey Mellor, who despite “a perceived weakness as an administrator and an alleged failure to give the school a strong sense of direction” never had his “skills and ability as a teacher and director” called into question (Puplick, 2012:9).

In the course of his essay, in relation to these ideas, Puplick invokes the category of an *artist*, as someone who possesses certain personal characteristics, and embodied mainly by those staff who had left the Institute during Williams’s tenure. In discussing both her appointment, and indeed that of her eventual successor, Puplick insists that the Director of NIDA must be “a respected and leading member of the profession with the skills of an artist and a teacher” (2012:61). One of the qualities he ascribes to those who do fall within this category is an “artistic temperament” (2012:59), one which must be understood by those who manage them (and by implication, which *can* only be understood by fellow artists). This is an example of two intertwined Bourdieusian ideas, those of *habitus* and *cultural capital*: Puplick is asserting throughout his essay that artists display and share a particular set of dispositions, making it possible for them to understand and interact with each other – he goes so far as to assert that “[n]othing could be more illustrative of the transition from ‘old’ to ‘new’ at NIDA than the collapse of the ‘family’ atmosphere which had characterised the place for the better part of four decades” (Puplick, 2012:21). (Family, of course, is an enduring metaphor in the field of theatrical production, as Camilla Sobb-Ah Kin [2010] reminds us – but a metaphor which is every bit as exclusionary as it is inclusive.) The valuing of *capital* also differs from field to field, and *cultural capital* is often at odds with the logic of other forms of capital. Puplick suggests here that the Director of NIDA should have earned her *cultural capital* through professional success in the field. Under Williams’ management, though, “[m]ost of the artists have left the building” (Puplick, 2012:60).

In the course of the essay, Puplick nominates the declining quality of pedagogy at NIDA as one of his key concerns. Again, he evinces a clearly *knower mode* approach to knowledge transmission, suggesting that a successful teacher of the creative arts is one who possesses the correct personal characteristics. This is demonstrated in the long roll-call of

departed staff, including brief biographies drawing attention to their length of service to the Institute, and respect from the student and staff body (despite some notable errors, including leaving Karen Vickery, former Head of Performance Practices, off his list, and some incorrect spellings). He further draws attention to a specifically *knower mode* idea of links to the charismatic knower: after “the legendary Keith Bain” and other staff trained in “[h]is tradition” left the Institute, “according to the students and professional observers, something uniquely valuable was lost” (Puplick, 2012:43,44). In relation to the advent of three-year contracts for teaching staff at NIDA, with a possible two year extension, which have been phased in during Williams’s tenure, Puplick makes the telling observation that “five years [is] just about enough time to dissuade any professional from seeing teaching as a promising alternative career” (2012:30). Quite apart from what this suggests about professional teachers, it is a revealing confirmation that Puplick sees the legitimacy of a trainer as directly related to their personal characteristics. This is further reinforced by the deployment of language like “tradition and legacy” (Hallett, 2010), echoed by Puplick, which Williams was accused of trampling.

Finally, Puplick also endorses a *knower mode* position in relation to the way teaching has proceeded at NIDA, in particular in the acting program though I suggest this can be extended to cover the mode of knowledge transmission which characterises the Institute. He asserts that “the NIDA method of teaching [...] was based on an approach which focussed on the trilogy of *talent* (realised through a rigorous audition process), *technique* (taught across all the disciplines) and *temperament*” (Puplick, 2012:31). Two of those three are distinctly *knower mode* characteristics, suggesting the teaching at NIDA is primarily addressing *who* the students are, or concentrating on their personal characteristics, rather than giving them access to any particular knowledge (although it could be argued that *technique* does go some way towards this). He takes up a perhaps predictable position on the curriculum reform debate too: citing the recent audit

of NIDA courses, which suggested “[t]he challenge for NIDA is to consider the practice of teaching and learning within a creative context, achieving a balance between industry professional practice and an academic approach to teaching and learning” (Australian Universities Quality Agency, 2010:10-11), Puplick turns directly back to *knower mode* concerns:

I have seen few, if any, responses to these criticisms but many in the industry would be alarmed at any move to shift the balance from ‘professional practice’ to ‘an academic’ approach to teaching when those same industry professionals were already recorded in the AUQA report as expressing concerns about the level of current students’ preparedness to enter the profession on graduation (2012:18).

(b) Justifying Change

Taking into account all of the above, the major charge of the essay appears to be that Williams herself is the wrong kind of knower to be in charge of Australia’s pre-eminent acting school. (That Puplick makes very little reference to any other program at the Institute is a telling omission, further evidence for the claim discussed in Chapter 2 that NIDA is defined by the Acting program and the star personalities it produces.) In the statements which were released in defence of the management, her suitability for the job was defended on these grounds: the Chairman of the Board, Malcolm Long, said “[Williams’s] extensive industry and educational experience has enabled the development of a coherent developmental strategy for NIDA, which balances traditional skills with new demands in the training of students” (quoted in Taylor, 2012b). This defence can be seen as operating in the *élite mode*: that which qualifies Williams to be an effective Director of the Institute is both her personal characteristics and also the knowledge to which she has access. Further to this, I argue that in the Institute’s response to the publication of Puplick’s essay we can identify many instances of the *élite mode* in the knower coding of staff and the knowledge legitimation and transmission at the Institute.

One of the changes highlighted by Puplick as a negative development was the placing of staff on short-term contracts; although he notes that Williams herself was not subject to the same conditions and that this risked creating stratification between artistic and administrative staff. Williams directly address this in her press response to the essay, where it was reported that she “insisted [staff] return to the stage or screen to refresh their skills, which she said was supported by industry” (Taylor, 2012d). She goes on to say that she felt the industry “were very concerned at that time that NIDA did not have teachers who were current” (Williams, quoted in Taylor, 2012d). This can be seen as an acknowledgement of the powerful sway *knower mode* legitimisation has in the area of professional training – in mandating teachers return to the industry, Williams is ensuring their profile and respect (that is, important personal characteristics) remained high.⁵⁶ There is a *knowledge mode* legitimisation being addressed also: *what* the teachers know must also remain up-to-date and continuously developing. Even this small detail, therefore, is illustrative of a shift to an *élite mode* legitimisation, “where legitimacy is based not only on possessing specialist knowledge but also being the right kind of knower” (Maton, 2007:98).

Williams also gestures towards the shifting modes of knowledge transmission and legitimisation when she states that “[i]t is important for the courses to reflect what’s going on in the real world and for students to have a whole tool kit” (quoted in Taylor, 2012d). By implication, then, it is no longer sufficient for students to have trained with the right people, or to have followed the right training path, but rather to further have access to a “tool kit” of sanctioned material. The appointment of Jeff Janisheski as Head of Acting from 2012 – an appointment criticised by Puplick on the basis of his not being the right kind of knower with a

⁵⁶ There is, of course, an industrial dimension to this too: academics across the country are being moved to short-term contracts in order to give institutions more control over their salary expenditure. This move was one of many issues which led to ongoing industrial action at the University of Sydney throughout 2013.

“limited knowledge of both the NIDA’s [sic] traditions and methods and the recent history of Australian theatre” (2012:34-35) – can be read as further evidence of this shift. While he might not have the exact personal characteristics which would legitimate his knowledge solely on that basis, there is “no questioning Janisheski’s experience as an acting teacher” (Puplick, 2012:34), suggesting here that *what* he knows must be considered alongside *who* he is. The clash here is that from Puplick’s point of view, although Janisheski’s epistemic relation to knowledge cannot be faulted, his social relation can: hence, the suggestion in Puplick’s writing that the job should have gone to an Australian. The Institute, in contrast, claimed Janisheski as an *élite mode* appointment.

The mainstream print media coverage of the stoush shifted the grounds of the debate in a final article entitled “New drama playing in the wings” (*Sydney Morning Herald*, September 22, 2012). Journalist Andrew Taylor claimed this “raises a question skirted in this week’s war of words over Australia’s most famous acting school. Why have a three-year university degree for actors if it fails to spot talent and is no guarantee of success?” (2012d). The article culminates with a list of graduates from four selected acting programs – NIDA, VCA, WAAPA, and the Flinders Drama Centre – and then another list of graduates of the “University of Life” (Taylor, 2012d), complete with the number of times they were rejected from NIDA. While it is tempting to dismiss this as simply journalistic silliness, it reveals the strong *knower coding* of the field. The suggestion here is very directly that it doesn’t matter *what* an actor knows, but rather it only matters *who* that actor is, and whether they have that elusive talent, which Brendan Cowell⁵⁷ is quoted as calling “real” (in Taylor, 2012d) – hence Taylor’s question about the value of training. In all of the spirited defences of the Institute, I identify an attempt to shift

⁵⁷ Cowell is one of Australia’s most successful stage and screen actors of the past decade. He has also worked extensively as a playwright and director, and in all three capacities has developed (and indeed cultivated) a reputation as a down-to-Earth, plain-speaking ‘bloke’. He completed a Bachelor of Communications in Theatre/Media at Charles Sturt University, Bathurst.

this legitimation into the *élite mode*: not by suggesting that the personal characteristics of the students are irrelevant; but rather by saying they must be matched by a rigorous program of study reflecting the “real world”.

(c) No Longer for the Likes of him

As a kind of postscript to this section, recall the *epistemic device*, “the means whereby intellectual fields are maintained, reproduced, transformed and changed. Whoever controls the epistemic device possesses the means to set the structure and grammar of the field in their own favour” (Maton, 2004:220). Williams is using her control of this device to make visible new objects of knowledge, and to restructure the field to privilege a different approach to knowledge-making. What we are seeing here, then, is that as a conservatoire, NIDA’s pre-Williams sense of itself (or rather the *habitués* of the people involved with constructing and maintaining it as a conservatoire) produced and maintained certain *habitués* in those who had involvement with it (such as former board members, staff, students). Puplick is finding that his *habitus*, or indeed his *knower code*, no longer matches the teaching that goes on at NIDA, and so what Maton refers to as a *code clash* is taking place. Puplick, who used to have some control over the epistemic device, is attempting to deploy his remaining capital to wrest it back.

If we explore Maton’s conception of the *code clash* for a moment, Lamont and Maton relate this to the experience of the student who gives up studying a subject once their *knower code* no longer matches that of the field:

Pupils who succeeded under the old code may find themselves suddenly doing less well under the new code. If this change and the new code are not made explicit to pupils – what Bernstein terms ‘invisible pedagogy’ (1975) – then the inexplicable loss of form of pupils whose *habitués* do not match the new code may lead to disincentive, bewilderment, alienation and a sense that ‘this is no longer for the likes of me’. Where

pupils are aware of a potential code clash or code shift in the near future, they may choose, if they have the choice, to opt out of facing that prospect (2008:273).

That seems to provide a fairly compelling description of what has happened to Puplick.

However, it also starts to point towards the dangers which could arise from an unidentified or un-remedied *code clash*, a danger which I and some of my colleagues in the more theoretically oriented departments of the Institute encountered in our work. A shift in modes of knowledge legitimation and transmission requires an attendant shift in the knower codes of the learners if it is to be fully effective.

5.6 Looking Forward

This Chapter has sought to examine how by introducing more teaching in the *knowledge mode* to the Directing program at NIDA, the course is starting to seek more *élite mode* outcomes. The majority of the teaching does without question still take place in the *knower mode*, concerned as it is with developing particular personal characteristics and *tastes* which the Institute broadly, and Kipste and his teaching staff more specifically, have deemed to be appropriate to emergent directors. This thesis will now look at another specific element of the Directing program; in Chapter 6, I turn my attention to the graduation productions and how they function as a kind of capstone experience for the graduating students. Starting with the observation that the productions are a capstone experience in the *élite mode*, I will then explore how they function as a marker of newly-acquired professionalism, before turning to the relationship of the graduation shows to the profession which these emergent directors are seeking to join. In the next Chapter in particular, I am interested in exploring how a particular *habitus* is inculcated in the students through the teaching and learning which takes place at NIDA, and exploring how this might interact with the features of the *élite mode* identified above.

chapter six

The Promise of Becoming

The professional [...] never lost faith in the promise of his 'becoming', despite adversity. He never gave up on 'making it'. He stuck by his training and discipline, was patient and trusting, contained his anger, never committed himself to extreme judgments or actions that might jeopardise a career

(Bledstein, 1976:113).

6.1 Introduction

At the conclusion of training in any arena, there is a symbolic moment of transition. Whether this is the presentation of a pen license in front of your year three class, or the formal admission ceremony after which you are entitled to practice law, a period of training is accompanied by a certain kind of acknowledgement of competence. In this Chapter, I am interested in exploring the graduation productions which conclude a student's year in the Graduate Diploma of Dramatic Art (Directing) as an equivalent kind of experience, designed to acknowledge professionalism. This Chapter proceeds by taking the graduation productions as a kind of liminal moment, a point of transition between two distinct fields: that of higher education; and the broader field of cultural production. Looking in/backwards, the production is the final assessment task of the Graduate Diploma, and required for the award of the qualification. Looking out/forwards, though, it must also demonstrate certain competencies required of anyone who seeks to occupy the positions of cultural authority for which NIDA is training its students. This Chapter, therefore, is broadly divided into three parts: the first will introduce some historical definitions of the professional; the second will argue that, relating to the educational field, the productions are an élite capstone experience; and the final section will consider how an ethos of professionalism, which the Institute asserts is integral to the *habitus* of agents in the field of cultural production, can be displayed throughout the graduation production process.

Before commencing an analysis of the graduation productions, it is important to consider the criteria by which the productions are assessed, as I believe they can be seen to capture the Institute's vision of what a director should look and feel like; that is, how a director can be understood as the field "made flesh" (Bourdieu, 1994:41). The official assessment criteria for the graduation production, which is worth 40% of the coursework subject 'Play

Production’, are weighted equally and divided across five areas: “casting and casting process; rehearsal methodology; elicited performances; artistic cohesion of design and technical elements; and leadership” (NIDA, 2012). Taken together, these assessment criteria demonstrate the dual aims of the graduation production both to assess the *élite* coding of the students and to facilitate a display of *habitus* imbued with professionalism. For example, the final criterion “leadership” is a direct attempt to assess *habitus*: how did a student behave during the process, and how did they “make choices to act in some ways and not others”, in line with Maton’s definition (2008:52). Other areas could be seen to fit the same structure, including “rehearsal methodology”; however, crucially, this also involves the assessment of *what* the students know, as well as *how* they have implemented what has been taught to them during the year. Skill and taste are also positioned as key determinants, particularly informing the criterion of “artistic cohesion of design and technical elements”, which appears to be a way of assessing the ‘look’ and ‘feel’ of a production. Throughout this Chapter I will make reference to these criteria, and how they attempt to encompass both the educational aims and the Institute’s professional aspirations for students at the end of their course.

I also note here that the common-sense definition of a ‘professional’ is one who is paid to render a service – particularly in the creative arts, this is often the sole discriminator between a professional and an amateur. By this definition, then, the students cannot be considered professionals at any point during their graduation productions, as they are not being paid for their work (in an uneasy sense, they are in fact paying for the privilege of making the work). The model of a professional I am pursuing in this Chapter is more complicated than this sharp distinction, as I outline in the next section. There are, though, key resonances, given an important element of the professional *habitus* which I outline below is being the type of person who might reasonably be paid to practice their craft.

6.2 Markers of Professionalism

[...] being a prima donna in that instance just didn't feel like the right thing to do to me. Maybe I should have, maybe I could have, I don't know.

In an interview about the graduation productions, Student H (2011) explains that something “just didn't feel like the right thing to do” in the throes of a production process. In this section, I will argue that this feeling stems from both the *élite* coding which the course has produced in the student, and also evidence of professionalism in their *habitus* that the graduation productions are designed to demonstrate in the students. I will consider how the graduation productions function as markers of professionalism, with particular reference to historical definitions of ‘the professional’. Many of these observations proceed from the fact that these productions are the capstone to a diploma program; a postgraduate diploma is a standard marker of professionalism in the field of higher education. This is complicated by the fact that in the field of creative practice, traditionally sceptical of educational markers (cf. Forgasz, 2010), something more (or at the very least, something different) must also be demonstrated in order for the student to be considered a true member of the profession. Part of the power of the marker is also drawn from NIDA's status – both self-proclaimed and acknowledged more broadly in public discourse (cf. Lawson, 2008a; Neill, 2008; Maddox, 2009; Hallett, 2010) – as a flagship institution within the field. So the piece of paper with the NIDA logo on it certainly gets the graduate part of the way, but the remainder of the heavy lifting has to be done by the graduation production itself. I will now consider the features which have been ascribed to the professional by selected historical definitions. In introducing each of these, my concern is to draw out what might be understood as the *habitus* of a professional; that is, what kind of personal characteristics might one have to display in order to be considered a professional?

According to Samuel Weber, a professional can be defined as follows:

He [sic] has undergone a lengthy period of training in a recognised institution (professional school), which certifies him [sic] as being competent in a specialised area; such competence derives from his [sic] mastery of a particular discipline, an esoteric body of useful knowledge involving systematic theory and resting on general principles. Finally, the professional is felt to ‘render a service’ rather than provide an ordinary commodity, and it is a service that he [sic] alone, *qua* professional, can supply. The latter aspect of professionalism lends its practitioners their peculiar authority and status: they are regarded as possessing a monopoly of competence in their particular ‘field’ (1987:25).

Earlier in this thesis, I discussed how the Graduate Directing program imparts an “esoteric body of useful knowledge”, mainly through Coursework units. With its focus on a methodology drawn from Active Analysis (AA), the course also provides the “systematic theory” and “general principles” to which Weber refers. By the program’s very nature as a year-long, full-time course taught at a conservatoire school, resulting in the award of a diploma, its graduates also meet Weber’s requirement of “a lengthy period of training in a recognised institution”, although the short length of NIDA’s course relative to international equivalents remains contentious (as I return to in Chapter 7). This leaves the last of his features of the professional to be demonstrated, and it is my argument here that the graduation productions are a demonstration of the capacity of these young directors to “render a service”; in this case, to bring a full production to the stage. In many professions, this capacity must be demonstrated through practical demonstration rather than solely certification.

Tertiary institutions, which often cast themselves apart from professional schools, have a conflicted relationship with this kind of definition. They are almost always seeking to train professionals, but their programs often lack the solely vocational focus which allows graduates to render an obvious “service”.⁵⁸ (I suggest this anxiety is particularly keenly felt in the Humanities and Social Sciences, in matters from open days – “What kind of job will this degree get me?” is the classic, dreaded refrain – to research outputs.) While “esoteric knowledge” and

⁵⁸ This was formerly the distinction between Universities and Colleges of Advanced Education (CAEs), which was lost in the early 1990s in Australia, as discussed in Chapter 2.

“systematic theory” are the stuff of university degrees the world over, a question mark is often raised over the field to which graduates can aspire to contribute. I suggest that this could be understood as part of the reasoning behind the lavish graduation ceremonies for which universities are renowned. In providing such a visible marker of the graduate’s command over the profundities of a discipline, the anxiety around the service-oriented definition of the professional is arguably lessened. This might also start to address the ‘informal’ characteristics of graduation ceremonies for practice-led institutions like NIDA. Having demonstrated their command of the goods through a successful graduation production, less symbolic significance need be attached to this moment of transition, of the imprimatur of the institution being attached to the individual; it is merely certifying the training. The wide gulf between the highly ceremonial graduations in the Great Hall of the University of Sydney and the rough-around-the-edges high school feel of the NIDA degree conferral⁵⁹ is caused in part by each attending to a different part of these historical definitions of the professional, although both function as markers of competence.

To take a very different example, solicitors and barristers seeking to practise law in the state of New South Wales must be admitted to practice. Even after the academic study of the law, however intensive and often resulting in tertiary qualifications, lawyers are not considered to be professionals until they have passed through the College of Law and admission. (In fact, lawyers who are employed but not yet admitted are paid at a considerably lower rate, and the range of services which they are able to offer is limited.) The course of study at the College of Law is mainly practice-led, consisting of practice exercises in court procedure, often led by retired judges and experienced lawyers. It culminates in the award of a certificate of admission in a formal ceremony, usually held in the Banco Court of the Supreme Court of New South

⁵⁹ During the period of research, traditional university-style gowns and hoods were incorporated into NIDA graduation ceremonies for the first time. Until that point, there had been no strict dress code.

Wales⁶⁰, during which these newly qualified lawyers are admitted by the presiding judge. This ceremony is designed to demonstrate and acknowledge what Weber calls a “monopoly of competence”, or to take a different theoretical lens, what Burton Bledstein characterises as “a special power over worldly experience, a command over the profundities of a discipline” (1976:90). Having completed a mostly practical course of study during which they are required to display their knowledge and professionalism, lawyers are admitted to practice by a group of their peers. This, I suggest, can be compared to the NIDA experience. The difference lies between the highly formalised procedure of the courtroom, and the more ramshackle process of a group of creative artists in a theatre space welcoming new members to their fold.

There is one final feature of the professional identified by these theorists which also has relevance here, and which I suggest is operating throughout the preparation of the graduation productions. Burton Bledstein offers the following:

The professional [...] never lost faith in the promise of his ‘becoming’, despite adversity. He never gave up on ‘making it’. He stuck by his training and discipline, was patient and trusting, contained his anger, never committed himself to extreme judgments or actions that might jeopardise a career (1976:113).

Although this definition is obviously conceived in relation to the long-form picture of a career, I suggest that the process of preparing the graduation process also provides an opportunity for the graduates to demonstrate their capacity to meet this further definition of the professional. As with the vast majority of creative projects, unexpected interruptions occur, in particular at this time of the year when other students of the Institute are completing their course requirements and, indeed in many cases, being called in and out of the rehearsal room in order to meet and pursue opportunities with agents and other professional representatives. Bledstein’s

⁶⁰ Banco refers only to a courtroom with a bench, but in this case it is the name given to the highest Court of Appeal in the Supreme Court of New South Wales, i.e. the highest court in the jurisdiction into which the lawyers are being admitted.

observation here also starts to suggest the rigour and discipline which the students are required to demonstrate. A graduation production which showcases an “extreme judgement”, therefore, is to be avoided in favour of sticking by “training and discipline”. (The other feature of some graduation shows which this formulation begins to explain is the extent to which they wear evidence of their training and approach: this is, after all, what this training has been preparing graduates for, to be able to rely on AA in times of crisis.) So taken together, the graduation productions offer students the opportunity to demonstrate all of these features of the professional. In the section which follows, I will discuss how some selected features of the graduation productions allow students to demonstrate their new-found professional status.

6.3 Élite Capstones

In this section, I will argue that the graduation productions are designed as a kind of capstone experience in the same manner as described in Chapter 3. That is, they require students to demonstrate their competence over material by bringing together the threads of an entire year of training. The student who can most successfully draw on all that she has learnt during the year of training at NIDA ought to be able to direct the most successful graduation production, because her skills and instincts will enable her to solve the problems with which the productions confront the students. In its ideal form, every moment of the year’s training should have been preparing students for the challenges with which they will be presented during this production period – in this way, then, the graduation productions are the ultimate capstone experience, as not only do they bring together a set of disciplinary knowledge, but they further tie off the entirety of the training. The graduation productions are therefore setting out to answer the same foundational question as the planned capstone units at the

University of Sydney: what do we expect students to have learnt in their course? For the NIDA Graduate Diploma in Directing, the answer proposed, of course, is that the student should have learnt sufficient skills to succeed in mounting a production.

The capstone experience offered by the graduation productions is based firmly in the *élite mode*. Following the examples enumerated above in Chapter 5, the productions are designed to demonstrate a newly acquired *élite* coding in the students. While it is an unnatural exercise to separate out the two relations necessary for this characterisation – that is, the manner in which they demonstrate the importance of *what* the students know and the separate ways in which the exercise engages with *who* they are – we can suggest areas in which either the epistemic or social relation predominates. For example, the many technical competencies of the production are driven by the epistemic relation (how much does this student understand about lighting, for example), whereas successful collaboration between the production team is led by the social relation. Other areas, like repertoire selection, rely on a successful negotiation of both: the student must demonstrate that they know their stuff, but choosing the correct piece also involves having the personal characteristics – that is, *taste* – to identify work to which *cultural capital* will attach. (This skill will of course prove crucial to any students wishing to negotiate a path from the independent theatre scene into state-subsidised companies.)

The early part of Weber’s definition of the professional, with its focus on the “esoteric body of useful knowledge” privileges the epistemic relation – what matters here is *what* these nascent professionals know, and this needs to be demonstrated through their work on the graduation production. On the other hand, the service which the professional is seen to render “is a service that he alone, *qua* professional, can provide”. That particular formulation privileges the social relation, or *who* this emergent director is. These two sides meet in Bledstein’s observation: the personal characteristics of the professional are crucial in that they are required

to demonstrate certain attributes; however, they must also be able to rely on a particular body of knowledge to which they have access. We see here, then, a clear invocation of Maton's *élite mode*, where it matters both *who* you are and *what* you know. To be considered a professional, then, a student is required to display an *élite mode* coding, and this is true of the graduation productions as it is of the parts of the training process considered in the preceding Chapter. This provides further evidence of the importance of the repositioning of the course to be taught in the *élite mode*.

I would therefore like to propose here that this analysis can disrupt the typical binary distinction between practice and theory, doing and knowing. While the project is still a practice-based experience, the role of the epistemic relation points to the importance of knowledge. This is particularly significant, I believe, in relation to a field which has displayed the kind of historical antipathy to theoretical knowledge detailed elsewhere in this thesis. The presence of any kind of specialised knowledge with reference to the epistemic relation is therefore of great importance, and its incorporation into this kind of capstone experience in even the most tentative way suggests an important shift in the grounds for achievement in the field. That is, in proposing new skills and knowledges to which emergent directors should have access (and indeed be able to demonstrate this access to), NIDA is promoting a certain kind of institutional ethos appropriate to the *habitus* of an emergent director – though there is no guarantee the industry will recognise it as such. I will examine this contention further in Section 6.4, below.

Looking at the graduation productions through Bourdieusian lenses, we can see that they are primarily designed to demonstrate that the students have acquired the *habitus* appropriate to emergent directors in the field of cultural production. (In this way, we can see the importance of both *who* these students are in terms of their personal characteristics, but

also *what* they know about their craft.) The ‘successful’⁶¹ completion of the project also earns the students *capital*, which they can theoretically use to advance through their chosen field. As I detail below, this capital is earned by students through means including: selecting appropriate repertoire; appropriately managing relationships with other students and the Institute; and dealing smoothly and effectively with any crisis which might arrive in production. As well, there is a question of recognition which runs through this area: the production must ‘look’ and ‘feel’ professional, in order to be recognised as such by not only the Institute, but also other professionals. This links back to observations made earlier in this thesis about initiation; having completed a project within the constraints of timeframe, budget and other factors outlined above, the students have proven themselves capable of producing what the industry might expect of them under more generous conditions. The more general point here is that the graduation productions are an opportunity for these emergent directors to both earn *capital* and demonstrate an acquired *habitus*, that of a professional director.

Above, I characterised the graduation production as a liminal moment in training, and the ability to maintain a kind of binocular focus, which considers both the educational expectations of NIDA and those of the professional industry, is a key competence. Student A (2010) explains about deciding in the rehearsal process to abandon the directorial approach which the course had taught, in order to create a more palatable product:

The graduation production was definitely not an apotheosis. It was a massive learning curve in its own right. So I went into that looking at it as a process, that I was going to be experimenting with these ideas and working with actors. They loved it – to a point. The danger, and this is where we start having that conflict where there is an institution that is both educational but also an industry figurehead, where the process I realised was going to produce a product that was not really good as a product to showcase to my work. About a week or so before we went into tech, we sort of dropped the [Active

⁶¹ The word successful appears there in inverted commas just to indicate that I am aware that the terms on which this is judged are likely to differ between individuals, and an investigation of the exact way in which this functions is beyond the scope of this thesis.

Analysis] process completely and said “OK, look, let’s make it this way”. And I think there were still elements of the more experimental side in there. It has definitely opened the door for more things that I’d like to do further down my career.

In being able to provide such an articulate rationale, the student evidences their *élite* coding: they have recognised in the moment described above that the production must demonstrate *both* what they know and who they are, in order to assert their adoption of *habitus* appropriate to a professional theatre director. I address the particular features of this *habitus* in the following section.

6.4 The Graduation Productions

As noted above in Chapter 5, the year in the Graduate Diploma of Dramatic Art (Directing) culminates in the public presentation of a graduation production. Significantly, this is the only public performance for which the directors are responsible during their time at NIDA. Of course, they collaborate and/or assist on performances which are led by more experienced creatives, but here they are the headline act as it were. The show is also a capstone experience in another way; it is the final assessment for the course, the successful completion of which is required for the award of the qualification.⁶² In this way, the show occupies the transitional space between looking backwards and tying together all of the work which has preceded it during the year of study at NIDA, and looking forwards to anticipate the professional career which awaits the graduates. This dual function of assessment and professional showcase drives many of the observations which I will go on to make in this section. I will first provide some more details on the place of the shows in the NIDA calendar. Then, I will consider how the assessment function of the production brings with it a number of competing agendas.

⁶² One of the 2011 cohort whose personal circumstances prevented her from completing the show graduated with the 2012 group after directing a show in a professional space.

The graduating directors' productions take place in or around the first week of December⁶³, making them the final event on the production schedule, at least a fortnight if not more after the Acting 3 graduation shows have closed in early November. This is a double-edged sword: it sets the shows up as a culmination for the entire Institute, but it also risks making them seem like something of an afterthought, particularly as the vast majority of the students have left the building for the summer vacation by the time the shows go up. John Clark insists they are a "special event on NIDA's calendar" (2003:97), and the timing does help to facilitate this status, as it means students who have been otherwise occupied during the rest of a busy production term are available to commit to the productions. For some of them, this is of particular note: in recent years, many of the graduating cohort of actors have chosen to make a graduating director's show their first gig outside of their coursework requirements. It also places the productions squarely in the mainstage 'silly season'⁶⁴, freeing many experienced actors to audition for and participate in the productions. It is this chance to collaborate with working actors which attracts many of the students who eventually work on the productions – the directors are free to cast their productions as they like⁶⁵, including a mix of student and more experienced actors, or indeed any collaborators from their own networks. Both this ability to cast from a wide pool, and the chance to have the full run of the building and the dedicated attention of the production and other staff, are facilitated by the particular place the graduation shows occupy in the calendar. Another significant factor here: as directors, the students are nominally 'in charge' of the rehearsal room, and are therefore themselves, while

⁶³ The quirks of the NIDA calendar – currently based primarily on the NSW school terms (as of 2013) – mean they can sometimes fall in the final week of November.

⁶⁴ Many mainstage and subscription companies avoid producing work in December to avoid clashing with end of year festivities.

⁶⁵ Although there has been some negotiation in recent years about whether directors could cast actors in the first or second years of their training at NIDA, casting in 2012 and 2013 seems to have established that any and all students and professionals can be invited to participate.

being tested on professionalism, exercising power over actual professionals.⁶⁶ This enables the students to not only rehearse their new status for those whose good opinions may well provide future opportunities, but also observe professional practice and dispositions one final time.

Before moving further in this analysis, I would like to draw out very clearly the tension which I see in operation here, summarised usefully by Student H (2011): “you are incredibly encouraged to aim for the stars, but also be aware that the stars you can hope to reach are here [gesturing to arm’s length]”. The rhetoric surrounding the production is that it is designed as a calling card, something by which the emergent directors can be recognised and remembered. The students are constantly pressed towards making bold choices, being more adventurous and more demanding of their collaborators. In addition to *taste*, there is clearly a logic of *capital* at play here: the louder, brasher, and more memorable a production, the more capital is seen to attach to the work. Students have reported in interview that they are urged to ask for whatever they want, and demand that this be accommodated. (Though they are unlikely to make any friends in the design and production departments this way, Student P [2012] recalls being told “if you want something, you demand it”.) On the other hand, they are subject to institutional constraints from many directions, which seem to be constantly limiting the choices and decisions they are able to make. Dream big, but only as big as will fit within this quite well-defined box. Ask for whatever you want, as long as it doesn’t exceed one costume and one properties make. This project is entirely about your vision, except for the part which is about a design student creating assessable work. (These particular limitations are explored below.) It could of course be argued that this is nothing more than a real-world approach: even in the subsidised theatre in which the majority of the graduates aspire to work, limitations of form, content, and budget will be placed upon them. My argument here is simply that this increases

⁶⁶ I am grateful to one of my thesis examiners, who coined this useful formulation in a generous written report.

the stakes and the pressure on the students – having been told that this is a one-time opportunity to make their mark, they are then subject to all of these caveats in the realisation of that work. The ultimate aim, though, is to demonstrate the professionalism inculcated in students across their year of study at the Institute.

(a) On Repertoire

A key area in which the students are invited to display their competence and assert their status as professionals is through repertoire selection. This is also the area in which we can see most clearly the claiming of *cultural capital*, and the operation of what has been referred to elsewhere in this thesis as *taste*. That is, the students need to display three inter-related features in their selection of graduation show: they need to choose a piece which will enable them to display their technical skills as a director; they need to choose a piece to which the industry will attach *cultural capital*; and they need to choose a piece which will display the taste appropriate to an emergent director seeking to enter the field. Skill, relevance, and taste therefore all combine to demonstrate this particular marker of ‘professional’. Students often make similar decisions in this area, resulting in similar playwrights being staged, and the slight misconception that there is an aesthetic agenda at play within the NIDA training. The distinction is, I think, that there is an agenda of *taste* being promoted by the course, but that NIDA sees this as related to the industry rather than to their own priorities; if anything, such an agenda is at play within the field, where *cultural capital* is still seen to attach to avant-garde or broadly ‘experimental’ work. What we are seeing here is a particular institutional idea of what a director should be; that is, the *habitus* which an emergent director should embody. Whether this aligns with the *habitus* of agents within the field of cultural production is a question to which I will return in section 6.5, below.

Looking at repertoire choices, contemporary playwrights have been a particular focus across recent years, as have adaptations and translations which allow students to take a freer approach to text. The exact balance will obviously change based on the personalities of each cohort, but these general patterns have stayed consistent. When analysing the play selection for the years 2008 to 2012, we can break the shows down into reasonably arbitrary categories, which yields striking results (see Figure 6.1, overleaf). Additionally, it bears noting here that between 2008 and 2012, all productions were of text-based work: although some experience is offered to the students in devised and collaborative work (see Chapter 2, above), they have been required to produce an existing text for their graduation piece. While this requirement relates to *taste*, it also positions the students to work on the Australian mainstage, which is still dominated almost exclusively by text-based productions, as prospective employers are able to appreciate their mastery of this particular broad genre of theatrical practice.

Contemporary UK	Contemporary North American	Classic US	Translations/Adaptations
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Play House</i> • <i>Pool (no water)</i> • <i>The Lover</i> • <i>The Collection</i> • <i>The Company of Wolves</i> • <i>Product</i> • <i>One For the Road and Press Conference</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>I Love You, You're Perfect, Now Change (US)</i> • <i>Vampire Lesbians of Sodom (US)</i> • <i>How I Learned to Drive (US)</i> • <i>Fortune & Men's Eyes (Canada)</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Thirst</i> • <i>And Tell Sad Stories of the Deaths of Queens...</i> • <i>This Property is Condemned</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Faust</i> • <i>Caligula</i> • <i>Salome</i> • <i>The Labyrinth</i> • <i>Electronic City</i> • <i>Frenzy for Two</i> • <i>Private View</i> • <i>Push Up</i> • "Howl" • <i>The Witches</i> • <i>The Bald Prima Donna</i> • <i>Not I</i> • <i>Medeamaterial</i> • <i>In the Solitude of Cotton Fields</i> • <i>Through the Leaves</i>
Australian⁶⁷			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Motel</i> 			

Figure 6.1: Graduating Directors' Productions 2008 – 2012

⁶⁷ There is more significance to this under-representation than I am able to detail here, including the relationship of this trend to the lack of new Australian work on the mainstage, and the perception that a young director has to prove herself against a 'heavyweight' (read as an international, rather than local, figure).

Taking the 2012 graduating directors' shows as an example, we might be able to propose some reasons for this breakdown. *Play House* is a very contemporary work by British playwright Martin Crimp, who has found widespread success in Australia, and the NIDA production was the work's Australian premiere. Perhaps a more unusual inclusion (as musicals haven't often been performed, sitting as they do outside the reasonably avant-garde taste the course explores) was the contemporary American musical *I Love You, You're Perfect, Now Change* (by Joe DiPietro and Jimmy Roberts), performed in an edited version. (The musical has a mostly jukebox structure, and could therefore be shortened with relative ease.) There were also two radically shortened translations of canonical European texts: the David Greig translation of Camus's *Caligula*, concentrating on Caligula's descent into madness; and the Robert David MacDonald version of Goethe's *Faust (Part One)*, edited to only the Gretchen/Faust/Mephistopheles scenes, and then performed in reverse order. Finally, there were two adaptations from existing texts: a version of Roald Dahl's *The Witches*, performed as a one-man show with a focus on the central scenes of the novel; and a version of Angela Carter's *The Company of Wolves*, drawing on both the radio and screenplay iterations of the text. Of these scripts, then, only one of the six was performed in its entirety, and three of the remaining five required extensive cutting and streamlining to fit within the required forty minutes. Whilst it is of course nearly impossible to measure what impact it had, these choices – particularly the latter four shows – could be read as a product of particular *taste* to which the 2012 students were exposed in Berlin, which was valorised throughout the year in the course. All of this raises the question of how these selections were made in the first place.

From their first weeks in the course, the students have weekly lunchtime meetings with Kipste in which they discuss their progress in the course to date. As they begin to settle into the rhythms of the training, they are encouraged to read widely, sometimes in areas suggested by

the teaching staff, to find material to which they are drawn.⁶⁸ They are then invited to discuss what they have found compelling about particular material, and develop a strategy for reading and finding repertoire. For example, Student H (2011) described a set of rules developed after a series of disappointments trying to find appropriate work:

1. Only four cast members;
2. Minimal cutting; and
3. Don't be scared of big writers, and avoid falling into the trap of doing 'that thing of trying to do something that's never been done before'.

Student H's eventual production, which the Institute and the student felt was highly successful, eventually conformed to all of these rules. Once a student has found something they feel might be appropriate, they have a meeting with Kipste in which they explain back to him how they have arrived at their eventual choice, making explicit this process of approving *taste* (Student H [2011]). Another student talks about the process of selecting the piece like this:

I walked in the first day and said 'this is what I want to do' and Egil said 'no' and I said 'why?'. And we, I kind of changed his mind. The other things I had on my possibilities were Martin Crimp's *Fewer Emergencies* plays, which I quite liked. *Thom Pain* [(based on *nothing*) by Will Eno] was the closest I came to, and I was about to say yes to that before the rights [to the eventual production] came through. That was probably the closest second choice. I looked at other things, like I looked at doing poetry from Arthur Rimbaud, which was just a bit hard, I looked into *Suddenly Last Summer* [by Tennessee Williams] at one point, but it wasn't - I couldn't cut it down to forty minutes. But um, I just knew - I had other possibilities, but they always just felt like they weren't right (Student G [2011]).

Quite a number of students come into the course with an idea of the piece they would like to direct for graduation, and as the student above describes, this sets a particular bar to which any other repertoire choices have to measure up. The other choices which are mentioned even in this brief extract also highlight the extent to which Student G has learnt lessons in *taste*, with

⁶⁸ Student Q (2012), for example, came to NIDA without a theatrical background, and their reading was driven not only by the meetings with Kipste but also by the texts covered in coursework units.

contemporary British work like Crimp's (2012, 2013) and a number of Williams shorts (2008) produced as graduation shows in recent years.

In terms of repertoire selection, students have in interview identified this same tension in which I am interested: Student G (2011) asserted that the show needs to function as a calling card, "your statement about the end of your year at NIDA" but also "a demonstration of your skills as a director". That is, the particular piece of work which is produced needs to be an effective piece of marketing collateral, making the argument that this student is the type of director an industry professional would want to hire because they have this demonstrable set of skills which can be seen in operation on stage. On the other hand, students have repeatedly discussed the importance of a personal connection to the material, and a desire to make *this* particular piece of work, quite apart from any showcase opportunities it might offer. As Student G (2011) also reported, "it had to be something that I personally connected to". Of course, the set up of the exercise assumes that these two goals will be in harmony, and we could consider this another environment in which the students are being asked to display professionalism: if their personal goals for the project do not match its showcase aims, then the personal goals should be adjusted. Another student explains their interpretation of the guidance offered thus:

Student H: [...] simultaneously incredibly encouraging to aim for the stars, but also to be aware that the stars you can hope to achieve are here [at arm's length]. So I felt really torn.

CDH: Was that explicit?

Student H: No, but that's how I felt in terms of being pushed to really tease out who I was, but also make sure that who that person is is accessible within the production.

So we see here another illustration of this conflict between the goal of demonstrating exactly who this student is and wants to be, and the parameters of the exercise. Again, the most

‘successful’ (or perhaps ‘professional’) student is likely to be the one who can effectively negotiate these dual forces battering their repertoire selection. A final word from a student, mystified by some of the other selections of students in the cohort,



Figure 6.2: Some of the Graduating Directors' posters for 2011, facing Anzac Pde.

who had not perhaps learnt this lesson: “I thought this project was supposed to be about us as a director, not about what we are *expected* to do as a director” (Student G [2011], my emphasis).

(b) On Individual/Cohort

Throughout the year they spend at the Institute, the students are treated both as individuals and also as a cohort of ‘graduating directors’. As discussed above, the productions at the end of the year are presented in two programs, one each in the Parade Studio and Parade Space. (Occasionally a third theatre is used, as happened in 2010, but this is increasingly unusual as the performance spaces in the building are offered to external hirers.) The season as a whole is referred as “the graduating directors’ programs” in marketing and promotional material, although a few cohorts have gone so far as to give their program a name (for example, the 2009 season was called “Zachem” [NIDA, 2010]). Ordinarily though, the two programs are rather impractically called the “Studio Program” and the “Space Program”. There are production implications to this set up as well; mainly that each show has only twenty minutes for either or

both of bump-in and -out. This is because there can be a maximum twenty minute interval between each show, before the evening as a whole starts pushing three hours' duration. A side-effect, therefore, is that the productions have begun to



Figure 6.3: The Graduating Directors' posters for 2012, facing Anzac Pde.

have a shared base set where possible (one of each of the programs in 2011 and 2012 took this option, for example). This has the obvious practical benefit of reducing the amount of time required in the change overs, but is also necessarily artistically limiting. My argument here is that it offers the students the chance to demonstrate their professionalism by making these adjustments in favour of the success of the cohort as a whole.

At the same time, there is a powerful sense of each director as an individual which is running through the program. Since 2010, the directors themselves have featured largely in the marketing of their shows, to the extent that in both 2011 and 2012 the shows were advertised only with large photographs of the graduating students. In 2011, each poster featured a director interacting with an indicative prop for each of their shows (see Figure 6.2, on previous), while in 2012 the advertisements were black-and-white pictures of the directors in motion as if each had been caught 'directing' or discussing their work (see Figure 6.3). (Student P [2012] recalls that Kipste claimed the 2011 directors "didn't look like artists", which resulted in the change for 2012. I suggest his use of the word "artist" in this context is equivalent to my usage of 'professional'; that is, Kipste is suggesting the pictures did not depict the students as

sufficiently professional.) Another piece of compelling evidence of the importance of the individual over the cohort is the assessment criterion outlined above, of “leadership”. The way this criterion has normally been talked about, according to the directors in interview, is the extent to which the individual director has been able to assert his or her own will on the production and get what they want from the production team on the show. In the programme produced for the season there is an emphasis on each of the directors as individuals, featuring a headshot and a ‘Director’s Manifesto’ for each of them, along with photographs detailing their activities during the year at NIDA. There is also a brief biographical note, accompanied by a list of their productions both preceding and during the course. This information is included to the exclusion of almost anything else – apart from a standard NIDA insert of the headshots of the entire graduating year across all of the Institute’s courses, there is no information about the actors, designers and technical production crew on the shows beyond their names (all of them, remember, are working on a volunteer basis). So not only is the director-as-individual championed, he or she is championed above all other contributors to the project. Again, I see this as significant to the relationship between bold, loud choices and *capital*: if the director is seen to be the primary creative agent, then he or she is able to claim whatever *cultural capital* attaches to the work.

Another occurrence of this tension I have identified in the graduation productions can be seen in the ‘audition’ function of the graduation production; that is, the extent to which it serves as a testing ground for the wider industry to assess these graduates. In being presented as a cohort, as they are both in the set-up of the graduation season and in the booklet of information about graduates which is produced to accompany it, they present a kind of united front. However, the reality of the situation is that they are competing against each other for the same very limited pool of jobs. To take the most direct example, the Griffin Theatre Company

appointed two Affiliate Directors, a position for which only the NIDA Directing graduates were eligible between 2010 and 2012. Many students in interview also reported that the competition for the Griffin job is the first sign that these emergent directors will be in direct competition. Although this might sound hopelessly naïve on the part of the students, there is an oft-repeated assertion throughout the year that the students all have very different interests and specialities and would therefore be concentrating on different areas of the market for emergent professionals.⁶⁹ (This, of course, is related to the *illusio* which the course is inculcating in its students, explored elsewhere in this thesis.) The students have been very quick in interview to reassure me that by the time the course draws to a close, they are only too aware of the limited opportunities for which they are jostling to position themselves.

(c) On Other Students

As early as 1979, NIDA Founding Director Robert Quentin noted the importance of using time at drama school to learn about collaboration across creative specialisations: “it is essential for the young director to gain knowledge and experience of acting, design and stage management, to develop qualities of leadership, and to learn to *work creatively and harmoniously* with artists, technicians and administrators” (n.p.). (For the first eleven years of its existence, as outlined in Chapter 2, the Production course provided a *de facto* integrated director training, with the course pairing in-depth technical knowledge with the presentation of a full production.) More recently Lee Lewis, the newly-appointed Artistic Director of Sydney’s Griffin

⁶⁹ In interview, the students have told many stories about how Kipste passes very particular job opportunities on to them after they have graduated. They all seem very aware of (and quite unapologetic about) the fact that opportunities will only be brought to the attention of ‘suitable’ graduates.

Theatre (and herself a graduate of the NIDA Directing program⁷⁰) made the same call, criticising the ‘silo’ mentality which conservatoire schools and an increasingly professionalised industry can encourage (Dow, 2013). These exhortations have been recognised in the structure of the contemporary Directing program at NIDA, which concentrates on collaboration from the students’ first days in the building. In particular, the relationship between the director and the designer is emphasised, including through an early opera project and a shared trip to an Australian arts festival. During that trip, for example, the students complete an extended exercise where they swap roles for a pitch, with the designers having to try conceptual thinking and the directors creating ‘white card’ models. Although these collaborations are not always equally weighted – in interviews, the directors noted that the designers were often assessed on work which was merely formative for the directors – the program of study fosters strong links between the directors and Design 2.

This reaches its natural climax when the designers create the set and costumes for the graduating directors’ productions. The issue of weighting arises here: not only is this an assessable task for the designers, it is also the first of their designs built in its entirety. However, they are of course somewhat at the mercy of directors who are attempting to showcase their own practice. Other students are involved in the productions too: technical production (TP) students at the end of their first year are required to contribute to the productions, and second-year TP students are asked to volunteer to fill the more senior roles in the production team. This introduces the additional complication in that some of these students are undertaking specialised production roles for the first time. In particular, the director may be working with a student who has never completed a lighting or sound design before, and a stage manager for

⁷⁰ Lewis is in fact a two-time graduate, having undertaken the Graduate Diploma of Dramatic Art (Directing) in 2003, and then the Master of Dramatic Art in 2005. She was the first, and one of only three, graduates of that Masters program.

whom this is their first chance to call a show. The crew on each production can range vastly in their levels of production experience, meaning the display of a director's craft can become restricted – this has implications, too, for their ability to meet the assessment criterion of “artistic cohesion of design and technical elements”.

Although the production is billed as a showcase for the directors, and the not inconsiderable resources of the Institute are made available to the students, the shows are also subject to many restrictions. Firstly, although there is a costume designer attached to each project, each is only allowed one ‘make’ – that is, a costume created entirely from scratch for that show. The same is true of any properties required for the production; the remainder of items of clothing and other objects must be sourced from the Institute's existing stocks. This necessarily restricts what can be achieved, and provides another counterpoint to the ‘think big’ rhetoric: the ‘size’ of the concept and design may be potentially infinite, but is subject to very practical constraints. The budget is also considerably less than even what students might have worked with before in student and independent theatre: each show is allocated an entire budget of \$1,500.⁷¹ It is, though, crucial to note that venue hire, staffing, performance rights, and many of the ancillary costs often incurred by non-company productions are covered by NIDA and fall outside of this budget. A final restriction placed on the shows is the time constraint: each director's work can last for no more than forty minutes. This results in adaptations, cuttings, devisings, and all manner of artistic solutions to fit within this requirement, which are discussed at length above.

To relate this to the larger concerns of this Chapter, my argument is that it is the student director who recognises the limitations of the process and the set-up, and still produces

⁷¹ The budget for a Major Production of the Sydney University Dramatic Society (SUDS), for example, which two students in the 2012 cohort had directed prior to attending NIDA was, between 2009 and 2013, \$6000.

high quality work, who has made choices to act in “certain ways and not others” (Maton, 2008:52), who embodies professionalism in her *habitus*. Remarkably removed from the stereotypical director who demands perfection from all, the professional here allows each student to work to her capability, and recognises the limits of the framework in which they are working. Student H (2011), in recounting why they felt their production had gone particularly smoothly, observed:

I had this realisation very early on, and I think it benefitted me greatly and stopped me getting frustrated, you know, like I saw some of my peers get, which was ‘this is our graduation show, yes, but it is just a piece in the puzzle of everyone else’s, you know, educational pedagogy. [...] And I think because I said ‘ah, this isn’t just about me’, even though the rhetoric of the course is ‘this is your grad show, make it yours’ [...] and you go ‘yes, I’m the person whose neck I guess is on the line but also whose opportunity it is to take the glory if the show succeeds’, but for so many of the other students it’s a really important step, and for a lot of them first steps.

And I think because I realised that, I made peace with the fact that the sound design wasn’t perfect and yet I had to keep it. And in another context, I might have been a real hard-arse and told them, ‘no I want a different sound design’, but that would have meant cutting this person’s first thing completely, and it would have then led to a series of meetings with the production department being like ‘why?’, you know, and being a prima donna in that instance just didn’t feel like the right thing to do to me. Maybe I should have, maybe I could have, I don’t know, but I felt that while I’m an important (and perhaps the main) part of that process, my production was just facilitating a lot of other people’s learning, and that was important.

The question of how to manage other students who are often asked to operate beyond their capabilities is a loaded moment for the student directors, because there is very little explicit teaching around leadership during the course – and that which does take place is usually implicit, through the many guest lecturers and tutors from the industry discussing their process and career with the students. The risk, of course, is that these professionals understand and deploy leadership in a context which can be radically different to the one in which the students are operating at the Institute. This casting of the director-as-facilitator is the crucial point here, I think; although the idea of leadership is still an overriding aim in the production, it is a leadership which is sensitive to the different capabilities of collaborators. The skill of

recognising these limits is thereby promoted as a key competence of these emergent directors.

(d) On Mentors

In terms of professional involvement in the shows, each student is allocated a mentor drawn from a high-profile Australian company. The level of involvement of each is something of a vexed question – the exact nature of a mentoring relationship is notoriously unclear, and these exchanges are no different. In interview, many students were unclear about exactly how they had been matched with their mentors, and whether this had been done on the basis of repertoire selection itself, or if it was something more personal. Student G (2011) said: “if I’m honest with you, I don’t think the mentors choose the projects so much as Egil [Kipste] chooses the mentors”, and Student P (2012) felt the allocation had been made to facilitate future work opportunities with a particular company. The mentors are expected to attend three rehearsals across the process, and make themselves available to the students throughout – how exactly they go about so doing is up to the individual. This, interestingly, is where the allocation of high-profile mentors can go awry, as students have reported feeling “intimidated” or “uncomfortable” approaching their mentors with problems during the process. Each of the students, however, reported that once they did make that approach, they received useful and valuable assistance. The mentor therefore functions in two major ways: as a safety blanket for assistance, deflecting some of the load away from the NIDA teaching staff in terms of assistance; and perhaps more importantly to provide a tangible link to the industry of which these emergent directors will very shortly become a part. Significantly, though, the mentors are very much drawn from the mainstage scene, and when students have proposed more experimental figures as potential mentors, they have been replaced by mainstream directors. The mentors are on the whole drawn from two important sources: graduates of the Institute;

and industry figureheads, many of whom sit on one of NIDA's many Boards and Committees.

In this way, mentors are insiders as well as outsiders, not only bringing with them industry values and expectations, but also sensitive to institutional pressures and values.

In order to illustrate this relationship more fully, I will extract here a longer answer to a question asked in interview. When asked how present a mentor, had been in the process, the student responded:

It's hard because for some other people she was really present and I think I was a bit intimidated by her being Robyn Nevin⁷³ that I felt I couldn't email her all the time, even though I got told I could. I also kind of felt in control – I was really surprised by how in control I felt. [...] And so Robyn... like, we had a really amazing first meeting, and she was fantastic in both letting me speak and then taking control of the conversation, asking a series of really pertinent questions. But after that and then saying a thank you, I asked her some questions [...] and the answers I got from her were astute and supportive. And then when she came in, she gave fabulous notes on the kind of rehearsal room run that she came and saw. So she was invaluable. [...] That being said, beyond that process I have just recently fired her an email asking to use some audio from her from the NIDA archives of the Old Tote [Theatre Company] and within four hours I had a really warm reply from her [...] having not had contact from her since the performance which she came to see (personally anyway). That was that: after some initial apprehension, I felt comfortable shooting her an email and heard back from her warmly with her knowing who I was.

So a final suggestion about the mentor relationship can be made here: presuming the process is a harmonious one, the student can carry this relationship into the professional world in the hope that it will open doors and present opportunities for them. The relationship here to definitions of the professional is perhaps a less obvious one; I suggest that the student's ability to display professionalism in the rehearsal room might be what is at stake here, allowing the mentor to observe their management of the 'backstage' business of rehearsal, rather than just the final on-stage product. The mentor has no role in the assessment process, but he or she functions as a key test of a student's professionalism: a professional exists in a network of other

⁷³ Nevin is one of Australia's most recognisable stage actors. After graduating from NIDA in the first cohort of students, she has been active on the mainstage ever since. She has also been Artistic Director of the Queensland Theatre Company (1996 – 1999) and the Sydney Theatre Company (1999 – 2007).

professionals, and is able to recognise someone who 'looks' and 'feels' the part. In this way the interaction of *habitus* and field produce the professional director.

(e) On Crisis

In the previous Chapter, I discussed the idea of crisis-as-pedagogy, asserting that it was a particular characteristic of *élite mode* learning at NIDA. Crisis management could, therefore, be seen as a key part of the *élite* coding which NIDA inculcates in its students. However if, as Bledstein suggests, a key determinant of the professional is her ability to remain “patient and trusting” in the face of “adversity” (1976:113), the skills required to deal with crisis becomes of crucial importance to the *habitus* these emergent directors are attempting to embody. Several of the students whom I interviewed recalled this as a key mode of teaching both within their program and also in the Institute as a whole. Student G (2011) suggested:

I think there probably is a bit of an idea there of that thing of deny you something, and put you in a state of panic. With our Triple J music video, we went from being the last group to being the first, and found out a week-and-a-half before we had to start shooting, and I was in Melbourne, and Lauren [the production designer] was in Berlin or Prague. So it was all of a sudden, it was just like... Sometimes I think it was accidental, but yeah sometimes I think I wouldn't be surprised if it was this thing. And I - sometimes it's useful, other times it's not useful at all.

Relating this to the graduation productions, then, this idea of constantly shifting boundaries, of giving with one hand and taking away with the other, can be read as an attempt to goad students into proving their professionalism by never losing faith. (Several graduates have been declared *persona non grata* by the design or production departments as a result of their behaviour under pressure, both during the course and during the production period.) Student P (2012) recognised the same element to the training when explaining that the cohort adopted the

mantra “everything is a test”, from the Welcome BBQ on the first day of the course onwards.⁷⁵ The ability and coping mechanisms to deal with crisis therefore become key determinants of professionalism, and students are forced to test their mettle against this score throughout their time at the Institute through this teaching through crisis, as discussed previously in Chapter 5.

In relation specifically to the graduation productions, as above, I construe the term broadly to include all of the unexpected developments – both positive and negative – which can affect the students throughout the production process. The way the graduation productions are incorporated into the Institute’s production calendar, with short rehearsal processes and no pay for the performers or other creatives, can also mean that the participation of external parties or indeed graduating students is contingent on no other opportunities arising. Many students from different cohorts have reported that performers were distracted by the realities of managing their emergent (or indeed established) careers, in particular those students who had recently completed their training. Student P (2012), for example, recounted that a number of days of an already short process were lost as graduating actors went into interviews with agents and teaching staff, later compounded by a number of performers being disappointed by the outcomes of their Agents’ Day performances.⁷⁶ Students G and H (2011) make similar remarks about their rehearsal processes – with both noting that the actors gave “much fuller” (Student H [2011]) performances in the remounted version of the 2011 productions which toured in April 2012. I would note though that although this sense of crisis might be ever-present, whether manufactured or not, so too is a safety net always in place: staff from the Institute, particularly Kipste, are always on hand to intervene if the circumstances

⁷⁵ The 2012 students were asked to cook the food for the Welcome BBQ at the last minute, and told that it was a ‘tradition’. It is, of course, nothing of the sort.

⁷⁶ Agents’ Day is the traditional capstone of the Acting program, where graduates perform for the assembled mass of Casting Agents in the hope of securing professional representation. It usually marks a student’s final official interaction with the Institute.

require. (Some students suggested in interview that this intervention was perhaps too quick to arrive, particularly in earlier projects.) Nonetheless, the ability to deal smoothly with these constant interruptions and uncertainties becomes through the course a key feature of the *habitus* embodied by emergent directors.⁷⁸

In 2011, one of the directing students had to withdraw from directing their graduation production, approximately a fortnight into the rehearsal period. This left the show, which had the largest cast of any that season (made up entirely of students), at risk of not proceeding to performance. While there were obviously implications for everyone involved, in particular because the season had been advertised and tickets sold on the basis of the inclusion of this piece, I would like to concentrate here on the ways in which this affected the other directing students, particularly those involved in the same program. (Recall, above, the shows are divided into two separate programs of three pieces each.) After the student's departure, Kipste led rehearsals for an interim few days before Netta Yaschin (a 2009 graduate) took on the show. The particular group of students – the Space Program for 2011 – had collaborated on a base set design, which meant that introducing another voice into the design conversation was particularly fraught. There were further implications for these two students in that their work (bear in mind, their professional debut) was now being presented alongside the work of a professional director. (Although, it is worth noting that Yaschin eventually had less than a fortnight to get the work on stage, and little scope to change anything.)

One of the two students whose work was so affected maintained in interview that the way in which s/he responded to the incident had been positively received by the Institute and the industry. When asked whether the graduation production had affected the shape of the

⁷⁸ The issue of people getting better offers and dropping out of independent and fringe productions is particularly fraught – ordinarily these are done on a co-operative, profit-share basis with no guarantee of any financial gain. If professional, or any form of paid, work arises therefore, it is the brave creative who turns it down.

student's subsequent emergent career, Student H (2011) reported that s/he was told during the course of a job offer:

the way in which you handled the Netta incident with grace and without, you know, kicking up a stink [...] from the product but also from the process, and the way in which I carried myself in the process, a reputation was starting to build about being pretty level-headed and pretty easy going, but also quite rigorous in getting what you want.

Although the address changes during that extract, the student is indicating very clearly that the ability they evidenced during the production process to work through crisis was considered to be an important skill. In relation to “the Netta incident”, this student was able to “make choices to act in certain ways” (Maton, 2008:52) in working through crisis, that is by remaining “calm [...] level-headed and [...] easy going”, and thereby demonstrating professionalism in the student's *habitus*.

(f) Conclusion

The prospectus produced for the 2011 iteration of the Graduate Diploma of Dramatic Art (Directing) was emblazoned with the tagline: “Don't just sit in the chair – inhabit it” (NIDA, 2011). I have taken this metaphor of inhabiting a chair as the title of this thesis, thereby asserting that the training offered at NIDA could be understood as *learning* to inhabit the chair. I include it here because the word “inhabit” can be understood as an expression of the development of a particular *habitus* in the students – the two words indeed share a root in the Latin verb *habere*, to have or possess (Oxford English Dictionary, 2013). The choice of this metaphor, which draws a distinction between the director who merely sits and the director who inhabits, is a telling one: the two directors are performing the same action in occupying the director's chair, but the latter is the right type of person to do so. Finally, this choice of

expression points to the overriding importance of personal characteristics and *habitus* in the teaching and learning which take place in the NIDA Directing program. The director who has all of the knowledge, who knows all there is to know, may nonetheless still be merely sitting in the chair, if they are unable to adopt the correct *habitus* of the professional. This metaphor of director training as learning to inhabit the chair offers a useful expression of the central contention which my fieldwork has outlined: the contemporary director training offered at NIDA is concerned with *both* what directors know *and* who directors are.

6.5 Looking Forward

In the previous Chapter, I suggested the Directing program at NIDA is moving towards an *élite* mode of teaching and learning. For its capstone experience, then, we could expect to see a task which allows students to display their *élite* coding. The directors' Graduation Productions mark the end of the year of study, and so this Chapter has paid close attention to their preparation and performance, including the way they are seeded throughout the course. I have also included the voices of students reflecting on their graduation productions, drawn from interviews conducted one year after the shows went up. This Chapter has proposed that the graduation productions also provide a showcase for emergent directors to display their professionalism, and to affirm the professionalism now in their *habitus*. This is effected through a number of different features of the productions, details of which I have explored above, with particular reference to certain productions which students discussed in interviews. In the following Chapter, I will leave the students and this particular course behind, and begin to look to the wider implications and reverberations of the changes I have detailed here. That is, I will return to the macro field, having been concerned up to this point, with my fieldwork.

Throughout this Chapter, I have outlined how the graduation productions allow the emergent directors to demonstrate their ability to embody the *habitus* of a professional. Part of this *habitus* is the *élite* coding which carries through from their training. In Bourdieu's own words, *habitus* "ensures the active presence of past experiences which, deposited in each organism in the form of schemes of perception, thought and action, tend to guarantee the 'correctness' of practices and their constancy over time" (quoted in Harker, 1992:18). However, in the field of cultural production more generally, NIDA does not wield the same power that it does within the field of creative arts training. There, as outlined throughout this thesis, NIDA has been able to use its control of the "epistemic device" (Moore and Maton, 2001:176) to set the terms of achievement in the field. While it does still have considerable influence, NIDA does not set the terms of engagement for the field of cultural production, and there is no guarantee that what has there been promoted as a professionalism will be recognised as such by the broader industry. It is for this reason that I have continued to use vocabulary around 'adopting' or 'embodying' a professionalism in students' *habitus*, rather than asserting that these graduating students *are* now performance professionals.

As these former students enter the field of cultural production, with their *élite* coding and particular vision of professionalism which the Institute has inculcated in them, there is the possibility of what Lamont and Maton identify as a "code clash" (2008). That is, when agents with different knower codes and further with different ideas of what the 'rules of the game' are might be, meet in the field. At least anecdotally, and supported by researchers such as Forgasz (2010; 2011), the field of cultural production still operates with a *knower* coding – that is, it matters *who* you are (and indeed who you know), to the exclusion of other factors. As more graduates move into the field of cultural production with this new coding as I have explored here and in previous Chapters, there is the possibility that the terms of achievement in the

field and indeed the 'rules of the game' might change. At risk of descending into convoluted sporting metaphors, I will invoke Michael Grenfell's contention that

the unchecked growing influence in a field of unquestioned sets of belief that belong to other fields and *habitus* can disrupt its autonomous presuppositions and arrangements by influencing and questioning the tacit rules of the game and adjusted practice (2008:126).

This raises the tantalising prospect that future years may see different *habitus* and *doxa* characterising the field of cultural production in Australia, and fruitful further research may follow the reverberations of this "code clash" into the field.

chapter seven

Invisible Made Visible

Don't just sit in the chair – inhabit it. Gain the confidence to lead a production team and realise your vision with a one-year full-time postgraduate directing course at the National Institute of Dramatic Art (NIDA), Australia's premier performing arts education and training institution

(NIDA Directing Prospectus, 2011).

7.1 Introduction

In this Chapter, I intend to move away from the specifics of the Directing program, and provide some more general conclusions about the manner in which the changes detailed in the preceding Chapters might resonate through the activities of the Institute and beyond into the field of cultural production. Turning to this perspective provides a timely reminder that this project is a hermeneutic one: in starting with the macro industry of higher education, before moving into the most local of local detail, I must now return to the global armed with what I have learnt. As noted previously in Chapter 1, the micro fieldwork this research details is intended as an illustration of the macro forces at play in the field of creative arts training. In the first part of this Chapter then, I am moving away from the ‘tacking between’ which characterised its predecessors, and instead concentrating on looking forward. I will set out here to answer three related questions which form a conclusion to this work, and they are divided across the three sections which follow. In the first, I consider the next evolution of the course which I have studied, in response to the very particular contemporary forces which are shaping the Institute. The second considers NIDA’s ‘endgame’, or the potential long-term results of the shifting modes of knowledge transmission and legitimation considered above. The final of these three sections considers future research questions, and speculates on how this or similar investigations might be carried out in years to come.

Of course, this Chapter also serves the larger purpose of concluding the thesis as a whole. There are many possible endings for this story; as it happened, the most definitive was provided by NIDA itself – shortly before I concluded this project, the Institute announced that the Graduate Diploma would be superseded by a Master of Fine Arts (Directing) from 2014. This thesis, then, is the story of a particular moment in time, a portrait of the way things were *then*. Fortunately for me, this development frees me from the pressure of mounting a best

practices argument about the training, as the information contained here about the course is no longer the way things are done. It does serve to highlight, though, the wider implications of this research as a framework for investigation of creative arts pedagogy. Building on the work of my colleagues Moore (2004), Seton (2007) and Syron (2012), this thesis offers a way of understanding what goes on during creative training. In the final section of this Chapter, therefore, I will offer some observations on how all of the material covered herein might fit together, and the methodology my research has produced. As a part of this, I undertake a final ‘speaking back’, where I consider how my particular application of the theoretical framework drawn from Moore, Maton and the Sociology of Education might serve to nuance and strengthen their model.

7.2 Master(y) of a Discipline

In September 2013, applications were finally opened for NIDA’s postgraduate programs in 2014 – almost three months after their undergraduate counterparts. The delay had been caused by the accreditation of two new programs: two Masters of Fine Arts specialising in either Directing or Writing for Performance. The introduction to the new Directing program published on NIDA’s website, as well as the “Course details” document which can be downloaded from the pages dedicated to the new program, reveal that it is fifteen months long, compared to the year-long Graduate Diploma. The other significant development is a new subject within the course entitled “Practice-based research”. This subject is valued at thirty credit points⁷⁹, or one-sixth of the total course load of 180 credit points. To put this in context,

⁷⁹ The introduction of an explicit credit point system, which mirrors a ‘university’ style course structure, is another new feature of the MFA course, although the same function (comparatively valuing coursework units based on workload) has previously been performed implicitly.

the subject “Directing Practice”, which comprises all of the practical work the students do across the course, is valued at sixty credit points. So, although practice still receives a heavier emphasis, the research component is nonetheless significant.

The statements around the course express the interplay between practice and research in a number of different formulations. While it is made very clear that “the focal point of the course is the selection, conceptualisation and staging of a theatrical or film production”, the website introduction also states that students will be able to both “develop their directing skills and be influenced by current theories and research relevant to the subject areas”. Furthermore, “[t]he context of contemporary performance is analysed and each student is encouraged to identify *their place within* the field of today’s cultural enterprise” (NIDA Website, n.d., my emphasis). Already here there is an identifiable tension between knowledge and personal characteristics, which is also present in the technique taught in the course: “[t]he directing technique that underpins the course builds on Stanislavski’s Active Analysis and contemporary theories of visuality. Other approaches are also covered during the year as students formulate their own personal directing methodology” (NIDA Website, n.d.). This same tacking between personal characteristics and knowledge can be seen in the practice-based research component, which is described thus:

The subject culminates in the writing of an academic journal article as the final research output. NIDA will create an online journal to which all journal articles arising from this subject will be posted and publicly accessible, thus adding to the body of knowledge concerning theatre practice. Students whose journal articles are assessed as outstanding will be encouraged and supported to submit them to externally published journals (Course details, NIDA website).

So in these statements about the content of the course, there is a real focus on two areas: there is a particular set of knowledges to which the course will grant you access; and it also matters what you yourself choose to do. That is, by the end of the course not only will you

know the right stuff, but you will also be the right kind of person – further evidence that, to return to the vocabulary offered above, the knowledge valued in the course is specialised by reference to *both* the epistemic *and* the social relation. The research project which is required of MFA students is identified as the major change in the new course, and the source of the extra three months which have been added to the program, dedicated to its completion. The completion of a dissertation can be seen as a quintessential *knowledge mode* experience; that is, it proceeds by requiring a student to understand the complexities of a particular, sanctioned knowledge set. In theory, anyone should be able to do all the reading and produce the work. The *distinction* of a research thesis is that it is required to make an ‘original contribution to knowledge’ – which, of course, starts to suggest that it matters too who you are. This is an important distinguishing characteristic, as only certain knowers are able to meet this requirement, and the particular person who is making the contribution isn’t simply reiterating what has already been established in any given research area.

There is a further complication in this case, as NIDA has been very clear in the documents provided to date around the MFA program that this project is “practice-based research”. This is a very specific deployment of terminology: the more ubiquitous term is *practice-led*, although there is some scepticism in the field of higher education towards this approach (cf. Haseman, 2006, for a general introduction). A basic distinction is that *practice-led* research delivers outcomes which are designed to advance a particular practice, whereas *practice-based* research utilises practice in order to more broadly create new knowledge (Candy, 2006). It seems important to note that in this circumstance, the nature of the practice which is conducted – which, as the previous paragraph identifies, is based on both a sanctioned knowledge set and personal characteristics – will affect the knowledge which is produced. It is therefore clear that the particular kind of knower which the course is interested in producing

has an impact on the kind of research which is done, and the outcomes of the project. In the case of the MFA (Directing), strengthened and expanded from the Graduate Diploma explored above, it is my argument that this will be an *élite* knower.

Additionally, there is one slight curiosity contained in these curriculum documents about the MFA research project, which asserts that there exists a “body of knowledge concerning theatre practice”. The assumption, then, is that the students in the course will be empowered to contribute to this body of knowledge – that is, that they are the right kind of knowers, and that they in this instance possess some control of the epistemic device (see above, section 3.2), and are empowered to make legitimate contributions to knowledge. Finally, it is significant that the Institute has plans not just to make this work available internally or to the industry, but rather “[s]tudents whose journal articles are assessed as outstanding will be encouraged and supported to submit them to externally published journals”. The twist in the tail here is that this is a return to an external assessment of who is entitled to make legitimate claims about knowledge, and an acknowledgement of the structure of the academic field. That field, of course, requires processes like blind peer review to assess the validity of new knowledge, in a setting which appears to downplay the importance of the personal characteristics of the knower, although of course their acceptance of the *doxa* of the field and consequent ability to follow the unwritten ‘rules of the game’ is still crucial.

In this context, it seems important to make two further comparisons: the first to the previous Masters program which existed until 2013; and the second to the earlier five-term iteration of the Diploma course, which existed until 1998 (NIDA course prospectuses). The Master of Dramatic Art (MDA), an additional year-long course of study to which high-achieving graduates of the Graduate Diploma of Dramatic Art (Directing) could apply, graduated three students during its lifetime: in 2005, 2010, and 2011. The MDA had two major components:

the direction of a full-length production, which in 2010 and 2011 was an internal NIDA show, and the completion of a research essay. This essay was conducted under the supervision of an external academic – in 2010 from the University of Sydney, and 2011 from the University of New South Wales. This essay was a traditional research dissertation, although in keeping with the requirements of a coursework Masters, this was around 20 000 words rather than the upwards of 30 000 required of a research Masters.⁸⁰ The MFA program makes two major changes: there is no longer a requirement to direct a full-length production, merely the forty-minute graduation piece examined in Chapter 6; and the thesis is now designated as practice-based and in scope will be the size of a journal article. This seems a significant departure, especially in light of the above observations about practice-based research, and crucially suggests that a piece of research can now fulfil similar training needs and outcomes as the production of a show.

Another compelling comparison is to the previous five-term, fifteen-month iteration of the Graduate Diploma of Dramatic Art (Directing), which was phased out in 1998 (for more detail, see Chapter 2). Significantly, the MFA is the same length – which must raise questions about its international currency, given the vast majority of high-profile American MFA programs in Directing are of three years' duration.⁸¹ The fifth term, in which there were no

⁸⁰ In the Australian field, there is a distinction between coursework Masters, in which a student undertakes a majority of coursework units of study and can choose to complete an optional dissertation which is usually a maximum of a quarter of the total program length, and research Masters, which are solely focussed on producing a research dissertation. Candidates in some research Masters programs can take one or two optional coursework units, which serve to mildly reduce the thesis word limit.

⁸¹ The MFA is considered a terminal degree in many American Graduate programs, and the three year course prevails at institutions like the Yale School of Drama, Columbia University, and the Brown University/Trinity Rep program. In the English field, institutions such as the Royal Academy of Dramatic Art (RADA) and the London Academy of Music and Dramatic Art (LAMDA) offer four-term, one-year Master of Arts (MA) programs. The Royal Central School of Speech and Drama (RCSSD) offers a similar program in Advanced Theatre Practice. The NIDA MFA therefore most closely resembles the British model, but has adopted the American nomenclature. This is another question of *cultural capital*: I suggest that NIDA have determined that more *capital* attaches to the title of the Master of Fine Arts than the other variants which could have been utilised. As well, NIDA could be acknowledging the competition here: the Victorian College of the Arts (VCA) offers a Master of Fine Arts. This qualification, which is of two years' duration, is primarily composed of a practice-based research project.

coursework requirements nor indeed a requirement to be physically present at the Institute, was taken up in previous iterations of the course by a secondment to a professional theatre company. (As outlined in Chapter 2, this was a hangover from the earlier Production course, which involved a secondment to the Old Tote Theatre Company.) This seems in keeping with the stated aims of the Directing program when it was introduced, which was to train students to work within a professional company structure – or, in the language which this thesis has preferred in recent Chapters, to inculcate professionalism in students’ *habitués*. In the earlier Graduate Diploma, then, this was acquired by observation, by breathing the same air as other professionals. Here though, in the new MFA, this requirement has been replaced wholesale with a practice-based research project, suggesting there is something more required of a contemporary professional, related to the sustained investigation of ideas. This new course is therefore proposing a key evolution in the *habitus* of the contemporary emergent director.

There are of course also industrial concerns around this new course, as I have alluded to in the above account. The MFA is a much more recognisable standard both domestically and internationally; certainly exponentially more so than the Graduate Diploma of Dramatic Art which it replaces. As a higher qualification with more extensive coursework requirements, NIDA is also able to charge higher fees for this course. A point emphasised in the course information for its first outing is that “with the approval of your supervisor”, the writing up and preparation of the journal article “may be undertaken away from NIDA”. This extra three months therefore could be seen as a way of extending the course without actually extending the duration for which in person attendance at NIDA is required – already of concern to emergent creatives taking time out of building a career. Of particular interest in light of this research project will be the mooted conversion course, which recent graduates of the Graduate Diploma will be able to undertake in order to ‘upgrade’ to the Masters qualification. Although

information is not available at the time of writing, any ‘top up’ course would be a fascinating example of the evolution of the model of a director which NIDA is pursuing. In order to make significant research findings, sustained attention would need to be paid to the new MFA program, in particular to how the practice-based research component is actually carried out, however my preliminary observation is that the introduction of the MFA program represents the cementing of the *élite mode* of knowledge transmission and legitimation in director training at NIDA. Even more persuasively than the Graduate Diploma which preceded it, the MFA ensures the production of *élite* coded knowers with a very particular *habitus*.

7.3 Endgame

Earlier in this thesis, I provided considerable detail about the structure of NIDA and how the Institute as a whole was responding to macro-level changes around accreditation and evaluation, before turning to the Directing program in particular. At this point, then, it seems fitting to reflect on what the Institute’s endgame might be in this respect; that is, where might NIDA see the changes to, and refocussing of, its courses leading? This speculation is not specific to the Directing program, but as I suggested in Chapter 2, the changes to that program detailed in this thesis will be, to an extent, replicated across the Institute as a whole as the new generation courses are introduced. This will begin with the MFA discussed above, followed by the Bachelor of Fine Arts (BFA), which will replace the Bachelor of Dramatic Art in 2015 in the Acting, Costume, Properties and Objects, Design for Performance, Technical Theatre and Stage Management, and Staging specialisations. This new course was already being referred to on NIDA’s website in late 2013, although these new courses were at the time still before TEQSA for approval. Teaching colleagues at the Institute are also busy designing stop-gap

teaching programs for 2014 which will prepare current and future students for transfer into the BFA programs from 2015 onwards. This mass roll-out of the new degree at the undergraduate level – which enrolls by far the majority of NIDA’s full-time students – represents the next step from the evolution of the postgraduate programs which this thesis has followed, and provides significant evidence of the future of NIDA’s degree level offerings.

As I outlined in Chapter 2, NIDA is currently considered a non-self accrediting higher education provider (HEP) under the TEQSA legislation. Thus, courses must be regularly reaccredited by TEQSA, and any potential changes pass through the rigorous inspection process outlined in the *Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency Act 2011* and the related *Higher Education Standards Framework (Threshold Standards) 2011*. Significantly, however, these legislative instruments also provide guidance on how a particular institution can be granted the power “to self-accredit each course of study that leads to a higher education award that it offers or confers” (s45, *TEQSA Act 2011*). These criteria are outlined in the *Standards Framework*:

- 4.1 The higher education provider has no issues or conditions outstanding from its most recent registration and course accreditations by TEQSA or a recognised registration or accreditation authority, no substantiated serious complaints, and no history of significant compliance problems in any other assessments, audits or reviews of its higher education operations conducted by TEQSA or external professional bodies or government agencies.
- 4.2 The higher education provider has highly effective academic governance processes and a robust internal capability to monitor and improve its higher education courses of study.
- 4.3 The higher education provider demonstrates sustained scholarship in respect of the course(s) of study, which informs teaching and learning for the course(s) of study.
- 4.4 The higher education provider has a history of successful operation of the course(s) of study including systematic, mature internal processes for course quality assurance and the maintenance of academic standards and academic integrity.
- 4.5 At least three cohorts of students in Australia have graduated from the course(s) of study, and there is substantial evidence of successful graduate outcomes from the course(s) of study.
- 4.6 If applicable, the higher education provider has achieved and maintained appropriate professional accreditation of the course(s) of study.

Once these criteria are met, an HEP can apply to TEQSA for the granting of self-accrediting status, which (like the majority of TEQSA's operations) requires the submission of lengthy documentary evidence to support any claims made with reference to the above criteria.

NIDA's aim throughout the process of curriculum review and renewal which this research has detailed (and which is, at the time of writing, ongoing) has been to attain self-accrediting status. Already, thanks to the careful structure which has been in place since the foundation of the Institute, including a Board of Studies which oversees its academic activities, and the more recent appointments of Directors of both the Undergraduate and Postgraduate Studies portfolios⁸², many of these legislated requirements are being met. The stringent procedure of external accreditation, which has been ongoing since the AUQA Report of 2010 detailed in Chapter 2, has meant that many of the other requirements – including a successful track record of offering these courses and maintaining their quality – are also well on the way to being met. With the introduction of the new generation MFA and BFA degree courses, as accredited by TEQSA, I suggest that the requirement of section 4.5 is the last to be met. If the Institute can successfully graduate three cohorts from these programs, and continue its impressive list of graduate outcomes, then the road to self-accreditation seems clear and relatively hazard-free. Having survived the tempestuous restaffing drive over the past five years, and with steady hands on the academic and administrative tillers, self-accreditation must surely be within NIDA's grasp.

As I noted earlier in this Chapter, the course which formed the backbone of this research will no longer be taught in years to come. Thus, somewhat inadvertently, this document has become a snapshot of history, a portrait of a particular moment in time at this

⁸² From the position's introduction in 2011 until 2013, Michael Scott-Mitchell has served as the Director, Undergraduate Studies, while also being Head of Design. Egil Kipste has been the Director, Postgraduate Studies, since that role's introduction in 2009, in addition to his position as Head of Directing.

institution. This moment, as I have argued, has been characterised by a new kind of visibility of pedagogy, giving a glimpse into the inner workings of a complex training institution. I have been privileged enough, and to a certain extent standing in the right place at the right time, to see this grinding of gears, and be able to witness a moment where suddenly something closer to the full picture is before me; the invisible made visible. It is my hope that I have been able to capture something of this complex portrait and communicate it in these pages – because as self-accreditation becomes more assured, as the gear change is more smoothly effected, all of this will shortly disappear once more. Of course, a handsomely funded, élite public institution will retain a degree of media fascination, most especially if it churns out ‘stars’ at the rate it has done so previously, but this moment of the visibility of the inner workings of the modes of knowledge transmission and legitimation will pass quickly. Once self-accreditation has been achieved, I do not mean to suggest that NIDA’s processes will be any less rigorous, or its academic standards lower, but simply that keeping this process internal will keep it (mostly) invisible. (It is for this reason that the Capstone proposal at Sydney provided such interest, laying bare as it did something usually hidden within the Faculty.) I am reminded of the difficulty of my ethics application, and of becoming lost down corridors of renumbered rehearsal rooms. The moment which this work has investigated has produced serious and sustained attention to questions of what is taught, and how and why it is taught, and it is my earnest hope that this research can contribute to keeping those questions alive and alight.

7.4 Future Research Directions

In the conclusion to the previous Chapter, I reiterated the idea of the “code clash”, and suggested that it might have powerful implications for future research in this area. In their

work on the code clash in secondary education, Lamont and Maton (2008) speculate that a code clash could be well be contributing factor in the low take-up and poor perception of music in the final years of secondary school. That is, students who have previously been successful in the subject suddenly find themselves fish out of water, and realise that this subject is no longer for the likes of them, as the terms of achievement in the field have changed. In section 5.5 above, I speculated that much the same process had seen Chris Puplick launch his very public attacks on the way things are done now at NIDA – he no longer recognised the shape of the field. In Bourdieusian terms, this is in part a question of *capital*: the hard-won *capital* which some agents have secured is no longer seen as valuable. Hence, I suggest, the high-profile departures of many of the ‘old guard’ staff at NIDA across the course of this research; despite their extensive experience and enviable track records, their capital was no longer considered valuable and they departed the field.⁸³ Other agents are moving quickly to shore up their *capital*, or earn the new forms of *capital* the field now expects of them.⁸⁴ As this thesis hints at, it has been an uncomfortable experience for them all.

A future expansion of this research project would pay close attention to how this “code clash” might reverberate through the field(s) in which the emergent directors considered herein find themselves operating. Will their *elite* coding serve them well as they seek to become members of their chosen profession, or will the field simply not recognise their *capital*? In particular at a time when the pathways for emergent directors are becoming less and less clear-cut (if indeed they ever were), these neophyte professionals will have to learn where their particular capital is valued. Graduates from the course examined in this thesis occupied two of

⁸³ As these former NIDA staff begin to carve careers elsewhere, it is interesting to note where their capital is still valued. In many cases, this is in academies and conservatoires which are not degree-awarding, and therefore not subject to the same regulatory oversight as institutions like NIDA.

⁸⁴ Hence, at least in part, the rush of many artists and trainers into higher-degree research, as I have noted earlier in this thesis. In 2013, staff with doctoral level qualifications are found only in the theory-focussed Performance Practices department, though I expect this will change quickly.

the three emergent artistic positions at the Sydney Theatre Company (STC) in 2013, but just down the road at Belvoir⁸⁵, NIDA graduates are struggling to even be considered for assistant director positions. Five years from graduation, the class of 2008 has seen three of its six graduates build successful artistic careers, working full-time at their chosen profession. A future longitudinal study could map the pathways of the directors whose training was considered in this thesis as they navigate the field. What knowledge have they found to be valuable? Which parts of the *habitus* with which the course has inculcated them have they had to ‘shrug off’? The mapping of artistic careers is notoriously difficult, but perhaps building on the model outlined in this thesis, it might be possible to interrogate how training affects the shape of a subsequent career.

These would be valuable research outcomes because they offer both the field of creative arts training and also that of cultural production ways of understanding each other, and could be exploited for strategies to further align the two fields. As I alluded to in the previous section, it is crucially important for NIDA to have access to data about the success of its programs in training graduates for the industry. This proposed extension of the current study, which would relate the teaching and learning within the programs to the way the graduates interact with the industry, would be of considerable value. I suggest that this kind of examination could help nuance discussions around the retention rates and diversity within the field of cultural production. Much has been written and discussed recently around the role of female creatives within the Australian industry, as well as those from minority backgrounds (cf. Lewis, 2007; Healy, 2009). If, as I assert here, creative arts training is interested in making its students into the right kind of knower through both access to sanctioned knowledge and personal characteristics, then it is entirely possible that it is these kinds of codings within emergent

⁸⁵ Sydney’s second major mainstage company, based at the Belvoir Street Theatre.

creatives which are producing imbalanced representation in the field – in which case, sustained attention may need to be paid to the personal characteristics which are being valued therein. For example, do all directors really need to ‘look’ and ‘feel’ the same?⁸⁶

Also crucial to all of these questions and debates is the generational aspect to the work done in this thesis. I suggest the size and scale of the industry in Australia lends itself to a stark generational division. To take a local example, this shift has been seen recently, when Robyn Nevin, Neil Armfield, Simon Phillips, and Michael Kantor departed mainstage companies⁸⁷ in favour of Andrew Upton, Ralph Myers, Brett Sheehy, and Marion Potts (as of 2013). This later group of directors is still at least a generation removed from the majority of graduates under consideration in this research. In the next five to ten years, as the field is due another generational reset, it is quite possible the terms of achievement in the field will shift to more closely resemble those discussed in this thesis. Some agents in the field will find themselves suddenly to be the right kind of knowers, and others will have the fish-out-of-water experience described above. This speculation, of course, returns to a question which was first raised in Chapter 1, and one with which NIDA finds itself constantly wrestling: is the role of a creative arts conservatoire to train graduates for the industry which currently exists, or should their graduates be anticipating the kind of field they will forge once they are able to set the terms of achievement?

Due to limitations of form, and a desire to provide as in-depth an account as possible of my fieldwork, this thesis has considered only one training program in detail. The value of the

⁸⁶ Lee Lewis recounts a persuasive anecdote about the launch of Belvoir’s 2010 season, in which she was the only female director, which kick-started the debate about gender representation on the Australian mainstage. Each director at the launch was invited to sit on the stage after their show had been announced; as the launch wore on, she found herself joined by a series of identically clad young men.

⁸⁷ These individuals were the Artistic Directors of the Sydney Theatre Company, Belvoir (Sydney), the Melbourne Theatre Company, and the Malthouse Theatre Company (Melbourne). These are the four largest, most handsomely funded theatre companies in the country, and thus considered the most prestigious appointments.

framework which it has proposed, however, is that it can be employed and enriched through comparative study. This process was modelled above in section 4.5, where I considered the differing modes of knowledge transmission and legitimation which were at play in the training programs offered by NIDA and the *HfS* Ernst Busch in Berlin. Additionally, throughout this thesis, I have drawn on my dual experience teaching across two very different institutions to map another kind of comparative study. A future development of this research would therefore extend the study to two equal parts, and consider the implications of different institutional approaches to knowledge. For example, a profitable study would expand the material gathered ‘on the ground’ in Berlin to apply this methodology through a wide-ranging ethnographic study. As international benchmarking becomes a more fixed part of the way conservatoires interrogate their own practices of teaching and learning, this could provide an important corrective – there is of course a danger in importing wholesale a training methodology which has been designed for a different kind of knower, or indeed comparing them without this kind of reflexive sensibility. The applicability of the framework is also not confined to directing programs, and it could usefully be applied to other creative arts programs both inside and outside the live performance context.

Additionally, as I briefly alluded to in Chapter 1, conservatoires increasingly have to align themselves with universities and other tertiary institutions in order to secure their funding and survival in a brave new regulatory environment. Local examples of this phenomenon are considered above in Chapter 2, with particular reference to how the approaches of the Victorian College of the Arts (now a Faculty of the University of Melbourne) and NIDA (still strategising to survive as an independent institution) have differed. However, as funding pools shrink across the English-speaking world, and the commercialisation of training institutions continues, conservatoires will again have to stare down the risk of

amalgamation with their university colleagues. As the University of Sydney narrative which has been threaded throughout this thesis suggests, university and conservatoire approaches to knowledge and knowledge production can be seen as fundamentally different, and any attempt to align these kinds of institutions must be sensitive to the modes of knowledge transmission and legitimation at play within each. The methodology proposed in this research could offer a way of articulating the distinctive approaches to teaching and learning which predominate in each, and allow for a nuanced analysis of the implications of any future attempts to combine their functions.

7.5 Some Conclusions

To conclude where we began, the field of cultural production is often shrouded in what Rachel Forgasz calls the “myth of the mysteriousness of the creative process” (2011:41). That is, agents in the field are interested in, and indeed earn *capital* through, a deliberate mystification of their working processes and creative practices. One consequence is that there is little critical or analytical reflection produced from within the field, and indeed sometimes an aversion to reflexive thought. Much research, including surveys by Jackson (2004) in the United States and Shepherd and Wallis (2004) in the United Kingdom, identifies in the field a belief that “intellectual labour [is] the key activity of the academy and that which sets it apart from the creative work of the professional theatre” (Forgasz, 2010:219). This reticence to explain, often manifested in a false distinction between work which comes from the ‘head’ over the ‘heart’, has become part of the *habitus* of agents in the field, to the extent that any intellectual endeavour is regarded with some scepticism. Many authors, including Maxwell (2010) and Prior (2012), have identified a similar mystification broadly at play in the field of creative arts

training. This tendency is confirmed by more sustained, ethnographic studies completed by Moore (2004) and Seton (2007). Broadly put, all of this research supports the view that although agents in the training field are very aware of what they are doing, they are reluctant to talk or think about it.

As a result, there is a general lack of articulated and visible pedagogy within creative arts conservatoires, particularly in Australia, where institutions have not historically had to account for their teaching and learning through academic accreditation processes.⁸⁸ In part, this concern is industrial: if you expose too much of what you do, what is to stop someone else from coming along and doing just the same? It does, though, make investigating what actually goes on within their walls a difficult prospect. In setting out, as this thesis has, to understand how contemporary Australian directors are trained, the major challenge has been to sculpt a methodology which is capable of articulating what is often left intentionally inarticulate. In this quest, I have been aided by my particular historical moment, which has required of the higher education sector in Australia almost unprecedented levels of accreditation and compliance. In this more general drive towards the 'corporate university', the field is following that in the United Kingdom, whose recent industrial history has been marked by fierce debate around deregulation and fee increases (cf. Collini, 2013). This has in particular affected those tertiary institutions which do not have university status, and therefore lack the organisational and administrative clout to seamlessly absorb these new regulatory demands. These smaller institutions, including creative arts conservatoires, have found themselves having to conform to a logic of practice imported from a different field. In the ensuing repositioning and redrawing of boundaries, the invisible has been made suddenly visible.

⁸⁸ This is not necessarily the case globally: particularly in other English-language traditions in the United States of America and the United Kingdom, creative arts conservatoires have been subject to accreditation requirements for far longer than in Australia, which has often resulted in much more visible and explicit pedagogical underpinnings to their trainings.

In order to investigate this moment, my research has concentrated on a single, high-profile institution: the National Institute of Dramatic Art (NIDA) in Sydney, Australia. In choosing this institution, I am both capitalising on personal connections, but also concentrating on an institution which has a long history of engaging with the conflicted relationship between practical and academic thought. As I outline in Chapter 2, this history is predicated on a very particular choice to found the Institute under the auspices, but not the administrative control, of a university. Even then, in 1958, it was seen as providing something different, something universities were unable to offer – the University of Melbourne asserted at the time that it was not the place of a university to train actors. As the Institute grew and expanded its course offerings, this conflicted relationship continued, and it was not until the Institute was granted the power of degree conferral that it came under similar regulatory requirements as its university neighbour. With the power to award degrees came increased demands for government accreditation, and new stakeholders whose needs had to be considered alongside those of the industry for which the Institute was training its graduates. These regulatory requirements only accelerated across the next decade, which saw NIDA appoint its first Director/CEO, succeeding an Artistic Director. This position was filled for the first time by an arts administrator, rather than a creative artist, which heralded larger-scale changes across the Institute.

In investigating the implications of these changes on training to uncover the sometimes invisible pedagogy at play within creative arts conservatoires, this thesis turned to the Sociology of Education, especially as articulated by Moore and Maton. Their work proceeds from Bernstein's distinction between horizontal and hierarchical knowledge structures within vertical discourse (1999:162), which accounts for the way new knowledge is produced in a given field. In nuancing this question, Moore and Maton draw the researcher's attention to

two separate, but linked, questions: how is knowledge legitimated in a given discipline; and, consequently, what is the dominant mode of knowledge transmission at play? They propose that knowledge can be specialised and legitimated with reference either to the social relation (that is, *who* you are), or the epistemic relation (that is, *what* you know). The same is true of knowledge transmission. This creates four possible modes of knowledge transmission and legitimation: the *knower mode*, with a strong social and weak epistemic relation; the *knowledge mode*, with a strong epistemic and weak social relation; the *élite mode*, with strong social and epistemic relations; and the *relativist mode*, with weak social and epistemic relations. Chapter 3 of this thesis outlined the evolution and current shape of this work, which has come to be called Legitimation Code Theory (LCT). The Chapter also provided sustained examples of teaching and learning in each of the four modes.

The thesis then turned to in-depth ethnographic fieldwork from within the Directing program at NIDA, following the model of anthropologist Georgia Born's participant-observation ethnography from within high-profile cultural institutions (1995; 2004). In Chapter 4, I provided two case studies illustrating knowledge transfer at work in the Directing program: one which seemed to be situated firmly in the *knower mode*; and another which seemed to operate in the *knowledge mode*. Throughout, my concern has been to avoid a 'binarising' – the 'on the ground' reality of teaching and learning is that it frequently tacks between differing modes and strategies, and resists reduction to fixed categories. This is addressed particularly in the second case study, which details the fluidity of these modes. Building on these two specific case studies, I go on to assert in Chapter 5 that the Directing program is now characterised by knowledge transmission and legitimation in the *élite mode*: in basic terms, it now matters *both* who you are *and* what you know. This accounts for a number of different features which I have observed in the Directing program, including the

identification of talent, the inculcation of *taste*, and the teaching of skills, technique, and specialist knowledge. This change in the way knowledge is made and transferred in the program can also be related to the larger change agenda at play within the Institute, as I introduced earlier and re-examined in this Chapter.

Chapter 6 brought together these ideas, and reintroduced some Bourdieusian frameworks in order to consider how the training has evolved, and what is at stake in the graduation productions, as the liminal moment of transition from training to the industry. The productions, staged betwixt and between these two fields, hoping to mark the transition of each student from one field to the next, provide a powerful example of how the modes of knowledge transmission and legitimation in the course have shifted to an *élite mode*. In their current form, the productions can be understood as designed to showcase not only what these students know, but also their personal characteristics as individual knowers. This is where Bourdieu's notions of *capital* and *habitus* come to the fore: the productions allow students to display the particular 'professionalism' that the course has inculcated in their *habitués*, and also allow them to earn the forms of *capital* which will be valued within the field of cultural production. This, as I explored, is a loaded exchange: while NIDA is a gatekeeper in the field of creative arts training, and controls the epistemic device in order to set the terms of achievement there (Moore and Maton, 2001:176), it does not possess the same control within the field of cultural production. Later in Chapter 6, therefore, I considered the possibility of a "code clash" (Lamont and Maton, 2008), whereby agents with one set of dispositions taught to them at a training institution may find themselves operating in a field with different 'rules'.

Throughout my research candidature, when I discussed my work with agents in the field of cultural production, they often asked excitedly whether I would make any conclusions about which form of training is 'the best'. I have been very clear from the outset: I am not

interested in making best practices arguments in relation to training. Not only would this kind of conclusion have serious methodological problems, but also it risks alienating the very subjects whom I wish to examine through my work. It seems important to reiterate one final time in this conclusion – this work proposes a framework through which the actual business of what goes on in creative arts training can be investigated. From there, it is my hope that the insight gained might be used to create more effective programs of training, but it is not for me to speculate what that might look like in any given case. Any study in this area must be sensitive to the structure and peculiarities of the institution in which the training takes place, *and* its students. It is for this reason that I have lingered here quite so heavily on the history of NIDA and the way in which training has been and is done there. Additionally, the field which emergent professionals are being trained to enter must form a central part of any research and analysis which is conducted around training.

Finally, there is a general reluctance in the field of cultural production for explanation; a preference for doing rather than thinking, and therefore a scepticism towards the ability of the reality of creative arts training to be captured by more traditional models of pedagogy. One of the primary advances of applying the framework outlined by this research to creative training is that it allows for the exploration of how training concerns itself with the *who* of the artist, rather than confining itself to the *what* of their knowledge. Long used to hiding behind deliberately mystified categories like ‘talent’ or ‘the x-factor’ (cf. Murphet, 2011; Prior, 2012) the vocabulary proposed by this research provides agents in the field with the ability to capture more of the totality of their training in discussions of modes of knowledge transmission and legitimation. While I am not suggesting that this work alone can heal the rupture between “the intellectual and the manual, upon which so much humanistic knowledge-making exists” (Jackson, 2004:6), I do feel that in this specific context, the framework can offer something of a

rapprochement. The more that can be done to convince both 'sides' in this false division that the other does not waste their time with meaningless enquiry and can rather be a partner in producing new knowledge, the closer we will come to understanding and strengthening creative arts training.

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- AETT 1, 1954 “A Project for the establishment of the Australian Elizabethan Theatre Trust Fund”
- AETT 2, 1957 Annual Report of the Australian Elizabethan Theatre Trust, delivered by Hugh Hunt
- AETT 3, 1958 “Recommendations regarding suggested new courses in drama”, written by Morven Brown

NB. I have assigned these numbers myself for the purposes of this project – all documents are available in MS 5908 at the National Library of Australia. The relevant documents are spread between Boxes 20, 21, 22, 23 and 383.

Documents from the National Institute of Dramatic Art Archive

NIDA 428, 1958	NIDA Board Minutes, 3 December 1958
NIDA, 1959	Prospectus for the National Institute of Dramatic Art, 1959
NIDA, 1960	Prospectus for the National Institute of Dramatic Art, 1960
NIDA, 1961	Prospectus for the National Institute of Dramatic Art, 1961
NIDA, 1965	“Drama at the University of New South Wales”, Prospectus
NIDA 579, 1970	“The Future of NIDA”, by Robert Quentin and John Clark
NIDA, 1971	Prospectus for the National Institute of Dramatic Art, September 1971
NIDA M002, 1971	NIDA Board Minutes, 23 April 1971
NIDA, 1972	Director’s Report by John Clark, November 7 1972
NIDA 654, 1972	Syllabus for Student Directors’ Course 1973
NIDA, 1987	Accreditation document for all courses offered by NIDA
NIDA, 1994	Accreditation document for the Graduate Diploma of Dramatic Art (Directing)
NIDA, 1998	Prospectus for the National Institute of Dramatic Art, May 1998
NIDA, 2010	NIDA Annual Report for 2009
NIDA, 2011	Prospectus for the Graduate Diploma of Dramatic Art (Directing) and Master of Dramatic Art (Directing) courses
NIDA, 2012	Subject Information for Play Production, compulsory subject for the completion of the Graduate Diploma of Dramatic Art (Directing)