

# **Demarcating Dramaturgy**

## **Mapping Theory onto Practice**

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## Abstract

‘Dramaturgy’ and the ‘dramaturg’ have entered the discourse of English theatre practitioners over the past two decades. For individuals working within subsidized building-based producing theatres, understandings and applications of dramaturgical practice have been significantly shaped by the structures and objectives of literary management - a role, established within the industry since the 1990s, dedicated to the development of new plays and playwrights. In Germany, the dramaturgical profession dates back to the latter half of the eighteenth century and, since the twentieth century, has held a remit inclined more towards the programming and production of theatre works than the developing and commissioning of new theatre writing. In Germany and across mainland Europe, dramaturgs hold a recognized position at the heart of producing structures; in England, the role and status of the dramaturg are less defined. Despite a decade or so of concerted explanation and exploration, the concept of dramaturgy continues to be met with indifference, principally associated with practices of literary management which, this thesis shall argue, risk eliding the critical and creative scope of dramaturgy as it is practised on the continent.

Through an assessment of the cultural, philosophical and economic contexts which inform processes of theatre-making, this thesis seeks to articulate and analyse these contrasting practices of dramaturgy. Chapters One and Two focus upon contemporary definitions of dramaturgy in England, addressing the role of the dramaturg within new play development and analysing the impact that distinctions between ‘script-led’ and ‘non-script-led’ approaches to theatre have had upon the reception of dramaturgical practice. Chapters Three and Four then compare those aspects of German and English theatre practice which I believe critically determine the agency of a dramaturg within production processes. These aspects may be summarized respectively as, on a micro-level, the relationship between text and performance and, on a macro-level, the relationship between theatre and society. This thesis regards dramaturgy as a creative practice defined in relation to a shared set of attitudes towards the production and reception of theatre, and argues that a specifically dramaturgical contribution to theatre-making rests in this analysis of the dynamic between performance and spectator.

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## Preface

This thesis seeks to assess dramaturgical practice in relation to the producing structures and artistic output of subsidized building-based producing theatres in England and Germany. As shall be elaborated below, my assessment of dramaturgical practice is informed by a residency I held within the Literary Department of West Yorkshire Playhouse between 2005 and 2008. Supervised by Alex Chisholm, Associate Director, Literary, during my time at West Yorkshire Playhouse I was invited to participate in and directly observe a host of activities and processes which otherwise would have been unavailable to me as a postgraduate researcher. I engaged with script-reading and reporting processes; observed the workshops of a six-week development course, *So You Want to Be A Writer?*; was allowed access to play development workshops with actors and directors, as well as one-to-one sessions with writers; and attended rehearsed readings and ‘Scratch’ evenings of new work. I also observed rehearsals for productions of new plays and classic texts, an opportunity to observe the interpersonal dynamics and practical details of production processes for which I am extremely grateful. Between 2005 and 2007, the WYP’s leading role in the Janus Project, an international investigation into European new writing, also brought me into contact with dozens of playwrights, directors, dramaturgs and cultural operators working throughout the UK and Europe.<sup>1</sup>

My research is indebted to these experiences but I decided at an early stage of this project that this thesis would not be composed of case studies detailing practice at West Yorkshire Playhouse. It was, and remains, my view that contemporary practices of dramaturgy within England are too diverse for analysis to be sustained by a focus upon one theatre only, and that to place West Yorkshire Playhouse at the centre of my research would have unnecessarily narrowed the scope of my study. Furthermore, I found the prospect of critiquing my host institution, without whose support I could not have conducted my research, unpalatable; a contradiction too difficult for me to reconcile within my writing. The latter is a concern I know has been raised by other

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<sup>1</sup> See Jacqueline Bolton and Sarah Dickenson, eds. *Janus: European New Writing in Translation* (Leeds: Alumnus, 2007).

AHRC Collaborative Doctoral Award Holders, and I hope one day to draw upon my experiences in order to support future scholars who embark upon this scheme.

My formal attachment to West Yorkshire Playhouse without doubt predisposed individuals working within English and German theatre to engage with, and contribute to, my research. In August 2006 I spent a week shadowing the Literary Department of the Birmingham Rep and, in May 2007, I observed a week-long rehearsal process leading to the staged reading of three new plays developed by Polka Theatre, London. I have attended showcase readings in London, Leeds and Edinburgh and participated in a host of conferences, talks and seminars organized to discuss and debate dramaturgy, literary management and strategies of new play development. Since 2008, I have worked as a Script Reader for Sonia Friedman Productions, the Theatre Royal, Bath, and the Churchill Theatre, Bromley.

Fundamental to my research have been dozens of interviews held with literary managers, playwrights, directors and arts funders working within English theatre, supplemented by over a dozen interviews with German dramaturgs and academics, conducted in English during a research trip to Germany funded by the AHRC in July 2007. Each one of these interviews was recorded, transcribed and edited by myself. An appendix listing all interviewees, their professional capacity at the time of interview, and the date and location of their interview(s) is provided at the end of this thesis.

A word or two should be said about the rationale behind this assessment of English and German theatre, as the differences which continue to impact upon the evolution of dramaturgical practice within these cultures are differences which work to complicate a direct comparison. In Germany, the country's theatrical provision is concentrated within a network of over one hundred and fifty state, city and municipal theatres, each one host to a resident ensemble and all directly subsidized, according to Germany's Federal system, by state and local government. Though in recent years economic instability has led some councils to make cuts to theatre budgets, it is still not unusual for a theatre to receive subsidy totalling between 70% and 90% of its annual income. Sponsorship deals and funding partnerships are rare, although, as a result of recent cuts, gradually becoming more common. This extensive network of subsidized building-based

producing theatres, presenting a mixture of opera, theatre and dance, is complemented by around one hundred and fifty performance venues without a permanent ensemble as well as over one hundred touring companies.<sup>2</sup> In the larger cities such as Berlin and Munich, a thriving *Freie Theater* – equivalent to London’s Fringe theatre – is establishing itself as an alternative to, and source of inspiration for, Germany’s established network of subsidized producing theatres.<sup>3</sup>

In England, over fifty building-based producing theatres and more than one hundred theatre companies currently hold the status of a Regularly Funded Organisation (RFO) within the portfolio of Arts Council England (ACE). Modest levels of subsidy, around 30%-40% of annual income, necessitate RFOs to routinely seek additional monies via a variety of other funding streams: local councils, lottery funding, business sponsorship and/or partnerships with local arts agencies, for example. ACE also regularly funds arts centres, youth theatres, outreach groups and development agencies. Whilst the majority of its budget, currently around 60%, is earmarked for its RFOs, ACE also oversees the deployment of Managed Funds, discretionary grants directed towards strategic development activities, and Grants for the Arts, an open-access project-funding scheme for individuals, art organisations and people who use the arts in their work.<sup>4</sup>

Within the context of German theatre, the phrase ‘building-based producing theatre’ implies and conforms to a discrete, autonomous, architectural structure: the existence of a resident ensemble means that if not all, then certainly the vast majority of works presented in a theatre’s repertoire will be produced in-house by a core team of actors, dramaturgs, technicians, publicists and administrators. While individual productions may make ‘guest appearances’ at other theatres, co-productions and visits from touring companies are more rare, far rarer than in England. The *Schauspielhaus* or *Stadttheater* may be regarded as a self-directed, self-sufficient institution, by which I mean that the theatre is relatively free, artistically and economically, to pursue the creative direction

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<sup>2</sup> Christine Dössel, ‘All the World’s a Stage’, *magazin-deutschland* <<http://www.magazine-germany.com/en/artikel-en/article/article/all-the-worlds-a-stage.html>> [Accessed 24<sup>th</sup> Nov 2010].

<sup>3</sup> In addition to its expansive subsidized sector, there are also over two hundred and fifty private (commercial) theatres located across Germany. Commercial theatres also operate across England but are clustered in the capital in the form of the West End (London alone has more than forty commercial theatres). Commercial theatre does not feature in this analysis of dramaturgical practice as dramaturgs tend not to operate within commercial theatres in Germany (and do not feature in commercial operations in England). The role of the dramaturg has its origins in aristocratic patronage and, as Chapter Four shall explore, is founded upon principles of public service rather than private enterprise.

<sup>4</sup> See <<http://www.artscouncil.org.uk/funding/>> for more information. [Accessed 24<sup>th</sup> Nov 2010]



desired by the *Intendant* (Artistic Director) and his or her colleagues. It is these theatres to which I refer when I invoke the term ‘mainstream’ within a German context.

Such freedom in creative and financial matters lies beyond the reach of most subsidised building-based producing theatres in England, where compromise and even conflict within planning, programming and production are commonplace. With very few exceptions, the ensemble repertory system no longer operates within English theatre. Instead, theatres present a mixed repertoire of self-produced and toured-in productions (alongside music, comedy and dance). Over recent years, the overall proportion of in-house productions has fallen, with a consequent increase in the slots available to host an external theatre company, or commission a co-production with another theatre or company. In stating, then, that my intention is to focus upon dramaturgical practice within the producing structures and artistic output of subsidized building-based producing theatres, I should add that within the context of English theatre this assessment of dramaturgical practice extends also to the subsidized producing *companies* which perform on the mid- to large-scale stages of subsidized producing theatres. It is these companies and theatres to which I refer when I invoke the term ‘mainstream’ within an English context.

The decision to focus upon subsidized building-based producing theatres (and, in England, the companies that perform therein) was made for three distinct but related reasons. Firstly, this was an obvious, even implied, choice, given that the AHRC Collaborative Doctoral Award which supported this research provided me with the aforementioned residency within a major regional producing theatre. The Collaborative Doctoral Award (CDA), launched in 2005 (this PhD formed part of the first cohort), is a research scheme designed to develop collaboration between Higher Education Institutions and non-academic organisations and businesses. According to the current CDA guidelines, these studentships aim ‘to encourage and establish links that can have benefits for both collaborating partners, providing access to resources and materials, knowledge and expertise that may not otherwise have been available and also provide social, cultural and economic benefits to wider society’.<sup>5</sup> The original project title for

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<sup>5</sup> *Collaborative Doctoral Awards 2011: Scheme Guidance*, p. 3. Downloaded from <<http://www.ahrc.ac.uk/FundingOpportunities/Pages/CollaborativeDoctoralAwards.aspx>> [Accessed 25 July 2011].

this CDA, as formulated in 2004 by Dr. Bridget Escolme of the Workshop Theatre, University of Leeds, and Alex Chisholm, then Literary Manager of the WYP, was ‘A Scholar in the Theatre? Models for Dramaturgy and Literary Management’.<sup>6</sup>

Yoking together ‘academia’ and the ‘theatre industry’, this PhD, as I understood it, was to evaluate the practices of one culture through the critical lens of the other – an evaluation which would, ideally, work both ways. From the outset, the CDA identified ‘models of dramaturgy’ as if not synonymous with, then closely related to, practices of literary management and, by extension, models of new play development. The research project was situated within a building-based producing theatre and, given Alex Chisholm’s connections with and interest in theatre institutions across the UK and Europe, the working practices of building-based producing theatres presented the most immediate frame of reference within which to explore dramaturgical practice.

Secondly, as my research progressed, I became aware that the understandings of ‘dramaturgy’ and ‘dramaturgs’ I encountered amongst practitioners – the playwrights, directors, actors and literary managers who worked at West Yorkshire Playhouse and other producing theatres and companies – differed from the descriptions of dramaturgical practice that I had read in articles and books such as Bert Cardullo’s *What is Dramaturgy?* (1995), Susan Jonas, Geoff Proehl and Michael Lupu’s *Dramaturgy in American Theater* (1997), and Judith Rudakoff and Lynn M. Thomson’s *Between the Lines: the process of dramaturgy* (2002). Before Mary Luckhurst published her illuminating study, *Dramaturgy: A Revolution in Theatre* (2006), I was cognizant of three major strands of dramaturgical practice: production, institutional and new play development dramaturgy. I was also aware that these strands could, with few exceptions, be geographically situated, with production and institutional dramaturgy common (in fact, indigenous) to German-language theatre cultures, and new play development dramaturgy (inspired by models drawn from the US) common to English theatre cultures.

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<sup>6</sup> Between securing the CDA in Spring, and the programme commencing in Autumn, Dr. Bridget Escolme left the University of Leeds to join Queen Mary University, London. Her successor, Professor Stephen Bottoms, inherited the CDA programme and partnership with West Yorkshire Playhouse.

Within the building-based producing theatres that formed my point of entry into the theatre industry, however, dramaturgical practice was understood as a practical activity subsumed under the institutional title of ‘literary management’. Understandings of dramaturgy which recognized and accepted the dramaturg as an integral, often senior, functionary within the artistic and administrative co-ordination of theatre institutions (‘institutional’ dramaturgy) or as a creative, collaborative voice within the rehearsal room (‘production’ dramaturgy) were absent from industry discourse in England, familiar only to practitioners who had worked in Germany and mainland Europe. It seemed to me that the practices of those theatres and companies in England that prided themselves on producing new work, often employing a literary manager or dramaturg to that end, in fact provided the starkest contrast to understandings and applications of dramaturgy as established in Europe for over two centuries. Very simply, I wanted to know why this should be. What were the material and ideological conditions within the mainstream theatre cultures of England and Germany which had created two such different conceptions of dramaturgy? How had these conditions shaped and defined the dramaturg’s profile, agency and contribution to theatre-making?

It became apparent that to talk about ‘the theatre industry’ as a stable, unitary mass was not possible. This is true for both England and Germany, but for the former in particular, as the overview of theatre systems provided above might suggest. As Chapter Two will explore, it is possible to characterize English theatre – in distinction to German-language theatre – as marked by a peculiar division between so-called ‘text-based’ and ‘non-text-based’ theatre, a reductive dichotomy which effectively works to pit playwrights and play-texts against devising companies and performance-led practices. Historically, in terms of institutional access, allocation of funding, critical coverage and, hence, public profile, performance-led processes have been overshadowed by the script-led production processes traditionally favoured by subsidized building-based producing theatres.<sup>7</sup> Over the past thirty years, however, it is the performance-led practices developed in England, the United States, Canada and across Europe since the 1950s which have been largely favoured within academia,

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<sup>7</sup> Figures from the Arts Council-commissioned report *Writ Large: New Writing on the English Stage 2003-2009* suggest that 77% of the theatre works presented at regional producing theatres during this period were categorised as ‘plays’; in terms of numbers of performances, devised shows occupied just 7% of the repertoire. British Theatre Consortium (July 2009), p. 6; p. 62.

analysed and creatively explored by drama, theatre and performance departments which have simultaneously distanced themselves from the analysis of dramatic play-texts and their production. Thus I found myself, in 2005, in the strange position of holding a first class honours degree in BA Drama and Theatre Studies (Royal Holloway University, 2001-2004), and yet entering a theatre industry I apparently knew nothing about. The effect was disconcerting and, frankly, demoralising; known as ‘that PhD girl’, my academic qualifications counted for little as it became evident I had little knowledge of, or familiarity with, the playwrights, directors, priorities and protocols of contemporary mainstream theatre production. My third reason, therefore, for wishing to look at the producing structures and artistic output of mainstream theatre was that there wasn’t – and I don’t believe, six years later, that there is now – sufficient critical attention directed towards the ‘backbone, or bedrock, of arts delivery’ constituted by these producing theatres and companies.<sup>8</sup> It is my hope, here and in future work, to access the ‘knowledge and expertise’ contained within both academic and industry sectors so as to facilitate a dialogue which emphasizes to each the ‘social, cultural and economic benefits’ delivered by the other.

A note on geography. My research initially sought to encompass dramaturgical practice and literary management within not only England but the whole of the UK. It was, and to a certain degree, still is, my view that domestic understandings and applications of dramaturgy and literary management apply to theatre cultures in not only England, but also Scotland, Northern Ireland and Wales. As my research has progressed, however, I have found it necessary to reconsider the scope of my thesis. Certainly, my research inclines towards examples drawn from English practice. Moreover, I have increasingly found that exceptions or contradictions to what I believe constitute ‘standard’ UK practices of dramaturgy and literary management are - not always, but often - drawn from Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. Dramaturgical practice evolves in critical dialogue with its immediate working environment and more detailed examinations of theatre practices specific to Scotland, Northern Ireland and Wales would be required to assess the reception of dramaturgy and dramaturgs in these countries; this level of investigation, however, lies beyond the range of this project. Similarly, or perhaps conversely, whilst my research here focuses particularly upon theatres in Germany, it is also possible to apply the practices discussed here to Switzerland and Austria.

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<sup>8</sup> Alison Gagen, Arts Council Theatre Officer, West Midlands, unpublished interview with Jacqueline Bolton, 6<sup>th</sup> October 2006.

Geography, history and politics have forged a common cultural infrastructure across these countries; directors and playwrights routinely cross borders and have established a network sufficiently tight-knit to equate the term 'German theatre' with 'German-language' theatre.

A final note: given the historical sweep of this study it is, of course, not always possible to talk about 'Germany' as a unified country. Where distinctions between theatre systems in the German Democratic Republic (GDR) and Federal Republic of Germany (FRG) notably impact upon dramaturgical practice this shall be addressed within the thesis. Ultimately, however, the critical bent of this research is how the role of the dramaturg, as it developed over the twentieth-century within German-language theatre, today contrasts with the role of the dramaturg as it is understood in England. At this stage in my research, and for the aims and objectives of this thesis, I am happy to rest with David Barnett's observation that, whilst there were 'internal differences' between the GDR and the FRG, 'their basic structures were similar in the way that they diverge from the British system'.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> David Barnett, *Literature versus theatre: textual problems and theatrical realization in the plays of Heiner Müller* (Bern: Peter Lang, 1998), p. 35.

## Introduction

Few terms in contemporary theatre practice have consistently occasioned more perplexity.<sup>1</sup>

The past five years have seen a striking degree of critical interest directed towards the ‘troublesome theory and painful practice’ of dramaturgy in England and the UK.<sup>2</sup> In 2005, when this PhD began, literature on dramaturgy was largely confined to American, Australian, Canadian and European contexts; academic publications on dramaturgy written from, or folding in, a British perspective were virtually non-existent. Today, however, two exemplary books have been published: Mary Luckhurst’s *Dramaturgy: A Revolution in Theatre* (2006) and Cathy Turner and Synne Behrndt’s *Dramaturgy and Performance* (2008). There are also two special issue journals: *Contemporary Theatre Review: New Dramaturgies* (2010) and *Studies in Theatre and Performance* (2010),<sup>3</sup> as well as a proliferating number of articles and interviews dedicated to the documentation, analysis and critique of the concept and practice of dramaturgy. Academic interest has been preceded and, indeed, informed by corresponding discussions within the theatre industry: a curiosity evidenced over the past fifteen years by the dozens of conferences, workshops and symposia organized to debate the definition and deployment of dramaturgy and dramaturgs. The discourse of dramaturgy today enjoys a profile that simply did not obtain in British theatre fifteen, ten, even five years ago; a discourse which is currently enabling dramaturgical practices to evolve, adapt and forge new roles. And yet, as Claire McDonald observes, dramaturgy remains very much ‘a term in

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<sup>1</sup> Susan Jonas, Geoff Proehl and Michael Lupu, eds. *Dramaturgy in American Theater* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1997), p. vii.

<sup>2</sup> Mary Luckhurst, *Dramaturgy: A Revolution in Theatre* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), p. 2.

<sup>3</sup> *Contemporary Theatre Review: New Dramaturgies*, 20.2 (2010), eds. Cathy Turner and Synne Behrndt; *Studies in Theatre and Performance*, 30.1 (2010), ed. Cathy Turner. In addition to these two special issues detailing work from a UK perspective, in 2009 *Performance Research* also published a special issue focusing on dramaturgical practice within contemporary European contexts. See *Performance Research*, 14.3 (2009), eds. Karoline Gritzner, Patrick Primavesi and Heike Roms.

flux, a not-quite-settled word'.<sup>4</sup> If conversations about theatre-making (-analysing, -spectating) today invoke the term 'dramaturgy' more often than in previous decades, the range of processes to which the term may refer does not yet suggest a settled consensus upon its specific contribution to theatre practice. Despite all debate and all experiment, dramaturgy continues to be regarded by many English practitioners (and scholars) as an unknown quantity: a practice 'shrouded in mystique, somewhat threatening, yet still with a certain dark attraction...'.<sup>5</sup>

Without doubt, understandings and applications of dramaturgy have been impeded by a perceived intractability; if dramaturgs are to secure agency within the industry then firmer ideas as to how, where and why existing theatre-making processes might benefit from dramaturgical perspectives will need to be defined and advocated. Whilst many theatre professionals remain sceptical that theatre industry needs a 'new', 'extra' profession, it is salutary to note that the pivotal position of the theatre director was widely established only in the last century; a role called for and constructed by, amongst other pressures, new styles of playwriting, the formalization of actor training, advances in technical resources and developing expectations of audiences. As new technologies, aesthetic forms and audience demographics develop, cross-fertilize and diversify in the twenty-first century, it seems reasonable to propose that existing practices may yet be augmented by a role unfamiliar to professional structures founded in an earlier era.

In working towards a more coherent articulation of dramaturgical practice, however, it is important to recognise that dramaturgy *is* a 'slippery, elastic and inclusive term',<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Claire McDonald, 'Conducting the flow: dramaturgy and writing', *Studies in Theatre and Performance*, 30.1 (2010), pp. 91-100 (p. 93).

<sup>5</sup> Tony Craze, *Dramaturgy: The symposia held in Birmingham and London*, report compiled for Arts Council England (2006), np.

<sup>6</sup> Cathy Turner and Synne Behrnt, *Dramaturgy and Performance* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), p. 18.

constituting sets of practices defined by, and realized within, specific practical contexts. Whilst frustrating for the pragmatists amongst us, it might indeed be useful to embrace slipperiness, elasticity and inclusivity as defining strengths, markers of a flexibility which ‘enable[s] dramaturgs to be responsive to the changing needs of performance practices’.<sup>7</sup> This is not, I hope, to wrap closer the shroud of mystique, but to attempt to foreground properties peculiar to dramaturgy as a first step towards answering this thesis’ first enquiry: Whence the perplexity?

### I. Demarcating Dramaturgy

It might be suggested that the perceived opacity of dramaturgical practice arises partly from a grammatical tension between dramaturgy as noun and dramaturgy as verb: depending on context, dramaturgy may refer to *the composition* and/or *the composing* (or advising on the composing) of a dramatic text. Dramaturgy also poses a challenge to habitual distinctions between ‘page’ and ‘stage’ by encompassing within its analysis both the play-text *and* its (projected or actual) realisation in performance. Since the popularisation of the term by Gotthold Ephraim Lessing’s 1769 volume, the *Hamburg Dramaturgy* (*Hamburgische Dramaturgie*), practices of dramaturgy have encircled not only the dramatic text but also the cultural, historical and political contexts of its original and/or contemporary performance(s). This long-established concept of dramaturgy as the critical and contextual study of dramatic literature is the tradition documented by Mary Luckhurst in *Dramaturgy: A Revolution in Theatre*. Dramaturgy as analysis of the ‘internal structures of a play-text’, she observes, attends to the ‘arrangement of formal elements by the playwright – plot, construction of narrative, character, time frame and stage action’, extending also to ‘external elements relating to

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<sup>7</sup> Cathy Turner, ‘Mis-Guidance and Spatial Planning: Dramaturgies of Public Space’, *Contemporary Theatre Review*, 20.2 (2010), pp. 149-161 (p. 149).



staging, the overall artistic concept behind the staging' and the 'politics of performance'.<sup>8</sup> 'Internal structures' are identified squarely with the playwright, and the 'external elements' of production (and, implicitly, reception) are designated to 'persons now known as directors', who are responsible for the 'underlying reading and manipulation of a text into multidimensional theatre'.<sup>9</sup>

Theorists and practitioners of dramaturgy, however, have long attempted to free the practice from an exclusive concern with the play-text, seeking to open dramaturgical perspectives onto works which are not reliant 'on reference to classical forms, or indeed to text as the principle element'.<sup>10</sup> Whilst acknowledging the significance of the literary-critical tradition cleaved to by Luckhurst's historical account, Turner and Behrndt's *Dramaturgy and Performance* incorporates into its overview new forms, processes and questions which, over the course of the twentieth-century, have encouraged 'an emphasis on the live performance and the performance text, as opposed to the written play'.<sup>11</sup> Expanding the aesthetic parameters of theatre to include works which do not presume the primacy of verbal text, Turner and Behrndt quote Adam Versényi's proposition that dramaturgy (as *noun*) be defined 'as the architecture of the theatrical event, involved in the confluence of components in a work and how they are constructed to generate meaning for the audience'.<sup>12</sup> Processes of dramaturgy (as *verb*) are '*processes of analysis*' which look at 'the ways in which levels of meaning are orchestrated' in performance;<sup>13</sup> that is to say, processes of analysis which are sensitive to how compositional strategies structure and inform spectators' responses. The notion of 'text' is expanded beyond the written word to encompass what Eugenio Barba, in his

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<sup>8</sup> Luckhurst, *Revolution*, p. 10.

<sup>9</sup> Luckhurst, *Revolution*, p. 11.

<sup>10</sup> Turner and Behrndt, *Dramaturgy and Performance*, p. 29.

<sup>11</sup> Turner and Behrndt, *Dramaturgy and Performance*, p. 30.

<sup>12</sup> Turner and Behrndt, *Dramaturgy and Performance*, p. 18.

<sup>13</sup> *ibid.* Emphasis in original.

seminal essay, 'The Nature of Dramaturgy: Describing Actions at Work', refers to as the 'weave' of performance (quoted in Turner and Behrmdt, pp. 31-32). Despite being written three decades ago, Barba's definition of dramaturgy remains one of the most illuminating, and is worth quoting at length:

The word 'text', before referring to a written or spoken, printed or manuscript text, meant 'a weaving together'. In this sense, there is no performance without 'text'. That which concerns the 'text' (the weave) of the performance can be defined as 'dramaturgy' – that is, *drama-ergon*, work, the 'work of the actions' in the performance.<sup>14</sup>

Barba goes on to define what is meant by 'work of the actions':

In a theatrical performance, *actions* (concerning the dramaturgy, that is) are not only what the actors do and say, but also what sounds, noises, lights, changes in space are used [...] *actions* are the episodes of the story or the different facets of a situation, the arches of time between two accents of the performance, between two changes in the space – or even the evolution, according to a relative autonomy, of the musical score, the variations of the lights, the variations of rhythm and intensity which an actor develops [...]

*Actions* are all the relationships, all the interactions between the characters, or between the characters and the lights, the sounds, the space. *Actions* are what work directly on the audience's attention, on their understanding, their emotiveness, their synaesthesia.<sup>15</sup>

Understanding dramaturgy as pertaining to the overall *texture* of performance, created by the relationships and interactions between verbal, visual, sonic and physical properties, suggests a collapsing of distinctions between 'internal structures' and 'external elements' and presses to the fore the involvement of the spectator in a process of observation, comparison, selection and interpretation. By expanding the range of theatre practices to which dramaturgy might be applied so as to include, but move beyond, dramatic literature, towards dance, devising, live art and digital technologies, *Dramaturgy and Performance* successfully revises the critical scope of dramaturgy,

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<sup>14</sup> Eugenio Barba, 'The Nature of Dramaturgy: Describing Actions at Work', *New Theatre Quarterly*, 1.1. (1985), pp. 75-78 (p. 75).

<sup>15</sup> *ibid.*

imparting a greater flexibility to its applications than typical associations with dramatic exegesis might suggest.

In addition to testing and furthering the *concept* of dramaturgy, however, Turner and Behrndt also share Luckhurst's concern with its various incarnations as working *practice*. It is from these writers' considerations of dramaturgy as professional practice that this thesis initially departs. In order to begin my own evaluation of dramaturgy in England and Germany, it is first necessary to examine the three strands of dramaturgical practice established within the mainstream theatre cultures of these countries: institutional dramaturgy, production dramaturgy (after the German *Produktionsdramaturgie*) and new play development dramaturgy. Institutional and production dramaturgy originated in Germany during the eighteenth and twentieth centuries respectively and continue to be employed, with local variation, throughout mainland Europe; in England, however, professional recognition of these practices is scarce. By contrast, new play development dramaturgy, inspired by models drawn from the US, established itself in England during the 1990s but has only recently gained recognition within German theatre cultures.

### **I.i. Institutional Dramaturgy**

Institutional dramaturgy has evolved from, and is supported by, Germany's competitive network of over one hundred and fifty state, city and municipal theatres, all directly subsidized by local government. Each publicly funded theatre possesses a *Dramaturgie*, a dramaturgy department located at the heart of the theatre's producing structures, directly appointed by and responsible to the *Intendant* (Artistic Director). The size of these departments varies in line with the number of stages and individual resources of each theatre, and may consist of anywhere between two and eight dramaturgs.

Productions are performed in repertory and are cast from a resident ensemble which again, depending upon size and resources, may consist of between fifteen and sixty actors. Some state theatres, such as the Staatstheater Stuttgart, have separate stages for ballet and opera as well as drama and, up until the 1990s, it was not uncommon for state and city theatres to house a resident dance company in addition to the acting ensemble. Productions run for as long as there is an audience to sustain them, and it is not uncommon for a show to stay in the repertoire for several years. Whilst theatres produce the vast majority of their repertoire in-house, productions which garner a national reputation may make 'guest visits' to other houses. Theatres are also increasingly looking to the *Freie Theater* (Fringe theatre) to either receive an existing production or commission a new work from a company.

The *Dramaturgie* is headed by a *Chefdramaturg*, who works closely with the *Intendant* on a long-term artistic vision for the theatre. The *Dramaturgie* collectively undertake the practices designated here as institutional dramaturgy and production dramaturgy, but it is important to distinguish between these activities. Production dramaturgy may be understood as a twentieth-century phenomenon, proposed by Erwin Piscator in the 1920s, advanced by Bertolt Brecht in the 1950s and officially instituted as *Produktiondramaturgie* by Peter Stein with dramaturgs Dieter Sturm and Botho Strauss at the Schaubühne am Halleschen Ufer, Berlin, in the 1970s. Though institutional and production dramaturgy combine within the theatre institution, the foundational aims and objectives of production dramaturgy are not confined in their application to production processes within building-based producing theatres. Individual dramaturgs may form lasting partnerships with particular directors and/or *Intendants*, working alongside them from production to production, or theatre to theatre; in larger cities such as Berlin, Munich and Hamburg, dramaturgs may work freelance within the *Freie Theater*.

The primary task of the *Dramaturgie* is to plan the theatre's season: to liaise with playwrights and publishers (both foreign and domestic) in the search for classics, new plays, new translations and adaptations (of novels, films, plays, books) to programme into the theatre's existing repertoire; it is expected that any theatre of distinction, irrespective of size or location, will include at least one new play and/or a German-language premiere in its repertoire each season.<sup>16</sup> New titles to be launched in a season are often programmed in dialogue with a topic deemed of social or cultural significance. In 2007, for example, the season at the Munich Kammerspiele was orientated around the theme of 'migration' whilst at the Schauspiel Leipzig it was 'security'. Dramaturg Birgit Rasch explains the rationale behind the latter theatre's choice of topic:

[This topic] means not only the security question connected with terrorism, but also the security you look for in yourself and in your family. Asking the questions: what [makes] you secure in your life? Is it a partner, is it a family, is it a job, is it lots of security cameras? Is it a right-wing/left-wing government? Is it peace, or war? And so on. This is the discussion we wanted to have with our plays.<sup>17</sup>

The choice of topic is 'a subjective thing', selected according to the interests of the *Dramaturgie* and the *Intendant*, or extrapolated from a particular play that the theatre especially wants to produce.<sup>18</sup> As well as creating a 'mini-brand' for the theatre's season, a 'canny marketing tool' by which to capture the public's attention,<sup>19</sup> this approach to programming also serves to supply a conceptual frame through which audiences may approach unfamiliar new plays and/or new interpretations of familiar

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<sup>16</sup> Christine Dössel, 'All the World's a Stage', *magazin-deutschland.de*, 20<sup>th</sup> March 2006 <<http://www.magazine-germany.com/en/artikel-en/article/article/all-the-worlds-a-stage.html>> [Accessed 11<sup>th</sup> January 2011].

<sup>17</sup> Birgit Rasch, unpublished interview with Jacqueline Bolton, 5<sup>th</sup> July 2007.

<sup>18</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>19</sup> Peter Boenisch, senior lecturer in Drama and Theatre Studies, University of Kent, unpublished interview with Jacqueline Bolton, 13<sup>th</sup> March 2007.

classics. Repertoires are expected to resonate with both local and national contexts; proposing perspectives upon, or posing questions about, contemporary political and social climates. In working to create a specific identity for a theatre, and a particular engagement with audiences, a critical concern of the *Dramaturgie* is to know the city, know its demographics, and to consciously position the theatre within this social and cultural context. In the words of Flemish dramaturg, Marianne van Kerkhoven: ‘the theatre dwells in the city and the city dwells in the world and the walls are made of skin. We cannot escape what penetrates the pores’.<sup>20</sup> Tilmaan Raabke, dramaturg at Munich Kammerspiele explains:

The dramaturgs together with the *Intendant* [have] to think about ‘what is our profile? What do we want to do? What kind of theatre in *this* theatre do we want to produce in *this* town with [*this* audience]? What is the city in which we are working, in which we want to make theatre? You are site-specific! [Because] you are town-specific.’<sup>21</sup>

Birgit Rasch echoes Raabke:

It’s about responding to what might be interesting here in Leipzig – which may be very different [to what is interesting] in Hamburg, or Stuttgart. We live here with a specific history and, more or less, we want to reflect this history. It has to do with Germany as a country, with the year 2006, or 2007, or whatever: what is relevant in society? What do you want to reflect there?<sup>22</sup>

In Germany, it is the *Dramaturgie* which invites and, via negotiation, elects directors to plays. Once plays and directors have been decided upon, each dramaturg in the *Dramaturgie* is appointed to support a number of these productions, working directly with each director as a *Produktionsdramaturg*. Throughout rehearsals, the production dramaturg is a liaison figure between the director, the production and the cast; a direct artistic link between the rehearsal room and the theatre, the dramaturg is uniquely

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<sup>20</sup> Marianne van Kerkhoven, trans. and qtd. Christel Stalpaert, ‘A Dramaturgy of the Body’, *Performance Research*, 14.3 (2009), pp. 121-125 (p. 124)

<sup>21</sup> Tilmann Raabke, unpublished interview with Jacqueline Bolton, 24<sup>th</sup> July 2007.

<sup>22</sup> Rasch, 5<sup>th</sup> July 2007.

placed to both serve as an advocate for the production and/or to anticipate and resolve any conflicts between members of the artistic team which may threaten the progress of a production. Informed by a commitment to the production and its needs, the dramaturg brings a perspective to rehearsals which incorporates a more global view of the production in relation to the theatre, its audiences and its profile (see production dramaturgy, below).

The *Dramaturgie*'s holistic view of production extends to its presentation to the public. The *Dramaturgie* works closely with the department of *Presse und Öffentlichkeit*, Press and Public Relations, to ensure that something of the play's substance is captured in its public profile: that the visual and linguistic discourses of various publicity materials – posters, postcards, production images, programmes, brochure, 'blurb', etc. – accurately and stylishly reflect the production's identity, as determined by conversations between the director and (production) dramaturg. 'Nearly every text we use in our work is written by the *Dramaturgie*', Gudula Kienemund, Press Officer at the Schauspiel Leipzig, affirms. 'We work with their wording, their ideas, their descriptions, with their pictures [...] They introduce their plans to us at a very early stage'.<sup>23</sup> Representing the theatre and its productions to the public is a vital and valued aspect of the *Dramaturgie*'s work and manifests itself in a variety of ways, including pre-show talks, participatory workshops, and collaborations with local universities and other civic institutions. Carl Hegemann, former dramaturg at the Volksbühne am Rosa Luxemburg Platz, Berlin, (1992-95, 1998-2006), articulates the function of a *Dramaturgie* in the following terms:

While a director directs the plays, the dramaturgs try to direct the whole theatre as a play, as a theatre-play in the town. We try to present the theatre [to the public] with its plays, with its performances, with its concerts and with its political intervention in the town, through public relations, advertising and publications.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Gudula Kienemund, unpublished interview with Jacqueline Bolton, 5<sup>th</sup> July 2007.

<sup>24</sup> Carl Hegemann, unpublished interview with Jacqueline Bolton, 16<sup>th</sup> July 2007.

The *Dramaturgie* provides a hub for the potentially disparate strands of an institution's profile, an integral aspect of both administrative and artistic lines of action.

Critical to the success of individual dramaturgs working within such a department is the ability to communicate: with directors, actors, technicians and with audiences. The more successful *Dramaturgen* articulate the potential as well as the actual, identifying, assessing and promoting new works and new ways of working both inwardly, to the institution itself, and outwardly, to its audiences.

[The most important function] of the *Dramaturgie* is communication. You have always the big problem to put something new, not well-known, in the institution. Nobody can work at these new things without knowing what [is going on]. So the dramaturg has to explain and discuss all these new things. And everyone shouts 'this doesn't work, it's impossible, no one ever made this!' And you as dramaturg have to put these ideas in a real context. This is very difficult.<sup>25</sup>

By dedicating a department to confront this difficulty, German theatres, ideally, build into their organisational infrastructures a safeguard against habit and complacency. Whilst I do not think Hegemann's grasp of English (infinitely better than my grasp of German) in the following description of his work allows him to fully articulate the complexity of his ideas, I include it here in order to suggest the kind of reasoning behind production choices – the focus upon aesthetics, the critical awareness of an ongoing dialogue with audiences – which typifies the pragmatics and principles behind processes of programming and production in German theatre cultures:

[After so many] years you get tired. You cannot invent always new things and everyone knows each other and the audience - in the beginning they were shocked and now they are totally happy: it's like the *Rocky Horror Picture Show*. Normally then you must stop and say 'let's try something [else]'. In the first twelve years [of Hegemann's

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<sup>25</sup> *ibid.*



association with the Volksbühne] every three years the style changed. For example, in the first three years [we were] destroying theatre: no play could be finished without destroying it. Then came the *reconstruction*. We made the *Les Mains sales*, Sartre, and people were shocked because it was *not* deconstructed, it was *not* destroyed! It was ‘really played’. Everyone knew that this was [Frank] Castorf but – ‘he didn’t destroy it, why not’?! [The audience knew] Castorf destroys, so it was a lot for us not to destroy.<sup>26</sup>

It may be observed that the *Dramaturgie* holds a potentially conflicted role within the institution: defining and maintaining a theatre’s artistic profile whilst continuously reassessing what that might be. Here, however, we are perhaps presented with a concrete instance of dramaturgy’s ‘elasticity’. Peter Eckersall, in ‘Towards an Expanded Dramaturgical Practice’ (2006) characterizes dramaturgy as essentially ‘subversive’, in that ‘it is a process that reflects on theatre production from the perspective of the production, whilst simultaneously being that aspect of the process that keeps an open view’.<sup>27</sup> He proposes that ‘whilst dramaturgs must work in response to the demands of production’, they are nevertheless ‘able to explore a creative tension with those same production systems’.<sup>28</sup> Indeed, the dramaturg as the ‘outsider within’ is a common trope of dramaturgical discourse; this sense of mediating between two complementary states – theory/practice; text/context; inside/outside; thought/feeling; affirmation/interrogation – recurs throughout accounts of dramaturgical practice, a dialectical dynamic pressed especially to the fore in contemporary practices of *Produktiondramaturgie*.

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<sup>26</sup> *ibid.* By ‘destroying’ Hegemann is referring here to a practice common in German-language theatre during the late 1980s, the application of Derrida’s concept of ‘deconstruction’ to classic texts. A difficult theoretical construct to explain in a footnote, the application of Derrida’s thesis to German theatre practice endorsed a critical approach to classical works which read the text not as a discrete, organic whole but as a morass of irreconcilable contradictions and competing interpretations. Theatre productions sought less to produce a ‘unified reading’ of a dramatic text than to expose the mechanisms by which such readings are derived, fracturing and recasting texts in order to stage the ambiguities at the heart of language.

<sup>27</sup> Peter Eckersall, ‘Towards an Expanded Dramaturgical Practice: A Report on “The Dramaturgy and Cultural Intervention Project”’, *Theatre Research International*, 31.3 (2006), pp. 283-297 (p. 284).

<sup>28</sup> *ibid.*

## I.ii. Production Dramaturgy

In Germany, a dramaturg's involvement with a director and his or her production begins with their appointment; a director's invitation to create work for a theatre is usually extended at a dramaturg's behest. Whilst it would not be accurate to say that production dramaturgs are embraced by all directors everywhere – 'not every director finds it productive to work with a dramaturg'<sup>29</sup> – in most cases the dramaturg enters the creative process as a partner to the director. Their working relationship may begin several months before rehearsals proper commence, and the dramaturg will function as a member of the creative team throughout rehearsals and into the production cycle itself.

The artistic principle underpinning production dramaturgy as it has evolved in German-language theatre during the twentieth century is that *the organic integrity of a play-text is subordinate to the ways in which it can be made to function in performance*. W. B. Worthen captures this approach to theatre-making when he writes, in *Drama: Between Poetry and Performance* (2010), that:

...dramatic writing is for use, an instrument: how we understand its utility, how we use it and what we use it to do is partly a function of the properties of the instrument, and *partly a function of our imagination of the task we want to perform with it*'.<sup>30</sup>

In mainstream English theatre, the phrase 'serving the text', frequently expresses the desired ends of performance; in German theatre cultures, however, this is a contested approach. As I hope this thesis to demonstrate, German mainstream theatre typically regards the work of performance as not so much conforming to, illustrating or, perhaps, elaborating upon pre-scripted dialogue, action and image (what I understand 'serving the text' to mean within English theatre) than as constituting an entirely original act, an event

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<sup>29</sup> Rasch, 5<sup>th</sup> July 2007.

<sup>30</sup> W. B. Worthen, *Drama: Between Poetry and Performance* (Chichester: Wiley Blackwell, 2010), p. xviii. Emphasis mine.

which need not necessarily be seen to comply with the implied directives of the written text. This latter approach demands a cogent rationale for *why* to produce this play, in this theatre, to these audiences, at this time: what sorts of cultural work might this play in this performance achieve? A provisional concept of the play in performance is usually reached by the director, the production dramaturg and the creative team before rehearsals commence, a production concept typically informed by a period of pre-rehearsal research during which the dramaturg will seek out:

information about the author, information about the time it was written, information about why it was written, what might be the reason for us now to put it onstage. *So it's really a new invention, a new topic, a new theme.* You start collecting material: everything from songs to paintings to pictures, to films to books to articles, everything you can think of where you might have some connecting point.<sup>31</sup>

Dramaturgical practice concerns not only the *accumulation* of materials but also their evaluation, exploration and exploitation; dramaturgs must know ‘*how* to deal with the material, whatever its origins may be – visual, musical, textual, filmic, philosophical, etc.’.<sup>32</sup> In response to this ‘new invention’, the existing play-text (or translation of a play-text) may be rewritten by the dramaturg, edited, spliced, fused and/or collided with other texts, dramatic or otherwise. *Fremdtext* is the German term for an ‘alien’ text that has been inserted into an existing play-text, a strategy adopted in order to accentuate a particular aspect the director wishes to explore in performance. As Anke Roeder, former dramaturg at the Bayerisches Staatsschauspiele and now Professor of Dramaturgy at the Theaterakademie Munich, explains:

For *Woyzeck*,<sup>33</sup> the dramaturg Hans-Joachim Ruckhäberle and [the director] Martin Kusej took a novel, Cormac McCarthy’s *The Road*. They [inserted] text from this apocalyptic novel [...] they interpolated, interspersed, parts of this novel into the text of

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<sup>31</sup> Rasch, 5<sup>th</sup> July 2007.

<sup>32</sup> Marianne Van Kerkhoven, ‘Looking without Pencil in the Hand’, *State of Mime: European Mime Newsletter*, (Summer 1995), pp. 13-14 (p. 14). Emphasis mine.

<sup>33</sup> Premiered 22 June 2007 at the Bayerisches Staatsschauspiel, Munich.

Büchner. It's a concentration on one aspect of the text. It accentuates the apocalyptic aspect which is in *Woyzeck* itself.<sup>34</sup>

The production dramaturg assists in both the articulation of a concept for the production and, throughout rehearsals, works alongside the director to discover the material embodiment of that desired concept in performance. To this end, and perhaps counter-intuitively to English theatre cultures accustomed to working with little time and less money, it is often the case that dramaturgs will work into their collaboration periods of absence from the rehearsal room, as Anne Paffenholz, dramaturg at THEATER AN DER PARKAUE explains:

If you are part of the rehearsal process, every single day, you don't see anything else: everything [seems] clear to you because you know what it's *meant* to be [...] We are the first spectators, a test audience in order to avoid [a situation where] people do not see the wood for the trees.<sup>35</sup>

Paffenholz's invocation of the dramaturg as 'first spectator' presents the idea of the dramaturg as an 'outside eye' within rehearsals. Whilst for some dramaturgs, this aspect of the role presents the most straightforward, least controversial, of their functions - 'I basically just [say] what I think works, and what doesn't work, and what I think is missing',<sup>36</sup> 'I give feedback: what did I see? What sort of an effect did that have on me? Do I still think that goes with the conception we had at the beginning?'<sup>37</sup> - for others, the issue is more complex: 'it is very hard to keep the critical distance, to be both inside and outside the production'.<sup>38</sup>

Contemporary writing on dramaturgy, as Synne Behrndt records, has put pressure upon this notion of the dramaturg as an 'outside eye', seeking to trouble the 'supposed claim to

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<sup>34</sup> Anke Roeder, unpublished interview with Jacqueline Bolton, 24<sup>th</sup> July 2007.

<sup>35</sup> Anne Paffenholz, unpublished interview with Jacqueline Bolton, 2<sup>nd</sup> July 2008.

<sup>36</sup> Maja Zade, dramaturg, Schaubühne am Lehniner Platz, unpublished interview with Jacqueline Bolton, 10<sup>th</sup> July 2007.

<sup>37</sup> Paffenholz, 2<sup>nd</sup> July 2008.

<sup>38</sup> Roeder, 24<sup>th</sup> July 2007.

objectivity, knowledge [and] a universal audience perspective' that such a role is perceived to imply.<sup>39</sup> Suspicion of the production dramaturg as an 'external authority' stems in part from perceptions of institutional hierarchies in which the dramaturg functions as "the protector" of a concept' worked out prior to rehearsals.<sup>40</sup> In this mould, the dramaturg is 'associated with a peculiar kind of power and authority', regarded as 'a kind of machine for producing meaning, who imposes externally predetermined decisions and meaning on the work'.<sup>41</sup>

This view that (continental) dramaturgs represent working practices wherein pre-given concepts must be fulfilled, rules imposed and prescriptions carried out is commonly held within English theatre cultures, where the practice of seeking and applying a critically involved perspective upon the dramatic text has traditionally been resisted, even scorned, by voices of authority within the subsidized mainstream. Chapter Three will explore in more detail what exactly is at stake when English practitioners invoke the spectre of 'Director's Theatre'. All I wish to propose here is that both a specific suspicion of dramaturgs as authoritarian enforcers of a pre-determined meaning, as well as a more general resistance to exploring conceptual approaches to play-texts, are reactions towards aging stereotypes of continental practice. These stereotypes are generated from what I believe to be misunderstandings of a) hierarchies of theatre-making and the dramaturg's position within those structures; b) definitions of the term 'concept' and its applications; and c) the ways in which meaning itself is understood to be produced in and through theatrical performance.

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<sup>39</sup> Synne Behrndt, 'Dance, Dramaturgy and Dramaturgical Thinking', *Contemporary Theatre Review*, 20.2 (2010), pp. 185-96 (p. 192)

<sup>40</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>41</sup> Behrndt, 'Dramaturgical Thinking', p. 191.

The first observation to be made about the position of a dramaturg within theatre hierarchies is that his or her agency within a rehearsal room is contingent upon the needs of the production, the needs of the director and the working dynamic of an ensemble:

Your job [as a dramaturg] is really to find out how the director works and how the process of this production works. And this is different from play to play, from director to director, from one set of people working together to the next. So your job is never to say ‘well, my opinion is this and as a dramaturg I want this’ but it is always to get a feeling for what the group needs and how it works and then to find your way into that organism.<sup>42</sup>

The dramaturg’s role is at its most expansive – and useful - when his or her contributions are regarded as *collaborative*, not corrective. It is the dramaturg’s responsibility, in the words of Hermann Beil, to adopt ‘a method of playing, seeing, hearing and comprehending what the director, designers and actors are thinking, he [sic] has to move around within their imaginations [...] he has to learn along with everyone else’.<sup>43</sup> Contemporary accounts of rehearsal room activity suggest a more fluid dispersal of roles and responsibilities than has typically been recognized: ‘everyone (director, scene designer, dramaturg) has to sit down together at one table and plow through the problem together [...] the specializations begin to break down, the disciplines get mixed up’.<sup>44</sup> As Beil suggests, and Anne Paffenholz confirms, the play-text is not the dramaturg’s exclusive province, nor is s/he prevented from commenting on other aspects of staging:

Sometimes it happens that the set designer says ‘please, you should cut this line because it’s more interesting if we do it like this’. And I say ‘oh yes, wonderful idea!’ And I can also say ‘I am not sure about this costume because this figure should be interpreted in a certain way and if she’s wearing that dress to me it looks like... ’ and so on.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> Rasch, 24<sup>th</sup> July 2007.

<sup>43</sup> Reinhardt Stumm, ‘Dramaturgy in Stuttgart: An Interview with Hermann Beil’ in *What is Dramaturgy?*, ed. Bert Cardullo (New York, Peter Lang: 2000), pp. 49-56 (p. 50).

<sup>44</sup> Stumm, ‘An Interview with Hermann Beil’, p. 51.

<sup>45</sup> Paffenholz, 2<sup>nd</sup> July 2008.

As these accounts suggest, the unavoidably processual and collaborative nature of theatre-making would indicate that ‘concepts’ perform function less as ‘clearly distinct logical entities’ – coherent frameworks of thought to be ‘imposed’ upon an unsuspecting text – than as ‘mobile and slippery frames for apprehending reality, whose interactions are always evolving’.<sup>46</sup> That is to say, the motivating impulses which inform the initial conception of a production are not immutable but subject to ongoing assessment and change throughout rehearsals, as unexpected findings discovered through improvisation and experiment shift the means by which the text-in-performance is encountered, recognized and engaged with. This is the notion of ‘concept’ I understand Birgit Rasch to be using when she explains that:

It’s not that you know what the outcome will be before you have started rehearsing. It is an idea of themes, of topics, of what you want to say, that you start with. And then you discover throughout the course of the rehearsal process whether they work or not [...] You sometimes really change directions in the course of the rehearsals because there are certain things you don’t understand without actors. You can read and read and read and think and read some more and still you don’t get it. You need an actor who puts the text onstage and discovers it anew, in a different way, and then you start understanding the text on a completely new level.<sup>47</sup>

With a dramaturg present to preserve a ‘sense of the whole’, the director can engage in the finer details of actions and images within individual scenes, suggest unanticipated points of departure and explore avenues which arise unexpectedly in rehearsal: ‘You try to understand what [the director] is doing, you try to see ahead whether it makes sense in the whole thing, whether you think it is a productive way or whether you think “oh no, that’s going to end up in a dead end”’:<sup>48</sup>

Sometimes directors get lost, they find something so interesting and then suddenly the whole thing takes a step to the left or to the right; which might be good, which might be possible also, because it might be the

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<sup>46</sup> Alex Thomson, *Adorno: A Guide for the Perplexed* (London: Continuum, 2006), p. 6.

<sup>47</sup> Rasch, 24<sup>th</sup> July 2007.

<sup>48</sup> *ibid.*

better way. But that's at least the point when you say 'I see you are working in the direction, is that what you want?' It's not my role to say 'well, you thought at the beginning this would be the outcome and you can't leave this track'; [that] is stupid. It's more like questioning: 'is this really the track you want to take?'<sup>49</sup>

The dramaturg serves not as the enforcer of a pre-determined concept, but rather as a reminder of the originating artistic impulse behind a work, the reasons why it was necessary and important for the producing theatre to respond to that impulse. As Hans-Thies Lehmann writes, 'the dramaturg is the one that incessantly questions the theatre, reminding what one wanted to achieve in making theatre in the first place',<sup>50</sup> ensuring that the production's 'first principles' remain in view throughout the digressive discussion and experimentation of rehearsal processes.

Perhaps the most significant feature to address in any (re)assessment of the production dramaturg's role, however, rests with the ways in which dramaturgical practice understands *meaning* to be produced in and through performance. Ric Knowles, in his book *Reading the Material Theatre* (2004), elegantly articulates the production of meaning in theatre as 'a negotiation at the intersection of three shifting and mutually constitutive poles': the *performance*, the *conditions of production* and the *conditions of reception*.<sup>51</sup> Composed of 'the raw theatrical event shared by practitioners and audiences' and the "'material conditions" that shape *both what appears on stage and how it is read*', these generative forces 'work in concert or in tension with one another to produce whatever meanings the performance has for particular audiences'.<sup>52</sup> Unpacking these terms a little, we may understand 'conditions of production' as encompassing practices of acting, directing and scenography; rehearsal processes and

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<sup>49</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>50</sup> Hans-Thies Lehmann, 'Theater Denken, Risiken wagen, Formeln nicht glauben', *Theater der Zeit*, Vol. 3 (March 2005). pp. 11-13 (p. 11). Trans. Kara McKechnie.

<sup>51</sup> Ric Knowles, *Reading the Material Theatre* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), p. 3.

<sup>52</sup> *ibid.* My emphasis.



working conditions, as well as the historical/cultural moment of production. ‘Conditions of reception’, we may understand as referring to such aspects as the discourses of publicity and critical review; the auditorium or space in which the performance takes place; geographical location of the theatre/venue and ticket prices, as well as the historical/cultural moment of reception also.<sup>53</sup> As Knowles is at pains to stress, however, ‘these elements do not – cannot – function in isolation from one another’.<sup>54</sup>

Assessing the status and the remit of the dramaturg in light of the above descriptions of institutional and production dramaturgy, we can begin to see how s/he is strategically positioned within the creative process to effect Knowles’ peculiarly global perspective on the production of meaning in performance; a perspective which, it is important to emphasize, is enabled by the specific material and cultural conditions of German-language theatre. Located at the heart of the theatre’s producing structures, the dramaturg sustains a relationship with a resident ensemble, is exposed to, and supportive of, a variety of directorial approaches, and works closely with designers in order to discover and realize the material embodiment of a desired vision for production. Embedding a dramaturg within the rehearsal process establishes a mediatory role between all the contributions of the creative team (actors, directors, designers, musicians, technicians), engendering a holistic perspective of the ways in which ‘the work of the actions’ might be assembled and combined in performance.

Complementing this tight focus upon a production, however, is the concurrent expectation that the dramaturg serves also as a critical intermediary between the production and the larger world surrounding the stage. Tom Stromberg, former *Chefdramaturg* and Artistic Director of Theater am Turm, Frankfurt, describes the

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<sup>53</sup> See Knowles, *Material Theatre*, p. 19.

<sup>54</sup> Knowles, *Material Theatre*, p. 4.

dramaturg in rehearsal as ‘an expert for the outside world, bringing in thoughts and ideas from beyond the artistic process’.<sup>55</sup> Attending to the material conditions that ‘shape both what appears on stage *and how it is read*’, applied dramaturgical analyses extend beyond the performance itself ‘to include the context, the audience and the various ways in which the work is *framed*’.<sup>56</sup> These ‘frames’ may, for example, include the theatre building and its stages; the theatre’s ‘site-specific’ (Raabke) relationship to a city and its demographics; contemporary events in the public sphere (often echoed in the ‘topic’ that provides a conceptual framework for the season); as well as implicit audience expectations – the anticipation of a certain directorial style, for instance, or the expectations raised by seeing a familiar actor play an unfamiliar role. Both the standardized functions and artistic ambition of production dramaturgy acknowledge the contextual circumstances of production, proceed from the principle that performance generates meaning in dynamic relationship to its context, and tailor analysis to the specifics of each production. As I shall argue in Chapter Three, it is this specific perspective upon the material conditions of production and reception which enables, to return momentarily to Worthen, ‘both a sense of what the text *is*, and *what we might be capable of saying with and through it in/as performance*’.<sup>57</sup>

Articulating the parameters of production dramaturgy as such, the critical significance of the dramaturg’s ‘outside eye’ lies less in an objective, authoritative, *fixed gaze* than in a ‘*continual movement* between detail and overview, [an] attempt to discover relationships and disjunctions between all elements of a work and between a work and its context’.<sup>58</sup> I would argue that the presence of a dramaturg in the rehearsal room in

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<sup>55</sup> Tom Stromberg, presentation at ‘European Dramaturgy in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century’, conference organized by Hessische Theaterakademie and schauspielFrankfurt, Frankfurt/Main, 26-30 September 2007. Notes taken by Jacqueline Bolton.

<sup>56</sup> Turner and Behrnt, *Dramaturgy and Performance*, p. 18.

<sup>57</sup> Worthen, *Between Poetry and Performance*, p. 68. Emphasis in original.

<sup>58</sup> Turner, ‘Mis-Guidance and Spatial Planning’, p. 151.

fact *testifies* to this recognition that meaning is a quality continually negotiated between performances and audiences. That which a dramatic text might be capable of ‘saying’ will always only exist ‘in pragmatic and tentative relation to the territory of the performance event’;<sup>59</sup> it is the dramaturg’s responsibility, as ‘first spectator’ to identify and articulate precisely what these ‘pragmatic and tentative relations’ are. We might, indeed, query the skill of a dramaturg in their reading of a performance, and/or their sensitivity to how an audience might receive the work – ‘the audience never asks the right questions!’ is a familiar phrase, exclaimed only half-jokingly, amongst dramaturgs in German-language theatre. But to suggest that the ‘enforcing’ of a ‘pre-determined’ meaning is even possible in performance is, I believe, to misconceive the ‘dynamic, contextual and, indeed, political dimension’ captured in contemporary practices of production dramaturgy.<sup>60</sup>

As already stated, institutional and production dramaturgy are administrative and artistic exercises undertaken by the *Dramaturgie* of state, city and municipal theatres across Germany. During the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, countries across mainland Europe based their structures of theatre provision upon Germany’s model, adopting institutional frameworks of dramaturgy with a felicity yet to be echoed in English theatre. For convenience, and in order to distinguish between contrasting understandings of dramaturgy in England and Germany, this thesis shall refer to the combined practices of production and institutional dramaturgy as ‘continental dramaturgy’.

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<sup>59</sup> Turner and Behrndt, *Dramaturgy and Performance*, p. 4.

<sup>60</sup> *ibid.*

### I.iii. New Play Development Dramaturgy and Literary Management

Since the mid-1990s, the development of new plays and playwrights has become a key activity of not only specialized new writing houses but also regional theatres and companies in receipt of regular Arts Council funding. Of the sixty-five producing theatres and companies surveyed in a report published in 2009 by the British Theatre Consortium (BTC), all but one agreed with the statement that new writing was ‘core’ to their work, leading the BTC to declare that ‘new writing is now written into the DNA of English theatre at all levels’.<sup>61</sup> Concomitant with previous decades’ increasing focus upon the development of new writing, ‘dramaturgical support’, ‘dramaturgical development’ and ‘one-to-one dramaturgy’ are phrases which have entered the discourse of mainstream theatre cultures to describe the practical development of new plays and playwrights. Inspired by models of new play development developed in the US during the 1960s, and drawing upon classical definitions of dramaturgy as the ‘principles of composing a play’, the activities that fall under the rubric of new play development dramaturgy may be divided between two, overlapping, emphases, which we may in turn describe as ‘pedagogical’ and ‘production-oriented’. Both emphases fall under the remit of literary management, a professional tier the establishment of which Mary Luckhurst has described as a ‘silent revolution’ within English theatre.<sup>62</sup>

By ‘pedagogical’ dramaturgy, I refer to activities and initiatives which seek to engage individuals who a) may be novices to any kind of creative writing; b) may have written creatively before, but not for the theatre; or c) may have written a play or two and who are looking to further develop their craft. Access to producing theatres and companies

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<sup>61</sup> British Theatre Consortium, *Writ Large: New Writing on the British Stage 2003-2009*, (2009), p. 79.

<sup>62</sup> Luckhurst, *Revolution*, p. 201.

for new or emerging playwrights is far greater in comparison to even twenty years ago, due primarily to the increased provision of two key open-access entry points: unsolicited script reading services and playwrights' groups. The extreme scarcity of producible plays 'discovered' via the unsolicited script route is an open secret amongst theatre practitioners; nevertheless, in practice, the purpose and significance of unsolicited script-reading lies in the opportunity for companies to be confronted with 'new voices' – 'new' in the sense that they are unknown within established industry circles. 'Voice' is a tricky term, typically used within the industry as a metonym for an individually-authored play-text which, whilst flawed, nevertheless possesses, in the words of Nina Steiger, Literary Manager of Soho Theatre, a certain 'spark and passion and vitality'.<sup>63</sup> From the unsolicited script pile, selected playwrights may be directed towards further development initiatives, or provided with targeted dramaturgical support in the form of workshops or readings, in accordance with the resources of the theatre or company.

Likewise, producing theatres and companies across the country today host open-access playwrights' groups, to which anyone – irrespective of experience - may apply to join. These groups typically consist of a fixed-term programme of weekly seminars and workshops, most often run by an experienced playwright. Through a mixture of studying canonical plays, experimenting with writing exercises and producing original work, these playwrights' groups introduce participants to the 'nuts and bolts' of playwriting, offering a practical vocabulary and, in the words of Christopher Roderiguez, Literary Manager of Talawa, a 'critical language' through which to understand, develop and refine techniques of scripting plot, action, space, time, character and dialogue: '[the playwrights] find a common language, so that they can

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<sup>63</sup> Nina Steiger, unpublished interview with Jacqueline Bolton, 6<sup>th</sup> July 2006.

look at each other's work and see if a story is being delivered. [They learn] to speak about why it isn't being delivered in a way that is constructive'.<sup>64</sup> These programmes often culminate in a script-in-hand rehearsed reading of a scene or short play, sometimes presented as a public showcase. Whilst the dramaturgical support provided by these playwrights' groups is primarily pedagogical, if a playwright attracts the attention of a theatre or company then, again, the playwright may be directed towards further development initiatives: promising playwrights may be invited, for example, to enter a playwriting competition or festival; to participate in an intensive playwriting residency; to write for the theatre's youth theatre; or, if a greater commitment is desired, to join the company on attachment.

By 'production oriented' dramaturgy, I refer to the practices of workshopping plays in development which, over the past two decades, have become a staple form of dramaturgical support for emerging playwrights. A concentration of time and resources typically directed towards playwrights who are either close to, or already under, commission (hence 'production-oriented'), workshops will usually follow on from an initial period of one-to-one discussion with a literary manager, during which time the playwright will be encouraged to focus on what they want to achieve with their play: 'The first thing you say [to a writer] is "what do you think the play is about?"',<sup>65</sup> 'I ask [the writer]: "what are you intending to do? [...] What do you want from this piece of work?"'.<sup>66</sup> The dramaturgical support provided during this period aims towards enabling a playwright, in the words of Alex Chisholm, Associate Director, Literary, at West Yorkshire Playhouse, 'to understand what they're doing with structure, understand what they're doing with character and [to] work out if that is, in fact, what

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<sup>64</sup> Christopher Roderiguez, unpublished interview with Jacqueline Bolton, 6<sup>th</sup> July 2006.

<sup>65</sup> Abigail Gonda, former Literary Manager, Bush Theatre, unpublished interview with Jacqueline Bolton, 6<sup>th</sup> December 2006.

<sup>66</sup> Ben Payne, former Associate Director, Literary, Birmingham Rep, unpublished interview with Jacqueline Bolton, 4<sup>th</sup> August 2006.

they want to do'.<sup>67</sup> Once the playwright reaches a stage where they feel their script is ready to be worked on by actors, the literary manager will either lead a workshop herself, or else engage a trusted director to lead the process. The primary aim of a workshop is to allow the writer to experience his or her play in performance: to explore characters and relationships; to solicit feedback from actors and directors as to the clarity of narrative; and to experiment with any physical action, live/recorded sound and visual image (see Chapter One).

There exists a considerable variety of approaches towards the sourcing and developing of new plays and playwrights. The driving motivations and methods, and hence the aims and outcomes, of new play development activity are diverse, contingent as they are upon material resources, geographical location, audience base, and artistic leadership. Common to the myriad processes of new play development across the country, however, is the averred primacy of the playwright as a singularly creative source: a perspective upon theatre-making which encourages and rewards 'the collective process of theatrical production harnessed in the service of an individual voice'.<sup>68</sup> The stated focus of the literary manager (or playwright, or director) who works dramaturgically with writers is first and foremost 'the writer's own voice. What are they trying to say? We don't want to inform that in any way, we just want to open the channels for them to be able to say it, clearly and effectively'.<sup>69</sup> Jeanie O'Hare, former Literary Manager of the Royal Shakespeare Company, articulates a commonly held view when she states that 'it is important to have someone who understands what the writer's vision is and can articulate and protect that in the directing process'.<sup>70</sup> O'Hare's delineation between a 'writer's vision' and the 'directing process' in fact invokes a

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<sup>67</sup> Alex Chisholm, unpublished interview with Jacqueline Bolton, 4<sup>th</sup> July 2006.

<sup>68</sup> Harry Derbyshire, 'The Culture of New Writing', *Contemporary Theatre Review*, 18.1 (2008), pp. 131-134 (p. 131).

<sup>69</sup> Órla O'Loughlin Artistic Director of Pentabus, qtd. Derbyshire, 'The Culture of New Writing', p. 132.

<sup>70</sup> Jeanie O'Hare, unpublished interview with Jacqueline Bolton, 17<sup>th</sup> October 2006.

recurring tension across models of new play development: the delineation of territories and roles in the staging of a new play.

Although practice is by no means standardized across the new writing theatres, companies and regional producing houses with a dedicated new writing policy, it is predominantly the case that the contributions of a literary manager/development dramaturg are largely restricted to the *pre-rehearsal* period. The literary manager/development dramaturg may work closely with a playwright until the commencement of rehearsals, at which point the play (and playwright) will be ‘handed over’ to the director. ‘Once the play has been accepted for production’, warns playwright Stephen Jeffreys, speaking here in his former capacity as Literary Associate for the Royal Court, ‘the dramaturg should jump ship: there is a danger that participants can become sectarian’.<sup>71</sup> There are counter-examples to this: Christopher Roderiguez of Talawa and Suzanne Bell of Liverpool Everyman and Playhouse are Literary Managers who are often invited to work in rehearsals. The key word here, however, is ‘invite’: it is fair to say that the literary manager/dramaturg’s presence within a rehearsal room is by no means *assumed* by the production team.

The tacit positioning of the literary manager *on the edges* of the creative processes of rehearsal and production is, perhaps, a legacy of the profession’s trajectory from an ad-

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<sup>71</sup> Stephen Jeffreys, qtd. Ben Payne, *Rules of Engagement*, (New Playwrights Trust, 1993), np. Conference report from ‘Rules of Engagement’, Albany Empire, 20-21 March 1993. For Graham Whybrow, former Literary Manager at the Royal Court, the literary manager absents herself from the process: ‘as soon as the director is assigned [...] You don’t want to carve off the director’s role as someone who ‘directs actors’, you want to encourage a direct relationship with the writer. So you don’t want to drive a wedge in-between [them]. [Directors] take responsibility for staging the show. You can’t have loose canons destabilizing or undermining their authority. If the director’s saying one thing and the literary manager is saying something else, there’s [the] threat [of] undermining the status of the director in the rehearsal room. You can’t do it, the writer will pick up on conflict’. Unpublished interview with Jacqueline Bolton, 19<sup>th</sup> November 2007. Abigail Gonda also stresses the importance of a direct relationship between playwright and director: ‘there’s a point with each play that goes into production [when] the three voices, me, Mike [Bradwell former Artistic Director of the Bush] and the director slowly shift it into the director’s corner completely, so it’s just one voice working with the writer’. 6<sup>th</sup> December 2006.



hoc script manager to the more engaged role that it has become over the past ten to fifteen years (see Chapter One). Whilst the situation is changing today, the historic lack of influence exercised over the programming, budgeting, production and marketing of new plays has been a cause for concern amongst literary managers seeking a more holistic approach to artistic planning and production. The commonplace divorce in English theatre between ‘creative visionaries’ and ‘administrative functionaries’ has a potentially disabling impact upon the artistic direction of a theatre or company; something of this divorce is captured by the description provided by Ashmeed Sohoey, former Literary Assistant at Theatre Royal Stratford East, of the role of a literary manager within a building-based theatre:

The [literary] manager bit is the nuts and bolts, the plays coming in and out of the building. And that’s the bottom line: make sure people are fed back to; make sure they get their plays back. The dramaturgy bit is when you work one-to-one with a writer. The [literary] manager bit is when you deal with the building; the dramaturg bit is when you deal with the writer.<sup>72</sup>

Working with the playwright is an aspect of the role deserving of one title; working with the building is an aspect deserving of another, distinct, title. How might the one inform the other? Literary departments hold a critical, if underestimated, position within theatre institutions: simultaneously outward-facing and inward-looking, literary departments are ideally placed to stay on top of new trends, spot new talent and develop new writing to feed into a theatre’s programme. In this respect, literary departments share some clear affinities with the German *Dramaturgie*. Unlike the *Dramaturgie*, however, the agency of a Literary Department to creatively and critically inform the artistic output, public profile and creative direction of a theatre or company is neither a fully recognized potential nor, it would currently seem, a viable or desirable direction for contemporary discourses of dramaturgy to explore. Speaking in 2006, Jack Bradley

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<sup>72</sup> Ashmeed Sohoey, unpublished interview with Jacqueline Bolton, 6<sup>th</sup> September 2006.

reflected upon his role as Literary Manager at the National Theatre: ‘my job is to find a ball, pump it up and give it to somebody else to play with. That’s the definition of dramaturgy at the National Theatre’.<sup>73</sup> This thesis is partly is an attempt to puncture that definition, to complicate and enrich expectations of ‘dramaturgy’ and ‘the dramaturg’ by pulling away from a dominant domestic focus upon processes of new play development towards continental approaches which presuppose and promote more holistic attitudes towards theatre, theatre-making and the theatre institution.

## II. Dramaturgical Discourses

The above overview of ‘dramaturgy’ and ‘the dramaturg’ as terms applied within German and English theatre cultures has drawn upon the prevailing discourses of subsidized building-based producing theatres and the companies that perform therein. There are, however, alternative discourses on dramaturgy available to, and applied by, theatre practitioners in England; definitions which relate less to practices of new play development – indeed, which often reject such associations – than to processes which favour performance-led (ensemble) approaches to theatre. Whilst, as the aforementioned BTC report suggests, the majority of producing theatres, companies and development agencies in England regard the dramaturg as an individual focused upon mentoring playwrights, working almost exclusively on the pre-rehearsal development of a play-text, there also exists a not inconsiderable number of devising companies and artists who are inviting dramaturgs into the rehearsal room as co-creators of a work which may not adhere to, or proceed from, an existing play-text; where a ‘performance text’ may be “‘written” not *before* but *as a consequence* of the process’.<sup>74</sup>

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<sup>73</sup> Jack Bradley, unpublished interview with Jacqueline Bolton, 7<sup>th</sup> September 2006.

<sup>74</sup> Turner and Behrndt, *Dramaturgy and Performance*, p. 170. Original emphasis.

With significant exceptions from companies such as Complicite, Kneehigh and Improbable, however, creative processes which proceed *from* a pre-existing (new or classic) script *to* that script's realisation in performance continue to command the mid- to large-scale stages of producing theatres, whilst creative processes which do not proceed from and/or are not orientated around the staging of a pre-existing script remain largely the preserve of small-scale studios, university theatres or non-theatre spaces. As such, it is possible to characterize English theatre – in distinction to German-language theatre – as marked by a peculiar division between so-called 'text-based' and 'non-text-based' theatre, a reductive dichotomy which effectively works to pit playwrights and play-texts against devising companies and performance-led practices. From this perspective, as Chapter Two shall explore, a 'two cultures' of theatre-making may be identified within English theatre, a division itself underscored by a parallel 'two cultures' of dramaturgical discourse.

The books on dramaturgy to be published in England to date, Mary Luckhurst's *Dramaturgy: A Revolution in Theatre* (2006) and Cathy Turner and Synne Behrndt's *Dramaturgy and Performance* (2008), in certain respects mirror this 'two cultures' divide within theatre-making and dramaturgical discourse (as the inclusion of 'theatre' in the former title and 'performance' in the latter suggestively implies). In Luckhurst's account, playwrights write play-texts to be realized by directors as theatre: as such, dramaturgical perspectives can potentially interrupt, or cut across, delineated roles and chronological processes. In consequence, Luckhurst identifies 'persistent struggles over the control of creative territories' as a key source of resistance towards dramaturgy and dramaturgs in England.<sup>75</sup> Luckhurst is not wrong to draw attention to the disputes that often occur between playwrights, directors and the individuals engaged to develop a

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<sup>75</sup> Luckhurst, *Revolution*, p. 2.

playwright's work; I would like to suggest, however, that to emphasize struggles over 'territory' and 'control' is to imply that the functions of a dramaturg significantly overlap with, or indeed replicate, the existing functions of a director or playwright.<sup>76</sup> Such a suggestion seems to anticipate a certain redundancy on the part of the dramaturg; Luckhurst here strikes an ambivalent note which perhaps shores up existing reservations as to the desirability of dramaturgs within English theatre.

Whilst this thesis acknowledges that dramaturgs across mainland Europe also often work as playwrights (less often as directors), it shall argue that important distinctions can be drawn between the vision and responsibilities of a specifically designated dramaturg and the vision and responsibilities of a director, playwright or, for that matter, actor, designer or technician. That dramaturgs and dramaturgy have traditionally been resisted by theatre professionals in England is not at all contested; as I hope to demonstrate, however, these sources of resistance are many and varied, and more deeply embedded within economic, cultural and philosophical structures than the sharp end of 'carving up' creative territories might suggest.

As the concluding chapter, 'Dramaturgy and Literary Management in England today' suggests, throughout *Dramaturgy: A Revolution in Theatre* Luckhurst uses the terms 'dramaturg' and 'literary manager' interchangeably. This chapter's final series of case studies, extrapolated from interviews conducted with literary managers, is advanced without commentary upon, or cross-references to, the practices and principles of the 'major theorists and practitioners of dramaturgy' who feature in earlier chapters -

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<sup>76</sup> Luckhurst would indeed seem to subscribe to this view when she writes that the 'functions' of a dramaturg 'pre-exist the actor-manager and modern-day director [...] some overlap with what may be regarded as the roles of the writer or of the critic; other now fall more obviously within the remit of the assistant director, director or Artistic Director'. *Revolution*, p. 12.

Lessing, Harley Granville-Barker, Bertolt Brecht and Kenneth Tynan.<sup>77</sup> This is despite the fact that the contemporary accounts of literary management provided by these final case studies depart, at times significantly, from many of the ideals and objectives Luckhurst claims for these ‘major intellects’.<sup>78</sup> Whilst agreeing with many of Luckhurst’s observations, I believe that in refraining from an exploration of contemporary dramaturgical practice in Germany (Brecht provides the most contemporary reference), Luckhurst overlooks a rich diversity of continental dramaturgy from which English theatre might today draw inspiration. Counter to Luckhurst’s formulation, this thesis shall argue that a conflation of dramaturgy with literary management both reduces the multiplicity of functions held by contemporary literary managers and unnecessarily contracts the potential scope – aesthetic, critical and political – of dramaturgical analysis.

Whilst dedicating chapters to ‘The Dramaturg and the Theatre Institution’ and ‘The Dramaturg and the Playwright’, Turner and Behrndt’s *Dramaturgy and Performance* expands the range of theatre practices to which dramaturgy might be applied, looking to contemporary practice in the UK, Europe and the US in order to evaluate dramaturgical practice as it evolves in relation to dance, devising, live art and digital technologies. Turner and Behrndt have continued to explore an approach to dramaturgy which ‘includ[es], yet mov[es] out from the ‘foundational definitions of “playwright” and “play” that underpin conventional literary management’ in their two special issue journals mentioned at the start of this introduction.<sup>79</sup>

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<sup>77</sup> Luckhurst, *Revolution*, p. i.

<sup>78</sup> Luckhurst, *Revolution*, p. 2. In the brief conclusion that closes the book, Luckhurst acknowledges that she is ‘sharply aware of how much more can be said, especially in integrating English and particular continental European theatre histories’ (p. 263).

<sup>79</sup> Cathy Turner, ‘Writing for the contemporary theatre: towards a radically inclusive dramaturgy’, *Studies in Theatre and Performance*, 30.1 (2010), pp. 75-90 (p. 75).

*Studies in Theatre and Performance* (2010) is themed around *Writing Space* (2008, University of Winchester), a project which brought together eight practitioners identified variously as playwrights, collaborative theatre makers, installation artists, live artists, adaptors, performers and dramaturgs, in order to open a dialogue around diverse forms of writing for performance. *Contemporary Theatre Review: New Dramaturgies* (2010), further tests the parameters of dramaturgy, querying both the contribution of dramaturgy to a ‘postmodern, or indeed “postdramatic” theatre’ and its possible relationship to ‘performance practice outside the theatre and without a core relationship to the drama (antithetical or otherwise)’.<sup>80</sup> The issue includes articles which consider dramaturgy in relation to site-specific art works and architectural process; models of collaboration between artists and disciplines; choreography and dance; devising; and the curation of a project exploring interactive technologies. Informed by Mike Pearson and Michael Shanks’s expansive characterization of ‘the dramaturgical’ as referring to ‘connective networks’ and ‘dramaturgy’ as ‘cultural assemblage’,<sup>81</sup> Turner voices the possibility that ‘just as the field of performance studies applies an understanding of performance to activities beyond theatre and live art practices’, so the concept of dramaturgy might be productively applied to ‘other disciplines and, indeed, to the everyday’.<sup>82</sup> ‘If the subject and practice of dramaturgy are constantly evolving and understood in relation to their contexts’, Turner and Behrmdt state in their Editorial, ‘then the concept of dramaturgy must also be capable of development and expansion, beyond (yet including) expectations of dealing with the dramatic form implicit in the text’.<sup>83</sup>

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<sup>80</sup> Cathy Turner and Synne Behrmdt, ‘Editorial’, *Contemporary Theatre Review*, 20.2 (2010), pp. 145-148 (p. 145).

<sup>81</sup> Mike Pearson and Michael Shanks, *Theatre/Archaeology* (London: Routledge, 2001), pp. 89-90.

<sup>82</sup> Turner, ‘Mis-Guidance and Spatial Planning’, p. 150.

<sup>83</sup> Turner and Behrmdt, ‘Editorial’, p. 145.

I wish to position this PhD in the space I perceive between Luckhurst and Turner and Behrndt's respective approaches: a space which desires a more expansive notion of dramaturgy applied to a more precisely defined 'mainstream' theatre practice. In 'Mis-Guidance and Spatial Planning: Dramaturgies of Public Space', Turner acknowledges the provocation of addressing 'new dramaturgies' when in 'many cultures (including that of the UK), some of the best-established uses of the term are yet to be well understood'.<sup>84</sup> Similarly, Turner and Behrndt's statement in their Editorial to *Contemporary Theatre Review* that 'it may be that our resistance to a prevalent tendency to relate dramaturgy exclusively to literary management and "new writing" leads us to overstate our case for "new dramaturgies"', demonstrates the careful positioning of their research within a UK context.<sup>85</sup> Without wishing to contradict or detract from a line of enquiry which seeks to pursue dramaturgical practice in contexts beyond that of the writing and staging of dramatic play-texts, it is nevertheless my conviction that concepts of dramaturgy established across Europe have not yet been sufficiently explored by English building-based producing theatres and companies, the artistic output of which principally consists of the writing and staging of dramatic play-texts.

This thesis, then, seeks to retain a focus on production processes structured around the contributions of playwrights, directors, actors and play-texts but to evaluate these processes against models of dramaturgy more expansive than those advanced by conventional discourses of new play development. It shall argue that the dramaturgical frameworks provided (explicitly) by Barba and (implicitly) by Knowles provide ways of thinking about theatre and theatre-making which a) provide an insight into the role of the dramaturg on the continent, and b) suggest new ways of thinking about, and

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<sup>84</sup> Turner, 'Mis-Guidance and Spatial Planning', p. 150.

<sup>85</sup> Turner and Behrndt, 'Editorial', p. 146.

working with, dramaturgs in England. In identifying and challenging mainstream cultures' ignorance, indifference and/or resistance to understandings and applications of dramaturgy as practised on the continent, this thesis seeks also to challenge the division between a 'two cultures' of theatre-making; a division which, I propose, itself obscures the recognition of a more inclusive dramaturgical praxis by which this divide might be overcome.

Chapter One, 'Capitalizing (on) New Writing: New Play Development in the 1990s', presents an overview of the emergence within English theatre of Literary Management, from the burgeoning 'self-help movement' of writer-led organisations in the 1970s and 1980s to the subsequent emergence of a 'New Writing industry' in London and across the regions during the 1990s. It offers a critique of new play development cultures as they evolved after the strategic 're-branding' of 'New Writing' by the Royal Court in 1994/5, and analyses the ways in which the imaginative parameters of new and emerging playwrights are staked out via the discursive practices of 'dramaturgical development'. It argues that mainstream definitions which identify dramaturgy and dramaturgs with the pre-production, writer-centred development of play-texts risk eliding the critical and creative scope of dramaturgical praxis and, indeed, restricting the potential of new theatre writing itself.

Chapter Two, 'Two Cultures', looks beyond the mainstream producing structures evaluated in Chapter One towards an alternative trajectory of dramaturgical practice articulated by the processes of performance-led artists and ensembles. It suggests that the existence of 'dual dramaturgical tracks' within contemporary discourse evidences a 'two cultures' of theatre-making within English professional theatre; a mutually disabling divide which currently impacts upon both the professional practice and



academic research of theatre. The attempt to discern what is at stake in the 'text- / non-text-based' divide is informed by a consideration of producing cultures within German-language theatre, where such a schism does not obtain. This chapter argues that dramaturgical analyses based upon more inclusive notions of 'text', as well as more nuanced approaches to 'authorship', might aid English producing theatres overcome a specious distinction between allegedly text-based and non-text-based processes, advocating a more holistic approach to theatre-making as advanced by practices of production and institutional dramaturgy.

In order to articulate critical distinctions between domestic and continental practices of dramaturgy, Chapter Three, 'Theory and Theatre: Play-texts in Performance', addresses the contrasting approaches of English and German producing theatres to the staging of dramatic play-texts. The status of the playwright within these cultures is evaluated by comparing the ensemble-led processes of production established in Germany during the twentieth century with the 'playwright-artist / director-interpreter' approach typically favoured within English producing cultures. This chapter identifies competing intellectual histories which have significantly determined the 'practices of reading' - how practitioners 'decode, interpret, reconstruct aspects of dramatic language'<sup>86</sup> - which underpin production processes in Germany and England. Intrigued by the homage paid by theatre directors such as Peter Hall and Trevor Nunn to the Cambridge scholar F. R. Leavis, it explores the reading practices promoted by 'Cambridge English' as formative for the first generation of directors, playwrights and actors to embark upon professional careers within subsidized theatre. Similarly drawing upon testimony from German practitioners, this chapter then turns to the area of Reception Aesthetics, specifically Hans Robert Jauss' 1967 essay 'Literary History as a Challenge to Literary Theory'.

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<sup>86</sup> Worthen, *Between Poetry and Performance*, p. xv.

Jauss' disquisition not only challenges many of the assumptions held by 'Cambridge English' during a similar period of history but also presents a compelling rationale for the agency and profile of production dramaturgy within contemporary German-language producing cultures.

Where Chapter Three addresses practices of production dramaturgy, Chapter Four, 'Theatre as a Cultural Mission: Politics and Subsidy' considers the function of institutional dramaturgy as it is currently established within German producing theatres. Whilst dramaturgs are often perceived in England as an 'extra' profession, beyond the economic means of an already under-funded system, this chapter observes that many of the functions of a *Dramaturgie* are, in fact, integral to the running of any theatre. It argues that the current institutional organization of theatres in Germany and England – and, hence, the perceived necessity of a dedicated dramaturgy department – is a direct reflection of not only the respective levels of theatre subsidy received but also the mechanisms by which it is provided and, critically, the arguments used to *justify* its provision. The chapter examines the history and philosophy of state patronage in Germany and England, identifying its abuses as well as its uses by successive governments. It suggests that the model of a *Dramaturgie* as a department which forges direct links between a theatre's social function, artistic programme and public reception could provide a useful means by which to facilitate creative responses to the socializing missions with which producing theatres in England are today tasked.

This thesis follows Peter Eckersall's description of dramaturgy as not only a 'creative combination of theatrical elements' but also the expression of a '*belief system* about the context surrounding theatre's production and reception'.<sup>87</sup> In 1996, Bonnie Marranca

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<sup>87</sup> Peter Eckersall, 'What is Dramaturgy, What is a Dramaturg?', *Realtime*, 70 (2005-2006), pp. 3-4 (p. 2) <<http://www.realttimearts.net/article/issue70/7983>> [accessed 10 April 2008]. Emphasis mine.

wrote that 'there is a vast difference between technique and worldview, drama and dramaturgy':<sup>88</sup> this research into English and German theatre cultures attempts to move beyond 'technique' to include 'worldview'; to extend from a study of drama to an analysis of the 'belief systems' which surround its production and reception.

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<sup>88</sup> Bonnie Marranca, *Ecologies of Theatre: Essays at the Century Turning* (London: John Hopkins Press, 1996), p. 40.

## Chapter One

### Capitalizing (on) New Writing: New Play Development in the 1990s

Mainstream definitions of ‘dramaturgy’ and ‘dramaturgs’ were established within English theatre during the 1990s, as a renewed industry focus upon the development and production of new plays produced the need for individuals who could support and mentor new and emerging playwrights. Whilst not identical with, the emergence of dramaturgical practice within subsidized producing theatres and companies cannot be understood in isolation from either the ‘boom in new play production’ which occurred from the mid-1990s onwards, nor from the burgeoning networks of literary management which prepared, supported and sustained this ‘upsurge in new playwriting’ throughout the 1990s and into the 2000s.<sup>1</sup>

The recent narrative of new writing – defined by the industry as the first production of an individually-authored unpublished play – is, by now, a familiar one. The Arts Council Cork statistics are oft-repeated: from occupying an average 12% share of the repertoire of English building-based theatres between 1971 and 1986, by the latter half of the 1980s new writing represented an average of just 7%.<sup>2</sup> The number of actual performances of new writing during this period also declined, with a concomitant fall in box office performance to below 50% capacity.<sup>3</sup> In November 1994, the outlook for new writing remained uncertain enough for eighty-six playwrights to sign a letter to the *Guardian* protesting against the ‘drastic decrease in the number of new plays being

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<sup>1</sup> Mary Luckhurst, *Dramaturgy: A Revolution in Theatre* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), p. 202.

<sup>2</sup> Figures recorded by *Theatre Is for All: Report of the Enquiry into Professional Theatre in England under the Chairmanship of Sir Kenneth Cork* (Arts Council of Great Britain, 1986).

<sup>3</sup> *ibid.*

produced'.<sup>4</sup> By the end of the decade, however, new writing had staged a comeback, with theatres and companies throughout the country producing scores of premieres and launching dozens of careers. Between 1993 and 1997, the number of new plays presented rose from 7% of the repertoire to 19%, with box office performance also rising to 57%: in percentage terms, 'new plays were outperforming adaptations, post-war revivals, translations, classics and even Shakespeare'.<sup>5</sup> In 1991, Michael Billington had lamented that 'new drama no longer occupies [its] central position';<sup>6</sup> by 1996 he could not 'recall a time when there were so many exciting dramatists in the twentysomething age-group'.<sup>7</sup> A critical and commercial success, new writing also became an international export: between 1995 and 1999 there were more than four hundred productions worldwide of plays premiered at the Royal Court.<sup>8</sup>

To date, academic analyses of this upturn have largely focused on the plays and playwrights successfully premiered during this decade, with little attention paid to the commissioning, developing and producing structures which supported these writers through to production. As Graham Saunders states in his introduction to *Cool Britannia? British Political Drama in the 1990s*, 'any assessment of British drama in this period has been dominated by the term "In-Yer-Face Theatre"'.<sup>9</sup> Saunders refers here to Aleks Sierz's popular and influential book of the same name, an account of new writing which, as *Cool Britannia?* addresses, offers a partial and polemical view of new

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<sup>4</sup> Jane Woddis, *Spear Carriers or Speaking Parts? Arts Practitioners in the Cultural Policy Process*, unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Warwick, Centre for Cultural Policy Studies, 2005, p. 172. Copy provided by Jane Woddis.

<sup>5</sup> Aleks Sierz, "'Art flourishes in times of struggle": Creativity, Funding and New Writing', *Contemporary Theatre Review*, 13.1 (2003), pp. 33-45 (pp. 35-36).

<sup>6</sup> Michael Billington, qtd. Aleks Sierz, *In-Yer-Face Theatre: British Drama Today* (London: Faber and Faber, 2001), p. 37.

<sup>7</sup> Billington, qtd. Sierz, *In-Yer-Face Theatre*, p. 64.

<sup>8</sup> See Sierz, "'Art Flourishes in Times of Struggle"', p. 36.

<sup>9</sup> Rebecca d'Monte and Graham Saunders, eds. *Cool Britannia? British Political Drama in the 1990s* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), p. 1.

British drama between 1991 and 1998.<sup>10</sup> Sierz's enthusiasm is focused upon 'the rash of funky plays by young authors that brought an excitement to new drama';<sup>11</sup> any consideration of the producing structures which enabled these plays to 'burst onto the scene' is confined to the 'individual visions' of Artistic Directors:<sup>12</sup> Dominic Dromgoole and Mike Bradwell (Bush), Ian Brown (Traverse) and the 'natural impresario', Stephen Daldry (Royal Court).<sup>13</sup> Whilst the analyses advanced by *Cool Britannia?* are more theoretically complex, their focus is split between assessments of a playwright's oeuvre and the analysis of plays from the perspective of critical and cultural theory.<sup>14</sup> A third publication, *British Theatre of the 1990s: Interviews with Directors, Playwrights, Critics and Academics*, engages, as the title suggests, directly with the industry but, again, focuses principally upon playwrights and productions.<sup>15</sup>

Mary Luckhurst's 'Dramaturgy and Literary Management in England today', in *Dramaturgy: A Revolution in Theatre* (2006), is, I believe, the only work to date to specifically identify the exponential rise in new play production during the 1990s with the concomitant development of Literary Management, an account supported by Harry Derbyshire's brief journal article, 'The Culture of New Writing'.<sup>16 17</sup>

<sup>10</sup> Sierz admits the charge: the first chapter of *Cool Britannia?* is given over to Sierz's "'we all need stories": the politics of in-yer-face-theatre' (pp. 23-37), a reassessment and reconsideration of *In-Yer-Face Theatre*.

<sup>11</sup> Sierz, *In-Yer-Face Theatre*, p. 38.

<sup>12</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>13</sup> In 2011, Sierz followed up *In-Yer-Face Theatre: British Drama Today* with *Rewriting the Nation; British Theatre Today* (London: Methuen). The book's introductory section defines new writing cultures via familiar 'buzz words': 'Distinctive and original'; 'Relevant and resonant'; 'Stimulating and provocative' (p. v). His acknowledgement of the role of literary management in stimulating this national ecology over the past two decades is confined to a rather baffling description of literary managers as 'unsung heroes, given to hard work but shy of publicity' (p. 42).

<sup>14</sup> The same can be said for Clare Wallace's *Suspect Cultures: Narrative, Identity and Citation in 1990s New Drama* (Prague: Litteraria Pragensia, 2006) which dedicates a chapter each to Conor McPherson, Mark Ravenhill, Martin McDonagh, Sarah Kane, Marina Carr and David Greig.

<sup>15</sup> Mireia Aragay ed. *British Theatre of the 1990s: Interviews with Directors, Playwrights, Critics and Academics* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007).

<sup>16</sup> Harry Derbyshire, 'The Culture of New Writing', *Contemporary Theatre Review*, 18.1, (2008), pp. 131-134. Luckhurst also develops this research in, 'Dramaturgy and Agendas of Change: Tinderbox and the Joint Sectoral Dramaturgy Project', *Contemporary Theatre Review*, 20.2, (2010), pp. 173-184.

<sup>17</sup> David Lane's *Contemporary British Drama* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2010), whilst largely composed of case studies of writers and companies, includes within its analyses frequent

Building upon the research conducted by Luckhurst and Derbyshire, this chapter seeks to displace individual plays, playwrights and premieres from the centre of new writing's narrative in order to advance an overview and a critique of the literary management structures which have supported the critical and box office successes of new writing during the 1990s and 2000s. Whilst the high-profile success of new writing venues in London certainly galvanized the industry, this chapter argues that the first swells of a sea change can in fact be traced to the regional 'self-help' playwriting organizations founded during the 1970s and 1980s. It proposes that this 'grassroots agitation' created the conditions for the apparent 'rash' of new plays in the capital, and suggests that the strategic 're-branding' of new writing by Stephen Daldry and his Literary Manager, Graham Whybrow, at the Royal Court in the mid-1990s ushered in what came to be known as a 'New Writing industry'.

This chapter shall then proceed to evaluate dramaturgical practice as it has come to be established at producing theatres and companies across England, analysing some of the ways in which the imaginative parameters of new and emerging playwrights are staked out via the discursive practices of development cultures. These practices of new play development will be considered in relation to the contexts, objectives and strategies of literary management as a relatively new profession within English theatre, assessing the influence of industry and public sector demands upon the direction and ambition of new theatre writing. Finally, this chapter will argue that mainstream practices which identify dramaturgs with the pre-production, writer-centred development of new play-texts risk eliding these practitioners' specific commitment to theatre as a live, dynamic process; that the critical and creative potential of dramaturgical praxis is often foreclosed by producing structures which instantiate a separation of 'play-text' from 'performance'.

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references to literary management and dramaturgy. Whilst by no means the focus of his book, it is refreshing to read an account of contemporary drama (1995-2000) which explicitly acknowledges the contributions of literary managers and dramaturgs alongside those of directors and actors.

## 1.1 Grassroots: writers organize

Jane Woddis's unpublished doctoral thesis, *Spear Carriers or Speaking Parts? Arts Practitioners in the Cultural Policy Process*, identifies one of the more significant features of theatre practice in the latter half of the twentieth century as the extent to which playwrights organized themselves at national and regional levels in order to voice their concerns for new writing, support the development of emerging playwrights and advocate for the production of new plays. Contextualizing the activities of these groups within the professional conditions which existed at the time, it becomes apparent that the changes these playwrights' organizations called for provided the foundations of the literary management practices today established in producing theatres and companies throughout England and the UK. Without this grassroots infrastructure and, furthermore, without the ethos of 'dramaturgical support' popularized through the work of these organizations, it is questionable whether the 1990s could have sustained its momentum of new play development and production.

The movement towards improved conditions for playwrights began in 1973, with the establishment of the Scottish Society of Playwrights (SSP). In a paper written in 2009, Ian Brown describes his visit in 1974, as Chairman of the SSP, to the Eugene O'Neill Theater Center in Waterford, Connecticut, home of the National Playwright Conference and a flagship location for playwrights across the US to develop their playwriting and showcase their work. Brown describes his purpose for visiting as 'to see what lessons could be learned for the establishment in Scotland of a similar process'.<sup>18</sup> The subsequent development of week-long SSP workshops in Edinburgh and Glasgow,

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<sup>18</sup> Ian Brown, 'The Eugene O'Neill Theater Center and professional playwright's [sic] workshops in the UK', 2009, np. According to Brown, this article was written for a *Contemporary Theatre Review* special issue on 'Playwrights' Development'; an issue which, to the best of my knowledge, has not (yet) been published. Paper provided by Ian Brown.



based upon O'Neill Theatre Center models, were means by which the SSP sought not only to encourage new writing but also to demonstrate that 'if playwrights would come together and co-operate, they might resolve common issues and create shared opportunities', eroding the 'prevailing "garret" complex' which saw 'writers as somehow outside the working theatre':<sup>19</sup>

The workshop process allows the writer to develop not only the play, but his or her own skills as a stage writer [...] This, conversely, allows the writer to develop a fuller appreciation of the other stage crafts and their needs from a script [...] An SSP working project like this would not only help develop writers, but show actors and directors the ways that writers cope with dramaturgical problems and, incidentally, that playwrights were as effective organizers as any other theatre-workers.<sup>20</sup>

The example of SSP was soon followed by the founding of the Northern Playwrights Society in January 1975 and, perhaps most significantly, with the establishment that Autumn of the Theatre Writers' Group (later renamed the Theatre Writers' Union (TWU)).<sup>21</sup> Set up in response to proposed cuts to Arts Council new writing schemes, in the first seven years of its existence TWU successfully negotiated contractual agreements with the whole of the subsidized theatre sector. These contracts, campaigned for under the slogan 'A Living Wage for Theatre-Writers!',<sup>22</sup> established the principles of commissioning fees, instated a threshold on theatres' entitlement to future earnings from plays premiered, codified the terms of options and future productions and laid down a 'bill of rights', guaranteeing playwrights' consultation, textual integrity and the right to be paid to attend rehearsals. TWU inspired and supported the creation of subsequent organizations including North West Playwrights (NWP) founded 1982; Yorkshire Playwrights, founded 1989; and Stagecoach! in the West Midlands, founded 1992. Each one of these groups developed a wide range of

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<sup>19</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>20</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>21</sup> The TWU merged with the Writers Guild of Great Britain in 1997.

<sup>22</sup> See Woddis, *Spear Carriers or Speaking Parts?*, p. 198.

activities designed to discover, support and promote new writing, including script-reading services, regular newsletters, commissioning awards and bursaries, seminars and symposiums, competitions, and, perhaps most significantly, development workshops leading to script-in-hand performances.

It is to the activities of NWP that the first use of the terms ‘dramaturgy’ and ‘dramaturg’ within English industry discourse may be traced, as the organization’s annual new writing festival developed during the 1980s into a showcase for playwrights to present their work to producers and directors, as well as to the general public. From the scripts submitted to the festival, six would be selected to receive development workshops with professional actors, a director and an individual classified as a ‘dramaturg’. Plays would be given five days of workshop rehearsal, throughout which the dramaturg, usually an experienced playwright, would serve as a liaison between playwright and director as the piece evolved.<sup>23</sup> Stagecoach! also organized showcases of new work ‘conceived along the lines’ of NWP’s workshops, engaging actors, directors and dramaturgs to workshop a play before presenting it as a script-in-hand performance at several of the region’s theatres.<sup>24</sup> According to Stagecoach! records quoted by Woddis, between 1996 and 1998 eight writers who had previously received workshop support went on to secure productions from theatres both regionally and nationally.<sup>25</sup> Similarly, in 1993, NWP could claim that 25% of the writers they had workshopped had gone on to secure professional commissions, and that from a situation in which almost no new plays had been presented in the region, the number of productions was now higher than the national average.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> ‘25 Years of North-West Playwrights’, presentation given at Next Stages Conference, *Dramaturgy and Beyond: Writers and their Careers*, Manchester Metropolitan University, 29-31 March 2007. Notes taken by Jacqueline Bolton. See also Luckhurst, *Revolution*, pp. 208-9.

<sup>24</sup> Woddis, *Spear Carriers or Speaking Parts?*, p. 208.

<sup>25</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>26</sup> Woddis, *Spear Carriers or Speaking Parts?*, p. 206.

In 1985, New Playwrights Trust (latterly writernet) was founded to liaise across this growing network of writer-led organizations. Styling itself as a ‘strategic body for the sector’,<sup>27</sup> New Playwrights Trust played a principal role in the instigation and facilitation of dozens of local and regional playwriting conferences dedicated to the discussion of good (and bad) practice and feeding back experiences of, and suggestions for, Arts Council theatre policy. At one remove from frenetic producing schedules, ‘second-tier’ organizations such as TWU, WGGB and NPT/writernet were ideally placed to disseminate, discuss and respond to policy documents as and when the Arts Council advanced its proposals. Jonathan Meth, director of NPT/writernet from 1994-2009:

A Green Paper [...] would be sent out to the [theatre] sector. And the sector would say ‘we’re too busy: we’ve got to run theatres’. [But there were] playwriting bodies who’d managed to get on the mailing list by dint of banging on the table and saying ‘please send us things’. So the Writer’s Guild would get a copy, New Playwrights’ Trust would get a copy. Those who were prepared to work together in committees, to lobby, to advocate, would say ‘okay, we’ll create a response’. So all that time, Tony [Craze] and I, and others, would be pulling together people’s thinking and making responses.<sup>28</sup>

In 1991, NPT’s contribution to the Arts Council’s enquiry into a National Media and Arts Strategy (NAMS) called for ‘a coherent national system’ of script management, a request formulated by writers concerned by the length of time taken by companies to provide feedback on submitted scripts and, moreover, by the quality of that feedback.<sup>29</sup> One proposal included in the final Arts Council report, *A Creative Future* (1993), was the allocation of funds to provide ‘centres of innovation [...] where new work [...] can be developed which in many cases will result in public performance, but where the

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<sup>27</sup> See Woddis, *Spear Carriers or Speaking Parts?*, p. 258.

<sup>28</sup> Jonathan Meth, unpublished interview with Jacqueline Bolton, 13<sup>th</sup> November 2007. Tony Craze was Literary Director for the London Arts Board 1992-2001(see below).

<sup>29</sup> Woddis, *Spear Carriers or Speaking Parts?*, p. 221.

emphasis will be on the process rather than on the outcome'.<sup>30</sup> This proposal is put forward in the context of a chapter on 'artistic originality and development' which argues for funding to provide artists with 'time and space in which to experiment'.<sup>31</sup> In the event, few recommendations made by the report translated into concrete initiatives. Nevertheless, the collective debate provoked by the consultation process created a heightened awareness amongst practitioners of the troubled situation of new writing and, subsequent to the NAMS enquiry, initiatives responding to the suggestions of playwrights' groups were undertaken by a number of theatres and companies throughout the country.

Jack Bradley, former Literary Manager at the National Theatre, confirms that in the absence of a 'co-ordinated strategy in terms of play development' the conferences organized by groups such as TWU and NPT, often in association with new writing theatres, would be attended by 'delegates from all round the country' in order to 'compare and contrast their strategies [...] It was piecemeal but ongoing'.<sup>32</sup> These conferences enabled the research and recommendations of playwrights' organisations to speak on a national platform: in 1988, for example, a 'priorities' paper written by a West Midlands branch of TWU called for a full-time 'Literary Manager' to be appointed at one of the main theatres in the region.<sup>33</sup> Whilst it was several years before this post became a reality (with the appointment of Ben Payne to Birmingham Rep in 1995),<sup>34</sup> it is possible to see in the ongoing distillation of playwrights' grievances the

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<sup>30</sup> Arts Council of Great Britain, *A Creative Future: The way forward for the arts, crafts and media in England* (1993), pp. 56-60.

<sup>31</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>32</sup> Jack Bradley, unpublished interview with Jacqueline Bolton 29<sup>th</sup> August 2008.

<sup>33</sup> See Woddis, *Spear Carriers or Speaking Parts?*, pp. 222-223.

<sup>34</sup> Funded by the West Midlands' Regional Arts Board, in 1995 Ben Payne was appointed Literary Manager for the newly re-opened studio theatre at the Birmingham Rep: 'I had no money to do anything. I think I had a budget of £2,500 a year. [But] it did mean that the theatre suddenly went 'well, now that we have a Literary Manager we need to commission something'. So we did commission about six plays, which was enormous for the time, for a regional theatre to make that kind of commitment was very, very big'. Unpublished interview with Jacqueline Bolton, 4<sup>th</sup> August 2006.

formulation and gradual installation of a new tier of practitioners dedicated to redressing informal, haphazard approaches to sourcing and supporting new plays. It is perhaps worth pointing out, when playwrights express dissatisfaction or frustration with the added layer of ‘bureaucracy’ supposedly represented by literary managers today, that literary management was professionalized during the 1990s largely in response to the requests and recommendations advanced by playwrights a decade previously.

One response to this grassroots agitation was the proliferation, initially centred in the capital, of writers groups. Through a mixture of experimenting with writing exercises and studying canonical plays, workshop leaders (‘dramaturgs’, though the title was rarely used) would teach the formal elements of drama (plot, narrative, character, dialogue etc.) and mentor individuals in the writing of a short play which, depending on resources, might receive a script-in-hand performance at the end of the programme. A knock-on effect of the rise in writers’ groups was an increase in the number of unsolicited scripts sent to theatres: according to a report by NPT quoted by Sierz, there were approximately 25,000 plays in circulation at any one time during the mid-1990s.<sup>35</sup> Rather than shunting responsibility for scripts onto assistant or associate directors, as was standard procedure previously, theatres and companies now began to appoint a dedicated, though usually part-time (and sometimes unpaid), ‘Literary Manager’ to oversee the influx of scripts.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> Sierz, *In-Yer-Face Theatre*, p. 236.

<sup>36</sup> To my knowledge there were only three key literary management posts in England before the late-1980s: Kenneth Tynan at the National Theatre, Rob Ritchie at the Royal Court, and Colin Chambers at the Royal Shakespeare Company.

The ad-hoc appointment of literary managers<sup>37</sup> in the late 1980s and early 1990s was, in the words of Ruth Little, former Literary Manager at the Royal Court, a ‘purely administrative and purely pragmatic’ exercise.<sup>38</sup> Charged with the reading and ‘managing’ of scripts rather than with the hands-on development of plays and playwrights, literary managers were someone to whom directors could delegate the onerous task of sifting through unsolicited scripts: ‘directors and associate directors’, confirms playwright and former literary manager Paul Sirett, ‘thought “hang on a minute, this literary manager thing is quite a good idea because they can read all the plays and just give me the good ones”’.<sup>39</sup> The role was typically peripheral to the core artistic activity of the theatre or company and cooperation between literary managers and artistic directors was contingent upon the coincidence of sympathetic personalities. Speaking of his first appointment at the Soho Theatre in 1989, Jack Bradley speaks of his initial frustration with the role:

I very quickly learnt that my function was to be a firewall. I thought that was really depressing [...] So my suggestion was that we would run workshops, bring together a group of six people and they would meet fortnightly over twelve weeks and we would spend a day on each play. So it gave a focus to the unsolicited script system. It also enabled us to cream off writers we thought were interesting [...] There was a degree to which for the job to be meaningful to me, I had to engage with the writers on a personal level.<sup>40</sup>

Bradley’s experience suggests the extent to which an individual could shape and define their role as ‘literary manager’, a feature which can be explained in part by the scarcity

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<sup>37</sup> Early appointments held various titles: New Writing Assistant; New Writing Manager; Literary Associate. If a theatre had a playwright-in-residence, s/he would typically assume responsibility for unsolicited scripts.

<sup>38</sup> Ruth Little, interview with Jacqueline Bolton, 14<sup>th</sup> November 2007.

<sup>39</sup> Paul Sirett, unpublished interview with Jacqueline Bolton, 17<sup>th</sup> October 2006.

<sup>40</sup> Jack Bradley, unpublished interview with Jacqueline Bolton, 29<sup>th</sup> August 2008. ‘Whenever I found a play I really liked I would mention it to Tony [Craze, then Artistic Director of Soho] and he wouldn’t be interested. So I would write a letter to the playwright and say there was a programming log-jam at the moment, hold on in there. The reason that’s relevant is that two and half years later when I found myself at the Cockpit [Theatre, Soho’s residence between 1992-1994], Abigail [Morris, then Artistic Director of Soho] said to me “what are we going to do, we haven’t got any plays or money to commission?”. I pulled out a drawer and said, “there’s our opening season”. And that was because I’d kept in touch with those writers’. *ibid.*

of formal training that existed for playwrights and those who wanted to work with playwrights during this period:

What happened in those days is if you hung around theatres people got you to read, so I read for the Court and Soho and all the rest of it and ended up running workshops and doing a bit of hands-on dramaturgy. And almost by accident found myself in the business.<sup>41</sup>

Sirett replaced Bradley as Literary Manager at the Soho Theatre in 1994, having spent some time as writer-in-residence at the Theatre Royal Stratford East where his role included working with writers on new plays. He came to the Soho, in his words, ‘basically as a playwright who had done a tiny bit of dramaturgy. I got the job there and then just worked on plays solidly. So I learnt very much on the floor in a very practical environment’.<sup>42</sup> Dramaturgy, understood as the mentoring of playwrights, was a skill learned and refined by Sirett and his contemporaries in pragmatic contexts through trial and error: ‘One of the things I had to do when started doing this job was formulate a language [of play development]. Because there was no language’:

So you walk through the door there and someone says, ‘ok, next week we’re doing a workshop for writers at the beginning of their career and you’ve got to teach them about dramatic structure and dialogue’. And you think, ‘how on earth am I going to do that? Given that all I have is my own experience and reading plays and talking to people about their plays?’ So I just dived headfirst into all the literature I could find about writing which was eclectic, mind-boggling, appalling, fantastic, inspirational and dreadful. All of those things. And I found that I really enjoyed it. I really enjoyed those things and, of course, teaching is a great way of learning.<sup>43</sup>

In order to highlight and address the ad-hoc development of what was by now increasingly referred to as the ‘dramaturgical development’ of new plays, Bradley, in collaboration with NPT, organized a four-day conference in 1996 at the National

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<sup>41</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>42</sup> Sirett, 17<sup>th</sup> October 2006.

<sup>43</sup> *ibid.*

Theatre Studio, called ‘Developing Theatre Writing’. In the introduction to the documentation arising from the conference, Bradley writes that:

A couple of years ago it occurred to me that the theatre I worked for, the Soho Theatre Company, were routinely running a handful of workshops every week for new and developing writers [...] Throughout the 80s [sic] workshopping plays had become a cottage industry as writers’ groups mushroomed around the capital to accommodate the needs of new playwrights [...] I was curious to know what was happening to [these writers] in countless rooms dotted around London.<sup>44</sup>

Delegates at the conference included literary managers, writers and mentors drawn from companies such as Paines Plough, the Soho Theatre, the Bush, Hampstead, Polka Theatre, Sphinx, Louder than Words, the Half Moon Young People’s Theatre Company and, interestingly, Forced Entertainment.<sup>45</sup> The vocabulary used in the conference’s report – ‘rigorous, supportive and nourishing dramaturgy’; ‘a clear need for more effective dramaturgical methods’<sup>46</sup> – indicates a burgeoning familiarity with dramaturgy understood specifically in relation to the development of new plays, an activity which the report recognizes as a responsibility of the literary manager.

By 1997, the recognized status of literary departments was such that a national conference organised by NPT, ‘Commissioning the Future’, brought together eighty literary managers, directors, writers and theatre makers to discuss literary management.<sup>47</sup> Describing literary management as comprised of ‘a broad range of separate yet allied activities, including research, development, dramaturgy, brokerage, advocacy, training, information provision and administration’,<sup>48</sup> the report indicates that dramaturgy, as one strand of a multi-tasked profession dedicated to the discovery and

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<sup>44</sup> Jack Bradley, ‘Preface’, *Developing Theatre Writing*, ed. Jonathan Meth, writernet, 1996, np.

<sup>45</sup> Tim Etchells of Forced Entertainment is described in the resulting conference report as ‘introduc[ing] the idea of thinking about text as “quotation” – a second hand object’. Meth, *Developing Theatre Writing*, np.

<sup>46</sup> Meth, *Developing Theatre Writing*, np.

<sup>47</sup> *Commissioning the Future*, ed. Jonathan Meth (New Playwrights’ Trust, 1997), p. 1.

<sup>48</sup> *ibid.*



development of new plays, was by now a term to which practitioners were acclimatized. Acknowledging the ‘considerable attention being focused on Literary Management departments’ the conference was intended ‘to provide a stimulus to the industry’ and to question ‘what might constitute an ideal Literary Department’.<sup>49</sup> The conference evidences that, by the late-1990s, literary managers were an established (if still contested) feature of the English theatre landscape, occupying a position significant enough for writers to negotiate with them directly. In London at least, the status of literary managers and literary management had indeed been raised, bolstered in part by the Royal Court Theatre’s headline-grabbing 1994/5 programme of new plays by new playwrights.

## 1.2 New writing re-branded

Co-produced with the National Theatre Studio, and drawing upon generous sponsorship from American donors, between 1994 and 1996 the Royal Court increased its annual number of productions from nine to nineteen. Between September 1994 and January 1995, the Royal Court Theatre Upstairs produced six new plays by six virtually unknown writers: Joe Penhall’s *Some Voices*, Rebecca Pritchard’s *Essex Girls*, Michael Wynne’s *The Knocky*, Nick Grosso’s *Peaches*, Judy Upton’s *Ashes and Sand* and Sarah Kane’s *Blasted*. Subsequent successful premieres of new plays included a Downstairs production of Jez Butterworth’s *Mojo* in June 1995, and Upstairs productions of Simon Block’s *Not a Game for Boys* (August 1995), Martin McDonagh’s *Beauty Queen of Leenane* (February 1996), Mark Ravenhill’s *Shopping and Fucking* (September 1996) and Ayub Kahn-Din’s *East is East* (November 1996). The exuberance of these plays’ collective gesture was matched by energetic marketing campaigns and further amplified

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<sup>49</sup> *ibid.*

between 1996 and 2000 by the Royal Court's residency in two West End theatres:<sup>50</sup> not only were new plays by *unknown* playwrights being produced, they were being produced in the heart of London's Theatreland, enjoying a media profile reminiscent of 1956. Sue Higginson, head of the National Theatre Studio which co-produced the 1994/5 season, has described that time as 'a seminal moment. That was when people started to say: "Oh I see, new writing is sexy", and jumped on the bandwagon'.<sup>51</sup> Bradley concurs: 'there was a cultural shift; [writing for theatre] became sexier'.<sup>52</sup>

When Stephen Daldry assumed sole Artistic Directorship of the Royal Court in 1993, however, the creative direction of the theatre appeared uncertain: 'There was a while early on in his tenure', according to James McDonald, then Associate Director at the Royal Court, 'in which he [Daldry] was really searching for a direction and seeking to push the boat out but not quite knowing the right direction to push it out in'.<sup>53</sup> Daldry's early programming included *MSM*, devised by dance-theatre company DV8; *Night After Night*, written, directed and performed by Neil Bartlett of queer performance group GLORIA; some revivals of previous successes and a handful of new plays. The eclecticism of Daldry's opening season, together with its apparent departure from the Royal Court's historical commitment to the living playwright, promptly raised concerns. In 1994, Daldry appointed Graham Whybrow to replace Robin Hooper as the Court's Literary Manager.<sup>54</sup> In an unusual move within the closed industry of British theatre, Whybrow was neither playwright nor director but a trained barrister, former journalist and company director of a publishing firm. Talking to me in November 2007,

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<sup>50</sup> Whilst the theatre at Sloane Square was being refurbished, the Royal Court rehoused themselves in the Ambassadors Theatre as a surrogate for the Theatre Upstairs, and the Duke of York's Theatre for the Theatre Downstairs.

<sup>51</sup> Sue Higginson, qtd. Sierz, *In-Yer-Face Theatre*, p. 234.

<sup>52</sup> Bradley, 7<sup>th</sup> August 2006.

<sup>53</sup> James MacDonald, qtd. Ruth Little and Emily McLaughlin, *The Royal Court Theatre Inside Out* (London: Oberon, 2007), p. 284.

<sup>54</sup> Luckhurst records the first official appointment of a Literary Manager at the Royal Court in 1979, although unofficial play-readers had existed before this. *Revolution*, p. 200.

only a few months after retiring from his eleven years at the Royal Court, Whybrow described the circumstances surrounding his appointment:

The board [of the Royal Court] was very worried because they'd got this immensely charismatic and talented former Artistic Director of the Gate [...] and yet the programming of the theatre was uneven to poor, mixed to poor. I was invited to apply [...] I was beckoned. The person who led this was Stephen Daldry, but it was Stephen Daldry coming slightly unstuck in his first year of programming.<sup>55</sup>

Immediately before Daldry, the Court had been run for almost thirteen years by Max Stafford-Clark, under whom 'workshops as a process for either conceiving, developing or rewriting a play' had formed a central plank of artistic policy.<sup>56</sup> In Whybrow's view, Stafford-Clark's approach to sourcing and developing new plays had served to contract the theatre's resources, resulting, ultimately, in fewer plays being produced. Armed with a 'clear conviction that we needed to respond to and identify the most exciting new playwrights and produce their plays without a process',<sup>57</sup> Whybrow transformed the Court's literary department into a producer-led search for talent, distancing the theatre from, in Whybrow's view, the 'nannying' implications of a development-led culture of new writing:

When I started I was appalled at the poor quality of commissioned plays delivered. And I thought that was a symptom of writers anticipating a development process [...] I thought people wrote plays and theatres put them on. Surely? This creepy, slightly insinuating and paternalistic, nannying, top-down ethos discourages this and says 'no, we will be involved not only in the presentation of the play but [also] in [its] development'. [Now] if that's the case, then I feel you are infantilizing the writers to such a point that they will crawl in like babies, sicking up their first drafts like spinach and asking you to sort it out. It's lamentable.<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> Graham Whybrow, interview with Jacqueline Bolton, 19<sup>th</sup> November 2007.

<sup>56</sup> Whybrow, qtd. Little and McLaughlin, *Inside Out*, p. 292.

<sup>57</sup> Whybrow, qtd. Little and McLaughlin, *Inside Out*, p. 294.

<sup>58</sup> Whybrow, 19<sup>th</sup> November 2007.

Articulating a principled rejection of the processes and procedures of development cultures, and with the full support of his Artistic Director, Whybrow focused the Royal Court's literary department upon 'strategically track[ing] first time writers in a very purposeful way':<sup>59</sup>

I was trying to put out the signal that I wanted to get the plays first. My vision, when I started, was to invert the pattern of aspiring playwrights sending plays to studio theatres and, if lucky, getting them on and waving madly. I wanted to invert that and get the aspiring playwrights to send their play to us first, at the top. We [would] get first access to first plays and be better placed to assess them and produce them and, if not, then they would trickle down and find their own level [...] The biggest intervention I want to make [was] to get access to those writers, to meet them and, as a talent scout, get first dibs on the new playwrights.<sup>60</sup>

The revitalization of the Royal Court's national and international reputation as a powerhouse of new British writing during the mid-1990s rested significantly upon its staging and promotion of a series of unproduced plays by young, unknown writers. This rhetorical emphasis upon 'first plays' and 'new playwrights', however, coupled with Whybrow's belligerent stance against development processes, merits closer scrutiny.

As Little and McLaughlin note in their history of the Royal Court, 'several of the plays which came to define the success of the mid-1990s at the Court, such as *Some Voices*, *Blasted* and *The Beauty Queen of Leenane* did not originate there' but were 'opportunistically snapped up' from other theatres and fed into a 'constant stream of production'.<sup>61</sup> Judy Upton, for example, had previously worked with director Lisa Goldman at the Red Room, Kevin Elyot's *My Night With Reg* had been originally commissioned and passed over by Hampstead Theatre (produced at the Royal Court 1994),<sup>62</sup> Ayub Kahn-Din originally wrote *East is East* in 1982 and later developed it

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<sup>59</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>60</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>61</sup> Little and McLaughlin, *Inside Out*, p. 286.

<sup>62</sup> Little and McLaughlin, *Inside Out*, p. 295.

with Tamasha Theatre,<sup>63</sup> and Mark Ravenhill's *Shopping and Fucking* had undergone a lengthy development process with Max Stafford-Clark at the Finborough Theatre with *Out of Joint*.<sup>64</sup>

The Royal Court was able to return to the attractively decisive stance of a theatre which championed 'new' writers because by the 1990s, thanks to the previous decades' organized agitation for new writing initiatives, the London conurbation of new writing venues were actively working with aspiring playwrights via a mixture of writers' groups, development workshops and support networks. Not only was there a greater number of plays in circulation at this time than compared with a decade previously, a significant number of these 'unknown' playwrights had benefited from varying degrees of dramaturgical support from theatres and companies which, for whatever reasons, were unable or unwilling to grant a commission or production. In collaboration with the National Theatre Studio, the Royal Court, with its comparatively greater resources, was able to consolidate (or 'cherry-pick', depending on one's view) the emerging talent of the early 1990s, pushing out a series of productions the quick succession and brassy marketing of which generated a critical and commercial profile for new writing which had been lacking from London stages. As Bradley attests:

The policy was 'stack 'em high, sell 'em cheap'. What we were trying to do was establish the fact that new writing could be like film: that it doesn't have to be a classic, because if you don't like it there'll be another one coming along in a couple of weeks. It was the whole idea that high turnover generated excitement.<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>63</sup> Little and McLaughlin, *Inside Out*, p. 357.

<sup>64</sup> Little and McLaughlin, *Inside Out*, p. 352.

<sup>65</sup> Bradley, 29<sup>th</sup> August 2008.

‘There was an excitement, a buzz generated’, affirms Lisa Goldman, former Artistic Director of Soho Theatre. ‘I think [Daldry] was re-branding new writing really. I think that’s what he set out to do and I think he did it very, very successfully’.<sup>66</sup>

In 1995, the year that Sarah Kane’s *Blasted* dominated headlines, Literary Managers in London participated, in Bradley’s words, in ‘a game of musical chairs’.<sup>67</sup> Bradley himself moved from the Soho Theatre to the National Theatre; Paul Sirett moved from New Writing Assistant at Theatre Royal Stratford East to Literary Manager at Soho; Joanne Reardon from being Oxfordshire’s Literary Development Officer to Literary Manager at the Bush Theatre, and Ben Jankovich from being Literary Assistant at the Royal Shakespeare Company to Literary Manager at the Hampstead Theatre. In Bradley’s view this was a critical moment:

You had a situation where hungry young Literary Managers [were] trying to impress their bosses at a time when the Royal Court appeared to have become head and shoulders more successful than the rest. I would argue that the change in personnel in the literary departments, which coincided with the success of the Royal Court in collaboration with the Studio, was the tipping point. It raised the profile.<sup>68</sup>

The conspicuous success of the Royal Court’s 1994/5 season reverberated throughout the industry, adrenalizing the sourcing, development, production and promotion of ‘New Writing’. The Royal Court’s strategy of targeting first time writers encouraged, moreover, a widespread shift in the priorities of theatres and companies from new writing to new writers. Over the course of the 1990s, the definition of new writing became confused, as the latest work from establishment figures such as Tom Stoppard, David Hare or Michael Frayn no longer fit the criteria of New Writing’s new image. Literary managements structures were put under an unprecedented market pressure to

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<sup>66</sup> Lisa Goldman, unpublished interview with Jacqueline Bolton, 13<sup>th</sup> November 2007.

<sup>67</sup> Bradley, 29<sup>th</sup> August 2008.

<sup>68</sup> *ibid.*

discover not just the ‘next new *play*’ but also the ‘next new *playwright*’, as pressure to find the next ‘interesting voice’ – ‘the younger, the better; the more “on the streets” the better’<sup>69</sup> – engendered intense ‘competition between theatres to stay relevant and stay sexy’.<sup>70</sup> ‘There is this culture of the new’, affirmed the former Literary Director of London Arts Board, Tony Craze, speaking to me in 2008, ‘you must be between sixteen and twenty-five for a start, and if you’ve had three plays produced, forget it, you’re not new’.<sup>71</sup>

For all its emphasis upon the innovative, the radical, the ‘new’ in New Writing, in positioning the belligerence of a young playwright at the centre of creative processes, the Royal Court in the mid-1990s was in fact returning to a mid-1950s model of theatre production.<sup>72</sup> Comparisons between a ‘1950s New Wave’ and ‘1990s In-Yer-Face’ generation provide a telling commentary on the resilience of particular values within English producing cultures. In *1956 And All That*, for example, Dan Rebellato cites John Osborne’s self-description of playwriting as ‘a “solo dash [...] fuelled by a reckless untutored frenzy”’.<sup>73</sup> In contrast to playwrights of a previous generation, playwrights and directors such as Osborne, Arnold Wesker, Lindsay Anderson and Bill Gaskill dismissed learned ‘technique’ as a sort of intellectual impediment which ‘forc[ed] [feeling] into predefined forms, displacing the *authentic vitality* of the author’s voice’.<sup>74</sup> Working within this ‘genius’ model of cultural production, kudos for a theatre lies in its ability to identify *untapped, as yet unrealized*, talent; the ‘newer’ the playwright, the ‘purer’ the voice, the greater the cultural cache won for the producing

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<sup>69</sup> Ian Brown, Artistic Director, West Yorkshire Playhouse, unpublished interview with Jacqueline Bolton, 12<sup>th</sup> December 2007.

<sup>70</sup> Payne, 4<sup>th</sup> August 2006.

<sup>71</sup> Tony Craze, unpublished interview with Jacqueline Bolton, 1<sup>st</sup> September 2008.

<sup>72</sup> ““That British New Writing..” one Flemish Theatre programmer said to me years ago, earnestly puzzled or playing devils advocate “... it’s really just the same as the old British writing, isn’t it?””. Tim Etchells, ‘Etchells’ in *Programme Notes: Case Studies for Locating Experimental Theatre*, eds. Lois Keidan and Daniel Brine (Live Art Development Agency, 2006), pp. 18-35 (p. 32).

<sup>73</sup> John Osborne, qtd. Dan Rebellato, *1956 And All That* (London: Routledge, 1999), p. 76.

<sup>74</sup> Rebellato, *1956*, p. 76. My emphasis.

theatre. Public acknowledgement of the contextual and material conditions of cultural production, including any previous training or *dramaturgical support* that a playwright may have experienced in the writing of their play(s), is seen to compromise the integrity of the individual, suggesting that neither the playwright nor the play is quite as autonomous as the genius model requires. A return to the model of ‘discovering’ ‘untutored talent’ explains, perhaps, Whybrow’s disinclination to acknowledge the development cultures which enabled the Royal Court’s literary department to ‘opportunistically snap up’ plays and playwrights mentored elsewhere.

I would like to argue that during from the mid-1990s onwards, the Royal Court held three key advantages over its London rivals. Firstly, thanks to Daldry’s entrepreneurial prowess, the theatre was in receipt of substantial overseas funding and was in a position to finance a rapid increase in productions. Secondly, as a result of a lottery grant to rebuild its premises in Sloane Square, the company was temporarily re-housed in the heart of London Theatreland. Thirdly and, no less importantly, the working relationship of Daldry and Whybrow established a strong, shared vision of artistic direction uniting the programming, marketing and literary departments of the theatre. Whilst other London new writing theatres at this time included a literary manager on their payrolls, the influence of this figure upon decisions of programming and marketing was, at best, uneven. As suggested above, the role of literary manager could initially be regarded as little more than a ‘siding down which writers [were] shunted to keep them out of the director’s sight’.<sup>75</sup> For the role to exercise influence over programming, it must be accompanied, as practitioners today attest, by recognition within senior management structures: ‘as a dramaturg or as a literary manager your most important relationship is with your Artistic Director: you can’t function without the support of your Artistic

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<sup>75</sup> Ben Payne, ‘Six Managers in Search of the Author’, 1995  
<http://www.writernet.co.uk/php2/news.php?id=321> [accessed 15 June 2007]



Director'.<sup>76</sup> In this respect, according to Charles Hart, Arts Council Theatre Writing Officer and designated Drama Officer to the Royal Court from 1989-2006, the model of the Royal Court was regarded as a 'very good example' of the way to run a literary department:

It's not everyone who loves the Royal Court but in terms of their process, their way of going about things, I always admired them because everyone was treated very professionally. Graham Whybrow had the ear of the Artistic Director; they had their script conferences and people weren't led down a garden path. There was no separation between the commissioning process and the literary department process, which there is and has been in many theatres [...] I thought the Royal Court was a very good blueprint [...] Problem[s] often occur [within new writing theatres] if the Literary Manager [doesn't] have the ear of the Artistic Director.<sup>77</sup>

Graham Whybrow's reputation preceded him within the industry, as playwright David Greig indicates with reference to Whybrow's partnership with the Court's next Artistic Director, Ian Rickson (1998-2006):

Literary management works when the Artistic Director has total trust in their Literary Manager. That gives the Literary Manager power. Graham Whybrow had a very close relationship with Ian Rickson at the Court. So I knew that if Graham Whybrow said that he thought my script was too long, or it was baggy in the middle, I needed to take that seriously. Because he had the ear of Ian Rickson and Ian Rickson really trusted him and [Whybrow] was the big intellect behind those things.<sup>78</sup>

The success of the Royal Court transformed the critical and commercial expectations of new writing within the capital, motivating and, indeed, enabling other theatres to more confidently pursue new writing within their artistic programmes. In 1996, *The Policy for Drama of the English Arts Funding System* unequivocally stated that 'the work of living playwrights is essential to the continuing vitality and cultural relevance of

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<sup>76</sup> Sirett, 17<sup>th</sup> October 2006.

<sup>77</sup> Charles Hart, unpublished interview with Jacqueline Bolton, 22<sup>nd</sup> November 2007.

<sup>78</sup> David Greig, unpublished interview with Jacqueline Bolton, 24<sup>th</sup> August 2006.

drama'.<sup>79</sup> Calling for less emphasis on 'finished product' and an increased focus on the funding of new play development, the report argued for sufficient resources to be made available for new writing to be properly developed as 'a part of the programme of work of all companies'.<sup>80</sup> By the turn of the millennium, many of the demands made by playwriting organizations during the 1980s and 1990s had been answered: in addition to the proliferation of companies who regarded new writing as a core activity, very few producing houses could now exclude it from their programme.<sup>81</sup>

### 1.3 A 'New Writing industry'?

Throughout the latter half of the 1990s and throughout the 2000s, companies and theatres which garnered a reputation for supporting new writers through to premiere won kudos from the industry and recognition from funding bodies. As the decade progressed, theatres and companies also began to re-direct their focus from *emerging* playwrights to *potential* playwrights: '[they] don't know who they are, they don't go to the theatre and they've never written a play. But if you gave them an opportunity, they might discover that they've got an extraordinary talent'.<sup>82</sup> When Ben Payne was appointed Literary Manager at Birmingham Rep in 1995, for example, 'there wasn't really an audience here for new work; there was no culture of it'.<sup>83</sup> Playwrights delivering stage-worthy scripts were conspicuous by their absence:

...in terms of the programme here, and in terms of the scripts that we were sent in, [there] was an immediate problem: how do you get new work that you're actually able to commission and produce? So we had to

<sup>79</sup> Arts Council of England, *The Policy for Drama of the English Arts Funding System* (1996), p. 8.

<sup>80</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>81</sup> *Writ Large* details that of the larger companies surveyed by the report, out of sixty respondents: '36 had a new writing policy, 23 had a literary department (although some of these offered a narrower definition of 'undertaking the activities of a literary department in some form'), 43 read unsolicited scripts [...] 54 engaged in development activities (script in hand performances, mentoring, attachments, workshops, rehearsed readings, residencies, writers' groups, other) and 31 worked with writing agencies'. British Theatre Consortium, *Writ Large: New Writing on the British Stage 2003-2009* (2009), p. 68.

<sup>82</sup> Whybrow, 19<sup>th</sup> November 2007.

<sup>83</sup> Payne, 4<sup>th</sup> August 2006.

introduce models which were much more proactive. Not waiting for scripts to come to us [...] we had to go out and actually start really active dialogues. [It] had to become about going out and finding that work.<sup>84</sup>

As more money became available for new writing, an increase in literary management appointments at subsidized producing theatres and companies was accompanied by a development of the literary manager's remit. Schemes and programmes designed to 'discover' and 'nurture' new writers became a central focus. Scratch nights, workshops, year-long writers' groups, out-reach placements, festivals, competitions, attachments: a remarkable number of access points were initiated by literary managers in order to 'lay a bridge down to potential writers'.<sup>85</sup> Despite this acknowledged 'explosion in dramaturgical activity in English theatre [...] not least in terms of the ubiquity of literary departments',<sup>86</sup> however, little academic analysis has so far been devoted to the methods and ethos of new play development or, indeed, to the qualities of the theatrical event created by such practices. Developmental processes are underpinned by particular assumptions regarding the form(s) and function(s) of plays and, indeed, the roles and responsibilities of a playwright: how might these assumptions have impacted upon the writing of plays and, moreover, the self-perception of playwrights? The following analysis responds to processes witnessed during the course of my research, supported by formal and informal conversation with practitioners.

Open-access writers' groups are routinely taught as weekly series of meetings; those who take part in these programmes are typically young, inexperienced in writing for theatre, or both. Formal elements such as character, dialogue and plot – as the dramatic 'tools' which might be most easily codified and taught – are given particular emphasis

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<sup>84</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>85</sup> Whybrow, 19<sup>th</sup> November 2007.

<sup>86</sup> *Writ Large*, p. 68.

within these weekly sessions. A ‘dramatically satisfying’<sup>87</sup> play executes a taut narrative of ‘interesting things happening to interesting people’,<sup>88</sup> realized via conventional dramaturgic principles: protagonists, initiating incidents, quests, complications, crises, suspense, ‘twists’, and resolutions. Responding to the commonplace advice ‘write what you know’, writers often tend to gravitate towards material drawn from personal and domestic spheres, centred upon relationships and typically situated within urban localities. This selection of material, in turn, suggests a focus upon psychological realism, itself part of a broader understanding of theatre in which ‘stories are linear, characters are three-dimensional; dramatic action, and therefore plot structure, has a basis in causality [and] spoken text takes the form of conversations between characters’.<sup>89</sup>

Character, plot and dialogue are, of course, the mainstay of most film and television drama, and learning how to write and manipulate these elements promises a potential spectrum of professional opportunity for writers. At West Yorkshire Playhouse, playwright and writers’ tutor Mark Catley advised aspiring writers on ‘So You Want To Be A Writer’, the theatre’s annual playwriting programme, not to ‘differentiate between television, theatre and the novel: they are all the same process, all about *telling a story*’.<sup>90</sup> Whilst laudably seeking to level hierarchies between cultural forms, extracting from these very different media an exclusive focus upon scripted plot overlooks the *medium specificity* of each art form, threatening to relegate theatre’s dynamic process of live encounter to an auxiliary concern.

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<sup>87</sup> Sirett, 17<sup>th</sup> October 2006.

<sup>88</sup> Edward Kemp, unpublished interview with Jacqueline Bolton, 6<sup>th</sup> September 2006.

<sup>89</sup> David Lane, ‘A dramaturg’s perspective: Looking to the future of script development’, *Studies in Theatre and Performance*, 30.1 (2010), pp. 127-142 (p. 128).

<sup>90</sup> Mark Catley, writing tutor for ‘So You Want To Be A Writer?’, West Yorkshire Playhouse, 14 May-21 June 2007. Notes taken by Jacqueline Bolton.

Whilst some processes are purposely left open-ended, with no expectation to deliver 'product', the designated end to which both writers groups and more intensive dramaturgical workshops typically work is the 'rehearsed reading'. 'Script-in-hand' rehearsed readings are typically held to enable the playwright to 'hear' her play spoken by actors, to 'get a feel' for whether or not the play 'works' in performance. As such, the process can often reinforce the marginalization of non-verbal 'actions' such as the interplay of lighting, sound, movement, image and music. How exploratory the workshop process leading to a rehearsed reading can be is impacted upon by different variables: the point at which the writing is introduced to a workshop process; the number and quality of actors; the supply of technical equipment; the basic time and space available; and, perhaps, by whether or not the play is already under commission to a theatre. Typically working with a minimum of resources - rarely more than a few chairs, tables and hand-held props - the muscularity of a play has perforce to lie in the language, if only because all other theatrical flesh is stripped back.

Underpinning this approach, as academic and theatre-maker Liz Tomlin has noted, is a prevailing attitude on the part of playwrights, dramaturgs, directors and actors that 'the pre-performance text [is] a reliable guide to the intended meaning of the final production', to be realised onstage with a minimum of 'treatment'.<sup>91</sup> The inbuilt aesthetic bias of much dramaturgical support is rarely remarked upon yet, as Tomlin suggests, any play-text which 'relies on a number of theatrical vocabularies as integral elements of an overall schema' will fail to be explored via development mechanisms which favour mimetic realism manifested in written dialogue.<sup>92</sup>

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<sup>91</sup> Liz Tomlin, 'Beyond Interpretation', unpublished paper presented at 'Performing Literatures', Workshop Theatre, University of Leeds, 30 June-1 July 2007. np. Copy provided by Liz Tomlin.

<sup>92</sup> *ibid.*

One potential source of what might be described as an ‘attenuated theatricality’ within play development processes is the industry’s continued focus upon, and energetic affirmation of, the single-authored play-text; a model of playwriting and producing in which ‘the collective process of theatrical production is harnessed in the service of an individual voice’.<sup>93</sup> Processes of new play development begin with questions designed to establish the intentions of a playwright, so as to be able to ‘make the play more like itself’.<sup>94</sup> A report from a Literary Manager’s Forum held at Polka Theatre, London, in 2005, states unequivocally that ‘the dramaturg’s role is to understand the writers’ intentions, interrogate the script and assist the writer to really find the fundamental skeleton of the script’.<sup>95</sup> Abigail Gonda, former Literary Manager at the Bush Theatre, testifies to this approach: ‘the first thing you say [to a playwright] is “what do you think the play is about”?’;<sup>96</sup> as does Ben Payne: ‘It’s about saying to that person, “okay, is this what you’re intending to do? What do you want from this piece of work?”’.<sup>97</sup>

The verbs commonly used in respect of playwrights, such as ‘nurturing’ or ‘protecting’, also speak of a sense of pastoral responsibility towards playwrights and play-texts, as though one were an organic extension of the other. Alex Chisholm, Associate Director, Literary at West Yorkshire Playhouse, suggests such a perspective when she states that:

An original new play has come into being because of something that playwright wants to do, wants to say, or had a vision of. Something about them has come into this play. So you have to work with them through the process, work with who they are and their personality [...]. It is important to keep in your mind that this play is from them.<sup>98</sup>

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<sup>93</sup> Derbyshire, ‘The Culture of New Writing’, p. 131.

<sup>94</sup> Lucinda Coxon, qtd. Meth, ‘Developing Theatre Writing’, np.

<sup>95</sup> Literary Managers’ Forum, Polka Theatre, October 20<sup>th</sup> 2005. Notes taken by Richard Shannon. Report provided by Richard Shannon.

<sup>96</sup> Abigail Gonda, unpublished interview with Jacqueline Bolton, 6<sup>th</sup> December 2006.

<sup>97</sup> Payne, 4<sup>th</sup> August 2006.

<sup>98</sup> Alex Chisholm, unpublished interview with Jacqueline Bolton, 4<sup>th</sup> July 2006.

Whilst the development and production of new plays necessarily entails a far more collaborative process than the acclamation of a ‘unique voice’ suggests, this rhetoric of individuality and originality serves to downplay or even erase the contributions of collaborating practitioners.

The celebrated ‘unique vision’ of a playwright furthermore encourages a commonplace distinction between ‘craft’ (technique) and ‘voice’ (vitality), a distinction that, in turn, transforms the inexperience of a novice playwright into a virtue, as Nina Steiger, Literary Manager at Soho Theatre, suggests:

The kind of plays I am relying upon [my team of script readers] to assess are plays that have that spark and passion and vitality and may not have that polish. [I] don’t want them to find me a ‘really well-made play’ [that’s] not doing anything interesting [...] I want them to find a badly-made play with a huge amount of life.<sup>99</sup>

Within development cultures, this distinction serves partly to disable the perceived ‘threat’ posed by a dramaturg to the ‘creative autonomy’ of a writer, as the stated imperative of development cultures to ‘uphold the integrity of the writer’s impulse’,<sup>100</sup> suggests: ‘you’re *servicing* the idea, you’re not *having* the idea’.<sup>101</sup> Whilst claiming a ‘hands-off’ approach – ‘I try and be as non-intrusive as possible and I would never tell a writer anything, I would only ask questions. It’s very much a sounding wall’<sup>102</sup> – the questions typically asked of playwrights nevertheless anticipate dramatic strategies designed to solicit, or ‘script’, a particular type of audience engagement: ‘What is the emotional heart of the play?’ ‘Whose story is it?’ ‘What does the character want?’ ‘What do they learn?’ The playwright must have ‘something to say’ but this is to be

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<sup>99</sup> Nina Steiger, unpublished interview with Jacqueline Bolton, 6<sup>th</sup> July 2006.

<sup>100</sup> Hanna Slatne, qtd. Tony Craze, ‘Dramaturgy: The symposia held in Birmingham and London’, report compiled for Arts Council England, 2006, np.

<sup>101</sup> Ashmeed Soho, former New Writing Manager, Theatre Royal Stratford East, 6<sup>th</sup> September 2006.

<sup>102</sup> Gonda, 6<sup>th</sup> December 2006.

communicated obliquely, not didactically, via the emotional journey on which the characters and, by extension, the audience are taken.

According to this model, the truthfulness or authenticity of a dramatic fiction is perceived as commensurate with the playwright's capacity to write from the centre of their own experience, to enter into imaginative sympathy with her or her characters and 'their' story. Abigail Gonda provides a description of working on a play about Elvis' entourage which exemplifies this tendency:

The first draft was a really fun regurgitation of everything that he'd picked up, great little scenarios, great little vignettes, but it was him regurgitating that story of Elvis' life. [It] wasn't *his* story. [I] was just like, 'where are you in this? Where's the writer in this? It's a great history lesson but walk away from it for a while and take ownership of it and put yourself in the middle of it. Write a story from *you* about these people [...] And that's what he did. He came back with the next draft and it was *his* story then; there was an emotional strain running through it because he'd gotten inside it and found himself in the characters, found himself in the story, and it worked beautifully.<sup>103</sup>

Without dismissing the benefits of encouraging a playwright to take possession of his material, it is telling that Gonda's response was to focus upon the individual's ability to engage with the *emotional strain* of his play as determined by a *personal* relationship to the story ('write a story from *you* about these people'). The writer might, for example, have been teamed up with a composer, a director, or a choreographer to work up the raw text through improvisation and experiment; instead, however, he was encouraged to refract history (quite literally, his-story) through the subjective prism of emotional insight.

The purported centrality of the playwright within discourses of new play development, however, is an assertion worth re-examining when contextualized within broader

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<sup>103</sup> Gonda, 6<sup>th</sup> December 2006.



processes of commissioning, programming and producing. Power in English theatre is ultimately concentrated in the hands of directors and artistic directors; playwrights possess as much agency as they are granted within the fiscal and artistic demands of a season. Significantly, increases in the funding available for the *development* of new writing in the late 1990s/early 2000s were not matched by a concomitant increase in monies available for theatres and companies to actually *produce* more new plays. Talking to me in November 2007, dramaturg Sarah Dickenson identified ‘a new writing culture in which supply far outstrips demand’,<sup>104</sup> a view supported by the former Literary Manager, now Dramaturg, at Birmingham Rep, Caroline Jester:

We develop so much work, we develop so many writers but where are the opportunities to actually give them a production? [...] And that’s probably where [a playwright is] going to learn most, when [they] have the audience in front of [their] work. So we may have a pool of thirty writers we’re working with, but only one of those may get a production.<sup>105</sup>

In the mid-2000s, for example, the Soho Theatre, which annually receives and returns written reports on approximately three thousand plays, and which boasts a community of writers numbering around a hundred, held between four and six slots for new plays.<sup>106</sup> The scarcity of production slots can breed conservatism amongst new and emerging playwrights who, in a bid to write the sort of play a theatre might (be able to) stage, dutifully conform to what Ben Payne has identified as a ‘standard British new writing aesthetic’: ‘small cast, realistic, multi-locational. Some might argue televisual’.<sup>107</sup> Speaking to me in 2006, Nina Steiger expressed a frustration with the plays she was reading:

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<sup>104</sup> Sarah Dickenson, unpublished interview with Jacqueline Bolton, 14<sup>th</sup> November 2007.

<sup>105</sup> Caroline Jester, unpublished interview with Jacqueline Bolton, 1<sup>st</sup> August 2006. In 2009, Jester’s title changed from Literary Manager to Dramaturg in order to signal her increasingly senior role on the theatre’s Transmissions programme, whereby professional playwrights work in partnership with teachers across the Midlands to deliver playwriting courses to secondary school pupils. Jester has recently co-edited a book with Claire Stoneman, *Playwriting Across the Curriculum*, which provides a guide to teaching playwriting at secondary-school level (London: Routledge, forthcoming).

<sup>106</sup> Steiger, 6<sup>th</sup> July 2006.

<sup>107</sup> Payne, 4<sup>th</sup> August 2006.

[I] want to see non-prescriptive playwriting. [T]he play is the skeleton of a house, it's the scaffolding: it's got big wide open windows, it's got gaping holes and hasn't quite got a roof. [But] the more you read the damn [thing], by the end, it's interior designed, decorated and the windows are sealed tight shut. And all the directors and the actors get to do is come and kind of bump their heads into the doorframes. As opposed to a play which just continues to let the light in and let the wind flow through it. Suggest the shape of the house but don't carpet it yet! Don't wallpaper it, just tell us that there may be walls.<sup>108</sup>

The emergence of a New Writing industry in the 1990s also engendered, almost by definition, a climate of development and production in which, as playwright and lecturer Steve Waters attests, it was 'much more lucrative and interesting to discover writers than to keep working with them'.<sup>109</sup> At least initially, the long-term development of playwrights was not a pressing consideration for theatres and companies attempting 'to do the Royal Court trick of finding the next great writer. Writers get chewed up and spat out so quickly, it's really difficult'.<sup>110</sup> Working within an economy of discovery, unless a first play happened to score a critical and/or box-office success there was little incentive for theatres to continue working with a writer on their second or third play. The relentless focus on the 'new', moreover, left very little room in theatres' programmes for revivals of contemporary plays. Christopher Roderiguez, Literary Manager of Talawa:

We do have solid work to look at but it feels very disposable [...] If something is not new then it has no life. That's it. It must have the term 'new' on its side. So once it has been staged, once it has been performed, it's like 'thank you', because it's done. It's done its job.<sup>111</sup>

Continued industry indifference towards revivals of plays that 'have done their job' leaves very little opportunity for plays presented in one region to be re-imagined in another. Unless their play is picked up by theatre cultures abroad, playwrights will

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<sup>108</sup> Steiger, 6<sup>th</sup> July 2006.

<sup>109</sup> Steve Waters, unpublished interview with Jacqueline Bolton, 22<sup>nd</sup> November 2007.

<sup>110</sup> Sirett, 17<sup>th</sup> October 2006.

<sup>111</sup> Christopher Roderiguez, unpublished interview with Jacqueline Bolton, 6<sup>th</sup> July 2006.

usually only witness one, by default, ‘definitive’ production of their play; a situation which perhaps does little to enhance appreciation of the possibilities and potentialities latent in the dynamic between text and live performance.

The pressures which continue to attend upon the continual discovery and development of new writing are articulated by many literary managers. Whilst expressing pride in a ‘clear, transparent expressible system [that] makes stages accessible to people’, Alex Chisholm also identifies the flaws in such a ‘systematic’ approach:

There has grown up this industry of turning people who want to be playwrights into plays that can be put on by theatres [...] literary managers are there to manage these processes, these ongoing programmes of work that essentially can become quite factory-like: you feed neophyte writers in one end and you get plays out the other! Every process like that needs a manager and a literary manager does that.<sup>112</sup>

‘The legacy [of] “British New Writing”’, asserts Lisa Goldman, is ‘that we’ve developed a whole industry around it which didn’t exist before’.<sup>113</sup> Whilst enabling the resurgence of new writing during the 1990s, the subsequent ‘industrialization’ of new play development implied by Chisholm and Goldman has inevitably impacted upon practitioners’ attitudes towards new plays and their production. Talking to me in 2006, for example, Jeanie O’Hare, then Literary Manager, now Dramaturg, at the Royal Shakespeare Company, declared that, ‘New Writing has become a victim of its success – it’s become its own cliché’:

[New Writing cultures] are about mining the same seam over and over again. Writers are writing the play they think people want from them and there is a diminishing return on those plays [...] I’ve been tired of what I’ve been reading for a long time, and I’ve felt a hunger for a much more theatrical language, for a bigger canvas for writers to work on [...] I think we’ve all been guilty over the last twenty years of becoming careerists - I mean literary managers and artistic directors and writers and

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<sup>112</sup> Chisholm, 4<sup>th</sup> July 2006.

<sup>113</sup> Goldman, 13<sup>th</sup> November 2007.

script editors, we're all careerists - and I think that is actually what is depleting us. I think we've got to release writers from that.<sup>114</sup>

The discursive practices of new play development cultures established during late 1990s exerted influence over new writing in four key ways: by seeking playwrights who were young, inexperienced in dramatic writing, or both; by affirming the individual vision of a single-authored play over collaborative approaches to the 'scripting' of a theatre event; by placing a premium on the 'authenticity' and 'vitality' of language at the expense of other theatrical vocabularies; and by prioritizing novelty at the expense of longevity. Given that networks inviting the participation of new writers are now widely established, I would suggest that the salient questions to be asked by practitioners and policy-makers today are those regarding the opportunities for 'emerged' playwrights to develop their aesthetic beyond tried-and-tested dramaturgic convention.

We haven't looked after our writers for such a long time. We've made them competitive and we've made them leaner. We've made them into these writing athletes. What they need is to drink in influences. [There is] a nourishment of imagination which I think we have a responsibility to focus on.<sup>115</sup>

#### 1.4 New writing and cultural diversity

The foregoing critique notwithstanding, a progressive feature of development cultures as they have evolved over the past two decades has been an articulated desire on the part of theatres, companies and development agencies to empower particular constituencies of writers through participation and representation. A focus upon

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<sup>114</sup> Jeanie O'Hare, unpublished interview with Jacqueline Bolton, 5<sup>th</sup> September 2006. In 2008, O'Hare's title changed from Literary Manager to Dramaturg in order to recognize the increased priority given to new writing within the company's policy, as well as O'Hare's own seniority within the company. 'At the level of Associate Directors, where the conversations are about the artistic policy of the company, there's been a voice missing, which is a voice about playwriting and writers and the creative catalysts [these] can have on the rest of the company [...] For a company that's named after a writer, there's never been that voice in programming policy. So it is now a question of there being a dialogue that goes around the Associate Directors [and] the Dramaturg, who act as an advisory group to the Artistic Director'. Unpublished interview with Jacqueline Bolton, 4<sup>th</sup> April 2008.

<sup>115</sup> O'Hare, 5<sup>th</sup> September 2006.

removing barriers with regards to gender, disability and ethnicity was a motivating factor of new writing initiatives from at least 1992, when playwright and dramaturg Tony Craze was appointed as Literary Director to the London Arts Board (LAB). Appointed to co-ordinate projects facilitating new writing, Craze had a modest annual budget of £20,000 to spend within the capital and held a specific brief 'to provide access to under-represented writers'.<sup>116</sup> Under the auspices of the LAB, Craze, in collaboration with writernet, instigated a number of projects and published a number of print guides directed at specific constituencies, including Asian, Black, disabled and young writers.

When New Labour came to power in 1997, 'New Writing' as a specific Arts Council category became, as Luckhurst records, 'explicitly associated with the agendas of minority politics, most obviously perhaps with ethnic minorities'.<sup>117</sup> Following the shake-up of British public institutions engendered by the MacPherson report in 1999, in 2001 the Arts Council published the Eclipse Report, an investigation into institutional racism within British theatre. 'Cultural diversity', accompanied by audience outreach and development, became key criteria within cultural policy during this period, emerging as statutory considerations for theatres in receipt of public monies. New writing recommended itself as a viable strategy for the democratization of theatre, and in 2002 the Eclipse Writers' Lab was founded at Nottingham Playhouse.<sup>118</sup> A number of companies representing specific ethnic communities, including NITRO, Talawa, Tamasha, Kali, and Yellow Earth, adopted new writing as a core activity of their artistic programme, and a number of producing theatres in areas with substantial ethnic

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<sup>116</sup> Tony Craze, 'A reflection', report compiled on the provision of new writing initiatives for London Arts Board (1999?), np. Report provided by Tony Craze.

<sup>117</sup> Luckhurst, *Revolution*, p. 209.

<sup>118</sup> See Sarah Dickenson, *New Writing Landscape* (New Playwrights' Trust, 2004). np.

populations began to host specific writers' groups for black or Asian writers. Playwright Kwame Kwei-Armah:

The Blair government [...] made sure that Arts Council funding was linked to inclusion. I think there's not a black writer, certainly that I know of, that didn't benefit from that. It meant that the major houses went out and made sure they had policies to find these black writers, to make theatre as inclusive as it could be.<sup>119</sup>

Whilst a movement of genuine social significance, I would like to argue that the translation into practice of a concerted focus upon diversity often threw into relief some of the engrained biases of a 'New Writing industry' predicated upon tropes of vitality, originality and, most importantly in this respect, *authenticity*. The targeted search for playwrights from culturally or, specifically, ethnically diverse backgrounds was from the outset accompanied by a desire, both artistic and economic, to broaden and diversify theatres' audience bases; as early as 1993, Arts Council statements on New Writing were noting its success in attracting 'New Audiences'.<sup>120</sup> The assumption that new writers would write from and about their own life experience meant that, in practice, working with black, Asian or Chinese playwrights carried the expectation, crudely speaking, that these individuals would write about black, Asian or Chinese subject matter. This, in turn, would appeal, via targeted marketing, to black, Asian or Chinese audiences.

Regarding a playwright primarily as a 'witness to their lived experience, their observation, their imagination',<sup>121</sup> however, creates a complex and highly dubious situation in which ethnic labels are perceived to function as a kind of stamp of authority, of authenticity. It could be argued, moreover, that the New Writing industry's desire for

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<sup>119</sup> Kwame Kwei-Armah, presentation at 'How Was It For Us? British Theatre Under Blair', British Theatre Conference, Writers' Guild of Great Britain, London, 9 December 2007. Audio transcribed by Jacqueline Bolton.

<sup>120</sup> See Arts Council of Great Britain, *Annual Report and Accounts* (1993), p. 14.

<sup>121</sup> Whybrow, 19<sup>th</sup> November 2007.

originality and, specifically, *novelty*, meant that the more ‘exotic’ a playwright’s lived experience, the more interest his or her ‘testimony’ could be expected to generate:

[If] a theatre gets into the habit of looking for voices which are ‘authentic’, a report from a particular world, then you are not looking at [playwrights] first and foremost as artists. [You’re] saying, ‘it’s not particularly imaginative or adventurous or daring or innovative, but I’ve never seen a play about a third generation Estonian mini-cab office in Shepherd’s Bush before.’<sup>122</sup>

For Ashmeed Sohoje, former New Writing Manager at Theatre Royal Stratford East, such ‘habits’ on the part of theatres have engendered:

a lot of black and Asian writing [which] is about navel-gazing. And it will be, until as a black or Asian writer you’re allowed to write about yourself in the context of a wider community. [It should be] about having a body of work and having different stories told and being able to tell stories in a different way.<sup>123</sup>

Black and Asian playwrights who succeeded in ‘breaking through’ onto main stages during the 1990s and 2000s have reported a consequent pressure to become a ‘representative voice’ for his or her ‘community’, as playwright Tanika Gupta, speaking in 2007 at ‘How Was It For Us? British Theatre Under Blair’, testifies:

I often get asked to write plays about Bollywood, about Muslim girls and jihad; there is this obsession with writing about 7/7 bombers. They’re all really important plays to be writing but I, as a playwright, can’t write all those plays and I, as a writer, don’t necessarily have the knowledge, the expertise or even the will to write all those plays. [The] word ‘Bollywood’ actually sends shivers down my spine.<sup>124</sup>

At the same conference, playwright Kwame Kwei-Armah echoed the sentiments of Gupta:

A lot of black writers went, ‘great, white people will allow us to talk about that [‘black experience’], so let’s write about that’. [Then] that

<sup>122</sup> Whybrow, 19<sup>th</sup> November 2007.

<sup>123</sup> Sohoje, 6<sup>th</sup> September 2006.

<sup>124</sup> Tanika Gupta, presentation at ‘How Was it for Us?’

door closes and you go ‘ok, what else can we write about that will be accepted?’ And actually you find that there aren’t very many other topics that you’re allowed to write about’.<sup>125</sup> I

Interest in the ‘alternative’ cultural experiences of ethnically diverse playwrights has, moreover, rarely been accompanied by an interest in non-Western aesthetic forms which significantly depart from what Tony Craze has described as a ‘white-schooled dramaturgical system’.<sup>126</sup> Kwei-Armah again:

We are very tribal when it comes to our acceptance of narratives. How do I create a narrative that white audiences feel they want to see? [You can] create a dual narrative: so that white audiences go ‘there’s a white character that I recognise, great, I’ll see it through their lens’. If you wish to not do that then you have to create narratives that [...] allow us to find another way in. So, *Elmina’s Kitchen*<sup>127</sup> was a play that was set in the underclass of Hackney. Gun crime was something that we were hearing about so we were able to access that [...] I knew very clearly that if I wanted to talk about some of the things I wished to talk about, I would have to put it in a context that somehow could bypass tribalism. And what constraints does that put on us, on writers who want to talk about other things?<sup>128</sup>

The division of (ethnographical) content (voice?) and (Westernized) form (technique?) encloses lived experience in a ‘Trojan Horse’ dramaturgy which, it is hoped, may appeal to ‘black’ and ‘white’ audiences alike.<sup>129</sup> To judge a play as an ‘authentic’ depiction of a social reality, however, is to authorize an ‘agreed-upon reality’ as well as to validate signifying strategies which presume to allow direct, unmediated access to ‘how it is’. The contradiction at the heart of English producing cultures is that the just recognitions of an agreed-upon reality which designate a play as authentic (or not) are still decided by a predominantly white theatrical establishment with a tendency to exploit media hype (‘gun crime in Hackney’). As Ashmeed Sohoye puts it, ‘every black

<sup>125</sup> Kwei-Armah, presentation at ‘How Was It For Us?’

<sup>126</sup> Tony Craze, ‘A reflection’, report compiled on the provision of new writing initiatives for London Arts Board (199?), np. Report provided by Tony Craze.

<sup>127</sup> Premiered at the National Theatre, May 2003.

<sup>128</sup> Kwei-Armah, presentation at ‘How Was It For Us?’

<sup>129</sup> *ibid.*



or Asian play comes through a white filter. At some stage there would have had to have been at least one [white person] saying “yeah, *that’s* what the black community are really thinking about””.<sup>130</sup> Christopher Roderiguez articulates the frustration:

What I don’t see as a black person in the United Kingdom is a whole bunch of stories that *I find* represent the people or the community that I come from. So there are stories onstage but [...] the narrative of it is very small. Those stories are reflected through a prism of how someone else wants to see it, not reflected through a prism [where] I am really considered as the audience. So I don’t learn something about my own community based on stories that are presented to me.<sup>131</sup>

Programmes focused on developing writing from underrepresented groups have proliferated over the past two decades, yet practitioners continue to point to a shortfall between development and production which exceeds the constraints of limited slots for new writing.<sup>132</sup> As playwright Winsome Pinnock has observed:

The theatre is director-led, and it is a director’s passionate response to a play that determines whether or not it will be produced. Because there are so few black directors with permanent placements at theatres, plays by black playwrights are often just not picked up because there is no one to respond to their subject matter’.<sup>133</sup>

Whilst New Writing in the 1990s was packaged as an effective means by which to represent diverse communities onstage, the discrepancy between development and production opportunities evidenced a failure to engage diverse practitioners at senior levels of theatre management. Whilst a targeted search for culturally diverse playwrights has succeeded in diversifying audience bases at some producing theatres, this has not yet been accompanied by a far-reaching diversification of the directors and

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<sup>130</sup> Sohoye, 6<sup>th</sup> September 2006.

<sup>131</sup> Roderiguez, 6<sup>th</sup> July 2006. For a recent rehearsal of some of these criticisms and reservations surrounding black theatre, see Lindsay Johns, ‘Black theatre is blighted by its ghetto mentality’, *London Evening Standard*, 9<sup>th</sup> February 2010. <<http://www.thisislondon.co.uk/standard/article-23803660-black-theatre-is-blighted-by-its-ghetto-mentality.do>> [Accessed 20<sup>th</sup> May 2011].

<sup>132</sup> This was an issue raised at ‘All Together Now? British Theatre after Multiculturalism’, a conference organized by the British Theatre Consortium, Warwick Art Centre, 13-14 June, 2009.

<sup>133</sup> Winsome Pinnock, ‘Breaking Down the Door’, in *Theatre in a Cool Climate*, eds. Vera Gottlieb and Colin Chambers (Oxford: Amber Lane Press, 1999), pp. 27-38 (p. 34).

producers who determine the artistic programmes of mid- to large-scale producing theatres and companies.

In response to a prevailing lack of ethnic diversity within producing structures, in 2005 the West Midlands branch of the Arts Council created a specific brief for a fixed-term Associate Producer to be appointed at the Birmingham Rep – a position the title of which was originally to be ‘Dramaturg’. Amanda Roberts, formerly Artistic Director of Derby Dance Centre, was appointed to ‘address the lack of independent African-Caribbean/Asian producers in the region’, and oversee the ‘developing, commissioning and producing [of] new text-based theatre, with a specific remit around culturally diverse artists and communities’.<sup>134</sup> Whilst Roberts’s position was formally located within the theatre’s literary department, part of her acknowledged function was to support this department in a diversification of its artistic practice:

My framework [for] developing text-based theatre is actually looking at where text sits within the development of new work. Text is the base, but to varying levels: how is that text used? How is that text developed? How is that new work created? I come from quite a cross-art form perspective in terms of looking at film, at dance, at movement, at pure theatre in a straight sort of narrative way. I suppose that’s the thing: how text sits within essentially inter-disciplinary work. So it’s working with writers but not just approaching it from a ‘here’s a treatment, go on and write it’ perspective [...] We could spend all day just commissioning work that comes through our door, but is that necessarily the best work?<sup>135</sup>

Robert’s post came with a budget of £160,000, two-thirds of which was to be ‘deliberately invest[ed] in new work, new commissions, new developments, co-productions, or productions’.<sup>136</sup> Roberts was clear that the future development of new work with culturally diverse artists would require a parallel engagement with art-forms and arenas other than play-based texts and studio spaces:

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<sup>134</sup> Amanda Roberts, unpublished interview with Jacqueline Bolton, 4<sup>th</sup> August 2006.

<sup>135</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>136</sup> *ibid.*

A script may come from a writer that doesn't necessarily work in a conventional play-based way. That's why there's an imbalance in terms of culturally diverse work coming through [...] Development cultures largely judge everything by a script. People who do that can dismiss and discount quite a lot of work [...] What platforms are there for work that comes from a specific community which [does] not really [hold] a Western perception of theatre?<sup>137</sup>

At the time of our conversation, ten months into her contract, Roberts had recently collaborated with regional writers' agency SCRIPT, and performance poetry organisation Apples and Snakes, on a week-long residency for regional writers which encouraged theatrical meeting points between spoken word and devising-led processes. Roberts had also led a joint commission with the music development agency Punch, co-ordinating a series of workshops led by musician and DJ Charlie Dark which teamed eighteen Grime<sup>138</sup> lyricists with a writer, a spoken word artist and a movement artist, 'just to push their boundaries of how they can write, what they're writing about and what it can mean':

Out of the [original] sixty that came for workshops, none of them had been to the Rep before [...] Out of the eighteen that went through the course of workshops, there's probably three that have got potential in terms of writing scripts [and] there's probably three that are going to be part of a spoken word project. And there's five of them that are starting to say to me, 'well, theatre-wise, where can we go?' [...] Other theatres and venues are hosting nights where [Grime artists] get to spit [but] what we're trying to do is say 'yeah, that's fine, but there's also something more theatrical [there] that would actually work within theatre'.<sup>139</sup>

In distinction to earlier new writing initiatives which specifically targeted black and Asian *playwrights*, driving Robert's strategic collaborations with organizations such as Tribal Soul (a producing company in Leeds concerned with representations of the African Diaspora) and Ulfah Arts (a Birmingham community-based organization that

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<sup>137</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>138</sup> Grime is a genre of urban music with roots in UK garage, dancehall and hip hop.

<sup>139</sup> *ibid.*

works solely with Muslim women) was the perceived need to evaluate how emerging (artistic, ethnic) communities might collaborate across different cultural forms and disciplines: ‘communities aren’t fixed anymore, they’re migrant. [We] have to be aware [of this] because perhaps our formal, “let’s just commission a script from existing writers” model will become outdated. In twenty years time, what’s the model going to be then?’<sup>140</sup>

### 1.5. Literary management at the end of the 2000s

Whilst the specialized dramaturgical support offered to playwrights by literary departments during the 1990s and 2000s increased access to stages and promoted method and rigour in the writing of new plays, what has perhaps been lacking from development cultures is the time and space to develop a complementary culture of critical self-reflection upon these methods, vocabularies and contexts. Literary management as a ‘growth sector’ within the industry has occurred with relatively little shared discussion between theatres and companies.<sup>141</sup> Despite an increase in conferences and symposia dedicated to discussions of dramaturgy and literary management, in 2006, for example, Caroline Jester could maintain that literary managers were still

very isolated in what they’re doing [...] It would be good if we had more of an understanding of what [our] practices are, but I think that’s maybe to do with workload as well: most literary departments are overworked, so you haven’t actually got the time to find out what’s going on in other places. But it would be great if there was that time, and I mean proper time, not a couple-of-hours-forum where you go around and say what you’re doing, because that becomes competitive as well. What you’d [want to] find out is *why* you’re doing it, *how* you’re doing it, what works and doesn’t work.<sup>142</sup>

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<sup>140</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>141</sup> Paul Sirett testifies to a growth in literary management appointments during the 1990s. ‘When I started there were probably about half a dozen literary manager jobs in the country [...] half a dozen is probably a generous estimate and I think they were just about all in London. But certainly by the time I’d finished working as a literary manager in [2004], the annual Writers’ Guild get-together for literary managers consisted of about 34 practitioners’. 17<sup>th</sup> October 2006.

<sup>142</sup> Jester, 1<sup>st</sup> August 2006.

The ad-hoc, ‘purely pragmatic’ development of literary management cultures has resulted in a vast array of functions conflated under one title. Dependant upon the size and artistic direction of a theatre or company, a literary manager may draft funding applications; liaise with agents; photocopy rehearsal scripts; write contracts; host post-show discussions; attend readings, performances, conferences and workshops nationally and internationally; work in tandem with an education department; lead community outreach projects; instigate working relationships with national and, increasingly, international theatres, companies and agencies; cast actors for readings; translate or adapt foreign work, or any or all of the above in addition to the ‘core work’ of sourcing, developing and commissioning writers.

Crucially, however, the rapid expansion of development cultures over the past two decades has not everywhere impacted upon processes of rehearsal and production within mainstream theatre cultures. Before literary management established itself as a professional tier within theatre, the process of working with a writer on a new play-text was largely the preserve of directors. If literary managers and dramaturgs are more familiar figures in the landscape of English theatre today, the necessity of their position is not entirely uncontested by playwrights and directors who believe that such figures unhelpfully interfere with a ‘direct link’ between ‘creator’ and ‘interpreter’.<sup>143</sup> Understanding dramaturgical development as simply working on (editing, restructuring, re-drafting) a play-text to ensure its stage-worthiness, many directors argue that dramaturgs are simply replicating an already existing skill set. Those who work dramaturgically with writers, however, argue that there exists a distinct difference between the perspective of a director and the perspective of a dramaturg. As Ashmeed

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<sup>143</sup> Christopher Roderiguez’s statement that ‘the play is [the writer’s] vehicle because they created it; the director is the interpretative part, they have to interpret what was done, and they shouldn’t cross over’ is an orthodox view held within English mainstream theatre, as Chapter Three shall explore.

Sohoye puts it, whilst dramaturgs express a commitment to the playwright and her process, directors are ‘thinking about the production [they can make with this play]. They are putting down the manuscript for their production’.<sup>144</sup> Playwright, director and dramaturg, Richard Shannon, echoes Sohoye’s view:

Directorial support is more pragmatic, it’s problem solving, it’s not to do necessarily with allowing the play to be itself most completely. Because as a director you’ve got a hundred and one other constraints, the length of the piece, type of audience, etc. As a director the moment you get a script you’re already seeing it on the stage, you’re already finding solutions, probably suggesting cuts.<sup>145</sup>

There is no guarantee that a director will accept a script as a ‘final version’, in spite of the work invested by a playwright and literary manager during a development process. Paul Sirett’s cynicism – ‘you start working with the writer and you get that play into the best shape you can [...] then you pass it to a director who says this character’s crap, this bit doesn’t work [and] the play is the wrong way round’<sup>146</sup> – is matched by the candidness of Jeanie O’Hare: ‘I’ve occasionally given a script that I’m really pleased with to a director who I know is going to fuck it up. And that sometimes robs you of the satisfaction of your job’.<sup>147</sup> The influence wielded by directors within rehearsal rooms is of particular concern, perhaps, for a New Writing culture predicated principally upon younger playwrights who may lack the confidence or experience to argue their case against an experienced director; indeed, some practitioners point to this power imbalance in order to suggest the desirability of a mediatory figure between playwright and director. O’Hare:

I think it’s important to have someone who does protect the vision of the writer [...] There are directors who just want to fix [the play], and sometimes they’ll fix it in a way that distorts what the writer’s trying to say. So it is important to have someone who understands what the

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<sup>144</sup> Sohoye, 6<sup>th</sup> September 2006.

<sup>145</sup> Richard Shannon, unpublished interview with Jacqueline Bolton, 8<sup>th</sup> September 2006.

<sup>146</sup> Sirett, 17<sup>th</sup> October 2006.

<sup>147</sup> O’Hare, 17<sup>th</sup> October 2006.

writer's vision is and can articulate and protect that in the directing process.<sup>148</sup>

For Nina Steiger, a key aspect of her role is to provide playwrights with more rehearsal experience – ‘even for a short thing, a ten minute play, a monologue’ - in order to encourage a responsiveness to the contributions of other theatre-makers:

Because where a lot of our writers fall down is that they're not good at talking to actors and directors and they don't understand [that] actually that's what theatre is: it's not writing the perfect script, it's getting a play ready for an audience. And I want to enable writers to be their most strong and articulate and coherent in the rehearsal room. Not necessarily at the laptop.<sup>149</sup>

Alex Chisholm concurs, suggesting that there is a responsibility to

get teams together as soon as possible and let them grow together [...] I'm there to bring people together and to try to enable them to work. And that starts with making the right choices of people to work together and trying to facilitate their working together.<sup>150</sup>

The importance of an individual dedicated to facilitating the work of others is echoed by Ben Payne, who regarded his function at the Birmingham Rep as ‘a curating sort of role’.<sup>151</sup> In this model, the literary manager jettisons any sense of ‘ownership’ over a particular work in favour of creating the right conditions for a play to be successfully developed and produced. For a literary manager to create these conditions, however, s/he must possess a status within the institution which individuals have historically found elusive. As Payne attests:

[As Literary Manager] you need to be able to have the resources and the power to actually get work onstage. The problem can often be that the literary manager is just a script rejection system, and they're not really linked to programming at all. [There needs to be a] basic principle of

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<sup>148</sup> O'Hare, 17<sup>th</sup> October 2006.

<sup>149</sup> Steiger, 6<sup>th</sup> July 2006.

<sup>150</sup> Chisholm, 4<sup>th</sup> July 2006.

<sup>151</sup> Payne, 4<sup>th</sup> August 2006.

saying this person is [...] part of a group whose job is to collectively define the artistic policy and programme.<sup>152</sup>

For a small new writing theatre such as the Bush, or the Finborough, which cannot routinely afford to commission plays which the theatre does not then produce, the commissioning and development work of a literary manager often directly translates to what goes onstage. At larger organizations where new play development constitutes only one strand of the theatre's artistic activity, however, the literary manager can find herself excluded from key decision-making processes. Alex Chisholm's experience at West Yorkshire Playhouse is not unique amongst literary managers:

There are some frustrations, which I think are inevitable, when essentially you are one person in one department within a building. You have to keep fighting your corner, you have to keep making sure that your voice is heard and your work is seen. The biggest satisfaction is seeing the work from the very beginning: you see it through and you've managed it and got it on. When that goes wrong - and it goes wrong sometimes because of structural or political reasons within the building - when you get it to a certain point and it gets taken out of your hands, or gets blocked, that can be really frustrating. Because you've put in an enormous amount of work into getting the play to a certain point and then for it to be mis-done, or misunderstood or not taken seriously, it's really exasperating.<sup>153</sup>

Chisholm was appointed Literary Manager at West Yorkshire Playhouse in 2001, a post which was initially funded by BBC Northern Exposure.<sup>154</sup> This was a scheme launched in five regional centres - Liverpool, Manchester, Bradford, Leeds and Newcastle – to provide funding for a wide range of training opportunities and platforms for new writing across stage, radio, television and film. With a ring-fenced budget of £24,000, West Yorkshire Playhouse created a specialist post and Chisholm was appointed as the

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<sup>152</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>153</sup> Chisholm, 4<sup>th</sup> July 2006. See also Ashmeed Sohoje: 'One thing I know is you can only be responsible for the things that you're responsible for. There are things that I won't be able to change and that's alright, I have to come to terms with it and let it go [...] I think this frustration is widely shared, which is why I'm not scared or ashamed to share it'.

<sup>154</sup> BBC Northern Exposure also funded another fixed-term Literary Manager post, held by Bally Johal at Asian Talent.



theatre's first official Literary Manager. Whilst her position was initially conceived as fixed-term, Chisholm proved a key resource and contact point for writers across the Yorkshire region and in 2003 her contract at West Yorkshire Playhouse was made permanent.<sup>155</sup> Chisholm's appointment was, in effect, grafted on to the existing producing structures of West Yorkshire Playhouse by an external funding source; a situation which perhaps partly accounts for Chisholm's stated sense of isolation ('one person in one department within a building'). Chisholm has since been promoted to Associate Director, Literary, a title which advertises (and, rightly reflects) a more integral function within the theatre.

The circumstances in which literary management positions are created are key to the subsequent status and influence held by a literary manager within a producing theatre or company. Suzanne Bell, for example, was appointed Literary Manager at Liverpool Playhouse and Everyman Theatres (jointly run by the Liverpool Merseyside Theatre Trust since 1999) 'in the wake of a decision by the theatres' Board of Directors, the Arts Council of England and Liverpool City Council to commit to new writing at both local and national levels'.<sup>156</sup> Bell's post was sanctioned by these authorities even before an Artistic Director had been appointed to the theatres (Gemma Bodinetz did not assume the role until 2003). Talking to me in 2007, Bell articulated a model of literary management which departs from the less progressive aspects of previous practice:

Beyond choosing a play, we choose a writer. We say, 'this is a long term development for you [...] we want to nurture *you*, we want to support *you*.' So nine times out of ten, if we produce a writer's work we then also re-commission them. And then re-commission them again.

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<sup>155</sup> The *Yorkshire New Writing Review*, a report commissioned in 2003 by Yorkshire Playwrights with support from Arts Council England, records that Alex Chisholm was singled out by playwrights and colleagues from inside and outside the region as providing one of the most useful support services for new writing. See *Yorkshire New Writing Review*, eds. Andrew Loretto and Jenny Wilson, (Yorkshire Playwrights, 2003).

<sup>156</sup> Luckhurst, *Revolution*, p. 239.

[We] are not just looking for a play. We're looking to give a home to writers.<sup>157</sup>

Whilst Bell's approach is by no means unique – Alex Chisholm at West Yorkshire Playhouse has pursued a similar model over the same time period – the presence, and success, of new writing within the Liverpool theatres' programming is noteworthy:

In a two-year period we have produced ten plays all by Liverpool writers. We've seen a 45% audience increase in the past two years and we have an above average audience loyalty for new writing in terms of the UK average.<sup>158</sup>

Over the past two decades, it has become increasingly typical for large-scale regional producing theatres to fragment artistic and administrative responsibility across a number of specialized departments (see Chapter Four). Bell's explanation for the success of new writing at the Playhouse and Everyman, however, suggests more integrated and coherent organizational structures. Paying special tribute to the marketing department – 'they do a fantastic job' – Bell stresses the importance of communication within the company:

We have company wide script meetings which anyone can come to. So if there's a script that's being thought of for production we'll put it in a script meeting and people can vote yes or no. You'll get the cleaners, the box office staff, the front of house staff, the stage door receptionist, the maintenance man, the marketing, finance, all reading this script and creatively, artistically, investing in the work we do. So if someone from marketing, from box office, from front of house, whatever, if they say, 'produce this play', then they've put their stamp on it and they're behind it. And it means that everyone works full pelt for the work that we do.<sup>159</sup>

Whilst subscribing to a writer-centred model of development – 'I fight for the writer, I defend the writer' – Bell also demonstrates an awareness of current limitations and broader perspectives on the development of new writing:

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<sup>157</sup> Suzanne Bell, unpublished interview with Jacqueline Bolton, 2<sup>nd</sup> March 2007.

<sup>158</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>159</sup> *ibid.*

I think that [new] writing needs to respond to a changing theatrical landscape and a more interdisciplinary theatrical landscape. Certainly that is something that we are supporting [...] I think there's a want to explore interdisciplinary practice: non-text-based practice, site-specific practice, devised, promenade... and that's something we discuss with our writers on a daily basis.<sup>160</sup>

The unique position of literary managers and dramaturgs within the theatre industry – committed to new writing but at one remove from *authorship* or *ownership* of that work – suggests itself to me as an ideal platform from which to advocate and curate new models of collaboration between writers and other theatre artists. Future research into dramaturgy and literary management might investigate how to create these conditions of experiment within building-based theatres, and whether, furthermore, opportunities to pursue alternative models of writer development might be greater in the regions than the concentrated, competitive ecology of the capital.

In 2003, for example, Frauke Franz was appointed as a part-time Dramaturg to run Playgrounding at Polka Theatre, London, an annual scheme to develop new plays or writers new to children's theatre.<sup>161</sup> Working with the theatre's then Literary Manager, Richard Shannon, Franz sought to introduce ways of working that 'might give the writers a chance to experience the theatrical process during the writing process, to embrace physicality and visual images'.<sup>162</sup> Observing Playgrounding's final week of preparation for its showcase in April 2007, however, I witnessed workshop/rehearsal processes which did not significantly alter from the writer-centred, script-led models I had encountered at West Yorkshire Playhouse and other producing theatres. Speaking to Shannon during Playgrounding's 2006/2007 cycle, he explained that the theatre was

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<sup>160</sup> *ibid.* One recent illustration of the Playhouse and Everyman's willingness to explore interdisciplinary practice is *Anthology* (2010), where Leeds-based collective Slung Low collaborated with Everyman writers to develop seven promenade pieces performed in and around the Everyman's site on Hope Street.

<sup>161</sup> Franz originally trained as a dramaturg in Germany.

<sup>162</sup> Frauke Franz, qtd. Turner and Behrndt, *Dramaturgy and Performance*, p. 141.

radically alter[ing] the focus this year. Instead of offering writers a set palate of opportunities, like a session with a puppeteer, a musician, etc., we're taking the script as the starting point. The writer, working with Frauke or myself, then requests a certain input which [they believe to be] appropriate. So we're focusing much more on the needs of the text as it develops [...] What was happening before was that the writers, because they'd done a puppetry session and this and that session, felt that that [theatre language] *had* to be in the play.<sup>163</sup>

A one-day development workshop with actors and directors did not take place until six weeks before the end of the programme; each play was then given only two days of rehearsal before a semi-staged reading of the play was presented to audiences at Polka Theatre. What I observed at Polka was a stated desire for greater 'theatricality' frustrated by development structures which unfortunately failed – through a lack of time, resources and, I would argue, *vision* on the part of the relatively novice writers – to productively integrate diverse disciplines within a shared process of theatre-making.

As the following two chapters shall explore, the facility with which mainstream structures of production marginalize and repress modes of theatre-making which contest writer-centred, script-led processes should not be underestimated. Another example of this might be provided by the experience of dramaturg and literary manager Ruth Little. Before appointed as Literary Manager at the Royal Court, Little was Dramaturg (though more often referred to as Artistic Associate) at the Young Vic. Speaking with Turner and Behrndt in 2007, she described her work with writers engaged in collaborative creation, as opposed to solitary composition:

We are now regularly making work which takes the dramatic script as a 'theatrical score'; where the playwright participates alongside director, designer, composer, choreographer, puppeteer, performer, drawing on live resources in action to produce a text [...] This 'convergent' theatre-making [...] is shifting dramaturgical practice away from linear, strictly causal models towards a recognition of the

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<sup>163</sup> Shannon, 8<sup>th</sup> September 2006.

play as a living system, subject to complex and subtle environmental forces and feedback from within the play and beyond it (in its relationship with its audiences).<sup>164</sup>

Speaking to me at the end of 2007, when she had only recently joined the Royal Court, Little reiterated that she'd 'never felt comfortable with the literary critical models of play analysis':

I see plays in performance as living organisms, as organic systems [...] it's something that I've started to talk about a lot with playwrights and in particular with choreographers who understand dynamics [...] the Court has been incredibly successful in promoting that view of the playwright as the rock solid core of the piece. But now I think even the Court is having to try to put a few levers under that and lift it up, because the weight of it is perhaps too heavy.<sup>165</sup>

I do not think it unfair to observe, however, that Little's (cautiously) optimistic vision for the theatre, her desire to explore the kind of work that takes place 'in the margins between different art forms',<sup>166</sup> did not discernibly impact upon the plays developed by the Royal Court during her two years there. Neither, I would suggest, is it inaccurate to observe that her successor, Chris Campbell (formerly of the National Theatre's literary department), currently brings to the Royal Court a knowledge of and expertise in the writer-centred, script-led processes historically favoured by mainstream cultures.

## 1.6 Conclusion

Within mainstream producing cultures, dramaturgical practice is currently identified with the writer-centred development of new plays by new or emerging playwrights. Processes of script development which take place *before* and *apart from* rehearsal and production processes can, however, work to unhelpfully isolate playwrights from the creative processes of a team of practitioners, an isolation that further instantiates a

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<sup>164</sup> Little, qtd. Turner and Behrndt, *Dramaturgy and Performance*, p. 194.

<sup>165</sup> Little, 14<sup>th</sup> November 2007.

<sup>166</sup> *ibid.*

traditional separation of play-text and production. If writers and literary managers are to respond to interdisciplinary approaches to theatre-making, more inclusive approaches to dramaturgical development need to be recognized and advocated.

It is a condition of theatre, as German playwright and academic Darko Suvin has written, that its ‘performers are immediately and directly present to the audience, with whom they communicate in a *feedback relationship that determines the framework of theatre dramaturgy*’.<sup>167</sup> Suvin’s point is that the ‘liveness’ of theatre is an active element of a play’s dramaturgy; that the play-text should anticipate and exploit a *symbiotic* relationship with performance. Moving beyond an ‘industrial dramaturgy’ focused upon ‘fixing the script’,<sup>168</sup> dramaturgical analyses today might instead be re-directed towards the relationships engendered between stage and auditorium during the ‘event of theatre’.

What sorts of development processes might produce a play-text which is less a destination to arrive at *in* performance than a point of departure *for* performance? As Chapter Two shall explore, more inclusive notions of both ‘text’ and ‘authorship’ might suggest fresh approaches to the development of new theatre writing.

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<sup>167</sup> Darko Suvin, *Brecht and Beyond* (Brighton: Harvester, 1983), p. 3.

<sup>168</sup> Peter Eckersall, ‘Towards an Expanded Dramaturgical Practice: A Report on ‘The Dramaturgy and Cultural Intervention Project’, *Theatre Research International*, 31.3 (2006), pp. 283-297 (p. 287).

## Chapter Two

### Two Cultures

During the course of the 1990s, dramaturgical practice became identified with the writer-centred development of new plays by new or emerging playwrights, a script-led process which reinforced a model of theatre production dominant in England since the 1830s.<sup>1</sup> Looking beyond the structures of mainstream producing models, however, the ongoing evolution of artists and companies engaged in physical theatre, live art, site-specific and intermedial performance has contemporaneously produced a need for ‘creative specialists who keep track of the complicated flow of ideas, technologies and forms associated with such work’.<sup>2</sup> An alternative trajectory of dramaturgical practice can be traced in the work of practitioners who operate outside of writer-led models of theatre, and particularly in the increasing number of collaborations between dramaturgs and ensembles who collaboratively devise work, such as David Williams with Lone Twin, Steven Canny with Complicite, Frauke Franz with Primitive Science/Fake Productions, Ruth Ben-Tovim with Vincent Dance Theatre, Louise Mari with Shunt and Synne Behrndt with Fevered Sleep, amongst others.<sup>3</sup>

In order to attempt a fuller account of dramaturgical practice within English theatre, as well as interrogate the presuppositions which currently structure mainstream cultures, this chapter will discuss this alternative trajectory of dramaturgy within devising processes with reference to what practitioners commonly refer to as a ‘two cultures’ of

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<sup>1</sup> See Jacky Bratton, *New Readings in Theatre History*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), esp. pp. 67-91.

<sup>2</sup> Peter Eckersall, ‘Towards an Expanded Dramaturgical Practice: A Report on ‘The Dramaturgy and Cultural Intervention Project’, *Theatre Research International*, 31.3 (2006), pp. 283-297 (p. 283). Although this article is based on dramaturgical practice as it has developed in Australia since the 1960s, there are some striking parallels with English theatre cultures. See esp. pp. 285-287.

<sup>3</sup> For detailed analyses of the contributions and interventions that dramaturgs can make within devising processes see ‘The Dramaturg and Devising: Shaping a Dramaturgy’ in *Dramaturgy and Performance*, Cathy Turner and Synne Behrndt (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), pp.168-184.

theatre-making in England. It will suggest that the existence of ‘dual dramaturgical tracks’ within contemporary discourse evidences a profound schism in the theory and practice of theatre, affecting both professional and academic contexts; a schism known in shorthand as ‘text-based theatre’ versus ‘non-text-based performance’. The attempt to discern what exactly is at stake for practitioners when these terms are invoked will be informed by a consideration of German-language theatre where such a division between theatre-making processes does not obtain. This chapter will argue that dramaturgical analyses based upon more inclusive notions of ‘text’, as well as more nuanced approaches to ‘authorship’, might aid English theatre cultures overcome a specious distinction between allegedly text-based and non-text-based processes, advancing a holistic approach to theatre-making which invigorates new theatre writing and performance. It proposes that common depictions of dramaturgy as a ‘bridge’ – between theory and practice, between text and performance, between knowledge and instinct – could be utilized, in this instance, to trace a series of pathways between these ‘two cultures’; pathways guided not by the predicates of a work but by the operations of a total performance text produced and received within the ‘collectively breathed air’ of a theatre event.<sup>4</sup>

## 2.1 Dramaturgy: two cultures

It might be argued that dramaturgical analyses concerning the content, structure and anticipated reception of a work have always been integral to devising processes.<sup>5</sup> In *Dramaturgy and Performance* (2008), however, Turner and Behrndt note that a designated individual who brings ‘compositional skills, but does not “author”, or

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<sup>4</sup> Hans-Thies Lehmann, *Postdramatic Theatre*, trans. Karen Jürs-Munby, (London: Routledge, 2006), p. 17.

<sup>5</sup> See Turner and Behrndt, *Dramaturgy and Performance*, p. 169, and David Williams, ‘Geographies of Requiredness: Notes on the Dramaturg in Collaborative Devising’, *Contemporary Theatre Review*, 20.2 (2010), pp. 197-202 (pp. 198).



necessarily even write any part of the performance work' has in recent years become increasingly recognized 'as an explicit function and not as something that happens informally or as an adjunct to other roles within the process'.<sup>6</sup> Indeed, Turner and Behrndt argue persuasively that 'it is perhaps in devising that we see one of the clearest manifestations of the usefulness of the dramaturg's role':

Devising, in the strictest sense of the word, implies a process where "no script – neither written play text nor performance score – exists prior to the work's creation". In truth, many (perhaps most) companies do use some form of script, verbal text or score [...] however, we could suggest that devising implies that the dramaturgy of the work is not defined before the work commences [...] the compositional challenge is to define and shape the material from the living process and from the dialogue between the people involved.<sup>7</sup>

In processes 'where the dramaturgy of the work is not defined before the work commences' the written text may be displaced from its familiar position as the central interpretative driver for audiences and performers. When a play is not regarded as the generative matrix for performance, then the interplay of theatrical elements – the total *performance* text of which verbal text is an element – may be afforded greater significance in the construction of narrative or communicated meaning. David Williams, writing about his collaborations with Lone Twin, echoes Turner and Behrndt's description of dramaturgy within devising processes:

Dramaturgy is about the rhythmmed assemblage of settings, people, texts and things. It is concerned with the composing and orchestration of events for and in particular contexts, tracking the implications of and connective relations between materials, and shaping them to find effective forms. In devising [...] dramaturgy is uncovered, worked and articulated *through the processes of making and rehearsing*, rather than being pre-determined.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Turner and Behrndt, *Dramaturgy and Performance*, p. 11; p. 169.

<sup>7</sup> Turner and Behrndt, *Dramaturgy and Performance*, p. 170. Turner and Behrndt are quoting from Deirdre Heddon and Jane Milling, *Devising Performance: A Critical History* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006).

<sup>8</sup> Williams, 'Geographies of Requiredness', pp. 197-198. Emphasis in original.

For Williams, the dramaturg is a ‘companion who is both utterly complicit and questioning’, someone who:

...draws attention to the different elements in circulation and at play, and to what they ‘do’: space, light, bodies, language, sounds, objects, ideas, energies, etc. She endeavours to help bring them into configurations that do what is wanted, required or imagined. So the dramaturg’s work is facilitative, combinative, (re)connective, integrative; it endeavours to bring fragments into relations and to find [...] their ‘living connections’.<sup>9</sup>

Turner and Behrndt’s statement in *Dramaturgy and Performance*, that ‘it remains to be seen whether UK practice will continue to develop the role of the dramaturg in “new writing” or whether there will, in fact, be an even greater interest in the dramaturg’s function within devised work’, neatly captures the prevailing bifurcation of contemporary dramaturgical discourse within English theatre cultures.<sup>10</sup> Whilst mainstream theatres currently construct the dramaturg as a playwright’s mentor, diverse practices within smaller-scale companies promote with almost equal vigour the dramaturg as co-creator of an ensemble-led performance, defining and refining the materials of a multidisciplinary composition as it emerges through play and experiment. Tracing the use of the terms ‘dramaturgy’ and ‘dramaturg’ through industry symposia held at theatres across England during the late 1990s and early 2000s, it is, in fact, possible to identify dual dramaturgical tracks, drawn up in response to sets of institutional and aesthetic assumptions regarding the distinctiveness (and, often, implied superiority) of these two differing approaches to theatre-making.

In 1997, ‘Commissioning the Future’, a national conference organized by New Playwrights’ Trust and held at the Young Vic, brought together literary managers,

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<sup>9</sup> Williams, ‘Geographies of Requiredness’, p. 198.

<sup>10</sup> Turner and Behrndt, *Dramaturgy and Performance*, p. 168.

directors and writers to discuss the future of literary management.<sup>11</sup> The resulting report contains a single reference to dramaturgical practice beyond the UK which throws into relief the script-focused system established within English theatre cultures:

Janine Brogt's [Dramaturg at Toneelgroep Amsterdam] assertion that the position of the Literary Manager figure doesn't cover the field she works in, raises questions about the role and function of the dramaturg as facilitating and in some cases leading any processes of acculturation to new ways [of working] [...] Brogt's belief that literary managers and dramaturgs have to develop new skills in music, visual arts etc. to be able to serve theatre properly in the future, underlines the limitation of a script-focused system.<sup>12</sup>

Whilst contributions by Ruth Ben-Tovim (then Artistic Director, Louder Than Words) and Paul Sirett follow Brogt's lead in calling for experimentation with development processes applicable to non-script-led work, the report communicates a prevailing resistance to departures from a script-led model. Jonathan Meth's phrasing may be a touch 'tongue in cheek', but only, I would suggest, to gloss the ardency with which these convictions are held:

What [these non-script-led models] contest, however, is the primacy of the writer [...] [Models of collaborative working present] issues of authorship and indeed ego at the heart of any move away from a script-focused system. For this would announce that the writer is no longer the sole custodian of the shamanic function – mediating prophetically between the divine and the tribe.<sup>13</sup>

Similar conclusions are drawn in the report resulting from two Arts Council symposia which took place at the Birmingham Rep and Oval House, London, in June and December 2005. Entitled 'Dramaturgy: The What, The Why, The How' and 'Dramatrix' respectively, these symposia were organized in order to 'contribute to a

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<sup>11</sup> *Commissioning the Future*, ed. Jonathan Meth (New Playwrights' Trust, 1997), p. 1.

<sup>12</sup> Meth, *Commissioning the Future*, p. 4.

<sup>13</sup> Meth, *Commissioning the Future*, p. 8.

national critical debate on dramaturgy'.<sup>14</sup> Despite the stated aim 'to explore and make more widely known different processes used', the context supplied by the conferences' report focuses exclusively upon dramaturgical practice as it has evolved through new writing cultures:

...the new play, in 1956, assumed a previously unarticulated importance – how such productions were created, and how similar future plays might be written and produced were questions which naturally arose. Dramaturgical practice in British theatre began to be articulated.

Designed to 'demystify' dramaturgy for 'those considered the de facto, primary creators of British theatre – the writers', the report achieves clarification only by subsuming unfamiliar concepts into familiar and favoured practices of theatre-making:

- script dramaturgy processes prior to rehearsal
- script dramaturgy processes during rehearsal
- script dramaturgy processes applied to groups of writers
- production dramaturgy processes

For all three of the 'script dramaturgy' discussions recorded in the report, the role of the dramaturg is equated with the facilitation of a new play development process; the testimonies of practitioners rehearse issues of best practice concerning productive relations between a dramaturg, writer, director and script. The infamous insularity of English theatre also features: 'Production dramaturgy processes' are identified as following 'a Continental model' and, accordingly, sidelined: 'presentations [on production dramaturgy processes] *focused on the stage of script dramaturgy* conducted by a production dramaturge, rather than the overall process of production dramaturgy' (my emphasis). The report's summary of presentations given by Frauke Franz (Dramaturg, Polka Theatre, London) and Hanna Slattne (Dramaturg, Tinderbox Theatre, Belfast), practitioners who hold extensive experience across a range of theatre-making

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<sup>14</sup> Tony Craze, *Dramaturgy: The symposia held in Birmingham and London*, report compiled for Arts Council England, (2006), np. All further references in relation to these two symposia are taken from this report.

processes, focuses only on their work with writers. German dramaturg Thomas Frank's work with devising companies, live artists and the 'commissioning of productions (not plays)' is briefly mentioned towards the end of the report but within the 'critical issues' identified from 'production dramaturgy processes', it is the 'identification of elements of process which may be transposable to script dramaturgy' which are foregrounded. Despite the symposia's aim to 'enhance overall understanding of dramaturgy practice' [sic], the concluding remarks tendentiously separate 'script dramaturgy' from 'production dramaturgy', summarily dismissing the latter:

The practice of script dramaturgy offers a processing tool enabling delivery in crafted theatrical form of the individual voice [...] The kernel of script development processes is the rigorous testing of material in development, the provocation to a writer to reveal the heart of their impulse; the questioning of appropriateness of structures, character development and plot; and in production dramaturgy, similar dialogues will pertain with director and other disciplines [sic].

Whilst acknowledging that 'there *were* calls to know more about how dramaturgy operates in non text work, indeed, in devised work', the report is resolute in its opposition to the perceived threat such processes pose to plays and playwrights: 'any future initiative must engage writers working in current practice today [...] It is likely then, that any immediate future activity [...] will be spearheaded by a writer sensitive spirit'.

An alternative trajectory of dramaturgical discourse, though one just as protective of its processes, can be seen running through *Dramaturgy: A User's Guide* (1999), a special issue of the journal *Total Theatre* dedicated to articles arising from a conference held at the Central School of Speech and Drama (CSSD) to investigate 'fundamental questions about the role of the dramaturg – and of dramaturgy – in the performance-making

process'.<sup>15</sup> Taking as its focus the 'contemporary performance and visual arts practices' which 'develop, intertwine and challenge established processes', *A User's Guide* explores models of dramaturgy that are 'not limited to literary questions (still less to the post-war English practice of literary management)'.<sup>16</sup> The collected articles repeatedly figure the dramaturg as less a 'literary expert' than a 'choreographer of the text', less the 'representative [...] of the writer in a production' than of the 'writing in the performance'.<sup>17</sup> Dramaturgy is likewise figured as a 'calculation of the impact of all dramatic effects, whether they arise from spoken text, scenography, lighting, sound or performative elements on the spectator'.<sup>18</sup> The dramaturg is located as a presence within the rehearsal room, working alongside directors, designers and performers in the orchestration of 'text' understood as the total texture of sonic, verbal, and visual signs which cohere to make a theatre event.

*A User's Guide* rightly wrests understandings of dramaturgy from an exclusive, limiting focus upon the writer-centred development of play-texts. In so doing, however, its governing framework upholds a distinction between 'traditional text-based theatre' and 'contemporary performance'.<sup>19</sup> In Dympha Callery's article, 'Theatre Mechanic', for example, the 'text-bound training which moves towards the work of the "Literary Manager"' is deemed 'inappropriate for modern concepts of devising in physical and visual theatre' for the reason that it 'excludes scenic, lighting and sound design as primary elements'.<sup>20</sup> Whilst sympathetic to the view expressed here by Callery, I wonder at the usefulness of the distinction between a 'text-bound training' and 'concepts of devising in physical and visual theatre', as though the dramaturgical

<sup>15</sup> Anthony Dean, preface to *Dramaturgy: A User's Guide*, eds. Total Theatre and Central School of Speech and Drama (London: CSSD and Total Theatre, 1999), p. 3.

<sup>16</sup> *ibid.*; Misha Twitchin, 'Aquarium Project', *A User's Guide*, pp. 4-7 (p. 6).

<sup>17</sup> Anthony Howell, 'Walrus Moustache', *A User's Guide*, pp. 22-23 (p. 22); Katalin Trencsényi, 'Under Dog', *A User's Guide*, pp. 24-25 (p. 25); Twitchin, 'Aquarium Project', *A User's Guide*, p. 7.

<sup>18</sup> Dympha Callery, 'Theatre Mechanic', *A User's Guide*, pp. 28-29 (p. 28).

<sup>19</sup> Dean, preface, *A User's Guide*, p. 3.

<sup>20</sup> Callery, 'Theatre Mechanic', p. 28.

structures of the former had nothing to offer those of the latter. If we understand dramaturgy as processes of analysis concerned with the composition of a work, “the architecture of a theatrical event”,<sup>21</sup> then Callery’s distinction between processes of dramaturgical analysis seems unnecessary. The problem to which Callery points, perhaps, is not that the skills of a literary manager or dramaturg working with writers have, by definition, no application within devising processes, but rather that the structures of literary management which evolved during the 1990s have been neither resourced nor, in some cases, predisposed to stage an encounter between differing traditions and working practices.

The dual dramaturgical tracks evidenced by these four conferences are a reflection of a profound distinction within English producing cultures today. A ‘two cultures’ of theatre-making observes and articulates a tangible friction - sometimes creative, though typically obstructive - between practitioners who primarily engage with the production of individually-authored play-texts – ‘text-based theatre’ – and practitioners who primarily engage with the collaborative devising of non-script-led works – ‘non-text-based performance’. To draw such a distinction is, of course, to invite its deconstruction: Beth Hoffman, for instance, has provocatively suggested that the perceived boundary between ‘something like the dramatic and literary’ and ‘something like the live and visual’ becomes ‘more and more rhetorically overdetermined even as it becomes less obvious to locate in actual performance practice’.<sup>22</sup> Despite scepticism regarding the ontological bases of such a distinction within performance practices, however, Hoffman nevertheless acknowledges the discursive affect of ‘two areas of performance practice that have liked to think of themselves both as incommensurable

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<sup>21</sup> Adam Versényi, qtd. Turner and Behrndt, *Dramaturgy and Performance*, p. 18.

<sup>22</sup> Beth Hoffman, ‘Radicalism and the Theatre in Genealogies of Live Art’, *Performance Research*, 14.1 (2009), pp. 95-105 (p. 97).

and as competing for a kind of cultural authority within the same territory'.<sup>23</sup> Indeed, formal and informal conversations with practitioners conducted during the course of this research support the suggestion that it is not only possible to talk of, but imperative to address, the disabling impact of a 'two cultures' divide within English theatre-making today.

## 2.2 English theatre and a 'two cultures divide'

The origins of a two cultures divide within English theatre may be traced to the emergence, across a range of fields including performance/live art, political theatre and community arts, of ensemble devising practices during the 1960s and 1970s. Deirdre Heddon and Jane Milling, in *Devising Performance: A Critical History*, suggest that the emergence of devising practices was partly a reflection of the desire of artists and performers to 'to establish collaborative companies that reflected an anti-establishment and anti-hierarchy ethos'.<sup>24</sup> As notions of 'agency' and 'representation' became increasingly politicized issues, collaborative models of practice sought to wrest processes of production 'from the grip of dominating institutions and dominant ideologies' in order to promote more complex and multiple representations via the productive ambiguities of live performance.<sup>25</sup> For example, Red Ladder (from 1968) and 7:84 (from 1971), focused on popular theatre made for a working class audience; Women's Theatre Group (founded 1973, today Sphinx Theatre Company) sought to advance a feminist theatre practice; Gay Sweatshop (from 1975) was led by issues affecting the homosexual community and Black Theatre Co-operative (founded 1979,

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<sup>23</sup> Hoffman, 'Radicalism', p. 100.

<sup>24</sup> Deirdre Heddon and Jane Milling, *Devising Performance: A Critical History* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), p. 61.

<sup>25</sup> Heddon and Milling, *Devising Performance*, p. 17.



today Nitro) sought to articulate the experiences of the black community through music and theatre.<sup>26</sup>

Ensemble devising practices initiated a challenge to the values and working practices endemic within theatre traditions centred upon the staging of dramatic texts. Arthur Sainer's description of the American experimental scene in the 1960s provides an accurate summary of the creative currents also occurring in England during the late 1960s and 1970s:

Everything came into question: the place of the performer in the theatre; the place of the audience; the function of the playwright and the usefulness of a written script; the structure of the playhouse, and later, the need for any kind of playhouse; and finally, the continued existence of theatre as a relevant force in a changing culture.<sup>27</sup>

Whilst Heddon and Milling refrain from labelling the first wave of devising groups as 'anti-literary' they do note that, in the absence of already existing models of devising, the emerging field of live art, with its experiments in happenings, installations and interdisciplinary compositions, 'offered a variety of practices and modes available for translation' into theatre-making practices.<sup>28</sup> These influences necessarily emphasized the visual potential of theatre as well as its liveness, encouraging models in which stage presence, gesture and movement were regarded as generative, rather than simply illustrative, elements of performance. A shift from regarding theatre as a primarily verbal art form towards conceiving of it as a visual one inevitably 'challenged the authority or dominance of the written text, and arguably the means then of authoring a text'.<sup>29</sup> Increasingly over the 1970s and 1980s, devising practices sought to interrogate dramatic narrative forms, interrupting the processes of meaning-making typically

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<sup>26</sup> See David Lane, *Contemporary British Drama* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2010), p. 83.

<sup>27</sup> A. Sainer, qtd. Heddon and Milling, *Devising Performance*, p. 13.

<sup>28</sup> Heddon and Milling, *Devising Performance*, p. 92.

<sup>29</sup> Heddon and Milling, *Devising Performance*, p. 64.

anticipated by the written drama and making transparent the constructed nature of representation. Heddon and Milling note that, by the 1990s, works created by means of devising were no longer categorized in listings and reviews as ‘visual performance’ but were instead referred to more simply as ‘performance’: ‘a term intended to signify’, Heddon and Milling write, ‘their difference from what might be considered more traditional, text-based theatre’.<sup>30</sup>

The separation of ‘performance’ from ‘a more traditional, text-based theatre’ finds its counterpart during this period in the academic discourses of Drama and Theatre Studies within university drama departments across England and the UK. Liz Tomlin suggests that it was ‘inevitable’, following its evolution from the curriculum of English Literature departments, that theatre studies should ‘seek to bolster its independence as a discipline’ by shifting its focus away from the forms and conventions of authored dramatic texts towards ‘collaborative practice[s] with an emphasis on the live, the physical and the visual aspects of theatre’.<sup>31</sup> Over succeeding decades, and variously influenced by the emergence of art forms such as happenings, environments and performance/live art, this ‘renewed attention to the materiality of performance’, as Karen Jürs-Munby records, was specifically equated with a ‘renewed challenge to the dominance of the text’, leading to a ‘paradigm shift in the study of theatre and to the emergence of Performance Studies as a discipline’.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Heddon and Milling, *Devising Performance*, p. 190.

<sup>31</sup> Liz Tomlin, ‘And Their Stories Fell Apart Even as I Was Telling Them’: Poststructuralist performance and the no-longer-dramatic playtext’, *Performance Research*, 14.1 (2009), pp. 57-64 (p. 57).

<sup>32</sup> Karen Jürs-Munby, introduction to *Postdramatic Theatre*, Hans-Thies Lehmann (London: Routledge, 2006, English translation. Karen Jürs-Munby), p. 4. By invoking the term ‘performance studies’ in the following account, I refer not to the New York University model of performance as an anthropological field of popular, traditional and everyday performance behaviours, but to the study and practice of the experimental or avant-garde theatre practices that emerged in the UK, Europe, Australia and North America from the 1950s onwards.

One aspect of this ‘renewed challenge to the dominance of the text’ assumed the form of questioning, breaking down or seeking to circumvent ‘the rational bases and coordinates of realist drama’ - of ‘text’ typically figured, in Michael vanden Heuvel’s suggestive phrase, in terms of a “coercive system” of Aristotelian poetics’.<sup>33</sup> Allied with the foundational structures of a well-made plot, plausible characters, coherent dialogue and transparent fourth-walls, ‘the latent ideologies inscribed in textual and realist representation’ came under scrutiny from a variety of interpretative discourses including semiotics, feminism and psychoanalysis.<sup>34</sup> No longer a catalyst for social and moral change, dramatic realist texts were deemed complicit with the ‘processes of cultural signification that create and sustain larger structures of hegemonic discourse’, lacking the capacity ‘to transvalue those practices from within’.<sup>35</sup> Set against the ‘suspect coincidences’ between dramatic theatre’s representations of reality and the ‘network of discourses [...] that the dominant culture already propose[d] and assume[d] as its reality’,<sup>36</sup> ‘performance’ was advanced as an alternative cultural strategy that could ‘displace, if only for an instant, the constellations that bind knowledge and representation together to fashion the narratives and structures that presume to describe and organize phenomena [e.g society, culture, identity] into concrete formations’.<sup>37</sup> In contradistinction to the ‘discredited’ aesthetics and politics of ‘dramatic realism’, ‘performance’, it was argued by scholars such as Josette Féral, ‘escape[d] all illusion and representation’.<sup>38</sup>

Critiques of the single-authored dramatic text were provided further philosophical ballast in the 1980s by the advent of post-structuralism, a critical discourse which

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<sup>33</sup> Michael vanden Heuvel, ‘Complementary Spaces: Realism, Realism, Performance and a New Dialogics of Theatre’ *Theatre Journal*, 44.1 (1992), pp. 47-58 (p. 49; p. 47).

<sup>34</sup> vanden Heuvel, ‘Complementary Spaces’, p. 48.

<sup>35</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>36</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>37</sup> Andrew Quick, qtd. Hoffman, ‘Radicalism and the Theatre’, p. 102.

<sup>38</sup> Josette Féral, ‘Performance and Theatricality: The Subject Demystified’, *Modern Drama*, 25.1 (1982), pp. 170-181 (p. 177).

worked to refute, in the words of Roland Barthes, ‘a single “theological” meaning’ in favour of ‘a multi-dimensional space in which a variety of writings, none of them original, blend and clash’.<sup>39</sup> Juxtaposed against the dramatic play-text’s perceived assumption of a ‘self-confirming human power over language and the material’, devised performance’s ‘erasure of the unified subject’, its ‘willingness to open up language and one’s experience to plurality, dispersal and play’ offered views of reality and representation conversant with (and, indeed, increasingly inspired by) poststructuralist thought and critique.<sup>40</sup> As the academy began to increasingly position the work of devising ensembles within a postmodern or poststructuralist framework, the individual playwright’s:

...coherent narrative or view of the world, common to the broadly realist parameters of most twentieth-century drama, was set in philosophical opposition to the multiple perspectives and fragmented narratives of ensembles such as the Wooster Group and Forced Entertainment [...] The critique of the dramatic text-based tradition implied by, or inherent within, such performance lent philosophical weight to the growing isolation of the dramatic text within contemporary theatre and performance departments in British universities.<sup>41</sup>

The influence of performance studies upon drama and theatre departments has without doubt been productive and significant; encouraging, amongst other outcomes, academic attention beyond the canon of Western drama and towards non-script-led processes situated within inclusive frameworks of culture, politics, economics and ethics. At the same time, however, the invocation of ‘performance’ as a conceptual strategy by which to ‘destabilize and decentre conventional, text-orientated drama’ has also today led to a curious dynamic within drama and theatre studies, whereby the acclamation of

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<sup>39</sup> Roland Barthes, ‘The Death of the Author’ in *Image, Music, Text* (London: Fontana Press, 1977), pp. 142-148 (p. 146).

<sup>40</sup> vanden Heuvel, ‘Complementary Spaces’, p. 51.

<sup>41</sup> Tomlin, ‘And Their Stories Fell Apart’, p. 57

ensemble devised performance seems to be ideologically calibrated to the deprecation of the individually-authored dramatic text.<sup>42</sup>

In 2007, ‘Performing Literatures’, organized by Stephen Bottoms and held at the Workshop Theatre, University of Leeds, brought together practitioners and scholars in order to address the relationships between theatre, performance, text and drama. In the special issue of *Performance Research* (2009) which arose from the conference, Bottoms notes in his Editorial that, as a member of the national peer-review panel for Drama, Dance and the Performing Arts during the UK government’s 2008 Research Assessment Exercise, he ‘encountered vast swathes of research concerned with performance and ‘non-text-based’ theatre, but comparatively speaking, very little work concerned with literary drama or playwriting’.<sup>43</sup> Bottoms’ experience was common across the panel and prompted its chair, Christopher Baugh, to draft the following passage in his summary report to the field:

The areas of theatre history, and of dramatic literature and its performance, continue to be important in some departments [...] Generally however, as a proportion of the overall research picture, the number of outputs in these areas is very considerably reduced since 2001. Conversely, over the period there has been a great increase in the range, breadth and diversity of research in experimental theatre practice and contemporary performance studies [...] At their best these approaches have generated much outstanding and world-leading research. However, in weaker submissions there is evidence that the potential of performance study has been limited by inadequate rigour, especially in terms of historicizing and contextualizing the analytical apparatus or subject matter.<sup>44</sup>

From this, Bottoms suggests that the academy’s ‘attempts to emphasize the centrality of the live performance event in our research have resulted in a situation whereby a largely

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<sup>42</sup> vanden Heuvel, ‘Complementary Spaces’, p. 49.

<sup>43</sup> Stephen Bottoms, ‘Editorial: Performing Literatures’, *Performance Research*, 14.1 (2009), pp. 1-5 (p. 2). Bottoms also notes that of the sixty or so paper proposals he received, ‘less than half a dozen of them chose the discussion of particular play-texts (or their performance) as their central focus’. *ibid.*

<sup>44</sup> Christopher Baugh, qtd. Bottoms, ‘Editorial’, p. 2.

reflexive disinterest in dramatic literature and theatre history has become the new orthodoxy'.<sup>45</sup> 'As a result', he continues, 'the academic field seems to be becoming further and further detached from the mainstream theatre industry and more and more wedded to a still-marginal field of alternative performance'.<sup>46</sup>

The fifteen essays collected in this issue of *Performance Research* in different ways call for a re-examination of certain assumptions regarding theatre and performance, testifying to a contemporary body of scholars and practitioners desiring to move beyond the restrictive labels of 'text-based-theatre' and 'non-text-based-performance'. Academia's engrained bias against 'theatre' as an institution principally committed to the production of dramatic texts, however, surfaces in Beth Hoffman's contribution, to which I have already referred, 'Radicalism and the Theatre in Genealogies of Live Art', when she argues that:

'Theatre', when bracketed to denote a particular kind of text-based, literary, proscenium-framed practice aligned with a particular formation of conservative British culture, has long stood in as the to-be-opposed or to-be-overcome in articulations of experimental, politically motivated performance work.<sup>47</sup>

Hoffman supports her case by citing Andrew Quick's delineation between the "resistant characteristic of the live" and the "representational regime of the theatre",<sup>48</sup> Baz Kershaw's argument for privileging "radical performance" against the canonized tradition of British "political theatre"<sup>49</sup> and Theodore Shank's praise of the 'multiplicity of contemporary theatrical experiment against the singularity of traditional drama'.<sup>50</sup> Bottoms, in a 2003 article for *Theatre Topics*, has also discussed the proclivity

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<sup>45</sup> Bottoms, 'Editorial', p. 2.

<sup>46</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>47</sup> Hoffman, 'Radicalism', p. 98.

<sup>48</sup> Andrew Quick, qtd. Hoffman, 'Radicalism', p. 102.

<sup>49</sup> Baz Kershaw, qtd. Hoffman, 'Radicalism', p. 99.

<sup>50</sup> Hoffman, 'Radicalism', p. 98.

of academic study to regard 'theatre' as a 'singular', internally undifferentiated practice in comparison with the hybrid and 'multiple' experiments of 'performance':

The expansion of Performance Studies over the last couple of decades seems both to have exponentially expanded the potential field of study for theatre-trained scholars, and to have contracted the field of theatre studies itself, by imposing a curiously limited and limiting definition of that which constitutes 'theatre'. All too often, theatre is now categorized as the acting out of dramatic literature in a purpose-built building, whereas performance is taken to encompass pretty much anything and everything else [...] I frequently find, in talking to colleagues who share my interest in 'contemporary performance' that my ongoing interest in plays and playwrights (i.e. in this other thing called 'theatre') seems oddly quaint.<sup>51</sup>

The bemusement of Bottoms' colleagues is indicative of a further 'two cultures' divide within the study, research, practice and production of theatre within England: a breach between the academic discourses of drama, theatre and performance studies and the professional discourses of a mainstream theatre industry still largely committed to the development and production of individually-authored dramatic play-texts. If Bottoms' colleagues are bemused by his interest in plays and playwrights, playwrights and those involved in the production of plays are positively nonplussed by the academy's predilection for devised practices.<sup>52</sup> Playwright David Edgar speaks for many theatre professionals when he states that:

the academy gives a much greater priority to devised, site-specific, performance-led work than the profession does [...] If you picked up a year's worth of *Contemporary Theatre Review* and *New Theatre Quarterly* and *Performance Studies* [sic], you'd have a rather weird view of what the British theatre is like'.<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> Stephen Bottoms, 'The Efficacy/Effeminacy Braid: Unpicking the Performance Studies/Theatre Studies Dichotomy', *Theatre Topics*, 13.2 (2003), pp. 173-188 (p. 173).

<sup>52</sup> As Malcolm Sinclair exclaimed at a recent conference organized by the British Theatre Consortium: 'Non-text-based work. Why? [...] it's like going to the Royal Ballet and saying I'll give you money for non-movement-based work!'. Sinclair's comments were received to rapturous applause. 'How Was it For Us? British Theatre Under Blair', Writers' Guild of Great Britain, London, 9<sup>th</sup> December 2007. Audio transcription by Jacqueline Bolton.

<sup>53</sup> David Edgar, unpublished interview with Jacqueline Bolton, 12<sup>th</sup> March 2008.

A founder of the Theatre Writers' Union and, as this chapter shall demonstrate, a vociferous campaigner against the 'threats' posed to playwrights by devising ensembles, Edgar's criticism might be expected. His view, however, is echoed in the concerns of many contemporary practitioners, particularly those with experience of both academic and industry sectors. In 1999, for example, Pete Brooks, co-founder of Impact Theatre, could speak ruefully of:

... a new orthodoxy abroad in the universities. The new theory is sexy and beguiling. I have taught in places where performances are called 'statements in action' – personally I prefer the word 'show'. I did a postgraduate degree and spent seven years teaching theatre; I left because I was meant to be teaching contemporary practice and I felt that I was losing touch with theatre altogether'.<sup>54</sup>

Steve Waters, playwright and Director of the MPhil in Playwriting Studies at the University of Birmingham, shares Brook's concern about a significant blind spot within drama and theatre studies:

It fascinates me, some of my colleagues, how unaware they are of the contemporary writing scene. They're up on postdramatic theatre and things like that. And, well, there's quite a lot of dramatic theatre out there still! There's more to life than Forced Entertainment, much as I admire them. But when you go to the conferences, it's always Forced Entertainment, because they fit into academic discourse much easier. So, with writing, there's a big breach there.<sup>55</sup>

There are, of course, a significant number of academics who continue to write about plays and playwrights. But even here, David Greig - a practitioner whose work has crossed the line separating 'playwrights' from 'devising ensembles' many times throughout his career – can testify to a schism between academia and professional theatre in the choice of playwrights studied:

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<sup>54</sup> Pete Brooks, interview in *On Directing: Interviews with Directors*, eds. Gabriella Giannachi and Mary Luckhurst (London: Faber and Faber, 1999), pp. 1-12 (p. 6).

<sup>55</sup> Steve Waters, unpublished interview with Jacqueline Bolton, 22<sup>nd</sup> November 2007.



I have felt for a while that academic theatre studies and the world in which I live as a professional producer of theatre have been strangely wide apart. So that people weren't writing about the things that I saw as being the main trends of what was happening. They were writing about marginal, at best, trends [...] How many essays are written about Howard Barker, how much Howard Barker was actually put on?! Sarah Kane would be the current thing. Sarah Kane studies is virtually now a branch in itself, but I don't imagine there's very much writing about David Eldridge or Anthony Neilson. There are some writers [...] who get a coagulation of theory and work about them that is almost like a snowball going down a hill. It gathers its own momentum. [But] there's an enormous amount out there being left undiscussed.<sup>56</sup>

There are two related points I wish to briefly draw out from Greig's observations. Firstly, that the choice of contemporary playwrights studied within drama and theatre studies – a non-exhaustive roll-call might include Sarah Kane, Mark Ravenhill, Martin Crimp, Caryl Churchill, Conor McPherson, Marina Carr, Martin McDonagh and, indeed, David Greig – might be guided by the extent to which the play-texts generated by these playwrights lend themselves to analyses responsive to Critical Theory, such as poststructuralism, postmodernism, feminism and/or postcolonialism. Secondly, perhaps these play-texts lend themselves to such critiques partly *because* they have been influenced, (un)consciously, by the 'possible shapes [and] trajectories by which narratives can or should be represented' which have been advanced by devised practices over previous decades.<sup>57</sup> Whilst there is not room in this chapter to develop this line of enquiry further, these suggestions begin, I believe, to query the contours of a text-based/non-text-based divide.

Returning to the trajectory of devising companies within English theatre cultures, there is little doubt that, during the course of the 1970s and 1980s, the 'hidden patronage' of the university sector – 'the provision of spaces, venues, audiences and technical support, the commissioning of residencies and workshops and the marketing, discussion and

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<sup>56</sup> David Greig, unpublished interview with Jacqueline Bolton, 24<sup>th</sup> August 2006.

<sup>57</sup> Heddon and Milling, *Devising Performance*, p. 221.

dissemination of many devising companies' performances' – supported a rapidly expanding programme of touring work, establishing what today might be regarded as a legacy of devised practice.<sup>58</sup>

Many members from various companies in the UK attended university Drama, Theatre and Performance departments, where they were introduced to the work of particular 'first generation' devising companies [...] The works of 'second generation' artists, such as Hesitate and Demonstrate, and Impact Theatre, were taught to and crossed over with the 'third generation', which included Forced Entertainment, Desperate Optimists and Dogs in Honey, who in turn influenced the 'fourth generation', such as Stan's Café, Third Angel, Uninvited Guests and Reckless Sleepers. This 'fourth generation' (along with the preceding three generation) are now 'models' taught to the next generation, who already are founding their own companies.<sup>59</sup>

The prevailing disjuncture between orthodox conceptions of theatre and theatre-making in the academy and in the industry is perhaps captured by a comment cited by Heddon and Milling in response to a 2004 questionnaire circulated to teachers of degree programmes in Theatre, Drama, Performance and Dance in the UK: 'Why would you not teach [devising]? It isn't new for goodness sake [...] it's just how people usually make theatre'.<sup>60</sup> As this and the following chapter shall demonstrate, within the producing structures of subsidized building-based producing theatres in England, this is demonstrably not the case.

### 2.3 Arts Council categories

During the 1980s, the Arts Council emerges as a significant influence upon the increasing division between playwrights and ensembles. Throughout this period, reduced Arts Council subvention forced many producing theatres to drastically reduce their production budgets. The number of shows that could be produced in-house fell,

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<sup>58</sup> Heddon and Milling, *Devising Performance*, p. 20.

<sup>59</sup> Heddon and Milling, *Devising Performance*, pp. 227-228.

<sup>60</sup> Anonymous respondent, qtd. Heddon and Milling, *Devising Performance*, p. 1.

increasing the need to co-produce with partner theatres or companies and/or to receive touring companies to fill vacant programme slots. During this period, independent artists and ensemble companies benefited from increased access to building-based theatres; during the late 1980s and early 1990s, the Arts Council increased its support of small-scale touring companies presenting “physically-based performance work”.<sup>61</sup> Increased contact between different traditions of theatre-making, however, did not, by and large, translate into a committed interest in the sharing of creative practices. According to Stella Hall, the founding Artistic Director of the Green Room Arts Centre in Manchester, ‘such was the sense of separation at the time that few theatres chose to invite experimental touring work in for [anything] other than financial reasons. It certainly wasn’t initially a passion for the work’.<sup>62</sup> Devisor, performer and director Neil Bartlett describes the theatre industry during this period as characterized by a ‘pretty absolute set of divisions between plays and formally innovative work, between building-based “theatre” and project-funded touring / arts centre / small-scale “experimental theatre”’.<sup>63</sup> Writing in the same publication as Hall and Bartlett, Tim Etchells, founder member of Forced Entertainment (whose members were graduates of the University of Exeter’s Drama Department), similarly recalls the relationship between ‘the mainstream, the literary theatre’ and the ‘live art/performance scene’ as at that time looking ‘very oppositional’.<sup>64</sup>

It might be argued that the rise in productions presented by ensemble companies at producing theatres during the 1980s and early 1990s partly *galvanized* the renewed focus upon new writing in the mid-1990s, as a decline in the production of new plays was linked to this increase in toured-in or co-produced productions. It might be further

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<sup>61</sup> See Heddon and Milling, *Devising Performance*, pp. 176-7.

<sup>62</sup> Stella Hall, ‘Hall’, *Programme Notes: Case Studies for Locating Experimental Theatre*, eds. Lois Keidan and Daniel Brine (Live Art Development Agency, 2006), pp. 46-55 (p. 52).

<sup>63</sup> Neil Bartlett, ‘Bartlett’, *Programme Notes*, pp. 36-45 (p. 40).

<sup>64</sup> Tim Etchells, ‘Etchells’ in *Programme Notes*, pp. 18-35 (p.32).

argued that the 1990s boom in New Writing, with its emphasis upon individual authors and script-led processes, served to further polarize theatre-making processes defined by the simple presence or absence of a predicated script. Liz Tomlin, for example, observes that, during the course of the 1990s, a number of London-based arts centres, such as the Battersea Arts Centre, began to establish development opportunities specifically tailored towards ensemble devising practices ‘that worked against, or outside of, the conventional rules of dramatic playwriting’.<sup>65</sup> Tomlin suggests that such centres were ‘responding to the dominance of the dramatic tradition and the hierarchical position of the written text sustained by the new writing industry’.<sup>66</sup> Accordingly, these venues ‘defined the practice they wished to develop, and ultimately programme, as “non-text-based” practice’.<sup>67</sup> Whilst recognizing the positive impact these opportunities have had upon the development of ‘new performance’, Tomlin also notes the less positive tendency for these models ‘to strengthen and uphold the binary division’ between new writing and devised practice, ‘requiring young theatre-makers to categorize themselves, for strategic development purposes, as either playwrights or non-text-based artists’.<sup>68</sup>

Writing in 1999 of the Birmingham Theatre Conference held in 1992, David Edgar contextualizes the event in terms of the ‘challenge to conventional text-based theatre’ posed by the devising practices of small-scale companies, summarizing the discussion as essentially ‘a contest between the advocates of the individually written theatre text

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<sup>65</sup> Tomlin, ‘And Their Stories Fell Apart’, p. 57.

<sup>66</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>67</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>68</sup> Tomlin, ‘And Their Stories Fell Apart’, p. 58. See also Tim Etchells interviewed in 1995: ‘There is no connection between what we do and ‘new writing’. There isn’t in this country the fluidity that there is in the US between forms. The theatre here has been very good at keeping its weird sons and daughters at bay. The literary theatre has kept its doors firmly closed’. Qtd. Ben Payne, ‘in the beginning was the word’ in *writing live: an investigation of the relationship between writing and live art*, ed. John Deeny (New Playwrights Trust, 1998), pp. 1-50 (p. 29).

[...] and the collaborative ethos of live art'.<sup>69</sup> This vocabulary of 'challenge' and 'contest' remains in evidence almost twenty years later in *Writ Large: New Writing on the English Stage 2003-2009* (2009), a report commissioned by the Arts Council in order to investigate the effectiveness of the Arts Council's initiatives in supporting new writing. *Writ Large* was researched, compiled and produced by the British Theatre Consortium (BTC), a group of playwrights and academics consisting of David Edgar, Dan Rebellato, Janelle Reinelt, Steve Waters and Julie Wilkinson. To conduct their assessment, the BTC drew up and distributed questionnaires to English building-based subsidised producing theatres as well as to new writing companies, asking for details of their programme and its box-office performance from 2003-2009. They received replies from sixty-five companies, including the National Theatre, the Royal Shakespeare Company and the Royal Court, most of the major regional reps and several touring and community theatres.<sup>70</sup>

The report's findings are illuminating. As stated in the previous chapter, between 1971 and 1986 new plays occupied an average 12% share of the repertoire of English building-based subsidized producing theatres. By the late 1980s this had dropped to 7%; between 1993 and 1997 this figure rose to 19%. Between 2003 and 2009, however, new {'individually-written, predominantly straight'}<sup>71</sup> plays made up 42% of all theatre shows presented by the theatres and companies surveyed.<sup>72</sup> Box office performance of new plays rose from 62% in 2003/4 to 69% in 2007/8 and, contrary to the belief that new plays remain 'ghettoized' in studio spaces, the report found that 'new plays [were]

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<sup>69</sup> David Edgar, ed. *State of Play: Playwrights on Playwriting* (London: Faber and Faber, 1999), p. 20.

<sup>70</sup> See British Theatre Consortium, *Writ Large: New Writing on the English Stage 2003-2009*, (2009), pp. 5-6.

<sup>71</sup> *Writ Large*, p. 8.

<sup>72</sup> *Writ Large*, p. 6; p. 53. Theatres were asked to identify every performance from a list provided: Plays; Devised work; New writing; Classical revivals (before 1850); Modern revivals (1850-1945); Post-war revivals (since 1945); Translation; Adaptation; Physical theatre; Pantomime; Music theatre; Children or young people's theatre. Theatres were encouraged to report their performances under as many of these categories as they felt appropriate. See pp. 52-53.

*evenly divided* between theatres with capacities above and below 200'.<sup>73</sup> Moreover, 'new plays are overwhelmingly watched on main stages [...] on average, across the five years of the sample, if you saw a new play, nine times out of ten, you would have seen it on a main stage'.<sup>74</sup>

The focus of *Writ Large* is ostensibly upon 'the institutions and systems in which new writing is developed and the quality, range and appeal of the new plays written over this period'.<sup>75</sup> Underpinning its analysis, however, is a systematic comparison of the success of new writing against 'the fortunes' of devised work.<sup>76</sup> *Writ Large* makes a point of reporting that in terms of numbers of productions, the percentage of plays (new or otherwise) to devised works stood at 81% to 19%.<sup>77</sup> In terms of the numbers of actual performances, plays made up 93% of the repertoire compared to 7% of devised work.<sup>78</sup> No definition of what constitutes a 'devised' work is provided, but the report does evidence a slightly more inclusive notion of 'new writing' when it acknowledges that 'new writing' (in distinction to 'new plays') 'embraces new adaptations and translations, and some devised work'.<sup>79</sup> The report records that 'productions of devised work represent 19% of all new writing productions',<sup>80</sup> only to later use this information to point out that:

...devising shows with a 'new writing' component are on average 2.4 percentage points more successful at the box office than devised shows without a 'new writing' component. The difference is slight but it might suggest that audiences still respond more readily to work with a recognisably 'writerly' quality.<sup>81</sup>

<sup>73</sup> *Writ Large*, p. 6; p. 58. Emphasis in original.

<sup>74</sup> *Writ Large*, p. 58. Emphasis in original.

<sup>75</sup> *Writ Large*, p. 17.

<sup>76</sup> *Writ Large*, p. 61.

<sup>77</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>78</sup> *Writ Large*, p. 62.

<sup>79</sup> *Writ Large*, p. 6. Whilst 'new plays' made up 42% of the repertoire, 'new writing' made up 47%.

<sup>80</sup> *Writ Large*, p. 7.

<sup>81</sup> *Writ Large*, p. 63. The report does not explain what it means by a 'new writing component'; I presume it means devising processes inclusive of a writer.

The report concludes from this that ‘plays in general and new plays in particular, continue to form the bedrock of the repertoire across the country [...] There are no real signs that devised work, despite its artistic merits, has broken through to a wider audience. It remains the taste of a very small fraction of the theatregoing audience’.<sup>82</sup>

Despite the apparent conclusiveness of this statement, however, the ‘threat’ of devising practices ghosts the argument for new writing throughout *Writ Large*. The reader is constantly reminded that devised work and physical theatre remain ‘a minority component’ of the repertoire; that ‘there is only a small following for devised work or projects in which the primary mover is not the writer’; that ‘playwrights feel additionally threatened when companies choose to present new plays which are devised or improvised by actors’; that a ‘growing concern about companies who chose not to use writers, but to develop their work through improvisation and other devising techniques’ has been present since the 1980s; that there are ‘concerns that performance-based, devised work [is] siphoning money and favour away from the development and production of traditional plays’; and that playwrights interviewed by BTC ‘disavowed the approach they note in companies such as Kneehigh where the author is part of a team, credited with “text” and not deemed primary’.<sup>83</sup> In frank contradiction to the foregoing, a couple of sops are thrown: devised works and new plays ‘are neither mutually exclusive nor exhaustive categories, and it should not be inferred that they have a competing or contrary status’; ‘devising and new writing are overlapping categories and many contemporary playwrights will pass more or less easily between the single-authored play and collaborative devised work during their career’.<sup>84</sup>

Nevertheless, the report’s conclusion drives its point home:

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<sup>82</sup> *Writ Large*, p. 67.

<sup>83</sup> *Writ Large*, p. 8; p. 11; p. 25; p. 26; p. 47; p. 92.

<sup>84</sup> *Writ Large*, p. 61; p. 63. Consortium members Dan Rebellato and Steve Waters are examples of just such playwrights.

The dramatic success of new writing in the English theatre gives the lie to the idea that the individually-written play is dying or dead [...] We do not see evidence for *a substantial shift in taste* towards devised theatre or work in which the writer is not the initiating artist.<sup>85</sup>

In attributing the success of a particular art form simply to a matter of ‘taste’, *Writ Large* displays, I believe, a certain coyness, a reluctance to explain some of the material reasons behind the success of new plays during this decade. Millman and Myers, in *Theatre Assessment Findings: data and consultation* (2009), reveal that 83% of the Arts Council’s £25 million uplift in 2001 went to producing organizations and companies and observe that ‘almost all regional producing theatres [i.e. theatres historically associated with the production of dramatic play-texts] received substantial increases’.<sup>86</sup> As *Writ Large* notes, however, in addition to this uplift across the sector there were two other significant sources of funding directed specifically at new writing during the 2000s. In 2003/4, the Arts Council’s Drama Department’s Managed Funds gave £270,000 to new writing initiatives, with an additional £100,000 distributed in subsequent years. From 2003/4 to 2007/8, new writing was also the largest single category for investment from Grants for the Arts (to which individuals as well as companies can apply), receiving nearly £12 million in total.<sup>87</sup> This figure was nearly ‘double the funds allocated to young people’s theatre, more than double the funds given for contemporary plays, street arts or “contemporary theatre” and more than three times the funds devoted to theatre in education, puppetry or youth theatre’.<sup>88</sup> *Writ Large* presents its many statistical comparisons between devised theatre and new writing as though it were possible for these categories to be compared like-for-like, when in fact the sub-category of New Writing was, during this period, in receipt of exponentially

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<sup>85</sup> *Writ Large*, p. 124. My emphasis.

<sup>86</sup> Anne Millman and Jodi Myers, *Theatre Assessment Findings: data and consultation* (Arts Council England, 2009), p. 22.

<sup>87</sup> *Writ Large*, p. 43.

<sup>88</sup> *ibid.*



higher amounts of ‘investment’. Furthermore, whilst *Writ Large* argues its case for the Arts Council’s continued support of new writing on the basis of its ‘self-evident’ success with theatres and audiences, it is strangely quiet regarding the box office performance of ‘physical theatre’ which, whilst remaining the smallest category of productions, nevertheless achieved ‘68% business over the six years’ studied by the report.<sup>89</sup>

Complementary to the research and production of *Writ Large* was the commissioning of Emma Dunton, Roger Nelson and Hetty Shand to assess new writing within the context of non-building-based, small-scale companies.<sup>90</sup> A fuller and more nuanced understanding of the positioning of devised and collaborative practice in relation to new writing within English theatre would necessitate a comparison of these two documents. All I wish to do here, however, is highlight from *Writ Large* a) the minimal presence that devised works occupy within the repertoire of middle to large-scale producing companies and b) the felt antipathy towards devised practice captured in the research and writing of the report. The explicit rhetoric of challenge and contestation evidenced throughout this document prompts me to ask: What, exactly, is at stake in the ‘text-based’/‘non-text-based’ divide?

## 2.4 The stakes?

One obvious answer is funding. As Heddon and Milling record, no devising company in the UK received funding until 1968, but by the mid-2000s Arts Council England was revenue-funding thirty companies which devised work either as a sole working practice

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<sup>89</sup> *Writ Large*, p. 7.

<sup>90</sup> Emma Dunton, Roger Nelson and Hetty Shand, *New writing in theatre: an assessment of new writing within smaller scale theatres in England*, (2009).

or as part of their activity.<sup>91</sup> In what has become an increasingly fractured<sup>92</sup> – and contracting - funding system, practitioners, as Ben Payne attests, can feel ‘obliged to concentrate on defending what’s left of our patches: our various artistic “heritages” of form and practice’.<sup>93</sup> In monetary terms, the small-scale activities of devising companies have historically received far less support than the play-text-oriented activities of producing theatres and companies.<sup>94</sup> The especial artistic merit vested in the individually-authored play-text thus continues to spike the ‘text-based’ versus ‘non-text-based’ debate with a sense of privilege and ‘something to defend’ on one side, and marginalization and ‘something to overcome’ on the other. David Edgar, writing for the *Guardian* in 2007 in response to the Arts Council’s proposal to reorganize funding priorities in favour of ‘experimental practice and interdisciplinary practice, circus and street arts’, exemplifies this tendency towards ‘aggressive dichotomizing’:<sup>95</sup>

For almost all of its history, theatre has been made from texts telling stories. So why does the Arts Council want to prioritise non-text-based theatre doing something else? There is (as yet) no statistical evidence that non-narrative, performance-based devised work is increasing in the repertoire (or proving a particular box office success) [...] By contrast, the evidence for the power and purchase of the individually written, narrative-based theatre text is overwhelming.<sup>96</sup>

Writing for a non-specialist audience, Edgar perhaps deliberately simplifies the terms of the argument. Nevertheless, this short paragraph evidences how, from the perspective of mainstream theatre cultures, the phrases ‘text-based’ and ‘non-text-based’ signify not

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<sup>91</sup> Heddon and Milling, *Devising Performance*, p. 21.

<sup>92</sup> See Rose English: ‘theatre just keeps fragmenting itself into smaller and more meaninglessly named fractions of itself (eg. visual theatre, physical theatre, live performance, new writing etc. as if theatre hasn’t always had all those aspects in it...) What it all is, of course, is **theatre** – that ancient, vibrant and still viable word – just endlessly diverse and mutable sorts of theatre’. Qtd. Payne, ‘in the beginning was the word’, p. 17.

<sup>93</sup> Payne, ‘in the beginning was the word’, p.17.

<sup>94</sup> Alison Gagen, Arts Council Officer West Midlands, unpublished interview with Jacqueline Bolton, 6<sup>th</sup> October 2007.

<sup>95</sup> vanden Heuvel, ‘Complementary Spaces’, p. 51.

<sup>96</sup> David Edgar, ‘Theatre audiences deserve the next Ravenhill and Kane’, *Guardian*, 13 December 2007 <<http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2007/dec/13/comment.theatrenews>> [accessed 21 January 2008].

only the ‘foundations’ of a work but also its purposes, its dramaturgies and its status as ‘theatre’. According to this account, ‘text-based’ theatre ‘tells stories’: ‘non-text-based’ theatre ‘does something else’ which is explicitly ‘non-narrative’ and, by implication, not *really* ‘theatre’ (theatre is an institution constituted by ‘texts telling stories’). Text-based, narrative-led theatre is the preserve of an individual playwright’s singular vision, whilst non-text-based, non-narrative work is the sole province of ensembles: the logic is that playwrights don’t do non-narrative, ensembles don’t do narrative.

As any critical account of devising will stress, however, any simple binary opposition of devising to script work is not supported by a survey of the actual practices of companies who choose to devise. Many artists and companies see no contradiction between working on pre-existing texts and devising work: very few devising companies perform without words and, of those that do, most still wish to emphasize the narrative clarity of their work.<sup>97</sup> As Carl Lavery has recently noted, ‘text – or quite simply language – is a core element in [contemporary] performance, the motor that, more often than not, drives the show’, citing as proof ‘the role of stories and story-telling in the work of UK companies and artists such as Forced Entertainment, Tim Etchells, Graeme Miller, Mike Pearson and Lone Twin’ – to which we could also add big hitters such as Kneehigh and Improbable, as well as emerging physical theatre companies such as Theatre ad Infinitum and Theatre Tmesis.<sup>98</sup>

I would like to suggest that, running alongside a funding culture that pits devised performance against the dramatic canon in ‘a zero-sum struggle for survival’,<sup>99</sup> Edgar’s

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<sup>97</sup> See Heddon and Milling, *Devising Performance*, p. 3-4.

<sup>98</sup> Carl Lavery, ‘Is There a Text in This Performance?’, *Performance Research*, 14.1 (2009), pp. 37-45 (p. 37). With reference to Theatre ad Infinitum I am thinking of their award-winning productions of *The Odyssey* and *The Big Smoke* (see <http://www.theatreadinfinitum.co.uk/>); with reference to Theatre Tmesis I am thinking of *The Dreadful Hours* (see <http://www.tmesistheatre.com/>).

<sup>99</sup> Hoffman, ‘Radicalism’, p. 99.

account indicates a network of presuppositions, which can be observed in the academy as well as the industry, which function aesthetically, ideologically and institutionally to perpetuate a hostile opposition between play-texts and devised performance. I suggest that this network of presuppositions is founded upon, and supported by, ideas regarding the negotiation of authorship, the status and function of narrative and, related to these concerns, anxieties surrounding language ('text') and intentionality in performance. I realise that in highlighting this particular nexus of concerns I am reiterating some of the original impulses behind the emergence of devising practices in the 1960s, whilst also overlooking a number of others (devising as a model of 'participatory democracy', for example, or as a means of circumventing the commodification of art).<sup>100</sup> I draw attention to these concerns, however, because I believe that they have taken on a particular significance since the 1980s, as the advent of Critical Theory has informed not only academic engagements with performance practice but also the varied practices of devised performance (emerging from drama and theatre departments) itself.<sup>101</sup> I wish to propose that what is signalled by the distinction 'text-based/non-text-based' theatre is palpably *not* the simple 'presence or absence' of a 'predicatory script', nor the basic 'acceptance or rejection' of 'narrative'. I want to suggest instead that the contestation centres upon the perceived deployment, interrogation, or erasure of a dramatic teleology conventionally signalled, in performance as well as in writing, by dramaturgical devices such as psychologized characters, quotidian dialogue, a cause-and-effect narrative and world representation; a teleology typically authenticated with reference to an individual writing-subject – 'the "person" of the Author'.<sup>102</sup>

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<sup>100</sup> See Heddon and Milling, *Devising Performance*, p. 95; p. 93.

<sup>101</sup> See Heddon and Milling, *Devising Performance*, pp. 190-1.

<sup>102</sup> Barthes, 'The Death of the Author', p. 143.

As dramaturg and playwright David Lane has noted, the dramatic strategies most prevalent within contemporary processes of new play development continue to take their lead from the realm of psychological realism:

...where phrases such as character, narrative, language, location and plot carry particular associations. These phrases are part of a broader understanding of theatre where stories are linear, characters are three-dimensional; dramatic action, and therefore plot structure, has a basis in causality; spoken text takes the form of conversations between characters; and locations are identifiable as part of the material world we recognize in everyday life.<sup>103</sup>

These functional markers of the dramatic are expected to constitute, through language, a ‘world “complete in itself”’<sup>104</sup> - a fiction typically rooted in positivistic experiences of the world, social realities that may be verified empirically. Revered as the originary source of the play’s language and meaning, a play is ‘finished’ when it is ‘textually resolved’ by a playwright presumed to command the creative hierarchy, including, implicitly, the audience’s (emotional) journey through the narrative. Jack Bradley, former Literary Manager of the National Theatre, seems to suggest this when he proposes that:

...there is an arc of a journey within the course of a [production]. And what you do is you take the audience by the hand and you walk them through. And the one thing you mustn’t do, like Peter Pan and Wendy, is let go and let them fall. And that’s good dramaturgy.<sup>105</sup>

Within mainstream producing cultures, a robust dramatic teleology constructed and governed by adeptly wrought language lies at the heart of ‘good’ playwriting; in the pairing of script and performance it is the former that occupies the dominant position. Expressing his concerns in 2004 about ‘a strong anti-text movement in the British theatre’, Michael Billington sketched out the establishment’s default position:

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<sup>103</sup> David Lane, ‘A Dramaturg’s perspective: Looking to the future of script development’, *Studies in Theatre and Performance*, 30.1 (2010), pp. 127-142 (p. 128).

<sup>104</sup> Tomlin, ‘And Their Stories Fell Apart’, p. 61.

<sup>105</sup> Jack Bradley, unpublished interview with Jacqueline Bolton, 7<sup>th</sup> September 2006.

...‘text is inherently rich, stimulating, ambiguous, full of ideas, full of moral conflict. That to me is what theatre finally comes down to and that’s when theatre begins to work on your mind and your imagination. [...] What I want is a theatre that is going to upset me, disturb me, change my view of the world. And in the end I think that happens with language.’<sup>106</sup>

In this scenario, it follows that ‘good’ directing is one that faithfully translates into performance what playwright David Hare refers to as the play’s ‘intended area of meaning’.<sup>107</sup> Characters are mapped one-to-one onto actors; design alludes to location(s) (and, perhaps, ‘mood’); dialogue is ‘mined for clues’ as to character motivation. If the playwright is living not a word will be altered without consultation; if the playwright is dead, directors will justify their decisions by invoking the authority of the playwright. The figure of the playwright remains a significant source of preparation, consultation and legitimization: when Freshwater observes that ‘it cannot be said the radical reassessment of the concept of the author delivered by critical theory in the 1970s and 1980s has had any discernible impact upon the majority of British theatre reviewers’, the force of her proposition is not lost if we extend this observation to include many, if not most, of the directors, playwrights and actors working within mainstream theatre cultures today (see Chapter Three).<sup>108</sup>

A dramatic teleology, the logos of language and the posited antecedence of an ‘Author’ who ‘exists before [her work], thinks, suffers, lives for it’ are, however, precisely the reality effects which poststructuralist practices of performance have sought to critique and undermine.<sup>109</sup> Drawing upon semiotic approaches to theatre and performance developed in Europe during the mid-twentieth century, in which ‘text’ came to be

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<sup>106</sup> Michael Billington, qtd. Helen Freshwater, ‘Physical Theatre: Complicite and the Question of Authority’ in *A Concise Companion to Contemporary British and Irish Drama* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2008), pp. 171-199 (p. 179).

<sup>107</sup> David Hare, *Obedience, Struggle and Revolt* (London: Faber and Faber, 2005) p. 106.

<sup>108</sup> Freshwater, ‘Physical Theatre’, p. 180.

<sup>109</sup> Barthes, ‘Death of the Author’, p. 145.

defined as ‘the entire set of structured verbal and/or non-verbal signs/sentences meant to be read, interpreted and experienced by a [spectator]’, devising practices have attempted to escape the dominant logic of logos defined by language by dispersing and displacing narrative and even character structures onto performative elements of theatre – space, light, music, bodies, rhythm, image etc. – and inviting these elements to assume an autarkical relation to the total ‘performance text’.<sup>110</sup> Suspicious of the drama’s use of ‘pretence’ in its representations, alternative performance practices have instead sought to present ‘the reality of a sequence of actions’ in attempts to demystify the ‘illusion of an event’.<sup>111</sup> Deconstructionist critiques of language and origins, furthermore, have made ‘explicitly visible the gap between the speaker and the spoken’.<sup>112</sup> Words do not ‘belong’ to the speaker but are always already borrowed from elsewhere: ‘it is language which speaks, not the author’.<sup>113</sup> As Tomlin elucidates:

Words can no longer be taken to be an ‘expression of the speaker’ originating in the thought of the speaker, nor an externalization through which the inner self can be ‘known’. Identity, in a poststructuralist discourse, is something that is consciously constructed out of the texts that are already present in the world; it is not something that exists prior to, or is expressed through, its own original voice’.<sup>114</sup>

Tim Etchells, speaking of his work with Forced Entertainment, captures this sense:

For us, in the work and out of it, this notion of self has often seemed after all to be simply a collection of texts, quotations, strategic and accidental speakings, not a coherent thing, much less the single-minded author of some text. What I am, in this text (now) at least, is no more (and no less) than the meeting point of the language that flows into and flows out of me...<sup>115</sup>

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<sup>110</sup> Eli Rozik, qtd. Lavery, ‘Is there a text in this performance?’, p. 37.

<sup>111</sup> Anthony Howell, *The Analysis of Performance Art: A Guide to Its Theory and Practice* (London: Routledge, 1999), p. 103.

<sup>112</sup> Tomlin, ‘And Their Stories Fell Apart’, p. 60.

<sup>113</sup> Barthes, ‘Death of the Author’, p. 143; p. 146.

<sup>114</sup> Tomlin, ‘And Their Stories Fell Apart’, p. 60.

<sup>115</sup> Tim Etchells, *Certain Fragments: Contemporary Performance and Forced Entertainment* (London: Routledge, 1999), p. 101-2.

Applying the idea of a ‘gap’ between speaker and spoken to not only the performative codes of individual performances but also the broader cultural and ideological context of theatrical production, we can see how the discursive practices of New Writing stand in opposition to those of much contemporary devised performance. Etchells captures this disparity between implicitly contending ideologies when he discusses his experiences with teaching writing to students:

I’ve been teaching some writing students in the last year or so [1995-6] and they all seem quite hung up on the idea that they should write from themselves and they should have something like a voice that’s their’s [sic]. And I feel very much as though one doesn’t have a voice particularly... I don’t believe there is anything authentic in what I write or how I speak, and whenever I write or speak, it’s really a collection of different voices speaking. You adopt strategies linguistically to deal with situations and you quote unconsciously or not from other voices... Other voices speak through you. You use them, they speak through you.<sup>116</sup>

In his 1999 publication, *Certain Fragments*, Etchells returned again to these thoughts:

When provoked into discussing where their writing ‘comes from’, some of my students will invoke the notion of a voice. To be looked for intently and nurtured when found, this voice lives in them somewhere, deep down inside. When they find it they want to write in it. This voice is authentic in some way [...] It is knotty, connected to the body. It comes *from them*.<sup>117</sup>

In contrast, the intentionality implicitly associated with the individual playwright has been deliberately avoided by practices which articulate a ‘desire to resist choosing or fixing any central idea prior to [...] making the work’.<sup>118</sup> Suppressing dominance and authorial power in favour of dispersal and difference, devised practices have signaled a preference for ‘semiotic openness’, a plurality of non-verbal ‘texts’ which allows the

<sup>116</sup> Tim Etchells, qtd. Ben Payne, ‘In the beginning was the word’, p. 24.

<sup>117</sup> Etchells, *Certain Fragments*, p. 101.

<sup>118</sup> Heddon and Milling, *Devising Performance*, p. 195.



audience to ‘impose their own “interpretative schema” on the work’ offered.<sup>119</sup> ‘With indeterminacy and contingent relations’ inscribed between spectators and performance, devised works have sought to encourage spectators ‘to make their own choices, and to be cognizant of that *activity*, or the politics and ethics of the choices they actually make, the meanings they attribute’.<sup>120</sup> Whilst *not* arguing that ‘a single author could not, definitively, produce such performances’, Heddon and Milling nevertheless conclude in *Devising Performance* that:

collaborative devising processes match contemporary critical concerns, making it the ideal means to explore and embody those concerns in practice [...] a group devising process is more likely to engender a performance that has multiple perspectives, that does not promote one, authoritative, ‘version’ or interpretation, and that may reflect the complexities of contemporary experiences and the variety of narratives that constantly intersect with, inform, and in very real ways, construct our lives.<sup>121</sup>

It is my contention that ‘playwriting’ and ‘devising’ are terms which have been made to function within English theatre cultures as metaphors, or epistemes, ‘that conceptualize and carve out possibilities of certain ways of being and knowing while excluding others’.<sup>122</sup> That this severance between the operations of play-texts and devised works is rhetorically determined rather than ontologically justified can, I believe, be illustrated through comparison with the contemporary producing cultures of German-language theatre.

## 2.5 German theatre cultures: unpicking the ‘weave of performance’

Speaking in 2007 with dramaturgs Anke Roeder and Tilman Raabke, and in 2008 with dramaturg Anne Paffenholz, German practitioners of three different generations, I was

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<sup>119</sup> Baz Kershaw, ‘The politics of performance in a postmodern age’ in *Analysing Performance*, ed. Patrick Campbell (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1996), pp. 133-152 (p. 149).

<sup>120</sup> Heddon and Milling, *Devising Performance*, p. 206.

<sup>121</sup> Heddon and Milling, *Devising Performance*, p. 192.

<sup>122</sup> van Heuvel, ‘Complementary Spaces’, p. 50-51.

surprised to find that the term ‘devised theatre’ was not recognised as a distinct theatre-making process and had no direct translation in the German language. Whether in the main houses or within the *Freie Theater*, the artistic predicates of a production did not designate it as belonging to a particular camp: the phrases ‘text-based’ or ‘non-text-based’ held no currency.<sup>123</sup> Indeed, Peter Boenisch, in his recent article ‘Towards a Theatre of Encounter and Experience’ (2010) notes that the degree of ‘ossified antagonism’ in the UK between ‘supposedly innovative experiments with bodies and images on the one hand, and text-based theatre on the other’ is ‘unknown to other European theatre cultures’.<sup>124</sup> Sidelineing this ‘unproductive antagonism’, here and in his 2008 article ‘Exposing the classics’, Boenisch turns his attention to recent examples of German theatre practice which instead emphasize ‘some of the (all too often neglected, even denied) spaces where the experimentation with new forms, media and theatre languages meets the *mise-en-scene* of classic [dramatic] texts’.<sup>125</sup>

Citing the productions of contemporary German directors such as Luk Perceval, Jossi Weiler, Frank Castorf and, in particular, Michael Thalheimer, Boenisch examines contemporary approaches to play-texts which seek to transform the drama of the written text ‘into an experiential economy generated through physicalization, spatialization and rhythmization’.<sup>126</sup> In apparent contrast to the iconoclasm of a previous generation of German directors, Michael Thalheimer in particular has emphasized a desire ‘to be “true to the play” in every way’.<sup>127</sup> Contrary to approaches in the English mainstream, however, Thalheimer maintains that this ‘hasn’t got anything to do with being “true to

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<sup>123</sup> Anke Roeder, unpublished interview with Jacqueline Bolton, 24<sup>th</sup> July 2007; Tilman Raabke, unpublished interview with Jacqueline Bolton, 24<sup>th</sup> July 2007; Anne Paffenholz, unpublished interview with Jacqueline Bolton, 2<sup>nd</sup> July 2008.

<sup>124</sup> Peter Boenisch, ‘Towards a Theatre of Encounter and Experience: Reflexive Dramaturgies and Classic Texts’, *Contemporary Theatre Review*, 20.2 (2010), pp. 162-172 (p. 162).

<sup>125</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>126</sup> Peter Boenisch, ‘Exposing the classics: Michael Thalheimer’s *Regie* beyond the text’, *Contemporary Theatre Review*, 18.1 (2008), pp. 30-43 (p. 42).

<sup>127</sup> Michael Thalheimer, qtd. Boenisch, ‘Exposing the Classics’, p. 33. My emphasis.

the text". It's all about effect and response. A speech spoken by two different actors creates a different effect, *and is therefore already a different text*'.<sup>128</sup> In order to approach what Thalheimer happily refers to as 'the essence' of a play, directors must 'distil, digest and even purify' the play-text.<sup>129</sup> As Boenisch glosses:

That 'essence' of a playtext, for Thalheimer, is not to be found by condensing it to a single meaning, nor to an assumed authorial 'intention'. He conceives of the 'essence' not as stable core, but as an animated process, as an experiential nucleus that generates, in the first instance, sensations, perceptions, and images which fashion a visceral and vital impact, rather than (re)produce the order of meaning.<sup>130</sup>

Thalheimer's method of distilling, digesting and purifying material works has produced several revisionist stagings of German classics, including, in 2001, Gotthold Lessing's *Emilia Galotti* (1772) at the Deutsches Theater, Berlin. Five acts were reduced to eighty minutes and transposed onto a bare stage where actors spoke their lines at break-neck speed or else assumed pantomimic tableaux without using words at all. Boenisch quotes actor Ingo Hülsmann:

Once we realized that the whole plot takes place on a single day, that it is like a nightmare starting in the morning and ending in the evening with everyone either dead or destroyed, at a frantic pace, it became clear that our production must work like this as well.<sup>131</sup>

As Boenisch observes, Thalheimer's approach 'displaces what the playwright had conceptualized in words' within the experiential score of his productions, 'transposing it onto other layers of theatrical presentation: space, rhythm and bodies':

Rather than functioning as a means to the end of framing, locating and illustrating plot and action, these components gain autonomy and become equal elements within the overall score: they are free to act as veritable characters, 'speaking' and 'playing' parts of the text which, in the crystallized economy of Thalheimer's *mise en scene*, no longer need

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<sup>128</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>129</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>130</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>131</sup> Ingo Hülsmann, qtd. Boenisch, 'Exposing the classics', p. 34.

to be spoken by the actors [...] Thalheimer intervenes on the level of presentation in performance, thus in the medium of theatre itself.<sup>132</sup>

Erika Fischer-Lichter has traced the ‘particular emphasis on the performance as an autonomous work of art’ evidenced in the work of contemporary German directors to the eighteenth-century and, in particular, to Goethe, for whom, she states, ‘performance [was] not regarded as an imitation of nature nor of social reality nor as a means of “mediating” or even “reproducing” something else, namely the literary text of a drama, but as an artwork in its own right’.<sup>133</sup>

Goethe can be regarded as the first director in the modern sense of the word. Above all he accorded the status of an autonomous work of art to the performance [...] for Goethe, the play, the space, the design, the actors, the costumes and the music, everything serves as material from which the performance as an autonomous work of art is created.<sup>134</sup>

Identifying the continuity of this philosophy in the *Gesamtkunstwerk* of Richard Wagner, Fischer-Lichte interprets the ‘so-called *Regietheater*’ within this tradition as a theatre that uses not only the text ‘but also the actors’ bodies and space as a material that has to be worked upon and transformed in the process of *mise-en-scene*’.<sup>135</sup> Contemporary German critics who criticize directors for not being ‘true to the text’, ‘overlook the simple fact that theatre in the German tradition is not regarded as derivative but as an art form by itself’.<sup>136</sup> That is to say, in Fischer-Lichte’s pithy phrase: ‘*Theatre is not the representation of a reality, but a reality of its own*’.<sup>137</sup>

Within German theatre cultures, an appreciation of, and emphasis upon, the materiality of performance does not negate or reject the use of dramatic text but re-positions it

<sup>132</sup> Boenisch, ‘Exposing the classics’, p. 39; p. 42.

<sup>133</sup> Erika Fischer-Lichte, ‘Patterns of continuity in German theatre: Interculturalism, performance and cultural mission’ in *A History of German Theatre*, pp. 360-377 (p. 360; p. 368).

<sup>134</sup> Fischer-Lichte, ‘Patterns of continuity’, p. 369.

<sup>135</sup> Fischer-Lichte, ‘Patterns of continuity’, pp. 370-71.

<sup>136</sup> Fischer-Lichte, ‘Patterns of continuity’, p. 371.

<sup>137</sup> Fischer-Lichte, ‘Patterns of continuity’, p. 365. My emphasis.

within the plurality of sign-systems at work in theatrical performance. To return to Eugenio Barba, quoted in the introduction of this thesis, ‘text’ exceeds considerations of the written play-text to include the ‘work of the actions’ which constitute the ‘weave of performance’:

*Actions* are all the relationships, all the interactions between the characters, or between the characters and the lights, the sounds, the space. *Actions* are what work directly on the audience’s attention, on their understanding, their emotiveness, their synaesthesia.<sup>138</sup>

What is particularly interesting about Barba’s model is its applicability to performance irrespective of whether a work’s compositional logic turns on the existence of a pre-written text. At the same time as enabling practitioners to confidently approach the interpretational and perceptual challenges embodied by multidisciplinary compositions, I would argue that Barba’s definition of ‘actions’ can be just as usefully applied to a variety of play-texts – realist or otherwise – when considering their realization *in performance*. Most importantly, in Barba’s conception of ‘the work of the actions’, issues of *ownership* - ownership of processes, ownership of materials, ownership of roles and rightful territory – are displaced in order to instead foreground the *performance-audience relationship(s)* engendered by the work *of* these processes and materials for a particular community of people, in a particular place, over a particular duration of time. Occurring simultaneously with the unfolding of a story is the unfolding of the “‘historical time’” of the performance’ itself:<sup>139</sup> there is the narrative of the *story* and there is the narrative of the *theatre event* as experienced by the spectator; the two are in dynamic relationship with each another.

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<sup>138</sup> Eugenio Barba, ‘The Nature of Dramaturgy: Describing Actions at Work’, *New Theatre Quarterly*, 1.1. (1985), pp. 75-78 (p. 75).

<sup>139</sup> *ibid.*

A contemporary version of Barba's formulation is provided by Hans-Theis Lehmann in *Postdramatic Theatre*, where he reminds readers that, 'in contrast to other arts, which produce an object and/or are communicated through media', in theatre the 'aesthetic act itself (the performing) as well as the act of reception (the theatre going) take place as a real doing in the here and now':

Theatre means the collectively spent and used up lifetime in the collectively breathed air of that space in which the performing and the spectating take place [...] The theatre performance turns the behaviour onstage and in the auditorium into a *joint text*.<sup>140</sup>

Lehmann draws a distinction between three different levels of theatrical staging: the *linguistic text*, the *text of the staging and mise en scene* and the *performance text*.<sup>141</sup> The linguistic material and the texture of the staging, he writes, interact with the 'theatrical situation' – what Ric Knowles might term the 'conditions of production' and the 'conditions of reception' – to produce the comprehensive 'performance text'.<sup>142</sup> That is to say, a *joint text*, in which 'the mode of relationship of the performance to the spectators, the temporal and spatial situation, and the place and function of the theatrical process within the social field' all have a bearing, to return to Barba, upon the spectator's 'experience of an experience'.<sup>143</sup> For Lehmann, 'the *whole situation of the performance* is constitutive for theatre and for the meaning and status of every element within it'; 'the adequate description of theatre', therefore, 'is bound to the reading of this total text'.<sup>144</sup>

I suggest that it is precisely this consideration of the 'whole situation of the performance' – the linguistic text, the text of the *mise-en-scene*, and their interactions

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<sup>140</sup> Hans-Thies Lehmann, *Postdramatic Theatre* (London: Routledge, 2006), p. 17.

<sup>141</sup> Lehmann, *Postdramatic Theatre*, p. 85.

<sup>142</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>143</sup> *ibid.*; Barba, 'The Nature of Dramaturgy', p.77.

<sup>144</sup> Lehmann, *Postdramatic Theatre*, p. 85; p. 17.

with the (social, technical, geographical) conditions of production and reception – which is creatively mined by production and institutional dramaturgs across German-language theatre. I would like to argue that dramaturgical perspectives do not regard composition, production and reception as chronological, discrete stages but as interdependent contexts mutually constitutive of ‘meaning’ in performance. To return briefly to David Williams’ description of dramaturgical process, dramaturgy is effectively concerned with the ‘composing and orchestration of *events for and in particular contexts*’; the dramaturg ‘draws attention to the different elements in circulation and at play’, as well as ‘*to what they “do”*: space, light, bodies, language, sounds, objects, ideas, energies, etc.’ (my emphasis). The ‘work’ of individual elements depends on the ways in which a performance is framed; the artistic elements which form the predicate(s) for a performance are of less significance than the total event of their reception.<sup>145</sup> If it is accepted that the spectator is both always already implicit and complicit in the event of theatre, then instead of ‘debating power structures (and struggles) between the (written) text and other theatre signs’ perhaps greater attention might be paid to ‘the dramaturgic scripting of the spectator’s experience in a performance event’.<sup>146</sup>

It may be noted that the relativization of dramatic text along with the displacement or dispersal of narrative as supported by processes of production dramaturgy share affinities with the techniques of devising practices explored by ensembles in English theatre cultures. The perceived similarities in expectations, processes and outcomes between mainstream German producing cultures and alternative devising practices in England were recently highlighted by a symposium, ‘English Playwriting/German Directing’ (Foyles Gallery, London, 2011). At this symposium, organized by myself

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<sup>145</sup> Lehmann, *Postdramatic Theatre*, p. 85.

<sup>146</sup> Boenisch, ‘Towards a Theatre of Encounter and Experience’, p. 164.

and Dr. Peter Boenisch, a recording of the German director Sebastian Nübling's 2007 production of English playwright Simon Stephens' *Pornography* (2006) was screened and discussed by academics and practitioners, led by Nübling and Stephens themselves.<sup>147</sup>

Commissioned by the Deutsches Schauspielhaus, Hamburg, and written specifically for Nübling to direct, Stephens' play takes the form of four monologues, two duologues and one list offering short descriptions of the fifty-two people killed in the 2005 bombings in London. The seven discrete scenes – inspired by the Seven Ages of Man – refract events leading up to and away from July 7th through the depiction of characters involved in various acts of transgression. Character names are replaced by hyphens (though some characters are referred to by name in the text) and stage directions state that the scenes can be performed in any order, by any number of actors.

As laid out on the page, *Pornography* would appear to be the most formally experimental of Stephens' plays to date. In fact, by Stephens' own admission, the dramaturgy of *Pornography* 'is pretty conventional: it's characters in pursuit of objectives who learn something about themselves or fail to'.<sup>148</sup> The play's mixture of narrated and enacted action may initially appear confusing on the page, yet this blending of modes is not radically different from what Stephens achieved with his earlier play *One Minute* (2003).<sup>149</sup> Nevertheless, the relatively open structure of *Pornography*, its refusal to delineate character and its deliberate appeal to directorial intervention were choices which, despite being deployed a full ten years earlier by Martin Crimp's

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<sup>147</sup> 'English Playwriting/German Directing: Simon Stephens's *Wastwater* and *Pornography*', supported by the Theatre and Performance Research Association, the European Theatre Research Network at the University of Kent, the Goethe Institute, London and Foyles Bookshop. Foyles Gallery, London, 30<sup>th</sup> April 2011.

<sup>148</sup> Simon Stephens, 'English Playwriting/German Directing'. Audio transcribed by Jacqueline Bolton.

<sup>149</sup> A co-production between Actors' Touring Company and Sheffield Crucible, directed by Gordon Anderson.



*Attempts on her Life*, continued, according to Stephens, ‘to bewilder many readers in England’:

I couldn't believe how difficult it was to get that play placed in an English theatre [...] I remember talking to Nick Hytner about that play and he said to me ‘I couldn't really read that. There are no character names or stage directions - it's not really a play is it?’ Sebastian Born at the National said exactly the same thing. He couldn't read it.<sup>150</sup>

Nübling and his actors, however, approached the text of *Pornography* less as a *blueprint* than as a *stimulus* for performance. Nübling's production partially rewrote a scene and swapped the gender of one of the characters (the story of incest between brother and sister became one between two brothers) but otherwise retained the original structure and sequence of the play. In the original staging, a male character was played as a male by a female actor; elsewhere in the play a female character was played as female by a male actor. The set was designed by Nübling's long-term collaborator Muriel Gerstner and comprised of half a dozen tables and chairs set before an enormous, half-finished, metal mosaic depicting Brueghel's painting, *The Tower of Babel* – an image the overwhelming physical presence of which gave voice to its own narrative of cultural division, miscommunication and confusion. All eight actors remained onstage throughout; when not the protagonist of a scene they populated its fictional landscape by assuming characters involved in subtle, interpersonal dynamics unanticipated by Stephens' writing. Furthermore, when not directly involved in the action, these ‘actor/characters’ engaged in the overarching ‘narrative’ of trying to complete the

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<sup>150</sup> Simon Stephens, qtd. Jacqueline Bolton, ‘Simon Stephens’ in *Decades of Modern British Playwriting: Voices, Documents, New Interpretations*, ed. Dan Rebellato (London: Methuen, 2012). ‘Bewildered and frustrated by people's reluctance to produce [*Pornography*], Stephens drafted another version of the script in an attempt to ‘seduce some English theatres into producing it’. Significantly, none of the text itself was altered: Stephens simply inserted character names before the dialogue and spliced the episodes to form a chronologically linear narrative. When Sean Holmes came to direct *Pornography* in a Traverse/Birmingham Rep co-production in 2008, this was the script that was taken into rehearsals. After encountering some difficulties with the revised version, however, director and actors decided to create their own versions, a decision that Holmes admits ran counter to his usual practice as a director: ‘that was new for me, this thing of inventing, having to invent... I'd never normally be so presumptuous to think that my structure could be better than the writer's’. Sean Holmes, unpublished interview with Jacqueline Bolton, 21<sup>st</sup> June 2010.

mosaic behind them. Tiles, scattered like debris about the stage, were slotted into wooden frames which, at various points during the action, were hoisted onto incomplete areas of the image by two or three actors working together. Stephens attests that ‘it was the best design I’d ever had [...] the necessity and impossibility of completing the mosaic seemed, to me, to be thematically relevant’.<sup>151</sup>

At ‘English Playwriting/German Directing’, Nübling described the rehearsal process for *Pornographie*:

So, we had the set [design, the mosaic] and we had *thousands* of these magnetic tiles. So for two or three hours a day we were puzzling, and [then for] two hours we were re-sorting the different colours into their original boxes because everyday we had a total mess! So that was one part of the work - no really! People got totally bored and so took these tiles, and threw them around [...] That was the first thing, the second was the idea of the Seven Ages of Man: so we [improvised around this idea]. The third phase was working on the text. And then we combined all these people working, and used all these little things that we’d invented by *not* concentrating on the play.<sup>152</sup>

Nübling, who has directed several of Stephens’ German-language premieres,<sup>153</sup> credits the latter’s plays for combining a coherent ‘plot structure’ with what he refers to as ‘a lot of room between scenes, between lines’:

That’s interesting to me as a director. I can say to actors ‘go, find your own ways through this play, there’s a lot of room, the spoken isn’t everything’. The text is more like the surface of what the play is; there are a lot of possibilities lying under water.<sup>154</sup>

Watching the screening and listening to Nübling’s description of his process of ‘playing’ with the actors, Lizzie Clachan, co-founder of devising ensemble Shunt and designer of Stephens’ *Wastwater*, then running at the Royal Court, testified to being:

<sup>151</sup> Stephens, qtd. Bolton, ‘Simon Stephens’.

<sup>152</sup> Sebastian Nübling, ‘English Playwriting/German Directing’.

<sup>153</sup> In addition to *Pornographie*, Nübling has also directed Stephen’s *Punk Rock* (Junges Theater Basel, 2010) and *Reiher (Herons)*, Staatsschauspiel Stuttgart/Junges Theater Basel, 2004).

<sup>154</sup> Nübling, ‘English Playwriting/German Directing’.

...struck [by] how it reminded me of devised work [...] *Pornographie* is recognizable to me as part of an ensemble in this country. We spend three, four, five months making a performance and the actors, performers, bring enormous amounts to that process – to stage design, to the whole performance. It's a very different process to how I work [as a designer] with mainstream British theatre.<sup>155</sup>

Nübling's *Pornographie* demonstrates that tightly-structured narratives, psychologized characters, quotidian dialogue and recognizable material worlds, as inscribed within a predicatory script, need not delimit the interpretative parameters of a play-text's performance. Instead, dramatic teleologies may be playfully, eclectically, re-imagined in and by performance, creating an autonomous theatre event which, in its 'effect and response', nevertheless remains true to the spirit of the play-text. The spectator is released from a singular interpretative reading – one that 'holds their hand' through the course of an evening – and are instead invited to *participate in a process* of observation, selection, evaluation and synthesis. Such an approach to the production of play-texts, as attested by Stephens, discussing *Pornographie* in a keynote speech for the 2011 Stückmarkt at the Berliner Festspiele, prompts a radical re-thinking of the artistic hierarchies conventionally subscribed to by mainstream producing cultures in England:

I couldn't have imagined the extraordinary design of Muriel Gerstner [...] I couldn't have seen that the cast could interweave with one another, doubling and trebling their roles [...] This excavation [of *Pornography*] wasn't imposed onto my play but dug out from its heart. Sebastian and his actors and creative team read my play with ferocious clarity and then, in a way I've never experienced in the UK, re-imagined it. I realis[ed] that theatre practise [sic] is not simply about staging the imagination of a playwright but a multi-authored process of collaboration, conflict, intervention and exploration. It led me to re-imagine how I write.<sup>156</sup>

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<sup>155</sup> Lizzie Clachan, 'English Playwriting/German Directing'.

<sup>156</sup> Simon Stephens, 'Skydiving Blindfolded', keynote speech at *Stückmarkt 2011, Haus der Berliner Festspiele*, 8<sup>th</sup> May 2011 <<http://www.theatertreffen-blog.de/tt11/author/simonstephens/>> [Accessed 18<sup>th</sup> June 2011].

## 2.6 Dramaturgy: A bridge between cultures

The example of *Pornographie* provides a clear demonstration, I believe, of what Turner and Behrndt describe as a ‘dramaturgy of process – a dramaturgy that makes us aware of the mechanisms of communication and the artificial construction of imaginary (real) worlds, even while we are moved and engaged by them’.<sup>157</sup> Stephens’ play-text highlights ‘the inadequacy of looking at the script as a discrete object, a closed system, without reference to the event of its performance’ and the consternation with which *Pornography* was initially met within mainstream producing cultures indicates a pressing need for fresh perspectives upon the relations between scripts and performance, authority and interpretation.<sup>158</sup> Together, *Pornographie/Pornography* demonstrate that a considered (re)assessment of the authority and function(s) of text within the generation and reception of meaning in performance could provide more expansive views of what ‘dramatic composition’ might entail in practice; a reassessment of text and performance which is, perhaps, as necessary within the discourses of academia as those of the industry.

Throughout this chapter I have purposefully avoided invoking the ‘postdramatic’ as a category which might more precisely locate the antipathy between theatre-making approaches and outcomes. Whilst I believe the term, popularized by Lehmann’s *Postdramatic Theatre*, holds currency as a descriptor of a particular attitude towards strategies of representation in theatre, I do not believe it can be neatly mapped onto a distinction between text-based/non-text-based processes. Whilst Tomlin has argued that, for Lehmann, the written text (by predicating the other elements of the production

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<sup>157</sup> Turner and Behrndt, *Dramaturgy and Performance*, p. 193.

<sup>158</sup> Cathy Turner, ‘Getting the ‘Now’ into the Written Text (and vice versa): Developing Dramaturgies of Process’, *Performance Research*, 14.1 (2009), pp. 106-114 (p. 111).

process) ‘categorizes [a] work within the logocentric binds of the dramatic’,<sup>159</sup> I agree with Boenisch that Lehmann’s concern is directed rather towards theatre events that cling to hermeneutically-sealed representations of a surveyable cosmos, ‘regardless of whether the dramaturgic texture’ [is] “pre-written” or “devised””.<sup>160</sup> If we identify the dramaturgical conventions underpinning a dramatic paradigm as involving the ‘representation of a closed fictional world; a plot based on some form of conflict; a coherent narrative told in (or to be resolved into) linear sequence’ and ‘psychologically characterized roles’ then, as Boenisch points out, quite a number of ‘allegedly “radical” productions from the stables of “physical theatre”, “devising” or “site-specific performance”’ turn out to be ‘no less than “well-made devising”’.<sup>161</sup> Boenisch’s observation should perhaps give pause to those practitioners who dismiss devised works as lacking in either narrative coherence or psychological insight. Similarly, for those who maintain hostile relations with dramatic play-texts, a revaluation of the dramaturgical co-ordinates of devised and physical practice is perhaps due.

In similar vein, Tomlin has convincingly demonstrated that the predicatory, individually-authored play-text, the completeness and independence of which is indicated by dramatic markers such as character, dialogue and world representation, does *not*, of necessity, signify that play-text’s compliance with the ‘teleological

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<sup>159</sup> Tomlin, ‘And Their Stories Fell Apart’, p. 59.

<sup>160</sup> Boenisch, ‘Towards a Theatre of Encounter and Experience’, p. 163.

<sup>161</sup> *ibid.* Carl Grose’s description of ‘providing text’ for Kneehigh is instructive in this respect. Alongside writers, Artistic Director Emma Rice collaborates with designers (of sound, light and set), composers and actors to create and/or adapt works for the stage; processes of devising and improvisation are central to the company’s working methods. Speaking to me in October 2006, however, Grose described how the company ‘fleshed out’ characters by providing them with ‘stronger journeys’ and a ‘real character arc’: ‘In the early stage of writing *Cymbeline* [commissioned by the RSC, 2005], [Emma and I] thought the heart of the story was this character, a King, whose wife has died, whose only daughter has married someone who he has raised but doesn’t want her marrying; he’s under a spell, so he’s kind of lost his way... So you start to open up the character. And you think, well, psychologically, the thing which goes over and over in his head is “my son, I’ve lost two sons”. So that becomes the heart of the play [...] So in that instance we did a sort of Hollywood character arc job on him and had a “turning point” where he dresses for war’. Carl Grose, unpublished interview with Jacqueline Bolton, 14<sup>th</sup> October 2006.

implications of the dramatic'.<sup>162</sup> In her detailed analysis of Martin Crimp's *The City*, Tomlin draws upon her own experience as a playwright in order to demonstrate how play-texts may deploy dramatic conventions in order to effect *in performance* 'an autodeconstruction of their own authority, which acts, in turn, as a comment on and deconstruction of the dramatic tradition'.<sup>163</sup> Tomlin concludes from her analysis of *The City* that there are, in fact, 'strong parallels that can be drawn between Crimp's philosophical concerns and those of a company such as Forced Entertainment', whose performers often enact 'desperate attempts to fulfil the obligations of dramatic characterization and coherent narrative in the face of their own scepticism that such things can be any longer sustained'.<sup>164</sup> Tomlin argues that the 'deconstruction of dramatic teleology present in the work of both Crimp and Forced Entertainment is [...] a more significant basis for analysis than a distinction based on what artistic element, or elements, constitute artistic predicates for the work'.<sup>165</sup> Like Boenisch, she suggests that an alternative approach 'based on an identification of power structures and/or their subsequent deconstruction within a whole range of performance models' might offer a 'more rigorous, and certainly more ideological, analysis of contemporary performance today':<sup>166</sup>

Academic and arts development agencies need to reject the easy and misleading binaries that divide new work into text-based/dramatic/teleological and non-text-based/postdramatic/deconstructive in order to more precisely define where the logos might lie, be that in the written text, the mise-en-scene of the auteur-director or the virtuosity of the performer. This will enable a more sophisticated ideological and philosophical analysis of new work and safeguard the diverse range and fusion of models and forms being developed in British contemporary theatre and performance today.<sup>167</sup>

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<sup>162</sup> Tomlin, 'And Their Stories Fell Apart', p. 60.

<sup>163</sup> Tomlin, 'And Their Stories Fell Apart', p. 62.

<sup>164</sup> Tomlin, 'And Their Stories Fell Apart', p. 63.

<sup>165</sup> Tomlin, 'And Their Stories Fell Apart', p. 64

<sup>166</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>167</sup> *ibid.*

Both Tomlin and Boenisch's analyses suggest the importance of assessing the potential operations of a dramatic play-text by reading it through the prism of its performance. Both scholars also, however, continue to base their critical analysis of theatre upon *whether or not* it successfully evades and/or challenges the 'representational regimes' associated with dramatic teleology.

Dan Rebellato, however, in 'When We Talk of Horses: Or, what do we see when we see a play?', confronts the nature of theatrical representation itself, taking to task the prevailing belief (he cites Lehmann, Theodore Shank, Anthony Howell and Josette Féral) that "'dramatic" theatre (plays that represent fictional characters and situations) is illusionistic' and, therefore, ideologically suspect as an art form:

Representational theatre is not illusionistic. In illusions we have *mistaken beliefs* about what we are seeing. No sane person watching a play believes that what is being represented before them is actually happening. We know we are watching people represent something else; we are aware of this and rarely get confused. There is a difference between what we see and what we imagine or understand to be happening in the represented world. What is, then, the relationship between the stage and the fiction?<sup>168</sup>

In place of illusion, Rebellato suggests that the relationship between stage and fiction instead works in terms of metaphor: 'in metaphor, we are invited to see (or think about) one thing in terms of another thing [...] when we see a piece of theatre we are invited to think of the fictional world through this particular representation'.<sup>169</sup> Rebellato emphasizes that 'the metaphorical nature of theatrical representation is very *inclusive*', encompassing not only acting but also design choices and casting.<sup>170</sup> An audience is invited to see (or think about) a fictional location through the strategic positioning of some chairs, for example: the relation between the chairs and location they represent is

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<sup>168</sup> Dan Rebellato, 'When We Talk of Horses: Or, what do we see when we see a play?', *Performance Research*, 14.1 (2009), pp. 17-28 (p. 18).

<sup>169</sup> Rebellato, 'When We Talk of Horses', p. 25.

<sup>170</sup> Rebellato, 'When We Talk of Horses', p. 26. My emphasis.

not mimetic but metaphorical, there is a vast aesthetic distance between the material reality of these chairs and the fictional reality they gesture towards. Extending this logic, ‘actors give performances that become metaphors for the characters’.<sup>171</sup> In productions where actors are cast closely to character type, this relationship might be better described as *metonymic*, as the aesthetic distance between the ‘thing we see’ (signifier, actor) and the ‘thing we are invited to think about’ (signified, character) is very slight. In a move which perhaps critiques the post-structuralist critique of ‘presence’, Rebellato adds that ‘sometimes this metonymic quality can be “actualized”, [as] in the case of a play about asylum seekers in which asylum seekers have been cast’.<sup>172</sup>

Inserting an important caesura between ‘drama’ and ‘realism’, Rebellato also suggests that the metaphorical nature of theatrical representation is very *flexible*: ‘metaphor does not prescribe in advance what sort of connection must be made between the two objects it compares’.<sup>173</sup>

Old can play young, women can play men, black can play white, wood can play stone, large rooms can play small rooms, a wooden O can play the fields of France, and words can play horses printing their proud hoofs i’t’h’receiving earth. The means of theatrical representation are metaphors for the worlds they represent. Metaphor is not limited [...] by any notion of *resemblance*.<sup>174</sup>

The logical conclusion to draw from this observation – which Rebellato does – is that:

...the metaphorical model is in fact not limited to plays but is equally at work in live art performances that attempt, obliquely and reflexively, to capture the form and character of the contemporary world, or to

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<sup>171</sup> Rebellato, ‘When We Talk of Horses’, p. 27.

<sup>172</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>173</sup> Rebellato, ‘When We Talk of Horses’, p. 25.

<sup>174</sup> *ibid.* Rebellato’s recent play *Chekov in Hell* in fact puts theory into practice: ‘There should be an *arbitrary* relationship between actor and character. Women can play men and vice versa, old playing young, etc. But not systematically. At points identity should be undecidable. Is Marcia black or white? I don’t know’. Dan Rebellato, *Chekov in Hell* (London: Oberon, 2010), p. 9.



represent members of the company, or to reflect on other performances, activities or habits of language. Each of those could well be described as metaphorical.<sup>175</sup>

Underpinning Rebellato's analysis of theatre, drama, representation, and spectatorial engagement is the belief that 'the hermeneutics of "dramatic theatre" is every bit as complex, paradoxical and supple as that of performance and the postdramatic'.<sup>176</sup> For Rebellato, I believe it is less the endorsement or rejection of a dramatic teleology which determines the 'radical' nature of a play-text in performance, than the degree to which the production invokes and exploits metaphor: 'the closer the stage and the fiction are together, the more representation becomes identical with itself. Theatre as metaphor requires a non-identity of the two'.<sup>177</sup>

'When We Talk of Horses' presents a rationale for the recuperation of the dramatic text within theatre and performance studies by not only emphasizing the interdependence of text and performance but also foregrounding processes of spectatorial engagement. Rebellato's analysis implicitly rejects the oft-cited claim that dramatic representation promotes passivity amongst spectators. In this, Rebellato is, I believe, supported by Jacques Rancière's essay, 'The Emancipated Spectator'.<sup>178</sup> An illuminating essay on theatre history and theory, 'The Emancipated Spectator' deconstructs the 'set of equivalences and oppositions' which equates dramatic representation with audience passivity, identifying the limitations of deterministic mechanisms not within dramatic modes of representation *per se* but within the 'stultifying [...] logic of straight uniform transmission':

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<sup>175</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>176</sup> Rebellato, 'When We Talk of Horses', p. 27.

<sup>177</sup> *ibid.* Rebellato also suggests that 'given the way that naturalism's particular and peculiar stylistic conventions have been naturalized, we might say that naturalism is a kind of dead metaphor' (p. 26).

<sup>178</sup> Jacques Rancière, 'The Emancipated Spectator' in *The Emancipated Spectator* (London: Verso, 1999) pp. 1-24.

There is something – a form of knowledge, a capacity, an energy in a body or a mind – on one side, and it must pass to the other side [...] What the spectator *must see* is what the director *makes her see*. What she must feel is the energy he communicates to her.<sup>179</sup>

Artists who ‘assume that what will be perceived, felt, understood is *what they have put into* their dramatic art or performance’ fail to recognize the critical ‘distance inherent in the performance itself, in so far as it subsists, as a spectacle, an autonomous thing, between the idea of the artist and the sensation or comprehension of the spectator’.<sup>180</sup>

Emancipation begins when artists realise that:

*The spectator also acts* [...] she observes, selects, compares, interprets. She links what she sees to a host of other things that she has seen on other stages, in other kinds of place. She composes her own poem with the elements of the poem before her.<sup>181</sup>

It is my understanding that Rancière’s ‘emancipated spectator’, not unlike Barba’s ‘work of the actions’, enables theatre performances of all kinds to be measured less by their relationship to a reified dramatic logoi than by their capacity to promote in performance an ‘unpredictable interplay of associations and disassociations’.<sup>182</sup> For Rancière, it is ‘in this power of associating and dissociating that the emancipation of the spectator consists [...] there is no more a privileged form than there is a privileged starting point’.<sup>183</sup>

Rancière refers to the performance of a work as that which is ‘owned by no one, whose meaning is owned by no one, but which subsists between [the artist and the spectator]’.<sup>184</sup> Again we are confronted with the *displacement* of a singular authorship in order to foreground active relations engendered between performance and spectator. An

<sup>179</sup> Rancière, ‘Emancipated Spectator’, p. 7; p. 14. Original emphasis.

<sup>180</sup> Rancière, ‘Emancipated Spectator’, p. 14. Original emphasis.

<sup>181</sup> Rancière, ‘Emancipated Spectator’, p. 13. My emphasis.

<sup>182</sup> Rancière, ‘Emancipated Spectator’, p. 17.

<sup>183</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>184</sup> Rancière, ‘Emancipated Spectator’, p. 15.

understanding and application of dramaturgical practice as specifically attuned to this dynamic between performance and audience would, I suggest, pave the way for more holistic approaches towards the theatre event, encouraging approaches to (dramatic) composition which encompass and deploy (rather than subordinate to prescribed intention) the entire spectrum of semiotic languages – visual texts, aural texts, texts of the body and voice as well as plot and character – available to performance. Rather than being ‘claustrophobically “hosted”” through a play,<sup>185</sup> a more nuanced manipulation of the multiple sign-systems activated in and by performance can invite audiences to a more active participation in the construction of meaning: a kind of theatre that Etchells refers to as ‘brave enough to surrender control – trusting its audience to think, trusting that they will go useful places when they’re let of the leash of dramaturgical control’.<sup>186</sup>

At present, however, ‘the new writing industry’s requirement for a written text to be the artistic predicate of an ensuing production’ does not provide an appropriate model for the development of play-texts which invite their own ‘displacement’ or ‘subversion’ in and through performance.<sup>187</sup> David Lane, assessing the challenges presented to conventional script development by the work of playwright and performer Tim Crouch, has argued that current techniques of dramaturgical development within English new writing cultures tend to promote ‘a theatre experience that is live only because it occurs in a shared space and time, rather than one that ‘fully exploits, within its composition, the risks and tensions of live performance’.<sup>188</sup> Lane suggests that contemporary dramaturgs need to better recognize ‘the dynamic of conversation between stage and audience’ as an ‘active element of the play’s dramaturgy’ by attending not only to the

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<sup>185</sup> Lane, ‘A Dramaturg’s Perspective’, p. 133.

<sup>186</sup> Etchells, ‘Etchells’, *Programme Notes*, pp. 29-30.

<sup>187</sup> Tomlin, ‘And Their Stories Fell Apart’, p. 61.

<sup>188</sup> Lane, ‘A Dramaturg’s Perspective’, p. 128. Tim Crouch is, indeed, a playwright and performer whose oeuvre to date crystallizes many of the concerns raised in this chapter. See Stephens Bottoms, ‘Authorizing the Audience: The conceptual drama of Tim Crouch’, *Performance Research*, 14.1 (2009), pp. 65-76.

narratives manifest within a dramatic fiction but also those ‘anticipated narratives that demand a live performance to be fully realized’.<sup>189</sup> Broader engagements with an expanded definition of ‘text’ would, as Freshwater suggests, ‘challenge the critical investment in tropes of authorship and enable a mature evaluation of the relationship between authority, authorship and interpretation’.<sup>190</sup> As Lane points out, however, such an approach to processes of playwriting first requires a ‘rearrangement of priorities regarding creation, definition, ownership, value and meaning’;<sup>191</sup> a rearrangement which, in Lane’s experience, ‘theatre in the mainstream – particularly writer-led theatre – is yet to embrace fully’.<sup>192</sup>

## 2.5 Conclusion

Observing the lack of opportunities within the theatre industry for writers and other artists who use text to meet, discuss and share their work on equal terms, in 2008 Cathy Turner organized the ‘Writing Space’ project at the University of Winchester. Informed by its development alongside ‘The space between words’, a complementary project initiated by Claire McDonald, Writing Space took a “‘radically inclusive’” approach to writing and dramaturgical practice, aiming towards ‘an expanded view of the theatre writer and theatre text, including, yet moving out from, the foundational definitions of “playwright” and “play” that underpin conventional literary management’.<sup>193</sup>

As Turner has recorded, Writing Space brought together a group of writers whose experiences ranged across a wide variety of performance forms, including new writing, devising, live art, adaptation, and site-specific theatre, in order to construct a process in

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<sup>189</sup> Lane, ‘A Dramaturg’s Perspective’, p. 128; p. 136.

<sup>190</sup> Freshwater, ‘Physical Theatre’, p. 191.

<sup>191</sup> Lane, ‘A Dramaturg’s Perspective’, p. 130.

<sup>192</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>193</sup> Cathy Turner, ‘Writing for the contemporary theatre: towards a radically inclusive dramaturgy’, *Studies in Theatre and Performance*, 30.1 (2010), pp. 75-90 (p. 75).

which ‘different formal approaches could be explored, debated, developed and cross-fertilized’.<sup>194</sup> Through dialogue, presentations and workshops, the group addressed fundamental questions such as ‘What is a writer? What is writing? What do we do with writing? Where does writing take place?’, and focused particularly on the thorny issue of narrative.<sup>195</sup> Interestingly, discussions ‘explored the political tension around modes of representation’, weighing the ‘potential for opening up dialogue’ against the ‘efficacy of attempting to represent a public reality’: “‘Are we too afraid of representation?’”, some asked’.<sup>196</sup> At the end of the project, texts for performance written by the participants were staged by undergraduates at the University of Winchester; ‘I was particularly struck’, records one participant, ‘by how the [discussions] led people to respond creatively in a way in which their work might not normally take them’.<sup>197</sup>

Writing Space exemplifies a process of exchange between the industry and academia, a process which, as Turner suggests, could prove mutually beneficial:

At its best [the university context] provides a space in which to rethink the assumptions that underpin professional practices, to experiment with alternatives and to engage in an open-ended dialogue free from the concerns of securing a commission, proving one’s talent or providing a theatre with a text it can produce [...] A project like this one might also present a challenge to some within the academy, proposing the possibility of placing writing within the immediate context of other contemporary performance practices: devising, live art and intermedial work, dance theatre, site-specific performance and so on.<sup>198</sup>

What is now required within both professional and academic discourses is the promotion of perspectives able to analyse dramatic structure, the work of performance *and* the (provisional, anticipated) ‘interplay of associations and dissociations’ between performance and spectator; an ability which, I suggest, defines a specifically

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<sup>194</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>195</sup> *ibid.*; p. 81.

<sup>196</sup> Turner, ‘Writing for the contemporary theatre’, p. 82.

<sup>197</sup> Qtd. Turner, ‘Writing for the contemporary theatre’, p. 81.

<sup>198</sup> Turner, ‘Writing for the contemporary theatre’, p. 87; p. 88.

*dramaturgical* contribution to production processes. Provided there is sufficient enthusiasm amongst academics and practitioners, it is my belief that approaches to dramaturgical practice as inclusive as those proposed by the model of Writing Space could help bridge not only a mutually disabling divide between text-based/non-text-based processes, but also the prevailing breach between academic and industry discourses.

## Chapter Three

### Theory and Theatre: Play-texts in Performance

There is no official decree or supernatural intervention which graciously dispenses the theatre from the demands of theoretical reflection.<sup>1</sup>

As the previous chapter suggested, a profound difference between English and German contemporary theatre cultures lies in their respective approaches to the staging of dramatic play-texts. In English mainstream theatre, production choices tend to be motivated by, and justified with recourse to, the playwright's original conception as inscribed in her play-text. Rehearsal processes 'discover' the meaning(s) of a play-text, its characters, actions and internal dynamics, and it is the responsibility of the director and her creative team to find ways in which to communicate in performance the play-text's 'intended area of meaning'.<sup>2</sup> In German mainstream theatre, however, the idea of a play-text's 'organic integrity' is subordinate to *the ways in which a play-text may be made to function in performance*. Instead of seeking to realize the play-text in some definitive manner, rehearsal processes might be better described as '*exposing* text to performance' in order to ascertain what any given production '*might be capable of saying with and through it in/as performance*'.<sup>3</sup>

This chapter examines some of the intellectual influences upon twentieth-century German and English theatre practice in order to offer an account of how and why these cultures' respective approaches to theatrical production stand at such apparent odds to one another. Inspired by W. B. Worthen's suggestion that 'the practices of reading –

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<sup>1</sup> Roland Barthes, 'The Tasks of Brechtian Criticism', *Critical Essays*, trans. Richard Howard (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1972), pp. 71-76 (p. 73).

<sup>2</sup> David Hare, *Obedience, Struggle and Revolt* (London: Faber and Faber, 2005) p. 106.

<sup>3</sup> W. B. Worthen, *Drama: Between Poetry and Performance* (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010) p. 82; p. 68.

how we decode, interpret, reconstruct aspects of dramatic language – [...] are not governed by the text, but by *the interplay between the text and conventions and practices of reading we bring to it*, this chapter seeks to address the ‘practices of reading’ which underpin production processes in Germany and England.<sup>4</sup> For the purposes of this analysis, I am constructing a basic antithesis between a (German) approach to the staging of play-texts, which promotes what Ric Knowles refers to as ‘theoretical method’, and an (English) approach to the staging of play-texts, which evinces a commitment to what Catherine Belsey terms ‘expressive realism’.

I would like to suggest that contemporary German-language theatre cultures conceive of theatrical production in terms of a critical project which demands ‘theoretical method’. By this I mean a strategy which, in the words of Ric Knowles, ‘consciously brings something – an approach, a politics, a purposefulness, or a way of thinking other than supposed objectivity and neutrality’ to the object of analysis.<sup>5</sup> Applied to the reading and interpretation of a play-text by a director and her creative team, the practice of theoretical method disavows the pursuit of a ‘faithful’ or ‘transparent’ rendering of the play-text in order to advance *in or as* performance a *critical perspective* towards that play-text, or towards that play-text’s relation to the surrounding world. Informing this approach to production are three key convictions: firstly, that the play-text is *not* a sovereign artefact; secondly, that the potential meaning, or ‘cultural work’, of a play-text in performance is neither prescribed nor delimited by the play-text; and, thirdly, that the entire theatrical experience constitutes a “reading formation” in which “neither text nor context [...] are conceivable as entities separate from one another”.<sup>6</sup>

It may be observed that such an approach shares affinities with discourses of cultural materialism, engages the semiotics of performance and draws upon theories of

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<sup>4</sup> Worthen, *Between Poetry and Performance*, p. xv.

<sup>5</sup> Ric Knowles, *Reading the Material Theatre* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), pp. 13-14.

<sup>6</sup> Tony Bennett, qtd. Knowles, *Material Theatre*, p. 14.



reception: underlying the entire enterprise is the dictum that theory and (theatre) practice are mutually constitutive.

I would like to propose that, in contrast to the above, English theatre cultures evince what Catherine Belsey terms the ‘commonsense view of literature’, ‘a practice of reading in quest of expressive realism’.<sup>7</sup> ‘Common sense’ Belsey explains:

... assumes that valuable literary texts tell truths – about the period which produced them, about the world in general or about human nature – and that in doing so they express the particular perceptions, the individual insights, of their authors.

Key notions within this reading practice are the ‘authenticity of experience’, ‘autonomy of the artist’ and the ‘transparency of discourse’. These are the structuring principles of ‘expressive realism’: the ‘theory that literature reflects the reality of experience as it is perceived by one (especially gifted) individual, who expresses it in a discourse which enables other individuals to recognize it as true’.<sup>8</sup> For the reading practices of expressive realism, to interpret a play-text is to attend sensitively to what is ‘there’, *pre-given*, latent within the text. The (moral) obligation of performance is to (re)present the drama’s internal dynamics, as written by the playwright and interpreted by the director, with the minimum of interference or distortion. As Belsey also points out, the ‘common sense’ view:

...offers this way of approaching literature not as a self-conscious and deliberate practice, a method based on a reasoned theoretical position, but as the ‘obvious’ mode of reading, the ‘natural’ way of approaching literary works.<sup>9</sup>

It is my contention that the practices of ‘theoretical method’ and ‘expressive realism’ inform not only relations between play-texts and performance but also relationships

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<sup>7</sup> Catherine Belsey, *Critical Practice* (London: Routledge, 1980), p. 2

<sup>8</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>9</sup> *ibid.*

between directors and playwrights. In consequence, whilst the German theatre system's critical-theoretical approach to the reading, interpreting and staging of play-texts *produces the need* for a production dramaturg to support the work of a creative team, the English theatre system's default adherence to principles of expressive realism forcefully *negates* the potential functions of production dramaturgy, effectively 'writing it out' of the creative process.

I am aware that by constructing this antithesis I am coming perilously close to the sort of 'aggressive dichotomizing' which I criticized in my previous chapter. There are at least four aspects of my argument to query: the accuracy of what I have defined as central tendencies within each theatre culture, the radical distance I am proposing between them, the strict delineation of these approaches between 'German' and 'English' theatre cultures and, as this chapter will evidence, my bias towards the former approach over the latter. It is, naturally, my hope that through the course of my argument the reader will be persuaded of both the validity and significance of identifying these differing approaches towards theatre-making. That these tendencies are ideologically removed from one another should also, I hope, become clear.

That these two approaches can be so neatly mapped onto contemporary German-language and English mainstream theatre is, perhaps, a more dubious claim, requiring both clarification and qualification. The practice to which I am referring as 'theoretical method' is one which, whilst evident in the work of directors such as Max Reinhardt and Erwin Piscator in the early decades of the twentieth century, was perhaps only fully inaugurated by Bertolt Brecht with the Berliner Ensemble in the GDR during the 1950s. It is today perhaps most closely associated with the working practices of a generation of directors based in the Federal Republic during the 1960s and 1970s, represented by

names such as Peter Stein, Claus Peymann and Frank Castorf. Whilst I believe that a ‘political and purposeful’, as opposed to ‘objective and neutral’, approach to the staging of play-texts continues to prevail in contemporary German theatre, evidenced in particular by the work of directors such as Christoph Marthaler, René Pollesch and the late Christophe Schlingensief, it should also be acknowledged that directors such as Elmar Goerden in Stuttgart, or David Bösch in Essen, are happy to describe themselves as ‘invisible’ directors, the ‘servants’ of plays.<sup>10</sup>

Similarly, I wish to suggest that the reading practices of ‘expressive realism’ within English mainstream theatre are tied specifically to writer-centred processes of theatre production (irrespective of whether the playwright is living or dead), processes dominant since the nineteenth century and inscribed within professional cultures by both the advent of subsidy in the 1940s and the success of the ‘New Wave’ in the 1950s. It is, of course, possible to identify contemporary directors, such as Alan Lyddiard, (Artistic Director of Northern Stage between 1992-2005; see Chapter Four), Rupert Goold (Artistic Director of Headlong) or John Tiffany (Associate Director at National Theatre Scotland), whose work seems to resist principles of expressive realism. Whilst significant, however, the works of these directors remain particular exceptions to the general rule, and it is the ‘rules’ of contemporary English theatre practice which I wish to examine here.

There are two reasons why I believe it both important and necessary to draw this contrast between German and English theatre cultures. Firstly, I believe that such an

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<sup>10</sup> See the website for the Goethe Institute, London: [www.goethe.de](http://www.goethe.de). ‘50 German Directors’, ‘Elmar Goerden’ <<http://www.goethe.de/kue/the/reg/reg/ag/goer/enindex.htm>>; ‘David Bösch’ <<http://www.goethe.de/kue/the/reg/reg/ag/bsc/enindex.htm>> [accessed 30 June 2011]. It is interesting and important to note, however, that those directors for whom a posited ‘fidelity’ to the text is uppermost are typically regarded by critics and audiences as belonging to a new generation of ‘neo-conservative directors’ *returning* to an art of dramatic storytelling.

analysis will help to better ascertain how the agency and profile of production dramaturgs are (dis)enabled by the ideological, material and aesthetic conventions of the theatre culture in which they work. Secondly, it is my hope that this analysis might more precisely define some of the deep-seated prejudices which, as this chapter shall demonstrate, continue to be held by many English professionals against German theatre practice. Whilst it is obviously inappropriate to tar all of English theatre with the same brush, I have often encountered in formal and informal discussions with practitioners either suspicion of, ignorance towards or, perhaps more commonly, vague admiration of what ‘they’ do ‘over there’, but without any inclination to ‘dabble’ in ‘that sort of theatre’ oneself. These expressions of condescension may have inspired a more sympathetic engagement with, and response to, German theatre practice than perhaps I might have had otherwise; but I think it truer to say that I am seduced by a mainstream theatre culture which confidently asserts the cultural work of its productions as serving a *material function* within the formation of social and political structures. In the words of director Thomas Frank: ‘you have to think very carefully about how you present a show, how you put it on, what kind of environment you create [...] I think this is very much an artistic decision, but I strongly believe this is very much a political decision as well’.<sup>11</sup> This chapter, then, is both an argument for better understanding and a provocation to those who study and practise theatre: in articulating distinct approaches in order to better understand their respective implications for theatre-making, the point is not to confine future analysis to this schema but to find ways to move beyond it. It is my hope that future research will build upon and refine the observations and conclusions recorded here.

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<sup>11</sup> Thomas Frank, qtd. Turner and Behrndt, *Dramaturgy and Performance* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), p. 111.

In its analysis of the tropes and value-systems which inform approaches to the staging of play-texts, the structure of this chapter departs from the chronological surveys offered in the previous two. Expanding upon the brief descriptions of practice presented at the top of this chapter, the opening two sections of this chapter focus upon contemporary attitudes to playwrights and play-texts in Germany and England. Modern practices of production dramaturgy cannot be understood in isolation from the working practices established at theatres by Erwin Piscator, Bertolt Brecht and their many collaborators; after a brief discussion of the political imperatives driving these directors' work, their continued impact upon approaches to staging play-texts is compared with the 'artist-interpreter' approach favoured by English playwrights and directors. The centrality of 'writer's intentions' within mainstream English theatre cultures is discussed in relation to both new plays and classical texts and is posited as a reason for what I perceive as a critical distinction between continental and domestic practices of production dramaturgy. These discussions of the status of play-texts and playwrights within German and English theatre cultures are grounded in a material context by way of two brief case studies of rehearsal processes witnessed at West Yorkshire Playhouse (2006) and Schauspiel Leipzig (2007).

This chapter then proceeds to identify two competing intellectual histories which, I believe, have significantly determined the reading practices of English and German theatre cultures, thereby impacting (in)directly on contemporary approaches to the reading, interpreting and staging of dramatic play-texts. It is a commonplace to observe that, at least since the advent of public subsidy, the writing, directing, acting, administrating and reviewing of mainstream English theatre has been dominated by university graduates of Oxford and Cambridge.<sup>12</sup> For example, aside from Laurence

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<sup>12</sup> A by no means exhaustive roll call of influential figures in British theatre over the past fifty years might include from Oxford University: Lindsey Anderson (former co-Artistic Director of the Royal Court),

Olivier (who appointed the Oxford-educated Kenneth Tynan as his right-hand man), every Artistic Director of the National Theatre has obtained a degree in English from Cambridge. Intrigued by the homage paid by theatre directors such as Peter Hall and Trevor Nunn to F. R. Leavis, this chapter explores the reading practices promoted by ‘Cambridge English’ as formative for the first generation of directors, playwrights and actors to embark upon professional careers within subsidized theatre. It is my contention that the literary value-systems advanced by ‘Leavisite criticism’ continue to structure contemporary mainstream practice and, moreover, that these value-systems impede the functionality of a production dramaturg working in the continental model. Drawing similarly upon testimony from German practitioners, this chapter shall then turn its attention to the area of Reception Aesthetics, and specifically to Hans Robert Jauss’ 1967 essay ‘Literary History as a Challenge to Literary Theory’. Jauss’ disquisition on literary theory not only challenges many of the assumptions held by ‘Cambridge English’ during a similar period of history but also, I believe, presents a compelling rationale for the agency and profile of production dramaturgy within contemporary German-language producing cultures.

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Alan Bennett (playwright), Michael Billington (current *Guardian* theatre critic), Peter Brook (director), Caryl Churchill (playwright), Michael Codron (producer), Michael Coveney (*Independent* theatre critic), George Devine (director, former Artistic Director of the Royal Court), William Gaskill (director, former Artistic Director of the Royal Court), Christopher Hampton (playwright), Ken Loach (director), John McGrath (playwright, founder of 7:84), Katie Mitchell (director), Terence Rattigan (playwright), Tony Richardson (director), Thea Sharrock (current Artistic Director of the Gate Theatre), Kenneth Tynan (*Observer* theatre critic; former Literary Manager of the National Theatre), Samuel West (actor), Peter Wood (director).

From Cambridge University they include: Michael Apted (director), Alan Ayckbourn (playwright, Artistic Director of the Stephen Joseph Theatre), John Barton (playwright, director, former Literary Manager at the National Theatre), Howard Brenton (playwright), John Cleese (actor), Declan Donnellan (director), Dominic Dromgoole (Artistic Director of the Globe Theatre), Richard Eyre (director, former Artistic Director of the National Theatre), Christopher Frayling (Chair, Arts Council England), Michael Frayn (playwright), Simon Gray (playwright), Peter Hall (former Artistic Director of the Royal Shakespeare Company and the National Theatre), Edward Hall (director), Rebecca Hall (actor) David Hare (playwright), Nicholas Hytner (current Artistic Director of the National Theatre), Derek Jacobi (actor), Stephen Joseph (director), Daniel Massey (actor), Simon McBurney (Artistic Director of Theatre de Complicite), Ian McKellen (actor), Sam Mendes (director), Jonathan Miller (director), Trevor Nunn (former Artistic Director of the Royal Shakespeare Company and the National Theatre), Corin Redgrave (actor), Michael Redgrave (actor), Toby Robertson (director), Peter Schaffer (playwright).

### 3.1 German theatre: playwrights and play-texts

In 1920s Berlin, amidst the political instability of the early Weimar Republic, Erwin Piscator (1893-1966) launched the Proletarisches Theater (Proletarian Theatre). Designed as a means by which to promote communist feeling amongst the proletarian class, Piscator outlined two fundamental principles for his theatre. Firstly, it was to ‘break with capitalist traditions and create a footing of equality [...] uniting directors, actors, designers and technical administrative personnel, and then uniting these people with the consumers (that is, the audience)’.<sup>13</sup> Secondly, it was to make an ‘impact on those members of the masses who are as yet politically undecided or indifferent, or who have not yet understood that a proletarian state cannot adopt bourgeois art and the bourgeois mode of “enjoying” art’.<sup>14</sup> Inseparable from the ‘bourgeois mode’ of enjoyment for Piscator was what he identified as the ‘conservative personality cult of the artist’, a hidebound celebration of the individual which he believed structured reactionary responses to forms of cultural production.<sup>15</sup> One of the initial objectives for the Proletarisches Theater was to question the privileged position of the ‘author’ as a singular arbitrator of language and meaning:

It will not always be necessary to give priority to the message the author intended. On the contrary, as soon as the public and the theatre have worked together to achieve a common desire for revolutionary culture, almost any bourgeois play [...] will serve to strengthen the notion of the class struggle [...] Such plays could [...] be altered [...] either by cutting the text, or by building up certain scenes, or, where necessary, even by adding a prologue or an epilogue to make the whole thing clear.<sup>16</sup>

At the Proletarisches Theater and subsequent theatres run by Piscator, including the Volksbühne (Berlin, 1924-1927) and the Piscator-Bühne am Nollendorfplatz (Berlin,

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<sup>13</sup> Erwin Piscator, *The Political Theatre*, ed. and trans. Hugh Rorrison (London: Eyre Methuen, 1980), p. 46.

<sup>14</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>15</sup> Piscator, *Political Theatre*, p. 45.

<sup>16</sup> *ibid.*

1927-9), 'theatre' was not to be regarded as a vehicle for dramatic literature, but as an event which itself constituted a political act. Piscator's re-visioning overhauled both professional hierarchies and artistic value-systems and, in doing so, laid the foundations of contemporary dramaturgical practice in German-language theatre:

We took the view that the dramaturg's task should not be limited as it was in other theatres to drawing up the repertoire, making suggestions for casting the plays, looking for new scripts and cutting superfluous passages in the text. What I required of a dramaturg in our special predicament was that he [sic] be able to cooperate creatively with myself or with the author. Our dramaturg had to be able both to rework texts in the light of our political standpoint and to work out new scenes to suit my ideas for the production, and to help to shape the script.<sup>17</sup>

Under Piscator's direction, as Michael Patterson has asserted, 'the creative process itself became revolutionized',<sup>18</sup> as a generation of left-wing directors, including Peter Palitzsch, Manfred Wekwerth and, of course, Bertolt Brecht adopted and applied Piscator's principles in their own practice. The dramaturg's newly elevated status within German theatre is demonstrated by Brecht's *The Messingkauf Dialogues* (*Dialoge aus dem Messingkauf*), a theoretical tract written as performance text in which five representatives - The Philosopher, The Actor, The Actress, The Dramaturg and The Electrician - discuss the radical transformation of traditional 'bourgeois' theatre. Written sporadically between 1939 and 1955, the theory outlined in the *Messingkauf Dialogues* may be regarded as both guidelines for, and commentary upon, the practical work conducted by the Berliner Ensemble, founded in East Berlin in 1949.

In the *dramatis personae*, the dramaturg is described as the one who 'puts himself [sic] at the Philosopher's disposal and promises to apply his knowledge and abilities to the conversion of the theatre into the theatre of the Philosopher'.<sup>19</sup> Théâtre, in distinction to

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<sup>17</sup> Piscator, *Political Theatre*, p. 194.

<sup>18</sup> Michael Patterson, *The Revolution in German Theatre: 1900-1933* (London: Routledge, 1981), p. 124.

<sup>19</sup> Bertolt Brecht, *The Messingkauf Dialogues*, trans. John Willett (London: Methuen, 2002), p. x.



theatre, rejects what Brecht regards as ‘illusionist’ representation on the grounds that it functions to sustain an unjust status quo: ‘people identified themselves with you [the Actor] and came to terms with the world. You were what you were; the world stayed as it was’.<sup>20</sup> Brecht’s formulation of theatre as *social praxis* in the *Messingkauf Dialogues* instead posits whether the world may be ‘representable’ as a *social question*. He proposes that instead of ‘mirroring’ existing conditions, theatre should present them from a *critically involved* perspective. Following Piscator, this ‘involved perspective’ is to be taken from the ‘great doctrine’ of ‘people’s social life’: Marxism.<sup>21</sup> The Philosopher elucidates:

Marxism posits certain methods of looking, certain criteria. These lead it to make certain judgements of phenomena, certain predictions and suggestions for practical action [...] It is a doctrine that criticizes human actions and expects in turn to be criticized by it.<sup>22</sup>

Central to both Piscator and Brecht’s Marxist theatre was the project of *historicization*, a critical perspective which wrestles with ‘the fact that we are no longer living in the time when the play was written but that that moment and our own age are parts of a continuing historical development’.<sup>23</sup> For Piscator, Brecht and their collaborators, a play-text was not to be regarded as a *permanent literary fact*, something remaining for all time, but rather as ‘something taking place *in time*, as an *historical event*’.<sup>24</sup> The play-text was thus ‘open to historical analysis, revision and reinvention, just as one might approach any other moment in history’.<sup>25</sup> ‘What really matters is to play these old works historically, which means setting them in powerful contrast to our own time’.<sup>26</sup> In the conversion of theatre into *thaëtre*, existing works were to be regarded as

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<sup>20</sup> Brecht, *Messingkauf*, p. 18.

<sup>21</sup> Brecht, *Messingkauf*, p. 27.

<sup>22</sup> Brecht, *Messingkauf*, p. 28.

<sup>23</sup> Clive Barker, ‘Theatre in East Germany’ in *The German Theatre*, ed. Ronald Hayman (London: Oswald Wolff, 1975), pp. 189-200, (p. 193).

<sup>24</sup> Turner and Behrndt, *Dramaturgy and Performance*, p. 48. Emphasis in original.

<sup>25</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>26</sup> Brecht, *Messingkauf*, p. 57.

‘so much raw material’, to be worked into a performance the ‘politics’ and ‘purposefulness’ of which might assume an independent status from the directives of the written text.<sup>27</sup> This was not to dismiss the canon but rather to *deploy* it, to include in the new theatre *re-contextualized* elements of the old. The revisiting of past theatre works included, moreover, not only past dramatic literature, but also the scenography, acting styles and presentational contexts of earlier works. Paul Walsh describes the Berliner Ensemble’s process:

A production aims first to clarify and elucidate the socio-historical, political and economic realities that conditioned the text’s production and original reception. This brings out contradictions displaced, or silent in the text, revealed by the Ensemble through exploratory rehearsals. These contradictions are then analysed and elucidated in terms of the concrete physicality of performance and the *mise-en-scène*: design, gesture, characterization, blocking.<sup>28</sup>

The implementation of these analytical-practical structures at the Berliner Ensemble followed Piscator’s reconstruction of relations between directors, designers, actors and dramaturgs. The Ensemble’s insistence on a dynamic relation between theory and practice positioned the dramaturg at the heart of theatre praxis, extending her critical gaze from the literary structures of a play-text to include design, acting styles and the use of space and architecture, as well as the social, cultural and political contexts of production. During this period, according to Volker Canaris, ‘the Dramaturg became the director’s most important theoretical collaborator’ supporting ‘the entire conceptual preparation of a production from its inception to its realization’.<sup>29</sup>

The practices of *Produktionsdramaturgie* established by Piscator, Brecht and their many collaborators were forged in practice by a collective desire to apply ‘theoretical

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<sup>27</sup> Brecht, *Messingkauf*, p. 30.

<sup>28</sup> Paul Walsh, qtd. Turner and Behrndt *Dramaturgy and Performance*, p. 49.

<sup>29</sup> Volker Canaris, ‘Style and the Director’, trans. Claudia Rosoux, in *The German Theatre*, pp. 247-273 (p. 250).

method', a critically involved perspective, to theatre practice. This politicization of reading strategies advanced a critical approach to the staging of play-texts which has since been adopted and adapted by subsequent generations of directors and dramaturgs, including Peter Stein at the Schaubühne am Halleschen Ufer, Claus Peymann at the Schauspielhaus Bochum and Frank Castorf at the Volksbühne am Rosenberg-Platz, to name just three prominent examples. Within contemporary German theatre cultures, the perceived *affordance* of a play-text – the ways in which it may be made to *function* in performance – is typically regarded not as a property of the *text* but of the total technical and social *context* in which it is performed: the theatre is less 'the site for the representation of a fictive narrative' than 'a scene of action defined not [exclusively] in relation to the text but as part of the larger world surrounding the stage'.<sup>30</sup> The dramaturgical properties of a play-text do not necessarily determine *how it should be used*: 'actors, the design and configuration of the theatre, audience expectations – since these and other features of producing the play are outside the text, beyond its control, we *cannot* read plays as definitive instructions for making performance'.<sup>31</sup> Practices of production dramaturgy seek to exploit the 'gaps', 'silences' or 'contradictions' of a dramatic text in order to forge new uses for dramatic writing, asking both *how* a play might function and *why* it might be important to activate this cultural work in/as performance. This approach to the reading and staging of dramatic literature is obviously not limited to existing play-texts but can be applied to new ones as well.

Viewed from this perspective, the principles underpinning production dramaturgy pose obvious challenges to notions of the 'sovereignty' of play-texts and the 'authority' of playwrights. If the play-text is not regarded as an originary source of meaning to be realized in performance, then a posited set of immanent 'intentions' ascribed to, or

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<sup>30</sup> Worthen, *Between Poetry and Performance*, p. 213

<sup>31</sup> Worthen, *Between Poetry and Performance*, p. xiv. My emphasis.

authorized by, the figure of the playwright is even less likely to wield influence as an arbiter of meaning.<sup>32</sup> Amongst many English practitioners, such an approach to theatre-making prompts the reflexive response that playwrights in Europe are somehow ‘cheated’ of their rightful position within the creative hierarchy. Director Richard Eyre provides a typically disparaging summary of the liberties taken with play-texts by practitioners ‘in the rest of Europe’:

...the creative motor is provided by the director, and the writer is generally a functionary of the directorial conceit – in both senses of the word [...] It’s a habit of mind now amongst European directors and designers to see every text of whatever origin as an opportunity to display feats of design and *mise-en-scene*, the writer’s intentions becoming barely discernable through a fog of expressionism [sic].<sup>33</sup>

Eyre’s assessment projects the value-systems of English theatre onto the professional relations and artistic output of European theatre, judging the latter by criteria which practitioners on the continent do not typically espouse. For example, at a discussion organized at the 2005 Informal European Theatre Meeting by playwrights’ network, The Fence, playwrights David Lindemann (Germany) and Nirav Christophe (the Netherlands), speaking as representatives of theatre-making on the continent, offered their perspectives on the role of playwrights within European theatre. Both playwrights drew a distinction between ‘making a play’ and ‘writing a text’, stating that the latter was the more appropriate means of describing their work. In the words of Christophe:

I think the playwright is the maker of a text not of a play [...] It’s very important to realise that the meaning can only be in performance: not in

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<sup>32</sup> The positioning of the playwright on the ‘margins’ of theatre practice in Germany is reflected and supported by broader institutional structures. Playwrights send their plays to a *Verlage*, organizations which are a mixture of publishing house and agency. If accepted, a *Verlag* will publish the play and agree to act as an agent to the playwright. Each year, *Verlage* send to theatres a publication which lists all the new plays, new translations, and new versions of plays which they have on their books. The *Dramaturgie* of the theatre will then choose from these plays and negotiations will be entered into with the respective *Verlag*, rarely with the playwright him or herself. Playwrights do not expect to be invited to attend rehearsals, though this is not to say that directors or dramaturgs will not consult them about certain aspects of their play, especially if it is a first production.

<sup>33</sup> Richard Eyre, ‘Michelangelo’s Snowman’ in *Theatre in a Cool Climate*, eds. Vera Gottlieb and Colin Chambers (Oxford: Amber Lane Press, 1999), pp. 57-68 (p. 65).

the text itself [...] I don't see stage plays as the place where my text is all important. If I want to say something alone I write a radio play. There I don't collaborate. But in theatre, I don't do that. I have to collaborate.<sup>34</sup>

In contrast to the views of their British colleagues, these playwrights did not regard the theatre as a place where their 'voice' or individual vision should be pre-eminent. Whilst acknowledging that 'German theatre is the most brutal machine on the text', Lindemann averred that:

...good texts can withstand anything and everything [...] I like it when a director has changed things in my work. I get bored if there has been no interpretation [...] I don't think they [directors] can kill me, or the text, because it's not there to be killed.<sup>35</sup>

Rather than presume its priority in performance, the challenge to which playwrights should rise, according to Lindemann, is 'to write text that cannot be avoided'.<sup>36</sup>

While it might be argued by some that Lindemann and Christophe work as playwrights only by 'capitulating' to the demands of a director-led system, this is, I suggest, to overlook foundational differences between English and European theatre cultures. Lindemann, for example, prefaced his presentation by stating: 'Rather than talking about the *role* of the playwright, I would prefer to talk about the *tasks* of a playwright'.<sup>37</sup> This seems to me a key marker of difference: in Lindemann's view, 'playwright' is not a predefined role which subsumes one's identity but simply the description of an individual who performs a particular set of tasks. Lindemann's formulation instates an

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<sup>34</sup> Nirav Christophe, Professor of the Research Centre for Theatre Making Processes at the Utrecht School of the Arts, presentation at 'The Playwright in the Postdramatic World'. Informal European Theatre Meeting, Utrecht, 24<sup>th</sup> November 2005. Notes taken by Sarah Dickenson, np.

<sup>35</sup> David Lindemann, Artistic Associate at the Volksbühne am Rosa-Luxemburg Platz, Berlin, presentation at 'The Playwright in the Postdramatic World'.

<sup>36</sup> Lindemann, 'Postdramatic World'.

<sup>37</sup> *ibid.*

important distance between the individual and the art-form: a distance which is routinely collapsed in the discursive practices of English mainstream theatre.

### 3.2 English theatre: playwrights and play-texts

Eyre's appeal to the 'writer's intentions' is responsive to a theory of expressive realism wherein literary texts 'express the particular perceptions, the individual insights of their authors'. Extrapolating from Belsey's formulation, we might say that, for Eyre, the director's function is to ensure that the 'reality of experience' as 'perceived by one (especially gifted) individual' is respectfully 'rendered in a discourse which enables other individuals to recognize it as true' (safely protected in performance from 'feats of design' or the mysterious 'fog of expressionism'). The way in which Eyre implicitly asserts authorial intention as a guiding beacon for-and-in performance presents, moreover, a perfect articulation of Belsey's 'common sense' view, offered not as a 'self-conscious and deliberate practice' but as the "natural" way' of staging a play-text.

Post-war English theatre features an illustrious history of playwright-director partnerships: Edward Bond and William Gaskill, John Osborne and Anthony Page, Arnold Wesker and John Dexter, Michael Frayn and Michael Blakemore, Tom Stoppard and Peter Wood, David Hare and Richard Eyre, Alan Bennett and Nicholas Hytner, Caryl Churchill and Max Stafford-Clark and, more recently, David Eldridge and Rufus Norris. In 1996, playwright David Hare could wistfully remark (with perhaps premature nostalgia) that 'at one time, every dramatist seemed to boast a regular director as loyal and companionable as a partner or husband' [sic].<sup>38</sup> The rapacity of the new writing industry may have diminished opportunities for similar long-term partnerships during the 1990s and 2000s but it also enabled a new generation of directors to carve out

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<sup>38</sup> Hare, *Obedience*, p. 106.

careers almost exclusively informed by working with living writers. In the view of the Royal Court's former literary manager, Graham Whybrow, 'Britain's best kept secret is that it has a culture of new writing directors who respect the fact that on this model the writer is the *artist* and the director is the *interpreter*'.<sup>39</sup> James MacDonald elucidates this model in a recent interview for *New Theatre Quarterly*:

I never think of myself as the core creator, or the originator, of an image. I think of myself as realizing things that I've been given in the text or that are suggested by the text [...] So I'm only ever as good as the text [...] If you want to do new plays, then, to me, you're doing them because you're *celebrating the imagination of that particular writer*. I don't have anything I wish to peddle to the audience directly myself.<sup>40</sup>

Unlike much German theatre practice, the artist/interpreter model which underpins the reading practices of English mainstream theatre continues to cast theatre as a vehicle for dramatic literature: the act of performance constitutes an interpretation of *something else*, a dramatic work that inheres 'in the "printed form" of the text'.<sup>41</sup> As Artistic Director of the Lyric Hammersmith, Sean Holmes, suggests: 'good writers write so it's like looking at a blueprint of a building: you can imagine the building from the blueprint. That's what reading the script is'.<sup>42</sup> The 'blueprint' metaphor casts performance not as *process* but as *finished structure*, the execution of which may be checked against the prescriptions of the page: the director's responsibility is to 'reveal'

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<sup>39</sup> See also Ben Payne, ed. 'Rules of Engagement', (New Playwrights Trust, 1993). Conference report from 'Rules of Engagement', Albany Empire, 20-21 March 1993. 'There is an ongoing debate about the role of new writing within theatre [...] yet rarely does the crucial relationship between director and writer come into question. The dynamic between these two, arguably the *interpreter* and *creator* of any text based piece of work, is instrumental in the success of any first production and, by default, the future of a script'. np. Original emphasis.

<sup>40</sup> James MacDonald, interviewed by R. Darren Gobert, 'Finding a Physical Language: Directing for the Nineties Generation', *New Theatre Quarterly* 24.2 (2008), pp. 141-157 (p. 155; p. 147). Again, the similarities in expectations, assumptions and process between the practitioners involved in the 'New Wave' and those involved in 'New Writing' are remarkable. Compare Macdonald with Bill Gaskill (Artistic Director of the Royal Court 1965-1972): 'Does [the director] have any creative identity of his [sic] own? My instinct is to say no [...] The director is on the quest of creating an experience for an audience of something that has already existed in the writer's mind. He is not creating something new'. Bill Gaskill, *A Sense of Direction: Life at the Royal Court* (London: Faber and Faber, 1988), pp. 139-140.

<sup>41</sup> Worthen, *Between Poetry and Performance*, p. 54.

<sup>42</sup> Sean Holmes, Artistic Director Lyric Hammersmith, unpublished interview with Jacqueline Bolton, 21<sup>st</sup> June 2010.

a play that is, in some critical sense, already *there* in the text. A conception of the theatre as, in the words of David Hare, ‘a place where the playwright’s ultimate sincerity and good faith is going to be tested and judged in a way that no other medium demands’ introduces, furthermore, a quasi-ethical dimension.<sup>43</sup> To consciously bring something – ‘an approach, a politics, a purposefulness’ – to one’s reading would be to violate one’s ‘direct’ and ‘spontaneous’ encounter with the play-text; to abdicate one’s responsibility towards an ‘objective’ appraisal of that which has been offered by a playwright in ‘sincerity’ and ‘good faith’. In the words of Ian Brown, Artistic Director of West Yorkshire Playhouse:

The pleasure [of directing new writing] is the recognition that the playwright is someone rather extraordinary [...] their voice is something very particular and special and as a director of a new play you are the guardian of that. You serve the play rather than serving your own ego. You’re obviously wanting to make it as good as you can make it, and you’re going to use your director’s skill to make it a really sparkly production, but you’re not going to put a big concept on it, you’re not going to set it on the moon when it’s clearly set in a Scottish hillside. You’ve got to be faithful to it, you’ve got to serve it and you’ve got to serve the playwright.<sup>44</sup>

The logical conclusion of a theatre culture which figures the playwright as the *source* of creative production is the presence of the playwright in the rehearsal room, as James MacDonald attests: ‘it’s one of the great privileges of the Royal Court tradition that you have the person from whose head the whole thing sprang in the room. And you can climb inside that head and rummage around, if he or she will let you [...] I absolutely celebrate it’.<sup>45</sup>

The basic principles of an artist/interpreter model remain unchanged even when the playwright in question is no longer living, as the ‘famous statement of the Royal Court

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<sup>43</sup> David Hare, qtd. Duncun Wu, ed. *Making Plays: Interviews with Contemporary British Dramatists and Directors* (Basingstoke: Macmillan Press, 2000), p. 2.

<sup>44</sup> Ian Brown, unpublished interview with Jacqueline Bolton, 12<sup>th</sup> December 2007.

<sup>45</sup> MacDonald, qtd. Gobert, ‘Finding a Physical Language’, p. 147.



ideal' that 'one should direct new plays as if they were classics and classics as if they were new plays' suggests.<sup>46</sup> A director must excavate the internal dynamics of a play through careful reading of the text, as Katie Mitchell, in *The Director's Craft*, advises:

The ideas that underpin the text determine everything that is said and done during the action of the play [...] If you diagnose the ideas correctly, the process takes you deep inside the writer's head and it is crucial to honour these ideas – however else you may interpret the material.<sup>47</sup>

Whilst contextual research may be undertaken – exploring, perhaps, the play's initial production and reception, other works in the playwright's oeuvre, works of art contemporaneous with the play-text – the overarching objective of this research is typically to gain a greater 'insight into' or 'expertise over' the fiction and the mind that produced it: 'look at what was happening in the writer's life at the time when they wrote the play. This can give you an idea about why the play was written'.<sup>48</sup> Revising, adapting and updating a classical play-text are common strategies but, again, tend to focus upon clarifying or amplifying a unified reading of the text: the justifications for textual revisions provided by directors routinely imitate a dialogue between the director and an 'implied' playwright vis-à-vis the playwright's likely intentions. Compare MacDonald's description of 'rummaging around the playwright's head' with director John Caird's speech to the cast and crew of the National Theatre's production of *Hamlet* (2001):

*Hamlet* [is] a portrait of the life and death of an unbelievably complex man: all Shakespeare's most fascinating thoughts are there in Hamlet's mind. It seems to me a deeply autobiographical play; you can almost hear him as he's writing, not caring where he takes the play, being driven by his thoughts rather than by the plot.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> Hare, *Obedience*, p. 107.

<sup>47</sup> Katie Mitchell, *The Director's Craft: A Handbook for the Theatre* (London: Routledge, 2009), p. 47; p. 49.

<sup>48</sup> Mitchell, *Director's Craft*, p. 46.

<sup>49</sup> John Caird, qtd. Jonathan Croall. *Hamlet Observed* (London: NT Publications, 2001), p. 14

Despite the ‘radical discontinuities between Shakespeare, his theatre, his culture and the circumstances of the modern stage’, the director nevertheless seeks to stage ‘an authentic encounter with Shakespeare, transcending the differences of history, culture, language [and] theatre’.<sup>50</sup> We might say the classic play-text has no ‘history’, in the sense that the intervening years, decades or centuries since its emergence are deemed to have little significant impact upon our ability to receive and make sense of it: the drama either ‘speaks’ to the present moment (‘has universal meaning’) or it does not and is regarded a lesser work for it.

Edward Kemp is one of the most established practitioners in England to prefer the title ‘dramaturg’ to that of playwright, director or producer, working on productions of classical texts at the National Theatre, the Royal Shakespeare Company and Chichester Festival Theatre. In certain respects, Kemp’s work shares affinities with that of a production dramaturg in Germany: conducting research, editing and rewriting, and working alongside the director in order to question, critique, support and guide the vision for production. In contrast to the practices of production dramaturgy established by Piscator and Brecht however, I would suggest that the principles of expressive realism, writ large in the artist/interpreter model described above, also provide the governing principles of Kemp’s dramaturgical practice.

One example of this is provided by Kemp’s description of his role on *The Mysteries*, a production inspired by the texts of medieval mystery cycles, as ‘the writer’s representative [...] in the rehearsal room’, a task for which it ‘became essential to try and get inside the heads of the people who made these plays’.<sup>51</sup> Perhaps a subtler

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<sup>50</sup> W. B. Worthen, *Shakespeare and the Authority of Performance* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), p. 54.

<sup>51</sup> Edward Kemp, ‘The Mysteries’ <<http://www.edwardkemp.co.uk/page10.htm>> [Accessed 5<sup>th</sup> July 2011].

manifestation, though, inheres in Kemp's concept of the 'three time zones', an interpretative tool he refers to as his 'dramaturgical touchstone':

There are three time zones that one is juggling with whenever one makes a piece of theatre. The first one is when the play was written: what was the writer trying to say to his/her audience in his/her time? The next time zone is now: what it means for us to do this play now. The third one was the eye opener: the 'psychoanalytic archetypal', or 'what is the play *really* about?' And you begin to dabble in both the territory of Greek myth and Freudian archetypes. What you discover in the case of Molière is that the plays are profoundly Oedipal. They're about conflicts between fathers and sons.<sup>52</sup>

Each one of equal significance, these three times zones present questions to be 'juggled with' throughout the production process.<sup>53</sup> In my understanding, the point of divergence from German models of production dramaturgy lies in the notion of 'archetypes': figures or tropes which claim to transcend social and material contexts, directly connecting audiences with/to the play's 'universal' humanity; what it's *really* about (a *singular* reading). Whilst distinctions between the time of the play's writing and the time of its contemporary production are drawn, the dramaturgical work Kemp describes seeks ultimately to *erase*, rather than explore, the dialectic of such historical and cultural distance. Compare also the detailed textual work undertaken by Kemp on a National Theatre production of William Congreve's *Way of the World*:

I tried to understand what Congreve was trying to do to his audience in the seventeenth century. [I] speculated on how you could have a similar kind of effect on an audience today and then lent Congreve skills that he might find useful. So at one very basic level, I simply removed every seventeenth-century word that no longer made sense and replaced it with a seventeenth-century word that did make sense and preserved the integrity of the text while making it more accessible to an audience now. But I also cut out some scenes [and] I largely rewrote the plot in the second half. Congreve's plot doesn't work because he doesn't expect his audience to follow it [...] I suggested to Congreve that it might be a good idea if his plot made sense.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> Edward Kemp, unpublished interview with Jacqueline Bolton, 6<sup>th</sup> September 2006.

<sup>53</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>54</sup> *ibid.*

Kemp's description of his approach to this production of *Way of the World* embodies a number of assumptions foundational to English theatre cultures: that the playwright is an autonomous artist; that their intentions are available to be understood; that the text possesses an 'integrity' to be 'preserved'; that audiences require a coherent plot in order to 'access' a play. There are also, however, contradictions between rhetoric and practice: whilst Kemp states that he wishes to 'preserve the integrity of the text', the second half 'doesn't work'. The suggestion that Congreve's plot does not 'work' by modern standards because he did not expect his audiences to follow it does not, for example, present a challenge to be confronted *in and through performance* but a problem to be resolved *textually prior to production*. We might suggest that in this particular instance Congreve's play-text was not so much historicized and re-contextualized in order to activate new readings than recuperated and domesticated for ease of contemporary consumption.

The foregoing does not represent the full spectrum of processes with which Kemp engages – his work as a dramaturg has ranged across classical text-based drama, new writing, opera and dance – and is intended not as a critique of Kemp but of the value-systems which continue to structure mainstream theatre practice in England. It is my contention that the contrasting reading practices of expressive realism and theoretical method underpin a nexus of relationships between play-texts, playwrights, directors and performance which is central to understanding the ideological chasm that can arise between German and English theatre cultures. The site upon which all these relations converge is, of course, the rehearsal room. In order to demonstrate how contrasting attitudes towards the reading and staging of play-texts can impact on production choices and rehearsal protocol, I would like now to offer two brief case studies of rehearsal processes observed during the course of this research in England and Germany. These

are *Hedda Gabler*, adapted by Mike Poulton and directed by Matthew Lloyd at West Yorkshire Playhouse, February 2006, and *Nathan (Ohne Titel)*, adapted from Gotthold Lessing's *Nathan der Weise* by Christian Lollike and directed by Alexander Marusch at the Schauspiel Leipzig, September 2007.

### 3.3 Case studies: *Hedda Gabler* and *Nathan (Ohne Titel)*

2006 commemorated the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Henrik Ibsen's death. It was known to West Yorkshire Playhouse that Mike Poulton, an established playwright and adaptor who lives in the Yorkshire area, 'wanted to do something here' and so the theatre commissioned Poulton to write an adaptation of *Hedda Gabler*.<sup>55</sup> Prior to rehearsals, Poulton and director Matthew Lloyd discussed issues relating to the script as well as possible casting decisions. A letter to Lloyd from Poulton during this period states:

I want to end up with a text that's acceptable to me, you and Ian [Brown] before we start rehearsals [...] I believe, very strongly, in getting a text right before we start [...] naturally, changes do arise in rehearsal – which is fine, so long as they are changes based on what I deliver. Oh dear! This looks more defensive than I intended it to be.<sup>56</sup>

Poulton's letter proceeds to discuss how 'language and speech pattern reveal character' in Ibsen; 'I think the very worse thing is to hear a translation where all the characters in a play speak in the same voice'.<sup>57</sup> Indeed, language and speech were the focus of Poulton's adaptation; the period setting, structure, characters and action remained intact whilst the dialogue was trimmed and divested of melodrama in order to present a leaner, sparser version of the text.

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<sup>55</sup> Alex Chisholm, unpublished interview with Jacqueline Bolton, 4<sup>th</sup> July 2006.

<sup>56</sup> Correspondence from Mike Poulton to Michael Lloyd, dated Thursday 13<sup>th</sup> October 2005. Copy provided by Matthew Lloyd.

<sup>57</sup> *ibid.*

Poulton attended the first week of rehearsals and, in contrast to the production's programme and publicity material, was referred to by actors and director as the *writer*, not the adaptor of the piece. Lloyd declared that he would be treating Poulton's adaptation 'as he would a brand new play' and Poulton's presence in rehearsal as 'writer' contributed to this sense;<sup>58</sup> the intervening century between play-texts appeared more an incidental curiosity than a condition of the drama to be engaged with. On the first day of rehearsals, actors and director together drew up a 'timeline' of all the incidents that took place before, during and immediately after the narrative. These initial discussions served to 'mine' the play-text, exploring questions regarding character, plot and the possible readings of a particular line or scene. Poulton sat silently until Lloyd invited him to comment: 'How much did we get right?' Poulton was always politely thanked by the actors for his contributions, which were received as authoritative and final.

The fictional hinterland created by the cast's 'timeline' was referred to constantly throughout rehearsals and it was from this shared understanding of the play's 'world' that the motivation and execution of lines, moves and reactions were subsequently derived and justified. The play-text provided the first and last reference point for all decisions; most of the questions or problems encountered by actors were resolved with reference to character 'biographies' pieced together from 'clues' in the script. The rehearsal period identified 'key moments' of crisis or resolution within the play and experimented with ways of translating these moments into performance. The text was 'used' chiefly to present a dramatic narrative of suspense and revelation, underpinned by psychologized characters of varying complexity.

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<sup>58</sup> Matthew Lloyd, informal interview with Jacqueline Bolton, January 2006. Notes taken by Jacqueline Bolton.

Christian Lollike's 'free adaptation' of Lessing's *Nathan der Weise* presented a very different process. *Nathan (Ohne Titel) (Nathan (Untitled))*, was published and had already received its premiere at the Aarhus Teater in Denmark. Dramaturg to the production Birgit Rasch introduced the work to me as less a 'play' than a 'philosophical treatise': 'it is too intellectual [...] it is all talking and there are no concrete situations. We have to play and experiment and the text will change a lot in rehearsals'.<sup>59</sup> When I queried why the Schauspiel Leipzig had chosen to stage a text that by her own admission 'didn't work', Rasch was sanguine. Re-writing or re-shaping text was, after all, standard practice – in writing a 'treatise' rather than a 'play' Lollike had, just as Lindemann and Christophe described, written in anticipation of the revision and re-contextualization which animates creative process in German theatre. The Schauspiel's resident director Alexander Marusch was interested in the piece; and most importantly, the themes drawn out by Lollike – religion, conflicts of faith, and multiculturalism – resonated with the theatre's forthcoming season to be oriented around the topic of 'security'.

It should be noted that as a non-German speaker, I was obliged to focus primarily upon the interactions between individuals, rather than the content of the many heated discussions (summarized afterwards for me by Rasch). Throughout rehearsals which, as is customary, were not attended by the writer, I was struck by the playfulness, the sense of spirited improvisation, which the interactions between actors and director possessed. It came as a surprise that the most vocal individual in the room (actors notwithstanding) was neither the director nor the dramaturg but the *Souffleuse*, whose duty it was to both keep the actors 'on track' with their lines and, as rehearsals progressed, to 'track the changes' made to the script. Situated outside the playing space proper, occupying the

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<sup>59</sup> Birgit Rasch, unpublished interview with Jacqueline Bolton, 5<sup>th</sup> July 2007.

same area as the director and dramaturg, the *Souffleuse* served as a prompt, poised to support the actor when she sensed s/he was about to dry. If the energy began to flag, or she heard the actor wildly improvising, then out rang the text, loudly and authoritatively, until the actor regained the character's energy. Often the *Souffleuse* would speak the actor's role alongside him for a few lines, not by way of giving direction but as if to ensure that his 'motor was running' again; this resulted in the actor having to 'act over' the *Souffleuse*, as his delivery of the lines was at variance to her functional prompt.

The dynamic was fascinating and entirely new to me. During rehearsals for *Hedda Gabler*, prompts were not supplied until the actor had 'admitted defeat' and called 'line', despite loss of momentum and the inconvenience of re-starting the scene. To call 'line' seemed an admission of failure and the actor would invariably apologize to the director and his fellow actors. It was as though the words carried the full weight of the action; they had to be precisely right or else the scene ground to a halt. In Leipzig, by contrast, the rhythm and energy of exchanges between actors seemed to be of as much significance as the emotional meaning invested in individual words, or in the construction of sentences. The effect was of streams of text flowing through the actors; the actors seemed to *release* the text rather than to *commit* to it. The presence of the *Souffleuse* meant that the actors need not fixate on remembering their lines but instead could concentrate on interacting and improvising with one another, playing with assorted props in order to invent bits of business. These 'inventions' were recorded by the *Souffleuse* and her two assistants but seemed open for revision (I was observing the early stages of rehearsal). Unlike the 'stop-start' rhythm of the rehearsals I witnessed in Leeds, where actors 'got into' and 'out of' character as if the fiction itself were a costume, the actors here fluidly mixed banter, discussion and scripted lines to the extent



that, unless one was familiar with the play-text, it was difficult to ascertain when the chatting had stopped and the ‘acting’ had begun. The overriding sense was of a game being played, the object of which was to find the most efficacious and entertaining situation within or *against which* the text could be delivered.

At one point in rehearsals, an actor paused proceedings to query his character’s scripted response. In an attempt to answer the actor’s question, the *Souffleuse* produced from her bag a copy of Lessing’s original play, a small bright yellow paperback which caused much laughter amongst the cast. The actor took the book, returned to the playing space and proceeded to read aloud his character’s response as written in Lessing’s original, at which point the room dissolved into giggles. Afterwards Rasch explained:

*Nathan the Wise* is a classic text which everyone had to study at school; we all studied that little yellow primer, it was the standard copy that schools used. When Michel [Schrodt, actor in the Leipzig ensemble] began reading it out, the difference in the language was so funny, it was so archaic compared to our version [by Lollike]. Seeing the actor with this familiar, bright yellow book reading out the original text was very funny.<sup>60</sup>

This improvised bit of business ‘answered’ the query of the actor: both the yellow book and Lessing’s original text were incorporated into the scene in order to exploit the humour derived from their anachronistic presence in performance. The little yellow primer acknowledged the existence of an external social world, which was subsequently invited to intrude upon the stage fiction; the production’s parameters were less *textual* than *contextual*.

The rehearsal process for *Nathan (Ohne Titel)* did not assume a uni-directional dynamic *from text to performance* as witnessed in rehearsals for *Hedda Gabler*. Rather, I saw not

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<sup>60</sup> *ibid.*

only how the written text inspired and guided the work of performance, but also how the work of performance informed and revised the text: text and performance were supplements to one another, forcing readjustments of perception in both directions. The play-text did not 'authorize' the performance, but neither did performance 'authenticate' the play-text; the production's 'integrity', if the term is appropriate, was something that *emerged* during the dynamic encounter between text and performance.

Günther Heeg, Professor of *Theaterwissenschaft* at Leipzig University, asserts that it is the role of the dramaturg to watch 'not only the text, not only the drama, but also the dramaturgy of representation, of performance',<sup>61</sup> suggesting potentially productive spaces between text, dramatic representation and the event of performance. Claus Caesar, dramaturg at Thalia Theater, Hamburg, similarly suggests that 'fundamental to understanding the work of the dramaturg is to recognize the distinction between 'text' and 'situation' and to know how to exploit that to an individual's ends'.<sup>62</sup> Playwright Mark Ravenhill's observation that 'German productions split open the gaps, whereas the pride in English theatre is that you don't see the joins', seems relevant here.<sup>63</sup> The dramaturg - as the one who exploits the gaps, silences and contradictions between text, dramatic fiction and performance - has little room to manoeuvre in theatre cultures which seek a seamless fusion of stage/fiction, actor/character, play-text/performance. If, however, a play-text is regarded not as 'complete' in its written form but rather 'replete' with potential points of departure, then perhaps a greater number of decisions regarding which story to tell, how and why, present themselves to the creative process.

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<sup>61</sup> Günther Heeg, informal interview with Jacqueline Bolton, 9<sup>th</sup> July 2007. Notes taken by Jacqueline Bolton.

<sup>62</sup> Claus Caesar, informal interview with Jacqueline Bolton, 19<sup>th</sup> July 2007. Notes taken by Jacqueline Bolton.

<sup>63</sup> Mark Ravenhill, qtd. Philip Oltermann, 'Divided we stand', *The Guardian*, 3 March 2009 <<http://www.guardian.co.uk/stage/2009/mar/03/ravenhill-theatre>> [accessed 3 September 2009].

I should like now to return to my analysis of reading practices by identifying critical influences upon the intellectual histories of German and English theatre. I have identified two literary critics whose work, I believe, has impacted considerably upon their respective theatre cultures: F. R. Leavis (1895-1978) and Hans Robert Jauss (1921-1997). Jauss' 'Aesthetics of Reception' (*Rezeptionsästhetik*) will be discussed in detail below. First, however, I would like to suggest that the continued influence upon English theatre of such tropes as 'authenticity of experience', 'artistic autonomy' and 'transparency of discourse' may be accounted for in part by the widespread dissemination of literary-critical practices associated with 'Cambridge English' and, specifically, F. R. Leavis. Without particularly wishing to attribute the general sweep of post-war theatre to a single Cambridge don, I do wish to forge a link between the celebrated iconoclasm of 'Leavisite' criticism and the steady stream of Cambridge graduates embarking on professional careers within subsidized theatres during the 1950s and 1960s. In discussing Leavis' literary criticism, I shall concentrate on those aspects which, I believe, continue to inform contemporary value-systems.

### 3.4 F. R. Leavis and 'Cambridge English'

*Tuesday 18<sup>th</sup> April 1978*

News today that F. R. Leavis is dead. A terrible shock. I never actually met him, but I went to his lectures. They were they inspiration of my Cambridge years. He somehow inculcated a feeling that art was to do with better standards of life and better behaviour. [...] All the textual seriousness at the basis of Trevor [Nunn]'s work and of mine comes from Leavis, and there is a vast band of us. Comical to think that Leavis hated the theatre and never went to it. He has had more influence on the contemporary theatre than any other critic.<sup>64</sup>

'In the early 1920s', Terry Eagleton writes, 'it was desperately unclear why English was worth studying at all; by the early 1930s it had become a question of why it worth

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<sup>64</sup> Peter Hall, *Peter Hall's Diaries*, ed. John Goodwin (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1983), p. 347.

wasting your time on anything else'.<sup>65</sup> Reacting against what was regarded as the de-humanizing consequences of an increasingly commercialized mass culture, the 'architects of the new subject at Cambridge' – a select group including I. A. Richards, L. C. Knights and William Empson, as well as Leavis and his wife, Q. D. Leavis – transformed the study of English into an 'arena in which the most fundamental questions of human existence – what it meant to be a person, to engage in significant relationships with others, to live from the vital centre of the most essential values – were thrown into vivid relief' and made 'the object of the most intensive scrutiny'.<sup>66</sup> During the inter-war years, 'Cambridge English', centred around Downing College, fashioned a 'particular way of thinking about and doing English' which, according to Stephen Heath, has subsequently exerted a 'powerful social influence' over the teaching of 'its version of "English"' in schools and universities across England.<sup>67</sup> As Terry Eagleton dryly remarks, 'English students in England today are "Leavisites" whether they know it or not'.<sup>68</sup>

Leavis taught at Downing from the 1930s to the early 1960s, during which time, as Hall suggests, a 'vast band' of students whose careers would later be made in English theatre were introduced to the 'disciplined attention to the "words on the page"' that the 'textual seriousness' of Cambridge English propounded.<sup>69</sup> It would seem that by the 1950s Leavis' reputation preceded him. Patrick Harrison has written of asking the director Trevor Nunn whether he went to Downing College 'by accident'.<sup>70</sup> Nunn's reply, 'Oh, no. Someone at school introduced me to Leavis' books when I was in the sixth form. They made a great impression. I don't think anyone ever went to Downing

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<sup>65</sup> Terry Eagleton, *Literary Theory: An Introduction* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2008), p. 27.

<sup>66</sup> Eagleton, *Literary Theory*, p. 26; p. 27.

<sup>67</sup> Stephen Heath, 'I. A. Richards, F. R. Leavis and Cambridge English' in *Cambridge Minds*, ed. Richard Mason (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), pp. 20-33 (p. 20).

<sup>68</sup> Terry Eagleton: *Literary Theory*, p. 27.

<sup>69</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>70</sup> Nunn was an undergraduate at Downing from 1959-1962.

by accident', appears representative of the notoriety and esteem which Leavis at that time commanded. Playwright Simon Gray recalls coming into contact with Leavis' criticism whilst studying abroad: 'It became a matter of great importance to get to Cambridge as quickly as possible, for Cambridge – in English studies at least – was evidently Leavis'.<sup>71</sup> Raymond Williams provides his own testimony: 'Cambridge was Leavis, though with the paradox – which supported much of our indignation, and which was an important element of the affiliation – that Cambridge, established Cambridge, had rejected him'.<sup>72</sup> 'Inevitably', writes critic and playwright Ronald Hayman, 'we tried to cultivate in ourselves the virtues Leavis taught us to look for'.<sup>73</sup>

Leavis' ringing declaration, in *The Great Tradition* (1948), that the 'great English novelists' 'are all distinguished by a vital capacity for experience, a kind of reverent openness before life, and a marked moral intensity' establishes the critical touchstone of Leavis' thought and writing.<sup>74</sup> An authenticity of experience, a directness of encounter and an appreciation of the 'moral preoccupations that characterize the novelist's peculiar interest in life' are the yardsticks by which the quality of a writer's expression, as well as the subtlety of a critic's response, is to be established and measured.<sup>75</sup> The true poet (Shakespeare is first and foremost a 'poet', and the great novelists are 'poet-novelists') is one 'who is more alive than other people [...] unusually sensitive, unusually aware, more sincere and more himself than the ordinary man [sic] can be'.<sup>76</sup> 'All that we can fairly ask of the poet', writes Leavis, 'is that he shall show himself [sic]

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<sup>71</sup> Patrick Harrison, 'Downing After the War' in *F. R. Leavis: Essays and Documents*, eds. Ian Mackillop and Richard Storer (London: Continuum, 2005), pp. 244-263 (p. 263).

<sup>72</sup> Raymond Williams, 'Raymond Williams' in *My Cambridge*, ed. Ronald Hayman (London: Robson Books, 1977), pp. 53-70 (p. 67).

<sup>73</sup> Hayman, *My Cambridge*, p. 12.

<sup>74</sup> F. R. Leavis, *The Great Tradition* (London: Penguin, 1962), p. 17.

<sup>75</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>76</sup> F.R. Leavis, *New Bearings* (London: Penguin, 1979), p. 16.

to have been fully alive in our time. The evidence will be in the very texture of his poetry'.<sup>77</sup>

There is, in Leavis' criticism, a *living, organic* link between the work and the writer: great literature is that which communicates 'an urgency, a resonance, a personal vibration, adverting us of the poignantly immediate presence of the author';<sup>78</sup> weak or unsuccessful poetry is composed of words that merely 'lie there arranged on the page [and] have no roots', whose writer 'can never have been more than superficially interested in them'.<sup>79</sup> Frequently in Leavis' writings, it is difficult to discern where the author ends and the oeuvre begins; Henry James, for example, has 'an easy and well-bred technical sophistication [...] and a quiet air of knowing his way about the world that distinguish him from among his contemporaries in the language'.<sup>80</sup> This sanctified link between author and work is itself profoundly moral: Conrad's novels are better than Flaubert's, because of 'the greater range and depth of his interest in humanity and the greater intensity of his moral preoccupation'; similarly 'the extraordinary reality' of Tolstoy's *Anna Karenina* 'comes of an intense moral interest in human nature that provides the light and courage for a profound psychological analysis'.<sup>81</sup>

Leavis' name is also closely associated with 'practical criticism' and 'close reading', the practices of which stress the importance of a disciplined attention to 'the words on the page'. The 'impressiveness' of a literary work 'lies in the vivid reality of the things we are made to see and hear';<sup>82</sup> 'the image is so just, the expression of it, far from producing any accidental effect, so inevitable and adequate, that we hardly see the

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<sup>77</sup> Leavis, *New Bearings*, p. 24.

<sup>78</sup> Leavis, *Great Tradition*, p. 51.

<sup>79</sup> Leavis, *New Bearings*, p. 12.

<sup>80</sup> Leavis, *Great Tradition*, p. 21.

<sup>81</sup> Leavis, *Great Tradition*, p. 42; p. 140.

<sup>82</sup> Leavis, *Great Tradition*, p. 217.

words as such; the image replaces them'.<sup>83</sup> To look *beyond* the text towards, perhaps, its cultural and historical contexts of production, is to 'invoke a training in inappropriate linguistic habits':<sup>84</sup> 'unable to relinquish irrelevant demands, the critic cannot take what is offered; misinformed and blinded by preconceptions, he [sic] cannot see what is *there*'.<sup>85</sup> Leavis' cursory dismissal of 'the bright idea' pursued by a Marlowe Society production of Shakespeare's *Measure for Measure* provides sufficient warning to aspiring directors:

... the idea of injecting point, interest and modernity into the play by making [Angelo] a study in neurotic abnormality, strained and twitching from his first appearance, was worse than uncalled-for. But then, if you can't accept what Shakespeare does provide, you have, in some way, to import your interest and significance'.<sup>86</sup>

In one sense, Leavis is championing an important kind of freedom: the freedom of the artist to create without preconception and the freedom of the critic to respond without prejudice. For Leavis, 'true respect' for a text is 'inseparable from the concern to see the object as in itself it really is', to 'insist on the necessary discriminations, and so to make the essential achievement, with the special life and virtue it embodies, effective as influence'.<sup>87</sup> Insisting on 'necessary discriminations' in order to realize the work's 'essential achievement', however, carries with it a presumed *moral* force which undermines the 'freedom' of artists, critics and, by extension, readers and audiences: the 'canon', and one's engagement with/appreciation of it, is to be *guarded* so that its irreducible 'special life and virtue' is neither lost nor traduced but respectfully *preserved*, disclosed to the 'masses' by the guardians of high culture in such a way as to ensure its 'effective influence'.

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<sup>83</sup> Leavis, *New Bearings*, p. 141.

<sup>84</sup> Leavis, *Common Pursuit*, p. 124.

<sup>85</sup> Leavis, *Common Pursuit*, pp. 124-125. My emphasis.

<sup>86</sup> Leavis, *Common Pursuit*, p. 125; p. 172.

<sup>87</sup> Leavis, *New Bearings*, p. 159.

Leavisite criticism implies a *singularity* of proper response, available only to the most perceptive and imaginatively sympathetic of critics. The reader, ‘by participation, both notices and makes what is real in the text, invited to make it so because of the way in which language is energized’.<sup>88</sup> This ‘noticing’ is, importantly, simultaneously a ‘valuing’, an exercise of judgement which enables the ‘placing’ of literary works into an ‘essential order’.<sup>89</sup> In the appreciative words of Barry Cullen, Leavisite criticism ‘adumbrates and reinforces the role of the individual as the locus of all significant understanding or insight’, ‘extend[ing] the idea of the critic as a “realizer” of the text’ to that of a ‘recognizer of its truth, its grasp and perception of human reality’.<sup>90</sup>

The rare real critic too has a more than average capacity for experience, and a passion at once for sincerity and complete conviction. He [sic] knows that, in the nature of things, he can’t attain to the completeness that is finality, and that some of his certitudes may be insufficiently grounded [...] the nearest the perceptively thinking individual gets to the certainty that he is grasping in direct possession significance itself, unmediated, is in the certitude that he has taken possession of the basic major perceptions, intuitions and realizations, communicated with consummate delicacy to the reader in the mastering of the creative work of a great writer.<sup>91</sup>

That Leavis should have had such particular appeal for students interested in drama seems, as Hall states, slightly ‘comical’, given that ‘Leavis hated the theatre and never went to it’. As Dan Rebellato observes in *1956 and All That*, however, a key appeal of Leavis’ literary criticism was the force he gave to the term ‘life’: a phrase ‘carried straight over into the New Left’ whose relations with the New Wave at the Royal Court, as Rebellato records in detail, were both ‘mutual and intimate’.<sup>92</sup> Value-judgements in Leavis’ criticism repeatedly turn upon the living, sensual link between the poet, her

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<sup>88</sup> Ian MacKillop, *F. R. Leavis: A Life in Criticism* (London: Penguin, 1995), p. 171.

<sup>89</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>90</sup> Barry Cullen, ‘The Impersonal Objective: Leavis, the Literary Subject and Cambridge Thought’ in *F. R. Leavis: Essays and Documents*, eds. Ian MacKillop and Richard Storer (London: Continuum, 2005), pp. 149-173 (p. 153; p. 170).

<sup>91</sup> Leavis, *qtd.* Cullen, ‘The Impersonal Objective’, pp. 170-171.

<sup>92</sup> Dan Rebellato, *1956 And All That* (London: Routledge, 1999), p. 23; p. 20.



words and their influence: the strength of Gerard Manley Hopkins, for example, is that ‘he brought poetry much closer to living speech’: ‘his words and phrases are actions as well as sounds, ideas and images, and must, as I have said, be read with the body as well as with the eye’.<sup>93</sup> Literature which possesses the incomparable ‘Shakespearean life’ is that in which ‘the texture of the actual sounds [...] with the variety of action and effort [...] demanded in pronouncing them’ play an essential role in the reader’s encounter with the work.<sup>94</sup> Rebellato reads this vocabulary of ““embodiment”” and ““muscularity”” as part of a principled effort on the part of Leavis and others (T. S. Eliot, Denys Thompson) ‘to bring bodily values back into literature, to reunify the mind and the body’.<sup>95</sup> Underlying Leavisite criticism is a notion of the ‘physical, sensuous, thinking presence of the individual in the text’,<sup>96</sup> a yoking of thought and feeling, language and action, which might easily blur formal distinctions between inert, abstracted ‘literature’ and alive, embodied ‘theatre’.

The ‘detectable force’ of Leavis in English theatre has been noted by several commentators, including Patrick Harrison, who has written of a generation of directors – Peter Hall, Peter Wood, John Barton, Toby Robertson and Trevor Nunn – ‘all influenced by his encouragement to understand how language works’.<sup>97</sup> Assessing the theatrical legacy of Oxbridge during the 1950s, Michael Billington has observed that Oxford ‘didn’t make the same impact on the world at large as Cambridge theatre of the same period’:

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<sup>93</sup> Leavis, *New Bearings*, p. 125; p. 128.

<sup>94</sup> Leavis, qtd. MacKillop, *Life in Criticism*, pp. 213-214.

<sup>95</sup> Rebellato, 1956, p. 25.

<sup>96</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>97</sup> Harrison, ‘Downing After the War’, p. 260. Peter Wood (b. 1927) is a former Associate Director of the National Theatre and enjoys a long-running director-playwright partnership with Tom Stoppard; John Barton (b. 1928) co-founded with Peter Hall the Royal Shakespeare Company for whom he has directed or co-directed over fifty productions; Toby Robertson (b. 1928) is a theatre and film director and was former Artistic Director of the now defunct Prospect Theatre Company. Harrison, ‘Downing After the War’, p. 260. See also George Watson, ‘The Messiah of Modernism: F. R. Leavis (1895-1978)’, *The Hudson Review*, 50.2 (1997), pp. 227-241, and Ros King, ‘Texts and Contexts’, in *Dramaturgy: A User’s Guide* (London: Central School of Speech and Drama and Total Theatre, 1999), pp. 36-37.

Cambridge theatre, I feel in retrospect, reflected the textual rigour and moral force of the Leavisian approach to literature, Oxford the more traditional and quietly appreciative attitude [...] Of course Oxford has produced outstanding individual writers, performers and directors. But it hasn't affected post-war English theatre as powerfully as Cambridge, and this may be a direct reflection on the different approaches of the two universities to teaching and to life in general.<sup>98</sup>

'Textual rigour' and 'moral force' are imperatives which, I believe, continue to structure approaches to staging play-texts within mainstream English theatre cultures, imperatives which, when combined, present a powerfully humanist argument for 'preserving the integrity' of a play-text in performance:

I think the legacy of drama, the great plays, seven or 800 [sic] of them is probably the greatest library of humanist thought and perception that exists [...] The act of drama is essentially moral. [Drama] matters because it needs disseminating. You and I know our Chekhov, but people in their late teens now don't. Does that matter? Yes it does, because they're bloody good plays [...] art is universal and eternal and needs protecting [...] I start off [rehearsals] by saying 'let's look at Hamlet at this particular moment in time [...] what does it say to us?' Let us find out what it is, but in finding out what it says to us, we mustn't abuse what it is.<sup>99</sup>

This perceived *duty* to refrain from 'abusing' a text's notional 'is-ness', as the rhetorical practices of New Writing discussed in Chapter One suggest, continues to stake a significant claim upon mainstream approaches to text and performance. Former Associate Director (Literary) of the National Theatre, John Russell Brown, manifests this claim in his 'stage-centred' criticism of Shakespeare:

Any interest, authority, or force that a performance can have will be temporary, as all theatrical events are temporary and unrepeatable: the text alone has permanent value, deriving from the author and capable of

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<sup>98</sup> Michael Billington, qtd. Humphrey Carter, *OUDS: A Centenary History of the Oxford University Dramatic Society 1885-1985* (Oxford: University Press, 1985), p. 186.

<sup>99</sup> Peter Hall, 'The John Tusa Interviews', John Tusa  
<[http://www.bbc.co.uk/radio3/johntusainterview/hall\\_transcript.shtml](http://www.bbc.co.uk/radio3/johntusainterview/hall_transcript.shtml)>

affecting all elements of performance, both words and action, time and space, actors and audience.<sup>100</sup>

In this 2008 essay, ‘Learning Shakespeare’s Secret Language: the Limits of “Performance Studies”’, Brown exhorts ‘scholars and critics’ to ‘cut through the temporary features of performance’ – actors’ performances, directorial decisions, lighting, design, costumes and audience response – in order to ‘concentrate on what can be learnt about the heart of the matter: what Shakespeare wanted to be on stage and what, moment by moment, the speaking of his dialogue requires from any actor’.<sup>101</sup> By scrutinizing ‘the permanent and authorial qualities embodied in the play text’, in order to uncover ‘the performance potential of the texts regardless of the conditions and context in which they have been performed’, a reader ‘can begin to visualize what might happen onstage and experience in the mind a representation of tangible lived experience’.<sup>102</sup> Brown’s conclusion is that:

Ironically, when study concerns itself with Shakespeare’s plays in performance on a stage, rather than as literature on a page, it is all the more necessary to turn back to the texts and discover, through their secret theatrical language, those elements of performance which the author had in mind as he wrote. From this base it should be possible to build an impression of the theatrical life the plays could have in any context and at any time.<sup>103</sup>

As Worthen has noted, stage-centred analyses which insist that plays (not exclusively Shakespeare’s plays) reveal their true natures only in performance often serve to reinforce a ‘literary’ sense of the play-text, suggesting a stage which is in some sense no more than a ‘printing press’ for performance, a means of ‘reproduc[ing] an already existing play’.<sup>104</sup> Whilst it is in performance that a play-text receives its fullest

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<sup>100</sup> John Russell Brown, ‘Learning Shakespeare’s Secret Language: the Limits of “Performance Studies”’, *New Theatre Quarterly*, 24.3 (2008), pp. 211-221 (p. 220).

<sup>101</sup> Brown, ‘Secret Language’, pp. 216-217.

<sup>102</sup> Brown, ‘Secret Language’, p. 216; p. 220; p. 217.

<sup>103</sup> Brown, ‘Secret Language’, p. 221.

<sup>104</sup> Worthen, *Between Poetry and Performance*, p. 2.

expression, there are strict limitations on the range of interpretations that may be generated by reading the play-text as a revelation of individual insight: performance is to be ‘guided by the text’s internal dynamics, seen as a mode of recovery rather than as a means of producing the text in a different order of signification’.<sup>105</sup>

It is my contention that the reading practices of expressive realism promoted by ‘Cambridge English’ imply a relationship between literature and reader, play-text and director, which, when mapped onto an artist/interpreter model of theatre-making, works to obviate the need for a production dramaturg. Expected to demonstrate a reading of consummate sensitivity, the critic-director’s skill must lie in her ability to ‘realize’ a nuanced and illuminating reading of a given play-text. The ‘responsible’ director approaches a text on ‘its own terms’, closely reading and objectively assessing the playwright’s ideas with neither preconception nor desire to impress her own ideas and theories, “like an ideological waffle-iron”, onto the text.<sup>106</sup> How these ‘new readings’ crystallize – by solitary study before rehearsals begin, or collectively with one’s creative team, for example – will depend upon the working processes favoured by an individual. Nevertheless, the director’s ‘mastery’ of the play-text is a highly individualized affair and the vital connection of intuitive sympathy is of paramount importance; the interruption of this connection by means of another individual, perspective or interpretative theory is inappropriate and discouraged. Directors are rewarded for dissolving into the process, as Tim Auld’s review of *Jerusalem* by Jez Butterworth,

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<sup>105</sup> Worthen, *Authority of Performance*, p. 153.

<sup>106</sup> Richard Hoggart, qtd. Anthony Easthope, *Englishness and National Culture* (London: Routledge, 1999), p. 88. See the description of process provided by director and co-founder of Cheek by Jowl, Declan Donnellan: ‘What I do is problem solve: when I begin the rehearsals I have the text and the actors, and I set myself the fiction that I’m not an interpreter and try to do the play as well as I can [...] I never have any preconceived idea of how I will rehearse’. ‘Declan Donnellan’, *On Directing*, eds. Gabriella Giannachi and Mary Luckhurst (London: Faber and Faber, 1999), pp. 19-23 (p. 20).

evidences: ‘Of Ian Rickson’s direction, his hand is entirely unnoticeable, and you can’t give higher praise to a director than that’.<sup>107</sup>

The theory of expressive realism requires the *dramaturgy of representation* (Heeg), of performance, to *render itself transparent*, as for the medium of performance to itself constitute a critically interested, invasive, interpretative *act* would be to threaten the vital, living connections between the playwright and play-text, play-text and performance, and, ultimately performance and audience: the director must render the play-text in a ‘discourse which enables other individuals to recognize it as true’. To introduce in and through the event of performance a ‘stance towards’ or ‘commentary upon’ the staging of a play-text would be to sever ‘a unity of intention and expression in the cultural object’;<sup>108</sup> to travesty, rather than preserve, the work’s ‘essential achievement’ and, ultimately, to refuse one’s moral obligations.

The practices of production dramaturgy established within German-language theatre are, I believe, unavailable to mainstream English theatre cultures as a result of orthodox reading practices which enshrine the play-text as *a priori* constitutive of the theatrical event. There is little *dialectical* relationship between the play-text and its contemporary production; the performance of a play-text rarely generates a meaning, or suggests a perspective, which does not derive or receive justification from either the directives of the text or the authority of its (implied) playwright. After Worthen, I believe that the English mainstream’s fixation on the text of a play as ‘*representing* the drama rather than *instigating* it’ draws critical attention ‘away from the text’s *agency*’.<sup>109</sup> This fixation also serves to disguise the fact that, in its realization of a play, ‘dramatic

<sup>107</sup> Tim Auld, ‘Green, unpleasant land’, *Daily Telegraph, Seven*, 26 July 2009, pp. 24-25 (p. 25).

<sup>108</sup> Rebellato, 1956, p. 34.

<sup>109</sup> Worthen, *Between Poetry and Performance*, p. 140. Original emphasis.

performance has always (already) altered the text, rewriting it and multiplying it into the many texts used in a given production'.<sup>110</sup>

Against seeking a notional 'transparency' of theatrical discourse, I suggest that the processes of historicization and recontextualization advanced by practices of production dramaturgy 'reveal the mode of (theatrical) production and so potentially dramatize the implication of theatre – the images it constructs and our consumption of them – in the reproduction of social reality'.<sup>111</sup> The *dramaturgy of representation* is enabled to function as a productive site of meaning *in dialogue with* the play-text; it is this dialogue between performance text and context which constitutes the dynamic supported and exploited by a production dramaturg. When the dramaturgy of representation is subordinated to a purported 'seamless fusion' of thought and feeling, language and action, however, the role of the dramaturg is, I suggest, accordingly diminished.

In sum, the premium placed by a theory of expressive realism upon a direct and unmediated encounter between director and play-text, and the suspicion that a 'third voice' in the process could only interrupt and disturb that encounter, work to either negate the functionality of production dramaturgs entirely, or else domesticate the role so as to accommodate it within existing structures. As a result, production dramaturgs are typically perceived by English mainstream theatre cultures as either encroaching upon established territories, rendering them a threat, or else replicating existing functions, rendering them superfluous.

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<sup>110</sup> Worthen, *Between Poetry and Performance*, p. 73.

<sup>111</sup> Worthen, *Between Poetry and Performance*, p. 213.

### 3.5 Hans Robert Jauss and the 'Aesthetics of Reception'

It is also possible to attribute a further characteristic of mainstream English theatre to the legacy of Leavisite criticism: a distrust of, and felt resistance towards, theory and theoretical enquiry. Leavis famously declared his intention to be known as an 'anti-philosopher'; when challenged in 1937 by the literary theorist René Wellek to "become conscious that large ethical, philosophical and, of course, ultimately, also aesthetic choices" are involved' in his literary criticism, Leavis' reply was to argue that a 'philosophic training' for literary critics risked the 'blunting of edge, blurring of focus and muddled misdirection of attention: consequences of queering one discipline with the habits of another'.<sup>112</sup> Leavis' professed absence of theoretical method provides, of course, further iteration of a reading practice supposedly unencumbered by 'distorting preconceptions'; what Belsey terms a specifically 'empiricist common sense' which

urg[es] that the real task of the critic is to get on with the reading process, to respond directly to the text without worrying about niceties of theory, as if 'eclecticism' – or the lack of any systematic approach or procedure – were a guarantee of objectivity.<sup>113</sup>

Leavisite literary criticism is not simply 'beyond' theory; it is an explicit rejection of the validity of theoretical enquiry which continues to reverberate within mainstream discourse today:

There has been a resistance to theory. The British theatre has been very empiricist, which is partly because it's British.<sup>114</sup>

In the theatre, we're pretty rubbish at theorizing anything, really. The English tradition is not to theorize [...] It's deeply in the English sense of what makes people English.<sup>115</sup>

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<sup>112</sup> René Wellek, qtd Leavis, *Common Pursuit*, p. 211. Emphasis in original.

<sup>113</sup> Belsey, *Critical Practice*, 4.

<sup>114</sup> David Edgar, unpublished interview with Jacqueline Bolton, 4<sup>th</sup> April 2008.

<sup>115</sup> David Lan, Artistic Director of the Young Vic, unpublished interview with Jacqueline Bolton, 22<sup>nd</sup> November 2007.

The rehearsal period is generally four weeks – and that’s very much the British way [...] There’s a pragmatic thing that we have – a dislike of theory and too much discussion.<sup>116</sup>

One of the attractions of theatre for me is how it resists theory: whatever you think, feel or say about the theatre, the only test is in performance.<sup>117</sup>

Accustomed as I was to the cursory dismissal of any school of thought associated with Critical Theory in particular and ‘academia’ in general,<sup>118</sup> it came of something of a surprise, interviewing dramaturgs in Leipzig, Berlin, Hamburg, Munich and Stuttgart, to hear references to key figures of critical, cultural and political theory; to, for example, Marcuse, Adorno, Benjamin, Jauss, Foucault and Derrida. However, before the institution of *Theaterwissenschaft* (Theatre Studies) during the 1980s, and long before the practical courses in Dramaturgy established at *Hochschulen* (theatre academies, or conservatoires), dramaturgs were typically trained to degree level – often to doctoral level – in humanities subjects such as German Literature, English Literature, Politics, History, Fine Art and/or Philosophy (this route is still not uncommon today). During a protracted period of intellectual ferment in the 1960s and 1970s - in politics and economics as well as philosophy and literary criticism - a framework and an ethos were thus already established to link the academic discourses of the ‘theory explosion’ to the pragmatic processes of theatrical production. Dramaturgy, for practitioners on the continent, is, at its most fundamental, ‘a theoretical job and a practical job [...] the thesis is “theory-practice, practice-theory”’.<sup>119</sup> As Katherina Keim, lecturer in *Theaterwissenschaft* at the University of Munich, explains:

<sup>116</sup> MacDonald, qtd. Gobert, ‘Finding a Physical Language’, p. 142.

<sup>117</sup> Eyre, ‘Michelangelo’s Snowman’, p. 61.

<sup>118</sup> David Greig: ‘British theatre is tremendously hostile to academia. I mean, to the extent where it’s not just un-interest, there’s actual fear that “you start bringing your book-learnin’ in here and our audiences will go away”. And however much people say otherwise, that is essentially what they think’. Unpublished interview with Jacqueline Bolton, 24<sup>th</sup> August 2006.

<sup>119</sup> Anke Roeder, unpublished interview with Jacqueline Bolton, 24<sup>th</sup> July 2007.



The dramaturg is an invisible person who tries to ship the academic weight to the other side of the river [...] This theory of *reception aesthetics*, for example, was so strong here in Germany from the 1960s [...] The literary theory and the theatre developed this idea more or less together. I mean not in the sense that they collaborated but they had the same arguments [...] [Dramaturgs] studied literature [...] They knew of [these theories] and they really poured it into the theatre.<sup>120</sup>

Indeed, Reception Aesthetics, or *Rezeptionsästhetik*, presents the most lucid explanation I have encountered of central tendencies within contemporary practices of production dramaturgy across German-language theatre. I would like to argue that to fully appreciate the foundational differences between English and German theatre cultures, it is necessary to compare the principles of Leavisite literary criticism with those propounded by one of *Rezeptionsästhetik*'s seminal essays, Hans Robert Jauss' 'Literary History as a Challenge to Literary Theory' (1967).

In 'Literary History as Challenge', Jauss asserts that 'the quality and rank of a literary work' results not from the 'biographical or historical conditions of its origin', nor from 'its place in the sequence of the development of a genre alone' but rather from 'the criteria of influence, reception, and posthumous fame, criteria that are more difficult to grasp'.<sup>121</sup> After brief summaries of Marxist and (Russian) Formalist approaches to literature, Jauss states that in order to 'bridge the gap' between 'historical and aesthetic approaches', and so revive practices of literary theory, it is necessary to move beyond 'the closed circle of an aesthetics of production and representation' in order to encompass 'the dimension of [a work's] reception and influence': the dimension of the 'reader, listener and spectator – in short, the factor of the audience'.<sup>122</sup> This is a call for a theory of the 'historicity' of literature: a theory which would explain and evaluate the continued influence of canonical literature understood not as a collection of works

<sup>120</sup> Katharina Keim, unpublished interview with Jacqueline Bolton, 25<sup>th</sup> July 2007.

<sup>121</sup> Hans Robert Jauss, 'Literary History as a Challenge to Literary Theory' in *Toward and Aesthetic of Reception*, trans. Timothy Bahti (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1982), pp. 3-45 (p. 5).

<sup>122</sup> Jauss, 'Literary History', p. 18.

independent of socio-historical context, but as a series of processes defined as always already in dynamic relation to ‘the material production and social praxis’ of historical human beings.<sup>123</sup>

The limitations of previous Marxist and Formalist approaches, as Jauss sees it, is that their methods conceive of a literary work as a ‘*literary fact*’: a ‘positivistic view’ of literature and of history which, writes Jauss, ‘neglects the artistic character as well as the specific historicity of literature’:

A literary work is not an object that stands by itself and that offers the same view to each reader in each period. It is not a monument that monologically reveals its timeless essence. It is much more like an orchestration that strikes ever new resonances among its readers.<sup>124</sup>

In distinction to ‘literary facts’, reception aesthetics suggests that works ought to be approached as ‘literary events’, which *come into a being* determined by the reader’s knowledge or experience of existing conventions and evaluative criteria: ‘the coherence of literature as an event is primarily mediated in the horizon of expectations of the literary experience of contemporary and later readers’.<sup>125</sup> An analysis of the ‘literary experience’ of a reader ‘avoids the threatening pitfalls of psychology’ if it describes the reception and the influence of a work within the ‘system of expectations that arises for each work in the historical moment of its appearance’.<sup>126</sup> By ‘system of expectations’, Jauss is referring primarily to a ‘pre-understanding of the genre, from the form and themes of already familiar works’: any literary experience demands a ‘foreknowledge which is an element of the experience itself’; indeed, it is this very context of foreknowledge which makes available the literary experience.<sup>127</sup>

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<sup>123</sup> Jauss, ‘Literary History’, p. 10.

<sup>124</sup> Jauss, ‘Literary History’, p. 21.

<sup>125</sup> Jauss, ‘Literary History’, p. 22.

<sup>126</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>127</sup> Jauss, ‘Literary History’, p. 22; p. 23.

A literary work, even when it appears to be new, does not present itself as something absolutely new in an informational vacuum, but predisposes its audience to a very specific kind of reception by announcements, overt and covert signals, familiar characteristics, or implicit allusions. It awakens memories of that which was already read, brings the reader to a specific emotional attitude, and with its beginning arouses expectations for the ‘middle and end’, which can then be maintained intact or altered, reorientated, or even fulfilled ironically in the course of the reading according to specific rules of genre or type of text [...] The new text evokes for the reader (listener) the horizon of expectations and rules familiar from earlier texts, which are then varied, corrected, altered, or even just reproduced.<sup>128</sup>

These observations are not in themselves particularly radical. David Edgar, in his recent book *How Plays Work*, advances the same basic thesis when he writes of the ‘rules’ of playwriting as ‘a sedimentation of all the expectations of plays (and, to an extent, all the stories) which we have ever encountered’:

...we judge a play conventionally, how it relates to other stage plays and indeed other fictions which we have internalized in our minds throughout our reading, listening, watching and play-going lives [...] the audience internalizes an accretion of conventions which add up to a pattern of structural expectation which can be fulfilled or broken but not ignored.<sup>129</sup>

A critical difference between these theses, however, a difference which I believe goes some way to explaining the mutual incomprehension often demonstrated by German and English theatre cultures, lies in the artists’ ideal relation to this established ‘horizon of expectations’. For Edgar, whilst the playwright ‘won’t be thanked for sticking so closely to the rules that the play is predictable from start to finish’, neither will ‘audiences readily accept their expectations being wilfully ignored’; of the three types of ‘probability’ that audiences ‘demand’, ‘convention’ sits alongside ‘factual plausibility’ and ‘coherence’ as standards which a play should ideally meet.<sup>130</sup> Jauss, on the other hand, writes that the ideal relationship to ‘literary-historical frames of

<sup>128</sup> Jauss, ‘Literary History’, p. 23.

<sup>129</sup> David Edgar, *How Plays Work* (London: Nick Hern Books, 2009), p. 7; pp.8-9.

<sup>130</sup> Edgar, *How Plays Work*, p. 7; pp. 8-9.

reference' is one which evokes the reader's horizon of expectation, formed by a convention of genre, style or form, 'only in order to *destroy* it step by step'.<sup>131</sup> The greater the *distance*, or *disparity*, between the given horizon of expectations and the new work of art, the better placed the work is to effect a transformative *change of horizon* 'through negation of familiar experiences or through raising newly articulated experiences to the level of consciousness'.<sup>132</sup>

For Jauss' aesthetics of reception, valuable literary works are those which force the reader into a 'critical awareness of implicit beliefs', 'disconfirm routine habits of perception' and 'violate normative ways of reading' so as to introduce new strategies for understanding.<sup>133</sup> The aesthetic value of a work of art may thus be determined by the magnitude of *horizontal change* that occurs:

...to the degree that this distance decreases, and no turn toward the horizon of yet-unknown experience is demanded of the receiving consciousness, the closer the work comes to the sphere of 'culinary' or entertainment art. This latter work can be characterized by an aesthetics of reception as not demanding any horizontal change, but rather as precisely fulfilling the expectations prescribed by a ruling standard of taste, in that it satisfies the desire for the reproduction of the familiarly beautiful; confirms familiar sentiments; sanctions wishful notions; makes unusual experiences enjoyable as 'sensations'; or even raises moral problems, but only to 'solve' them in an edifying manner as predecided questions.<sup>134</sup>

With regards to the *socially productive* dimension of literature and art, the capacity of artworks to 'lead men beyond the stabilized images and prejudices of their historical situation toward a new perception of the world or an anticipated reality' is most valuable,<sup>135</sup> works which 'only allow an already previously known (or ostensibly known) reality to be *once again recognized*' command lesser social and aesthetic value:

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<sup>131</sup> Jauss, 'Literary History', p. 24. My emphasis.

<sup>132</sup> Jauss, 'Literary History', p. 25.

<sup>133</sup> Eagleton, *Literary Theory*, p. 68.

<sup>134</sup> Jauss, 'Literary History', p. 25.

<sup>135</sup> Jauss, 'Literary History', p. 14.

for Jauss, ‘the specific achievement of literature in social existence is to be sought exactly where literature is not absorbed into the function of a *representational art*’.<sup>136</sup>

Again, however, the phenomenon of ‘horizontal change’ is itself implicated in historical process. Aesthetic distance, ‘at first experienced as a pleasing or alienating new perspective’ will, perhaps inevitably, disappear for later readers, to the extent that the ‘original negativity’ of the work has itself become a familiar expectation.<sup>137</sup> In such cases, it requires a ‘special effort’ to read these works “‘against the grain” of the accustomed experience, to catch sight of their artistic character once again’.<sup>138</sup>

Efforts to reconstruct the past horizon of expectations within which an earlier work was created and received are motivated less by the desire to uncover an ‘authentic’ or ‘original’ meaning than to speculate upon the past questions to which this text offered answers. Such an approach ‘brings to view the hermeneutic difference between the former and the current understanding of a work’, ‘raises to consciousness the history of its reception, which mediates both positions’ and thereby calls into question the ‘apparently self-evident claims’ that ‘literature is eternally present, and that its objective meaning, determined once and for all, is at all times immediately accessible to the interpreter’.<sup>139</sup> The interpreter who supposedly ‘disappears’ before the text is, in fact, ‘rais[ing] his own aesthetic preconceptions to an unacknowledged norm and unreflectively moderniz[ing] the meaning of a past text’:

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<sup>136</sup> Jauss, ‘Literary History’, p. 14; p. 45.

<sup>137</sup> Jauss, ‘Literary History’, p. 25.

<sup>138</sup> Jauss, ‘Literary History’, p. 26. I am reminded here of Michael Thalheimer’s description of his working practice: ‘Schiller, Goethe, Lessing [...] all those playwrights wrote their pieces back then on the verge of crying out loud, driven by rage, and willing to provoke a response right there and then. And rage, breaking boundaries, and crying out – that must still be at the heart of the matter today’. Thalheimer, qtd. Peter Boenisch, ‘Exposing the classics: Michael Thalheimer’s *Regie* beyond the text’, *Contemporary Theatre Review*, 18.1, pp. 30-43 (p. 33).

<sup>139</sup> Jauss, ‘Literary History’, p. 28.

Whoever believes that the ‘timelessly true’ meaning of a literary work must immediately, and simply through one’s mere absorption in the text, disclose itself to the interpreter as if he had a standpoint outside of history and beyond all ‘errors’ of his predecessors [...] denies ‘those presuppositions [...] that govern his own understanding’ and can only feign an objectivity ‘that in truth depends upon the legitimacy of the questions asked’.<sup>140</sup>

Literary history challenges literary theory to acknowledge that all interpretation is situational. There is no possibility, as Leavisite criticism tantalizingly implies, of a reader-critic encountering and knowing the text ‘as it is’: the reader’s hunt for a ‘truth’ ‘buried’ in a text is mistaken, for meaning is not to be dug out or pieced together from textual clues but rather reached by an interactive process in which the text is constituted *by and in* act of reading.

Released from the duty to respect an ‘organic integrity’, readings of play-texts, to apply Jauss’ theory to theatre, can be defiantly provisional.<sup>141</sup> Supporting this approach to dramatic literature and its theatrical production, the dramaturg works collaboratively with a director and an ensemble to effect a reading not so much *drawn out* from the interpretive parameters of a text but *structured in response* to historical traditions, theatrical convention and contemporary contexts of reception. In this specific sense, the dramaturg serves as an advocate for the play-text in as much as s/he is an ‘advocate of a proper act of reading’;<sup>142</sup> in the words of Hans-Thies Lehmann, the dramaturg’s role is to test, or ‘doubt’, the precipitous analyses which congeal around aesthetic works or, rather, the *tradition* of their *reception*:

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<sup>140</sup> Jauss, ‘Literary History’, p. 29. Jauss is quoting Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Wahrheit und Methode* (1960).

<sup>141</sup> Jauss in fact concludes his essay by invoking two titans of German theatre as examples of his method: ‘Thus a literary work with an unfamiliar aesthetic form can break through the expectations of its readers and at the same time confront them with a question, the solution to which remains lacking for them in the religiously or officially sanctioned morals. Instead of further examples, let one only recall here that it was not first Bertolt Brecht, but rather already the Enlightenment that proclaimed the competitive relationship between literature and canonized morals, as Friedrich Schiller not least of all bears witness to when he expressly claims for the bourgeois drama: “The laws of the stage being where the sphere of worldly laws end”’. ‘Literary History’, p. 44. See Chapter Four.

<sup>142</sup> Hans-Thies Lehmann, ‘Theater Denken, Risiken wagen, Formeln nicht glauben’, *Theater der Zeit*, Vol. 3 (2005), pp. 12-13 (p. 13). Trans. by Kara McKechnie. Emphasis in original.

The older texts have to be torn away from conformity [conventionalism] again and again and that is something the advocate of the text has to facilitate. This, of course, means the conformism of tradition, rarely that of the text itself. *The dramaturg is the advocate of a reading practice that enables even the oldest texts to be understood in a new way.*<sup>143</sup>

Dramaturgical perspectives engage the historical dimension of dramatic literature as ‘event’ (in other words, as an instance of production and reception) and the *theatrical treatment* of a literary work is thus often *informed* by a critical consciousness working with or against these traditions.

It is the *dramaturgy of representation*, enabled to function as a productive site of meaning, in which, I believe, the playing out of this critical consciousness is given full reign. This, by definition, invites strategies of representation that seek not to *erase* but actively *exploit* theatrical discourses, to invite what Jacky Bratton usefully refers to as ‘the intertheatrical’ into performance. An intertheatrical reading of performance:

...seeks to articulate the mesh of connections between all kinds of theatre texts, and between texts and their users. It posits that all entertainments, including the dramas, that are performed within a single theatrical tradition are more or less interdependent. They are uttered in a language, shared by successive generations, which includes not only speech and the systems of the stage – scenery, costume, lighting and so forth – but also genres, conventions and, very importantly, memory. The fabric of that memory, shared by audience and players, is made up of dances, spectacles, plays and songs, experienced as particular performances – a different selection, of course, for each individual – woven upon knowledge of the performer’s other current and previous roles, and their personae on and off the stage.<sup>144</sup>

Bratton’s invocation of audiences’ knowledge of performers is particularly apposite with respect to the resident ensembles which form the constant artistic reference for German theatre audiences (typically, actors’ head shots are lavishly framed and

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<sup>143</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>144</sup> Jacky Bratton, *New Readings in Theatre History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), pp. 37-38.

displayed in the theatre foyer; a ‘team’ to whom audiences pledge loyalty and affection). As just one example of ‘intertheatricality’ within German theatre, I would like to suggest that the fact of resident ensembles, from which all productions are cast, makes it difficult for an audience to ‘read’ a character without also ‘reading’ the performer’s own status, or persona, *alongside* the performance they give. Unlike an English theatre system which typically expects its actors to be ‘perceptually indistinguishable from their character’, the actor working within an ensemble system cannot ‘withdraw from the audience into the text in an inspiring act of indivisible vitality’.<sup>145</sup> The relation between actor and character instead offers itself as a potential site for ‘the enjoyment of artifice, of pleurably playing off actor against character’.<sup>146</sup> of *exploiting* a contradiction between stage and fiction,<sup>147</sup> the effect of which is dependent upon the intertheatrical reading brought to a production by its audience.

Within German theatre cultures the spectator (reader, listener) is regarded as both implicit and complicit in the theatrical realization of a ‘literary event’. Christopher Innes has written of theatre in Germany: ‘the audience addressed is the opposition, the aim a radical change in consciousness’.<sup>148</sup> ‘Opposition’ is too strong a word, yet it does accurately suggest the implied position of the audience as observers or witnesses, rather than consumers, of a theatrical event. In a 2005 article in *Theater der Zeit*, Hans-Thies Lehmann addresses the complex implications of the formulation ‘making theatre for the audience’.

This sentence is interesting: it is right, but it has trapdoors. To make theatre ‘for’ an audience: this turn of phrase does not clarify for whom or

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<sup>145</sup> Rebellato, 1956, p. 81; p. 79.

<sup>146</sup> Rebellato, 1956, p. 79.

<sup>147</sup> German playwright Johannes Schrettle stresses the importance of ‘what lies between the stories and the stage, between actor and character’ in *Janus: European New Writing in Translation*, eds. Jacqueline Bolton and Sarah Dickenson (Leeds: Alimus, 2007), p. 34.

<sup>148</sup> Christopher Innes, *Modern German Drama: A Study in Form* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), p. 46.



for what in the audience [...] Theatre for the viewer who ‘becomes’, who changes himself and his perception and is just waiting for the impulse and inspiration to see new things newly; or theatre for the viewer who ‘is’, who is something and somewhere and wants confirmation of and satisfaction from that?<sup>149</sup>

Lehmann’s conclusion is that the dramaturg, as committed advocate of the production’s critical vision, ‘should trust the artistic impulses, should trust that these will be able to communicate with the “becoming” in many viewers’.<sup>150</sup> In describing the production’s relationship to its audiences, Lehmann uses the word *treffen*, a word without English equivalent which may be translated as ‘to meet socially with’ but also carries connotations of ‘to strike’, ‘to move’ or ‘to injure’. Tim Etchells perhaps captures this gesture when he talks of combining, on the one hand, a ‘trust in the spectators’ ability to cope [...] to make a way through a performance experience’, with, on the other hand, ‘a really healthy mistrust of what an audience is as a formation, of what it “wants” as a collective presence’.<sup>151</sup> ‘In the triangle of author, work, and public’, Jauss writes, ‘the last is no passive part, no chain of mere reactions, but rather itself an energy formative of history’.<sup>152</sup> The dramaturg serves less as a representative of playwright, I believe, than that of the audience as ‘itself an energy formative of history’.

### 3.6 Conclusion

The director cannot simply be ‘loyal to the work’, for the work is not something lifeless and final: once it is placed in the world, it changes with time, acquires patina and assimilates new awareness. So the director is given the task of finding that standpoint from which he can uncover the roots of the dramatic piece [...] Only inasmuch as the director feels himself the servant and interpreter of his time will he succeed in fixing the standpoint which he has in common with the decisive forces that shape the character of the age.<sup>153</sup>

<sup>149</sup> Lehmann, ‘Theater Denken’, p.13.

<sup>150</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>151</sup> Tim Etchells, ‘Step off the Stage’ in *The Live Art Almanac*, eds. Daniel Brine and Emmy Minton (Live Art Development Agency, 2008), pp. 7-15 (p. 13).

<sup>152</sup> Jauss, ‘Literary History’, p. 19.

<sup>153</sup> Piscator qtd. Patterson, *Revolution in German Theatre*, p. 123.

Jauss's formulation of *Rezeptionsästhetik* presents a theoretical rationale for an approach towards staging play-texts which rejects a notional fidelity to 'the work' in favour of a critical exploration of *how* a text might continue to mean within contemporary contexts of production and reception. The *affordance* of a play-text, to return to Worthen, 'arises from our understanding of the uses of writing in performance'; and this cannot be 'directly calibrated, *blueprint*-like, against the text "itself"'.<sup>154</sup> Practices of production dramaturgy address less the staging of a play than the staging of a *relationship* to a play, a process in which the audience is centrally involved.

Within mainstream English theatre, however, the reading practices of expressive realism as mapped onto a dominant artist-interpreter model continue to delimit understandings of and experiments with the relations between play-text, performance and audience. Whilst English mainstream theatre practice has traditionally remained resistant to critiques of its conceptual frameworks, as artists' access to international work increases, and greater exchange between theatre cultures occurs, English theatre will inevitably face new questions and challenges to practices hitherto protected and preserved by the insularity of previous generations. Indeed, there is growing evidence that some of these questions and challenges are issuing from a perhaps unexpected quarter: English playwrights whose plays have been produced by German 'auteur' directors. Simon Stephens, for one, has described his experience of encounters with German theatre:

In London [*Hérons*] was perceived as being felt and tender, naturalistic and detailed and rather slow. This was at the base of my assumptions about what to expect. What I saw was entirely different. [Sebastian

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<sup>154</sup> Worthen, *Between Poetry and Performance*, pp. 12-13.

Nübling's] production was ferocious and fast, sexy and angry. He'd re-centred two peripheral characters to the heart of the play. They spat, swore, played American football with another character's arse, ran like lunatics and yelled the language with an energy that was as focused as it was furious. I loved it. I had never realised that there was a life latent within my plays that I'd not prescribed.<sup>155</sup>

Mark Ravenhill has also voiced a previously unanticipated appreciation of continental approaches to play-texts:

This emphasis upon the auteur in European theatre is partly because they have such faith in the text. That's been the strange journey for me; for your first couple of forays into that world you think it's because they don't like the text and the author. Actually what you realise is that we have a rather fragile sense of the text, that it's all going to fall apart at any given moment, that unless we protect it and circle the wagons around it that it's going to be got at. But actually, particularly in German theatre, the author is so respected and venerated – so what if someone deconstructs your play? It exists there as a great text that can be [...] pulled apart and interpreted in very many different ways. So the text seems less fragile.<sup>156</sup>

In order to renounce the fragility of 'art-as-object', and embrace the robustness of 'art-as-process', present relations between playwright, play-text, director and performance need to be supplemented by a greater critical appreciation of the *act* of spectatorship. A more nuanced understanding of the value-systems which structure dramaturgical practice in England and Germany might offer a way of meeting these perspectives upon the staging of dramatic play-texts.

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<sup>155</sup> Simon Stephens, 'Skydiving Blindfolded', keynote speech at *Stückmarkt 2011, Haus der Berliner Festspiele*, 8<sup>th</sup> May 2011 <<http://www.theatertreffen-blog.de/tt11/author/simonstephens/>> [Accessed 18<sup>th</sup> June 2011].

<sup>156</sup> Mark Ravenhill, speaking at 'How Was it For Us? British Theatre Under Blair', British Theatre Consortium, Writers' Guild of Great Britain, London, 9 December 2007. Audio transcription by Jacqueline Bolton.

## Chapter Four

### Theatre as a Cultural Mission: Politics and Subsidy

Where the previous chapter focused on the role of production dramaturgy servicing the dynamic between play-text and performance, this chapter addresses the role of institutional dramaturgy as it services a dynamic between theatre and society. As stated in the introduction, the *Dramaturgie*, a discrete department of dramaturgs, is centrally responsible for forging a theatre's artistic profile. The *Dramaturgie* engages with the social and political climate of the city or town in which the theatre is located and consciously positions the institution within this environment. Representing the theatre and its productions to the public is a vital aspect of the institutional dramaturgs' work: 'while a director directs the plays, the dramaturgs try to direct the whole theatre as a play, as a theatre-play in the town'.<sup>1</sup>

Within English theatre cultures, the myriad functions of a dedicated dramaturgy department – programming; appointing directors; providing production dramaturgy, overseeing the composition of an ensemble; informing press and publicity; hosting educational and outreach activities; shaping a theatre's artistic policy – are generally perceived, by practitioners and scholars alike, as practicable only within the context of a highly-subsidized ensemble repertoire system. As this is a system which contemporary English theatre cultures do not operate and, it is asserted, cannot afford, the potential role of an institutional dramaturg is often dismissed by practitioners in England as an 'unnecessary (and perhaps unaffordable) luxury'.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Carl Hegemann, former dramaturg at the Volksbühne am Rosa Luxemburg Platz, unpublished interview with Jacqueline Bolton, 16<sup>th</sup> July 2007.

<sup>2</sup> Anthony Dean, *Dramaturgy: A User's Guide*, eds. Total Theatre and Central School of Speech and Drama, (London: CSSD and Total Theatre, 1999), p. 3.

I want to suggest, however, that the institutional dramaturg is not simply a (by-)product of generous state subsidy but that her role provides a fundamental justification *for* those impressively high levels of subsidy.<sup>3</sup> As listed above, many of the *Dramaturgie*'s functions are integral to the running of any theatre; what distinguishes the organizational infrastructures of theatres in Germany and England is not the existence of an 'extra' department but simply a different arrangement of roles and responsibilities. In positioning the *Dramaturgie* at the heart of producing structures, German theatres unify artistic and administrative functions - programming, marketing, casting, education - which in English theatres can often be dispersed across several departments. In this chapter, I want to argue that the current institutional organization of theatres in Germany and England – and, hence, the perceived necessity of a dedicated dramaturgy department – is a direct reflection of not only *levels* of subsidy but also the mechanisms by which it is provided and the purposes to which it is put. These factors are, in turn, critically influenced by the arguments and rationale used by local and national governments to *justify* arts subsidy.

The history of German-language theatre is defined by a commitment to 'theatre as a cultural mission':<sup>4</sup> a profoundly held conviction that the arts in general and theatre in particular play a critical role in sustaining the *cultural welfare* of a healthy society. 'A well-run theatre', as Simon Williams and Maik Hamburger note in *A History of German Theatre* (2008), is 'as necessary to the health of the community as [...] a research university, a well-stocked library, a symphony orchestra, or even an efficient hospital

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<sup>3</sup> The federal system and lack of any centralized arts agency (see below) make it difficult to assess precise subsidy levels. John Allen records that in 1978/9 theatres received an average 17.2% of their income from the box office and 82.2% from subsidy. Subsidy totalling 80% of costs seems to remain today's average. *Theatre in Europe* (Eastbourne: John Offord, 1981), p. 133.

<sup>4</sup> Katherina Keim, lecturer in *Theaterwissenschaft* at the University of Munich, unpublished interview with Jacqueline Bolton, 25<sup>th</sup> July 2007.

and clinics'.<sup>5</sup> Germany is today divided into sixteen *Länder* (regional and state governments). Each *Land* has its own Minister (or equivalent) of Cultural Affairs responsible for the direct allocation of subsidies, some budgetary supervision and the appointment of *Intendanten* to theatres. Policy and practice vary across the different *Länder*, but a common feature is the presence of an artist advisory committee to assist and inform the Ministry on decisions regarding questions of artistic quality.<sup>6</sup> There is no centrally controlled arts agency, such as the UK model of the Arts Council, as it is widely believed that a separate, autonomous organization would be less effective in lobbying for money than that of a Ministry or similar government agency.<sup>7</sup>

A theatre's *Intendant* is chosen from a number of applicants by a committee of the sponsoring state or municipal authority, 'usually after considerable public airing and eager debating in the press, both locally and nationally'.<sup>8</sup> The *Intendant* is typically accompanied by a select team of trusted artistic collaborators - dramaturgs, designers, sometimes actors – and, once appointed, s/he assumes total artistic and fiscal control of the theatre. The *Intendant* is contracted to the state, or city, for an average period of four years and funding may be secured from the authorities, without annual assessment, for up to seven years. If a theatre underperforms, which in Germany is indicated by audience attendance consistently below 60%, the *Intendant* is dismissed and a new individual appointed.

Germany's system of theatre subsidy enables professional *security* – actors, directors and technicians are municipal or state employees, with contractual guarantees and

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<sup>5</sup> Simon Williams and Maik Hamburger, eds. *A History of German Theatre* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), p. 1.

<sup>6</sup> See J. Mark Davidson Schuster, *Supporting the Arts: An International Comparative Study, Canada, Federal Republic of Germany, France, Italy, Great Britain, Netherlands, Sweden, United States* (Washington: National Endowment for the Arts, 1985), pp. 17-18.

<sup>7</sup> See Schuster, *Supporting the Arts*, p. 18.

<sup>8</sup> Peter Fischer, 'Doing Princely Sums – Structure and Subsidy' in *The German Theatre*, ed. Ronald Hayman (London: Oswald Wolff, 1975), pp. 215-234 (p. 229).

pension rights; *freedom* from commercial constraints – plays receive longer rehearsal periods than in England and may be produced for aesthetic, political or social reasons, irrespective of whether they score a success at the box-office; *autonomy* in artistic and financial matters and, critically, a *stability* of funding levels which allows for and encourages long-term planning and strategy. Conceived as a place for ‘the discussion of aesthetic, ideological and political matters, and hence as a part of the general education of the public’,<sup>9</sup> the levels, means and purposes of subsidy in Germany grant theatres the ability (and responsibility) to present a mixed repertoire of foreign and domestic classics, adaptations, translations, new work and, often, opera and dance on their stages. Over a sustained period of time, a theatre and its resident ensemble can build strong connections with its public, developing audiences for works which might otherwise be regarded as ‘difficult’ and therefore enabling a greater diversity of aesthetic experiment. The programming of a theatre can be led by the interests and passions of its senior artistic team: the *Intendant* in consultation with the *Dramaturgie*. As a critical mediator between the theatre, its programme, its productions and the public these play to, the *Dramaturgie* is thus integral to the German theatre’s civic role.

Regarded for most of its history as a commercial enterprise, theatre and theatre provision in England were not informed by similar commitments until comparatively recently. State subsidy for the arts continued to be resisted in the early decades of the last century as a ‘continental and deeply un-British institution’, with warnings in the House of Commons against efforts to ‘Prussianize our institutions’.<sup>10</sup> Indeed, it was not until the war-time Council for the Encouragement of Music and Arts (CEMA) indicated

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<sup>9</sup> William R. Elwood, ‘Freedom of the German Repertoire’, *Modern Drama* 13.3 (1970), pp. 237-258 (p. 238).

<sup>10</sup> Anselm Heinrich, *Entertainment, Propaganda, Education: Regional theatre in Germany and Britain between 1918 and 1945* (Hertfordshire: University of Hertfordshire Press, 2007), p. 237; Arthur Lynch, qtd. Janet Minihan, *The Nationalization of Culture: The Development of State Subsidies to the Arts in Great Britain* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1977), p. 148.

that the arts showed ‘real promise of voter appeal’ that the British government decided to proceed with a national agency for arts provision.<sup>11</sup>

The advent of state funding offered huge opportunities for theatre provision in England, providing the burgeoning regional repertory movement with the resources to develop and expand on an unprecedented scale: by 1970, only a quarter of a century after the Arts Council had been established, more than sixty subsidized building-based regional producing theatres were operating across the country.<sup>12</sup> However, as Olivia Turnbull argues in *Bringing Down the House: The Crisis in Britain’s Regional Theatres*, the ‘quasi-accidental’ circumstances of the Arts Council’s foundation, and the ‘consequent unresolved issues surrounding the funding body’s role and responsibilities’ have in fact ensured a consistently fragile material base for regional producing theatres in post-war England.<sup>13</sup>

For several decades, the Arts Council’s criteria for allocating funds, as well as the methods of distributing them, were ‘largely ad-hoc’;<sup>14</sup> indeed, it was not until 2001 that a national theatre policy detailing ‘consistent, coherent guidelines for funding’ was drawn up by the Arts Council for its clients.<sup>15</sup> Indeed, the absence of clear policy and precise targets was maintained by the Arts Council partly as a point of principle. In 1973, Richard Findlater, then a member of the Drama Panel, defended the Arts Council’s operations by rejecting the idea of what he called ‘theories’ - ‘theories of what arts are more important than others; of what principles should govern public

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<sup>11</sup> Janet Minihan, *Nationalization of Culture*, p. 288.

<sup>12</sup> Olivia Turnbull, *Bringing Down the House: The Crisis in Britain’s Regional Theatres* (Bristol: Intellect Books, 2008), p. 10.

<sup>13</sup> Turnbull, *Bringing Down the House*, p. 11.

<sup>14</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>15</sup> *ibid.*



subsidy [and] of what artists should be subsidised in preference to others'.<sup>16</sup> The reason for this was to protect the arts from 'interference from the state':<sup>17</sup> the same rationale lay, of course, behind the stated 'arm's length' principle of the Arts Council. Many commentators have since argued that the Arts Council's ideological 'arm's-length' status was, in Turnbull's phrase, 'always questionable';<sup>18</sup> as Robert Hutchinson concluded in his 1982 study of the Arts Council of Great Britain, 'the Arts Council has to, and does, work within the grain of Government policy'.<sup>19</sup>

In practice, as Turnbull demonstrates, the growth of subsidy has meant that 'government bureaucracy has become an increasingly important determinant' in the operations of producing theatres, with state funding 'an increasingly vital condition of their survival'.<sup>20</sup> The 'fluctuating nature of government cultural and economic policy', however, coupled with the 'erratic' basis on which the Arts Council has historically allocated funds, have together created 'insecure grounds' for theatres in receipt of subsidy to rely upon.<sup>21</sup> Good box-office has continued to be an essential condition of both subsidy and survival; in a 1970 report, the Arts Council noted that regional theatres were still expected to gain seventy-five per cent of their income through the box office to break even.<sup>22</sup> In the absence of a profound historical commitment to theatre as cultural welfare, and without even a clear-sighted policy for the distribution of government monies, factors such as plural funding structures, fluctuating subsidy levels and competing political demands have largely militated against the conditions of stability, freedom, autonomy and continuity granted by the levels and structures of

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<sup>16</sup> Richard Findlater, qtd. Jane Woddis, *Spear-Carriers or Speaking Parts?: Arts Practitioners in the Cultural Policy Process*, unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Warwick, Centre for Cultural Policy Studies, p. 62. Copy provided by Jane Woddis.

<sup>17</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>18</sup> Turnbull, *Bringing Down the House*, p. 12.

<sup>19</sup> Robert Hutchinson, qtd. Schuster, *Supporting the Arts*, p. 36.

<sup>20</sup> Turnbull, *Bringing Down the House*, p. 11.

<sup>21</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>22</sup> Turnbull, *Bringing Down the House*, p. 38.

subsidy in Germany. In the absence of these conditions, opportunities for the sort of long-term planning and aesthetic experiment supported by the presence of a *Dramaturgie* have been severely reduced.

This chapter addresses the history and philosophy of state patronage in Germany and England, analysing some of the key developments from the eighteenth century to the present day in order to ascertain how the ‘civic function’ of theatre has been construed by these respective countries. It then considers the contemporary ‘cultural missions’ which English and German theatre are today funded to fulfill, evaluating English theatre’s increasing focus upon issues of diversity, access and inclusion with reference to the German theatre’s conspicuous lack of similar initiatives, despite the increasing diversity of its population. It shall argue that the model of the *Dramaturgie* as a department which forges direct links between a theatre’s social function, artistic programme and public reception could provide a useful means by which to facilitate critical and creative responses to the socializing missions with which English theatres are today tasked.

#### **4.1 The founding of German theatre: the Enlightenment**

In order to appreciate the exceptional regard with which theatre in Germany is held by public and government alike, it is necessary to return to the ‘founding’ of the ‘German’ stage during the eighteenth century. The Germany of this period was divided into a myriad of dukedoms and principalities, the largest of which was Prussia, ruled from 1740 to 1786 by King Frederick II. In 1763, The Seven Years War ended with Prussia confirmed as one of the great European powers, and the growing nationalism of the time demanded that Germany become unified both politically and culturally. In light of the Empire’s fragmentation, it was the emerging print cultures of philosophy, literature and,

for reasons explored below, especially drama to which intellectuals looked as potential elements of cultural consolidation. Unlike Italy, France or England at this time, however, the German language could boast no dramatic canon, nor claim an indigenous stage tradition; the theatrical reform which took place during the century was thereby motivated as much by a desire to rehabilitate the German language as a literary medium which could unify a nation, as it was by a desire to improve the standards and morals of the stage. It is perhaps salient to note that today the German-language equivalent of ‘the Queen’s English’ is *die sprache der Bühne*, ‘the language of the stage’.

At the beginning of the eighteenth century, theatrical production in Germany was divided between *Wandertruppen*, itinerant troupes of actors and comedians performing improvisational comedies, and aristocratic court theatres dedicated largely to the production of Italian opera and French drama. In 1727, supported by the ‘German Society’ of Leipzig, Johann Christoph Gottsched, Professor of Philosophy and Poetry at Leipzig University, collaborated with Friederica Carolina Neuber, director of a renowned actors’ troupe, on a series of ventures aimed at reforming the *Wandertruppen*’s repertoire, replacing the commercially-orientated ‘fantastic adventures and amorous imbroglios’ with classic prose dramas designed, in Neuber’s words, ‘not so much to amuse the spectators as improve them’.<sup>23</sup> Neuber and Gottsched’s reform advanced an early argument for the social benefits of theatre: in programmes published to accompany their productions, the troupe ‘stressed their contribution to the happiness of their fellow-citizens and to the prosperity of the State’,

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<sup>23</sup> Caroline Neuber, qtd. W. H. Bruford, *Theatre, Drama and Audience in Goethe’s Germany* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul Ltd., 1950), p. 38.

asserting that their dramatic presentations provided a service to society for which they should be remunerated by the authorities.<sup>24</sup>

Neuber's troupe spawned successors, most notably G. H. Koch and Konrad Ackermann, both of whom attempted to combine economic survival with a continued emphasis upon the edification of a burgeoning middle-class public. In Hamburg, between 1758 and 1763, it was Koch who advanced the first approach towards a permanent repertory company, managing an ensemble of actors presenting a mixed repertoire on a regularly changing basis. Trading upon the public enthusiasm generated by Koch's company, in 1764 Konrad Ackermann borrowed enough money to build a permanent theatre there. Three years later, when the aspiring theatre manager J. F. Löwen decided to launch Germany's first 'National Theatre', he found both financial assistance and an existing theatre in Hamburg. According to W. H. Bruford, Löwen 'simply leased [Ackermann's] building, took over his company, and added no more and no better works to the existing repertoire [...] than had been usual in the preceding years'.<sup>25</sup> Neither a pioneering company nor a particularly successful one, the distinction accorded the short-lived 'Hamburg National Theatre' rests upon the involvement of Germany's 'foremost man of letters', Gotthold Ephraim Lessing.<sup>26</sup>

A philosopher, theologian, journalist, art critic, essayist, and translator, Lessing (1729-1781) was also Germany's pre-eminent dramatist. Lessing's appointment to the post of 'Dramaturg' advertised on behalf of the Hamburg National Theatre a commitment to raise dramatic standards, educate the taste of the public and, moreover, promote the

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<sup>24</sup> Pascale Laborier, 'Cultural Policy as Welfare Policy: A Geneological Approach – The Reform of German Theatre in the 18<sup>th</sup> Century', *The International Journal of Cultural Policy*, Vol. 7.2 (2000), pp. 259-280 (p. 267).

<sup>25</sup> Bruford, *Goethe's Germany*, p. 102.

<sup>26</sup> Mary Luckhurst, *Dramaturgy: A Revolution in Theatre* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), p. 25.

cultivation of a national cultural heritage. Lessing himself, although able to read and translate Latin, Greek, French, Italian, Spanish, Dutch and English, wrote his extensive oeuvre of plays, essays and letters in German, dedicating his career to the creation of a national literary culture which spoke to the concerns of an increasingly confident and assertive middle-class.<sup>27</sup>

Concomitant with the will for a union of states and peoples was the desire to realise ‘an intellectual aristocracy, independent of the aristocracy of birth’:<sup>28</sup> an expression of the Enlightenment (*Aufklärung*) ideals coursing through the art, philosophy and politics of eighteenth-century Germany. The consummate Enlightenment thinker, Lessing’s major contribution to German drama - and dramaturgy - is his dedicated promotion of theatre as a ‘public forum that engages its audience in the project of Enlightenment’,<sup>29</sup> a project which was at the same time one of national identity formation.

Famously described by Immanuel Kant (1724-1804) as a ‘way out’ (*Ausgang*) from a state of self-imposed tutelage,<sup>30</sup> Enlightenment thinking dared humanity to take confidence in the power of its intelligence to understand and re-shape the world. Peter Höyng describes the Enlightenment philosophy to which Lessing adhered as:

an act of conscious resistance against a tradition that is perceived as antiquated or irrational. It is a *process* in which one first evaluates the current state of knowledge [...] before one develops an empirical, philosophical or scientifically informed and new approach [...] Common to all these efforts is the desire to change society in the social, political or cultural domain’.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Barbara Fischer and Thomas C. Fox, ‘Lessing’s Life and Work’ in *A Companion to the Works of Gotthold Ephraim Lessing*, eds. Barbara Fischer and Thomas C. Fox (Rochester, NY: Camden House, 2005), pp. 13-40 (p. 16).

<sup>28</sup> Bruford, *Goethe’s Germany*, p. 112.

<sup>29</sup> Peter Höyng, ‘Lessing’s Drama Theory: Discursive Writings on Drama, Performance and Theatre’ in *A Companion to the Works of Gotthold Ephraim Lessing*, eds. Barbara Fischer and Thomas C. Fox (Rochester, NY: Camden House, 2005) pp. 211-130 (p. 217).

<sup>30</sup> Immanuel Kant qtd. Michel Foucault ‘What is Enlightenment?’ in *The Foucault Reader* (New York: Pantheon, 1984), pp. 32-50 (p. 34).

<sup>31</sup> Höyng, ‘Lessing’s Drama Theory’, p. 211

Attempts to comprehend the world were simultaneously accompanied by an examination of ‘the emotions and passions that inform human natures, social customs and mores, knowledge of which was considered indispensable for the advancement and improvement of society’.<sup>32</sup> For Lessing and many of his contemporaries, theatre – ‘the most stirring vehicle of the life of the mind’<sup>33</sup> – provided an unparalleled means by which to question the status quo, reveal the complexities of human nature and promote the critical mode of thinking which a new era of intellectual freedom both enabled and demanded. This belief in the power of theatre to encourage a critical dialectic between the world of the drama and the world of the spectator underpins the essays written, collected and published by Lessing as the *Hamburg Dramaturgy* (*Hamburgische Dramaturgie*) in 1769. Indeed, reading past the excoriating critiques of French neo-classical drama and protracted disquisitions on Aristotle, it is possible to perceive in this collection of essays the values and convictions which continue to inform dramaturgical practice in twenty-first century Germany.

In the *Hamburg Dramaturgy*, drama is cast as ‘neither a single nor a discrete branch of knowledge’ but as encompassing a wide range of concerns ranging from playwriting, acting, design, and performance to hermeneutics, social criticism, morality and politics.<sup>34</sup> The supposedly deleterious effects of criticism upon enjoyment are dismissed as fallacy – ‘those who have learnt to judge a piece the most severely are always those that visit the theatre the most frequently’<sup>35</sup> – and a productive tension is identified

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<sup>32</sup> Steven D. Martinson, ‘Lessing and the European Enlightenment’ in *A Companion to the Works of Gotthold Ephraim Lessing*, eds. Barbara Fischer and Thomas C. Fox (Rochester, NY: Camden House, 2005), pp. 41-66 (p. 42).

<sup>33</sup> Victor Lang, introduction to *Hamburg Dramaturgy*, Gotthold Ephraim Lessing, trans. Helen Zimmern (New York: Dover Publications, 1962), p. xviii.

<sup>34</sup> Edward M. Batley, *Catalyst of Enlightenment: Gotthold Ephraim Lessing* (New York: Peter Lang, 1990), p. 5.

<sup>35</sup> Lessing, *Hamburg Dramaturgy*, p. 64.

between literature and theatre, with the latter considered integral to the emotional, and therefore moral, effects of the former:

To what end the hard work of dramatic form? Why build a theatre, disguise men and women, torture their memories, invite the whole town to assemble at one place if I intend to produce nothing more with my work and its representation, than some of those emotions that would be produced as well by any good story that every one could read by his [sic] chimney-corner at home?<sup>36</sup>

Perhaps the most enduring gesture of the *Hamburg Dramaturgy* is its affirmation of a public discourse surrounding drama and theatrical production. As resident critic of the Hamburg National Theatre, Lessing's self-appointed task was to articulate the meanings of dramatic works to the public, on whose behalf he wrote, in order to stimulate debate and create a common consensus as the basis for future critical enquiry. According to Klaus L. Berghahn, unlike the situation in France and England 'where taste as common sense could already appeal to a bourgeois public', in Germany, the public's judgement received a philosophical justification through the figure of a critic 'who mediated between emotional responses [...] and aesthetic principles';<sup>37</sup> in the ideal formulation, 'the critic was both an advocate and educator of the public'.<sup>38</sup> The aim of critical consensus was not to ordain the meaning of a work once and for all, still less to impose rigid 'models' of dramatic convention, but to underscore the value of public discourse and criticism in a process of collective enlightenment. Literature and criticism were conduits by which the rising middle-classes might forge common values and opinion; the theatre as conceived by Lessing and many of his contemporaries was a 'cultural and public domain that tied aesthetics and politics together'.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Lessing, *Hamburg Dramaturgy*, p. 198.

<sup>37</sup> Klaus L. Berghahn, 'Lessing the Critic: Polemics as Enlightenment' in *A Companion to the Works of Gotthold Ephraim Lessing*, eds. Barbara Fischer and Thomas C. Fox (Rochester, NY: Camden House, 2005), pp. 67-88 (p. 74).

<sup>38</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>39</sup> Höyng, 'Lessing's Drama Theory', p. 220.

The development of one's capacities - mental, spiritual, moral and aesthetic - achieved a particular significance and philosophical justification in eighteenth-century German culture. As used by Lessing's friend and colleague, Moses Mendelssohn (1729-1786), *Bildung*, a term for which there is no precise English translation, subsumed both *Kultur* (culture; practical) and *Aufklärung* (Enlightenment; theoretical) into a vital concept of 'self-formation', or 'self-education'.<sup>40</sup> *Bildung* and the Enlightenment complemented one another in the Kantian sense that as man is responsible for his immature status, so he will be able to escape it only by a change in himself brought about by himself: 'the Enlightenment must be considered both as a process in which men participate collectively and as an act of courage to be accomplished personally'.<sup>41</sup> Human beings are at once 'elements and agents of a single process',<sup>42</sup> conceived as 'both an artist and an artwork with the task of "self-formation"'.<sup>43</sup> *Bildung* as reflexive verb, *sich bilden*, took on a particular significance in eighteenth-century German drama, as suggested by Charles Taylor's description: 'man comes to know himself by expressing and hence clarifying what he is and recognizing himself in this expression'.<sup>44</sup> The realm of the aesthetic was particularly well-suited to the process of self-education, because by it 'true goods and evils are made as thoroughly sensible as they can be'.<sup>45</sup> Enlightenment thinkers considered the dramatic arts, like other forms of art and literature, as an instrument of moral, political and spiritual training; that is, as an instrument of *Bildung*. Indeed, the drama was hailed the highest form of art precisely because it 'linked in an ideal manner the sensual appearance of a corporeal image in space with the

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<sup>40</sup> Martinson, 'Lessing and the European Enlightenment', p. 41.

<sup>41</sup> Foucault, 'What is Enlightenment?', p. 35.

<sup>42</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>43</sup> John H. Smith, *The Spirit and its Letter: Traces of Rhetoric in Hegel's Philosophy of Bildung* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1988), p. 49.

<sup>44</sup> Charles Taylor qtd. Smith, *The Spirit and its Letter*, p. 48.

<sup>45</sup> Martinson, 'Lessing and the European Enlightenment', p. 47.



intellectually moving statement in time, thereby guaranteeing the best possible effect on the spectator'.<sup>46</sup>

The most eloquent exponent of the relationship between *Bildung* and theatre was Lessing's ardent disciple, the philosopher, historian and playwright, Friedrich Schiller (1759-1805). In his 1784 address, 'Theatre Considered as A Moral Institution', delivered to the German Elector's Society whilst resident dramatist at the Mannheim Court Theatre, Schiller captured in powerful rhetoric the ideals and expectations with which a new generation of public intellectuals greeted the German theatre. Drama and theatre, he declared, exercised every faculty of the passions and intellect, 'providing nourishment to the soul's every power [...] and uniting the acculturation of mind and heart with the noblest sort of entertainment'.<sup>47</sup> The stage was 'a school of practical wisdom, a guide to our daily lives, an infallible key to the most secret accesses of the human soul'.<sup>48</sup> Referring to the ongoing social reform of legal and political authorities, Schiller notes that 'humaneness and toleration are becoming the predominant spirit of our times; their rays have penetrated the courtrooms, and further still, into the hearts of our rulers', and rhetorically asks 'what share of this divine labour falls to our theatres? It is not these which have acquainted man with his fellow man, which have explored the hidden mechanism of his actions?':<sup>49</sup>

Thus is the great and varied service done to our moral culture by the better-developed stages; the full enlightenment of our intellect is no less indebted to it [...] The stage wields critical, determining influence over morality and enlightened thought [and] is the institution where instruction and pleasure, exertion and repose, culture and amusement are wed; [...] we are given back to ourselves; our sensibilities are

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<sup>46</sup> Berghahn, 'Lessing the Critic', pp. 83-84.

<sup>47</sup> Friedrich Schiller, 'Theatre Considered as a Moral Institution' (1784), trans. John Sigerson and John Chambless, *The Schiller Institute* <[http://www.schillerinstitute.org/transl/schil\\_theatremoral.html](http://www.schillerinstitute.org/transl/schil_theatremoral.html)> [accessed 16 July 2011].

<sup>48</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>49</sup> *ibid.*

reawakened; salutary emotions agitate our slumbering nature, and set our hearts pulsating with greater vigour.<sup>50</sup>

Schiller's address laid the foundation for a view of theatre held by the German middle-classes ever since, as an institution which could and should function as a critical touchstone for German civil society.

Although itself short-lived, the example of the Hamburg National Theatre inspired a number of similar ventures, in the small towns of Gotha and Münster (both 1775) and in the larger cities of Vienna (1776) and Mannheim (1779). During the course of the nineteenth-century, theatre as a '*moralische Anstalt*', a institution for serious aesthetic discourse, gained enormously in prestige; in 1808, the royal *Publikandum* of Königsberg recognised theatre as an institution of *Bildung* as important as scientific and artistic academies.<sup>51</sup> Alongside libraries, museums, galleries and public gardens, theatres became a prime means by which Germany's numerous dukedoms and principalities displayed their wealth and sophistication. As David Barnett puts it, 'theatres signified "culture" and each territory was keen to demonstrate its credentials'.<sup>52</sup> Whilst a proportion of the theatres created during this period, such as the Rokokotheater in Schwetzingen (near Heidelberg), were integrated as status symbols into the residences of dukes or princes, those located in the heart of towns and cities enjoyed the proximity to public discourse advocated by Lessing and his contemporaries.

Whilst the common perception of German theatre is that aristocratic patronage was continuous until the modern state took over, Anselm Heinrich, in *Entertainment, Propaganda, Education: Regional Theatre in Germany and Britain* (2007) has detailed

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<sup>50</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>51</sup> Laborier, 'Cultural Policy as Welfare Policy', p. 273.

<sup>52</sup> David Barnett, 'The Problems and Pleasures of Running a Theatre in Berlin: The Changing Role of the *Intendant*', *Contemporary Theatre Review*, 18.1 (2008), pp. 80-83 (p. 81).

how, during the eighteenth, nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the economic organization of these German theatres was, in fact, not dissimilar to that deployed in England.<sup>53</sup> Whilst the courts or, later, local municipalities were perhaps more likely to financially contribute to the construction of theatre buildings, the greater proportion of these theatres were not then administered by the authorities but instead leased to entrepreneurs. If a theatre was suffering financial difficulties then the annual lease might be waived, but this did not amount to a widespread or regular policy of subvention. For the few theatres that did receive an annual grant from an aristocratic ruler or business consortium, these subventions were limited and rarely granted financial stability; theatres across Germany were reliant upon the box-office throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. ‘Commercial’ in orientation, German theatres nevertheless housed a resident ensemble, presented plays in repertoire, possessed a dramaturgical office and were widely accepted as promoting national unity whilst simultaneously contributing to the cultural and social welfare of the public. Differences between English and German theatre cultures during this period lay, therefore, not in subventions granted or withheld but in the expectations of public and government shaped by cultural and historical imperatives. The dramaturg, as ‘educator and advocate’ of the public, became a critical figure in the articulation of ideas and principles designed to stimulate a debate which itself was regarded as a valuable exercise. The dramaturgical profession today remains at the centre of theatrical production, facilitating the social, political and philosophical enquiries with which the German theatre is expected to engage.

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<sup>53</sup> See esp. pp. 80-81.

## 4.2 Twentieth-century German theatre: censorship and freedom

Indeed, it was not until the military defeat of Imperial Germany in 1918 that municipalities across Germany decreed statutory support of their theatres. At this juncture, thirty-two court theatres came under the control of the federal states of the new Weimar Republic; the lease system on municipal theatres was ended; and by 1923 the subsidy of both state and city theatres became directly linked to federal and municipal budgets.<sup>54</sup> Whilst securing statutory support, this direct link to governmental resources left theatres vulnerable to censorship and, moreover, prepared the ground for the Nazi takeover of theatres during the 1930s.

Upon accession to power in 1933 Hitler sought to distance the National Socialist Party from their image as radicals seeking revolutionary change. The cultural authority wielded by theatre in Germany suggested itself as an effective medium for the dissemination of Nazi ideology, and the public's regard for the theatre was accordingly exploited in a number of ways. Desiring to cultivate the sense of respectability and stability which would 'recommend [the Nazi party] to the bourgeois classes as an established people's movement', the takeover of Germany's municipal theatre system was presented as one amongst a number of 'sweeteners' for those uncertain of the new leadership.<sup>55</sup> Previously, the economic instability that Germany suffered in the 1920s had prompted municipal councils to discuss cuts in the realm of the arts, including mergers between theatres or even a return to the commercial lease system. Heinrich suggests that these discussions gave the public the negative impression that fiscal

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<sup>54</sup> See Michael Patterson, *The Revolution in German Theatre 1900-1933* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1981), pp. 28-29 and Heinrich, *Entertainment*, pp. 81-90. John Allen also notes that: 'until the November Revolution of 1918 all German theatres had been run on a commercial basis except for 32 court theatres and 10 municipal theatres [...] with pressures of war and the economic deterioration of the country during the 1920s the concept of theatre as business began to be questioned and was seen to be inimical to theatre as art'. *Theatre in Europe*, pp. 81-82.

<sup>55</sup> Heinrich, *Entertainment*, pp. 101-102.

considerations were being prioritized over artistic standards, thereby leaving ‘cultural politics’ as an area of concern ripe for Nazi propaganda to exploit.<sup>56</sup>

In 1933, for example, the Münster Stadtheater in Westphalia was threatened with closure. After a successful public appeal to save the theatre, the new Nazi magistrate seized the opportunity to take over the project. In a campaign covered by local and national press, the theatre was refurbished by the new administration and presented to the public, in line with Nazi *Völkische* ideology, as a shining example of what could be achieved by ‘the *Volksgemeinschaft* working together for their *Volkstheater*’.<sup>57</sup> In Berlin, renowned artists such as Gustaf Gründgens and Heinz Hilpert were appointed as *Intendanten* of the Staatstheater and Deutsches Theater, ‘a strategy which allowed [the Nazis] to claim that the government respected and supported the [...] theatre’.<sup>58</sup> Moreover, in striking contrast to circumstances elsewhere, where the Great Depression was causing mass unemployment for theatrical professions, the legislation and working conditions for those practitioners allowed to remain in their jobs (see below) improved dramatically. Subsidies increased, salaries increased, attendances rose, jobs were created and pension funds established; all theatres were brought under public ownership and theatre workers – actors, directors, designers, dramaturgs and technicians – were granted the status of civil servants.<sup>59</sup>

At the same time as these ‘sweeteners’ were ‘cultivating respectability’, Joseph Goebbels’ Reich Culture Chamber was consolidating control over all aspects of

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<sup>56</sup> Heinrich, *Entertainment*, p. 113.

<sup>57</sup> Heinrich, *Entertainment*, p. 93. *Völkisch* derives from the German word *Volk*, meaning people and holds ‘strong romantic, folkloric and “organic” undertones’. Under the Nazis, however, the term became increasingly characterized by ‘anti-communist, anti-immigration, anti-capitalist, anti-parliamentarian and strong anti-Semitic undercurrents’ (p. 19).

<sup>58</sup> Erika Fischer-Lichte, ‘Patterns of Continuity in German theatre: Interculturalism, performance and cultural mission’ in *A History of German Theatre*, eds. Simon Williams and Maik Hamburger (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), pp. 360-377 (p. 376).

<sup>59</sup> In 1933, 147 publicly subsidized theatres employed some 22,000 people. By 1940 these numbers had risen to 248 theatres employing 44,000 people. Audience figures tripled within four years from 520,000 in 1932 to 1.6m in 1936. See Heinrich, *Entertainment*, p. 221n73.

Germany's arts and culture. On 15 May 1934, the Reich Cabinet issued the Theatre Law. Censorship became the administrative responsibility of the Propaganda Ministry, which now wielded complete authority over all theatre licensing.<sup>60</sup> The law granted the ministry veto over the appointments of *Intendanten*, directors and music directors, who were henceforth to conduct themselves 'according to the best artistic and moral convictions' as dictated by Nazi ideology.<sup>61</sup> Swathes of Jewish and other 'unsuitable' theatre-workers were dismissed from their posts and works by Jewish dramatists and composers, along with left-wing drama, disappeared from repertoires.<sup>62</sup> The law also vested the ministry with powers to prohibit productions and to demand the performance of works deemed necessary for the 'fulfilment of [a] cultural mission' now distorted by a fascist regime.<sup>63</sup>

Under Goebbels' direction was the *Reichsdramaturgie*, a National Dramaturg's office which worked in conjunction with the Theatre Chamber to oversee the implementation of National Socialist cultural policy. In a practice that would continue in the German Democratic Republic after the war, directors relied upon their dramaturgs to develop and present production plans for the ministry's approval, explaining why a particular play had been chosen and how the director planned to stage it. It is from this era that stereotypes of the dramaturg as the 'enemy of creativity and the purveyor of state censorship' most likely stem.<sup>64</sup> Formal theatre censorship in England ended only in 1968, of course, and 'deep-rooted cultural anxieties about the standardisation of a figure who can infiltrate various production processes and potentially exercise ideological

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<sup>60</sup> See Alan. E. Steinweis, *Nazi Germany, Art, Ideology and Economics in Nazi Germany: The Reich Chambers of Music, Theatre and the Visual Arts* (Chapel Hill; London: University of North Carolina Press, 1993), p. 135.

<sup>61</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>62</sup> Steinweis, *Nazi Germany*, p. 133.

<sup>63</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>64</sup> Luckhurst, *Revolution*, p. 215.

power' still remain.<sup>65</sup> In the view of a certain generation of English practitioners, dramaturgs remain tainted by association with critical censure, political partisanship and ideological manipulation of the arts.

Heinrich remarks that during the Nazi era, 'the question of interpretation, of staging a play became crucial [...] what mattered was not so much the plot but the ideology behind it'.<sup>66</sup> During the 1930s, a responsiveness to the interdependence of text, interpretation, presentation and reception - in short, the *dramaturgy* of theatrical performance - became a tool for the overt or oblique endorsement or criticism of governing ideologies. The critical, self-reflexive aspect bequeathed German theatre and dramaturgy by its Enlightenment origins was, however, stifled in many theatres by a 'comprehensive framework of pre-censorship' strategically engendered by the Nazis.<sup>67</sup>

The German theatre remained a 'prestigious asset' of the war effort, boosting morale, feigning cultural stability and 'proving to foreign commentators that Nazi Germany was, in fact, still a *Kulturnation*'.<sup>68</sup> 'Drastic measures' such as cancelling performances and closing theatres were introduced only in 1944, when most German towns and cities already lay in ruins.<sup>69</sup> At the end of the war, moreover, despite heavy devastation the theatres reopened almost immediately: 'even after twelve years of the Nazi regime', writes Erika Fischer-Lichte, 'the general belief of the German public in the civilising and humanizing force of theatre was not diminished'.<sup>70</sup> Across Germany, in big cities such as Berlin, Hamburg, Düsseldorf, Cologne, Munich and Leipzig, as well as smaller

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<sup>65</sup> Mary Luckhurst, 'The D Word: New Writing Cultures in England', *Contemporary Theatre Review* 17.4 (2007), pp. 549-556 (pp. 555-556).

<sup>66</sup> Heinrich, *Entertainment*, pp. 191-192.

<sup>67</sup> Steinweis, *Nazi Germany*, p. 136.

<sup>68</sup> Heinrich, *Entertainment*, p. 107; p. 207.

<sup>69</sup> Heinrich, *Entertainment*, p. 113; p. 114.

<sup>70</sup> Fischer-Lichte, 'Patterns of Continuity', p. 376.

towns such as Trier, Koblenz, Kamenz, or Weissenfels, theatres reopened within months of defeat: ‘Theatre quite clearly was as necessary as daily bread’.<sup>71</sup>

With the creation of the Federal Republic (FRG) and German Democratic Republic (GDR), the history of German theatre bifurcates, though in both West and East the theatre remained a crucial mechanism by which to debate national identity and promote social cohesion – however these aims might conflict with one another in practice. As a result, in both the FRG and GDR levels of subsidy remained at least consistent with, and often in excess of, previous state subvention. The GDR, for example, boasted the densest theatre network in the world, with sixty-eight theatres comprising two hundred stages (the population of the GDR was 16 million; the FRG 62 million).<sup>72</sup> The importance that the ruling Socialist Unity Party [SED] attached to the theatre, however, also manifested itself, as Laura Bradley details in *Cooperation and Conflict: GDR Theatre Censorship 1961-1989*, in a ‘strict regime of censorship’ regarding the publication and performance of drama.<sup>73</sup> Under the SED, it was determined that the theatre take a positive role in shaping the identity of the new state: contemporary plays were to ‘reflect society’s progress to towards socialism, help to create socialist citizens, and even increas[e] industrial productivity’.<sup>74</sup> Theatre was also to provide ‘a valuable source of prestige, capable of projecting a positive image of the GDR abroad’, especially important during the GDR’s battle for recognition in the 1950s and 1960s, when the Federal Republic threatened to break off diplomatic relations with any state that officially recognized the GDR.<sup>75</sup> Theatre censorship was articulated in a number of ways, from the enforced deletion of lines or scenes to a full production ban. Whilst

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<sup>71</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>72</sup> Carl Weber, ‘Between the Past and the Future’, *Performing Arts Journal* 13.1 (1991), pp. 43-59 (p. 48).

<sup>73</sup> Laura Bradley, *Cooperation and Conflict: GDR Theatre Censorship 1961-1989* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), p. 1.

<sup>74</sup> Bradley, *Cooperation and Conflict*, p. 2.

<sup>75</sup> Bradley, *Cooperation and Conflict*, pp. 2-3. The Berliner Ensemble acted as a cultural ambassador during this time, representing the GDR on its tours to London and Paris when the state’s diplomats could not.



these forms characterized the most public conflicts, however, Bradley writes that production bans ‘actually represented a breakdown in the system’, an indication that the usual political checks had failed; in consequence, this form of direct intervention ‘was always a last resort’.<sup>76</sup> Far more pernicious were practices of self-censorship embedded in production processes, influencing the selection, interpretation and realization of play-texts. ‘Individuals negotiated the system in different ways’, Bradley writes, ‘but it was the only one available to those wanting to practice theatre in the GDR’.<sup>77</sup>

Carl Weber has identified the paradoxical nature of a ruling party who, on the one hand, devoted much time and energy to the ‘guidance and control’ of the theatre and, on the other, regarded its relative freedom as essential to the party’s credibility. Weber suggests that within the GDR in fact, ‘no other medium enjoyed equal tolerance to conduct a discussion of the state’s fossilized political structure’.<sup>78</sup> Weber also suggests that from the late 1970s onwards, censorship in the GDR started to ease and the practices of theatre in the GDR and the FRG began to overlap. Growing numbers of GDR directors worked in West German, Austrian or Swiss theatres, including Alfred Dresen, Thomas and Matthias Langoff and Alexander Lang.<sup>79</sup> Actors increasingly received official permits to perform in the West and, similarly, East German playwrights such as Heiner Müller, Volker Braun, Christoph Hein and Georg Seidel were given permission to have their plays staged in the Federal Republic.<sup>80</sup>

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<sup>76</sup> Bradley, *Cooperation and Conflict*, p. 3; p. 5.

<sup>77</sup> Bradley, *Cooperation and Conflict*, p. 4.

<sup>78</sup> Weber, ‘Between the Past and the Future’ p. 46. Bradley also notes that far from resenting the required promulgation of socialist ideology, ‘there was a widespread consensus among practitioners that theatre should intervene in society; disagreements with officials often focused upon the purposes and nature of that intervention. Controversial productions tended to criticize the system from within, seeking to reform it and highlighting its distance from the ideal’. *Cooperation and Conflict*, p. 3.

<sup>79</sup> Weber, ‘Between the Past and the Future’, p. 44.

<sup>80</sup> *ibid.*

Whilst also deployed as ‘showcases’ of prestige and cultural achievement, theatres throughout the Federal Republic possessed greater liberties than their counterparts in the GDR; a ‘freedom of art’ actually ‘written into the federal constitution, repeated in the constitution of the *Länder*, and repeated again in the basic programmes of the political parties’.<sup>81</sup> A ‘new breed’ of directors emerged in the 1960s, including Peter Zadek, Peter Stein, Hans Neuenfels, Claus Peymann, and Jürgen Flimm, the majority of whom looked to Brechtian theatre practice as their point of departure.<sup>82</sup>

[These directors] wanted to change the structural organization of the theatre. The politicization of West German theatre depended less on plays and themes or issues than on the working methods between director and actor, the structural organization of the theatre, and particularly on the notion of codetermination [*Mitbestimmung*] in theatre practice.<sup>83</sup>

In the wake of an anti-authoritarian swing in German politics, signalled by the replacement of Konrad Adenauer’s Christian Democrats by ‘Willy’ Brandt’s Social Democrat government (as well as by the student riots of 1967-8), ‘participation’ or ‘codetermination’ became a recurrent demand, especially in theatre and industry.<sup>84</sup> The *Mitbestimmung* movement, which ‘challenged traditional authoritarian structures and called for decentralized and collective control’,<sup>85</sup> was to profoundly influence the artistic and administrative infrastructures of German theatre in the Federal Republic. One of the movement’s earliest high-profile manifestations (after, arguably, the Berliner Ensemble) came during the 1970s, with Peter Stein’s company at the Schaubühne am Halleschen Ufer in West Berlin. When Stein arrived at the Schaubühne am Halleschen in 1970 (seduced in part by an annual subsidy which represented 72% of the theatre’s total

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<sup>81</sup> Allen, *Theatre in Europe*, p.82.

<sup>82</sup> David Ashley Hughes, ‘Notes on the German Theatre Crisis’, *The Drama Review* 51.4 (2007), pp. 133-155 (p. 140).

<sup>83</sup> Klaus Völker, qtd. *ibid.*

<sup>84</sup> Michael Patterson, *Peter Stein: Germany’s leading theatre director* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), p. 38.

<sup>85</sup> *ibid.*

budget)<sup>86</sup> he and his collaborators overhauled the existing institution in an attempt to establish a collective model of theatre-making which might enable the full company – directors, designers, actors, technicians and administrators – to participate in democratic processes of decision-making. Whilst this experiment in full-scale participation failed to meet all of its own ideals, what did remain was the practice of involving all participants in the decisions affecting a production, so that actors, designers, technicians and dramaturgs were consulted about casting, design, and the overall conception behind a production. Such participation, as Patterson notes, was dependent upon ‘a willingness to question and be questioned at each stage of the rehearsal process’;<sup>87</sup> a proclivity towards query and critique that Stein and his company demonstrated throughout their approaches to artistic process. Stein himself described his work with actors as engaging in a “‘doubting process’”;<sup>88</sup> Dieter Sturm, Stein’s long-term dramaturg, similarly referred to the company’s conception of the theatre as a ‘kind of protesting moment’.<sup>89</sup> Whilst these descriptions recall Lessing’s (and Brecht’s) view of criticism and dialectic as ‘indisputably productive’,<sup>90</sup> Stein’s appraisal of the theatre similarly echoes Schiller’s ringing declaration, made nearly two hundred years earlier, that ‘the jurisdiction of the stage begins where the domain of secular law leaves off [...] the theatre wields a more profound, more lasting influence than either morality or laws’:<sup>91</sup>

[The theatre] has the capacity to examine human qualities that direct politics or law cannot – such as death, irrationality, insanity... the subtle kinds of suppression, such as the workings of memory or myth in the human mind.<sup>92</sup>

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<sup>86</sup> Patterson, *Peter Stein*, p. 40.

<sup>87</sup> Patterson, *Peter Stein*, p. 45.

<sup>88</sup> Stein, qtd. Patterson, *Peter Stein*, p. 163.

<sup>89</sup> Dieter Sturm, qtd. Patterson, *Peter Stein*, p. 159. Patterson quotes Stein’s appreciation of his dramaturg: ‘Without Sturm, the Schaubühne would be nothing [...] Sturm is the real soul of this theatre’ (p. 47).

<sup>90</sup> Berghahn, ‘Lessing the Critic’, p. 70.

<sup>91</sup> Schiller, ‘The Theatre Considered as a Moral Institution’ <<http://www.schillerinstitute.org/transl/schil-theatremoral.html>> [accessed 16 July 2011].

<sup>92</sup> Stein, qtd. Patterson, *Peter Stein*, p. 157.

Peter Stein's name, along with many of the 'new breed' of directors listed above, is often invoked in discussions of 'director's theatre' (*Regietheater*). As Peter Boenisch points out, however, the label 'director's theatre' often does little but 'reify the notion of individual authorship', a simplification which not only perpetuates fruitless battles over authority but also 'makes it easy to glance over intricate collaborative processes'.<sup>93</sup> The *Mitbestimmung* movement, I would argue, set the cultural conditions for an examination of collaborative processes within German theatre institutions which have proved influential ever since.

Collective models of theatre-making in Germany are, I would suggest, further supported by contemporary structures of subsidy which leave the artistic direction of a theatre to be self-determined by the company. Bitter memories of the theatre system's former manipulation today uphold a 'firm tradition that the independence of the artist must be respected at all costs [and] that he who pays the piper shall not call the tune'.<sup>94</sup> The public bodies which today provide subsidies regard themselves as professional only in the field of finance; as a rule they exert no influence on the artistic line taken by the theatre they support, none on the programme, and none, beyond appointing the *Intendant*, on the personnel policy.<sup>95</sup> In contrast, as we shall see, to the cultural policies which influence the distribution of subsidy in England today, the notion of a central government intervening with 'agendas' for the arts is anathema to contemporary German theatre cultures, where the social concerns and cultural critiques which theatres often explicitly advance are generated from *within* a politically-engaged and outward-

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<sup>93</sup> Peter Boenisch, 'Exposing the classics: Michael Thalheimer's *Regie* beyond the text', *Contemporary Theatre Review* 18.1 (2008), pp. 30-43 (p. 32).

<sup>94</sup> Elwood, 'The Freedom of the German Repertoire', p. 241.

<sup>95</sup> Authorities cannot, however, 'impose' an *Intendant* upon a company. Maja Zade describes a situation that occurred in Berlin in 2007: [the council appointed an *Intendant*] to the Deutsches Theater but the company rebelled, so he stepped down before even taking the job. Then they appointed someone new [and] the company rebelled again. So now they've appointed someone else'. Unpublished interview with Jacqueline Bolton, 10<sup>th</sup> July 2007.

looking institution, and are not adopted in order to meet the targets or objectives externally imposed by a funding body.

### 4.3 English theatre: reform and war

From the so-called ‘Restoration’ of theatres in 1660, to the constitution of the Council for the Encouragement of Music and Arts in 1940, theatre in Britain was typically regarded by government, public and, indeed, the profession as a private enterprise, a commercially-run entertainment industry. For almost two hundred years, the Royal Patent system permitted only a handful of cities outside London to present the ‘legitimate’, ‘spoken drama’; theatre was thus represented to the majority of the population by ‘illegitimate’ bills of music, comedy and singing. It was not until 1832 that, amongst a general wave of parliamentary, legal and social reform, Edward Lytton Bulwer agitated for a Select Committee to inquire into the legislative situation governing theatrical performance, presenting his case for ‘the drama’ in terms that acknowledged more than just commercial interest:

In a literary age, acknowledged to abound with writers endowed with a true poetical spirit, the decline, or rather the extinction of the English Drama seems a paradox as curious as it is lamentable [...] after all, is the Drama a trifle? – has it not exercised a mighty influence on the thoughts, the feelings, and the morals of a nation? – perhaps not the less powerful because somewhat unexpected.<sup>96</sup>

As Jacky Bratton charts in *New Readings in Theatre History*, Bulwer, himself an accomplished novelist, appointed himself the representative of theatre workers’ protests against the monopoly of the patent houses and brought with him a new agenda: the introduction of the protection of playwrights by dramatic copyright. His speech to the House of Commons ‘spelt out his concern in the matter quite clearly: he wished firstly

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<sup>96</sup> Edward Lytton Bulwer, qtd. Jacky Bratton, *New Readings in Theatre History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 70.

to “inquir[e] into the State of the Laws affecting Dramatic Literature” and only secondly to consider “the performance of the Drama”.<sup>97</sup> Bulwer got his Select Committee and set its agenda: the introduction of copyright; the dissolution of the patents, the licensing of more Metropolitan theatres – the greater number of theatres presenting plays, Bulwer argued, the more chance there was of excellence in playwriting; and better regulation and management to render the auditoria safer places to which to bring middle-class families – ‘to listen to serious drama’.<sup>98</sup> Two parliamentary Bills were formulated the following year to put into place the reforms he urged, but only one of them, that establishing Dramatic Copyright, passed into law; the changes to the licensing of theatre spaces had to wait until 1843.<sup>99</sup>

The 1843 Theatre Regulation Act permitted all theatres to produce prose drama. A rapid expansion in theatre building followed, particularly outside London.<sup>100</sup> The foundation of this regional network was a resident ‘stock company’, a semi-permanent group typically managed by its leading actor. Although referred to as ‘repertory theatres’, these companies did not, as in Germany, present a store of productions played in rotation but produced plays *en suite*. Plays, mainly farces and melodramas, were played for a week (sometimes even a night), taken off, and replaced by a new production. Repertory devoured enormous amounts of material sustained ‘by a species of conveyor-belt manufacture on the part of both actor and author’;<sup>101</sup> a rapid turnover of production which left minimal time for rehearsal, let alone ruminations upon a repertoire’s contribution to the ‘cultural welfare’ of its audiences. Specialist knowledge which could

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<sup>97</sup> Bratton, *New Readings*, p. 76.

<sup>98</sup> Bratton, *New Readings*, p. 79.

<sup>99</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>100</sup> Luckhurst records an increase from 147 theatres in 1850 to 495 in 1900. *Dramaturgy*, p. 45.

<sup>101</sup> George Rowell and Anthony Jackson, *The Repertory Movement: A History of Regional Theatre in Britain* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), p. 8.

serve to broaden, diversify and enrich a theatre's repertoire was not a priority in an industry organized to exploit success and marginalise risk.

As the nineteenth-century progressed, entire theatre companies - usually London-based and generously backed by private investors - ventured on long tours throughout the country, leading to the virtual extinction of the regional stock company.<sup>102</sup> Whilst these tours undoubtedly did much to raise production standards and stimulate audience demand, they were operated by managements governed by commercial imperatives. The spectacular idiosyncrasies by which companies attempted to outdo their competition centred audience expectation upon the novelty and delight of star actors, lavish design and decorous costume; if the quality of plays declined then the diversity of productions certainly narrowed, with many managers happy to find a vehicle they could tour year in and year out. Former producing theatres were reduced to receiving houses; a sustained relationship between the theatre, its productions and the public could not be conceived given the lack of continuity or consistency across a season. Whereas the resident stock companies gave theatres a measure of contact with local audiences, a succession of travelling companies simply visited, played and left. A practice of programming with a long-term view to the audience's general education was not available; the demands exacted by maintaining a production line of hit shows left little time, inclination or inspiration for such 'auxiliary' concerns. Lacking the financial autonomy to programme, cast and stage their own productions, theatres in the regions became increasingly subject to the taste of 'the town', that is to say, London. Issues, fashions and subject matter which made sense in the context of the capital were foisted onto the regions, frustrating the cultivation of civic relations critical to the development of a theatre and its audiences.

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<sup>102</sup> See Rowell and Jackson, *Repertory Movement*, p. 12.

In the closing decades of the nineteenth-century, visits to London from the Comedie-Francaise (1879), the Meiningen Company (1881) and the Théâtre Libre (1889), coupled with an increasing awareness of dramatists such as Ibsen and Strindberg, began to spark interest in the possibilities offered by a subsidized theatre presenting plays of social and political import. Responding to Matthew Arnold's 1879 rallying cry to 'Organise the Theatre!', ventures including the Independent Theatre Society (London, 1891-97; also Manchester 1893-97), the New Century Theatre (London, 1897-99), and The Irish Literary Theatre (Dublin, 1898, later to merge with the Abbey Theatre) prepared the ground for actor and director Harley Granville-Barker, with critic and translator William Archer, to present to London the 'Blue Book': *Schemes and Estimates for a National Theatre* (1904, officially published 1907).

Inspired by their encounters with continental repertory theatre - Archer had conducted extensive research into German, French and Scandinavian theatre systems - this work laid out in detail the financial, administrative and artistic structures required for a theatre of national status to 'break away, completely and unequivocally, from the ideals and traditions of the profit-seeking stage'.<sup>103</sup> A striking aspect of Granville-Barker and Archer's plan for the theatre is the inclusion of a Literary Manager - 'an official answering to the German *Dramaturg*' - as an essential functionary within a theatre designed to 'bulk large in the social and intellectual life of London'.<sup>104</sup>

[The Literary Manager's] duties should be to weed out new plays before they are submitted to the Reading Committee; to suggest plays for revival and arrange them for the stage; to follow the dramatic movement in foreign countries, and to suggest foreign plays suitable for production;

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<sup>103</sup> William Archer and Harley Granville-Barker, *A National Theatre: Schemes and Estimates* (London: Duckworth & Co., 1907), Legacy Reprint Series, p. xviii.

<sup>104</sup> Archer and Granville-Barker, *A National Theatre*, p. 13; p. xviii. Luckhurst identifies the German director Max Reinhardt and his work with dramaturgs as a formative influence upon Barker's conception of a Literary Manager. See *Revolution*, p. 89.



to consult with the scene-painter, producers, &c., on questions of archaeology, costume and local colour.<sup>105</sup>

Granville-Barker's vision for the theatre, outlined in *Schemes and Estimates*, put into practice between 1904-1907 at the Court Theatre, London, and reiterated in *The Exemplary Theatre* (1922), rejected the engrained practices of commercial management in the name of continental repertory: 'the repertory theatre is the only sensible theatre; and it is at least a genuine theatre, not a shop for producing plays'.<sup>106</sup> Whilst commercialism and conservatism eventually closed the Court venture, its example inspired the regional 'repertory movement' of the early twentieth century. Theatres in Manchester (1908), Glasgow (1909), Liverpool (1911) and Birmingham (1913) were directly influenced by the ideals as well as the repertoire of the Court theatre, brought to them by the migration of actors and directors who had previously worked there. Financed by single patrons (Annie Horniman at Manchester, Barry Jackson at Birmingham) or groups of businessmen and shareholders (Glasgow and Liverpool), the earliest companies were established to provide an alternative to the commercial productions which dominated touring circuits. John Pick notes the 'markedly more international, more literary and more innovative' programmes pursued by these theatres, citing the Liverpool Rep's policy of performing twelve new one-act-plays by untried dramatists each season and Sheffield's complete seasons of new foreign drama as examples of managements informed by notions of public service.<sup>107</sup> Pursuing high production standards, promoting new playwrights, programming a diverse repertoire and affirming a particular local identity, during the first half of the twentieth century these theatres reclaimed some of the ground lost to touring commercial managements.<sup>108</sup>

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<sup>105</sup> Archer and Granville-Barker, *A National Theatre*, p. 13.

<sup>106</sup> Harley Granville-Barker, *The Exemplary Theatre* (New York: Books for Libraries Press, 1970), p. 160.

<sup>107</sup> John Pick, *The West End: Mismanagement and Snobbery* (Eastbourne: City Arts Series, 1983), p. 119.

<sup>108</sup> See Cecil Chisholm, *Repertory: An Outline of the Modern Theatre Movement* (London: Peter Davies, 1934), p. 17.

Interestingly, however, Granville-Barker and Archer's vision of an 'in-house, high status' Literary Manager did not translate into practice at these theatres.<sup>109</sup> Conscious that they were addressing an industry wherein practicalities often of necessity prevail over principles, Granville-Barker and Archer introduced the role of the Literary Manager in terms of its practical *functions*, an approach which in fact weakened the argument for a specialized role. Directors, producers or perhaps resident playwrights could recommend, choose and edit plays; an unfamiliar role which seemed only to replicate existing functions did not command authority. Drawing upon their observations of dramaturgs in Germany, Granville-Barker and Archer had conceived of the Literary Manager as a key contributor to a broader mission to deepen and further the critical appreciation and intellectual engagement of audiences and artists alike.<sup>110</sup> In order to present a convincing argument for such a project, however, Granville-Barker and Archer would have had to persuade recalcitrant minds, firstly, that theatre should assume such a cultural and social mission and, secondly, that the Literary Manager could make a unique contribution to its realization. Indeed, the scepticism against which they perceived themselves fighting is illustrated by Granville-Barker in a dialogue satirizing the Manichean struggle between 'The Man of the Theatre', arguing for the theatre's 'rightful place in the settled economy of society', and 'The Minister of Education', asserting the artistic compromise that would follow were theatre to 'change its nature' from a 'pleasant superfluity of life' to an institution of educative standing.<sup>111</sup> Accused by the Minister of 'car[ing] little about the theatre in comparison with the use you can make of it to forward your social and political ideas', the Man of the Theatre fires back:

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<sup>109</sup> Luckhurst, *Revolution*, p. 88.

<sup>110</sup> See Luckhurst, 'William Archer and Harley Granville-Barker: constructions of the literary manager', in *Revolution*, pp. 78-108.

<sup>111</sup> Granville-Barker, *Exemplary Theatre*, pp. 9-10.

When are ideas *not* artistic ideas? I utterly resent the implication that art, any art, but most especially the simple, democratic art of the theatre, is to be divorced from the things of everyday life [...] Even if I cared for nothing else in the theatre but the quintessential art of the theatre [...] I should welcome its present attachment to some larger idea, to drag it [...] abreast of the need of the times.<sup>112</sup>

The British establishment's distaste for mixing education and entertainment, however, is captured by the Minister's arch rejoinder: 'I'm to go to my evening's entertainment to be more fully and freely developed, am I? [...] Will the process be decently concealed from me?'<sup>113</sup>

Whilst Granville-Barker and Archer called for the establishment of a subsidized theatre, they held no expectation that regular subsidy would issue from government; which, of course, it didn't until a generation later. Indeed, as late as 1932, Cecil Chisholm could confidently assert that 'as the British cabinet has no electoral spur to foster taste in art, literature or the drama, it can hardly be expected that any Government will ever introduce a bill on the subject'.<sup>114</sup> Less than a decade later, however, as Janet Minihan writes, the British Government 'did more to commit itself to supporting the arts than it had in the previous century and a half'.<sup>115</sup>

The Council for the Encouragement of Music and Art (CEMA) was convened in January 1940, financed jointly by the Treasury and the Pilgrim Trust.<sup>116</sup> CEMA's remit was to boost national morale whilst simultaneously creating 'permanent, educated audiences all over the country'.<sup>117</sup> Theatre and the arts were to function as a means of sustaining morale and/by fostering national identity, but the ways in which these aims

<sup>112</sup> Granville-Barker, *Exemplary Theatre*, p. 18; pp. 21-24.

<sup>113</sup> Granville-Barker, *Exemplary Theatre*, p. 37.

<sup>114</sup> Chisholm, *Repertory*, p. 235.

<sup>115</sup> Minihan, *Nationalization*, p. 215.

<sup>116</sup> The Pilgrim Trust was founded in 1930 by American millionaire and Anglophile Edward Harkness.

<sup>117</sup> *The Fifth Year: The End of the Beginning. Report on the Work of CEMA for 1944* (CEMA: London, 1944), qtd. Heinrich, *Entertainment*, p. 49.

were achieved decisively altered as the war progressed. CEMA's original constitution conceived of 'morale' as a quality sustained by access to, and participation in, the arts: early commitments focused upon supporting amateur work and touring classical music, visual art and drama to areas not served by concert halls, art galleries, or theatres. As Dan Rebellato details in *1956 And All That*, however, this strategy soon came under attack, the complaint unifying CEMA's critics being the lack of conspicuous prestige attached to such activities.<sup>118</sup> Soon after the appointment in 1942 of the future Arts Council Chairman, John Maynard Keynes, the emphases of CEMA's work shifted from 'amateur activity, touring and regionalism' towards the conspicuous glamour and success of 'professionalism, buildings and London'.<sup>119</sup> The visible success of high-profile companies in the nation's capital constituted, in Keynes' view, a far more effective means for the promotion of a nationalistic agenda.

In 1944, for example, the Old Vic was opened in London as Britain's first permanent continental-style repertory company. The finances involved (CEMA immediately advanced £5,000 towards the project), together with the intervention of the First Lord of the Admiralty in order to release from active service the Old Vic's desired Artistic Directors, Laurence Olivier and Ralph Richardson, suggest the increasing focus placed upon theatre within political conceptions of 'national heritage'.<sup>120</sup> Similarly, two years previously CEMA had gone directly against its original constitution and taken over Britain's oldest working theatre, the Theatre Royal, Bristol. In a move reminiscent of Münster Stadtheater, CEMA saved the playhouse from demolition, restored it and ran it

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<sup>118</sup> See Dan Rebellato, *1956 And All That* (London: Routledge, 1999), pp. 37-50.

<sup>119</sup> Rebellato, *1956*, p. 41.

<sup>120</sup> Lord Lytton, the chairman of the governors of the Old Vic, wrote to the First Lord of the Admiralty asking for their release: 'the importance need hardly be stressed of having such a company in existence whilst the war is in progress', adding that 'the many thousands of overseas visitors in London make it highly desirable that British drama, and particularly the Classics, should be presented in the best possible manner'. Qtd. Heinrich, *Entertainment*, p. 67n115.

on a lease under its direct management.<sup>121</sup> Across the regions, emphasis was placed upon classical drama, with a strong focus upon ‘our national Poet’. For four years CEMA ran a successful scheme offering grants to companies who presented a play for a fortnight rather than the usual run of one week. This scheme was designed not only to raise standards but also to encourage the production of more classics such as Shakespeare, the successful presentation of which, it was argued, could only add to Britain’s sense of ‘national greatness’.<sup>122</sup> As Minihan writes, theatres and companies were subsidized as an ‘integral part of the war effort on the home front’, a reminder to the British population of the rich heritage for which the war was being fought.<sup>123</sup>

Whilst the British government did not intervene directly in theatre repertoires, this, rather surprisingly, did not mean that they were constitutionally restricted from doing so. Heinrich records that on the 27 February 1942, a memorandum on public entertainments was put before the War Cabinet by the Home Secretary Herbert Morrison. Worried that his powers regarding entertainments during wartime were restricted to security and safety questions, Morrison proposed to the Cabinet that it:

...appears necessary that the Government should be empowered to prohibit or restrict entertainments on the ground that they are inimical to the war effort, irrespective of the degree of risk to those present, and that the Defence Regulations should be amended to give control of entertainments in circumstances where the efficient prosecution of the war is in issue.<sup>124</sup>

The cabinet discussed Morrison’s memorandum in early March 1942, agreed, and two weeks later the King signed the relevant amendment of the defence regulations.

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<sup>121</sup> Heinrich, *Entertainment*, p. 67n115.

<sup>122</sup> Heinrich, *Entertainment*, p. 46.

<sup>123</sup> Minihan, *Nationalization*, p. 226.

<sup>124</sup> Herbert Morrison, qtd. Heinrich, *Entertainment*, pp. 159-60.

Morrison had, at least in principle, gained total power over the performing arts; a power, as Heinrich points out, heretofore attributed solely to Goebbels.<sup>125</sup>

By the end of the war, and for the first time in the history of Parliament, the arts showed real promise of voter appeal: ‘wartime chauvinism had inspired pride in British values’, Minihan writes, ‘and by 1945 it was politically sensible to endorse public expenditure on the arts’.<sup>126</sup> In CEMA, ‘Parliament had the instrument to do so ready at hand [...] the establishment of the Arts Council was politically safe and constitutionally sound’.<sup>127</sup>

#### 4.4 Post-war English theatre: subsidy and policy

When CEMA became the Arts Council with Keynes as Chairman in 1945, specific art-form panels, which until then had held executive power, were demoted to the status of advisory bodies, a move which effectively transferred power upwards: ‘the Arts Council was always to give the appearance of consulting the experts in the respective art forms [...] but the real power of decision lay with the members of the Council and their executive officers’.<sup>128</sup> The system of Council membership was from the outset one of appointment from the top down: the Chairman of the Council was chosen by the Government Minister responsible for the arts, and other appointments were made through a combination of recommendation and discussion with chairs and members of the relevant bodies. If CEMA was, as Robert Hewison claims, an ad-hoc wartime institution set up ‘in the best tradition of political expediency and the old boy network’, then the constitution of the Arts Council’s executive was similarly drawn from ‘natural territory of the Great and the Good’.<sup>129</sup> Despite the Arts Council’s purported ‘arm’s-length’ from central government, informal associations were commonplace; members of

<sup>125</sup> Heinrich, *Entertainment*, p. 241.

<sup>126</sup> Minihan, *Nationalization*, p. 230; p. 288.

<sup>127</sup> Minihan, *Nationalization*, p. 288.

<sup>128</sup> Robert Hewison qtd. Woddis, *Spear-Carriers or Speaking-Parts?*, p. 65.

<sup>129</sup> Hewison, qtd. Woddis, *Spear-Carriers or Speaking Parts?*, p. 66

the Council and government moved in similar social and political circles and often shared ties through schooling, business and marriage.<sup>130</sup> Robert Hutchison has drawn attention to the close connections between the Arts Council and the major arts organisations: in 1982 he could cite the fact that all seven chairmen of the Council had been on the governing bodies of one or even both of the national opera companies, and that the Royal Opera House's accountant, D. P. Lund was, from 1951 to 1965, at the same time accountant of the Arts Council. It is difficult, in such circumstances, to interpret as merely coincidental the fact that in 1945 the Arts Council granted the Covent Garden Trust £25,000, more than a tenth of the Council's budget; while, astonishingly, in the 1950s and 1960s at least a third of the Council's money was being given to Covent Garden.<sup>131</sup>

In her study of the first decades of the Arts Council, Jane Woddis concludes that a body 'in which influential personal connections held sway was perpetuated through a system that had no transparency and very little democracy'.<sup>132</sup> Certainly, the Council's formulation of cultural policy displayed little 'transparency'. No clear policy for the arts was developed by the Council after its inauguration in 1945; indeed, 'the concept of a master plan and policy for the arts was seen by members [...] not only as inadvisable, but as risky and wrong'.<sup>133</sup> In 1973, a wonderfully titled examination of Arts Council policy statements, *Does the Arts Council Know What It Is Doing?* finds little evidence for the Arts Council's assertion, in 1953, that it 'must select its role and objectives with precision', stating that 'if there are underlying principles or guidelines to decisions, the

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<sup>130</sup> Woddis, *Spear-Carriers or Speaking Parts?*, p. 66. In 1997 all but one Council Chairman had been educated at Oxbridge (p. 68).

<sup>131</sup> See Woddis, *Spear-Carriers or Speaking Parts?*, p. 67. In the 1990s, the first major capital grant of the Council's Lottery fund was awarded to the Opera House, with both the chairman of the Council's Lottery committee and the secretary-general of the Arts Council subsequently moving to become the Opera House's Chairman and Chief Executive respectively. *ibid.*

<sup>132</sup> Woddis, *Spear-Carriers or Speaking Parts?*, p. 70.

<sup>133</sup> Anthony Keller, *qtd.* Woddis, *Spear-Carriers or Speaking Parts?*, p. 60.

Arts Council has appeared remarkably reluctant to give an account of them'.<sup>134</sup> The report concludes that 'it is not too much to say that in 26 years of official reportage they have failed to produce a single coherent and operational statement of their aims', a view echoed nearly a decade later in Robert Hutchison's assessment of Arts Council policies as 'typically [...] too vague, too ambiguous'.<sup>135</sup> With unresolved ideas about the function of the arts and even the nature of subsidy itself, and lacking not only clear policies but also any democratic system of appointment, the operations of the Arts Council have since amply demonstrated their vulnerability to the political persuasions of successive governments.

Perhaps one of clearest demonstrations of this with regards to theatre and particularly regional producing houses is the ongoing conflict, inherited from CEMA, between notions of theatre as a 'civilizing' or 'socializing' force within society. Keynes's initial emphasis upon the civilizing nature of art, seen 'largely in terms of text-based drama for a minority elite as defined by the metropolis' characterized the post-war years;<sup>136</sup> the criterion of an unspecified 'excellence' has since remained an important credo in state funding of regional theatres.<sup>137</sup> Since the 1960s, however, Keynes's 'civilizing' emphasis has coexisted uneasily alongside claims made for the 'social utility' of the arts. In 1965, *A Policy for the Arts* set the main agendas as participation, access and community provision, on which increased subvention was subsequently based. The following years saw the size of government subvention in the arts almost treble in four years, rising to more than seven million pounds in 1967/68.<sup>138</sup> Such generosity did not

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<sup>134</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>135</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>136</sup> Turnbull, *Bringing Down the House*, p. 11.

<sup>137</sup> Turnbull notes that 'excellence' was 'upheld as an explanation for cutting grants to certain companies that failed to meet such ambiguous standards during times of economic hardship in the 1980s'. Harrogate Theatre lost their funding for this reason in the mid-1980s and similarly saw it severely reduced for such reasons in 2007. *Bringing Down the House*, p. 37.

<sup>138</sup> Turnbull, *Bringing Down the House*, p. 58.



come without strings but instead, as Turnbull argues, marked a significant turning point in the Arts Council's relationship with government:

The astute Keynes had once said to an employee 'As long as the Arts Council doesn't get too much money, the Government won't start interfering'. And not without reason, as with increased money came increased intervention. From this point on, there was no question but that Arts Council policies should reflect those of government – a situation the organization has since been unable to escape.<sup>139</sup>

The expectation, or requirement, for theatres and companies to fall in with the ideological consensus of their central funding body was a matter further complicated by the mechanism of plural funding, introduced by Keynes in the 1950s as a means of sourcing additional streams of money from other public bodies, principally local authorities. As the economy began to prosper in the post-war years, a period of urban renewal encouraged many local authorities to regard the construction of a new theatre 'as a way of giving physical expression to civic self-confidence'.<sup>140</sup> Between 1958 and 1970, twenty-one new theatres were opened across the country, primarily funded by donations from local authorities who then typically became the proprietors of the new buildings.<sup>141</sup> Whilst general enthusiasm and increased financial subvention in many ways gave the regional theatre movement a new lease of life, a lack of forward planning meant that, for many theatres, 'the long-term effects of local authority investment provided as many problems as benefits'.<sup>142</sup> Turnbull records, for example, that rather than providing and maintaining a theatre at no charge to the resident company, 'in many towns a situation arose whereby regional theatres were using the subsidy they received from the local authority to pay that same authority back the mortgage, lease or rates tax on the building'.<sup>143</sup> In 1970, the Nottingham Playhouse, for example, was being given an

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<sup>139</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>140</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>141</sup> Turnbull, *Bringing Down the House*, p. 49.

<sup>142</sup> Turnbull, *Bringing Down the House*, p. 50.

<sup>143</sup> *ibid.*

annual subsidy of £22,000 by the city council. Meanwhile, the resident company was repaying the council the total original cost of the building to the tune of £27,000 a year.<sup>144</sup>

Additional challenges such as the increased maintenance costs of running large buildings (costs particularly vulnerable to variables such as inflation and recession) were not helped by the continuing disputes between the Arts Council and local authorities concerning the roles and functions of the regional producing theatres. Increased civic support meant, in practice, increased civic interference and, whilst drama remained the core activity, local authorities also expected their theatres to function as multipurpose arts centres, providing a 'public service' by presenting youth programmes, education and outreach activities and public amenities.<sup>145</sup> The local authorities' commitment to 'accessibility' also required ticket prices to be kept reasonably low, a requirement to which early post-war intervention by the Arts Council had responded. Turnbull notes, however, that by the 1960s 'such a concern largely took second place to the national funding body's emphasis upon standards';<sup>146</sup> whilst the Arts Council was suggesting that regional theatres should raise seat prices to make up shortfalls in income, keeping the costs of tickets down was seen by the regional theatres as necessary to fill the new large auditoria and to maintain funding from local authorities. The agendas of local authorities could thus often be diametrically opposed to those of the Arts Council; in subsequent years, such broad and conflicting demands would 'prove almost impossible for regional theatres to reconcile'.<sup>147</sup> This situation was to escalate under terms of parity funding in the 1980s and 1990s, when the 'failure to

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<sup>144</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>145</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>146</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>147</sup> Turnbull, *Bringing Down the House*, p. 29.

satisfy one funding body could potentially lead to the loss of a theatre's entire grant and therefore its closure'.<sup>148</sup>

Turnbull observes that one of the perennial challenges to regional theatres has been the 'consistent failure of public funding to keep pace with the increasing demands placed on them as a condition of that subsidy', a challenge, she points out, that has been 'similarly faced by the Arts Council itself'.<sup>149</sup> The problem of an already inadequate arts budget, spread increasingly thin as their client base expanded, required the Arts Council during the 1950s to prioritize its interests, which it did, in favour of the capital at the expense of the regions.<sup>150</sup> To help work within the limits of its budget, the regional theatres that the Arts Council took on as clients during the 1960s were given subsidy primarily in the form of grant-in-aid or guarantee-against-loss. Whilst reducing costs to the Arts Council, this method of distribution greatly increased the financial risks to theatre companies, as the Arts Council's 1956/7 annual report notes:

[Grant in aid] guarantees that all money allocated is subject to annual control by Parliament; it is, theoretically, based upon a calculation of actual need; and by its short-term nature it restrains its beneficiaries from developing grandiose ambitions. Its disadvantages are equally apparent: it inhibits long-term planning, allows no margin for accidents, discourages any accumulation of reserves for rainy days.<sup>151</sup>

The provision of monies via the mechanism of grant-in-aid meant that subsidy 'by no means guaranteed the survival of all recipients',<sup>152</sup> ensuring instead the struggle of playhouses to survive a 'hand-to-mouth' existence wherein long-term planning and development was simply untenable.

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<sup>148</sup> Turnbull, *Bringing Down the House*, pp. 29-30.

<sup>149</sup> Turnbull, *Bringing Down the House*, p. 38.

<sup>150</sup> See Turnbull, *Bringing Down the House*, p. 43. In 1984, no theatre company outside London, including the larger companies in the major cities enjoyed an Arts Council subsidy equal to even a tenth of that given to either the National Theatre or Royal Shakespeare Company (p. 83). See also Jen Harvie, *Staging the UK* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2005), esp. pp. 16-40.

<sup>151</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>152</sup> *ibid.*

Until 1963 the Arts Council's claims for higher funding had been based on the "quality of life" argument.<sup>153</sup> In the mid-60s, however, as finance director Anthony Field recalls, the rhetoric decisively altered:

I said that we must change the argument to get more funds. We must say that money spent on the Arts was not subsidy but investment. I produced statistics showing that for each one million pounds invested, the Treasury received three million from foreign tours and tourism, royalties and employment taxes. I led the Arts Council into its sad decline of quantifying the arts in material terms.<sup>154</sup>

As Turnbull notes, this attitude backfired when the Conservatives, led by Margaret Thatcher, 'took the Arts Council at face value and summarily started perceiving the regional theatres as businesses operating in a market economy whose worth could be discerned by their ability to earn their keep'.<sup>155</sup> The subsequent years marked a clear move to bring the Arts Council's activities and ideals more closely in line with the Thatcher government. This, as Turnbull suggests, 'may have saved the organization from extinction' but, if so:

it was at the expense of turning it into an instrument of government. As clients of the newly restructured organization, whether capable or not, regional theatres were increasingly forced to alter their operations to coincide with the New Right philosophy in order to retain any state support.<sup>156</sup>

Inducted into a policy of expansionism, recipients of Treasury money were now decided by their ability to maintain a plural funding base, maximise income from secondary spend areas, attract and retain commercial sponsors and improve the ratio of earned

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<sup>153</sup> Turnbull, *Bringing Down the House*, p.64.

<sup>154</sup> Anthony Fields, qtd. *ibid.*

<sup>155</sup> Turnbull, *Bringing Down the House*, p. 65.

<sup>156</sup> Turnbull, *Bringing Down the House*, p. 84.

income to subsidy.<sup>157</sup> The increased pressure to maintain a plural-funding base of public support while maximizing income from the private sector and the box-office put regional theatres ‘in the position of having to answer an escalating number and variety of demands that were often out of proportion to their budgets and occasionally in polar opposition to one another’.<sup>158</sup> According to Genista McIntosh, Senior Administrator at the Royal Shakespeare Company from 1977-1986, theatres were pressed during this period to marginalize cultural, social and even artistic considerations in order to ‘argu[e] the economic points – job creation, contribution to the exchequer through National Insurance, income from tourism [and] prestige abroad’.<sup>159</sup> Clients of an Arts Council now arguing the *economic* logic of subsidy, regional theatres were forced to subject themselves to the methods of self-appraisal and analysis that would demonstrate the cost-efficiency and material benefits of their operations.

This new emphasis on ‘good housekeeping’ forced many theatres to reconstruct their system of management and radically expand their administrative departments. Turnbull argues that, theoretically, the government’s increasing insistence on economic returns combined with social utility should have translated into efforts to expand and diversify the box office. ‘Caught in the subsidy trap’, however, theatres could not afford to risk alienating their loyal audiences by putting on anything considered ‘risky’.<sup>160</sup> The pressure to run a financially efficient operation ultimately resulted in poorer working conditions and a severely restricted programme of activities in regional theatres, where artistic questions increasingly took second place to administrative requirements.

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<sup>157</sup> Peter Boyden Associates, *Roles and Functions of the English Regional Producing Theatres: Final Report* (Bristol, Peter Boyden Associates, 1999), p. 8.

<sup>158</sup> Turnbull, *Bringing Down the House*, p. 70.

<sup>159</sup> Genista McIntosh, ‘The Price of Change’ in *Theatre in A Cool Climate*, ed. Vera Gottlieb and Colin Chambers (Oxford: Amber Lane Press, 1999), pp. 121-128 (p. 123).

<sup>160</sup> Turnbull, *Bringing Down the House*, p. 94.

Any, already partial, autonomy that artistic directors may have retained under the increased administrative and financial burdens of the early 1980s was further compromised in the latter part of the decade by changes in managerial practice. In 1988, the government introduced the Insolvency Act, making a theatre's board of directors directly responsible for any outstanding debts should an organization on which they sat become insolvent.<sup>161</sup> Artistic directors were increasingly required to seek the approval of the board for each season's programme and, 'in a climate of doubt and anxiety, the pressure to police all decisions and minimize risks rose exponentially'.<sup>162</sup> Throughout the 1990s, problems between boards of directors and artistic directors became increasingly common, with the latter claiming that the former were encroaching on territory regarded as their prerogative. Two years after the 1988 Insolvency Act was introduced, the Artistic Directors of five major provincial houses – Sheffield Crucible, Derby Playhouse, Nottingham Playhouse, Leicester Haymarket and Lancaster Rep – resigned from their posts.<sup>163</sup> Citing her reasons for leaving the Sheffield Crucible in 1990, Clare Venables stated:

Planning a season is the most difficult job for an artistic director. You are putting your soul down on the stage with the choices you make. But more and more people demand to know why you are doing it and what it will be like when you've finished. Funders, sponsors, administrators, boards, councils, your own publicity people... everyone pushes you into a kind of fruitless endgaming.<sup>164</sup>

Since the advent of state funding, regional theatres have been increasingly required to be different things to different masters. The conflicting demands placed by the exigencies of plural funding, the failure of subsidy to keep pace with the expansionist policies engendered as a condition of that funding, a grant-in-aid mechanism of subvention which precluded long-term planning, the undermining of creative vision and

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<sup>161</sup> Turnbull, *Bringing Down the House*, p. 97.

<sup>162</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>163</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>164</sup> Claire Venables, *qtd.* Turnbull, *Bringing Down the House*, p. 98.

control and, underpinning this chaos, the vagaries of both local and national politics, have all ultimately worked to ensure that stability, freedom, autonomy and continuity of staffing, programming and artistic purpose are conditions historically lacking from the infrastructure of English regional producing houses.

One indicator of this situation is the decline of the practice, until the 1950s encouraged by the Arts Council, of maintaining a permanent or semi-permanent ensemble company. Regional theatres typically tried to present a wide range of drama each season but, with less money for actors' salaries, the number of actors a theatre could employ dwindled and it became increasingly difficult to credibly cast a broad range of productions.<sup>165</sup> By the end of the 1970s, the resident company was primarily a thing of the past, with the significant exception of Peter Cheeseman's company at the Victoria Theatre, Stoke-on-Trent (later at the New Victoria Theatre, Newcastle-under-Lyme). Cheeseman established his company in 1962 and continued this practice throughout his thirty-five years as Artistic Director. Cheeseman has cited as a major influence 'the documentary theatres of Piscator and Brecht' and his company's practice centered upon the collaborative creation of 'musical documentaries' inspired by material drawn from the local community:<sup>166</sup> 'tuning myself into the world around me became very important and it seemed to me that the company could do this collectively'.<sup>167</sup> It is interesting to observe that the Victoria Theatre was one of the few regional houses that 'did not experience a significant decline in audience figures during the hardship years of the 1980s and 1990s, nor did it find itself with such a huge financial deficit as to threaten closure'.<sup>168</sup>

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<sup>165</sup> According to Turnbull, by the 1980s 'it was the exception for regional theatres to present plays with more than six actors'. *Bringing Down the House*, pp. 40-41.

<sup>166</sup> Peter Cheeseman, 'Peter Cheeseman' in *On Directing: Interviews with Directors*, eds. Gabriella Giannachi and Mary Luckhurst (London: Faber and Faber, 1999), pp. 13-18 (p. 14).

<sup>167</sup> Cheeseman, 'Peter Cheeseman', p. 15.

<sup>168</sup> Turnbull, *Bringing Down the House*, p. 40.

A more contemporary example of a working ensemble within English regional theatre is the Northern Stage, Newcastle, which from 1998-2005 successfully maintained a permanent acting ensemble of, on average, ten actors. Under the Artistic Directorship of Alan Lyddiard, Northern Stage functioned on a continental model inspired directly by Lev Dodin's Maly Theatre in St. Petersburg and, of particular interest for this study, from 2002-2005 employed Duska Radosavljević as a resident Dramaturg.<sup>169</sup> The impetus behind this position, according to Radosavljević, in fact came from the English Department at the University of Newcastle, who were looking to appoint someone to teach both undergraduate drama and an MA in Creative Writing. The department sought the advice of Claire Malcolm, then director of regional playwriting organization New Writing North, who suggested the appointment of a Dramaturg to teach in the English department at Newcastle, work on productions with Northern Stage and also liaise with New Writing North

Lyddiard's closest working relationship was with Northern Stage's Resident Designer, Neil Murray, and together they were keen to supplement their partnership by including a dramaturg to work not only with writers but also directors, designers and musicians:

[Lyddiard] often just wanted a script for performers and music [...] He needed an outside eye, someone who would be able to take care of the narratives, of the story-telling and so on, because his interest was more in the area of creating the stage picture.<sup>170</sup>

In addition to teaching at Newcastle University, and mentoring writers with New Writing North, Radosavljević worked as a production dramaturg for main stage productions, was instrumental to the programming of the Newcastle and Gateshead Gypsy Festival in 2003 and the Barcelona Connection Festival in 2004, and wrote and

<sup>169</sup> See also Turner and Behrndt, *Dramaturgy and Performance*, esp. pp. 161-2.

<sup>170</sup> Duska Radosavljević, unpublished interview with Jacqueline Bolton, 14<sup>th</sup> April 2008.



compiled the programme and publicity materials for the theatre. Northern Stage operated a ‘projects rather than plays’ approach to programming, whereby each new production would be accompanied by a number of satellite events, ranging from conferences to workshops in schools, exhibitions to writers’ events.<sup>171</sup> Lyddiard articulated his creative vision to the *Independent* in 1995: ‘the theatre’s got to become an event [...] We’ve got to get away from the sense that each production is just another one off the conveyor belt’.<sup>172</sup>

Despite Radosavljević’s connection with New Writing North, the creative process at Northern Stage did not follow a writer-centred model but instead sought to place the ensemble at the heart of the work: ‘everyone was free to voice their opinions, make requests related to their personal training needs and invited to participate in regular meetings where the “way of working” would be discussed by ensemble members’.<sup>173</sup> Jim Kitson, a long-time ensemble member, was also the theatre’s resident musician; new plays were tailored to actors’ particular skills; and the ensemble’s permanent presence at the theatre enabled periods of collective experimentation and play ‘long before a play was due to be delivered or rehearsals were due to start’.<sup>174</sup> The ensemble remained the centre of the theatre’s focus even when engaging with education and outreach activities, programmes more often delivered by a separate department within a theatre and typically divorced from the core programming of a theatre. In 2004, Northern Stage produced *Blaze*, a site-specific opera with school children and steelworkers from Darlington: ‘not an outreach team, not an education team, but me, the actors, every single person in our company, our ensemble, was out there working in

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<sup>171</sup> Duška Radosavljević, ‘A Shared Utopia? Alan Lyddiard, Lev Dodin and the Northern Stage Ensemble’ in *Russians in Britain*, ed. Jonathan Pitches (London: Routledge, forthcoming), np. Copy provided by Duška Radosavljević.

<sup>172</sup> Alan Lyddiard, qtd. Radosavljević, ‘A Shared Utopia?’, np.

<sup>173</sup> Radosavljević, ‘A Shared Utopia?’, np.

<sup>174</sup> Radosavljević, 14<sup>th</sup> April 2008.

those schools developing a piece together. We brought it together: [it was a] great success'.<sup>175</sup>

Departing from conventional programming and producing models, Lyddiard's approach required Radosavljević to articulate the 'narratives' of not only individual performances but also the building's profile: 'in order for him to maintain the case for the importance of the ensemble at Northern Stage he had to satisfy the Arts Council that the ensemble [were] always delivering work'.<sup>176</sup> In her third year, Radosavljević was invited by Lyddiard to attend meetings with the artistic sub-committee of the board.

Alan's reasoning behind having me in these particular meetings was because it gave me a hands on-approach to his development of a vision for the company, which he always saw me as a mouthpiece for. He saw my role as being about articulating his vision. I often wrote documents for circulation amongst board members on Alan's behalf.<sup>177</sup>

The dramaturg as an ambassadorial figure remains an unfamiliar concept within English theatre cultures; Radosavljević's dual responsibility for artistic and administrative functions, however, placed her in a strong position to support and communicate Lyddiard's artistic vision to audiences, boards of directors and arts funders alike.

In 2002, Executive Director Mandy Stewart left Northern Stage and a new Executive Director was appointed by the Board of Northern Stage without Lyddiard's approval. According to Radosavljević, Lyddiard 'did not see eye to eye with the new Executive Director or the newly appointed Marketing Director and this led to a period of tension, ineffectiveness and a period of reduced productivity'.<sup>178</sup> Also in 2002, Mike Worthington succeeded Fiona Ellis as Chair of the Board. Whilst sympathetic to

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<sup>175</sup> Alan Lyddiard, qtd. *Ensemble Theatre Conference*, np. Document arising from the event organized by Equity and the Directors' Guild of Great Britain at the Barbican Theatre, 23<sup>rd</sup> November 2004. <<http://www.dggb.org/files/EnsembleTheatreConf.pdf>> [Accessed 19<sup>th</sup> July 2011]

<sup>176</sup> Radosavljević, 14<sup>th</sup> April 2008.

<sup>177</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>178</sup> Radosavljević, 'A Shared Utopia?', np.

Lyddiard's vision, Worthington's view was that 'ideally theatre in this country should be 50% subsidized and 50% generating its own income'.<sup>179</sup> When he took over as Chair, he found that the ratio at Northern Stage was 75:25 in favour of subsidy, 'which led him to believe that the ensemble model was not financially sustainable'.<sup>180</sup> In 2005, Lyddiard resigned from his role as Artistic Director and the Northern Stage Ensemble dissolved. Whilst Radosavljević was reassured that her post would be kept, she chose not to remain at the theatre and the post of Dramaturg was not subsequently continued.

Radosavljević's work at Northern Stage presents possibly the closest approximation to a *Dramaturgie* within English theatre, yet the dissolution of her post with Lyddiard's resignation testifies to its dependency upon the initiative and continued support of an individual Artistic Director. There is, as yet, little evidence to suggest widespread acculturation to institutional dramaturgs within English mainstream cultures,<sup>181</sup> despite increasing expectations, stipulated by cultural policy, of the 'civic role' to be played by subsidized theatre.

#### 4.5 Contemporary cultural missions

In April 1997, when a landslide election victory for New Labour ended eighteen years of Conservative rule, 'promises of a new cultural policy brought hope for change amongst the country's regional theatres'.<sup>182</sup> Under Tony Blair, the arts were swiftly identified as a powerful tool for realizing 'an enterprise culture' built upon 'social

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<sup>179</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>180</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>181</sup> Whilst certain individuals, as noted in earlier chapters, have changed their institutional title to 'Dramaturg' in recent years, the remits of these positions are notably distinct from one another. It remains difficult to speak of a widely recognized role for institutional or production dramaturgs *per se* when positions have been created or refined in response to individual talents and specific circumstances. Playwright David Greig, appointed Dramaturg at the National Theatre of Scotland in 2005, sums this up: 'Did Vicki [Featherstone, Artistic Director] say, "I'll need a dramaturg, it'll be David"? I think it was ever so slightly the other way round: "I'll need someone like David, I'll call him Dramaturg"'. Unpublished interview with Jacqueline Bolton, 28<sup>th</sup> August 2006.

<sup>182</sup> Turnbull, *Bringing Down the House*, p. 199.

inclusion', and, as such, were granted a far more prominent position on the political agenda than they had under the Conservatives.<sup>183</sup> Initially, however, the higher profile attached to the arts did not automatically translate into increased government subvention, as New Labour's commitment to reduce public expenditure and maintain low levels of income tax meant a commitment to construct the 1997/8 budget within the spending limits set by the previous Conservative government. Consequently, the first year of the administration saw a reduction in annual grant-aid, only the fourth actual cut in government support to the arts in the history of public subsidy.<sup>184</sup> Although New Labour's arts subvention in 1998/9 offered a substantial increase on the previous budget, the rise of £125 million over the course of three years still left state support for the arts below 1990 levels.<sup>185</sup>

By this time, the climate for regional producing theatres had become so serious that the Arts Council felt impelled to hire independent consultants, Peter Boyden Associates, to examine the situation.<sup>186</sup> The resulting report, *The Roles and Functions of English Regional Producing Theatres* (2000, henceforth the Boyden Report), estimated that an extra £25 million was required if producing theatres were to have a future.

The Boyden Report, published alongside the Arts Council's own theatre review, *The Next Stage*, 'heralded what was perhaps the first genuine ray of hope for the collective body of England's regional playhouses in twenty years'.<sup>187</sup> *The Next Stage* and the Boyden Report motivated the creation, in 2001, of a *National Policy for Theatre in England*, the first time a national policy for drama had been drawn up. After years of

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<sup>183</sup> Turnbull, *Bringing Down the House*, p. 200.

<sup>184</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>185</sup> Turnbull, *Bringing Down the House*, p. 200.

<sup>186</sup> When the Tories had left office in 1997, the country's remaining forty five producing theatres were carrying a combined deficit of 6 million, a sum that exceeded their collective annual subsidy. Turnbull, *Bringing Down the House*, p. 9.

<sup>187</sup> Turnbull, *Bringing Down the House*, p. 203.

financial struggles and ambiguity, such events generated optimism, in England at least, that the regional producing theatres' debts could be wiped out and that theatres would subsequently be funded at levels that would allow them not only to survive but to thrive. As ever, however, the new levels of funding and a new national policy brought with them added demands.

As early as 1998, the Department for Culture, Media and Sport, which had replaced the Department of Heritage as government body for the arts, had stated it would be developing a clearer and more exacting agreement with the national funding body, an agreement which expected the Arts Council to demonstrate how arts organizations were contributing to the government's political, social and economic objectives.<sup>188</sup> Indeed, the 2001 national policy clearly reflected New Labour's ideas about the function of art, identifying a number of priorities for regional producing theatres: offering a better range of high quality work, attracting more people from a wider sector of society, diversity and inclusion within the workforce as well as audience, developing new ways of working, establishing an international reputation, ensuring an emphasis upon education and maintaining their regional distinctiveness.<sup>189</sup> In response to Labour's call for an 'evidence-based' cultural policy, the Arts Council increasingly demanded that all projects be evaluated in terms of 'measurable success factors' to determine the accomplishments of organizations in which they had made an investment. Despite attempts to increase efficiency and reduce bureaucracy, the administrative machine that theatres had been forced to adopt under the Conservative government was now replaced by the equally onerous burden of collecting data and constantly proving how far artistic programmes were driven by advocacy.

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<sup>188</sup> Turnbull, *Bringing Down the House*, p. 201.

<sup>189</sup> *The Arts Council of England's National Policy for Theatre in England* (London: ACE, 2001), pp. 4-6.

Talking to me in 2006, Alison Gagen, Theatre Officer for the Arts Council West Midlands, explained the funding system as one in which there are ‘a number of agendas we’re trying to deliver, things like diversity, young people, regeneration, creative economy [...] the idea is that regularly funded organisations each help us to deliver part of that agenda’.<sup>190</sup> Gagen acknowledged that ‘there is more expectation that the arts will generate outcomes that can be reported and demonstrated to government’, a statement echoed by Charles Hart, former Arts Council Officer for New Writing (1989-2006), speaking to me in 2007: ‘It’s become an accepted fact that the arm’s length principle is being lost. [Theatre] ties in with a particular social agenda but it’s *having to*’.<sup>191</sup>

While taking up vital funds that many felt could have been better spent elsewhere, the resulting ‘tick-box culture’ has also, in the experience of practitioners, had a profound effect on theatre programming. Despite the fact that there was no official hierarchy amongst the priorities outlined in the 2001 national policy for theatre, in practice the Arts Council’s concern that theatres should maintain a regional distinctiveness has often, as Turnbull demonstrates, been relegated in the interests of ‘diversity’ and ‘access’.<sup>192</sup> The heavy-handedness with which government priorities have been allowed to set such directions for, and limits to, arts policies has provoked widespread concern and anger amongst practitioners working in regional theatre today. Driving practitioners’ frustration is not the *intent* behind these policies but rather the means used to monitor and measure them, as Matt Fenton, Artistic Director of the Nuffield Theatre, Lancaster, explains:

I agree with these agendas: they’re my agendas and those of the people who work here. But in the end, that comes down to: ‘Ok, how many black or Asian artists did you commission this year? None, or two or

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<sup>190</sup> Alison Gagen, unpublished interview with Jacqueline Bolton, 6<sup>th</sup> October 2006.

<sup>191</sup> Charles Hart, unpublished interview with Jacqueline Bolton, 22<sup>nd</sup> November 2007.

<sup>192</sup> See, for example, Turnbull’s accounts of the Leicester Haymarket (p. 208) and Basingstoke Haymarket (pp. 210-212).

four or ten?’ And of course you think ‘well, I’d better do it’. But there’s a huge, huge ‘But’, which is about the artists’ process and the usefulness or otherwise of these agendas being passed down from DCMS to Arts Council to Venue to Commissioned Artist.<sup>193</sup>

However necessary and culturally progressive, throughout the 2000s central government targets were worked into Arts Council funding agreements without the requisite sensitivity to the particular needs of a theatre or company. A ‘one-size-fits-all’ approach did not recognize the discrete aims and operations of individual venues and institutions: ‘there are certain artists and projects are who absolutely right to be delivering a particular kind of targeted, participatory, community focused project’, argues Fenton, ‘but to apply those expectations to other organizations, to try and impose that on all the work that you do, is a real problem’.<sup>194</sup> Subsidized theatres were enjoined to advance a cultural-political line in which they had little, if any, input. As a result, ‘targets’ were too often met via a host of disparate activities, measured by statistical data and often disassociated from the core artistic programme. Such a system risked cynicism and resentment; practitioners interviewed during the course of this research observed that the means by which the pursuit of diversity had been translated into policy were, at best, unimaginative and, at worst, ‘counterproductive [...] ways that might even reinforce the stereotypes’.<sup>195</sup> As freelance dramaturg Sarah Dickenson admits, ‘often we do not respond creatively enough. For a group of creative people we are not always creative enough about the conversations that we’re having – or at least I don’t feel we’re able to be’.<sup>196</sup> Justification of the arts through social agendas and economic targets has, moreover, arguably worked to erode the validity of the art form as

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<sup>193</sup> Matt Fenton, unpublished interview with Jacqueline Bolton, 29<sup>th</sup> October 2007.

<sup>194</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>195</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>196</sup> Sarah Dickenson, unpublished interview with Jacqueline Bolton, 14<sup>th</sup> November 2007.

*itself* contributing something valuable to society: ‘the most problematic thing to make an argument for in arts discourse is the work itself’.<sup>197</sup>

However clumsy the mechanisms by which matters of genuine social significance have been approached by the DCMS in negotiation with the Arts Council, the responses of practitioners interviewed during the course of this research suggest pride in the (slowly, but) increasingly diverse ethnic makeup of English theatre, combined with shock at the almost total absence of a similar discourse in their experiences of European theatre.<sup>198</sup> Indeed, contrasted against English theatre cultures, key issues of access and diversity are conspicuously absent from the stated ‘cultural mission’ of contemporary German theatre practice. Over half a century of Turkish immigration, for example, remains a history and a demographic almost entirely absent from the German stage. In recent years, Karin Beier, *Intendant* at Schauspielhaus Cologne, has taken steps to assemble a culturally diverse acting ensemble at the theatre, but the uniqueness of this is testified to by Anne Paffenholz:

It is [an] approach [which says] ‘we live in a very multi-ethnic city and that must be represented by the stories we tell and also by the characters we show’. They do a good job but it’s specific, that’s not the normal way [of working]’.<sup>199</sup>

The ethnic homogeneity (white Caucasian) of the vast majority of ensembles in Germany holds obvious implications for the cultural range and diversity of a theatre’s repertoire, as Maja Zade, dramaturg at the Schaubühne am Lehniner Platz, Berlin, admits:

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<sup>197</sup> Steve Waters, unpublished interview with Jacqueline Bolton, 22<sup>nd</sup> November 2007.

<sup>198</sup> ‘I went to the IETM meeting in Istanbul and it was just... in the end [I] didn’t even want to speak to people. The European models are just so fascinating [...] I was talking about cultural diversity and they were looking at me like ‘What?’. They just don’t work in that way. Their eyes glazed over or they kept saying, “oh, you’re so much better in the UK”, and I was thinking, god, we’re so far behind, we’re really neglecting a lot of communities. But it was, it was fascinating’. Amanda Roberts, former Associate Producer at Birmingham Rep, unpublished interview with Jacqueline Bolton, 4<sup>th</sup> August 2006.

<sup>199</sup> Anne Paffenholz, dramaturg at THEATER AN DER PARKAU, unpublished interview with Jacqueline Bolton, 2<sup>nd</sup> July 2008.



[In May 2007 we did] a production of debbie tucker green's *Stoning Mary*, which is of course the first play [of hers] that we could produce with our company of actors because it's the only play for white actors that she's written. And of course now we really want to do *Trade*, and we did a reading and it was a nightmare to try and find black actors. We've decided that we can only do it if we find the right actors, and we still haven't found them.<sup>200</sup>

In 2006, the Turkish director Neco Çelik staged *Schwarze Jungfrauen (Black Virgins)* at the Theater Hebbel am Ufer, Berlin, a series of ten monologues adapted from interviews with Turkish women living in Germany. In performance, however, in a move which I suggest would seem ethically dubious to critics in England, the roles were taken by white actors, in the apparent absence of Turkish women who could or would perform the piece.

Practitioners in Germany are conscious of working within a tradition whereby the supporting and informing of a society's 'cultural welfare' is of itself a necessarily politicized act: 'I've never met a non-political artist in our theatre', asserted Gudula Kienemund, speaking to me in 2007 as Head of Press and Public Relations at Schauspiel Leipzig. 'All our artists want to develop their political ideas. That is the mission of every *Stadttheater* in Germany'.<sup>201</sup> For a theatre culture which for centuries has centred its cultural mission upon educating audiences in the best of domestic and international plays, however, the absence of an infrastructure by which to stage the works of August Wilson, Wole Soyinka or Suzan Lori Parks suggests a culture far poorer than its historical commitment belies. Enabled to self-determine the artistic-political lines adopted, theatres in Germany are reliant upon individual self-reflexivity; upon 'doubting processes' applied to one's own praxis. Whilst the dramaturgical profession serves in part to facilitate such critical reflection, the certainties derived from

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<sup>200</sup> Maja Zade, unpublished interview with Jacqueline Bolton, 10<sup>th</sup> July 2007.

<sup>201</sup> Gudula Kienemund, unpublished interview with Jacqueline Bolton, 5<sup>th</sup> July 2007.

an established artistic and intellectual heritage can, perhaps, mute the desire of practitioners to explore beyond a comfortable cultural zone.

#### 4.6 Conclusion

Over the past fifteen years, the framework of government priorities and public policies within which regularly funded organisations are expected to operate has become more explicit, more specific, and more influential over the work that is developed, commissioned and programmed. Regarded for centuries as little more than capricious diversion, theatre in England is now funded to serve as an agent of social and cultural change. As an alternative to the opacity of the Arts Council's previous structures of decision-making, perhaps the greater clarity provided by policies regarding the subsidized sector's social function might today be welcomed as an articulated set of potentially progressive principles with which the arts community can consciously and creatively engage. As such, the most strategic move at present might be to confront the 'shortness' of the arm's length principle and embrace it as an opportunity.

Over the latter quarter of the twentieth century, regional producing theatres have increasingly *fragmented* their artistic and administrative structures by creating individual departments to 'deal' with Arts Council directives: a marketing department, an education and outreach department and a development team may all operate within a theatre but communication between these departments is ad-hoc, as is the relationship between their activities and the theatre's 'core' work of programming and production. I would like to suggest that there is now, perhaps, opportunity to both reassess

organizational structures and advance a dramaturgical practice understood in terms of ‘an agenda for making plays [...] that is consistent with the public agenda’.<sup>202</sup>

It is important to emphasize that theatres do not necessarily require the institutional apparatus of a standing ensemble and continental system of repertoire for a dramaturg to service the artistic, social and cultural direction of a theatre. There are currently an increasing number of theatres in Germany, such as the Hebbel-am-Ufer or Sophiensaele (both in Berlin), without a resident ensemble, which play productions ensuite, but which still regard it as necessary to employ a dramaturg. As dramaturg Tilmaan Raabke attests:

They still have to develop the idea: ‘what is our situation, how could it work?’; to have the intellectual idea of ‘what do we have to do in this place?’ Whether there is an ensemble or not, this is still the main work of a dramaturg.<sup>203</sup>

A *Dramaturgie* could situate itself within existing institutional structures, not as an additional drain on resources but as a re-organization of them, uniting the development, production, marketing and outreach and education activities of a theatre. As an ‘advocate and educator’ of the public, it could foster informed public debate surrounding a theatre’s programming and production, informing funding bodies of both the rationale and responses which underpinned and made sense of this work. A dramaturgically focused sense of ‘cultural mission’ could, perhaps, bring creative cohesion and even political clout to producing theatres, encouraging supportive relationships between theatres, local government and funding partners; relationships focused, crucially, upon making an argument for the artwork itself.

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<sup>202</sup> Peter Hay, ‘American Dramaturgy: A Critical Re-Appraisal’, in *What is Dramaturgy?*, ed. Bert Cardullo (New York, Peter Lang, 1995), pp. 67-88 (p. 87).

<sup>203</sup> Tilmaan Raabke, unpublished interview with Jacqueline Bolton, 24<sup>th</sup> July 2007.

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## Appendix A

This appendix lists all individuals quoted in the thesis, their job title at the time of interview and the place and date(s) when the interviews took place.

Bell, Suzanne, Literary Manager, Liverpool Everyman and Liverpool Playhouse, Liverpool, 2 March 2007.

Boenisch, Peter, Lecturer in Drama and Theatre Studies, University of Kent, Canterbury, 13 March 2007.

Brown, Ian, Artistic Director West Yorkshire Playhouse, Leeds, 12 December 2007; 26 June 2008.

Bradley, Jack, Literary Manager, National Theatre, London, 7 September 2006; Literary Associate, Sonia Friedman Productions, London, 29 August 2008.

Chisholm, Alex, Literary Manager, West Yorkshire Playhouse, Leeds, 4<sup>th</sup> July 2006; Associate Director, Literary, 3 July 2008.

Craze, Tony, former London Theatre Literary Director for London Arts Board, London, 1 September 2008.

Dickenson, Sarah, freelance dramaturg, London, 14<sup>th</sup> November 2007.

Edgar, David, playwright, founder of MPhil Playwriting Studies at University of Birmingham, Leeds, 12 March 2008; London, 4 April 2008.

Fenton, Matt, Artistic Director of the Nuffield Theatre, Lancaster, 29<sup>th</sup> October 2007.

Gagen, Alison, Arts Council England Theatre Officer, West Midlands, Birmingham, 6 October 2006.

Goldman, Lisa, Artistic Director, Soho Theatre, London, 13 November 2006.

Gonda, Abigail, Literary Manager, Bush Theatre, London, 6 December 2006.

Greig, David, playwright, Dramaturg at National Theatre of Scotland, Edinburgh, 24 August 2006.

Grose, Carl, playwright and company member of Kneehigh, Leeds, 14 October 2006.

O'Hare, Jeanie, Literary Manager, Royal Shakespeare Company, London, 5 September 2006; 17 October 2006; Dramaturg, Royal Shakespeare Company, London, 4 April 2008.

Hart, Charles, former Theatre Writing Officer for Arts Council England, London, 22 November 2007.

Hegemann, Carl, former Dramaturg at Volksbühne am Rosa-Luxemburg-Platz, Berlin, 16 July 2007.

Holmes, Sean, Artistic Director, Lyric Hammersmith, London, 21<sup>st</sup> June 2010.

Jester, Caroline, Literary Manager, Birmingham Rep, Birmingham, 1 August 2006.

Keim, Katharina, lecturer in Theaterwissenschaft, University of Munich, Munich, 25 July 2007.

Kemp, Edward, director and dramaturg, London, 6 September 2006.

Kienemund, Gudula, Head of Press and Public Relations, Schauspiel Leipzig, Leipzig, 5 July 2007.

Lan, David, Artistic Director, Young Vic, London, 22 November 2007.

Little, Ruth, Literary Manager, Royal Court Theatre, London, 14 November 2007.

Meth, Jonathan, Director, writernet, London, 13 November 2007.

Paffenholz, Anne, Dramaturg, THEATER AN DER PARKAUE, Leeds, 2 July 2008.



Payne, Ben, Literary Manager, Birmingham Repertory Theatre, Birmingham, 4 August 2006; 17 October, London, 2006.

Raabke, Tilman, Dramaturg, Munich Kammerspiele, Munich, 24 July 2007.

Radosavljević, Duska, former Dramaturg at Northern Stage, Leeds, 14 April 2008.

Rasch, Birgit, Dramaturg, Schauspiel Leipzig, Leipzig, 4 July; 5 July 2007.

Roberts, Amanda, Associate Producer, Birmingham Rep, Birmingham, 4 August 2006.

Rodriguez, Christopher, playwright and Literary Manager at Talawa Theatre, London, 6 July 2006.

Roeder, Anke, former Dramaturg at Bayerisches Staatsschauspiele, Munich, 24 July 2007.

Shannon, Richard, Literary Manager, Polka Theatre, London, 8 September 2006.

Sirett, Paul, playwright, former Literary Manager, Soho Theatre and Royal Shakespeare Company, London, 17 October 2006.

Sohoye, Ashmeed, playwright, New Writing Manager, Theatre Royal Stratford East, London, 6 September 2006.

Steiger, Nina, Literary Manager, Soho Theatre, London, 6 July 2006.

Waters, Steve, playwright, Director of MPhil Playwriting Studies at University of Birmingham, London, 22 November 2007.

Whybrow, Graham, former Literary Manager, Royal Court Theatre, London, 13 November 2007; 19 November 2007.

Zade, Maja, Dramaturg, Schaubühne am Lehniner Platz, Berlin, 10 July 2007.